HÉLÈNE CIXOUS, ONE OF THE MOST influential theoreticians of French feminist thought, claims in *The Newly Born Woman* that “we are living in an age where the conceptual foundation of an ancient culture is in the process of being undermined.” Drawing on poststructural philosophy, Cixous’s writing brings into the contemporary theoretical discussions a uniquely forceful argument about gendered identity, discursive transgressions, rebellions and resistance, about the place of women’s writing in the patriarchal sexual, social, and linguistic order, and, ultimately, about the need to dispute Western phallogocentric discourse that has historically excluded the female subject from discursive productions. Asking poignantly about the place of women within philosophical and literary history, “Where is she?” Cixous claims, “Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought.” And later on, she adds, “Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman’s abasement.”

Cixous’s project, thus, aims at pointing to the violence of hierarchical, binaristic oppositions that historically construct and bind ways of Western thought—that is, dismantling the privileged logical system that denies women’s agency and the possibility of self-representation in diverse ways. Such dualistic pairs as activity/passivity, culture/nature, head/heart, superior/inferior speak about the ways in which philosophical systems are organized around, as she writes, “‘the’ couple, man/woman.” Aware that women cannot simply abandon the symbolic and its history and invent a completely new language, she posits the notion of *écriture féminine*, which involves the concept of *voler*. This French verb means both “stealing” and “flying,” and Cixous argues that this is the act that female writers need to perform in order to claim their own discursive space. Thus, *écriture féminine* does not appropriate the masculine power, but instead “steals” language and captures its structure only to make it fly, to move its stable paradigm. This theft of the available resources suggests the possibility of shifting and relocating the fixed meaning in the realm of the symbolic order.
Cixous’s desire to re-conceptualize the discourse of philosophy is perhaps best evident in her own way of writing, which shows how “stealing” and “flying” work. Mixing poetry and theory, highly emotional tone with argumentative stance, she problematizes the question of philosophical style by displaying that content and form exist and work together in fusion and cannot be separated. By writing a theoretical piece in a passionate, highly visual and poetic way, she, of course, risks the accusation of being “emotional” and not “rational.” But this is precisely her goal—she wants to demonstrate how writing lingers in the space of *différance* and how being discursively passionate and sensual does not have to signify irrationality. (She draws on Derrida’s critique of the logocentric constitution of Western thinking, and on his contention of language which through both difference and deferral always occupies the space of *différance*).

In order to dispute phallogocentric discourse and to claim *écriture féminine* in cultural terms, Cixous engages the concept of “bisexuality.” Her idea of bisexuality embraces the notion of the subject that recognizes otherness in itself, and “permits” the possibility of mergence of all kinds of “Is.” She calls bisexuality “the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes,” and describes it as the unfixed space of fluidity, mobility, inviting and accepting the other in oneself. Such a view of bisexuality not only undermines the traditional category of closure in women, men, language, and writing, but also celebrates the inclusion of difference.

As you read this selection, consider these three questions: “Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman’s abasement,” Cixous claims. Explore her assertion, paying particular attention to her discussion of the binary logic. Cixous writes, “We are living in an age where the conceptual foundation of an ancient culture is in the process of being undermined.” Analyzing this statement explain how one might conceptualize the condition of postmodernity. Examine Cixous’s notion of *écriture féminine* and the way it opens up a new discursive space within contemporary theoretical discourse.

Where is she?
Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon
Culture/Nature
Day/Night
Father/Mother
Head/Heart
Intelligible/Palpable
Logos/Pathos.
Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.
Matter, concave, ground—where steps are taken, holding—and,
dumping-ground.
Man
Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its fig-
ures, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same
thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criti-
cism, centuries of representation and reflection.

Thought has always worked through opposition,

Speaking/Writing
Parole/Écriture
High/Low

Through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, leg-
ends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering inter-
venes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual,
irreconcilable; or sublatable, dialectical). And all these pairs of oppositions
are couples. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism sub-
jects thought—all concepts, codes and values—to a binary system, related to
“the” couple, man/woman?

Nature/History
Nature/Art
Nature/Mind
Passion/Action

Theory of culture, theory of society, symbolic systems in general—art,
religion, family, language—it is all developed while bringing the same
schemes to light. And the movement whereby each opposition is set up to
make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time, a war is let loose. Death is always at work.

Father/son Relations of authority, privilege, force.
The Word/Writing Relations: opposition, conflict, sublation, return.
Master/slave Violence. Repression.

We see that “victory” always comes down to the same thing: things get hierarchical. Organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between activity and passivity, which he uses to sustain himself. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity.

There are repercussions. Consulting the history of philosophy—since philosophical discourse both orders and reproduces all thought—one notices that it is marked by an absolute constant which orders values and which is precisely this opposition, activity/passivity.

Moreover, woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy. Whenever it is a question of woman, when one examines kinship structures, when a family model is brought into play. In fact, as soon as the question of ontology raises its head, as soon as one asks oneself “what is it?,” as soon as there is intended meaning. 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 woman in the calculations. Ultimately the world of “being” can function while precluding the mother. No need for a mother, as long as there is some motherliness: and it is the father, then, who acts the part, who is the mother. Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought. Which certainly means that she is not thought, that she does not enter into the oppositions, that she does not make a couple with the father (who makes a couple with the son).

There is Mallarmé’s tragic dream, that father’s lamentation on the mystery of paternity, that wrenches from the poet the mourning, the mourning of mournings, the death of the cherished son: this dream of marriage between father and son.—And there’s no mother then. A man’s dream when faced with death. Which always threatens him differently than it threatens a woman.

