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## “Fantastic Dance of Images, Shapes, Forms”: Visuality and Fragmentation in Ann Quin’s *Passages*

**Abstract:** This paper brings together aspects of visuality and fragmentation in Quin’s work, concentrating on her 1969 novel, *Passages*, in order to tease out the effects and implications of Quin’s formal fragmentariness. The visuality manifests itself in *Passages* through Quin’s borrowing of compositional techniques from the visual arts — layering effects from painting, shaping and cutting techniques from sculpture, the whole method of the textual cut-up. Quin splits her narrative in two sections seemingly narrated by each of the main characters, one female and one male. Applying painterly techniques to the former and sculptural to the latter, Quin’s narrative implicitly explores the habitual feminisation or masculinisation of certain aesthetic categories and modes of epistemological enquiry, as well as the unequal power relations of gender politics within a social context. Quin’s textual fragments do on some level cohere into a whole, but it is one riven with uncertainties, provoked specifically by the elliptical nature of the narrative, and complicated by Quin’s blurring of boundaries of all kinds — between characters, between binary categories, between narrative moments and locations. This resistance to categorisation — both on the level of individual fragments or passages of text, and of Quin’s work more generally — invites readers and critics to question the frameworks in which they are trying to place the parts, to challenge the rigidity of the categories themselves.

**Keywords:** Ann Quin, visuality, fragmentation, visual art, composition, cut-up, collage, gender

In order to understand the nature of language you began to paint, thinking that the logic of reference would become evident once you could settle the quarrels of point, line and color.

Rosmarie Waldrop, *The Reproduction of Profiles*

Ann Quin’s work eludes categorisation. During her short career, she published four strikingly original novels, slim yet remarkably complex volumes. The work is in many ways itself about the evasion of categorisation, concerned with the

transgression of boundaries and limits of all kinds. In Quin's third novel, *Passages* (published in 1969), a character's diary contains the line, "I would like to exhaust the limits of the possible" (Quin 2015: 92) — a concept which can be applied to almost any aspect of the novel, not least the formal composition, the extension of the expressive capacities of language via visual techniques. Quin's interest in and exposure to the visual arts is increasingly gaining critical attention; most recently, Jennifer Hodgson has written about Quin's presence in London in the 1960s as the British pop art scene was growing up, and "the art school's abiding influence on her" (Hodgson 2018: 8).<sup>1</sup> In this article, I hope rather to provide a sustained exploration of the textual effects of Quin's interest in the visual arts by focusing on *Passages*, and considering how visual thinking impacts upon experimentation with language in the novel. Instead of trying to place or label her work, I will focus on how this novel seems to float at the boundaries of the visual and verbal representational modes, at the same time examining the challenges that *Passages* poses to such categorical thinking in terms of the 'purely' visual or verbal. In *Passages* both verbal images and characters are composed by the visual logic of painting, through layers of colour, shapes and shadows, or of sculpture, shapeshifting as they pass from one form to another. The heightened attention to composition results in a novel whose architecture is exposed, which seems to be visibly in mid-formation, projecting forwards into futurity at the same time as unmaking itself, tending towards fragmentation. Forging a link between the visual and the fragmentary aspects of *Passages*, this article is split in two sections, as is the narrative of *Passages* itself, one seemingly focalised through the female character and one through the male, as they travel together across unidentified countries in search of the woman's lost brother. Each character's narrative sections are accompanied by different stylistic techniques, the female character's sections the more painterly, employing the impressionistic technique of truncated sentences, flickering depictions of vision punctuated with silences, the white spaces functioning as both visual and narrative gaps. The second section of this article addresses the more physical, sculptural techniques of shaping and cutting in the text, and the collage or 'cut-up' method which emphasises the materiality of the printed text, all of which feature in the male character's sections. *Passages* sets up stylistic differences between the characters, implicitly mapping the artistic practices employed and modes of expression projected onto gender relations within the text. This gendering of the narrative allows for an interrogation of the conventional gendering of certain aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, Hodgson writes about Quin's early experiments with "visual-textual writing" in her short fiction (Hodgson 2016: 143). Alice Butler writes about Quin's artistic influences and her relation to art-writing ("Ann Quin's Night-Time Ink: A Postscript" 2013). For a succinct yet illuminating analysis of the illustrations in Quin's later work, *Tripticks*, see Evenson and Howard 2003. There is to date still not a lot of critical work on Quin, although this certainly seems to be changing, especially considering the renewed interest in Quin, largely prompted by Hodgson's recently-published edited edition of Quin's shorter works.

categories and modes of epistemological enquiry. Quin’s short novel thus provides an exemplary platform for thinking through the politics of aesthetic fragmentation, the implications of these formal techniques, the ways in which they shape — and are shaped by — the subjects represented.

