

Undoing Subjectivity: Sensual Politics, Semioethics, Agency, and Affect  
in Anne Garréta's *Sphinx*

Jemma R. Dixon

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English, University of Auckland, July 2021.

## Abstract

This thesis investigates subjectivity in the context of four main interconnecting themes: sensual politics, agency, affect, and semioethics. While ‘undoing’ subjectivity in Anne Garréta’s *Sphinx*, I pursue a dialectical and intersectional approach to subjectivity that reveals how the text’s grammars each take dialectical turns of privilege to articulate different ontologies and ways of thinking and perceiving. I argue that *Sphinx*’s formal constraint encourages a (distributed) ontological reading experience, and that in order to ‘undo’ or ‘rethink’ subjectivity afresh in *Sphinx*, one also ought to interpret and imagine distributively. I further contend that *Sphinx*’s subtle yet powerful shifts in language prompts a shift in affect, and I argue that the text – though not always ethical – queers dominant discourse while it re-writes supposedly stable critical identitarian tendencies. In Chapter One, I implement Susan Petrilli’s concept of semioethics, for such theorisations seek to detotalise global communication systems; they encourage us to rethink how subjectivity is experienced and felt, and they encourage enquiry toward how language shapes our subjectivities and their permissible expressions. In Chapter Two I derive two hermeneutic frameworks from the work of Lisa Samuels - termed Deformance and ‘distributed centrality.’ I use these theories in a bid to undo dominant discourses, critical interpretations and modalities of thinking about normative ontologies concerning subjectivity. I argue that the text performs a poetic ‘sensual politics’ which resists ideas of static subjectivity and identity.

## Acknowledgments

No work is done alone. This project started one afternoon on a terrace in Paris; it has since moved across borders and changed its own scope; it has shaped my own locations and subjectivities.

My parents, I have always felt fully loved and supported by you. I am thankful you exist and that you met one another by chance-encounter in London. I would still be here without you, although I am not sure where. Thank you for loving me bravely.

Thank you to those who have encouraged me to write, to think, and to see with new eyes. Dr. John Adams, thank you for aiding me with my Faculty of Arts scholarship application while I was overseas and for sharing your bookshelves, your poetry, music, your stories and time. Lily Ruban, thank you for listening to me and for teaching me about ambiguity, courage, fortitude and redefinition. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and research – your unique contributions with me. Harriet Robinson-Chen, thank you for your enduring friendship and beautiful soul – you are someone with whom I have always felt safe. You inspire me to read outside my genres. I wish I enjoyed *Tokyo Story* (1953) as much as you.

I do think it is strange to say to ourselves that the world is too small for us to meet, and too large for us to find each other again. To the once stranger on a train who introduced me to the poetry of Hilde Domin: If we set our feet upon the air, I am closer now to believing it will hold and carry us. Danke schön.

Thank you, Dr. Lisa Samuels, for your complex-intellect, *dasein*, and for cheering me on during my writing process. You inspire me to think *and* feel; to see that freedom is inherent in most choice. I am thankful for your academic precision, and for the way you gently reveal my own philosophical and personal blind-spots. I never really liked poetry until I read yours, searching to ‘Get’ it – as though poetry could be ‘Got.’ I am honoured to know you.

To you, the reader, thank you for taking the time to read this thesis. It would not have been the same without the presence of the people just mentioned, or yours, known or unknown.

Дякую, Je vous remercie, Danke schön, Thank you.



# Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Introduction: Anne Garréta.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Sensual Politics   Semioethics   &amp; Affect.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Theorising Subjectivity and Agency with Sensual Politics .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Subjectivity   Deformance   Five Thought-Experiments .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Relational and Recursive Subjectivity: Embracing ‘Both/And’ Dialectics .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Five Thought-Experiments.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>1. Prefactual   Thinking Subjectivity .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>2. Counterfactuals   Gendered Experiments &amp; Perspektivismus .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>3. Hindcasting   Outside-In Subjectivity .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>4. Retrodictive   Synthetic Subjectivity .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>5. Backcasting   Integrative Thinking.....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>111</b>

*Critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation. This schema, very simple in appearance, is actually the conjunction of three processes: first, the production of a sensory form of 'strangeness'; second, the development of an awareness of the reason for that strangeness and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness.*

— Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus:  
On Politics and Aesthetics*

*I had a curious feeling that I was living on several planes simultaneously; the overlapping of these planes was confusing.*

— Anna Kavan, *Ice*

## Introduction: Anne Garréta

Anne Françoise Garréta (born in Paris in 1962),<sup>1</sup> is a contemporary experimental French author and theorist. She received her License de Lettres at the Université Paris 4 (Sorbonne), as well as her “Maitrise and her D.E.A at the Université Paris 7 (Diderot) before moving to the US and pursuing her Ph.D” at New York University in 1988.<sup>2</sup> She has published half a dozen novels; the period of literary experimentation begins for Garréta in 1986 with her first published Oulipian text. The novel *Sphinx* resists normative fictive expectations to pronominally gender characters.

*Sphinx* recounts a love story between two individuals without giving any grammatical clues to the gender of either the narrator in the first person (Je), or the other character (A\*\*\*) in the third person.<sup>3</sup> Garréta’s second novel, *Ciels Liquides* (1990), recounts a character’s experience of losing their use of language.<sup>4</sup> In *La Décomposition* (1999), a serial killer assassinates Proust’s characters in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>5</sup> Some of Garréta’s novels have been translated into Japanese, Finnish, Spanish, Italian, and German. Two of these works have appeared in English and have been reviewed in the *London Review of Books*, the *TLS*, *Lambda Literary*, *Bomb magazine*, *Kenyon Review*.<sup>6</sup> After receiving France’s Prix Médicis in 2002 for her text, *Pas un Jour* (2002)<sup>7</sup>, whose epigraph is “Life is too short to resign oneself to reading poorly written books and sleeping with women one does not love,”<sup>8</sup> Garréta

---

<sup>1</sup> Anne F. Garréta, “Littérature Française Contemporaine”. 2020. *Cosmogonie.Free.Fr*.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Garréta. “Program In Literature”. 2020. *Literature.Duke.Edu*. Garréta has also taught at Université Rennes 2, Paris 7 (Diderot), Princeton, the University of Virginia (Charlottesville) and Duke University in North Carolina, USA.

See <https://scholars.duke.edu/person/anne.garreta>

<sup>3</sup> Anne Garréta and Valérie Beaudouin. 2007. “Anne F. Garréta, Oulipo”. *Oulipo.Net*. My Translation.

<https://oulipo.net/fr/oulipiens/afg>.

<sup>4</sup> Garréta and Beaudouin. 2007. “Anne F. Garréta, Oulipo”.

<sup>5</sup> Garréta and Beaudouin. 2007. “Anne F. Garréta, Oulipo”.

<sup>6</sup> Garréta and Beaudouin. 2007. “Anne F. Garréta, Oulipo”.

<sup>7</sup> Garréta, “Littérature Française Contemporaine”, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Levin Becker. 2012. *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise Of Potential Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 227.

was the second Oulipian to win the Médicis (after Georges Perec, who received the award in 1978), and she was later elected to the jury of the Prix Médicis in 2011. Each year, the award is bestowed upon authors whose “fame does not yet match their talent.”<sup>9</sup>

Sara Rauch, an author at *Lambda Literary*, considers how *Sphinx* has been celebrated by critics; it has been called “influential and groundbreaking, and with this, her first translation into English, it is easy to see why. *Sphinx* is an important contribution to queer literature – fascinating, intelligent, and very welcome.”<sup>10</sup> For the present thesis, what appears liberatory, fascinating, and intelligent in Garréta’s writing is not that she invents a new language out of constraint *per se*, but rather how she uses a pre-existing genderless language that has always-already existed in French, but is not used within dominant discourse – suggesting that specific ways of thinking belong to ethical realms involving the right to the freedom of linguistic choice. I shall detail in this introductory section exactly how Garréta’s writing in *Sphinx* operates within constraint.

*Sphinx* situates itself mostly in 1980s Paris – the story begins with a genderless French narrator (named Je, or ‘I’ in English), who is a theology student by day and a DJ by night. Most of the text details Je’s intense hunger for another human being. One night, Je comes in contact with an American dancer named A\*\*\* (whose gender identity is not revealed, and whose name ‘appears’ to be hidden behind the three suggestive asterisks), and A\*\*\* and Je become lovers, eventually travelling to New York together (where A\*\*\*’s dying mother resides), and we read of their disintegrating relationship. Mid-text (at the end of chapter two) A\*\*\* dies during a performance after “fall[ing] headfirst...down the entire flight of stairs, helpless to resist or

---

<sup>9</sup> Anne Garréta, Emma Ramadan, and Daniel Levin Becker. *Sphinx*. 2nd ed. Dallas, Texas: Deep Vellum Publishing. Originally published in French as *Sphinx* by Editions Grasset & Fasquelle in Paris, 1986, 2015. Print, 178.

<sup>10</sup> Anne Garréta and Emma Ramadan. 2002. *Not One Day*. 1st ed. Dallas, Texas: Deep Vellum Publishing. Originally published in French as *Pas un Jour* by Anne. F. Garréta, Editions Grasset & Fasquelle in Paris, 2002, 3.

direct the fall”<sup>11</sup> in the nightclub. Soon after, Je quits their job as a DJ and visits A\*\*\*’s mother during her (the mother’s) death in New York.<sup>12</sup> Returning to Europe, the nameless narrator (Je) recounts their memories of A\*\*\* as they write in Amsterdam where soon they too are killed.<sup>13</sup>

*Sphinx* was, on certain levels, well received in France. It has been deemed

a landmark linguistic and literary accomplishment that combines the philosophical intricacies of Monique Wittig and Roland Barthes with the ornate language of Alan Hollinghurst... Garréta’s debut novel at twenty-three years old, *Sphinx* was published in France in 1986 to universal acclaim and gained the author into the prestigious Oulipo literary collective in 2000. *Sphinx* is a modern classic of experimental, feminist, and queer literature.<sup>14</sup>

Garréta met Jacques Roubaud (a member of the Oulipo group) in Vienna in 1993, and she was invited to present at his poetry seminar in March 1994, and again in May 2000 to discuss how she uses constraint in her novels.<sup>15</sup> Jacques Laurent (writer and member of the Académie française) has termed *Sphinx*: “A literary feat... The most beautiful praise one can give to a novel is to say that it is unlike anything else... What she has done is a kind of masterpiece.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite contemporary critical praise of *Sphinx*, shortly after its initial publication, the work landed differently in France than it did America. In a 2017 interview with Sarah Gerard from *The Paris Review*, Garréta explains how *Sphinx* was a commercial success, and it was heralded, yet there remained a level of “politically negative reaction.”<sup>17</sup> The book was picked up by Grasset and Fasquelle, and “the readers’ reports were good, but the head of publishing house refused to publish the book, saying that it was a perverse book.”<sup>18</sup> When asked if the

---

<sup>11</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 158.

<sup>13</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 171.

<sup>14</sup> Garréta, *Sphinx*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Anne Garréta and Valérie Beaudouin. 2007. “Anne F. Garréta, Oulipo”. *Oulipo.Net*. My Translation. <https://oulipo.net/fr/oulipiens/afg>.

<sup>16</sup> Garréta, *Sphinx*, 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Garréta,. 2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta by Sarah Gerard*. In person. Paris, France. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/12/11/states-of-desire-an-interview-with-anne-garreta/>

<sup>18</sup> Garréta,. 2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta by Sarah Gerard*.

book was deemed perverse because Garréta did not identify the lovers' genders, Garréta replies:

Right, because it was basically undermining or deconstructing a difference, or a binary, which that person held to be foundational to civilization, or culture. Now, thirty years later in the U.S.—after years and years of queer theory, deconstruction, Judith Butler, all sorts of things—there's no scandal any longer. There's just a strange experiment which validates the experience we have now of gender and sexuality.<sup>19</sup>

### **OULIPO: Ouvroir de littérature potentielle**

Why do responses to *Sphinx*, and to a plot such as this, position the work as avant-garde?

Garréta, having been “elected to the OULIPO<sup>20</sup> in 2002 (the name of a small experimental literary and mathematical “Paris-based collective”<sup>21</sup> founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau)<sup>22</sup>

writes *Sphinx* in literary omission – with gender-neutral language. The OULIPO translates to

“workshop of potential literature”, where writing within constraint can give way to deeper

experimental, creative, or previously unarticulated literary forms. In *Many Subtle Channels: In*

*Praise of Potential Literature* (2012), Daniel Levin Becker writes that since the Oulipo's

creation in 1960, the Oulipo has

served as the laboratory in which some of modernity's most inventive, challenging and flat-out baffling textual experiments have been undertaken[...] The works, all of them governed in some way by strict textual constraints or elaborate architectural designs, are attempts to prove the hypothesis that the most arbitrary structural mandates can be the most creatively liberating[...] there's also something crucial in the fluidity, the sheer inexhaustible vagueness, of the workshop's shared pursuit: potential literature. Potential literature is both the things that literature could be and the things that could be literature. Potential literature is language; potential literature is life. Nobody's ever been entirely, definitively clear on what potential literature is, and this is to everyone's advantage. When you don't know what you're looking for, as they say, your chances of finding it are excellent.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Garréta. 2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta by Sarah Gerard.*

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Levin Becker. 2012. *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise Of Potential Literature.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Becker. 2012. *Many Subtle Channels*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> María Dolores Vivero García, “Humour, engagement et création littéraire chez Anne Garréta” in *Women in French Studies*, Volume 19, 2011, 86.

<sup>23</sup> Becker. 2012. *Many Subtle Channels*, 6-9.

Although Potential literature is hard to define precisely because it is polyvalent and polysemous, the main dictum of the group is to impose fictive constraint upon writing for the purpose of generating creatively free and unique non-normative works. The thinking is that

writers are constrained whether or not they acknowledge it—not just by the strictures of poetic forms like the sonnet or the haiku, but also by the conventions of their chosen genre, the format in which they publish, even the grammar and lexicon of their native (or adopted) language. Embracing a set of carefully chosen rules is meant to focus the mind so narrowly that those obscure pressures and preoccupations fade, revealing paths and passageways that one would never notice without the blinders.<sup>24</sup>

In the ‘Translator’s Note’ of the text, for example, Emma Ramadan explains that it was not until she was translating the original French version that she realised that *Sphinx*’s narrator is never actually described as having completed an action – a clear example of how writing with constraint releases certain strictures while creating others. This is because verbs of action in French always accord with a gender: because this is a genderless text, it cannot operate according to normative French tenses; nor can it be translated into English from a normative lingual perspective. Upon becoming aware of a form of strangeness in the writing (that the principal constraint in *Sphinx* is that the writing is gender-neutral), Ramadan discerned that the narrator:

[...] walks, overtakes, passes, is dragged along, is led places, follows, hurries, rushes, reaches, reaches on foot, sets foot, wanders, descends, ascends, climbs, strolls, promenades, returns, roams, roves, visits, meets people, joins people, travels, traverses, crosses, takes paths, gets lost, gets diverted, trundles along flies away, and eventually sinks. Never does the narrator ever simply *go* anywhere.<sup>25</sup>

Language (and how it is shaped by constraint) in *Sphinx* not only shapes genderless characters, it also shapes their permissible actions and experienced subjectivity. Characters in *Sphinx* can never *go* anywhere (they are limited), for movement is always gendered in French. A crucial feature of Garréta’s novel *Sphinx* is located in the grammars of having and being: they are the

---

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Levin Becker. 2012. *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise Of Potential Literature*, 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 168.

central feat (the style that becomes, as this thesis will argue, political) which performs Garréta's resistance to gender categories.

In traditional French grammar, there are certain expressions which cannot conceptually map to English translatory understandings. This is because the two auxiliary verbal forms, 'avoir' (to have), and 'être' (to be), change according to their tense and thus they are not always able to directly translate into English. In English, one might say, for example: "I *had gone* to the store" (the past-perfect), or "I *went* to the store" (the indicative preterite of the English infinitive 'to go.'). The use of both the English and French auxiliaries 'to have', and 'to be' are interchangeable according to particular tenses. Compare the English past continuous "I was going..." (which uses the auxiliary 'be'), against the past perfect "I had gone..." (whose auxiliary is 'have.'). A translation into French for the past continuous "I was going..." would be: "*J'étais allée au magasin*" (imperfect: être), and then "*J'avais été*" (pluperfect: avoir). Accordingly, the closest tense to the French imperfect in English would be the past continuous, which expresses a past action or state such as in the phrase "I *was going*." In the French version of *Sphinx*, Garréta radically avoids using the *passé composé* (the past composed) – a tense which has been appointed its name because it is constituted by the two auxiliary verbal forms *avoir* and *être* – in order to conceal gender. This literary constraint is still evident in the English translation of *Sphinx*, which I am principally concerned with analysing; Chapter Two has some consideration of translation. Ramadan notes how "Garréta makes the *passé simple* work for her,"<sup>26</sup> essentially fusing the narrative style (written in a formal register) with subjectivity, she explains how:

The *passé simple* is the literary past tense, meaning a past tense used only in written French. It has no real equivalent in English, as it comes off as much higher in register and more unusual than our commonly used simple past tense (e.g. I went to the Apocalypse). Best of all, it does not require gender agreement, as do certain verbs in the *passé composé*.

---

<sup>26</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 176. Translator's Note.

However, in French, the *passé composé* does not signal an archaic or “high” literary style, and more importantly, the *passé composé* reveals gender. In order to alter the grammatical poetics of *Sphinx* and to write a genderless text, it makes sense to write according to a linguistic constraint which uses such a literary style and which inflects and then

become(s) part of the narrator’s identity—he or she is a rather pretentious, bourgeois(e) scholar who does not shy away from praising his or her own intelligence. And so even though in my *Sphinx* the narrator does not need to use a high literary style to avoid revealing his or her gender, this aspect of the narrator’s personality is a part of Garreta’s text that cannot simply disappear in translation.<sup>27</sup>

To some, the use of “highfalutin” vocabulary, avoidance of le *passé composé* and use of le *passé simple* alongside *l'imparfait* may initially come across as literarily pretentious and robotic – a textual practice which positions Garréta’s *Sphinx* neither as androcentric writing nor as *écriture féminine* (feminine writing). The latter of which is often defined as an avant-garde writing style that “challenges and moves beyond the constraints of phallogentric thought...a path towards thought through the body”<sup>28</sup> and which centres “the representation of the feminine body as a path towards thought, a thought that would question the foundations of male-centric thinking, that which would “unsilence” the female voice enabling them to manifest their unconscious hidden self or “the Other” in androcentric language.”<sup>29</sup> Importantly for Garréta, she addresses *Sphinx* “To the Third”, perhaps a wink to Hélène Cixous’ (1970) *Le troisième corps* (The Third Body), defined by critic Abigail Bray in *Helen Cixous, Writing and Sexual Difference* (1984) as “the merging of the masculine and feminine that dissolves opposition and creates a body which defies the Symbolic Law and moves towards the

---

<sup>27</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 173-174.

<sup>28</sup> Debadrita Chakraborty. 2013. “Analysing Écriture Féminine in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa.’” *European Academic Research Vol.I, Issue 9*. ISSN 2286-4822, p.2897.

<sup>29</sup> Chakraborty. 2013. “Analysing Écriture Féminine in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’” 2897.

limitless.”<sup>30</sup> This kind of writing seeks to rustle thought and transgress lingual borders and imaginations by playing with conventional language practices.

In French, the past participle agreement holds that past participles always require auxiliary verbs, whether they are ‘to be’ or ‘to have.’ For example, if the subject (i.e., the subject referring to themselves in writing) of the phrase’s gender were to be female, by traditional (some might consider conservative) regulations of French grammar, one would be obliged to write (or be assumed to write, in accordance with their own gender): “J’étais *allée* au magasin”, in place of the masculine “*allé*.” In a similar example, Ramadan explains in her ‘Note on Translation,’ that

if the narrator were to say, “I went to the Apocryphe,” then “the narrator would have to use the *passé composé* (the most common French tense used to describe already completed actions) and would have to say either “*je suis allé*”<sup>31</sup> or “*je suis allée*.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, for the narrator to say that they simply *went* anywhere would require revealing his or her gender.<sup>33</sup>

In part, due to the use of Oulipian constraint, *Sphinx* provokes questions of a structuralist nature – the kind that Judith Butler posed in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990): Is gender a “function of discourse which seeks to set certain limits of analysis to safeguard certain tenets of humanism as presuppositional to any analysis of gender?”<sup>34</sup> Do “the limits of the discursive elements of gender presuppose and pre-empt the possibilities of imaginable realisable gender configurations within culture?”<sup>35</sup>; do “the boundaries of analysis suggest the limits of a discursively conditioned experience?”<sup>36</sup> One can consider that “constraint is thus built into what language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender”<sup>37</sup>, and there is a sense that discourse can be oppressive and limiting; it imposes stylistic

---

<sup>30</sup> Abigail Bray. 2004. *Helen Cixous, Writing and Sexual Difference*. Palgrave Macmillan, 62-63.

<sup>31</sup> This is the past participle (masculine) form of the infinitive ‘*Aller*’: To go.

<sup>32</sup> This is the past participle (feminine) form of ‘*Aller*.’

<sup>33</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 168.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler. 1990. *Gender Trouble*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Butler. 1990. *Gender Trouble*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Butler. 1990. *Gender Trouble*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Butler. 1990. *Gender Trouble*, 13.

communicative systems upon its users which limits what is thinkable and imaginable. Garréta seeks to use constraint to her advantage in order to experiment with how language can inflect, change, and sustain subjectivity.

Garréta's critical writing practice is reflexive and cautious of static interpretation, it is informed by what she terms 'Thinking in Translation.'<sup>38</sup> For Garréta, 'Thinking in Translation' means being aware that translation is a process whereby "things are lost and gained, which are neither equivalent nor identical; meaning subtly drifts; categories and demarcations are revealed and shift."<sup>39</sup> Garréta's writing in *Sphinx* reflects the awareness that "there is no immediate translation between what you perceive and what you think"; it highlights that "there is a filtering" which distances the interpreter "from what they're actually perceiving of the world around them..."<sup>40</sup> Garréta overturns many of the linguistic conventions that had dominated French Literature since the conception of a gendered French language via lingual constraint. For example, while Garréta writes a genderless novel, she plays with the categories of grammar itself by inverting subject-verb-object expectations and by confusing the idea of who is the subject. This Queers 'straight' discourses and narrative styles whilst it disrupts normative modes of thinking. *Sphinx* performs what Rancière terms a 'sensory form of strangeness', and once readers develop or are made aware of that 'strangeness' (the Oulipian gender constraint and the altered grammatical poetic of inverted subject-verb-object patterns), readers can 'mobilise' – we can re-think how grammar frames and constitutes one's inhabitations/feelings/thoughts of subjectivity. Language has the power to shape how we feel in our embodiment; how we relate to others, and how we can imagine broader constructions of

---

<sup>38</sup> Anne Garréta. 2001. "Re-Enchanting The Republic: "Pacs," "Parité" And "Le Symbolique". *Yale French Studies*, no. 100: 146. doi:10.2307/3090585. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3090585>

<sup>39</sup> Garréta. 2001. "Re-Enchanting The Republic: "Pacs," "Parité" And "Le Symbolique". *Yale French Studies*, no. 100: 148. doi:10.2307/3090585. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3090585>

<sup>40</sup> Garréta .2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta*.

subjectivity. Discourse can limit the way we imagine, theorise, and translate subjectivity.

Emma Ramadan buttresses the idea that

*Sphinx* certainly follows in the footsteps of its members. Authors such as Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau, and Michelle Gringaud used linguistic constraint as a source of inspiration for their writing, for example in Perec's *La Disparition*, a lipogrammatic novel written entirely without the letter 'e.' Why did Garréta decide to write a genderless love story? Why this constraint? By omitting the supposedly ever-present phenomenon of gender, Garréta both reveals and undermines sex-based oppression, demonstrating that gender difference is not an important or necessary determinant of our amorous relationships or our identities but is rather something constructed purely in the realm of the social.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, Garréta's use of the gender-neutral linguistic constraint – as Joseph Schreiber, a critic and nonfiction editor muses – “opens up the potential for a completely free reading experience. One can choose gender, sex and sexuality as desired, play with alternatives in the reading, or re-encounter the work with repeatedly different contexts. Garréta has incorporated enough ambiguity to open up all possibilities.”<sup>42</sup> This ambiguity, or, in other words, one of the principal constraints of *Sphinx*, is that it is a genderless love story by virtue of the absence of pronominal gender markers.

In Garréta's case, shattering form (syntax) becomes her shifting-reconstitutive-linguistic subject. When asked in an interview if writing can clarify “even if we can never completely understand,” Garréta replies, “No, but there's a difference between being totally blind and living chiaroscuro.”<sup>43</sup> To read *Sphinx* is to engage with the theoretical-intensity of chiaroscuro living: Garréta writes that the experience of reading *Sphinx* aims to provide an empirical experience, it should serve to project the inanity of how culture sacralises metaphysical Différence. The fact that Garréta has been able to write a story which questions how sexuality, sex, and gender in the text are “nullement marquée” (“not at all marked”), even if “Cela demande un peu de travail” (“if it demands a bit of work”), reflects how Garréta's

---

<sup>41</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 169.

<sup>42</sup> Schreiber, Joseph, “21 Thoughts On “How Do You See Me, Anyway? *Sphinx* By Anne Garréta”, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Garréta. 2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta*..

transgressive aesthetic acts as a mirror: it indicates that entrenched cultural thinking-systems change our own theoretical imaginative horizons, which we sculpt and divide. The transgressive aesthetic also reminds us that we give language meaning, and so too, gender is meaningless unless we give it meaning – it is built on arbitrary social norms (it is a cultural artifact)<sup>i</sup>. Literary omission of gender is a reminder that it is imperative one construct a sense of their own subjectivity (their own sense of sexuality, power, desire and gender) from within, versus constructing subjectivity only from ‘outside’ social and cultural factors.

### **Intercategorical Complexity and Autofiction**

Garréta’s work has largely been examined under the lens of Oulipian experimentation, and yet scholar Annabel L. Kim aptly points out in her book *Unbecoming Language: Anti-Identitarian French Feminist Fictions* (2018), that “what the category of the Oulipo does not do, however, is make visible the political dimension of Garréta’s writing[...] Identifying Garréta as an Oulipian is a convenient way of making her writerly identity intelligible by reducing it to the constraint.”<sup>44</sup> Other critical responses to *Sphinx* conveniently relegates her writing to one of semi-imposed autofiction (of fictionalised autobiography), which, Kim claims, “obscures the political project of writing against difference: *queer* leads people to read Garréta through an identity politics that focuses on her biographical self” as an identifiably queer person, which accordingly “places what she does do with language under the sign of queerness.”<sup>45</sup> Garréta does not contradict Kim’s claim; in *The Pink And The Black: Homosexuals In France Since 1968* (2000), Frédéric Martel cites Garréta as saying: “Discos for women always functioned behind closed doors, so that no one would see what was going on inside.”<sup>46</sup> Garréta has personal

---

<sup>44</sup> Annabel Kim. 2018. *Unbecoming Language: Anti-Identitarian French Feminist Fictions*. 1st ed. Ohio: The Ohio State University Press Columbus, 127. My Ellipses.

<sup>45</sup> Kim. 2018. *Unbecoming Language*. 127.

<sup>46</sup> Frédéric Martel. 2000. *The Pink And The Black: Homosexuals In France Since 1968*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 175.

knowledge of the subject<sup>47</sup>: she was a disc jockey at Le Katmandou, and her novel *Sphinx* was set in that disco.<sup>48</sup> Postmodern theorisations which push at the bounds of the autofiction genre seem to question the chiaroscuro boundary between autobiography and fiction. Annabel L. Kim writes in “Autofiction Infiltrated: Anne Garréta’s *Pas un Jour*”:

Garréta lures the reader with the promise of access to some part of her real self and her lived experience by mimicking the conventions and tone of autofiction, only to reveal that the auto in autofiction is an empty concept and to insist that there is no real subject to be found in the fiction. *Pas un Jour*'s infiltration of autofiction puts this subject into crisis and challenges readers to consider that who we think we are is as fictive as the novels that we read.<sup>49</sup>

Garréta mentions in *States of Desire* that “When I wrote *Sphinx*, I must have spent two and a half years, every night, in nightclubs, never sleeping even one night in my own bed. I was fascinated by the spectacle.”<sup>50</sup> Garréta’s speaks of how, aged twenty-four, she worked as a professional DJ in nightclubs in Paris while she was still a student at the École Normale Supérieure. “I was supposed to be a student full time,” Garréta tells us “but I spent my nights dj’ing and then would go take exams at the university”<sup>51</sup> — an act reminiscent of Je’s fictionalised life in *Sphinx*. Accordingly, Garréta writes and plays on the line between autobiography and fiction; each flows through one another’s current in an imitation game.

