

## Performing Archives of Passing, Moving Bodies across Language

Heather Hermant

**Abstract:** This experimental travelogue of a journey through process narrates research-creation work dealing with an eighteenth century "multicrosser," Esther Brandeau/Jacques La Fargue, purportedly a Jewish female passing as Christian male and the first (known) Jewish arrival in what is now called Canada. Outed on both counts and deported, this historical figure moved across many axes of differentiation simultaneously. This movement, these multiple simultaneous passings, and the fractured evidence that erupts this life into knowability, dictate particular ways of working in order to translate a French colonial interrogation record into the colonial present. This paper describes the complexity of translating the first black box theatre production to contend with this story, *ribcage: this wide passage* by Heather Hermant, into French as *thorax : une cage en éclats* (translated by Nadine Desrochers). The author situates this practice-as-research within debates about body as archive and what constitutes knowledge, and proposes performance-as-research as a realm in which a "new intersectionality" might best be elaborated, and body as translator/ion across languages and genres, temporalities and spatialities.

**Key-words:** Esther Brandeau; performance; archives; research-creation

**Résumé:** Ce récit de voyage expérimental traite d'un projet de recherche/création sur Esther Brandeau / Jacques La Fargue, une juive qui se faisait passer pour un chrétien. À son arrivée au Canada, son double subterfuge a été découvert et on a déporté cette personne qui se déplaçait sur plusieurs axes de différenciation à la fois. Ce mouvement, ces déplacements multiples et simultanés et la nature fragmentaire de ce que nous pouvons découvrir de la vie de cette personne nous obligent à puiser à des modes de connaissance particuliers afin de pouvoir traduire un interrogatoire consigné dans un texte colonial français pour la scène d'un présent qui demeure lui aussi colonial. L'article décrit la tâche complexe de traduire le premier spectacle boîte noire traitant de cette histoire, *ribcage: this wide passage* par Heather Hermant (traduction française de Nadine Desrochers intitulée *thorax : une cage en éclats*). Cette pratique-recherche s'inscrit dans les débats sur « le corps comme archive » et sur ce qui compte comme connaissances; l'auteure propose la performance-recherche comme un terrain propice à l'élaboration d'une « intersectionnalité nouvelle » et à l'exploration du corps comme traduction entre genres et entre les frontières linguistiques, temporelles et spatiales.

**Mots-clés:** Esther Brandeau; performance; archives; recherche-création

**Resumo:** Este diário experimental de uma viagem por um processo narra uma obra de pesquisa-criação que lida com um "multicrosser" do século XVIII: Esther Brandeau/Jacques La Fargue, suposta judia que se passou por cristão e foi também a primeira pessoa judia (de que se sabe) que chegou ao território hoje chamado Canadá. Desmascarada em ambos os planos e deportada, essa figura histórica passou por vários eixos de diferenciação simultaneamente. Esse movimento, essas diversas dissimulações simultâneas, e a evidência fraturada que levou essa vida ao conhecimento, ditam maneiras específicas de trabalhar a fim de traduzir um registro de interrogatório em francês colonial no presente colonial. Este artigo descreve a complexidade de traduzir a primeira produção de teatro experimental que compete com essa história, *ribcage: this wide passage*, de Heather Hermant, para o francês, como *thorax : une cage en éclats* (tradução de Nadine Desrochers). A autora situa essa prática como pesquisa em discussões sobre o corpo como arquivo e o que constitui conhecimento, propondo a prática como pesquisa como sendo uma dimensão em que uma "nova interseccionalidade" pode ser melhor elaborada, e propondo o corpo como sendo tradutor/tradução através de línguas e gêneros, temporalidades e espacialidades.

**Palavras-chave:** Esther Brandeau, performance, arquivos, pesquisa-criação

**Resumen:** En esta crónica de viaje experimental acerca de un proceso se narra un trabajo de investigación-creación entorno a la figura de Esther Brandeau / Jacques La Fargue, quien en el siglo XVIII

cruzó múltiples fronteras: se trataba de una mujer judía que se hacía pasar por un varón cristiano, y fue a su vez la primera persona judía de quien se tiene registro de entrada al territorio ahora conocido como Canadá. Esther Brandeau/Jacques La Fargue fue, por estos dos motivos, víctima de delación y deportación. Esta figura histórica atravesó a la vez varios ejes de diferenciación; su movilidad, esos pasajes múltiples y simultáneos, y los trozos de evidencia fracturada que, al hacer erupción, dan su vida a conocer, requieren de acercamientos singulares para lograr traducir este personaje de los textos coloniales franceses al discurso colonial actual. El presente artículo describe la compleja tarea de traducir la primera obra de teatro estilo caja negra realizada para dar cuenta de esta historia. Se trata del montaje de Heather Hermant, titulado *ribcage: this wide passage*, traducido como *thorax: un cage en éclats* (traducción al francés de Nadine Desrochers). La autora sitúa esta práctica-investigación en el marco de debates actuales acerca de qué constituye una forma de conocimiento y también entorno a la idea del cuerpo como archivo. Plantea desde su experiencia la idea del *performance*-como-investigación como un ámbito en el cual se logra elaborar una "nueva interseccionalidad", y también la imagen del cuerpo como traductor-traducción entre distintos idiomas y géneros, temporalidades y espacialidades.

