Rewritings / Refoldings / Refleshings: fictive publics and the material gesture of defamiliarization

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops the concept of fictive publics through the proximate gestures of rewriting, refolding and refleshing of certain characters. Feminist and queer rewritings of canonical literary texts have become a fairly lucrative area of publication, from Angela Carter's now classic fairy tale collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) to Kathy Acker's *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997), and a more recent spate of mythological rewritings including Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* (2007) and Ursula K. le Guin's *Lavinia* (2008). The intervention into patriarchal mythical structures via rewriting has been well documented by Cixous (1975), Rich (1976) and Miller (1986), but the ways in which this interrelates with the philosophical feminist and new materialist projects of the radical rewriting of modernity itself has not yet been investigated. In this paper I argue that a paradoxical relationality structures the concept of fictive publics, which is analogous to the modernist gesture of defamiliarization. Publics presuppose a proximity of strangers (Warner, 2002), and the concept of proximity is vital to queer studies (Ahmed 2000, 2006). Rewriting is constituted by a particular type of radical and contentious movement which has significance for feminist thought. Using these examples I explore the creative process of radical rewriting as a material gesture of intervention.

Keywords: fictive public, feminist, mythology, new materialism, rewriting

> A revolution in thought and ethics is needed if the work of sexual difference is to take place. We need to reinterpret everything concerning the relations between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic, the macrocosmic. (Irigaray 1993, 6)
>
> This constitutive and normative environment of strangerhood . . . requires our constant imagining. (Warner 2002, 417)

What does it mean to give someone a voice, and how does this contribute towards the growing of a new literary public sphere?

The need for a "revolution in thought" described in Irigaray's text above has been echoed by Grosz (2005) and Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) in terms of a radical *rewriting*. In this paper I posit rewriting as an embodied enactment of gendered materiality, examining a number of strategic reworkings of mythological texts that result in a multiplication of personae. The fruits of these rewritings, I argue, can be perceived as a type of gendered literary public: a fictive public. This fictive public shares qualities of other configurations of publics and counterpublics in that it is both familiar and estranged; close and distant; a multiplicity and a unity. To conflate these oppositional tendencies I develop and affirm a paradoxical relationality inspired by the assertion that publics presuppose a proximity of strangers (Warner 2002).

The concept of the literary public sphere, according to some, pays attention to both artistic and commercial interests. "Dissolution of genres and transgression of borders has become the rule, rather than the exception" (Forslid and Ohlsson 2010, 431). The generic dissolution and transgression focused on in this article regards gender, narrative and myth. The lacunae of audible femaleness as in ancient patriarchal discourses are obvious to us now as feminist researchers, and naturally we want to make those silent female voices speak. We make them speak through the creation of another fictional being or version of the original, and together these unsilenced personae constitute a new type of literary public. My focus in this article, however, is the potential for the concept of the public to be used in the fictive sphere.

Mythological figures are endless sources of fascination for artists and writers, which results in a multiplication of these personae. What makes the figures under discussion here a *public* are the unifying and yet estranging notions of gender and sexuality. Through the interlinked processes of rewriting, refolding and refleshing, gender imbalances are redressed, silenced female voices are unsilenced, and the result is a fictive public consisting of a plurality of rewritten female figures who may go by the same name but matter differently. These personae are both the same and different as the prototypes from which they spring. A public is "*poetic world making*" (Warner 2002, 422), and in this article I literalise that concept, drawing together a host of fictive personae who collectively make up an enfleshed, emancipatory subjectivity.

We will start with the process of radical rewriting, which has been championed in new materialist thought. As an intervention, radical rewriting goes beyond the limitations of what Dolphijn and van der Tuin call "classificatory negation" (2012, 120) – for example, the 'post-' of postmodernism. Rewriting is a gesture that is simultaneously critical and creative. Dolphijn and van der Tuin demonstrate how this gesture relates to sexual difference through pushing dualism to an extreme. The supposed 'paradox' of feminist thought – that it creates the sexual difference it seeks to eliminate – is in fact affirmed within new materialist philosophies. As they argue, feminist theory revolutionises dualist thought by making a qualitative shift from the noun of sexual difference to the verb of sexual differing. This allows for sexual difference to be traversed rather than overthrown.