French literary critic Eva Domeneghini writes that Garréta’s novels like to “jeter la langue par les fenêtres” (“to throw language out the window”), in order to reflect upon the

---

<sup>47</sup> Le Sphinx was once “a small strip club that was previously a legendary Paris brothel where photographers Brassäi and Man Ray had taken photos in the 1930s.” See Frank Horvat. *Paris de noche* [Paris by Night, 1956.] As seen in *Cultura Inquieta*. 2016. *Paris De Noche: Frank Horvat Fotografía Le Sphinx Club En 1956*. [FrankHorvat Photographs The Sphinx Club in 1956.]

For the image, see:

[https://culturainquieta.com/images/articles/Paris\\_by\\_Night\\_Frank\\_Horvats\\_Photos\\_of\\_Le\\_Sphinx\\_Club\\_in\\_1956/Frank\\_Horvat\\_Le\\_Sphinx\\_Club\\_vintage\\_erotica4.jpg](https://culturainquieta.com/images/articles/Paris_by_Night_Frank_Horvats_Photos_of_Le_Sphinx_Club_in_1956/Frank_Horvat_Le_Sphinx_Club_vintage_erotica4.jpg)

For the more detailed original article, see: <https://culturainquieta.com/es/erotic/item/8314-paris-de-noche-frank-horvat-fotografia-le-sphinx-club-en-1956.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Martel. 2000. *The Pink And The Black: Homosexuals In France Since 1968*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, pp.174-175.

<sup>49</sup> Annabel Kim. 2018. Autofiction Infiltrated: Anne Garréta's *Pas un Jour*. *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, abstract. doi:10.1632/pmla.2018.133.3.559

<sup>50</sup> Anne Garréta. 2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta*. .

<sup>51</sup> Anne Garréta. 2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta*. .

relationship between words and things.<sup>52</sup> Domeneghini writes of how literature is deeply ‘in the world,’ and yet the relation between ‘world’ and ‘literature’ must be careful not to lose itself.<sup>53</sup> In other words, literature must not get lost in its direct relations to the world, and it should question traditional fictional constructions. For Garréta, asking such questions of literature is a dangerous game which she plays within the realm of Oulipian semantic constraint and, for her, these are the only games worth playing.<sup>54</sup> However, in an interview between Megan Bradshaw and Emma Ramadan (the literary translator of *Sphinx*), Ramadan advocates Garréta’s literary emphases:

When I first met with Garréta, she was very hesitant to ascribe the word—the label of “Oulipian” to this book. I actually met her for the first time in the company of Will Evans [founder of Deep Vellum Publishing], and he was discussing how he was going to market the book, why he was excited about it, and how it was the first novel by a female Oulipian to be translated. Garréta was wary of putting a lot of emphasis on that. She was very much like: “This book is radical and lesbian and feminist and queer before it is Oulipian.” So it’s a little strange for all the focus to be on the Oulipian aspect, especially because she wasn’t in the group yet when she wrote it. But *Sphinx* definitely does follow in that lineage. There’s a very obvious constraint. It is simultaneously very high literature, a very high register of language, very serious literature, but it is also very playful in the way that it distorts language and plays language against itself to make this point. I think she was definitely influenced by the Oulipo. Garréta was reading Oulipian works when she was growing up, so it’s not so far-fetched to say that of course it was influenced by that tradition.<sup>55</sup>

Kim makes an important point in claiming that Garréta’s political impact is likely to be read and situated within her personal subjecthood and identity, which she claims effectively misses the “anti-identitarian core of her writing.”<sup>56</sup> In this study, I contend that *Sphinx* gifts readers

---

<sup>52</sup> Eva Domeneghini. 2021. “La question du genre dans l’oeuvre d’Anne Garréta” in Anne F. Garréta, *Littérature Française Contemporaine. Cosmogonie.Free.Fr.* Accessed March 1. <http://cosmogonie.free.fr/index2.html>. My Translation.

<sup>53</sup> Domeneghini. 2021. “La question du genre dans l’oeuvre d’Anne Garréta” in Anne F. Garréta, *Littérature Française Contemporaine.* My Translation.

<sup>54</sup> Domeneghini. 2021. “La question du genre dans l’oeuvre d’Anne Garréta”, My Translation.

<sup>55</sup> Megan Bradshaw and Emma Ramadan. 2021. “A\*\*\* And I: In Conversation With Emma Ramadan”. Blog. *Asymptote*. <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2016/02/15/a-and-i-in-conversation-with-emma-ramadan/> My Emphasis.

<sup>56</sup> Kim. 2018. *Unbecoming Language*. 127.

the potential to free Garréta's characters from complex identitarian and anti-identitarian constraints just as they can choose to project analytical categories and subjectivity upon the characters. In *Sphinx*, this 'opening' lies in one's fascination of the simultaneous interplay between mimesis and anti-mimesis. As Leslie McCall so aptly puts it in *The Complexity of Intersectionality* (2005):

Since critics first alleged that feminism claimed to speak universally for all women, feminist researchers have been acutely aware of the limitations of gender as a single analytical category. In fact, feminists are perhaps alone in the academy in the extent to which they have embraced intersectionality—the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations—as itself a central category of analysis.

To critique one kind of analysis of identity is to take-up a particular dialectical and epistemological stance toward understanding and interpreting. Logically, it may seem that to remove the limitations of gender, one must displace or remove gender itself as an analytical category, which is what Garréta's writing poststructurally performs by relegating the gender of the protagonists to an anti-category. A central component of McCall's argument is that "different methodologies produce different kinds of substantive knowledge and that a wider range of methodologies is needed to fully engage with the set of issues and topics falling broadly under the rubric of intersectionality."<sup>57</sup> When Kim claims that Garreta's writing is obscured by her claim to queer identity, arguably she is not at fault for wishing to read an author via an anticategorical approach or methodology; it would be further interesting to read Garréta through what McCall terms intersectional *intercategorical complexity*, which requires scholars to "provisionally adopt analytical categories to document relationships" and use them strategically to "change configurations of inequality among multiple and conflicting dimensions."<sup>58</sup> For Garréta, (herself a critic) adopting analytical categories is a strategic

---

<sup>57</sup> Leslie McCall. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30: 1774.

<sup>58</sup> McCall. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30: 1773-1774.

hermeneutic approach familiar to her own literary interpretations – intercategory complexity takes the awareness that one can be complicit in one’s own censorship (because it can be dangerous to have a voice that speaks in radical clarity), yet that ‘voice’ continues to speak anyway. Garréta applies such thought while interpreting Proust’s writing:

I have long suspected that the public, exoteric text of *Remembrance of Things Past* is a fake. A skillful fake, but a fake nonetheless. I suspect it was the object of censorship: censorship in which Marcel himself was, perhaps, complicit . . . in order to see his work published, to win the Goncourt, to make peace . . . and censorship that is enthusiastically perpetuated, to this day, by Proustians and pastry chefs alike. This censorship will, naturally, have disfigured the text.<sup>59</sup>

The methodology of intercategory complexity that is demonstrated via the interplay between Garréta’s autofiction (whether or not this accords with her definition) and blurred mimesis is what I claim (as Garréta does for Proust) works on a deeper symbolic level in *Sphinx* (versus generating literature that is ‘closed’ to interpretation, or is purely anti-categorical). Garréta’s lived experience infuses the text with autofictive parallels, adding other potential layers of intercategory complexity which, as mentioned, rather than completely rejecting categories, strategically uses their *potential* within the French public and academic landscape.

What becomes interesting, as McCall states, is to interrogate “the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself.”<sup>60</sup> The anticategorical process, according to McCall, is “based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences.”<sup>61</sup> Intercategory complexity requires

---

<sup>59</sup> Anne Garréta. 2013. “To Sleep, Perchance To Dream”. *Words Without Borders*.

<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/to-sleep-perchance-to-dream>.

<sup>60</sup> McCall. 2005. “The Complexity of Intersectionality.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30: 1774.

<sup>61</sup> McCall. 2005. “The Complexity of Intersectionality”, 1774.

integrative thinking which helps draw distinctions between chaos and complexity<sup>62</sup>; it does not necessarily require reconciliation of the irreconcilable.

Trinh T. Minh-ha's 1990 essay "Political Arts, Subversive Acts: Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box" points out that "no matter what position she [the writer] decides to take, she will sooner or later find herself driven into situations where she is made to feel like she must choose from three conflicting identities[...]She usually writes from a position of power, creating as an "author" situating herself *above* her work and existing before it, rarely simultaneously *with* it."<sup>63</sup> In an interview in 1996 between Garréta and Josyane Savigneau, they discuss 'Gay French Women Writers', and Garréta states:

There was a basic ambiguity since the text itself thematized an indetermination of gender and in my public person I tried to keep a certain balance. I have never hidden what my private life could be. Dissimulation or denial has always seemed to me to entail too high a cost. On the other hand, I am not keen on any sort of exhibitionism, I distrust categories and the attendant compulsory identification with them, and I do not wish to write autobiographical novels, or autofictions. If you attempted to include me, to fit me in the GFWW category, some tinkering around the edges would be needed since the G and the W predicates are not thematized in my texts. You would have to rely on a circular and rather speculative hermeneutic move to reinscribe them. You would be constrained to build an interpretation and thus expose yourself as a reader before you could draw me in and make me accountable.<sup>64</sup>

In *Sphinx*, despite pronominal omission, there is a constant awareness of gender and its expressions. Gender expression can be defined as "the ways you present gender, through your actions, dress, and demeanour, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms."<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Roger L Martin. 2016. "Specialization and Its Discontents" in *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking*. 1st ed. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press, 113. F.C.Kohil, in discussion with author at the Rotman School, Toronto, November 2, 2004.

<sup>63</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha. 1990. "Political Arts, Subversive Acts: Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box." In *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 245.

<sup>64</sup> Anne F. Garréta and Josyane Savigneau. "A Conversation." *Yale French Studies*, no. 90 (1996): 223. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2930365?seq=1>

<sup>65</sup> Sam Killermann. 2017. "An Adorable, Accessible Way To Explain A Complicated Concept: The Genderbread Person". *The Genderbread Person*, 1. <https://www.genderbread.org/>

Garréta draws attention to gender norms and expectations, at times demonstrating with the use of gendered language (using the pronouns ‘her’ and ‘she’ alongside both stereotypically feminine and masculine expressions), how Je thinks about and reconciles binary gendered assumptions. Even in the presence of pronominal naming, the text constitutes (represents) and exceeds (recreates) the parameters of gender and subjectivity. To describe this process, I consider how the text functions along gendered continuums,<sup>66</sup> which subvert readerly expectations of control in the sense that one may experience an inability to settle, imagine, impose, or ‘find’ a sense of gendered stability within the depicted characterisations of the two protagonists – which I argue does not exist in the text, and nor do one’s expectations of readerly-control. For example, consider the lines from early in chapter I:

A streetwalker crossed my path, harnessed in garters and leather straps. Her joints, limbs, and torso were bound in black leather fastened with metallic buckles. On the edge of the sidewalk she began her firefly ballet. She looked like a gladiator, or some kind of beast of burden.<sup>67</sup>

This extract identifies the subject (the ‘streetwalker’) as female. It reconciles the notion that feminine and masculine expressions exist on a continuum, and that the humanimal is one among other “beast” selves. The gender-loaded descriptions such as “her firefly ballet”; “she looked like a gladiator”, “some kind of beast” are not oxymoronic descriptions. They do, however, contain implicit gendered and cultural assumptions; words used to define gender norms. The subject is portrayed as expressing both masculine and feminine gender; one expression does not cancel out the other – they add metaphorical complexity to the full spectrum of the human expression, whether that expression is gendered or genderless. The extract enacts the idea that:

---

<sup>66</sup> Killermann. 2017. “An Adorable, Accessible Way To Explain A Complicated Concept: The Genderbread Person”.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 18.

Using two continuums for each element (the “-ness” approach), instead of having a scale from F-to-M, allows a person to demonstrate that they embody more of one aspect of gender without that meaning they are less of the complement.<sup>68</sup>

The identified female subject is both Beauty and Beast. She is colourful in a “blood-red bodice” and “purple garter belts”; soft in “sheer lace thongs” – adjectives which are symbolically socially contestable and constructed as being associated with femininity: brightness, rich colour and softness. She is also depicted as a “beast” and as an armed combatant: “a gladiator” – she disrupts normative feminine conformity.

Je questions and reflects upon these norm-concepts rather than questioning the layers of social conditioning within which such questions arise (i.e., the evoked dominant paradigms and societal structures which shape the norm are not questioned, yet non-adherence to what is perceived to be the norm is): “Were there really women who wore these blood-red bodices, purple garter belts, and sheer lace thongs?”<sup>69</sup> In *Sphinx*, ideas of gender expression and who holds power (who can freely express themselves within socio-cultural norms with internal will, autonomy and self-awareness) belong to quite complex, much broader and contested conversations concerning agency and choice: foundational pillars for creating subjectivity (while knowing that the subjectivity curated for public consumption is not necessarily the same subjectivity that is crafted by choice – these subjectivities will ebb and flow).

These conversations, as I direct them here, relate to how subjectivity and “identity [are] publicly formed aspect[s] of self”;<sup>70</sup> they concern how “we perform our identities within the constraints of power.”<sup>71</sup> Masculinity and femininity are publically expressed aspects of subjectivity operating within such power constraints, which Dominic Strinati terms “the sexist

---

<sup>68</sup> Sam Killermann. 2017. “An Adorable, Accessible Way To Explain A Complicated Concept: The Genderbread Person”.

<sup>69</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Carisa Showden. 2011. “Conceiving Agency” in *Choices Women Make: Agency in Domestic Violence, Assisted Reproduction, and Sex Work*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Showden. 2011. “Conceiving Agency” in *Choices Women Make*, 16.

constructions of femininity and masculinity in the wider society.”<sup>72</sup> These constructions are hierarchical and are therefore power-based. They are also related but are not limited to aesthetic sensibility, sensorial and tactile preference – attractions which can sidestep power relations and categories. Strinati points out that:

It is not merely a question of adding in gender as another feature of popular culture, but of understanding and challenging the hierarchy of categories which elevates the masculine and subordinates the feminine in examining popular culture. The perspective Modleski criticises has a set of oppositions which privilege masculinity and art at the expense of femininity and mass culture:

<b>High culture (art)</b>	<b>Mass culture (popular culture)</b>
Masculinity	Femininity
Production	Consumption
Work	Leisure
Intellect	Emotion
Activity	Passivity
Writing	Reading <sup>73</sup>

Contrasting the *Sphinx* passage above with a *Sphinx* extract which comes just one page later demonstrates how Strinati’s conceptions of masculine and feminine stereotypes play out in the text. Just after having witnessed the woman, Je recalls: “I sped up until I reached the café on the northwest corner of Place Pigalle. Some working-class men in tired suits were packed tightly together along the bar.”<sup>74</sup> At this point, Je observes gender, but does not comparatively ask, ‘were there really men who wore those suits?’ A comparative analysis of the female streetwalker (a sex worker) contrasted against the description of working-class men reinforces Carisa Showden’s point in *Choices Women Make* (2011) that, “as we resignify or attach differently to the norms constituting our identities, our sense of self can then entertain some

---

<sup>72</sup> Dominic Strinati. “The Feminist Analysis of Popular Culture” in *An Introduction To Theories Of Popular Culture*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2007, 172-173.

<sup>73</sup> Strinati. “The Feminist Analysis of Popular Culture” in *An Introduction To Theories Of Popular Culture*, 172-173.

<sup>74</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 18.

new variables, but this is likely to close off some of the old meanings that were possible as well.”<sup>75</sup> These fictive descriptions do not seem to outrightly inflect Je’s own sense of subjectivity, but Je does observe gender norms, and they do calculate gender expectations within which they are subsumed in this fictive heterotopia.

As Je wanders as a fictional character, though not lost, they constantly attach meaning to signs: navigating gender expectations and their own fictive (or authorially imposed) implicit gender biases and norms. Despite such a conscious awareness of gender, Ramadan argues that gender should not matter to the story:

I don’t know the real answer to this, or what Garréta would say to this, but my reading is in two parts. When people first read this book in France, in 1986, there were many reviews that didn’t notice that the two main characters were genderless. I think that was the proof of the success of the book in a way, that Garréta was able to write this without people noticing because it shouldn’t really matter. The constraint is not what this book is about. It’s about a love story. And the point is that gender shouldn’t matter. So if you’re constantly noticing and trying to figure out what the genders are, you have sort of missed the point[...] I think it would become a lot more obvious and draw a lot more attention to the constraint if the other characters were also genderless....<sup>76</sup>

Such interpretations reinforce how gender does not appear to matter consequentially for Je and A\*\*\*’s relationship – in fact, what causes rifts in the relation, according to Ramadan, are not gender matters. On one level, as Ramadan argues, the rift is because A\*\*\* and Je are incompatible on an intellectual level. Je criticises A\*\*\*’s leisure, consumption, and passivity: “A\*\*\* would spend most days in front of the television screen watching shows and films, despite my attempts to suggest a less passive pastime. No book or work of art was enticing enough to evoke curiosity.”<sup>77</sup> Je places greater value on work, intellect and activity: “I hated

---

<sup>75</sup> Carisa Showden. 2011. “Conceiving Agency” in *Choices Women Make*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. “The Challenge Of Genderless Characters: What A 30-Year-Old Novel Reveals About Hidden Biases”. Interview. *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/05/the-challenge-of-genderless-characters/482109/>

<sup>77</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 101.

the television, detested those frivolous parties and their cortèges of ostentatious, superficial people.”<sup>78</sup> Ramadan argues that:

Ultimately, their relationship falling apart has nothing to do with what gender or race or age they were. It really boils down to the fact that one of them is very intellectual and wants to study and resents the other person for watching too much TV and not being interested in going to these museums with him or her. They just fundamentally have different personalities.<sup>79</sup>

What is interesting here is that despite the claim that gender is irrelevant for their relation, gender is highly relevant to the narrator, who *is* ‘constantly noticing and trying to figure out what the genders are.’ However, gender being an inconsequential determiner for relationship satisfaction is not the main point. For this analysis, subjectivity is the focal point, and I argue that *Sphinx*’s subjectivity aligns with what aesthetic sensibility means within a stratified social context (even as gender, at least for these characters, appears to ‘pass’ in the text).

Our cultural context is fundamentally gendered, but it can be navigated in agentive ways which can both attend to and discard gender regimes in assertive, liberatory ways. A reductive and gendered reading into A\*\*\* and Je’s incompatibility would claim that Je stands in as a masculine signifier for High culture (art), and A\*\*\* stands in as a feminine signifier for Mass culture (popular culture). However, the question of whether Garréta challenges or upholds the above hierarchy of categories comes undone: How could Garréta uphold a category when the characters are explicitly genderless and are thus unable to be boxed-in? Rather than subsuming Je and A\*\*\* into gender categories by asking: How do they occupy the above stereotypical categories of the elevation of the masculine and the subordination of the feminine in popular culture? The categories themselves which demarcate and brand (stereotype) the masculine with ‘High art’ and the feminine with ‘popular culture’ need to be dismantled. Since the characters are genderless, masculine and feminine stereotypes related to artistic taste and

---

<sup>78</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 112.

<sup>79</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. “The Challenge Of Genderless Characters: What A 30-Year-Old Novel Reveals About Hidden Biases”.

production simply do not, and cannot, apply; they also should not apply irrespective of gender. Textually, these gender boundaries – rather than being transgressed – are entirely avoided. The categories that become foregrounded other parts of the human spectrum rather than the gender binary are thus independent of gender. In Ramadan’s words:

Because, in this story, you necessarily can’t read into any of the problems A\*\*\* or the narrator have as being kind of gender-power relations, or for example, “A\*\*\* was being denied his or her voice because A\*\*\* is clearly a woman, because she doesn’t get to speak at all.” In the book, you can’t make sweeping statements like that, so all the problems that are present in their relationship have to be part of something else. They have to be separate from gender.<sup>80</sup>

With an example from *Sphinx*, Ramadan reinforces that despite living in a world of exclusions and boundaries, the characters are able to transgress them: “I transgressed against all the boundaries. I went into all these places.”<sup>81</sup> Thus gender acts as a lingual artefactual and social force in the writing which both constitutes and exceeds subjectivity - i.e., gender is both acting and not acting, not just in language, but also in other representational manifestations.

This thesis seeks to implement a dialectical, integrative, and intersectional approach to thinking about (and undoing) representations of agency and subjectivity in *Sphinx*. I consider agency and subjectivity in *Sphinx* within a literary context such as the theory of bioautography with which Lisa Samuels writes of Lyn Hejinian’s work; “the story of a languaged self, a written “I,” rather than the autobiography of an experiencing human.”<sup>82</sup> This thesis operates under the premise that, as scholar Chris Greenough writes: “the fundamental issue with ‘queer’ research is that it cannot exist in any definable form, as the purpose of queer is to disrupt and disturb.”<sup>83</sup> Just as Garréta’s writing and its interpretations shift, the methodology for this thesis

---

<sup>80</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. “The Challenge Of Genderless Characters: What A 30-Year-Old Novel Reveals About Hidden Biases”.

<sup>81</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. “The Challenge Of Genderless Characters: What A 30-Year-Old Novel Reveals About Hidden Biases”.

<sup>82</sup> Lisa Samuels. 1997. “Eight Justifications for Canonizing Lyn Hejinian’s “My Life.”” *Modern Language Studies* 27, no. 2 (1997): 103-19. Accessed March 4, 2021. doi:10.2307/3195353. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3195353>

<sup>83</sup> Chris Greenough. 2018. *Undoing Theology*. SCM Press. Book Description.

so too desires to shift in accordance with a queer praxis which seeks to ‘undo’ representations of lingual agency and subjectivity in *Sphinx*. I argue that Garréta queers subjectivity in grammar at the intersection of her own life and in other grammatical and syntactic forms.

## Chapter One: Sensual Politics | Semioethics | & Affect

*A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space.*

— Albert Einstein.

This chapter centres on developing ethical and affectual theorisations of agency and subjectivity, focusing on radical, feminist, and queer writing via the lens of Garréta's experimental text *Sphinx*, which can be described as sui generis, hybrid and queer. My contextual framework for researching and analysing subjectivity and agency (my methodological questions in this chapter) are thought through in terms of semioethics and affect theory, both of which evoke a desire to theorise subjectivity and agency through an integrative dialectic. In this thesis, I consider how the philosophical intersection between ethics and affect is an evocation of sensual politics: the characters and their situated contexts are lingual embodiments of performed ethics and affects where subjectivity and agency are reflected in their embodiment - often described as enacting distributed subjectivity.

### *Theorising Subjectivity and Agency with Sensual Politics*

As Garréta's writing enacts a political dissensus to normative paradigms, it coheres (translates) affect and ethics into what might be termed such a sensual politics: the body becomes a contestable and distributed site of poetry, of resistance and estranged beauty; often the body's own appendages are written against normative expectations of language use. I define sensual politics as resistant thinking which seeks to upend teleology and mind-body-culture dualisms. For example, male or female expressing bodies are often imbued with cultural expectation or meaning. In sensual politics, bodies enact and experience and *are* affects existing in non-teleological ethical relation to one another. Sensual politics recognises that the body – its articulations and its signage/signifiers – emits a politics influenced by culture and lingual expectation. It recognises the inherent (often inescapable) political nature of the body

and yet it desires to flaunt the idea that subjectivity can transgress its own formations which have been structured by language. Rather than limiting subjectivity, ambiguous language use and constraint in *Sphinx* extenuates and increases its performative possibilities.

Garréta's writing performs a politic which resists binary categorisation through sensual though highly ambiguous fictive description. Analysing Garréta's writing under a partial ethical lens does not necessarily reflect that her writing is always enacting or performing ethics. I do not argue that her politics are always racially or agentively well-informed or ethical, although her writing is certainly emancipatory and resistant in other ways. For example, as I detail in this chapter, gender agreement alters the use of nouns and verbs, meaning that A\*\*\* is presented as a body (which never speaks for itself) rather than a person. *Sphinx* is certainly a text of radical, queer, sensual and feminist resistance, and it is a text of alterity and polysemy which exists in its own right – at times it is not necessarily interpretatively demonstrative of the kind of ethics one might assume (in its sui generis) such a work might desire or unknowingly enact. As the text is unique in its constrained language use, as I shall detail in this chapter, it naturally hits against its own expressive limits.

I think about subjectivity and agency in *Sphinx* as though both terms constantly amplify and oscillate against limit. Garréta's writing enacts a pulsative integrative dialectic<sup>ii</sup> that performs a critique of gendered subjectivity by virtue of its Oulipian formal constraint. In other words, its core, provocative linguistic structures elicit ambiguity in interpretive meaning, and what might be thought of as the subjectivity or agency of the lingually represented human-mind-heart-soul in *Sphinx* may stand to be true in one linguistic preposition/sentence or interpretation, and yet, in another, surety of meaning (of whether the at-times ambiguous Garrétian sentence enacts agentive, ethical or subjectival qualities) - shifts - with possibilities of the return or perpetual departure of meaning.

### *Why semioethics, and what is semioethics?*

Since Garréta's writing does not always seem to perform ethics, why use this as a critical methodology to theorise subjectivity and agency under a sensual politics? If the premise of dialectics states that everything is connected to everything else,<sup>84</sup> then ethics and non-ethics must connect and simultaneously enact themselves against or according to ethical definition. If change is constant and inevitable,<sup>85</sup> ethics and non-ethics will – at times – disconnect. If opposites can be integrated to form a closer approximation of truth (always evolving),<sup>86</sup> then *Sphinx* and its subjectivity and agency can, with certitude, be *both* liberatory, feminist, queer, radical *and* ethically contestable, disconcerting and problematic according to one's ethics. Thinking dialectically, the antithesis of a critique of meaning in relation to subjectivity and agency is then to embrace dialectical theorisation and meaning of multiple accords and consensus – meaning (interpreting subjectivity) goes beyond pure synthesis and textual-delirium; what may read as incoherence can be thought of as simultaneously contingent meaning. Interpretively, *Sphinx* does not perform singular meaning. Although this argument can be made of any text, this point requires mentioning in the context of an analysis which wants to dialectically look at the performativity of subjectivity and agency.

Dialectical thinking is fundamental to the praxis of semioethics. Semioethics is a critical neologism coined in the 1980s by Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio – both Italian semiologists and philosophers. Petrilli provisos semioethics as “a trend in Semiotic studies that wants to insist on the relationship between signs and values.”<sup>87</sup> Semioethics is located at the intersection of semiotics and ethics, and its purpose “in this historical moment is the detotalisation of global

---

<sup>84</sup> Alexandra H. Solomon. 2017. “Embracing Both/And” in *Loving Bravely*. Oakland, CA: New Harbringer Publications, 93.

<sup>85</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Embracing Both/And” in *Loving Bravely*, 93.

<sup>86</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Embracing Both/And” in *Loving Bravely*, 93.

<sup>87</sup> Susan Petrilli. 2018. *Susan Petrilli Keynote Lecture*. Video. Bucharest: International Conference Semiosis in Communication: Differences and Similarities, Bucharest.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzvdki7VoWk&t=1189s>

communication systems.”<sup>88</sup> This refers to the artistic and academic desire to dismantle univocity; to lean into ambiguity and incompleteness, and to re-think how responsible (conscious and reflective) and irresponsible (unreflective) communication structures life. Global semiosis is described as being “about life in all its articulations”, recognising that where there is life, there is communication and thus connection/relationality.<sup>89</sup> I ask, how can semioethical readings of *Sphinx* allow us to interrogate dominant cultural meanings and gendered signs (as well as their omissions) so that we can engage with subjectivity and agency – not purely dichotomously – but with more dialectical critical nuance, openness, and curiosity?

As stated, semioethics seeks to problematise binaries – suggesting a more fluid approach to reading which does not simply avoid seemingly uncomfortable incongruities and opposites between ethics and non-ethics – but which pursues their shades of grey. Garréta’s writing, as I have mentioned, is *both* ethical *and* unethical: on balance, first identifying and then integrating these observations can “form an approximation of truth (which is always evolving)”<sup>90</sup> – and it follows that, whether dialectical or not, most meaning partakes in integration. As *Sphinx* continually displays, subjectival and agentive meaning within the text are not static or ‘pure’<sup>91</sup> – the very nature of integration is suggestive of a lingual alchemy which distils, mixes, adds, and alters.

