HER IMPENETRABLE PROSE: DISOBEDIENT POETICS AND NEW EROTIC COLLECTIVITIES IN EXPERIMENTAL WOMEN'S WRITING

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ABSTRACT

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The driving anxiety of this analysis is to trace the possibilities of attaining utopian consciousness in ontological and political actuality by means of interactions of feminist body, text and desire. I attempt to uncover the feminist body and text both as a material reality and a utopian locus of the poetic desire for the other, as they already live in the political here and now. This I perform in a set of co-created experimental feminist texts which are induced by and induce certain ontological and epistemological practices, lifestyles and modes of relating that do not identify with the values of dominant cultures. The pieces I try to unfasten are by Hélène Cixous, Mireille Calle-Gruber, Carole Maso and Jeanette Winterson.

I show how from the encounter with the aesthetic features of feminist experimental (inter)texts ensue certain epistemological changes. They enable us to perceive and enter the queer intersubjective collectivities broadly established all about this textual space. Here begins the structuring of a progressive utopian feminist ethics around the principle of displacing/tearing myself in the position of otherness. By systematic engagement with experimental texts' queer poetics and ethics, we are actually required to practice relating to the other in me and in us (me and you). Thus we reinforce utopian feminist collectivities and continue their embodiedness by entering them imaginatively and affectively.
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INTRODUCTION

my continent, i mean to talk about the radical
effect of light in broad daylight
today, i've held you close,
loved by every civilization, every
texture, every geometry and ember
delirious, as it is written: and
my body is enraptured

an intuition of reciprocal knowledges
women with curves of fire and eiderdown
fresh-skinned – essential surface
you float within my page’ she said

Nicole Brossard Lovehers

The future is dreamed about in lucid half-sleep by the sea, as one turns one's ear to the sound of waves so as to catch a song hushed behind of the procession of days to come (or of women on the beach) with eyes half-closed in order to see farther, look longer into the dazzle, in the vision. The pictures seen in this way recur and haunt: they evoke and invoke each other in the manner of echoes floating around the shores of a rocky island. Perhaps, over the pages to follow, we could try and draft an imaginary map of this seaside vision, with the sense that it is a map of an echoing spiral field of solid dreams and anticipations in the flesh, where objects and corporealties change shapes and density, take this or that position, signify this or that relation, and yet another shift of topography, another twist of meaning is possible, always about to occur. ¹

¹ The descriptions of the landscape in the opening paragraphs, while they are not a direct reference to any of the particular texts under discussion in this essay (except where I quote) and while they are in large part a personal vision inspired by the theme of the essay, are with no doubt in their mood and imagery quite contaminated with the prose of writers I will talk about, most perceptibly Carole Maso. As I discuss later, it seems impossible to engage analytically with these texts and not become deeply implicated oneself in their mutual relations and the utopian space they initiate.

The figure of the spiral which plays crucial role in structuring my central proposition of feminist intertextuality as a material/fictional utopian field organized around a circular space-time instead of linear time is largely inspired by Nicole Brossard's figure of feminist (lesbian) writing as the “spiral of love.” The figure is present in her other texts, which are indeed striking examples of poetic fiction working radically as separatist lesbian/feminist critical theory (I primarily looked at the poetic sequence LoveHers and the fragmentary poetic
But, let's say that there is an island here, which also takes the shape of a bed in a room, or of a “universe beneath the sheets” cradled in the midst of the pressing vastness of reality of humanity (Winterson 35). There is also the beach, as there are paragraphs traversed and marked by footprints of women, syntax of the sea, waves broken or surging, fragments and syllables gasped, words floating astray like petals or sticking to each other ferociously like teeth biting into the skin. There are bodies smeared with desires, as they are smeared with wet sand: wounds bursting or healing with longing for texts – for fiction; and also, there are the scars stitched and unstitched by recounting the encounters yet expected. “This text had been written before it happened to me.” (Brossard 12)

Thus, on this map, there has to be the sea and the land. And the space where they meet: the beach, the rocks, the seaside town, or the window dazed with the light from the sea – the in-between. There are several names or shapes of this in-between, as we shall see. As, for example, when we think of Carole Maso's *Aureole* as a marine field of desire because, while it has thirteen “chapters” (they don't seem to be separate stories, and Maso apparently thinks about this book as an experimental novel) the most tangible narrational thread that connects them into a novel would be the “relentless trajectory of...desire” and its manifold materializations on female bodies and in the outer spaces in which they move, just as they move over the blank and printed sections on the page: the old pier giving in under the bodied in embrace, anticipation of violet breasted lovers, at the Paris airport, the lighthouse-keeper’s dream of two women having sex in the surging waves off the seaside town (they have just floated in from the previous “chapter” and

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fiction theory of *Picture Theory*). In the encounter with Brossard's writing one becomes highly aware of the multiple relations binding the producers and receivers of the texts which concentrate around the piece we have in hands. The interdependence of feminist texts, “writing at the heart of the spiral” is the axis of Brossard's conceptualization of women's reading/writing as an “act of loving” (*LoveHers* 9). Brossard's feminist utopia is based on lesbian desire and body, feminist writing, political memory and imagination. In its effort to liberate and establish a reality outside the patriarchal symbolic, this utopia is radically separatist.
they drift on throughout the novel), dazzling light of thighs – the light hovering over the sea or flowing from the street into the Paris room, “oystering” of labia, of tongues and mouths and oysters, tiding of the hips carrying and breaking the paragraph, lover’s ink-stained hands touching the page, river-beds of pleasure glistening through the cities and interlocked bodies, cleavages and crevices between the words and letters where birds nest… (Maso ix)² These and many others stream throughout the book, as the erotic energy of the text invokes them and the syntactic logic of passion evokes them in whirls of emotional and sensuous concentration and dissolution. Nothing more to create a narrative, a novel. Thus, *Aureole* is a “story of a woman who wants” (ix).

The in-between opened in the group of texts I will analyze here is unbound and boundless in its capacity for variation; still, its fluctuating and circulating contents are rather specific in substance. Very material, the in-between is permeable and porous, amalgamative but never unified and unifying - the space where the textuality of the body and corporeality of the text meet in a utopian political fantasy. It is initiated by the epistemology of sensation and affect relentlessly pursued through the pores of poetic fiction to the point of an abstraction, always rooted and brought back to the physical experience of political history and the political. Seaweeds and shells pulled by the tide of fiction through the text’s grooves into the immeasurability of sensuousness, into the unconscious and translucent abstraction - to be thrown back again. The in-between is where this taking and giving, swelling and falling, thirsting and washing among multiple feminist texts takes place (those written and not yet written). Rich intertextuality. It is important to note that this is a space that cannot be said to begin and end, where one cannot start with the morning sun and reach the resolution of the beach or the horizon,

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² In her essay “Except Joy: on *Aureole*” Carole Maso writes: “I have given up any conventional notions of the novel in *Aureole*. I have tried to respect and indeed encourage the longing and the genuine mystery which exist between the discrete pieces” (125).
come to the end of text or sentence by dusk. Here, one cannot trace the chronology and
genealogy of things: this is the spiral, the plurality of writers’ and readers’ thoughts,
corporealities, states of consciousness and relations. I enter these relations with my desire, thus
the tissue of my text to a good part depends on close, ongoing and indefinite interaction with the
texts in front of me.

As it will hopefully emerge on this map that I wish to begin in this text and (compelled
by its nature) never finish (even as the text itself will eventually have to stop with the limitations
and exhaustion of my argument) the landscape or the field of desire we are trying to picture here
has the dynamic of feminist consciousness – of feminist body, text and sexuality. This is
something we continuously strive to achieve, becoming is its permanent reality and its
condition. To point out again, such a body, such a desirous and writing body is crucially tied
into relationships of plurality and intertextuality. It depends on the plurality of women, texts,
bodies and the feminist quality of their consciousness which ensues from the awareness of such a
mutual dependence.

The elaborate space created in feminist consciousness, as it seems from what I observed
above, is truly utopian. It appears reasonable to say that in the present political moment
reconciliation and situation of this utopia within stable social configurations would lead to its
deterioration. Rather, its survival depends on the restless condition of (be)coming, its being-in-
the-imaginative-movement towards the abstraction of feminist utopia. The concern and the
driving anxiety of this analysis is to trace the possibilities of bringing utopia to ontological and
political actuality by means of interactions of feminist body, text and desire, all based on the
premise of the actual necessity of utopian political thinking. I would like to uncover the feminist

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3 Perhaps it needs to be emphasized that even though feminist desiring body in its materiality and also as an idea
necessarily overlaps with female body, still the latter stays largely vague a term which as a material reality and a
concept only potentially occupies the political and fictional position of the former.
body and text both as a material reality and a utopian locus of the poetic desire for the other, as they already live in the political here and now. This I will perform in the set of co-created texts (where this one belongs too) which are induced by and also induce certain ontological and epistemological practices, lifestyles and modes of relating that do not and cannot identify with the values of dominant cultures.

Believing that desire for the other, as an erotic non-resistance to the alterity of the radically foreign is the most complex and urgent ethical problem of feminist consciousness, I will endeavour to “seek for more subtle theories capable of including non-oppositional differences,” such as those that “exist in feminist theory of today” (Berry 34). In order to do that, in the chapters that follow I will try to listen to certain feminist texts speaking together about an epistemology already insinuated on the opening pages of this essay – the epistemology of sensations and affects that arguably proves to be ethically more sophisticated than any of those which exclude such kinds of indispensable knowledges. So as to stay aligned with the methodological starting position I've chosen, I will try to carefully touch certain sensitive spots in these texts, in hope they will respond and at least to a certain extent open up to my search for this desired/desiring epistemology. The pieces I wish to unfasten for the purpose of this discussion are Jeanette Winterson's short story “The Poetics of Sex,” Hélène Cixous's “The Laugh of the Medusa,” as well as her other text “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: InterViews,” written with Mireille Calle-Gruber and Carole Maso's *Aureole*.

At the outset, I would like to stress that this essay is marked with an awareness that the

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4 While (as far as it is familiar to me) the majority of these texts don't declare themselves to be strictly feminist, in the sense that they are overtly instrumental in a specific political agenda or that with this aim in mind they theorize certain feminist concepts, I feel free to consider them as such, convinced in my decision by their epistemological approach to the overall experience of living and by their explicit and implicit practice of a feminist ethics of desire for the other. This issue of affiliation with feminism in its political and theoretical sense can also be addressed with regard to each author separately, as for example, it is openly problematized in the case of Hélène Cixous. Finally, it can be argued that these authors' feminist (dis)identifications, whether open, cautious, purely ethical or only implicit, don't necessarily determine the significant feminist effects their texts produce.
texts chosen might respond differently and more often than not in voices contradictory to my reading desires. While I want to read them as if they constitute and as if they are intimately related to each other in this specific field of desire – the utopian space of feminist consciousness, and while I have no doubts that this space is conditioned by the multiplicity of positions of desire, I also wish to be ready (if not now, then sometime) to see these pieces contradict each other as well as possibly question the construction, the materiality and therefore livability of feminist utopia.

Nevertheless, if this be the case, paradoxically, a stronger undercurrent of this pursuit will get some significant confirmation. Feminist desire for the other is polyvalent: it is a longing to be displaced out of one’s self through permanent instances of movement towards the other, but also, to be almost literally invaded, possibly obliterated by the other. 5 These two mental conditions or perceptions seem contiguous, or maybe even hard to distinguish. Still, in the former there is nuance towards subjectivity’s expansion over the troubling, yet apparently indispensable boundaries of the ego. In the latter the nuance is towards the subjectivity being inhabited, even being under attack of otherness, in fever of the unfamiliar, the foreign. This often dramatic subjective fragmentation, contraction or expansion, apart from or by virtue of being erotically and ethically ecstatic, is also experienced as an extreme vulnerability, quite often a mental and bodily suffering. Since the powerful driving force here is desire, love of the other (and unavoidably, fear of the other); what's more, since, as we have already said, one's (feminist) subjectivity depends for survival on the plurality of (desired) bodies; with that much at stake it seems inevitable that desiring subjectivity also runs a risk of enduring an unspeakable loss and pain. For, if the other is lost, and as it might happen in an unlimited plurality, if the other's desires

5 This rough vision of the positions of subjectivity's desire to be othered is mainly inspired by Judith Butler's discussion of intersubjectivity in the chapter “Longing for Recognition” in *Undoing Gender*. 
reject or contradict “me”, if the other is destructive to “me” for any reason – are then the plural
dynamics of feminist desire simultaneously “my” chance for survival and danger of my
destruction? Such a dramatic paradox seems to be at the heart of feminist desire. But at this
point, let us say that if this analysis happens to discover this paradox reverberating throughout
the texts in its focus, then the apparently dissipating field of desire will reemerge, perhaps in an
even more convincing unity of disparateness.

The Torment of Intimacy

When writing about experimental feminist texts, it is advisable to recognize that to a large
part, they are about what happens to me, what they do to me when I read them. These pieces
don't only advocate and then also practice the epistemology of affect. Rather, they require of us,
the readers, to persistently subject ourselves to a series of specific experiences which include
waiting in silence, the states of perceptual suspension, non-understanding, sensuous overload,
and others (what Hélène Cixous in “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book Inter   Views”
describes as an “extreme passivity, which is actually activity”). We are systematically dislocated
from the safe position of a detached analyst and a voyeur into a sudden torment of intimacy with
somebody else's desire with which we establish complex and varying relationships throughout –
from the first reading, to the attempt to systematize the most intense moments of our textual
experience. Therefore if I say that these texts are about what happens to me, it's not that I've
suddenly fallen prey to a delusion that they are offered as a space for the practice of self-
indulgence. Exactly the opposite: in them we achieve what Cixous calls “reduced resistance of
the ego,” as we leave more and more space for the other within ourselves or, in Mireille Calle-
Gruber's words, we discover the non-subject space in ourselves.
As I've tried to approach selected texts in quest of the ways their insurgent aesthetics actually performs certain political ethics (what I occasionally call erotic ethics or the ethics of the other) a hypothesis has been confirmed to me: these pieces will either reject me, or request from me to participate in an enactment of what they pursue. But even when once accepted, I have not been granted the same admittance the next day. This process has no clear continuity, as it starts differently with each new instance of reading and writing. We will see in the chapter on the dialogue between Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber that these are the texts which always recycle themselves into new strata of meaning and establish new intra and intertextual relations. Thus not unusually, we are intermittently let in or refused, depending on the flexibility of our desires in the encounter with the intimacy of the text. As a reader inflected by a critical approach, I come to understand that I'm not equally welcome with my desires in the private world of the text. But also, that the privacy of it is not always welcome with me – even when I think I am coming to it with a strong anticipation of a shared affective experience and intellectual empathy. Examining her own varying feminist positions in an effort to expand the register of readerly “scenarios” in the direction of the “reduced resistance of the ego,” Ellen Berry at one point realizes: “Indeed, my desire to maintain control in the case of Many Many Women or to get at the 'truth' of the text, to uncover its enigma, in the case of A Novel of Thank You, may well put me in the Oedipal Camp” (33).

Here, in the intimacy of the text, as feminist readers, we might be required to question

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6 The “erotic ethics of the other” might appear as the most “correct” name, since erotic and the other seem to be two different markers. But this hasn't been my standpoint. I consider the process of allowing for the other (in me) induced by an encounter with radical difference not distinguishable from an ethics commended by erotic desire. While this includes sexual erotic desire, it necessarily encompasses this ethics in all other relations of (mutually non-exclusive) otherness, such as different forms of social, cultural and bodily otherness. They are all marked by a conscious movement out of one's assigned identity in order to make room for the other, in what would be recognition of the vital bond of my body and your body. Still, it seems to me that this, from rationalistic standpoint almost leap of faith is usually the most bold and traceable in the situations of sexual eroticism.

7 Both are texts by Gertrude Stein.
our own (feminist) desire and perhaps understand how much it is fraught, as Berry reveals, with
the need for mastery. Or as she suggests, to “propose new feminist models of reading
nonmimetic works: ... to ask within what 'plots' are current feminist theories of reading and
writing enclosed,” and how “have these 'plots' prevented us from understanding the 'complexity
of our desires in front of works' such as Stein's” or such like (35). The next possible step would
probably be to learn to relax our desire and endure this tearing difference, or even rejection,
while we still remain appreciative of the text. Nevertheless, I maintain the conviction that even
the texts tightly closed in their own codes, have their ways of reading me (as Hélène Cixous
formulates this relationship). It is probable though that they will request from me to drastically
relocate myself within my self-conscious approach of finding certain intelligible stimuli for the
ethical positions which I (at least partially) already inhabit.

Talking about the trying experience of reading experimental texts and its feminist
implications, Ellen Berry writes: “In textual instances such as those I have just described, we are
negotiating different needs and demands. It is a space of difference we should hold open (for
now) in order to pursue our differences diligently” (33). Berry specifies the meaning of
diligence, a “constant careful effort,” by tying it back to its Latin root *diligere*, “to esteem
highly,” “to be apart,” “to choose.” Thus she recovers and highlights the ethical dimension of
acknowledging the importance of difference between us: “In choosing to be apart in order to
consider our differences, we esteem diversity within and between ourselves and the other
woman; we listen carefully without excluding” (33).

In the end, it seems to me that the texts which have a more distinct theoretical affinity,
those more inclined to the genre of theoretical essay or some similar essayistic form are far easier
to empathize with intellectually or emotionally (and we will see that none of the texts here have
clear predilection for such mode of communication). But, of course, what is easy and accessible here is not the simplicity of the idea communicated. Actually, it is not too hard to engage, even with certain passion and emotions stirred with the text which doesn't demand from us to expose painfully our sense of the self in front of the radically other. On the other hand, when involved with an intensely poetic text – poetic in the sense that it is relentlessly determined to abandon any safe ground of perceiving, feeling, relating, living – we can't avoid coming very close to the other to ourselves. It is true that sometimes, quite easily this intimate encounter can lead to an enormous pleasure of mutual recognition. Yet this doesn't have to occur at all or at least not in an unambiguous form. By setting our senses to an interplay of the unconscious with the intellect, we permanently run the risk of sliding into the space where we begin to discern the vast realms of unfamiliarity of the non-self – Calle-Gruber experiences this process as the tearing of I-me. It is here that we might even feel repulsion before an insistent otherness in the text which doesn't hesitate to indulge in its idiosyncrasy. Also, it can quite easily happen that we'll not find a way to tune our reading and writing senses to the text before us. In any case, we will always stay wondering whether it is possible at all, even by flexible, inclusive and inconclusive readings, not to impose to a certain degree the scope of personal experience onto the text.\footnote{Situations which I briefly describe above from my own reading experience are a schematization of the complex experience of engagement with radically poetic texts. A detailed analysis of different stages – different “scenarios” of the relation of feminist reader and experimental texts and its ethical aspects is given in the chapter “On Reading Gertrude Stein” from Ellen Berry’s \textit{Curved Thought and Textual Wondering}.}

If I briefly glance at the levels of intimacy in some of the pieces I discuss here, I might talk about the linguistic abundance and repetitiveness of Hélène Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa” in whose most lyrical passages one occasionally loses the clear thread of meaning and becomes dizzy of the sensuous noise of the words. The experience of this text might fluctuate
from an ecstatic recognition of the actuality of inscription of body's knowledge and understanding the freedom of material and mental relations this opens, to being stuffed by the sensuous profusion and irritated by bodily exposures, when we are still looking for logical coherence.

Actual repulsion and over-satiation would occasionally occur in the initial encounters with the indulgence in the particular personal and the insistent clichés of Carole Maso's *Aureole*. It takes to try more than once in order to get into this text's space/time in-between: after the feeling, but before the book is written. Slowly, one learns to sense how the cliché clears the page from the narrative and leaves it blank for all possible inscriptions of my desire and desire of the other. But before this takes place, one needs to keep holding one's breath and one's self for what appears a self-sufficient pleasure and infatuation with the speaker's own experience.

If I feel that I should pose the question of why feminist utopia matters (nothing less than it mattered in prior decades when it was more popular to look forward to it) this is not out of anxiety to hush the doubts about its significance. In the following chapters I will try to show how from the encounter with the aesthetic features of feminist experimental intertexts ensue certain epistemological changes. They enable us to perceive and enter the queer intersubjective collectivities broadly established all about this textual space. Here begins the structuring of a progressive utopian feminist ethics around the principle of displacing/tearing myself in the position of otherness. But, if these utopian moves do have a transformative ontological potential, they are not taught as conventional modes of social and private acting (although the capacity for them exists in the affective memory of the unconscious). Nevertheless, by systematic engagement with experimental texts' queer *poetics*, we are actually required to practice relating to the other in me and in us (me and you). Thus it seems that we can intentionally subject
ourselves to this dynamic of deegoization, and practice courage and patience in the face of resistance that will at some point occur in ourselves as a response. We reinforce utopian feminist collectivities and continue their embodiedness by entering them imaginatively and affectively. We perpetuate the ethics, and in this space both fictional and material, we perform and practice it as a living. Here there is no reason this ethics can't reach all the segments of relational otherness – social, cultural and bodily otherness. In this sense, such an involvement with intertextual utopian space should be thought of as a performative, as entering the space of a performance with all its potential to materially actualize (just as the text we engage with is a performative).

My conviction is that in this process (as I will try to describe it in and among some feminist texts) poethical intersubjectivities are created, capable of political resistance and vitality, just because they are not conditioned by the existence of any one institution, not even a feminist one. Maybe they are only epistemologically indebted to (by its definition) unsettled space of the text, the always politically operative field between actuality and potentiality. Here these intersubjectivities enter a wider consciousness, a focal point of queer feminist body and feminist fantasy.9 At the beginning and also later in the text, I call it the beach, as the place of in-between the sea and the land (fiction of the body or poetic body are also possible names for it) in order to give visual and tangible evocative power to its locatedness in the convergence of the imaginary and the material. As much as this visualization might appear too idiosyncratic, with it I actually poetically respond to a certain recurring imagery in a number of pieces I was reading before I started writing this text. In the end, only some of them were included in my discussion, while others, such as Nicole Brosard's Lovehers, Picture Theory and Mauve Desert and the

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9 In several places in this discussion I will clarify that the idea of feminist I operate with is always queerly inflected. Just as I understand and explain the terms feminine and feminine (French) as feminist, as a political and poetic standpoint, and not a sign of biological characteristic or certain variable complex of cultural gender identifications.
remaining pieces from Carole Maso's *Break Every Rule: Essays on Language, Longing, and Moments of Desire* stay to work in the unconscious of the text and in its interstices.

The constant feature of feminist consciousness is that it is a space in (be)coming: this means that as it is inscribed into a text it starts and it never stops to undo, as Cixous puts it, to recycle itself. As such, it is an uninscribed textual space that depends on the continuous creation of new imaginative spaces in which to conceive desired selves and radically different social constellations these selves can enter. Here I can see not only the potential for building queer utopia, but even the actuality of utopian socialites being built. Going myself a step further than usual conceptions of utopia as a state of futurity, I argue that queer utopia, by virtue of its intrinsic impossibility to be situated now or later in the institutions of any social order, is actually realizable in the present moment. As I suggest in this introduction, utopia's reconciliation and situation within stable social configurations would lead to its deterioration. Instead, it stays resistant and effective as long as it is in the condition of restlessness and (be)coming, in the imaginative movement towards the ideal. Am I running the risk of sounding politically ludicrous and academically naive and dated? Not so much, I believe...

**Fleshly Epistemology for Feminist Utopia in My Hand**

There is another pressing conceptual and methodological question which haunts this discussion, conceptual and methodological in nature, and related to the issue of a suitable theoretical prism, that is, a prism supple enough to stay receptive and operative within vertiginous equivocations of the themes of desire and love of alterity. Initiated by the conceptual and political maturation of feminist and queer theory, the ethics of the other has seen many sophisticated and vigorous discussions. This courageous efflux into highly experimental and
uncertain realms of anticipatory political and ethical thinking has also served as personal inspiration and intellectual background for this essay. But I find it important to stress that I understand queer in its most generous scope, as a poetic, political and conceptual stance which can’t settle for any of static and separative cultural categories and identities. It is feminism in its queer amalgamation that in my opinion bears the most hopeful and most utopian promise of new and better forms of living. Still, trying to think about desire in terms of acceptance of the plurality of ways our desires relate; consequently, to think about love of the other pushed to the limits of one's ability to love and to the far boundaries of pleasure and pain; to think about an enormous ethical potential of such an erotically commanded critical movement into the unknown, where the question stays how much one's self can be deconstructed before it gets destructed – trying to speculate about all of these in conceptual categories clear enough so as to make them usable as instruments of meaningful social change, one is quite at a loss and in lack, even if one operates within the most subtle theories founded on the epistemology of affect. How does one think theoretically and consequentially if one willingly enters the space where one gets lost? The possible answer might be – by thinking right from within desire and in the very language of the body burning with affect. There seems to be no proximate way of conceptualizing the epistemology of the flesh, if thinking and writing is not performed through the its experience. Right here the pieces in consideration reveal themselves as this highly experimental, this ideologically risky and living textual ground fraught with longing: the body theorizing desire, persistently reflecting on itself from itself, fiercely stretching into otherness,

10 Theresa de Lauretis’s “Eccentric Subjects” Judith Butler’s Undoing Gender, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Gender Trouble and Frames of War, Sara Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology, Eve Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet and “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” José Esteban Muñoz’s Cruising Utopia and Disidentsifications, Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings, which have the most immediate influence on this essay are only a few of many others I have in mind or have lost from my mind, but which still operate in mental sediments of the text.
aching for profound changes, within its untamed imagination providing utopian feminist ontology right here in “my hands”. Thus these texts present a material methodological framework that enables us to think both politically and affectively through the body. Perhaps, we could even hope that by developing such fleshly methodology we might make certain positive movements in bridging the gap between critical theory and political action. But then, what kind of theoretical texts does one produce by thinking critically in and with the body?

In the course of this essay, I will occasionally term the pieces under discussion as poetic theory and theory fiction in order to point to conceptual uncertainty and poetic unresolvability as basic qualities which work simultaneously with the texts’ rootedness in the flesh. Thus they speak of the poetic bodies (according to Hélène Cixous, a potential which exists in all of us), the idea I will refer to in the chapter “The Shipwreck of One Hundred and Fifteen Pages: Truthfulness of Myopia.” And these are exactly the qualities that make them indispensable as one example of “more subtle theories capable of including non-oppositional differences.” They are necessary in order to theorize and politicize affectively, as it seems we should when it comes to the difficult subject of love and desire as an erotic ethics. As a writer, reader, thinker and desirer, one is here in the self-imposed condition of vulnerability, ever sensitive to the feeling of lack and loss, but also to the possibility of yet another variation and one more ambiguity of meaning, one more shape of the body, another text, another movement of desire. Also, when I

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11 Differentiation between theory fiction and poetic theory is also rather tentative. It might serve us to make distinction between the texts such as Winterson’s “The Poetics of Sex” or Maso’s *Aureole*, which have and will be conventionally considered as fiction, and Cixous’ “The Laugh of the Medusa” and “We are already in the Jaws of the Book,” which are somewhat more theoretical, although quite poetic in tone and structure. “We are already in the Jaws of the Book” complicates these already “dirty” categorizations even more, since in lots of respects, it can be considered as an experimental memoir. But although any oppositional distinction of genre seems bound to fail, it still appears important to offer some tentative names in order to clarify that say, *Aureole* is not a piece of fiction which happens to perpetuate or perform certain political standpoints. Rather, Maso’s novel is a text which with its very body seeks to experiment with and develop certain ethical political concepts. Also, in the following chapters I propose that Cixous’ texts can’t be merely theoretical or reflectional essays which happen to be written in a poetic language. Rather, their very subject dictates their structure.
suggest the concepts of theory fiction and poetic theory, I am far from proposing that these
names should be used as mutually exclusive alternatives for each specific text. To the contrary,
and by nature of the subject matter they refer to, each term stands for a series of problematic and
questionable positions of these texts, enabling them, as means of flexible organization, to
fluctuate between theory and fiction in the conceptual space of plurality – in the in-between, in
the field of desire.

Only two, or one, or none of the pieces I will analyze here can be approached as
“appropriate” examples of critical theory, and this also with some wrist-twisting. Of course,
Hélène Cixous's “The Laugh of the Medusa” is quite often anthologized and taught as such. Still,
the way I address it leaves it purposefully suspended, fluctuating in the conceptual possibility of
the in-between of poetic theory and theoretic experimental fiction, each perhaps desiring to be
the other. And this would probably be one of Cixous's most conventionally theoretical texts,
deliberately so, under the exigency of the political moment.12 “We Are Already in the Jaws of the
Book: Inter Views,” her other text I address here is more evasive in an attempt to classify it
among “real” theory. It has the surface form of an “interview” with Hélène Cixous by Mireille
Calle-Gruber. It is certainly more suitable to call it a dialogue. This piece could be said to play a
key role in drawing the map of feminist consciousness (as the task of my essay) and also, it plays
a role of this map's reading key as its conceptual legend of a sort. For in the instance of the
dialogue literally happening – a conversation between two women writers, readers, thinkers and
in their ethical predilection, two feminists, Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber – a fluid field of
desire gets established at its most physical and most abstract, simultaneously. I take this striking

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12 In “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” Cixous explains her motives to write a more “strictly”
theoretical essay as initiated by the urgency of the political moment which required her to “spell out” things.
Otherwise, Cixous seems to be rather wary of theory (12). I refer to this more clearly in the chapter “A Shipwreck of
One Hundred and Fifteen Pages: Truthfulness of Myopia.”
immediacy, this literalness of formal movement from physical to conceptual, which presents the field of desire as an abstract space ultimately sensuous, for a reason justifiable enough to start this discussion with the chapter on “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views.” The plurality of corporeal, figurative (therefore, poetic) and theoretical registers in which it operates makes it comfortably spacious as a metaphoric and discursive frame for the elaboration of some of the central concepts of this essay. But what is more exciting (and as I hope to discover) the encounter between Cixous and Calle-Gruber is an example of the ontological reality of feminist utopia. Within this encounter, a book as an intense experiential time-space of intertextuality starts coming to life: it is acted out (by its “performers:” writers, readers, speakers…) as it is passing through one of many spiral movements in the process of alternate textual crystallization and dissolution.

