

Embodied Borders:
Auto/erotica in the Writings of Anaïs Nin

Chris Michael

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*For Lyn,
with love.*

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Chris Michael, September 2006

Abstract

This thesis brings together the two genres for which Nin has become so (in)famous: her autobiography and her erotica in what I have termed 'auto/erotica'. By reading her autobiography and her erotica in and against each other I attempt to explore her development of a feminine aesthetic, or 'womb writing' as a strategy of resistance with which to challenge dominant discourses of 'woman' and the 'feminine', and her exclusion from cultural production. Drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, this thesis explores the role of the border in the cultural production of bodies and sexual difference within Western discourses of sexuality, with particular reference to the discourses of psychoanalysis, modernism and pornography/erotica. My focus is on the trope of the borderline within Nin's texts, which, I argue is less a marker of radical difference than a site of instability offering the possibility of 'other' or 'between' spaces of resistance.

This study engages with the politics of gender and genre by drawing on various feminist rewritings of autobiographical theory and Jacques Derrida's 'The Law of Genre' and the *Ear of the Other* in order to explore the tension between the 'auto' (the selfsame) and the 'graphy' in the formation of the 'bio' and gender identity. I explore how the threat of the other within the selfsame, the tracing of the *différance* of desire, affects the generic self-identity of 'autobiography' and 'erotica' as representations of (sexual) identity. Nin utilises the radical instability of the autobiographical genre to put into question the 'genre' of gender identity, the gendering of genre and the undecidable border between the 'body' and the 'text', the 'life' and the 'work'. Drawing on various psychoanalytical feminist film theories of the female spectator and the masquerade I explore how Nin performs the 'feminine' or 'woman' of (male) Surrealist and mainstream heterosexual pornography/erotica in order to emphasise the gaps, to hold at a distance, the female from the feminine. The concern of this thesis is the 'ob/scene' margins of 'erotica' and the *trace* of 'otherness' that threatens the single and self-identical body/text. The 'outworks' or prefaces of Nin's work not only disrupt fixed generic boundaries but also echo the desiring subject's fantasy of gender identity, wholeness and unity. By drawing attention to the role of vision in the constitution of gendered subjectivity and the (re)production of the phallus as the primary signifier of desire, I explore how Nin's erotica undermines a position of phallic certainty by drawing attention to the out-of-sight spaces, of 'ob/scene' pleasures that disturb and disrupt the illusion of 'masculine' phallic mastery. I argue that it is in the 'interview', this dialogue or movement *between* (at least) two genres – autobiography and erotica – that *other* possible representations might be glimpsed.

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Introduction: 'Auto/Erotic' Foreplay

'It is feminine to be oblique. It is not trickery.'
(Nin 1979a, p.65)

Anaïs Nin has become in/famous for two achievements: autobiography and erotica. This thesis attempts to bring these two genres together in what I have termed 'auto/erotica' in order to explore her development of a 'feminine' aesthetic, and her appropriation of the borderline as a strategy of resistance in her experimental 'womb writing'. To a large extent Nin's 'reputation' as a writer has been constructed by a certain ambiguity between her 'life' and her 'texts'. This has meant that her somewhat unorthodox lifestyle has tended to obscure the process of writing in her exploration of gender, sexuality and desire. One of the major concerns of feminist theory of the last thirty years has been the relationship of the female subject to language, femininity, the body and desire. According to mainstream psychoanalytical theory, it is women's relationship to the phallus, and ultimately the symbolic, that has left women *lacking* in language and their erotic faculties.

One of the key questions this thesis explores is: how does one particular writer, Anaïs Nin, attempt to represent a desiring female subject within discourses founded on the exclusion of the female body and feminine sexuality. Indeed, 'how can the recognition of a hitherto repressed female eroticism embody itself in texts that might be called "feminine"?' (Suleiman 1986, p.13). As a woman and a writer, Nin occupies a precarious borderline position that is both 'inside' and 'outside' phallogentric discourse. This thesis explores the possibility of rewriting and rethinking the female body and sexuality by concentrating on the concepts of the borderline, the limit and frame as *engendering* an alternative perspective from which the relationship between the female body, language and the feminine might be represented *otherwise*.

The focus of this thesis is the borderline in the 'framing' of knowledges and meanings pertaining to the (female) body, sexuality and gender. My aim is to displace limits and margins, to investigate the limits of the borderline and the '(in) the between' of writing (Cixous 1996b, p.86). In order to do this I will be drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida as well as the feminist psychoanalytical theories of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. The drawing of borders in the constitution of meanings and knowledge also has far reaching affects on the material relations of class, race and ethnicity. Indeed, the border has played a major role in more recent developments in postcolonial, race and queer studies, which concentrate on the important debates around the racialisation of bodies, colonialism and transnationalism.¹ However, this thesis focuses specifically on the borderline as an important textual trope in the development of Nin's feminine aesthetic.

Certainly, the issue of transnationalism and race is pertinent to Nin as a writer. Born in France to her Cuban-born father and her mother of Danish and French-Cuban parentage, Nin's multiracial heritage and trilingualism becomes an important factor in her developing sense of 'foreignness'. I do not wish to undermine the importance of Nin's specific experiences as a racially and ethnically mixed woman living and writing between Paris and New York in the years spanning the Second World War. However, this thesis attempts to explore the disruptive *textual* strategies of the borderline, exile and 'foreignness' as a means of resisting dominant Western discourses of sexuality and aesthetics founded on purity and the exclusion of the 'other' within the selfsame. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that whilst I focus specifically on the gender politics of traditional Western modernism and surrealism, such movements were founded in colonialism and the

¹ See for example Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) who explores the implications of the borderline as a geographical, sexual, racial and linguistic marker of difference. Her border-identity, or new 'mestiza', offers a position from which women who are racially and ethnically mixed are able to challenge the binary oppositions structuring racism, sexism and heterosexism and to move beyond those limitations.

appropriation of non-western cultures.² Whilst I realise that it is problematic to treat questions of sexuality, gender and identity in isolation, I feel that it is beyond the limits of this thesis to do justice to these particular issues.³ However, what I hope this piece of research will offer is a much-needed close textual analysis of Nin's work within a predominantly biographically driven field of scholarship.

Indeed, whilst this study is restricted to one particular author's work it is not biographically driven and is, therefore, not intended to be a definitive overview of the author and her work: indeed, where might that boundary be drawn?⁴ That is not to say that the author, Anaïs Nin, is not important in my exploration of her texts, but that she does not fully authorise or control the meanings that her texts produce. It is after all, as Roland Barthes remind us, 'language that speaks, not the author' (1977, p.143). Furthermore, the critic (reader) is not in any 'outside' position from which she or he is able to study her texts as objects to be finally known and 'explained'. As Nancy Scholar points out, there is no *one* 'Nin' to be fully discovered somewhere *behind* the text: 'She is a series of endless contradictions and dualities' (1984, p.17). Yet whilst Scholar seems to attribute this evasiveness entirely to the author's endless 'seductive' play, I shift the focus of this performance to the text itself and to that 'internal border' somewhere between the 'author' and the 'reader', the 'inside' and the 'outside', and to the endless play of the signifier in the process of *différance* (Rodolphe Gasché in Derrida 1988c, p.41).⁵ Indeed, rather than

² See for example Said (1994), Jordon and Weedon (1995).

³ Judith Roof's (1991a) article explores the relations of looking in the constitution of gender and race in Nin's erotica. Helen Tookey (2003) briefly explores the erotic appeal of Orientalism in the discourse of 'woman'.

⁴ For author-based scholarship on Nin see: Oliver Evans (1968); Bettina L. Knapp (1979a); Evelyn J. Hinz, (1973); Sharon Spencer (1981). For biographical information see Deirdre Bair (1995) and Noël Riley Fitch (1994).

⁵ Derrida's concept of *différance* is a development from Ferdinand de Saussure's (1981) account of language as a system of differences rather than a referential system. *Différance* is an attempt to incorporate the two verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer' in order to explain the construction of meaning in language. *Différance* maintains that meanings are not founded in fixed referents, but are rather produced in the movement, displacement and deferral of other (absent) meanings. For further information see Derrida (1997 and 1982c).

attempting to ‘impose a limit,’ (Barthes 1977, p.147) my aim is to open up the texts to other *absent* or displaced meanings by reading Nin’s texts in and against each other. In this sense I will read less to find the woman *in* the text than to explore the text *of* ‘woman’ and how that text might be opened up to *other* and multiple possible meanings.⁶ As Barthes reminds us, writing is not the place of identity or (dis)covery, but rather, the space of endless deference: ‘Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing’ (1977, p.142).

The focus of my research is theoretically driven and concentrates on close-readings of a selection of Nin’s texts which are read against each other. I have chosen to read closely a relatively small sample of her work written (though not necessarily published) between 1931 to 1941. Rather than confining my research to one particular genre of her work, my research attempts to cover examples from three different genres: autobiography, fiction and erotica. From her diaries I concentrated on the following texts: the first two expurgated volumes (1979a, 1979b) covering the period of 1931 to 1939; and the unexpurgated diaries, *Henry and June* (1990c) and *Incest* (1994b), which between them cover the period from October 1931 to November 1934. From her fiction I have chosen to explore her first prose-poem, *House of Incest* (1994a, originally published in 1936), and her two volumes of erotica: *Delta of Venus* (1990a) and *Little Birds* (1990b). The stories contained within these volumes were written between 1940 and 1941 for a male collector and were edited and published in Britain in 1978 and 1979 respectively.

I use the term ‘autobiography’ rather than ‘diary’ as the published diaries (both the expurgated and unexpurgated versions) have been edited and shaped from Nin’s ‘original’

⁶ See Mary Jacobus (1986), p.83-109.

diaries and journals specifically with the intention of publication. What is more, she draws attention to the fictionality of the diary by directly addressing her reader.⁷ Indeed, I intend to foreground the impossibility of the fantasy or misrecognition of the 'auto' as a self-contained individual in control of language and meaning which places both autobiography and identity formation somewhere undecidably between fact and fiction. With this in mind, I feel that the term 'autobiography' best highlights the very tension between the 'auto' (the selfsame) and the 'graphy' in the formation of the 'bio' and gender identity.

My decision to use the term 'erotica' rather than pornography was partially influenced by Nin who always referred to the manuscripts she wrote for her male collector as erotica. However, the difference/s between pornography and erotica, and the ensuing feminist debates over sexual representation, are discussed in detail in Chapter Four. I do not reproduce the term 'erotica' because I believe there is any radical or fixed difference between pornography and erotica, yet neither do I believe that the two can be conflated, as Peter Michelson's rather cumbersome term 'pornorotica' appears to suggest (1993, p.185-232). The borderline demarcating the difference between these two terms is neither fixed nor immutable but rather temporal and cultural. I would rather displace the question of difference to the borderline itself. It is, therefore, the point at which certain individuals are authorised to make decisions differentiating the acceptable (hence visible) from unacceptable (hence invisible) representations of certain bodies and sexualities which is the point of my analysis. At the risk of oversimplifying the complexity of the debates on sexual representation, the term 'erotica' is generally given to those forms of sexually explicit representations that are deemed 'acceptable' or 'proper' for the general public to

⁷ This self-conscious device is further elaborated upon in Scholar (1984). Indeed, the boundary between the genres of 'autobiography' and the 'diary' are less clear than might initially be presumed. These issues are discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.

view. However, this visibility is always dependent on the *trace* of the ‘other’, the ‘ob/scene’,⁸ that haunts the very margins of the visible and threatens to expose the viewer/reader to the *improper* workings of the border in the constitution of stable and knowable bodies and pleasures. The concern of this thesis is the ‘ob/scene’ margins of ‘erotica’ and the *trace* of ‘otherness’ that threatens the single and self-identical body/text.

The reason why I have chosen a specific period of Nin’s work is that these were the years, in my view, when Nin produced the most interesting and radical work as she started to develop her theories of writing, gender and genre. What is more, the thirties and forties hover rather uncomfortably just outside the boundaries of Western ‘modernism’ which have typically been drawn between 1890 to 1930.⁹ However, Shari Benstock (1987) and Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers (1988) shift the boundaries of modernism by a decade, from 1900 to 1940, in order to incorporate an alternative female modernism or a ‘modernism of the margins’ which has typically been obscured and effaced from the academic canon. Yet, despite this strategic shift Nin’s texts still (dis)appear to the margins of the margins in Benstock’s text and remain absent from Hanscombe and Smyers.

⁸ I borrow this phrase of the (female) ‘obscene body’ from Lynda Nead (1992) who argues that the female nude occupies a liminal position within Western aestheticism, marking the boundary between art and obscenity. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. I adapt Nead’s use of the term by incorporating the oblique to foreground the always present absence of the ‘ob’ (off) which is undecidably *both* ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the frame of representation. This is an attempt to highlight the workings of the frame: to keep ‘in the frame’ the marginal, silenced and invisible which are the preconditions of representation itself, and whose presence/absence marks the possibility of alternative ‘feminine’ discourses of sexuality and the body.

⁹ See for example Bradbury and McFarlane (1991). However, according to Jean-François Lyotard the difference between modernism and postmodernism is not chronological but is rather a certain attitude to the ‘unpresentable’ (1992, p.20). This difference is distinguishable only by the ‘merest nuance’ and depends on where the ‘accent’ falls between jubilation and nostalgia (p.22). My reading of Nin’s texts in this thesis places a greater emphasis on what might be considered the ‘postmodern’ aspects of her work: the playful questioning of the border between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, the ‘real’ and ‘representation’. In this sense, I argue that the border is less a limit than a possible *other* way of representing the body and the text which challenges the repressive workings of the frame in the constitution of binary opposition. As a result, I would argue, her *corpus/work* does not neatly fit within the predefined ‘genre’ of modernism (as either an aesthetic practice or as a particular time-frame); rather her work appears to sit rather uncomfortably neither ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’ but on its very limits. This undecidable positioning draws attention to the limitations of genre itself, which by making certain texts visible ensures others remain invisible.

The borderline 'frames' wider questions concerning women's relationship to the representation of gender and genre: more specifically to modernism, feminism and the constitution of embodied female/feminine subjectivity. Nin's diaries have tended to earn her a 'place' in feminist reevaluations of modernism/s as her work has been read in the light of a feminist revival of autobiography as self-writing.¹⁰ However, Helen Tookey notes that Nin's position in relation to recent feminist rediscoveries of women modernists is 'fleeting', making 'appearances in introductions and conclusions [...] but never quite appearing in the main text of feminist-modernist criticism' (2003, p.2). Indeed, I argue, that Nin appears to 'supplement' (Derrida 1973c) these works of 'rediscovery': she 'edge[s]' or 'hovers on the fringes' (Tookey 2003, p.9) of the discourses which frame feminist modernism and autobiography theory appearing to oscillate in an undecidable position between the inside/outside of its borders.¹¹ Tookey also notes the difficulties in 'placing' Nin in terms of nationality (2003, p.8-9). Indeed, although born in France to Cuban born parents, she spent the majority of her life, particularly the later part, in North America and wrote predominantly in English. Interestingly, Nin is only temporarily claimed within the 1991 edition of *Modern American Women Writers* by Friedman who bemoans the fact that 'feminist literary criticism has not yet embraced her' (1991, p.349), yet just two years later Nin seems to have slipped from Friedman's embrace and from the 1993 edition. Lynette Felber points out that Nin may have contributed to her own marginalisation by choosing to cultivate and explore an identity as a 'feminine' writer which, she argues, was denigrated by male critics and dismissed as essentialist by feminist critics in the 1980s and 1990s (2002, p.36). What is more, though her erotica is now receiving critical attention, its initial

¹⁰ See for example: Elizabeth Podnieks (2000); Lynette Felber (2002); Susan Stanford Friedman (1988).

¹¹ Tookey notes that Nin's work does 'edge into the main text' of Lisa Rado (1997), however, this mention is brief and, according to Tookey, 'inaccurate' (2003, p.2, n.6).

publication did much to further exclude her from the canon of ‘respectable’ writers (Felber 2002, p.196, n.6).

It is specifically Nin’s diaries that have received the most attention from feminists since the 1970s; however, changes in critical approaches have produced very different readings of these texts. In the 1960s and 1970s Nin was celebrated as a model of female sexual liberation and as an example of the empowered female subject. Her diary was celebrated as a testimony of women’s self-definition and as an assertion of women’s right to speak of the most personal of experiences. Kate Millet’s ‘Anais – A Mother To Us All’ (a version of this essay originally appeared in French translation in *Le Monde* in 1976), argues that Nin was a ‘role model’ for women in her exploration of a seemingly ‘universal’ and specifically female sexuality that was the key to women’s identity and liberation (1991).¹² In this article Millett (1991) presumes there is such a thing as a ‘universal’ woman, that *all* women have the same experience, and have been equally repressed.¹³ Yet, as Jacobus remarks, this appeal to ‘women’s experience’ assumes an easy relation between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the text (1986, p.108). The diary is considered to simply refer to a knowable reality ‘outside’ the text: an ‘outside’ to which language can simply refer. However, the text always already inhabits the ‘outside’, as it is part of the constitution of the meanings and values that construct ‘reality’ for the subject (Jacobus 1986, p.108). Furthermore, ‘woman’ does not mean the same thing to all subjects at all times: *when, how* and *who* reads/writes produces very different texts. As Tookey notes, Nin’s own relation to

¹² Also see Robert Zaller (1974b); Deena Metzger (1974); Knapp (1979b); Evans (1968). Similarly, Spencer believes that Nin’s task as a woman was to reject ‘false images of femininity’ and assert her ‘own authentic nature’ as an ‘authentic woman’ (1981, p.110). Hinz also makes a distinction between false or external images (mirror) associated with ‘realism’ and the supposed authentic or ‘natural’ images of the female artist (garden) which is aligned with a sense of ‘reality’ (1973, p.11-14).

Also see Nancy Jo Hoy (1986).

¹³ This is a criticism often made of Western feminism that tends to assume a Western, white, heterosexual, middle-class model of ‘woman’ as the ‘norm’ against which all ‘other’ differences of ‘woman’ are silenced. See for example Mohanty (1991).

her diary as a text of ‘woman’ shifts from a certain ambivalence towards its literary nature and the fluidity of gender identity in the 1930s, to an insistence on their authenticity in the 1970s (2003, p.11). Whilst Tookey also locates the strongest association between an *écriture féminine* and her diary writings in the late 1930s when Nin formulates an aesthetics of ‘womb writing’,¹⁴ the focus of her analysis remains on what she identifies as Nin’s *shifting* ideas in relation to femininity, corporeality and creativity. Indeed, Tookey also finds strong associations between Nin’s *A Woman Speaks* (1992c) – a collection of essays, interviews and seminars given between 1972-3 – and Cixous’ ‘Laugh of the Medusa’ (1981a). She argues that this was a time when Nin started to embrace a more stable image of gender identity in line with dominant radical feminist views of identity and power (Tookey 2003, p.22).¹⁵ Whilst this analysis is certainly illuminating, the focus of my thesis is on the border itself as the marker of difference *between* gender and genre, where the boundary between the diary and fiction, body and text remains undecidable. For this reason my focus remains on close readings of her more fluid and experimental writings of the 1930s and 1940s in which she attempted to question the border between diary/fiction, artist/muse, self/other by focusing on the marginal and borderline *positionality* of ‘femininity’ as it (dis)appears within phallogentric discourse.

As I will argue in this thesis, Nin’s texts do not entirely fit within their different genre categories, on the contrary, they tend to ‘abound’ these boundaries and to ‘mix’ themselves up within/ between each ‘other’. However, my intention is not to ‘expose’ her erotica as thinly veiled autobiography, or to simply argue that her autobiography is a different, and some would say better, example of an alternative or ‘feminine’ erotica.¹⁶ On

¹⁴ I also discuss this and engage with Tookey’s argument in some detail in Chapter Two.

¹⁵ Felber also notes that the release of Nin’s diaries in the 1960s and their subsequent marketing as examples of ‘feminine writing’ was a piece of ‘astute merchandising’ which happily coincided with this shift in feminist ideology (2002, p.36).

¹⁶ Sophia Papachristou (1991) makes a case for the latter.

the contrary, rather than conflating one genre with the other, in order to read for *sameness* and unity, my intention is to read *obliquely*: to read for what is (not) there in between the margins. In this thesis, I will attempt to read *otherwise*, that is, to read for the points of ‘impropriety’ or excess when these texts rub up against/inside each other, defiling their own margins. Indeed, Nin’s erotica remains a particularly stubborn presence/absence in the vast majority of Nin scholarship. As such, it appears to haunt the margins of the ‘proper’ *corpus* of her work as scholars have tended to concentrate on her autobiography and/or her fiction.¹⁷ However, by dis/locating or questioning the boundaries of the ‘object’ of analysis, it is possible to ‘glimpse’ (to look ‘in-between’) generic borders to offer an alternative inscription of desire and subjectivity that is not fixed but is rather in process and open to challenge and change (Derrida 1988b, p. 164).

The concepts of the border and limits are important recurring themes in Nin’s work. Her attempts to speak *as a woman* and a desiring subject within the dominant discourses of psychoanalysis and modernism involved her constant negotiation of the symbolic and aesthetic b/order between subject and object. Various Nin scholars have noted the importance of borders in relation to Nin’s work.¹⁸ As Johanna Blakley writes, whilst modernists ‘flirted’ with the borders of identity, ‘Nin initiates a full-fledged affair with them’ (1998, p.9).¹⁹ Her life-long exploration of feminine sexuality and desiring

¹⁷ There has been no full-length studies of *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* in relation to Nin’s strategy of ‘womb writing’ (discussed in Chapter Two and Three) as most writers have read her autobiographical and fictional work separately from her erotica. Richard-Allerdyce footnotes that she intends to devote her next book to Nin’s erotica rather than incorporate it into her discussion of Nin’s other works, though this text is yet to be published (1998, p.187, n.31). Disappointingly, Tookey’s otherwise brilliant and insightful text devotes only six pages to the discussion of Nin’s erotica (2003, p.84-90). Indeed, most of the discussion of Nin’s erotica is in article form, see for example: Karen Brennan (1992); T.M. March (1998); Smaro Kamboureli (1996); and Cathy Schwichtenberg (1981).

¹⁸ See for example Johanna Blakley’s Ph.D thesis (1998); Tookey (2003); Diane Richard-Allerdyce (1998).

¹⁹ Blakley’s thesis devotes one chapter to Nin in which she explores the *House of Incest* and Julia Kristeva’s theory of the ‘erotic abject’ (1998). Parts of her thesis share a similar interest to Chapter Three as she too engages with Kristeva’s semiotic. However, her chapter is primarily concerned with the representation of lesbianism (1998, p.111). By contrast, I discuss *House of Incest* in relation to the ‘framing’ discourses of ‘woman’ circulated within psychoanalysis and (male authored) Surrealism and suggest that this text engages

subjectivities concentrated on the *between* states of (sexual) identity, and the disruption of the borders defining ‘appropriate’ articulations and representations of sexuality. Her insistence on testing the very limits of sexuality, as they were inscribed within culture, led her to live a ‘trapeze’ life: a state of oscillation *between* both psychological and geographic borders (Bair, 1995, p.340).²⁰

In the course of my analysis I explore how the body and language *figure* in the production of (sexual) difference. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis the body/sex (as anatomy) is not the origin of gender but rather anatomy becomes the *figure* or representation of sexual difference within the symbolic. In this sense, the body is always already a signifier: it is a textual surface ‘contoured’ by discourse and inscribed with psychical and cultural meanings mediating our lived ‘experiences’ (Conboy 1997, p.1). According to Derrida, the ‘bio-graphical’ is the undecidable, ‘internal border’ between two ‘bodies’: the ‘corpus’ and the ‘body’ (1988b, p.4-5). It is (im)precisely on this undecidable border that ‘texts are engendered’ (Gasché in Derrida 1988c, p.41). Within mainstream psychoanalytical theory, it is the body of the woman and the absence/presence of the penis as phallus that marks the border between the ‘life’ (nature) and the ‘text’ (culture). In this sense, the female body is inscribed as the borderline and serves as the marker of (sexual) difference against which meaning and value is measured. Indeed, the drawing of an immutable border marking radical sexual difference between female/ feminine and male/masculine is fundament to the workings of phallogentrism and the asymmetrical relations of power between embodied subjectivities. Elizabeth Grosz argues that, ‘Philosophy, thought itself, cannot move past the question of (sexual) difference for this is

with the concept of the ‘frame’ in order to highlight its instability in constituting identity and embodied subjectivity.

²⁰ Nin used this term to describe her divided life and ‘identities’ between her two husbands, Hugo Guiler and Rupert Pole.

the condition of its means of knowing, the condition of its modes of representation, and the consequences of its (embodied but unrecognized) models' (2005, p.88).

Like Grosz, I believe that re-conceptualising sexual difference in terms of a Derridean sexual *différance* offers real possibilities for feminists to challenge the dominance of gender identity (Grosz 2005, p.89). Sexual identity and subjectivity are not natural and immutable but are effects of language, and, as such, are differential, positional and continually in process. Derrida is careful to distinguish between sexual opposition and sexual difference: 'Opposition is two, opposition is man/woman. Difference, on the other hand, can be an indefinite number of sexes' (2005, p.151). He argues that perhaps once the concept of sexual difference is differentiated from sexual opposition, from a certain sex(d)uality, then conceptions of sexuality might no longer be understood as singular, obvious or determined, but rather 'a sexuality completely out of the frame, totally aleatory to what we are familiar with in the term "sexuality"' (Derrida 2005, p.151). Sexuality, like gender is not a property of the subject: it does not rest *in* subjects but rather, as Muriel Dimen argues, '[s]exuality rests between things, it borders psyche and society, culture and nature, conscious and unconscious, self and other. Its variety makes it intrinsically ambiguous' (1982, p.27). I argue that the 'feminine' invades and dislocates the phallic certainty of erotic representation in order to produce discursive spaces in and from which *other* desires might be written/read. I explore how the threat of the other within the selfsame, the tracing of the *différance* of desire, affects the generic self-identity of 'autobiography' and 'erotica' as representations of (sexual) identity. The representation of the 'auto' as unified and the self-same is always already haunted by that 'other scene' that serves to disrupt the apparent unity of (sexual) identity.

The borderline, as marker of difference, is fundamental to the workings of the symbolic and the exclusion of the 'feminine' and the 'body' from the discourses of

phallogocentrism. Within such discourses the feminine/body remains an absent presence: it is the oblique or elusive text that haunts the margins of the 'proper'. Cixous (1996b) argues that the exclusion of the body and its subordination to the mind enables the main body/text to be presented as coherent and unified. Nin's 'womb writing' performs a similar strategy to Cixous' *écriture féminine* in that it attempts to inscribe the feminine and the body by paying attention to the gaps, fissures and blind spots in phallogocentric discourses of 'woman'. Nin's constant foregrounding of the borderline as an inadequate and unstable marker of difference deliberately calls into question any clear and unmediated relation between aesthetic and anatomical form. By focusing on the instability of the borderline, Nin sets up an undecidable relationship between the 'life' and the 'text', opening up the possibilities of alternative or deferred identities that constantly evade the fix of 'truth'. Embodied subjectivity is merely the constant failure of identity characterised by the destructive effects of the 'other scene' of the unconscious. I argue that difference must be read *otherwise* on the very borders and in-between the margins of her texts where (sexual) difference opens up to the play of *différance*. The border is not a silent, uncorruptable virgin space 'outside' the 'body' of the text, but is rather produced *by* and is productive of the 'inside' space. These margins are the site of 'impropriety' and the promiscuous generation of *other* meanings, and, as such, they threaten the very proper(ity) of the body/text. What is more, if margins are a site of proliferation rather than delimitation, then precisely *what* and *where* the 'body/text' *is* remains undecidable and open to ever proliferating possibilities. As Derrida asks: 'Where has the body of the text gone when the margin is no longer a secondary virginity but an inexhaustible reserve, the stereographic activity of an entirely other ear?' (1982b, p.xxiii)

Whilst my readings of Nin's texts focus on the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Lacan, as well as feminist appropriations of these theories, it is important to

acknowledge the influence of the psychotherapist Otto Rank on Nin's developing 'feminine' aesthetic, and indeed her influence on the work of Rank himself. His particular interest in the creative artist, and the theme of the double and incest made him an obvious choice as an analyst for Nin, and equally she became an irresistible object of analysis for Rank.²¹ Indeed, Spencer asserts that Rank acted as a 'male muse' and 'double' for Nin's developing identity as a woman artist (1997, p.98, p.102). She argues that it was both Nin and Rank's philosophical discussions about the role of woman and artist that both 'inspired' Nin's 'womb writing' and Rank's own essay 'Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology' first published in *Beyond Psychology* in 1941 (Spencer 1997, p.102). However, Philip K. Jason is less generous in his readings of Nin and Rank's relationship suggesting that Rank had more to gain from his relationship with Nin who became, according to Jason, a means through which Rank could gain access to the coveted world of art and artists (1986, p.14). Moreover, he argues that Nin's apparent embodiment of his own philosophy of 'Woman' served to fulfill a familiar fantasy of narcissistic love: 'Rank was playing out the old myth of the man creating the woman' (Jason 1986, p.20).

Helen Tookey's *Anais Nin: Fictionality and Femininity* (2003) has been a major influence on my research. Her work is primarily concerned with questions of fictionality and femininity: of how the self is constructed through the text and performance.²² Tookey's text focuses on the context of production and the reception of Nin's work and attempts to 'instate Nin both as author and as a historically and culturally located agent' whilst also 'pay[ing] attention to the ways in which texts may escape or ramify beyond authorial control or intention' (2003, p.11). However, whilst her text provides a new and

²¹ For a good historical introduction to Otto Rank's work see Karpf (1970).

²² Tookey explores Nin's 'versioning' of her self within her texts. Concentrating on the cultural and historical context of Nin's texts, Tookey explores how she operates for the reader as 'a mobilizer of fantasies, a kind of symbolic place-holder' in which 'one woman comes to stand as another's fantasy of self or of femininity' (2003, p.189; p.173).

much needed perspective to a field of scholarship dominated by author-dominated research, I do feel that her work lacks close textual analysis.

Our methodologies most closely converge in our exploration of women's 'narratives of the self' in which she, too, takes a Derridean approach (Tookey 2003, p.15-50). In her first chapter she draws specifically on Derrida's essay 'Signature Event Context' in order to explore the ambiguous or 'double-jointed' concept of the signature in the constitution of the proper name and narrative identities (2003, p.37). However, my thesis delivers a more sustained reading of Derrida's texts in relation to Nin's work, focusing in particular on the border or frame as the site of resistance to the dominant representations of gender and sexuality which posit women as 'other' to the masculine 'norm'. Drawing on Derrida's 'The Law of Genre', my focus is on the politics of the borderline in the constitution of gender and genre 'norms'. In her exploration of autobiography and women writers Tookey rightly notes that, '[b]lurring generic lines and problematizing "proper" names may be characteristic of women writers, but [they] are not peculiar to them' (p.21). Whilst I agree that the questioning of genre is not 'peculiar' to women writers (it does not 'belong' to the female gender) the very limit of genre announces the 'norm' against which women writers have been defined and effaced within the modernist genre. In this sense, what *is* 'peculiar' about women writers is their *positioning* within the discourse of aesthetics *as* 'peculiar', that is, as *other to* or 'outside' the 'norm' of the (male) artist. I would argue that the questioning of gender and genre boundaries can be strategically employed in order to challenge the legitimacy of categorisation and identification in the generation of knowledges pertaining to bodies and texts. Jacobus (1984) suggests that it is the fixing of genre/gender that organises literary (and bodily) form into recognisable objects of knowledge. However, the categories that constitute such knowledges are always already disrupted and displaced by the play of *différance*, that is the presence/absence of the trace.

Indeed, textual/bodily form is acquired via the repetition of genre/gender norms. These 'norms' are not 'natural' and ahistorical, but are historically contingent and culturally specific. Their constant repetition produces the effect of knowledge which in turn enables the subject to confidently identify the borders between the 'body' of the text and his/her own 'body' as knowable and (gender) definable. As Jacobus argues what is at stake in this process of naming is 'not the genre of literature [or autobiography], but the literariness – the fiction – of genre [and gender]' (1984, p.57). Auto/erotica marks the non-closure of gender/genre: the insistence of the other that refuses the selfsame. This *lack* of closure opens each genre up to something other-than-the-same.

In her Lacanian study of Nin, *Anais Nin and the Remaking of Self*, Diane Richard-Allerdyce argues that the ambiguity of the border between her life and her art is a point of tension, not just for Nin herself, but also between those readers who either value her experimentation with form and gender, and those who use it to denigrate and/or dismiss her work (1998, p.8). She argues that '[t]he *absence* of this border is also one of the dominant themes in her work, appearing time and time again in her diaries, essays, and fiction' (p.8 my emphasis). Though Richard-Allerdyce acknowledges that Nin 'eventually came to embrace the idea that the boundary must be a permeable one' between her diaries and her fiction, she still 'needed a clear line, and she needed to draw it herself' (p.8). It is for this reason Richard-Allerdyce states that the motif of the borderline is one of the most important themes of Nin's work, informing her relationship to psychoanalysis, gender and modernism. However, she argues that it is the formal boundaries of writing which have served to 'compensate for the lack of stable identity born of early wounding' (p.8). Richard-Allerdyce's conception of 'wounding' revolves around the loss of the father figure. In this sense, writing is the constitution or 'narrative recovery' of the self, as well as the space of its interrogation. However, I would argue that it is not the *absence* of the border

that dominates Nin's work; rather it is her undecidable location in relation to the borders of language and representation that serve to constitute embodied subjectivity.

Whilst Richard-Allerdyce has many interesting points to make about Nin's exploration of gender in relation to a Lacanian feminine *jouissance*, in which 'phallic certainty comes under fire' (1998, p.197, n.20), I believe her certain assumptions about genre and identity obscure the very politics of gender and genre. For Richard-Allerdyce, the borderline seems to be less an undecidable position, a place of radical challenge to the premise of binary oppositions, and the illusion of either/or 'gendered' identity, than an affirming *recovery* position. That is, a position from which the subject is able to achieve stability by working *within* the laws of gender/genre, and, therefore, *reinforcing* the (re)production of 'phallic certainty'. She argues that the absence of a boundary in Nin's work between fact and fiction is directly related to Nin's status as a 'wounded daughter', injured by the emotional and (possible) physical abuse of her father during her childhood. She states that, 'her work resonates with unsayable paternal abuse' (p.7).²³ In this sense, she seems to suggest that it is her writing, or rather the appropriation of the subject position as 'artist' and inscriber of meanings, that compensates for a certain *lacking* subject/ego. She writes that '[t]he boundaries she establishes for the purpose of healing operate through a recognition that narratives and egos are analogous' (p.88). However, clearly not all 'narratives' (and not all egos) are equally powerful. Elsewhere she writes that Cixous and Kristeva share with Lacan 'the notion that women's identities are more likely than those of normative men to be grounded in porousness of ego and fluidity of style' (p.27). Indeed, it

²³ There are a number of psychoanalytical readings of Nin's work which take the loss of her father and/or paternal abuse to be the central and motivating force behind her work which then appears to take on a 'therapeutic role'. Suzette Henke states that, '[t]here seems to be little doubt that Anais Nin's loss of her father at the age of ten constituted a defining moment – a traumatic wound that resonates throughout her writing and determines many of the patterns of her adult life.' (1998, p.79). See also Doris Niemeyer (1988); and Knapp (1979a, p.44-50).

would seem that *lacking* the 'formal' or aesthetic borders capable of signifying the difference between the 'life' and the 'work', the 'nearly boundary-less diary' (p.8) is deemed by Richard-Allerdyce to be not powerful enough to effect the necessary distance between self and object of analysis. She argues that it is the formal boundaries of a specific genre of writing as 'literary *form*' that 'became her stay against confusion, her way of warding off her tendency to identify with the source of her emotional unease' (p.8 my emphasis).

For Richard-Allerdyce the concept of unified (literary) form seems to be inextricably bound up with the construction of the self and individual identity as a coherent and rational subject. My problem with this is that it obscures both the question of writing, as the *trace* of the 'other', and the gendering of genre itself. Clearly, the genre of *fiction* is equated with the fiction of identity, of a misrecognition of the bounded and unified whole able to achieve 'a formal closure' (p.8). By contrast, the ambiguous 'nearly boundary-less', the *almost* all-encompassing, form of the diary is positioned differently. It is all *content* or (corpo)reality: it is the excluded 'other' that haunts the 'knowledge' or certainty of identity and gender whilst the qualifier 'nearly' ensures it remains just within these mastering terms. Indeed, the 'nearly boundary-less' diary is analogous to the psychoanalytically lacking or castrated body of the female, who, in relation to the Law of the Father, is permanently 'wounded' and whose 'narrative recovery' is only ever temporarily 'healed' by reproducing the *fiction* of phallic unity. It is the aesthetic boundaries of 'fiction', the cultivation of a subject position of the autonomous 'artistic' as opposed to 'wounded' daughter/diarist that, according to Richard-Allerdyce, provided 'evidence of maturing artistry' and, more importantly, 'a formal closure she was not able to achieve elsewhere' (p.8).

Mary Jacobus argues that gender is not a possession of the individual, neither is it 'inside' the text as content. On the contrary, she claims that it is a *reading effect*. She states: 'In order to read as women, we have to be positioned as already-read (and hence gendered); by the same token, what reads us is a signifying system that simultaneously produces difference (meaning) and sexual difference (gender)' (1986, p.4). What is more, the process of reading woman, of making woman the object of the reading process, reconfirms what we (think we) know about gender (as difference), and consolidates our position as (gendered) readers 'outside' of the text. It is in this sense that:

Reading woman becomes a form of autobiography or self-constitution that is finally indistinguishable from writing (woman). Putting a face on the text and putting a gender in it "keeps the male or female likeness" [...] while concealing that "vacillation from one sex to another" which both women and men must keep, or keep at bay, in order to recognize themselves as subjects at all. (p.4-5)

In this thesis, I argue that Nin's exploration of writing and gender identity is inextricably intertwined with her questioning of genre. Indeed, it is a certain generic undecidability between her texts, between fact and fiction, or the (corpo)real and representation, that enables 'Nin' to evade the reader's desire for 'autobiography'. Auto/erotica defers the (dis)closure of 'woman' by drawing attention to the paradoxical status of the border in the constitution of radical difference which both marks and re-marks upon the endless slide of the signifier.

For Derrida (1979), 'woman' holds a special (non)space on the very borders and defining limits of Western metaphysics. As a *concept*, not an identity, 'woman' is used to trouble the very question of the limit and its role in the construction of the 'proper' defining essence or 'truth' of an object. Elizabeth Grosz argues that it is precisely Derrida's 'slipperiness' over the question of 'woman', his 'refusal to state or stay within a singular definitive position', which generates suspicion amongst feminists and political activists

(1997, p.75).²⁴ Interestingly, Nin's strategies of evasion have produced similar reactions amongst her readers, and, as Nancy Scholar states, the author, 'revels in her indeterminacy and defies us to locate her in a category out of which she cannot slip (1984, p.17). Both Julia Casterton and Tookey note that Nin's work sits rather uncomfortably within feminist agendas precisely because she raises *different* questions about writing and femininity (Molyneux and Casterton 1996, p.215; Tookey 2003, p.191-192). Casterton finds that 'Nin's work sets her apart; she stands as *another* voice, making different meanings and representations of women' (Molyneux and Casterton 1996, p.216). However, Tookey notes that whilst Nin was, in some instances, seen as 'representative' of 'femininity' itself, of 'what it is, what it ought not to be', the resistances that her texts engender suggests the very slipperiness of 'femininity' as a signifier (2003, p.191). She notes that '[i]t seems that Nin is defined by – and defines herself by – “femininity”, but that “femininity” is impossible to define' (Tookey 2003, p.192). As Jacqueline Rose notes, 'femininity', like all gender, is never fixed and is, paradoxically, defined by its persistent *failure* (1988, p.90). Yet, it is this *failure*, this *lack* of a fixed signified, which is the very site of resistance as this opens up the possibility of its resignification and challenge.

Scholar argues that Nin's diary is a form of seduction in which '[s]he traps herself in the age-old mythology she wished to surpass, reducing her gender definition to biological function (woman as womb), building her legend around traditional notions of the “eternal feminine”' (1984, p.42). What is more, she goes on to state that, 'her need to be loved and admired keeps her encased in the “golden cage” of her ideal woman persona' (p.43). However, whilst Scholar's text is certainly engaging, I think she undervalues the subversive potential, or the undecidability, of seductive *performance* and its challenge to

²⁴ See Rosi Braidotti (1991); Alice Jardine (1986); Diana Fuss (1989) and Teresa de Lauretis (1989).

gender and genre expectations. Certainly, I would agree that Nin does not break completely with phallogocentric discourses, but neither does she simply accept them. As Mary Ann Doane notes, 'It is a mistake to believe that women have the option of simply accepting or rejecting these positions, a mistake buttressed by a misunderstanding of subjectivity and its relation to discourse' (1988, p.176). She argues that the stylization or repetition of 'woman' by women, 'demonstrates that these are poses, postures, tropes – in short, that we are being subjected to *a discourse on femininity*' (Doane 1988, p.181 my emphasis).

In *Gender Trouble* (1999, originally published in 1990), Judith Butler proposes a theory of gender as performance. In this text she offers a new perspective on gender and embodiment by arguing that gendered subjectivity is not 'essential' but is acquired, or rather it 'materializes' as 'real', through the repeated performance by the individual of discourses on gender. In this sense, she proposes 'genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity' (1999, p.174). In *Bodies That Matter*, she argues that 'performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (Butler 1993, p.2). As a fully autonomous subjectivity is impossible, there is always resistance within repetition or 'reiteration'. She notes that the very fact '[t]hat this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled' (Butler 1993, p.2). Similarly, I would argue that Nin's texts do not simply reproduce or repeat discourses of femininity, but rather she takes on these roles in order to perform the gaps, the uncertainties and the fissures in their apparent unity. Also drawing on Butler's theories of gender performance, Tookey claims that Nin's *femme fatale* or masquerading figures place 'a striking emphasis on the epistemic dimension, rather than on the bodily or sexual dimension' (Tookey 2003, p.104). Whilst I agree that Nin's textual

performance of the ‘feminine’ is an attempt to flout the discourses of ‘woman’ as ‘essence’, I would also add that it is within the gaps, or the fissures that this performance also reveals the *other* or ‘ob/scene’ body of feminine desire. This ‘bodily or sexual dimension’ might be traced on/in the very border between the text and the body. This point is argued in more detail in Chapters Three to Five of this thesis.

With this in mind, I would argue that Scholar’s aforementioned ‘golden cage’ (1984, p.43) is less an encasement than the very possibility of Nin’s subversion. It is in the performance of the ‘ideal woman persona’ (Scholar 1984, p.43) that Nin inscribes a gap between ‘woman’ and her own subject position as woman *and* writer. This is not to suggest there is any ‘truer’ or more ‘authentic’ ‘woman’ behind the masquerade, but rather that the concepts of ‘woman’ and the ‘feminine’ are strategically undecidable. Derrida utilises the figure of ‘woman’ and the ‘feminine’ as figures of displacement and challenge, warning that these *figures* should not be confused with ‘real’ (for want of a better word) women as material subjects. Within traditional phallogocentric discourse ‘woman’ and the ‘feminine’ are excluded, therefore neither exist *as such* ‘inside’ such a discourse; however, neither does ‘woman’ exist ‘outside’ that discourse in any determined or essential way (Derrida, 1979). As Grosz notes, this does not deny the existence of ‘real women’ but rather that ‘real women are the consequences or effects of systems of representation and inscription’ (1997, p.79). In ‘Women in the Beehive’ Derrida argues that once the strategy of undecidability deconstructs the binary opposition between man/woman, the meaning of the term ‘woman’ (as Truth to ‘man’) is altered to such an extent that, ‘[p]erhaps we could not even speak of “woman” anymore’ (2005, p.147). In this sense, the meanings and values embodied by those individuals who currently identify themselves as ‘women’ are not stable or ahistorical but can be subject to challenge and change.

As both subject and object of such discourses, I explore how Nin negotiates this borderline position between ‘woman’ and ‘women’ in order to ‘glimpse’ an alternative ‘inter-view’²⁵, a space from and through which the female subject’s relation to the feminine might be positioned differently (Derrida 1988d, p.164). Teresa de Lauretis notes that, ‘[i]t is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social’ that forge the gap/s to enable feminist intervention (1989, p.26). I argue that Nin’s texts foreground the gap between the female body and discourses of the feminine by deliberately *over-playing* or parodying multiple discourses of femininity. The movement or dislocation of the ‘feminine’ away from discourses of the ‘natural’ fixed female/feminine subject is an attempt to highlight its cultural construction and to create an alternative perspective from which heterogeneity and mobility is accentuated.

The concept of ‘auto/erotica’ connotes another ‘dangerous supplement’: masturbation or autoeroticism. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s *The Confessions*, suggests that his attempts to write autobiographically are constantly corrupted by that ‘dangerous supplement that is called masturbation and that cannot be separated from this activity as a writer’ (1997, p.155). As a ‘dangerous supplement’, masturbation is undecidably *both* an ‘addition’ to the subject’s desire for satisfaction, and also a ‘substitution’ or seductive ‘detour’ away from the ‘real’ business of sex as confirmation of the paternal line of descent. Like writing, masturbation, which is believed to substitute for an ‘original’ presence, puts into question the ‘integrity’ (fullness) of the presence/proper. Figuring somewhere between presence and absence, masturbation produces the illusion of

²⁵ Christie McDonald notes that: ‘In French, to take a glimpse is to look into the spaces between things, *entrevoir*, that is, inter-view’ (Derrida 1988d, p.164). Cixous also develops this concept of the ‘Inter View’ as a form of discourse that makes room for the other in her text. See ‘We are Already in the Jaws of the Book: Inter Views’ (1997, p.1-115).

the presence of another in their absence and as such effaces the need for the other. In this sense, the corrupting force of writing and onanism is the 'dis-ease' of the metaphysics of presence and its legitimising effects. Yet, perhaps more subversively, Derrida suggests that the substitution of an absence with the illusion of presence performed by masturbation is not 'supplemental', but is rather the very 'origin' of desire. He states that 'it has never been possible to desire that presence "in person" before this play of substitution and this symbolic experience of auto-affection' (1997, p.154).

Auto-erotica, or auto-affection, is a demand for self-presence: it is a desire for immediacy, to make desire *speak*, whilst autobiography is a desire to 'hear oneself speak' (Derrida 1973b, p.79). Yet, paradoxically, autoeroticism and autobiography challenge the illusion of the subject as autonomous and self-sufficient. Rather than 'hearing oneself speak', it is the other of writing that 'resounds' in the gap or in 'the detour through which I must pass in order to speak' (Derrida 1982c, p.15). Derrida states that in the act of, '[a]ffecting oneself by another presence, one *corrupts* oneself [makes oneself other] by oneself' (1997, p.153). Indeed, autoeroticism is not an 'outside' corrupting threat to the 'purity' of the subject, but rather the very 'presence' of the other within the selfsame: the supplement 'is the self's very origin' (Derrida 1997, p.153). In autoeroticism the 'self' becomes open to the trace of the 'other' and the play of *différance* in desire. I argue that Nin's texts, or the text's of Nin, perform this 'auto/erotic' pleasure by *playing with* (the idea of) *her-selves* not as One but *as other*: as that which corrupts and contaminates the 'proper' self.²⁶ However, rather than 'hearing oneself speak' (Derrida 1973, p.79), rather

²⁶ In this thesis I 'substitute' the hyphen of auto-erotica (masturbation) with the oblique to draw attention to the *trace* of the 'other' within the 'auto'. As in the 'Tympan' the oblique angle of the oblique mark is intended 'to increase the surface of impression and hence the capacity for vibration' (Derrida 1982b, p.xv). In this sense, the signifier 'auto/erotica' should recall 'masturbation' as well as resonating 'beyond' this signified to call into question the borders of the autobiographical text, language, the body, and desire: to call into question the borders between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the 'text'.

than fortifying the boundaries of/around the self, my reading of Nin's texts focuses on the border or limits *between* each text, reading them along(in)side each other. It is from/in-between the margins, that a proliferation of alternative meanings can be 'heard': listening with 'the ear of the other' (Derrida 1988a) for the detours that (re)inscribe the 'body' in 'other' (im)possible ways.

The majority of book length studies of Nin fail to take into account her erotica.²⁷ Scholar merely footnotes her own omission and states that: 'While the writing in *Delta* is very effective as erotica, in the limited space available here, I do not think a close study of it is warranted' (1984, p.137, n. 26). This comment is particularly interesting since in her reading of Nin's autobiography as an 'art of seduction', Scholar's footnote (which displays the *absence* of Nin's erotica within her text) appears to actually stage the performance of seduction. Indeed, despite Scholar's refusal to be seduced or *led astray* by Nin's 'seductive' texts, the thread of her argument is momentarily *sidetracked* to the margins. It is here that the reader's 'diverted' glance momentarily catches a 'flash' of the absence/presence of Nin's erotic '*Delta*'. '[I]t is', as Barthes proposes, 'this flash itself which seduces' in its 'staging of an appearance-as-disappearance' (1990, p.9-10).

In 1981 Spencer published an 'expanded' or 'supplemental' edition of *Collage of Dreams* to include a six-page account of Nin's erotica. Interestingly, Spencer refers to these works as: 'Charming and humorous, *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* may best be regarded as ornaments on the substantial and graceful edifice of Nin's achievement in literature' (1981, p.117). Spencer considers these two works to be mere 'supplements' to Nin's already established 'graceful' *corpus*. As such her erotic writings are mere 'ornaments' or fripperies that remain 'outside' as trivial interludes to the main business of her more serious

²⁷ Obviously those book length studies that were published before 1978 (the date of *Delta's* publication) were unable to take these previously unpublished texts into account.

work. However, these ‘charming’ fripperies appear to threaten or destabilise the *ergon*, the ‘graceful edifice’, that is Nin’s achievement. This erotic *parergon* furnishes the *ergon* of her work with a border: it becomes the border needed to give unity to the ‘proper’ *corpus*. However, in the process this erotic *parergon* becomes *central* to her work: ‘When one considers *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* within the context of Nin’s entire body of work – the Diary, the fiction, and even the literary criticism – it becomes clear that the principle of Eros is at the center of everything she has done, in life as in writing’ (Spencer 1981, p.123). This outside limit, this contaminating or supplementary element, becomes *reinscribed* inside the body of her work. Indeed, the chapter on ‘The Erotica’ literally and metaphorically takes a central place in Spencer’s text. What is more, this relocation of the *parergon* to the *ergon*, its (re)positioning from an oblique to a central position, seems all the better to (re)appropriate and contain it as *purity*. Spencer writes, ‘The *variety* of erotic incidents and activities that Nin has called upon is impressive. Even more surprising, it is all in a spirit of innocence’ (1981, p.117).

Richard-Allerdyce professes her text to be ‘unique in book-length studies of Nin’ providing a ‘unified view of Nin’s oeuvre’ as it is the first to incorporate the ‘four volumes of previously expurgated portions of Nin’s diaries’ (1998, p.4). She asserts her originality in being ‘the first’ scholar to gain access to Nin’s four unexpurgated volumes of previously expurgated texts (p.4). In this sense, her project appears to ‘fill in’ the gaps of previous scholarship by redrawing the boundaries around Nin’s *corpus* and offering it up as a more complete object of critical observation and analysis. What is more, Richard-Allerdyce feels the need to pardon the gaps and omissions in Nin’s diaries, to restore her ‘integrity’ as an important modernist ‘deserving recognition within the literary canon’ because of her ‘policy of eventual full disclosure in her unexpurgated diary’ (p.14). Indeed, there seems to

be a link between Richard-Allerdyce's own desire for an original angle, to find a certain 'closure' and become an authority on Nin, and her belief in finally 'disclosing' the Truth of Nin. Yet, this 'oeuvre' as a (*dis*)closure of Nin is only possible because of Richard-Allerdyce's own 'disclosure' of an omission on her part. Indeed, she footnotes that her book 'spans *most* of the works' of Nin though, '[b]ecause my plans include a separate study of Nin's erotica, I have not included them in this study' (p.170, n. 20 my emphasis).²⁸ Interestingly, it is the erotica that disrupts Richard-Allerdyce's sense of unity and troubles the boundaries of Nin's 'oeuvre'. That this disruption must be made obliquely, in the borders or margins of her text, further emphasises the border as the site of meaning and of power. It is the point where decisions are made, as to what to include and what to exclude, in order to create an illusion of coherence and unity. My point is not to undermine Richard-Allerdyce's text, but rather it is to raise certain questions about the kind of value systems operating in her criticism. For instance, *why* is the erotica displaced to the margins of a text that explores the question of gender and narrative? *Why* might her erotica require a different type of reading to her diaries and fiction, and *why* does it need to be addressed separately? Indeed, might the erotica need to be 'framed' differently precisely because it threatens the very possibility of the 'oeuvre' and the 'proper' body?

²⁸ This separate study has not been published to date though she has published a short article 'Anais Nin's "'Poetic Porn": Problematizing the Gaze,' (2001). Drawing on Brennan's identification of a 'doubleness of perspective' (2001, p.17) in Nin's erotica (discussed in Chapter Four), Richard-Allerdyce argues that her erotica provides an 'analytic function' by encouraging readers to both recognise the ways in which they are 'manipulated by the text' (p.20) and to 'analyze their complicity' in the (re)production of 'socially constructed positions and sexual desire' (p.19). Extending her theme of the 'wounded daughter', which is discussed above, Richard-Allerdyce argues that this 'double' reading position encourages the reader to resist the text's manipulation of their desires much like Anaïs as 'wounded daughter' rejects her own manipulation by the desires of her father (p.20). However, far from liberating the reader from textual conventions, as Richard-Allerdyce seems to suggest, this alternative reading strategy simply indulges another culturally constructed desire to 'open the way to authentic love' (p.33). Further, by closing down the ambiguity of the last two lines of the preface to *Little Birds*, Richard-Allerdyce neatly brings closure to the debate by suggesting that Nin believes in 'a natural or true human sexuality' that somehow lies *behind* the 'layers of veils' (p.33). Whilst acknowledging her own skepticism of this notion she states that 'it is *clear* that Nin attempts through her erotica to make it so' (p.33 my emphasis).

This question of ‘framing’ seems particularly significant in relation to Nin’s erotica. Tookey notes that Nin’s own framing of her erotica as wholesome and unifying is ‘strikingly at odds with the depictions of sexual desire within the stories themselves’ (2003, p.87). She states that the erotica seems to illustrate ‘the constant slippage of identity and identifications, even across gender boundaries, and the psychic divisions caused by fantasy and desire’ (p.87). However, even Tookey’s otherwise excellent study fails to seriously engage with a close analysis of Nin’s erotica, dedicating merely six pages to a brief exploration of ‘Elena’ (*Delta of Venus*) and ‘Two Sisters’ (*Little Birds*). Locating her work within recent feminist psychoanalytical feminist theory, she extends her own exploration of the actress and role-play to ‘Two Sisters’. Here she argues that the protagonist Dorothy’s re-staging of her desires for (feminine) exhibitionism condemns her to ‘re-create herself in fantasy as mirrored spectacle’ for another’s gaze (Tookey 2003, p.90). Her desire to be the object of desire, a spectacle for her lover (as ‘masculine’ voyeur) consigns her to the role of ‘actress whether she wants to be or not’ (Tookey 2003, p.90).

I would hope that this thesis adds *another* ‘deconstructive’ perspective to these psychoanalytical readings from which the reader/writer might rearticulate feminine desire. By reading Nin’s texts in and against each other I intend, in the words of Tookey, to ‘wreck havoc’ on their boundaries and the ‘integrity’ of gender/genres in the constitution of knowledges pertaining to the (female) body and desire. This is not to suggest that this will enable any ‘clearer’ or ‘truer’ picture of what these pleasures might actually *be* – this is not a ‘proper’ reading in search of ‘essences’ – rather, it is an attempt to inscribe a ‘discursive space, in and from which femininity and desire might be articulated differently (Guild 1992, p.74). From this perspective the apparent ‘closeness’ of the feminine to the body *engendered* in the constitution of the female subject is placed in question by the *trace/space* of ‘writing’ itself. The instance between the girl child’s *seeing* and *knowing* the meaning of

(sexual) difference as *lack*, is delayed (Doane 1991, p.23).²⁹ The immediacy between *seeing* and *knowing* is subjected to the ‘detour’ of *différance* which constantly defers the possibility of a fixed relation between bodies, texts and desires and as such *traces* the possibility of other and differing desires.

Chapter One, ‘Bordering on Subversion’ lays the theoretical grounds for my thesis. As a chapter, it attempts to highlight the fact that meanings and knowledges of the (female) body are not fixed but rather multiple, culturally specific and historical contingent. Here I engage with psychoanalytical and philosophical discourses of the body and feminine sexuality and outline various ways that feminist theory has challenged and rearticulated the terms of the debate in order to offer alternative understandings of the body and gender.

Chapter Two, ‘Gender/Genre Trouble’ is concerned primarily with the politics of gender and genre. In this chapter I draw on various feminist rewritings of autobiographical theory and self-writing as well as Jacques Derrida’s ‘The Law of Genre’ to explore the politics of self-representation and embodied subjectivity. This chapter also investigates the position of women writers within the modernist canon paying particular attention to the so-called ‘female’ genre of diary writing and Nin’s own conception of ‘womb writing’.

Having established Nin’s ‘womb writing’ as a strategy for re-writing and deferring the very ‘identity’ of autobiography and gender, Chapter Three, ‘Surrealism and “Writing the Body”’, makes an apparent ‘detour’ away from the (female) autobiographical genre and focuses on Nin’s first attempt to write the (male) genre of fiction: *House of Incest* (1994a, originally published in 1936). In this chapter I explore in more detail how the subversive strategy of ‘womb writing’, as the inscription of a disruptive ‘femininity’, works to mime and undermine the discourse of ‘woman’ as Other within the so-called ‘marginal’

²⁹ Doane is discussed in more detail in Chapter One where I explore the relation between the female body and the feminine as it is constructed within Freudian psychoanalytical discourse.

discourses of Surrealist avant-garde texts. This chapter offers an alternative perspective to the existing criticism of *House of Incest* by engaging with the photomontages that appeared in the 1958 edition and which have been largely ignored by critics. These ‘supplementary’ additions to the 1958 edition destabilise the author(ity) of an ‘original’ and timeless text, and, as I argue, offer alternative perspectives on ‘writing the body’ that further challenge the very notion of (body) borders, margins and frames.

Chapter Four, ‘The Ob/scene (Between) Body’ asks what difference a female writer/reader might make to the tradition of male-authored erotica. What happens to the discourse of (sexual) difference and desire when its framing narrative is disrupted: when the ‘object’ becomes a ‘subject’ of that discourse and an ‘inside’ (*ergon*) turns ‘outside’ (*parergon*). What happens when ‘womb writing’ wanders ‘hysterically’ into spaces where it does not traditionally belong? It seems to me that this juxtaposition of Nin’s diaries in relation to her erotica sets up an interesting and important relation between the two genres which has not been adequately explored. Nin’s erotica continually emphasises the narrative process itself, which refers not to an ‘outside’ Truth but rather to *other* passages/texts. This continual citation of its fictionality and intertextuality calls into question the ‘natural’ difference between sexuality and textuality. By drawing on the concept of the ‘detour’, I explore the possible *other* texts of feminine sexuality within Nin’s erotica which take pleasure in the journey, and, as such, ‘deviate’ from more ‘conventional’ pornographic/erotic texts that celebrate the *telos* of the male orgasm.

I also attempt to trace the border between ‘pornography’ and ‘erotica’ and explore what might be at stake in the process of differentiation and the policing of those boundaries that mark an insurmountable difference between male/female, masculine/feminine, self/other. Here I have found the work of Lynda Nead to be extremely useful, especially her use of the concept of the ‘obscene’ as a space just beyond the frame of (phallogentric)

vision (1992, p.25). As phallusless and *lacking* the 'ob/scene' female body oscillates undecidably between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of phallogocentric discourse marking both its centre and its boundaries.

My final chapter, 'Curious Inter-Views' is an attempt to redirect the reader's gaze from a phallic centre to the margins, to the 'ob/scene' where the in/visibility of 'feminine' pleasure is banished outside the framing conventions of phallogocentric representation. I argue that by placing both the 'expurgated' and the 'unexpurgated' diaries and *Delta of Venus* in dialogue, in a relation of nearness and proximity, an *other* 'passage' is produced. The reading of Nin's erotica and her diaries in relation to one another provides an alternative and undecidable space between the inside/outside, text/body which offers, not an uncovered Truth, but rather an alternative way of seeing. It is a 'glimpse' *between* things where meaning is not fixed and the 'traces' of 'other' possibilities are kept in play. This gestures neither to an unspeakable 'outside' nor to a 'true' confession but rather towards *another* text: another possible form of representation. I argue that by making visible the gap *between*, or the 'inter-view', Nin attempts to create space for the 'other' to be inscribed.

Chapter One

Bordering on Subversion: Sexuality and the Body

The main focus of this chapter is an investigation of the discourses of sexuality, in particular scientific discourses, and their role in the construction and justification of asymmetrical power relations between men and women. Nin's work was heavily influenced by psychoanalytic discourse, and for this reason the first part of this chapter concentrates on the changing discursive production of bodies and sexual difference within the discourses of sexuality constituted by medicine, sexology and psychoanalysis. It concentrates on how sexuality was constructed within a discourse of phallogentrism which 'naturally' excluded women from their own bodily pleasures and made them objects of (male) scientific 'knowledge'. The latter part of this chapter attempts to lay the theoretical foundations on which to articulate Nin's subversion and renegotiation of borders in the construction of alternative sexualities and gender identities. I argue that the questioning of these borders attempts to counteract discourses of sexology and classical psychoanalysis which align the 'feminine' with a *lack* of spatiality between the female body and the 'feminine'. This closeness denies women the critical distance or perspective from which to renegotiate and challenge hegemonic discourses of feminine sexuality. I argue that Nin explicitly foregrounds the gap between the female body and discourses of the feminine by deliberately *over-playing* or parodying multiple discourses of femininity. The movement or dislocation of the 'feminine' away from discourses of the 'natural' fixed female/feminine subject is an attempt to highlight its cultural construction and to create an alternative perspective from which heterogeneity and mobility can be envisaged.

Certain Borders: Nature/Culture

Within modern Western mainstream culture the body is considered to be a biological given, the 'bedrock' of the sexed subject, as opposed to gender which is widely conceded to be culturally constructed. However, 'the body' is not a transparent Truth within an unchanging and immutable nature but is rather a site of multiple and contesting meanings: it is, as Moria Gattens argues, a cultural text that is very much 'written upon' (1996, p.38). As Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur note, 'the human body itself has a history' (1987, p.vii). By reading the history of the body/text, Laqueur demonstrates that the body's dominant manifestation within the West as 'closed, autarchic, and outside the realm of meaning' is, ironically, a very modern *cultural text* (1990 p.7). Within post-Enlightenment Western thinking, 'sex' is understood as an ontological and immutable category, whilst gender is widely understood as culturally constructed; however, pre-Enlightenment texts suggest that 'sex, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while *gender*, [...] was primary or "real"' (1990, p.8). Laqueur states that '[s]ometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented' (1990, p.149). He writes, '[i]n the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, science fleshed out, in terms acceptable to the new epistemology, the categories "male" and "female" as opposite and incommensurable biological sexes' (1990, p.154).

Whilst Western contemporary thinking believes anatomy is the marker of an incommensurable difference between the sexes, Laqueur notes that ancient medicine, constructed on a principle 'of flux and corporeal openness', saw the boundaries between the sexes to be relatively fluid (1987, p.8). Indeed, it believed it to be entirely logical and possible that, 'women [could] turn into men, as writers from Pliny to Montaigne testified' and that 'bodily fluids could turn easily into one another' (Laqueur 1987, p.8). It is not until the eighteenth century, that certain 'physiological processes – menstruation or lactation –

that had been seen as part of a common economy of fluids came to be understood as specific to women alone' (Laqueur 1990, p.viii). Michel Foucault also challenges modern Western Truths of 'sex' as a natural (and therefore ahistorical) opposition between two biologically different bodies. In *Herculine Barbin*, he argues that the need for all to have one 'true sex' is a relatively modern concept as, '[f]or centuries, it was quite simply agreed that hermaphrodites had two' (Foucault 1980, p.vii).

Pre-modern European discourses of difference relied on a 'one-sex model' which was premised on the assumption that all bodies were alike in substance, and difference was merely a matter of degree (Gallagher and Laqueur 1987, p.viii). The second century A.D., Greek physician Galen, saw no essential difference between female and male reproductive organs believing both had testes which were simply located differently depending on the sex of the individual (Laqueur 1987, p.2). Galen posited difference and reproduction in relation to a continuum of 'vital heat' whereby the more heat a body produced, the higher its position in the 'great chain of being' (Laqueur 1987, p.4). Within this model, the male was understood to produce excess heat, which resulted in his genital organs being pushed outside of his body, whilst the female's cooler, and hence less perfect, disposition meant that her organs were retained within (Laqueur 1987, p.4-5). Indeed, there seems nothing particularly surprising about this model of difference, since although it articulates difference *differently* to modern European discourses of sexuality, it still posits hierarchical difference and takes the male reproductive organs as the goal or measure against which all else is indexed.

However, whilst women were considered to have the same basic genitals as men, the female orgasm was believed to be central to conception with 'giants of eighteenth century biological science' postulating that the female orgasm was a 'sign that the ovum [had] been ejaculated from the ovary' (Laqueur 1987, p.17). Yet, Laqueur notes that this

pre-modern 'one-sex model' model of difference gave way in the late eighteenth century to a new 'two-sex model' in which the female orgasm appeared to slip from view and the differences between the sexes were constituted as incommensurably grounded in anatomy and physiology (1990, p.6). By the end of the nineteenth century this 'new difference' was not just limited to the 'outside' or visible anatomical differences between bodies but had thoroughly permeated the body structuring difference at a cellular level (1990, p.6). This new model of incommensurable difference posited that '[s]exual difference *in kind*, not degree, seemed solidly grounded in nature' (1990, p.6 my emphasis).

