

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Piano Plays: A Feminine (Re)vision

by

Michelle Newman

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

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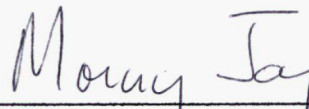
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Gavin Semple, Department of Drama



Dr. Morny Joy, Department of Religious Studies

May 25, 1994.
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Abstract

This thesis is based on my direction of Piano Plays, by Friederike Roth, during the 1993 - 1994 Mainstage Season at the University of Calgary. It represents an original attempt to articulate both the conceptual and practical implications of *l'écriture féminine*, a theory/practice/aesthetics of "writing the feminine" pioneered by contemporary French feminists, as it relates to the "writing" of a performance text. In the first paper, I examine the applicability of "writing [through] the body" to a feminine theory of acting and to the staging of sexual difference. The second paper, which is heavily informed by contemporary feminist film theory, deals with issues pertaining to the problem of arresting that form of visual pleasure upon which the perpetuation of woman as image is predicated. The third and final paper is a subjective account of the difficulties that I have encountered in aspiring to write/direct/speak (as) woman.

*Among those to whom I am indebted
for giving me the space to (w)rite
in/to my beyond*

are

*Dr. Robert B. Moore,
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*For Tanya and Monica,
my other-loves,
from whose white mouths
have come the only songs
I have heard in this place.*

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pre/dis/positions: by way of formulating an approach

I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text -- as into the world and into history -- by her own movement. (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 245)

Where is she?

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Logos/Pathos

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground -- where steps are taken, holding and dumping-ground.

Man

Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized Thought has always worked through opposition ... (Cixous, The Newly Born Woman 63)

A Woman's Coming to Writing:

Who

Invisible, foreign, secret, hidden, mysterious, black, forbidden

Am I...

Is this me, this no-body that is dressed up, wrapped in veils, carefully kept distant, pushed to the side of History and change, nullified, kept out of the way, on the edge of the stage, on the kitchen side, the bedside?

For you? (Cixous, The Newly Born Woman 69)

Cixous's text re-calls my own: I come to writing as I come to directing -- of necessity, woman, through transgression. Writing (as) woman, I already am where I was prohibited from being. I verge on the dis/con/juncture of knowing and being known, of seeing and being seen, of presence and absence, truth and fiction, plenitude and lack, and it is there -- in the gap between -- that I inscribe a space for my self to w(rite) beyond.

Woman (as) Other-in-my/self. Gaining momentum. The text is always on the threshold of becoming, other than.

I write to you, the reader, and not for you; this paradox is critical to an understanding of the [authorial] subjectivity envisaged by Hélène Cixous as well as other proponents of *l'écriture féminine*, a theory/practice/aesthetics of "writing the feminine" pioneered by contemporary French feminists. *L'écriture féminine* attempts to "stage" an in(ter)vention at the si(gh)te of meaning-for-the-Other, and, in so doing, it throws into question the very (im)possibility of locating woman/self as subject.

Where am I for you? I am not for you. Even if I were to write for you, I would simply be assuming yet another variation of "the pose" relative to language.

Julia Kristeva contends that "a woman cannot 'be' does not belong in the order of being. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it.' In 'woman,' I see something that cannot be represented" ("Woman can never be defined" 137). Although Kristeva's theoretical praxis differs in many respects from that of Cixous, I refer to it here because I mean to invoke the problematic upon which both projects touch: the relation of the feminine "subject-in-process" to phallogocentric discourse. Whether divining to "write the body," as Cixous insists, or occupying the marginal position advocated by Kristeva, the threat of woman's erasure from meaning -- *other than in opposition to* -- is en-coded by the very word(s) with which she seeks to trans/cribe her differential subjectivity. Hers is the ongoing dilemma of writing from the inside out and from the outside in -- "escaping the cave," says Luce Irigaray (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 353).

Each inscription of location describes in advance [of] a dislocation; every act of locution implies a [prior] interlocution. Word-play. The text is "shot through" with interlocutors.

The (w)hole of what I write-as-woman embodies reciprocity; remembering other texts, anticipating your texts, I read, am read through, and write, to them and you, simultaneously. I hope to bring you to writing as others have brought me. Such a process is [self-]confessedly idealistic, but it does at least begin to articulate a model of [inter]subjectivity based on connection and interaction rather than separation and exile (Waugh 72-73). Regarding Cixous's work with this alternative model, critic Sarah Cornell observes: "The poetic text is given to the writer, is received by the writer, as a stroke or blow (*un coup*). The author writes in a state of narcissitic porosity, in a state of selflessness (*démoïsation*) which leaves room for the other to enter" (33). The "other" of whom

Cornell makes mention is, of course, a multiple other, alluding at once to other writers, other texts, other aspects of self -- the collective and the individual [un]conscious -- and other readers. I wish to emphasize that there is no obligation to receptivity incurred at the locus of reading. I give you an open text, freely, and you bring to the reading what you bring; for me to presume otherwise would be to objectify you as women have traditionally been objectified.

Censor the body and I/you/we censor the voice. Which amounts to coercion. How difficult it is to write in white ink. Bare hands, sound-less voice.

By now, you will recognize the analogy I am drawing between writing the feminine and directing-as-female, thus rendering the task of writing about directing that much more subjective. Directing is, arguably, an intermediary form of writing, insofar as the director translates text into performance. Among the multiple others who enter in/to my directorial process are [the texts of] the French feminists (in particular, those of Cixous, Irigaray, and Duras), the actors, designer(s) and technicians I work with, the play I choose, as well as my own feminine coming-to-consciousness, which has been deeply intrigued of late with feminist film theory. The readers to whom I/we re-(w)rite the text, in advance of performance, are the spectators. It is approaching the vicinity of their [specular] entry into the performance text -- the entrance of "the gaze" -- that the relation of the feminine body-in-performance to representation becomes as potentially productive of contra/dictions as the relation of the feminine subject-in-process to discourse. Directing-as-female is necessarily a subversive gesture; while the authority conferred on me by my editorial function situates me as an "ideal" spectator, my feminist mandate is to disrupt both the narrative and the visual identification circuit through which the body feminine comes to be valued for her "to be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 62).

"... what is manifest in the coming to consciousness of each of us can only be a deformation of an ultimate figure, which will emerge after and through a difficult progression from work to body and from body to language" (Clément, "Enclave Esclave" 131).

My choice of Piano Plays, by German playwright Friederike Roth, for my Thesis Project, was (and continues to be) informed by my appreciation of the text as a venue uniquely suited to the practice I am outlining. In her introduction to the play, Sue-Ellen Case makes the following remarks:

The play is the interplay between genders. The piano signifies the bond and the bondage of their relationship. The piano belongs to Her, is played by Him, remains after He leaves, cannot

be played by Her; yet she is unable to let it go As a cultural apparatus, only He has access to the production of its music, and, as a sexual one, the piano assigns the role of her body

Beyond the image of the piano as cultural/social apparatus, the apparatus of the production of the play itself is laid out, so to speak, in its minimalism The elliptical, lyrical style is palpable in the severely contracted space of the language [which] begins to feel like a gag on the woman character's/author's mouth. ("Friederike Roth" 184 - 85)

While Case tends to write from a materialist feminist perspective, which differs somewhat from the French (dis)position, I quote her verbatim because she explains so succinctly the bearing/baring of culture on the female body. She also infers a crucial connection between language and culture; woman's deferential and/or marginal (non-)relation to language relegates her to a similarly disadvantaged "space-off" with regard to her access of culture (and representation).

Leaving aside a discussion of culture for the time being, it becomes important to note that Roth contextualizes her own work in terms of her ongoing fascination with and profound distrust in the ability of language to convey meaning. During study for and after obtaining her doctorate in linguistics and aesthetics (circa 1975), Roth wrote an abstract prose text and two volumes of poetry before writing her first play, Piano Plays in 1980. Of her earlier writings, Roth says; "It was [Ernst] Jandl who led me away from the dead end of Concrete Poetry. He too was once a 'concrete' poet in the strict sense. The same thing happened to him, he too wanted content" (Rennison 53). Roth's transition to the dramatic medium was facilitated by several attempts at writing radio plays, which caused her to realize that dialogue most closely approximated the workings of her inner voice. Since the controversial premiere of Piano Plays in the Malersaal of the Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, Roth has written four other plays: Ritt auf die Wartburg (The Journey up the Wartburg), 1981; Die einzige Geschichte (The Only Story), 1983; Krötenbrunnen (Toad Wells), 1984; and Das Ganze: ein Stück (The Whole: A Piece) in 1986, none of which are available in English translation. She has won seven literary awards, including the prestigious Gerhart-Hauptmann prize for The Journey up the Wartburg in 1983. Despite her apparent success in literary circles, Roth's work is frequently subjected to censure by theatre critics. Piano Plays is described as "illustrated poetry"; The Only Story is concerned with "lyrical themes"; and Toad Wells stands on "dramatically shaky legs"; while the body of her writing is dismissed as lacking in both "dramatic action" and the "visual element," dealing with "women's issues," and using "feminine" language (Rennison 52 - 54).

Many of the foregoing criticisms are not without validity; however, I consider them to be potential

strengths of Roth's writing rather than weaknesses per se. Her background in concrete poetry certainly manifests itself in Piano Plays, though not necessarily to the play's dramatic and/or visual detriment. The text is written as a series of very brief, even banal, encounters between She and the various characters who populate her inner/outer "landscape(s)." Interspersed among these encounters are passages of extreme poetic density, mainly intended as monologues which She addresses to the audience. These passages, rich as they undeniably are in recurring imagery, form the basis of a kind of image-text; the images not only provide a through-line in the [lack of so-called] "dramatic action," but they also suggest beautifully resonant opportunities for visual realization. Unfortunately, Roth's use of the banal and repetition to question the quality/reality of language and experience is often discounted as an "overuse of cliché" (Rennison 59, 61). Be that as it may, I concur with Lucinda Rennison, who, in her assessment of Roth's work, comments: "Words which have been repeatedly used to describe situations, emotions and visions have been 'used-up,' stripped of any actual meaning Since our consciousness is largely dependent on language, this inability to articulate the original is tantamount to a lack of original experience" (59 - 60). Yet again, I arrive [back] at the problematic underlying discourse, except that it is now linked to the (im)possibility of original experience, and thus, even more immediately, to the body feminine.

You will notice that I continue to make rather oblique references to "writing the body" and "the body feminine." This deferral is deliberate on my part; the applicability of "w(rit)ing [through] the body feminine" in/to the theatre is at the very core of my thesis. At present, it suffices to say that French theories of the feminine (most notably, those of Cixous and Irigaray) share a common concern with the way(s) in which women experience sexual pleasure differently, and so, come to language differently. One of the ways in which this difference may re/veal itself is in their evocation of in/complete, frag/mented and/or para/digmatic forms. Roth's fragmentation of the *mise-en-scène* in Piano Plays demonstrates precisely such a differential relation to structure. In her stage directions, Roth specifies that all three locales -- She's apartment, the bar, and the grain field -- are [to be] represented onstage simultaneously (187). In fact, there is virtually no other way to stage the play, which is further/more (de-)composed as a sequence of narrative "takes" that move sharply between these locales and, in retrospect, give the impression of leaving off/from where they began. Insofar as Roth's writing practice tends to be more cinematic than theatrical, more cyclical than linear, more subjective than objective, more associative than denotative -- in other words, more kNOwing than known -- Piano Plays de/re/contextualizes itself at the very si(gh)tes of meaning/appearing-for-the-Other/spectator.

Postscript. I write this introduction by way of form/ulating a preliminary in(ter)vention; mine is an

endeavor to "preserve the strangeness" of encounters with other texts, including your encounter with my text(s), and my encounter with meaning(s) (Cixous, "Conversations" 146). As Jennifer Birkett writes of Cixous's teaching strategies, "psychoanalysis and philosophy cannot deal with the 'poetically beyond' qualities of the text meeting the text on its own ground, rather than wrapping it up in another, alien discourse is what matters" (207).

CHAPTER 1

*"The dark continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. --
It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe
that it was too dark to be explorable.
And because they want to make us believe that what interests us
is the white continent,
with its monuments to Lack.
They riveted us between two horrifying myths:
the Medusa and the abyss.
That would be enough to set half the world laughing,
except that it's still going on."
(Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 255)*

Staging Sexual Difference: The (corpo)Real

Among the various mediums through which to transcribe sexual difference -- theatrical, novelistic, and/or filmic -- the theatrical medium distinguishes itself at the locus of corporeal immediacy. The body is always present, spatially, temporally and phenomenologically. In this respect, the theatre invites an exploration of the "bodily roots of meaning," as Cixous notes (Shiach 106). But what is the apprehension/perception of the female body, if not what Irigaray and Cixous demonstrate to be a si(gh)te "for the inscription of social significances?" (Wright 39). How does "she" come to mean, when "she" is at once a biological sex determined by lack, a linguistic designation encoding negativity and inferiority, a social class relegated to marginality, and thus a sexual (non-)being to be penetrated, objectified, and oppressed? He acts; "she" exists to be acted upon. How can "she" then aspire to representation -- to "acting," in both senses of the word -- particularly for the theatre, where "the stereotype is in danger of being naturalized by a flesh and blood woman?" (Austin 80). Is it by virtue of theatre's [lack of] proximity to the real? Just as "representation presupposes the absence of the represented," does not staging "she" presuppose the absence of the absent, thereby dis/closing her presence? (Wright 377). These are some of the questions which I attempted to address during my direction of Piano Plays, and it is to these questions that I return now.

the imaginary (in) exile

In order to understand the relation of the female body to representation, it is imperative to examine the co-relation of the feminine imaginary to language. The work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan is seminal to this endeavor, although he cannot be credited with the subsequent feminine/feminist dis/assemblage of his ideology. Whereas Freudian theory claims that biology is destiny, a Lacanian approach asserts that language is destiny (Flax 115). According to Lacan, the Symbolic Order -- the realm of language -- structures and represents the contents of two subsidiary Orders, the Imaginary and the Real, and is held in an hierarchical relationship of privilege over them. In fact, neither the Imaginary nor the Real can even be accessed except through the mediation of the Symbolic (Gilbert 164). Entrance into the Symbolic, which is in turn governed by the "phallus" as a "universal signifier," is synonymous with entrance into language. Psychoanalytic critic Jane Flax explains how the child becomes a speaking subject, incorporating direct quotes and terminology from Lacan:

The phallus signifies the "Name-of-the-Father" which puts its mark on the child/subject. One's place in the world, sexuality, and gender are determined in being marked by and having or

not having access to the phallus. The Name/Law of the Father is equivalent to culture (including language) itself....

All speaking beings "inscribe themselves" on the masculine side, no matter what their physical attributes might be. To speak one must enter into and become constituted by the realm of the Symbolic those who lack access to the phallus and hence to the world of culture and language are called "woman"

"Woman" is "not all;" she is the "empty set." Woman herself "does not exist and ... signifies nothing." The child's discovery of the mother's lack forces it to recognize the "gaps" which invariably exist between persons. Speaking both bridges and signifies this "gap." (111)

Ironically enough, Lacan's theory serves to accentuate the extreme difficulty of extricating the body from discourse and discourse from the body. Following from his schematic, woman can enter into the Symbolic "only to the extent that she internalizes male desire -- that is, to the extent that she imagines herself as men imagine her" (Jones 83). However, if the phallus exists as a signifier in the Symbolic Order -- projection of an arbitrary relation between signifier and signified into an abstract realm -- how does it alone signify entrance into language? How is it endowed with universality? Why is woman prohibited from accessing this "linguistic artifact" -- the phallus? (Flax 110). Why does woman desire it in the first place? What content are he and his Symbolic concealing, if not a libidinal one?

Deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, whose work I refer to here in much abbreviated form, criticizes at least three aspects of Lacan's Symbolic Order:

- (1) logocentrism, the primacy of the spoken word
 - (2) phallogocentrism, the primacy of the phallus, which connotes a unitary drive toward a single, ostensibly reachable goal; and
 - (3) dualism, the manner in which everything is explained in terms of binary opposition language creates meaning
- Because there is not being (presence) to be grasped, there is no nothingness (absence) with which to contrast it. (Tong 222)

Fundamental to Derrida's critique is his observation that language not only structures and represents content, but it also creates meaning, and thereby seeks to constitute content/presence in and of itself, albeit at the level of "not being." (Lacan admits as much when he describes the speaking subject as being constituted by the Symbolic.) It is partly due to this grandiose abstraction that the libidinal agenda inherent in phallogocentric discourse and all its accompanying social incarnations is frequently obscured; the masculine is maintained as presence by constructing the feminine as its artificial contrast, absence. The Symbolic is not

some pre-ordained Order, but rather a finely crafted and well fortified signifying system, which, "despite its overwhelming patriarchal content is necessarily arbitrary, abstract, and fictional" (Gilbert 168).

Recalling Lacan's Imaginary and Real Order(s) -- the Imaginary consisting of "content" which is "perceptual, pre-verbal and pre-Oedipal," and the Real comprising "the absolutely unrepresentable" -- a deconstructive method makes it possible to conceive of exchanges among these realms (and the so-called Symbolic) that would be mutually differential rather than subsuming of all difference (Gilbert 164). The presumption underlying the Law of the Father is that woman introduces difference into the system, a difference which, paradoxically, enables the system to operate, but which, conveniently, justifies her exclusion from meaning in that system. Nevertheless, this same Law fails to take into account what Derrida calls "*différance*," translated as both "difference" and "deferral" (Moi 106). Given the complexity of this concept, theoretician Rosemarie Tong provides a very lucid, if somewhat simplified, explanation of *différance* as "the inevitable, meaning-creative gap between perception and the object of perception" (223). French feminism is heavily informed by the notion of *différance*, although it almost always appears in translation as "difference." In an effort to contextualize the feminist interpretation, I draw your attention to two features of the foregoing definition: (1) the gap inferred is "meaning-creative," instead of meaning-prescriptive, which has profound implications for subjectivity; and (2) perception and the object of perception are interchangeable, depending on your perspective. While dominant discourse may perceive the woman as the object in a masculine libidinal exchange, it does not follow that the woman must perceive herself, the other woman, and/or the male as the object in a similar exchange.