Feminist rewriting or revisionism is not a new strategy or discourse, particularly in terms of the rewriting of canonical 'greats'. These greats can range from ancient Greco-Roman texts to more popular folk or fairy tales. The figures I discuss in some detail here are Arachne, Eurydice, Iphis and Lavinia, but there are innumerable other names that could have equally been the focus. They are mythological staples; they are typologies themselves. Their stories are comfortable, and the gesture of revisionism involves making them uncomfortable. The making-strange required here is an act of rewriting, refolding and refleshing, which is at the same time an act of defamiliarization. This paper examines the gendered nature of this act and gathers together the rewritten, refolded and refleshed beings.

Personae: conceptual, narrative, collective?

A 'persona' is a useful term for encapsulating multiple narrative concepts of 'role' or 'character' outside of conventional narrative spaces. This has been explored by philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari (1991), who believe that philosophy relies on conceptual personae to enact the concepts it creates. As they state in *What Is Philosophy?,* "Even Bergsonian duration is in need of a runner," (Deleuze and Guattari 1991, 64). As I have written elsewhere (Palmer 2014, 129), the conceptual persona in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology lifts an utterance or a being out of its particular enactment and makes it universal; it changes *parole* to *langue.* These concepts are just as ripe for the revisionist strategy. Tamboukou (2010) develops the concept of the conceptual persona drawn from Deleuze and Guattari into the *narrative persona* when writing about the women artists in her study. The narrative personae "become mediators through whom narrative as philosophy mobilizes thinking and narrative as art produces affects" (Tamboukou 2010, 181). The narrative persona demonstrates how we might use a person's story in order to demonstrate the movement of a concept. O'Sullivan (2014) develops the concept of *fictioning* in art practice in which art 'speaks back' to its progenitor through becoming something entirely other and untimely. "For the I is indeed a stranger, but it is only through a specific practice that this stranger can foreground itself from the habitual and familiar." (O'Sullivan 2014, 5). Braidotti (2013) also develops Deleuze and Guattari's concept when she outlines the need for what she calls 'figurations', which are critical, creative and alternative dramatizations of the subject. "A figuration is the expression of alternative representations of the subject as a dynamic non-unitary entity; it is the dramatization of the processes of becoming" (Braidotti 2013, 164).

Before examining some examples of these personae, however, we can take a few more examples of *conceptual* personae and determine how these might be queered or gendered. Deleuze and Guattari's list leaves no room for the feminine:

> The destiny of the philosopher is to become his conceptual persona or
> personae, at the same time that these personae themselves become something

other than what they are historically, mythologically, or commony (the Socrates of Plato, the Dionysus of Nietzsche, the Idiot of Nicholas of Cusa). (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 64)

A useful literary addition to the list here might be Virginia Woolf's Orlando. Orlando both is and is not Vita Sackville-West; Orlando is a both conceptual and narrative persona embodying the materiality and fluidity of gender. Braidotti (2006) and Ryan (2013) both read Orlando as personifying a queer new materialist vitalism. The following excerpt from Braidotti regarding the Virginia-Vita-Orlando relationship is worth quoting in its entirety:

> In other words, one's affirmation of the life that one is shot through with is materially embodied and embedded in the singularity that is one's enfleshed self. But this singular entity is collectively defined, interrelational and external: it is impersonal but highly singular because it is crossed over with all sorts of "encounters" with others and with multiple cultural codes, bits and pieces of the sticky social imaginary which constitutes the subject by literally gluing it together, for a while at least. (Braidotti 2006, 198)

The type of embodied relationality outlined here is precisely the rewriting/refolding/refleshing to which the title of this paper refers. What I would like to suggest in this paper is a different kind of collective persona: a *fictive public*. A fictive public could be described as a collective of personae engendered by myth and reimagined as a multiplicity. Both conceptual *and* narrative, the fictive public is constituted by versions of mythological figures who have been rewritten in order to enable the silenced females of the original narratives a voice.

Long perceived by the male gaze as an aesthetic horror, the figure of Medusa is particularly applicable for feminist rewriting. Bowers (1990) proposes that we perceive Medusa and other figures with the *female* gaze in order for women to reclaim their own sexuality. Here women would learn "to see clearly for themselves" (Bowers 1990, 218). As we will see a little later in the article, the foregrounding of a new mode of *seeing* is particularly significant here. Looking further back into feminist mythological revitalisations, Cixous (1976) infamously invokes the figure of Medusa in her exultant manifesto for a corporeal, relational, feminine writing.

