



turn to the act of writing," declares Cardinal (*Autrement dit*, p. 54). The fierce struggle of these two women—Laure and Cardinal—against the loss of self reveals however adherence to that philosophy that Foucault calls the philosophy of identity and truth. In wanting Absolute Presence, they uphold the most profound goal of the metaphysics of *pure subjectivity*¹⁴—a goal whose pursuit ends in madness. The illusory search for a *pure* unseparated body is a journey to the end of the night. Laure is fully conscious of this; her disappointment as a writer, her agonizing sense of the limits of language, run through her *Ecrits*:

Cripure is condemned in advance, even and especially it is
Pure cry [*Cri pur*] (p. 205)

The paper is smooth / smooth smooth
one can't catch up with oneself / on paper
Like a drowned person / who clings / to the rock. . . .
the hackneyed words (p. 208)

Life moves and words are apparently fixed: "I will never be there where you believe you'll find me, there where you think you can finally grasp me" (p. 320). Laure writes in order to face the untranslatable, to denounce that impasse which returns as a leitmotif in her poems. She "writes the way one strips oneself . . . of writing" (Jérôme Peignot).

Body-writing challenges the flaws in the Western metaphysics of Presence. It remains an illusion, however, as long as its deepest aim coincides with that of the system denounced. The awareness of the impasse of such an approach has allowed literature to weaken the verticality of its evolution and to multiply its orientations at the base.

The refusal of a *dualistic* and *thing-oriented* philosophy is a work of *endless* locating and undermining. It appears indubitably vain and fragmented when it limits itself to a question of "content." Moreover, more and more women see writing as *the* place

of change, where the possibility of transforming social and cultural structures is offered. Going beyond the convention Presence-God-Author and feeling the urgency of a decentralizing movement, they take up speech not to identify it with themselves or to possess it, but to deliver it from its enslavement to mastery. The consequences of such a position disrupt our slightest actions, for they challenge an entire tradition based on the worship of illusory centers and are not satisfied with *reforms*. Women's writing thus frees itself from the desire for authenticity; it *inscribes the body of the subject* (and reciprocally) without being assimilated to it. *It is itself body*. Difference is thus conceived of not as a divisive element, but as a source of interactions; object and subject are neither in opposition nor merged with each other. *Rosé saignée* by Xavière Gauthier, for example, opens with these lines:

This is not a moment of my life. It's a piece of my thigh. I've cut it into slices, between which I've spread out a few faded rugs. This is not my story. It's an enclosure and I'm unbuttoning my face there.¹⁵

To sustain a body-writing while going beyond the subject/object identification. "Writing in order to forge an *antilogos* soul" (Cixous). The woman who begins her struggle from language is carrying out a many-sided task: she is trying not only to "express the unexpressable" (Barthes), she writes (in) the space where the question of saying, of being able to say, and of wanting to say/to mean is asked. "There is no real," observes Barthes, "which has not already been classified by men: being born is nothing other than finding this ready-made code and having to accommodate oneself to it." Whence this affirmation: "The raw material of literature is not the unnameable, but certainly the opposite, the named."¹⁶ These reflections, pertinent in their way, nevertheless manifest certain lacks when it's a question of women's truths. Excluded from the named, she must also and ceaselessly work on language in order to make it permeable to feminine concepts. And for that difficult task, all the paths are lined with brambles.

Undoing, doing, and redoing interact mutually in their dispersion and continuity. Emma Santos lives writing as a series of deaths which allow her to be reborn to life. Her texts call for at least two simultaneous readings: the relation of dependency and rejection that Santos maintains towards psychiatry and the world of hospitals is also the one she engages with literature:

THE BODY DOCTOR IS AFRAID OF WORDS AND REJECTS ME. THE WORD DOCTOR NEGLECTS THE BODY AND REJECTS ME. I AM ALONE.¹⁷

WE CRAZY WOMEN, WE ONLY KNOW HOW TO DO ONE THING . . . : GIVE BIRTH TO MADNESS. . . IN MY BELLY I HAVE ANOTHER BEING WHICH LIVES AT MY EXPENSE. I DON'T HATE HIM I LOVE HIM. . . I LIVE, I LIVE AGAIN. LIFE IS IN ME. I HAVE IN MY BELLY A NEW RACE, TENS OF ABNORMAL CHILDREN. I PULL OUT FROM THE HOLE OF MADNESS A FETUS, A HUNDRED IDIOT FETUSES, MORE FETUSES. . . I'M SETTING THEM DOWN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HOSPITAL. MY LITTLE RUNTS ARE OVERRUNNING THE CITY OUTSIDE, MILLIONS OF ESCAPED EMBRYOS, THE EARTH COVERED WITH MY GERMS.¹⁸

