WHEN "I" SPEAK(S) TO "YOU":
THE LITERARY SUBJECT AS AN EFFECT OF PRONOMINAL PLAY
IN TWO WORKS BY CONTEMPORARY WOMEN WRITERS
By
RHODA E. A. HANAFI
B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1983
A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
PROGRAMME IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
September 1987
(c) Rhoda E. A. Hanafi, 1987
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **PROGRAMME IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

The University of British Columbia  
1956 Main Mall  
Vancouver, Canada  
V6T 1Y3

Date **SEPT. 1, 1987**
Abstract

The deictic property of pronouns, words that stand for proper names and only take on referential status in the context of a specific utterance, is a fascinating area of study inasmuch as pronouns are pivotal to the construction of a sense of subject. The process of constructing the literary self is especially problematic as it also involves the equivocal placement in time and space of the written subject. This thesis examines that process in relation to the way two contemporary women writers make use of first- and second-person pronouns in two texts, and in so doing proposes a theory of women's first-person fiction as a subversive strategy to write outside the dominant patriarchal ideology.

Part I: When "I" speak(s) to "you", not only does the text mark empty spaces to be filled, offering up literary beances as signposts to ravishment, but reader, text, and writer also participate in a triadic exchange of personal positions that turns the fixed origo of the deictic "I, here, and now" into another twist of the kaleidoscope, a temporary tableau of subjectivity. When "I" speak(s) to "you", language converts into speech by making the personae the dramatic necessity of the linguistic act; but literary speech localizes itself within a context that is endlessly locatable: with every reader and every reading, a different instantiation.

By writing letters to their children, diaries to
themselves, or literary products that exclude themselves from main-stream genres, women find in the false dialogism of "you"-addressed monologues a way of sustaining the illusion that one can write outside of patriarchal ideologies by denying the arbitrariness of the sign. "S/he" is patently a fictional construct, and the third person the venerable mode of epic and novelistic narration. When I speak to you, we seemingly short-circuit that channel and make of our communication both a detour around the symbolic order and a transparently direct line to the Other.

Part II: In Oriana Fallaci's Lettera a un bambino mal nato this direct line is an umbilical cord, and her speech a series of lessons told as fables. The unnamed "you" makes possible the transmission of personal experience in a form that seems harmless and childish. Fallaci makes her work innocuous by stripping it of references to time, place, or person, so that the journalist, a chronicler of public History, is able to don the mask of private writer communicating personal history. This act is made possible by the equivocal functioning of the pronouns.

Part III: Marguerite Duras, a self-avowed exile from writing at the time she wrote the three Aurélia Steiner texts, and, above all, from writing as a coherent story with well-crafted characters that develop along the linear exigencies of beginning, middle and end, finds in the peripatetic nomination
of "you" and "I", an opening to a "post-Holocaust" solution to narrative. The shifting lines of Aurélia's tri-partite story are paralleled in the proliferation of "shifters" which fracture and disperse the unity of the text, preventing total mastery by the reader, while also frustrating the reader's efforts to construct a monolithic sense of self and Other.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I: The Subject As Pronoun</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II: Oriana Fallaci's <em>Lettera a un bambino mai nato</em></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part III: Marguerite Duras's <em>Aurélia Steiner</em></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Way of Conclusion</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Consulted</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Incidence and Types of Naming in <em>Aurélia Steiner</em> by Page Number</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

My thanks to Lorraine Weir, for these two years of encouragement; and for the freedom she granted me by her trust in my abilities; to Ralph Sarkonak, for enticing me back to the textual nest; to Giusi De Stefanis, for her wisdom, friendship and intellectual integrity; to Jared Pinesmith, companion and sounding board, daytime muse and nighttime inspiration, for helping me to realize that writing is just one more activity in the typical day of a cowboy-sleuth; and finally, to my mother, for having brought me up with the conviction that I could do anything I set my mind to.
Introduction

So, an homological analysis of person at the level of the signs of discourse....It would be a magnificent subject for a "troisieme cycle" doctorat to ask someone to find out what becomes of the proper signs, the indications of person at the level of discourse.
Roland Barthes, SC, 147.

Theory

In summing up the papers and ensuing discussions of the 1966 international symposium at Johns Hopkins University entitled "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man", Richard Macksey observed that "...the announced concern for methodological and axiological questions was perhaps diverted by a recurrent preoccupation with a basically metaphysical question, namely, the status of the subject in the several disciplines before us."/1/ Members of that symposium who presented papers either partially or totally concerned with 'the subject', included such theoretically and methodologically diverse thinkers as Georges Poulet, Lucien Goldmann, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan, while a great deal of the discussion also concentrated on the precise conceptual formulation each speaker attributed to that term. The "structuralist controversy", it seems to us now, was far more motivated by the question of the subject than it was by the nature and place of structure.

Twenty years later books and articles continue to be published on the same topic. The punning title of Kaja Silverman's The Subject of Semiotics (1983) is an indication of the inextricable relation that holds between any
theoretical inquiry into signifying systems and the agent of signification itself. Furthermore, as David Carroll states in The Subject in Question (1982):

...the conflicts between theory and fiction are fundamentally conflicts among various concepts and figures of the subject - the subject that various theories assume, construct, formulate, and/or defend (the philosophical, historical, psychoanalytical, linguistic subjects) and the subjects assumed and/or figured by fiction. To resolve once and for all the question of the subject would also be to resolve definitively the problem of the relationship between theory and fiction. (6)

Two premises of my discussion thus become apparent: 1. any answer to the "question of the subject" can only be provisional, serving to crystallize presuppositions relating to wider theoretical stances; 2. conceptions of the subject are pivotal to fiction(s), theory(ies), and to the relationship(s) that hold between them.

Given the abundant literature on this topic and its interdisciplinary scope (philosophy, linguistics, history, psychoanalysis) this thesis will concentrate solely on the construction of the fictional subject in two contemporary works of fiction, and will examine that process specifically in relation to the use of pronouns, the most "staggering" of shifters, as Roland Barthes termed them. Emile Benveniste's essays on pronouns, in Problèmes de linguistique générale, provide the main theoretical source, along with works by such other linguists as Karl Bühler, Roman Jakobson, and Julia Kristeva.
Fiction

Neither Oriana Fallaci nor Marguerite Duras has achieved status as a "serious literary writer". Fallaci is known purely as a controversial and aggressive interviewer, while Duras, in spite of having received the Goncourt prize for *L'Amant* in 1984, continues to dwell in the nether regions of avant-garde cinematography. Marginal women writers, then, writing marginal texts.

*Lettera a un bambino mai nato* is a first-person narrative that tells the tale of a woman's conflicting desires to give birth to the foetus that inhabits her body and to be free and self-constituting. When the pregnancy ends in miscarriage, the narrator puts herself on trial in an hallucinatory effort to expiate her guilt. By completely eliminating any use of proper nouns from her text, Fallaci breaks with her work as a journalist and places the reader outside the discourses of history and politics that define the context and limits of her previous publications. The play of pronouns is a pivotal element of that move.

*Aurélia Steiner* is a tripartite monologue addressed to a 'vous' that floats among the narrator's mother, father, lover, and daughter. The three sections describe: 1. a questioning search for 'you', punctuated by the plaintive cries of a leprous cat outside a window by the sea; 2. a series of sexual encounters with sailors in a port town gradually engulfed by tidal storms; 3.
an anguished dialogue between a little Jewish girl and her protector who are shut up in a black tower during an air-raid. Throughout the text, "Aurélia" disorients and fractures the efforts of the reader to locate time and place as well as to piece together a coherent story. Adopting a strategy diametrically opposed to Fallaci's, Duras subverts the discourses of history and power by "over-naming", by proliferating proper names until they lose their effectiveness as referential markers.

**Between Theory and Fiction**

One of the aims of this thesis is to demonstrate that these works/writers are ever on the borderline between naming and rendering anonymous a certain subjectivity by constantly affirming and simultaneously denying their own and the reader's sense of subject through the ruses of the pronoun. In a parallel move, this present work attempts to break down and disorient the reader's sense of subject by adopting a similar strategy: "I", "you", and "she" fuse and splinter as the boundaries of text and interpretation - the language and meta-language of literary criticism - are perforated and then dissolved.

In order to accomplish this aim I first found it necessary to question the nature of academic discourse, and to examine how one creates and affirms one's own subjectivity in the appropriation of a particular 'voice'. Until recently,
most theoretical articles and books seemed to subscribe to the fallacy that a neutral tone, avoidance of the first-person, and a preponderance of passive constructions and Subject-Verb-Object syntax lend the infallible authority of scientificity to their ideas. The absence of an obvious authorial subject in these papers is meant to be a sign of objectivity, and therefore of truth, to the reader. I attempt instead to write my own voice as one among many, a transcription of self that takes its place in a polyphonic text composed of other thinkers and writers who appear in italic citations and quoted passages in the text. This work is thus an endeavour to walk the borderline between language and metalanguage, in this case, between literature and theory, in order to describe a marginal route around the academic subject.
Notes

/1/ The Structuralist Controversy, p.320

/2/ ibid. p.144
The Subject As Pronoun

1. Spatially

We cannot say anything about language or the functioning of language if we stay on the position of metalanguage. But language says something concerning itself in the permanent plays with its own categories, and that is what literary texts say. But it is not philosophical, it is not scientific. It is another practice of language, another status of the speaking subject.

Kristeva, in *Semiotica* 217.

"I" subject speak(s), tracing the imaginary conceptualized line between language and meta-language, infiltrating myself into the interstice that separates within and without./1/ Not to talk about language but within language, narcotizing (blowing up, exaggerating) the permanent plays with its own categories. Speaking, saying: the very practice of the *sujet en procès* /2/ as it delineates its own within and without.

The boundary, then, of meta-/object, this oblique slash, shall provide the itinerary for this discourse - *un parcours de discours* - which, at once, fills up the interstice and traces out its boundary. Not a confine, no legal border, but a permanent play, a ceaseless diversion, on a detour from meta- (= 'beyond, transcending') to ... ?

But how do(es) "I" go beyond, transcending language? (And so she saw reflected in a double play of mirrors that old stand-by, *mise en abyme*, language reflected/ing in meta-language, an impoverished game of polished surfaces, false infinity trapped within the finite faces of narcissistic
imaging.) There is no infinity here, no meta-supposition, no transcendental language turning with-in in/to with-out. What contour do we (= you + me) grasp, which handholds do we grip, in order to turn "language" inside out? Prestidigitation, then? A sort of intellectual mummery? Or another permanent play to show up other, unheard-of cracks between meta- and ...

This interstice, then, is a hollow fiction: diction dictating discourse, and discourse dictating diction: a "metaphyctional" fiction fissuring the solid wall of meta/language. It is in this crevice that "I" insinuates itself, speaking, being spoken, taking on its own solidity as it fills up this heterogenous hollow.

2. Temporally

" "I" subject speak(s)"

(t)here, presently, in full presence, tracing out its contour (do you see it?) by this writing. Locate it. Mark the spot. Signifying, signalling its presence in/by the signifier, it locates mySelf in the present-already-past. (A new tense: the tense of 'écriture': le présent-déjà-passé.)

Benveniste writes that "ce "présent" ... n'a comme référence temporelle qu'une donnée linguistique: la coincidence de l'événement décrit avec l'instance de discours qui le décrit" (PLG 262). Sheer coincidence, the present gives itself to conceptualization only in enunciation: a
paltry sort of gift, this "donnée linguistique" offers itself up only as a coinciding of event and description. So that in referring, in mentioning, the speaker utters a temporal reference, a sort of temporary refuge in an unco-ordinated space. Dismantled as it is erected, the present is reconstructed in/by the peripatetic peripheries of the signifier.

3. Presently

On arrive ainsi à cette constatation - surprenante à première vue, mais profondément accordée à la nature réelle du langage - que le seul temps inhérent à la langue est le présent axial du discours, et que ce présent est implicite. Il détermine deux autres références temporelles; celles-ci sont nécessairement explicitées dans un signifiant et en retour font apparaître le présent comme un ligne de séparation entre ce qui n'est plus présent et ce qui va être. Benveniste, Problèmes du langage 9.

The present is implicit in speech as it is inherent to language. By stating "I", I locate(s) a "generating axial centre", a temporal / spatial axis. A line, then, of affirmation and separation: affirming 'now' and 'here', yet separating present from past / future, "I" rends as it renders, parting, splitting what no longer is from what may be, yet simultaneously defining the very possibility for that split.

This line of separation is affirmed, however, only in discourse: "C'est dans l'instance de discours où je désigne le locuteur que celui-ci s'énonce comme 'sujet'" (PLG 262). Speaker and subject synonymize in discourse; the "I" speaks
itSelf in/onto a graphic location through pronominal appropriation. Subjectivity in these terms is nothing other than the locus of locution, a plotting of the person on a time / space continuum in the precise instance of speech.

Two intersecting perpendicular strokes on the page can serve as a coordinate system for us with 0 as the origo, the point of origin for the coordinates:

I maintain that three deictic words must be put at the place of 0, if this scheme is to represent the deictic field of human language, namely the deictic words here, now, and I. These lexical items, so simple in their sound structure, might induce the language theorist into esoteric philosophical abysses or to respectful silence, when challenged to determine their function. Rather, he should simply acknowledge that it is certainly very peculiar, but nevertheless precisely statable, how they function in a concrete utterance.

Bühler 12.

