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Women's Language: an image/word conjunction
(politics, propaganda, practice -a feminist response)

Dyana Werden Asimakos

A Thesis

in

The Special Individual Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

May 1991

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ABSTRACT

Women's Languageing: an image/word conjunction
(politics, propaganda, practice - a feminist response)

Dyana Werden Asimakos

This thesis utilizes Yvonne Rainer's film, THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN, as a catalyst for developing the ideas and extensions of languageing. The purpose in introducing the present participle of language is to place women's voicing (image, word, sound) into a process of recovery. To call this process a postmodern / a poststructural feminist practice identifies languageing as a term which incorporates women's many subject positions. Recognizing the sites of contradiction becomes primary to this discussion. Patriarchy tends to bind, to smother, to erase our diverse identities. Languageing is a resistance in women's language oppression that has a herstory of struggle. Languageing identifies, locates and articulates women's experiences through empowering propaganda, a responsible politics and a feminist practice. By breaking and entering into the stories of patriarchy, Yvonne Rainer has demonstrated a strategy for resistance, e.g. the many levels of narrative, use of authoritative texts and documentary film, rear-screen projections of Hollywood films. In my thesis I have stressed a non-linear process rather than a systematic progression. The emphasis on women's languageing encourages strategies of resistance for all oppressed peoples.

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Elizabeth Henrik, of Arpi Hamalian, principal of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, of all the women at the institute will be remembered.

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LEGEND

BELIEVABILITIES The term makes reference to those fallacies which women are turning around to make into our own believabilities, by re-investing words and phrases with our meanings.

KNOWLEDGE This form of knowledge refers to the institutional Knowledge that has an acceptance in the Absolute. Rather than knowledge growing from personal experiences, this form of Knowledge dictates and prescribes, e.g. Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed speaks of the banking concept of knowledge.

MAL[E] This prefix is intended to extend the meaning of mal-practice. The direct reference is that often mal-practice has its origins in mal[e]-practice, e.g. male gynaecologists.

MIS[S] This prefix is also intended to extend meaning by showing a lack. When using the terms 'mis[s]-representation' or 'mis[s]-understanding', the missing often is complete, e.g. women are not represented at all or understood when we speak.

PEOPLES My term, 'peoples,' as a singular term, recognizes individual identities within the larger cultural segments of our societies. There is a singular identity within a collective plurality, the individual in the collective. Peoples, as a term, considers the negativity of erasure.

REALITY This form of reality is the accepted, patriarchal Reality which demands conformity and denial to the experiences of women and all oppressed peoples. Consider the accepted written history of society.

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WOMEN...HER When I use the term 'women' to be followed by 'her/she' rather than 'their', my [dis]agreement is intentional. It is again the individual woman in women. 'Their' is not a gendered pronoun.

DASHES The use of dashes between words emphasizes the relationship between particular words which otherwise exists only on a grammatical level, e.g. an extension of inter-textuality.

SINGLE QUOTATION MARKS The use of single quotation marks is meant to emphasize particular words or phrases within the text.

!? / ?? When these marks are doubly used, they are to emphasize the statement of the sentence.

PREFACE

I would like to begin this preface by saying that I am a visual artist coming to language, to open language. Within my art practice I have incorporated written text as an element for expanding ideas. I use both images and words to contextualize my intentions. As a woman who sees and listens more than she speaks, I find it necessary to break existing conventions. The patriarchal system of repressive conventions advocates rules to bind and gag. Restricted by linear thinking, bound by patriarchal rules, my thinking spaces seek a language form which can speak my contradictions amidst my multiple subject positions. It is necessary to question the rules, the policies of any given society.

Being a mother of three grown children and a practising visual artist, who has been involved in teaching on all levels, I have experienced a variety of repressive forms originating in social norms. Within these social norms my role was seen as primarily the mother of my children. It was my responsibility to be 'there' when difficulties arose, e.g. school problems, broken friendships, a bad soccer practice. Everything else was relegated to a secondary position and seen as unnecessary or frivolous. Teaching was worked in around the family needs. If an emergency came up, it was I who left my class. My art practice was something I did in my 'spare time', which was

often non-existent. This time became a 'dream reality.'

I still retain the attitude that my children come first, otherwise the 'guilt-trip' sets in. Social norms are hard to shake. The internalization of guilt is a primary factor in the suppression of women.

To find language which speaks my life I seek paths which have no mapping. It is unmapped territory. Women's knowing not only uses language to speak, but also incorporates image and space. I have found the capitalistic society in which I live an alienating place. As the mind was split from the body in Cartesian logic, so has capitalism split art, in all its spiritual and physical manifestations, from our living experiences. The art-making of the creative process has become known as a luxury. Art has become a bad word in a world where our priorities are based on the stock exchange, on the profit margin, on consumer management skills.

My approach in producing this thesis involves a writing technique which layers a discourse acknowledging divergent patterns of thought. The overall intention eventually becomes evident. A gradual exposition of the points under discussion generates a cumulative effect. It is a process wherein ideas are not "thrust" forward to coalesce in one central focus.

The focus is multi-faceted. The intention is to have the "format" agree with the "content" of the thesis - women languaging our critical insights through image and word. There is a plurality of voices. I propose no singular reading. Utterances are voiced to raise questions.

I come to language as a site for subversive political practice which involves the image and the space of a working, living propaganda. Giving voice to the living stories of lived experience crosses through ambiguity without denying its positive nuances, to speak of reality. It is within this reality that naming occurs. By considering the relationship between our own identities and giving voice to our empowerment to break through oppression, I recognize the need to continually be present. This presencing acknowledges my many voices which speak out the realities of my presumed fictions. The image/word conjunction identifies that space in which/from which the subject speaks. And that space inscribes the political struggle inherent in my identity. Is there a congruence between my many realities and the fiction/fact (the social lies) upon which these realities have been premised? Or do I live my contradictions, which is my reality, and locate myself at a crossroads through which I continually pass?

"Finding a voice, searching for words and sentences: say some thing, one thing, no thing; tie/untie, read/unread, discard their forms; scrutinize the grammatical habits of your writing and decide for yourself whether they free or repress. Again, order(s). Shake syntax, smash the myths, and if you lose, slide on, unearth some new linguistic paths. Do you surprise? Do you shock? Do you have a choice?" Trinh T. Minh-Ha

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

FOREWORDS ON WOMEN'S LANGUAGE

Language as a vehicle for expression has not always posed difficulties for women.¹ Linguaging works in the interstices of women's concerns to clarify perceptions and understandings within the issues of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, poverty, etc. The relationship between speaking, thinking, writing, communicating has always been a concern held by women. Women spoke their needs, spoke their children, spoke with each other. Women developed language codes and made marks to show the relationships between her codes and her reality. When the Cartesian split of mind/body developed, language was placed 'outside' the body as a function of the mind. Language became an object for study. The functionality of language became a science, e.g. linguistics. The language, the voices of women became incidental, became silent. Language became a paradox of betrayal and possible liberation.

Women draw their forms of language from lived experiences which evolve into empowering propaganda, unlike the social lies imposed upon us. This action, as a political practice,

¹ When I use the term 'women', I recognize each woman's identity (subjectivity) as a position among many women. Each woman has a distinctive voice that cannot be subsumed under one generic heading. There is no sense of inclusion or exclusion intended.

identifies the "infinite authentic situations"² which are the lived stories of fiction/fact (the lived experiences of our stories are often seen by the patriarchy as fiction whereas we know them to be fact): the crossroads of our many contradictions.

Enter the women of recent history who have been struggling to regain the herstory of our many lived identities. Feminists have been grappling with language to understand patriarchal distortions for some time now. They have also sought to identify paths of returning to language as empowerment. I would identify these women who have been contending with language, as women entering language to expand, to articulate language. They are the forerunners of a languaging.

Briefly, there have been five possible evolving functions within the sites of feminist discourse on/about language:

- (1) locating the sexist bias in language;
- (2) recognizing the contradictions within the subject positions of women;
- (3) breaking the forms of linear language;
- (4) embodying women's subject positions within theoretical texts: the engaging process within feminist theory and action;

² Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name", OCTOBER 52 (Spring 1990): 79.

- (5) critiquing from women's realized experiential knowing.

Locating the sexist bias in language

Having realized the sexist bias in language, feminists such as Mary Daly, Dale Spender, Robin Lakoff, Adrienne Rich, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Marilyn French developed theories and methodological approaches to study the effects of patriarchy on language. Daly, for instance, examined the roots of words, looking for origins, and junctures where original meanings were distorted to fit the patriarchal sensibility.³ She saw words as tools of oppression. Dale Spender also focused on the oppression caused by word-distortion. How an androcentric society developed definitional codes to eliminate women from discourse is seen as primary to "man-made" language.⁴ Spender questions 'the believabilities'⁵, "to believe or not to believe", imposed upon language to silence women. Are we to believe that women's language is inferior, has lesser value than man's language, is in fact inadequate for 'real'

³ Mary Daly, GYN/ECOLOGY (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); WICKEDARY (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

⁴ Dale Spender, Man-Made Language (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁵ 'The believabilities', as a term, has its roots in Dale Spender's "to believe or not to believe" and the quotation from Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass which is cited before the next segment of this chapter.

dialogue?

As one of the first feminists to research language, Robin Lakoff made note of the words which mark women: words which marginalize and make powerless women who attempt to make themselves heard.⁶ Lakoff points out the manners, the ways in which women speak. These mannerisms / gestures maintain a level of non-responsibility, e.g. the tag questions of hesitancy, the use of 'mistress' and 'master' and what they signify, the term 'professional' which had different connotations for the male, for the female.

The negative 'attributes' which were imposed upon women to keep us in line are also seen by Adrienne Rich as an androcentric practice. Rich sees compulsory heterosexuality inscribed in society.⁷ This one-dimensional attitude does not allow women to recognize themselves as autonomous beings. There is always the male appendage who (as the principle) identifies the woman, e.g. father, husband, son. And when this attitude persists, women have no language. We whisper in the corners and eavesdrop on the men.

⁶ Robin Lakoff, Language and Women's Place (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

⁷ Adrienne Rich, On Lies, Secrets, and Silences: Selected Prose 1966-1978 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979). "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" SIGNS, 5:4 (summer 1979) Sexuality Issue, 631-60.

The male-identity-principle of domination is seen by Dorothy Dinnerstein as self-perpetuating. It is a social malaise which is deeply rooted in socialization.⁸ This analysis of socialized repression agrees with Lakoff's observations on language discrimination; the two books were published around the same time. In addition, Dinnerstein saw the possibility of social change through recognizing the damaging effects of demeaning language.

Marilyn French distinguishes four stereotypes which affect women's relationship to language: women as deviants; women in relation to man; women enveloped into the generic 'he'; women as some sub-human species.⁹ French articulates the areas within language where women are consistently seen as other than, as less than. In all these instances language plays a controlling part.

Feminists have noted the need to resist patriarchal uses of language. Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler co-edited A Feminist Dictionary¹⁰ wherein words are examined and placed into a context of women-identified experiences. Words

⁸ Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur (New York City: Harper and Row, 1976).

⁹ Marilyn French, "Women in Language" Soundings, no. 59 (1976): 329 - 344.

¹⁰ Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, A Feminist Dictionary: in our words (London: Pandora Press, 1985).

generate meanings of empowerment, of paradox, of our lived contradictions. Kramarae argues for the need to name situations wherein sexism is expressed: e.g., men will flatter women on their performances in roles which are female-identified thus perpetuating a sexist discrimination.

