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Being-Exposed: 'The Poetics of Sex' and Other Matters of Tact

By Nikki Sullivan

Regionality, write the editors of this collection, is 'a cartographic metaphor for a cognitive and conceptual reliance on boundaries'. I want to go one step further and suggest that regionality, as a categorising logic that makes meaning and identity possible, does so in and through the instituting of boundaries. Regionalism (in both the material and the conceptual sense—and the two are inextricably bound) seems to me to function in much the same way as John Caputo's 'nutshell': it 'enclose[s] and encapsulate[s], shelter[s] and protect[s], reduce[s] and simplif[ies]' (Caputo 1997: 31). However, as anyone familiar with deconstruction will know, such logic (and the effects it produces) is inherently contradictory. It is only possible to designate identities, to represent things (places, people, practices, texts) as things—that is, as objects of knowledge—by 'forgetting' that the logic of regionality is haunted by that which it cannot contain, by what Derrida calls 'the impossible'. This 'forgetting' (of the heterogeneous, of alterity, of affect, of the impossible) is not simply a passive overlooking, but rather, consists of incessant boundary patrolling since whenever one attempts to 'stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away' (Caputo, 1997: 31). The aim of this paper, then, is to testify to this 'something' (which is no 'thing'), not by re-presenting (by remembering) what the logic of regionality forgets, but by raising the question of how to write, to respond, so as not to forget that which exceeds and at the same time is at the very heart of representational logic, or what I am calling here the logic of regionality.

Whilst such a task may sound simple enough, I must confess at the outset that I am unsure as to how to proceed. This is because the rules of engagement specific to the particular 'genres of knowledge' or conceptual regions (namely literary studies and philosophy) in which I currently find myself mired provide little or no clues to assist me in this (deconstructive) undertaking. I will return to this point in due course, but for the moment I want to introduce a number of texts which move me, which call to me to respond in *otherwise* than conventional ways and thus to contravene the logic of regionality that (in)forms the genres of knowledge mentioned and the effects they produce.

In two touching papers entitled 'Corpus' and 'Exscription', Jean-Luc Nancy explores the possible relationship between bodily-being, self and other, reading, and writing, not so much in terms of signification, but rather, in terms of 'tact'—of a sensuous and exorbitant exposure that touches, cuts, marks, traces, engraves, squeezes, scratches, strikes, weighs, palpates, thinks. Like Nancy, I too am troubled by regionalising practices that (attempt to) read the body/the text (of the other) as an expression of the (sexed) self, thus converting it into nothing more than a sign, constituting it as an object to be known, and thus 'betraying it' (Nancy, 1993a: 335). Such an approach enacts the logic of regionality, in and through (com)prehension: it arrests the heterogeneous and/or affect in the name of authority, the authority of naming. This tactless closed-fisted approach to the (body of the) other precipitates a foreclosure, and thus is

itself a way of forgetting that which 'never ceases to reopen the wound of the unaccomplished' (Lyotard, 1990: 22).

I am not the only one to be moved, to be touched, by the body of writing that bears the name Jean-Luc Nancy, by the questions it raises—most particularly the question of how to respond. In an equally moving meditation on touch Jacques Derrida writes:

I didn't know what to present as an offering to Jean-Luc Nancy in order to tell him of my gratitude and admiration . . . As I had nothing to teach him . . . and nothing to make known to him . . . I wanted, without telling him anything, at least to *touch him* . . . Or, if it was still necessary to tell him something, that it be a sort of secret, which without teaching him anything, without bringing anything to his awareness, especially not the truth, would have had as effect to *touch him*. But with tact. In short, to share with him, but to share nothing, a question of tact, to partake with him, in this taking-part, something that touches him (Derrida 1993: 124-129).

As Derrida notes here, what touch/to touch him *means*, how touch can be performed, is far from clear. There is no simple answer to the question of touch, to the pressing call that weighs on me. But perhaps in raising the question of what touch *is*, one once again falls into the trap of attempting to represent touch, of trying to formulate rules of engagement for its practice, of responding without tact. Perhaps one would be better to follow in the footsteps of Derrida here and concede that 'I cannot share with him and share this, touch, without touching upon touch, . . . that is, on the *sense* of touch' (Derrida 1993: 129). [1] For as Nancy suggests, the imperative is not to *answer* the call of the body, the text, that touches, but rather, to respond to the call of the absolutely Other; the sensuous call that moves me, marks me, affects me, stirs me, calls me into being, *otherwise*.