The 0, origo of indexical reference is a dangerous abyss which "I" skirts either by remaining respectfully silent or by concretizing itSelf in utterance. "I" does not symbolize or name, I/it denote(s) nothing but its/my presence, pointing directly to an original point of reference: the origo of subjectivity. Deictic gestures that indicate nothing but the point of origin of speech, 'I', 'here' and 'now' "demand that they be characterized as signals" (Bühler 12), thus distinguishing themselves from the naming words, which "function as symbols, and receive their specific complete and precise meaning within the synsemantic field" (Bühler 12).
Excluded from meaning as a conventional (syntactic / semantic) field of sign-functions, deictic markers take up residence only on the outskirts of the symbolic field, in a situational, contextual cross-current of temporary forces.\textsuperscript{4}/

As Benveniste writes: "[Les pronoms] se distinguent de toutes les désignations que la langue articule, en ceci: ils ne renvoient ni à un concept ni à un individu" (PLG 261). "Singulier"/\textsuperscript{5}/, "peculiar"/\textsuperscript{6}/, "staggering"/\textsuperscript{7}/, "scandalous"/\textsuperscript{7}/, "I" is the nomadic nomenclature for a nonproductive, non-existent nomination.

5. \textit{I and You}

\begin{quote}
(If they are to be \textit{human}, they must be at least \textit{two} in number.)
\end{quote}

Kojève 43.

Le langage n'est possible que parce que chaque locuteur se pose comme sujet, en renvoyant à lui-même comme je dans son discours. De ce fait, je pose une autre personne, celle qui, tout extérieure qu'elle est à "moi", devient mon echo auquel je dis \textit{tu} et qui me dit \textit{tu}....Cette polarité ne signifie pas égalité ni symétrie: "ego" a toujours une position de transcendance à l'égard de \textit{tu}; néanmoins, aucun des deux termes ne se conçoit sans l'autre; ils sont complémentaires, mais selon une opposition "intérieur/extérieur", et en même temps ils sont réversibles.

Benveniste, PLG 260.

As "I" explore(s) the confines of subjectivity, running back and forth along the border of meta/language, necessarily implicating my/itSelf in a non-symbolic, deictic field, and at once, circumscribing the origo of referential speech, "I" also, by my/its very allocution, allocate(s) an-other in
my/its subjective economy. Within and without, "vers l'intérieur" and "vers l'extérieur", are the reversible sides of an isolating membrane which inwardly and outwardly designs the structures and regions of the communication act. This common border is a resonating surface, enclosing an echoing chamber of the person: "I" speak(s), say(s) my/itSelf and simultaneously hear(s) echoed back the voice of "you", a voice that paradoxically originates with, and within, the isolating confines of "me". The person, like the present, both affirms and separates: affirms itSelf in the appropriation of the personal pronoun, and separates itSelf from the exterior in the instant substantiation of the other, "you".

If neither equal nor symmetrical, however, how is this 'polarity of persons' to be characterized?

If neither equal nor symmetrical, however, how is this 'polarity of persons' to be characterized?

La subjectivité se laisse localiser un instant dans une stase pronominale qui, sans être isolée en soi, maintient des relations définies avec les autres. Du point de vue de cette instantanéité de la subjectivité dans l'usage normatif du langage, l'Ego toujours transcendental et surplombant l'allocution, ne s'isole qu'en s'opposant à tu.
Kristeva, "Instances du discours" 77.

Subjectivity is not any thing: it is a motionlessness, an instantaneous stasis in a pronominal equilibrium brought on by a relational positing of "I" and others. 'Ego' remains "transcendental and overhanging allocution", silently poised on the outward rim of speech, over and above the localising effect of discursive orientation. But in utterance, division and complementarity: an instantaneous splitting of the
"forever transcendental" I which cleaves itself into the oppositional sides of the same, reversible (non-)duality: "I" becomes "you", and "you", "I", so that "you" is both other and the same; not a difference, but rather a question of positionality on the self-same axis.

La conscience de soi n'est possible que si elle s'éprouve par contraste. Je n'emploie je qu'en m'adressant à quelqu'un, qui sera dans mon allocution un tu. C'est cette condition de dialogue qui est constitutive de la personne, car elle implique en réciprocité que je deviens tu dans l'allocution de celui qui à son tour se désigne par je.

Benveniste, PLG 260.

Ainsi ne s'étonnera-t-on pas de constater que "tu" est une façon de nommer "je", que "tu" cache "je".

Kristeva, "Instances du discours" 86.

Allocution thus implies dialogue and reciprocity: a speech drama in which the personae exchange the masks of their person/8/ in a reciprocal play of pronominal cache-cache (hide-and-seek). A strange game, paradoxically contrived, in which the players reveal themselves through speech, call attention to their own presence, and affirm to themselves their Selves, while at the same time implicating the other through a reciprocal gift of persona, thus masking, covering up, and assuming the pretence of pronominal allocation in an endless series of moves, stases and hypostases.

Subjectivity is not any thing: it is the itinerant effect of an incessant positing and posing of the person, a double play that calls into action "I" and "You" in a perpetual game of revealment and masking.
6. S/he

Dans les deux premières personnes, il y a à la fois une personne impliquée et un discours sur cette personne. "Je" designe celui qui parle et implique en même temps un énoncé sur le compte de "je": disant "je", je ne puis pas parler de moi. À la 2e personne, "tu" est nécessairement désigné par "je"; et, en même temps, "je" énonce quelque chose comme prédicat de "tu". Mais de la 3e personne, un prédicat est bien énoncé, seulement hors de "je-tu"; cette forme est ainsi exceptée de la relation par laquelle "je" et "tu" se spécifient. Dès lors la légitimité de cette forme comme "personne" se trouve mise en question.

Benveniste, PLG 228.

[I]l est méchant: c'est le mot le plus méchant de la langue: pronom de la non-personne, il annule et mortifie son référent; on ne peut l'appliquer sans malaise à qui l'on aime; disant de quelqu'un "il", j'ai toujours en vue une sorte de meurtre par le langage....

Barthes 171.

"I" and "you" engaged in conversation: as we exchange the masks of person in a mutual reaffirmation of the status of subject, we implicate each other in our deictic fields, revealing the presence of our personhood through our enunciation. "I" say(s) "s/he", and this utterance immediately points to a reference outside our shared coordinate system, a point exterior to the echoing chamber constituted by our discourse. "S/he" is an absent entity, designating no one in particular or an unspecified multiplicity of persons./9/ The third person is a mis-nomer, since the person it calls up is not, is a non-person, forever excluded from the intimate reference of personal dialogue.

This murderous appellation distances the third other
from any access to the origo of subjectivity, and as such only names the possibility of person. It is thus a hypothetical nomenclature, the fictional person par excellence./10/

If "s/he" is annulled and mortified, hypothetisized and fictionalized, "s/he" also opens up for "I" a route to a metalinguistic promontory:

Si l'énonciation se fixait en un "il" ainsi isolé de l'allocation, elle pourrait s'articuler comme un métalangage ou comme une contemplation: tenu par un sujet forclos, soumis à la loi ou usurpant sa place. Kristeva, "Instances du discours" 90.

"S/he" is the mark of an utterance issued by a foreclosed subject, one who is debarred from the linguistic Eden of innocent speech. For "I" to name an absent (non-)person or to refer to a point outside of the deictic field of the discursive instant, "I" must first of all conceive of that exterior, that other place, in order to "plan the murder" from a transcendental position of self-conscious linguistic knowledge.

The third person is indeed a meta-fictional construct since its use sets up a distancing effect, first by removing the subjective "I" from the third other while placing it in a field outside of the dialogical reference coordinates of "we", relegating "s/he" to the status of non-person and thus setting up an unbroachable dichotomy between "us" inside, located, allocated in the discursive instant, and "them", outside, unlocatable, multiple, hypothetical creations of language. Secondly, "s/he" distances the speaking "I" from speech
itself, by calling attention to the unnatural artifice of pronominal naming: where denotation is called into question, where "only one" and "many" are designated by the same term, the implicit transparency of the here-and-now clouds over, language calls attention to itself and no longer to the message./11/

7. Literally

Now let "I" literize itSelf. Littering the marks of its/my presence in the pages of an already-past present, what here-and-now do(es) "I" render? These literal transcriptions of a displaced presence plot themselves endlessly onto any time and space coordinate system. "L'instance du discours" is multiple, infinitely repeatable; re-enacted, re-activated in the instance of reading, this instant transmutation (écriture to lecture) sunders the present from its original location. Uprooted, evicted from its temporary/temporal refuge, the literary "I" takes on a migratory cast.

The implicitly present, seemingly inherent to unspoken language, is, thus, once spoken, once signified, immediately implicated in another time: the past of its own presence, marked in the trace of the signifier, and the future of its own re-enactment, given by the possibility of another reading. The literary "I" is a necessary explication of the migratory subject-in-process, forever en train de..., straddling past, present and future, locating itSelf in the double instance of
écriture-lecture./12/

In language and in the use of language, duplicity plays a cardinal role.
Jakobson, "Shifters" 133./13/

The written is doubly duplicitous: referring 'back' to a no-longer now and 'forward' to a possibly is, while re-enacting the here-and-now in a reader's present, the deliberately deceptive status of the literary text also confounds attempts to pin down the place of the person. "I" and "you" no longer designate speaker and listener, but some kaleidoscopic hypostasis, an instantaneous stasis of a pyramidal positing between author, text, and reader.

"S/he", then, is a fictitious fiction, a fiction within a fiction of an imaginary absent presence, realized solely within the confines of a literary possible world, and unlocatable except within that very imaginary universe of discourse.

8. L'homme qui parle

[Le discours est] la langue en tant qu'assumée par l'homme qui parle, et dans la condition d'intersubjectivité qui seule rend possible la communication linguistique.
Benveniste, PLG 266

"L'homme qui parle": two invisible appropriations combine to make imperceptible and inaccessible la femme qui écrit. Discourse, a running back and forth (dis-cursus) between fully constituted subjectivities, leaves undetected, unnoticeable, both women and writing, as if by rendering inconspicuous this
subsumation - a taking up under of the hidden alterities - they will remain undetected, and more, incapable of being seen. This visionary lapsus is not just a metaphysical slippage, or an innocuous sliding of the signifier under the signified: when he speaks, man takes on language, assumes it as his own, enters the subjectivized arena of linguistic communication through this very assumption.

When does language become discourse, and speech, writing? What is pernicious about this imperceptible lapse, and at what point precisely does it fall through? Language is converted into discourse, says Todorov (Structuralist Controversy 316) through (not solely) the agency of the "shifters"/14/, those empty deictic markers that stand outside denotative meaning, gesturing, pointing, showing, but remaining (like women) naturally, Naturally, mute and insignificant./15/ It is by filling up the emptiness of deictic signals that man signifies his self in the present, takes on presence, and presents himSelf in the act of communication. Denoting, referring, appropriating proper names, marking his proper-ty through self-identification, man circumscribes the 0, origo of the here-and-now./16/ Through the agency of deictic anchoring in contextualized, concretized speech utterances, man traces out and fills in the 0-mphal(l)us of his own subjectivity. Et la femme qui écrit? But what about (the) woman who writes?

9. La femme qui écrit

Aussitôt que produit, l'énoncé disparaît, si fond
It is in the aspiration toward artistic and, in particular, literary creation that woman's desire for affirmation now manifests itself. Why literature? Kristeva, "Women's Time" 31.

A woman is in the act of writing. Putting pen to paper, she enters into a socio-symbolic contract, contractualizes her Self into a signifying practice, and encodes the expression of her Self into a series of sign-functions already negotiated by a community of language-users. The bargain has already been struck: the woman who writes is a woman being written.

Whether excluded from the dominant discourse or simply marginalized, the writing woman is also confronted by a sense of invisibility: her gender is subsumed under the imperialistic, supposedly ambisexual, appellation of man. Her writing is thus an act of affirmation, an attempt to make visible the fugacious flight of speech, to coalesce the ephemeral chatter of the second sex into a socially valued form.

But not all writing is Literature. The literary is a prescriptive principle, and canonization a process of power at work, inviting some texts into, and rejecting others from its hallowed hall of fame. The woman who writes maps out a strategy of acceptance or rejection according to the choices she makes: lexical, syntactical, narrative and discursive (genre) choices.
Her marks on the page graphically proclaim a graffiti-like affirmation of presence ("I was here", scrawled on the back walls of the literary ante-chamber); but, at the same time, this very writing disassociates itself from its origin. It is bastardized speech, set loose to circulate unparented in a signifying economy. The graphic assertion of "I" is a locating function, an affirmation of here-and-now, but paradoxically, by not naming, by not assigning a proper name to this origo, the woman/17/ who chooses to use personal pronouns dis-locates herSelf, puts herSelf out of joint from the coordinating axes, displaces and shifts herSelf to an anonymous empty position, capable of being filled in and assumed by a multitude of readers. The "I" (and "you"), assumed endlessly by the efforts of the reader, are thus more appropriable than the third person, which distances the reader by its meta-lingual and meta-fictional effect. She, at once, asserts, locates, dislocates, displaces, renders anonymous, and pluralizes herSelf by this act. A strategic move, then, in the literary game, to bring the reader 'closer' by allowing her/him to assume the origo of the already-past written present, but one which simultaneously proclaims its distance from the 'classic' novelistic genre, the murderous third-person narrative. The pronominal dislocation is doubled: shifting the space-time coordinates of the origo according to a reader's appropriation, it simultaneously displaces both writer and reader out of the literary confines of a fictional
constraint.

This side-stepping gesture is also a nimble avoidance of the authoritarian function of the Author, a patriarchal posture assumed by the writer who "fathers" the text, patents the literary product, propertizes his patrimony before putting it out to circulate as exchange-value in the economy of literary business. This public persona is nothing but another social construct, one that a woman skirts by continuing to write those traditionally 'female' forms such as the diary, the letter, and the first-person monologue addressed to a "you"-listener.

