

Obsessed by her reading: An interview with Adriene Jenik about her CD-ROM translation of Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve*

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September 1998

Elle ne saura jamais pourquoi tout son être s'est enfoncé dans un livre, pourquoi pendant deux ans elle s'est brisée, s'est allongée dans les pages de ce livre ... (55)/ She will never know why her whole being plunged into a book, why for years she spent herself, stretched herself through the pages of this book... (MD 51).

Nicole Brossard

What drove me to this obsession? The beauty of language, the character of Mélanie, the images flying about in my head as I was reading? The all-encompassing nature of Brossard's project and its confluence with my own cultural practice of revealing the process of production? My fear of the future?

Adriene Jenik

In writing her novel, *Le désert mauve*, Nicole Brossard¹, one of Quebec's most important writers, and a crucial feminist writer and theorist, was inter-

1. Nicole Brossard was born and lives in Montréal, Québec. Since the appearance of her first book in 1965, she has written more than thirty books in every genre, including *Picture theory* (1982), perhaps her most important (but obscure) work; *La lettre aérienne* (1986)/*Aerial letter* (1988); *Le désert mauve* (1987)/*Mauve desert*; *Vertige de L'Avant-Scène*, nominated for the Governor-General's award for poetry in 1997; and her latest novel, *Baroque d'aube* (1995)/*Baroque at dawn*. Brossard is now a writer of imposing status. In 1991, she was awarded the Prix David of the Quebec government, the highest literary award for Quebec literature, for the entire body of her work. Through her editorial work with *La barre du jour* which she co-founded in 1965, Brossard has elaborated a highly distinctive and influential postmodern poetics. Similarly, through her editorial association with *Les têtes de pivoche*, she has helped develop feminist theory in Quebec. She also co-produced with Luce Guilbeault the film, *Some American feminists* (1976), and in 1991, with Lisette Girouard, published the only anthology of Québécois women poets, the *Anthologie de la poésie des femmes au Québec*. Her books have been translated into English, German, Italian, and Spanish. As Alice Parker writes in her *Liminal visions of Nicole Brossard*, «Two generations of women have been intrigued enough by her feminist ideas to become familiar with an experimental textual practice. Each new piece she publishes and each reading/lecture is by now a remarkable intellectual and literary event, not only in her native Québec but elsewhere in North and South America and in Europe... Her reputation has continued to expand in spite of the complexity of her texts, because of the allure of her writing, the pleasure of her texts, and because of her radical politics» (1998, 3).

ested in «translation as an act of passage... the transformation of a reality».² Her intention was «to translate myself from French to French» (NB), and in the text, the process of translation takes place within one language, between language and body, and in the writing of a woman's tongue. Interrupting her own writing process in order to read and imagine, Brossard developed her novel as an «interactive discourse» (Parker, 1990: 109), a dialogue between two versions of a story, between two writers, one of whom is an active reader: a translator. Brossard's novel is a structural triptych, consisting of Laure Angstelle's novel, *Le désert mauve*, and a translation of Angstelle's book, *Mauve, l'horizon*, by Maude Laures. In the space between the two sites of writing, the translator imagines the possibilities of the text she has read, creating a fluid dimension of desire, a «space to swim with the words» (NB). Alice Parker locates Brossard's own prolific «writing project» in «the overlapping space between the epistemological crisis of modernism and the ontological crisis of postmodernism». As she adds:

Epistemology is in crisis because the production of knowledge and our access to it have undergone drastic transformations in the electronic age. The emphasis for half a century has been on new modes of processing and transmitting data, while a postcolonial, global community has unsettled former power arrangements whereby information was disseminated. Ontology is in crisis because revised philosophical and scientific insights have forced us to rearticulate who/what we are and what world(s) we inhabit. (Parker, 1998: 5-6)

Or as the question is posed within *Le désert mauve*, «La réalité avait un sens, mais lequel» (28)/ «Reality had a meaning, but which one?» (25).³

