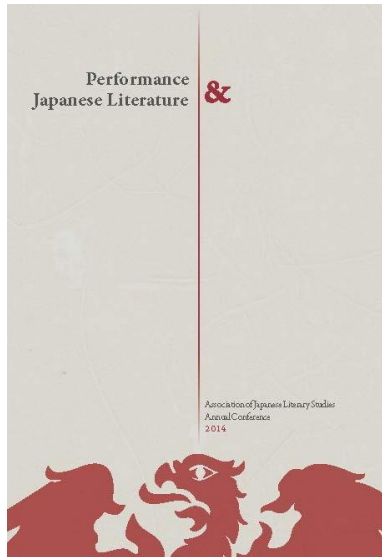


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## Symbiotic Cycles and the Parodic Performance of Mother-Daughter in Ōhara Mariko's *Hybrid Child*

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Judith Butler famously argues that gender is a “performative” act; that there is no gender before the repetition of acts. In particular, the repetition of the gendered signs through performance “can reveal the hyperbolic status of the norm itself, [and] indeed, can become the cultural sign by which that cultural imperative might become legible.”<sup>1</sup> Whereas Butler claims that the most obvious example of this performativity is found in drag, I propose that science fiction, particularly by women writers, provides a similar stage upon which to highlight the constructiveness and performativity of gender through cyborg or posthuman figures. In this paper I will discuss Ōhara Mariko's 1990 novel *Haiburiddo chairudo* [Hybrid Child], focusing on the mother-daughter dyad that is performed repeatedly through the recreation of cyborg subjects. I will consider the way these models of mother-daughter relationships thus alter and tease the notion of a mother-daughter symbiosis. Since each version of the mother-daughter relationship is slightly different, the process of the repetition itself can challenge conventional notions of maternity and the roles of mother and daughter.

Mother-daughter relationships are emotionally ambivalent, Luce Irigaray suggests. They teeter simultaneously between love and hate. This ambivalence stems from “the absence of symbolization,” “a state of *déréliction*,” or “the state of being abandoned by God or, in mythology.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, ambivalent emotions in a mother-daughter relationship are due to their lack of subjectivity and their marginalized positions in society and culture. Irigaray, thus, argues that women are outside of the symbolic order or unsymbolized<sup>3</sup> since Sigmund Freud's theory of a child's psychic development is a son (male) as a prototype based on the heterosexual matrix.<sup>4</sup> Unlike a boy, whose penis already marks the loss of the original symbiotic relationship with mother, a girl, according to Freud, has specific difficulty in recognizing the loss of the original symbiotic relationship with mother or continuing the pre-oedipal phase, as

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 181.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: The Philosophy in the Feminine* (London and NY: Routledge, 1991), 77.

<sup>3</sup> Whitford clarifies Irigaray's definition of the unsymbolized in a mother-daughter relationship; it refers to “an absence of linguistic, social, semiotic, structural, cultural, iconic, theoretical, mythical, religious or any other representations of that relationship” (76).

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on Theory of Sexuality,” (1905d), in *Freud: Complete Works* ed. Ivan Smith (2011) 1478-1483.

both mother and daughter are castrated. Thus, women, usually, daughters remain in melancholic stage but are not able to achieve mourning since they cannot realize the loss of origin.<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan radically revises Freud's psychic development of the child in relation to language, but not biological difference. In the Symbolic order, which corresponds to the Oedipus complex, the child accepts the Name-of-the-Father (law, knowledge, control) to control his/her sexual desires through language (*The Mirror Stage*). The child recognizes lack of the mother's attention to him/her, as it is caused by the outside world. Lacan calls this the symbolic castration of the mother (*The Signification of the Phallus*). Despite Lacan's critical stance on Freud's biological difference, the very term he uses is still phallogocentric.

