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'Technology Errs': Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*, Queer Stereo, and Failure

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ABSTRACT

Brigid Brophy's 1969 novel *In Transit* has been consistently read as a novel which troubles gender, centring on a character, Pat O'Rooley, who forgets his/her gender in an airport transit lounge. Yet, whilst most critiques focus on the relationship between gender/sex and language in Brophy's metafictional novel, I suggest that Brophy also turns to a more technological, non-literary medium in order to represent Pat's gender deviance: that of stereophonic sound and broadcasting. Using a combination of queer theory and sound studies, as well as archival components, I show the ways in which stereo aesthetics play out in Brophy's presentation of non-binary gender. Read this way, *In Transit* becomes a novel about the failure of the novel to represent stereo sound and, through this, the failure of language to represent non-standard gender identities. This failure, I argue, itself constitutes a form of gender expression, which I here formulate as 'Queer Stereo'.

INTRODUCTION

Brigid Brophy's 1969 novel *In Transit* centres on Evelyn Hilary 'Pat' O'Rooley, an Irish transplant who forgets his/her gender after choosing to miss his/her flight and remain in an airport transit lounge.[1] As the novel progresses the transit longue turns into a kind of parody 1960s 'international cosmopolitanism', a space in which all categories (nationalities, high and low culture divides, gender, language) are 'in transit' and in between.[2] Whether being

[1] Brigid Brophy, *In Transit* (Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 1967). It is exceedingly difficult to provide pronouns for Pat, as there are many moments at which she/he is presented as neither male or female (or both), but these sections are pointedly first person. I have reluctantly settled on his/her and she/he, as the currently common non-binary use of the singular 'they' not only does something of a historical violence to the presentation of gender here but also Brophy vehemently rejects the singular 'they' in a later article—see Brigid Brophy, 'He/She/Hesh', in *Baroque 'N' Roll* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), pp. 61–67.

[2] Indeed, counter to my reading, Karen Zouaoui suggests that *In Transit* is 'not so centrally concerned with sexual orientation and gender representation as it is with in-betweenness and indeterminacy'. For more, see Zouaoui, 'Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*, or the Post-war Novel's Transition from an "Exhausted" to a "Replenished" Form', in *British Experimental Women's Fiction, 1945-1975: Slipping Through the Labels*, ed. by Andrew Radford and Hannah Van Hove (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 235–55.

'in transit' is liberatory or destructive, if the novel is conservative or progressive, has proved a contentious point in scholarship on the novel, a tension indicative of Brophy's own politics (a bisexual, vegetarian, free-love advocate, Brophy also had an ambivalent relationship with feminism and liberation movements in general).[3] The suggestion in the novel that the gender binary emerges discursively is cited as perhaps the novel's most 'subversive' aspect and, indeed, has proved prescient, anticipating Judith Butler's seminal work in the 1990s, as Barry Shiels points out.[4] However, though critics have noted Brophy presents gender/sex (Brophy uses the word 'sex' for both genitalia and gender) as 'mutable' and 'illegible', and though this presentation points to the potential for counter-hegemonic liberatory politics, *In Transit* has also been thought of as a conservative novel, tracking what Brophy sees as the decline of culture through the 1960s.[5] Certainly, as Len Gutkin puts it, Brophy 'is committed to conserving past modes and styles', opera, the novel, and so forth.[6] In particular, as Brooke Horvath suggests, Brophy presents music in decline from an opera played over the transit lounge's public address system in Section One of the novel to the inane din of live pop music after the 'regime of perpetual noise' takes over in Section Four. Implicit here is also a sense of shifting telecommunications and media sensibilities: in the microcosm of the airport, the public address system serves as an analogue for radio (Brophy said in 1980 that 'serious music [which for Brophy means classical music and opera] owes not everything but much to the invention of radio'[7]), which is later switched off and replaced as the means of mass communication by the closed circuit television screens, a stand-in for the 'deverbalised […] instant image impact' of television.[8] Indeed, Brophy had written a defence of novels vis-à-vis television earlier in the decade.[9]

Brophy's cynicism about technology and mass media is perhaps overstated by Horvath, as I will show, and the current article suggests that Brophy adopts a technological aesthetic of transmission in order to represent gender in ways beyond the written word. Pat's gender is, as I have said, ambiguous and non-binary, a part of what Sonya Andermahr calls Brophy's Both/And aesthetics.[10] This aesthetics, I assert, emerges in part from Brophy's technological context, in an appropriation of a rising medium in the 1960s: stereophonic sound and broadcasting. Specifically, Brophy seems to mimic stereophonic sound at several points in the novel, splitting her text into two columns, communicating a non-binary gender identity within the terms of the gender binary. I call this aesthetic 'queer stereo'. That is what this article is about, but it is also about failure. Both a failure to communicate and a

[3] For more see Carole Sweeney, 'The Dissenting Feminist', in *Brigid Brophy: Avant-Garde Writer, Critic, Activist*, ed. by Gerri Kember and Richard Canning (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 220–34. For accounts of Brophy's literary historical context within the British experimental writers of the 1960s, see Sebastien Groes, *British Fictions of the Sixties: The Making of the Swinging Decade* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) and Joseph Darlington, *The Experimentalists: The Life and Times of the British Experimental Writers of the 1960s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

[4] Barry Shiels, 'Style Interminable: The Auto-Fictional Object of the Humanities in Works by Brigid Brophy and Ben Lerner', *Textual Practice*, 36:4 (2022), 518–41.

[5] See Sheryl Stephenson, 'Language and Gender in Transit: Feminist Extensions of Bakhtin', in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. by Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 181–98; Carole Sweeney, '"Why This Rather Than That?": The Delightful Perversity of Brigid Brophy', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 12:2 (2018), 233–47; Sonya Andermahr, 'Both/and Aesthetics: Gender, Art and Language' in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* and Ali Smith's 'How to Be Both', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 12:2 (2018), 248–63; Justine Gonneaud, 'Baroque Parody' in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*, *Polysémes*, 23 (2020), 1–12, and David Vichnar, 'Between the Pun and the Portmanteau: Multilingualism in and after Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*', in *The Poetics of Multilingualism—La Poétique du Plurilinguisme*, ed. by Patrizia Noel, Aziz Hanna, and Levente Seláf (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), pp. 269–80.

[6] Len Gutkin, 'Brigid Brophy's Aestheticism: The Camp Anti-Novel', in *British Avant-garde Fiction of the 1960s*, ed. by Kaye Mitchell and Nonia Williams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 72–89.

[7] Brigid Brophy, 'The Librarian and the Novel: A Writer's View', in *Brigid Brophy: Avant-garde Writer, Critic, Activist*, ed. by Gerri Kember and Richard Canning (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 37–48 (p. 45).

[8] *In Transit*, p. 200. A clear riff on Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (California: Gingko Press, 1964).

[9] Brigid Brophy, 'The Novel as a Take-over Bid', *The Listener*, 3 October 1963, pp. 13–14.

[10] Andermahr, *Both/and Aesthetics*.

communication of failure, the failure to be within or accept one side of the gender binary, the inevitable failure of Brophy's writing to manifest as the stereo aural transmissions they imitate. This failure of transmission allows Brophy to bring to the surface limitations reading gender as a binary and the failure to express this binary in Brophy's writing constitutes a form of gender expression in its own right. The article thus makes a case for reading *In Transit*'s deconstruction of the gender binary within the context of the 1960s stereophonic technologies, as a multifaceted appropriation of stereo aesthetics.