Woman's differential relation to language makes room for a variety of practices on the part of individual French writers (and their respective practices in turn make room for further differentiation). Kristeva, for instance, adopts a fairly conservative stance both with regard to woman's positionality and with regard to her ability to access language. Displacing Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic Orders with what she describes as a distinction between the Semiotic and the Symbolic terms, Kristeva argues for a signifying process based on the continual interaction among these two terms (Moi 161). In her words, "if women have a role to play in this on-going process, it is only in assuming a negative function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude places women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary movements" ("Oscillation between power and denial" 166). Other writers, such as Marguerite Duras, rarely engage in theoretical debate, and yet her work in particular betrays an immense

sensitivity to the (in-)operative role of the feminine in language. On the topic of writing the feminine, she simply says: "I know that when I write there is something inside me that becomes silent something that flows from femininity.... The silence in women is such that anything that falls into it has an enormous reverberation. Whereas in men, this silence no longer exists" ("Interview" 175). The juxtaposition of Duras's "poetry" and Kristeva's "theory" may, at first glance, seem decidedly unlikely. By evoking this comparison, I hope to illustrate the range of work currently being done in France -- a range which is always in the process of be/coming full circle. Although Kristeva is deeply suspicious of even the word "feminine" and uses it only as a dis/organizing principle, her position from the margin writing in is at once somewhat different from and not that different from Duras's orientation from the inside writing out. Duras too assumes a "negative function"; she writes from that other place that has traditionally been associated with femininity -- absence, lack, darkness, death, silence, mysticism, passivity -- and, through-the-writing-in/of/to-it, transforms the masculine feminine into what Kristeva herself calls "a white rhetoric of the Apocalypse" ("The Pain of Sorrow in the Modern World" 138).

It is the possibility of writing that other place with/in a white rhetoric that interests me [from] here. "Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes and it is that zone that we must try to remember today," as Catherine Clément puts it (The Newly Born Woman ix). That other place, that zone, is the feminine imaginary in exile; a white rhetoric is the art/form of re-remembering the imaginary, and simultaneously, forgetting it, for it is, after all, imaginary. Notice how the meaning of the word "imaginary" fairly resonates with contra/diction(s), depending on its usage as a noun or an adjective and its transcription with an upper case "I" or a lower case "i." When used as a noun and transcribed with a lower case "i," it is meant as a feminine dis/re/(con)figuration of Lacan's "Imaginary Order" -- in other words, as both an assertion of the reality of the feminine imaginary and a calling into question of that reality's imaginary exile. Elsewhere in her writings, Clément clarifies the relation of the imaginary to the real (and not to the absolute "Real" constructed by Lacan):

Assuming the real subjective position that corresponds to [this] discourse is another matter. One would have to cut through all the heavy layers of ideology that have been borne down since the beginnings of the family and private property: that can be done only in the imagination. And that is precisely what feminist action is all about: to change the imaginary in order then to be able to act on the real, to change the very forms of language which by its structure and history has been subject to a law that is patrilinear, therefore masculine. ("Enclave Esclave" 130 - 131)

Incidentally, Clément's writing bridges the gap, so to speak, between French feminism (otherwise

known as postmodern feminism) and materialist feminism (sometimes called "Marxist" and/or "socialist feminism"). Materialist feminism "underscores the role of class and history in creating the oppression of women," though not necessarily to the exclusion of psycho-linguistic considerations (Case, "Materialist Feminism and Theatre" 82). French feminism shares a similar concern with class and history -- the material/"real" evidence of the bodily constraints imposed by patriarchy -- but, as Clément points out, there is still vital work to be done through the exertion of the feminine imaginary.

Irigaray's work on the imaginary bears a strong resemblance to Clément's, except that hers is a more deliberately play-full approach. She re-contextualizes the feminine imaginary as the "feminine unconscious," which is that "latency" or "excess" reaching beyond the limits of "the cultural imaginary" (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 163). In addition to this shift in terminology, Irigaray executes a subtle shift in perspective; now, it is the cultural imaginary that is being called into question, while the feminine unconscious is full of latency and excess, and therefore lacks nothing. Irigaray's repudiation of the feminine as absence/lack is not a mere reversal of Lacan's theory, nor is it an exhortation to essentialism, but rather an exceedingly sophisticated deconstruction of both. By revaluing the feminine unconscious and the female body as sites of sexual difference, she renders them productive of meaning in relation to the "feminine feminine" instead of the masculine feminine:

But woman has sex organs just about everywhere.... the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined -- in an imaginary centered a bit too much on one and the same

"She" is indefinitely other in herself.... One must listen to her differently in order to hear an "other meaning" which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilized. For when "she" says something, it is already no longer identical to what she means. Moreover, her statements are never identical to anything. Their distinguishing feature is one of contiguity. They touch (upon). And when they wander too far from this nearness, she stops and begins again from "zero": her body-sex organ. ("This sex which is not one" 103)

Although Irigaray's references to the female's sexual morphology are quite controversial, her mimicry of Lacan -- "the lips touching upon" in comparison to the phallus's violation of -- is intended, at least to some extent, to mirror the mimicry imposed on all women by phallogocentric

discourse (Moi 140). (I shall have much more to say on the subject of mimicry later on.) At the same time, Irigaray seeks to introduce differences (plural) into the system by way of "contiguity" and deferral. In this respect, her project has less to do with the structure of sexually specific morphology than it has to do with the (re-)imagination of how the female experiences sexual pleasure differently, and thus, how the feminine comes to mean in relation to the feminine.

Like Irigaray, Cixous envisions the female body as a potential source of plenitude; she advocates an "erotics of writing," coming from "a feminine unconscious and shaped by female bodily drives" (Jones 88). This writing occurs only in the feminine imaginary, which Cixous privileges outright over Lacan's Symbolic. However, the male sex is in no way precluded from entering the imaginary (as the female is prohibited from entering the Symbolic). As far as Cixous and Irigaray are concerned, the attributes "masculine" and "feminine" are purely artificial constructs and can pertain to either biological sex, except that, as Cixous allows, "I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man it's up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 247). Cixous holds that sexual differentiation takes place primarily at the level of *jouissance*, rather than at the level of the specular (ie. his possession of a visible sex organ). She explains:

... *sexual difference* is not determined merely by the fantasized relationship to anatomy, which is based, to a great extent, upon the point of view, therefore upon a strange importance accorded [by Freud and Lacan] to exteriority and to the specular in the elaboration of sexuality. A voyeur's theory, of course.

No, it is at the level of sexual pleasure [*jouissance*] in my opinion that the difference makes itself most clearly apparent....

For me, the question "What does she want?" that they ask of women conceals the most urgent question: "How do I experience sexual pleasure?" What is feminine *sexual pleasure*, where does it take place, how is it inscribed in at the level of her body, of her unconscious? And then how is it put into writing? (The Newly Born Woman 95)

In a sense, Cixous's writing anticipates Irigaray's and vice-versa. In fact, all of the female writers that I refer to share in common an interest in differentiation and *jouissance*. Even Kristeva's conceptualization of the Semiotic as "pre-linguistic erotic energy" tends to support this observation (Jones 86).

Jouissance is a word that is not easily translatable into English. At a literal level, it means "pleasure" or "enjoyment" and is usually associated with "sexual ecstasy." Its usage has been

expanded to encompass a variety of philosophical, political, and economic connotations because it also implies a "sense of access and participation in connection with rights and property" (Gilbert 165). Marks and de Courtivron, editors of New French Feminisms, comment on the connection between *jouissance* and the body politic(s) as follows:

This pleasure, when attributed to a woman, is considered to be of a different order from the pleasure that is represented within the male libidinal economy often described in terms of the capitalist gain and profit motive. Women's *jouissance* carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration. It is a kind of potlatch in the world of orgasms, a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure. One can easily see how the same imagery could be used to describe women's writing. (36 - 37)

On a metaphorical level, Sandra Gilbert adds that "woman's capacity for multiple orgasm indicates that she has the potential to attain something more than Total, something extra -- abundance and waste (a cultural throwaway), Real and unrepresentable" (165). Gilbert goes on to point out the phonic association evoked by *jouissance* to the French-speaking ear: "*jouissance* : *j'ouïs sens* : I hear meaning" (165). Hearing the "other meaning," as Irigaray calls it -- the meanings which cannot be exteriorized and/or put into words and are therefore "Real and unrepresentable" -- is of fundamental importance to any practice/aesthetics of writing, including directing, that aspires to be feminine/feminist. These other meanings are abundantly manifest in the writing of Piano Plays, and so it is to a consideration of theatrical desymbolization that I now turn.

"Extracting the (corpo)Real from the Symbolic"

There are an almost infinite array of variables involved in theatrical desymbolization, limited only, in theory, by the number of spectators who attend a given performance. Among those variables through which the playwright and the director assert their imaginaries, the writing of the "narrative" and the (re-)writing of the "body" are the most immediate sites of respective dis/closure. That the playwright Friederike Roth writes through her own body feminine is evidenced in both the form and the "content" of Piano Plays; insofar as form mediates "content" and "content" mediates form, a feminine syntax derives from the differential interaction between form and "content." I choose to problematize "content" by setting it apart in quotation marks because I am no longer sure that pure "content" exists. It is, after all, on the basis of woman's perceived lack of visible "content" that she continues to be alienated from her self and from her body, which in turn permits patriarchy to subscribe to a "sexually indifferent Symbolic Order" (Wright 181). Therefore, the question "How does this play mean?" is allowed as more critical than "What does this play mean?," since an understanding of feminine "content" (and its consequent impact on "narrative") must

necessarily be relational and not reductive.

In his work on Cixous's "phenomenology of theatre," Mark Silverstein describes her project as being one of "restoring the 'wholeness' of the female body through the theatrical desymbolization of that body -- extracting the (corpo)Real from the snares of the Symbolic" (508 - 509). I like this turn of phrase -- "extracting the (corpo)Real from the Symbolic" -- because I think it encapsulates the stakes inherent in representation, which are, for the feminine, bodily and Real. In Cixous's words:

If the stage is woman, it will mean ridding this space of theatricality. She will want to be a body-presence; it will therefore be necessary to work at exploding everything that makes for "staginess," going beyond the confines of the stage, lessening our dependency on the visual and stressing the auditory, learning to attune all our ears, especially those that are sensitive to the pulse of the unconscious, to hear the silences and what lies beyond them. "Distantiation" will not exist; on the contrary, this stage-body will not hesitate to come up close, close enough to be in danger -- of life. A body in labour.

The scene takes place where a woman's life takes place, where her life story is decided: inside her body, beginning with her blood. This will be a stage/scene without event. No need for plot or action; a single gesture is enough, but one that can transform the world.... ("Aller à la mer" 547)

Cixous's emphasis on the auditory as distinguished from the visual is wholly consistent with the French feminist critique of Freud and Lacan. It is also consistent with Roth's writing aesthetic. When told that her plays lack the visual element, Roth replies: "But the audience -- to help their concentration -- can shut their eyes. They will miss nothing of the action on stage" (Rennison 54). As a director, I would hesitate to effect a literal interpretation of Roth's commentary, since the theatre is, by its very nature, a visual medium as well as an oral/auditory intermediary. Cixous says as much when she writes of "lessening our dependency on the visual," which, I assume, is what Roth means to say; if not, she might have been content writing radio plays. At any rate, Cixous and Roth's "use of sound to problematize sight suggests that 'truth' is precisely that which remains unavailable for specular capture" (Silverstein 511).

One of the primary ways in which Roth problematizes sight and arrests narrative pleasure -- for neither project exists independently of the other -- is through her writing of the poetic passages spoken by She, the central character in Piano Plays. She is a woman whose role in "life," as with/in the "fiction" of the play, seems predetermined to an un/natural extent by the-look-of-the-Male/Other; hence, Roth names her after the gender specific pronoun "She." The play has

almost "no need for plot or action" in terms of the linear narrative elements of rising action leading to a climax, and followed by denouement (which may constitute further proof of Roth's assertion that the audience would "miss nothing of the action" if they were to shut their eyes). In fact, the so called "action" is played out in its entirety as a kind of cyclical "denouement," occurring at the end of an intense and brutal love affair -- that of She, a singer, and He, a pianist -- and ending with the possible resumption of their affair. Thus, among the "truths" that "remain unavailable for specular capture" is the narrative explication/visual re-enactment of the affair itself.

After breaking up with He, She engages in a series of promiscuous transactions with at least two other men, called Buyers, and an Insurance Agent, all of which She "performs" under the pretense of selling her "piano." She goes to bed with the First Buyer. The Second Buyer tries to strangle her when she decides not to sleep with him. The Insurance Agent rejects her advances, while attempting to play on her fear of losing her voice. Despite the admonitions of a female Friend, She sinks further into an underworld of substance abuse, violence, and depravity. She goes to a pickup bar, where She is robbed of the money She has earned singing, although it is returned to her, bloodied, from the mouth of Erwin, an old man. He reappears. The outcome of their reunion remains open to debate, but even if She chooses to resume her affair with He, I maintain that She has achieved a newfound level of self-awareness through her invocation of the lyric/poetic as alluding/deferring to "a possible alternative space" (Case, "Introduction" 21). This alternative space is her feminine imaginary; its meaning-creative activity refuses to resemble the role imag(in)ed for her by the Symbolic, a role which her actions, if taken at "face value," might otherwise appear to collude with in their [self-perpetuating] oppression of her.

Consider, for example, an excerpt from She's monologue prior to her first "sale:"

Like a ruffled bird, beating its wings, I have tumbled through the
nights where time goes by unmeasured. You know the glaring
nightglow of the colors; it lets the stars come sliding down.
Someone comes, steps in; then another comes and steps in too.
I think I'll never be able to sleep again; not tonight and not
tomorrow night and never any other. -- Someone sits down with
him, all tender and soft, a little feather. Her eyes are so bright,
moths must gather on her. I see him kissing her, and how he runs
his hand through her hair that makes a sound if you even look at it.
-- Of course, that was his wife.
I've climbed into the mouth of autumn, it seems. (194)

Far from being a "flight" of fancy, and/or fulfilling an illustrative function, her poetry betrays how She has been conditioned to imag(in)e herself -- as an object of exchange in the masculine libidinal economy. Woman is valued for her object-ness (i.e. her to-be-looked-at-ness) in this

economy, so that one woman can easily be substituted for another. It is the sexual substitutability of He's wife for She that motivates She's self-destructive behaviour; by implicitly agreeing to imag(in)e herself as She appears for He, She is driven to test the boundaries of her role as a sex object. At the same time, her feminine imaginary is desperately trying to assert itself -- "like a ruffled bird, beating its wings," then "tumbling," spiralling downward "into the mouth of autumn." The association of woman with images of flight is of special import in French feminist mythology, since the verb "*voler*," meaning "to fly," also means "to steal." As Cixous asks, "What woman hasn't flown/stolen?... Flying is woman's gesture -- flying in language and making it fly for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 258). The compulsion to fly becomes more than a subversive "gesture" at the moment it steals/re-imag(in)es woman back from certain death in the guise of the masculine libidinal economy, and, in so doing, aspires to re-create a subject-on-the-move, in-the-process, of-becoming-a/new.

She's aspirations to subjectivity (and not to closure) are Real-ized in imaginary increments throughout the course of the play. It is worthwhile noting that one of the reasons She gives for breaking up with He in the first place is his inability to imag(in)e his role for her as She is required to play her role for him:

SHE: Just once, a single beautiful lie from you.
I would have fluttered and rolled in the grass.
HE: Why lie? We're grownups.
SHE: At least that would have been a suitably sad illusion
Lies are so much fun. They make people happy. The
effort you would have had to make. To fantasize on my
account. (190)

The foregoing interchange suggests that She is conscious of living a lie, and yet, even after He is gone, She persists in the elaboration of that lie by replacing He with another man, then another, and another -- in short, She imitates/mimics He. Such are the games that the Symbolic forces woman and man to play with each other in its relentless pursuit of conformity to the phallic ideal: same-ness/indifference. When eventually stripped of all illusions about herself and "the stories where everything fits together neatly," She is left to remark, "it all leads who knows where and that's where I want to go. Once I'm there, I will know that my dreams didn't take me far enough" (205). He comes back, bearing a "single beautiful lie" in the form of a poppy, but now he only succeeds in reminding her of "medieval paintings [where], at least, hearts are torn out and heads are struck off. The women's breasts are torn off with pincers" (206). Lies are no longer enough. Her desire to be desired/possessed by him is no longer enough. Her desire for original

desire -- the feminine imaginary -- has surpassed the lie and recognized it for the empty "dream" it is. Enraged, She taunts him with images of "the death masks of dear little curly heads in stone," as if tempting him to kill her (206). At last, She acknowledges the pain evoked by their irrevocable separation: "I want most of all to run as far as I can see I've had enough of that. Too much" (209).