Based on these psychoanalytic theories, Irigaray considers that only male subjectivity, and thus one sex, exists in Western philosophy, which excludes women/ the feminine from the subject position. Therefore, she suggests a strategy called "mimesis" to recover female subjectivity and "the female imaginary" and problematize the phallogocentric logic of femininity. Irigaray suggests:

One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to covert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it...To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to locate the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the 'perceptible' of 'matter'— to 'ideas', in particular to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/ by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible' by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: recovering a possible operation of the feminine in language.<sup>6</sup>

In short, mimesis is not simply miming, but rather miming unfaithfully, and it thus reveals the exclusion of the feminine in the phallogocentric economy.

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<sup>5</sup> Lacan, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and many psychoanalysts revised Freud's phallogocentric analysis. For Lacan, there are three dimensions of a child's psychic development: the Real, the Imaginary order, and the Symbolic order. The Real is a chaotic mixture of materiality, images of the world, and needs, and the child has not separated its self from mother. According to Lacan, it is impossible to describe the Real in language. The mirror stage marks the entry of the Imaginary order; a child recognizes its image as a whole in the mirror (the other person, especially its mother can also function as a mirror) and creates an ideal image of the self (Ideal-I) and also narcissistic fantasy of the self. When a child enters a language system and accepts rules, he/she accepts the Symbolic order, which marks gender differences and corresponds to the Oedipus complex. Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908c.) 1972; "Female Sexuality" (1931b.), 4590-4607.

<sup>6</sup> Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 71. Whitford quoted from Irigaray's *The Sex is Not The One* (76); translation is adapted.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler elaborates on Irigaray's concept of mimesis by suggesting a critical strategy of mime— a reverse-mime or performativity as citationality. Particularly she employs Irigaray's concept of "to play with mimesis" and "an effect of playful repetition" (of citation), questioning originality as a ploy of the power discourse such as masculinism, binaristic gender, and heterosexual matrix.<sup>7</sup> In Ōhara's *Hybrid Child*, the hyperbolic or artificial versions of maternity through mimesis or repetitive performance can question the legibility of symbiotic illusion of the mother-daughter relationship in the masculinist and heterosexual matrix and recreate an alternate version of the symbiotic relationship.

Of course, Ōhara is not the only writer to represent complicated mother-daughter relationships. Many modern Japanese women writers of science fiction (or speculative fiction), such as Kurahashi Yumiko (1937-2007), Shōno Yoriko (1956-), Hagio Moto (1949-), challenge the hegemonic form of gender roles in the patriarchal society in Japan. Kurahashi's "Uchūjin" [An Extraterrestrial, 1964, trans. 1997], for example, illustrates not only a playful bi-gender alien but also a satirically conscious performance of expected gender roles that questions the phallogocentric notions of gender in the patriarchal family. Shōno's *Haha no hattatsu* [The development of the mother, 1995] deconstructs the conventional perceptions of the mother through linguistic play and multiple physical metamorphoses viewed from the daughter's perspective. And, SF manga artist Hagio's "Iguana no musume" [Iguana Girl, 1992, trans. 2010] portrays the emotional ambivalence in the mother-daughter relationship through parodying the mother's perception—who can only see her daughter as an iguana. After the mother's death, Rika comes to see her mother as an iguana, realizing her mother's struggle to raise her daughter and reconciling with her mother at the end. The text illustrates the mother's rejection of the mother-daughter enmeshment, but the daughter's acceptance of this symbiosis at the end. These women writers and manga artists attempt to bring attention to or to rewrite the mother-daughter relationship to challenge the hegemonic form of gender roles in the patriarchal society in Japan, by incorporating an alien, an animal, and a cyborg through satirical performance, playful perceptions, or linguistic play.