> Write! and your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed. (Cixous 1976, 889)

The problems we can now see with this influential text have been recently pointed out by a rising star of the literary transgender world, Juliet Jacques, who rightly points out the Orientalist and appropriative descriptions in this famous text, as well as the fact that differences of race, nation, class ability, sexual orientation and gender identity are only mentioned in passing or not at all (Jacques 2014). Despite these time-contingent

reservations, however, it feels right to take up the Cixous' Medusa as a useful example of a feminist philosopher's appropriation of a maligned female figure in order to foreground the vital materiality of women's writing. It is possible to perceive of not one but several laughing Medusas, affirmed in all their snake-haired glory. As with the other personae examined in the following section, these characters inhere with one another forming a kind of mythological palimpsest; the way that they relate is through a shared demonstration of the potency of reappropriation.

Fictive publics: Arachne, Eurydice, Iphis, Lavinia

Arachne

In mythological terms, spinning and weaving are feminine activities associated with both materiality and artifice. We know that the *Odyssey*'s Penelope weaves and unweaves a shroud for her elderly father-in-law in order to escape the unwanted attentions of the suitors clustering around her while Odysseus is away. Ariadne possesses the spun thread that leads Theseus in and out of the labyrinth, whilst Arachne's hubris in the weaving stakes results in her being transformed into a spider. Miller's (1986) concept of the 'arachnology' is defined as

> a critical positioning which reads *against* the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblems of its construction . . . more broadly the interpretation and reappropriation of a story, like many in the history of Western literature that deploys the interwoven structures of power, gender, and identity inherent in the production of mimetic art (Miller 1986, 272).

Miller reminds us of the literature-as-web analogy with which Woolf presents us in *A Room of One's Own* and suggests that within the web of women's texts we may find "marks of the grossly material, the sometimes brutal traces of the culture of gender; the inscriptions of its political structures" (1989, 275). Miller describes Ariadne as a pre-emptive figure for Sedgwick's homosocial bond (1985). What is interesting in both examples is that traditionally they are both silenced and punished for overreaching their positions. The conflation of Arachne and Ariadne to "Ariachne" in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* has been debated by many literary critics in the last century (Bate et al 1996, 292 n.39). Whether a deliberate or mistaken blend of these almost-homonymic names, the result is rather ambiguous. Miller (1992) applauds the coinage as a "splendid portmanteau" and an excellent vehicle for a deconstructive reading:

> She is both and neither at once. To the similarity and dissimilarity of stories in the same mythical or narrative line must be added the lateral repetition with a difference of distinct myths, here called attention to by the accidental

similarity of the names. This clashing partial homonymy perfectly mimes the relation between the two stories. (Miller 1992, 14)

Whilst the laterality of the repetition is a useful aspect to be foregrounded here, Miller does not lament the fact that a conflation of two distinct figures here amounts to the elimination of both. Prohibited from her own individual subjectivity, Arachne and Ariadne fade. To this equation, then, we might rather add the possibility of rewriting Ariachne as an entirely new persona with her own voice; rather than eliminating the possibility of the other two she adds another persona to the public.

More recently, Arachne has been recast as restless Canadian travelling sales rep the 1996 novel *No Fixed Address* (Van Herk 1986). Rather than spinning or weaving, Van Herk's Arachne peddles women's underwear and drives along the roads on a voyage of self-discovery. *"From Calgary roads spider over the prairie. Arachne pores over Thomas' maps, the lines enticing her to quest beyond the city's radius"* (Van Herk 1986, 163-4). The verb "spider" appears a number of times in the novel, standing for a type of nomadic wandering which transforms the act into something else entirely. Resonances with Braidotti's theories of the nomad are inescapable.

> . . . the feminist subject needs to activate difference counter-memories and actualise alternative political practices. Becoming-nomadic means that one learns to reinvent oneself and to desire the self as a process of qualitative transformation. (Braidotti 2013, 344-345).

Whilst spinning and weaving are a means to an end, the "spidering" encountered here is an autonomous movement that is an end unto itself. Furthermore, Arachne's desire to move beyond the lines meted out for her on maps is palpable throughout the novel. Van Herk's Arachne therefore continues and develops the project of Arachne the spinner, but instead of being transformed into a spider as punishment for overreaching she rather has the agency of her own transformation, which, like Braidotti's becoming-nomadic, does not have an end point.