To describe the plot of *Le désert mauve* is difficult as the author projects a series of complex trajectories in lieu of a storyline. The novel conflates the story of Mélanie, the narrator of Angstelle's novel, and the story of Maude Laures, the translator of Angstelle's text. Mélanie is Angstelle's fifteen-year-old narrator, who, driving her mother's car, speeds through the desert landscape of the American south-west, filled with energy, trembling on the verge of loving another woman, Angela Parkins, and on the verge of writing. But nothing can protect Mélanie from the misogyny of Longman, the intellectual scientist, who cannot tolerate the thought of woman as subject, of women existing without men. Nothing perhaps but translation, as Maude Laures attempts to alter the fiction in her own translation, to suggest new relations between women and writing. In her Montreal apartment, immersed in the text she is translating, but resisting its violence, Laures attempts to alter the temporal configuration of the novel's narrative, to slow time down, as

2. From an interview with Nicole Brossard, which took place in Montréal on April 23, 1996. Hereafter referred to as NB.

3. Page reference is to Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's English translation of Brossard's novel, *Mauve desert*, Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1990. It was through this translation that Jenik first read Brossard. Hereafter cited as MD.

time seems to be suspended in a desert, in order to delay the death of Angela Parkins, at least for one more breath. Brossard's provocative writing has obsessed many readers and evoked some brilliant translations. One of these is the CD-ROM translation of *Mauve Desert* by media artist, Adriene Jenik.⁴ From her first reading of the English translation of Brossard's novel, Jenik realised that she had found a book that would transform her own life. Much like Maude Laures, the translator within the text, the process of translation was for Jenik not entirely one of choice: «No, I am not at liberty to forget *Mauve Desert* even if my equilibrium were at stake». But while Maude Laures was left to imagine dialogues with the author of the novel that had seduced her, that she had been driven to translate, Jenik enjoyed the luxury of knowing her author, and talking to her about «translating this work into moving images». As she explained in a letter to Brossard, exploring the possibility of her project at an early stage, Jenik was fascinated with «not only the transformation from written words to image-sounds, or from French to English, but also the movement from North to South, from night to day, from your generation to mine».⁵

In her CD-ROM translation, Jenik creates a space, «a landscape, an enigma entered with each reading» (MD133). Originally conceived as a film, the interactive reading is full of movement and images, the hypertext imposed on the print surfaces of maps and Brossard's text, tattooed with the inked notes of Jenik, her «active» reader. The process of production is consciously on display, as Jenik «shows the seams» of her work by including scenes of the video shoot and her correspondence with Brossard within the translation. Indeed, as Sue Ellen Case points out, «The pleasures of the text are located neither in plot nor in character, but in an obsession with a prior print text that performs its own obsession with a depiction of a particular terrain and images of people and things within it». (Case, 1996: 648) The reader is always made

4. Adriene Jenik is a media artist who for more than a decade has worked as a community activist in a number of collectives: Paper Tiger TV (1985-1990); the 'zine collective *Screambox*; video production and live satellite TV. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of California (San Diego) and a 1997 Rockefeller Foundation Fellow in New Media. According to her on-line profile (<http://visarts.ucsd.edu/faculty/ajenik.htm>), «Jenik has consistently moved among and between media. This insistence on expressing herself and her ideas on many levels (musical composition, math/logic/programming, telecommunication, drawing/painting, videography) is at present finding its home in the development of computer-based interactive work. MAUVE DESERT: A CD-ROM Translation is Jenik's internationally acclaimed interactive narrative based on the novel *Le désert mauve* by French Canadian author Nicole Brossard. Jenik wrote, directed, produced, edited, designed, programmed and published the disc... Her current projects include the on-line performance (with Lisa Brenneis) of <waitingfor-godot.com>, the development of a multi-user multi-generational on-line world inspired by a feminist science fiction text». Those readers interested in ordering her CD-ROM can contact Jenik at <ajenik@ucsd.edu>.
5. From Adriene Jenik's unpublished thesis concerning the making of her CD translation, *Mauve desert*. Hereafter referred to as AJ.

conscious of her own activity, her own presence within the site of the story as Mélanie's eyes in the rear-view mirror seek hers. In the first screen the Arizona desert fills with the sound of insects and then cars, and the blinking neon of a motel sign from the first screen, and a woman's voice (Jenik's) gently cautions the reader to drive carefully: «As you drive *Mauve Desert*, I hope you keep in mind where you sit and what drives you to understand».