“a union
a marriage, splendid And dreams of filiation
—and with life that is masculine, dreams
still in me of God the father
I shall use it issuing from himself for . . . in his son—and so not mother then?” no mother then

She does not exist, she can not-be; but there has to be something of her. He keeps, then, of the woman on whom he is no longer dependent, only this space, always virginal, as matter to be subjected to the desire he wishes to impart.

And if we consult literary history, it is the same story. It all comes back to man—to his torment, his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father. There is an intrinsic connection between the philosophical and the literary (to the extent that it conveys meaning, literature is under the command of the philosophical) and the phallocentric. Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman’s abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery’s functioning.

Now it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallocentrism—bringing to light the fate dealt to woman, her burial—to threaten the stability of the masculine structure that passed itself off as eternal-natural, by conjuring up from femininity the reflections and hypotheses that are necessarily ruinous for the stronghold still in possession of authority. What would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble?

If some fine day it suddenly came out that the logocentric plan had always, inadmissibly, been to create a foundation for (to found and fund) phallocentrism, to guarantee the masculine order a rationale equal to history itself.

So all the history, all the stories would be there to retell differently; the future would be incalculable; the historic forces would and will change hands and change body—another thought which is yet unthinkable—will transform the functioning of all society. We are living in an age where the conceptual foundation of an ancient culture is in the process of being undermined by millions of a species of mole (Topoi, ground mines) never known before.

Night to his day—that has forever been the fantasy. Black to his white. Shut out of his system’s space, she is the repressed that ensures the system’s functioning.
Kept at a distance so that he can enjoy the ambiguous advantages of the
distance, so that she, who is distance and postponement, will keep alive the
enigma.

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**MURDER OF THE OTHER:**

I come, biographically, from a rebellion, from a violent and anguished direct
refusal to accept what is happening on the stage on whose edge I find I am
placed, as a result of the combined accidents of History. I had this strange
“luck”: a couple of rolls of the dice, a meeting between two trajectories of
the diaspora, and, at the end of these routes of expulsion and dispersion that
mark the functioning of western History through the displacements of Jews,
I fall.—I am born—right in the middle of a scene that is the perfect exam-
ple, the naked model, the raw idea of this very process: I learned to read, to
write, to scream, and to vomit in Algeria. Today I know from experience that
one cannot imagine what an Algerian French girl was; you have to have been
it, to have gone through it. To have seen “Frenchmen” at the “height” of
imperialist blindness, behaving in a country that was inhabited by humans as
if it were peopled by nonbeings, born-slaves. I learned everything from this
first spectacle: I saw how the white (French), superior, plutocratic, civilized
world founded its power on the repression of populations who had suddenly
become “invisible,” like proletarians, immigrant workers, minorities who are
not the right “color.” Women. Invisible as humans. But, of course, perceived
as tools—dirty, stupid, lazy, underhanded, etc. Thanks to some annihilating
dialectical magic. I saw that the great, noble, “advanced” countries estab-
lished themselves by expelling what was “strange”; excluding it but not dis-
missing it; enslaving it. A commonplace gesture of History: there have to be
two races—the masters and the slaves.

We know the implied irony in the master/slave dialectic: the body of
what is strange must not disappear, but its force must be conquered and
returned to the master. Both the appropriate and the inappropriate must exist:
the clean, hence the dirty; the rich, hence the poor; etc.

So I am three or four years old and the first thing I see in the street is
that the world is divided in half, organized hierarchically, and that it main-
tains this distribution through violence. I see that there are those who beg,
who die of hunger, misery, and despair, and that there are offenders who die
of wealth and pride, who stuff themselves, who crush and humiliate. Who
kill. And who walk around in a stolen country as if they had had the eyes of their souls put out. Without seeing that the others are alive.

Already I know all about the “reality” that supports History’s progress: everything throughout the centuries depends on the distinction between the Selfsame, the ownself (—what is mine, hence what is good) and that which limits it: so now what menaces my-own-good (good never being anything other than what is good-for-me) is the “other.” What is the “Other”? If it is truly the “other,” there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorized. The “other” escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other. It doesn’t settle down. But in History, of course, what is called “other” is an alterity that does settle down, that falls into the dialectical circle. It is the other in a hierarchically organized relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns “its” other. With the dreadful simplicity that orders the movement Hegel erected as a system, society trots along before my eyes reproducing to perfection the mechanism of the death struggle: the reduction of a “person” to a “nobody” to the position of “other”—the inexorable plot of racism. 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—an exclusion that has its limits and is part of the dialectic. If there were no other, one would invent it. Besides, that is what masters do: they have their slaves made to order. Line for line. They assemble the machine and keep the alternator supplied so that it reproduces all the oppositions that make economy and thought run.

The paradox of otherness is that, of course, at no moment in History is it tolerated or possible as such. The other is there only to be reappropriated. recaptured, and destroyed as other. Even the exclusion is not an exclusion. Algeria was not France, but it was “French.”

**The Masculine Future**

There are some exceptions. There have always been those uncertain, poetic persons who have not let themselves be reduced to dummies programmed by pitiless repression of the homosexual element. Men or women: beings who are complex, mobile, open. Accepting the other sex as a component makes them much richer, more various, stronger, and—to the extent that they are mobile—very fragile. It is only in this condition that we invent. Thinkers, artists, those who create new values, “philosophers” in the mad Nietzschean
manner, inventors and wreckers of concepts and forms, those who change life cannot help but be stirred by anomalies—complementary or contradictory. That doesn’t mean that you have to be homosexual to create. But it does mean that there is no invention possible, whether it be philosophical or poetic, without there being in the inventing subject an abundance of the other, of variety: separate-people, thought-/people, whole populations issuing from the unconscious, and in each suddenly animated desert, the springing up of selves one didn’t know—our women, our monsters, our jackals, our Arabs, our aliases, our frights. That there is no invention of any other I, no poetry, no fiction without a certain homosexuality (the I/play of bisexuality) acting as a crystallization of my ultrasubjectivities.” I is this exuberant, gay, personal matter, masculine, feminine or other where I enchants, I agonizes me. And in the concert of personalizations called I, at the same time that a certain homosexuality is repressed, symbolically, substitutively, it comes through by various signs, conduct-character, behavior-acts. And it is even more clearly seen in writing.