In Ōhara's *Hybrid Child*, several different versions of mother-daughter conflicts are played out repetitively: some seem to conform to psychoanalytic theory of a symbiotic mother-daughter identity, whereas in others the excessive performance of maternity or cyborg/posthuman entities tease or create parodic effects of the mother-daughter relationship. Importantly, none of the mother-daughter pairings are created by reproduction in the heterosexual family. Rather,

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<sup>7</sup> Reverse-mime does not have to privilege the masculinism as an origin or binaristic opposition of masculinity and femininity, but shows the subversive possibility— for example, miming without a heterosexual matrix. Thus, a reverse mime contains a wider sense of miming to destabilize a master's discourse: "for every oppositional discourse [women, children, slaves, animals in Plato] will produce its outside, an outside that risks becoming installed as its non-signifying inscriptional space" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 52).

they are copies or imitations of the family enhanced by advanced technology such as genetic engineering. In addition, Kotani Mari notices that since the father figure is absent in most of these mother-daughter dyads, the family becomes a feminized space and the mother role takes on attributes of a phallic figure.<sup>8</sup> In this feminized family space, there is no castration and no loss of origin, but the mother-daughter symbiosis continues since there is, as Luce Irigaray suggests, no clear identification of the female subject in the phallogentric logic. Nevertheless, the mother-daughter symbiosis is an imitation of the heterosexual matrix; in a sense, the imitation of the repetitive acts creates the reality of this dyad, yet it is not quite faithful to the heteronormative matrix in the process. In this respect, the mother-daughter symbiosis in this text is by default.

Before going further in my analysis of the mother-daughter symbiosis, a few brief words about the text are in order. The award-winning novel *Hybrid Child* consists of three parts and was published over six years in *SF Magazine*, the most prominent monthly science fiction magazine produced by Hayakawa Publisher. First, the short story “Hybrid Child” was published in December 1984; the second story “Kokubetsu no aisatsu” [Farewell] appeared in February 1985; third, the longest story “Akua puranetto” [Aquaplanet] was serialized from 1989 to 1990. All three stories were compiled and published as a book in 1990. The resulting novel is complicated and multifaceted—unraveling on a variety of levels, involving characters who transform into a multiplicity of versions of themselves, and with narrative that challenges linearity. Any attempt to render the “plot” in a seamless description reduces it to the ridiculous. But, for the purpose of this essay, we can say that the novel is about a secret animated military weapon, known as Sample B III, that escapes, assumes the forms of whatever it ingests, and interacts with a mother-daughter dyad who continue to morph into various versions of themselves.

The mother-daughter relationship in *Hybrid Child* exists on several levels and can be read through three separate cycles. The first cycle is that of Clone Jonah. In this cycle the daughter materializes as a clone of the mother. Second, there is Consciousness Jonah, which manifests as a first-person narrative voice that assumes the historical memory of the mother from the first cycle. This voice dialogues with Sample B III, a cyborg who has ingested the corpse of the first cycle mother and is bodily manifested in the guise of the daughter, Jonah. We recall that the daughter Jonah from the first cycle was already a clone of the mother. So, in fact, the Mother is in dialogue with herself. Third, we have Hybrid Jonah. In this cycle we have a hybrid of Sample B III and Jonah after he ingested

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<sup>8</sup> As Kotani points out, Ōhara’s *Hybrid Child* rather focuses on “the phallic mother, who replaces the absent patriarchal authority figure by becoming one with the home and by becoming the ruler of the feminized family space” and “the postmodern daughter, who survives by adapting to different situations and transforming herself.” “Alien Bodies in Japanese Women’s Science Fiction,” trans. Miri Nakamura, in *Robot Ghosts Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 61.

the corpse of Clone Jonah and Consciousness Jonah in the second cycle. This Hybrid Jonah creates a giant dragonfly mother, into which Jonah's brain cells and memory are implanted. (See Diagram #1)

In the first cycle, the seven-year-old girl Clone Jonah and her mother simulate their roles as a daughter and a mother. In an interview about this point Ōhara noted that we see in this performance two hyperbolic aspects of maternity: either extreme nurturing or extreme authority— both of which are manifest in destructiveness.<sup>9</sup> Through Jonah's flashback, Jonah's mother attempts to “play” the maternal role, going through the motions of “feeding” her daughter Jonah. The act of “feeding” is a nurturing aspect of the maternal role, while “being fed” (or eating) is part of the daughter's role. The mother is fixated on both “feeding” and “eating” and she herself has an extreme eating disorder that fluctuates between bulimic and anorexic periods.