Proceeding with the conviction that new taxonomies and histories of gender nonconformity and deviance are vital to unearth at a time of judicial and official political hostility towards gender nonconforming people in the UK (and worldwide), my methodology here is informed by queer and gender theory, as well as sound studies and histories of stereophonic sound in particular. I also make use of archival materials relating both to Brophy and to the emerging use of home stereos and stereo broadcasting in the 1960s. I begin by outlining the ways in which Pat's gender is 'read' and overdetermined in *In Transit*. I then outline the context of stereophonic sound in the 1960s, before showing the ways in which Brophy makes use of it as an aesthetic to express Pat's non-binary gender, what I call queer stereo. I propose that the queer stereo in *In Transit* does not function smoothly but, instead, produces a failure on the reader and Brophy's part, a failure of text to be sound, a failure of stereo channels to seamlessly blend, and a failure on Pat's part to occupy the poles of the gender binary.

THE AMBIGUITY OF TROUSERS

Whilst the moments of queer stereo in *In Transit* alter and nuance our understanding of gender, technology, and failure in the novel, they are infrequent and their analysis does not provide an effective plot description or sense of Brophy's baroque style. I will try to give some sense of that here. It concerns Pat who forgets his/her gender in an airport transit lounge. She/he begins to slip, uncontrollably at times, between languages, also flipping genders and pronouns depending on how she/he is perceived both by others and his/herself. The action of novel is punctuated by numerous metafictional asides from Brophy herself, as well as pictographic elements, near-constant puns, and unconventional page layouts. As the novel progresses, the transit lounge becomes replete with parodies of Western 1960s popular and political culture: free love, conceptual art, rock music, game shows, countercultural revolutions (including a failed working class butch lesbian revolution led by Pat), communism, and capitalism. A French erotic novel comes to life, there is a penis smuggling operation, two planes collide and crash. At the novel's end, Pat commits suicide and then is reborn.

In amongst this, the question of Pat's gender remains central. Pat forgets his/her gender and/or 'sex' in Section Two (punned 'Sexshuntwo'). The next fifty or so pages of the novel are dedicated to Pat's rather comic attempts to deduce his/her own gender. These attempts I will class as attempts to 'read' his/her gender, as they all involve searching for signs which could be definitively interpreted as signifying male or female. She/he considers his/her clothes, his/her body shape, even resorting to formal logic only to find it strangely gendered already (BARBARA, BRAMAN-TIP). Nothing provides an answer. When one seems to come, it is undermined quickly. A character named Donaghue mentions that Pat was his wife Betty's 'first date', suggesting, to Pat, that he is a man. The narrative shifts for the first time here into the third person describing 'O'Rooley', now with male pronouns, entering the men's lavatory, only to discover that once he 'unzipped his trousers and reached his hand inside' that 'There was nothing there'.[11] At which point O'Rooley becomes Patricia.

[11] *In Transit*, p. 117.

Throughout the much of the rest of the novel, different characters will read Pat's gender and, at each point this happens, the narrative flips pronouns appropriately.

In the absence of nearly any outside gendered 'sign', Pat and other characters continue to read Pat's gender and, in reading it, create, change, and sustain it. Reading and interpreting signs, as well as making signs legible to others, becomes the very stuff of gender. Carole Sweeney writes that 'Pat/Patricia's body becomes "sexed" by the discursive trappings of convention—language, clothes, and gesture'.[12] Gender and/sex depend on being intelligible, and thus on a series of signs for oneself and for others (readers both interior and exterior) to read. Reading Pat's gender does not correspond to some essential point within Pat, but instead to a number of signs which move in an already gendered discursive field, i.e., the situation in which the signs emerge is one which already legitimizes certain genders and this, in turn, effects the production of signs and their meanings.

Yet Brophy is at pains to show that Pat is not visibly male or female: she/he is read as different genders depending on which character she/he encounters, speaking to Butler's identification of 'a criterion that posits coherent gender as a presupposition of humanness'.[13] For Pat to exist as a legible person, she/he enters a discourse which does not correspond to his/her own set of signs. Sweeney highlights this need to be read in her analysis of *In Transit* suggesting 'Consciousness here becomes the search for an interlocutor, a reader of your own signs'.[14] The reader is thus paralleled with the characters of the novel, reading the signs of Brophy's narrative which gender Pat (name changes, pronouns) just as Donaghue and others read Pat's body.

Pat's gender becoming wholly dependent on how his/her signs are read certainly undermines the notion of immutable and essential gender, in spite of the fact that it relies on a disciplinary paranoid reading, to borrow a famous term from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, one which places emphasis on 'knowledge in the form of exposure'.[15] Pat is continually 'exposed' as a given gender through paranoid readings which anticipate the revelation in advance, but the over-determining nature of the readings becomes the very thing which makes gender mutable. Paisley Currah and Tara Mulqueen suggest in their article on transgender airplane passengers and airport security that 'gender scrutiny' can serve to destabilize identity as well secure it, revealing the contingency of perceived discrepancies between gender as judicial identity, on a passport say, and gender as it is formed on the body.[16] Significantly, Pat's passport has an obscured honorific (the victim of a coffee spill), obliterating its gender identifying mark and producing the need for Pat's continued gender scrutiny which allows him/her to queerly move between male and female.

Yet there is a clear frustration, made explicit in Brophy's metafictional asides to the reader, with the ways the English language produces and reasserts binary gender, the act of reading, and, indeed, the world as a whole. The failures of 'reading gender' are illustrated neatly in Pat's relationship with the airport lavatory, in which she/he runs into a version of what Jack Halberstam calls 'The Bathroom Problem'.[17] In fact, reading Pat's problem through Halberstam's formulation proves illuminating to the ways in which the privileging of visual knowledge functions with regards to non-conforming gender expression. As Halberstam

[12] '"Why This Rather Than That?": The Delightful Perversity of Brigid Brophy', p. 243.

[13] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 58.

[14] Carole Sweeney, '"Groping Inside Language": Translation, Humour and Experiment', in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Between* and Brigid Brophy's *In Transit*, *Textual Practice*, 32:2 (2018), 301–16 (p. 312).

[15] Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You', in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 1–37 (p. 17).

[16] Tara Mulqueen and Paisley Currah, 'Securitizing Gender: Identity, Biometrics, and Transgender Bodies at the Airport', *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 78:2 (2014), 557–82.