Thus, what is inscribed under Jean Genêt’s name, in the movement of a text that divides itself, pulls itself to pieces, dismembers itself, regroups, remembers itself, is a proliferating, maternal femininity. A phantasmic meld of men, males, gentlemen, monarchs, princes, orphans, flowers, mothers, breasts gravitates about a wonderful “sun of energy”—love,—that bombards and disintegrates these ephemeral amorous anomalies so that they can be recomposed in other bodies for new passions.

**SHE IS BISEXUAL:**

What I propose here leads directly to a reconsideration of bisexuality. To reassert the value of bisexuality; hence to snatch it from the fate classically reserved for it in which it is conceptualized as “neuter” because, as such, it would aim at warding off castration. Therefore, I shall distinguish between two bisexualities, two opposite ways of imagining the possibility and practice of bisexuality.

1) Bisexuality as a fantasy of a complete being, which replaces the fear of castration and veils sexual difference insofar as this is perceived as the mark of a mythical separation—the trace, therefore, of a dangerous and painful ability to be cut. Ovid’s Hermaphrodite, less bisexual than asexual, not made up of two genders but of two halves. Hence, a fantasy of unity. Two within one, and not even two wholes.
2) To this bisexuality that melts together and effaces, wishing to avert castration, I oppose the *other bisexuality*, the one with which every subject, who is not shut up inside the spurious Phallocentric Performing Theater, sets up his or her erotic universe. Bisexuality—that is to say the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex, and starting with this “permission” one gives oneself, the multiplication of the effects of desire’s inscription on every part of the body and the other body.

For historical reasons, at the present time it is woman who benefits from and opens up within this bisexuality beside itself, which does not annihilate differences but cheers them on, pursues them, adds more: in a certain way woman is bisexual—man having been trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality. By insisting on the primacy of the phallus and implementing it, phallocratic ideology has produced more than one victim. As a woman, I could be obsessed by the scepter’s great shadow, and they told me: adore it, that thing you don’t wield.

But at the same time, man has been given the grotesque and unenviable fate of being reduced to a single idol with clay balls. And terrified of homosexuality, as Freud and his followers remark. Why does man fear *being* a woman? Why this refusal (*Ablehnung*) of femininity? The question that stumps Freud. The “bare rock” of castration. For Freud, the repressed is not the other sex defeated by the dominant sex, as his friend Fliess (to whom Freud owes the theory of bisexuality) believed; what is repressed is leaning toward one’s own sex.

Psychoanalysis is formed on the basis of woman and has repressed (not all that successfully) the femininity of masculine sexuality, and now the account it gives is hard to disprove.

We women, the derangers, know it only too well. But nothing compels us to deposit our lives in these lack-banks; to think that the subject is constituted as the last stage in a drama of bruising rehearsals; to endlessly bail out the father’s religion. Because we don’t desire it. We don’t go round and round the supreme hole. We have no woman’s reason to pay allegiance to the negative. What is feminine (the poets suspected it) affirms: . . . and yes I said yes I will Yes, says Molly (in her rapture), carrying *Ulysses* with her in the direction of a new writing; I said yes, I will Yes.

To say that woman is somehow bisexual is an apparently paradoxical way of displacing and reviving the question of difference. And therefore of writing as “feminine” or “masculine.”
I will say: today, writing is woman’s. That is not a provocation, it means that woman admits there is an other. In her becoming-woman, she has not erased the bisexuality latent in the girl as in the boy. Femininity and bisexuality go together, in a combination that varies according to the individual, spreading the intensity of its force differently and (depending on the moments of their history) privileging one component or another. It is much harder for man to let the other come through him. Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who?—a feminine one, a masculine one, some?—several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars. This peopling gives neither rest nor security, always disturbs the relationship to “reality,” produces an uncertainty that gets in the way of the subject’s socialization. It is distressing, it wears you out; and for men this permeability, this nonexclusion is a threat, something intolerable.

In the past, when carried to a rather spectacular degree, it was called “possession.” Being possessed is not desirable for a masculine Imaginary, which would interpret it as passivity—a dangerous feminine position. It is true that a certain receptivity is “feminine.” One can, of course, as History has always done, exploit feminine reception through alienation. A woman, by her opening up, is open to being “possessed,” which is to say, dispossessed of herself.

But I am speaking here of femininity as keeping alive the other that is confided to her, that visits her, that she can love as other. The loving to be other, another, without its necessarily going the rout of abasing what is same, herself.

As for passivity, in excess, it is partly bound up with death. But there is a nonclosure that is not submission but confidence and comprehension; that is not an opportunity for destruction but for wonderful expansion.

Through the same opening that is her danger, she comes out of herself to go to the other, a traveler in unexplored places; she does not refuse, she approaches, not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be.

Writing is working; being worked; questioning (in) the between (letting oneself be questioned) of same and of other without which nothing lives; undoing death’s work by willing the togetherness of one-another, infinitely charged with a ceaseless exchange of one with another—not knowing one
another and beginning again only from what is most distant, from self, from other, from the other within. A course that multiplies transformations by the thousands.

And that is not done without danger, without pain, without loss—of moments of self, of consciousness, of persons one has been, goes beyond, leaves. It doesn’t happen without expense—of sense, time, direction.