Laqueur argues that this reorganisation of female and male bodies from a vertically ordered hierarchy of 'vital heat' to a horizontally ordered system of oppositions could not be entirely explained by so-called scientific 'discoveries' (1987, p.3). He states, 'no one was very interested in looking at the anatomical and concrete physiological differences between the sexes until such differences became politically important' (1987, p.3-4). Ironically, since the historical shift in eighteenth century thinking about sex, the political and economic inequalities governing the gender roles of men and women in the West have been based on the apparent ahistorical 'facts' of a 'two-sex model' of incommensurable difference (Laqueur 1990, p.6). Indeed, he states, 'Sex, in both the one-sex and the two-sex worlds, is situational; it is explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power' (1990, p.11). Cultural appropriations of 'nature' as a foundation or 'essence' ensured that the political construction of 'difference' appeared as an unquestionable truth. Or, to put it another way: 'wherever boundaries were threatened arguments for fundamental sexual differences were shoved into the breach' (Laqueur 1987, p.18).

Michel Foucault noted the importance of borders and categorisation in constructing new objects of knowledge and their subsequent formative influence on modern understandings of sexuality and subjectivity. With the emergence of the human sciences in

late eighteenth century Western culture, 'man' and specifically 'the body' became the central object of the medical gaze to be constituted and 'known' through its discursive practices (Weeks 1982, p.112). As Jeffrey Weeks notes, '[t]he "Man" [...] who emerges in late eighteenth century thought is a creation of discourse, and not a creative being in his own right. He does not speak. Instead he is spoken' (1982, p.112). In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* (1998, first published in French in 1976), Foucault argues that these new objects of knowledge were constructed within a discourse of sexuality which came to constitute an obsession within modern Western culture in which sex and sexuality became pivotal to our conceptions of individual identity and desire. He posits that from the eighteenth century onwards, modern science made the female body the new object of scientific investigation, ascribing it meaning and subjecting it to a process of hysterization (1998, p.105). In this sense, the female body was not merely the object to which a supposed objective scientist referred; rather it was constructed within the very discourse that sought to 'explain' it. This discursive production of the 'nervous' woman as nothing but womb, whose body was totally saturated with a sexuality beyond her own realization, was central to the rewriting of femininity and the exclusion of women from the public domain (Weedon 2001, p.105).

Many scholars have noted with suspicion that the rise of sexology in Europe, in the mid- to late nineteenth and early twentieth century, coincided with the rise of the women's movement.¹ Stephen Heath traces the 'origins' of the term sexology to the term 'sexualogy' first appearing in English in a paper printed for private circulation on 'The Woman's Question' authored by a professor Karl Pearson in 1885 (1982, p.9-10). Heath argues that Pearson's motivations were distinctly anti-feminist as his paper questioned the social

¹ See Stephen Heath (1982); Margaret Jackson (1987); Shelia Jeffreys (1997, first published 1985); and Celia Kitzinger (1987).

implications of women's struggles for emancipation and their potential withdrawal from reproduction (p.10). In short, the message seemed clear, women were the property of patriarchy and their primary purpose was the (re)production of the discourses constituting disciplined patriarchal subjects. Moreover, the presence of these transgressing female bodies threatened to disrupt the traditional cultural organisation of gender and spaces by placing increasing pressure on the borders that traditionally differentiated between the sexes, and the healthy (re)production of a nation. Whereas cultural borders proved to be permeable and mutable, 'nature' was called upon to act as guarantee and anchorage to shifting gender positions. Within the discourses of sexuality promoted by the sexologists, biological bodies became the guarantee of male and female sexual behaviour predetermined by 'natural laws' and 'instincts' themselves traced back to the 'original' laws of an animal kingdom. As Jeffrey Weeks notes:

Appeals to 'Nature', to the claims of the 'natural', are amongst the most potent we can make. They fix us in the world of apparent solidity and truth, offering an affirmation of our real selves, and providing the benchmark of our resistance to what is corrupting, 'unnatural' (Weeks 1989a, p.61-62).

The appeal to 'nature', as the antithesis of culture, is an attempt to reduce the possibility of resistance and obscure the relations of power between bodies and subjectivities. As Weeks notes, 'the meaning of "Nature" is not transparent. Its truth has been used to justify our innate violence and aggression and our fundamental sociability' (1989a, p.62).

The effect of defining an indisputable path of 'natural' (that is reproductive) sexual behaviour, predetermined by a 'naturally' sexed identity, was, by implication, to define 'unnatural' or 'deviant' behaviours. These behaviours were then believed to disclose an underlying 'unhealthy' or 'perverse' identity. 'Deviant' individuals became subjected to medical and legal intervention and discipline. However, as Foucault (1998) points out, this

desire to 'know', to define and control this thing called 'sexuality' and the bodies it inhabits, was not just repressive but resulted in the proliferation of sexualities and sexual identities. This obsessional cataloguing of 'perversities' can be seen in the ever-proliferating pages and volumes of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* growing from 110 pages and 45 case studies in 1886, to 437 pages of 238 case histories by 1903 when it reached its 12th edition (Weeks 1989a, p.67). In effect, these proliferating 'other' sexualities worked to undermine the rigidity of the border between a 'normal' heterosexual centre and its 'deviant' margins which such research had attempted to fortify. Indeed, Jonathan Dollimore identifies an integral deconstructive impulse within the psychoanalytic project of classifying 'perversion' which he coins the 'perverse dynamic' (1996, p.228-230). This structural impulse serves to blur the boundaries of coherence between the very notion of normality and perversity precisely because the 'outside' of perversity originates 'inside' and is integral to the 'norm' that its very existence threatens. Therefore, in a Derridian sense, 'perversity' occupies an ambiguous and undecideable borderline position in the construction of heterosexuality precisely because '*[t]he absolutely other is inextricably within*' (Dollimore 1996, p.182). It is perhaps the very *proximity* of 'perversions' in the construction of a so-called 'normal' heterosexual identity which intensified scientific efforts to distance and differentiate contaminated 'deviant' bodies from 'healthy' reproductive subjects.

Celia Kitzinger argues that the 'sick lesbian' was a pervasive discourse in the construction of lesbian sexuality until the early 1970s (1987, p.39). What is more, she argues that the use of disease terminology was a powerful form of social control in which 'health' equated with conformity and 'sickness' with dissidence. In this sense, the discourse of sexology worked to ostensibly invalidate and obscure women's political challenge to compulsory heterosexuality (Kitzinger 1987, p.33). She maintains that sexologists

attempted to 'cut out' symbolically and metaphorically the disease of lesbianism and 'replace women's developing political analysis of gender and sexuality, with a personalized and pathologized alternative' (1987, p.40). Margaret Jackson argues that Havelock Ellis explicitly targeted feminists who were accused of deviance in flouting not just cultural expectations but 'the laws of their own nature' by rejecting motherhood (Ellis cited in Jackson 1987, p.56). Similarly, Elaine Showalter argues that autonomous female desire and attempts to achieve independence from men were aligned with so-called female sexual excess, autoeroticism and madness (1987, p.75-76). She draws attention to the increasingly brutal methods of Dr. Isaac Baker Brown, who, believing the clitoris to be the cause of female insanity, performed clitoridectomies on patients in his private London clinic between the years 1859 to 1866 (1987, p.76). By the 1860s his methods had progressed to the total removal of the labia (Showalter 1987, p.76). Showalter notes that Brown 'operated five times on women whose madness consisted of their wish to take advantage of the new Divorce Act of 1857, and found in each case that his patient returned humbly to her husband ' (1987, p.76). Such brutal procedures served to restrict female sexuality to reproduction and cut out the 'disease' of female pleasure and independence.

The Modern 'Truth' of Sex

As Peter Childs notes, the rise of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century saw the decline of religious feeling (2000, p.54). Quests for the Truth were replaced by an epistemological search for self-knowledge, an exploration of the mind and a proliferation of discourses of individualism (Childs 2000, p.54). Joseph Boone remarks that one particular hallmark of modernism was a retreat from an 'externally rendered reality' to an exploration of interiority and sexuality 'beyond direct representation' (1998, p.4). Freud's theories of sexuality and the unconscious were hugely influential in European artistic circles during the

modernist period and lead to a widespread fascination with 'interiority' and 'psychological realism', sharply juxtaposed against the surface 'artifice' of realist fiction (Childs 2000, p.51). Since the atrocities of the Great War, which had shattered the foundations of Western belief systems, the modernist avant-garde looked with grave suspicion upon the Victorians' preoccupation with 'realism' and their apparent confidence in the ability to accurately map a 'universally' acknowledged 'reality'. Jean-François Lyotard's uncharacteristically polemical essay 'Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?' equates the genre of realism and certainty with totalitarianism and the reign of terror inflicted on the world by fascism (1992, p.24). This unfolding of certainty in the retreat of the 'real' (Lyotard 1992, p.22) and the destabilisation of the rational and coherent subject goes some way towards explaining the huge influence of psychoanalytical theory within the field of the humanities that developed during the early twentieth century.

However, as Rita Felski notes, Foucault questioned the radical difference between a Victorian and a 'post-Freudian' culture, '[w]e share with the Victorians [...] the conviction that sexuality holds the key to our identity' (1998, p.1). Sex was supposed to tell us whom we really were 'inside', that is, below the surface of superficial appearances. Foucault (1998) argues that the emphasis placed on the importance of sexuality in defining the Truth of ourselves is central to the category of modernity and the constitution of the modern subject. He suggests that one of the central institutions involved in the formation of sexuality as a historical phenomenon was the church and its demand for confession. Foucault illustrates how the Christian compulsion of confession became secularised and implemented as a mechanism for Truth production and the secrets of sexuality underpinning psychoanalysis. The analyst's 'knowledge' of the latent invested him with the authority to listen and translate the Truth of sex from the words of his analysand. He writes:

we demand that sex speak the truth [...] and we demand that it tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness. We tell it its truth by deciphering what it tells us about that truth; it tells us our own by delivering up that part of it that escaped us. (Foucault 1998, p.69-70)

Nin's own life-long exploration of the feminine, female sexuality and the unconscious was constructed within the form of a 'confession': explored within the pages of vast volumes of diaries from 1914 to 1977, and on the psychoanalyst's couch. However, she was fully aware of the powers that mystery could evoke. In *Volume One* of her *Diary* she apparently 'confesses' her attempts to seduce not only her analyst René Allendy by 'concealing some secret part of my real self', but also, the reader is told, 'I hold back from everyone a full knowledge of myself' (1979a, p.107). Whether the reader is aware of it or not, this *excluded* 'everyone' *includes* the reader. Like the analyst, the reader is situated 'outside' the text, and, although this position may *seem* to guarantee exclusive rights to Nin's full 'confession', the 'object' of knowledge persistently evades and puts into question the certainty of that judgement. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, Nin constantly plays with readers' expectations offering both the possibility of resolving an enigma, whilst simultaneously denying them any such certainty. However, it must be added that even the author of her *Diary* persona is not privy to such information, as '[t]here must always be a secret' (1979a, p.107). The Truth of the subject is not the subject's to *possess*, it is rather the product of language, the meaning of which is endlessly differing and deferred.

Bordering on un/certainty

Freud's theories of sexuality and the unconscious attempted to question the discourses of the sexologists, who attributed sexuality entirely to biological essentialism, by arguing that sexuality belongs within the realms of the psyche and fantasy: psychic reality. In 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1991a, originally published in 1905) he maintained

that all adults had a 'prehistory' of infantile sexuality in which they were bisexual or 'polymorphously perverse', as in the absence of an object for the sexual drive they sought all forms of sensual gratification. Psychoanalysis unsettled the boundaries between the sexes and the dominant discourses of biological essentialism by maintaining that bodies *became* differentiated and overlaid with meaning through the imposition of cultural rather than natural processes which he defined as the Oedipus and castration complexes. What is more, as Jeffrey Weeks points out, sexual identity for Freud was not inevitable or predetermined by biological instincts; rather 'it was a struggle through which a tentative accommodation of conflicting drives and desires with the structures of language and reality was precariously achieved' (1987, p.38). In this sense, if everyone had a bisexual prehistory and were 'polymorphously perverse', then the attainment of a single sexual identity would always be an act of violence in which a subject position was a constant struggle of forced compromise and loss (Weeks 1987, p.38).

Whilst Freud attempted to move ideas of gender identity away from an uncomplicated relationship between anatomy, gender and sexuality by introducing the realm of fantasy and an original bisexuality, he still conceded that there was an ultimate goal of 'normal' sexual identity. In Freud's model all individuals necessarily go through the Oedipus complex. This refers to the process of psychosexual 'normalisation' in which the child's incestuous desires for its parents are redirected to more socially acceptable outlets, i.e. the opposite sex and towards someone who is not a family member. As a process of psychosexualisation, it introduces the 'bisexual' child to sexual/genital differences and requires the child to fit into pre-existing binary oppositions: s/he must take up *one* specific subject position as *either* masculine *or* feminine (Grosz 1990b, p.69). It also attempts to 'match' the child's 'sex' (biological anatomy) to 'gender' and fix it in socially constructed roles by reducing the definition of 'sex' to the presence/ absence of the penis, which in turn

defines the presence/ absence of active social agency and sexuality itself (Grosz 1990b, p.69-70).

Infantile sexuality in the pre-Oedipal stage is constructed on a one-sex model, presumed to be the same for both boys and girls, and based on an assumption of the primacy of the phallus. At this stage, the girl child is referred to as a 'little man' and her clitoris, which becomes the focus of autoerotic activity, is understood only in phallic terms as an inferior penis (Freud 1991c, p.417). In the pre-Oedipal stage the primary love object for both the boy and the girl child is based upon a fantasy of the '*phallic* mother', an all-powerful figure, perceived to be capable of granting the child everything (Freud 1991c, p.425). However, the boy child's incestuous wishes for the mother are censored by the castrating 'no' of the father whose authority to prohibit the child's sexual access to the mother is founded on an *assumed* phallic superiority. Moreover, this renunciation is only temporary and is in exchange for a promise of deferred satisfaction from a woman of his own – a guarantee to his place as heir to his father's position within patriarchal kinship systems (Grosz 1990b, p.68).

One of the problems that feminists have with Freud's theory of psychosexual development is his premise that the boy child becomes the 'norm' from which the girl child must differ. From this position it is the girl child that becomes 'problematic' within Freudian psychoanalytic theory as it is the fear of castration, signified by the female body and the feminine subject position, that establishes the boy's subject position as male. As Rachel Bowlby (1992) notes, it is not simply biological anatomy that determines the boy's identification as male; rather, the threat of castration is reaffirmed for the boy when he catches sight of his mother's or sister's so-called 'castrated' body. In this sense, the primary meaning of sexual identity for the boy is not based on biology but rather, 'man's identity as a man is founded [...] on the fear of castration, on the denial of being a woman (Bowlby

1992, p.141). However, the asymmetry underpinning Freud's account of psychosexual development means that '[t]here is no equivalent insistence for the woman that she is not a man' (Bowlby 1992, p.141). Indeed, the girl child is ambiguously placed within such a theory potentially occupying *both* gender positions. It is not until her 'discovery' of her and her (phallic) mother's castration that she is impelled to give up an initial masculinity and move into her next phase of psychosexual development in order to attain femininity. Whereas acceptance of the threat of castration marks the resolution of the Oedipal stage for the boy child, for the girl the structures of castration and the Oedipus complex 'make the "boundary" between the "two phases" of the girl's life acquire all the sharper a distinction' (Bowlby 1992, p.140). At this stage the little girl is faced with three possible pathways leading either to sexual inhibition or neurosis; a masculinity complex; or to 'normal' femininity (Bowlby 1992, p.143). The path to 'normal' femininity initiates a chain of radical changes to the girl's libidinal desires. Rosalind Coward notes:

First, the girl-child must undergo a very radical change in the *form* of her sexuality – from active to passive, from clitoral to vaginal. Second, if the girl-child experiences the same desire as the boy-child for the mother, she must therefore undergo a very radical change in the *object* of her desire – from mother or woman to man. (1983, p.205)

Yet, as Grosz points out, the girl child's motivation towards the Oedipus complex is unclear as, '[f]or her, the oedipus complex involves no rewards, no authority, no compensation for her abandonment of the mother; rather, it entails her acceptance of her subordination' (1990b, p.69). What is more, the girl child's 'recognition' of castration causes her to abandon her fantasy of the mother as (phallic) love-object and redirect her desires towards the father, who is now perceived as possessing the phallus and from whom she wishes to have a baby-penis. However, Bowlby notes there is a contradiction or uncertainty in Freud's positing of femininity in relation to the penis. She notes that whilst

in his lecture on 'Femininity', Freud maintains that the girl's wish for the penis is '*par excellence* a feminine one' (the girl wants what she is supposed to be lacking), elsewhere he notes that this 'entirely *unfeminine* wish to possess a penis' must 'normally [be] transformed into a wish for a baby' (Freud in Bowlby 1992, p.144). She suggests that this substitution merely hides the continuing existence of the penis-wish, and, as such, produces the ultimate scandal that, '[t]here is no place of femininity at all: femininity itself is still "the masculine wish for the possession of a penis"' (1992, p.144). In this sense, Freud's proposition of the girl child's ultimate goal of 'femininity' is not a goal as such, but rather a repudiation of femininity, caught as it is within the masculine complex. Indeed, she argues that: 'If it seemed at first that there were three roads, of which only one led to the "final" destination of femininity, it now seems that all roads lead to the same destination, or rather to the same non-destination, the same repudiation' (1992, p.144).

Language, Subjectivity and the Unconscious

Jacques Lacan's rewritings of Freud focus on *linguistic* lack in which the phallus, as the privileged signifier and temporary stabiliser of meaning, takes a central role. Once again, the female subject is precariously positioned in relation to the phallus and to meaning itself. Lacan's theory of the acquisition of language stresses the loss or the split within the subject upon its entry into the symbolic order which prohibits certain pre-linguistic drives related to the (m)other's body. These drives become repressed, that is, they are barred from consciousness and banished to the site of the unconscious. Prior to language, in the pre-Oedipal phase, the infant enjoys a close relationship with the mother who is understood as continually present and capable of ensuring all its needs are met. At this stage, the child does not distinguish body boundaries and instead experiences its body as an undifferentiated, ungendered space. It is not until the 'mirror stage' (Lacan 1989, originally

published in French in 1949) that the infant begins to form a sense of self in relation to these boundaries. This also marks the moment when the subject becomes located within the symbolic order, which is outside of itself and to which it must continually refer. In this phase, the infant becomes aware of its reflected unified image (his little other) which is given meaning and validity by the presence and look of the mother. It is at this point that the child (mis)recognises itself as a unity which initiates a constant struggle for identity throughout adulthood. In Lacanian discourse, subjectivity is a fiction providing a fantasy of coherent identity, which, though placing the child in the symbolic, also divides his or her identity into two (Rose 1988, p.53). This transference of identity onto the image of the (little) other marks the child's movement into an Imaginary order, which is the structure of subjectivity itself. In this sense, identity is a desiring position, originating in the recognition of a lack in and loss of the mother's body. Each time the individual takes up a subject position in language the workings of the Imaginary (of unity and certainty) are involved.

The radical aspect of both Freud and Lacan's theories remain their articulation of sexuality with the unconscious. Such an assertion undermines any claims to knowledge and rationality in the exploration of sexual identity and subjectivity. As Rose states,

For Lacan, the unconscious undermines the subject from any position of certainty, from any relation of knowledge to his or her psychic processes and history, and *simultaneously* reveals the fictional nature of the sexual category to which every human subject is none the less assigned. (1988, p.52)

Sexuality is fundamentally unknowable, ambiguous and subject to change. The unconscious is formed through prohibition and the conscious mind spends considerable effort in fortifying this barrier and protecting consciousness from the knowledge of such desires. The unconscious is therefore 'unknowable' to the conscious subject as it operates without its knowledge and according to an entirely different set of processes. Despite its

prohibitions, the unconscious continually attempts to cross the boundaries of censorship and gain pleasure through distortion and disguise, primarily achieved through techniques of condensation and displacement. These two primary processes function together to express unconscious wishes through dreams, slips of the tongue, nuances, gestures and ‘mistakes’. The borderline between the conscious and the unconscious subject is less a limitation on meaning than a point of its constant deferral, renegotiation and resignification.

For Lacan, the subject is not the agent of language, it does not preexist language but is rather subjected *to*, and constituted *within*, its system. As Grosz notes, ‘it is (through) the Other (i.e. the unconscious) that language speaks the subject. The subject is the effect of discourse, no longer its cause’ (1990b, p.97-8). Desire signifies a repression within the unconscious that is unable to manifest itself directly within the symbolic. In this process of translation from the unconscious to the symbolic, the needs of a subject, which can only be articulated in language, are reconstructed into a demand. This means that ‘as long as his needs are subjected to demand they return to him alienated’ (Lacan 1982a, p.80). This is because ‘it is from the place of the Other that his message is emitted’ (Lacan 1982a, p.80). In this sense, the demand is for something *other* than what it enounces. Yet, as Rose states,

[s]ubjects in language persist in their belief that somewhere there is a point of certainty, of knowledge and of truth. When the subject addresses its demand outside itself to another, this other becomes the fantasied place of just such a knowledge or certainty. Lacan calls this the Other – the site of language to which the speaking subject necessarily refers. (1988, p.55-56)

Feminist Responses

Psychoanalysis and feminism share what can only be described as a tempestuous relationship and, broadly speaking, prior to Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1975 first published in 1974), feminist responses were highly critical of what they believed

to be an affirmation and reinforcement of patriarchal sex roles.² Mitchell and Rose are the most prominent defenders of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and both argue that their theories are the most effective tools for understanding the workings of phallogentric knowledges and are therefore invaluable to a feminist discourse of resistance.³ Both argue that Freud and Lacan do not advocate their theories as an example of the way things *should* be but rather seek to explain or theorise the acculturation of the subject within the existing patriarchal system. Rose argues that psychoanalysis is fundamental to feminism, as it provides a theory of sexual identity which is not 'natural' but culturally enjoined upon the subject and continually resisted:

Sexual difference is then assigned according to whether individual subjects do or do not possess the phallus, which means not that anatomical difference *is* sexual difference (the one as strictly deducible from the other), but that anatomical difference comes to *figure* sexual difference, that is, it becomes the sole representative of what that difference is allowed to be. (Rose 1988, p.66)

In this sense, anatomy is not destiny, it is not the 'essence' of sexual difference, but rather it comes to *figure* that difference within a system that relies on symbols to represent the loss of presence. She maintains that '[t]he importance of the phallus is that its status in the development of human sexuality is something which nature *cannot* account for' (Rose 1988, p.64). Furthermore, she argues that psychoanalysis has a certain 'affinity' with feminism precisely because of 'this recognition that there is a resistance to identity at the

² Such texts are vast and wide ranging but the most influential are considered to be: Kate Millet (1977, first published in the US in 1970); Betty Friedan (1963); Shulamith Firestone (1979, originally published in the UK in 1970); Germaine Greer (1970).

³ See Mitchell and Rose (1982); Rose (1988). Grosz (1990b) and Doane (1988, 1991) maintain the strategic use of psychoanalytical theory for the further development of a feminist discourse of resistance, though, I would add, they are more cautious in their appraisal of its possibilities than Mitchell and Rose. Grosz acknowledges that feminist engagement with such theories is a 'risky' project noting that, '[t]he utility of psychoanalysis for feminist endeavours remains unclear. It is a risky and double-edged "tool", for as a conceptual system it is liable to explode in one's face as readily as it may combat theoretical misogynies of various kinds.' (1990b, p.147).

very heart of psychic life' (1988, p.91). Femininity is never achieved precisely because, '[t]he unconscious constantly reveals the "failure" of identity' (Rose 1988, p.90). As Belsey and Moore point out, the implications of this refusal of the unconscious to submit to the order of language and culture means that '[a]t this ultimate level, in other words, we reject the Law of the Father, the symbolic order of a patriarchal society' (1989, p.6).

In 'The Meaning of the Phallus' (1982a, first presented in Munich in 1958), Lacan maintains that the signifier chosen to structure language and desire, the phallus, is purely arbitrary though he does equate this choice with the order of vision. He states, 'One might say that this signifier is chosen as what stands out as most easily seized upon in the real of sexual copulation' (1982a, p.82). Lacan maintains that the 'phallus' is *not* the penis but a 'privileged signifier' able to provide temporary stability of meaning by halting the eternal slide of the signifier and therefore it is *believed* capable of delivering presence. He argues that the phallus is a signifier not an organ and that the confusion of the two amounts to a conflation of the Real with the symbolic. Indeed, no one possesses the phallus precisely because it is a signifier belonging not to the subject but to the symbolic order and that the relation of the sexes to the phallus is one of *being* or *having* (Lacan 1982a, p.84). Entry into the symbolic and the acquisition of a subject position in language requires the child to reject the role of *being* the phallus for the mother and move to a relation of *having* it (masculine subject position) or *being* it for someone else (feminine subject position). It is the 'Law of the Father' which prohibits the child's desire for the mother's presence (for the Real) through the threat of castration. In this sense, the 'Father' is a symbolic father whose prohibition makes possible the process of signification in the symbolic order by instigating a loss. The subject's entry into the symbolic is accompanied by a recognition that there is only lack or desire in the place of the Other (the site of language) and the phallus can only

stand in for that loss. In this sense, ‘castration’ refers to this loss and, according to Rose, to the exposure of the phallus as a fraud (1988, p.62).

Grosz notes that despite Lacan’s insistence that the conflation of the penis with the phallus is an illusion, it is still this very illusion, this signification of the phallus, which constitutes the very foundation of the symbolic order and the structure of desire (1992a, p.321). Lacan maintains that, as the phallus is the signifier of difference, there is no sexual difference prior to language. ‘Woman’ and feminine sexuality can only ‘exist’, in the loosest possible terms, as a ‘lack’ within the symbolic, therefore, as Rose states, ‘woman’s sexuality is inseparable from the representations through which [she] is produced’ (Rose 1988, p.67). Lacan states that there is no necessary biological connection between the biological female and the feminine as subject position in language: ‘On the whole one takes up this side by choice – women being free to do so if they so choose’ (1982b, p.143). However, women do not have access to the phallus *as women* but as ‘phallic women’ (Lacan 1982b, p.143), and, in the absence of a suitable signifier of difference, women are forced to take on a phantasmal existence in relation to or for men. Lacan states:

when any speaking being whatever lines up under the banner of women it is by being constituted as not all that they are placed within the phallic function. It is this that defines the... the what? – the woman precisely, except that *The* woman can only be written with *The* crossed through. There is no such thing as *The* woman, where the definite article stands for the universal. (1982b, p.144)

Woman is therefore a ‘gap’ in the symbolic chain reflecting back the man’s fantasy (or misrecognition) of wholeness. The woman’s body stands in for the lost maternal body of the imaginary pre-Oedipal that guarantees wholeness yet by definition threatens subjectivity. As Judith Butler argues, “‘being’ the Phallus is always a “being for” a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that “being for” (1999, p.58). Therefore, Lacan’s statement that ‘woman’ does not exist

can be read on many levels. In one sense, he is arguing that there is no such thing as the essence or unity of 'woman', as the subject position itself is dependent on a recognition of lack or castration: 'she is not all' (Lacan 1982b, pp.144). In another sense 'woman', as she (dis)appears within the symbolic, is merely a male fantasy of m/other unity and cannot, therefore, signify anything in her own right. Indeed, this demand for unity is always for the Other and therefore remains beyond the addressed object of the subject's desire. In this sense, the category of 'woman', which serves to guarantee man's unity, is always a (mis)recognition mobilised by the establishment of the Imaginary at the mirror stage.

Luce Irigaray, a practicing psychoanalyst, challenges the predominant hierarchy of vision within patriarchy that defines sexual difference on the basis of an instance of perception: of those who *have* and those who *lack*. She states that for the female, 'her sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A "hole" in its scopophilic lens' (1985b, p.26). Within such a system, female desire and the 'feminine' mark the very gap or point of incoherence that serves to undo or deconstruct a phallogocentric system of sameness and coherence. She maintains that it is precisely the rigid conflation of the penis with the phallus as transcendental signifier that has enabled both Freud and Lacan to theorize the exclusion of women from language and has repressed their specific erotic faculties. In *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985b), Irigaray argues that the phallus is not the signifier of *difference*, it is the signifier of sameness. Women can only be classed as *not all* when they are subjected to the phallogocentrism of language acquisition. It is women's asymmetry in language, and her exclusion from the creation of meaning and culture, that has allowed the man to define the (lack of) woman in his own terms. What is more, she argues that both patriarchy and psychoanalysis are founded on the exchange of women's silenced bodies from one male to another. She maintains that, 'If women's bodies must act as the form of exchange between

men, it means that women ensures the foundation of the symbolic order, without ever gaining access to it' (Irigaray 1977, pp.71-72). Irigaray argues that the elevation of the phallus as a symbol of the male sexual organ to the status of privileged signifier reaffirms notions of patriarchal power and its associations with the potency of male sexuality.

The Look of Lack: Masquerade and Gender Performance

The transparent relationship between vision and knowledge and its application to theories of sex and gender are further complicated by the theory of masquerade. In 1929, Joan Riviere published her hugely influential paper, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1986) in which she identified within women a manipulation of the signifiers of femininity in order to mask what was essentially a failure of femininity. According to such a theory, women behave or perform in certain ways in accordance with men's expectations of what a woman *should* be, and, as a result, both confirm and are complicit in the reproduction of patriarchal stereotypes of femininity. Although Riviere's thesis seems particularly negative, the concept of femininity *as performance* served to establish radical new ways of re-thinking femininity as a cultural construction based on mimicry and parody, and to dispense with essentialist assumptions of sexual identity.

Riviere maintained that 'womanliness', or ultra-femininity, was a mask or disguise worn by women who attempted to appropriate masculine power. This masquerade was deemed to be largely defensive and was, she states, 'an unconscious attempt to ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual performance' (1986, p.37). In this sense, the masquerade is an attempt to transform a fear of reprisal into a form of seduction. Riviere states that she 'discovered' this masquerade when analysing an American woman whom, she notes, after each public speaking performance, would experience a degree of anxiety leading her to

seek reassurance or compliments from ‘unmistakable father-figures’ (p.36). Riviere notes that her patient was ‘attempting to obtain sexual advances from the particular type of men by means of flirting and coqueting with them in a more or less veiled manner’ (p.36). As such her thesis attempts to grapple with the apparent ontological impossibility of a ‘feminine’ woman achieving a stable identity based on an ‘imaginary’ symbolic mastery. She argues that previously it was ‘an overtly masculine type of woman’ who pursued intellectual fulfilment and who ‘made no secret of her wish or claim to be a man’ (p.35). However, as more women entered the professions and universities, it would appear that rigid gender identities were starting to be questioned, ‘[i]n university life, in scientific professions and in business, one constantly meets women who seem to fulfil every criterion of complete feminine development’ (p.35-36). However, according to Riviere, this flawless mask attempted to hide the woman’s ‘theft’ of masculinity and the desire to *have* rather than *be* the phallus. She writes:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (p.38)

Therefore, according to Riviere, the performance or mask of ultra-femininity adopted by women within patriarchy does not *disguise* an essential or ‘true’ woman; on the contrary, for Riviere ‘womanliness’ *is* the mask and femininity *is* the performance. According to this theory, there is no femininity: it is hollow, a *lack* to be covered over, and a surface to be adorned as protection against the horror of castration. All the signifiers of femininity constantly push away the possibility of obtaining any ultimate signified, gesturing as they

do to an 'elsewhere' or beyond. In this sense, femininity is a guise, a series of gestures, roles and performances with no essence.

Drawing from Freud's lecture on 'Femininity', Mary Ann Doane (1991) argues that sexual difference has been constructed on the imbrication of vision and knowledge mapped onto gendered discourses of spatial and temporal relations to the (female) body. She states that, '[f]emale specificity is thus theorized in terms of spatial proximity. In opposition to this "closeness" to the body, a spatial distance in the male's relation to his body rapidly becomes a temporal distance in the service of knowledge' (Doane 1991, p.23). She maintains that Freud's theory of castration and fetishism is constructed on a differential relationship to the look. For the little girl there is no temporal gap between 'seeing' (the penis) and 'knowing' (that she is 'castrated' and desires to have it back), she therefore, 'makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it' (Freud cited in Doane 1991, p.23). By contrast, the little boy 'does not share this immediacy of understanding', indeed, his first sighting of the female genitals results in a 'lack of interest; he sees nothing or disowns what he has seen' (Freud cited in Doane 1991, p.23). Doane notes that it takes '[a] second event, the threat of castration' in order to 'prompt a rereading of the image, endowing it with a meaning in relation to the boy's own subjectivity' (1991, p.23). In this sense, '[i]t is in *the distance between* the look and the threat that the boy's relation to knowledge of sexual difference is formulated' (1991, p.23 my emphasis).

The implications of this differential relation to vision and knowledge are significant precisely because it structures the borders between masculine and feminine subject positioning and marks the subject *with* knowledge of *his* object. The male subject is able to distance himself from his corporeality and obtain the illusion of coherence and rationality necessary for knowledge; whereas the female subject, who is represented as 'so close, so

excessive', remains trapped within her body and within the discourse of Freudian 'femininity' (Doane 1991, p.23). In the absence of any adequate theory with which to differentiate between the feminine (gender) and the female body (sex), both distinct terms are collapsed into one immutable discourse of biological essentialism. This discourse serves to construct women as objects rather than subjects of the discourses in which we are (re)produced. Doane suggests that a theory of masquerade may produced the necessary distance between 'sex' and 'gender' to allow for this 'masculine' encoded *second look* and a re-visioning of the female body's relation to 'lack'. She writes:

The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic. [...] Masquerade [...] involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image. (Doane 1991, p.25-26)

In refusing or resisting the subject positioning of the 'female' within the 'feminine', the masquerade resists the stabilisation of the two into the one, and offers an alternative and more subversive multiplication of femininity and mobility, accentuating the impossibility of a stable feminine position.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999) is perhaps the most influential theory of the construction of gender identity in which she argues that gendered identity is acquired through the repeated performance of culturally produced discourses of gender played out on the body. She maintains that bodies, genders and sexualities are culturally produced within a variety of institutionally located discourses and regulatory practices, the repetition of which actually constitutes the fantasy of gender identity itself grounded in stable, biologically defined bodies. In this sense, Butler argues that there is no 'natural' or originary 'sex' from which culture enjoins a 'gender', but rather that there is only gender

experienced as a 'true' identity. As she reiterates in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), she does not deny the material existence of bodies per se, but that there is no direct and unmediated access to bodies outside of language and discourse. Bodies come to *appear* and signify within culture, and are embodied by subjects, via the citation and performance of highly regulated gendered discourses that converge to form the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler 1993, p.2). However, Butler states that the subject can never meet the full expectations of this matrix, as individual citations can never encapsulate the entirety of 'gender' which always exceeds the borders of the matrix. In this sense, gender identity as a binarised category is the *effect* of regulatory practices which serve to restrict more fluid possibilities (Butler 1999, p.42). Butler proposes to subvert and displace these 'naturalised' categories of gender identity, that is, 'to make gender trouble [...] through the mobilization, subversion confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity' (p.44). She advocates the subversive possibilities of parody and drag in the destabilisation of 'natural' or 'essential' categories of identity and their ability to 'trouble' the established borders between male and female, masculine and feminine, abnormal and normal, self and other.

The conceptualisation of gender as a performance is potentially useful for feminists in that it deconstructs any fixed or stable relationship between the feminine and the female body as an expression of a fixed and essential identity that is heterosexually orientated. Moreover, the 'unfixing' of the feminine from the female body, and an accentuating of the gap *between*, allows for the possibility of heterogeneity and the subsequent generation of alternative perspectives, locations and subject positions. In this sense, if femininity is not fixed within a 'natural' and immutable essence, and the body itself is the site of multiple and (dis)located expressions of gender and desire, then femininity and the female body can be subject to *misreadings* and *resignification*.

Luce Irigaray argues that contrary to traditional psychoanalysis that postulates the masquerade as an express of woman's desire, the masquerade is the only form of sexual expression for women in an economy that denies feminine specificity (Whitford 1991a, p.135). What is more, participation in the masquerade further alienates women from her own desires and continues to reproduce her as a sexual object for man's enjoyment.

Irigaray argues:

I think the masquerade has to be understood as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain 'on the market' in spite of everything. But they are there as objects for sexual enjoyment, not as those who enjoy. (Irigaray in Whitford 1991a, p.135-6)

Whilst I would be inclined to agree with the overall logic of such an argument, it does potentially short-change the radical possibilities of masquerade in the rearticulation of desires and subjectivities. However, Irigaray argues that as '[a]n interim strategy' (1985b, p.220), 'mimicry' is a more radical alternative to the masquerade as it requires the female subject to 'assume the feminine role *deliberately*. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it' (p.76 my emphasis). She suggests that by taking on and performing the 'feminine' to an extreme, the female subject can 'recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it' (1985b, p.76). Indeed, rather than engaging in the alienating effects of the masquerade, by engaging in the game of 'mimicry' women not only hold 'femininity' at a distance, but as 'good mimics' they '*also remain elsewhere*' (p.76). Furthermore, she argues that the 'elsewhere' of feminine pleasure is not to be found in the process of 'reflection or mimesis' but rather in the 'playful crossing' and 'unsettling' (p.77) of the 'mirror' boundaries between subject and object. Indeed, woman's pleasure is found

not on either side of that ‘mirror’, in binary logic, but rather in ‘a *disruptive excess*’ that works by ‘jamming the theoretical machinery’ necessary for the workings of phallic desire (p.78).

‘The Slide Between’: *Other Representations of the Feminine*

As this chapter continues to exemplify, feminism and psychoanalysis remain inextricably linked. Citing both Mitchell and Rose, Rachel Bowlby suggests that ‘repudiation’ often appears in the arguments over the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis (1992, p.145). Interestingly, she argues that the word ‘repudiation’ does not simply mean to reject ‘but also that what is rejected is somehow a part of the repudiator: that it is illegitimately cast off’ (p.145). Indeed, hearing another tune in this ever repeating dance of courtship, Bowlby *traces* the now defunct meaning of ‘repudiate’ in English to that: ‘Of a husband: To put away or cast off (his wife)’ (1992, p.145). In this sense, she suggests, feminism’s ‘repudiation’ of psychoanalysis not only assumes a masculine subject position (an accusation often made against feminists in classical psychoanalysis), but it also locates feminism as the administrator of patriarchal authority whilst placing psychoanalysis ‘in the impossible place of the [cast-off] woman’ (p.148). From this position the opposing factions of an anti-psychoanalytical feminism and psychoanalysis, ‘each accusing the other of acting like a man’, appear to converge in that they ‘come straight back together in their joint claim that something should speak from the position of the cast-off woman’ (p.148). Furthermore ‘the repudiation of femininity’, which Bowlby acknowledges ‘has become one of the most familiar phrases in anglophone discussions of Freud and femininity’, is further complicated once the issue of translation is broached (p.148). Pointing out the ‘other’ possible meanings generated by Freud’s original German text, which seem to have slipped from view in English translations to the signifier ‘repudiation’, she ponders on ‘what it would mean if

“the repudiation of femininity” were nothing but an error of translation’ (p.149). Indeed, perhaps this ‘error’ might open up many *other* possible avenues:

In this sense, it would seem that ‘the biological “bedrock”’ was not the repudiation of femininity but the *faulting of femininity, leaving open, in the slide between the strata*, the possibility that there might be further to go after all, a still more ‘basic fault’ that had previously not been seen. (Bowlby 1992, p.150 my emphasis)

However, such ‘discoveries’ would not halt the debate of femininity, but ‘would simply be the vehicle of a further stage in them’, perhaps offering other routes or alternatives to follow, though ultimately no final *telos* (p.150). Diane Elam equates this endless uncovering or (re)covering of this condition of ‘woman’ to ‘the *mise en abyme*, a structure of infinite deferral’ (1994, p.27). In this sense, she argues that, ‘[w]omen both are determined and are yet to be determined. There are established, pre-conceived notions of what women can be and do, at the same time that “women” remains a yet to be determined category’ (Elam 1994, p.27). As Bowlby (1992) suggests, without a clearly defined destination it is impossible to determine the ‘detours’ from the direct route. Indeed, these ‘detours’, this constant ‘slide between the strata’, might (im)precisely be the *non-place* of femininity. Furthermore, as Bowlby implies, perhaps the importance for the feminist explorer is the re-marking on/of the ‘trivial’, that is, the making of alternative tracks in and from which the ‘feminine’ can be continually reinscribed.

In the absence of any final *telos*, the crucial question for feminism in these debates must hinge on *who* has the power to define and represent female sexuality. As Susan Rubin Suleiman argues, what is needed is a radical challenge to old repressive binary structures of homogeneity and a genuine encounter with difference and heterogeneity within language itself. She writes:

Women, who for centuries had been the *objects* of male theorizing, male desires, male fears and male representations, had to discover and reappropriate themselves as *subjects*; the obvious place to begin was the silent place to which they had been assigned again and again, that dark continent which had ever provoked assault and puzzlement ('Was will das Weib?'). (1986, p.7)

The French poststructuralist Hélène Cixous is the leading practitioner of *écriture féminine*, a form of writing which attempts to inscribe an excluded femininity by challenging the phallogentric discourses of Freud and Lacan. In one of her most famous essays 'Sorties' (1996b, original published in French in 1975), Hélène Cixous attempts to find 'ways out' of the phallogentric binary system of the symbolic that excludes the feminine and exiles women from their bodies and pleasures. These hierarchical binaries, based on the heterosexual couple, construct language as a 'battlefield' in which one term must be destroyed in order to make 'sense'; an act structured in terms of a masculine victory over a feminine defeat (p.64). Cixous's deconstructive approach to binary logic draws upon Derrida's theory of *différance*, which posits that meaning resides in language and is a temporary effect of difference infinitely deferred along a chain of signifiers. As the only source of meaning is linguistic difference, there is always a *trace* of the excluded, opposing term within the signifier. Cixous's alternative to the masculine symbolic order is 'feminine' writing, or *écriture féminine*, located in the pre-Oedipal phase, and is closely aligned with the (female) body and the unconscious as site of the repressed 'other'. Cixous's aim is to explode the myth of binary logic and to transform sexuality and subjectivity through an encounter with difference and the 'other', situated within the signifying gaps or '(in) the between' of writing (1996b, p.86 my emphasis).

As a discourse *écriture féminine* raises an important challenge to binary oppositions, in particular, the Cartesian mind/body split and its exclusion of the female body from acts of creativity. However, the connections between the female body and the

feminine remain unclear. Cixous's theory seems to oscillate between two seemingly incommensurable logics: on the one hand she maintains that both men and women are able to write the 'feminine', yet on the other, she seems to explicitly cite this form of writing within the female body, through a use of maternal metaphors. She writes, '[t]here is always at least a little good mother milk left in her. She writes with white ink' (1996b, p.94). This ambiguity is strategic as, within phallogocentric models of thinking, the mere uncovering of a repressed feminine simply reverses the terms of logocentric logic rather than finding 'ways out' as the title of 'Sorties' suggests. Moreover, Cixous throws into question our 'knowledges' of the 'body' as a signifier which is continually subordinated to its defining Oneness, the 'mind'. Under the law of the self-same, the structuring logic of logocentricism, what we have left to 'know' about the body is precisely 'everything'; a form of 'knowing' that refuses to be *placed* and subsequently *effaced* within these binary categorisations (Leitch 2001, p.2038). In this sense, it is logocentricism and the 'trap' of binary oppositions which create this seeming illogicality within the discourse of *écriture féminine* based not on 'male/female' but on Oneness and heterogeneity. Or, to put it another way, '[t]he incompatibility between *écriture féminine* as assertion of the female body and *écriture féminine* as capable of being written by men creates an impossible logic that is *écriture féminine*' (Leitch 2001, p.2038).

Irigaray (1985b) challenges phallogocentricism with a specifically 'feminine' language, or 'womanspeak', which she argues is able to articulate a specifically female eroticism. However, in contrast to Cixous, Irigaray seems more specific in her alignment of this language with an alternative representation of the female body. By decentring the phallus and the significance of the symbolic, she concentrates on the 'marginal', polymorphous identity of child-mother and the ability of the m/other to 'slip through the patriarchal net' of phallogocentric representation to experience the other side of the symbolic

mirror (Selden and Widdowson 1993, p.229). In contrast to Lacan and Freud's centrality of the phallus/penis, Irigaray symbolises a female desire through the 'two lips' of the labia that is/are simply not definable within a phallogocentric economy of binaries as it/they are neither *one* nor *two*, but their very proximity creates continual and excessive pleasures '[w]ithout breaks or gaps' (1985b, p.213). The 'two lips' mark the very *betweenness* where movement against or across surfaces seduces borders into a polymorphous and constantly deferring fluidity. By accentuating the permeability of those boundaries, the subject/other relationship is suspended as neither the same nor different but somehow *both*. Unlike men, whose body boundaries and binary oppositions are traditionally constructed as a protection against the 'other', Irigaray argues that women's pleasure comes from nearness and touch. Indeed, these bodies are not 'properly' differentiated as 'One' or 'other', but rather the boundaries of I/identification between I/we, inside/outside, self/other remain ambiguous and permeable:

No surface holds. No figure, line, or point remains. No ground subsists. But no abyss, either [...] Our depth is the thickness of our body, our all touching itself. Where top and bottom, inside and outside, in front and behind, above and below are not separated, remote, out of touch. Our all intermingled. (1985b, p.213)

Women, as phallusless 'others' do not achieve one but many selves within language and when these 'two lips' speak, they speak the fluidity and multiplicity of a pleasuring female libido. Irigaray claims that women's different relationship to their bodies and language is constituted by proximity and touch enabling them to evade the phallic laws of prohibition. 'Womanspeak' cannot be fixed or 'properly' identified, but rather it marks the multiple points at which the anatomical and the linguistic brush up against, and transform the terrain of each *other*: '[i]t touches (upon). And when it strays too far from that proximity, she breaks off and starts over at "zero": her body-sex' (Irigaray 1985b, p.29). Furthermore, by

emphasizing proximity, as opposed to the distancing and effacing measures of the One, 'it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation (Irigaray in Whitford 1991a, p.136). In this sense, 'womanspeak', or the 'feminine syntax', does not generate a Truth of femininity, but is rather an alternative way of conceptualising the relationship that language creates between 'sex' and 'gender'. As Elizabeth Grosz writes in *Sexual Subversions*:

The 'two lips' is not a truthful image of female anatomy but a new emblem by which female sexuality can be positively *represented*. For Irigaray, the problem for women is not the experience or recognition of female pleasure, but its representation, which actively constructs women's experience of their corporeality and pleasures. (1990a, p.116)

Without an alternative *representation*, 'woman' is reproduced as a no-thing, an *objet a*, or *lack* on to which men can project their own narcissistic fantasies of sameness. However, by mobilising Irigaray's symbolisation of woman it is possible to perceive this 'Nothing. [as] Everything' (1985b, p.29). A woman, as desiring subject, desires 'precisely nothing, and at the same time everything. Always something more and something else besides the *one* – sexual organ, for example – that you give them, attribute to them' (1985b, p.29). 'Womanspeak' does not search for meaning (for the phallus) to fill up the pleasuring 'holes' of language. On the contrary, it is the speaking process itself, the constant 'touching (upon)' the female body and language, that continues to proliferate alternative possibilities of feminine pleasure and desire which remain just beyond the fix of the phallus.

Julia Kristeva (1984, originally published in French in 1974) takes up a rather different angle in the debate over femininity, and I have found her theories particularly useful in the exploration of the feminine as a borderline position in relation to the symbolic. Kristeva identifies language as dualistic in that it has both a 'masculine' and a 'feminine' aspect associated with the symbolic and the 'semiotic' respectively. According to Kristeva

(1984), the marginal 'feminine' position constantly disrupts and threatens the position of the subject dependent on the inside/outside metaphor of border formation for its coherence and authority. The disrupting influence of the 'feminine' constantly defers any guarantee of meaning or Truth within the subject and redefines its relationship to language as continually in process and subject to change. However, the semiotic and the symbolic can never transcend each other's influence but rely on a borderline relationship – of distance and proximity, of visibility and invisibility – that constantly reinforms and reorientates the subject's relationship and authority within language.

The attainment of a 'masculine' subject position by men, who are identified as phallic, locates men *inside* the borders of the symbolic, whilst 'woman' or the 'feminine', is located on the very borders of absence/presence. Gendered subjectivity for a woman depends on a recognition of a fundamental ontological *lack*. Women, as Grosz notes, 'are not *inside* the symbolic in the same way as men' (1990b, p.166), but rather occupy a strange 'borderline' positioning within language as neither fully 'inside' nor 'outside' of the symbolic order: a position that is fundamentally unstable. Yet, as Belsey and Moore state, '[w]hat is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies' (1989, p.127). Borders are surprisingly ambiguous markers of difference, precisely because of their contingent nature and their inability to clearly differentiate an 'inside' from an 'outside' or a 'subject' from its 'other'. They argue that, '[f]rom a phallogocentric point of view, women will then come to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos, but because of their very marginality they will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside' (Belsey and Moore 1989, p.127). The 'feminine' or 'woman' comes to stand in for the ambiguous borderline itself: as either a marker of the 'outside' wilderness and 'otherness', or as an integral part of the ordered 'inside' that protects the symbolic from a contaminating and chaotic disorder (p.127). Therefore, borders are less

effective in determining incommensurable differences than in tracing an inherent faultline within the symbolic itself and the radical and shifting undecidable structure of signification and embodied subjectivity.

In conclusion, this chapter explores the various ways in which the female body has been appropriated by medical and psychoanalytical discourses as the ground or Truth in order to centralise the (re)production and (re)presentation of phallogocentric thinking and the constitution of 'woman' and the 'feminine' as 'natural' objects of male theorizing and representation. Having drawn on various poststructuralist, deconstructionist and feminist psychoanalytical theorists I have attempted to draw attention to the gaps between the female body and femininity, arguing that this relation is neither 'essential' nor fixed, but is rather discursively produced and therefore open to transformation. In the following chapter I explore the ways in which Nin appropriated the generic instability of autobiography to trouble the borders of genre and rearticulate the relationship between gender and the body/text.

Chapter Two

'Gender/Genre Trouble': The Female Autobiographical 'I'

In this chapter I will explore the ways in which Nin developed her diaries as a *strategy* for rewriting a feminine aesthetic, in order to challenge dominant Western modernist discourses of 'woman' and the 'feminine' and their exclusion from cultural production. Arguably Nin's greatest literary achievement was her life-long devotion to her journal writings, which upon her death in 1974 amounted to a total of sixty-nine volumes plus several hundred file folders of diary writings, letters, photographs and newspaper clippings compiled in the last thirty years of her life (Bair 1995, p.xvii). In this chapter I will be drawing on feminist rewritings of autobiographical theory as well as Jacques Derrida's 'The Law of Genre' (1980) and *The Ear of the Other* (1988a) for their explorations of self-representation, embodied subjectivity and the debate over gender and genre. I will argue that Nin's exploration of feminine subjectivity and autobiography interrogates the politics of gender and genre highlighting the ambiguous borderline between the 'self' (auto), the 'body' (bio) and the 'text' (graphy).

The borderline, as marker of difference, is fundamental to the workings of the symbolic and the exclusion of the 'feminine' from the discourses of phallogentrism. However, as Jacques Derrida has demonstrated, the borderline demarcating the radical difference between an 'inside' (culture) and its 'outside' (nature) is fundamentally unstable, operating via a principle of contamination and transgression. Nin's constant foregrounding of the borderline as an inadequate marker of difference deliberately calls into question any clear and unmediated relation between aesthetic and anatomical form. I intend to explore further the relationship she poses between a possible female *aesthetic form* and the female *bodily form* in her manifesto of 'womb writing' suggesting it is not as stable as it first

appears and as such deserves a *second look*.¹ As Luce Irigaray and Mary Anne Doane have argued, the look serves an important function in the construction of embodied female subjectivity within male psychoanalytical discourse. Women's relationship to language and the body is constructed within discourse as one of 'closeness' whereby 'knowledge' of her body's relationship to language as lack is represented as unmediated and 'self-evident', whilst its discursive production is veiled over. Irigaray's (1985b) concept of the 'two lips' attempts to create a more positive representation of femininity as multiple rather than lacking, by challenging the inadequacies of phallogentric discourse to comprehend anything that exceeds a logocentric binary structure of either/or.

I: Troubling Borders: Modernism, Autobiography and the Fiction of Identity

Susan Stanford Friedman argues that Western modernism was inaugurated by 'a loss of faith, experience of fragmentation and disintegration, and shattering of cultural symbols and norms' (1987, p.97). She suggests that Freud's discovery of the unconscious was central to this crisis of belief within twentieth century Western culture (p.97). His theory that the subject was radically divided, and thus fundamentally unknowable, profoundly unsettled firmly established Cartesian understandings of subjectivity *as* consciousness. Furthermore, in 1915 Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1981) questioned traditional understandings of language and its relationship to the self and the

¹ Whilst I am not the first to explore Nin's work in relation to a feminine aesthetic, this work is original in its reading of her 'womb writing' in relation to her erotica. For further work on Nin's developing aesthetic see: Richard-Allerdyce (1998); Sharon Spencer (1981, 1989) who heralds Nin's 'writing the womb' as anticipating Hélène Cixous and Annie Leclerc's 'writing the body' (1989, p. 171); Margret Andersen (1979) also notes a similarity between the writings of Leclerc and Cixous; Friedman and Fuchs argue that Nin radically challenged the 'male structures' of literature by violating established genre norms resulting in what they perceive to be 'subversively feminine' forms of writing (1989b, p.24 and p.23) Also see Friedman (1991); Tookey (2003) takes a more cautious stance arguing that her explorations of 'femininity' and 'feminine writing' altered over time to accommodate varying feminist discourses. Felber argues that Nin's feminine aesthetic is a seeming contradiction mediating as it does between male and female literary traditions (2002, p.48); Fitch states that Nin was 'an early proponent of what is now called "essentialism,"' which she posits as 'the position that women's difference from men is critical' (1994, p.423, n.41).

world. Language, he argued, was not a transparent tool but rather an arbitrary system of signs that signified, not by reference to an outside world, but rather by their *difference* from other signs within a signifying system. According to Saussure, language was not referential but *differential*, and, as such, meanings were not expressed through language, but rather constructed within language itself. The implications of this theory for the subject and for representation itself were profound. As Childs notes, '[l]anguage was in crisis because its simple relationship to the world, of naming and describing, no longer appeared to apply transparently, as ambiguity, irony, misunderstanding and the ineffable seemed commonplace' (2000, p.62). For many, words no longer seemed capable of expressing a coherent sense of self, indeed, to quote T.S. Eliot, words began to "slip" and "slide" (cited in Childs 2000, p.62). So, too, did previously established categories of self, gender and sexuality.

Conventionally, autobiography has been understood as the effort of an individual to express a 'self' through writing and works on a common sense assumption that there is a coherent and unified 'self' which preexists language and is therefore directly accessible and fundamentally 'knowable'.² In this sense, language is perceived as a tool to be skillfully manipulated by the writer in order to describe transparently and unequivocally to the reader the Truth of this 'self' as a stable unity. Further, the reader of autobiography must somehow suspend her or his disbelief and take the representation (the 'I' of the narrative) as the referent (the 'I' of the speaking 'author') 'guaranteed' by the authority of a photograph and/or the name on the front cover of the text. Philippe Lejeune's influential 'The

² Georges Gusdorf (1980) argues that autobiography is 'a concern peculiar to Western man' (p.29) and that the 'curiosity of the individual about himself' is 'tied to the Copernican Revolution' (p.31). He argues that it is only by understanding the centrality of 'mankind', the consciousness of self, and of 'individuality' to Western narratives that the project of autobiography can be understood. As a narrative, the mirror-like quality of autobiography appears to 'reflect' and consolidate the subject, to 'fix his own image so that he can be certain it will not disappear' (p.30). In this sense, autobiography is 'a sort of posthumous propaganda for posterity' (p.36).

Autobiographical Pact' (originally published in French in 1973) states that autobiography 'proper' is defined in a relation of identity and sameness in which 'the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical' (1995, p.5). Furthermore, this 'pact' (or convention) between the author and reader relies on the author's 'intention to honor his/her *signature*' and to portray their life truthfully to their reader (p.14). Lejeune presupposes that autobiography is a consolidating genre and centralises the author's conscious intention in the act of writing. Such is the power of learnt convention in the construction and appearance of 'truth' and 'reality', that the reader remains largely ignorant of the linguistic gymnastics s/he must perform to evade the 'blind-spots' within the text in order to construct a sense of unity and coherence.

Derrida (1988b) explores an alternative 'deconstructive' relationship between 'life' and 'writing' directly challenging the 'certainties' of Western metaphysics whose truth claims are always guaranteed 'outside' or beyond language itself. Western philosophy divides the world into a system of hierarchical oppositions whereby one side of the binary occupies the site of determination and power. However, Derrida argues that these terms can never maintain the radical difference on which each must depend precisely because 'difference cannot be thought without the *trace*' (1997, p.57). In other words, meaning does not reside 'outside' of language in the 'individual' or 'nature', on the contrary, meaning is constituted within language and '[t]he meaning of each depends on the trace of the other that inhabits its definition' (Belsey 2002, p.75). In 'Otobiographies', Derrida attempts to problematise traditional understandings of the 'life' and the 'work' by highlighting the border between the two concepts, which, he argues, is the site of the text itself (1988b, p.5-6). In this sense 'the text' is neither 'inside' nor 'outside' but rather oscillates between the two. Its contours or borderline remains undecidable: a strategy that attempts to keep difference in view by drawing attention to the multiple trace(s) of the effaced other within

the selfsame. By keeping the borderline between the 'life' and the 'work' in debate, and by questioning the limits of the 'text' and the 'material', life-writing becomes an important strategy in the relocation of cultural borders, and the possible rethinking and resignification of embodied subjectivity.

This crisis of the subject and representation became the crucial point of *resistance* from which women renegotiated the discourses of 'woman' and difference, their relationship to language, the body and sexuality. Modernist women writers were aware of their absence within cultural and linguistic representations of identity and selfhood, and, as such, autobiography became a particularly fruitful site in which to grapple with the issues of subjectivity, representation, language and culture. Autobiography persistently troubles the borderline or the location of the subject in relation to language and the text: between an 'outside' or essential self and an 'inside' representation of that self. If the self is not essential, not fixed within 'nature', but always already a cultural production, then the question of who (we think) we are is open to renegotiation and challenge. Elizabeth Podnieks (2000) and Lynette Felber (2002) both argue that the unstable genre of autobiography, which constantly transgresses the boundary between fiction and fact, public and private, became an attractive space for modernist women writers (in which they include Nin) eager to challenge conventional and outmoded notions of embodied gender identity.

Autobiography reveals itself as a paradox. Liz Stanley writes that, '[t]he approach of auto/biography proposes that "what you know is what and who you are", and, correspondingly, that "you are what is known about you"' (2000, p.41). Yet, this seeming correlation is in fact a paradox: knowledge of the 'inside' (of 'who you are') is posited 'outside' in the discourses and narratives of the 'other': you know 'who you are' by what is 'known about you'. In this sense, the 'self', paradoxically does not *belong* to the 'self', instead it is formed on the *borderline* between an 'inside' and 'outside'. Shari Benstock

notes in 'Authorizing the Autobiographical' that far from revealing self-knowledge and coherence, autobiography reveals a whole multitude of *gaps* within the subject's relationship to language, writing and selfhood (1988b, p.11). The crucial question that Benstock asks is, '[h]ow does writing mediate *the space between* "self" and "life" that the autobiography would traverse and transgress?' (1988b, p.11 my emphasis). She convincingly appropriates Lacan's theory of the 'mirror stage' to autobiographical writing and suggests that this recognition of the self in writing, as a unified and coherent identity is merely an illusion, or a *misrecognition*. According to Lacan, at around six months every child reaches the 'mirror-stage' of psychic development, which initiates its path into the laws of the symbolic (1989, p.2). At this stage the child 'still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence' jubilantly identifies with his mirror image and formulates a sense of what Lacan terms 'the Ideal-I' (Lacan 1989, p.2). The important point of this (mis)identification is that this sense of self as unity 'is given to him only as *Gestalt*' (Lacan 1989, p.3) and 'situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction' (Lacan 1989, p.2-3). In this sense, 'the illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself' is essentially a '*méconnaissance*', or misrecognition (Lacan 1989, p.7). What is more, this sense of 'unity' is constructed from the 'outside', by the mirror and by the authorising eye of the 'other', usually that of the mother (or its primary carer), who reinforces this external 'image' of self as a 'true' identity. In this sense, the 'child's ego becomes split into the I which is watching and the I which is watched' (Weedon 2001, p.51).

The crucial point of this theory in relation to autobiography is that 'identity' is neither an essence nor the property of the subject. On the contrary it is always a *misidentification*: an attempt to cover over a radical split. Identity is born in this very split, the border *between* an 'inside' and an 'outside', or between the unconscious and conscious

mind. As such, subjectivity is never fully present to the self as it always contains that which is 'other'. Benstock draws on the familiar figure of traditional autobiographical theory, Georges Gusdorf, whose definition of autobiography as a form of writing enabling both a 'distancing and reconstituting' of the self, is illustrative of the workings of the mirror stage (1988b, p.15). Autobiography in this traditional sense stems from, 'a recognition of the alienating force within the specular (the "regard") that leads to the desperate shoring-up of the reflected image against disintegration and division' (1988b, p.15). By reinforcing the ego, or the *moi*, this split in the subject is *written over*. However, since this 'gap' is the site of the subject and of 'identity', this 'stitching up' or the veiling over of the gap in an effort to achieve wholeness, paradoxically threatens the very existence of the subject itself.

Benstock makes connections between the radical instability of the autobiographical genre and the discovery of the unconscious, with the development of a female modernist writing aesthetic. She maintains that it was *women* writers of the modernist period who foregrounded the instability of the subject and radically questioned what was the essential aspect of autobiography: the relation between 'self', consciousness and representation (1988b, p.21). She argues that the essential difference between women's exploration of self-consciousness and those of their male contemporaries was 'that as women they felt the effects of the psychic reality Freud described more fully than did men' (p.21).³ She suggests that the traditional view of autobiography, which reaffirms this illusion of the '*conscious* control of artist over subject matter', is perhaps most often mobilised by those whose assignment within the symbolic is to *represent* phallic power (1988b, p.19). Those who seek to question and subvert such authority are precisely 'those who are expected to submit to it, those who line up on the other side of the sexual divide – that is, women'

³ The women writers she refers are Djuna Barnes, Isak Dinesen, H.D., Mina Loy, Anaïs Nin, Jean Rhys, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf. The men are T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats.

(p.20). However, she rightly goes on to footnote that this divide of psychosexual identity does not translate directly onto biological bodies, and excluded or marginal identities are not only mapped onto the matrix of gender but also of race, class and sexuality (p.31, n.5).

Sidonie Smith (1987) takes a similar position and argues that whilst women have been relegated to the cultural and literary margins, these borders may hold certain advantages for women writers. Smith writes that, '[w]hile margins have their limitations, they also have their advantages of vision. They are polyvocal, more distant from the centers of power and conventions of selfhood' (1987, p.176). From this perspective, women's marginal positioning within Western culture enables alternative representations of the self to a unified subjectivity and may produce the possibilities of multiple and polyvocal selves subject to change and contestation. Indeed, Podnieks tentatively suggests that, '[i]t is arguable that modernist women were more consciously aware of – or better able to articulate – how gender is a construct and how women have been handed predetermined narratives through which their lives are to unfold' (2000, p.60).

The Politics of Genre

As many critics of modernism have argued, genres do not neutrally differentiate between various 'types' of texts/objects. Indeed, it has become commonplace in feminist criticism of modernism to assert that the movement itself has been defined in masculine terms.⁴ For some feminists the canon of modernism was less of an archive that preserved a periodical 'essence' than a border which actively constructed marginalised groups and obscured them from literary history. Modernism is not a transcendental value or Truth emanating from the texts but rather the retrospective mapping of generic borders, which, by the very act of

⁴ There is a vast array of feminist literature on this very issue. Perhaps the most influential are Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar Vol. 1 (1988), Vol. 2 (1989), Vol. 3 (1994); Shari Benstock (1987); Bonnie Kime Scott (1990); Rita Felski (1995); Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers (1988).

differentiating, gives meaning and value to its contents. However, these borders are also sites of continual challenge and interrogation as the meanings of ‘modernism/s’ continue to proliferate, to be reinvented, reinterpreted and deferred. As Astradur Eysteinnsson states:

But while we may succeed in calling dominant critical approaches into question, this does not mean that modernism is going to be disclosed to us as it ‘really is,’ in all its glory, as it were. It must be reiterated that ‘modernism’ is not a concept that emanates directly from literary texts; it is a construct created by the critical inquiry into a certain kind of texts [sic]. (1992, p.100)

The process of canonisation itself, the process of selecting, naming and valuing, is productive in many senses: it makes visible a certain ‘modernist essence’, that is, a certain understanding of ‘modernism’ *as it really was*, which in turn creates an illusion of an unmediated access to historical ‘reality’. It also has a material effect in that it makes visible and accessible the texts of those ‘modernist’ writers in the marketplace by supplying demands created by academic syllabi. What is more, whilst the Canon on the one hand makes certain texts visible and certain ‘knowledges’ possible, it does so by obscuring or rendering *invisible* ‘other’ possibilities. In *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings*, Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace argue:

‘modernism’ is not simply a series of discrete texts and images, but a discourse. This means that it is produced by various cultural agents – the writers and artists themselves, publishers, editors, gallery owners, patrons, and subsequent generations of intellectuals and academics – but also that *it is itself productive of meaning*. As a discourse, ‘modernism’ has, in part, a disciplinary function. A hegemonic ‘modernism,’ [...] privileges some texts and aesthetics, and renders others invisible; it makes some questions inevitable and others unthinkable. (1994, p.15)

In this sense, there is no innate or fixed ‘modernism’ that can simply be excavated in order to ‘uncover’ certain ‘lost’ women writers. However, Elliot and Wallace argue that by ‘imposing and positioning women’ within the discourse of modernism it is possible to expose how discourses are constructed and how gender informs their construction (1994,

p.2). In *Sentimental Modernism* Suzanne Clark argues that '[m]odernism reversed the increasing influence of women's writing' and of a 'feminised' mass culture (1991, p.1). She maintains that these changes were perceived by the new critics as powerful and dangerous, and, in response, they developed and advocated a politics of 'aesthetic antisentiment' that worked to exclude women and the 'feminine' from cultural production (1991, p5).⁵ Similarly, Podnieks argues that the dominant discourse of modernist 'impersonality' and 'an aesthetics of detachment' served to create fraternities and an 'elitist patriarchy' in order to 'blackball' the sex which has historically and culturally been defined in relational terms (2000, p.81-82). Peter Nicholls argues that this sense of detachment and impersonality was largely a reaction of writers and artists who perceived 'a mimetic principle at work in bourgeois modernity', which found comfort and pleasure in representational art and 'tradition' (1995, p.13). He argues that a sense of 'irony and duplicity' found in these writers and artists of the period is a reaction to this perceived paradox underpinning bourgeois culture, 'that we become truly ourselves only by copying others' (p.13). This sense of bourgeois *mimetic* 'identity' was pitted against a fierce artistic sense of individualism which required 'radical, and often violent, demarcations of limits and boundaries' (p.15). Moreover, Nicholls argues that this particular form of individuality was gendered, and, as such, 'woman', as the antithesis to 'man', was conceived of as the dangerous 'other', the 'body' that threatened the coherence and detached aesthetic form of the individual, male artist (1995, p.4). He argues that the ensuing development of literary aesthetics, founded on the affirmation of distance and individuality with its appeal to

⁵ Similarly Andreas Huyssen notes that there are connections between the increased physical and political presence of women in the public sphere, the expansion of mass culture, and the development of a 'high art' masculine modernism (1988, p.47). Childs also discusses the formation of a masculine elitist modernism as a reaction against the 'feminine and moralistic' character of Victorian literature which, he states, 'can be easily read as a reaction to the rise of the suffragette movement and its equivalent in writing, the New Woman' (2000, p.23).

objectivity and the visual, is 'without doubt the most familiar form of Anglo-American modernism' (Nicholls 1995, p.197).

