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Mouth Ghosts: The Taste Of The Os-Text

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[collected in *Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women.*
Lizbeth Goodman & Jane de Gay (eds.) (Bristol: Intellect. 2003): 153 – 175]

This chapter proposes a radical connection between femininity and orality. In particular it proposes the new term 'os-text' to describe the relationship between writing and speaking one's own text in performance. The os-text incorporates the uttering mouth (the 'os'), the kissing (osculation) of words into being, and the oscillation between writing and speaking. Written, uttered, kissed and oscillatory, the os-text is a challenge to the conventional authority of the performance text. Its combination of textual and oral economies in a single corpus performs a resistance to and a revelling in *both*.

I begin with the female mouth as a site of contested and contestable meanings. The filled, or obstructed female mouth is a recurrent image in literature, visual art, performance and film. Hélène Cixous writes in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' "Our lovely mouths (are) gagged with pollen" (Cixous 1981: 248). Caryl Churchill and David Lan have a female character in their 1986 play *A Mouthful of Birds* who feels that her mouth is stuffed with birds (Churchill & Lan 1986: 71). Women's relationship to 'mouths full of talk' is a familiar one; they are consistently characterised as chatterers and gossips. Female insane asylums during the nineteenth century were regularly described as more noisy than their male equivalents (Showalter 1985: 81). And yet the symptology of hysteria includes a loss of speech (Freud 1895 & 1905), and a lump in the throat at one time thought to be the womb rising towards the mouth (Veith 1965). It is at this threshold of the body that many women play out the regulation of their self-worth through bulimic and anorexic economies (Orbach 1986). These connections between femininity and orality are traced in this chapter, and the particular potentialities of the os-text is proposed as a strategy for transgressing such realms of oral occlusion, silence, and garrulousness, through a writing practice that weaves utterance in the breath of writing.

os *n., pl.* **ora** *Anatomy*. A mouth or opening. [Latin *os*, mouth]

oscillate *v.* **1.** To swing back and forth with a steady uninterrupted rhythm. **2.** To waver between two or more thoughts or courses of action; vacillate. **3.** *Physics.* To vary between

alternate extremes. [Latin *oscillare*, from *oscillum*, a swing, originally a mask of Bacchus hung from a tree in a vineyard to swing in the wind (as a charm) diminutive of *os*, mouth]

osculation *n.* **1.a.** The act of kissing **b.** A kiss

The os-text is a text which is neither written nor spoken, neither is it *both* written and spoken. This is a text which survives in oscillation not *between* but *because* of the mouth and the text. Its place is on the side of the feminine. It has no secure place in the oral or in the written, but flies instead in the face of both. This is a text which refuses stillness. A text marked by the grain of the voice. A text written in the mouths of writers.

What happens when the bite and taste of voicing is performed through the same body as the body of the writer? What does it mean to have your own writing in your mouth; your tongue in your text? The os-text describes this connection between orality and writing. Hélène Cixous suggests that writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written, (Cixous 1993: 38). I suggest that to speak your own writing in performance is to speak what you cannot know before you have spoken. In this elaboration of Cixous' phrase is a claim about the extraordinary possibilities of voice in relation to writing, and writing in relation to voice. The os-text resists the suggestion that a voice speaking a text is a repetition of what has been written. I am interested in bodies which write *and* speak; in a voicing body which has also written; a writing body which also voices. I conjure a theory for the progressive ways in which vocality and 'writality' entwine:

In the night, winds rise in her. They rush skin-close, and find the space of her. Warm blizzards arch in her chest, and her breasts swell and turn tender. Her belly answers the hefts of small gales - air filled with ochre leaves, turning on itself. She turns as the airs in her move. Leaf winds curve her a belly to meet her high breasts. Small breezes trace the surface of her skin, and when she wakes, she is plumly ripe and ready to birth. But before breakfast, she is tiny again. The flatness of her stomach inside her jeans. Her breasts are two handfuls again. And tenderless. This is an air haunting. She is nightly flooded with gusts that curve her from inside out. *wind ghost.*

Do such voices /such writing entwine or oscillate? Neither will quite do. Weaving and shivering between text and voice is the *os-text*:

(finding the breath of writing)

I write a text called 'wind ghost' for our work *The Secret Project.* I write it in the fall of 1998 in Northern Ontario. Leaves are blowing about me on my morning walks. And they are scarlet. I have been working on two ideas for the text of this work, one to do with falling, the other with ghosts. Another of the texts for the piece is called 'snow ghost.' In 1999, I try out some preliminary ideas for performing *wind ghost*, in Limerick[1] and in Cork.[2] Strangely, my first idea is the one that makes it into the finished piece. The idea is to move from stage right to stage left, speaking the text and moving as if being swept internally by the winds and breezes and sudden gusts the text evokes. Finding the force of the text again in rehearsal is like digging for a precious thing I remember being there. I bury flesh in the blood of words so that I can return to them months / years later and find it there, pulsing. In performance, in the saying and moving of these words before an audience, I find the sinew of the text again. When I wrote *wind ghost* I placed something in it that I knew I could return to, without knowing what it was. Such a text oscillates in my os (my mouth); I send it curving flesh to text; font to voice. I kiss it to life. This is the *os-text*. I let the breath of flesh and voicing arch in my chest. As I develop the piece, so I compose a score for the rhythms and intonations of the text. This is not anything I write down, but a musical pattern in my ear and mouth and body. I hear it resounding in my blood even as I write this. It rides on the waves of my moving longing flesh. It is one of the patterns on the turning cord of the performance. Listen. I hear my writing as I speak it; as I move in its tangled swept spaces; breathing in light's blush. In music's coil I conjure *wind ghost* into being, before you.

I bring you with me, slowly, from stage right to stage left.

Here we move. All of us. In breeze's arms.

wind ghost.

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In this next section I look at Ruth Salvaggio's *The Sounds of Feminist Theory* (1999) in relation to my proposal of the *os-text*. I use analyses of my own practise as a way to extend these discussions. This will lead into an examination of the work of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. It is the aim of this chapter to develop a productive understanding of the relationship between femininity, the body, writing and utterance in relation to a practice of women writing and performing their own texts (the os-text).

Salvaggio's recent book *The Sounds of Feminist Theory* is a dynamic engagement with orality, sounding and listening in relation to feminist critical writing. Salvaggio examines a range of contemporary feminist critical writing and identifies an

enervating and motivating force within it which she identifies as inflected by the energies of oral language; something she calls "hearing the O" (Salvaggio 1999: 7). Although Salvaggio's analysis is always (finally) of writing, her argument is one of the most compelling in a development of the categories of the *feminine / oral* and the *os-text*, because she proposes a revolutionary potential for the meeting of orality and writing. In the following analysis of Salvaggio's book, I pay particular attention to her work on *aurality* / *listening*, and *motion*.