During the bulimic period, the mother forces Clone Jonah to eat lots of food. When Jonah does not eat, the mother punishes her by asking her to stand in front of the mirror, where the mother pulls savagely at the girl's face. She sees in Jonah her own mirror image and is jealous of Jonah's youth and beauty that she no longer has.<sup>10</sup> Her punishment of Jonah illustrates her ambivalence: she is jealous of what Jonah has that she lacks, while at the same time she admires what she sees of her younger self reflected in her daughter. The mother, hence, has difficulty in completely separating herself from Jonah. In contrast, during her anorexic period, the mother completely rejects the role of nurturer. She does not feed Clone Jonah, and eventually the girl starves to death.<sup>11</sup> Once Jonah dies, the mother preserves her girl body safely in an EMP capsule, thus demonstrating both her excessive love for her daughter as well as her own narcissistic desire for her own self-image.<sup>12</sup> This is enmeshment where the mother-daughter boundaries are diffuse.

The mother-daughter symbiosis or enmeshment seems to fit Freudian (or Lacanian) theory; however, because Jonah is already a clone of the mother, the mother's ambivalence and confusion between her self-image and her daughter's is coming from their identical images by cloning, and not because there is no castration or the loss of origin. According to Jean Baudrillard, “the mirror stage is abolished in cloning, or rather it is parodied therein in a monstrous fashion.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ōhara mentions that maternity has twofold meanings: a nurturer for everything and a destructive force as an authority. Ōhara, “2777-nen no joou” [The Queen of the Year 2777] Moshimo to iu jikkenba de: josei SF sakka ni totte no haha [Experimenting “What if..”: What “Mother” Means for Women SF Writers], in *Bosei fashizumu: Haha naru shizen no yūwaku* [Maternal Fascism: Temptation to Maternal Nature], ed. Kanō Mikiyo, vol. 6 of *Nyū feminizumu rebuyū*. [New Feminism Review] (Tokyo: Gakuyō shobō, 1995), 188.

<sup>10</sup> Ōhara, *Haiburiddo chairudo* [Hybrid Child, 1990] (Tokyo: Hayakawa shobō. 1993), 53-4 Translation of all the passages in *Hybrid Child* is mine.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-2.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* [Simulacres et simulation, 1981], trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 97.

The mirror stage—the moment of self-identification for Jonah—is thus unclear; Jonah is identical with the mother in adulthood. Therefore, the image of the mother becomes a prison for the daughter, as the mother-daughter symbiosis is an imperative concept in the male imaginary. Nonetheless, in this cycle, the mother-daughter symbiosis is modified by cloning, and the use of the mother's contradictory performance—excessively nurturing and simultaneously destructive—mocks their enmeshment.

For the next mother-daughter cycle, Consciousness Jonah assumes the role of the malicious mother in her interaction with Sample B III, the biomechanical weapon noted above. Jonah's consciousness, now disembodied, attaches itself to the house as a kind of cyborg and manifests in a first-person narrative voice.<sup>14</sup> The pronoun assigned to this cyborg, regardless of its physical manifestation, is always male. In this cycle, Sample B III eats the corpse of Jonah's mother and transforms himself into the seven-year-old girl Jonah. Despite the pronoun "he," Sample B III's gender is contingent because of his ability to simulate. In this respect, Sample B III's girl is a copy of Jonah—ultimately a copy of the mother. His gender is always a simulation and thus no original exists. There is also no description of his original form in the narrative, just as Butler's notion of gender identity—the imitation of repetitive acts reproduces the reality of gender.<sup>15</sup>