### 1. “Succession of images, controlled by choice” — painterly technique and visual memory in ‘her’ narrative

The narrative from the female character’s point of view is distinguished by painterly attention to visual detail, descriptions in which objects and people are flattened, being composed as they are of angles, lines, colour and shading. To give just one example: “Mountain rocks reddish, parts in light fawn-coloured. Branches contained shadows of every other branch, the light on one side extended equalled the shadow’s shape” (Quin 2015: 17). The specificity of colour and the concision with which depth is rendered lend this verbal image the vibrancy and immediacy of visual perception. What makes the technique so precisely painterly is not only the impressionistic quality of the writing and resultant immediacy, but the way this image is formed as if in layers of paint. Quin exploits the sequential nature of language to emulate the compositional process of painting, instead of the finished product of the painting itself. The redness of the rocks effectively ‘underlies’ their “fawn-coloured” highlights, because of the order in which the elements of the visual image are recorded within the sentence. The branches contain blocks of colour which we know are shadows cast by other branches, but the emphasis is on visual, not causal, relationships — the emphasis is on the shapes themselves rather than where the shapes come from. Equally the image could merely represent the order in which elements are noticed, and the blurred distinction between whether a visual image is being looked at or composed is a pertinent one. Arguably, it is both — the character scans the landscape, composes a vision in language. Sometimes the landscape is explicitly rendered as if being drawn, as in “[d]ownward outline of the hills” (Quin 2015: 18). This outline is imposed on the landscape by the character, or the author: the ‘[d]ownward’ direction is not implicit in the vision of the hills, foregrounds the creative agency involved in the description, the representation over the material being represented. One effect of this technique is that both the character and the reader are further distanced from the reality of the objects being depicted.

Characters, too, are composed of shapes and angles, the relationship between them visual: “Dark spokes of the fan across his face. Angle of his body met the angles of her arms, legs. The shape of these shaped her moods. Fingers along ridges, furrows” (Quin 2015: 19). The main way in which the fictional world is perceived in the female character’s sections is through looking — rather than evoking the sense of touch, we see snapshots of “Fingers”, “ridges”, “furrows”; a succinct

demonstration of how imagistic techniques, like juxtaposition, lead inevitably to fragmentation, as clear connectives are omitted in favour of suggestive gaps between assembled images. This relay through memory imposes spatial and temporal distance between the narrator and ‘image’, an effect supported by Quin’s technique of relating visual impressions in language: no amount of visual detail, nor of enhanced immediacy, can make the verbal image function exactly *like* a painting. A whole system of representation is in effect being represented within another, an exaggerated version of Quin’s general technique in *Passages* of depicting representations within representations, “[i]mages within images” (Quin 2015: 25). These distancing techniques ensure a greater degree of disorientation on the part of the reader, as the mode of representation shifts between media, the narrative between states (mental and physical), times, places.

Passages of prose in the female character’s sections succeed one another like remembered images — thus it seems apt that characters and landscapes alike are composed of pictorial elements like line and colour. The character is, quite literally, *looking back* on past events. One passage in particular reinforces this possibility:

what did I see, for when the scene reappears it merges with a dream, fallen back into slowly, connected yet not connected in parts. So what I saw then was as much a voyeur’s sense. And since has become heightened. Succession of images, controlled by choice. I chose then to remain outside. Later I entered, allowing other entries. In that room a series of pictures thrown on the walls, ceiling, floor, some upsidedown. Only afterwards could I see things. More so now in specific detail. (Quin 2015: 24)

