CHAPTER TWO
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I: The 'Other' Woman

Adrienne Rich confesses to facing a stark choice of poetic selves as she wrote in the late fifties: between a male self, “cold and egotistical” she embraces in her poem ‘Orion’, and a womanly self, endowed with “maternal love, altruistic love – a love defined by the weight of an entire culture” (Rich, 1979: 45-46). Her poem, 'Thinking of Caroline Herschel', 1966 is, as she declares, the first poem in which “the woman in the poem and the woman writing the poem become the same person” (1979. 47). The speaker of the poem synthesises with the subject of her poem in a shared experience:

I have been standing all my life in the
direct path of a battery of signals
of the most accurately transmitted most
untranslatable language in the universe (47)

The woman speaker and the woman poet are searching for a new language for communication “for the relief of the body/ and the reconstruction of the mind”. The language of “battery signals”, of the mechanised reality of the industrialised world is “untranslatable” to the speaker. To the poet, it is a moment of creative realisation that the inherited male persona of her poetry is a false self, and must be discarded. Unlike Woolf who, in her attempt to delve into the female unconscious for the purpose of her writing,
hits against "something about the body, about the passions which it was not fitting for her as a woman to say", Plath chooses not to be inhibited by male censorship (Battersby 150). In Plath's mature work the womanly self of the poet begins to emerge, speaking in the language of the female experience; the realm of the “She” of 'In Plaster' (CP 158), of a peculiar female consciousness, becomes the subject matter of her poetry.

This 'Other Woman', denied in the prosaic world of Plath’s domestic prose, emerges as a vitriolic force in her mature poetry. Plath’s reading of Robert Graves’ The White Goddess undoubtedly influenced her perception of the female as a fragmented, tripartite entity, whose mythical forms as hag, virgin and mother reoccur in Ariel. In the mythology of the goddess, there is always another female self-shadowing the manifest form; what is not manifest now, will be in the future. This kaleidoscope of female selves offers the woman a solution to “the discontinuity of the female life” - to the self split between wife, poet and mother (Rich, 1979: 43). The mythology of the goddess allows the female to regard her femaleness as something multiple, and thereby transcends the demands of her culture and her self to be three simultaneous selves. Furthermore, it allows the enraged female self, the angry old hag denied by the pretty environment of the domesticated female, to surface. This seething archetype explodes outside beyond the boundaries of traditional female existence and in the face of male cultural oppression. So we find ourselves reckoning with the female personae of 'Daddy', 'Lesbos' and 'Lady Lazarus':

And your neat moustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.

Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You --

Not God but a swastika

So black no sky could squeak through.

Every woman adores a Fascist,

The boot in the face, the brute

Brute heart of a brute like " ('Daddy', CP 222).

Your voice my ear-ring,

Flapping and sucking, blood-loving bat.

That is that. That is that.

You peer from the door,

Sad hag. 'Every woman's a whore.

I can't communicate ('Lesbos', CP 227).

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware.

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air ('Lady Lazarus', CP 244).
These final, poetic female personas are characteristic of Plath 'writing like a woman'. She is, in this sense, adhering to the advice of Robert Graves that a woman poet should "write as a woman, not as if she were an honorary man" (Graves 446-447). However, she turns a deaf ear to Graves’ exhortation that a woman “either be a ‘silent’ Muse”, like “the visible moon: impartial, loving, severe, wise”, or “nothing at all”. By writing as a woman, (and a vengeful, disturbing woman at that), Plath shatters her own conception of female poetry, as something “quailing and whining” (LH 244), or, what she diagnoses in her Journals female poetry to be: “the sublimation . . . of deep, basic desires” (J 61). As Norman Brown recalls (quoting Röheim): "The difference between a neurosis and sublimation is evidently in the social aspect of the phenomenon. A neurosis isolates; a sublimation unites" (qtd. Malkoff: 7). An act of sublimation, then, would include Plath in an entire circle of female predecessors - something she was anxious to avoid.

Her husband’s opinion of her poems, as representative of the continuing tradition of established male poets, is recorded in a letter to her mother, April 29, 1956: "Ted says he never read poems by a woman like mine; they are strong and full and rich . . . they are working, sweating, heaving poems born out of the way words should be said . . . (LH 244). Clearly, it was Plath’s desire to be acknowledged as a woman poet who did not write like other women poets. In this sense she is redefining what it means to be a 'woman' and to 'write'. The prevailing order of womanhood that defined her generation, and the preceding generation, did not serve her purpose. The need to be separated from
the category of “quailing and whining” female poets such as Sara Teasdale, or the “simple lyrics” of Edna St.Vincent Millay, indicates a conscious and deliberate process of self-differentiation from that tradition. In the same letter, she writes of wanting to “hit the critics violently” with her book of 33 poems, a wish born, perhaps, of witnessing her husband’s impressive critical reception. Her choice of adverbs further reflects her husband’s poetry, whose first collection, *The Hawk in the Rain*, (1957), was characterized by images of a violent Creation. In a letter of the same period, she writes, with the utmost admiration, of Hughes’ poetry as “controlled explosions of dynamite when he really writes full tilt” (LH 254).

This admiration for the force of violence in Hughes’ poems is indicative of Plath’s desire to graft her poetic vision to a stronger and more resilient voice than that of her foremothers, to a new and stronger version of female writing. The closest example she can find of the "explosions" she desires in her own poetry, is that of her husband’s poetry, not for the purpose of writing like a 'man', but in order to find a way out of the restrictive 'femininity' of female poetry. The “quailing and the whining” of feminine poetics, reminiscent of Victorian notions of womanhood, are spurned by the maturing Plath as a hindrance to the more serious business of those poetic “explosions” she desires. This turning away from what she perceives as the weaker female tradition of poetry coincides with her rejection of the contemporary form of womanhood. The blonde, lip-sticked girl of the fifties sorority mould vanishes and replacing her is the “deliberately dowdy . . . mother and established poetess” (Newman 46). Thus, Plath the writer replaces
the notion of fifties femininity with a more serious and effective form of womanhood which, in turn, allows her to begin writing 'like a woman'.

II: The 'Experience' of Fifties Femininity

Identity is further determined by social space. In the introduction to her study, Women and Space (1981) Shirley Ardener explores the ways in which social spaces define women. Plath's 'Nine Female Figures' (1950-1) ('Eye Rhymes' Exhibit, 2002) depicts a repeated motif of a boxed-in female form in varying degrees of reduction: the female breasts merely a series of squiggles; in the foreground two Matisse-like faces suggests the full sensuality of the female. The unifying theme of the piece is the repeated use of oblong-shaped boxes, suggesting the confinement/containment, and, in turn, reduction of the female form. Plath's women reflect a sense of sexual exposure; a keen sense of embarrassment suggested by the repeated motif of protective folded arms and hands over their genitalia. The space that holds these women (and we must assume this space is domestic) is antithetical to female sexuality, antithetical to nature itself. Ultimately, Plath's art piece is a comment on the artificial construct of domesticity and the domestic lifestyle that denies the female access to the power of her sexuality and, in turn, her individuality.

'Lesbos' (CP 227) is a clear example of how the domestic space defines the occupant. The kitchen, matrix of domesticity, implodes with fraught tension. The speaker describes her space in images evocative of a low-budget horror film:
the fluorescent light wincing on and off like a terrible migraine,
Coy paper strips for doors . . .

The baby smiles, fat snail
From the polished lozenges of orange linoleum . . .

An old pole for the lighting . . .

The sparks are blue.
The blue sparks spill,
Splitting like quartz into a million bits (CP 227-8).

Allusions to lighting and colour reinforce the sense of a set, a contrived mis-en-scène, in which the speaker observes herself, objectified, for the sake of theatricality. The speaker adopts the role of a 'dramatis personae', and thereby, heightens the grotesque sense of drama of her domestic space. An acute sense of the dramatic supplies the poem with its momentum, and the rapid rhythms of hate punctuate the poem at regular intervals:

Now I am silent, hate
Up to my neck,
Thick, thick.
I do not speak.
I am packing the hard potatoes like good clothes,
I am packing the babies,
I am packing the sick cats (CP 229).

In dramatic monologues, the speaker addresses herself: she, the actress, she the mother and wife. Lyrical apostrophes address a domestic muse, an aspect of self-personified: "You peer from the door, / Sad hag. 'Every woman's a whore/. I can't communicate' " (CP 229). A sense of public occasion, of spectacle drives the speaker. Similarly, the speaker of 'Lady Lazarus' is a bona fide actress. As Juliet Blair comments, the role of the actress is to bring into the public space that which is normally reserved for the private (Blair 205). The female, relegated (by the norms of her culture) to the private and personal sphere of the home space becomes, in Plath's poem, a matter for public scrutiny. It is her capacity as an actress that removes the sanctions governing that space. As an actress, 'Lady Lazarus' is herself, a renegade of the social order. By thrusting herself into the public forum, she is able to address her audience with all the dramatic art afforded an actress. The art of acting itself is traditionally associated with feminine wiles or "duplicity", with traits designated as 'feminine' by our culture. Those traits, listed by Blair as, "emotionality, subjectivism, hysteria, irrationality" are "devalued" by our culture for their negative connotations of "passive suggestibility; and introspection regarded as narcissism and duplicity" (Blair 205-6).
As a true actress, Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' persona projects the facts of her interior life into the public domain, but not before she has tantalised her audience with the delights of her physical self. Like an actress, she evaluates herself from the outside in, offering a grotesque catalogue of the value of her features as 'objets-d'art':

A sort of walking miracle, my skin,
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen . . .

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth (CP 244)?

