

# WOMEN'S WRITING AS DIFFERENTIAL WRITING: THE INSCRIPTION OF (FEMININE) BODY INTO TEXT

DRAGANA STOJANOVIĆ

**Abstract:** *Women's writing as a term in post-Lacanian poststructuralist texts stands for the specific inscription of women's body into the textuality of language and discourse. Women's writing thus introduces a new layer of presence of the other perspective into the dominant phallogocentric mode of writing, reading and speaking, into the dominant mode of signifying. In the same time, by producing itself as the other perspective and yet doing it within the phallogocentric discourse, it challenges the authority and unity of signification chain within it, opening the potentials of transgressions, restructurations, significations and hybridizations of the system, writing itself as a writing within a writing, a writing which frictions with the (dominant) writing – it constitutes a practice of differential writing. This text explores a potential of women's writing as differential writing, and researches it as a vehicle of possible change of a phallogocentric signifying mode.*

**Key words:** *women's writing, differential, text, body*

Text, as a term and as a production, offers a lot more than language, although the mechanism of language is the system that makes this very production possible. Text is, as Julia Kristeva defines it, the translinguistical apparatus that redistributes the order of language through the communicational qualities of writing or speech.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to language that is a structure – the skeleton of possibilities that are to be performed, text is a concrete production of language as an actual, redistributive practice of intertextual encounters of different contextual platforms from within the text can be written, read, spoken or reformulated. Text is, thus, never *one text, the text itself*, that would be isolated from all the other texts. On the contrary, it always points to interrelations of multitude of texts and possibilities of their readings, which are dynamically and continually displaced by the subject that, by producing meanings in texts, also finds itself in the process of *being produced*, the process that makes the subject possible and (textually, symbolically) existing, *alive*.

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1 Julia Kristeva: "The bounded text", in: *Desire in language. A semiotic approach to literature and art* by Julia Kristeva, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, 36–63.

The signification is, however it may look ordered and rigid, always in articulation, always appearing as a bearer of different uttering position. The position is, following this, not a fixed category, but always-already a *transposition* of previous signification,<sup>2</sup> which takes it to the level of reinterpretational and resignificational performative. That being said, a sign is always open, polysemic and ready to be challenged by the very act of writing and speech, and the battle for producing the interpretational difference cuts directly across and through the sign and the language itself, turning into a locus of always possible and potential subversion inside/of language.<sup>3</sup>

Looking at the text as a resignificational field, we can propose a thesis that intertextuality, discovered in continual plural and multiple correlation of text with the other texts of culture within which the text is spoken, read or written does not appear as a weakness of the language, as softening of the text to the point of mutability, uncertainty and unintelligibility, but just the opposite – as a strength that reveals the text as full form of interweaving of the symbolic and semiotic in it.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of a possible work with the resignificational potential of the language it is crucial, as it's already stressed, to read it always anew; to interpret it through reinterpretation, to write it by rewriting it, to constantly reposition the place of the subject within language. Interpretation is not only discovered in finding a meaning within the range of offered possibilities; it can also stand for much more radical semiotic procedures in which signifiers are uncovered in their game of fraud,<sup>5</sup> deconstructed and detached from their significational chain which ties them to the Master Signifier – the Phallus and reorganized in such a way that encourages creation of new understandings and other – *differential* writings that would shake the fundamental points onto which signifiers are tied. This kind of differential writing would open up the space for new/different/*differential*<sup>6</sup> voices and bodies in language.

2 Leon S. Roudiez: "Introduction", in: *Desire in language*, *ibid*, pp. 1–20, here p.15.

3 See Toril Moi: *Sexual/Textual politics: Feminist literary theory*. London and New York: Methuen and Co, 1985, p. 158.

4 Julia Kristeva: "Nous Deux, or a (Hi)story of intertextuality", in: *The Romanic Review* 93/1–2 (2002), pp. 7–13, here p. 9.

5 Jacques Lacan: *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Freud's papers on technique, 1953–1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991, p. 212.

6 *Different* is here used to mark a difference, a place differing from the other through a simple system of significational relations. *Differential* is used a bit differently, as reading/speaking/writing/producing the text in the differential dialogue with the familiar significational points of language. Different language is just a language that uses a different manner or style; differential language is a language that uses a different strategy (of reworking language through the process of not ignoring the friction produced by specific position, a specific body being contained in, and not erased from language).

