

TRUE LOVE STORIES
THE TROPICAL PRODUCTION AND AUTHORIZATION OF MEANING

by

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ABSTRACT

The reason that modern love is not postmodern is that it insists on being psychological. The reason that sociology treats of love so poorly is that it insists on not being poststructuralist. This project inverts this double steadfastness, in order to sociologize love as a production of its own tropes, and move from feelings to discourse without leaving feelings behind. Love's emotional body is not denied by a poststructuralist sociology, but poststructuralist theory recognizes that both the body and sociology are radically textualized. This realization puts into doubt canonical notions of feeling and fact, truth and validity, lucidity and experience, reality and representation. What emerges is literally academic literature: true love stories. As Hannah Arendt writes, "We who for the most part are neither poets nor historians are ... [nonetheless] preparing the way for 'poetry', ... [as if] we are ... constantly expecting it to erupt in some human being."

The poetics of love manifest in flights of metaphors. Then the discourse of love is distinguished by how those metaphors infloresce its meanings. If love is constituted through its tropes, any definition of it cannot but fail. This is not a descent into romantic nonsense, but a shift to a different sense of love. Love becomes open to all the polymorphous movement and play of the poststructuralist sign. Yet modern love is the tropical discourse that denies its tropicity, for modern love is love that claims that it is real. The credibility of this fiction can only be maintained through a puissant regime of truth, one which aligns love with a narrow rhetoric of Nature and mystery: "Love is just that way"; "Love explains itself;" "Love is love." If such homey platitudes are read carefully enough, they betray themselves as devices of brutal, constitutive closure. The imperative of a poststructuralist sociology of love is to deprive the modernist consciousness of such conceptual orthopædics, in order to force it to open itself to less comforting but more compelling fictions.

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Acknowledgments

Surely Walter Benjamin's contention that what people need most is good counsel was never more true than for a bemused graduate student struggling to write true love stories. I was thrice-blessed with the discerning counsel of my committee, Ken Stoddart, Elvi Whittaker, and Aruna Srivastava. I owe much to my colleagues, Ann Travers, Mary Des Chene, and Catherine Milsum, for the generosity of their reading and affirmation when that generosity was badly needed; to my parents, Ted and June Aoki, for their advice and support; and to my friend David Jardine, for his sometimes pointed criticism and always cherished friendship. My heartfelt thanks goes to all of them, but ultimately this manuscript must be dedicated to Kirsten Sigerson, who always knew more about love than I did.

Prologue (1):

Caveat Lector

I could do much worse than begin with Erving Goffman:

I ask that these papers be taken for what they merely are: exercises, trials, tryouts, a means of displaying possibilities, not establishing fact. This asking may be a lot, for the papers are proclamatory in style, as much distended by formulary optimism as most other endeavors in this field.

Forms of Talk

Prologue (2):

Singing Extempore Upon a Plainsong

Once upon a time, descants were always sung. They were free-running soprano counterpoint to the tenor melodies: “*Twenty doctors expound one text twenty ways, as children make descant upon plainsong*” (William Tyndale).¹ Hence the title of this prologue, which comes from a 1597 text by Thomas Morley. The meaning of descant soon changed, and kept on changing. As a result, “this is a puzzling term because of its application at different periods to somewhat different things; most musical works of reference leave difficulties in the mind of the careful reader” By 1667, Christopher Simpson, in his *Compendium of Practical Musick*, was writing of “The Form of Figurate Descant ... what else Art and Fancy can exhibit; which as different Flowers and Figures do set forth and adorn the Composition.” Thus the meaning of descant had widened to encompass both the composition of counterpoint and the music itself, with a notable emphasis on figuration. Subsequently, it became even less specific, to simply denote a song or melody. Yet the word also narrowed, at least in one dimension, to mean the upper, treble, or soprano voice in part-music (thus *descant clef*), while simultaneously broadening to include the instrumental voice (thus *descant recorder*, *descant viol*, and

¹ *Plainsong* is the “ritual melody of the Western Christian Church” (Scholes 1970, 813).

Unless otherwise noted, all citations in this paragraph are from Scholes 1970, p 288.

even *descant sackbut*). Today, *descant* has not only retained all these variations played on it through its history, it has also become the mimicry of itself—that is, it also means an unextemporized imitation of the effect of descant (*fauxbourdon* or *Faburden*) (Scholes 1970, 290).

Yet this is not the final word on descant, not by far. Though descant arose in song, early on—at least as early as the sixteenth century—it was spoken outside music proper as a term of rhetoric, without losing the musical traces of its etymology. This tradition continues today. Thus, in what the Second Edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* calls transferred usage, *descant* has come to mean “a variation from what is customary” and *a shift of descant*, “a shift in argumentative position—a change of ‘tune.’” This meaning of *variation* slides through “varied comment” to “observation” and “criticism.” Again, the meanings broaden: a descant is also and more generally a “disquisition, dissertation, or discourse,” or, as an infinitive, to descant is to discourse or to make a disquisition or dissertation (all these definitions are from the Second Edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary*).

So if I claim that this thesis is a descant, which of these meanings should be read into it? The answer is all of them, in one form or another. *True Love Stories* slants and loops repeatedly through variation, figuration, composition, observation, criticism, discourse, imitation, art fancy, and more. If the technical definitions of part-song are nowhere explicitly invoked, counterpoint and voice nonetheless furnish pretty tropes for the leitmotifs of polysemy and articulation which run through this text. More importantly, the significance and the signifying of descant cannot be restricted to, or totalized by, definition or taxonomy. Meaning is contingent upon histories which are narrated both outside of and intersecting with etymology. Thus, if *descant* is read as discourse, *True Love Stories* is an unsubtle invocation of Roland Barthes’ *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*; the derivation of descant from the Old French *deschant* prefigures the derivation of this text from contemporary French theory; the specific connotation of

discourse keys multiple connotations of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Spivak, and other poststructuralists; the specific connotation of descant's figuration foreshadows *True Love Stories*' obsession with tropes; and on and on. Indeed, it is this very complex, fragmented, indeterminate, and reticulated form of meaning of descant, more than any particular content of meaning, which prefigures how this text will theorize and practice meaning in general. All of this will become both more elaborate and more muddy as this thesis warbles and shifts its tune, which leads to something which is simultaneously another *caveat* and another tease: the term descant is obviously obscure, or, to be more generous, most likely unfamiliar, and it was deliberately chosen for that reason. What follows is a text that aspires, in relatively good faith, to leave difficulties in the mind of the careful reader.

Prologue (3):

(Post) Modern Love

Never gonna fall for modern love

David Bowie, "Modern Love"

It is fashionable in the academy to regard romantic love as modern love—in other (very un-Bowiesque) words, as a creation of the particular historical and social conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth century West (Gillis 1988, 87; Stone 1988, 19). This is a profoundly sociological sensibility. However, while sociologists are fond of writing about love once removed, that is, about its institutionalization as marriage and family (Hale 1990, 325-353; Lundy and Warne 1986, 249-267; Bernard 1982; Bellah et al. 1985, 85-112), they avoid engaging it directly.² Instead, they default love qua love to

² CD-ROM *sociofile* indexes 10,203 papers under *marriage* or *family* that were published in sociological journals between January 1974 and April 1992 inclusive. Only 109 papers are indexed under *love* (not including 33 which are also indexed under *marriage* or *family*). 21 of these are social psychology

philosophers, physiologists, poets, and especially psychologists, and thereby betray their exegetical prejudices.³ Despite lip-service to the discourse of the social production of love, sociologists work within an alternative and essentialist discourse, one which assumes love is individual, natural, innate, and somebody else's business (in the terms of Henny Youngman, "Take this business of love—*please*"). Hence, for noted sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, "[e]motion ... is a biologically given sense" (1983, 219). This is a profoundly psychological sensibility. Since the orthodox sociology of love, ever conscious of its disciplinary mandate of group process, is practiced at or above the analytical level of marriage and relationships, it is thoroughly contingent on such essentialist presuppositions. Resistance to Hochschild's biology of emotion would therefore have radical ramifications for the discipline. Such resistance has already begun.

Sociological concern with emotion is relatively recent; a decade ago, Ann Oakley could justifiably observe that "a sociology of feelings and emotions does not exist" (1981, 40). It was not until 1987 that the first thematic sessions on the sociology of emotions were convened by the American Sociological Association (Kemper 1990a, 4). This was just one year after the publication of the notable interdisciplinary anthology *The Social Construction of Emotion*, edited by Rom Harré. Constructivist theory (Harré 1986a; Bedford 1986; Stearns 1988; Sommers 1988; Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Denzin 1990) was and still is pioneering in its serious consideration of the sociocultural

articles; omitting these leaves 88. So there were more than 115 times as many sociological journal publications in this time period on marriage and the family as there were on love. CD-ROM PsychLIT indexes 521 papers under *love* that were published in psychological journals between January 1974 and December 1991 inclusive. Adding 21 social psychology papers yields a total of 542. So psychology papers on love outnumbered sociology papers by a ratio of nearly seven to one.

² Feminist criticism is more incisive and politically cognizant than dominant sociology—it analyzes family and marriage in terms of patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia and capitalism (to give a very narrow and eclectic set of examples, Rubin 1976; Luxton 1980; Thorne and Yalom 1982; Pogrebin 1983; Ehrenreich 1983; Sprey 1988; Eichler 1988; Yllö and Bograd 1988; Okin 1989).

construction of emotion. Through this paradigm love exceeds its psychological confines and opens up to a broad array of academic inquiry: linguistics (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 1986, 1988, 1990), literary criticism (Cottom 1989); history (Gillis 1988; Sommers 1988), anthropology (Lutz 1990; Abu-Lughod 1990), and even sociology (Cancian 1987; Clark 1990; Denzin 1990; Seidman 1991). However, constructivism's uncomfortable turn towards functionalism (Hochschild 1983, 1990; Harré 1986a; Armon-Jones 1986a, 1986b; Coulter 1986; Sommers 1988; Collins 1990; Hammond 1990) reveals that much of it is milder revisionism than the name suggests. Thus, Hochschild's "biological sense" is read within the emergent sociology of emotion as exemplary constructivism (Sommers 1988, 24; Stearns 1988, 20; Kemper 1990a, 3-4), even as it appropriates the Freudian "signal function" to trope emotion as both bodily sense and Social Darwinism: "Like other senses—hearing, touch, and smell—[emotion] is a means by which we know about our relation to the world, and it is therefore crucial for the survival of human beings in group life" (Hochschild 1983, 221). This brand of constructivism is obviously still strongly committed to the natural imperative. Much more radical and provocative work is underway, but almost all of it is being done outside the disciplinary boundaries of sociology. Consider the anthropology of Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, who pursue a poststructuralist practice that I would like to translate into sociological terms:

Emotions are one of those taken-for-granted objects of both specialized knowledge and everyday discourse now becoming part of the domain of anthropological inquiry. Although still primarily the preserve of philosophy and psychology within the academic disciplines, emotions are also ordinary concerns of a popular ... cultural discourse whose relationship to such professional discourses is complex and only partially charted. Tied to tropes of interiority and granted ultimate facticity by being located in the natural body, emotions stubbornly retain their place, even in all but the most recent anthropological [and sociological] discussions, as the aspect of human experience least subject to control, least constructed or learned (hence most universal), least public, and therefore least amenable to sociocultural analysis.

(Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990, 1)

Abu-Lughod and Lutz are considering emotions in general, but in this thesis I have a narrower ambition: to contest the conventional, psychologized status of the particular emotion of love. My point of departure is to elaborate on their suggestion that this status is a discursive one, by taking *discourse* in the Foucaultian sense of a body of “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972, 49). This pronouncement of linguistic productivity breaks sharply with the modernist preoccupation with language as communicative action—expressive of ideas and emotions located and originating in individuals (Cook 1987, 63). Because meaning is constructed as referentiality in modernist social scientific and popular (common-sensical) discourses, the modernist meaning of an emotion like love is secured by the transcendental signifieds of interiority and facticity, as noted by Abu-Lughod and Lutz. Hence the conviction, shared by both these forms of discourse, that the relation of language to love and other emotions is the naming of internal states (Hochschild 1983, 223; Scherer 1988, 241; Shaver et al. 1988, 81). In this way, the semantics of love are warranted by truth, and love itself is established as an autonomous quale (Sarbin 1986, 84; Armon-Jones 1986a, 44). Given that the modernist ontology of love is thus radically contingent on these particular discursive assumptions, its epistemology—as well as what in love often displaces epistemology—is susceptible to the scrupulous analyses of meaning initiated by structuralists (Nöth 1990, 92-103) and greatly extended by poststructuralists. Hence the crucial relevance of Foucault, with his contention that “truth is the unacknowledged fiction of a successful discourse” (Cook 1987, 62); Lyotard, with his definition of postmodernity as the “incredulity towards metanarratives” such as truth (1984, xxiv); and Derrida, with his recognition of the infinite deferral of meaning (*différance*) (1982). If postmodern love has become incredulous of its own metanarratives, so that its truths can now be acknowledged as infinitely differed fictions, then the success of those truths must be seen to turn on discursive, rather than veridical means. Then the discursive maneuvers of love are no more sacrosanct than those of any other assemblages of text, and the terms

of love are fair game for a poststructuralist analytic just as much as those of any other regime of signs. And if, therefore, it is no longer sufficient to romantically aver that music be the food of love, we must nonetheless still play on, but we must play on words with much more care: “Words are tricky things ... they’re much more tricky than violins” (Ondaatje 1992, 37). A sociology that would seriously engage with love is therefore driven to become different from what sociology is and has been; it is driven to reflexively transform itself in poststructuralist fashion, in order to articulate love at all.

“About love you can say anything, but you don’t know what to say. Love exists, and that’s about it. You love your mother, God, a woman, little birds and flowers: the term, become the leitmotif of our deeply sentimental culture, is the most strongly emotional one in our language, but also the most diffuse, vague, and unintelligible.” (Baudrillard 1990, 99) If the term love is indeed a leitmotif of our culture—our society—it is intriguing that sociology, which styles itself as the serious analysis of society (Lundy and Warne 1986, 8; Hale 1990, 2), has all but ignored it. To translate Roland Barthes’ observation about photography into this text’s concern with love, sociology suspiciously circumvents love when it reduces it to the “disincarnated and disaffected socius which science is concerned with” (1981, 74). A clue to the nature of this evasion is Baudrillard’s reference to love as a “term.” In other words, he is—and I am—talking about words, language, discourse, writing: the terms of the poststructuralist project. The poststructuralist proposition is that the lacunæ of the domains of sociology are not happenstances; they are consequences of the methods and theories (and tropes) the discipline has heretofore authorized (Game 1991, 4). Suppressed in one or more of these lacunæ, love requires the approaches of an unauthorized sociology, and this text is an attempt to partially address that need. About love, Baudrillard says, I can say anything ...

Chapter One:
Love's Body

The characteristic poststructuralist shift to discourse does not deny extradiscursive reality, as some critics of poststructuralism maintain. Instead, it simply recognizes that meaning in general is crucially and inescapably (although not totally) a matter of discourse. What is denied is therefore not the existence of the 'real' world, but rather its sovereignty with respect to generalized language (the regimes of signs); what is denied is the foundational assumption that the world is the absolute anchor and guarantor of meaning—the transcendental signified—of what we say and write, of what we think and feel. Extradiscursive reality is therefore not so much discarded as decentered.

Symmetrically, considering love as discursive does not deny the bodily affects of love, but rather displaces their referential primacy with respect to their own discourse. This strategy is willfully perverse, working against the grain of the *idées reçues d'amour* in order to reveal and press upon the necessary limits of that received wisdom. More importantly, the strategy is to not just transform or penetrate those limits, but to invert their very form. Thus, the ineffability of love is commonly seen as betraying the inadequacy of language before the profundity of the human heart, as the failure of language before its own referential limitations—this is “I can't tell you how much I love you” as “I don't have the words to tell you how much I love you.” My poststructuralist suggestion is that the feelings which are misrecognized as love are instead the physical symptoms of their own selective suppression of discourse. To exploit Michelle Rosaldo's lovely phrase, love is the “silence discerned” in discourse itself (1984, 147), rather than something out there in the world, or in here in the soul, towards which that silence indeterminately gestures. Felt passion, then, is the effect, the production, of this discursive lack rather than its source—this is “I can't tell you how much I love you” as “Love means never having to say what love is.” Love is thus the hysterical symptom, in the Freudian sense, of its own discourse.

It is this radicalization of the relation of love to discourse that will be pursued at length in this thesis. For now, this proposition is merely put forward to prepare the ground for a brief examination of its implications for the relation of love to the body. The rhetorical orthodoxy that will be unsurprisingly resisted here is the conflation of the psychological, the bodily, and the natural. The force of this convergence drives even constructivist considerations of emotion. Thus, Claire Armon-Jones, although he endorses constructivism, nonetheless spurns its “strong thesis,” which claims that “emotion is an irreducibly sociocultural product,” in favor of its “weaker thesis,” “which concedes to the naturalist the existence of a limited range of natural emotion responses” (1986a, 37-8), such as those held in common with non-sentient animals. Such a concession of a “physiological substrate to emotions” (Kemper 1990a) is a tactic which reassuringly accommodates the emotional body to its enculturation, but this reconciliation is a treacherous one, for the same gesture simultaneously refortifies a psychological kernel against sociological and linguistic encroachment. The trouble is that Armon-Jones’ casual reinvocation of the “natural” collapses the critical difference between embodiment and naturalness (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990, 12). As Foucault has trenchantly observed, the body is a favored site for discursive discipline, so it is therefore neither constant nor pristine, but protean and well-traversed. “We believe ... that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this ... is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances” (Foucault 1977d, 153). The body cannot escape its penetration and production by social discourse. It is infused by the circumstances and history it walks through. The body may be born of nature, but the manifest body is an unnatural effect—the anabolic hyperbole of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the plastic-surgical excesses of Cher are only exaggerated American instances of the general case. The body is material—that is indisputable. But it does not follow that the body is

therefore exterior to discourse; the logic of that particular entailment is radically contingent on the ideological fantasy that language is something separate from the world, and it is at the fundamental level of that fantasy that a poststructuralist reconsideration of the body works its resistance. The body is material because it materializes discourse. The body is unnatural because it is subject to *both* natural and unnatural overdetermination.

Even the naturalness of being born is itself moot. Consider the dissemination of intensive technologies of fertility and maieutics. Or consider that beyond or prior to the intimidating and dehumanizing machinery of modern medicine the birthing process has become deeply technical, insofar as it is a matter of massive intervention, not only by obstetricians and midwives, but also by clergy and lawyers and patriarchs in general bent on preserving the succession. Nor does intervention need be deliberate in order to be unnatural: is the birth of a crack baby ever a 'natural birth,' whatever the circumstances of its delivery? Natural childbirth is an oxymoron, and not just because of the recent indiscretions of Western medicine or the recent ravages of Western capitalism. Now, obviously, these few examples do not a rigorous or complete analysis of birth make. Still, these examples suggest that all of us, as creatures borne of history, are all creatures born into a discursive order which precedes us. In this sense, one fact that makes us human is that we are never born alone. Given that our reproduction is so deeply production, the human nature of our human birth is that it is denaturing. In this way, it is precisely because test-tube babies and surrogate mothers are specific deviations from the natural order that they are striking metaphors for the general unnaturalness of being born.

However, birth *is* nonetheless natural. Or more accurately, birth is also natural. It *does* follow the laws of physiology. The critical point is the distinction made by Foucault: those laws do not exclude other determinations. The body escapes neither its natural nor its unnatural production, and that double negation pertains in particular to the body in its origin. Birth cannot be removed from discourse, and it cannot be totalized by nature. Birth is not *hors-text*. It is in this sense that the unnaturalness of the biological origin of

the body is a counter-trope to the conventions which place the analytical origin of the body in nature. Nature does not determine birth, and Nature does not determine the body 'in the last instance'. The body is never a substrate, because even at its most fundamental, constitutive level the body already bears the traces of discourse. It is never *tabula rasa*; it never was, and there is no immaculate origin to ground any conviction of naturalness. As Hélène Cixous puts it, "the body [is] ... 'always ciphered.' Anatomy, incapable of commanding structures, is always already in language" (Wing 1991, vii). The consequences of such a displacement of the origin will be pursued below. For now, the salient point is that the body, and therefore the bodily affects of love, are ineluctably discursive, their materiality or reality notwithstanding.

At the everyday level, the external conformation of the body, its techniques and postures, collectively the "body hexis" (Bourdieu 1977, 90), are learned and read as cultural texts (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990, 12). The surface reading of the body is a synecdoche for its holistic exteriority; the plasticity of posture is thus a synecdoche for the mutability of the body *in toto*. "The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved in ideas)" (Foucault 1977d, 148), and of events traced by love and dissolved in passions. Reading these signs requires care and diligence and good fortune, but mostly it simply requires the acknowledgment that the body must indeed be read: "Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there" (Winterson 1992, 72). Troping the body as palimpsest, despite its reinscription of the bodily substrate, inverts the essentialist reduction of love to bodily feeling, and consequently denies the appropriation of love by human nature.

Just as embodiment and nature are irreducible to each other, so too are the experience and meaning of embodied feeling.¹ Whether feeling originates within or

¹ For example: "I certainly find no feeling, or class of feelings, that marks off indignation from annoyance, and enables me to distinguish them from one another. The distinction is of a different *sort* from this" (Bedford 1986, 16). The distinction is in meaning.

without the body, whether it is constructed as rational or irrational, its meaning gets produced in discourse, as Calvin and Hobbes well know (see Figure 1). “The achievement of a workable, well-ordered, clearly articulated emotional life in man [*sic*] is not a simple matter of ingenious instrumental control, a kind of clever hydraulic engineering of affect. Rather, it is a matter of giving specific, explicit, determinate form to the general, diffuse, ongoing flow of bodily sensation; of imposing upon the continual shifts in sentience to which we are inherently subject a recognizable, meaningful order, so that we may not only feel but know what we feel and act accordingly” (Geertz 1973d, 81). Emotion, cognition, meaning, language, and the body are thus brought together. Of the terms that emotion subsumes in contemporary discourse, love fits this analysis particularly well, since falling in love is “perhaps the best example of the *acquisition* of a new emotion experienced by most adults” (Averill 1986, 115, emphasis added). “It is the continuity of thought that systematizes our emotional reactions into attitudes with distinct feeling tones, and sets a certain scope for the individual’s passions. In other words: by virtue of our thought and imagination we have not only feelings, but a *life of feeling*” (Langer 1953, 372, emphasis in original).

Thus feeling cannot be extracted or decontextualized from discourse, as a *quale*. Feeling is lived through thought and imagination. Then feeling, felt through the body, is like belief and philosophy and logic, in that it is susceptible to cultural (discursive) formation. “The development, maintenance, and dissolution of ‘moods,’ ‘attitudes,’ ‘sentiments,’ and so on—which are ‘feelings’ in the sense of states or conditions, not sensations or motives—constitute no more a basically private activity in human beings than does directive ‘thinking’.... A child counts on his [*sic*] fingers before he counts ‘in his head;’ *he feels love on his skin before he feels it ‘in his heart.’* Not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts in man” (Geertz 1973d, 81, emphasis added). The shift from the signification of love, by touching the body, to feeling it, in the figurative heart,



Figure 1: What do the feelings of love mean? (Watterson 1987, 46)

is the discursive production of the embodied trope. Discourse is therefore material work; discourse is real. In this way, the analytically distinct terms *discourse* and *love* are materially concatenated. “Meaning proliferates, and ... meaning is weighted with the tabooed affections of the body” (Lecerle 1985, 66).

Even the term *body* is not as straightforward as it might first appear. As far back as the time of the Stoics “the word ‘body’ was used in the broadest sense, as applying to any formed content” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 86). A psychic body or a political body or a textual body is still a body even if it is incorporeal—a body without a body. It is therefore not incoherent to regard the language of love as itself somatic. The slide between feeling love on the skin and feeling it in the heart is only accomplished because the carnal body and the cultural body coincide. To attempt to locate feelings/emotions/love exclusively in one or the other becomes nonsensical with this coincidence.

Finally, while the question of whether the ultimate source of love is in either the natural body or language may be in the last instance undecidable, it may also be unimportant. In both strong and weaker constructivism—indeed, in any discourse—love is intensely mediated by discourse, so intensely that the pursuit of the origin becomes suspect. That desire for the origin “is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities.... This search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to ‘that which was already there,’ the image of a primordial truth.... However, ... there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.” (Foucault 1977d, 142) Foucault is writing here of a historical, rather than organic, origin, but the logic sustains for the body. His project of genealogy provides a historical trope: he works back from the present to explore conditions of emergence, rather than searching for a pure, distant

origin, the “primordial truth.” Analogously, this text pursues the discursive conditions of the emergence of love, rather than attempting to isolate its terminal origin. There is a serendipity to Foucault on this point. Substitute ‘love’ for ‘history’ and he turns almost (patho)poetic: love “is the concrete body of a development, with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells; and only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant ideality of the origin” (1977d, 145). Love’s body is therefore fruitfully sought in discourse.

Chapter Two

The Point Is to Make Us Bold, Agile, Subtle, Intelligent

It is in fact a part of the function of education to help us to escape, not from our own time—for we are bound by that—but from the intellectual and emotional limitations of our time.

T. S. Eliot

What a vapid idea, the book as the image of the world.

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

2.1: Love as Sociology: Discourse, Reading, Clarity

To seek the meanings of love through its tropes is to move from feelings to discourse, without leaving feelings behind. Yet to make this simple recognition is indeed to make a decisive turn. “Whence a new view of *I-love-you*. Not as a symptom but as an action.... What I want, deliriously, is to *obtain the word*” (Barthes 1978, 152-53, emphasis in original). To desire the word is to disrupt convention and to make a paradigmatic shift from the psychological to the sociological. This shift is really a set of multiple shifts: First, it is a move away from interiority even as interiority is deconstructed, a displacement of essence by “positionality,” as Toril Moi (1988, 166) puts it.¹ Second, it is a relocation of truth from an independent, extradiscursive world to a discursive “social location” (Rabinow 1986, 256). Third, it is a replacement and refiguring of the traditional sociological terms/concepts of *culture* and *ideology* by socially penetrated *discourse* (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990, 9; Cottom 1989, 49-102; Foucault 1977a, 60). Fourth, it is a tactical move from understanding language as an instrumental usage by the modern, sovereign, individuated subject (that is, language as employed by *him* as a tool), to understanding language as a social production of both meaning and subjectivity (that is, language as simultaneously forming and dividing *him*

¹ To make a free and crude paraphrase of Moi, meaning is less an *essence* (a quality of an object) than it is a relation of the divers discursive/social *positions* inhabited by the subject constructing the meaning and the *positions* in language attributed to the object.

and *her* and *it*). Through these reorientations one paradigmatic shift maps onto another: the move from the psychology of love to the sociology of love is isomorphic to the move from modernism to poststructuralism. However, these four dislocations are not presented to comprehensively define poststructuralism. No definition will be attempted here at all, because such an effort would be futile and self-defeating. The heterogeneity of poststructuralism so frustrates the unification of its texts and its theorizing that even the rubric they are gathered under is uncertain, variable, elusive, and disputed: what is read by some as *poststructuralist* is read by others as *structuralist*; what is read by some as *poststructuralist* is read by others as *postmodern*; what is one woman's *postmodernism* is another's *modernism*; what is one man's *critical theory* is another's *resistance to theory*; what some associate with *Foucault* are *archaeology* and *genealogy*, but what others associate with *Foucaultian* is *new historicism* (Dreyfus 1982; Culler 1982; de Man 1986; Jencks 1989; Salusinszky 1987; Thomas 1991; Veese 1989). The attempt to name inevitably fails, and that failure is exemplary. The terms of poststructuralism will not cooperate; they will not stand still, remain constant, mark their boundaries, taxonomize, or coherently integrate. Instead, they pulse with refractory meanings; they are the multiple, variably inflected, syncretic turns of language upon itself. This reflexivity deliberately and unconcernedly unmoors the legitimating anchorage of reference. There is, therefore, no Archimedean point to give authority to naming—that is, there is no extra-discursive position which the 'competent' reader might assume or take up in order to determine what meaning is true, or even best. This absence of foundation generates a foundational trope: a chiasmus, in the New Historicist sense.