As an actress, she is accountable to her audience, particularly in terms of aesthetic appeal. Therefore, she must offer herself as something of an advertisement of good taste, a "smiling woman . . . only thirty"; she must sell her femininity as a visceral commodity to please the senses of her audience. The true theatre of Plath's 'Lady Lazarus', however, is achieved in a shocking debacle of reversal of feminine aesthetics. Like a true actress 'Lady Lazarus' delights in an opportunity for the theatrical, and proceeds to destroy the cultural belief in the aesthetic appeal of the feminine. Redefining what it means to be feminine, she offers a mimesis of the feminine in relation to the horrors of the interior
life. Her catalogue of body parts now appears grotesque; the notion of attractive femininity is replaced by something monstrous, cannibalistic even: a ghastly, superficial covering whose presence threatens the existence of the inner. Marilyn Monroe, writing in 1974, quotes Yeats on the subject of a self apart from body and face: "... only God, my dear, / Could love you for yourself alone/ And not your yellow hair" (qtd. Blair: 219). In this sense, Monroe speaks for all women, not merely actresses, whose socialisation involves a process of objectification and assessment of the value of her physical 'parts'.

III: Appearance is everything: The Fifties Female as Cultural Object

The process of objectification that constituted the femininity of the 1950's largely emphasised the role of the female as a cultural product. According to this doctrine, the female is exhorted by her culture to present herself as an item for consumption by the male. This process of consumption depends upon the female being presented as something delectable, visually arousing. As Erica Jong parodies in her poem 'The Objective Woman', the condition of the American woman is that of a market product, controlled as she is by the dictates of a male order to achieve some state of sublime perfection, to improve the quality of herself, and therefore, her marketability. This is what Jong calls, in parody, the "firmessence of their ultralucence" - a belief in the possibility of such an actualisation. What is meant to be 'feminine', or to demonstrate 'femininity' is specified by Elaine Connell as a state of being: "dependent, submissive, passive, masochistic, unselfish and accommodating oneself at all times to the needs of men and children", and is associated with the 'feminine' qualities of "nurturing and the
development of the emotions, rather than the intellect" (Connell 15). This form of femininity was heavily marketed to young women of Plath's generation through the popular women's magazines whose purpose it was to perpetuate this ideal.

A regular feature of The Ladies Home Journal during the 1950's was the column entitled “The Sub-Deb”, aimed specifically at teenage female readers for the purpose of initiation into the cultural notion of 'successful' womanhood. A July 1949 “Sub-Deb” column by Maureen Daly offers its young female readers advice on the most crucial of feminine attributes – her appearance: Decide right now that special magic is going to make you look different overnight – you have to do the waist-bending exercises, hairbrushing and clothes-choosing all by yourself! The column takes a more serious turn with its injunction to its young readers to discipline themselves to study “the teen-fashion section of a good magazine” as if it were “a school textbook”, then, to place themselves at the centre of “the experiment” as if this imaginative self-projection were “the picture in real life” (Wagner 34). When Charles Newman in his essay, “Candor is the Only Wile; The Art of Sylvia Plath” declares Plath to be “a very different woman in the last long year of her life” he is referring, in an immediate sense, to Plath’s external shift in appearance. He notes her transformation in photographs from “the Smith girl who won the Mademoiselle fiction contest to the “deliberately dowdy” image of the mother and “established poetess”, and concludes that this alteration is owing to Plath having “moved beyond the persona of the ‘new woman’ ” (Newman 46-47).
Plath herself was acutely aware of the role-playing, transformative aspects of her own femininity. In an August 1952 journal extract she assesses the quality of her physical self from the vantage of the male gaze, and urges herself to “learn the art of subtle power” that will grant her the “power to create a dream for them [men]” (Kukil 140). As any other young woman of her generation, she desired to be, herself, the object of male desire: the subject of her own, self-directed, self-starring romance. As a woman, Plath acknowledges herself as a commodity for exchange on the sexual market; in terms of the Baudrillardian discourse, she offers herself to “the commodity system” as an advertisement for desire: she, herself, the embodied advertisement (Poster 13). Thus, the young Plath declares her intention to conspire with that system of production in which she, as female, dressed in feminine costume, will play the part of object of consumption. In other words, the “use-value” of the female is determined by a tautology in which the subject is defined by the object and vice-versa (Baudrillard 66; 123).

An early Plath collage, dated 1950-1, (Art scrapbook 4) portrays a woman “in a light-hearted, romantic state, accompanied by a love poem (Kathleen Connors, Curator, ‘Eye Rhymes Exhibit’, 2002) suggesting that Plath was herself intrigued by the process of female commodification. Here, the figure of a woman emerges mannequin-like from behind a diaphanous veil; cinematic in its lure, the piece holds both the woman, and her viewer, captive. Emerging like a Botticelli Venus, she is the complete object of male romantic desire: caught by the male gaze (the gaze of the camera), she is both subject and object – the complete romantic commodity. Within the Baudrillian discourse, her image is the hyperreal: hypnotic, alluring, more real than the real: a simulation of cultural signs
and motifs of femininity. Surrounded by rose-shaped petals, this screen siren (and on the opposite page, another female face frozen in time and space, reinforces the allure of the ‘eternal feminine’) costumes herself in the vestments of romance. Plath’s satirical comment on the commodification of the ‘eternal feminine’ points to the huge industry of romance within her contemporary culture – an industry whose primary asset was the simulated image of the feminine. A 1952 valentine card, ‘I Shall Fall into Decline’, is further evidence of Plath’s sense of irony in relation to the convention of romance (‘Eye Rhymes’ Exhibit, 2002). Here, a reclining female swoons across a heart-covered chaise-long under the heady influence of romance; valentine hearts circle her head, and she holds a single rose clutched in her limp hand. Plath, both the subject and object of romance, (‘caught’ within the visual narrative of the card she becomes an object), satirises herself in the acting out of what she perceives to be a ludicrous social role-play.

Plath’s ‘The Applicant’ (CP 221-22) is the perfect example of the system of commodification in which the female finds herself. Plath’s parody of the commodity fetishism of the sexual-marriage market sees the female in the role of doll: a product of the male world of production, for the male consumer. Denied a gender identity, the female becomes an “it” whose body parts are factory made to fit; inhuman, mass-produced, the female is defined by the language of production and industry:

We make new stock from the salt.

How about this suit –
Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.
Will you marry it?
It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof
Against fire and bombs through the roof (CP 221).

In the language of production, the individual is non-existent. Baudrillard’s analysis suggests that individual agency is irrelevant in consumer society: “The logic of exchange is primordial. In a way, the individual is non-existent . . . a certain language . . . is prior to the individual. This language is a social form in relation to which there can properly speaking be no individuals, since it is an exchange structure” (Baudrillard 75). In other words, within the language of exchange, the female ceases to exist; instead, she is consumed by the larger, more essential need for exchange itself: she becomes, simply, one item within the meta-language of commerce. The anxiety surrounding the durability of the female ‘good’ is considerable; hence, the tremendous drive to advertise:

Naked as paper to start

But in twenty-five years she’ll be silver,
In fifty, gold.
A living doll, everywhere you look.
It can sew, it can cook,
It can talk, talk, talk.
It works, there is nothing wrong with it.

You have a hole, it’s a poultice.

You have an eye, it’s an image.

My boy, it’s your last resort.

Will you marry it, marry it, marry it (CP 221-2).

The internal market drives the competition: the female, as commodity, must become her own advertisement, her own version of the male fantasy with her “power to become a dream for them”. This will be her life work, the work that will keep her circulating within the consumer market.

Nothing was more important to the fifties feminised woman than her appearance; and everywhere she turned she was reminded of this fact. Marjorie Rosen’s Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & The American Dream explores the effect of film and media on the shaping of American womanhood. She notes that during the early post-war years the beauty and cosmetics industry profits soared until by 1952 the cosmetics industry claimed to have sold over $1 billion beauty products a year (267). The comments of Fletcher Dodge, Vice President of Corset and Bra Associates reveal the extent to which young women and girls of the fifties were subject to the reproach from an industry with which they were unconsciously deeply connected: “It’s sad but true that seventeen million females over fifteen just don’t care how they look. Sometimes it makes a man wonder” (268). The power of the advertising and film industries to provoke a woman’s concern for her appearance cannot be over-estimated. According to these industries there
was nothing more effective in a woman than the power of her physique, and the effect of this media message produced a series of frenzied commercialised trends in women’s dress. In 1948 breast pads sold as never before as a result of Lana Turner launching what became as the “sweater girl” look. The purpose was to create an ultra-feminine form with the emphasis on the bust, waist and hips - the hourglass figure. A woman was to be confined to the sphere of a traditional gender role – to breeding and homemaking - as she was to be confined and defined by the spheres of her form.

The epitome of the female defined by her form was Marilyn Monroe, sex-goddess and the ultimate fifties male fantasy. Darryl F. Zanuck, Studio Chief of Twentieth Century Fox and creator of Monroe, produced what every man wished a woman to be when he threw Monroe into the limelight. She was a fantasy of womanhood assembled from popular male imagination; “an exploitative and grotesque parody of a woman’s body as isolated from her mind, emotions, soul, and all other functions that would make her truly human” (270). Plath’s ‘The Applicant’ (CP 221-2) presents the female as a grotesque assemblage of manufactured parts, disassembled, disembodied - the antithesis of the carefully assembled, carefully marketed image of Monroe. While Plath's doll is exposed for its inauthenticity, Monroe embodied the fifties precept of woman as a supreme physical entity. As a woman, however, she was powerless, denied any access to her mind.

The obvious ineffectuality of Monroe, despite her supreme beauty of form and face, was a hallmark of fifties womanhood. The women of the fifties silver screen,
Debbie Reynolds, Doris Day, Natalie Wood, despite their beauty, remained two-
dimensional, powerless and ineffectual. Being attractive would win a woman attention,
but once won, that attention would diminish her to observes in her chapter entitled
“Popcorn Venus: Allure for the Kiddie Crowd”, “pretty, amusing and childish” (292).
Never permitted to think for themselves, they were deliberately characterised as
innocents, thereby deeming themselves incapable of serious thought. Sandra Dee, the
Debbie Reynolds of the late fifties, hit the screen as the ultimate little girl, “the most
passive, flattery, pink-and-white perfection” (93). In Gidget, 1959, Dee, playing the title
role, is told by her mother that “to be a real woman is to bring out the best in a man” and
following that motto, the teenage Gidget gives back her boyfriend to his heroic profession
as a pilot. According to the fifties maxim of female etiquette she has behaved like a “real
woman” (94). Young girls, vulnerable to the influence of movie romance were as equally
likely to heed the code of conduct of their favourite stars, and thus “good girls” far outdid
“bad girls” in their screen appearances.