But is that specifically feminine? It is men who have inscribed, described, theorized the paradoxical logic of an economy without reserve. This is not contradictory; it brings us back to asking about their femininity. Rare are the men able to venture onto the brink where writing, freed from law, unencumbered by moderation, exceeds phallic authority, and where the subjectivity inscribing its effects becomes feminine.

Where does difference come through in writing? If there is difference it is in the manner of spending, of valorizing the appropriated, of thinking what is not-the-same. In general, it is in the manner of thinking any “return,” the relationship of capitalization, if this word “return” (rapport) is understood in its sense of “revenue.”

Today, still, the masculine return to the Selfsame is narrower and more restricted than femininity’s. It all happens as if man were more directly threatened in his being by the nonselfsame than woman. Ordinarily, this is exactly the cultural product described by psychoanalysis: someone who still has something to lose. And in the development of desire, of exchange, he is the en-grossing party: loss and expense are stuck in the commercial deal that always turns the gift into a gift-that-takes. The gift brings in a return. Loss, at the end of a curved line, is turned into its opposite and comes back to him as profit.

But does woman escape this law of return? Can one speak of another spending? Really, there is no “free” gift. You never give something for nothing. But all the difference lies in the why and how of the gift, in the values that the gesture of giving affirms, causes to circulate; in the type of profit the giver draws from the gift and the use to which he or she puts it. Why, how, is there this difference?

**WHEN ONE GIVES, WHAT DOES ONE GIVE ONESELF?**

What does he want in return—the traditional man? And she? At first what he wants, whether on the level of cultural or of personal exchanges, whether it is a question of capital or of affectivity (or of love, of jouissance)—is that he gain more masculinity: plus-value of virility, authority, power, money, or
pleasure, all of which reinforce his phallocentric narcissism at the same
time. Moreover, that is what society is made for—how it is made; and men
can hardly get out of it. An unenviable fate they’ve made for themselves. A
man is always proving something; he has to “show off,” show up the others.
Masculine profit is almost always mixed up with a success that is socially
defined.

How does she give? What are her dealings with saving or squandering,
reserve, life, “death”? She too gives for. She too, with open hands, gives her-
self—pleasure, happiness, increased value, enhanced self-image. But she
doesn’t try to “recover her expenses.” She is able not to return to herself,
ever settling down, pouring out, going everywhere to the other. She does
not flee extremes; she is not the being-of-the-end (the goal), but she is how-
far-being-reaches.

If there is a self proper to woman, paradoxically it is her capacity to
depropriate herself without self-interest: endless body, without “end,” with-
out principal “parts”; if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are
wholes, not simple, partial objects but varied entirety, moving and boundless
change, a cosmos where eros never stops traveling, vast astral space. She
doesn’t revolve around a sun that is more star than the stars.

That doesn’t mean that she is undifferentiated magma, it means that she
doesn’t create a monarchy of her body or her desire. Let masculine sexuality
gravitate around the penis, engendering this centralized body (political
anatomy) under the party dictatorship. Woman does not perform on herself
this regionalization that profits the couple head-sex, that only inscribes itself
within frontiers. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide:
her writing also can only go on and on, without ever inscribing or distin-
guishing contours, daring these dizzying passages in other, fleeting and pas-
ionate dwellings within him, within the hims and hers whom she inhabits
just long enough to watch them, as close as possible to the unconscious from
the moment they arise; to love them, as close as possible to instinctual
drives, and then, further, all filled with these brief identifying hugs and
kisses, she goes and goes on infinitely. She alone dares and wants to know
from within where she, the one excluded, has never ceased to hear what-
comes-before-language reverberating. She lets the other tongue of a thou-
sand tongues speak—the tongue, sound without barrier or death. She refuses
life nothing. Her tongue doesn’t hold back but holds forth, doesn’t keep in
but keeps on enabling. Where the wonder of being several and turmoil is
expressed, she does not protect herself against these unknown feminines; she
surprises herself at seeing, being, pleasuring in her gift of changeability. I am spacious singing Flesh: onto which is grafted no one knows which I—which masculine or feminine, more or less human but above all living, because changing I.

I see her “begin.” That can be written—these beginnings that never stop getting her up—can and must be written. Neither black on white nor white on black, not in this clash between paper and sign that en-graves itself there, not in this opposition of colors that stand out against each other. This is how it is:

There is a ground, it is her ground—childhood flesh, shining blood—or background, depth. A white depth, a core, unforgettable, forgotten, and this ground, covered by an infinite number of strata, layers, sheets of paper—is her sun (sol . . . soleil). And nothing can put it out. Feminine light doesn’t come from above, doesn’t fall, doesn’t strike, doesn’t go through. It radiates, it is a slow, sweet, difficult, absolutely unstoppable, painful rising that reaches and impregnates lands, that filters, that wells up, that finally tears open, wets and spreads apart what is dull and thick, the stolid, the volumes. Fighting off opacity from deep within. This light doesn’t plant, it spawns. And I see that she looks very closely with this light and she sees the veins and nerves of matter. Which he has no need of.

Her rising: is not erection. But diffusion. Not the shaft. The vessel. Let her write! And her text knows in seeking itself that it is more than flesh and blood, dough kneading itself, rising, uprising openly with resounding, perfumed ingredients, a turbulent compound of flying colors, leafy spaces, and rivers flowing to the sea we feed.

So! Now she’s her sea, he’ll say to me (as he holds out to me his basin full of water from the little phallic mother he doesn’t succeed in separating himself from). Seas and mothers.

But that’s it—our seas are what we make them, fishy or not, impenetrable or muddled, red or black, high and rough or flat and smooth, narrow straits or shoreless, and we ourselves are sea, sands, corals, seaweeds, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves . . . seas and mothers.