In classic rhetoric, chiasmus is the device of syntactic inversion of identical or nearly identical groups of words (Dupriez 1991, 95). For instance, "the text is historical; and history is textual." This particular chiasmus, regarded as a New Historicist motto, extrapolates the classical and technical definition into the critical and poststructuralist trope of placing two practices into reflexive relation with each other (Thomas 1991, 9;

Montrose 1989). Thus, in the very same way, in the very same rhetorical fashion, the meaning of poststructuralism chiasmatically tropes poststructuralist meaning—the elusiveness, multiplicity, connotativity, and incoherence of the names of poststructuralism together constitute a metaphor for the poststructuralist understanding of meaning as elusive, multiple, connotative, and incoherent. Symmetrically, naming tropes modernist meaning—the relation of name (word) and named (object/subject) is homologous to the modernist isomorphism² of sign and referent. But unlike poststructuralist meaning, there is no chiasmatic relation in naming, because the latter privileges the real world, generating a unidirectional, nonreflexive relation, anchored by the referent. In contrast, the fluid and reflexive multiplicity of poststructuralism exceeds and undermines attempts to name it, just as it defies attempts to systematize and firmly locate it. These divers difficulties arise from an assiduity of recursion: poststructuralism keeps turning and returning its gaze upon itself. The indeterminacy of meaning, its deferral, its *différance*, its corruption, its fluidity, its obscurity, and especially its motivation, are all as critically germane to the analytical apparatus as they are to the objects of analysis. Through this reflexivity, poststructuralist uncertainty attends on poststructuralist strategies themselves. Thus, this chapter will not chase after chimeræ of definitions for poststructuralism. Nonetheless, this chapter still freely deploys the terms *poststructuralism* and *poststructuralist*. This seeming paradox incarnates the heart of the heuristic in this text: an incomplete, openly partial and insufficient discourse working to come to terms with itself.

² Isomorphism is a systematized one-to-one (functional, in the mathematical sense) mapping from one domain to another—here from language to the real world—in which each element from one domain operates in a parallel fashion—has parallel relations to other elements of its own domain—to the element in the other domain with which it is associated. In other words, not only does each sign correspond to a specific extradiscursive object, in a functional relation, the regime of signs (language) as a whole constitutes a parallel ‘world’ to the world.

The first task for this less-than-total and never-totalizing discourse, a task that will be returned to again and again, is to demonstrate that love is a felicitous entry (although an infelicitous speech-act) for poststructuralism into sociology. Despite the manifestly sociological concern of this text with the social production, maintenance, denial, legitimation and illegitimation of the social relations of love, its sociological nature is often obscured. This occurs not only because the traditional deferral of love to psychology has an enormous conceptual inertia, but also because the poststructuralist analytic has a disconcertingly foreign (mostly postmodern French, often called ‘Continental’) accent when spoken against dominant (mainstream ‘English’—that is, Anglo-American-Canadian-...) sociological discourses.³ This disturbing unfamiliarity is only exacerbated by the notorious density and opacity of French poststructuralist writing. “Textual onanism” is what one of my disgruntled colleagues calls it.

Poststructuralist theorizing is vulnerable to the charge of obfuscation, but the criticism that it is *unnecessarily* difficult becomes vulnerable itself when voiced by academics, whose own texts are often regarded as inaccessible outside of the academy. Conventionally, the accessibility of a text is determined by judging some of its immanent characteristics against a standard which conflates good writing with clear writing. In contrast, poststructuralism reads accessibility as a socially and historically situated—and therefore bounded—interplay between the text, the situation of reading, and authority. Poststructuralism recognizes and reads a refractory subtext in any judgment on accessibility, one which continually asks, “Who or what decides the criteria of this judgment? What legitimates this authority?” Or, to be more concrete, “What is too

³ To quote Game, “In speaking of the discipline of sociology I am well aware of the problems associated with typifications, particularly the danger of producing a unity, the very thing that I would undo” (1991, 21). Dominant discourses may be heterogeneous—although Giddens is striving to put a stop to that (Game 1991, 21)—and while I am confident I will be faulted for many sins, I doubt that one of them will be arraying continental thought against that Anglo-American-... polyglot.

difficult to read? *Glas*? *Écrits*? *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*? *Being and Time*? *Finnegan's Wake*? The difference between “this text is inaccessible” and “I do not understand this text” should not be facilely elided. Inaccessibility, or obscurity, as a fault of the text, and obscurity as a predicament of the reading circumstances and the reading subject, are distinct, though sometimes overlapping, constructions. The slippage between the two is evidence of an ironic academic hubris. The density of poststructuralist texts is often used to accuse poststructuralist theorists of intellectual arrogance, but the charge itself is presumptuous. Some critics think they can demolish all Continental writing by the obvious exercise of judgment, by condemning it as self-aggrandizing literary intricacy. Yet, in making that very condemnation, the same critics are aggrandizing themselves, by their implicit conviction that they have moved beyond the sophomoric attraction of superficial complexity to an appreciation of the genius of simplicity in ‘straightforward’ prose.

Some critics think that “they can demolish the entire French critical effort by the obvious exercise of common sense” (Salusinszky 1987, 105), but academics, and especially sociologists, should recognize that common sense is a heterogeneous social production maintained by relations of authority. Poststructuralism extends that social contingency to obviousness. I extend it to methods of reading and standards of good writing, and to the homology of the naturalization of knowledges of love to the naturalization of common sense.

Some critics think that they can demolish a poststructuralist reading of love by the obvious exercise of common sense and personal experience, but as common sense, personal experience, and obviousness are radically contingent on convention, history, and power, none of them can prove an absolute, or even firm, ground for the determination of what good writing or competent reading is. As love travels from a psychological to a sociological paradigm, neither common sense nor nature nor personal experience can prove an absolute ground for knowledges of love. The meanings of all terms are open to

interrogation and movement. The convergence of love and discourse is simply this: rather than being an interior and psychological object or relation, *love is precisely that form of discourse which enables itself to be (mis)read as an interior and psychological object or relation*. The poststructuralist question, then, is not one of the *truth* of love, but one of the necessities and consequences of the authorization of that truth/misrecognition. The poststructuralist task, then, is one of scrupulously rereading the signs of love.

Derrida is the obvious example of poststructuralist reading, being the most infamous synecdoche for Continental writing. While his project, or rather, fragments of it, have infiltrated broadly across the humanities and the social sciences—witness the proliferation of sometimes bizarre employments of the term *deconstruction*—its impact has varied widely and significantly across that range. Derrida has a huge presence in literary criticism, a significant presence in philosophy, and a lesser but notable presence in anthropology, but he is virtually absent from sociology. Among other things, his absence manifests the presence in the discipline of the valorization of clarity.

The criticism that Derrida is unnecessarily difficult is often phrased as something like, “he could have said the same thing much more clearly.” This claim is only possible if there is a ‘thing’ that the text ‘says’; that is, it can be sustained only if a definitive reading can be made, only if a closure of reading can be effected. This authoritative reading is in turn contingent on the transformation of a text into a vessel of signs with a particular content, and the arrogation of that well-defined content as the meaning.⁴ However, fixing the meaning of Derridean texts is not only very un-Derridean in its reiteration of the classical (modernist?) separation of meaning and text, it is also difficult to maintain, given the range of varied and often incoherent readings of those texts. More

⁴ This criticism also presumes the validity of communication, which is itself critiqued in Chapter Four as obscurant of the politics of meaning.

importantly, to accuse any text of being “unnecessarily difficult” is to open the possibility of a text being necessarily difficult:

Derrida is very difficult to read, but not because of any willful or perverse desire to antagonize the reader or to be deliberately obscure. It is, rather, that Derrida’s philosophical position, like his method of analysis, systematically undermines the presumption of a stable interpretive context to which a reader may habitually appeal for the determination of meaning. For just this reason, Derrida’s difficult prose cannot be dismissed as an incidental irritation, nor can it be deflected by the reactionary charge that it is in some way decadent or irrational. It is, rather, a radical challenge to prevailing notions of “meaning” or “rationality” that can be ignored only at the cost of demonstrating that the prevailing notions prevail by force of repression—a point Derrida frequently underscores.

(Adams and Searle 1986, 79)

The difficult text makes the reader work in distinctive and potentially productive ways, by pressing its writing *as a form* upon her awareness, rather than trying to efface itself as the conveyance of content. Clear writing is writing that succeeds in vanishing, at least to the reader who discerns it as clear, so that what the text ‘means’ becomes obvious and unequivocal. That success is its own failure. Lucidity is an alias for the plural authority of the closure of meaning.

First, to read a text as clear writing is to presume that its meaning has been wholly seized. This is the presumption of mastery over the text; this is the satisfaction of controlling meaning; this is the victory over other possible readings; this is the refusal by the apodictical reading to countenance contesting meanings. This is: Seizure. Mastery. Control. Victory. Refusal. Through these terms, the protocols of the production of clarity by the reader can be recognized and analyzed as protocols of power: the politics of meaning and the authority of the extant conventions of reading.

Second, this exercise of power is justified by the modernist appeal to the authority of the author. *Justified*, here, in at least three senses: rationalized (given logical substantiation, according to a particular regime of truth), legitimated (given decisive force, by a particular regime of power), valorized (made fair and just, by a particular regime of ethics). In other words, the protocols of power are given the guise of seemingly

neutral procedures of reading. Conventional resistance to the difficult text may thus be read as irritation at how the difficult text frustrates the conventional exercise of power. To extrapolate these politics of reading into wider social/discursive relations, any reduction of discourse to a single meaning—the claim to truth by another name—can be analyzed as the resort to power. To proclaim truth is an eminently political act.

Third, the ideological cleavage of textuality and meaning can be understood as necessary to the preservation of the purity of meaning from the pernicious, obfuscating corruption of writing and rhetoric. This is the fundamental Derridean argument about the profound Western metaphysical denigration of writing in its privileging of speech (Derrida 1976; Norris 1982, 1987).

Derrida's intervention into Western philosophy and criticism can be conned as the recognition of the operation of the politics of clarity. Not only have his texts had force just as they were written, but his writing has worked against readers being able to feel assured that they have *accomplished* the meaning of any of those texts. The critical shift beginning here, in this text, with Derrida, is a move from the ideal text as an immaculate conveyance of meaning to the given text as necessarily working upon and within the world. At stake is the meaning of meaning. The play (of the text) is the thing; meaning is ineluctable from textuality (which includes the rhetorical, stylistic, tropical, structural, connotative, syntactic, grammatical, aesthetic, and concrete characteristics of the text). Then meaning is not passive but active; not content but situated production; not apodictical but contested. The issues of meaning, play, textuality, contestation and politics will be developed in Chapter Four, which examines language and communication, but for now the point is that they coalesce around the lucidity and obscurity of the text.

The immanent textuality of meaning means that substance is not separable from style. "Every style embodies an epistemological decision, an interpretation of how and what we perceive" (Sontag 1966, 35). Every style is a certain enabling of articulation, so

each one embodies a certain embrace of the world. Clarity, as read as a particular style situated within particular conventions, rather than a universalizable quality of a text, shows itself as a specific literary device. Clarity, as the absence of tropes, is itself a trope. If tropicity—style—and textuality are inseparable from the production of meaning, then when we write in different ways, we must write different things—or more to the point, we cannot write the same thing in different ways, and neither can Derrida. Culler (1982) and Norris (1982, 1987) have written deconstruction primers, which are popular and useful in large part because they are more accessible than the primary texts which provoked them. Yet neither Culler nor Norris are Derrida writ simple; neither is a translation of Derrida's "concepts" into clear English. Culler and Norris give insightful, productive, valuable readings and commentaries, which necessarily generate different meanings than the difficult texts of Derrida themselves. More crucially, Culler and Norris could not have written about deconstruction in their own ways if Derrida had not written it into existence first, in his own way.

This digression is not meant to champion Derrida, but merely to serve notice that this text strives to intensively reflect upon the operations of reading and writing (not excluding its own) as it proceeds, rather than attempting to read texts and the social world for some essential or intended content. This text therefore approaches sociology as a practice of reading and writing. From this orientation, the necessary lesson to be gained from reading Derrida is that any text moves between different modes of obscurity and clarification, because both are productions of reading. "Those who complain that Derrida writes in a deliberately difficult way might do well to read the plain English of ... humanists and see if it does not turn on them, when it is read carefully, as much as Derrida's writing does" (Cottom 1989, 66). This suggests a radical imperative of good reading: *one should keep reading any text until it turns*, because it is only when the text passes from the lucidity of a single, unquestioned, objective, neutral meaning, to the obscurity of multiple, unstable, incoherent readings that the face of the politics of

meaning, in the Foucaultian sense (Foucault 1977a), shows itself. These politics are the operations of regimes of truth, the discursive apparatuses which make certain statements and texts function as true in particular circumstances, especially through the familiar and seductive attitudes, assumptions, omissions, intertextualities, and selective contexts by which the reader reads and is constituted. These politics, therefore, are about the authority of meaning: what and who have the power to produce, determine, regulate, repress, articulate, reproduce, and reject meanings, and how that determination gets done.

Through the politics of meaning, reading and writing manifest the very sociological concerns of power and its distribution. But more than that, sociological writing is itself reflexively a regime of truth. For example, Stoddart (1986) demonstrates how sociological ethnography is a radically textual politics. So in a poststructuralist sociology and in a postmodern world, where meanings and contexts proliferate and get contested, illumination does not disperse obscurity, but surfaces it. In other words, the problem with clear writing is that it is obscure, in the sense that it obscures its own politics. Likewise, some texts are more transparent because they are more obscure, in that the contestation of meaning makes their politics more evident and accessible—although no text can fully disclose its politics. I am not valorizing obscure writing in general, for I am not claiming that writing becomes good just by being obscure. Nor am I maintaining that all obscure texts articulate their regimes of truth. No writer emulates Derrida simply by obfuscating. Rather than championing obscurity, what I am doing is resisting the uncritical valorization of lucidity. I have been accused of canonizing obscurity, but I maintain that I am doing the precisely the opposite: I am undermining the conventionally unchallenged authority of canonical reading. In parallel fashion, this text is not a wholesale indictment of clear writing; I am not claiming that clear writing is necessarily bad. Rather, I am merely proposing that clear writing has certain limits which are customarily obscured by its popular valorization. To read until “the text turns” is to work against the willful and glorified obscuration perpetrated by clarity, by applying the

familiar strategy of “making the familiar strange” (*ostranenie*, to the Russian Formalists [Hyde 1987]) to reading.

Now, clearly (?), if a text stymies reading, it works within a difficult, hermetic, problematic politics: it seriously limits both what work it can do, and who it can work for—at least directly. Thus Derrida and other Continental writers are often attacked for being useless because they are inaccessible. This uselessness, this political sin, is only partially ameliorated by how meaning ramifies and disperses through more accessible rereadings and rewritings. By contrast, the clear text can work more widely and immediately. Yet its ease of reading does not liberate that text from politics. Rather, that ease implicates it in a certain (Enlightenment) regime of truth. Clarity can be a wonderful thing in writing; poststructuralism is merely careful about what that *wonderful* means, what it covers, and what it covers up. Both lucidity and obscurity empower and limit, but in the historical circumstances in which *this* text operates, that is, within the postmodern academy, they are hardly on equal ground, and they should therefore not be addressed in balanced fashion. Instead, the hegemony of lucidity calls for strategic resistance. This agonistic heuristic locates the point of departure for this text’s examination of the reticulated linkage of the lucidity of writing, the transparency of representation, the cogency of argument, the standards of validity, the sociological regime of truth, the regnancy of vision, the valorization of communication, the separation of literature and disciplinary literature, the reduction of language to communication, the closure of meaning, the modernist critique of poststructuralism. For now, lucidity is the limit in the text that this text strives to transgress.

On some occasions, striving is not the issue, because lucidity is impossible. When I read Derrida, the text slides constantly and multilaterally between the provocative and the difficult and the incomprehensible, so I have considerable sympathy for those frustrated readers who lash out at his texts—yet I do not join them. Gayatri Spivak writes that to be a poststructuralist is to “develop a mind set which allows one not to be nervous

about the fact that what one is saying is undermined by the way one says it, radically” (1990h, 20). Spivak, of course, can be read several ways. In this context, I read her as being generous towards my own predicament with her teacher, Derrida. She allows me to keep muddling through, so even though I am often confounded by his writing, my obtuseness does not prevent me from working with his texts, although it does give conspicuous warning that my reading is always provisional and suspect. This is just as well, because Derrida has proven to be unavoidable—I encounter him whatever analytical route I take, I bump into him whichever way I turn.⁵ In this way, reading Derrida serves as a trope for a more general politics of meaning and inquiry. “No one can quite articulate the space she herself inhabits” (Spivak 1990d, 68). Like everyone, I proceed with partial truths, acknowledged limitations, unacknowledged biases, but I proceed in the world anyway, both personally and academically, because I cannot avoid engaging with politics that I am still struggling to understand. No transcendental or natural truth serves as a ground for the practice of theory, just as no Archimedean point exists for naming it, so theorizing must instead be done on unstable and shifting bases. This is what I must do, because this is all I, or anyone, *can* do.

This necessary instability, contingency, and uncertainty is troped by a principal tenet of deconstruction: the meaning of all texts depends on subtexts which contradict that meaning, a thesis that is appropriately both unprovable and irrefutable. This is a taste of a milder proposition: language is never wholly transparent, and reading is never wholly innocent. “*There is no such thing as just reading.* We never just read. Justice takes on meaning in social life, in which meaning is always contested. Whatever else it is, reading

⁵ Of course, other people go out of their way to avoid Derrida and other poststructuralists. Some critics, angry with the obscurity and difficulty of the texts, retreat to more comfortable theory in an attempt to simply ignore French writing. Similarly, others like right-wing ideologue Alan Bloom hope that poststructuralism is just a fad that will fade away and allow a return to more sensible endeavors (Bloom 1987, 379). The irony is that both responses, being manifestly reactionary and exclusive, demonstrate the poststructuralist politicization and partialness of discourse.

is always a political act, whether or not we recognize it as such” (Cottom 1989, 70, emphasis added). If there is no such thing as just reading, then there is no such thing as a literal reading. No meaning is simply manifest in the text. To resist lucid writing is merely to recognize that meaning is contested and that reading is political. The immediate relevance is that when this text is declared as being outside the proper ambit of sociology, the appearance of words like *proper* should be a sociological red flag, a conspicuous signal that value- and theory-laden judgments are being rendered and being realized. When that recognition is made, the disciplinary reading of the foreignness of this text becomes itself readable as partisan politics of modernist xenophobia, as the suspicious interrogation of the Other.

The standard sociological approach to something new and unfamiliar is to try to turn it into something old and comfortable. Sociology “displays a tendency to turn the emotions into variables that can be measured and studied in first one and then another area of sociological specialization (for example, organizations, stratification, small groups, racial and ethnic relations, the schools, work and occupations, the family)” (Denzin 1991, 108). Standard institutions like the family are continually instituted and reinstituted; they are the disciplinary Procrustean beds to which the social world is forced to fit. Despite the discipline’s scientific aspirations to neutrality, with its immaculate connotations, such a standard analysis works by transforming its subject into something other and easier.⁶ This transformation is parallel to the production of lucidity. A standard tactic of clarity is to turn the text into a reiteration of some other familiar text; to paraphrase Culler (1982, 120), clarity is something of a quotation. Anticipating the discussion to come on the production of meaning and the generation of context, dominant sociology—the sociology Denzin is referring to—makes sense of emotion by reading it

⁶ Of course, such tactics are practiced in other disciplines as well; I am not arguing that sociology is singular in this respect.

through prior generic sociological categories. “[Dominant sociology] moves the study of lived emotional experience off center stage and makes it part of the satellite system of ancillary theories that can be put to use in any substantive sociological area” (Denzin 1991, 108). Conventionally, sociology examines love by relocating it in the familiar institutions of family and marriage—and good and valuable work is done that way. I am not denying that. Rather, I am proposing that this relocation is symptomatic of both the power of such thinking and its limitations. The poststructuralist text, drawing upon deconstruction, is very much concerned with examining and pressuring such limits. If love is to be considered tropically, the necessary theoretical apparatus is not available in dominant sociology, which forces this text to pass by the Procrustean methodological bed and move towards Denzin’s unconventional notions: “Our project [of theorizing emotion is] one that interrogates human experience from inside. We must locate the human being within language and within emotionality. We must enquire into what kind of gendered emotional being this late postmodern period is creating” (1991, 108) (*being* in Denzin is usefully read as both noun and verb). If we do not, we risk reifying Abraham Kaplan’s “principle of *the drunkard’s search*” (1964, 11, emphasis in original):

A woman comes across a drunk who is on his hands and knees under a streetlamp. She asks him if he is alright, and he tells her that he’s looking for his keys. She then asks him, “Where did you lose them?” and he points to a dark alleyway fifty feet away. “Then why are you looking over here?” she wants to know, and he says, “Because there’s more light here.”

The real problem is this: not only does sociology keep seeking the key to love under the streetlamp, it keeps finding it there.

If we are to avoid this trap, and if we are to locate postmodern human being within language, then we must address the remarkable insight of one crucial sentence from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, whose trace is across the entire of this text: “*One cannot speak of anything at any time*” (Foucault 1972, 44, emphasis added). That is,

particular and manifold social and discursive conditions enable or disallow specific productions of texts and other “objects of discourse” (Foucault 1972, 44). There is no historical and social position, no discourse, no language, no science, no ecology of the mind, no archaeology, no descant, no sociology, no poststructuralism which allows all relevant statements to be made, all relevant knowledge to be spoken, all relevant questions to be posed, all relevant observations to be made. This negative formulation of Foucault has its corresponding positive version: all historical and social positions permit—bring into possibility—certain statements, knowledges, questions, observations. Objects of discourse are only made possible by the “positive conditions of a complex group of relations” (Foucault 1972, 45). Every position allows and excludes articulations; poststructuralism merely keeps reminding us that the productivity and limitation of meaning are continually in force and in operation. This constitutes one entry of poststructuralism into sociology, for Foucault can be paraphrased as “all discourse is always socially contingent.”

Foucault is particularly apt to this text when he is brought together with Game, who suggests that any lacuna—like love—in the sociological domain is neither an accident nor an oversight, but a consequence of historically contingent sociological practices of sociology—specific theoretical models and specific orienting tropes (1991, 4). Game’s proposition is conjecture, and likely an unprovable one, but the implausible alternative is to believe that love has been susceptible to dominant sociological analysis, but has been avoided for some other reason, such as love has been so uninteresting that very few sociologists have examined it, while concomitantly an endless stream of sociologists have written about marriage and the family. A more convincing explanation than this ‘love is boring’ hypothesis is Game’s proposition, reframed as ‘it is necessary to assume that love is psychological.’ But the construction of love as psychological excludes its construction as profoundly political and social discourse.

A reconsideration of how sociology is written out is occurring here: if there is no such thing as just reading, there is no such thing as just sociological writing either. Justice is disputed in writing as well. “The intellectual biases built into an academic discipline are most clearly revealed by considering not what range of explanations it makes available for the phenomena falling within its domain but rather what questions pertaining to those phenomena cannot be raised within the theoretical framework it provides” (Harris 1991, 153). What theoretical constraints have worked against the sociological investigation of love? To put it more bluntly, what and who are being disciplined by the sociological discipline? Robert Scholes makes classical hermeneutics a disturbing trope for the academy: “[The classical] tradition of hermeneutic study has its roots in biblical exegesis, so we should not be surprised to find that it tends to regard the author as God. Its most powerful appeal, I should think, comes to our sense that students are in fact not adequate readers, and hence are in need of a rigorous *discipline* in which there must be a standard for ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ readings” (1982, 8-9, emphasis added). Discipline and punish. This is a “law-and-order approach” (Scholes 1982, 8), whose author-as-God trope suggests that the notion of discipline in the academy is not only political, but authoritarian. Then the defining characteristics of an academic discipline are analyzable as deriving not only from internal logic, but also from the determinations of authority. The sociology that has heretofore only gingerly and distantly considered love is therefore susceptible to the opinion that Cottom holds of Derrida: “One might criticize the *topicality* of Derrida’s work: the audiences it does and does not address, the issues it does and does not raise, the constructions of society to which it does or does not lend itself” (1989, 65, emphasis in original). What follows is a metatheoretical text about how the regime of authority in dominant sociology operates to exclude love—a metatheorizing of the regimes of truth of sociology and love and the sociology of love.

2.2: The Regimes of Truth and Disciplinary Boundaries

“You never tell me nothin’ that’s true.”

“Hell, it’s all true,” Francis said. “Every stinkin’ damn thing you can think of is true.”

William Kennedy, *Ironweed*

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its *regime of truth*, its “general politics” of truth: That is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true.... There is a battle “for the truth,” or at least “around the truth”—it being understood ... that by truth I do not mean “the ensemble of truths that are to be discovered and accepted,” but rather “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true.”

Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power”

The mission at hand is to identify and examine the battles for truth that are waged in sociological regimes of truth. This is an analytical shift from the scientific practice of sociology—which, by putting its attention and energy into meeting standards of validity, participates in and supports the modernist regime of truth, rather than critiquing it—to a sciosophical practice of sociology. Despite the poststructuralist suspicion of logocentrism, this shift does not dismiss rationality as useless, or even deficient per se, but instead understands it differently. “[T]he fact that the best tools that we seem to have are ... tools of rational thinking, does not stop us from saying that they might be symptomatic rather than ... the union ticket to truth” (Spivak 1990h, 33). To read sociology as a regime of truth is to regard the best tools of sociological research as being ineluctable from politics, “from the micropolitics of interpersonal relationships, through the politics of research units, institutions and universities, to those of government departments and finally to the state” (Bell and Newby 1977:10). To read sociology as both a regime of truth and a practice of writing is to pursue the symptoms of what passes in sociology as clarity, accessibility, rationality, logic, argument, and validity.

A productive starting point for this pursuit of politics is the sociological preoccupation with its own closure (Game 1991, 5-6), which has a pedigree traceable to the origin of the discipline. Founding father Emile Durkheim knew that the identity of sociology depended on the successful establishment of the boundary between it and psychology. Sociology's long-standing and sometimes wistful aspiration to be a serious science is also a matter of its boundary, although this time the different one which separates the humanities and the social sciences—C. P. Snow's two cultures (1959). I do not want to overgeneralize here, because clearly sociology is neither unified nor homogeneous, and not all sociologists call themselves scientists (although even the non-scientists usually call themselves social scientists, a telling discrepancy). Nonetheless, the discipline is nearly uniformly touchy about its boundaries, particularly when its mandate, rarely clearly defined, is articulated as something like cultural criticism, which might as justifiably be practiced in art history or literary criticism or some other university department which is decidedly and unconcernedly unscientific, at least in the parochial social-scientific gaze. Poststructuralism thus antagonizes sociologists when it pursues the "dispersion of disciplinary boundaries" (Game 1991, ix). Anthony Giddens, often regarded within sociology as the preeminent sociologist of these times, calls poststructuralism a dead tradition of thought (1987, 73) because it cannot be contained by his notion of the proper concerns of sociology: the macro analysis of the social and social change (Game 1991, 5-6; Giddens 1982, 66). Durkheim, Snow, and Giddens are all producing constitutive exclusions. To define a discipline by its boundaries is to define it by excluding what is on the other side; it is therefore a political act. Giddens is rearticulating a well-established sociological hostility towards poststructuralist approaches. Such antipathy stands in revealing contrast with the attitudes of (some) anthropologists, whose reliance on ethnography (and the long shadow of Lévi-Strauss) has led inevitably to the serious consideration of the problematics of writing and representation (Geertz 1973a; Geertz 1984; Geertz 1986; Clifford 1986a; Clifford 1986b;

Crapanzano 1986; Rabinow 1986; Tyler 1986; Geertz 1988; Clifford 1988a; Game 1991, ix; Fernandez 1991; Friedrich 1991; Quinn 1991; Alverson 1991; Pesmen 1991). It is *writing, reading, language, text, rhetoric, trope, metaphor, fiction, truth, and discourse* which are the crucial terms, and the sociological animosity towards poststructuralism betrays the unconscious realization that it is the handling of these words which sustains or dissolves the defining boundaries of sociology.

Consider sociological writing by first considering aspects of writing more generally. “Language is like shot silk; so much depends on the angle at which it is held,” observes John Fowles (1969, 358), a marvelous writer. The trouble is that his art is that of the novel, and as UBC sociologist Neil Guppy writes, “scholarly research writing is not literature” (1991, 287). For Guppy, this is self-evident, but it is exactly the assumption that poststructuralism unpacks. Obviously, distinctions between literature and refereed journal articles can be, and are, usefully made—although such distinctions are much easier to mention than define. The possibility or existence of difference is not being disputed. Instead, this text is interested in exploring why this particular difference is maintained. A set of questions ensues: What work is accomplished by making and accepting this distinction? What and whose utility does it serve? What politics is it implicated in? What does it produce? What does it obscure? What are the consequences for sociological writing, reading, and inquiry? To paraphrase Spivak, what is sociology that it has been, and continues to be, obliged to produce this difference? (Spivak 1990h, 33)

As a first response, “[w]hat one has to look at is how historically some things have been *called* literature, and others have not been” (Spivak 1990c, 47). This discrimination is parochial to a particular epistemology. “The relationship between philosophy and literature in the mainstream Anglo-American tradition could be described as one of mutual suspicion: philosophers see their discipline as being about knowledge and truth, and that of the *littérateurs* as being about feelings” (Mortley 1991, 2). With

such philosophical underpinnings, dominant sociology locates love (feeling) outside itself. But in other nationalities and other traditions, things and attitudes are much different. For the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Monique Schneider, there is no separation between philosophy and literature (Schneider, in Mortley 1991, 25), and this is characteristic of the Gallic conception of the humanities (Mortley 1991, 1-3). It is therefore no coincidence that this thesis, in its concern for love and language, turns to French theory. As Wing notes (and overstates), the French “have always liked the little shiver of delight—the ‘frisson’—they feel when wrestling with ideas, whereas Americans seem happier smashing them” (1991, xi).