Those sirens of the screen defined the peak of a perfect femininity. In her
autobiographical Aphrodite at Mid-Century (1974), Caryl Rivers recalls the women of
the movies she dreamed of becoming, a dream shared by millions of young girls:

The women we saw on the screen on
Saturdays at the Silver were goddesses. There is no other word for them.
They stood at the pinnacle of mid-century’s altar of success. For a woman,
no other triumph could equal Being a Movie Star. Nothing could compare
The movie industry prescribed to the young female population a standard of femininity few could reach. Ideal femininity was possible only for those with movie star looks. To be a movie star was to be the ideal woman. As Benita Eisler states in *Private Lives: Men and Women of the Fifties*, 1986, it was at the movies that "we learned what men and women were supposed to be" (Eisler 54). By a trip to the movies a young girl could learn what it was she was desired most to be by the men around her. Just as Esther Greenwood learns that she is shut out from the favoured formula of femininity while watching a movie (BJ 39) so all young women of her era learnt what was and was not preferred by men through the movie screen. By watching versions of femininity "more real than the real" (i.e. those idealised forms of femininity) the young female is removed from any contact with the actual: what she experiences is what Baudrillard calls the 'hyperreal', a "fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination" in which the "contradiction between the real and the imaginary" is 'effaced' (Poster 146). With the removal of "unreality" (fantasy and dream) all that remains is the hyperreal – "the real's hallucinatory resemblance to itself" (Poster 145). The young female, then, immersed in images of the hyperreal, loses all semblance of the real; indeed, because the hyperreal is able to simulate a version of the real more alluring than the real, the real is vanquished.
In her article, “Femininity as Discourse”, Dorothy E. Smith supports a view of femininity as a creation of women themselves in which the woman regards herself as a ‘work’ to be accomplished. Her reference point, Smith argues, for the achievement of this assimilated ‘self’ is undoubtedly the fashion and beauty industries, but the woman herself is in control of the product she creates as she participates in a “discourse” with the images offered to her by the market. The woman strives to create a sense of her own femininity through active involvement in “discourse”, - Foucault’s term for “an assemblage of statements’ arising in an ongoing ‘conversation’, mediated by texts, among speakers and hearers separated from one another by time and space” (Smith 39). The “textual discourse” involved in a woman’s femininity arises from the women’s magazines, film, television, advertising, the cosmetics and fashion industry, and the woman herself with, what Smith terms the “skills” and “decisions” that constitute the process of her self-creation. For example, in Hitchcock’s Marnie, (1964), the opening close-up shot sees the film’s female protagonist, played by Tippi Hedren, introduced to her audience through the image of her canary yellow handbag, symbol of the social construction of femininity. Thus, the male gaze (here the gaze of the male director as well as his male audience are, as Mark Rutland says to his company partner, “interested spectator[s] in the passing parade”), complicit with the construction of the female as a commodified object. Marnie’s canary yellow handbag (a typical Hitchcock motif: the birdlike female) - man-made, synthetic - establishes a central trope of the film: the male/social construction of the female.
Soon after, we see Marnie washing the brown dye from her hair, the disguise that has permitted her to carry out her crime (a crime strongly located in the feminine aspect of her self, in her handbag, in which she carries the money stolen from Strutt, her former employer: the typical Hitchcock confluence of femininity and crime). This symbol leads us into one of the central themes of the film: the ability of the female protagonist to costume and so, disguise herself; a process that, as the film progresses, leads to her own psychic unravelling. In *Vertigo* (1958) the male gaze, very literally, constructs female identity, and so the film’s male protagonist, Scottie, reconstructs the lost image of his feminine fantasy (Madeleine) through the character of her understudy, Judy. The film’s opening credits allude to the mask of femininity that is at the heart of this male construct: an immobile female face defined by those essential feminine parts – her lips and eyes. The eyes flicker back and forth, uncertainly; and we are reminded of the female’s uncertain claim to her own femininity.

Similarly, Plath’s ‘The Applicant’ (CP 221-22), explores the male construction and consumption of the female self. “Naked as paper to start” the female is the tabula rasa upon which the male gaze constructs his fantasy image. Here, the closet is the site of the female costuming, the place from which her social costumes are drawn. In the same way, Judith returns from the beauty parlour remade as Scottie’s lost love-fantasy, Madeleine, a role she has played out once, and now discarded. She walks down the corridor towards the hotel room where Scottie awaits her in a shot full of the anticipation of Scottie’s desire: like a mannequin, she approaches him, awaiting the verdict of his male gaze. Her reconstruction is imperfect: she has failed to follow his close instructions for her
manufacture - and so his desire is frustrated. Still, this reconstructed ‘Madeleine’ is, in the words of Plath’s speaker, his “last resort” (CP 222) – the closet he will get to his dream woman.

Smith locates the emergence of a “textually mediated discourse” as a new form of social interaction, that is, the mass market of magazines, books, advertisements, etc, that constitutes the influence of popular culture over a woman’s self-image. This “textually mediated discourse” ‘transcends’ and ‘organizes’ local settings, “bringing about relations among them of a wholly different order”. In other words, women everywhere with access to the “text” are involved in a process of decision making as to what is, and what is not, femininity. This process of decision making leads to the introduction of ‘codes’ regarding femininity whose origins cannot be locally traced, but whose “authorities and originators are themselves constructs of the media (inscribed in the text)” (42). Smith traces the process of “textually mediated discourse” for forms of femininity through history for the sake not only of communicating popular tastes and values, but also to create “a common code” in language and images as a source of popular cultural reference on a day-to-day level. Once the feminine ideal that evolves from the discourse emerges and has been made ‘public’ through the commercial channels of television, film, advertising, etc, the woman involved in the discourse on a local level can begin to assimilate the “public textual images” into her own femininity. Smith calls this her “project” that involves her in “the production of the visible self as in instance of the image” (44). Instruction in this “work” is to be found in abundance in women’s magazines as in this example of a Seventeen reader:
Seventeen taught me how to manicure my nails, how to shave my legs, how to make up my eyes to twice their size, not to mention how to make a tuna casserole, how to let boys win at all tests and sports, how to flirt without making a jerk of myself and how to be FUN for other people to be around (46).

Smith concludes that within this “discourse of femininity” a woman’s relation to herself shifts toward an understanding of the self as an “object of work, even of a craft”. By participating in the discourse the woman views herself as “object” (48). Thus, a young woman involved in applying makeup, for example, merges with the objects in the mirror involved in this practice, which includes herself as course, as well as her ‘tools’ of appliance. The application of the makeup thus becomes an actual “work process involving effort, technical and experiential knowledge of how to produce on her actual body the effects displayed in the mirror object” as well as “expenditure of time and money on skilled shopping for tools and material, and so forth” (49). It is the desire of the woman to achieve the perfected image of the magazine advertisement and so she conspires with the fashion and beauty industries to achieve this perfection through the “skills” she acquires and the “work” she applies to herself. Thus, the woman and the fashion industry “play and interplay” in the creation of fashionable forms of femininity (54), both parties in pursuit of a perfection.
Plath herself was acutely aware of the prescriptions of the fifties code of femininity. A 1949-50-school sheet entitled 'The Influence of the American Way of Life' is adorned with a pencil sketch of a voluptuous female form that much resembles the figure of Plath herself (‘Eye Rhymes’ Exhibit, 2002). The female, in the mode of a 1940’s film star, is, in itself, an ironic pictorial subtext on the title of Plath’s essay; apparently, the greatest influence, in the mind of the young Plath is the figure of the Hollywood femme fatale. As Gary M. Leonard comments in his essay "Sylvia Plath and Mademoiselle Magazine" (1992) the magazine culture of the 1950's perpetuated a code of femininity whose essence was the commodification of the female form (Leonard 64). Central to the code was the advertising industry whose slogans filled the pages of magazines such as Mademoiselle, a magazine Plath herself viewed as a crucial forum for her writing. Plath's internship as a guest editor for Mademoiselle suggests that the platform of the women's magazine was a place she felt, both as woman and writer, she must embrace. Indeed, Plath's desire to be published in Mademoiselle magazine indicates her own collusion with what Friedan identified as the feminine mystique - a deeper urge, perhaps, to be accepted into the brand of femininity espoused by her culture. In a letter to her mother, Plath writes of the ecstatic experience of seeing one of her stories published in Mademoiselle:

I can hardly believe its August already, and that my magazine is reposing in my closet, well read . . . took the car alone for a blissful two hours . . . with a bag of cherries and peaches and the Magazine. I felt the happiest I ever have in my life . . . I read it . . .
chortled happily to myself . . . I have never felt so utterly happy and free (LH 790).