Iphis

> . . . the imagination doesn't have a gender. (Smith 2007, 97)

Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* transplants the Iphis/Ianthe myth to Inverness in the year 2007. Part of the Canongate *Myths* series which also contains Atwood's famous *Penelopiad* (2005), this novella queers its very own narrative line through syntactical playfulness. Iphis is reconstituted as Robin, a gender-fluid political activist with whom Anthea, reluctant employee of evil bottled water company Pure, falls in love. As Mitchell (2013) points out in her queer reading of Smith's text, the central motif of *Girl Meets Boy* is a material element: water. Rather than the predictable association of water with the feminine, Mitchell reads it as dismantling the gender binary and standing for a type of sexual desire that is quite literally fluid. Water and watery

language "eschews the logic of penetrating/penetrated (and thus, by extension, of masculine/feminine), so that erotic experience renders the body liquid, malleable but forceful: finally, watery motifs here express the saltiness of bodily fluids, a body dissolved in desire, the boundaries between bodies likewise dissolving" (Mitchell 2013, 70). New materialism teaches us the inseparability of water and the body. An example: Alaimo in *Bodily Natures* (2010) cites Steingraber's (2001) narrative of the material ecologies of motherhood and focuses in on a moment in which Steingraber drinks water which then becomes blood plasma and suffuses through the amniotic sac, in order to demonstrate that her theory of transcorporeality "her body, the habitat for her developing child, is inextricably linked to the wider world . . . Steingraber imaginatively transforms a medical test for genetic 'abnormalities' into a poetic exploration of how the substances of the vast world flow through her body as well as her daughter's body" (Alaimo 2010, 103-4). Smith's use of water's universal pervasiveness in *Girl Meets Boy* is much more sexualised, culminating in a series of syntactically parallel questions whilst narrating the lovers enthralled in their first night together:

> Was that what they meant when they said flames had tongues? Was I melting? Would I melt? Was I gold? Was I magnesium? Was I briny? Were my whole insides a piece of sea, was I nothing but salty water with a mind of its own, was I some kind of fountain, was I the force of water through stone? (Smith 2007, 102)

Requiring no answer, these questions beautifully encapsulate Alaimo's theory of trans-corporeality (2010), which sees the body as co-extensive with its material environment. Not only this, but the *transitional* nature of the language, the bodies and the elements invoked are both vital aspects here. Already a queer narrative, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is queered further in Smith's linguistic virtuosity. The process of metamorphosis itself is rendered real and physical, again through the language describing the sexual act: "I was hard alright, and then I was sinew, I was a snake, I changed stone to snake in three simple moves, stoke stake snake, then I was a tree…" (Smith 2007, 102). The list "stoke stake snake" literalises the material process in the most radical way possible within recognisable language. The words are pre-existing, but the syntax eschews the syntagmatic line and becomes serial. Another syntactical deviation Smith employs to literalise language's transformative power is the 103 word sentence consisting of the repeated phrase "I was…" or "we were…" with a different noun or descriptive noun phrase.

> I was a she was a he was a we were a girl and a girl and a boy and a boy, we were blades, were a knife that could cut through myth [. . .] were the tail of a fish were the reek of a cat [. . .] can we really keep this up? (Smith 2007, 103)

The elimination of any conjunctive word between the phrases in favour of *another* phrase very much conjures up the sense of eternal becoming, queering not only the

metamorphoses of Ovid's text but also queering *becoming* in the Deleuzian sense; becoming as developed by Nietzsche (Deleuze 1962). The linguistic experimentation in Smith's text renders the eternal shifting nature of being matter at every juncture.

Eurydice

Understandably, the form of the question is a common feature in modern retellings of myth as humans retroactively apply reason to the seemingly arbitrary actions of the gods. We remember Yeats concluding his famous poem by asking the enigmatic question of Leda after Zeus rapes her in the form of a swan: "Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" (Yeats 1923, 127). The Leda who exists in this poem, however, is still silenced. Yeats' Leda only exists through an inventory of body parts: thighs, nape, breast and fingers. The form of the question inhabits the almost-contemporaneous 'Eurydice' in H.D.'s poetic reimagining of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, but this time Eurydice does have a voice. H.D.'s Eurydice is rightly enraged and bombards the silent Orpheus with questions:

> what was it that crossed my face
> with the light from yours
> and your glance?
> what was it you saw in my face?
> the light of your own face,
> the fire of your own presence? (H.D. 1924)

It has been argued that whilst H.D.'s Eurydice refuses to accept her own death and is able to express her rage in her own language, she also "obeys the imperative of a gaze that cannot be escaped" (Bruzelius 1998, 458). While H.D.'s Eurydice acknowledges that the contingency of her own existence rests solely upon the gaze of Orpheus, she does not seize the opportunity to reverse her position and become the subject rather than the object of the gaze.