As a second response, this peculiarly Anglo-American discrimination satisfies a yearning for a reassuring boundary between the humanities and the social sciences, between literature and disciplinary literature. This yearning can be read as the sociological desire to put fiction at a remove from truth. This desire is one which must be put to trial.

2.3: Specularity and the Transparency of the Text

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.
The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The sociological regime of truth is surfaced in the discipline’s identification with specular tropes: Game writes of the “sociological mirror” which reflects the nature of modern society (1991, 20-36); the Canadian text I read in my introduction to sociology was subtitled *Window on the World* (Lundy and Warne, 1986); Stoddart describes the sociological ethnographer’s “theme of the invisible researcher” (1986). Thus *specular* not only implicates seeing, but also how that seeing is enabled through some device

(paradigm, methodology, research instrument). The sociological mirror is a variation on the Enlightenment metaphor for science: the fundamental and idealized desire to “clear away false hindrances in order that the object [of research] can be *seen in clear light*” (Crowley 1990, 28, emphasis added). The triumph of modernism is evidenced in how seeing itself has become a general metaphor for understanding. Even so, the specular trope, like all tropes, ironically undermines its own articulation. The modern sociological mirror is metonymically haunted by such postmodern revenants as the neo-Freudian mirror stage of Lacan (1986), the “infinite mirror of writing” of Foucault (1977b), and the post-Marxist “mirror of production” of Baudrillard (1975). Specular sociology stolidly ignores these spectral disturbances in favor of a more earthly consciousness. I was taught as a graduate student that sociology is the explanation of repeated patterns of group behavior. This is one variation on the specular *topos*: the transparent representation of the real. Such a project has two requirements: there must be an autonomous social reality, and there must be instrumental access to transparent language. Sociology can then distinguish itself from mere storytelling by claiming a privileged relation to the material truth. From this standpoint, “texts and language are somehow less real than social reality which remains as an extra-discursive context” (Game 1991, 4), so text and language are separated from reality. Language, for sociology, reinscribes specularity: “language reflecting society” (Cameron 1990, 89), which is modernist referentiality by another name.

A cautionary note: what I call specular sociology is not a straw man, though it is a trope of a certain kind. Under the rubric of specularity, I am including a system of allied assumptions, convictions, and attitudes; a disciplined epistemology, ontology, and methodology. These are all connected, and some or all of them are implicit whenever clear writing, or plain English, or tight argument, or transparent representation, or standards of validity, or the generalizability of theory, or claims to truth, or simply the really real, is invoked, and therefore the critique that follows applies whenever those

concepts and terms are deployed. However, I am not claiming that sociologists are so unperceptive or willfully ignorant that they have overlooked all of the issues I am addressing here. Nor am I claiming that those issues have never been engaged, or that those problems have never been dealt with (although I do not believe that they have been dealt with effectively). Nor am I claiming that excellent and important sociological work has not been done in very un-poststructuralist ways. Instead, I am making the uncontroversial proposition that the specular constituents listed above have been and continue to be generally valorized in sociology. It is the hegemony of that approbation that I want to struggle against, and I proceed by examining the implications of specularity.

Poststructuralism threatens specularity when it recognizes the reality of fictions, by taking Foucault seriously and acknowledging truth as a produced fiction of successful discourse (see Prologue 3, p 6). This acknowledgment denies both representational presuppositions by merging them: language and reality are suffused with each other, and the autonomy of either becomes unsupportable. It is this mutuality and interpenetration that is productively read in Derrida's (in)famous dictum: "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte.*" [*There is nothing outside of the text*] (1976, 158, emphasis in original). In other words, the popular interpretation of this phrase—as the denial of the existence of extra-discursive reality—is an unjust reading, for it turns a positive critique into a negative one. Real experience is not being rejected by the turn to discourse; rather, reality, as far as we encounter it, is being recognized as something truly experienced. "The notorious Derridean aphorism ... may be invoked to abet an escape from the determinate necessities of history, a self-abandonment to the indeterminate pleasures of the text; however it may also be construed as an insistence upon the ideological force of discourse in general and of those discourses in particular which reduce the work of discourse to the mere reflection of an ontologically prior, essential or empirical reality" (Montrose 1989, 16). Thus something old as something new: the "social construction of reality" (Berger and

Luckmann 1967) is a venerable sociological phrase now “mediated,” to use Hegel’s term via Žižek (1991, 48), by the discursive politics of poststructuralism. If language and the world are not separable, then the Derridean critique of language translates the meanings of the sociological world. If there are no transcendental signifieds, then there are no facts in themselves, ‘social’ or otherwise, Durkheim notwithstanding. If clarity is a literary device, then transparent representation is a historically situated and politicized convention, and not the revelation or explanation of reality. If the textual imperative is to read the text until it turns, then the sociological imperative is to read the world until it admits plural meanings, instead of reading it until it closes on truth. If the sociological inquiry into the human world is to emulate the scientific inquiry into the natural world, then the poststructuralist caution is that the postmodern trope for and from nature is the Heraclitian one: you cannot step into the same river twice.⁷ If poststructuralist inquiry is to penetrate the limits of love’s modern conceptualization, limits enunciated in terms of behavior and psychology, it must indeed examine those *terms*, and how they reveal the “prudishness of behaviourist psychology, with its coy, euphemistic, circumlocutory avoidance of any language which smacks of the human” (Eagleton 1983, 122).

With this reorientation, mystification transforms from being an ideological transgression to being either meaningless or inevitable or both: “In the original dance of the seven veils, one comes at last to a direct perception of reality, with no veil, no code, between us and what we see. Semiotic [and poststructuralist] studies must caution us on this point. The veils are not removed but displaced by others that seem transparent only for a time” (Scholes 1982, 141). Transparency is then neither an ideal nor a virtue, but a masquerade, a particularly insidious opacity. It is the denial of the ubiquity of *the code* of

⁷ This gives a disturbing meaning to the scientific valorization of repeatability. Also, T. M. Robinson points out that the Heraclitian authorship of the river analogy is highly disputed—which is very appropriate in this context. Robinson’s translation of the key fragment is, “As they step into the same rivers, different and (still) different waters flow upon them” (Heraclitus 1987, 17). This version has poststructuralist resonances too, albeit different ones from the more familiar expression.

seeing (and writing and reading). Troping understanding with seeing has efficiently obscured how seeing and transparency are rhetorically systematized. We *do* judge a book by its cover.

Or do we? What are the various operational metaphors for the understanding here? Scholes refigures the original dance of the veils by replacing Salome, posing as the Enlightenment ecdysiast—who in the end bares the truth—with the perpetual tease—who never fulfills the hints of promises she makes to bare all. Appropriately, this shuffle does not close the matter. The stripping away of layers is open to less problematically sexist and sexualized tropes. Perhaps the sociological world is not Salome but an onion, wholly constituted of layers. Then the rational method that would take away all layers—all veils—would leave nothing at all. Or perhaps the impulse to strip away obscuring layers is akin to seeking the real artichoke by divesting it of its leaves, and by doing so finding the heart of the matter (Shweder 1991, 32) (that is, don't judge a book by its cover). Stripping away veils may be reread as a systematic throwing away, encouraged by the generally unexamined conviction that what is worthwhile—what is on the target agenda—remains in the heart of the artichoke. Poststructuralism is characteristically interested in examining what has been left out; it is concerned with identifying the limits of accepted narratives (Spivak 1990h, 19). Thus Foucault gives up the quest for truth (the heart), in order to carefully examine the means by which truth is produced (the stripping away of surface layers). Given such a priority for the *process* of truth, obscurity and transparency can be read as productions by codes which determine what may be, or must be, discarded in the production of sense.

Discarding is better described as exclusion. What must be excluded for truth to be proclaimed? Truth, with its absolutist connotations, summons universality and normality.

The universal aspects of human nature discovered by anthropology and other human sciences are always produced through the exclusion of "sports," "monstrosities," or other deviants. These aspects are universal only within the modern discourse of culture....

The *normal* is involved in signifying practices (such as those that define the human sciences in relation to the natural sciences; the formal separation of knowledge from nationality, race, class, and religion; the statistical view of humanity; and modern political forms) in which there appears a binding relation between rhetorical and historical realities.

(Cottom 1989, 82, emphasis in original)

The invocation of the normal is always political repression through exclusion. “Metaphor is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results” (Derrida, in Cottom 1989, 63). A trope orienting science is one of theory as generalization, applicable broadly across the normal population. Such theorizing must exclude its exceptions. A trope orienting poststructuralist studies is one of the margin and the excluded. This trope orients not only research and results, but also attitudes towards language. “If language viewed from any perspective (style, theme, plot, and so on) appears unequivocally coherent and transparent to meaning, this appearance simply represents the surface of unconsciousness in the identification through which we are reading the text in question” (Cottom 1991, 88).

As Cottom notes with respect to Derrida, the reading of transparency can itself be read as insufficiently close reading. Consider the exemplary academic text that presents as transparent, and yet is compelled to label its own beginning, “Introduction,” and its own ending, “Conclusion.”⁸ Transparency, as far as it does exist, is as much (or more) a production by the appropriately indoctrinated reader as it is a production by the author. The obvious is only obvious to those whose vision and understanding have been structured in specific ways, under specific circumstances. Transparency is therefore a discursively inscribed practice of writing and cognition that obscures its own politics—the operations, assumptions, prejudices, blindnesses, beliefs, orientations, and misunderstandings that are necessary for anything to be taken as true. To speak of transparency is to speak of the transparent representation of the real, to portray

⁸ There is the old story of the scientist who so completely organized his research that every chemical and reagent bottle and equipment shelf and cabinet in his laboratory was accurately labeled. One day, a colleague visited the lab and found that the old piano that was in the anteroom bore a small label on which was neatly lettered *piano*.

realistically. Realism, as a function of transparency, is therefore a particular discursive production. “Realism, Barthes tells us, has nothing to do with reality; it is simply a text that is readable because it is composed entirely of what is already known” (Scholes 1982, 12). The rejection of transparency entails a methodological *caveat*: “If, in language, our situation is one in which there is no escape from the mechanisms of power, then it is better that we be aware of our situation” (Taylor 1991, 25)—as far as that is possible, in any case. Poststructuralist boundlessness applies not only to the variance of interpretations, but also the range of interpretive influences which are at play. Finite interpreters can never gain complete awareness of the infinite incarnations of power. To the extent that we credit the unconscious with having influence in reading, writing, criticism, love, and the world, “awareness of our situation” will remain partial. Despite such limits, there is still a pragmatic lesson. At the minimum we should be aware that our texts do not escape power, even if we are not fully aware of all the ways that this is so. The problem with specularity is that it *necessarily* makes itself unaware of its politics in order to maintain faith in its specularity. This compulsory ignorance is structured into the corresponding regime of truth, and its signal apparatuses. The discursive practices of politics “cannot be comprehended within the human sciences because their recognition would disrupt the apparatus of rationality on which the ideologies of these disciplines depend. This apparatus includes elements such as the neutral observer, freedom of discussion, and the distinction between discourse and force. No matter how scientific the discourse of culture becomes, then, the definition of culture must remain political, and in fact most profoundly political in the attempt to give it the character of scientific regularity” (Cottom 1991, 85). The provision of the neutral observer is merely the first instance noted here of the production of subjectivity in discourse as it converges with the authority of that discourse. The neutral observer is science incarnate. It is also a deceit. “No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of

beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society.... [P]olitical society in Gramsci's sense reaches into such realms of civil society as the academy and saturates them with significance of direct concern to it" (Said 1979, 10). To imagine oneself in the place of the Other is not the same as being in that place—imagination does not liberate the self from its circumstances, *verstehen* notwithstanding. The rhetorical construction belies itself: such imagining is truly imaginary. The subject of the Other is imagined into existence through the race, gender, class, and other categories the observer produces, but she is untotalizable by any possible set of categories. The subject is constructed; the subject escapes. Reality, including the reality of the subject, is always narrated (Spivak 1990h, 19), so an observer cannot elude diegesis by methodological circumspection.

The political specificity of the position from which the world is narrated makes ethnocentrism inescapable in the same way. "Now, ethnology—like any science—comes about within the element of discourse. And it is primarily a European science employing traditional concepts, however much it may struggle against them. Consequently, whether he wants to or not—and this does not depend on a decision on his part—the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he denounces them. This necessity is irreducible; it is not a historical contingency" (Derrida 1986, 86). "As [Stanley] Diamond puts it, in one of his better moments, '[Cultural] relativism is the bad faith of the conqueror, who has become secure enough to become a tourist'" (Cottom 1989, 82). We are inescapably ethnocentric because we are historical and discursive. Given the impossibility of escaping ethnocentrism, the putatively non-ethnocentric text—which is the professionally valorized text—is immediately and deeply suspect for presenting itself that way. "Any enterprise which claims to be non-ideological and value-neutral, but which in fact remains covertly ideological and value-laden, is the more dangerous for this deceptive subtlety" (Joseph and Taylor 1991, 2). Thus, the serious problem with transparency is that it presents itself as the language of truth. The

serious problem with specularity is that it denies its politics. Its advocate becomes Casanova: “I have always loved truth so passionately that I have often resorted to lying as a way of introducing it into minds which were ignorant of its charms” (Source unknown).

Since truth purports to ground in an extralinguistic reality, its operationalization in language is denotation—the fixing of meaning through the naming of a referent. Then transparency is made dubious by the Barthesian recognition of its immanent politics: “denotation has come to be associated with closure of meaning, and hence with censorship and political repression” (Scholes 1982, 143). Denotation, or naming, is then not truth, but a particular and politicized system of truth, for, as Barthes notes, “there are no such things as denotations, there are only connotations, and ... we call the last one, the connotation we rest upon, the ‘denotation’” (Scholes 1982, 144). Denotation is arrogation. Foregrounding of a particular connotation makes it perceptible, but concomitantly it renders others obscure (Cameron 1990, 81). The sociologically poststructuralist interest is in the tendentious election and suppression of certain connotations, and how those operations manifest the politics of a regime of truth. Thus, tropes are so politically charged because they are so highly connotative, and the discourse of love such an apt entry for a poststructuralist sociology because it is so highly tropical.

The problematics of transparency suggest a move towards fiction and away from specular truths, traversing the once solid line between ‘scholarly’ and ‘artistic’ literatures, as the issue of representation gets more troublesome. The use of *fiction* “may raise empiricist hackles. But the word as commonly used in recent textual theory has lost its connotation of falsehood, of something merely opposed to truth. It suggests the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are systematic and exclusive” (Clifford 1986a, 6). The anthropologists, once again, were here long before the sociologists. Nearly twenty years ago, Clifford Geertz wrote, “anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a ‘native’ makes first order ones: it’s *his* [*sic*] culture.) They are, thus, fictions; fictions in the sense

they are ‘something made,’ ‘something fashioned’—the original meaning of *factio*—not that they are false, unfactual, or merely ‘as if’ thought experiments” (1973b, 15, emphasis in original). The irony is that the radical fictionality of sociological accounts is the natural progeny of two traditional sociological concerns: reflexivity and the avoidance of ethnocentrism.

As indicated above, both of these concepts are troubling, but for the moment, consider the implications of the conventional embrace of both. First, sociology has long claimed that among its virtues is a reflexivity that is singular within the academy; among the social phenomena it takes as its rightful domain is the phenomenon of sociology itself. Second, sociology has long disdained ethnocentrism, the imposition of the sociologist’s own knowledge and value systems on those of the Other—the Self passing judgment on the Other. A conventional disciplinary response to the problem of ethnocentrism is the endorsement of cultural relativism, which, by dissolving any absolute standard, approaches the recognition of partial truths as fictions. When these two traditions are put together, when the domain becomes the discipline and Other and the Self are made to coincide, sociology, by its own demands, should regard itself as a system of fictions, susceptible to the same analysis conventionally brought to bear on external domains the profession investigates. In this light, Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical troping of social life is acute, but his ‘frontstage/backstage’ dichotomy is truncated. The whole sociological analysis is a frontstage for the ethnomethodological dramatic; the discipline inevitably turns Shakespearean in a most traditional aspect, as it performs its play within a play (within a play within a play within ...). The analysis of social life is always more social life to be analyzed. The series is infinitely chiasmatic and recursive; there is no ground in the end. In this way Derrida reappears on stage, for meaning is infinitely deferred. Sociology’s hoary saw about the discipline being legitimately part of its own domain ends up denying the transcendental signified, so that every interpretation is an interpretation of an interpretation. Sociology, in seeking truth,

ends up proliferating fictions: texts upon texts, narratives of narratives. This inevitable recursion characterizes the poststructuralist approach, as noted by Spivak: “I think if one can lump Derrida and Lyotard together ... I think what they are noticing is that we cannot but narrate” (1990h, 19). There is nothing outside of the text. Returning to anthropology (or at least the history of anthropology) once again, Clifford’s comment on ethnography applies to all sociological accounts: “The maker (but why only one?) of ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it. In this view, more Nietzschean than realist or hermeneutic, all constructed truths are made possible by powerful ‘lies’ of exclusion and rhetoric. Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are systems, or economies, of truth” (1986a, 7). The division between literature and sociology does not disappear, but the boundary does become vague and permeable. “The issue is ... one of a questioning of the rules and closures that provide the basis of claims to the status of truth or science” (Game 1991, 4). In its desire for the ground of representation, specular sociology in its heart craves to be science, even if some styles of sociology talk of renouncing it. “The trouble here is that the exact sciences are content to speak in terms of truth” (Lecercle 1990, 36). A poststructuralist sociology cannot be so easily satisfied. Instead, it seeks, in Scholes’ terms (1982, 35), to exceed the necessary, in the realization that there is not a single, systematic, totalizing explanation of patterns of behavior to be discovered, but many incoherent and provisional tales and meanings to be told. This is not a fall into utter relativism or subjectivism, in which any tale or meaning will do, but an awareness that it is the sensible, reasonable, seductive and satisfying explanation that we must be suspicious of, because that is precisely the explanation which has the *power*, in the most explicitly political sense, to enforce not only its explicit narratives and concepts and structures, but also its implicit assumptions and prejudices and exclusions (which may be unnoticeable because they are identical with our own, and therefore naturalized and made reasonable). An explanation satisfies by obscuring its own fictionality, in order to offer

mere truth. An explanation satisfies by making the operations of the world clear, up to a certain point. Past that point, things get opaque.

To resist satisfying explanations is to make the natural suspect. "It is a tenet of semiotic studies ... that much of what we take to be natural is in fact cultural. Part of the critical enterprise of this discipline is a continual process of defamiliarization: the exposing of conventions, the discovering of codes that have become so ingrained that we do not notice them but believe ourselves to behold through their transparency the real itself" (Scholes 1982, 127). To seek out these ingrained codes is to understand that we are all historical creatures, and therefore to reject any truth that transcends our historical circumstances. It is this rejection of transcendence which problematizes the psychological meaning of love, for psychology is grounded in the assumption of a fundamental "psychic unity of humankind." "General psychology assumes that its subject matter is a central (abstract and transcendent = deep or interior or hidden) processing mechanism inherent (fixed and universal) in human beings, which enables them to think (classify, infer, remember, imagine) experience (emote, feel, desire, need, self-reflect), act (strive, prefer, choose, evaluate), and learn. The aim of general psychology is to describe that central inherent processing mechanism of mental life." (Shweder 1991, 77)

The shift from the psychological to the discursive, and therefore sociological, is a shift to an understanding that we, as readers, writers, sociologists, theorists, humans, are likewise under the sway of the particular circumstances that situate both us and what for us passes as truth. This resists the untrammelled relativism that is too often read into poststructuralism. We cannot say anything at anytime. Derridean free play is restrained. "Whereas the free play of readings may in theory be infinite, there are, at any historical moment, a limited range of canonical and emergent allegories available to the competent reader (the reader whose interpretations will be deemed plausible by a specific community). These structures of meaning are historically bounded and coercive. There is, in practice, no 'free play'" (Clifford 1986b, 110). In the texts and readings of the

sociological world, there is neither truth nor solipsism, but instead Foucault's regimes of truth, Clifford's economies of truth (1986a), Rabinow's social location of truth (1986), Said's systems of truths (1978). These regimes, economies, locations, and systems are the legitimate and necessary subjects for a poststructuralist sociology.

2.4: The Blurring of Genres

The approach taken here imperils the integrity of disciplinary boundaries other than the one between sociology and literature. The same postmodern recourse to discourse that makes love suitable for sociology also makes it suitable for linguistics and narratology and poetry and political science and history and semiotics and philosophy and psychoanalysis. As a consequence, this text appears a little like a lot of these, but not much like any one of them in particular. It is a teratological monster—or perhaps merely a mongrel—more than a little strange to proper sociology. Perhaps I can blame Foucault for this muddle—after all, he can defend himself much better than I can, even if he is dead. The edifying problem with Foucault is not merely that he was not a sociologist, but that it is impossible to decide exactly what he was. He slid arrantly across disciplinary categories, which prompts Geertz to ask, “What [*was*] Foucault—historian, philosopher, political theorist?” (1986, 515, emphasis in original) Geertz calls such muddling the “blurring of genres.” But he also calls it the “refiguration of social thought” (1986, 514), which hints at approbation: “Freed from having to become taxonomically upstanding, because nobody else is, individuals thinking of themselves as social (or behavioral or human or cultural) scientists have become free to shape their work in terms of its necessities rather than received ideas” (Geertz 1986, 515). In postmodern jargon, this is *bricolage*—the assemblage of a pastiche of dissimilar materials which are useful and at hand. For the postmodernist, the dissolution of boundaries does not make a crisis of identity, but a fortuitous necessity. Fortuitous, because the transgressive sweep of the

terms allows the use of the sophisticated analytics of disciplines for whom the text has historically been regarded as much more central than it has in sociology. A necessity, because “the central ideas in contemporary French theory—those of reading, writing and text—defy disciplinary appropriation” (Game 1991, ix). The text is manifest in sociology; it is present here just as it is present in a multitude of other disciplines and other worlds. It can be neither wished away nor owned by self-styled science.

Just as Geertz noted for anthropology, sociology does not deal directly with social phenomena, but with second and higher order accounts of them. Sociological accounts are therefore highly textualized; minimally, they are stories of stories, and therefore deeply implicated in the tropical productions which characterize narratives. “Literary procedures pervade any work of cultural representation.... Literary processes—metaphor, figuration, narrative—affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered” (Clifford 1986a, 4). *Contra* Guppy, scholarly research writing *is* literature, and cannot escape being so. To elaborate on Edward Said’s distinction (1978, 21), if what Guppy calls literature is “openly imaginative text,” then scholarly research writing can be understood, not as non-literature, not as unimaginative text, but as *covertly* imaginative text. The distinction between literature and disciplinary literature is discursively produced. Literal language is no guarantor of truth, if only because literal language is merely language that obscures its tropicity. The difference between literature and disciplinary literature is not one of the presence or absence of literary procedures, for those are always present, but one of whether or not that presence is acknowledged or disavowed, explicitly or implicitly. The claim by specular texts that they represent reality transparently can only be sustained by disguising the literary processes that, as Clifford notes, infest them. Close reading will betray that literariness; it will expose “the pretense that literal truth is artless” (Shweder 1991, 11), which is why Cottom can write that close reading of straightforward texts will cause them to turn. To consider scholarly research writing as literature is therefore a heuristic move, since, to quote Hartman quoting de Man, “literature is not afraid of the

fallacy of unmediated expression—it doesn’t pretend that it can get beyond that—and in that sense it may be less naive than philosophy” (Salusinszky 1987, 85)—or sociology. Transparency turns out to be not the intimate relation with reality, but the maintenance of what Benjamin calls “a natural distance from reality” (1989b, 233).

Despite the inevitable pervasiveness of tropes that makes transparent language—zero degree writing—impossible, specular sociology still longs to make language invisible. Like the ethnographic methodology of the observer in the field, it seeks to efface itself. Its ideal is what John Locke called “telementation”—what Saussure depicted in his famous talking heads diagram in *A First Course in General Linguistics*, in which a concept in the mind of subject *A* is immaculately reproduced in the mind of subject *B* through the instrumental use of transparent language (see Figure 2). This is idealized

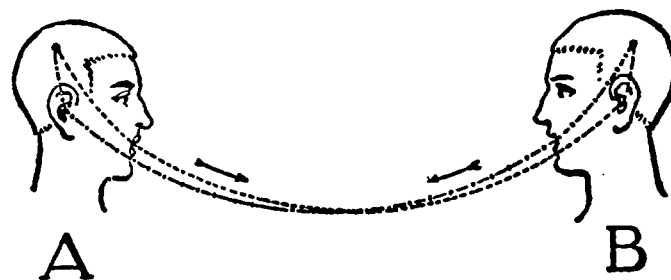


Figure 2: Ideal communication (Saussure 1966, 11)

communication: the medium disappears. This is another modernist motivation for distinguishing literature from disciplinary literature, for “[t]he formal qualities of literature are the result of a process that multiplies or complicates the normal features of human communication” (Scholes 1982, 35). Despite the problematics of such complications, and the scientific desire to be rid of them, the productivity of language—its production, regulation, and inflection of meaning through rhetorical practices—will not be effaced.

“Both learned and imaginative writing are never free, but are limited in their imagery, assumptions and intentions” (Said 1979, 201-202). The problem with specularity is that it is a narrative which, in order to maintain faith in its revelation of truth, is necessarily unconscious of its own narrativity (and therefore of its own narrative politics and limitations): “As you proceed along the narrative, the narrative takes on its own impetus as it were, so that one begins to see reality as non-narrated” (Spivak 1990h, 19). *All* realities are stories. Truth is the unacknowledged fiction of a successful discourse. This has been addressed in sociology by Van Maanen (1988) and Atkinson (1990), though not as incisively as by anthropological historian Clifford (1986a, 1986b, 1988b, 1988c) and anthropologists like Crapanzano (1986), Tyler (1986), and Rabinow (1986). However, the simple fact that (some) sociology is acknowledging the fictiveness of the discipline is quite a separate matter from general acceptance. Disciplinary boundaries are, to use Clifford’s phrase, “partial truths” (1986a). Taken-for-granted academic parochialism seems suspiciously like a strategy of political exclusion, an attempt to hold onto territory that becomes untenable when the ground itself is seen to be moving (Clifford 1986a, 22,24). Poststructuralism is minatory to orthodox sociology not just because of its heretical theory, but because its irreverent practice destabilizes the vision of the domain of the discipline. If sociology wants to speak of its rightful ‘domain’ and ‘field’, it is legitimate to probe further into the real estate trope and question how the discipline claims ownership of its property.

The trope of property pervades the sociological identity. As Game points out, the discipline’s idea of interdisciplinarity is “taking insights from other areas in order to produce a better or more complete sociology” (1991, 4)—in other words, interdisciplinarity is colonization and appropriation which maintains and even strengthens the discipline’s boundaries, instead of transgressing them. When the real estate metaphor is rejected, the relevant question to be made of this text is not, “Is this written like sociology?”, but rather the very pragmatic, “How should a sociology of fictional love be

written?" Inquiry no longer orients to received ideas, but to the Geertzian necessities of the work. Thus, a sociological research project into postmodern love is *inescapably* a fiction about fiction. It is the writing out of love stories. What Clifford and Geertz and other writers have unintentionally imposed on this project is the imperative to write sociological metafiction—fiction that conscientiously and explicitly acknowledges that it is indeed fiction.⁹

The sociological rejection of literature, once the scientific aspirations and rhetoric are displaced, is a very curious one, even at the level of what the discipline is concerned with, and quite aside from poststructuralist concerns with writing and the text. "Literature takes as its subject all of human experience, and particularly the ordering, interpreting, and articulating of experience.... Because of its exploration of the limits of intelligibility, literature invites or provokes theoretical discussions that draw in or draw upon the most general questions of rationality, of self-reflexivity, and of signification" (Culler 1982, 10-11). This seems to me as good a definition of the mission of sociology as any I have read. Yet, just as it was noted that both literature and sociological literature are politically infested, this seeming valorization of literature must also be resisted. Literature is no more sacred than science; literature is penetrated by sociology just as sociology is penetrated by literature. As Frye says, we need to "account for the fact that so many great writers have been ideological fat-heads: Yeats, Pound, Lawrence—you name them" (Salusinszky 1987, 33). I have privileged literature as a tactic of resisting dominant sociology, but this is an unstable and invertible hierarchy. Literature, no less than truth, is no absolute ground. The deconstructive moment here is a gentle apocalypse:

The old values are no longer transmitted, no longer circulate, no longer impress; literature is desacralized, institutions are impotent to defend and impose it as the implicit model of the human. It is not, if you will that literature is destroyed; rather *it is no longer protected*: so this is the

⁹ Significantly, metafiction is identified with poetry, puns, and tropes: "the secret life of words" (Lecerle 1990, 56).

moment to go there. Literary semiology is, as it were, that journey that lands us in a country free by default; angels and dragons are no longer there to defend it. Our gaze can fall, not without perversity, upon certain old and lovely things, whose signified is abstract, out of date. It is a moment at once decadent and prophetic, a moment of gentle apocalypse, a historical moment of the greatest possible pleasure.