More or less vaguely swelling like wavesurge indistinctly sea-earth-naked, and what matter made of this naked sea-rth would deter us? We all know how to finger them, mouth them. Feel them, speak them.

Heterogenous, yes, to her joyful benefit, she is erogenous; she is what is erogenous in the heterogenous; she is not attached to herself, the airborne swimmer, the thieving flyer. Stunning, extravagant, one who is dispersible,
desiring and capable of other, of the other woman she will be, of the other woman she is not, of him, of you.

Woman (I) have no fear of elsewhere or of same or of other. My eyes, my tongue, my ears, my nose, my skin, my mouth, my body for (the) other, not that I desire it to stop up some hole, to overcome some flaw of mine, not because I am fatefully hounded by “feminine” jealousy, not because I am caught up in the chain of substitutions that reduces the substitutes to one ultimate object. It’s all over for the stories of Tom Thumb and of the Penisneid that the old grandmothers whispered to us, those ogresses serving their son-fathers. Let them believe what they need to make themselves feel important—believe we are dying of envy, that we are this hole edged with penis envy; that’s their age-old deal. Undeniably (we confirm this at a cost to us but also to our amusement), men are structured only for the feathering of their shafts to let us know they have a hard-on; so we will assure them (we, the motherly mistresses of their little pocket signifier) that they are something, that they still have them. It is not the penis that woman desires in the child, it is not that hot-shot piece around which every man gravitates. Except within the historical limits of the Ancient world, gestation doesn’t come down to coincidences, to those mechanical substitutions that the unconscious of an eternally “jealous woman” puts in place, or to the Penisneid, or to narcissism, or to a homosexuality linked to the always-there-mother.

The relation borne to the child must also be rethought. One trend of current feminist thought tends to denounce a trap in maternity that would consist of making the mother-woman an agent who is more or less the accomplice of reproduction: capitalist, familialist, phallocentrist reproduction. An accusation and a caution that should not be turned into prohibition, into a new form of repression.

Will, you, too, discounting everyone’s blindness and passivity, be afraid the child might make a father and hence that the woman making a kid plays herself more than one dirty trick, engendering the child—the mother—the father—the family all at the same time? No, it’s up to you to break the old circuits. It will be the task of woman and man to make the old relationship and all its consequences out-of-date; to think the launching of a new subject, into life, with defamiliarization. Rather than depriving woman of a fascinating time in the life of her body just to guard against procreation’s being recuperated, let’s de-materpaternalize. Let’s defetishize. Let’s get out of the dialectic that claims that the child is its parents’ death. The child is the other but the other without violence. The other rhythm, the pure freshness, the pos-
sibles’ body. Complete fragility. But vastness itself. Let’s be done with repeating the litany of castration that transmits and pedigrees itself. We’re not going to back up to go forward anymore. Let’s not repress something as simple as wanting to live life itself. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive, all drives are good forces, and among them the gestational drive—just like wanting to write: a desire to live oneself within, wanting the belly, the tongue, the blood. We are not going to refuse ourselves the delights of a pregnancy, which, moreover, is always dramatized or evaded or cursed in classical texts. For if there is a specific thing repressed, that is where it is found: the taboo of the pregnant woman (which says a lot about the power that seems invested in her). It is because they have always suspected that the pregnant woman not only doubles her market value but, especially, valorizes herself as a woman in her own eyes, and undeniably takes on weight and sex. There are a thousand ways of living a pregnancy, of having or not having a relationship of another intensity with this still invisible other.

Really experiencing metamorphosis. Several, other, and unforeseeable. That cannot but inscribe in the body the good possibility of an alteration. It is not only a question of the feminine body’s extra resource, this specific power to produce some thing living of which her flesh is the locus, not only a question of a transformation of rhythms, exchanges, of relationship to space, of the whole perceptive system, but also of the irreplaceable experience of those moments of stress, of the body’s crises, of that work that goes on peacefully for a long time only to burst out in that surpassing moment, the time of childbirth. In which she lives as if she were larger or stronger than herself. It is also the experience of a “bond” with the other, all that comes through in the metaphor of bringing into the world. How could the woman, who has experienced the not-me within me, not have a particular relationship to the written? To writing as giving itself away (cutting itself off) from the source?

There is a bond between woman’s libidinal economy—her jouissance, the feminine Imaginary—and her way of self-constituting a subjectivity that splits apart without regret, and without this regretlessness being the equivalent of dying, of the exhaustion described by Valéry as the Young Fate—answering herself with anomalies, without the ceaseless summoning of the authority called Ego.

Unleashed and raging, she belongs to the race of waves. She arises, she approaches, she lifts up, she reaches, covers over, washes a shore, flows embracing the cliffs least undulation, already she is another, arising again,
throwing the fringed vastness of her body up high, follows herself, and covers over, uncovers, polishes, makes the stone body shine with the gentle undeserting ebbs, which return to the shoreless nonorigin, as if she recalled herself in order to come again as never before . . .

She has never “held still”; explosion, diffusion, effervescence, abundance, she takes pleasure in being boundless, outside self, outside same, far from a “center,” from any capital of her “dark continent,” very far from the “hearth” to which man brings her so that she will tend his fire, which always threatens to go out. She watches for him, but he has to keep an eye on her; for she can be his storm as well: “will I die by a storm? Or will I go out like a light that doesn’t wait to be blown out by the wind, but which dies tired and self-satisfied? . . . or: will I extinguish my own self in order not to burn down to the end?” Masculine energy, with its limited oil reserves, questions itself. Whereas, the fact that feminine energy has vast resources is not without consequences—still very rarely analyzed—for exchange in general, for love-life, and for the fate created for woman’s desire. Exasperating: he’s afraid she “goes too far.” And the irony of her fate has her either be this “nothing,” which punctuates the Dora case—(“You know my wife is nothing to me”)—or this too-much, too-much reversed into not-enough, the “not how it should be” that reminds her that her master is on the limited side.