As these women bring a woman's definition to language, a feminist positionality, theories develop which recognize the sites of contradiction. What are these contradictions? What are the subject positions of women?

recognizing the contradictions within the subject positions of women

In turning to these themes, Julia Kristeva positions herself in language by recognizing the subject as that position which can undercut/intercut the phallogentric discourse. Kristeva sees the feminine as a mode of language rather than a biological imperative.¹¹ Contradictions develop when the feminine discourse is relegated to the margins and is not on par with the masculine discourse. Language then becomes a site of struggle. Kristeva argues that the feminine subject, as one that is changeable, always in flux (the semiotic), can put into question the apparent concretized order (the symbolic) of a patriarchal society.

¹¹ Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. T. Cora, A. Jardine and L.S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

As Kristeva argues the subject position of the feminine, so Alice Jardine contends that the theoretical position of feminist critic requires continual reappraisal. She bases her theoretical studies on French thought and its relevance to American feminism.¹² Her research challenges binary practices and the distinguishing factors of difference. The genderization of the writing (reading) process appears to hold multiple problems for Jardine: e.g. the risk women take when 'borrowing' from the male-written texts. When this occurs, the master text authority over-rides, erases the feminist position. How can I possibly legitimate my position when it's not based on my own knowing practices?

Within the practice of feminist criticism, Chris Weedon sees the subject position as a position for feminist poststructuralism which can change "the overall network of social power relations."¹³ Weedon includes an historical analysis in this position. In this position women's subjectivity focuses on a contextual response to lived contradictions. Weedon proposes the possibility of sites of resistance within a feminist poststructuralist criticism which examines the power-plays expressed through discourse, through the various forms of language. There is a constant

¹² Alice Jardine, GYNESIS (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

¹³ Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1987), 135.

referral of meaning, a process of transference which relocates meaning. And in this referral process exists the possibility for political change.

Contradictions in the attitudes of white middle-class feminists are disturbing to bell hooks. What is said and what is done do not come together.¹⁴ hooks does not see mainstream feminism recognizing the positions of black feminists. The priorities differ, discourse differs according to experience, and language defines a split of insider/outsider.

As a white middle-class feminist, Toril Moi advocates gendered languages and in so doing recognizes many voices. "A multiplicity of sexually marked voices"¹⁵ would be able to speak their meanings and experiences according to their identities. Rather than advocate an essentialism (which also speaks of reductionism), Moi would rather see the sites of language be attributed to a sexual signifier whose subject position has the potential to change. Moi understands the subject to be positioned within language according to her/his sexuality.

¹⁴ bell hooks, Ain't I A Woman (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Feminist Theory: from margin to center (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London and N.Y.: Methuen, 1985), 173.

breaking the forms of linear language

The recognition of contradictions also follows another mode of thought which breaks with the forms of linear theory. In this critique of Western thought, the repression of women's experiences and forms of language is rejected. The new French feminisms recognize language to be sexually identified and see women's experiences determining language. This attitude reflects the statement on page one that speaks of women being language/'writing the body'. But what is seen here is a possible reductionism wherein this site becomes the primary and only authentic site from which women can speak. This position reverts to an essentialism which denies cultural and social formations.

One of the women advocating this position, Hélène Cixous, admires the sexuality of women which she sees reflected in women's language.¹⁶ Women's language continuously spirals in the present rather than in the enclosure of a 'single-mindedness'. Cixous sees this process as liberating the female discourse, a discourse of multiple impulses. As sexuality begins with the body so then does women's language. It is with this concept of 'writing the body', that re-writing the text comes into play: an empowering discourse of female

¹⁶ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, The Newly Born Woman, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

writing, of languaging.

Catherine Clément reminds women of the need to take a stand. Feminist action calls "...into question and into the play the transformational powers of language."¹⁷ Clément speaks of the positive effects of revolutionary zeal in the form of language change, of creating new positions in language.

Luce Irigaray is another articulate French feminist who grounds her theory of women's language(s) on woman's understanding of her own body. She advocates a specificity that distinguishes man from woman,¹⁸ in which it is the genital and libidinal differences that count. Women, Irigaray argues, have been mis[s]-represented and mis[s]-understood by men. Women by their specific sexuality cannot in any way be subsumed under male categories. Women literally engage bodily energies into full dialogue. For Irigaray it is man who is lacking.

**embodying women's subject positions within theoretical texts:
the engaging process within feminist theory and action**

In many contemporary feminist writings a 'new' approach to

¹⁷ Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., "Catherine Clément," New French Feminisms, An Anthology (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 131.

¹⁸ Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

theoretical texts is emerging. There appears to be an 'engaging process' within feminist theory/action wherein the two activities are not separated from each other. (This 'engaging process' has been evident in women's writings of non-Western cultures for many years.) I see this phenomenon as an outgrowth of women's capacity to recognize the validity of the many voices of women. In this recognition, theoretical research is interwoven with women's lived experiences. Even the ways of articulation vary. The chanting of working songs, the telling of grandmothers' stories, the raving of the 'madwoman's' visions all speak of women's dreams, memories and experiences. And these stories form a layered continuum of narrative density. This is an embodiment of theory wherein women's deepest knowings are revealed.

With the intense conviction of a woman who has been in cultural collision, Gloria Anzaldúa articulates multiple voices which travel the borderlands (the 'safe' places between the borderlines) of continual transition.¹⁹ By acknowledging the thin edge, the danger zone wherein women tread (particularly women on the borderline), Anzaldúa transforms this danger into ever-changing forms which strengthen and empower women to grow. She embodies 'feminist theory' in her poetry, in her writings, by calling out the anger, the

¹⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco: spinsters/aunt lute, 1987).

frustrations she has felt as a Chicana, lesbian poet who has fought through years of oppression.

The insights of Audre Lorde are expressed in a poetic form of language when she voices her anger, her love.²⁰ Through this form of critical engagement Lorde touches us deeply without the screen of rhetoric. Her essays identify the need for nurturing the creativity in difference. Difference is positive and works to change and ripen our mutual interactions.

Nicole Brossard's The Aerial Letter²¹ embodies her feminist theory in a form which is her own voice. Rather than distancing the reader, Brossard engages the reader through a contextual writing. The body/mind provides a contextual interplay which informs and inspires. Contextual writing allows a reality to emerge through the experience of opening-out, of exceeding the imposed limits of a patriarchy. The subject in process through writing continually changes, shifting her position. There are many feminist writings today which take into account our varied lived contradictions, thus creating many forms of theory. These many forms speak of our identities through an embodiment of theory / experience rather

²⁰ Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1984).

²¹ Nicole Brossard, The Aerial Letter trans. Marlene Wildeman, 1988 (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1985).

then following the linear forms of the master narratives.

Through stories, through women's experiences, Bettina Aptheker speaks her feminist theory.²² Theoretical concerns mingle with the threads from stories, lived and told, thus providing a contextual experience. The spaces of contradiction are opened, discussed and acknowledged.

Jardine questioned whether women could develop our own texts without continual reference to the master texts: I think this is happening.

critiquing from women's realized experiential knowing

The critics who emerge out of a contextual approach utilize their own voices and refer to their own experiences or those told to them by other women. We are witnessing contemporary feminisms emerge from the ashes of deconstruction. Deconstruction is a step which continues onto reconstruction. A feminist theory of textuality (contextuality) reconstitutes the fragments of Derrida's deconstruction. Although reference is made to male writers when distinctions are necessary, the feminist text is not solely based on 'his' writings (e.g. Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, Freud, Jameson, Lyotard.

²² Bettina Aptheker, Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989).

In the discourse of film criticism, Teresa de Lauretis moves to 'new' positions of feminist criticism wherein women recognize the paradox, the contradictions within our subject positions, to become clearer on the questions of representation, of violence, of narrative.²³ New forms of community form disjunctions between images and voice. Woman as a social subject refutes closed spaces. These spaces as examined by de Lauretis, are the reworked spaces of woman's narrative.

Art practice can be a form of political address involving images and voice. Martha Rosler politicizes the woman's subject position by bringing into question the accepted position of women within society.²⁴ In two of her videos, Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained and Losing: A Conversation with the Parents, Rosler questions the ethics of dominant ideologies which advocate consumerism: e.g. the need to continually create segments of society which are oppressed and subjugated. Rosler's inquiry into social mal[e]-practices shows them to be the demeaning activities that they are. Rosler utilizes video, performance art and critical writing to

²³ Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

²⁴ See the selected videography of Rosler's work and selected listing of her articles.

address a 'popular audience'; she is interested in mass media and how it manipulates people.

Against a cultural clutter of social (de)meanings, broad-visioned women are needed to sort things out. In Toronto, Marlene Nourbese Philip critiques the motives of the cultural elite; those who set into place the guidelines of acceptance in writing, in creative practices.²⁵ Philip finds this attitude typical of a patriarchal society which espouses a one-dimensionality. The many voices attempting to be heard are silenced by taboo. In her essays and in her poetry, she has developed a voice which speaks her lived experiences and memories of oppression (e.g. how is history formulated? what is suppressed? what is acknowledged?)

Yvonne Rainer's filmwork develops a layered narrative at times difficult to follow, to understand.²⁶ Her revolutionary voice jolts the spectator by initially disrupting the expected linear narrative. Rainer's stories have no beginning, no end, but expand and spiral through a politics of critical awareness. Rainer has the ability to identify different positions without advocating one particular position to follow.

²⁵ See selected bibliography for a listing of her critical writings.

²⁶ See selected filmography of Rainer's films and selected listing of her critical writings.

With a biting edge nibbling away the fringes of a patriarchal elite, Meaghan Morris writes with wit and double entendre.²⁷ In her essays, Morris calls into question the jargon presented by this elite in their criticisms of the arts, of their 'fellow' writers. There are times, when I find Morris brings her critique to an edge where the story re-echoes itself, a parabolic path which leaves the reader hanging and somewhat entangled on the return journey. However, her clever writing presents insightful positions which clearly affected Rainer.

Within the world of visual arts Lucy Lippard sees popular culture as an expression of people's lived experiences.²⁸ She has written extensively on the different phases of art practice, of the artists involved. My interest in her writing comes from her recent commitment to the political expressions of oppressed cultures. Her understanding of the dominant male art world comes from involvement in these machinations and her eventual dismissal of their jargon, their premises. A feminist of strong insightful perceptions, Lippard sees the need for public action against oppression. This public action utilizes art as a form of political response.

²⁷ Meaghan Morris, The Pirate's Fiancee (London, New York: Verso, 1988).

²⁸ See the selected listing of her writings in the bibliography.

The current recognition of women's many voices, the many valid positions of women bring into consideration the 'problems of exclusion', the position of privilege held by many white middle-class women in this society.²⁹ Elizabeth Spelman's work stresses the need for women to 'unpack' what we mean when we talk about ourselves: which women are speaking from where and what is being said and how. Spelman speaks of tolerance as reflecting a position of privilege. If women echo this sentiment, we are echoing the voice of patriarchy. We erase ourselves as we would through thinking as the 'generic woman'.

In the work of Trinh T. Minh-ha, a Vietnamese composer, writer and filmmaker, there is an actual embodiment of theory.³⁰ Unlike the abstract theories espoused by men, Trinh takes into consideration the fabric of women's diverse living patterns. She speaks about women writers who become 'language-stealers' when trying to speak their stories. The reluctance to repeat the illusions of a patriarchal language system and the struggle to 'free' the writing from this system, brings confusion and desperation. The betrayal of our root selves can be heard in the many stories we tell. It is within these stories that we recognize each other. Our authentic voices

²⁹ Elizabeth V. Spelman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

³⁰ Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

which speak from our truthfulness of being , vary from each other in the intensity of the scream or whisper. Rainer also shows us the many layers of lived experience(s) which expand to include rather than exclude. We redefine our subject positions as we redefine the language of our stories. The critical mediation occurs in the space of reflection.