(Barthes 1982b, 475-6, emphasis in original)

2.5: As If We Expect Poetry to Erupt in Some Human Being

Crossing into literature means taking storytelling, and therefore tropes, seriously. “Stories are told or written, not found. And as for the notion of a ‘true’ *story*, this is virtually a contradiction in terms. *All* stories are fictions. Which means, of course, that they can be ‘true’ only in a metaphorical sense and in the sense in which a figure of speech can be true. Is this true enough?” (White 1989, 27, emphasis in original). This text would fail its own demands if it merely considered itself to be *about* discourse, since it is utterly immersed in the same discursive issues of love it addresses as an object of research. The collapse of the ground of truth is a general one—no Archimedean point remains here either. The ends of inquiry change, in more than one sense. The imperative of metafiction provides the start.

The metafiction being written out here is one of the regimes of truth of love. This may be articulated as a lexical displacement: “Once the social is thought in terms of textual production the question becomes: ‘How does this particular social text mean?’ Analysis is concerned with ‘the how’ of meaning rather than ‘what is’ questions that demand *a* meaning or signified” (Game 1991, 5, emphasis in original). ‘How’ questions displace ‘what’ questions. This text sets aside the dubious ambition of determining what love is, in order to investigate how the regimes of truth of love operate through tropes. Thus, although I began by disputing the grounds of the psychological definition of love, I now recant: I am not really claiming that the definition is wrong. Neither am I admitting that it is right. Truth value is not the point; the regime of truth is. This takes up the Derridean project: “Deconstruction is not exposure of error, it is a vigilance about the fact

that we are always obliged to produce truth” (Spivak: 1990c). Thus, here the psychology of love is not so much being damned, but being read as a sociological and discursive production. It is the regnancy of that specific psychologized truth that is both resisted and probed here; as it is only one story among possible alternatives, what is interesting is why and how it is currently one of singular consequence. The sociology of the matter is in the presuppositions and ramifications of the circulation of that particular story, and the suppression of others. The politics of the matter fall out of this move to polysemy. “Taking up a methodology of multiplicity in specific cultural or social analyses is one means of writing in a more open way than is allowed for by the rules of academic (specifically social science) discourse” (Game 1991, 191). The openness of texts is the principal new criterion that Game proposes to replace representational validity, and which can be added to metafictionality. In the absence of truth, transparency, and determinate meaning, validity loses its significance, if not its relevance altogether. Openness is a theme that plays throughout Game’s own text, a theme that she adopts from Barthes. She calls for ‘seductive’ sociological texts, ones that invite further writings and rewritings. The rhizomatous or ‘nomad’ thought of Deleuze and Guattari is variation of openness. “Nomad space is ‘smooth,’ or open-ended. One can rise up at any point and move to any other. Its mode of distribution is the *nomos*: arraying oneself in an open space (hold the street), as opposed to the *logos* of entrenching oneself in a closed space (hold the fort)” (Massumi 1987, xiii). In the move from the seizure of unified truth to the play of multiple readings, the lucid is displaced by the ludic. However, as noted above, the multiplicity of texts is not a fall into utter relativism, and poststructuralist critique is not just the legitimation of saying anything. On one hand, one cannot speak of anything at any time. On the other, part of the poststructuralist critical enterprise is to make possible other readings, in the constant awareness that such an enterprise, strive as it might, cannot get utterly outside the very same historical bounds of meaning that unify and limit extant texts. Clifford writes that what is real is always analyzable as a “restrictive and expressive

set of social codes” (1986, 10). Likewise, what is valorized as emancipatory, including the ambitions of this text, is always analyzable as set of constraints. Even emancipation does not suffice as the new transcendental signified, though it has become the ironic and disturbingly uncritical resurrection of a motherhood issue for the academic left. In being skeptical of that move, I am not playing the apologist for the status quo. Rather, I am insisting on the need to examine how any strategy which emancipates also restricts—it is no more sufficient to cry “emancipation” than it is to crow “free enterprise.” If nothing else, the poststructuralist attention to language must make us more sensitive to and critical of all slogans, however inevitable they may be. By being more critical, writing and reading can indeed become more mobile, if never ‘free’. “There is no text that is not an occasion of power, which is manifested according to distinctions, categories, relationships, procedures, and forms that require a political interpretation, since any formal systematization of them would repress the differences at play in their articulation. However, this is not to say there is no point to formal analysis. *It is only to say that any signifying form ... is as mobile and as open to change as we are able to make it through the critical analysis of rhetorical authority.*” (Cottom 1991, 40, emphasis added)

The rhetorical authority of specular sociology derives from using *seeing* as a trope for understanding. Its politics are foregrounded by seeing visualism—the hegemony of vision—as a variation on transparency of representation and clarity of writing. “Narrative is the specific form taken by written history to counter the permanence of vision” (Said 1979, 240). The critique of visualism is not a new one, at least in anthropology and literary criticism (Clifford 1986a, 11-12; Crapanzano 1986, 57; Geoffrey Hartman, in Salusinszky 1987, 83). ‘Looking at’ operationalizes objectifying (in both senses) a given fiction of reality. “Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually—as objects, theaters, texts—it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and towards expressive

speech (and gesture)” (Clifford 1986a, 12). “Vision is insufficient.... The domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision” (Said 1979, 240). It is no coincidence that transparency is an ocular metaphor. The trope of seeing as understanding is as constraining as it is productive. Visualism, and therefore specularity, is an imperial regime of truth. Now, I am not urging that the tyranny of the eye be replaced by the tyranny of the ear of the listener or the tyranny of the voice of the storyteller (replacements that in present circumstances are not likely to soon occur, in any case). Instead, the attention to voice and discourse is a tactical resistance to the dominance of visualism (Hartman, in Salusinszky 1987, 83). Totalizing and totalitarian politics of any kind is what poststructuralist openness and mobility resist.

As a result, no specific protocols of love will emerge from my work, because no truths of love are sought. As it works to open the world, my work will pass no standards of validity—insofar as validity is measured against either a posited truth or representations of a posited real world—because I seek to continuously undermine truth, and problematize real worlds and their transparent representations. If the imperative of reading is to read until the text turns, the corresponding imperative of research is to inquire until the representation—the truth, the narrative, the system of validity itself—turns. Hence, this text will not even argue for one method of thinking. In a recent seminar someone told me that I should have told him how to think, but that most frightening of totalitarian missions is just what I want to disavow. I do not want to tell anyone how to think (although I cannot avoid such telling as I tell my own stories); I do not want to offer truths that I do not possess (although I cannot avoid own provisional truths and beliefs—to claim there is no truth is obviously to proclaim a truth).

These negative desires do not make me a nihilist, though I join the select company of Nietzsche and Derrida when I get accused of being one. Neither do they make me a cynic, though I have been accused of heartlessly seeking to mire lovers in a hopeless state, taking away their long-cherished grounds for love without providing them positive replacement for what has been lost. I read myself as offering a choice: On one hand, people can maintain that they know or can know truths of love. Those people have no need of me, and I genuinely hope they fare well with their truths. They already possess the programs of love that I can never achieve. My general impression, though, is that those programs have fallen short of universal success, inasmuch as the world does not seem to me to be replete with happy lovers. On the other hand, people can feel that their truths of love have failed them. I cannot provide a program for them; I cannot write out guidelines; I cannot give them anything sound and reliable; I cannot give them the modernist solutions that they crave. All of these alternatives are aliases for the now absent truth. What I *can* do is best written by someone else's trope (love is always something of a quotation; we are continually writing someone else's tropes into our own stories). So the words of Hannah Arendt: "We who for the most part are neither poets nor historians are ... [nonetheless] preparing the way for 'poetry', ... [as if] we are ... constantly expecting it to erupt in some human being" (1968, 21). This is one of my favorite texts about love. It is even more beautiful and more appropriate than it seems at first sight, because it is also more deceitful. I have framed this text as a discourse on love, but that was not what Arendt intended—or so I think: the passage is embedded in an essay on Lessing and totalitarianism. I have framed this text as a quotation of Arendt, but the ellipses and bracketed insertions testify that I have rewritten her. I have attributed the words to Arendt, but even those words that I have not forced upon her are simultaneously hers and not hers, for the passage is a translation from German by second parties. So my quoting Arendt is both an appropriation of an already highly contaminated text and a

subversion to my own purpose. I turn this passage, already pulsing with tropes, into a trope for my text: at best, what I can do, is prepare the way for poetry.

What does that mean, in less romanticized terms? It means a criticism of love through writing and reading. It means an explication of the power of the texts of everyday life, enabling people to analyze and criticize both that power and their own productions of meaning. These are defensible, realistic aspirations for a poststructuralist sociology. *Program* is an unfortunate word, but if I have a program, it is “arming people with the power to read, which I see as an absolutely fundamental necessity in order for them to make their way in the present world” (J. Hillis Miller, in Salusinszky 1987, 217). This text strives to demonstrate its assumption, namely that the linguistic and the social penetrate each other. “What a notion of textuality in general does is to see that what is defined over against ‘The Text’ as ‘fact’ or ‘life’ or even ‘practice’ is to an extent worlded in a certain way so that practice can take place” (Spivak 1990a, 2).

Or “preparing the way for poetry” may be read as the simultaneous pursuit of enchantment and disenchantment. “Obviously literature has an enchanting effect; obviously there are many things in life that are enchanters, and life may be a process of disenchantments. What [one finds] is that there’s no progress in that; that one falls from one enchantment into another through a method which one thinks is going to disenchant one” (Hartman, in Salusinszky 1987, 84). This reads, appropriately, like a trope for love itself. The contention here is that this association is no accident. The discursive formations of love make a chiasmus where the text becomes worldly and the world textual. The incoherence of enchantment/disenchantment is then readable as a manifestation of the incoherence of the accommodation of polysemic love to a modern sensibility which demands monosemy. As a first-pass suggestion, what is necessary is a criticism of the regimes of truth in which this incoherent cultural text works. In preparing the way for poetry, love and discourse are like beer and TV. Scholes notes, in concluding a brief semiotic analysis of an American Budweiser commercial, “At a time when critics

such as William Bennett and E. D. Hirsch are bemoaning our ignorance of culture, it is important to realize that many Americans [and Canadians and Japanese and ...] are not without culture; they simply have a different culture from that of Bennett and Hirsch. What they really lack, for the most part, is any way of analyzing and criticizing the power of a text like the Budweiser commercial—not its power to sell beer, which is easily resisted, especially once you have tasted better beer—but its power to sell America” (1989, 124-5).

Or preparing the way for poetry is like Barbara Johnson speaking of a gifted teacher she had, “who used a text that you could hold in your hand to expand or exfoliate a set of questions” (Salusinszky 1987, 161).¹⁰

Or preparing the way for poetry is like Susan Sontag eloquently limning the enormous project of Roland Barthes, by invoking Nietzsche: “All of Barthes’s work is an exploration of the histrionic or ludic; in many ingenious modes, a plea for savor, for a festive (rather than dogmatic or credulous) relation to ideas. For Barthes, as for Nietzsche, the point is not to teach us something in particular. *The point is to make us bold, agile, subtle, intelligent, detached. And to give pleasure*” (1983, 432, emphasis added). Sontag links openness to disturbing pleasure, which is a second criterion Game takes from Barthes. This disturbance is also the pleasure of the open text; what is disturbed is closure—truth framed as the fixing of meaning. Also disturbed is certainty, which is closely allied to closure, but distinguishable from it. To recognize openness is to acknowledge the partialness of all stories and explanations. This is a different form of the hoary saw about the getting of wisdom being the awareness of ignorance. “It is not, in the final analysis, what you don’t know that can or cannot hurt you. It is what you don’t *know*

¹⁰ The gifted teacher was Paul de Man, and Johnson’s comments antedate the notorious posthumous revelation of his Nazi sympathies (see Johnson 1990). This footnote is included deliberately to undermine the text. On the other hand, this is footnote, and not part of the body. Whether this is honest or dishonest politics is something I am in no position to decide.

you don't know that spins out and entangles 'that perpetual error we call life'" (Johnson 1985, xii, emphasis in original). Unsurprisingly, openness, pleasure, and disturbance are interwoven. Thus, in a sociology of open works, the ludic displaces the specular. "Implicit here is a reference to Freud's account of the pleasure principle as the breaker of the peace, for which we might read the comfortable coded of culture. Furthermore, the pleasure principle is associated with life and is constituted in deferral: a disturbing pleasure is that which never arrives, but moves us forward into infinity" (Game 1991, 191). *Contra* Giddens, poststructuralism is about life, and not death—at least the textual death of closure. To invert the more familiar metaphor in which writing stands in for living, writing can be troped by material reality: "the zero degree of life is death" (Scholes 1982, 65)—a new cant to the somberness of objectivity. To resist this particular seriousness, this *petit mort* of another kind, with poststructuralism may appear bizarre. The poststructuralist discourse is so freighted that it may seem too laborious. But too much work and not enough play would make Jacques (Derrida) a dull boy, and the play (in all senses of the word) of language does indeed obtain. "Like a diaphanous nightgown, language both hides and reveals. There is no way of getting at the naked truth, even if it's wearing the Emperor's New Clothes, or the Empress's New Clothos.¹¹ We follow our Mother Tongue into her boudoir, anyway, hoping for a glimpse of something never yet beheld—and come face to face with our own reflections in her most private mirror, veiled meanings in a gossamer heap on the floor. And still there are enough words left in the old girl's voice to sing us to sleep once again. 'I've got *you* uncovered,' she says" (Gordon 1989, xiv, emphasis in original).

Thus, three provisional criteria are offered in place of modernist standards of validity: Metafictionality. Openness. Disturbing pleasure. These criteria can be read as imbricated, or they can be read as different aspects of the same poststructuralist heuristic,

¹¹ Clotho is one of the three Fates. She carries the spindle and spins the thread of life.

namely the reflexive or recursive turn of discourse (Hayles 1990, 35). For the reader who, as a social scientist, is looking for the virtues of the lucid writing, tight argument, satisfying explanations of repeated patterns of group behavior—in other words, all the emblems of specularity and the modernist heuristic—the orientation of this thesis to these criteria will brand it a hopeless failure. Good. In this poststructuralist gaze, this failure is success, for those modernist virtues are the very presumptions which are being contested here.

There is a central tradition of philosophy [which has been adopted by dominant sociology], to which both the critical approach of Descartes and Kant, and the systematic one of Aristotle and Hegel belong. It is based on three assumptions: the power of truth, the foundational role of myth (e.g. the Cave), and the juridical contract between reason and language. *Imperium, muthos, logos*: the model of philosophy is Truth, Justice and Law.... It is governed by two universal concepts—Totality (as the foundation of Being) and the Subject. But there is another tradition, subordinate but persistent; that of antinomian thought (outside the main tradition, and beyond the control of the subject): its heroes are philosophers like Nietzsche or Kierkegaard, or poets like Artaud and Kleist; its form is not argumentative and logical, but aphoristic; its main characteristic is not *muthos* or *logos*, but *pathos*—personal involvement, the experience of suffering; not so much a foundation as a foundering. For them there is no Totality, and there is no Subject to grasp it, only a collection of fragments, particles, and flows of desire. And since there is no *logos*, there is no control over language. (Lecerle 1985, 163)

Frye writes, “I read so many articles which *are* arguments, which don’t seem to get anywhere in particular, but which are sufficiently coordinated to be publishable as arguments” (Salusinszky 1987, 37). A very loose kind of extended argument drifts throughout this text, but it is a poor one as arguments go. An argument is supposed to have a point, a conclusion, a closure, a destination, an end, and none of these modernisms are prominent here. To adopt the Spivakian “mind set” of not being dismayed by continuously undermining one’s own work is to eschew such closures and terminations. This text will not close; “it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25). Yet, I submit that it is better to be on the way somewhere (even if I never get there) than to polish the argument, for any argument tightens up only by closing up, and *that* is surely the wrong direction.

Once argument is decentered, what is left? Recalling Arendt and preparing the way for poetry, “what’s left is to make the next poem possible” (Harold Bloom, in Salusinszky 1987, 60). A certain obstinacy is necessary. “Keeping emotionality center stage means that we do not subvert our project by turning emotions into variables. Nor do we ask how a focus on the emotions can fill out, or better inform traditionally established areas of sociological study. Our project should be emotionality: how emotionality, as a process, is lived, experienced and *given meaning* by interacting individuals” (Denzin 1990, 109, emphasis added).

”What begins [here] as clarification ends as nonsense, producing categories so exclusive or inclusive that they bring all attempts at systematic thinking about [love and meaning] into disrepute. [But] muddling along, in ... theory as in life, is often more humane and even more efficient than the alternatives offered by political, ethical, or esthetic systems” (Scholes 1982, 17). Muddling along and being more humane is a more appealing aspiration than meeting disciplinary standards of validity. Muddling along and being more humane is a better practice than reducing people’s humanity to behaviour, or love to truth.

Chapter Three

The Trope: Love Is A Flight of Metaphors

The language of love is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be most straightforward; it is a flight of metaphors—it is literature.

Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*

The identification of love with poetics is maintained by popular and professional discourses alike. Even psychologists, those most scientific of social scientists, concede the ascendancy of literature when they write of love. Zick Rubin, in his preface to a 1988 survey of the state of research in the psychology of love, admits that “psychologists are not about to displace poets or novelists as society’s preeminent observers of love” (1988, xi). Rubin himself is observing that love marks the limit of the regime of psychological truth—which is not so much to say that psychology is wrong, but that it is insufficient. This limit manifests in the difficulties and preeminence of literary language. The convergence of Rubin to Kristeva locates the crux of the matter, for Kristeva recognizes that the metaphorical language of love is impossible, inadequate and allusive—anything but straightforward. Resurfacing are the familiar issues of clarity and opacity, scientific discourse and literature, regimes of truth, and the integrity of disciplinary boundaries. Now the relevance of Chapter Two’s discourse on discourse to the sociology of love becomes—to use an infelicitous phrase—clearer. Love is the critical site where these discursive problematics cannot be evaded or ignored—as they can be in political economy, where Marxist critics show no deference to poets, or in the theory of new social movements, where sociologists show no deference to novelists. I am not implying that there are sectors of writing, thinking, or theorizing which escape the Derridean critique of meaning in general, for that critique encompasses the very nature of textuality. Rather, I am claiming that love is the place where even the pretense of immunity cannot be explicitly and straightforwardly sustained. Instead, modernist discourses, when

confronted by love, resort to obscurant tactics such as disingenuous concessions to poetry and literature, or, as will be discussed below, superficial avowals of the ineffability, impenetrability, and mystery of love. Love is therefore a place where modernist discourses conceal their own insufficiencies, a site of strategic vulnerability in the modernist regime of truth. It is therefore an apt location for poststructuralist sociological analytic to attempt entry.

The discursive problematics of love condense around its constitutive tropes, which resist accommodation to referential meaning. Here is the first hint as to why love is troubling, in different ways, to the discourses of psychology, sociology, and everyday life: it disrupts the fundamental operations of meaning which structure, define and sustain those modernist discourses. “Love comes on the scene like the fire which breaks out on the stage of the theatre: it’s an interruption” (Schneider, in Mortley 1991, 33). The tropes of love comprise a rhetoric of disruption.

In its most immediate sense, a trope is any rhetorical figure or literary device, including the familiar—such as metaphor, synecdoche, and alliteration—and the less familiar—such as anamnesis, chiasmus, and elision. Dupriez (1991) identifies some 4000 tropes, which attests to the breadth of their range and differentiation. The key recognition is that tropes are indeed rhetorical; they are the moments of language turning upon itself, rather than of language referencing the extralinguistic world. The recursiveness of tropes necessarily distances them from modernist meaning: “Quintilian first introduced the definition of the figure (and trope) as ‘a departure from the simple and straightforward method of expression’” (Nöth 1990, 341). The trope, while being at least as ancient as Latin, is nonetheless a fitting realization of poststructuralist meaning, in which purportedly explicit, closed, isomorphic reference accedes to loose, variable, and polymorphous semantic play. It was no coincidence that Chapter Two opened by troping poststructuralist meaning with the trope, and by troping modernist meaning with the name. The trope is the polysemous turn of language; the trope is the inflorescence of

meaning¹. *Inflorescence*, as a biological and botanical trope for the poststructuralist production of meaning (tropes upon tropes, wheels within wheels), invokes the happy connotation of the rhizomatous formations of Deleuze and Guattari. “A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with roots or radicles may be rhizomorphic in other respects altogether: the question is whether plant life in its specificity is not entirely rhizomatic. Even some animals are, in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extensions in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. When rats swarm over each other.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 6-7) *Inflorescence* may seem a mawkishly over-romantic image next to that of swarming rats, but this very excess is circumstantially apt, given that the signifying operations of local love excuse (and sometimes are identical with) the most excessively flowery language. More importantly, it is precisely the severe incongruity of blossoms and vermin that makes the pair *inflorescence:rhizomatousness* so analytically useful. These characterizations of tropes are, of course, themselves tropes. Tropical analysis necessarily turns upon itself. Then the difference between the connotations of these tropes itself tropes the range and difference of tropical meaning proliferating under the sign of love. Thus, *inflorescence* images the poststructuralist production of meaning; *rhizomatousness* images the poststructuralist relations of meaning. “The rules are no longer explicit and clear cut; meaning is no longer obtained by definition and composition through projection rules: the winding paths of allusion, echo, private play on words and figures of speech must be tentatively explored; they never yield more than fragments of meaning, which it is almost impossible to assemble into a coherent whole, a totality” (Lecerle 1985, 67).

¹ Hölderlin writes that language is “the flower of the mouth” (Lecerle 1990, 113).

The tropical inflorescence and rhizomatousness of meaning is more easily demonstrated by narrowing the focus to one specific trope, the metaphor, and then linking metaphor to its subsuming term. The relation between trope and metaphor has fluctuated across theory and history, since, typical of the rhetoric of rhetoric, both terms have several meanings (Lecercle 1990, 59). Sometimes metaphor is taken as one of two analytical axes of tropes, independent of metonymy—Jakobson’s schema (Evans 1986, 144); sometimes it is distinguished from metonymy, synecdoche and irony—Ramus and Vico’s schema (Whalley and Martin 1986, 140); sometimes it is counted among many other figures (Nöth 1990, 128); sometimes metaphor is considered the prototypic trope. Classically, a metaphor fills a lexical lacuna (Ricoeur 1978b, 143). The metaphor is the necessary recourse of language in the failure of literalness. The excess of polysemic metaphoricity succeeds where monosemic referentiality cannot, for monosemy is not so much the clarity of language as the impoverishment of meaning. The recourse to metaphor is not merely a matter of moving into uncharted linguistic territory. For Lakoff and Johnson, love is “structured mostly in metaphorical terms ... [because,] typical of emotional concepts, ... [love is] not *clearly* delineated in our experience in any direct fashion” (1980, 85, emphasis added). The trope of clarity/obscurity has come again, this time as immanent to the nature and meaning of the trope itself. Lakoff and Johnson are suggesting that metaphors pervade the terrain of love because love is so notoriously hard to define.² Yet their proposition can be inverted chiasmatically: perhaps love is so hard to define because it is metaphorical—or, more generally, tropical. What is primary and therefore privileged is moot; what is evident and crucial, even to psychologists of love, is that love and tropes suffuse each other. The perpetual difficulty in defining love is intriguing and revealing, because love is not rare and alien, but immediate and familiar.

² Not that psychologists haven’t claimed to have succeeded in defining love. For example, Shaver et al. 1988; Sternberg 1988.

Nonetheless, thousands of years of writing of love have not closed on a satisfying definition. Love still eludes the rational systematics of language. It is described and inscribed tropically, in language's irrationality, in the plenitude of connotation and imprecision.

The fortunate paradox is that this complication of meaning can be simultaneously a simplification. In catachresis, in the failure of reference, a constellation of metaphorical meaning can nonetheless coalesce around a tangible and familiar vehicle. The metaphor can *materialize* meaning, enabling what is indirect and elusive to be grasped through the seemingly concrete. For example: "Love is a spirit all compact of fire" (Shakespeare 1988, 23). Or an equally tangible fire metaphor: "Love is a burnt match skating in a urinal" (Hart Crane, in Winokur 1987, 75). Put together, each metaphor mediates, and is mediated by, the other; put together, each meaning cannot escape the other's connotation. The materiality of some metaphors of love allows the meaning of love to be grasped, but this does not mean that it has been seized. It has only been sampled. Concreteness is a separate matter from closure, regardless of what referential notions of meaning presume, because references do not escape the influence of discourse when they are implicated in the rhetorical operations of tropes. Moving from Shakespeare to Crane, the referent of fire remains fire, but the meaning of fire, and therefore its impact when it subsequently reenters the world as an image of love, shifts dramatically. Concreteness manifests the real force of discourse in the world—its utility, in an approximate, unsatisfactory sense—rather than troping the control of discourse by the world.

The metaphor is thus plurally productive: it concomitantly infloresces meaning and enables understanding. Consider the proliferation of meanings in the figure of simple friendship in the local popular discourses of love. Friendship is the essence of love: "My

husband is my best friend.”³ Friendship is the essence of non-love: “Lori’s in love with her, but Beth just wants to be friends.” Friendship is the romantic construction of identity: “she’s my girlfriend.” Friendship is desexualized, Platonic love: “I love him as a friend.” Friendship is the valorized precursor of love: “We fell in love because we started off as friends, which is the best way.” Friendship is the valorized residue of love: “But we can still be friends.” Friendship is the contestation of all these variations, when it is deployed in lesbian and gay discourses as a body of conventions for love that rejects marriage, as a tactical response to how heterosexist marriage rejects the homosexual lover (Seidman 173). Friendship and love display diverse and incoherent relations of meaning.

The entwined inflorescence and rhizomatousness of meaning constitute the difficult power of metaphors, and of tropes in general. To characterize the trope metaphorically, and once again blur genres, the trope has the sense of classical music’s leitmotif—a “theme song.” In Wagnerian opera, “through a process of continual transformation the leitmotifs trace the course of the drama, the changes in characters, their experiences and memories, their thoughts and hidden desires. As the leitmotifs *accumulate layer upon layer of meaning*, they themselves become characters in the drama, symbols of the relentless process of growth and decay that rules the destinies of gods and heroes.” (Machlis 1970, 186-87, emphasis added) The imbrication of meaning, then, both materializes the leitmotif (makes it more concrete) and generalizes it as a sign (makes it more abstract). Troping love as leitmotif is especially appropriate in local discourse, where love is often constructed as transcendental, or, in Richard Shweder’s terms, *romantic*: “To make contact with the really real, the inspired (=divinelike) imagination of human beings must be projected out to reality; or, alternatively, the gods must descend to earth” (Shweder 1991, 9).

³ This was the most frequent response survey researchers Lauer and Lauer were given by both men and women when asked “What keeps a marriage going?” (Lundy and Warne 1986, 256)

Despite the materialization of love, through tropes of fire and gods and heroes, the inflorescence of meaning is problematic to any hermeneutic: “Love is a crucible of contradictions and misunderstandings—at the same time infinity of meaning and occultation of meaning.... It is revealed as such in the wandering of metaphorical connotation.... Do we speak of the same thing when we speak of love? And of which thing? The ordeal of love puts the univocity of language and its referential and communicative power to the test.” (Kristeva 1987, 2) These difficulties suggest the transgressiveness of tropes. Insofar as they exceed standard language, and insofar as they invoke the literal falsehood of metaphors (love is not fire, even if it is; love does not skate in a urinal, even if it feels like it does), tropes have the air of the illicit—the air of Kristeva’s contradictions and misunderstandings. On the other hand, they are domesticated outlaws; they have the somewhat fusty legitimacy of more than two millennia of academic attention. While tropes test and transgress the limits of language, insofar as they are recognized as figurative they are neither ungrammatical or illegal, although at certain times and in certain circles they have been extremely unpopular.⁴ Tropes cross some ill-defined boundary, but “how do you cross a frontier, if not by taking the main road (the French aptly call them ‘*voies de communication*’) up to the warning sign, and then going across?” (Lecercle 1990, 60). Lecercle holds that language has both a bright and a dark side, that meaning has both reference and inflorescence, and he believes that both sides are always present in any text or instance of discourse (1985, 71). This paraphrases the contention made in Chapter Two, namely that literary procedures—the dark aspects of language—pervade all writing. Those omnipresent literary procedures are tropes by another name. Ostensibly licit, tropes are subversive, rather than rebellious;

⁴ “All the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, *move the passions*, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are perfect cheats” (John Locke, *Essay* (bk. 3, chap. 10), cited in Cohen (1978, 2). Emphasis added).

they commit their transgressions, but they do so by beginning within the conventions of language.