As in dreams, the passages are “connected yet not connected in parts”: sometimes the syntax across successive passages is continuous but the context shifts, sometimes both syntax and context are continuous, sometimes neither. For example, “A longing / for rain” could run continuously across textual segments — but the continuity suggested is not definite, not wholly supported by the narrative (Quin 2015: 6); “he looked like / I ran on” is more jarring, disrupts the consistency seemingly set up in previous transitions between segments (Quin 2015: 17). The fragments form a series, linked by certain likenesses or continuities but ultimately distinct. This passage appears to offer a method for interpreting the rest of the text: the question “what did I see” could open almost any paragraph. To see in a “voyeur’s sense” suggests observation alone, without interaction — as would inevitably be the case if this narrative section is largely recounted memories, as is technically the case in dreams, or memory, or in looking at visual art. The latter is suggested by the phrase “a series of pictures thrown on the walls”, but also on the “ceiling, floor”, heightening the unreality of the scene and drawing the reader back into the realm of dream or memory. In the remembering, the sense data have “become heightened”, less spontaneous reaction and more artistic rendering: “Succession of images, controlled by choice”. As with most of *Passages*, positions are relational, relative — “outside” and inside — rather than situated definitively in space or time; the suggestive phrasing of “allowed other entries” connotes invasion

or penetration, but it is unclear who or what is being penetrated or invaded. Similarly, “afterwards”, “now”, and the situation of the passage in the past tense: we are offered glimpses of fixity constantly shifting in relation to one another, but without an identifiable frame of reference, one known position to work from, these relationships are unanchored, ultimately indeterminable.

Quin’s narrative, so concerned with the concept of shape and with shaping (less so with specific shapes), with how one thing shapes another, itself is shaped by these visual techniques — the characters, locations, plot seem to take on the qualities of visual imagery. Adjacent, or connected, elements shape each other: “Landscape formed the angle of her head” (Quin 2015: 13); “Shape of mouth corners shapes the corners of his eyes” (Quin 2015: 9); “Gap in the wall held part of the sea” (Quin 2015: 20). The relationships between elements depicted here are primarily visual ones: only visually does a hole in the wall ‘hold’ the sea. Once characters are reduced to angles, it is the relationship between these angles that “shaped her moods” (Quin 2015: 19), as flat pictorial elements can be seen to shape each other. If one shape in a picture is enlarged, necessarily those it overlaps with are reduced. As characters become more like images, as this visual metaphor is carried over into their characterisation, they are flattened: the reader’s knowledge tends to be limited to the interpretation of surfaces. Without so much narrative exposition, the reading process becomes more akin to looking at a picture; the *telos* of sequence conventionally expected from plot is somewhat transformed. Once the emphasis is shifted onto surface, onto effect rather than cause, the motivation behind actions is for the most part unknowable.

Thinking through these visual techniques and this narrative emphasis on process, the novel could perhaps more accurately be thought of in terms of sketching than of painting. Robert Buckeye in fact uses the term to describe the “uncompleted” nature of Quin’s novels (Buckeye 2013: 38). But there is more to this “sketchy” technique than incompleteness. In pictorial sketches, more of the architecture of the image is visible than if the surface were polished, pencil lines erased or painted over. In *Passages*, too, the conventional elements we might expect of a novel — characters, events, narrative arc — are suggested or projected, rather than fully rendered. As Quin builds up characters in a painterly fashion, ‘applying’ multiple layers in the form of linguistic impressions, so the narrative of *Passages* is built up from fragments of text. An overall effect emerges in the process of reading, through accumulation. This technique has clear affinities with the structuralist and poststructuralist theory of the late sixties and early seventies,<sup>2</sup> but it is specifically

<sup>2</sup> John Sturrock sums up the (structuralist) notion of structure as such: “what stands out in a structure is that the relationships between the elements are more important than the intrinsic qualities of each element” (2003: 6), a situation which did not really change when poststructuralism arose as a critique of structuralism in the late 1960s. In 1966, Jacques Derrida presented ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ at a conference entitled, ‘The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man’, which took place at Johns Hopkins University and is often heralded as the

the architectural bent of this thinking I wish to highlight here, the focus on construction. Take Sharon Spencer's considerations of what she calls the 'architectonic novel' in 1971:

In architectonic books, words bear the same relationship to the whole as do bricks, stones, steel rods, and concrete blocks to a building. This relationship is more accurately structural than expressive. The meaning of the book, then, is no longer *in* the words, but arises [...] from the tensions among the elements of the composition in their various juxtaposed arrangements. (Spencer 1971: 169)

Spencer indicates the structuralist view of language as a material to be manipulated — composed of units like bricks that can be assembled in multifarious combinations, in "juxtaposed arrangements", a decidedly pictorial strategy of placing segments (of text) alongside one another to produce 'new' meaning out of their combination.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere is this more clearly a technique borrowed from the visual arts than in the cut-up method, which, claimed William S. Burroughs, "brings to writers the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years" (Burroughs and Gysin 1978: 29). The title of Burroughs's essay, 'The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin', further clarifies the adopted nature of the technique, apparently a "chance discovery" by Gysin (Burroughs and Gysin 1978: 13). Quin's overt use of the cut-up technique in *Passages* will be discussed in the next section of this article; for now, it suffices to draw out similarities, in some cases direct lines of influence or cross-fertilisation, between developments in literature and the visual arts in these decades, to suggest that the (literary) aims outlined by Spencer can be reached by a number of means, one of which is a heightened attention to visuality: images, too, communicate non-linguistically through "juxtaposed arrangements".

Spencer aligns 'expression' with linguistic communication, positing the more structuralist 'relation between parts' at the opposite end of the spectrum, as if the equivalency between language and expression were itself straightforward. However simplistic this model, it still serves to represent the move away from 'purely' linguistic expression (if such a thing were possible), towards expression by other means. Rosmarie Waldrop, too, in 1971 was prophesying that

the general restlessness as far as form and media are concerned is part of a more general aesthetic change. And the direction seems to be away from the pole of expressiveness towards greater emphasis on composition, towards a kind of formalism. (Waldrop 1971: 123)

advent of poststructuralism. In this lecture, he marks a point in critical thinking after which the concept of structure, or the "structurality of structure", shifted. Once conceived of as centred, organised around "a fixed origin", structure was now being thought of as decentred, a conception which permitted the "*play* of the structure", that is, the unlimited interplay of the composing elements, as the boundaries which once supposedly delineated the structure become unclear, undeterminable (Derrida 2005: 352).

<sup>3</sup> Quin's contemporary, the novelist B.S. Johnson, also makes use of architectural metaphors to speak of literary form: "The architects can teach us something [...] Subject matter is everywhere, general, is brick, concrete, plastic; the ways of putting it together are particular, are crucial" (1999, n.p.) (originally published in 1973).



Waldrop seems to consider expressiveness in terms of completeness — a finished statement — as opposed to the “emphasis on composition”, on the process of formation, the *how* rather than the *what* or *why*. Too reductive a model to really account for what Quin’s novel is doing, this kind of structuralist criticism, so fond of categorisation and definition, is useful mostly to indicate what Quin might be undermining: rigid categories (usually in binary opposition to one another) that leave little, or no, room for ambiguity. It is W.J.T. Mitchell, finally, who most fully underscores the relevance of visuality to our case. Considering expression in terms of visual images, Mitchell opposes the expression achieved by “predicates” which can be attached to “pictured objects” to the “expressive charge” of visual elements like “setting, compositional arrangement, and color scheme” (Mitchell 1984: 528). The latter, more abstract, categories allow us to “speak of moods and emotional atmospheres” (Mitchell 1984: 528), an interpretive idea extremely resonant with a text like *Passages*, which renders “moods and emotional atmospheres” so deftly by linguistic means, all the more ‘charged’ for their lack of narrative exposition.

Quin’s focus on the visual in this text is perhaps indicative of the more general shift within the art of the 1960s and ’70s, from “monomodality” to “multimodality” as John Bateman puts it (Bateman 2016: 30), a shift away from Waldrop’s “pole of expressiveness” to incorporate expression by means other than language. One early (unsigned) reviewer of *Passages* described how “the language seems bent on effacing itself in favour of some musical or visual medium” (qtd. in Evenson and Howard 2003: 5), but arguably effacement is not the aim of Quin’s technique, or at least it cannot be the effect: the incorporation of visual techniques into a narrative simply cannot make the language function exactly like a visual medium. Rather, in writing according to a largely visual logic, Quin infuses the narrative at all points with the visual, in effect demonstrating the difficulty of separating the two media, suggesting instead that categories like the visual and verbal are always intertwined, never separate.