I am drawn to the work of Trinh T. Minh-ha. A freshness of breath vibrates my inner core. The poetics of consciousness and women's knowing breathe 'new' life into our utterances. Who are the 'we'? Can 'we' each hear each other? It is from the semiotic chaos, from the cacophony of sounds, that women fashion each our own identity in fullness and in joy. And in these formations we each voice the language we each identify to be our own.

OPENING WOMEN'S LANGUAGE

"Languaging": a verb form of language, denoting empowering actions brought about through propaganda, politics, and practice.

"I can't believe that," said Alice.
 "Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone.
 "Try again, draw a long breath, and shut your eyes." Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said. "One **can't** believe impossible things."
 "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."
 (Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass)³¹

When devising methods to critique the socio/political concepts and practices of dominant culture, feminists often comment on what appears to be ambiguous in main-stream ideology, in the canons of institutional control, and in the linear constructs of knowledge. The fears and the anxieties which become subconscious constants are addressed. The patriarchal structures of a 'social determinism' are questioned. How do

³¹ This quote has recently been used by Carol Cohn in her essay, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defence Intellectuals", 107. Feminist Theory in Practice and Process Micheline R. Malson, Jean F. O'Barr, Sarah Westphal-Wihl and Mary Wyer, eds. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989). The essay first appeared in Signs, vol. 12, no. 4 (summer 1987). Cohn examines the metaphors of paternal power which use everyday language to 'de-fuse' [sic] what is actually happening: learning to speak the language of defence so it "...becomes an extension of self rather than a threat to self." 127

we perceive 'our' disguised realities? ³²

Like the Queen, we must believe six, if not more "impossible things before breakfast" and all day long. Contradictions abound in our daily routines of social 'normalities'. Our 'true' representations are missing or 'misprinted'. The 'looking glass' phenomenon only reflects a 'smoky mirror', where the masks of deception obliterate our images. The 'looking glass' does not return our own images. The masks of deception, the images of a patriarchal culture only reflect what this culture perceives to be reality. This phenomenon is one-sided, one-dimensional. No, our images cannot be seen, if we are not acknowledged to be speaking and acting subjects of our own realities. Women (and men) exist only as patriarchal distortions amongst the many global communities of colonized peoples.

Languaging the reified words codified by patriarchy exposes the colonizer, the seductive words of consumerism, the power words of competition - the myths perpetuated by a patriarchal language. What is actually happening?

³² When I use the terms 'we'/'our', I am making reference to all oppressed peoples who have been colonized by a patriarchal society. In this paper, I am primarily concerned with women who have felt, who have known this oppression and are attempting to make her voice heard, her hands seen. "...that women fashion each our own identity." (PREFACE, 17)

I am primarily concerned with the contradictory ways text and image are read in our lived experiences. The resulting issues of gender, power and perception make these readings primary experiences of a contextualized realization as distinguished from the fragments of deconstruction. In other words, when we think on our experiences, in that space of reflection, our perceptions seek a relational context rather than some fragmentary jumble. Deconstruction is that process of critique which turns the experience into a cognitive realization. Deconstruction is only step one. Languageing takes on deconstruction to continue an affirmative process. It is in this realization that languageing confirms its post-structural stance: a stance reflecting the many identities, the many positions languageing confirms. The idea and activity of languageing has a past, but it has not been identified. By identifying languageing as that process which negotiates a feminist post-modernism, languageing in turn names contemporary feminisms.³³ The nuances present in the process elaborate upon the ever shifting perspectives and their attendant positions.

It is crucial to this paper, that The Man Who Envied Women

³³ I regard languageing to be multi-culturally inscribed. I also recognize the vulnerability of this position wherein continual flux is present.

(TMWEW), a film made by Yvonne Rainer in 1985 ³⁴, be seen as a resistance strategy identifying the many sites for change.

As Teresa de Lauretis comments,

The films of Yvonne Rainer are a distinguished exemplar of contemporary American art. Produced at the intersection of creative and critical practices - the avant-garde and the women's movement, filmmaking and theories of representation and spectatorship, performance art and psychoanalysis, auto-biographical writing and the critical study of culture - her films situate themselves in the figural space between text and discourse, in a sustained exploration of the material, political relations of subjectivity to sociality.

Attendant to the film are the current socio-political writings and artistic practices of 'marginal' peoples moving for social change. TMWEW languages a critique of our contemporary dominant discourse. Within the film are sections which support this critique. These particular sequences comment on displacement, violence, power manipulations. Yvonne Rainer, by embodying her theoretical practice in her film, epitomizes this process. I am using film to reveal a discourse and to make apparent the on-going contradictions in which we live. To co-exist within contradictions belabours our bodies, our minds, our emotions, but they are our realities. TMWEW has become a catalyst for my thesis which seeks academic accreditation for 'linguaging', a process-term (a term denoting continual reflection and action) used for recognizing change

³⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, "Foreword"; Rainer, 1989.

I intend to explore the themes of social violence within our lived contradictions through the works and writings of four practitioners: Yvonne Rainer, previously a dancer and choreographer, now a filmmaker; Martha Rosler, video and performance artist, and freelance cultural critic; Lucy Lippard, art and cultural critic; and Marlene Nourbese Philip, freelance writer and cultural critic.

There are many examples within TMWEW and within Rainer's other writings, and the writings of Rosler, Philip, and Lippard of resistance practices. Slowly, I will present the material, the discursive matter of the thesis (there is no comprehensive proposition). I am attempting to disclose, to expose, to reveal tendencies which would allow 'linguaging' to have an identity of active engagement. In this commitment 'linguaging' questions the oppressive tactics against women's struggle to speak out and be heard. 'Linguaging' is also identified as a means to facilitate women's engagement in her/our identity as a peoples struggling to make socio/political changes.

Each chapter has sub-titles which call attention to different aspects of the topic under discussion. I propose to review and to contextualize the material of each chapter. Within this process, different forms of linguaging will emerge.

By languaging our myths, our stories, we expose the all-pervasive language of patriarchal society. 'Languaging' exposes the "misoneism", the fear of change, in this society, upon which Audre Lorde strongly comments:

And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile and feel good. I am speaking of basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives.³⁵

Women in many cultures are expected to perform maintenance tasks, to make sure systems run smoothly, to be put in charge of entropy (degradation of energy to an ultimate state of inert uniformity) rather than social change. The misoneistic tendencies of our society attempt to quell any disruption of the status quo. But, if we are to see clearly, then we must proceed with "radical alterations" in our visionary and practical socio-politics.

Mary Daly speaks of the positive action of verbs as one step in the process of change:

It is women's own Gyn-Ecology that can break the brokenness of the "fields", deriding their borders and boundaries, changing the nouns of knowledge into verbs of know-ing.³⁶

³⁵ Lorde, 1987.

³⁶ Daly, 1978: 11.

By languaging ourselves through the continuum of time/space, by re-presenting ourselves as historical beings, we could be seen by main-stream ideology (views held by the majority of the dominant culture) as a possible threat and also as a 'deviation from the normal' (normal being historically 'male' defined). Rosalind Coward, who has co-authored Language and Materialism with John Ellis, offers some insights:

...language does not just reflect the society in which we live, it also contributes to how we experience that reality and how much we contribute to keeping things as they are. Language doesn't just change when social conditions change. Even if women are legally entitled to equality, sexist language still activates and recirculates deeply held beliefs about female inequality. The idiomatic phrases, the stereotyped utterances, the patterns of speech themselves actively contribute to a world where women are the different sex, the defined sex. What we have is an excess of definitions around the feminine whereas men are the undefined norm.³⁷

Woman, to fit the male defined standards, became a biological abnormality. Throughout history, woman distorted her body and her mind to satisfy male criteria. The implications of these behavioural modifications became symptomatic of main-stream culture. Woman learnt to see herself as incomplete and inferior. Society, and the dominant culture, developed a pathological attitude towards anyone who did not fit the

³⁷ Rosalind Coward, "Kicking the Habit", THE NI (New Internationalist), no. 191 (January 1989): 9.

prescribed 'norm'.³⁸ The language of women was/is seen as deviant. By proposing 'linguaging', I am refuting this tendency to pathological determinism and analysis. Although the patriarchy would like to interpret the act of linguaging as a pathology, an 'abnormal disease', the realities of women must be seen, heard and acknowledged.³⁹

"Talking back"⁴⁰, linguaging our existences/our experiences, becomes an engagement in response to patriarchal dogma. Linguaging our representations, re-presents us, on our own terms. In this linguaging, the female body in its entirety is re-presented. The total body becomes active and productive.

³⁸ Two terms have come into play when discussing multiplicity, and/or actual difference: schizophrenia and pathology (ies). Both terms have negative connotations. Biddy Martin, in her article "Feminism, Criticism and Foucault", New German Critique, no. 27 (fall 1982), argues the need to forefront a feminist critique of repressed phallogocentric meanings. In other words, when we accept the patriarchal renderings of normalcy, we buy into the concept that anything not "normal" is either pathological or in the throes of schizophrenic survival. The latter appears to be characteristic of the postmodern survivors as discussed by Patricia Mellencamp in her article, "Postmodern T.V.", AFTERIMAGE (December 1985).

³⁹ Ibid., 7. [Mellencamp]: "Following in the footsteps of Foucault's equation of women with patients and children and Freud's investigation of female hysteria, the grand scholastic finale is to perform a psychoanalytic diagnosis and assign a label - in the Postmodern case like Baudrillard, schizophrenia. Unlike Freud, however, Jameson avoids naming his stumbling block of language [which exists] for so many modern male theorists."

⁴⁰ "talking-back", a term used by and perhaps introduced into feminist discourse by bell hooks; Women's Review of Books, vol. viii, no. 5 (February 1990): 29.

Fragmenting the female body for study, for pathological research, is a violent act of negation, of violation which can no longer continue.

By languaging our believabilities, we make visible our identities, therefore reconstructing a topography. And there are many topographies as indicated by differences in race and class. What is involved in these topographies? bell hooks draws our attention to class division between women and the absolute necessity to work this out:

Outspoken socialist feminists, most of whom are white women, have emphasized class but they have not been effective in changing attitudes towards class in the feminist movement. Despite their support for socialism, their values, behaviors, and life styles continue to be shaped by privilege. They have not developed collective strategies to convince bourgeois women who have no radical political perspective that eliminating class oppression is crucial to efforts to end sexist oppression. - Until we focus on class divisions between women, we will be unable to build political solidarity.⁴¹

'Languaging' releases the lopsided cultural positions held by this society, by giving voice to all the 'deep voices' pushing up through the crevices. We have opened up the cracks of social norms by questioning. "I can't believe **that**," said Alice. By 'scrubbing our discourse' clear of patriarchal remnants, we also recognize the fears, the anxieties which invade our daily social discourses. Our disguised realities

⁴¹ hooks, 1984: 61.

are nurtured along by the 'believabilities'. "Can't you?" belies the fact that we can't shut our eyes. If we did, would we disappear?

Language transformations reveals not only the masks of deception for what they really are, the despotic body, but also the contextualized vision of a reconstructed body. The strategic tools for inquiry can be found in languageing our re-formed believabilities. The tediousness of insinuations, of inverse fears (the binary "support" tactics of patriarchy, e.g. home = haven), fragments our energies and our visions. In this example, I am seeing the home as site for mental and/or physical battering, wherein the illusion of 'haven' (a place away from harm) is offered to the woman. This example is very real for most women and well articulates the deceptive codes within patriarchal culture. Contesting the abusive, seductive, and addictive side effects of promoted illusions provide us with positive energy for further raids on the (un)'believabilities'.

I must ask some questions:

For whom/to whom do we address the inquiries?

How do we form the criteria? formulate options?

What are our positions? how did we get here?

What are we to believe? What things are believable?