As an experiment, cheek to cheek with this chapter stands the chapter on Carole Maso's *Aureole*, whose feminist theoretical standpoints are contracted and encapsulated in the linguistic tissue of the poetic prose of intense lyrical moments, prolonged into a novel by an erotic longing for language and text (Maso 33). As such, *Aureole* offers its ideas for an erotic ethics in a rather elliptic form often close to a poetry of hallucinatory images charged with desire, triggering a series of olfactory, taste and tactile sensations, thus requiring the activation of a sentient cognition on the reader's part. This cognition, acquired in the poetic field of the text, if it lets itself be directed by utopian desire, establishes synchronicity and conceptual continuity between the material experiences of now and then and the political thinking of futurity. As mentioned, instead of developing a narrative, even fractional one, Carole Maso places a large part of the erotic and emotional experience of the novel on the structure of the text. By means of phonetic and syntactic variations, paragraphs freely fragmented, sometimes almost lost in the varying
patterns of the page, by means of the sentences left lingering without a period, the parenthesis never closed, Maso follows the reiterative logic of unending desire and reproduces the movements of the multiple lovers' bodies' in the longing field of the text. In the preface to *Aureole* she announces her radical poetic agenda of structural transformation, fraught with the utopian feminist ethics of continuous becoming, an ontology of longing for that which is always about to happen, the text about to be but is never written:

I have started to think more and more how these urgencies might create new formal structures. (...) I have tried to leave this work at its most erotic moment, longing at the threshold of story, before the shapes are made manifest, before the connections lose their mysterious fragile hold. In the liminal space before whatever happens next will happen. Where both writer and reader are for a while endlessly possible – fluid, luminous, clairvoyant, intensely alive, close to death, reckless. (...) The desire all winter long was for transformation, transcendence. (Maso xi)

By examining *Aureole* as a valuable example of experimental feminist methodology, an example of epistemology of the body performed through the logic of poetic fiction, I hope to open the door for a whole range of similar texts which in their highly personal and aestheticized lyricism appear too insubstantial to engage in a critical dialogue, even less to offer theoretical propositions themselves. Motivated by a desire to oppose this conventional view, I hope to discover in the lyrical structure of *Aureole* its original potential for an innovative theoretical approach to themes that don't surrender so easily to critical theory. If in the course of my analysis this proposed stance starts to resonate convincingly, Maso's text will expose the vital connection of aesthetic and erotic cognition with political thinking.

I give an important place in this discussion to the analysis of the respective ways of
resignifying cliché in the texts of Winterson and Maso. Both authors' texts intervene at the very spot of cliché and they do it generously. Winterson with something of a happy self-indulgence in the game of rearrangement and inversion of stereotypes of gendered desire; Maso, who works in the very linguistic fabric, by repetition, variation and fragmentation dissolves cliché into an erotic idiosyncrasy. I find that both pieces emerge with rather spacious and messy notions of gender and desire, maybe at the first glance surprisingly so, because of the superficial indicators about them being texts about lesbian sex. Finally, this might make it necessary for us to rethink the political capaciousness of the lesbian as a term and as a theoretical concept: we might ask whether it needs to be inverted and played with as another cliché, if it wants to retain its political usefulness in future?

The final chapter about theoretical and poetic interrelations of “The Poetics of Sex” by Jeanette Winterson and “The Laugh of the Medusa” by Hélène Cixous, is an attempt to examine the range of critical, erotic, discursive, and historic positions a feminist text can occupy simultaneously, if politically imaginative and meaningful. An apparently determined genre of both pieces (that of a short story and a theoretical essay) actually proves rather helpful in order to show how formal and conceptual frames can be tossed about, rearranged and confused. This intentional confusion can even become a game, one that Winterson seems to play so gladly – the spinning at the core of stereotype, myth, history, religion, genre, language.

“The Poetics of Sex” and “The Laugh of the Medusa,” with their imagery and their metaphors contribute to the aquatic world of the field of desire: the in-between of feminist consciousness. They both think politically and projectively, and at the same time they work like a feminist desiring body. Here, like in Aureole or “We are already in the Jaws of the Book,” subjectivity finds its bearing where it has no bearings, in an effort to allow for the multiplicity of
“our” desire and for a more radical otherness, even at the risk of self-negation (Cixous, Calle-Gruber 8). Both “The Poetics of Sex” and “The Laugh of the Medusa” provide unique arguments for one of my central concerns: to emphasize the important benefits of adopting the most differentially proliferating concepts of an oppositional consciousness. With this idea in mind, throughout my text I keep asserting subscription to a radically spacious idea of the.

The concept of écriture feminine that found its most clear political articulation in “The Laugh of the Medusa” has often been read by critics as a debatable piece of feminist essentialism. The apparently paradoxical possibility of inclusion of men in this practice of writing, has frequently been explained as – well, a paradox. Winterson’s story “The Poetics of Sex” for its part revels in appropriating all sexual, sexist and gender stereotypes and popular myths at hand, not refraining from describing lesbian love as the love of husband and wife. But somewhat more troubling might be that at the center of Winterson's story is a romantic, dare we say, an ideal love between two women. How do “feminist essentialism” and a story of romantic love given in a series of stereotypes fit into the field of a limitless multiplicity of desire?

One of the important propositions of Cixous's essay is that écriture feminine, while it is a practice of writing and a way of knowing with the female body, is still available for men, once they succeed in getting over the confining heritage of Western thought's authority of Logos and the centrality of the phallus. Yet, Cixous's understanding of gender and sexuality is far more sophisticated than any of the notions of essential difference between male and female. Rather, when she says male and female sex, she asks for the non-exclusion of difference, for the presence of both sexes in the self, “variously manifest and insistent according to each person” (2046). More importantly, male and female are not two opposing sexual positions, which somehow inhabit an intrinsically contradictory sexual subject. After one carefully reads her texts,
what appears is that Cixous proposes an idea of versatility and excess of differences within “me”, within the other and in-between us, the idea of the always variously different from the familiar and imaginable male or female. In this sense, for her, male and female are not the given, not even as two extreme tendencies that are freely combined within each individual sexuality, sometimes perhaps confused. Founded on these hypotheses, it seems reasonable to say that Hélène Cixous's concepts of gender, sexuality and difference posed in 1975 are in an important relation of interplay and complementarity with the perceptions of queer theory of today. Thus Cixous's concepts might be understood as an announcement of the discussion of queerness of gender that ensued in some founding texts of queer theory two almost decades later, such as Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Still, in the chapter which analyzes queer quality of “The Laugh of the Medusa” I offer some more complex views about its relatedness to these and other queer feminist texts. I attempt to put Cixous’s ideas in a dialogue with another set of pieces that, I believe, make an equally important part in the body of feminist queer theory's engagement with gender and sexuality, but which traditionally are not categorized as such. Here I refer to Jeanette Winterson's short story and her other fiction and also, to theory fiction of Maso, only as the beginning of a possible endeavour of undoing the boundaries between the genre of theoretical essay and other textual forms in order to uncover the rich capacity of the latter for insights, frequently inaccessible within more rigid conceptual and linguistic frames of conventional theoretical discourse. This advantage of “different” critical theory, I propose, lies in its poetic fictional perception. It is my belief that “The Laugh of the Medusa,” a text that has been anthologized as a significant example of feminist and Derridean poststructuralist theory, opens a spacious passage between “conventional” theoretic essay, poetic theory and theory fiction as well as between queer theory conventionally dated to early 1990s
and some earlier examples of theoretical queer thinking. Cixous explains her ideas in a too often misread concept of *other bisexuality*. As I will suggest later and in more detail, the misinterpretations probably occur because of an inadequate (sometimes perhaps even untrained) reading on the part of certain critics when facing a piece of poetic theory. (Needless to say, while she theorizes, Cixous simultaneously practices what she “preaches.”).

It seems to me that in the poetic extremity of “The Laugh of the Medusa,” male and female should be read as metaphors, readily appropriated if they serve the purpose of the desire, even more readily abandoned, once desire surpasses them. Since we must confess that in spite of all ferocious queer criticism we somehow still find it hard to dispense with the centrality of the conceptual division between male and female, I suggest as useful an understanding of the two terms as strategic metaphors (and I imply that this is what Cixous does as well) while keeping in mind metaphor's spaciousness, or rather, its elusiveness to any specific concept. And right here may lie the most interesting of many points that connect Cixous's and Winterson's texts: they don't exclude different bodies, marked by different desires, even though they do create an entire universe out of the text started with the female body. That's why it seems that both Cixous and Winterson talk more explicitly not about the female but about the feminist body, if we understand the latter as something far more complexly specific. The feminist body, then, is not to be thought by gender, sexual, least by biological dichotomy. It is radical in its inclusiveness of different desires and also, radical in its pursuit of the knowledge of body's affects to the theoretical

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13 Then, for example, it would be also fruitful to include in the corpus of the founding queer theory the works such as the films of Pedro Almodóvar, or Djuna Barnes's modernist novel *Nightwood*, and so forth. While Almodóvar starts thinking queerness in the medium of feature film already in 1980 (before that, he makes short films) Barnes's 1936 published novel offers a radical and systematic queer conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, time and space decades before academics made any more coherent move in the direction of queer theory. Again, it is my belief that “The Laugh of the Medusa,” a text that has been anthologized as a significant example of feminist and Derridean poststructuralist theory, opens a spacious passage between “conventional” theoretic essay, poetic theory and theory fiction as well as between queer theory conventionally dated to early 1990s and some earlier examples of theoretical queer thinking.
abstraction and the possibility of feminist utopia. In this sense, I would say that Cixous and
Winterson, move in the direction of acknowledging the concept (to sexuality more just?) of the
queer feminist body. My intention to place her among queer theorist might prove challenging,
having in mind Cixous's “bad” reputation of a supposedly essentialist writer. Jeanette Winterson,
on her part, seems to endeavour to confirm the actuality of feminist utopia in the face – in the
very heart of the patriarchal myth and stereotype. Would it be too difficult (or absurd) to imagine
her kidnapping a “male” body in order to make of it a lesbian feminist body? In the light of the
fact that they don't exclude the possibility of certain bodies, messiness of certain desires, wish to
play with certain identities, the materiality of Winterson's or Cixous's utopia feels somewhat
more convincing than say those often imagined in the writings of the second-wave feminism.14

Again, as I pointed out, feminist utopia exists only as long as it aches to stretch beyond a
self-contained and containable name, definition, political agenda, identity, movement, body-text
or conception of time/place. Thus this utopian idea and experience tears, it annihilates itself in
order to allow for more bodies, desires, more loving into the unknown, where the loving self is
(self-)doubted, it dissipates at the point of destruction, perhaps dies to itself, but emerges to the
ethics different to traditional narratives of the ego. In that sense, possible divergences among the
texts under consideration will hopefully only expand and confirm the notion of complex and
continual self-reflexivity of feminist erotic ethics.

14 Then, also, if we want to understand Cixous's concept of sexuality as looser than those of second-wave feminism, at the time of which her text was written, her rejection to fully align and identify herself with the movement, acquires another aspect.
A SHIPWRECK OF ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN PAGES: TRUTHFULNESS OF MYOPIA

If I want to know what happens, if I want to find out the secret, I have to write it.

Pedro Almodóvar

I am an astrophysicist of minuscule stars. Clearly, this is a metaphor. It's also the desire of a nearsighted person. (Laughs) (...) I owe some of the most fantastical hallucinatory experiences of my childhood to my extreme nearsightedness: vanishing streets, substitutions, metaphorization and metonymization of the world and of people. (...) I have never known the state of a person whose eyes see 'the world-as-it-is-supposed-to-be-seen-by-seeing-human-eyes'; I have never known the state of a person capable of living without the aid of a magic instrument like writing.

Hélène Cixous

...poetry can go where philosophy – not where it stops, but...suspects.

Mireille Calle-Gruber

M.C-G.: Is this not what fiction writing as you practice it, and even the choice of the fictional space, is looking to do: to give speech to what does not speak? To what is mute, *infans*-infancy in our speech? To what has no constructed discourse? (...) ... what can poetry do, what can dreams do that theory cannot?

H.C.: I also write in order to go further, further than what I say, and this is not impossible. I can go further than myself because there is further-than-myself in myself – as there is in all beings. This further-than-myself in myself can only be a mixture of

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15 The published version of “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” in its English translation, which is the version I talk about here, together with the footnotes has exactly one hundred and fifteen pages.
others and myself. Traces of other, the voices of my others – but who? We are full of voices, like all islands. (Cixous, Calle-Gruber 56)

In a particular moment early in “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: InterViews” Mireille Calle-Gruber says to Hélène Cixous: “There is a sort of irremediable, never finished cutting into pieces of I-me. This is what holds me back at first; it is what I would say about your books: they recount I-prey-to-the-other. I in a bout of otherness – as one would say a bout of fever” (8). At this instant the text before us is revealed as literally made of flesh and warm breath of the two women talking. In whichever of incarnations we might experience it later, it gets hard not to think about it as a physical act of moving into the field of in-between each other, and of circling in it, open to the possibility of being othered. Apart from producing a discourse – speaking of their own views on the experience of the space between the self and the other, and always tying this erotic ethical relation back to the instance of (poetic) writing/reading, Cixous and Calle-Gruber are actually engaged in the same complex relationship. They are caught in the gap of inter...views: in the fictional space of reading and writing each other, a cognitive practice of affect on and between these two bodies, a vulnerable field still before the book is written.

With such insights in mind, I have decided to begin the discussion of feminist experimental writing with the chapter which examines this very concrete feminist encounter of “We Are Already in the Jaws…” in its extreme bodily and textual realness. The intersubjective/textual utopia is here performed physically, as it is being textualized and conceptualized. Also, as it is actual in the time of the encounter, it is actual now in the text's prolonged performative present (in which we the readers actively participate), and it remains real in the text's poetic permanence. Thus my attempt is to reveal Cixous's and Calle-Gruber's dialogue as the first and unique among the several (and many possible) instances of
incorporation of the feminist utopian space in which we can live now. The simultaneous clarity and prominence of all its multiple working levels: bodily, fictional and conceptual is primarily what makes it unique. Also, this is the reason for me to believe that this text contains indispensable directions and experiences of feminist intertextuality, sensuous and ideological, to be analyzed and pursued in other texts which are ideologically related to it.

Also, very early we are given the hints of the ethical direction of this textual space. In it, the desiring writing/reading subject gets displaced from the defined space of the ego (or the book well done) and begins to enter the unknown, possibly the unknowable. Rather than an interview, the text in front of us is inter views, the glimpses of the in-between me and you and all our others, the views of all different possibilities of me and you. This becomes visible when Mireille Calle-Gruber, the reader/desirer/writer talks of the power of texts of that other (Cixous's poetic fiction) to make her: “...find my bearings where I have no bearings; find my bearings where I become lost” (8). By speaking in(to) each other's words and in between each other's sentences, they create the most immediate intertextuality of voices, sensations, the most incorporated ex-change of writing/reading pursued to the level of the abstract concept.¹⁶

If the poetic text is what is true, true of desire and soul, of what is the best of us, then, is it not that this is the place where we should direct our efforts for building relationalities as we dream about them? How to develop a feminist model which will be the basis for a movement of shared struggle and common oppositional goals but at the same time allow for and perpetuate differences, has been an unresolved and central problem of feminist theory and practice. Even though theory's great mobility in devising abstract concepts is necessary for intellectual progress,

¹⁶ In the hyphenated form of ex-change by putting emphasis on respective meanings of both the prefix and the root word: ex-outside, out of, away from, and change-to become different, undergo an alteration, or transition, I wish to recover the meaning which takes the derivative exchange in the semantic direction of transformation suffered in an act of stepping outside of where one was, towards the relation of reciprocity and plurality.
it is somewhat lacking when the models of living are urgent to design. Thus it happens that theory and practice find themselves on two different sides of an epistemological gap, while it appears clear that the attempts to disentangle them are politically harmful. What is missing, I propose, is poetic perception of the matter.

In comparison to other texts I discuss here, “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” is the most embodied and the most abstract one. But also, the most intimately abstract. In its extreme corporeality, it is an extreme example of Cixous's in critical theory well-known concept of *écriture féminine*, writing with the body. On the other hand, it is a purposefully contemplative discussion about Cixous's and Calle-Gruber's insights of the writing of life and the life of writing. It seems almost impossible (and useless) to say anything more concrete about this text's locatedness between poetic theory and theory fiction, except that it openly talks about the relation of fiction (the poetic texts) and theory. It continuously suggests that critical theory as much as we need it, can't really reach into the experience of existence as deeply as poetry can; at the same time it hints that the poetic must aspire to the most lucid and accurate insights. Therefore it is compelling to propose that if we provisionally decide that “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” is not too much of a (theory) fiction, it does offer one example of how poetic theory might look like, or rather, how it might be enacted (and I mean, literally, with the bodies) in order to expand into the epistemological realm of the poetic.17

“We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” awaits us before we open the first page of text of the long conversation between Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber and

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17 And again, the mere fact that this text is in a sense a stage, an act of performance of certain insights – the two women agitated and attracted to talk to each other about their affective and intellectual experiences, sets it as a fictional space. The relationships that visibly take place in this text and which we might want to think are the cause of the text's occurrence, are as true as the poetic is true in Cixous's sense of the phrase (referred to several paragraph below). Also, in the sense that they are in the full potential of becoming just as this text, suspended before any defined form and genre, might go anywhere, and develop into anything. As poetic fiction does.
somehow it dispenses our expectations that upon opening a book, we are about to witness, perhaps, participate in the beginning of something new. Instead, it appears we've already been enmeshed in the book which has been happening for some time – but where did it start? And what's more, it all feels as if we've slid, really slid with our entire body into some large mouth that slowly chews us, while we wriggle and maybe even hurt. So, is this what we're to expect of the experience of writing and reading? Because, this dialogue, we sense, will be about a particular writing and reading as a living, knowing and loving. In all probability, it is just like this: we are in the meshes of skin, muscles and bones, and we are messed with, our reading body is taken, disarranged, and even spat out. Hélène Cixous claims to write about the minuscule events – alarms, incidents and accidents, which all take place on the body and precede the book. Affect is her realm. Affect, the “poetic body,” Cixous is sure, precedes the concept, the thought, the name (18). Hence her relative indifference in front of novels if she's given to look into “the earth before the book”: the author's notebooks and journals of writing, the state of rawness, “preparations, intimacies, “the breaths, the cries, the pebbles” before the affect is filtered by the procrustean frame of the novel (57). Hence her dream of an alter ego who will take the responsibility of giving her books the titles, because: “it is only belatedly (...) that we give general and global names to a whole quantity of particular phenomena. (...) Now writing deploys itself before 'it is called'. Before...” How impossible to reduce a book to a title, when: “Each (word or) sentence of a text has survived a shipwreck of two hundred pages. The process of writing is to circulate, to caress, to paint all the phenomena before they are precipitated,

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18 Intentionally, I would not call this text an interview, which it obviously is, at least in the traditional sense of a well known author and thinker being interviewed (even by another writer). In what follows, I tend to see the positions of the interviewee and the interviewer to a large extent as tentative roles assigned by the desire for the genre and for other definitions, while actually the relationship of Cixous and Calle-Gruber is more interactive. Actually, “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” is a part of the book Rootprints, which might be described as an experimental memoir. It comprises of several sections authored by different people: the dialogue, the collection of family photographs with Cixous’s notes, the excerpts from her notebook, a contribution by Jacques Derrida, and short essayistic notes by Calle-Gruber.
assembled, crystallized in a word” (18). To give voice to what has no words, neither a constructed discourse, give words to the infancy of speech – in front of which theory seems to be helpless, as Cixous and Calle-Gruber believe. And as we, the readers who are being chewed by the text these two create by responding to each other, as we too get to understand while from page to page we experience the shipwreck of the word, the concept, the genre: there needs to be a theory whose language lives in intimacy with poetry.

“We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book.” Obviously, we are always already in the jaws of the book, if by book we understand this specific sentient text-writing (and reading), which gives material shape of poetic permanence to feeling, and represents the instance of a book before the traditional book takes place, or the theoretical concept is constructed. By this we are reminded that we, the readers, in our cognizant bodies have the hidden receptors, a particular memory for the fleeting moments of internal tumults. These are already the stuff of writing, residues of our half-conscious poetic lives: we are already in the book and we don't know it, unless we become implicated into a poetic text. Cixous says: “...we will not have lived these innumerable intimate events that constitute us because we will not recognize them. In a book, sometimes, all of a sudden, we see the portrait of a palpitation pass, the portrait of an instant of which we ourselves have been the lead character, without being able to detain it” (19). This is why the form of the notebook, a poetic contemplation of existence with the dispersed multiple foci and its special “focalization” of the minuscule and ephemeral is more fit to catch a glimpse and “detain” fleeting instants.

It even seems that all of these is communicated at once, in the space before the text titled “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book Inter Views” really begins. At the center of the page before the “first” page, there is a tiny rectangular like an opening in which we read “The
Thus we learn, this text has windows, keyholes and telescopes into other texts, moments and selves. But soon, we will hear more about this intimate optic of short-sightedness, we might say inner-sightedness or inter-sightedness.

Once we have opened the page where the text starts, we find a line and a half of dots, a fragment as if from the middle of the sentence, then dots, then some more fragmentary sentence, and dots again, without an ending to what is actually a thought spoken by Cixous. We must have missed the beginning of the book; we can even perceive this visually and feel the loss and absence. But having been snatched like this into it, without apology or explication, we understand from the fragments that whatever is going to be talked about, “one cannot talk about it without” ...

“attitudes, positions, dispositions of the body-(and)-of-the-soul or even mechanisms...” The text breaks here and the line of dots continues.

What genre is revealing itself before our eyes? “Structural unfaithfulness” of a sort is being performed as early as in the dubious instance of inscribing the title (24). Beneath the main title line, which as previously noted, tells us that the book has already started while we were somewhere else, the expected word, the name of the genre – an interview, is unexpectedly split open, with one syllable on the far left, and the other on the far right side of the page: Inter – the white gap of the page – views. Through this sudden window in the word we enter the space of intersubjectivity, intertextuality, and of manifold interrelatedness about which we don't normally think when prepared we face an interview with a distinguished author(ity) to be asked about the themes... While this extensive conversation is obviously initiated in another person's experience of being in Hélène Cixous's writing and thinking, the text itself will be necessarily traversed by many other breaths and voices. Because, as we learn in the citations opening this chapter, there is further-than-Cixous in herself, as in each one of us, and this is made in the mixture of us with
others. “We are full of voices, like all islands.” To be able to look at this space, one needs to write/read, and let oneself be read by the text: as Calle-Gruber has been read by Cixous's, as Cixous herself has been read by Clarice Lispector's and Jacques Derrida's texts, and so on...

When after the opening fragments and silences in the shape of dots, Calle-Gruber says that it is Cixous's work they are discussing and that it cannot be talked about if one ignores that she has written around thirty books of fiction, suddenly, in one sentence, she turns on the light on the other side of the window through which we are trying to discern the events about to occur. She says: “What is most true for you is poetic writing” (3). And with this brief observation she inscribes the first coordinates of the plane we are entering. After this, we dive into the space of minute and revelatory elaborations, on the thin and taut thread between hallucination and speculative lucidity.

Between the sensation and the idea before it's written down and explained, there is the gap in which body records myriad excitations. By working on the threshold of the conscious, they produce diverse mental poetizations: what seems fleeting and lost is actually retained here and replayed as a recurring vision, mysterious vision, a strange synesthetic replacement. Cixous expands Calle-Gruber's remark by responding that what is most true is poetic and also, what is most true is naked life. Thus she anticipates her later statement that we all have certain potential for being poetic bodies, if only we could allow ourselves to feel. Still some of us keep looking closely with a “naked, obstinate, defenceless eye of [my] nearsightedness” into the minuscule phenomena of life. This special myopia that enables us to watch carefully and copy patiently what we see is our potential for poetic writing (3). Our own “keyholes,” “microscopes, telescopes, myopias, magnifying glasses,” “auras,” our focalizing devices help us see the world naked poetic. “All this apparatus in us: attention. To think, I knit my brows, and I look.” This is
how Cixous describes the lucidity of poetic “blindness”. What we are able to see with this myopic attention is “events' interiors” as we try to “snatch them from the cradle.” In her notebooks, Cixous writes that she “want[s] to watch watching arrive” (4). If it is by means of an affective textual involvement and contemplation that we connect to “the truth” of the world: if what we perceive on these occasions are the movements between the feeling (an imprint on the body) and its intellectual translation (the passage between signified and the signifier while the sign keeps being “shipwrecked” numbers of times) then what seems to ensue is that this truth is an ever ongoing experiential process. If we want to think about its temporality, it seems suspended in the present of the text which once written or read, endlessly rewrites itself: in Cixous's words, the poetic text keeps recycling itself. This is the poetic truth of life.

Cixous and Calle-Gruber distinguish between the principles of truthful and less-truthful in terms which seem to draw a symbolic map, a more abstract version of the landscape I tried to establish in the introduction (for the sake of a more evocative visualization and spatialization of my arguments). Thus the main distinction they make is between the not stoppable, in passage, seething, emitting and self-recycling, which is as true and poetic as naked life, and on the other side, everything that is “stopped, grasped,” “subjugated, easily transmitted...all that comes under the word concept...taken, caged...less true.” While living is about continuity, theory “entails a discontinuity, a cut,” and although it is sometimes “indispensable” in order to achieve progress, alone – it is lifeless. What carries us on is “aerial, detached, uncatchable” (4). Taking this same belief as my starting point, in the introduction to this analysis I ask whether certain texts which don't want to choose between conceptual and poetic, and which find the choice between factual and fictional, private and political to be false, can be read as another strain of feminist queer theory. (Because, I believe theory is indispensable in order to make the moves such as these I
propose in this text, and also, in order to systematize, connect and perpetuate certain knowledges to their benefit, to actualize the ethical dimension of the political.) Then, is it not that feminist queer theory should make a systematic and conscious movement towards the poetic and fictional? 19 Calle Gruber mentions the “misunderstanding about the term 'theory' and she says that there is a practice of writing which is more “like a form of philosophical reflection” “led through poetry” (4). “[I]n the very place of writing's blindness” it still pursues an “effort of lucidity” and although it is confused for theory, it refuses to “close itself in conceptualization” (5). I believe that here is the promised land for cultivation of new, more insightful and politically more sensitive forms of feminist queer theory. The space of a poetic text with its lucidity of the affect (the truthfulness of the naked life which is never one) offers an epistemology by which every impulse to subjugating idea to a “stopped,” to an unquestioned ideological concept is being undone in the process of writing/reading. The only permanent principle here is the possibility of one more which is other to me, to here, to what I know. In this inconclusive truthfulness may be the epistemological flexibility and inclusiveness that feminist queer theory keeps reaching for.

At the Convergence of Poetry and Philosophy POETHICS

Without suggesting that Calle-Gruber introduces a relation of opposition between this

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19 Calle-Gruber raises the question of there being “so little space, in the woman's movement for the right to literary creativity, and of a “north-American situation of which echoes are returning presently to Europe, and which under the name of 'feminist theory' ignores Hélène Cixous's books of fiction and considers a very limited number of her essays such as here discussed “The Laugh of the Medusa,” “Sorties,” and her contributions to “The Newly Born Women”. The latter texts, according to Cixous were written “at a very dated, entirely historical moment” in a deliberate political and educational effort to systematize certain knowledge and “emphasize a minimum of sense” in the climate of the general discourse on “sexual difference” which was “confusing” and “producing repression and loss of life and sense” (7, 4-5). What has happened is that these few essays and articles have been substituted for an entire opus, which, in Calle-Gruber words is “plural; overflowing; which incessantly questions what it draws” (4). What I see as the problem with the reception of both groups of texts is that they have been read and consequently discarded or accepted/appropriated (or not read at all) as conventional theoretical texts of univocal concepts and definitions. The “errors of judgment” which have ensued in the case of “The Laugh of the Medusa” are more broadly discussed in the chapter “On Scorching the Books of His-Story or Ways of Being a Pain in the Ass to All Men.”
lucid poetic fiction and all critical theory, and remembering that Cixous thinks of theory as a “dangerous aid” and a “prosthesis,” I am trying to consider in this and other chapters how possible it is to use certain pieces traditionally regarded as “non-theoretical,” or far from queer, as particularly efficient, ethically sensitive and inclusive queer feminist texts. Besides sharing certain queer feminist values, their strong performative and fictional inflection and resistance to definition and closed conceptualization shows their, I believe, structural queerness which in turn requires developing flexible perception based on erotic feminist ethics. I want to refer here to a particular moment in the dialogue when Cixous declares that her vocation is not political. Immediately, she adds that she knows that “all expression is always indirectly political.” But what follows seems rather important for my attempt to understand her thought and her writing practices as ultimately feminist and political in their clear ethical dimension. “The ethical question of politics or of responsibility has always haunted me... I am at once always alert (this began when I was three years old, in the streets of Oran, I remember clearly), always tormented by the injustice, the violences, the real and symbolic murders – and at the same time very menaced in truth by the excesses of reality” (6).

There is a striking similarity between this picture of young Hélène Cixous and another early insight which shaped the sensibilities of another author whose ties with feminism are intertwined between theoretical thinking and fiction. It is Virginia Woolf's memory of the “violent shock[s],” one of the “moments of being” which occurred during an exchange of punches with her brother. Suddenly, the question comes to her: “why hit another person?” Her fist, already in the air instantly drops and she lets herself be beaten, overwhelmed with the feeling of “hopeless sadness.” She is at once aware of “something terrible; and my own powerlessness” (Woolf 71). She writes this down in the long essay “Sketch of the Past,” later
included in “The Moments of Being.” Here she remembers that this and similar shocks – the impossibility to explain the horror of why do people hurt each other – were always followed by passive desperation and collapse of the body (72). With the years and growing ability of reason to find explanations, Woolf's “shock-receiving capacity” increases, but her sensitivity to them remains as well, “mak[ing] her a writer.” The violent shocks have become a “revelation of some order” or at least their promise – but they are real and intelligible only after she puts them into words. This is followed by the great pleasure of removing their power of hurt and “put[ing] the severed parts together.” She calls it “Perhaps...the strongest pleasure known to me,” and identifies it with the rapture in writing, when I seem to be discovering what belongs to what...” (72). From here starts what perhaps is philosophy, as Woolf says, or at least an insistent thought that behind all of it is a “hidden pattern” in which we are all connected, and that actually the entire world is a work of art of which we are a part. And then: “Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call a world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock” (72).