Salvaggio is interested in "the way in which much feminist writing infuses the energies of oral language into a vibrant critical literacy" (Salvaggio 1999: 7). She is careful to side-step an uncritical revelling in the liberatory possibilities of voice and orality; "I stress both the distinctly oral and literate properties of the O because I do not want to seem as though I'm uncritically embracing a return to oral language and aligning it with feminine or feminist expression" (Salvaggio 1999: 8). Salvaggio, like myself, is interested in the combination of oral and written energies; the difference between us is that Salvaggio is always speaking of a textual product, whereas I am proposing something which oscillates between writing and literal orality (the *os-text*). Why is Salvaggio careful to avoid an uncritical association of oral language with femininity? The main reason is likely to be that such a 'return' as Salvaggio calls it, risks excluding femininity from the culture of writing itself, and reifying notions of femininity. Nonetheless, Salvaggio's oft-repeated defenses against the dangers of oralities suggest something of the apparently recidivist power of orality itself. The dangers Salvaggio describe lie in an "uncritical celebration of so-called feminine modes of language that emphasise the personal, subjective, emotive and potentially liberatory dimensions of voice" (Salvaggio 1999: 4). Whilst Salvaggio's reservations clearly refer to an early period of feminism,[3] it seems to me (and putting historical precedent, for the moment, aside) as possible to engage with the "personal, subjective, emotive" and "liberatory" in vocal as well as written language. I think the dangers of consciousness-raising groups defining feminine language / orality and the voicing of one's autobiographical truth[4] have passed long enough for contemporary feminist thought to engage more rigorously and bravely in the possibilities of the oral. Any political project undertaken uncritically is likely to fail. The proposal of the os-text is a proposal of an active engagement in the dynamics of writing and speaking, in which each is enervated by the other. The os-text links with Salvaggio's work on two

levels; firstly because it connects writing and orality and secondly because it brings bodily poetics into writing and performance.

I want here to clarify how Salvaggio's work informs *os-textual* practice, and in what ways it exceeds it. I am aware that the work Salvaggio identifies as resounding with the 'O' is part of a discourse on the nature of critical / poetic / autobiographical *writing*. Therefore, any discussion of bodily practice in relation to this work is always a transformation of *writing* and reading. In relation to my proposal of the *os-text*; *writing* text and *speaking* it in performance does not in itself guarantee progressive *os-textual* practice. Just as a too uncritical embrace of orality in writing can fail ("Not some chaotic outburst, but a working and kneading of sound into written language and critical thought for the very purposes of expanding and multiplying possible meanings" Salvaggio 1999: 132). I want to suggest that progressive *os-textual* practice is best enabled through *both* an engagement with orality / aurality in the *writing* of these texts, *and* an oscillatory economy between voicing and writing in performance. It is my contention that something particular occurs when the writer is also the performer of such texts. This is not to say that someone other than the writer performing these texts is necessarily of less value, this is simply a *different* engagement with text and performance.

One of Salvaggio's strands in her argument is the importance of sound / listening in relation to 'hearing the O' in feminist critical writing. This is of particular relevance to the *os-text* firstly because it may contain such 'sonorous energy' in terms of the written text itself, and secondly because the *os-text* is doubly heard – by the performance writer herself as well as by the audience. Salvaggio is interested in "the effects produced by the oral and aural reverberations of language as they infuse writing and thought" (Salvaggio 1999: 14). I too am interested in such reverberations, but I am equally interested in the ways in which the oral / aural are affected by writing. Salvaggio writes of voices haunting written language (Salvaggio 1999: 20), I want to ask how writing haunts *voice*; of writerly ghosts in mouths.

Salvaggio extends this discussion of the aural in contrasting the realm of sound to the realm of vision. She does this " . . . by turning (her) sensory antennae to what is audible rather than purely visible in critical language and thought" (Salvaggio 1999: 22). Salvaggio cites Murray Schafer's work on 'soundscapes'[5] in which he explains how

"the advent of writing and especially print in the west elevated vision over sound, resulting in our increasing lack of sensitivity not only to the sounds that surround us, but our very abilities to know the world through listening to its sounds as voices" (Schafer 1980: 11, cited by Salvaggio 1999: 137). In this scenario print replaces orality, steals its particular charge. In this process femininity is associated with the immersion of sound, and masculinity with the distance of vision. I want to associate femininity with a skilled heteroglossia[6] – with an ability to weave both the sound of voicing and the vision of writing. Salvaggio's engagement with these ideas take her into an analysis of certain critical / narrative strategies in which she identifies 'meaning on the move' – a resistance to dénouement in favour of troubling resonances, odd endings / cyclical structures. Salvaggio suggests that this is the consequence of sound / orality inflecting this writing; "that the feminist engagement with bodies in writing works to sustain the effects of sound, meanings that resound beyond definitions and final determinations" (Salvaggio 1999: 64). This is a well-made argument, but I am still struck by the actual silence of all this vocally-inflected writing. No one speaks before me. No one moves before me. I understand Salvaggio's point that such writing conjures a kind of listening / reading, and an engagement with physicality, but if I heard this writing spoken, if these writers were present here on the cliffs at Cill Rialaig[7] performing their texts before me, grounds would shift significantly.

> **yarn** *n*. **1.** A continuous strand of twisted threads of natural or synthetic material, such as wool, cotton, flax or nylon, used in weaving or knitting.
>
> **2.** *Informal.* A long complicated story or a tale of real or fictitious adventures, often elaborated upon by the teller during the telling.

How does 'meaning on the move' become moved again by the exigencies of a performing speaking body before an audience? What is the connection between hearing a voice and moveable meaning? Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* says that voice "alters a place (it disturbs), but it does not establish a place" (de Certeau 1984: 155). I don't want to install meaning. I want to set it running. The *os-text* has the potential to engage Salvaggio's 'hearing the O' with the vivid presence of performance; to set meaning on the move:

(inbreath) (inbreath) trip, shift to side. over slow, down. (breathe) runs, slipping up over. over down. (outbreath). fall (breath). down and wide. singing out over wide, to the left. wide. ocean. I have you. I'm falling. (outbreath) (two small sighs overlapping) sings, root of her, (outbreath). touchlight, falling, waterlight, over. ache. high, falling and over (escapes) (small breath). seeming. shift and echo to the side. twice turning. fly lightful, air wards, cleanly (breathe), small flicks passionful. keep sky, out over down. aches two. light folding over. small secrets, up over down. twice turning. stop (outbreath) (outbreath)

I write a text for *The Secret Project* called *twice turning*. We are working with technologies which connect movement with sound (by 'we' I mean Richard Povall and I). The sound we use most often is samples of my voice speaking my text. When I write *twice turning*, I write it with the taste of this technology in my flesh.[8] The text attempts to *write* physicality; it is characterised by verbs, action, movement, and a parenthetical breathing. We design an intelligent environment[9] for the text to be triggered in; we are interested in making something that you have to move vigorously within in order to trigger the text. Richard fragments the recording of the text, into short phrases. He programmes an environment we design together; it operates like a little window over the text; early in the performance of the piece it is only possible to trigger the first phrase, and later a middle sentence, and so on. The texts' fragmented quality is performed through the moving body of the dancer: She plays the text like an instrument. It is as if there are textual ghosts in the space which will speak their words if dynamic movement wakes them. And this is a text itself about dynamic movement. As a writer and performer, it feels as if this technology enables me to make my text three-dimensional. In the environment for *twice turning* it is possible to layer phrases of the text, as well as to slowly trigger the internal sound of a single word. Tumbles of text move with this fragmentation. Such cacophany and stillness engages with the moving dynamics of the text itself. Unlike many of the interactive environments designed for *The Secret Project*, *twice turning* does not involve the speaking of text in real time in relation to samples of text triggered by movement. This is not an *os-textual* piece because no one speaks before you in performance. But there is a voice, and it is mine, and I am speaking my writing. What does it mean then for another body to perform this piece? What does it mean when Cindy[10] performs this piece in the final version of *The Secret Project*? Does she, in some sense 'speak' my writing? Does she, in another sense 'choreograph' my writing, as she controls its ebb and flow by her leaps, curves and stillnesses? What kind of 'O' would Ruth Salvaggio hear in such a piece? In the performance of *twice turning*, Cindy's