Leonard points to self-help article from the 1953 edition of *Mademoiselle* that Plath was herself, partly responsible for producing. The article is typical of the type of agony aunt advice handed out to young women in the guise of psychoanalysis - advice that invariably involved some form of feminine masquerade: "Start with the surface, because that's what shows, then work your way down to the big basics. Consider that venerable saying: You're as young as you feel. Substitute: you feel as vital as you look" (qtd. Leonard: 66). The emphasis is purely upon the female potential for aesthetic/visual transformation: what is implied is that any psychological problem can be remedied by the ability of the female to transform her physical self. Indeed, her physical self is both her redemption and cure. As Plath writes in her *Journals*: "Masks are the order of the day, and the least I can do is cultivate the illusion that I am gay, serene, not hollow and afraid (J 630). A 1950 painting by Plath demonstrates her strong sense of the fifties doctrine of femininity (‘Eye Rhymes’ Exhibit, 2002). Entitled 'Two Women Reading this 18" by 24" piece is a playful advert of the idealised fifties female, graceful and serene, poised in the foreground of an Edenic suburban setting. The two women are the epitome of suburban leisure, positioned in the foreground like two leisurely angels. The sunny colours and flat planes of the piece belie support the notion of an idealised era: Plath's piece depicts a calm and serene psyche, a psyche conflated with the brand of femininity espoused by the advertising industry of the 1950's. Indeed, this 1950's piece confirms that the female masquerade is the essence of the brand of femininity supported by her culture.
The process of initiation into an alternative form of womanhood was barred by the ubiquitous presence of the fifties female, a brand of femininity designed to prevent the female from becoming her own subject. Instead, popular culture worked hard to keep her in the position of object. Luce Irigaray's notion of the 'speculum' as a mirrored, male instrument of investigation of the female body comes to mind here. The concavity of the instrument imitates the concavity of the female body, allowing the male gaze entry into the hidden recesses of the female (Moi 130). Thus, the female is the object under investigation, never the investigating subject. She remains the passive body, the 'Other' reflected in the male mirror, a poor imitation of the male subject. The Freudian code of femininity of the 1950's objectifies the female based on the assumption that visually she lacks the penis, and therefore, in the absence of the physical presence of the penis, there is a void, nothingness. This interpretation of the difference between the sexes thus, is based on a visual perception, a biological difference, what can be seen or not seen, what there is or not (Moi 132). Into this void, femininity is constructed - and the woman becomes an adorned object, to make up for her physical lack of the phallus. In terms of the Freudian discourse, the female cannot be perceived, only seen, and so she taught to adorn herself with the camouflage of beauty as a bolster to her identity. In her natural state she is inadequate. She is not subject, only object; a physical lack. She must be made adequate through ornamental and beautifying paraphernalia.

The idea of femininity as a mask or masquerade stems back to a 1929 essay by psychoanalyst Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as Masquerade" (Heath 45-59). Rivière's
thesis is that "genuine womanliness" is synonymous with masquerade; is in fact a
"device" for avoiding the display of her masculinity. Rivière concludes that the feminine
"masquerade" belies a deeper desire on the part of the female for the masculine function
of subjectivity. In other words, the woman wishes to take on the masculine identity in
order to function as a subject rather than an object. In psycho-linguistic terms, this means
a desire to function as the subject within language, rather than the sign-object; the
signifier rather than the signified. Rivière's thesis follows that of the Freudian castration
complex that posits that sexual difference is determined by the lack of the phallus. As the
"initial signifier", the phallus "inscribes" the being or non-being of the subject according
to its state of 'lack' or 'having'. Thus, the female is inscribed with a sense of lack, or non-
being, and hence, is ascribed the position of 'object' in relation to the male 'subject'. In the
light of this, femininity becomes a guise for disguising the lack of the phallus or "initial
signifier". In the words of Lacan: "Such is the woman behind her veil: it is the absence of
the penis that makes her phallus, object of desire" (322). Thus, the woman is constituted
by her disguise; she is the guise itself, and nothing else, and in her disguise, she
'masquerades' as the object of male desire. Within the symbolic order of language, as
within biology itself, the woman suffers a division from the 'real', or that which is
constituted as 'real' - that is to say, the masculine experience of subjectivity and
signification. According to the psychoanalytic thesis of Rivière and Lacan then, feminine
identity is representational, constructed and dependent upon images and symbols of
femininity (Mitchell & Rose 90). These symbols and images are 'props' designed to
bolster her sense of identity; if you like, to 'play' at an identity. By acting out an identity,
the woman staves off the fear of erasure that comes from her marginal position.
According to this thesis, the woman is forced into masquerade in order to have either a sense of identity ontological security.

A defining characteristic of Hitchcock's films is his use of what he calls "the subjective treatment" – particularly in relation to his female characters. Hitchcock defines this "treatment" as: "the close up of the person and what they see" (Gottlieb 291). So, for example, in The Birds (1963), we suddenly see Melanie Daniel's face in close-up, as she watches from the diner window a man light the cigarette – anticipating the tremendous explosion this will cause. Or, in the same film, when Lydia Brenner discovers the corpse of Dan Fawcett, the camera moves back and forth rapidly between objective and subjective shots. The implication is what is being represented is the female point of her view – her true subjectivity – whereas in reality, what is being represented is a male construct of female subjectivity; and so the female keeps acting.

Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' is an exploration of the cultural costuming of the female in the face of ontological insecurity. The speaker feeds off the irony of her situation, pitting one self against another - the self that lives in full awareness of her objectification, and the self that plays the part of the victim of this process. She is happy to objectify herself as a series of articulated parts: "the nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth", "my hands/ my knees. / I may be skin and bones". She takes a perverse pleasure in the fragility of her identity, as she does in the fragility of her flesh; indeed, she flaunts this fragility: "A sort of walking miracle, my skin/ Bright as a Nazi lampshade", "For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge". 'Lady Lazarus' is the voice of a psyche alert to the knowledge of
having 'become a woman' in the sense of De Beauvoir's famous maxim, "One is not born a woman: one becomes a woman". Having gained the awareness of having 'become' rather than merely 'being', the female speaker earns the irony of her situation - the knowledge of having been constructed - and so she is able to put to use this sense of self as a social construction in the form of a subjective self. This subjective self is born out of the knowledge of having been constructed into the cultural form of a 'woman', and in the process another self is born, a self that watches over the objectified cultural self with an ironic gaze. This self is at the heart of 'Lady Lazarus' and Plath's mature body of writing.

The discovery of self as subject involves the heavy emphasis and presence of the personal or "I" voice. For the female speaker, whose cultural self has been constructed for her, the discovery of a separate, private or inner self free of the cultural paradigm of the 'Other', leads her to an expressionistic, deliberately self-conscious form of expression. This is part of the process of her initiation into a subjective voice, her ability to write 'like a woman'. The "I" voice, then, is a necessary tool for the emergence of the subjective self and the relinquishing of the self as cultural object.

IV: "Hovering "on the edge": The Abject Self

Plath's mature poetry records the search of the fifties female for mythological alternatives to the social self, a process of disengagement from the contemporary definition of 'female' and 'feminine', and, in particular, release from what Julia Kristeva has called the state of 'abjection'. In Kristevan terms, the social self forces the personal
"I" into a position of 'abjection', that is, into a position in which it is "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable the thinkable", denying even the fact of its existence. The abject personal "I" of Plath's poetry detects, what Kristeva describes as "a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside" (Kristeva 1). The abject self exists "on the edge of non-existence and hallucination", a "reality" that "annihilates" the possibility of "me" (Kristeva 2).

Plath's poem, 'Tulips' resonates with the hallucinatory experience of a non-self, hovering on the edge of a retreating sense of reality. The speaker of 'Tulips' has resigned from quotidian reality, from any engagement with her diachronic self: "I am nobody, I have nothing to do with explosions" (CP 160) she declares. This statement is one of resignation, the resignation of the 'sick' from the matters of the contemporary world. Plath's careful choice of "explosions" echoes the paranoiac fear of a nation obsessed with its own nuclear annihilation. The paradigm asserted here is that non-engagement with the social orbit denies one a legitimate self: because of her resignation from the social, the speaker loses any claim to identity and is ontologically obliterated. The medical establishment that now houses her holds the rights to her non-self: "I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses/ And my history to the anaesthetist and my body to the surgeons". The hospital is the borderland that marks the end of her civil self and the on-set of her non-being. The reiteration of passive verbs functions as a sedative: "They have propped my head", "My body is a pebble to them", "They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring me sleep". The only desire voiced is to remain in a state of complete resignation: "I only wanted to lie with my hands turned up
and be utterly empty". This position of utter resignation leads the speaker into a precarious situation where she becomes prey to hallucination and surrealism, Kristeva's "edge of non-existence".

The image of the tulips is the embodiment of the social sphere invading the private cocoon of the speaker: indicative of the social ritual of flowers at a hospital bedside, they remind the speaker of her obligations to her contemporary world. Indeed, they are the emissaries of the socialised world, whose duty it is to lure the speaker back to her socialised self. The tulips force the speaker to adopt a more alert, active position, albeit paranoiac: "Nobody watched me before, now I am being watched" (CP 161). In Kristevan terms, the presence of the tulips is a reminder to the speaker of her abject position in relation to the world and her position in that world. Resignation, the retreat into sickness, is a valid escape route from the abject self of the social (predominantly male) sphere. The tulips mark the return of the speaker's abject self: "flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow", one-dimensional and unassimilated into a sense of a complete, fully fleshed self. In Kristeva's words, the abject self lies "at the border of [my] condition as a living being". Thus, the speaker of 'Tulips' finds herself expelled from a position of authority or autonomy; her condition of sickness is both her haven and the source of her abjection, a "double-bind" she cannot avoid, situated as she is "between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips". The sun and the tulips are the agents of the state of abjection from which she has fled; the social regime from which she so deliberately extricated herself. Their reappearance as symbols of her abjection mark the beginning of her return to that
state, her conscious mind under the continual assault of their presence - an 'Other' whose presence drains and distracts her:

Before they came the air was calm enough,
Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.
Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.
Now the air snags and eddies around them the way a river
Snags and eddies around a sunken rust-red engine.
They concentrate my attention, that was happy
Playing and resting without committing itself (CP 161).

The tulips threaten the very existence of the speaker: "the tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals"; they remind her of "her heart" - the fragility of her ontology as an emotional being. They beckon her back into the reality of the world where (according to the definition of 'abject') a super-ego threatens to annihilate her. The threatening presence of the super-ego is present in the speaker's dawning sense of her heart as an all-consuming force; indeed, the image of the speaker's heart and the image of the tulips merge and converge in such a way that the two become indistinguishable, conflated: "And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes/ Its bowl or red blooms out of sheer love of me" (CP 162). At the close of the poem, we are reminded that the speaker's sickness springs directly from the conflation of these two images. The over-dominination of the super-ego has led to the collapse of the ego, and this, in turn, has precipitated the retreat into sickness. The presence of the tulips reawakens the anxiety of
the speaker in relation to the world and her, in particular, to her abject self. Indeed, by the end of the poem, the speaker finds herself, once again, engulfed by the presence of the tulips. The tulips themselves, are the embodiment of the social forces that have controlled the speaker's sense of self: invading the security of her environment, they threaten the very premise of her ontological retreat into sickness.