The production of force in the world by tropes can be scanned as a poststructuralist strategy of analysis. Love can be read through the discursive operations of the specific trope of pathopoeia. This is a staple figure in both literary criticism and popular reading, one whose orthodox meaning is emotionally evocative language—in the literature of love, the poetics of romance. With the poststructuralist displacement of linguistic referentiality by discursive productivity, pathopoeia exceeds its conventional glamour to realize its etymology: the literal translation from ancient Greek is the “making of feeling” (Cuddon 1982, 493). Wedding this transfiguration of pathopoeia to James Clifford’s (1986a, 16) concern with ongoing cultural poesis, I call this thesis an inquiry into the *pathopoesis* of popular discourse—how discourse makes love.

Pathopoeia, as a matter of poetics, is sometimes cast as mere ornamentation. This does not mean pathopoeia is necessarily superficial. Consider ornamentation a matter of style and Sontag becomes apropos: “Every style embodies an epistemological decision, an interpretation of how and what we perceive” (1966, 35). This is the *raison d’être* of classical pathopoeia. Consider that there are more and less meaningful ways of saying, “I love you,” as Cyrano proved to Christian below Roxane’s balcony (Rostand 1981, 100-114). Or consider the grammar of “I love you” in English and the stylistic subtleties of translation, as Julian Barnes describes:

‘I love you’.... These are grand words; we must make sure we deserve them. Listen to them again: ‘I love you.’ Subject, verb, object: the unadorned, impregnable sentence. The subject is a short word, implying the self-effacement of the lover. The verb is longer but unambiguous, a demonstrative moment as the tongue flicks anxiously away from the palate to release the vowel. The object, like the subject, has no consonants, and is attained by pushing the lips forward as if for a kiss. ‘I love you.’ How serious, how weighted, how freighted it sounds.

I imagine a phonic conspiracy between the world’s languages. They make a conference decision that the phrase must always sound like something to be earned, to be striven for, to be worthy of. *Ich liebe dich*: a late-night, cigarette-voiced whisper, with that happy rhyme of subject and object.

Je t'aime: a different procedure, with the subject and object being got out of the way first, so that the long vowel of adoration can be savoured to the full. (The grammar is also one of reassurance: with the object positioned second, the beloved isn't suddenly going to turn out to be someone different.) *Ya tebya lyublyu*: the object once more in consoling second position, but this time—despite the hinting rhyme of subject and object—an implication of difficulty, obstacles to be overcome. *Ti amo*: it sounds perhaps a bit too much like an *apératif*, but is full of structural conviction with subject and verb, the doer and the deed, enclosed in the same word.

(1989, 227-228)

Barnes is usefully read as an inter-linguistic trope of intra-linguistic differentiation, for, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, “style is a language within a language, competing with other languages that are the same language” (Lecercle 1990, 186). Cyrano is famous for being eloquent, but that eloquence varies across his verse, blank verse, and prose translations: the same, but different (Rostand 1972, 1981, 1990, 1991). Style works upon meaning—it produces, inflects, excludes, elides. Ornamentation is more serious than the adornment of the plain-spoken.

Even beyond ornamentation, the pathopoetic tropicality of love is hardly a novel conception. Echoing Rubin, Lakoff and Johnson, and Kristeva, Theodore Sarbin (1986, 84) holds that emotion itself is a metaphor. Baudrillard is more wildly postmodern: “It may even be that ... love is only the diffuse metaphor of the fall of beings into individualism and the compensatory invention of a universal energy that would incline these beings to each other. By what providential effect, by what miracle of will, by what stroke of theatre would beings have been destined to love one another, by what crazy imagination could one conceive that ‘I love you,’ that people love each other, that we love each other?” (1990, 100). All of this reads like traditional pathopoeia. But the tropes of love exceed poetics, for they are abundant and familiar even in mundane discourse. In a list that does not attempt to be exhaustive, Lakoff and Johnson give forty-three examples (such as “I could feel the *electricity* between us,” “There were *sparks*,” “The marriage is *dead*,” “I’m *crazy* about her,” “The *magic* is gone,” “She *pursued* him *relentlessly*”) of specific instances of general metaphors like “Love is a physical force” and “Love is war.” (1980, 34, emphasis in original) Zoltán Kövecses identifies roughly 300 English

“conventionalized expressions about love” (1990, 43): metaphors, metonymies, idioms, clichés, sayings, proverbs, collocations and others which are in widespread usage. He adds there are also “creative, novel, unconventional or non-standardized expressions ... [such as those] used by a good poet when he or she writes about love” (1990, 43). Perhaps the most obvious and widely dispersed figure of love, in poetry and mundane discourse, is the sign of the heart, the dominant incarnation of the medical/pathological trope (and its seductive connotations of the natural body).⁵

The tropicity of love may be nearly banal, but the recourse to tropes for analysis is a perilous turn. Since Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, literally thousands of treatises on the nature of metaphor have been put forward, and, even more daunting, “no end of this scholarly tradition is in sight.” (Nöth 1990, 129) As a result, given my sociological aspirations outside this imposing tradition⁶ and my realistically modest aspirations for fluency within it, this thesis will necessarily work with a partial and eclectic understanding of metaphor, which will in turn necessarily constrain contingent analysis. In characteristic poststructuralist fashion, the texts of metaphor cannot be mastered. This discourse of inquiry must remain incomplete. Yet such partialness does not obviate the productivity of theorizing metaphor. Instead, it surfaces the limitations inherent in any production of meaning.

One thing that this text is capable of doing is drawing on the theorizing of how metaphors—and tropes in general—problematize meaning and truth (in quintessentially poststructuralist fashion), and how their deployment within a discourse reflexively constitutes that discourse. “As that which lies outside the literal, normal, proper, or

⁵ Anticipating the discussion to come of the implication of tropes in the politics of meaning, I offer Lutz’s (1990, 72) acute observation that the medical figuration of emotion is necessary to the appropriation of authority in knowledges of emotion by the medical and quasi-medical professions like psychology and psychiatry.

⁶ Although the subtext permeating this paper is that sociology is itself inescapably tropical.

systematic, metaphor serves as the topic through which each system defines itself: metaphor is not simply false, but that which marks the limits of the distinctions between true and false, or meaningful and deviant” (Whalley and Martin 1986, 140). Metaphor is therefore the boundary of theory, and more: “The starting point of a theory is generally the choice of the relevant metaphors, in terms of it will proceed to construct its object” (Lecercle 1990, 18). Thus, unpacking the tropes of love is a means of identifying and analyzing the regimes of truth of love, of finding where they begin and end.

The metaphor of love is the moment in which being and textuality at once converge and diverge. Thus, Kristeva, who in the above citation may seem to be writing conventionally of pathopoeia, goes on to observe the troping of the word and the body in love: “As intersection of corporeal passion and idealization, love is undisputably [*sic*] the privileged experience for the blossoming of metaphor (abstract for concrete, concrete for abstract) as well as incarnation (the spirit becoming flesh, the word-flesh)” (1987, 95). Love and its tropes are distinguished by their *carnality*—their relationships to sex, desire and the body—sometimes immediate and sometimes distanced, sometimes overwhelming and sometimes subtle, sometimes valorized and sometimes despised. This carnality is itself a metaphor for how metaphor embodies love; witness the figure of “making love.” “Love is an intermingling of bodies that can be represented by a heart with an arrow through it, by a union of souls, etc., but the declaration ‘I love you’ expresses a noncorporeal attribute of bodies, the lover’s as well as that of the loved one” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 81).

The invocation of sexuality, and the passage beyond it, mark the intimate materiality of some tropes of love. “The very expression ‘figure of speech’ implies that in metaphor, as in the other tropes or turns, discourse assumes the nature of a body by displaying forms and traits which usually characterized the human face, man’s [*sic*] ‘figure’; it is as though the tropes gave to discourse a quasi-bodily externalization. By providing a kind of figurability to the message, the tropes make discourse appear”

(Ricoeur 1978b, 142). This is the figuring of “love’s body” (Brown 1966). Concomitant with its production of meaning, metaphor produces presence—it is ontogenetic. These powers of making conduce in pathopoesis. It is the ability of tropes to “make discourse appear” that makes them strategic in the discursive production of social relations; in these tropical operations, rhetoric exceeds rhetoric to encounter the traditional mandates of sociology. Betsy Wing writes that “voice has its rhythms, but it is hard to know and formulate what they are” (1991, ix). Surely tropes can be read as precisely these rhythms of voice and literature. Then, “the rhythms of voice are connected to a body; they share in but are not the same as the universal tickings of this body. If voice stops, there is silence to listen to and the silence participates somehow in the same rhythm and the same *intimate meaning*. Connected to histories, cultures, and particular lives, voices, silences, and their meanings can never be quite the same universally, but they seem to invite us to inhabit some common place.” (Wing 1991, ix-x, emphasis added) In love, sociology defers psychology, but psychology defers to literature. By its own logic, sociology must engage love through its discourses.

Chapter Four

The Discipline of Love: Theorizing Meaning and Politics

Love appears as the rhetorical site, the form and forum of words, at which community is instituted or, conversely, is seen as being without any founding authority.

Daniel Cottom, *Text & Culture*

The politics of dancing,
The politics of feeling good.

Re-Flex, "The Politics of Dancing"

4.1: There Is No Such Thing as Just Communication

Bakhtin is the beginning: "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (1981, 294). But any beginning is always already a point of departure, so I can take Bakhtin's declaration (of a fact of language) and immediately turn it into a suggestion (for a direction of inquiry). The line of flight, just begun, has veered. Facts require proof, so they move us to look behind them; suggestions summon speculation, so they turn us round to peer ahead. We have made the poststructuralist turn, which eschews the totalizing, absolutist assumptions of proof to embrace the simultaneously ludic, ungrounded and linguistic. This assertion is too easily said, and I do not expect that its saying will convince any dismayed modernist expecting tight argument. I could take the hoary dodge of asserting that the proof of the inevitability of politics in language is outside of the scope of this text—which it surely is—or I could challenge the doubtful to prove or even demonstrate the contrary, a task which promises to be as daunting as the positive case. Instead, I beg indulgence, like a child at play. For play's the thing; the game's afoot—the language game: "Interpretation, 'literary criticism,' is not the detached statement of a knowledge objectively gained. It is the desperation of a bet, an ungrounded doing things with words: 'I bet this is a lyric poem,'

or ‘I bet this is an elegy,’ or ‘I bet this is a parable,’ followed by the exegesis that is the consequence of the bet” (Miller 1985, 26). I am suspicious of the term “interpretation” in any circumstances, with its implicit construction and separation of actively interpreting subject and passively interpreted object, but “the thing that [poststructuralist strategies give] us [is] an awareness that what we are obliged to do, and must do scrupulously, in the long run is not OK” (Spivak 1990c, 45). Or, to invert, the inadequacy and failure of certain concepts or terms need not keep us from employing them productively. Here *interpretation*, for all its troubling aspects, usefully relates this nascent language gamespersonship to my larger purpose, which might be written as an “interpretation of love,” or better, as an “interpretation of the interpretations of love.” More specifically, my game crosses Miller with Clifford, with the latter’s suggestion that what is real is always analyzable as a “restrictive and expressive set of social codes” (1986, 10). Then I can translate Bakhtin into “I bet that language is always analyzable as a set of political practices,” and what follows is not a proof, but an exegesis that is the consequence of that bet.

Here, *political* means subject to relations of motivation and power—and conflict. More concretely, *politics* invokes the “general politics” of meaning addressed by Foucault’s through his regimes of truth. Bakhtin’s overpopulation of language is symmetrical to the poststructuralist overdetermination of meaning. The epistemological shift is a discursive one. Modernist meaning, construed as the stable isomorphism of sign to referent, is displaced by the unstable, complex, motivated, contested production of meaning within and without the sign. Moving outward from the micro-scope of the sign to the macro-practice of discourse in the ‘real’ world, this latter poststructuralist view explicitly resists the modernist framing of language as communication, and implicitly contests the claims to neutrality and objectivity in sociological or any other texts. With regards to the discourse of love, it may seem to be merely stating the obvious to describe the language of love as “overpopulated with intentions,” but more than the undisguised

presence of desire is being addressed here. What Bakhtin makes suspect is the fundamental modernist conceit of communication as the transfer of information, whether between lovers loving or sociologists writing and reading. Communication as information “implies a *transmission charged with making a pass, from one subject to another, the identity of a signified object, of a meaning or of a concept* rightfully separable from the process of passage and from the signifying operation. Communication presupposes subjects (whose identity and presence are constituted before the signifying operation) and objects (signified concepts, a thought meaning that the passage of communication will have neither to constitute, nor, by all rights, to transform). *A communicates B to C*” (Derrida 1981, 23, emphasis in original). Recall Saussure’s diagram. *Communication* is read here, first and foremost, as a term, a lexical object, a psychology buzzword entrenched in and across the relations of love, their everyday discourses, and their professional meta-discourses. Within these relations and discourses, communication is read and valorized as essential, both to love itself, and to talking and writing about it. The irony is that such valorization reiterates master propagandist Stalin, who half a century ago authored a political pamphlet championing language as the neutral instrument of communication (Lecercle 1990, 48).¹ In resisting the idealization of communication, I am not claiming that communication is either never possible or always totalitarian. After all, one purpose of this text—but only one among several—is to communicate. Nonetheless, I am giving warning that communication is never merely communication. It may sometimes be precise—it may carry a great deal of information—but it is always inaccurate—it can never be wholly reduced to that information. Information conventionally denotes literal meaning, but since literalness is another name for transparency, it is undermined by the same critique made of the latter. Literalness is not

¹ The irony is multiple here: a member of the Soviet academy wrote the pamphlet under Stalin’s name (Lecercle 1990, 206). Authorship loses its simple identity; communication loses its ground of simple speaking (or writing) subject.

an attribute of the communicated text (it is not a quality of a quale), but a social production only made possible by the repression of the proliferation of meaning, and the exclusion of polysemy. “The use of language for purposes of communication implies a certain restraint, a capacity to discern and differentiate, that is, *not* to say things, an ability to stop when one’s meaning has been expressed” (Lecerle 1985, 34).

‘Literal’ (from *literals*, from *litera*, a letter) therefore equates exactness with the absence of tropicality. A literal reading is a tactic of claiming superficiality as a virtue, in order to disclaim politics. This disavowal of politics is therefore itself a consummately political maneuver, whereby the terms communication, information, literal meaning and transparency align with each other in a rhetorical, or, more accurately, an *interlexical* regime of truth. There is no such thing as just communication. Just as Foucault insists on the mutuality of knowledge and power, this text insists on the mutuality of communication and power. It is the presence of these politics that made the reduction of language to communication misleading. The danger of the convention of ‘communication’ is rhetorical. In a slippage of terms, the critical social processes immanent to language get elided, as the meaning of communication is reduced to the exchange of information. When these politics are recognized, discursive operations appear more as productions than any sort of transfers. But what are these politics? What are their material forms? Foucault gives one reply, recognizing the problematics of communication’s production of subjectivity:

We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning; how does it accomplish its design by animating the rules of discourse from within? Rather, we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse. (1977c, 137-138)

In other words, Foucault is foregrounding for analysis exactly what communication takes for granted: the specific production and circumstances of subjectivity.

Spivak gives another view of the politics of communication, recognizing the problematics of the open neutrality of dialogue:

Talking about elite theory, let me suggest that that is the kind of position Jurgen Habermas articulates: a neutral communication situation of free dialogue. Well, it is not a situation that ever comes into being—there is no such thing. The desire for neutrality and dialogue, even as it should not be repressed, must always mark its own failure. To see how desire articulates itself, one must read the text in which that desire is expressed. The idea of neutral dialogue is an idea which denies history, denies structure, denies the positioning of subjects. I would try to look how, in fact, the demand for a dialogue is articulated. (1990c, 72)

Spivak is acute in reading the idealization of communication as “the demand for dialogue,” and this text will take up her suggestion for probing this demand, in a discussion of context. For now, the recognition that communication is highly motivated and overdetermined permits its de-sanctification, and once communication’s comforting, obscuring aura of neutrality is dispersed, other rhetorical operations are made apparent.

Baudrillard writes of a different politics of communication when he tropes it with an unexpected convergence: the encounter exercises of the Californian human potential movement and the Teflon frying pan:

[1980s America] is a culture which sets up specialized institutes so that people’s bodies can come together and touch, and, at the same time, invents pans in which the water *does not touch* the bottom of the pan, which is made of a substance so homogeneous, dry, and artificial that not a single drop sticks to it, just like those bodies intertwined in ‘feeling’ and therapeutic love, which do not touch—even for a moment. This is called interface or interaction. It has replaced face-to-face contact and action. It is also called communication, because these things really do communicate: the miracle is that the pan bottom communicates its heat to the water without touching it, in a sort of remote boiling process, in the same way as one body communicates its fluid, its erotic potential, to another without that other ever being seduced or even disturbed, by a sort of molecular capillary action. The code of separation has worked so well that they have even managed to separate the water from the pan and to make the pan transmit its heat *as a message*, or to make one body transmit its desire to the other as a message, as a fluid to be decoded. This is called information and it has wormed its way into everything, like a phobic, maniacal leitmotiv, which affects sexual relations as well as kitchen implements.
(1988, 32-33, emphasis in original)

This text suggests a more radical text, namely, that the frying pan metaphor for communication without touching is just as acute for ordinary romantic (non-therapeutic?)

love as it is for artificial therapeutic love. The “code of separation” that Baudrillard identifies is very accessible, because it is already present in widely dispersed and valorized metaphors for communication, in which the operations of telecommunication technologies like the telephone and the telegraph stand in for the fundamental operations of language—recall the Saussurean diagram of Locke’s telementation (*tele*: at a distance). The acceptance of these metaphors is so complete that their ironies disappear, which is perhaps as good a measure as any of the success of the construction of understanding through rhetoric. In particular, the instantiation of distance in these tropes is obscured, so that they may be unselfconsciously deployed in texts in which communication intimates closeness—intimates intimacy. Yet the very act of speaking of *communication* installs separation and distance, as it inserts the *between* between the subjects who are communicating (even more fundamentally, as Derrida noted, it is through this separation that a particular subjectivity is generated and maintained: communicating subjects are two, divided, individually unified, independent subjects who use the device of language instrumentally). Hence the closeness of communication depends upon distance. The familiar telephone monopoly marketing jingle, “reach out and touch someone,” attempts to make closeness and touching the same, but they are manifestly different. The frying pan is best at communicating heat when it is very close to, but does not touch, what it is heating. Distance is the counter-trope, already present in communication. What happens in that distance, and what are the implications and demands of this necessary separation? Or, to use the deconstructionist vernacular, what happens in that *gap*? This place—this space—is where the transparency of language and the lucidity of the text converge, for it is precisely language that is conventionally held to discursively bridge that gap—in a certain way.

Consider the conventional difference between language as instrument and language as art. Communication is idealized as a pure use of language, uncontaminated by the figurative ambiguity of the language of literature, because Baudrillard’s maniacal

worm of information has utterly infested contemporary attitudes towards language (clarity, simplicity, directness, transparency, efficiency, accessibility, unambiguousness, generalizability are different aspects of the worm). However, just as any cultural representation partakes of literary procedures, any language use deploys literary devices. “‘Literariness’ ... might be given other names: rhetorical effects, places where figurative language interferes with straightforward grammatical meanings—and that effect of ‘literariness’ *is everywhere*. It is a feature of language in general.... [It is] a universal feature of language” (J. Hillis Miller, in Salusinszky 1987, 229, emphasis in original). Literalness can be troped as decreasing distance, and literariness as increasing it, in that figuration—‘rhetorical flourish’—puts straightforward meaning (truth) at a remove, contaminating communication. This trope complicates the telecommunications trope, by showing that communication has a multiple rhetorical relation to distance: distance is necessary, but should be figuratively minimized. To converge the two figures, purity in communication, in its opposition to distance, invokes immediacy. But if literariness is a universal feature of language, and if literariness takes the name of contamination, then no communication can be pure. Yet, as Said comments, “a great deal of unnecessary effort goes into defining what is purely literary. I don’t understand the need constantly to do that. It’s like saying that something is American, and the opposite to it is un-American: that whole field seems to me quite boring. What is interesting is the degree to which it’s mixed with other things, not its purity” (Salusinszky 1987, 138). Communication is always tainted, and it is precisely that impurity which is interesting about it (although, to dispute Said in the letter, if not in spirit, the discursive constitution of politically charged binary textual oppositions like American/un-American is critically important). Said’s point of view goes against the convention of recuperating contamination by belittling it as inevitable imperfection in an imperfect world. What is necessary is to closely examine the means by which this belittling takes place, and to consider its motivations. This necessity motivates the recurrence of the trope of contamination in this analysis, although its

association with communication at first appears strange. That relation becomes more accessible by embedding the trope once more in a telecommunication discourse.

One criterion of any telecommunication modality is its signal-to-noise ratio, where the signal is the information to be transmitted, and noise comprises all other perceptible phenomena in the received transmission. The purity of the signal is contaminated and corrupted by noise, so the higher the signal-to-noise, the better the communication.² This criterion maps onto the classical hermeneutic mission of recovering authorial intent in a text, or, equivalently, the valorization of clarity as the ease of that recovery. Signal may thus be paraphrased as information that is intended or desired, and noise as information that is unintended or undesired. Then (tele)communication can be judged by how well these kinds of information are distinguished, how well the desired kind can be retained (reproduced), and how well the undesired kind can be filtered out or excluded. Put this way, signal and noise can be read as defined not by intrinsic qualities, but by how they are perceived, understood, judged, engaged, accepted, and rejected—in other words, how those attributes are attributed. Signal and noise are categories produced by the convergence of convention and intention, both of which change according to the context that is brought into being. Radio static is noise in a broadcast, when listeners are desperately seeking Madonna, but it is signal in radio telescropy, when astronomers are painstakingly seeking long-band stellar emissions. The meanings of noise and contamination are themselves produced *in situ*.

The relation of signal to communication can also be approached through Slavoj Žižek's analysis of content and form:

Michael Mann's *Manhunter* is a movie about a police detective famous for his ability to enter intuitively, through his "sixth sense," the mind of perverse, sadistic murderers. His task is to detect a particularly cruel mass murderer who slaughtered a series of quiet, provincial families. The

² Hayles (1990) discusses in much more sophisticated terms the relation of entropy, information, noise, communication, and disorder through her convergence of chaos theory and literary criticism.

detective reruns again and again super-8 home movies shot by each of the slaughtered families in order to arrive at the *trait unaire*, the feature common to all of them that attracted the murderer and thus directed his choice. But all his efforts are in vain as long as he looks for this common feature on the level of content, i.e., in the families themselves.... The only thing common to all the slaughtered families is ... *the home movies themselves*, i.e., the murderer had to have had access to their private movies, there is no other link connecting them. Because the movies are private, the only possible link between them is the laboratory where they were developed. A quick check confirms that all the movies were developed by the same laboratory, and the murderer is soon identified as one of the workers in the lab. Where lies the theoretical interest of this denouement? The detective searches for a common feature that will enable him to get at the murderer in the content of the home movies, thus overlooking the form itself, i.e., the crucial fact that he is all the time viewing a series of home movies. The decisive turn takes place when he becomes aware that through the very screening of the home movies, *he is already identified with the murderer*, that his obsessive gaze, surveying every detail of the scenery, coincides with the gaze of the murderer. The identification is on the level of the gaze, not on the level of content.

(1991, 107-8, emphasis in original)

This is a concrete indictment of visualism: the obsessive attention to what-is-seen blocks awareness of both the problematics and the power of the process of seeing. The detective, a highly trained and gifted observer, is so good at seeing that for too long he does not see himself seeing. He sees too clearly, and the clearer his vision, the more the crucial form disappears, the more his attention fastens on various pieces of content, and the more false conjectures he comes up with. It is always possible to construct some diegesis from any fragmented or selected content. Meaning is always producible; one can always make—produce—sense. It is only when all content is bracketed, so that the invisibilized form reemerges, that the detective recognizes that the form *is* the critical content.

This analysis is also an indictment of communication, and the communicative model of language, insofar as the valorization of signal scans as the fixation with content and the simultaneous neglect of form. Symmetrically, the clarity and obviousness of content obscures how it is the conformity to a specific form which makes it clear and obvious. Love, as content, obscures how it is formed by and conforms to a particular tropical rhizome. Truth, as a content, obscures how it is formed by and conforms to the dominant regime of truth. The poststructuralist shift, from the Enlightenment search for

truth to the Foucaultian inquiry into regimes of truth, can be read as the decentering (but not the annihilation) of content by form.

Insofar as love is presented as depending on communication, love is contaminated with the familiar issues of transparency, textuality, reading, writing, discourse, and meaning. This convergence of love and language is contaminated with politics, but in a peculiar way. One consequence of the reduction of communication to information transfer is that communication associates with cognition, and dissociates from affect. Emotion connotes bias, while information connotes fact. So communication, like neutral scientific language, aligns with the absence of emotion, which slants or obscures information content. The cool neutrality of rationality; the hot commitment of passion. What results is a proliferating set of binary oppositions: clarity versus obscurity, content versus form, centrality versus supplement, signal versus noise, coolness versus heat, science versus literature, neutrality versus political motivation, objectivity versus bias, distance versus immediacy, rationality versus irrationality, fact versus feeling, cognition versus affect, sobriety versus passion, purity versus contamination. The distance between these oppositions can be bridged only in limited and specific ways. Communication *about* emotions is discursively unproblematic, as long as it is done in comfortably distanced logical and scientific terms, which is the sociological tactic described above, and the scientific tactic of psychology. Distance then constitutes a reassuring *cordon sanitaire*.

What is curious about love is that its intimate association with communication conflicts with this binary opposition, and the relation between the two must therefore be differently constituted. Honesty and truth, which are deployed generally in discourses on communication, take on specific inflections when applied to and by love. As will be discussed below, the alignments just described are troped biomedically in local discourse by the differences between the head and the heart. Yet with respect to love, communication maintains its purity by inverting the usual hierarchy, to constitute an

emotional discourse which is contaminated, instead of purified, when it is intellectualized. Honesty in local love speaks as, “tell me what you feel, not what you think.” Truth is now feeling. The heart speaks for itself, and though the mediation of the mind is obviously necessary, the figure is one of the heart speaking directly: the true heart. Hence the valorization, begun in the sixties and generally maintained through to the nineties, of the story of the sensitive (New Age) male who is in touch with his feelings, and who, as one woman told me, has gained access to the “emotional vocabulary” that women have always had at their disposal.

Love, in its identification with communication, is therefore organized around two poles which are irreducible to each other. Any compromise between them would be read as contamination from either viewpoint, so both poles must be maintained. “The question then is, how romance fights against itself” (Hartman, in Salusinszky 1987, 85). The regime of truth of love is charged with the tension of this contradiction, which is why love is an apt location to examine the work of socially embedded language. The language of love, cast in this manner, speaks in difference, immediacy, sensation, figuration—the poststructuralist vocabulary. In this way, the dichotomy of love in communication can be read as less contradictory than constitutive. To reinvoke Cottom and make the text turn, consider the trope of a dynamo, which is a system in which a current arcs between two opposed magnetic poles (Hayles 1990, 68; Cox 1980). Any assimilation of one pole into the other would make the dynamo fail. The gap must be maintained for the dynamo to work. The discursive identity of postmodern love comes into being in, and is sustained by, the arc firing in the space between differentiated poles, in the incoherence of the carnal trope. “Voice, as the ‘immediate figure of the senses,’ has been shown, by Derrida, to be caught up in the displacements, mediations and *différance* which are features of ‘writing in general’” (Salusinszky 1987, 83).