working flesh - her breathing, arching, sweating body grazes and tangles the writing / voicing she triggers. In what sense is she the writer of this text? And in what sense am I its choreographer? The process of making this piece 'work' is one in which Richard develops the environment as Cindy works, as I watch, giving them both feedback. Cindy develops an improvisation which is structured in response to the environment. The environment becomes her dancing partner. This is neither completely open improvisation, nor set choreography. The ways in which Cindy triggers the environment will always be different (the movement / text score is always different). She (we)[11] must *listen* in a way dancers are not used to listening because the soundtrack is usually the same. If she (we) does not really *listen* and let the phrasing and phrases she triggers affect her improvisation, then the piece fails. Such a failure is a failure of the connection between fleshly and writerly longing. If there is a loop between *this* movement, *that* phrase and *this* movement, then such writing resounds with the 'O' put forth by Salvaggio. It becomes impossible to speak of this text and that body, it becomes instead a single thing, something like the 'bodies-language' proposed by Dianne Chisholm (1995), in a context of performance. Such a listening is always a double listening; a heightened fleshly hearing by the performer herself, that enables the audience to listen themselves through the heat of blood. *This* is meaning on the move.

I choreograph writing; I leave it flickering with the beat of blood;
I write dancing - I flesh it into loving speech –
muscular sayings of consonant to vowel to inbreath.

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Amongst feminist critical theorists writing about femininity and writing, one of the distinctions regularly seen as definitive of their work is whether they develop their ideas in relation to *women* or *femininity*. These arguments are intimately connected to critiques of essentialism weighed fairly regularly against such writers.[12] Such arguments turn on a fear of prescribing and reifying what it means to be a woman, and what femininity in turn might constitute. The two extremes (rarely seen so simply) either suggest femininity as clearly and directly connected to biological femaleness, or played out though a kind of liberal pluralism where any kind of difference is (apparently) 'OK.' In this fourth decade of contemporary feminism,

feminist critical theory engages with a broad and complex spectrum of meaning. What constitutes biological femaleness is up for debate in the discourses of Queer and Transsexual theory and practice,[13] just as much as liberal pluralism has been criticised in favour of a "powerful infidel heteroglossia" (Haraway 1991: 181).[14] Early readings of French Feminist texts as essentialist and therefore philosophically recidivist have been re-thought in favour of readings which emphasise the importance of playfulness, mimicry and 'tactical essentialism' (see later). Feminist thought remains a powerfully dissonant discourse, however, even as its occasional polyvocal playfulness suggests intelligent irreverence might be the way forward for such infidels.

In relation to this discourse within feminist theory about the relationship between femininities and femaleness, I am proposing that the *os-text* is *not* exclusively linked to *women* and their texts / performances. The *os-text* is certainly *on the side of* the feminine. I have no interest in claiming *os-textual* practice for women alone, but I do want to suggest that women (on the whole) are the artists making this kind of work. It seems to me that women are *more likely to* engage with writing and performance in this way. This is not to say that men are unable to make this kind of work, rather that if they do so, they engage in the dynamics and energies of femininity. Whilst this particular distinction is not the focus of my argument here, it seems to me that contemporary women artists make this kind of work because they are often in a political, social and sexual position to engage with writerly and oral energies in performance transgressively: Symbolically they have little to lose from disturbing settled philosophical and artistic categories with an os-textual practice.

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Before moving on to analyses of Irigaray and Cixous, I want to examine the relationship between vision and sound from another perspective; the perspective of *being seen to speak*. In an os-textual practice, part of the scenario of writing and performing one's text, is that one is *seen to speak*. I first became interested in this 'witnessed' speaking of text during the making of a screenic work; the CD-ROM *mouthplace* (Gilson-Ellis & Povall 1997). I was interested in the consequences of a particular dissonance between visual images (sometimes animated video stills / sometimes just stills), and the utterance of my writing. By an accident of design, and despite forty sites of text and performance – I was never *seen to speak* in this work. There were technical reasons why it was difficult to synchronise video and audio on a

CD-ROM in 1995,[15] but such limitations still impact on meaning, even productively so. In a CD-ROM which was entirely focused on the feminine / oral, and which contained a plethora of images of my mouth, and many spoken texts focused on feminine orality, *none* included mouths which were seen to speak: In *mouthplace* I am not seen to speak, but I speak incessantly nonetheless, and I am in almost every image. I came to this CD-ROM project interested in women writing and then speaking that writing, and yet we made something that wasn't able to witness this in any image of a female body that was a *speaking* female body. Although this characteristic started its life as a technical difficulty, it becomes resonant of the cultural, political and psychic context of women writing and speaking their writing in performance.[16]

In *The Secret Project* which we premiered in Cork, Ireland[17] a few people at the rear of the audience said that they couldn't see when we were speaking, and when we were triggering pre-recorded texts by our movement. Because of this, something failed for them. Re-reading the website text written about *mouthplace* in 1996,[18] I realise how this echoes with my concerns then about not being seen to speak. *The Secret Project* is a dance-theatre production. This means that our bodies are breathlessly before an audience. We speak; it's unmistakable. But because we have our voices amplified through headset microphones, and play with environments which enable us to trigger pre-recorded samples of voice with our movements, and then to improvise vocally in relation to them, *who* is speaking, and *when* becomes intentionally confused. If you are not close enough to *see me speaking*, something fails. I speak a text in counterpoint to a text I trigger with my movement. This is a loop which an audience needs to be able to witness in order to engage with. Unlike the CD-ROM, if the audience is unable to bring the realm of vision (the *seeing* of speaking) into play with the realm of sound (the *hearing* of speaking) then something particular about live performance is lost for them.

What is the nature of this difference between speaking / performing in a recorded medium (CD-ROM) and speaking / performing in a live medium? The dissonance between voices and images in our CD-ROM *mouthplace*, produces a work in which her (my) voice is lost in the darkness, or a counterpoint to a visual image. Such a work performs the troubled relationship between *being seen* and *being heard* for femininity, and it uses a writerly strategy to do this. These are ghosted, difficult connections between *this* body and *this* voicing, through *this* writing. It makes a resonant sense

that we have made a work which never witnesses a speaking female body. Instead this is a work of mourning and wickedness, in which voices are wrested from bodies, only to be lain beside them in careful canon.

This powerful difference between *mouthplace* and *The Secret Project* lies in the unmitigated *presence* of live performance. Such a difference performs itself through the trope of the feminine body speaking text, and being *seen to do so*, or not. In conjuring 'meaning on the move' within *The Secret Project*, it is *dancing* bodies which speak; a fleshly articulateness bringing the bite of text into utterance. This is no coincidence of skill. In the CD-ROM *mouthplace*, 'meaning on the move' is choreographed in the way we design navigation from this site to that, so that the user's movements construct the patterns of viewing. In *The Secret Project*, we wanted to bring the muscular knowledge of dancing bodies, into a speaking presence. In itself this is an interleaving of the discipline of watching (dance) and the discipline of listening (theatre). So that *speaking* as much as *writing* the 'O' would be a bodily thing. To see her (me / us) speak, is to assert the utterance of blood; such is the charge of performance. The ghosts we set running here, are half-seen things in the darkness; the recorded story *snow ghosts*, woven in the textures of my voice, the haikus that repeat themselves,[19] the two performances of *lingua* (one by Mary[20] and one by me) that graze English against French, Irish against Irish. This is meaning on the *move*.