AND YET I BELIEVE THAT THE LIVING-WORDS EXISTED BEFORE. SOMEWHERE THERE WAS AN INVISIBLE WAR WHICH DESTROYED EVERYTHING, A LONG STAY IN AN ASYLUM OF DRUGS, A CHEMICAL WAR OF CONSCIENCE. . . I'VE FORGOTTEN. . . MY FEMALE-FISH EGGS I DEPOSIT THEM AND I RUN AWAY HALF ASHAMED. I WRITE AS I AM WITH MY CHEWED NAILS, DECORATED IN THE DARK, REPAINTED RED IN HASTE. . . I PUT BACK MY FINERY-WORDS IN MY STRAW BAG, MY GAME-WRITING, PLAY LITERATURE. AS I LEAVE, I'M SAD. SOLITUDE.

SHE LOCKS UP WORDS ON A PAGE THE WAY THE RETARDED ONES HIDE SLIPS OF PAPER, . . . A REASSURING WORLD. . . I WRITE THAT I WRITE . . . I'M LOGICAL, I'M "THE ILLULOGICIAN."

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MADNESS WAS QUEEN. . . . THE MADWOMAN YELLS. THE MADMAN KEEPS QUIET EXCEPT THE HOMOSEXUALS. . . . MAN HAD THE RIGHT TO SPEAK BEFORE BIRTH. WOMAN HAS TO CONQUER IT BY PASSING OFTEN THROUGH THE PATHS OF MADNESS AND THE SCREAM.

DIE IN ORDER TO BE REBORN, LIVE AGAIN WHEN ONE FEELS AGAIN THE ANUS. THE ASS.

WRITING IS DYING. I'M NOT A DRUG FOR SALE.¹⁹

The scream inhabits women's writings. Silence is heard there. Emma Santos is not alone in her solitude. Xavière Gauthier experiences her mute words as "what can be read in what has not been said. . . . The essential, what we didn't *mean to say* but what has been said without our knowing it, in the failures of the clear, limpid and easy speech, in all the slips of the tongue."²⁰ Hélène Cixous also experiences coming to language as a transgression and a rebirth:

. . . I who had been nothing but the expression of hope in a language which had become extinct, no one spoke to me any more, not spoken myself I abandoned myself, I didn't believe myself anymore, my voice was dying in my throat, silence submerged it, I no longer heard anything but the silence.²¹

No more body thus no more writing. . . . ("Le Rire," p. 48)

When I write, it's everything we don't know we can be which writes itself from me, without exclusions, without foresight. (*Ibid.*, p. 54)

Write in order not to sink into the comfort of the drug or to become oneself a saleable drug through one's costume-words. In the hall of meaning, She suffocates, wanders into nonsense, dissipates, multiplies into millions of embryos, threatens, yells, then comes to haunt again the corridor of ordering thought, and deposits, while running away, her female-fish eggs. WHAT DOES SHE WANT? Neither being shut up in a hospital, nor the confinement of the "normal" false system. Emma Santos's drama is

that of a woman who, without refuge, wanders between two equally crazy worlds. LIVE. She wants to be reborn in order to live; savagely, she struggles against the corrosion of madness, but after each "recovery" comes back infallibly towards it like a child who asks for her wet-nurse:

IMPROVEMENT AND RELAPSE. . . . THIS BACK AND FORTH
THIS DANCE, TOSSED ABOUT REJECTED FROM BOTH SIDES
OUTSIDE INSIDE. THE HOSPITAL AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD
WERE SO ALIKE. (*L'Itinéraire*, p. 86)

In that chemical war of consciousness, another voice raises itself, light and insistent, Clarice Lispector's:

. . . I'm afraid, that to be understood . . . I begin to "manufacture" a meaning, with that same sweet madness which was up until yesterday the sane method I used to insert myself into a system.²²

. . . truth for me has never had any meaning. . . . But if I don't speak I'll get lost and, having gotten lost, I'll lose you . . . I can't already speak to myself, to speak from now on would be to precipitate a meaning, to imitate one who rushes to turn to the paralysing security of a third leg and doesn't move forward any more . . . in order to move out and attempt to materialize what I'm experiencing, I need courage. It's as if I possessed some bank notes, but didn't know in which country they were legal tender.

— It's going to take courage to do what I'm going to do; say something. Courage to lay myself open to the great surprise I will experience in front of the poorness of the thing said. I'll say it wrong and I'll have to add: it's not that, not that, still not that

What do you mean, if I've lost natural language? Am I going to have to, as if I were creating what has happened to me, manufacture my own language? I'm going to create what has happened to me. . . . I'll speak in that somnambulous language which, if I were awake, would not even be a language.

