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Between the Breast-Milk and the Penis-Envy: A Theoretical Reading of the Body

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To my Angel
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It was not easy for a man to speak up with a female voice, to identify himself with every
woman who sacrificed her life to lift the burden of exclusion, for every woman striving for
freedom with an inside pain and an outside tears, However, the question stirs my interest as I
found myself caught to the extent that I started feeling almost the same pain and having an
equal intention to grasp the true meaning of that freedom.

Woman’s writings whether the Portuguese ones or the French helped me actually to
contextualize the question and to explore it from different perspectives and to come out with a
mosaïque of experiences that would make it easy to have an overview that takes from the
classic readings its originality and from contemporary writings its vivacity.

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whether likes it or not.
Abstract

It is now so long that we have been accustomed to speak about sexuality, femininity and woman’s body as separate entities whereby the single link is supposed to be some written lines no more. Accordingly academics, scholars and readers in general find it difficult to move from the one entity to the other in the absence of a general consensus that bridges the gap. My choice to discuss this bond between the purely theoretic and the biological, under the title *Between the Breast-Milk and the Penis-Envy: A Theoretical Reading of the Body*, is evidently aiming to approach, in a first level, the relationship between the female body and the non-compatible theoretic readings of the classical era, while exploring, in second level, the new bond that brings woman closer to her body as ever before in an attempt to construct a new understanding that stems its legitimacy not from a general hegemonic consensus but rather from an awareness that something was deliberately alienated from the whole painting.

This alienation was actually at the center of contemporary readings among which I chose to investigate the French experience focusing on Hélène Cixous’ book *The Third Body*, published in 1999, as a starting point to underline the discrepancy between what was said and what was kept silent in purpose. In order to carry out such exploration with its exorbitant philosophic alternations I have to put the finger on one of the major key concepts of this paper that is woman’s writing which is to be the cornerstone of the so-called bridge.

To further re-enforce my argument and to consolidate my bridge I tried to dislocate, geographically speaking, my research to focus on the Portuguese Experience through the most problematic book *Nouvelles Lettres Portugaises* (NLP), a French version published in 1972, by the three Maris; Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa. The book provides me actually with new theoretic perspectives and more flexibility in dealing with its various phases.
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Bibliography
Introduction:

“If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts?” an irritating, exorbitant and provocative question that reflects not only Gilbert or Gubar’s concern but the large scale of women writers who got tired of male-made cannon and its exclusive normative values. If woman is already castrated under the Freudian psychoanalytic logic of the Oedipus complex, then how would she write herself into words that necessitate an active patriarchal identity? But if it happens and manages to take it into hands, whether penis or pen, what guarantees that she is going to write in a female style and not imitating male writing? Let us suppose she is writing, how would then for such a woman to fight against a phallic symbolic order that governs the structure of meanings which is previously manipulated for women’s oppression? The problem becomes complicated if we look at woman’s use of language from a Lacanian perception; does she appear as “having the phallus” or “being the phallus”? Then in what way the masquerade would serve as an emancipator? A very little hope comes from the far tunnel as we focus deeply on Merleau-Ponty’s “being-in-the-world” awareness that demonstrates a corporeal manifestation of the human being. The flesh, the bodily, the libidinal and the corporeal is actually the hidden ruled-out force that decides over not only on being the phallus but equally on subjectivity and being the ‘I’. Female militants raised, in fact, awareness about the fact of being alienated from their bodies and the extent to which their libidinal multiplicity helps to construct a sense of belonging and identity that overcomes male-made limitations.

Women’s awareness stems actually from their conviction that the different theoretical readings of femininity, of body, of language, of gender and of sexuality are culturally constructed deriving then their legitimacy from the ideological hegemony of male supremacy.
The lack of reasonable and rational foreground for those theoretical readings boost these women writers to reconsider every single given stereotypical normative value, to put it into question, to deconstruct it, and then to redefine it according to woman’s experience and not vis-à-vis any imposed reified reality. Awareness and redefinition turned to be the most important qualities of woman’s writing during the last three decades emphasising thus on the need to re-establish a new understanding of femininity that goes basically through the body and manifests itself on writing. These women who consecrated their writings for this purpose shared a common single belief that once bodily multiplicity is recognized woman can ensure thus her emancipation, and that writing is the only way to write down this libidinal fluidity.

Gilbert and Gubar’s question about the female organ that would generate texts was very striking but equally inspiring for other women writers whose experience enables them to say few things about this issue. Among those women appears Hélène Cixous who strongly believed that her text as woman is written in white and black, in “milk and night”. It is indeed through her breast’s milk that she writes her body and deeply describes its multiplicity, for her “writing is the possibility of change itself” (Sellers 2008: 63) implying thus a double-hinged process that combines deconstruction and redefinition.

This awareness about redefinition and writing does not stem from the vacuum of arbitrariness but rather from a high consciousness that liberation necessitates the recognition of bodily multiplicity. Cixous puts foreground a very subversive, implicit but exorbitant strategic schema to undermine the patriarchal authority and to ensure the re-establishment of the feminine alternative. The choice of *The Third Body* as a book stems actually from this big purpose and then explained by sub-purposes among which; the use of the autobiographical fiction, the style, the quality of writing which is purely feminine, the distinctiveness of her critical approach, and most of all the imagined third body that demonstrates a possibility of change in the social structure without inducing any conflict.
*Between Breast-Milk and Penis-Envy: A Theoretical Reading of the Body*, a thesis proposing a flash back on the most important theoretical interpretations of body, femininity, writing and sexuality with a targetable critical reading of aspects of weakness, impuissance, and locus of crisis as women writers imagined. The paper equally focuses on the major deconstructive women’s versions of the already-mentioned theories stressing basically on the quality of writing that takes into account the body and its libidinal energies. *The Third Body* establishes, in fact, a possibility where the alienated woman’s body can constitute a locus of power that would fill up the lack, the loss and the absence upon which the feminine was constructed. It is both literary and theoretical space-off where stereotypical conventions cease to function and where the feminine is invested with new understanding deriving its legitimacy from the body and from woman’s experience as single trustful alternatives.

Such a model of “écriture-feminine” seems to be very inspiring as a model to be followed but very exorbitant as it raises several questions typically about its potentiality to challenge what becomes known as the symbolic order or male-made language. Cixous was actually aware about the hardships and the obstacles that would halt this female project but decided to go all the way and to push all the extremities and to cross all theoretical and literary boundaries. She strongly insisted on the need to re-appropriate the body and to redefine it according the ‘have to’ and not the ‘imagined’ or the imposed:

Now, the current stage is the one which, in my opinion, consists in encouraging women to undertake a work of reflection upon and re-appropriation of femininity, starting precisely with a thorough re-thinking of the body, of sexuality, of the rapports between the sexual and the cultural (Sellers 2008: 62)

The body of the paper is constructed along theoretical, chronological, literary and cultural lines of woman’s plight stressing basically on the third wave feminism with its multiple perspectives and contributions. *The Third Body* proposed by Cixous provides us with fictional clues aiming essentially to subvert the different theoretical readings of
femininity and puts forward a prescriptive attempt to deal with issues like the female body, sexuality and writing from realistic objective perspectives rather than from a reified stereotypical reality. The imagined third space opens the possibility of emancipation whereby the corporeal and writing intermingle into a subversive spot of re-definition and re-appropriation. The book reveals a state of deep suffering and pain as consequence of long decades of oppression whether in terms of theory or practice; accordingly, it comes as an outcome of an imagined, auto-fictional space of relations. Fatherhood, motherhood, the body, love, eroticism, homosexuality, death and life are among the major stations where Cixous repeatedly stops to fill up the new wine of femininity in the old bottles of sexuality.

Such an “écriture-feminine” would have never been successive if it was not universal and cosmopolitan, in other word, Cixous was not writing for the bourgeois, intellectual, white and employed woman but rather for every woman in the world with whom she shares the pain of oppression and the endeavour for emancipation. Among the women who identified themselves with Cixous are the Three Marias; Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, the writers of *Nouvelle Lettres Portugueses*. The book is another inspiring, exorbitant, revolutionary and very problematic piece of literature that causes polemic reactions all over the world for its subversive tone and its open narrative. Such a book constructs for a universal identification that copes with geographical limitations and socio-political boundaries, an identification that reflects itself on the multiplicity of voices, on the dissolution of the subject, on the originality of language, on the fluidity of the register and on its syntactic subversiveness. The book creates an open space where binary opposition cease to exist, where woman’s corporeal multiplicity is taken as a constructive alternative, where the national plight turns to be a universal concern and where the feminine and the masculine cope with ideological definitions. *Nouvelles Lettres Portugaises* is not an imitation of other books written by women of different geographical, social and political backgrounds.
but rather a book that stems its distinctiveness from the singularity of its literary genre and its revolutionary writing, it proposes a resolution for the common problem but differently imagined. The Three Marias were, actually, quite aware about the instrumentalisation of literature and the extent of oppression in the general atmosphere of emancipation, they accordingly opted to speak up the silence and to stir the skin of muteness. Their understanding of femininity and the struggle for freedom is summed up in the writing of the body with all its taboo matters in a courageous attempt to undermine the patriarchal order by crossing its ethical and social boundaries. The paper proposes a reading of the different theoretical prescriptive and analytic perspectives that take into account the significance of the female body in generating woman’s writing. This writing extends itself socially, politically but equally geographically as it manifests itself in differently geographically dislocated experiences which would be another major concern within a comparative approach that brings together the French and the Portuguese woman’s writing closer.

It remains to acknowledge that the maintenance of some passages and titles, whether on their original French or Portuguese languages, was made in purpose as some of them would lose their true connotations in the translated versions. Furthermore the whole paper is based on a comparative approach that necessitates such ranging between those differently dislocated experiences with respect to their linguistic peculiarity.
I/ the Philosophical Clues and the Theoretical Reflections:

1. The Ideological Crisis:

“How can we accept the idea that woman’s entire sexual development is governed by her lack of, and thus by her longing for ... the male organ? Does this mean that woman’s sexual evolution can never be characterized with reference to the female sex itself? All Freud’s statements describing feminine sexuality overlook the fact that the female sex might possibly have its own specificity” (Morris 1993:114)

The discussion of the question of sexuality and the female body within a psychological and to such extent biological framework necessitates a brief theoretical reading of modern and contemporary analysis. Such a theoretical reading would provide us with a very broadened understanding not only of how identity, sexuality, hegemony and the way the body was differently manipulated, but equally to demonstrate the extent to which Hélène Cixous was subversive in terms of writing and thinking. This theoretical analysis, though detailed, focuses only on the major concerns invoked on The Third Body, and because this area extends over about six decades of writings and experiences I will try to be selective and targetable in my description of the way Cixous succeeded to unveil and to deconstruct this ideological hegemony and at the same time to establish a new understanding that takes into account the true natural dimensions of the individual without allusions. Among the most common theories discussed in this first level is Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. His theory stems basically from the origins of neurosis (1) and the extent to which it can be traced back to the repressed memories of sexual seductions in the phase of childhood.

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(1) The term is derived from the Greek neuron and osis to indicate major disorder in the senses stimulated basically by the emergence of psychosomatic symptoms. The term was further framed by Freud in his “Introductory Lectures 16.457”
However, Freud was not satisfied about the claim that neurosis is a mere local disturbance that can be cured by releasing the repressed sexual emotions. He developed accordingly two major hypothesis framed around the infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex.

Freud retains that neurosis is the outcome of a repressed libido or sexual energy under the influence of taboo. This libido has three dimensions; moth, anus and genitals reflecting itself through desire which can be, according to Freud, directed toward persons of the same sex or towards the individual himself. Freud distinguishes between three major phases of the development of this libido, where the first stage, pregenital sexuality, extends over the three years of the infantile life. In this stage the mother’s breast is the infant’s object of desire which is to be satisfied by sucking with the first orifice of the body, the mouth. The second phase is the phallus during which the infant centres his concern on the penis. A last phase is circumstanced by the fear of castration and the exploration of an external object that goes beyond the mother’s body.

The significance of the phallus phase derives from the way it provides us with a close psychological understanding of neurosis and equally by framing in details the Oedipus complex. This phallic stage can be considered as a turning point in the infant’s sexual development, as he centres his concern on his penis with an associated sexual attraction to his mother accompanied usually with a feeling of jealousy towards his father. This psychological framework of the phallus is generally known as the Oedipus complex. This stage comes to its end only with the child’s fear of castration and punishment.

The little girl on the other side undergoes equally a phallic stage where she becomes interested by her clitoris but just to the extent when she discovers that her organ is inferior to that of the boy’s penis. Accordingly, the girl becomes overwhelmed by an envious desire to
be like the boy. This female feeling of lack is known as the penis-envy (2) which manifests itself on the girl’s strong attachment to her father.

Frustration is another factor that may bring about the repressed libido while hysteria is seen as a developed level of the phallic. With regard to the way the phallic bursts into a developed libido, Freud framed personality into three major layers; a perceptual conscious where awareness resides, a preconscious which is responsible of recalling and generating memories, and finally the unconscious which is usually the repressed where resides the fixated libido.

Freud’s analysis of the neurosis extends itself to the question of life and death where the tensions between them would decide over the kind of neurosis and its nature distinguishing thus between life instinct and death instinct. Life instinct or Eros involves both a self-preservation drive and to such extent the repressed libido. The death instinct, on the other hand, or Thanatos is a force of innate distinctiveness which tends to spare the body from its tensions basically caused by neurosis. Dream is considered equally a tendency of death instinct as it tends to return to an earlier satisfactory state, but dream can be a life instinct as it helps to erotize death by combining it with a possible libido in the form of sadism or masochism. Freud’s psychoanalytic theory can be studied equally from other different perspectives to construct a very deep understanding about the way questions like neurosis, sexuality, libido, memory, dream and the female body are manipulated vis-à-vis

(2) The term was coined by Freud in his description of the psychosexual development of the girl whereby her discovery of having the inferior genital leads to her identification with the father and rejection of her mother. Further analysis is available in Freud’s 1905 book “Three Essays of the Theory of Sexuality” or equally Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique of 1963 under the chapter entitled “The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud”
power and the law of the father. Sexuality provides us with a different framing of theses associated issues. According to Freud sexuality is not biologically constructed but rather the outcome of a social milieu where the child is born bisexual but adopts a masculine or feminine identity throughout a long-bitter process. Freud maintains that a child is biologically born masculine or feminine but not with a corresponding gender identity which he/she develops within his/her social milieu. The development of a gender identity goes through a torturous path and typically based on castration. Under this fear of castration and punishment the boy gives up his maternal body as an object of desire to identify thus himself with the father as an image of authority.

This fear of castration and the boy’s identification with the father are generally considered as the resolution to the Oedipus complex. The boy, accordingly, constructs an active masculine identity by looking for a partner from the opposite sex to fill up the loss of the previous object of desire. For the female infant the situation is much more complicated as she first discovers that she is both castrated and lacks the penis. Out of this penis-envy she rejects her mother for inflicting her with this physical inferiority and accordingly identifies herself with the father to construct therefore a passive identity. This feeling of lack gives way to the girl’s sense of inferiority and her continuous rivalry with her mother over the father.

While a great majority of women writers showed a disappointment about Freud’s psychoanalytic approach, Juliet Mitchell maintained that such theory is not basically descriptive but rather prescriptive in the sense that it reveals the social and the psychic process whereby the patriarchal authority established itself as a subjective authority based on denial and repression. While the unconscious desire remained repressed in the form of fantasy and imaginary energies, the conscious desires were regulated by the “reality principle” \(^{(3)}\), which the child acquires once getting through the patriarchal authority. Within this process this paternal authority was internalized to turn then into a superego that functions
as an agency of prohibition in social and moral terms. This prohibition and this repression function to ensure the heterosexual modality of the patriarchal. However, these repressed unconscious desires do not remain silenced or passive but rather turn in one way or the other into active agencies in the process of gender construction. According to Freud there exist two mechanisms that operate to reveal these repressed desires and to overtake the boundaries created by the paternal law. The first is called “condensation”, known usually as an unconscious process by which two images or ideas combine into a single symbol especially in dream. The second process is “displacement”, whereby a libidinal energy is associated with a particular desire to drop away from the established cultural barriers. These two mechanisms are typically used in poetic language as processes of subversion from within.

After proposing an understanding of the psychoanalytic approach through a reading of both neurosis and sexuality, I would like to broaden this analysis by throwing an eye on the question of melancholia with regard to ego construction and gender identity. Freud based his theory of Ego construction on melancholia asserting that it is through melancholia and mourning that the other is incorporated in the ego through an act of imitation. It is through this act of identification that the Ego overcomes the feeling of loss of the object of desire by internalizing the I, he affirms that “The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathesis, the result of which is that inspite of the conflict

with the loved person the love-relations need not be giving up” (Butler 2006: 78). It is then through this process of substitution and internalization of the lost object and its associated love that the Ego is constructed. This idea is best framed by Freud who asserts

We succeeded in explaining the painful disorder of melancholia by supposing that [in those suffering from it] an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego - that is, that an object cathesis has been replaced by identification. At that time, however, we did not appreciate the full significance of this process and not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its ‘character’ (Butler 2006: 79)

Melancholia and mourning function then to help the ego to overcome the loss of the other or the object of love and desire but equally in gender formation. In other words the denied love and desire are to be recuperated by internalizing them and identifying with them through melancholia and mourning. Thus the tabooed homosexual union that stems from the object and its desire becomes internalized subject with whom the ego is identified; this internalization and identification are typically carried out by this process of melancholia.