The introductory screens are placed in such a way that all background material about the book, the characters, and how to drive the CD-ROM can be impetuously passed in one's rush to drive *Mauve Desert*. If this happens you are driving at your own peril, since you may not be able to piece together what is happening. My hope is not to produce confusion or obfuscation, but rather to set up a situation in which, like Mélanie, you learn that even in interactive media there are consequences for your actions. (AJ)

The CD drives the story off the page, off the main road, and into the desert (*désir*), the dimension of desire. The reader, drives with Mélanie, Angstelle's 15-year-old narrator whom Jenik describes as «Brossard's picture of a desiring force», tuning in the radio for French, English, or Spanish versions of the story, or reaching into the glove compartment to select a map, Mélanie's notebook, or a revolver. There are three maps in the glove compartment, linking the desert, the site of Mélanie's story; Montreal, where Brossard (and Maude Laures, the translator) lives; and the maker, Adriene Jenik, who is located in the text through her reading and the text located within her through the making of her translation.⁶ Melanie's notebook consists of poetry; there is only one message when you click the gun: «the revolver is always loaded». As in the novel, as in the desert, there is fear here, too. Fear of violence as specific as a rattlesnake or a revolver, or as diffuse as angst. And there is the fear generated by Longman who cannot be controlled by the reader. In Brossard's novel, «l'homme long» is a threatening presence confined to a room at the motel, but he is linked with the violence of nuclear testing and the death of Angela Parkins. Maude Laure's file of this character consists of only a series of blurred photographs; she has no words for him. On the CD, Jenik links Longman to the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Disposal site, a threat to the environment. He is also a distinct threat to the reader, undermining her sense of freedom and choice. The cursor, skimming Mélanie's map, will suddenly change to a radioactive icon and the reader will hear the static of a radiation detector. Without

6. Jenik describes her Maker Map as a way to extend «the frame of vision of the project to include my own progress/process. These process elements also needed to be considered when thinking of the possibilities of an «interactive» piece. In my process section, Maker Map, which seeks to uncover the generational, cultural and shifting-horizon perspective of my translation, I would be revealing my own position as a woman maker. As Brossard has written, «To write I am a woman is full of consequences». I began to feel that my relationship with Brossard, my dreams and questions, the off-shoots of narrative contained within the actor's stories were all better suited to more quiet, individual and personal contemplation» (AJ).

warning, Longman appears in a series of black and white photographs. His appearance cannot be controlled and can shut down the reading process. The reader cannot forget about reality. In the car, too, with Mélanie, the reader must relinquish control, unable to leave the car until the driving sequence finishes (in a little more than a minute). This can cause impatience and be unsettling to hypertext readers who enjoy the free choice of the medium as one of its most liberating features. Jenik's CD, though, is designed to slow the reader down, so that she might think about the process of what she is doing, to find time to linger with the language. In this way, Jenik's translation makes explicit the connection a text has with a reader, that a text can choose its reader just as much a reader chooses a text; and that a text may carry a reader to regions previously unimagined.

Le désert est indéscribable/«The desert is indescribable» begins Brossard's novel. How Jenik translates versions of the «indéscribable» from print to screen is the process described the interview⁷ which follows.

BC: When I gave people your CD version of *Mauve Desert* to read, they said they grew impatient because you had slowed the rhythm and pace expected from electronic texts. This really interested me because Brossard says in *The Aerial Letter*⁸, that when we think, «there is nothing which says we must slow down. When we write, we are necessarily slowed down by the act of forming letters or of striking the keys of a keyboard»(150) and time becomes a space. And in *Mauve Desert*, the rhythm changed at night' it slowed down. Your CD changes the pace of information processing; it's not easy to «escape». Once you are in the car with Mélanie, you have to stick it out.

AJ: That was a big issue that I struggled with from the beginning in making the CD: the whole issue of user control. People that I was conferring with were giving me flow charts and at the beginning they just said that what makes media «interactive» is you can bail out at any time. You can click away wherever you want; you always have the option to go wherever you want: that's what makes it different from a linear medium, that the control is with the viewer. Well, I felt like, yeah sure, but I also took a lot of time to notice how I interacted when I was using CDs.⁹ There's this sense that you have to look at everything, and so I think you're almost burdened by the possibilities. I felt that if people were really going to get it, if they were really going to be engaged by it on a larger level, it was going to have to happen with the lan-

7. The interview took place at the University of California, San Diego, on February 25, 1998. I am grateful to Steve Cornwall for his patient transcription of the interview.

8. The English translation of Brossard's *La lettre aérienne* by Marlene Wildeman. *The aerial letter*, Toronto: The Women's Press, 1988.