In hearkening to this call my paper constitutes an offering (a gift, a celebration), that has little or nothing to do with questions of meaning, identity, truth, with the instituting and patrolling of borders which is integral to the logic of regionality. [2] It touches upon the sense of touch, lightly, and with tact. It 'tells its own story as a gift, or rather, its failure to translate into one' (Zsuzsa, 2000: 450). And unlike what Nietzsche has described as the hand of the law that—in a considerate fashion—kills, it will attempt to avoid (com)prehension. In short, the paper is a response to bodies/texts that have touched me: that is, bodies of text which bear the names Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jeanette Winterson.

The Winterson text that touches me most profoundly and that I want to respond to here, is a short story entitled 'The Poetics of Sex', but before I do this I will provide a brief overview of what I see as the general tendency to read Winterson's body of writing as the autobiographical incarnation of the author's subjectivity, and more particularly, her sexuality. [3] The aim of this exercise is to illustrate the ways in which the rules of engagement specific to the region of literary studies reproduce the logic of regionality (and its limited and limiting effects) in and through foreclosure and the simultaneous forgetting of the heterogeneous, of tact. In particular I am interested in the 'nutshell effect' of this logic on the constitution of the sexual (as something bounded, knowable, innate, unified, dichotomous, and so on).

Whilst there is (to my knowledge) only one published commentary on 'The Poetics of Sex', much has been written on Winterson's novels, and the majority of the claims made in these articles could equally well be brought to bear on a reading of the story that concerns me here. In their introduction to the collection of essays entitled *I'm Telling You Stories: Jeanette Winterson and the Politics of Reading*, Helena Grice and Tim Woods write:

Despite the many differences between Winterson's texts, they return repeatedly to certain issues: love and desire; identity and subjectivity; artifice and aesthetic self-reflexivity; lesbian and gendered perspectives; the difficulty of forging a language suitable for the discussion of non-heterosexual love; and the relationships between narrative and reference (Grice and Woods 1998: 7).

If the tendency to 'return repeatedly to certain issues' is apparent in Winterson's texts, repetition could be said to run rife—even to the point of monotony—in the critical commentaries on her writing that seem, for the most part at least, to relentlessly clutch at the same old straws, to negate the sensuousity, the heterogeneity, of the body/the text, to absorb it into the project of making sense of the body of texts, the textual bodies, which bear the name Winterson. The 'theme' that is repeatedly identified in such works as central to Winterson's writing(s) is, of course, lesbianism. For example, in her paper 'Teledildonics: Virtual Lesbians in the Fiction of Jeanette Winterson', Lisa Moore describes Winterson's oeuvre as 'a particularly powerful attempt to imagine a lesbian body without a liberatory political agenda' (Moore 1995: 104). Similar claims are made by Cath Stowers and Paulina Palmer, who in their readings of *Written On The Body* and *The Passion*, argue respectively that 'the trajectory of [Winterson's] work . . . exceeds a gendered logic towards a specifically lesbian reconceptualisation of female desire' (Stowers, 1998: 63), and that Winterson's creation of a lesbian subject position or lesbian narrative space disrupts 'conventional heterosexual narrative structures and scripts, resulting in a refiguration of female desire' (Palmer, 1998: 105). Whilst these readings portray Winterson's writing(s) as transgressing boundaries—for example, the boundaries of 'gendered logic' and/or 'conventional heterosexual narrative structures'—they simultaneously reinscribe the texts in accordance with the logic of regionality by representing them as refiguring female desire and naming this reconfiguration 'lesbian'. In making sense of the textual bodies that bear the name Winterson in this way, such responses undermine the contestation of regionality—or more specifically, of the region of the (hetero)sexual—that they claim *Written on the Body*, and *The Passion* engender.

In an article that seems even less familiar with critiques of regionalising logic—in particular of the notion of the bounded subject, the humanist figure of the author, and of identity politics—Diana L. Swanson claims that:

In 'The Poetics of Sex', Jeanette Winterson rescues words for lesbians. . . . Winterson, through double entendre, allusion, metaphor, and genre-blurring, reinvents literature as a form of play that creates a new space for the truth(s) of lesbian lives, love, and sex, a free(ing) space in which 'lesbian' can exist liberated from the over-determination of a homophobic and misogynist culture (Swanson 1997: 325).