Other explanations of semioethics include Roland Arnett’s work, author of *Communicative Ethics: The phenomenological sense of semioethics* (2017), who defines Semioethics as a communicative act that “necessitates attentiveness and responsiveness to Otherness and difference. Semioethics functions as resistance, the unwillingness to accept and abide within an unreflective communication production system composed of taken-for-granted

---

<sup>88</sup> Petrilli. 2018. *Susan Petrilli Keynote Lecture*.

<sup>89</sup> Petrilli. 2018. *Susan Petrilli Keynote Lecture*.

<sup>90</sup> Alexandra H. Solomon. 2017. “Embracing Both/And” in *Loving Bravely*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 93.

<sup>91</sup> I refer to purity here not in terms of religious connotation or morality, but of lingual alchemies – dialectics is never ‘pure’ because it is necessarily integrative.

sameness of process and procedure.”<sup>92</sup> Although alterity/difference/otherness is not necessarily constitutionally ethical, semioethics wants to attend to semiotics on a meta-semiotic level – it desires to “interrupt immediate semiosis and reflect upon what we’re doing.”<sup>93</sup> What follows is that semioethics does not offer clear interpretive paths out and away from the gender binary (a facet of subjectivity) so much as it offers interpretive orbits which seek out the space between the known/unknown: recognising that masculine, feminine, both, or neither traits (and their expressions) are part of a subjectival human experience.<sup>94</sup> Semioethics, in the context of *Sphinx*, recognises that we can contemplate and find dialectical openings beyond masculine and feminine constructs and their attached gender stories.<sup>95</sup> In doing so, the full complexity of human agency and subjectivity is less likely to be reduced to strict cultural narratives which silhouette one’s thinking and visceral relations. Semioethics encourages deep reflection of how the lingual human experience of subjectivity is swayed by the way one relates within and to language – with or without agency.

---

<sup>92</sup> Ronald. C Arnett. (2017). “Communicative Ethics: The phenomenological sense of semioethics”. *Language and Dialogue*. 7: 80–99. [doi:10.1075/ld.7.1.06arn](https://doi.org/10.1075/ld.7.1.06arn).

<sup>93</sup> Susan Petrilli. 2018. *Susan Petrilli Keynote Lecture*.

<sup>94</sup> Alexandra Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*. Oakland, CA: New Harbringer Publications, 179.

<sup>95</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 179.

## *Defining Subjectivity*

*Thomas Nagel wrote that if we accept a bat has its own conscious experience then there is something it is like to be a bat, but we cannot imagine what that is like because it is so outside our own experience. The same may be said for any conscious organism, including other humans. There is the physical knowledge of another person but can there be an understanding of what it is like to have their experiences?*

— Sophie Ward, *Love and Other Thought Experiments*

But I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat.

— Thomas Nagel, *The Philosophical Review*

Subjectivity is a term related to “phenomenal aspects of consciousness[...] in particular, the epistemic form of subjectivity concerns apparent limits on the knowability or even the understandability of various facts about conscious experience.”<sup>96</sup> This definition defines itself within a study frame which makes meaning-making, related to subjectivity, possible. There are clear limits to our understanding of subjectivity based on our own subjectival experiences and theory of mind. In *Sphinx*, subjectivity can partially be thought through grammar’s shifting lingual landscapes; through/with objects; outside anthropomorphisms and in terms of altering grammar’s turns.

As I detail in Chapter Two, grammar’s positionality in *Sphinx* is frequently referential, yet its continual altered referentiality increases the possibility for how we can use and perceive its terms. Often, subjectivity within the lingual landscape is reassigned; perfused; negated and flipped – sometimes subjectivity is represented as material, at other times it is represented as interpretive pure immaterial affect. In this chapter, I mention the term ‘referentiality’ to think about how grammar enacts a distributed subjectivity.

Subjectivity in *Sphinx* is often rendered as an illusion constituting reality: confusing definition and agreed upon constructs with perceived subjectival reality. Subjectivity is a game

---

<sup>96</sup> Robert Van Gulick, ‘4.4 Subjectivity’ in “Consciousness”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/consciousness/>

of ontological and phenomenological possibility; it is constantly negotiated and it requires participants to interpret and think from a place of knowing that we/the subject continually create, co-create, and dissolve. In *Sphinx*, representations of subjectivity are necessarily entirely lingual: they are epistemically ‘measured’ by words - which do have limits. I do not argue for paratext, though a different analysis might do so.

### *Defining Affect Theory*

Throughout this chapter, I evaluate and critique the implications of analysing *Sphinx* via affect theory (alongside semioethics), demonstrating how Garréta’s writing – on balance – reflects an ethics of dissent against the limits of dominant discourse and dominant paradigms of thinking, perceiving, and generating meaning through language. In my analysis, affect theory deeply coheres with semioethics, especially when thinking of philosophies concerning embodied relationality and sensual politics. For the purpose of this chapter, I conceive of affect as both an emergent property of energy and as element of embodied non-lingual semiosis. The following definition of affect gets close to how affect theory functions in this thesis:

Affect arises in the midst of *inbetween-ness*: in the capacities to act and to be acted upon...affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those **forces** – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward **movement**, toward **thought** and **extension**, that can likewise **suspend** us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability.<sup>97</sup>

The Greek root of subjectivity shares similarities with the concept of affect in that both concepts extend beyond the mind-body problem of consciousness. Whereas subjectivity may border on the existing real and in the mind, affect is similarly described as a concept of in-

---

<sup>97</sup> Melissa Gregg and Gregory J Seigworth. 2010. “An Inventory of Shimmers” in *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1.

between-ness: of force; movement; thought; extension and suspension. Affect – much like subjectivity – expresses itself in contingency and modality.

With this definition of affect in mind, this chapter extends the work of licensed clinical psychologist and academic Alexandra H. Solomon<sup>iii</sup>, who advocates for a semioethical relational awareness between self (subjectivity that is both individuated and collective) and culture, which, as I shortly explain, refers to how one navigates semiosis and thus their own subjectivity. She writes:

Self-awareness about gender stories is as important for people in the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) community as it is for those who identify as heterosexual. Each of us has a relationship to masculinity and femininity, because our culture is gendered [...] we need to be (and deserve to be) conscious of our gender stories regardless of whether we look, feel, identify, and behave in ways that are masculine, feminine, both, or neither.<sup>98</sup>

Labelling desires, thoughts, and behaviour is essentially a practice of semiosis in the sense that semiotics is not only a science; it is also an affect, since it is “an attitude [that] arises and is developed within the boundaries of anthroposemiosis.”<sup>99</sup> In other words, semiosis happens in and between human beings: in this case, between Garréta and the reader and this thesis and you. Thinking about semiosis and the way meaning is produced as an attitude in *Sphinx* semioethically attends to semiosis meta-semiotically, which means (a) a search for meaning that is methodical and yet unsystematised – it does not search for what it desires to find in a ‘genre-ed’, perhaps predicable, text. In earlier readings, I found myself wanting Garréta’s writing to ‘hold’ its ethical-state throughout, and yet *Sphinx*’s depiction of subjectivity does not always support ethics of freedom and agency located within the transitivity of signs, grammar, or ideas. Continuing to think about how meaning is produced in semiosis,

---

<sup>98</sup>Alexandra Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 179.

<sup>99</sup>Susan Petrilli. “Semiotics as semioethics in the era of global communication.” *Semiotica* 2009, no. 173 (2009):343-367.

<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/SEMI.2009.015/html>

metasemiotic attention then (b) reads signs of subjectivity as conditions of plurivocality and polylogism which “favors creative interpretation and critical questioning.”<sup>100</sup> Semioethics wants to attend to contradiction, plurivocality and polylogism – though these qualities are not necessarily ethical at face-value – and to seek more expansive ways to imagine and pursue subjectivity’s constitutive alterity, which I contend is comparatively more ethical than subsumption or sublimation (than trying to unify meaning into a simplified category).

Here I wish to point out that the fictional heterotopia of *Sphinx* exists and is embedded within a culture where gender is traditionally strongly defined, identified, and expressed. The gendered systems the genderless characters inhabit are cultural designs and are therefore capable of being dismantled – as evidenced via the gender-neutral writing. However, Garréta does not dismantle the cultural subtext or evident prevalence of gender in *Sphinx*, rather, she dismantles language which expresses how these figures relate with subjectivity and agency within semiosis. Thus I interpolate into critical semioethics and affect theory Alexandra Solomon’s understanding of gender in the sense that gender is inescapably related to our cultural context: “We can never transcend our cultural context”;<sup>101</sup> and it is difficult to escape the “often unthinkable and countless cultural messages we are bombarded with”<sup>102</sup> – empirically and in language in the sense that “our culture heaps a dizzying number of assumptions and “shoulds” onto a male body and a female body.”<sup>103</sup>

Solomon is constantly working within affectual relations; her ethical awareness holds that “our continued efforts to embrace people whose sexualities and gender identities have been marginalized and oppressed serve all of us,”<sup>104</sup> and that the extent to which “we can embrace all of the manifestations of what we call masculine and feminine is the degree to which we can

---

<sup>100</sup> Petrilli. “Semiotics as semioethics in the era of global communication.” *Semiotica* 2009, no. 173 (2009):343.

<sup>101</sup> Alexandra Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 183.

<sup>103</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 182.

<sup>104</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 176.

live with increasing authenticity and integrity.”<sup>105</sup> Strict gender binaries, Solomon proposes, “relegate us to being ‘half-humans.’ In fact, the mere act of labeling desires, thoughts, and behaviors as being either “masculine” or “feminine” puts us into boxes that just don’t fit. We need and deserve access to the full spectrum of human experience.”<sup>106</sup> Although this is a contingent contextual claim, I cite this with an understanding that elements of masculinity and femininity (constructing subjectivity) can “elevate and connect us, too”; Solomon advocates that we “use masculinity and femininity where and when it serves connection to self and connection to other. Find a space beyond masculinity and femininity when gender stories are putting you or your partner in a box.”<sup>107</sup> A gender-neutral love story is a reminder that representations of the human experience may be expressed with authenticity and integrity. What happens when subjectivity does not accord with dominant lingual ideation? Solomon advocates for expansion and relational self-awareness which is on par with metasemiotic attention. Her work partakes in a semioethical approach to reading cultural life in its messy articulations:

Our culture sends us messages about who and when and how to love – messages that shape how we feel within our skin, how we make choices about intimate relationships and how we feel about those choices. Many of us are blindly guided by sweeping cultural “shoulds.” But when we are able to *name* how cultural messages and stories live within, we open up new possibilities for how we feel and how we relate...<sup>108</sup>

I add to Solomon’s relational self-awareness analysis that as culture sends us messages about what sort of agents we should or should not be, *Sphinx* as a cultural literary production inflects its own affectual and cultural ethics, (i.e., *Sphinx* acknowledges that part of the gender spectrum includes many possibilities: masculine, feminine, both, and neither.<sup>109</sup>) In the context of *Sphinx*, as this chapter shall demonstrate, the text depicts cultural life in constantly fluid, changing

---

<sup>105</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 176.

<sup>106</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 177.

<sup>107</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Doing Gender” in *Loving Bravely*, 180.

<sup>108</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Self-Awareness” in *Loving Bravely*, 170.

<sup>109</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Self-Awareness” in *Loving Bravely*, 180.

articulations. I mostly consider this on a grammatical level, noting that Garréta's own cultural messages relating to subjectivity and agency are expressed according to often-changing and distributed meaning.

### *Sensual Politics and Translation*

In *Sphinx*, as I have noted, the body is a site of sensual politics – it has or does not have the power to express reflexive agency, subjectivity, and voice. I consider who possesses agency in grammar, unveiling opposing models representing subjectivity in the text.<sup>110</sup> In some instances, for example, the writing appears to be active, yet it is grammatically passive. Moreover, Garréta's gender-neutral centred writing aesthetic articulates gender continuity: androgyny; masculine/feminine margins, and agentive and non-agentive subjectivity.

A close reading focused on the relationship between Garréta's gender-neutral centred aesthetic and articulations of subjectivity can explore how the confluence, relationality, and unexpected rupturing of narrative arcs reflect the continuums on which subjectivity and gender lie: reflecting difference and sameness within and between each other in unusual constructions. For example, almost halfway through *Sphinx* (at the beginning of Chapter III and after A\*\*\*'s death), the main protagonist (Je) who is described as possessing an “unfailing tendency to diffract the real”<sup>111</sup>, experiences what is described as “roving fantasies”<sup>112</sup> about A\*\*\*, where moments and fragments of memory are reimagined. In this example from the following passage, form mostly follows function:

I was watching A\*\*\* dance from within a profound paralysis, an intense solitude, letting myself be invaded by every movement, feeling the tension of this immaterial thread that linked us even from a distance. Then a sudden invasion of anguish—looking at this body and knowing it to be ephemeral.

In the end what I loved above all else: those hips, narrow and broad at the same time, those legs that I never knew how to describe except, mundanely, as slim and long. But it wasn't this that made them desirable to me—when we made love, I couldn't stop

---

<sup>110</sup> Roger L Martin. 2016. “Cultivating Stance” in *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking*. 1st ed. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press, 156-157.

<sup>111</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 113.

<sup>112</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 112.

caressing them, my lips against the inner thighs—it was something else, always something else, this indefinable something else where desire hides itself. Perhaps I was enticed by the slow motion of the dance, before my eyes, sublimely taking the body out of its rhythm.

Ephemeral, this body was undeniably ephemeral[...]<sup>113</sup>

Je imagines the memory of A\*\*\* in a way that thrusts the reader toward what reads as the furtive present tense. For example, the first clause: “**I was watching** A\*\*\* dance from within a profound paralysis...” places emphasis on temporality – constructing the clause in a manner which, in the context of the passage quoted above, differs slightly from normative grammatical expectations in English. The lines which precede this clause read as follows: “I was imagining this body, lost, dead, vanished. I used to love watching it move, hips and back swaying in rhythm. The memory of sweat on that body after...after what?”<sup>114</sup> The question ‘after what?’ appears to be an unwillingness to accept the fact of A\*\*\*’s death. And thus, rather than saying, ‘I had watched A\*\*\*’; or “I remember when I used to watch A\*\*\*” (clauses which create clear demarcations between past and future), “I was watching...” conjugates the infinitive ‘to watch’, so that the once stative verb (*watch*) becomes the dynamic verb (*watching*) due to the added presence of the gerund (-*ing*), which is often used as a present participle, or continuous verb. This is also the case for the verbs “letting”<sup>115</sup>, and “knowing.” Although told in the past tense, the writing creates a sense of presence, as though the passage is essentially reading in the present continuous (when in fact, it is not). Je’s “unfailing tendency to diffract the real”<sup>116</sup> manifests itself in their recollections of A\*\*\*. Thus from one perspective it appears as though memory is being diffracted either into hallucinogenic denial or empirical, subjectival reality.

Garréta’s writing in the English translation does not read as normative; we are presented with unusual semantic structures of representation. Emma Ramadan, the literary translator of

---

<sup>113</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118.

<sup>114</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118.

<sup>115</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 113.

<sup>116</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 113.

*Sphinx*, has to translate the text without losing Garréta's gender neutral-centred aesthetic. Garréta's text displaces the way in which a semiotic community (in this case, a community of French and English readers) have been trained "to speak a natural language and 'see' the world"<sup>117</sup> within a doctrine of signs. When these signs concern gender and the articulation of its apparent absence, Ramadan writes:

Where Garréta enlisted possessive adjectives to avoid gendered language I alternated between four different strategies in English: using a demonstrative, dropping the article all together, pluralizing, or repeating A\*\*\*'s name. In other places, I rewrote certain passages to avoid personal pronouns, or applied adjectives directly to the subject rather than to something possessed by the subject.<sup>118</sup>

While the recreated translingual aesthetic alters how readers experience the grammatically articulated subjectivity of the protagonist (Je) – as seen with the above example of the unusual tense, it also provides an example for how the writing aesthetic matches genderless, or rather, both masculine and feminine traits and articulations. At face value, the writing is not stereotypically either/or; masculine/feminine; this is because it is not: the writing enacts ambiguous androgyny and ambiguous gender expression simultaneously. Garréta's choice to write with oulipian constraint means that it is hard to tell if this is the male, female, or genderless gaze. I bold and underline the following re-quotation as a means to highlight and draw focus toward gender ambiguity as well as the narrator's own inability to express what *exactly* attracts them toward the indefinable:

In the end what I loved above all else: those hips, **narrow and broad at the same time**, those legs that **I never knew how to describe** except, mundanely, as **slim and long**.<sup>119</sup> Je declares: "But it wasn't this that made them desirable to me—when we made love, I couldn't stop caressing them, my lips against the inner thighs—**it was something else, always something else, this indefinable something else where desire hides itself**."<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Horst Ruthrof. 2000. *The Body In Language*. London: Cassell, 102.

<sup>118</sup> Anne Garréta. "Translator's Note" in *Sphinx*, 166. My Bold and Italicised Emphasis.

<sup>119</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118.

<sup>120</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

The paradox of Garréta's gender-neutral prosodic writing and its implications for interpreting (or 'Undoing' subjectivity) concern the fact that Garréta's writing is not necessarily neutral – it is trans/androgynous, and transandrogyny does not necessarily neutralise gender despite the fact that gender may seem to be indeterminate (i.e., non-binary or sometimes more easily defined in negation as *not* cis-gender.) I make these points based on textual performance rather than considering authorial intention, although this point could also take into account a conversation between Ramadan and Garréta, which Ramadan recounts when asked in an interview: “Were you able to maintain Garréta's androgyny in your own mind while you were translating the novel? Again, perhaps this makes me a bad reader, but I'm really curious to know whether Garréta, even in her own mind, was able to do so.”<sup>121</sup> Ramadan tells us that she “specifically asked [Garréta] this question. It was a really foolish thing to do, because immediately she was like, “What are you talking about? These characters don't have genders that I'm secretly withholding, these characters were constructed in my mind without gender.”<sup>122</sup> In this sense, according to Garréta, the characters simply 'mean' (enact subjectivity) without gender.

### ***Critique of Gender: Syntactic Ambiguity & Subject-Object Relations***

However, Garréta's writing arguably performs aspects of gender whether or not the author believes that to be the case. Gender significations themselves do not always articulate or sign static, clear meaning: “...those hips, narrow and broad at the same time, those legs that I never knew how to describe...”; “it was something else...this indefinable something...” Significations in *Sphinx* have the potential to be read according to stereotypically (and highly generalised) masculine and feminine sex (not gender) adjectival signifiers. These signifiers are

---

<sup>121</sup> Megan Bradshaw and Emma Ramadan. 2021. “A\*\*\* And I: In Conversation With Emma Ramadan.” Blog. *Asymptote*.

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2016/02/15/a-and-i-in-conversation-with-emma-ramadan/>

<sup>122</sup> Bradshaw and Ramadan. 2021. “A\*\*\* And I: In Conversation With Emma Ramadan.”

scattered and embedded within the storyline of the gendered and genderless narrative arcs: ‘narrow’ (hips), for example, can signify taken-for-granted<sup>123</sup> gender expectations and can read as stereotypically masculine, whereas ‘broad’ (hips) connate with the stereotypical sex-characteristics of femininity; ‘slim’ and ‘long’ could read as either/or (trans/androgynous.) I do wish to point out along rhizomatic lines that:

Gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation are independent of one another (i.e., they are not connected). People’s sexual orientation doesn’t determine their gender expression. And their gender expression isn’t determined by their gender identity. And their gender identity isn’t determined by their biological sex. And also, every other mismatch of A isn’t determined by B combination you can dream up from those inputs. Those things certainly affect one another (i.e., they are related to one another), but they do not determine one another.<sup>124</sup>

It is clear that, in *Sphinx*, subjectivity relating to desire does not arise because of gender expression, here androgynously represented. Desire (and thus subjectivity) comes from another, “indefinable”<sup>125</sup> place where it hides. In this sense, desire and therefore subjectivity do not grammatically belong to the subject (to Je), they are their own unmeasurable, perhaps unlocatable agents.

At grammatical and style levels, Garréta’s writing enacts a version of what poet and critic Lisa Samuels terms ‘distributed centrality’<sup>126</sup>; *Sphinx* generates its own grammatical ‘langage inclusif’, for the grammar (with its tenses being confined to the passé simple and l’imparfait), tends to not value certain modalities of expressing over others. For example, as I shall demonstrate, normative prose is disrupted; at times prose is pushed through itself and into

---

<sup>123</sup> Ronald. C Arnett. (2017). “Communicative Ethics: The phenomenological sense of semioethics”. *Language and Dialogue*. 7: 80–99. [doi:10.1075/ld.7.1.06arn](https://doi.org/10.1075/ld.7.1.06arn).

<sup>124</sup> Sam Killermann. 2017. “An Adorable, Accessible Way To Explain A Complicated Concept: The Genderbread Person”. *The Genderbread Person*. <https://www.genderbread.org/>

<sup>125</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118.

<sup>126</sup> See Lisa Samuels. “Everything Speaks—How Do We Listen?” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2017), 319.

[muse.jhu.edu/article/689594](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/689594). For a more recent inquiry into dis-cent, see Lisa Samuels. 2020. “Distributed Centrality Again”. *Ka Mate Ka Ora: A New Zealand Journal Of Poetry And Poetics*, no. 18: 86-89. [http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/18/kmko18\\_08\\_samuels2.pdf](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/18/kmko18_08_samuels2.pdf).

the poetic – desire becomes personified relational embodiment; non-bodies become bodies; apparitions become ‘real’, and notions of static and temporal identity are disfigured and disrupted, thereby creating extreme readings of incognito fragmentation.

As exhibited in the aforementioned passage, although Ramadan does not use demonstrative pronouns, she presents Je as ‘demonstrating’ (pointing toward a subject/non-body) who is not there. In doing so, the ‘ephemeral’ subject *seems* to be personified as it initially (seems) to exert agentive qualities, and acts upon the protagonist who receives the ephemeral action. Desire is likewise personified and contains ponderable agentive, actionable qualities; it is dynamic and invasive: “I was watching A\*\*\* dance from within a profound paralysis, an intense solitude, **letting myself be invaded** by every movement.”<sup>127</sup> What is being imagined in phantasmagoria – in analytic judgement (*a priori* or nominally defined knowledge); or in synthetic judgement (empirical knowledge)<sup>128</sup>; or in descriptive sensorial or somatic bodily knowledge of invasion, is not actually happening in the text; it is an example of fiction diffracting the ‘real.’ Remember, A\*\*\* is being imagined into either undead or pre-death existence by Je.

What is curious here is how this phrase presents Je as receiving an action via the verb ‘invaded’, and yet the supposedly agentive phrase is really a passive construction, for there is no direct active subject (agent) in the sentence performing the action in fictive-literalness or in grammar. This thinking seems to travel along the lines of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who in 1817 considered fiction as a suspension of disbelief.<sup>129</sup> Diffracting the real to Je is equivalent to the suspension of disbelief for readers. The invasion happens to Je, yet no ‘real’ personable subject performs the invasion. Of course, readers can comprehend: ‘Je is being

---

<sup>127</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> Immanuel Kant. 1998. “Introduction” in *Critique Of Pure Reason*. Edited and translated by Paul Guyer, and Allen W Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 130.

<sup>129</sup> “Suspension Of Disbelief”. 2021. *Oxford Reference*.  
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100544310>.

invaded’, and we can clearly recognise that no fictive grammatical subject in fiction is empirically real – however, if we attend to grammar and the way in which it is constructed metasemiotically, we can suspend grammars’ action and reflect on its communicated signs.<sup>130</sup> Despite Garréta’s contention that “these characters were constructed in my mind without gender”<sup>131</sup>, there is a remaining hierarchy within the language. For example, the grammatical composition strays from what is termed *langage inclusif*<sup>iv</sup>, at times it still privileges certain grammatical forms and descriptive representations of subjectivity, identity, and agency over others, yet it also possesses marked grammatical fluidity.

*Sphinx* takes normative grammatical terms and interjects them into what might be considered eccentric or unconventional places. Consider, for example, how the dance becomes the subject which takes (diffracts and ‘invades’) the object (the body) out of its rhythm. Usually it is the body that dances and syncopates, not the dance that dances the body. Or rather, these binary ideas can be thought in terms of a dialectic of ongoingness that a body enters – and both agency and community figure here. This does not mean that one way of expressing such thought is right or wrong; in semioethical terms this suggests an ideological thought-alternative.<sup>132</sup> The semioethical articulation of *langage inclusif* can also extend beyond its desire to assure equality between men and women through language, it can frame itself in terms of distributed centrality so that subjects, objects, and verbs (movements) can ‘take turns’ of privilege to articulate different ways of perceiving. Samuels defines distributed centrality (dis-cent) as:

an ethical value term for the equal centrality of every being, place, and event. On the surface of our planet, the center happens at every point, and **every point speaks**

---

<sup>130</sup> Susan Petrilli. “The responsibility of power and the power of responsibility: From the “semiotic” to the “semioethical” animal”, Abstract. Originally Published in: Withalmm, Gloria & Josef Wallmannsberger (Hg./Eds.), *Macht der Zeichen, Zeichen der Macht. / Signs of Power, Power of Signs. Essays in Honor of Jeff Bernard*, INST (www.inst.at), Wien 2004, pp. 103-119.

<http://www.susanpetrilli.com/files/the-responsibility-of-power-and-the-power-of-responsibility.pdf>

<sup>131</sup> Megan Bradshaw and Emma Ramadan. 2021. “A \*\*\* And I: In Conversation With Emma Ramadan”.

<sup>132</sup> Susan Petrilli. “Semiotics as semioethics in the era of global communication,” 343.

whether with or without what we recognize or allocate as a voice. Distributed centrality is a term for acting so that the center is everywhere. If the centre is everywhere, then all terms are given priority and all terms are on the side of logos.<sup>133</sup>

Garréta's language performs Samuels' idea of distributed centrality within interchanging grammatical articulations: there is even an evident fluidity not just to gender, but to categories of grammar and grammar's allocative terms (how grammatical terms are chosen and used in relation to each other, and how these terms are thought-through). For example, we are told that "A\*\*\* never speaks once"<sup>134</sup> – but what do we allocate as voice? Consider the following inversions and how they relate to disrupting not only normative prosodic explanations tied to subjectival events, but also how they disrupt the notion of static and temporal identity in both the self and other by way of an inarticulable magnetism (attraction):

But it wasn't this that made them desirable to me—when we made love, I couldn't stop caressing **them**, my lips against the inner thighs—**it** was something else, always something else, **this indefinable** something else where desire hides itself. Perhaps I was enticed by the slow motion of the dance, before my eyes, sublimely taking the bodyout of its rhythm. Ephemeral, **this body** was undeniably ephemeral[...]<sup>135</sup>

Breaking down the static and the temporal, notice how dropping the English indefinite articles ('a' / 'an') means that, on balance, Ramadan instead tends to opt for demonstrative determiners rather than demonstrative pronouns; and she also uses the neuter "it", which progressively generates a reading of incognito fragmentation. She adds, "A\*\*\* is already, in French, just a jumble of body parts and the narrator even talks about that[...]<sup>135</sup>it makes a lot of sense for A\*\*\* to be a collection of body parts, because A\*\*\* never once speaks in the novel, because of the

---

<sup>133</sup> Lisa Samuels. "Everything Speaks—How Do We Listen?" *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2017), 318-319. My Emphasis. [muse.jhu.edu/article/689594](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/689594).

<sup>134</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. "The Challenge Of Genderless Characters: What A 30-Year-Old Novel Reveals About Hidden Biases". Interview. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/05/the-challenge-of-genderless-characters/482109/>

<sup>135</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

constraint.<sup>136</sup> Ramadan is aware of the interpretative by-products of translating in such permissible (and feasible) ways:

The reason this book was so difficult was because, in French, one of the easiest ways to describe people is by describing bodies—because the gender agreement happens with the noun of the body part, not the person it's attached to. So, this book is all about bodies: the narrator watching A\*\*\* dance, the narrator watching A\*\*\* sleep, the narrator remembering A\*\*\*... there's just a lot of bodies.<sup>137</sup>

Whereas in French the gender agreement occurs with the noun of the body part, in English, body parts require possessive adjectives.<sup>138</sup> In this passage, I am focused on how interpretations of the original French passage and Ramadan's English translation reveal the shifting conditions for subjectivity in language – these ideas also concern the idea that subjectivity is often a projection and an imagining. A\*\*\* appears as an apparition, and they never speak for themselves. Thus, how is it then that they possess agentive qualities in relation to Je – particularly when they are described in and as fragmentation: all that Je has access to? In addition to altered gender agreement, Ramadan does not consistently drop all articles. For example, the definite article 'the' is often used interchangeably with 'this' (a singular determiner) and body parts (nouns) become pluralised determiners:

“Perhaps I was enticed by the slow motion of the dance, before my eyes, sublimely taking **the body** out of its rhythm. Ephemeral, **this body** was undeniably ephemeral[...].” For other examples, consider the fractured lines: “feeling **the** tension of **this** immaterial thread...”; “looking at **this body** and knowing **it** to be ephemeral...”; “I loved above all else: **those** hips...”; “**those** legs...”; “I couldn't stop caressing **them**”; “**the inner thighs**...”; “**the body**...”<sup>139</sup>

Opting for demonstrative determiners here creates both a distinctly agentive and yet objectified style of writing which is brought about by the grammatical choice to pluralise body parts. For example, consider the line:

---

<sup>136</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. “The Challenge Of Genderless Characters.”