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise to learn that within an artistic practice that coveted a certain aesthetic form of impersonality and abstraction, the diary, a traditionally quintessential 'personal' form, was devalued, 'feminised' and excluded from the literary canon. Podnieks (2000) argues that whilst Nin was not the only woman writer exploring the idea of the 'self' as contingent, relative and in process, her choice of genre (the diary) as the *primary* context for the explorations of transgression has been used to discredit her literary worth. She notes that in her study of four modernist women writers – Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart and Nin – each writer's literary status was fundamentally linked to the genres in which she wrote (p.9). She writes that they, 'have been assigned by literary history to different positions along a continuum of literary value', with Woolf operating at one end of the spectrum as a 'major writer', whilst Nin occupies the other as a 'minor writer' (p.9). For Podnieks, this is fundamentally an issue of genre: 'Woolf has been honoured first and foremost as a novelist, while her diaries have garnered scant attention as literary texts. Nin, on the other hand, has been recognized as a prolific diarist, but at the expense of becoming infamous and thus devalued' (p.9).

As I mentioned in the introduction, I am aware that I may be using the terms 'diary' and 'autobiography' interchangeably, that is not to deny the differences between them, but rather to suggest that these differences are neither fixed nor certain. Perhaps one marker of difference between diaries and autobiographies could be that of authorial intention and its intended audience. Traditionally autobiographies have largely been written by those individuals who have led important, interesting and usually public lives; by contrast, diaries are often regarded as private day-to-day accounts or records of existence. In this sense,

diaries might be considered to be of less importance to a reading public, unless of course they were to elaborate on or ‘flesh out’ a portrait of an already important figure. However, this distinction does not hold in practice, especially when we consider that the diaries of many famous writers have been published, both within and after the lifetime of their authors. Podnieks demonstrates that the published diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anaïs Nin were all intended, at various stages of their development, to be published (2000, p.8). Indeed, Nin always treated her diaries more as a literary construction than as a private source of ‘confession’, often passing carefully selected versions around to be read by her husband, friends and family. To this end, Podnieks attempts to expose the myth of genre specificity per se by suggesting that these writers continually transgress the distinction between the novel and the diary with each genre taking on the characteristics of its defining other. She maintains that, [t]he diary we conceive in theory does not necessarily exist in practice; rather, it can be read as autobiography, which itself can be seen as a kind of fiction’ (p.13). Interestingly, whilst she notes that all four writers’ texts display generic ambiguity, it is Nin’s diary which marks the limits of such generic mixing. She notes that ‘in *an extreme case* such as Nin’s [...] the author’s signature on the title page is no longer a sign of sincerity but, rather, a testament to the diarist’s manipulation and exploitation of that intention’ (p.31 my emphasis).

This questioning of autobiography as a clearly defined genre distinct from fiction has come under repeated attack from various feminist critics. Janice Morgan states that ‘as the paradigm has shifted to privilege the relationship between “autos” and “graphe,” a new kind of autobiographical writing has come into being – a writing neither wholly autobiographic nor wholly fictional, but rather a provocative blend of both – hence, the use

of the term autobiographical fiction' (1991b, p.5).⁶ Moreover, the conventional assumption that genres are purely aesthetic and ahistorical forms of categorisation and organisation has been systematically challenged. Such questioning draws attention to the underlying politics of exclusion informing its selective processes founded on issues of gender, class and race which are precisely cultural and historical. One such critic, Celeste Schenck, argues that genre operates by the enforcement of a law that serves to protect generic purity from an 'impure' outside. This works to preserve the power to name and categorise, which in itself (in)forms knowledge and perpetuates 'a defensive history of exclusions that constitute a political ideology' (1988, p.283). She writes:

Mixed, unclassifiable, blurred, or hybrid genres, like impure, anomalous, or monstrous genders, have traditionally offered up problems to their diagnosticians. Implicit in these sexual metaphors as thoroughly as in genre theory itself is also a binary opposition between norm and departure, between convention and confusion, Platonic idea and deceiving appearance, pure form and polluted copy, which bears a subtext of not only gender but also racial oppression. (1988, p.284)

Schenck notes that given the fact that genres are culturally constructed, despite the various interests served in naturalizing their effects, 'they might be more usefully conceived as overdetermined loci of contention and conflict than as ideal types that transcendently precede and predetermine a literary work' (p.282). She challenges Derrida's deconstructive approach (p.284-5) and 'contemporary theory' for its effacement of genre as a site of political interest in favour of a 'borderless *écriture*' (p.283). Whilst I share her concerns with the material effects of genre laws, which serve to exclude from representation certain histories and voices, I do feel that she is too quick to dismiss the radical *possibilities* of a

⁶ Felber uses a similar term 'fictional autobiography' which 'vexes distinctions between fiction and autobiography' (2002, p.5). Morgan (1991b) notes that this 'hybrid form' can also be related to Smith's 'poetic autobiography' (1987) or the term 'fictional autobiography'. She maintains that the difference between these terms depends on the perceived balance between fact and fiction within the discipline of 'self writing' (Morgan 1991b, p.15, n.2).

‘deconstructive’ approach. Indeed, far from ‘effacing’ generic borders, a deconstructive strategy puts these borders on trial and subjects them to further interrogation. Classification systems are always political as they authorise *who* is able to represent *what* and *how* those ‘others’ are to be represented. Deconstruction does not neutralise or depoliticise borders; rather it activates the very possibility of resistance and change.

Autobiography and Contamination: Mixing Up the ‘I’

In ‘The Law of Genre’ (1980), Derrida attempts to deconstruct the traditional view of genres as ‘natural’ and show how self-contained categories are fundamentally unstable. In the conventional sense, the law of genre is prescriptive, defining limits of what is permissible and what is not: ‘Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres’ (Derrida 1980, p.55). As soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded a limit has been drawn between an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’, and it is that very generic boundary which produces the norm and exiles abnormality. Therefore, genres contain and defend their contents against contamination and defilement. Yet, Derrida argues that whilst the ‘law of genre’ demands discipline and conf(n)ormity, the very conditions of the law are predicated upon the *possibility* of resistance to it: ‘And suppose the condition for the possibility of the law were the *a priori* of a counter-law, an axiom of impossibility that would confound its sense, order, and reason?’ (p.57). In this sense, ‘the law of the law of genre’ operates via ‘a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy’ (p.59). The border that separates is also the point at which such a division is simultaneously disrupted and transgressed. Derrida puts into question the whole impossible logic of classification, the ‘whole enigma of genre’, by taking two supposed oppositions *physis* (biological, human or ‘natural’ genre) and *techné* (literary or artistic genre) as culturally constructed genres that rely on certain laws and orders (p.56). He goes on to demonstrate how they are ‘neither

separable nor inseparable' but operate precisely on a principle of transgression whereby each, paradoxically, depends on the constant citation of the other. He writes that they,

form an odd couple of one *without* [connoting both *lack of* and *outside of*] the other in which each evenly serves the other a citation to appear in the figure of the other, simultaneously and indiscernibly saying 'I' and 'we,' me the genre, we genres, without it being possible to think that the 'I' is a species of the genre 'we.' For who would have us believe that we, we two, for example, would form a genre or belong to one? (p.56-57 my emphasis)

Each constantly demands the appearance of the other, in order to maintain a separate and individual 'identity' (p.56). The genre 'I', is never entirely separate from its defining 'other' precisely because it depends on this 'other' to form its identity. In this sense, the genre 'I' is 'a species of the genre "we"'. It is the very play of *différance* that challenges the (im)possibility of identity or an 'inside' that can be conceived of independently of its altering difference, that is, its 'other' or 'outside'.

Whilst autobiography could be seen as an authoritative affirmation of identity as stable, coherent and knowable, it also draws attention to its own radical impossibility and places considerable pressure on the border between *physis* (auto/bio) and *techné* (graphy). As Derrida puts it, 'one owes it to oneself not to get mixed up in mixing genres' (p.57). Indeed, '[i]f a genre is what it is, or if it is supposed to be what it is destined to be by virtue of its *telos*', that is if genres are fixed and 'pure' categories guaranteed by a transcendental or 'natural' Truth, then, Derrida *re-cites*, 'genres are not to be mixed' (p.57). If the 'one', as subject, holds its 'purity' in any esteem, if it does not wish to be 'mixed up' or *disillusioned* by the contaminating principle of *différance*, then borders are not to be transgressed. Yet, there is *always* 'one ow[ing]' to 'oneself': there is always something left over from this category of sameness that both guarantees and undermines its 'oneness'. What is more, the moment a text 'remarks' itself as 'belonging' to a particular genre, it does so via the 'mark'

of language which ‘cannot be simply part of the corpus’ (p.65). In this sense a text ‘belongs without belonging’ as it cannot be completely reconciled or identified ‘inside’ its generic destination (p.65). As a result, the very borders of a text, what constitutes the difference between a ‘text’ and its ‘other’, its ‘insides’ from its ‘outsides’, remain undecidable.

Nin’s autobiographical writings refuse a fixed immutable identity, and instead explore multiple and contingent expressions of selves in both her life and her work. In 1931 she wrote in her diary that, ‘[t]here was once a woman who had one hundred faces. She showed one face to each person, and so it took one hundred men to write her biography’ (1995a, p.419). According to Deirdre Bair (one of Nin’s biographers) she had a certain ‘quality of mutability’ that constantly evaded Bair’s efforts to contain her within her own writing. She notes, ‘I was struck by how the Anaïs Nin I wrote about the previous day was fast becoming a different woman who required an altogether different approach and appraisal’ (Bair 1995, p.xv). What is more, this ‘mutability’, this multi-fac(et)ed persona, incited fear and animosity amongst Nin’s acquaintances and readers of her diaries. Her ‘violation’ of genre conventions seemed suitable evidence for her work to be publicly discredited and dismissed not as a ‘diary’ but as a ‘liary’: a monstrous creation that cynically courted the public eye (Bair 1995, p.xvi). Such is the strength of connection between the author and the narrative ‘I’ within the text that a slur on her work is ultimately a slur on her integrity as an individual: ‘Anaïs Nin “lied”’ (Bair 1995, p.xvi). Further, her *deviation* from artistic convention, her frustration of reader expectations, holds as proof that ‘she “could not be trusted”’ (p.xvi). Podnieks also notes that,

Nin was a compulsive liar both inside and outside the diary. While the unexpurgated supplements serve as a kind of running check on the expurgated volumes, they too must be considered in terms of a Nin who admitted to inevitable inconsistencies, double truths, and necessary inventions (2000, p.286).

Whilst there may be no *intrinsic* meaning to specific genres, the expectations a reader brings to a text are largely determined by its literary classification. In the case of diary writing the reader demands an unambiguous relation between the author and the narrative 'I' of the text. What is more, as I will argue in this chapter, because of the borderline position of 'woman' within Western culture, as both the guarantee of Truth and the epitome of artifice, this convention is most vigorously enforced, most persistently policed, when the author is a woman.

Diary and Confession: The 'Truth' and the 'I'/Eye

As Michel Foucault (1998) has argued, this particular understanding of the 'self' as interiority, as an 'essence' in need of 'self-expression', is itself an historical phenomenon produced within the discourses of 'modernity'.⁷ Indeed, modernity's changing understanding of 'self' and 'identity' (and I include within that remit gender, sexuality, class and race) may have had certain positive effects for women who were able to appropriate and rearticulate alternative discourses of 'femininity' and 'woman'. Liz Stanley argues that this 'modern' phenomenon of interiority and confession was a risky and double-edged discourse that both 'enabled but at the same time undermined women's emergent senses of selfhood' (2000, p.42). However, the diary is a particular sort of text, perceived to be closer or more intimately associated with female subjectivity. The diary, like the text of the female 'hysterical' body, appears to expose the text of 'woman' almost despite herself. Perhaps the compulsion to 'confess' that informs the discourses of women's diary writing

⁷ It should be noted that I am not conflating 'modernism' with 'modernity' here. Whilst modernism is a particular aesthetic practice (the boundaries of which are the subject of ongoing debate), 'modernity' refers to a particular historical moment, although various academics and theorists map the borders of 'modernity' very differently. With that said, I am suggesting that the representations of 'the self' and the unconscious that are now understood as examples of modernist aesthetics developed out of the discourses of 'selfhood' circulating within modernity.

is less a desire to confess a guilty secret than an effect of power which constructs female subjectivity as a secret in itself: a mystery in need of 'discovery'. Framed as a medium for Truth production, the reading of the diary is an unveiling of the body of the text, the uncovering of the body of 'woman' and the disclosure of the riddle.

Nin challenges this particular form of critical interrogation in her work by denying and evading the desire of the reader to fix and to 'know'. In *Novel of the Future* (1986b, originally published in 1968), she seems barely able to contain her contempt for this type of personal detection. She writes:

I do not think it is love of the novelist which drives critics to play sleuth to the personal lives and personal genesis of their art. It is merely the exercise of the art of sleuthing, and as this continues to be a favored sport among the academicians, it might be well for the novelists to *make their own confessions* for the sake of greater accuracy. (p.157-8 my emphasis)

Nin seems to suggest that diaries, as discourses of confession and 'truth', are merely utilised as a form of surveillance or discipline against which the 'fictions' of novelists can be measured and valued. However, her response to this academic 'sleuthing' is ambiguous. On the one hand, she seems to suggest that since it is the desire for knowledge that drives the academic, then the novelist may as well disclose all. In this instance s/he may as well be honest thereby reducing the risk of misunderstandings and incrimination. In this sense, whilst pressured into 'confession', the author would seem to gain some degree of power over the meanings circulated around his or her work. However, I am doubtful about this reading not least because of Nin's own interest in the workings of the unconscious that places the very possibility of 'truth' and knowledge into question. With this in mind, I would argue that the above quote could be read as a strategy of resistance to a cultural obsession with surveillance and the policing of the boundary between 'fact' and 'fiction', 'truth' and 'lies'. If the diary is synonymous with 'confession' as the marker of Truth, and

is also the ground from which fictions are judged, then the diary becomes a particularly interesting point for intervention and manipulation. From this perspective her statement could be seen to encourage other writers to *make up* their own confessions, to further obfuscate the border between ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’ by scandalously mixing the ‘one’ with the ‘other’.

The discovery of Nin’s ‘true’ identity, as opposed to her ‘false’ representations, has obsessed many critics and biographers not least because of the genre with which she is most (in)famously associated. Suzanne Nalbantian notes:

Questions of sincerity and authenticity, what have come to be known as the ‘truth claim’, are constantly brought into the discussion of autobiography, and with Anaïs Nin the truth factor becomes an issue as the reader moves from diary to fiction, searching for truths in a writer who herself was ambivalent about the notion of absolute truths. (1997b, p.3)

It does *seem* ironic that with public access to almost a lifetime of Nin’s diaries and fictions, readers are no nearer to the ‘truth’ of whom ‘Anaïs Nin’ actually was. It is not without a certain sense of irony that Noël Riley Fitch poses the question in her introduction to her biography of Nin: ‘Why does a writer who kept a diary all her life need a biographer?’ (1994, p.4). Her answer being, ‘*Because her diary is itself a work of fiction, an act of self-invention. Untrue confessions*’ (p.4-5). Her question appears logical as, according to Lejeune’s ‘The Autobiographical Pact’ (1995), a diary *should* tell the truth of a life. Fitch notes that:

The thirteen volumes so far published are reworked and self-censored versions of a work almost twice that length. Though she claimed that the diary was ‘untranscribed’, she rewrote, retyped, edited, added dialogue, suppressed key events and people, occasionally reordered the sequence of events, superimposed later judgements on earlier experience, omitted her husband [...], and transformed her life in an art form. *In short, her diary is not to be trusted* (1994, p.5 my emphasis).

Fitch would seem to understand her role as biographer as analogous to a detective or 'sleuth', determined to uncover and discover the 'original' Nin behind her fictional 'copies' by dealing with facts and objective truths.⁸ In this sense, the biography seems to satisfy a certain demand for the metaphysics of presence: the (dis)covered facts of a life will ultimately attempt to guarantee the Truth behind the narrative.

Bair's biography (1995) *starts* from a similar premise: Nin's diaries are in fact 'liaries' or fabrications. These veils of lies can be stripped back to an original source – the genre of the 'individual' as *telos* – the guarantee of which is 'Nin' herself as a stable and guaranteed bodily presence behind the masquerade. She writes:

My starting point was Anaïs Nin's *original* diaries [...] *I compared everything* with the various typed versions of the diary that she prepared throughout her life, noting how time and distance made her change much in some instances and nothing at all in others. *I checked* her evolving texts against the documents that became the first seven volumes of her published diaries, the four volumes of the early diaries, and finally the series that is presently appearing as the 'unexpurgated' diaries. (p.xvii my emphasis)

In the absence of the author as guarantee of meaning, the 'original' diaries seem the obvious point to start such an investigation: they are somehow closer to an unmediated and 'truthful' essence of self than the published diaries. Whilst the latter are supposedly copies of an original, and are therefore considered inherently artificial and *lacking*, the original and unpublished diaries seem to satisfy the demand for purity and presence. Podnieks also emphasises the value of the original diaries as she undertakes the task of evaluating and detecting the differences between these and the author's published diaries, to explore how each individual writer constructed a sense of 'self-representation' and 'self-preservation' (2000, p.10). Interestingly, however, when her attentions are turned to Nin's texts, the

⁸ One of Fitch's most determined detective quests is to uncover the truth of Nin's accounts of incest within her diaries. She argues that Nin's narratives of incestuous seduction are an attempt to rewrite and realign the balance of power between herself and an abusive father.

coherence of her methodology is undermined and the sheer scale of the task thwarts what Nin might call her ‘academic sleuthing’. Indeed, Podnieks states that her ‘treatment of Nin’s manuscripts differs from the approach taken with the others [...], I found the task of even attempting to compare the unedited and the various edited versions beyond the scope of my research’ (p.10).

Similarly Bair’s theoretical position is adapted and affected by the object of her study. Her original certainty, as a biographer, that Nin was *her* subject – that is *the* subject of her biography – is placed in question as her research progresses. Indeed, it is Bair who ‘confesses’ to have been fascinated by the enigma that was ‘Nin’ and, like a detective, sought to unravel her mystery: to name and expose her. She writes that, ‘[i]n one form or another, this was what engaged me during the many months I sat poring over her original diaries in the UCLA library, hunting for clues that would allow me to present as unified a profile of this woman’s personality as possible’ (1995, p.xvi). What is more, the boundary between her own subject position as biographer and her object of study becomes ‘troubled’ as her (re)search progresses. She found herself ‘frequently frustrated as I strove to express *my* view of *her* life in an objective and coherent manner, and this too, was intriguing’ (p.xvi). In this sense the border between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the text, the ‘subject’ and ‘object’ of analysis, is placed under question as Bair’s (auto)biographical project does less to ‘reveal’ than endlessly frustrate her efforts to reaffirm the difference between the ‘auto’ and the ‘bio’ and thus confirm her objective, and hence author(itive), position as critic.

Nin’s diaries deny the reader a comfortable and ‘knowing’ position from which to judge her textual creations. By ‘mixing herself up’ within the genre, she turns herself into an enigma and incites the reader to find the (ever-elusive) ‘woman’ in the text. This provocative autobiographical narrative strategy of disclosure and disguise is not unique to

Nin. Catherine Slawy-Sutton notes that this motif of ‘needlepoint’, a double gesture of a ‘weaving and reweaving’ of self-narrative, was an important component of Colette’s writing (1991, p.36). Drawing attention to Colette’s oft-quoted epigraph, ‘[d]o you imagine, in reading my works, that I draw my portrait? Patience, it’s only my model’, she argues that even whilst Colette embroiders her own self-portrait, she is simultaneously unraveling her work, ‘cast[ing] a shadow of doubt on the very veracity of her drawn portrait’ (p.29). Similarly, Nin ‘tells’ her diary:

You and I are waging our great battle for truth, secretly and quietly, but our purpose is not to describe Anaïs Nin; indeed not – what a waste of time that would be. We are here practicing in order to be able to write someone’s life, someone who would be a character, a hero, for the edification and despair of the world. (1982, p.394)

Whilst Colette’s ‘you’ refers directly to her readers, creating a distance between herself and her narrative ‘I’, by contrast Nin’s ‘you’ is the diary itself which she sees as a collaborator in her ‘battle’ for literary space and a literary or mythical reputation.

Slawy-Sutton attributes this double gesture of self-revelation and disguise to a certain paradox in commercial self-writing: the marketability of the private self and the ultimate destruction of this marketable private essence in its exposure to the public sphere. She writes, ‘[f]or, in the woman living off her marketable skills, there constantly conflict the tendencies to preserve this private self while revealing a public self’ (Slawy-Sutton 1991, p.30). This double gesture becomes a necessary *yarn to spin* for professional survival in that it captivates the interests of her audience by simultaneously (r)evoking the possibility of certainty and (dis)closure. However, it also serves as a particularly poignant strategy of resistance to the voyeuristic tendencies of the reader who finds the reading lens turned back upon them. Denied a comfortable position ‘outside’ of the text, the reader is instead brought ‘inside’ its framework. The text is shown to be a product of, or in direct

relation to, the reader's own voyeuristic desires to see what is essentially private, to demand *presence* and to make a silence speak. Slawy-Sutton suggest, '[r]ather than bringing her [Colette's] readers to any type of unified, indiscreet voyeurism on her life, rather than intentionally presenting memoirs with a meaningful center, Colette points towards the inevitable plurality of one's inscriptions of the self, factual or fictive alike' (1991, p.35). What the reader sees is less an authorial presence than the *trace* of absence within presence or the presence of absence.

The Private Eye/I: Autobiography as 'double' agent

It is useful to relate this process of detection, surveillance and categorisation in the production of (sexual) identity to Nin's novella, *A Spy in the House of Love* (1978f), originally published in 1954). This particular novella follows the sexual exploits of the adulterous female protagonist, Sabina, in her attempts to live out multiple selves and other possible subject positions beyond that of a wife. Sabina attempts to live 'outside' the boundaries or spaces of conventional femininity that attempt to limit her choice to either public/private, wife/whore, pure/impure, truth/lies. Her refusal to reside 'inside' an either/or binary means that her sense of self is constantly *on the move* and her wandering sexuality drives her to roam public spaces in search of her next lover. As she roams the pages/streets of the text/city she attempts to evade the voyeuristic eyes both *within* and *without* the text. It is Sabina's multiple and evasive sense of self, her digressions from the fixed bounds of femininity, that become the central concern of the text as she is pursued through the labyrinth of the city/text. Nin incorporates a detective, or 'lie detector', into the narrative, encouraging the reader to take on this 'knowing' subject position only to constantly thwart his/her quest for knowledge. As such this becomes a particularly apt novella for the

reader/detective who wishes to finally ‘catch’ Nin ‘in the act’ of masquerading within this ‘fictional’ genre.

Nalbantian notes a certain ‘transparency’ between the protagonist Sabina and Nin herself, which, she argues, ‘leaves her open to an autobiographical reading’ (1997b, p.15-16). Within the rigid forms of available representations, Sabina is portrayed as a phantasmal figure shrouded in her vampire-like cape that allowed, ‘some swagger of freedom denied to woman’ (Nin 1978f, p.366). Not only did the black cape become Nin’s trademark, she too was also a notorious adulteress and bigamist equating her duplicitous lifestyle as living the ‘trapeze’ between two husbands and two lives located at either end of the North American continent (Bair 1995, p.340). Nin uses the metaphor of the trapeze in *A Spy in the House of Love* to emphasise the intrepid and dangerous quest of Sabina who precariously crosses moral boundaries, challenging gendered and cultural taboos. She becomes a monstrous spectacle performing to a transfixed, yet disapproving, audience:

She could see in their eyes the wish that she should fall from this incandescent trapeze on which she walked [...], for no guilty party has a right to such adroitness and to live only by its power to balance over the rigidities of life which dictated a choice, according to its taboos against multiple lives. (Nin 1978f, p.411)

Clare Taylor (1998) and Johanna Blakley (1998) both attempt to make an even closer connection between ‘Anaïs’ and ‘Sabina’ noting that Sabina, a recurring character in Nin’s work, is *almost* an anagram of Anaïs aside for an excess letter ‘b’ (Taylor 1998, p.158; Blakley 1998, p.112).⁹ Yet, I would argue that this *difference*, this ‘b’, is significant in that it refuses to allow the reader to finally categorise or translate her work as *either* autobiographical *or* fictional. It is the ‘b’ that denies this ‘ordering’: it is the undecidable ‘b’/order between ‘self’ and ‘text’. Haunted by the remainder of the ‘other’ within the

⁹ Taylor (1998) and Blakley (1998) are referring to the character Sabina in *House of Incest* which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

selfsame, the excesses of Anaïs/ Sabina 'b'/others the law of genre which polices the *fiction* of unity and the 'integrity' of autobiography as bodily presence.

I would argue that both Anaïs and Sabina engage the reader in a game of 'I Spy' whereby the relationship between the author (Anaïs, the 'I') and protagonist (Sabina as 'spy'), between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the text/s remains undecidable. This game is noted by the narrator of *A Spy* who states that: '[a]t first she [Sabina] beckoned and lured one into her world; then she blurred the passageways, confused all the images, as if to elude detection' (Nin 1978f, p.364). Nin draws attention to both the lie detector's and the reader's desire for resolution and disclosure by (almost) repeating this line again towards the end of the narrative (p.450). However, whilst this *re-cited* sentence may resemble its 'original' it is marked by grammatical differences which seem to perform Sabina's evasiveness. Laura Marcus (1994) suggests that autobiography itself is an ambiguous genre precisely because its postulated oppositions between fact and fiction, subject and object are unstable. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, Marcus suggests that autobiography operates *between* these two poles and will therefore be perceived either as a 'dangerous double agent' or a 'magical instrument of reconciliation' (1994, p.7). However, I would argue that the latter state is undermined by the very presence of uncertainty: we can never be certain on which side of the pole the 'dangerous double agent' is working. In this sense, the 'spy' continues to 'stir up' the possibilities of 'self' that lie *between* the 'truth' and 'fiction', or *between* the 'self' and 'other'. Indeed, Nin herself becomes the 'double agent' of autobiography remaining neither wholly inside or wholly outside her own fiction/autobiography. Or, to use Derrida's terms, Nin's 'texts', or the texts of 'Nin', 'belong[s] without belonging, and the "without" [...] which relates belonging to non-belonging appears only in the timeless time of the blink of an eye' (1980, p.65). It is within this 'blink of an eye' that Sabina/Nin, who, 'avoiding exposure' and 'defeating the sentinels watching definite boundaries' (Nin

1978f, p.411), manages to *abound* the very borders of gender/genre and ‘re-mark’ upon the multiple possibilities of textuality as a form of resistance (Derrida 1980, p.65).

However, the identification of the elusive Sabina, her enclosure within a stable and accountable identity, becomes the obsession of the narrator, the lie detector and her former lover Jay. Yet, whilst Sabina is *identified* by various subject positions – she is ‘Sabina’; an actress (who, interestingly, plays Madame Bovary); a wife; an adulteress; and a liar – none brings any of the ‘detectives’ any closer to defining exactly *who* Sabina is. The narrator notes that, ‘[t]he faces and the figures of her personages appeared only half drawn’ (Nin 1978f, p.364). Like the reader of Nin’s diary and fiction, the ‘lie detector’ (as the enforcer of the law of genre) becomes increasingly frustrated in his efforts to fix Sabina/Anaïs within his own descriptions:

He [the lie detector] could not retain a sequence of the people she had loved, hated, escaped from, any more than he could keep track of the changes in her personal appearance [...], when in desperation *he clung* to the recurrences of certain words, they *formed no design by their repetition*, but rather an *absolute contradiction*. (Nin 1978f, p.364 my emphasis)

Sabina does not cohere within this narrative and constantly escapes both the efforts of the narrator and the pen and pad of the detective who try to inscribe and fix her to the page. Within the available hegemonic discourses of ‘woman’, Sabina cannot be visualised, her *presence* is not conjured up by the phallus/pen, but rather it is constantly deferred. Furthermore, the inability of the lie detector to construct an ‘account’ (a *récit*) of her narrative actually threatens his own coherence as a speaking subject as he literally tries to ‘cling’ to her every word for fear of dissipation. The text continually tries to ‘capture’ Sabina within its own narrative by repeating key images and sentences relating to her. Yet, these repetitions are repetitions of an absence, a *repeated erasure*, in which ‘[s]he repeatedly took a giant sponge and erased all she had said by absolute denial, as if this

confusion were in itself a mantle of protection' (Nin 1978f, p.364). This image is then repeated later in the text (p.449-450). Moreover, the boundaries of the text itself are unable to contain Sabina as she moves between texts: the above sentence also reappears (slightly altered) once again in an entirely different text, *Ladders to Fire* (Nin 1978e, p.91, originally published in 1946).¹⁰ What is more, every repetition of these 'identifying' sentences produces a *difference* rather than a *sameness*: Sabina is never finally identified but rather these differences constantly alter and proliferate, defiling the integrity of the One and the 'proper'. Further, the signifiers 'purity' and 'integrity' resound with sexual and moral connotations as Sabina's promiscuity and deception is directly related to her understanding of self as proliferation and her refusal to contain her multiplicity within one single identity. Moira Gatens (1996) argues that women's bodies are persistently represented as *lacking* wholeness and integrity and notes that 'the etymological links between *integrity* and *morality*. The root of integrity (Latin "integritas") involves not only the notion of wholeness but also notions of moral soundness, honour and honesty' (Gatens 1996, p.41).

Sabina's own body boundaries are unable to contain or cohere a sense of self, the more she is pursued, the more skins she sheds 'abandon[ing] like a disguise, shedding the self he had seized upon' (Nin 1978f, p.407). The warmth or *closeness* of Anaïs/Sabina's autobiographical presence is denied and she, like the cold-blooded serpent she appears to be, leaves only the *traces* of a bodily presence. Indeed, '[w]hat remained was a costume: it was piled on the floor of his room, and empty of her' (p.407). Indeed, Sabina's theatrical and outlandish costuming becomes subject to a repeated textual performance in *A Spy*. The lie detector's first sighting of Sabina does not fail to deliver the stereotype of a *femme fatale*: '[d]ressed in red and silver, she evoked the sounds and imagery of fire engines as

¹⁰ Furthermore, the character Sabina (re)appears again in *House of Incest* and will be the subject of the next chapter.

they tore through the streets of New York [...] The first time he looked at her he felt: *everything will burn!*' (Nin 1978f, p.362). Her identity as a destructive adulteress is repeatedly over-performed within the narrative. Yet, the recognition of this image *as a stereotype* is hard to ignore and is played on later in the text when it is repeated *almost* word-for-word, and, for added emphasis (if any were needed), it is placed in italics (Nin 1978f, p.445-446). This is then (almost) repeated once again in *Ladders to Fire* (Nin 1978e, p.89-90). The effect of this repetition is to foreground the textuality or discursive production of identity as the narrator and the 'lie detector' literally try to materialise Sabina via a process of repetition.

Sabina's body literally becomes the canvas or paper upon which the gaps, conflicts and fissures of 'woman' are both written and erased. The undecidability between the 'body' and the 'text' is most vividly portrayed in the following passage in which Sabina literally 'makes-up' her face before the mirror:

The eyebrow pencil was no mere charcoal emphasis on blonde eyebrows, but a design necessary to balance a chaotic asymmetry. Make up and powder were not simply applied to heighten a porcelain texture, to efface the uneven swellings caused by sleep, but to smooth out the sharp furrows designed by nightmares, to reform the contours and blurred surfaces of the cheeks, to erase the contradictions and conflicts which strained the clarity of the face's lines, disturbing the purity of its forms. (Nin 1978f, p.365)

I would argue that Sabina embodies the paradox of 'writing the self'; whilst traditionally the self and identity are characterised by *sameness* and unity, it is this very action which threatens to (ef)face Sabina from the text. The face is 'made up' to disguise or veil over a supposed 'impurity', that is, the presence of the contaminating 'other' within the selfsame. It is significant that it is the face that Sabina chooses to 'rewrite' because, as Doane has suggested, the face operates as 'the mark of individuality' (1991, p.47). This, she argues, is because, '[t]he face is that bodily part not accessible to the subject's own gaze (or

accessible only as a virtual image in a mirror) – hence its over-representation as *the* instance of subjectivity’ (Doane 1991, p.47). Sabina demonstrates that the face, like the book, is a product of discourse not an internal essence, and, as such, can be rewritten and resignified. The eyebrow pencil, like the pencil of the writer, attempts to write over the gaps and fissures and to smooth over the ever-present split between the conscious and the unconscious. The pencil tries to create symmetry out of a radical asymmetry, and, in the process, paradoxically threatens the very existence of the subject and the possibility of resistance. In more ways than one, Sabina’s *face does not fit* in the eyes of the detective, nor within the discourses of ‘woman’, both of which demand an either/or identity as feminine/masculine, mother/whore, wife/mistress. However, Sabina constantly seems to evade such binaries, and, in the process, becomes a ‘monstrous’ figure: a spectacle or code that must be cracked.

However, because language is not referential but polyvocal, the face as a text is open to varying and divergent readings. From one angle, Sabina can be seen as being both aware of her own objectification and complicit within the very project of self-objectification. She after all continues to *make a spectacle of herself*: she redraws her face to suit dominant conventions of ‘woman’; she encourages the lie detector to watch and follow her; and she continues to publicly chase the men she desires. Yet, viewed from another angle, Sabina’s foregrounding of the cultural limitations placed on the female subject, gestures towards some ‘other’ (im)possible space. The reader might envisage this alternative space as Teresa de Lauretis’ ‘space-off’, a term borrowed from film theory to depict: ‘the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible’ (1989, p.26). By re-marking (upon) the absence necessary in the constitution of the ‘inside’ framed space, this ‘outside’ excluded ‘space-off’, paradoxically, becomes visible and/or conceivable as a space of resistance. De Lauretis argues that it is this ‘movement between

the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses' that marks the very subject of feminism (1989, p.26). This in/visible space, this movement *between* an 'inside' and 'outside' of the genre or discourse of gender, as it is culturally and historically produced, foregrounds a certain *gap* or 'elsewhere' between the female subject and the feminine subject position offered within a particular discourse.

Although the reader (and Sabina herself) is unable to visualise precisely *who* Sabina might actually *be*, what is apparent is the mis-fit within the framework of 'woman'. This reiteration of 'woman' never wholly coheres, and, as such, undercuts and continually escapes both the voyeuristic 'I/eye' of the reader/narrator, and the very categories to which she *seems* to belong. For instance this 'seamless' *fabrication* of the face within the mirror is juxtaposed with the already unraveling fabric of 'a dress with a hole in its sleeve' which Sabina selects to wear (Nin 1978f, p.366). As such, the borderline between the 'material' body and the 'material' or fabric of her dress becomes unstable. Indeed, Sabina seems to live in this perpetual discursive tension as she tries to straddle the slowly expanding space that unravels between 'female' and 'feminine' gesturing towards *both* a possible alternative space and an impending dissolution. Yet de Lauretis writes, 'to inhabit both kinds of spaces at once is to live the contradiction which [...] is the condition of feminism here and now: the tension of a twofold pull in contrary directions [...] is both the historical condition of existence of feminism and its theoretical condition of possibility' (1989, p.26).

Yet, as Nin was well aware, the price that women had to pay for 'troubling' or transgressing the genres or spaces identified as 'belonging' to women was high. In *A Spy* Sabina, familiar with the scripted ending for the *femme fatale*, notes the eagerness with which her surveyors sought her (dis)closure. She states:



they seemed to be awaiting her hour of punishment after living like a spy in the house of many loves, for avoiding exposure, for defeating the sentinels watching definite boundaries, for passing without passports and permits from one love to another. Every spy's life had ended in ignominious death. (Nin 1978f, p.411)

In *The Novel of the Future* Nin remarks on the 'troubling' character of Sabina whose multiplicity seems to defy the very conventions of language itself leaving Nin searching for some 'other' way of expressing identity. She writes:

Sabina caused me a great deal of trouble because I wanted to describe fragmentation without the disintegration which usually accompanies it. Each fragment had a life of its own. They had to be held together by some tension *other than the unity we are familiar with*. (Nin 1986b, p.162-3 my emphasis)

Perhaps this 'other' tension is this 'tension of a twofold pull' between the representable subject position of 'woman' and the 'other' unrepresentable possibilities that inhabit the 'space-off' (De Lauretis 1989, p.26). Nin's exploration of feminine subjectivity within her diary/fiction writing consistently conflicted with the dominant discourses of self and identity proposed by psychoanalytical theory. Nin writes in her diary:

How can I accept a limited definable self when I feel, in me, all possibilities? Allendy [her first analyst] may have said: 'This is the core,' but I never feel the four walls around the substance of the self, the core. I feel only space. Illimitable space. The effect of analysis is wearing off in this way. (1979a, p.209)

Nin goes further and suggests that this 'core', this central anchor of the self as 'origin', might not be singular but multiple and therefore neither fixed nor untransmutable. She states that, '[w]hat interests me is not the core but the potentialities of this core to multiply and expand infinitely. The diffusion of the core, its suppleness and elasticity, rebound, ramifications. Spanning, encompassing, space-devouring, star-trodden journeys, everything around and between the core' (Nin 1979a, p.209-210). This refusal to accept her place as 'woman', as reproducer of culture as opposed to cultural producer (or 'artist'), incites

allegations of ‘perversity’ from her lover Henry Miller. In the diary Nin quotes Henry as saying: ‘The first day I saw you [Nin], I felt and believed you perverse, decadent, as June was. I still feel in you an immense yieldingness, I feel there is no limit to you, to what you might be or do. An absence of boundary, a yielding that is limitless in experience’ (1979a, p.209). However, Nin goes on to challenge the values implicit in this depiction of excessive femininity, and demands, ‘But why call this perverse? Henry has it too’ (p.209). It would appear that Nin’s persistent transgression or devaluation of unity in her exploration of feminine subjectivity was perceived as fundamentally ‘perverse’ and profoundly threatening to a phallogentric economy of sameness.

II: A ‘Womb’ of Her Own: The Diary as a Female Form

Nin’s engagement with the diary as a genre for the exploration of writing and subjectivity ultimately leads her to question the relationship between gender, genre and language. Sharon Spencer notes that Nin was only one of three women writers, along with Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, to explore the possibility of a feminine aesthetic some four decades before the work of the French feminists (1989, p.165 and p.171).¹¹ The focus of this debate orientates around entries written in 1937 in *Volume Two* of her expurgated *Diary* (1979b). It is at this point that she starts to create links between what she terms a ‘feminine’ *form* (as both genre and language) and the female *form* (or ‘body’). However, I argue that this is less a form of essentialism than an attempt to explore the corporeality of language and the embodiment of desire in language. As such it necessarily challenges any

¹¹ Dorothy Richardson explored the ‘feminine sentence’ in her life-long work *Pilgrimage* (1979a-d, first published in individual volumes between 1915 and 1935), which through the course of four volumes follows the life of her protagonist Miriam Henderson. Virginia Woolf also heralded Richardson’s writing as ‘the psychological sentence of the feminine gender’ (1923, p.229). See Woolf (2000, originally published in 1929) for her development of the ‘female sentence’.

easy demarcation of an essential 'inside' of the self and a clearly demarcated 'outside' of language able to transparently reflect and guarantee an objective Truth.

As Felber suggests, Nin's appropriation of the 'womb' was employed as a strategy of resistance to the dominance of Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell and Otto Rank in her development as a writer (2002, p. 42-3 and p.48). In this sense, 'womb writing' was used to represent a perceived difference in the 'feminine' form and space of the diary, and her further assertion of a difference between men and women's writing. It is important to emphasise that this was, in my view, a *strategy* rather than an assertion of biological Truth. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, unlike Truth whose 'value is eternal', strategy remains 'provisional' (1990a, p.110). Interestingly, for most of the men in Nin's life, the diary seemed to present itself as 'the problem' precisely because, according to Henry, it threatened to 'upset all the art theories' (Nin 1979b, p.241). Both Miller and Durrell argued that if she was to become a serious writer she must become autonomous, rational and 'objective'; hence she must take up a masculine subject position. In order to do this she must abandon the womb/diary, and 'make the leap outside of the womb, destroy your connections' (Durrell cited in 1979b, p.242). In Western philosophy 'man' is able to transgress his own corporeal limits and occupy the privileged side of the 'mind' and culture precisely because 'woman' is made to represent all that he is *not*: the body, the emotions, and the unconscious. The 'womb', as metonym for the maternal body, becomes the ground, the miring entity that threatens the 'originality' and autonomy of the male 'artist'. Whilst 'woman' *is* 'the womb', she remains, like the diary, only capable of reproduction and mimesis. By contrast 'man' as artist is able to escape from the womb and from his own corporeality to inhabit the realm of the mind, of the imagination and 'fiction'. From this 'objective' position man, as artist, is considered closer to the divine creator. However, Nin rejects Miller and Durrell's concept of artistic objectivity or 'the necessity of "I am God" in

order to create' as, quite simply, 'nonsense' (1979b, p.242). Yet, she is also well aware of its gendered implications: she writes, 'I suppose they mean "I am God, I am not a woman"' (1979b, p.242).

What is more, she maintains that this rigid detachment of 'the body' and the senses from any artistic creation is detrimental to the process of writing itself and was a dangerous *delusion* to maintain. She argues that 'Man fabricated a detachment which became fatal. Woman must not fabricate. She must descend into the real womb and expose its secrets and its labyrinths' (Nin 1979b, p.244). This statement is particularly ambiguous and would appear to advocate an unproblematic association between women's writing as personal and the reproduction of 'woman' as vessel of Truth. However, I would argue that Nin suggests in this statement that women writers should not merely *reproduce* the same 'fabricated' sense of detachment from the body as men, but rather represent their relationship to language and aesthetics *differently*. Richard-Allerdyce also suggests that Nin did not simply align women as closer to the unconscious and nature; rather, she argues, 'it seemed to Nin, women often resisted what she considered a masculine tendency toward rationalization through language' (1998, p.25). According to Nin, women's writing *difference* should lie in an alternative writing capable of exploring the relationship between language and the body. She writes that, 'the woman artist has to fuse creation and life in her own way, or in her own womb if you prefer. She has to create something different from man' (Nin 1979b, p.243). Nin argues that far from severing herself from the 'womb', '[s]he has to sever herself from the myth man creates, from being created by him' (p.243). Moreover, the *difference* that women must bring to art is not to be found in an either/or binary between 'mind' (man) and 'body' (woman); on the contrary, women must explore the gendered corporeality of language and art itself. She states that: 'The art of woman must be born in

the *womb-cells of the mind*' (p.243 my emphasis). By employing a strategy of 'womb writing' Nin resists a pervasive Cartesian mind/body split.

The 'womb' operates as a metaphor for women's creativity and as a way of differentiating and recreating a space for women to represent for herself what the relationship *might* be between the female body, the feminine, language and the subject position of the artist. Nin stresses there is no easy relationship between them precisely because the means of representing the female and the feminine are always already articulated through a phallogocentric discourse. She asserts that within such discourses, '[w]oman never had direct communication with God anyway, but only through man, the priest. She never created directly except through man, was never able to create as a woman' (Nin 1979b, p.242). As a result, she argues that 'most women painted and wrote nothing but phalluses, like totem poles, and no womb anywhere' (p.244). In this sense, the incorporation of the 'womb' metaphor may be a way of redressing the issue of women's *lacking* relationship to language, and their own 'castrated' bodies, by mobilising a discourse in which women's bodies have a very real presence in language and in cultural representation. What is more, Nin notes that the conflation of the 'material' with 'representation' serves the interest of men by reinforcing the *misrecognition* of the penis as the phallus and men as the *makers* of meaning. She argues:

I believe at times that man created art out of fear of exploring woman. I believe woman stuttered about herself out of fear of what she had to say. She covered herself with taboos and veils. Man invented a woman to suit his needs. He disposed of her by identifying her with nature and then paraded his contemptuous domination of nature. *But woman is not nature only.* (Nin 1979b, p.244 my emphasis)

It is the *undecidable* relationship, *not* the conflation, between 'woman' and the 'womb', 'nature' and 'culture', the 'text' and the 'body' that holds the potential for subversion. Within such a discourse the 'bodily' and textual borders of the 'womb' oscillate somewhere

between culture/nature, inside/outside and gesture towards a fantastical 'return to the womb' which the male subject both fears and desires.

Interestingly, many of the men in Nin's life consistently attempted to identify both her, and her work, with 'nature' and to *erase* the uncertainty that she successfully engendered between the female body, writing and the diary. Tookey notes the determined effort of Nin's male acquaintances to remove any sense of artistry from her work by suggesting that the diaries were mere bodily 'records' of life itself (2003, p.156-158). By conflating the text with the body they consistently attempted to eliminate the writing process itself. Nin notes in her diary that Durrell gleefully exclaims, 'I have only smelled the diary writing, just read a page here and there. You have done it, the real female writing.' (Nin 1979b, p.263). Yet, rather tellingly, his emphasis on a supposedly 'real female *writing*' is undermined by his own admission that he has barely read it: merely 'a page here and there'. The reader is lead to understand that her work is so authentically 'female', that he literally 'sniffs her out': her words, like her body, *ooze* an odorous presence. His excitement is not for the discovery of her *writing*, but rather his own desire to violate and 'smell' out the 'jewel' that nestles within the 'body' of her work. Nin quotes him as saying:

You're like a diamond desiring to be made dust and they all cut away but the diamond is left untouched [...] The diary cannot stop until the quest is over. It is the quest of all of us, only you struggle more. We are all writing about the Womb, but you *are* the *Womb*. (Nin 1979b, p.265)

For Durrell, the '*real* female writing' is a relationship of *lack*: a lack of writing and of the borders between the 'real' and representation. The 'Womb' ('Nin'/diary) plugs the gap between the two: she *is* the living embodiment of the (corpo)real, of total presence, that enables Durrell's erotic fantasy of ultimate union. Somewhat paradoxically, the Truth or

worth of her *writing* is its unmediated access to the 'real', guaranteed by the biological female (maternal) body. He writes, 'Asaïs [sic] is *unanswerable*. Completely unanswerable. I fold up and give in. What she says is biologically true from the very navel strings' (1979b, p.245).

Yet, as I have been arguing, whilst women's autobiographical writing might be seen as a particular strategy of resistance to hegemonic discourses of 'woman' and subjectivity, it is also the dominant reading practice applied to women's writing. In the foreword to Morgan and Hall (1991a), Holly Hite argues that the conflation of both the narrative 'I' with the authorial 'I, and the protagonist with the author, are 'nearly inevitable' when the reader is presented with a female author (Hite 1991, p.xiii). She argues that for women who write fiction, '[e]vasion is an issue because the attendant implication is that little or no artistry is involved: for women, to "write oneself" is a procedure analogous to rubber stamping, in which a preexisting self is simply inked and then imprinted on the page' (1991 p.xiii). Within Western metaphysics, women are represented as maintaining a closer relationship to language than men. Grounded within their bodies as mimetic reproducers they are unable to make the transition from body to mind, from biological entity to a transgressive 'creative' genius. Read from this familiar perspective, Hite notes that women seem to inscribe themselves, almost despite their best intentions, as '[m]imesis requires little mediation; at most, only the simplest and most clerical act of transliteration suffices to turn world into word.' (1991, p.xiii). Moreover, many women writers were marginalised by critics and scholars precisely because their work was *too* autobiographical (Morgan 1991b, p.9). This particular reading strategy of 'unmasking' the presence of autobiography appeared to show a fundamental *failure* in these writers to achieve generic purity and to 'make the leap' into the purely imaginative realm of artistic creativity. In this sense, the persistent reading of the 'bio' into women's 'graphy' serves as a constant reminder of

women's *failure* to establish limits, to make the necessary 'creative' transcendence from the body to the 'superior' (masculine) realm of the imaginative, artistic mind.

Masquerading (as) The Border

As many writers have noted, Nin's diary started its life as a letter designed to seduce her estranged father back into the family home.¹² However, in 'Seduction and Subversion' Margaret Miller (1983) suggests that Nin's use of the diary, as a tool for seduction and flattery, was strategic and enabled her to carve a space for herself as an artist without being perceived as a potential threat to the male artists in her life. Indeed, she appeared to become 'the quintessentially feminine artist, reflecting men, and some women, back to themselves as twice their natural size, heightened into mythic proportions' (1983, p.88).¹³ Most men in Nin's life saw the diary as profoundly threatening, and, as Miller notes, those who had authority over her urged her to give it up. In this sense, as Miller argues, there appears to be 'something dangerous about it', yet, she asks, 'What are they so uneasy about?' (1983, p.88). Miller notes that it is precisely when the diary was most threatened that it seemed to work its seductive magic, Nin writes, 'Kill the diary, they say; write novels; but when they look at their portrait, they say: "That is wonderful"' (Nin 1979a, p.311).¹⁴ The diary/womb seduces and lures the unsuspecting male to contemplate his image in the narcissist pool only to find that his gaze is met by the gaze of an 'other' who turns subjects into *objects* and artists into *muses*. Miller argues that in Nin's role as 'portraiturest', she was able to 'turn[s] the tables on those who want to give her a pattern: in portraying them she in a sense creates them' (1983, p.89). As discussed previously in Chapter One, in 'Womanliness as a

¹² Scholar argues that Nin's association with writing and the ability to charm and seduce originates in her diaries, which were written to win back the love of her father (1984, p.38). Also see Wilson (1999).

¹³ Tookey (2003) also argues that the diary, and Nin herself, functioned like a mirror upon which others sought a reflection of themselves and their desires. See in particular the chapter "'I am the Other Face of You": Fantasies and Femininity' (2003, p.173-209).

¹⁴ Also partially cited in Margaret Miller (1983, p.88).

Masquerade' Joan Riviere (1986) argues that women who attempted to take on traditionally masculine roles, to appropriate male power, attempted to transform what they feared would be male reprisals by a process of seduction and 'womanliness'. Frances Wilson argues that Nin's 'otherwise inexplicable behaviour' can be explained with reference to Riviere's theory of the masquerade and 'womanliness' (1999, p.36). She argues that Nin's conflation of her writing with seduction meant that she could mask her 'masculine' desires for literary achievement with 'feminine' displays of 'flattery and servility' (p.36). Wilson proposes that by allowing men to 'admire' and read her diaries, she actually seemed to desire confirmation of 'her *desirability as a woman*. She would invariably go to bed with her reader and fake an orgasm' (p.36). Yet, she argues that Nin's crafting of a 'feminine' style of writing, which was 'as slim, ethereal, flirtatious and flattering as she tried herself to be' can actually be read as an attempt at 'dramatizing a problem at the heart of feminine identity' (Wilson 1999, p.39).

As a man and an artist, Henry Miller had his own investment in his adherence to the laws of aestheticism. His own sense of artistic individuality was founded on a sense of detachment of the self from the other and the mind from the body. Yet, the persistence of Nin's diary, its continually watchful 'I', appears to irritate Henry, to get under-his-skin and, according to Nin, he believes that the diary, 'should be nailed with a big nail on the wall of *his* studio and muted forever' (Nin 1979b, p.262 my emphasis). Suspicious of these venomous outbursts against her work she writes, 'I ask myself is it fear on the part of man, fear of a woman unveiling her own truths? Is there another reason for everyone being against it, one not purely ideological?' (1979b, p.262). Despite its *appearance* as a 'feminine' and 'respectable' *female form* of writing, the diary suggests a particularly 'dangerous and unfeminine power' (Margaret Miller 1983, p.90). The female diarist is able to transgress not only the boundaries between 'artist' (as creator) and 'woman' (as

reproducer) but also to 'pervert' and undercut the 'purity' of masculinity (as active) and femininity (as passive) with the contaminating and seductive presence of the *female form*. I would suggest that the threat of this diary is not that it *speaks* an alternative Truth of 'woman', but rather it throws into question the very possibility of the Truth of gender itself, and, as such, undercuts the powerful positions which her male contemporaries contentedly inhabit. The resistance to her diary is perhaps the fearful 'unveiling' of the *lack* of Truth: 'that the phallus can only play its role as veiled' (Lacan 1982a, p.82). In this sense, the diary holds a particularly (im)potent threat of castration that decentres the male subject and forces him to acknowledge the presence of the other within the self: the *split* that is the site of the subject.

Whilst Nin's diary persona masquerades as 'feminine', it oscillates on the very border between *being* (feminine) and *having* (masculine) the phallus, and, as such, puts into question, or mixes up, the clearly allocated places of subject and object of desire. She writes, 'What will be marvellous to contemplate will not be her [woman's] solitude but this image of woman being visited at night by man and the marvellous things she will give birth to in the morning' (Nin 1979b, p.243). There is a certain playfulness within this sentence that appears to follow the classic Freudian/ Lacanian line on feminine subjectivity and desire. Nin plays the role of 'woman' as *being* the phallus, the 'object' of desire who is 'visited' by man in the night: her desire to 'have' the penis is sublimated by her desire for a penis substitute or child to which she gives birth in the morning. However, the diary specifically highlights the *gap* between the penis and the phallus, or the detachment of the phallus from the male, as *no 'body'* ever really 'has' the phallus. As such her 'feminine' writing oscillates on the line between 'having' the penis (in the act of sex) and 'having' the phallus ('giving birth' to stories in the morning). As in the act of sexual intercourse, her diary writing marks the disappearance of the penis within the body of the woman. This

symbolic castration marks the *loss of phallic* authority, of ‘what stands out’ and the ultimate deflation of the ‘virtue of its turgidity’ in the ‘real of sexual copulation’ (Lacan 1982a, p.82). In her unexpurgated diary *Fire* (1996a), she describes how the diary ‘stirred’ up this vacillation of gender positions between herself and Henry. She writes:

It seems when I stick my powerful vision [the diary] into him like a fiery phallus, move it around in him, stir his blood, plant the sperm of my solid creative unity, Henry is stirred and then he, in turn, wants to take me physically, wants to stick his penis inside of me and stir my blood. (Nin 1996a, p.393)

The constant conflation of diary writing with Truth and ‘mimesis’ has a certain ‘sting in the tail’ for Henry as Nin’s *bedtime stories* of his sexual performance, his own public identity as a potent and masculine (real) man, proffered in his own ‘autobiographical’ writings, may or may not be (re)produced the next morning by Nin. Indeed, she offers *another* public image of Miller that is beyond his own (misrecognised) sense of authorial control.

The seductive power of her diary becomes a key element in Nin’s relationship with the analyst Otto Rank. Like the ‘Dance of the Seven Veils’ Nin used her diary to seduce and entice his interest. Yet, as Nalbanthian notes, this seduction was based on lies (1997b, p.18). Having read Rank’s work *Art and Artists*, Nin was determined to meet and seduce its author, and, as such, the diary was crafted precisely for this purpose. The diary becomes a masquerade: a textual reconstruction of Rank’s own interests and fantasies. In November 1933 Nin masterminds her seduction of him. She writes:

I felt that from such an abundance of life, I must make a selection of what might interest him. He had made a speciality of the ‘artist’. He was interested in the artist. Would he be interested in a woman who had lived out all the themes he wrote about, the Double, Illusion and Reality, Incestuous Loves Through Literature, Creation and Play. All the myths [...], all the dreams. (1979a, p.279)

According to Nin’s diary, her first introductory words to Rank, ‘I am one of the artists you are writing about’, sets herself up as an irresistible object of analysis (1979a, p.280).

Moreover, Nin's diary 'I' notes, perhaps with some sense of irony, 'I felt at home among the [Rank's] books' (p.280).¹⁵ Indeed, having gained Rank's interest she then 'confesses' her intentions to trick and seduce Rank by reading to him the notes that she made in her diary on her train journey to meet him. She states:

I made this note on the train: 'On my way to see Dr Rank I am planning impostures, cheating, tricks.' I begin to invent what I will tell Dr Rank, instead of coordinating truths. I begin to rehearse speeches, attitudes, gestures, inflections, expressions. I see myself talking and I am sitting within [sic] Rank, judging me. (1979a, p.282)

Yet, whilst she may now 'confess' to be telling the truth about her intention to lie, how can the reader be certain that this 'confession' is not simply her performance of the 'rehearse[d] speeches': that is, a (re)performance of a confession of truth. Perhaps her promise to reveal the truth, to disrobe her costume of lies before Rank, was designed to further flatter and seduce him. Whilst Nin reads her confession of her intended deceit to Rank from the diary itself, the reader, who may or may not be convinced of her sincerity, cannot help but be aware that s/he too has become part of the game of unveiling and seduction. Indeed, she divulges to Rank that, '[b]ut now, as I sit here, I am as truthful as I am with my journal', which, of course, she has just 'confessed' to be a lie (1979a, p.283). Similarly, Wendy DuBow (1993) argues that the diary is less a repository of truth than the 'narrator's staging of herself' (p.24) whereby she continually 'demonstrates the play-acting [she] is capable of, and the convincing nature of her performances' (p.27). DuBow points out the numerous 'contradictions, ironies, and gaps' within her diaries which put into question the truth of the 'real life' it professes to reveal, and, as a result, 'calls attention to itself as a fiction, or as an impossible task' (1993, p.24). She argues that the 'illusion of full revelation' is produced by

¹⁵ Similarly Joanne Rock's article (1995) which 're-evaluates' the validity of the incestuous affair between Nin and her father, notes with suspicion the similarity between Nin's diary accounts of this affair and Rank's own interests in the Don Juan figure and the incest motif. Rock complicates the relationship between the experiential and theory by suggesting that it is entirely possible that Nin was merely 'acting out' these learnt theories rather than actually being afflicted by the neurosis the theories attempted to diagnose (1995, p.30).

the incorporation of 'intimate details' and 'the promise that the diary contains her secrets' (1993, p.26). However, she notes that these confessions of 'secret-keeping' have often been mistaken by the reader's of her diaries as a sign of sincerity and intimacy (DuBow 1993, p.25). It is this sense of betrayal that seems to rile another of Nin's critics, Joan Bobbit, who notes that Nin's diaries may not be all that they appear to be, in fact, she argues they reveal 'a calculated artistry which is in direct opposition to Nin's espoused ideal of naturalness and spontaneity' (Bobbit 1996, p.190). In the end, she argues the diary 'reveals' what amounts to a lie because '[t]hough she exalts openness, she excises from her work everything humanly important, everything that does not affirm her masks and personal fictions. While she offers her self, she presents only a metaphor of self' (Bobbit 1996, p.197). What is more, the dis-ease of her diary ultimately contaminates and 'troubles' the sacred border between nature and culture, or between the real and representation. Bobbit states: 'Ultimately, emotion is reduced to a mere artifact, and reality becomes indistinguishable from artistic creation' (1996, p.197).

Elyse Lamm Pineau's essay 'A Mirror of Her Own: Anaïs Nin's Autobiographical Performances' (1996) focuses on the latter part of Nin's career when she toured college campuses to give readings from her diaries and to engage students in discussion. However, she notes that these readings were not merely a 'performance of autobiography'; rather, they were 'autobiographical performances'. Pineau suggests that whilst the former maintains a clear boundary between the text (as product of experience) and a speaking 'authentic' self, in the latter the autobiographer offers herself to her audience as a 'living text' (1996, p.234). She argues that, '[b]y collapsing the distinction between her textual and lived identities, she [Nin] offers both as simultaneously present in her performing body' and thus creates an illusion of greater authenticity for her audience (p.234-235). By way of illustration, Pineau draws upon Nin's 'autobiographical performance' at the Edison theatre

in which the authenticity of her diary, as representative of the voice of 'Everywoman', was visually staged by the dramatic removal of a metal mask. This removal, according to Pineau, was meant to represent the metaphorical shedding of patriarchal constrictions (1996, p.235). Interestingly, she points out that this seamless assimilation of the 'living text' was only attainable by ensuring that these appearances and 'open' discussions between Nin and her audience were heavily censored (Pineau 1996, p.243-246). Apparently Nin outlined beforehand certain 'taboo' questions and, 'refused to discuss aspects of her personal life which had been edited for publication' (Pineau 1996, p.244). However, by shifting the focus of Pineau's argument away from a paradigm that assumes the author(ity) of an originary presence, it could be argued that Nin's refusal to offer her 'presence' as the ultimate ground upon which her diary writing is 'judged' – whereby judgement is reduced to a binary between either sincerity or deceit – she further problematises the relation between the 'work' and the 'life'. From this angle the 'text' is neither 'inside' (the diary) nor 'outside' (in her self-as-presence); rather this 'living text' could be seen to, 'cut[s] across both of the fields in question: the body of the work and the body of the real subject' (Gasché in Derrida 1988c p.41). In this sense '[t]he status of the text [...] is such that it derives from neither the one nor the other, from neither the inside nor the outside' (Gasché in Derrida 1988c, p.41). Indeed, it *materialises* in the difference between the two: it is perpetually performed and *re-cited* somewhere between the gaps, silences and inconsistencies in a 'living' (mutable and changeable) process of *différance*.

The 'Body' of the Text

Derrida suggests in 'The Law of Genre' (1980) that the subject's attempt to master or signify *oneself* within the space of writing is constantly thwarted by the ever presence/absence or *trace* of the excluded and opposing 'other' term within the signifier

that (in)forms the subject's borders. He reminds his Anglo-American readers that the semantic field of 'genre' resonates differently within the French language as 'genre' cannot help calling up 'gender'.¹⁶ Indeed, when the issue of 'genre/gender' is *on the line*, 'genres pass into each other' so that "'I", then, can keep alive the chance of being a fe-male or of changing sex. His transsexuality permits him, in a more than metaphorical and transferential way, to engender' (Derrida 1980, p.76). This interplay between the 'self' and the 'other', between 'masculine' and 'feminine' moves beyond dualisms to imagine a multiple and mobile subjectivity open to infinite transformation within the transgressive space of writing as a non-unified, de-centred and fluid, 'feminized' entity.

However, a number of feminists have objected, some more strongly than others, to what they perceive to be Derrida's 'anti-feminism' and his appropriation of the 'feminine' and metaphors of the female body in order to reassert his own already privileged position as white, male subject of knowledge.¹⁷ These concerns are that whilst the 'feminine' is used to re-represent the male subject as a subversive and transgressive entity, it continues to empty women of materiality and subjectivity, and transforms them into the resounding, muted category of 'woman'. Indeed, though Derrida announces that '[t]he law is in the feminine', this deconstructive power granted to the 'feminine' is reinforced as a particularly hollow one: '[s]he is not a woman (it is only a figure, a "silhouette," and not a representative of the

¹⁶ It is precisely the differential relation between language systems that creates a certain amount of misunderstanding between French and Anglo-American theories. Whilst 'feminine' in French is ambiguous, in that it refers to *both* biological sex (female) *and* gender (feminine), in English the term simply translates as gender. For a more detailed exploration of the relationship between French and Anglo-American theory see Jardine (1986).

¹⁷ See Whitford (1991b); Braidotti (1991); Fuss (1989); de Lauretis (1989). Jardine is more cautious in her criticisms of Derrida suggesting that his 'putting into discourse of "woman"', a neologism she coins as 'gynesis', is a particular response of Western philosophy to a certain crisis of Enlightenment beliefs in the grand narratives. She argues that this 'new *space* or *spacing within themselves*' might actually create a possible space of resistance for feminism (1986, p.25). Similarly, Jacobus suggests that the feminist reader is able to forge a gap, or a space of rupture, in 'masculinist critical and theoretical reading' (1986, p.288). She argues that though the feminist reader is 'framed' by the powerful discourses of deconstruction (and psychoanalysis), she 'frays the edges of that frame by being at once inside and outside (at once content and frame of reference).' (Jacobus 1986, p.289).

law)' (Derrida 1980, p.77). What is more, she 'does not signify a female person' but is rather a disruptive, transgressive space within the founding principle of the law itself (Derrida 1980, p.78). Donna Wilkerson (2004) argues that Derrida's analysis of Maurice Blanchot's *La Folie du jour* (*The Madness of the Day*) doubly appropriates the feminine. She writes, 'not only does it use the female body as the ground for its own rhetorical demonstration, but it also posits the feminine as the unrepresentable, as that which is without boundary, an empty and limitless space' (2004, p.4). In such a move the 'feminine' enables the male subject to free himself from his own boundaries or marked limitations by transgressing the phallo(hetero)centric matrix of representation whilst in the process reaffirming its very limitations (Wilkerson 2004, p.3-4).