Once again what we witness here is the designating of 'new spaces', regions that are allegedly liberating and liberated but that nonetheless—insofar as they are identifiable spaces with specific features and definite characteristics—delimit the (homo)sexual as a domain: a domain which is identifiable, has particular characteristics, and will no doubt be fought for, and fought over.

Whilst the desire that drives these commentaries and their various attempts to map some sort of knowable relation between (homo)sexuality and textuality may be understandable given the marginal status of lesbianism both in the academy and in so-called normative society more generally, there is nevertheless something fundamentally problematic with this tendency to furnish the body of the text—and by association, its 'author'—with an identity (in this case, lesbian), even if lesbianism is formulated as virtual rather than essential, or is presented in quotation marks. In short, these responses, which abide by the rules of engagement specific not only to literary criticism but to Western ontology more generally, reduce the other to a concept, to an object of knowledge, to another myself, and in doing so reproduce what Irigaray has called an Economy of the Same. Here, writing functions as a form of mastery, it is 'an experience conducted by an I in the quest of self-knowledge' (Lyotard, 1988: 113). But what these regionalising forms of writing forget (what they must forget in order to (re) produce themselves) is that the other is nothing (no 'thing') but a call to which I am obligated to respond: the 'other as an exteriority whose reason does not lie within the ego, announces the insufficiency of knowledge. The other announces no sense, it is the announcement, the non-sense' (Lyotard, 1988: 110). In other words, for Lyotard, Nancy, Levinas, and others, the sensuous encounter with the (body of the) other, or the ethical event as they might call it, does not take place in the field of knowledge: 'the ethical realm is not a realm, it is a mode of the *I/you* situation which happens unforeseeably as the scrambling of the [domain] in which *I* is *I*' (Lyotard, 1988: 112). To put it another way, this encounter with the other is not an event situated in time and space, but rather 'a structural possibility that precedes and makes possible all subsequent experience' (Levinas, 1969: 45). Integral to the constitution of the self, then, is the 'call that cannot come from an identifiable subject, that cannot be 'heard' as proposition or project, but yet to which we are obliged to respond' (McCance, 1996: 140).

A common second-degree response to this 'event which . . . calls forth from the self a response that exceeds and determines the ego . . . and places it into question in such a way that one experiences it as answer-ability, respons-ibility', involves an attempt by the self 'to take hold of itself again by understanding what unsettles it [*le dessaisit*]' (Tallon, 1995: 113). However, whilst this attempt to know the other (and thus to (re)gain a sense a mastery) 'is always possible like an inevitable temptation . . . it cannot annul the event, only tame it, and master it, and in doing so, forget the transcendence of the other' (Lyotard, 1988: 163–164). But rather than attempting to 'take hold of the self again by understanding what unsettles it' (which is the function of (com)prehension), what interests these writers is writing as response, that is, as 'the testimony of a fracture, of the opening onto the other . . . its aptitude for hearing a call' (Lyotard, 1988: 113), or, to put it otherwise, writing as a matter of tact. I will return to this point later.

Like most writers, Winterson is aware of the conflation of the book and the writer, of sexuality and textuality that I have suggested is symptomatic of the logic of regionality. [4] In a rather scathing anecdote in an essay entitled 'The Semiotics of Sex', Winterson tells of a young female student who approached her in a bookshop informing her that she was writing a comparative essay on her work and that of Radclyffe Hall, and asking Winterson if she could help. Winterson's rather cutting reply, 'Yes. Our work has nothing in common', provoked puzzlement in the student who responded with '[but] I thought you

were a lesbian' (Winterson 1996a: 103). Winterson comments thus on the encounter:

I have become aware that the chosen sexual[ity] . . . of one writer is, in itself, thought sufficient to bind her in semiotic sisterhood with any other writer, also lesbian, dead or alive. I am, after all, a pervert, so I will not mind sharing a bed with a dead body. This bed in the shape of a book, this book in the shape of a bed, must accommodate us every one, because, whatever our style, philosophy, class, age, preoccupations and talent, we are lesbians and isn't that the golden key to the single door of our work? (Winterson 1996a: 103)

What Winterson so vehemently objects to here, and in this I agree with her, are the delimiting (binding) effects of the production of meaning and identity as singular; the fact that 'women', 'women writers', and the 'sexual' are all deemed to be determinable concepts, and that all 'women writers' who have 'sexual relations' with other 'women' are condemned to inhabit the malignant domain of the Same, of homogeneity.