A sense of alienation from the authoritarian / authorial function, then? An uncomfortable compromise in order to speak across the outer, marginalized frequencies of the patriarchal channels of Literature? More than likely, excluded from the anthologies of Great Books, and unwilling now to be recuperated into that tradition, the woman writing today finds in the first-person monologue an anonymous discourse, bordering on the confines between transcribed voice, autobiography (= herstory), and fiction, a fiction conceived outside the genres that have excluded her until now.

10. Gender and Genre

Emerse dal mondo del silenzio e del bisbiglio al mondo dell'espressione, fin dal loro primo apparire le donne che scrivono vengono spesso calamitate ai margini della scena letteraria. Le troviamo impegnate in forme di letteratura, se non precarie o prive di tradizioni, certo più' fluide e facilmente praticabili. Sono generi dominati, almeno
all'apparenza, da una logica del frammento piu' che
dal progetto compluto: le raccolte di lettere, gli
epistolari, e i diari. Altre scrittrici si rivolgono
all'autobiografia, un genere che porta sempre a una
difficile verifica della propria identita' (dal greco
*graphia* "descrizione", *autós"propria", *bíos"vita").
Rasy 93.

[M]i sembra che il comportamento mimologico postuli
dall'inizio il rifiuto dell'arbitrarie'ta' del segno.
Infatti, tale comportamento si muove nella logica
dell'imaginario; l'illusione mimologica consiste nel
credere che il segno sia un doppio della cosa, che vi
sia tra essi un rapporto di necessita', che il
linguaggio aderisca perfettamente alla realita' in
modo da confondervisi. E' l'illusione che sta alla
base sia della scrittura epistolare che di quella
diaristica.

Kreyder 504.

A clandestine denial of fictionality, a search for refuge
in marginalized first-person forms, a development of "the
logic of the fragment", a refusal of the arbitrariness of the
sign...thus I/woman write(s) my/herSelf into the symbolic
order while remaining, all the same, within the confines of
the imaginary. Pursued ceaselessly around the borders of
signification, barred from entry into the dominant male
discourse, I/she put(s) in stakes where language seems its
most transparent, where fiction and reality superimpose: in
the deployment of an I-voice, telling the tale, describing
my/her own life, as if the narration itself were nothing more
than a description of an already-formed identity, rather than
the very construction of that identity itself.

L'illusione secondo la quale, tra la realita' e
l'espressione che ne diamo nelle confidenze, nelle
lettere e nei diari, esiste solo un legame di
naturalizza, nasconde il fatto che ordiniamo i dati
del vissuto secondo le leggi di una storia *già*
scritta.
Kreyder 511.

History / the story has already been written, but the passage from passive, spoken object to active, speaking subject can only take place in the act of narration. When I/woman tell(s) my/her story, appropriating a pronominal position, revealing the coordinates of here-and-now (but displacing and shifting that origo according to the unlocatable origin of lecture) while implicating the other in my/her enunciation (donning and exchanging the mask of the persona), I/she also defy(ies) the fictionality of language, step(s) outside the generic constraints of Literature, refute(s) the power of Authorship, and enter(s) into the socio-symoblic order while at once remaining on its threshold. More precisely, I/she mark(s) the contours of my/her own identity, take(s) on and trace(s) out the lineaments and substance of subjecthood.
Notes

/1/ "Contrairement à ce [qu'on croit], without n'enferme pas les expressions contradictoires "avec sans"; le sens propre de with est ici "contre" (cf. withstand) et marque pulsion ou effort dans une direction quelconque. De là within "vers l'intérieur" et without, "vers l'extérieur", d'où "en dehors, sans" (PLG 81).

/2/ See Catherine Belsey's Critical Practice, 64-7, for a succinct account of this Lacanian/Kristevan term. See also under "process" in Leon S. Roudiez introductory glossary to Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.

/3/ 'Deictic' means simply 'pointing or showing directly'. John Lyons has defined deixis as "...the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatio-temporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance". (From Lyons, John. Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics. London: Cambridge UP, 1977; qtd. by Mark Steedman in Speech, Place, and Action 125.)

Lyons himself also notes (Speech, Place, and Action, 106) that "Peirce's term "index" is but one of a set of grammatical and philosophical terms, traditional and modern, all of which are based, in one way or another, upon the notion of pointing: 'deixis', 'demonstrative', 'ostension', etc.". We can add 'shifters' to that list of terms.

See also Charles Fillmore, Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis, 39: "Deixis is the name given to those formal properties of utterances which are determined by, and which are interpreted by knowing, certain aspects of the communication act in which the utterances in question can play a role."

Linguists identify three basic types of deixis: person (personal pronouns, proper names), place (e.g. 'above', 'there') and time (e.g. 'yesterday', 'next Tuesday').

/4/ Cf. Bühler, p.19: "Briefly speaking, the words I and you refer to the role holders in the on-going speech drama, in the speech action. In prosopon, the Greeks had an excellent name for it, and the Romans meant nothing by persona but the role in the speech act.... The main and original function of personal pronouns like I and you is not to denote sender and receiver, just as names denote, but only to refer to these role holders...."

/5/ Benveniste, above.

/6/ Bühler, above.

/7/ Roland Barthes, in The Structuralist Controversy, 144:
Inasmuch as person, tense and voice imply these remarkable linguistic beings - the "shifters" - they oblige us to conceive language and discourse no longer in terms of an instrumental and reified nomenclature, but in the very exercise of parole. The pronoun, for example, which is without doubt the most staggering of the "shifters", belongs structurally to [parole]. That is its scandal, if you like....

/8/ Note the double meaning of 'persona': in Latin it means 'mask'.

/9/ "Seule la "troisième personne", étant non-personne, admet un véritable pluriel." Benveniste, PLG 236.

/10/ "'Je", extirpé de sa position, s'accroche donc à un "il" qui, pour être hors dialogue, ne désigne aucun énonciateur de l'act discursif en cours, mais marque simplement et objectivement la possibilité d'une instance de discours." Kristeva, "Instances du discours" 82.

/11/ Roman Jakobson: "[Shifters are distinguished from all other constituents of the linguistic code solely by their compulsory reference to the given message" ("Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb" 132). Jakobson places shifters in the Peircean category of INDEXICAL SYMBOLS: signs that are associated with the represented object by a conventional rule, yet necessarily connected to that object by some existential relation. Certainly "I" fits into this analysis, since the speaker is implicit to the act of utterance (i.e. is existentially related to the instance of discourse); but in what way is "s/he" existentially related to the object it represents? Rather the third person calls attention to the code itself by referring to the possibility of language to name the absent or fictional person. It is for this reason that I characterize the use of the third person as a metalingual function. (See Jakobson, "Metalanguage as a linguistic problem" 116: "A metalanguage is a language in which we speak about the verbal code itself.")

/12/ Cf. Jacques Derrida in The Structuralist Controversy, 155: When I look for the présent of discursive time, I don't find it. I find that this present is taken not from the time of the énonciation but from a movement of temporalization which poses the difference and consequently makes the present something complicated, the product of an original synthesis which also means that the present cannot be produced except in the movement which retains and effaces it.
/13/ Jakobson's use here of the word 'duplicity' refers to the duplex functioning of message and code which "...may at once be utilized and referred to (= pointed at)" ("Shifters" 130).

/14/ Kristeva, in "Instances du discours" 78-79, recalls Jakobson's definition of shifters: "des pronoms dans la locution ... qui translatent le code dans le message, le procès de l'énoncé dans le procès de l'énonciation, les divers protagonistes de l'un dans l'autre et vice versa". She adds: "C'est donc dans la locution elle-même que les pronoms jouent le rôle d'échangeurs entre divers niveaux et aspects de l'acte et du système linguistique. La fiction ne ferait alors que mettre en évidence le caractère de charnière de ces instances, en faisant jouer les translations non seulement entre code et message, énoncé et énonciation, mais dans tous les sens et à l'intérieur de chacune de ces divisions".

/15/ Note the double meaning of this word: 1. unimportant 2. non-signifying.

/16/ See Hélène Cixous, "Le Sexe ou la tête?", in Les Cahiers du GRIF 13 (1976): 5-15, for a discussion of the Realm of the Proper, identified with the male; and Luce Irigaray, "Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un", Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977).

/17/ Or man, of course.
Oriana Fallaci's Lettera a un bambino mai nato

Il fatto e che come ogni altra fatica, ogni altro lavoro, quando un libro e' concluso vive di vita propria. E diventa cio' che vi vedono gli altri. Non e' piu' cio' che l'autore voleva che fosse.


1. Lettera a un bambino mai nato/1/, letter to an unborn child, letter to a male child, never born. A letter without names, without dates, a fictitious series of diary entries to take the place of a journalist's report on abortion/2/, to stand in for, substitute what was asked for and paid for in the work-place: a stolen manuscript, robbed from the commissioning editor and given to another/3/, almost as if the woman who wrote it was depriving the rightful father of his progeny, willfully illegitimating her offspring by bringing into the world an inappropriate response to his desire and then giving it away to another, refusing payment, breaking the contract, stepping outside of proprietal etiquette. A marginal text, then, calling itself a letter, written as a diary, published as literature, sold as a best-seller/4/, by a journalist who has been refused the title of writer./5/

The dustjacket warns that "questo libro diverso da ogni altro nella forma e nella sostanza sara' una grossa sorpresa pei lettori di Oriana Fallaci, cioe' della Fallaci che racconta la guerra in Niente e cosi' sia o attacca il potere in Intervista con la storia." Both in form and content, this text breaks not only with literary genre and property rules;
it also steps out of the tradition established by the author's production by turning down the themes of history and power, those privileged arenas of male prerogative. Instead, it transcribes a nameless, history-less woman's voice, situated outside of time and place./6/

This is not the first time that Fallaci has chosen to write in the first person/7/, nor as an "I" addressing itself to a "you". For example, in Intervista con la storia (161-2) - a series of transcribed and amplified interviews with "history-makers" of the day - she slips into a dialogistic "we" versus "you" passage, as she questions the aims of Dr. George Habash's Popular Front:

L'uomo che avevo dinanzi era l'uomo cui si dovevano, a quel tempo, gran parte degli attentati in Europa. ...

Ecco che discorso: io sono venuta a capirvi, a cercar di capirvi attraverso i miei dubbi. ...

Anche noi abbiamo tipi che mettono bombe: pero' non le mettono in casa vostra, e non li consideriamo eroi.

But in this example (as in all her other works, with the exception of Lettera), personal pronouns are easily attached to the referred person: there is no room for doubt as to the identity of "we" Europeans, as opposed to "you" Palestinian terrorists.

History and power are precisely what pin Fallaci's writing down, obsessive themes serving to anchor the journalist into the here-and-now, constraining, taunting,
limiting the imaginative and creative talents of the "writer". From taped interviews, to in-depth diaristic accounts of her experiences with the NASA space program, and in the midst of fighting during the Vietnam war, to her 600-page roman vérité describing the imprisonment, tortures, and subsequent murder of Greek political activist Alessandro Panagulis, Fallaci pursues her obsessive search for the virile male hero, an image imprinted in her cultural memory-bank as a thirteen-year old member of the Resistance during the Second World War:

_Ti ho gia' detto che ammiro quel tipo d'uomo: e' allora? Devo essere condannata? Si', si', forse sono un po' ossessionata dal coraggio. Nella mia vita e' successo qualcosa, un trauma, quand'ero una ragazzina. Il trauma del fascismo, il trauma della Resistenza. Ha marchiato la mia vita, moralmente e culturalmente, e questo non lo posso cambiare._

_Playboy_ 37.

Fallaci was never a feminist. She was too affected by the "heros" who passed through her house during war-time: partisans or escaped prisoners of war, they were never perceived as scared boys, but rather as comic-strip supermen. A "man" for Fallaci is an independant being, an extra-ordinary individual who is impervious to social conditioning and who stands outside signifying practices: he is a god, creator, inventor./8/ A woman can aspire to nothing better than to become such a She-man.

Fallaci is nauseated and tired of feminists, offended by their victimisation complex, and aliened by their fanaticism./9/ But neither does she feel at ease with more traditionally 'feminine' roles. In _Se il sole muore_, dining in
a restaurant on Mother's Day, Fallaci feels like a dangerous element, a subversive symbol for the mothers that surround her: "E intanto mi affogavano nel loro Niagara di latte, papa', mi scudisciaiavano con la loro fertilita' prorompente, lapidandomi a ogni sussurro col rimprovero di mille bambini mai nati" (405). Drowned in their maternal milk, lashed by their fertility, stoned by their whispering disapproval of a thousand unborn children, as Fallaci describes her experience she also proclaims her Otherness, her absolute denial of a female identity. All the more surprising, then, that she should write this fictional monologue that struggles with the specific difference biologically afforded by the female body and with the uniquely female destiny of pregnancy and miscarriage./10/

2.  

Il diario e' il luogo che risarcisce quello che la vita non consente. Lo spazio in cui ci si riappropria di un'identita' spezzata nel confronto con l'esterno, con l'altro. Il luogo infine dove e' possibile dare voce al silenzio femminile senza venire a patti con l'istituzione letteraria. Rasy 104.