## 2. “A kind of dream made to order” — cutting and classifying in ‘his’ section

The sections apparently written from the male character’s perspective consist of diary entries, classificatory lists and marginalia: sometimes references to classical myth or literature — especially those surrounding the god Dionysus<sup>4</sup> — sometimes ekphrastic encounters with classical art, the relation of which to the main text is always suggestive rather than clear-cut. While both narrative types contain ellipses

<sup>4</sup> Dionysus is associated with limits, transgression, shapeshifting, has a “paradoxical ability to embody multiple extremes at once — whether they pertain to emotion, gender, or sexuality” (Harrison 2017: n.p.).

and multidirectional reading possibilities, these are on the surface more apparent in ‘his’ section because of the more unusual spatial layout employed. To roughly reproduce an example of the experimental typography:

*Sunday*

Lay out this obsession: hers/mine:

How she watches  
me. God how she  
watches herself  
watching. How-  
ever if no one  
observes me I  
have to observe  
myself all the  
more

Obsession/obsidian, obsidional	
attention	Carefulness
positiveness	observance
bias	mindfulness
belief	observation
folly	watchfulness
eccentricity	eyes on, watch,
Obsessive/unceasing	guard
habitual	

The general argument: I am completely lost in  
this country — this climate.

(Quin 2015: 31)

The associative logic governing the transition between items in the list is characteristic of the narrative as a whole, as is the pattern of resonances set up between certain elements within the whole — here, terms or phrases suggesting observation, watching or being watched. The placement of the marginalia allows for its relation to either the phrase which introduces the list, or to the list itself; in fact, none of the items of text is strictly delineated from others (or definitively linked to another). The blurring of “hers/mine” further reinforces this inseparability of elements within the larger structure — here, specifically, characters within the narrative, as well as smaller parts of the text within this fragment. Frequent references to shaping elsewhere in the text help to guide the reading of sections like this, too: the negative space between the columns of the list stands out, an interpretative lacuna at the centre of the quoted segment, which in turn shapes the text around it; on a narrative level, the marginalia shapes the main text — in that it influences our reading of it — and vice versa. The male character’s narrative comprises a more overt gallery view of successive verbal images, invisible frames keeping the text in line, segments of text situated in suggestive relationship to one another, allowing the reader to choose the reading sequence and make their own links between sections.

There are numerous references to ‘forming’ in ‘his’ narrative — “[f]orms forming themselves” (Quin 2015: 31), “within forms and shadows, wondering when they become real” (Quin 2015: 59), “[f]eeling myself in a world of forms” (Quin 2015: 60) — mostly suggesting combination, genesis, a building up of material rather than a taking away. However, his sculptural technique performs the opposite: “In her nakedness she presents to him the surface of marble, which he slowly begins to cut other shapes from” (Quin 2015: 88). A clear reference to the Pygmalion



myth, in which a (male) sculptor falls in love with a (female) sculpture of his own creation, this section reverses the process: the human becomes sculptural, is already figurative, and yet he begins to cut other shapes from — to fragment — the form. The gender roles within the original myth are exaggerated — “she presents to him”, the underlying violence reinforced with the term ‘cut’, with the calculated slowness of the process. Her material is memory; his material is *her* — the greater physicality of his material and technique always connoting or leading to violence. Worth recalling also is the “voyeur’s sense” in which she is said to see, imposing further distance (and minimal interaction) between her and her material, whereas his sculptural technique is more ‘hands-on’, as it were. This stereotypical distinction is certainly well-worn, going back at least to Aquinas, who theorised that “form is masculine and matter feminine: the superior, godlike, male intellect impresses its form upon the malleable, inert, female matter” (Selden 2005: 115).