Later in the same essay Winterson writes that 'art must resist autobiography', it must avoid making 'what is unlike anything else into what is just like everything else' (Winterson 1996a: 106). In opposition to the foreclosure of heterogeneity (which constitutes both a forgetting and an act of violence) integral to the regionalising approach to texts discussed earlier, Winterson posits the possibility of reading/writing as an encounter with a text 'in its own right, separate, particular': a form of reading/writing that would allow the text to 'speak in its own voice, not in a ventriloquism of yours', that would acknowledge that 'the love between you is not a mutual suicide' (Winterson 1996a: 111). Here reading/writing is not 'the nymph Echo falling for the sound of her own voice nor is it the boy Narcissus falling for his own reflection' (Winterson, 1996b: 25). Unlike the conventions of realism (as a genre or domain of the literary) which, Winterson claims, have 'been bolstered by the late twentieth century vogue for literary biography, tying the writer's life with the writer's work so that the work becomes a diary', and which thus 'save us from a bad attack of Otherness' (Winterson 1996b: 25), this alternative configuration of reading/writing, self/other, and the relations between them, does *not* perform 'a kind of thanatography, . . . which controls the destiny of the [the other], and which incarnates the corporeal to corpse' (Didi-Huberman, 1987: 69). [5] Rather, reading/writing as exposure and response (to the other or alterity) 'seeks out and affirms otherness, while protecting it' (Irigaray, 1985: 174).

It is in light of this notion of reading/writing as tact that I want to approach 'The Poetics of Sex' and the works of Nancy. Rather than telling 'the same old stories all over again . . . reproducing the same history' (Irigaray, 1985: 205), mapping the same old territory, I want to focus on the ways in which these texts could be said to generate (and be generated by) 'the pain and pleasure that result from the impossibility of communicating anything without touching the limit where all meaning (*sens*) spills out of itself, like a simple ink stain on a word, on the word meaning' (Nancy, 1993a: 319). This is not, of course, to suggest that these texts are *essentially* non-sensical, ungraspable, ephemeral, and that in this they differ from other texts. Nor do I want to declare that the readings of Winterson's texts developed by Palmer, Stowers, and Moore, are simply erroneous. Rather, my point is that the ellipses that occur in and through the regionalising focus on representation, on identity, on meaning, on decipherment, render inaudible that

which strains against re-presentation but simultaneously makes it possible: that is, the matter of tact. I will return to this point in due course.

How to respond, to write so as not to 'forget' 'the precariousness of what has been established' (Lyotard, 1990: 10): how to respond to the call, the touch, of the other, with tact. Here I am reminded of Bataille, who, desiring to write on that which moved him, which touched him, wrote *On Nietzsche*, in such a way as to not comment *on* Nietzsche, not write *on* him. As Bataille so poignantly puts it: 'Nietzsche wrote 'with his blood'—whoever criticizes him, or better, *experiences him*, can do so only by bleeding in turn . . . [Y]ou haven't understood a word of Nietzsche if you haven't lived this dissolution bursting into totality' (in Nancy, 1993a: 336). And as Rosalyn Diprose has pointed out, blood, in the Nietzschean sense, is matter that defies body integrity or bodily boundaries. Thus the 'one' who writes, the author who is never 'one', can be understood as 'animated flesh, fluids, forces, and affects' rather than as the always already constituted originator of writing as communication. This writing in blood then, is, to paraphrase Diprose, a response of the author's bodily being as a trace of the alterity that provokes it (2002: 189–196). It is a writing that defies the logic of regionality, fights against the forgetting of that which overflows it and yet is at the heart of it. It is a tactful, rather than a tactical response, 'the testimony of a fracture, of the opening onto the other', rather than 'an experience conducted by an I in the quest of self-knowledge' (Lyotard, 1988: 113).