The word is, basically, the extension of body in the process of speech. It is the body that is actually masked through the speech, that is temporary invisible, covered by signification chain that revives (with) every speaking act. The subject is, as such, both bodily subject and textual subject and also, it is subjected both to the body, which functions as its prop, and to the text, which produces it as meaning, as an existing reference point in language, which, together with the tongue that speaks it and the arm that writes it then appears as a material limit between carnal and textual realm, between Lacanian Symbolic and Real, on the very zero point of writing from which both realities appear as possible and/or meaningful.<sup>7</sup>

From that point there arises the Signifier, proclaiming the Law of the *hard letter* given to masculine subjects to guard it. *Hard letter*, with its *hard writing*, by and through Phallus as their master signifier, appears as a form of masculine writing, universal writing, proper writing, *well mannered* writing.<sup>8</sup> *Hard writing* is writing with the power of naming: the place that connects Symbolic and Real into the intelligible weave that conceals the consciousness of what could be out of it and transposes the unbearable fullness of Real into the reality, this broken home of the desire in language which produces subject as the subject of (masculine) language with the name of the privilege – the Name of the Father.<sup>9</sup>

Body is, as we see, the text; and text is the body – body as textuality and body (of the speaker, reader, writer) that inscribes itself into the text, body that, in spite of the main function of the signification chain – to conceal, cannot be ignored. The play of language is actually the play of the body within language, through language, play of the body that aches in language, that resists it and allows language to penetrate it, all in a try to express itself, to inscribe itself into the system of language, all in order to write a personalized map of linguistic reality into which the subject that stands instead of a body as its only *proper* attribute tries to position itself. The body is the place of painful delight (of the subject), which is brought to life by the loss (of the body in language). But body is not just the place of loss; body is also the place of the *other* (corpo)reality of the language. Julia Kristeva speaks of *other* body – the body that parallels the textual body in the specific duplication of the subjectivity; the culturally, discursively, linguistically and textually

7 Roland Barthes: *Writing degree zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.

8 Luce Irigaray: "Is the subject of science sexed?", in: *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 2/3 (1987), pp. 65–87, here p. 73.

9 Jacques Lacan, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: R. S. 1, Book 22, 1974–1975*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, <http://www.lacaninireland.com> (18.2.2013), pp. 132, 164–165.

ungraspable body.<sup>10</sup> These *leftovers* are, according to Kristeva, a fact that gives the experience of the body. Body is thus not (only) a concept created in the moment of subject recognizing itself and its body in language and culture; it is also an excess which stays unreachable to signification.<sup>11</sup> Body is the partner in writing, a sort of double voice, or enriched voice, the voice of language strengthened by the dynamics and volume of carnal which un-envelops the full potential of subjectivity within the different, *differential* language, *differential writing*.<sup>12</sup> Body is the place *from where* (we speak, we write, we inscribe, we communicate, we read, we utter), place that inscribes itself in *hard writing*, decentering it and crumbling it into the flux, uncertainty, permanent questioning, into the contradictions, ironies, laughter, silence, into the inconsistency of the imperfectabilities of hard language. If I *notice* that my body is present within language (that it was always there in the first place), my language becomes *hysterical*; I'm left without words.<sup>13</sup>

Being the act of inscribing one's body into the text, writing also appears as the strategy of resistance, of inscription of one's own body into it, of the *expression*. Every writing is always a gendered writing – hard (ruling) writing or the *other*, *differential writing*. Masculine writing or feminine writing. The *third* writing, writing of yet untold genders and undiscovered bodies. For me writing is the mode through my body speaks in language that denies me, that annihilates me or excludes me; I push my body against the language, against the text through which the textuality of my feminine subjectivity is prescribed; I write. I read; can the reading from within the female body contribute to its inscription into the corpus of textuality, interpretations and performativity of language as (seemingly) real? I suffocate; my body breathes through other pulsation which demands a different syntax. Women's writing is not one writing – my and your writing, writings of mine and your female body will not be the same – every each of us will inscribe her body bringing different history, different spatiality, different axes of laughter, pain and bliss.

*Women's writing* is a manifesto of female (feminine) body in language: it presents the return to body through language, uncovering it in the place where it has always been, re-inscribing of femininity in the discourse of language from which woman was excluded, negated, moved away. Helene Cixous says: "Woman

10 See Dani Cavallaro: *French feminist theory: An introduction*. London and New York: Continuum, 2003, p. 126.

11 Idem.

12 Hélène Cixous: "Coming to writing", in: *Coming to writing and other essays*, ed. Deborah Jenson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp. 1–58, here p. 43.