**Palabras clave:** Esther Brandeau; performance; archivos; investigación-creación

## Introduction

In September, 1738, Esther Brandeau/Jacques La Fargue<sup>1</sup> arrived at what we now call Canada, the first (known) Jewish person here, the foundation story of Canadian Jewishness. S/he/they were outed as female and as Jewish, interrogated, held under house arrest for a year, then deported back to France for refusing to convert to Catholicism at a time when non-Catholics were barred by royal decree from the colonies, and disappears thereafter from the record. Armed with an arts council grant, I set out to research and write an evening-length series of spoken word pieces about this under-known story, thinking as I was then as a multilingual anglophone performing poet with not-so-distant francophone roots whose own ancestral and personal experiences of gender, language, sexuality and cross-cultural settler origins found profound resonances in the tale. Many years later I find myself continuing to perform this story as black box multidisciplinary theatre work, as site-specific performance, as one-to-one performance, across genres, languages and geographies, while simultaneously writing what is as far as I know the first dissertation concerned with this compelling piece of history.<sup>2</sup>

The "paper" to follow is an experimental travelogue through process: I will be narrating and exploring a research-creation process that speaks best through body, but is told here in text. My aim is to present my embodied exploration of the story as a layered series of translations and to demonstrate the relationship between the story itself and the performances of translations that it has compelled me to enact. I offer a descriptive narrative case study of moving across tongues, through my own bodies multiple, which in turn translate tongues, temporalities and spatialities as inseparable, as I search to find a way to "tell history" in the colonial present.

I will detail the intersectional nuances of the story itself and how it comes to us. Then I will describe my research-creation process as translation through/by what I have

---

<sup>1</sup> I include use of two names here not to reaffirm a binary, but to point to the multiplicity of this person's experience. I choose Jacques La Fargue because it was this identity that erupted the story into view, and only two names to avoid a cumbersome series of forward-slashes that would more accurately account for the complexity of crossings undertaken.

<sup>2</sup> I am a PhD candidate in Gender Studies at Utrecht University, The Netherlands, under the supervision of Dr. Gloria Wekker with Dr. Geertje Mak. The title of my dissertation is "Esther Brandeau / Jacques La Fargue: Performing a reading of an eighteenth century multicrosser."

come to understand as *becoming archive*.<sup>3</sup> The focal point of this discussion will be one major outcome of my research-creation, a one-person theatre work set in a live-mixed video installation entitled *ribcage: this wide passage*, half movement, half language(s), multi-collaborative across genres, and recently translated from primarily English to almost exclusively French by Nadine Desrochers in a collaborative physical process. Through my body we have returned the story closer to the language of its centre, en français as *thorax : une cage en éclats*.

I wish to suggest that the core acts of passing in the source story of the "multicrosser"—one who passed across gender, across "race" and/or religion, across geographies, empires and more—and the glaring centrality of my body as translator/ion, might compel us toward thinking translator as multicrosser. It is not just language across which one migrates in the act of translation here. Story itself compels different kinds of translational movement, as I hope to illustrate, broadening translation into multiple genres of practice. By recounting my seemingly circuitous route according to its own embodied intuitive logic, I hope to arrive at some thoughts as to how we might understand not just the nature of the encounter between translator and text, but of our understanding of what constitutes knowledge.

## I: I encounter

I first encounter the story of Esther Brandeau in a graduate performance class, when I am asked to research an ancestor so that I might step into that ancestor's shoes through performance exploration.<sup>4</sup> I turn to a Jewish great-great grandmother, and the research naturally leads me to read Jewish-Canadian history. There I learn for the first time of a purported cross-dresser as the first (known) Jewish story in Canada, one that is recounted in a few paragraphs and moved past, remarkable but unanalyzed. "This handsome, gay and refined young 'man' was in reality not a man, but a woman, and that her name was not 'Jacques' but Esther—Esther Brandeau" (*The Jew in Canada* 3). I see it, perhaps scandalously, as a queer "race"-crossing tale that erupts into crisis on colonial shores and results in deportation.<sup>5</sup> I wonder at the difficulties the details might have posed over time and continue to pose in the present to the founding story of francophone Catholic Quebec, and to gendered mainstream understandings of Jewish history and practice here, to the heteronormative assumptions underpinning such "foundation" settler tales. And the difficult web of complicities in the projects of colonization within which these stories are embedded. I wonder what this has to tell us about the present, a present of continued attempts at colonization (as the Idle No More movement reminds us).<sup>6</sup> I wonder about how we translate the embodied experience of all these conflicted intersections into language in the present moment.

<sup>3</sup> See Hermant, "Becoming Archive—*ribcage*" for my first published use of this phrase.

<sup>4</sup> "Testimony, Autobiography, and Performance" (Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, Winter 2005) was taught by Diane Roberts, director of *ribcage*. See Hermant *Becoming*, and see Roberts.

<sup>5</sup> For consideration of gender passing in the colonial period, see: Dekker and Van De Pol; Steinberg; Velasco. For a case where "race" and gender passing coincided, see Burshatin.

<sup>6</sup> Idle No More was catalyzed by four women activists, three First Nations and one settler ally, in 2012 in response to legislation that would remove environmental protections from Canadian waterways. First Nations activists have viewed it as violating their Treaty rights. I write "attempts at colonization," after Anishnaabe scholar Robin Cavanagh, who urges us to consider the implications of using just the word "colonization" and how this might discursively deny the fact of colonization's failure, embodied in the uninterrupted presence of First Nations people in resistance since first contact.