Like Bataille, I want to write *with*, rather than *on*, the textual bodies that bear the names Winterson and Nancy. [6] But like Bataille, I find myself caught in a complex web of contradictions, always already faced with what Nancy describes as a 'double failure': 'a failure to produce a discourse on the body, also the failure not to produce discourse on it' (Nancy 1993b: 190); the impossibility of writing nothing on the book, and simultaneously the impossibility of avoiding writing on the book (Nancy 1993a: 320–321). The question remains then: How does one touch the (textual body of the) other without grasping at meaning? How does one touch, with tact? How does one bleed in turn?

Nancy suggests that perhaps it is possible to respond 'to the call only by repeating the call—as night watchmen do. It may be that the imperative is not the response, but only the *obligation* to respond' (Nancy 1993a: 323). Or, as Irigaray writes in what could well be a critical response to the logic of regionality as I've outlined it in this paper, '[w]e can do without models, standards, or examples. Let's never give ourselves orders, commands, or prohibitions. Let our imperatives be only appeals to move, to be moved, together' (Irigaray 1985: 217). But as Bataille's conundrum and Nancy's notion of the 'double failure' suggest, all writing/reading as response inevitably inscribes being, at least in part. However, what precedes, exceeds, and is at the very heart of reading/writing—and by association, being—is the infinite withdrawal of meaning—and, by association, of identity—that is affected in and through the touch of the Other, of alterity, of the limit. As Nancy puts it:

writing *exscribes* meaning every bit as much as it inscribes significations. . . . To write, and to read, is to be exposed, to expose oneself, to this not-having (to this non-knowledge) and thus to 'exscription'. The exscribed is exscribed from the very first word, not as an 'inexpressible' or as an 'uninscribable' but, on the contrary, as writing's opening, within itself, *to* itself, to its own inscription as the infinite discharge of meaning . . . By inscribing significations, we exscribe the presence of what withdraws from all

significations, being itself (life, passion, matter . . .). The being of existence is not unrepresentable: it presents itself exscribed (Nancy 1993a: 338-339).

What Nancy is arguing here is that writing simultaneously involves inscription—the meaningful representation of 'things'—and exscription—the overflowing of meaning, identity, and so on. [7] Here, exscription is inaugurated in and through, and is the inauguration of, an incessant (re)opening of 'the wound of the unaccomplished' (Lyotard, 1990: 22), 'of a fracture, of the opening onto the other . . . its aptitude for hearing a call' (Lyotard, 1988: 113). In and through the touch of the other 'I' bleed, like an ink stain on the word, on the word meaning, identity. This is because, in touching, in being touched, 'one' encounters that which it cannot encounter: that is, alterity, the limit. '[I]t comes upon that which it cannot touch, and thereby it touches *itself*, . . . it feels *itself* (powerless) there where it touches (tangentially) what it cannot attain' (Derrida, 1993: 125). Touch, then, is what Baross describes as 'the in-between *par excellence*' since:

to touch another may be in one's power . . . but it is not anyone's property; always shared in-between . . . touch is never mine or mine alone. No-thing, it cannot be kept, held on to, appropriated . . . *nor*—as gift—annulled, that is, reciprocated, compensated. . . . Touch is always already reciprocal, returned simultaneously, in the same instant (Baross 2000: 452).

If we accept the claims made by Derrida and Baross that the 'self' comes into being only in and through the sensuous relation with the other, in and through exposure to the limit, to that which is not the self (but is nevertheless internal to it), then we can see how touch (not as an object to be known, but as a generative (un)becoming) is integral to the (im)possibility of the logic of regionality.

For Nancy, the body—and by extension, the 'self'—is not simply an object of the self's perceiving consciousness. Rather, it is only in and through exscription. In 'Corpus' he writes:

Bodies are first to be touched. Bodies are first masses, masses offered without anything to articulate, without anything to discourse about . . . discharges of writing rather than surfaces to be covered by writings. Discharges, abandonments, retreats. No 'written bodies', no writing on the body, nor any of this graphosomatology into which the mystery of the Incarnation and of the body as pure sign of itself is sometimes converted 'modern style'. For indeed, the body is not a locus of writing. No doubt one writes, but it is absolutely not where one writes, nor is it what one writes—it is always what writing exscribes. In all writing, a body is traced, is the tracing and the trace—is the letter, yet never the letter . . . A body is what cannot be read in writing . . . It is by touching the Other that a body is a body . . . it is nothing but the being-exposed (Nancy 1993b: 197-198; 204).