The inquiry, to be relevant, must be grounded in an informed politics, a politics of gender, race and class, which deconstructs power-structured politics. A politics of gender that doesn't consider race or class undercuts any honest attempt at a feminist discursive practice. When bell hooks speaks about racist and sexist patterns, she describes the attitudes which have existed among white women:

White feminists did not challenge the racist-sexist tendency to use the word "woman" to refer solely to white women; they supported it. For them it served two purposes. First, it allowed them to proclaim white men world oppressors while making it appear linguistically that no alliance existed between white women and white men based on a shared racial imperialism. Second, it made it possible for white women to act as if alliances did exist between themselves and non-white women in our society, and by so doing they could deflect attention away from their classism and racism. ⁴²

Women transforming the 'believability', as opposed to the Queen's "impossible things", involves deconstructing fallacies which have become complacent mis[s]-representations. 'Languaging' deconstructs the hidden agendas of racism, sexism and class bias by extending into the realm of all oppressed peoples who are not marginalized by choice. As a revolutionary strategy, languaging 'talks back' by revealing the despotic body of the 'smoky mirror'. "Half-an-hour a day" for practice is not enough. Practice subverts political manifestations of double-talk. Practising practice shatters

⁴² hooks, 1981: 140.

'the clay mould' of Pandora's pithos⁴³ which then allows the propaganda of our 'linguaging' to escape and be known. Linguaging a continuum realizes our multi-layered existences. And these existences are languaged through the propaganda of our engaged socio/political experiences. This form of propaganda facilitates the emergence of 'value patterns' which could affect our social responses. These 'value patterns' become the references of our feminist ethics. Draw a long breath and **don't** shut your/our eyes. Believe man-made boundaries? "There's no use trying."

In the image/word conjunction, in the 'gap', in our space-place, 'linguaging' contextualizes our conceptual and practical meaning forms. The 'gap' is that conjunctive space from which we spar. When I speak of an image/word conjunction, I am referring to the disruptive possibilities of the semiotic in relation to the symbolic order, an order based on symbolic logic. It's the shattering of 'the clay mould'. This conjunctive practice introduces the extended agenda of a 'perhaps' (other forms of collective inquiry). Linguaging a manifesto (that idea of proclaiming an action) contextualizes our position on institutional language, its strictures of a homogeneous conformity. Institutional language is a language

⁴³ When I speak of the pithos, I am referring to the clay vessel used in classical Greek times to store olives, olive oil, and the bones of the dead. The pithos, unlike "the box" described by Hesiod, was also the vessel that Pandora opened releasing creative chaos.

of privilege. I would like to see language subverted to disclose the oppression within the master narrative, the authoritative text issuing from the dominant ideology. Cora Kaplan's critique of male-dominated culture takes into consideration the institution as a political structure of patriarchy:

Patriarchy was defined as 'a political institution' rather than an economic or social relation, and political institutions were in their turn conceived as hierarchical power relations. Institutions were conceptualized as expressing oppression in homologous and analogous ways, so that the State, the Family, the University, the Mental Hospital or the Army, instead of having differentiated structures and a complex articulation, were, instead, metaphors for each other, emphasizing through their similarities the dominance relations of the society as a whole, which were characterized by racism, sexism, and capitalism. ⁴⁴

'Languaging' as action, as process, places us within a relational context. 'Languaging' becomes a practice of liberation, of recuperation in affirmative propaganda (whereas dominating propaganda exploits and oppresses).

In 'languaging' we 'talk back' the struggle. bell hooks emphatically speaks her concern in 'talking back':

Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination - a language, that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you. Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover

⁴⁴ Cora Kaplan, Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism (London: Verso, 1986), 15.

ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are in action, a resistance. Language is ----- struggle. ⁴⁵

In this struggle, there is also evidence of the paradoxical nature of language (paradox can be used to make space for contradictions as Rainer has done in TMWEW, or be a controlling mechanism as seen in oppression). Tarzie Vittachi begins his article, "Leaving the Peasants in the Dark", by discussing just this dilemma:

Language has many paradoxical purposes. It can be used to communicate and to discommunicate; to bring people nearer to one another and to separate them; to liberate human beings and to control them; to iron out differences and to make and establish differences; to clarify and to mystify. ⁴⁶

I acknowledge that a growing amount of work has and is being done on women's language. But my intention, by utilizing the present participle of language, is to take language out of the realm of being an object, a one-dimensional meaning-form, as experienced in the patriarchal language system "...into verbs of know-ing."⁴⁷ I am not working 'on' women's languaging, but attempting to uncover a few sites, positions of women's languaging. These positions or sites are conjunctions of recovery and articulation, e.g. propaganda, "talking-back",

⁴⁵ bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space for Radical Openness", FRAMEWORKS, no.36 (1989).

⁴⁶ Tarzie Vittachi, "Leaving the peasants in the dark", THE NI, no. 191 (January 1989): 10.

⁴⁷ Daly, 1978: 11.

engaged critique...

Using Rainer to ground my discussion, I will discuss these practices as follows:

chapter 3: Rainer's use of the woman's voice-over which absents the woman while she questions whose words are being uttered;

chapter 4: a lecture sequence in the TMWEW, where the camera man and the audio track 'play' with the concept of Knowledge;

chapter 5: the densely layered sequence of films within films, the primacy of the female voice-over pondering on the concept of family while the audience become agitated and refuse to be passive spectators;

chapter 6: the corridor scene where subject positions are in continual flux;

chapter 7: the continual changes being made on the wall where magazine clippings speak of patriarchal constructs, social manipulations, power struggles.

My thesis intends to further the ideas concerning women's languaging. My emphasis is on turning existing information around, inside-out, for re-examination. What we need to know is there, but it requires a close reading. I find that clarifying the practice of languaging is necessary. As bell

hooks states in an interview in FUSE ⁴⁸, there is a need "...to engage in constant critique of our writings" so we do not "reproduce the old oppressive paradigms."

SITES OF LANGUAGE

The film, TMWEW by Yvonne Rainer, places itself into a visible field of layered image/text and collaged social structures. TMWEW, by addressing linear constructs of knowing, languages a politics of gender, a need to change and to develop 'new' ways of thinking. In this paper I am distinguishing between the film's distinctive ways of speaking, acts of languaging, potentials for dialogue. The speaking, languaging and dialogue tend to reveal the central focus of Rainer's work which I see to be the disjunction between the private, the public. I chose this film because of the way it has been made, e.g. the many situations layered to give depth and dimension to inquiry without a traditional narrative structure which negates potential dialogue. There is continual disruption when words or/and voices and images run over each other emphasizing current social contradictions. Unlike many other instances within the arts or academia, situations and/or events in this film are not reduced to banalities, absurdities, or universals. Perhaps what can be seen and

⁴⁸ bell hooks, "talking b(1)ack", FUSE vol XIII, no. 4 (spring 1990): 23.

heard is the contextuality of situations which expands the notion of a deconstruction. The TMWEW languages a critique of dominant discourse(s) within society.

'Languaging' has led me to consider the attributes of propaganda, a populist vehicle for social change. "Popular culture" makes use of propaganda as a tool for affirmative action against the oppressive tactics of a dominant ideology. As I have already mentioned, affirmative propaganda facilitates social awareness. Lucy Lippard speaks about propaganda as a positive approach to deconstructing and re-constructing:

The dictionary definition of the word is "propagating, multiplying, disseminating principles by organized effort"; In its positive sense the word 'propaganda' can be connected to women's classic role of synthesizer. Feminism has potentially changed the terms of propaganda...by being unashamed of its obsessions and political needs, and by confirming the bonds between individual and social experience. - 'Good propaganda' would be...a provocation, a new way of seeing and thinking about what goes on around us.⁴⁹

Each chapter of my thesis addresses some construct of power: the power of voice/author, the power of Knowledge, the power in violence, power-play(s), the power of subversion, media power, and the power (empowerment) of feminist discourse. My engagement attempts a re-contextualization, a re-thinking as

⁴⁹ Lucy Lippard, "Some Propaganda for Propaganda", HERESIES, no. 9 (1980): 36.

a feminist response through languaging.

Rainer, Rosler, Lippard and Philip share a critique and analysis of our mainstream culture. Active feminists, making their propaganda their practice, they perceive this society as a mine field of contradictions, contradictions which can work to expand women's languaging positions.

Rainer continually addresses social constructs through her films. Her written responses, published in anthologies and film journals, sustain a current dialogue. As a proponent of the avant-garde, Rainer's position is one of political engagement.

Rosler, through her many videos, e.g. Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained, questions the practices of the dominant ideology. An alert critic of our consumerism, society's violations of women, of 'minority groups', and of our blatant media disinformation, she forces us to re-think our agendas. Rosler publishes primarily in outspoken film and cultural journals.

Lippard, writer of many books and articles on visual artists and art practices, is also involved in making concrete actions visible, e.g. HERESIES (a feminist journal), Printed Matter (New York City bookstore for artist books and books by

artists), and Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America. Encountering questionable practices on an ongoing basis, Lippard has become a feminist critic on the edge.

These three women, originally based in New York City, have long been involved in the women's movement. They have never allowed their political agendas to be affected by a 'popular' dismissal of a feminist mandate. Through their feminist perspective, cultural mal[e]-practices within the main-stream ideology are also brought to the foreground. Racism, classism, ageism, sexism and many more mal[e]-practices fall within the rubric of their understanding of a sexist, patriarchal society.

Marlene Nourbese Philip works, writes and critiques out of Toronto. Very much in the 'thick of things', Philip addresses the contradictions of an urban culture. She locates herself in the epicentre [of the storm] to better understand the problems, the injustices of a very real reality. Why aren't there more non-European writers publishing? Whose reality defines who gets published?

These women form an historical conjunction of image/word by presenting their propaganda within political practices: an ongoing agenda continually changing and re-thinking itself.

What is ambiguous in main-stream ideology, for example, can often work against us. Languageing the contradictions of difference and ambiguity, dislodges assimilations. The disappearance of the gendered subject into a body politic occurs when the dominant authority, e.g. the master text(s) acting as the "political right" presumes all identities.

In the 'smoky mirror' is seen the vision of a re-constructed 'body', a reclaiming of our many identities (a conversion of 'contradicted' forms). By re-addressing the oppressing 'believabilities', we open our eyes and our ears to the complex voices of knowing. Languageing the contradictions imposed upon us brings into play our many subject positions and the attending empowerment of our propaganda. In the conjunction of these forms, feminist discourse debates the masquerade

that women are not merely male surrogates or masquerades but historical subjects with real experiences, knowledges, and histories... ⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Patricia Mellencamp, "Postmodern TV", Afterimage (December 1985): 8.

CHAPTER 2

SOME COMMENTARY ON THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN (TMWEW)

(125 minutes, black and white and colour, 1985)

a film by Yvonne Rainer

Moving from dance/choreography and performance into film, Yvonne Rainer has utilized film as a medium for social and arts criticism. Her earlier films, Lives of Performers (1972), Film About A Woman Who... (1974), Kristina Talking Pictures (1976), Journeys From Berlin/1971 (1980), have attracted a critical audience.

Formally, her films have followed a New York tradition seen in the early 70's as 'the minimalist / structural movement' (a bare-bones approach to art emphasizing formal structures without 'aesthetic' embellishments), but with a difference. Rainer's films indicate a political and psychological concern. Although her position is strongly anti-narrative, Rainer utilizes the narrative process to expose its manipulative illusions. She develops her own style of dense narrative: a theoretical / experimental film approach. Filmic techniques are developed to deconstruct the authoritative text, the Hollywood produced scripts. Her political roots in 60's collectivism and 70's feminism informed her cinematic approach and critical position. This position in the male-dominated world of cinema caused Rainer to consider her own lived experiences in relation to her professional experiences of

visible contradictions.