If, as Rasy writes, the diary is the place that compensates for what life does not consent to; the space in which one reappropriates an identity broken down in the face of the external, the other; and finally, the place to give voice to female silence without coming to terms with the literary institution, then how are we to characterize the fictional diary?
The diaristic "I" stubbornly denies the arbitrariness of the sign in a futile attempt to locate and give form to the writing subject. But in the very tracing of the signifier the origin-ating "I" and the writing "I" split, are cleaved onto opposite sides of language and meta-language, and uprooted from their original time/place coordinates, make their temporary residence in the multiple instance of reading: even when read by its own writer, the writing and reading "I" are separated by a spatio-temporal difference./ll/ There is no denying, then, the fictional status of the diary; there is no possible safe-house in which the diaristic "I" may seek refuge from the insidious effect of the signifier to falsify the authenticity of a transcendentally located, unified self. The fictional, diaristic "I" thus stands twice removed from the linguistic Eden of a Self present to itself in its own speech, un-re-presented and therefore uncodified, self-constituting without, and outside of, the institutions that coin and circulate those very re-presentations. The fictional diary is a mock auto / graphía, mocking both the yearning for a self-present-to-itSelf, transparently evident and unclouded over by language, as well as mocking the literary institution's desire for a consumable product, put out and patented by the Author-writer. "This is (and I am) a fiction that is not a fiction", it seems to say, deliberately confusing the reader's sense of pronominal propriety, inviting identification while pushing it away, laying out markers for the reader to follow and identify
while, at the same time, covering up its traces, destroying the imprints of its track, obfuscating both its ontological status and its literary legitimacy.

The ideal discursive tactic, then, for a female journalist who wants to write a story outside of History, who wants to describe a "herstory" while circumventing the power of literary dictates.

3. Ci si affida al discorso diretto, immediato, al parlare in prima persona, come se la voce, i suoi toni portati a forza sulla pagina, potessero garantire la donna scrittrice dal pozzo oscuro della scrittura, dove capita a maschile e femminile di annegare in un'identica morte.

Rasy 32.

Stanotte ho saputo che c'eri: una goccia di vita scampata dal nulla. Me ne stavo con gli occhi spalancati nel buio e d'un tratto, in quel buio, s'e' acceso un lampo di certezza: si', c'eri. Esistevi. ... [M]i sono accorta di precipitare in un pozzo dove tutto era incerto e terrorizzante. Ora eccomi qui, chiusa a chiave dentro una paura che mi bagna il volto, i capelli, i pensieri. E in essa mi perdo.

(7)

Being and nothingness, certainty and uncertainty, light and blackness, You and I. Two concentric circles, You inside me, Us locked within "the dark well of writing", are chambers of fear in which I lose(s) my/itSelf were it not for the bright certainty of Your existence: "c'eri; si', c'eri; esistevi." That nothingness that terrorizes, obliterating even the graphic mention of "I"/12/, is silence/13/, to be warded off, kept at bay by this voice: "Ora eccomi qui...". Now, here I am. But when, and where? "I" 's location, lost
somewhere in a dark well of fear, is traceable only through the marks of these words. Now, here, let my writing give the lie to nothingness, because "I" fear(s) nothing but silence, because "nulla e' peggiore del nulla" (8), and what terrifies me is not death, not pain, not the others, but "il niente, il non esserci, il dover dire di non esserci stato..." (8).

"I" speak(s), conjuring up a "you", a you that shall remain voiceless and silent, trapped within the echoing double chamber of my body and the dark well of writing, a senseless spark of being, started perhaps, like the universe itself, in error (9-10), but providing, all the same, the possibility for my discourse: an invisible, mute interlocutor, allowing "I" to take its bearings and carve its initials into the existential walls encircling the well of fear./14/

4. Non puoi mica parlarmi. (7)
Io ti parlo, bambino, e tu non lo sai. (16)

Cosa darei, bambino, per rompere il tuo mutismo, penetrare nella prigione che ti avvolge e che avvolgo, cosa darei per vederti, ascoltare la tua risposta! (26)

Speechless infant, in-fans, You can't talk, can't know (or know everything already/15/), wrapped up in that prison that I wrap(s) up, which I would like to break into to extricate your voice, to tear through the very tissues of my own body in order to hear your answer, in order to see you face to face. ('"I" speak(s), say(s) my/itSelf and simultaneously hear(s) echoed back the voice of "you", a voice
that paradoxically originates with, and within, the isolating confines of "me". ('"Subject As Pronoun" 6) Were "I" to give birth to "you", flipping the membranes of this echoing chamber inside out, reversing the reversible sides of this communication act, our positions would be exchanged on the self-same axis; and yet, "I" need(s) "you", need(s) to have confirmation of your person in order to know myself existent. That is why "I" interrogate(s) myself incessantly on the exact moment that life begins, in an exasperated attempt to attribute consciousness to the Other: "Allora dimmi, tu che sai tutto: quando incomincia la vita? Dimmi, ti supplico: e' davvero cominciata la tua? Da quanto?" (26)

Perhaps if "I" trace(s) out a composite drawing, giving visual form to an invisible silence, literally constructing the body of You? Here, your photograph, see your head, your mouth, your eyes, a dorsal spine, a nervous system, a stomach, liver, intestines, lungs, and even that affective centre, your heart (9), look at them. "Non era proprio la tua fotografia, evidentemente quella di qualsiasi embrione di tre settimane..." (9). No matter that You is any "you", a pluralized, anonymous other, because what is important is only that "you" be, setting up a polarity to balance the symmetrical necessity of my discourse.

And then, the visual obsession, scopophilic desire. A woman alone in a room pastes up images ripped out of a magazine, willing form and contour onto a presence she is
never sure exists, making visible the unseen, concretizing a fantasm of herSelf: "Gli innamorati lontani si consolano con le fotografie. Ed io ho sempre in mano le tue fotografie. E' diventato ormai un'ossessione" (18). "Ho ritagliato la fotografia....L'ho attaccata al muro, e qui dal letto la ammiro: ossessionata dai tuoi occhi" (34). The eyes become the indicator of consciousness: "Da quando so che hai chiuso gli occhi mi sembra che tu non presti attenzione a ciò' che ti racconto, che ti culli in una specie di incoscienza" (52). What they see ("L'acqua e basta? Le pareti della prigione e basta?" (34)), how they see, whether they see at all. A mania to see and be seen, as if by positing an indexical relationship, an imagistic one-to-one correspondence between "you" and "it" / the photograph, the image itself might take the place of being, and conjure up the other's presence through a pantheistic rite, turning any "you" into You / my Other through a magical transmutation from signifier to signified, in the belly of "I".

5. Certo siamo una ben strana coppia, io e te. Tutto in te depende da me e tutto in me depende da te:.... Pero' io non posso comunicare con te e tu non puoi comunicare con me. In quella che e' forse la tua sapienza infinita, non conosci nemmeno la faccia che ho, l'eta' che ho, la lingua che parlo. Ignori da dove vengo, dove mi trovo, cosa faccio nella vita. Se tu volessi immaginarvi, non avresti neanche un elemento per indovinare se sono bianca o nera, giovane o vecchia, alta o bassa. Ed io mi chiedo ancora se sei o no una persona. Mai due estranei legati allo stesso destino furono piu' estranei di noi. Mai due sconosciuti uniti nello stesso corpo furono piu' sconosciuti, piu' lontani di noi. (26)
Strange couple that we are, reader. Linked together by these words, "I" call(s) to "you", invite(s) your participation in the pronominal play, proffer(s) the mask of person, pull(s) you into the revealing / concealing game of pronominal hide-and-seek, and yet..."I" disclose(s) no secrets, and what "I" make(s) known is nothing more than my allocutionary location: "sono una donna che lavora" (10), "sono una donna che ha scelto di vivere sola" (11), no more than that.

Let me taunt you with my unknowns: secret knowledge is the only power that I have in this attempt to write mySelf without making public my fear. Do(es) "I" tease you with this game of Twenty Questions? "If you wanted to imagine me..." What is "I" 's face like, what is my age, mother-tongue? Where do(es) "I" come from, where is "I" now, what do(es) "I" do for a living? Am "I" black or white, young or old, tall or short? And You, are you a person? Strange couple, indeed, bound together by the profferment of discourse, spoken through the words of each Other, taking on definition only through the defining axes and the polarizing effect of instant substantiation in speech, yet remaining, all the same, strangers, unknown(s) to each('s) Other.

And this body, body of words, textual corpus that unites us, envelopping us in its web of narrative necessity, it does no more than veil the distance that separates "I" from "you". A series of constraining tissues, cartilaginous structures,
fibrous sinews of plot/16/, en-joining us to the commands of the text yet leaving us no line of communication, no possibility to break free of their directives, to pull up the slack and to tear back the signifying veil of printed words that, as it binds us together, divides us so irrevocably.

"Io non posso comunicare con te e tu non puoi comunicare con me."/17/ This textual body (my words, "I" 's words) form a connecting passage not only between the within and without of pronominal subjectivity, transmitting thought from language to meta-language, it also tunnels out a hollow chamber between writer and reader, to be filled in by our appropriations. It is a sort of connecting chamber that makes known and makes commonly shared the distance that lies between us. A dark well, then, that "I" and "you" construct with our discursive act, and that we peer into and across, like moles in a burrow, ceaselessly offering up our bodies for the Other to inhabit, incessantly writing our literary corpus in the hope of filling in or having filled in that empty communicating passage.

6. Non mi piaceva allinearmi con le donne dalla pancia gonfia: non avevo nulla in comune con loro. Nemmeno la pancia. (56)

Sopra di me c'e' un soffitto bianco e accanto a me, dentro un bicchiere, ci sei tu. ... Ti guardo, finalmente. E mi sento beffata perché non hai proprio nulla in comune con il bambino della fotografia. Non sei un bambino: sei un uovo. (98)

Nothing in common, neither I with those other pregnant women, nor you with all the other normal foetuses. You are/is
a deviation from "qualsiasi embrione"; any baby is not you, baby, and the common characteristics that "you" share with "them", the communicating, interlapping territory, is nil. In fact, you are/is not even a baby after all. That scopophilic fever has finally been assuaged. I have/has you within sight at last, and as I look(s) at you finally, a glass containing an egg, in turn containing you, I ask(s) myself why it is that every enclosure that I come up against is a circle within a circle, concentric duplicity to close me in, to seal off any hope of ever finding a communicating passage, something in common with the Other(s).


To hear silence is a formidable task, worthy of a Zen master. I wonder what can be more profound: the silence of isolation when trapped inside the concentric rings of Selfhood, or the silence I hear(s) when I talk(s) to "him"? Perhaps the telephone lines may provide a link; but "neanche fosse caduta la comunicazione", not even if the line had been cut off, not even if the telephone had gone dead, or the connection been severed, not even if the communication had "fallen" away, would the silence have been so deeply and utterly complete.
Silence and immobility appear as parallel images and fears throughout this body of words, like old regretted tattoos or ugly childhood scars, hidden in some obscure and fleshy (textual) fold. Lettera is "about" pregnancy and choice, "about" women's right to the management of their own bodies; it is the story of one woman's struggle to live independently and come to terms with the responsibility of giving birth to another life; it is the tale of... Yes, all that too, but when I listen to the harmonic pitches, whistling above and through this faceless monologue, I hear louder than any others the frustrated tones of a disembodied voice lamenting a broken or impossible contact, and willing into existence, through the sheer force of language, that lifeline to the Other. Call it a communicating passage or a connecting tunnel; call it a separating hollow, if you will, this line of communication is no better evoked than as an umbilical cord, transmitting sustenance and lifeblood from "I" to "you": a metaphorical transversal connecting within and without, running back and forth, like discourse, between the Self and the Other.

8. Qello che non capisco e' perche', quando una donna annuncia di essere legalmente incinta tutti si mettono a farle festa... Con me rimangono fermi, zitti, o fanno discorsi sull'abortire. (22)

Lui e' rimasto zitto e fermo: un'ombra alta e scura contro il bianco della parete. (53)

Still and silent, silent and still: I am/is surrounded by
fantasm-like shadows, insubstantial presences that menace by their immobile quiet. When "he" left, "col suo passo deciso, senza che io lo fermassi", it was almost as if "non avessimo piu' nulla da dirci"(11), and this lack of dialogue, this nothing-to-say-to-each-other, is a haunting recurrence, making the pseudo dialogue with "you" all the more imperative. As I listen(s), without speaking, to "he"'s pleading, my/her silence is misinterpreted as complicity: "incoraggiato dal fatto che ascoltassi zitta..." (17). Twice their telephone conversations end cut off, interrupted by silence: "Ho posato una seconda volta il recevitore senza ascoltarlo" (22). No wonder that "I"'s love objects in the past have been nothing more than "fantasmi deludenti di una ricerca sempre fallita" (17): ghostly, speechless constructs of a gigantic swindle perpetrated by the priests, billboards, literature, and politicians, in order to keep people distracted and well-behaved (17). In fact, the father's words are entirely ignored and dismissed, both over the phone and in person, until he commits them to graphic form; then his letter is quoted in entirety, is considered worthy of reflection and manages to enter into "I"'s dialogue with herSelf (94-95), as if only the written takes on solidity and emerges from the world of fantasms and shadows; as if only the written has true authority in "I"'s universe.

9. Due settimane immobili, a letto, sono troppe. ... [E'] subentrata una specie di spossatezza, un'ansia
che assomiglia all'angoscia. (51)

Siamo all'ospedale. Una camera triste di questo mondo triste. Ci siamo da una settimana che ho trascorso quasi sempre dormendo, obnubilata dai seditavi. ... Il silenzio mi abbrutisce e mi schiaccia. (61)

Immobility leads to an anguish-like anxiety, while silence brutalizes and weighs "I" down. "I" lie(s) for two weeks, groggy and sedated, between sleep and awake. Denied newspapers, television, telephone and visitors, "I" am/is reduced to a brutish, animal-like state. The silence that is imposed on me/her closes in and surrounds like a cage which the white-clad keeper enters only to give injections of hormonal drugs. Without exchange of speech, locked into this silent prison, even the keeper is reduced to the level of brutes: "prigioniera di una belva vestita di bianco..." (61).