## II: What the archive says

The story of Brandeau/La Fargue is one of simultaneous and multiple crossings. The Jewish/*converso*<sup>7</sup> community of Saint-Esprit was the Jewish quarter across the river from Bayonne in the French Basque region where Brandeau originated. It was fed by the exiles of Iberian Inquisition, and was networked to Sephardic Jewish and *converso* communities in France, The Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, and in the Americas and beyond. According to the French colonial archive, a shipwreck on the sandbar of Bayonne interrupted Brandeau's journey to relatives in Amsterdam and led her to the house of a widow in coastal southern France, from which he departed as a young man and worked on various ships between Bordeaux and Nantes. Later he traveled north to Rennes where he worked as assistant to a tailor; then to a small town near Nantes where he worked as a domestic for a convent; then to northern coastal Saint-Malo where he was assistant to a baker, and finally to a job as a lackey in a small town outside Rennes. Five years after that shipwreck and after a day's incarceration for being mistaken for a thief while traveling overland back to Nantes, Brandeau finally boarded a ship as Jacques La Fargue at the port of La Rochelle, destined for Quebec City.

The above is one of many of my own recountings of the original recounting. Minus the pronoun choices that I have so blatantly imposed above, betraying my own positionality and intentions, thus does the scribe of the Intendant of New France write this story into posterity in a three-page, third-person *procès-verbal* that begins:

Aujourd'hui, 15<sup>e</sup> septembre, mil sept cent trente-huit. Par devant nous, Commissaire de la Marine chargé à Québec de la police des gens de mer est comparue Esther Brandeau, âgée d'environ vingt ans, laquelle s'est embarquée à La Rochelle en qualité de passager en habits de garçon sous le nom de Jacques La Fargue sur le bateau le St. Michel [...]. (ANF 129)

The archival text traces not just geographic and chronological movement. These travels across geographies, which purportedly transpired over a period of five years prior to arrival at Quebec, also entailed migration across genders, trades, classes, ages and communities, across languages, across religions or what we may today understand as "races" *avant* their naming as such,<sup>8</sup> *à travers* many liminal spaces. An intersectional reading of this story has compelled me to understand that theirs was never simply a case of gender passing, but rather what I consider interdependent crossings, crossings which enabled each other; what I call "multicrossing."

## III: I search for language for these ideas

In January 2013, I attended the 8th *Encuentro* of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics held in São Paulo, Brazil, where translation of the above *procès-verbal* formed the core of my presentation, the entry point into my investigation of what it means to work in and through archives, and what genres of knowledge production these archives compel in the process of translating meaning across temporal and other borders. The week-long gathering of political artist-scholars from all over the Americas

---

<sup>7</sup> *Converso* refers to people of Jewish origin forced to convert to Christianity during the Inquisition.

<sup>8</sup> On genealogies of "race", see for example Frederickson; Gilman; Goldberg; Mariscal; Wahrman.

featured performances across a vast range of genres, including street-intervention, theatre, working groups, cabaret, keynote addresses, workshops, performance art, installation, roundtables and teach-ins. The *Encuentro* offered an unusual and welcome academic space to me as a queer, politically-engaged artist-scholar, one where I could be present in all my capacities working at the convergence of performance, aesthetics, queer anti-colonial discourses, colonial history and academic production. At the *Encuentro*, three spoken/written languages—Portuguese, Spanish and English—operated concurrently, often hybridizing and surely losing meaning in the slippages. It was in this context that I was able to begin to articulate the project of this paper, with the working group "Performance Practice as Research."<sup>9</sup> I presented in Spanish with a peppering of English to a group of primarily Brazilian Portuguese speaking peers, plus two multilingual Americans and one Colombian. The majority of us grapple with how to legitimize performance practice as a scholarly endeavor with its own legitimate language(s) of knowledge.

In our working group, I began by showing a series of images documenting the kinds of archives I have worked with in my search for "the evidence" in the Brandeau/La Fargue story. Among these were the kinds of documents predictably understood as just that, as "archives": the three-page third-person testimony dated September 15, 1738; handwriting translating into a condensed version what Esther Brandeau, doubly outed, was purported to have recounted; subsequent colonial correspondence between the Intendant of New France and the King, and between his offices and the authorities at the French inland port city of Bayonne; a circumcision log book; shipping records; tax ledgers; ordinances; births, deaths and marriages; a widow's letter to a priest. I am at various degrees of arm's length from such documents. Some I read on microfiche and online. Others I hold in my bare hands in smaller local French archives where the protective arm of state bureaucracy has not yet removed the materiality of the record via scan to digital version from the contemporary, present body of the scholar-witness.

There are other "archives" though. Photographs of doorways and stone walls in Old Québec City. The view from a porthole in Saint-Malo, home of Jacques Cartier<sup>10</sup> and the place of his burial, where Brandeau as Pierre Mausiette or Alansiette is purported to have worked as the assistant to a widow baker years before boarding ship for Quebec. The stone-carved *macarons*—head of an African woman, head of a sailor—adorning buildings in Nantes that border the river where the slave ships pulled up for outfitting, a port at which Pierre abandoned ship and made his way up to Brittany. A beach. A gate he is purported to have lived near for a time, which is still standing today. The grassy slope away from a convent as it runs to meet a river bend near what was once a tannery, the convent where they may have worked. The barely legible name on a Sephardic tombstone sunk beneath the level of the adjacent river's flow, outside Amsterdam. My hand holding a notarial record seemingly unrelated to the story, but which I happen upon in a Breton archive, the sudden unexpected signature of my own Jewish last name circa 1727 certifying receipt of payment from a craftsman to receive his official standing. My body as it meets the archive.