The "truth" of her predicament is that She can/not hide from the si(gh)te of who He imag(in)es her to be (or run/fly from it, except in her imaginary). Instead, She says:

I lie there with my eyes wide open I stay silent and I can't
scream, and I see an open coffin with a child's corpse in it which
has blond curls and looks innocent and is holding out flowers to
heaven. I want to scream, heaven is lovely enough without your
flowers. It has the whole field already. You just can't hear it rustle.
(209)

At this juncture, I am reminded of Duras's words in The Malady of Death, when she supposes to speak-as-Male/Other to men and wo/men (the masculine feminine): "You think you weep because you can't love. You weep because you can't impose death" (46). And, "When you wept it was just over yourself and not because of the marvelous impossibility of reaching her through the difference that separates you" (54). The connection between feminine sexuality and images of silence and death is deeply embedded in the cultural unconscious, as Duras, Roth, and Cixous demonstrate. Insofar as the female subject is "both a cultural and an unconscious construction," She's fate would be a fate akin to death if her only function as a sex object were to mouth the meaning-prescriptive usage of the words imposed by phallogocentric discourse, and thereby hold the proverbial mirror up to "nature" (Austin 76). It is hardly surprising that She fantasizes about herself and/or his "child" dying; She weeps because, on the one hand, She can/not die, and, on the other, She can/not speak-as-Woman -- this is the [non-speaking] role imag(in)ed for women (as castrated children) by culture. The sense that She has begun to question/circumvent the fiction of that role through the speaking in/of/to her feminine imaginary -- the poetic and/or the feminine perception of a contiguous Real -- is evidence in itself of "psychosomatic jouissance," which is also channelled from the unconscious (Jones 86). "Her [woman's] shameful sickness is that she resists death," claims Cixous, from the beginning ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 246).

She's final monologue serves as something of a testament to the imaginative resilience of woman:

Heaven would have had to turn itself around and orbit Earth.
But heaven's fire was dying away, and, at last, a white sun rose.
White suns bring nothing, nothing but rain. I want nothing more

up there now.... There are such lovely places in the abyss.
 Who wants to know whom the birds kiss.
 They fly light and easy, without mercy, far above. (210)

The beauty of this passage -- indeed, the beauty latent in all the passages I quote, among others -- lies in the other meanings that escape the words and transcend the body, even at an oral/aural level, let alone at a specular level. Hearing the words, perhaps reading them, or seeing them originate from She, they have a sensual interest all their own and yet their sense never quite coalesces into a single [bodily] meaning. As Rosette Lamont says of Duras's work, "words whirl around this hole which is a whole: they fail to fill it" (143). Roth's poetry is in excess of the [lack of] "dramatic" action. It opens the text on/to an (in)di/visible space. I could, of course, point to She's lack of "constructive" action within the "fiction" of the play as indicative of a failure on Roth's part to provide a positive role model for women, but such a judgement would hardly enable the recognition of woman as role/image that Roth and I are trying to facilitate. The character "She" is on the verge of consciousness, just hovering with/in "the abyss," where She can now differentiate herself from the birds that fly above and the demons that linger below. I imag(in)e her change in [planar] orientation as potentially conducive to a change in behaviour; the feminine imaginary has been internalized, so-to-speak, and when it flies/steals again, She will fly/steal with it.

You will notice how formerly held distinctions between form and content, oral and auditory, action and imitation, truth and fiction, nature and culture, the role and the image, the Real and the imaginary, flying and stealing, the poetic and the theoretical, the dream and death, the psychosomatic and the psychological, the body and the text, sensual and sense, speaking and writing, performance and economy, tend to break down when re-imag(in)ed interdependently and/or differentially with/in the feminine feminine. Like the traditional notion of "character" used to designate a unified subject, these distinctions once fell into "the category of the *déjà là* (the given)," but now consist in "projecting" themselves "into the *non encore là* (the not yet there)" (Conley 24). Similarly, She projects herself into "the not yet there" -- at first, before being conscious of it, and then, moving towards an awareness of self that is not defined in opposition to and/or in collusion with the Male-as-Other. "For it is true that woman is lost," to quote Josette Féral paraphrasing Kristeva, "on the narrow fringe that separates the *pas encore* (not yet) from the *pas cela* (not that)" ("The Powers of Difference" 93). Whether conceived of in terms of "the not yet there," and/or the "not that," the Real-ity of the feminine condition is that though She may be represented only through her very un-representability, the feminine feminine is a libidinal economy which can bear/bare sexual difference and separation.

Of the different value system implied by said "feminine feminine," Irigaray writes:

Property and propriety are undoubtedly rather foreign to all that is female. At least sexually. *Nearness*, however, is not foreign to woman, a nearness so close that any identification of one or the other, and therefore any form of property, is impossible. Woman enjoys a closeness with the other that is *so near she cannot possess it, any more than she can possess herself*. ("This sex which is not one" 104 - 105)

It is the concept of nearness and/or proximity to -- with/out explicit possession of -- others and other meanings that most closely approximates what Irigaray and Cixous call a "feminine syntax" (Roof 325). That this feminine syntax is operative in mediating the libidinal/Real "content" of Piano Plays has already been shown. But what about form, the meta-(con)text? Why does Roth choose to fragment the narrative? Why does she utilize a cinematic writing aesthetic for a theatrical medium? Why are She's monologues addressed directly to the audience? Are these techniques intended as what Duras might term "absenting effects?" (Willis 113). Or are they what Case describes as "proximity devices?" ("Introduction" 6). Could they simultaneously function as both absenting effects and proximity devices? These questions refer [back] to the problem of arresting narrative and visual pleasure, without sacrificing the nearness to the other/spectator that is so essential to the re-(e)valuation of the feminine erotic. Remember Cixous's admonition: "if the stage is woman 'distantiation' will not exist this stage-body will not hesitate to come up close, close enough to be in danger -- of life" ("Aller à la mer" 547).

Roth's fragmentation of the narrative, I argue, functions primarily as a series of absenting effects designed to arrest narrative pleasure. The promotion of narrative pleasure in the theatre, as in film, is predicated upon the establishment of an "identification circuit" with the spectators, whereby the female protagonist assumes "marketable value" by virtue of her resemblance to the "feminine" image dictated by the Symbolic (Conley 25). The spectators come to identify with the desire of that image to the extent that it resembles/reflects their own desire -- that is, to the extent that it fulfills the oedipal contract of resulting in narrative "restitution" and visual display. Of course, there can be no narrative restitution without the adherent commodification of the female body, which is why Roth renders "the signs of the female's elision from the text" readable by the presence of narrative gaps (de Lauretis, "Imaging" 57). Again, I draw your attention to a form of absence dis/closing presence, for inasmuch as She's Real desire is a desire-to-[originate]-desire -- to discard the untenable image and foreground an alternative space -- the narrative quest is shown to be "hollow, a quest for the sake of desiring her, exchanging her, controlling her" (Roof 330). Incidentally, this narrative quest is "complicated" from about a third of the way into the play

by the progressive impropriety of She's actions, making her a character with whom it is not always easy to identify, unless the spectator is sensitized to "the pulse of the unconscious." The uneasiness She provokes is nonetheless a crucial part of the process through which She and the play come to mean.

Like Roth's She, Duras's female characters are frequently afflicted with the malaise of addiction to self-destructive behaviours, a dis-ease which the narrative can never fully retrieve, em/body or cure. In the context of commenting on her writing for the theatre, Duras observes:

In normal theatre procedure -- let's take the theatre as the rule -- you've got the auditorium and you've got the stage, where things happen. Between the auditorium and the stage there's constant, direct communication.

Here you have the auditorium, you have the stage, and you have another space. It's in this other space that things are lived, and the stage is only an echo chamber

But which is the darkroom for them? Is it the stage, where nothing happens, or that other space where everything happens? The darkroom is what I call the reading room. (*Woman to Woman* 140)

Not only is Duras's reference to "that other space where everything happens" reminiscent of Roth's transcription of the feminine imaginary, her description of the stage as an "echo chamber" and/or a space "where nothing happens" invites a comparison to Roth's writing aesthetic as well. Part of the challenge involved in staging *Piano Plays* derives from the fact that almost nothing of apparent significance -- apart from the everyday occurrence of a few random acts of gratuitous sex and violence -- happens on/stage to further the dramatic action. I say this somewhat ironically; with the notable exception of the Second Buyer's attempted strangulation of She and the harassment She endures in the pick-up bar, culminating in the beating of Erwin, Roth does not portray the consummation of the sexual act and/or the perpetration of violence. However, her structural articulation of narrative gaps cannot fail to "elicit a reading of the story between the texts," and so, interrogate the stakes inherent in the spectator's desire for the depiction of sexual subjugation (Willis 109). Does She get what She deserves? Has She got it coming to her, so to speak, whatever horrific, unspeakable act "it" entails? Does She need to be "tamed," "brought to reason," "taught a lesson?" It is, undeniably, the prospect of witnessing her subjugation that would create suspense and facilitate the restoration of narrative and Symbolic "order" -- except that Roth never quite allows that to happen.

In working with *Piano Plays*, I was often intrigued by the riveting, verging on violent precision with

which Roth makes the "cuts" between scenes. Just at the moment it seems that She may take decisive action, such as immediately after the Second Buyer tries to kill her, the gap intervenes, and in the next scene, She dismisses the incident. Roth gives the unmistakable impression that there is much more to her/story than meets the eye; this impression might in itself have built suspense among the spectators, were it not for the fact that by this point in time they are well acquainted with her cyclical pattern of masochistic behaviour and have begun to expect it of her. I daresay they are disappointed when, during the latter third of the play, She shows signs of aspiring to break the cycle. In any event [or lack thereof], She's repetitive pattern of behaviour at once echoes and offsets an equally repetitive cycle of verbally articulated images, many of which are similarly associated with self/Symbolic/Other-imposed death as the inevitable consequence of her attempted separation from the Male/Other. Roth's refusal to make narrative reparations for this separation in the form of explanatory/illustrative bridges between scenes simulates [formatively] the ultimate resistance of She's imaginary to dying. Death is not the inevitable and violent consequence of separation, but rather differentiation and nearness are the meta-theatrical/Real possibilities touching upon the metaphor of death. Regarding these possibilities, Roth's feminine (de/re-)formation of theme and contiguous thematization of form constitute her performative exploration of sexual difference, thereby alluding to that other, manifestly absent "reading room" in which She's actions can be read "as both delirious repetitions [of dying] and obsessive efforts to differentiate" (Willis 110). Whether or not her efforts will continue to succeed in their deferral of "death" remains to be seen.

Roth's implementation of a cinematic writing aesthetic in a theatrical venue also reveals a vested interest in that other reading room where differentiation [dis/closing proximity] happens. Since there is virtually no other way to stage the play but to represent all three locales onstage simultaneously, the physical limitations of live theatre tend to problematize the relation of the narrative to spatial and temporal categories in much the same way that the performance of the female body problematizes the relation of sight to the imaginary and the Real. In other words, the supposition of the "real"/narrative distance traversed among locales and the "real"/narrative time elapsed between scenes requires a certain suspension of disbelief on the part of the spectators - or, conversely, the engagement of their imaginaries to fill in the spatial/temporal gaps left by these transitions. This convention is not unique to Piano Plays, although I think it would be fair to say that few plays specify a total of nineteen internal scene transitions between three locales over the course of a performance that lasts eighty minutes. Furthermore, scene transitions in the theatre usually occur between acts and/or at an appropriate break in the action. The most acceptable practice of facilitating scene transitions unobtrusively -- so as not to disrupt the audience's identification circuit -- is to go to a blackout, during which stagehands change the

scenery, reset the props, and the lights come up on actors already in place. Unless the scene transitions were to be of longer duration than the scenes themselves, such a practice would have proven "deadly" if applied to Piano Plays. My points are several: (1) that differentiation resulting in proximity compels a consideration of what Derrida calls "the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time;" (2) that Roth's spatial/temporal fragmentation of the narrative and the mise-en-scene calls precisely these imaginary categories into play; and (3) that, in so doing, Roth deprives the spectators of either narrative or visual continuity, thus heightening their reliance on the auditory and sensitizing them to the pulse of the unconscious ("Différance" 9). In short, Roth draws the spectators near to the feminine unconscious but not in/to the masculine libidinal identification circuit.

Without delving into the theoretical intricacies of the relations between time and space, I wish to emphasize that the theatre would seem to be very much confined by/to the bodily/present experience of "real" time. The ending of a performance cannot be "read" first, as with a novel, nor can a given performance be re-run, as can a film (Shiach 107). Likewise, the theatre would appear to be rooted in the here as well as the now; seeing is believing, as long as the spectators are prohibited from seeing what they are supposed to disbelieve. However, when they are permitted to see what they were supposed to disbelieve -- as is the case during the scene transitions in Piano Plays -- they are transported from the "(t)here then" ("reality") into "the not yet (t)here" (the imaginary). It is in this respect that Roth tries to project the spectators into the same position relative to narrative/visual "reality" as She is in relative to the role imag(in)ed for her (and all women) by the Symbolic. Both "reality" and her role are constructed re(tro)spectively as "real" categories, subject to the external exigencies of time and space, and yet, as such, they bear/bare little or no resemblance to the internal becoming time and space of the Real or the imaginary. In familiar terms, women have been conditioned to "imagine that there exists an exterior knowledge more essential to themselves than their own truth" (Boyman 183). Roth's fore/grounding of internal truth, which, for want of nearness to the experiential real, has taken refuge in the feminine imaginary, serves simultaneously as a succession of absenting effects and proximity devices - these in the form of spatial/temporal gaps and transitions.

On the fine point of the [lack of] distinctions among absenting effects and proximity devices, I should explain that neither ought to be confused with alienation and/or distantiation techniques. Alienation obligates an emotional detachment on the spectator's behalf, privileges the intellectual/political over the emotional/private, and writes the way the action is supposed to be read into the narrative itself. It is partially due to Roth's refusal to prescribe an intellectual/political reading room -- to instruct the spectators on how to read She's actions -- that she runs the risk of

their disapproval, anger, and dis/illusionment, but hopefully, not their detachment. Roth makes fiction/the imaginary the point of departure in distinguishing what may inversely be called truth/the Real, and while she induces the audience to follow suit, hers is never a coercive writing practice. Nowhere is Roth's resistance to effecting closure (and distantiation) more palpably insistent than in the poetic monologues that She addresses to the audience. These monologues do not provide objective commentary on the action, as if She were condescending to bestow some platitude upon the other/spectator; on the contrary, they be/speak She's very painful and lonely aspiration to subjectivity and ask only for an empathic understanding of her pain. For example, after the incident in the pick-up bar, She openly confesses her impropriety, but offers no single reading of it:

I want to tell you, I'm coming apart at the seams. Quite without meaning to, I have thought through the stories that weave in and out of one another without beginning or end Sitting there, making up stories where everything fits together neatly -- step by step, I have made solitude for myself, which you know as well. It's not the quiet calm we dream about in the high places that comes over us We stay down below, in dreams." (205)

On this note, I am left to reaffirm my earlier assertion that the re-(e)valuation of nearness to others and other meanings can/not be sacrificed for the sake of arresting narrative and visual pleasure (and/or vice-versa). Roth's evocation of a feminine syntax is symptomatic of this dilemma, as are the performative aspects of She's imaginary. It is keeping in mind the possibility of absence dis/closing symptomatic/phenomenological immediacy, and there/fore, presence, that I (re-)turn to a discussion of (re-)writing the body feminine (Silverstein 508).

W(rit)ing [through] the body

In another version of this paper, I could have begun by quoting Barthes: "Today, writing is not 'telling' but saying that one is telling which is why part of contemporary literature is no longer descriptive, but transitive" (114). If I had begun thus, I would have effectively told/described *what* I was saying, which is different from saying/inscribing *that* I am telling. Now, I (w)rite that [Roth (w)rites that] She says that She is telling -- with/out saying what She is telling. It is through the process of saying that She is telling that She (re-)writes her/self, continually deferring the "what"/"content"/meaning (singular) of which She speaks. There is a kind of separation, even an alienation, being transcribed here, but it does not consist in the separation of self from others and other meanings; rather, it is consistent with the separation/alienation of self from self. This separation traces back to the "mirror stage," which is that stage in the development of the male

and/or female child when s/he learns to differentiate self from Other(s). Because the female child lacks a penis, and so "lacks access to the world of culture and language," as Lacan puts it, the mirror stage is a particularly traumatic one for her. In addition to being confronted with her own absence from meaning owing to her lack, she must learn to suppress/deny the plenitude/truth of her bodily drives in order to speak and write. According to Irigaray's studies of the mirror stage, "it is in this margin [or gap] -- in the difference between the self prescribed by culture and the intuition of another self -- that the unconscious is created" (Berg 68). The "intuition of another self" survives in the female body at the level of the unconscious through her experience of *jouissance*; "writing [through] the body" simultaneously re-constitutes this gap to show it for the artificial construct it is, and [consciously] seeks to restore "the wholeness of the female body" and the feminine unconscious/imaginary "through the desymbolization of that body" (Silverstein 508 - 509).

Before examining the implications that said gap has on acting in the theatre, I wish to clarify its impact on the ability of the female to act in "real" life and/or with/in the "fiction" of a play (since both "real" life and "fiction" are presided over by the same Law-of-the-Father). The "self prescribed by culture" undergoes yet another separation subsequent to its strictly enforced exile from the body feminine. Performance theoretician Martha Roth calls this separation a split between the "observing self" and the "performing self," which she contextualizes as follows: "The female child's split allows her observing self to become skilled at vicarious experience, while her performing self keeps busy learning the limits of her role" ("Notes Toward a Feminist Performance Aesthetic" 11). The similarity of psychoanalytic terminology to the vocabulary used in performance theory is not coincidental; the idea that gender is a performance in life, like in art, has become so widely accepted in feminist circles as to be self-evident. Equally demonstrable is the applicability of Martha Roth's model to Piano Plays. She's performing self is the self that tries to fill the gap with the Male/Other by playing the role of the femme fatale. Meanwhile, her observing self -- recognizing (at first, unconsciously) that this role is a role -- comes to identify with "death" as the only way to get revenge on He, his wife, his child, the world, her inner child, and her performing self. She has learned to hate her/self and her body. Her self-hatred is a symptom of the wound inflicted by the Law-of-the-Father, a wound that is re-opened each and every time She attempts to speak, and thereby pays unwilling tribute to the duplicitous ingenuity of the Symbolic -- that it has displaced woman's hatred of the role she has been conditioned to play onto her own body and thus turned woman against her/self.