13 Roland Barthes: *A lover's discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1979, p. 88.

must write herself"<sup>14</sup> and calls women to write, to introduce themselves and each other into writing, which was taken from them the same way as their bodies were taken through the phallogocentric reign.<sup>15</sup> A woman has to write herself through the text, not letting the text to fully produce her without the imprint of her body into it. She has to open the spaces to act, speak, position herself through familiar and not yet familiar discursivities. To connect, to dissolve, to deconstruct, to annul the oppositions male vs. female, or masculine vs. feminine given as A vs. A, and to turn it into the possibility of constructive dialogue in the forms of A vs. B, C, D, E...n... To inscribe yourself into the place your body wishes for, that is a potentiality of a *new* writing.<sup>16</sup> To discard the language which produces itself as a stranger to feminine body; to discard the exclusivity of the Phallus; to go further into linguistic spaces which are not afraid of difference and which are not erasing it, but which are learning from it, as from visible, multiple differences that are going to open up language to the field of individual, the field of communication (through and via these differences).<sup>17</sup>

Dealing with the notion of *women's writing* in the field of theoretical discussions easily leads into very different traps: those of essentialism and those of extreme constructivism in the form of linguistic determinism. On the one side, researching of *women's writing* as a specific inscriptive practice of a female body was heavily criticized from the side of anti-essentialist theoreticians; for example, their critics go through one of the next paths:

- (a) leaning onto the concept of phallogocentrism implies it as ahistorical phenomena ingrained in language, which denies any kind of contextual analysis and eventual social change;
- (b) theory of *women's writing* is conceived as utopian and thus condemned to powerlessness and impossibility to offer pragmatic, concrete interventions;
- (c) sexual difference becomes a metanarrative which cancels all the other metanarrative possibilities and so risks to offer a simplifies explication of the social and political reality;
- (d) theory of *women's writing* often idealizes revolutionary potential of the language and mixes the potential of linguistic change with the possibilities of concrete social change;

14 Hélène Cixous: "The laugh of the Medusa", in: *Signs* 1/4 (1976), pp. 875–893, here p. 875.

15 Idem.

16 Hélène Cixous: "La", in: *The Hélène Cixous reader*, ed. Susan Sellers. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2000, pp. 59–67, here p. 60.

17 Luce Irigaray: "Being two, how many eyes have we?", in: *Paragraph 2* (2002), pp. 143–151, here p. 147.

- (e) the concept of feminine was romanticized within the idea of the oppositional or negative;
- (f) the *differential* feminism, from which the concept of *women's writing* comes, is based on the biological-essentialist key.<sup>18</sup>

By no means all the feminist critics see this kind of a possible weakness or trickiness in the concept of *women's writing*, but those who do nevertheless point to an important remark: if, through developing the theory of *women's writing*, we willingly or unwillingly approach the fields of essentialism, then we get into the danger of another banishment of female body from the structures of linguistic: if there is some *real* woman, some female body outside of the language *per se*, then the whole writing of this body is an empty practice. Such a woman is mute because the language does not interest her; she exists outside of it, independently of it. On the other side, radical approach to *women's writing* through social and linguistic constructivism threatens to deny the intervention potential of *women's writing* – if language is an empty, universal structure that cannot be possessed (not even as a position within it), if there is no body (nobody) inside, outside and against it, then the language actually cannot be transformed, and need not to be transformed, for it always-already stays detached from the material reality. It is certainly impossible to bring out one of the approaches as definite or more relevant, but what stands out as important is the place of *women's writing* in the point of resistance, subversion and difference, which makes it interesting and crucial and draws attention of very different feminist theoretical platforms through all these years since it was first brought out as a concept.<sup>19</sup>

*Women's writing* is a space of (re)search of writing opened both to women and men, although women are usually, thanks to a stronger internalization of a female position within the phallogocentric system, a little closer to feminine linguistic and uttering point. *Women's writing* is *another* experience (of writing, of reading, of *living*); it is the inclusion of the *other* experience, the relation to forgotten, moved away, to the abject outer-discursive, semiotic, maternal realm. *Women's writing* is, in this way, *differential* writing, the *difference that writes*.<sup>20</sup>

To search for the strategies of *women's writing* within this context also means to propose a wider theory of marginality – and not only of femininity as unspeakable

18 See Monique Wittig, "The point of view: Universal or particular?", in: *Feminist Issue* 3/2 (1983), 64.

19 Elaine Showalter: "Shooting the rapids: Feminist criticism in the mainstream", in: *Oxford Literary Review* 8 (1986), pp. 1–2, here p. 2.

20 Hélène Cixous: "The newly born woman", in: *The Hélène Cixous reader*, ed. Susan Sellers. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2000, pp. 37–46, here p. 42.

and unspoken place in language. *Women's writing* and its strategies thus become the theorization of subversion, dissidence and transgression of the seemingly strong and indestructible phallogocentric system.