Non ho risposto nulla. Non ho fatto un gesto. Non ho battuto un ciglio. Sono rimasta lì con un corpo che era pietra e silenzio. Anche il cervello era pietra e silenzio. Non si annidava un pensiero, una parola. L'unica sensazione era un peso insopportabile sopra lo stomaco, un piombo invisibile che mi schiacciava come se il cielo mi fosse precipitato adosso: senza far rumore. (75)

The woman doctor informs "I" that the foetus is dead: "I"'s/my response is immobility and silence, a body of stone and silence, a mind of stone and silence, where not a single thought, not single word is lurking. The death of "you" not only puts an end to dialogue and speech, it puts an end to the very functioning of the body, so that the month of immobility was only a prelude to the death-like state that follows when the Other is no more. When "I" search(es) for the baby during
the trial scene, "dentro la gabbia, fuori della gabbia, al di la' degli scanni, per terra, sui muri", "I" am/is unable to locate him. What I find(s) instead is only "una quiete di tomba" (88). This tomb-like hush is precisely what is left to "I" when dialogue becomes monologue, when the implicit "you", summoned up by pronominal posing in the instance of discourse, remains hidden behind the "I". Yet, it is at the very moment that "you" is no more, when "I" realizes the Other was not another person - a substantiated presence outside herSelf - but rather simply the other pole that makes speech possible, it is at that moment that "I" continue(s) to talk nevertheless: "Tu non renascerai mai piu'. Non tornerai mai piu'. E' continuo a parlarti per pura disperazione" (92).

10. Cio' che vedo in te non sei te: sono io. Ti ho attribuito una coscienza, ho dialogato con te, ma la tua coscienza era la mia coscienza e il nostro dialogo era un monologo: il mio! Basta con questa commedia, basta con questo delirio. (62)

It is the delirious play of person, the exchange of pronominal masks that is so dangerous and that "I" long(s) to put an end to in order to reappropriate and proper-tize the boundaries and confines of my/herSelf. Hence "I"'s frustrated imperatives to unmask the nature of my/her discourse: monologue disguised as dialogue, "questa commedia, questo delirio", a delirious play of person as the writing self calls up the absent Other in an attempt to make 'mine' into 'ours'.

The struggle to individuate "I" from "you" runs
throughout the text, from "I"'s promise to separate body from mind, giving body to the Other and retaining mind for herSelf (59), to comments such as: "Tu prenderesti il mio posto nel mondo e io mi riposerei" (59); "ti insinuasti in me come un ladro, e mi rapinasti il ventre, il sangue, il respiro. Ora vorresti rapinarmi l'esistenza intera" (62).

"I"'s fears of being obliterated by the Other are summed up succinctly in her account of a science-fiction novel in which the protagonist needs only to drink a solution in order to fertilize him/herself: "Si tratta di una normale scissione cellulare e, nell'attimo in cui il protagonista si scinde, cessa d'esser se stesso: compie una specie di suicidio del suo io" (69). It is this sensation of splitting, of cleaving in two, that leads to "I"'s obsessive repetition of the word 'coerenza': "[Il mio cervello] ha pensato: 'E' andata come doveva andare. Dunque ci vuole coerenza.' E la parola coerenza mi ha accompagnato fino all'albergo, martellante, ossessiva: coerenza, coerenza, coerenza" (76)./18/ "I" need(s) desperately not only to be logically coherent in my/her thought-processes and actions, but also to be adhesive, to adhere the "I" to the Other, in order to protect my/herSelf against a suicidal splitting of the ego.

11. Svegliati, su. Non vuoi? Allora vieni qui, accanto a me. Appoggia la testina su questo guanciale, così'. Dormiamo insieme, abbracciati. Io e te, io e te... Nel nostro letto non entrerà nessun altro. (52)
S'era infranto un equilibrio, al suo ingresso. S'era rotta una simmetria, turbata una complicità: quella che esisteva fra me e te. Era giunto un estraneo, capisci, e s'era messo fra noi ed era come se ci avesse imposto un mobile di cui non si ha bisogno, anzi ingombra la stanza, togliendo luce, rubando aria, facendo inciampare. (55)

Vedremo cosa fare di lui: a volte un mobile di cui non si ha bisogno finisce col dimostrarsi utile.... (68)

Equilibrium, a symmetrical, cohesive balancing between "I" and "you" can only be achieved, it seems, under the threat of a third intruder. "Let's sleep together, hold on to me, hug me. You and I, you and I... No one else shall enter our bed" (my trans.). There could be no more explicit verbalizing of the Oedipal yearning than this incestuous desire on the part of "I" to wrap up the "you" of her loins into her bedding, forbidding and despising the intervention of the father. Perhaps it is true, as Kreyder suggests (Kreyder 504), that first-person diary-writing is an expression of the Imaginary Order, an illicit signifying practice that eschews the meta-lingual manipulation of the fictional third-person as a way of circumventing entry into the Symbolic by denying the arbitrariness of the sign. Certainly in Lettera the third Other "he" is purely an antagonistic presence serving to nourish and off-set the complicity between "I" and "you", almost as if in the face of adversity their bond were strengthened. Nor could the treacherous effect of the third-person appellation be more clear: "I" likens "he" to an unneeded piece of furniture cluttering up the room, blocking
light, using up air. "He" is objectivized, robbed of any personal status, coldly and persistently told that "he" is "an outsider" ("un'estraneo") coming between "you" and "I", a completely useless and entirely unwanted object. In a flipping of the person in a hypothetical, and therefore not realized, statement, "I" elevates "he" to the status of person by addressing him directly as "tu": "Avrei voluto dirgli: 'Vattene via, per favore. Non abbiamo bisogno ne' di te', ne' di Giuseppe, ne' del Signore Iddio. Non ci serve un padre, non ci serve un marito, tu sei di troppo'" (55). "He" (or "she") is precisely that: one too many, an unnecessary adjunct to a perfect discursive coupling between complementary poles in the communicative act; one that can admit no other into the origo of their discursive instance. In consonance with the Oedipal yearning, "I" and "you" murder the father by their very use of the third-person pronoun, distancing and banishing him from their intimate tete-a-tete.

12. Ti ho scritto tre fiabe. O meglio, non le ho proprio scritte perché stando a letto non posso: le ho semplicemente pensate. (38)

How difficult it is to write when the bed remains my prison and only horizon; and were I to write, that act would only displace me farther away from pure expression of myself; after all, the signifier of the signifier is such a distant facsimile of the origin-al logos, pure speech, present to itself. Perhaps, instead of writing, if I think my fables,
and communicate my thoughts to you that way? How much closer you would seem: you and I entwined in thought, a utopian telepathic coupling, undefiled by the necessity for representation, unbesmirched by codification, circumventing all entry into the Symbolic Order and all interference from a patriarchal signifying practice. Let me "simply think" these fables, then, and pretend that writing is nothing more than transcription, an appearance of thought on the page, scripted by an anonymous hand, some other Author who is not Me.

C'era una volta una bambina innamorata di una magnolia. (38)
Quella bambina ero io.... (40)

C'era una volta una bambina cui piaceva molto la cioccolata. (41)
E' da quel giorno che io non posso mangiar cioccolata. (44)

C'era una volta una ragazzina che credeva nel domani. (45)
Fu lavando le mutande sporche degli altzi che me ne resi conto: il nostro domani non era giunto, e forse non sarebbe mai giunto. (49)

Try as I might to craft my fictional person, placing her within the venerable discursive frame of the fable, sculpting and gilding that frame, "Once-upon-a-time...", with the quotation marks of story-telling, telling you again and again that I will tell you a story ("Te ne racconto una" (40); "Anche questa e' una fiaba" (41); "Questa non lo so se e' una fiaba, ma te la racconto lo stesso" (45); "Potrei raccontarti una fiaba. E' tanto che non racconto una fiaba. Eccola" (69).), try as I might to project mySelf onto the fictional co-ordinates of the third-person axes, I still am/is unable to
accept and maintain the fiction.

Four times "I" begin(s), and four times "I" shift(s) back onto my own frame of reference, until, in the end, "I" no longer even attempt(s) to disguise the 'autographical' (self-descriptive) nature of my story: "E revedendoli lei elemosinava (io elemosinava): 'Mi dai un poco di luna? Ne hai tanta!'" (70) "Lei" is a fictional stance, a distancing from the Self, assumed from a metalinguistic promontory, an artificial artifice crafted according to authorial instructions, a literary device, finally, which "io" can neither uphold nor sustain. But what is the alternative?

13. Forse e' troppo presto per parlarti così'. Forse dovrei tacerti per ora le brutture e le malinconie, raccontarti un mondo di innocenze e gaitzezze. Ma sarebbe come attirarti in un inganno. (15)

Raccontare, the telling of tales, is, for "I", tantamount to the spinning of the trama, the fibrous sinews of plot that attract and trap "you" into a fraudulent, self-deceiving swindle of an innocent world full of joy. The ruse of the third-person is equivalent to the ruse of fiction in general which weaves a fine veil of 'story-fied' illusion, a con-trap-tion which protects and blinds "you" from the ugliness and sadness of life. By rejecting the fictional contrivance; by letting the fictional weave run bare here and there, exposing its bald spots in the way that "I" subvert(s) the story-telling conventions by letting the narrator's "I" poke
through; by refusing the narrator's cloak while continuing to narrate, "I" tell(s) instead a series of lessons, the sum of her knowledge, to pass on to the Other: "E per oggi ho finito, figlio mio, figlia mia. La lezione ti e' giunta?" (15) The lessons are jealously guarded for your ears only, and if others should hear, let them think of the lessons as fictions, harmless fables told to pass the time of gestation away; anything to keep "them" from separating "us".

After all, in view of the way independent women have predominantly been judged since Eve tempted Adam with the apple of knowledge, determined to leave that Eden of innocence and gaiety: "Chissa' che direbbero alcuni se mi ascoltassero. Mi accuserebbero d'essere pazza o semplicemente crudele?" (15) Will "they" accuse me of being crazy, or simply cruel, for telling my truth to you?
Notes

/1/ Henceforth to be referred to as Lettera. All quotes from Lettera will be followed simply by a number in brackets. E.g. (23).

/2/ "Poi, un giorno, Giglio [Fattori, il direttore della rivista Europeo], mi chiede un lungo reportage sul problema dell'aborto. Gli rispondo: "E se invece del reportage ti scrivessi un racconto?" ... Mi misi a scrivere. Continuai per tre mesi. E il racconto divenne un libro." ("Una donna chiamata Oriana", Annabella 6 Sept. 1979: 21.)


/5/ This statement is based on personal research in Italy which attests to complete critical and scholarly silence in regard to Fallaci. It is also based on comments from newspapers, magazines and booksellers.

/6/ Proper noun references are carefully avoided. When the narrator sets off on a trip the destination is studiously referred to as "il paese in cui siamo venuti" (64) or "questo paese" (68).

/7/ Apart from Penelope alla guerra which uses a fictional 3rd person narration, all of Fallaci's work is written in the first person, a natural extension of her journalistic activity primarily as an interviewer. While Se il sole muore, Lettera and Un Uomo all make consistent use of a "you" interlocutor, only the "you" and "I" of Lettera are fictional constructs.

/8/ "Non riesco a escludere insomma che la nostra esistenza sia decisa da pochi, dai bei sogni o dai capricci di pochi, dall'iniziative o dall'arbitrio di pochi. Quei pochi che attraverso le idee, le scoperte, le rivoluzioni, le guerre, addirittura un semplice gesto, l'uccisione di un tiranno, cambiano il corso delle cose e il destino della maggioranza." (Interview, Playboy Nov. 1981: 8.)

/9/ ibid. 39.

/10/ Surprising, also, that Lettera is dedicated "da una donna per tutte le donne".
 Cf. Barthes in The Structuralist Controversy, 140: "When a narrator recounts what has happened to him, the I who recounts is no longer the same I as the one that is recounted. In other words ... the I of discourse can no longer be a place where a previously stored-up person is innocently restored." and "When I use (libere) the sign I, I refer to myself inasmuch as I am talking: here there is an act which is always new. However, arriving at its destination, this sign is received by my interlocutor as a stable sign, product of a complete code whose contents are recurrent. In other words, the I of the one who writes I is not the same as the I which is read by thou" (141).

In Italian the personal pronoun is implicit to the verb and need not be stated except for the purposes of disambiguation or emphasis. The first occurrence of 'io' is in line 11, page 7: "Io non mi curo degli altri".

"Come faccio a intuire che non vuoi essere restituito al silenzio?" (7)

Cf. the metaphor of the well on p.90. The foetus explains his refusal to be born: "Giungesti addirittura a sfidarmi spiegando cos'era la vita da voi: una trappola priva di liberta', di felicita', di amore. Un pozzo di schiavitu' e di violenze cui non mi sarei potuto sottrarre". Also Ida Magli (20) refers to "that famous apologue of the woman fallen in a well": "Per le donne che parlano esistono soltanto attributi negativi: pettine, chiacchierone, maldicenti, la lingua comunque le perdera', come insegna il famoso apologo della donna caduta nel pozzo".

"Ma a poco a poco va maturandosi in me la certezza che tu li capisca perché sai gia' tutto" (25).

See Laura Kreyder's article, p.500-502, for an interesting feminist analysis of the words 'trama' (= woof, yarn; plot, conspiracy; plot of a novel; attacking strategy; tissue. Sansoni Italian-English Dictionary, 1979 ed.) and 'velo' (= veil).

Note the various meanings of 'to communicate' (from Latin comunicare "to make common", make known, from communis, COMMON): tr. 1. to make known; impart 2. to transmit (a disease, for example) intr. 1. to have an interchange as of thoughts or ideas 3. to be connected or form a connecting passage. (American Heritage Dictionary, 1969 ed.)