I find Rainer's obsession with the multiple forms of language to be engaging and expressive of daily lived experiences. It is this emphasis which primarily brings me to her films. The contradictory perceptions, dense texts, and thought-provoking concepts activate questions without providing simplistic answers. The cumulative tumbling process of languaging unbalances the master narratives embedded in language. Rainer's unusual quirky mix offers an intriguing feminist strategy in deconstructive techniques.

Throughout the film Rainer uses particular filmic devices to deconstruct the authoritative voice of mainstream film. The interweaving of narrative lines allows each voice to have 'equal' authority. The politics of visual representation can be evidenced in her use of voice over where the woman is not seen but only heard. The social interactions between the characters in TMWEW form a web of stories. The characters invent themselves as the stories unwind. The rear screen projections of Hollywood films form links with the questions Rainer is raising in her film. The questions of power, of authority, of interpersonal relationships, of woman as society's victim, of media manipulation are addressed. We hear the dialogue of found texts being spoken by expressionless actors. The non-expression of the characters

is a feature found in many of Rainer's films.

The narratives in IMWEW are hardly the conventional stories of mainstream cinema. Working through the scenarios of daily experiences, Rainer has examined the politics of gender, social malaise, and popular culture. Rainer displaces authority by presenting space for contradictions, e.g. the continued foregrounding (to place into a position of prominence) of dualities (the practice(s) of exposing the patriarchal binary system and promoting unmediated access to all realities). Narrative then takes on the strategic role of critical analysis.

By creating an effect of 'neutrality' in expressionless voices and immobile faces by the actors, Rainer presents a cinematic deconstruction which avoids Hollywood illusionism and plays with the elements of fact/fiction. Disjunction develops when the emotional cliches of dominant narrative become transparent: e.g. a scene from Hollywood's Dark Victory with Bette Davis and George Brent:

Have you been a good girl? / No. / I thought not. /
Why? / I knew you wouldn't be, I knew you couldn't
be. / You mean - a good girl? Why, the idea.
Well, I am! / Did you drive right in for lunch and
come right back? / Father, I can not tell a lie. /
What did you do?

The scene shows "the paternalistic father and obedient daughter" situation prescribed by the master narrative. The

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

Jack speaks to his therapist while a Hollywood film clip is screened in the background.



inner tension created by Rainer's inclusion of this scene prompts the spectator to see the potential of a deconstruction in language and behaviour.

Rainer seizes the opportunity to lay bare the contradictions in the text. The critical questions raised by a feminist perspective when viewing this film are brought forward by Rainer's filmic techniques: a woman's voice-over which mimics the authoritative male voice-over of the documentary film; the film clips of Hollywood melodramas; actual documentary footage of political meetings; tracking shots; no linear narrative; the written appropriated text read as fictional fact...

The narrative structure in TMWEW emphasizes the break-down of communications between men and women, between fantasy and reality, between the different sectors of society. The film is set in Manhattan in the mid-80s with characters in mid-life conflicts. Jack Deller (for "Jack, tell her"), played by two actors, finds himself attending therapy after the break-up of a four year marriage. The therapy sessions act as confessionals with the Hollywood film clips in the background. His ex-wife, played by Trisha Brown, is not seen (except in one film clip where she is shown dancing in slow motion) but her presence is heard as voice-over. Trisha, as protagonist, argues her subject position, one of many throughout the film.

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

Documentary footage shows the debate on the New York City housing shortage between the homeless and artists.



The sections of documentary footage on the housing shortages being debated in the hearings show working artists pitted against the homeless, the working poor. The display of solidarity amongst artists for non-intervention in Central America is seen in their filmed meetings where arguments arise over presentational procedures; e.g. how to present the upcoming film series by Central American women. (There appears to be no life outside film.) The documentary footage projects a reality of living communities which actually exist, whereas the Hollywood melodramas make a pretence of lived experiences. Everything comes tumbling down. The Hollywood cliches of emotionalism are played out. Trisha's voice-over follows Jack through classrooms, therapy sessions, walks to where ever, and social encounters.

The film begins with Jack describing his myopic world view while sitting in the therapy chair, and facing off to the side. In the back ground a film clip shows a razor being sharpened to slice a woman's eye on the word of "speculum"¹, which is being spoken by Trisha. This type of narrative layering: e.g. Jack's confession in the therapist chair,

¹ A speculum is a plastic or metal tool with an attached mirror intended for vaginal examination. It is also a compendium of all Knowledge. As the woman's eye is sliced, her vision is lost and her own self knowledge is denied. The hand with the knife belongs to a man, to Bunuel.

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

Jack talks with his therapist while a film clip from Bunuel's Un Chien Andalou shows a woman's eye being sliced.



followed by the film clip from Luis Bunuel's Un Chien Andalou,² then the voice-over of ex-wife's ordeals, "It was a hard week. I split up..."³, continues throughout the film. Three layers begin the film; fiction (Jack's confession), fact (voice-over of ex-wife), fable (woman's eye being slit). I have interjected these three categories to emphasize Rainer's layering technique as a form of languaging a reconstruction; man as fiction, woman as fact, the stories perpetuated by men about women as fable.

Next are seen two women in a diner telling each other 'dyke-bar' jokes and other 'one-liners'. Jack is reading a newspaper and wearing a set of headphones while eaves-dropping on the women. Lateral tracking shows lit library windows, a man peering from behind a screen, Manet's "Dejeuner sur l'herbe",⁴ a TV weatherman, a suitcase lid being closed (voice-over describes marriage, father, cock sucking and the relentless struggles society entails), documentary footage of

² Luis Bunuel was a Surrealist filmmaker who wanted to expose the contradictions of lived situations. For Bunuel, the only man who could see clearly in the human quagmire, was the 'mad' man.

³ Rainer, 1989: 173.

⁴ Edouard Manet headed the third wave of revolutionary painters in France. His use of colour and landscape, with Goya as a mentor, went against tradition of that day. However, this particular painting is often used as an example of male voyeurism. The painting is a landscape including fully-dressed men sitting on the ground around a nude woman. Her body becomes the focal point of the painting.

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

The film opens with Jack on his exercise machine. Later the camera tracks to the mangled bike, 'the wall art' and the ironing board.



housing hearings and steering committee, of people entering a theatre. This textual density has occurred in the first six minutes of TMWEW.

Throughout the film, the spectator is drawn through situations which articulate estranged communications on many levels. We witness a cacophony of commentary, counter-discourse and personal quandaries. Our senses vacillate between doubt, confusion and understanding: e.g. Trisha's eviction doesn't interrupt Jack's exercising but what we see leaning against the wall is a broken, twisted bike, an ironing board standing to the side (which he tells her to take out of his place), and 'her wall art' (cut out images from magazines). This sequence occurs near the beginning of the film. We are given the mangled bike as metaphor for the lived experiences soon to unravel before us. Nothing is said about the bike. Only the camera lingers over its frame. The ironing board, the domestic / the personal, is banished. 'The wall art' remains. I find these three elements telling indicators of what is to come.

Rainer accepts the dichotomies, the confessional experiences which create penetrating textual densities. By being able to place her own lived experiences within a filmic language / a narrative and apply rigorous cinematic techniques, Rainer reveals actual subject positions and makes a fresh statement.

The visual / verbal layering signifies a continual present. Humour and wit enliven the unravelling. Rainer reiterates social malaise through the contradictions inherent in social and personal interactions.

Let me outline the main elements in Yvonne Rainer's film, TMWEW, which makes the work significant to my needs. Although Rainer did not intend to make a feminist film, the film releases the woman's voice as that contributing element deconstructing language. First, it is the voice-over which becomes a distancing and engaging device for Rainer:

Rage at men. The noun: rage at men. Why now? Why can't it be put off indefinitely? I'm not up to it this week. I have nothing more to say about that subject....Don't say anything more about it....Let it speak....In a manner more suited to...⁵

The woman is dis-embodied. Her body can no longer be prey to voyeuristic manipulation. I find this an empowering feminist strategy. Another instance speaks of possible rape:

Oh. Oh. Oh. The biting man, the man who looks, the man who offers the little girl candy in return for...⁶

The male-dominated text, the master narrative, when it appears, is seen as vacuous and often dangerous.

The woman's voice is situated in lived experience. I see her

⁵ Rainer, 1989: 175.

⁶ Ibid., 174.

response as a polemic, refusing to be reduced to some Oedipal game. Rather, Rainer actually plays with the paradox of the sphinx:⁷ the empty words of promised reality raise questions and unearth the paradox of 'language'. Rainer's filmic techniques provide a unique form of feminist discourse. Our many feminisms lead to new theoretical approaches which involve 'a kind of story-telling'.⁸ A multiplicity of subjectivities evolve thus giving credence to a 'new-fiction-making' which is in fact our-woman-selves.

Second, the patriarchal rhetoric heard in the lecture scene, becomes that propaganda about Knowledge which Rainer thoughtfully deconstructs. Here the class waits for the illuminating lecture given by Jack Deller. His apolitical stance is reflected by the continuous in-referencing of his presentation (the "I" knowing everyone intimately). Any genuine or unaffected contextuality of the text is missing. The text has been lifted from Foucault among others, a deliberate appropriation on Rainer's part. In this process she places the mannered texts into question. The violence of institutional oppression becomes apparent through the veneration placed upon the read text (the elite text of authority).

⁷ The sphinx could look in both directions (death and life) at the same time, therefore being seen to embody the contradictions of the human condition, our lived experiences.

⁸ Trinh, 1989: 149.

Having the student identified as placating victim 'violates' any possible communication between professor and student. The questions raised by the students actually continue the banter and the exploitative rhetoric. There is a parallel between the 'classic' professor and Deller on the exercise machine: machinations either verbal or physical remain illusionary. Both are distant and unconnected, unlike Trisha's observations:

Deller, #2: But that whole play of identity and difference, that whole play of coming into being, comes into being only because of difference from what it's not, comes into being only in contradistinction to the other, which, of course, it's not. That "not" the subject and process.

Trisha: Here in America the war against the poor does not yet have to be masked as a war against Communism.⁹

In another instance, I see Rainer utilize the layering technique as a form of languaging. This **third** element deconstructs linear constructs and presents a continual present. As Deller runs from class to exercise machine to telephone to walking to diner, the woman as voice-over unravels her fiction-stories:

When he was courting me he loved my reserve and independence, what he described as extreme shyness and supreme self-confidence. After four months of living together his reason for starting an affair was that I didn't love him.¹⁰

⁹ Rainer, 1989: 187.

¹⁰ Ibid., 178.

At this point the camera settles on Jack on his exercise machine and then tracks to where the magazine clippings are pinned to the wall (the wall art). The voices of both Jack and Trisha are heard discussing the images.

The content of these images (the wall art) is the fourth element which considers the social and political malaise of this society as being experienced and made sense of by Rainer. She offers a dialogue between Deller and Trisha and then later between herself and Martha Rosler. I see this as an attempt to convey the many sites of meaning, of experience. During the film Deller repositions these wall images which depict various forms of violence; e.g. torture, class privilege, medical mal[e]-practice, male privilege. The voice-over speaks of social violence, the expressions of class struggle, of the disappearances taking place in Central America and relates these situations to what is presently happening in New York City.

Rainer has made this film into intervals where episodes slide past each other, sometimes revealing the contradiction, sometimes being a part of the contradiction. One of the most telling scenes of the film takes place at a party...a party that the audience never sees but only hears. We are left in the hallway outside the apartment listening to party conversation and facing a closed door. The camera lingers on

the door until Deller leaves and eventually becomes involved in a conversation with Jackie Raynal (one of Deller's former lovers). I refer to this scene as 'the corridor scene'.