<sup>137</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. “The Challenge Of Genderless Characters.”

<sup>138</sup> Stephanie Hays and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. “The Challenge Of Genderless Characters.”

<sup>139</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

I couldn't stop caressing **them**, my lips against **the inner thighs**— **it** was something else.<sup>140</sup>

The sentence describes the relation between A\*\*\* and Je through an (imaginary) lens of objectification. On a semantic (and cultural) level, it reads as though “**the body**”<sup>141</sup> is more desired than the individual (of/to whom the body belongs.) The sentence is composed in three parts. The first clause focuses on the subject (Je) and their caressing action upon a pair of legs (using the plural pronoun “them”); the second clause positions the subject again in a similar way, yet now the subject relation moves from ‘Subject A’: Je’s “lips” to ‘Subject B’: “the inner thighs” of A\*\*\*, again pluralising A\*\*\*’s body. Subject B therefore becomes multitudinous, since their inner thighs are not the only parts to which have been referred; they are Subject B in various rhizomatic and synecdochic directions many times over (i.e., they are enacted semiotic examples of Samuels’ dis-cent).

In close readings which build upon one another, I argue that Garréta’s writing positions subjectivity and agency as ‘live sculpture’ (both relational and embodied), which can exceed their own subject-object and temporal parameters. Subjectivity – as presented in *Sphinx*’s grammar – can disrupt our own ontological schemas in terms of thinking in and through it. To make a meta-comment, semioethics as a theoretical praxis should be ethical, however the content it analyses does not necessarily need to be. While semioethics considers and critiques ethics via semiosis, it does not feign that there exists no contradictive ethic; and while not always advocating for semioethical writing, what *Sphinx* does do well is it constantly proposes alternative viewpoints which may encourage the reader to think ethically – and this can start at the level of grammar – though such grammar nevertheless exists within both gendered and genderless narrative arcs. *Sphinx* accordingly reshuffles poesis by presenting cubist-like thought-alternatives, which semioethics *does* urge us to perform under the thought-conditions

---

<sup>140</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

<sup>141</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

of plurivocality and polylogism.<sup>142</sup> With this in mind, and to see these ideas in action, consider once more the beginning of the third section of the prior extract:

I couldn't stop caressing **them**, my lips against **the inner thighs**— it was something else.<sup>143</sup>

The omission of a potential conjunction, such as “and”, adds additional sentence ambiguity: the clause “—it was something else”, is vague: does “it” refer to a body part belonging to A\*\*\* (is it a subject pronoun?), or does “it” refer to recollected experience? Such writing recalls the writer Maurice Blanchot's idea of The Neutral (*le neutre*), which, for Blanchot, is articulated as

a force, or trace which lies outside of reading and writing. It exists outside of familiar patterns and narrative scenarios. In Blanchot's thinking, the neutral has two identities, one possible, one impossible. The neutral as impossible is wedded to paradox and contradiction. The neutral as possible (or as a less opaque idea) is located through a narrative voice – it takes the form of either an “I” or an “it.”<sup>144</sup>

Although the nomination ‘Je’ is always-already neutral, because the potential reflexive pronoun in the demonstrated *Sphinx* passage is not easily or clearly implied, the relational ambiguity (to whom does the ‘it’ correspond?) becomes interpretively distributed. Garréta's writing, in this instance, can claim to be written in the middle voice if the ‘it’ refers to Je (still the neutral ‘Je’/‘I’), for the ‘it’ would be the agent, and Je would be the receiver of the action. Although, the idea remains that in caressing something Other, in an abstract sense, the action is still reflexive. When we caress the other, we touch ourselves; in touching the inner thighs with the lips, the inner thighs touch the lips in events of reciprocity. Thus, Garréta's writing both mirrors and inverts. Grammatically, the passive breaks its confines and becomes active, too. If we move back from grammars of detail, however, and shift into political and ethical

---

<sup>142</sup> Susan Petrilli. “Semiotics as semioethics in the era of global communication.” *Semiotica* 2009, no. 173 (2009):343-367.

<sup>143</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

<sup>144</sup> Suzie Gibson. “The Work, The Neutral And “The Unnameable”. *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 14 (2004): 294. Accessed March 20, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25781473>

reading contexts, it is apparent that the neutral ‘it’ (if the ‘it’ is referring to A\*\*\*), again strips them of the power of self-definition.<sup>145</sup> Michelle Cliff writes:

Through objectification – the process by which people are dehumanized, made ghostlike, given the status of Other – an image created by the oppressor replaces the actual being. The actual being is then denied speech; denied self-definition, self-realization; and overarching all this, denied selfhood – which is after all the point of objectification.<sup>146</sup>

In the original French, Ramadan points out that “Garréta took advantage of the fact that, in French, gender agrees with the object, meaning that in the phrase *son bras*, *son* is in the masculine because *bras* is a masculine noun, not because the person the arm belongs to is a man, while in English this would usually be translated as his or her arm.”<sup>147</sup> Equally, all parts of the body are gendered in French, and thus the writing (depicting subjectivity and agency) operates through objectification. In an interview between Emma Ramadan and Mirene Arsanios ‘Crotches Crosses and Sexes Mixed’ (2015), Ramadan notes:

There are certain parts in the book in which the narrator will be describing A’s body, and the nouns she uses will alternate gender. The head will be one gender (“la tête”), but the rest of the body parts will be masculine. There’s a part where the narrator talks about watching A dancing on a stage and each noun alternates between masculine/feminine. Garréta does so much with language and gender on the page, screwing with your ability to perceive A\*\*\*’s gender. And I can’t do that in English. That was something I had to lose in English.<sup>148</sup>

In the English translation, gender does not need to agree with the object if the object is pluralised into the third person or neuter “it.” Accordingly, neutrality is as ambiguity; two identities at once – possible and impossible.<sup>149</sup> I consider this nuance (how translation effects

---

<sup>145</sup>Michelle Cliff. 1990. “Political Arts, Subversive Acts: Object Into Subject: Some Thoughts On the Work Of Black Women Artists.” In *Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 272.

<sup>146</sup> Michelle Cliff. 1990. “Object Into Subject: Some Thoughts On the Work Of Black Women Artists,” 272.

<sup>147</sup> Emma Ramadan. “Translator’s Note” in *Sphinx*, 166.

<sup>148</sup> Emma Ramadan and Mirene Arsanios. 2015. “Crotches Crossed And Sexes Mixed, Emma Ramadan By Mirene Arsanios”. Makhzin.

<http://www.makhzin.org/issues/feminisms/crotches-crossed-and-sexes-mixed>

<sup>149</sup> Suzie Gibson. “The Work, The Neutral And “The Unnameable,” 294.

representations of subjectivity) within the *Sphinx* extract by comparing the English translation with the French.

Comparatively reading from French to English and back again can allow us to ‘see’ differently how the lingual artefactual relationship between gender and language operates within a nuanced doctrine of signs. *Sphinx* takes seriously the idea that *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees* – the title of Lawrence Weschler’s 1982 text concerning light, space and site-conditioned projects. Although *Sphinx* is not as visually abstract, it is textually so, and since one cannot ‘intentionally forget’, one rather resists nominalisation in order to open oneself to new ways of seeing in *Sphinx* within subtractive gender-neutral grammatical constraints and inversions. Comparative thinking in ethical translation is thinking semioethically – it recognises that words have been culturally inherited, and that words often sculpt subjectivity within permissible collective archetypical expressions and distinctions. Changing language is changing culture and thus articulations of subjectivity. Accordingly, consider Garréta’s original French, which reads as follows:

...Et cette intense solitude, le contempler dansant, depuis une profonde immobilité, me laisser envahir par son mouvement, éprouvant **la tension de ce fil immatériel** qui nous relie encore à distance. Mais la subite irruption de l’angoisse : **regarder et savoir ce corps éphémère.**

Ce que j’avais fini par aimer entre tout : **ces hanches étroites et large à la fois,** articulées sur **des jambes** dont je n’ai jamais rien su dire si ce n’est, banalité, **qu’elles étaient fines et longues.** Mais ce n’est pas cette qualité qui me les rendait désirables — jamais lorsque nous faisons l’amour, je ne me lassais de **les caresser,** mes lèvres **posées contre l’intérieur de la cuisse** — : **autre chose.** Toujours autre choses, cette autre chose indéfinissable où va se réfugier le désir[...] <sup>150</sup>

In French, if Garréta were to explicitly refer to the body, she could have written, “C’était autre chose” (‘It was something else’- which is how this line is actually translated into English by Ramadan), or “Ce/le/son corps était quelque chose d’autre” (This/the body was something else)

---

<sup>150</sup> Anne Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*. 1st ed. Paris: Grasset, 165-166. See the section in *Sphinx* to which footnote 32 (in this thesis) refers for the English translation (p.118 of *Sphinx*). My Emphasis.

– articles which are applied one page earlier (p.165) in the French text<sup>151</sup> – yet as can comparatively be seen in the original version, there is suddenly no article. Instead, a simple hyphen *and* colon (seen only in the original French) as “— : autre chose” (something else) appears between the syntactic form of the sentence without any smooth transition or warning. Perhaps the ‘autre chose’ refers to a distributed “I” or “it”. There is no univocal or bridging meaning representing subjectivity here, which ‘autre chose’ seems to teasingly critique. Moreover, to cite the literarily well-known Rimbaud line, perhaps ‘Je est un autre.’

*Sphinx* provokes a queering of discourse as it gently dismantles normative communicative systems; the text also queers anticipated, prescriptive, or expected phenomenologies of subjectivity in discourse. As this passage demonstrates, there is often considerable syntactic ambiguity over where the grammatical focus lies – instead, the focus appears to be distributed: there is constant alteration between the subject-object and the subject-subject relation, further blurring representations of lingual subjectivity. I thereby argue that the semiotic position of the text on lexical planes of usage resists language’s normative and supposedly stable critical identitarian tendencies; subjectivity itself is presented as a riddle constantly navigating between semiotic opacity and transparency as it takes on rhizomatic lines of flight.<sup>v</sup> For example, the ‘autre chose’ almost becomes an intransitive verb, but it does not function as such, since the verbs “caresser” (stroke/caress) and “posées” (hovering/to fix upon – Ramadan translates this as ‘against’), rapidly change and do not originate from the same ‘parts’ of Je either. The ‘I’ completely subsumes conceptions of ‘the lips’ (which often accord with the entire conception of an ‘I’: who possesses the lips; (the lips also possess the ‘I’), yet the phrase: “I couldn’t stop caressing them, my lips against the inner thighs” posits a distance

---

<sup>151</sup> Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*, 165. See the past-imperfect tense: “j’imaginai ce corps” (‘I had imagined this body’) / “son corps” (‘this body’). Although ‘son corps’ is a masculine noun, it does not reflect that this refers to a masculine subject.

between the ‘I’ and the actor who performs the action with the body (defined as I). A\*\*\* is described as fragmentary and distributed, yet so is Je’s agentive subjectivity.

Garréta’s writing encourages distributive interpretation – it enacts a critique of univocal or ‘centralised’ subjectivity. The distribution of normative French: *subject-object-verb* constructions; sentences can be read ‘outside’ of normative linear French grammar to more dispersed semioethical ends and effects. Garréta creates semioethical reframes beyond dominant linguistic structures, and normative bodily and subjectival lines are blurred because of this alteration. Her writing engages with alterity and subjectivity which begin and end as fractured cognitions and bodies – this is a practice of grammatical blurring performing inversions of dominant paradigms. As I shall point out, this happens because the writing is genderless; translation needs to preserve this touch and it is for this reason that certain expressions and ways of thinking must be avoided.

For example, Je’s expression of subjectivity halts as we come across the concept of ‘something else’, since this decapitated phrase (similarly lexically fragmented) cannot receive a direct object, considering it is too abstract. However, transitive verbs do appear in this section and they *are* connective and relational. In French, they have an object which connects to other parts of the sentence within the traditional *subject-object-verb* grammatical formation. (In traditional English prosaic grammar, this is often *subject-verb-object*.) The hyphen and colon makes it so that there is no traditional grammatical object to wholly (contextually) complete the verbal transitivity of the sentence. After the first comma in the following extract, the sentence also begins to read outside of normative French grammatical order. Consider the lines:

“**je** {subject} ne me lassais de **les** {indirect object pronoun} **caresser** {verb}, **mes lèvres** {subject} **posées** {verb} contre l’intérieur **de la cuisse** {indirect object pronoun} — : autre chose.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*. 1st ed. Paris: Grasset, 166.

This sentence reads: subject-object-verb / subject-verb-object — : autre chose. This ‘something else’ reads as peculiar. The above grammar reflects a semioethical kind of grammatical reframing beyond dominant structures: meaning starts to invert its normative prosodic expressions, with the literary effect being that Garréta has created a reading which blurs normative bodily and subjectival lines. I argue that this is not necessarily a bid to engage with subjectivity of the Other at the level of grammar, but rather, the writing engages with alterity and subjectivity which journey to and from demonstrated fractured bodily positions and fractured cognitions. Such cognitive and bodily fractures are represented by the alternation of verb and object positions, and the use of hyphenation and a colon aids subjectival grammatical blurring and inversions in unfamiliar ways. The sentence appears to halt — and then : recommence.

In this instance, in terms of blurring and inverting grammar, it is evident that Garréta chooses *not* to take advantage of the masculine noun *son corps*, or *ce corps*, indicating that this ‘something else’ (a latent or budding non-space) is potentially a — : (hyphenated) mental disruption to the physical; “— : autre chose.”<sup>153</sup> The lack of the French article and its similarly evasive English translation, as I shall explain, puts and pulls the body into fractured and ephemeral subject-object-verb / subject-verb-object terms. As such, it becomes difficult to locate subjectivity as it becomes increasingly transcendent.

In *The Self As A Sign, The World, And The Other* (2013), Susan Petrilli refers to Victoria Welby, a philosopher of language. Petrilli finds coherence in Welby’s analysis of the ‘ephemeron’, which steers toward the contemporary notion that identity is intrinsically (intrapyschically) relational and transcendent; subjectivity is built into the dialectical/dialogic relationship between the self and the I.<sup>154</sup> Welby claims that:

---

<sup>153</sup> Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*. 1st ed. Paris: Grasset, 166.

<sup>154</sup> Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio. 2013. “The Self as Opening to the Other” in *The Self As A Sign, The World, And The Other*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 108.

The I or Ident is not the ‘individual’ but the ‘unique’. The self is also designated with the neologism ephemeron, and is described as being mortal, ephemeral like the body. By contrast, the I is described as tending toward immortality beyond the mortality of the body and of the self. Formed in this way, identity is not unitary or compact, but, on the contrary, presents a surplus, something more with respect to identity itself, which it transcends.<sup>155</sup>

The I-narrator (Je) locates subjectivity in the ephemeral body – recognising that subjectivity is a sense of aliveness rather than a sense of definition. In Petrilli’s later book, *Sign Studies and Semioethics* (2014), she asserts that whatever underlying force “makes us speak or produce signs”<sup>156</sup> henceforth “pushes us to produce semiosis and to come into being as a subject, as an “I.”<sup>157</sup> Here, she discusses what are essentially subject-object relations:

If we search for an answer in the object alone, in the dynamical object, claiming, as does Eco, that it is the object that “demands to be said,” not only is our response partial with respect to the whole issue, but it fails to account for the overall context in which the need to speak makes itself felt...the relation with the object is always mediated by the relation with the other, not the other understood as a thing, but as “other.” We could claim that it is our relation with others that makes us speak, that demands that the subject should speak.”<sup>158</sup>

I have mentioned that, in English, gender does not need to agree with the object if the object is pluralised into the third person or neuter “it.” However, in the French translation, the language more specifically refers to “— : autre chose” (something else). In light of this, and considering Petrilli’s comments above, the *Sphinx* passage appears to position the ‘other’ in terms of being a ‘chose’ (a ‘thing’ – *Je est un autre*) whose subjectivity is indefinable because the semiotic process of reading the ‘other’ fails to push the object into the subject (into an ‘I’, or rather, a ‘they.’) ‘L’autre’ exceeds gender as well as subjectivity (this is clearly not to say that to be genderless is to evade subjecthood or subjectivity, but rather that non-binary or ambiguous gender exceeds traditional understandings of subjectivity). In other words, this is not so much

---

<sup>155</sup> Susan Petrilli. “Semiotics as semioethics in the era of global communication.” *Semiotica* 2009, no. 173 (2009), 8.

<sup>156</sup> Susan Petrilli. 2014. “Evolutionary cosmology, logic and semioethics” in *Sign Studies and Semioethics: Communication, Translation and Values*. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 88.

<sup>157</sup> Petrilli. 2014. “Evolutionary cosmology, logic and semioethics” in *Sign Studies and Semioethics*, 88.

<sup>158</sup> Petrilli. 2014. “Evolutionary cosmology, logic and semioethics” in *Sign Studies and Semioethics*, 88.

a lingual demonstration of suspended subjectivity as it is the annihilation of the other's subjectivity often understood in binary terms. Selecting the term “— : autre chose” understands a ‘thing’ (Object) not an ‘other’ (Subject), which in some ways speaks to the inarticulate nature of subjectivity, and helps explain why Garréta’s epigraph addresses the novel to “*To the third.*”<sup>159</sup> This makes descriptive ‘sense’, considering Je is recalling something beyond a subject/object of memory: A\*\*\*, whose body is described as ‘ephemeral’ and is no longer physically ‘here.’ Subjectivity in *Sphinx* can then be understood as a distributed, alive and dislocating force: ‘autre chose’ is prose made poetry attempting to describe the liminal; it shifts into Rimbaud’s poetics, which *Sphinx* insists is enough.

### ***Bioautography & Embodied Relationality***

Garréta’s inversion and distribution of subject-object, mind/body cognitions further recentres dominant discourse (i.e., positions it elsewhere). In other words, the articulated distributed cognition of the body recentres dominant discourse and the manner in which it regulates subjectival perceptions vis-à-vis subject-object grammatical distributions. Hence, narrative outcomes based on gender-neutral writing reframe phenomenologies of subjectivity in terms of philosophies of the body in the mind. Such syntactical transpositionings and inversions adjust perspectives, meaning and imaginations – they effectively detotalise taken for granted semiotic communicative systems and render Garréta’s writing as both catalyst and crucible for nuanced, fluid, semiotic and ethical consideration of subjectivity and agency.

In Lisa Samuels’ literary analysis of Carolee Schneemann’s art, entitled “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann’s VULVA’S MORPHIA” (2017), Samuels engages with artistic work which similarly recentres dominant discourse and ways of thinking. Schneemann’s relentless body interest can be seen as time and topic relevant to Garréta in the

---

<sup>159</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 8. Epigraph.

sense that both artists deal with powerful cultural ideologies concerning sex, philosophy, the body, gender, politics, agency, subjectivity and more<sup>160</sup> - in other words: ‘sensual politics.’

In the 2017 essay, Samuels uses the critical neologism “bioautography” as a way to “give primacy to the bio-life in self-writing.”<sup>161</sup> Bioautography is an extension and a syntactic inversion of the normative term “autobiography,” and the emphasis begins as ‘bio.’<sup>162</sup> Samuels’ article reads Schneemann’s work in relation to the inversion of subject-object cognition, which, in certain ways, can reframe common expectations or assumptions concerning how the mind and body (constructions of subjectivity) can be read (how they can ‘mean’) in concert as *both* cognised *and* embodied. This thinking also concerns self-definition within normative language use. Samuels writes that the sensoria – upon engaging with Schneemann’s work – is reminded that “One historic echo [of VULVA’S MORPHIA] is sentimental literature,” which refers to “the positive sense of the “body in the mind” and “thought beating in the heart.”<sup>163</sup> This kind of reading takes on an embodied approach to “the distributed cognition of the body,”<sup>164</sup> which in many ways recentres dominant discourse and the manners in which it regulates subjectival perceptions vis-à-vis subject-object grammatical distributions. For example, Samuels writes that “The somato-psychic knowing and explication involved in bioautography index a widespread change in imagination languages of the body self, and here of the vulva.”<sup>165</sup> Instead of the body ‘always-already’ being defined and spoken-for, this emphasis allows the body to speak in non-dominant discursive terms: “Schneemann problematizes if womens’

---

<sup>160</sup> See “Carolee Schneemann, Kinetic Painting At MOMA PS1”. 2021. *Artifactoid*.

<https://theartifactoid.com/2018/01/31/carolee-schneemann-kinetic-painting-at-moma-ps1/>

<sup>161</sup> Lisa Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA’S MORPHIA”. *Chicago Review*, 60 (4), 154.

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Bioautography+and+Carolee+Schneemann%27s+VULVA%27S+MORPHIA.-a0522758666>

<sup>162</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA’S MORPHIA”, 154.

<sup>163</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA’S MORPHIA”, 154.

<sup>164</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA’S MORPHIA”, 158.

<sup>165</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA’S MORPHIA”, 154. See also <https://theartifactoid.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/vulvasmorpheus.jpg>

understanding of their own anatomy/physiology is defined in masculine terms.”<sup>166vi</sup> This “change in imagination languages”<sup>167</sup> is necessarily cultural; the emphasis is rather placed on thinking about how creators and consumers of art can partake in philosophies of self-awareness which can begin from any place – whether that awareness starts from the author’s body, their own, or from the artist’s oeuvre (another ‘body’ of work) from which other bodies relate and through which they can think and (re)imagine themselves. Both *Sphinx* and Schneemann’s work constantly point to the power of language. Language is powerful because it fundamentally shapes the ways in which we relate to, feel, express and navigate our own embodiment and relation to other bodies and beings. Garréta, as I shall demonstrate, writes from this place of intense corporeal interest.

Garréta’s gender-neutral writing alters ontological perception and meaning by reframing phenomenologies of subjectivity in terms of philosophies of the mind-body connection and ideas of the body in the mind. A reading considering *affect*<sup>168</sup> versus pure linguistic rationality can adjust imaginations and perspectives – it can, in some respects, detotalise taken-for-granted global semiotic communication systems<sup>169</sup> by challenging the production of literary meaning as it becomes ampliative and uncertain. Garréta’s writing acts as a partial semioethical articulation of a desire to induce interpretation in multiplicity, and in doing so, it challenges and queers dominant discourse. In the case of the demonstrated *Sphinx* passage, not only does Garréta’s writing provoke a queering of discourse as it performs a gentle dismantling of normative semiotic communicative systems, but it also queers once anticipated, normative or expected phenomenologies of discourse. Consider again the lines:

---

<sup>166</sup> “Carolee Schneemann, Kinetic Painting At MOMA PS1”. 2021. *Artifactoid*.

<https://theartifactoid.com/2018/01/31/carolee-schneemann-kinetic-painting-at-moma-ps1/>

<sup>167</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann’s VULVA’S MORPHIA”, 158.

<sup>168</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann’s VULVA’S MORPHIA”, Notes (2/).

<sup>169</sup> Susan Petrilli. 2018. *Susan Petrilli Keynote Lecture*.

But it wasn't this that made them desirable to me—when we made love, I couldn't stop caressing them, my lips against the inner thighs—it was something else, always something else, this indefinable something else where desire hides itself.<sup>170</sup>

The second and third line draw attention to themselves: if the “it” does refer to A\*\*\*'s body, then this posits that subjectivity creates itself in relation to (and reflects) the object of the subject's desire. If the “it” refers to the sexual experience, then this posits that desire is both embodied, ‘indefinable’ and distributed, yet it is often thought of in normative grammatical terms which demarcate clear subject relations. The use of the hyphen, acting as a midline stop, suggests that Je's thoughts are entropic and yet uncontrolled as language denies itself its own complete articulation.

Of course, on a pragmatic level, instead of writing: “A\*\*\*'s body / hips / legs / inner thighs / body”, these body parts become pluralised in order to avoid revealing A\*\*\*'s gender, and to avoid repeating the second protagonist's gender. However, as mentioned, the effect is an irrevocable alteration of the subject-object and subject-subject relationship: A\*\*\* is only referred to as *the body-object* versus *a person-subject*. Paradoxically, this depicts the idea that gender (or its expression, rather than gender identity) can still operate without its name even in the face of syntactic ambiguity which destabilises subject-object relations. Moreover, despite such syntactic ambiguity, gender continues to operate doubly and in other ways on a subtextual level.

Chapter III, (p.119), for example, presents many doublings and overlaps of subject relations between the characters, as well as an overlap of “the body in the mind”<sup>171</sup>, and the “thought beating in the heart.”<sup>172</sup> For example, when the main protagonist says: “...**there is no way to assassinate the cadaver I have been carrying in me for eternity**, no way to dull the acidic decomposition that gnaws at me, **torturing my flesh** every time I fall in love. I

---

<sup>170</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118.

<sup>171</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA'S MORPHIA”, 154.

<sup>172</sup> Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA'S MORPHIA”, 154.

constructed each love too much **in my own image**,<sup>173</sup> when this extract is linked back to other lines in *Sphinx*, a phrase such as this (filled with death imagery) creates a sense of looped mimesis (i.e., there is a body in a body in an image thinking love), and a blurring of the sense of singular subjectivity. To what or to whom does the cadaver ‘inside’ of J refer? One page earlier, A\*\*\* is described in Je’s memory as “Ephemeral, this body was undeniably ephemeral”<sup>174</sup>, and yet, we might recall, this description was merely an exemplar of Je’s “unfailing tendency to diffract the real.”<sup>175</sup> In this sense, A\*\*\*’s subjectivity becomes what Je projects and language itself becomes a constant diffraction of the real, the temporal, and the hyperbolic unreal. Moreover, the phrase above places emphasis on ideas of the “body in the mind” and “thought(s) beating in the heart”<sup>176</sup>: thought (in this case, the articulation of feeling) is personified as a body – it is a “cadaver I have been carrying for eternity”, and it **“tortur[es] my flesh every time I fall in love.”**<sup>177</sup> Who is the subject here performing the action of the verb? It is too ambiguous to be certain. This ambiguity positions subjectivity as potentially multiple and enigmatic.

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, *Sphinx* is ambiguous in its ethics and affect; its grammars take dialectical turns of privilege which articulate different ontologies and ways of thinking and perceiving. We start to question exactly how grammar shapes thought – even how terms such as “voice” can be rethought and extended; we are not actually limited by language, we are limited by the ways in which we think *through* language. “What do we allocate as voice?” – voice can mean or be anything. *Sphinx*’s formal constraint encourages a synesthetic ontological reading experience (in order to undo or rethink subjectivity); its language does not solely rest within the realm of the lingual-cognitive. *Sphinx*’s subtle yet

---

<sup>173</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 119. My Emphasis.

<sup>174</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 118. My Emphasis.

<sup>175</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 113. My Emphasis.

<sup>176</sup>Samuels. 2017. “Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann’s VULVA’S MORPHIA”. *Chicago Review*, 154.

<sup>177</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 119. My Emphasis.

powerful shifts in language prompts a shift in affect. This is why I have argued that the text – though not always depictively ethical – queers dominant discourse and re-writes supposedly stable critical identitarian tendencies in zones of distributed subjectivity and sensual politics.

## Chapter Two: Subjectivity | Deformance | Five Thought-Experiments

*Play is the Highest Form of Research.*  
— Albert Einstein.

This chapter introduces an added methodology in order to navigate and challenge several perspectives and ways of attending to subjectivity in *Sphinx*. I am principally concerned with grammatical enactments which decentre and displace lingual subjectivity. *Sphinx* enables readers to question the idea of a stable subject and of supposedly stable grammars which, arguably, represent subjectivity. I argue that undoing subjectivity is rethinking subjectivity – all grammars can become subjects and all grammars express particular modal ontologies; we can redefine their terms in order to fit subjectivity inside its own allocative terms, not the other way around.