And there are other sources still, the kind that move away from "archive" in the

<sup>9</sup> The Performance Practice as Research working group was convened by Cristine Greiner and Pablo Assumpção Costa.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Cartier was a French explorer from Brittany who claimed what is now Canada for the French Crown, in 1534.

forms that we commonly assume it takes, and into the realm of what performance theorist Diana Taylor calls "the repertoire", related to what Paul Connerton calls "social habit memory" (35); a living, performed, live and ephemeral accounting of "history," a remembering housed in and performed through the body in the social. The sound of the Basque language as it encounters French in the streets of Bayonne. The speed of a tide's retreat as *Semana Santa* processions pass behind me. My recording these as I move. Take pictures. Audio record. Videotape. My body as it responds viscerally, takes in information, archives it in body-memory.

I recount such a broad range of "archives" here to point to the body of the scholar and her embodied experience of the story researched. She will in turn translate from such traces into tellings across genres, a kind of performance. I work between what sometimes seem to be genre extremes that nevertheless vitally feed each other, that make each other's knowability: academic writing at one extreme, and performance at the other. In what typically counts as academic production, the body and experience of the researcher/translator tend to be absented from view. In performance, the researcher/translator is in full view, the body and its genealogies undeniably linked to, inseparable from all that is told. Ann Laura Stoler's analysis of Dutch colonial bureaucrats' experiences is an interesting example of the academic genre where the body of the historical researcher seems primarily to be absented in the discourse. Hers is an important analysis concerned, as its back cover summary notes, with the "affective registers of imperial governance" in the colonies. Interesting for our purposes here is that on page 273 of the 278-page analysis, the researcher suddenly erupts herself and her own affective registers into clear visibility by citing from her own journals. And yet, isn't it that very affective register that underpins her entire telling? Historians shy away from such self-inclusion. The archival scholar is a performer, a translator who embodies the story as she reads it through the lens her locational experiences, as she reads it through her embodied experience, in order to tell of what she finds. In order to perform the story through whatever genre with which she chooses to translate and represent her knowledge.

The story that would become the interdisciplinary theatre piece *ribcage: this wide passage*, which is in turn translated as *thorax : une cage en éclats*, is preceded by "the story" recorded in archival text. This text, and its "sister" texts from the same era—the colonial correspondence that ultimately recorded the decisions about Esther Brandeau's fate, along with the utter absence of any direct record elsewhere of Brandeau's existence or their direct voice or handwriting, compel particular ways of searching and reading. Between the lines. Through interpretations of wording. Through imagining into discrepancies. The fact of the unreliability of testimony given under the circumstances of its recording underlies any movement in the present from this record. Adding to these original documents are subsequent iterations of the story—reiterations of the content of that archival text in history books and newspaper articles across the centuries, interpretations that live in novels and installations that have been produced in the past decade.<sup>11</sup> These together form a trans-temporal cultural archive, which I pass through the filter of my body and experience. Indispensable to my reading is the nature of my own experience as a queer artist, a Toronto-born Jewish-Christian-descended person whose ancestral roots are Franco-Ontarian and Jewish Montréalais, among others. It is through

---

<sup>11</sup> See, for example: Lasry; McKay; Oberlander.

this intersectional experience that I read Brandeau's multicrossing, and in so doing perform my own multicrossing of genre and gender contexts. My layering of research-creation strategies, I argue, is compelled by the very patchwork of sources—and the patchiness of each of these sources—described above.

#### **IV: I research-create layers, an embodied archive**

*ribcage* emerges from my body as a series of gestures and embodied experiences across worlds, word-less, coughed up across centuries, continents, violences, migrations and grief, across genres, my great-grandmothers entwined with myself, the archivist entwined with myself, the poet entwined with the one I call a "multicrosser" Esther Brandeau/Jacques La Fargue. For months and years I work with this story and with barely a poet's word. Instead, movement, rhythm and sound, site-specific intervention, video installation, my body. Words in English eventually appear, but like the outer layers of an onion witnessing an interior that is neither English nor French, not language but body in motion. I make video poems out of gesture staged site-specifically. I emerge out of Lake Ontario in costume, shed skirts, corset and scarves, transform myself into a male ship-hand and disappear into a crowd, a body of witnesses, my audience on the beach. I walk through a snow-covered forest in handmade leather boots, over and over again. On my video camera, waves crash against a distant rocky outcrop in Galicia. An old man walks away from me, slowly, on crutches, along a Portuguese port wall. I loop my breath against a Hebrew melody, an old nursery rhyme in Dutch about a cross-dressing sailor boy.