[17] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

puts it, the bathroom problem arises when 'various bathroom users […] fail to measure up to expectations of femininity, and those of us who present in some ambiguous way are routinely questioned and challenged about our presence in the "wrong" bathroom'.[18] Pat runs into a similar problem. She/he is wearing trousers, but this is no proof that Pat is male because, in 1960s Western culture, trousers could now be worn by men or women. Yet, *In Transit* continues, the sign 'trousers' is still used to signify 'men' on toilet doors: 'the authorities did not mean, I knew with a twinge, that anyone wearing trousers might enter by the trousers door'.[19] Pat laments: 'The ambiguity of trousers is unilateral'. The trousers are deployed as a visual sign of both gender ambiguity *and* gender discipline, giving way to the worry that, whichever toilet Pat enters, she/he will encounter the bathroom problem. Appropriately, Halberstam points out that 'the policing of gender within the bathroom is intensified in the space of the airport, where people are literally moving through space and time in ways that cause them to want to stabilize some boundaries (gender) even as they traverse others (national)'.[20] *In Transit*'s airport setting plays on precisely this, the airport as the in-between space, a space to be 'in transit'. Pat chooses to miss his/her flight and thus finds him/herself at neither gender 'destination'. Yet she/he finds him/herself in a regime of signs which discursively roots out gender ambiguity even as it generates it, even within the same sign (in this case, trousers). This phenomenon within the bathroom problem emerges as 'gender's very flexibility and seeming fluidity is precisely what allows dimorphic gender to hold sway' and so Pat is read into the gender binary, must submit to it more thoroughly through the readings of others, must in fact depend on these readings of his/her signs all the more, *precisely* because of the ambiguity of trousers and Pat's status as a 'gender deviant'.[21] So whilst Andermahr writes that 'Brophy presents gender as an "illegible" or indeterminate category', we might also consider that it is this very illegibility which calls up a reductively legible binary.[22] As I mentioned, the first thing Pat does when he becomes 'Patrick' is go into the male lavatory, only to suddenly become Patricia when she cannot find her penis. These readings made by others (and then, latterly, by Pat) can only shuttle Pat between the ends of the gender binary, opening up new potentials for the bathroom problem: Pat as Patricia 'knows' she is in the 'wrong' bathroom because signs used to read him/her are not stable, *only binary*, meaning that, in Brophy's novel, it seems one can move between male and female but *never be both male and female at once*. When Pat is figured as outside gender, language leaves one only with recourse to a pre-gendered 'I', a fragile sign cracked and shunted by each reading. In its communication, its transmission and circulation, Pat's 'I' is reworked only into he or she.

What one cannot fail to notice here is that gender in *In Transit* is always a social relationship, dependent on assignation, not by a judicial or political body (the honorific on the passport is obscured) but by the public, both the reading public and the fictional public of the novel. Pat as an 'I' can remain amnesiac to his/her gender, but once she/he finds a 'reader of [his/her] own signs' the operations of the binary assign him/her a position. Pat reassures him/herself that 'it was impossible for an adult human to forget what sex he/she belonged to' adding that 'it was doubly impossible for an adult human *in public*'.[23] And this is indeed the case: it is interactions with the 'public' which tend to gender Pat. Yet Brophy is careful to leave Pat's gender ambivalent. This throws up two failures, one of transmission and one

[18] *Female Masculinity*, p. 20.
[19] *In Transit*, p. 82.
[20] *Female Masculinity*, p. 20.
[21] Ibid., pp. 20–21.
[22] Andermahr, *Both/and Aesthetics*, p. 248.
[23] *In Transit*, p. 73.

of reception. On the one hand, Pat fails to transmit the information which would place him/her within the gender binary. On the other hand, confronted with the gender non-conforming body of Pat, the characters fail to receive him/her as anything other than male or female. Understanding these twin failures will help us see why and how Brophy constructs a queer stereo, seeking alternative forms of gender transmission.

These failures are illuminated by the parallel failure of Brophy's 1967 play *The Burglar*, whose truncated run and poor critical reception mark a major blemish in a decade otherwise marked for Brophy by prolific output and a rise to the status of minor public intellectual in the UK.[24] Brophy was convinced the play's negative reviews stemmed from misogyny, suggesting in her introduction to the published play script (1968) that if she had been billed as 'Tim Smith' perhaps she would have received different (though not necessarily better) reviews, as well as sarcastically apologizing for not 'impersonating' a woman well enough. The only thing Brophy is guilty of, she insists, is being a woman though 'you would never be able to guess it from my books' or, by implication, her plays.[25] In the manner of Pat's trousers, *The Burglar*, which should communicate (at least for Brophy) nothing of her gender, has instead been read *only* in relation to her gender. And, like Pat, Brophy now senses her own construction by both critics and the public, the 'fantasy of a monstrously pugnacious me'. The word 'pugnacious' is Irving Wardle's description of Brophy in his review of *The Burglar* for The Times.[26] In what can only be a conscious echoing, the word 'pugnacious' acts as a pivot for a moment of gender confusion in *In Transit*, when Patrick realizes that two 'pugnacious' Irish butches have referred to him as 'one of ourselves' and she (now transformed into Patricia) may also be a 'contentious, pugnacious tough-breathing Irish butch'. The reading of the word 'pugnacious', its application as a sign to either Brophy or Pat, produces a failure of gender transmission and reception. Reading gender then, is a doomed and inevitable task for Brophy, one which hinges on the over-determination of signs. Hence, the consistent issue of (mis)communicating gender to a public in *In Transit*. Pat does not seem to be able, in same manner as *The Burglar*, to not communicate gender. How to transmit to the public a gender-ambiguous character like Pat? My suggestion is that Brophy turns to the technological and the aural. The next section deals with the aesthetic that this generates, the transmission writing of queer stereo.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BAD STEREO

Brophy's primary engagement with stereo in *In Transit* takes the form of splitting her text into two parallel columns. The columns are sometimes streams of parallel text, with occasions where a single column will stand on its own. They are stereophonic in nature not least because they are twice referred to as such, as 'stereo thinking apparatus' or 'Stereo Sci-FI' (punning on 'hi-fi'), and all of them are concerned in some way with gender and with sound itself, eventually being used to split Pat into two parallel characters Patrick (frequently called O'Rooley) and Patricia (sometimes called Bunny).[27] It is through these columns, I argue, that Brophy attempts to, in her own words, 'have-it-both-ways' when it comes to gender expression. Unlike the acts of reading which interpolate Pat/Brophy into gender binary even when, like the trousers, the medium registers ambiguously, the stereo aesthetic Brophy

[24] Brigid Brophy, *The Burglar* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968). As well as many articles, a handful of novels, and a radio play, Brophy also devised a gameshow for BBC 2 in this time called *Take It or Leave It*.

[25] *The Burglar*, p. 24.

[26] Irving Wardle, 'Bluestocking Pot-Pourri without Bones', *Times*, 23 February 1967, p. 10.

[27] *In Transit*, pp. 101, 223.

adopts suggests a simultaneous quality. But in order to look at these sections, it is necessary to have some context on what stereophonic sound meant in the 1960s. What does Brophy mean by writing about 'stereo thinking apparatus'?