9. Jenik describes her experience with CD-ROMs as comparable to her relationship with an advent calendar: «I would quickly open all the doors to see what was behind them and, after a brief moment of glee, would close them all back up. Since I had «seen» inside all the windows already, the power of the delightful daily ritual was diffused» (AJ).

guage, and with Mélanie. So I felt I needed to carve out some kind of space however small or short—I mean, you are in the car not longer than a minute and a half—but I needed to make a space in which people weren't concerned about where else they could go, or what else they could do, so that they actually had the chance to really be there, and have the language flow over them and through them. I wanted the language to have chance to penetrate... And again, I constructed them so that they're quite short, and that's the only time when you can't click out of the CD.

BC: Except when your cursor mark suddenly changes to a «radioactive» icon. Longman's appearances are another thing the user cannot control.

AJ: No, you can't control that, you can't control him. It was important to me that Longman frighten you and also take some control over the space you were in. He was supposed to be really unsettling, just as I had found his disruptions in the book as I was reading it, incredibly unsettling. Longman is not something that you just voluntarily go to, so he had to disrupt and also he needed to disrupt and unsettle, and make it clear to you that you weren't in control of everything in a big way. And that there was this parallel narrative that was happening, and that it actually was something that at some point you had to wrangle with.

BC: In the novel, Maude Laures translates Longman into O'blongman, making him a more substantial threat to the women. But in the print text, the reader can skip Longman's parts. Even Maude Laures, who imagines dialogues with the characters, avoids Longman; his dossier contains only blurred photographs: there are no words for him. He is segregated in the text, and confined to his motel room until the last chapter when he enters the bar and Angela Parkins dies in Mélanie's arms. But as a kind of contamination, Longman's presence is stronger in the CD translation, the ecological concern further foregrounded.

AJ: I live out in the desert, and essentially the desert has been seen as this kind of trash can, a wasteland for all the worst of civilisation. It's a complete tragedy for me. I feel like everything's that going on in the desert right now, and particularly Yucca Mountain¹⁰, was something that was going on that

10. In the course of «making sense of [Longman's] narrative purpose», Jenik «stumbled upon news articles about the U.S. Government's desire to bury 80,000 metric tons of high-level radioactive waste in the desert. My «update» of Longman focuses a lens on this decades-in-progress history of hosting nuclear experiments in the desert: from 1940's and 50's test bombings conducted by Los Alamos Laboratories in New Mexico (referred to by Brossard in *Mauve desert*), to the plans to geologically isolate high-level radioactive waste in Yucca Mountain in Nevada... In this «fact is stranger than fiction» script adaptation I position Longman as chief mathematician at the DOE sponsored Yucca Mountain Site Characterisation Project. In my narrative it is based upon Longman's certainty (read: ego) that the go ahead is given to bury this hazardous material in the side of Yucca Mountain. Currently (in non-fiction space) the site is being studied by the DOE in order to prove its suitability and safety for long term storage (AJ).

people didn't know about: it was urgent. And in the back narrative that I made for myself, about how Angela Parkins and Longman were connected, it made sense that they were sort of connected to the site; and then when I did the research on Yucca Mountain, I found out that there were three fault lines that ran directly across the proposed nuclear waste disposal site. I wanted people to understand the way that science was being used. And also the mathematics—it's called «roll of the dice» mathematics: I mean there are so many important implications for computer users. I think it's very interesting how the «certainty» of numbers is held up, and the extent to which progress and numbers are valued in our culture. Above all, it's urgent for me that this knowledge not just be an academic exercise. I read Longman as an historical figure, but also in terms of scientific ethics; and what kind of pressures go on in scientific communities; what kind of pressures are put on people to just sign off on things. I don't know if you stayed with the story to this point, but at the end of the ninth time he interrupts, Longman shuts the computer down.

BC: What about the complex figure of Angela Parkins, who is involved in the same nuclear project as a geometrist? In the novel, Maude Laures imagines a dialogue with the author of the text she is translating, and wants to know why the author let Angela Parkins be killed. Brossard's novel suggests that the reason Longman kills Angela is because he could not, as patriarchal society cannot, «support lesbian love, cannot accept the fact that woman can be subject» (NB). But your reading seems to be saying that Angela's death is a result of her being seen as a threat to the security of the scientific project.