*ribcage: this wide passage* ultimately becomes a one-person solo interdisciplinary theatre piece that begins with my own ancestral stories and walks into the archive to become it. My ancestral and contemporary experiences are the tools that enable me to read my way into the archival story out of which I emerge in the end, the poet and storyteller. In the same space of a single stage I triangulate several stories, move them through space. The story is the story of these intersecting stories. The diasporic movement of my settler ancestors. A grasped-at family tree that maps Esther Brandeau's absence, my own handwriting tracing these archival details in projection behind me, then chalking them frantically onto the floor, these lines of maps and family trees soon to pull me into the video projection itself, pull me into the story. My own walk of exile-meets-pilgrimage from Portugal through Spain toward France, delivered through an enveloping live-mixed soundscape and moving video projection environment. A sacred transformation from "female" to "male" that translates through movement and melody the psychic collision of passing from Jewish to Christian. I become Jacques. The story of an Indigenous landscape that is settled and settled and settled is told through collaboration between live-mixed video of me, a figure in hand-stitched boots walking and walking and walking through a winter forest, and the soaring sounds of live violin, my performer's body witnessing from within the audience itself.

*ribcage* culminates in a scene in which I translate the sounds of that three-page testimony into movement, my body a simultaneous translator as I recite the interrogation record, inventing new kinds of syllabic synonyms. The starting point three-page, third-person *procès-verbal* in the French colonial archive regurgitates itself back through me as movement syllables, my plain body, a plain black stage, under a single spotlight:

*Stage left, facing audience.*

Aujourd'hui [head flung back, chokes sound], quinzième [head flung back, chokes sound] septembre [bent knee, hand slaps raised thigh, gathers air into fist] mil sept-cent trente-huit [head flung back, chokes sound], par [step forward, arms straight in front, right fist a ball, left palm exposed, fingers push downwards] devant nous [fist into belly, collapse over] Co [stand up, head flung back, chokes sound] missaire [lean left, both arms float wavelike to right] de la Marine chargé [right hand over heart, soldier's stance] à Qué [head flung back, chokes the sound] bec [head flung back, chokes the sound] de la police des gens [right hand over the heart, soldier's stance] de mer [body leans left, both arms float wavelike to right] est com [head flung back, chokes sound] parue Esther [body leans left, both arms float wavelike to right] Brandeau [right arm reaches up straight, hand on high ledge] ...

*Stage left, 45 degree turn away from audience.*

I [right index finger framing outer edge of left eye] do not [bent knee, hand slaps raised thigh, gathers air into fist] think [head flung back, chokes sound] one ought [bent knee, hand slaps raised thigh, gathers air into fist] to believe the entire [up on tip-toes, right index finger framing outer edge of left eye] sto [drop down from tip-toes] ry [head flung back, chokes sound] of Esther [body leans left, both arms float wavelike to right] Brandeau [right arm reaches up straight, hand on high ledge] who came [head flung back, chokes sound] to Canada [head flung back, chokes sound] last year [full body turn 45 degrees to the left, straight pivoting axis] ...



**Photo caption:** *ribcage: this wide passage* and *thorax : une cage en éclats*, AKI Studio Theatre, Toronto, May 3-5, 2013. Video stills by Heather Hermant from footage shot by Melina Young and Shahin Parhami.

Head flung back, choking the sound of the words. Fist into the belly collapsing the body over. Palm over the breast-bound chest, like a soldier. Arms floating away from the leaning body, wavelike, drawing the body in counter-directions. Hand reaching high on a ledge. The body a straight pivoting axis. The text doing violence to me. I fight the text. I move within and against it as I speak it.

## V: My torso multiplies in language

Translator Nadine Desrochers, dramaturge Amélie Dumoulin and I are in studio in Montreal translating *ribcage*.

[My great-great grandmother] Riva. Married off to a widower decades her senior. She left, refusing to be his maid. And walks back to her father's village with my great-grandfather in tow. One year old. Who in turn would walk. Back to his father's village to seek his blessing at bar mitzvah, only to receive instead a slammed door in the face. (*ribcage* 1)

*Blessing* translates to French as *bénédiction*. My reaction is immediate, visceral. I cannot accept the word. So Catholic, it threatens to eclipse the sacred Jewish blessing for which my great-grandfather had walked so far not to receive. I propose that we look to Hebrew instead. *Berakha*. Which we feel we could use, but if used would have to be translated to French anyway. Or explained with added text. Or otherwise left not understood by non-Jewish audience members. Nadine consults Quebec francophone Jewish sources, and finds the widespread use of *bénédiction*. We settle on *bénédiction*. This is the expected back-and-forth of translating a dramatic text across languages.

The syllabic gesture translation scene, however, confounds assumptions about how a text moves from one language to another. The original, *ribcage*, is written primarily in English, but woven throughout is plenty of French, along with a spattering of words in Hebrew, Dutch, Occitan and Basque. The syllabic gesture translation scene weaves French and English, sampling from the original archival record, as well as its translations across eras from a variety of sources. The scene culminates in a sampling/remix of the archival text and its reiterations. This remix too is bilingual:

Aussi docile que revêche docile que revêche batarde si volage légère batarde such an uneven temperament her conversion quite dutiful obedient deliver her the entire story I do not think quite instruction not reprehensible the priests I approve your action aussi docile general hospital que revêche légèreté conversion quite the entire story the entire story I will undertake... (*ribcage* 15)

But the French version of the play is to be exclusively in French. When translated for a francophone audience, the play until the moment of the syllabic gesture translation scene itself is entirely in French, save for a few autobiographical details and presumably my accent to indicate the presence of English. Since the original piece itself is also partly about the very interstices *between* languages, and about my own location in relation to the story, we must find a way to allow English to seep into this final section. To reconstitute in French the bilingual archival recounting that is present in *ribcage*, we return to the original archival record, giving up the English translations that have fed the scene in *ribcage*.