She doesn’t hold still, she overflows. An outpouring that can be agonizing, since she may fear, and make the other fear, endless aberration and madness in her release. Yet, vertiginous, it can also be intoxicating—as long as the personal, the permanence of identity is not fetishized—a “where-am-I,” a “who-enjoys-there,” a “who-I-where-delight”: questions that drive reason, the principle of unity, mad, and that are not asked, that ask for no answer, that open up the space where woman is wandering, roaming (a rogue wave), flying (thieving).

This power to be errant is strength; it is also what makes her vulnerable to those who champion the Selfsame, acknowledgment, and attribution. No matter how submissive and docile she may be in relation to the masculine order, she still remains the threatening possibility of savagery, the unknown quantity in the household whole.

“Mysterious”—the incalculable with which they must be counted. — Mysterious, yes—but she is blamed for that even if pleasure is derived from always wanting to expose her. And mysterious to herself, something she has been disturbed by for a long time, made to feel guilty for “not understanding herself” (taking herself in) or knowing herself (cunt-born), because all
around her they valorized a “knowledge” (cunt-birth) as ordained, as a mastery, a “control” (cunt-role) (of knowings! cunt-births!) established on repression and on “capture,” arrest, sub-poenis, confinement.

**Writing femininity transformation:**

And there is a link between the economy of femininity—the open, extravagant subjectivity, that relationship to the other in which the gift doesn’t calculate its influence—and the possibility of love; and a link today between this “libido of the other” and writing.

At the present time, defining a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded, which does not mean it does not exist. But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallocentric system; it takes place and will take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. It will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, border runners never subjugated by any authority. But one can begin to speak. Begin to point out some effects, some elements of unconscious drives, some relations of the feminine Imaginary to the Real, to writing.

What I have to say about it is also only a beginning, because right from the start these features affect me powerfully.

First I sense femininity in writing by: a privilege of voice: writing and voice are entwined and interwoven and writing’s continuity/voices rhythm take each other’s breath away through interchanging, make the text gasp or form it out of suspenses and silences, make it lose its voice or rend it with cries.

In a way, feminine writing never stops reverberating from the wrench that the acquisition of speech, speaking out loud, is for her—“acquisition” that is experienced more as tearing away, dizzying flight and flinging oneself, diving. Listen to woman speak in a gathering (if she is not painfully out of breath): she doesn’t “speak,” she throws her trembling body into the air, she lets herself go, she flies, she goes completely into her voice, she vitally defends the “logic” of her discourse with her body; her flesh speaks true. She exposes herself. Really she makes what she thinks materialize carnally, she conveys meaning with her body. She inscribes what she is saying because she does not deny unconscious drives the unmanageable part they play in speech.

Her discourse, even when “theoretical” or political, is never simple or linear or “objectivized,” universalized; she involves her story in history.
Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking—even just opening her mouth—in public is something rash, a transgression.

A double anguish, for even if she transgresses, her word almost always falls on the deaf, masculine car, which can only hear language that speaks in the masculine.

We are not culturally accustomed to speaking, throwing signs out toward a scene, employing the suitable rhetoric. Also, it is not where we find our pleasure: indeed, one pays a certain price for the use of a discourse. The logic of communication requires an economy both of signs—of signifiers—and of subjectivity. The orator is asked to unwind a thin thread, dry and taut. We like uneasiness, questioning. There is waste in what we say. We need that waste. To write is always to make allowances for superabundance and uselessness while slashing the exchange value that keeps the spoken word on its track. That is why writing is good, letting the tongue try itself out—as one attempts a caress, taking the time a phrase or a thought needs to make oneself loved, to make oneself reverberate.

It is in writing, from woman and toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence, the place reserved for her in and through the Symbolic. May she get out of booby-trapped silence! And not have the margin or the harem foisted on her as her domain!

In feminine speech, as in writing, there never stops reverberating something that, having once passed through us, having imperceptibly and deeply touched us, still has the power to affect us—song, the first music of the voice of love, which every woman keeps alive.

The Voice sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one’s breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation. The deepest, the oldest, the loveliest Visitation. Within each woman the first, nameless love is singing.

In woman there is always, more or less, something of “the mother” repairing and feeding, resisting separation, a force that does not let itself be cut off but that runs codes ragged. The relationship to childhood (the child she was, she is, she acts and makes and starts anew, and unties at the place where, as a same she even others herself), is no more cut off than is the relationship to the “mother,” as it consists of delights and violences. Text, my body: traversed by lilting flows; listen to me, it is not a captivating, clinging
“mother”; it is the equivoice that, touching you, affects you, pushes you away from your breast to come to language, that summons your strength; it is the rhythm that laughs you; the one intimately addressed who makes all metaphors, all body(bodies)—possible and desirable, who is no more describable than god, soul, or the Other; the part of you that puts space between yourself and pushes you to inscribe your woman’s style in language. Voice: milk that could go on forever. Found again. The lost mother/bitter-lost. Eternity: is voice mixed with milk.

Not the origin: she doesn’t go back there. A boy’s journey is the return to the native land, the Heimweh Freud speaks of, the nostalgia that makes man a being who tends to come back to the point of departure to appropriate it for himself and to die there. A girl’s journey is farther—to the unknown, to invent.

How come this privileged relationship with voice? Because no woman piles up as many defenses against instinctual drives as a man does. You don’t prop things up, you don’t brick things up the way he does, you don’t withdraw from pleasure so “prudently.” Even if phallic mystification has contaminated good relations in general, woman is never far from the “mother” (I do not mean the role but the “mother” as no-name and as source of goods), There is always at least a little good mother milk left in her. She writes with white ink.