Consciousness Jonah—who is disembodied and lacks a fleshly presence—is jealous of Sample B III's Jonah, who appears in bodily form. This jealousy echoes that of the mother's in the earlier cycle who was envious of the young and beautiful Jonah. Consciousness Jonah mimics the mother's insolent voice and interrogates Sample B III's transformed Jonah:

“What are you?” I asked. The girl looked puzzled as if she was sorry for becoming Jonah. “I ... want to get out of here,” the girl answered. I asked again, “What the hell are you?” I mimicked my mother's tone of voice and interrogated her. The girl looked terrified, yet she peered straight into my eyes. My anger surged up from deep within like a cauldron of wrath. I'm jealous of her beautiful flesh that I no longer have. “What are you?” I screamed. Suddenly, a divine revelation came to me. “Oh, it's you! Mom!” The girl stepped back. I was agitated by her frightened look like a scared cat. “I'm right, aren't I? You're not me. You're my mom! How on earth do you think you can get away from me?”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The first-person narrative voice “*atashi*” (a casual form of I, primarily used by women) is employed for Consciousness Jonah and Hybrid Jonah (a hybrid of Sample B III and Jonahs), while the first-person narrative voice “*watashi*” (I, a general form) is used for the Mother at the very beginning.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside/ Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 22.

<sup>16</sup> Ohara, *Haiburiddo chairudo*, 57.

Consciousness Jonah perfectly performs the phallic mother— an authoritative and abusive mother just as her mother had done, while Sample B III plays the role of an obedient and frightened daughter as had the previous Jonah. Jonah’s mother becomes the text for Consciousness Jonah to perform. However, as the above quotation shows, Consciousness Jonah wants to interpret Sample B III’s version of Jonah as that of the mother, not the daughter in order to take revenge on her mother. Consciousness Jonah confuses the image of herself with that of her mother. She attempts to destroy the girl’s body with fire, but ultimately saves her by dousing her with water. Her ambivalent feelings toward Sample B III’s Jonah come from the mother-daughter symbiosis that Consciousness Jonah inherited.

Jonah—both a clone body and a consciousness— and Sample B III’s girl are all Jonah’s mother. That is their point of origin. The relationship of the mother and the clone daughter Jonah is replaced by the simulation of the mother (Consciousness Jonah) and the daughter (Sample B III’s Jonah). The mother-daughter enmeshment does not end here; however, these extreme mother-daughter simulations through clone or cyborg subjectivities can expose the performativity of the mother-daughter roles *per se* and the artificiality of their symbiotic relationship.

In the third cycle, the relationship of Jonah and her mother is revived with role reversal performances. At this point, Jonah is a hybrid of Jonah and the cyborg Sample B III after he ingested the corpse of Clone Jonah and Consciousness Jonah in the second cycle. I will call this cyborg Hybrid Jonah. Hybrid Jonah gives birth to a giant dragonfly containing the mother’s memory— in other words, Hybrid Jonah’s dragonfly offspring is an imitation of the mother. Hybrid Jonah performs the role of nurturing mother and feeds the giant dragonfly. The dragonfly assumes the role of daughter and grows into a grotesque form with a voracious appetite. Hybrid Jonah eventually tires of feeding the dragonfly, kills her and slowly consumes pieces of her flesh.<sup>17</sup> Hybrid Jonah ultimately fails in her performance of nurturing mother. But as the destructive phallic mother, Hybrid Jonah is able to kill the daughter/dragonfly and thus re-enact the role of *her* mother who killed Clone Jonah to end their symbiotic relationship.

As mentioned above, Hybrid Jonah is already a hybrid of Jonah’s body and consciousness and Sample B III, while the dragonfly mother is a chimera of a dragonfly with the mother’s memory. But four of them: Clone Jonah, Consciousness Jonah, the Dragonfly Mother, and a part of Hybrid Jonah are derived from the mother as origin, as Butler mentions that “the prior presumption of the maternal as ground” is the male imaginary in psychoanalysis.<sup>18</sup> The role reversal initially confuses the identities of the mother and the daughter.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-51.