In an article entitled "Feminine writing and its theatrical 'other,'" Cynthia Running-Johnson explains how the theatre is potentially (de-)reconstructive of the gap(s) imposed by culture:

Performance is the reign of the multiple and of transformation. It is the place where fiction and reality interpenetrate. The fiction of a text combines with the reality of a place, the fiction of a role touches the flesh-and-blood reality of the actors and actresses. One mode is constantly changing into (exchanging with) the other." (179)

I would hasten to add that the "fiction" of a role played out in the theatre also touches the "reality" of the role that the actress plays in "real" life. It is in the vicinity of the interaction among these [two] roles -- namely, through the body feminine -- that differentiation occurs, presuming, of course, that the actress is in touch with the intuition of another/Real self. I was privileged to work with such an actress in the role of She. Though younger than I had originally imagined She to be, Tanya Palmer brought to the role both an indomitable sense of self and a spirit of self-lessness, of generosity towards others, well beyond her age in years. These qualities, combined with her intelligence, sensitivity, vulnerability, creative energy, and her love of poetry, prevented her portrayal of She from ever degenerating into a stereotype. Tanya played at playing a role quite foreign to her in "real" life and yet not so foreign that she could not imag(in)e playing it, since She's role is deliberately imitative of the role prescribed for all women by culture. For me, the truth of Tanya's performance was generated by its very imitative-ness and/or its lack of proximity to "reality"; she inscribed with her body and her voice that she was playing a role and telling [of] the Real/ truths that would forever escape that role.

To those who have criticized Tanya's performance because of its "unnaturalness," I have responded by arguing for different evaluative criteria -- which would re-value the body as a si(gh)te of differentiation. If, as Michèle Montrelay contends, "the [female] body must be 'lost' repressed, in order to be symbolized," what happens when the body is allowed to speak? (91 - 92). Does she de-symbolize her/self? What if, instead of merely accessorizing lack -- dressing it up in the appearance of "femininity" -- that lack asserted itself as a virtual plethora of bodily, imaginary, and Real meanings/resources? Would her wholeness be restored? And what if, women having proven that we are capable of being "ideologues, philosophers, poets, etc., etc.," we asked: "can *men* forget everything and join women?" (Duras, "Interview" 174). The last question is taken from an interview given by Duras, during which she goes on to say: "Make women the point of departure in judging, make darkness the point of judging what men call light, make obscurity the point of departure in judging what men call clarity" ("Interview" 174 - 175). While I do not advocate a reversal of hierarchy (nor does Duras), I do believe that woman must at least exercise her right to ask "what if?" What if the tables were turned, figuratively speaking? Is this not what She proposes to do when She imitates He's role as sexual aggressor, only to find

that the "masculine" role is as devoid of self-fulfillment for the female as is the more submissive "[masculine] feminine" role -- that even if the tables could be turned, it would not be enough simply to turn them? Could we then see our way through the fallacy of binary logic to the (re-) activation of the feminine feminine in language, in art, and in life? Theatre is the realm of "what if?" -- of play, of re-imagining alternatives to patrilinear thinking, alternatives that are not yet fully formed and never can be as long as they are formulated within the confines of that thinking - - which is why I find it so perplexing that verisimilitude would be the criteria used to judge a performance that overtly plays at being other than a "naturalistic" portrayal with/in the context of a script that also plays at being other than a "realistic" drama.

The concept of playing at playing [a role] and/or playing at be/coming other than [the role], a concept different from playing at be(com)ing the other/role, forms the basis of a recurring theme in French feminist theory. That this theme applies to the staging of sexual difference is substantiated by Clément's description of the phenomenon of hysteria: "the hysteric, whose body is transformed into a theatre for forgotten scenes, relives the past, bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering" (The Newly Born Woman 5). Although the hysteric is not held up as a role-model to which woman should necessarily aspire, her mythological significance derives from the fact that she dares to break something and she un/consciously uses her body to break it. That something is the look-of-the-Male/Other; she refuses to comply with cultural standards for to-be-looked-at-ness. That something is the mirror image; the hysteric desires against [the consummation of] desire to be more than just an empty reflection in the eyes of the Other(s). That something is the role imag(in)ed for her by the Symbolic, which dictates a separation between body and self; her body be/speaks unheard-of truths, re-imagining/Realizing her intuition of her other self. As Cixous insists, "she is the name of a certain force It is that force that works to dismantle structures which makes the little circus not work anymore" (The Newly Born Woman 156 - 157).

Of the symptoms dis/played by the hysteric, Irigaray writes:

Hysteria: it speaks in the mode of a paralysed gestural faculty, of an impossible and also a forbidden speech It speaks as symptoms of an "it cannot speak to or about itself" And the drama of hysteria is that it is inserted schizotically between that gestural system, that desire paralysed and enclosed within its body, and a language that it has learned in the family, in school, in society, which is in no way continuous with -- nor, certainly, a metaphor for -- the "movements" of its desire. Both mutism and mimicry are then left to hysteria. Hysteria is silent and at the same time it mimes. And -- how could it be otherwise --

miming/reproducing a language that is not its own, masculine language, it caricatures and deforms that language: it "lies," it "deceives," as women have always been reputed to do.

The problem of speaking (as) woman is precisely that of finding a possible continuity between that gestural expression or that speech of desire -- which at present can only be identified in the form of symptoms and pathology -- and a language, including a verbal language. (*The Irigaray Reader* 138)

Notice how both Clément and Irigaray use the metaphor of theatre and/or drama to translate the symptomatology of hysteria. What strikes me as uniquely compelling about Irigaray's commentary is its adaptability to a feminine theory of acting. That is, the problem of acting (as) woman in the theatre mimics that of speaking (as) woman in "real" life. The body and the voice have no stake in representation -- relegated as they undeniably are to mimicry and mutism -- and yet it is through representation that they are put at stake. Furthermore, it is because of the feminine's lack of a stake in, and/or woman's aspiration to, representation that she is doubly condemned: at first, for not being able to speak to her role, and then, for speaking too much of not being able to speak to it. This distinction is a critical one from my point of view, as a director. If the actress cannot speak to the role she plays, due to her culturally imposed silence, and if she cannot speak too much of that role, since hers is in any case "an ineluctable mimicry," then how can she hope to speak through it? (Moi 140).

According to Toril Moi's analysis of Irigaray's work, woman speaks through her role only by "miming the miming" of it:

Irigaray's mimicry becomes a conscious acting out of the hysteric (mimetic) position allocated to all women under patriarchy. Through her acceptance of mimicry, Irigaray doubles it back on itself, thus raising the parasitism to the second power. Hers is a theatrical staging of the mime: miming the miming imposed on women, Irigaray's subtle specular move intends to undo the effects of phallogocentric discourse simply by overdoing them. (140)

This idea of "acting out of" and/or "miming the miming" (which is simply another way of articulating the concept of playing at be/coming other than and/or playing at playing, except that now the role inferred re-contextualizes itself as mute and mimetic) indicates a radical departure from classical modes of acting and conventional means of evaluating the "worth" of a performance.

Traditionally, an actress/actor's performance is valued to the extent that it s/he successfully convinces the audience that s/he is the character. Being the Other is valued over be/coming other than, product over process, and the appearance of "reality" over proximity to interior truth.

While I can appreciate the talent and the technique involved in the actor/actress's embodiment of the Other/character, I can/not in all good conscience condone the dis/possession of self from body that process entails, especially where the portrayal of woman is concerned -- she/the actress .having already been pre-dis/possessed of her body (at least twice over). It seems to me that it is quite possible and eminently more desirable for the actress playing a role to both let her self be read by the role and let her body read the role. Neither process is passive, but together they are absolutely contingent upon the actress's intuition of her other self (acting as a sort of screening or filtering mechanism) and the exertion of her feminine imaginary (through which she draws near to the character's intuition of her other self). If (and only if) the actress is conscious of acting through a different incarnation of the same role imposed on her and the character -- which implies a well-developed sense of self-awareness on the actress's part, as well as a recognition that all roles attributed to the female under patriarchy share in common mutism and mimicry -- then her inevitable resistance to that role will be rendered visibly and audibly readable through her body and her voice.

In practice, Tanya is the only actress that I have worked with to date who has an almost instinctive affinity for "miming the miming" of the role(s) imposed on women. Were it not for the many hours that I have watched her in rehearsal, I may not have recognized what it could mean to "play with mimesis," to borrow another phrase from Irigaray (This Sex Which is Not One 76). To begin with, Tanya has the advantage of being exceptionally bright and intuitive; her understanding of text is immediate and profound, as is her ability to discern the character's intentions and what lies beyond them. Her facility for assimilating the thought process behind the character's invocation of the poetic, in particular, may account to some extent for her virtuosity when it comes to letting her body be read by and read the text. It is as though her intellectual and emotional understanding of text frees her body to respond with abandon to the playing at playing a role -- though never to the total abandonment of her intuition of another self. Indeed, it is that other, formerly unconscious [awareness of] self that Tanya consciously endangers every time she steps onstage -- that eccentric, funny, sometimes sad, infinitely knowing side of her that reminds me, as an "ideal" other/spectator, of the possibility of life and transformation -- and thus, helps others to empathize with whatever character she is playing (or so I imagine).

Regarding Tanya's portrayal of She, I should acknowledge that it did bear some resemblance to her depiction of Dora in Hélène Cixous's Portrait of Dora (which I directed in May, 1993), except that She proved to be a decidedly more dangerous role for Tanya (and me) to confront. Dora's role within the "fiction" of Portrait of Dora is labelled as such; Freud diagnoses Dora as suffering from "hysteria," for which he prescribes a rigorous regimen of memory recall and dream analysis,

and thereby seeks to paint a narratively accurate, still-life "portrait" of her "disease." Dora actively resists Freud's efforts to "bring her to [phallogocentric] reason" and ultimately succeeds in breaking [out of] the confines/frame of the role/"portrait" that he has imag(in)ed for her. In this respect, the dis/ruptive function that Dora fulfills -- which acts to "reveal, refuse, and subvert her repression" -- is much closer to Tanya's awareness of her other self than is the apparently self-destructive role of She (Féral, "Writing and Displacement" 556). The "neurosis" with which She is afflicted in Piano Plays -- "the malady of death," let's say -- is not only far more difficult to diagnose, given the subtlety, complexity, and scope of its naturalization throughout contemporary culture, but her role is more difficult to play at playing precisely because it is not generally recognized as a role. Whereas the actress whom I had initially cast in the role of She did not recognize She's role as a role and could not distinguish among aspects of her self and the role, Tanya saw through She's role at once. The challenge facing Tanya then became that of reconciling her other self to She's other self, without allowing her body to be inhabited/possessed by She's performing self (which, as you will recall, is that side of She that gives her body over to playing the role of a sex object). Tanya's experience at playing the role of the hysteric was invaluable insofar as it facilitated her discovery of She's [intuition of that] other self -- the self which survives in [the poetry of] the body. (Make no mistake: I am not suggesting that She is an hysteric, but rather that her body bears/bares the marks/wounds of the same "forgotten scenes" as does the body of the hysteric and as do the bodies of all women.) However, that [self-same] discovery was to further accentuate the tension between Tanya's other self (now reconciled to She's other self) and She's performing self, a problem that Tanya did not encounter while playing Dora since the hysteric's other self is in/corporated with/in her performing self.

To say that I witnessed the transformation of She's character when Tanya entered the rehearsal process as She (having previously been cast in the role of the Waitress) is something of an understatement. I heard the poetry of the piece [as if] for the first time; I heard it resonate with other meanings. I also saw the (corpo)Real evidence of She's suffering -- those marks left by the separation of body from self. While Tanya was entirely at ease with letting her body into the reading of the poetic passages, she expressed strong reservations about playing those scenes involving the Buyers, the Insurance Agent and the men in the bar which would require her to engage in sexually aggressive and/or "provocative" behaviour. (It is interesting to note, at least in passing, that culture deems it impossible for a woman to be sexually aggressive without inviting sexual aggression upon herself, without being provocative, and therefore, imag(in)ed as submissive.) Far from discouraging this kind of "editorialization" on the actress's part, I actively encouraged it, urging Tanya to trust her body and her self. She did not have to be "provocative"; she only had to play at playing/imitating/mimicing culture's image of provocative-ness/sexi-ness,

and "take it over the top," as the saying goes. The results of what began as a theoretical experiment of sorts were much more painful to sustain and to see than either Tanya or I had anticipated. At times, she did fight her body and her self; her insecurity was the residual effect of (re-)remembering the trauma she experienced during the mirror stage (a trauma recalled by She's objectification of her body). Most of the time, her self resisted the role ascribed to She with the aid of her body. And at one time -- in that moment after the Second Buyer's attempted strangulation of She -- her self seemed almost to vacate her body. I say "almost" because at no moment in time did Tanya ever give her body over to the embodiment of She's role. She imagined what it might have been like to have played "She," and let her body and her self do the editing.

I cannot possibly over-emphasize what I believe to be the editorial function that the body feminine must be allowed to play -- in conjunction/alliance with the actress's intuition of her other self and/or her imaginary -- in the staging/Realization of sexual difference. The process of editing relates both to the processes of reading and identification, and in turn anticipates playing with mimesis. As Cixous explains, "One never reads except by identification. But what kind? What is 'identification?' When I say 'identification,' I do not say 'loss of self.' I become, I inhabit, I enter. Inhabiting someone, at that moment I can feel my self traversed by that person's initiatives and actions" (The Newly Born Woman 148). The difference between this form of reading/identification as it applies to acting and that form traditionally practiced in the theatre - - which requires the actress to let the character become/inhabit/enter her body -- is that the former leaves room for the actress to resist the role with her "I"/self and for that resistance to become readable through her body and her voice. (Traversal of self in no way obligates possession of the body.) If her resistance (to being possessed by the character) is productive of a performance that is, like Tanya's, perceived as "efforted" or "affected," so be it, for therein lies the dissimilarity between the female body as "ground" and the "feminine" role as image -- when, in truth, there is no stable "ground," but only the bodily inscriptions of the void left by the actress's repeated attempts to differentiate her self from/discard the role.

Again, I quote Irigaray, on playing with mimesis:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself -- inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter" -- to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language." (This Sex Which is Not One 76)

Since [the lack attributed to] the female body is the "place of her exploitation by discourse," a place that the actress can try to recover by miming the miming of the role(s) imposed on women, then "writing [through] the body" becomes less a matter of defining her self in opposition to and/or in collusion with the Male/Other and more a process of be/coming other than -- of "resubmitting herself to 'ideas' about herself." This is "the possible operation of the feminine in language": that she, the female, can re-define her self in relation to the feminine and re-value her body, not only as a source of pleasure, of *jouissance*, but of knowledge and ideas. With respect to the connection between acting and writing, Duras argues for a practice of acting that would conceive of the role as a reference to the-writing-in/of/through-it, rather than as a void to be filled by acting (*Outside* 138). It was precisely her avoidance of filling this void with her body, while inscribing that other void between her self and She's role through her body, and simultaneously, aspiring to (re-)write/transcribe She's other self, that led to Tanya's visibly conflicted portrayal of She.

So, what does the "writing [through] the body" mean, then, for the actress? What it most definitely does *not* mean is "denying her [bodily] drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking," according to Cixous, who goes on to make the following observations:

She doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying ..."
("The Laugh of the Medusa" 251)

What it also does *not* mean is speaking in the "hypercoded, where nothing traverses," as Cixous remarks elsewhere ("voice i" 63). What "writing [through] the body" comes to mean is *letting* the female body speak, both through itself and in/of/to its other than and its other-ness. In other words, as long as her other self seeks to be/come other than the role(s) imag(in)ed for her by the Symbolic, her body fairly anticipates its other-ness, and so, is constantly engaged in the process of desymbolizing itself. The conflict that the actress experiences while trying to differentiate self from role -- that is, while trying to be/come other than that -- is partially due to the fact that her [other] self can only be defined in terms of *what it is not*. It is in this respect that her body can be her greatest ally; not only is it (along with the feminine imaginary) among the very few sources of affirmation for her other-ness, but the gestural language is perhaps the sole remaining language through which she can transcribe/point to her other-ness without necessarily having to elaborate

that other-ness with/in a masculine logic -- without having to assume a purely negative and/or a backwards-looking function. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that woman should withdraw into some exclusively gestural language or that she must invent a verbal language that is hers and hers alone. Rather, I am suggesting that the project of restoring her wholeness -- of reconciling self to self and self to body -- must include a re-(e)valuation of the body feminine as a potential si(gh)te of differentiation through which her other-ness in relation to the feminine others can be Realized.

Finally, I wish to render transparent the premise underlying the (w)hole of this paper, which is that all women are actresses and all "feminine" roles are imag(in)ed [as the same] by the same [sexually indifferent] Symbolic Order. The issue of staging sexual difference is not simply a question of pointing out her absence from meaning within that system -- of portraying "She" in quotation marks -- although her act of throwing into relief the role, as perpetuated by the system and as distinguished from her [other] self, is a crucial part of the actress's process that must remain visible. Ultimately, though, what she must further throw into relief is that her resistance to playing the role culminates in her [imaginary] vacation of it, so that all that is left of the role are the quotation marks designating the not that of which She never Really was -- the absence of the [Symbolically] absent(ed). It is because acting for the theatre is at least once removed from "reality," and yet still very much rooted in the imaginary and the corporeal, that it affords the actress both the possibilities of dis/closing her presence and attaining proximity to the (corpo)Real. From the moment she steps onto the stage, she is already other than the role that she plays in "real" life. However, it is only through simultaneously aspiring to be/come other than the role imposed on the character -- other than [the] other than [that] -- that she be/comes other-in-herself, for in the end, "she cannot not," as Cixous would say ("voice i" 59). That she cannot not, that she must come to rely upon her other self (as made manifest through her body and her imaginary), is, in my opinion, the primary indication that differentiation has been "staged."