4.2: Politics and *Parole*: The Insertion of Real Words into the Body of Love

Resisting the conventional characterization of language as being centrally about communication, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 76,523) write of language as manifestly polemical, as the imperative of propaganda. Their fundamental term is *mot d'ordre*—‘slogan’, or ‘order-word’—which foregrounds the power relations that the communication conception of language obscures. I use Deleuze and Guattari tactically, because their approach so effectively surfaces desire and politics in discourse. I use their theory to examine authority through “*strategic formation* [of discourse], which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large” (Said 1979, 20). *Strategic* here reiterates Game’s characterization of the poststructuralist displacement of *what* questions of meaning by *how* questions. “The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances” (Said 1979, 21). These attributes of the text are the signs by which we may pursue the authority of the text, that is, textual politics. This is the analytical site where Said meets Deleuze and Guattari. How does love, through discourse, acquire mass, density, and referential power?

As a necessary preparation for Deleuze and Guattari, let me take a brief semiotic detour. The implication of tropes in the politics of language is surfaced when the former are considered as signs. Thus, the Barthesian semiotics of love : “The lover is the natural semiologist in the pure state! He spends his time reading signs—he does nothing else” (1991c, 303). Tropes are not the only signs of love, but they are easily read as signs. I. A. Richards theorized the metaphor as consisting of a *tenor*, the “purport, or general drift of thought regarding the subject of the metaphor,” and a *vehicle*, “that which serves to carry or embody the tenor” (Friedman 1986, 278). There is a striking parallel between this system and the sign as signifier and signified, although I am leery of being overly

structuralist about tropes,³ and of allowing metaphor to constitute the boundary of all tropes. But such formalism is not necessary to the purpose at hand; the trope still qualifies as a sign in the broadest sense of a “natural or conventional semiotic entity consisting of a *sign vehicle* connected with *meaning*” (Nöth 1990, 79, emphasis in original). As a sign, the trope converges with intention, polysemy and agonistics. “We all use the same language but ... we have different *interests*—and interests must here be taken to mean political and power-related interests which intersect in the sign. The *meaning* of the sign is thrown open—the sign becomes ‘polysemic’ rather than ‘univocal’—and although it is true to say that the dominant power group at any given time will dominate the intertextual production of meaning, this is not to suggest that the opposition has been reduced to total silence. The power struggle *intersects* in the sign” (Moi 1988, 158, emphasis in original). Then as far as love remains critical to social groups, in whatever form that criticality takes, the meanings of the signs of love will be locations of dispute. Tropes “are not merely arbitrary signs, but living powers” (Crowley 1991, 43), reflexively situating, situated in, and situated by social life. Cixous tropes this chiasmatically: “poetically political, politically poetic” (Conley 1984, 139). The tropical inflorescence of meaning is a “pulsation, the movement which animates the word” (Monique Schneider, in Mortley 1991, 37). The productivity of the sign reiterates the productivity of language—how the latter constructs, rather than merely reflects, social relations such as those which appeal to the name of love (Moi 1988, 158). Likewise, the struggle for the meaning of the sign reiterates the Foucaultian linkage of knowledge and power in discursive formations (Foucault 1977a, 73-75; 1977d; 1980, 92-102).

³ Scholes notes that modern structuralists and poststructuralists alike have muddled the distinction between the signifier and the signified: “[Witness] the inconsistent translations of *signifiant* and *signifié* in *S/Z*. It is safe to say that neither term has any precise meaning at present—which perhaps justifies the semiological position on the matter” (1982, 148).

In this thesis, the relation of tropes to extant knowledges of love is radically informed by Said's ideas on the relation of rhetoric to Orientalism:

Its objective discoveries—the work of innumerable devoted scholars who edited texts and translated them, codified grammars, wrote dictionaries, reconstructed dead epochs, produced positivistically verifiable learning—are and always have been conditioned by the fact that its truths, like any truths delivered by language, are embodied in language, and what is the truth of language, Nietzsche once said, but

a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.⁴

(1978, 203.)

Three notes: First, Foucault turns out to be paraphrasing Nietzsche when he writes of truth as unrecognized fiction—which is no surprise. Second, Said's description of Orientalists is a disturbingly accurate characterization of sociologists. Third, while Said is as useful as he is eloquent, knowledges of love are significantly different from Orientalism, in that the latter is characterized by deferral to expertise, while the former are much more ambivalent with respect to the authority of the expert.

Out of this stew of Bakhtin, Barthes, Moi, Deleuze and Guattari, Said, Nietzsche, Foucault, and others still to come, can be distilled a pivotal proposition:

It is because the meanings of love are produced tropically, and because tropes are so highly contingent on the linguistic practices which situate them, and because language is profoundly and inescapably political, that the meanings of love are highly politicized.

This understanding dissolves the distance installed by modernism between language and social relations, an imaginary distance which reiterates the distance implicit in the communication paradigm of language. The sociological conviction that the

⁴ The Nietzsche citation is from "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1968, 46-7).

meanings of the word may be treated as different from the meanings of the world motivates the sociological suspicion of a social analytic which centers on language. This suspicion is justified, for poststructuralism *does* pose a multiple threat to specular sociology when it assaults the communication paradigm of language the latter takes for granted. Lecercle lists the four postulates of that communicative understanding of language, as presented by Deleuze and Guattari:

- (1) The function of language is to inform and communicate.
- (2) Language is an abstract machine, which admits no 'extrinsic factor'.
- (3) Language is a homogeneous system.
- (4) The object the linguist studies is the standard version of the language, not dialectal variations or individual style.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the interest of these axioms is that they provide a good picture of what language is *not*, and therefore, *a contrario* suggest what language is. (Lecercle 1990, 43)

"Language is both material and social" (Lecercle 1990, 52), and love is both social and linguistic. Following Deleuze and Guattari, this text recognizes that material and social character by asserting "the primacy of *parole* over *langue*" (Lecercle 1990, 48), thereby invoking and denying Saussurean formalism. *Langue* is systematically structured language, ordered by grammatical, syntactic, semantic rules, and standardized by dictionaries, pedagogy, handbooks of style. It presents itself as "a self-contained whole and a principle of classification" (Saussure 1966, 9), but that "self-containment" is suspect, as it is an arrogation of authority. The self-regulating semiotics of *langue* denies what Spivak calls the worlding of language. Worlding can be read through *parole*, which is language-in-use, language-as-spoken, utterly immersed in and permeated by the flux of usage and speaking, in what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call pragmatics. This is not a retreat to referentiality. The relation of *parole* to the world is not one of the former naming the latter, but one of mutual embeddedness. Sometimes the poststructuralist discourse on discourse is mistaken for a reversion to Hegelian idealism (another take on

“there is nothing outside of the text”), but such an interpretation ignores the continual poststructuralist effort to circumstantially and socially embody the text. *Il n’y a pas de hors-texte* is a chiasmus: the text is worlded and the world is textualized. Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on *parole* is an extrapolation of this trope to language in general. In other words, *parole* is language that is utterly and ironically sociological (and, inversely, the world is worked through by its language):

Deleuze and Guattari stress not only the non-autonomy of language, but also its materiality. Language is caught both in the bodies of its utterers and in the society that they form.... It is no longer a case of a *symbolic* articulation of language and the unconscious which nevertheless turned out to be an essential aspect of the reality of *langue*, ... but a case of a *real* insertion of words within bodies. Words not only *do* things; they *are* things. Language cannot be a simple representation of the world [as specular sociology must maintain]; it is also an intervention within it, to be analysed in terms of positions, advance and retreat, territorial markings, and deterritorialization. We are moving here from the body of the individual to the body politic. The non-autonomy of language opens up to the social. Language is an institution with a vengeance. It suffers the fate of all institutions: it is a locus for the exercise of power, and a target for rebellious attacks.

(Lecercle 1990, 47-48, emphasis in original)

The irony is that a move from the individual to the body politic, this opening up to the social, is a thoroughly conventional sociological interest. Language is a *regulated* social institution (Cameron 1990, 88), just as love is. “The world and language are not distinct orders of being but belong to the same ontological order” (Crowley 1990, 30). Recalling Abu-Lughod and Lutz, love is one of the last bastions of essentialism, of the profoundly interior self. The convergence of language and the world, including the internal psychological world, is an assault on that supposedly final essentialism: “Of all the approaches to man, psychology is the most unprovable, the most marked by its time. This is because, in fact, *knowledge* of the profound self is illusory: there are only different ways of articulating it” (Barthes 1964, 171). The self is made intelligible to the self, and others, included experts on the self, in language. The psychological is linguistic; the linguistic is social. Love is ineluctable from its articulations. The construction of love as interior is the resort to Nature by another name, but “the most natural remark about the

world depends on cultural codes. As Pascal put it, ‘if custom is a second nature, as it manifestly is in these cultures that would pass as natural, then perhaps Nature is only a second custom.’” (Culler 1983, 41). To acknowledge the tropicity of love is to remove it from the interior and natural and resituate it in the uneasy, ongoing interpenetration of culture and language. “Verbal discourse is a social phenomenon social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning” (Bakhtin 1981, 259). Language, like love, once it is explicitly acknowledged as social by sociologists, gets implicitly treated as something else again. Whenever—*whenever*—language is regarded as clear, neutral communication, its social nature, laden with Bakhtinian politics, is effaced. With that recognition, the accepted sociological analysis of love appears as misprision, or at least sleight-of-hand, where the focus on the social institutions of marriage and family directs attention away from the social institution of language, even as language is flaunted before our eyes. This text refocuses—changes the depth of field—on the social institution of love in language, or more accurately, in *parole*, as opposed to *langue*. This is the *parole* of love. If language is a social institution, *parole* is something else again: “language-using is a social *practice* in its own right” (Cameron 1990, 90, emphasis added). The distinction is crucial. *Parole*, as the protean, socialized, politicized, practice of language, continually exceeds *langue*. *Parole* will not be contained in any semiotic order; it exceeds the structuration of *langue* just as love exceeds the structuration of rationality, within local discourse. *Parole* is like Spivak’s notion of writing: “The best model for it is something woven but beyond control” (1990a, 2). *Parole* is an open work itself, the language of the tropical inflorescence of meaning, the language of rhythm and pulsation (Schneider, in Mortley 1991, 37). This is the break between the rhizomatous poststructuralist theory of Deleuze and Guattari and the structuralist linguistics of Chomsky:

The linguistic tree on the Chomsky model still begins at a point S and proceeds by dichotomy. On the contrary, not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature

are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status. *Collective assemblages of enunciation* function directly within *machinic assemblages*; it is not [possible]⁵ to make a radical break between regimes of signs and their objects.... A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7, emphasis in original)

It is because the discourse of love has the rhizomatous nature of *parole* that love is fluidly excessive.

In order to elaborate, a first consideration of the subject is necessary. “Social agents are not *free* agents, but this does not mean we have to go back to the notion that they are sociolinguistic automata. Rather, we should ask ourselves such questions as ‘what determines “the expressive resources available” in particular languages or to particular groups of speakers? Who or what *produces* “the conventions which apply to their use”? How—that is to say, through what actual, concrete practices—is this done?’” (Cameron 1990, 88, emphasis in original) These questions echo those that Foucault puts forward with respect to discourse and the subject (1977c, 138). My own text may be read as an inquiry into what determines the expressive resources available to lovers—with the proviso that its understanding of language is something much more than either an expression or a resource.

Language is used by people, but language also uses—and makes—people. “Each person represents one locus where a given language takes shape in a particular way” (Schleiermacher 1988, 75). *Parole* is heterogeneous, in the same place where *langue* is homogeneous (Saussure 1966, 15). Nonetheless, the determination of expressive resources is notable for how it sometimes operates in an institutional vacuum. With regard to the discourse of love, “though it is spoken by millions of people, diffused in our

⁵ Massumi’s translation has “impossible” here. This is in error; the original is: “Les agencements collectifs d’énonciation fonctionnent en effet directement dans les agencements machiniques, et l’on ne peut pas établir de coupure radicale entre les régimes de signes et leurs objets” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 13).

popular romances and television programmes as well as in serious literature, there is no institution that explores, maintains, modifies, judges, repeats and otherwise assumes responsibility for this discourse” (Culler 1983, 108). Yet language *is* partially institutionalized; language, or rather an aspect of language, is itself the institution. *Langue*, as opposed to *parole*, is, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, the “*abstract machine of language*[,] ... a synchronic set of constants” (1987, 90, emphasis in original)—a formal system. *Langue*, then, as a systematization, is an imaginary construction imposed upon *parole*, a discursive attempt to fix discourse (or a text—the most obvious manifestation being the dictionary), at least for a moment. *Langue*, then, is the overt effort to control *parole*; it is the instantiation of politics, which, by simultaneously claiming authority, autonomy and neutrality, denies that very politics. *Langue* “stabilizes around a parish, a bishopric, a capital” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7); around a university, a discipline, a department; around an engagement ring, a marriage ceremony, Valentine’s Day. Hence, a different inflection to *mots d’ordre*: *langue* is both a slogan and an order, the repression that Barthes recognized in the closure of connotation (*parole*) to denotation (*langue*). This effort, according to poststructuralists, always fails, and always continues to attempt to succeed. So it is not language that is a social institution, but *langue*, as distinguished from the social *practice* of *parole*. “*If the external pragmatics of nonlinguistic factors must be taken into consideration, it is because linguistics itself is inseparable from an internal pragmatics involving its own factors....*” The interpenetration of language and the social field and political problems lies at the deepest level of the abstract machine [of language], not at the surface” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 91, emphasis in original).

Langue is not something used in various ways by different groups and different peoples; these are not “idiolectal or dialectal variations within the same *langue*” (Lecercle 1990, 48). Meaning is produced in the active variation of the language itself, as *parole*. “Style, not *langue*, becomes the focus of attention” (Lecercle, 49), because style is now

understood as not a matter of inflection, but of identity. Hence the relevance to the trope, which produces meaning through the installation of style in *parole*, and thereby insinuates into *langue*. To say “I’m falling in love” is to deploy a trope that has forgotten its tropicity; according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* the earliest known recorded use of the phrase was in the fifteenth century “So ferre I-fallyng into lufis dance,” which is at once more figurative and more specific than the current usage. Teresa de Lauretis writes, “language ... is more than a game.... Language and metaphors are always embedded in practices, in real life, where meaning ultimately resides” (1984, 3). Her statement is open to different readings, but here it is read as asserting that real life is also embedded in language and metaphors. There is no privileged term.

But, in the world, *The Oxford English Dictionary* indeed has privilege. It establishes and maintains a standard English and a standard for English. Then the opposition of the polyphony of *parole* versus a unitary dictionary standard of *langue* is another instance of the politics of language. “The standard version of English is the dialect of cultured, white, European, heterosexual, urban, adult males. This reads like the converse of a list of the victims of comedians’ jokes: women, peasants, wogs of all description, trade unionists, lunatics. It is almost the same list, which means that the major dialect is the embodiment—and its adoption the practice—of relations of power” (Lecercle 1990, 50). *Standard*, after all, has more than one sense, and its normative cant signifies its exercise of power: “But who owns English? Whose norms do the editors of the OED cite, and why should they apply to my behaviour, or his, or hers?” (Taylor 1990, 25). Who owns the discourse of love?

Consider Kövecses’s myriad “conventionalized expressions,” that is, “linguistic expressions that are commonly used by and are familiar to most, if not all, native speakers of English” (1990, 43). Conventionalization, in its univocity, is not the sign of the consensus of culture, but the mark of success of the exercise of power—whether this power presents as fact (biology), verity (philosophy and immutable truth), instinct

(human nature), knowledge (certification by expertise⁶), or common-sense (cultural truths). As language is acknowledged as a social institution, its conventions are recognizable as social objects themselves. The inquiry into the politics of the language of love therefore echoes Barthes' description of semiology as the "'undoing' of linguistics" (Culler 1983, 71). It is "the labour that collects the impurity of language, the waste of linguistics, the immediate corruption of any message: nothing less than the desires, fears, expressions, intimidations, advances, blandishments, protests, excuses, aggressions and melodies of which active language is made" (Barthes 1982b: 470-471). To read Barthes at a suitably different angle, all of these constituents of active language are metonymies for love—and for politics.

As these terms suggest, the production of meaning is neither a systematic functionalism nor a congenial negotiation. It is not irenic. "The world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys" (Foucault 1977d, 139). Love, through its tropes, appears in at least two fields of violence. "On the one hand, writing does entail a certain generalized system of violence. On the other hand, there exist structures of violence in the world which cannot be reduced to just the violence of writing. [Derrida] said ... that there is a constant negotiation between these two structures of violence, and whatever you call theoretical, you have to be aware that you're negotiating in one way or another" (Spivak 1990c, 36). Recalling Foucault's definition of regimes of truth, politics *makes* certain discourses function as true. The stratagems and misadventures of speech and desires (*parole* and love) coincide, but this is no coincidence. "What we know from experience of love and lust, charity and hate, pleasure and pain, we bring to bear upon ... fictional events—invariably, because we seek to make every text our own" (Scholes 1982, 32). The lover seeks to possess the text of love, just as, in local discourse and in the local world, s/he seeks to possess the body of

⁶ I take the notion of the modernist deferral to expertise from Roy Turner.

the other—to know the other. The intentions that Bakhtin warned of turn out to be ones of appropriation. Local discourses of love are characterized by how terms like possession and fidelity and jealousy are accommodated to valorized articulations of giving and selflessness.

4.3: Reading Context into Being Through the Tropes of Love

Though love is held to be natural, it is implicated in a weave of terms ('text', from *textus*: that which is woven)—language, meaning, desire, authority, truth, intention, transcendence, contingency, power—that are linked through the plural, shifting, and intimate political relations of tropes. Thus, "we believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history" (Foucault 1977d, 153). Cottom provides a useful amplification to this text, although he is not specifically referring to it: "*History*, here, is not a term that simply substitutes for *culture*, ... thereby correcting the analysis performed ineptly under the name of culture. *History* signifies the absence of transcendent authority under any name: idealism, pragmatism, community or culture, text, or whatever. It signifies the political constitution of all meaning: the *materiality* of all rhetoric and the rhetoricity of all signifying practices." (1989, 85, emphasis in original) Spivak wants to turn history from a "master word" (1990i, 157) into a catachresis—in her terms "a metaphor without an adequate literal referent" (1990i, 154). History itself appears not as some real context, but as a trope. Put together, Foucault, Cottom, and Spivak deconstruct not only essentialist doctrines of emotion, but also those constructivist alternatives which merely replace biology by culture as the transcendental authority.

Cottom does for culture what Foucault does for the subject: he reveals that the coherence, unity, and closure of culture are operations of power in discourse, which restrict, produce, exclude and shape—in short, *discipline*—meaning. This power does not

impose itself externally and in a hierarchical fashion on the understanding of already individuated and unified subjects, but instead infests the active productions of discourse and subjectivity. Its authority, therefore, need not always show itself as authoritarian, although the shadow of authoritarianism often looms vaguely behind the appearances of things. Instead, “what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, *it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse*. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (Foucault 1977a, 61, emphasis added). In its simultaneous formation of knowledge and production of discourse, this power is the operative aspect of a regimes of truth. In its induction of pleasure, this power is easily discerned in regimes of love. This reticulated, productive power is troped by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) with the randomized, pervasive rhizome. Thus, the production of the subjectivity of the lover does not necessarily proceed by force—although sometimes it does: the discourse of love is full of demands and expectations and disappointments and outrages (“If you loved me, you would ...”). Outside of the violence too common to the relations of love (which are usually and strangely analyzed as separate from love itself), the power of love manifests less as overt force, than as culture. It is through rhizomatous dispersion that the power of the discourses of love—and culture—are maintained.

“Despite all the differences in the use of this word, *culture*, the discourse of culture is powerfully institutionalized across the disciplines within the contemporary social sciences and humanities and so acts on our lives, whether or not we assent to it. Insofar as texts are constituted and interpreted within this discourse, it is against this discourse that we must struggle if we are not satisfied with the ways textuality, reading, and writing have been institutionalized.” (Cottom 1989, 86, emphasis in original) I am counted among the unsatisfied. This text can be read as working through this

dissatisfaction to examine the politics of the meanings of love. Then this text must grapple with the word *culture*, not only because it must address the underdeveloped sociological proposition that love is a cultural production, but also because the orientation of the sociological enterprise to culture is the archetypal way in which the textuality of the discipline has been institutionalized. “*Culture is a linguistic creation*, not a field of study or work to which language is applied after the fact” (Cottom 1989, 85, emphasis added). What sociologists and other social scientists conventionally do not choose to recognize is that “the delineation of culture in any sense can proceed only by way of rhetorical figures, relations, and procedures, such as drawing the ethnographic boundary, establishing contextual rules to evaluate information within and across cultures, and defining deviancy. This rhetoric has meaning only to those who have subscribed to a certain discourse” (Cottom 1989, 85), to those who accept and participate in a certain regime of truth. The meaning of culture proceeds through a tropical discourse, which summons and comforts its sociological congregation. Those unsatisfied with its institutionalization are thus heretics. In the name of the heresy of decentered culture, this text substitutes *trope* for *joke* in Cottom:

Culture ... is not and never can be entirely present: independent, universal, innocent, neutral, transcendent, or anything of that sort. It is rather the imaginary law that has to exist, *that is read into being*, so a [trope] can have meaning.... [I]t is the imaginary power of authority contested within and between different readings, within and between different signifying practices of all sorts. Its definition is not decided by analytic insight or by narrative discovery but rather by the struggle over justice, the contest over meaning that is social life. (1989, 28, emphasis added)

In this passage and the ones to follow, another substitution could be made: *love* for *culture*. This replacement is motivated not by any equivalence between the two terms/concepts, but because love, like culture, can be productively read as discourse. To give this discursive construction of culture a deconstructive turn of circularity and reflexivity, “culture is ... something that is the effect of the production of cultural explanations, and cultural explanations are produced because a certain culture needs to be

fabricated, a monolithic explanation of a group needs to be fabricated. [This is not to suggest] that there is nothing like culture. [This is to suggest] that when it is taken as an agent and given a certain descriptive power describing groups generally outlined by nation state outlines, a certain politics of discursive production is going on there.” (Spivak 1990f, 123)

Culture must not be mistaken, as it and history often are, as a context for interpretation, in the conventional sense of context. Culture is not some hermeneutic horizon, information which provides the indices for understanding. The appeal to context is too innocuous and necessary to the logocentric mind—and heart. Context is not given, but chosen, or at least received, whether consciously or unconsciously. The simple appeal to context is the reinscription of grounding in the extradiscursive world. “[Derrida] argues that every sign, ‘linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context and *engender infinitely new contexts* in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion” (Cottom 1989, 64, second emphasis added). Context is always implicated in the production of meaning, but context cannot be the absolute ground for interpretation because it is always partial. “Total context is unmasterable, both in principle and in practice. *Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless*” (Culler 1982, 123, emphasis added). In this way, Derrida and the nonsaturability of meaning is reconciled with Foucault (one cannot say anything at anytime) and Clifford (in practice, there is no free play of meaning). An infinite number of meanings is not the same as *all* possible meanings. Context must be mobilized for the production of meaning because pure communication is impossible, in the sense that authorial intent alone cannot suffice to produce the meaning of any text. However, “accounts of context never provide full determinations of meaning” (Culler 1982, 128). Culler identifies two general ways in which context is boundless. First, “any given context is open to further description” (1982, 123). “This structural openness of context is essential to all disciplines”

(1982, 124), including the most systematic, empirical and positivistic of sciences, which are continuously seeking new evidence that will re-context current knowledge. Second, “any attempt to codify context can always be grafted onto the context it sought to describe, yielding a new context which escapes the previous formulation. Attempts to describe limits always make possible a displacement of those limits, so that Wittgenstein’s suggestion that one cannot say ‘bububu’ and mean ‘if it does not rain I shall go out for a walk,’ has, paradoxically, made it possible to do just that” (1982, 124). This second kind of openness has radical consequences for human sciences which would codify human behavior as if that codification, and the dissemination of that codification, will not affect the self-same behavior. Some experimental psychology routinely excludes psychologists and psychology students from participating in their research, because informed subjects could recognize what was happening and affect the results. Such psychology is only the psychology of those who can be kept ignorant of psychology. (Bakan 1967; Gergen 1973)

More than the openness of context is expressed in Cottom’s idea of culture as read into being. The sign or the trope *engenders*—generates—its context. In this regard, Cottom may be read through Scholes and Culler. Scholes distinguishes text from diegesis (*récit* from *diégésis*), where the former means the words and the latter means both “what [those words] encourage us to create as a fiction” (1982, 112) and the process by which that fiction is created. If, siding with Clifford and Geertz, sociological texts are regarded as fictions much like literary texts, then diegesis is the politicized production of meaning by another (narrative) name. “One of the primary qualities of ... texts we understand as fiction is that they generate a diegetic order that has an astonishing independence from its text” (Scholes 1982, 112). This independence emphasizes how diegesis is the active construction of a story from a text. “Words never speak their own meaning” (Scholes 1982, 112). Words cannot speak their own meaning, for what they construct in a text is a fluid syntagm of gaps or holes which must be diegetically filled or bridged by the

plenitude of context in order that the text can mean. “A text, as opposed to [the New Critical construction of] a work, is open, incomplete, insufficient” (Scholes 1982, 15). And fluid: the holes are not fixed, but desultory. A text is a semiconductor, viewed as the movement of absence, of positive holes.⁷ Context makes the text intelligible by completing it, but since context is boundless, there is no absolute, unitary context which may absolutely fill the text, for the context exceeds and spills over the text. Every and any context is chosen—though perhaps unconsciously, though perhaps not by ourselves for ourselves. It is selected from a surfeit of contexts, and so it is invoked by necessarily excluding others. “Life itself, with all its quotidian contingency, provides the richest possible field for interpretation. Art [or diegesis] reduces this field—drastically. And that is why we value it” (Scholes 1982, 59). But valuing or needing a narrative to exist does not make that narrative true or real in any absolute sense. “The impulse to narrate, ... the impulse to think of origins and ends ... [must be acknowledged as] a need rather than the way to truth” (Spivak 1990h, 21). The trouble with conventional cultural diegetics is that as they effect closure, they efface their narrativity and arrogate extradiscursive truth. Scholes regards diegesis as the production of fictions, but Kermode distinguishes fiction from myth: “Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. In this sense anti-Semitism is a degenerate fiction, a myth: and *Lear* is a fiction.... *Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change*. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent” (1967, 39, emphasis added). So Kermode is opposing the Fryean transcendence of myth with the contextual contingency of fiction.

When a particular context is read into being, connotations close to denotation. To say context is selected is perhaps too irenic, for the production of context is necessarily

⁷ In the physics of semiconducting materials, which are the bases for transistors, the flow of electric current is sometimes conceptualized as the flow of the absence of electrons—positive holes.

similar to the production of meaning: contested. “When we look at the word ‘culture’ we should see it as the site of a struggle, a problem, a discursive production, an effect structure rather than a cause” (Spivak 1990f, 123). Any process of diegetics, therefore, in generating a particular story by reading a particular context into being, enforces closure of meaning (Scholes 1982, 114). Context, through diegetics, is the incarnation of repressive and productive politics.

To read the context of culture as an imaginary law and a discursive production is to read context as more text (*contextere*: “to weave together”). Context is then distinguished, not by its belonging to an extradiscursive world, but by its being the text read as reference. This relationship does not exist prior to reading, but gets produced in the production of meaning. Context is “the very conditions of textual production and dissemination” (Fox-Genovese 1989, 217). *Diégésis* is then the political specification of what intertextuality is allowed—what texts are permitted to constitute (read into being as) culture for the purpose of reading the *récit*. To understand that this intertextual operation always takes place is to recognize that it is impossible to read anything out of context, except by applying the conventions of politicized regimes of truth. When it is said that something is ‘read out of context,’ what is meant is that an inappropriate set of texts has been selected as context. The word *inappropriate* betrays the surfacing of the politics of meaning. What are the standards of inappropriateness, and who decides them? Some ‘real’ meaning must be arrogated, some ‘truth’ must be appealed to. A transcendental signified must stand as judge, and obscure the politics of meaning.

The politics of context become more emphatic when it is recognized that the context of a text includes the interpreter. To paraphrase Clifford (1986b), interpreters constantly construct themselves through what they study, and readers constantly construct themselves through what they read. “Vocabularies are crossing circles and loops. We are defined by the lines we choose to cross or to be confined by,” writes A. S. Byatt in *Possession: A Romance* (1990, 431). Thus, the object of interpretation (the trope of love)

and the interpreter (the sociologist or the psychologist or the writer or the lover or ...) and the context of interpretation (the worlds of the interpreter and the worlds of the text) all work and are worked upon in the production of meaning. The words *interpreter* and *interpretation* seem inappropriate because of this mutual influence, inasmuch as they connote an active subject and a passive object. Contextual understanding is too passive a view; interpretation turns not on simple background, but on the active struggle of politics immanent in language operations themselves. These politics are submerged by the commitment to linguistic paradigms like communication, but they surface in occasional and marginal events. Thus Culler notes, “When anyone proposes an example of a meaningless sentence, listeners can usually image a context in which it would in fact have meaning; by placing a frame around it, *they can make it signify*” (1982, 122, emphasis added). Listeners, and readers, can take any text and make it mean something. Lovers can too, to such an extent that the necessity of context becomes moot.