. . . I feel less and less the need to express myself. Is that again something I've lost? No, already during the time when I was sculpting, I was seeking only to replicate and I was seeking it only with my hands.

... now that I scorn speech, I'm finally going to be able to start to speak. (*Ibid.*, pp. 28–31)

Speaking, writing, touching, are closely linked in women's context. Their not-wanting-to-say transcends a simple negation; it doesn't lead to disorder or to an exclusive parceling out, but to what Xavière Gauthier and Marguerite Duras call "an organic discourse."

We have seen, from the various examples given, how much "writing and voice braid, weave, themselves together" (Cixous). Women in writing want their words to be *cries*, *life*, capable of *touching* (other lives—things and beings) and *being touched* (being touched by the reader). They live, Cixous has noted, the speech act (oral and written) as "a wrenching, a launching of self, a diving:

There is waste in what we say. We need this waste. Writing always involves slashing the exchange value which keeps speech on its track, giving to overabundance, to uselessness, their unauthorized share. That's why it is good to write, to allow the tongue to experiment with itself, as one tries out a caress. . . . she writes, as one throws one's voice, forward, into the void. ("Sorties," pp. 171–73)

Unreserved speech "doesn't turn back on its tracks" in order to reassemble the fragments. It neither forces nor imposes itself; it tries itself out, like a *caress*—these lines throw a strangely "significant" light on the whole of Cixous's texts. They dissolve, in a way, the opacity so often attributed to them. Reading again, for example, these sentences in "Regarding the Apple of the Text":

In the almost presence which stretches out boundlessly between the hand which drips words and the body which lets itself be assessed down to its guts, there are sensual delights . . . if I desire them, [they] escape me, if not expected, they are in harmony, by surprise.

Written caresses live? It depends on us to let them come near. But we can neither seize them, nor pursue them, nor give them back.²³

... a hand ... having decided to make known how it knows, rests on the fruit, smoothly,—and by its skill in holding something, without taking it, in fingering/feeling it, in understanding its whole skin, makes acquaintance with it: it's *an apple*, touches it, so precisely, feels it living. (*Ibid.*, p. 413)

... a caress found me again, a hand made me a hand again. (*Ibid.*, p. 412)

Or again these passages in *Vivre l'orange* where Cixous weaves from *The Passion According to G.H.* a conversation with Clarice Lispector and women:

There are those. ... whose speaking is so profound, so intense, whose voices pass gently behind things and lift them and gently bathe them, and take the words in their hands and lay them with infinite delicateness close by things.²⁴

... And to all of the women whose voices are like hands that come to meet our souls. ... And to all of the women whose hands are like voices that go to meet the things in the dark ... that don't catch, that attract and let come, I dedicate the orange's existence. (p. 17 [16])

Hand/writing carries with it life—one life gives, remakes, maintains another. It is the *mother*: the one who experiences childbirth neither as a loss nor as an augmentation of self, the one who “desires the other for the other” and “wants both herself and the other to be whole.” The mother “outside her role, as a non-name” and as a restorative force “which doesn't let itself be cut but takes the breath away from the codes” (“Sorties,” pp. 172–73). Cixous, for whom creation is a process of continuous childbirth, insists on writing as an “inscribing activity.” Her texts, whose forms cancel themselves out as they appear, challenge the work's status as *object* (temporal, finite). Infinitely dividing and multiplying, they are engaged in “a movement of otherness which never comes back to the same” (Derrida) and in

no case let themselves be determined by a course going from a beginning to an end:

Admitting that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, examining the process of the same and the other without which nothing lives, undoing the work of death, is first of all wanting two and both, one and the other together, not frozen in sequences of struggle and expulsion or other forms of killing, but made infinitely dynamic by a ceaseless exchanging between one and the other different subject, getting acquainted and beginning only from the living border of the other: a many-sided and inexhaustible course with thousands of meetings and transformations of the same in the other and in the in-between, from which a woman takes her forms. ("Le Rire," p. 46)

Woman is a *whole*—"a whole composed of parts which are wholes"—from which language is born and reborn. Her fluid, distended, overabundant writing challenges the divisive and classifying world of meaning; it "can also only continue, without ever inscribing or distinguishing contours, daring these dizzying crossings of other, ephemeral and passionate visits in him, in them, men and women" (*Ibid.*, p. 50). The speed with which Cixous writes and inundates the trade with her texts forces the reader to re-evaluate the book market in general and the dominant male economy of well-finished products.²⁵