The **fifth** element which Rainer presents in this corridor scene is the non-communication between man and woman. The expressions on their faces lack any acknowledgement of each other, of what they are saying to each other. They move back and forth in a tantalizing seduction. The walls, the narrow passageway enclose their utterances. The communication is nothing but monologues which do not reflect their own ideas. The whole conversation (excerpts from the writings of Meaghan Morris¹¹ and Michel Foucault) is empty. They enact a discourse of male power and feminist response.

It is during the performance episode which slices through the corridor scene, when dishes are being washed and dropped and broken on the floor, when a plastic duck and duck decoy make an appearance, when woman parodies woman through the daughter/mother exchange and the man attempts to seduce himself while hustling for a blanket with a masked 'woman', that the subject on one hand becomes a subject on another hand:

¹¹ Morris, 1988.

If a girl takes her eyes off Lacan and Derrida long enough to look, she may discover she is the invisible man.¹²

Rainer leaves her film with Martha Rosler's comments heard over Deller's rearranging of wall images:

...If we're willing to grind up other people because we can't be bothered to feel about them then it [masculinity defined as uncaringness and unthinkingness and unfeelingness] does matter.¹³

¹² Rainer, 1989: 215. This quote taken from Meaghan Morris and spoken by Trisha, was extended by Rainer to include "...she may discover she is the invisible man." This implies that woman is subsumed under the heading of man, of mankind. She has become not only 'lacking', but invisible - 'the invisible man'.

¹³ Ibid., 216.

CHAPTER 3

TO BE WOMAN IS TO BE POLEMICAL (whose voices are speaking??)

Whose voices are speaking?! Throughout our growing years, we (women) have had voices echoing in our heads. Some of these voices whose words we value are retained. Other voices pass through us, finding no resonance. We have been indoctrinated to pay heed only to voices of 'authority'. Often our own voices in response are not heard. Soon we hear ourselves speaking without knowing or recognizing the voice. Our voices have become the voices of others. Woman in order to speak her own voice, soon becomes polemical (we dispute, we refute). We, as women actively engaged in our languaging, enter into a counter-discourse. Virginia Woolf's Three Guineas is seen by Kramarae and Treichler as a feminist polemic:

Feminist speech or writing which articulates too bluntly its unwelcome political perspective: thus Virginia Woolf's...Three Guineas is a polemic)¹

In this chapter I intend to explore a feminist polemic expressed as counter-discourse through:

- languaging dissent which speaks of violations;
- languaging contradictions which turns "things" around;

¹ Kramarae and Treichler, 1985: 343. [This is one interpretation of the term, polemic.]

- languaging a reality which speaks about 'fact/fiction';
- languaging violence which exposes the colonizer;
- languaging (for) change. This last section which brings in the writings of Marlene Nourbese Philip, grounds the theory in actual encounters of the present (an embodiment of theory) through social criticism.

I will discuss the power of voice / of author(ity). (The double edge in this word is clear.) The voice as voice-over (V-O) predominates in TMWEW, disrupting the narrative flow. The "Master's Voice" is deconstructed by Trisha's own voice into multiple layers of identities. Rainer insists on opening our complacent mind-sets:

Rather than repositioning ourselves as spectators in response to cues that indicate we are being multivocally **addressed** and not just worked on by the filmic text, we still attempt to locate a singular author or wait for a conclusive outcome. The Master's Voice Syndrome all over again. And why not? Why else do we go to see narrative cinema than to be confirmed and reinforced in our most atavistic and oedipal mind-sets? ²

The monologue/dialogue argues the concerns of coping in a 'daily' reality. Rainer's voice-over strategy often denies Jack, the main visible actor in the film, his voice. When it is heard, the voice rings hollow. The disembodied female

² Yvonne Rainer, "Some Ruminations around Cinematic Antidotes to the Oedipal Net(les) While Playing with De Lauraedipus Mulvey, or, He May Be Off Screen, But...", The Independent (April 1986): 22.

voice makes utterances outside traditional expectations of film, and contradicts the master text of authority. Rainer's narrative emanates off centre-stage, thus refuting a central focus to the film. She has placed the male character inside the film, while the female protagonist exists outside the film. The voice-over also makes reference to another order, to be detached from the spectacle of synchronization, woman as calibrated puppet. The woman becomes polemical while negating the traditional stance of being inside the narrative, being in the position of a negative interiority, consequently languaging dissent.

LANGUAGING DISSENT

Well, the human voice is at once the clinker and the crunch. It lies, sings, floats, or emerges from a mouth from which it may or may not - usually not - have originated in the mind behind the mouth in question. These three terms of possible dissociation - word, mouth, thought - suggest a fourth: the thought as a cultural given rising unbidden at a particular historical moment. And a fifth: the fourth in relation to each of the first three. **Where and when is whose voice uttering whose thought through whose mouth and what for?** [my emphasis]³

"Where and when...and what for?" When Yvonne Rainer poses these questions, she suggests a politics of ambiguities. She

³ Yvonne Rainer, "Begining With Some Advertisements For Criticisms of Myself, Or Drawing The Dog You May Want To Use To Bite Me With, And Then Going On To Other Matters", Millennium Film Journal no. 6 (Spring 1980): 6.

reminds us of the fictional fabric of our realities. Our daily experiences involve a narrative story line perpetually interrupted by voices jumbling our visions. What becomes ambiguous is, whose voice is coming out of our mouths uttering whose thoughts. If we can maintain a concept of ourselves as constructively polemical, then perhaps our voices can contribute to the forming of our own subject-beings rather than allowing patriarchal distortions into our discourses.

The term 'polemical' has a tradition of negative implications, especially when used in reference to women (e.g. the social constructs which state that woman is argumentative with no apparent 'reason'). Julia Kristeva briefly discusses the 'hidden interior polemic':

A third type of ambivalent word, of which the hidden interior polemic is an example, is characterized by the active (modifying) influence of another's on the writer's word. It is the writer who "speaks" but a foreign discourse is constantly present in the speech that it distorts. With this active kind of ambivalent word, the other's word is represented by the word of the narrator.⁴

This issue re-emerges when Rainer discusses ambiguity as

...an identity-ridden voice on my sound track relating to an identity-ridden performer in the frame.⁵

⁴ Kristeva, 1980: 73.

⁵ Yvonne Rainer, "More Kicking and Screaming From the Narrative Front/Backwater", Wide Angle 7, nos 1/2: 10.

I relate Rainer's "identity-ridden voice" to Kristeva's "hidden interior polemic", but Rainer expands upon Kristeva's analysis. Kristeva observes the writer-writing-words which are "represented by the word of the narrator". Rainer, in a filmic context makes a similar statement. It's that "modifying influence of another". Again we are speaking of layers where the densities can distort or reveal. Kristeva argues that 'distortion', always present, tends to influence the word of the narrator. 'Distortion', as Rainer perceives the situation, could consist of an ambiguity between the performer and the polemic voice, the voice (when heard) of that polemic insistence once hidden away with no identity. I see this ambiguity relating to a political practice. To be ambiguous in this sense is a grass-roots strategy for political survival. It is the hidden text, the between-the-lines, the resistance to dogma.

In that the V-O has no corporeal position, Rainer is able to situate herself into positions of contradiction which make audible or apparent the hidden polemic and thus create space for other forms of coherence. Her intention through a "notion of poetics" embraces a seeming contradiction which in fact is very real: woman is inside and women are outside the ideology of gender. Teresa de Lauretis sees this situation expressed within feminist filmmaking which tends

to make films against the plot that frames woman as narrative image, object, and ground of cinematic representation. In short, to reread, rewrite, remake all cultural narratives striving to construct another form of coherence, one that is, alas, founded on contradiction.⁶

The enunciator, 'proclaimer of articulate statements', reveals the double-bind of the woman protagonist relegated to speaking out from the outer edges, the periphery (a possible strategic position). The immediacy of her polemic, inside the narrative, provides access to 'a different order' of positions. Kaja Silverman echoes Rainer's assertion:

The disembodied voice...asserts its independence from the visual track, it presents itself as enunciator...The authority of the disembodied voice-over is thus the effect of both a displacement and a consideration.⁷

In the film, TMWEW, the V-O relates daily dramas of a woman (Trisha) who is trying to cope with life:

Trisha as V-O at beginning of film: It was a hard week. I split up with my husband and moved into my studio. The hot water heater broke and flooded the textile merchant downstairs; I bloodied up my linen pants; the Senate voted for nerve gas; and my gynecologist went down in Korean Airlines Flight 007. The worst of it was the gynecologist. He was a nice man. He used to put booties on the stirrups and his speculum was always warm.⁸

⁶ de Lauretis, 1987: 114.

⁷ Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 51.

⁸ Rainer, 1989: 173.

The 'voice of the (absent) protagonist', detached as she is from the physicality of the film, possesses the possibility to speak out and 'talk back'. The protagonist continually disrupts and undermines Jack's attempt at any coherence throughout the film. The narrative structure, by being regularly disrupted, is violated. Throughout TMWEW, we see Rainer use film clips of other films (e.g. Hollywood, experimental films), basically all dealing with violence, with some form of devaluing and violating women. This mindless social violence continues to exist 'affecting' everyone. To be 'polemical' is to confront these violations.

By withholding a traditional narrative form, Rainer posits an open-ended engagement rather than a closure of form, e.g. traditional narrative includes a beginning, middle and end. This type of engagement is emphasized by de Lauretis as the more 'natural' approach:

Because linear-temporal categories, such as beginning and end, are not pertinent to the type thus generated, human life itself is not seen as enclosed between birth and death, but as a recurrent, self-repeating cycle which can be told starting from any point.⁹

By languaging dissent, we put into question the existing structures within our culture, one of which is the constructed subject; who is the subject?!

⁹ de Lauretis, 1984: 116.

Only the naive humanist feminist thinks she can change something by changing her consciousness; the rigorous feminist plumbs the hidden depths of subjectivity, studies its construction in language, follows the diffusing implications of Benveniste's empty instance through to its fulfilments elsewhere, winds through the labyrinth to find not a monster but a new position of the subject... ¹⁰

Meaghan Morris poses the notion of positionality: e.g. from where is Rainer's subject speaking? The subject (the unseen woman) is the 'female subject' who is usually subjected to the 'gaze' of the spectator. However, Rainer has reversed the roles. Deller, the male 'subject', is on the screen. As a fragmented character, who becomes schizoid through disengagement, he thinks of himself as responsible and productive without recognizing his patriarchal reality. Has Rainer portrayed Deller to symbolize the asocial, ahistorical, apolitical patriarchal fiction?

The narrative (in TMWEW) no longer acts upon the audience as a seductive drug of allurement. The narrative becomes layers of dissenting voices decentering a patriarchal construct. Are these voices narrating a polemic? I would say that Rainer is deconstructing the master narrative.

Rainer felt herself closely aligned with narrative and "suspecting the worse":

¹⁰ Morris, 1988: 60.

From descriptions of individual feminine experience floating free of both the social context and narrative hierarchy...to explicitly feminist speculations about feminine experience ... an evolution which is becoming more explicitly feminist seems to demand a more solid anchoring in narrative conventions.¹¹

While these "narrative conventions" expose the hierarchy, TMWEW catapults the spectator into a quagmire of contradictions, the layered true experiences of living. The subject as a complex engaged voice reconstructs her own realities, her own positions. The "Master's Voice" becomes a bland rhetoric attempting to emerge from his own self-imposed bog. While Jack's use of language is to cause boredom, the woman's V-O questions the empty rhetoric. And in this mal[e]-function of language, is seen the need to turn things around. Contradictions abound in our positional differences, exposing language to be one function of languaging (languaging includes all forms of language).