Also referred to on p.95: "La nostra amica mi informa che il bambino e' ancora dentro di te e rifiuti di liberartene, quasi tu volessi servirti di lui per punire la tua incoerenza e proibirti di vivere" (95).
Marguerite Duras's Aurélia Steiner

1. CAHIER DU CINEMA: Est-ce que tu ne pourrais dire aussi d'Aurélia Steiner comme du Vice-Consul que son mal, c'est l'intelligence?

DURAS: Oui.... Mais une intelligence sans correctif.

C. DU C.: Une intelligence folle, littéralement.

DURAS: Déchaînée.

C. DU C.: Elle est folle aussi Aurélia Steiner, d'une certaine façon.

DURAS: Oui, elle est partie dans la folie. Comme Abraham. C'est quelqu'un qui est parti. Elle ne s'arrêtera pas Aurélia Steiner.

Les Yeux Verts 89.

C. DU C.: On peut dire aussi qu'il y a une cruauté qui passe [dans le film Aurélia Steiner].

DURAS: L'amour.

C. DU C.: Ce sont toujours des amours cruels.

DURAS: Je n'ai pas choisi.

Les Yeux Verts 91.

And if a woman dared to be both crazy and cruel?

Aurélia: "Petite fille. Amour. Petite enfant" (155), you are crazy, gone, you'll never stop; unleashed by that unbridled intelligence, you propagate your cruel love across the bodies of your lovers, young sailors with black hair and blue eyes, those to whom you will never belong, or across the body of the cat "[qui] ronronne du désir fou d'Aurélia" (198). Why do you crush him like that with your caresses, "à lui couper le souffle, à lui faire peur" (172), only to call him back with words of love? Cruel love, crazy love, propagating fear, propagating madness, propagating sickness and death.

Death and pain are the text's spiderweb.

Complicitous readers who succumb to its charm must beware: they may remain in the web for good.

Kristeva, "The Malady of Death" 141 /1/

X.G. -- Et qu'est-ce qu'ils vous ont dit, les hommes?
M.D. -- Le mot "malade" revient dans chaque lettre.
X.G. -- Malade?
M.D. -- "Je suis malade de vous lire."
X.G. -- Et les femmes, non?
M.D. -- Les femmes aussi.
X.G. -- De la même façon?
M.D. -- Oui. ...

Les Parleuses 18.

Take note, then, of a different kind of trama: the Durassian web is a pernicious weave of morphological threads/2/ that ensnare unsuspecting readers in its non-representational, non-narrational, non-literary plot; an opaque tissue made of interwoven voices, often faceless and nameless, that insinuates itself between speaker and hearer, subverting the functioning of the communicative act, stretching out the distance that divides them, widening and rendering impossible the bridging of the gap that separates one from the other:

Je ne vois pas l'écrivain écrire pour tenter d'établir cette communication par le livre avec les autres hommes, je le vois en proie à lui-même, dans ces lieux mouvants, limitrophes de ceux de la passion, impossible à cerner, à voir, et dont rien ne peut le délivrer.

Duras, Les Yeux Verts 80.

The dark well of writing that Duras inhabits, "la chambre noire où tu n'entres pas mais dont tu as pressenti l'existence"/3/, this dark room only sensed but never entered, hovering on the confines of passion, is a solitary moving space, closed in on itself, "limitrophe", a bordering state, thus neither here nor there, inside of which the writing self remains trapped and incapable of deliverance, and yet also incapable of perceiving and sealing off the very confines that
enclose it. Duras writes because she cannot help herself, because there is nothing else she can do/4/, but her endeavour is one of murdering the text, of achieving the ultimate "mot-absence"/5/, of reducing the text to silence:

Je suis dans un rapport de meurtre avec le cinéma. J'ai déjà commencé à en faire pour atteindre l'acquis créateur de la destruction du texte. Maintenant c'est l'image que je veux atteindre, réduire. Les Yeux Verts 49.

Separation, isolation, madness that manifests itself as unintelligibility, discourse dwindling to monologue, monologue to single words, delirious repetition, obsessive memory: these are the elements that combine in Duras's work throughout the "India Song cycle", with the Aurélia texts arguably constituting a transitional break between these works of alienation and the writer's latest production, more accurately characterized as works of recuperation, initiative and renewal./6/ As Marcelle Marini writes in "L'autre corps", p.30:

[Duras] n'a jamais mis entre parenthèse la souffrance qu'est la folie: en cette souffrance, elle a vu d'abord un gain par rapport à l'anesthésie, parfois l'hébétude, des individus et des peuples; depuis les Aurélia Steiner, elle fait de cette souffrance une force positive qui pousse non seulement à la destruction d'un monde intolérable, mais encore à l'invention dès maintenant de relations différentes comme de valeurs nouvelles.

The Aurélia texts occupy a special position in the Durassian corpus for other reasons as well:

C'est vrai que, historiquement, quand je serai morte et qu'on fera l'histoire de mes écrits, on verra que j'ai recommencé à écrire avec Aurélia. Comme si
quelque chose était assouvi, une douleur très grande que je n'avais jamais exprimée.
Marguerite Duras à Montreal 73.

These texts mark a return to writing after ten years almost exclusively devoted to film-making/7/; in a very literal sense, then, they are a break with textual silence and a return to the written word. Thus, when Aurélia repeats at the beginning and end of each section "J'écris", one hears echoed the wonder and almost sensual enjoyment of the exiled writer returned to the homeland of the graphic word. "L'écrit", writes Duras in Les Yeux Verts (10), "je le retrouve avec Aurélia"./8/

2. A multiplicity of contradictory sources and motives are described as the origin of the Aurélia texts:

1. A l'origine d'Aurélia Steiner, il y a une lettre adressée à quelqu'un que je ne connais pas. ... Avec cette lettre, tout à coup, j'ai recommencé à écrire.
Les Yeux Verts, 4.

(This letter is dated July 3, 1979.)

2. Le 25 août 1979 je trouve écrit dans mon agenda [une phrase]. ... C'est quelques jours après que j'ai commencé Aurélia Steiner. Mais après avoir envoyé à quelqu'un la phrase sur la mer sur une carte postale bleue.
Les Yeux Verts 67.

3. La troisième Aurélia vient de l'histoire de Sami Frey, qui m'a été racontée, mais pas par lui. ... La deuxième histoire vient d'Elie Wiesel, d'un film qui s'appelle La Nuit ... Voilà sur les Aurélia.
Marguerite Duras à Montreal 40.

If the origin of the Aurélia texts is multiple and contradictory, its destinataire, or addressee, is most
definitely identifiable. **Aurélie Steiner** is a letter (or letters?) "adressée à quelqu'un que je ne connais pas"; the sentence about the sea was sent to "quelqu'un"; and when asked whom she refers to when she uses the expression "vousvoyez" in her texts, Duras replies: "Je dis ça à quelqu'un. Ces textes-là, j'ai commencé par les dire à quelqu'un"/9/. In the broadest sense, then, "vous" must be identified with "quelqu'un", that is to say, someone, anyone, but most definitely some Other who is not "I", not the writing self, and not Duras herself:

La prétention, c'est de croire qu'on est seul devant sa feuille alors que tout vous arrive de tous les côtés. Evidemment, les temps sont différents, ça vous arrive de plus ou moin loin, ça vous arrive de vous, ça vous arrive d'un autre, peu importe, ça arrive de l'extérieur.

_Les Lieux de Marquerite Duras_ 95.

Not only is the positing of "un autre", a voice that arrives "de l'extérieur", necessary to writing; it stands at the very genesis of (this) writing.

Unlike Fallaci's interlocutor, "tu", Duras's other, "vous", is, even at the purely grammatical level, plural, formal and distant. The Durassian "someone" to whom to address speech must be allowed the possibility for pluralisation; s/he must be situated outside the writing space and outside the writing body, capable of shifting and displacing according to the continually moving borders ("the peripatetic peripheries") of that invisible, ungraspable place on the confines of passion. How seriously should we take
Duras's word, then, that: "[Écrire] regarde l'individu seul. Pour le reste, que le livre soit une communication, c'est égal"/10/? That communication between people is impossible, and that they are "irremediably separated"; that this separation is "[une] fixité quasi mathématique"/11/ and an unbearable torture/12/; that all this is true does not change the fact that the basis and genesis of Duras's writing is an anonymous, unknowable, plural, distant and absolutely necessary "you"-interlocutor. "Je voulais vous le dire à vous..." she writes at the beginning of a fragment in Les Yeux Verts, p.80, inscribing the Other's desire into her own (voulais vous = voulez-vous?); and:

Je vous le dis aussi, on croit ne pas survivre à la connaissance de ces données abominables de la séparation irremédiable entre les gens. Or ce n'est pas vrai. On y survit. On peut. On peut faire de soi.

Les Yeux Verts 23.

Perhaps the way to survival, this solitary defiance of the "abominable facts concerning the irremediable separation between people", lies precisely in the call to the Other through writing, a writing addressed to "vous": "C'est ce que je désire. Que cela vous soit destiné" (117). The breakthrough associated with the Aurélia texts that marks a return to writing is none other than this acknowledgement that the desire for writing (and the desire engendered by writing) is destined, addressed, fated, necessarily directed to "you", and is, most clearly, a desire for rapprochement and communication with the Other:
Où êtes-vous?
Comment vous atteindre?

Comment nous faire rapprocher ensemble de cet amour, annuler cette apparente fragmentation des temps qui nous séparent l'un de l'autre? (118)

3. Aurélia Steiner  Aurélia Steiner  Aurélia Steiner, with this name, incantatory repetition, a triple evocation of nominal presence, as if the power of the proper noun, the mere repeated inscription of a proper name, were enough to bring into existence a self of one's own: "nom propre" = a proper noun / a proper name / a clean name / one's own name. Hug this name to yourself, Aurélia, for in truth, you have nothing else of your own, and nothing else that remains constant across your transmutations but this name which you repeat to yourself and to others or have others repeat to you. Placed on a graph and collated as shown below, these sixty-eight instances, inscribed in 84 pages, define the beginning and end of the first section as single punctuation marks, swell to a rise at the end of the second section, and explode, after tenacious anonymity dotted by a teasing apparition of initials, into a veritable geyser of first name appellations to close off the third-person, third section. Were you to plot the progress of your nomination, you would create three separate efforts, each one a cluster of appellations, and each nebula overlapping the one before in the manner of waves breaking on a beach; a superimposition of swelling proportions, a swell of nominations breaking harder
Incidence and Types of Naming in Aurélia Steiner by Page Number
and farther up onto the shore of identity, each of the three waves slapping and diffusing with greater strength and greater density of flow, filling in, like a connect-the-dots drawing or a paint-by-numbers portrait, an impressionist image of that cluster of *noms propres* that is both "you" and "I" (and "s/he") in this text: Aurélia Steiner, Aurélia, A.S., Steiner, Steiner Aurélia. "[C]e nom sans sujet" (146), these words called out for three days from the end of a hanging rope, "ce scandale" put an end to by a bullet and "repris ailleurs, dans d'autres étages, dans d'autres zones du monde" (159), this name given to a lover as password to penetration, a secret, senseless mantra, *mot de puissance* to be repeated without understanding (161), this series of marks on a white page (162), inscription of race (164), guarantor of parentage and placemarker in History (197)... What more, Aurélia, can your name do, other than generate text and act as matrix for the birth of writing?/13/


*Je vais peut-être vous écrire mille lettres, vous donner à vous des lettres de ma vie maintenant.*

*Et vous, vous en ferez ce que je voudrais bien que vous en fassiez, c'est-à-dire ce que vous voulez.*

*C'est ce que je désire. Que cela vous soit destiné.* (117)

Begin then, with writing and desire for writing.

Writing, desire for writing, and "you": "you" unidentified,
free to roam and fix its appellation on mother, father, lover, sea, daughter, like desire itself or meaning which must be free to circulate, lighting on but never landing, endlessly postponed from a final destination. Stop desire, invest it in one person and you deaden it: "La personne est un support passager.... Oui, ce serait toujours le même amour, au départ, qui se déplacerait, de personne en personne";..."il y a une sorte de circulation, si vous voulez, de la jouissance". Fix meaning onto one signified and you create metaphysics (and God). Attach writing to one source, make it the property of an Author and it develops "cette gangue de l'écrit, cette gangue sacralisée"./14/

So this cornucopia of 'shifterisation', a maddening proliferation of deictic signals (such as the 24 instances of 'je', 'vous', 'ça', 'en', 'ma', 'maintenant', 'cela' in this opening passage) is a way of starting up the circulation of jouissance, of inducing a field of desire through the setting up of opposing currents. By fixing speech into writing, thereby localising the origin of language and creating a stable grid, while destabilizing that grid through the implantation of empty, non-signifying marks that only take on meaning in the instance of reading, desire runs through these opposing currents in a constant movement of appropriation and reference: pronouns referring back and forward in space and time, personal pronouns continually circulating from one character to another, and both incessantly (re-)appropriated
by writer and reader(s).

The Aurelian universe, in oxymoronic contrast to the rock-like 'stein' that opposes it, is a labyrinth of fluids, a series of pronominal stop-gaps, sluices, locks, dams and cascades, channeling identification and location through shifting canals that lead into intersecting and confusing junctions, so that the reader floats from one sense of subject to another, propelled along by the ruses of the shifters, and more specifically, by the play of pronouns./15/

5. On peut dire que la fiction produit une permutation incessante des shifters. Le procès signifiant est exploré selon toutes ses possibilités de se structurer en tant qu'acte d'énonciation (allocution), et en conséquence le "je" qui normalement transcende cet acte, à force de shifterisation et permutation, cesse d'être un point fixe localisable, mais devient multipliable selon les situations de discours. "Je" n'est plus "un", il y a plusieurs "je"-s et donc plusieurs "un"-s qui ne sont pas des répétitions du même "je" mais de diverses positions (en "tu", en "il") de l'unité.
Kristeva, " Instances du discours" 79.