V: An "Ambiguous Opposition": The Abject and the Deject

The "abjection of self" leads the subject to realise that "all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded". The mature Plathian voice demonstrates the "want" of the abject self-as-object, a self that has "forfeited" the right to being (Kristeva 5). Plath's radio play, Three Women (CP 176-187), is a certain example of the perpetual condition of the "want" of the abject self. All three voices echo the Kristevan diagnosis of "lives not sustained by desire" but rather by "exclusion", of subjects who perceive themselves as objects hovering "on the edge of existence". These women, are in fact, removed from their own selves: as the 'Second Voice' remarks, I talk to myself, myself only, set apart" (CP 179); or, "I am a heroine of the peripheral" (CP 182). The lack of a solid, secure, integrated sense of self leads to what Kristeva (following the Freudian prognosis) calls the "splitting of the ego" and an "ambiguous opposition" between the subject's sense of "I/Other, Inside/Outside". This, a symptom most commonly associated with "borderline" behaviour, leads to the contents of the unconscious to "become explicit"; that is, manifest. The woman of the 'Third Voice' experiences the merging of her own ego with that of the child she has lost in her womb:
the loss of her child is the catalyst for the shattering of her ego and, hence, she finds herself egoless "a wound walking out of hospital" (CP 184).

The eluded position of the abject relies upon the involvement of what Kristeva calls a "deject": the deject "places (himself) separates (himself) situates (himself) and therefore strays" (Kristeva 8). The source of the "deject" in Three Women is the speaker's complete lack of affect, a voice that "situates" her both in the immediate present - in the passive role of one who lies in a hospital bed awaiting her fate - but also one that "places" her in an eternal present: "I shall move north. I shall move into a long blackness", "I shall be a heroine of the peripheral" (CP 182). In this latter sense, the speaker does in fact "situate" herself beyond the sphere of the institutional environment in which she finds herself: in the Kristevan sense, she "strays" beyond the parameters of the abject self of her immediate situation. Thus, the "abject" voice: "I feel it enter me, cold, alien, like an instrument" - locked into the situation of the passive victim, is offered relief, (the relief of pain) by a sense of the outer, or "deject" - a voice that locates her in the realm of the abstract, the eternal, the philosophic: "I shall not be accused, I shall not be accused/. The clock shall not find me wanting, nor these stars/ That rivet in place abyss after abyss" (CP 182).

The "deject" subject, according to Kristeva, is well aware of his relation to the "abject": "moreover, he includes himself among them ["his abjections"], thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations" (8). The "deject" is, essentially, responsible for the divisive situation in which he finds himself and deliberately sets about
demarcating the "space" in which he exists. The "deject" exists by dint of his divisive
efforts and stands, juxtaposed yet inalienable from the situation of the "abject". Plath's
poem, 'Daddy' (CP 222-224) is a carefully balanced tête-à-tête between the "abject" voice
of the speaker and its "deject" counterpart. The abject self of the speaker is uttered in a
series of angry proclamations against the "deject" subject of the poem, the 'Daddy' figure.
The conjured presence of the 'Daddy' figure - personified in the second person pronoun,
the "you" spat out - threatens the annihilation or the continued existence of the "abject'
self of the speaker:

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, more black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo (CP 222).

Here, the abject self turns on the continual and haunting presence of the deject,
whose presence has denied the abject the ontological space to exist. The voice of the
speaker is here, the voice of the abject self in crisis; hence, the following line: "Daddy, I
have had to kill you". The assertion of the abject over the threatening presence of the
deject underlies the sense of a developing performance in the poem. The continual
reference point for the abject self (who holds centre stage) is the continual aggravating
presence of the deject - "Daddy". The complexity of the poem lies in the subtle shifts
between abject and dejects selves. The speaker shifts between one role-play and another:
between the role of the abject and the role of the deject. In her declaration, "I began to talk like a Jew/. I think I may well be a Jew", the speaker is stepping into the "space" of the deject whose continual obligation it is to demarcate and revise his territory, to mark himself out from the "other" - the abject. The speaker's perception of herself as a "Jew" is the vision of the deject subject, her "Daddy". This subtle shift in perspective occurs in relation to the abject self. What actually occurs is that the deject, the "Daddy" figure, succeeds in 'capturing' the abject subject within his carefully demarcated territory. This territory is the territory of the Lacanian "Other", the male "Other", which in this case, is the figure of a dead father loaded with the weight of an entire mythology. The father figure, the deject, has in fact, caused a subtle yet definite shift in roles in which the abject speaker merges into the "space" of the deject, thereby temporarily eradicating the very existence of the abject self. In a more dramatic (and Kristevan sense) the deject has occupied and seized the role of the abject speaker, and in doing so has annihilated the possibility of the personal 'me', the possibility of the formation of a personal self.

By merging the "I" voice of the speaker with the image of the deject (the "Daddy" figure), the direction of the poem - which had, up until now, been governed by the assertion of the abject voice - is lost. This usurpation of the abject by the deject subject occurs throughout the poem in the speaker's employment of German words, a vocabulary that betrays, once again, the ascendancy of the deject or "daddy" personae from behind the abject voice. "Ach, du"; "Ich, ich, ich, ich": these lines are resonant, onomatopoeically, with the struggle of the abject voice against the invasion of the deject - the memory of the father breaking into the designated "space" of the abject. The abject
voice of the speaker responds to the assault of the father figure with images of violence and annihilation that pepper the poem. The image of the "model" of the "man in black with a Meinkampf look" is an image of voodoo, of black magic and the death-wish, followed by the incantation: "I said I do, I do/ So daddy, I'm finally through" and "If I've killed one man I've killed two". These incantations crescendos to a dramatic and sadistic finale evocative of an African voodoo ceremony in which the abject victoriously re-ascends to claim supremacy over the defeated deject, the father figure:

There's a stake it your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through (CP 224).

The tension of the dependent abject-deject relationship is thus resolved, ultimately, in favour of the abject; and so, the figure of the deject father figure is forced out of the alliance. The finale of 'Daddy' fits the description of Kristeva's moment of "jouissance" (a term also favoured by Irigaray): "the moment when revelation bursts forth" and the prominence of the abject is acute. Jouissance involves a moment of "oblivion and thunder"; a moment when the abject falls into what Kristeva calls "forgotten time", or a state of oblivion. In 'Daddy', this is the moment when the abject speaker reinforces its own voice, discards its dependency on the figure of the deject father and proclaims its sovereignty to its audience. The final stanza of 'Daddy' offers the reader a glimpse of
Kristeva's "jouissance", a moment when the abject voice, having finally achieved its own legitimacy, simply revels. The abject speaker's declaration of independence is the line: "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" (CP 224) - the moment when, according to Lacanian theory, the mirror-stage is ended, and the ego surrenders its own image "in order to contemplate itself in the Other" (Kristeva 9). In the case of the speaker of 'Daddy', the end of the mirror-stage is marked by the repeated renunciations of association with the father figure ("So daddy, I'm finally through/. The black telephone's off at the root" (CP 224)) - that is, the object of desire whose image must also be shattered in order to free the ego for contemplation "in the Other". The "Other", is the speaker's self in relation to its own ego, free of the dependency of the ego upon the deject figure of the father - an ego moulded by the desires of the abject voice whose drive directs the speaker towards independence.

Kristeva's several attempts at defining the volition of the abject includes a definition in relation to the Lacanian 'Other'. The identity and suzerainty of the abject (which is only fully realised in moments of jouissance) is directly related to the presence and location of an 'Other'. She expounds:

I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be "me". Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be. A possession previous
to my advent: a being-there of the symbolic that a father might or might not embody (10).

So, the presence of the father figure is necessary to the formation of the abject self, but must be kept in check for the sake of its continued existence. The relationship, then, between abject and deject subjects appears to be a precarious, and at times, menacing one.

VI: Primal Repression: The "Precondition to Narcissism"

Plath's 'Getting There' (CP 247-49) strays further into the realm of the abject. Here, the speaker drags herself, metaphorically, back into what Kristeva identifies as the "primal repression" of abjection. This primal repression borders on the "territories of the animal", an area where the abject becomes the object of primal repression (Kristeva 12). The speaker of 'Getting There' experiences a psychic journey downward into the area where she confronts primal repression head on. She experiences a transformative regression that leads her into the terrain of her primal (primeval) animal self, located in the imagery of the "thick, red" mud that swathes her:

How far is it?
There is mud on my feet,
Thick, red and slipping. It is Adam's side,
This earth I rise from, and I in agony (CP 248).
The speaker experiences herself in relation to the archetype of the male "Other", Adam - an indication of her location within the realm of the psyche receptive to myth and archetype. Throughout the poem she moves in and out of this mythopoeic place described as a place "so small", where "obstacles" await her (P 249) Interpreted as a psychic journey, 'Getting There' becomes a series of confrontations with archetypes of the speaker's "personal archaeology" (Kristeva's term). The "body of [a] woman"; "garlanded children"; "charred skirts", a "deathmask", "thunder and guns", the poem literally drags the speaker through a nightmarish dreamscape of her own psyche, echoed in the image of the animalistic train:

The train is dragging itself, it is screaming -
An animal
Insane for the destination,
The bloodspot,
The face at the end of the flare (CP 249).

Here, the speaker is 'straying' into the abject, to use Kristeva's expression: in the process, she assimilates her animal self - a fact indicated by the proliferation of imagery of struggle indicative of the process itself. In the midst of this process of assimilation a fundamental transformation occurs - a process of rebirth. This rebirth occurs amongst a proliferation of animal imagery; in particular, imagery related to metamorphosis and the process of evolution; hence, the "wounded" who appear "like pupas"; the "bloodspot" that
looms hungrily before the animal-self, awaiting a predator. From this state of animal
awareness, the speaker declares her transformative process to be the transformation from
one animal to another:

And I, stepping from this skin
Of old bandages, boredoms, old faces

Step to you from the black car of Lethe,
Pure as a baby (CP 249).