Later, the Pygmalion myth is taken up again and reversed in a different way: “He shaped out of the wall a creature, a sort of half man, half woman. Just before he completed this the creature jumped out and began to unshape him bit by bit until only his toe remained” (Quin 2015: 96). In this version, the sculpted “creature” revolts, segmenting the sculptor — “bit by bit”, in vague but quantifiable units — seemingly again for no purpose except to dismantle him: no reference is made to the shapes removed; the emphasis is on the dwindling remains. The “half man, half woman” he creates resonates with the overall narrative of *Passages*, in which by this point the sections have begun to overlap so that there are echoes of each other in each character’s narrative; it is also a further reference to the androgynous, limit-defying god Dionysus. As she is his medium in the first passage quoted above, so he becomes the medium in the second, but this is not a reciprocal relationship between parts. The reversal is not straightforward, the power relations not equal. The violence implicit in the act of cutting represents something of the nature of their relationship: each is partially responsible for fragmenting the ‘whole’ of the other (not that *Passages* ever suggests that subjects are wholes). However, the greater physicality of the sculptural technique associated with the male character’s narrative sections seems to imply a more embodied form of violence, a directness of contact prevented in the female character’s narrative by the distancing techniques employed therein.

Lorraine Morley has discussed the gendering of the sections, “the male (masculine) journal, the female (feminine) stream-of-bodyconsciousness” (Morley 1999: 133). However, the means by which the female narrator is distanced from her material — through recounting memories in the past tense, through the heightened artifice of the painterly technique and the filtering of visual impressions through language — complicate Morley’s notion of an embodied ‘feminine’ narration. In fact, by rendering the male character’s narrative as the more embodied, the more directly in contact with the reality it describes — through its situation in the present tense, through the physicality and direct contact implied by the artistic

techniques of sculpture and cut-up, the more overtly written, and therefore material, nature of the diary entries that form ‘his’ sections — Quin follows abstract associations between gender and knowledge through to their social implications. Quin plays with the rigidity of gender categories, but this play is lent a darker tenor as the narrative develops, as the male character dreams of beating and killing the female character, a progression from the bodily violence implied by the Pygmalion references. While Quin complicates any supposed binary division between the male and female characters, the power dynamic between the two is not so simply upended, the threat of male violence perhaps even increased under the circumstances. The fragmentation of character and identity in *Passages* allows the male character to be ‘inside’ her head while entertaining violent fantasies in his own.

The familiar association between masculinity and sharpness is incidentally handled in the same poem by Waldrop which provides the epigraph for this article, *The Reproduction of Profiles*: “As long as I wanted to become a man I considered thought as a keen blade cutting through the uncertain brambles in my path” (Waldrop 2006: 37). Quin, then, seems to be playing directly into this stereotype when she includes two explicitly labelled ‘cut-up dreams’ in the male character’s narrative (Quin 2015: 52–53, 102–103), both entirely in first-person present-tense, this consistency a rarity in the novel (and one granted only to the male character). The use of dreams is in keeping with Burroughs, who was “deliberately addressing [himself] to the whole area of what we call dreams. Precisely what is a dream? A certain juxtaposition of word and image” (Burroughs and Gysin 1978: 1). Dreams thus provide a material most suitable for Quin’s shifting representational modes. The first dream, before it even gets cut up, entails shapeshifting (“My body covered by fish scales, fins, tails [...] I am a star fish”), changes of location (“A glass stairway I climb into the sky, changes into a bank of snow”) and changes of state (“I swim in snow.”; “I plunge into water. It is ice”) (Quin 2015: 52). This thematic interest in changing states has an affinity with the novel’s formal shifts between verbal and visual semiotic registers, once again reinforcing that one medium need not ‘efface’ itself to become another. Rather, one medium is always already in a position of turning over into the other (and back again, depending on environmental factors).

After a short reflective passage, in which “the dream pursues” him (Quin 2015: 52) — thus after a period of waking — he includes a passage headed by the phrase ‘Cut-up dream’. Almost immediately he takes the dream and consciously turns it into an artwork, changes its shape, re-ordering reality as he does in lists elsewhere in the diary entries. Cut-ups, according to Burroughs, are by nature boundary-defying: “Either-or thinking just is not accurate thinking. That’s not the way things occur, and I feel the Aristotelian construct is one of the great shackles of Western civilization. Cut-ups are a movement towards breaking this down” (Burroughs and Gysin 1978: 5–6). Being in two states at once is by this thinking quite natural, let alone possible, and the cut-up supposedly breaks from the rigidity