Freud denied this process of melancholia to the boy’s ego formation maintaining that identification is not built on the lost love or prohibition but rather through the fear of castration after which the child identifies with his father and adopts an active masculine identity. The possibilities of ego formation are much diversified alternating from sexuality to dream, from neurosis to melancholia, from condensation to displacement but the most common thing is the difference in the mechanisms attributed to male and female infant. Bisexuality provides us with a broader psychoanalytic perspective as it stands for, according
to Freud, “the ambivalence displayed in the relations to the parents” and which “should be attributed entirely to bisexuality and that it is not […] developed out of identification in consequence of rivalry” (Butler 2006: 80)

From this bisexual framework Freud sustains that the boy’s choice of an active masculine identity is typically governed by a fear of castration but equally by another fear of feminization. “Gender consolidation” is a term first introduced by Freud to designate the moment when the boy repudiates his desire to his mother and accordingly consolidates his attachment to his father. On the other side, if the boy submits to his desires and renounces this identification with the father, he internalizes as a consequence his mother and establishes a feminine superego.

According to Freud it is the strength and weakness of masculinity and femininity in each individual that plays a vital role in this process of identification. Our understanding of these sex modalities masculine/feminine depends basically on the way bisexuality as a psychological and biological phenomena is perceived. Bisexuality according to Freud is the concurrence of two heterosexual desires in the single psyche where neither the masculine disposition is directed to the father nor the feminine disposition is directed to the mother. Accordingly, the girl repudiates her femininity to avoid being a homosexual and repudiates her attachment to the father to deny any identification with masculinity. The consequence would be then the construction of a passive femininity in its heterosexual milieu.

The object, as Freud affirms, is brought inside the ego under the pressure of melancholia and its associated process of internalization. This object becomes, in fact, a critical voice within the ego. Melancholia can be seen as a precondition to the functioning of mourning as it can be considered in Freud’s words “the sole condition under which the Id can give up its objects” (Butler 2006: 84) and that to give up the object of desire does not imply
any rejection of the libidinal cathesis of that object but rather its internalization and preservation.

The internalized losses of the object with its associated anger and blame are now established in the external mode of the ego ideal, however, these internalized anger and blame can be released manifesting itself in suicide. The ego ideal does not only motivate suicide but equally can be taken as a resolution to the Oedipus complex, as Freud affirms that the super ego is not “simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against these choices. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept; you ought to be like this (like your father). It also comprises the prohibition; you may not be like this (like your father) - that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogatives” (Butler 2006: 85). This ego ideal turns then into an agency that sublimates and regulates desire in order to consolidate gender identity. This prohibitive function is one of the agencies of the ego ideal whereby the parents are not only seen as prohibitive object but equally as an internalized object of prohibition by providing an interior space to generate the repressed desires.

Prohibition functions relatively as a denial of the aims and object of homosexual cathesis whereby melancholia turns into a preservation of object relation. Only in this way we can speak of a positive identification where gender identity is built up in accordance with the heterosexual law. In the case of negative identification the object relation remains unresolved and the agencies of ideal ego that regulate gender identity cease to function whereby the outcome would be a same-sexed gender identity that gives way to homosexuality. However, gender construction and identity formation, vis-à-vis melancholia, seemed exclusive as it is based typically on the belief that identity is an outcome of the law of prohibition.
Accordingly, this disposition, of being masculine or feminine, does not stem from bodily or psychic factors but rather from an imposed cultural law where the ego ideal is the outcome of a process of prohibition and repression maintained in an ideological and hegemonic level.

Furthermore, such analysis of identity formation brings to the fore two oppositional perspectives; a first is that melancholia means the loss of a loved object through separation, death or the collapse of an emotional bond. However, melancholia within the oedipal situation implies the loss of a loved object under the law of prohibition and punishment, relatively, these dispositions masculine/feminine are constitutive of the sexual life and are purely effects of the law that regulates and controls sexual identity and heterosexuality.

This law of prohibition functions equally to maintain such a kind of forced sexuality based on the logic of continuity that makes “natural” the process whereby these modalities are established and consolidated. Foucault, for instance, in his book *The History of Sexuality* (1976) affirms that it is this prohibitive law that silenced the object desire and broke down the object relation in order to categorize them as repressed forms of expression. He equally maintained that this desire is the effect of a repressive law that derives its legitimacy from the repressive strategies it produces for the sake of cultural continuity. According to this perspective the repressed desire is a necessity in terms of culture and language as it creates a series of displacements.

Generally speaking the genetic theory of the ego is a psychoanalytic approach that frames the relationship of the subject to its own body in the way the subject is identified with an imago. To deal with this relationship we need to bear in mind the significance of the hysterical symptoms on the one hand and to submit that this functional symptom reflects itself in an imaginary anatomy which has to do basically with bodily functions. This body
image with its symptoms and its imaginary anatomy had an autonomous existence of its own and independent from the objective structure.

Lacan generated his concept of “Mirror Stage”, first introduced on his paper delivered on the conference of the *International Psychoanalytical Association* in Marienbad on August 3, 1936, to describe the physiological development of a child maintaining that the formation of the ego goes through the libidinal relationship of body-image. This theory is built upon the reflection of a child when seeing his image in a mirror and, accordingly, the interest he showed to his body helps to construct his ego. The mechanisms and the functions of the ego in this stage take shape on the psyche and among which the obsessional symptoms. By the end of this mirror stage and the absence of the mirror as a process of generating the ego and its mechanisms the child turns to the super ego to build up his identity. Generally known, after the moment when the Oedipus complex ceases to function, out of the fear of castration and punishment, the child turns his interest to one of his parents and called ‘introjection’.

Lacan maintained that the recognition of the ego through desire happens only in the symbolic level otherwise it would be destructive to the other. Desire is only achieved through rivalry with the other. The mother’s breast, for instance, is the child’s first object of desire which will leave only under the threat of castration and punishment associated with rivalrous instances. This imaginary function helps the child to recognize himself as a form and then as an ego. The reflective image and desire are the very original elements in the ego formation, however, this mechanism though imaginary and symbolic can be problematic if the individual’s entire attention is centred upon himself and starts seeing himself both as desire and an unsatisfied desire, relatively he would develop a very egotistic character and would equally alienate himself by creating a state of tension.
Lacan’s perception of social identity is typically based on the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. De Saussure’s theory is built upon his belief that it is language that gives sense to the world and it is not reality that endows language with meaning. The relationship of the signifier and the signified is arbitrary but it is through this structural relationship as we place the grid of signs over the continuum of experience that signs produce meaning. Equally language functions as a structure of differences with regard to sound and meaning within which the meaning of a word does not stem from the qualities it possesses but rather from its difference from other words.

The child’s construction of the self and his relation to language is basically framed with regard to mirror reflection and the “mirror stage”. According to Lacan it is in the pre-oedipal phase of infancy that the child develops a sense of identity based on the visual and that comprises any kind of reflection whether his reflection in his mother’s eye or his image projected by another child. Lacan considers the mirror stage as imaginary emphasising on the fantastic nature of the child’s relation to the world around him. This imaginary image of the ego is endowed with a narcissistic desire, a belief of self-plenitude and an independence from the mother’s body. This imaginary perception of the self paves the way for an eventual social identity but cannot be considered a full identity because it is constructed on the image. It is a subjective identity which Lacan called “Ego Ideal” since it is an imaginary image endowed with narcissistic desire.

The oedipal crisis is only resolved when the child, according to Freud, fears castration and submitted to the social order; however for Lacan it is only resolved when the child enters into the symbolic order of the linguistic system. This symbolic order is, in fact, our total structure of meaning since it is language that gives sense to the world and not the opposite.
Language is typically based on the feeling of lack and loss as the child was forced, under the paternal authority, to be separated from his mother out of his fear of castration. Words relatively help the child to speak up his needs which overcome his mother’s body. He is then impelled into language to satisfy his needs. The phallus is the signifier of the law of the father which implies the use of language within its linguistic system which is structured along social and gender lines. It is then the feeling of loss and lack that forces the child to enter this system of language and to be placed in a subjected position whereby the patriarchal law encodes and governs the structure of meanings.

It is through language that the unconscious, already repressed by the authority of the phallic, comes into existence. Language is the means by which the child redirects his repressed desires from the mother to other realistic social objectives. However, according to Lacan this unconscious desire flows from the gap between the signifier and the signified as words are not endowed with a unitary stable meaning and therefore meanings slip continuously over an endless chain of displacements. Concerning the female infant, Lacan maintained that women are not concerned with such linguistic identification or the entry into the symbolic order. This entry necessitates the phallus not as penis but as symbol within the process of constructing a social identity with regard to the law of the father, relatively woman is marginalized within this process of social identification. Although Lacan releases woman from her biological essentialism as she was not defined on the bases of her biological differences or weakness, he throws her into a linguistic determinism whereby woman is marginalized and deliberately alienated from language and culture.

Lacan’s discussion of the ego formation, vis-à-vis the feminine, language and the extent to which such analysis can be trusted, still debatable but can provide us with a prescriptive perspective. This theoretical framework is further strengthened with another perspective that takes into account both the issue of the “Being” and the “masquerade”.

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Lacan generated an ontological reading of the “Being” which is to be determined by language and to be structured along the paternal law and its associated process of differentiation. However Lacan conditioned the possessing of this “Being” or becoming a “Being” by a prior inquiring of the phallus. To be the phallus then is to acquire a position within language. To be the phallus for Lacan is to be the signifier who has the desire and who reflects it on the other. For those women who identify themselves with the phallus reflect the power of that phallus on the one hand and reveal the other as a site of lack and absence on the other.

According to Lacan the one who does not have the phallus is herself the site of the phallus since the masculine subject who has already the phallus needs the other in order to confirm himself as “Being” a phallus. This Being is typically created within the structure of signification and with regard to the symbolic order that creates a binary opposition between “having the phallus” and “being the phallus”.

This binary opposition is equally framed on the basis of loss and lack in the prior scene and with regard to the functioning of the symbolic order. For Lacan the symbolic is a universal structure of signification with a binary opposition between the subject as a signifier and object as a signified. In other word between the “I” as a masculinized autonomous effect of repression and the other as a feminized object of this repression. This subject creates itself as a signifier only through the repression of the pre-individual pleasure and desire associated usually with the maternal body.

The masculine subject, according to Lacan, is the one who originates meanings and then has the authority to signify. However, this process of meaning construction requires the existence of the other, the woman, to reflect the subject’s power and therefore his autonomy over the process of signification. The problem is that there exists a constant conflict between the masculine subject who tends to assure the dependency of the feminine object in order to
have full mastery over signification while the feminine object on the other hand tries to maintain its independence by recovering the female body and the pleasure of prior-individuation which was already oppressed by the male subject.

“Being the phallus” is then holding the power to reflect the masculine autonomy which the masculine subject needs to confirm his identity and to overcome any feeling of lack which is to be filled up by the object reflection. Moreover, for Lacan, to be a “Being the phallus” equates “Being for” a masculine subject, a property through reflection.

This binary opposition between “Being” and “having” the phallus is basically generated by the symbolic order which is governed by the paternal law where the signifier, the masculine subject, belongs to the symbolic. This “to be the phallus” is basically seen as an instrument of the paternal law by which he confirms and extends his power. However, some feminist thinkers maintained that in order to break down this paternal law it is needed to give up being the signified and therefore giving up being a mere reflection by the rejection of desire which the masculine subject needs to ensure his autonomy.

It is through the “masquerade” that woman appears to have the phallus and which according to Lacan “follows from the intervention of an appearing which gets substituted for the ‘having’ [a substitution is required, no doubt, because women are said not ‘to have’] so as to protect it on one side and to mask its lack on the other” (Butler 2006: 63)

This process of appearing as being the phallus whereby woman uses mask to protect herself and to hide her lack is described as a heterosexual comedy which is typically built upon two contradictory aspects; the first is that such perspective based on appearance and the masquerade would reduce the whole gender ontology to mere appearing and reflections. Second this process of masquerade comes only after a prior-individuation with a feminine desire capable of disrupting and diffusing the phallocentric signification. Lacan’s process of
appearing to be’ the phallus constitutes two different perspectives; the first is that such a masquerade can be considered as performative production of sexual ontology. This first perspective seems to be easy-defeated since how would it possible that ‘appearing’ can be understood as ‘being’?

The second perspective concerning this masquerade would give way to an unexpected consequence since it would fuel women to unmask as a process to recover their desire already repressed and considered as a lack. “The masquerade” Irigaray affirms “is what women do … in order to participate in man’s desire, but at the cost of giving up their own” (Butler 2006: 64). This masquerade is, in fact, a very problematic issue and needs much more elaboration to know the way it functions, the way identity is constructed, and most of all what is it tending to create with regard to the phallus, feminine desire and to the possibility of continuous female dependency or refusal.

The function of the phallus as Lacan affirms “dominates the identifications through which refusals of love are resolved” (Butler 2006: 66) which means that the mask is associated with the incorporative strategy of melancholy where lack is to be the outcome of refusal of love. Lacan goes further to maintain that this process of masquerade is strongly linked to female homosexuality confirming that “the orientation of feminine homosexuality, as observations show, follows from a disappointment which reinforces the side of the demand for love” (Butler 2006: 66)

It can be said therefore that the female homosexuality stems from a disappointed heterosexuality and where lesbianism appears to be the incorporation of refusal derived typically from the absence of desire. This refusal can be understood as both loyalty to another object and equally a preservation of loss in the form of melancholia, the mask then functions to incorporate a melancholic identity with regard to the body. This melancholic identity is not
typically based on loss but rather based on the refused object. The loss of the object has two
dimensions psychic and corporal and both function to incorporate that loss.

Joan Riviere\(^4\) framed the masquerade from a theory of aggression and conflict
resolution maintaining that female sexuality is a masquerade by itself used as self-defence
against male heterosexuality and a reflection of her refusal. She believes that to be
homosexual or heterosexual oriented is not the outcome of desire but rather a resolution of a
conflict tending to overcome the state of melancholy.

One of the major effects of paternal law as Lacan maintained is the creation of such
divisions within the subject establishing then for a duality, as Jacqueline Rose affirms “for
both sexes, sexuality will necessarily touch on the duplicity which undermine its fundamental
divide”. But this sexual division based on repression can be only undermined by a feminine
identity created out of the paternal orbit. However, Rose continues to assert that there is no
other place for identity to be constructed other than the paternal law. Identifying herself with
Lacan she confirms that “there is no discursive reality […] no place prior to the law which is
available and can be retrieved” (Butler 2006: 74)

Merleau-Ponty, in many instances in his book \textit{Phénoménologie de la Perception} first
published in 1945, provides us with a different perspective that takes into account Freud’s
psychoanalytic approach and Lacan’s psychic formation. According to Merleau-Ponty the
body-reflex, which stems from ‘nascent movement’, is \textit{“attention to life”} or \textit{“being in the
world”} awareness.

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\textit{\footnotesize \(\text{\hyperlink{footnote4}{4}}\)} Further analysis of the female masquerade and its associated strategies are best studied in Riviere’s
translation of Freud’s book \textit{‘Female Sexuality’} under the title Sexuality and the Psychology of Love edited by
Philip Rieff, 1963
The psyche is, accordingly, a corporeal manifestation of the human being that comes from this awareness of this existence and can equally manifest itself in personal acts, while the psychological motive on the other hand intersects with bodily conditioning. These two causalities intermingle within an organic process and they are no longer distinguished as the in-itself or the for-itself but rather turn into sentiment and absent-minded reflex.

Mental disturbance or neurosis is an outcome of the organic accident that happens during an exchange between the psychic and the psychological that reflects itself on bodily events. This intimacy between the two casualties goes beyond the Cartesian “Cogitatio” which renders the union of soul and body as a mere juxtaposition between external subject and object. This harmony stems, in fact, from the interdependence of these casualties in the movement of existence and which give the body importance in generating the unconscious through the fixated reflex.

The conscious, on the other hand, is not a mere outcome of perceptual sensations or a matter of “I think that”, but it is rather a reflection of the way the psyche and the psychological function with regard to the body. Sight and movement, for instance, are considered the first “momentum of existence” as they put the body in direct relationship with external objects. This bodily experience reflects the harmony of the physiological elements rather than placing them under the control of the ‘I’ think. The significance of movement within bodily experience is best described by Goldstein who affirms

Each voluntary movement takes place in a setting, against a background which is determined by the movement itself … We perform our movements in a space which is not empty or unrelated to them, but which on the contrary bears a highly determinate relation to them: movement and backward are, in fact, only artificially separated stages of a unique totality (Donn 199: 154)

Consciousness then transmits knowledge to the body which incorporates this knowledge with its world and then transforms it into movement. This bodily movement and
its incorporation of conscious knowledge copes with the claim that the body is in a space or in a time, but rather it inhabits space and time when it comes into a momentum of existence through bodily experience. The bodily movement is then the way to have an access to the world and the objects around us. This bodily experience of movement assures our existence since it is the first point of communication with the external environment but it does not involve by itself knowledge or makes use of ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying function’.

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between sexuality as an understanding which stems from experience, which intentionally flows from existence and takes account of its movement, and on the other hand desire which exalts itself through body-to-body bond. Accordingly, the sexual life is a form of original tensional where sexuality is internally linked to the active and cognitive being.

Merleau-Ponty argues with Freud that the sexual is not necessarily the genital or a process that rests on the genital organs and that the libido is not an instinct though it is a general power which is directed to an end. There are, in fact, two major streams of thought with regard to sexuality; a first emphasizing the sexual substructure of life while the other retains the significance of sexuality with regard to existence. If we accept that the sexual life is a reflection of existence we render then this whole existence depends on abstraction and it turns by itself into abstraction.

Existence is differently framed vis-à-vis the body-mind relationship and equally with regard to bodily experience. The loss of speech during the oral phase of a child’s sexual development is a refusal of co-existence. This loss of speech can be equated to a girl’s envious feeling when she discovers her lack. Her ‘penis-envy’ and her rejection of the mother are by themselves reflections of existence. The body transmits then data coming from consciousness into things symbolizing their existence. The body holds, in fact, the power of
shutting off and isolating itself from the world but without falling back on itself or getting rid of the fixated reflex, and equally has the ability of opening itself to the world ensuring then its momentum of existence.