This ideology seems to significantly echo with Hélène Cixous's notions of the poetic as the most true, as the naked life, which most often becomes intelligible if put into words, as we engage with the poetic text as writers and readers). Also, there seems to be the shared insight that it is through a complete mental and physical involvement with intense experiences that we can see certain patterns behind the apparently mysterious moments of living. Thus, Cixous talks about the phenomenon of shedding tears, a “mystery throughout all our life.” We don't really know why, when and how much, although they are the very “production of our body.” It is right here, in this unknowing that writing begins for Cixous: “I go back up the stream of tears. When I
begin to write, it always starts from something unexplained, mysterious and concrete. Something that happens here. (…) … I think these are the only important phenomena. It begins to search in me” (43). It seems that this meditation which starts to search itself “in me,” takes place within the body of the inquirer who is being taken by it: “Where does this thought come to us from: from the body/It is the place that writes/What is it called/To follow the course: of the blood/of the wind etc.” (42). Then, how does one give voice to this speech without words? Perhaps, by agreeing to enter the poetic, personal, intersubjective and intertemporal? Cixous says: “And this question could be philosophical: but for me, right away it takes the poetic path. (…) … it goes through scenes, moments, illustrations lived by myself or by others (…) it crosses very many zones of our histories” (43). When Woolf points out that there is no god or godlike figure, but still the world is a work of art, and that this is only us, “we are the words,” perhaps, we can also hear Cixous talking about the potential of us all to be poetic bodies. But to move even closer to her belief in poetic imagination as the truth, the “thing itself,” we can think of Cixous's notions of love (and by doing so glance back at Woolf's words).

For Cixous, love is an exalting but also menacing foreign territory “of the same species as God.” It becomes the “opposite of comprehension,” a “movement of faith,” “Loving: not knowing.” Because, it is “to have faith in the other beyond all proof,” “Faith: my movement. I exist God” (17). Does this not mean that the pattern of life, which is not the word of a detached god, but a work of art of multiple dynamics, is made of our unstoppable fantasy; it exists by virtue of our passions and poetic bodies? Also, after Cixous's reflections on the ethical dimension of politics, Calle-Gruber points out that her “field of action, indeed your combat, takes place in poetic writing, language, fiction” (7). This observation appears important for my recurring question: if the poetic-affective is more true to life than the conceptual (even if it is so more often
than not) how indispensable then for politics must be the role of poetic writing? The poetic, since it is initiated and largely shaped by the most dramatic segment of our consciousness manifested within our bodies, saves the idea from being severed from the affective. Knowledge of the affective dimension of beings offers insights about the “naked life,” harmfully absent from the greatest part of current politics. Further, a persistent consideration and acceptance of the affective, why not through a patient exposure to the poetic (texts, sensibilities, etc.) is the beginning of acknowledging by one's body and one's mind the erotic ethics of the other – again, dangerously missing in the ruling politics of the western world. The indispensable advantage of the poetic is that in its actual if limited space, we are actually taken and we perform the ethics of the other, thus we make it happen right here and now. Poetic text, in its condensed field if desire makes us endure and perceive, what in the life which marginalized the poetic either eludes us or overwhelms us as an unintelligible mess of sensations and shocks.

I intentionally amplify these echoes between Woolf and Cixous so as to try to explore what kind of theory a poetic theory would be? A theory which embraces as its epistemological frames the changeable forms and the rushing language of a poetic text. Consequently, what kind of ethics is intrinsic to the structure of the poetic, the fictional text, the one that requires us to develop a kind of perception which could be crucial for our feminist theory and politics? The arresting similarity between what we might call dramatic ethical experiences of two little girls' (future authors') lives possibly points at certain patterns. Both are the instances of strongly embodied shocks and alarms: Woolf remembers a terrible mental and physical collapse before the immensity of horror she glimpsed at, while Cixous talks about how menaced she has been by different forms of real and symbolic death. She is also convinced that if directly exposed to human pain in excess, she would surely succumb like her doctor father. Both Woolf and Cixous
find a way to explore these intense affects through the experience of poetic writing and discern certain variable patterns in living by means of the perception offered by a poetic text. This leads them to establish, what Calle-Gruber calls the *poethics*.

Writing “under the sign of poethics” is at the convergence of poetry and philosophy. It is free of “realism” and other narrative and conceptual laws, in order to “give itself full latitude to think”: to become a “thinking-writing,” and go where philosophy's to discover the universal principles is suspended, as Calle-Gruber echoes Heidegger and other akin thinkers (79). The _poethical_ text goes beyond; as a matter of fact, it requires the reader to run, because it “runs far ahead of the reader and ahead of the author” and cannot be “appropriated” to a single theoretical paradigm, ideology, mind, character, a single voice. This is the text that is hard to read – it asks our minds and bodies to get out of joint into the “place of otherness.” It “refuses an assignable position,” and stays in the “between, the in-between, the entre-deux.” Thus as it disrupts conventional ways of writing (seeing and saying), it also “tear[s]...[the] reader, who finds himself or herself torn between received ideas/feelings that are dismembered by each word” (7-8). This is a disturbing experience, says Calle-Gruber and doubtless, it can be highly uncomfortable and repulsive. Still, Cixous says that reading such texts makes us happy – it transports us elsewhere out of ourselves, takes us on a trip (8). For Calle-Gruber herself the encounter with Cixous's texts is a double movement back and forth into a “known-unknown.” Here she gains a “means of recognition” of how her habits, how she is “incessantly thwarted by the other” – an “endlessly restaged otherness” (8). Hence this doubleness, attraction and repulsion, desire and fear in our state of alterity, be it as readers (writers) or lovers. (Cixous claims that in love, the state of extreme alterity, when we are radically ejected from our selves into the unknown, we are

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20 In the chapter “Longing for Another Text” we will hear Carole Maso talking about the emotionally and physically trying experience of writing new poetic forms. She calls it “writing into reluctance” (“Except Joy” 135).
simultaneously given immortality and we become more mortal and vulnerable than ever: an immortality marked by constant possibility of death.) Thus, Calle-Gruber, once she starts being Cixoused, becomes subject to an “irremediable, never finished cutting into pieces of I-me.” An endless unfolding of selves, other than the familiar self: “...I (reader) find my bearings where I have no bearings; I find my bearings where I become lost,” “in a bout of otherness – as one would say a bout of fever” (8). It seems that such processes at least verge on suffering. But, with her particular approach to suffering, Cixous claims that in it, we can find a strange profit: “in suffering there is a whole manoeuvre of the unconscious, of the soul, of the body, that makes us come to bear the unbearable.” Severe pain makes poets of us, and the same works for joy: “whoever has not suffered from joy, has not known true joy” (19).

What is this suffering/joy about? Extreme, ecstatic joy “goes beyond us, it is bigger than we are. We suffer from our smallness and we make superhuman efforts to be superhuman.” Or – we break into this more-than-ourselves-in-ourselves, the-other-in-me. And this incessant painful extending is the exact way the poetic language works – to it is intrinsic the ethics of one more, the poethics which is spacious enough for (an)other and more. Poetic and philosophical, intimate, corporeal and ethical, its principle is “one-step-more. When you arrive 'at the end' (of a thought, of a description etc.) take one more step.” And after that, continue again (83).  

As poetic writers/readers/bodies we come to “have such pointy pricked-up ears that we hear what language says (to us) inside our own words...” Because, it “always tells us volumes more than we are saying” or when I speak, it is never I but us – me and the language, me and my others, in each

21 When talking about the “secret of one more step” Cixous largely refers to the philosophy and ethics of Jacques Derrida. In “We Are Already in The Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” there are many and long passages in which Cixous speaks about Derrida, as one of the most important figures in her life of writing-thinking, as her writing space, discovered in the early moments of her career, when she was “in such a desert, an absolute desert that no one in the world, not even I, could imagine now” (83). Calle-Gruber envisions Derrida and Cixous as “on the two slopes of the same ridge” (79). For Cixous, Derrida is her difference.
other, with each other, by each other (85). As Calle-Gruber summarizes, poetic writing-thinking, although it has the dynamic of running, appears as mythical and elementary (no conventional logic of fictional characters is let in; what we have instead are forces, intensities...). “[A]t once practical, concrete – and fabulous,” it “not only “give[s] rise to a relational interplay in the fictional text” but “in depositing, in accumulating,” it “form[s] echoes, strata of meanings” (81).

Here we come to what I propose as the unique political potential of poethics, ethics of the other or erotic ethics (different names can be coined...) for feminist queer theory. Its message is elliptically condensed in the suitable poetic uncertainty of Cixous's phrase: “The undecidable is the other's chance” (83).22 Once we have embraced the poetics of the undecidable as the principle of knowing, we have allowed for “what is other than myself” (83). This means that we have dissolved the idea of difference/opposition as an affirmation of one at the cost of the other's exclusion (“one is nothing,” Cixous says) or as it happens, annihilation of one for the other to dominate and regulate. Instead, we have organized our epistemology around the poetic perception of difference as differentiality, a multiplication of interacting selves in the situation of desire, and with this we have given an impulse to the series of relationalities based on it. 23 For Cixous, in a brief condensation of Derridean ethics, the epistemology of undecidability is “thinking of tolerance):

...the thinking that does not sever, the thinking capable of concavity, of turning on itself to make room for difference. The undecidable thinks all the possibilities, all the positions. In

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22 Here, of course, the other is other(s) in me and other in the other, all our others which make us and enable us to be more-than-ourselves.

23 By the principle of differential Hélène Cixous explains her inclusive notion of sexual difference, a matter of much misinterpretation and misappropriation in the reception of her older text “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975). Sexual difference is discussed in “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views” as well (52-54). But instead of the terms bisexuality and other bisexuality, the latter known from the 70s on as the name for Cixous's concept of what I understand as radical queerness of all desire, this time she talks about sexual difference as differentiality. Both terms, the other bisexuality and differentiality stand for a dynamic of complex multiplication of interacting selves in the situation of desire – sexual, textual, or some other.
the writing of J.D. the multiplicities of places, of voices, of identities are always inscribed, not because J.D. wants to be everything, but because he does not reject the uncertainties of who and where. He never knows. One never knows with him.

Apprenticeship of humility. (83)²⁵

It is hard to think of too many examples of such an inclusiveness which is directed by incessant questioning of oneself with the conviction that there is always one more possibility for the different, for another. A particularly important point seems to be that the multiplicity of places, voices and identities does not mean an uncritical belief in an endless possibility of being anything, everything and nothing at will, in an ecstatic dream of shattering all identities. Rather, different desires and identities are seen as staying in a complex and non-finite interplay of the intimate and cultural, deliberately performed and painfully compelling, material and fictional. The humble apprentice position of not-knowing is necessary here in order to poetically, that is, with one's entire body and mind allow for always one more possibility of a voice, an identity or a desire. This position seems to be a promising conceptual and political direction for today's queer feminist theory.

Gift for the Present, Poetic Mathematics

In the field of poethics we make temporal calculations which are different and lead to self's detachment from the unified assignments of the ego; instead, self sees and imagines itself and also gets seen and imagined in an infinite specular multiplication of intersubjectivity, beyond the conventions of place and time. Hélène Cixous says: “There are scenes where we begin to be

²⁴ The initials J.D. stand for Jacques Derrida.
²⁵ The significance and subtlety of such political thinking is discussed directly in relation to Cixous's and accordingly to Jeanette Winterson's notions of difference in the chapter “On Scorching the Books of His-Story.” Also, an attempt to trace the hints of a compatible ethics is made in the chapter on Carole Maso's texts.
in such intersubjectivity that the subject is only intersubjectivity” (77). She refuses the traditional narrative construction of the character as an “illusion of the real” (76). That is why her characters will not have “real names” which would force onto them a certain psychological and motivational realism. The very tentative and malleable names they get allow them, Calle-Gruber describes, “to play with the rest of the text” and maintain the “same suppleness, the same fluidity as the text.” Just as the text itself is nothing less of a character enmeshed in the dense twisting and unraveling of its elements, the “shipwreck of two hundred pages.” What we see in Cixous's fiction are more like “points, motives, movements that form descriptions of vectors, of drives also, desiring forces, libidinal forces…” They allow us to enjoy a “spectrum of possibilities. Of scenarios” (76).

This infinite multiple “modification of subjects” is mathematical, Cixous calls it a “specular shuttle.” She mentions the example from her Cerisy text for Derrida where she describes the case of two lovers who are at two distant parts of the world and she speculates: “how can (I), A, here, live a time that is no longer my time, that becomes a time altered by a time B that is the other end of the world” (77)? In other words – what time is actually happening right here, in this now of the text, if “I” am an inter-subjectivity which exists by the other who operates in a different time and space (different in any of combinations possible)? This opens a great number of opportunities for the perception of new significant relationalities (of bodies and consciousness) and their transportations and mutual inflexions in times and spaces. There are at least two aspects here, important for this overall discussion. First is how such poetic or let's call

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26 This problem of untraditional, queer or non-straight temporality, though present in my entire discussion, is specifically referred to in the chapter “Longing for Another Text” as the temporality of desire; it is closely connected to Carole Maso's similar idea of this specific measure of time. In this chapter I also discuss how Maso's characters are recognized more as desires, pictures, phrases of certain evocative force... Maso herself says that in *Aureole*, she has largely abandoned the conventional laws of the character. The question of 'What time is actually happening right here in this now of the text' is also treated in the analysis of Jeanette Winterson's short story “The Poetics of Sex” in the chapter “On Scorching the Books of His-Story or Ways of Being a Pain in the Ass to All Men”.

it desiring sense of time enables us to recognize certain “erotic collectivities” whose ties would traditionally be considered random, provisional or simply stretched. Why do I say that Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber form an erotic ethical collectivity in the spiral time of feminist poetic temporality with Carole Maso and Jeanette Winterson? Second, how is it possible to regard the dense intertextuality of certain apparently detached writings as a rather particular space of feminist consciousness very complexly situated in the present, in between material actuality and the domain of the fictional? To see it as an open field of ongoing desire – a utopia of conceptual undecidability, of the faith in the unknowable, of letting oneself go and putting one's subjectivity at an extreme risk perhaps?

The temporal dynamic which is not linear but for example, spiral sets us free from the narrative logic of consequentiality. Instead of working within the narrowing concepts of diachronic separation of certain ethical and poetic phenomena (separated in “time”) we can imagine them as existing in the synchronic field of feminist desire that moves spirally. By way of such a logic, in Carole Maso's *Aureole* it is not only the lovers of the beach of today who can see Sappho longing for a young nymph (it is not straining at all for the mind in imagining a leap of fantasy backwards in the past, in the shape which is fed to us by history). Instead, we see Sappho being entranced by sensuously palpable visions of many contemporary lovers who share her longing. Apparently, they all coexist in “time” and incessantly affect each other. They coexist in time, but this is a wholly different time. It moves in circular, spiral motions of feminist intertextuality: a textual space, embodied and fictional, actual but always plurally possible, as it revolves around another, and another, now, now, now... Always departing form one, never finally

27 Obviously, the idea of such a collectivity cannot be limited to the writings of the authors I include in this discussion. My choice is almost arbitrary and restricted by the limited scope of the discussion. But even here we can see how the selected texts endlessly and intermittently unfold and condense in the spiral of tight intertextual relations.
arriving to the other.

Cixous: “To live, one must live in the present, live the present in the present. At the same time: the sensation of forming one body with all time, all the living substance of time” (33). And also: “There are impossible things I try to do with writing. Thus, I want to write in the present.” Still, she says, one cannot avoid but writing after the present, although writing's dream stays to write the present and it urges us to search and transform writing, so that it approximates this dream (78). Admittedly, to live in the present is such a hard task and we don't even have a gift for it (35). Besides, “everything conspires so that we do not live” in it. (33). Yet, “one must manage to live in one's house, inside one's time”: even if it's not always possible, it's a necessary practice. Reading and writing come to our rescue (34-35). It's here that we find this specific time-space which disavows the loss induced by separation of bodies and imaginations in the straight flow of history. In the undecidable space of the text, a never finished “here and now,” what has happened never stops flowing. It is always experienced as something still desired, yet to occur and be lived. “In this place, we stop, we return to our time, it is here, we live in it, it lives in us” and here we can form “one body with all time, all the living substance of time” (35, 33). With the help of the full involvement with the poetic text, by letting my self exceed itself into other-to-me-in-myself, we learn to linger over the intensities and alarms which don't qualify for the mainstream narratives which build up towards a resolution. Instead, they remain to glow in the interstices of perception and language, of body and mind. They are the ephemeral eternal. They are our continuous present, the permanent interplay of all time, in which one subjectivity, a single space or a sequence of time is surpassed. Cixous says: “as soon as one is in time, one sees that it is not what goes by but what stays, what opens itself. What deepens itself” (35). Maybe this is how she comes to an insight that “for me death is past. It has already taken place. My own.
It was at the beginning. (...) For me, neither beginning nor end, that is to say neither end nor end, everything is always right in the middle...life flows towards life. Between life and life there is an unknown passage” (82). Such a queer temporal logic enables us to see the authors I discuss here as contemporaries, and to understand their own claim to contemporaneity with certain other texts and authors. The consciousness of this synchronicity offers the sense of historical existence of a significant queer feminist body and of its ethical continuity. This further can open the possibility for creating tactical political coalitions and movements which while rooted in the particular material experience, work across the lines of nation, ethnicity, class, political group and other social divisions, as they are also conceived transhistorically.28

By now we have seen that Cixous and Calle-Gruber consider the position of loving to be the same as that of writing/reading: an erotic relation to my other(s) and to other(s) in the text. As we're hopefully growing to understand, both mean putting one's self at a great risk. This peril, the fever of being torn between the learnt (self) and the foreign is why it is all worth the effort: immortality is at stake, paired with an utmost vulnerability. Or translated in a different language, the sense of a greater political continuity and belonging to an unrecognized critical mass (beyond the learnt cultural identities, even those oppositional) with the power of social change is at stake. And the ecstasy of knowledge that we've been saved (both in writing and loving) this time again (a “narrow escape,” as the two authors call it) is recognizing the ethical power of being bound to my other, the foreign in me. In poetic terms, this movement is an incessant going, letting go, in the “unknown passage.” That is, giving my self up in what is an entrusting of it to the other that is always somewhat unknown and unknowable. Intersubjective as we are, it is by this other that

28 For a powerful and insightful discussion of the transhistorical and transnational and transracial trajectories of queer trauma and queer consciousness see Ann Cvetkovich's “The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma” in An Archive of Feelings.
we exist, and by them we act ethically in the world. Cixous says: “...this is not at all abstract. It is true that one deposits oneself. (...) ...what you give, that is to say yourself, your life ... is returned to you immediately by the other. The other constitutes the source. (...) And as a result, you receive your life, which you do not receive from yourself” (36-37). If the other leaves, becomes lost, this deposit that we entrust in a movement of faith is forever gone, can't be recovered. Thus in loving, by putting “our life in the hands that hold our death,” “we are already half dead” (36-37). This is an ultimate tension: being given immortality in love (for immortality it is: the joy when by loving we exceed what we normally can and are) by the same gesture we are given our greatest mortality. (“With the person we do not love we are much less mortal.” As probably in the text in which we are not dared out of our selves.)

And we can keep thinking of loving the otherness (of the other) and writing together. In the permanent equivocation of each word and its tearing in the text, amongst plural voices of the language and by an ethical acceptance of the undecidable that we are being saved. Lots of bold and almost blind movements need to be made here. Like Carole Maso writing her poetic text into reluctance, against resistance, when one practices courage which one doesn't have (“Except Joy” 135). Just like when according to Cixous one practices living in the present. Maso says: “To give up a little. To let the earth go, and the ones I love most. (...) To live at the heart of the unknown, without explanation” (135).

Giving Chance to an Alternate Reality of “e”: from the Moon to the Other

Renouncing mastery over one's self or the text; renouncing the (illusionary?) safety of one and the same by wanting nothing less than both and all that is between them; playing by the undecidability of and instead of exclusionary or – if pursued as the poetics of knowing and
being, are all feminist ethical choices in an extreme queer form. Letting go of the unified identity (sexual, authorial, etc.) and understanding that my living/writing source is the threatening other, is the initial position of the politics of radical inclusion of different as differential. As a social order, this still seems to be an important utopia and might always (have to) stay so. But as a living/knowing practice attainable here and now, I suggest, it does exist in the poetic/queer feminist writing where everything depends, where “I” depend on intertextuality – the text of the other in and by which I can only write myself. Where I deposit myself at the risk of tearing of I-the writer/reader.

Quite often, splitting of the critically poised self, equivocations opened by the precipice in meaning and silent avalanches of grammatical rules depend on the placement of a single punctuation mark. Sometimes it is only a shift in one word or maybe the tricky game of unleraning linguistic (cultural) clichés. The power of language is immense and it is at our disposal, Calle-Gruber and Cixous are in unison here. “You can say everything, do everything, that has not yet been said, not yet been done. (...) It suffices to display a letter, a full stop, a comma, and everything changes” (10). For Hélène Cixous (finally, for her as a proponent of French poststructuralism and the practice and epistemology of écriture) unleraning of the accepted idiom is related to undoing social hierarchies which keep our imaginations and bodies ensnared. She seeks to undo them in the space she calls enterdeux where everything always is in the passage from one to the other, in French de l'une à l'autre (10). The process of unlearning and “dechierarchizing everything” begins in such a way that the “superior” and the “inferior” are not reversed, because this would reinscribe hierarchical mode of thinking. Instead, relation is stirred, even permanently disordered into equality of the multiple. An ethical political movement

29 While idiomatically, this phrase uses “un” which is the masculine form of the pronoun, Cixous changes it into feminine form of “une”. An immediate and the most general translation of “enterdeux” would be “between the two”.
has been made, the one whose goal is to allow for the other.

There is the fantastic example of *de l'une à l'autre*. In its “correct” form, it shows the “stubborn, outdated side of a number of idiomatic locutions which are not questioned and which impose their law on us” (10). It is the masculine grammatical form of the pronoun that is used in this phrase in the “sober practice of French language”. But in the new version, the excluded feminine is retrieved in such a way that we are always in the passage between *l'une* and its other. But this is not all; there is more to this “serious game”. Next, Cixous writes *lune*, the moon, and what we have now is from the moon to the other. She reminds us that our overall perception is geocentric (we can say, egocentric) but with this reversal, the earth becomes the other of the moon. This practice is important, because, “being commanded in advance by language, we deprive everyone of everything. We deprive ourselves of otherness – of the otherness of the earth. We ourselves finish by no longer seeing it from another point of view, while it absolutely needs this.” But if we look at it from the moon's vantage point, it becomes “revived: it is unknown; to be discovered” (10).

The need for this writing-thinking into the cliché is absolute, because its goal is to reestablish our sense of justice. Justice is expelled from our very minds with injustice being ingrained in the language. Cixous says: “We do not think with justice. The world-wide non-justice that we all know politically has spread all the way to our imagination. It goes so far that we are not just with the earth, with the stars, with ground, with blood, with skin” (11). What hinders us initially is the cliché in our bodies. And this is for Cixous more important than ideas.

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30 Cixous talks here about the hierarchical binary couples which structure the language and therefore the western thought and at whose beginning is the first couple of hierarchy – the masculine and the feminine. I refer to the role this founding postulate of French post-structuralism and *écriture* has in Cixous's politics of writing, in the chapter “On Scorching the Books of His-Story.” About this particular issue, in “We Are Already in the Jaws...” Cixous says: “In advance, and without our even being informed, everything is already ordered-classed according to a scale which gives primacy to one element over another. And power to one thing, or to one being over another” (11).
since the affects which appear on our bodies are generated by the “innumerable turbulence of the soul.”(12). Cixous systematically does her work of overturning the hierarchies in language, always at least implicitly exposing the initial separation of feminine and masculine. She sets the word free: difference as one or the other becomes nothing (“One is nothing,” she says) and instead, it starts being thinkable only as a sign of differentiality, the virtual impossibility to limit the number of differences of *enterdeux*. As said, Cixous believes that we should take nothing less than both and everything in between with equal respect, wonder and acceptance. One must not exclude the other, not even as retribution. Only in this sense, she is not for the feminist correction of language: choosing one, this time feminine, at the cost of losing the other.31

Calle-Gruber points out the “great urgency” that can be felt in the fabric of Cixous's texts, their pace and their energy and she reminds: “You say: writing is living. This is already a certain response to the question: why does one write?” (95). What appears is that this urgency of attaining alterity is the matter of survival, of the ability to create an alternate world, an impulse initiated by suffering social reality and its forceful impact on the private. Cixous talks intimately about these connections between writing and surviving: “The refuge value has always existed. The reality of the world to which I was witness was so violent. Like today: the world comes at me with such violence that I could not stand it without a shield” (95). The reasons for refuge are always there, then and now, the need for a protective shield is permanent. Not as oblivious turning away, but rather, as an engaged dreaming, projecting and looking for transformative possibilities amidst the culture of separation: in the language, mind, imagination, cliché, body.

Cixous continues about why she started to write – it was in desperation and “against reality” of massacres, betrayals, barbarity:”because there was no language, and too many

31 In her notebooks she says: “Imagine a 'corrected language'. I am against it. The grammatical effects are precious. Indeed, they allow us to play. We would not play anymore. The fact that the language resists me, hampers me, is a good thing. There is a profit” (63).
languages and not enough languages, because my father died, because the Jews were massacred, because the women were exploited, because the Arabs were expropriated…” (96). When Calle-Gruber remarks that writing might be gaining time, Cixous replies that for her it is more as if she “gathered up twigs, magic words. (...) Gaining earth, fabricating a ground, rather than gaining time.” Here Calle-Gruber makes an important clarification, and establishes connection between the place of refuge, an alternative utopian reality attained in writing and writing as gaining permanent present in the text. She talks about: “...attempts to bring back to the present, to reanchor all activity in the presentification of the book” (96). We can tie the presentification of the book back to the idea of the experience of text as the space of convergence of all time. Or to the image of moving in the enterdeux: the powerful poetic residue left by an intense past moment in the body which is lived over and over again in the prolonged present of the text. In the permanent now where text keeps recycling itself into new possible meanings, we can discover political creativeness and a potential for futurity of what is conventionally understood as gone and lost.

Loving the Impossibility or On Aime Personne

“Writing has a separating function, that is true. It also has a repairing function” Calle-Gruber points out (94).

So far, we've discussed only the reparative one. But then, separating function seems to originate from the reparative effects. As Cixous explains: “It repairs the author. But it does not repair the relationship.” While the writing person feels “innocent of writing,” in the “little explored zones, with lots of shadows” the friend, the lover, the other can sense something cruel

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32 This is also in relation to the already mentioned necessity to live and dream of writing in the present.
and harmful coming from the writing (or some other art) of the desired one. They have a feeling that an elsewhere is created there, necessary and ecstatic for the author, an “infinite jouissance,” a mysterious and indefinite intimacy in the relation of the writer and writing that cannot be communicated to or grasped by the other in the couple. (Even though and paradoxically so, in writing, it's all about desire for words). This is experienced as a threat, which ultimately challenges our desire and capacity for acceptance of the unknown. Cixous calls it capacity and desire for appropriation and explicates: “Because I does not always want there to be too much private you, too much in reserve. A lot of you and a lot of your intimate life is less of me.” This often feels as “engendering of a second person – whom one has nothing to do with” (94). Still, she adds, “there are people who love the elsewhere of the other in this form.”

This seems to insinuate another drama of desire: Cixous believes that the “first state of desire” is the craving to know what exactly the other feels when they experience pleasure – how is their jouissance theirs and different from mine? But this is impossible to know, just as my jouissance is not communicable from me to them. At the same time, both these impossibilities are the driving force of desire – impossibility as a mystery at the heart of desire. For Cixous “…it is indeed the only pleasure that is structurally indissociable from this dream of sharing. Double and divided joy. (...) This is what gives the act of love its venerable character…” And it is intrinsically tied to desire for words: “This urgency...to decipher what cannot be said, what is expressed otherwise than in verbal speech which nonetheless arouses desire for words, this is our human drama. We are always in fine messes” (56). There is no moment comparable, in which while we want so much to exchange the one and the other (“to add the one to the other, the one in the other, there, precisely, in that unparalleled experience”) the exchange is not possible (54). But suddenly, this, we might say tragic impossibility at the core of desire, has a strange effect:
...right where the exchange is impossible, an exchange happens, right where we are unable to share, we share this non-sharing, this desire, this impossibility. Never before has what separates us united us with such tender ties. We stand separaunited, tasting separately-together the inexpressible taste of sexual difference, as it gives itself (without giving itself) – to enjoy in the *jouissances* of the one and the other sex. Sexual difference [La d.s.] is truly the goddess of desire. If she does not give “herself”, she gives us the most of us possible.33 She gives us to me by you, from you. (54)

Loving and writing/reading intersect again in this dramatic desire for the other's desire (and also to give mine to them), the impossibility of it, and from here, (in simplified terms) at least two scenarios. One is fear that the incomprehensibility of other's desire (if let in) will induce the loss of my self, therefore a sense of threat, anguish, and even humiliation. Another – unity in separation, the ecstatic separaunitedness. And this is not to say that the latter is easy at all and that suffering is not intrinsic to it as well. Still, this is apparently where we achieve “the most of us possible.” Generally, suffering comes from the impossibility to really know other's desire (and the question of how we accept it with love, if we are not able to know it). Then, we should also remember that loving can hardly mean loving one: rather, as Cixous says, “in writing,” and we can say in loving too, “we do not love anyone. Or rather, we love (no)one. *On aime personne*” (112). We love all our others, but also all other's others, some of which can be felt as a threat to my self. In writing (as in loving), Calle-Gruber continues, the “subject must forget itself a bit (him or her) so as to enrich itself from its non-subject, something in itself that it can only encounter only by going out” (112). Initially, this seems paradoxical: I need to forget myself, or actually, diminish my self in order to enrich it, but only by leaving it and stepping out

33 *La d.s.* stands for *La différence sexuelle*, and it is “phonetically indistinguishable in French pronunciation from *déesse*, goddess” (114).
of it. But one experiences resistance here, Calle-Gruber says, especially if one hasn't written much, or as at the beginning of love. The resistance must be strong, because, according to Cixous, this is the path of the series of renouncements, before all, the “renouncement of the affirmation of an identity.” In what she calls an amazingly changed economy, one opens oneself, but apparently not to flood and flow outside. One shrinks, makes room for the other in the self, it accepts less self and achieves a “reduced resistance of the ego” (110). Here we discover the non-subject space in ourselves.