CHAPTER 2

*There is a ground, it is her ground --
childhood flesh, shining blood --
or background, depth.
A white depth, a core,
unforgettable, forgotten,
and this ground,
covered by an infinite number of strata,
layers, sheets of paper --
is her sun
(sol ... soleil).
And nothing can put it out.
Feminine light doesn't come from above ..."
(Cixous, The Newly Born Woman 88)*

Visual Pleasure: Si(gh)te of In(ter)vention

One of the difficulties that I have consistently encountered in my review of [Anglo-American] feminist performance theory is a lack of concern with the form/al aspects of the theatrical medium. Where form is addressed, any substantive examination of its aesthetic dimension – *its bringing to bear upon [the subversion of] visual pleasure* -- is almost always superseded by thematic analysis and/or image of women criticism. As Cixous points out, the poverty of thematic analysis, when practiced separately from an inquiry into form, is that it tends to (re-)construct the past as its sole referent: "One will work on woman in such and such a period and in such and such a text it is a kind of work which refers us back to the *past*, which in almost all cases does not allow a work in the *present*" (qtd. in Féral, "The Powers of Difference" 92). Image of women criticism has a similar tendency to (re-)invoke the past-as-Other; insofar as it attempts to categorize images of women according to the attributes "positive" or "negative," it reactivates a whole system of assigning meaning/*value* based on thinking in terms of binary opposition. Not only does this mode of criticism refer women back to the image that the Symbolic has of us -- from which we are currently in the process of trying to re-imag(in)e/re-value ourselves differently -- but it does nothing to facilitate the recognition of image as image. That is, while advocating the substitution of "positive" images of women for "negative" images of women, image criticism unwittingly conspires with the Symbolic in erecting yet another variation of the image-as-[imag(in)ed-by-the]-Other to which women are supposed to measure up. Film theorist Teresa de Lauretis comments on precisely this dilemma when she refers to Barthes's description of the cinema as an " 'imaging machine,' which by producing images (of women or not of women) also tends to reproduce women as image we should rather think of images as (potentially) *productive of* contradictions in both subjective and social processes" ("Imaging" 38 - 39). Like film, the theatrical medium often functions as little more than an "imaging machine," whereby the primacy granted the specular (over the auditory) in socio-subjective processes confers upon the image an authority which it does not in truth possess. It is only by rendering the libidinal content/intent of these [invisible] processes visible that images can become productive (again) of contra/dictions, and so participate in arresting the visual pleasure on which the perpetuation of image-as-Other is predicated. I have suggested elsewhere that Roth's implementation of a cinematic writing aesthetic in a theatrical venue -- her choice of a form that contradicts its own translation in/to an/other medium -- is intended to problematize the relation of sight (and/or the perception of the image) to the imaginary and the Real. I will argue here that my translation of text into performance was designed to amplify exactly the potential latent in that form of contra/diction.

Making visible the invisible

In her work on film theory, Annette Kuhn observes: "The fundamental project of feminist film analysis can be said to centre on *making visible the invisible* and may [therefore] operate at the levels of both text and context, and would ideally aim to delineate a relationship between the two" (73). I begin by referring to film theory because, unlike performance theory, it overtly addresses [itself to] the subversion of visual pleasure, and *thereby subjects the filmic medium to the scrutiny of its own desire*. In my opinion, performance theory ought to "take its cue" from film theory, which is one of the reasons why I chose to work with Piano Plays -- a text so obviously desiring of an other/cinematic context, and yet written for the theatre. It was my hope that by bringing to the theatrical medium a text that could not fail to appear as somewhat out of context -- *as an/other-in-itself* -- I might be able to interrogate visually the relationship of the medium to the articulation of its own desire and to its [other] self.

It is with regard to laying bare the network governing [the propagation of] visual pleasure, which is the same network regulating desire and the marketability of the image, that the application of film theory in the theatre proves most illuminating. This network is never a dispassionate one (as some performance theorists might inadvertently lead us to believe), nor is it remotely interested in any other pursuit save the furtherance of its own, specifically masculine, desire; rather, it is always the (re)incarnation of the *masculine-libidinal economy*, sometimes called the *(re)presentational economy* and/or *the realm of the proper*. The linkage of desire to the notion of an economy is, of course, an idea reminiscent of French feminism. Cixous, for example, describes "the economy of the proper" as structured in strict accordance with the libidinal laws governing the acquisition/*appropriation* of woman as man's *property* -- his is the expectation of a sexual *return*, which will ease temporarily his own fear of castration (qtd. in Moi 111). Woman's perceptible lack of a penis thus serves [visually] as both stimulant and threat, since, in his view, "everything must *return to the masculine*.... If a man spends and is spent, it's on the condition that his power returns" (Cixous, "Castration or decapitation?" 50). Film theory is extremely quick to pick up on the connection between *the pleasure taken in looking at her* and *the cultivation of a libidinal investment resulting in the restoration of his power over her* that that form of pleasuring entails. Man looks; woman exists to be looked at. But, as Laura Mulvey warns of the filmic medium: "going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds *the way she is to be looked at* into the spectacle itself Cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of [male] desire" ("Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" 67).

Mulvey's analysis of visual pleasure is considered seminal in the field of aesthetic and feminist film theory because it exemplifies the growing body of criticism that "insists on rigorous, formal work on the medium itself" (de Lauretis, "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory" 175). In the same article cited above, Mulvey explains that there are two [contradictory] aspects of pleasure in looking: *the scopophilic* and *the narcissistic*. "The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" and is "a function of the sexual instincts," whereas the second, narcissistic, "comes from identification with the image seen" and functions as an extension of the "ego libido" (61). Owing to the fact that conventional/narrative cinema is set up to locate "*man as the bearer of the look*" and to feed [into] his ego libido -- in other words, to reconcile his scopophilic to his narcissistic -- it only follows that the cinematic codes shaping this process will position "*woman as image*" and/or as the [erotic] object of exchange in the (re)presentational economy (Mulvey 62). Moreover, in the very unlikely absence of a male "hero" who is seen to possess/subjugate/tame the woman as image/object and so provide an identification with *the objectification of* the image seen, these codes will function themselves in his [Imaginary] capacity. If this seems tantamount to suggesting that the gaze is male, and/or that the filmic medium tends to be masculine, that intimation is quite intentional on Mulvey's part (as it is on mine concerning the theatrical medium).

Mulvey concludes her article with a brief explication of the three *looks* involved in film. There is the "look of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion" (68). Narrative film, she contends, privileges the third look, that which preserves the "reality" of the illusion and facilitates his *voyeuristic* participation in it, over the other two looks in an effort to minimize/mask the castration threat that the female image also represents. However, as soon as the look(s) of the camera and the audience at [the spectacle of] her to-be-looked-at-ness are rendered visible/intrusive -- which is to say, as soon as they are free(d) *to look at themselves looking* -- the look that positions her as object/image is broken, and his status as bearer of the look is demonstrated to be just the projection of his own desire to see himself as he desires to be seen.

Although Mulvey's model is designed with specific reference to film, it is important to note that at *least* two of the looks she identifies -- namely, the look of the audience at the performance and the look of the characters at one another -- are implicated in [the production of] theatre as well. The other look, that of the camera at the pro-filmic event, could be argued to correspond roughly to the eye/"I" of the theatrical director (and/or the designer) as s/he choreographs the mise-en-scene. Clearly, the eye of the camera lends itself to a more tightly controlled manipulation of the

looks involved in film than does the eye of the director in theatre, but there is still an "I"/director behind the camera who performs many of the same editorial functions as does the theatrical director. From my [directorial] point of view, I frequently find it useful to imagine myself [as] looking through the lens of a camera at a scene in progress, if only to pick out those details that I desire to look at and that angle from which I desire to look at them. Whether my desire to look at [myself] looking is merely a function of my own narcissism, or whether it is primarily desirous of an other/different way of looking at [looking in] the theatre, I do not know. It is probably a combination of both. At any rate, while I realize that I can/not direct the audience's gaze at details of the spectacle with the same degree of precision that the camera affords a film maker, I can (re-) direct the audience's gaze [back] at/to themselves in a way that the camera as visual intermediary prohibits film from doing. In the theatre, there is always the potential for an additional look to be/come involved, a look that film lacks: *the gaze/look of the performers/characters at the audience*, a look distinguished from the look of the characters into the camera by virtue of its corporeal immediacy. This is the look that the character of She activates in Piano Plays when she speaks directly to the audience. What [further] differentiates She's *form of address* from that usually practiced during the performance of monologues, soliloquies, and/or asides in the theatre is her use of the inter-subjective "you" and "we" (in addition to her use of the purely subjective "I"). As much as was possible, I encouraged Tanya to "capitalize" on the freedom afforded her look by this particular form of address; I asked her to focus the delivery of her monologues at/to individual spectators -- to unleash her look upon them and to personalize it -- so as to arrest/reflect back to them the narcissistic transparency of their own desire(s) to look at, without being seen looking at, She (which is the definition of voyeurism).

Another way of looking at the looks involved in both film and theatre is in terms of *how* they en/gender [male] desire, which relates again to the problem of providing an identification with woman as image. It has been said of a number of Duras's male characters, for instance, that in order for them to have desire, they must "imagine an identification with the desire of another [man]" for the same object/image of desire, the same woman (Roof 332). That observation could also be made of Roth's He; She becomes desirable to He only after having proven (to herself and to him) that She is "worthy" of being desired -- that other men desire her too. *Notice that the proof of her desirability is to be found in the eyes of a male third.* He's look at She within the text/stage illusion is thus shown to be *not* a single look, but a composite of three looks: his look at her, his [imaginary] look sideways at the look(s) of his rival(s) (aptly called the Buyers), and the look(s) of his rival(s) at She, which serve to heighten his desire. These three looks operate at the level of context as well; they are built into the way that the audience views the performance. There is the look of the spectator at the object/image of his desire, his look sideways at the look of the

male/other -- for affirmation, to see whether or not she is desirable -- and the look of that male/other either at the same woman or at another. Of course, that [mythical] Male-as-Other need not be physically present (as "he" is onstage in the character of He and/or offstage in the personage of fellow audience members) for his look to be felt and/or for the spectator to imagine an identification with his desire. In the event of his [physical] absence, the whole of culture, the mass media, language, and the masculine unconscious will stand in for him.

Duras herself speaks to *the circulation of desire among three* in a series of interviews that she published with Xavière Gauthier:

- X.G. *It's true that in a certain way, you can make love only in threes. In other words, the third person, even and especially if he isn't there ... isn't it necessary for there to be a third so that desire can circulate?*
- M.D. Yes And do you think that this third character -- isn't it writing? Do you think that you can find it ... elsewhere?
- X.G. *I'm thinking ... of the Oedipal triangle.*
- M.D. Which means?
- X.G. *Which means the father, mother, and child. If the child desires the mother, the father has to be around -- right? -- who prohibits but who doesn't just prohibit, who is there and who ...*
- M.D. And who is the rival.
- X.G. *Yes, or who complicates things, anyway.*
- (Woman to Woman 28 - 29)

There are several features of the foregoing discussion to which I wish to draw your attention. To begin with, Gauthier's comment that it is the third person who, "*even and especially if he isn't there,*" permits desire to *circulate*, strikes me as particularly relevant to a closer examination of the audience's look at Piano Plays. As I have suggested previously, the character of He can be seen to function as the third person from the spectator's point of view; not only does his look at She provide an identification with [the objectification of] She, but it marks her as his property, and thereby acts as a prohibitor even in his absence. What tends to throw He's look at She (and his [imaginary] glance sideways at his rivals into relief, however, and hinder the circulation of [male] desire, is the presence of said rivals onstage. They are not imaginary, nor are their intentions left open to interpretation; they are the Buyers and they are out to "buy" She. In a sense, the Buyers are to He what He is to the audience and what the audience is to the theatrical medium -- enablers disguised as prohibitors, each colluding with the other in their objectification of She. It is only when we see the interaction among the looks wielded by these (four) parties at She -- She forming the apex of two identical Oedipal triangles, one onstage and one off -- reduced to the

level of [sexual] transaction, which is the function that the Buyers perform along one axis of the onstage triangle, that we may begin to recognize the (re)presentational economy as just the transposition of the masculine libidinal economy on/to looking.

The other feature of the above-noted dialogue that must be addressed is Duras's reference to writing as the "third character" in the triad formed between a woman, a man, and [the possibility of] (re-)writing desire. Given that the majority of Duras's work is autobiographical, her commentary implies that she views writing as her feminine other -- as providing the means through which to *circumvent* an identification of/with herself based solely on how she appears in the eyes of the Male-[as]-Other. It is precisely *for lack of* a feminine other -- *for lack of a different way of looking at herself [looking]* -- that, in the absence of He, the character of She relies overly upon the looks of other men to confirm her desirability. That is, in order to see herself as desirable, She imagines an identification paralleling that of He with the desire/look(s) of other men/culture for/at her. She internalizes male desire. Her very lack of inhibition/propriety when it comes to soliciting the male gaze is symptomatic of the pathology of his desire, which by exiling woman to the realm of vicarious experience is intended to relegate her to experiencing both herself and desire vicariously. Nevertheless, it is simultaneously *for want of* a feminine other -- *for want of [finding] a way to see herself differently* -- that She seeks out the look of her female friend. While Friend does everything in her power to help She gain some perspective on her relationship with He and to make She see what She is doing to herself, Friend can only do so much. Ultimately, it is up to She to take a look at herself, which is how She's poetry can be seen to function as her feminine other; it provides She with the means to see herself as bearer of the look [at herself], and in so doing, it (re-)positions her as capable of originating her own desire[-to-desire].

The problem of *refusing to provide* an identification with the objectification of woman as image -- of arresting visual pleasure -- is not so much a question of removing images of women, "negative" or otherwise, from the (re)presentational economy, as it becomes a question of "making work in which the cost of women's perpetual 'aversion' [to/from themselves and of their gazes] is clearly measured," of bringing that economy into view (Phelan 125). This is the strength of Roth's script: that by depicting the sometimes devastating effect that her status as an object/commodity within the (re)presentational economy can have on a woman's self-image, the play interrogates the relation of a woman's self[-image] to the image that culture has of her. In other words, it looks at the relation of the woman to the image and to imaging while trying not to lose sight of her [other] self -- the self that survives in/through the poetry of the body, the self that culture's image of her can never quite contain or capture. For my part, I became so intent on foregrounding She's other [(in)di/visible] self at the deliberate expense of preserving the "integrity" of culture's image of her

that, at times, I lost sight of the fact that the performance would be read at the level of image. Ironically enough, that oversight was entirely in keeping with my intentions (or so I can see in retrospect), which were, on the one hand, to make visible those invisible processes which persist in culture's perpetuation of woman as image, and, on the other, to throw into question the predominance granted vision/the image by culture -- images being the "counterfeit currency" of the (re)presentational economy (Phelan 125).

(W)holes in the (in)di/visible

Further to the notion of destabilizing the [currency of the] image, film critic Mary Ann Doane observes:

... the visible in no way guarantees epistemological certitude. Insofar as it is consistently described [throughout psychoanalytic theory] as a lure, a trap, or a snare, vision dramatizes the dangers of privileging consciousness *There is a hole in the visible.* What consciousness and the cinema both fail to acknowledge in their lust for plenitude is that the *visible is always lacking.* ("Veiling over Desire" 106)

Doane goes on to point out that despite culture's equation of *appearing/seeming [to be] with being* -- of vision with truth -- "vision remains precarious" ("Veiling over Desire" 106). It is, therefore, both because of and in spite of the visible, that woman can continue to participate in the (re)presentational economy without necessarily compromising her [other] self, which is only one of the operative paradoxes in an economy [potentially] riddled with them. Speaking of paradoxes, there is yet another contained within [the (re-)activation of] that one, for in order to deconstruct/destabilize culture's image of woman she must also (re-)construct her own/an other image of herself -- not in opposition to culture's image of her, but different from it. This is the paradox to which de Lauretis refers when she re-defines the task facing feminist theory and practice as follows:

The project of feminist cinema is not so much 'to make visible the invisible, as the saying goes, or to destroy vision altogether The present task of theoretical feminism and of feminist film practice alike is *to articulate the relations of the female subject to representation, meaning, and vision, and in so doing, to construct another frame of reference, another measure of desire.* ("Imaging" 68)

That other frame of reference, that other measure of desire, is analogous to what I have called

writing/poetry, She's feminine other. My choice of writing as a metaphor for [constructing] that other is indicative of my concern that this *process* be self[-as-other] referential rather than image[-as-Other] referential -- that it not simply reactivate binary thinking patterns -- which is a concern shared by de Lauretis. The danger of constructing an/other frame of reference, an/other image -- if transposed/[super-]imposed on/to either the female subject or the female spectator *externally* -- is that it could reproduce an identification of/with her based on how she appears in the eyes of the image[-as-Other], whereas the type of imaging that we seek is, as de Lauretis puts it, productive of "her double identification *in the process of her looking at her looking*" ("Imaging" 69).