Merleau-Ponty comes then to conclude that the bodily existence is the single proof of existence in the world and goes even beyond to maintain that the body itself is “the hidden form of being ourself” (Donn 1999: 165). His body is an expression of his total existence not because it is an external object within space and time but also because existence exists only if there is a body.

2. Awareness and Redefinition:

The detailed description of the very diversified theories made forward concerning the mind-body relationship, the psychological manipulation of sexuality and sex differences are meant to show the grievances put on woman’s shoulders and the extent to which woman, as a human being and active member, in terms of the social and the sexual, was kept to the merge and marginalized to the very lower levels. I tried, in purpose, to focus on these theoretical readings so that for a reader can easily understand the discrepancy and equally to discover the extent to which Hélène Cixous, throughout The Third Body, was subversive and revolutionary.

The book advocates, in fact, an implicit approach of refusal where the literary and the theoretical are harmoniously melted in a reconstructive spot. Some readings of Cixous’ theories show that she is typically eclectic in the sense that it brings together only the positive approaches she sees suitable to woman’s case. However, Cixous was not eclectic in any of her writings and the proof is that while she disagrees with some philosophers over some points she shared with others their convictions. Cixous, I think, was deeply aware that such
eclectic approach would be descriptive rather than analytic leaving thus little space for women thinkers to establish their own perspectives.

To go deeper in this level Cixous implicitly rejected notions of sex division biologically or socially constructed proposing thus a third body where masculine/feminine modalities no longer exist. The third body turns then into a non-sexed body that overcomes the male-made cultural boundaries, she affirms, describing her intimacy to T.t

When it’s with an uneven eye that I watch him, he gives in to my desire without resistance: inside the flesh is the singular feminine common noun of our limitless existence; set down in the cavity, moistened, stretched out, eyes closed, I let whoever materializes do what he/she will, to the point where masculine and feminine can no longer be distinguished (Cixous 1999: 75)

Cixous was strongly believing that gender is not innate but rather acquired in the sense that woman is culturally constructed as a set of meanings. Her distinction between sex and gender leads to the idea that to be a woman does imply a compulsory cultural construction of the female body, and to be a man is not necessarily being a male body. The distinction made by Simone de Beauvoir between sex and gender, the natural and the cultural was further framed by Cixous who comes to the conclusion that such distinction would give way to other different genders beyond the binary sexes. She maintained that the patriarchal law functions to avoid such proliferation of gender beyond the heterosexual order. The relationship of sex and gender should be causal and expressive, accordingly, gender would be perceived as cultural and corporeal action. Cixous was, actually, challenging this heterosexual order not through sex proliferation but through a radical denial of sex division affirming in The Third Body ‘Literally now, He is She, She is He; he-or-she is the blood and morrow of his, her beauty. Is is God, is he or she a giant, seen with the eye-one from all sides.’ (Cixous 1999: 75)
Monique Wittig, for instance, extended Beauvoir’s idea stressing that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” maintaining that sex division is not natural but rather the outcome of a political manipulation aiming at serving the needs of heterosexuality as a legitimate institution (Butler 2006: 151). She affirms that sex is not natural but was made as natural in purpose through the binary opposition of masculine/feminine. She relatively advocated lesbianism as a rejection of sex modalities and its cultural associations that function to consolidate the law of the father. Cixous on the other hand was aware that this sex division is not natural but rather a reified reality that serves only male objectives. However, she disagrees with Wittig over lesbianism as a ‘sortie’(5).

Cixous rejects strongly Freudian notions of castration and penis-envy affirming that such theories belong to the male orbit and operate only to consolidate the paternal law with it associated tangible processes. She asserts that

Religion, society, the law should throw the young widow into a dangerous state of anxiety. Aren’t the facts her enemies? She is neither virgin, not godly, nor mad. She is pregnant and a widow, and Reason, which she respects just as much as her father, has become her enemy, because: it is impossible for a dead father to beget a child, it is impossible to be faithful and pregnant. Biology, and the chemical sciences, the law of probability denounce the young woman. There is no man who is not born of a man. End of discussion. And beginning of the child (Cixous 1999: 83)

(5) ‘Sortie’ is the title of the essay written by Cixous in 1975 through which she introduced her deconstructive model to establish a new understanding of femininity that overtakes the hierarchal oppositions of man/woman, culture/nature, colonizer/colonized and speaking/writing giving thus way to an exclusive power. Further readings of this essay are available in Literary Theory: An Anthology edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 1998
Though she denied any form of heterosexual coupling, she does not mention any reference to lesbianism. She strongly rejected the institution of marriage which she sees as "an event of closure. In its way it is one of the names of death: it is always recounted in the historical past. They married; they crumbled into dust" (Cixous 1999: 59), while on the other hand advocating a non-gendered pairing that unveils the reified reality. The theory she framed with regard to this pairing, I think, is very exorbitant since on the one side it brings man and woman together without any recognizable social bond that ensures the enclosure. It is a kind of coupling that overtakes the primitive forms and without any reference to the reproductive function of woman. While on the other, it is embarrassing for those feminist writers who advocated sex proliferation and thus found their theory unconvincing.

I strongly think in this level that Cixous’ triumph stems basically from her perspective alternating between integrity and implicit refusal. The Third Body proposes a sortie whereby relationships of male/female, mother/daughter, father/daughter and I-self are revisited. The narrator’s relationship to her beloved is one dimension of these pairings through which she describes the way they are organically melted out affirming:

First and last of all, I go through it to get to you. I turn it into the flesh and skeleton of my soul. Above all, no primal couple, no engendering pair, no reproductive function. I want to be an only daughter and virgin and gullible. At every moment I want to be able to go into that body, into that thought, at every moment be able to be before him as before a temple wall that doesn’t exist, that exists only if I cross the wall and I’m the door. I cannot do ‘without’ your altogether different body, which I never left in the first place (Cixous 1999: 64)

Cixous raised a distinctive awareness that being sexed is the way to be marginalized and locked into cultural enclosure, she, accordingly, advocated the rejection of sex division asserting that such a division is not natural but the outcome of cultural manipulation. The heterosexual institution of marriage is consolidated not only through this ideological
hegemony but equally through a linguistic discrimination whereby sex modality was made universal. However, Cixous maintained that to be sexed is to be particular and relative and that woman as a sex modality is only a cultural manifestation of an opposite natural reality. She refused any reformist approach of this repressive system and advocated the deconstruction of these sex modalities while on the other hand constructing a new understanding of male/female relationship without any reference to the sexual and the linguistic.

Wittig, another French revolutionary figure known by her radical ideas, shares Cixous this reconstructive approach asserting that sex appears to be an abstraction and reified reality imposed violently on society through mechanisms that function to reproduce sex as natural. This constructive approach seeks to unveil this oppressive process by exposing the true meaning of male-made sex which is best framed by Wittig

Sex is taken as an “immediate given”, “a sensible given”, “physical feature”, belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an “imaginary formation”, which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as others but marked by a social system), through the network of relationships in which they are perceived (Butler 2006: 155)

Sex establishes then for a discursive and perceptual attributes through the physical features, it imposes a kind of artificial unity on those attributes and makes them as natural through the functioning of language that operates to maintain the perceptual construction of the physical body. This understanding of sex appears to be discriminating against the physical features of the real body among which the penis, the vagina, the clitoris and the breast deepening thus its fragmentation. This idea of cultural construction of sex division is best described by Wittig affirming “we are compelled in our bodies and minds to correspond,
feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us … ‘men’ and ‘women’ are political categories, and not natural facts” (Cixous 1999: 157)

*The Third Body* was, in fact, the outcome of awareness about the extent to which psychoanalytic and linguistic theories generated a kind of ideological hegemony to maintain the heterosexual order stable. Such hegemony was meant to keep unspoken the question of sexuality within its corporeal scope, leaving thus women in a state of bitter silence, but at the same time conscious about what is going on, Cixous affirms that “if your mouth is full of ashes, how can your soul cry out” (Cixous 1999: 23) and continues describing the way she was silenced asserting

I was not unaware of the imperfection of my silence. Because of all that, or more precisely because there was such suffering around me, I was veiled in mourning: I felt the somewhat aggravating softness of a fabric of animal origin, a sick no doubt like transparent gray shantung, a little veil sometimes stiffened into a visor. I entered with sadness. I woke up. I woke up poorly: it was like a missed entrance, a miscalculated leap, a compromise that did me violence (Cixous 1999: 22)

I would like here to stress again the idea that Cixous is not advocating a radical transformation but rather a soft change from a state of awareness to a state of responsible acknowledgement of woman’s existence as equal partner. Her subversive approach does not imply a radical denial of the other and total retreat to woman but rather continues with the other associated with redefinition of relationship. She shifted, for instance, the interest from the father as the object of desire with regard to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, to the other man whom she loved. T.t is not simply the man who nourishes her imagination but equally the other who copes with sex division as both are melted into an organic third body

Then the arms, the legs, which are mine when he is here, would rip off and fall upon him. I wouldn’t try to hold him back. But he is in my flesh, and he is in my eyes, and he is the marrow of my bones. By leaving he drew me away from myself, the self that wasn’t leaving with him except by means of the
immovable in me, and if I’d had my eyes open, I would have seen his back dripping with blood. You
are the morrow of my bones (Cixous 1999: 1)

This pairing with T.t enables her to overcome the feeling of lack and or any reference
to ‘penis-envy’. She truly demonstrates the impact of T.t’s love and the way both are
dependent on each other whereby he turns into “locus of my disappearance” (Cixous 1999: 3).
This love relationship is the way through which Cixous comes to conclude that the female
identity is constructed throughout a bitter process but without being locked in Freudian
determinism or Lacanian binarism. She implicitly hinted to Lacan’s binary opposition
through the Marquise Von O’s rejection of being identified in relation to a missed image, she
affirms

She had not entered into the lie of duplicity, she had not tried to separate love from the love-object; so
as to continue loving love beyond the dead object, she had accepted the most solitary of solitudes, that
in which the memory doubles the present of a past that does not toy with the actual mirror (Cixous
1999: 84)

This redefinition puts every associated male-made law into question since Cixous was deeply
aware that they were not born inferior but were made inferior under the oppression of the
patriarchal law. This shift from a state of ignorance and marginalization to a state of
knowledge and awareness is fully framed by Cixous through the narrator’s dream affirming

I am in a dream that encloses a dream, I am the skin of the dream and I dream that skin, I am the
outside of the inside, the eye that sees itself seeing everywhere, he is the gigantic master, the enactor of
the law, I am the edict that is established. Very quickly a modification is produced in the grammar of
the dream. The being does not move. He is very handsome. Is. The subject, according to whether I look
at it with an even eye or an odd eye, is masculine or feminine. (Cixous 1999: 74)

Still another moment I want to invoke within this scope of rejection through which
Cixous mixed the purely biologic and the exorbitant theoretic to reveal the hegemonic
weakness whereby the body is manipulated to maintain power. The narrator describes this moment affirming “I am a cheerful, muscular, plumb child, but the shadow that falls over the lower part of my naked body is too dark to be able to tell if I’m a boy or girl” (Cixous 1999: 117) stressing thus the conflict between the natural with its biological multiplicity and the cultural with its hegemonic deception.

The narrator’s relationship to her father and her mother constitutes another theoretical as well as social redefinition of what was taken as natural and normative. Woman’s task according to Cixous involves a deep and broad deconstructive model. The idea is best described by Cixous

Now, the current stage is the one which, in my opinion, consists in encouraging women to undertake a work of reflection upon and re-appropriation of femininity, starting precisely with a thorough rethinking of the body, of sexuality, of the rapports between the sexual and the cultural. They can’t take on everything at once-just look at what is happening: it is extremely heavy for women to think themselves- I don’t believe it is possible for them, at the moment, to think man, to rethink him […] At best … they can undertake a task which will be very hard, certainly very painful and probably slow, dealing with the significance of being women uneasily [d’être mal femmes], of being female awkwardly, uncomfortably. To be woman confronted with man. This is bound to have repercussions for masculinity. (Sellers 2008: 62)

The image of the father in The Third Body and equally in the different writings of Cixous is very exorbitant as she deliberately shifted this image from the psychoanalytic field to that of a very intimate relationship whereby the father turns into a symbol, “if I were going to confuse someone with my father”, Cixous affirms “it would more likely be myself” (Cixous 1999: 51). The image of the father that Cixous created is not, in fact, a very realistic one but it is the outcome of two major motives; first because Cixous was trying to overcome the rigid image created all over Freudian theories whereby the father turns into a tough master. The second motive on the other hand, consists on the autobiographical fiction as a literary technique; such a technique enables her to manipulate her past, her relations and her
memories to create a harmony with her theoretical understanding. However, this poetic language associated with the father does not imply her ignorance about the extent to which the patriarchal law was oppressive and exclusive. She consciously asserts “intention: desire, authority-examine them and you are led right back … to the father. It is even possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for women in the calculations” (Morris 1993: 118). She, accordingly, raised an urgent need to this repressive binary opposition that reflects itself on social and cultural dimensions; she was, in fact, trying to make it clear and evident that “there has to be some ‘other’ – no master without a slave, no economico-political power without exploitation, no dominant class without cattle under the yoke, no ‘Frenchmen’ without wogs, no Nazis without Jews, no property without exclusion” (Morris 1993: 119).

The father imago is then redefined to be constructed thus not along lines of punishment and castration but rather a symbolized and internalized image that overtakes the mere reified reality. The narrator’s intimacy to her father, without any reference to the penis-envy, puts the Freudian psychoanalytic approach into question. The narrator, as a proof of what was said, does not show any sense of dependence on her father or mother as objects of desire. She demonstrated such a kind of intimacy with the father that does not entail her endeavour to fill up her lack or absence. The father actually was not presented through his family and social status but rather through his symbolic image, an internalized figure that gives her pride of being his daughter, she wonders

And my father? He was tall and supple and brilliant, green and gold. He was a curer of others, master of words, setter of things in their place, therapeutic, taciturn, he urged me to write, to count, to break up sentences with my ax to see what they contained, homeopath, carrier of children, short-lived. He went straight along the horizontal. He threaded his way among the rocks, he stopped in the sun, he moved about in the shade (Cixous 1999: 151)
The father appears like a metaphor much more than being an ordinary man. In her fiction ‘Dedans’ (1969) she describes her father as ‘Inner Orient’, a God, spouse, and twin;

‘Dans ma joie de l’avoir trouver, je suis une force gaie renouvelée chaque matin. L’inattendu et attendu s’ épousent comme lui et moi, il fait jour dedans ma nuit, je perds l’ espoir à force de satisfaction, peu à peu j’annexe le future a notre intensité, il était déjà tout et que j’ étais lui et qu’ il était moi. Le passé ne cache plus qu’il a été ma prison (Cixous 1999 : 77).

It is through the process of internalization that Cixous comes to recognize her father and to keep his intimacy with him even after his death. He is the ‘altivolans’ who “flew high. He desired at a high level as well. It is from him that I get my ardent desire for great heights” (Cixous 1999: 143), however, it is not an internalization meant to fill up the Freudian notion of gap. Her identification with the father demonstrates awareness about the extent to which such intimacy would help her to establish her independent active identity without being object of the repressive patriarchal law.

The death of the father was always seen as a loss with regard to psychoanalytic theories, yet this loss helps her to generate a redefinition of the self not from the oedipal crisis but rather through the internalization of the father’s figure. Throughout her 1980’s writings Cixous emphasized the importance of the patronymic identity within the female self and vis-à-vis society. This process of self-generation reflects not only the narrator’s attempt at overcoming the patriarchal understanding of the female identity, but equally to highlight the combination of biography and refusal within an auto-fictional framework.

While the father was described as a God-like figure in a very imaginative context, the mother was seen as a ‘pagoda’ with a very realistic image. Her existence is too tangible which makes it difficult to be simply idealized; she is the particular, the universal, the insider, and the outsider, she affirms
Evènement: le problème est le suivant ; Eve est simple, d’une monstrueuse simplicité, d’une simplicité coupable, intolérable, élégante, excavatrice, venteuse, pleine, inamovible, imaginez un œuf couvé pourvu de racine ? Imaginez une maison fortifiée sans porte (Cixous 1970: 81)

Cixous was aware that her mother’s name is associated with the biblical image of the doomed womanhood. She relatively tried to redefine this image by invoking maternal passivity while generating an archetypal image of the archetypal multiplicity through her role as mother. The figure of the mother entails a great deal of sameness and continuity whereby the mother-daughter bond opens up the possibility of constructing a sense of identity without being compelled to take into account the feeling of lack and absence. Cixous was, in fact, fully aware that it exists a process of corporeality, love and creativity within the feminine construction. In her book Anké (1979) Cixous affirms that:

The mother was preparing the first diaper, she folded it in a point, she was announcing me. So I was going to be born! Myself, my mother, my child. Shyness. First news. Seeing her move, to have come out well. Seeing oneself being wrapped in a large sheet of paper. I, then alien, the expelled, to be given such a grace! To be born! One does not forget, when one has learned to be born, it is like swimming; birth remains forever within your body as the mark of a power always ready to be felt (Cixous 1999: 25)

Women writers were generally trying to investigate new romantic possibilities to overcome the oppressive hierarchal order of denial usually recurring to the maternal discourse and the pre-oedipal phase. Throughout her book ‘The Mother/Daughter Plot’ Marriane Hirsch maintained that the limitations imposed on the maternal body give way to an unbalanced position whereby this bond was cut off leaving thus the daughter struggling with her feeling of lack upon which she builds her identity. Daughter was usually denied from discourse of subjectivity depending thus on the maternal body and any kind of representation that consolidates the mother-daughter bond, she affirms that the “Euro-American patriarchal
context of discourse and representation … identifies writing as masculine and insists on the incompatibility of creativity and procreativity” (Liscio 1992: 33)

Women’s writings reveal, in fact, a need to be identified out of the patriarchal orbit. Tony Morrison’s “Beloved”, for instance, Sula screamed “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (Liscio 1992: 33), while Cixous avows “you are not there anymore, outside, frozen. Motionless. Departed. Displaced. I still want to love. To death. To hold on to what is going to disappear. Till loosing. Not dead, worse. To body. Here. Separate. Flesh; Separation” (Morris 1993: 112). This concern about the need to get aloof from the patriarchal realm was differently described by Kate Chopin decades before Morrison and Cixous. The heroine of the Awakening Edna Pontellier who after discovering “her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about”, she declares that she is “no longer one of Mr Pontellier’s possessions” avowing thus “I give myself where I chose” (Sayersted 1984: 932)

Back again to Tony Morrison, she believes that it is only through the new signification of mother-infant bond that women can speak out the unspoken without using the language of the master. Only through this bond she can bring out the ‘unofficial history’ (6) and to free herself from the void, the lack and the absence imposed by the law of the father. Morrison strongly maintained that such feminine language would be both problematic and relevant.