*Women's writing* is not only a strategy of imagined possibilities; it is also a political writing, or, more precisely, it is a poetical writing with political inclinations.<sup>21</sup> *Women's writing* as *political writing* is present both in theoretical texts dealing with the issue of women's social, cultural or linguistic position and in the hybrid genres of writing, poetic writing, novel writing and similar. As for the theoretical writing, for example, we can take French poststructuralist feminist writing as a model for such a work (Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and other post-Lacanian writers). These texts are not only theorizing the mechanism of linguistic codification of the worlds and bodies within it; they are not just the theoretical explications of the problem, they *perform* this problem and its possible solutions through working and reworking the language itself, showing the way language can work not as a copy/paste mechanism for reproducing the system of which it is written, but as an active tool of reconstructions and resignifications of the signifying system itself. These texts thus become not only texts *about women's writing*; they take place as the *demonstration* of *women's writing in situ*. These texts become performatives of *women's writing* which, by speaking about possible strategies of subversion/transgression/change of writing mode in the same time perform these dislocations at the very place, by experimenting with the writing practice as with a practice of a research, restructuration and redefinition of writing. They are involved in the production of women's discourse as other discourse, discourse of revolt and permanent resistance, a permanent persistence to speak up *a dialogue* with the phallogocentric discourse through not the other, but through another body.<sup>22</sup> Such a *women's writing* reveals itself as *impenetrable*, yet communicative.<sup>23</sup> The other, more direct political strategy of *women's writing* can be seen on the very borders of fiction, theory and politics and they bring on a specific strategy of parody, disruption, even revolution in writing, aiming on the complete deconstruction of meta-narrations of phallogocentric system of linear, hard, phallic signification.<sup>24</sup> A good example of this strategy can be seen in the writing of American novel writer, Kathy Acker. Writing of Kathy Acker is

21 Lisa Jardine: "The politics of impenetrability", in: *Between feminism and psychoanalysis*, ed. Teresa Brennan. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 63–72, here p. 67.

22 Luce Irigaray: *This sex which is not one*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

23 Jardine: "The politics of impenetrability", p. 66.

24 Patrick O'Donnell: *The American novel now: Reading contemporary American fiction since 1980*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 22.

deliberately scandalous (she takes the *scandal* of women's body into her own hands that write!); it's plagiaristic (she takes whatever she wants from the big sum of texts of the Tradition, deconstructing the power and hierarchy system within it); and it is sadomasochistic (if her body is in the system that condemns it to pain, she makes it happen under her conditions).<sup>25</sup> Kathy Acker attacks systematic codes of phallogocentrism, exposing its taboos as places of its shame. By speaking what is unspeakable, she points to the Law as to the illusion, the lie, the *unnecessity*.<sup>26</sup> Acker's writing is also being political as queer writing, deconstructing the place of gender in language, which also shakes up its gender-based power relation foundation.<sup>27</sup>

*Women's writing* in all these ways dissipates the concept of a linear teleological temporality. The language itself is temporal; it is written and read in time, and it is understood through specific temporality which phallogocentrism codes as the linear concept of Time, Power and History.<sup>28</sup> To write *women's writing* means to deconstruct the linear readings to the point of bringing them down to maps of possibilities, maps of possible roads through which the subject would be able to grasp a potential of *differential* temporality of writing, which would lead to a whole *differential* signification. *Women's writing* is not an entirely new writing (by using an entirely new logic, this kind of new writing would risk its exile and impossible communication with the phallogocentric structure, which would leave that structure intact, disinterested). *Women's writing* is a new way of understanding, new way of looking, listening and touching, new way of *speaking* the writing within we find ourselves as subject. *Women's writing* is a new way of redefining the subject and its place within the new language, a new way of redefining the place of body within it. For that strategy to come true, we must go from the place we know, from the linguistic place we are already in – and it is not an easy task.

The desire for generating all the not yet spoken possibilities is what multiply the readings, as well as the writing itself, making the way to *women's writing*, as to a kind of differential writing to perform and develop itself as a potential, as an action, as an intervention of women's body into the space of discursive practices.

25 Ibid, 121.

26 Ellen Friedman: "A conversation with Kathy Acker", <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/book/?fa=customcintextGCO1=15647100621780&extrasfile=A09F76BE-B0D0-B086-B653FFBC137719A6.html> (14.3.2011), p. 6.

27 Julie Sears: "Kathy Acker", in: *American writers: Supplement XII*, ed. Jay Parini. New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 2003, pp. 1–20, here p. 1.

28 Teresa Brennan: *The interpretation of the flesh: Freud and femininity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 71.



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