Yet, whilst these are extremely valid and important challenges to Derrida's text, I would hasten to point out that the semantic proximity of the 'feminine' (as textuality) and 'female' (biological entity) within the French language causes many misunderstandings between French and Anglo-American readers. However, as Ellen K. Feder and Emily Zakin point out, Derrida's *Spurs* dramatises 'femininity' as a 'style' rather than an inevitable attribute of the female sex which we may accede to or refuse' (1997b, p.23). Furthermore, '[o]nce the causal link between women and femininity is broken, the opposition between woman and man is also shown to be neither natural nor essential' (Feder and Zakin 1997b, p.23). Indeed, Derrida's courting of the multiple semantic resonances of the 'feminine' is precisely the very possibility of resisting the system that *homogenises* difference as opposition rather than as *différance*. Derrida's use of the signifiers 'hymen' and 'invagination', are deliberately provocative, and, as Geoffrey Bennington suggests, are incorporated within the text to 'mark the discourse, with a sexual register', having the effect of 'generalizing these terms towards apparently more "abstract" structures' (1999, p.226). Adopting a slightly different angle, Diane Elam suggests that 'Derrida's strategy is to

denaturalize the rhetoric of the body' (1994, p.61) and as a result 'create different distributions of sexual markings' (p.62). Whilst the 'hymen' may seem 'to mark a space of material difference' (the space that marks the difference *of* the female body and 'inside' the female body), as a signifier the 'hymen has no proper, literal meaning, belongs to no woman in particular' (Elam 1994, p.61).

Furthermore, the term 'hymen' resonates not only with sexual or ontological meanings but also signifies the male possession of the female body in the legal consummation of the marriage contract. Yet, Derrida argues, the undecidability of the signifier 'hymen', its multiple resonances, disrupts the very possibility of ultimate (sexual) possession and the constitution of (the) proper(ity). As Jardine notes, 'there is hymen (virginity) when there is no hymen (marriage or copulation); there is no hymen (virginity) when there is hymen (copulation or marriage). The hymen is the locus of the abolition of the difference between difference and nondifference' (1986, p.190). Jane Moore reads the 'hymen' as 'evidence of a double strategy' in which the text both draws attention to its sexualised discourse as evidence of 'essential truths' and then turns that discourse against itself by 'revealing' the absence of Truth necessary to fix meaning within the body as sexual difference (1994, p.79). Moreover, the 'hymen', the marker of difference between what Derrida terms *physis* (biology or 'nature') and *techné* (culture), is always already 'invaginated' (Derrida 1980, p.56). As the 'The Law of Genre' demonstrates 'the figural work of invagination means that genres/genders are never pure but always mixed' (Elam 1994, p.136, n.96). Both 'hymen' and 'invagination' are particularly ambiguous terms that draw attention to the supposed binary relation between inside/outside, nature/culture, body/text underpinning Western metaphysical thinking, and, as such, becomes a 'way of troubling [this] dominant discourse' (Bennington 1999, p.226-227).

Elam draws connections between Derrida's refiguration of the 'hymen' and 'invagination' and Irigaray's 'two lips' of the labia which work 'as a strategy [...] for denaturalizing the body by redeploing morphological language' (1994, p.62). Similarly, Margaret Whitford (1991b) and Elizabeth Grosz (1990a) produce persuasive cases for re-reading Irigaray's work as a morphology of the body as opposed to a crude form of essentialism. The 'body' and corporeality refer to a 'body' that is already constituted within language at the mirror stage, and is therefore already inscribed with meanings that are culturally and historically specific. As products of the symbolic, these meanings refer not to any biological anatomy, but rather to the '*social and psychical meaning of the body*' (Grosz 1990a, p.111). Indeed, Grosz argues that Irigaray does not intend to describe or define any 'true' sense of the female body and femininity precisely because 'truth', as it figures within phallogocentrism, is merely 'the relation of doubles, or mirror reflections' and, as such, simply reflects the viewpoint of the dominant (1990a, p.110).

Nin makes a similar point in *House of Incest* (1994a), though in rather more inflammatory language. She writes, 'I cannot tell the truth because I have felt the heads of men in my womb' (1994a, p.24-5). In this sense, within the discourses of phallogocentrism, 'normal' femininity is made to occupy the site of Nature, Truth and the reproductive body: she is passive, asexual and maternal. As a result, the transgressing, *desiring* woman who clearly relishes the chance to 'have' many men is by contrast unfeminine, promiscuous and *deceitful*. Her words, like her body, have a tendency to 'deviate' from the acceptable representations of 'femininity', and, as such, the *looseness* of her speech denies her the authority and power to speak the Truth. In another sense, 'the heads of [many] men' have indeed plundered and obsessively written about the mysterious depths of the 'womb'. Therefore, the essence of 'woman' as 'womb' is already a product of discourse; it is not a 'originary' or 'pure' source from which the Truth can be discovered.

Tookey convincingly argues that Irigaray's morphology of the 'two lips' can be employed as a way of rereading Nin's concept of 'womb writing' and her exploration of the female body, feminine pleasure and language (2003, p.159-160). She notes that, '[t]he morphology of a woman's body becomes the basis for a series, or rather a circle, of metaphorical connections: Nin uses the womb image to link the ideas of woman, labyrinth, the eastern city, the veil, and – crucially – the diary' (2003, p.160). However, whilst this concept of the circle is indeed prevalent in Nin's work, I would argue that the circle is never quite complete. The 'womb' *does not quite* link these images: it does not form an (en)closure, an endless cycle, but rather an ever proliferating spiral. The 'womb' is not directly translatable *as* the diary or the female body; there is always a *difference* and hence the presence/absence of 'other' possibilities. The metaphor of the 'womb' is both consistent and consistently ambiguous within Nin's work, drawing attention to the corporeal metaphors of identity, of gender, and of the genre of diary writing itself.

In order to demonstrate the morphology of the female body within Nin's work, I will draw on her short-story 'The Labyrinth' (1978c, originally published in 1938). Tookey argues that, '[t]he diary, of course, is Nin's personal labyrinth [...], and the associative circle is complete when we note that the original title for "The Labyrinth" was "The Paper Womb"' (2003, p.160-161). However, I would argue that within this text, Nin's 'labyrinth' is itself a *polymorphic* and undecidable signifier which is constantly deferred along a chain of possible signifiers: it *morphs* into the diary, a cave, a city and an ear. As a story, 'The Labyrinth' (1978c) *appears* to follow a cyclical structure beginning with an eleven-year-old who walks into the diary and journeys into an apparently pre-Oedipal or womb-like structure. At this point the child's body boundaries begin to disintegrate forming a split or between-like state. Finally the child is reborn and reunited at the end with her 'other' self

thereby apparently completing the circle. However, as I will now demonstrate, on closer examination the completion of this circle is deferred by the presence of *difference*.

The first lines of the text read, 'I was eleven years old when I walked into the labyrinth of my diary' (Nin 1978c, p.66). From the outset, the border between the 'text' and the 'self', 'fiction' and 'fact' are doubly blurred. In the first instance, those readers familiar with Nin's diaries would be aware that Nin first started writing her diary at the age of eleven. This reader is then encouraged, by a certain 'knowledge' or (mis)recognition of the 'I' of the author with the 'I' of the diary, to further transgress the 'law of genre' and mix the 'I' of the diary with the 'I' of fiction (the short story). What is more, the boundary between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the text is simultaneously highlighted and blurred by what appears to be the transgression of an external or material 'I' who literally walks into her own textual creation. Similarly, the textual appears to take on a certain materiality: the 'I' finds itself 'walking on a carpet of pages' or on 'a stairway of words' (p.67). This unstable ground upon which the self walks is literally and metaphorically a *diverging* path or a bodily/textual form of resistance: 'I was walking on my rebellions, stones exploding under my feet' (p.67). Stripped of any illusions of narrative control, the narrating 'I' is sucked and swept towards a 'dark tunnel' unable to gain a footing and 'slipping' on '[t]he escalator of words [that] ran swiftly under me, like a river' (p.67). It is the uncontrollable tide of words that washes the narrator into what appears to be a womb-like watery cave (p.68).

The entrance to this labyrinthine cave warns the 'I' of an impending threat to illusions of identity as wholeness adorned as it is with dismembered bodily parts, '[I]legs and arms and ears of wax were hung as offerings, yielding to the appetite of the cave' (p.68). The narrator's movement into this structure is marked by the transgression of borders and a splitting of subject positions: 'I found myself traversing gangways, moats, gangplanks while still tied to the heaving straining cord of a departing ship' (p.68). The

narrator finds itself 'suspended' on the very border *between* two stable structures: 'I was suspended between earth and sea, between earth and planets' (p.68). It is the process of writing that leaves the self, the 'I', somewhere *between* an 'inside' and an 'outside': neither inside the diary nor completely outside but somewhere *between*. The narrator is unable to fully locate itself on one side of the border or the other and is left feeling a sense of 'anguish for the shadow left behind, the foot's imprint, the echo' (p.68). This process leaves behind the *trace*, the 'echo' of the 'other' that is always in excess of the categories by which the subject identifies.

What is more, without this coherence, without firm body boundaries from which to speak, the 'I' is propelled into a pre-Oedipal 'voicelessness' whereby the narrator struggles to articulate itself through speech: 'I moved my lips [...], but I felt they no longer articulated words. My lips moved like the sea anemone, with infinite slowness, opening and closing, [...] forming nothing but a design in water' (1978c, p.68-69). The 'sounds' of her 'ramblings' bring her 'inside the soft turning canals of a giant ear' (p.69). Here the narrator is 'awakened by a sound of paper unrolling. My feet were treading paper. They were the streets of my own diary, crossed with bars of black notes' (p.70). This whole section is reminiscent of Irigaray's concept of 'womanspeak', the 'language' of the 'two lips', which remains non-signifying within the semantic structures of the symbolic. This, Irigaray argues, is possible because for the girl child, the division between the pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal stages of psychosexual development remain fluid, meaning that the 'female/feminine' oscillates on the borders *between* the two: on the rim. 'Womanspeak' becomes a way of challenging the categories by which we locate *ourselves* as coherent subjects at the expense of silencing those 'other' unspeakable excesses formed *between* the representable 'body' and language. The 'two lips' refer to both speech (mind) and writing (as body), yet the *location* of these speaking/writing lips to the 'self' is constantly deferred,

and, what is more, the very boundaries between bodies remains ambiguous. As such they oscillate somewhere *between* the 'body' (as labia) and the 'head' (as lips) and between *bodies* ('self' and 'other'). To hear this 'other' language speak the *gap* of feminine desire, '[o]ne would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an "*other meaning*"' (Irigaray 1985b, p.29).

This 'other' self that is left behind by the narrator upon crossing the 'gangplank' goes on to create 'other' footsteps and 'other' echoes or pathways audible only to 'another ear' (Irigaray 1985b, p.29) and which remain invisible or 'outside' this narrative frame. This, I would argue, gestures towards de Lauretis' 'space-off', foregrounding the limitations of the text or genre to 'frame' and contain the multiple possibilities of textuality (1989, p.26). This 'other' moves *between* the representable space and the 'space-off' disappearing *without* and then reappearing to the narrator *within* the narrative frame in the last two lines of the text: 'The white orifice of the endless cave opened. On the rim of it stood a girl eleven years old carrying the diary in a little basket' (Nin 1978c, p.70). As such, the beginning and the ending of the narrative *appear* to meet in a circular motion; it *appears* to unite the 'I' with its 'other', which in effect *appears* to make sense of and cohere the meaning of the text. However, there *is* a difference as the eleven year old at the beginning of the narrative is genderless (remaining an 'I' throughout the text) whilst the eleven year old at the end of the narrative is identified as a 'girl'. The last three sentences of this text question the boundary between text and (maternal) body/womb: the 'white orifice' through which the 'self' is born oscillates somewhere between the opening of the vagina and opening of the diary pages. She writes that, '[e]normous rusty keys opened each volume [of the diaries] [...] The white orifice of the endless cave opened. On the rim of it stood a girl eleven years old carrying the diary in a little basket' (p.70). The reader, like the obstetrician, remains poised, waiting to identify and re-contain the 'self' emerging from the

text/body back into the body boundaries of a gendered subject. Yet, the full circle of this narrative is never complete as the final footstep uniting the 'self' and its 'other' (the 'little girl' who looks back at the 'self') is never taken, its 'echo' *resounds* in the space *between* the 'self' and the 'other'.

The 'girl' as mirror image remains '[o]n the rim' (Nin 1978c, p.70), on the border between an 'inside' and 'outside': she is both *within* and *without* the cave/diary. As Nin's texts repeatedly suggest, this borderline or *between* position is precisely the site of a provisional and resisting sense of 'feminine' subjectivity whereby the multiple possibilities of *différance* are always already 'outside' or 'beyond' the narrative frame. In *Volume Two* of her *Diary* she writes that, '[t]o be inside or outside was my nightmare. *I feel born on the rim* of an eternally elusive world' (Nin 1979b, p.249 my emphasis). The 'I' of this narrative does not necessarily identify itself with this gendered identity: the narrator writes, '[o]n the rim of it stood a girl' (Nin 1978c, p.70). Indeed, the 'I' foregrounds the *distance* rather than the proximity between the two subject positions. There appears to be a resistance to be contained and engendered by the genre of gender as the final step to unite the self with the 'little girl' is never taken. In this sense, the border between the 'I' and 'the girl', the 'body' and 'text', 'diary' and 'fiction' is held in tension and becomes the ground from which alternative 'echoes' of the self proliferate.

In conclusion Nin exploits the ambiguities of the autobiographical genre in relation to self and subjectivity in order to explore alternative female subjectivities. Her constant negotiation of the borderline is not an attempt to inscribe limitations, but rather to trace the *fault-lines* that mark the very possibility of change and the resignification of the female subject's relation to language and representation. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Nin's attempts to write an alternative feminine aesthetic or 'womb writing' are not unproblematic. However, to dismiss her work as essentialist is to reduce its very

complexity and perhaps to miss its most challenging elements. By foregrounding the gap between the 'body' and the 'feminine', the text of 'woman' remains open to renegotiation and exploration. The following chapter will explore in more detail some of the key concepts I have introduced above, in particular, Nin's strategy of 'womb writing', or 'writing the body', and the relationship between the visual and the textual in the construction of embodied subjectivity. I will argue that Nin's 'writing the body' was a subversive strategy appropriated in order to undercut the dominant discourse of 'woman' as 'other' so obsessively (re)produced within male modernism. To do this I will explore in more detail Nin's *House of Incest* in which, I argue, she attempts to mime and undermine the male dominated discourse of Surrealism.

Chapter Three

Surrealism and 'Writing the Body': A Discourse on the Frame

This chapter will explore in more detail some of the key concepts introduced above, in particular Nin's strategy of 'womb writing', which I argue has strong connections with Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine*, and the relationship between the visual and the textual in the construction of embodied subjectivity. I propose that 'writing the body' is a subversive strategy appropriated by Nin in order to undercut discourses of 'woman' so obsessively (re)produced within the conventions of Anglo-American modernism. To do this I will look specifically at Nin's *House of Incest* (1994a, originally published in 1936), in which she attempts to mime and undermine the male dominated discourse of Surrealism. This strategy is an attempt to inscribe a female writing *difference* that is not reducible to an essentialist binary logic, but rather vacillates on the border between body/text; feminine/masculine; object/ subject. Furthermore, I argue that the trope of 'incest' functions less as a pornographic trope than as a between space of undecidable difference that keeps in question the difference between 'woman' and 'women', 'real' and 'representation', thus holding out the possibility of resistance and challenge.

Julia Casterton notes that Nin's work sits rather uncomfortably within feminist agendas precisely because it raises *different* questions about writing and femininity (Molyneux and Casterton 1996). Casterton argues that Nin appears to take on the roles, or the stereotypes, of femininity as defined by patriarchal discourses. As such, '[s]he presents herself as a problem because she *uses* these labels, rather than refuses them, to assemble herself as an artist' (Molyneux and Casterton 1996, p.226). These performances become the identities, the costumes, by which she begins to 'materialise' as a woman and a writer: 'posing before them, playing with them, seeing if they fit' (1996, p.226). However, by

performing these identities she makes apparent the performativity of the roles themselves and their *lack* of ‘fit’. I argue that by making visible this gap between her sense of self and those currently circulating within hegemonic discourses of femininity, Nin attempts to create discursive spaces from which ‘other’ representations of the feminine and desire might be articulated. In this chapter I will attempt to show how Nin’s *House of Incest* foregrounds the margins, gaps and inconsistencies in the so-called ‘marginal’ discourse of Surrealism and the avant-garde, in order to engage in a marginal discourse of the margins: a proliferation of difference and heterogeneity. It is precisely this *gap*, this unstable border between the ‘female’ and the ‘feminine’, that becomes the space of her writing *difference*. I will demonstrate how Nin’s exploration of ‘writing the body’ in *House of Incest* was less an uncritical appropriation of the Surrealist discourse of ‘woman’ as Other, than a subversive strategy used to undercut and to find ‘Sorties/Ways Out’ of this binary. To do this I will be drawing on the work of Hélène Cixous, especially her essay ‘Sorties’ (1996b, originally published in French in 1975). Like Cixous, Nin emphasises the instability of body and language borders and attempts to resignify feminine sexuality and the logic of the subject and other through the exploration of the borderline and fluid or ‘between’ images. As Cixous argues, a feminine writing practice ‘will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, *border runners* never subjugated by any authority’ (1996b, p.92 my emphasis). Through an exploration of the transitional or ‘between’ states of the unconscious, and the trope of the borderline, Nin attempts to articulate alternative possible representations of the female body, the feminine and desire.

Inside/Outside: (En)Gendering Aesthetics

Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have argued that modern Western culture has been constructed on a system of binary oppositions in which one half of the

pairing remains dominant: man/woman; culture/nature; white/black; public/private; heterosexual/ homosexual. Within this logic, the white heterosexual male is aligned with the mind and rationality and is productive of culture and meaning, whereas female and black bodies are represented as closely aligned to Nature and animality with 'blackness' signifying as *pure difference*. As many feminists since De Beauvoir (1997, originally published in French in 1949) have continued to argue, the border differentiating subjects into two distinct sexes has also been the site of asymmetrical power relations in which those located on the inside (men) are afforded the power to define the outside and those that inhabit it. De Beauvoir argues, 'She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other' (1997, p.16). In this sense, borders and boundaries are not just spatial demarcations but are formative of subjectivities and meanings and are necessary to the workings of power.

As Corelina Klinger remarks, it was the 'discovery of the *symbolic* mechanisms' underpinning women's exclusion from artistic production that led feminists to challenge not just the practices of art institutions but the very politics of aestheticism itself (2000, p.343). Klinger argues that underlying aesthetic theory of art is 'a concept of man, of human essence' endowed with universal taste and judgement which functions like 'a type of aesthetic reason' (2000, p.344). Within Western culture, women, who have traditionally been denied the capacity for reason, have also been considered incapable of aesthetic reason and judgement (Klinger 2000, p.244). The viewers and the producers of art are symbolically posited as 'masculine' whilst their object has been coded as 'feminine'. In this sense, the subject position of the artist or genius is male, and, as subject of 'knowledge', remains outside a position of analysis. This obviously poses a problem for women wishing to be the subject of their own bodies and 'knowledges', as opposed to objects of male

discourses. In *The Female Nude* Lynda Nead argues that in Western culture, '[t]he framed image of a female body, hung on the wall of an art gallery is shorthand for art more generally; it is an icon of western culture, a symbol of civilization and accomplishment' (1992, p.1). What is more, '[i]t symbolizes the transformation of the base matter of nature into the elevated forms of culture and the spirit. The female nude can thus be understood as a means of containing femininity and female sexuality' (Nead 1992, p.2). Nead argues that the representation of the female body within Western art is structured within an aesthetic of 'outlines, margins and frames' which prescribe and regulate how the female body is shown and, in turn, how it is to be viewed (1992, p.6). In this sense the 'defining frame' of art and aesthetics, the imposition of style and technique, attempts to give form to an otherwise unruly female body 'matter' (Nead 1992, p.23).

Embodying the 'Woman' as 'Other': Modernism and Surrealism

One of the ways that modernists' attempted to differentiate their 'new' literary phenomenon from 'old' Victorian literary conventions of realism, morality and rationality, was through explorations of the 'feminine', the unconscious and the repressed. The 'new' subject of exploration and aestheticisation was the supposed 'irrational', anarchic and subversive potential of sexual desire and 'obscenity': the repressed libidinal desiring 'body' of the unconscious. The avant-garde movement of Surrealism drew on Freudian psychoanalysis and explored the language of dreams and the unconscious as a means by which to subvert and transgress established conventions of representation and reality informed by the rational, conscious mind. Sexuality, desire and the ambiguities of sexual difference became the primary means of transforming and subverting the dominance of the Cartesian rational bourgeois subject.

Like psychoanalysis, Surrealism has had a contentious relationship with feminism, not least because of its treatment and objectification of the female body. Indeed, Nead argues that the somewhat liminal space occupied by the female body within Western culture, its positioning somewhere between worship and defilement, has made it a very familiar trope for the expression of cultural disruption (1992, p.87-96). Xavière Gauthier's pioneering work *Surréalisme et sexualité*, published in 1971, was the first feminist challenge to Surrealism (Suleiman 1990, p.19).¹ She sought to show, in psychoanalytical terms, that the naked female body was merely a space over which the rebellious 'sons' (avant-garde) signified their defiance of the established order and paternal authority (Suleiman 1990, p.19). For the Surrealists' the female body was an empty sign upon which they could safely project and explore the fantasy of m/other union without risking the castrating effects of corporeal closeness. By way of example, Susan Suleiman turns to an essay published in 1924 by Louis Aragon, one of the founding members of the Surrealist group. Here he states:

We hung a woman on the ceiling of an empty room, and every day receive visits from anxious men bearing heavy secrets [...], we have opened a romantic Inn for unclassifiable ideas and continuing revolts. All that still remains of hope in this despairing universe will turn its last, raving glances toward our pathetic stall. *It is a question of formulating a new declaration of the rights of man.* (cited in Suleiman, 1990, p.20)

However, as Robert Belton notes in *The Beriddoned Bomb*, the Surrealists' call for the emancipation and rights of all *men* failed to acknowledge the current demands of women for emancipation in France (1995, p.15). He argues that whilst their discourse of 'liberation' was played out in the Imaginary, it was 'Woman' that became caught up in their rebellions against 'Man' (Belton 1995, p.13). This point is also made by Rudolf E.

¹ Unfortunately, this text is not currently available in English therefore I must rely on Suleiman's translation.

Kuenzli who states that, '[t]he Surrealists saw the demands of French women for social emancipation in 1924 as merely bourgeois' and preferred instead 'to celebrate female hysteria' (1990, p.19). Indeed, he goes further to state that Surrealism displayed 'an intensification of patriarchy's misogyny' (1990, p.25). Chadwick (1985) is more generous in her assessment of the Surrealists' political allegiances. She argues that whilst male Surrealists encouraged and supported the creative energies of women associated with the group and were, at least theoretically, supportive of women's emancipation from domestic servitude, they were not willing to align themselves with a movement they associated with the bourgeoisie (Chadwick 1985, p.14-16). She notes that in the 1920s and 1930s their theoretical and 'poetic' idealisation of 'woman' clashed with the demands and changing status of real women in Western Europe and North America after the First World War (1985, p.14). Indeed, she suggests that many women experienced the war very differently from men noting that '[t]he same war that filled Breton with contempt for a society unwilling to give up its faith in reason and logic had liberated many women from domestic captivity' (Chadwick 1985, p.14).

The 'woman' of Surrealist discourse had very little to do with *actual* women, standing merely as the sign for radical difference. As Suleiman argues, 'the subject position of Surrealism, as it was elaborated at the inception of the movement, was male' (1990, p.24). What is more, as Briony Fer notes 'the "feminine" was Surrealism's central organizing metaphor of difference' (1994b, p.175). Their obsessive concern with 'the underside of modernity, the erotic, the bizarre, the unconscious material of mental life' persistently placed 'woman' at the centre of their transgressive artistic gaze (Fer 1994b, p.176). Fer suggests that it is this particular construction of 'woman' as *all* body and closer to 'nature', the unconscious, and the irrational, that has served to silence and exclude women from positions of authority and cultural production (1994b, p.176). Furthermore,

the objectification of the female body was, according to Belton, ‘produced neither as formal experiment nor as psychic truth but as things to be used by men for a purpose peculiar to men’ (1995, p.xiii). ‘Woman’ was not merely ‘made the object of [male] desire’ but she was also made to stand ‘as a sign for desire’ itself and, in a very real sense, women’s own desires were *overwritten* and silenced (Fer 1994b, p.176).

‘Woman’, Women and the Avant-Garde

Many feminists have challenged the privileging of the supposed ‘experimental’ and subversive potential of the ‘feminine’ within the aesthetic avant-garde. Rita Felski questions the privileging of formal experimentation in modernism from which the logic of an alternative ‘female avant-garde tradition’ grew as a ‘counter-canon’ (1994, p.197). She argues that the effect of this was to reinforce the assumption that formal experimentation was more subversive than the supposedly ‘regressive, sentimental texts of mass culture’ and representational art (Felski 1994, p.197). Similarly, Clark argues that the modernist New Critics perpetuated an aesthetics of antisentiment and established their own position of literary authority by differentiating themselves from a discredited, that is ‘feminized’, mass culture (1991, p.5). In this sense Clark suggests that the ‘sentimental’ served to mark the borders of modernism itself or ‘the other of its literary/ nonliterary dualism’ (1991, p.9) whilst also working to actively repress the increasing influence of women writers within the literary domain (p.21). Felski, along with numerous other feminists,² draws attention to the fact that Julia Kristeva’s subversive ‘feminine’ semiotic is found, not in women’s texts, but in the signifying processes of male avant-garde writers such as Joyce, Artaud, Mallarmé

² See for example Moi (1985, p.97). DeKoven points out that certain women’s eagerness to align ‘feminine (*f eminine*, feminist, female, women’s) stylistic practice’ (1989, p.72) with a marginal male avant-garde is not reciprocated by ‘the male heroes of Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and poststructuralism’ who, she argues, ‘do not seem to feel the need of invoking the authority of female thinkers to legitimize their work’ (p.74).

and Lautréamont (1989, p.33-34). According to Kristeva, 'poetic' experimentation assumes a privileged relationship to the repressed, and anarchic ('feminine') unconscious which threatens to disrupt conventional, signifiable language or the ('masculine') symbolic system. However, this 'feminine' aspect of language is not biologically determined, it is not merely a signifier for the female body; rather it is a marginal position within the symbolic that is structurally aligned to the repressed 'semiotic' anarchic body of the m/other.

Suleiman (1990) provides an interesting dimension to these debates on the position of women artists in relation to the marginal (male) avant-garde. She argues that whilst the avant-garde and women's writing both share a common 'trope' of the margin (p14), and, in certain cases, 'the trope of marginality, "woman," "women's writing," and "avant-garde" become metaphors for each other' (p.15-16), there are fundamental differences within the power relations. It is this difference which *makes all the difference*:

One difference is that avant-garde movements have willfully chosen their marginal position, the better to launch attacks at the center, whereas women have more often than not been relegated to the margins: far from [...] those centers where cultural subjects invent and enact their symbolic and material rites. (Suleiman 1990, p.14)

What constitutes 'the borders' and 'the margins' depends on what is held as central to a particular discourse. Whilst various avant-garde movements defined their 'central' point of rebellion as dominant bourgeois culture, to many feminists their place of enunciation as 'artist' remained securely central within patriarchal culture. As Rita Felski remarks: 'A text which may appear subversive and destabilizing from one political perspective becomes a bearer of dominant ideologies when read in the context of another' (1995, p.27). Indeed, she notes that this rebellious counterdiscourse relied on very conventional assumptions of transgressive, competitive masculinity and disdain for the 'feminine' realm of emotion and feeling (Felski 1995, p.27). Certainly 'viewed from the inside', from a (white) male subject

position, the Surrealists' appropriation of the marginal sign of 'woman' as central to their thesis may have *appeared* radical and challenging. However 'viewed from the outside' these margins *appear* to converge and reconfirm central masculinist and misogynist discourses of radical difference (Jordan and Weedon 1995, p.397-398).³ This difference is precisely one of subject positioning. Drawing from Gauthier's published interview with Marguerite Duras, Suleiman argues that avant-garde women's 'doubly intolerable' position within mainstream culture has potentially radical implications (Duras cited in Suleiman, 1990, p.15). She argues that, '[t]he avant-garde woman writer is doubly intolerable, seen from the centre, because her writing escapes not one but two sets of expectations/categorizations; it corresponds neither to the "usual revolutionary point of view" nor to the "woman's point of view."' (1990, p.15).⁴ Indeed, DeKoven (1989) suggests that the conventional alignment of male writers with experimental and transgressive forms, and women writers with more traditional literary forms, reveal a cultural anxiety over the disruptive potential of experimental women writers to patriarchal discourses. She writes, '[e]xperimental writing by women, explicitly linking the feminine subversive cultural/literary Other, the maternal repressed of discourse, with the female gendered signature, is [...] simply too subversive to be supported or recognized by hegemonic institutions such as the academy or mainstream publishing' (DeKoven 1989, p.78).

Mary Jacobus (1986) argues that recent French writings by women, such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, also utilise the trope of the margin and boundaries though to very different ends. These texts, she argues, are concerned with a different kind of difference,

³ Here I have appropriated Jordan and Weedon's (1995) discussion on the politics of race in Dadaism to elaborate on gender and the avant-garde. Unfortunately, as I acknowledge in the introduction and conclusion, the complex issues of race and the modernist avant-garde are beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴ Suleiman suggests that Gauthier's use of the term 'woman's point of view' is an allusion to the (misplaced) assumption that women's writing is not experimental, but is rather 'realistic' or mimetic (1990, p.15).

which is not reducible to an either/or binary mapped onto the ‘biological’ bodies of ‘men’ and ‘women’ (1986, p.30). This binary sense of difference is always already limited by the discourse of phallogentrism which takes the ‘phallus’ as the norm against which all else differs in a relationship of *lack*. Contrary to difference as opposition, it is rearticulated as the heterogeneity of textuality itself, as ‘a process that is played out within language, across boundaries’ (Jacobus 1986, p.29). She writes, ‘[d]ifference, in fact, becomes a traversal of the boundaries [...], but a traversal that exposes these very boundaries for what they are – the product of phallogentric discourse and of women’s relation to patriarchal culture’ (p.30). Jacobus argues that the similarities between both the avant-garde and feminists’ explorations of the ‘feminine’ did not ultimately mean the exclusion of women from the political and intellectual arena, on the contrary, it was a route to the ‘inside’ (p.30). Crucially the feminists’ debates about the specificity of a ‘feminine’ language proved useful in *positioning* women within the whole intellectual and aesthetic debate of writing and the production of meaning so that the boundaries and borders of phallogentrism itself could be ‘subverted from within’ (Jacobus 1986, p.30).

A Discourse on the Frame

In *The Truth In Painting* (1987, originally published in French in 1978), Derrida proposes that within Western metaphysics all discourses of art, and meaning in general, are generated around a binary discourse of inside/outside, which must distinguish an unequivocal difference between the *ergon* (work) and the *parergon* (outside the work). Yet, Derrida argues, the originality of the ‘inside’ is produced as *an effect* of the ‘outside’ in the process of framing. He argues that meaning does not emanate from ‘inside’ the work of art as it has no intrinsic value; rather its meaning is *generated* via the workings of the frame which attempts to establish an intrinsic difference between the work’s essential ‘inside’ and

its inessential 'outside'. Derrida argues that this is not specific to art and aestheticism; rather '[t]his permanent requirement – to distinguish between the internal or proper sense and the circumstances of the object being talked about – organizes all philosophical discourses on art, the meaning of art and meaning as such' (1987, p.45). Western metaphysics finds its Truth in 'nature' as presence, and what is constituted as 'natural' (as the limit of culture) is deemed apolitical, incontestable and universal. Yet, Derrida goes on to argue that, '[t]his requirement presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and outside of an art object, here a *discourse on the frame*' (1987, p.45). If meaning is generated by the discourse of inside/outside, which is in turn marked by the frame, then this frame takes on a particularly unstable and ambiguous (dis)location: it is neither simply 'around the work', nor can it be simply placed 'inside' or 'outside' of the work (Derrida 1987, p.9). Rather it takes on a profoundly *undecidable* and *ungrounded dislocation* that is somewhere in-between, and, as such, 'does not stop disturbing the *internal* order' (Derrida 1987, p.9). This is significant for feminism and as a strategy for intervention in Western metaphysics precisely because the borderline, or the frame, marks not only the point of meaning production and regulation, but it also gestures towards the possibility of resistance and contestation. The 'interiority' of femininity, its *closeness* to the female body, does not emanate from 'inside' the body or the '*ergon*'; rather it is created by the very process of framing. The female body is delimited, constructed from the 'outside' as an 'inside' (as pure 'nature') which comes to stand in for the very essence of 'interiority' itself. Femininity is contained within its own more permeable corporeal 'frame'. Yet, this 'inside' always contains within it the *trace* of its defining difference: the 'inside' is always already an 'outside'.

I: The House of *Fiction*: Leaping into Limbo

In this chapter I will argue that Nin's first 'leap outside of the womb' (Durrell cited in 1979b, p.242) into 'fiction' could be read as a leap into a Derridean '*discourse on the frame*' (1987, p.45). In this sense, the gendered discourses of aestheticism, the framing device that attempts to mark a clear and radical difference between an 'inside' ('woman' as object) and 'outside' (artist as subject), is resisted and challenged. *House of Incest* was Nin's first attempt to write fiction and was written largely under pressure from Henry Miller and her psychoanalyst Otto Rank to abandon her diary. There was a pervasive assumption amongst the men in Nin's life that the diary symbolised the incestuous overpresence of the maternal body and inhibited her from achieving a 'healthy', that is disinterested and detached, position as a writer of fiction. However, I suggest that as fiction, *House of Incest* (1994a) is not all that it appears to be. I argue that by shifting the focus from the work (*ergon*), to the work of the frame, Nin gestures towards an alternative 'feminine' aesthetic.

House of Incest (1994a) attempts to inscribe an excluded femininity by articulating an alternative relationship of the female subject to femininity and to the fiction of unity that underpins the Cartesian mind/body split. Psychoanalytical theory also appears to undermine such a '*phallacy*' arguing that all subjects are constituted within language in a relationship of loss. Embodied subjectivity is merely the constant failure of identity characterised by the destructive effects of the 'other scene' of the unconscious. However, Doane notes rather provocatively, that this analysis is misleading and suggests that the traits attributed to the Cartesian 'I', the supposed antithesis to the psychoanalytic 'I', are not *absent* from psychoanalytical accounts of subjectivity, but are merely (re)constituted as fictions, illusions or misrecognitions (1988, p.11). Furthermore, she argues, '[i]t is this *illusion* of a coherent and controlling identity which becomes most important at the level of social

subjectivity. And the woman does not even possess the same access to the *fiction* as the man' (1988, p.11). Indeed, within such a discourse women are *too close* to themselves, unable to establish the necessary distance between self and the body. Drawing on Montrelay, Doane argues that the girl child, knowing *instantly* that she is castrated, suffers from a certain lack of a lack: a lack of the signifier of lack (the phallus) able to represent the distance between the 'I' and the body necessary to establish a desiring subject (1988, p.12).

Within her diary, traditionally the antithesis to fiction, Nin recounts her own version of the mirror stage in which she 'fails' to establish the necessary *fiction* of a unified identity. Whilst looking at a photograph of herself she seems surprised to see that s/he appears to be located and unified within stable body boundaries:

I cannot remember what I saw in the mirror as a child. Perhaps a child never looks at a mirror [...] Later I remembered what I looked like. But when I look at photographs of myself one, two, three, four, five years old, I do not recognize myself. The child is *one*. At one with himself. Never outside of himself. (Nin 1979b, p.188)

Nin appears to be unable to make the necessary 'leap', to establish the link between the sign and its referent, to construct a fiction of herself as unified, single and bounded body within language. She 'fails' to recognise herself within the photograph and instead speaks as if the child is entirely 'other'. Ironically, it is this crucial failure to *misrecognise* this 'other' as 'I', a failure to *not see* the 'self' in the 'other' and to collapse the boundary between 'self' and 'other', that accounts for her difference and her alienation within symbolic language. What she appears to suggest is that gender is not dependent on biological bodies but is rather a question of subject positioning in relation to a unified body *imago*: the male subject is *within* himself and unified whilst the female subject is *without* herself as multiple and excessive. Moreover, this relationship to 'oneness' and 'unity' is a

masculine subject position, '[t]he child is *one*. At one with *himself*', as opposed to the multiplicity of the feminine that constantly negotiates the corporeal/textual borders between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the body/text. Nin's alternative representation of her relationship to the 'I' and the body is neither unified nor stable, but multiple and polymorphous. Within psychoanalytical discourse, women occupy a strange borderline positioning as neither fully inside nor outside of the symbolic order: a position that is fundamentally unstable because of the female body's relation to 'lack'. As phallusless subjects, '[t]he woman, whose access to that signifier is problematic, finds herself in a kind of signifying limbo' (Doane 1988, p.10). As I will argue, the 'I' in Nin's diary account of the photograph and the 'I' in Nin's 'fiction', *House of Incest*, appear to take on and parody this role of the suspended feminine position caught in this 'signifying limbo' (Doane 1988, p.10).

House of Incest is a short abstract prose-poem started by Nin in 1932 and published in 1936. Other than her diaries, it is now perhaps one of her most respected pieces of writing. In this text, the narrator recounts in seven parts her dream-like journey into this 'house', which I have interpreted as a metaphor for her developing sense of a 'proper' identity as an artist. I argue that this text attempts to explore the liminal space between body/text, self/other, conscious/unconscious. As Michelson argues, Nin uses the trope of incest as 'a symbolic image of the dialectic of "inner space" – between self and other, passive and active, male and female, idol and whore, sanity and madness' (1993, p.216). However, the narrator is 'haunted', menaced, and seduced by the 'incestuous' unconscious and its many 'other' pathways and possibilities. Its preoccupation with the theme of 'the double' has led some critics to read this text as a piece on lesbian sexuality whilst others see it as an 'incestuous' exploration of her relationship with her father.

Like Evans (1968), Knapp (1979a) argues that there are two parallel narratives of lesbian love and incest in *House of Incest*. In a section entitled 'Lesbianism/Narcissism', she conflates the two by arguing that love between women is essentially a form of incestuous self-love and that Nin believed it to be a form of 'arrested psychological development' (Knapp 1979a, p.54). Similarly Benstock (1987) takes the trope of incest to be 'a figure of stasis, a dead end' (p.430) in which the narrator explores lesbian love figured as 'a search for the self in the self's own image' (p.431) and makes certain associations between this text and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. Blakley's thesis (1998) takes issue with this conflation of lesbian love and narcissism, and, like me, takes Michelson's (1993) interpretation of incest to be an exploration of 'between' states. Drawing on Kristeva's theory of the 'abject' she explores how a cultural abhorrence to 'between' states might offer both an explanation and a challenge to the discourse of heteronormativity positing that sexual difference is essential and that desire is for difference whilst identification is based on sameness (1998, p.111).

Friedman (2001) and Richard-Allerdyce (1998) both focus on Nin's relationship with her father and to patriarchal discourses. Friedman suggests that 'incest' both 'speaks literally of her affair with her father' and metaphorically as the alliance of the woman artist with male values and patriarchal discourses (2001, p.80). In this sense, 'incest' suggests 'limitation, artistic and other, imposed by the father, who allows only repetitions of himself and the world he has constructed in his own image' (Friedman 2001, p.80-81). Indeed, she suggests that only by engaging in 'incestuous literary practices' could woman enter the 'sacred brotherhood' of literary fraternity (2001, p.86). Richard-Allerdyce (1998) argues that *House of Incest* speaks the 'unsayable' (p.31), which she interprets as the 'effects of both psychological and actual incest'. She qualifies this thesis by arguing that the

publication of Nin's 'unexpurgated' diary *Incest* and the very title of her prose poem adds to the viability of her interpretation (1998, p.30 and p.33).

However, my particular focus in this chapter is on the workings of the frame or the borderline in the (mis)recognition of embodied subjectivity which is constantly threatened by its 'between' or 'incestuous' drives. I argue that this is a text preoccupied with the themes of inside/outside, surface/depth and absence/presence: the very binaries that construct a sense of bounded, bodily subject identity. The narrating 'I' refuses to perform to the reader's expectations by wholly identifying itself within the body of the text. Instead it floats in a kind of 'limbo' between the pages, between the inside and outside of the frame, between the paragraphs and sentences of the page, and between the bodies of the different characters within the narrative. The reader's first encounter on this journey into the *House of Incest* is ambiguous and disconcerting. The first piece of text is suspended centrally in the top third of a blank page. This stanza, which introduces the reader to the narrating 'I', occupies a strange liminal space: it is neither inside nor outside the text, situated as it is just after the title page and before the 'Foreword'. Furthermore, it is not clear whom this 'I' is: is it Nin or the narrator? Indeed, like this first stanza, the reader is left hanging in 'limbo':

All that I know is contained in this book
written without witness, an edifice without
dimension, a city hanging in the sky. (Nin 1994a, no page reference)

This first piece of text appears to 'frame' or incite an autobiographical reading of the proceeding text. On the one hand, perhaps like Aragon's 'hanging woman', this suspended stanza appears to offer direct access to the Truth of 'woman', an *écriture automatique* of the 'feminine' unconscious; hence 'written without witness', without the conscious 'I', it appears to promise an unmediated spectacle of 'incestuous' debauchery and exposure. On the other hand, written without the authorising gaze of the other, this might not be the

'bodily' confession that it purports to be. It might even hint at the possibility of treachery: a masquerade of the 'naked' Truth. Indeed, as an 'edifice without dimension' its 'naked' corporeal boundaries are, if not absent, certainly ambiguous. What is more, this textual or spectral 'body', without clear and measurable flesh-like contours, further complicates the distinction between form and matter, and between the inside and the outside of its containing frame.

The troubling form of *House of Incest*, the undecidable borderline between a supposed inside and an outside, between author and narrator, continues to disorientate the reader. Upon entering the book, having been temporarily distracted by this 'floating' preamble figured above and the preceding 'foreword', the reader, now expecting to enter into the main 'body' of the text, is confronted once again by another obstacle or 'pre-text'. This 'preface', differentiated from the 'proper' body of the text by its font, creates a fiction of an outside space, the domain of a disinterested and detached artist who has, as Durrell demanded, '[made] the leap outside of the womb' and 'destroy[ed her] connections' (Nin 1979b, p.242). The text reads:

The morning I got up to begin this book I coughed. Something was coming out of my throat: it was strangling me. I broke the thread which held it and yanked it out. I went back to bed and said: I have just spat out my heart. (Nin 1994a, p.1)

This preface appears to introduce the reader to the writer of the text, to Nin herself, who may or may not be distinct from the narrating 'I' that appears 'inside' the main 'body' of the text. However, this difference between the inside (object) and the outside (subject) is not a fixed or radical difference, it is not guaranteed by an external referential presence. Indeed, the 'inside' is quite literally turned 'outside': the text appears to be a vomited heart. This textual 'gagging' is perhaps an expression of women's difficulty to speak/write within the symbolic. On the one hand, the 'heart', which is a symbol of the body and perhaps of

the girl child's primary mother love, threatens her existence as a subject. It is a *foreign body* that must be expelled from the (single and bounded) body of the subject. Unless she expels her 'love', she must remain gagged and 'outside' of the symbolic in a place of silence. Yet paradoxically, her place within the symbolic is not one of a speaking subject, but rather she is an instrument through which men's desires *resound*:

There is an instrument called the quena made of human bones. It owes its origin to the worship of an Indian for his mistress. When she died he made a flute out of her bones. The quena has a more penetrating, more haunting sound than the ordinary flute. (1994a, p.1)

Within hegemonic discourses of 'woman', her 'essence' is considered to be located within the body, that is, within her very biological or bone structure. The turning inside-out of the female body by masculine desire is a desire to *know* and to make 'woman' *speak*. But, in this case, the body of the mistress does not speak; rather it is defined, shaped and spoken by her Indian master. The 'voice' of the female bodily essence remains nothing more than an act of ventriloquism: the breath of the male artist/musician who plays the female body to the tune of his own making. Paradoxically women can only ever 'speak' powerfully in their own death, when they become an *absence*; their speech is 'penetrating' and 'haunting' when it is heard from the lips of men and filtered through the reconstructed female form.

As Blakley (1998) suggests, it is unclear with whom the narrator is identifying: the Indian or the mistress. She writes, 'If the narrator abides by gender alignments, she must be the mutilated mistress, risen from the dead, playing a flute whittled from her own bones' (1998, p.123). Yet, I would argue that this question of *positioning* and identification is precisely the point of this preface as the narrator goes on to declare:

Those who write know the process. I thought of it as I was spitting out my heart. Only I do not wait for my love to die. (Nin 1994a, p.1)

Indeed, this statement is pivotal to the text as a whole, the sentence itself *resounds* differently depending on *who* takes up, or *who* is able to take up, the subject position of writer/artist. Certainly, the *woman* writer is all too familiar with ‘the process’ of writing, as ‘[t]hose who write’ (p.1) within Western culture must be masculine/male, whilst the feminine/female must be the object of their a(muse)ment. Blakley notes the ‘shocking’ and morbid equation of ‘writing with the dismembering [of] a *live* lover’ (1998, p.123). However, I feel that this statement remains deliberately ambiguous. It oscillates between a discourse of Surrealist sadomasochistic fantasy and a ‘sentimental’ or ‘feminine’ heart-felt discourse of life and love. In order to write, the female subject must perform a precarious balancing act. Like a ‘trapeze’ artist (Bair 1995, p.340), she must perpetually (re)negotiate the b/order *between* masculine/feminine, autobiography/fiction, body/text, artist/muse. This ‘between’ or ‘incestuous’ space is precisely the space of ‘writing’ and the possibility of *another* tune. As a ‘dangerous double agent’ (Marcus 1994, p.7) the narrator articulates an ‘incestuous’ or ambiguous form of writing able to rearticulate the relationship between genders and genres, subject and object, fact and fiction, whereby difference is not fixed in biological bodies but is rather a process of *différance*.

‘And I In-Between’

In her diary Nin comments on the developing style of her first fictional text: ‘I have written the first two pages of my new book, *House of Incest*, in a surrealistic way’ (1979a, p.84). However, as her work develops she is determined to take up a subject position as a woman within such a discourse, to speak *otherwise*, she writes ‘when I have written a few pages of the corrosive *House of Incest*, my season in hell [...], I am not yet satisfied. I still have something to say’ (1979a, p.298). What is more she states, ‘what I have to say is really distinct from the artist and art. *It is the woman who has to speak*’ (1979a, p.298-299). In a

tradition that places 'woman' as the muted object of the man's (the artist) power of representation, *speaking as a woman* is not the concern of the artist or the privilege of the art object. It is clear in this statement that, *as a woman*, Nin feels alienated from both the subject position of 'artist' and his enunciations. Furthermore, she goes on to note, '[a]s I discover myself, I feel I am merely one of many, a symbol' (1979a, p.299). Ironically, the discovery of what she calls 'myself', as a unique, speaking and 'real' individual, is actually a recognition of her own *textuality* within the history of the discourses of 'woman'; her presence is precisely an absence, 'a symbol' or masquerade within writing itself.

I would argue, that perhaps what Nin 'discovers' is a *gap*, a discrepancy within the discourses of 'woman', of female embodied subjectivity, and her own sense of 'myself'. She feels unable to identify with either, '[t]he mute ones of the past, the inarticulate, who took refuge behind wordless intuitions; and the women of today, all action, and copies of men' (1979a, p.299). Indeed, Nin finds her (dis)location precisely within the *gap*: 'And I, in between' (p.299). She refuses to position herself 'outside' of discourse, in the space of silence, yet neither is she willing to merely reproduce the discourses of 'woman' articulated by men. As a woman *and* a writer, Nin is situated on the borders of language and culture, caught between two seemingly incommensurable subject positions. She states, it is only in the 'sketchbook' (the diary renamed in order to appease and evade Rank's demands to give it up) that she can 'be free, and myself' (1979a, p.299). However, she also writes, 'I will never write anything here [in the diary] which can be situated in either *House of Incest* or *Winter of Artifice*, I will not give my all to the sketchbook' (1979a, p.295). Yet, as most attentive readers would notice, this statement is somewhat ingenuous, precisely because this 'sketchbook' and *House of Incest* are filled with obvious allusions to, or direct references from, each other. Indeed, some pages on she directly states, '[t]hought of the scenes I had extracted from the diary, the dreams and moods I used in *House of Incest*'

(1979a, p.319). In this sense, 'my all', as she puts it, is neither 'inside' nor 'outside' the diary. This 'I' is always already divided and (dis)located: it is an 'I, *in between*' the 'woman' of her fiction (*House of Incest*) and the 'woman' of her diary (1979a, p.299 my emphasis). In her first attempt to write fiction, to 'make the leap outside of the womb' (Durrell cited in 1979b, p.242), Nin's diary may simply be masquerading as fiction, highlighting the very *fictionality* of fiction itself. Equally, the *trace* of fiction 'contaminates' the 'integrity' of the diary and exposes its fiction of Truth and presence.

Whitney Chadwick (1998) and Rosalind Krauss (1999) both argue that women artists working with the Surrealists did not merely reproduce the discourses of their male contemporaries, but rather engaged in explorations of their own bodies and the subversive strategies of masquerade. Indeed, both theorists note the importance of masquerade in the formation of a female subject position within Surrealism. Chadwick notes that '[i]n mobilizing the body as a primary signifier of its cultural politics, Surrealism established new parameters within which women artists might begin to explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between the female body and female identity' (1998, p.4). What is more, the Surrealists' engagement with the radical potential of the unconscious to challenge repressive Cartesian rationalist discourses of mind/body and self/other, had considerable appeal to women artists who had been continually located on the repressed and excluded side of the binary. She argues that it was the Surrealists' exploration and defamiliarising of the body that 'provided the starting point for works that challenge existing representations of the feminine through reimaginings of the female body as provisional and mutable, or at least intimating a shift away from the phallic organization of subjectivity' (1998, p.15). Similarly Krauss states that the Surrealists' obsessive exploration of fetishisation and fantasy supported an understanding of gender as both constructed and transgressive, and, as

such, 'the surrealists must be seen to have opened patriarchy's view of "woman" up to questioning' (1999, p.17).

I will argue that *House of Incest* attempts to forge a gap between the discourse of 'woman' and women as material beings, by focusing on the instability of its structural framework. I attempt to show that the position to which 'woman' has been assigned 'outside' and on the limits of vision, the vanishing point of culture, is not 'natural' and immutable, but is constituted by the discourse of the frame. Indeed, the 'object' of this particular narrating I's discourse is less the work (*ergon*) than the *parergonal* workings of its framing discourses. In *House of Incest*, the narrating 'I [falls] in between' the discourse of Surrealism to the liminal space of the 'frame':

The night surrounded me, a photograph unglued from its frame. The lining of a coat ripped open like the two shells of an oyster. The day and night unglued, *and I falling in between* not knowing on which layer I was resting, whether it was the cold grey upper leaf of dawn, or the dark layer of night. (Nin, 1994a, p.6 my emphasis)

The female narrating 'I' is 'a photograph unglued from its frame': a signifier 'woman' unfixed from its framing discourse that *positions* and fixes her as *ergon*, as the object from which the male Surrealist subject can reaffirm his 'outside' position. In this sense, the reader is given a different point of view from the 'other side' of the Surrealist discourse: to explore what the Other/woman might look like from a woman writer's different or 'unfixed' viewpoint. The female narrating 'I' falls *between* meaning into the always-present gap, between what we 'see' and what we 'know'. Unfixed from the frame of gender, from the sign 'woman', the 'I' falls in-between the sign itself into the gap between 'woman' (as signifier) and 'women' (as signified). To this end the 'I' experiences 'woman' (Sabina), the sign with which she must identify, as 'other' than self:

Sabina's face was suspended in the darkness of the garden. From the eyes a simoun wind shrivelled the leaves and turned the earth over; all things which had run a vertical course now turned in circles, round the face, around HER face. (1994a, p.6)

This seemingly 'natural' process of identification of the female 'I' with 'woman'/Sabina is juxtaposed against the 'natural' setting of a garden. Yet, this identification is 'suspended', the narrator's perspective slides, and the workings of the frame in the construction of core gender identity is exposed. Sabina's differences from the narrating 'I' are accentuated both by her exoticism, 'her nacreous skin perfumes spiralled like incense' and by the accentuation of the *signifier* 'HER' (1994a, p.6). The 'I' is suspended in a liminal space *between* body boundaries, unable to find her 'identity' through gender identification. Indeed, it is significant that the narrating 'I' continues to evade any final classification throughout the text by withholding her name from the reader.

As *House of Incest* progresses, it becomes clear that Sabina is also elsewhere, she is something 'other' than what she appears to be. She is a parody or a 'waxy' and 'luminous mask' (1994a, p.9) masquerading as the exotic Other; the Other that men are supposed to desire and women are supposed to desire to *embody*. Sabina appears to be an erotic fantasy of 'woman' projected and inscribed by men onto the bodies of women. As such, the masquerade of Sabina is temporarily taken on by the narrator in order to make an 'imprint on the world': in order to take up the phallus/pen (p.15). Yet, Sabina's status as a representation, as a psychological projection rather than an *actual* woman, does not, ironically, make her less powerful or less 'real'. Indeed she has very real material implications for the writer as she enforces, produces and reproduces concepts of 'woman' as Other. It is Sabina, who appears to control and police the behaviour of the female narrator. She becomes the I/eye, the visible body that controls, monitors and censors the female narrator's movements: '[t]he luminous mask of her [Sabina's] face, waxy,

immobile, with eyes like sentinels. Watching my sybaritic walk, and I the sibilliance of her tongue' (1994a, p.9). This masquerade appears to take on a life of its own, challenging the very border between 'real' and 'representation' and the difference between (corpo)real and 'fabricated' body borders. The distinction between Sabina's 'material' body boundaries, and the 'material' borders of her costumes, are placed in suspension as they freely oscillate between the two:

Her black cape hung like black hair from her shoulders, half-draped, half-floating around her body. The web of her dress moving always a moment before she moved, as if aware of her impulses, and stirring long after she was still, like waves ebbing back to the sea. Her sleeves dropped like a sigh and the hem of her dress danced around her feet. (Nin 1994a, p.8)

The effect is to put in question the very border differentiating (bodily) 'truth' and (fabric) artifice. Like a second skin these clothes signify the elasticity and mutability of the body boundaries and the instability of that border between the 'body' and the 'text' as well as the 'self' and the 'other'. The artificial fabric of her black cape masquerades as her 'natural' hair and her dress mimics the movements of the sea.

In *Adorned in Dreams*, Elizabeth Wilson investigates the 'strangeness of dress' and its ambiguous relationship to body boundaries (1985, p.2). She argues that dress 'links the biological body to the social being, and public to private. This makes it uneasy territory, since it forces us to recognize that the human body is more than a biological entity' (1985, p.2). Wilson suggests that clothes operate like a 'second skin' or a protective border in that they attempt to fortify an anxious recognition of a more permeable body boundary:

If the body with its open orifices is itself dangerously ambiguous, then dress, which is an extension of the body yet not quite part of it, not only links that body to the social world, but also more clearly separates the two. Dress is the frontier between the self and the not-self. (1985, p.3)

Yet, whilst clothes may stand in for the borderline between subject/other and nature/culture, in order to reinforce the difference, they also mark the *trace* of the 'other': the 'not-self' within the 'self'. The undecidable space *between* the 'material' body and the 'material' or cloth threatens the coherence and stability of (gendered) identity which must be clearly and unambiguously located inside the borders of a biologically sexed body. As a cultural text, clothes can be read and signify entirely independently of a bodily presence, indeed, they can masquerade *as* a bodily presence. Pineau notes that Nin's swirling black cape, which became 'immortalized in the second and third *Diaries*', was available to purchase in 1972 in Berkeley dress shops and was marketed as 'The Nin Cape' (1996, p.237). The cape came to stand in for Nin herself and was capable of signifying her *presence* even in her physical *absence*, and, what is more, 'Nin' could be overlaid onto an entirely different body. It is precisely this ambiguous border between cloth and body, surface and depth, signifier and signified in the *fabrication* of identity or essence which is playfully foregrounded in the act of travesty. Moreover, Sabina's cape interrogates further the borderline between fiction and the diary by putting in question the very *fictionality* of fiction. This complicates not only the difference between the narrator and Sabina, but also their relationship to 'Nin' as author. I am not simply suggesting that Nin's fiction is merely autobiographical as that would be to *collapse* the border, but rather that the masquerade serves to make undecidable the difference between the 'origin' and the 'copy', the 'inside' and the 'outside', 'body' and 'text'. It is impossible to finally know *who* or *what* is masquerading as something 'other'.

As a writer, in order to be visible and to get published, it could be argued that Nin uses the masquerade, her 'body' (which *is* and *is not* hers) to achieve her audiences and to have a 'voice' within a male dominated profession. Similarly, it is visibility which the narrating 'I' appears to lack: 'Sabina, you made your impression upon the world. I passed through it like a ghost' (Nin 1994a, p.13). As many feminist academics have argued, whilst

the discourse of ‘woman’ within Surrealism and modernism was extremely visible, the histories and material existence of women artists as active producers within these movements have been noticeable absence. The narrator too, ‘passed through [the academic canon] like a ghost’ (1994a, p.13). Therefore, in order to have a voice and to be visible, the narrator *performs* the ‘legend’ (the text) of femininity: ‘Men recognized her always: the same effulgent face, the same rust voice. And she and I, we recognized each other; I her face and she my legend’ (1994a, p.10). The narrator writes:

I borrowed your visibility and it was through you I made my imprint on the world. I praised my own flame in you.

THIS IS THE BOOK YOU WROTE

AND YOU ARE THE WOMAN

I AM

Only our faces must shine twofold – like day and night – always separated by space and the evolutions of time. (Nin 1994a, p.15)

Rather than simply taking on the role of ‘woman’ uncritically, the masquerade highlights the gap between the narrating ‘I’ and the discourse of ‘woman’ and/or Sabina. They are not one in the selfsame, but rather they are ‘always separated by space’. In this sense, the mask slips to reveal not the Truth behind the masquerade, but rather the textuality of the masquerade itself. This gap produces the *trace* of the other: the spacing that is the precondition for meaning and the possibility of its resignification. The space between the ‘I AM’ and ‘WOMAN’ is foregrounded by the placement of the signifiers on the page itself. Their triangular arrangement appears to correlate with the conventional representation of perspective in European art: the Quattrocento. Within the tradition of perspective, the eye of the subject becomes the centre of the visible world, which is ordered for him or her to a vanishing point of infinity. From this point of view, the ‘real’ could be presented to the

spectator as a unified and knowable whole, which in turn confirms to the spectator his position as unified and 'knowing' subject. In the above quote, the point of vision appears to emanate from the bottom tip of the triangle, the 'I AM', to incorporate the object of knowledge, 'WOMAN', within a unifying vision. Indeed, similar to the workings of the mirror stage, the 'I AM' understands itself as its supposed mirror image, that is, 'WOMAN'. However whilst 'WOMAN' is literally and metaphorically placed on the periphery of the subject's vision, what dominates the 'I's field of vision is 'THE BOOK', that is, the signifier and the very process of writing and representation. The 'I AM' and 'WOMAN' do not cohere in a unified 'seamless' vision but are rather 'always separated by space'. This 'gap' in vision, attempts to redirect the subject to an 'elsewhere' to *another* way of 'knowing' found '(in) the between' of writing (Cixous 1996b, p.86). This site allows for the possibility of heterogeneity and the subsequent generation of alternative perspectives, locations and subject positions.

This representation of Sabina/'woman' as the 'timeless' exotic sex/text that the narrator feels compelled to perform is *culturally* reproduced and 'framed' within hegemonic discourses as ahistorical and natural. The narrator writes that 'they enclosed us in copper frames' (p.10), which are perhaps the 'copper frames' of the traditional printing press. However, this framing medium of copper is but a soft, penetrable metal, the borders of which are dangerously pliable and unstable (Nin 1994a, p.10). This copper surface, the protective sheath between inside/outside, like the surface of the skin is penetrable and open to reinscription, and it is with these 'copper words' that the 'woman' narrator fights/writes back. She writes: 'The soft secret yielding of woman I carved into men's brains with copper words; her image I tattooed in their eyes. They were consumed by the fever of their entrails, the indissoluble poison of legends' (1994a, p.9). The female writing 'I' denies the male viewer the disinterested distance between (male) mind and (female) body that frames the

discourse of art and aesthetics. As Judith Butler has argued, 'gender' does not simply proceed from 'sex' but is rather 'a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculinity* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one' (1999, p.10). The narrator unleashes the signifiers (feminine and masculine) from their corresponding signifieds (female and male) 'mixing up' bodies and genders in the process. It is the male subject who becomes *embodied*, yielding like a 'woman', to the penetrating mark of the female writer/phallus who writes the *traces* of 'womanly' pleasure with 'pollen and honey' gathered from Sabina's parted legs (Nin 1994a, p.9). The female 'I' highlights the permeability and contingent polymorphous nature of 'the body' as she *drags* the image of 'woman' from the female body reinscribing it onto the male. This 'I' becomes the text(ure) of the male subject's corporeality and undermines his privileged 'outside' position. Indeed, 'consumed by the fever of [his] entrails' (1994a, p.9) and reinscribed by his own bodily/ textual pleasures, the 'detached' male subject position of artist is literally and metaphorically turned inside-out.

Hysteria: Speaking from the Borderline

In his reevaluation of 'Joan Riviere and The Masquerade', Stephen Heath (1986) argues that hysteria is the *failure* of the masquerade. He writes, '[t]he hysteric will not play the game', [and therefore] misses her identity as woman' (1986, p.51). This 'game' which the hysteric refuses to play 'is that of being the phallus' and instead, according to Freud, she reverts back to a childhood sexual identity that is 'masculine' (active) in character (1986, p.51). Cixous and Clément (1996a) have argued that the hysteric is a figure to be celebrated by women as a form of *écriture féminine* in which the body 'writes' what it is impossible to speak. As such, the hysteric has been claimed by many feminists as a rebellious, disruptive

figure who fought back against the repressive discourses of patriarchy, frustrating their desires to master and tame their female subjects. However, the hysteric also took centre stage in the discourse of Surrealism where she too became the celebrated, rebellious figure capable of unleashing the anarchic desires of the unconscious.⁵

For a woman writer to take up the discourse of Surrealism she must straddle the 'inside' and 'outside' of the text: to take up a between position as both the subject and the object of art. Chadwick (1998) notes the difficulty women artists faced in attempting to move from object to subject of Surrealism. She asserts that the young women artists who joined the scene in the 1930s 'lacked a clear sense of what being an artist meant (or perhaps they perceived all too clearly that the roles of women and those of artists are often incompatible)' (Chadwick 1998, p.5).⁶ In her 'unexpurgated' diary *Fire*, Nin writes 'Surrealism bothers and irritates me. I am near them but not one of them. I like their theory but not what they write' (1996a, p.338). In her efforts to write a Surrealist discourse, *as a woman*, she 'repudiates' Surrealism: she is caught *between* subject and object positions whereby the 'irritating' *trace* of something 'other' prevents her from fully refuting or identifying with either position.⁷ Nin recounts the words of her psychoanalyst Otto Rank and his 'medical' opinion of her 'condition' as a woman artist: 'Women, said Rank, when cured of neurosis, enter life. Man enters art. Woman is too close to life, too human. The feminine quality is necessary to the male artist, but Rank questioned whether masculinity is

⁵ The Surrealists celebrated the supposed 'madness' of the Papin sisters whose murder of their abusive employers was considered by Comte de Lautréamont as 'poetic rather than criminal' (cited in Fer 1994b, p.218). Similarly Louis Aragon considered Germaine Berton's assassination of the right-wing monarchist Marius Plateau 'the most beautiful protest' (cited in Fer 1994b, p.218).

⁶ Elsewhere Chadwick acknowledges that whilst the women artists she interviewed for her book found Breton and the other male Surrealists to be an important source of support and encouragement in their artistic careers, she also notes that '[a]lmost without exception, women artists viewed themselves as having functioned independently of Breton's inner circle and the shaping of Surrealist doctrine' (1985, p.11).

⁷ Here I draw on Bowlby's definition of 'repudiation' which means not simply to reject or refuse but rather to 'illegitimately cast off', which, implies that 'what you repudiate really belongs to you, stays behind to haunt you' (1992, p.145).

equally necessary to the woman artist' (Nin 1979a, p.319). In fact, he gives her an ultimatum, 'Perhaps [...], you may discover now what you want – to be a woman *or* an artist' (1979a, p.319 my emphasis). In the discourse of psychoanalysis, women must make a choice between being an artist *or* a woman: taking a position that is *either* masculine *or* feminine. In *Women: The Longest Revolution*, Juliet Mitchell argues that 'the woman novelist must be an hysteric' (1984, p.289). She proposes that like the hysteric's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of femininity, as it is constituted in patriarchy, the woman novelist both refuses the 'woman's world' (hence she is a novelist) as well as 'her construction from within a masculine world of that woman's world' (p.290). Indeed, (dis)located on a borderline 'incestuous' position somewhere *between* masculinity and femininity, the hysteric/novelist 'touches on both. It touches, therefore, on the importance of bisexuality' (Mitchell 1984, p.290), and, as such, her refusal/acceptance of her (dis)position 'troubles' the workings of the borderline in the construction of (sexual) difference and the acquisition of identity.