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(6) The expression is coined by Toni Morrison referring to the lost motherhood and the extent to which this loss was manipulated to deepen the gap between the mother and her daughter. A full analysis of this loss is made by Jane Flax in her book “Mother-daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics Politics and Philosophy” The Future of Difference edited by Eisenstein, H. & Jardine, A. Boston
Such a female language is typically endowed with marks of psychic energy, pulsations, sound, voice and rhythms basically derived from the pre-oedipal phase and sensations that the mother-infant bond would release. To be associated with the maternal body is equally to be able to speak its own subjectivity; it is to be able to disrupt the male order. This association with the pre-oedipal energies is a subversive process to deny the bond imposed by the Lacanian symbolic order to establish then for a semiotic authority.

Kaja Silverman, for instance, tried to challenge the Freudian Oedipus complex but without being in total collision with it. She maintained that the oedipal complex is both positive and negative as the child manages to overcome the crisis through fear of castration, yet it would give way to a negative attraction to the father as an object of desire. However, the daughter, who was compelled to reject her mother for inflicting her with weak genitals, she still has the possibility of extending the maternal through language and literature. It is then the mother who fuelled woman’s passion to keep fighting; in this level I strongly believe that Cixous was deeply aware that such a redefinition of the mother would be very subversive not only on the psychological level but equally in the diversified areas. This distinctiveness stems basically from her belief that a mother can be an object of desire, a mirror, a reflection, a libidinal satisfaction and moreover a spiritual inspiration. The mother imago, for instance, is purely biblical endowed with a highly poetic language within an auto-fictional scope aiming at demonstrating her corporeal multiplicity and reinforcing her archetypal symbolic existence. Cixous was strongly insisting that such mother-daughter bond should be maintained inviolable to ensure thus the female continuity.

A woman is never far from ‘mother’ (I mean outside her role functions; the ‘mother’ as a non-name and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother’s milk. She writes in white ink … in women there is always more of less of the mother who makes everything all
right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will
knock the wind out of the codes (Liscio 1992: 31)

The female libido that Cixous celebrates, and which she thinks would spare the
feminine from its silence through writing, is typically expressed in terms of the maternal. The
mother, the child and the text constitute a reproductive cycle whereby the maternal is both the
driving force and source of inspiration. Verena Andermatt asserts “converse to the male who
at best can only spray his words, the writer-as-mother gives birth to and ‘nourishes’ her text,
at once giving milk and accouching it” (Crowder 1983: 136). Cixous combines the purely
biological and spiritual in generating her mother’s image, she is on the one hand the body that
gives life, that nourishes the bond, that release desires and takes life, while on the other hand,
she is that spiritual force that gives sense of belonging, that identifies and that fills up female
deficiency. This idea is best described by Ann Rosalind Jones with whom I must agree when
she affirms

I myself feel highly flattered by Cixous’ praise for the nurturing perceptions of women, but when she
speaks of a drive toward gestation, I begin to hear echoes of the coercive glorification of motherhood
that has plagued women for centuries (Ann Rosalind Jones : 255)

The fact of giving birth, according to Cixous, is a noble moment whereby motherhood
is fully developed. From a theoretical point of view motherhood, in my opinion, is very
expressive and convincing proof that demonstrates Cixous’ concerns in its deepest levels. On
the one hand it is a refusal of lesbianism which she sees as a transfer of power rather than
being a reversal of it, while on the other it is a consent about woman’s function within a
heterosexual context associated with a redefined reading of the female body as a naturally
multiple and not culturally reified. To be pregnant, according to Cixous, is the point of
intersection of two opposing perspectives that would give way not to a compromising state
but rather to reality as it should be. Lesbianism reflects an over overt refusal of the paternal
order and basically the reproductive function of woman, while on the opposite side implicit
consent of heterosexuality and coupling within a new social order without any reference to
reproduction but equally with an implicit rejection of lesbianism. Pregnancy is then an
expression of loyalty to the father and continuity of the mother. This idea is best framed by
Cixous in the possibility of a third body through which woman “could do so only by
comparing this internal agitation to the kicks made against the dark womb by a child, held
inside, to be born. In saying that she wasn’t betraying the lost husband or her mother’s
sanctity or her mother’s authority: the nobility of her nature was such that this marvellous yet
tragic presence of a martial beauty in her womb did not embarrass her” (Cixous 1999: 94). Birth
is then the instant of liberation and the meeting point of the biological and the literary
creation, the pot where ink and milk are melted together within a very revolutionary
scope. It is “at the same time mother-text, love-text: a place for genesis. Let milk flow! Let writing
fly!” (Crowder 1983: 1975)

This need to write the body in such instant was consciously required to demonstrate
the libidinal continuity that would pave the way for an ‘écriture feminine’. This idea was
equally framed by some other women writers who strongly advocated a feminine writing that
flows basically from the maternal libidinal energies. Birth and writing are seen as the
outcome of self-pregnancy process whereby woman gets pregnant in womb and mind without
being touched only by the oppressive factors deriving from the paternal order. Annie Leclerc,
for instance, generated a sense of subversive pregnancy that brings together an overt refusal
of male-made norms and highlights equally a female corporeal multiplicity. The mother
throughout the cosmic womb turns into a superwoman with the potentiality to expel the
superman, female genitalia would thus take the place of the phallus and relatively creativity
would be placed over reproduction. In the book La Venue a l’écriture Cixous together with
Madeleine Gagnon and Annie Leclerc maintained almost a unique position vis-à-vis the question of pregnancy and birth, Cixous affirms;

I have always taken pleasure in seeing a woman give birth … giving birth like one swims, playing against the resistance of the flesh, of the sea, the work of respiration in which the notion of “mastery” is annulled, body to body, the woman flows herself, joins herself, marries herself. She is there. Entirely. Mobilized, and it is her body that is concerned, the flesh of her flesh … she is not absent, she is not feeling, she can take herself and give herself to herself …. It is not the “mother” that I would see. The child, it concerns her, not me. It was woman at the height of her flesh, her bliss, the force finally delivered, manifest … She gives birth. With the force of lioness. Of a plant. Of a cosmogony. Of a woman (Duren 1981: 46)

However, such framing of birth would constitute notions of contradiction as it is associated, either with Cixous or Leclerc, with sexual jouissance which is basically released throughout the phallus reproduction within a heterosexual context. The question, relatively, would be how for such a discourse of birth and sexual jouissance, depending on the phallus, to be subversive?

Cixous was, in fact, deeply aware that such contradiction would cause troubles for major women thinkers especially those who fell into the trap of lesbianism. She relatively advocated ‘the other bisexuality’ with an implicit rejection of the heterosexual male-female coupling. It is a kind of homosexual space best described by Cixous;

It starts out with an easiness, an uncertainty, it starts out with a bed, an awakening, and it ends with all possible kinds of births. But it also poses the question of the relation between the body and the loved person, a man, and the body of the mother: these bodies are completely interchangeable. So there is an entering and an exit from a man's body which is at the same time the body of a mother (Wenzel 1981: 270)

The narrator’s identification with the mother spreads itself not only in terms of the corporeal but equally in a highly symbolic level as the internalization of the mother becomes
a reflection of the self. The mother is the self, the third body that does not take account neither of time nor of space. Cixous asserts “I’m here with my mother. It doesn’t seem as though we intended to leave. We show no sign of activity; a silent, unmarked complicity connects us. It is possible, moreover, that the presence of my mother, whom I do not see, is purely fictional. It is possible also that I am my mother. There is my mother. Do I have one sex?” (Cixous 1999: 100). It is the mother’s soul, breath, voice, touch and smell upon which the daughter constructs her identity. Cixous strongly emphasised on these pre-scene maternal energies denying thus any reference to the oedipal crisis or the mirror stage. The mother is no longer the womb and the feeding breast but turns into the thinking mind, the beating heart and the breathing air, “the air that I breathe is my mother, and I cut through it with bursts of assertion. “Arise” is said by my voice, but an extra sound slips in with it, a sign that the air I breathe is my mother” (Cixous 1999: 107)

Cixous was mindful that the multiplicity of the female body was kept unspoken in purpose to give way then to the phallic order. Woman’s representation in male’s literature is discriminating in many instances, relatively Cixous advocated a purely feminine writing that would invoke male’s discrimination and to reveal female plenitude. It is then through words that the complete female imago can be created without being fragmented or dismissed;

What is important is to disconcert the staging of representation according to exclusively masculine parameters, that is, according to a phallocentric order it is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it-that amounts to the same thing in the end-but of disrupting it and modifying it, starting from an ‘outside’ that is exempt in part from phalocratic law (Morris 1993:128)

It is then through the generation of the mother’s image and the female-to-female relationship that Cixous tried to entail the female plenitude and multiplicity. The figure of the mother was repeatedly internalized and to such extent was described as an archetypal imago, the mother “is always beautiful […] I belied in the law. A mother must be beautiful (…) the
beautiful is always mother” (Cixous 1999: 78) and continues to demonstrate another biblical dimension of this image asserting that the mother Eve is “multiple and primordial. She spreads out, she spares no room, she desacralizes (…) I sacrifice everything on the limitless altar of my mother” (Cixous 1999: 85)

It is evident then that female representation functions to marginalize motherhood and to break down the mother-daughter bond for the sake of the phallocentric order. Luce Irigaray, for instance, denies the presentation of woman as a reflection of male fullness and advocates relatively the metaphor of speculum with a feminine representation based on multiplicity deriving basically from the maternal libidinal energies. She criticizes the way Freud builds his notion of sexuality upon the sight maintaining that touching is the way whereby the child first acquires knowledge within the pre-oedipal scene. She rejects the ‘mirror stage’ and its associated reified reality of a void identity stressing on the other side on the reality of female plenitude

Why has the women been expected to choose between the two, being labelled ‘masculine’ if she stays with the former, ‘feminine’ if she renounces the former and limits herself to the latter? … in fact, a woman’s erogenous zones are not the clitoris or the vagina, the clitoris and the vagina, and the vulva and the mouth of the uterus, and the uterus itself, and the breasts … what might have been , ought to have been, astonishing is the multiplicity of genital erogenous zones (…) in female sexuality (Morris 1993: 129)

Both, Cixous and Irigaray, were deeply aware that because of the broken mother-daughter bond the daughter builds her identity on lack and void and even was made unknown to herself. However they both insisted on the need to maintain that bond strong to ensure therefore the female continuity and her corporeal multiplicity as a gift rather than being a property. In her essay ‘When Our Lips Speak Together’ Irigaray describes this intimacy in a very exorbitant way but without any reference neither to lesbianism nor to reproduction, “kiss
me. Two lips kissing two lips: openness is ours again. Our ‘world’. And the passage from inside out, from the outside in, the passage between us is limitless. Without end. No knot, no loop, no mouth ever stops our exchanges. Between us the house has no walls … when you kiss me the world grows so large that the horizon itself disappears” (Morris 1993: 130)

To conclude in this level, it can be said that Cixous successfully managed to redefine male-made theoretic standards with its associated structural relationships within a heterosexual context. Such attempt was made by several feminist writers who either radically denounced the patriarchal law leaving thus no space of communication between sex modalities, or those who tried to compromise over the differences on perspectives through a process of re-appropriation whereby the outcome is merely reproduction of the paternal order. The distinctiveness of Cixous stems basically from her implicit refusal within an auto-fictional biography alternating thus between what we have and what it can be reached. This distance between both poles creates a third body endowed with diversified possibilities vis-à-vis female concerns. The redefinition, for instance, of father-daughter bond or the mother-daughter bond implies an implicit refusal of the cultural hegemonic modalities while internalizing the purely natural tie, revealing thus the discrepancy between the reified reality and the truth of intimacy. This third body, actually, unveils the patriarchal distortions of the female representation and the way the phallus functions to maintain power through an exclusive manipulation of truth.
II/ ‘Écriture Feminine’ and the possible ‘Sortie’:

The text I write is an object of desire to me. Between it and me, there is an exchange that occurs day and night. It does not matter if this happen in paper or not. In some ways, I live with it constantly. All that would happen within me-continuously fermenting emotions, desires, anxiety-I never cease to recapture and rework in order to return it to this other body in the process of maturing next to me. At root, it is precisely as if I made more than another body with my own body (7)

We have seen in the first chapter how Cixous was subversive through her idea of the third body which establishes for a new understanding of femininity and redefinition of the different relations. This third body with its associated structuralist models is only achieved through language which is basically derived from the maternal body. The ‘écriture feminine’ is actually the bridge that would ensure both displacement and power relocation by generating a new writing purely feminine and fundamentally subversive. My choice of a detailed philosophical reading of sex and body from psychoanalytic and linguistic perspectives was actually in purpose as it provides us with the major theoretic clues that make it easier to understand the extent to which Cixous was subversive in her approach. She was deeply aware that the relationship between writing and woman should be reviewed and re-established. She maintained that woman was alienated from the act of writing under an

exclusive linguistic discourse and restrictive syntactic forms. She relatively, urged woman to acquire language and to transcribe their bodies into words asserting that “by writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her … censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (Crowder 1983: 133)

This call made it apparent that such a feminine writing would be typically descriptive, though it helps to unveil the reality of a hegemonic patriarchal hierarchy it fails to be constructive. This deficiency alerted those feminist writers who consciously put the whole male cannon into question undermining thus male property of language. Monique Wittig, for instance, in her book Les Guérillieres\(^8\) launched a guerrilla attack on the patriarchal order, institutions, and language for the sake of establishing a new order, and a new language to promote new values stemming typically from the corporeal and from desire.

Hélène Cixous in Le Rire de la Méduse, first published in 1975, raised an equal need invoking thus the extent to which the female is oppressed and marginalised asserting relatively that such emancipation is only achieved through an ‘écriture feminine’. Cixous was, in fact, aware that the female libidinal energies were dismissed in purpose and that male language with its associated cannon was considered as an unquestionable exclusive normative model. She accordingly urged women to write since it is only through writing that woman can threaten the phallus and cope with its symbolic order.

\(^{8}\) The book was first published in 1969 and was considered the most problematic, the most radical and most subversive feminist writing about which Toril Moi says "a depiction ... life in an Amazonian society involved in a war against men ... [in which] [t]he war is finally won by the women, and peace is celebrated by them and the young men who have been won over to their cause." Further analysis available in her book Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory edited in 2002
Woman must write herself; must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies … woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into-history- by own movement … Write yourself. Your body must be heard … It is time for women to start scoring their feats in written and oral language. (Wenzel 1983: 267)

Language is then generated from the body and its drives which would be celebrated as multiple and plentiful. This corporeal language would free women who are no longer imitators but rather proprietors of language. To do so women “must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetoric, regulations and codes” (Wenzel 1983: 267)

I think here that such a feminine model of language seemed too exorbitant and illogic and then can be out of hands for how can for woman to write with her white breast-ink? And then how can the libidinal unconscious drives be translated into words and texts? And moreover to which extent the so-called poetic language is able to generate a subversive model and relatively to re-appropriate the feminine in terms of language and the biological?

Cixous made it actually clear that an écriture feminine essentially stemming from the denied energies of the female body once recognized will reflect itself into texts differently written and differently structured from male texts. A feminine writing, according to Cixous, is “a work of reflection upon and re-appropriation of femininity, starting precisely with a thorough rethinking of the body, of sexuality, of the rapport between the sexual and the cultural” and continues insisting that “anything having to do with the body should be explored, from the functional to the libidinal, to the imaginary; and then how all of this is articulated at the symbolic level. It is beyond doubt that femininity derives from the body, from the anatomical, the biological difference, from a whole system of drives which are radically different for woman than for men”. (Wenzel 1983: 267)
Ecriture feminine is thus endowed with a subversive process of questioning, revision and deconstruction of the patriarchal order. The female body with its associated drives, energies, ambitions and abstract notions as sex, the sexed body and sex division are all together put into question leaving thus little space for doubt about the relevance of a radical reformation.

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity; about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain minuscule-immense area of their bodies. A woman’s body, with its thousand and more thresholds of ardour (Wenzel 1983: 268).

This feminine writing is typically establishing for the logic of difference. Cixous was totally rejecting the logic of sameness maintaining that by ensuring differences woman can be able to get out of the patriarchal order that constructs them on the merge. To ensure the differences is a demonstration of multiplicity which used to be described as void and lack asserting that she is “working on femininity, on sexual difference” and continues “what is happening at this moment, in every insidious way, is the effacement of difference. Well, what is necessary is to work on difference” (Wenzel 1983: 268).