This series of movements of de-egoization appears rather important for feminist queer theory and politics, as a way to create feminist consciousness, the basis for utopia of plural subjectivities. In an encounter with the foreign and by allowing for the different in me, I am able to enter the non subjective space and be more than I am. In the course of this experience, I come to understand how much I am implicated with your body and subjectivity: I exist only in the series of intersubjective positions – by the other, in the other, with the other. This also implies the pain and longing: my other always stays the foreign-in-me, ever questioning the identifiable me, reminding me of not yet realized me in us.34 At this point it is the question of whether I'm capable of making the ethical step of allowing for this difficult foreignness in me, which tears me to a lot of other-I. Also, of acknowledging my vulnerability and the profit of it (the profit of suffering). Or whether I negate this constitutive bonds and yield to the dream of pure identities.

34 Apart from building on Cixous’s rendition of the psychoanalytic concept of intersubjectivity, here and elsewhere in my discussion I draw upon the theories of intersubjectivity of Judith Butler and Anne Anlin Cheng. In “Longing for Recognition” from her Undoing Gender Butler engages with the concepts of subjectivity by feminist psychoanalytical theorist Jessica Benjamin in order to depart from it and give her own view of the ethics of the other, which she also elaborates in Frames of War. Although Cheng in her Melancholy of Race writes about mutually constitutive dynamic of racial identities, and I don't specifically address this aspect here, her ideas are particularly helpful and revelatory for my, and I believe, many other discussions of this kind, since racial other seems to be one of the most drastic examples of the encounter with the foreign in me as the abject.
and safe unified subjectivities. Cixous thinks that to be “better human is also“not to be closed in one's small duration, in one's small house, in one's small car, in one's small sex, but to know one is part of a whole that is worth the trip, the displacing of all our ideas” (32).

Always Saved Register of Writing, Livable Space of Another Planet

In support to the recognition of vulnerability in life and politics, Calle-Gruber invokes Cixous's book Déluge: “Knowing that one day, I will die and that he will die one day suffices for me to lose my anger and my illusions. A great human tenderness had reappeared” (32). There is particular dynamic in Cixous's discourse on love, which could also be described as an exchange of vulnerabilities. While in love, we know that destruction of the other is in our hand, and we often are dazed by this power (for, love is also destruction, greed and devouring). Still, we choose not to destroy, not to pursue this strong internal impulse. From the position of power, we choose the position of vulnerability. On the other side, “the lamb-that-isn't-eaten-but-that-could-be points up the (spared) fragility of the lamb but also the (consented) fragility of the wolf” (the wolf being the first lover, the one who can destroy, although of course, in love the roles are always reciprocal) (110).

Let's state again: loving and writing/reading start in the same position. And let's suppose that between the two scenarios of love, we will succeed in persisting on the path of de-egoization, believing that crucial profits can come out of it for feminist queer theory and politics.

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35 As we witness every day, the ways one can be repelled by one's other and the threat its foreignness poses for the stable ego, are numerous. Here we have an ethical obligation to think how such fears become complex on the level of inter-ethnic, religious, racial, sexual and other encounters, and how perilous are their mechanisms of self-defense.
36 Before this thought, Cixous specifies and thus opens the term human beyond its prescriptive implications: “When I say 'more human', I mean more progressing. I ought to say: better human. This means while being human, not depriving oneself of the rest of the universe” (32).
37 It seems worth noting again, especially in the light of my larger argument of the spiral of feminist intertextuality, that this kind of ethical acknowledgement of vulnerability strongly resonates with the ideas Judith Butler develops in her numerous text such as Undoing Gender, Precarious Life and Frames of War as she moves into the field of politics.
Clearly, it is not that we ever face an easy choice of one or the other. Rather, what we suffer on this path is a life-long struggle in order to allow for what we cannot appropriate and also to endure deconstruction of the self experienced along the way. I would suggest that by exposing ourselves as readers/writers-lovers to the inter-(subjective)-textuality which, and this is my wider point, is in the very structure of feminist experimental texts, we can almost deliberately enter a new sort of erotic ethical relations. By feminist experimental text I mean what Cixous and Calle-Gruber discuss at lengths as the poetic text in the passage, or the text of sexual differential difference.38 We can perhaps, as a conscious political step, systematically subject ourselves to diminishing the self in order to receive the difference of my (never fully knowable) others and access the profits this brings.

How much we are able to go to the far limits of subjectivity in these processes and stay in suspension, in a state as between life and death, for Hélène Cixous is the question of recognizing that there is, what she calls, a resource in us for the poetic genius. This makes us capable of enduring even in the situations of drastic annihilation (Cixous takes the example of concentration camps and resistance fighters) (27). The suffering can be so severe that we indeed are othered, we are in the realm of the incomprehensible, on the critical edge of subjectivity as we can understand it. Here we are in a strange state of passivity-activity (extreme passivity, which is actually activity) and “we are not the masters of writing” (or any kind of similar action). “...[W]hen we write in these circumstances, it's because we are another person, we are the other. Perhaps I am going to die: but the other remains. In this situation, it is the other who writes” (27). It seems that in desire for words (and this is not only about the most immediate instance of producing a book, but about all these sentient moments of poetic production in love, art, dreams

38 In the chapters to come and as a result of the engagement with other feminist experimental authors, some other, complimentary terms will come up for this same ethical position and hopefully prove helpful in understanding my arguments.
above all) while we vacillate on the verge of death, we who suddenly say and do more than we are, it is then it seems that we confirm life. In the very instant of our “brushing death” we confirm life. Cixous says: “At the moment when you cry out, when you say 'I am going to die', five words that belong to the always saved register of writing appear. It is to avow life” (26).

In this process of writing/living/loving, as we are transported from our familiar self as the center of perception, we are well guided by the unconscious, the dreams. There, we are preserved in the space of metaphors that don't lie: “…the dream does not cheat with metaphor. That is impossible, by definition.” The poetic production of dreams is independent from the deliberate desire for writing and this is a process we are also largely unaware of. It is a “force that does not belong to me,” but “goes through me. A force that I am not recounts my story to me” (27). This tells us that even when awake we should look into the poetic record of the reality of myriad intensities between the unconscious and the body in my and the experience of the other – if we are able to hear them, before they become a narrative, a single name. Therefore the text is here already, we are in the text; it's only that we shouldn't hope to master it. Rather, we are in the jaws of the text. Cixous senses that she is before an “infinite, but unusual” book: “... in my book the words are not there. It is by dint of contemplating and listening that I see words appear. That's it. That is how writing begins for me” (57).

Cixous claims that what is rediscovered and saved by writing and reading is a “life factor,” while “what daily life brings us, to a very great extent, is death.” Poetic writing endeavours to bring about “rehabilitation or...salvation of what risks being lost or being debased, scorned” (95). Thus the life of poetic truthfulness is in the difference from social death factor. Instead, it is in the marginalized, forgotten, in the fleeting instances of revelation between body and mind. It is usual that in the “daily life” of social hierarchies these instances are devalued as
ephemeral and not in meaningful connection with “reality.” Or they can be unrecognized, even debased as a part of the life of culturally marginal collectivities (among whom poets are found when they are revolutionaries). But we can choose the opposite position and claim that actually, the truth is reverse and that life and eternity are right here in this so ephemeral and forgettable. We can maintain Cixous's positions when she says that “writing serves also to ... collect what Joyce called epiphanies. Moments where reality, in its most modest form, joins in a single stroke a possibility and a promise of eternity – an instant that resists death” (98).

Thinking about the intermediary locus of poetic realities, Cixous expresses herself metaphorically, saying that love is not of this world, “but of another planet” (111). In the light of the arguments for the poetic as naked life, it seems logical to acknowledge that within dominant cultural reality there exist other poetic realities, as material as the flesh and its rich affective life, therefore decisive for our existence. My intention was to connect this idea with my understanding of experimental feminist writing as giving us access to present utopian life space of intertextual relations. I would like to see Cixous's image and mine, as possibly two ways of envisioning the same utopian life space, and thus confirm its actuality and its potential for bringing hope in the current political moment. Describing an actual world within the world, Cixous says that by entering it, we make the “lightning movement of trust” and we do it “[w]ithout reserve and without calculation.” While this world's ethics is in a systematic divergence with given language, unifying concepts and controlling cultural narratives, its faith in the necessity of otherness is absolute and unconditional (although always tried). Its navigation through the radically foreign is led by the sense of poetic logic and desire. With this in mind I read Cixous's words:

We must realize that to love is not of this world, but of another planet. What can be
confusing and misleading is that the other planet, which is ruled by the absolute and by faith, is nonetheless located in this world. So that when we love, we are subject to double regime: that of the ordinary world with its economy and its common laws, and simultaneously that of the singular planet where everything is different. And what is impossible in this world is at the same moment possible in the sphere of love. Words even change meaning when we change levels. (111)

But then, she warns promptly that in this sphere where “all is ‘easy’ actually “nothing is easy,” and thus reminds us of the sphere's living complexity and also its locatedness in the midst of “this world”. This is why there must not be final ideologies, final ideas of difference; this is why feminist queer utopian consciousness must never permanently inhabit a site of social institution, a political regime, a fixed set of cultural beliefs, although it has to exist within them and know them well.

Cixous concludes that “this sphere must be created, at every instant.” (...) “In any case, to love well, to belove, is relentless work” (111). And Calle-Gruber points out the immense promise of epistemological non-finality, with the words of personal enthusiasm and poetic energy: “What is fabulous is that it is never definitely settled” (111).
LONGING FOR ANOTHER TEXT: THE SYNTACTIC WOMEN’S BEACH

inside our heads celebrating the reflex of vertigo
we can conceive anything
concrete within the fiction (wellspring
prolonging you)
from language and its folds
matter, all tides at the limit
in my temples are presented

Nicole Brossard Lovehers

She's dreaming on the lip, on the edge of the known world
remembering
Her hand reading across the pillow to outline the lips – the
whole room perfumed...
Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?

Carole Maso Aureole

The temporalities and epistemologies of Carole Maso's novel Aureole are strangely condensed in this excerpt here almost randomly chosen for an epigraph – might it be in a state of subconscious lucidity, the mood in which, Maso says, this book was written (“Except Joy” 115). Here, the woman is suspended over the lip of the mouth or vulva, and since she is said to be dreaming, we can suppose that the body underneath her as much as it belongs to an actual lover, recollected or just tasted, is also a sensuous fantasy of a prolongation of a moment of perfect erotic ecstasy. An endless longing for another body, text, world, longing for more. And indeed, the woman swaying over this precipice in time, is on the verge of the world not yet known and only glimpsed at, but paradoxically enough—she is also remembering this world. And when we want to feel free to say that the lips which stir to such a leap of anticipation are something of a point of refraction of all desires: already satiated, spent, still haunting and those foreseen, then it should be that on these lips converge then, now and yet to be lived, what we will talk about later as of Carole Maso's constant presentness of desire's and desiring text's temporality (“Except Joy”
This is how the longing woman is suspended over the lip at *this instant now*: reliving the sense memories of the moments of ecstasy, she remakes them, unbinds them from pastness and unhinges them from actuality in the inconclusive space of the text, so that they are felt as something still about to occur. Something to be pursued a bit further, into another book longed for and not yet written, and into another of possible lives, unknown, but sensed. To a good part, her anticipatory cognition is sentient: she tastes it on the lover's lips, and she is even feeling these knowledgeable lips with her fingertips on the pillow, as marks of a sensuously perceivable absence. This body both poetically remembered and anticipated, is being read, thus it has a structure of a text.\(^39\) For Carole Maso, writing is one more form of lovemaking, and lovemaking is being discovered as a form of writing (118). Language “has always been a deeply sensual experience,” emotion, feeling and body itself, and its derivative capacity for semantic representation and conceptualization is only secondary (116-117). Language, the “visionary, mystical, ecstatic alphabet,” as a thing in itself, a thing with its own life, brings the ephemeral close to the sacred. (136). Memories of the future world and of the novel longed for are conveyed by the smell (“whole room perfumed”), movement of the body, touch of the palm, the eternal ephemeral incorporated in the language of *Aureole*. But in the end, there remains the question—what is it, this elusive but recurring thing that shakes body and mind, that travels through and shapes this book and leaves it open, this “gate of the last village”—this who *(Aureole* 201)?! This seemingly haunting odd phrase that wanders from chapter to chapter: *Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?* And how insistent must it be, if it leaves the book in the end

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\(^{39}\) By “poetically remembered” I specifically refer to the briefly described process of the recreation of past moments of sensual and mental intensities by repeating them and examining their poetic capacity for variation, thus keeping the past permanently coincidental with the present and always suspended at the threshold of futurity of an unbound potential.
suspended over the woman's lip, with the vision of a new novel and a new world?

Voluptuous world

Following the gleam of her body down

drinking from her cup

of mysterious paradise

Aureole.

Gorgeous.

Gorgeousness...

more— (210-211)

Maso practically spells out her political utopianism in “Except Joy,” an essay on writing *Aureole* after she once again pronounces the “old fictions” “ultimately useless”: their narrative techniques an “unviable and untruthful strategy,” suspect as all formulas are, since desire cannot be formulaic – an “agreed upon way to shape reality” (125, 132). Instead, she wants “there to be space enough for all sorts of accidents of beauty, revelations, kindnesses, small surprises.” Also, for “[n]ew patterns of thought and ways of perceiving. New visions of world, renewed hope”. In *Aureole*, Maso says, she has tried to examine ways of being in a “space neither fictive nor autobiographical where I am allowed to exist in an utterly different way. Not as a character or through a character, and yet not as author either” (132).

*Aureole* could be a novel, and its author seems to think about it that way: it does have thirteen “chapters,” yet they are not tied in any sort of continuity recognizable as a narrative. But
then, they are too intertwined by the threads finer than those which usually connect an ordinary collection of short stories. Maso often calls them pieces, and I will borrow this term in this chapter. In the Preface, she writes that “Oh that fiction, of all things, might do something other than be descriptive” (ix). In “Except Joy,” she writes that she has abandoned all conventional ideas of the novel in this book and she talks about its cohesive attraction: “I have tried to respect and indeed encourage the longing and the genuine mystery which exists between the discrete pieces” (126). Also, *Aureole* can hardly be said to have characters in the sense that there are certain agents in the text who pursue certain actions and goals or are deprived of them. Sometimes, in our desire for characters, we find glimmers and fractions of these, but even then, they are subject to another force, more distinct, indeed, central to the structure of this book. And this force, we suspect, is the “relentless trajectory of desire,” the “river being pulled through me like a miraculous, golden thread” (xi). Maso writes, simultaneously commenting on the novel's nontraditional experimental temporality and spatiality: “The figures from piece to piece are connected peripherally. An erotic consciousness of abundance and allowance, a kind of promiscuity seems to allow them to move back and forth between space and time more radially than might otherwise be the case” (“Except Joy”125-126).

Still, we are somehow mistaken if we expect another postmodern fragmentary narrative of a fractured consciousness. It is hard to say that *Aureole* in a consistent manner pursues anything but its wish to examine the epistemological and ontological potentials of a very inclusive erotic longing and its capacity to structure the language of the text. And vice versa: it wants to examine the intrinsic capacity of language unloosened in certain experimental texts to open a free space, both experiential and fictional, in which to perpetuate the palpable recreative effects, conceptual and hopefully political, of this longing. This wish as a consequence has both a
painstakingly methodical and chimerically unpredictable disorganization of narrative and linguistic causality. In this knowledge which comes from the life of writing, or in this living that can’t be really distinguished from writing, I hope to discover a potentially radical feminist utopianism of Maso's critical theory fiction, in the text of *Aureole* and occasionally turning to the essay “Except Joy.” I tend to understand and treat the latter not so much as a useful authorial explanatory comment, but more as an expansion of its text over the limits of its pages into certain afterthoughts, insistent images, phrases and words, into other genres, into a retrospective poetic-conceptual journal, the book's restless continuous life of longing for more – more texts, more free and freeing fictional spaces for the construction of new identities and new worlds (“Except Joy” 132). When Maso imagines a fictional space for the construction of new identities, this might seem to be in contradiction with the absence of conventional characters or character at all in her texts. I would suggest that when she avoids characters, she wants to avoid what Cixous and Calle-Gruber call “illusion of the real” brought by an apparent psychology of the character. But when Maso calls for the construction of new identities, I read this as her attempt to question all identities unified by psychology, politics, or some other exclusionary discourse and propose differentiality in Cixous's meaning of the term, as the dynamic of assuming and giving up the identity, following the need of desire. As such, “Except Joy” confirms *Aureole's* concept of a text at the threshold, an intimation. But, also, together, intertexts to each other, and already intertwined in the complex web of “internal and external” they expand the feminist polytextual and polysexual space.

40 “Except joy.” is Hélène Cixous's sentence from *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, which Maso also quotes in her essay.

41 By using the oppositional terms of external and internal (intertexts) my argument is vulnerable to committing a (conscious) mistake of conceptual contradiction. In feminist intertextuality and polytextuality, this division should not exist. Still, I am using it here for the sake of terminological distinction between the intertexts found in *Aureole* which are either from other Maso's work (older or perhaps anticipated at that moment) and the texts of other authors, such as Marguerite Duras, Gertrude Stein, Sappho, Eleanor Clark, Anna Kavan, filmmaker Maya Deren, Emily
All That Longing of the Letter C

The lines quoted at the beginning of this chapter are from the final piece in *Aureole*, titled “In the Last Village.” While this section resonates with almost all the ecstatic intensities and insights which, like threads, have kept the entire book together, even more insistently, it echoes with the variations of the phrase “we've come to this place at last” suggesting an end or a beginning, and the evocations of sleep, silence and departure. Also, here, all of a sudden the bed and the world are always white, and from other pieces (both in *Aureole* and *Break Every Rule*) we learn that snow and whiteness are the colour and touch of madness and fear of mental remoteness, a final end, an impossibility to live in the world. In the tone of: “No more insomnia. Lavender, a lovely sedative. And the silence./How muffled the world suddenly – as if walking through snow/to the last village of Zenka, perched on a hill/where forever resides, and hasn't it been nice?/The women comb each other's hair and laugh and talk until they fall,” the

Dickinson, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, but also implicitly Djuna Barnes, Virginia Woolf, and quite probably Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, and the list can go on. An early and clear notification of *Aureole*’s autobiographical and literary (artistic) intertextuality can be found in the acknowledgements which tells us that the book would not happen without Colette, Gertrude, Virginia, Djuna, the city of Paris and Provincetown, Anne-Marie Stretter (a character of Marguerite Duras) but also, not without names which seem to have equal personal and literary significance. The list starts with “Not without the muses.” If we follow the directions Maso gives us, we know that the muses quite often have their beginning in the body desired, and from there they start their uncertain and unpredictable journeys.

My arbitrary use of the term *polytextuality* should not be confused with the musicological term (meaning the use of two or more texts in a vocal work) although a relation of certain homology might be perceived between them. Here, I feel free to use in analogy with the term polysexuality, but also perhaps to let these to interact. The latter I understand as an attraction to more than one sex and gender, not to be confused with bisexuality, which supports the opposition of two sex and genders, male and female. I also talk into detail the implication of these terms in the chapter “On Scorching the Books of His-Story” when I discuss Hélène Cixous' term of *other bisexuality* as a queering of sexual desire and arguing for polysexuality. The interactive relation of textuality and sexuality has a central place throughout this discussion. Then, I understand polytextuality to mean the structural, conceptual, poetic promiscuity of the feminist texts I discuss: their attraction to different textual registers to such an extent that the shifts incessantly happen within a few sentences. This also refers to their attraction to other texts in such a way that they speak together with them tightly, and simultaneously, so that it is hard to distinguish which is which. In this respect, my idea of polysexuality has certain analogies with the musicologist term. As for the concepts of polysexuality, they don't seem to be too present here, since although very erotic, *Aureole* appears to be a very lesbian text, a world of women, although it doesn't really argue for lesbian separatism either. Whether Maso's extreme polytextuality can be understood as an implicit polysexuality as well will be the subject of speculation later in this discussion.

42 But then, it is not in “In the last Village” that we first hear such dark tones. While they briefly, but repeatedly glimmer in almost all the pieces of *Aureole*, “Exquisite Hour” specifically reflects such themes. *Break Every Rule* is the title of the book of essays where “Except Joy” is included.
repeated question – “Isn't this Paradise,?” and an invitation for petals to be stuffed under her tongue (eating the lotus of oblivion?), we might think that the speaker(s) is tempted by a final repose of some sort. While this seems so, there also are too many hints that she, while dazed by the proximity of the end (of the book, love, life) actually hovers over these possibilities only to assert that this is a book about the beginning of everything that the text, us and the world might yet be. At the outset of this piece Maso invokes Valery's line inscribed on the walls of Trocadero: “Friend, do not come in here without desire” (202). And although she begins her alphabetic walk from the end of the “visionary, mystical, ecstatic alphabet,” the final village of Zenka, this is only to find herself in the very next line “sailing into port” of the “dazzling village of A,” “Clutching now child's/almanac – or so it seems,/remembering...” From here, following the counternarrative logic of longing and passion, commences the specific textual and temporal prolongation of memories and anticipations, many of which are tied to the shape, size and sound of letters. As A is childhood, the sea and the beginning (and never ending) of desire, it is also an early faith in the protective capacity of love, and the feeling that if it “holds my hand in winter,” we might as well live on and survive this world: “sweet apples”...“they turn to face the day, and beyond,/a picture book, a book of days” (202). Still in the shelter of A, there is always also the pain of a possible end, the imminent zed of it all (and of course, this is the permanent dynamic of desire throughout the piece). Having reached by now the final pages of *Aureole*, as readers, we recognize the recurring theme of the lover who left but who can't be forgotten—we recognize it by the picture motifs of the breaking pier and petals floating in the barrel, certain varying word motifs such as “Intensify to rose then one more time,” by the punctuation and syntax shaped by the emotion of “stay a while” and “come back,” most often, we recognize it by the painful, suddenly direct tone of addressing in the parenthesis. So, in “In the Last Village” as well, there is an echo of this
They smile, draw the letter zed in talc, my love.

Come my dove—(intensify to a rose) come to bed now (just the thought) (203)

Just here, within these few lines, one can read an enormous pain and pull of both finality and eternity. The lilting amber world of possibilities still open becomes clearly dependent on the prolongation of the aureole of the text. But the demand of an outer reality is to conclude the text, draw the zed, finish the book (finally, publish it). And along with this, the desire (suspended as we are over this desire's visions, perhaps, we have decided) never to put a period (as in this passage Maso never does) gets written out. Here, in a text like this, the lover just might come back any moment, always possible as a thought, suddenly re-intensify in any imaginable shape—materialize as a line left for ever open, or as a rose. Even though the sense of loss is permeating, the intensity of pain it causes (also clear in the direct mode of addressing) renders the lost materially present—a sensuously experienced absence. But then, the book is coming to an end and again we hear “Everything suddenly muffled” (204). Still, what ensues is our quotation from the opening “She's dreaming on the lip, on the edge of the known world/remembering” and the question “Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?” I choose to read this passage as an attempt to preserve the lost body beyond the breakup of the relationship, the period at the end of the line, or interruption of the text or memory. The sense of helplessness (“They pat my head. They take my ink-stained hands”) continues to fade into unceasing variations of visions of desire (205). The most of closure these visions would have is – ...

They press the tiny book of delirium into my palm...as beautiful as it's all been...
it’s as if, as if—

now at the edge of the bed: your gorgeousness

And they whisper, giggling, “this must be Paradise...”

(...)

and then, at last

the way the lip cleaves

the way the lip clings

intensify

Where eternity resides, where rising up from the sea –
eternity

(204-205)

And this dichotomy between finality and eternity of desire and text continues till the piece stops. The text is “[l]eafing through the dreamy alphabet,” always mysteriously tied back to the “dazzling village of A.” “All that longing of the letter C” – do we see in it the curve of the hip, the spiral of desire as an aureole, a “circle of light around the world?”—is followed by the “moment I realize I will have to say goodbye” (206). But then, this is followed by “hold[ing] votives now for all the lovers,” almost letter by letter, “[a]s we delay a little, stay, as we prolong, elongate...” (207). Holding votives for all the lovers seems to be a refusal to give up any of the bodies desired – equally those that still might be loved, might have been loved and will never be known, but always exist as a possibility – because it is their bodies and desires make the spiral (inconclusive) map of our intersubjective longing selves (selves which are more than we are). But even more, this mystical loyalty to all the lovers might be subscribing to an ethics which
surpassed the ideology of the identities: familial, sexual, monogamous, and further, along the line of cultural restrictions.

The white theme of the last village, white bed, winter world, the theme of zed, when the woman realizes that someday soon she will have to say goodbye, might be about different forms of finality. Still, the repetition of the figures of continuation and commencement make it clear that by facing the ending of the book, she comes to a recognition that her writing is all for a text, all of desire that doesn't cease. If it were true that plots have to be resolved and paths covered, as the canons of culture require from us to think about life narratives, then for Maso too, death would remain the primary principle in the world. But in “Except Joy” she explicitly states: “I believe notions of plot as well will be radically reimagined—and become much more open again. This is what art does for me: It opens new places; it affords glimpses not glimpsed before. Without it I not only fail to live fully, but I begin to die” (129). Thus the assertion that the text never really ends but only provisionally stops, because desire doesn't really end either, is both personal and ethical claim to eternity in one's own way in the face of death, but also in the face of cultural death plots imposed on intersubjective relations which don't belong within these plots.

Therefore the “right never to close the parenthesis” by the end of *Aureole* begins to emerge as a question of survival, of overcoming the death principle and the narratives of the Father's genealogies and the riddle's resolution.\(^\text{43}\) What we can see in “In the Last Village” is this

\(^\text{43}\) In the chapter “On Reading Gertrude Stein” from her book *Curved Thought and Textual Wondering* Ellen Berry discusses different positions (the “plots”) of conventional and feminist reader's desire when approaching a text. The former is a position perpetuated by the dynamic of conventional (patriarchal) narrative. In summarizing the main qualities of such a narrative Berry refers to Teresa De Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*: “All narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, is overlaid with...an Oedipal logic...The work of narrative...is a mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost of sexual differences, into each text; and hence, by a sort of accumulation, into the universe of meaning, fiction, and history [including here, theories of reading]...(quoted from Berry 11-12). Continuing from de Lauretis's and Patricia Tobin's insights (Tobin in her *Time and the Novel: Genealogical Imperative*) Berry comes to the conclusion that if we approach an experimental text with patriarchal expectations of mastery and narrative resolution, we stay deprived and unsatisfied with our gain from the textual encounter: “The linear causal structure of narrative is shot
luminous field of the amorous alphabet, lover by lover never abandoned, a refusal to really
subject this vision to paternal notions of plot, history and authorship. A refusal to finish the book.
“*Aureole* for me exists forever on the verge, on the edge of a slightly heightened and unhinged
world, just before the narrative strands coalesce. Ordinary story seems rather false,” Maso writes
in “Except Joy” (127).

I wish to uncover a radical conceptual insurgency in this experience and practice: this
reality you condemn “me” to is somebody's script; this consequentiality of time, with its laws
and resolutions, is trying to put to eternal sleep desire's more polyphonic reality. Also, the
apparently reverberating idea in between the lines is that what is possible not only tomorrow, but
here and now, what begins and what stops, is actually in the domain of an engaged fantasy and
the experimental text structured by the logic of longing:

Plot cannot be contained given the subversiveness and potential extremity of the subject.

Content insists on its form here. It is my hope that at the book's threshold the reader and
the writer might be allowed to inhabit an extended moment of suspended sexuality, where
anything might occur. (“Except Joy”127)

through with 'genealogical imperative,' a pattern of anticipation and resolution by 'which events in time come to be
seen as begetting other events with a line of causality similar to the line of generations.' At the point of conclusion,
all possibility has been converted into necessity – 'the subsequent having been referred to the prior, the end to the
beginning, the progeny to the father.' If we approach Stein's fiction with conventional narrative...expectations we are
likely to seek with desire but not to find. We remain frustrated from completing the satisfying literary encounter with
the text, groping blindly in the dark, failing to discover the Oedipal pleasure that Roland Barthes insists is
fundamental to fictional pleasure...” (Berry 12).
I Want the Right Never to Close The Parenthesis... (in Love with Amendments)\textsuperscript{44}

Maso takes us on linguistic, emotional and conceptual journeys into the unknown (without a guarantee that we will be able to get back). On our way we come to realize that \textit{Aureole} is a text about women as female subjectivities, who reappear in different places and guises, driven by something left to long for, perhaps, not so much and not always an actual love—but encounters (with a lover, lovers?) free of the stories wishing for a resolution. Thus \textit{Aureole} is about textual and erotic encounters multiplied, suspended, haunting, haunted, hinted, intimated and foreseen, but never really realized and as such, forever capable of another, of something different, of more than this, of the boldly imaginable. Breaking of the concepts of desire and desirability is performed by breaking the rules of a coherent and “meaningful” text. This takes place on the very level of rhythm, sound dynamic, punctuation, the white between words and lines and the shape of line and text on the page, and also, by the resonances within a paragraph, page, chapter, or the entire novel. With the language that constantly liberates itself from a recognizable form, \textit{Aureole} emerges as a love-intoxicated mutable body, heavy with the light, dreamy with the sea, enraptured with the longing for more erotic texts, in the liminal world “in the gap between touch and speech, in the vulnerable, in the open” (\textit{Aureole x}).

Everything burns here with the material clarity of a sensuous dream of the women involved in relationships of love: always erotic, intellectual, intertextual, imaginary, always ethical love for the other, always precipices of utopian notions. But their identities are never tied to a character: their names, even if recognizable, are just provisional signs for a certain affective

\textsuperscript{44} The “right to never close the parenthesis” is a reference to a passage from Maso's essay “Except Joy” in which she talks about the new logic she wants to feel and pursue in the text of \textit{Aureole}: “To understand that there might an instance where the parenthesis can never close. I want one day to get that right – to feel that vulnerable on the page, that bed of language, that world” (121). “In love with amendments” points directly to a moment in the piece “Make me Dazzle” in \textit{Aureole}, in which Maso persistently performs the logic of prolongation and allowance for more. The quote goes: “Even now, I give room for some future sighting, hope. Anticipatory. In love with revision, amendments. You turn, with hesitation...” (56).
tension, or for the ethics of intertextuality. In this space-time between actual and fictional, sensed and uttered, “Sappho sings the world ecstatic” and Gertrude Stein's poodle frequents the pages of the novel.\textsuperscript{45} In the preface, Maso asks herself about the identity of the woman on the bridge who keeps reappearing in the novel, “in different places and in different guises,” and she replies: “At the beginning of this project, I thought I knew; but by the end I have no idea. A woman moving along the relentless trajectory of her desire, transformed by it again and again” (ix). Thus the trajectory of desire is what apparently gives the very shape to \textit{Aureole}: this is a “story of a woman who wants.”