"Pure as a baby": an image of renewal. In the case of the abject subject, this would be
renewal of the state of pre-oedipal, pre-objective being. It is an instance of Kristeva's
primal repression whose definition rests on the ability of the abject self to constantly
"divide, reject, repeat":

But what is primal repression? Let us call it
the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to
divide, reject, repeat. Without one division, one separation, one
subject/object having been constituted (not yet, or no longer yet). Why?
Perhaps because of maternal anguish, unable to be satiated within the
encompassing symbolic (12).
As in Kristeva's earlier definition of abjection he 'Other' plays a significant role in relation to the subject achievement of that state. The fact that the abject self is "always already haunted" by the presence of the 'Other' is crucial to her choosing the abject as a state of being. Furthermore, the primal repression associated with the abject means a constant condition of metamorphosis that allows her to elude the 'Other', to "divide, reject, repeat" in a series of self-concealing, self-defensive guises. The abject, thus, although she is aware of her dependency on the 'Other', defies a concrete, intractable definition of self in relation to 'Other'. In this sense, the 'Other' becomes "exorbitant", superlative, unwanted, undesired. The speaker of 'Getting There' engages in a process of metamorphosis that engages her primal, animal self as a means of eluding the presence of the symbolic 'Other', the male sphere signified by the backdrop of war and human struggle, and the impossibility of that struggle. The absurd impossibility of that struggle is voiced in the line, "It is Russia I have to get across, it is some war or the other (CP 248). The tenuous relationship of the abject speaker in relation to the 'Other' is declared in a geographical (hence situational) metaphor in which the Other is the embodiment of the vast space of the Russian land and the suggestion of the immense human struggle associated with that place. The speaker is "dragging her body" through the terrain of the 'Other', a place harsh and utterly foreign to her abject self. She is a foreigner in the terrain of the symbolic 'Other': propelled by the force of primal repression and the animal self, she is engaged in a struggle to dislocate herself from her harsh surroundings, driven by, what Kristeva describes as that "maternal anguish, unable to be satiated within the encompassing symbolic" (12). Furthermore, this state of abjection is a precondition of narcissism (13, Kristeva's italics).
Narcissism is the chief preoccupation and modus operandi of Plath's outrageous 'Lady Lazarus' in which the abject voice becomes a wanton exercise in narcissism (CP 244-47). Kristeva defines narcissism in relation to abjection as "a regression to a position set back from the other, a return to a self-contemplative conservative self-sufficient haven" (14). The speaker of 'Lady Lazarus' speaks from a position of complete self-involvement, a position she acknowledges with irony and deliberate self-promotion. Her verbal gymnastics are flamboyant and theatrical, reinforcing the position of the speaker as "set back from the other", a separate, unrelated entity with a deliberately constructed, charismatic ego. Kristeva's prolonged definition of abjection regards the latter as "a kind of narcissistic crisis", caused by "Too much strictness on the part of the Other, confused with the One and the Law" as well as "lapse of the Other, which shows through the breakdown of objects of desire". Kristeva concludes that

in both instances the abject appears in order to uphold "I" within the Other. The abject is the violence of mourning for an "object" that has already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgements. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away - it assigns it a source in the non-ego drive, and death (15).

As with 'Getting There' the source of the Other is the father figure whose presence in the memory of the speaker triggers the over-arousal of the latter's ego. In the presence
of an over-inflated ego, the father figure becomes, literally, the "enemy", the object of the speaker's imploding enmity. The voice of the abject stands in direct opposition to the deject voice, 'sounding' it off with the virtuosity of her verbal acrobatics. Thus the abject constructs (through language) a process of intimidation, a forced retreat of the deject object. Through a ferocious bravado, a bullet-like delivery of words, the abject assassinates the object of her malice:

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it - . . .

Peel off the napkin
O my enemy.
Do I terrify? - . . . (CP 244)

There is a charge
For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge . . .

And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch
Or a bit of blood . . . (CP 246)
So, so, Herr Doktor.
So, Herr Enemy . . .

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
Beware
Beware.

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air (CP 246-7).

A catalogue of taunts, threats, dares; a litany of abuse; a grotesque carnival of self-promotion: by such means the abject voice achieves detachment from a perverse attachment to the deject. The narcissistic crisis is induced, on the one hand by a "strictness on the part of the Other", and on the other a "lapse of the Other" leading to "the breakdown of objects of desire". In both cases, the abject arises in response to the dissolution of a sense of "I" in the Other: in other words, the decline of the "I" of the deject Other triggers the ascendency of the abject "I", almost as an instinctive act of substitution. This explains, perhaps, the large presence of the abject "I" in the voice of the speaker of 'Lady Lazarus', an overly zealous mantra-like repetition of "I":

Dying
Is an art, like everything else.
I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.
I do it so it feels real.
I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.
It's easy enough to do it and stay put (CP 245).

By constantly drawing attention to itself, the abject "I" eclipses the presence of the deject; the process is one of repeated self-revocation through which the abject eliminates the harmful aspects of the Other. Repeated self-referencing continues with a cataloguing of body parts:

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth? . . . (CP 244).

These are my hands
My knees.
I may be skin and bone . . . (CP 245)

. . . a bit of blood

or a piece of hair or my clothes . . . (CP 246).
The fixation on the body is indicative of a high degree of solipsism; as the poem progresses, the intense self-regard of the speaker inflates, hyperbolically, to the level of the absurd. Belying the absurdity, lurks the serious desire for oblivion: the need to obliterate or block the pain of the memory of the desired object - the father figure - with complete self-reflexivity.

VII: Perversion: Undermining the Rule of the Symbolic

Perversion begins to creep in; as Kristeva expounds, the perverse is inherent in the abject nature: "It kills in the name of life - a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death" (15). In the poetic scheme, this means a dalliance with imagery of death and the death-drive; in particular, images of self-annihilation:

I am your opus,
I am your valuable,
The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.
I turn and burn . . .

Ash, ash -
You poke and stir.
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there - (CP 246).

It is the gratification of surrender to the death-drive that makes these lines perverse. There is pleasure in the image of the self offered up to the enemy - the Nazi who is also the desired father figure. These lines are full of contradictory impulses: they both repel and attract with the force of the death-drive, synonymous with the penchant for life. Heightening the sense of perversion is a sadomasochism toward the object of desire: "Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face, the brute/ Brute heart of a brute like you; "And a love of the rack and the screw" (CP 223). Sadomasochism is closely aligned to a sense of self-loathing for actions committed under the mastery of the object of desire:

At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you
I thought even the bones would do.
But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you (CP 224).

Sadomasochism can be traced to the perverse relationship between the abject and the object of desire. In Plath's 'Surgeon at 2 a.m.' (CP 170-71), the abject speaker experiences the perversion of her own, familiar logic, for the logic of the symbolic in the
form of logic at odds with her own. The symbolic takes the form of the medical establishment whose persuasive, clinical rhetoric overwhelms the speaker:

The white light is artificial, and hygiene as heaven.
The microbes cannot survive it...

I am so small in comparison to these organs...

I am left with an arm or a leg,
A set of teeth, or stones
To rattle in a bottle and take home...

Tonight the parts are entombed in an ice box...

Tomorrow the patient will have a clean, pink plastic limb (CP 170-71).

Engulfed by the language of the clinical, the self of the speaker is in jeopardy; under threat of being extinguished. It is here that the abject voice can be detected, and so, in a bid to rescue the self from annihilation, the abject appears between the spaces in the symbolic language as a language of self-discovery and self-retrieval, a language rooted in the earth:

It is a garden I have to do with - tubers and fruits
Oozing their jammy substances,
A mat of roots. My assistants hook them back.
Stenches and colors assail me.
This is the lung-tree . . .

The blood is a sunset. I admire it.
I am up to my elbows in it, red and squeaking.
Still it seeps up, it is not exhausted,
So magical! A hot spring
I must seal off and let fill . . . (CP 176-87).

The abject self wrestles with the language of the clinical, the symbolic, and in an attempt to shrug off its influence aligns itself with images of the organic and the natural. This is an act of defiance and perversity, of subversion and rebellion, a struggle for poetic control. As the poem reaches an end, the abject merges with the symbolic, as the voice of the speaker surfaces from beneath the "coat" of the symbolic:

I walk among sleepers in gauze sarcophagi . . .

The red night lights are flat moons. They are dull with blood . . .

I am the sun, in my white coat,
Grey faces, shuttered by drugs, follow me like flowers . . . (CP 176-87).
In the final lines of the poem, the "I" of the speaker aligns itself with the rhythm and drive of the abject whose desire it is to remain beyond the extent of the symbolic: separate, differentiated astray. Ultimately, the abject voice is synonymous with the voice of the speaker whose purpose also, is driven by an anarchic, perverse energy directed against the symbolic. The influence of the symbolic echoes through the final image of the poem, "I am the sun, in my white coat, / Grey faces, shuttered like drugs, follow me like flowers"; yet, it is the abject that draws the emotional response, the re-emergence of the charismatic "I" that elicits the attention of the reader: "I am the sun", the bold statement of the abject voice triumphing in the power of its non-co-operation and non-compliance. The language and imagery of the symbolic merely "follow . . . like flowers".

VIII: The Abject and the Semiotic: The Disruption of the Symbolic and the Social

A parallel can be drawn between the stance of the abject and the position of the private or personal self; that of the deject, with the external or social-familial self. These parallels help extend the idea of Plath writing toward a process of change, what Hughes (quoted earlier) has called "those processes and transformations" that led her as a writer and a woman to "her new organic self" (Hughes 87). This process of change involves a fierce dialogue between the voice of the abject or private (subterranean) self, and the deject or socialised (engendered) self. The latter appears in the form of the Lacanian symbolic, or, as Kristeva explains, the "power play" of "Religion, Morality, Law"
(Kristeva 16). In a poem such as 'Daddy' (CP 222-24) the power play between abject and deject is intense; ultimately, the poem's speaker only succeeds in shrugging off the influence of the father figure by a staged 'revenge' in the final stanza of the poem. Throughout 'Daddy', The 'Rule of the Father', the influence of the patriarchal and familial, surrounds the abject voice, determining the direction of the poem's narrative. On the other hand, Plath's 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' (CP 170-71) or 'Tulips' (CP 160-62) sees the power play shift in favour of the abject voice, firmly established in language and imagery of the organic world. In these poems, the abject voice is closely aligned to the speaker's desire for a retreat into a private, subterranean language, a language of the interior - self-reflexive and introspective.