This difference in terms of the body and its drives manifests itself in writing since the oppressed energies creates a third body with its free space to exalt femininity through texts and most of all through desire and ambitions. Cixous was repeatedly insisting on the fact that writing and the corporeal are organically cemented and whenever the body moves it writes. This interdependency is best described by the narrator in The Third Body

I was reading and my body followed, we walked one behind the other along the narrow, nameless edge that has neither aim nor necessity, and which flows between one (masculine, indefinite unique, chosen, singular, unknowable) and the other masculine-feminine-neuter, dependent, attractive, disturbing, desirable) between that which is without any doubt day and that which is without any doubt non-day. I became exhausted. What’s prowling around? (Cixous 1999: 18)
The valorisation of the true value of language does not stem only from the discovery of this female multiple corporeal energies but equally from an awareness that the reified reality and the false male-made abstractions are consolidated through language. Sex, for instance, establishes for a set of discursive and perceptual attributes through the physical features which are reproduced to appear as natural. Sex imposes a kind of artificial unity on those attributes and makes them seen as natural through language, which functions to ensure this perceptual construction of the physical bodies. This understanding of sex seems discriminating against the physical features of the real body; the vagina, the breast, and the uterus, maintaining thus this discrimination through channels of restriction and fragmentation of the body. Monique Wittig proposed a deconstructive model aiming at a total overthrow of this notion of sex with its imposed unity giving way then to the lesbian body as a true demonstration of unity and multiplicity of the female body.

Wittig maintained that it is only through language that social reality is created focusing basically on the socially constituted ontology which is seen as a pre-social and pre-discursive whereby sex is constructed as a second hand reality. While rejecting any structuralist assumption that there exist universal signifying structures prior to the speaking subject, she maintains strongly that there exists a historically contingent structures that govern the redistribution of rights of speech favouring man, as a full authority, over woman who is totally denied any speech authority. Language turns then into the process whereby sex is maintained as discriminating abstraction through the mechanisms of naming and repetition. Language thus produces reality affects about sex and body involving a process of naming sexes without recurrence to the sexed body but rather to a heterosexual political order.

Cixous, being aware about the extent to which language and relatively the act of writing are significant in the manipulation of sex and lifting the grievances imposed on woman’s shoulders, pretended the ownership of language as a subversive step
It is I who am author of the word written in a neutral hand. The word is not a name, it’s a vocative that runs through T.t. and wants to pass itself off as the object of my desire, to which I am firmly opposed. All I have left to do is to denounce this semblance of subversion … what had I intended? What do I want? Everything that is written in the dark depths is part of us. Last remark: the word wrote itself; now, when I think of T.t. I never write it down; I see him, I touch him, I speak to him loud or softly, and I’m the one doing all that, without any intermediary (Cixous 1999: 52-53)

Wittig urged women equally to gain control over language in order to overthrow any reified reality of sex and any denial of the body. The significance of language consists then in the possibility of casting “sheaves of reality upon the social body” (9) by enslaving the real sexed bodies and allowing only what consolidates the heterosexual order.

This discourse functioning through its exclusive linguistic mechanisms denies the other in terms of sex weather biologically or culturally constructed. Cixous, in fact, was aware about the power language has in this patriarchal oppressive order, and that such process of categorization, naming and abstractions via sex would effect a physical violence against the real body paving the way for the denial of the corporeal energies.

There is nothing abstract about the power that sciences and theories have to act materially and actually upon our bodies and minds, even if the discourse that produces it is abstract. It is one of the forms of domination, its very expression, as Marx said; I would say rather, one of its exercises. All of the oppressed know this power and have had to deal with it (Morris 1993: 158)

(9) The expression appeared in Wittig’s essay The Mark of Gender which is seen as a contribution to the feminist deconstructive model and to the Queer Theory with the belief that gender in language is the ‘fictive sex’ and that linguistic gender marks social conventions.
It is language that functions to ensure these abstractions and to maintain them as norms; it works equally to identify the male speaker as universal who has the authority of using language while identifying the female speaker as particular who has no authority but rather an object of this order. These asymmetrical positions does not stem actually from the nature of man and woman but rather from its plastic action of altering nature into second-hand reality. This idea is fully framed by Simone de Beauvoir who affirms

One must understand that men are not born with a faculty for the universal and that women are not reduced at birth to the particular. The universal has been, and is continually, at every movement, appropriated by men. It does not happen, it must be done. It is an act, a criminal act, perpetrated by one class against another. It is an act carried out at the level of concepts, philosophy, and politics (Morris 1993: 158)

This need to gain control over language and its art of writing was a common feminist conviction though they differed over the mechanisms and the processes to reach this objective. Julia Kristeva, for instance, establishes a subversive model based on a belief favouring the semiotic over the symbolic maintaining that the former constitutes an implicit refusal of the patriarchal order. She retains that this maternal semiotic manifest itself in the poetic language which is strongly bound to the maternal body and thus has a great capacity of undermining the symbolic order. Kristeva was actually aware that an over reliance on the semiotic with its implicit exclusion of the symbolic would overthrow her model. She was equally conscious about the fact that such semiotic would be hardly decisive in terms of culture and language bearing in mind the idea that the libidinal economy could not define our practice of language but can demonstrate its multiplicity which would pave the way for a subversive model. She maintained that the patriarchal language represses the libidinal
energies usually manifesting itself in hysterical linguistic expressions and disobedience and which are typically found in the semiotic and generated through its poetic language.

This poetic language constitutes then the possibility of creating heterogeneity of sounds and meanings that flows from the repressed semiotic giving thus a new modality of meaning which does not adjust to the requirements of univocal designation. It is through this poetic function that meanings can be fractured and multiplied leading then to the degeneration of univocal signification. Kristeva sees then the semiotic as an energy that functions to disrupt the univocal signification of the symbolic by the creation of plurivocal set of meanings. The semiotic is by itself a “signifying function … connected to the modality of primary process”. (Morris 1993: 111)

This maternal poetic language, deriving basically from the corporeal repressed energies, does not only disrupt the symbolic order but equally maintains the continuity of the mother-infant bond strong. The significance of the semiotic as a linguistic modality is best described by Kristeva;

A phoneme as distinctive element of meaning belongs to language as symbolic. But this same phoneme is involved in rhythmic, intonational repetitions; it thereby tends toward autonomy from meaning so as to maintain itself in a semiotic disposition near the instinctual drive’s body (Morris 1993: 112)

Cixous, actually, made it clear in her essay ‘Sortie’ that phallocentricism is an association of exclusion and marginalization with a process of commodification of language which becomes a property transmitted from father to son and functions relatively to consolidate this transfer of power. She maintained that it is only through writing that woman can break out this cycle and would then create a sense of identity without being an object of coded and enclosed identity. She asserts that “it is impossible to define a feminine practice of
writing, and this is an impossibility that would remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist” (Morris 1993: 119)

Writing relatively is the third space where the repressed, usually woman, can valorise her capacities and establish a sense of identity that goes beyond the law of the father, she continues “there has to be somewhere else, I tell myself … everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That’s not obliged to reproduce the system. That’s writing. If there is somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies on that direction” (Morris 1993: 120)

It is through the manifesto of feminine writing, which Cixous demonstrates, that a feminine practice of writing is not typically based on a single order of meaning i.e. the symbolic order, but can be rather based upon a different order which would enable them to be flexible yet subversive at the same time. She equally stressed the need that such feminine writing should involve a feminine libidinal gift instead of property and exchange.

Notions of rejection and subversion exist strongly all over Cixous’ discourse ensuring thus the female withdrawal from the patriarchal order while creating logic of difference establishing for a feminine linguistic independence. In terms of writing Cixous raised a very exorbitant radical need to generate a feminine practice of writing that flows from the libidinal and manifests itself into texts purely feminine in syntactical and structural terms

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there is no other way. There is no room for her if she is not a he. If she is a her-she, it is in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the truth with laughter (Morris 1993: 121)

Cixous was trying to establish a joyful sense of feminine identity basically subversive in terms of language and culture. She melted together the poetic, the theoretic and the
everyday dictions associated with the duality of sound and meaning to reveal the presence of a subjective feminine identity. The coupling of language and voice constitutes a very subversive process generally used to redefine language via the female body. This significance is typically derived from her awareness about the extent to which ‘sight’ was considered an exclusive signifier with Freudian determinism and Lacanian binarism. The redefinition of language in terms of voice and rhythm stirs our attention to the mother-daughter bond, the maternal libidinal energies, the corporeal multiplicity and motherhood as an experience.

The poetic language, with its voice, rhythm and touch, gives birth to a diversified syntax and heterogeneous meaning which would help thus woman to generate a revolutionary subversive model and to inspire other women to raise equal awareness.

You are not there anymore, outside, frozen. Motionless. Deported. Displaced. I still want to have; I still want to be able. Attacked. I want to be on the way to love. To death. To hold on to what is going to disappear. Still losing. Not dead, worse. The body, here. Separate. Flesh; separation (Morris 1993: 122)

To sum up in this sublevel it can be said that Cixous’ notions of écriture feminine is very exorbitant as it brings together an awareness about the way language is appropriated through ideological hegemonies on the one hand while urging woman to write her multiple libidinal energies in an attempt to challenge the phallus. Cixous was, in fact, fully aware that the secret behind this marginalization consists on the denial of the female corporeal multiplicity, she relatively, advocated a redefinition of the female body which she sees as “cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide. Her writing can only keep going … [she] spacious, singing flesh … for her joyous benefit she is erogenous; she is the ergogeneity of the heterogeneous” (Morris 1993: 126)

Cixous was actually trying to redefine a practice of writing on the basis of the corporeal but without locking this redefinition on biological essentialism. Cixous was deeply
aware that such essentialism would take woman back on her struggle for acknowledgement and emancipation. She combines, accordingly, what is unconscious in terms of the corporeal and the conscious associated usually with the mastery of language. She managed to challenge both Freud and Lacan in their notions of the ‘sight’ and the mirror identifying herself sometimes with Merleau-Ponty’s “nascent movement” or “attention-to-life”\(^{(10)}\) awareness To come by the end to the conclusion that woman does not need any exterior back-up to generate writing and to ensure her existence as an equal partner but rather has to retreat to her body and to discover her inner driving forces.

In women’s speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops reasoning, which, once we have been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us—that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why this privileged relationship with the voice? … A woman is never far from ‘mother’ … there is always within her at least a little of that good mother’s milk. She writes in white ink (Morris 1993:120)

Writing, actually, enables woman not only to establish a sense of identity and belonging to a particular feminine sphere but equally to create a third body within a third space that would guarantee an equal partnership, it is, as Cixous retains;

\[\text{\ldots}\]

\(^{(10)}\) The significance of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophic reading of the body stems from his belief that the body is not natural but rather socially constructed i.e. it is not represented as an external object but rather we are our-body-in-the-world. The body is then “a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms.” Further analysis is available in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception (Trans. Colin Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 1996 [1945]); Sara Heinämaa, Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003)
A completely different place that realistically gave women the means to transform their practices of writing, and thus to be women in History. At last, writing may cease to be a narcissistic and individualistic gesture. At last, the text may cease to supply a lacking reality, to mask the lack with a utopia, and take its place as a production that thinks of itself without avoiding politics, in a structure that, for the first time, writes, publishes, elaborates new forms of thought and produces—being a woman in desire and reality—all these gestures establishing living relationships with each other. That the stature of writing changed: “des Femmes” made this both possible and necessary (Seller 2008: 52)

The significance of writing consists basically in revealing the true nature of things and the way reality is manipulated. It is only through writing that woman can figure out the way sex is presented as given and mere manufactured object, and only through writing she can valorise the sensual pleasure and the corporeal desires regulating the domestic space.

Cixous was strongly insisting that woman’s writing is the single way to re-appropriate femininity through the reconstruction of the body, of sexuality and the redefinition of nature-culture relationship. She invites women to write and to participate in writing as an equal partner since woman’s writing is the most truthful representation of femininity. In her book L’Arc Cixous went to affirm that “writing is the possibility of change itself … the movement which precedes the transformation of social and cultural structure” (Seller 2008: 63)

The oppression exerted by the different theoretical readings of the body and sexuality is, in fact, a reality that cannot be denied, however, these readings, though discriminating, were actually inspiring as it encouraged women to generate their mechanisms of self-defence. Lacan’s account of language and gender, for instance, is deterministic and exclusive in the way woman creates an identity on the merge. This account provides women writers with an insight about this radical subordination and alienation from language and culture. This alienation is fully framed by Cixous in her essay The Laugh of the Medusa affirming
Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away—that’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak—even just open her mouth in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine (Morris 1993: 109)

Cixous was strongly maintaining that such a feminine language stemming from the corporeal would be both problematic and exorbitant. This ‘écriture feminine’ is typically endowed with marks of psychic energy, pulsations, sound, voice and rhythms basically derived from the pre-oedipal scene and the sensations that the mother-infant bond would release. To be associated with the maternal body is equally to be able to speak up its own subjectivity; it is to be able to disrupt the male order. This association with the pre-oedipal energies is by itself a subversive process to deny the bond imposed by Lacanian binarism to establish then for a semiotic supremacy.

Equal perspectives investigating the female writing and their possession of language relied heavily on the theoretic reading of subjectivity and the construction of the ‘being’. In this level I would like to start with Irigaray’s assumption that the “subject is always already masculine” (Butler 2006: 158) and the way the appropriation of subjectivity is understood as an appropriation of language. Monique Wittig, for instance, extended Merleau-Ponty’s notion of being and existence vis-à-vis subjectivity to maintain that the ‘I’ is the universal human; the holder of language and the capacity of speech; the holder of power; and has therefore the authority to be himself or herself without being subject to a repressive system. She affirms that “no woman can say I without being for herself a total subject—that is, ungendered, universal, whole” (Butler 2006: 159)

Wittig was strongly insisting that the question of language and being are interdependent in the sense that individuals possess equal opportunities to speak and to use
language in order to assert their subjectivity. Relatively, the primary task would be to unmask
the reification of sex and sexuality through speech, through the speaking ‘I’ and the quest for
ontological access that promotes equal linguistic opportunities. Discrimination in terms of
writing and language is basically explained by the division created between the universal
subject, usually the owner of speech, and the particular, who is the object of that speech. This
distinction is created on the cultural level and was consolidated through language and its
associated plastic action and mimesis.

Woman’s objective would be then to cope with this division and exclusion made on
the level of subjectivity and to drive her concerns towards the universality of language and
the unity of being. It is through writing and text that woman can create a war machine to
undermine the hierarchal division of gender and the violation of the prior ontological order.
According to Cixous this re-appropriation of language is only achieved through writing
which would ensure as a consequence female subjectivity and her ownership of independent
identity. She was aware that a text is a space of creativity that does not submit to the logic of
the patriarchal, relatively, she opted to start with a redefinition of abstraction as a primary
step of rehabilitation. Throughout The Third Body Cixous was genuinely playing with the
syntax creating thus not only the possibility of language appropriation but equally to extend it
to demonstrate the extent of their oppression. In her book The Newly Born Woman (1988)
Cixous made it clear that woman should write and made of writing the way to ensure her
subjectivity even by turning into a thief of words. To be the thief of words is to raise the
question to whom the property belongs to? To be the thief is to re-appropriate what had been
already stolen from them and to reproduce it differently

He says: Get up [Lève-toi]. Then: lift, Eve, Lift, calf, bear, veld [l’ève, l’ève, l’ève, vèle, vèle, vel]

I: Live. Vile, vile, there’s the I that has come out. Live, levi, levite, avoiding it [l’évite]
Wittig was, in fact, aware that the binarism created by the patriarchal order between subject and object, universal and particular, abstract and concrete, text and content maintaining that this division is consolidated by a plastic language. Relatively, she urged woman to bridge these gaps through the written text, she asserts that it is only “through literature … words come back to us whole again” and continues “language exists as a paradise made of visible, audible, palpable, palatable words” (Butler 2006: 163). She was deeply aware that such language would ensure the masculine as universal while maintaining the feminine as particular, she tried in purpose to bring upside down this position by favouring the feminine as an absolute subject which is aiming as she affirms “not to feminize the world but to make the categories of sex absolute in language” (Butler 2006: 163).

Wittig distinguishes between two different contracts regulating the patriarchal order; first an ideal or primary contract of language whereby language can be a manifestation of the individual’s subjectivity and universality, while on return establishing for a linguistic hierarchy whereby the masculine is privileged over the feminine in terms of language. The second contract is the heterosexual whereby language justifies, reifies, and creates a second order reality where woman is usually the marginalized and excluded from the ontological reality under the pretension of ignorance and inferiority.

Though Cixous was strongly advocating the emancipation of the feminine through the appropriation of language, which is basically achieved through the liberation of the female libidinal energies, she was not favouring any female-to-female coupling in terms of lesbianism. She was insisting that a woman’s writing is the single way to ensure any transformation in the patriarchal order indicating that such a feminine writing has to be typically subversive in order to “break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to
project” (Cixous 1976: 875). She urged woman to proclaim the empire of language which goes through their bodies and desires, she was insisting that once woman gains control of her body and her inner energies she can then undermine easily the phallus. Woman has then to go the entire dark path through writing, but Cixous still not satisfied about those women who did not take yet the initiative to write their bodies and whom she asked

And why don’t you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you: your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven’t written (...). Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it is reserved for the great-that is, for ‘great men’; and it is ‘silly’. Besides, you’ve written a little, but in secret. (Cixous 1976: 871)

And continues urging those women to break down their silence and to take the pen into the hands

Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man: not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not yourself. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don’t like the true texts of women-female-sexed texts. That kind scares them (Cixous 1976: 877)

Writing as woman, according to Cixous, is a raison d’être, it is a conscious violent reaction that comes from the deep inside to expose the body and to reveal the silenced drives. Writing, especially in auto-fictional biography, enables her to figure out things around her and then to manipulate reality according to her convictions as a woman. Writing, relatively, is not just a manifestation of this libidinal multiplicity but equally a process whereby the patriarchal law can be undermined and new order can be established on the ruins of the phallus. Writing is then

An extraordinarily violence, of which am very conscious. I don’t write novels, I write what I call fictions. I transpose. I transfigure from the living. I nourish myself on the flesh and blood of those
around me. I always say: I’m a “carnivore of souls”, which is, for me an ineluctable tragedy … But as soon as “I will never write” is said, the mind has already been touched by the possibility of writing, by the risk, the imminence (Seller 2008: 129)

It is thus up to woman to take the initiative and to break up any model that functions to consolidate the patriarchal order. Difference is only achieved the moment once the patriarchal law ceases to operate; this difference flows actually from the maternal libido which would make it easy for woman to write it down as text and experience. Once this libido is written the écriture would be evident and language is re-appropriated. From a theoretic point of view it would be impossible to demonstrate the functioning of such écriture feminine. The reason behind this impossibility can be analysed as the following; abstractions like the sexed body, sex and sexuality were manipulated by the law of the father and were made as reified to deny then any truth that would give woman the authority to speak up her femininity. The écriture feminine on the opposite side is a reflection of the true nature of the body, the multiple body, which was for several decades silenced and oppressed, a body humiliated and at the best described as reproductive while on the worst commoditized and sold. According to Cixous woman’s body holds inner power not only to survive the crisis but equally to write, to subvert, to re-appropriate and to generate life from death. It is a body that overcomes the injustice hegemonic readings and can only be rehabilitated through writing which is to be problematic and exorbitant

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorised, enclosed, coded-which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate (Cixous 1976: 891)
The feminine practice of writing, according to Cixous, overtakes the boundaries of unitary, coherent and linear order of meaning. It is a kind of writing that stems basically from a sense of belonging and spontaneity of the subject that takes into account the bitter separation from the maternal body. This feminine writing is, in fact, endowed with an implicit refusal of the unitary meaning while valorising the rhythms of the libidinal energies and its associated voice.