"An incessant permutation of shifters" radically pluralizes "je", which migrates referentially between Aurélla, Duras, and reader as well as designating a multiplicity of fictional clusters in the text: she who writes; triple manifestation at Melbourne, Vancouver, Paris; daughter of sailor; daughter of hanged prisoner; daughter of mother dead in childbirth in the concentration camp; daughter of mother taken away by the Gestapo; she who lives in a glass room facing a garden; she who lives by the sea; she who lives in a black tower in a forest; 18-year-old; 7-year-old.... The
splintering and excessive reproduction of pronominal referents not only makes "I" many, it also makes impossible any fixed, localisable point of reference for the reader, who is presented with a multiplicity of markings, a variety of possible coordinates to be assumed on the axes of discourse. That is to say, this 'shifterisation' also has for effect a radical splintering of the unified persona of "you". "I" offers not one mask in the proferment of discourse, but several, making coincidence between sender and addressee random, and thereby severing contact between the two actors in the play of speech, who confront each other, masks in hand, unsure at any time which one to don, unsure also who stands before them: "Où êtes-vous? Comment vous atteindre?" (118)

Kristeva, "Instances du discours" 91.

If the Other is unable to attain a monolithic presence, remaining splintered, effaced and unknown, prevented, like the play of meaning, from taking fixed residence in any one signifier and thus denied a metaphysical access to being, the Other is equally unable to attain to a fixed position from which to climb to a metalinguistic promontory. "You" is thus activated for the purposes of permitting the writing act, but at the same time, is refused unity, permanence and transcendence as a way of safeguarding the conflictual movement in this problematic speech act.
Comment nous faire nous rapprocher ensemble de cet amour, annuler cette apparente fragmentation des temps qui nous séparent l'un de l'autre? (118)

On dit que vous êtes dans une terre équatoriale où vous seriez mort il y a longtemps, dans la chaleur, enterré dans les charniers d'une peste, dans celui d'une guerre aussi, et aussi dans celui d'un camp de Pologne allemande. (119-120)

Both space and time separate "I" from "you", but it is not the distance between the two that is unbroachable, so much as the plurality and fragmentation, the continuous shifting and multiplication of identities, places, and times that serve as a backdrop for the (Hi)story that will eventually unite them.

M.D.-- C'est peut-être ça, la vie: entrer dedans, se laisser porter par cette histoire -- cette histoire, enfin, l'histoire des autres -- sans cesse mouvement de [rapt, de ravissement].... C'est ça qui est le mieux, c'est ça le plus souhaitable au monde.... C'est ça qui n'arrive jamais, dans la vie.

X.G.-- Ou très, très rarement.

M.D.-- Oui, dans des moments extrêmes.

X.G.-- Oui, de rupture, de vacance, de réception.... Si on ne commence pas par être envahi par ce vide, par cette béance [alors ce n'est pas la peine de continuer]....

M.D.-- C'est le désir?

X.G.-- Oui, c'est le désir comme une force qui ne nous appartient pas.

Les Parleuses 65.

"To enter into, to let oneself be carried by this (hi)story, others' (hi)story, a constant movement of rapture, of ravishing", this is the process that Duras sets into motion by telling a story full of holes, empty spaces, béances, left by the discontinuous and shifting meandering of the narrative, but especially by the essential blanks whose contours are traced out by the unappropriated deictic signals. This is the
process that "Auréllia" sets into motion by writing a series of letters to a blank position in the discursive act.


When the "I" of Fallaci's letter recounts fables to the foetus, the act borders on an autobiographical reconstruction of the important moments in a life, to be passed on as lessons to a future generation. The didactic aim of Fallaci's work -- experience comes first, only afterwards does one use language to describe and communicate about it -- goes hand in hand with her attempt to make writing invisible in order to communicate pure experience to the Other, outside of the dominant symbolic order, thus avoiding patriarchal oppression inherent to signifying practices. Lettera also accomplishes this aim by stepping outside of history, by carefully avoiding references to time and place, and by leaving nameless all the characters. It marks a journalist's attempt to be free for a short time from the male-dominated arenas of history and power.

The Auréllia texts follow an almost diametrically opposed tactic. Not only is the act of writing made explicit, the "I" uses language -- a name and fables told about the name -- in order to construct an identity and reconstruct a history: experience and language are concurrent. The child Auréllia questions the lady who looks after her; what the child wants to hear is a story she has heard tens of times before: "Puis la dame laisse l'enfant chanter seule et pour la centième fois
lui raconte" (178). It is a ritualistic pronouncement of words the child has memorized, but needs to hear spoken by someone else in order that they may take on their incantatory power to define and substantiate her Self:

Aurélia a cessé de chanter. Elle écoute la dame qui contient son histoire....
-- Raconte, dit Aurélia -- Elle attend, la dame dort, alors Aurélia lui dicte -- "alors elle est montée en courant, elle me portait?" etc. (193-4)

In less explicit terms, Aurélia Vancouver demands the same of her lover. She needs to hear spoken her name, which she writes on a piece of paper, thus concretizing in every way possible the only remnant she retains of a past that has dispossessed her. Hence her pleasure in the sailor's addition of "Juden", each repetition of her name a further locating tag: race or religion, first name, family name: "Il dit: Juden, Juden Aurélia, Juden Aurélia Steiner" (163-4). With each utterance the cluster of attributes that make up "Aurélia" is more tightly bonded and disambiguated: her identity collesces with the thickening density of proper nouns that at the same time fix her to a more specific location. Unambiguous identity, here, is a verbal tattoo bestowed exclusively by the language of the Other.

Two processes are at work in these texts: first, an attempt to write desire into narrative by leaving blanks in the pronominal positions and by fragmenting and pluralizing both references to space and time as well as the story/ies itself/themselves; secondly, an attempt to make the personal
political, to transform the private and individual into a public, generalized experience. This 'classic' feminist approach has been Duras's aim since working on her first film-script *Hiroshima, mon amour*./16/

"Aurélia", then, whoever she may be, makes of her quest for identity, at once, a quest for love, and a quest for a place in the multiform, endless story of oppression, war and suffering that we call History. It is not surprising, then, that the work progresses from an almost nameless monologue, addressed to a "you" dispersed all over the globe (among the isles of France, dead in an equatorial land, buried in a mass grave of plague victims, buried in a mass grave of war victims, lost in a Polish-German concentration camp (119-120), struck by the plague in London, killed in East Germany, in Siberia, "here" (126), and in a Cracow crematorium (130)), to a named, Jewish "I", a story localised to the white rectangle of a Nazi camp; and finally, to a third-person, historically and geographically located account of the suffering and anguish experienced by a little Jewish girl shut-up in a tower during an air-raid during the Second World War. The accumulative effect of these three texts, the second one longer than the first, and the third one longer than the second, is a progressive movement of location and identification, somewhat like a focussing zoom effect that closes in from the abstract, blurry image of Aurélia Melbourne to the precise outlines of Aurélia Paris. The last Aurélia,
the only one that Duras has chosen not to bring to film, must, like Lol V. Stein, "rest[er] intacte, enfermée dans le livre, cloîtrée dedans...comme une proposition absolue et intranscriptible. Infernale"./17/ She must remain a creation of verbal language because she is already expelled from the interior monologue and fixed into a history, fictionalized by the third-person account and at the same time, placed in an object-ivized rendering of war-time persecution. The murderous third-person is here a linguistic echo or parallel of that persecution.

7. Vous disiez: des histoires traînent le long de ce fleuve, de cette longueur fluviale si douce qu'elle appelle à se coucher contre et à partir avec elle. (132)

Ravished by history and the story of others, bourne away by desire, "I" want(s) to lie with this fluid length of (hi)stories; let it fill me up, penetrate my body with the empty fullness of naming. "Vous auriez remarqué ce corps laissé, livré, cette jouissance emportée loin de vous et de laquelle celle-ci ne veut pas revenir" (144). How can I come back to you when this sweetness calls me away, calls me to emerse mySelf in the anonymous flow of time, an eternal repetition and re-enactment of our birth, separation and death? "Nous deverions nous rapprocher ensemble de la fin. / De celle de notre amour. / N'ayez plus peur" (126). As I look(s) at myself in the mirror, "informée de notre
ressemblance profonde devant le hasard du désir" (143), our bodies join across the expanse of hunger and madness through the corpse of the leprous cat (134), and if I ask you "comment faire pour que cet amour ait été vécu?" (134), it is because I already know the answer: "J'écris"; and it is in the act of writing that our love shall be lived, coalesced into marks on a page, so that it shall never be forgotten or swept away into the flux of "cette longueur fluviale si douce...".

Dans la chambre fermée de la plage, seule, je construis votre voix. Vous racontez et je n'entends pas l'histoire mais seulement votre voix. Celle du dormeur millénaire, votre voix écrite désormais, amincie par le temps, délivrée de l'histoire. (146)

Your body that I search for among the sailors at the port escapes me, so I construct your voice, and as I transcribe(s) it, alone in this closed room, the story you recount joins the cries of the mad cat outside my window: "Ecoutez... / Quoi? Que dirait-il? / Quel mot? / Quelle désignation insensée? / Inept?" (131) It is by my act, "votre voix écrite désormais", that your voice is delivered from the cruel senselessness of history and distilled by time into this story of "Aurélia Steiner".


Even if the events of the past, the litany of cruelty, hunger, madness and death, is "une force irréfragable", a force that cannot be refuted, one that lurks as a monolithic
mass beneath me, like God, a "stein-like", petrified presence that challenges the fluid outpouring of my song, there is still one way that "I" can subvert it.

8. As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations.... In return, female subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding: time as departure, progression and arrival — in other words, the time of history. It has already been abundantly demonstrated that this kind of temporality is inherent in the logical and ontological values of any given civilization, that this temporality renders explicit a rupture, an expectation, or an anguish which other temporalities work to conceal. It might also be added that this linear time is that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation — death.

Kristeva, "Women's Time" 16-17.

Je ne peux plus, et vous, vous le comprenez, écrire une histoire cohérente, la mener à bien, prétexter d'un sujet et le développer dans toutes ses conséquences, depuis les premières jusqu'aux dernières. C'est fini. Je ne sais pas comment vous l'exprimer clairement. Je peux vous dire seulement que pour en arriver à tenter par exemple de vous l'exprimer, je suis tenue d'en passer par une apparente fragmentation de l'écrit, des temps qui le structurent et surtout de constamment désorienter la direction de ses composants.

From original Aurélia Steiné letter, dated July 3, 1979; rptd. in Les Yeux Verts 5.

Imagine, then, History as a straight line that runs from Beginning to end, with an arrow placed somewhere along the length to indicate its vectorial status: teleologically
attuned, proudly project-oriented, a straight arrow slipping through Time on its journey to the heart of Progress. Linear history with such a prospective is a well-formed sentence unfolding according to the decorum of grammaticality, an anecdote full of (common)sense recounted in order to make sense, a story of protagonists engaged in heroic quests, a tale turning the arbitrary and the unjust into the fated and the necessary, a chronicle that starts at the beginning and finishes at the end. THE END. This final rupture provokes an anxious expectation and lends finality to the once-only accomplishment of death: language as a finite resource, an enunciation clocked by the erosion of time, bound to run out with the dying breaths of speech, and thus linked necessarily with the ethos of production, a lust for product and consumption.

Now draw beside this line a cyclical figure, spiralling around on itself in a rhythmic pirouette, traced against the background of a "monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the word "temporality" hardly fits."}/18/ How is one to impose coherent story on this consistently tangential curve that diverges endlessly at the point of infinity? Perhaps if one were to isolate an arc, fragment the totality, re-produce an approximation of events that take their place on this repeating cycle? Syntax decomposes, protagonists split, direction is disoriented, plot loses coherence, sense loses
meaning, story refracts, repeats, is recounted and re-recounted as it subtly shifts and displaces the contours of sameness.

Aurélia Steiner is precisely this sort of re-presentation conceived in reaction to and refusal of a linear version of History. When story and history merge, when the particular is only one example of the universal, when a proper name denotes both someone and an unspecified plurality of "anyone"'s, when desire is left free to circulate among the blanks offered by deictic proliferation, when "you", "she", and "I" exchange places and masks in a fluid re-appropriation that offers no containment, then it is just possible that History and God, pain, suffering and death can be refuted after all, in the act of writing: "Aurélia Steiner dix-huit ans, dans l'oubli de Dieu, se pose en équivalence à Dieu face à elle-même"./19/
Notes

/1/ Kristeva, judging Duras's work from a purely clinical point of view, pronounces it dangerous and unhealthy. Other relevant passages from "The Pain of Sorrow in the Modern World: The Works of Marguerite Duras" follow:

...Duras's texts should not be given to fragile readers, male or female. There is no purification at the end of these novels laden with disease, no heightened sense of well-being, no promise of a beyond, not even the enchanting beauty of style or irony that would provide a bonus of pleasure beyond the ill revealed.

... With neither cure nor God, without value or beauty other than the malady itself, seized at the site of its essential fissure, Duras's art is perhaps as minimally cathartic as art can be. Undoubtedly, this is because it stems more from sorcery and bewitchment than from the grace and forgiveness traditionally associated with artistic genius.