This visionary fiction theory of plural realities allows us to perceive the possibility of a political utopia in the field of desire of an experimental (feminist) text. As I have already proposed, we may understand this utopia as created and experienced in \textit{this} actuality: feminist consciousness opens the space of intertexts as the site of realities and political erotic relations existent in the here and now.\textsuperscript{46} By dismissing “old fictions” as formulaic and an “agreed-upon way of shaping reality,” and by pointing out that “[a]ll formulas are suspect,” Carole Maso implies that there are multiple realities, as there are multiple fictions (125, 132). If this is so, then certain fictions, such as those she or the feminist figures ingrained in her writing desire, are generative of certain kind of realities—utopian, if such is the political imagination of its practitioners.

\textsuperscript{45} The recurring names, names of places, quotations or texts differently insinuated in \textit{Aureole}, suggest that there is a shared field of utopian desire which circulates among, what I've called plural feminist texts, bodies, imaginations, and ideas. “Sappho Sings the World Ecstatic” is title of one of the pieces in \textit{Aureole}.

\textsuperscript{46} Somewhat before this, Maso says that “Without apology” in \textit{Aureole}, she has tried “something of a feminine space,” because, she rejects the “myth of ungendered writing” (130). Promptly, she invokes political pronouncements of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, implicated in the concept of \textit{écriture feminine}. Possible implications of the concept of “gendered writing” and “feminine space” as a queer space or a non-queer space depending on how sensitively we read feminine I discuss in detail in “On Scorching the Books of His-Story or Ways of Being a Pain in the Ass to All Men”. When I occasionally use “queer” as a qualification of Maso's feminist utopia, I am primarily referring to its understanding of time, history and (inter)textual relations and consequently, to how queer desire generates and is generated in such an erotic field.
From this point forward I will proceed to examine the queer political inclusiveness of Maso's feminist utopia—its foundation in the materiality of the body, its ethical belief in the necessity of plurality of bodies and desires (and what if this ethics actually means that “I” desire and love “you” but also other, plural bodies and subjectivities?), and its implication in the fictional promiscuity of intertexts. Maso envisions a space for free identity construction and creation of new mental patterns, which are crucially involved with the fictional/personal positions of writer and reader. From here, according to Maso, we start to perceive a glimpse of a new social hope in the form of an ethical political consciousness capable of materializing and multiplying erotic life practices, life choices and relationalities, which might progressively attain a level of deliberately constituted collectivities. But what resonates as an important point is that in this utopian field, identities are going to be plural, therefore taken and dismissed as desire requires.

In *Aureole*, the material/fictional field of the in-between has its clearest materialization in the beach and the seaside town of the pieces “Make Me Dazzle,” “As We Form Our First Words” and “You Were Dazzle:”\(^{47}\)

There is something so simple really, so lovely here: this longing woman walking down the beach that flanks the bay in winter...

     little seaside town
     little seaside star  off season

     floating  (37)

The scene is set in only a few strokes: the page, the bed, the world to be written, the “space neither fictive nor autobiographical where I am allowed to exist (…) not as a character

\(^{47}\) In “Except Joy” Carole Maso refers to them as “You Were Dazzle” pieces, apparently because of a certain continuity of desires, visions, bodies and leitmotifs among them (123).
or through a character, and yet not as author either” (132). The woman is walking down the beach, which we learn again has no end... (the woman on the bridge, who appears in different guises, the woman who wants?). While this might be an actual place of memories, it is in equal measure an open fictional field, where Maso gains her right never to close the parenthesis to so much unending desire.\(^48\) It is simple: a little seaside town ... is a town, a dream, a star, a petal... And indeed we can see in the very shape of the text how it drifts away from the sentence – off season – and floats into everything that might yet become of it, of us, who keep moving over the beach in longing. Over and over again, the constant present is established through reinvented syntactic and sound relations, as they also become fluid temporal and subjective relations. And then, they are set afloat. Floating becomes “recalling water”: “She dreams remembering the way her eye hugged the river on the passing train – long after the ride had ended.../like the lip lingers,/like the lip cleaves to the clitoris – long after,/long after./clavicle, lilting world” (37). The eye lingers over the river, the lip is suspended over the labia, long after the body has slipped away we are all interminably present in this lilting world: “a long, narrow beach (blowing, salty air, sand/flying, a great expense of gray and blue, etc., without beginning or end)” (36-37). And as we read through *Aureole*, we probably know by now, the glistening flux of the river (Seine becomes Ganges becomes Hudson) is the luminous thread of desire weaving through our bodies, long after the encounter, the text, a life... This temporal logic is accompanied by an optic of visions: hundreds and thousands of years later or a few months or years ago, plural intertwining bodies and subjectivities, “[T]he relics of love. Bones bleached on the beach” “and if one's vision is good, and hers is, one can see a long way, far. Far enough to see what from here is only a blur, then a human figure, then a woman – ” (38). By means of a punctuation of sudden suspension –

\(^48\) Once again, in “Except Joy,” suddenly addressing the lost lover (“trying even here, in the most inappropiate of places, an essay for God's sake”) Maso returns to the emotion of the never closed parenthesis: “You are long gone, except here. Right here. And then you are gone again. But I will not close the parenthesis yet...” (134, 133).
before everything that might happen next with this encounter, we are kept at the limits of the fullest and endless potential of it. All these relics of love far gone but also yet to come exist in this here and now of feminist text, they are being collected as the memory of writing: “Bending, picking up stones or shells, small collections of something ... She picks up the relics of a sea creature. A shell shaped like a clavicle. The sound of bells” (38). If we are reading for the first time, at the point we reach “Make me Dazzle” we've just started discerning the logic of the book's structure. But we are already in the whirl of time and subjectivities. The relics of love, the shards of stones or shells shaped like a clavicle and tinkling like bells, evoke the memories of the pieces yet to come – thus they remember in a forward direction. “Kiss my clavicle” floats through all of Aureole, we will learn soon. Whose bone is this, in the spin of encounters between actuality and fiction, in the place between the author and the character? “Their bones, thousands of years from now, glowing on this beach. Recalling pleasure, the hidden sexual residue of their lives, pulsing” (39). It is of no use trying to find conventional narrative and temporal relations here.

What perspective is this then, from which we are able to see all at once the lovers gone though still hurting us, and some other lovers fantasized and anticipated, all of them haunting our ephemeral sights, puns and texts? All of them (the “aspects of the unfolding self”) can simultaneously appear as a vision of the woman in the 6th century B.C (Sappho), as a (fictional?) encounter of the two women, the professor and the sailor, in the synchronic textual space of the beach, and also, as the residue of so much desire in the “intetext” between the parentheses, intimately addressed to “you”. It is by looking from the feminist temporal spiral that the

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49 The “memory of writing” is the phrase Hélène Cixous uses in “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book” when she says: “There must be a sort of magnetic ‘force’ in me that collects, without my knowing it, jewels, materials of the earth, that are propitious for a future book. It is my memory of writing that does this. I say ‘my memory of writing’ because it is not the memory of life or the memory of thought. It happens with sound elements, aesthetic elements, etc.” (29).
conventional past and future are dissolved into an expanding presentness. Utopian relationalities not fully realized and recollected from the past moments of intense encounters, maybe waiting for some other life, are actually enacted and perceived in the “right here and right now” of “this text”.

Time as conventionally conceived in much fiction loses its meaning when placed in desire's crucible. Desire's temporality is not that generally of development, direction, or movement. Often the erotic stops or suppresses time... (...) Sometimes it warps time, sexual consciousness seeming to inhabit an odd hanging space. “In the passage between day and night. The transition. In the uncertain hour.” (...) That odd kind of tripped-up time where threads of thought, memory, sensation are all combined, dissolving the ordinary distinctions and boundaries in a kind of perceptual synesthesia. (...) But narrative here is far more diffuse; it's an altogether different kind of energy field. I have tried to enter the continuous present of the erotic experience – a present which is constantly unfolding and includes past and future in its fluid hold. Time is experienced, to borrow from Heidegger, as a “sequence of nows.” That the past or future is autonomous seems not quite believable in this hanging, eroticized state. (...) In “Make Me Dazzle” there is the intermingling of time that allows the longing woman on the beach to converse in two time periods simultaneously to two different people in the simple: “you're right here.” (“Except Joy” 124-125)50

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50 The quotations are from Aureole's opening piece “The Women Wash Lentils” in which we are already immersed in the constant present of a highly eroticized space of a Paris room, the bed, and the window looking into the luminous city. The text about a young American and young French who spend days of intoxicating sex (this text which “I” am writing/reading “right now,”) incessantly circulates through Maso's earlier texts, excerpts of Eleanor Clark's The Oysters of Locmariner and numerous allusions to Gertrude Stein, Alice Toklas (and the poodle). The virtual impossibility to distinguish among these women's subjectivities suggests that our reading lesson is to stop trying. Instead, we might consider relaxing our desire for narratives of the identities and accept the rules of feminist intertextual game: text is complex, polysubjective, polysexual space for the free construction of subjective positions, in the logic of desire.
Thus in the erotic field of energy, as Maso understands it, the “real” diachronic time is of no consequence. After the experience of “perceptual synesthesia” of desire's temporality – the “hanging space,” “tripped-up time,” the “continuous present” – the linear sequence of past, present and future just doesn't make too much sense. Here, we are situated “[i]n the passage between day and night. The transition. In the uncertain hour.” It is significant for my understanding of feminist text's queer temporality that Maso also uses spatial terms to describe her idea of desire's and desiring text's temporality: hanging space, energy field, the passage. Finally, this continuous present she describes is the beach, the text – she calls it “right here” even before perhaps she calls it “right now.” That the dismissal of traditional shapes of time also means giving up the “coherent” notions of reality and subjectivity seems probable. In the Preface to *Aureole*, Maso talks about the “abrupt shifts in time, place, point of view, as invariably one lover will call up a past love or experience, or fantasy will intermingle with reality, disrupting the usual way of thinking. The tumult and disorientation.” The experience of which makes her think about “how these urgencies might create new formal structures” (x-xi).

There really seems to be something urgent in these insights: they demand new formal structures, which means new patterns of thought and new notions of reality and fiction. If dominant patterns and notions be shaken by the epistemology of erotic “tumult and disorientation,” we would be entering a realm of a different ethics. Instead of the massive histories of subjectivities elaborately constructed around the Ego always poised to collapse into shreds from the top of the precipice of the phallic or some other construction, we are faced here with a “spectrum of consciousness, refracted, escaping and elusive, casting light and shadow in all directions. The potential in us, and the extraordinary, awesome potentials still asleep in the language” (“Except Joy” 128). It seems this potential is for enduring the “erasures of the self”
and allowing for the radical desire for “that other thing.” For suffering the loss of a greater picture of the self and the “real” world, instead of which, by the “enlargement of a small detail” we acquire “microscopic” insights into the multiplicity of relations to the self and the other.\(^{51}\)

With each memory, fantasy, ephemeral sensation and fleeting relic of desire, we enter a spectrum of intersubjective consciousness – if we accept to get fully engaged with experimental texts such as Carole Maso's. Recognition of such an erasability of the self and its intrinsic implication with other subjectivities is a promise of the feminist erotic ethics based on the theories of wide inclusiveness of radical difference. Its methodology is based on the epistemology of the affect and the ephemeral, which I will later discuss as the epistemology of the ephemeral as eternal.\(^{52}\)

As the writing-reminiscing-fantasizing professor of the “Make me Dazzle” pieces is approaching her vision of the woman sailor on the “longing beach,” she is also talking to her absent lover, between the parentheses. Thus it seems that many passages of anticipation of the sailor's body have their mysterious connection with the love in the parentheses. Interestingly, while in the first each sensation might be a fantasy with the power of an intuition of actual encounter, the latter is an inability to really let go of the desire. It is an attempt to prolong the possibility of love's recommencement by repeating and variously recreating its “relics,” by trying never to finish the text, refusing to close the parentheses. And indeed, after several attempts to talk about the lover and in this way somehow talk to her as well, at one point the parentheses widens, and what at the beginning was painfully short text, as if uncertain of its own possibility, becomes longer and openly reminiscing. Then, the parenthesis between the two women the

\(^{51}\) Here are some striking resonances, both of the imagery and the idea, with Cixous's myopia in “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book.”

\(^{52}\) For further discussion on the theories of the ephemeral or the theories of every day see Michel DeCerteau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Georg Simmel's *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, *On Individuality and Social Form*, or Ben Highmore's *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory.*
professor longs for falls. By watching how these two subjectivities get diffused over each other and also into the subjectivities of women from other pieces – as they take diverse positions in the space between actual and fictional, and then only for more or less brief moments concentrate back into themselves, in a shape of a leitmotif, a haunting theme or a phrase (“kiss my clavicle,” “a broken pier in summer,” “Guide me like a Carmelite”…) – we begin to understand the ways in which desire in the field of the text remains suspended at the point of an unlimited possibility for its new realizations. What would conventionally appear as two opposite narrative movements, one backwards (memory of love on the beach in spring), the other forwards (anticipation and perhaps realization of an encounter in the now of the text in winter), is actually the beach of incessant intersubjective movements, the in-between of fiction and actuality, in the permanent present:

It's like a miracle then, again, sprung like this
from one another's longing and desire flung and fucked
and oh and oh and aureole and mouth and straddle

Two women in a café, having tasted, glimpsed:

A deep deranging of the sentence – disorder. (46)

We keep experiencing this specific change of perspective, this intersubjective shift from winter to spring beach and back, all over again. Between the parentheses it is “This long walk away from you now,” “As you turn to go – but hesitate for a moment and turn back slightly…” “I am startled, offered hope by the incompleteness of the gesture.” With the revision of the parting moment, the woman is also collecting the “bits of this and that, /shells and seaweeds and driftwood and small sea creatures” of this love, thus sedimenting the writing memory, when
suddenly it appears that “Then is right there. /You're right right here” (38-39). What we would assume is a recollection of the past, seems actually like right now: “She nods, smiles, bows her head. She sees her neck.” Is the following a recollection, an anticipation, an ongoing encounter, or a conflation of all of it: “The motion of a hand already moving through that tangled/ hair and how now looking away she sees that motion – /a kind of downward stroke in everything.” After a single “Hello,” “She closes her eyes for a moment and sees her ankles/already around the woman's neck. Back arched. Hips slung. (...) As they try (unsuccessfully) to get to the end of the sentence” (40).

The woman (professor) keeps experimenting with how the flexibility of the text can shape the attitude with the emotional experience; this time she does it with grammatical tenses. When she says: “Though we lived in the same city, I never saw you again” and then rewrites it as “Or though we live in the same city, I have never seen you again,” she retrieves the possibility of that which probably has been lost. With an affective engagement with the dimension of the text which renders clear an unending presentness of desire, our perception may be reorganized. It makes us reimagine our visions of reality, and as a result, we start to acknowledge the actual ethical potential of the text. What forms of intellectual and affective connections are really possible in this world and what sorts of utopian relationalities are imaginable and realizable in these newly open dimensions? The self involved and reshaped in such reparative and utopianist texts, we might even say the self which endures these ethically experimental texts, is:

“Anticipatory. In love with revision, amendments”; in this self's perception of the world, “You turn, with hesitation...” (56).53

53 Reparative texts is a reference to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of the paranoid and reparative forms of reading, in the essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” from her book Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity. The perception of reality which is systematically cultivated (here, in a textual encounter) so as to find actual spaces in which to induce social
Maso's erotic pieces are not oblivious of the actual risks and pain of the love they talk about. We come to know more about the two lovers' parting. We learn the difficulty of love for plural bodies, potential hurting and danger of desire that doesn't settle for the domestic, monogamous, culturally sanctioned happiness: “My sin: that I love others as well. Though nothing compares to you (...) Your touch. Your particular finesse. I have not forgotten” (56). “Humiliated, you wanted to leave me before I left you” (59). “Our sad history. I would never have left you” (171). “You thought you were of no consequence. You thought you were just a part of a larger pattern, a dizzying design (...) You were a part of a larger design. But you were never inconsequential.” The point of unresolvability: “Our sad history. I loved others. I wanted others. You could not see how you were any different. Or if you were, then why I would not stop, change for you” (60). Still, what remains is the dazzle “of our two bodies together,” in spite or along with pain. “We were flagrant and we were rage. Conflagrations: the pier suddenly on fire. Cremations. We were ashes (...) You were flagrant, you were fury, you were fear. You were decorum and rules and all of it doomed” (176, 177). Also, a plea, evocation, invocation, an ongoing sensation or an anticipation that keeps recurring: “Make me dazzle.” But even in the things “turned to stone, irrevocably away and engraved and forever,” there is plenty of room for different revisions and amendments, with “you in my mind, forever turning and turning back – like this” – in this open sentence never lost (66). Is it in an endlessly hesitant punctuation, or in the particularly elusive and halting syntax in the following passage, that the entire dynamic of desire's perpetual presentness: its rejection of loss and its longing to keep the other body is condensed?

change is in my opinion a form of Sedgwick's reparative reading. Sedgwick traces in the contemporary critical theory (feminist, queer and psychoanalytic theory, deconstruction, New Historicism) the epistemology of suspicion, or the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (borrowing the term from Paul Ricoeur) which she also calls paranoid reading and which is primarily concentrated on discovering different forms of systematic oppression, rather than looking for the knowledges which would repair the effects of the oppressions uncovered by paranoid epistemology.
If you would let me kiss just once those stony feet, just
once now with the mouth that –
The mouth that (57)
(...)
If I only had one sentence to seduce you with. To get you
back. To reach you.
One glistening sentence.
She takes her hand and puts it – (60)

Passages like this of painful stuttering but yet of a conviction embodied even in the
syntax that there is the possibility of revision, permanently slip into or they are actually pieced
together by the passages where the professor engages into playful dialogues of sexual
connotations with the athletic sailor lover, much in the tone of clichés of love on the sea.
“Triathlete! When she's American she says, 'oh baby, oh honey, tell me what you want.)/ When
she's French she says: derangement” (56). Or: “She says, 'like this?'/good girl's knot/'Uh
huh.'/Like this?'/Now you try' (65). Each pun, each variation of the phrase and image, each
simple rhyme draws multiple connections to the two ferocious lovers and women from other
pieces. Conspicuous is also the connection with Sappho who will fully emerge a few chapters
later, but here, she is briefly present, as she anticipates: in a “fever dream ...she sees a woman
lying on a beach, and lifting her lyre she sings the professor, athlete, lilting world and you and I
too into being...” (68). Again, the question of who imagines whom in this feminist intertextuality
is insinuated.

Slip knot. Slippery girls.

And then in your fierce, pierce, cry

Again. And then (her fist)
Rising from their sexual wreckage

She bleats, “threathlete!”
Triathlon. And tribid, bible, triple, pyramidal.

(A dream in which there are three woman on a bed. A
flash of three women. And the one who is the ocean,
lapping, licking – sea door – is being devoured by a second
woman who in turn is being fucked by – ...)

Your mouth on my clavicle that afternoon on the pier.

Dreaming tingling clavicle a million years from now

Recalling your mouth on the beach, bleached white

Dazzling deep eternity.

The woman who is grinding on her mouth in fishnets is
fucking the woman who is fucking her. Something like
that –

singing demented songs              dazzling songs

devouring

more –                             (69-70)

From sailor's songs into violent images of emotional hurting into athletic and sexual word
games into the mythical timeless dream of three women devouring and fucking each other in an
unintelligible circular interrelatedness. The fantastical pyramidal/triangular figure has its more material echo in the later related piece “You Were Dazzle,” where conflict over the woman's non-monogamous desire is mentioned with the same visual associations: “I wanted others and you were furious./ I wanted others and you were humiliated./The triangles you tried to negotiate./the pyramids...” (171). The ephemeral and material, the pier, “your mouth on my clavicle” on the beach that particular afternoon, becomes eternal and sacred: a bleached bone, “thousands of years from now,” “for an eternity will hold our pleasure – heavy with it like the gold” ... “Your clavicle and/beauty without end” (67).

I Want You Between Fiction and Essay. Ephemerality of Utopia

One of the questions which appear worth asking is whether feminist theory of today in its practical, lived mode can help create an ontological elsewhere right amongst the grand narratives of the history of societies, amidst their competitions and definitions, resolutions to questions and gratification of desires? How can feminist desire, as I have tried to understand it throughout this discussion, perpetuate politically imaginative enactments of utopian relationalities that don't have much to do with the ideas of feminist separatism? While diverse feminist communities have tried to forge certain systematic life practices rooted in the experience of the feminist body, one such elsewhere-but-right-here utopian place might be feminist experimental intertext, ethically structured around the desire for extreme difference and alterity and lateral plurality of knowledge. The feminist experimental text is an intricate, but also flexible site, and Carole Maso describes it as: “A place where we are for a little while endlessly possible, capable of anything, it seems: fluid, changing, ephemeral, renewable, intensely alive, close to death, clairvoyant, fearless, luminous, passionate, strange even to ourselves” (“Except Joy” 114).
As we've seen, for Maso, the space of utopia is found in the narrowest interstices of feminist fiction's flesh – the sensuous phenomenological place where the living experience and intellectual abstraction meet. When I previously say that this utopia is fragile, it is important to add that it is so in several different senses of delicacy. Before I proceed to illustrate this by a close discussion of the opening piece “The Women Wash Lentils,” I will quickly summarize the argument. On one hand, much of Aureole's political progressiveness depends on its freedom to assert the ontological significance of the ephemeral. This happens through recreation of the clichés of desire, by means of textual reiterations with aberrations, linguistic fracture, interruption, sudden speechlessness, loss of breath and stuttering – when we learn to find an engaged life of material changes in the affective social space of fiction. Getting involved with the text and enacting such ontological concepts and experiencing their effects on one's body and consciousness, which is what Aureole's sentiently cognizant readers do, also means actualizing a dream of another world, bringing it into political actuality. Yet, at the same time, Maso's feminist utopia is delicate because it constantly feels its existential and conceptual vulnerability. It finds itself battered between the insistent demands for social compromise and cultural conformity (in the vicious circle of existential survival and personal freedom) on one side, and on the other, the torrential elusiveness of knowing by the unconscious and an impending pain of the ego which pursues desire for plurality.

We might say that Carole Maso's fiction theory of utopian realities is the contact zone of the ephemeral and sacred, an unquenchable quest for the eternal in the fleeting and sensuous. It reasserts the personal and affective as politically significant. I would suggest that central to Maso's feminist ideas and writing practices is the insight into indispensability of relational intersubjective consciousness materialized in feminist intertextuality. In “Except Joy,” Maso
pronounces in spatial terms her feminist methodology, her epistemology of desire, as an ethics of acceptance and forgiveness. It is painstakingly attained in the textual in-between of utopian anticipation and realization, an ongoing presentness:

...a place where pleasures and arousals spread in a lateral radiance, in a kind of prolonged ecstatic. In an aureole of desire. At one diffuse, specific, and inclusive. A place where what is often discarded as unusable will be kept. A place at once interested in the abstract, distant, and also the utterly urgent, personal, even confessional. A place where we do not have to apologize. A place of forgiveness. I have incorporated, taken into the body of this book, my own past work. That there might be a place where we wouldn't have to disown ourselves, loathe ourselves in that mild, insidious way, feel ashamed of who we are, or who we were (...) To embrace our own texts, our written texts, and the texts of our lives. To risk the things they love to call us most: self-indulgent, histrionic, irrational. Indulgent, excessive, pleasure texts – unconcerned with getting to the point. In love with freedom. To walk out of the constraints of perfection, or modesty, or approval, or taste, or integrity as integrity has too often been defined. To escape the burden of the already-constructed and received forms... (131)

The opening paragraph of *Aureole* and of the piece “The Women Wash Lentils” takes us boldly straight into the heart of cliché. It also immediately states its intention to do something else with it.

When they are French, which they often are, especially in bed they say: *derangement.* When they are French, as this is Paris, which it often is – so beautiful, so light dappled, such light – the window opening up onto everything, everything: the tree-lined boulevard, the stars, the *Tour Eiffel,* she says, it's like a cliché, only beautiful: *croissant, vin rouge,*
fromage, French poodles, polka dots. When they are French. (1)

It is clear that if they are often French, they also can be something else, just as the place can be any other, and also Paris. Will this text bother to tell us any particularities of the young American's Paris undiscovered, while she is having an erotic encounter with the young French, during her first visit to the city? 54 (At least, this is what seems to be happening.) At the same time, the text doesn't hesitate to reach for any of the clichés that we would normally refrain from. Thus unless we are satisfied with Tour Eiffel and vin rouge, no Paris for us. (We might recall here Maso saying in “Except Joy” how “In this time of witness, of storytelling” she has “tried to allow myself to walk into forgetfulness, dissolution.”)

Then, as dutiful postmodern readers, we think for an instant of how any attempt of telling a story is just another version, but telling endlessly multiple stories has been even more annoying than any sort of narrative prescriptiveness. And we expect that Carole Maso would spare an effort of writing Aureole so as to break the news of this postmodern postulate. Here we can think how any story is about what we forget and what we put in its place, and that we might as well feel free not to put anything in its place, but write in this space as in a moment before the story begins. “In a space where I lose, lose ... in the unstable space ... between wakefulness and sleep, between sleep and dream – where language falters,” when the lost and called up might be just anything – this Parisian window, a luminous halo of desire “opening up onto everything, everything” (Aureole 1, 14). And then we might have no fear of using clichés, since “capturing” stable shapes, not even multiple shapes, is not our aim. Instead, clichés turn out to be quite wonderful boats (“each word a boat”) for our desires, which themselves, we can argue, are a rather subversively unregulated redeployment, deconstruction and free reconstruction of the

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54 Somewhat later, we learn that the encounter of the two women is happening at the point “before they've become anything.” between imagination and realization.
clichés about identities and desires. And if we know how to set them afloat, they will drift on like flexible but solid linguistic vessels containing all sorts of moments which are elusive to memory as actual events, because they have never or hardly ever taken place as such. Instead, they remain to haunt us as ephemeral sensuous intensities, those brief moments of vision of everything that we can be and that we indeed become in a place different than “real world.” This might be one of the reasons to say that Aureole's opening piece (and finally, this entire novel) is an instance of textual lovemaking, “a kind of prolonged ecstatic,” not a story, but all textual desire. Therefore I will proceed to understand “The Women Wash Lentils” as a written piece of textual and sexual ecstasies and look at the creative living spaces these ecstasies open to us. The two women, their bodies “oh, so gorgeous” intertwined on the bed in a Parisian light-dappled room, are of course “mad for each other” and so gone, but “to the place where language takes them.” That is why often, “When she is French, and she slowly opens the legs of the woman she also opens a book and reads” (1).

Different visual and linguistic variations of this “lexicographic love” “spread in a lateral radiance” of dense intertextuality of diverse books of desire and also the book of sexual slang. From them, the lovers incessantly read to each other during sex. The young American learns about a fantastic abundance of the vocabulary of lesbian love and female body in French, an endless catalog of funny or endearing names for the vagina and related sites and occurrences: le abricot, le barbu, le bijou de famille, la bonbonniere, la boîte à ouvrage, le benitier, qui est de la

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55 The phrase “lexicographic love comes from Jeanette Winterson's short story “The Poetic of Sex” discussed in the chapter “On Scorching the Books of His-Story.” I use this phrase here trying to briefly hint that Winterson's ways might be close to Carole Maso's understanding of lovemaking as another form of writing and vice versa.

Throughout the text of “The Women Wash Lentils” circulate the names The Book of Oysters which is Eleanor Clark's The Oysters of Locmariner, The First Book of Desire, which is Maso's Ghost Dance and The Fourth Book of Desire – again Maso's The American Woman in the Chinese Hat (Aureole 213). These are all the books by which the two Parisian lovers have sex.
Let us briefly get back to the question of the city. The cliché. By now, we have been able to read Paris as a (beyond) cliché name for the fiction of lovemaking (and vice versa). At one point, la Parisienne says: “You won't, I regret, be seeing much of Paris... Unless – Already they are inside the French doors, French windows, cat, baguette – a kind of short hand. Vin rouge, fromage, yes” (17). Thus Paris is a shorthand, a trigger sign in the constellation of other French and English words around itself. A vessel to sail over the water of erotic ecstasy, between the word and the meaning, where all lost and desired meanings, encounters and selves are possible, or perhaps, no meaning at all, but – ecstasy, a life-lasting aureole of visions, affection, and maybe love. “Between imagining and seeing you. (...) In the space of longing which lasts a lifetime. (...) In the spaces forever between me and you. After she, after I return to New York. Even after – ” (20-21). It never stops. Then, again, the young Parisian says that actually “you” might see a lot of Paris, if we “call your body Paris, my body, Paris, your mouth, Paris, your hair. Your feet are Paris, and your thighs, mon coco, mon lapin, ma louloutte, mon poisson, mimi, chouchoute ... are Paris. Your legs are Paris. (...) In their language Paris throbs. Its streets are wet and hot in August” (17). There is a space “between English and French, language and meaning,” between an entry in the dictionary of sex slang and its translation, a space for a certain vision around which spins the text of this piece, “our erotic etude”: “do you see what I see, now on the horizon:

56 maison tire-bouchon, voir les anges... She reads aloud from the dictionary, and the entries become indistinguishable from their fantasies, from what they do to each other or perhaps, only imagine about each other, because “When they are in Paris. They are like geniuses together. They are like artist with each other. During lovemaking, or just after, they see the most incredible things. Ouvrez la livre. She reads...” (2).

57 All names for the vagina in the book of sex slang.
the woman washing lentils in the twilight ocean” (21). Lentille f. clitoris, lentil; eplucheuse de lentilles f., lentil washer (19).