LANGUAGING CONTRADICTIONS

Michel Foucault's work (see bibliography), directed towards an historical analysis of the institutionalized responses to illness, to knowledge and to sexuality in relation to the changing views of society, brings into play the many positions of power.

¹¹ Rainer, Wide Angle 7, nos 1/2: 8.

Foucault's "power-is-everywhere" can be seen especially well through Rainer's use of documentary footage. Although a time honoured film tradition, documentary film reflects the thoughts and intentions of the filmmaker and is not a 'neutral' observer to events. The viewer's response to the factual information is therefore in 'the hands' of the 'truth' maker.¹² In that Foucault sees power as situated within events promoted by individuals, the location of power changes as events evolve and individuals change. Power, as Foucault perceives it, is not an unmoving monolithic structure. Rather, it shifts positions as society's needs change. Power 'can' reside in the individual, but it changes or has the potential to change as individuals and events change. What happens to those points of power which resist social change? This is one problem in Foucault's work which I will discuss later. Power positions itself in the conjunctive space binding the event with the individual. Therefore documentary footage illustrates those particular occasions of power being generated around particular issues which have been brought into focus (fixed in that interval) by an individual filmmaker. Rainer makes use of the inherent ambiguity of documentary filmmaking and plays with the notion of pseudo-documentary. The 'power' of the individual filmmaker to interpret situations connects to the notion of power that

¹² Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name", OCTOBER no.52, MIT Press (spring 1990): 77.

Foucault addresses. In other words, the filmmaker decides on what to put into the film and how that material is to be presented. But this particular power of authority can only be 'made real' in the space of the film. The filmic issues are later critiqued by the audience/spectators.

Documentary films illustrate sites of power, of manipulation. Manipulation within the 'master narrative' is questioned by Rainer as she uses the Hollywood film clips from the 40's which demonstrate the negative aspects of contradiction:

...[I] create situations that can accommodate both ambiguity and contradiction without eliminating the possibility of taking specific political stands.¹³

The plot or narrative form isn't so much that structure trying to "make sense of life" but rather presents

a mapping of differences and specifically first and foremost, of sexual difference into each text.¹⁴

The counter-discourse Rainer offers throughout TMWEW gives recourse to women's voices. This strategy is not one of competition but rather one of exposing the differences between male and female, between classes, between women. Rainer has actually taken male privilege away from the man and given the woman (in this case Trisha) the 'privilege' of voice. 'The

¹³ Rainer, 1989: 25.

¹⁴ de Lauretis, 1984: 121.

cluttered male monotone' is seen for what it is. . . a strangling voice of privilege, a perpetuation of self references. As Patricia Mellencamp observes:

Rainer throws down a gauntlet of language by breaking and entering men's stories with abandon. ...[W]omen - articulate, politically astute and friends - are everywhere in this film, speaking with each other, interrupting Jack, and posing difficult questions... ¹⁵

Gender specifics in narrative can be constraining by continuously replaying the Oedipal binary:

"male-hero-human...female-obstacle-boundary-space". ¹⁶

This tension splits into multi-layered responses in TMWEW. The interplay between individual and society moving in language becomes more complex as situations develop. Narrating protest breaks the oedipal bonds of possession within the "second language", the language of our fathers.¹⁷ The process of language identification resonates with a Lacanian discourse which locates "the mother tongue" in the Oedipal myth. The master text is seen as threatening "the mother tongue". However, the Oedipus myth is a constructed myth, and can be deconstructed and re-analyzed. Rainer has in fact done this in TMWEW. She has turned things around,

¹⁵ Patricia Mellencamp, "Images of Language and Indiscreet Dialogue: 'The Man Who Envied Women'," SCREEN 28, no. 2: 97.

¹⁶ de Lauretis, 1984: 121.

¹⁷ Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 50, 52, 157-161.

upside-down and exposed the strengths inherent in 'difference'. I am referring to the active participation in voicing protest. To narrate is to remind, to communicate.

The necessity for digressing from and undermining a coherent narrative line driven by characters, or simply refusing to comply with its demands for spatio-temporal homogeneity, uninterrupted flow of events, closure, etc., has always been a basic assumption in my scheme of things.¹⁸

As we language our contradictions, they clearly become the matter of our reality. What and how we speak throws into question the assumptions of the dominant social-politics. It is within this process that we refute 'the-order-of-things' and turn them inside-out.

LANGUAGING A REALITY

When I speak about 'a reality', I am referring to that reality which women experience inside/outside dominant, imposed Reality. Imposed Reality is composed of the representations set into place by figures of authority. These representations often do not include women's positions. They are outside our peripheral vision. This imposed Reality frames our expressions, particularly our own speaking, our own thinking. We know there are 'alternative' models of Reality. However,

¹⁸ Rainer, 7, nos 1/2: 10.

if we are so immersed in 'the accepted Reality', we don't, we can't perceive of another. But we know something is wrong. The process of languaging a reality attempts to focus on other positions. In TMWEW, Rainer has played with the notion of 'reality', by situating the woman's voice outside the visual frame to better perceive what constitutes "the Real". Meaghan Morris alludes to this practice when discussing the research being done on women's language:

another kind of investigation is being carried out in terms of women's language, the possibility of discovering or rediscovering a speech that articulates the diversities of women's reality.¹⁹

The commentary made by the disembodied voice does not describe situations, but rather places situations into contextualized positions.

Rainer has placed the female voice outside traditional forms of narrative structure. What is heard is a recounting of another narrative. From this place/space the voice erupts through crevices, and breaks down closed doors. Dissonance and dislocation (read re-location) animate the V-O. And this V-O is gendered. She identifies herself and involves herself as a subject in the social field. De Lauretis notes that

..."feminist cinema" is a notation for a process rather than an aesthetic or typological category: the notation for a process of reinterpretation and

¹⁹ Morris, 1988: 25.

retextualization of cultural images and narratives whose strategies of coherence engage the spectator's identification through narrative and visual pleasure and yet succeed in drawing "the Real" into film's texture.²⁰

"[T]he Real"²¹ is that reality which feminists have re-invested and brought to the fore. By rewriting this culture's 'master narratives', a re-reading is made possible. The paradox of woman as 'captive', caught in a melo-drama of socialization, and 'absentee' without voice has been identified. To contextualize the female voice into social reality acknowledges the concept of "the Real" (within feminist terms). The female voice as V-O enunciating "the mother tongue" (a feminist languaging) argues the representing of language in other textual practices. Rainer re-situates the female voice in protest, as polemical. She exposes the contradictions of lived experiences, of social realities as the 'uneven' events that they are:

²⁰ (de Lauretis 1987, 115)

²¹ "[T]he Real", a Lacanian emphasis denoting the difference between symbolic and the real, the interrelation of the symbolic and the imaginary. Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan, 162.

"..."[T]he Real" might be seen as the object and telos of psychoanalysis itself....Lacan: "The real, I would say, is the mystery of the speaking body; it's the mystery of the unconscious." Alice Jardine, Gynesis, footnote on p.122.

Could a feminist reading of this term suppose "the Real" to be the phallic order, wherein woman is symbolic of lack? of lacking access to words? as located between words? "[T]he Real" appears to be the phallic reality which does not acknowledge women's reality.

I am talking about registers of complicity / protest / acquiescence within a single shot or scene that do not give a message of despair. I'm talking about bad guys making progressive political sense and good girls shooting off their big toe and mouth. I'm talking about uneven development and fit in the department of consciousness, activism, articulation, and behavior that must be constantly reassessed by the spectator. I'm talking about incongruous juxtapositions of modes of address: texts, quoted texts, et al., all in the same film. I'm talking about representations of divine couplings and (un)holy triads being rescreened only to be used for target practice. I'm talking about not pretending that a life lived in potholes taking potshots will be easy and without cost, on screen or off.²²

LANGUAGEING VIOLENCE

In her films, Yvonne Rainer questions the inconsistencies, the conflicts, the disparities in our daily living experiences in relation to urban and global politics. There is the insistent, repeated theme of violence. The social violence of inner-city living combines with global violence where aggression, oppression, and domination prevail. The violations against women take on many forms, e.g. Hollywood's depiction of women, off-side comments, and blatant sexism. Acts of racism (in TMWEW) are primarily seen in the documentary clips on urban housing and the proposed screening and publicizing of Central American films:

woman's voice: ...so many Spanish names
are on the poster...

²² Rainer, 1989: 25.

H.'s voice: ...I had thought in the exhibition...

Daniel Flores: In the exhibition, yes, but I am talking about printing the names on the poster...

woman's voice: ...But it wouldn't be clear at all where they are from...

Flores: ...But I think it would be nice if we could include some of them...

and again:

Chino Garcia: What I would like to say is that one of the main objections to this project is secondary displacement. No private landlord that we know of...has rented any space in the last year to any Hispanic or black person in our community. That is one of the most disgusting things...

and again:

A.Z.: ...uh, two nights, February 10 and February 24th, which will be films about Central America by women, and then the second night it will be films by Latino women about Central America...²³

Rainer is emphasizing the incongruities in our society. A society whose socialization of its members promotes violence through acts of racism and class privilege cannot adequately deal with violence against women. Society interlocks these forms of violence, making the process difficult to change: sexism is racism is classism. These attitudes are all interrelated.

Domestic violence erupts through out TMWEW via the film clips, the narrations of Trisha and the confessions of Jack. White, male privilege is heard in Jack's rhetorical ranting in the

²³ Ibid., 175, 195, 216.

lecture sequence. Later in the corridor scene Jackie and Jack spar with theoretical verbiage. The violence of rhetoric is often overlooked or dismissed. But, in that it can control our thinking processes and dull our responses to action, rhetoric in the form of an unrelenting dogmatic lecture becomes frighteningly overt. (Subordination through speech-making is a time worn tradition.)

If we look at how the film is structured, the 'violence' of appropriation is in its construction (a postmodern construct). Rainer deliberately draws on documentary footage, clips of Hollywood and experimental films, and the words of others. By this act of appropriation, Rainer brings attention to contemporary issues through the images and words of others as not isolated incidents. She takes what is already 'out there' being said, brings it together and presents it to the audience / spectator as a mirror. The mirror does not reflect positive images. What we see and hear becomes our insensitive disregard of each other, the non responsibility for our actions.

The V-O suggests a variety of image/word conjunctions, thus reviving our memories of past experiences. These recontextualized experiences call attention to the need for forming some ethical agendas, collective practices which will address the power/violence syndrome. Power and violence are

doubly intertwined (power begets violence and violence attends power). Is Rainer polemical? Yes, she is actively engaged, using her filmmaking as a vehicle to question our political practices (mal[e]-practices). The underlying violence rattles us, the audience, and provokes us to think about what we are doing, not doing and / or doing unconsciously.

LANGUAGING (FOR) CHANGE

In the last section I will emphasize racism and sexism as seen and experienced by Marlene Nourbese Philip. By referring to these writings, the critiques voiced by Philip, I intend to focus on the current double-talk within our society, a concern which is also developed in Rainer's films. In that Philip writes experientially, she embodies the theoretical material so far discussed.