For the female 'hysterical' narrator/writer of *House of Incest*, her text is a double-edged sword: it is *both* a site of inscription and reinscription. As a discursive space it offers *both* the possibility of freedom and 'peace' – 'I walked into my book, seeking peace' and a space in which she can 'materialise' her rebellion – and *simultaneously* a dangerous imprisoning space (Nin 1994a, p.43). Indeed, the text for the narrator/writer is a space of careful negotiation. She writes: 'I made a careless movement inside the dream; I turned too brusquely the corner and I bruised myself against my madness' (1994a, p.43). The 'madness' of the narrating 'I' is the inability to *mis*recognise the *fictionality* of self-possession: 'I walk ahead of myself', and bumped and 'bruised myself against my own madness' (1994a, p.24, p.43). The narrator 'bruised' herself against the limitations of symbolic language, *tracing* like a prisoner the confines of her defining cell: 'More pages

added to the book but pages like a prisoner's walking back and forth over the space allotted him. What is it allotted me to say?' (1994a, p.43). As Belton argues, hysteria is not an illness or madness but rather signifies a problem of representation: the 'problem' that *is* 'woman' framed as she is within a discourse of phallogentrism (1995, p.257). This female artist is trapped within the discourse of Surrealism/psychoanalysis in which she is restricted ('allotted') to speak a so-called 'hysterical' discourse, translated and framed by the watchful eyes and ears of the analyst. Janet Beizer argues that the hysterical body, 'does not speak; it is spoken, ventriloquized by the master text that makes it signify. The woman becomes a text, but she is a text within a text, a text *framed* as signifying source by another, mediating text' (1994, p.26). Indeed, Nin draws attention to the construction or the 'framing' of the woman writer *as* the hysteric within Surrealist and psychoanalytical discourse by performing her borderline position. By taking on this category of the 'hysteric' she highlights the *trace* of the 'other', the space of the impossible 'outside' that is constitutive and therefore always already part of the 'inside'. I would argue that this 'hysterical' discourse is 'a *discourse on the frame*' (Derrida 1987, p.45) in which the undecidable border between masculine and feminine, body and text, is opened up to a 'space' of *possible* resistance within an apparent position of (im)possibility.

The Wandering Womb

Unsurprisingly, the 'origin' of hysteria has most often been fixed within the 'faulty' reproductive organs of women. Those women who refused to *reproduce* the discourses of 'normal' reproductive femininity were the products of a 'deviant' or wandering reproductive biological organ: the uterus. The theory of the hysteric's 'wandering womb' can be interestingly appropriated to explore Nin's own exploration of fictional writing. As I have argued in Chapter Two, Nin's 'womb writing' deviated and wandered into spaces

where it did not conventionally belong. Instead of remaining rooted within the 'body' of the author, the womb/diary wanders 'perversely' between body and textual boundaries:

During my struggle against the diary 'opium habit' I had many misgivings. Should the diary disappear altogether? Was concerned with its value as a document, its usefulness to my work. Thought of the scenes I had extracted from the diary, the dreams and moods I used in *House of Incest*. Would it reappear in a more objective form? (1979a, p.319)

In this quote the diary is presented as a 'drug' upon which the narrator is completely dependent; perhaps it is the incestuous, hysterical closeness to the m/other from which she must wean herself. However, Nin's uncertainty about *where* and *in what form* it might next appear seems to foreground the unpredictability of the diary/womb's textual wandering. The diary itself appears to take on an hysterical position wandering somewhere between fact and fiction, inside and outside, text and body. Interestingly, Bair notes that after writing *House of Incest* Nin 'now believed her fiction would "never get stuck again" because she was "imitating the diary, approximating the tone of sincerity and the fullness."' (Nin cited in Bair 1995, p.214). Her fiction masquerades as her diary and her diary masquerades as her fiction: it becomes impossible to say where the 'Truth' lies. In this sense, it would appear that her first 'leap outside of the womb' (Durrell cited in Nin 1979b, p.272) is less a 'leap outside' than a leap to the '(in) the between' of writing (Cixous 1996b, p.86), that is, the space of ambiguity, multiplicity and 'perverse' masquerade.

Masquerading Madness: 'Come as Your Own Madness'

In 1938 there was a Surrealist exhibition held in Paris which 'attracted large crowds and extensive press coverage' (Chadwick 1998, p.16).⁸ The entrance to the gallery was a long

⁸ Nin does not mention this exhibition in any of her published diaries. However, as she was living in Paris at the time, and was clearly interested in the work of the Surrealists, it would seem highly likely that she either attended, or was aware of this highly publicised exhibition. Nin gives numerous accounts of meetings with key Surrealist figures such as Duchamp, Breton, Dali and Artaud. She also had contact with the photographer Brassai, and apparently sold her camera to Man Ray in 1939 (1979b, p.357).

corridor lined with twenty mannequins outfitted by artists such as Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Man Ray, André Masson and others.⁹ Chadwick notes that these mannequins were ‘transformed into Surrealist gorgons that guarded the portals of the Surrealist world’, and, she states, one in particular received much attention (1998, p.16). This mannequin was Masson’s *Mannequin*, or to be more specific, *Le Bâillon vert à bouche de pensée* (*The Green Gag in the Mouth of Thought*). The head of this female figure was imprisoned in a birdcage, her mouth was gagged and a pansy was tucked into her mouth and under her armpits. Her pubic area was also covered with tiger’s eyes and peacock feathers (Figure 1). Chadwick notes that Masson’s figure is a particularly disturbing ‘rewriting [of] the female body as exoticized other’, juxtaposing ‘images of femininity and masculine control’ (1998, p.17). In this image the sites of women’s erotic pleasure are overwritten with ‘natural’ symbols and quite literally silenced by various restraining devices.

In 1953 Nin attended a masquerade which took madness as its theme. Nin’s costume to this ‘Come as Your Madness’ party (Figure 2) seems to bear striking similarities to Masson’s *Le Bâillon vert à bouche de pensée*, or *Mannequin* (Figure 1). Bair quotes Nin’s description of her costume from one of her diaries:

Skin colored net stockings up to my waist. Leopard fur earrings glued to tips of my naked breasts, leopard belt on waist, rest painted by Gil, and my head inside a birdcage. Hair dusted with gold and eyelashes two inches long. Around my wrist strips of paper on which I had copied lines from my writing – out of context. I unwound these and tore off a phrase for each person at the party. (Nin cited in Bair 1995, p.410)

The most obvious point of similarity to Masson’s mannequin is the birdcage placed over the head. This image of the caged ‘exotic’ female body has a long tradition within Western

⁹ For a description of these mannequins and their creators see Belton (1995, p.114).

discourses of race and gender and was mobilised in particular by the avant-garde as a means of accessing the transformative powers of the repressed unconscious.¹⁰ Moreover, the image of caged femininity and repression of unconscious sexual desires has long been a strong motif within women's art and literature (Chadwick 1998, p.33, n.24).¹¹ Indeed, this bird cage could perhaps symbolise the suffocating 'iron cage' (Nin 1994a, p.16) that the narrator of *House of Incest* speaks of as the 'house' of incest: the discourse of 'woman' 'framed' within (male) Surrealism and modernism from which women must fight/write their way out of.

However, Nin does not merely reproduce Masson's image, she does not simply turn herself into his text, as juxtaposed with this Surrealist image is the addition of her own texts copied onto pieces of paper and wrapped around her wrists. These paper bracelets, perhaps signifying handcuffs or identity bands worn in hospitals and/or asylums, further enforce the idea of entrapment and repression *dressed up* as 'exotic' adornments. Whilst Masson displaced the site of the body and of 'otherness' onto an external object (the mannequin) in order to reaffirm his position as artist, by contrast Nin's performance clearly locates the 'other' within the self: she is *both* subject and object of the Surrealist discourse. Like the hysteric Nin 'performs' the text of 'hysterical madness' on the surface of her body by masquerading as the *Mannequin* (Figure 1), which is itself a mannequin *dressed up* to display the (male) Surrealist text of the exotic 'woman' as other. In this sense, Nin draws attention not simply to the (corpo)reality of her own body (as opposed to the 'artifice' of the mannequin), but rather to the textuality and mutability of the female body *as* mannequin or masquerade. As such Nin masquerades the masquerade.

¹⁰ See for example Jordan and Weedon (1995), especially parts III and IV on 'The Cultural Politics of Gender/Race'; and Sieglinde Lemke (1998).

¹¹ See Gilbert and Gubar (1979).

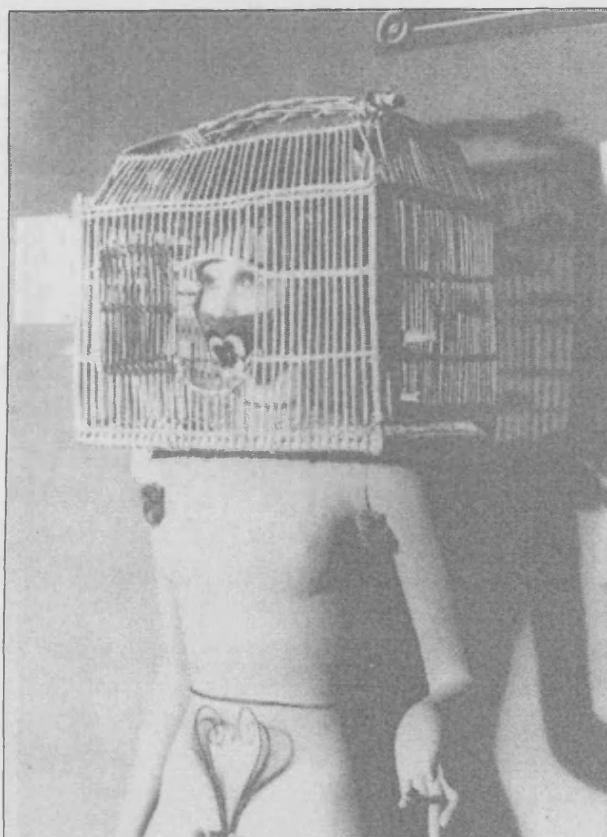


Figure 1

Man Ray *Mannequin*, 1938 (Chadwick 1998, p.17)

Photograph of André Masson's *Le Bâillon vert à bouche de pensée*, 1938



Figure 2

Anaïs and Rupert at the 'Come as Your Madness' party (Bair 1995, p.407).

Unlike Masson's *Mannequin*, Nin's mouth is not obscured by a 'flowered gag' which could be read as an emancipatory gesture, an unleashing of 'our beautiful mouths stopped up with gags, pollen, and short breaths' (Cixous 1996, p.69).¹² It is, after all, '*the woman who has to speak*', and, far from being silenced, Nin's performance demands an audience and could be seen as a publicity stunt (Nin 1979a, p.299). In making a 'spectacle' of herself and of her body she draws attention to her status as a *writer*. Indeed, 'a complete stranger read his piece of tickertape and recognized the passage as one written by the novelist Anaïs Nin' (Bair 1995, p.410). In this sense, Nin masquerades not just as the Surrealist 'woman' but also as the 'Anaïs Nin' of her texts: in 'performing' the Surrealist text, she also 'performs' her own texts. She is recognised by a 'complete stranger' not by her *presence* but by her *absence* or textual *trace* within the configuration of words on the 'tickertape'. Interestingly, Scholar argues that the central point of *House of Incest* circulates around the issue of identity and Nin's 'hopes to make herself known to herself and to the world, to release herself from confinement' (1984, p.80). The gradual unraveling of her bracelets/handcuffs as she hands out fragments of her work to strangers both 'releases' her wrists from confinement and 'unleashes' her texts into the public domain.

I would also argue that the juxtaposition of her writing with the Surrealist masquerade of 'woman' draws attention to the conventional subordination of writing as fabrication and artifice. As Derrida remarks in *Of Grammatology*:

Writing, sensible matter and artificial exteriority: a 'clothing.' It has sometimes been contested that speech clothed thought. [...] But has it ever been doubted that writing was the clothing of speech? For Saussure it is even a garment of perversion and debauchery, a dress of corruption and disguise, a festival mask that must be exorcised, that is to say warded off, by the good word. (1997, p.35)

¹² Belton notes that Masson often associates the pussy with sex in his work. In this sense he deliberately equates the mouth of the female mannequin with her vagina therefore connoting a *vagina dentata* (1995, p.198). He also notes that in the Surrealist exhibition this model also had wilting red peppers caught in traps strewn around her feet therefore reinforcing this image of the castrating female (Belton 1995, p.198).

Writing, much like the female body, must be exposed and disrobed of its surface artifice in order to find its 'naked' Truth. Performing an apparent striptease, Nin slowly disrobes herself of her text, giving 'a piece' of herself to everyone at the party.¹³ Masquerading as the mysterious 'woman', she offers the promise of 'unraveling' her mystery to reveal the Truth of flesh. However, the Truth of her performance is endlessly deferred. Indeed, Nin appears to be unable to follow her own unwinding narrative, as her records of this masquerade within her diary are contradictory. In *Volume Five* of the *Diary*, the location of her textual bracelets are displaced from her wrists to the cage itself. She writes:

My head was inside a birdcage. From within the cage, through the open gate, I pulled out an endless roll of paper on which I had written lines from my books. The ticker tape of the unconscious. I unwound this and handed everyone a strip with a message. (1979e, p.133)

Perhaps this is just another masquerade in which she appears to be unable to 'rationally' account for her own performance of her 'madness'. However, the differing '*récits*' of her performances produce alternative and 'other' narrative threads which cannot be traced back to any 'original' source; rather they continue to rewrite the boundaries between the body of Nin and the 'corpus' of her work. Yet, by relocating her writings to different parts of her body, she draws attention to her own textuality: to her own rewritings and editings of her body/text. Interestingly, the photograph of Nin at the party (Figure 2) seems to document a complete *absence* of these textual adornments, whether on the wrists or in the birdcage. The photograph appears to find the 'naked' Truth of Nin's textual 'fabrications', thus capturing and re-fixing her back within the Surrealist photographic frame as 'object' of interrogation.

¹³ Another interesting association here is that the Surrealist's mannequins were meant to conflate female sexuality and prostitution. According to Belton, these mannequins were originally supposed to be seen by 'flashlight' provocatively lurking beneath or near street signs in a network of streets recreated within the confines of the *Galerie de Beaux-Arts* (1995, p.111). The placement of these mannequins/prostitutes attempted to allude 'to the sort of sexual street solicitation that may still be encountered in the tawdry half-light of the rue Saint-Martin' (Belton 1995, p.111).

However, by foregrounding the textuality of the *Mannequin* as a site of reiteration and possible intervention, the textuality of the photograph simply tells another *tale*. As a representation, a sign that stands in for presence, the photograph is always already caught up in the masquerade. In this sense, if ‘femininity’ is not fixed within a ‘natural’ and immutable essence, and the ‘body’ is the site of multiple and (dis)located expressions of gender, then femininity and the female body can be subject to *misreadings* and *resignification*.

Performing Autobiography: ‘A Photograph Unglued From its Frame’

The *House of Incest* does not exist as a singular entity bounded within a specific frame but is rather multiple and constantly in process, written and rewritten not just by Nin whilst she was alive, but also by different publishers, different editions and by its readers. As a whole the ‘text’ is always abounding and exceeding the unity of any single body. In 1958 Nin produced a further edition of *House of Incest* which introduced photomontages into her text. In this section I would like to analyse the effect of these images on the written text as they offer another perspective from which the relationship between the text and the body, and the very process of ‘writing the body’ can be formulated.¹⁴

The photographic medium, as a form of representation, has enjoyed a privileged relationship to ‘reality’ functioning to both construct and confirm dominant discourses of gender, race and sexuality. Abigail Solomon-Godeau states that photography played a major role in the process of objectifying and classifying ‘otherness’, and in the process of ‘inventing visual conventions of bodily display’ which were ‘overwhelmingly feminine’ (1992, p.328). Whilst the photograph is a sign that stands in for an absence, its power lies in

¹⁴ Whilst these photomontages are the work of Val Telberg, Nin decided and approved the artwork for her text.

its apparent presence and transparency. Just as Nin's diary writing has been devalued as a mere 'record' of life (a transparent imprint of the body onto the text) the photograph is conventionally seen as a 'record' or evidence of an unmediated bodily presence. Indeed, one of Nin's friends, Robert Duncan, perfectly encapsulates this dominant 'common sense' view of diary writing and the photograph. In the following quote he reduces both mediums so that one merely (re)confirms the authenticity or presence of the other: '[i]t is your [Nin's] life itself which will become monumental. The writing is only a record, a vicarious record of that creation as a photograph would be a vicarious record of physical form' (Duncan cited in Nin 1979c, p.101). However, the border that becomes effaced in order to establish a clear link between signs and their referents is precisely the border of *writing* itself: the materiality or text(ure) of the signifier.

Interestingly, both Chadwick (1998) and Krauss (1999) note a complete absence of photographic autobiography within the work of male Surrealists. Chadwick states that the work of women Surrealists, and especially the treatment of the female body as Other is noticeably different to their male contemporaries.¹⁵ She states:

[t]his body of work appears to have no parallel in the work of male Surrealists more inclined to project their desires outward, locating moments of rupture between conscious and unconscious, subject and object, in bodies Other to theirs, and almost exclusively of an otherness assigned to the feminine. (Chadwick 1998, p.4)

Krauss, commenting specifically on the self-portraiture of Claude Cahun, argues that by placing herself on both sides of the camera – as both subject and object of the representation – the female artist is able to claim the power of both projecting and returning the gaze (1999, p.37). Nin's incorporation of her own image into the photomontages of

¹⁵ The female artists to which she refers and which the study engages with include the artists: Leonor Fini, Frida Kahlo, Claude Cahun and Leonora Carrington.

House of Incest further complicates the relationship between fiction and autobiography and the female and the feminine's relationship to writing and the body. The 'identity' of the 'I' is constantly deferred as the reader follows the journey of the narrator's floating 'I' through the narrative. Unfixed from their defined spaces, the 'I' and the 'you' masquerade in many other 'skins' occupying the bodies/places of *both* self and other. The text continually 'mixes up' the distinction between the inside and the outside, the subject and object, bodies and identities. This undecidability is further complicated by Nin's use of autobiographic photomontage. For example, at the beginning of the third section to *House of Incest*, the narrating 'I' announces, 'I am floating again. All the facts and all the words, all images, all presages are sweeping over me, mocking each other' (Nin 1994a, p.21). As the reader turns the page, this 'I' seems to take shape and the image that emerges from the dark room, floating within the watery depths of the photographer's developing tray, is instantly recognisable as Nin herself (Figure 3). However, as the narrator warns '[a]ll the facts' and 'all images' (p.21) within the text, cannot guarantee or 'fix' a *presence*; rather they 'mock' or imitate a presence with an absence (an *image* of Nin). The self is caught in an ever increasing labyrinth of representation, whereby signs masquerade as other signs, as words and images 'mock[ing] each other' as well as any reader who expects to find the Truth 'inside' representation.

Drawing from the work of Derrida, Krauss offers a 'deconstruction' of Surrealist photomontage by arguing that contrary to conventional or 'straight' photography, which attempts to show the 'seamlessness of reality', photomontage deliberately foregrounds the absences which precondition the signs of 'reality' (1985b, p.28). Krauss suggests that montage exploited the language of 'straight' photography, which appeared to be unmediated, by accentuating the 'gaps between one shard of reality and another' (p.25).



Figure 3

Untitled (Nin 1958 ed., 1994 reprint, p.22)

She suggests that these gaps or spaces ‘mimic[s]’ and draw attention to the *lack* in representation which is the ‘precondition[s] of signs’ (p.28). She argues that the photomontage or collage, which is ‘internally riven by the effects of syntax – of spacing – would imply nonetheless that it is reality that has composed itself as a sign’ (Krauss 1985b, p.28). This rejection of photographic realism was substituted with the ‘reality’ of representation itself as the ‘language effect’ (Krauss 1985b, p.28). In this sense she argues that Surrealist (and Dada) photomontages operated as a kind of ‘other’ to ‘straight’ photography, disrupting the photograph’s privileged relationship to the ‘real’ by highlighting the *misrecognition* of a ‘pure presence, present-all-at-once’ (Krauss 1985b, p.28). Furthermore, I would add that the process of overlaying and transposing multiple images in the production of photomontage literally reinscribes the margin or frame ‘inside’ the work, thus necessarily destabilising and *displacing* the position of the viewing subject. Whilst ‘straight’ photography produces an illusion of a stable all-seeing and powerful subject, photomontage, which is composed of multiple photographic images, potentially offers multiple subject positions and endlessly defers the homogeneous transcendental ‘I’ in place of a heterogeneous or ‘changing I’ (Cixous 1996b, p.88). Of course, whilst this multiplicity is in some sense ordered and presented to the viewer as a unified image, the ‘purity’ of the ‘inside’ is shown to be a fictional construct dependent on its relation to the ‘outside’ or frame. Indeed, the frame, like the body, is literally turned inside-out and outside-in.

In *House of Incest*, the accompanying photographs appear to have become ‘unglued from [their] frame[s]’ (1994a, p.6), they have quite literally slipped off-centre. Interestingly these off-centred or marginalised figures are, for the large part, images of the female body. In Figure 3 the female body is placed in the bottom left hand corner of the photomontage

occupying an ambiguous 'between' space both within and without the frame. Her 'outside' or exiled position is further emphasised by the black mass of rock or land boundary placed centrally within the photograph and from which her body has been (dis)orientated. This figure appears to be literally and metaphorically 'at sea' floating in the unfixed drift of signifiers. The perspective or illusion of reality is disturbed not only by the surreal floating figure of Nin, but also by the incorporation of texture across the surface of the photographic plane. Furthermore the image bares the *trace* of its own construction, as just off-centre the work is punctuated by a vertical white line slicing through the image. Appearing like a 'fault' in the photographic illusion of a 'seamless reality', this line *traces* the technical process of 'shadowing' in the production of montage in which disparate images are overlaid and (re)formed in the darkroom to create an illusion of unity. Indeed, this 'internal seam' could be usefully related to the formation of the subject who is born in the split between the conscious and the unconscious. By foregrounding this 'internal seam', the photomontage foregrounds the *fictionality* of unified identity and opens up the sutured gap between the feminine and the female body.

Rather than confirming the 'reality' of embodied subjectivity, the text gestures towards its own textuality and the partiality of the reader's viewpoint. The image of Nin is both inside and outside of the frame: situated on its very framing margins. Her body appears to be incomplete, cut-off or castrated. However, the placement of her image draws attention to the frame, and, though the female body may be represented as 'castrated', this image seems to suggest that this is less a biological fact than an effect of its framing discourse. Furthermore, it highlights the site of the frame as the condition of meaning and representation, of what it is possible to 'see' and to 'know'. Indeed, this 'inside' is neither essential nor fixed but rather inherently *lacking*: the photograph is an absence

masquerading as a presence. Moreover, it suggests an 'elsewhere' or a gap in the narrative which may be read as an 'other' (im)possible way of seeing and of writing the body. This 'other' possible body is not 'outside' discourse in some utopian or extralinguistic space, but rather it forms the boundary *between* inside and outside. Neither one nor the other, this 'body' places considerable pressure on the borders of language itself, marking the limits of the un/sayable and the in/visible as constructed in a relation of difference between the 'inside' and 'outside' of its framing discourse. This oscillation or disturbance within this *fictional* narrative of 'truth' and unity, causes the 'body' to slip like, 'a photograph unglued from its frame' not into an 'outside' void but onto/into the white space of the page (Nin 1994a, p.6).

The B/Order of Incest: A Discourse on the Frame

As if to reinforce this undecidable relation between fiction and the diary, much has been made by critics of the title *House of Incest* and Nin's alleged incestuous affair with her father which is 'disclosed' by Nin's diary persona in the 'unexpurgated' diary, *Incest* (1994b, originally published in 1993). Richard-Allerdyce maintains that 'Nin's affair with her father during the writing of *House of Incest* shows her most unfortunate response to boundary issues as well as, paradoxically, an effort to work through and move away from identification with him' (1998, p.32). According to Richard-Allerdyce, it would appear that Nin's first published piece of fiction is simply a rewriting of an 'authentic' experience or else a mode of 'confession' or 'therapeutic' exorcism. Indeed, it would seem that the only way to give authority to this text is to prove its Truth in 'real life'. However, the only ground to which the reader can refer is the 'unexpurgated' diary *Incest*, which is, as I argued in the previous chapter, a work of 'fictionalised autobiography'.

However, the title of this text was certainly not meant to go unnoticed. In *Fire*, another ‘unexpurgated’ diary, Nin notes that her father is ‘tearing his hair over the title *House of Incest*. More so because he cannot read what it contains’ (1996a, p.406).¹⁶ According to this version, her writing itself becomes an act of defiance and a challenge to paternal authority: ‘So I wrote on the cover of a book in large characters: *House of Incest*. And I laugh [...] I love to throw bombs’ (Nin 1996a, p.406).¹⁷ Nin may or may not have embarked on an affair with her father; she may or may not have been abused by him as a child: it is impossible to finally ‘know’ the Truth. However, the very title of *House of Incest* would certainly have generated publicity for Nin, and, as Jane Keller (1993) points out in ‘Incest! The Deviance of the Day’, this apparent ‘posthumous public confession’ could well have been motivated by her ‘agents’ interest in book sales’ (p.170) and a certain ‘fashion trend in deviance’ (p.167).

However, what I find particularly interesting is that Nin uses this ‘bombshell’ of incest in an attempt to write an alternative Surrealist text which draws attention to the limits of the ‘penetrating’ powers of the ‘father’. Indeed, this ‘father’ *could* be Joaquín Nin, equally it could be a figure of authority such as Miller or Rank, or indeed the ‘Law of the Father’: precisely *what* Nin ‘intended’ is not only impossible to pinpoint, but neither is it the primary concern of this thesis. In a strategy similar to Irigaray’s ‘womanspeak’ (1985b), the female writing ‘I’, who falls ‘between’ language, has ‘to listen with another ear, as if hearing *an “other meaning”*’ (Irigaray 1985b, p.29). Much like the protagonist of

¹⁶ *House of Incest* was written in English and, unlike this daughter, Joaquín Nin never learnt to speak English.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Belton’s (1995) exploration of the image of ‘woman’ in Surrealist art authored by men suggests that they were largely indifferent to the work of women Surrealists. His study, the title of which is taken from André Breton’s somewhat reductive summary of the work of Frida Kahlo as ‘a ribbon around a bomb’, suggests that ‘a great many of the women who participated in Surrealist exhibitions were there precisely because within the male Imaginary they, too, were little more than explosives in attractive packaging’ (1995, p.254).

the diary who ‘laughs’ as she drops her bombs, the writer/narrator of *House of Incest* laughs with pleasure at the disruption that the ‘other’ causes to the unitary subject:

I smile because I listen to the OTHER and I believe in the OTHER. I am a marionette pulled by unskilled fingers, pulled apart, inharmoniously dislocated [...] I laugh, not when it fits into my talk, but when it fits into the undercurrents of my talk. I want to know what is running underneath thus punctuated by bitter upheavals. (Nin 1994a, p.16)

II: Writing (in-between) the Body

The *House of Incest* was written whilst Nin was in therapy with Otto Rank. Interestingly, this pivotal piece of prose-poetry in which Nin grapples with the possibility of a feminine writing aesthetic and an alternative relationship to the ‘womb’ and the ‘body’, appears to engage with Rank’s own areas of interest: incest, the role of the creative artist and the double. Despite retaining certain preconceptions about the genre of the diary and woman’s relationship to creativity, Rank’s theories offered an alternative to the dominance of Freudian phallogentrism. Though Rank was initially part of Freud’s ‘inner circle’, his thesis *The Trauma of Birth* (1924), which explored the significance of separation anxiety in art, myth, religion and philosophy, actually challenged the centrality of Freud’s Oedipus complex. Here he argues that it is the trauma of the child’s separation from the mother at birth that is fundamental to psychosexual development and becomes the ‘nucleus of the neuroses’ (Mitchell 1974, p.81). Rank’s deviation from the Oedipal narrative resulted in his renunciation of his powerful position as Vice-President of the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society and his separation from Freud. Furthermore, Esther Menaker argues that Rank himself was the ‘forerunner of ego psychology’ (cited in Tookey 2003, p.71) which crucially shifted the focus from the Oedipus complex and the father to privilege the ‘pre-Oedipal’ mother-child dyad. This alternative thesis to mainstream Freudian psychoanalysis,

emphasising the phallus and castration at the expense of the maternal body, offered an important point of resistance for many feminists. Indeed, it could be argued that this creative relationship to the 'womb' and the mother's body also influenced the later works of feminists such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva.¹⁸

As Felber points out the first part of *House of Incest* appears as 'a sort of mythical flashback' to 'the daughter's metaphorical "first birth"' (2002, p.49). Here the narrator appears to recount the *trace* of a pre-Oedipal state of mother-child closeness which also comes to symbolise the birth of a 'feminine' writing subject. The narrator notes that, '[m]y first vision of earth was water veiled. I am of the race of men and women who see all things through this curtain of sea, and my eyes are the color of water' (Nin 1994a, p.3). This 'feminine' writing is not exclusive to the female subject as she is a 'race of men and women'; rather the 'feminine' is one of positioning and of a perception which is 'water veiled', ambiguous and fluid. Here the self and its relation to the world appear to be malleable and changeable as the narrator looks 'with chameleon eyes upon the changing face of the world' as it floats and mutates in a watery, formless amniotic state (Nin 1994a, p.3). This 'birth' of the self into writing appears to recall an imaginary pre-Oedipal state of existence marked by an absence of restrictive body boundaries and a sense of *foreignness*:

I remember my first birth in water. All around me a sulphurous transparency and my bones move as if made of rubber. I sway and float, stand on boneless toes listening for distant sounds, sounds beyond the reach of human ears, see things beyond the reach of human eyes. (Nin 1994a, p.3)

To use the words of an 'other', the narrator 'lets the other tongue of a thousand tongues speak' and 'does not protect herself against these unknown feminines; she surprises herself at seeing, being, pleasuring in her gift of changeability' (Cixous 1996b, p.88). At this point

¹⁸ I thank Jan Campbell for this idea and for her helpful insights into the work of Otto Rank.

in the narrative, this 'I' experiences its 'body' not as a bounded or fixed entity but as movement itself. She 'felt only the caress of moving – moving into the body of another – absorbed and lost within the flesh of another, lulled by the rhythm of water, the slow palpitation of the senses, the movement of silk' (Nin 1994a, p.5). The narrator's 'birth' or 'awakening' of the subject from this undifferentiated fluid-like state into clearly defined body boundaries is likened to being marooned or shipwrecked: 'I awoke at dawn, thrown up on a rock, the skeleton of a ship choked in its own sails' (1994a, p.5). The 'body' appears to oscillate on the very border between the symbolic and the semiotic. It represents both the *presence* of the subject, as s/he is contained within the borders of the skin, yet also the *absence* of an *other body*, the non signifying *trace* of the 'other' which haunts the coherence of the speaking subject. The only signifying *trace* of this body is its absence: a 'skeleton', the bones of which are hollowed out to form the haunting sound of the 'quena' a life-less no-body that resounds with the words of men (1994a, p.1). The narrative 'I' of the text searches within writing for a lost 'body' from which she has been exiled, '[a]lways listening for lost sounds and searching for lost colors, *standing forever on the threshold* like one troubled with memories, and walking with a swimming stride' (1994a, p.3 my emphasis).

Falling 'between' language the narrating 'I' journeys, not into the internal depths or 'core' of the self, but rather s/he falls into the 'incestuous' liminal space of the 'between', the site of subjectivity and writing. In 'Sorties', Cixous states that it is precisely this '(in) the between' space of writing that has the potential to transform sexuality and subjectivity through an encounter with difference (1996b, p.86). This abstract '(in) the between' space is closely associated with her concept of the '*other bisexuality*' which is in radical opposition to unity allowing for the play of *différance* within gender construction (Cixous 1996b, p.84). In this sense, sexual differentiation relies on the presence (or *trace*) of the

‘other’ sex within the self. This interplay between the self and the other, or ‘the I/play of bisexuality’, moves beyond dualisms to imagine a multiple and mobile subjectivity open to infinite transformation (Cixous 1996b, p.84). Cixous writes:

Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me – the other than I am and I am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? (1996b, p.85-86)

The ‘I’ of *House of Incest* is not a unified ‘I’ with established body boundaries but is rather multifaceted and constantly oscillating between the self and ‘others’. Like Cixous’ ‘changing I’ (1996b, p.88), the narrative ‘I’ of *House of Incest* is never I/identified, it does not have a transcendental signified within any particular body but rather floats within the pages ‘passing’ (for/as) other signifiers. According to Cixous, the ‘I’ is not fixed or predetermined, but rather it is in a constant process of ‘becoming’: ‘I am spacious singing Flesh: onto which is grafted no one knows which I – which masculine or feminine, more or less human but above all living, because changing I’ (1996b, p.88). Indeed, the narrative ‘I’ of Nin’s text deviantly lingers and loiters in spaces where it is not supposed *to be*: where definitions of unified and embodied subjectivity start to break down. This ‘I’ feels both pleasure and pain in its multiplicity, both lamenting ‘the strain made to achieve unity’ (Nin 1994a, p.16), and pleasuring in its release from homogeneity to an eroticised heterogeneity: ‘I will let you carry me into the fecundity of destruction’ (p.13). The dislocation and disunity of the ‘I’ in *House of Incest* is accentuated by its lack of quotation marks: it is not (within the laws of language) attributed to any specific body but rather hangs within/upon the space of the page. The ‘I’ of the narrative asks:

DOES ANYONE KNOW WHO I AM? (1994a, p.13)

From no(wh^ere)one this question appears floating or suspended between two paragraphs. This question resounds within the text, the invisibility of the feminine body haunts the margins of the text, disrupting its unity and defying its closure. For the narrating 'I' subjectivity is a struggle, a constant process of division, duality and dislocation. The narrator writes, 'I see two women in me freakishly bound together, like circus twins. I see them tearing away from each other. I can hear the tearing, the anger and love, passion and pity' (Nin 1994a, p.16). Furthermore, this apparent duality within the very 'voice' of the text, this 'freakish' duality of the narrative 'I' is emphasised in the juxtaposition of capitalised text suspended in-between the 'proper' (more conventional) 'body' of the text which appears in lower case.

The 'House' of Incest: The Subject In (-between) Residence

Nin's sense of a multiple or heterogeneous 'I' was to a large extent initiated by her trilingualism. In her early diary, *Linotte*, Nin comments, 'If one knows two languages, one is two people. If one knows three, one is three people. So, then [...] What am I?' (Nin cited in Bair 1995, p.34). Indeed, Bair notes that this questioning is repeated throughout her unpublished diaries (p.530, n.19). As a result of her parents' separation, eleven years old Anaïs moved with her mother and two brothers to New York where she began to learn English. However whilst she continued to write in French to please her father, her developing adult identity was being constructed in the English language. These language differences produced very different textual formations of the self and increasingly served to highlight very different senses of self. Bair notes that Nin becomes increasingly frustrated with her inability to express her developing sense of identity within French, which was essentially the writing of 'a very young schoolgirl and not capable of conveying the sophistication of her thoughts and ideas' (Bair 1995, p.43). By 1920 she decided to write

completely in English though, as Bair notes, because 'she continued to think in Spanish and French, awkwardness and infelicities appeared in her English grammar and syntax throughout her writing life' (1995, p.43). These *traces* of 'other' identities continually haunt the coherence of a 'pure' English language and identity. This difference served to fuel Nin's growing sense of 'foreignness' and a feeling that she just did not *fit* within the English language.

Hugo, Nin's first husband, continually criticised her 'sloppy language', the way her 'foreignness' deformed and made non-sense within the rules of English grammar. These *traces* are perceived by Hugo as 'punk', as contaminating elements that are *foreign* to the naturalness of language and in need of elimination (Bair 1995, p.95). Hugo's corrections, or 'mangling of my work', have fundamental consequences for Nin's writing as she is confronted with the untranslatable differences *within* and *between* languages (Nin 1995a, p.276). Increasingly frustrated with his criticisms, she writes, 'I see a whole paragraph of mine crumble because he takes out a word "that can't be said in English," I'm helpless. *What can't be said in English is now my permanent problem*' (Nin 1995a, p.276-7 my emphasis). However, Nin's encounter with the avant-garde magazine *transition*, seemed to vindicate her work as much more than mere 'mangling' of language and seemed to align her with modernist aesthetics. Nin writes: 'Reading the last number of *transition* has been tremendous for me. I read all these things after I have done my work and then find an affinity with modernism which elates me' (Nin 1995a, p.358). Bair notes that the magazine's founder, Eugene Jolas, was also trilingual and he too was 'frequently accused of garbling all three of his languages' (1995, p.96).

Exile and expatriation have been well documented as formative of a Western modernist aesthetic. Raymond Williams (1990) notes the importance of 'visual and linguistic strangeness' (p.34) in the modernist movement due to 'the fact of immigration to

the metropolis' (p.45). He argues that the effects of this increased border crossing were displayed on a thematic level in expressions of distance, strangeness and alienation, but also, on a more profound aesthetic level, in the very medium of language itself (Williams 1990, p.45). Indeed, Williams' states that this crossing of national borders 'worked to naturalize the thesis of the *non-natural* status of language' (p.34) and, in its place, language was seen to be both conventional and arbitrary (p.45-46). Benstock (1989), focusing specifically on women writers, goes further to argue the difference that gender made to both the experience of expatriation and women modernists. She states:

For women, the definition of patriarchy already assumes the reality of expatriate *in patria*; for women, this expatriation is internalized, experienced as an exclusion imposed from the outside and lived from the inside in such a way that the separation of outside from inside, patriarchal dicta from female decorum, cannot be easily distinguished. (1989, p.20)

She argues that it is from within this 'psychic and literary space' of female exclusion that modernist women wrote (1989, p.29). She maintains that one common denominator among women's writing of this period is the mark not only of gender but also of sexuality. Benstock writes, '[h]eterosexual and homosexual women expatriates, for instance, discovered *sexualized* writing identities in expatriation – and, in doing so they changed the history of modern women's writing, charting the terrain of female sexuality from female perspectives' (1989, p.28).¹⁹

Certainly, the question of language difference and writing styles becomes a site of struggle for Nin and Hugo not just between 'English' and '*foreignness*' (Nin 1995a, p.277) but also between different understandings of gendered identities and their position within

¹⁹ For further explorations of the gendered implications of expatriation during the modernist period see Broe and Ingram (1989).

the symbolic. Nin writes, 'He tames, sometimes obliterates the very brilliancy, because *his writing is different*, and *he can't put himself in my place*' (Nin 1995a, p.276 my emphasis). Interestingly, her choice of words highlight language as less a transparent medium for communicating an obvious 'reality', than as a differential system that is culturally specific. It is precisely this sense of her '*foreignness*', this displacement or cleavage within language itself, which becomes the site of Nin's own growing sense of a gendered writing identity. Finding confidence in her position, she writes:

Hugh has agreed to correct the English only, and to make general criticisms, but not to *make me over*. He has an idea about writing, his own personal ideal, which he thought I would fulfill; instead he has to realize I am doing something else. He has to readjust himself to the difference. (Nin 1995a, p.278)

I would argue that this constant *trace* of something else, some 'other' or 'foreign' possibility, which, 'can't be said in English' (Nin 1995a, p.277), is essential to her understanding of the multiplicity of the feminine and its relationship to the unconscious. The 'foreignness' in her work enabled her to envisage a sense of self that might challenge the limitations of identity as sameness in favour of a certain 'feminine' ambiguity.

Tookey (2003) also notes Nin's trilingualism and the effects it had on her developing sense of language differences, along with her identification with the work of D.H. Lawrence. However, she argues that her formulation of a feminine aesthetic did not arise from her work on Lawrence, or from *transition*, but rather from a conflict between diary writing and fiction writing (2003, p.154-155). Whilst I would agree that this generic conflict was indeed crucial to her development of 'womb writing', so too was this sense of the 'foreign' and the borderline. I would argue that Nin cultivates this sense of

‘foreignness’, which increasingly comes to inform her understanding of the feminine and the erotic.²⁰

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva (1991) argues that as subjects within the symbolic we are all exiled from ourselves as fully present and ‘knowing’ subjects, and that we are inhabited by a stranger (the unconscious) whose workings are unfamiliar to us and continually disrupt our sense of sovereignty. She writes ‘[s]trangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder’ (1991, p.1). In Western metaphysics to ‘own’ a self, to say ‘I’ or ‘myself’, means to know the self. Kristeva’s theory of the subject-in-process breaks apart the assumptions of Western metaphysics which presumes the existence of a unified, self-present and knowing subject who is ‘at home’ with him or herself and in full possession of language and rational discourse. This, Kristeva maintains, is the ‘thetic’ subject: a temporary position which individual speaking subjects assume within language via a process of misrecognition (Weedon 2001, p.85). Language always exceeds the boundaries of the symbolic order and rational discourse, and it is precisely those unsignifying and repressed aspects of language which constitute the ‘other side’ of language, as the unconscious. This is the site of ‘negativity’, the ‘semiotic *chora*’, which is itself the effect of the repression that necessitates the subject’s entry into the symbolic order (Kristeva, 1984 p.28). Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic *chora* is developed out of Lacanian psychoanalysis and attempts to account for the repressed linguistic and libidinal excesses of the speaking subject originating in the pre-Oedipal phase. She appropriates the *chora* from Plato’s *Timaeus* to denote an unnameable space or receptacle formed by the

²⁰ Fitch notes that having moved to New York with her mother and two brothers, Anaïs ‘clings to her accent, while her brothers lose theirs’ (1994, p.13). She continues to nurture this ‘image’ of a ‘foreigner’ and by the age of sixteen ‘the image has become an affectation’ for which she is taunted and ‘shun[ned]’ (1994, p.13).

drives which are anterior to identity (p.25-26). This *chora* refers to the earliest stage in psychosexual development in which the child is dominated by the drives and is unable to distinguish boundaries between its self and mother. At this stage the child experiences its body as an undifferentiated, ungendered space across which chaotic and rhythmical drives of physical and psychic impulses flow. These drives form the basis of the semiotic *chora*, which is the alternative non-signifying element of meaning within language. Although it is repressed by the symbolic, this *chora* remains active beneath the rational discourse of the speaking subject and manifests itself in the ‘vocal or kinetic rhythm’ of poetry and other non-rational discourses (p.26). Anna Smith notes that Kristeva sees poetic language as ‘breaking and entering a space, breaching a law, and house-breaking’ as it violates and trespasses upon the ‘property’ of the thetic subject (1996, p.99). As such the body, like the subject, is not a stable ground but a body-in-process. Its boundaries are produced within the symbolic, and yet they are constantly disrupted and challenged by the semiotic. Kristeva writes:

Caught up within this dynamic, the human body is also a process. It is not a unity but a plural totality with separate members that have no identity but constitute the place where the drives are applied. This dismembered body cannot fit together again [...], unless it is included within a practice that encompasses the signifying process. (1984, p.101)

The semiotic and the symbolic are not different languages but are intertwined, dual functions of language, which work to construct and deconstruct the embodied unified subject. As Rita Felski notes the semiotic ‘constitutes *its other face*, the link between language and the body, embodying the materiality of the sign as a source of pleasure’ (1989, p.34 my emphasis). The narrator of *House of Incest*, having slipped ‘between’ language says to Sabina:

So now we are inextricably woven. I have gathered together all the fragments. I return them to you [...]

I AM THE OTHER FACE OF YOU

Our faces are soldered together by soft hair, soldered together, showing two profiles of the same soul. Even when I passed through a room like a breath, I made others uneasy and they knew I had passed. (Nin 1994a, p.14)

In this sense, the narrator claims to be the 'other face' of Sabina, to be the semiotic link between language and the body, unsettling the *fiction* of unity that the symbolic seeks to establish between 'self' and 'its other face' (Felski 1989, p.34). Yet, although both the narrator and Sabina are 'woven' together, they are not a unity, there is always something in excess as 'all the fragments', which do not fit into the process of identity/identification, remain as something 'other' (Nin 1994a, p.14). Indeed, the 'foreignness' of the narrator 'made others uneasy' (1994a, p.14), serving to remind the subject that the stranger is within: the 'other' is always already within *oneself*.

'I listen to the OTHER'

The gap between the narrative 'I' and Sabina, the broken bond forged between language and the *imago* marks the *trace* of the semiotic 'body' (Benstock 1991, p.25). What is more, '[w]hen these energies are expended textually, they mark poetic language with archaic inscriptions of the body' (Benstock, 1991, p.27). These *traces*, which cannot be articulated within the symbolic, the unsignifying excesses of the child/mother dyad that exceed symbolic b/ordering, 'are the traces of the *experience* of differentiation' which are intimately linked to the (m/other) 'body' and the senses (Benstock 1991, p.27). This process of differentiation, of disrupted unity, is continually emphasised in *House of Incest*

by the use of font and spacing. As such the font textually performs the very process of differentiation, of the splitting and dividing that creates (gendered) bodily difference.²¹

Certain sentences within the text are capitalised and appear to hang in the space *between* the main ‘body’ of the text, disrupting the flow of the narrative and vying for the attention of the reader. Threatening to encroach upon the reader’s space these capitalised words appear to place the reader *too close* to the body of the text. The ‘I’ and the ‘YOU’ interpolate the reader, making her/him aware of their role in the construction of meaning and the ‘rewriting’ of the body/text. As Benstock notes, ‘[t]he semiotic unsettles – and in psychosis actually dismantles – the privileged [b/]order of symbolic signification, the domain of propositions, positions and judgements’ (1991, p.24). These capitalised sections appear as ‘foreign’ or different from the main body of the text, as part of a *different* discourse speaking or ‘leaping’ through the gaps in the text. The narrator writes: ‘ I smile because I listen to the OTHER and I believe the OTHER’ (Nin 1994a, p.16). This ‘OTHER’ is perhaps the ‘semiotic’ which persists in ‘the undercurrents of my talk’ (Nin 1994a, p.16). From these gaps and interstices the plural body emerges beneath the (mis)recognition of unity: ‘Disrupt the brown crust of the earth and all the sea will rise’ (1994a, p.18).

The *House of Incest* is split into seven parts and the start of each passage, each ‘part’ of the textual body, is marked by what appears to be a (pseudo) hieroglyph. It seems to me that this use of hieroglyphs works on at least two levels. On one level it appears to signify an encounter or entrance into a ‘foreign’ or Other world, born out by the constant references to foreign and ancient worlds of which the ‘I’ and Sabina appear to be part and from which the reader is excluded. As such it accentuates the mysticism attached to the

²¹ I owe this idea to Beizer’s account of Radchilde’s use of italics in *Monsieur Vénus* (1994, p.233).

feminine signifier and the female body. Like the mannequins of ‘Surrealist “street”’ (Chadwick 1985, p.118), these hieroglyphs guard/mark the entrance *into* the ‘feminine’, the passageway into the female body/text. However, on another level, each hieroglyph stands defiantly at the entrance to each passage, perhaps blocking this process and marking it as a site of the untranslatable. Herein lies the trace of the Other, the ‘foreign body’ within language that re-marks upon the very limits of symbolic language and in turn the constitution of the subject itself as eternally exiled or absent from presence. In this sense, these hieroglyphs remain unknowable to the subject/reader, denying the desire to adequately translate and finally reduce and efface the (female) body to the ‘superiority’ of the (male) mind. Yet, simultaneously threatened and intrigued by the unknown, the reader is incited to discover, to ‘know’ and translate their meaning and how they *figure* within this discourse of the text/body. As strange ‘foreign bodies’ they appear to oscillate somewhere *between* word and image as they become overlaid with cultural meaning. As such they mark the passage of the ‘body’ into writing, as the unfamiliar and untranslatable is reinscribed and framed as ‘object’ of knowledge. Yet, situated on the border, on the entrance to the *ergon*, these ‘*parer-gorgons*’ continue to haunt the margins suggesting something ‘other’ that continually escapes its (re)inscription.

‘Leave Out the Poetry’

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Nin’s efforts to articulate a ‘feminine’ or ‘womb writing’ draws attention to the undecidable border between writing and the body, and between the inside and outside of the text. However, many of her male contemporaries attempted to erase such uncertainty, and instead praised her feminine writing as a ‘truthful’ or pure (female) bodily incarnation. Interestingly, having encouraged Nin to abandon the diary and to write fiction, Nin’s male contemporaries were somewhat reserved in their

praise of *House of Incest*. Their criticisms seem to be concerned mainly with her use of poetry and its *lack* of formal ‘unity’. Nin states that the literary agent William Bradley, first introduced to her by Henry Miller, criticises her text for being too enigmatic. She states that, having assumed his role as her adviser and ‘director’, he demands ‘a direct narrative. He wants to bring me out of my secret caves’ (Nin 1979a, p.232). His demands are for Nin’s exposure and unambiguous self-definition: to ‘become more egotistic’ and to ‘write for myself’ (1979a, p.233). Yet, oddly he denies her the choice to decide her own medium, indeed Nin states that ‘[h]e fought the poetry of *House Of Incest*’ (1979a, p.232). I find it interesting, and somewhat telling, that his demands for her to become more ‘egotistic’ are inextricably linked with his demands for her to forfeit the poetry, that is, the ‘semiotic’ element of her writing foregrounding the body-as-(writing)-process. Moreover, it is the semiotic that disrupts the bond between language and the ego/imago and challenges the unity or bounded visible subject. As Blakley says, ‘the semiotic remains as a reminder of what the symbolic order seems to forget: that signs are not their referents’ (1998, p.124). It is the ‘poetic’ semiotic which highlights the border between the real and representation by reintroducing the opacity of the sign. Bradley’s demands for Nin to become ‘more egoistic’ appear to be a demand to make her body visible, to redraw or clarify the uncertainty between the body and the text, and to externalise an apparent ‘interiority’ in order to fix and confirm the feminine as thoroughly female. Indeed, his demands for her to become ‘more egoistic’ seem more of a demand for (re)confirmation and (re)fortification of *his* own subject position capable of mastering feminine ‘interiority’.

The unfamiliarity or ‘strangeness’ of her text is frequently pointed out to Nin as a fault or a failing to make *herself* explicit. Patrick Evans, a friend of Lawrence Durrell, remarks:

I found it [*House of Incest*] disconnected, there was no unity running through it, like the upward growth of a tree trunk. *Or rather*, there is unity there but it isn't on the surface [...], it's like seeing the tree trunk through a wall of many coloured fog. *Or like* a floating island – one expected the sea and in fact the sea is there – but one never gets to it, one is always on top of the island. The book is full of good things but they are all isolated and foreign to one another [...]; but they are all jumbled and disconnected, not strung together on one thread. The thread got lost somewhere. (Nin 1979b, p.236-237 my emphasis)

Interestingly, Evans' inability to grasp or fix the unifying thread of Nin's narrative threatens to undo his own authoritative subject position. He finds himself grappling for words to express *himself* clearly. Indeed, losing his own narrative 'thread', he becomes aware of the limits to his apparent mastery of language and his own (in)ability to express and translate this unknown or 'foreign' text. He goes back on his words ('or rather') attempting to relocate his narrative place. He retraces his thoughts and doubles his metaphors ('or like') in an effort to make tangible the intangibility of the text.

As opposed to her diaries, which are conflated *as* the body itself, the *House of Incest* is an anomaly of 'nature' in its apparent *lack* of unity. Somewhat ironically, Evans' prerequisite for judging fiction is *the fiction of unity itself*, the (mis)recognition of a 'natural' relation between the signifier and the signified. His metaphor for this unity is the 'natural' phallic upward thrust of the tree trunk, the vision of which is compromised by the 'coloured fog' that obscures, refracts and proliferates the reader's unified vision. This interruption to 'pure' vision draws attention to *another* way of seeing, an absence in vision, and, more importantly, the subject's lack of symbolic mastery.

Similarly, Henry Miller appears to be equally unsettled by her use of poetry. Nin writes, that '[h]e attacks the extreme reserve and mystery of the phrases, asking for more explicitness. But that is poetry, I protest. Poetry is an abstraction. I am not sure Henry understands *House of Incest*. Soon I will see a parody of it' (1979a, p.207). It would appear, from Nin's account, that this poetic 'womb' reflects back his own gapping 'lack', that is,

his inability to fix the signifier and the signified. His fear of the castrating effects of poetic language is such that he violently ‘attacks’ her work and demands more ‘explicitness’. The reader is told that Henry ‘hates poetry and he hates illusion’ precisely because of his own particular ‘passion for unveiling, exposing’ (Nin 1979a, p.21). Incidentally, Miller’s demands for Nin to forfeit the poetry appear to anticipate the words of Nin’s male ‘collector’ for whom she writes erotic stories some seven years later.²² Indeed the semiotic reminds the reader that subjects are signifiers positioned *within* and inscribed *by* language. The fiction of unity mobilised by those subjects positioned within the symbolic to represent phallic power, and the illusion of a transcendental signified, are faced with the ‘reality’ of their ‘castration’. In a fetishistic act of denial and disavowal the (male) subject demands the *lack of a lack*: to ‘leave out the poetry’ (Nin 1990a, p.viii).

The House of Incest: ‘We Only Love Ourselves in the Other’

Jeanne is the second character the narrator meets on her journey into the ‘house of incest’. Her incestuous love for her brother, her defiance of the symbolic order, is irredeemably marked on her body by her ‘crippled leg’ which she drags around with her like ‘the chained ball of a prisoner’ (Nin 1994a, p.27). Though ‘grounded’ for breaking the rules of the symbolic she also defies the laws of physics feeling she must place a ‘heavy book’ on her head for fear of floating away (1994a, p.30). What is more, Jeanne appears to marvel at her ‘monstrous’ contradictions, sitting before her mirror she laughs at herself and her lack of coherence:

Here are a pair of eyes, two long braids, two feet. I look at them like dice in a box, wondering if I should shake them, would they still come out and be ME. I cannot tell how all these separate pieces can be ME. I do not exist. I am not a body. When I shake hands I feel that the person is so far away that he is in the other room, and that my hand is in the other room. (Nin 1994a, p.31)

²² This point will be elaborated on in Chapter Four where I discuss the issues of poetics, gender and female/feminine sexuality in relation to pornography and erotica.

Jeanne is 'crippled' by the symbolic order for her 'blindness' to its fiction of unity. Unable to inscribe her own body boundaries, her existence as a subject is put into question, so too, is the materiality of her body: 'I am not a body' (p.31). Her love of her br/other is collapsed into a narcissistic love for her own reflection, yet, what she sees reflected in this mirror is not 'herself' (as she states, 'I do not exist') but something 'other'. Indeed, Jeanne's love is directed not towards an object, but rather it 'deviantly' slips *between* the subject/object divide into the shadowy 'incestuous' border: 'I kissed his shadow' (p.31). I would argue that Jeanne's monstrosity lies not in her incestuous brother love, nor in a narcissitic self-love, but rather in the 'distended shadows' which *trace* the absence of presence within unity and identity and threatens to 'cripple' the workings of the symbolic.

Travelling though the 'house of incest', the space *between* self and other, the narrator also comes across the 'modern Christ': an ultra-sensitive man 'born without a skin' (1994a, p.47). This modern Christ, perhaps based on the Surrealist artist Antonin Artaud, is a figure for the masculine avant-garde writer, whose modern religion was an 'epistemological quest for self-knowledge' (Childs 2000, p.54). It is 'he', the gendered position of the avant-garde artist, that the female narrator/writer must identify with in order to write. The narrator notes the similarities between her work and his:

In our writings we are brothers, I said. The speed of our vertigoes is the same. We arrived at the same place at the same moment, which is not so with other people's thoughts. The language of nerves which we both use makes us brothers in writing. (Nin 1994a, p.47)

Yet, this 'brother' does not appear to register the narrator, he talks past her as if deaf to her words and blind to her status as a writer. (This is an all too familiar narrative for many women writers whose place in modernism has been largely overlooked.) Instead of engaging in a *dialogue* with the narrator, he starts a *monologue* of laments about his

castrating journey into the incestuous depths of the 'womb'. Held 'inside' the womb, *too close* to his own body, he fears the dissolution of his own ego boundaries:

I dreamed once that I stood naked in a garden and that it [his skin] was carefully and neatly peeled, like a fruit. Not an inch of skin left on my body. It was all gently pulled off, all of it, and then I was told to walk, to live, to run. (Nin 1994a, p.47)

This dream is one of seduction in which the boundaries between active (masculine) and passive (feminine) become blurred, putting into question the myth of preexisting and stable gender positions. The subject (or artist) becomes the passive, feminised object of his own unconscious dreams, the subject and object of his own erotic fantasies, rather than the subject capable of projecting his fantasies onto the 'space' of the 'other' as female/muse.

He states:

I felt [...] not on the surface of my body, but all through it, the soft warm air and the perfumes penetrated me like needles [...] The whole body invaded, penetrated, responding, every tiny cell and pore active and breathing and trembling and enjoying. (Nin 1994a, p.47-48)

Without his 'skin' to differentiate between an inside and an outside, and between feminine/masculine, he temporarily 'exposes' himself to the pleasuring, yet disturbing, touch of the 'other'. However, without the protective border to guard the One against the 'contaminating' effects of the 'other', this 'incestuous' pleasurable experience of proximity slips into one of pain and horror: 'I shrieked with pain. I ran. And as I ran the wind lashed me, and then the voices of people like whips on me. Being touched! Do you know what it is to be touched by a human being!' (Nin 1994a, p.48). This modern Christ experiences the 'other' as something that is both feared and desired. However, ultimately it is something from which he wishes to escape, to 'make the leap outside of the womb' (Durrell cited in Nin 1979b, p.242), in order to resume his 'outside' position as masculine artist. When this

character speaks, he speaks for them *all* inscribing himself onto the ‘others’ that inhabit this space. He states: ‘If only we could all escape from this house of incest, where we only love ourselves in the other, if only I could save you all from yourselves, said the modern Christ’ (Nin 1994a, p.48). Whilst he appeals for difference, he speaks *for*, that is, *in the place of*, difference thus overwriting it with sameness. ‘Framed’ within a discourse of phallogocentrism, ‘incest’ for the modern Christ is one of narcissism, of only loving the self within the other.

Whilst many Surrealists indulged in fantasies of ‘otherness’ they did so by overwriting the other within the self. Mary Ann Caws notes, that ‘merging the one with the other’ was a typically surrealist trope, ‘as in the surrealist game of “l’un dans l’autre,” the one in the other, where one object is considered as augmented by the other and each rendered more interesting’ (1986, p.275). bell hooks addresses this very issue in ‘Eating the Other’, though, ‘the Other’ includes not just gender but also race. She argues that this fantasy and fascination with the transgressive and transforming powers of the Other is ‘embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy’ (hooks 1992, p.22). In this sense, ‘difference’ (cultural, ethnic, racial) is merely a commodity ‘offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate’ and in the process ‘the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten’ (1992, p.39).²³ However, as she acknowledges, by analysing the structures and politics of desire and how it informs an understanding of difference, it is possible to subvert and resist the discourse of Otherness (hooks 1992, p.39). In contrast to the modern Christ, the narrating ‘I’ of *House of Incest* refuses to reduce the ‘other’ to the

²³ Edward Said (1994) argues that British modernist form was formulated as a response to a perceived decline of imperialism. He argues that ‘[w]hen you can no longer assume that Britannia will rule the waves forever’, the role of European artists became one of ‘aesthetic rather than of political domination’ in which they ‘discovered’ and named the ‘foreign’, incorporating ‘tokens’ from disparate cultures and locations in order to regenerate aesthetic form. Said notes that ‘the hallmark of modernist form is the strange juxtaposition of comic and tragic, high and low, commonplace and exotic, familiar and alien’ (Said 1994, p.229).

selfsame. This is not, as I argue, to better establish the self as more interesting, but to break apart binary logic which ‘frames’ the discourse of (hetero)sexuality and embodied gendered subjectivity.

The Dance of the ‘Other’

The final ‘I’ the reader is introduced to in the ‘house of incest’ is the armless dancer: a woman condemned for clinging. She sings, ‘My arms were taken away from me [...]. I was punished for clinging. I clung. I clutched all those I loved; I clutched at the lovely moments of life; my hands closed upon every full hour’ (Nin 1994a, p.49). Caws notes that the armless, generally lacking or dismembered female body is a familiar figure in male Surrealist discourse: ‘Headless. And also footless. Often armless too; and always unarmed, except with poetry and passion’ (1990b, p.11). For myself, as a reader, the concluding image of the happy, singing but armless dancer is difficult to ‘embrace’. However, as a dancer this figure occupies multiple and changing positions within the text,²⁴ she is not fixed to one single perspective but rather continually ‘turns’, oscillating between subject positions: an ever ‘changing I’ (Cixous 1996b, p.88). I would argue that she embodies this rather uncomfortable, undecidable position oscillating both ‘within’ the discourse of Surrealism (as a ‘straight’ appropriation of its misogynistic imagery) and ‘without’ that discourse (as a site of parody and masquerade). Significantly, like the narrating ‘I’, the dancer also listens with *another* ear to the undercurrents of symbolic language and appears to dance to *another* tune: ‘She danced as if she were deaf and could not follow the rhythm of the music’ (Nin 1994a, p.49).

The ending of *House of Incest* is ambiguous as the inhabitants of this ‘house’ watch the dancer who appears to dance, to ‘leap’, her way to the ‘outside’ space and daylight. The

²⁴ I thank Anne McMonagle for this idea.

narrator notes that, 'she danced; she danced with the music and with the rhythm of the earth's circles; she turned with the earth turning, like a disk, turning all faces to light and to darkness evenly, dancing towards daylight' (Nin 1994a, p.51). However, these remaining characters seem unable to 'make the leap' to the outside, 'to pass through the tunnel which led from the house into the world on the other side of the walls' (p.48). Instead they remain suspended in an apparent *impassé* on the border *between* 'doubt' and 'knowledge': '[w]e could not believe that the tunnel would open on daylight' (p.48), despite the fact that 'we knew that beyond the house of incest there was daylight' (p.49). It seems to me that this ambiguity could be read as a refusal of a phallogocentric or binary model that merely reduces knowledges of difference to a simple equation between an inside and an outside. It is the work of the frame, the 'trap' of binary oppositions, which creates this seeming *illogicality*.

As a reader, I recall the first (out)lines of the text encountered on the journey into *House of Incest*. The first 'outwork' or stanza of the prose-poem, floating undecidably between the inside and the outside of the work, introduces the very theme of borders in the framing of 'knowledge': 'All I know is contained in this book' (1994a, no page reference). It is the very presence of *doubt* (the *trace* of the 'other' within the selfsame) that has the ability to rupture what we (think we) know about the body and desires. Indeed the dancer appeared to be 'listening to a music we could not hear, moved by hallucinations we could not see' (p.49). As Cixous argues, trapped within the structuring logic of logocentrism, what we have left to 'know' about the feminine and the body is 'almost everything' (1996b, p.94). This is a form of 'knowing' that refuses to be *placed* and subsequently *effaced* within these binary categorisations. Rather, it is a form of knowledge that is 'open' to a process of continual renegotiation of the borderline in the formation of bodies and subjectivities and the 'infinite mobile complexities of their becoming erotic' (Cixous 1996b, p.94).

Juxtaposed with this piece of writing is a photomontage of the dancer (Figure 4). Having ‘danced her fears’, embraced the ‘other’, and relinquished her desires for stasis, her arms seem suddenly to reappear, ‘she stood looking at her arms now stretched before her again’ (Nin 1994a, p.51). Indeed, in the montage, the dancer’s arms form an undecidable border between the image and the blank page, appearing to oscillate between in/visibility suggesting *both* bodily and textual form. They appear to ‘embrace’ the blank spaces of the page entwining themselves in-between the stanzas on the adjacent page. In the image these arms signify not as a means of controlling and fixing meaning, but as a ‘gesture of abandon and giving’ as a surface over which ‘all things [...] flow away and beyond her’ (p.51). Her arms become the space of writing itself. Her ‘body’ appears to fill the spaces between the words and phonemes, embodying the spacing and ‘becoming’ the dancing rhythms of the semiotic *chora*. This ‘womb writing’ disrupts the ‘fiction’ of unity and gestures towards ‘other’ possible inscriptions.

The daylight to which the dancer dances is ‘beyond the house of incest’ (Nin 1994a, p.49) and is to be accessed ‘through the tunnel which led from the house into the world on the other side of the walls’ (p.48). However, the dancer appears to embody the borderline between the inside and the outside of the ‘house’. In the photomontage (Figure 4), the dancer’s ‘body’ becomes the very borderline, the ‘frame’ that marks the distinction between the inside and the outside of the text: the ‘outside’ skyline appears to become embodied into the figure of the dancer. This apparent *impassé* is a passageway not *out of* but *into* the space of writing itself. The daylight to which she is dancing appears to be the white page of the text, a discursive space in which ‘the feminine remains an open question’ (Guild 1992, p.74).



Figure 4

Untitled (Nin 1958 ed., 1994 reprint, p.50)

In conclusion, I have attempted to explore how Nin's strategy of 'womb' or 'feminine' writing attempts to both mime and undermine the dominant discourses of 'woman' as Other by focusing on the borderline as site of *différance*. By masquerading as/on the borderline, Nin serves to oscillate the boundary between 'inside' and 'outside', 'self' and 'other' in order to suspend the fix of meaning. Viewed from the margins, from the space of the '(in) the between', the mask or masquerade of 'woman' slips to reveal not the Truth of presence but rather the workings of the frame (Cixous 1996b, p.86). This move holds in suspension the 'leap outside of the womb' (Durrell cited in Nin 1979b, p.242) to produce an 'incestuous' space from which feminine difference and desire might be (re)articulated. What is more, this process of 'feminine' or 'womb writing', which pays particular attention to the border and the site of undecidable difference, must also call into question the process of reading in the (re)writing of bodies and desires. As I will argue in the following chapter, this becomes a particularly important strategy in rewriting and challenging the misogynistic and violent representations of the female/feminine within heterosexual male discourses of pornography. In the following two chapters I will explore Nin's claim to have 'glimpsed' the possibility of an alternative 'feminine' erotica by taking a closer look at her two volumes of erotica, *Delta of Venus* (1990a) and *Little Birds* (1990b).

Chapter Four

The Ob/scene (Between) Body: Pornography and Erotica.