The purpose of constructing an/other frame of reference, where the emphasis is on the cap/ability of the female subject to construct her own frame -- *to look at herself looking and to en/gender her own desire* -- and where that frame is never constructed as an impermeable/permanent entity, is not to (re-)objectify/(re-)frame the subject but to provide her with some [measure of] objectivity on her subjectivity. Her frame of reference is exactly that: it is a *frame*. As such, it is no more capable of containing/capturing the essence of her than is the frame prescribed by culture; however, it does give her another/different image of herself to compare/contrast with culture's image of her. Cixous calls this mode of working between (at least) two frames of reference "*working (in) the in-between*," which she considers to be the distinguishing "mark" of the feminine libidinal economy and/or *the realm of the gift* ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 254). Working (in) the in-between means the "non-exclusion of either difference or one sex;" it means, moreover, working towards that "*other bisexuality*" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 254). Among the characteristics of that other bisexuality is the "multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body, indeed, it doesn't annul differences, but stirs them up, pursues them, increases them" (qtd. in Moi 109). Cixous's association of the feminine attribute of generosity, of gift giving, with bisexuality is intended to demonstrate that it is only in the realm of the gift that differences can be both borne and made a gift of, and that desire can flourish. She explains: "If there is a 'propriety of woman,' it is paradoxically her capacity to deappropriate unselfishly, body without end, without appendage, without principal 'parts' This doesn't mean that she's an undifferentiated magma, but that she doesn't lord it over her body or her desire" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 259).

The significance of the realm of the gift as it relates to the (re)presentational economy is that by replacing buying and selling with *giving*, it divines to divest itself of the need for an "economy" altogether. Earlier, I made a rather oblique reference to images as the "counterfeit currency" of the (re)presentational economy. The point I wish to make now is that *images are only counterfeit as long as they are allowed to function as currency*. While trading in images of women may be the

mark of the masculine libidinal economy, within which women are themselves perceived as "the goods," valued for their to-be-looked-at-ness and/or their adoption of "the pose," and while she, the female subject and/or the female spectator, "is only ever the 'subject' of a transaction in which her own commodification is ultimately the object," it does not follow that the feminine libidinal economy (which is not an "economy") must work in the same way (Doane, "The Economy of Desire" 30). In the realm of the gift, images of women (or not of women) are not for trade/sale. She, the female subject, does not have to sell her self [out] in order to play a character, nor does she have to sell culture's image of that character [back] to culture/the audience. What she may alternatively *choose* to do is *give of her self* to the audience. And, since hers is not a "gift-that-takes" -- a "gift" given in the expectation of receiving a "gift" in return -- the female spectator is neither obliged to buy into culture's image of the character (which is no longer for sale anyway) nor is she obliged to receive or to reciprocate the gift of her self that the subject/actress makes (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 259). The female spectator is thus endowed with her own subjecthood/subjectivity, her own capacity to value images according to the standard set by her self (instead of the other way around), which is the greatest gift that I, as a director, in conjunction with the actress, can aspire to give her -- the gift of giving her back to herself. It is only when our subjectivities are not a consequence of her object-ness that we can make this gift -- that we can show her imaging without presuming to image for her. If this seems like a somewhat utopian (re-) vision of the (re)presentational "economy," consider the perspective offered by Irigaray:

But what if the goods refused to go to market? What if they maintained among themselves "another" kind of trade?

Exchange without identifiable terms of trade, without accounts, without end -- Without a standard of value. Where *red blood* and *pretense* would no longer be distinguished one from the other by deceptive packaging that masks their respective worth. Where use and exchange would intermingle. Where the most valuable would also be the least held in reserve

Utopia? Perhaps. Unless this mode of exchange has always undermined the order of trade and simply has not been recognized *because the necessity of restricting incest to the realm of pure pretense* has forbidden a certain economy of abundance. ("When the goods get together" 110)

Irigaray's remark concerning the restriction of "incest to the realm of pure pretense," incest being a metaphor for autoeroticism and/or auto-imaging, recalls again the problem of framing in theatre and in film. While these mediums are purported to function culturally as the realm(s) of pure pretense, it is worthwhile noting that within the context of the mediums themselves, they almost always find it necessary to frame pretense as pretense -- there is as little tolerance for "incest" in

these realms as there is in culture as a (w)hole.

The necessity of framing -- of setting apart pretense/the imaginary from "reality" -- can be traced back to the male child's separation from the mother. His discovery of her lack, though traumatic, is not enough to break his attachment to her, which is why the Law of the Father/culture must intrude on that attachment from the outside. According to a feminist reading of Lacan, it is "the incest taboo, backed by the threat of castration," that finally "forces the child out of the bodily, seamless, wordless world of narcissistic symbiosis into existence as a cultural, universal, specifically gendered subject" (Flax 111). The primarily visual mediums of film and theatre "facilitate his continuing participation in the Imaginary," even as the castration threat that she has come to represent is minimized by the [largely] *imaginary* presence of a frame around her (Kaplan 19). (The irony to which I refer here is that having framed pretense as pretense, it then becomes necessary to keep up the pretense that it is not entirely a pretense -- to make that frame disappear in order to leave him room to enter the text imaginatively.) As for the incest taboo, his tacit observance of it depends upon the maintenance of a safe distance from her, which calls into question the *depth* of the frame that surrounds her. Of course, this is less of an issue in film than it is in theatre; in film, the distance between the spectator and the screen remains constant. But, in the theatre, there is always the danger that she might come up too close -- "*close enough to be in danger, of life*" -- that she might break [through] the fourth wall and so jeopardize the preservation of the illusion of his separate-ness from himself and from her (Cixous, "Aller à la mer" 547). It is for this reason that I see the theatrical medium as inherently better suited to testing the depthwise dimensions of framing than is the filmic medium, although, once again, it is film theory and French feminism that pave the way for specul(ariz)ation in this area.

I have spoken briefly about the potential for an/other look to be/come involved in theatre, a look that draws attention to the depth of the illusion of separation and has the capacity to break that illusion instantaneously: this is the look of the characters/performers at the audience. I have also alluded to the fact that the activation of this look is contingent upon the subjective form of address. In her work on cinematic forms of address, of *enunciation*, Kuhn argues that there are basically two: *discours* and *histoire* (46 - 49). *Histoire*, which utilizes an impersonal form of address, is the most common in dominant/narrative cinema, whereas *discours*, employing as it does the subjective form, is generally preferred among feminist film makers (Kuhn 49). Kuhn explains that it is by virtue of the principle of *suture* (a concept first identified by Jean-Pierre Oudart) that *histoire* accommodates the male spectator's need to enter the text imaginatively without having his presence acknowledged (without arresting his voyeurism):

Suture is the process whereby the gap produced [between takes/ scenes] is filled by the spectator, who thus becomes the "stand-in," the "subject-in-the-text." The process of subjectivity in cinema is seen as both ongoing and dynamic in that the subject is constantly being "sewn-in" to, or caught up in, the film's enunciation. (53)

The same principle applies in the theatre, except that when the gaps between scenes become [a visible] part of the play's enunciation -- that is, when they are no longer gaps in the visual sense, though they may be in the narrative sense -- as they do/are [not] in *Piano Plays*, it is that much more difficult for the spectator to enter the illusion without being aware that it is an illusion, without seeing the frame around the illusion and the [syntactical] framework supporting it. At the same time, She's subjective form of address begins to challenge the spectator's proximal relation to the illusion, and I would venture to say that at the very moment her gaze meets his/hers, the illusion of her confinement to the realm of pure pretense, of *bloodlessness*, is broken and, along with it, the "incest" taboo.

The importance of breaking the "incest" taboo is *not* -- and this is where I beg to differ with some of the more politically left film theorists, such as Kuhn -- to simply throw it back into relief and thereby increase the distance between the spectator and the spectacle, "reality" and illusion, desire and attainment. Rather, it is to "*obscure the distance between desire and attainment*," the imaginary and the Real, the visible and the (in)di/visible -- *desire being in itself a form of attainment* (Krance 106). I know of no better way of explaining this paradox than by quoting Irigaray's description of "the cloud":

I opened my eyes and saw the cloud. And saw that nothing was perceptible unless I was held at a distance from it by an almost palpable density. *And that I saw it and did not see it.* Seeing it all the better for remembering the density of air remaining in between.

But this resistance of air being revealed, I felt something akin to the possibility of a different discovery of myself. (*Elemental Passions* 105)

It has been said that analyzing poetic truth kills it, which is a task that I am extremely reluctant to undertake in this case (or in any other, for that matter). Let it suffice to say that part of the imaginative resonance of this passage derives from the juxtaposition of two senses that are rarely associated with one another: sight and touch. Whereas vision is usually evoked as a means of measuring distance from the other, of *transcribing separation*, it is invoked here as a means of measuring proximity to the other, of *inscribing nearness* and even the possibility of touch. In fact,

I would go so far as to suggest that vision is a form of touch(ing): that which she holds in her purview, she holds, but she does not own, holding it all the closer -- *obscuring its and her own perceptibility* -- because [feeling the "almost palpable density of air remaining in between" reminds her that] she can/not own.

Regarding the density of air, of so-called "negative" space, nowhere is the resistance it offers more keenly experienced as Real than by the actress in performance when the predominantly male gaze is trained [squarely] on her. I would argue that the obverse holds true as well -- that when she looks at the spectator, "he" experiences differently that same sensation of being traversed by the look/touch of the other, and/or, at the very least, *of being in the other's space*. This relates to Heidegger's concept of the artwork "riff," which is, essentially, that "in the vicinity of the work we are suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be" (35). As Marc Silverstein explains with reference to Cixous's phenomenology of the theatre, "this somewhere else is an aesthetic space, a zone of being that radiates from the stage itself, enlarging its confines until the feminist spectator finds herself enveloped within the theatrical event, reconfiguring her subjectivity through the 'body-presence' of the 'Woman [a]s Whole' ..." (508). Silverstein's commentary reminds me of the problematic adhering to the (re-)location of the feminist/feminine spectator[-as-other], for whom, in the end, I must function as stand-in. While doing everything in my purview to dis/locate the male gaze and to stage an intervention at the si(gh)te of meaning/appearing-for-the-Other, mine is also the project of inventing that other space, in the vicinity of which both the feminine feminine and the masculine feminine [spectators] (but particularly the former) might feel as if they [truly] were somewhere else than they usually tend to be. Since neither feminist performance theory nor film theory offer much in the way of guidance with respect to what a feminine and/or a bisexual aesthetic might actually look like, which is hardly surprising considering the extreme difficulty of decoding the already [too much] there, let alone of articulating the not yet there, I am left to ponder Irigaray's response to the question that she asks [of] herself as a writer -- "how can we create our beauty?":

I think color is what's left of life beyond forms, beyond truth or beliefs, beyond accepted joys or sorrows. Color also expresses our sexuate nature, that irreducible dimension of our incarnation ...

Or it may be that in destroying already coded forms, women rediscover their nature, are able to find their forms Furthermore, these female forms are always *incomplete*, in perpetual growth, because a woman grows, blossoms, and fertilizes (herself) with her own body. (je.tu, nous, 109 - 110)

It is no coincidence that Irigaray's perception of beauty resembles her concept(ualizat)ion of

female eroticism, to which "the prevalence of the gaze, discrimination of form, and individualization of form are foreign" ("This sex which is not one" 101). "Color is what's left of life beyond [complete] forms" in the sense that color is what we see when we get close enough to the form *not* to perceive it as [wholly] discrete, though still to perceive it as strange -- as an/other.

(re)Visions in process

The design concept for Piano Plays evolved out of the interaction between precisely these [two] aesthetic idea(l)s: the intromission of *nearness* and the preservation of *strangeness*. As to the first, it affected profoundly the (re-)configuration of the theatrical space and the execution of the groundplan, as well as the way in which I worked with the performers. I chose the Reeve Theatre as my preferred venue because of the flexibility it affords; by extending the performance space further into the audience, I hoped to draw the audience closer to the performance. It was for this reason that the designer, Gavin Semple, and I eventually decided upon a thrust format with a raked stage and more sharply raked audience platforms along the downstage end of the stage. The rakes were designed to compress the distance between spectator and spectacle and to interrogate the hierarchical distinction(s)/opposition(s) higher versus lower, "reality" versus the imaginary, "truth" versus "fiction," since those spectators seated on the middle and upper platforms would receive the impression of looking down on the performance. Gavin suggested that we use the north-east wall of the theatre, the wall that borders upon the Reeve Secondary, as our back wall, so that we could open the doors leading into the Secondary and thus accentuate the illusion of depth. I must confess that it was not until I saw the set installed in the theatre with the doors open that I was able to appreciate fully the significance of the frame that that opening created. Not only was the frame placed *behind* the stage, which implied that the performance somehow escaped and/or existed in excess of the frame, but it opened so forgivingly on/to the possibility of nothingness, of emptiness, darkness, sleep, death, and blessed reprieve -- of the abyss She dreams of. And, just as the exertion of her imaginary is all that prevents She from succumbing entirely to the temptation of the void, so it may be for some of us; perhaps the stage, engaging as it does our respective imaginaries, could be read as a metaphor for the framework that separates us, as individual spectators, from the abyss -- the very spectre of our aloneness.

Or the abyss could be read as a hole in the visible. A hole permitting us to see through the imaginary to the Real and unrepresentable, which I for one am quite content to let remain. In(di)visible. Untranslatable. Lacking.

The other spatial distinction related to reconstructing an aesthetic of nearness that I was

interested in breaking down was the opposition interior versus exterior. Roth builds the exploration of this distinction into the script when she specifies that the stage depict an outdoor scene consisting of "grain fields, with poppies here and there, and a sun," onto which a number of indoor furnishings, including a bed and a piano, are transposed (187). The critical ambiguity of this image lies both in its strangeness, its utter incongruity, and in its absolute rightness -- the sense of harmony, of poetic accord, that it strikes up between the forces of nature and the human passions. Short of planting a grain field onstage, however, it would have been impossible to achieve such an effect without dulling and flattening the vibrancy of nature to a thoroughly unnatural extent, which is why the representation of the grain field was abstracted and slowly metamorphosed into a ground resembling the skies overshadowing the entwinement of flesh in the Rococo stylist François Boucher's paintings. While this solution was initially arrived at by way of finding a compromise, I thought it worked beautifully. For one thing, it carried the interrogation of the distinction higher versus lower a step further, leaving the audience to look down upon an apparently surface treatment which most closely approximated a cloudlike formation but which was colored to evoke an association with "the death masks of dear little curly [blond] heads in [pinkish] stone," and, for another, it lent a dream-like ambiance and a quality of movement to the set similar to that suggested by a grain field (206). On an almost purely theoretical level, I was also intrigued to note how applicable the following commentary was to the set: "... it is only in the space between oppositions that 'a woman' can be represented *It is in a space in which there is no ground, a space in which (bare)feet cannot touch the ground*" (Phelan 120).

"White on white" (Roth, Piano Plays 193). Flesh on flesh. Pale hands on white keys. Offering difference without contrast.

With respect to the opposition interior/exterior, which is simply a horizontal version of the opposition lower/higher, we tried to incorporate the specific interrogation of it into the set by utilizing a kind of piano in a piano construction -- this to emulate the "old box in a box" structure of the narrative (Rennison 63). The gently curving wraparound wings that ran along the upstage corners of the rake were designed to echo the curves of a grand piano, their coloration in high black lacquer reinforcing this motif. In fact, the shapes, colors, and textures of virtually all of the set pieces were inspired by the piano in some way, as was their arrangement onstage. The groundplan developed more out of necessity than by design; having insisted upon a nine foot grand piano that I wanted to use as a playing surface as well as a musical instrument, we had to place it upstage where it would not interfere with sightlines. This requirement was in turn offset by what I perceived as the need for an entrance from beneath the set, which would expedite access to and from the bar for Erwin and the Old Women in particular and serve to make a connection

between images of aging, of death, and depravity, and the otherworldly creatures who populate She's [imaginary] underworld. As for the placement of the bed, her little table, and the bar furniture, these were fixed according to the general area in which they seemed to belong: the bar downstage of the underground entrance, the Waitress's table guarding the stage left entrance, her table center stage, laden with the paraphernalia of her addiction to alcohol and to cigarettes, and the bed down right. What the groundplan, coupled with the rake, forced the performers to do was to adopt circular patterns of movement and/or to move as though they were walking outside -- up, across, and down an incline. This made blocking the play remarkably effortless for the most part; furthermore, the rake sensitized the performers to the strangeness of the space and to their unusual proximity to the audience, which brings me back to the opposition interior/exterior. That is, the theatre usually locates the spectator on the *outside looking in* upon either an interior or an exterior scene -- the location of the scene matters little as long as s/he is firmly ensconced in his/her own position of voyeuristic indemnity, of exteriority, in relation to the spectacle. Even if I wanted to, I do not believe that I could reverse this relation, by which I mean that I could not locate the spectator on the inside looking out at the spectacle. But what I might alternatively try to do is re-locate the spectator on the *inside looking in* [at an exterior scene that is furnished as an interior scene], which is the implication that the piano in a piano construction was intended to convey. In addition, we tried to dis/locate the spectator's perception of verticality: if s/he is looking down up/on what appears to be a sky, is s/he on the upside looking down, is s/he on the downside looking down, or is s/he on the upside looking up? Or could s/he be upside down looking down, which is up? You can see how the perception of oppositional relations can change, grow stranger, and become almost indistinguishable depending entirely on your perspective.

"Could it be that what you have is just the frame, not the property? Not a bond with the earth but merely this fence that you set up, implant wherever you can? You mark out your boundaries, draw lines, surround, enclose. Excising, cutting out. What is your fear? That you might lose your property. What remains is an empty frame. You cling to it, dead" (Irigaray, Elemental Passions 25).