Acker's Eurydice (1997) demonstrates a good deal more agency than H.D.'s, and takes control of her own environment. She refuses to play the role Orpheus lays out for her as "the sexiest, the hottest piece of flesh I had ever encountered" (Acker 1997, 26); instead she is a subject in control of her own sexuality with a voice and a good understanding of the material agency of language and desire. Her sexual desire has the impetus to make a world: "The sort of sexual desire that when it moves begins the world started up in me" (Acker 1997, 22). Acker's Orpheus cites Blanchot (1981), and with Blanchot reduces Eurydice to the role of the that-which-cannot-and-simultaneously-must-be-seen. For Blanchot's Orpheus, and also for Blanchot himself, Eurydice is "the profoundly dark point towards which art, desire, death, and the night all seem to lead" (Blanchot 1981, 99). She is the centre of the night; the point to

which he cannot or must not look. It is as though Orpheus does not really want her except as the dark impossible point of art; the infinite. Whilst Blanchot focuses on around this point of impossibility in Orpheus as artist, Acker's Eurydice here demonstrates her own artistic perception:

> The countryside: Silver here is everywhere an object, and swamps. Pale greens and browns mix with branches; in this place objects and colors have the same status. Sky can be seen either through, or falling through, wood: inside the colors is a house. (Acker 1997, 15)

This beautiful passage demonstrates precisely the *matter* of which Blanchot speaks or pronounces the impossibility of speaking. Eurydice's artistic perception here flattens the ontological heirarchy of colours and objects. Whilst Blanchot's Eurydice is the muse who calls forth a creative flow of inspiration: "To look at Eurydice without concern for the song, in the impatience and imprudence of a desire which forgets the law – this is *inspiration*" (Blanchot 1981, 101); Acker's Eurydice lives in her own world because she makes the whole world hers. (Acker 1997, 1). We can see from this description the extent of her agency and power. She is referred to in the second person as well as the third; she is equally Eurydice and "YOU". Consequently there is a feeling of universal applicability to this persona who creates new worlds with her defamiliarizing gaze.

Lavinia

Le Guin's *Lavinia* is the deliberate fleshing out of a fairly marginal character, whose role is to wait and see is interesting because of the placement of Vergil, the poet, within the fictive frame. This enables Lavinia to talk about her own story with its creator and hers. Lavinia talks to the poet in the sacred space about her fate; he foretells some details about her forthcoming marriage to Aeneus which ultimately prevents her from agreeing to marry the Turnus, the suitor favoured by her mother. Lavinia is well aware of the disservice done to her in terms of an insubstantial narrative portrait and voice: "If you'd met me when I was a girl at home you might well have thought that my poet's faint portrait of me, sketched as if with a brass pin on a wax tablet, was quite sufficient" (Le Guin 2008, 5).

The poet wonders aloud why he has revisited the world of the living in order to communicate with Lavinia rather than any of his other characters, for example Aeneus. His conclusion is telling: "Because I did see him. And not you. You're almost nothng in my poem, almost nobody. An unkept promise" (Le Guin 2008, 63). The lack of depth in the poet's portrayal of Lavinia compared to that of Aeneus suggests a different kind of 'seeing' altogether, as I will return to later in the article. As the poet realizes the gendered nature of his creations, so too does Lavinia realise the difference between her reaction and her husband's if he had been presented with the fact of his own fictionality. "It has not been difficult for me to believe in my