Extensive reiterations with variations seem to suspend the time into the continuous present into the space before the story starts, between the intuition, the experience, and fiction: “I want you in the liminal stage. In the in-between place. In the most vulnerable, in the most tentative. In the place where one thing is about to change into another,” and we understand that this possibility of transformation is not limited. This is a place where the two lovers still can be everything they imagine: “I want you when I am still on the airplane flying here – before I am aware of your existence; I am still dreaming you, imagining you, fantasizing this:our delirious oystering. And you now between my legs” (3). Here again, we might be left pondering what the temporal references mean. While it seems that the American girl is anticipating her erotic encounter with the Parisian, the sensual immediacy of the dream, its materialness hints at it being a memory. But again, as much as it appears reasonable to believe that this is a memory of an actual, personal experience (and maybe of its prior anticipation) we sense something else as well. Here is also another kind of memory anticipation, from the field of desire of feminist intertexts, whose queer dynamic we slowly recognize by reading our way through Aureole. “You now between my legs,” as much as it can be a certain moment of the physical experience, is also the perpetual now of the text that doesn't want to end. Such temporal logic perhaps becomes more unambiguous later, with “she remembers the time before all this: on a plane, drawn to a woman or a city she has dreamed but does not know, and may never know, may never meet. Despite the urgency, the shifting, the wish ... Bliss ...” (17). The logic of desire's temporality also works to include into its field the fictionalized childhood, shaped by the quenchless longing “like a cliché, only beautiful.” Because desire always reaches for more than we are, it brings here more than we
can be: “I'd like to have you then – when we're so young we haven't become anything yet. Eating chocolate. Making a *tarte aux pommes avec ta mère*. Picking flowers” (4). It is desire for language: “I'd like to do with any sentence what I'm about to do to you...” (7). These yearnings and insights are happening in “the space between letters, in the shape the white makes, the fire, where the real word lives but we cannot see” (12).

Gradually, by now, we might have started sensing that the space which is so elaborately indicated by diverse manifestations of sexual and textual desire for transformation, is indeed an ontological site, a place to invent and live in, a place of encounters and relations actual and imaginary which leave a mark, which write on the body: “Language and its weight on us. Like my hands all over your body. My little work box “(8). A place of erotic permanence and subjective becoming, an entire – another world in becoming: “...and they'll never find their way back really. They're losing touch – they'll need to brush up on the language being spoken out there, where they left off...another life...lifetimes ago...really fucking...”(6). This world-in-the-gap of incessant wanting, of systematic fictionalization, intellectual poetizing, is a methodology, a view of the world, I write you into an essay, my erotic ethics: “In the space between fiction and essay ... poetry. In the moment before you fall into irretrievable sleep, I take you again, you smiling and protesting (...) exhausted by our lovemaking, language making, speechless – exhausted, beautiful, invented one...into dreams...” (13).

In these gaps and interstices, where imagining is a mode of loving and writing is a mode of desiring, the women of *Aureole* find the ways to live. Thus it seems that being and knowing in the liminality is a life choice (that might have chosen us) and I would be free to maintain, in the climate of political pessimism, it becomes as urgent as a mode of survival, an ideology. The future is created as “I” and “we” would like it to be, in our idealistic political consciousness,
enacting it here and now within our creative practices (artistic, social, sexual). In an incessant becoming (never arriving) towards “you,” in the movement to understand “you” between language and meaning, the mystery of being “anything we want to be yet (...) and a good-bye” – “Our desire for everything: miracles, the sea...” (22). Or:

All the places we found joy. All the ways we found – despite everything – to live. The place in my brain where I imagined you, dear future, dear potential – and loved you – In the time before we were anything we wanted to be. Oh sweet être. Oh lovely yet to be.

(22)

*Aureole* knows the never escapable fear, the uncertainty on the verge of the conscious. It knows quite well the anxiety of freedom of an empty page: “The shape of empty space, page. Don't be afraid, let it stand that way for a moment: the hip hovering toward the desiring mouth” (23). It knows the power for transformation in the unwritten, before the experience takes shape of a concept – “she on the airplane right before imagination floods and transforms her (...) the brain at rest for a moment, perception kept at bay” (23).

**Poodle Dog Ecstatic Spins in Feminist Time**

At the very opening of the piece “Sappho Sings the World Ecstatic,” the basic epistemological position of *Aureole* is taken at its most physical. “Beached on the hypnotic, lilting lip of a sweet – of a young nymph's clitoris, Sappho sings the world delirious... Haloed rosy – ” (157)58 This perspective is both sensuous and conceptual, just as a way of being

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58 But this image of Sappho dreaming, as for a moment or for an eternity she lingers over a young nymph's lip, keeps recurring in many other pieces in *Aureole* in full shape or as a hint. The recurrence of the picture seems to attach to it certain importance. I will not call it originary (to the rest of the book), since clearly this would make no sense in the overall understanding of time both in Maso's texts and in my discussion which try to speak outside the concept of chronological histories. Rather, in order to make strings throughout my text connect, I try to see Sappho images as paradigmatic to the modes of knowing in Maso's and other theory fictions (and poetic theories): as pictures of an open poetic evocativeness, whose implications freely unfold, loosening the tight relations of the sign
provides material ground for conceptual knowledge and Sappho maintains it through the chapter. “Haloed rosy –” the line breaks, perhaps, by the surge of pleasure, and it is followed by Sappho’s actual lines, also broken. And then, a precipice in the chronology of time is opened, as she's having visions. Sensual slur of “word,” “world,” “pearl” and “delirious” if written and read together in varying order, reveals their mutual attraction.59 This magnetism among the words which generates sentences and texts of specific shapes reveals something more complex than a mere evocativeness of sound. It hints at the dynamic of building up a micro vision of another epistemological space, whose origins lie in the aureole of audio, tactile, olfactory and visual ecstasies in playful relations to semantics. Also, such “pleasure texts” are cognitively embedded in the spiral interconnectedness of other feminist texts, lives (“written and texts of our lives”) and bodies. Thus their political intention, but also their existential necessity is to discover or create another place to live: a world, a book about to happen, something very new, a “medium mysterious” and yet unknown, but unruly. “She sings, on that delirious precipice, longing, hip, the world – holds in her mouth: word and rosy pearl and world, Sweet apple. Violet breasted. Aureole...” (157)

In “Sappho Sings the World Ecstatic,” as in the entire text of Aureole, sensations and pictures echo varyingly and profusely. Violet breasted, clitoris, rosy pearl, the seaside town a place of dreams and vision, the word that sparks a text, aureole and a world often melt and substitute each other in the logic of visionary passion. For this to go on, Sappho says (an actual quotation of the poet) she will “go unleashed, unpegged,” and adds that the beach is wide and that the world is round ecstatic (157). The world-text-consciousness in which we keep asking

and meaning, the writer/reader/character and the text, the intention and its realization, and desire and the subjectivity.

59 In “Except Joy” Maso talks about how while writing Aureole, she would often let the words follow their own affinity for each other, “The word’s attraction for the word” (114). Thus she pursues in one more way the textual logic of passion and desire.
who imagines whom, as Maso seems to say – Who conjured this book of mine? And Sappho, suspended over the precipice in historical time of the Father, keeps wondering about the girls dressed in white who walk in a luminous procession over the beach and fill her with an ecstasy of immediate anticipation of an entire girls' world. The intertexts, either visually highlighted such as the parts of the shot lists for Maya Deren's experimental films or those allusively inserted, move Maso's text, or is it Sappho's, in the variously repetitive pattern of sea-waves (and we can already tell how the movement of sea-waves is different from the linear pace of History). Sappho falls into a clairvoyant dream much like fever and in a “medium unknown” she whispers and “conjures the woman Maya, smiles and who is this? (...) lifts her lyre and sings a gorgeous song and girl ecstatic.” She wonders “Where, oh, where is my pussycat,” she slurs, in her lips she “holds a word, a world, a pearl, delirious” and then raises her eyes from the girl's clitoris to see a “woman in a cocktail dress: crawling across a dining table on all fours toward her desire” (158).

This text, the medium unknown, is deregulated, free from “already constructed and received forms;” as we can see in the passage to come, it is intermittently songlike, conversational, chimerical and oracular. This feels as if the abrupt changes in perspective, tone and tempo have the power to stop the History, to unhinge its perceptual frames and mental connections and to flood it with a variety of bodies and texts. To inhabit it with intersubjective entwining not utterly grounded in biography, never completely fictional – such as when Sappho imagines with the fantasy of Maso, wants with the desire of Deren, speaks with the words of Stein, breaks the syntax with a sudden appearance of Gertrude Stein's poodle or Paris (where Stein and the poodle lived) or rides the texts out of syntax into endlessness, on the hips of a

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60 The films in question are *Meshes of the Afternoon* and *At Land.*

61 The crawling woman is one of Sappho's visions from Maya Deren's films *At Land.*
young nymph. Thus spun in the feminist spiral of time, Sappho lifts her lyre and sings a “gorgeous song,” quite of the shape of the “girl ecstatic.” She proclaims that the dream of freedom is happening right here in the text erotic and on the hip syntactic, in an eternal world on the beach, where the procession of open-mouthed girls passes, girls with the mouths open like the moon, moaning – oh!

She ... mounts her like a luscious horse with bridle, saddle, leather crop and sputters go!

And sputters oh! and fuck! She sees before her everything: a lovely curved cuneiform of woman, lilting horse and wondrous girl and gallop. Frenzied, frantic: horse of her desire, live forever, oh, and fuck and suck and shudder.

“Trembling was all living, living was all loving, someone was then the other one.”

In the city of Paris... (159)\textsuperscript{62}

(...) Sappho sings and sells seashells. Sappho sings by the seashore. (...) She rides the woman world syntactic. Sings Paris, Paris, Paris. And they walk the poodle Basket. (...) And strapped – and oh and oh and oh and oh and –

Poodle dog ecstatic!

(...) Pearl to pearl to pulsing pearl she drags her tongue and teeth a little, throbbing ripe and slower, shudder. She sucks the rosy pearl ecstatic. Girly girl. She sees the sea and shoulder, slower, shells. And yellow flowers grew there gentle. She licks her salty lips and sucks eternal. The little girls all in a row – Sappho's singing makes it so.

She sees a woman now against a door (papyrus tore). Blue. Blue door. Stutters. Shudders. I adore. She crawls, adores, on all fours toward her desire. Syllable by syllable. Word by

\textsuperscript{62} The quotation is from Gertrude Stein's \textit{Ada}
In these passages is condensed something of the technique of writing and the dynamic of utopian projecting, which (I believe Maso to believe) is capable of initiating a resistant space of feminist consciousness and practice. A space of wide cultural inclusiveness and forgiveness: generous enough to accommodate the confessional and abstract, to formulate a political conviction on an erotic acceptance of otherness, the unknown, and perhaps, unknowable to the historical menace of rationality. To fall in love with freedom such as to imagine in a playful joking rhyme that perhaps, where we lose the written record of Sappho, is where her erotic text gets confused with Carole Maso's and Maya Deren's poetic, and where she has prophetic visions of the feminist field of desire and intetextuality. Just as this text conjures her, “Sappho conjures close what is remote to her, far off – all want – in the place the papyrus ended or was lost or tore – women thousands of years apart – in the lucid, orgasmic, gorgeousness, beautiful, beautiful” (154). It is the place, the precipice that is important, the view from the verge of the conscious (over the clitoris) – “Sappho does not entirely understand how women appear from the strings of her lyre: Hypnotic Maya D and others she has never seen before while on that gorgeous lilting Grecian lip and hip and nymph ecstatic” (162). The visions beyond the historical record begin to emerge: “Where the papyrus tore, dissolved, Sappho sings a line of sweet girls in white ...” “What lovely world is this that Sappho conjures in desire? (...) She crawls on hands and knees toward word and world and rosy pearl and sea eternal” (166).

In the introduction to this discussion I mention that the knowledge obtained by clinging to intense sensuous memories, if directed by a longing for a utopian hereafter, could establish synchronicity and conceptual continuity between the experiences of now and then and the
political thinking of futurity. We need to clarify here again that “clinging to memories” does not mean a nostalgic recollection of the past. To the contrary, we are actually haunted by the memories of something more to be longed for. The longing for once again but different, constantly anticipated but not fully achievable, urges us to keep reenacting this recollected desire with always new aberrations. This renders our performance never complete, but ever split open by the “flaw” in repetition: slipping into more, looking for another variation of word attractions, body relations, ecstasies, possible encounters, in another world. As readers, writers, and those who imagine and create social realities different than “the one reality,” we might have come to realize that indeed, there is a field of desire, the beach between the sea of dreams and the land of material urgencies, where “past, present and future” instead of linear succession, coexist in an inventive overlapping of memory, ongoing experience and anticipation. Our ability to become conscious of the persistence and resistance of this field and perceive the immense possibility for structural change within it is important for feminism of today. That is, if we understand that the movement's goal is to attain an oppositional consciousness, engaged around the goals relevant for all those who don't find their reflection in the big histories for the posterity – the histories about language, society, desire...

In *Aureole*, the conversing women's voices don't cease to whisper over the beach and desires are ravishing. Still, cold whiteness of snow can take us off guard, insanity of the humanity, morality of the closed text, narratives of origin, genealogy and closure. 63 Thus everything – thus survival depends on the polyphony of the voices and plurality of bodies. The sense of textual utopia and imminent poetics of political thinking in *Aureole* are engulfing, apparently, enough to create a refuge for an erotic and intellectual collectivity. Yet, permeable as

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63 As I already mention at the beginning, the “whiteness of snow” is the reference to Carol Maso's metaphor for insanity and the experience of severe suffering for not being able to integrate into social order. The motif recurs both in *Aureole* and the collection of essays *Break Every Rule*. 
it is, the space of the utopian beach here is always under the threat of being plundered by the terror from the land. The shadows of loss, fear of the winter of insanity and submitting in the face of pressing compromise are ever impending in the luminous space of this book. The incessant negotiations are necessary: the utopian in-between – as it depends on the multiple bodies in their most vulnerable and most (self)destructive, and being pressed by the sea on one side and the land on other – only knows itself as long as it knows the urgency of the personal and political struggle for survival.

_Aureole_ takes upon itself a difficult task to open in the narrowest places of fiction's flesh the possibility of feminist utopia – here and now, the affective space where political actuality and intellectual abstraction meet. The space for poetic and ethical experiment to be lived as it is imagined. Maso's world is delicate, flickering and suspended in the perfect moment of desire for feminist utopia. Being so, this chapter's difficult wish has been to examine it as an extreme feminist dream - extreme in the bold performance of its bold politics. If I haven't silenced it with my own desires, I hope that in interaction with the texts discussed in other chapters it will speak its integrity and power of resistance beyond the capacities of my argument.

That Maso is able to think of her ideas and modes of knowing in spatial terms, as of a (textual) place, is reassuring for other utopian beliefs in resistant consciousness as a place with the capacity for material manifestations and tactical flexibility. In _Aureole_, the ephemeral dynamic of this space is beautifully incorporated by an experimental sensuous text, shaped by the pull of desire, where Maso finally find[s] a sentence to “make you stay for a while”. I have tried to understand and claim that the success of the hard task she has undertaken as a feminist author is of political significance: to render the field of desire clearly perceptible and a manipulatable material space, so as to keep it for a while, for a paragraph, a dreamy winter, a
novel, and examine whether it is conducive to the constitution of a socially creative utopian consciousness. Also, in the present moment of feminist experience, an ongoing self-identification of the third-wave feminisms, it seems reasonable to settle for nothing less than political utopianism as an ontological elsewhere in the midst of social actuality. One of the ways to feel the solidity of this utopian consciousness, if we have found it in the erotic ethical intertextuality of *Aureole*, is to listen carefully to the text's language, so loose and luminous, but also, that “impregnable” that it becomes capable of incorporating the reality of feminist desire. In the Preface Maso talks about her “early belief that language was capable of great physical and emotional feats that had barely been tapped into” (ix). *Aureole* is pressed to shape in a “trance of language,” by “writing into the heart of longing, of regret,” “unsure...how I would get back or if I'd get back,” with the conviction that “there might be ways in language to express the extreme, the fleeting, the fugitive states that hover at the utmost boundaries of speech” (“Except Joy” 116). And how far is this into the epistemological elsewhere?

If I was doing something I already knew how to do, the rule was to start again in an attempt to break habitual patterns of mind and expression. (...) I have practiced courage a long time. (...) I've tried to write into reluctance – to actually feel the pull forward and back simultaneously, an erotic motion in itself. In this time of witness, of storytelling, I've tried to allow myself to walk into forgetfulness, dissolution. (...) To give up a little. To let the earth go, and the ones I love most. (...) To live at the heart of the unknown, without explanation. (116)
ON SCORCHING THE BOOKS OF HIS-STORY OR WAYS OF BEING A PAIN IN THE ASS TO ALL MEN

But look, our seas are what we make of them, full of fish or not, opaque or transparent, red or black, high or smooth, narrow or bankless; and we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, seaweed, beaches, tides, children, waves... More or less wavily sea, earth, sky – what matter would rebuff us? We know how to speak them all.

Hélène Cixous “The Laugh of the Medusa”

A fairy in a pink tutu came to Picasso and said, ‘I bring you tidings of great joy. All by yourself with no one to help you will give birth to a sex toy who has a way with words. You will call her Sappho and she will be a pain in the ass to all men.’

‘Can’t you see I’ve got a picture to finish?’ said Picasso.

‘Take a break’ said the fairy. ‘There’s more to life than Art.’

‘Where?’ said Picasso, whose first name wasn’t Mary.

‘Between your legs.’ said Gabriel. (Winterson 37)

Here is a nice reenactment of the Annunciation story, as performed by Jeanette Winterson in her piece of short fiction called “The Poetics of Sex”. All the key elements are present. It starts with an annunciation of the incarnation, that is, the birth of a divine creature bringing the blessings and tidings of joy. The fertilization is performed without the agency of a man, thus an independent girl’s labor is at work, or if you will an immaculate conception, although the archangel Gabriel takes a suspicious form of a fairy in a pink tutu. For those who still might be distrustful, the story hints that the child to be born is indeed an incarnation of Logos, the creative word of God embodied in his son, hypostasis of divine wisdom or the active principle governing the cosmos. Fairly enough, the story says, the child “has a way with words”. Still certain
disconcerting attributes are attached to the essential nature of this offspring: that of being a sex toy, a pain in the ass to all men and – a female!

Now we might regret being unsuspicious readers and go back to the start. The subtitle of the story’s section reads *Were You Born a Lesbian?* Wait, is it not the son of god?! The text says the annunciation is brought to Picasso (“whose first name wasn’t Mary”!) by the pink tutu, and the divine baby’s name is going to be Sappho. This must be a shameless sabotage of the history of the Name of the Father performed by an invert!\(^\text{64}\) Indeed. If one reads more carefully, a wholly new “theology” and order of meanings begins outrageously to unfold.

That the holy mother is named Picasso and the son of god Sappho still might be some weird modern metaphor. But what follows is a symptom of a fundamental breaking of the traditional values of Western civilization and the matrix of familial relations. On being blessed with the news, with no trace of demure self-composedness Picasso barks that she has no time for this game because she has a painting to finish and no room between her legs since she paints with her clitoris.\(^\text{65}\) But it’s too late, the New Baby is coming…

The realization of the prophecy ensues quickly as a chain of bodily and emotional earthquakes and transformations. Outraged, Picasso rushes down the corridor of the Art College, dissolving the linoleum tiles with her fiery steps, when she gets violently assaulted by a hardly human life.\(^\text{66}\) She is “suddenly trip-wired, badly thrown, her hair came away from her glorious

\(^\text{64}\) The Name-of-the-Father is a concept that Jacques Lacan developed in his Seminar *The Psychoses* (1955-1956).

\(^\text{65}\) In this place in the story the fairy offers Picasso a phallic fat brush instead of clitoris as a painting device, but the offer is flatly rejected with the words: “I’ve had all the brushes I need.” This might be interpreted as a general refusal to subject oneself to the patriarchal principle of the phallus, but also as a clear indication of demythification of the symbolism of the male phallus as creative power. The breaking is even stronger if connected to the name and the popular myth of Pablo Picasso’s male potency. It establishes a new symbolism of corporeal creative power, this time tied to the female body, here clitoris, and thus corresponding to Hélène Cixous’ concept of *écriture feminine*, as my further arguments will show.

\(^\text{66}\) When thinking about subjectivity which gives itself to other love – a complex of emotions which is not socially intelligible in Western culture, we might ask ourselves who inscribes the boundaries of humanness and after which model. A more elaborate argument about the need to rethink the limits and the function of the category of human is
head. She was being scalped. She was being mugged. She was detonated on a long fuse of sex. Her body was half way out of the third floor window and there was a demon against her mouth. A poker-red pushing babe crying, ‘Feed me, Feed me now.” Thus, Sappho, the miraculous baby, explodes her way into this world, with no indication of being imbued with divine reason, not even having any language but “two greedy hands and an open mouth.” Still, the baby has a marvelous power, though “nothing to offer but herself.” She is taken home by Picasso who “mated with this creature she had borne (...) Flesh of her flesh she fucked her (...) Picasso, who believed she had seen it all before, smiled like a child and fell in love” (38). 67

From this point on, a whole new universe (“under the sheets”) explodes into the text, characterized by a shattering of any fundamental stability, choosing contradiction and breach of logic for its permanent ground. It seems appropriate here to remember Hélène Cixous’s words: “…a time during which the new breaks from the old, and more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old (la nouvelle de l’ancien) 68 as there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project” (Cixous 2039). And, indeed, “The Poetics of Sex” offers no story, no narrative logic of cause, motivation and resolution. By ending precisely at the point when something is about to start (something which will never be narrativized) it consistently pursues specific queer feminist theoretical positions which I discuss in this and previous chapters.

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67 The full quotation goes: “She mated with this creature she had borne and began to feel that maybe the Greek gods knew a thing or two. Flesh of her flesh she fucked her.” This is one of many examples of Winterson's way of traversing diverse theologies and mythologies. In an “impious” tone of conversational ease, she implies through “mere” side-remarks that this love-counter-humanity has everything to do with transhistorical bonds and cords stronger than any temporary historical good social value.

68 La nouvelle (the new, the news) in French is grammatically feminine. L’ancien (the old, the former) is masculine (Leitch at al. 2039)
In the pages to follow, I will read “The Poetics of Sex” (published in 1998) as a complete enactment “in the moving, open, transitional space” of the sext as heralded by French thinker, writer and theorist Hélène Cixous in her mid 70s manifesto of écritoire feminine, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (Cixous 2056). Sext is one of many coinages Cixous makes throughout her essay, already writing in the new language of écritoire feminine. This one obviously comes from the words sex and text, and it refers to a type of writing in which the liberated woman will no longer be afraid to talk openly about her plural sexuality in language which will incorporate her bodily parts (2048). Further in the direction of this queer kinship, Winterson’s literary techniques of provoking gender deeper into conceptual trouble are arguably the very incorporation of theoretical points of écritoire feminine.\textsuperscript{69} This relationship exposes Cixous's poetic theory, a few decades after the political moment of its production as a very relevant but controversial lens that offers sensitive insights into the difficult question of the instability of gender and sexuality. At the same time, its concepts can open the way to understanding important theoretical value of texts such as Winterson’s, which exist in the space I have tentatively called theory fiction.

Contemporaries in curved time

While Winterson's writing debuts slightly before the publication of some of the founding texts in queer theory such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's \textit{Epistemology of the Closet} and Judith Butler's \textit{Gender Trouble}, Cixous's essay dates back in 1975, prior to any clear intimation of the constitution of this field.\textsuperscript{70} Although I conventionally make this reference to temporal proximities, I am far from attempting to speculate about any possible immediate influences

\textsuperscript{69} An allusion to \textit{Gender Trouble}, the title of Judith Butler’s seminal essay elaborating the idea of gender destabilization.

\textsuperscript{70} Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's \textit{Epistemology of the Closet} and Judith Butler's \textit{Gender Trouble} both appear in 1990. Of course, if we want to think historically, we should keep in mind that the first volume of Michel Foucault's \textit{The History of Sexuality} appeared in France in 1976, a year after the publication of “The Laugh of the Medusa.”
Sedgwick and Butler may have had on Winterson. Rather, in the overall space of my text, I have been more interested in playing with the idea of intellectual and emotional agglomerations, which take place beyond the acknowledged or chronological lines of conceptual and poetic exchange. Or, we could make a mental picture of something like half-conscious cultural undercurrents (possibly a constitutive element in the process of crystallization of feminist queer thought), which as much as they work forwards, also work backwards and sideways in relation to the linearity of time. This enables us to talk of Cixous as a queer thinker, not in retrospect, but in the curved plane that lies in-between the counterlogic of dreams and desires on one side, and refracting genealogical narratives of the Mainland, on the other. Such an approach, as it dismisses the conventional assumption about one writer's familiarity with some other thinkers' writing, attempts to uproot certain theoretical ideas from their recorded historical moment and set them afloat through time and space. In this way, we are free, if we want, to think about Cixous' essay as a “contemporary” of Winterson, Sedgwick and Butler, not in a historical moment, but in the queer field of desire and the spiral movement of the feminist intertext. Because, even though the order of genealogies, fathers and sons and chronological calculations still shape the present, this “doesn't prevent woman from starting the history of life somewhere else” (Cixous 2047).

The organism of Cixous’s écritoire feminine is structured around the logic of paradox, in the arena of cultural theory and criticism sometimes understood as a weak spot of untenable contradiction (Leitch at al. 2037). While stating that écritoire feminine is a literal incorporation of female bodily parts in a textual form, Cixous argues that both men and women can master it; attain the ability of writing from the realities of their entire bodies. This chapter will try to show

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71 The Mainland is the term from “The Poetics of Sex” used by Winterson to signify the world other than the Island of Girls where Sappho and Picasso reside, together with other women, actual or fictional, akin to them. In this imaginary landscape, the island and the Mainland stand opposed to each other but also implicated, as two different political ontologies as well as the dominant culture and its systematic inversion.
that this paradox is the very spot from which the theory of Cixous’s vitally leaves into and through the contemporary experience of gender identity—by its theorists almost unequivocally marked as intrinsically equivocal, the site of permanent instability and contradiction. Thus the theory of écriture feminine should emerge as speaking exactly on the opposite pole from those speculating about the essence of femininity and [the] female body, with which it has been too often associated (Leitch at al.1036).

Feminine Is Polysexual, Is Fictional, Is an Eskimo...

Then how should we read this feminine if the name has never aimed to arrive at a precise spot of the intrinsically female? Coming from a Derridean poststructuralist necessity for redefining the oppositional binaries that have undergirded Western thought since Plato’s idealism of Logos, Hélène Cixous declares in her text Sorties that beneath these either/or couples—speech/writing, presence/absence, truth/difference, Logos/lack, oneness/heterogeneity, mind/body, activity/passivity, etc.—always lies a parental couple of hierarchy, that of male/female (232).73 In their theory and practice of écriture (writing) French poststructuralists seek to recognize the second half of the binaries as a way of unrepressing everything that has been repressed in Western thought (since Platonic idealism) as inferior and obscure, unintelligible, as female; and also, by performing it, to enact a conceptual and social revolution in the text. Thus: “In a way, all écriture was” always already écriture feminine” (Leitch at al. 2037).

72 Judith Butler’s theoretical proclamations of (gender) identity as a “trap” and a “category permanently problematic” seem to have acquired the status of famous quotes and inspirational aphorisms in many academic discussions on the subject.
73 According to Derridean poststructuralism neither speech, traditionally identified with Platonic or divine Logos, nor writing are able to express immediate truth (even less the questionable supreme Truth). Instead, they are set up, as philosophy itself, as an unfolding of endless flows of meanings. Around these inevitable “misunderstandings” in the space in-between the sign and the meaning, in the impossibility of oneness, the new writing—écriture is to start its life (Leitch et al. 2036-2037).
We can proceed to consider feminine as that which treasures the unconscious, the unlimited possibility in the excess of meaning, erotogeneity, polysexuality, the fictional, the always differently interpretable—the attributes of queer feminist epistemology. Cixous writes that the unconscious (especially the culturally unspoken and unspeakable) except in dreams, most articulately talks through the body, and this language is best embodied and explored in the sext. The passages between the askew ways of signifying in the experience of queerness, in dreams and in a non-realistic poetic text (literary or other artistic forms that don't respect the laws of rationality and linearity and closure) have been discussed by different authors. The desire of my argument is thus to uncover feminine, not as culturally constructed monogendered and sexed nature, but as everything that is not containable in the finite categories of body, desire, text or meaning.

In order to firmly place ourselves together with our two writers in the bosom of this notional inconsistency, a characteristic of queer feminist theory, we might turn to the articulations of the nature of gender and its relation to desire in Ellen Berry’s article “Suspending Gender.” Although the text analyzes Winterson’s novel Written on the Body, the method as disclosed by Berry is very similar to that in “The Poetics of Sex.”

…Winterson takes great pains simultaneously to mobilize and prevent stereotypical

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It is hard to imagine that in 1975 Hélène Cixous could have thought of the idea of the queer as a field of study and a methodology. We are free to speculate that Cixous in the 1970s was trying to formulate and practice an epistemology that today we would call queer. In connection to these conceptual efforts stands the coinage erotogeneity: “She is the erotogenity of the heterogeneous ... dispersible, prodigious, stunning, desirous and capable of others, of the other woman...” (2053).

Only a few of the more recent discussions that consider the conterminous languages of queerness, the unconscious and art that projects beyond the constrictions of social actuality would be Kathryn Bond Stockton's The Queer Child, José Esteban Muñoz's Cruising Utopia and Disidentifications, Jill Dolan's Utopia in Performance, or Ann Cvetkovich's An Archive of Feelings.