of conscious thinking to indicate these alternative pathways: “Acting as an agent of simultaneous integration and disintegration, the cut-up imposes another path on the eyes and on thought” (Burroughs and Gysin 1978: 21). Notably the fragmentation and reconstitution are “simultaneous” in Burroughs’s model; this is the case for Quin’s novel, too, although examining the temporal form of a narrative can make it seem a more linear process, a disintegration followed by a reintegration, rather than both at once. While the sequential nature of linguistic narrative cannot perhaps be completely subverted, the incorporation of visual strategies — such as the elimination of connective material in favour of juxtaposition — allows for a greater sense of immediacy, the approximation of simultaneity.

Recalling the female character’s “[s]uccession of images, controlled by choice”, the cut-up dream reorganises the material provided by the male character’s unconscious in dreaming. This is not necessarily a conscious assemblage, and the order is still presumably determined by chance, although there are multiple additional elements in the cut-up version. It is unclear where all of these have come from — certainly not all from the rest of the available narrative of *Passages*. The sky in the original dream becomes “the sky, mother’s grave” in the cut-up, and a father first appears in the cut-up; considering also the more sexualised imagery in the cut-up dream, Quin seems to be purposefully stressing the Freudian overtones. In fact, the relationship between the original dream and the cut-up seems to demonstrate an exact reversal of Freud’s own assertion that “some dreams completely disregard the logical sequence of their material [...] In doing so dreams depart sometimes more and sometimes less widely from the text that is at their disposal for manipulation” (Freud 2010: 330). Quin’s character has somehow departed rather, in waking, from the material made available to him by his dream. Reality and text alike are materials subject to conscious fragmentation in Quin’s narrative. The practice of cut-up denotes materiality, the physicality of paper and written words or phrases which have been fragmented and reconstructed, recalling Roland Barthes’s statement that “[t]he structuralist takes the real, decomposes it, then puts it back together again” (qtd. in Spencer 1971: 174), albeit the “real” here is a dream. Relevant, also, that the ‘structuralist’ in Quin’s text is male, his character in effect a play on the masculinised notion of masterful classification.

The associations between ‘sharp’, ‘masculine’ reasoning and the act of cutting are brought together in a passage towards the end of the novel which acts as a kind of coda to his sections, fittingly titled ‘*Metamorphosis*’:

There must be time enough for preparation and for destruction, for the scheming, for reconstruction. A kind of dream made to order. To arrive finally at a unit with contradictory attributes never moulded or fused together, but clearly differentiated. (Quin 2015: 111)

The need for “preparation” and “scheming” belies the more ‘ordered’ nature of his narrative, his propensity for categorising and typifying, while movements of “destruction” and “reconstruction” underpin both his relationship to the Pygmalion

myth and his cut-up dreams, and suggestively also his relationship to his female co-traveller. “A kind of dream made to order” plays on the multiple meanings of ‘order’: a dream with order imposed on it, a dream imposing order on reality, a dream made as one requests it. The final sentence seemingly describes the form of the whole novel, which is indeed made up of fragments “never moulded or fused together, but clearly differentiated”, although the use of “clearly” is perhaps a bit optimistic. The suggested syntactical and contextual links, the echoes and overlaps between multiple parts of the narrative, within singular page layouts and across the whole narrative, complicate any such clear differentiation. Finally, the use of “unit” suggests coherence, and indeed the textual elements do form a unit of sorts, in the form of the book, in the manner that they are all laid out — flatly — on the page. But they are also nearly always in tension with one another, a tension largely maintained by gaps and silences that resist authoritative interpretation.