In this chapter I wish to explore how Nin's diary and her two volumes of erotica, *Delta of Venus* (1990a, originally published in Britain in 1978) and *Little Birds* (1990b, originally published in 1979) engage in a dialogue that mimes and undermines the discourses of heterosexual male erotica which obsessively represents 'woman' as knowable object. Within such a discourse, 'woman' stands as a guarantee of radical difference and a fantasy of possible presence. Whilst the diary format could be considered a 'feminine' genre, pornography and erotica have been dominated by male writers in a tradition that masquerades as a female 'erotic' confession (Moke 1998, p.66).¹ This 'discovery' of feminine Truth offered to the male reader is less its unveiling than an image of masculine desire. I ask what *difference* an 'authentic' female author might make to the tradition of male-authored erotica. What happens when Nin's 'womb writing' wanders 'hysterically' into spaces where it does not traditionally belong? Indeed, what might happen to the discourse of (sexual) difference and desire when its framing narrative is disrupted: when the object becomes a subject of that discourse, when an inside (*ergon*) turns outside (*parergon*).

In the first part of this chapter I will trace the border between pornography and erotica and explore what might be at stake in the process of differentiation and in the policing of those boundaries marking an insurmountable difference between male/female, masculine/feminine, self/other. Nin's insistence that *Delta of Venus* was 'erotica' strategically aligned her writings with a genre that offered an acceptable representation of sexuality. However, whereas traditionally male heterosexual pornography attempts to

¹ Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.

obscure its production, by presenting itself as unmediated and 'real', Nin's erotica continually emphasises the narrative process and its relation not to an 'outside' Truth but to 'other' texts. As such this continual citation of its fictionality and intertextuality calls into question the 'natural' difference between sexuality and textuality. Constructed on the primacy of vision, male heterosexual representations of sexuality traditionally serve to reinforce phallogocentric discourses by centralising the role of the penis as the phallus capable of satiating a *lacking* female. Nin's erotica appears to highlight the limits of language and vision by focusing on the blind spots, on the spaces where the female body and femininity remain in excess of their defined limits, and, as such, gestures towards an 'other' alternative feminine libido. Drawing upon these debates, the second part of this chapter will closely analyse the story of 'Elena' in *Delta of Venus*.

'Pornography': Defining a Modern Subject

Andrea Dworkin, one of the leading American anti-pornography campaigners, traces the origins of the term pornography to ancient Greece where she states that '*porné*' and '*graphos*' translate as 'writing about whores' and then uses this as evidence of its exploitative origins (1981, p.199). However, an etymological approach is problematic because it lacks an historical insight into the ever changing signified of the 'pornographic'. Indeed, 'pornography' is notoriously difficult to define precisely because its meaning is not fixed but is historically and culturally located. Walter Kendrick notes that in 1909, the *Oxford English Dictionary* took its first meaning of pornography from an 1857 medical dictionary where it was defined as 'a description of prostitutes or of prostitution, as a matter of public hygiene' (1996, p.1). Interestingly, he notes that it is the dictionary's *second* definition, 'the expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature or art',

which is more familiar to the modern reader whilst the primary definition has now become 'completely outmoded' (1996, p.1-2).

Kendrick argues that 'pornography' is, 'not a thing but a concept, a thought structure that has changed remarkably little since the name was first applied to it a century and a half ago' (1996, p.xiii). Yet, what has been considered as 'pornographic' has changed dramatically over the decades. For example, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, D.H. Lawrence's, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* are now firmly established in academic literary syllabi, however, all three of these texts tested the boundaries of early twentieth century sexual morality and each became the subject of obscenity trials (Kendrick 1996, p.xii).² This persistent flouting of bourgeois morality, and a commitment to radical aesthetics, were dominant strands of the modernist movement and its espousal of radical nonconformity. Pornography was a modernist tool believed capable of subverting and shaking-up social and cultural norms still founded in, what were considered to be, outdated Victorian attitudes of reason and control. However, as Kathy Myers points out, not everything that is 'socially unacceptable (and hence subject to censorship) is inherently subversive and liberating' (1987, p.194). Indeed, some of the images of women that circulated in these publications were decidedly conventional. Furthermore, it became increasingly obvious to many women and excluded groups that a subject's ability to

² The modernist period has become associated with a conflict between a so-called artistic freedom of expression and a tyrannical, prudish and out-dated legal system that attempted to silence 'new' and 'modern' representations of sexuality and subjectivity. Kendrick (1996) states that *Ulysses* began its literary life in the form of a serialised publication in March 1918 in the avant-garde American literary magazine, *Little Review*. After an official complaint in 1920 it ceased publication leaving over half the remaining novel unpublished (Kendrick 1996, p.183). *Ulysses* was not legally back in print in the US until 1934 with Britain following in 1936 (p.186). Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* was published in 1934 in France and was banned by all English-speaking countries until the 1960s (Robert Nye 1993 'Introduction', no page reference). Lawrence privately published *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1928 though many of the copies he distributed to England and America were confiscated by customs (Squires and Jackson 1985, p.ix). In 1929 he reprinted in Paris though 'the decades that followed [...] ignited controversy the world over' with many countries banning its sale (Squires and Jackson 1985, p.x).

challenge, to speak of sexuality, depended on his/her *location* in relation to the boundaries of legitimate speech.³

Kendrick (1996) proposes that the introduction of the term ‘pornography’ was a historically specific response to various social and political changes within Western culture resulting in the elite’s reorganisation and sanitisation of literature and artifacts in the name of public health and decency. He writes that it was, ‘the great age of “pornography,” when the word was invented and the past was scoured to locate those books and pictures that had been “pornographic” all along without anyone knowing it’ (Kendrick 1996, p.xi). Kendrick locates the ‘origin’ of ‘pornography’ in the nineteenth century and the establishment of the ‘Secret Museum’. These ‘museums’ were built to house the erotic and sexually explicit artifacts unearthed at Pompeii and to restrict public access to them (p.11). Most predictably viewing privileges were granted only to ‘a gentleman with appropriate demeanor (and ready cash for the custodian)’ whilst ‘women, children, and the poor of both sexes and all ages were excluded’ (p.6).

Framing the ‘Feminine’

There is no doubt pornography *is* a political issue, as its location in relation to cultural boundaries is fundamental to both its definition and its attraction. Laura Kipnis writes:

A culture’s pornography becomes, in effect, a very precise map of that culture’s borders: pornography begins at the edge of the culture’s decorum. Carefully tracing that edge, like an anthropologist mapping a culture’s system of taboos and myths, gives you a detailed blueprint of the culture’s anxieties, investments, contradictions. And a culture’s borders [...] are inevitably political questions. (1999, p.164)

³ Note for instance the treatment of Radclyffe Hall’s *Well of Loneliness* (1928, originally published in 1928) in comparison to Miller and Joyce’s writing of the female body and heterosexual ‘obscenities’. Whilst Miller’s texts were strewn with the heterosexual ‘cumings’ and goings of ‘cunts’ and ‘pricks’, the fate of Hall’s *Well of Loneliness* was sealed by the seemingly innocuous line, ‘and that night they were not divided’.

In Western culture women mark the very borders of culture and are more closely associated with nature. Lynda Nead argues in *The Female Nude* (1992) that the female body occupies a liminal space between art and obscenity. The female nude of fine art, and the naked female body of the pornographic industry, marks both the height of patriarchal civilisation (mind/culture) and its ultimate debasement (body/nature). She argues that the difference between the two resides in the issue of frames and framing: 'The female nude is the border, the *parergon* as Derrida also calls it, between art and obscenity' (1992, p.25). Interestingly, Nead refers to the somewhat disputed etymology of the 'obscene' as the Latin 'scena': the *ob-scene* means 'literally what is [*ob*] off, or to one side of the stage, beyond presentation' (p.25). In this sense the *obscene* is 'that which is just beyond representation' (Nead 1992, p.25).⁴ This particular definition of the obscene draws attention not just to the sexual content of texts but also the regulation of the viewing process itself marking 'that which is beyond the accepted codes of public visibility' (Nead 1992, p.90). Nead notes, somewhat ironically, that within British law pornography is not against the law; rather it is the *presence* of 'obscenity' that arouses the attention of the censors (p.90). The first legal definition of obscenity, given in 1868 by Lord Chief Justice, Sir Alexander Cockburn, was defined as 'the tendency to deprave or corrupt' (cited in Nead 1992, p.90). Nead suggests a connection between the illegality of the 'obscene' and the dissipation of coherent and stable identities. She notes that in contrast to the consolidating and 'framing' discourse of aestheticism, 'the experience of pornography is described as a kind of disturbance; it

⁴ Dworkin (1981) also suggests this etymological link. However, Linda Williams (1993) notes that this allusion to the 'off-stage' ('ob'-*scaena*) may actually be a 'false etymology'. Instead she suggests an alternative possible etymological link from the word '*caenum*' for filth (1993, p.329, n.3). Williams argues that the association of the obscene with what remains off-scene is an interpretation that is culturally located in a 'modern age, which has found so many classical references to sexual functions obscene' (p.329, n.3). Nonetheless it still remains a useful concept in the exploration of censorship and visibility. I would also suggest that this concept of the 'obscene' echoes de Lauretis' feminist appropriation of the 'space-off' discussed in Chapter Two (1989, p.26).

presents the possibility of an undoing of identity' (p.28). The presence of the 'obscene' haunts and 'corrupts' the coherence of the Western subject and the discourse of Western aesthetics by tracing the spectre of the 'other' within the selfsame. Without the 'frame' of aesthetics to clearly demarcate subject from object (the inside from the outside), the subject risks being dislocated from a fixed and mastering position of 'knowledge'. As such, '[t]he obscene body is the body without borders or containment and obscenity is representation that moves and arouses the viewer rather than bringing about stillness and wholeness' (Nead 1992, p.2).

The associations between pornography and social disturbance have been well documented and remain firmly established within Western discourses of sexuality and censorship. Kendrick notes that during the increasingly nervous political climate within America in the 1970s, Richard Nixon voiced his anxieties over the threat that pornography posed to state power and his ability to maintain social control. He states that 'if an attitude of permissiveness were to be adopted regarding pornography, this would contribute to an atmosphere condoning anarchy in every other field – and would increase the threat to our social order as well as to our moral principals' (Nixon quoted in Kendrick 1996, p.219). This statement reveals a deep fear and distrust of the physically aroused body whose contaminating fluids are believed to sow the seeds of social unrest and moral dis-ease. Within this context, pornography is believed to be emancipatory not only in its ability to incite the 'uprising' of the individual body but specifically the brute proletarian spirit rendered docile by 'civilisation'. Of course, fears of the physically aroused *male* body also underpin many feminists' objections to pornography. Mandy Merck states that as pornography is 'evidently acquired and used for the purpose of sexual stimulation, it is

difficult to deny that they produce effects. Whether and how they denigrate, subordinate or incite attacks against women is more difficult to demonstrate' (1987, p.154).⁵

In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, Lynn Hunt suggests that 'pornography as a category was invented in response to the perceived menace of the democratization of culture, which prominently included the participation of women in the consumption of culture' (1991, p.4). Interestingly, Hunt notes that in 1769, Rétif de la Bretonne published *Le Pornographe*, the subtitle of which was deliberately juxtaposed against the original Greek meaning of pornography, as the writings about prostitutes, and eighteenth-century anxieties over the presence of women in the public sphere (1991, p.3). Hunt concludes that this usage 'reveals the now-hidden connections between the development of the modern notion of pornography and the particular eighteenth-century worry about women's participation in public life' (p.3). From this perspective it would seem that 'pornography' is less a discourse of emancipation than a means by which asymmetrical power relations are (re)confirmed and fortified.

John Ellis states that in contemporary Britain, debates on pornography stem from three main positions: the right-wing 'Nationwide Festival of Light' led by Mary Whitehouse; feminist concerns with women's representation, which Ellis takes to be the 'dominant feminist position' of anti-pornography; and the liberal Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship chaired by Professor Bernard Williams (1992, p.148). The Festival of Light remains right-wing in its appeal to traditional Christian notions of morality and respectability which they believed to be in decline. Ellis states that their position on pornography is defined within the Longford Report (1972) and was published 'as a mass-sale paperback amid a blaze of publicity, aiming to capture the definition of pornography

⁵ To date no evidence has been produced to clearly link the consumption of pornography with sexual violence against women.

for a semi-religious right-wing position' (Ellis 1992, p.149). This report concludes that pornography incites violence, anti-social behaviour and causes offence to 'the great majority of people' (Longford Report quoted in Ellis 1992, p.150). Ellis states that, '[t]he metaphor of "health" hovers over the report: healthy sexuality is a sexuality which is functional within a relationship; a healthy attitude towards representations is one of contemplation and uplift; a healthy society is one that contains no disruption of its tranquillity' (p.150).

In contrast to The Festival of Light, the 1979 Williams Report recommends a liberalisation of censorship laws underpinned by a strict distinction between the private and the public realm. Whilst the Committee reserved the rights of individuals to consume pornography within a private sphere, they also acknowledged the rights of 'reasonable people' not to be exposed to pornography in their daily lives (The Williams Report cited in Ellis 1992, p.153). This was to be achieved by restricting its sale to clearly defined venues. There are obvious problems with this definition for many feminists, the first of which lies with the very test of the 'pornographic' itself: that which is 'offensive to reasonable people'. This not only assumes a consensus on what constitutes 'reasonable people' but it also clashes with a multitude of feminist writings that seek to demonstrate the alignment of 'reason' with the dominant subject position of the white, male, heterosexual subject. Furthermore, it presupposes that what is offensive is self-evident, something which feminist debates have never been able to assert, and, it might be added, forms the very reason for the Committee itself. The Committee's 'reasoning' also makes an apparently uncomplicated distinction between the public and private which resides in an assumption that the kind of discourses on female sexuality that pornography incite remains within both the enclosures of the individual's private fantasy and the pornography industry. As Mandy Merck states, 'merely restricting display or availability [...] ignores the concerns of anyone who regards

the personal as political' (1987, p.158). Indeed, Mary Bos and Jill Pack argue that since the 'permissiveness' of the 1960s, pornography, which was formerly consumed privately and secretly, has managed to gain access to the *public* sphere through the medium of advertising (1987, p.184). Similarly, Ruth Wallsgrove argues that pornography might be seen as a mere 'extension of images of women in adverts, as shiny decorative objects' (1987, p.172). Further, she argues that this new more 'acceptable' face of pornography paradoxically means that it 'becomes more intrusive and more threatening in its view of sexuality as it becomes respectable, and as the women in it become glamorous' (1987, p.172). In this sense, the images of women that are consumed in private are always already part of the discourses of femininity constructing women's sense of identity and the way they live their own 'personal' lives. As Rosalind Coward argues, far from being a specific form of representation, pornography 'has very close correspondence with the *whole* regime by which sexuality is organised and experienced in our culture' (1987, p.177).

Finally, the particular feminist position that Ellis outlines is the 'most dominant feminist position', that is, the anti-pornography movement, which, he argues, 'finds itself confused with the Festival of Light's position at certain points' (1992, p.151). Indeed, the alignment of many anti-pornography feminists with the political ring wing is a move that many feminists find particularly difficult to comprehend. In what follows I wish to elaborate further on the issue of pornography for feminism, firstly to highlight the many differences that exist *within* feminist debates on pornography and the representation of sexuality, and, secondly, because these highly politicised debates provided the context for the publication of Nin's erotica in the late 1970s.

In the early seventies the majority of feminist activity in the UK centred on the two dominant positions of either radical (revolutionary, cultural) or socialist feminism. Radical feminists tended to be critical of heterosexual relations which they felt acted as a buttress to

a patriarchal society in which male violence was equated with male sexuality. By contrast, socialist feminists tended to focus on the political and economic structures within society that ensured women's subordination and denied their autonomy. Whilst most British socialist feminists were not advocates of heterosexual male pornography they were more critical of the move towards censorship and its political implications for women and marginal groups. They were also more likely to question the established relationship between morality and sexuality.

Feminist debates on pornography were reignited in the seventies and eighties following the political activities of the women's liberation movement who demanded women's social and political power to control and define their own bodies. Women's growing politicisation of the issue of male violence initiated increased concerns over the issue of rape and sexual abuse. Rape was starting to be reexamined by feminists as an issue of male violence and power against women rather than as a sexually motivated crime. This shift produced significant feminist works such as Susan Griffin's, 'Rape: The All American Crime' (1977, originally published in 1971) and Susan Brownmiller's, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975). Lesley Stern argues that during this period, rape, which had increasingly become the metaphor for the oppression of *all* women by *all* men, underwent a certain amount of 'reframing' so that pornography 'usurped rape as the prime metaphor' for sexism and misogyny in patriarchal society (1992, p.203). In 1977 British feminists marched the streets to 'Reclaim the Night' demanding their rights to safety in the public arena. In 1977, Robin Morgan's 'Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape', reprinted in Laura Lederer's *Take Back the Night*, explicitly linked pornography and rape and coined the powerful anti-pornography slogan, 'Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice' (1980, p.139). From 1978 onwards, a proliferation of 'Women Against Porn' movements appeared in both Britain and America. In 1981 Andrea Dworkin's, *Pornography: Men*

Possessing Women added to the feminist debates along with Susan Griffin's *Pornography and Silence*.

Carole Vance declares that from 1977 until 1982 anti-pornography feminism was at the height of its powers and totally dominated the feminist agenda (1992b, pxxii). Whilst, as Lynne Segal (1993) and Vance (1992b) note, the issue of women's sexual pleasure had previously concerned the women's movement, the emphasis changed within this climate so that '[p]ornography seemed to become *the* feminist issue of the 1980s' (Segal 1993, p.3). As fear and anger became a source of empowerment for women, pornography became a necessary visual target for radical action as it represented not just offensive depictions of women's bodies but a widespread anti-woman sentiment. Pornography became fundamental to radical feminists not just as an example of one of the many ways that women were demeaned in visual representation, but it also stood for the violent subjugation that *all* women experienced unilaterally by an essentially misogynist patriarchy. Vance argues that this persistent focus on the dangers of sexuality was ultimately detrimental to women and feminism as '[i]t makes women's actual experience with pleasure invisible, overstates danger until it monopolizes the entire frame, positions women solely as victims, and doesn't empower our movement with women's curiosity, desire, adventure, and success' (1992b, p.xvii). Indeed, Segal notes that during this period most feminists 'simply stopped writing about sex altogether, refocusing on the problem of men's violence' (1993, p.4). The effect was to reduce the much needed discussion of the complexities of sexuality 'to a critique of pornography, as if all women's experience could be found there, or as if female viewers even agreed about the meaning of what they saw' (Vance 1992b, p.xx).

Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson argue that in the late 1970s, there was a change in the mood of feminism from a celebratory politics to a defensive politics of sex which was largely due to a feminist backlash from the American New Right

(1984, p.28). Indeed, just four years after the right to state-funded abortion was introduced it was threatened by the passing of the 1977 Hyde amendment whilst the Equal Rights Amendment came under increasing pressure from the New Right (Snitow et al. 1984, p.29 and Segal 1993, p.4). Vance notes that the, largely feminist lead, anti-pornography movement thrived in the period of ring-wing ascendancy in which debates over sex law were seen as part of a feminist backlash (1992b, p.xix). Stern (1992) astutely notes that whilst these debates focused wholly on the power struggle between women and men, another form of power was being played out between feminism and the Right. She notes, '[i]nstead of scrutinizing pornography for a revelation of male power, feminism would do well to scrutinize the Right, to see how power is being articulated not just as a backlash but in order actively to structure positions for feminism' (1992, p.210). Indeed, Snitow et al. argue that the New Right's attacks on sexuality was a 'blatantly divisive strategy' that was designed to 'separate poor women from middle-class women, heterosexuals from lesbians', and, as such, 'made the overwhelming need for unity apparent to many feminists' (1984, p.29).

These cries from certain feminists for a unitary 'sisterhood' seemed to elide the concerns of lesbian and black feminists. As radical feminists targeted heterosexuality in terms of male violence against women, lesbian and black women attacked feminism for its inherent racism and heterosexism. Imelda Whelehan notes that 'both groups were therefore fighting for visibility within a movement which claimed to embrace their interests beneath the umbrella term of "sisterhood", but which had developed a methodology that used as its paradigm white, heterosexual and middle-class female experiences' (1995, p.106). She states that there was a reluctance within the women's movement to even acknowledge,

much less tackle, what was seen as ‘the inherent racism of white feminists’ (1995, p.113).⁶ Patricia Collins argues that there is a fundamental difference between the kind of pornographic images applied to white women and ‘women of color’ (1991, p.169). She maintains that the very foundations of contemporary pornography as ‘the representation of women’s objectification, domination, and control’ might be traced back to the history of slavery and the treatment of black women’s bodies in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth-century (1991, p.168). Indeed, she states that there is a persistent image of the enslaved African woman in Western mainstream pornography: ‘African American women are usually depicted in a situation of bondage and slavery, typically in a submissive posture, and often with two white men’ (p.169). Collins maintains that, contrary to the dominant (white) feminist viewpoint, pornography is not primarily a white feminist issue onto which ‘racism has been grafted’ (1991, p.169). Rather, sexist *and* racist imagery has been persistently sexualised in pornography, and, as such, the ‘dynamics of power as domination’ which are pivotal to pornographic imagery, can only be understood if pornography is ‘reconceptualized as an example of the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression’ (Collins 1991, p.170).

Whelehan notes that in the early seventies North American lesbian groups such as The Furies and Radicalesbians caused ‘profound unease’ by criticising aspects of radical feminist politics as fundamentally heterocentric (1995, p.91). On 1st May 1970, American lesbian-feminists took the opportunity to promote ‘The Woman Identified Woman’ manifesto at the National Organisation for Women’s (NOW) Second Congress to Unite Women in New York which had ‘completely omitted lesbians from its agenda’

⁶ Whelehan notes that the ‘Reclaim the Night’ marches that took place in the United States caused anger amongst some black women who felt that the designated route of the march, which took women into predominantly black areas, was an example of deep-seated racist stereotypes of black masculinity that prevailed amongst white feminists (1995, p.117)

(Zimmerman 2000, p.636). Twenty protesting women wearing 'Lavender Menace' T-shirts took over the microphone and accused the women's movement of homophobia (Snitow et al. 1984, p.24).⁷ As Snitow et al. note, this was a specific strategy designed to redefine lesbianism as quintessentially feminist, and, as a result, it temporarily shifted lesbianism from an erotic base to a political choice of empowerment (1984, p.24-5). As the erotic became more politicised it became increasingly difficult for feminists to justify heterosexuality and increasingly feminist texts advocated autoeroticism and sexual autonomy (Snitow et al. 1984, p.19-20). As more women began to 'find their voice' and self-confidence within the safety of women-only consciousness-raising groups their collective anger towards men helped forge their unity and sense of political identity. In this particular climate, the subject of women's erotic pleasure was elided and 'anger became in itself erotic, a bond among women, a step towards empowerment' (Snitow et al. 1984, p.20).

The issue of power is central to both the politics of sexuality and the pornography debates. The first chapter of Dworkin's, *Pornography* (1981) is dedicated to this very issue. Her condemnation of pornography rests on her belief that pornography reflects the beliefs of a repressive patriarchal society, whose power is maintained by enforcing the submission and degradation of women. She argues, '[m]ale power is the *raison d'être* of pornography; the degradation of the female is the means of achieving this power' (1981, p.25). However, one of the major problems of this analysis is Dworkin's polemical representation of power between men and women, which is unable to theorise the subtleties inherent in power relations complicated by social factors such as class, race and sexuality. However, most

⁷ The term 'lavender menace' was used by NOW's president Betty Friedan (author of *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963) as a derogatory term for lesbian feminists whose activities and presence within the organisation, she felt, were discrediting the women's movement (Zimmerman 2000, p.635). Lesbian feminists reappropriated the term as their own and formed their own group, the 'Lavender Menace' group, which later became known as the Radicalesbians (2000, p.635).

importantly in terms of feminist politics, it reinforces the myth of women's powerlessness and leaves little, if no, possibility for women to resist their victim status until the complete destruction of a dominant, patriarchal society. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault defines this dominant, Western conceptualisation of power depicted in patriarchy as 'juridico-discursive' (1998, p.82). In this model, power is believed to be something concrete that can be held and possessed centrally and exerted over individuals. This has a negative and unproductive relationship to sex as it can only prohibit and repress. Although Foucault does not deny the existence of this type of power, he argues that it is only *one* of the forms in which it manifests itself. In opposition to 'juridico-discursive' he defines another type of power, which is resourceful and pervasive and operates at a micro-level within a multiplicity of differential points *between* subjects:

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault 1998, p.92-93)

This model of power is relational between subjects, always present and inherent within social practices and relationships. It is intentional and relies on the circulation of discourse mobilised by the instability of discursive subjectivity and difference within social relations. The constant incitement of the subject to discourse is an effect of power and is necessary to the perpetuation of its growth and circulation.

The important aspect of this analysis for feminists is the presence of resistance. Foucault states that, '[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (1998,

p.95). Therefore, whilst there is no position 'outside' power, where there is power there is always the potential to resist or at least to release its grip. Feminist intervention is possible precisely because discourses are plural and can offer more than one subject position from which to speak. It is important to remember that although the subject is subjected to discourse, s/he is still a subject able to exercise choice between subjectivities. One way that power can be resisted is through the production of "'reverse" discourse' (1998, p.101). For example, Foucault argues that the categorisation of 'homosexuality' not only relegated the practice as a pathology, it also produced a subject position through which the homosexual subject could speak and demand rights, 'often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified' (1998, p.101). This is possible precisely because discourses are both plural and ambiguous. They are, 'tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy' (Foucault 1998, p.101-102). Therefore, we cannot predict how they will be utilised and what strategies they will adhere to.

Drawing on a Foucauldian model of power, Myers (1987) argues that representation and pleasure are inextricably linked. Therefore feminist moves to repress certain forms of sexual representation both denies women the opportunity to represent for themselves what their own sexuality might be, and, crucially, 'side-steps the whole issue of female sexual pleasure' (1987, p.189). Instead, she argues that by reexamining the workings of power as a positive force in the *production* of pleasure and sexuality, rather than assuming sexuality is a fixed given, 'provides the groundwork for a feminist erotica' (Myers 1987, p.189). However, the implications for feminism are twofold: whilst the plurality of discourses enable feminists to subvert or recreate subject positions, it also means that these new

'feminist' discourses can be co-opted and used against women's interests. Foucault warns that, '[w]e must not expect the discourses on sex to tell us, above all, what strategy they derive from, or what moral divisions they accompany, or what ideology – dominant or dominated – they represent' (1998, p.102). Feminist intervention in pornographic discourse is not an easy or risk-free act.

According to Judith Butler (1997), attempts to close down the circulation of pornography through censorship are misguided. She states that the process of constraining the speech act paradoxically results in its proliferation (1997, p.94). Certainly, the pornography debates demanded the constant incitement and examination of pornographic texts and images. Vance notes that:

[i]ronically, in a culture where it was increasingly costly for feminists to present erotic images or speak in an erotic language, only the anti-pornography movement could publicly revel in the most graphic sexual images and lurid sexual language, all acceptable because their purpose was condemnation (1992b, p.xx).

Similarly, Kendrick remarks that in 1985, the US government's so called *Final Report* into the social effects of pornography, issued in 1986, was 'blatantly pornographic' (1996, p.234). Indeed, though intended to be informative, this report 'provided three hundred pages of summaries and descriptions, some with dialogue: "I want to taste your cum. I want you to come in my mouth. I want to feel your hot cum squirt in my mouth," and much, much more in the same vein' (Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 1986 cited in Kendrick 1996, p.234). In addition, Linda Williams notes that the whole strategy of anti-pornography feminism relies on 'the strategic placing of obscenity onscene' (1993, p.329, n.3). Indeed, as Butler notes the representation of obscenity is necessary 'in order to enter them as objects of another discourse' (1997, p.100). Whilst this does not negate their degrading meaning, the effect of this repetition is that it 'reproduces them as public text and

that, in being reproduced, displays them as reproducible and resignifiable terms' (Butler 1997, p.100).

However, as Butler (1997) notes, censorship does not simply *restrict* the speech of the subject, it actually *forms* subjectivity and the boundaries of legitimate speech. It delimits who will be a subject depending on who obeys the rules of language, that is, of what it is possible to say and what it is not. Therefore, a subject's ability to speak (powerfully) depends on their *location* in relation to the boundaries of legitimate speech.

Butler notes that:

Here the question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not. *To move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one's speech is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech.* (Butler 1997, p.133)

She goes on to argue that the investment of the court with the power to censor makes possible new points of discrimination where the cultural production of African-American or lesbian and gay self-representation is discounted under obscenity law (1997, p.75). Leslie Green, also concerned about the implications of censorship and regulation on gay identity, asks: 'If [...] we regulate *pornographies* as if they were all just *pornography*, how will the values of autonomy or equality really be affected?' (2000, p.51). What is more, he questions the heterosexist assumptions of feminists such as Dworkin whose definition of pornography as 'men harming women' cannot be meaningfully applied to gay pornography (2000, p.30). What is more, the different meanings and relations of power between different sexualities means that 'uniform regulations' of a supposedly 'universal' concept such as 'pornography', is likely to have very different effects on different groups (Green 2000, p.31). Wilson also raises similar concerns for lesbians and gay men who are particularly

'vulnerable to the effects of restrictive legislation' (1993, p.26), precisely because, as Betterton notes, '[u]nder current legislation body images made by women and gay magazines and bookshops have been prosecuted along with commercially produced, mass pornography' (1987b, p.146).

Lesley Stern (1992) argues that feminist calls for legal intervention into the censorship of pornography assume the existence of complete and stable sexualities whose imbalances could be redressed. However, she argues, '[w]hat is more likely is that different kinds of sexualities would be constructed, not necessarily to the benefit of women' (Stern 1992, p.207). Furthermore, Jane Ussher suggests that the condemnation of all sexually explicit material works to 'distract attention from the myriad other factors which precipitate and allow sexual violence' (1997, p.245). In addition, it provides 'little (if any) space for the exploration of sexuality and desire from the perspective of women' (Ussher 1997, p.245). Indeed, the *exploration of pornography as a discourse* could well provide insights into the cultural construction of sexuality and provide women with the opportunities for resistance and the resignification of female pleasure. As Butler states, 'what is displayed is never quite the same as what is meant, and in that lucky incommensurability resides the linguistic occasion for change' (1997, p.102).

The politics of difference in the debate over pornography and sexual representation led some radical feminists to advocate what they termed a 'feminist erotica': a representation of sexuality marked by both a quality and equality of feeling between the participants. In 1978, Gloria Steinem's (1980) famous article, 'Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference' appeared in *MS* magazine and argued, as the title suggests, that there is a real difference between these two forms of sexual representation. Steinem aligned erotica with sexuality, and pornography with violence, rape and, by implication, men: 'Perhaps one could simply say that erotica is about sexuality, but pornography is

about power and sex-as-weapon – in the same way we have come to understand that rape is about violence, and not really about sexuality at all’ (1980, p.38). Feminists advocating erotica as a possible genre for women to express their sexuality tended to distinguish it from its counterpart in etymological terms. Steinem states, that ““erotica” is rooted in “eros” or passionate love, and thus in the idea of positive choice, free will, the yearning for a particular person’ (1980, p.37). Similarly, Audre Lorde argues that, ‘[t]he very word “erotic” comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects’ (1980, p.297). Indeed, Lorde argues that the erotic as ‘a source of power and information’ for women has been repressed and misnamed within Western society founded on ‘male models of power’ (p.295). She argues that ‘feeling’ is the defining difference between the erotic and the pornographic, which she believes are ‘two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual’ (p.297). Lorde maintains that, ‘pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling’ (p.296).

I: Auto/Erotica: Masquerading (as) Essential Difference

Crucially, the debates over pornography and erotic representation illustrate the conflict *within* difference itself, and that women’s struggles to represent for themselves their own pleasures and desires can not be reduced to a struggle between two stable and coherent ‘sexes’ in possession of clearly ‘knowable’ sexualities. Indeed, the debates over a supposed objectifying ‘masculine’ pornography and a more ‘ethical’ ‘feminine’ erotica can only be understood within the context of larger struggles over difference and power. In short, the apparently ‘natural’ and immutable borderline *between* ‘the sexes’ is always already divided along the axis of gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality etc. The key point these debates seem to perform is the ‘faulting’ of the borderline, which, in attempting to mark

difference between the 'genres' of pornography and erotica, and between the 'genders' of masculine and feminine, also re-marks upon their 'essential' absence: the 'ob/scene' *trace* of writing that haunts the discourse of presence. Furthermore, in the case of *Delta of Venus*, it is specifically the *genre* of the diary that is called upon to 'guarantee' the *gender* of the author, and by extension, the 'authentic' representation of gender experience within the preface to Nin's erotica.

In this section I explore the ways in which Nin uses the genre of the diary and its traditional associations with the 'feminine' gender and (erotic) 'confession' to mime and undermine the discourse of 'woman' perpetuated in traditional male-authored (heterosexual) erotica. I explore what happens when the 'traditional' object of male erotica takes on a 'supplementary' or *parergonal* position *both* inside and outside of erotic representation. Indeed, the 'supplementary' position of the 'feminine' genre (the diary) and of feminine sexual pleasure, which form the 'preface' to the 'proper' object of heterosexual phallic erotica, draws attention to the *lack* in the discourse of phallic desire and to the constant displacement of 'essence' in the inscription of (sexual) difference. Rather than merely reestablishing a binary between the diary (the Truth of female experience) and her erotica (as a 'false' representation of female sexuality), I would suggest that Nin's texts are more playful with the very issue of 'authenticity' and gender identity. Indeed, 'authenticity' cannot be simply reduced to a simple binary between its presence (in the diary) or its absence (in the erotica); rather its *meaning* is produced on the border between the two, in the 'supplements' Nin calls on to 'guarantee' gender 'integrity'.

In what follows I will demonstrate how the genre of the diary as an 'authentic' form can be read as less a marker of (sexual) difference than of *différance* in order to open up alternative 'ob/scene' spaces of 'out of sight' feminine pleasures. The juxtaposition of the two genres – the 'feminine' autobiographical form and the male dominated genre of erotica

– performs the incommensurable gaps, conflicts and fissures in the illusion of (erotic) unity and opens up the possibility of alternative inscriptions of desire. Furthermore, it ‘poses’ the ‘paradoxical problem of the border’ in the inscription of (sexual) difference (Derrida 1988c, p.44). As Derrida argues, ‘this very line itself becomes unclear. Its mark becomes divided; its unity, its identity becomes dislocated. When this identity is dislocated, then the problem of the *autos*, of the autobiographical, has to be totally redistributed’ (Derrida 1988c, p.45).

In 1940 Nin took over Henry Miller’s job of writing pornography for a male ‘collector’ after Miller found the ordeal ‘a castrating occupation’ (Nin 1990a, p.vii).⁸ In the spring of 1940, Nin met with Gershon Legman, a 23-year-old American researcher working for a pornographic publisher and bookseller. According to Fitch, Legman suggests that Nin could try her hand at the task, ‘though no woman has ever written *authentic erotica*. To this challenge he adds the suggestion that she could make a valuable contribution by telling what women really think about during sex’ (Fitch 1994, p.232 my emphasis). Legman adds, ‘We want to know if women really have orgasms or if you’re just faking it half the time’ (cited in Fitch 1994, p.232). Legman appears to present this ‘challenge’ to Nin as a pseudo-scientific case study in which he demands from Nin an erotic confession. His interest is less in *form* than in ‘authentic’ *content* (the Truth of ‘woman’) the desire for which appears to have been ignited by his attraction to Nin’s apparent ‘foreignness’. Curiously, it is ‘[t]he clothes and the fact that she is from France, not, he claims later, her physical body’ which initially attracts Legman (Fitch 1994, p.232). Her ‘suede shoes that are tied around her ankles in a manner unfamiliar to New York’ as well as her ‘big woolen cape’ gives her the appearance of, in Legman’s words, an ‘elegant and exotic Spanish woman’, and, he states, ‘a real *poule de luxe*’ (Legman cited in Fitch 1994, p.231).⁹ Nin’s ‘material’, that is

⁸ See Fitch for a detailed account of how Nin came to write the erotica for this ‘collector’ (1994, p.230-233).

⁹ ‘*poule de luxe*’ is another term for a prostitute, or a woman to be *had* as a ‘luxury.’

'essential', difference is marked on her body by the clothes that she wears. Interestingly, he notes that she 'had a definite air of being on the make' (Legman cited in Fitch 1994, p.231). According to Legman, Nin was 'made up' to perform a certain sort of *embodied* 'femininity' which she seemed intent to profit from. As such she *appears* to promise *real* pornography, to 'perform' its etymological origins: 'the writing of harlots' (Hyde 1964, p.1). Indeed, this is an association she seems to embrace, noting in the preface to *Little Birds*, her second volume of erotica, that she was 'the Madame of an unusual house of literary prostitution' (1990b, p.vii-viii). A house in which she sells her 'wares/wears', her masquerades of femininity, to her male customers for profit.

Bair notes that in response to the collector's request for a sample of her erotic work, she sent him volume 32 of her diary, which recounted the first part of her passionate relationship with Miller and his wife June (later to be compiled to form *Henry and June*), and 'pasted an exotic photograph of herself as a Spanish dancer inside the front cover' (1995, p.262). Such an action could appear to substantiate Riviere's (1986) claim that women masquerading as 'woman' or ultra-femininity did so through a fear of male reprisal and certainly Nin expressed a certain anxiety of authorship in her writing of erotica for money.¹⁰ Her actions could be interpreted as a rather calculated application of her 'feminine wiles' in order to gain access to a male dominated tradition, and, in this sense, she could be accused of colluding in her own and other women's objectification. Certainly whilst the pursuit of a career as an author and artist was traditionally considered to be masculine territory, the writing of pornography was especially so. Yet whilst women were not traditionally the *authors* of pornography, they were the *protagonists* of erotic adventures, recounting their escapades in a pseudo autobiographical form (Moke 1998, p.66-67). Susan

¹⁰ See Smaro Kamboureli (1996, p.91) and Brennan (1992, p.75).

Moke (1988) argues that this wholesale fascination with the literary performance of the 'feminine' and sexuality was pervasive in male-authored modernist and pornographic texts, noting that male modernists indulged in 'literary transvestism' (p.2), appropriating the female voice in an attempt 'to define and represent female sexuality in self-interested terms' (p.iv). Indeed, perhaps one of the best known erotic 'memoirs' is John Cleland's *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1963) which was originally published in two volumes in 1748-9. However, as Elizabeth Wilson notes this 'pornographic' text is 'more complex' than it first appears as Cleland's *Memoirs* is itself a parody of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* published in 1740 (1993, p.25).

The photograph of Nin pasted inside the manuscript *appears* to frame the reading of her text as more 'authentic' than her male revivals: these are 'real' confessions of a 'real' woman not merely textual *drag*. She appears to encourage her reader to read 'autobiographically': to blur the boundary between the 'real' and representation. In the postscript to her erotica Nin writes that '[h]ere in the erotica I was writing to *entertain*, under pressure from a client' (1990a, p.xiii my emphasis). Nin appears to take centre stage, and masquerading as 'woman', she entertains her male patron by slowly unveiling herself in her seductive 'exotic' dance. Yet, in *Volume Three* of her published *Diary*, which is also adapted to form the 'preface' to *Delta of Venus*, she states, 'I felt I did not want to give anything genuine, and decided to create a mixture of stories heard, inventions, pretending they were from the diary of a woman' (Nin 1979c, p.61; 1990a, p.viii repeated almost verbatim). As I have argued in Chapter Two, Nin was very aware of her readership and would continually rewrite and edit her work for specific audiences. Of course, whilst it was in her interest to make her male patron believe that these writings were 'authentic'

confessions of female vice, this was not necessarily the case for the readers' of her expurgated diaries.¹¹ Nin would often appeal to the journal's fictionality when her husband, Hugo, happened to read explicit accounts of her numerous affairs, telling him that it was just her '*imaginary*' or 'invented' journal' (Nin 1990c, p.75; 1994b, p.268). However, it would seem rather reductive to conclude that this illusion of fictionality, of an invented diary persona, merely masks a certain anxious Truth of female infidelity. Though this anxiety may, or may not, have played a part in her oscillation between affirmation and denial of authenticity, it is suggestive of her continual strategy of evasion. In *Henry and June*, Hugo, who is discussing with Henry precisely this evasive tendency in Anaïs, notes that '[o]ne feels that she gives you a neat pattern and then slips out of it herself and laughs at you' (1990c, p.228). The 'style' or 'pattern' she offers her 'collector' appeared to be one of traditional erotica: she masquerades as the archetypal female protagonist of the (male) tradition of erotica, which is itself a parody of its own tradition. Yet, her masquerade is further highlighted by a photographic 'supplement' of her masquerade as a Spanish dancer: a masquerade of a masquerade. However, the costume she 'slips out of', and the 'form' revealed between its much fingered pages, is not the form of naked feminine flesh, but rather another *textual* form, that is the 'pattern' or 'model/mirror' of male erotica. Indeed, I would argue that instead of 'slipping-into-something-more-comfortable', into a well-trodden formula of pornographic 'realism', Nin's erotica 'slips-between' into a rather less comfortable space somewhere *between* pornography/ erotica, masculine/ feminine, self/ other. It is precisely this space of the 'in-between', of writing itself, which many critics have passed over in their criticisms of Nin's erotica.

¹¹ *Volume Three* of the *Diary* recounts her experiences as an erotic writer and was first published in 1969.

'Authentic' Erotica?

In the preface to *Delta of Venus* the 'authenticity' of her erotic 'confessions' is further put into question. Here she appears to question the 'auto' (selfsame) of 'bio' (life) writing, noting that this very process was not a 'solo' masturbatory performance, but rather a collaborative erotic event, a multiplicity or 'orgy' of 'other' bodies/texts. She writes, 'I gathered poets around me and we all wrote beautiful erotica. As we were all condemned to focus only on sensuality, we had violent explosions of poetry' (Nin 1990a, p.xi). Yet, whilst they were 'condemned' to make economic use of language, to collapse the border between real/representation and produce the *effect of the real*, these erotic productions do not produce the ultimate signified (the 'cum shot'). On the contrary, they defer and proliferate into 'violent explosions' of 'poetic' signifiers. The literary juices, the aesthetic excess of their erotic/aesthetic debauchery, produce a fluid mass of illegitimate, bastard texts as the group 'pooled our stories' (1990a, p.ix). Within this textual 'pool' the 'auto' and author(ity) of individual creations *succumbs* to the 'perverse' polymorphous *trace* of the 'other'. This literary 'orgy', 'started an epidemic of erotic "journals"' (1990a, p.ix). She writes:

Everyone was writing up their sexual experiences. Invented, overheard, researched from Kraft-Ebing and medical books. We had comical conversations. We told a story and the rest of us had to decide whether it was true or false. Or plausible. *Was this plausible?* (1990a, p.ix my emphasis)

Crucially, this last question resounds throughout her text: Is this representation of sexuality plausible and 'authentic'? Which is the 'original' story of a truthful 'experience' and which is the 'copy' from a medical case study (itself a story of a story)? Moreover, where is the boundary between psychoanalysis (medical science) and pornographic narrative? Karen Brennan (1992) also notes the problems of attributing any clear authorship to Nin's erotica.

She writes, 'it is still not clear which stories – even in the published versions, *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* – were solely authored by Nin' (1992, p.75). Whilst the reader is told that certain stories were told to her by others, and then written down for publication, 'for the most part, we don't know, and will never be sure, who wrote what' (1992, p.75).¹² Indeed, John Ferrone, Nin's editor at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, further places Nin's authorship of the erotica in question. He notes that the final versions of *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* were the result of a manuscript totalling 850 pages edited and shaped by himself (1986, p.37). According to this account, during the latter stages of Nin's life, Ferrone and Rupert Pole (Nin's second 'illegal' husband) persuaded her to part with the manuscript and to allow it to be prepared for publication. At this point Nin, too weak from the final stages of cancer, told Ferrone to, 'Do anything you want with it [...] I trust you.' (Ferrone 1986, p.37). As a result, the supposed 'feminine point of view' (1990a, p.xiv) glimpsed within *Delta* and *Little Birds* was 'framed' and crafted according to another's, and more specifically a *man's*, point of view. What is more, the so-called 'unexpurgated' diaries, *Henry and June* (1990c, originally published in 1986) and *Incest* (1994b, originally published in Britain in 1993), were produced after Nin's death by Rupert Pole. Like Ferrone, Pole oscillates undecidably between author and editor, inscribing his view of the events to such an extent that, '[a]ll this shaping of AN's original text, from initial selection to correction of her grammar, punctuation, and spelling, and even in many instances of her actual language, has resulted in something different in many cases from what she actually wrote' (Bair 1995, p.518). According to Ferrone, this framing and shaping process makes

¹² As Brennan (1992) notes, Nin's lover Gonzola told her the story of the 'Hungarian Adventurer' that features in *Delta of Venus* and he also seemed to have authored parts of 'The Basque and Bijou'. Also Brennan points out that parts of the story 'Elena', which is discussed below, 'can be found almost verbatim, in her diary descriptions of Robert Duncan and his lover' (1992, p.75). Kamboureli suggests that Nin is 'being deceptive' (1996, p.92) when she states 'I did not want to give anything genuine' in the preface to *Delta* (Nin 1990a, p.ix). She goes on to note that 'Mandra' (*Little Birds*) are almost direct copies from *Volume Three* of her *Diary* (Kamboureli 1996, p. 92-94).

Henry and June, in particular, ‘undependable as a reference’ and, as a result, ‘of questionable use to scholars’ (Ferrone cited in Bair 1995, p.518). My point is not to argue that these texts are ‘untruthful’, or even of ‘questionable use’ to this study of Nin’s erotica. Rather, my point is to put in question the ‘proper’ author(ity) of the *ergon* as a single and unchanging bounded object, crafted by the genius of the individual author, and instead, to draw attention to how the inside (*ergon*) is continually ‘edited’ and ‘re-written’ in relation to its *context* (*parergon*). As subjects of language, we are never in full control of its meanings, and, as such, they can never be reduced to or guaranteed by the ‘intentions’ of the author.

The Preface of Difference

In this section I will continue to explore the preface to *Delta of Venus* and suggest ways in which it works to ‘supplement’ (Derrida 1973c) and (dis)locate the ‘proper’ subject of the erotic text. Indeed, it is in this preface to *Delta of Venus* that Nin marks a *difference* (a gap) between her understanding of ‘erotica’ and her representation of ‘feminine’ desire, and the subject position offered to her as ‘woman’ within the majority of male authored ‘erotic’ texts. This gap afforded a recognition of ‘a difference between the masculine and feminine treatment of sexual experience’ and, according to Nin, this ‘great disparity’ was best exemplified by a relationship of difference ‘between Henry Miller’s explicitness and my ambiguities’ (1990a, p.xiii). It would seem that for Nin, ‘explicitness’, the pretence of a direct and uncomplicated relationship of the signifier to the signified, was a ‘masculine’ representation of sex indulged in by Miller and shared by the demands of her male collector for ‘[l]ess poetry’ and to ‘[b]e specific’ (1990a, p.ix). Indeed, male (hetero)sexuality has an investment in keeping up the pretense that the penis *is* the phallus: the transcendental signifier capable of producing a stable marker of difference as the ultimate signified.

In a much quoted statement in the preface to *Delta*, Nin writes, ‘I had a feeling that Pandora’s box contained the mysteries of woman’s sensuality, so different from man’s and for which man’s language was inadequate. The language of sex had yet to be invented. The language of the senses was yet to be explored’ (1990a, p.x). Whilst Nin appeared to conform to standard male discourses of pornography she still maintained that her stories contained elements of this ‘feminine’ sexuality that was not entirely repressed. Indeed, drawing on Mary Jacobus’ text *Reading Woman*, Brennan argues that Nin’s apparent ‘discovery’ of a feminine difference in her erotica was established by retrospectively ‘reading as a woman’ (1992, p.74). Indeed, Nin writes ‘[r]ereading it [her erotica] these many years later, I see that my own voice was not completely suppressed. In numerous passages I was intuitively using a woman’s language, seeing sexual experience from a woman’s point of view’ (Nin 1990a, p.xiii). In order to give authority to gender, in order to ‘see’ from ‘a woman’s point of view’ she draws on the Truth of ‘experience’. Yet Belsey notes:

experience, like sexuality, surely does not exist in the raw, in its natural state, outside the order of language and culture. Experience is lived as differential, and difference is the mark of the signifier. Experience inhabits the symbolic order, whether in a state of submission or resistance to it. (Belsey 1994, p.10)

Within Western culture ‘intuition’ has become a particular text of femininity designed to reaffirm women’s closer relationship to nature and maternity. In this sense, ‘intuition’, which is already read, is then (re)read (back) into Nin’s erotic text to affirm a ‘woman’s point of view’. Jacobus argues, sexual difference, like textual difference, does not rely on an ‘outside’ biological referent, but is rather always already ‘inside’ language (1986, p.4). The subject is a subject *of* and *to* language and must therefore take up a predetermined position within the symbolic order. However, as phallus/ess subjects, women take up a

particularly ambiguous place within that order, and, as such, are afforded a different or marginal viewpoint of the workings of the borderline within such a system. I would argue that this 'woman's point of view', this view from the margins, serves to put into question the 'explicitness', that is, the effectiveness of the border to fix (radical) difference between signifier/ signified, *parergon/ ergon*, preface/ 'proper' text, masculine/feminine. Instead, this marginal position serves to highlight what Nin refers to as the 'ambiguities' (1990a, p.xiii) of the borderline in the constitution of binary logic.

Whilst Nin wrote her erotica in the 1940s, *Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* were not published until the late 1970s when British and North American feminist debates on pornography were raging. Although Nin's preface and postscript appear to advocate what Steinem might call '[a] clear and present difference' (1980) between men and women's representation of sexuality, I would argue that these 'outworks' do more to *obscure* and to defer any 'clear' (sexual) difference and instead gestures towards the *absence* that haunts the very possibility of presence. As Tookey notes, it was within the context of these feminist debates that Nin added her postscript to *Delta* where she appears to mark a difference between women's 'sensuality', aligned with love and wholeness, and men's more carnal desires for 'explicitness' (2003, p.87). Nin writes: 'If the unexpurgated version of the *Diary* is ever published, this feminine point of view will be established more clearly. It will show that women (and I, in the *Diary*) have never separated sex from feeling, from love of the whole man' (1990a, p.xiv). Tookey quite rightly points out a discrepancy between both the preface and postscript and the actual content of her erotica, noting that 'the framing is strikingly at odds with the depictions of sexual desire within the stories themselves' (2003, p.87). Indeed, the stories attempt to account for 'the constant slippage of identity and identifications, even across gender boundaries, and the psychic divisions caused by fantasy and desire' (Tookey 2003, p.87).

Tookey suggests that this discrepancy between Nin's erotica and their 'framing' marks a certain tension between Nin's depictions of femininity and those advocated by the dominant voice of cultural feminists in the US at the time (2003, p.87). In this context it could be argued that Nin's homage to love and wholeness could be seen as a masquerade of 'woman' circulated within the discourses of radical feminism. Indeed, whilst the preface and postscript appear to stabilise gender identity, to 'perform' the work of the frame, they also 'perform' the gaps and fissures – the 'ob/scenity' – in the *illusion* of whole(some)ness. In this sense, it becomes the (pre)'face' to her erotica which enables her to write differently about female sexuality whilst attempting to avoid reprisals from certain feminists of the time.¹³

However, I wish to linger further in this liminal space of Nin's preface and postscript to *Delta*, and to elaborate on Tookey's observation that this 'frame' is 'strikingly at odds' (2003, p.87) with the 'inside' of the text. Indeed, I would argue that it is not just the *content* (the images of sexuality 'inside' the text) which depicts this conflict and division, but it is also the very *form* of *Delta* itself. Whilst the preface may attempt to inscribe a limit, to draw a border around its 'contents', these 'insides' constantly exceed their frame. It is the relation between the preface and the 'proper' body of the text that 'performs' the inevitable *failure* and conflict of the desiring subject to reproduce the much-fantasied 'wholeness' and unity of sexual identity. What is more, the preface draws attention to this radical split and the censoring that constitutes sexuality itself by playing on the split between the 'I' of her expurgated and that of her 'unexpurgated' (and at that point

¹³ Bair (1995) notes that women who did not agree with Nin's particular approach to feminism would often heckle her when she gave lectures or readings. She notes that on one occasion in 1969, when Nin was asked to speak at Smith College, she was 'hooted and hissed' by some women who resented her evasive answers when questioned about her commitment to feminism (p.493). In 1971 at Bennington College Bair notes that there was a 'sizable contingent of women graduates who sat toward the rear of the class and whose attitudes veered between open sneering and politely hidden scorn' (Bair 1995, p.494).

unpublished) diaries – between the censored (conscious) and the, supposedly, uncensored (unconscious) versions.

To return to Nin's statement, she maintains that it is in the dialogue *between* the (as of then) unpublished 'unexpurgated version of the *Diary*' and the 'I, in the *Diary*' (the 'expurgated' and published version), that the 'feminine point of view will be establishing more clearly' (Nin 1990a, p.xiv). As such this 'feminine point of view' does not *preexist* the space of writing (as the *Diary*), neither is it a property or 'essence' of the (female) subject; rather it is *produced* in the *différance* between the 'expurgated' (censored) text and the (im)possibility of what is to come, the space of 'unexpurgated' writing. Indeed, it is *between* these two texts that a 'feminine point of view' *may perhaps* be (dis)located. In this sense, Nin appears to offer her readers a liminal space *between* textual borders in order to better establish a specifically dispersed and decentred *way of looking*. Yet, the disrupting influence of the 'feminine' constantly defers any guarantee of meaning or Truth within the subject and redefines its relationship to language as continually in process and subject to change.

I find it interesting that Nin chooses to allude to a counter-discourse of female sexuality by way of the Pandora myth: another patriarchal, misogynistic myth against the dangers of female sexual curiosity.¹⁴ In her essay 'The Myth of Pandora', Laura Mulvey rereads this myth for its topographical configuration of space and the female form as well as to reformulate Pandora's 'transgressive' curiosity as a drive to explore the myths and images of women perpetuated within patriarchal culture (1995, p.3). She argues that

¹⁴ According to Greek mythology, Prometheus tricked and stole the secret of fire from Zeus to give to humankind. In retaliation Zeus created Pandora, fashioned out of clay and dressed with all the beauty and graces of the gods. Realising that Prometheus was too clever to fall for such a trick, Zeus presented Pandora as a gift to his brother, Epimetheus, along with a jar (in later versions this appears as a box) into which were confined all the evils of the world. Despite being forbidden to open the jar, Pandora's curiosity was too strong and, once opened, evil, despair and trouble entered the world leaving only hope remaining (see Mulvey 1995, p.4-5).

Pandora, as an icon of femininity, takes 'shape' as a contradiction or division between an inside and outside, a seductive surface that veils over secret and dangerous depths or 'essence'. Mulvey writes, 'There is [...] a dislocation between Pandora's appearance and her meaning. She is a Trojan horse, a lure and a trap, a trompe l'oeil. Her appearance dissembles her essence' (1995, p.5). She argues that 'the image of woman has become conventionally accepted as very often meaning something other than herself' (p.4). In this sense, what is both alluring and yet unnerving is the inability to directly align vision with knowledge. Women are to be treated with suspicion precisely because they may not be all that they appear to be; they contain a 'secret' and unknowable essence which both entices and threatens the knowledge of man. Mulvey argues that whilst the Pandora myth operates as a warning against women's transgressive desires for knowledge, and in particular sexual knowledge, it could also be read as a metaphor for feminist resistance to authority. In this sense, Pandora's desire to look where she is not supposed to look could be seen as a desire to 'investigate the enigma of femininity itself', and, perhaps, to offer alternative representations of embodied female subjectivity (Mulvey 1995, p.11).

In *Volume Three* of the published *Diary*, which contains parts of the erotica found in *Delta* and *Little Birds*, the reader's attention is drawn to the secrecy of the diary which is 'hidden in a box' in order to retain its 'integrity' (1979c, p.172). She states that, '[l]ike the stalactite caves, it would crumble at exposure' (p.172). From behind her diary/veil she peeks coyly adding that the diary 'was born out of timidity' (p.172). In the preface to *Delta*, Nin suggests that, like Pandora's box, her erotica/diary might actually contain the 'mysteries', that is, the answer to the enigma of 'woman' (1990a, p.x). The very title, *Delta of Venus*, appears to allude to her 'box', to the female genitals and the apparent 'core' of 'woman': the place to which man constantly strives to re-enter. In this sense, '[t]he box [and the book] repeats the topography of Pandora herself' (Mulvey 1995, p.8). This 'box',

as a signifier, both *is* and is not the feminine/female: it *stands in for* an absence. As such the 'box' forges a gap, a space of discursive resistance, between the female body and femininity in which the female subject can take a second look. This 'look' of the female subject is transgressive in that it falls *between* the gap of feminine/female to the space of writing itself. Unlike Pandora, Nin merely *suggests* that she will open her 'box'. Instead her investigative gaze falls *not* to the 'inside' but to the border of language itself where meaning and difference constantly slip. As Mulvey suggests 'the topography, by suggesting that meaning lies concealed behind a disguise, disguises the processes of displacement' (1995, p.13). Language can only displace, misplace the 'feminine' in metaphors and allegories in its search for its Truth which is always other than what it appears. As Mulvey notes, 'Curiosity as a desire to know may also be linked to pleasure, but a pleasure that again displaces the visual' (1995, p.10). Nin's promise of a 'feminine' language is always in process, it is 'yet to be invented' and 'yet to be explored' (1990a, p.x). The 'feminine' is always just beyond the frame of phallogocentric discourse in the space of the 'ob/scene' where language fails to fully identify and fix difference.

It is interesting to consider Derrida's concept of the *parergon* or frame in this case and to reexamine Derrida's *The Truth In Painting* (1987) discussed in the previous chapter. Here he contemplates the ambiguity of the garments on 'naked' or partially clad statues which *both*, paradoxically, 'decorate and veil their nudity' (Derrida 1987, p.57). These clothes oscillate undecidably between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the *ergon* (the work): they are at once intrinsic and extrinsic to the 'natural' or nudity of the piece. By way of example, Derrida refers to Lucas Cranach's painting of *Lucretia* (1533). This is a painting of a young 'naked' woman who wears only a necklace and holds 'a light band of transparent veil in front of her sex' with one hand, whilst pointing a dagger at her heart with the other (Derrida 1987, p.57). Whilst her 'nakedness' appears to be 'central' to the

painting, the veil occupies an undecidable position to this 'central' theme being both *parergonal*, that is 'not part of her naked and natural body' yet still somehow *adding to* or 'supplementing' the illusion of nakedness or naturalness itself (Derrida 1987, p.57). As a 'supplement' the garment remains peripheral to the *ergon* (the work) as it merely 'adds to' or decorates and adorns the 'naked' object; yet, the veil is also central to the *ergon* itself as it augments the meaning of 'nakedness' and increases its erotic appeal. However, Derrida asks, where does that leave 'absolutely transparent veils'? (1987, p.57). The distinction between the *ergon* and the *parergon* is no longer a 'sheer' opposition. On the contrary, the absence/presence of 'absolutely transparent veils' actually '*sheers away from*', or holds in suspense, the difference between the *ergon* ('essence' or Truth) and the *parergon* (external or artifice), that is, the binary opposition underpinning meaning and sexual difference. This veil 'reveals' the 'abysmal' Truth of 'woman' as undecidable: the non-truth of Truth.

Like Cranach's 'absolutely transparent veils' (Derrida 1987, p.57), Nin holds up the 'pre-face' of Truth/diary suggestively in front of her 'sex'/text (her 'Delta' of *Venus*) in order to maintain a semblance of secrecy, which works to enhance its erotic appeal. In this sense, the preface as *parergon* 'adorns' the 'proper' work of the erotica, it seduces and attracts the attention of her reader, momentarily leading them astray (Derrida 1987, p.64). The preface of 'femininity' must 'adorn' and 'augment' the workings of phallogentric erotica, 'not because [it is] detached but on the contrary because [it is] more difficult to detach and above all because without [it], without [its] quasi-detachment, the lack on the inside of the work would appear; or (which amounts to the same thing for a lack) would not appear' (Derrida 1987, p.59). In this sense, the preface works to both constitute and undermine the unity or *ergon* of phallogentric (masculine) desire.

Indeed the preface does not just attempt to establish writing differences between feminine and masculine 'sensuality', it also tries to establish a difference between 'poetic'

and 'scientific' language as well as French and North American literary traditions of 'erotica'. According to the preface the battle between 'poetry' and 'clinical descriptions of sex' were fought not just by Nin but also her poet friends who were both male *and* female: she specifically names Harvey Breit, Robert Duncan, George Barker, Caresse Crosby (Nin 1990a, p.xi). Furthermore, Nin writes:

France has had a tradition of literary erotic writing, in fine, elegant style. When I first began to write for the collector I thought there was a similar tradition here, but found none at all. All I had seen was shoddy, written by second-rate writers. No fine writer seemed ever to have tried his hand at erotica. (1990a, p.xi)

Aside from the obvious debate between high ('elegant') and low ('shoddy') art that the distinction between pornography and erotica engenders, I find it particularly interesting that her experience of writing 'erotica' appeared to make visible, to trace the cultural borders or differences between French and North American literary traditions. As Kamboureli notes, 'In writing her *Erotica*, Nin confronts the established French tradition of erotic writing and the American tradition of pornography' (1996, p.91). However, as I have argued in the previous chapter, this confrontation with cultural difference, with the 'untranslatable' or 'between' was not 'unfamiliar' to Nin whose adopted second language of English was continually 'haunted' by the trace of 'other' tongues: her first languages of French and Spanish. As I have suggested, her growing sense of a multiple and gendered identity stemmed from her sense of 'betweenness' and her refusal to finally 'I'dentify with an either/or dichotomy: 'to be true to *oneself*'. Kamboureli argues that Nin's choice 'to call her pornographic stories erotic' was intended to show that 'she is innovative within the genre of pornography' (1996, p.90). She notes that Nin's decision to write a preface for both volumes of her erotica was certainly unconventional and worked to 'both obfuscate and illuminate' her erotic writings. Conventionally, she argues, prefaces are not given to

pornographic works, firstly as this may 'cause a confusion of the pornographic genre with more serious literature', and secondly, because it 'delay[s] the promised pleasure' of the text (Kamboureli 1996, p.90). In this sense, I would argue that the presence of the preface, its liminal placement as 'outwork' (*parergon*), works to radically destabilise the very boundaries of the erotic work itself (*ergon*). Not only does it call into question the work's (*ergon*) 'identity' as a genre, it also forges a 'detour' (a space of possible resistance) to its 'proper' purpose.

In her article 'Derrida's Detour', Barbara Mella (no date given) argues that the preface aims to establish clear boundaries between the textual body 'proper'. As such it not only delimits the work (the *ergon*), it also offers a subject *position* from which the reader is able to 'make sense' of the work itself:

The preface aims to be a sort of gate, a passageway from an outside world – the 'real' one with a political, intellectual, social context – into the world of the text. At the same time, it might also wish to delimit the main text, to establish clear contours by clarifying what such text [sic] will be about, and what instead it won't be about. It provides a programme, it sets up a stable reassuring ground from which to view the horizon of the text. (Mella 'Derrida's Detour', p.1)

The preface or frame is 'precariously positioned between an inside and an outside, on a limit between two edges' (Mella 'Detour', p.1). It is a space through which the reader must pass in order to 'enter' the main body of the text. As such it acts like a 'detour', a site of postponement or gap that is fundamental to subjectivity: it is 'the detour through which I must pass in order to speak' (Derrida 1982c, p.15). This 'edge', this passageway, also marks the unconscious and the '(in) the between' space of writing itself (Cixous 1996b, p.86).

However, Nin's preface to *Delta* does not attempt to confirm an 'outside' authorial 'I' or 'frame' the 'inside' of the preceding text, but rather it defers the 'I/eye' to another

text: her diaries which formulate the preface itself. This preface takes on a precarious borderline position of absence/presence: it is *both* present (it can be read by the reader) *and* curiously absent (in that it is a *trace* of *another* text). It refers not to an ‘inside’ but to a detour that defers the reader to another ‘absent’ text. Having negotiated the ‘passageway’ that supposedly leads to the ‘inside’ of the text, the reader is not delivered to the erotica but rather deferred to another text: a postscript written by Nin in 1976. By setting up this binary opposition between pre/post (before/after) the reader is made conscious of the workings of the border itself. S/he is taken on a ‘detour’, that is ‘a sort of dislocation or removal from what is an intended trajectory, a temporal or/and spatial displacement of sorts’ (Mella *Detour*, p.3). I would argue, therefore, that the preface could be viewed as a way of inscribing femininity, of producing a discursive spacing or postponement in which ‘feminine’ difference is both temporarily articulated and ultimately deferred. Quoting from Derrida’s essay ‘Différance’ (1982c), Mella writes that the, ‘detour is a structure of temporal and spatial delay. It “suspends the accomplishment and fulfilment of a “desire” or a “will” [...] It is a “temporisation”: a device attempting to postpone the arrival, the end, avoiding to commit oneself to a closure’ (Mella ‘Detour’, p.10). In this sense, the preface and the postscript become textual ‘foreplay’ whereby the erotics of the text – the *movement* between textual surfaces and the multiplicity of signification – serves to disrupt, deviate and delay the demand for the ultimate climax and closure.

‘Elena’: An Explosive Detour

In the final section of this chapter I will explore in detail the story of ‘Elena’ in *Delta of Venus*. Of all Nin’s erotica, this story has received the most amount of critical attention, partly because it is a substantial piece of narrative, but also because it appears to contain so

many autobiographical references.¹⁵ Karen Brennan's excellent article 'Author(iz)ing the Erotic Body' argues that through the figure of hysteria and 'doubleness', Nin takes 'an opportunity to create her story of feminine desire' (1992, p.74). Though my reading of 'Elena' draws on Brennan's text, my 'auto/erotic' reading of the diary and *Delta* 'deviates' or 'detours' from hers. Indeed, I linger within/on the 'outside' edges of this narrative, to explore the many 'other' 'ob/scene' passageways that put into question the stability of the boundary between inside and outside, pornography and erotica, lust and love which 'frame' the discourses of phallogentrism. I argue that the constant 'echoes' of *Delta's* preface 'inside' the story itself continually destabilise the boundaries of the body/text thus turning this spectacle of female erotic awakening inside-out. Whilst Brennan's reading of 'Elena' takes the figure of hysteria to suggest the 'monstrous' vacillation of gender *within* the text as the 'production of feminine subjectivity' (1992, p.75), I also (re)turn the focus of the gaze to the instability of the frame and the text's 'outworks', arguing that the erotic 'body' of Elena is straddled 'ob/scenely' between generic and textual boundaries. By drawing on the metaphor of the 'detour', I will argue that 'Elena' deviates from the usual erotic narrative of female sexual awakening, and instead attempts to make space for 'other' representations of 'feminine' sexuality.