Clearly, my assumption is that the texts I discuss in other chapters all present a practice of écriture feminine. For a more conventional perception, which would look for immediate indications such as temporal proximity, tangible references, facts of life, etc. the connection between Winterson and Cixous would be the least obvious one. Carole Maso makes explicit references to Hélène Cixous in her collection of essays Break Every Rule when she talks about her own poetic biography as a writer. Not surprisingly, Aureole speaks with a body made of écriture feminine.
identifications or disidentifications on the reader’s part, to suspend gender. The various permutations of gendered behaviors and sexual desires that circulate throughout the text force the reader to remain flexible as we are asked to position and reposition ourselves in relation to the narrator’s desire and our own. These positions foreground the radically unstable nature of gender, the multiplicity of ways that sexual desire may be mobilized and expressed, and the fact that desire itself always exceeds the categories we have to express it. (Berry)

Taking these lines as a conceptual predilection, I attempt to expose the affinity between Winterson’s and Cixous’s experience of gender with its theoretical and political implications, by looking at these texts’ poetic language. If this be achieved, some critics’ suspicions that at the bottom of Cixous’s écriture féminine stands an essentialist notion of the universal feminine, might be simultaneously argued away. Possibly, such critical inertia comes from an unwillingness to recognize a consistently figurative style in a primarily theoretically oriented text not as a matter of personal taste, but as a systematic form of expression necessitated by the subject matter. Reading the two pieces as a dialogue in the intertextual spiral of feminist consciousness, another inherent freedom, that of dissolving and merging genre boundaries, may be uncovered. 77

At the center of the notorious paradox of écriture féminine (both women and men can inscribe it) is the concept of the other bisexuality, which Cixous opposes to the traditional meaning of bisexuality, as she understands it. In the latter, she calls it neuter, the subject, driven

77 Once we acknowledge this, we might come to understand theories of gender identifications and sexualities as something which, if thought through stable linguistic terms, appears indeed paradoxical. But how far into the matter we go, if we keep announcing a language of theory which will be sensitive to the fluid nature of gender/hedire, and then continue to describe this fluidity within the conceptual limits of neat ties between signifier and signified? And shouldn’t we recognize the need for something like the poetics of critical theory, which will acknowledge a better perceptiveness of poetic language in the theme of gender and desire (arguably, the topic most obscured and misconceptualized by the language of rationalistic representation)?
by a deeply internalized fear that difference means loss (Freudian castration fear) is thinking – I have to cling to masculinity to be whole. From such an *either/or, male or female* logic, by excluding the presence of the different inside me, bisexuality ensues as neuter, neither one nor the other. On the other hand, the other bisexuality which Cixous proposes as the foundation of a versatile erotic universe of an unpressed erotogenic body (and this is the one that inscribes *écriture feminine*) asks for the non-exclusion and difference, for the presence of both sexes in the self, where each of them has their location “variously manifest and insistent according to each person.” 78 She also calls it “multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body.” (2037) Or, if there must be an “opposition,” then it is non-acknowledgement of patriarchal writing by feminist polysexual writing. Hence, as with sexuality and gender, Cixous, when she says *écriture feminine*, means everything but the opposition of male and female writing. Instead, this is the name for “precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and the other without which nothing can live (...) a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between...” (2047) It seems reasonable to read this as pleading against the oppression of gender identity stabilization: for the indeterminacy of gender in order to allow a free proliferation of sexualities.

This “multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the body of the other” is rather manifest throughout the text of “The Poetics of Sex.” Picasso and Sappho appear free of the need to restrict themselves to any one gender role and sexual

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78 The very problematic word *difference* (of the sexes) requires careful interpretation. Writing theory, Hélène Cixous is writing in the language of poetry and the words she chooses should not be read in their most immediate meanings. More precisely, Hélène Cixous tries to rescue words from their patriarchal sedimentary meanings. Thus difference implies versatility and excess of differences within me, within the other and in-between us, the idea of the always variously different from the familiar and imaginable male or female. An obvious connection of Cixous’ difference with Derridean *difference* already indicates that this is not a distinction between to (or more) but proliferation of differences.
desire: feminine, masculine, lesbian, or any other.\(^7\)\(^9\) In fact, they rejoice in an endless repertoire of the history of sexuality and the myriad always slightly different positions in the continuum of overall sexual experience rendering gender a messy thing good to play with. They take by will, whim or necessity whatever role there is to be taken, in order to creatively live out their complex desire for each other. But also to perform the urge to recreate it, to recreate their selves and each other through various artistic forms—in language, painting, acting... (A telling moment: the first time in Picasso’s studio, Sappho notices “naturally enough” a small easel and a big bed. Picasso remarks: “My work comes first.”) (34). Beside the fact that she paints with her clitoris, Picasso is her own model, a sculptor by trade. Thus we can say that Picasso's art is made of the knowledge of her own flesh, while the performance is an enactment of self-invention.

This sweet and systematic anarchy, for anarchy it seems to be from the standpoint of any normativity, including that of certain feminist and lesbian groups, structures the very tissue of Winterson’s story. It manifests itself as a conscious struggle for a new language and new writing—a new sext, and it works through the recklessly eclectic imagery and the anti-narrative “chaos.” The game of the two who incessantly confuse and lose the boundaries of their bodies to each other, comprised of identity dressings-up, experiencing a succession of small deaths and coming to always new life is painful, bloody, thrilling and revelatory as it has to be, if we are true to desire. But Winterson has very particular ways of undermining traditional ideological and aesthetic categories and structures. When she builds an elsewhere of patriarchy, we have the feeling that her main weapon is a linguistic and conceptual trick. Her “new histories” have no

\(^7\)\(^9\) Cixous on her part is not too ready to align herself even with the feminists of the 1970s, believing that by kicking the ball into the other court and simply reversing the old either/or or male/female logic, they merely reproduce the same harmful effect of Oedipal desire Tracing the work of the patriarchal mechanisms of repression, as she deconstructs them, we come to realize that “Indeed, any desiring transgressing body – and perhaps the body itself – has been repressed” (Leitch et al. 2038).
history, in the sense that we never get to know any alternative genealogy of the two lovers, except that on one hand, they start here and now, in each other's embrace and the game of mutual invention; and on the other, the pebbles they play with are many inverted fragments of the grand narratives of the Father or just any myth and cliché at hand: The New Testament, Eskimos, saints, bullfight, gospels and cover girls, Montparnasse, ancient history, husbands and wives, mothers and children... Then we can consider how actually Winterson's utopian island of elsewhere is not a politically unproductive dream of lesbian separatism. Rather, she instills erotogeneity where she believes it has always been—in the midst of any subjectivity. Winterson's “lesbian” erotics seems to be based on the knowledge that in ancient times or modern, all desire has always been queer, all gender identity has always been messy. Lesbian, straight, gay, etc. are different narratives that, depending on how much we are able to flexibly and tactically play with them in our new liberatory gender-chaotic texts, can be personally and politically enabling, or inhibitive and hegemonic. If we need a “continuity” to this epistemology, then we might find it in the consciousness of feminist intertextuality and knowledge of the boundless feminist body and desire.

Meaning Compromised in a Rolling Splitting Brack

We might for a moment look at how Cixous, in her essay, anticipating a profusion of sexts (“we are going to show them our sexts”), “a time…to foresee the unforeseeable, to

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80 Lisa Moore's gives excellent observations on Winterson's mistreatment of the cliché of the genre and identity: “She offers neither a critique of heterosexual culture nor a salvific account of lesbianism, largely because she refuses to accept that conventional distinction in the first place; that is, while she mobilizes certain conventions of lesbian self-representation, she understands them to produce an identity no less fractured than those (like heterosexuality) produced by other, equally conventional, textual strategies. Instead, she takes a certain lesbian narrative space for granted – a space both romantic and postmodern, sincere and ironic. Thus the 'virtual lesbianism' of Winterson's fiction challenges the notion that the fragmentation of the subject also means the end of desire. (...) But Winterson pushes these clichés to extremes, literalizing nearly-dead images such as 'I can't live without you' and 'I'd follow you to the ends of the earth', cracking such phrases open to mine their violent potential for transformation and dislocation” (107).
project,” announces the woman who is not afraid anymore to talk about her mobile erotogeneity (2039-2040). With a poetic intuition which grows as a live tissue into and with her reasoning, she dreams and projects this moment in quite concrete terms. For what is a socially engaged anticipation of a more meaningful and better future, if not a utopian projection? And while Cixous is imagining a world-yet-to-be, we come to understand from the tone, the sensuous and affective immediacy of the text and its intellectual clarity that this political projection comes from an experience and from an actuality already performed and lived in the space of the sext. Cixous describes from live female experience the way a sext comes into being as a bodily art form, an embodied thought and an apt weapon of political resistance:

A world of searching, the elaboration of knowledge, on a basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity. This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful. Beauty will no longer be forbidden. (2040)

This kind of writing, she adds, will “wreck partitions, classes, rhetorics, regulations…” It is challenging to imagine a writing which can produce a change so radical that it will “wreck” classes and turn social consciousness upside-down. This seems possible only if the s/text itself is already an open site for enactment of a radically different relationality, the feminist ethical relationality of [to?] the other. A text, which instead of closure and mastery, seeks to remain forever unfastened in a movement towards what is yet unknown, even when this unknown is outside the bounds of my present desires. Such an inclusive text, never resolved in its political longing for another body, text, relations, can cause corporeal and mental alterity that will
gradually invert social regulations – from the heart of the norms, within the language. “My desires have invented new desires,” Cixous says (2040). And while the sext is fictional as an ultimately free space – free for the most progressive utopian anticipation, it is also as real(ized) as “systematic experimentation with the bodily functions” and the body's experience of the word's history and politics can be. Also, “elaboration of a knowledge” and precise but passionate experimentation indicate an entire epistemology. The knowledge of erotogeneity spurs to invention in the breach of the order of the Father. The incorporation is so literal that it presents an actual enactment of a resonant vision of a utopian future that proceeds to be repeated and lived in body, text, relations, life practices – in feminist consciousness in the midst of a patriarchal world. “Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think” (2045).

And indeed, nothing is forbidden or too sacred for the game Sappho and Picasso play. No symbol is untouchable for Winterson’s mischievous alteration of its traditional use into a new order of meaning. No stereotype too often trodden is inconvertible into a new beauty:

My bull-lover makes a matador out of me. She circles me and in her rough made ring I am complete. I like the dressing up, the little jackets, the silk tights, I like her shiny hide, the deep tanned leather of her. It is she who gives me the power of the sword. I used it once but when I cut at her it was my close fit flesh that frilled into a hem of blood. She lay beside me slender as a horn. Her little jacket and silk tights impeccable. I sweated

81 Jill Dolan offers a concept of the utopian performative which “describe[s] small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking and intersubjectively intense” (Dolan 4). Thus performance has the capacity to “offer a place to scrutinize public meanings, but also to embody and, even if through fantasy, enact the affective possibilities of 'doings' that gesture toward a much better world” (6). Also, Dolan points at some of the politically most incapacitating qualities of performance and its utopian temporality: its “simultaneity, its present-tenseness” opens the performance for utopia as a “hopeful process that continually writes a different, better future” (13). Find more information about this on pages 134-135.
muck and couldn’t speak in my broken ring. We are quick change artists we girls. (31)

Picasso is both bull-lover and slender as a horn, in the testosterone game of bull-fight. She challenges her lover to a deadly butchering game of potency and command. They dress up as androgynous matadors, the stabbing occurs but it is not clear any more whose flesh is cut, who is the bull and who the matador, who breaks whose ring, still the ring is broken. Yet Picasso lies impeccable in her little androgynous costume and matador Sappho is now a wounded, panting bull. The phallic sword and horn flagrantly appear as symbols of power on both sides, but not to dominate and subject, but to be perpetually exchanged, gained to be lost, in this infinite girls’ game of desirous surrender. It is more what Cixous describes as her conception of other bisexualit, an “incessant process of exchange” of “different subjects knowing one another” “beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other,” an “inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between…” (2056). Thus the phrase “power of the sword” might actually be hiding something more as well: “It is she who gives me the power of the (s)word.” Except as a phallic symbol, the power of Logos, the (s)word, if we apply a translucent reading technique, becomes the power of writing (écriture) – the production of new forms of art, bodies, of new desires and words, and the unrepresing of settled meaning. This art is the self's capacity for the other, even with the perilous risk of other's desire undoing “my” subjectivity, just as I am started again and again, towards that desire. When Sappho hits Picasso with the (s)word, it's her own flesh that starts bleeding, because they are books and secret words to each other, communal feminist text[s] to

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82 The horn might simultaneously be cornucopia. Besides the already subverted stereotype of bullfighting, singling out of the horn adds a complex reference to a female form of power. We can guess that Winterson doesn't really think about fertility as a motherly attribute, but as the power to produce beautiful forms and ideas. In Greek mythology, cornucopia is the horn of the she-goat which suckled Zeus. The horn broke off and became filled with fruit. In later folklore, cornucopia is filled with whatever its owner wishes for, therefore we could understand it as an signifier of imagination and selfinvention (Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca 2.148). We can play with the idea of the bullfight in its mythological context: killing of the sacred bull and continuation of life – self-recreation.
each other – flesh of my flesh to each other. As the abundance of explicit or subtly hinted references show, the spiral of feminist (lesbian) love doesn't start with these two. Hence the “living no-names” of Sappho and Picasso.

Also, Picasso is squatting “like a Sumo” “wide enough for my hips like roses,” “cover[ed] with my petals,” a “cover girl wide enough for the weight of my cargo”. Picasso is linguistically adored for “the stench of her, the brack of her, the rolling splitting cunt of her”, “ham thighs, loins of pork.” She smells “the dirt on me,” this “lithe lover bulrush-thin fat[s] me.” “We are fat for each other we sapling girls.” “Neat clean branching girls” “thick with sex” (31). “Her skin comes away with her clothes. On those days it was possible to record the patience of her digestive juices and the relentlessness of her lungs” (32). These lovers are indeed conceived in language, but this poetry is indeed made of body's fluids and bursting tissues. No bodily chemistry is too dirty not to be lovable as a miraculous materialization of the beauty of bodily frailty that never spares itself but blissfully crumbles in love and desire. And how possible is it at all to identify such desire and such bodies, where the hips like roses, big as rosehips are wide enough to receive a cargo of a Sumo? The lust is condensed in the stench from the brack of the cunt, the sex is taking place in the syntax. One thrust of hips – the stench of her; another, more forceful with the thrusting body still suspended over the deep opening underneath – the brack of her; and suddenly, the body slips on the slippery, rolling splitting cunt and starts falling.

Also, think of the word-choice “brack”: a word not commonly used any more. It is possible to play here over and over again. There is about “brack” a more obvious and conventional association to an opening, the parting, female body, which is not self-contained, but broken and permeable. But also, we might think about the brack as of a breach and breaking of
the protective surface, and also a flaw.\textsuperscript{83} Protective surfaces that can, but should not be broken are laws, regulations and agreements, which preserve peace or the status quo. Also, the last and most immediate protective surface is that of the skin on the well-contained and normalized body maintained by regulated desire. Thus a brack is also violation of confidence. And a breach of security of the social order and cultural continuity is always a crack in reputation too. In Winterson's story, this violation is subtly and gradually performed right in language and the body, and it is performed strategically wisely as well, if we understand these two as the hardest shells of the regulated view of the world. By a poetic tactic of a mixed synecdochic and metaphoric concentration, not banally conspicuous yet “insidious”, the rolling splitting cunt becomes the breach of social security, the cultural meaning compromised in the language, and an assault against diverse discourses that wish to track and contain bodies and desires.

In “The Laugh of the Medusa” Cixous projects the invention of the “\textit{impregnable} language” (2045) weaved of bodily parts. As the careful choice of the term \textit{impregnable} indicates, it should be at the same time vitally resistant to patriarchal discourses and the one seeding and seething with wholly new word meanings.\textsuperscript{84} The language fit to take upon itself the task of the cultural liberation of the \textit{feminine} and its historically stereotyped body, coming from the obscurity and silence into the full presence, through writing (2040).

\textsuperscript{83} In \textit{Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language} the entry for \textit{brack} writes: “An opening caused by the parting of any solid body; a breach; a broken part; a flaw [obsolete].”

\textsuperscript{84} In “The Poetics of Sex” Jeanette Winterson is careful to use \textit{seeth}, an older form of the verb \textit{seethe}, which apparently is one more way of her recovering the words locked in their repressive canonical meaning. While the meaning in use today strongly suggests a state of permanent change and becoming appropriate to Winterson’s story’s theme, it is interesting that she uses seehe, an old form which is “rarely used in common concerns of life” according to \textit{An American Dictionary of the English Language} by Noah Webster. It doesn’t seem improbable that Winterson had in mind that \textit{seeth} appears in \textit{Exodus} (xxiii) of \textit{The Old Testament}: “Though shalt not seeth a kid in its mother’s milk” (66). Also, \textit{seeth} is used in the meaning “hot” by another canonical poet Edmund Spencer.
Rescuing of Word-Hostages by the Scorching Tongues

We have seen some of Winterson's methods, but let's have a look at how Sappho herself describes her warfare for this linguistic cause. The language of Sappho – who knew no language at all when for the first time she clung to Picasso’s body, all hunger and need – flickers, (un)rolls and splits, setting free ever new associations of meanings. Sappho either dives her nets into the past, fishing out forgotten words to triumphantly reveal them in “forbidden” garments or, if need be, comes “scorching the history books with tongues of flame”. She says: “When I see a word held hostage to manhood I have to rescue it” (39). The battle takes the form of a heroic endeavor, overflowing with references to ancient history and mythology. The first word taken hostage is set free: “Never mind the poetry, feel the erection. Oh yes, women get erect, today my body is stiff with sex.” Lovingly poeticizing, Sappho confuses the imprisoned words with locked princesses within a traditional fairytale frame: “Sweet trembling word locked in a tower, tired of your Prince, coming and coming.” And then she turns to the legendary poetics that doesn’t know so many locks and doors. This is the one that belongs to her, Sappho of Lesbos, bold enough to create in the midst of patriarchy a universe of noble love for the female spirit and body: “I like … to come back to my island full of girls carrying a net of words forbidden them. Poor girls, they are locked outside their words, just as the words are locked into meaning. Such a lot of locking up goes on the Mainland but here the doors are always open” (40). On this “delicious

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85 Again, the conventional picture of “scorching the history books with tongues of flame” releases multiple associations. Thus Sappho does “scorch” the history of the Father by turning its books upside-down, emptying them of old meanings and allowing them radically new relations with her liberated lesbian tongue (language). But also, her “artistic tongue,” an imaginative power of the feminist consciousness that displaces the phallic power, is intrinsically connected to her sexual body – her tongue.

86 According to Cixous, conventional men, the victims of the Lacanian phallic order, confuse themselves with their penis, losing their bodies, while women experience and write their reality with the entirety of their bodies (2041).

87 Throughout Winterson's story, the term Mainland is used to refer to everything hostile to the island of infinite variety of women: the patriarchal Western society and the coercive cultural meanings locked in its language. In my text's map of the feminist space of the in-between, the Mainland corresponds to the pressing forces of the social and political reality, which is always refracted through feminist consciousness.
unacknowledged island where we are naked with each other” (41). How much this resonates with the Derridean redefinition of the binary structures of the linguistic sign and thought, and unrepresing the obscured meaning in the theory of écriture, the realm of philosophy Hélène Cixous comes from!

The major “lexicographic” rescue ensues when a male artist evocatively called Salami tries to invade the girls' island. The paradox of Salami is that he wants to be a lesbian or an artist of écriture féminine. This could be resolved according to Cixous, but only if he were able to shed the low bodily regions burden of his name. Unfortunately, he cannot do better than use familiar techniques: he begs or threatens, offering “his greasy wallet” or to paint Picasso for posterity 39-40). Predictably, the love of women he professes is of gluttonous and exterminating character. He lies against the wall ridden with hate and lust, listening to Picasso and Sappho’s sex, complaining that they stop him painting. Here is once again “the Prince coming and coming.” Both references are clear if we remember the symbolic meaning of the brush rejected by Picasso: demythification of the principle of the phallus and its symbolism as creative power and establishing a new symbolism of corporeal creative power of the female body – Picasso paints with her clitoris. Of course, Sappho can see through Salami’s pain: “Salami hates to hear us fuck. The real trouble is that we have rescued the word not allowed to our kind” (41).

The passages of Winterson’s story which remarkably echo with the tones of “The Laugh of the Medusa” are many. We've discovered that this happens simultaneously on the three intersecting levels: theoretical, political and on the level of poetic language. Keeping in mind passages quoted so far, let's offer a few more examples:

On this island where we live, keeping what we do not tell, we have found the infinite
variety of Woman. On the Mainland, Woman is largely extinct in all but a couple of obvious forms. She is still cultivated as a cash crop but is nowhere to be found growing wild.”... “Making love we made a dictionary of forbidden words. We are words, sentences, stories, books. You are my New Testament. We are a gospel to each other, I am your annunciation, revelation. (…) When you have sunk me to the pit, I’ll mine you in return and we shall be husbands to each other as well as wives.” “Picasso is an unlikely mother but I owe myself to her. She baptized me from her own font. (…) We are honour-bound, love-bound, bound by cords to {too?} robust for those healthy hospital scissors. (Winterson 42)

Everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman. There is hidden and always ready in woman the source; the locus for the other. The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to women by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was “born” to her. Touch me, caress me, you the living no-name, give me my self as myself. (…) (she is) what touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? bodies?), no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other; that part of you that leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman’s style.” “…I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. (Cixous 2043-2044)

Perhaps, if read polyphonously, these two voices can tell us what is so radically liberating about the suffocating figure of the mother. Apparently, as readers we are requested to shed our
mental cobwebs of the inherited critical codes. Here, the meaning is not carved in the hard tablet for posterity. Instead, it is the “living no-name” inscribed in water, which makes “all metaphors possible.”

So, what kind of (unlikely) mothers are these and who do they give birth to? A brief summary: these mothers, much like ancient gods, fuck the flesh of their flesh and then baptize the offspring from their own font (the basin for baptismal text?!). The body is thus born back to the offspring: her self and her language are given to her as herself, by this “intimate recipient.” The offspring and the mother continue to procreate and the roles are utterly exchangeable and replaceable by any other role inhabitable for these robust cords of originary love and honour. But what kind of birth is this that effects in the creation of the dictionary of forbidden words, of another forbidden New Testament, another history of life? I would propose that this is a birth of feminist consciousness begotten by erotic, linguistic and political emancipation of one's body through the immersion into the bonds of the feminist intertext. The self thus received is the one that goes out of oneself, as a permanent locus for the other in-between oneself and between us, the one ready to start us again, ever slightly different mother, bull, (s)word, baby, song, text, anticipation, fantasy, struggle... It appears that these are the bodies rather spacious, wide enough for taboo kinships between incestuous mothers and no-names, outside, along, around and in-between the genealogies of the father, in the intertextual feminist field of desire, utopian for sure.

Feminist Consciousness: Spacious Bodies of Incestuous Mothers

Having said that Cixous aims at an immediate incorporation of physical sensations in the text and that consequently hers is the language of an affective poetry, this analysis has suggested that her words require perception with an ear sensitive to of fit contextual implications. I have also tried to show that écriture feminine is as far from any concept of the essential feminine as it

88 “Here lies one whose name was writ in water” is the epitaph on the grave of John Keats.
can be. Still, every new, fastidious reading of Cixous’s text is rewarded with the previously undiscovered instances of elaboration of the idea of *erotogeneity* and unnoticed word relations delicately glistening in the unthought of directions of meaning. Then the statements that Hélène Cixous is talking about Universal Woman in the best case are close to satisfying oneself with the first meaning of an entry word and closing the dictionary quickly.

If “I write this as a woman, toward women,” even echoes with the universal, it is only that we might have turned a deaf ear and therefore misread what follows: “When I say ‘woman,’ I am speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history” (2040). What appears as the only and also merely provisional universality is the “inevitable struggle” against the man who yields to and perpetuates the oppressive patriarchal categorizations of gender identities, himself robbed of his erotogeneity. Thus the struggle is maybe universal in the sense that the political moment requires a systematic resistance to the codified past whose effects “are still with us”. Consequently, “universal woman subject” can be understood as the femininity constructed and subjected to power and violently driven from its erotogeneity “for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal” (2039). Also, “subject” might be read as subjectivity, implying individuality which does not succumb to universality. Or even, as subjected (female) individuality. Already in the next line Cixous says “…in spite of the enormity of repression that has kept them in the ‘dark’ – that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute– there is at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman.” And then: “…you can’t talk about female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another” (2039).

Therefore why not suggest that the “universal woman subject” Cixous is addressing can also
stand for a patriarchal construct, a *universalized* woman that needs to get *deuniversalized* into her “infinite variety” of the “body (body? bodies?)” no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other? It seems heard to imagine a statement of plurality more open and uncompromising than this.

We are possibly doing better if we use the term *feminine* to refer to those subject citizens who have been systematically obscured or misrepresented in the long history of Western cultural discourse on the basis of their socially assumed gender and their sexuality. Standing on this premise, we might say that *feminine* is also about certain conceptual achievements and insights of certain subjects who share the experience of this repression – perhaps, we can call them queer feminists. This feminist self is like an “arrow” which “quits the bow with a movement that gathers and separates the vibrations musically, in order to be more than her self” (2042). The bow here might be the ego (for, writing will “tear [woman] away from superegoized structure”) and the vibrations Cixous’ brilliant sensuous vision of the multiplications of the selves, from the boundaries of the ego, towards the other (2044).

**Other Bisexual Genre**

The transgression of genre that occurs throughout Cixous’s theoretical essay and Winterson’s short story is virtually dictated by the slippery nature of the subject. Also, our goal has been to understand both pieces as the sext, the field of desire, the in-between, where body and poetic text merge in order to crystallize into a feminist idea. Therefore the name of genre remains only as a tentative form one recombines and dismisses in order to pursue desire for an

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89 Thus the way I understand the terms of queer and feminist are very open; they stand for more than women and queer women. These inclusive definitions I operate with have an affinity with other, spacious and sensitive concepts based on the insights about intersections of social oppressions, such as those by José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia*, Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, and Cathy Cohen in the article “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical. Potential of Queer Politics?”
ever new text, as one compulsively or capriciously plays out and manipulates the stereotypes of gender following one's desire for different bodies. Through the concept of *écriture feminine*, Cixous theorizes gender, sexuality and love, at the same time performing her ideas by means of a language which at all its levels, from the syntactic to the semantic, is rich with allusive and elusive messages, meaningful hints and intuitions, evocative correspondences between the sounds. This is the way poetry only or the prose which doesn't defend itself from poetry can work. In a sense, by practicing what she preaches, Cixous confirms that it is hard for theory to hope to convey the actual diversity of the experience of existence, if it excludes the methods of poetic written forms.

In many respects, Jeanette Winterson’s story is structured as a polemic and poetic essay. With the title itself suggesting an essayistic form and a theoretical subject (poetics), it polemizes with the public about sex, gender and language. Winterson gives personal but not apolitical answer to “a series of questions, mainly the questions I was getting all the time in the nineties from the British press. Funny lot – journalists (jeanettewinterson.com). These, as Winterson says, funny queries are given the role of subtitles structuring the narrative, which as it finally appears has no narrative at all, being set out as a postmodern collage of poetic but poignantly antagonistic responses to: *Why do you sleep with girls?; Which one of you is the man?; What do lesbians do in bed?; Were you born a lesbian?; Why Do You Hate Men?; Don’t you find there’s something missing?*  

While the issues discussed in both pieces need to be theorized for intellectual, ethical and political reasons, they are, as I implied, by virtue of their complex nature too elusive to theory and can probably be further mined only through a poetic lens. Theory’s grasp of desire and its

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90 And these seem to be the question that queer feminist theory for a long time has endeavoured to answer or dismiss.
relation to gender also stays a step behind, if it excludes the not definable emotions of love. And these are hard to reflect on in the conventional language of critical theory, however sophisticated this language sometimes might be. Cixous dares and succeeds in theorizing love in her text, by inventing *other bisexual genre*.\(^9\) Just as the non-exclusive and non-restrictive conception of *other bisexuality* helped her introduce the notion of the multiplicity and indeterminacy of gender and their relation to polysexuality, the “open, transitional space” of what I tentatively call here *other bisexual genre* enables her to elaborate on the themes very much like a moving target. (Though, Hélène Cixous would probably rather choose the term of sext.) Anyway, the premise of sext is rejection of any normativity as an untenable social construct that intrinsically obscures something, and the initial step is dismissing the oppression of genre.

Cixous herself notes that the “feminine practice of writing is and will remain impossible to define, theorize, code and enclose because it does and will always take place beyond and outside of the phallocentric conceptual system,” and we sense that she wants to say – out of a (stable) discourse (2046). As a new revolutionary theory brought by French post-structuralism, *écriture* understands that a discourse must remain permanently unsettled and always ready to reinvent itself, if it is to have any chance to alter social relations. Yet, this doesn't appear to be in the nature of discourse at all. Still, Cixous announces that “there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break” for “we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather of a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another.” The emerging and urgent question is then how do we un-discourse, deunify and deregulate theory and history?

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\(^9\) This refers to already discussed Cixous’s characterization of gender through the concept of *other bisexuality.*
Discourse Adulteresses

To this question relates perhaps one of the most important and widely disregarded moments in “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Here, woman as a “militant”, we shall understand this as a radical feminist, is an “integral part of all liberations.” She sees her struggle further and beyond the battlefield of gender discrimination, because she understands that while this would probably benefit woman of certain origins, the real “mutation in human relation, in thought, in all praxis” ensues from a “much vaster movement.” Here Cixous thinks feminism in its most insightful, foreseeing and politically productive strain: probably talking back to Marxist theory and feminist theory, she points out that feminist/feminine struggle of difference (by now we can also call it other or queer feminism) has to make the class struggle or “any other struggle for the liberation of a class or people” split open, “spread it out, push it forward, fill it with the fundamental struggle” and prevent it from “operating as a form of oppression” (2046). In order to retain the power to stay outside or compromise discourse from within, and in order to avoid the fate of some other social movements which eventually calcified into another political and conceptual hegemony, this form of struggle will have to “occur[s] simultaneously in several places.” It needs to be developed and practiced “as a process of becoming” by those always already “breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.”

It is hardly probable that Cixous here thinks only women, even less the universal woman, or, only if the universal woman is the feminist conceived of in her queerest, as those historically marginalized on the basis of their assumed gender, their sexuality, nationality, colour, race or

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92 Here Cixous understands that there cannot be politically productive and ethically significant feminist struggle if it is not founded on the concept of intersectionality of social oppression and opposition. This key insight, which in the time of the second-wave feminism was accessible to feminists of color and other social minorities (hardly ever to white middle class women in Western culture) in the present late capitalist postmodern moment seems to be one of the crucial stand points for the creation of the third-wave feminism and a transnational oppositional social movement. A significant example of such feminist thinking today is Chela Sandoval’s concept of differential oppositional consciousness derived from the experience of the US third world feminists in late 80s and early 90s.
other categorization. In the light of this, we might consider *écriture féminine* as an encompassing, but the ultimate name for the insights about gender, desire and love in feminist queer theory, performed in a textual form. (In a poetic text no term is obliged to the consistency of meaning. Instead, it is free to build itself throughout the text, if need be, in the logic of contradiction and plurality.)