As we proceed, the archival record, its translations into English in various newspapers and history texts over the centuries, Nadine's translations and my own accidental counter-translations have merged in the archive that is my memory, my remembering body, causing me difficulty in learning *thorax*. I am forced to suspend access to memory of the English, of *ribcage*, in order to embody *thorax* : *une cage en éclats*.

In returning the final syllabic body-translation scene entirely to French, we lose the

strategic rhythmic placement of that "k" sound [*head flung back, chokes sound*], and the violence that this does to my/through my body at rhythmically important moments. We might also lose the image that is hit just before the head is flung back, and sustained through the head flung back—the arms out in front, right hand in a fist, left palm exposed, fingers pushing downwards. We decide this gesture concurrence must be maintained, and to do so we need the “k” sound at the very end. To maintain both the sound and its strategic rhythmic location, while introducing some English, Nadine rewrites the ending altogether, introducing entirely new word-meaning.

Aussi docile que revêche docile que revêche batarde si volage légèreté batarde  
 such an uneven temperament sa conversion aussi docile que revêche la renvoyer  
 une foi entière déclaration I do not think instructions mauvaise conduite  
 ecclésiastiques zélés I approve your action aussi docile general hospital que  
 revêche légèreté conversion je raconterai the entire story **l'histoire entière à  
 raconter en anglais d'abord puis en français en France et au Québec.** (*thorax*  
 16)

Here, you can see that the language of the body has prevailed to guide the translation from English to French, with gesture of the body overriding words. The new meaning introduced (bolded above), however, is not necessarily new meaning but an underscoring of a thematic, embodied in the process of creating from this archive through a trajectory that now arrives back at the language of the story's first recording. What this new writing also does is require me to rework the movement; in the original, I cannot speak the text without the gestures that accompany the syllables, and I cannot perform the movement without reciting the text. So if the text changes, so will the movements that body-translate the sounds. Further, I have to find new syllabic translation gestures for a host of new sounds that are present in the *thorax* version of this scene and not in the *ribcage* version. Clearly, it is not just that the language that I speak as a performer that changes; I also source from a different body. *ribcage* is not the same as *thorax*. I must make decisions between retaining the spirit of the original "choreography," running with the new poetic opportunities of the new sounds and making compromises on “accurate” body-translations of sound according to the body-score I have created. The new gestures to accompany new sounds I find by sampling from the physicality elsewhere in the performance and/or consistent with the intention and spirit of this body-sound simultaneous translation of this archival document.

So we move from *ribcage*

the **entire** [*up on tip-toes, right index finger framing outer edge of left eye*] **sto** [*drop down from tip-toes*] **ry** [*head flung back, chokes sound*]  
**entire** [*up on tip-toes, right index finger framing outer edge of left eye*] **sto** [*drop down from tip-toes*] **ry** [*head flung back, chokes sound*]  
**l** [*right index finger framing outer edge of left eye*] **will un** [*fist into belly, collapse over*] **derta** [*step forward, arms straight in front, right fist a ball, left palm exposed, fingers push downwards*]  
**ke.** [*head flung back, chokes sound*]

to *thorax*

the **entire** [*up on tip-toes, right index finger framing outer edge of left eye*] **sto** [*drop down from tip-toes*] **ry** [*head flung back, chokes sound*]  
**l'histoire** [*left elbow pulled out to side, forearm hung limp perpendicular to floor*] **en** [*fist into belly, collapse over*]  
**tière** [*lean left, both arms float wavelike to right*] **à racon** [*fist into belly, collapse over*] **ter en an** [*fist into belly, collapse*]

over] **glais** [right hand cups below chin, follows sound trajectory out from mouth] d'abord puis [head flung back, chokes  
sound] **en fran** [fist into belly, collapse over] **çais en Fran** [fist into belly, collapse over] **ce et au Québe** [step  
forward, arms straight in front, right fist a ball, left palm exposed, fingers push downwards] **c.** [head flung back, chokes sound]

## VI: I arrive

After performing this body as simultaneous translator of archival testimony, I pose questions to my Performance Practice as Research working group in São Paulo. I have the sense that the whole preamble I had given is eclipsed, all the spoken language, the images that came before this body-translation performance. The vital information lies within that performance, more potently expressed than the language and the slideshow that preceded it. I ask my colleagues: What is this? How do I speak of this in language when it is its own language? Is this translation of the archival text, or creation from it? How do I translate this translation into the genre of academic language, when language may fail where body in motion speaks best? I say it is a question of genre. I am reminded (coincidentally or not) that in some languages and not in English, *genre* and *gender* are the same word.<sup>12</sup> This speaking movement is a theorizing of the archive through its bodily translation. Here, in this genre, the body of the researcher and all the experience this body carries is utterly inseparable from the archival research she undertakes, and how she then presents this archival material as a story to tell. She is *become archive*.<sup>13</sup> This genre exceeds the language of the archival text, is an embodied language of written text recounting that text and analyzing it from the vantage point of the present. It explodes the autonomy of the historical record as an artifact of the past called to be researched, translated in-to the present by an autonomous, detached historian.