In her poem, 'The Commandments', Eric Jong launches a direct appeal to the female poet to call upon the power of the abject voice, a voice she locates between "the spaces" of the rhythms of "sleeping men". What Jong's poem does, in fact, is direct the female poet to the peculiar voice of the abject, to the intervals within the male order of language where, she suggests, the female poet may find an alternative language:

If a woman wants to be a poet,
she should peel back the hair from her eyeballs;
she should listen to the breathing of sleeping men;
she should listen to the spaces between that breathing (Jong 43-44).
The 'experience' of the female poet, can be defined according to Teresa de Lauretis' definition of experience as a "a complex of habits resulting in the semiotic interaction of 'outer world' and 'inner world', the continuous engagement of a self, as subject, in social reality" (Lauretis 182). If we turn again to Kristevan terminology, the alternative rhythms that Jong prescribes above can be defined more precisely by Kristeva's directive to embrace the semiotic, that subterranean drive within language that cannot be signified, but can be 'heard' within the rhythms and tone of language. In socio-political terms, the semiotic is a direct challenge, a rebuttal of the force of the symbolic with its peculiar 'Law'. However, as Toril Moi has pointed out, the Kristevan subject "is always already inserted in the symbolic order" and, therefore, the female poet is bound to speak from within "the framework of the symbolic language" (Moi 170). De Lauretis' definition of the female poet locates her within an oscillating relationship between inner and outer, between Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic. Kristeva, likewise, defines the linguistic relationship between the semiotic and symbolic elements as one based on an oscillating dialectic. For the female poet, the semiotic is intrinsically linked to the position of the abject: a pulsation located within the domain of the symbolic, but functioning as a subversive space of utterance. The utterance of the symbolic can be heard in what Moi describes as "a series of ruptures, absences and breaks in the symbolic language", as well as through thematic expression of subversion. These breaks in the language of the symbolic are inimical to the death-drive, "the most fundamental semiotic pulsation" (Moi 170).
While Moi dismisses Kristeva's attempts to "account for the relations between the subject and society" within the dialectic of semiotic and symbolic, there are discernible aspects of the "subversive schemes" of the abject and the semiotic elements in Plath's later poems. A poem such as 'Daddy', defies the idea of a unified subject; instead, the speaker of 'Daddy' disrupts the language of the symbolic with a return to a pre-Oedipal, (or Imaginary, to use Lacan's term) form of language - Plath's "Ich, ich, ich, ich, ich". The nursery rhyme quality of 'Daddy' further enhances the sense of a rebellious force driving the rhythm of the poem, a subversive and deliberately unsophisticated attack on the proprietary aspects of the symbolic. The urge of the speaker toward the semiotic drive reflects the desire for an intensely private, covert language; a language unclaimed, unconfined by the Law of the symbolic. This struggle is inimical to the struggle of the female, in particular, the female poet, for a separate language and identity reflective of the peculiar forms of the feminine.

Plath's radio play, Three Women (CP176-187), is particularly indicative of this process of self-differentiation. The language of the three female voices is intrinsic, private (non-public). It emerges from the female's experience of social apartheid and consequent separate (non-public) language. The women speak a language from 'behind closed doors'; a language that emerges as a palimpsest, almost, of the private recesses of the mind. The women speak out their innermost fears, and in the process, weave an intricate mosaic of the peculiar female psyche. Their voices are involuntary, and seeped in traces of the unconscious:
I remember a white, cold wing

And the great swan, with its terrible look,
Coming at me, like a castle, from the top of the river.

I wasn't ready. The white clouds rearing
Aside were dragging me in four directions.
I wasn't ready.

I am dragged by the horses, the iron hooves . . .
Dark tunnel, through which hurtle the visitations,
The visitations, the manifestations, the startled faces.

I dream of massacres.
I am a garden of black and red agonies. I drink them . . .

I see her in my sleep, my red, terrible girl.
She is crying through the glass that separates us . . . (CP 176-87).

This language separates the women from public involvement; instead, they exist in a state of quarantine, removed from the rejoinders of the social and the political. The dominance of the "I" persona increases the sense of self-mastery and self-determination,
the deliberateness of the women's position. It is from a position of abjection, of self-imposed exile and retreat that these women address us, in a language that points away from the self as a social, toward an intrinsically private and personal being. Ultimately, this position disrupts the process of the symbolic - the attempts to regulate and structure the fracturing process of language itself.

**Disruption and Dissemination: Collage Art of the 1950's**

The separatist language of Three Women and other Ariel poems is resonant of the themes of dissemination and disruption, the prevailing themes of American collage art of the 1950's. In his article, 'Plurality and the Reproduced', Allen Fisher notes that the chief characteristics of the art of the decade were "plurality and simulation". He defines the former as the "changing of boundaries and the quantitative increase in geographical awareness and access"; the latter as "the reproduction of already-reproduced in an age of multi-media that fuels the quantitative spread of mass communication". Fisher equates plurality, in particular, with "the process of boundary breaking and expansion"; simulation with the technique of collage in which multiple planes interact, thereby challenging the parity of space-time (150). The disruptive elements of collage art echo the effects of the semiotic as an agent of subversion to the prevailing symbolic. The concept of 'Open Field' composition, as described by poet Charles Olson, occupied the attention of artists of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Olson's term, applied to poetry, involved a shift in perception of compositional space in which, as Fisher quotes from Olson's 1951 essay 'Projective Verse' "one perception must immediately and directly lead
to a further perception" (Olson 4). What this amounts to, compositionally, is a technique of indefinite boundaries, blurred images and fragmentation. In this sense, the 'Open Field' technique is reminiscent of the disruptive effect of the semiotic within the structure of language - an insurgent force resisting classification or even, at times, detection. 'Open Field' emerges from the Surrealist and Expressionist movements of the 1930's and 1940's, and these influences are particularly discernible in the later work of Plath.

Plath's own art scrapbooks betray a strong personal interest in the medium of collage that filters through to the text of her poetry. The dissolution of boundaries symptomatic of the collage technique of the 1950's can be encountered in the surreal qualities of poems such as Plath's 'Poppies in October' (CP 240). The caesura technique of the poem creates a sense of disjunction and rupture, as one-image forces out another:

Even the sun-clouds this morning cannot manage such skirts.
Nor the woman in the ambulance
Whose red heart blooms through her coat so astoundingly -

A gift, a love gift
Utterly unasked for
By a sky . . .

O my God, what am I
That these late mouths should cry open . . . (CP 240).
This abrupt sequence suggests that the poet is involved in a process of dislodging unconscious imagery through a series of eruptive and disruptive gestures. Each image, although autonomous, rests upon an antecedent image whose function is specifically catalytic. There are no definite boundaries between one sequence of imagery and the next; instead, each image leaps from one pool of imagery to another, with no trace.

Plath's images assimilate a sense of the existential experience; in particular, the sense of social isolation and anomie associated with that experience. Similarly, 'The Night Dances' (CP 249-50) spawns a sequence of collage-like images, snippets of lines that begin and end abruptly with a sense of repeated elision:

A smile fell in the grass.
Irretrievable!

And how will your night dances
Lose themselves. In mathematics?

Such pure leaps and spirals -
Surely they travel

The world forever, I shall not entirely
Sit emptied of beauties, the gift
Of your small breath . . . (CP 249-50)

The final set of images drifts further away from the material, the embodied, toward the ethereal, the disembodied, and the non-figurative:

Such coldness, forgetfulness.
So your gestures flake off -

Warm and human, then their pink light
Bleeding and peeling

Through the black amnesias of heaven.
Why am I given

These lamps, these planets
Falling like blessings, like flakes

Six-sided, white
On my eyes, my lips, my hair

Touching and melting.
Nowhere (CP 250).
An acute sense of self-disintegration characterises these lines, non-coalescence - a distinct lack of a unitary self or subject. Verbs of disintegration support this idea: "bleeding and peeling", "touching and melting", the self in the process of unravelling. The female self is not located in time or space; instead, she exists in a "nowhere", a no-man's-land of fragmentation and disparity. Culturally, there is "nowhere" for a unitary existence, and so she disintegrates into a collage of separate parts and accessories, scattered and diffused. This reality, according to Irigaray, is indicative of the containment of the female within a cultural space equivalent to a death-like tomb, what she calls a "sepulchre". This "sepulchre" is the domestic space she inhabits where, she argues, the female exists in a state of what Kristeva would call 'abjection' (Irigaray 143-44). On the same theme, Elisabeth Grosz perceives the female existing within a state of "homelessness" even within the home itself:

The containment of woman within a dwelling they did not build, nor was even built for them, can only amount to a homelessness within the very home itself: it becomes the space of duty, of endless and infinitely repeatable chores that have no social value or recognition, the space of the affirmation and replenishment of others at the expense of the erasure of the self, the space of domestic violence and abuse, the space that harms as much as it isolates women (Grosz 122).

An early draft of Plath's 'The Babysitters' (Draft 1) sees the female subject (in this case Marcia Brown, Plath's childhood friend) as a personification of the domestic-space
metaphor. As domestic metaphor, the female unravels and “rides” on a topographical tour across the domestic terrain:

Military, a kitchen Napoleon, her cannonball head
Rides on the body of a pink radish...

Her taut hands work the white piano; a strawberry dress
Jazzes the mahogany glazes...

Her body has been baked in honey like breakfast cake...