Christine Brooke-Rose, in her essay ‘Woman as Semiotic Object’, describes the same stereotypically ‘masculine’ impulses (when faced with the ‘feminine’):

two types of possessive behaviour: the Pygmalion urge (to form her to his own desires, and ceasing his love should she herself take wing), or the demolition enterprise (using his very love to prevent her, in innumerable ways and whatever his verbal assurances, from achieving any kind of self-expression). (Brooke-Rose 1985: 247)

Brooke-Rose may be writing about the sexist bias underlying structuralist criticism, but the uncanny accuracy with which this statement describes Quin’s characterisation demonstrates the cultural embeddedness of these norms of masculine behaviour, the reference point so readily available, mythologised even — “the Pygmalion urge”. The prevention of self-expression by possessive male behaviour that Brooke-Rose writes of resonates with Quin’s employment of the more ‘hands-off’ painterly technique for the female character’s narrative, the distancing effect of having her recount from memory, whereas the male character’s narrative is largely in the present tense. Brooke-Rose’s account similarly illuminates the implications of Quin’s focus on visual perception in the female character’s narrative, on silent composition, as opposed to what our earlier critics might deem ‘expression’. Quin’s narrative effectively carries within it the aforementioned association between language and expression, although *Passages* characteristically complicates the relationship between the two ‘poles’. Aligning language and expression closely enough that a greater emphasis on visuality implies a restricted form of self-expression, Quin’s technique also suggests the ways that visuality might extend the capacities of linguistic expression, allowing for a closer approximation of non-linguistic aspects of experience like the “moods and emotions” Mitchell mentions. However, in a similarly complex move, *Passages* also maps modes of expression onto contexts of self-expression, shifting the conceptual landscape somewhat so that the poles are no longer those of expression and relationship, but those of masculinity and femininity, or both sets of poles exist simultaneously in an oblique relationship to

one another. Thus the focus on visuality takes on different attributes in the context of male and female characterisation, as the narrative is continually attuned to the differing hindrances to self-expression for different kinds of subject.

Notably in *Passages*, the wish to “exhaust the limits of the possible” (Quin 2015: 92) is framed as a desire, not an achievement. While the visual techniques Quin employs grant a certain artistic and expressive freedom, there is palpable discomfort in the blurring of other lines, especially those between characters, as becomes evident in the male character’s violent fantasies and the destructive connotations that fragmentation takes on in his narrative sections. Hodgson writes of Quin’s “uncommon sensitivity to the cost of extremity, transgression, and limit experiences in terms of invisibility, disempowerment, and risk”, her “refusal to romantically valorize such a position”, to “simply [celebrate] the freedoms and possibilities of being in-between” (Hodgson 2016: 145). Considerations of fragmentation in *Passages* are never solely aesthetic, or the aesthetic is continually wrought up in the social and political. In *Passages*, there is a bit of everything in everything else, but it turns out that the intermingling is not exactly equal. No matter the consistency with which Quin blurs boundaries of all kinds, the power dynamic in the relationship depicted remains imbalanced. To be in-between art forms is one thing; to want to transgress strict societal categories is another, yields different results. Quin does seem to stress the possibility, at least in artistic terms, even implied in the shift from visual to spatial metaphors towards the end of the novel — for “[a] distance now that never reaches its limits” (Quin 2015: 111), and for “[a] new order of space” (Quin 2015: 112). But, as with everything in *Passages*, these statements resist singular interpretation: not reaching limits can imply failure, and the need for a “new order” suggests problems with the old.

Applying the compositional logic of art practices including painting, sculpture, and collage to the formation of a novel, Quin effectively translates these visual techniques into the stuff of novels — character, plot, human relationships — so that the visual relationship between pictured elements becomes metaphorical: the ways that elements of a visual image ‘interact’ are the ways in which Quin’s characters interact with one another, shape each other. As such, investigations of visuality in Quin’s work can help to elucidate the ways in which aesthetic and social categories are continually wrought up with one another in her work, how challenges to restrictive frameworks of classification in an aesthetic sense readily metamorphose into explorations of oppressive or harmful divisions in the realm of social relations and gender politics, and how the lines between the two are never so clear. Attending to the visual in Quin’s work also sheds light on what Burroughs deems to be the “evolutionary trend” in literature, as words are “laid aside”, “awkward instruments” that they are (Burroughs and Gysin 1978: 2–3), bringing us back to contemporaneous critics like Waldrop who seek to follow ways in which literature incorporates representational methods other than the linguistic. The value of considering Quin’s interest in the visual arts has regularly been noted by critics, as

outlined near the beginning of this article. With the rising interest in Quin's work currently underway, perhaps now is an opportune time to also reverse this thinking, to look at Quin's novels as exemplary of conceptual experimentation with visual techniques in the literature of the 1960s and '70s.

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