He is in love: he creates meaning, always and everywhere, out of nothing, and it is meaning which thrills him: he is in the crucible of meaning. Every contact, for the love, raises the question of an answer: the skin is asked to reply.

(A squeeze of the hand—enormous documentation—a tiny gesture within the palm, a knee which doesn’t move away, an arm extended, as if quite naturally, along the back of a sofa and against which the other’s head gradually comes to rest—this is the paradisiac realm of subtle and clandestine signs: a kind of festival not of the sense but of meaning.)

(Barthes 1978, 67)

Different texts (especially subtexts within the same text) collide to contest meaning in the intersection of discourses. Intertextuality displaces the more familiar indexicality.

If beyond the construction of meaning by a subject is the construction of subjectivity, beyond that is the construction of the *process* of production of meaning itself. And if these sounds merely like double-talk, consider Lévi-Strauss’s much more elegant formulation: “things ordinarily thought *about* become things for thinking *with*” (Alverson 1991, 100, emphasis in original). Here are resonances of Althusser’s reading of

ideology, although no real conditions of existence exist to be distinguished from mystification (1980, 241). Instead, culture is the necessary and imaginary law. Hence Abu-Lughod and Lutz's observation that poststructuralism displaces both *culture* and *ideology* by *discourse* (1990, 9), motivated by the infestation of the discourse of culture by disciplinary relations of power. Rather than being context, Cottom's imaginary law of culture is the reinscription of Lecercle's imaginary construct of *langue*, and its imposition therefore points to the same issues of the politics of the unitary versus the divers. Discourse, therefore, is not yet another substitution of transcendental terms; it is not a simple replacement for culture. Discourse is not the true ground of supersession, but instead its absence. "Culture understood as discourse is not an authority but a will to power. It is an appeal to understanding rather than the ground to which one appeals for understandings. It is a contested social desire rather than a coherent frame to the production of ideologies" (Cottom 1989, 86). The discourse of culture is the "*lack* of interpretive authority" in politics (Cottom 1989, 86, emphasis in original). The complicity of tropes in such politics is their complicity in narratives, fictions of truth, constructed in discourses of love. "If you put a lover in a 'love story,' you thereby *reconcile* him with society. Why? Because telling stories is one of the activities coded by society, one of the great social constraints. Society tames the lover through the love story" (Barthes 1991b, 302, emphasis in original).

4.3: Absolutely Modern Love

Cottom tells an instructive anecdote of the familiar essentialization of love: "The puzzle [is] that the students I teach generally have a much more difficult time in trying to put [love] into question than they have in dealing with God or State. Even though most of the students in the school where I currently teach are politically conservative and more than nominally religious, most are able to regard political and religious beliefs as

historical constructions (at least for the purposes of the classroom) with an ease that vanishes when I ask them to consider how, why, and what people desire” (1989, 126).⁸ This despite the potent and immanent politics of the terms of love: “‘I love you’ ... has neither meaning nor subject nor addressee outside of circumstances that not only give it credibility but make it a veritable assemblage, a power marker, even in the case of an unhappy love (it is still by a will to power that one obeys)” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 82). For Cottom’s students (who, as participants in the mainstream academy, may be safely presumed to be no especial mystics or romantics⁹) love achieves a truth and allegiance exceeding what the nation, or even God, can claim. In my own observations, this same absoluteness of love is often articulated in local popular discourse, embedded in very ’90s kind of talk about ‘what’s real’. Love is The Law, which produces its own self-satisfied hermeneuts. This Law is transcendental, which means it is not only anti-historical, but also immanent—convergent of interiority and facticity, as Lutz and Abu-Lughod would say. Thus this Law is the Law of Nature. This Law curiously converges the categorical and the subjective, because the immanence of love disperses privilege: the authority to speak, which is the authority of knowledge. “Love is such an individual thing,” I have been told, over and over, so any lover becomes the expert, but love is also transcendental, sacred, and mysterious, so every lover becomes the hierarch. This

⁸ As Richard Cavell points out (private correspondence), Cottom’s anecdote does not generalize over all populations. Some politicized gays in the 1970s, for instance, did in fact critique love. Indeed, they rejected love as bourgeois and oppressive, and the pre-AIDS gay promiscuity was one materialization of that rejection. This kind of counter-example is to be expected; the hegemony of any local discourse of love, like the heterosexist one, in no way implies a homogeneity across all local discourses. Given this corrective, Cottom is, however, made even more acute with respect to his larger argument that discursive productions and maneuvers are themselves politically contested. In Cavell’s counter-example, subjects marginalized by the heterosexist discourse of romance resist that discourse by doing exactly what Cottom’s students *cannot* do if they are to maintain their own integrity within that discourse—as is explored below in the discussion of the necessity of mystery.

⁹ To be even nominally consistent, this presumption should be read as being exclusionary, since, presumably (?) mystics and romantics could be tenacious enough to resist academic domestication. It is then more telling of my own cynicism to hold that this is most unlikely.

dispersion of authority, which appears discursively as both good liberal respect for others and simple common sense, performs the plural, overlapping political work of empowering the speaker's own voice, establishing the speaker's independence, and eliminating the need for any further justification. A specific subjectivity for the lover is thus constructed in terms of speaking, agency, and legitimation. These are thoroughly discursive terms; this is a thoroughly discursive regime of truth. The dispersion of this production of love, the lover, and the knowledges and authorities of love manifests the rhizomatous power which constitutes culture, as discussed above.

The relativization of love gives it absolute immunity. "Every episode of language refers to the 'sensation of truth' the amorous subject experiences in thinking of his love, either because he believes he is the only one to see the loved object 'in truth,' or because he defines the speciality of *his own requirement as a truth concerning which he cannot yield*" (Barthes 1978, 229, emphasis added). Milan Kundera traces such necessary truth back to the slogan by Rimbaud in *A Season in Hell*: "*Il faut être absolument moderne*" [One must be absolutely modern] (Rimbaud 1961, 88; Kundera 1991, 137). "To be *absolutely* modern means never to question the content of modernity and to serve it as one serves the absolute, that is, without hesitation" (Kundera 1991, 138, emphasis in original). The passionate transcendence of modern love is intriguing in the postmodern light of its flagrant rhetoricity. Love is suffused with its tropical history; rather than being absolute, it is utterly conventional. Love celebrates its singularity, even as it waxes passionate over its universality, but it is as iterative as it is common. "'I love you' is always something of a quotation, as many lovers have attested" (Culler 1982, 120). "We are always taking the names of dead or past characters and applying them to others" (Harold Bloom, in Salusinszky 1987, 56). From this perspective, the more the discourse of love strains to maintain its naturalness, the more it manifests its artificiality; the more it reiterates its psychological interiority, the more it demonstrates its social contingency. The manifest concreteness of nature appears a deceit. First, "language is a process in

which sheer existence is given form, the abstraction through which the subject apprehends the concrete world, which gives form to the concrete world” (Lecerle 1985, 37). The concrete is made concrete through the particular abstraction of language, and so experience in general is symmetrical with the experience of reading. “What we mean by ‘concrete’ is ‘description according to our normal modes of perception.’ The codes of fiction are tied to our perceptual system as well as to our language” (Scholes 1982, 25). Perceivers, like readers, are traversed by codes. If “leaving the reader ‘free’ to interpret is an impossibility” (Scholes 1982, 14), so is leaving the subject ‘free’ to perceive. The faith in such freedom grounds much of the discourse of love. Absolutely modern love, therefore, demands a pervasive and puissant apparatus to maintain its difficult truth.

Considerations of the mechanics, or better, fluidics, of this apparatus may be gained by a slightly different reading of Cottom’s anecdote: his students are refusing to think about love. Then their deeply felt truth is a flight from knowledge to mystery. They are less vigorous versions of William Proxmire, a U.S. Senator: “I believe that 200 million Americans want to leave some things in life a mystery, ... and right at the top of the list of the things we don’t want to know is why a man falls in love with a woman and vice-versa”¹⁰ (Rubin 1988, x). Or perhaps this is slightly wrong; perhaps it is not *knowledge* that the students are fleeing—after all, they do lay claim to their own knowledge—but epistemology. In their own minds, truth does exist, but it is secured by non-rational means: feeling, instinct, divine inspiration, the wisdom of the body, common sense, and personal experience. A suspiciously satisfying simplicity ensues. “Students in literature classes, questioned about [*Great Expectations* and] the way Pip describes his feelings—‘I loved her simply because I found her irresistible’—have assured me that ‘love is just that way sometimes ... it isn’t logical.’ These students, of course, were

¹⁰ I suspect that higher on the list of things Senator Proxmire doesn’t want to know is why a man falls in love with a man, or a woman with a woman, or a man with a boy. The attempt to exclude certain knowledges is couched in other exclusions—the politics of rhetoric in another form.

unknowingly repeating the wisdom of innumerable professors of literature.... [There is] the assumption that *love, in a sense, explains itself: that love is love*" (Cottom 1989, 115, emphasis added). Love explains itself; love is love: the ultimate closure. As a very bright, very analytical man told me, "Some things just *are*. Some things cannot be explained." Love makes sense, though that sense obtains in the necessary absence of logic. I have met the students of Cottom; they are everywhere. They mark themselves by their declarations against the 'over-intellectualizing' of love. They embrace the carnal, biomedical trope which divides and separates the heart from the head, love from thought, and the irrational from the rational.¹¹ This division, is, to use Michael Taussig's description, the "tired game of emotion versus thought, body versus mind" (1992b, 147), but that very banality testifies to its pervasiveness and predominance. This structure of binary oppositions is homologous to the ubiquitous Cartesian dualism of modernism. By aligning with the carnal trope, the truth of love attains both naturalness and irrefragability. Again, a critical discursive slippage: *rational* is opposed simultaneously to both *emotional* and *irrational*, which permits the collapse of each of the latter into the other. The pertinent question is, why does local discourse converge the two? What does this convergence accomplish? And what does this convergence obscure?

"Love is love" is a way of saying love is a *quale*, and therefore essentially independent of discourse. One man told me, "You can't be too analytical about love," a delightfully and effortlessly ambiguous declaration. For the moment, I read it as meaning "you *shouldn't* be too analytical about love." Then love has a very circumscribed susceptibility to thinking. In Said's terms, this trope produces the dispersion of privilege (of authority) by constricting the vocabulary of such a privilege (1978, 44): *passion*, not *cognition*; *nature*, not *theory*; *feeling*, not *discourse*. The relation of the lover to love

¹¹ This trope associates with the alignment identified above: communication, information, centrality, signal, cool, science, neutrality, fact, cognition, sobriety, purity, as distinguished from obscurity, supplement, noise, heat, literature, bias, feeling, affect, passion, contamination.

parallels that of the sociologist to writing: both subjects are committed to denying that the objects they are dealing with are theory-laden. In other words, modern love is like specularity: its object is taken as being transparent to proper understanding. Just as the transparent representation of the real world demands language that will not contaminate externally grounded meanings with the productions of language itself, the pure love of the heart rejects the contamination of the intellectual head. “Tell me what you *feel*, don’t tell me what you *think*.” The knowledge of love depends on the absence or suspension of thought and the clarity of the heart (or the stomach and intestines—“I just have this *gut* feeling ...”). In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man are on distinct and separate quests: seeking the brain and seeking the heart. On the other hand, idiomatic English itself undermines this cinematic trope. As A. S. Byatt acutely observes, the word *heady* is both astonishing and revelatory, “suggesting both acute sensuous alertness and its opposite, the pleasure of the brain as opposed to the viscera—though each is implicated in the other, as we know very well, with both, when they are working” (1990, 471)—which is ultimately one lesson of *The Wizard of Oz* anyway, inasmuch as the Scarecrow and the Tin Man end up finding their desires in the same place.¹² Moreover, this purported transparency of the heart entails an immediate paradox, for the very existence of love is simultaneously constructed as dependent on its opacity and ineffability.

Anthony Burgess has translated Edmond Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* three times, most recently in his celebrated English subtitling of Jean-Paul Rappeneau’s 1990 film starring Gérard Depardieu. While preparing an adaptation in 1971 for a production at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota, he and Michael Langham, the artistic director, agreed that some radical changes to Rostand’s text were necessary, given the social

¹² It remains moot as to what and where that place is, exactly. Is it in the Emerald City (and therefore utterly illusory)? Or within the Tin Man and the Scarecrow themselves, always already? Or in the comforting rhetoric of the real/sham Wizard?

distance between 1897 and 1971, between Paris and Minneapolis, and between French and English. Those distances separated different audiences, who necessarily read *Cyrano* differently because they read the relations of love and language differently (and because they are read by love and language differently):

Of all the characters in the play, the least satisfactory to a modern audience appeared to be Roxane (whose name was degallicized to Roxana). She loves Christian, and yet she rebuffs him because he cannot woo her in witty and poetic language. This must seem very improbable in an age that finds a virtue in sincere inarticulacy, and I was told to find an excuse for this near-pathological dismissal of a good wordless soldier whose beauty, on her own admission, fills Roxane's heart with ravishment. (Burgess 1991, vi).

The spirit of Burgess's problem resonates in a very familiar text of love, one which confesses its own failure: "I don't have the words to say how I feel." Despite the disavowal, this text is a specific discursive device, a trope which forms and is formed by local contemporary circumstances. It valorizes the depth and sincerity of felt passion by positioning it outside discourse, in the posited real heart. The structure of the statement is, "I say how I much love you by saying I can't say how much I love you." So the emotional vocabulary which the sometimes celebrated New Age man has finally acquired is critically contingent on wordlessness: "sincere inarticulacy." The truth of the heart is transparent through the specific opacity of ineffability. While this truth is presented as more true for being of a piece with the natural heart, Burgess's experience testifies to its social/discursive production. What spoke truly to the *fin-de-siècle* French appeared as merely neurotic to 1970s Americans (with their propensity for locating attitudes in the psyche). The necessity of eloquence was the alien *Roxane*, replaced by sincere inarticulacy's exoteric *Roxana*.

Yet *Cyrano*'s eloquence is not lost on contemporary audiences—I spoke with 1990s Vancouver women (and men) who were moved to tears by *Cyrano* (or Rostand or Burgess or Rappeneau or Depardieu—who exactly was speaking in the film?) *Cyrano*, if not exactly great art, is undoubtedly great pathopoesis. Yet the viewers I spoke with

disclosed a curious ambiguity. They wept for the sake of tragedy and they were enraptured by the eloquence of doomed love—but they watched and heard from afar, for they believed that eloquence as unfortunately but irremediably anachronistic. To them, *Cyrano* was a costume drama; it was a period piece. Real life, of course, is nothing like reel life, so outside of the movie theater they and their friends and peers fell in love with “good wordless soldiers,” because poetics—even the grandiloquent poetics of *Cyrano*—were, in their words, “too much to expect.” Unlike both Roxane, who spurns the besotted Christian when he tries to play the poet of love and fails miserably, and, in at least Burgess’s mind, 1897 Parisians, these women and men were and are moved *enough* by the simple “I love you,” or “I love you more than words can say.” For even those who wistfully wished their lovers were “a little more romantic,” these simple words were true *enough*.

This observation is not normative; I am not judging 1990s Canadians as the inferiors of 1897 Parisians. Instead, I am presenting the contemporary reading of *Cyrano* to illustrate just one way in which love is worked through by discourse—the ennoblement of inarticulacy. This valorization of inarticulacy as the true, mute voice of love is closely allied to the valorization of mystery as the fitting epistemological condition of love. There is a contemporary slide from the superficial suppression of language to the obscurity of knowledge, and further through to the materiality of passion. The unthought aligns in a discursive trine: on one side with the unsaid—that which is located outside of discourse; on the other, with the emotional—that which located outside of the mind. These treble elements collapse into each other, to form one element of a familiar binary opposition: ineffable feelings as the contrary of thinking. This is a specific variation of the rational:irrational pair, which produces the alignment of love and irrationality.

The irrational, as that which is outside rational understanding, has another guise in the *doxa* of love: mystery. “The mystery of what a couple *is*, exactly, is almost the only true mystery left to us, and when we have come to the end of it there will be no more

need for literature—or for love, for that matter” (Mavis Gallant, cited in Barnes (1990, 226), emphasis in original). *Mystery* is a favored word in love. With this conviction in mystery, knowledge—at least knowledge of any depth—destroys. We love, or we are permitted to love, only to the extent that we do not understand what we are doing. Or, alternatively, mystery *is* the satisfying explanation for love. Love is understood, or more accurately, satisfies the standards for understanding, by being mysterious. Given such necessity, mystery then disciplines by force of threat. Such intransigence is a manifesto of power easily made manifest.

One of the difficulties of doing field work in this project was that people took offense at my theorizing of love with a vehemence that sometimes amounted to moral outrage. This work was work that was not supposed to be done, for even the least controversial heterosexual love is love that dares not speak more than its name. The violence of response was a measure of the breadth and depth of the offense, for more than just love was at stake here, necessarily. Given my fundamental contention, namely that love and language and culture (or history, or politics, or context) are inextricable from each other, the writing I do works against the received wisdom of that consecrated trinity. “Writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law” (Barthes 1977, 147, emphasis in original). The imperative here is to disturb, to look “closely at the text (so closely, perhaps, as to alarm its protectors)” (Scholes 1989, 6). The protectors of love are, of course, its guarantors of meaning, its experts, its subjects—which means, in the *doxa*, everyone.

Alvin Gouldner defines rationality as “the capacity to make problematic what had hitherto been treated as given; to bring to reflection what before had only been used; to

transform resource into topic; to examine critically the life we lead. This view of rationality situates it in the capacity to think *about* our thinking. Rationality as reflexivity about our groundings premises an ability to speak about our speech and the factors that ground it” (1976, 49, emphasis in original). *Rationality* is a troublesome term here, given the Barthesian repudiation of reason, as well as that most rational of pursuits, science. Nonetheless, this text appropriates and extends Gouldner, in order to gaze upon itself and understand one critical aspect of its own theorizing as the refractory capacity to think about our thinking *and* our feeling—or at least about our thinking and our love—and to speak about our speaking. With this deliberately and strategically offensive attitude in place, the mystery of love beckons as an invitation. Having moved away from the particular rationality of scientific modernism, that beckoning is not accepted as the impulse to frame and solve a problem, but neither is that beckoning rejected in the arrogant surety that the mystery of love is impenetrable and inviolable. Mysteries, after all, are stories meant to be read.

The mystery of love is presented as both an article of faith and a foundational precept, but it is arguably more a feint. First, it is too conveniently utilitarian: mystifying love is a facile tactic of preserving it by disallowing its interrogation. Note how the alignment works: the valorization of sincere inarticulacy; the prohibition of interrogation; the removal of love from analysis. Second, the mystery of love is a guise for homogeneity: in accepting that we cannot know why love is the way it is, we also accept that love actually is what we say it is. And third, while the necessary mystery of love is embraced, and even totemized, at the same time lovers *do* profess to know love.

Mystery and transcendence are not the only ways of reading of the knowledges of love, of course. They are merely the bounded dictates of locally invoked context, and context is boundless. Thus Barthes suggests a third context for reading: “Discourse on love though I may for years at a time, I cannot hope to seize the concept of it except ‘by the tail’: by flashes, formulas, surprises of expression, scattered through the great stream

of the Image-repertoire; I am in love's *wrong place*, which is its dazzling place: 'The darkest place, according to a Chinese proverb, is always underneath the lamp'" (Barthes 1978, 59, emphasis in original). Mystery turns playful with Barthes here, which is unsurprising for the overtly ludic theorist. Mystery still obtains, in that systematic, totalizing knowledge is still impossible, but tenebrific mystery nonetheless gives out tantalizing hints and clues, seductive flashes and surprises. "If it is any point requiring reflection ... we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark" (Poe 1986, 303). And mystery, according to Barthes, is most potent in the most dazzling place of love, which is the place of being in love. Resisting the trope of the authority of personal experience, Barthes claims that the closer one is to love, the deeper is one's blindness to it—which is itself paraphrases that most conventional of love's mysteries: love is blind. Or love is sciophilous.

Barthes is problematic, however, in how he distinguishes discourse from concept. "Discourse on love though I may ..." can be paraphrased as "No matter *how much* I read/write/listen/speak of love ...", but what is decisive is a matter not of quantity, but of kind. The difficulty here is not that there is insufficient discourse, but that the discourse itself is insufficient. More content will not remedy a lack that is structured by form. The contention here is that the dominant modernist discourse of love, insofar as it is produced, and regulated by communication, *langue*, clarity, referentiality, and allied concepts of language, must maintain the integrity of these blind spots in order to maintain its own integrity. This is how the politics of the "demand for dialogue" are suspect: the imperative to communicate, to keep talking *in the same way*, is a strategy by which the immanent limits and productions of the very form of communication are kept off the agenda. Recalling the crucial 'areas of blindness' that Scholes identified in every text and reconstructing the visual metaphor in terms of the spoken and the unspoken, love and love concepts can be understood as silences. "What we call 'real feelings' or the inner self are simply silences discerned, given *our* analytical discourse, silences that do not

necessarily help us to grasp the ways that culture shapes and is shaped by human experience” (Rosaldo 1984, 147, emphasis in original). These silences are not silences which can be broken by better communication, for it is communication itself which produces them by communicating. The more we speak, the more profound the Rosaldoesque silence. This suggests the strategy of moving to, or producing, a different, more helpful analytical discourse—and thereby shifting the context of meaning. In such a discourse, “feelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell. They are structured by our *forms* of understanding” (Rosaldo 1984, 143, emphasis added). In such a discourse, the silences of love are readable as the (non)content of a particular language form.

Silence presents polymorphously across local discourses. Thus, Burgess identifies the valorization of “sincere inarticulacy” and “good wordless soldiers.” These literal silences get reiterated in the silencing of explanation: “love is love,” “some things just *are*,” “love is just that way sometimes.” This congeries of silences is symmetrical with the sociological lacunæ about love. But the most telling silence is one explicitly written out by science. To make a tendentious paraphrase of Rubin’s admission of the limits of psychology, poets and novelists can say things about love that scientists cannot, which is another way of saying that these silences of love are different manifestations or non-contents of the same form of communicative language. Rubin’s admission of the limits of psychological discourse is the clue, because he is making the same distinction between scholarly research writing and literature that Guppy makes, and conceding the power of literary writing. If love is radically contingent on the unsystematic, prolific, elusive production of meaning immanent to tropes, then language use that continually insists on its own literalness must be stymied, and respond with silences. Rubin is close to the mark, but necessarily off it: it is not the absence of literary procedures that limits the psychology of love, for tropes permeate all writing, but rather the absence of their acknowledgment. The great peril of this conviction in language-as-communication,

whether incarnated in psychology, sociology, or everyday life, is in its corresponding conviction that those silences are (specular) reflections of the real world, rather than productions of the implicated form of discourse. Thus a different inflection to truth as the unacknowledged fictions of a successful discourse: love is the unacknowledged fiction of the dominant communicative form of discourse.

One tactic for surfacing the fictionality of love discourses is to read different stories across different (cultural) discourses. “Dr. Audrey Richards, an anthropologist who lived among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia in the 1930s, once related to a group of them an English folk-fable about a young prince who climbed glass mountains, crossed chasms, and fought dragons, all to obtain the hand of a maiden he loved. The Bemba were plainly bewildered, but remained silent. Finally, an old chief spoke up, voicing the feelings of all present in the simplest of questions: ‘Why not take another girl?’ he asked.” (Branden 1981, 12) This is a clear clash of conventions. These are very different attitudes of love. And yet ... consider another tale, told to me by a Vancouver WASP woman, an articulate, ambitious nurse in her early thirties. This woman, reflecting cheerfully upon her own romantic history, said that she drew her inspiration for her personal philosophy of love from the movie *My American Cousin*. At the end of that film, the protagonist, a teenage girl’s first love leaves her broken-hearted. She is consoled by her mother, who tells her, “Men are like buses. If one leaves, another one will be along shortly.” This is advice that would sit ill with Western romantics thrilled by Richards’ folk tale, but it is advice the Bemba would understand. (Or would they? The change in gender is not an inconsiderable shift; so much of the heterosexist Western tradition of love is structured around such asymmetries.)

These tales point to a set of critical provisional propositions. The first is rather boring: love is heterogeneous not only inter-culturally, but intra-culturally. Of course, post-Cottom, the *cultural* of *intra-cultural* and *cross-cultural* is suspect, which leads to the second proposition: love is constituted through plural tropes which are irreducible to

each other. Plurality is not identical to subjectivity or relativism, though it may overlap them. The meaning of love in the nurse's tale departs from the meaning in the tale of the Bemba, but the former is not simply individual or idiosyncratic, but a reinscription of a very public cinematic discourse. Finally, the regimes of truth of love operate to impose an imaginary and necessary (and evanescent) unity of culture, maintained by various strategies, of which mystery is preeminent.

The nurse and the Bemba appear to end up in the same place, but the neat circularity does not hold. The same nurse also told me that when one particular love affair of hers ended, she left Vancouver and to work in Saudi Arabia for a year—the 'geographical cure' for heartbreak, as a different woman I talked to called it. This sounds more like the English story that baffled the Bemba. Now, the breakup was not the only reason she left, but it was a significant factor. The woman went on to tell me how relieved she was, when she arrived in Saudi Arabia and found that there were very few single men in the small community of Westerners that she worked and lived in, so she didn't have to deal with issues about dating. Is this a rebuttal of the men-as-buses trope? Moving twenty-thousand kilometers is a rather severe response to getting off a bus. Or is this a reinterpretation? One of the good things about buses is that you don't have to get on, if you are not so inclined. Or is this another reinterpretation? One of things about buses is that you *do* have to get on, eventually—it's just that any bus will take you to the same place, so you can delay getting on for as long as you want. Or is this another reinterpretation? Buses can take you places—but they may not take you where you want to go. The polysemy of a tropical *parole* seductively and insidiously fosters such multiple rereading and multiple shifts of meaning.

The nurse is confident that she knows what love means to her. Putative truth invests putative authority her, just as it does in individuated subjects like Cottom's students, enough so they can challenge their professor in the grossly unequal politics of the classroom, but that truth simultaneously and necessarily constrains them to know and

speak in specifically productive, restricting and excluding ways. Love is real for them—it has force and consequences in their worlds—but, as Clifford notes, “what appears as ‘real’ in history, the social sciences, the arts, even in common sense, is always analyzable as a restrictive and expressive set of social codes and conventions” (1986, 10). The local codes: Love is real—it is transparent to the universal, subjective human heart; love is real—it is impermeable to analysis. Love is knowable; love is inexplicable. This is, once again, the coincidence of power and knowledge.

The politics of the tropes of love manifests in their participation in such regimes of truth and power—not so much hierarchies of domination, although these may sometimes be their “terminal forms” (Foucault 1980, 92) (such as straight love over gay love, or monogamy over polygamy), but apparatuses of ‘individualized’ techniques in which lovers and students cooperate in their own production and discipline. These regimes may be fruitfully opened up through the narratives of human experience—like Cottom’s anecdote—in which they manifest. The crucial fiction here is revealed by “one of feminism’s most important recognitions: that one’s desire may not be one’s own” (Weed 1989b, xv).

4.4: The Subjective Experience and Seductive Explanations of Love

As one instance of the operation of the regimes of truth of love, reconsider how the *doxa* that knowledges of love are putatively derived from and authorized by personal ('real') experience—as if personal experience itself is not thoroughly contingent upon specific conditions of circumstance, history, language, and subject production; as if personal experience, particularly in love, is not a consummately partial understanding (lovers being partial to each other); as if personal experience is experienced immediately, rather than through socially constructed understanding; as if personal experience is original in itself, rather than a reinscription of *idée reçues*. The valorization and necessity of personal experience constitutes the insertion of the person who experiences love—simultaneously the subject and the author of love's discourse—into discourse and knowledge. The situation of the lover with respect to the discourse of love is the "strategic location" of the lover (Said 1979, 20). Love gains a special authority from experience. "*What right do you have to say anything about love?*" "*Well, I was in love once.*" Once is enough; enough to lay claim to wisdom. If love is a transcendent essence, any sample of love is truth, and any personal experience is adduction.

This reconsideration of personal experience is not to deny its 'reality', or even to discount its explanatory power. The concern here is not whether or not wisdom in love is 'really' accessible from personal experience, but rather how personal experience maintains such authority in local discourses of love, when it does not have that authority in other realms. The concern is with how this aspect of the regime of love operates.