The challenge that such ‘volcanic’ writing would demonstrate to the existing structure of the patriarchy is the resistance it shows to the unitary symbolic order in terms of language and culture. Cixous was actually aware that such symbolic order, usually functions to ensure male supremacy at the expense of the feminine, can only be undermined by the rejection of the logic of sameness and the creation of a new order of meaning. It is, in fact, through the metaphoric poetic language, associated with a spontaneous overflow of energetic drives and desires, that a feminine writing can shake the basis of the symbolic order and its structural unitary order of meaning giving thus the way to a heterogeneous multiple alternative.

Though I tried to make it evident and clear the extent to which such écriture feminine is both subversive and reachable, I still think that such practice of writing is equally exorbitant and debatable in many aspects. This exorbitance is actually fundamental as it raised the question about the legitimacy of an exclusive male unitary order of meaning and the extent to which can be considered as truthful in terms of culture, bearing in mind that it is the same exclusive discriminating culture that establishes for a hierarchal order.

Such a feminine model of writing raises many questions not only about the legitimacy of the paternal law but equally the possibility of such model to be competitive and reachable. In this sub-level I shall put the finger on the most exorbitant sites of this project and to unveil the mysteries among which the belief that an écriture feminine is typically utopian and
ahistorical. Back again to Lacan to analyse this point, the symbolic order is a totalizing system of meaning associated with our perception of reality and culture. Any analogous language would be ideologically and culturally impossible since it is created outside the paternal orbit whereby our understanding of culture and history is established.

Some others hold the assumption that the fact of writing with the white ink implies a return to the maternal libidinal energies and its associated unconscious drives which means locking again woman and femininity into biological determinism and essentialism. Women writers actually created a mosaic of perspectives about a possible ‘sortie’ altering between biological essentialism, hegemonic determinism and social utopianism and though they shared several common points they differed over the mainstream ideological schools to fight for their rights. In my point of view this mosaic of perspectives is actually healthy as it provides them with more than one strategy; however, they failed to create a non-debatable solid ground over which the agreed on most of primary concerns and to put away their differences for the sake of their emancipation.

Still another elusive aspect related to the écriture feminine and consisting on its reliance on emotionalism, unconscious irrationalism and disorder of the pre-oedipal scene. These elements, in fact, proved to be irrelevant in the creation of a new order of meaning and to duplicate any kind of writing and culture. Cixous was actually aware about these aspects and that is what explains her conviction that she is not feminist but writing for woman to re-appropriate her femininity and her body through writing. She accordingly, advocated a non-defined feminine writing that goes beyond the symbolic binarism, the psychoanalytic determinism, the neutral lesbianism and the excessive emotionalism. This awareness unveils the extent to which the hegemonic manipulation of abstractions and even the female body is maintained on an ideological level rather than being a reflection of reality
Men and women are caught up in a network of millennial cultural determinations of a complexity that is practically unanalysable; we can no more talk about ‘woman’ than about ‘man’ without getting caught up in an ideological theatre where the multiplication of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications constantly transforms, deforms, alerts each person’s imaginary order and in advance, renders all conceptualisations null and void (Wenzel 1981: 125)

Cixous’ strategic feminine practice of writing is typically directed towards the ideological theatre of phallocentricism to reveal its unjustness and to transform it. In order to do so Cixous maintained that a radical redefinition of male-made abstractions is needed starting with bisexuality, to the sexed body going through the corporeal energies constructing then for an écriture feminine “opening up to and benefitting from this vatic bisexuality which doesn’t annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number” (Cixous 1999: 125)

It can be understood in this level that a problematic practice of writing starts basically from a need of emancipation, going then into awareness about the fact that only through language power can be re-appropriated, moving afterward to a redefinition of the feminine via ideological hegemony, deviating later to the repressed unconscious with its silenced multiplicity concluding with a genius écriture feminine implicitly subversive, syntactically expressive, stylistically innovative and historically originative. This awareness and the need to redefine the hegemonic abstractions are fully framed by Luce Irigaray in her book *The Speculum of the Other Woman*

What is important is to disconcert the staging of representation according to ‘exclusively’ masculine parameters, that is, according to a phallocratic order. It is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it—that amounts to the same thing in the end—but of disrupting it and modifying it, starting from an ‘outside’ that is exempt in part, from phallocentric law (Wenzel 1981: 128)

Almost all women writers shared the conviction that it is only through the maternal body and its repressed energies that woman can write her body and her experience into text.
Monique Wittig, for instance, was deeply convinced that woman’s subordination is not the outcome of her biological inferiority but rather of a political and ideological order. Relatively, she advocated the re-appropriation of the relationship between body and writing to establish a new alternative that goes beyond patriarchal determinism.

The body of the text subsumes all the words of the female body. Le corps Lesbian attempts to achieve the affirmation of its reality … To recite one’s own body, to recite the body of the other, is to recite the words of which the book is made up (Crowder 1983: 120)

Woman was, in fact, metaphorically decapitated, socially ‘inferiorized’, culturally alienated and linguistically disoriented by the law of the phallus. Cixous maintained that this repression broke up the skin of silence raising then an urgent need to be released and to be poured into texts. Writing is then the single absolute force that would spare woman from bonds of slavery, of ignorance, of exclusion and of dependence. Writing, according to Cixous, is life itself and words are the air that comes into body and goes into text in an imaginative passage to reveal this mysterious multiplicity. She was fully convinced that “writing is the breath, the respiration, it is a necessity as imperious as the need to wake up, to touch, to eat, to kiss, to progress. When I do not write, it is as if I had died” (Seller 2008: 51)

Cixous generated actually a very elusive understanding of écriture feminine flowing basically from the repressed energies written in white ink metaphorically woven and poetically structured. It is, in fact, the poetic language that creates a kind of harmony between the body movement and the born word giving thus more space for libidinal expressions to be understood. Cixous was fully aware that only an implicit subversive feminine writing can undermine the patriarchy through its metaphors and indirect signification. This excessive use of metaphors was basically directed toward the male-made cannon and its associated norms which for several decades alienated women from writing. Metaphor, according to Cixous,
holds the power to reveal the repressed, to reshape the twisted, to redefine the reified and to reunite the fragmented

Metaphors breeks free; all that belongs to the realm of fantasmatic production (La production fontasmique), all that belongs to the imaginary and smashes language from all sides represents a force that cannot be controlled. Metaphors are what drive language mad … but one must work on it by trying to pull it, as far as possible, away from the strict meaning … to which it always alludes; it must be drawn toward the figure and away from the strict meaning (Crowder 1983: 142)

Cixous’ insistence on the importance of the libidinal energies stems from her awareness that the unconscious remains outside the patriarchal authority and therefore does not submit to the cultural norms. It creates a new possibility that overtakes Lacanian binarism, de Saussure’s determinism and Freudian mysticism which together establish for a kind of reified reality that does not take any account of the denied unconscious energies. This approach makes of the unconscious silenced drives the cornerstone of the feminine practice of writing since it provides the corporeal with a free space to be released through an imaginative representation transcribed with a highly poetic language. Cixous strongly relied on this driving force not only to generate a woman’s writing but equally a re-appropriation of the feminine body. This idea is best described by Cixous who was fully convinced that such a feminist perspective goes basically through the unconscious energies

She must write herself, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history … By writing herself woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her …

Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time …

Write your self … your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. (Cixous 1975: 880)
And continues describing the way the act of writing is a demonstration of the denied multiplicity

To write. An act which will not only “realize” the decensored realism of women to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal …

A woman without a body, dumb, blind can’t possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman. (Cixous 1975: 880)

Back again to this linguistic binarism to figure out the functioning of both the symbolic and the semiotic in defining the feminine practice of writing and the way power is manipulated vis-à-vis culture and language. While the symbolic remains a hegemonic modality of language through its discriminating and repressive order, the semiotic on the other hand functions from within this order through repetitions, rhythms, voice, sound, through its signifying images and metaphors to reform it.

The symbolic actually deny any female ownership of language and its associated cannon, the semiotic on the other hand advocates a poetic language that would redefine the maternal body and reconstruct new cultural convictions without any hegemonic references. This poetic language would equally deconstruct our understanding of the subject and the re-appropriation of the ‘I’ from which woman was alienated. It would then stimulate the collapse of the patriarchal prohibitive law by pulling the carpet from under its false legitimacy. The difference in the functioning of both the symbolic and semiotic is fully framed by Kristeva who maintained that this discrepancy is basically explained by the ideological hegemony and the continual alienation of motherhood

Language as a symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic
language (from whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed, instinctual, maternal element (Morris 1993: 113)

Cixous, Irigaray, Wittig, Kristeva and female militants were actually aware that the symbolic order could not be easily overthrown or simply replaced by the semiotic for its excessive reliance on emotionalism and irrationalism in generating language. Yet they agreed together on the necessity to violate the borders between the symbolic and the semiotic in order to give more space for those instinctual unconscious drives that constitute the poetic reproduction. Kristeva, for instance, maintained that a total change in the structure of the symbolic would be impossible since language and culture are built on a prohibitive law and the repression of the maternal libido. However, she affirms that a process of subversion from within is possible since; on the one hand, the bond of poetry and maternity is so strong constituting then heterogeneous drives. These drives on the other hand are considered the fundamental basis of the repressed culture. Accordingly, these drives would undermine the mastery of universal signifier through the diffusion of the anatomy of the subject as a manifestation of the paternal law.

This opposition between the heterogeneous drives and the paternal law gives birth to homosexuality and its dependence on psychic. This female homosexuality would be basically psychic since it stems from the repressed energies, while from the other hand makes of the maternal body a line of defence against any libidinal chaos. In this case the poetic language plays a fundamental role as it recovers the multiplicity of the female body, exposes the way the subject functions as purely endowed with repression and then showing the extent to which the semiotic can be a reliable cultural structure. Lacanian binarism created actually deep gap between the symbolic and the semiotic making it difficult for women to generate their own writing without being oppressed. However, feminist militants did not submit to this
patriarchal order but went even to steal the language and to re-appropriate it. Cixous, for instance, created this possibility by urging women to restore their property.

Flying is woman’s gesture-flying in language and make it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we’ve been able to possess anything only by flying: we’ve lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It is not accident that voler has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense. It is not accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds (Cixous 1976: 887)
This third chapter is basically dedicated to go deeper into woman’s writing but through a comparative approach that takes us into account Portuguese woman’s writing under the *Salazarian Estado Novo* \(^{(11)}\) and the way it resembles in many aspects the French or the American experiences. The reader of us would expect some difficulties in extracting the figures of similarities between those geographically dislocated achievements; however, the task is much easier than what we imagine as I found really striking and very apparent the resemblance just if the different experiences are analysed and appreciated at equal levels.

The Portuguese woman’s writing is to so far extent revolutionary but equally exorbitant in terms of content, quality and quantity leaving thus a remarkable trace on several levels especially the textual structure, the contextual formation, the thematic choice and most of the problematic language used to write the body. Portuguese women writers were actually aware about the fact of limitations of male-made stereotypes and decided accordingly to free their minds and bodies in order to generate the kind of literature that demonstrates their concerns. They relied on what is called “*écriture de Dedans*” \(^{(12)}\) to reveal the significance of woman’s

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\(^{(11)}\) It is the kind of a socially and politically repressive regime created by Salazar who was deeply inspired by the Fascist ideologies of Hitler and Mussolini. Further analysis can be found on Costa Pinto’s book *A Comparative Overview of the Estado Novo in Relation to Italy and Germany* (1992), or with Rabey in his book *A Marxist Analysis of the Estado Novo as a Fascist state*.

\(^{(12)}\) The term was coined by Beatrice Didier and best framed in her book “L’écriture-femme” first published in 1972 emphasising the qualities of woman’s text among which fluidity of words, the imaginative language, the metaphorical structures and spatiotemporal dislocations.
body and its libidinal energies, to demonstrate the primacy of motherhood as a socio-cultural contributor, and most of all the female ability to generate texts out of a corporal white ink melted with the bitterness of humiliation.

Lidia George, for instance, is one of these women writers whose two major books La Journée des Prodiges (1980) and Os Cais das Merendes (1982) created a solid literary platform for the coming waves of feminist writers. The multiplicity of her writing was to so far extent inspiring and exorbitant as she was not deeply formed by the philosophical complexities that go with and against woman’s plight, yet she was aware that woman’s writing is to be basically revolutionary, writing is a space where myth and reality meet, where polyphonic voices coexist and where the body bursts itself into words without discriminating its erotic attractiveness. The newly constructed image of woman all over her books is very striking and subversive as she no longer accepts Freud’s castration or Lacanian notion of binarism, she holds always that metamorphosed figure of the female man (13) who combines images of masculinity and femininity of power, of attractiveness, of the erotic and of knowledge. In her book Le Rivage des Murmures (1988) she invokes this female figure affirming

La femme du sud me touche, affirme la romancière, elle a un passé sans expression, veut être comprise des hommes mais n’y arrive pas, désire un homme sans trouver la parole pour l’appeler. […] Mais leur force tient dans le regard ; elles ont un regard analytique sur le monde, elles regardent, c’est ce qui les sauves (Jorge 1989 : 84)

(13) The expression is the title of a book written in 1970 by Joanna Russ and was only published in 1975 imagining new alternatives for woman’s struggle within a purely utopian world. This feminist science fiction deconstructs the pre-existing notions of womanhood, re-questions the gender role, and redefines male/female relationship along sexuality and nature-culture relation.
The multiplicity of Portuguese woman’s writing is actually cogent evidence of its maturity. The resemblance noticed on the thematic, structural, linguistic and contextual levels between texts written in Portugal by Lidia George or Maria Gabriela Llansol, or in the States by Friedan or Chopin, or in France by Cixous or de Beauvoir reflect to a very far extent not only a textual conformance but equally a highly shared awareness about the plight of woman. This identification copes actually with geographical limitations and socio-political boundaries that tend to further contain this burst of femininity. Language all over these texts is a very dynamic entity that unveils the silence, speaks out the hidden, fills the absence, writes the gaps and multiplies meanings. Language for those feminist militants is a space of liberation, an alternative that implies the possibility to redefine the self and the other.

The multiplicity of voices, the originality of language, the dissolution of the subject, the fluidity of the register and the syntactic subversiveness are among the most important qualities of Portuguese woman’s writing. Maria Velho da Costa reveals in her book Casas Perdas (1977) some of these qualities shifting thus the significance from the strict canonical literary style to that of the ordinary, the everyday concerns, the particular and detailed, where language describes the inner noises of the self, to the polysemous lexical style, and to the semantic fluctuation. Dialogism is another major innovation where oppositional elements come into a very constructive dialogue; masculinity and femininity, the regional and the national, the textual and intertextual, the male and the feminine voices, sign and language, body and mind, this hybrid of binary elements was typically meant to create the possibility of a general redefinition of what was taken as consentaneous.

The excellence of Portuguese woman’s writing after the Estado Novo consists actually in its deep concern with the everyday problems, the ethical, the philosophical, where the rural and urban spaces meet, where life and fiction coexist, a space where the biblical intertextuality, the fantastic and the mythical intermingle together in a subversive literary
spot. The singularity of the 1970s, 80s and 90s feminist books reflect actually not an arbitrariness that comes from the vacuum but rather from an elaborated awareness about the fact of social, political and literary degeneracy. Books like *Soma, A Fenda Erotica* (1988), and *Casa Eterna* (1991) by Helia Correia or others such as *O Ultimo Cais* (1992) and *A Deusa Sentada* (1994) by Helena Marques demonstrate to a very far extent these feminist concerns that relied on common images of death, sickness, deception, solitude and betrayal in order to reveal the deep woman’s suffering within a deconstructive attempt.