In this chapter I seek to expand the sense of what subjectivity can be in grammars and logic, yet I also desire to go beyond these thinking frameworks. Thus I demonstrate with new examples and further nuance how, in *Sphinx*, subjectivity is not expressed as logical; subjectivity is presented as contradictory affect and it is dialectical rather than certain and unrecursive. Since subjectivity is not articulated in linearity, I further pursue the argument that the writing queers ‘straight’ dominant discourses and modes of thinking; I consider how this writing relates to agency and to gendered or genderless grammars articulating subjectivity. Throughout this chapter’s interpretive theorisations, I use Lisa Samuels’ theory of Deformance as an alternative base to ‘undo’ subjectivity, and I continue to use Samuels’ theory of ‘distributed centrality’ in order to read subjectivity semioethically. As articulated in Chapter One, a semioethical reading of subjectivity wants to detotalise global communication systems to make us rethink how subjectivity is experienced and felt – how does our language shape our subjectivity and its permissible expressions?

I also argue in this chapter that while Garréta's writing performs resistance to dominant, gendered discourse, it also creates its own ontological problems. I specifically address how active and passive cases representing subjectivity fluctuate according to gender and gender-neutral language use. I provide further examples of how linguistic structures of meaning produce and reinforce agential and non-agential ontological perspectives, illustrating how this relates to Subject-Verb-Object grammatical constructions (which can be undone, and these are the constructions with which Garréta plays.)

Chapter Two is split into five main sections which take up five thought-experiments; within each of the five sections are subsections which, on balance, consider specific philosophies of subjectivity including those in Phenomenology, Ontology, Grammar, and Propositional logic. I am principally concerned with the details and potentialities of represented subjectivity in *Sphinx* rather than in a final synthesis of meaning. One of the central concerns of Chapter Two engages with the question: How can subjectivity best be understood when the way subjectivity is articulated fundamentally alters its own ontology? Accordingly, this chapter focuses on language and being – and on how the two inflect one other.

### **Relational and Recursive Subjectivity: Embracing 'Both/And' Dialectics**

Garréta articulates the idea that the grammatical subject is a *state*. The 'I' is expressed according to states of being: *être* and *avoir*. The 'I' in *Sphinx* is both a translation (I is Je) and a grammatical function with which it can express itself. Even within the grammatical 'I' in *Sphinx* there is relation and self-relation (recursion), where a decentering and displacement of subjectivity plays out when gender is concealed through the 'I'; it continually touches upon its own limits. Identity is consequently disguised as the singular 'I' is metamorphosed with the use of pronominal anaphora and cataphora, which I shall demonstrate in a close reading of the following passage. Consider how the 'I' is spoken through in *Sphinx* in these lines:

I exist in a morbid state, my body riddled by consumption, not knowing from where to vomit up the soul it has created. For all I have done since A\*\*\*'s death is forge myself a soul, and I no longer know if I should deny its existence. When I close my eyes, I see my soul as a screen crisscrossed with flowing, intertwined lines; architectural straight lines of a volume uncertain of its limits, exposed on all sides; a fragile construction, by turns knocked down, invaded, uprooted, robbed of its foundations, mined by all those embraces in which it happily prostitutes itself. Gazes, hands, all that is outside comes to burn it, shake it...But I would like to drown out the noise of this tearing of silk that happens between physical bodies and mental architecture. I am assailed by indifference. I had thought that I would never be able to grow tired of loving, but one night I woke to an absence of love and felt no torture: it was the absence of this torture that truly scared me, that tortured me.<sup>178</sup>

As Chapter One also notes, *Sphinx* can be read as deploying/performing the self-referential capacities of decentralised subjectivity; again it puts into play the famous phrase, articulated in a letter from Arthur Rimbaud to Paul Demeny in 1871<sup>179</sup>: “Car je est un autre” (‘Because I is another’/somebody else/that which is not the same). In *Sphinx*, the I exists at the interstices of an (imagined) physical body and the (imagined) mental architecture which represents it. Which I relates to which I? There are different ‘parts’ inside the humanimal which have ongoing relationships with each part. Rimbaud’s phrase is a paradox because it puts into question differentials between identity and alterity/otherness while maintaining the opposition by its very terms.<sup>180</sup> The question prompts us to ask: What makes us believe in the stability of the subject? How can you be other than yourself?<sup>181</sup> Therapist and academic Richard Schwartz states that:

A part is not just a temporary emotional state or habitual thought pattern. Instead, it is a discrete and autonomous mental system that has an idiosyncratic range of emotion, style of expression, set of abilities, desires, and view of the world. In other words, it is

---

<sup>178</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*. 2nd ed. Dallas, Texas: Deep Vellum Publishing. Originally published in French as *Sphinx* by Editions Grasset & Fasquelle in Paris, 1986, 2015. Print, 127.

<sup>179</sup> Fabula, Équipe. 2007. “Car Je Est Un Autre”: Articulations Du Rapport Entre Identité Et Altérité”. *Fabula: La Recherche En Littérature*. [https://www.fabula.org/actualites/car-je-est-un-autre-articulations-du-rapport-entre-identite-et-alterite\\_16900.php#:~:text=%C2%AB%20Car%20je%20est%20un%20autre%20%C2%BB%2C%20telle%20est%20la%20c%C3%A9%20bre,opposition%20par%20ses%20termes%20m%C3%A9mes.](https://www.fabula.org/actualites/car-je-est-un-autre-articulations-du-rapport-entre-identite-et-alterite_16900.php#:~:text=%C2%AB%20Car%20je%20est%20un%20autre%20%C2%BB%2C%20telle%20est%20la%20c%C3%A9%20bre,opposition%20par%20ses%20termes%20m%C3%A9mes.)

<sup>180</sup> Fabula, Équipe. 2007. “Car Je Est Un Autre”: Articulations Du Rapport Entre Identité Et Altérité”. *Fabula: La Recherche En Littérature*.

<sup>181</sup> Fabula, Équipe. 2007. “Car Je Est Un Autre”: Articulations Du Rapport Entre Identité Et Altérité”.

as if we each contain a society of people, each of whom is at a different age and has different interests, talents, and temperaments.<sup>182</sup>

Although *Sphinx* depicts literary characters, not necessarily real ‘selves’ or ‘parts’ (however much it may be based on aspects of the author’s lived experience) the linguistic simulacrum comes extremely close to normative prosodic thought, reflecting how language grammatically subsumes subjectivity (selves) into a unified self (identity) or singularity, even though this is not always how subjectivity is *experienced*. It is the felt gap between representation and phenomenology, which is often difficult to articulate when different selves speak with the same ‘I’. Accordingly, as articulated in Chapter One, if semioethics wants to detotalise global communication systems, it makes sense to begin by ‘unseeing’ parts of language which are always-already articulating alterity and difference within what appears to be centrality and similarity. Further, it is worth noting the self-telling autobiographical aspects in *Sphinx* and their relations to subjectivity; though this chapter’s focus is mostly how subjectivity is represented lingually, and it is worth bearing in mind that, despite Garréta’s claims, *Sphinx* can be read as an Autofiction.

I am going to think about instability and the alterity of the subject and subjectivity with the following five thought-experiments, working with the interpretative assumption of Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann’s critical theory from ‘Deformance and Interpretation’<sup>183</sup> (1999) as a way to both totalise and detotalise Garréta’s writing (i.e., her communicative system.) A close reading will illustrate that it is only after comparatively ‘unseeing’ totalised form (aesthetics) in Garréta’s writing that one can appreciate how genderless writing functions

---

<sup>182</sup> Richard C Schwartz. 2013. “An introduction to IFS” in *Internal Family Systems Therapy: New Dimensions*. Edited by Martha Sweezy and Ellen L Ziskind. New York: Routledge, xviii.

<sup>183</sup> See Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann. “Deformance and Interpretation.” *New Literary History* 30, no. 1 (1999): 25-56. Accessed February 19, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057521>. I use McGann and Samuels’ idea (see p.42) to perform ‘double deformation’ of the writing by “examining it in isolated pieces. Start with a noun reading, keeping the words in their same positions relative to the complete poem.” See also Lisa Samuels’ PhD thesis for where deformative criticism was invented: [https://www.academia.edu/9473096/Poetic\\_Arrest\\_Laura\\_Riding\\_Wallace\\_Stevens\\_and\\_the\\_Modernist\\_Afterlife](https://www.academia.edu/9473096/Poetic_Arrest_Laura_Riding_Wallace_Stevens_and_the_Modernist_Afterlife)

ontologically in relation to active subjects and passive objects (and how it flips and reverses concepts of the subject and object.) I will work with the extract from *Sphinx* above in order to consider linguistic contradiction, negation, and possibility – asking how these concepts illuminate the aforementioned relations between subjectivity and agency.

## Five Thought-Experiments

### 1. Prefactual / Thinking Subjectivity

*What if X were to occur?*

I shall begin by introducing the deformative procedure of omission, which seeks to examine writing in fragmented pieces according to their grammatical categories. In this singular case, X = Removing all words from the page which are not verbs, and later nouns. I also deploy an intersectional version of critical analysis that combines deformance and/or psychological theories of attention. I ask, how can subjectivity in *Sphinx* be understood according to a prefactual, deformative thought-experiment? And what do I mean by prefactual? Prefactual thoughts can be conceived of as “Mental Simulations about What Might Happen”<sup>184</sup>, defined as:

a conditional (if-then) proposition about an action-outcome linkage that may (or may not) take place in the future, such as “If I take action X, it will lead to outcome Y.” A prefactual embraces a causal belief that an action (if taken) will result in the outcome with a high degree of certainty. A form of mental simulation, prefactuals often derive from counterfactuals (which focus on the past) and feed into intentions (which center on the future).<sup>185</sup>

Deformative procedures of omission highlight linguistic architectures which symbolise how subjectivity can be divided and sculpted anew within each emergent interpretation. Deformance also plays around, experiments, even undresses syntactic positionalities. If words were apparel, then rather than stripping its subject bare, Deformance takes off specific lingual garments with the intention to analyse and refashion its subject(s) in order to get different nuanced senses for how the writing functions.

---

<sup>184</sup> See Kai Epstude, Annika Scholl, and Neal J. Roese. “Prefactual Thoughts: Mental Simulations about What Might Happen.” *Review of General Psychology* 20, no. 1 (March 2016): 48–56.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000064>

<sup>185</sup> Epstude, Scholl, and Roese. “Prefactual Thoughts: Mental Simulations about What Might Happen”, Abstract.

As I shall demonstrate, Deformance and prefactual thinking take cause and effect (i.e., the synthesised idea that prose implicitly renders itself accessible by means of conjunctions, connectors, and *if-then* statements) out from under the original sentences (i.e., Garréta's complete communicative system) and, in the case for nouns, for example, focuses only on how concrete and abstract nouns enact themselves as phenomenological and empirical architectures that seek to signify concepts that represent, or, symbolise, the divided linguistic experience of subjectivity. I say divided because, in prose writing, lingual subjectivity evidently constructs and accoutres itself via a combination of nouns, verbs, and other language features which work in tandem, and also because I do not observe that subjectivity in *Sphinx* is performed in linearity, as I shall soon explain. Disruptions of temporal normative representations of subjectivity Queers writing and disrupts normative linguistic reproductions. Language can determine how we view and interact with the world, and Garréta's writing (which resists dominant discourse) reframes how we can 'see.'

### ***Why look at Subjectivity via Deformance?***

*I mistrust all systematisers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.*

— Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, Maxims and Arrows*

Very often, interpretation can represent biased filtering and select viewpoints which arc toward the pursuit of desired 'truth' seemingly capturable within an analytic or syncretic system. How can we attend to and invite our own interpretive frames to be both focused within the limits of the system, and expansive outside it? From the outset, Deformative critical practice can perform one way of filtering meaning with potentially reduced bias if this style of interpretation extends itself many times over and in different directions to reveal different patterns and/or textual insights within lingual description – isolating word-concepts. Deformance is a way to

see differently and to focus on specific grammars – how do they constitute the representation of subjectivity in a text?

Analysing *Sphinx*, seeing differently can mean considering different grammatical categories in separation and in unison. One's interpretation may be ushered in by the systematic forces of interpretation and can therein assist one, in Proustian locution, to possess and behold the subject (language: the lingual landscape) with new eyes.<sup>186</sup> Deformative interpretation analogously could be considered as an innovative Oulipian style of constraint aiming to perform experiential interpretation.

Deformance as a practice of constraint desiring capacious interpretation places disproportionate attention upon certain grammars and ideas; it stimulates new perspectives and allows for a concentrated focus on specific terms constituting lingual subjectivity. Since Deformative critical practice can be said to take both a systematic and creative approach to interpretation, the practice enacts a form of methodical randomness. In the case of this thesis, choosing to closely examine nouns and verbs (versus prepositions, adverbs, the subjunctive, or adjectives etc), will render this select interpretation as distinct from prepositional or adverbial readings; it should uncover different ways of thinking about subjectivity through particular focused readings via select grammars. All of these reasons support the use of deformative techniques which analyse subjectivity in *Sphinx*.

Like tuning into a specific colour or attending to “a pair of wings, a different mode of breathing,”<sup>187</sup> Deformative criticism disrupts grammar and suspends words in their original

---

<sup>186</sup> Marcel Proust. 1913. *In Search Of Lost Time (All 7 Volumes)*. Translated from the French by C.K Moncrief, and Stephen Hudson. London: Shandon Press, Chapter II p.38966.

<sup>187</sup> Proust. 1913. *In Search Of Lost Time (All 7 Volumes)*, p.38966. Proust writes of how art renders itself externally visible “in the colors of the spectrum that intimate composition of those worlds which we call individual persons and which, without the aid of art, we should never know[...] The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of eternal youth should be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is;[...].”

context(s) and grammatical systems while removing context (i.e., removing the now interpretively deemed ‘extraneous’ words which once surrounded the now ‘highlighted’ words.) This practice calls for an open playfulness of attention – filtering guided by deformative criticism can act as a prism which refracts and disintegrates margins.<sup>188</sup> As addressed in Chapter One, Samuels writes that:

On the surface of our planet, there is no centre: the centre is at every point. The corner, the wave, treetop, the room of earnest conversation, organisms teeming closely, the turn of a wing. I want to consider some implications of this situation, using the ethical value term distributed centrality to think about the equal centrality of every being, place and event[...]. In distributed centrality, there are no margins. Everything acts centrality. Replacing centre-to-margin descriptions with distributed centres means to upheave assertions that some anywheres operate as sidelines to some other more main anywhere.<sup>189</sup>

Lingual performances of distributed centrality are emphasised in Deformance. Presuming one has a certain level of free-will (the ability to choose how to interpret without overwhelming coercion or conscious antagonism), therein lies the pleasure and interpretive endeavour of one invited way of performing critical Deformance – which allows itself to be thought through a dis-cent network approach. The idea that one can see the centrality of a text and see it in its own reality is always a question of relation and hermeneutics. What conceptual systems should we use to understand the manifold layers constituting subjectivity in a text? Might the text require another system, another quite different frame of reference? Does not the person or text “evade our investigations, slip through our scientific fingers like seafoam, precisely to the extent that we rely on the logical consistency of our own system?”<sup>190</sup>

Deformative criticism puts into even deeper contestability the idea that any continuous sense of stable or static subjectivity is common or even truly possible; subjectivity is made and

---

<sup>188</sup> Lisa Samuels. 2020. “Distributed Centrality Again”. *Ka Mate Ka Ora: A New Zealand Journal Of Poetry And Poetics*, no. 18: 86. [http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/18/kmko18\\_08\\_samuels2.pdf](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/18/kmko18_08_samuels2.pdf).

<sup>189</sup> Samuels. 2020. “Distributed Centrality Again”, 86.

<sup>190</sup> Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Heri. F Ellenberger. 1958. “Introduction”, in *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*. 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books, 3.

remade continually. If we focus on verb dynamism and the transitory nature of noun-subjectival states, the sense of subjectival distribution, temporary permanence, transitivity and flux become more apparent.

Thus I turn over again Lisa Samuels' theoretical concept of distributed centrality to think about how dis-cent in subjectivity is enacted in deformative interpretation and what this means for interpreting subjectivity in the context of Deformance and *Sphinx*. This procedure is also, although it may not seem like it, a performance of textual reintegration. In other words, after Deformance has highlighted particular patterns and word choice/use, multifaceted interpretation can begin again *ad infinitum* and in different ways. Both Deformance and dis-cent are interested in theoretical considerations which (when thought through spatially) span from top to bottom; inside and out; over and over.

The following *deformed* verbal extract, quoted in full on page 59 of this thesis, reads as though the non-centre of surface (verb-dynamism) is the vacillating centre at every point:

	exist	riddled		knowing	
vomit	has created	have done		is forge	
	know	should deny		close	see
	crisscrossed		flowing	intertwined	
turns	knocked	invaded	uprooted	robbed	exposed
					mined
			prostitutes	Gazes	is comes
	Burn	shake	would	drown	tearing
Happens					am assailed
		Had thought	would	be grow	
	woke		felt	torture	
torture	tortured				
	Scared				

What happens here? And what does this tell us about how subjectivity is constituted in *Sphinx*? Each word constituting subjectivity is preserved under Deformation and rendered as poetic chiral object – each word is like a möbius strip – a non-orientable surface. If words were

topological boundary curves they would, in self-translation, collapse in their fragile inconsistencies (i.e. 'Is' polymorphously self-intersects "is" and "be" and "exist" and "am" in translatory difference and continuity). In other words, representation is just that – representation. Words representing subjectivity fail to present subjectivity outside of a chiaroscuro. Words representing subjectivity transcend their states of impermanence in cycles of dissolution and reintegration; this would be their *sine qua non* – the essential condition – the chasm between the lingual and the alive; between “what is abstractly true and what is existentially real;”<sup>191</sup> they would, at least for a moment, enact the lie of subjectival stability.

The original *Sphinxian* lines: “But I would like to drown out the noise of this tearing of silk that happens between physical bodies and mental architecture”,<sup>192</sup> directly address the lie: the centres of “knowing”, “thought”, “felt [feeling]”, and “have” are stative verbs expressing transitory states rather than actions. However, there is a difference between the idea “I exist in a morbid state”<sup>193</sup>, and “I *am* a morbid state”, and yet, “exist” stands in for “am” – does ‘exist’ function as a mask for ‘am’, interpretively rendering this line as verbal action, rather than affectual state? How would we know how to separate the two when action and state so often interface? Drowning out the noise between the physical and the mental – further expressed via the ambiguous verb/affectual descriptions – is a call to inquisition concerning action and affect. On one level, *Sphinx* is performing the question: are we what we feel or think, or are we what we do? Are we both? What constitutes an ‘I’? Is the ‘I’ a harmonious integration of verb and affect? Is knowing the ‘I’ knowing when to distinguish when language defines action rather than affect?

---

<sup>191</sup> May, Angel, and Ellenberger. 1958. “Origins of the Existential Movement in Psychology”, in *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*, 13.

<sup>192</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

<sup>193</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

A side-effect of the deformative technique is that the once normative prose begins to be lifted away, it lies as poetry in literature and out of literature: it considers what happens when lingual derivations of words ache from their own chirality and referential definitions, and so flee toward other habitations. The poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) writes:

To see the Summer Sky  
Is Poetry, though never in a Book it lie –  
True Poems flee – <sup>194</sup>

The prose of *Sphinx* appears to concretise what is liminal, and yet language encounters and constitutes reality outside language. Despite the fact that the syntactic form of the deformed sentence constantly performs a ‘tearing of silk’ which lifts away from static thinking, it likewise performs a constant extenuation of an ongoing-ness of subjectivity as expressed in different though largely metonymic verb forms.

### ***Deformance as Fluid Viewing***

Deformance is a reminder that Language, in articulating subjectivity, is an integration of more than just emotion, cognition, body or instinct. This is what the text can (at least try) to capture or explain, and it can do so starting with or without language. Deformance creates paratextual ‘gaps’ that put the verbs above into stark interface relations. It reminds us that interpretation is pure attention directed towards its own experience. The deformative verb experiment and interpretation shown above presents verbs representing subjectivity as chaotic, non-logical, timeless, and in intense flux. This highlights how subjectivity in *Sphinx* is a violent experience of imagined concepts – experience is rendered lingual: the soul is acted upon as though it were a material object to be “knocked”, “invaded”, “shaken”, “burned” – subjectivity is constituted in words which hit against their own presumptive limits – an interesting

---

<sup>194</sup> Jill Magi. 2019. “‘True Poems Flee—’: A Refugee Poetics Or Poetry As Permanently Temporary.” *Poetry Foundation*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2019/04/true-poems-flee-a-refugee-poetics-or-poetry-as-permanently-temporary>.

conception, for it posits that subjectivity is non-dualistic and that there *is* an integration, a warming of hues between what is conceived as material and immaterial. As we are reminded by Deformance and the elegance of dis-cent, there is no soul versus body in *Sphinx*: the centre is everywhere.

### ***The Eccentricity of Grammar & Syntax: Departing from Etiology***

Looking closely, then, at the deformative interpretation, it is clear that across the deconstituted context, there is a missing pronominal subject to perform the action of the verb. The verbs hang, detached (in one particular mode of interpretation) in some form of dishevelled air as though waiting to be reunited with the normative grammatical subject – this is in despite of the fact that the verbs themselves are now each their own subjects: all 44 of them. Does each verb, when read normatively, ‘step-in’ in order to perform a lineal action for the next verb, from verb one to verb forty-four? There are no nouns here to be used as the object, and the deformative practice does not appear to want to be read according to dominant lines or communication systems. Once writing is detotalised and considered outside of logic-driven thinking patterns, it does not conform to the same grammatical standards one might expect; it becomes a reading allied to feeling.

Discussions of linguistic repetition and return – the articulation and burgeoning of how language refers and returns to itself to produce ideas, are discussions which base themselves upon the idea that language is circuitous. Within this circularity, language is referential – it points to other language (within itself) to describe itself. As Lily Ruban<sup>195</sup> (a former French Literature Masters student of Luce Irigaray) points out, Argumentative Theory<sup>196</sup> does not

---

<sup>195</sup> Lily Ruban. 2021. “Exploring The Sexuate Nature Of Text Through Close Reading Of Anna Kavan’s Novels.” *Working With Luce Irigaray*. Accessed February 18. <https://workingwithluceirigaray.com/previous-seminars/seminar-2018/lily-ruban-exploring-the-sexuate-nature-of-text-through-close-reading-of-anna-kavans-novels/>.

<sup>196</sup> See Jean-Claude Anscombe. 2009. “Théorie De L’Argumentation, Topoï, Et Structuration Discursive”. *Revue Québécoise De Linguistique* 18 (1): 13-55. doi:10.7202/602639ar.

subscribe to a logical approach to language, for example, “we don’t naturally guess that ‘bipède sans plume’ is a human, we have to deploy a different force, the logical one, in order to decipher this statement. We have to consider logic and language separately. Describing language with logical processes, as is done in formal semantics, is a fault.”<sup>197</sup> Lisa Samuels’ 1997 PhD dissertation *Poetic Arrest: Laura Riding, Wallace Stevens, and the Modernist Afterlife* writes of language’s own controlling systems. The following extract thinks about relinquishing normative-grammatical expectations which define the subject and/or object, desiring to think/imagine beyond what Samuels terms a ‘poetic human lens’:

But what is language’s reality, broadly conceived, other than description? There is no other “reality” than language in the poem: it is constituted in words. Given the way language’s own controlling systems are dismantled, we become thoroughly uncertain about what is “subject” and what “object,” here.<sup>198</sup>[...] If we relinquish the notion of subject or object as some overarching abstract – theme, goal, end, interpretable conclusion – we can embrace the subject as, first, the poem, and second, “Crispin.”<sup>199</sup>[...] Thus Stevens refracts what we think of as ideological or intellectual subjects – reality, belief, whatever this poem “stands for” – through a poetic human lens. But it is not the lens of a single human subject: the “subject matter” is not an “I.”<sup>200</sup>

Ruban considers how it is useful to regard logic and language separately, and I imagine how grammar operates according to a ‘poetic human lens’ requiring grammatical logic, or “rules” which we tend to have to follow (although, not always), in order to be understood. If logic is not inherent to language itself, yet language is able to represent logic, and we use logic and association in order to understand language, then it makes sense (as Samuels points out), that there would be more than one simple grammatical subject. When Samuels says: “we become thoroughly uncertain about what is “subject” and what “object,”<sup>201</sup> she is returning to

---

<sup>197</sup> In email and conversation with Lily Ruban. 29/07/2021.

<sup>198</sup> Lisa Samuels. 1997. “Poetic Arrest: Laura Riding, Wallace Stevens, And The Modernist Afterlife.” Ph.D, University of Virginia, 47. ‘Here’ refers to Stevens’ poem.

<sup>199</sup> Samuels. 1997. “Poetic Arrest: Laura Riding, Wallace Stevens, And The Modernist Afterlife”, 48-49. Crispin is the name given to the normative grammatical subject in Wallace Stevens’ poem - from *Harmonium*. I say normative grammatical subject because there are many poetic ‘subjects.’

<sup>200</sup> Samuels. 1997. “Poetic Arrest: Laura Riding, Wallace Stevens, And The Modernist Afterlife”, 49.

<sup>201</sup> Samuels. 1997. “Poetic Arrest: Laura Riding, Wallace Stevens, And The Modernist Afterlife”, 49.



nouns are the containers for event-experiences (representing subjectivity) in the sense that – in isolation – they represent or ‘mean’ exactly what they contain. For example, “absence” in the noun Deformance represents the concept of absence; “death” represents the concept of death; “silk” represents silk and so forth – they are not metaphors for something else. Although the magnetic or ghostly areas between and around the nouns (the paratext) arguably do act as connectors in the reading experience, in this precise interpretive case, nouns in Deformance act as relatively closed containers of meaning which do not go beyond their original ‘selves.’

A systems way of thinking about subjectivity is to say: “You and I are not noun-like entities; we are more like verb-events that are deeply interconnected”<sup>204</sup>; we can consider the word ‘you’ as a plural event-like verb rather than a singular isolated entity or noun-like thing.<sup>205</sup> It is not just changing grammar and language which makes it possible to detotalise global communicative systems, it is, importantly, the way we think about such grammars and how they can be re-framed to shape thought and relations (for grammar expresses a particular modal ontology, and we can redefine its terms).

Via deformative interpretation, the nouns above highlight a symbolic unity and continuity between uprooted soul and matter: Deformance pulls apart the idea of what truly constitutes and names nouns and verbs outside of preconceived grammatical relegations which structure thought and our relationship to thought/materiality. Take the following nouns, for example: existence → death; soul → body; sides → lines; volume → screen. These are terms which, when read together (not necessarily in linearity, although my flow signs habitually follow ‘→’ this route), constitute the ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ of what constructs, in this context, representations of articulated fictive western subjectivity.

---

<sup>204</sup> Dave Asprey and Dan Siegel. 2019. “Interpersonal Neurobiology: A Systems-Thinking Approach To Optimal Health – Dr. Dan Siegel #587”. Podcast. *Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey*. 21:28-30:00. <https://podcasts.apple.com/podcast/bulletproof-radio/id451295014?mt=2>.

<sup>205</sup> Asprey and Siegel. 2019. “Interpersonal Neurobiology”, 21:28-30:00.

Is it possible to locate a unified theory of subjectivity? Is subjectivity always a relative, moving perspective? The symbol, to half-paraphrase Carl Jung, has the great advantage of being able to unite heterogeneous or even incommensurable factors in a single image. The symbolic unity of spirit and matter have fallen apart; in search of unity, we can find ourselves uprooted and alienated in a de-souled world.<sup>206</sup> Much of Je’s desiring angst and feelings of alienation appear to revolve around desire craving non-absence. They describe their own desiring soul in integrated physical noun-terms: “I see my soul as a screen”<sup>207</sup>— as though the soul could receive the tacit, material reassurance of touch, or as if hands would be a tender breeze on the texture of the body. How are we to understand the referent of ‘screen’? A screen can conceal, veil, protect, or project a simulacrum or imitation in abstraction. Perhaps the screen is language? Potential materiality and thought are thus perfused through one another: word and thing. The nouns depict how words used to represent dimensional materiality (“sides”; “lines”; “volume”; “screen”; “limits”; “lines” etc) contrast with the delicacy of non-physical memory made incarnate. Je represents their subjectivity via noun-like statements, which possess an incredible loneliness: the line of thought suggests that ‘I am only I’, versus conceiving of the self as an unfolding and interconnecting verb-like event.<sup>208</sup>

Rather than seeking to imbue language with life – if we instead start the subjectivity analysis with the assumption that language is already life-imbued<sup>209</sup> (since it is also a social construct), it follows that language enacts its own linguistic desires and exercises its own wills. To extend the analysis of “I see my soul as a screen”<sup>210</sup>— when Kant says “Thinking is

---

<sup>206</sup> Carl G Jung. 1967. “Aspects of the Mother Archetype”, In *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull 1st ed. London: Routledge, 48.