Firstly, stereophonic sound is, roughly, the positioning of two or more microphones to record sound into separate channels which could then be mixed so that, in a two-speaker system say, different sounds come from each speaker. By the time *In Transit* was published in 1969, stereo speakers at home had only recently become a solidified and popular phenomenon in the UK. Whilst the history of stereophonic sound stretches back into the nineteenth century and might be also be tracked by series of experiments and implementations on film audio in the 1940s and 1950s, it was not until the late 1950s that stereo speakers and records for home music listening were consistently advertised and even then 'stereophonic sound was considered to be the purview of high-end users and audio-philes', often being coupled with specialist records of trains and landscapes to demonstrate its more dynamic spatial-sonic capabilities.[28] Spatiality and realism were, indeed, two of the primary selling points of stereo hi-fis in the late 1950s and early 1960s. One article in *The Listener* from 1958 tells us that 'The aim of stereophonic sound reproduction is to restore the listener's ability to locate the position in space of the various sources of sound and to follow movement', whilst more recently Tony Grajeda reflects that stereo in the mid-twentieth century 'produced a dramatically different perception of sound from monophonic recording, creating a more pronounced spatial dimension in the listening experience. As opposed to the perceived "chaos" of monaural sound, the phenomenology of stereophonic effects constituted a very specific location for a listening subject—effects that sought to place the listener front and centre in an aural field'.[29] Notions of spatialization as stereo's primary innovation persist beyond the relative verisimilitude of the sounds produced, becoming woven into listening practices themselves. Adverts and handbooks for stereo speakers in the 1950s feature diagrams demonstrating the ideal placing of speakers and, crucially, the position of the listener, the interpellated listening subject.[30] This position, the crossing point of speakers, sometimes dubbed 'the sweet spot', suggests, as Jonathan Sterne writes, 'a stable audioposition, one from which the entire world is available to be heard'.[31] It should be noted that the listening subject interpolated in this sweet spot was, for the most part, coded as masculine, as well as implicitly affluent.[32] Part of stereo's perceived superior spatial audio realism (sometimes called concert hall realism in promotional material) was in direct parallel to the centring the male audiophile in a frictionless sound world: the closer to the 'sweet spot' one was, the more stable the subjectivity created vis-à-vis the sound world. This stable subject (stable in both their assumed gender and embodied centrality to the sonic field) will be precisely what Brophy undermines and queers with her own use of stereo sound.

As to which sounds were being heard by 1950s/60s owners of stereo hi-fis, advertisements and press surrounding stereophonic innovations emphasized its ability to replicate the particular spatialization of an orchestra or concert halls, and thus stereo records and hi-fi sets are associated largely with classical music and (significantly as we shall see) opera during

[28] Kenneth Womack, *Solid State: The Story of Abbey Road and the End of the Beatles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), p. 8.

[29] H. T. Greatorex, 'Stereo Broadcasting', *Listener*, 16 October 1958, p. 605; Tony Grajeda, 'The "Sweet Spot": The Technology of Stereo and the Field of Auditorship', in *Living Stereo: Histories and Cultures of Multichannel Sound*, ed. by Paul Théberge, Kyle Devine, and Tom Everrett (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), pp. 37–64 (p. 37).

[30] Gilbert Arthur Briggs, *A to Z of Audio* (New York: Gernsback Library, 1961), p. 188;
H. T. Greatorex, 'Stereo Broadcasting', *Listener*, 16 October 1958, p. 605; Electric Audio Reproducers LTD, 'Full STEREO Performance', *Listener*, 21 August 1958, p. 284.

[31] Jonathan Sterne, 'The Stereophonic Spaces of Soundscape', in *Living Stereo*, ed. by Théberge et al., pp. 65–84 (p. 79).

[32] Paul Théberge, Kyle Devine, and Tom Everrett, 'Introduction: Living Stereo', in *Living Stereo*, pp. 1–34 (p. 28).

this period.[33] This is reflected, not only in the proportion of classical records relative to 'pop' records which were recorded and released in stereo in the early to mid-1960s, but also in the pieces selected by the BBC to broadcast in stereophonic sound throughout the 1960s. A *Times* article from 1969 notes that, 'more serious music is selected because full orchestras can prove particularly rewarding on stereo sound'.[34] The BBC's limited regular stereo broadcasts of the 1960s were confined almost entirely to the Third Programme (Radio 3 after 1967), a station which mostly broadcast classical pieces.

The relative novelty of home stereophonic systems and especially stereo broadcasting, however, meant the stereo sublime of a stable audio position or subjectivity was always haunted by its potential failure. Thebérge, Devine, and Everrett suggest that the acoustic space of most living rooms made it near impossible for any given audiophile to achieve a 'sweet spot' in practice.[35] Among an array of disorienting effects of misplaced speakers could produce would be a 'hole in the middle' aesthetic, in which the left and right channels would sound too isolated from one and other, or a 'squashed', 'muddled', or 'indistinct' sound if the speakers were too close together. Hence the continued 'training' by articles and ads to position the speakers correctly. Fail to do so and the stable audioposition would no longer be so stable. This went double for stereo broadcasting, whose public nature meant that many people with mono sets would be picking up said transmissions. One book on radio broadcasting suggests that, even though some stereo broadcasts were supposedly mono compatible, many of them sounded like 'mere babble' on mono sets.[36] Simultaneously, even those with stereo speakers would not only have to arrange them correctly but sometimes (set depending) set two different radio receivers to different frequencies in order to pick up the right and left channels. Before many stereo broadcasts a 'test tone' would be transmitted for four minutes, to allow users with compatible systems to align their speakers and tune in both receivers. For every listener able to adopt the exact equilateral distancing designed to optimize immersion and fidelity, there were other listeners with 'unsuitable sets, indifferent aerials, and a confused attitude towards this type of broadcasting'.[37] My suggestion in the next section will be that it is precisely by presenting a stereo with *bad reception* (much like the bad reception of *The Burglar*) that Brophy ultimately creates a kind of (gender) queer expression in *In Transit*. If the elaborate listening practices and industry guides to setting up speakers were in service of a stable, implicitly male normative subjectivity, a smooth immersive listening experience, then to listen to stereo badly would be a queer act, placing oneself, as David Halprin puts it, 'at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' and instead within the 'eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject'.[38] Stereo broadcasting is important here due to its public nature: like *The Burglar*, the failure of transmission or just plain old bad reception becomes a kind of public miscommunication of gender. Yet, in the case of queer stereo, it is one Brophy turns to her own ends, to bring to the surface a failure

[33] An advertisement for the 'World Record Club' in 1961 lists twenty-eight records readers can write in for: the only 'pop' record in stereo is *Presenting Cole Porter*, with the other stereo records being mostly recordings of pieces by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, with the odd cast recording of Broadway musicals. Meanwhile, a guide to audio from the same year suggests that 'There is one sphere in which stereo appears to have no scope. We refer to those "pop" records, mostly with crooners'. (Briggs) But as the decade wore on, stereo's increasing availability and a rise in pop music's prestige would mean that, by 1968, Tim Stouster is suggesting listening to *White Light/White Heat* with 'stereo headphones, the new ivory tower' to experience the 'true pop sound' at home, implying not only that stereophonic sound is conducive to pop music but assuming that the reader's playback equipment would already be stereo speakers.

[34] Peter Mytton-Davies, 'Stereo Radio Dilemma', *Times*, 28 November 1969, p. 40.

[35] Théberge, Devine, and Everrett, p. 24.

[36] Elwyn Evans, *Radio: A Guide to Broacasting Techniques* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1977), p. 175.

[37] Mytton-Davies, p. 40.

[38] David Halprin, *Saint Foucault* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62.

to communicate. I now turn to Brophy's use of columns to represent stereo and gender in *In Transit*.