Forming, deforming, informing, malformed, many forms [difforme, dix formes]? We are fully into the electronic era of "software" or of instantaneous information. Using McLuhan's definition of the auditory space in which tribal man lives, we can also say that the writerly space is "a sphere whose center is everywhere and periphery nowhere. That demands a high level of participation but excludes the idea of goal and direction" (p. 118). Perhaps life appears less agonizing when decentralization (and decentering) are no longer understood as chaos or absence—the opposite of presence—but as a marvelous expansion, a multiplicity of independent centers. Such an understanding can allow us, following Clarice Lispector's example, not to succumb to the

need for form, linked to the terror of finding oneself without boundaries. *The Passion According to G. H.* is a slow and persistent labor which takes shape from an absence or rather a pulverization of form:

... a form provides an armature for the amorphous substance—the vision of a piece of meat that would have no end is a mad vision, but if I cut that meat in pieces and distribute it according to the progress of time and appetite, then it will no longer be perdition and madness: it will be humanized again. . . . since I will inevitably have to divide that monstrous meat . . . let me at least have the courage to allow that form to shape itself by itself, just as a crust grows hard by itself . . . allowing a meaning, whatever it may be, to come to the surface. (p. 23)

The entire book—form and content—can be found in these lines. One can, however, say the same of each sentence etched; they all carry within them the heart of the writing. *The Passion According to G. H.* is an endless vision divided up into assimilable portions. This dividing up does not break the continuity of the text, it scans it, gives it a solemn and steady march rhythm. Each chapter thus closes with an ending that is also the beginning of the next chapter; each closure opens out onto a new closure.

Form makes content (and vice versa). Cixous's "L'Essort de Plusje" ["The Flight/Going Out of the More than I"] is another example where the shattering of the signifier implies that of the signified:

With the beat of a drunken wing or book [ivre-livre; allusion to Mallarmé], every life-text must reach the open sea. . . . there must be some nowhere a relationship between "pierre" and "je" [rock and I]; between "pierreje" [rockI] and "pierce" [?] or "vierge" [virgin] and "verge" [rod/penis]; and between "terre" [earth] and "tiers" [third] or "iciel" [heresky?], and between "tirer" [shoot] and "atteindre" [reach] or "éteindre" [extinguish], and between "éteindre" and "tuer" [kill]; and between "tueur" [killer] and "tuteur" [tutor]; and between "infliction" and "infiction" [non-fiction?]. . . . If the bow here is drawn and shoots blindly in the direction/un-erection of the unknown female, then the air stirs/arrows ["sagitte"], the cloud

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bursts and spurts out/ejaculates a "pluieje" [I-rain] of eggs which sprinkles/bumps ["aspèrège"] the page: a certain new item unsettles the climate heretofore assured of its durability/earthiness ["terrenité"]; mother page gasps for breath, criss-crosses, and suffers/offers herself ["s'ouffre"] elsewhere. Thus/at the same time nothing wrings/flies/comes out ["il en essore rien"].²⁶

The text body-cry-hand-mother-life is a text which, decentralized, divests itself of Presence and circulates like a gift. In order for a life to sustain another life, the hand should have the right touch—neither disengaged nor possessive—or the "author" should let herself be traversed by the other ("a relationship between 'pierre' and 'je'; between 'pierreje' and 'pierge' or 'vierge' and 'verge' . . . ") without trying to seize it, catch it or suffocate it by her presence, should be sufficiently "rich in humility, inflexible enough in tenderness to *be no one*" like an apple or a rose, "being pure joy before all naming" (*Vivre l'orange*, pp. 41, 37 [40, 36]; italics mine): "The one who lives totally for others, the one who lives his or her own generosity gives, even if his/her life takes place in the secrecy of a cell. Living is a gift so great that thousands of people profit from each life lived" (*Passion*, p. 188). One can in fact recognize the relationship "between 'tirer' [shoot] and 'atteindre' [reach] or 'éteindre' [extinguish], and between 'éteindre' and 'tuer' [kill]; and between 'tueur' [killer] and 'tuteur' [tutor]." Living without enslaving (oneself), is to understand the flight of "plusje" [morethanI] and of the "pluieje d'oeufs" [I-rain of eggs] necessary for any liberation. "There are in the heart," says Artaud, "more than ten thousand beings: and I is nothing but one being." De/personalization or non-obstruction is not a loss; it allows the emergence of possible being:

Finally, finally my envelope had actually burst and without boundaries, I was. From not being, I was. To the end of what I was not; for "I" is only one of the momentary spasms of the world. (*Passion*, p. 199)

In her own name she would have died of asphyxia. But once emerged from the membrane of self, spread out unto all the ways,

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coming to dwell at the brink of all sources. (*Vivre l'orange*, p. 37
[36])

Transcendence of the (un)known opens out onto an limitless
field. Everything remains to be done.