Voice! That, too, is launching forth and effusion without return. Exclamation, cry, breathlessness, yell, cough, vomit, music. Voice leaves. Voice loses. She leaves. She loses. And that is how she writes, as one throws a voice forward, into the void. She goes away, she goes forward, doesn’t turn back to look at her tracks. Pays no attention to herself. Running breakneck. Contrary to the self-absorbed, masculine narcissism, making sure of its image, of being seen, of seeing itself, of assembling its glories, of pocketing itself again. The reductive look, the always divided look returning, the mirror economy; he needs to love himself. But she launches forth; she seeks to love. Moreover, this is what Valéry sensed, marking his Young Fate in search of herself with ambiguity, masculine in her jealousy of herself: “seeing herself see herself,” the motto of all phallocentric speculation/specularization, the motto of every Teste; and feminine in the frantic descent deeper deeper to where a voice that doesn’t know itself is lost in the sea’s churning.

Voice-cry. Agony—the spoken “word” exploded, blown to bits by suffering and anger, demolishing discourse: this is how she has always been heard
before, ever since the time when masculine society began to push her off-stage, expulsing her, plundering her. Ever since Medea, ever since Electra.

Voice: unfastening, fracas. Fire! She shoots, she shoots away. Break. From their bodies where they have been buried, shut up and at the same time forbidden to take pleasure. Women have almost everything to write about femininity: about their sexuality, that is to say, about the infinite and mobile complexity of their becoming erotic, about the lightning ignitions of such a minuscule-vast region of their body, not about destiny but about the adventure of such an urge, the voyages, crossings, advances, sudden and slow awakenings, discoveries of a formerly timid region that is just now springing up. Woman’s body with a thousand and one fiery hearths, when—shattering censorship and yokes—she lets it articulate the proliferation of meanings that runs through it in every direction. It is going to take much more than language for him to make the ancient maternal tongue sound in only one groove.

We have turned away from our bodies. Shamefully we have been taught to be unaware of them, to lash them with stupid modesty; we’ve been tricked into a fool’s bargain: each one is to love the other sex. I’ll give you your body and you will give me mine. But which men give women the body that they blindly hand over to him? Why so few texts? Because there are still so few women winning back their bodies. Woman must write her body, must make up the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes, and rhetorics, orders and codes, must inundate, run through, go beyond the discourse with its last reserves, including the one of laughing off the word “silence” that has to be said, the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops dead before the word “impossible” and writes it as “end.”

In body/Still more: woman is body more than man is. Because he is invited to social success, to sublimation. More body hence more writing. For a long time, still, bodily, within her body she has answered the harassment, the familial conjugal venture of domestication, the repeated attempts to castrate her. Woman, who has run her tongue ten thousand times seven times around her mouth before not speaking, either dies of it or knows her tongue and her mouth better than anyone. Now, I-woman am going to blow up the Law: a possible and inescapable explosion from now on; let it happen, right now, in language.

When “The Repressed” of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before, on the scale of the most tremendous
repressions: for at the end of the Age of the Phallus, women will have been either wiped out or heated to the highest, most violent, white-hot fire. Throughout their deafening dumb history, they have lived in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellions.

And with what force in their fragility: “fragility,” a vulnerability to match their matchless intensity. Women have not sublimated. Fortunately. They have saved their skins and their energy. They haven’t worked at planning the impass of futureless lives. They have furiously inhabited these sumptuous bodies. Those wonderful hysterics, who subjected Freud to so many voluptuous moments too shameful to mention, bombarding his mosaic statue/law of Moses with their carnal, passionate body-words, haunting him with their inaudible thundering denunciations, were more than just naked beneath their seven veils of modesty—they were dazzling. In a single word of the body they inscribed the endless vertigo of a history loosed like an arrow from all of men’s history, from biblicocapitalist society. Following these yesterday’s victims of torture, who anticipate the new women, no intersubjective relationship will ever be the same. It is you, Dora, you, who cannot be tamed, the poetic body, the true “mistress” of the Signifier. Before tomorrow your effectiveness will be seen to work—when your words will no longer be retracted, pointed against your own breast, but will write themselves against the other and against men’s grammar. Men must not have that place for their own any more than they have us for our own.

If woman has always functioned “within” man’s discourse, a signifier referring always to the opposing signifier that annihilates its particular energy, puts down or stifles its very different sounds, now it is time for her to displace this “within,” explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, take it in, take it into her women’s mouth, bite its tongue with her women’s teeth, make up her own tongue to get inside of it. And you will see how easily she will well up, from this “within” where she was hidden and dormant, to the lips where her foams will overflow.

It is not a question of appropriating their instruments, their concepts, their places for oneself or of wishing oneself in their position of mastery. Our knowing that there is a danger of identification does not mean we should give in. Leave that to the worriers, to masculine anxiety and its obsessional relationship to workings they must control—knowing “how it runs” in order to “make it run.” Not taking possession to internalize or manipulate but to shoot through and smash the walls.
Feminine strength is such that while running away with syntax, breaking the famous line (just a tiny little thread, so they say) that serves men as a substitute cord, without which they can’t have any fun (jouir), to make sure the old mother really is always behind them watching them play phallus, she goes to the impossible where she plays the other, for love, without dying of it.