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Luce Irigaray

Irigaray's radical and far reaching critique of the symbolic structuration of Western philosophy has produced a troubled response amongst critics. One such response has been the regular dismissal of her as an essentialist. Margaret Whitford (1991) argues that Irigaray has often been mis-read on this count, suggesting instead that what has been read as essentialism is part of a tactical 'double-gesture', an 'intervention' setting change in motion; not the theoretical 'answer', but a process *enabling* of dynamic cultural shifts. Irigaray's expulsion from the Department of Psychoanalysis at Vincennes after the publication of *Speculum* in 1974 was the result of censure for being politically committed. This aspect of Irigaray's work makes her writing both tantalising and difficult because it engages with both material and symbolic realms.

Irigaray suggests that the 'feminine' is not available under present masculinist hegemony, as well as arguing for the importance of women's symbolic representation. This aspect of her theory is often regarded as utopian in its willingness to imagine a post-patriarchal future. Such imaginative zeal is tempered by her regular assertion that such a female symbolic is unknowable under patriarchy. Nonetheless she scratches at its possibilities. Part of this project is to attempt to collapse the division between feminine pleasure and language. She *enacts* as well as *calls for* such a collapse. She characterises the un-knowable possibility of this female symbolic as fluid and plural, and defines it by refusing, in a radical and playful gesture, the underpinnings of what it means to define. Whatever it might be, and it is (literally) unimaginable, such a symbolic will be multiple and resistant to categorisation. Understandably then, under such a philosophical conundrum, Irigaray has been read as suggesting a feminine symbolic that is essentialist; one that is to do with the determinism of female bodies, rather than a profoundly alternative symbolic, achievable (perhaps) through provocation, and by playing at such positionality.[21] Some clusters (cultural, geographic, temporal) of women *do* have significant shared experience, but it is possible to think of such experience as culturally produced rather than ensuing from the flesh of femaleness. It is at this juncture where feigning at essentialism for a political project and essentialism itself become confused.

The relationship of femininity, bodies and language is a troubled one. The thrall of Irigaray's project is that she engages in the grand gesture of trying to imagine the impossible. She teases methodically, ruthlessly and playfully at the edifice of Western Thought, its foundational implications, preoccupations and exclusions. Although Irigaray is regularly clumped in the trio including Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous and labelled with them as a theorist of *écriture féminine*, she never uses this term in her work (Whitford 1991: 38). Instead she uses the term *parler-femme* (speaking (as) woman). This has been variously interpreted as a regression to the pre-Oedipal moment, hysterical / incoherent / irrational / a direct connection between women's bodies and a 'woman's language'. Whitford suggests: "we might understand the idea of a woman's language as the articulation of the unconscious which cannot speak about itself, but which can nonetheless make itself heard if the listener is attentive enough." (Whitford 1991: 39) This resistance to the authority of metalanguage's explanatory zeal is an important characteristic of *parler-femme*. It is a basic

presupposition of psychoanalysis that the unconscious makes itself heard through speech. The concern of Irigaray is how such utterance is gendered. I am interested in the negotiation of such speech through writing and performance. Is the work of Irigaray productive in relation to the os-text?

Perhaps the most important and distinctive aspect of Irigaray's term *parler-femme* is that her concern with both the material and symbolic realms means that she argues for the possibility of a female symbolic which would result in a different kind of language for *real women*, as opposed to a notion of a femininity within language achievable by men or women (see for example, Cixous 1981). This has been a regular site of stumbling in the response to Irigaray; since she is *not* an advocate of a pregiven identity / essence, and yet talks about the possibility of women's accession to a different language. Again, the response to this aspect of Irigaray's work is located in the elision of essentialism and sexual difference.[22]

Margaret Whitford suggests that Irigaray uses pyschoanalysis as a model in her writing. Just as the parole of the psychoanalyst provokes change in the analysand, so Irigaray's writings also act as a provocation for change. It is important to note that such change (within the psychoanalytic scene and within the intervention of Irigaray's writing) is never programmatic, static or conclusive, but contextually dynamic and contingent. Within this context, Whitford's suggestion is a compelling one because it links Irigaray's written texts with a speaking scene. In a variation on the idea of the *os-text*, Irigaray's written texts engage with readers to provoke the cultural possibility of *parler femme*; of a feminine speaking. Irigaray's texts operate in an oscillatory and troubling relationship to dominant culture and language. Their irritant playfulness, have their power in their very shiftiness, in their refusal to prescribe what might constitute *parler-femme*, at the same time as their insistence on its possibility.

It is within language that one becomes a subject. According to Irigaray, therefore, the subject is male. Whitford terms this "the monosexual structuration of subjectivity" (Whitford 1991: 38). In her early work on senile dementia (*Le Langage de déments* 1973), and later work on the language of the schizophrenic, hysteria and obsession, it became clear that Irigaray was attempting to establish a connection between pyschic and linguistic phenomena. The term enunciation (énonciation) is used within these writings to refer to the position of the speaking subject in the discourse or statement.

Whitford suggests that *parler-femme* must refer to enunciation in this sense. (Whitford 1991: 41) She goes on to elaborate that:

> This would also explain why *parler-femme* has no meta-language, since in the moment of enunciation the enunciation is directed towards an interlocutor (even if this direction is in the mode of avoidance), and cannot speak about itself.
>
> (Whitford 1991: 41)

In this scenario speaking (as) woman is always spoken *to* someone, in a way that precludes meta-linguistic discourse on the speaking scene. What is interesting to note here is that *parler-femme* is seen to refer to the act of *speaking* rather than writing. Certainly Whitford's point about meta-linguistic resistance of the *parler-femme* only makes sense if the language is spoken, i.e. is positioned within discourse in 'real time' in relation to an interlocutor. She can't speak two languages at once (although she might try). Such contingent acts of utterance suggest this moment of enunciation. It is also such kinds of utterance which constitute performances involving the spoken voice.

It is important to distinguish between *parler-femme* within patriarchy in which the voice is not heard / listened to and *parler-femme* within a different symbolic order which does not yet exist. Because women are used to construct language, it is not available to them. Irigaray uses the metaphor of the mirror in this regard, suggesting that women are the tain, and function as reflective material with no possibility of seeing themselves. Irigaray wants women to enter the symbolic as female subjects, and in this way forge the beginning of a different symbolic order.

In this yet un-signified female symbolic, grounded not in the destinies of anatomies, but in the material processes of cultural operation, Irigaray calls for a different kind of difference, not the 'minus A' to man's 'A', but a 'B'. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that Irigaray's insights regarding the primacy of the phallus indicate "not a truth about men and women, but the investments masculinity has in disavowing alterity" (Grosz 1990: 172).