<sup>207</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

<sup>208</sup> Dave Asprey and Dan Siegel. 2019. “Interpersonal Neurobiology: A Systems-Thinking Approach To Optimal Health – Dr. Dan Siegel #587”. Podcast. *Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey*. 21:28-30:00. <https://podcasts.apple.com/podcast/bulletproof-radio/id451295014?mt=2>.

<sup>209</sup> See Carl Jung. 1982. “Foreword to Jung: Phenomenes Occultes” in *Psychology And The Occult*. 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN: Routledge, 4.

<sup>210</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

cognition through concepts,”<sup>211</sup> another way of saying this is: ‘Thinking is cognition through *constructs*’ (screens: abstractions; ideas; intersections between reality and un-reality). Although our thoughts arguably are not ‘us’, they are an avenue toward explaining how the experience of subjectivity in literature can be understood. Rather than asking the question: How does one grant language the force of its own closed-circuitry of ‘owned’ desire? Carl Jung considers:

Every “idea” is, from the psychological point of view, a phenomenon, just as is “philosophy” or “theology.” For modern psychology, ideas are entities, like animals and plants[...] Ideas are not just counters used by the calculating mind; they are also golden vessels full of living feeling.<sup>212</sup>

In other words, *thinking is cognition through living-feeling*. As previously mentioned, nouns are the ‘containers’ for event-experiences (representing subjectivity). If nouns are both abstract and concrete ‘golden vessels full of feeling’, and subjectivity is construed via feeling, then subjectivity must also be both abstract and concrete. What better idea to articulate this than with ‘screen’? This idea is articulated in the non-deformed version of the *Sphinx* extract: i.e., bearing in mind its translated state, this is what the ‘full-form’ version of Garréta’s writing says outright.

The noun Deformance highlights the work Garréta is performing with subjectivity in full-form writing. Why, then, would we need it? Because Deformance highlights what is already there as well as what is not so easily ‘seen’ in descriptors of subjectivity. Lingual representations of subjectivity switch descriptive grammars. As social historian and academic Joe Moran writes, what often happens when we try ‘to pin the world down’<sup>213</sup> and organise language in order to understand it is that, only later:

---

<sup>211</sup> Kant. 1998. “The Analytic of Concepts: First Chapter: On the Clue to the Discovery of all Pure Concepts of the Understanding” in *Critique Of Pure Reason*, 205.

<sup>212</sup> Carl Jung. 1982. “Foreword to Jung: Phenomenes Occultes” in *Psychology And The Occult*, 4-5.

<sup>213</sup> Moran. 2018. “Nouns versus Verbs” in *First You Write A Sentence*, 49.





Somehow, absence is not torturous until it is. This touches on the concept of apophasis, (*apophasis* from *apophanein* “deny, say no”)<sup>216</sup> – or paralipsis – what is termed “the predicate denial of Aristotelian term logic”<sup>217</sup>: the thing(s) that something is not. In other words, the sentence and its represented subjectivity can be read pragmatically, recursively, and in context: it has to be read in/according to its own alterity and negation as separate from the whole independent clause, or more specifically, from its clause complex (i.e., the sentence can be read as though it recursively competes against itself according to the rules of logic, essentially ‘cancelling’ internal-sentence ambiguity.) Systemic functional linguistics defines a complex clause as “a grammatical construction consisting of two or more (simplex) clauses.”<sup>218</sup> In *Sphinx*, this occurs as follows in the absence of co-ordinating conjunctions (barring ‘and’) in the places one might expect to see them:

1. [...] [ $\alpha$ , 1] one night I woke to an absence of love and felt no torture: [ $\beta$ ,2] it was the absence of this torture that truly scared me, that tortured me.<sup>219</sup>

Paraphrasing, or reducing the sentence (i.e., the two clauses) to extreme linguistic ‘cause-and-effect’ by *adding* co-ordinating conjunctions versus *removing* words (as we see with Deformance), looks something like this:

2. [ $\alpha$ , 1] I woke: [ $\beta$ , 2] *and* I was tortured.
3. [ $\alpha$ , 2] I was tortured [ $\beta$ , 1] *because* I woke.

---

<sup>216</sup> Laurence R Horn and Heinrich Wansing, “Negation and opposition in natural language. 1.1 Introduction” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/negation/>>.

<sup>217</sup> Horn and Wansing, “Negation and opposition in natural language. 1.1 Introduction” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>218</sup> Thomas Hestbæk Andersen and Alexandra Emilie Møller Holsting. 2018. “Clause Complexing In Systemic Functional Linguistics – Towards An Alternative Description.” *Functional Linguistics* 5 (1), pp.2-3. doi:10.1186/s40554-018-0059-7.

<sup>219</sup> Anne Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

Here, I use a modified version of the ‘code’ of Thomas Anderson and Alexandra Holsting, as seen in their article on Functional Linguistics.<sup>220</sup> Accordingly,

1. The clauses are numbered according to the sequence in which they occur in the *original* extract from *Sphinx*.<sup>221</sup>
2. If the status of the clauses are unequal, they are related through hypotaxis (the subordination of one clause to another), which is noted with Greek letters.<sup>222</sup> i.e., the ‘final meaning’ of the clause has to be ‘built’ upon the phrases within the subordinate clause – therefore the entire sentence is relational, however seemingly antithetical or in opposition to itself.

However, the central emphasis of the sentence in its totality is not related to the supposed logic of waking up and then feeling tortured, or being tortured *because* of waking. The emphasis (of one kind of subject/subjectivity) is placed on the poiesis of emotion: what is it like, what does it *feel* like to wake and move through the process of feeling an absence of love and feeling no torture? It can be difficult to discern which part of the sentence one ‘should’ give more weight to – as though the sentence lacks an equal distribution, or as though one could ever know. When attending to subjectivity, it becomes interesting if one considers language as a performing recursive loop headed toward subjectivity. If we loop, we can almost attend to the entirety of the sentence, or, more realistically, to its irreconcilable complexities. By looping I mean to say reading with reflexive awareness of the entire context of the novel, versus reading ‘meaning’ removed from context. The following *Sphinx* excerpt (representing subjectivity) is not expressed in logic. Rather, there is more emphasis on the poiesis of feeling (of affect) – one

---

<sup>220</sup> Thomas Hestbæk Andersen and Alexandra Emilie Møller Holsting. 2018. “Clause Complexing In Systemic Functional Linguistics – Towards An Alternative Description”, 2-3.

<sup>221</sup> Andersen and Holsting. 2018. “Clause Complexing In Systemic Functional Linguistics – Towards An Alternative Description”, 3.

<sup>222</sup> Andersen and Holsting. 2018. “Clause Complexing In Systemic Functional Linguistics – Towards An Alternative Description”, 3.

layer of subjectivity in *Sphinx* is thus expressed affect. As I shall demonstrate, deformance releases and exposes the complex layers of subjectivity within *Sphinx*, helping the critic perceive the very negation and entwinement *Sphinx* uses with so much pressure.

### ***The Syntactic Form of Complex Subjectivity***

In order to ‘undo’ subjectivity through a network approach, I now segue from my Deformance work above to consider how a reading of negation and multithreading (braiding) can reveal further complexities of subjectivity – particularly in terms of how subjectivity is lingually represented alongside the weaving pathways of grammar and clauses. Subjectivity itself can be imagined as a ‘thread’: a component within a process which interacts within a complex grammatical system: the whole contains the part, and the part contains the whole. Subjectivity in *Sphinx* is constituted by multiple ‘threads’ which are often perceived in unison.

The idea that the center of subjectivity is everywhere: “When I close my eyes, I see my soul as a screen crisscrossed with flowing, intertwined lines; architectural straight lines of a volume uncertain of its limits, exposed...”<sup>223</sup>, and that its circumference is nowhere, suggests that subjectivity is immeasurable. Thus I draw attention toward how subjectivity in *Sphinx* eschews simplicity and enacts itself as a distributed centrality. As I shall demonstrate, the clauses and logic in the following *Sphinx* extract are separate, yet they are interpretively ‘pulled’ into the secondary structures – or ubiquitous excess – of their own linguistic tapestries. It is here that holistic lingual juxtaposition creates meaning and constitutes (and represents) complex subjectivity. I care to further demonstrate how subjectivity in *Sphinx* is constructed according to negation and absence, and yet it functions beyond logic – it cannot be rendered in a synthesis because its very nature consists of change and affect.

---

<sup>225</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*,134.

## ***Mapping Boolean Logic to Functional Linguistics***

To explain what I mean above based on textual evidence from *Sphinx* (which displays complex subjectivity in and outside of logic, clauses and negation), I must first take a leap and demonstrate how complicated linguistic statements – according to Stoic and Fregean propositional logic<sup>224</sup> – essentially ask readers to perform Boolean logic. In Boolean logic, the ‘values’ of a phrase or sentence will produce either True or False ‘outputs’, and yet pragmatics asserts dialectical multiplicity. For example, how can one perform Boolean logic on language, when language tends to operate dialectically versus in simple True or False statements? Let us try to perform logic on the following *Sphinx* extract:

[...] I had thought that I would never be able to grow tired of loving, but one night I woke to an absence of love and felt no torture: it was the absence of this torture that truly scared me, that tortured me.<sup>225</sup>

Hence, according to the semantics of each individual below sentence, only considering the separate conditions in which the sentence is true or false, is it true that:

1. The absence of torture scared and tortured Je? True.
2. Absence of feeling (love) = feeling no (negative: absence) torture. True. i.e., the absence of love was not torturous.
3. Absence of torture (feeling) = feeling (positive: presence) scared and tortured. True. i.e., not feeling anything is its own kind of torture.

There is no contradiction *within* each clause. However, there is contradiction *between* each clause (or singularity). Thus, whether a sentence or phrase is true or false is not enough in order to understand its true sense or affect, which Garréta’s sentences seek to represent. Here, combining the three re-composed ‘sentences’ (which are each saying very different things), we

---

<sup>224</sup> Laurence R Horn and Heinrich Wansing, “Negation and opposition in natural language. 1.1 Introduction” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>225</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

see temporally installed contradiction. The collective question is not to be answered according to seemingly basic either/or statements – one cannot simply consider subjectivity as a True or False statement to ask: Is clause 1 greater, or is there more ‘truth’ here, in this clause, than in that of clause 2? To do so would be to practice the antithesis of dialectics. These sentences appear to require belief in a logic that allows for multiple contradictory statements to be true.<sup>226</sup> Along these seemingly aporetic lines, what is interesting about the clause complex, as Thomas Anderson and Alexandra Holsting point out, is how, in being a univariate structure, clause complexes are uncertain and recursive. For example, in their article “Clause Complexing in Systemic Functional Linguistics – Towards an Alternative Description” (2018), the authors define a complex clause as follows:

While we in a clause observe different functional elements (e.g. Subject, Finite and Predicator) forming a multivariate structure, what we see in the clause complex is a univariate structure where each functional element (each clause) stands in the same relation to the other functional elements (the other clauses) in the same structure: “each new element is related to the previous simply as the ‘next’ link in a series or chain” (Matthiessen et al. 2010: 235). In other words, in a multivariate structure the syntagmatic organization is one of constituency, i.e. all clause elements constitute a larger element of another kind, while a univariate structure is syntagmatically organised in terms of interdependency between elements of the same kind. Univariate structures, such as the clause complex, are in principle indefinite, since they allow for recursion.<sup>227</sup>

Identifying such language features in the passage (according to propositional logic), which represent negation and opposition, help us understand how internal dissonance within language negation both constructs, effects, and reveals complex subjectivity – mirroring in form (aesthetic) and function that subjectivity itself (as it articulates itself in grammatical ideology) *is* difficult, non-linear, and messy. Each clause is relational *and* multivariate in its relationality. Normative prose is often assumed to be read linearly and logically, as though the dialectics of the sentence only ever move toward one final singularity (i.e., as though we could ‘synthesise’

---

<sup>226</sup> John Horgan. “Quantum Philosophy.” *Scientific American* 267, no. 1 (1992): 96. Accessed March 19, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24939143>

<sup>227</sup> Andersen and Holsting. 2018. “Clause Complexing In Systemic Functional Linguistics – Towards An Alternative Description”, 2-3.

the individual, contradictive sentences and render meaning singular.) Meaning is clearly built contextually, but considering that a synthesis makes multitudinous contradiction singular, it follows that since meaning is potentially infinite – and interpretation recursive – singularity (which is also interpretation), is likewise recursive and potentially infinite, too; there is no ‘final’ synthesis here, for subjectivity.

Lingual subjectivity, then, is recursive; in the context of the *Sphinx* extract, it is indeed ‘not the case that’ it is negation *per se* which constructs nuanced subjectivity – it is rather that language systems (as represented in the complex clause) which allow and make room for disparity as well as both/and statements better represent and mime the intrinsic ‘messiness’ of what it means to be human and to possess human subjectivity (versus, say, to be robotic or posthuman, whose contexts would swerve the situation of the analysis yet again). According to how ‘far’ one wants to voyage with interpretation, another way of saying lexical subjectivity is recursive is to say it is both referential and expansive; lexical subjectivity can always produce more meaning than it appears to contain. A synthesis of each individual phrase ‘adds up’ to be more than its previous existing values – ever multiplicitous.

## ***2. Counterfactuals / Gendered Experiments & Perspektivismus***

*What if X had not occurred?* i.e., What happens if we leave everything except verbs and nouns on the page and ‘unsee’ the verbs and nouns?

Deformance enacts a form of subjectival epistemological pluralism; it can deconstruct to reintegrate and/or reimagine linkages among differentiated perspectives. Deformance highlights both linguistic-absence and linguistic-presence: drawing attention to the functionality of referentials which arguably designate interpretive meaning(s). We have seen that when nouns and verbs are split off from one another, they are less referential because they are not put in contact with, and nor do they encounter, other linking words; one might say they

become lingual distillations which structure and generate poetic solitude, the ‘place’ of lingual absence we see visually.

Poetic solitude might be a term to describe what happens when language has been detotalised (or deformed). There is less grammatical opportunity for language units to coherently act referentially, and gender and subjectivity tend to need referentials to ‘exist.’ Thus, rather than using this thought experiment to subsequently (systematically) remove all of the verbs and nouns on the page (nothing much interesting happens here – I tried),<sup>228</sup> I resist one possibility of counterfactual logic and move to another optimistically more generative example: thinking of the language of counterfactuals as ever relational mutable substance.

### ***Counterfactuals: Gendered Anaphora and Cataphora***

*Language is not truth. It is the way we exist in the world.*

— Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*

Continuing to think counterfactually with anaphoric and cataphoric grammars, I trace the grammatical architecture of the first three lines of the passage (rather than the last), asking, what phrases or lines begin with the same words? Which linguistic units are referring back to (relating to, repeating and/or changing) other units, and what effect does this exert on represented subjectivity? Just as there is difference in this passage and in language (i.e., some linguistic units do not relate to other linguistic units, since they exist within zones of indeterminacy), there is also repetition. In *Sphinx*, examples of repetition are easily located at the level of grammar, although they are subtly, implicitly represented here in this passage by anaphora, a rhetorical device which Barbara Lust in *Introduction to Studies in the Acquisition*

---

<sup>228</sup> However, I do note that if X had not occurred (if we do not attend to verbs and nouns), then we would be able to recognise, in higher resolution or clarity, the text’s pronouns. Becoming more aware of, for example, how the “I” is repeated four times; “me”: twice; and “it”: once – a linguistic occurrence that was always-already happening in Garréta’s writing but which is magnified under the technical lens of Deformance.

of *Anaphora* (1986)<sup>229</sup>, describes as “The use of a linguistic unit, such as a pronoun, to refer back to another unit, such as the use of *her* to refer to *Anne* in the sentence ‘Anne asked Edward to pass her the salt.’”<sup>230</sup> Anaphora represents the relation between a “proform” (called an “anaphor”) and another term (called an “antecedent”), when the interpretation of the anaphor is in a certain way determined by the interpretation of the antecedent.”<sup>231</sup> Let us see this play out in one counterfactual interpretation of *Sphinx* where the ‘I’ is countered and becomes instead a fact of gender. More specifically asking: what happens to subjectivity when gendered language occurs in *Sphinx* versus reading gender neutrality?

“I exist in a morbid state, my body riddled by consumption, not knowing from where to vomit up the soul it has created. For all I have done since A\*\*\*\*’s death is forge myself a soul, and I no longer know if I should deny its existence.”<sup>232</sup>

In the above excerpt, “I exist” is the antecedent and “my body” is the anaphor. Usually, an example of a more regular or normative anaphor might look something like this:

“Anne Smith [antecedent], her body [anaphor] riddled by consumption, her soul [anaphor] forged into her [anaphor] own existence...”

Notice how my above example of the anaphor is now necessarily composed of gendered language units. Anne Smith [the antecedent] implies a feminine name. Consequently, the anaphor will be “her body” – since the pronoun in “her body” is referring to Anne Smith. In my gendered anaphor example, identity is referentially *layered* into gendered linguistic units, almost acting as a synecdoche (for the name of a part for ‘I’ is used to stand for the whole; where does the whole for ‘I’ begin and/or end)? The sense of grammatical reflexivity changes

---

<sup>229</sup> Barbara Lust. 1986. “Introduction To Studies In The Acquisition Of Anaphora.” Presentation, University of Iasi, Faculty of Computer Science.

<sup>230</sup> Lust. 1986. “Introduction To Studies In The Acquisition Of Anaphora.”

<sup>231</sup> Lust. 1986. “Introduction To Studies In The Acquisition Of Anaphora.”

<sup>232</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

when gender enters into the language equation – so to speak. For example, “forge myself a soul” instead becomes “her soul forged into her...” which not only changes the agency of the sentence – who is doing what to whom: passive versus active constructions, and ‘I’ versus ‘She’ – it also establishes gendered identity. In *this* case, gendered writing renders the subject passive, whereas gender neutral writing asserts the subject as an agent of their own subjectivity and autonomy.

This is comparably different to what I later consider in the following thought-experiment ‘Hindcasting’, where in a close reading of an alternative partition of the text, Je habitually (counterfactually) becomes the object of the verb rather than the subject, and therefore receives the direct action of the verb.<sup>233</sup> This observation might initially seem interpretively disintegrative and counterintuitive; it performs what Nietzsche terms the “art of dissimulation”,<sup>234</sup> as though Garréta’s writing is a counterfactual mirage that is deceptive and self-masking – expressing multiple contraries to the ‘fact.’ And yet upon reflection, within the robust zones of negative hermeneutics, it indicates that readings of negation (counterfactuals) are fruitful in approaching the linguistics of *Sphinx* – revealing the contingencies of agency and its relationship to specific articulations of gendered or genderless subjectivity.

If ever one were to perceive the text ‘completely’, such notions of ‘full’ or all-embracing perception are not the same as objective perception, neither of which possess the capacity to elucidate ‘truth.’ And besides, “what about these linguistic conventions themselves? Are they perhaps products of knowledge that is, of the sense of truth? Are designations congruent with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities?”<sup>235</sup> Nietzsche knowingly theorises *in abstracto* that we exchange illusions/abstractions for truth (interpretations). If subjectivity

---

<sup>233</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 176.

<sup>234</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. 1896. *On Truth And Lies In A Nonmoral Sense*. S.I: Delphi Classics, 2.

<sup>235</sup> Nietzsche. 1896. *On Truth And Lies In A Nonmoral Sense*, 3.

can consign itself to both the passive and active case, lingual subjectivity is then presented as relational and contingent upon its own expression.

### 3. *Hindcasting / Outside-In Subjectivity*

*Running predictive model after X has occurred.*

In the context of *Sphinx*, one way to consider hindcasting as a thought-experiment would be to ask the following: One of the effects of genderless writing is ‘X’. Could ‘X’ have been predicted before ‘X’ occurred?

As detailed in the Introduction, one of the effects of genderless writing in French is that the passé simple must be used, because, unlike verbs in the passé composé, it does not require gender agreement. This means that the subject-predicate (verb) agreement significantly changes the way subjectivity is performed and described. Emma Ramadan, the translator of *Sphinx*, writes:

In order to become natural, not to signal a linguistic constraint, it [the passé simple] had to become a part of the text, but more than that, a part of the narrative. And so it becomes part of the narrator’s identity—he or she is a rather pretentious, bourgeois(e) scholar who does not shy away from praising his or her own intelligence. And so even though in my *Sphinx* the narrator does not need to use a high literary style to avoid revealing his or her gender, this aspect of the narrator’s personality is a part of Garreta’s text that cannot simply disappear in translation.<sup>236</sup>

Genderless writing from French to English fundamentally alters the way subjectivity can be expressed because it constrains the use of literary tense which cannot expand to render language (and therefore performances of subjectivity) precise – again ultimately pointing to the idea that even within normative French and English, the concept of subjectivity is inevitably limited by the constraints of language.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>236</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 173-174.

<sup>237</sup> Although the question of analysing translation as a means to understand performed lingual subjectivity in *Sphinx* hovers throughout this thesis, one can thus wonder here why translation itself does not belong to one of my detail-level analyses. I address this question and potential interpretive avenue in the concluding section of this thesis.

A brief point I wish to make is that subjectivity in *Sphinx* – which directly corresponds to the cause-effect relationship evident in genderless writing – is synonymous with the habitus, whereby subjectivity is defined as the linguistic and cultured body. Or, in other words, the body and the way culture describes the body through language are what drive both the articulation and experience of subjectivity. There is a difference between lingual subjectivity – language-bound identity markers – and social subjectivity. After all, social, in-real-life subjectivity can be performed by walking, humming, building, sleeping, without language involved. In Pierre Bourdieu’s words, “The body has become a repository of ingrained dispositions that certain actions, certain ways of behaving and responding, seem altogether natural.”<sup>238</sup> Making the Oulipian choice to write using the passé simple means that the expression of the subject-predicate relation slightly shifts and alters the expression of subjectivity. For example, Je habitually becomes the *object* of the verb rather than the *subject*, since this requires no gender agreement.<sup>239</sup> Following Frances Peck’s grammatical style code, in the following excerpts, the **Subject** will read as bold, and the {predicate} will be positioned inside curly brackets.<sup>240</sup> Thus, consider the following examples – each pulled from Chapter I to V in *Sphinx* – where Je is described as follows:

1. Chapter I: “{Remembering} saddens **me** still, even years later”<sup>241</sup>; “**I** {took up the habit of studying in complete solitude at my house}.”<sup>242</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. 1983. “The Economy of Linguistic Exchanges” in *Language and Symbolic Power*, 12-13.

<sup>239</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 176. Grammatically, the sentence is not reflexive. Je is guided by habit, not the reflexive ‘I.’

<sup>240</sup> Frances Peck. 2021. “The Parts Of The Sentence”. *The Writing Centre*.

<https://arts.uottawa.ca/writingcentre/en/hypergrammar/the-parts-of-the-sentence#:~:text=Every%20complete%20sentence%20contains%20two,Judy%20%7Bruns%7D>

**D**

<sup>241</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 16.

<sup>242</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 31

Rather than saying: ‘**I** {remember being sad}’ (a sentence which remains open to change since it is a memory and not necessarily happening now), the passé simple and the imparfait invert the subject-predicate relation.

2. Chapter II: “**I** {was guided by habit, or maybe addiction}, as **I** {left my house every night around midnight}.”<sup>243</sup>

Here, the predicate is the action which Je performs – it provides information about the subject and creates a sense of subjectivity via movement.

3. Chapter III: “What am **I**,” **I** was {asking myself}, “other than what you do not know how to say about me?”<sup>244</sup>; “**I** {was embracing an absence whose scent alone was penetrating me}, breathed in from the folds of a T-shirt that had been forgotten and left on a sofa overnight.”<sup>245</sup>
4. Chapter IV: “**I** {was fleeing the incursions of my memory by constantly uprooting myself, always running}...”<sup>246</sup>
5. Chapter V: “**I** {detach and distance myself from my **body**}, now petrified. **I** {gaze at it}, upright at the edge of the canal, mirrored in the ice: the simulacrum and its reflection.”<sup>247</sup>

The examples above demonstrate how writing in the passé simple denies Je the right to the future tense. In this sense, subjectivity can only construct itself in an ‘outside-in’ function whereby the subject refers to the past – positioning themselves as the object of the verb *even* while it narrates itself as though it is an evolving ‘becoming.’ Philosopher Shoshana Zuboff writes that “When we refer to the past, we see only objects, but the view to the future brings

---

<sup>243</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 53.

<sup>244</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 125.

<sup>245</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 125.

<sup>246</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

<sup>247</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 160.

“projects,” things that are yet to be...”<sup>248</sup> This is a salient observation in light of the quote in Chapter V, where Je appears to dissociate and have an out-of-body-experience. They are able to “gaze at it [the body].”<sup>249</sup> At this point, Je becomes their own multitudinous Subject/Object whereby their subjectivity grows in accordance with how much they attend to the shifting subject/object recollections of their past. Of this concern, Ramadan comments:

The body is either murdered, or sick, or very pale. She uses light and shadow metaphors, walking the line between the visible and the invisible (“as if my identity had been lost or dissolved within the chiaroscuro”).<sup>250</sup>

Je’s subjectivity is expressed as softening, shifting; Je is a chiaroscuro tension between perceived materiality and immateriality unsure of its own driver and drives. Is the body and its subjectivity guided by habit in which it will dissolve? For Je, this reflection begins more cerebrally than corporeally – as though the ‘I’ is driving the body containing ‘it’ and both will dissolve.

It is clear, according to the *above* genderless (original) and my gendered (retext)<sup>251</sup> example, that Garréta’s non-gendered grammar and syntax comparatively possess more agency than my recreated gendered grammar and syntax: “I have...forge[d] myself a soul”<sup>252</sup> versus “her soul forged into her own existence.” However, stepping outside the anaphoric example, all one has to do to create an active or passive sentence is switch whether or not the subject performs or receives the action. Here in the genderless text, the subject of the sentence performs the action:

---

<sup>248</sup> Shoshana Zuboff. 2019. “The Right to The Future Tense” in *The Age Of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight For A Human Future At The New Frontier Of Power*. New York: Public Affairs, 705.

<sup>249</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 160.

<sup>250</sup> Emma Ramadan and Mirene Arsanios. 2015. “Crotches Crossed And Sexes Mixed, Emma Ramadan By Mirene Arsanios”. Makhzin.

<http://www.makhzin.org/issues/feminisms/crotches-crossed-and-sexes-mixed>

<sup>251</sup> See Mark Amsler. 2011. *Affective Literacies*, xxiii. Amsler explains a re-text as “the primary gestures of writing and reading against the grain,” and “The antithetical Latin verb *retexere/retextere* means both ‘to unravel’ and ‘to reweave, retie.’”

<sup>252</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

“**I [Subject] exist [verb]** in a morbid state, **my body [Object]** riddled by consumption, not knowing where to vomit up the **soul [Object]** it has created.”<sup>253</sup>

**Subject / Verb / Object.**

Whereas in the passive voice, which I shall recreate, the subject of the sentence will receive the action, and the object will relegate itself to become the subject. Again, it is interesting to note the relative ease with which an object will become a subject in the passive sentence, shifting the subjectival perspective as grammatical roles turn over. From here, the sentence could be cleaned up and re-created as follows:

“The soul and my body exist.”

**Subject / Subject / Verb.**

*Sphinx* is its own thought experiment: Garréta’s aesthetic, genderless representation is a select arrangement of representation(s) which enact and reimagine language – the very structure of representation<sup>254</sup> – to be other than what it actually is (while depicting what is.) In other words, Garréta’s writing functions outside of gendered social constructs.

Not only does genderless writing produce a different kind of phenomenological experience, what the poet and linguist Per Aage Brandt terms ‘Phenomenological objectivity,’<sup>255</sup> Garréta’s sentences comparatively place emphasis on how linguistic structures of meaning produce and reinforce ontological perspectives which relate from Subject to Verb to Object, versus re-thinking the Object(s) to Subject(s) to Verb relation. Brandt points out that Phenomenological objectivity refers to “structures of representation”, and “structures of

---

<sup>253</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134. My Emphasis.

<sup>254</sup> Per Aage Brandt. 1993. “Cognition And The Semantics Of Metaphor”, abstract, *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 26 (1): 5-21. doi:10.1080/03740463.1993.10415450.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261682840\\_Cognition\\_and\\_the\\_semantics\\_of\\_metaphor](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261682840_Cognition_and_the_semantics_of_metaphor)

<sup>255</sup> Brandt. 1993. “Cognition And The Semantics Of Metaphor”, abstract, *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia*.

meaning”, which are not the same as what “symbolic thinking (or applied logic) manifest.”<sup>256</sup> That is to say, phenomenological objectivity looks at how structures of meaning “can be seen as objectively constituted by image representations” rather than as “structures of real-world entities (physical, or social.)”<sup>257</sup> Phenomenological objectivity can be thought of as the interplay between the idea that subjectival phenomena is represented as a porous connection between the ‘self’ that is contained within a system and the self which energetically connects to other systems. In other words, there is an entanglement between structures of symbolic thinking or logic and their representational solidifications seemingly *made* ‘solid’ by the symbolic or by logic, and yet these structures connect; they are woven into and they are interrupted by negation and lingual shuffling – always interpreted in abstraction. In *Sphinx*, thinking of the representation of subjectivity, it is very difficult to prise apart the differences among structures of representation, structures of meaning, image representations and objective, empiric image ‘truths’.