THE FIRST COLUMNS: OPERA

Music plays in the transit lounge. A fictional opera called *Alitalia* (named for an Italian airline). Brophy tells us 'public-address put on a record'.[39] Pat has not yet forgotten his/her gender/sex, the subject not having been raised yet. The opera is communicated to us through two columns: on the left, the libretto in Italian, and, on the right, an English translation. Whilst doubtless an airport public address system would not be equipped for hi-fi stereo, as stated before, the PA system serves as a stand-in for radio broadcasting and the use of two columns is later more explicitly linked to stereo.[40] As stated previously, many early stereo radio broadcasts were sections of operas, deemed appropriate as the movement of figures, their positions, would register in stereo but not in mono.[41] The *Alitalia* section is in many ways a celebration, albeit a somewhat humorous one, of the joy, the queer joy as we shall see, of listening to a transmission of opera. Yet there are important ways in which the queer, the stereophonic, and failing are bound together in this transmission.

Only Pat is in the transit lounge when *Alitalia* is broadcast, the sole listening subject. In passages which interrupt the columns of the libretto, Brophy/Pat refers to opera as a monster called 'Amphisbaena', 'have-it-both-ways'. This is not just to 'have it both ways' in terms of the language of the opera, but also the genders of the characters. *Alitalia* is populated nearly entirely by 'man-women' and 'man-maids', as well as a Sappho singing longingly of Hippodamia's 'hermaphrodic face'.[42] When Orestes enters he(?) is a 'she-hero', a 'he-soprano'.[43] Nearly every character is assigned an operatic voice range of the 'opposite' gender in the binary. Sappho sings in a 'male' baritone, whilst Achilles and Patroclus are 'female' sopranos. The transmission of the opera achieves what the later 'readings' of Pat's gender/sex will not: it provides a queer sonic space in which one can escape from the binary gender of the dominate semiotic/judicial/political system. In contrast to Pat's movement between genders, the aural transmission of gender through the broadcast opera *seems* to allow for a simultaneity of multiple genders (albeit those of the binary). Sound becomes a space in which one can be both at once, have it both ways.

There is also a sense that this opera opens up a public line of communication. Even though there is no one else in the transit lounge at this point, for Pat:

> Listening to it is at once idealistic and hedonistic. I am as shut-up in my own self-seeking sensations as if I were doing invisible masturbation. And yet my enjoyment is a social act.[44]

Observe here, a listening, at once private and communal, always sensational. The invisibility of the masturbation is also important: it cannot be opened up to a reading. The social aspect is not one reading another, but one becoming another and a being with others ('opera = coopera').[45] Brandon Lebelle suggests that 'the acoustical event is always a social

[39] *In Transit*, p. 50.
[40] *In Transit*, p. 22.
[41] John Warrack, 'Stereo's Boon to Opera', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 December 1958, p. 8; Edward Greenfield, 'Stereophonic Opera', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 April 1959.
[42] *In Transit*, p. 53.
[43] Ibid, p. 56.
[44] Ibid, p. 55.
[45] Ibid, p. 58.

one' as 'Sound is produced and inflected not only by the materiality of space but also by the presence of others, by a body there, another there, and another over there'.[46] Yet with no one else present, the social act that Pat refers to is not bodies of others around him/her, but the voices and bodies of the non-binary opera singers. It speaks to the paradox of public address which Brophy examines elsewhere in *In Transit*: in a metafictional aside Brophy/Pat points out that the word 'you' does not specify whether its address is singular or plural. Is the novel addressed to the 'you' of the individual reader or the 'you' of the reading public? As the opera plays, the 'you' singular of 'Pat' is addressed as in the plural (the public nature of the broadcast), collapsing the gap between the two, as well as between Pat and the singers.

In listening to the transmission of the opera, Pat has the 'space to impersonate someone else', to 'suspend one's "own" identity in the affective solution of a fictional other' as Len Gutkin writes.[47] In the context of this gender ambiguous and (for lack of less direct phrasing) extremely gay opera (see Achilles and Patroclus, Sappho, and a reference to 'the lugubriously gay old fagatto'), the identification and this immersion, is certainly a queer one.[48] As Pat listens, the transmission of the opera has 'sucked [him/her] deep into your contralto throat, drawn me down into identifications with your characters by your sheer liquid expressiveness of their emotions. I am free of self … '.[49] In *The Queen's Throat*, Wayne Koestenbaum writes of listening to opera: 'Straight socialization makes queer people discard their bodies; listening restores queer embodiment', making one 'two-gendered'.[50] In disappearing into the contralto's throat (a range, significantly, on the lowest end of the female classical register), Pat secures not an identification through reading, through the queer embodiment in sound Koestenbaum describes. Pat's identification is quite explicit: 'I *am* you, you she-hero and he-soprano'.[51] Crucially, Koestenbaum's opera experience shows us in Brophy a different listening practice to the dominant male subject of the mid-twentieth century stereo hi-fi. Where that listening subject is constituted by a centrality and stability, a place in which sounds 'become available', Koestenbaum and Pat lose their position outside of the sound object itself. Rather than this being a loss of subjectivity, however, it is this loss which allows the queer subject to form in the aural experience.

The transmission of the opera allows for the identification with characters, not only outside one's own gender, but who express genders not assignable to the binary. This last limitation (*two* genders) is important, as is the 'both' in the 'have-it-both-ways'. The non-binary nature of these characters comes through only in their mixing and matching of binary gendered aspects (a 'male' voice from a 'female' character) an aesthetic not dissimilar to the gender expression Declan Henry cites as 'Gender-fuck', described as the practice of bending stereotypical gender appearances and mannerisms, resulting in a mixture of masculinity and femininity (for example a person with a beard wearing a dress).[52] Like Brophy's opera and (as we shall see) queer stereo more broadly, gender-fuck takes markers of the gender binary puts them into a queer relationality, though it is telling that Henry's examples are visual, beards and dresses. Brophy too, is deploying a binary in a queer way. Several binaries in fact, not least those two columns which split the opera up into Italian and English. This gives them a certain relationality (and as LaBelle points out 'Sound is intrinsically and unignorably relational') not present in the rest of the text: the columns interact, the reader moves

[46] Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. xii.

[47] Len Gutkin, 'Brigid Brophy's Aestheticism: The Camp Anti-Novel', in *British Avant-garde Fiction of the 1960s*, ed. by Kaye Mitchell and Nonia Williams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 72–89 (p. 85).

[48] *In Transit*, p. 54.

[49] Ibid, p. 54.

[50] Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat* (London: GMP, 1993), p. 42.

[51] *In Transit*, p. 56.

[52] Declan Henry, *Trans Voices: Becoming Who You Are* (London: Kingsley, 2017), p. 121.

between them, just as Pat moves between his/herself and the voices of the opera.[53] The columns are not only translation of the Amphisbaena opera, they themselves are an attempt at the 'have-it-both-ways' monster which they represent.