To elaborate on the ways in which women are used to construct language, one can think of 'Woman' as a 'universal predicate' (Whitford 1991: 46) i.e. just as the predicate within grammar expresses something about the subject, so women function to elaborate something about men within language. However, if 'Woman' is configured as a universal predicate, it suggests that the price of bringing 'Woman' to language is the end of signifying itself. Another tack would be to shift the enunciatory position. Irigaray suggests that there could be a two-way predication, or an enunciation not yet qualified by a predicate (Whitford 1991: 46). Perhaps another way to 'shift the enunciatory position' would be to engage in the grammatic and oscillatory trouble of *writing* as well as *speaking* one's own text (*os-textual* practice), without recourse to a beginning and ending for such a scenario. Will she predicate nonetheless?

In *Lingua* from *The Secret Project*, I speak the etymologies and dictionary definitions of the words 'secrecy,' 'secret,' and 'secretive.' This is a text adapted from that definitive of all texts; the Oxford English Dictionary. This is a text characterised by its attempts to install meaning; to capture the sense of words. I work with such a text for that very reason; I want to set meaning running within its definitive phrases. We design an environment in which I can trigger samples of my voice speaking French. The French words and phrases are all associated with secrecy; mysteries and hidden things. And then I move. I nudge French text, and counterpoint it with my English definitions. I use physical phrases which suggest hidden things, but with an assurance, that whatever secrecies I conjure here, they are *on the move*. This is a pleasure in metonymy. I want to tell you that this skill of interlacing text to text to physical effort is an *un-thought* thing, a thing enabled by much rehearsal and discussion, but that is finally – if it *listens* aurally, physically and vocally, a forgotten thing. In rehearsals when we are working on our structured improvisations in these environments, when the work is good, we finish performing and have little sense of what we did. Cindy expects this. I finish a rehearsal of *Lingua*, with Mary and Cindy watching; they both say the work is hugely better than earlier, but I can't remember what I did. Cindy says 'Of course! That's the sign of good improvisation.' What does this mean? And what does it mean for an audience as well as the performer? Mary and Cindy help me recall what I did, not so that I can reproduce it, but so that I can find the taste of the possibilities of the piece, the kinds of gesture pools, the spatial dynamics, the particular playfulness with layering and repetition. In performance, when this works, when we are listening, speaking, moving alive things, then the

complexity of our endeavour becomes a clear and single thing, wrought from our steady attentiveness to each moment. There is something I struggle to tell you which is to do with this attentiveness, which results in a radical forgetting. I want to say it is the operations of the unconscious in performance, except that is not quite it, or not quite possible. Let me leave it then, that I want to say it nonetheless. I want to suggest that this is why the work is forgotten, because it is both vividly present in the moment yet engaged with a particular level of consciousness. I recall Whitford on Irigaray's *parler-femme*; "we might understand the idea of a woman's language as the articulation of the unconscious which cannot speak about itself, but which can nonetheless make itself heard if the listener is attentive enough." (Whitford 1991: 39) I stumble in text to articulate something, which by its very resistance suggests something of Irigaray's *parler-femme*. I want to suggest that within such *os-textual* practice, what is heard is the consequence of a skilled performative listening which facilitates the attentive listening of the audience. I re-read Irigaray's essay *This Sex Which is Not One* (1986), and find this:

> She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished . . . When she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere. From another point of pleasure or of pain. One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing *an "other meaning" always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed congealed in them.*
>
> (Irigaray 1986: 29)
>
> [Irigaray's emphasis]

Strangely, this reads like a description of our work on *The Secret Project* ("She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished . . . When she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere"). One of the effects of weaving text with text through physicality is both a claiming of and a moving-through language worlds ("*embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words*"). In this work "listening with another ear" becomes a collaborative discourse, played out between performers and audience. This ear which is not one.

Irigarayan philosophy has radical implications for language, utterance and signification. Irigaray never discusses performance or concrete strategies for bringing about her vision of such a powerfully alternative symbolic. She does, however, perform a strategy in her mimesis[23] of the critical voices of philosophy and criticism. I take this gesture, that of mimesis, and place it here. Just as *parler-femme* has no meta-language, so Irigaray's strategies are performative rather than descriptive. I will not tell you what you should do, because I do not know. You must find your own ways. But I do it here. In my voice. Inflected through my knowledges, and acted like the wise actresses, feminine things can be.

In her essay 'When our Lips Speak Together' (Irigaray 1986: 205 - 218), Luce Irigaray writes a performative text conjuring the relations and possibilities of feminine sexuality and orality. Her title purposely elides oral and genital feminine lips, mirroring the symbolic slippage common in Western discourse. In this revolutionary text, Irigaray suggests a feminine orality characterised by plurality: it isn't possible for simply one word to pass here:

> 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 voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. You/I: we are always several at once. And how could one dominate the other? Impose her voice, her tone, her meaning?
>
> (Irigaray 1986: 209)

Here Irigaray evokes a multiple feminine orality in *text*. She does not speak it; I read this rather than listen to it. Tenors of textuality and orality playfully mingle here in a provocation of the possibilities of a feminine language. Irigaray writes to me, she doesn't kiss me, though perhaps she might if she were here. I write / kiss to you, here again, as I visit this kissing loving text. Irigaray's text of plural voices, of unceasing layering, repetition and reworkings is made concretely and productively possible in the engagement of writing, technologies and performance. Our work is an example of this. None of our mouths open simply; we speak and move to call-up

another speaking. Such voices might be our own, or one of the other two, or both of them. We always play anew in the thrall of them; "several ways of speaking resound endlessly." None of us can dominate the meaning because we don't have it – we make it every time we perform, *differently*.

lip *n.* **1.** *Anatomy*. Either of two fleshy, muscular folds that together surround the opening of the mouth.

2. Any structure or part that similarly encircles or bounds an orifice: as *Anatomy.* A labium.

3. *Slang.* Insolent talk. **- bite one's lip.** (i) To hold back one's anger or other feeling. (ii) To show vexation. **- button one's lip.** *Slang.* To stop talking. **- smack one's lips**. To relish or gloat over something anticipated or remembered.

™

Hélène Cixous

Hélène Cixous is among those theorists commonly included under the rubric 'French Feminism' and associated with *écriture féminine* (feminine writing).[24] Although widely known outside of France as a theorist, the majority of Cixous' publications have been fiction. Importantly for this study, Cixous' recent fiction includes play texts written for a context of live performance. Much of Cixous' work is concerned with writing and sexual difference. Whilst Irigaray is also concerned with the possibilities of articulating sexual difference, she does so in terms of a specifically female language. Cixous in contrast to this articulates her terms of sexual difference in relation to a femininity which can be enacted by men or women. Cixous has also been accused of ahistorical essentialism, and in a similar movement to the critical response to Irigaray, recent commentators have re-thought this relationship between theories of sexual difference and essentialism in relation to her work.[25]

For Cixous, writing is a revolutionary practice. One of the main reasons for this is its potential to undo binary structures. Writing is also powerfully corporeal for Cixous. The combination of these two gestures - the bodily undoing of binary opposition within writing results in a practice of fiction / theory concerned with destabilising narrative / lived subjectivity, and re-inscribing somatic experience. Cixous' association with *écriture féminine* may seem contradictory to a practice concerned with undoing the

opposition feminine / masculine.[26] For Cixous, however, *écriture féminine* is 'feminine' in two senses. Firstly she believes women are presently closer to a feminine economy than men. Consequently she sees in women's writing both the possibility of including other experience and the subversion of existing structures. The relationship to the mother's body is also important in this context. For Cixous the rhythms and articulations of the maternal body continue to affect the subject into adult life, and this provides a connection to the pre-symbolic union between the self and m/other. The subject's relation to the self, the other, language and the world is affected by this connection. Secondly, (according to Cixous) a feminine subject position is not constructed around mastery, and does not, therefore, appropriate the other's difference. Because of this, Cixous suggests that feminine writing will bring into being alternative forms of perception, relation and expression.[27]

Cixous' most well-known work is the essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (Cixous 1981) first published in 1975 / 6. In this essay Cixous calls for a feminine writing that will be powerfully physically located, radically transgressive and pleasured / pleasurable. Elin Diamond suggests that the writing called for in this essay is as much revolutionary myth as practice. This seems to me a useful way to think about this essay and Cixous' work in general.