*De-propriation, depersonalization,* because she, exasperating, immoderate, and contradictory, destroys laws, the “natural” order. She lifts the bar separating the present from the future, breaking the rigid law of individuation. Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy,* said that this is the privilege of divinatory, magical forces. What happens to the subject, to the personal pronoun, to its possessives when, suddenly, gaily daring her metamorphoses (because from her within—for a long time her world, she is in a pervasive relationship of desire with every being) she makes another way of knowing circulate? Another way of producing, of communicating, where each one is always far more than one, where her power of identification puts the same to rout.—And with the same traversing, dispersing gesture with which she becomes a feminine other, a masculine other, she breaks with explanation, interpretation, and all the authorities pinpointing localization. She forgets. She proceeds by lapse and bounds. She flies/steals.

To fly/steal is woman’s gesture, to steal into language to make it fly. We have all learned flight/theft, the art with many techniques, for all the centuries we have only had access to having by stealing/flying; we have lived in a flight/theft, stealing/flying, finding the close, concealed ways-through of desire. It’s not just luck if the word “voler” volleyes between the “vol” of theft and the “vol” of flight, pleasuring in each and routing the sense police. It is not just luck: woman partakes of bird and burglar, just as the burglar partakes of woman and bird: hesheits pass, hesheits fly by, hesheits pleasure in scrambling spatial order, disorienting it, moving furniture, things, and values around, breaking in, emptying structures, turning the selfsame, the proper upside down.

What woman has not stolen? Who has not dreamed, savored, or done the thing that jams sociality? Who has not dropped a few red herrings, mocked her way around the separating bar, inscribed what makes a difference with her body, punched holes in the system of couples and positions, and with a transgression screwed up whatever is successive, chain-linked, the fence of circumfusion?

A feminine text cannot not be more than subversive: if it writes itself it is in volcanic heaving of the old “real” property crust. In ceaseless displacement. She must write herself because, when the time comes for her libera-
tion, it is the invention of a *new, insurgent* writing that will allow her to put the breaks and indispensable changes into effect in her history. At first, individually, on two inseparable levels: —woman, writing herself, will go back to this body that has been worse than confiscated, a body replaced with a disturbing stranger, sick or dead, who so often is a bad influence, the cause and place of inhibitions. By censuring the body, breath and speech are censored at the same time.

To write—the act that will “realize” the un-censored relationship of woman to her sexuality, to her woman-being giving her back access to her own forces; that will return her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her vast bodily territories kept under seal; that will tear her out of the superegoed, over-Mosessed structure where the same position of guilt is always reserved for her (guilty of everything, every time: of having desires, of not having any; of being frigid, of being “too” hot; of not being both at once; of being too much of a mother and not enough, of nurturing and of not nurturing . . . ). Write yourself, your body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst out. Finally the inexhaustible feminine Imaginary is going to be deployed. Without gold or black dollars, our naphtha will spread values over the world, un-quoted values that will change the rules of the old game.

In the Selfsame Empire, where will the displacement’s person find somewhere to lose herself, to write her not-taking-place, her permanent availability.

But somewhere else? There will be some elsewhere where the other will no longer be condemned to death. But has there ever been any elsewhere, is there any? While it is not yet “here,” it is there by now—in this other place that disrupts social order, where desire makes fiction exist. Not any old fiction, for, of course, there is classical fiction caught in the oppositions of the system, and literary history has been homogeneous with phallocentric tradition, to the point of being phallocentrism-looking-at-itself, taking pleasure in repeating itself.

But I move toward something that only exists in an elsewhere, and I search in the thought that writing has uncontrollable resources. That writing is what deals with the no-deal, relates to what gives no return. That something else (what history forbids, what reality excludes or doesn’t admit) can manifest itself there: some other. With the desire to keep this other alive—hence some living feminine—some difference—and some love; for example a desire, like the one that can unleash a woman, that goes all the way and
does not let itself be subjugated by anything. That imposes its necessity as a value without letting itself be intimidated by cultural blackmail, the sacrosanction of social structures. That does not organize life around the threat of death; because a life that has given up can no longer call itself life.

Hence, a “place” of intransigence and of passion. A place of lucidity where no one takes what is a pretense of existence for life. Desire is clearly there like a stroke of fire, it shoots the night through with something. Lightning! that way! I don’t have it wrong. Life is right here. Afterward, it’s death.

Sometimes I find where to put the many-lifed being that I am. Into elsewheres opened by men who are capable of becoming woman. For the huge machine that ticks and repeats its “truth” for all these centuries has had failures, or I wouldn’t be writing. There have been poets who let something different from tradition get through at any price—men able to love love; therefore, to love others, to want them; men able to think the woman who would resist destruction and constitute herself as a superb, equal, “impossible” subject, hence intolerable in the real social context. Only by breaking the codes denying her could the poet have desired that woman. Her appearance causing, if not a revolution, harrowing explosions. Sometimes, moreover, it is in the fissure made by an earthquake, when material upheaval causes radical change in things, when all structures are momentarily disoriented and a fleeting savagery sweeps order away, that the poet lets woman pass through for a brief interval. Kleist did so to the point of dying wishing that women who never lowered their heads—lover-sisters, maternal-daughters, mother-sisters—live. After it’s over, as soon as the magistrates’ courts are back in place, someone must pay: immediate and bloody death for these uncontrollable elements. (Only for poets, not for novelists who stick with representation. Poets because poetry exists only by taking strength from the unconscious, and the unconscious, the other country without boundaries, is where the repressed survive—women or, as Hoffmann would say, fairies.)

There was Kleist: all was passion then. Passions sweeping beyond the individual, on all levels. No more barriers. Michael Koolhaas is wonderful, going off to war against the moral and social universe, against the political and religious stronghold, against the State because of a tariff barrier. For a tariff barrier is enough to prevent any life that thinks it is beyond being a subjugated human. One gets beyond everything with Kleist and it is not called transgression. Because passion suddenly flares up in the world where that idea does not exist.