Like Nin, Elena is a writer of erotica, and at certain points in the narrative, she seems to oscillate between her position as protagonist and narrator. Brennan argues that as a female erotic writer, aware of 'the gendered dimensions of writing', Nin's position is not reduced to a subject/object dualism but rather she takes on a more critical 'third' position of 'double-identification' (1992, p.69). She argues that this doubleness produces 'another layer of vision to the already doubled vision of the less-theoretically aware female

¹⁵ See for example: Tookey (2003), Brennan (1992), Spencer (1981), and Moke (1998).

spectator' (p.69). Indeed, the story of 'Elena' starts in anticipation of an expected journey: a literal train journey to Montreux and a journey of sexual discovery. It also anticipates the 'journey' that the reader is about to take with the protagonist who, as both spectator and spectacle, oscillates precariously between the inside and the outside of the text. The narrator writes that: 'Every trip aroused in her the same curiosity and hope one feels before the curtain is raised at the theater, the same stirring anxiety and expectation' (Nin 1990a, p.72). Like her readers', she, too, is 'expecting someone' to appear on stage, to take up the narrative in order for the performance to begin (1990a, p.72). As Brennan notes, 'Elena's desire for narrative, for something to happen, is displaced from the outside in and parodies the reader's own erotic expectations of Nin's text' (1992, p.77). However, Elena's expectant gaze falls not centrally to the main action 'on/scene' (Williams 1993); rather her gaze falls obliquely to the very margins, to the possible 'ob/scene' of what is *yet to come*. Elena sits in anticipation watching, 'every time a door opened, every time she went to a party, to any gathering of people, every time she entered a café, a theater' (1990a, p.72). Elsewhere, in *Henry and June*, Nin also articulates this divided sense of self in which she becomes both spectator and spectacle to her own performance:

I cannot help feeling today that some part of me stands aside watching me live and marveling [...] It is like the scenes of an exceptional play. Henry guided me. No. He waited. He watched me. *I* moved, *I* acted. I did unexpected things, surprising to myself. (1990c, p.74)

This 'someone' for whom Elena waits remains on the margins of the text, on the very limits of vision, marking the presence of an absence: the site of the 'ob/scene'. This recurring question of this elusive 'someone' haunts the margins of the text, marking the very limits of the speakable with the 'not-yet-thought-or-said' (Guild 1992, p.76). The narrator notes that, '[i]f she had been brutally asked what she was expecting she might have answered, "*Le*

merveilleux” (Nin 1990a, p.72).¹⁶ Whilst Elena’s question of ‘someone’ lingers somewhere between the signifier and the signified, the brutality of this question is its demand for an answer: to pin down, to identify and fully master what is a ‘vague, poetic’ craving (1990a, p.72). As Mella notes, whilst, ‘[a] question inaugurates a realm of possibility and of movement’ this space of possibility is ‘instantaneously sealed by an answer. With the answer, an opening is closed’ (‘Detour’, p.20). Elena’s questioning lingers on the frame, resisting the effects of the phallus to close down alternative ‘detours’ or ‘deviations’ of femininity and desire. Significantly Elena’s ‘answer’ is given in a language that remains ‘foreign’ to the question: a question addressed in English is answered in French and italicised. Her ‘answer’ foregrounds the movement of ‘someone/thing’ that escapes identification, passing from one language to *another*. This movement marks the absence/presence of another desire, the *trace* of some ‘other’ or ‘foreign’ possibility that both structures and exceeds the phallogocentric desire to fix and make visible. As I have argued in Chapter Three, this constant *trace* of something else, some ‘other’ or ‘foreign’ possibility of, ‘[w]hat can’t be said in English’ (Nin 1995, p.277), is essential to Nin’s understanding of what she calls ‘my [feminine] ambiguity’ (Nin 1990a, p.xiii) and marks an alternative way of ‘seeing’ and writing which draws attention to the differences *between* languages and to its opacity, limits and borders. As Jane Gallop notes, bilingual is, ‘a word not quite in any language but marking the junctures and disjunctures between them, thus making language knotty and thick, *blocking the view*’ (1997, p.9 my emphasis). It is Elena’s *way of seeing*, her oblique gaze, that disrupts and upsets the straightforward and apparently ‘transparent’ fictions of logocentricism. The narrator recalls an incident in which Elena, having criticised a male writer, was admonished for her *failure* of insight: “‘You

¹⁶ The search for the ‘marvelous’ forms part of André Breton’s *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924).

cannot see him as he really is, you cannot see anyone as he really is. He will always be disappointing because you are expecting *someone*' (Nin 1990a, p.72). It appears that this 'foreign' 'someone' *stands in the way* of, or 'block[s] the view' (Gallop 1997, p.9), therefore limiting her ability to see the 'obvious' genius of this male writer. This 'someone' operating just on the margins of vision appears to obstruct her ability to (mis)recognise the signifier for its referent; to see behind it to the Truth of the world *as it really is*. I would argue that as writers of erotica both Elena and Nin are 'expecting' the arrival of some 'other' possibility, an alternative way of writing 'feminine' desire marked by ambiguity as opposed to unity and the selfsame.

Elena, still sitting awaiting her journey, turns her attention to her book: *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Brennan argues that this both parallels and parodies the reader's own opening of *Delta* and again reconfirms the readers anticipated discovery of a 'feminine sensuality' that Nin apparently finds submerged in the writings of Lawrence (1992, p.77). However, the book itself is also significant: it is not just *any* work of erotic fiction but one that served to mark 'one of the key moments in the regulation of obscenity' (Nead 1992, p.91). As such this text marks a boundary, the limit between art and obscenity, between the 'on/scene' (Williams 1993) and the radically 'ob/scene'. Yet whilst Elena appears to crave something 'other' than her lot as a woman, she appears to be *lacking* in the courage of her convictions. The reader is told that she 'had stood many times on the very edge, and then had run away' (Nin 1990a, p.72). However, it also serves to highlight the differentially inscribed border of obscenity for male and female subjects. Whilst Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is both visible and available (despite its apparent 'obscenity'), Elena's envisaged 'someone', and her own erotic writings, remain strictly 'ob/scene' and situated on the very limits of visibility.

Having read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Elena finds that '[i]t was the submerged woman of Lawrence's books that lay coiled within her, at last exposed, sensitized, prepared as if by a multitude of caresses for the arrival of *someone*' (Nin 1990a, p.73). Oddly Elena finds 'herself' in the 'submerged woman of Lawrence's books' which, perhaps, suggests that this character is a familiar story already found 'inside', or discovered in the most famous work of (male) 'obscenity'. As the reader and Elena turn the pages of their books, she (Elena) is 'at last exposed' to the eyes of her(self as) reader 'prepared' and bound into book format for the masturbatory 'caresses' and 'for the arrival of *someone*' (p.73). She is framed and bound, as Legman puts it, for 'heavy one-handed use' (Fitch 1994, p.231). Elena becomes an 'open book', supposedly 'exposed, sensitized', knowable and always ready to be devoured and identified within the reader's pornographic fantasies of mastery. Yet, this illusion of 'openness', of unmediated access to a Truth as presence, is an *illusion* that *both* disguises and uncovers the fallibility of the Lawrencian all-powerful phallus. 'Elena' *is* precisely, an 'open book', a collection of signifiers that continually a-bound the single body/text.

Brennan argues that this connection between the reader and Elena 'unsettles' as Elena anticipates 'a different kind of reading, a reading which is able to discover a "submerged woman," which is to say a figure of repression submerged in an erotic narrative' (1992, p.77). However, I would argue that this different kind of reading is not restricted to 'inside' the erotic narrative, but rather gestures towards its margins or its liminal spaces of the 'ob/scene'. Indeed, *my reading of Elena's reading* of this 'obscene' text deviates away from the 'proper' object of this story (Elena) to Nin's preface to *Delta of Venus* in which she argues for a feminine difference. It is here that Nin, like Elena, seems to 'glimpse' the possibility of an alternative expression of sexuality and sensuality by reading Lawrence's texts (Nin 1990a, p.x). Indeed, I would be reluctant to call this (dis)location

between the 'inside' (*ergon*) and the 'outside' (*parergon*), a 'third position', as does Brennan, precisely because this suggests a position of relative stability and assumes the position of a 'superior voyeur' (Brennan 1992, p.69). Rather, I would suggest that it is in the *movement* or the 'detour' between the preface and the 'proper' object of the reader's attention ('Elena') – in the *différance* between the on/scene and the 'ob/scene' – that this 'feminine point of view' (Nin 1990a, p.xiv) might be (dis)located. Indeed, this 'feminine' is not essential or fixed 'inside' the text, but rather it remains in process, that is, 'yet to be invented' and 'yet to be explored' (Nin 1990a, p.x my emphasis).

Brennan argues that Elena's discovery of a 'submerged woman' on her train journey is not the phallus-worshipping Constance Chatterley of Lawrence's text, but the disruptive 'phallus hidden within the woman', her 'discovery' of both masculinity and femininity which is 'a discovery of her woman's desire' (1992, p.77). Indeed, it is at the station, at this site of interchange that this new 'someone' appears to arrive: '[a] new woman emerged from the train at Caux' (Nin 1990a, p.73). This 'New Woman', an iconic figure of female sexuality and writing, arrives in this new place where she will remain 'until her new book was ready to be published.' (p.73) However, her 'arrival', her step 'outside' the train, does not deliver her into new and undiscovered 'feminine' terrain. Instead she appears to walk straight into another eternally repeated discourse of submerged desire: the '[o]nce upon a time...once... and once again' of the fairytale (Cixous 1996b, p.66). Indeed, the chalet where she stays 'looked like a fairytale house, and the woman who opened the door looked like a witch' (Nin 1990a, p.73).

Elena's travelling, her exploration of her sexuality, now takes a different form as she takes up a new enthusiasm for walking or wandering. In contrast to her train journey these walks are without a predefined destination, and on her wanderings she often 'turned back' on herself (1990a, p.74). It is on one of these walks that she meets the ultra-

masculine Pierre who is both wild animal and tamer. Whilst he ‘had the fixed, hypnotic gaze of an animal tamer, something authoritative, violent’ (p.74), he also gave the impression of ‘an imprisoned animal’ (p.75). He is the epitome of the masculine aesthetic, his ‘magnificent athlete’s torso’ (p.74) matches his strong ego boundaries which seem to control his seething ‘animal’ wildness by channelling and containing his ‘natural’ and ‘animal’ potency into artist and cultural forms (p.74). On the run from the French police for his drunken revolutionary speeches, Pierre is a stereotype of the ‘real’ male artist: ‘a man of all trades, a painter, a writer, a musician, a vagabond’ (p.75).

Significantly, it is Pierre who notes the difference between his own straightforward style of ‘walking’ and Elena’s supposedly ‘incomplete’ walks: ‘You have a habit of turning back, starting a walk and turning back. That is very bad. It is the very first of crimes against life. I believe in audacity’ (Nin 1990a, p.75). It is her ‘deviant’ behaviour that ‘arouses’ his attention and brings her walking style under his own censoring I/eye. According to psychoanalysis, ‘femininity’ is a path or process that is predefined and to which the female is expected to conform. However ‘femininity’ is neither simply achieved nor is the female subject’s journey ever really complete: in fact ‘femininity’, like *all* identity, is marked by its failure. Elena refuses to walk-the-line, to follow this man’s own interpretation of radicalism or ‘audacity’. Ironically, Pierre’s own ‘recklessness’ reinscribes an artistic ‘norm’ against which Elena is seen to deviate. Irritated by his arrogance, Elena challenges and re-turns the direction of his question back to Pierre:

‘People express audacity in various ways [...] I usually turn back, as you say, and then I go home and write a book which becomes an obsession of the censors.’
 ‘That’s a misuse of natural forces,’ said the man. (p.75)

Here, her ‘turning back’ is a detour as such: a turning away from a predefined ‘norm’. In this sense, the detour changes her *position* and slants her viewpoint from a central to an

oblique or marginal perspective. Her 'audacity' is the reckless walk of the 'trapeze' artist (Bair, 1995, p.340) as she negotiates the fine line between pornography and erotica, that is, between the speakable and the unspeakable. Her 'writings', like her deviant wanderings, continually *a-bound* their prescribed positions, tracing the liminal edge, the defining border *between* things. Her books mark the undecidable vacillation of the border between the visible and the 'ob/scene', haunting and undermining the authority of the censors to suppress the *trace* of her textual wanderings.

However, according to Pierre, writing is a 'misuse' of natural forces: a 'perversion' or deviation from the 'norm' (Nin 1990a, p.75). Emily Apter notes that 'pervert' originated in the Latin '*pervertere*' and means 'to twist' or 'to turn the wrong way' (1992, p.311). Whilst all pre-subjects are polymorphously perverse and 'aimless' in their sexual pleasures, the attainment of embodied subjectivity demands the (mis)recognition of prohibitive borders and the channeling of sexual desire towards 'correct' or appropriate objects. The achievement of a mature and 'normal' (hetero)sexual 'goal' is dependent upon the direction of the sexual instinct and the correct location of, and fastening to, the sexual object. To be 'normal' is to be focused, targeted, economical and *straightforward* in the location and achievement of the (hetero)sexual aim. By contrast, the 'common denominator' of perversion is, according to Apter, 'understood in strangely temporal terms as "lingering", extended fore-pleasure, or the deferral of coitus' (1992, p.311). In this sense, the 'pervert' is 'bent' on spending his or her 'essence' in fruitless aims of non-reproductive desire. To Pierre 'writing' is secondary and supplemental to the 'reality' of life, just as masturbation is a supplement to reproductive sex. The 'aim' of Elena's 'natural' libido is to reproduce his expectations of what constitutes a 'normal' walk, by redirecting her sexual/textual pleasures onto another outside object (presumably Pierre himself). However, Elena's writing/libido 'turns back' on itself. She returns 'home' to make herself the object of her own auto/erotic

writing pleasures. Indeed, what is so threatening to Pierre, and indeed to the censors, is that Elena's auto/erotic pleasures remain 'beyond' the 'No of the Father': 'Woman "touches herself" all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for the genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s) – that caress each other' (Irigaray 1985b, p.24).

Interestingly, these pleasures are performed on the terrace of her room. Here in this liminal *improper* space, this 'outwork' of the 'home', she 'sometimes caressed herself [...] and recalled scenes from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' (1990a, p.73). Indeed, this scene of auto/erotic pleasure 'recalls' not just a previous scene 'inside' the narrative – of Elena reading Lawrence's text on her train journey – but it also 'touches upon' the preface to her sex/'Delta' in which Nin threatens to open a Pandora's box of women's sexual curiosity. Her 'turning back' is a *departure* or 'deviation' from the conventions of traditional (male heterosexual) erotica which orientates its reader towards the ultimate 'goal' of the climax. Indeed, Elena's 'ob/scene' gaze falls to the margins, to the in-between or out-of-sight spaces of alternative sexual pleasures. This movement away from the 'destination' of traditional erotica attempts to produce a 'detour', or a discursive space, in which to speak alternative feminine desires. In response to Pierre's accusation of her unnatural (pre)occupation, she retorts:

'But then,' said Elena, 'I use my book like dynamite, I place it where I want the explosion to take place, and then I blast my way through with it!'

As she said these words an explosion took place somewhere in the mountain where a road was being made, and they laughed at the coincidence. (Nin 1990a, p.75)

This *doubled* explosion, a signifier 'explosion' and an 'actual' explosion marks the 'detour' between the signifier and signified, a rupture within the fiction of unity. Interestingly, Elena's explosive statement appears to contradict the narrators' previous account of Elena

who, the reader is told, 'had stood many times on the very edge, and then had run away' (p.72). This is not consistent with the actions of a writer who sets out to deliberately court the borderline and to incite her censors. Indeed, much like Elena, this story appears to 'turn back' on itself, to create a hole or rupture in an apparently linear narrative, by refusing to 'return' logic or coherence. Indeed, her writing, like her 'sex', 'represents *the horror of nothing to see*. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A "hole" in its scopophilic lens' (Irigaray 1985b, p.26). Indeed, this 'interruption' is the site of another possible path, another possible 'explosive' 'Elena', which, exceeding the textual boundaries of *Delta*, finds itself 'elsewhere' in the 'ob/scene' margins/mountains of this erotic text. These 'ob/scene' (yet to come) stories lie just beyond the frame of vision in a space of possibility and *becoming*. Brennan argues that the mountain explosion,

puts an end to Elena's writing in Nin's text. By situating the (mountain) explosion outside of her own authorship, in the real world, Nin initiates Elena into another kind of audacity. Elena is thus impelled forward, in the direction of masculine desire. From now on, it appears that her orgasms will replace her writing. (1992, p.79)

Yet, this would be to presume, like Pierre, that 'writing' is merely supplemental to life and that Nin herself is clearly 'outside' and in control of the text of 'Elena'. What is more, it reduces the radical potential of the borderline, the site of undecidability and auto/erotic pleasures *between* the 'inside' and 'outside', and between the 'real' and 'representation' that the text seems to continually foreground. Indeed, the difference between the 'real world' and the 'fictional' is marked by the trace of the *other*: the 'detour'. I would argue, what 'Elena' *traces* is the movement of 'arche-writing' which is 'at work not only in the form and substance of graphic expression but also in those of nongraphic expression' (Derrida 1997, p.60). Her writing *is* the 'movement of differance' (Derrida 1997, p.60): the 'journey' or the 'detour' of the signifier that constantly undermines and defers the final fix

of difference. There is a postponement, a movement of something deferred, between Elena's enunciation of an explosion and the narrator's announcement of an 'actual' explosion – between a 'here' (now) and a 'there' (then) – which is marked spatially and temporally by the space of a paragraph between each sentence. In this sense the 'double' explosion foregrounds the spatial and temporal play of *différance* opening each of them up to the *trace* of the 'other'.

Furthermore, I would argue that Elena's explosive 'writing' is never 'on/scene', but rather its (im)possibility is explored via the 'detour' which attempts to make space for the 'other'. This desiring writing remains radically 'ob/scene' oscillating on the border of in/visibility in the figure of 'someone' and in a state of imminent publication. This 'real' explosion redirects the reader's attention away from the centre and to the margins as the site of resistance where other 'road[s] [were] being made' (p.75) in order to challenge the author/ity of the father/frame. These explosions create (other) *Deltas*, spaces *between* the towering mountains of phallogentric male erotica. Brennan notes that, 'As dynamite explodes a familiar (perhaps) terrain, Elena's and Nin's erotic writing opens gaps in male discourse' (1992, p.78). However, she also notes, '[o]n the other hand, hasn't woman's pleasure always been figured as the "gap" upon which discourse sustains itself' (1992, p.78). Elena's 'audacity' and her authorial dexterity in tracing the borderline *risks* her own silencing and reappropriation back into the discourses she seeks to subvert. Yet it is precisely the 'gap', the *lack* of a fixed signified, which enables these reverberations to 'resound' and 'rebound' differently, in multiple and unpredictable ways.

What is more, this 'explosion' refers the reader not to an 'outside' but rather *repeats* or *(re)performs* another frame or margin: the preface to *Delta of Venus*. It is in this preface that Nin re-cites extracts from her diary which recount the writing of her erotica as a form of resistance. She writes: '[a]s we were condemned to focus only on sensuality, we had

violent explosions of poetry. Writing erotica became *a road to sainthood* rather than to debauchery' (Nin 1990a, p.xi my emphasis). This explosion also reverberates beyond the textual limits of *Delta* to yet another of Nin's defiant narrative voices in *Fire* (1996a) where she challenges (paternal) author/ity. Noting her father's anxiety over the title of *House of Incest* she notes: 'So I wrote on the cover of a book in large characters: *House of Incest*. And I laugh. Just as I laughed when I wrote my preface for *Tropic of Cancer*. I love to throw bombs' (1996a, p.406).¹⁷ This 'explosion' is not singular, produced at the centre of discourse, but is doubled, repeated and re-cited at its borders. These explosive cites/sites of 'feminine ambiguity', of 'ob/scene' pleasure, are auto/erotically formed just beyond the frame, not 'outside' discourse, but somewhere *between* the framing margins of the diary and *Delta*.

Elena appears to crave something 'other' than what is expected in a standard text of (male) erotica. Indeed, appearing to 'echo' Nin's words in the preface to *Delta*, Elena states, 'I want my eroticism mixed with love' (1990a, p.100). Yet the problem remains that 'love' is a word treated with great suspicion by feminists because of its associations with romance designed to seduce women into their subservient roles as wives and mothers and away from their sexual needs as autonomous beings. As Griselda Pollock states, '[p]assion without love bespeaks an autonomous female sexuality in a social system in which love signifies women's submission to legal and moral control and definition of their sexuality by men' (1988, p.142-143). In the tradition of romantic fiction the lovers, Elena and Pierre, come up against a 'struggle', but this struggle is with the very definition of heterosexual, monogamous love that appears to stand in place of, and efface, the possibility of feminine difference and desire. The narrator writes that, 'the struggle of their love was to defeat this

¹⁷ See Nin (1974) for her preface to Miller's text.

coldness which lay dormant in her and which a word, *a small wound, a doubt*, could bring out to destroy their possession of each other (Nin 1990a, 94 my emphasis). Elena's 'otherness' becomes the 'problem' or the obstacle that needs to be obliterated and overcome. Indeed, 'Pierre became obsessed with it' (p.94). It is the presence of 'a doubt', the *trace* of the 'other' within the selfsame, which ruptures the illusion of the 'ideal self'. Any 'small wound, a doubt' would serve to highlight the 'holes' in the discourse of unity, throwing into question certain 'knowledges' of sexuality and desire as a search for 'wholeness' and unity.

Pierre was 'fully aware of her [Elena's] own attraction to the demonic and the sordid, to the pleasure of falling, of desecrating and destroying the ideal self. But because of his love for her, he would not let her live out any of this with him' (Nin 1990a, p.100). Like the censors, Pierre becomes obsessed with finding the Truth of 'woman', in finally possessing her in an annihilating unity. He uses 'erotic books' to corrupt and wear down Elena's resistances to total possession and '[t]hey exhausted themselves in excesses of all kinds' (p.95). It would seem that Elena is apparently 'moved' by these pornographic images, and, the reader is told, 'Pierre believed he had awakened in her such a sexual obsession that she could never control herself again. And Elena did seem corrupted' (p.95). Indeed, Nin appears to follow a familiar pornographic script in which, having 'unleashed' Elena's desires, she swings dramatically from virgin to insatiable nymphomaniac. Of all the erotic images that Elena has seen, there is one particular image that she appears to respond to:

There was a picture of a tortured woman, impaled on a thick stick which ran into her sex and out of her mouth. It had the appearance of ultimate sexual possession and aroused in Elena a feeling of pleasure. When Pierre took her, it seemed to her that the joy she felt at his penis belaboring her was communicated to her mouth. She opened it, and her tongue protruded, as in the picture, as if she wanted his penis in her mouth at the same time. (p.95-96)

Like the impaled woman of the text, Elena appears to literally speak phallogocentric desires: the penis becomes her desiring mouth/speech. Perhaps rather strangely, this image of an impaled woman seems to arouse Elena's pleasure rather than disgust. Indeed, Brennan is relatively silent on the presence of the pornographic within this 'feminine' erotic tale suggesting that they are relatively fixed male images of female objectification from which Elena and Nin must 'shake [themselves] free' (1992, p.82). However, these images may not be as stable as they first appear. Jane Ussher argues that, 'whilst undoubtedly violent pornography exists – and the *suggestion* of violence and the demonstration of man's power over woman is central to much of heterosexual pornography – there are many other stories of "woman" and "man" being told within the pornographic images and texts' (1997, p.196). Indeed, on closer analysis it is not necessarily the image of the impaled woman that 'aroused in Elena a feeling of pleasure', but rather what it appears to *signify*: 'It had the appearance of ultimate sexual possession' (1990a, p.94-95). Further, it is by no means certain with whom Elena identifies: the woman *being* possessed or the 'phallus' capable of *having* ultimate possession. Indeed, she may even oscillate between the two. Interestingly, the viewing/reading of pornographic images often unsettles any illusion of (sexual) difference as biological sex and sexual preference do not necessarily guarantee with whom the viewer/reader of pornography identifies. Segal notes that 'it is never clear even to me whether I am identifying most strongly with the male or the female characters. It is always, at least partially, with both' (1994, p.237). However, to break this down further, it is not even necessarily 'ultimate sexual possession' that produces Elena's pleasure, but is perhaps the *appearance* of it: her pleasure may actually be in the *trace* of *what it is not*. Contrary to all appearances the meaning of this image is not 'pinned down' or immutable, the phallus is never in 'ultimate [sexual] possession' of language, but rather meaning continually slips and slides between many 'other' possible 'detours'.

Indeed, Elena's apparent desire for love and for wholeness appears fundamentally at odds with her declared fantasies for violence and violation. Further on in the story Nin writes:

Sometimes in the street or in a café, Elena was hypnotized by the *souteneur* face of a man, by a big workman with knee-deep boots, by a brutal, criminal head. She felt a tremor of fear, an *obscure* attraction. *The female in her was fascinated*. For a second she felt as if she were a whore who expected a stab in the back for some infidelity. She felt anxiety. She was trapped. She forgot that she was free. A dark fungus layer was awakened, a subterranean primitivism, a desire to feel the brutality of man, the force which could break her open and sack her. To be violated was a need of woman, a secret, erotic desire. She had to shake herself from the domination of these images. (Nin 1990a, p.130 my emphasis)

This is another disturbing image not least because it offers the reader a rather uncomfortable image of (feminine) subjectivity as essentially desiring violation: to be forcefully broken apart and 'sacked'. What is more, this promiscuous physical desire can only manifest itself in the image of the prostitute. Yet, it must be noted that this is Elena's *fantasy*, and, as the narrator notes, her attraction is not clear but 'obscure': its meaning is in no way obvious. This 'obscure attraction' serves to create a *conflict* within Elena as it is specifically '*the female in her*' that is 'fascinated' and 'hypnotized' by this image of brutality. This implies that she only *partially* identifies with this representation of 'femaleness' and that there is something 'other', another (subject) position within her s/text that resists.

Arguing for a psychoanalytical re-reading of pornography, Elizabeth Cowie states that, '[w]hat arouses is already a highly coded entity. Sexual arousal is not merely a bodily affair but first and foremost a psychological relation. However, this signifying process is not a set of contents – of socially learned conventions of sexuality; rather, it is what psychoanalysis has termed *fantasy*' (1993, p.135). She argues that the power of pornographic representations to produce sexual arousal 'cannot be understood without

considering the nature of pornography as sexual fantasy, and the nature of the relation of fantasy to the social relations of sexuality' (Cowie 1993, p.133). The sexual arousal of men and women as *cultural* beings, is no more 'instinctual' or primitive than sexuality itself, but rather it is subject to signification. Indeed, pornography is not a discourse of *presence*; rather it is a discourse of *absence*. In this sense, '[t]he objects and elements in the fantasy scenario may be present not for what they are but for what they are not – as substitutes in a process of defence. Fantasy cannot be taken at face value' (Cowie 1993, p.152). Yet, when the narrator of 'Elena' states, '[t]o be violated was a need of woman, a secret, erotic desire,' it seems difficult to read it in any *other* way than what women really desire, deep down, is to be violated (Nin 1990a, p.130). However, there *is* a difference between 'need' and 'desire' which makes *all the difference* to the possible re-signification of this representation. According to Lacan, it is language that causes a 'detour' or deviation of 'needs' into a demand and 'as long as his needs are subjected to demand they return to him alienated' (1982a, p.80). Belsey notes that whilst, '[d]esire is the effect of the lost needs: loss returns and presents itself as desire' (1994, p.57). It is because of this that, '[d]esire is not *the same as* need' (Belsey 1994, p.57). Furthermore, '[w]hat returns as desire is quite other than the repressed needs that are its cause' (Belsey 1994, p.58). The 'dark fungus layer' of 'subterranean primitivism' that Elena speaks of is not *essential* to her; it is a particular image of 'woman' that ultimately *fails* to be inscribed or to be embodied by her (1990a, p.130). Indeed, she 'shake[s] herself from the domination of these images', and thus 'shake[s] off' those signifiers which masquerade as an essential essence (p.130). It is perhaps in the 'detour' between the signifier and the signified, the space of (re)writing and (re)reading, that the female subject's relation to the pornographic text might be resignified.

Indeed, what appears to have been overlooked and pushed to the margins of this text is the fact that Elena is *not* a 'virgin' in the erotic 'terrain': she herself has apparently

published books that ‘becomes an obsession of the censors’ (Nin 1990a, p.75). Having been coached in the discourses of erotica, Elena ‘became a consummate actress. She showed all the symptoms of pleasure, the contraction of the vulva, the quickening of the breath, of the pulse, of the heartbeats, the sudden languour, the falling away, the half-fainting fog that followed’ (p.96). I would suggest that by performing this role of ‘woman’ she holds it at a distance: forging a gap, or ‘a doubt’ (p.94) that resists the conflation or subjugation to the One True story of desire. Pierre’s expression of his ‘love’ is articulated through control, and his attempts to achieve ‘total possession’ of Elena are coordinated through the power of his controlling gaze: ‘Pierre sought now to make love to the other selves of Elena, the most buried ones, the most delicate ones. He *watched* her sleep, he *watched* her dress, he *watched* her as she combed her hair before the mirror’ (p.96 my emphasis). Elena not only becomes the ‘obsession of the censors’ (p.75) but also the obsession of Pierre who uses ‘lovemaking’ to pin down the ‘spiritual clue to her being’ (p.96). Yet, her masquerade of sexual pleasure continually escapes Pierre’s watchful eyes to the point where, ‘[h]e no longer spied on her to make certain she had enjoyed an orgasm, for the very simple reason that Elena had now decided to pretend enjoyment even when she did not feel it’ (p.96).

Whilst ‘pleasure’ can be simulated so, too, can ‘love’. Elena notes that love is inextricably interwoven in the simulation of pleasures: ‘She could simulate everything – to her, loving and being loved were so irrevocably mixed with her pleasure that she could achieve a breathless emotional response even if she did not feel physical enjoyment’ (Nin 1990a, p.96). Her ‘role’ *to be* the phallus for Pierre obscures, and seems to become, her own desire. In this sense, ‘love’ appears to *stand in place of* women’s eroticism. However, if love and desire are ‘irrevocably mixed’, it would be impossible to tell the difference between a simulation of love (as desire) and a simulation of desire (as love). Indeed, in *Fire*, Nin herself seems to be taken in by her own performances: ‘I will never again pretend

to love – only, the truth is that I *deceive myself* as well as the others’ (1996a, p.31). Though the reader may suspect that s/he too is being ‘deceived’, the ambiguity of these simulations might be particularly useful for the female erotic writer, precisely because, as Belsey notes, ‘[l]ove subsists within the sphere of legality and sex outside it’ (1994, p.43). Similarly, Lynda Nead (1992) argues that whilst the difference between the ‘erotic’ and the ‘pornographic’ is not fixed, the location of the defining border marks the crucial difference between licit (visible) and illicit (censored) forms of sexual representations. She states:

The erotic plays a critical role within this system; it is the borderline of respectability and non-respectability, between pure and impure desire. The erotic is not a fixed or innate property of any given image, but is historically specific and open to competing definitions. Since the erotic describes the space of permissible sexual representation, there is a great deal at stake in where the boundaries of this category are placed. (Nead 1992, p.104)

The female erotic writer balances precariously between ‘love’ and ‘lust’ marking the boundaries between erotic (licit) and pornographic (illicit) representations of feminine (hetero)sexuality. In her essay ‘Eroticism in Women’ (1992b), originally published in ‘Playgirl’ in 1974, Nin argues that ‘serious critics’ of her novel, *Spy in the House of Love*, condemned the promiscuous behaviour of the female protagonist Sabina. She argues that, ‘[i]t was the first study of a woman who tries to separate love from sensuality as man does, to seek sensual freedom. It was termed pornographic at the time’ (1992b, p.5).

In the final scenes of ‘Elena’ it would *appear* that her ‘detour’, or her ‘perverse’ wanderings, ‘return’ her into the arms of Pierre and the conventions of a heterosexual romantic/pornographic narrative. Returning to his apartment, ‘[s]he threw herself over him, saying, “I had to come back, I had to come back.”’ (Nin 1990a, p.132). To which Pierre relies, ‘I wanted you to come back’ (p.132). In this sense, she *appears* to conform to the demands of Pierre which Brennan notes seems ‘so like the *fort da* game Freud describes’

(1992, p.83). Indeed, it would seem that within traditional erotica, written for her male collector, what the man ‘wants’ must ultimately be given. Elena, like Nin, ‘*had* to come back’, to get back ‘on track’ with conventional discourses of sexuality. Pierre proceeds to ‘take’ Elena in what seems to be a punishing reminder of his ultimate power to recall the object of his desire: ‘Sliding in and out of her he said, “I like to see how I hurt you there, how I stab you there, in the little wound.” Then he pounded into her, to draw from her the spasm she had withheld’ (Nin 1990a, p.132). However, this is not the ending of the narrative. The close of this story is ultimately another departure. Elena sets out on another one of her ‘walks’ and poses another, this time *unanswered*, question: ‘[w]hen she left him she was joyous. Could love become a fire that did not burn, like the fire of the Hindu religious men; was she learning to walk magically over hot coals?’ (p.132). To all appearances this masquerades as a ‘happy ending’, a ‘return’ of ‘normality’ required by the realist/ pornographic text. Yet, her ‘joy’ is found ‘[w]hen she left him’ (p.132), in her departure, and, what is more, Brennan notes, ‘Nin’s negotiation of feminine sexuality ultimately finds its figure in contradiction: Love becomes “a fire that does not burn”’ (1992, p.83).

I would argue that this masquerade of ‘love’ provides a safe framework, a representation of permissible feminine sexuality that enables Elena to ‘walk magically over hot coals’: to walk the risky borderline in order to *trace* the ‘ob/scenity’ of an alternative feminine desire. These spaces or ‘flaws’ within the ‘goodness’ of Nin’s narrative are remarked on by Henry in *Henry and June*, when he states, ““There are flaws in your goodness””, to which Nin replies, ‘Flaws. What a relief. Fissures. I may escape through them. Some perversity drives me outside of the role I am forced to play. Always imagining another role. Never static’ (1990c, p.119). Posed as a recurring and unanswered question, the ‘ending’ of this narrative is continually deferred. The ‘detour’ between ‘love’ and ‘lust’,

between *being* and *having* the phallus, holds in suspense the final (dis)closure of 'femininity', and, unable to finally achieve its generic destination (the female body), this narrative attempts to produce space for 'other' possible wanderings. The relation between the 'feminine' and the female body remains an 'open' question that circulates in the 'detour' between the text and the (ever-becoming) 'destination' of its reader/writer.

In this chapter I have attempted to redirect the focus of the debate between pornography and erotica away from definitions and essences to the workings of the border itself in the (re)inscription of meaning. My exploration of the preface to *Delta* and the story of 'Elena' drew attention to the gaps and margins within the text which threaten to 'deviate' from, to complicate and undermine, the narratives of femininity inscribed within traditional pornographic discourse. In the following chapter I explore in closer detail the relationship between Nin's un/expurgated diaries and the two volumes of her erotica. Focusing specifically on the role of vision and the primacy of the phallus in the construction of sexual difference, I explore other points of view in and from which 'other' possible inscriptions of difference and desire might be *glimpsed*.

Chapter 5

Curious 'Inter-Views': *Delta of Venus* and the *Diaries*.

In this final chapter I will continue to explore Nin's erotica from a 'feminine point of view' (1990a, p.xiv) in order to challenge the central role of vision in the constitution of gendered subjectivity and the (re)production of the phallus as the primary signifier of desire. I argue that the 'feminine' in Nin's texts must be read obliquely by closely reading her erotica in and against her 'un/expurgated' diaries in order to keep difference/s in view. By focusing on the limits and 'outworks' of the text it is possible to glimpse the *lack* in vision and the *trace* of the 'other' 'ob/scene' body/text that haunts the discourse of phallogocentrism. I argue that the borderline offers the possibility of inscribing alternative multiple selves and sexualities.

The crucial question for feminism is who has the power to define and represent female sexuality. Jeffrey Weeks notes that whilst 'male sexuality as culturally defined provides the norm and [...] female sexuality continues to be the problem. Males, in *becoming* men, take up positions in power relations in which they acquire the ability to define women' (1989b, p.60). Therefore the issue of power is central to both the politics of sexuality and the debates on pornography. Within phallogocentric discourse it is the phallus that becomes the centre for the organisation of discourses, and it is specifically the mis-recognition of the penis *as* the phallus, circulated in particular in psychoanalytical discourses, that continues to align men with power and women with castration. As Ussher notes, 'At all levels of the pornographic gaze, man is able to maintain the illusion that the penis *is* the phallus – that possession of that particular biological organ *naturally* leads to power, authority and control' (1997, p.181).

Within Western heteronormative culture, women's bodies are (hetero)sexualised and enshrouded in phallic anxiety and suspicion precisely because they have been constructed to oscillate on the very borders of (in)visibility. According to patriarchal myth, reinforced by mainstream psychoanalysis, women's bodies are saturated with a sexuality that must remain hidden and coded from them, only to be translated by a capable analyst whose gender position endows him with privileged access to the phallus. Anne McClintock argues that this 'cult of the male expert – and the edict that female sexuality be awakened and managed by a male tutor' is a standard pornographic trope whereby the female is managed into 'heterosexual desire, female sexual obedience and phallic worship' (1993, p.121).

However, it would seem that not *all* modes of representing the sexually explicit are equally powerful. As Bos and Pack note, the Williams Committee report had 'a different attitude to photographic images than to the written word' (1987, p.182). Interestingly they note that whilst the Committee viewed sexually explicit writing as a subjective 'medium of self-expression' that must be protected from censorship, the photographic image was perceived as an objective or unmediated representation of 'reality' and therefore subject to the scrutiny of the censors (Bos and Pack 1987, p.183). Ellis also notes the changing attitude towards the pornographic medium noting that '[w]riting and the fine arts are virtually freed from this emphasis that they used to have as major channels for pornography because they lack the immediacy of the "photographic effect"' (1992, p.157). It is specifically the *visual* element of pornography, and most notably the cinematic or photographic genre, that arouses the interest of the censors. This particular form of visual presentation causes concern precisely because it has become culturally understood as a form of representation that appears to tell the Truth or merely reproduce 'reality' *as it is* with little or no external mediation. Hard-core pornography is distinct from soft-core or

erotica because it shows people engaged in real, penetrative sex. Its appeal lies in its ability to manipulate a very 'real', quick, and powerful response to what is essentially an arrangement of bodies within a set frame – the *golden triangle* of pornography. The composition of such elements encourages us to 'suspend our disbelief' that this is a representation, an image or sequence of images recorded for mass production, and suggests that we can (re)experience the 'truth' of these desires signified by the female body and by the phallus as the marker of desirability. Bill Nichols (1991) argues that the power of pornography lies in its ability to assure the viewer/reader that what s/he sees actually happened. Indeed, he argues that '[i]t is not reality that is at stake but the impression of reality, the impression conveyed by the conventions of historical realism' (1991, p.216).

It could be argued that whereas men's sexual excitement is clearly visible in the erection and climax, women's sexual excitement remains 'hidden' or 'invisible' to a phallogocentric culture. As McClintock argues, the representation of the 'vaginal orgasm' is problematic within pornography not least because it renders the penis invisible, but also because it obscures the consumer's view of the vagina (1993, p.127). It is for this reason that women's sexual pleasure is displayed on her body, primarily the face, and read through a series of 'ecstatic grimaces' translated as 'orgasmic' (Cowie 1993, p.127). Visual displays of women's pleasure initiated by the man are essential to a pornographic genre, not because it is concerned that women are as sexually fulfilled as men, but because 'woman's body, for many men, comes to be the sign of their desire' (Cowie 1993, p.138). Her apparent desire reconfirms to the heterosexual male that he *has* what women desire, the phallus, and he therefore possesses the ultimate power of a 'real' man to satiate the desires of 'real' women. Indeed, as Nichols notes 'unflagging phalluses, and copious, visible ejaculations of semen [are] the most common resolution to narrative suspense' (1991, p.213). In this sense, gender and narrative 'suspense' are ultimately (dis)closed in the pornographic genre.

However, the very fact that sexual pleasure can be displayed through a code or gesture means it can be faked. In the Imaginary of the male pornographic genre, the association between the signifier (the facial expression or groan) and the signified (sexual satisfaction) is unquestionably concrete because of the presence of the privileged signifier (the penis/ phallus) deemed capable of fixing meaning. The viewer's identification with this unifying and powerful signifier is confirmed by the desiring look of the female, yet this is precisely a *misrecognition*. In this sense, the 'problem' of female orgasm becomes a problem of the 'frame' of phallogocentrism itself which is 'a convention that forbids the occurrence of orgasm in out-of-sight places' (Nichols 1991, p.217). Therefore, despite its mighty visual impression, the phallus as an absolute is a *fallacy*, and, as Lacan states, it must 'play its role as veiled, that is, as in itself the sign of the latency with which everything signifiable is struck as soon as it is raised [...] to the function of signifier' (1982a, p.82). The ultimate signified must be constantly evaded and questioned in an endless chain of signifiers. Indeed, it is this very *gap* (*lack* or female 'crack') between the signifier (desire) and the signified (satisfaction) which the obsessive repetitions of pornography seek to fill or cover over. Indeed, the *visual* preoccupation of pornography could be read as a tactic to distract its very vulnerable *lack* of phallic credibility.

Butler (1997) suggests an alternative reading of pornography as a performance of gender instability which would expose the very gaps and slippages necessarily covered over in the discourse of mainstream heterosexual pornography. She argues for 'a feminist reading of pornography that resists the literalization of this imaginary scene, one which reads it instead for the incommensurabilities between gender norms and practices that it seems compelled to repeat without resolution' (Butler 1997, p.69). What is more, by (un)faithfully 'repeating', or taking up the 'injurious speech' of pornography, feminists can

subvert and resignify the apparent hegemony of that discourse (Butler 1997). She argues that,

[t]o read such texts against themselves is to concede that the performativity of the text is not under sovereign control. On the contrary, if the text acts once, it can act again, and possibly against its prior act. This raises the possibility of *resignification* as an alternative reading of performativity and of politics (Butler 1997, p.69).

I: 'Marianne': Re-Reading/Writing Desire

In this section I will look specifically at the story of 'Marianne' in *Delta of Venus* in order to read for these gaps and slippages, or those 'other' stories of gender and sexuality that (dis)appear within Nin's erotica. Jacobus argues that, '[r]eading woman becomes a form of autobiography or self-constitution that is finally indistinguishable from writing (woman)' (1986, p.4). Indeed, by '[p]utting a face on the text' (1986, p.4) the concept of difference is stabilised as an opposition and works to 'conceal that "vacillation from one sex to another" which both men and women must keep, or keep at bay, in order to recognize themselves as subjects at all' (p.4-5). With this in mind, I feel it is significant that Nin's own re-reading of her text, her reading of gender into her erotica, is marked by a 'pre-face', which is itself a rereading/writing of her diaries. It is the diary extracts that attempt to mark a difference between her 'feminine' understanding of sexuality and the 'masculine' position of her male 'collector'. Furthermore, she does, quite literally 'put a face on her text' when she sends a photograph of herself along with her 'autobiography' to her client as a *sign* and signature of its (gender) authenticity. However, what I wish to argue is that the preface and the postscript reveal not the 'stabilizing, specular image of woman in the text' (Jacobus 1986, p.4), but rather the instability of the boundary in the constitution of sexual/textual difference. This particular preface marks not the unity of the 'I', but its polymorphous and ever changing bi-sexual status. In this sense, the preface to *Delta* is a significant 'framing' device that attempts to reposition the reader differently in relation to 'traditional' erotica. It

is from the frame itself, from the preface as an undecidable space *between* the inside and the outside of the text, that the reader is offered a *glimpse* of an alternative ‘feminine point of view’ (Nin 1990a, p,xiv). (Dis)placed in this liminal position, the reader’s attention is drawn to the ‘ambiguities’ (Nin 1990a, p.xiii) of the borderline in the constitution of meaning and radical difference, and to the possibility of an ‘elsewhere’ or ‘ob/scene’ space which haunts the limits of representation. As Nin states in the preface to her erotica: ‘We were haunted by the marvelous tales we could not tell’ (Nin 1990a, p.xi).

The story of ‘Marianne’ in *Delta of Venus* seems a strange choice to include in a collection of erotic tales, most notably because it is a tale that supposedly recounts its own production: the writing, re-writing and reading of erotica for sale to a collector. In the very first paragraph of ‘Marianne’ the narrative ‘I’ (and the ‘writer’) *both* ‘signs’ and evades disclosing a ‘proper’ I/dentity:

I shall call myself the madam of a house of literary prostitution, the madam for a group of hungry writers who were turning out erotica for sale to a ‘collector’. I was the first to write, and every day I gave my work to a young woman to type up neatly. (1990a, p.55)

Though the narrator remains nameless it is tempting to I/dentify this ‘madam’ as Nin herself, not least because this introduction to the story ‘Marianne’ is also adapted to form the ‘outwork’, or preface, to the second volume of her erotica, *Little Birds*. In this sense, the text draws attention to the undecidable location of the ‘outwork’ (*parergon*) as its ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’, its form and content, continually fold in upon each other in what appears to be ‘a *discourse on the frame*’ (Derrida 1987, p.45). However, in the preface to *Delta*, Nin seems at pains to stress the fictionality of her erotica arguing that she did not want to give anything ‘genuine’ to her collector (1990a, p.viii). This mixing of the ‘inside’ with the ‘outside’ sets up an undecidable relation between the Truth (‘outside’/Author) and fiction

(‘inside’ as the tale) putting into question the boundary between the *ergon* (the work of ‘Marianne’ in *Delta*) and the *parergon* (the preface to *Little Birds*). The radical difference between an inside (*ergon*) and an outside (*parergon*) is shown to be illusory and the difference between the two is less a boundary than a pathway: a movement *between* two textual surfaces. The position of the preface itself *shifts*, disturbing and *dislocating* the position of the reader in relation to the ‘I’ of the text. The ‘I’ of the reader/author/narrator cannot be wholly identified within or without the text, but rather remains in limbo, constituted somewhere *between* self and text, inside and outside, the diary and her erotica. In this sense, the ‘I’ of the text remains multiply inscribed, never fixed but open to possible re-writings. The footnote that links the ‘outwork’ (preface) of *Little Birds* to the ‘inside’ of *Delta* and the story of ‘Marianne’, marks not simply a ‘detour’ – a textual wandering in which the reader transgresses the textual boundaries to *another* ‘cite/site’ – but also its radical duplicity. Like Irigaray’s (1985b) ‘two lips’, this erotic text is ‘not one’ but rather it remains undecidably *both* inside *and* outside its own textual boundaries.

The subject of this text in *Delta* is Marianne, a young woman painter who earns extra money by typing up the narrator’s erotica. However, the reader is to learn that Marianne is not all that she seems to be. By all appearances she was a woman well versed in sexuality, for ‘[s]he had read Proust, Krafft-Ebing, Marx, Freud’ and ‘had had many sexual adventures’ (Nin 1990a, p.55). However, these adventures were mere performances: ‘it was all external’, because ‘the body does not really participate. She was deceiving herself. She thought that, having lain down with men, caressed them, and made all the prescribed gestures, she had experienced sexual life’ (p.55). Interestingly, there is a certain similarity between the narrator’s description of Marianne’s ‘external’ and ingenuous erotic

experiences and the claims Nin makes in the preface to this volume of erotica.¹ It is in this preface that Nin states she spent days researching erotica from medical books, the *Kama Sutra*, and listening to and reading about friends erotic adventures (Nin 1990a, p.ix). As Nin herself claims to have written up other people's stories as her own (1990a, p.viii), it might be reasonable to surmise that Nin in fact masquerades as Marianne: as a (re)writer of erotica. Yet, the reader, like Marianne, is 'deceiving herself' by believing there is a certain Truth to be (ex)posed behind the erotic performance and that Nin's 'confession' might be drawn from the clues that lie waiting to be discovered within the text. Indeed, by performing the masquerade Marianne (and Nin) remain 'elsewhere'.

One day, the narrator/writer, realising that Marianne had missed a deadline for her typed scripts, goes to her studio to find out what the delay might be. Having knocked at her door she finds that she is not there: '[n]o one answered' (Nin 1990a, p.56). Marianne *was not where she was supposed to be*; in the process of re-writing she had *slipped from view*. In Marianne's absence, the narrator resorts to the written word for an explanation:

I went to the typewriter to see how the work was going and saw a text I did not recognize. I thought perhaps I was beginning to forget what I wrote. But it could not be. That was not my writing. I began to read. And then I understood.

In the middle of her work, Marianne had been taken with the desire to write down her own experiences. This is what she wrote: [sic] (p.56)

The narrator appears unable to recognise her own work. She states: 'That was not my writing.' Indeed, somewhere in the process of re-citing her words this 'I' becomes something 'other', and the narrator is faced with an 'other' text: the 'other' in the selfsame.

¹ The relation between 'madam', Marianne and Nin is further complicated in *Volume One* of the *Diary*. Here the reader is told that Nin employs a woman, Madame Marguerite Pierre Chareau, who 'help[ed] me to copy the diary' (1979a, p.81). However, on reading the expurgated diaries against the unexpurgated versions, these two women appear to stand in for each other on a number of occasions. For example, compare the similarities between the scene in which René Allendy attempts to act out his desire for flagellation on Marguerite in *Volume One* (1979a, p.204-205) and on Nin in *Incest* (1994b, p.146-148).

The gap formed by this division becomes the cite/site of the unconscious and desire in which the 'I' is 'taken' by *another* desire. Whilst this 'madam' is committed to giving pleasure to her paying clients, she, like Nin herself, appears to harbour a desire to resist the phallogentric narrative of male erotica. In re-reading her writings of erotica, which are themselves 'derived from a reading of men's work', she rewrites the script of female erotic desire (Nin 1990a, p.xiii). Here the story seems to re-mark on its own textuality, on the *trace* of the 'other' that inhabits the One, and, indeed, it seems significant that it is particularly in the (re)writing of erotica that the 'purity' of the 'I' becomes 'contaminated'. The difference between the 'I' and the 'other' is 'properly' marked in the text by the use of double spacing and quotation marks signalling the deferral of 'madam's' narrative and the beginning of Marianne's. This gap, or double spacing, also marks the slippage between the positions of writer and reader: Marianne who has previously been the reader, now becomes the writer of the text (taking up the 'I' of the narrative), whilst the narrator/writer reads this 'other' story of desire.

Marianne's 'I' tells a story of her relationship with Fred who happens to knock on her studio door one day in the hope of finding an artist willing to draw a life portrait of him. Apparently concerned that she only seemed to paint 'abstracts', he anxiously asks if she can draw 'lifelike figure[s]' as well (Nin 1990a, p.56). Interestingly, Fred's initial knock at her studio door mirrors that of the narrator who comes in search of her own 'lifelike' image amongst Marianne's typescripts. She too seems only able to find an 'abstract' or unrecognisable portrait: a portrait which she, along with the reader, now sits and reads. Unlike Marianne's previous models, this model declines to undress in the privacy of a changing cubical, and instead starts to disrobe in front of her. Whilst she busies herself preparing her canvas and charcoal, she suddenly becomes aware 'that he was abnormally slow in undressing' and 'that he was waiting for my attention' (p.57). Within this scenario

the traditional sex roles of the artist (male) and model (female) are switched, affording Marianne ‘the right to observe that is given to painters’ (p.57). Having assumed a ‘masculine’ subject position, she ‘look[s] at him boldly, as if I were beginning my study of him, charcoal stick in hand’ (p.57), whilst the *object* of her ‘masculine’ gaze appears to display ‘a faunish air and a feminine evasiveness which attracted me’ (p.57). As it transpires this model is less interested in obtaining a portrait of himself than in indulging his ‘perversion’ of exhibitionism.²

Curiously, it is in the very process of the model’s ‘unveiling’, when ‘his skin was so delicate it caught the light that poured in through the big window and held it like a satin fabric’, that Marianne suddenly experiences a flash of desire (Nin 1990a, p.57). In this glimpse his nakedness appears to be *both* adorned and augmented by this ray of light and it is ‘[a]t this moment the charcoal in my hands felt alive, and I thought what a pleasure it would be to draw the lines of this young man, almost like caressing him’ (p.58). This erotic moment dis/appears in the gap between two surfaces: a surface of light hovers like fabric over the skin’s surface, vacillating undecidably between an absence and a presence, a surface and a depth. In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1990, originally published in French in 1973), Roland Barthes touches upon the elusive text(ure) of the erotic moment. He asks:

Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?* [...] the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (Barthes 1990, p.9-10)

Marianne’s pleasure appears to reside not in the object itself but in the drawing/writing

² According to Freud, exhibitionism is the passive form of scopophilia which is the drive to look. As Elizabeth Grosz notes, the irony is that whilst exhibitionism is associated with femininity and voyeurism with masculinity, the former is almost exclusively a male perversion (Grosz 1992b, p.448).

process, where the lines of her charcoal mark the limits of representation as they ‘almost’ brush up against the contours of the (corpo)real. In this sense, she *traces* the *movement* of her desires on her canvas as ‘the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance’ (Barthes 1990, p.10). Yet, these *traces* of her desire inscribed on the canvas remain radically absent from the desiring eyes of the reader whose reading remains only a ‘translated’ version. The difference between the mark of her charcoal lines and their *reinscription* on the typed page gestures towards a certain absent or ‘ob/scene’ space of desire. This space is beyond the frame of the text and ‘outside’ the mastering gaze of the reader.

Indeed, it would appear that the gaze of the artist is a far cry from the ‘disinterested, functionless gaze’ of fine art proffered by aesthetic theory (Nead 1992, p.85). According to Lacan (1977), the gaze is not merely an ‘objective’ mode of perception, enabling the subject to represent things *as they really are*; rather it is a mode of desire, and as such emanates from the field of the Other. In ‘Artists and Models’ (*Delta of Venus*), a young male artist is *disturbed* that his position as the objective artist is momentarily threatened in the initial revelation of his subject’s naked body. He states, ‘there is always a moment before and after, when the model is undressing and dressing, that does disturb me. It’s the surprise of seeing the body’ (Nin 1990a, p.40). Similarly, in ‘A Model’ (*Little Birds*), a female life-model notes that, ‘[o]ne painter told me that the body of a model on the stand is an objective thing, that the only moment he felt disturbed erotically was when the model took off her kimono’ (Nin 1990b, p.62). It is in this moment of un/veiling that the subject’s position is destabilised from one of certainty to one of uncertainty in relation to its defining *other*. It is this dislocation that ‘disturbs’ the illusion of art itself as a ‘pure’ and ‘objective’ activity.

However, Marianne’s ‘sketch’ of her desire, (dis)covered in the space *between* the un/veiling of her male subject, and articulated somewhere *between* the body and the text, is

put into question in the full naked 'presence' of the penis. Fred, who had been naked only from head to torso, 'leaned over, unfastening his belt, and the trousers slid down. He stood completely naked before me and in a most obvious state of excitement. When I saw this, there was *a moment of suspense*.' (Nin 1990a, p.58 my emphasis). Whilst the representation of Marianne's desire is sought in ambiguity and 'abstraction' – in the space *between* the signifier and the signified as body/text – the 'most obvious' desires of Fred appear to be more 'real', that is, they appear to have a clear and 'obvious' referent: the erect penis. As the main(stream) protagonist of male pornography, the erect penis vies for its central place in this erotic representation and threatens to rewrite Marianne's developing 'portrait'. Yet ironically, the 'presence' of the erect penis as the signifier of desire seems to throw the text into 'a moment of suspense' in which meaning itself becomes uncertain. The 'slide' of Fred's trousers does not reveal the 'completely naked' Truth of the penis as phallus, but rather it seems to foreground the sliding of the signifier itself: the 'impotence' of the phallus to mark pure and radical difference. Indeed, it is the 'phallus' that appears to be suspended in a moment of undecidability between these two subjects: it is not 'obvious' where it is supposed to be. The male model awaits confirmation from Marianne that his erect penis *is* the phallus (the object of her desire) whilst Marianne's charcoal 'phallus' perhaps stands in for her own desire and the possibility of its alternative representation.

This 'moment of suspense' also appears to bare the weight of a threat as both Fred and Marianne seem to fear the castrating power of the other (Nin 1990a, p.58). Marianne fears that Fred may 'vent his excitement on me' (p.58), whilst her male model appears to plead for Marianne's understanding rather than her anger: 'Do not be angry. Forgive me' (p.58). This 'suspense' marks the point at which language fails to deliver a transcendental signified leaving the narrator unable to specifically name the object of her disturbance. Indeed, precisely what Marianne sees is *not* 'most obvious', and she can only bring herself

to name it as a 'protrusion', as something which *stands out* (p.58). Indeed, what *stands out* in this text is precisely the *absence* of the phallus to produce presence and meaning: what the 'I/eye' saw to bring about this rupture is held, like the text, in 'a moment of suspense'.

I would argue that Marianne's repositioning as subject of the look enables her to see in a different way, to adopt another point of view, which enables her to *see* the gaps in the discourse of phallogocentrism. Whilst she tries to draw her subject, her ability to represent is hampered by the unfamiliar or by a 'strange experience' (Nin 1990a, p.58). Her familiarity with the 'head, neck, arms' ensures that she is able to translate these objects with relative ease onto her canvas (p.58). However, when it comes to drawing the 'protrusion' she finds that a part of her *resists* its drawing: 'the defensive virgin in me was troubled' (p.58). Perhaps what is 'troubling' is that this 'protrusion' draws attention to itself as already a signifier. Within phallogocentric discourse the penis is itself a sign for something 'other', that is, the phallus as signifier of sexuality and power. Marianne appears to be divided as to *how* to re-represent this signifier: 'I thought, I must draw attentively and slowly to see if the crisis passes, or he may vent his excitement on me' (p.58). As it appears to Marianne, this 'protrusion' demands to be represented, to be acknowledged and given appropriate value: she must 'draw attentively' or else face the consequences. As wielder of the charcoal, Marianne holds the possibility of *re-drawing the line* between 'art' and 'erotica', between 'licit' and 'illicit' representation, in order to inscribe her own desires. However, her resistance appears to be something she can ill afford as, '[i]f I protested, I would lose my fee, which I needed so badly' (p.58). As such, she appears to be bound economically to conform to those predefined lines, to reproduce a text of phallic worship by appearing to acknowledge her model's desire – his desire to be desired – as her own. In this sense, the boundaries between artist (subject) and model (object) are further complicated as Marianne

herself becomes a metaphorical canvas, a surface (object) reflecting back the desire of her male subject/model.

However, as the signifier has no guaranteed referent, Fred's 'sex' may not guarantee his assumed gendered position. Indeed, as she draws him, '[h]is sex had an almost imperceptible quiver' (Nin 1990a, p.58). This 'quiver' or involuntary oscillation could be seen as a tremble within the discourse of phallogocentrism, perhaps only apparent under the close scrutinising gaze of the female artist. Yet, as Marianne draws her model he becomes more 'masculine', coherent and bounded. The charcoal appears to make an absence present; his body boundaries become fixed on paper and before her eyes he appears to become 'transfixed and content[ed]' momentarily secured and confirmed (p.58 my emphasis). The reader's attention is drawn to the cultural reproduction of the penis *as* phallus; it is in her attentiveness to its (re)representation that the phallus is (re)confirmed as the penis. However, as its power is constituted in the process of representation, in the representation of the penis as the phallus, phallogocentric discourses need to be continually repeated in order to sustain their power. As such the model asks, perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, 'May I come tomorrow at the same time?' (p.58). However, Fred's composure appears to come at the price of Marianne's who states: 'I was the only one disturbed, and I did not know why' (p.58). She is *disturbed* or dislocated by the representation of the phallus as penis; her own status as *lacking* the phallus (re)positions her as 'feminine' and on the 'other' side of the subject/object binary. Rather fittingly, it is at this point that 'madam' abruptly interrupts or 'disturbs' Marianne's narrative announcing its closure and reasserting her author(ity) as *the* writer. As such, Marianne is swiftly displaced from 'inside' her text and re-cited back into the space of 'real' life, that is, back 'inside' the borders of 'madam's' narrative: '[h]ere the manuscript ended, and Marianne entered the studio' (p.58).

Interestingly, this disturbance marks the emergence of desire for Marianne. According to 'madam's' narrative, Marianne 'confesses' that 'it was I who was excited all day' (Nin 1990a, p.58). Curiously Marianne addresses this desire to her drawings, to the signifier, stating that 'to one of them I added the complete image of the incident' (p.58). Whilst this gesture may suggest that Marianne's desire is a fantasy of completion, there also seems to be a recognition of the play of the signifier, of the structure of fantasy as an effect of absence and writing itself. Firstly, her desire is addressed to a drawing (an image), and secondly, it is only *one* of these images which she attempts to complete, preferring to leave the others unfinished and open to 'other' possibilities. As a result she somewhat joyously states, 'I was actually tormented with desire' (p.58). Indeed, desire, as Belsey notes, 'subsists as an effect of the signifier, in the gap (Derrida would say the difference) that resides within the utterance of an impulse. In this sense it is an effect of absence' (1994, p.34). Furthermore, it is only *after* the incident that Marianne 'returns' to her drawings, and presumably to her typewriter, in order to give a sense of coherence and unity to an experience marked by gaps and absences. Whilst the one 'complete image of the incident' (Nin 1990a, p.58) may in fact be the 'image' the reader now reads, it also marks a radical absence of the 'other' possible representations: the very different inscriptions of feminine desire left 'unfinished' and radically 'ob/scene'. As if to accentuate this point, Marianne's recognition of desire is marked by an absence: a double-space in the text. This space marks the borders of Marianne's narrative and the return of the 'original' narrating 'I' of 'madam' to the text. Yet, madam's attempt to restrain the wandering 'I'/eye of Marianne, to clearly differentiate the gap between the two narratives, is unsuccessful as Marianne's story now becomes the focus of madam's story. Just like Marianne, who addresses her desire for completion to one of her paintings, madam attempts to complete the 'incomplete' portrait of Marianne's for herself. However, as an erotic story written for

the male collector, madam paints a very different portrait of her protagonist's desire. Marianne now becomes the model who is 'drawn' back into the narrative as *object* of investigation, and, as such, she becomes *objectified* by madam's account. Madam writes:

She [Marianne] was also affected by the continuous copying of other people's adventures, for now everyone in our group who wrote gave *his* manuscript to her because she could be *trusted*. Every night little Marianne with the rich, ripe breasts bent over her typewriter and typed fervid words about violent physical happenings. (p.59 my emphasis)

Although the reader is told that Marianne could be 'trusted' to write up the erotica of her male writers, she has obviously not trusted to continue her own narrative. What is more, it is her reading/writing of the 'male members' of this group that further alters the developing story between Marianne and Fred. Having lost *narrative* control, Marianne also appears to lose her *self*-control in the presence of Fred's 'constantly erect, sex' which remains faultlessly 'smooth, polished, firm, tempting' (Nin 1990a, p.59). During one painting session with Fred, she 'finally [...] lost control of herself and fell on her knees before the erect sex. She did not touch it, but merely looked and murmured, "How beautiful it is!"' (p.60). However, as the text progresses the tone becomes more tongue-in-cheek and the distance between the narrator and her narrative becomes exaggerated to reveal a space of resistance. The narrator writes that, '[t]he day after this episode Marianne repeated her worshipful pose, her ecstasy at the beauty of his sex. Again she kneeled and prayed to this strange phallus which demanded only admiration' (p.60). Here, again, there seems to be a slippage between artist and model: it is now the artist (Marianne) who 'poses' before the phallic mastery of her model. Further, in the repetition of this 'worshipful pose' a crucial difference is made present: authenticity becomes contaminated with the possibility of its performance. The mask of adoring femininity briefly slips and in flaunting this 'feminine' phallus worship the narrator holds it at a distance. However, as quickly as this space is

glimpsed it is covered over, and Marianne's desire for looking and admiring becomes a desire to be 'possessed' by the sexually passive Fred. The reader is told that 'she yearned to be possessed by him more completely, to be penetrated' (p.61). Yet, her desire *to be penetrated* becomes a desire *to* penetrate the 'secret' of Fred's passivity, which she urges him to write. However, this written 'confession' that Fred accedes to write returns to Marianne as one of the many erotic manuscripts she is asked to read/type up for the collector: 'So Marianne found herself with her lover's manuscript in her hands. She read avidly before typing, unable to control her curiosity, in search of the secret of his passivity. This is what she read: [sic]' (p.62).

Unsurprisingly Fred's 'confession' re-cites a rather familiar cliché. It is a childhood memory of being watched by a woman who lived opposite whilst he walked naked around his apartment. He writes that, '[t]he woman never ceased looking at me. *Would she make a sign?* Did it excite her to watch me? It must have' (Nin 1990a, p.63 my emphasis). Indeed, 'woman', or Marianne in this case, does become a 'sign' for Fred's desire. He states that '[a]t the mere recollection of these episodes, I get excited. Marianne gives me somewhat the same pleasure. I like the hungry way she looks at me, admiring, worshiping me' (p.63). The pleasure of these texts comes from the re-enactment and re-staging of familiar events that, nonetheless, always attest to the radical absence of presence. Desire, like meaning itself, is played out at the level of the signifier constantly deferring any possibility of Truth or presence.