I am particularly interested in Cixous' use of the feminine voice as a trope / referent within her fiction and theory. This is not always a use of the term 'voice' as a metaphor for a writing practice. Feminine vocality also functions as an 'inspiration' in these texts, a lived / imagined experience 'to be brought' to such writing, something like Salvaggio's 'O'. Interestingly, the opposition between speaking and writing is one of the binaries Cixous lists at the beginning of 'Sorties' (Cixous & Clément 1986). How then, can an undoing of such opposition only be sought in writing itself? It is as if Cixous uses the extraordinary possibilities of the feminine voice to inscribe such vocality in her writing, but never approaches what the possibilities of using such writing to inscribe vocality in literal voices, might be.

In the following quotation from 'Sorties' Cixous weaves such a writing practice from vocal and textual femininity:

> First I sense femininity in writing by: a privilege of voice: writing and voice are entwined and interwoven and writing's continuity / voice's rhythm take each other's breath away through interchanging, make the text gasp or form it out of suspenses and silences, make it lose its breath or rend it with cries.
>
> (Cixous 'Sorties' in Cixous & Clément 1986: 92)

In this extract, writing and voice exchange breath and rhythm. Cixous writes of a text which has vocality - it gasps and cries. Yet I hear nothing. There is no body before me breathing into writing, moving rhythmically flesh to text. Cixous powerfully theorises and practices a feminine writing which calls up feminine vocality / corporeality. Implicitly Cixous' work invites the theorisation and practice of the os-text, a practice which inscribes the transgressive possibilities of writing within vocality / performance. A site in which she can breath into text before me / beside me / inside me.

What does it mean for an os-textual practice that women (according to Cixous) are closer to the pre-symbolic connection with the mother? Here the maternal voice figures undifferentiated plenitude. There are certainly dangers of essentialism ghosted in this terrain; ghosts that promise priveleged access (for women) to a site where the 'other' is not yet separate from the subject. If this connection is only figured in this way then it is a philosophical and political failure. For this realm to be productive, it must operate as a half-truth. It must figure as a 'revolutionary myth' (Diamond 1997: 83) inciting radical departure from the patriarchal structurations of language, whilst at the same time opening up the possibilities of *difference* for subjects figured as feminine in relation to the maternal. Women have a different relation to the maternal because they have the potential for maternity themselves, as well as being closer (according to Cixous) to the 'equivoice' - a voice that brings into being / is processual in opposition to the subject / object monoliths:[28]

> Text, my body: traversed by lilting flows; listen to me, it is not a captivating, clinging "mother"; it is the equivoice that, touching you, affects you, pushes you away from your breast to come to language, that summons your strength; it is the rhyth-me that laughs you; . . . Voice: milk that could go on forever. . . Eternity: is voice mixed with milk.
>
> (Cixous 'Sorties' in Cixous & Clément 1986: 93)

Cixous' imagery of a 'voice mixed with milk' powerfully inscribes the maternal agency in the subject's shift from pre-symbolic to symbolic realms. Later in the same essay Cixous writes "She writes with white ink." (Cixous 'Sorties' in Cixous & Clément 1986: 94) suggesting that such bodily and fluid agency is a writerly as well as vocal influence. In these revolutionary scenarios, the maternal body (her voice and milk in particular) figures a practice of writing which mixes up oralities - the suckling of milk and utterance, and confuses who it is that utters, the mother or her child. Such fluid tectonics find their way into textuality in the metaphor of the woman writing in milk.

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In our 1997 CD-ROM *mouthplace* there is a section on insanity. You can find it under an icon of cut stitches. When you click 'Special Mark' appears on your screen, written in my handwriting. At the opening of the insanity section, there is a video loop of my face moving, milk slowly dripping from my mouth. As you move the cursor over the surface of this moving image, so quiet whispered texts can be heard:

I'm bruised
I've got bruises
they're deep and slow
like drugged hornets
I'm body-stuck
and hurt in slow motion

your little kisses
little half-kisses
ached-for breaths of skin to skin
I am half-surprised
you ever came to me
woman.

and when you click, you hear the following words in a clear voice:

I jumped in with my lips clenched, gasped at the cold,
and a swarm of hummingbirds flew out of my mouth.

As milk moves from my lips in the field of vision, so flowing visions move from my mouth here in the realm of sound. I write this to nudge you towards witnessing this seeing and hearing spun from milky trajectories of mouths and writing.

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In the extract from Cixous' 'Sorties' quoted above, the maternal and the child's voice, suckling / maternal voice, suckling / speaking and suckling / writing are webbed together in non-hierarchical connection. This could be figured as a Deleuzian[29] assemblage in which subject and object are understood not as discrete opposites but as a series of flows and intensities, linked in heterogenous ways.[30] This is a useful way of thinking these relations, since it resists staging any of these scenes as necessarily productive of any others. This is important because Cixous is not only interested in describing a psychoanalytic scene but in provoking a writing practice. The following quote is from 'Breaths' (1975):

> The voice says: "I am there." And everything is there. If I had such a voice, I would not write, I would laugh. . . . (it) rises from the greatest dilation of her breast, without listening to herself. Does not assume airs . . . If I had such a voice, I would not write, I would fight.
>
> (Cixous 'Breaths' in Sellars 1994: 50 - 51)

Here Cixous again inscribes maternal plenitude as voice. This is a voice which suggests a circumvention of writing - a kind of imaginary pure access to jouissance and revolution. What is important here is that Cixous' fictional voice is inscribed here in *writing*, in a writing pleasured and motivated by such a voice. It is not *voiced*.

Elizabeth Grosz in her study of corporeality, *Volatile Bodies* (Grosz 1994) analyses orality and sexuality in relation to a range of theorists. According to psychoanalysis, during the development of the sexual drive, the sensuality of sucking milk, shifts to other bodily parts (Grosz 1994: 54 - 5). However, the mouth remains especially priveleged in terms of its sensitivity to sensations - introceptively & extroceptively - "a primordial link . . . connecting perceptions from inside to the outside of the body" (Grosz 1994: 93). In the following quote, Grosz refigures oral sexuality as a kind of connective zest:

> oral sexuality can be re-transcribed in corporeal terms. Instead of describing the oral drive in terms of what it feels like, as an endogenously originating psychical representation striving for an external, absent or lost object (the fantasmatic and ultimately impossible object of desire), orality can be understood in terms of what it does: creating linkages with other surfaces, other places, other objects or assemblages. The child's lips, for example, form connections (or in Deleuzian terms, machines, assemblages) with the breast or bottle.
>
> (Grosz 94: 116)

It seems to me that whilst the participants of such assemblages might change, the essential structure of their connective operations does not. In adult life and in the context os-textual practice, such connections / machines / assemblages involving orality matrix writing, utterance, performance instead of breasts or bottles.