If one were to continue down this pathway of considering representational solidification as the multithreaded phenomena which is interrupted by negation and lingual recursion, how can such thought between the ‘idea’ of object and subject relations and their grammatical constructions change how we perceive and engage with subjectivity and gender? In ‘Autonomy and its Discontent’ (2005), Garréta writes:

In Straussian terms, engagement is a critique or an attempted turn to the political which remains caught within the horizon of autonomy. To posit that the subject can choose whether or not to be committed supposes that abstention or neutrality is a possibility. A subject considering a possible political engagement is already installed comfortably (but maybe not without a certain discontent) on the side of autonomy.<sup>258</sup>

---

<sup>256</sup> Brandt. 1993. “Cognition And The Semantics Of Metaphor”, abstract.

<sup>257</sup> Brandt. 1993. “Cognition And The Semantics Of Metaphor”.

<sup>258</sup> Garréta. 2005. “Autonomy and Its Discontent.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 4, Dec, p. 727. Scopus, doi:10.1215/00382876-104-4-723.

Garréta's line of thought: "To posit that the subject can chose whether or not to be committed supposes that abstention or neutrality is a possibility", suggests the distance between how she is referring to real-world-entity-phenomenology, and what it means to enact autonomy in grammar, whereby the subject does not commit to gender; both abstention and neutrality are phenomenologically objective meaning structures which assert the right to subjectivity and autonomy *without* having to linguistically 'claim' gender. In light of this, in *Sphinx*, Garréta seems to soundlessly assert that not only is gender irrelevant to the grammatical subject and to a subject experiencing subjectivity, likewise, not claiming gender (in a textual representational structure) enacts an autonomous rebellion against presumptive social edifices which seek to control and demarcate the limits of representational subjectivity as articulated in discourse.

### ***Abstention & Neutrality: Affirming Genderless Ontology***

*Sphinx* reshuffles the lingual ingredients of subjectivity, at least as concerns gender, into a suspension that is both an artistic language game and an indictment of real-world subjectivity. The second effect is a negatively-available (i.e., perceivable by interpreting readers but not installed by the words) political penumbra around the language game.

*Sphinx* enacts a phenomenology of the inconspicuous.<sup>259</sup> As the text performs its second effect – a negatively-available political penumbra (which could be termed a chiaroscurist retext created in genderless language), the implicit metaphysical conditions for genderless linguistic subjectivity are shown to exist just under the surface level of the sentence –instantiating and affirming genderless ontology. When Garréta writes toward the phenomenologically objective, she writes into the idea that language contains active forms of hiddenness. As subsequent analysis will detail, Garréta's writing, specifically considering her grammatical representational structures, reflects a metaphysical dialectic which silently inserts (genderless)

---

<sup>259</sup> Jason W Alvis. 2017. "Making Sense Of Heidegger's 'Phenomenology Of The Inconspicuous' Or Inapparent (Phänomenologie Des Unscheinbaren)". *Continental Philosophy Review* 51 (2): 211-238.

Cartesian subjectivity into grammar. Garréta's text performs genderless subjectivity while also performing an underlying Subject to Verb to Object/Subject relation. i.e., 'I think therefore I am.'

In *Sphinx*, normative, expected conceptions of gendered identity and subjectivity are disguised (actively hidden) even as anaphora creates parallelisms between phrases and lines that begin with the same words. Consider again the phrase, "I exist in a morbid state..." The linguistic unit "I exist" refers to another unit: "morbid state", but there are no pronouns used to coreference the expression (which one might see with, for example, cataphora – where "the following expression provides the information necessary for interpretation of the preceding one", such as: "Near her, Anne saw some silk." What *does* happen with the phrase "I exist in a morbid state", is that it calls to mind the hidden grammatical conventions and syntax(s) which assemble subjectivity outside (or irrespective of) gendered constructions. Consider the original syntax from *Sphinx*'s excerpt:

"I exist in a morbid state, my body riddled by consumption, not knowing from where to vomit up the soul it has created.

If one were to change or to reweave the syntax of the sentence, or, in other words, create a retext (*retexus*) of Garréta's writing, starting with the lines "I exist in a morbid state...", it might look something like this:

"Not knowing (*Cogito*) from where to vomit up the soul it has created, my body riddled by consumption, (*Ergo*) I exist (*Sum*) in a morbid state."

In the case of the above sentence, the rewoven *implicit* (as in reflexively available) syntax does not fully change the meaning: *Cogito ergo sum* = *Sum ergo cogito*. The implicit metaphysical conditions for subjectivity exist just under the surface level of the sentence. It is not as though (at least I do not assume) that Garréta consciously writes the Cartesian dualism into the fabric

of the sentence – but the fact is, this kind of metaphysics emerges at the level of close linguistic attention. For Derrida, for example, “language is premised on an interweaving movement between what is there and not there. Language is always an interweaving, a textile”<sup>260</sup>, and in this case, re-texting reinforces the logic and underlying presence of a fundamental linguistic subjectivity which instantiates and affirms genderless ontology (in both the original French and English translation.)

Garréta’s writing articulates the always-already-there metaphysics and ontological discourses of genderless subjectivity. Mark Amsler notes in his book *Affective Literacies: Writing and Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages* (in reference to Gee’s *Social Linguistics and Literacies*) that discourse is an instantiation of identity: “I take discourses to be ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or “types of people”) by specific groups[...] Language makes no sense outside of Discourses, and the same is true for literacy.”<sup>261</sup> It follows that “literacies, then, are performative spaces and cognitive spaces”<sup>262</sup> (at times representing subjectivity), and as Hans-Georg Gadamer points out in *Truth and Method* “[...]interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak.”<sup>263</sup> Here, Gadamer’s assertion can be used to illuminate my point about the revolving-in-crystal formulations we are called on to interpret, as critics, in complex *Sphinx* passages such as this, the idea that really ‘listening’ to a text requires a deeper consideration of the pre-made systems constituting subjectivity within grammar (also in translation); for they, too, as I have demonstrated – at least for the protagonists – instantiate and affirm genderless ontology and subjectivity in language.

---

<sup>260</sup> Jeff Collins and Bill Mayblin. 2011. *Introducing Derrida*, 151-152.

<sup>261</sup> Amsler. 2011. *Affective Literacies*, 1.

<sup>262</sup> Amsler. 2011. *Affective Literacies*, 4.

<sup>263</sup> Samuels. “Membranism, Wet Gaps, Archipelago Poetics” in *Reading Room: Liquid State*, vol 04, no. 01, 2001, 179.

A way to search for the ‘hiddenness’ constituting lingual subjectivity, as I have demonstrated, is to engage with the interpretative process of *retexting*. For example, the beginning of *Sphinx*’s passage – untouched – is a syntactically divergent *retexting*, or what Amsler points out Bakhtin calls a *pereaktsentuatsyia* (‘reaccentuation’, ‘revoicing’)<sup>264</sup> of presence and absence.

There are many names for such methods of interpretative criticisms, namely what we have already seen via Lisa Samuels and Jerome McGann’s theory of “Deformance”<sup>265</sup>, or what Samuels points out the critic Randall McLeod calls “transformissive reading”<sup>266</sup> and more.<sup>vii</sup> In any case, as Samuels asserts, reading backwards “enables one to see more of the poem’s non-narrative, synchronic angles”<sup>267</sup>, or a text’s ‘hiddenness.’ Concerning *Sphinx*’s literary-poetic-philosophical passage, the *retext* (one specific interpretation of reading *Sphinx* backward) has accurately reproduced René Descarte’s tautological position ‘*Cogito ergo sum*’ (*Méditations*, 1641). The ontological-philosophical concepts are repeated, only in reverse order; the only difference is in the hidden by-product (*unscheinbar*), which turn up in re-assemblage and reaccentuation (doubling) of the passage, thereby creating a chiasmus. As we have seen, *Sum ergo cogito* becomes *Cogito ergo sum* when the syntax is de-centred or read backwards. With my point being, a retext of *Sphinx* (looking at certain textual contexts, for this is not true of all cases) which seeks to generate gendered language activates the passive sentence, whereas the original gender-neutral language activates the active sentence. Regardless of active versus passive cases, *Cogito ergo sum* does not change its inherent ontological meaning – indicating that the ‘substance’ or ‘essence’ of subjectivity must not

---

<sup>264</sup> Amsler. 2011. *Affective Literacies*, xxiii.

<sup>265</sup> See Lisa Samuels, “If Meaning, Shaped Reading, And Leslie Scalapino’s Way.” *Qui Parle* 12, no. 2 (2001): 180. Accessed August 23, 2020.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20686127>

<sup>266</sup> Samuels, “If Meaning, Shaped Reading, And Leslie Scalapino’s Way”, 180.

<sup>267</sup> Samuels, “If Meaning, Shaped Reading, And Leslie Scalapino’s Way”, 180.

inherently function according to subject-verb-object rules. Rather, this is an architectural way of thinking that simply acts as a scaffold to ‘hang up’ the meaning of subjectivity, and ‘change it’ and ‘take it down’ at will.

Accordingly, this analysis is demonstrating that a ‘hidden’ trace within Garréta’s work is the articulated phenomenology of this Cartesian dualism, which is not so much written into the syntax as it is written into the level of grammar – and consequently, as mentioned, the content repeats and loops a metaphysical dialectic which inserts Cartesian subjectivity into grammatical foundations. Despite using such interpretative strategies in order to ‘find’ hiddenness (Λήθη), (reading backwards, de-centring or deforming a text to re-think identity constructions and deconstructions), the passage – itself composed by a language of limits – continues to convey the unmeasurable and unlocatable dimensions of subjectivity which literary and grammatical analyses often fall-short of being able to define. To return to Samuels’ conception of distributed centrality, in this thinking there is no hierarchy or derivative and thus the theory is not a product of metaphysics, which is said to:

proceed from an origin, seen as simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical[...] Hence good before evil, positive before negative, pure before impure, simple before complex, etc. This is not just one metaphysical gesture among others; it is the metaphysical exigency, the most constant, profound and potent procedure[...]Derrida's task is to undermine metaphysical thinking - to disrupt its foundations, dislodge its certitudes, turn aside its quests for an undivided point of origin, the *logos*. Derrida argues that metaphysics *pervades* Western thought. In a sense, it has *been* Western thought. Is it escapable? Has anyone escaped it?<sup>268</sup>

Thinking in terms of distributed centrality, we can perceive Garréta to write of subjectivity in metaphysical terms of mind-matter, potentiality-actuality, substance-attribute which long to escape themselves while the writing itself remains metaphysical – it is difficult for writing to stand outside of metaphysics, itself a Western paradigm and methodological procedure for thinking. Although Garréta briefly acknowledges that sexual identity and gender identity act

---

<sup>268</sup> Jeff Collins and Bill Mayblin. 2011. *Introducing Derrida*, 103-104.

as frameworks and categories by which people attempt to try to understand identity and subjectivity, Garréta insists and seeks to prove that gender can be eluded in a story without missing it.<sup>269</sup> Indeed, the ‘missing’ or ‘active-hiddenness’ of the meaning of gender fills the space with its absence. It becomes again the purloined letter of Poe’s tale for which the reader-detective seeks.<sup>270</sup> While gender generally tends not to be overlooked in gender-normative codified social interactions, it can enact social subjectivity as it is experienced in real life. Although the characters are truly genderless, gender in *Sphinx* almost becomes the metaphorical idiom of ‘the elephant in the room’ – it enacts a linguistic and social suspension of gender attribution.

Performing a predictive thought experiment on *Sphinx* is difficult, for the nature of prediction is to theorise future outcomes based on present data. Thus for *X to stay the same* – for text to ‘remain as it is’ (i.e., to not have undergone deformance/interpretation), is to essentially leave the text unread. To a certain extent, all textual interpretation undergoes some mental process of Deformance – a taking apart, mixing and resuturing of textual silks (word-games).

### ***Diagramming Sentences***

There is a tapestral structure to lingual subjectivity in *Sphinx*.

[subject] | [action] | [target] | [activity]”<sup>271</sup>

---

<sup>269</sup> Eva Domeneghini. 2020. “Littérature Française Contemporaine”. *Cosmogonie.Free.Fr.* <http://cosmogonie.free.fr/index2.html> My Translation.

<sup>270</sup> Monique Wittig. 1983. “The Point Of View: Universal Or Particular?”. *Feminist Issues* 3 (2): 68. doi:10.1007/bf02685543. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/BF02685543.pdf>

<sup>271</sup> Baratunde Thurston. 2019. *How to deconstruct racism, one headline at a time.* 10:20. [https://www.ted.com/talks/baratunde\\_thurston\\_how\\_to\\_deconstruct\\_racism\\_one\\_headline\\_at\\_a\\_time/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/baratunde_thurston_how_to_deconstruct_racism_one_headline_at_a_time/transcript).

In the *Sphinx* sentence: “I exist [subject] in a morbid state, my body [target] riddled by consumption [action], not knowing from where to vomit up [activity] the soul it has created.”<sup>272</sup>

Thus the systemic order constituting subjectivity’s own self-relationality in *Sphinx*, with this particular example, looks like this:

[subject] | [target] | [action] | [activity]

What does a reversal of the [action] and [target] indicate? In the Sphinxian sentence, the order is reshuffled, and the subject dualistically acts upon itself. There is the existing [subject]; the body is the [target] of its own [active] consumptive demise which relationally interacts with itself in order to perform the [action] verb (vomit). It is as though subjectivity exists within uncorralled, uncontrollable and disintegrative affectual forces inherent in the self: the subject reflexively focuses on (targets) a part of themselves and then the affect of that activity is described.

### ***Crossing, Termination, Translation, and Racial Subjectivity***

Gender, of course, is not the only component related to identity – there is the ever-present question of race. I take note of the racial component of the work in terms of the trope of ‘crossing’ and termination as a concern of subjectivity making an interpretive shift from grammar-as-gender focus to grammar-as-subject focus. I consider how this relates to the mobility of identity as it is articulated within a Oulipian formal constraint which sculpts the narrative.<sup>273</sup> As Mirene Arsanios observes in ‘Crotches Crossed and Sexes Mixed’: “Though Garréta successfully avoids gender, other binaries creep in: the confessor and the listener, who is black who is white, who is smart who is uneducated. How does she challenge these other categories?”<sup>274</sup>

---

<sup>272</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

<sup>273</sup> Ramadan and Arsanios. 2015. “Crotches Crossed And Sexes Mixed, Emma Ramadan By Mirene Arsanios”.

<sup>274</sup> Ramadan and Arsanios. 2015. “Crotches Crossed And Sexes Mixed, Emma Ramadan By Mirene Arsanios”.

Although Garréta's trans/androgynous writing escapes its gender-binary confines to engage with ethics and affect via a translingual aesthetic (i.e., by articulating subjectivity in grammar via unusual tenses), contestably, her writing does not always maintain an ongoing, critically informed-resistance or feminist ethic: "Feminism itself is a politics that has long recognised the critical links between affect and gendered, sexualised, racialised, and class relations of power."<sup>275</sup> Although in the context of *Sphinx* the protagonist (the narratorial I/Je) is aware that "Black skin, white skin: our looks were against us. Our intimacy went against the mandate dictating that birds of a feather flock together,"<sup>276</sup> and although towards the end of chapter II Je declares feeling at home in New York: "so much did [A\*\*\*'s] family make me feel like part of their family, effortlessly forgetting our differences in race, color, culture, class – everything that one might cite as possible traits of alterity,"<sup>277</sup> it remains problematic that (as a grammatical function of pursuing lingual gender-erasure), at the beginning of Chapter II, A\*\*\*'s subjectivity is merely described as a noun in addition to explicitly being defined as biracial. A\*\*\* is objectified as "That face" whose "features had retained nothing of A\*\*\*'s African origins, except for a barely perceptible, sensual heaviness of the mouth."<sup>278</sup>

A\*\*\* is biracial (with a white father and black mother) – they are a US Harlem "escapee" to Paris, and lingual attention is given – not to the erasure of all binaries – but to how characters possess fluidity within their identities which correlate with crossing psychogeographies, race, age, class, and cultures. Direct allusions to the trope of 'crossing' the ocean from New York to Paris, and of crossing among cities, of crossing races and of navigating a ten year age difference (which usually partakes in gender assumptions – it is more conventional in normative sex/gender relations for a man to be ten years older than a female,

---

<sup>275</sup> Libe García Zarranz. 2014. Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim. 2014. *Transdisciplinary Approaches To Affect Theory*. Video. 11:51-12:04. Zarranz here is referring to North Whitehead's writings. <https://tv.uvigo.es/video/5b5b60308f4208f94216bd48>

<sup>276</sup> Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*. 1st ed. Paris: Grasset, 60.

<sup>277</sup> Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*, 95.

<sup>278</sup> Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*, 64.

yet except for mapping the story with gendered significations based on normative-guesswork, readers cannot know whether this trope is actually crossed or not.) Garréta ‘sets-up’ binaries which are ready to be traversed, and in doing so, dialectically (though not always) presents subjectivity and identity as breaking-free from normative sex/gender/age/class/race relations and conventions in the 1980s without ever explicitly defining or breaking (crossing) such definitional binaries.

Identity in *Sphinx* is thus not necessarily communicated as a location or static stratum – it is a tipping event; a happening which occurs in navigation across different cultures and spaces creating meaning – yet identity is not always lingually navigated with necessary critical racial awareness.<sup>279</sup> Emma Ramadan explains her difficulties in translating *Sphinx*:

ER: There is a part in the French in which the narrator meets A’s family in Harlem and a part in which she/he/they is with A’s mom in the hospital. I wasn’t entirely comfortable translating the way Garréta wrote about the black characters. This book was written in France in the 80s. In present-day America, certain things sound culturally offensive. When in the hospital with A\*\*\*’s mother, the narrator keeps bringing up that she is black. In the French, Garréta refers to two men at the end of the last chapter as “*les noirs*.” In English you can’t just be referring to them as “the black guys.” She also uses the word “*nègre*”, or more precisely “*les origines nègres*.” In English you can’t say “the negro origins.” That’s just not OK. So I had to change things like that.

MA: Did she agree?

ER: It’s funny because I met with her in Paris and told her I wasn’t really comfortable translating the word “*nègres*” and she couldn’t believe she had used that word! She absolutely agreed to my translation.<sup>280</sup>

Black identity in *Sphinx* is depicted as extremely sexual, sensual, objectified, and violent. Sexual and sensual being should be embraced, but when identity is solely reduced to these limits (stripped of its multiplicity), subjectivity is then unfairly limited in its relegation to the status of misinformed triviality and superficiality. A\*\*\* is exoticised for having features that retain nothing of their African origins “except for a barely perceptible, sensual heaviness of the

---

<sup>279</sup> Ramadan and Arsanios. 2015. “Crotches Crossed And Sexes Mixed, Emma Ramadan By Mirene Arsanios”.

<sup>280</sup> Ramadan and Arsanios. 2015. “Crotches Crossed And Sexes Mixed, Emma Ramadan By Mirene Arsanios”.

mouth,”<sup>281</sup> and in the original French, “*les origines nègres*” are two men described as eventually murdering Je: “Two dark-skinned figures walk toward me, speaking loudly in a dialect that sounds like pidgin English[...] the two men drag me to the edge of the canal that has not yet frozen over...”<sup>282</sup> This kind of writing depicts black bodies within tiring familiar grammatical structures representing the power dynamics of subjugation:

[subject] | [action] | [target] | [activity]”<sup>283</sup>

“A subject takes an action against a target engaged in some activity”<sup>284</sup>: positions Je (a white body) as the target of violence by black bodies while they are out walking in Amsterdam at the border of the red-light district. Taking a dialectical approach to interpretation, it is clear that Garréta’s writing (based on prior analyses in this thesis) is categorically *both* resistant *and* problematic in that it can destabilise and dismantle oppressive power structures and stereotypes representing subjectivity while, unfortunately, upholding and perpetuating others. To erase gender yet to uncritically deploy race draws attention away from certain subjectival categories and pours focus into others, yet this is odd, for Garréta’s conceptualisms seem to hunger for theorisation which advocates that one is simply the person one is. This problematic race material presents subjectivity as performing itself from an ‘outside-in’ perspective. The ‘self’ does not define itself according to its own definitions or desires, its degrees of complexity are diminished (from an outsider’s perspective) rather than honoured.<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>281</sup> Garréta. 1986. *Sphinx*, 64.

<sup>282</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 162.

<sup>283</sup> Baratunde Thurston. 2019. *How to deconstruct racism, one headline at a time*. 10:20.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/baratunde\\_thurston\\_how\\_to\\_deconstruct\\_racism\\_one\\_headline\\_at\\_a\\_time/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/baratunde_thurston_how_to_deconstruct_racism_one_headline_at_a_time/transcript).

<sup>284</sup> Thurston. 2019. *How to deconstruct racism, one headline at a time*. 10:20.

<sup>285</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 127.

#### 4. *Retrodictive / Synthetic Subjectivity*

*If X has already occurred, how do we go from effect to cause?*

Consider the following excerpt from *Sphinx* once more:

When I close my eyes, I see my soul as a screen crisscrossed with flowing, intertwined lines; architectural straight lines of a volume uncertain of its limits, exposed on all sides; a fragile construction...<sup>286</sup>

Synthetic, interweaving subjectivity and suspended excess are transpiring. How? The ‘I’ starts to represent itself as both difference and repetition. For example, the concept of the “I” repeats itself in recursion and forward projection (reference and creative re-genesis), and yet there is difference in the way that its predicates are produced. As we progress through the passage, the “I” becomes a displaced addition of itself as it continually replicates and then replaces itself with different terms (an example of simultaneous repetition and difference), it becomes “fragile”, “flowing”, and “intertwined.”<sup>287</sup> In other words, Garréta adds as she substitutes within zones of contrariety. Here, all linguistic units reflect and originate from the first word in the sentence: “I”, which connects and then refers to other *changing* language units (synthetic judgements) – connecting new information to the judgement’s subject. Jacques Derrida terms this logic the *supplément*, which means “both the addition and substitution [replacement] simultaneously.”<sup>288</sup> Derrida considers the *supplément* as being an addition to something which is always-already complete:

But the *supplément* supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the *supplément* is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. A substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it

---

<sup>286</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 127.

<sup>287</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 127.

<sup>288</sup> Huang. 2020. *Epistolary Writing: Paradox Of The Supplement*. Ph.D, NCU, 60.  
<http://nccur.lib.nccu.edu.tw/bitstream/140.119/33321/9/55100409.pdf>

produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be *filled up of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.<sup>289</sup>

If “the supplément goes beyond the hierarchical relationship of oppositions”<sup>290</sup> because it destabilises boundary limits, then when I write about shifting pronouns (i.e., non-gendered pronouns; these pronouns therefore cannot be categorised within a binary), this suggests that there are articulations of sameness in difference simultaneously; apposition as self-derangement is arrangement.

Examples of both addition and replacement are seen in states of being. In *Sphinx*'s passage, for example, where the “I” is connected to a morbid state: “I exist in a morbid state, my body riddled by consumption, not knowing from where to vomit up the soul it has created”, *State* is the supplément for a form of ‘being’ from the infinitive *Être* (*to be*), now expressed (replaced) in another form (the synonym for being). “My body” is also an ontological appositive; it is another way (or supplément) of saying “I” – linked to the state of “consumption” – whereby an unstable external force interacts with the internal (“I”) force: “I no longer know if I should deny its existence.” *Savoir* is a state of knowing, and these lines invoke the linguistic regulations which defer the compartmentalisation of different selves (in other words, the *supplément*) – the supplément extends itself in repetition: “... not knowing from where to vomit up the soul it has created” – all of these words (i.e., *soul* and *it*) refer to the same thing, “it” refers to itself and to the different permutations and derangements of that self.

Extending and providing another textual example for this idea, a methodical reading from a different perspective reveals that the “I” subject initially describes itself pronominally; it is then displaced and transmigrated from “I”; to “my”; to “the soul” (“my” connects its

---

<sup>289</sup> Huang. 2020. *Epistolary Writing: Paradox Of The Supplement*, 62 from 1976, Derrida’s emphasis.

<sup>290</sup> Huang. 2020. *Epistolary Writing: Paradox Of The Supplement*, 62.

linguistic unit to “the soul”), and then to “it” (the soul – which is often conceived of as a distinct entity and progressively connects its linguistic unit to “it”), moving backwards again to “myself,” and once more to “soul, then “I.” The “I” is personified in the inverse (Self/Subject to Object) as “a screen” (see line four) and then to “volume” (see line five): Here, the “I” moves specifically from a pronominal Self (I) to abstract Object uncertain of its own material fragility and limits.

A charted, bolded illustration of this interconnectedness looks like this:

**I** exist in a morbid state, **my** body riddled by consumption, not knowing from where to vomit up **the soul it** has created. For all I have done since A\*\*\*’s death is forge **myself** a **soul**, and **I** no longer know if **I** should deny **its** existence. When **I** close my eyes, **I** see **my soul** as a **screen** crisscrossed with flowing, intertwined lines; architectural straight lines of a **volume** uncertain of **its limits**, exposed on all sides; a fragile construction....<sup>291</sup>

A deformation of linguistic subjectivity:

I		my					
	the soul it					myself	
soul I		I	its	I		I	
my soul	screen						
	volume		its limits				<sup>292</sup>

In doing so, one can see that the “I” (complete and yet paradoxically ready to be deranged) continually substitutes itself, performing as a floating signifier marked by sameness (the “I” refers to itself, although ambivalently.) As Derrida writes, “it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.”<sup>293</sup> The idea of an “I” is complete and yet it remains open to the supplément

---

<sup>291</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 127.

<sup>292</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 127.

<sup>293</sup> Huang. 2020. *Epistolary Writing: Paradox Of The Supplement*, 62.

(to addition and substitution), which “opposes by replacing.”<sup>294</sup> Consider, for example, in *Sphinx* how the “I” is verbally, spatially, and geometrically described and therefore insists on its instabilities. The “I” is clearly unstable when it becomes a multitudinous representation and imagining of floating (plural, non-gendered) signifiers:

“When I close my eyes, I see my soul as a screen crisscrossed with flowing, intertwined lines; architectural straight lines of a volume uncertain of its limits, exposed on all sides; a fragile construction...”<sup>295</sup>

The lines reveal addition: the “screen” – much like what the ‘form’ of Deformance enacts – presents a ‘floating’ sign substitution for the soul and thus for ‘I’ – a *same-but-different* supplément) is “a volume uncertain of its limits” composed by multitudinous exposures, lines and sides. Again, subjectivity presents itself as ampliative, circuitous: as disconnected interconnectivity.

### 5. *Backcasting / Integrative Thinking*

*History is the love that enters us through death.*

— Anne Michaels, *Skin Divers*

*We want X to happen, what do we do now?*

The entire plot of *Sphinx* (itself) has been an *in medias res* thought-experiment which begins in backcasting: “Remembering saddens me still, even years later.”<sup>296</sup> What do we do now, realising that *Sphinx* operates on several overlapping planes simultaneously? What does *Sphinx* tell us about subjectivity and agency within affectual and ethical frames? Subjectivity and agency certainly continually reinscribe themselves as somatic mutable in/coherent substance and lingual-ideology.

---

<sup>294</sup> Jeff Collins and Bill Mayblin. 2011. *Introducing Derrida*, 74.

<sup>295</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 134.

<sup>296</sup> Garréta. *Sphinx*, 16.

And what are the evaluative implications for *Sphinx* as a work of political dissensus beyond these ideas? Drawing out an interpretive nuance from Samuels' article in *Qui Parle* "Everything Speaks—How Do We Listen?"<sup>297</sup> – *Sphinx* asks similar questions – perhaps sounding, or looking, something like this: "Everything Signs— How Do We See?" The implication for analysing how *Sphinx* treats subjectivity and agency read against (and by) affect, semioethical theory, and deformative practices serves to reinforce Garréta's textual ethics via her political and aesthetic commitments - which dissent against dominant ideologies (i.e., discourses and dominant paradigms of thinking and perceiving through language.) Garreta's writing reframes subjectivity and agency into an alternative affectual and ethico-sensual politics.