For Nancy then, like Derrida, Bataille, and others, reading and writing are not simply modes of communication, but first and foremost, are matters of exposure that constitute bodily being as a being-with, as a sensuous relation to alterity, to that which makes meaning and/or identity possible and simultaneously washes away the ground on which it erects itself. Thus what these writers are concerned with is the imperative to move and to be moved in/through/with the other: it is the permeability rather than the patrolling of boundaries that interests them and likewise myself. Consequently, like Nancy, and unlike Palmer, Moore, and Stowers, I do not want to circumscribe the body of the other; in this case, the heterogeneous body of writing that bears the name Winterson: a body of writing which is less a territory with definable outlines and identifiable characteristics, than a 'being-exposed'. Rather, I want to respond to the sensuousness of the textual body of the other, the inaudible call that touches, only by repeating that call, but at the same time, I cannot afford to forget the impossibility of avoiding the signification of my own discourse, for as Derrida asks: 'How can one . . . say anything that does not in advance get surrounded, invested, pre-occupied by all the historical figures of this rhetorical, logical, hermeneutic circle?' (Derrida 1993: 130). One must, certainly, writes Lyotard, 'inscribe in words, in images. One cannot escape the necessity of representing. It would be sin itself to believe oneself safe and sound' (Lyotard 1990: 26). Representation or inscription is, he claims, 'an inevitable lure', an 'unavoidable trap', but it is the task of writing (or at least of a writing that fights against forgetting) 'to deconstruct the lure' (Lyotard 1990: 60). So, perhaps the best I can hope for is that in foregrounding this dilemma, in repeating the call of the other, I will have somehow made it possible for you to 'hear', to 'feel', 'in each line the work or the play of a writing against meaning' (Nancy, 1993a: 336); a pressing call that touches, a sensuous touch that resonates. Given this, my attempt to testify (and with tact) to that which the logic of regionality necessarily forgets and yet never ceases to be haunted by, will '*proceed here only according to a series of tangents*' (Derrida, 1993: 128). [8] To be more specific, my response to 'The Poetics of Sex' will involve repeating a stylistic device used by Derrida in his offering to Nancy.

Tangent I [9]

Why Do You Sleep With Girls?

. . . My bull-lover makes a matador out of me. She circles me and in her rough-made ring I am complete. I like the dressing up, the little jackets, the silk tights, I like her shiny hide, the deep tanned leather of her. It is she who has given me the power of the sword. I used it once but when I cut at her it was my close fit flesh that frilled into a hem of blood. She lay beside me slender as a horn . . . In my broken ring I sweated muck and couldn't speak (Winterson, 1993: 413; my emphasis).

The might of the sword, the pen, the stylus. 'I used it once but when I cut at her it was my close fit flesh that frilled into a hem of blood'. I tried to write (on) the body of my lover but instead 'I' bled with her, through her, like an ink stain that dissolved the project at hand. 'I sweated muck and could not speak'. It is she who gave me the power of the sword, you who gave me the gift of tact. 'To touch, as tact is, thanks to you, because of you, to break with immediacy'. To touch, to feel, my 'self' in and through you, 'to self-touch you', *exscripts*, "it makes writing come out of itself by marking that you, here, will never be a

simple mediation in a reappropriating move of self presence'. 'In my broken ring I sweated muck and couldn't speak'. 'You, metronome of my heteronomy, you will always resist that which, in my 'self-touching', could dream of the . . . autonomy of self-presence'. Together we write a corpus—a body of writing, a writing of bodies—'as a separation and sharing of bodies, sharing our body-being, shared out by it'. Together we seek out unchartered territories. Turning our backs on the warmth, the blinding sun, of a hylomorphic age we watch the world of Author and Muse receding to a barely visible point on a distant horizon. We leave behind 'a trail of footprints two by two in identical four. I don't know that anyone following could [tell] you which was which and if they [could] there would . . . be no trace by morning' (Derrida, 1993: 141; Nancy, 1993b: 197; Winterson, 1993: 414).

Tangent II

Which One Of You Is The Man?

I can't catch [my lover] by copying her, I can't draw her with a borrowed stencil. She is all the things a lover should be and quite a few a lover should not. Pin her down? She's not a butterfly. I'm not a wrestler. She's not a target. I'm not a gun (Winterson, 1993: 414; my emphasis).