In 'To Live the Orange' (1979) Cixous elaborates her experience of the voice as a trace of the articulate body:

> I can adore a voice: I am a woman: the love of the voice: nothing is more powerful than the intimate touch of a veiled voice, profound but reserved coming to awaken my blood; the first ray of a voice that comes to meet the newly-born heart. My heart is in the belongingness with a voice fashioned out of shining darkness, a nearness infinitely tender and reserved.
>
> (Cixous 'To Live the Orange' in Sellars 1994: 84)

In this extract, Cixous speaks simply of her love of the voice. This is not the maternal voice, yet her description certainly recalls her writings on the maternal. Such a voice (part of a prelude to a tribute to the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector) is marked by its nearness and tenderness. She goes on:

> There are those of whom I cannot speak outside with words that come out making noise. Out of love for the infinite delicateness of their voices. Out of respect for the delicateness of the nearness. 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, to call them and lull them without pulling them and rushing them. There are women who speak to watch over and save, not to catch, with voices almost invisible, attentive and precise like virtuoso fingers, and swift as bird's beaks, but not to seize and mean, voices to remain near by things, as their luminous shadow, to reflect and protect the things that are ever as delicate as the newly-born.
>
> (Cixous 'To Live the Orange' in Sellars 1994: 84)

In this second passsage, it is quite clear that Cixous uses the maternal metaphor to figure her love of this voice, as if such moving voicing were an uttered act of mothering. Certainly there are dangers here in reifying a romanticised version of the maternal (a site of material oppression for women, as well as pleasure), but of importance here, is that once again the maternal is figured in webbed relation to the voice and writing. This extract also recalls Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*, cited earlier; "And how could one dominate the other? Impose her voice, her tone, her meaning?" (Irigaray 1986: 209). And here is Cixous; "There are women who speak . . . not to seize and mean, (these are) voices to remain near by things" (Cixous 'To Live the Orange' in Sellars 1994: 84). Both suggest a voicing that sets meaning in motion.

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Hélène Cixous' radical textual practice has been enormously influential in re-thinking writing in relation to the body, and the female body in particular. Yet it is in *performance* that writing's transgressive possibilities might be staged in an altogether different paradigm. It is my contention that the choreographer / writer / performer has the potential to bring into being alternative forms of perception, relation and expression; a particular access to making *" the text gasp . . . make it lose its breath or rend it with cries"* (Cixous 'Sorties' in Cixous & Clément 1986: 92). With the addition of technology, this relation of physicality and vocality in choreography / performance can be textured in new ways, troubled into unlikely alliances.

Most structures of contemporary performance training separate voice / text work from physical / choreographic work. Dancers, in my experience, often stumble at voice work, despite their articulate bodies. Yet it is precisely this detailed physical knowledge, which, with training, also makes them

extraordinary performers of vocality. Such physical knowledge also brings something particular to digital technology. Perhaps our epistemologies are more likely to refuse a separation between the technologies that become our tools and our dancing / uttering bodies.

In the work of weaving bodies, writing, utterance, sound and technology, it is the troublings of improvisational grazes that most profoundly recall Cixous' work. Her crying out for a plural writing, one marked with bodies and their voices[31] seems to me to lie here in the playful entanglement of digital technology and the voice / body / writing / sound. Here in the linear lines of theory, I must place my elements one after the other, in different orders divided by slashes, to evoke a sense of their mingling. There is much in performance which resists analysis, but I continue to try and articulate what happens in sweat and light. I too want to write a writing that will antagonise resistance.

The Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada
Out of the Box: The Future of interface
September 1998

Air Canada is on strike. The Sample Cell and BigEye have not arrived from Ohio. It's Saturday, and I'm performing this evening. This is the first time I've performed without Richard setting up the environments. Nothing on the 8am bus, or the 9am. At 9.30 Bill walks into the studio with a grin on his face and a parcel in his hand. Scott and I set to work. It takes us all day, a move of studios and several borrowed lamps to get set. 'Chorda' is the last one. It's nearly 6 and the performance is at 8. We run the choreography and tweak the settings. My knowledge of the piece is a corporeal one. I know clearly how it feels to perform when the settings are right, but light levels, camera proximity, and what I'm wearing affect these settings. I try to guide Scott with my physical understanding of the piece, but I struggle for a language - "It felt much richer" "It needs to have a clear threshold here that I can move beneath" "I need to be able to build up the layers more." Between us we weave a space for me to perform in conjured from the memory of flesh and the pressure of fingers on keys.

In this work, we make spaces for entanglement. These are precisely designed to be imprecise. Their textures are composed from choreographic fragments, made to

conjure sound / text from its motion in particular ways. This practice demands that I am alive to every moment of performance; I weave with pools of choreography, utterance, and recorded text / sound. What I trigger with my motion affects what I say / sound / how I move again. Listening, speaking and moving become a related series of energies. I push at language to tell you what this is.

The movement of air in bodies variously occluded to produce sound, is not profoundly different to the movement of information within digital technologies. Exchanges between these two (the uttering body and technology) is not a radical conceptual leap, especially if the relation between writing, utterance and physicality is already one of connective flows and intensities. Perhaps the most productive body of theory in relation to these ideas is Deleuze and Guattari's 'assemblages' in which one element is never dominant over another, but are combined in terms of energies, processes, durations, corporeal substances and incorporeal events (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

Elizabeth Grosz suggests that Deleuze and Guattari's reconception of corporeality in these terms is key to re-thinking bodies, the body is:

> understood more in terms of what it can do, the things it can perform, the linkages it establishes, the transformations and becomings it undergoes, and the machinic connections it forms with other bodies. . . In place of plenitude, being, fullness or self-identity is not lack, absence, rupture, but rather becoming.
>
> (Grosz 1994: 165)

Such 'becoming' is a productive way of thinking what happens in the physical - vocal – written - digital performance I am describing here; a processual matrix, in which the performer, her writing, her live voice, her recorded voice, the digital tools, the programmer and composer comprise a webbed series of liaisons, which shift and mark each other with durational pulses. Such liaisons are;

> composed of lines, movements, speeds, and intensities, rather than of things and their relations. Assemblages or multiplicities , then, because they are essentially in movement, in action, are always made not found. They are the consequences of a practice.

(Grosz 1994: 167)

Thinking corporeality in discourse has pressing implications for a choreographic practice which involves bodies which write, dance and speak. Cartesian dualisms of mind and body (read writing and dancing / writing and speaking), are simply not productive in relation to these practices. Women's troubled relationship to bodily symbolics means that she is positioned differently to men in these economies; her body has been represented / constructed as "frail, imperfect, unruly, unreliable" (Grosz 1994: 13) and is symbolically associated with the body in the mind / body pair. For femininity then, re-working such weary dualisms becomes a necessary tenet. The os-text does this with noisy texts in its arms. In the trouble, mess and grubbiness of performance, with technology and theory as partners, such re-thinking, such thinking again seems to me to make possible the kinds of perception, relation and expression Cixous has so often cried out for, and femininity's unruliness is a twinkling skill for such a troubling.

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[1] At a lunchtime concert in the *Irish World Music Centre*, at the University of Limerick, Ireland 15th April 1999.

[2] At the Triskel Arts Centre, Cork, Ireland for the opening of the *Intermedia Festival*, 1st May 1999.