AJ: I had to create an understanding for myself around the connection between Longman and Angela. That certainly wasn't like the book, but in trying to breathe life into Angela as a character, I felt that there had to be some reason for her to be around, and I think in the end it wasn't even necessarily that she was behind some implication but that Longman's paranoia is conflated with his male aggression. I was also looking at some transcripts from interviews with these whistle blowers¹¹ and was very interested in the way that this one particular woman scientist was engaging not just the power of the government, but also the male ego and its certainty, and that was something I wanted to engage as well. As a woman working in a technology field, I know there is an amazing amount of this kind of egoism among my male colleagues, and certainly it doesn't really have to do with science, or technology, or any kind of certainty, but has to do with the holding of a certain position. I wanted to bring that element in and show the extent to which women in these fields have to develop strategies to deal with governmental pressures, personal pressures, and the pressures of someone who is just assuming they are smarter than you are and more capable. I was an engineer

11. Jenik is referring to interviews with whistleblowers at Hanford Nuclear Facility which can be seen in Branda Miller's tape «Witness to the Future» (60:00, 1995).

at Disney for a while before I came here and when I was having problems doing programming a number of colleagues would just talk to me about how women's brains were different than men's brains and women weren't really cut out to be programmers and why did I think there weren't many women in engineering school. It was very insulting to hear that constantly, and you start to believe it because we all have internalised sexism. Angela's alcoholism is like a whole other level that I got into just from my own personal relationship with alcoholism and so that was really important to me like what kind of role that was playing in terms of her release and what was happening with her and the way that she was slipping further into alcoholism because she had this secret. I did a lot of work trying to make sense of Angela and Longman for myself in terms of narrative.

BC: What about the interface between the reader and the writer, and your media translation? HD said «writing is loving», and Daphne Marlatt says the ideal relationship is the writer making love to her reader. In your case, you are the reader of Brossard's text. And the media artist and the translator and in fact, a character in the text¹², creating another dialogue, another spiral of interactivity in your version of *Mauve Desert*.

AJ: There's a number of reasons why that interface engages me. One of them is my background as a video artist/ media artist. Most of my works —and in particular I can speak about a project called Paper Tiger Television, a public access group that works out of Manhattan, where I was a member of the collective for a number of years, — has to do with revealing the process, the way that something is made, so that other people will be empowered within that process. When I found Brossard's book, and had the revelation to do a translation, it really was exactly like what I was getting at in my past work: to show the seams, you know, to show this relationship to production, and then offer the possibility of a self-reflective moment within it. I felt it was important for me not to hide my subjectivity behind the work. It was important that I implicate myself, as an English speaker mainly; and important that I position myself geographically, in order to continue that cycle so that the person watching the CD would include themselves in it, too. I was a layer in that progression that needed to exist in order for the person that was watching the CD to feel that they were the next level. If you read the Brossard correspondence, you get a sense of how someone like her «mentors» younger artists like me, and what it might mean to be an older feminist. I think that people can learn from that, so as a teacher that becomes really important to me. Also, when I pressed the disk, I kept all the files open. Normally, when people make a disk they close all the files to protect them, but in my files, the way I have them pressed, you can actually, as a multi-media teacher, open it, look at the

12. The CD-ROM includes correspondence between Brossard and Jenik; a maker's map which features Jenik's face, and her voice introduces the CD.

code, look at every way that I've organised the piece, and really learn. People can open it up and analyse it and learn how to actually structure a CD. This is important because a lot of information about how to get something to work off a CD is actually industry-bound; it's not something people have access to in educational institutions.

BC: Reading *Mauve Desert* deeply affects the life of the translator, Maude Laures. She experiences what happens when a reader falls in love with a book: «you never know by what chance encounter, by what turn of phrase your life can find itself transformed» (MD114). When did you decide to plunge into the book, and translate yourself from reader to media translator?

AJ: There were so many layers in working on it, but I knew from the first paragraph. I was in a bookstore getting a bunch of books for my vacation, and I was getting another book out and *Mauve Desert* fell down on the floor. I went to pick it up to put it back and looked at the cover, and read the back, and threw it on my pile of books.¹³ It ended up being the only book I read on my vacation and I knew from the first page, from the first paragraph, that it was something I had to do. I mean I didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew I was going to spend a lot of time with this book.