Whilst this listening experience is, for Pat, a simultaneous aural expression and identification with non-conforming gender presentations, there is always a tension present with the written nature of the representation of this aural form. Brophy writes of opera elsewhere as musical form with a neglected, even disavowed, literary element: the libretto. She writes: 'I suspect […] that there is implicit in some operatic criticism and comment the belief that to pay serious attention to the plot and characters would somehow taint the purity of the music.'[54] *In Transit* emphasizes this literary element in writing out the libretto, yet Pat's ecstasy is given to us entirely in aural terms: the vibrations of the contralto's throat, the delays and suspension of notes. Attention is drawn to the contrast between reading a novel or watching a play, the reader being directly addressed 'reader-interlocutor' and in the libretto itself Sappho puns 'I love the page'.[55] The address alerts us to the 'illusion of inhabiting a character's […] train of consciousness', as Pat/Brophy tells us, but the erotics of listening to the opera are bodily and sonically savoured.[56] The 'sun-smiling soprano voices' of Patroclus and Achilles produce a confusion of tongues: 'Can you no longer tell whose tongue wags […] in whose head?'[57] Pat can be swallowed into the sound of *Alitalia*, opera can 'seduce [his/her] into its kiss', can experience the Amphisbaena of gender, but the reader cannot. It is still a failure in reading. 'Sounds,' writes Julian Henriques, 'have to be re-presented rather than represented' i.e., have to played back, re-transmitted.[58] This failure of the writing goes beyond its inability to manifest as music and sound. It is specifically, as we shall see a failure of stereo.

THE OTHER COLUMNS: STEREO-APPARATUS

Brophy will make the connection between the columns and stereo more explicit the second time she uses them, referring to her 'intellectual stereophony' with the two columns representing two trains of thought, one emerging from a 'weaker speaker'.[59] By this stage Pat has realized she/he does not know his/her own gender and has been going through a laborious process of self-reading, i.e. checking if she/he has breasts, a cock, gendered clothing. It is here the columns enter, at a moment of gender ambiguity akin to their previous usage as vectors for a non-binary opera. This 'stereo thinking apparatus', as Pat refers to it, technologizes his/her interiority but also renders it in audio terms. This extends into the subject matter of the columns. One column considers the potential for stereo sound with regards to opera (and later contemplates a book Pat is holding), whilst the other consists of Pat reasoning that she/he could determine his/her gender/sex through his/her singing voice. The most telling moment comes from the left 'speaker':

> Technology errs, I contrived to think just before the fadeout supervened, in propping up our bifocalism: wasteful to direct the two speakers of a stereophonic system, or the two lenses of a pair of spectacles to helping two sense organs focus on a single object.

[53] LaBelle, p. xi, n. 46.
[54] Brigid Brophy, *Reads* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 20.
[55] *In Transit*, p. 53.
[56] Ibid, p. 56.
[57] Ibid, p. 54.
[58] Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 51.
[59] *In Transit*, p. 93.

> The true advance of civilization will come when science enables a human being to see two Veroneses, one out of each eye, at once to lend each of his ears to a different opera at the same time.[60]

Notice here that Brophy thinks the potential of stereophonic speakers is to provide the Amphisbaena that she herself is attempting to emulate through her two columns: to be tuned into two heterogeneous elements rather 'a single object', yet to still be a listening subject between them. There is here a queering of stereo itself. Mid-twentieth century stereo discourse was marked by its focus on realism, its ability to spatialize orchestras, operas, and Broadway casts. In rewriting stereo as two distinct transmissions, Brophy removes stereo's supposed mimetic quality in favour of simultaneity and multiplicity, a gender-fuck of operas. This is in some ways the failed encounter with stereo that haunts the advertisements for hi-fis, with their diagrams for correct loudspeaker positioning, or the initial BBC stereo broadcasts with their dual signals to be picked up by two separately tuned receivers. Tune into the wrong station or misalign your loudspeakers, and the single object (the opera one is listening to say) which should mark the relation between the two speakers, and thus render them coherent, is gone. Stereo would bring in two separate objects into an unexpected and ultimately arbitrary relation. Brophy's stereo takes advantage of precisely what audiophile culture would have viewed as a failed listening experience.

This lack of a single object, the have-it-both-ways of *In Transit*'s 'intellectual stereophony', is intertwined with the novel's critique of binary gender. In the second use of the columns, Pat's stereo thinking is not only set off by the sight of a masculine woman but also concerns the gendering of Pat's singing voice. Later, the columns will divide Pat into male and female, into Patrick/O'Rooley and Patricia/Bunny, at first placing Patrick in a hard-boiled detective novel paralleled with Patricia in another Italian mock opera, and then, at the novel's conclusion, dividing him/her based on whether she/he attempts suicide or not (though each dies in their own column). Being able to take in two different operas is thus, through these stereo columns, also the capacity to express to different genders.

Yet, crucially, Brophy's attempt is hampered by the very 'bifocalism' she criticizes in stereo. The reader cannot take in both the columns at once, cannot see 'two Veroneses, one out of each eye, at once lend each of his [sic] ears to a different opera at the same time'. The ironic failure of the libretto of *Alitalia* to be experienced as sound is redoubled and recontextualized here. Brophy writes to mimic stereo yet the very reason she is doing it, to produce a simultaneity, a both/and aesthetic, amphisbaena, is undermined by the nature of the reception i.e., the reader who is only ever looking at one column. Later in the novel, Pat reads a passage from an erotic French novel (*L'Historie de la Langue D'Oc* trans; The Story of Oc's Tongue, another Brophy invention) and tries to determine whether they see with the submissive female protagonist Oc as 'self-subject-identified or submissively, supinely subjected object'.[61] Disappointed that the answer is annoyingly 'both', Pat realizes what the reader might already have realized about reading *In Transit:* 'I'd been the victim of a narrative method whose eye must by its nature be bifocal, peering sometimes through the subject, sometimes through the object'. The bifocalism not only fails to apprehend two sexes at once

[60] Ibid, p. 93.

[61] *In Transit*, p. 105. Langue d'oc (lit translation—the language of yes) is also the name for a regional language/dialect/patois spoken in Southern France and other parts of Occitania. In resonance with *In Transit*'s concern for linguistic slippages and corrupted binaries of high and low culture, langue d'oc is contrasted to the official French of langue d'oïl, the latter's encouragement in French institutions since the First Republic being 'based in the idea that equality among citizens depends on the universality of a standard national language' (Janet E. Connor). Thus, the regional, unofficial, low-culture langue d'oc is appropriate for the extra-literary, unofficial language of pornography. For more, see Janet E. Connor, '"The *Langue d'Oc* Is Bringing People Together": Debating the Place of Regional Languages in France', *Linguist Anthropology*, 29:2 (2019), 249–70.

but also bisexual desire. This lack of the aural 'Amphisbaena' is reflected in Pat's rather cool reaction to the supposedly sexual novel. In contrast to Pat's erotized response the non-binary, genderqueer, and gender-fuck characters of *Alitalia*, all that the strict gender roles (woman-submissive, man-dominant) of *Oc's Tongue* 'had in fact made [him/her] want, all but compulsively, to do was pee'.[62] Tellingly, the act of reading *The Story of Oc's Tongue* is presented through a set of columns, with the text of the fake novel on the left and Pat's thoughts on the right. Unlike the representations of stereo sound, the column of *Oc's Tongue* is thicker than the 'intermittent grumbly obbligato' of Pat's accompanying thoughts, suggesting both a kind of gender hierarchical quality to the act of reading, one similar to the dominant male and submissive female relationship contained in the novel itself (a 'single object', to the accompany musical thoughts 'propounded on a double-bass'), but also giving us the opportunity to see once more the problem of bifocalism that Pat observes in reading, peering through both the framed story and Pat's commentary one after the other, but never both at once.[63] The experience of amphisbaena, which the *transmission* of the non-binary opera allows, Pat is impossible in the binarized *reception* of text.