Language for those women writers is the process with which boundaries can be undermined, inner noises can be heard, corporal fluidity can be celebrated and the feminine can be redefined along the logic of ‘the have’ and ‘the imagined’. Maria Teresa Horta, for instance, developed a kind of repetitive, circular, metaphoric and poetic language to reveal this female sexuality, her multiplicity, her pregnancy, her sterility, her masturbation and most of all her mastery of the unconscious drives. Woman’s writing can be best described as revolutionary, deconstructive, exorbitant, fantastic and fluid as it comes from the body, writes the body, embodies the body and resembles its movements, Beatrice Didier coined a kind of definition that brings this notion of the libidinal asserting that “une écriture telle que le flux de la parole s’y trouve, avec ses soubresauts, ses reptures et ses cris” (Besse 2006: 93)

This chapter will study the socio-political background related to the era *Nouvelles Lettres Portugaises* was written in, the singularity of this masterpiece and most of all its universality through a comparative approach. The significance then of this book stems basically from the oppressive political and social context under the architect of the Estado Novo. Portuguese woman’s writing can be traced back to the 1930s and 40s with few writing most of them remained unpublished with “the appearance” as Ana Paula Ferreira affirms “for the first time in Portugal of a body of narrative work written by women and centred on woman as a focus of ideological struggle” (Owen 2000: 6) This body of narrative survived, in
fact, the heavy pressure put on women writers and equally the state censorship of newspapers and books which found on such authoritarian atmosphere very inspiring energies to reveal the discrepancies upon which stereotype of woman’s inferiority were framed and maintained as reified reality. *The Estado Novo* as Ferreira asserted “generated a consensual fictional poetics of womanhood and femininity encompassing heterogeneous spaces and peoples characterized as naturally different” (Owen 2000: 7)

This exclusion was further strengthened through the definition of woman on the basis of sexual differences to become then “a celula de corpo social” and “a primeira das sociedades naturais” maintaining thus the primacy of the reproductive role of woman and limiting her to the private sphere while enabling “chefe de familia” to have a complete mastery over decision-making. The situation was made suffocating as woman was not even allowed to work on the pretension that “woman’s work outside the family sphere disintegrates home life, separates its different members, and makes them stranger to each other … life in common disappears; the work of educating the children suffers, and families became smaller” (Sadlier 1986: 247)

Women, actually, did not give up their fight and took advantage of the alteration of the article 5 of the constitution which copes with woman’s responsibility for “o bem de familia” (Comissão 27). This act was considered the first drop of woman’s liberatory efforts as it opened the door wide for woman’s foreign experiences to be imported into the Portuguese environment. Feminist writers were deeply inspired by some of these works especially by Friedan, Millet or Sheila Rowbothan who fuelled Portuguese militants to push the whole plight to the extremities. Graça Abranches maintained that this alteration is very helpful as it “allowed the impact of the second wave French, Italian and US feminisms to be felt in intellectual circles as attested by the number of books dealing with feminist issues published in Portugal, in the years immediately before 1974 Revolution” (Owen 2000: 9)
The rebirth of Portuguese women’s writing was accompanied by a literary awakening significant in quality and quantity among which a very provoking book by Natalia Correia entitled *Antologia de Poesia Portuguesa Satirica e Erotica* and equally an auto-erotic anthology by Teresa Horta under the title *Minha Sinhora de Mim* (1967). However, *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* remained the most problematic book of that era as it constitutes a turning point in the history of Portuguese feminism for its open and radical counterattack of the oppressive measures under the *Estado Novo*. This counterattack costs the Three Marias the censorship of the book and their condemnation of pornography and the offense of public morals. However, these Marias pushed the case to the far extremity first by nationalising their plight provoking thus the government to further tighten private freedom and then universalising it through Barreno’s appeal to Christiane Rochefort in Paris who unveils the exclusive patriarchal order and its associated discriminatory measures.

This symbolic turning point was basically due to women’s awareness about the political instrumentalisation of literature and the impact it has on the struggle for freedom. In the first congress of the Associação dos Escritores Portuguesas, Vasco Gonçalves made it clear that “sois vós, como vosso trabalho criador, a vossa experiencia, o vossa saber, que deveis indicar o caminho para a libertação da nossa patria [...] vós sereis uma força motora da revolução” (Owen 2000: 13). This awareness was, in fact, further procreated by broadening the Portuguese experience and benefiting at the same time from outdoor writings especially from some French feminist theorist such as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray to whom Maria Horta, for instance, owes much of her poetry of the 1980s.

The Three Marias were consciously aware that the act of writing consists a true challenge to the patriarchal order especially if woman writes about taboo matters crossing then social and ethical boundaries previously maintained as unshakable. Horta wrote series of poems like *Ambras as Mãos Sobre o Corpo* (1970) and *Minha Sinhora de Mim* (1967) all of them...
celebrating the female body through eroticism. Barreno, on the other hand, published a collection of short stories under the title *De Noite as Arvores São Negras* (1968) and *Os Outros Legitimos Superiores* (1970) discussing generally corporal multiplicity. The three women shared almost the single concern with the belief that the deconstruction of such hierarchal order goes inevitably though writing besides their experiences as mothers, daughters and wives.

It is actually difficult to classify the book vis-à-vis the critical terminology as the book possess a very singular, problematic and non-conform structure or form to fit a precise literary category. The book actually combines prose and verse that does not submit to a peculiar genre. This peculiarity stems basically from its thematic construction and its language that overcomes the usual and the normative. The description of such feminine book is best framed by Virginia Woolf affirming

> The book has somehow to be adopted to the body, and at a venture one would say that women’s books should be shorter, and more concentrated than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work. For interruption there will always be (Sadlier 1986: 252)

*Novas Cartas Portuguesas* can be best described as a post-modernist and post-structuralist masterpiece for many reasons; first it implies a radical redefinition of the intellectual and the poetic codes and therefore reconstructing the cannon according an equal female partnership. Second, it can be considered as a theoretical as well as literary project where the descriptive and the analytic are combined within a historical scope. Third, the book has a strategic objective as it tends to degenerate the gender mythologies of Portuguese epic nationhood in order to establish an embodied subject whereby the flesh plays an important role in the process of identification.
This process of redefinition works along sexual, social, political as well as hegemonic dimensions. The multiplicity of woman’s discourse opened up widely the multiplicity of spaces within the same discourse where modernity and post-modernity coexist, where the structuralist and the reformist left their traces, and where the multiple woman as a burdened object, as a writer, as a subject, as a poet and as a thinking body meet together in the same voice. This idea is best described by Teresa de Lauretis who maintained that this multiple female voice is explained on the basis of Foucauldian concept of “Technologies of Gender” affirming;

Between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or ‘between the lives’, or ‘against the grain’) of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community (Owen 2000: 23)

The poetic language, whether in prose or verse, is derived basically from the body movement, a language that digs into, investigates and reconstructs male/female relationship, redefines the feminine, and undermines the sexual and cultural boundaries based on differences. This poetic language functions basically to show up the silenced, to valorise the libidinal, to re-establish a new system of values that takes the purely feminine into the calculation and rebels over the organic unity of the conventional romantic structure associated with an attempt to restore the broken bond of fiction and history. Writing actually invokes those feelings of passion, of love of desire, of revenge, of rage and only through words can invent them as one of the Marias affirms in the second letter

Avec des mots nous construisons notre amour, maison de sureté et temps de réflexion. Chacune de nous séparément est spontanée et d’apparence fragile, toutefois ensemble nous sommes ensuite la rigueur, l’enveloppe, la terre, l’effroi que nous causons à l’homme quand il nous «sait» et nous écoute

(NLP 1974: 76)
It is, actually, through writing that Mariana overcomes her feelings of terror and loss, writing helps her to develop a state of self-consciousness, self-examination to dig into the very deep world of her emotions and to rediscover her femininity. Writing was not used to solicit male sympathy or to beg for a personal purpose but rather to release her anger and to tear the skin of silence, she was repeatedly insisting that “it is not my intention to over send you these lines to read, for their role purpose is to be committed to paper” (Sadlier 1986: 258)

Back again to the book before getting into the details, it is widely considered a revolution over classical categorization as it implies a mosaic of genres and forms. It is, in fact, a hybrid of essays, reports, poems, dialogues, testimonies, citations and letters melted together into a multifaceted work aiming to undermine the canonical, the normative, the authoritative and the authentic. It is actually best described by Kauffman asserting that it is “a work of criticism as well as of fiction, one that intentionally subverts the conventions of scholarly discourse that so frequently nullify the female” (Owen 2000: 26)

Some other critics considered the book a socio-political literary tragedy whereby woman is metamorphosed, isolated, abandoned, subjugated, and forcefully separated from her body. Feminist writers were deeply aware about the extent to which they are made trivial through this alienation; they accordingly raised their voices to maintain themselves as an organic unity that goes basically through writing. This female writing does not only unite women who shared common grief, despair and loss but equally over a very elaborated writing that brings novel, fiction and epistle together into a single revolutionary genre whereby the relationship between time and history, history and fiction are restored. This unity that denies any chronological reference within the structure of epistolary fiction is best framed by Ruth Perry who affirms
One effect of telling stories about the consciousness of the characters is that it gives a continuous sense of time even where there is no formal unity of time or place in this genre. The reader soon disregards the female dislocations and paces himself instead to the inward rhythms of the epistolary characters who are always reacting to the present.

(Sadlier 1986: 269)

The Three Marias strongly maintained that a three-dimensional process of re-reading, redefinition and re-appropriation is need whenever woman’s plight is put into question. Thus the book appeared in many instances descriptive of several decades of exclusion, marginalization and humiliation while at the same time analytic offering new alternatives of liberation and rehabilitation. The analytic approach of the book proposes the redefinition of woman on social and political basis with a possible identity that copes with male-made stereotypes and heavily depends on the body. The libidinal energies, in this respect, are the major significant elements to bring woman back to her alienated self and to ensure her subjectivity through a wide-range process of re-appropriation. The erected ‘I’ accordingly, is no longer the representation of the symbolic phallus but rather a redefined identity that derives its significance from the celebrated libidinal multiplicity.

This three-dimensional process is actually very effective and provocative as it tends to unveil the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system through an implicit subversive scheme based on satirical mimesis and a patrilinear system of exchange. The scheme describes the way the paternal order functions vis-à-vis the appropriation, the commodification and the commercialization of woman being transmitted from father, to son and then to husband. This idea is fully described by Luce Irigaray in her book This Sex Which Is Not One asserting

The exchange upon which patriarchal societies are based takes place exclusively among men, women, signs, commodities, and currency always pass from one man to another […] exchanges without
identifiable terms, without accounts, without end … without additions and accumulations, one plus one, woman after woman … without sequence or number (Owen 2000: 28-29)

This patrilinear exchange system is a clear evident of this oppressive hierarchy which, in fact, stirs women’s awareness not about their exclusion but rather their forceful inclusion to be the other, the different, not the real but the projection, not the master but the slave, not the owner but the commodity. It is a binary system that distributes territories between man and woman not as human beings but according to stereotypical privileges that favours man over woman just because she is woman. The Three Marias repeatedly reject this binarism thus in the first letter VII the woman narrator went even to reject syntactic dichotomies of ‘le’ and ‘la’ addressing her discourse to her mother saying

Ma mère, je dis bien car je ne veux plus de la mere, je ne veux plus de l’article défini dont on sert dans notre bande pour définir nos parents, ces le/la ne servent qu’à l’usage courant, c’est-à-dire, pour dire Le père, La mère, et d’ailleurs cela n’a pas changé depuis le siècle dernier (NLP 1974 : 198)

This female awareness is associated with a complete rejection of the centred masculine identity, of the patrilinear heterosexual system of exchange, of the phallic order and most of all the rejection of the stereotypical figure of the reproductive, the obedient and the passive woman. The Three Marias excluded the notions of mother and father from the calculation and introduced accordingly the notion of ‘the orphaned’ selves as mothers, daughters and sisters whose rebellious sense of belonging and identity brings together mind and body functionality. They advocated a redefinition of the female subject that takes into account the platonic psyche and soma with the belief that if one element is excluded under whatever reason the harmony of the self is thus undermined leading on the one way to the objectification of the self, while on the other resting on a psychotic unconscious paralysed subject easily controlled and exploited. The unity and the separation of these two entities are so inevitable as the latter, in Plato’s words, “easily conceal its sexual connotation, always
marked by difference. Hence the male gender can easily claim to be neutral and universal” (Owen 2000: 31)

This idea is actually very inspiring as we can hear Cixous’ voice that imagines a possible third body where mind and body complement each other within an exorbitant non-sexed self. Cixous’ deconstructive scheme proposes a re-reading of the body that celebrates the libidinal multiplicity, putting thus the conscious mental drives in equal terms with the unconscious corporal energies for the sake of a balanced identity that copes with sexual differences. The Three Marias equally suggested such notion of female identity that makes of the body the cornerstone not only for existence and liberation but equally as unity and defence maintaining thus that “il est temps de crier, assez. Et de former un bloc avec nos corps” (NLP 1974: 251)

The book is actually based on three major pillars; separation, affirmation and possibility. The structure of letters, poems and reports in Novas Cartas Portuguesas clearly invokes a continuous state of conflict and separation; man and woman, mother and daughter, the insider and the outsider, father and daughter. This state of conflict is, in fact, very deconstructive as it attempts to cope with all aspects of patriarchal conventions of the reified social harmony forcefully maintained. The affirmation of an auto-erotic feminine body is basically meant to speak up its silenced multiplicity and to free it from the teleology of reproduction and death.

The Three Marias raised equally awareness about the deliberate alienation of woman’s body that would open the door wide for her exploitation, that’s why a process of redefinition, based on the recognition of female libidinal energies, is needed to reconstruct her identity. This deconstructive state of conflict within the scope of auto-erotic description of the female body creates actually a possible ‘space-off’ where sex differences are no longer countable. Their position to have a full mastery of mind and body to ensure their femininity and their independence stems from their inspiration by the wave of foreign feminist writings
among which the most brilliant woman’s book by Mary Wollstonecraft entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) through which she affirms

> I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrase, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become object of contempt (Wollstonecraft 1972: 8)

Though the book reflects a high awareness about the plight of woman and the reality of her oppression, the Three Marias differed actually over the reasons and the ‘sorties’ proposed to achieve liberation and recognition. While Horta made it clear that society is the responsible for woman’s subordination through its system of exchange and the commodification of woman, Barreno, on the other hand, asserted that humiliation is basically explained by the deep effects of the institution of marriage and the restriction of woman to her reproductive function. Velho da Costa sees the problem differently as she believes that both man and woman are victims of social practices as they are caught in very broad systematic conflicts of race, class and culture.

This difference between the Three Marias, which grows sometimes to opposition, created a state of rivalry within unity which is actually very healthy as it conveys a clear message for those feminists that difference is not always a mark of disunity but can be rather very constructive. It is a reflection of a multi-coloured discourse that brings together various women’s experiences as mother, lover, wife, daughter and sister within a revolutionary scope. The book is best described by its writers who, in a postscript of an English translation of the book, asserted

> This book is not the work of an isolated writer struggling with personal phantoms and problems of expression in order to communicate with an abstract Other, not is it the summing up of the production
of three such writers working separately on the same theme. The book is the written record of as much broader, common, lived experience of creating a sisterhood through conflict, shared fun and sorrow, complicity and competition, an interplay not only of modes of writing but modes of being, some of them conscious and some far less so, all of them shifting in the process, and all three of us still facing, even today, the question of how (Sadlier 1986: 262-63).

Generally speaking, *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* is a book of possibilities, of awareness, of separation and of loss where the Three Marias strove to redefine femininity through a socio-political scheme that makes of writing and words the process of emancipation. Mothers, daughters and sisters in the different poems, reports and letters and who epitomized simplicity, serenity and nature in previous times are now the embodiments of revolution and challenge. The New Woman (14) who associated herself with social involvement, with a new understanding of motherhood, with nature and most of all with writing is no longer a fragmented or alienated self but rather a very complex, multiple and fluid self whose libidinal energies, spontaneity, pleasure and feelings are basic elements in her revolutionary liberation.

To go deeper within the thematic as well as theoretical structure of the book we can easily put the finger on several similarities that bring the Portuguese woman’s experience closer to their counterparts in Europe, and this similarity in my point of view gets wider and deeper whenever the interest is directed toward the psychoanalytic and linguistic fields. Here, the Three Marias were implicitly subversive as they attempted to bridge the gap between writing and body, two alienated entities under the patriarchy, in order to appreciate the corporal multiplicity. They were actually aware that the redefinition of femininity necessitates the recognition of the libidinal energies through which woman can restore her body back and then can generate the text that would embody her belonging and her identity. They created a supper female voice that advices and redirects woman’s intentions affirming
Écoute, ma sœur, il n’y a que le corps. Le corps seul nous mène jusqu’aux autres et jusqu’aux morts, «tu es fruit, Mariana, produit, long gémissement un symptôme complètement perdu et retrouvé, repris sans cesse tout au long d’une maigre histoire … tu es peur et peur encore, sans aucun secret, sans aucun talent … car toute possession est mâle, Mariana, et aujourd’hui encore … Douce plainte qui t’échappe, qui m’occupe, qui me féconde, qui me dépasse et me tue : mon écriture … j’ai feint de t’aider jusqu’au vice (NLP 1972: 288)

This voice is quite relevant with French feminist writers like Cixous or Irigaray. The former, for instance, raised an urgent need to write the female body and to demonstrate its multiplicity, her symbolic white ink implies notions of challenge and insistence to create a ‘sortie’ that would cope with sex differences and equally woman’s humiliation. For Cixous woman’s text is always the context of her libidinal energies and the locus where

The body is there! But it is a disturbed body, a body intoxicated with words because she is trying to conjure up the flesh, to evoke it with words: this body, in fact, is very absent. And her anxiety about it is truly the anxiety of hysteria. It is indeed: “Where are they, where are my organs?” (Sellers 1986: 65)

The combination of an inter-textual dimension with a fragmented and hybrid écriture-feminine demonstrates a crossroad where woman raises self-awareness and self-understanding about her subordination associated with a need for a total redefinition of the phallocentric order of the patriarchy. This redefinition necessitates, actually, a very evocative kind of writing that would speak up long decades of humiliation and equally to establish for a solid constructive dialogue that copes with stereotypes.