When did I begin to translate myself? I think there were a number of different times: writing the script, and going through the process of writing, and re-writing. Then, having to understand that it was not going to be a film, that it was going to be something else: that was a really important moment of having to translate myself; having to translate my ideas and place them into a different context. And then, the whole process of working on a computer in which I really was having to do things, and then re-do them, and in the process ask myself so many questions.

BC: In the 1997 *Modern Fiction Studies* issue on hypertext, Sue Ellen Case's article in which your CD translation is discussed, leaves out the original; that is, she reads the translation as an original work in its own right, quite a departure from the usual way of viewing any translation as inferior, or always a palimpsest through which the original can be read. Indeed within Brossard's novel, in the dialogue the translator imagines with the author, she is initially intimidated by the book which is «unforgivingly previous» to her reading; but eventually she asserts her right to her own reading. With fidelity as such a tradition in translation, did you have that same tug? Was there a point where you just felt that no matter how much your desire to translate the book came from being in love with it, there was also the desire to write it your own way?

13. Maude Laures finds «her» book in a used book shop in Montreal: «Say, what can be plotted in your gaze that you were unable to understand during the initial readings when you annotated this unusual book found in a second-hand bookstore?» (MD 14)

AJ: Well, when I first went to Montreal and met with Nicole Brossard and spoke with her, it was really quite incredible. I talked with her about some of my ideas, like updating Longman and about including Spanish as a language of the region, and she just said this is your project you're going to do: I trust you. At that point I felt a kind of freedom. I asked her if she had any advice for me actually; she said, «I just want to fall in love with all the women characters», so I said okay. I mean, that was tough enough, right? But her saying that to me made it very clear that she trusted my instincts. The most difficult decision actually and the main resistance from her at a certain point came when I ended up deciding that I had to do *Mauve Desert* as a CD ROM instead of a film. When I realised that funding was not available for film, I went up to visit her, and I took a computer and I showed her some other CD ROMs so that she would know what I wanted to do. I mean, this was quite early; it was 1994 and there wasn't too much out there: there wasn't anything out in fiction¹⁴, and my background was in film video, not in computers, so Brossard had a lot of different resistances to the idea. First of all, I think she had been enamoured with the idea of seeing everybody really big. She had pictured it really being big, and all of a sudden she had to picture it being small. Another thing was that she was thinking about the experience of people in a theatre, and that whole relationship with the «big screen» and compared it with people's relationship to the computer: she had some, what I call very French questions like, can the symbolic exist on a computer screen? She also had questions about my background in film and video, and its relationship to what I was getting into and was not convinced that the computer would in any way be equal to the task. I was upset when I left. I hadn't expected her to completely embrace it, but we had had this understanding that this was my project and she wasn't yanking away from me, but at that point there was the issue of rights because I had thought all along I was going to be able to get money to do the project as a film. I also felt that this project wasn't something I wanted to do without her support, not that she had to be completely into every little thing that I was doing, but that I felt that it was really important to me that I didn't just grab her book away from her and do what I wanted. It didn't make any sense to me in terms of the ethic of the book and the community and everything else. It was clear to me that that wasn't the way that this was going to get made. Finally, I wrote a letter to her in response. This was the point at which I understood that this book lived inside me: I knew the language by heart; I knew the landscape; I had this image of what I wanted to get out, and also had a sense of what I wanted people to leave with. And I felt like there wasn't going to be any shaking of that; it had really taken root in my body, and that whatever came —whether it was a

14. In fact, there was some hyperfiction available. For example, Michael Joyce's «Afternoon, a story», appeared in 1990 and Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory garden*, in 1991.

film or a CD ROM¹⁵— was going to be true to that vision, and I was really clear about that. That's the point at which I noticed that I was no longer going back to the book because it was something that I had fully digested, and I was working from that place. I felt that I had lived with the book long enough, and lived with the characters long enough, that I felt really clear about what kind of people they were to me.

BC: The print text and the human body: there's a very strong connection in Brossard between the ink of text on the white page; the coloured inks of the translator; and the tattoo on Melanie's skin. I think it's Katherine Hayles who says that you just can't apply that kind of metaphor once you move into electronic texts. How do you deal with a text that has so much to do with the body? The landscape of desire may be just as much a virtual body as a tangible one, but how do you retain those metaphors in an electronic medium? Or do you just lose it, or do you think in fact that it is still working? And can you write lesbian in hypertext?