*ribcage/thorax*, given the nature of the story itself, as I hope I have demonstrated, could only ever be interdisciplinary. Video makes present a past recorded, simultaneous with the present performer, in a way that only the videographic or photographic genre can. Music delivers melody that can anchor the story to moving and colliding cultural targets: a Hebrew melody adapted to the voice of a choirboy; me singing high atop a suspended dress reminiscent of those tunics worn by dissidents of the Inquisition. Gesture as means to animate and point to the liminal spaces *between*, between the inked lines of an archival record in third person, between languages, between borders, the slippages, the losses that are not accounted for in the written record. The performer looking at you the audience, looking at the images floating past. The image, myself, looking down at me, eras, spatialities co-witnessing each other.

In the arts we tend to think of disciplines—music, dance, poetry, video, and in the academy too—history, sociology, literary studies, criminology. Interdisciplinarity has ascended in recent decades in the academy, accompanied as Klein demonstrates by a shift in metaphors, from fixed foundation and structure to dynamic networks and webs, contested fields as Bourdieu articulated, interdisciplinarity itself a field. (Klein 5) Particularly with the social turn in fine arts, interdisciplinarity becomes a tool kit with which to respond according to the needs of context and moment, rather than only starting from one particular artistic discipline. I think it is helpful to think of how disciplines are deployed

<sup>12</sup> I thank Pablo Assumpção Costa for this reminder.

<sup>13</sup> I use an odd grammar tense here to suggest neither a state of arrival, which would be articulated if I wrote "has become archive" nor a state of approaching arrival, which might be articulated if I wrote "is becoming archive." I am trying to evoke a confounding of time, with the body as the means of this confounding.

in their meeting as genre. A genre is a cue to a particular register or registers of knowledge. Performer-director-scholar Honor Ford-Smith has called for an expansive consideration of genre in the production and representation of knowledge in the present-day academy, which she names “the new intersectionality” (Ford Smith). Intersectionality, as it was first named by Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams many years ago, was a naming of the interdependency of multiple axes in the production of and experience of oppression, a call to take into account concurrently such factors as gender, age, race, ethnicity, language, ability, sexuality, class, geographic location. Ford-Smith suggests that in the scholarly endeavor, “the new intersectionality” would contend with these intersecting and interrelated axes *in concert with* intersecting modes of knowledge production and representation, as these factors into our understanding, judgment and production of knowledge. Performance may be at the heart of this “new intersectionality” and practice as research the realm in which it might best be elaborated.

Bourdieu demonstrated that genre exists because a system of recognition inseparable from power names it into validity; certain genres accrue value differentially depending on intellectual, artistic and academic milieus (161-176). The legitimacy and validity of embodied knowledge has been fought for in the academy as a feminist concern, with some terrain of validity established. Arts-based inquiry is familiar across the humanities, autoethnographic performance being one more specific to the kind of work described here. We are a long way yet from an academy where embodied philosophical-spiritual practices are viewed as legitimate research practices, and it is important to ask what denigration of these might have to do with racism, sexism and/or Eurocentrism. We *are* in a moment in the academy where performance practice as research is building its own validity.<sup>14</sup>

In my own practice as research, informed by decolonial feminist theory (Lugones), queer notions of time (Dinshaw; Freeman) and the possibilities of performance as destabilizing the logic of “archive” (Schneider), I am trying to demonstrate how performance methods engage in decolonial historiography (Hermant, “Performing”), What I take from my own experience described herein in terms of how it might apply to thinking translation is around the question of whether and how the translator might consider the registers of knowledge that the story to be translated speaks of and from, and whether and how the translator may enter those registers in order to translate the story to its fullest meaning, confined as the translator may be to a textual outcome.

## **VI: I depart again**

I have spent a week taking in performances, lectures and working group discussions from 9 am until 2 am every day in São Paulo. On one rare occasion when I have downtime to wander, I realize I am staying equidistant between a cathedral and a synagogue, opposite a newly gentrified square that is overrun by teenagers on skateboards at all hours, a paved-over expanse sporadically peppered with bench-framed tree-gardens. Ample staircases with handrails lead out of the square, perfect launching pads for skateboarding tricks. Under it all is a police headquarters, and beneath that still, a

---

<sup>14</sup> On arts-based inquiry, see, for example, Cole and Knowles. On autoethnographic performance, see, for example, Shoemaker. On embodied philosophical-spiritual practices, see, for example, Alexander 287-332. On practice as research, see, for example: Barrett and Bolt; Chapman and Sawchuk; Fleishman; Kershaw and Piccini.

tunneled highway that glows with an eerie purple light at night, deliberate lighting meant to rattle addicts and keep the homeless away, those who once populated this square more visibly, I am told. Layers of urban reality over and through which I walk daily between performances and discussions, meditating on how the multiple bodies of my eighteenth century characters might be performed here.

On my last day I take my female character to the steps of the cathedral, barefoot. I find she is a much older character than the one I have known thus far. I perform a movement sequence that enacts both departure and shipwreck, my friend Johannes following with the video camera. In the theatre piece, I perform these movements live as Jacques La Fargue, while his femaled self performs the same sequence in video projection behind him, shot on the shores of Lake Ontario. I walk from this São Paulo church, through the post-rain skateboarder's square, past the graffiti buildings and metal siding of the still-being-renovated square, to the synagogue. Perform the sequence again. Walk the street that runs alongside the synagogue under construction. On the sidewalk of a busy street, I perform my gender change, then loiter on the adjacent bridge. This Jacques La Fargue is young still but more forlorn than I'd previously known. The hammer of nearby construction pounds rhythmically into the ground. I walk back to the square, barefoot still. I watch. I borrow a skateboard from a teenage girl. Ride across the square. I am almost passing.