[3] During the first ten years of contemporary feminism (approx. 1965 – 1975), there was a movement both within grass roots and theoretical feminism that did exactly what Salvaggio describes herself as avoiding here; it engaged in an uncritical celebration of 'feminine' modes of language, that emphasised the personal, subjective, emotive and liberatory dimensions of voice. In relation to performance practise this manifested itself as a staging of 'positive' voices of women. This is Lynda Hart on this period of feminism in relation to performance practice:

> "The optimism of the 1970s, in which feminist theatre companies were operating with the idea that presenting 'positive' images of women would counteract the misogyny of masculinist representations of women, gave way to the realisation that differences between, among, and within women precluded any direct access to what constitutes 'positivity.' . . . In the histories of these collectives we can observe the process of feminists wrestling with what Derrida has called 'women as truth' and 'women as untruth,' both remaining 'within the economy of truth's system, in the phallogocentric space.' (Derrida 1978b: 97) Such oscillation between competing claims for a definition of 'woman,' raises the problem of essentialism and the necessity of performing gender and sexuality in a register that disrupts a metaphysics of presence" (Hart in Hart & Phelan 1993: 6-7).

[4] During the early years of feminism, particularly in the United States, there was a 'consciousness raising' (CR) movement. This consisted of groups which encouraged and validated the telling of personal histories / stories and fantasies as a way toward 'women's liberation.' This is not to denigrate the importance of speaking one's experience in a supportive context, but such groups tended to do so uncritically, and validate anything that was said because it was uttered by a woman. Part of the consequence of this was (i) that the tenets of CR became powerfully associated with the broader meanings of feminism, and (ii) that in trying to dislodge and problematise these meanings, contemporary feminism has become overly sensitive to being accused of essentialism. The pleasures and possibilities of the oral operate within this historical context within feminist history. "In the 1960s and 1970s, 'consciousness raising' stressed the importance of women sharing their experiences in order to understand that these experiences were not only personal and individual but were political,

produced and affected by the prevailing social and cultural structure and systems" (Harris 1999: 145 - 6).

[5] This is work which focuses on the ways in which the cultural primacy given to *sound*, is a nonwestern phenomenon, in contrast to the primacy given to *vision* in most western cultures. See Schafer (1980).

[6] Heteroglossia is a term used by Bakhtin (1984), to describe the mixing of discourses within carnival. I use it here to suggest the *uttered* and *written* nature of what I want to associate with femininity, and the contingent, politically-inflected meanings that might be wrought from such apparently dispersed discourses.

[7] The Cill Rialaig Project, Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry, Ireland is an International Artist and Writers Retreat. Cill Rialaig was a pre-famine village, circa 1790. The village was abandoned over fifty years ago and re-built during the 1990s. Cill Rialaig is situated high on the edge of Bolus Head, Ballinskelligs. I was resident here during the writing of this article.

[8] *half/angel* spent several years developing expertise in motion-sensing systems in relation to text and choreography. This work took place largely during residencies at STEIM, Amsterdam (July & September 1996), Firkin Crane, Cork, Ireland (November 1997) and The Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada (April & September 1998 / August & September 1999).

[9] These 'intelligent environments' are made using a software programme called 'BigEye.' Performers are not required to wear any identifying costumes / nodes, or to 'hit' particular triggers in the space. Instead movement information is fed into the computer through a simple video camera which surveys the space. This means that performers are physically unemcumbered by the technology. This also means that it is possible to have a fluid relationship with each environment because it is sensitive to qualities of movements, in ways that all of us (performers and programmers) design and navigate together.

[10] Cindy Cummings, performer in *The Secret Project*.

[11] This profoundly corporeal *listening* became a key process for all of us (Cindy Cummings, Jools Gilson-Ellis and Mary Nunan) performing within the intelligent environments designed for *The Secret Project*.

[12] See discussion of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous later in the article as examples of this tendency.

[13] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and Kate Bornstein *Gender Outlaw* (1994).

[14] Salvaggio cites Haraway on this; "Complexity, heterogeneity, specific positioning, and power-charged difference are not the same thing as liberal pluralism . . . The politics of difference that feminists need to articulate must be rooted in a politics of experience that searches for specificity, heterogeneity, and connection *through struggle*, not through psychologistic, liberal appeals to each her own endless difference . . . Experience, like difference is about contradictory and necessary connection" (Haraway 1991: 109, cited by Salvaggio 1999: 53).

[15] In the production of our CD-ROM work *mouthplace*, we found that files which contained audio as well as visual information were prohibitively large, and would take overly long to load when viewing the work. It was difficult as a consequence to video me speaking and then use the audio *and* the visual information on screen. Instead we made a decision to counterpoint visual and aural worlds by design. A consequence of this is that the CD-ROM contains no sound that was recorded at the same time as the images were filmed. Most of the video loops in the CD-ROM are animated stills: we reduced the amount of 'frames per second' in order that they might load more easily. This gives these loops a distinctive staccato quality that contrasts with the high quality of the sonic worlds that accompany them.

[16] See Laurie Anderson's performance from 'For Instants', for another example of performance practice in which *seeing* and *speaking* are dissonant (Anderson 1994: 114 - 5).

[17] *The Secret Project*, a dance theatre production by *half/angel*, European Premiere, Firkin Crane, Cork, Ireland 4th November, 1999.

[18] This text was written as part of the mouthplace website: www.halfangel.org.uk

[19] These were *heart*, *palm* and *echo:*

heart
my small heart
flying towards
the finish line
without me

palm

if you're falling
so is the snow
perhaps
you will also
melt
in my palm

echo
I have
your echo
in me

[20] Mary Nunan, performer in *The Secret Project*.

[21] See Moi 1985: 127 - 149 for an example of critical dismissal of Irigaray as an essentialist who pays no attention to the material conditions of women's lives.

[22] Such 'difference' is not a difference from a pregiven norm, but 'pure difference' - difference in itself, difference with no identity. Such 'pure difference' refuses to privilege either term. See Grosz 1995: 53

[23] Irigarayan use of the term 'mimesis' refers to a process of miming dominant discourses, as a way of engaging with and troubling such dominance. Its most contentious manifestation, is as a mimicry of dominant discourses of the feminine, a process intended to puncture their descriptive force. Critics of Irigaray's tactics usually profess unease at the possibility of negotiating traditional realms of femininity with resistant flair. Such discussions have been developed further in the discourse on camp, cross-dressing and Queer theory. See Meyer (1994), Garber (1992) and Case (1996).

[24] Écriture féminine is experimental writing, initially French, whose gesture is to inscribe *femininity*. The term has been used to describe an invigorated 'writing through the body' such as Cixous calls for in her revolutionary text 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (Cixous 1981). See Guild (1992) for a summary introduction to the term.

[25] See introduction to Sellers (1994) re: Cixous, and Whitford (1991) re: Irigaray.

[26] Sometimes termed the 'other bisexuality' by Cixous, see 'Sorties' in Cixous & Clément 1986: 84 – 5.

[27] I am indebted to Susan Sellers' introduction to *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (Sellers 1994) for this summary of Cixousian theory.

[28] Importantly, this is partly through their material exclusion from cultures.

[29] See Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

[30] See Grosz (1994) 'Intensities and Flows' for a discussion of the work of Deleuze & Guattari in relation to feminist theory.

[31] *The Laugh of the Medusa* (Cixous 1981) is Cixous' most well-known essay describing such a writing practice.