AJ: Actually, that's a question I struggle with as a person working on computers. The discourse on the body, whether it is lost or reinscribed is huge, but for me, it is very important to consider the human body that is sitting at the terminal. I guess some of ways that I dealt with that have to do with including the viewer in the navigational system so that there is this identification in terms of moving into the landscape of desire. From the very beginning, in my beginning voice-over, I talk about where you're sitting. I want people to pay attention to where they're sitting so I do something like with the book where you're moving the hand to underlined passages, and playing around with those layers. I guess the most important thing for me was trying to figure out the ways I could keep pointing out to a person about their own body and where they were sitting and what how what was happening. When I show the lips, Maude Laures' lips, I want people to think about their own lips as they read. Or with the cursor: there's a part in my map where it says if you squint your eyes you can see me in 3-D. Whether or not you can, I like thinking about people squinting their eyes—I mean some people can; it's like one of those optical illusion things and some people can and some people can't. I guess most important to me was the issue of obsession in terms of this landscape of desire. Melanie had an obsession for Angela Parkins, but also there was what was driving her, and then certainly Maude Laures had another layer of obsession; and then I had a layer of obsession. I feel the CD is a format in which you need to be—you are, literally—obsessive, working through this text or device, and so I wanted that to be another

15. *Mauve Desert : A CD ROM Translation* has since been screened at a number of film festivals, including the Festival International Nouveau Cinéma Nouveaux Médias, Virginia Film Festival, 2nd Annual Digital Storytelling Festival, Melbourne International Film Festival, and Toronto International Film Festival, several times as the first presentation of an interactive work in a film festival context.

layer of the landscape; having people thinking about their desire as they drive through it, and just using verbs like that to talk about it like enjoy your drive and things like that. I wanted people to think about what they were actually doing. I think there's a potential for a loss of body, and I find it very frightening because I experience it myself when I'm coding. I'm worried too because I think actually there's a great deal of pain people feel from sitting in front of a computer. I have a lot of friends who are crippled, and I don't want to contribute to that: that's not a small issue. I really want people to pay attention to what's happening to their bodies at the point that they're using it. I toyed around originally with a bunch of ideas of different interfaces. Like, I wanted you to write on a notepad because you have a lot of interfaces besides a keyboard, and the mouse, and I had thought about actually having a steering wheel that people could operate. I thought a lot about people moving their bodies in certain ways, but that would necessarily have limited where it could be seen, be experienced. It would have to be in a kiosk installation environment, and in the end I decided I wanted it to be more like a book where people could access it from a library, from their school library or from a café or somewhere like that. I wanted it to exist like that rather than in a really specialised context like a museum display.

BC: And just what happens to gender?

AJ: I think it is pretty amazing the extent to which even though men like this piece, they are very aware that the only man in it is not a man. I think it is very jarring actually for men. I got a lot of responses from a lot of men on E-mail, and it's a wholly different experience for them. A lot of electronic stuff is made for men essentially, and in fact, in my desire to get the CD published, I went around and people just said no, there is no market for electronic media for women, so clearly gender is left out in terms of thinking about a woman's body being the one that is sitting there in front of the terminal. So I think that *Mauve Desert* ends up making people really aware of their body. A woman may feel wow, this is the first thing I've seen on a CD ROM that I'm actually inspired by, and want to spend time sitting down with. Men may be very drawn to it, but they also feel some distance from it. And that was not necessarily my intention, but I think it just ends up being as much a comment on the extent to which there's an assumption about gender behind most things that exist. Although, it's very complicated because most of the electronic media, most of the CD ROMS that are out and about now that are really of any depth or interest are made by women: women seem to have a real proclivity towards working in this multi-layered form.

BC: Would you like to do the same kind of translation project again?

AJ: Letting a text take me over like that was really exciting. I am a wholly different person. It doesn't only have to do with the skills I acquired during the process; it really has to do with the kind of questions that got to me and

the kind of situations that I had to go through: I became transformed by the process.

Or as Jenik wrote in one of the links in the Maker Map:

It's 4:28 a.m. and I'm nearing the end of the road. I've been dreaming building and driving these particular paths for 5 years now. Three journals and 30 gigabytes later I find myself hungering for other things. On the other side of this creative and technical odyssey I feel the urge to tell you something. And realize I already have. It must be time to stop.

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