We return in this to the gendered nature of all the columns and to the construction of a queer stereo. Because, ultimately, the failure of this stereophonic writing is also the lament of Pat's gender identity; Brophy's columns, through the evocation of stereo transmission, seem to circumnavigate the trouser problems of 'reading' gender, but end up at the same frustrated/frustrating binary. On the one hand, just as gender scrutiny and Pat's movement between genders/sexes might offer the potential for a queering of gender and the foundations of the gender binary, the columns allow the reader to engage in a relational reading, with the columns spatiality letting us see, for instance, that as the right column attempts to recount Pat's time at a choir school, the left column is searching for clues to Pat's gender/sex within these very memories. On the other hand, this relationality only allows our gaze to flip between each single column, just as Pat can only flip between the extremes of the gender binary.

The stereo transmission of Pat's 'defective stereo-thinking apparatus' is doomed to frustration because its reception is as written text rather than aural and, in turn, the expression of gender is doomed to the binary.[64] When the novel divides in Section 3 into lawyer/detective O'Rooley (left column) and his secretary Patricia/Bunny (right column), the now separate characters spend their divergent and parallel narratives searching for the other, as though the text itself were struggling for the simultaneity which would bring about a 'have-it-both-ways' gender expression. At the novel's conclusion Pat is standing on a girder of the transit lounge, a crowd gathering below him/her, about to jump to his/her death. The text once again splits into columns, with Patricia on the left killing herself, Patrick on the right deciding to live, only to trip and fall to his death anyway. Brophy moves into ergodic or ludic territory, asking the reader to 'make the choice' between Patricia and Patrick.[65] The moment illustrates, again, the ultimate failure of the binary through the dual columns: the reader is the one who must choose yet, in spite of choosing, both columns exist. One will doubtless read both, yet the two appear as mutually exclusive. We arrive back at a kind of a 'bathroom problem': we might take the presence of both columns to suggest a simultaneous transmission of male and female but, in the act of reading, must push Pat through one bathroom door or another (or push him/her off one girder or another). It is impossible not to do so

[62] *In Transit*, p. 106.

[63] Ibid., p. 102.

[64] One thinks of the fascinating potentialities of an audiobook of *In Transit* which would allow for a stereo reading of the column sections.

[65] *In Transit*, p. 235.

under the discursive regime Brophy works through and, as we have seen, Brophy knows this. Her transmission writing cribs a stereophonic aesthetic, but comes up against its own limits as text.

WHY I'M NOT GOING TO FIX YOUR QUEER STEREO, EVEN IF I COULD

We arrive then, at several failures: the failure of the columns to transmit as stereophonic sound, the failure of Pat to be either male or female, and the failure of the reader to receive Pat as anything other than male or female. They weave into other failures: of *The Burglar* and the failure of some actual stereos to play stereophonic sound. I will spend the remainder of this article examining the qualities and nature of these failures, what they mean to discussions about gender and communication *In Transit*, and suggesting the potential of the defective queer stereo they describe.

The characters of *In Transit* read through the seemingly genderless Pat to a supposedly gendered centre. Laura Fausto-Sterling, writing on intersex or mixed sexed bodies, describes the language of medical practitioners which 'reinforces the idea that lurking inside the mixed-sex child is a real male or female body'.[66] The queer stereo in *In Transit* re-enacts this failure but with a crucial difference: it inscribes the failure to read gender into its expression and, in doing so, undermines the binary itself. It also presents us with alternative, non-binary gender expressions which only become inaccessible when expressed as written text. In the opera section, for instance, the genderqueer characters of *Alitalia* express an amphisbaena which resonates (in all senses) with Pat, a resonance denied to the reader, an acknowledged impossibility.[67] In spite of the fact that transmission is, in some ways, disembodied (Pat is not at the opera but listening through the public address system), it provides, as we have seen, a queer embodiment for Pat, a way of being not male or female, but *both*, 'two gendered' to return to Koestenbaum.

Yet Brophy's attempts to communicate the amphisbaena of gender to the reader are doomed to failure. We are aware that Pat experiences this simultaneity, but when Brophy evokes stereophony the reader is shunted from column to column, unable to receive the transmission Pat receives through *Alitalia*. This is felt most keenly when the two columns represent Patrick and Patricia, with the reader's 'choice' between the two (such as Brophy/Pat proffers at the novel's conclusion) always being wrong, always a failed reception. Some experience of gender other than male or female *is* expressible but not through writing it seems. Writing will fail as stereo. We will fail at reading it and, unlike the critics of *The Burglar* or characters who gender Pat in *In Transit*, we will always be aware of our failure, that we are listening all wrong.

It should be noted, however, that this is not a despairing failure or a snide trick on Brophy's part (you see, you cannot read me or my play!). Rather, failure is a part of the queer stereo. It has to be defective. Halberstam has made a convincing case for some of the queer potential of failure, suggesting that 'failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development'.[68] The queer stereo which haunts the reader with the promise of simultaneity, of Patrick and Patricia existing at once in the same 'plastic Pat', resists disciplining and draws attention to the disciplinary function of text for the reader, the ways in which it aims for but does not achieve stereo transmission.

[66] Laura Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 76.

[67] I do not, unfortunately, have the space to write on the fact that Brophy's next, unpublished and never performed, play was called *Libretto*.

[68] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 3.

Stereo transmission in the 1960s required a whole informational apparatus in order to create the impression of a smooth broadcast and to centre its listening subject: equipment, placement, magazines, diagrams, tones, not to mention the vast arrays of manufacture and capitalist interests (these which have gone without saying). And even then, in practice, the reality of garbled signals, limited distribution of equipment, and the less than ideal environment of an actual home meant that the listening experience for not an insignificant amount of people was one of disappointment and failure. Like the act of reading one column and not the other, the failure of mono or poorly tuned stereo radios and televisions to coherently transmit stereo recordings represents an acknowledged partiality. Binary gender can only be sustained, it seems, through an elaborate act of positioning. The 'white male affluent' subject which stereo hi-fi systems interpolated, sitting in the dead centre of two speakers, is queered by repositioning, moving from the centre. Brophy's defective stereo cannot offer a centre, even as it does broadcast gender ambiguous operas, two male and female channels and texts, and deliberations on how the sound of one's voice is tied to what sex one possesses. If the identification Pat feels with the queer characters of *Alitalia* speaks to the always social, embodied act of listening to sound and the potential for a 'have-it-both-ways' with regards to gender, then Brophy's later defective stereos (uses of the columns) indicate that this embodiment relies on using technology wrong, on failing to cohere for the audience or public to which one is transmitting.

It is this public, audience, and crowd, which watches Pat at the end of the novel, in a moment to which I have already alluded. The 'Codetta', as the section is titled, serves as a microcosm for a novel that is already a kind of microcosm of the 1960s. We will visit it a final time. Pat stands on the girder. She/he wants to die because Pat sees that she/he is both a part of the crowd below, his/her 'very close kin', but also separate from it. A transmission over the public address system. An attempt to talk Pat down. Pat's father, who supposedly died in a plane crash, has returned and is speaking into the mic. The public address system has reversed its role here from the broadcast of *Alitalia*. There, the broadcast was public but only Pat was present to hear it. Now there is a crowd, but the transmission is entirely for Pat. Now the public address system marks the divide (and the connection) between Pat and the crowd below, the one which will read him/her as male or female despite the fact she/he does not appear to be either. Pat is not interested in speaking to his/her father, suggesting he 'clear the line for some more urgent interlocutor'.[69] This is us. Pat suggests she/he will not leave the decision to live or die to his/herself as she/he will not 'play god' and 'So You'll have to make the choice'. The final set of columns, as I have mentioned, detail Patricia killing herself, and Patrick falling to an accidental death. After this, there is a strange rebirth and Pat/Brophy suggests they are climbing out of the novel itself.