“Abusing” the genre and cheating on discourse is surely what Jeanette Winterson does in this, and probably her other pieces, and as I already hinted, this is for highly justified goals of bringing “women to their senses and to their meaning in history.” She is “scorching the books of history” (his-story) by uncovering that the story of the two lesbian lovers, Picasso and Sappho, already has its hidden multiple pre-histories. She weaves it playfully out of the threads of diverse common tales, communal myths, archetypes and stereotypes and some foundational narratives in order to tell a fable of certain love. But to say this is misleading enough, since what Winterson does is an exuberant disordering of virtually everything: of history and mythology, art and culture, religion and psychology, popular myths of gender and sex, beauty both physical and abstract, decency and formal consistency of a narrative. In order to tell a fable of certain other love, to praise and worship it, to invent and enact it for the future. And this, in the midst of the culture that apparently has no narrative and language for it. An already present island in-between the history of the Mainland and the dreamed of but not yet realized queer feminist future: always in the text, among the bodies, beneath the sheets. Possible to limit as much as it is possible to describe the soul, or explain the fear before artistic beauty – utopia of the sext, here and now.

“Under my obligations, my history, my fears, this now. (...) I will not let time lie to me. I will not listen to dead voices of unborn pain. (...) Love is you and here I am. Now” (Winterson 36).

With this disorderly map of the history of love and desire derangingly spiraling around
the “history of men,” we gradually come to understand the following. This past of women
“supplicants of yesterday,” who “with a single word of the body, have inscribed the vertiginous
immensity of a history which is sprung like an arrow from (...) biblico-capitalist society” is
regained in the participation in the feminist intertext, as a beginning and a signpost for an
anticipated future. So far, much like “birds” and “robbers,” these “poetic bodies” have flown and
stolen through “narrow passageways” of language and other cultural segments, thus “jumbling
the order of the space,” “emptying the structures,” “dislocating things and values,” “turning
property upside-down,” “inscri[bing] ... the differential,” “punctur[ing] the system of couples and
opposition” -- they “jamm[ed]” or actually, they dreamt another “sociality” (Cixous 2050-
2051).93 Much like Sappho, who scorches the books and rescues the girls and words from being
locked in the meanings of the economy of possession and the ego, the new woman of Cixous
“once she blazes her trail in the symbolic ... cannot fail to make of it the chaosmos of the
‘personal’ -- in her pronouns, her nouns, and her clique of referents” (2051). With the initiation of
signifying chaosmos, His-story, as Cixous announces, does change its meaning.

Other Love

Love between lovers, love between mother and child. Love between man and wife. Love
between friends. I had been all of those things to her and she had been all of those things
to me. What we were we were in equal parts, and twin souls to one another. We like to
play roles but we know who we are. You are beauty to me Picasso. Not only sensuous
beauty that pleases the eye but artistic beauty that challenges it. Sometimes you are ugly
in your beauty, magnificently ugly and you frighten me for all right reasons. (…) What
holds the small space between my legs is not your artistic tongue nor any of the other

93 French voler – fly, steal
parts you play at will but the universe beneath the sheets that we make together.

(Winterson 41-42)

This, in the vocabulary of Hélène Cixous is the *other love*, love of the other, this utopian present that rereads and changes the meaning of history of sociality and enacts in body and text a feminist future:

In the beginning are our differences. The new love dares for the other, wants the other, makes dizzying, precipitous flights between knowledge and invention. She cuts through defensive loves, motherages, and devourations: beyond selfish narcissism, in the moving, open, transitional space, she runs risks. (…) I am for you what you want me to be at the moment you look at me in a way you've never seen me before: at every instant. When I write, it's everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusion, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. (Cixous 2055-2056)

As we have seen in the example of *other bisexuality*, the term *other* has multiple and complex implications in Cixous’s language. This is a desire which “dares for the other:” “without exclusion” and “without stipulation” it wants the other within “me” and “me” within the other and all differences in-between, before and after us. It risks the displacement from the self into the foreign state of mind and body. Here there are no other signposts than this fever to be othered through and through, to the point of an extreme peril for the self, contiguous to the great pleasure of performance of the shared desire. In this sense, this leap is hardly a choice for the lover, desirer or reader, but rather, the only possible movement – to pursue one's othered mind and body as in a bout of illness. Hoping that we are not going to meet our destruction (or maybe rejection of our desire) by the other's radically different desires, we survive by incessantly
recreating the other and the self as always “in the moving” and the self more spacious than “me”
to receive the different “you” with the faith in the transformative power of fictionalization.

“When I write, it's everything that we don’t know we can be that is written out of me,” as Picasso
and Sappho experience in their “universe beneath the sheets”. Also, “I am for you what you want
me to be at the moment you look at me in a way you've never seen me before: at every instant.”

One needs to listen carefully to these lines for their significant political promise.

Hopefully, the thread of continuity between other love, feminist fictionalization (writing) and
utopian social anticipation of a different world, has emerged more clearly by now. The aim of
other love is to include the radically different, at the price of a dramatic alteration of the self and
also to allow for that alteration to happen. Also, radical othering would often even require a
conscious consent of mind and body to be launched into the conceptually unknown. Since it
grows beyond the actual into an anticipation of a possible world as utopian art does, this desire is
in a sense, art itself and it provokes fear (“artistic beauty that challenges” and “frighten[s] [me]
for all the right reasons,” as Sappho describes Picasso). For Winterson and Cixous, this is the art
of writing and an “unappeasable search for love.” Still, why this necessity of alterity? Why is
there so much at stake in this desire, sometimes much like fever and compulsion, which makes it
indispensable to critical feminist theory engaged in inventive political thinking?

We could say that in the present moment it is urgent to politicize other love.

Acknowledgement of a radically different desire represents a mark of an engaged fantasy of the
future of altered relations. An eroticism that allows for the self to be altered or temporarily
suspended by the unknown is an initial position of utopian thinking and acting. By inventively
enacting queer feminist sociality in bodily and other life practices, other love brings the promise
of an anticipated utopian future to this here and now – in “my” body, text and in the ways of
relating to each other (“Anticipation is imperative” says Cixous, politically charged) (2039).

Finally, how much is at stake, we can hear from Judith Butler: “The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy and the foreclosure of fantasy - through censorship, degradation, or other means - is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons” (28-29).

This other love, being a capacity for fantasy and anticipation of the fulfillment of desire, has an aptly open end in Winterson’s story, and we might recall once again that in her text Cixous calls it “open, transitional space”. At a certain point Picasso whose “standards are high,” leaves Sappho because “She says develop or die.” She “won’t let yesterday’s love suffice for today. She makes it new, she remixes her colours and stretches her canvas until it sighs” (43). At the end, due to narrative unfixedness, we might say atemporality or even other temporality, we don’t know if they are united again or whether this is Sappho’s recreation and fantasy projection of the fulfillment of her desire for Picasso. We do know that she can't win her back before she goes a step further in the art of other love.

Thus the story’s end is as indeterminate, as is its subject matter, its genre and Sappho's closing words. She says that she has learned to feed her lover every day, to feed her “full of fuel that she gladly finds”. She has “unlocked the storehouses of love.” The very last lines read: “She is painting today. The room is orange with effort. She is painting today and I have written this.” This is the moment of non-resolvable tension, the moment of self-invention through the art of écriture, the moment of transition to future love and future selves that we anticipate and desire, a perfect moment in which everything is completely possible for a while (Maso xi).

“In one another we will never be lacking. And we'll keep on becoming!” (Cixous 2056).
ENDING NOTES

"I should like to defend night like a thesis at the seaside."

Nicole Brossard Lovehers

We Can't Afford Not to Be Utopian

The event that coincided with the beginning of writing this text and which significantly influenced my thoughts on queer utopia was reading José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia.* Published only last year, in it Muñoz pleads for the necessity of utopian thinking in the present political moment: “Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1). I find such a standpoint vitally important for all progressive acting, as it explicitly states that contrary to frequent, even certain feminist (ironic or nostalgic) estimations, utopianism is actually an indispensable ethical mode of knowing. Since it is derived from the always-in-potential principle of desire (between reality and the ideal) it offers an epistemological way around the dominant rationalistic ethics of impossibility and pessimism.

Drawing from and commenting on Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope,* Muñoz talks about utopian “hope as a hermeneutic” and points out that “such a critical optic is nothing short of necessary in order to combat the force of political pessimism” (4). While he is aware that politically utopian position is a difficult one, Muñoz states that antiutopianism which presently dominates cultural criticism is usually a “poor substitution for actual critical intervention.”

At the outset of his inspiring book-length argument according to which we catch glimpses of utopia in the aesthetically reenacted past instances of queer utopian being and relating, which also become a visionary material for an anticipation of the future, Muñoz states what I've tried to state clearly as my central argument. Politically conscious cultivation of
utopian perception and the consequent life practices are the matter of survival. He writes: “We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (1).

Then, Muñoz specifies some channels of this imperative dreaming: “The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness” (1). But, Muñoz makes it clear, reaching for the “aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. (...) Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.” Muñoz believes that evocations and reenactments of past and present practices of certain queer individuals and collectivities, those differently socially degraded on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual and other identifications, offer access to the insights into the possibility of future of queer utopia (56). Muñoz also terms these practices as “sexual avant-gardist acts,” “both antinormative and critical of the state,” “theatrical and quotidian.” These reenactments usually found in queer art and stage performances which intrinsically assume some sort of collective affective participation would be a meaningful way, Muñoz suggests, to critically engage with cultural actuality and also, a mode of inventive political thinking about the future.

Let me reiterate that the concept of queerness with which I operate throughout this text is not less spacious than the one Muñoz delineates here and therefore it necessarily exceeds plurality of sexualities. Still, in both arguments (Muñoz's and mine as well) sexuality stays a
recurring focus of analysis, because of its strong erotic potential to uncover desire as diffuse and differential and traversing across “more than sexual” divides and oppositions. We might proceed from here in order to look for the hints that for example the relations of racism and heterosexism perhaps are not only those of straightforward oppression, but of a complicated and impossible mutual desire. This perspective might enable us to think about the “straight” lines drawn between queer and “non-queer” desire as something of an anxious fiction, while perhaps, it would be more helpful to understand desire as intrinsically queer. With this binary undone, our notion of the things queer would become more inclusive and more sensitive to the intricate ways the non-normative desire is straightened and “homosexualized” in order to reinforce the oppositional mindset. It is possibly naive to envision a society which recognizes desire as overall queer. Still, an understanding that something queer has always worked in the non-homosexual lives would make the recognition of the self and the other as queer less dramatic. Also, alternative groupings in both categories would become something of an expected dynamic of life. While this opens new possibilities for queer utopian relationalities embodied in the life choices we make, the modes of interacting and treating each other, the ways we carve spaces that don't identify with the cultural (or even countercultural) givens (be it that these spaces are queer texts we create), we might also say that in this way we are getting closer to a collective political fantasizing of a more encompassing queer utopia.

What I find particularly significant in *Cruising Utopia*, and in the question of utopia in

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94 Here again I use the term *erotic* in its broader meaning which includes but goes beyond sexual desire, at least in the narrow sense of the word.

95 For this argument I owe much to the cogent insights of Anne Anlin Cheng in her *The Melancholy of the Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief (Race and American Culture)*.

96 It might be interesting to continue in this direction of “queering back,” and then say that something queer has always worked in the “non-racialized” desire, and so on, along the axis of social differences. By non-racialized I mean white racial consciousness which tends to see itself as racially unmarked, in the same way heterosexuality thinks about itself as neutral and straight in the sense of a normative line.
general are the ways of understanding utopian temporalities. In a very nuanced differentiation among them, I see a possibility to find room for utopia in the present. Munoz writes: “We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. Future is queerness's domain” (1). Here, Muñoz instantly dismisses conventional histories of the linear progression of time and establishes a certain queer temporality: in recollected fragments of queer past, there are the intimations of an entirely queer futurity which rejects the mental and social “quagmire of the present”. Still, we might want to pay more attention to the fact that it is in the cultural moment of the present that we engage with its political givens: by reenacting the intense moments of queer past. Of course, to say “queer past” is not a nostalgic observation that once we were queer and that this better world has been lost. Rather, it is to recognize in selected past moments certain capacity for utopian feeling and acting, which enable us to “dream, and enact” further, in a very clear way “new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (1). While Muñoz doesn't seem to dismiss the possibility of feeling utopian in the present, some of us might like the utopian capacity of the present more clarified. At this point I would insist that even though it is “distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” and “exists for us as an ideality,” (it presents an act of rejection of cultural givens of the present) queer utopia is enacted and felt in the here and now. With all caution, we might suggest that as a feeling, an oppositional consciousness, a political imagination performed among the bodies, queer utopia is realizable in the present moment. 97 Obviously, it is not a place, a social system, an institution, nor even a

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97 Feminist writer Angelica Bammer suggests that we “need to reconceptualize the utopian in historical, this-worldly terms, as a process that involves human agency (...) [I]t is often the partial vision, rather than the supposedly comprehensive one, that is most able to see clearly. In the sense that the gaze that encompasses less is often able to grasp more, the partial vision is more utopian” (quoted from Dolan 6).
movement with a fixed and permanent agenda.\textsuperscript{98}

When Muñoz says that queerness is performative: it is not “simply a being” – it neither was, nor it is, but exists as an oppositional imagining of a different world – he seeks to confirm it as a “rejection of a here and now” (1). Rather, he claims, (as a performative) it is a “doing for and toward the future,” a “realm of futurity.” He further instantiates this forward-oriented-temporality by describing it as an “insistence on ... concrete possibility of another world.” Yet, there is a potential here of a reading which threatens to render the concepts temporarily contradictory, while actually I hope this is only to open them as readable in a more excessive manner. If queerness \textit{is} a performative - its capacity for futurity is experienced within the performing process by distillation of the utopianism of the past – we might as well say that this ideality or this futurity is experienced here and now. It is a doing toward a better world by enacting it affectively in the present moment. Still, there is this given present that queerness rejects. But, by calling it \textit{a} here and now, I would suggest that perhaps Muñoz implies (or if not, maybe this is the moment to do so) that there are also \textit{some other here and now} even not exclusively tied to queer art forms and performances – those locatable in a feeling, a social consciousness and political imagination, in ethical acting. We can find them materialized in the queer body and they are all infected or rather, dependent on performing in this life a “concrete possibility of another world”. Hence the concreteness: in this embodiedness in the queer here and now.

Muñoz explains how “certain performances of queer citizenship contain (…) an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present” (49). These are the “sites of
embodied and performed queer politics,” the “outposts of actually existing queer worlds.” The anticipatory illumination contained in certain (queer) art forms is not about aesthetic pleasure only, just as queer utopia, or to use Bloch’s term, a concrete utopia is not just daydreaming of another, better place. Some aesthetic and performance practices with their “surplus of affect and meaning” help us access and even materialize the not yet conscious – this being the dream matter of concrete utopias and the “collectivities actualized and potential.”

In her book *Utopia in Performance* Jill Dolan analyzes live performance as a specific time and place where, at certain moments, spectators feel “allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public, in which social discourse articulates the possible, rather than the insurmountable obstacles to human potential” (2). Dolan offers a concept of the utopian performative which “describe[s] small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking and intersubjectively intense” (4). Thus performance has the capacity to “offer a place to scrutinize public meanings, but also to embody and, even if through fantasy, enact the affective possibilities of 'doings' that gesture toward a much better world” (6). Here, while she appropriates J.L. Austin's concept of “doing,” Dolan closely touches Muñoz's idea of queerness and utopia. When Muñoz says that queerness is performative – not

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99 Anticipatory illumination is the concept that Muñoz borrows from Bloch.

100 Muñoz further appropriates Bloch’s utopian terminology: “Not only hope’s affect (with its pendant fear) but even more so, hope’s methodology (with its pendant, memory) dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy.” This idea of indeterminacy is then, through an evocation of Giorgio Agamben, connected to a critical process close to potentiality. Hope and fear are affective critical structures that have an anticipatory value (3).

101 Actually, it is fairer to say that Muñoz comes close to Dolan's ideas, since in *Cruising Utopia* he refers to *Utopia in Performance* as one of the texts that largely inspired his book. Indeed, this is obvious at the beginning, in the basic concepts Muñoz sets before proceeding to discuss queer utopia as performative.
“simply a being,” but a “doing for and toward the future,” we can hear in this Dolan talking about certain performatives which “allow fleeting contact with a utopia not stabilized with its finished perfection, not coercive in its contained, self-reliant, self-determined system, but a utopia always in process, always only partially grasped, as it disappears before us around the corners of narrative and social experience” (6).

Dolan invites us to think about utopia as processual...”an index...to the 'what if,' rather than a more restrictive, finite image of the 'what should be.” The former “allows performance a hopeful cast, one that can experiment with the possibilities of the future in ways that shine back usefully on a present that's always, itself, in process.” Such an understanding of utopia, Dolan maintains, “prevents it from settling into prescription, into the kind of fascism that inevitably attends a fully drawn idea of a better world” (13). And another Dolan's insight for the notion of utopia as a state of consciousness, as acting and not achieving: “performance allows us to see utopia as a process of spending time” since performance (or utopia embodied) “lives only in its doing, which is imagining...” (13-14).

By understanding queer life experience and queer feeling and aesthetics as performative (instead of showing what is, queer is doing what could be, or even embodying what is and thus opening it for critical refiguring, as Dolan states) Muñoz, like Dolan in her own way, participates in a theoretical sensibility for which certain performatives are passageways to Bloch's concrete utopias – those which engage with social reality and are about “collectivities actualized and potential.” There is no reason, I would suggest, not to recognize these concrete utopias in the particular states of intersubjective consciousness which we develop when we find ourselves a part of queer collectivities of the feminist experimental intertext. With a newly released personal and social affectivity, we come to understand the potential of actual being and acting in the
presentness of the text, while keeping the utopian feeling as our ethical standard. In this way, we bring more spacious collectivities and more differential relationalities from the fictional realm of the social-not-yet to our immediate physical and mental experience.\footnote{In her explication of the utopian as “always in process” and always only “partially grasped,” Dolan refers to and quotes Angelika Bammer’s formulation of the realness of utopia: “I want to counter the notion of the utopian as unreal with the proposition that the utopian is powerfully real in the sense that hope and desire (and even fantasies) are real, never ‘merely’ fantasy. It is a force that shapes and moves history” (quoted from Dolan 7).}

During the performing experience of an ecstatic world that could be, what apparently becomes accessible to us is a collective knowledge about a mass of queer individuals otherwise separated by cultural conceptual inertia. Within this expanding presentness of the intertext we achieve a particular utopian consciousness of the far-reaching historical interrelatedness of queer lives. We are finally able to projects a queer utopian future beyond the social exclusions of cultural concepts. Affective intensity of these experiences, both in individual and in collective situations (although even in individual instances, our consciousness is collective now) has the power to: “transport ... across symbolic space, inserting us in a conterminous time when we witness new formations within the future and the present, surpassing the relegation to one temporality (the present) and insisting on minoritarian subject’s status as world-historical entity” (56 Muñoz).

Consciousness of this world-historical entity stays critically important for political hopefulness and utopian ethical education of subaltern population.\footnote{As I already stated several times in different words, subaltern corresponds to the notion of queerness I use in this text.} Muñoz talks about sexual cultures concentrated around life practices and reenacted and maintained in art, which offer profound insights into an actual historical existence of queer utopian publics – insights into a massive queer political whole. The question possibly worth further pursuing is whether these queer publics, also those we’ve seen constituted in feminist textual space, with their rituals of
intimacy and interdependence, lead to a large-scale understanding that the considerable mass of queer individuals possesses a relevant life-preserving and political power?

Before the Exit, a Beginning...

“Like the revolutionary movement of the sixties, what we now call French feminism simultaneously faded out of fashion and was defeated by an array of persuasive counterarguments, coming primarily from critical race, postcolonial, and queer theories and from class analysis” (1692-93 DeKoven). Four years ago, in a PMLA article “Jouissance, Cyborgs, and Companion Species: Feminist Experiment,” a good part of which is a glance back to what she describes as utopian French feminism inspired by Derridean poststructuralism and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Marianne DeKoven explicated the way “[t]he excitement about women’s experimental writing and about experimental writing in genera faded along with French feminism” – a sequence of events that is, according to her, too well known to everybody (1693).

DeKoven writes in the tone of apologetic self-irony as one who apparently has been brought to political maturity and is able now to see through personal naiveté and self-indulgence of an intellectual elite and their belief that cultural and social revolution can be achieved by an experimental language. She seems to have entirely done away with women’s experimental writing and she can even locate with relative precision the time of its “natural” death to the beginning of the 1980s. DeKoven then connects “[a] large part of this phenomenon”... “with the emergence of the postmodern, in which modernist and avant-garde experimentalism is absorbed into, and partially replaced by refunctioned, opportunistically and ironically deployed conventional aesthetic modes” (1693).
Several positions Marianne DeKoven takes in relation to experimental writing and French feminism, and at times she seems to take them for granted, might render my entire discussion questionable, if not redundant. I feel compelled to try to explain that DeKoven's stances seem to me a result of, as she herself says later, “probably a distorted view, a product of my own intellectual history and the history of the intellectual period I have witnessed and participated in” (1693). But they also might be an indication of occasional broader tendencies in the US feminist academy's reception of what is called here French feminism, identified in the first place with Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray.

Apparently, Marianne DeKoven sees a series of discontinuities and fade-outs induced by what she believes to be one generation or one strain of feminism defeating the other, where I would rather suggest that a critical refraction of an idea and its practice has taken place. This natural diffusion of poststructuralism has been perpetuated primarily by critical effects of race, queer and postcolonial theories and class analysis, whose conceptual space was previously enabled by the critical sweep of poststructuralism and its feminist strain. Also, strangely enough, for DeKoven the occurrence of postmodernism in literature is the end of modernist and avant-gardist ideology of textual experiment which according to her, was only experiencing one last flight in the shape of (women's) experimental writing fueled by French feminism of the 70s and early 80s. Here, like in several other moments in her essay, DeKoven's concept of time, the history of writing and literary feminist theory seems to strangely depend on the narratives of

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104 My view of the trajectory of connections between (French) poststructuralist feminism and feminist queer theory is actually somewhat different, as I try to envision them beyond chronological continuities, and instead by means of the idea of queer temporal spiral of feminist intertextuality. Within such a view, French feminism does not occur in the time prior to the beginning of feminist queer thinking, as the chronological logic would prescribe. This argument is developed in the chapter “On Scorching the Books of His-Story or Ways of Being a Pain in the Ass to All Men” where I talk about queer affinities of Cixous, Winterson and other authors. The idea at the bottom of it is that the phenomenon of queer thinking is not a result of historical development of critical thought (as queer theory probably is) because queerness is not the result of a historical progression.
chronological sequence. In this model, in its crudest form, according to a somewhat naive sense of history, phenomena follow each other in the logic of opposition, where one system of ideas displaces previous by virtue of uncovering its illusions or untruths, and replacing them with new conceptions. But somehow it seems that such views of the history of ideas and subjectivities become particularly popular in moments when there is, with any possible motivation, a will to obscure certain ideologies, in order perhaps to enhance the revolutionary newness of some other. Thus they are forced into a relation of a conflict which seems theoretically misleading and intellectually not so effective.

There are perceptions of historical relations and time in general, which question such models of thought and examine their effect on Western culture. One of them, particularly close to queer feminist ways of knowing, I have discussed throughout this essay. Of course, the intention here is not to question the actual moments of revolution in theoretical and political thought – arguably, one such revolution was indeed induced by French poststructuralism, and its effects are very present in the phenomena such as queer, postcolonial or racial critical theory. But this is on the level of theory. To state that certain attitudes to the experience of living, which are then perfected in the interaction of the experience and the text are conditioned, that they begin or end as a sort of fashion with certain schools of thought, appears a sign of misunderstanding of the nature of literariness, in this case experimental women's writing and its queer poethical predilection.

An excellent example of the inadequacy of thinking only chronologically and oppositionally about the history of subjectivity can be found in Lisa Moore's “Teledildonics,” a discussion of the relation of postmodernism and lesbian identity in the writing of Jeanette Winterson. Pointing at how Winterson in her novel *Sexing the Cherry* journeys the heroes'
experience of multiple subjectivities to the time of early modernity, Moore observes that the ideals of the coherent subject, stable identity and impermeable corporeality are shown here as “only one of many possible ways of describing human experience” (116). At the same time “postmodern understandings of fragmented bodies and multiple subjectivities are seen to have been there all along, produced by (and thus in some sense proper to) the impossible demands of the Enlightenment modernity rather than challenging or rejecting them.” By the same logic, the practice of écriture feminine is not an invention of French feminism, but rather an attitude through writing to the experience and ethics of living, which French feminists and poststructuralists wish to perpetuate and bring into focus of critical theory. With this in mind, the history of écriture feminine neither starts nor ends with French feminism, nor with real or imaginary break between literary modernity and postmodernity.

In the light of all of this, I would question what appears as DeKoven's obliviousness of an uninterrupted practice of feminist experimental writing such as that of Jeanette Winterson or Carole Maso whose ideas seem to be in striking continuity with the notions of écriture feminine or the fiction of Hélène Cixous herself. This leads to another question: if for DeKoven this kind of writing entirely stops, with perhaps an exception of only a few lonely names, which literary space is legitimate for her to look in it for women's experimental writing? Further, for a member of the US feminist academia who shared the beliefs and actually participated in the cultural phenomenon of poststructuralist écriture, it seems to me that DeKoven’s present critical observations about it are rather schematic. Saying this, I am far from suggesting that theorists and critics are not supposed to change their positions and make even radical departures from them. But it is at least confusing for me when DeKoven maintains that feminist theory only after French feminism has experienced a significant shift towards ethics: “Theory in general, as we
well know by now, has taken after the linguistic turn, an ethical turn. We now concern ourselves extensively with the other – not the other as the (m)other, that formulation once familiar to Lacanian feminism of *jouissance* and sexual difference, but the Levinasian other as the universal location of absolute and unknowable difference, of the not-self, that calls us to the ethical accountability” (1694).

What seems to be missing here is a careful reading of the profoundly ethical concepts of the other and difference (Derridean *difference*) ingrained in the language and structure of not only a few texts of French feminism, which have been in circulation in the US academy since the 70s and 80s, but also of a long array of fictional theoretical texts that ensued in the decades after, only one example of which is “We Are Already in the Jaws of the Book”. It is interesting how the ethics of entering the non-subject space in order to let in the radical or, as she calls it, an unknowable difference, remains invisible to DeKoven in her perception of French feminism and experimental writing with whom it shares this ethics. This is even stranger since the concept of sexual difference is directly implicated with Derridean *difference*.

Finally, this opposition between linguistic (thus apparently non-ethical) and ethical turn of theory appears to be in certain contradiction with what DeKoven says later about the intrinsically experimental quality of feminist theory – she doesn’t specify of what time, thus we stay under impression that it is feminist theory in general. Or might she be introducing some new oppositions within the term feminism? But let’s first remember that in each of the discussions of the experimental texts selected here, we’ve realized how complex ethical political concepts can be developed not also but specifically within the linguistic body of the text. Therefore we might ask how for DeKoven it is only from the 80s on that critical theory suddenly matures to take a serious ethical turn? But it seems that some other polarities are implied here as well. She reflects
on how “[e]xperimentalism, as a mode of being or of writing, as a political, existential, or aesthetic idea, seems to me almost archaic now” and although she cautiously inserts the possibility of her looking through the lens of personal intellectual history, she immediately reinstates that “the current moment of academic feminism, as well as of literary writing by women, has run as far away as it can from the experimentalism of French feminism's heyday” (1693). I already expressed my doubts and counterarguments to such claims. But finally, DeKoven does suggest that these statements are misleading since even feminist cultural studies (on whose margins, she claims, today lives literary feminist theory) “is frequently caught by modes of popular culture or by archival materials that have powerful utopian or experimental underpinnings” (such as science fiction, fantasy, cybertext, rap and spoken-word poetry, graphic novel, independent film, alternative rock, cultural production of marginalized groups, performance art, etc.).

After all the movements back and forth, which at least to me suggest that DeKoven can’t disentangle herself from the dilemma whether experimental mode of thinking lives or dies, she concludes with something of a realization that the spirit of the experiment lives on, because feminist theory is intrinsically an experiment in living, writing, thinking and politics. But what is uniquely experimental about literary feminist theory is its effort to bridge the gap between thought and practice and aesthetics and politics – the sundering which is the result of “modernity's rationalism and rationalization” (1693-94). In the light of this standpoint, with which I wholeheartedly agree, I stay myself in bewilderment about whether this means that DeKoven doesn’t consider feminist experimental texts as contributive to this important political aim as “real” literary or cultural feminist studies is, or whether this not a contradiction in adjecto

105 In this experiment, DeKoven sees literary feminist theory together with the Frankfurt School and Birmingham Cultural Studies.
of a sort? Because if DeKoven first establishes a dichotomy between linguistic and ethical feminist theoretical preoccupations, and shortly after asserts that one of the greatest endeavours of feminist theory is “bridg[ing] the gap between thought and practice and aesthetics and politics,” then it is that either feminist experimental writing has a very poor theoretical and political potential (which to me seems hardly probable) or she is actually perpetuating the divide between politics and aesthetics and thought and practice? Such a standpoint seems to be far from the queer feminist idea of hybrid forms, such as those I call in a quite generalized manner fiction theory and poetic theory, the forms which with their own structure theorize politically crucial ideals of plurality and being in-the-passage.

As I am making my temporary exit from this discussion, I imagine it is only in order to wait for the prolonged effects of the experimental feminist texts: the texts which believe in the reparative ethics of prolongation, of how the current experience of queer living/reading can provide us with a feeling for ever bolder enactments of utopia in this social moment. Being myself, like Carole Maso, in love with revisions and amendments, and intrigued by Cixous’s vision of permanent existing at the beginning, I find myself located in the midst of an unknown passage, waiting for all sorts of perpetual beginnings for us, anticipated in the encounter with feminist experimental writing, the writing that has been happening…
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