(10) It is a feminist ideal appeared by the late 19th Century imagining a new image of woman able to undermine the straight narrow male-made boundaries and to create a multidimensional figure of the universal woman. Various books embody this ideal among which Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* and Elizabeth Barrett’s *Aurora Leigh*
This writing would be nothing other than, as Françoise Colin asserted, “un travail de déterritorialisation (...), un langage libre, souverainement indifférent, et qui passe d’un genre à l’autre, d’une forme à l’autre, langage d’une terre extraterritoriale où les frontières n’ont pas tant à être franchies, qu’à être déplacées” (Besse 2007: 6-7)

The universality of the Marias’ call concerning writing and the body is quite evident not only with Cixous but equally with other feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich who proposes a very revolutionary, non-imitative, non-masculine, and exorbitant notion of writing that does not stem from the margin of culture, where man places her, but rather derives its efficiency and its singularity from the center where the female body is the single legitimate reference affirming

I asked what words could do; we have filled reams of paper over the months, and what can we do, what are we doing? Words are not a substitute for action, but they can be an aid. They can be used, for instance, to outline the political background of the problem of the woman, for as long as that is missing, the problem will dissolve into one of which packaged soup to buy and “how to satisfy your husband in bed (Araújo-Gröcheni: 53)

Language in Novas Cartas Portuguesas is self-reflexive, containing the seeds of its own critique, where desire is a mobilizing force to articulate writing and to express the inexpressible. Desire takes always a place between the libidinal needs and the demands that speech articulates making thus of dialogue a spatial methodological possibility to express differences, contradictions, continuous conflict and invites deconstruction. L’amour-écriture, ‘le désir de la différence’ and ‘l’amour de la transgression’, in this respect, are actually clear reflections of the interconnectedness of both the need to reveal inner desire and to engrave it into words.

De toi, tu dis que tu es fluide, de moi que je suis de verre et de toi, notre autre, que tu es un milan (mout, mat). De moi, tu dis que je suis désir : mon corps est à la découverte du plaisir et ma passion me
And continues describing this dependency between desire as a libidinal reflection and writing as ‘la pratique’ of femininity affirming that «de la même façon que l’écriture avance, que le corps, soutenu par une main sage, avance, par sa propre main, combien de femmes, combien d’hommes sont-ils délectés déjà de ce qu’ils peuvent faire par eux-mêmes, uniquement ?» (NLP 1974: 274)

*Novas Cartas Portuguesas* can be actually read as a framework in our understanding of the general woman’s experience as mother, daughter, sister, wife and writer, while particularly to figure out the major conventions we agreed on in previous chapters concerning especially French Feminism. The resemblance noticed on the quality of woman’s writing between the Three Marias and Cixous is just one episode of the different similarities established over questions like the body, the masquerade, the phallocentric and marriage. The masquerade, for instance, gets a particular significance throughout the book for it’s the possibility it created to overcome moments of weakness and to create other moments of superiority through masking/unmasking process.

The Marias’ recurrent use of the masquerade is very relevant as it helps, through the process of double writing, to mask their feminist, aggressive intentions and to unmask the fragile qualities of the maternal figure under the patriarchy.
This masquerade implies actually a very ambivalent technique that makes of both writing and appearance processes to manipulate the distribution of power according to moments of weakness and strength. Cixous on the other side plays on equivalent technique that makes of appearance and disappearance the means of deception and liberation.

[...] but it was only in the instant that preceded my reappearance that I recognized, by the form of its walls and the odor of its tissues, the thoracic cage in which I quivered, and that scarcely lasted, for as soon as I opened my eyes, my disappearance had disappeared, cut out from the memory of my senses as utterly as a dream (Cixous 1999: 3)

This masquerade can be differently analysed depending on the narrator’s intention and the general mood of the plot. In many instances the Three Marias resorted to the masquerade in an attempt to evoke the need for challenge and action, the mask turns then into the weapon, the arm that would break down the patriarchal order through disguise. In the first letter the narrator was stressing this necessity without which woman could not lift the bonds of humiliation affirming

Rassasiées nous serons un jour. Je demande : Aurons-nous cette sorte de satiété vorace pour laquelle nous sommes les fruits ? Sans masques nous irons, même si nous savons que cela nous expose aux menaces, aux pures médisances, à la rage, à l’intolérance des coutumes, avec lesquelles on fait le bois des buches (NLP 1974: 30)

The Three Marias pushed the matter to its extremities by declaring war on those male-made conventions that limited woman to its narrow private sphere. They raised awareness about the illegitimacy of the institution of marriage which is considered as the first episode on woman’s subordination maintaining that a possible third space would provide them with a chance to overcome sex difference. Woman was always reduced to the context of reproduction and was never considered an equal partnership who is appreciated for its libidinal multiplicity and mental capacities. This oppression created on those women a feeling of hatred mixed with a
desire for revenge that fuelled their attempt to subvert the whole system. They were not actually convinced that “une femme est et sera toujours mère avant toute chose” and asked accordingly to rebel over this institution warning « faut attention, avec les mariages on ne sait jamais, quelquefois il vaut mieux de rester célibataire …» and went even to demand « ne te marie pas, Maria, viens plutôt vivre ici à la maison, regarde, il n’y a rien de mieux qu’une femme libre et sans homme» (NLP 1974 : 172-73)

Marriage is then the object of general consensus that brought women from different ideological backgrounds under the unique response believing that the subversion of such institution would open the door wide for more freedom as sex differences is socially-constructed phenomena and that “marriage is an event of closure, in its way it is one of the names of death: it is always recounted in the historical past. They married; they crumbled into dust” (Cixous 1999: 59)

This awareness about the impact of the institution of marriage most of all the reproductive role whereby woman is seen as an « objet producteur d’enfant et de travail dit domestique … elle est devenue aussi un objet consommateur et de consommation; elle était auparavant une espèce de propriété rurale, fécondable, et maintenant elle est commercialisée pour être distribuée » (NLP 1974: 213) raised on those women writers the need to be united for the singularity of their plight and equally for the value of unity since “quand nous nous donnons la main, nous trois, quand nous nous livrons, nous trouvons notre independence á nous”(NLP 1974: 31). Although the book can be described as a space of separation and alienation, it implies equally many instances where subversion is achieved and the bond is restored especially those of woman-to-woman and mother-daughter bonds. This growing attempt to bring back woman to woman and the daughter to her mother is actually a very revolutionary response to the deep impact of the Freudian psychoanalytic theories which created spheres of influences depending on the Oedipus complex and its associated
hegemonic understanding. The Three Marias showed a great deal of resemblance, already seen with Cixous, Irigaray, Wittig and Clement, that can be depicted through their endeavour to revive the mythical bonds of femininity and to find new alternatives basically depending on the Pre-oedipal phase. The state of despair, of doubt, of betrayal and of mistrust between the mother and her daughter, as a result of long decades of crowded stereotypes that poisoned this relationship, turns into the solid foreground for the redefinition of femininity through pregnancy, motherhood and the matriarchal. In many instances in the book she reveals her love to her mother and her gratefulness for the notion of identity and belonging she offers her, this appreciativeness is best described in a letter written by Mariana Alcoforado to her mother

Madame ma Mère je sais

avoir été dans votre ventre

engendrée

gout de plaisir ou silence

vos entrailles j’ai dilapidées

y étant entrée par inadvertance

O destin de peine immense

O souvenir de mon labeur

O son intense agonie

O vos couches ajournées

Peur tristesse et appui

Ton épaule pour mon enfance

Absence qui a été torturante
This gratefulness is always accompanied with awareness that this mother-daughter bond is the locus of strength as it demonstrates on the one hand this subversive capacity to cope with aspects of cultural and hegemonic manipulation of femininity, while on the other hand to make female multiplicity evident through especially pregnancy. The fact of giving birth to a child is considered as a moment of pleasure and equally of challenge, but in some other moments the whole heterosexual order was violated advocating thus a kind of bisexuality far away from the phallus pleasure. Woman-to-woman bond turns to be the alternative to the oppressive patriarchal understanding of together reproduction, orgasm, masturbation and libidinal delight shifting it then to the clitoris, the breast and the vagina.

There is, in fact, a very large scale of resemblance between what the Three Marias wrote and what Cixous invokes in her writing to such extent that it would be impossible to distinguish to whom the text belongs. They shared the same fundamental concern and differed over few marginal questions dealing with the specificity of national belonging. Back again to the issue of general consensus and the way the Marias perceived the production of the libidinal energies into language and the role literature plays to demonstrate this multiplicity. They were actually aware about the limitations imposed by the unitary order of meaning and that is what explains their advocacy of a metaphoric and colloquial language associated with a
spontaneous flow of energetic drives. They have been wondering «mais que peut la littérature? Ou plutôt: Que peuvent les mots? » (NLP 1974: 229) but soon a voice coming from the very deep inside avows «en ce temps-là je me sentais seul et je me refugiais dans la littérature.» However, this refuge is only reached through the body and its libidinal energies which once recognized and appreciated the symbolic order can be easily overthrown. They knew that the body is the single right path and accordingly asked to free it, to bring it back, to celebrate its multiplicity and to give up seeing it as something alien or strange explaining

[…] parce que toute la survie de la ville s’appuie sur cette pratique, la femme s’est retirée de son corps pour que celui-ci puisse être utilisé, exploré sans résistance personnelle … les femmes sortent de leur longue hibernation sexuelle mais elles n’habitent pas encore leur corps, elles le regardent, elles en parlent mais uniquement comme d’un animal pour lequel elles ont beaucoup d’estime (NLP 1974: 237)

They were, in fact, trying to wake up their counterparts and to warn them that their bodies are the locus of their emancipation and that writing the multiple bodies is an aggression of the patriarchal order that kept them inferior for several decades. This awareness was previously discussed with Cixous who strongly maintained that nothing can be achieved without the appreciation of the libidinal energies. She was repeatedly asserting that the patriarchal unitary order of meaning is basically exclusive in many aspects and as a consequence woman has to develop her own language that would reflect what man fails to figure out. Writing the body is then the process through which femininity is appropriated and identity is redefined along new lines of sexuality. Cixous, for instance, raised almost a similar appeal to draw back to the female body for the sake of generating writing and to ensure liberation affirming

I believe that anything having to do with the body should be explored, from the functional to the libidinal, to the imaginary; and then how all of this is articulated at the symbolic level. It is beyond doubt that femininity derives from the body, from the anatomical, the biological difference, from a whole system of drives which are radically different for women than for men (Seller 2008: 66)
I would like just to stop a little bit in this analysis of writing that makes of the body the central entity and to think deeply about it; three Portuguese women geographically, culturally, and socially dislocated, with differently-imagined resolutions, writing under the most authoritarian regime, writing about a taboo issue in the scope of a very exorbitant literary genre, challenging the most solid theoretical and ideological conventions, writing for the sake of very far, unknown other woman, and most of all these writing through a very rebellious and subversive woman’s writing that owes nothing to male-made cannon but just the hatred that opens their eyes wide to see differently what was in some old days one-way given reality. Such a book leaves no doubt for its reader, whether scholar or critic, to see elsewhere the weakness of its linguistic brilliance, its syntactic splendour or its thematic creativeness. Briefly the book is a turning point not only in the Portuguese struggle for recognition and redefinition but equally a cornerstone in the universal quarrel for sex equality and cosmic well-being of humanity. The best to close up with this analysis is Lidia Jorge’s appreciation of this book about which she said

*The New Portuguese Letters* is about female desire. This was considered a crime in the seventies. Through the discourse itself, and the audacity of those amazing women writers, this book became a literary icon. It opened a way for us, which we have all more or less followed (Owen 2000: 39)
Conclusion:

Returning to the question posed on the beginning of this study, it is now possible to maintain that woman’s awareness about the deficiency of the patriarchal discourse made it urgent together the processes of deconstruction, redefinition and rehabilitation. Women writers shifted actually the frame of identity from the field of vision, disguise and masquerade into the field of writing, a reposition that transforms woman from an object of desire into a subject-being whose identity depends on the self and flesh more than on the other. This shift has two major reasons; on the one hand, woman’s writing would frustrate both the fetishistic desire of the exclusive male-made stereotypes and equally the voyeuristic desire upon which sexual identity is based. While on the other hand, tries to re-establish a new understanding of femininity stemming basically from the valorisation of woman’s body and the multiplicity of its drives.

Woman writers actually raised a consciousness about the current patriarchal mode of discourse based on mimicry with a desire for immediately recognisable other, the desire for the reformed other, not a subject but rather an object who is the same but not quite. A discourse that do not establish for the self and the other but for the self or the other reinforcing thus the dependence of the other through mimicry which constitutes a real threat to identity. What those women writers seek to do is a theoretical liberation from this binary discourse, of this binary closure by celebrating the multiplicity of the other, of woman. This deconstructive scheme is heavily dependent on writing to cope with this binarism and the reproduction of contradictory poles while maintaining at the same time the hybridity of discourse within the scope of sexual differences. Boundary, accordingly, is the place where difference begins to manifest itself, the very unstable zone where the self and other, man and woman come into contact, into clash, and into attempt to destabilize each other. Writing is
therefore a dialogic space of intervention where differences are abolished and where the re-articulations of elements of direct contradiction in the struggle of identification are no longer functioning. This hybrid site is what constitutes Cixous’ notion of the “third space”, the moment and the place when negotiation becomes inevitable, about inter-subjectivity, the moment when a contingent discourse opens between man and woman.

The ‘Third Body’ stems its specificity almost from this notion of the ‘space-off’ and the boundary whereby sexual differences are neglected and the ideological crisis was resolved. I firmly believe that the book provides us with a considerable alternative that overcomes not only woman’s fragmentation and the dividedness of their attempts but equally establishes a solid ground upon which a possible counter-strike can be launched. Cixous’ framework does not break totally with the past but rather imagined an exorbitant project that takes from the body its multiplicity and from language its efficaciousness, that brings back woman to her body and turns the breast-milk into a white-ink that verbalises the libidinal energies of the deep unconsciousness. I entirely agree with Cixous in this level that a possible redefinition of woman’s identity derives basically from the re-appropriation of language and the overflow of the ‘poetic language’ reflects the triumph of the repressed qualities which have been silenced for several decades. The manifesto of feminine writing sets forward a subversive feminine practice of writing aiming basically to question, to deconstruct, to redefine and to re-appropriate language within a background that valorises every female corporeal gesture.

The new space of possibilities created all over the Third Body proposes a volcanic model of writing that stems its originality from its implicit rejection of the exclusive male unitary order of meaning and the exploration of the semiotic capacities. Such a scheme necessitates actually the valorisation of female libidinal hybridity but without locking the whole matter into biological determinism.
Cixous’ experience was not actually the unique adventure among woman writers, yet other geographically dislocated experiences emerged from the ruins of the patriarchal kingdom. The three Portugeses Marias, for instance, raised almost the same awareness that both man and woman are created equals affirming that “sur la terre que Dieu a créée nous sommes toutes égales, et cela nous donne ainsi le courage d’entreprendre l’aventure!”(NLP 1974: 53).

This awareness stems its legitimacy not from the fake male-made visual presentation but rather from the female corporeal multiplicity, a hybridity which was kept silent under the pretension of being a taboo. However, this consciousness fuelled their attempt to rediscover that deserted area striving to bring it to life by unveiling the falsified pretensions:

Le corps de la femme avec son sang et ses cycles, qui se scinde dans un autre corps-enfant, mystère de vie et de mort, scandale d’un corps trop proche de la nature que l’homme tente de dominer en craignant toujours ses vengeances, en ayant peur de corps, corps de perdition, en redoutant d’y trouver la castration, homme érigé et constructeur mais qui a besoin de la femme pour qu’elle lui fasse des enfants, femme marginalisée dans ce que l’homme a rejeté par ses choix pragmatiques … l’homme se fait mère réorganiser ses origines à partir de chaos, femme pouvoir de tentation et de pacte avec le désordre, pouvoir de scandale, pour l’homme sentiment de la faute et aussi sa critique marginale, son image négative. (NLP 1974: 89-90)

The book proposes an exorbitant perception that takes both female body and writing into account relying thus on the ‘écriture de Dedans’ to bridge the gap which was left for several decades as an open wound. Writing for those women writers is a polyphonic space where different voices interact and coexist, a space where sex differences cease to function, a dialogic space whereby language copes with forms of binarism and the absolute unitary truth.

The was considered the most problematic one on that era for its thematic choice, its subversive tone and the openness of the Three Marias in discussing taboo issues. They
actually managed to shift the field of concern from the symbolic with its associated exclusive patriarchal laws to the semiotic with its libidinal fluidity.

*Novas Cartas Portuguesas* entails not only the threat of Salazarian dictatorship but equally awakened the buried female hysteria and hatred from being metamorphosed, subordinated and deliberately separated from her body. The book tries to reflect those fragmented pieces to bring that original female image back into existence with its mosaic of gender mythologies, of epic nationhood and of its theoretic innovations. Throughout its descriptive and analytic approaches the book invokes a necessity to re-read, re-define and re-appropriate femininity by recognizing the libidinal energies. This process, as I repeatedly mentioned, would ensure the subjectivity of woman and would thus guarantee the creation of an independent identity that stems its efficiency from its multiplicity.

The book consists actually of various differences on the way the “*sortie*” is imagined and the perspective upon which several issues are discussed. There are different female voices echoing and reflecting each other but do not tend to silence each other, this mosaic of voices creates a *space-off* whereby possibility, awareness, separation, loss and unity are intermingled together. I find it difficult to reach a final conclusion in this level for the openness of the issue under discussion, but I’m tempted to say that there is a great deal of resemblance between the French feminist experience and the Portuguese one brought about respectively by Cixous and the Three Marias. Both experiences showed a feminist commitment to reread and redefine femininity basically through the body and then to emphasize the necessity of writing to carry out the fundamental feminine objective which is the liberation of mind and body.

*Femelles nous sommes*

*Fidèle à notre image*

*Opposition ardente que nous revêtons*
Femmes sans y chercher avantage

Mais sûres assez des hommes que nous protégeons

Et jamais gibier

Nous nous serons

Ou objet

Donne

Ni odeur consentie

De bosquet sec

Verre nous disons

Pierre

Parcourue

On ne nous atteint que

Par barque

Ou par vent

Lointaine giration qui se distribue

Celle que nous utilisons pour parvenir á

Nous sustenter

D’amarre présupposée

Où nous nous fixons

Séparées des autres et tout prés (NPL 1974 : 39-40)
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