<sup>18</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 200n26.

<sup>19</sup> Kamikawa discusses the exchangeability of the mother and the daughter: “attributes of mother and daughter are exchangeable in a deeper level; the daughter also connotes twofold maternal meanings:



However, as both cyborg mother and cyborg daughter perform the roles of “feeding” and “being fed” repeatedly, the repetition of their performance can expose the artificiality of their gender roles and of the symbiotic identity because all return to the mother.

Moreover, since the sign “feeding” or “eating” is repeatedly used for playing the mother-daughter roles here, the action of “eating the mother” (cannibalism) is to create an alternative form of the mother-daughter symbiosis in the feminized family space (without the father figure). “Eating the mother’s flesh” in the text connotes two paradoxical meanings. First, it displaces an authoritative figure—the phallic mother, as Tomoko Aoyama posits that “texts that have cannibalism as a theme involve [...] a notion of ‘displacement.’”<sup>20</sup> The daughter (Hybrid Jonah) gains power and becomes independent as an individual subject. Second, cannibalism can emphasize the daughter’s affection for the mother and the mother-daughter affinity. The slow process of eating her flesh is an act of homage; the complete absorption of the mother is also the act of her acceptance of the mother.

After consuming the mother’s flesh, Hybrid Jonah can no longer keep the body of a seven-year-old girl, and she begins to grow. No matter how many times she destroys her body out of revulsion, it continues to grow into that of an adult woman’s body. The daughter will become the mother no matter what, and hence the mother-daughter symbiosis will never end. Nonetheless, by eating the mother, Hybrid Jonah can finally end her conflict with her mother, and their reconciliation establishes her subjectivity while embracing the mother’s qualities. Once again Hybrid Jonah might return to the mother; the mother-daughter symbiosis is like the food chain, a cycle that never ends.

As discussed here, three different cycles of the mother-daughter relationships are simulated through excessive maternal performance and cyborgs/posthuman subjects. In the first cycle, Clone Jonah and the mother seem to comply with the symbiotic relationship in the phallogocentric theory, as the mother cannot completely distinguish herself from the daughter. However, Jonah as the clone of the mother reveals the mother-daughter symbiosis in the male imaginary itself as an imperative concept. Excessive performance of the mother: nurturing and destructive can also reinforce the artificiality of the concept of the mother-daughter symbiosis, as Butler suggests. In the second cycle, Consciousness Jonah and Sample B III’s transformed Jonah repeat the roles of the mother-daughter in the first cycle; however, their cyborg subjectivities can stress the performativity of the gendered roles *per se*. In the third cycle, Hybrid Jonah and the dragonfly mother/daughter changes the dynamic of the mother-

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nurturing and destructive.” Kamikawa Aya, “Chikara no opera- Ōhara Mariko no miraishi shōsetsu to ‘chitsujō’ josetsu” [The Power of Opera- The Introduction to Ōhara Mariko’s Futuristic Novels and Social “Order”], in *Joseigaku nenpō* [Annual Report of Women’s Studies] 16 (Oct 1995): 103.

<sup>20</sup> Tomoko Aoyama, *Reading Food in Modern Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 95.

daughter relationship with their role reversals. The daughter-cum-mother murders the mother-as-daughter by cannibalizing her. Eating the mother's flesh creates an alternative for the mother-daughter symbiosis, as their symbiosis is inescapable: the daughter will eventually become the mother. However, as mentioned earlier, all these versions are performed by imitation mothers and daughters; hence, they are products of the male imaginary and the heterosexual family by default. The mother-daughter symbiosis is rewritten within a feminized family space as existing only between the mother and the daughter. Although each cycle of the mother-daughter relationship is not drastically different, the repetition of the imitations of the mother-daughter symbiosis in the process exposes the constructedness of the phallogentric logic of the mother-daughter symbiosis.

**Diagram #1**