Among my several directorial eccentricities is that I like to work in close proximity to the performers and that I like to play with boundaries -- boundaries between spectator and spectacle, between performer and character, between performer and performer, between performer(s) and I/eye. I had never really given the latter much thought until I began to rehearse on the set in the Reeve Theatre after spending about two weeks rehearsing in the Studio while the rake was being built. Suddenly, I was intensely aware of what seemed like the great distance(s) across which I had to traverse (uphill, no less) in order to speak to a performer personally and/or to show her/him a move that I wanted to try. I was also aware of the terrible strain that the fluorescent lighting put on my

eyes, making my vision seem hazy, and I felt the awful weight of the stale, dormant air pressing down on me, stifling my breath, draining my energy. The performers experienced a similar reaction to the theatrical space, which was partially compensated for by [being on] the set, but which took its toll on their psychic and vocal energy nonetheless. This is the disadvantage of working in the Reeve: it is a vast, dead space. My initial response to its deadness might have been to urge mastery over the space, except that I could hardly require the performers to do what I myself could not. Instinctively, I moved closer to the stage and then right onto it. I would work a scene blocked around the piano while seated at her little table or I would stand upstage of the bar to work one of the bar scenes. I used runthroughs to gauge projection and overall composition, but I found that the actors' energy and their sensitivity to playing all sides of the stage (including the upstage side) improved significantly just by my having overstepped their boundaries -- by my having transgressed upon the performance space and thereby introjected myself into their space. Performers are extremely vulnerable, especially those who have the courage to [aspire to] make a gift of themselves to each other and to the audience. Nevertheless, they, like the rest of us, feel the need to separate "reality" from "illusion," "truth" from "fiction" -- to maintain their boundaries even within the [fictive] boundaries of "fiction"/the stage frame -- and so were somewhat unnerved when I (who was supposed to remain on the outside looking in) came up close, close enough to be in danger of breaking [through] their illusion of interiority. My purpose was not to unnerve the performers or to assert my authority; I wanted them to feel what it might feel like *to be in the other's space*, to be in my space as a spectator, albeit an "ideal" one, and *to be the other to an/other* from outside the stage illusion, who, in a rehearsal context, was me. I realize in retrospect that those performers who adapted and were even quite receptive to my presence onstage were, without exception, the same performers who were the most open to their fellow actors and who gave the most of themselves in performance. In other words, it was those whose porosity overcame their narcissism -- though not at the expense of their [other] selves/their "I"s -- who were able to extend their energy beyond the confines of the stage/frame and fill the space to overflowing.

"Matriarchal art transcends the traditional mode of communication which consists of: author-text (art product)-readers all are simultaneously authors and spectators Matriarchal art is not 'art.' For 'art' is necessarily defined in terms of the fictional; the principle of fictionality is the primary principle of every patriarchal theory of art (aesthetics)" (Gottner-Abendroth 561 - 564).

The above-noted quote is excerpted from an article entitled "Nine Principles of a Matriarchal Aesthetic," by the German feminist philosopher Heide Gottner-Abendroth. Those were the third and ninth principles. The fifth principle states that "matriarchal art cannot be objectified; that is,

turned into an object. It is a dynamic process characterized by ecstasy and with a positive impact on reality (magic)" (Gottner-Abendroth 563). While I struggle with her use of the term "positive," Gottner-Abendroth's remarks serve nicely as a segue [back] into the subject of the preservation of strangeness (which is Really where I have been writing to all along). Since the *intumescence* of nearness is contingent upon the perception of strangeness/otherness -- I cannot envelop nor can I be enveloped by the other unless I perceive him/her as an/other and not just [as] the projection/object of my own fantasies -- the *non-objectification* of either the text, the performers, the spectators, the theatrical "art" form and/or the performance space is of crucial importance to the re-creation of a feminine/bisexual/matriarchal aesthetic. I would argue that objectification is primarily a function of taking away the other's strangeness/uniqueness -- of demonstrating indifference to the other's difference (which, incidentally, is in turn a function of fictionalizing the other's Realities, of exiling her to the realm of the Imaginary, but I have already written to that at length). Oddly enough, what started me looking at the way I see difference was an art installation entitled Metaphorphosis, by the Canadian artist Annemarie Schmid Esler, which Gavin and I viewed at the Nickle Arts Museum during spring 1993. The installation consisted of a wide variety of found objects, including moulds, utensils, picks, shovels and an old chair, "all freshly ensheathed in absorbent velvet blue skins of cement and casein paint and arranged in a clean white cube-shaped room," according to the artist's own description (N. pag.). Of course, part of what made these objects stand out as other than objects was the contrast created by their coloration in vivid blue against a stark white background. However, what made them seem less like objects and more like [three-dimensional] forms was that each and every one of them was allowed to have a sensual interest/life all its own, was made to stand out from the others in some way -- sometimes by virtue of its surface detailing and/or its lack thereof, sometimes by virtue of its size, sometimes by virtue of its proximity to an/other form and/or its isolation from other forms.

"The framework you impose and posit as a given, is your skin. You shut me in, in your protective skin. Your appropriation -- my tomb Proprietor, your skin is hard. A body becomes a prison when it contracts into a whole" (Irigaray, Elemental Passions 16 -17).

This idea of an art installation proved extremely resonant for both Gavin and me; I daresay it affected the look of Piano Plays more than any other. You could see it in the bold contrast between the fleshy blondish-pink of the groundspace and the glossy black sheen of the set pieces, in the interplay of the lighting effects during scene transitions, throwing shadowy figures into kind relief and foregrounding "negative" space, and in the selection of the set pieces, each chosen and prepared carefully to exist in contiguity with other forms but never simply equated with its function, never treated as an object. Consider the bed, for instance, a three-quarter child

-size bed with bars along the headboard, swathed in black cotton: it became the "bridebed, childbed, bed of death," and the birdcage in which the songbird was trapped, unsinging (Cixous, The Newly Born Woman 66). You could also see it in the areas of overlap created among different parts of the stage; by suspending the convention that the actress playing She must exit the stage before entering upon a new scene, She became associated with all parts of the stage [at once], and all parts with one another, while still retaining their strangeness adjacent to She and to the other parts. As well, we admitted a certain lack of color contrast into our choice of She's costume -- this to accentuate the pale, almost translucent skin of Tanya's face and hands when she was at the piano or on the bed and to allude to the piano as a metaphor for culture's appropriation/objectification of the female body. Regarding the rest of the costumes, particularly those of Erwin and the Old Women, the Buyers, the Insurance Agent, the Waitress, and the Men in Bar, we discussed them mainly in terms of the cultural clichés that each character reminded us of and then Gavin determined how to push their costuming beyond the realm of opacity/cliché and into the realm of [sheer] absurdity. This he did with the meticulous attention to detail, the impeccable taste, the wonderful imagination, the sensitivity to color, form, and texture, and the sense of humor that characterized all of his work as the sole designer. You will notice that Friend and He are absent from the list of above-mentioned characters; they were the most difficult to costume because, of all the characters in the play, they are the most firmly grounded in "reality." In the end, Tina Rasmussen, who played Friend, helped put together her own costume, which was as irrepressibly flamboyant and chic as the character she portrayed, and we chose to outfit He, played by Vince Bruni-Bossio, in a loose-fitting wheat colored suit and a sky blue shirt in an effort to align him with the forces of "nature."

SHE: What can I do in the face of nature? Way over there in the background, the landscape is sometimes blue. But that's a long way off.

HE: You're getting carried away with feelings for nature, and I'm sick of memories.

(Roth, Piano Plays 188)

In her article on Roth, Lucinda Rennison says of Piano Plays that "the concentration on the main character is such that other characters scarcely exist outside her mind and reflections" (55). This is very true; not only is She onstage throughout the play, but her unrelenting fixation on the past and her obsession with death (as evidenced in/through her use of language) lend a surreal quality to the space, as though it were inhabited by ghosts from a discarded dream or an old memory resurfacing. If you look/listen closely at/to her text, it is replete with repetitive images, many of them associated with a particular color, a texture, the passage of time, extreme variations in temperature, the seasons, nature, the use of alcohol and narcotics, animals, coitus, water, music,

money, fire, and religious superstitions. Among those specific images that recur with the greatest frequency are birds, poppies, lips, a sun, a dead child with curly blond hair, the grain field, white on white, blood, green and gold, blue, wine, and the abyss. It was around these images that I picturized -- trying to incorporate them into the visuals without sacrificing their strangeness touching upon/between the actress's mouth, her body, the spectator's ear, and/or the mind's eye -- and that Gavin designed the lighting effects, which ranged from a very warm blood-tinged blush to a very cool underwater blue-green to white. As to picturization, I think the British theatre director Simone Benmussa describes this process best in her forward to Cixous's Portrait of Dora:

The stage is the reflecting surface of a dream, of a deferred dream. It is the meeting place of the desires which can only make signals to us and which, although deformed and interwoven, both accumulate and cancel each other out as they succeed one another, change their medium, pass from word to gesture, and from image to body. It is through this kind of arithmetic which, though precise, yet contains a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements, that we must be shown the "obviousness" of something that is not there I sometimes show certain details just as they are: a prop, a hand, or a profile They concentrate a desire very powerfully, but they create around them a nebulous zone which allow the spectator to divine the other, distant, ever-widening circles in which other desires are lying in wait. (9)

One of the images in Piano Plays that served to "concentrate a desire very powerfully" and which I concretized repeatedly (though sparingly enough, I hope) was the poppy. I liked this image because it worked on so many different and even contradictory levels at once: obviously, it is a symbol of remembrance taken by She as a token of love, but in the language of flowers it also represents "consolation, fantastic extravagance, and sleep -- her bane, her antidote" (Powell 152). In short, the poppy stood simultaneously for remembrance and forgetting, for sleeplessness and self-abuse (opium being a pain-killing drug obtained from the seed capsules of the white poppy). Visually, it was the only blatant stroke of red in the stage picture and yet it took on subtly different shades of meaning according to the way(s) in which Tanya used it -- in the first scene, as a whip, in the tenth, as a paintbrush, and in the eighteenth, as a prop which had irretrievably and quite without warning become foreign to her. The other images that I mined with something approaching desire were those having to do with birds. Tanya reminds me of a bird - - fragile, awkward, sinewy, but possessed of an amazing grace and strength. We built the bird imagery into the staging of all She's monologues and into her physical characterization as well, into the way that She would perch on the edge of a chair or clutch at the bars along her headboard, into the way that She would wait, poised as if in anticipation of flight, for/from He astride the piano or on the bed. Speaking of images, I feel compelled to explain that while I am

deeply suspicious of that form of visual pleasuring which is predicated on the equation of woman with image, I use imaging frequently in my work with performers. Tanya, for example, is an actress who responds extremely well to being asked for and/or given an image to work with, rather than talking about a scene or analyzing objectives ad nauseam. When I asked her what images came to mind when she first read Scene 20, the final scene of the play, she replied that it provoked an association with water, with lying in the shallow salt water of the ocean and simply letting the waves wash over her, receiving them and letting go of pain. Focusing on that image -- the product of her imagination -- she was able to let her body into the text and to let the text play her.

"And if this scene/stage is movement, if it extends to where everything happens and Woman is Whole, where instead of being acted out, life is lived, women will be able to go there and feel themselves loving and being loved, listening and being heard, happy as when they go to the sea, the womb of the mother" (Cixous, "Aller à la mer" 548).

Concerning the preservation of strangeness, of difference, feminist theoretician Judith Roof observes: "only, it seems, *in the moment of subversion does difference exist before the comprehension of its difference winds it back into the machine*" (339). Derrida verges most closely on a performative approximation of this dilemma, when, in a series of exchanges with one of Cixous's students, Verena Andermatt Conley, he writes the following:

There may be (maybe) the occasions -- and they must remain incalculable -- to divert the "contract" of the phallogocentric terror which you have just recalled. *It must leave something to be desired.* I prefer to stop today at this sentence which I am not sure is very intelligible but which, I am convinced, remains untranslatable. But what can't be translated leaves something to be desired when it appears as such, and it makes us think, which is what I like to write. And before the questions you ask of me, that must be my only rule... ("voice ii" 87)

It -- the contract between spectator and spectacle, between author/director/performer and text, between the seen/scene and the unseen/unscene -- "must leave something to be desired," must at some level remain untranslatable, and therefore strange, but not a stranger, not foreign. There is no room for movement/traversal [of self]other/wise, only an almost unbearable sense of interiority and/or exteriority. This has come as something of a revelation to me, both in directing and in attempting to write about directing, which ought to be very much like writing about writing and might be except that directing is more ephemeral than writing. When I do attempt to write about my work on Piano Plays in concrete/opaque/descriptive terms (as I have done in the last section of this essay) -- that is to say, when the text overtakes the meta-text and I try to translate

sound-images back into [phallogocentric] discourse, after having laboured so imaginatively to extract the corporeal and the visible from the Symbolic -- the text becomes utterly foreign/impenetrable to me and I feel the need to exit it, though still to mark my passage from it. The quotes from elsewhere, from other texts that I have read and have read me, and which I have allowed to stand alone and yet not apart from the main text, these mark my passage-way, and, in so doing, anticipate/leave room for mine and an/other's (re-)entry. I mean for them to set off an infinite number of [other] associations, in much the same way that I intended the image-text which I "wrote" for Piano Plays to "allow the spectator to divine the other, distant, ever-widening circles in which other desires are lying in wait," as Benmussa puts it (9). Benmussa's and Derrida's texts dramatize what I consider to be the essential difference between a male (hence indifferent/neuter) aesthetic and a feminine/matriarchal/bisexual aesthetic, which is that the former, in leaving nothing to be desired -- in leaving nothing unseen/invisible/undisclosed -- leaves the spectator with no recourse but to derive pleasure from voyeurism, whereas the latter, through arresting voyeurism and while still leaving some/thing(s) unseen, leaves everything to be desired. As a female director, I take great care and pleasure in composing the visuals, but not so that I can make desire and/or the spectator the slave(s) of the visible/spectacle, or so as to make the image the slave of the Symbolic. I value desire for what eludes it and/or the other desires that it alludes to, the visible for the sake of re-valuing the in(di)visible, the spectacle for that which escapes specularization, and the lone image for how much it can say without being able to be translated into words -- without coagulating into a single/finite/comprehensible (and therefore, apprehensible) meaning.

"In Roth's Die einzige Geschichte The Strange Woman speaks of 'the sweetest dream, that nothing will be repeated. You dream it as you die' (Rennison 57).

CHAPTER 3

*"It is time to liberate the New Woman from the Old
by coming to know her --
by loving her for getting by,
for getting beyond the Old without delay,
by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be,
as an arrow quits the bow
with a movement that gathers and separates
the vibrations musically,
in order to be more than her self."
(Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 248)*

intersubjectivities

You give me a blank white mouth. My white mouth, open, like an angel in a cathedral. You have stopped my tongue. What remains is song. I can say nothing but sing. (Irigaray, Elemental Passions 7)

Irigaray's words point to the extreme difficulty of attempting to speak (as) woman, a difficulty with which I/"I-woman, escapee" have always lived, but guardedly, holding it inside like a shameful secret (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 249). Writing has become very painful, very efforted, of late; when the words come, if they come, they do so only haltingly, soundlessly, breathing no life into me. I feel as though I have no voice. I fear that I have nothing to say. *Expiration. Pause.*

Voice-less. Saying nothing, I run the risk of retreating into silence -- into a silence so vast and shattering that I could never be torn from it. And, while I believe that silence is precisely what is called for when words will almost surely fall on deaf ears, I refuse to participate in my own silencing or that of other women any longer. I say NO to NOthing.

"*Voice-cry.* Agony -- the spoken "word" exploded, blown to bits by suffering and anger, demolishing discourse: this is how she has always been heard before, ever since the time when masculine society began to push her offstage, expulsing her, plundering her" (Cixous, The Newly Born Woman 94).

I see my role as a feminine/feminist director as being that of giving a voice to the expression of woman's pain in her perpetual struggle to find her voice. The struggle cannot be separated from the outcome; as long as she is forced to speak in words that are not her own, the threat of being silenced will always pursue her, throwing her body and her self into jeopardy. I am not unaware of the ironies adhering to this project, beginning with my assumption of the director's voice -- the voice of authority. I assume that voice reluctantly and as a last resort, reserving it for those rare occasions on which I cannot seem to communicate with a performer in any other way. Otherwise, I try to speak to performers in a voice that most closely approximates my inner voice -- the voice that I hear when I am reading or writing, the subjective voice (subjective because it is conscious of its subjectivity), the voice "that insists in silence" (Gunnars 1). This I do in an effort to make room for the performer's voice to be heard in the face of her/his own silencing, for when s/he takes the words of another into her/his mouth, s/he is in danger of being silenced as surely as if s/he were WOMAN. Tanya explains her resistance to silencing either her voice or the playwright's voice as follows: "One begins with the text. This particular text comes in the form of poetry 'poetry comes closest to approximating silence.' If poetry is silence's mouthpiece, then by taking Friederike Roth's poetry into my mouth, I take a bite out of her silence" (2). *And she finds her*

voice, gives birth to mine, calls forth the voices of a thousand other women to be raised in song, mourning the death of silence in advance of their own silencing.

One of the criticisms that was levied against Tanya's performance in Piano Plays was that there was too much pain in it. *Too much body, too much pain, a voice shot through with agony.* Not enough "reality." Nobody could be in so much pain for such a long time, they said. That this criticism came from other women shocked and saddened me; that it was made in front of Tanya angered me. Who were they to silence her voice, stop up the flow of her suffering, gag her lovely white mouth with the sterile white gauze issuing from between their pursed, painted lips? Frigidify her. Paralyze her. Anesthetize her. Seal her off from themselves and from herself. But who was I to silence them, even if they did speak the speech of the proprietor? Who was I to speak for her? What could I have possibly said that might have reached them -- they, my sisters in silence whose words still deafen me?