fictionality, because it is, after all, so slight" (Le Guin 2008, 119). The question of narrative agency – as opposed to narrative predestination – is left deliberately ambiguous. Lavinia has some knowledge of the textual nature of her existence, and yet is simultaneously unable to alter her own fate. She is given a voice and is yet still denied agency, but only in the same way that all of the characters are simultaneously denied it. She appears to be the only character in the unique predicament of knowing both her fate and her fictive status. The relationship between literature and mythology, however, is necessarily constituted by an ambivalence in terms of the reciprocal levels of fiction, metaphor and literality. Consequently, it matters less that Lavinia knows she is not 'real', and that her fate is predetermined by a poet-author, than it would in contemporary times. It is Lavinia's centrality in this narrative, as well as her relative freedom of movement for a girl of ancient Roman times, which is striking here in its revolutionary nature. Lavinia and her friend run for miles through the countryside. "I was all dirt and dried sweat" (Le Guin 2008, 116). Not only is she rewritten as an entire character with agency, she is also permitted a messy corporeality that directly challenges the ideal embodiment of femininity of the time. Here we can feel the *refleshing* of Lavinia take place as she is rewritten in the narrative.

Paradoxical relationaities: intimacy and estrangement

In order for rewritings such as those detailed above to happen, a particular kind of relationship to the 'original' version must be affirmed. I argue here that what is required is a paradoxical relationality requiring simultaneous proximity and distance. Following Fraser's famous conception of subaltern counterpublics (1990), Warner's conception of publics as presupposing a "relation among strangers" (2002, 217) is a key beginning point. The very concept of a proximity of strangers is paradoxical in itself, but is nevertheless vital in the thinking of gender, race and other issues. Warner's concept of proximity is developed by Ahmed (2000) in terms of the nation as a space, body or house requiring precisely a proximity of strangers. Hickey-Moody's concept of little publics (2013) is expressed similarly as being both local *and* global. In terms of gender, Berlant (2008) proposes and advances the concept of the intimate public, noting again its paradoxical proximity and distance. The symbolisms of intimacy and touch have been well documented within queer literary theory. As Carolyn Dinshaw says in her queering of Chaucer's Pardoner's tale, "The dissonant hand renders what it touches unnatural, makes it strange" (Dinshaw 1995, 76). The dissonant hand, then, is estranging with its proximity. It is estranging or defamiliarising by its touch. As a researcher you can estrange through your proximity to a particular culture or discipline. If you queer a concept you estrange it, which is exactly what Ahmed has done with phenomenology (2006).

Both Cixous (1976) and Rich (1972) pre-empt more recent theories of relationality in the thinking of feminist rewritings. "There must be ways, and we will be finding out

more and more about them, in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united" (Rich 1972, 23). The so-called relational turn of the past couple of decades has been documented and explored in feminism and literary theory (Schapiro 1994) psychoanalysis (Mitchell 2000), new materialism (Barad 2003), affect theory (Venn 2010), and continental philosophy (Benjamin 2015). Prior to these explicit documentations, however, Cixous is already advocating a feminist materialist relationality when she asserts that writing is "precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death – to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another" (Cixous 1976, 883).

A *paradoxical* relationality, then, is thus due to a conflation of the opposing vectors of proximity and distance. This is particularly relevant when considering new materialist thought in relation to the feminist project of radical rewriting I outlined at the beginning. We want to be proximal; we want to be close to, preferably to touch the thing we are apprehending in order to perceive it anew. And yet at the same this strategy for perception requires a critical distance. So we are pulling in opposite directions at the same time. The concept of the fold (Deleuze 1988) has been useful for two analogical figurations relevant to this discussion: for dissolving the internal/external dualism in the thinking of subjectivity, and for figuring relationality. Probyn (1993) acknowledges the importance of pleating or folding when both constituting and dismantling internality and externality in terms of the self. The figure of the fold demonstrates the reciprocity of the processes of subjectificaiton and objectification. Through Deleuze (1988) and Foucault (1988), Probyn demonstrates that folding is always refolding: "The act of 'pleating' or 'folding' ('la pliure') is thus the doubling-up, the refolding, the bending-onto-itself of the line of the outside in order to constitute the inside/outside – the modes of the self" (Probyn 1993, 129).