The parallel structure of writing and reading is accentuated throughout this story through repetition. Marianne's apparent desire to 'penetrate' the Truth of sexuality, the secret 'confession' of the text, is thwarted as the reader/writer is continually confronted with 'other' stories. The *presence* (absence) of stories *within* stories emphasises the permeability of textual boundaries and the very status of sexuality itself as a repeated

(always already read) performance. The 'final' text is a collage of writing/reading that is not one coherent bounded identity, but is rather permeated with multiple voices and points of entry. This undermines any possible sense of authority, of a single authorship that stands 'outside' the text controlling its direction. Indeed, the text is made up of at least five authors which are always already *readers*: madam, Marianne, Fred, Nin, and, of course, the reader her or himself. As such, the text draws attention to the plurality of meanings, to the many other 'ob/scene' stories being told within/out the 'single' or bounded erotic text whose narratives collide, contradict and (mis)read each other.

The final image of Marianne given by madam is one of loss. The last line of this story represents her as a dutiful woman of phallogocentric discourse defined and framed by *lack*. The reader is told that, '[s]oon they [Marianne and Fred] were completely estranged. And Marianne was left alone again to type our erotica' (Nin 1990a, p.64). However, as a *sign* of 'woman' she is already 'elsewhere' and her apparent presence in the text merely *traces* her radical absence. This 'closing' image of her reading/writing erotica echoes the beginning of the text and *another* possible narrative: an 'other' (re)writing. It could be argued that Marianne is given the space or, in the words of Virginia Woolf, a 'room of her own' to recreate 'our erotica' away from the voyeuristic eyes of the reader and the demands of her 'collector'. This (re)writing becomes the space of possible 'other' stories, where repetition is never 'pure' but always contains within it the chance of alteration, of performing the narrative of 'woman' *differently*.

II: 'The Basque and Bijou'. Performing the Fallacy of the Phallus

In this section I will explore in more detail Nin's use of parody as a subversive technique to undermine the authority of the penis as phallus and its central role in the construction of desire. I will concentrate on the story of 'The Basque and Bijou' in *Delta of Venus*, which

is also found in *another* form in the expurgated *Diary, Volume One* (1979a) and *Volume Three* (1979c), and in the ‘unexpurgated’ version *Henry and June* (1990c).³ I will argue that these textual detours, this disregard for the ‘proper’ boundaries of the ‘text’ as book, offer an alternative position from which to rewrite/read ‘other’ possible inscriptions of desire. Nin’s use of parody in her erotica could be seen as a form of resistance to the constant demands of the collector for ‘[l]ess poetry’ and for her to ‘[b]e specific’ (1990a, p.ix). However, despite writing ‘tongue-in-cheek’ (p.viii) and trying to make her stories ‘so exaggerated that I thought he would realize I was caricaturing sexuality’ (p.viii-ix), this ‘other’ meaning appears to fall on deaf ears, producing ‘no protest’ from the collector (p.ix). Angered by his blindness to her parodies, Nin aims straight for the weak spot of masculinity by calling into question his potency as an ‘old man’ (p.ix). Indeed, the number of impotent men in *Delta of Venus* is by no means a coincidence, and it is a point that Edmund Miller notes, rather defensively, in his article ‘Erato Throws a Curve’ (1997):

[a]lthough the *Diary* suggests that Nin could tell from his voice that the patron (whom she never saw in person) must have been an old man, she brazenly peppers her stories with descriptions of men having recurrent erection problems or at least gone limp at some particular moment of erotic opportunity. (Miller 1997, p.172)

Indeed, he argues that it is the theme of ‘a woman squashing an aroused lover’ that ‘the great mass of female critics’ have blindly ‘passed over’ (Miller 1997, p.173). Furthermore he rather astutely notes that ‘[p]robably the very last thing a man wants in erotica is a description of impotence’ (p.172). Apparently unaware of any irony, he chastises Nin’s inability to maintain a *rigid* ‘hyperstructure’, and arrogantly asserts that her ‘tendency to thwart arousal is partly a consequence of the loose plotting’, and partly ‘a feminine misunderstanding of what works to arouse men’ (p.166). Miller’s use of the baseball term

³ This connection between *Volume One* and *Volume Three* of the *Diary* is also discussed by Felber (2002) though she does not extend her analysis to ‘The Basque and Bijou’ in *Delta of Venus*.

‘to throw a curve’ (a demonstration of skill on the part of the pitcher to surprise the batter) is somewhat ambiguous as it seems to suggest that Nin’s erotica does something unexpected within the established genre of erotica. However, having stated unequivocally that ‘[t]he erotic impulse is relatively circumscribed’, it would seem that the unexpected deviation or ‘curve’ that Erato (Nin) – the Greek Muse of love, poetry and mimicry – ‘throws’ seems to be less the skillful twist of mimicry, than the ‘lob’ of either an amateur or a writer ‘too careless to tidy up the inconsistencies’ in her narratives, or even blind to their existence (p.170). As the ‘batter’, Miller seems somewhat perturbed by his own inability to perform the necessary ‘stroke’ to achieve a ‘homerun’. Whilst she may be ‘curiously wide of the mark’ in ‘what works to arouse men’ (p.166), this ‘curve’ or departure from an assumed ‘correct’ marker of desire may serve to highlight the very gaps and inconsistencies which are not necessarily *in* Nin’s erotica, but in the reading conventions which ‘frame’ Miller’s reading of what an erotic text *should be*. Furthermore, Nin’s ability to ridicule, and her refusal to take seriously, what Miller believes to be of vital importance – male potency confirmed and displayed in textual form *and* content – is rewritten as a ‘problem’ or misunderstanding which he is in a position to correct. Miller’s suggestion that her erotica seethes with a repressed hostility marked by her ‘characteristic enmity to erection’ (p.172) reveals his own repressed animosity to Nin’s ‘erection interreptus’ (p.173) which finally erupts in his last paragraph: ‘*Delta of Venus* and *Little Birds* are not erotica and conform precisely to the negative standards of pornography. The works repeatedly forestall arousal, and in her grotesquerie they explicitly vulgarize the sensual’ (Miller 1997, p.181).

In *Volume Three* of the *Diary* Nin states that ‘The Basque and Bijou’ was told to Nin by her lover Gonzalo, which she then wrote down for her collector (1979c, p.81). Whilst the Basque ‘the best of the primitive painters’ (p.82) and Bijou ‘the reigning queen of the prostitutes’ who ‘had a house of her own with a red light over the door’ (p.81),

appear to take the title roles of the story, their performances are sidelined by another more *prominent* star. As Nichols states, in pornographic discourses '[t]he penis as phallus – symbol of sexual potency – is the “true” star [...] A pornographic film is in many ways the story of a phallus' (1991, p.211-212). In *Delta of Venus* (1990a), the 'madam' of this brothel is 'Maman', a 'maternal woman' whose concern for fitting her boys with the right 'glove' is overplayed and parodied (1990a, p.133). Her professionalism was such that, '[e]ven through the trousers, she could measure the client, and set about getting him the perfect glove, a neat fit' (p.133). She even laments the good old days when people knew 'the importance of a fit':

If a man today found himself floating in too large a glove, moving about as in an empty apartment, he made the best of it. He let his member flap around like a flag and come out without the real clutching embrace which warmed his entrails. Or he slipped it in with saliva, pushing as if he were trying to slip under a closed door. (p.133)

What is more, 'if the girl happened to laugh heartily with pleasure or with the pretense of pleasure, he was immediately ousted, for there was no expansion allowed for the swelling of laughter' (p.133-134). The laughter that Nin's text incites both celebrates the textual/sexual pleasures of her erotica and parodies the discourses of phallogentric sexuality and desire in an effort to undermine their seeming rationality and coherence. Therefore, whilst her erotica may *appear* to be moulded to 'fit' the hand of the collector like a glove, it also breaks open that mould to make room for 'other' pleasures. For Cixous, women's laughter is subversive in its potential to break up the regime of phallic Truth and to make space for the feminine in patriarchal law: 'There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter' (1981a, p.258). Unlike the 'tight' or 'clinical' descriptions of sex that the collector appears to demand from Nin, this text

positively swells with the pleasure of parody, burlesque and humour. Here the penis is the object of 'other' kinds of pleasure, less an object of awe and desire than the 'butt' of her joke. For Joanna Frueh, the 'looseness' of words is an analogy for the cultural denigration of woman as 'the sloppy sex' who 'bleeds, fluid oozes from her vagina, she produces milk, and her body is softer than man's' (1996, p.4). She argues that academic discourse demands women to '[b]e tight, like a vagina that holds onto a penis solely for a man's pleasure' (1996, p.4). Yet, this 'looseness' and wetness, she argues, is precisely part of women's erotic faculties and is a strategy for an alternative form of discourse that closely aligns women's sexuality and language: '[w]etness is one signal of a woman's lust. Why should she enjoy making dry arguments? Why should her voice defend the phallus?' (Frueh 1996, p.4).

'The Basque and Bijou' in *Delta of Venus* (1990a) swells with parody, it is a textual shrine to the worship of the phallus. Indeed, whilst the Basque appears to be the protagonist of this story, in *Volume Three of the Diary* (1979c) and *Delta* (1990a), he is presented as a character with whom the reader is unlikely to identify. Right from the outset the narrator tells the reader, in no uncertain terms, that he is a *fraud* having built his reputation as a 'great painter' on the fact that nobody realized that he merely 'copied from postcards' (1990a, p.133). Nin makes a direct link between his identity as 'artist' and his own over appreciation of the powers of his penis. Like his fraudulent paintings, he is equally proud to exhibit his most prized possession: 'his royal *pendentif*' (p.134). She notes that,

[h]e would lay it on the table sometimes as if he were depositing a bag of money, rap with it as if calling for attention. He took it out naturally, as other men take off their coats when they are warm. He gave the impression that it was not at ease shut in, confined, that it was to be aired, to be admired. (p.134)

It seems almost inevitable that his 'royal *pendentif*', the certainty he places in his masculinity and heterosexuality, will prove to be a 'phallacy'. It is not without a sense of irony, or of Lacanian foresight, that in grammar 'pendent' refers to a sentence construction which is *incomplete*: a sentence without a verb, devoid of action (Collins 1994, p.1152).

In *Delta* (1990a), Maman is a parody of the Freudian 'woman' whose desire for the penis is over-played and ridiculed to maximum comic effect. Two and half pages of text are devoted to her escapades. Like a true fan, she tries to catch sneaky glimpses of the much sought after male member. Stationed outside '*urinoirs*' she sometimes 'had the luck to catch the last flash of some golden member, or some dark-brown one, or some fine-pointed one, which she preferred' (Nin 1990a, p.134). Wandering the boulevards she was 'often rewarded with the sight of carelessly buttoned trousers' (p.134). Indeed, Maman is in a positive frenzy on hearing about 'the parade of the Scots soldiers', and could think of nothing else except 'simulating a faint' in order to get a look 'under the short skirt at the hidden "sporrán" swinging with each step' (p.136).

Whilst the initial part of 'The Basque' in *Delta* is devoted to the portrait of Maman, by contrast the majority of the story in *Volume Three* of the *Diary* (1979c) is devoted to the portrait of Bijou, who takes the place of Maman as the 'madam' and prostitute of a Parisian brothel. Though *Delta* (1990a) seems to indulge in phallus worship, the *Diary* (1979c) could be accused of 'womb' worship, and, although Bijou still possesses the talents of Maman in her client's 'fittings', much less is made of this. Indeed, more attention is paid to the 'glove', that is to Bijou, rather than to the hand that fits it. Nin writes that, '[t]his constant living in the eyes, molded by the hands and desire of man, had given her eyes, skin, and motions a singular quality, one which could only be described as the dark and secret womb turned inside out for all to see' (Nin 1979c, p.84). This provocative tone sits in stark contrast to the high burlesque and bravado of 'The Basque' in *Delta* (1990a). Bijou,

like a well-worn glove, merely takes the shape of the hand that wears it: her gestures, her appearance, her desires are 'molded' to 'fit' the desires of men. Moreover, having been 'molded' to fit a singular model, her 'quality' or 'essence' can *only* be described and reduced to 'the dark and secret womb' (p.84). The Basque, the artist who copies from postcards, merely copies a tired cliché of 'woman' as the walking womb and narcissistically he worships the representation he has reproduced. Nin writes:

When the painters discovered Bijou they felt they had found the woman who possessed all the attributes of the prostitute. It was as if this constant living in a climate of sensuality had grown a particular kind of body, produced a phenomenon. Bathed in eroticism, this quality pervaded her body, her gestures, and was as apparent on the exterior, on the surface, as a species of fruit or flower one could recognize among hundreds of others. (1979c, p.83)

Like an object, Bijou is 'discovered' by the mastering eyes of her painters who then re-write her body boundaries to inscribe a 'particular kind of body'. In order to 'know' and gain mastery over her she is fixed within the painter's archives of 'natural' objects, classified as a wholly different species. She is bathed and cleansed by these painters within the discourse of eroticism; her skin is covered with a liquid of erotic signifiers that operate like a second skin, a protective border that keeps her more corporeal, carnal 'wounds' at bay. This second skin of eroticism is a frontier or a frame between the subject (artist) and a more dangerous and contaminating 'other' (muse). Having adorned Bijou with the costume of eroticism, it is made to stand in for her 'identity' and internal 'essence'. In this sense, eroticism is supplemental as it performs the work of the frame in the reinscription of the body boundaries guaranteeing or representing the *ergon* ('woman'). However, there is also an anxious recognition that this 'body' is not *simply* a biological body. Having reinscribed the boundaries of the corporeal to form 'a particular kind of body', this body is 'apparent [*only*] on the exterior, on the surface' (1979c, p.83). The reader is told that:

[h]er skin, too, had a glow which was erotic, not alone the living glow of it, the transparency which revealed the pale turquoise veins, but the *almost imperceptible vibrancy* of nerves and blood under caresses. The satin surface registered the flow of blood, the palpitations of desire. (1979c p.84 my emphasis)

The erotic glow of her skin is constructed on the border between in/visibility. Her skin, a protective layer or 'frame' between self and other, between inside and outside, produces the illusion of transparency. Indeed it appears to glow and to reveal the (corpo)real Truth behind the surface, offering up its 'essence' to be mastered. However, the eroticism of her skin is less the supposed revelation of its 'transparency', than the secret that remains only half 'known': the supposed secret it seems to withhold. According to this narrative, the erotic is the glow or the charge caused by the 'almost imperceptible vibrancy' of the 'nerves and blood' that oscillate under the 'caress' of the hand/pen. Whilst this 'glow' *appears* to signify a transparency, a clear view 'inside', it also draws attention to the inadequacy of perception ('almost imperceptible') to 'see', or to 'know' what 'vibrates': the *movement between* which produces an effect. In this sense, signifiers vibrate and jostle with each other, their meaning merely differing and deferring by their relation to the next signifier in the chain of signification. The 'vibrancy' of the erotic, the visually *loud* becomes visually muted or 'imperceptible', whilst the very limitations of perception become *loudly visible*. The partiality of language and knowledge are foregrounded by the movement of signifiers in the process of meaning which remain 'almost imperceptible'. The 'almost' oscillates on the border of the un/seeable offering a Derridean 'glimpse' (1988d, p.164) into the *between*, to the process of *différance*, which prevents the final fixing of meaning necessary to produce an illusion of the 'real'. What becomes 'almost imperceptible', or almost inconceivable, is the textuality of Bijou's 'skin' as a weave of signifiers that work to produce meaning and 'matter' via a process of *différance*. The

'erotic glow' is not the *presence* of desire but the *trace* of its presence/absence: its 'vibrancy' which *resounds* loudly in an absence. In *Rootprints* Cixous argues that this point of vibration, the movement of signifiers, is the very process of writing and the possibility of resignification:

I write where it vibrates. Where things start to signify. To self-ignify. Very far beyond the simple moment of vibration. There is sending, dispatching, there is jostling together and reverberating; it echoes through our memory, through our body, through foreign memories with which we communicate through subconsciouses. What is of interest to all human beings is what we call the affects, what we are preoccupied with: the *pre-* of the occupation, or the *post-* of the occupation. (1997, p.68)

The 'erotic' straddles the undecidable border between the visible and the invisible, the speakable and the unspeakable. As such it is situated on the limits, at its framing edges, where meanings are produced via a process of difference and deferral.

As this portrait of Bijou unfolds the Basque appears to become more obsessive in his desire to master his lover. The narrator writes: 'In the street, walking behind her when she did not know the Basque was following her, he could see even urchins following her, who had not yet seen her face. It was as if she left a trail of animal perfume, an animal scent behind her' (Nin 1979c, p.85). This is an important move on the part of the narrator who 'catches' the Basque looking and following Bijou. Whilst he remains hidden from Bijou, he remains on show to the reader, incorporated into his own fantasy of mastery. The reader watches the Basque watching Bijou, and, as such, the *painter* becomes *painted* into the space of the womb-diary. Yet, whilst the subject (the Basque) becomes object, the object of the Basque's gaze (Bijou) seems to literally slip from view. The final sentence reads: 'The Basque loved this Bijou, who walked nakedly sexual through the city of Paris . . .' (p.85). This final sentence tails off leaving only the *trace* of her presence: an ellipsis. Bijou, the 'walking womb', wanders into the depths of the diary as womb-writing. Whilst her walk

appears as 'naked' and unmediated, guaranteed by the 'trail of animal perfume' she leaves behind her, this 'trail' is 'nakedly' revealed as an effect of language: the three dots of an ellipsis revealing the presence of an absence. In the re-citing of this erotic story, in the process of repetition from Gonzalo to Nin, and from Nin to her reader, something (Bijou) slips from view. The circle as the symbol of full presence and meaning is ruptured to form an ellipsis, that is, an absence.

Looking for Absences: Performing the Phallus

I now wish to return to the story of 'The Basque and Bijou' in *Delta of Venus* (1990a) in order to explore further the relation between vision and knowledge underpinning traditional understandings of sex, gender and heterosexuality. Having gone to his customary brothel, the Basque is disappointed to learn that his usual source of pleasure, Viviane, is otherwise engaged. However, so as not to disappoint her regular, Maman hides the Basque behind a curtain enabling him to indulge his desires in the act of voyeurism. Looking in on the scene before him he sees, 'four people in the room: a foreign man and woman, dressed with discreet elegance, watching two women on the large bed' (Nin 1990a, p.141). The Basque, assuming a heterosexual norm, presumes that the two 'foreigners' wanted to see a man and a woman: the 'compromise' being 'a rubber penis', a signifier which must stand in for a man in his absence (p.141). However, unlike a 'real' penis, this substitute 'possessed the advantage of never wilting', and, as such, performs the Basque's fantasy of 'a perpetual erection' circulated within mainstream pornographic discourses (p.141). In this sense, the 'fake virility' (p.141 my emphasis) appears to perform its role better than the 'real thing', assuming, of course, its role is to stand in for the potency of 'real' male/masculinity. Whilst great emphasis is placed on the 'fakeness' of the strap-on, there is an uncertainty over what precisely it represents within this scenario: the women's 'real' or 'faked' desires. Indeed,

the reader is told that '[t]he Basque could not tell whether they were pretending or actually enjoying themselves, so perfect were their gestures' (p.141). What is more, it is not clear if these desires (real or faked) are being performed strictly within a heterosexuality fantasy.

As Linda Williams notes, '[w]hen [a] woman puts on the dildo her fantasy does not seem to be that she *is* a man' (1993, p.255). Rather, she suggests that '[t]he point of this play [...] is neither that the dildo is a penis *manquée* nor that it is believed in as substitute for the "real thing", but rather the proof that there is no "real thing" based in biology' (Williams 1993, p.256). Indeed what Bijou 'performs' is the fact that the 'phallus' is *not* the penis, it is detachable, and, therefore, re-locatable. She 'misperforms' the role of the phallus by refusing to 'fit' it in its 'proper' place: 'inside' Viviane. What is more, '[s]he seemed intent on making Viviane feel the penis only from the outside. She handled it like a door knocker, knocking gently against Viviane's belly and loins, then gently teasing the hair, then the tip of the clitoris' (Nin 1990a, p.141). Bijou performs the slippery status of the phallus as signifier, '*sliding this fake virility* not inside but between Viviane's legs, as if she were churning milk' (p.141 my emphasis). Bijou does literally make this signifier of masculinity *slip and slide*, as not only is it attached to the 'wrong' (female) body, but also its attentions are deployed to the 'wrong' place, therefore destabilising a presumed heterosexual 'framing'. In this sense, Bijou, and Nin, 'churn up' and agitate the very discourses of heterosexuality which she seemingly 'churns out' for paying customers.

Furthermore, in the displacement of the phallus from its 'proper' place of residence, it redirects pleasure to *another* site/sight arousing both the desires of Viviane and the 'foreign woman' (Nin 1990a, p.141). When this strap-on touches 'the tip of the clitoris [...] Viviane jumped a little, and so Bijou repeated it, and Viviane jumped again. The foreign woman then leaned over as *if she were nearsighted*, to catch the secret of this sensitivity' (p.141 my emphasis). Here it is the clitoris rather than the phallus that makes an

'entrance' and becomes the site/sight of visual pleasure for the female spectator. However, as briefly as this is mentioned it is covered over and the reader's attention is drawn back to the 'proper' star of the narrative, the (fake) phallus. Unlike the role of the phallus, the clitoris, as the scene of purely female pleasure, is *underplayed* and the sexual curiosity of the female spectator is represented as essentially *lacking* or myopic. This is a significant point in the text and will be returned to later on in this chapter.

This 'fake virility' finally slips into its 'proper' place inside the vagina of Viviane. As if to reaffirm the authenticity of this particular performance the Basque *sees*, and therefore validates, Viviane's 'real' pleasure, the evidence of which is apparently caught, like a corporeal confession, on the end of Bijou's withdrawn penis (Nin 1990a, p.142). The narrator notes that, 'the Basque saw the rubber penis glistening now, almost like a real one, still triumphantly erect' (p.142). Whilst this 'glistening' signifier appears to signify the presence of desire, of sexual pleasure, it is unclear whose desire/s it represents. Since Bijou's 'penis' is 'fake', and therefore not capable of producing semen, this 'glistening' must therefore signify the *trace* of Viviane's pleasure. Yet, the Basque notes that this glistening signifier is 'almost like a real one' in its ability to produce an outward and visible 'proof' of a man's inward state, or indeed 'proof' of an ever-elusive female desire *for* the penis *as* phallus. Whilst the Basque appears to make an identification with the phallus as his own penis, he also seems to have been seduced by the magnificence of this 'still triumphantly erect' penis (p.142), which, unlike the 'real' thing, does not suffer the loss of virility even after it is apparently 'spent'. It therefore becomes uncertain as to which position the Basque takes up within this fantasy scenario: whether he desires to *be* or *have* the phallus – or indeed *both*. However, in identifying with this particularly virile phallus, he not only recognises the phallus as a 'fake' (as a signifier), he also inadvertently identifies with Bijou as 'woman', and, what is more, with a position that is blatantly a performance.

In this sense, the Basque occupies a dangerous, and potentially castrating, undecidable position as wo/man.

The Basque's privileged and supposedly all-seeing position 'outside' of the performance is an illusion which becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Faced with uncertainty, the Basque is unable to sustain his 'masculine' or voyeuristic position as spectator and, as such, he intervenes turning himself into a spectacle: 'The Basque suddenly opened the door. He bowed and said, "You wanted a man and here I am." He threw off his clothes' (Nin 1990a, p.142). Having assumed his privileged status within this performance of phallic desire by announcing that he *has* what this performance ultimately *lacks*, he still appears haunted by his own absence. Indeed, the Basque betrays the uncertainty of his status as a 'real' man by announcing and confirming his *presence* in language: 'You wanted a man and here I am' (p.142). Yet, whilst he strips 'bare', he reveals not his presence but his absence or loss within this performance, as he merely exchanges one set of signifiers (his clothes) for another (speech).

After an initial threesome, the Basque's desires are addressed not to the 'feminine' Viviane but to Bijou who appears to oscillate between masculine and feminine subject positions. This gender ambivalence does not appear to be resolved by the 'reality' of the Basque's penis/phallus, and in taking up a 'traditional' dominant heterosexual pose, the reader is told that 'a strange thing happened' (Nin 1990a, p.142). This 'strange thing' occurs in the following scene:

Bijou lay full length under the Basque [...] The Basque was crouching over this women who bloomed under him like some hothouse flower, odorous, moist, with erotic eyes and wet lips, a full-blown woman, ripe and voluptuous; yet her rubber penis stood erect between them, and the Basque was overtaken with an odd feeling. (p.142-3)

In the above passage, Bijou's apparent submission under the weight of the phallus, her 'natural' positioning as 'woman', is guaranteed by the abundant clichés of 'natural' femininity that 'bloom' only within the presence of what it *lacks*: a desire of her own. The semicolon differentiates between the 'natural' positioning of 'woman', as responsive to the desires of 'man', and the cultural or artificial signifier of 'fake virility' that stands in the way of the Basque's ultimate mastery of his 'possession'. However, it also serves to foreground the artificiality of the 'natural' position of woman. Whilst the rubber penis appears as an 'obvious' signifier, as 'unreal' and as a stand in or for something believed to be 'missing', it also calls into question the so-called 'natural' signifiers used to define the 'reality' of a 'full-blown woman'. Perhaps the 'odd feeling' that overtakes the Basque is the truly 'abysmal' revelation that the difference between 'nature' (real) and 'culture' (fake), the very opposition structuring our sense of identity and the most intimate of our desires, is an effect of the signifier. The 'strangeness' of this moment is perhaps the point at which the most familiar becomes unfamiliar. As Belsey asks: 'what if sexuality precisely calls into question that opposition between nature and culture? What if there is no human sexual relation outside culture, outside the regime of the signifier?' (Belsey 1994, p.5). According to Lacan individuals are positioned in relation to the phallus as either 'being' (feminine) or 'having' (masculine) the phallus (1982a, p.84). The Basque's status as a 'real' masculine man is determined by his assumption of 'having' the phallus whilst Bijou merely *fakes* her position. However, this 'having' is only ever an illusion, 'appearing' as a reality that is in fact only ever a substitute, a stand in for reality (a signifier). As Lacan reminds us, the phallus is not the property of *anybody*, but is rather an effect of language. As a signifier, the phallus stands in for the *objet a*, that is, the lost object in the real (Belsey 1994, p.63). Indeed, Bijou appears to oscillate undecidably between feminine and masculine subject

positions: whilst she appears to 'bloom[ed] under him' (to 'be' the phallus), she also seems to 'have' her own phallus.

Unnerved by his 'odd' or uncertain position, the Basque 'commanded' Bijou to take off her strap-on in order to assert his authority as masculine subject and apparent owner of the 'real' phallus (Nin 1990a, p.143). However, this authority is quickly undermined by Bijou, as whilst the Basque 'threw himself on her [...], she, still holding the penis, held it over the buttocks of the man who was now buried inside of her. When he raised himself to thump into her again, she pushed the rubber penis inside of his buttocks' (p.143). As such *both* the Basque and Bijou become the penetrator *and* the penetrated. Unable to gain a foothold, to take a place in the symbolic, '[t]he Basque was sliding back and forth. The bed rocked as they rolled, clutching and folding' (p.143). Indeed, the very foundations, the 'bedrock' of heterosexuality and gender identity as radical difference begins to slide. He finds himself in 'turmoil' unable to take a *stable* and single subject position, feeling 'not only his own turmoil but hers as well' (p.143). He becomes 'contaminated' by, and unable to keep a distance between, his 'self' and the 'other'. His only solution is to 'possess her to annihilation', to efface the *trace* of the 'other' within the selfsame and to (re)assert his authority: '[s]he cried as if he had murdered her' (p.143). However, having won back his status as a 'real' man, his 'lance [was] still erect, red, inflamed' (p.143). Though his virility seems not to have failed him, neither is it 'naturally' spent and his inflamed 'real' penis now appears to take on the 'perpetual erection' of its 'fake' counterpart (p.141). What is more, his 'red, inflamed' state seems less to signify his 'manliness' than his own humiliation at being found out that he is a fraud. Indeed, his penis is never really *present* within the narrative itself; rather it always *stands in for* something *other* than itself. In this instance, his 'royal *pendentif*' (p.134) is substituted once again for a more defensive weapon of battle: a 'lance'.

However, Bijou, the object of the Basque's frustrations, is not defeated or 'murdered' by the piercing of his 'lance', but rather she is found to be 'sitting up, laughing, her tilted eyes long and narrow' (p.144). Her laughter is at the Basque's (and possibly the reader's) *lack*, and, as such, she 'tilts' *her* 'lance', and momentarily (j)ousts the Basque, from his assumed privileged position.⁴ Her 'tilted' vision is oblique. It is not at (the) 'right angle' to *see* the misrecognition of the penis as the phallus but rather the *lack* within vision itself: the unbridgeable *gap* between 'signifier' and 'signified'. Furthermore, the tilt of the 'mirror' of pornography puts into question the reality of its representation and the partiality of its construction. As Susanne Kappeler states, '[t]he question should never arise as to who is holding the mirror, for whose benefit, and from what angle' as this 'would make this concept of the mirror – and hence of reality – problematical' (1986, p.2-3). As I will continue to argue, it is this oblique look which offers an alternative angle from which to re-read the performance of text/sexuality.

The Myopic Inter-View

Many feminists have taken issue with the privileged role of the visual in psychoanalytical discourses which works to (re)confirm the 'norm' of the male subject and (re)produce asymmetrical power relations between differing bodies and genders. Doane argues that it is the *lack* of both a spatial and temporal gap between the little girl's 'seeing' and 'knowing' that produces the *illusion* of an unmediated 'reality' of her castration: she *is* the lack (1991). In the story of 'The Basque and Bijou' in *Delta of Venus*, the 'foreign' female spectator is visualised as *lacking* in visual mastery: she is myopic, or 'nearsighted' (Nin 1990a, p.141). However, I will argue that it is precisely this marginalised look of the 'foreign' woman in *Delta* that further calls into question the unity and coherence of the text as a visual display

⁴ I owe this idea to Jane Moore (1994).

of phallic mastery. This particular reading, like Bijou's 'tilted' vision, reads not for its coherence, but rather, as Butler suggests, for its gaps: its spaces for opportunistic intervention (1997, p.69). The Basque and the reader both appear to occupy the 'all-seeing' subject position of voyeurism: a position which, 'symbolizes an economy based on seeing but not being seen [...] an economy of knowledge predicated on distance and control centered around a single, all-seeing vantage point' (Nichols 1991, p.212). However, as I will argue, this position of mastery is threatened by the 'nearsighted', 'foreign woman' whose *closer look* opens up other ways of seeing (Nin 1990a, p.141). It is the proximity of the 'foreign' look within this text that disrupts the fiction of phallic mastery and has the potential to transform the boundaries of the text beyond the boundaries of the book itself. This point of rupture within *Delta*, the look of the 'foreign' woman, is directed 'outside' the text of *Delta* (1990a) and 'outside' the frame of heterosexual phallic desire towards the narrative 'I'/eye in *Henry and June* (1990c). At the risk of overplaying the relevance of this 'defective' female look, I wish to argue that this *closer look* deviates from the textual limits of phallic mastery, disrupting the illusion of phallic unity constituting the 'knowledge' of women's *lacking* bodies and libido.

In *Literary Liaisons*, Lynette Felber argues that there is an interrelation between *Volume One* of the *Diary* and *Henry and June* which is structured around the female spectator. She suggests that this becomes 'an initiation into an exclusively female sexuality, one from which men are excluded' (2002, p.53). Whilst the performance of lesbian sex for a male voyeur is a 'set piece in male-directed pornography', Felber proposes that Nin breaks with this tradition by adding into the piece the female voyeur (2002, p.53). Furthermore, it is the inclusion of this female voyeur within *Volume One* of the *Diary* and *Henry and June* that allows for another type of vision. She writes that, '[b]oth versions make clear, in different ways, that although they perhaps do not see "everything," they do

see something new, and see differently' (Felber 2002, p.53). She argues that both episodes 'refashion the June/Anaïs, mother/daughter dyad through an erotic fantasy in which the male role, even as gazer, is diminished' (Felber 2002, p.53). Whilst I find Felber's insights engaging, I feel that Nin is more playful with the concept of the look as a way of reproducing and undermining embodied subjectivities, particularly given that the context of this exploration is an 'exhibition' or sexual performance. What is more, Felber does not make the connection between her diaries and her erotica, which, I argue, further troubles the border between body and text.

In *Henry and June*, Nin persuades Hugo to go to a brothel at 32 rue Blondel 'just to see' an 'exhibition' between prostitutes (1990c, p.70). It is as they walk through the doors of the café that the narrator flags a shift, or a disruption in subject positions. She states, '[a]nd now we are in a play. *We are different*' (Nin 1990c, p.70 my emphasis). The narrator becomes *both* spectator and spectacle. Upon entering the café they are lead to a table by the *patronne* and asked to choose two girls. As Felber notes, Nin takes a more 'active' or 'masculine' role in initiating the evening and in choosing the prostitutes she wishes to watch (2002, p.52). However, having assumed this 'masculine' position, something happens to the narrator/Nin's vision. As she watches these women dance for her and Hugo, she notes, 'I see only in spots, intensely. Certain places are utter blanks to me. I see big hips, buttocks, and sagging breasts, so many bodies, all at once' (Nin 1990c, p.70-71). I would argue that it is this particular way of looking that reproduces these women's bodies as inherently *lacking*. Paradoxically, having paid for unrestricted access to the sight of these women something seems to obscure her vision. Whilst she sees 'intensely' certain sexualised areas of the female body, anything *other* is simply passed over as 'utter blanks', *lacking* signification or value (p.70). In this act it seems that she is performing a particularly gendered *way of seeing*, which, whilst giving an illusion of 'explicitness',

merely covers over or disavows its multiple absences. Rose argues that, 'It is possible to think of visuality as a sort of discourse too. A specific visuality will make certain things visible in particular ways, and other things unseeable, for example, and subjects will be produced and act within that field of vision' (2001, p.137).

By *masquerading* as a spectator, by oscillating between the subject and the object of the gaze, the narrator destabilises the image before her and the reader (Doane 1991, p.26). In this sense, she brings into focus the limitations of the magnifying lens, that is, what it must ultimately obscure or 'blank' out in order to create an illusion of realism. In the preface to *Delta of Venus*, Nin specifically aligns this misrecognition of 'explicitness' to a masculine treatment of sexual experience. Accusing her collector of this particular form of phallogentric fantasy, she states, '[y]ou do not know what you are missing by your microscopic examination of sexual activity to the exclusion of aspects which are the fuel that ignites it' (Nin p.1990a, p.xii). What is more, she argues, '[h]ow much do you lose by *this periscope at the tip of your sex*, when you could enjoy a harem of distinct and never-repeated wonders? No two hairs alike, but you will not let us waste words on a description of hair; no two odors, but if we expand on this you cry Cut out the poetry [sic] (1990a, p.xii my emphasis).

In *Henry and June*, the reader is told that Nin and Hugo had expected to watch a man and a woman perform rather than two women. However, the *patronne* simply replies that, 'the two girls will amuse you. *You will see everything*' (Nin 1990c, p.71 my emphasis). Their fears of a *lacking* visual spectacle, felt in the absence of the penis/phallus, are put to rest by the *patronne's* promise of their visual mastery. The narrator/Nin and Hugo are then led to a private room where the women take up their roles in this sexual performance. Both women assume 'heterosexual poses' aided by the addition of a strap-on. The narrator notes:

We watch the big woman tie a penis on herself, a rosy thing, a caricature. And they take poses, nonchalantly, professionally. Arabian, Spanish, Parisienne, love when one does not have the price of a hotel room, love in a taxi, love when one of the partners is sleepy . . . (p.71)

However, in this narrative the lack of authenticity in these heterosexual poses is emphasised as they foreground the process of their performance. Whilst the narrator and Hugo find their 'sallies' amusing they 'learn nothing new. It is all unreal' (p.71). Indeed, what these women seem to display is that sexuality is a 'performance', a set of learnt 'poses' repeated and cited as a 'natural' or instinctual desire. However, whilst Hugo and Nin 'look on' (p.71) at the two women's performance, they are also being 'look[ed] on' by the reader. The emphasis on the inauthentic, on the performance of these two women, seems to parody the narrator's own masquerade as spectator/spectacle within her own textual performance of *Henry and June*. As I have already mentioned, upon entering the café, the narrator appears to assume her position as spectacle on stage noting 'now we are in a play' (p.70), whilst the *patronne* appears to promise them a prime position as spectators from which they 'will see everything' of the(ir own) performance (p.71). It is also at this point of vacillation that *Henry and June* (1990c) and *Delta of Venus* (1990a) appear to rub up against each other. It is this movement between two textual surfaces that produces another 'inter-view': a space of the 'ob/scene'.

Before I proceed, I would like to return, to 'detour' briefly, to *Delta of Venus* (1990a). To be specific, to the scene in which the Basque, who, still hidden behind the curtain at his local brothel, finds himself looking in upon a scene that seems remarkably similar to that described by the narrator in *Henry and June* (Nin 1990a, p.140-1; 1990c, p.71). It is almost as if he himself, like the reader, is 'looking on' to the text of *Henry and June*. The effect of this textual transgression is to destabilise the Basque's 'image': the

'text', which he sees/reads before him becomes unstable, sliding between multiple possibilities. Seen from this perspective, the 'foreign' man and woman which the Basque describes might possibly be the narrator (Nin) and her husband Hugo, performing their roles elsewhere in an entirely *other* text/performance. It might even be Nin and Henry as this same scene is similarly told in *Volume One* of the *Diary*, except that in this *récit* it is Henry who appears to stand in for Hugo (Nin 1979a, p.65-67). Indeed precisely *what* the Basque 'look[s] on' *to* becomes unclear. The scene that unfolds before him is undecidably located *between* different and differing textual repetitions. This image is not fixed in the 'frame' or within the boundaries of his vision; rather it always retains within it the 're-cite' or *trace* of an 'other' 'ob/scene' text within its margins.

When these texts are read against each other, it would appear that Viviane's phallus-wielding partner in *Delta* (1990a) is also Bijou in *Volume Three* of the *Diary* (1979c). Furthermore, the reader is told in *Delta* that, '[t]his is how the Basque found Bijou' (1990a, p.140). Given the many different 'forms' of this text, there is more than one way to interpret this statement. On the one hand, it *is* the first time that Bijou appears in the story of 'The Basque and Bijou' as it is re-cited in *Delta*. In this sense, this is the point in the narrative when the Basque first 'found', or meets, Bijou. On the other hand, this could also refer to the 'lost' Bijou of *Volume Three* of the *Diary* (1979c): the 'walking womb' who wanders or disappears 'outside' of the textual frame. If this is the case, then it is on this 'detour' into *Delta* that the reader and the Basque now literally 'find' Bijou, having picked up that 'trail of animal perfume' (1979c, p.85) left behind in the *Diary*. If we accept this scenario, the reader may be tempted to fill in the 'ellipsis' of those three dots with a presence; the lost object is found and she returns to fulfil or confirm a presence. Indeed, the figure of Bijou appears to straddle the boundaries between these two texts, this 'walking womb' wanders 'hysterically' into places where she does not entirely 'belong'. In this sense

she is *both* within and without the textual borders, *both* inside and outside of the *Diary* and *Delta*. She oscillates on the boundaries of in/visibility which seem dependent on her relationship to the phallus and the presence or absence of her own desiring subjectivity.

Returning once again to *Henry and June*, the reader is told that the performances of the two prostitutes with the 'fake penis' holds 'nothing new' for the two spectators (1990c, p.71). However, it is in the absence of the strap-on, in the performance of 'lesbian poses', that female pleasure *appears* to be revealed. The narrator notes:

The little woman loves it, loves it better than the man's approach. The big woman reveals to me a secret place in the woman's body, a source of new joy, which I had sometimes sensed but never definitely – that small core at the opening of the woman's lips, *just what the man passes by*. There, the big woman works with the flicking of her tongue. The little woman closes her eyes, moans, and trembles in ecstasy. (Nin 1990c, p.71-72 my emphasis)

It is precisely the articulation and representation of female desires by women, the 'opening of woman's lips', which have been 'passed over' or marginalised by the Basque's display of phallogentrism in *Delta* (1990a). Furthermore, it also highlights the construction of gender in relation to spatiality and vision; whilst the woman is nearsighted and leans in closer to the female body, the Basque's vision is voyeuristic, and is characterised by the distance he places between himself and 'other' bodies. Doane notes, 'It is precisely this opposition between proximity and distance, control of the image and its loss, which locates the possibilities of spectatorship within the problematic of sexual difference' (1991, p.22). Whilst the Basque, and indeed the reader, assume a mastering voyeuristic position 'outside' of the exhibition, the woman's look is assumed to be partial and *lacking*: she is too close to herself and the (female) body to gain visual mastery. Yet, by excluding or omitting from the narrative in *Delta* the 'secret' of 'woman's' pleasure, the viewpoint of the Basque is, by implication, *lacking* and incomplete. It is ultimately the 'foreign woman's' different

relation to the female body that disrupts the unifying fiction of a one-sex model reproduced within phallogentric erotica. It is the curiosity of both 'Nin' (*Henry and June*) and the 'foreign woman' (*Delta of Venus*), their desire to 'look' *differently*, that produces a discursive space or passageway *between* textual frames. This dialogic 'inter-view' holds the possibility for the re-inscription of multiple feminine desires that exceed the framing boundaries of phallogentricism. As such, the unity of 'The Basque and Bijou' is disrupted, and, exceeding its textual boundaries, it is re-cited and re-written in *another* form 'elsewhere'. In this sense, female *form* and *content* are represented as excessive of a unifying 'ideal' textual form. Oscillating between '*at least two*', the sex/text of the feminine remains undecidably '*neither one nor two*' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.26).

Felber argues that it is specifically the rejection of the 'third term', the 'patriarchal obstacle', that allows the erotic mother-daughter encounter (2002, p.53). Further, she suggests that Nin is able to 'gaze[s] upon herself (the "little woman")', and, as such, identify with the daughter in a fantasy of pre-symbolic union (2002, p.53). She proposes that by reversing Freud's discourse of the daughter's discovery of her 'castration', Nin enables 'the acquisition first of gender identity, then of libido' (Felber 2002, p.54). However, I would hesitate to fix this difference so quickly as the gaze appears to have a more destabilising effect on the gender identities of these spectators. The narrating 'I' states: 'Hugo is in turmoil. I am no longer woman; I am man. I am touching the core of June's being' (Nin 1990c, p.72). It would *appear* that neither of the spectators are where they are supposed to be. Their expectations of arousing heterosexual desires are thwarted by the apparently more powerful presence of something 'other'. Whilst Hugo is in 'turmoil', the narrator appears to be both inside and outside the scene. She is watching and recalling some

other scene between herself and June.⁵ The narrating ‘I’ destabilises the image that appears before the reader as s/he oscillates ambiguously on the very border *between* texts. Whilst she appears to identify with ‘the big woman’ whose ‘tongue’ is capable of ‘touching the core’ or invoking the desires of the other woman (June), she also appears to identify with the desires of ‘[t]he little woman’: the desire for another’s ‘tongue’ to speak the unspeakable (1990c, p.71). In this sense the narrative hovers between ‘tongues’ on the borders of symbolic language where ‘other’ desires become half-spoken between the narrator and the two women: ‘Do I want...? They unfasten my jacket; I say no, I don’t want anything’ (Nin 1990c, p.72). The narrator notes, ‘[t]hat moment alone stirred my blood with another desire. If we had been a little madder...’ (p.72). This ‘other’ desire haunts the border of the speakable, marked in language by the absence/presence of the ellipsis. This ellipsis gestures towards another story, spoken in another tongue, and falling *between* the signifier and the signified. However, the heterosexual framework of this narrative is apparently restored upon Nin and Hugo’s return home when their desires are then redirected towards each other. The narrator writes that, ‘we sank into sensuality together with new realization. *We are killing phantoms*’ (p.72 my emphasis). Perhaps this ‘new realization’ is that (sexual) identity is haunted by the phantasmal *trace* of ‘another desire’ which both produces and defers the very possibility of presence (p.72).

However, these ‘other desires’, these ‘phantoms’ haunting the unity of the text, keep it open to *other* possible re-inscriptions. I would argue that where *Delta* (as erotica) and *Henry and June* (as diary) brush up against and touch upon each other, they produce a ‘glimpse’ or an ‘inter-view’ of an *other scene*: an ‘ob/scene’ space of feminine pleasure that vacillates on the borderline of in/visibility. Like Irigaray’s two lips, the proximity of these

⁵ June was the second wife of Henry Miller and with whom Nin has a brief affair. *Henry and June* (1990c) is the ‘unexpurgated’ diary/story of this love triangle between Nin, Henry and June.

two texts, their 'passing' over each other, produces an auto/erotic pleasure that belongs neither to one text nor the other. Rather this pleasure breaks apart the 'framing' narrative of (scopo)phallic pleasure which works to fix the object of desire 'inside' the body of the woman/text. Irigaray writes:

Ownership and property are doubtless quite foreign to the feminine. At least sexually. But not *nearness*. Nearness so pronounced that it makes all discrimination of identity, and thus all forms of property, impossible. Woman derives pleasure from what is *so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself*. She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either. (1985b, p.31)

These two lips/texts engage in a dialogue which redirects the gaze from the central 'performance' (from an illusion of full presence) to the margins of the text. It is here where its 'proper' boundaries are subjected to 'woman's pleasure, as it increases indefinitely from its passage in and through the other' (Irigaray 1985b, p.31).

III: 'Mallorca': A Fluid Between

In this final section I will explore this 'ob/scene' or excessive space of 'feminine' pleasure with reference to another story in *Delta of Venus*, 'Mallorca'. This is a story set in a cove just below the village of Deya (Mallorca) and depicts the sexual awakening of a local girl called Maria. The reader is told that the narrator is 'spending the summer in Mallorca, in Deya, near the monastery where George Sand and Chopin stayed' (Nin 1990a, p.25). Every day s/he would make the 'hard, difficult road to the sea, down the mountain' to the cove, 'where the sea came into a small round bay of such transparency that one could swim to the bottom and see the coral reefs and unusual plants' (p.25). Laced with a touch of exoticism, this 'cove' becomes the site of an erotic fantasy. As a space of 'such transparency' it seduces the subject into a (mis)recognition of his/her powers to see beyond the surface of language, to 'know' and master the 'real' depths of corporeal desire. The 'cove' appears to

be a signifier of female genitalia, of a 'hidden' sanctuary and place of forbidden pleasures where feminine sexuality is awoken and a prelinguistic polymorphous perversity can be (re)explored.

However, the story is not simply about Maria's erotic pleasures in this watery cove, it is also a story about the storytelling process itself. The tale is told in the first person by an unnamed and ungendered narrator who re-tells what s/he refers to as this 'strange story' that 'was told of the place by the fishermen' (1990a, p.25). The storytelling process, the process of re-telling or re-citing, emphasises the *differences* or the 'strangeness' in the very process of repetition. This supposedly 'transparent' cove is also, somewhat paradoxically, the site of the unfamiliar: it is a '*strange* story'. It is in the very *movement* between languages, in the process of translation (presumably from an 'original' Spanish narrative into English), where language comes adrift and where desire slips or escapes the fix of the signified. After all, desire is an *effect* of the signifier and is (dis)located in the gap between the signifier (word) and the signified (referent). Indeed, contrary to the narrator's assurances of its 'transparency', the cove is a site for the expression of cultural *differences* between local and/or European and North American women which become apparent specifically in attitudes towards female sexuality and the body. The 'inaccessible, puritanical and religious' women of Mallorca 'looked with disapproval on the midnight bathing parties innovated by Americans' and their desires to 'lie naked in the sun like pagans' (p.25). These differences are marked on the body by the clothes these women wear and are inscribed within a narrative of temporal difference. Whilst the Mallorcan women wore the 'long skirted bathing suits and black stockings of *years ago*', the 'shameless European women' wore '*modern* bathing suits' (p.25 my emphasis).

Interestingly, it is an eighteen-year-old daughter of a local fisherman (Maria) who forms both the centre and the margins of this narrative. The first image the reader is given

of Maria is on one particular evening as she is 'walking along the edge of the sea' (1990a, p.25). This female figure precariously treads the line between land and sea, as she is found 'leaping from rock to rock' to escape the soft lapping of the water at her feet (p.25). It is at this slippery point, where the boundary between solid ground becomes invaded by its fluid other, that the body of this girl is visually 'framed' by the narrator: 'leaping from rock to rock, her white dress clinging to her body' (p.25). Her white dress, her 'purity', is represented as 'clinging' desperately to a body that is dangerously situated between girlhood and womanhood, and which, according to the conventions of the erotic narrative, will inevitably topple into the forbidden abyss of female sexual awakening. Her moonlit wanderings bring her to this 'hidden cove where she noticed that someone was swimming' (p.25). Whilst the swimmer was too far away to be identified s/he appeared to know Maria and calls out her name 'in Spanish with a foreign accent' inviting her to join in with the evening bathing (p.25). Maria responds to the invitation with apparent caution seeking to identify the owner of this voice:

She [Maria] answered, 'Who are you?'
 'I'm Evelyn,' said the voice, 'come and swim with me!'
 It was very tempting. Maria could easily take off her white dress and wear only her short white chemise. She looked everywhere. There was no one around. (p.26)

However, whilst the 'proper' name 'Evelyn' appears to identify this swimmer, it fails to name a specific (gendered) body. Indeed, Maria believes that it was 'one of the young American women who bathed there during the day' (p.25). Like the 'I' of the narrator, 'Evelyn' oscillates undecidably between a signifier of embodied male and/or female subjectivity. Tempted by the invitation, Maria nervously glances around, checking 'everywhere' to ensure no one can see her undress. However, 'outside' the water she remains on view to the reader whose eyes become the 'I' of the narrator: 'She took off her

dress. She had long black hair, a pale face, slanted green eyes, greener than the sea. She was beautifully formed, with high breasts, long legs, a stylized body' (p.26). It is only once in this watery cove that Maria appears to engage in a pre-Oedipal fluidity in which the dominance of sight is eluded by touch and ambiguity. As she enters the cove, 'Evelyn embrac[ed] her from behind, *covering her whole body with hers*. The water was lukewarm, like a luxuriant pillow, so salty that it bore them, helping them to float and swim without effort' (p.26 my emphasis). Their pleasure seems to be in the abandon of their bodies to the drift of language as they are held in 'suspension' by the fluid movement of signifiers. Indeed, 'Maria wanted to float away', yet she remains suspended, 'held by the warmth of the water, the constant touch of her friend's body' (p.26).

This cove becomes the site of playful abandon where the two 'wrestled' with each other, touching and embracing, 'swimming nonchalantly away and back to each other' (Nin 1990a, p.26). Like the fluid morphology of Irigaray's 'two lips', the body boundaries between Evelyn and Maria ebb and flow with the water as they become '*neither one nor two*' (1985b, p.26). Both play around in this fluid drift, diving underwater *in-between* each other's legs in order to 'reappear *on the other side*' (Nin 1990a, p.26, my emphasis). Questions of Evelyn's gender also 'float' and dance around the physicality of Evelyn's body. The physical or biological differences that Maria notices between her own and Evelyn's body do not seem to signify sexual difference (male and female), but rather they figure as difference *within* difference itself. Maria notes that s/he wears a bathing cap which 'made it difficult to see the face clearly', though, having noted Evelyn's 'deep voice', she simply reasons that 'American women had voices like boys' (1990a, p.26). Even as they embraced '[s]he did not feel breasts on her friend, but, then, she knew young American women she had seen did not have breasts' (p.26). Interestingly, though the body seems to be the primary referent for the 'disclosure' of (sexual) identity, in this case, the body, like

language, 'fails' to identify Evelyn's 'true' gender. The 'body' to which Maria refers does not speak unmediated or 'naturally', but rather it is a sign overlaid with cultural meanings.

This 'languid' and continuous pleasure is suddenly interpreted by 'something else, something so unexpected, so disturbing that she [Maria] screamed' (1990a, p.26-27). It is the presence of this 'something else' (the penis) which finally appears to make what is *present an absence*: '[t]his was no Evelyn but a young man, Evelyn's younger brother, and he had slipped his erect penis between her legs' (p.27). This disturbance or interruption, causes a rupture within the text whereby Evelyn simply *disappears* from view. This 'other' or 'feminine' (Evelyn), which is repressed or banished in the presence of the phallus, appears to slip under the fluid surface of language to form the marginalised 'semiotic'. In Evelyn's place, her (br)*other* becomes simply, 'the boy' and is defined and identified by 'the penis' (p.27). This recognition of 'difference' and of loss seems to re-perform the subject's movement into the symbolic, and, as such, Evelyn's ambiguity must come under the identifying mark of the phallus. Yet, despite Maria's scream, the narrator notes that this 'was only something she had been trained to expect of herself. In reality his embrace seemed to her as lulling and warming and caressing as the water' (p.27). Indeed, this lost polymorphous state, the 'other' fluid Evelyn who falls from sight beneath the surface of the water, remains an active part in this erotic experience: 'The water and the penis and the hands conspired to arouse her body' (p.27). Whilst the movement and fluidity of the water colludes with the penis and the hand to arouse the pleasures of Maria, it also conspires against the boy's desires to identify, and fix his defining 'other': '[w]ith the *constant motion* he could not really take her, but his penis touched her over and over again in the most vulnerable tip of her sex, and Maria was losing her strength' (p.27 my emphasis). Maria's pleasures remain undecidably between the water and the penis, between 'feminine' and 'masculine' libidinal energies. Indeed, it is the pleasure of this *movement* between the

two, a bisexual oscillation of the passing from the 'one' to the 'other' that appears to arouse her desire.

Significantly it is on the shoreline, on the 'transitional' site *between* the land and sea that '[t]he boy then took the girl, and the sea came and washed over them and washed away the virgin blood' (p.27). This difference between 'boy' and 'girl' is temporarily fixed only to be 'washed over', to be set adrift again, by the movement of the sea of signifiers. Eager to repeat this performance, the reader is told that '[f]rom that night they met only at this hour. He took her there in the water, swaying, floating' (p.27). However 'he' and 'her' are not fixed to any specific bodies, the border between self and other is undermined by the sway of the water, which, like language, sets difference adrift to the movement of *différance*. As Derrida states, 'One is but the other different and deferred, one differing and deferring the other' (1982c, p.18). The narrator notes that '[t]he wavelike movements of their bodies as they enjoyed each other seemed part of the sea' (Nin 1990a, p.27). The watery 'semiotic' or feminine aspect of signification undermines the stability of subjectivity and the fix of the phallus, ensuring that the subject remains in process and subject to the fix and drift of the dual modes of signification.

The final sentence of the story brings the narrator back into focus and attempts to contain the fluid contents of the story within a secure narrative framework: to inscribe a 'shoreline' between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the text. The narrator writes that, '[w]hen I went down to the beach at night, I often felt as though I could see them, swimming together, making love' (p.27). This last line draws attention to the textuality of this story, to its *lack* of presence and the very *gaps* in its framing narrative. The narrator, and presumably the 'good' or 'faithful' reader, is seemingly seduced by the apparent transparency of the cove and of the signifier to reproduce its referent: 'I often *felt as though* I could see them' (p.27 my emphasis). This story appears to bring back 'an imagined

originary presence, a half-remembered “oceanic” pleasure in the lost real, a completeness which is desire’s final, unattainable object’ (Belsey 1994, p.5). Whilst the ‘I’ of the narrative remains distanced from the scene of his or her desire s/he is also inscribed within the story itself. ‘Mallorca’ is not simply a story, but it is a story *of a story* being re-told within a narrative for erotic effect. The ‘I’ of the narrator oscillates between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the text, and it is in the site of the *between* that the ‘oceanic’, re-remembered story of desire is written. Unfixed from any outside referent, the ‘I’ remains multiple and changeable, subjected to the reinscription of ‘other’ desires. The repetition of this narrative passed from one ‘I’ to an ‘other’, unfixes it from the ‘real’, from an ‘outside’ authorial presence, as the ‘shorelines’ between bodies and texts succumb to the fluid drift of language and the multiple pleasures of a desiring or ‘be-coming’ I (Cixous 1996b, p.100).

Conclusion:

Looking for/in the Gaps

Focusing on the work of Anaïs Nin, this thesis has explored the role of the border in the cultural production of bodies and sexual difference within Western discourses of sexuality, with particular reference to psychoanalysis and modernist discourses. In Chapter One I explored the various ways in which borders have been appropriated in order to centralise the (re)production and (re)presentation of phallogocentric thinking whereby ‘knowledges’ of differentiated bodies work to enforce asymmetrical relations of power between (en)gendered subjects and their ‘objects’ of analysis. Drawing on the work of various poststructuralist, deconstructionist and feminist psychoanalytical theorists, I argued that the trope of the borderline is an important site of resistance within/out Nin’s texts and offers alternative ways of reading/writing the feminine, which is neither singular nor fixed, but is rather an unstable, multiple and temporary effect of difference.

In Chapter Two I attempted to read Nin’s diaries in relation to the considerable feminist debates on gender, modernism and genre, and in particular recent feminist appropriations of autobiographical theory, which explore the constitution of identity and embodied subjectivity in language. I hope to have both added to this debate and to Nin scholarship by focusing on the borderline itself as the site of *différance*, which resists the constitution of ‘essences’ and the closure of meanings thus keeping open the possibility of resistance. In this chapter I drew upon Derrida’s deconstructive approach to the borderline in the constitution of genres in ‘The Law of Genre’ (1980) and his questioning of the boundary between the ‘life’ and the ‘work’ in *The Ear of the Other* (1988a). I also utilised Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory of the ‘mirror stage’ (Lacan 1989) which posits that subjectivity is founded on a fundamental misrecognition of the self as Other. To these

theories, I added the asymmetrical borders of gender and argued that Nin utilises the ambiguous, borderline positionality of the feminine gender's relation to the b/order of language, the unconscious, and the radical instability of the autobiographical genre to put into question both the 'genre' of gender identity and the (en)gendering of genre in the discourses of 'woman'.

In Chapter Three I explored in more detail the *trace* of the corporeal in Nin's first piece of fiction, *House of Incest*, which further complicated the border between the 'text' and the 'body'. By drawing on Derrida's concept of the *parergon* and Cixous' *écriture féminine*, I drew attention to the excluded and unrepresentable 'outside', which marks the limit of language and aesthetics and serves as the repository for the (corpo)real and all that is 'feminine'. In this chapter I paid particular attention to the curious *between* position of the *parergon*, which whilst 'performing' the effect of an *ergon* (inside), also gestured towards the very *lack* of the 'inside'. I explored the rupture and displacement of unity and coherence not just 'inside' the 'fictional' work, in its metaphorical or linguistic content, but also how its form puts in question the very possibility of inscribing a clear line between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the text. I also made connections between *parergonal* logic and gender performance theory, which posits that gender identity is embodied through the repeated performance of gender discourses producing an effect of internal essence and unity. This chapter argued that Nin's 'performance' of the fictional genre and the Surrealist discourse of 'woman' enabled her to forge a gap between hegemonic discourses of 'woman' and her own position as an artist. I suggested that it is from these gaps and fissures in the borderline or frame that Nin's 'womb writing' attempts to keep in view the *gaps* between subject/object, 'woman'/women and body/text opening up the possibility of challenge and change.

In Chapter Four, having established the various feminist debates over women's erotic representation in pornography and erotica, I argued that the focus of the debate should not be centred on essences, on what pornography or erotica *is*, but rather on the border itself that not only inscribes the meanings (differences) within and between representations, but also structures their position within culture. This in turn determines *what* it is possible to see and represent, *who* has access to these representations, and *who* has the power to define these borders. My reading of Nin's erotica attempted to redirect the reader's gaze away from the centre, to the margins and the sites of the 'ob/scene', as the unrepresentable *other scene* that threatens dominant understandings of stable and complete sexualities and gender identities. By drawing on Derrida's concept of *différance*, I drew attention to the temporal and spatial play of writing in both the form and content of her erotica. I argued that the 'detours' and prefaces to her erotica not only disrupt fixed generic boundaries, but also echo the desiring subject's fantasy of gender identity, wholeness and unity.

In Chapter Five, I used Lacanian psychoanalysis and feminist film theory to draw attention to the role of vision in the constitution of gendered subjectivity and the (re)production of the phallus as both the primary signifier of desire and the central point for the organisation of discursive power. I attempted to show how Nin's erotica undermines a position of phallic certainty by drawing attention to the (male) subject's (mis)recognition of the self as Other, that is, as the subject endowed with the bodily attributes and thus the power of the gaze, the phallus and desire. This chapter turned attention to the out-of-sight spaces of 'feminine' pleasure that disturb and disrupt the illusion of 'masculine' phallic mastery. Drawing on performance theory, I argued that Nin's erotica performs and parodies the desire for the penis *as* phallus and suggest that in the process something slips from view. By deconstructing the text I hope to have offered new ways of seeing/reading

the 'feminine' as less an essence or attribute to be found 'inside' Nin's texts, than as an 'inter-view', a borderline positioning of the reader *as* writer in relation to the 'text'. By opening up the boundaries of the sex/text to the differential network of *traces* beyond the enclosing margins of books and bodies it might be possible to inscribe alternative and other multiple selves and sexualities.

I am aware that this thesis covers only a selection of Nin's writing and whilst this approach could be extended to the vast amount of Nin's published work, as a reader, I am increasingly haunted by the 'ob/scene' remainder of the 'bundled up 850 pages of erotica' that did not find its *form* in Ferrone's two volume edited erotica (Ferrone 1986, p.37). It is tempting to suggest the next stage of research would be to explore how 'this feminine point of view' (Nin 1979a, p.xiv) might be further transformed and reinscribed by reading this 'ob/scene' and unpublished manuscript against the published erotica and the un/expurgated diaries. This particular project would necessarily raise questions of 'ob/scenity': who has legal ownership of, and accessibility to, the *corpus* of Nin's work and for what purpose these texts might be utilised.¹

Whilst gender and sexuality are important markers of difference, these signifiers do not operate independently from other categories of difference such as race, class, ethnicity and nationality. I am very aware that this thesis is largely constructed on the gaps of these 'other' differences and believe that the next stage of this research should take up these very issues. I would also hasten to add that by 'putting aside' these specific issues for my investigation, I do not mean to imply that Nin's texts, nor indeed my readings/writings of these texts, are not implicated in such discourses. As a white, middle-class, heterosexual

¹ See Bair (1995, p.544, n.46). Although her original diaries are housed at the UCLA, access is only permitted to qualified scholars and only by permission of her husband Rupert Pole (Bair 1995, p.516). Interestingly, some of the manuscripts of her early work, which were rewritten either partially or entirely for her erotica, are housed at The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction and the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington and UCLA (Bair 1995, p.544, n.46).

woman, I recognise that my subject position/s largely place me on the dominant side of those binary oppositions structuring the discourses of race, class and sexuality in the West. Whilst, as I have argued, Nin repeatedly challenged the power relations implicated in the invisibility and 'neutrality' of the subject position of 'Man', this challenge did not extend to the questioning of her own racial position, and how her identification with 'whiteness' was also implicated in the discourses of gender and sexuality. What is more, my reading of her work is also implicated in this blindness. Viewed from the position of race, this thesis would produce very different readings of Nin's texts which may well appear far less radical.

To date, Nin scholarship has been surprisingly silent on the issues of race and nationality despite her obvious engagement with discourses of 'Orientalism' and 'primitivism'. Nin's texts typically ascribe a certain 'feminine' quality of exoticism, sensuality and mysticism to the East whilst those characters of African descent are defined by more 'masculine' qualities of physicality, hypersexuality and a certain 'natural rhythm' (Weedon 1999, p.154). Tookey notes Nin's appropriation of the erotic and exotic charge of the Orient in the form of veils, labyrinths and the ever-elusive 'woman' of male fantasy, though this is largely confined to her exploration of the *femme fatale* figure in Nin's diaries and fictions (2003, p.109-110, p.187). Yet, I would argue that this kind of analysis would have to pay close attention to the discourses circulating at the time when Nin's work was produced. As Weedon notes, '[t]hese definitions are not merely the property of prejudiced individuals, they are structural, inhering in the discourses and institutional practices of the societies concerned' (1999, p.152).

To my knowledge, the only piece of research in Nin scholarship that incorporates both gender and race in the study of Nin's erotica is Judith Roof's excellent article, 'The

Erotic Travelogue: The Scopophilic Pleasure of Race vs. Gender' (1991a). This article focuses on the importance of vision in the discourse of pornography, sexuality and power by exploring the exotic appeal of travel and the 'foreign' in erotic discourse, which relies upon highly visible bodily differences. Roof argues that the pleasure of scopophilia is largely a desire for 'autoerotic' self-confirmation whereby the 'other' is safely distanced, objectified, and then colonised via a certain 'heterosexual imperialism' (1991a, p.120). However, she argues that Nin's erotica is 'in many ways a metadiscourse of pornography' (p.120) in which she,

characteristically recites lists of racial, sexual, anatomical, and ethnic distinctions – skin color, language, class, national origin; the size, color, and configuration of sexual organs; sexual preferences, odors, tastes – intrinsic to the establishment of variety *that frames* the watching of the erotic event as a conquest and fusion of differences. (Roof 1991a, p.121 my emphasis)

It might be argued that Nin flaunts the supposed *presence* of difference in erotic discourse, that she *repeats to excess* the obsession with bodily inscribed differences, in order to draw attention to a fundamental *lack* of difference within the structural framework of erotic representation. Roof states that, 'the book, like the brothel and the theatre, is the safe place to encounter simulations of diversity, because all three forms mediate their customers' encounters with differences by providing a formal, protected, and constrictive site from which to consume spectacles' (1991a, p.124). However, as I have argued, whilst the 'book' might appear to 'frame' otherness, these limits are not fixed but are continually shifting depending on the many possible contexts in which difference (meaning) is read and interpreted. The text is not enclosed inside 'books', 'bodies' and 'identities'; rather it forms the borderline that continually transforms the relation between the 'inside' and the 'outside', between the 'essential' and the 'inessential' (Derrida 1988b, p.5-6). Racial difference, like sexual difference, is not the property of the individual, but is rather

historically and culturally produced within discourse. Whilst 'bodies' may differ between individuals, the meanings and values attributed to these 'bodies' are discursively produced within differential relations of power. Perhaps by drawing attention to the *lack* of closure in the 'framing' discourses of race, to the *trace* of 'blackness' that always already inhabits the subject position of 'whiteness', it is possible to deconstruct further the so-called marginal, *parergonal* 'white' spaces of Nin scholarship.

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