Reading/writing must/does, resist autobiography; we must not, indeed can not, 'make what is unlike anything else into what is just like everything else'. 'I can not draw her with a borrowed stencil'. Reading, writing, the body, precedes and exceeds an Economy of the Same. I trace the body of my lover, but this tracing is not a mapping, it is only the trace of a trace: a trace of that which is separate, particular; of a body that cannot be read in writing. She/it speaks in her/its own voice, not in a ventriloquism of mine. 'She's not a target, I'm not a gun', and 'the love between [us] is not a mutual suicide'. I am no longer one of those children who 'take a clock apart in order to find out what time it is'. She is inside/outside 'my' body, which is not to say that she is the mechanical cause of my desire. She 'inhabits my heart as a stranger' but she inhabits it nevertheless. And this heart is not the insensitive centre of my secret interiority, of my 'self': it is the rhythm, respiration, the beating of the blood that 'I' bleed with you, through you. What interrupts an Economy of the Same 'is what makes the heart beat and it's you, the you of self-touching-you': you, 'metronome of my heteronomy' (Winterson, 1996a: 102, 111; Barthes, 1990: 71; Derrida, 1993: 140, 130–131, 139).

Tangent III

Were You Born A Lesbian?

Picasso was an unlikely mother but I owe myself to her. We are honour-bound, love-bound, bound by cords too robust for those healthy hospital scissors. . . . I am proud to be Picasso's lover in spite of the queer looks we get when holding hands on busy streets. . . . We need more Labradors. The world is full of blind people. They don't see Picasso and me . . . They see perverts, inverters, tribades, homosexuals. They see circus freaks and Satan worshippers, girl-catchers and porno turn-ons. Picasso says they don't know how to look at pictures either (Winterson, 1993: 416; my emphasis).

Like Narcissus, fixated with his own reflection, the people on the street inscribe my lover and I in their own image. They read our bodies. They draw boundaries around us with invisible white chalk as if we were accident victims in a mystery waiting to be (re)solved. They tell stories. They are critics, in all senses of the word. But perhaps I am looking through a glass darkly. Perhaps, as my mother once told me, I should look on the bright side, although not, of course, through rose coloured glasses. For it's true to say that some read our bodies as 'erupting in a plenitudinous display of transgressive *jouissance*'—but even *their* eyes touch without tact. For them we are nothing but glorious bodies. But, as some of us know only too well, 'glory is for its witness, the spectacle is for the spectator', and they inscribe us, circumscribe us, create us, as God was said to have created man, in order to receive the splendour of his glory. Thus my lover and I become nothing more than pools that reflect back the desire in their unseeing eyes. They imprison us with their longing and we grow stagnant, fetid, barren. Our eyes are the windows of their souls. Their souls are the prisons of their bodies. The evil eye/I of solipsism is Medusa-like deadly, but sometimes insidiously so.

When I look into my lover's eyes, *with tact*, I see *both* her eyes *and* her look: I see what can be seen (her eyes) and touch what cannot (her look, the limit). Eyes caressed by eyes, eyes kissed by eyes. But this is not a vampiric kiss and I am not Narcissus. I am not she and she is not me/I. We are not the Same, which is not to say that we are not in-relation, but we have no need of hospital scissors in order to prove this point, my lover and I. No lextalionis for us; no law of retribution, no eye for an eye. We are not fetishists caught up in an Economy of Exchange; we are not interchangeable. No one else can fill the space that she carves out but no one can map it either (Grice and Woods, 1998: 9; Lingis, 1983: 9; Derrida, 1993: 141).

Tangent IV

Why Do You Hate Men?

Making love we made a dictionary of forbidden words. We are words, sentences, stories, books. You are my New Testament. We are a gospel to each other. I am your annunciation, revelation. You are my St Mark, winged lion at your feet. I'll have you, and the lion too, buck under you till you learn how to saddle me. Don't dig those spurs too deep. It's not so simple this lexographic love (Winterson, 1993: 418-419; my emphasis).

We need a *corpus*, says Nancy—a sensuous body of writings, a sensuous writing of bodies: a corpus of tact. Touching, being touched, touching on touch *with tact*, my lover and I 'made a dictionary of forbidden words': that is, of words rendered impossible, of words, that like ink stains, dissolve words, meaning, identity. Words that refuse to obey the logic of self-containment. Together we bleed, we write in blood. 'The blue that runs through her [veins] is sanguine . . . Deep pools of blue silk drop from her. I know her by the lakes she leaves on her way to the bedroom'. But these viscous pools are capricious. They wave(r) wantonly and refuse the functional imperative to reflect, to re-present, to reproduce. They spill and flow and become one with all that they touch.