I have often wondered how it is that some women appear to be so utterly and so flawlessly alienated from their own and one another's suffering. I view these women with a mixture of envy and fear; the faintly accusatory, supremely indifferent tone of their voices cuts through to the deepest part of me, resounds in my head, lodges in my throat, comes between me and my ability to hear their silences and what lies beyond them. What do they do with their anger and their pain? Do they swallow it, stuff it, hide it, mute it, roll it into a tight little ball that lies in the forsaken cradle of their wombs like a dead child? No wonder they see their flat bellies as swollen, the bellies of other women as flat; jealousy insinuates itself into women's speech like the forgotten memory of the time when they first learned to regard their bodies as their enemies, dominion over their flesh as the ultimate proof of their womanhood, and other women as the competition. And will there ever come a time when their anger at having been exiled so completely from themselves and other women rises up in their throats to choke them, as mine did when I first went to look for myself among the stories of women and could not find myself anywhere -- that is, until I heard the voice of Cixous and her "silenced but savage" child Dora "crying in the wilderness?" (Gilbert, The Newly Born Woman ix).

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," which is the first French feminist text that I ever read, Cixous writes:

Woman, be unafraid of any other place, of any same, or any other....
Other love. -- 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 comes in, comes-in-between herself me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me" (260, 263)

Of her coming in, of the new love speaking to/through the other(s) me and you, Irigaray says:

Open your lips; don't open them simply. I don't open them simply. We - you/I -- are neither open nor closed. We never separate simply; a single word cannot be pronounced, produced, uttered by our mouths. Between our lips, yours and mine, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth One cannot be distinguished from the other, which does not mean that they are indistinct. You don't understand a thing? No more than they understand you.

Speak, all the same. It's our good fortune that your language isn't formed of a single thread, a single strand or pattern. It comes from everywhere at once. (*This Sex Which is Not One* 209)

Woman, be unafraid and speak; "write your self," take back the "immense bodily territories" which have been stolen from you, live in the porous envelope of your skin, speak through your white pain, be swollen with desire and with hope, love the other passionately, count her differences as rare and precious gifts, her desires as no obstacle to yours, listen for her silences -- listen intently and with your whole self for those -- give her back to herself ceaselessly and let her give you back to you (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" 250). That is what I wish I could have said to those women, my sisters, except that I was afraid and so I hoarded my silence, gathering it around myself like a cloak, wearing it like a mask.

The act of silencing herself is at once the most violent, the most selfless, and the most selfish act that a woman can perform upon herself; it results in the near erasure of the self, the near vacation of the body, but at the same time it covers over that erasure, that vacation, with silence. In other words, silence creates doubt in the mind of the other, self-doubt in the mind of the silenced/woman. Never has this distinction been so clearly and so poignantly brought home to me as when I read Tanya's response to the criticism that her performance received:

The act of silencing myself.... I was told that my voice sounded "affected" or "directed," that it was a voice that was not my own. I could offer explanations, or a defense against that criticism. imagined dialogue
1. What was that voice all about? (that voice that was not your own) me: That was the voice that most closely approximated silence. 2. That voice sounded "stagey" (that voice that was not your own) me: That was the voice of my soul. That was the voice of pain. (3)

Doubt. This is where the pain enters a woman's soul, makes it hard for her to open her lips. But it

is also where she leaves room for the other to enter her silence and her pain. Self-doubt obliges me to confess that I did not hear Tanya's voice as "affected" or "stagey," so I did not direct it. *We just talked about how strange it seems and how sad that She is a singer but She never sings while She is onstage, and has reportedly been reduced to singing in a radio choir after having sung with the state opera (201). We talked about recurring images of orality in the play, many of which connect the act of silencing to the use of force, such as the Second Buyer's attempted strangulation of She, the extrication of She's money from Erwin's mouth, and the numerous occasions on which She is directed to silence herself by various male characters. Did I miss something?* I heard Tanya's voice as though it were the voice of my own pain, calling out from her to me, coming in "between the other me," between "herself me and you" (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa 263). *Was I projecting myself onto her? For fear of you? For love of her? To come between her and you? Did I, who never let anything slide by, did I let the writing slide by, for just an instant? I hope so. The thought of this pleases me immensely; this would be a Real accomplishment for me.* Now, I openly admit that I can maintain no safe distance, no objectivity, where Tanya is concerned, NOR DO I WANT TO, for she speaks to me always of other-love. I am vulnerable in the face of her fragility, stricken in the wake of her pain, speech-less in the presence of her silence, doubt-less in the light of her doubting. Duras calls this the state of being "ravished" from one/self, which is "what's best, what's most desirable in [all] the world" (Woman to Woman 42). Her interlocutor, Gauthier, interjects that it is only in moments of "rupture," of extreme "receptivity," that this ravishing can take place: "I mean that if you don't begin with this, then it's not worth continuing, because otherwise, *only* you [and you alone] continue. If you don't begin by being invaded with this emptiness, this gaping" (42).

That is what I would wish for other women: that they too would be invaded by "this emptiness, this gaping," which opens onto the possibility of other-love, "woman for women," as Cixous exhorts ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 252). However, I must concede that this is quite impossible unless and until those women open their eyes and see themselves as having been silenced. A woman can hardly recognize the silence in another, let alone be ravished from her self/doubt, if she has never experienced her own silence/silencing and/or if she has never seriously doubted herself. I think this is why silence sometimes fails as an agent of change or a way of reaching other women; it either goes unnoticed, unheard, and therefore creates no doubt in the mind of the other, or it is mistaken for shyness and even condescension on the part of the silent. At the very worst, it is read as an indication that the silenced/woman has nothing to say, whereas, in most cases, nothing could be further from the truth and NOTHING closer to it. The French feminist critic Josette F  ral reminds us that "women say NOTHING [in language] because they have NOTHING to say, and because there is NOTHING to say about whatever they may say, since it means NOTHING say

NO to it/NO to NOTHING. By word play, chop off the neuter, passive noun and turn it into an active verb, making what was empty FULL" ("Writing and Displacement" 551 - 552).

Saying NO to NOTHING. There is a single image from Piano Plays that continues to haunt me. It is the image of Tanya, half-sitting, half-lying on the bed, legs draped over the pillow as though they were broken, back arched, head back, body trembling, and hands gesturing nervously with white wrists upturned. *A body in labour.* This was during her monologue in Scene 7, which I called "Moths Gathering." Tanya created this image of her own accord and it struck me as breathtakingly beautiful and absolutely right, so I did not question it, only accepted it -- gratefully, voraciously, lovingly, humbly -- as one of the many gifts that she constantly brought to rehearsal. Here is what she writes about her creation of that and all the other images of silencing in the play:

Perhaps there is [another] possibility; [perhaps] I was creating and negating silence simultaneously. In a desire to control my own narrative, and that of She, I obscured [certain] glimpses of myself and revealed others. I offer a final self defense: my body, as it is wont to do, betrayed me.

victimization - (poetic entrance)

1. search for a dictum: Desiring a system for becoming a victim. Starting out one must create a void -- a gaping abyss that is hungry. Hungry for pain. A photograph may be sufficient nourishment.... Then you offer up sections of your body. Points of weakness are preferable: wrists, necks, soles of feet, the points where your fingers go in, the web.... You must simply answer one question. Where are your seams? (The question must be answered so that they can be ripped apart.) (5)

I do not know what to say to this monologue, how to write back to it. I am rendered speech-less, not voice-less, by which I mean that I am relieved temporarily of the necessity to speak; this is very different from being silenced. *Inhalation. Pause.* It occurs to me again and with an even greater power of force that "the silence in women is such that anything that falls into it has an enormous reverberation" (Duras, "Interview" 175). Those words of criticism that were spoken carelessly and in unkNOwing ignorance of the stakes involved in this project for both Tanya and me, they plundered the space(s) of our silences but they did not silence us, nor did they come between our silences. Everything that I have written in this thesis, and everything that Tanya wrote in her paper on playing at playing She, has come in the form of a rebuttal -- as a way of saying NO/kNOw to NOTHING, to negation, to annihilation.

If I could sing, if I could begin all over again with a white mouth, white paper, and white ink, if I could drop words into the spaces of your silences and if they would fall softly like rain or green leaves, or

sometimes like tears, if I could speak, if I had no words left to offer you, if I had all the words in the world from which to choose, if I had to borrow the words of another, these are the words I would offer:

Was it your tongue in my mouth which forced me into speech?
Was it that blade between my lips which drew forth floods of words to speak of you? And, as you wanted words other than those already uttered, words never yet imagined, unique in your tongue, to name you and you alone, you kept on prying me further and further open. Honing and sharpening your instrument until it was almost imperceptible, piercing further into my silence....

And I was speaking, but you did not hear. I was speaking from further than your furthest bounds And it was not that I was withholding myself from you, but that you did not know where to find me. You searched and searched for me, in you.... I was speaking, not so that you would stay where you already were, but so that you would move beyond. (Irigaray, Elemental Passions 9 - 10)

This is the song that I imagine Tanya singing to her detractors, and me to mine, when, staring blankly at yet another screen to fill with scrawling black letters in a foreign tongue, I long to dip my pen in milk, or in something, anything, that would not stain the paper this way, so that I could say that I was never really here, but already elsewhere, waiting for you. I am overwhelmed by the sensation that I am suspended, unmoving -- a perfect target -- somewhere between the inside and the outside of writing. All I kNOW for sure is that I must keep writing/moving -- that somehow, I must get to the outside (or is it the inside?). I remember this sensation, from directing.

As a director, I am at the centre of all discourses pertaining to the translation of text into performance; as a woman, I have access to/I can speak NONE. Or at least that is what I try to imagine when, at the end of a rehearsal, I am so completely drained of words -- words of encouragement, words of love, words of caution, of explanation, of instruction, of intervention, of prodding, probing, pulling, and of prayer -- that I wish I would never have to speak again. The director's palette is one of spoken words on white silence(s); it is the silences that allow for the playwright's, the performers', and the designer's voices to be heard. In my opinion, there ought to be more and greater silences on the director's part than there are trifling words spoken. Words that come easily and are invisible, as is the spoken word, are easily forgotten. But it is very difficult to convince performers of this, since most of them are used to having the director tell them what to think, where to move, how to deliver a particular line, what their motivation is, how to walk, what to do with their hands, what their lines mean -- in short, they want to talk everything to death, when what they really need to do is *listen* to their bodies, their inner voices, and, especially, their acting

partners. One of the reasons I enjoyed working with Tanya and Tina so much was that they always brought such a wealth of ideas to rehearsal, and they did not just want to talk about their ideas. They wanted to try them on me and to play with one another, laughing, crying, singing, cavorting wildly in the sea of Roth's poetry and of my silence. It was one of my most "difficult joys," watching them, for it was then that I knew with a certainty surpassing all prior claims on knowledge that I was making the transition to the outside of writing, without ever having truly been on the inside (Cixous, "Difficult Joys" 5). Duras describes this as the danger zone; being on the inside is "not where it's dangerous, it's when you're trying to get out, you see" (*Woman to Woman* 5). Cixous argues that there is no inside when you are writing/directing for the theatre "because it is the OTHER who must be there completely and so you experience disappearance, your own complete disappearance [which is] extremely painful. What remains of yourself in the play, is the pain" ("Difficult Joys" 28). *Yes. And then to have to turn around and write about that process while the wounds are still fresh -- to have to lay your silence bare -- this is almost unbearable. What remains of myself in this text is that pain, which I have tried to cover over and to assuage with the words of the poets I love.*

Of all the "directorial" poses/voices that I am reluctant to assume, the one that I rebel most strongly against is the defensive pose/voice; I do not like to defend my work after the fact and I use silence to avoid defending it. This is not because I consider my work indefensible, or in any way above criticism, but because I am not sure that I can defend it without speaking simply -- without sacrificing my subjectivity and diminishing yours in the process. I will relate to you an anecdote from the past in the hope that you will be able to forgive my failure to speak in opaque defence of my work. Shortly after *Piano Plays* closed, I met with a female director from the professional theatre community and she gave me a critique of the play. While she spoke very highly of the visual aspects of the production and told me that I had a "good eye," she expressed a dislike bordering on revulsion for the script itself and for Tanya's performance within it. What was that voice about, and that body? Whatever were you trying to say with that play? She said that she could not hear anything -- anything above that "strident" voice. I should have asked her if she could hear anything beneath it, or perhaps beyond it, but before I could open my mouth, she said that she had wanted to get up and walk out of the performance -- that that voice was so bad and the play so offensive. I asked her why she did not leave, if she really felt that way. She replied that she had stayed on as a favour to the department head, who had asked her to give this critique. I remember nothing of the remainder of the meeting except praying fervently that I would just disappear; I imagined that my soul had already departed my body through my white mouth and was hovering elsewhere over dark waters and that image helped a bit. It rendered me capable of speaking simply, anyway. But I did learn something from that encounter with the spectre of the

other woman, so my silence was not entirely in vain. I learned that any theory of *différence* must address the differences among women, as well as the differences between men and women (de Lauretis, "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory" 183). Reconciling the "I" and the "we," the personal and the political, is the most daunting task facing feminist theory and practice today. "That, then, is an area that criticism should explore," says Louise Dupré, "the pinpointing of the exact point where woman as 'I' encounters the feminist 'we' and also where they do not meet, but diverge. And we have come to a time in the history of women when it is absolutely necessary to hear the 'I'" ("On the Dark Side of Write" 74).

In her more theoretical work on women's speech, Irigaray makes a distinction between "speaking (as) woman," "speaking-among-women," and "speaking of woman": "there may be no speaking (as) woman except in places of women-among-themselves *Speaking (as) woman is not speaking of women*. It is not a matter of producing a discourse of which woman would be the object, or the subject. That said, by speaking (as) woman, one may attempt to provide a place for the 'other' as feminine" (*The Irigaray Reader* 137). This distinction is a critical one, from my point of view, insofar as it goes a long way towards clarifying the adverse reaction, a reaction verging on outright hostility, that *Piano Plays* provoked among some female spectators. I suspect they came expecting to see a "feminist" play in the Anglo-American tradition, a socially engaged text that would speak of woman in her struggle against man. This tradition is essentially reactionary, in that it has internalized the male gaze while reversing its polarity. Thus there is a need for a sympathetic woman with whom the female audience member can identify and with whose gradual or sudden liberation she can celebrate. In other words, the spectators wanted to be presented with a "positive" image of woman, a character who takes firm and decisive action against her easily identifiable [male] oppressors, and in so doing appears to break free of that oppression. Instead, they were confronted with the cinematic portraiture of a woman drowning in the pain of being a woman -- a woman who makes some bad choices, who seems almost to collude with the male/other in his oppression of her, but whose other self surfaces always in her poetry and through her body. *And they could not forgive her for these -- the unpardonable sins of being a woman and being in pain. Most of all, they could not forgive her for living in her body and speaking (as) woman through her pain*. For it is true that woman is seen as guilty, to quote Cixous again, "guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being 'too hot'; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 250). This, the cult following of female guilt, is precisely what men have always counted on to silence women and to widen the schism between body and soul, voice and body, woman and woman. Is this the

culture of indifference that we, as a body of women, wish to perpetuate? Are we really so intolerant of the differences in another that we are prepared to find woman guilty all over again, while carefully disassociating ourselves from her guilt? Have we so successfully assimilated the binary thought processes of our oppressors that we have become one another's oppressors? As Duras cautions, "*the spectator needs to recognize before [s/he] can judge*. If [s/he] does not recognize this woman, if [s/he] does not recognize her attraction to all forms of oppression -- an attraction I call love -- then I can do nothing for [the spectator], nothing to help him/[her] join her. The spectator is the issue is responsible" (*Woman to Woman* 141). It is important to note that Duras's reference to this [mythical] woman's "attraction to all forms of oppression" (an attraction similar to She's) is *not* intended to advocate the adoption of the victim's stance, but to illustrate that identifying with oppression/the oppressed is infinitely preferable to identifying with the oppressor. In her words, "this woman who reinvents everything she has ever learned -- this woman is for me a woman who is open to the future (*Woman to Woman* 141).

I have but a few songs left to sing to you, my reader-other, and they are songs of (re)conciliation. I have allowed myself the freedom of speaking subjectively in this, the last chapter of my thesis; I let my "I"/my voice be seen and heard "in an effort to provide a place for the 'other' as feminine," just as I let Tanya's "I"/voice speak (as) woman for her and for She and for me in *Piano Plays* (Irigaray, *The Irigaray Reader* 137). Perhaps ours were experiments that appear to have failed and to have even embraced their apparent failure, as a mother would her recalcitrant child to protect her from the other mother's wrath. Perhaps, in trying to make room for the other as feminine, we estranged the masculine feminine from her feminine, brought out her masculine side. Perhaps we did let too much of ourselves into the text, or not enough. Perhaps we had a "desire to censor the stories that [we] did not love," as the text is wont to do (Gunnars 89). Perhaps we did not love *Piano Plays* enough, so we staged a different story, our composite version(s) of another story -- a story that we could love, our other-love story. Perhaps we did not know what one statement we desired to make with our texts, were not convinced that we had a voice, and so we tried to make too many, fashioned them out of silence. Perhaps we only desired to desire and to have a voice. I will let you be the judge; I cannot say with any degree of certainty because, for once, I am on the inside of writing.

Cixous says: "I go to the theatre because I need to understand, or at least to contemplate, the act of death, or at least to accept it, to meditate upon it" (qtd. in Shiach 107). This is why I go to the theatre too.

EPITAPH

"But where would the dream of the innumerable come from, if indeed it is a dream.
Does the dream itself not prove that what is dreamt of must exist in order for it to provide
the dream?" (Derrida, "voice ii" 71)

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