Her arms are a good basket for sturdy turnips.
Pumpkin-heads nod off her sills... (Conners Email)

The correlate of this theme of containment is the desire to disintegrate, to decompose and so eradicate the presence of the containing borders or demarcations. ‘The Night Dances’ reflects the somatisation of this conflict, a tendency Grosz notes, peculiarly female (Grosz 1994: 38). The eradication of the body frees the female from the space that contains her. This eradication, however, denies her any socio-cultural identity, of which the body is the chief symbol. In reference to Lacan’s notion of the ‘imaginary anatomy,’ Grosz notes that the disintegration of the unified body threatens to push the subject into what Lacan has described as the “preimaginary real”: that is to say, the reality of the psychotic (43). The disintegration of the body is disruptive to the social
order that contains it, and its borders, under threat. The social topography of the female hovers around a borderline position, a “site of danger and vulnerability”, but also, potentially, a site of subversion (195). The borderline position of the female is suggestive of the hallucinatory state, an alternative and disruptive phenomenology to the prescriptive and unitary vision of the prescribed social order. ‘Purdah’ (CP 242-44) describes the process of perception antecedent to hallucination:

I
Smile, cross-legged,
Engimatical,
Shifting my clarities . . .
and the mouth
Veil stirs its curtain
My eye
Veil is
A concatenation of rainbows (CP 242-43).

Here, the female speaker prepares herself for entering the 'borderline' area of hallucination, a process that will release her from what Irigaray describes as the "excising" process of social demarcation. She elucidates:

Everywhere you shut me in. Always you assign a place to me. Even outside the frame that I form with you . . . You
set limits even to events that could happen with others . . . You mark out boundaries, draw lines surround, enclose. Excising, cutting out. What is your fear? That you might lose property? (Irigaray, 1992: 24-25)

IX: "I" Need Space

Space is the correlate of power, and in the case of the female, this space is demarcated and bounded. As the speaker of 'Getting There' declares, "It is so small/ The place I am getting to", and obscured by "obstacles" (CP 249). The female psyche is confined, topographically, to the dimensions of the social order. Her movement is restricted, and the tension of frustrated kinetics becomes apparent. The speaker of 'Years' declares her desire for unconfined space and movement, for a more expansive psyche: "What I love is/ The piston in motion -/ My soul dies before it" (CP 255). Stasis is associated with death; psychic devastation. Reductive images reflect the reducibility of the psyche and of pain itself. In 'Mary's Song' the vastness of the holocaust is contained within "a heart" as pain itself is quantified by space (CP 257). Likewise, topographically, the speaker of 'The Childless Woman' locates herself within a landscape of a "hand with no lines/ The roads bunched to a knot", the "knot" designating herself (CP 259).

In 'Daddy', the speaker declares that her relationship with the absent father figure is based on her confinement to a "black shoe" in which she has lived "like a foot/ For thirty years" (CP 222). The basis of this locus is poverty: the conflation of "poor and white" and living in a shoe evokes the nursery rhyme 'Old Mother Hubbard' with her many
children. In this light, "poor and white" is a statement of social exclusion, of the 'white trash' underclass of America. Thus, the speaker defines her spatial confinement in terms of social poverty, which in turn, produces a psychic poverty: from her confined space, she "barely" dares "to breathe or Achoo" (CP 222). Space is dictated by economics; lack of space reflects poverty and a dispirited, stunted self. The absent male figure of 'Daddy' clearly has taken up too much space: "a bag full of God". Again, self is defined spatially, but here, density also plays a part. The "bag" that contains "Daddy" is a bag "full of" a God-like presence. Accordingly, this bag is "marble-heavy". Thus, the male figure brings a great deal more density to the space he inhabits than the speaker designates to herself. This weight or density is owing to the idol-like position he occupies in the speaker's psyche, a position all-consuming of her psychic space.

As the poem progresses, the psychic topography of the speaker seems to be increasingly incumbent upon space. Self-expression is curbed by lack of space: "The tongue stuck in my jaw/ It stuck in a barb wire snare" (CP 223). The image of barbed wire reinforces the sense of demarcated, limited space. This is directly related to self-expression and the ability to transcend cultural and gender barriers. In the case of the speaker, these barriers were not overcome because of lack of psychic and ontological space: "Ich, ich, ich, ich,/ I could hardly speak". Confinement has led the speaker into a regressive psychic state, demonstrated by her inability to "speak" language; she exists within the twilight zone of the pre-symbolic (pre-language) state. This could be what Kristeva means by 'abjection'; in any case, this stunted verbal ability is firmly linked to spatial deprivation: both material and psychic. For the speaker of 'Daddy' these
deprivations are apparent in the addition of imposition severe psychic/corporeal boundaries. The regression into pre-verbal utterance is symptomatic of the speaker's desire to repostulate her position in relation to the enormously powerful, but absent, male figure. Rather than be represented as dependent of the male other, the speaker returns to the Lacanian mirror-stage and breaks away from the representation of self as a mere reflection of other, (which to this point has held her psychically captive, confined). Instead, she moves toward a revised imago of self.

This new imago will depend upon the repositioning of self within language, of self no longer as the sign or signified, but self as the signifier, the subject of language itself. Hence, the rather subversive tactics of reducing language to its most basic unit - the first person utterance, the utterance of the subject speaking for itself. This is, in fact, a claim to more space, space within language itself that will allow the speaker to reposition herself in relation to the other. Thus, she reclaims for herself the much-desired psychic space that will allow her a more luxurious and independent existence. The German first person pronoun with its aggressive guttural sound perfectly suits the purpose of the speaker to ward off the image of the other that has haunted the subject-space for so long. By means of the first person utterance, the speaker is literally, denouncing the right of the male other to occupy the subject-space; that space she now claims for her self by semantic means.

For the female self space is power; for the female author, space is power as well as authorial longevity. The speaker of 'Daddy' chisels out (both aurally and semantically) a
space for herself. This is the effect of her "ich, ich, ich", her active, aural and physical engagement with the "I" pronoun. This engagement is an act of both of authorial self-preservation as well as self-assertion. The imposing topography of the "I" pronoun functions as a system of defence, a semiotic pillar defending the right of the author's identity to remain partially revealed, partially hidden. Within the body of the text then, the identity of the female author remains protected; furthermore, she is licensed to reconstruct her own identity. In Bakhtinian terms, this is the freedom of the 'carnival': the suspension of "the terror, reverence, piety and etiquette which contribute to the social order", an "overthrow" of the hierarchical codes and "conventions" that define the limits of the self (Bauer 717). Thus, the safe space of the text enables the process of reconstructing the self. The momentum (or libido) required for this process is derived from the tremendous energy of the female speaker engaged in a self-performance.

X: The Performer and her Audience: The Spectacle of Femininity

The relationship between the female performer and her audience is a central concern of Plath's poetics. In her essay "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernity of Patriarchal Power" (1988), Sandra Lee Bartky argues that all women functioning within contemporary culture are subject to the conditions of Foucault's 'panopticon' and the "panoptical male connoisseur". Bartky's argument is that the presence of the male gaze within female consciousness acts as a juridical and formative force upon her sense of self; furthermore, the presence of this "panoptical male" is responsible for the performer-observer dialectic that is the basis of the construct of femininity (Bartky 42). As performer, the female is permanently
visible, permanently 'on show'; hence, even within the auspices of the home the female is subject to the gaze. In Foucauldian terms this would make her an inmate of the panopticon, "a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance" (42). The visibility of the female is heightened by a relentless bombardment of images relating to the female body. These media images function, according to the Foucauldian discourse, as "a machinery of power that explores it [the female body], breaks it down and rearranges it" (Foucault 138). Plath's The Applicant (CP 221-222) is a parodic deconstruction of the female body into a series of grotesque proboscis, a machine that "works". Plath's technique is what Linda Hutcheon has termed as "speaking the language of the dominant" for the purpose of subversion (O'Grady 21-22). Hence, Plath's ironic and parodic language is mimicry of the speech of the "dominant" male culture, a device that forces the subterranean language of the female subject to rise to the surface and be heard.

Terry Johnson's recent play, Hitchcock Blonde, explores the relationship of Alfred Hitchcock to his female performers. Hitchcock's Blonde explains her own ontology in relation to the male viewer/screen: "I'm lit like cut glass . . . I'm theirs to look at" (I.v. 33); "You could tell me that I have a quality you can't quite explain and that no other could replicate and I am the one who must be gazed upon in order for you to tell your story . . . and I must be looked at and followed and murdered most probably . . . (I.vii.45).

Hitchcock's Blonde, then, is aware of the process of female objectification identified by Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975); indeed, she is complicit with it. When she steps naked into the bath on screen she gives Hitchcock and his audience what they crave: "a greater intimacy with one's subject" (I.vii. 45). In the
same way, Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' (CP 244-46) gives her audience what they want – that "big strip tease" (CP 245) – performed beneath the gaze of "the peanut crunching crowd" whose members, she knows, are principally male:

Then unwrap me hand and foot –

The big strip tease.

Gentleman, ladies

These are my hands,

My knees.

I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same identical woman (CP 245).

Plath deliberately punctures her audience's anticipation of viewing the naked female flesh, their voyeuristic pleasure. Performing her own flesh does not make the female subject-object any different from her point of view: according to her own empirical experience of herself, her own ontology she is still the “same identical woman” - whether on or off the stage, on or off the screen. Thus, Plath titillates her audience by bringing out her naked female subject – the fantasy of the voyeuristic imagination - then reduces that same subject to the level of empiricism: “Nevertheless, I am the same identical woman” (CP 245).

Plath's deliberate exhibitionism is thus, two-pronged: it is both a reflection of the social construct of femininity in which the female is subject to performing 'herself', and
also a subversive device, designed to undermine that very same construct and its
discourse. In this light, the self-indulgent voyeurism of 'Lady Lazarus', is an attempt to
open up the discourse of the feminised/socialised female to that much needed process
identified by Adrienne Rich – the “reconstruction”/reconstitution of the voice of
contemporary womanhood. The language of ‘Daddy’ and ‘Lady Lazarus’ then, is a
reconstitution of the language of the dominant discourse; that is to say the language of the
male in the mouth of the female. These are the “words” of ‘Words Heard’: “these
syllables” that “he has achieved”, “looking for a listener”, that She will now speak.
These words, newly assimilated, are the language that Rich calls for. In ‘Words Heard’
the female speaker confronts this language and pulls away, declaring these words too
“fertile . . . too big” (CP 203).