Rather than looking at the five performed thought-experiments of *Sphinx* and seeking to synthesise each experiment or model's implications for subjectivity and agency (i.e., choosing between the models or making an ultimate synthetic trade-off), I argue that what might be thought of as textual aporia(s) could also be thought of as symbiotic intercategory complexity. Thus I desire to think through the thought-experiments as follows:

1. Existing models do not represent reality; they are our constructions.
2. Opposing models are to be leveraged, not feared.
3. Existing models are not perfect; better models exist that are not seen yet.<sup>298</sup>

Each thought-experiment can be conceived of as its own analytical category belonging to a broader information matrix. If I corral and document the relationships between each, and deconstruct the analytical categories (which is what anti-categorical complexity is based on; it

---

<sup>297</sup> Lisa Samuels. "Everything Speaks—How Do We Listen?" *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2017): 318-319. [muse.jhu.edu/article/689594](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/689594).

<sup>298</sup> Roger L Martin. 2016. "Cultivating Stance." In *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking*. 1st ed. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press, 157.

is a methodology which deconstructs and asks how analytical categories are formed) - we can then perform integrative thinking which allows for the creative resolution of tensions, rather than performing thinking which accepts unpleasant trade-offs.<sup>299</sup> Together, integrative thinking and intercategorical complexity reinforce the idea that we can look at each thought-experiment as prototypes which do not represent reality, but, rather, represent select readerly constructions and/or semblances/projections that help nuance and render overt some of what we can learn about subjectivity in close readings of *Sphinx*.

---

<sup>299</sup> Martin. 2016. "Cultivating Stance." In *The Opposable Mind*, 167. "Opposing models, in fact, are the richest source of new insight into a problem"; [...] "The most creative, productive stance is one that sees opposing models as learning opportunities to be appreciated, welcomed, and understood."

## Conclusion

*For every complex problem, there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.*

— H.L. Mencken

I have examined subjectivity in the context of sensual politics, agency, affect, and semioethics, elaborating that an ‘undoing’ of subjectivity in *Sphinx*, as I have argued, accordingly ‘undoes’ dominant discourses relating to a consideration of how subjectival expressions act distributively. With the central support of Lisa Samuels’ deformative criticism, bioautography, and her theory of ‘distributed centrality’, this ‘undoing’ has proven itself to be complex, intersectional, and it has required dialectical thinking which does not desire to find a single, clear, or centralised answer; in *Sphinx*, such ‘truths’ do not make themselves easily nor readily available.

While I have argued that Garréta’s novel encourages distributive thinking and feeling which queers dominant discourse as it re-writes supposedly stable critical identitarian tendencies, I have also interpreted readings of subjectivity according to a semioethical praxis which, regardless of the performed ethical status of the text, encourages ethical and nuanced interpretation of subjectivity.

A longer study would extend the praxis of semioethics further, for example analysing the representations of race in *Sphinx* with sustained critical apparatus in order to do it justice as a topic within subjectivity. Since I address comparative conditions of French and English grammar in my Introduction, and in Chapter One, another extension of semioethics would address translation on a deeper, more sustained detail analysis level. Experimental translation theories such as those espoused and practiced in Outranspo (the ‘Ouvroir de translation potencial’ was founded “in the wake of the Oulipo in 2012”<sup>300</sup>, and its focus centres on

---

<sup>300</sup> “Outranspo | Ouvroir De Translation Potencial.” 2012. Outranspo.Com.  
<http://www.outranspo.com/>

translating constrained literature), would be a welcome model for continuing the undoing of subjectivity. As academic and Professor of Translation studies Lily Robert-Foley points out, such Outranspian feminist models of translation remain acutely aware of how translation can expose “gender dimension[s]” or “the misogynistic architectures of the language”<sup>301</sup>; translation can further disrupt by “paratext (“prefacing and footnoting”)”; it can negotiate or betray the power of the text, or even divert “the authority of the text as an act of political resistance.”<sup>302</sup> A further semioethical analysis would focus on these points in a *Sphinx* translation analysis in light of Emma Ramadan’s critical deployment of racial terms and descriptors in the translated version of *Sphinx*. As I note of Rancière at the beginning of this thesis:

Critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation. This schema, very simple in appearance, is actually the conjunction of three processes: first, the production of a sensory form of ‘strangeness’; second, the development of an awareness of the reason for that strangeness and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness.

In “La Traduction Queere: Outranspo” (2012), Lily Robert-Foley writes: “instead of using translation theory to read Queer texts, I use queer theory to read translation — in theory and in practice,”<sup>303</sup> and that “Queer as a verb: *to queer* , queeriser, would then mean “to make strange.”<sup>304</sup> A reading of subjectivity, looking acutely at translation, would be another way of critiquing and analysing how dominant discourse and its translations function to produce new forms of ‘strangeness’, for strangeness seems to shake us into curious awareness or feeling we might not otherwise encounter; the overlapping of translatory planes according to an Outranspo analysis of *Sphinx* – though, again, never truly representing reality – could be leveraged;

---

<sup>301</sup> Lily Robert-Foley. 2017. “La Traduction Queere: Outranspo”. Outranspo.Com. <http://www.outranspo.com/la-traduction-queere/>

<sup>302</sup> Robert-Foley. 2017. “La Traduction Queere: Outranspo”.

<sup>303</sup> Robert-Foley. 2017. “La Traduction Queere: Outranspo”.

<sup>304</sup> Robert-Foley. 2017. “La Traduction Queere: Outranspo”.

existing translations and interpretations would never be perfect, and strangeness would strive again and again for better, unseen models.

To *queeriser* “to make strange” in art (to emit or to create or to analyse ‘strangeness’) might seem to require a belief that ‘strangeness’ is Here, and that ‘non-strangeness’ is someplace peripherally out There. In translation, and in the stories we tell of our own and of others’ unfolding subjectivities, we often ‘break’ (or translate) meaning within our meaning-making crucibles to reform it anew. Distributed centrality continues the metaphor of *kintsugi*, a Japanese ceramic technique. In *kintsugi*, “the artist takes a broken ceramic object and reassembles it, holding the pieces together with resin mixed with gold, silver, or platinum. The cracks are not to be hidden but instead made beautiful.”<sup>305</sup> Part of breaking (i.e. undoing) subjectivity requires a willingness to let go of the idea that we can ever truly locate such an idea. This is far from dire. In fact, it is enticing: “we can trust that there is strength and beauty – even in and *especially* in – all the broken places.”<sup>306</sup>

---

<sup>305</sup> Alexandra Solomon. 2017. “Love is Alive” in *Loving Bravely*, 562.

<sup>306</sup> Solomon. 2017. “Love is Alive” in *Loving Bravely*, 562.

## Bibliography

- Alcoff, Linda Martín. 2000. "Merleau-Ponty and Feminist Theory on Experience." In *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion Of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Alvis, Jason W. 2017. "Making Sense Of Heidegger's 'Phenomenology Of The Inconspicuous' Or Inapparent (Phänomenologie Des Unscheinbaren)". *Continental Philosophy Review* 51 (2): 211-238. doi:10.1007/s11007-017-9422-8.
- Amsler, Mark. 2011. *Affective Literacies: Writing And Multilingualism In The Late Middle Ages*. Brepols.
- Anscombe, Jean-Claude. 2009. "Théorie De L'Argumentation, Topoi, Et Structuration Discursive". *Revue Québécoise De Linguistique* 18 (1): 13-55. doi:10.7202/602639ar.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company.
- . 1990. *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Arnaud, Noël, and Jacques Roubaud. 1987. *La Bibliothèque Oulipienne: Volume I*. Paris: Éditions Ramsay.
- Asprey, Dave and Siegel, Dan. 2019. "Interpersonal Neurobiology: A Systems-Thinking Approach To Optimal Health – Dr. Dan Siegel #587". Podcast. *Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey*.  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/podcast/bulletproof-radio/id451295014?mt=2>.
- Baxter, Judith. 2003. *Positioning Gender In Discourse: A Feminist Methodology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and John B Thompson. 1991. *Language And Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell.
- Bowman, Paul, and Richard Stamp. 2011. *Reading Rancière*. London: Continuum.
- Bradshaw, Megan and Ramadan, Emma. 2021. "A\*\*\* And I: In Conversation With Emma Ramadan". Blog. *Asymptote*.  
<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2016/02/15/a-and-i-in-conversation-with-emma-ramadan/>  
[www.jstor.org/stable/223428](http://www.jstor.org/stable/223428)
- Brandt, Per Aage. 1993. "Cognition And The Semantics Of Metaphor". *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 26 (1): 5-21. doi:10.1080/03740463.1993.10415450.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261682840\\_Cognition\\_and\\_the\\_semantics\\_of\\_metaphor](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261682840_Cognition_and_the_semantics_of_metaphor)

- Bray, Abigail. 2004. *Helen Cixous, Writing and Sexual Difference*. Palgrave Macmillan, 62-63.
- Buchanan, Ian. 2010. *Oxford Dictionary Of Critical Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1987. *Subjects Of Desire: Hegelian Reflections In Twentieth-Century France*. Columbia University Press. Paris: Librairie Classique-Élémentaire.
- . 2004a. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Cameron, Deborah. 1998. *The Feminist Critique Of Language*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Cogan, Gaëlle. 2021. "A Genre Beyond Gender: Anne Garréta's Sphinx." *The Kenyon Review*.  
<https://kenyonreview.org/reviews/sphinx-by-anne-garreta-738439/>.
- Collins, Jeff, and Bill Mayblin. 2011. *Introducing Derrida*. London: Icon.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia*. Translation and Foreword by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Christine Irizarry. 2000. *On Touching - Jean-Luc Nancy*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Domeneghini, Eva. 2020. "Littérature Française Contemporaine". *Cosmogonie.Free.Fr*.  
<http://cosmogonie.free.fr/index2.html>
- Epstude, Kai, Annika Scholl, and Neal J. Roese. "Prefactual Thoughts: Mental Simulations about What Might Happen." *Review of General Psychology* 20, no. 1 (March 2016): 48–56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000064>
- Esposito, Joseph. *Synechism: The Keystone of Peirce's Metaphysics*. The Commens Encyclopedia: The Digital Encyclopedia of Peirce Studies, 2005.
- "French Lesbian Writers?". 1996. *Yale French Studies*, no. 90: 235. doi:10.2307/2930366.  
[www.jstor.org/stable/20057357](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057357)
- Fabula, Équipe. 2007. "Car Je Est Un Autre": Articulations Du Rapport Entre Identité et Altérité". *Fabula: La Recherche En Littérature*.  
[https://www.fabula.org/actualites/car-je-est-un-autre-articulations-du-rapport-entre-identite%20et-alterite\\_16900.php#:~:text=%C2%AB%20Car%20je%20est%20un%20autre%20%C2%BB%2C%20telle%20est%20la%20c%C3%A9%20A8bre,opposition%20par%20Oses%20termes%20m%C3%A9mes](https://www.fabula.org/actualites/car-je-est-un-autre-articulations-du-rapport-entre-identite%20et-alterite_16900.php#:~:text=%C2%AB%20Car%20je%20est%20un%20autre%20%C2%BB%2C%20telle%20est%20la%20c%C3%A9%20A8bre,opposition%20par%20Oses%20termes%20m%C3%A9mes)
- Felski, Rita. 1995. *The Gender Of Modernity*. S.L.: Harvard University Press.

- García Zarranz, Libe. 2014. Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim. 2014. *Transdisciplinary Approaches To Affect Theory*. Video. <https://tv.uvigo.es/video/5b5b60308f4208f94216bd48>
- Garréta, Anne. "Autofiction: la Ford intérieure et le self-roman." *Genèse et autofiction*. Ed. ---. 2007. "Anne F. Garréta, Oulipo". *Oulipo.Net*. <https://oulipo.net/fr/oulipiens/afg>.
- . "Program In Literature". 2020. *Literature.Duke.Edu*. <https://literature.duke.edu/people/anne-garreta>.
- . 2000. "Entretien avec Anne F. Garréta et Eva Domeneghini." *Interview by Radio France*.
- . 2001. "Re-Enchanting The Republic: "Pacs," "Parité" And "Le Symbolique". *Yale French Studies*, no. 100: 145. doi:10.2307/3090585. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3090585>
- . 2005. "Autonomy and Its Discontent." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 4, Dec, pp. 723–33. Scopus, doi:10.1215/00382876-104-4-723.
- . 2012. *Wittig, la langue-le-politique* In: *Lire Monique Wittig aujourd'hui*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon. <http://books.openedition.org/pul/4203>
- . 2013. "To Sleep, Perchance To Dream". *Words Without Borders*. <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/to-sleep-perchance-to-dream>.
- . 2017. "Écrire Demande d'être Absolument Sauvage." *France Culture*. <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/par-les-temps-qui-courent/anne-garreta-ecrire-demande-detre-absolument-sauvage>.
- . 2018. French Culture US. 2018. *Anne Garréta At Albertine Books In NYC | Authors At Albertine*. Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qo6Eqy9c8s>
- . 2002. *Not One Day*. 1st ed. Dallas, Texas: Deep Vellum Publishing. Originally published in French as *Pas un Jour* by Anne. F. Garréta, Editions. Grasset & Fasquelle in Paris, 2002.
- . 2015. *Sphinx*. 2nd ed. Dallas, Texas: Deep Vellum Publishing. Originally published in French as *Sphinx* by Editions Grasset & Fasquelle in Paris, 1986, 2015. Print.
- .1986. *Sphinx*. 1st ed. Paris: Grasset.
- .2017. *States of Desire: An Interview with Anne Garréta*. Interview by Sarah Gerard. In person. Paris, France.

- Garréta, Anne F., and Josyane Savigneau. "A Conversation." *Yale French Studies*, no. 90 (1996): 214-34. Accessed March 24, 2021. doi:10.2307/2930365.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2930365?seq=1>
- Gibson, Suzie. "The Work, The Neutral And "The Unnameable"". *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 14 (2004): 293-305. Accessed March 20, 2021.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25781473>
- Gordon, Marshall. 2018. "Weltanschauung (Philosophy)". Encyclopedia.Com.  
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/philosophy/philosophy-terms-and-concepts/worldview-philosophy>
- Graham-Dixon, Andrew. 2008. *Art: The Definitive Visual Guide*. London [etc.]: Dorling Kindersley.
- Gratton, Johnnie, and Michael Sheringham. 2005. *The Art Of The Project: Projects And Experiments In Modern French Culture*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Greene, Brian. 2007. *The Fabric Of The Cosmos*. London: Penguin Books.
- Greenough, Chris. 2018. *Undoing Theology*. SCM Press. Book Description.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J Seigworth. 2010. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Hays, Stephanie, and Ramadan, Emma. 2016. "The Challenge Of Genderless Characters: What A 30-Year-Old Novel Reveals About Hidden Biases". Interview. *The Atlantic*.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/05/the-challenge-of-genderless-characters/482109/>
- Horgan, John. "Quantum Philosophy." *Scientific American* 267, no. 1 (1992): 94-105. Accessed March 19, 2021.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24939143>
- Horn, Laurence R and Heinrich Wansing, "Negation", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/negation>
- Huang. 2020. *Epistolary Writing: Paradox Of The Supplement*. Ph.D, NCU, 60  
<http://nccur.lib.nccu.edu.tw/bitstream/140.119/33321/9/55100409.pdf>
- Jung, Carl. 1969. *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull 1st ed. London: Routledge.
- . 1982. *Psychology And The Occult*. 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN: Routledge.
- . 1978. *The Collected Works Of C.G. Jung: Psychiatric Studies*. Edited by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler. 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

- Killermann, Sam. 2017. "An Adorable, Accessible Way To Explain A Complicated Concept: The Genderbread Person". *The Genderbread Person*.  
<https://www.genderbread.org/>
- Kim, A. (2018). "Autofiction Infiltrated: Anne Garréta's Pas un jour", *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 133(3), 559-574.  
 doi:10.1632/pmla.2018.133.3.559
- Kim, Annabel L. 2018. *Unbecoming Language: Anti-Identitarian French Feminist Fictions*. 1st ed. Ohio: The Ohio State University Press Columbus.
- Klein, Marty. 2012. *Sexual Intelligence: What We Really Want From Sex – And How To Get It*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Kovalic, Cordelia. 2021. "A Conversation With Dr. Alexandra Solomon: Boundaries". Podcast. *We Heal Together*.  
<https://we-heal-together.simplecast.com/episodes/a-conversation-with-dr-alexandra-solomon-boundaries-Q8pnAY4D>
- Kramer, Michael J. 2016. "Distorting History (To Make It More Accurate): Artificions For Artifacts? Digital Deformance as a Mode of Historical Inquiry." Blog. *Modern US & Transnational History—Public & Digital History—Cultural & Social Criticism*.  
<https://www.michaeljkramer.net/distorting-history-to-make-it-more-accurate>
- Lear, Amanda. 1978. Amanda Lear - The Sphinx 1978. YouTube Video.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig6UdrVhqiY>
- Lévesque-Jalbert, Émile. "This is not an autofiction: Autoteoría, French Feminism, and Living in Theory." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 76, no. 1 (2020): 65-84. doi:10.1353/arq.2020.0002.
- Levin Becker, Daniel. 2012. *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise Of Potential Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Livia, Anna. 2001. *Pronoun Envy: Literary Uses Of Linguistic Gender*. Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press.
- Ludernik, Monika. *The Genderization of Narrative In: Recent Trends in Narratological Research* [online]. Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 1999 (generated 11 avril 2021).  
<http://books.openedition.org/pufr/3958>
- Lust, Barbara. 1986. "Introduction To Studies In The Acquisition Of Anaphora". Presentation, University of Iasi, Faculty of Computer Science.  
<https://slideplayer.com/slide/3535849/>
- Magi, Jill. 2019. "'True Poems Flee—': A Refugee Poetics Or Poetry As Permanently Temporary". *Poetry Foundation*.  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2019/04/true-poems-flee-a-refugee-poetics-or-poetry-as-permanently-temporary>.

- Martel, Frédéric. 2000. *The Pink And The Black: Homosexuals In France Since 1968*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Martin, Roger L. 2016. *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking*. 1st ed. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press.
- Massumi, Brian. 2011. *Semblance And Event: Activist Philosophy And The Occurrent Arts*. Massachusetts: Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited.
- May, Rollo, Ernest Angel, and Heri. F Ellenberger. 1958. *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*. 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30: 1771–800.
- Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa. 1981. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Persephone Press.
- Moran, Joe. 2018. *First You Write A Sentence: The Elements Of Reading, Writing ... And Life*. Milton Keynes: Viking.
- Mulvey, Laura and Peter Wollen. 1977. *Riddles Of The Sphinx*. Film <https://vimeo.com/175782348>.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1896. *On Truth And Lies In A Nonmoral Sense*. S.I: Delphi Classics.
- "Outranspo | Ouvroir De Translation Potencial". 2012. Outranspo.Com. <http://www.outranspo.com/>
- "Oxford English And Spanish Dictionary, Synonyms, And Spanish To English Translator". 2021. Oxford Lexico Dictionary. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/synergistic>.
- Peck, Frances. 2021. "The Parts Of The Sentence". *The Writing Centre* <https://arts.uottawa.ca/writingcentre/en/hypergrammar/the-parts-of-the-sentence#:~:text=Every%20complete%20sentence%20contains%20two,Judy%20%7Bruns%7D>
- Petrilli, Susan. "Semiotics as semioethics in the era of global communication." *Semiotica* 2009, no. 173 (2009): 343-367.
- . 2014. *Sign Studies and Semioethics: Communication, Translation and Values*. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- . 2018. *Susan Petrilli Keynote Lecture*. Video. Bucharest: International Conference Semiosis in Communication: Differences and Similarities, Bucharest <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzvdkI7VoWk>
- Petrilli, Susan. 2004. "The responsibility of power and the power of responsibility: From the "semiotic" to the "semioethic" animal." 1-16. Originally Published in: Withalmm,

- Gloria & Josef Wallmannsberger (Hg./Eds.), *Macht der Zeichen, Zeichen der Macht. / Signs of Power, Power of Signs. Essays in Honor of Jeff Bernard*, INST (www.inst.at), Wien 2004, pp. 103-119.  
<http://www.susanpetrilli.com/files/the-responsibility-of-power-and-the-power-of-responsibility.pdf>
- Prokhovnik, Raia. 1999. *Rational Woman: A Feminist Critique Of Dichotomy*. London, USA, Canada: Routledge.
- Proust, Marcel. 1913. *In Search Of Lost Time (All 7 Volumes)*. Translated from the French by C.K Moncrief, and Stephen Hudson. London: Shandon Press.
- Ramadan, Emma, and Mirene Arsanios. 2015. "Crotches Crossed And Sexes Mixed, Emma Ramadan By Mirene Arsanios". Makhzin.  
<http://www.makhzin.org/issues/feminisms/crotches-crossed-and-sexes-mixed>
- Ramadan, Emma. "Translating Anne Garréta's *Sphinx* Emma Ramadan On The Complications Of A Genderless Love Story". *Five Dials* 33 (2014) pp.36-38.  
[http://fivedials.com/files/fivedials\\_no33b.pdf](http://fivedials.com/files/fivedials_no33b.pdf)
- Robert-Foley, Lily. 2017. "La Traduction Queere: Outranspo". Outranspo.Com.  
<http://www.outranspo.com/la-traduction-queere/>
- Ruthrof, Horst. 2000. *The Body In Language*. London: Cassell.
- Rye, Gill. 2000. "Uncertain Readings and Meaningful Dialogues: Language and Sexual Identity in Anne Garréta's *Sphinx* and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'enfant de sable* and *La nuit sacrée*". In *Neophilologus*, vol. 84, no 4 (octobre), p. 531-540
- Samuels, Lisa, and Jerome McGann. "Deformance and Interpretation." *New Literary History* 30, no. 1 (1999): 25-56. Accessed February 19, 2021.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057521>.
- Samuels, Lisa. 2008. "If Meaning, Shaped Reading, And Leslie Scalapino's Way." *Qui Parle* 12, no. 2 (2001): 179-200. Accessed August 23, 2020.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20686127>
- . 1997. "Poetic Arrest: Laura Riding, Wallace Stevens, And The Modernist Afterlife". Ph.D, University of Virginia.
- . 2017. "Bioautography and Carolee Schneemann's VULVA'S MORPHIA". *Chicago Review*, 60 (4), 154-174.  
<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Bioautography+and+Carolee+Schneemann%27s+VULVA%27S+MORPHIA.-a0522758666>
- . 2020. "Distributed Centrality Again". *Ka Mate Ka Ora: A New Zealand Journal Of Poetry And Poetics*, no. 18: 86-89.  
[http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/18/kmko18\\_08\\_samuels2.pdf](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/18/kmko18_08_samuels2.pdf).

- . "Everything Speaks—How Do We Listen?" *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 26, no. 2 (2017): 318-319.  
[muse.jhu.edu/article/689594](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/689594).
- .1997. "Eight Justifications for Canonizing Lyn Hejinian's "My Life."" *Modern Language Studies* 27, no. 2 (1997): 103-19. Accessed March 4, 2021. doi:10.2307/3195353.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3195353>
- Schabert, Ina. 2010. "Translation Trouble: Gender Indeterminacy In English Novels And Their French Versions". *Translation And Literature* 19 (1): 72-92.  
doi:10.3366/e0968136109000776.  
<https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/full/10.3366/E0968136109000776>
- Schreiber, Joseph. 2015. "21 Thoughts On "How Do You See Me, Anyway?" *Sphinx* By Anne Garréta". Blog. *Rough Ghosts*.  
<https://roughghosts.com/2015/05/04/how-do-you-see-me-anyway-sphinx-by-anne-garreta/>.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1990. *Epistemology Of The Closet*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- Showden, Carisa. 2011. *Choices Women Make: Agency in Domestic Violence, Assisted Reproduction, and Sex Work*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Siegel, Daniel J. 2010. "Differentiation and Linkage" in *Mindsight: The New Science Of Personal Transformation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 466.
- Solomon, Alexandra H. 2017. *Loving Bravely*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Strinati, Dominic. *An Introduction To Theories Of Popular Culture*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2007.
- "Suspension Of Disbelief". 2021. *Oxford Reference*  
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100544310>.
- Thurston, Baratunde. 2019. *How to deconstruct racism, one headline at a time*. TED Video.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/baratunde\\_thurston\\_how\\_to\\_deconstruct\\_racism\\_one\\_headline\\_at\\_a\\_time/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/baratunde_thurston_how_to_deconstruct_racism_one_headline_at_a_time/transcript).
- Van Gulick, Robert, '4.4 Subjectivity' in "Consciousness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/consciousness/>
- Vilain, Philippe. "Autofiction." In *The Novelist's Lexicon: Writers on the Words That Define Their Work*, edited by Gillet Villa and Le Monde by Herman Jeanine, 5-7. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. Accessed March 13, 2021. doi:10.7312/vill15080.9.  
<https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/stable/10.7312/vill15080>
- Vivero García, María Dolores. "Humour, engagement et création littéraire chez Anne Garréta." *Women in French Studies* 19 (2011): 85-93. doi:10.1353/wfs.2011.0027.

Whitman, Walt. 1855. *Leaves Of Grass*. Edited, with an Introduction, by Malcolm Cowley. 1st ed. New York: Penguin Books.

Wittig, Monique. 1983. "The Point Of View: Universal Or Particular?". *Feminist Issues* 3 (2): 63-69. doi:10.1007/bf02685543.

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/BF02685543.pdf>

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. *The Age Of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight For A Human Future At The New Frontier Of Power*. New York: Public Affairs.

---

<sup>i</sup> "There's an apocryphal story about Don Jose, the most accomplished bullfighter in Spain. At the height of Don Jose's career, some journalists arrange an interview with him. When they arrive at his spacious home in Madrid, they find him in the kitchen wearing a frilly apron, washing dishes[...] "Your home is beautiful," they say, "and we appreciate you making the time to see us. But we're confused. You are our national hero, courageous, skillful, the symbol of masculinity to every man and women in Spain. And here you are wearing a frilly pink apron, so *muy delicado, muy femenino*." [...]

"Feminine? I am the symbol of masculinity to every man and woman in Spain. Everything I do is manly. If I wear a frilly pink apron, it is manly to do so."

If Don Jose could decide this, so can you. You can decide what is manly, or womanly, or sexy – and you'd be silly to craft a definition that excludes you. It would be like starting a club and writing membership rules in a way that made you ineligible to join."

See Marty Klein. 2012. "Redefining "Sexy"" in *Sexual Intelligence*. New York: Harper Collins, 233.

<sup>ii</sup> See p.93 of Alexandra Solomon's *Loving Bravely*: "Dialectics is a complex concept that has roots in philosophy and science, and it involves several assumptions about the nature of reality: 1) everything is connected to everything else; 2) change is constant and inevitable; and 3) opposites can be integrated to form a closer approximation of truth (which is always evolving.) For example, "I feel *both* excited *and* afraid"; "This moment is full of *both* joy *and* sadness"; "I am *both* feminine *and* athletic"; "I can be *both* rational *and* emotional[...]" Both/and. One does not destroy the other. Ever. One does not lessen the other. Ever."

<sup>iii</sup> "Alexandra is a licensed clinical psychologist at The Family Institute at Northwestern University and a clinical assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Northwestern University. She received her PhD in Counseling Psychology and a graduate certificate in Gender Studies from Northwestern University. During graduate school, she was awarded the Dr. John J.B. Morgan Fellowship and worked at The Family Institute at Northwestern University as a research and clinical fellow."

See <http://www.dralexandrasolomon.com/about/>

<sup>iv</sup> See <https://www.unifr.ch/uni/fr/organisation/acad/egalite/langage-inclusif.html>

<sup>v</sup> "There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. This is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject[...]" See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. 1987. "Introduction: Rhizome" in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia*. Translation and Foreword by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 30.

<sup>vi</sup> See Marty Klein. 2012. *Sexual Intelligence*. New York: Harper Collins, 7. Schneemann (an American experimental visual artist) problematizes how a female's understanding of their own anatomy/physiology is defined in masculine terms, and Dr. Klein mentions how (published in 2012) "Most school sex education programs in the United States are not allowed to use the words clitoris or pleasure." The female body has much to reclaim, especially in cultural conversation which denies or makes invisible fundamental and pleasurable life-affirming possibilities for language use and female ontology.

<sup>vii</sup> For more on Deformance as a critical practice, See Michael J Kramer. 2016. "Distorting History (To Make It More Accurate): Artificions For Artifacts? Digital Deformance as a Mode of Historical Inquiry." Blog. *Modern US & Transnational History—Public & Digital History—Cultural & Social Criticism*.

<https://www.michaeljkramer.net/distorting-history-to-make-it-more-accurate>