As whom?

Performing archive, producing archive.

Until now the ink of the colonial archive has guided the angles of my vision across the Atlantic and back in search of the trajectory of Brandeau/La Fargue, from Québec, Portugal, France, The Netherlands. These parting performative actions in São Paulo are like notes for further investigation, my gaze now alerted, through embodied presence t/here, to the hemispheric.<sup>15</sup>

### Works Cited

- ANF (Archives nationales de France). "Procès-verbal de l'interrogatoire d'Esther Brandeau jeune juive qui "s'est embarquée ...". Série C11A, Fonds des Colonies, Correspondence générale, Canada, 15 September 1738: 66-99. Microform. *Library and Archives Canada*. Fiches #129-130.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- Barrett, Estelle and Barbara Bolt, eds. *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. London: IBTauris, 2007. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and the Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995. Print.
- Burshatin, Israel. "Written On the Body: Slave or Hermaphrodite in Sixteenth Century Spain." *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*. Eds. Josiah Blackmore and George S. Hutcheson. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. 395-420. Print.
- Cavanagh, Robin. "Welcome: The Next 500 Years..." York University. Eco Art & Media Festival, York University, Toronto. 7 March 2012. Workshop.
- Chapman, Owen, and Kim Sawchuk. "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37.1 (2012): 5–26. Print.

<sup>15</sup> The author thanks two anonymous peer reviewers; Nadine Desrochers, Amélie Dumoulin and Diane Roberts for their collaboration in the making of *thorax : une cage en éclats*; and Juliana Borrero and Jérôme Havre.

- Cole, Ardra L. and Gary Knowles, eds. *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008. Print.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. Print.
- Dekker, Rudolf and Lotte C. Van de Pol. *The Tradition of Female Transvestitism in Early Modern Europe*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Print.
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. Print.
- Fleishman, Mark. "The Difference of Performance as Research." *Theatre Research International* 37.1 (2012): 28-37. Print.
- Fredrickson, George M. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. Print.
- Ford-Smith, Honor. "Give thanks." Message to the author. 8 Mar. 2013. Email.
- Gilman, Sander. *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. Print.
- Goldberg, Theo David. *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. ebrary PDF file.
- Hermant, Heather. "Performing (Readings of) Moving Across as Decolonial Praxis." *Everyday Feminist Research Praxis: Doing Gender in The Netherlands*. Eds. Koen Leurs and Domitilla Olivieri. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. Forthcoming. Print.
- . "Becoming Archive—*ribcage: this wide passage*." *Canadian Theatre Review* 153.1 (2013): 39-43. Print.
- . "Becoming Archive: Performance as Archival Research and the Story of an 18th Century Multicrosser." Performance Practice as Research Working Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. University of São Paulo, São Paulo. 17 January 2013. Working group presentation.
- . *ribcage: this wide passage*. Trans. as *thorax : une cage en éclats* by Nadine Desrochers. Unpublished script-score. Print. Personal collection of Heather Hermant.
- Kershaw, Baz and Angela Piccini. "Practice as Research in Performance: from Epistemology to Evaluation." *Journal of Media Practice* 4.2 (2003): 113-123. Print.
- Klein, Julie Thompson. *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity*. Charlottesville: UP Virginia, 1996. Print.
- Lasry, Pierre. *Une juive en Nouvelle-France*. 2001. Montréal: Midbar Editions, 2004. Print.
- . *Esther: A Jewish Odyssey*. Montréal: Midbar Editions, 2004. Print.
- Lugones, Maria. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): 742-759. Print.
- Mariscal, George. "The Role of Spain in Contemporary Race Theory." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*. 2 (1998): 7-22. Print.
- McKay, Sharon E. *Esther*. Toronto: Penguin, 2004. Print.
- Oberlander, Wendy. *Translating Esther*. Curated by Carolyn Bell Farrell. The Koffler Gallery, Toronto. 20 March – 4 May 2003. Installation.
- Roberts, Diane. "The Lost Body: Recovering Memory—A Personal Legacy." *jViva! Community Arts and Popular Education in the Americas*. Ed. Deborah Barndt. SUNY Press, Albany; Between the Lines: Toronto, 2011. 42-54. Print.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. London: Routledge, 2011. PDF file.
- Shoemaker, Deanna B. "Autoethnographic Journeys: Performing Possibilities/Utopias/Futures." *Handbook of Autoethnography*. Eds. Stacy Holman-Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013. 517-537. Bluefire Reader.
- Steinberg, Sylvie. *La confusion des sexes: Le Travestissement de la renaissance à la révolution*. Paris: Fayard, 2001. Print.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009. Print.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- The Jew in Canada*. Toronto: Jewish Publications Limited, 1926. Print.
- Velasco, Sherry. *The Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire, & Catalina de Erauso*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. Print.
- Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2004. Print.

Williams, Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *The Public Nature of Private Violence*. Eds. Martha Albertson Fineman and Rixanne Mykitiuk. New York: Routledge, 1994. 93-118. Print.