The knot of public, Brophy, Pat, and reader might be too much to untangle here. The communication of gender fails, the columns or speakers of the queer stereo only unite in Pat's death. What remains is the 'I' and we are told at the start of the codetta it 'no longer matters a damn of course whether 'I' is masc. or fem.' Brophy here falls back onto a pre (post?)-gendered human subject, perhaps the only successful transmission she can make. The moment feels limiting. The idea, as Butler puts it, that gender could be 'an *attribute* of a person who is characterized essentially as a pregendered substance or "core"' fails to acknowledge the ways in which gender constitutes human subjectivity and (mis)recognition itself.[70] The destruction of Pat's gendered bodies (Patricia in particular whose 'entrails [are] too distorted to be of any use for transplants') leads to a kind of transcendence of the body

[69] *In Transit*, p. 234.
[70] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 12.

itself (although Brophy/Pat does describe themselves as leaving the novel 'knee after cumbersome knee') into the pre-gendered consciousness of the 'I', an example of what Elizabeth Grosz would critique as the 'elevation of consciousness [...] above corporeality'.[71] Pat/Brophy/*In Transit* becomes disembodied and ungendered in the manner Brophy saw *The Burglar* as disembodied and ungendered: without the body, there is nothing to read gender onto the surface of (at least, not to Brophy's mind).

In this sense, the columns and queer stereo run counter even to Brophy's own project or at least the part of *In Transit* which supposes the 'I' not only need not be 'he' or 'she' but cannot be a situated in a body for the public to mis-recognize, misgender, receive badly. The queer stereo is an embodied experience in Brophy's novel, whether body is experiencing the non-binary erotics of *Alitalia* or the pain of falling from a great height. Additionally, the gendered subject of any given column is always relational and never whole in at any given reading, like the listeners of a failing stereo broadcast. It speaks to Halprin's assertion that queerness is a positionality not a positive position or to Nikki Sullivan suggesting that 'Queer, in this sense, comes to be understood as a deconstructive practice that is not undertaken by an already constituted subject, and does not, in turn, furnish the subject with a nameable identity'.[72] Instead the final columns of queer stereo offer the gender binary as a public failure, a scrambling to assemble stereo for an incoherent signal.

CODETTA

Queer stereo is a failing aesthetic then. It is a technologized one and one which transmits. Stereo and stereophonic broadcasting figure in strange and even contradictory ways here. On the one hand, the advertisements, articles, and handbooks, as well as the insights of Sterne and Gradeja, position stereo oriented towards the production of a stable subject, in this case an affluent male listener, probably in a (by default) heterosexual marriage. Yet, of course, this construction is idealized, a position one moves toward rather than occupies in a material sense. Hence, the other function of stereo as a space of failure, of garbled transmissions, gaps, desync, incomplete or partial reception, a not uncommon scenario for listeners within the range of BBC stereo broadcasts to find themselves in. This is one of the ways *In Transit* uses stereo, as a method destabilizing stable subjects and gender binaries by revealing them as a series of miscommunications and false premises, exposing 'the disciplinary and regulatory structures' (Seidman) which govern identity.[73] Pat fails to be a man or woman and this failure is revealed, through the queer stereo, to be a problem of texts and reading, even broader structures of meaning. But there is also the third way the stereo is used, in its association with opera. The *Alitalia* section reveals a version of non-binary or genderqueer or gender-fuck embodiment for Pat which *is* not simply a failed binary. The aural, non-textual dimension here allows for this, and we still find a failure: the failure of the text to be music.

If there is anything that other critical responses to *In Transit* seem to miss, it is precisely that the failure to communicate or to represent gender, to make it legible, is always haunted by the transmission of the opera, with the successful act of queer embodiment. Lee, for instance, correctly claims that *In Transit* is about miscommunication but, in the miasma of puns and deflations, forgets that Brophy is a lover of music and that *Alitalia*, the closest thing

[71] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 7.

[72] Halprin, p. 62; Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 59.

[73] Steven Seidman, 'Queer-Ing Sociology, Sociologizing Queer Theory: An Introduction', *Sociological Theory*, 12:2 (1994), 166–77 (p. 173).

Brophy got to writing an opera, produces a moment of genuine connection through electronic transmission which is held out of the reader's reach. Without this, or Pat's desire to listen to two operas at once, or his/her lament that reading produces bifocalism, the reader cannot know what Brophy is not only failing to communicate but communicating as failure.

There is, in all this, a sense of trying to transmit to a public which will, inevitably, misread and misrecognize what one is communicating. Stereo transmission allows Brophy a method of surfacing the gendered misreadings of both *The Burglar* and Pat. It allows us to see the impulse towards the construction of gendered subjects which flips Pat between male and female. The queer stereo is the same process of bad reception but re-appropriated and retransmitted in such a way that binary collapses. That said it is worth stressing that the gender binary need not be operated within. Aspects of the queer stereo I have outlined here risk configuring non-binary people and gender identities as wholly un-representable or shadows and failures of a dominant binary, one disavowed but reasserted, stuck within the male and female terms. Brophy's engagement with 1960s stereo broadcasting is also a limited one and the queer stereo passages are in some ways minor elements of *In Transit*. The conclusion of the novel appeals, as I have said, to an internal, non-prosthetic, humanist subject. With these things in mind, why highlight a queer stereo?

It is important to point out the ways in which gender non-conformity manifests historically and culturally, in part to show the multiplicity and contingency of gender expressions at all points of history, and in part because in 2025 gender non-conforming people, especially trans and non-binary people, face opposition, persecution, and antagonism at all levels, from powers official and unofficial, newspapers, academics, Prime Ministers, and Presidents. The attacks against trans and non-binary people are often predicated on the idea that gender non-conformity is a recent phenomenon, as several recent books written by members of the bigoted gender critical movement attest.[74] It is important, as such, to maintain there are cultural lineages of gender non-conformity and that the binary, supposed as stable and common-sensical, can in fact fail as a system of representation, a means of transmission. Bryant Alexander writes of loving bad drag, of 'those moments when the spectator has no doubt about the seeming incongruity between sexed body, socialized gender performance and political intentionality'.[75] *In Transit* is writing in stereo drag, a faulty transmission with political intent, revealing itself as a failure within a failing system of communication. But always with the utopian possibility of hearing *Alitalia* over the airwaves.

[74] See Kathleen Stock's *Material Girls: Why Reality Matters for Feminism* (London: Fleet, 2022), Julie Bindel's *Feminism for Women: The Real Route to Liberation* (London: Constable, 2021), and Helen Joyce's *Trans: When Ideology Meets Reality* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2021).

[75] Bryant Alexander, 'Querying Queer Theory Again (or Queer Theory as Drag Performance)', *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)*, ed. by Gust Yep (New York: Routledge, 2014 [2003]).

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