Gendered perception: queer defamiliarization

In the introduction to their volume on feminism and classical myth *Laughing With Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (2006), Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard cite Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969) and Elizabeth Cook's *Achilles* (2001) as two exemplary modes of feminist rewritings. It is noteworthy that the section they highlight from Cook's novel involves the following line (about Helen): "Not one of them has ever seen her" (Zajko and Leonard 2006, 2). As they rightly point out, Helen is a figure infamously constructed by the male gaze. Helen operates as the catalyst for an entire war through the mere image of her face, and yet no one has 'seen' her. This suggests to us that the nature of the 'seeing' proposed by Cook is more nuanced. According to Russian formalist thinker Viktor Shklovsky, not a figure known for progressive proclamations about gender but hugely important for theories

of modernist artistic perception, *seeing* is a truly creative act (Shklovsky 1917). *Seeing* is opposed to *recognition,* which is a mode of perception that requires no autonomous thought. In the process of recognition, outlines and symbols are predicted, rehearsed and recognised; no creativity is required. The now classic text of Shklovsky's is *Art as Technique* (1917), in which he sets forth the theory of defamiliarization (остранение). The purpose of art is to defamiliarize, for Shklovsky; he uses this distinction to separate "everyday" language from "artistic" language and therefore "everyday" perception (recognition) to "artistic" perception (seeing) (Shklovsky 1917, 112).

Let us turn back now to Helen. Cook's line suggests that one has 'seen' Helen in the Shklovskian sense. Helen is traditionally recognised without being seen; she is perceived automatically as the face that launched a thousand ships. As a substitution of part for whole, Helen's face is a synecdoche for her entire being. The task, then, is to build another Helen: a Helen made strange. The way to do this is through giving her a voice. This is precisely the process we witness with Lavinia as outlined above: the poet's admission that he did not 'see' Lavinia.

It is my ongoing project to queer the concept of defamiliarization and present it in terms of gendered material enactments. The creation of a fictive public is one such gendered enactment: the telling of new stories, and in doing so, the creation of new voices. What I am calling a queer defamiliarization, then, can go beyond the linguistic and the aesthetic to critique the dominant mode of perception of the human subject. As feminists we can understand that a queering of defamiliarization itself, considering its now canonized and institutionalized position within modern aesthetic theory, constitutes quite a radical rewriting, refolding and refleshing.

Conclusion

> Increasingly, I find myself drawn to poetics as a mode of expression, not in order to move away from thinking rigorously but, on the contrary, to lure "us" toward the possibilities of engaging the force of imagination in its materiality. (Barad 2012, 14 n.24)

The role of the imagination in the thinking of a fictive public is clearly of vital importance, from conception to expression. The very materialism of Barad's own materialist writings shows us, in fact, that conception and execution are inseparable in their mutual entanglement. As Warner states in the quotation at the beginning of this article, what is required for the thinking of what he calls 'strangerhood' is *constant imagining.* The conception of a fictive public requires just this: a constant imagining and a creative execution. The cementation of this concept and the conclusion to this paper is therefore unashamedly creative in its execution: it consists of a list. The listing of names as a feminist intervention is not new; in fact, it is interwoven through

the text of Wittig''s *Les Guérillères* (1985). The word LACUNAE punctures the narrative throughout, and what fills these lacunae are a fictive public of female names, throbbing through the pages.

> AIMEE POMA BARBA
> BENEDICTA SUSANNA
> CASSANDRA OSMONDA
> GENE HERMINIA KIKA
> AURELIA EVANGELINE
> SIMONA MAXIMILIANA (Wittig 1985, 21).

The systematicity of the list is a device Wittig uses throughout her narrative. The subversion of syntax is another example of linguistic and material defamiliarization, as we saw above in *Girl Meets Boy*. The defying of syntactical convention within the framework of a narrative packs a symbolic punch as a feminist intervention. One concluding list is therefore required, consisting of the rewritings, the refoldings and the refleshings discussed in this article. The multiplicity of rewritings, refoldings and refleshings that constitute the fictive public, united by name yet defamiliarized, are listed below. Our task going forward is therefore to affirm and to create.

ARACHNE THE WEAVER SPINS ARACHNE THE DRIVER ARIACHNE QUEER CHILD OF ARACHNE AND ARIADNE EURYDICE THE SEEN BECOMES EURYDICE THE SEER EURYDICE THE MUSE EURYDICE BEYOND CANCER EURYDICE WHO DESIRES REMAKES THE WORLD HELEN UNSEEN HELEN BEYOND CATALYST IPHIS ACTIVIST BEYOND DISGUISED BOY IPHIS AS BOY AND GIRL AND GIRL AND BOY AS GIRL AS IPHIS LAVINIA MERE BLUSH LAVINIA FLAME-HAIRED OMEN LAVINIA SPEAKS RUNS SWEATS MEDUSA NO LONGER SNAKE-CHAINED MEDUSA GUFFAWS

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