Consider a few takes on personal, or 'real' experience:

Take One: My real experience is that the sun rises in the east, crosses the sky over the earth, and sets in the west. This is my sensory reality, a very human reality. Yet that experience conventionally gives way before the greater authority of the discourse of science, by which I know that the apparent motion of the sun is a production of the rotation of the earth, where I am located. The discursivity of the authority of that

knowledge is emphasized by recognizing its historical circumscription: since I believe science, and not the Flat Earth Society, science is true enough, but it was not so long ago that science gave way before religious discourse, and the truth of the age was that the sun moved around the earth. Moreover, the relation of experience and discourse here is a particular one: scientific discourse maintains its authority, even though its meaning of sunrise/sunset, when examined with care, rapidly becomes abstruse and abstract, a highly mathematical discourse of differential calculus and the mechanics of angular momentum, very much removed from usual experience and understanding. The local discourse of sunrise/sunset is therefore very different from the local discourse of love, where the accusation that the intellectualization of love abstracts it and removes it from people's real experience carries considerable argumentative force. To move from this simple physical example to more sociological ones, I know people who articulate their real experiences as "niggers are lazy," "East Indians smell bad," and "Jews are conspiring to take over the world." Or, closer to home, I know a distinguished cancer researcher whose real experience is that sociologists are idle, feckless, lazy, irrelevant, ill-read, obnoxious. Sociologists, I submit, are not prepared to simply concede the authority of any of these 'real' personal experiences. The relation of real experience and discourse is that discourse can critique real experience with authority. That critique need not be negative. A woman in her early forties told me that she had recently fallen in love for the first time in her life. She had had other lovers—she had even been married before—but those experiences were nothing like the one she was having now. She told me, "Now I know what all the songs and stories are about." Discourse makes the experience of sunrise false; discourse makes experience of love real.

Take Two: My real experience is that the earth rotates, creating the illusion of the sun's movement. Thus a different meaning to *real* from that in Take One: my conviction in my understanding of what is happening when the sun rises overrides the sensory impressions I have. The uneasy relation of truth and reality is starting to surface, and

disrupt their superficial coincidence. The rotation of the earth is real to me, although now, many years since I studied physics, the scientific evidence which supports that truth is ill-remembered and vague: something to do with the observed trajectories of planets and Occam's Razor. Similarly, the daily rotation of the earth is the real experience of many people have never studied physics, and never known any such evidence. Their real experience is completely determined by scientific discourse and faith in that discourse. In the same way, many people's real experience of the world includes knowing that nothing can go faster than the speed of light, that electrons exist, and that love is a psychological, individual matter, in the near total absence of knowledge of the justification for those knowledges (the first example, about the speed of light, is as widespread as it is mythical). I am not criticizing those people for their ignorance, because the size and complexity of postmodern knowledges necessitate such ignorance. The texts of the world are not masterable. All of us are compelled to take for granted, and on sheer trust, many things which are crucial in our lives. One consequence of that necessity is that the relation of personal experience to discourse is that discourse constitutes real experience. We know the sun does not rise, because we have been told it does not.

Take Three: My real experience is that I know that the earth rotates and the sun does not rise, but I nonetheless use terms like *sunrise* and *sunset* unproblematically. For many people, their daily existences, their work and play, are structured around the rising and setting of the sun. Newspapers and weathercasts list the times for sunrise and sunset. They do not say, "the time that the rotation of the planet carries our particular location on its surface into the area that is exposed to the sun's radiation is ..." or even some more practical contraction meaning the same thing. The discourse of sunrise/sunset persists for its own historical reasons and conventions, despite the acknowledged and contradicting authority of science. "It's nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 3). The relation of real experience and discourse is that real experience is organized by discourse

even when that discourse is held to be false (by another discourse), and this incoherence is easily, repeatedly, and usefully practiced. On the other hand, just what is real experience (the way we behave or the way the planet moves?) and what is discourse (the way we speak or the way science speaks?) here is moot. A corollary is that the utility and dispersion of a concept, meaning, or practice is a different from its truth, so that utility cannot serve, by itself, as evidence for truth.

Take Four: My real experience is that I know that the earth rotates, and the sun does not rise or set, but the tropes of sunrise and sunset are so powerful (partially because they materially associate with my real experience, as sketched in Take One) that I use and appreciate their deployment in discourse and conceptualization: *The Sun Also Rises*, “the sun is setting on the British Empire,” “It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!”, “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun.” These tropes form, inflect and transform the experiencing of reality, because ‘objective’ falsity forces the production of meaning to abandon its superficial literal pretensions, and proceed through highly connotative literary means. A polyphony of new thoughts and new feelings is made possible. The relation of real experience and discourse is that the peculiar discursive falsehoods of tropes have force and beauty in real experience; they construct reality. Yet unlike the scientific-discursive construction of sunrise/sunset in Take Two, the tropical construction of reality is not straightforward. Juliet’s aspect like the sun is at once concretely material and elusively discursive. Reading the trope produces meaning, but that meaning cannot be comfortably closed or limited, and it is through that poetics that the phrase can become a real intervention into the real experience of love for a reader. The literariness of the trope succeeds the literalness of true and false. In Take Three, discourse has force in real experience *despite* being false; here discourse, through figurative language, has force in real experience *because* it is false.

These four takes are not presented as being comprehensive; they are merely given to demonstrate how the authority of personal experience in the discourse of love can be

easily read as very peculiar. Yet the authority of experience is widely dispersed. A doctor I know is a radiation oncologist, a specialist in treating cancer with radiotherapy. When he asked what I was studying and I told him “the sociology of romantic love,” his response was to ask me if I had a girlfriend. When I said, “No,” he laughed and said, mocking me good-naturedly, “And you think you can figure out love?” Consider the parallel situation in his own context. He is an expert on cancer. He has never had cancer. Together, these statements are untroublesome to the point of being banal, but that is exactly the point. The different knowledges of medicine and love, situated in different regimes of truth, are subject to different codes of authorization. If I were to attempt to joke about the doctor’s knowledge of cancer because he never experienced the disease himself, the joke would fail. It wouldn’t work; it would be nonsensical. Yet his joke about my work succeeds (well, it isn’t excruciatingly funny, but it succeeds more than the non-joke about cancer) because, like all jokes that do work, it is structured about a kernel of tacitly and generally accepted truth.¹³ The particular posited truth in this joke is that the authority—the right—to speak of love derives in a large and sufficient way from the personal experience of love. To put it another way, love is real because it is experienced. Lovers are the guarantors of their own truths of love. Unexpectedly, love turns out to be a thoroughly empirical enterprise, albeit an unscientific one, since the objective and dispassionate observer of positivism is replaced by “the witnessing ‘I’ of subjective experience” (Miller 1991, 14). In this discourse, it is because I can *say* I have been in love that I can legitimately speak of love.

To give an inverse illustration, if I had never been in love, if I had never been loved, if I had never had a lover, if I were still a virgin in body and soul, and I was to study love as a purely academic exercise, I would be the object of popular derision, and possibly pity (I mean, even more so than I am already). I would appear as a caricature of

¹³ And because it does not reference cancer, which is distinctly unfunny in local discourse.

the dried-up academic, one trying to approach at a remove what is supposed to be experienced immediately. Because I can say that I do indeed have my personal experiences of love, I escape most such indignities, with some exceptions like the oncologist's joke. However, the achievement of legitimacy in discourse—and a limited, provisional authority—is purchased at the price of being structured as a peculiar subject by it. Stories of my personal experience justify my texts, but at the very same time they operate as particular explanations for who I am and what I do. Hence, what I do not escape is having friends and colleagues and faculty read my research text as a working out of some undeclared personal agenda of love—as a psychoanalytic displacement of an 'unresolved' (to use the vernacular) past love. This reading by those who know me manifests several salient theoretical points.

First, the author of the text cannot control the meanings that these readers generate from it. Authorial intent has lost its authority. A double movement is occurring here: the author is at the same time separated from and identified with the text. I speak, and I speak about myself, but what I say about myself (what people take as significant meaning) is not what I say. The trope of folk-psychology-as-interpretation is on the loose—as it always is in any popular discourse which addresses or implicates the speaking subject. My psyche, or rather, the reading of my psyche, is part of the context that is necessarily read into being to make my text intelligible. This language game is contiguous with the classical hermeneutic tradition. In 1828 Schleiermacher wrote that “the task [of interpretation] is to be formulated as follows: ‘To understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author’ Before the art of hermeneutics can be practiced, the interpreter must put himself both objectively and subjectively in the position of the author.” (1977, 83) The superior understanding of the interpreter has significant implications for the notion of explanation, as will be discussed below. For now, it is noteworthy that readings like this one can carry such force that they maintain even in the face of explicit disavowal by the author. Indeed, that force can be so overwhelming that

such a denial can be recuperated to support what it denies. “We think he does protest too much ...” is only one common tactic by which denial is read as confirmation. The text may twist and turn as new pieces of text are added, but a certain desired meaning can maintain against contradictory textual evidence by the reading into being of the appropriate context.

Second, the same text can simultaneously work in several, and sometimes incoherent or contradictory, ways. In the same gesture, the text gives me authority (I can legitimately speak of love) and takes it away (others will decide what I mean by what I say).

Third, the text privileges personal experience in a very selective way. The particular story of a past love affair does not constitute all or even a major portion of the range of all love stories that my personal experience might produce, but that one story is sufficient for many of its readers.

Fourth, this sufficiency manifests the diegetical desire for closure of the story, through the production of context. Here, a small text with huge gaps is filled out dramatically and conclusively. The extrapolation of unresolved love resolves the story of Doug and his text. Such resolution demonstrates the discursive operation of explanation. “If you ask people ‘Why does so-and-so do that?’—if you elicit a lot of explanations of behavior—you find that people go along and then they hit one of these explanations that allows them to stop explaining” (Roy D’Andrade, in Shweder 1984, 11-12). In this context, the truth of such explanations is beside the point. The interesting thing is to examine how they work, and to consider D’Andrade’s insightful, if circular, observation: explanations work when they allow the explainer to stop explaining. Being convincing or satisfying is not the same as being true or right (or helpful or productive or provocative or liberating). Alternatively, to be right, in the discourse of love, is to be merely convincing. As Martin Meissner says, “Truth is what you can get away with,” which applies to both lovers whispering intimate conversation, and sociologists

publishing in refereed journals. In *this* discourse, however, the seductive and satisfying explanations are the ones that are most suspect, because they are the ones that obscure the omissions and gaps of the discourse most effectively, by the dint of stopping further explanation. Love stories work in their own peculiar ways in the world. In this minor fable, they work to systematically produce closure. That is, in this discourse, they make sense by putting an end to inquiry. Nothing more need be said.

The Monty Python troupe of the 1970s did a famous television sketch in which Eric Idle pestered a fellow pub patron with a seemingly endless series of sexual double entendres. Idle went on and on, for several minutes, and the other character gradually moved from bafflement to irritation, until he finally exploded. His reaction was delayed for several reasons. First, Idle's literal language was completely inoffensive, if often incoherent. Second, Idle's chatter was not only highly figurative, it was also very elliptical—much of what was meant in the conversation was left unsaid. (Lots of nudge, nudge; wink, wink). Everything crucial was happening in the subtext. Third, Idle's victim kept trying to recuperate the conversation as an appropriate one. This performance—which was much funnier than my stodgy description suggests—manifested several language operations discussed here: diegesis, the production of meaning, the production of context. Yet, reconsidering the sketch analytically, what is especially striking is none of these, but rather how Idle chanted “Say no more! Say no more!” each time he turned one of his companion's utterly bland and innocent remarks into a double-entendre—the usually implicit work of diegetical closure and the production of meaning through the suppression of discourse made explicit.

To continue with the original example of explanations produced about my own work, I went back to several people who articulated variations on the ‘displacement-of-unresolved-love’ story, and told them how I read the production of this explanation. Their responses were uniform: the explanations were not undermined, but reinforced. They were very supportive of my work—after all, they were my friends—and told me that my

motivation was irrelevant, and that they were sure that I could still do good, important work, regardless of why I was doing it. In other words, their response neatly and unproblematically incorporated my statement into their diegesis, and made the whole explanation signify as a genuine solidarity.

The validity or invalidity of their explanation is not the concern of this text. If the existence and significance of the unconscious is accepted, that explanation could well be true (whatever 'true' means), despite my conscious dissatisfaction with it. The interest here, however, is not in the truth value of explanation, but elsewhere, in how this explanation is very seductive and satisfying to local inhabitants of my world—how it makes sense to them; how it produces sense. Further, while such explanations are obviously not limited to the domain of love, this domain seems especially susceptible to them. The discursive points of vulnerability, and not the grand themes, are those points that merit the most scrutiny. Love is susceptible to seductive explanations because love imbricates its tropes with subjectivity and social/discursive situation. "One needs to be vigilant against simple notions of identity which overlap neatly with language or location" (Spivak 1990c, 38). When I studied physics, I never had any peculiarity of my past read into my interest in electromagnetic wave theory. Physics, like medicine, operates in a different register of truth than love. The willingness to engage in such diegetical explanations is another manifestation of the dispersed authority in the knowledges of love. What is appearing is the trope of the everyday, universal expert in the regimes of love.

However, what is permissible, and perhaps necessary, in local discourses of love cannot be so easily accepted in this analytical discourse. Seductive explanations are undermined, not so much because undermining is an intent of analysis, but because undermining is inescapable. The poststructuralist is less seeking to undermine, than attempting to observe and work with undermining that is happening already. In that spirit, the explanation of explanations, as just more text, is equally susceptible to the same

skepticism. Indeed, I have been accused of practicing folk psychology myself by the act of identifying it in my friends' explanations, although I maintain I am just analyzing discourse. This disagreement may just confirm theory—discourse and the (socially constructed) psyche are imbricated, and not separated.

4.5 Seeking Love in the Gaps of Discourse

The explanatory character of diegesis converges with the literariness of narrative to justify the orientation to rhetorical devices in the social meanings of love. General narrative concepts can be implicitly addressed through the narrower focus on tropes. Stories can be examined for their narrative coherence—the way the story “hangs together,” the way it structurally maintains its validity (Hobbs 1978, 5). This is a literal “making sense” (Mishler 1986, 89)—in other words, production and closure of meaning through diegesis. Tropes work not only by and of themselves, but also by how they diegetically organize and cohere stories, and thereby participate in more global meanings. Standards of coherence, of the logic of the story, are regimes of (fictional) truth by another name. Thus tropes mediate the meaning and authority of narratives through their reinscription of socially dispersed regimes of truth. Here literature and social practice coincide, here fiction meets Foucault.

The political analysis of tropes may begin by problematizing Lévi-Strauss and his figure of social life as a game (and is not the troping of love as a game so familiar as to be a cliché itself?). “When Lévi-Strauss describes man as a player at a card game who ‘must accept the cards’ he is given and who must follow ‘systems’ of interpretation, ‘rules of the game of rules of tactics’, we might ignore the issue of cultural law and instead read this passage as an instance of the mythological habit of thought, by which all human beings (we might argue) develop figures of speech to give a seeming order to their cosmos” (Cottom 1989, 91). (The universality (?) of tropes working to produce

coherence.) But what is necessary is to analyze “how Lévi-Strauss ... allows for complexity and variation in the game and yet does not recognize that we are not all interchangeable players ... that some people may be players while others are cards and still others are rules, limits, wagers ... that a situation in which there is ‘a connection between the male and the consumer and the female and the thing consumed’ cannot be described adequately as a game” (Cottom 1989, 92). What is necessary is to pursue and pressure the trope into admitting its assumptions, limits, elisions and exclusions; that is, into admitting its politics of meaning. “[W]hat [the poststructuralists] are about is asking over and over again, What is it that is left out? Can we know what is left out? We must know the limits of the narratives” (Spivak 1990h, 19). Such exclusionary politics of meaning both evince regimes of truth, and belie the scientific faith in the adequacy of transparent communication. “Every text has ‘areas of blindness’ that are in some way crucial to its interpretation. The text cannot say all it means, because its meanings are enabled by its silence on some crucial point” (Scholes 1982, 13). The trope manifests in such gaps, through its excessiveness (saying what cannot be literally said) and transgressiveness (violating nominal order). If the trope situates the struggle for meaning, the point is to illuminate that struggle in the disjunctions and interstices where discourse fails. Coherent, rational discourse contains and hides subversive discourses that at certain critical places continuously threaten to break out and disrupt order. Read this way, these systems seem less regimes of truth than “conceptual orthopedics” (Cixous 1986, 313), apparatuses which prop up a vulnerable discursive body. This recalls the intrinsic illicitness of tropes. Catherine Belsey writes, “Ideology obscures the real conditions of existence by presenting partial truths. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence in the interests of the social relations generated by and necessary to the reproduction of the existing mode of production.” (1980, 58) Belsey must be amended or extended, slightly: the presentation of partial truths is an inescapable aspect of writing or

speaking, rather than evidence of bad faith. It is not the partiality of truths, but satisfying explanations that deny such partiality which must be put to trial. The necessary strategy is to seek out the omissions and gaps, the “weak points” that Foucault’s general project ideally seeks out (Foucault 1988, 124). They are the manifestation of what Michèle Le Doueff, after Lacan, calls the Imaginary. She unsurprisingly invokes tropes to characterize those weak points:

[The Imaginary] is a rhetorical term which refers to the use of figures or imagery in philosophical and other texts. [Le Doueff] sees it as a kind of ‘thinking-in-images’, the use of narrative, pictorial or analogical structures within knowledges. In this sense, the imaginary is symptomatic of an (intellectual and political) elision: it marks those places within philosophical texts where the discourse is unable to admit its founding assumptions and must cover them over. It signals thus a point of critical vulnerability within texts and arguments, a site for what remains otherwise unspeakable and yet necessary for a text to function.

(Grosz 1989, xviii-xix)

In local discourses of love, these points of critical vulnerability are marked in multiple and different politicized means: by simple, brutal, totalizing closure: “love is love;” by arrogating individual, totalizing authority through the dispersion of expertise; by calling it ‘subjective’ and thereby ignoring the production of subjectivity; by denying access to understanding: “love is mystery;” by denying access to reason: “love is irrational;” by denying access to analysis: “love cannot be explained;” by denying access to inquiry: “love is something we don’t *want* to know too much about;” by denying access to voice: “love is sincere inarticulacy;” by being satisfied with the truth.

Kristeva’s version of weak points, in her psychoanalytically informed semiotics, identifies them as those places where the meanings that escape the symbolic order of discourse (*langue*) may be recovered and articulated (which neatly articulates the work of this text). These sites are especially associated with the discourses of emotion, which correlates with her Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. For Lacan, the *real* is the real of desire, of murder, rape, incest, parricide, suicide. “Our common every day reality, the reality of the social universe in which we assume our usual roles of kind-hearted, decent

people, turns out to be an illusion that rests on certain 'repression,' on overlooking the real of our desire. This social reality is then nothing but a fragile, symbolic cobweb that can at any moment be torn aside by an intrusion of the real" (Zizek 1991, 17).

Then the Kristevan discursive points of vulnerability are those sites where the real threatens to intrude upon this seemingly stable but fragile reality.

The semiotic chora is the site of those meanings and modes of signification which cannot be reduced to the symbolic order and which exceed rational conscious subjectivity. It is an effect of the entry of the individual as subject into the symbolic order and the repression which this involves. It is a site of what Kristeva calls *negativity*, a process of semiotic generation which constantly challenges and seeks to transform the apparently unitary subject of the symbolic order. It is manifest in symbolic discourse in such aspects of language as rhythm and intonation and is at its strongest in non-rational [emotional] discourses which threaten the organization of the symbolic order and the stability of its meanings, such as poetry, art and religion. In these discourses it demonstrates the temporary and unstable nature of *thetic* subjectivity¹⁴ and it is a site for the articulation of the subject in process.... Because the subject is the crucial site of the fixing of meaning, subjectivity is also a site of potential revolution. (Weedon 1987, 88-9)

The discourses of love, as non-rational and tropical *parole*, are particularly open to disruption, and their instability must be continuously patched over. The methodological consequence is that the operations of discourse are productively sought in those gaps or interstices. I wrote above of the dominant sociological discourse, and by implication, of a dominant discourse of love. Although I worked very hard to make these convincing, neither characterization is quite right (Spivak again: I am obliged to do this work, and do it as scrupulously as I can, but regardless of the result, in the long run, that work is not OK). These characterizations are insufficient, for the existence of weak points or critical sites suggests that these dominant discourses already contain their own nemeses. The corresponding poststructuralist suggestion is that it is precisely this immanent paradox

¹⁴ "In Kristeva's work the unitary subject of rational discourse is termed the *thetic* subject and is an effect of the linguistic structure of the symbolic order. The term 'thetic' refers to the assumption in rational discourse of a unified, transcendent, self-present subject which is fixed in a subject-object relationship of which it is the guarantee and which itself guarantees meaning" (Weedon 1987, 88, emphasis in original).

which necessitates the construction and exercise of regimes of truth, and thus of the politics of love, because the struggle for truth is already engaged as soon as any discourse of love is articulated or assumed. If the meanings of love are constituted as *in situ* discursive/social productions, and not definitions or references, then they are not inherently fixed or stable. Despite their characteristic presentation as natural, commonsensical, reasonable, or simply true, the meanings of love do not justify themselves. Such knowledges are substantiated by authority.

It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies....

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument of power and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. (Foucault 1980, 100-101)

Recalling that this section's discussion began with Lévi-Strauss's trope of card playing, if there is a game of love to be joined here, it is the game of truth and power in discourse, including this discourse on the discourse of love. The game continues; it never closes. Bets, whether those of Lévi-Strauss, Cottom, or Miller, are still being wagered, still being won and lost. The regimes of truth of love continue to struggle with their diverse discourses, and continue to sporadically fail. The poststructuralist position is that all regimes do so, including its own. For the positivist, this is spinning one's wheels; for the poststructuralist, this is both productive and unavoidable. Wheels within wheels.

William Carlos Williams once said "he did not think a poem should click like a box" (Scholes 1982, 51). If love can be troped as a box, then my effort can be troped as fighting against all the discursive attempts to make it click. I am just trying to open up love instead.

Epilogue:

Mapping the Map

When I began this research project, I thought my endpoint would be an accurate representation of the discourse of love in 1991 middle-class Vancouver. Inspired directly by the suggestion of Aruna Srivastava, my strategy was to seek out and examine the tropes of that discourse. I proposed to hold multiple interviews with each of about fifteen diverse informants, and then to do a close reading of the transcripts generated, in order to extract an authoritative, objective account of how tropes structured the local discourse of love. Then I could say, “Here is the way that people speak of love; here is the way that they feel and think it.”

Of course, this is not how things turned out.

The more I proceeded along the project—the more I thought about what I was doing—the more troubled I became. My predicament surfaced early on; it was even structured into my thesis proposal, in a profound incoherence between theory and method. In the proposal, chapters on the trope, poststructuralist approaches to writing, and the politics of language were followed by a long one on interviewing methodology. The trouble was that the latter, when read through the former, scanned as page after page of what Stoddart calls “textual strategies”—tropes which “structure a textual account so that it achieves its effect as knowledge of ‘others’” (1986, 103). That discussion on methodology manifested the proposal’s attempt to satisfy disciplinary standards of validity, so that the consequent text could successfully make a claim to truth before an readership of sociologists. That discussion, however, had already been preempted by what preceded it in the text, namely the discussion of theory which recognized disciplinary standards of validity as politicized regimes of truth. As a result, the chapter on method danced frantically and abysmally between fictional realities and true stories. Its rhetorical convolutions, and the preposterous length of the proposal as a whole, were

graphic evidence that this was a text that was straining to cover its own inadequacies. Such an effort could not be sustained. The project had to shift, and it did.

But what did it shift to? *This* place in a thesis, this location at its end, is conventionally the place for the writer to concisely answer such a question, to say where the research ended up, to make conclusions, to summarize the enterprise. Yet all these are guises for the global closure of meaning, which must be regarded very suspiciously by this now-shifted project. Having learned a hard lesson about the perils of practicing what I do not preach, I fervently wish to avoid such a neat, dangerous, and ultimately impossible closure.

As an alternative, I could appeal to certain academic conventions for closing without closing. Conclusions are the discursive sites where theses (and professional papers) often categorize themselves as ‘exploratory’, and where authors routinely admit that their texts raise more questions than they answer. Both of these tactics bring the text to a close by opening up prospects for further research; both of these tactics so familiar that they veer dangerously close to cliché. Beyond banalization, there is another and more serious problem with these tactics, one which is illustrated by a parallel ethnographic tactic. John Van Maanen observes that in recent sociological ethnographies, what he calls ‘realist’ texts—ones which “push most firmly for the authenticity of the cultural representations conveyed by the text” (1988, 45)—are often accompanied by what he calls ‘confessional’ texts—ones which explicitly admit the flaws and problems of the fieldwork which generated the realist representation (Van Maanen 1988, 73-100). Yet “fieldwork confessions nearly always end up supporting whatever realist writing the author may have done and displayed elsewhere The linguistic footwork required is considerable, but it often boils down to the simple assertion that even though there are flaws and problems in one’s work, when all is said and done it still remains adequate.” (Van Maanen 1988, 78-9) The considerable linguistic footwork of these confessionals recalls the textual convolutions of the methods chapter of my proposal, and is similarly

motivated. In other words, the seeming openness or undermining suggested by confessionals—and by the exploratory projects, and by the raising of more questions than the giving of answers—is disingenuous. Confessional ethnographic texts and other tactics are textual strategies which, despite their self-deprecating and open presentations, work to tighten, rather than loosen, the closure of meaning in texts. They appear in conclusions specifically to abet concluding. Such conventional tactics are obviously inadequate here.

Or, to make another reading, they are pointless. Ending this text with a Van Maanen-esque confessional would be superfluous, inasmuch as the entire text qualifies as a more serious confessional tale. Or, to make another reading, the confessional, in the postmodernist guise of the provisionality and contingency of meaning, is a major leitmotif in this work, a figure—a *trope*—whose signature plays throughout the text. Or, to make another reading, this trope of contingency plays recursively across both the analysis and the analyzed. The confessions throughout this discourse *on* love signify unconfessed parallels in local discourses *of* love, so that postmodern love resonates with the same fictionality as poststructuralist inquiry. This text has sought to map the discursive terrain of love, but the contours it limns turn out to be figurations of still other discursive maps. This recursion can distress the social scientist and the lover alike: one level of mapping denies the grounding of the analysis of love; the other level denies the grounding of love itself. Yet,

Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map and the thousand and one nights in the book of the *Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious. In 1833, Carlyle observed that the history of the universe is a sacred book that all men write and read and try to understand, and in which they are also written. (Borges 1964b, 196).

Sociologists get uncomfortable when the word *fiction* intrudes upon their work—it sounds too unlike *truth*. Lovers get uncomfortable when the word *fiction* intrudes upon their love—it sounds too much like *lies*. A sociology of love which locates and works in

this doubly shunned fictional space must therefore expect to draw fire, for anyone “who ventures into no-man’s-land brandishing cigarettes and singing carols must expect to be shot at” (Kermode 1983, 7).

The title of this thesis is an implicit questioning of the production and authorization of the meanings of love. My textual response, in its brandishing of burning fictions and singing of poststructuralist descants, must draw the same modernist fire that brought down Saul Bellow’s eponymous hero Moses Herzog: “I said to her, if a tear was an intellectual thing how much more intellectual pure love was. It needed no cognitive additives. But she only looked puzzled. It was this sort of talk by which I lost her” (1976, 77). This text is the sort of writing which many would say loses not only the reader, but also the author and the truth of love. “This [charge,] of course, raises a specter over the present manuscript, one which I neither endorse nor seek to discredit, and that is the possibility that the ... disturbing story unfolded ... in [these] pages ... is now and always was intended to be nothing less serious than a work of fiction” (Martin 1990, 183). *Nolo contendere*. This text is a serious love story. It is “a limited intervention, with no aspiration to be comprehensive or to cover the territory. It sheds a strong, partial light” (Clifford 21).

In that shifting light, I finish with no truths, but merely words—the same words with which *A Thousand Plateaus* begins. The best that I could hope for is that this text be approached as Massumi suggests Deleuze and Guattari should be:

The question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?

The answer for some readers, perhaps most, will be “none.” If that happens, it’s not your tune. No problem. But you would have been better off buying a record. (1987, xv)

Postscripts

To be in love is to create a religion whose god is fallible.
(Paul Valéry, in Maurois 1964, xiv).

I could not know yet that my caresses, my reverence, and—when I moved—my newfound exactitude of care, made me a lover. But I knew that everything I did was futile, that I could not really mend: only I made the gestures of the healer all the same, defiantly. I felt my own bones age against the hardness of the floor, and, breathing for us both, ... I tasted my own mystery. In that dark way, among my vanquished gods, I began my work in the world.

(Whittier 1989, 279)

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