'We're fat for each other we sapling girls', fertile, fecund, fructuous; but no offspring ever becomes the sum or the system of this corpus. We are books, and like books, the call we make is not a call for commentary. 'It is not a call to communication, but the propagation of the repetition of the call . . . which teaches nothing . . . which calls not for a response but for the simple obligation

to respond'. 'I am your annunciation, we are a gospel to each other'. In and through the call that touches, 'I' am drawn forth; 'I' touch my 'self'. But is it really (an) 'I' that is born in and through 'your' tender touch? Or is it Presence that is born, and does not cease being born? The 'birth to presence': a conundrum at the heart of representational logic. This lexographic love, then, is not an archaeological pillaging of bodies, an autobiographical unearthing of little gems that will make you wise. 'Don't dig those spurs too deep'. To touch, to be touched, without appropriating anything, with tact, that is writing and love. 'I', 'you', 'we' are nothing (no thing) but this lexographic love, this separation and sharing of bodies, of carnal sensuousity, this bleeding-with, this being-exposed (Winterson, 1993: 413, 412; Nancy, 1993a: 331).

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Notes

[1] Derrida says: 'pertinence is, literally, etymologically, the quality of that which touches, of what is important, of what counts (pertinet) because it touches, concerns, refers to, or stands as it should in relation to that which is necessary, adjusts itself to the contact, and so forth' (Derrida 1993: 132). [\[return\]](#)

[2] In this sense, the paper does not, as the referee's reports noted, abide by the rules of engagement specific to academic discourse: it, at times, allegedly contravenes (or at least does not fulfill) scholarly conventions, in particular the conventions associated with specific genres of knowledge. For example, it may well be unclear whether this work should be considered as literary criticism, or as a philosophical undertaking, or as a piece of 'creative' writing, because of its inconsistent (non)adherence to the conventions of particular genres of knowledge. [\[return\]](#)

[3] Integral to this sort of approach is the construction of the author's body of work, his/her oeuvre, as unified, coherent, consistent, bounded, and so on. Foucault (1977) critically engages with this tendency in his discussion of the criteria used by St Jerome to decide whether or not a particular text was the product of a particular author. [\[return\]](#)

[4] My aim in citing Winterson here is not to reinstate her on the throne of The Author by suggesting that we must read her fictional texts in and through these comments. To do so would be to reaffirm the regionalising or autobiographicalising gesture which I have thus far attempted to critique. [\[return\]](#)

[5] This connection between the logic of regionality (as it is played out in the

realm of the literary) and the death of the other, of alterity, of the heterogeneous, is again taken up in *Art and Lies*. Here Sappho, one of the novel's narrators who shares a name with the narrator of 'The Poetics of Sex', says 'The biographer, hand on heart, violates the past. The biographer, grave robber and body snatcher, trading in sensational dust, while the living spirit slips away' (Winterson, 1994: 140). [\[return\]](#)

[6] For an analysis of the status of the 'with' and its relation to writing see Sullivan (2003). [\[return\]](#)

[7] For Nancy inscription and exscription are mutually constitutive and yet incommensurable. [\[return\]](#)

[8] Etymologically the term tangent means 'to touch'. [\[return\]](#)

[9] These tangential responses will (necessarily) include the words of others but in order to performatively evoke the transgression of boundaries surrounding and (in)forming 'proper' selves (that is, bounded, autonomous, unified) that interests me, and to enact (or to fight against forgetting) the intersubjective character and/or exscription of writing, of (un)becoming self/other, I will refrain from the regionalising convention of referencing these words, thoughts, phrases, which have become, in this context at least, a sign of the other-in-me. However, so as not to flout academic convention to the extent where I might find myself accused of plagiarism, I will list the sources of each of the 'unmarked citations' at the end of each tangent. These tangents also address a 'you', an addressee 'who' is less a person I can know (another myself) than a site of heterogeneity, a (non)place 'where something is prescribed to me, that is, where I am obligated before any freedom' (Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985: 37). [\[return\]](#)

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