... The "crisis in literature" that Valery, Caillois, and Blanchot describe attains a kind of apotheosis in Duras.... In Duras, the crisis leaves writing just short of a complete distortion of meaning and confines it to the laying bare of malady. Noncathartic, this literature encounters, recognizes, but also propagates the ill that mobilizes it. (140-141)

One cannot help but be amused at the grim tone of Kristeva's critique, as if literature that is not cathartic, or at the very least pleasurable through stylistic beauty or irony, ought not to be read: an Aristotelian aesthetics applied to twentieth-century texts?

A nagging doubt also remains: aren't the criteria that Kristeva is using to judge Duras's texts also those that have traditionally been applied to ascertain the worth of a woman? That is to say, she should be sexually effective / cathartic in bed, or at least offer some kind of pleasure: beauty, or lighthearted wit, for example. It would seem that for Kristeva a work of art must be a companion of easy virtue, servicing the sorrows of the soul through an aesthetic purge.

Furthermore, as powerful women have often been judged over the centuries, Duras's texts derive their potency, not from "the grace and forgiveness traditionally associated with artistic genius" (Madonna) but from supernatural "bewitchment and sorcery" (Lilith/Eve). Once again, women (and texts), are placed in the dichotomous categories of Sainthood or Whoredom. Odd assertion for a thinker who has advocated a global
breakdown of dichotomies relating to the sexes, oppositions which "may be understood as belonging to metaphysics" ("Women's Time" 33).

/2/ Duras: "Le mot compte plus que la syntaxe. C'est avant tout des mots, sans articles d'ailleurs, qui viennent et s'imposent. Le temps grammatical suit, d'assez loin." (Les Parleuses 11) Gauthier rightly points out that this insistence on the word in Duras's writing results in syntactic blanks in the grammatical chain which constitute and cause a rupture of the symbolic (masculine) order. (Les Parleuses 12)

/3/ Les Yeux Verts 80.

/4/ Les Lieux de Marquerite Duras 11.

/5/ J'aime à croire, comme je l'aime, que si Lol est silencieuse dans la vie c'est qu'elle a cru, l'espace d'un éclair, que ce mot pouvait exister. Faute de son existence, elle se tait. C'aurait été un mot-absence, un mot-trou, creusé en son centre d'un trou, de ce trou où tous les autres mots auraient été enterrés. On n'aurait pas pu le dire mais on aurait pu le faire résonner.

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein 54.

/6/ In her M.A. thesis Susan Mae Brett places Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, Le Vice-Consul, L'Amour, La Femme du Gange, India Song and Aurélie Steiner in a group which she calls the "India Song" self-portrait works, texts which tell and retell the same story of abandonment, madness, and voyeuristic love through the same characters: Lol V. Stein, Anne-Marie Stretter, Michael Richard(son). According to Brett, a switch from the primacy of (male) sight to the (female) mode of hearing takes place in the Aurélie texts, signalling Duras's discovery of her own female voice.

There is no apparent connection between the Aurélie texts and the rest of this cycle; however, in a fragment written in Les Yeux Verts, 66, Duras places Aurélie on the beach of S.Thala:

Aurélie est sortie du corps massacré de L.V.S....

Les Yeux Verts 66.

Note also the resemblance of names tying these texts together: Stein, Steiner, and Stretter, as well as the initials of A.-M.S. and A.S.. Bernard Alazet points out that "Aurélie fait émerger, par le jeu de l'anagramme, le prénom refusé par Lol: Valérie...." (51). Madeleine Borgomano writes that the signifier "Aurélie Steiner" reunités "bien d'autres
mouvantes figures de l'univers durassien, masculines et féminines, de Loï V. Stein au Stein de Détruire, dit-elle, sans oublier ceux qui se trouveraient convoqués par traduction (Pierre) ou par paronomie (Anna, Anna-Maria Stretter). Aurélia Steiner fait de son nom, comme de son fantasme, un lieu de condensation et de déplacement à la fois" (163).

See Bibliography for works written after the Aurélia texts.

/7/ Between 1969 and 1979. On p.11 of Les Lieux de M.D. Duras refers to the period when she stopped writing books and only made films: "Seulement, quand j'ai cessé d'écrire, j'ai cessé, oui, j'ai cessé quelque chose... de... enfin, la chose la plus importante qui m'était arrivée, c'est-à-dire d'écrire."

/8/ See also: "Très longtemps je n'ai pas su comment agrandir les lieux et, surtout comment les reprendre ailleurs, loin, dans autre chose. Et puis ces temps-ci, après les Aurélia, j'ai trouvé naturellement comment faire" (Les Yeux Verts 32-3).

/9/ Les Yeux Verts 84.

/10/ ibid. 90.

/11/ ibid. 23.

/12/ From the anguished and very beautiful fragment "Je me demande comment" in Les Yeux Verts, p.89: "Emmenée à Venise, soignée, entourée pour que j'oublie la séparation, à moitié morte emmenée de force, adorée, j'ai mille ans, je ne peux pas supporter la séparation, ils s'y mettent tous pour me dire qu'il le faut. Pourquoi? ..."

/13/ Bernard Alazet lists three meanings of the phrase "Je m'appelle", which as he points out, contains "toutes les marques de l'identité": pronom-sujet, verbe nominatif, pronom réfléchi à la première personne, prénom et nom" (53). 1. identification: "They call me Aurélia Steiner"; 2. nomination as an act of subject: "Right at this moment I call myself Aurélia Steiner"; 3. Choice of name and constitution of oneself as subject: "I, myself, decide that I call myself - and will henceforth call myself - Aurélia Steiner".

Furthermore, as Ralph Sarkonak points out, the signifier 'Aurélia Steiner' is teeming with anagrammatic readings. However, since this kind of study does not fall within the scope of the present work on pronouns I list here some of his observations:

1. aureLia = "elle lia" = she made links; with AUR as "or" = "now she made links" or "she linked gold", a description of writing?

2. auRELLa sTeiner = "elle rit" = she laughs; variation:
AURELIA STEINER = "la rieuse" = "the laughing woman";
3. Aurelia Steiner = "tu as rien", the displaced and possessionless, owning nothing but her name; variations: STE INER = "tes", "rien" = "your", "nothing"; an even more devastating reading gives "t'es rien" = you are nothing;
4. Steiner Aurelia = "sa" = abbreviation for signifiant;
5. Steiner Aurelia = "ça" = "it", "the id"; also "here" in the expression "ça et là".

/14/ Les Parleuses: 1) p.124; 2) p.47; 3) p.196.

/15/ Note the abundance of water-related references:
p.120: "Je vois que le ciel du fleuve est bleu de cette même couleur liquide et bleue de vos yeux."
p.124: "Ecoutez, / sous les voutes du fleuve, il y a maintenant le bruit de la mer."
p.129: "D'abord le bleu liquide et vide de vos yeux."
In Aurélia Vancouver descriptions of the sea, and the story of it rising up and engulfing the town, are interposed between the fragments relating to Aurélia's birth and receiving of lovers. Other references to water:
p.157: "Je suis rentrée dans ma chambre, j'ai rincé mon corps et mes cheveux à l'eau douce et puis j'ai attendu le jeune marin à cheveux noirs."
p.158: "Au-dessus de vous, trois jours durant, le ciel allemand, devant vos yeux ce ciel plein d'eau et de pluies fécondes."
p.160: "Ainsi, parfois, je vois la couleur liquide et bleue des yeux vides déjà pris par la mort du jeune pendu de la cour de rassemblement."
p.161: "Il me dit qu'il était sur la plage lorsque je me baignais dans la mer."
In Aurélia Paris the tears of the lady form a constant trickling noise in the background, occasionally augmented by those of the child.
p.169: "La pluie a cessé."
p.170: "On pleure. C'est la dame qui garde la petite fille, qui la lave et qui la nourrit."
p.176: "--J'ai encore pleuré, dit la dame, tous les jours je pleure sur l'admirable erreur de la vie."
p.176: "La dame se penche et sent les cheveux de l'enfant, les mange, elle dit qu'à la bouche ces cheveux sentent la mer."
p.182: "--Ils passent la mer, dit l'enfant, écoute."
p.190: "[L'enfant] pleure dans ses mains."
p.199: "J'ai encore pleuré."
The dominant colour of all three sections is blue: the sky, the river, the sea, as well as the eyes of Aurélia, the
sailor, her father and mother are all varying shades of blue, green, or gray.

The name Aurélia, containing both the 'liquid' consonants 'r' and 'l', also harbours the word 'eau'.

Finally, the names of the cities were chosen for their proximity to water.

/16/ In her Preface to the text of Hiroshima Mon Amour, Duras explains how important it is that the love story between the two main characters be perceived as completely banal, "quotidienne". Moreover:

Toujours leur histoire personnelle, aussi courte soit-elle, l'emportera sur Hiroshima. Si cette condition n'était pas tenue, ce film, encore une fois, ne serait qu'un film de commande de plus, sans aucun intérêt sauf celui d'un documentaire romancé. Si cette condition est tenue, on aboutira à une espèce de faux documentaire qui sera bien plus probant de la leçon de Hiroshima qu'un documentaire de commande. (10)

The example of the particular serving as a lesson about the universal is explicitly illustrated in the same preface:

Simplement, [the Japanese man and the French woman], ils s'appelleront encore. Quoi? Nevers, Hiroshima. Ils ne sont en effet encore personne à leurs yeux respectifs. Ils ont des noms de lieu, des noms qui n'en sont pas. C'est, comme si le désastre d'une femme tondue à Nevers et le désastre de Hiroshima se répondaient exactement. (14)

This passage, written in 1960, also shows Duras's long preoccupation with the effect of names as referentially ambiguous signifiers that designate both one particular person and a multitude of people.

/17/ Les Yeux Verts 65.

/18/ Kristeva, "Women's Time" 16.

/19/ Les Yeux Verts 76.
By Way of Conclusion

Being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I do? What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through? And it is this which frightens me:

Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?

Ellison, 503.

Lower frequencies, outer, marginalized frequencies; it is across these subversive channels that "I"-voices skip a reticular path on their broad-casted trajectory to "you". A history in the telling, refracted and recounted according to this pattern, becomes a fiction and an art(e)fact, a lying monologue diarized by a journalist, or a collection of names with various referents, misnomers for a reference that lies, at once, outside History and within a multiplicity of "herstories".

When "I" speak(s) to "you" not only does the text mark empty spaces to be filled, offering up literary béances as signposts to ravishment; reader, text, and writer participate in a triadic exchange of personal positions that turns the fixed origo of the deictic "I, here, and now" into another twist of the kaleidoscope, a temporary tableau of subjectivity. When "I" speak(s) to "you", language converts into speech by making the personae the dramatic necessity of the linguistic act; but literary speech localizes itself within a context that is endlessly locatable: with every reader and every reading, a different instantiation.

By writing letters to their children, diaries to
themselves, or literary products that exclude themselves from main-stream genres, women find in the false dialogism of "you"-addressed monologues a way of sustaining the illusion that one can write outside of patriarchal ideologies by denying the arbitrariness of the sign. "S/he" is patently a fictional construct, and the third person the venerable mode of epic and novelistic narration. When I speak to you, we seemingly short-circuit that channel and make of our communication both a detour around the symbolic order and a transparently direct line to the Other.

In Fallaci's letter this direct line is an umbilical cord, and her speech a series of lessons told as fables. The unnamed "you" makes possible the transmission of personal experience in a form that seems harmless and childish. Fallaci makes her work innocuous by stripping it of references to time, place, or person, so that the journalist, a chronicler of public History, is able to don the mask of private writer communicating personal history. This act is made possible by the equivocal functioning of the pronouns.

In his review of Régine Robin's novel La Québécoïte, Ralph Sarkonak discusses the "impossibility of telling a complete and finished story in a linear manner" (101) given "the insuperable barrier which has separated language and history since the Holocaust. For to write in a linear manner is to postulate a coherence, a continuity, and a direction which have been lost forever" (102). A passage Sarkonak cites
from Robin is singularly apt in this context:

Rien qui puisse dire l'horreur et l'impossibilité de vivre après [the Holocaust]. Le lien entre le langage et l'histoire s'est rompu. Les mots manquent. Le langage n'a plus d'origine ni de direction. (102)

Duras echoes that sentiment in her 1960 Preface to Hiroshima mon amour:

Impossible de parler de Hiroshima. Tout ce qu'on peut faire c'est de parler de l'impossibilité de parler de Hiroshima.

At the time she wrote the Aurélie texts, Duras had declared herself an exile from writing; above all, from writing as a coherent story with well-crafted characters that develop along the linear exigencies of beginning, middle and end. In the peripatetic nomination of "you" and "I", she finds an opening to a "post-Holocaust" solution to narrative and a "post-Hiroshima" answer to the necessity of silence. The shifting lines of Aurélie's tri-partite story are paralleled in the proliferation of "shifters" which fracture and disperse the unity of the text, preventing total mastery by the reader, while also frustrating the reader's efforts to construct a monolithic sense of self and Other.

Gaps in narrative, gaps in pronominal reference, blanks to be filled in differently with every reading; every reading a personal appropriation of the essentially "unappropiable" instant of textual jouissance.... This latticework effect - gaps transversed by the lines of text and reading - more than any other, perhaps, traces out a possible link between
language, history and 'herstory'. By extending a communicating line to the Other through the play of pronouns, the works of these women writers construct a textual bridge across those gaping chasms.
Works Consulted

I. General Critical Works


II. Fallaci

A. Books by Fallaci


B. Interviews with Fallaci


"La Gente che fa opinione - 4) Oriana Fallaci". Oggi 28 May, 1980: 47+.

"Duetto [with Isabella Rossellini]". Amica n.d.: 22+.


C. Articles on Fallaci


III. Duras

A. Selected Works by Duras


B. Works on Duras