I would like to bring into discussion (and listen to) the problems of racism and classism as witnessed and critiqued by Marlene Nourbese Philip. As a feminist member of a visible minority, Philip calls attention to the blatant racism and sexism in our social constructs. The perpetuated stereotyping of women and of racial / cultural 'minorities' has continued to surface without sufficient protest. There are not enough changes being made to make these practices unacceptable. People have been placed in these positions by imperialist

domination. Anger continues to erupt from the 'margins'. Philip discusses the concept of marginality as an inferior position in relation to the dominant culture. What she proposes to do is to turn this interpretation around. Speaking from the margin is speaking from the frontier where

... 'emergent energies and experiences - stubbornly resist' the dominant culture. Frontier changes our perception of ourselves and the so-called mainstream. ... Many of these communities on the frontier are communities under stress. In the case of the black community, for instance, there is always the issue of racism as well as issues flowing from economic depression within the community.²⁴

In her articles, reports, and critiques, Philip addresses the acts of omission which "continue to plague the women's movement": "racism" continues to be "a cancerous sore in the already sore body politic".²⁵ Coming from a writer's community, she emphasizes the difficulties in publishing material in which the characters and the plots of black peoples in their cultures, are not depicted as stereotypes. The popular works of two West Indian writers, V.S. Naipaul and Naipaul's nephew, Neil Bissoondath, recreate stories of racism aggravating the tensions and problems of the ethnic communities. Philip criticizes the attitude which these two

²⁴ Marlene Nourbese Philip, "Who's Listening?" FUSE XII, nos 1/2 (Sept. 1988): 22.

²⁵ M. N. Philip, "Hurrying On Up", FUSE IX, no 6 (Feb/Mar 1986): 19.

writers have concerning their own peoples. By buying into "...the racist views of colonial powers, past and present...", both men have "scorned and ridiculed" their own people perpetuating "...a Sisyphean nightmare...of depr. and despair".²⁶ They perpetuate the lop-sided view of the Third World as a wasteland, existing in some existential, ahistorical space / place. Philip would prefer that the Third World be re-addressed as "...New Worlds of empowerment and strength for women or peoples of colour." In this sense there is an acknowledgement of a "continuing remembrance of the future and imagination of the past."

Tarzie Vittachi sees the term, "Third World", as one that separates and reinforces the privileged position of the materially rich:

One of the most infectious (phrases to be put into currency) was 'Third World'. It was first used by Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer, in an article published in Le Monde in which he referred to two industrialized worlds, one capitalist, one communist, and a **tiers monde** which remains largely agricultural. The developmentalists grabbed it and used it to make distance between the materially rich and poor nations so that very soon 'Third World' universally connoted poverty, over population, disease, disorder, illiteracy, violent social upheavals and every imaginable human horror. Tacitly interpolating a second world as a buffer between the first and the third, served to emphasize the non-relationship between the rich and

²⁶ M. N. Philip, "Naipaul's Legacies: Continuing the Colonizer's Dirty Work", FUSE IX, no. 4 (Dec/Jan 1986): 42-44. [A good example of this attitude can be seen in Naipaul's book, Bend in the River.]

the poor. ²⁷

Both Vittachi and Philip see this terminology as a perpetuation of class privilege and hence, subjugation. When Naipaul and Bissoondath see themselves as unconnected to their history, see their history as negative, they reinforce the non-existence of a peoples. This species of writer "...panders to the insatiable appetite of North America for Third World violence" and this reflects a "...truly colonized mind, trained and schooled to despise all that has produced him except what the colonizer considers valuable." ²⁸

When discussing Alice Walker's novel, The Color Purple, Philip finds not only an emphasis on stereotypes in the portrayal of the characters in both book and film, but also, via the media, an interpretation of Alice Walker as speaking for all black women. As readers of her book and spectators of the film, are we coming away with a view of a many-faceted peoples? The tendency of the writing, as Philip sees it, was to pander to an ideology, a system, needing to perpetuate an ahistorical, one-dimensional 'tradition' of a black peoples. The potential

²⁷ Tarzi Vittachi, "Leaving the Peasants in the Dark", The NI, Issue on Language: SAY;WRITE;SCREAM, no. 191 (Jan 1989): 11.

²⁸ M. N. Philip, "Immoral Fiction", FUSE XII, no. 4 (Jan/Feb 1989) 42.

"...for misunderstanding and exploitation is great." ²⁹
 Philip's approach to the book, the film, the media, the dominant culture in which this all takes place, is one of an archaeologist sifting through rubbish in the year 3086: what if they found a time capsule containing all the hype about the book, the film, the author, her interviews and reviews, postcards, posters and diaries?? There is some strong evidence of co-optation: co-optation as a symptom, a characteristic of a colonialist society which encourages exploitation. (How Rainer has dealt with this in her film will be seen in Chapter 7.)

In an article entitled, "Journal Entries Against Reaction", Philip divides the article into 13 days. Each day reflects on the need to respond as a woman, a black woman. By way of making a "first statement", rather than the immediate "reaction to a statement of denial", Philip creates her own primary position.

Day six

To transform writing from reaction to statement.
 To oppose Woman to Man, according to Kristeva, is to impose a "fixed sexual identity which is counter-productive to understanding and action.
 "...Woman is not a reaction to Man; she is not a response. She is her own first statement. Black is not a reaction or response to White; it is its own first statement. Am I only Black and female, if you are white and male: I think therefore I am

²⁹ M. N. Philip, "A site Report: The Color Purple", FUSE IX, no. 6 (May/June 1986): 22.

- Black and female. ³⁰

Several months and a year or so later, Philip, in an article entitled, "Who's Listening? artists, audiences, and language", ³¹ speaks of exile, of an alienation within a white, Anglo-Saxon (Rainer's Jack) male audience. How many people are exiled in a country not their own, trying to make their voices heard, trying to dialogue their reality while being colonized through its 'educational' system:

It becomes even more complex for the artist in exile - working in a country not her own, developing an audience among people who are essentially strangers to all the traditions and communities that helped produce her. Scourges such as racism and sexism also work so as to create a profound sense of alienation resulting in what can best be described as psychic exile among those artists who are not in physical exile. ...Many of us remain immigrants in a profoundly psychic sense. Some of us recognizing this, choose to emphasize that alienation - it appearing a more positive position....We are at times better able to understand and respond more positively to works from the dominant culture than we do to work coming out of our own traditions - such is the pernicious effect of sexism and colonialism. Could we, however, argue that education offers one solution to this problem? Possibly, but we would do well to remember that the education of colonized peoples - I include women in this group - has traditionally been closer to brainwashing than to education. ³²

³⁰ M. N. Philip, "Journal Entries Against Reaction", FUSE X, no. 4 (Winter 1986/1987): 40/41.

³¹ Ibid.

³² M. N. Philip, "Who's Listening? artists, audiences and language", FUSE XII, nos 1/2 (Sept 1988): 15-24.

This comparison between educational systems, the colonizing power of patriarchy, sexism, and racism, which Philip has so well articulated underlines a basic premise of this chapter - **whose voices are speaking??** This problem also becomes focused in Rainer's work, e.g. the colonizing power of patriarchal language. Language remains a contentious issue. Languageing our social contexts encourages active participation in change. The written struggle against racism, as Philip reminds us, must always be foremost:

Language has been and remains...a significant and essential part of the colonization process; ...It is also a choice resonant with historical and political realities and possibilities.³³

Philip has thoroughly and thoughtfully revealed her concerns in this article. The interrelations / interactions between "audience and language", "community, audience, market", "feminism and audience" underscores the problems of a black feminist writer (in particular) attempting to write, to publish, to live in this culture whose traditions glorify male supremacy in an Anglo-Saxon chaos masquerading as order.

The common base for women is a shared history of oppression in all its varieties and forms, as well as, I hope, a shared commitment to establishing communities organized along non-patriarchal, woman centred, non-racist principles. While wishing to avoid reductionist arguments as well as those body-centred theories which become at times tiresome, we

³³ Ibid.

must acknowledge the fact that the basic common denominator of female experience in all cultures and in all classes has been the fact that our bodies have achieved a universal negative significance -bodies which have become palimpsests upon which men have inscribed and reinscribed their texts.³⁴

Both Philip and Rainer hold similar socio/political views which I see expressed in each woman's work. The written views of Philip have been made visible in Rainer's films, in particular TMWEW which I am focusing on in my thesis. It has become evident that the counter-discourse of women, of feminists continually challenges the dominant speech of the patriarchy. To be polemical is integral to our languaging positions.

³⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

STRIPPING THE TEASE FROM PATRIARCHAL JARGON (the ironic implications of visual/verbal propaganda)

When speaking of patriarchal jargon, we must always beware of the tease, of the seduction which can become synonymous with this form of 'discourse'. This discourse manipulates the 'listener' into believing false statements of intent, of 'sincere' dialogue. Patriarchal jargon exhibits 'terms of endearment' through capricious acts of language. Lacking any 'real' substance, patriarchal formalisms are codified for their specific use. Unacceptable to women's understanding, distancing to all oppressed peoples, patriarchal propaganda dominates and oppresses.

To confront this phenomenon, it is necessary to develop a subversive strategy. My proposal, as discussed in the introduction, is to subvert through the process of languaging the visual / verbal propaganda of the oppressor. Within our use, this propaganda is embedded the ironic implications of our thoughts and actions. (This ability to use irony reveals our verbal readiness, women's salty 'bits'.) Languaging is situated in the conjunctive space, the interstice, to deflect the on-coming barbs of the paternalistic assault. We become players in a field where double vision is required: double vision includes public exposure within a patriarchy wherein our images, our ethos of being is constituted, and the existence of women's experiences with the internal vision

women have of their own existing realities is renounced. Language is an affirmative action of believing in myself despite the negative images which are reflected back to me.

The conjunctions 'but, and/or, yet' can suggest other possible formulations than the dominant discourse. By their introduction into feminist / women's texts, either written or implied, interventional space is created.

In this chapter I am reflecting on the process of propaganda. The focus is on the lecture scene in TMWEW, where the schizophrenic Deller orates on formalized concepts of Knowledge. In this scene a loft is used as a temporary classroom. Both Dellers take turns standing to lecture at the podium. The students sit at lecture-room desks facing the podium. They listen with 'mock' attentiveness to the authoritative male voice of Knowledge / of academia.

The structures (and subsequent deconstructions) of this form of Knowledge refer to those formalisms we find within the patriarchal institutions of Knowledge. However, Rainer has us see and hear a sub-text which is working to reveal another political agenda: 'the class room' is actually an artist's loft being co-opted into a condo-loft (read: knowledge as privilege). By speeding up the audio track during parts of the lecture, the seductiveness of Deller's Knowledge is seen as a

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

When the students ask questions, they shine a 'blinding light' into Deller's face.



blathering on, a vomiting of jargon. Deller, reading from his prepared text, becomes completely disengaged from his physical reality. Trisha's voice-over, on the other hand, reminds us of 'class struggle', of 'poverty', of 'dis-location', the present situation with the urban poor, which confronts us daily. By having the camera track around the room with the cameraman's voice in an undertone describing where he is going, Rainer forefronts her questions about power, about privilege to present another political agenda. Rainer is creating space by circulating a voice.

I intend to utilize this scene as I review the feminist practice of intervention through interruption, thus exposing disjunctive conjunctions through conflictual propaganda. Conjunctions link thoughts into patterns, into connections. Feminist intervention disrupts these connections to reveal conflictual propaganda. Propaganda can communicate and empower action or exploit and cause oppression. This chapter will have five sub-headings:

- languaging disjunctive practices;
- languaging 'a knowing'¹;
- languaging propaganda;
- languaging as communication;
- languaging struggle (recuperative meanings).

¹ There is no 'one' way to know.

If languaging is a "talking back" formed within conjunctive spaces (those spaces in which the political practice of languaging can be seen), it can become disjunctive (the or/but of our disjunctive narrative). This process acknowledges women's experiential knowing which then becomes a propaganda communicating struggle (and strength). And in these struggles disparities are seen and recognized for what they are. Knowledge as prescribed by a patriarchal academia is seen for the transparency that it is.

LANGUAGEING DISJUNCTIVE PRACTICES

At the visual level, nothing is consummated. And, at the level of discourse, it is entirely about consummation. There is in me a refusal to let the characters connect with each other...²

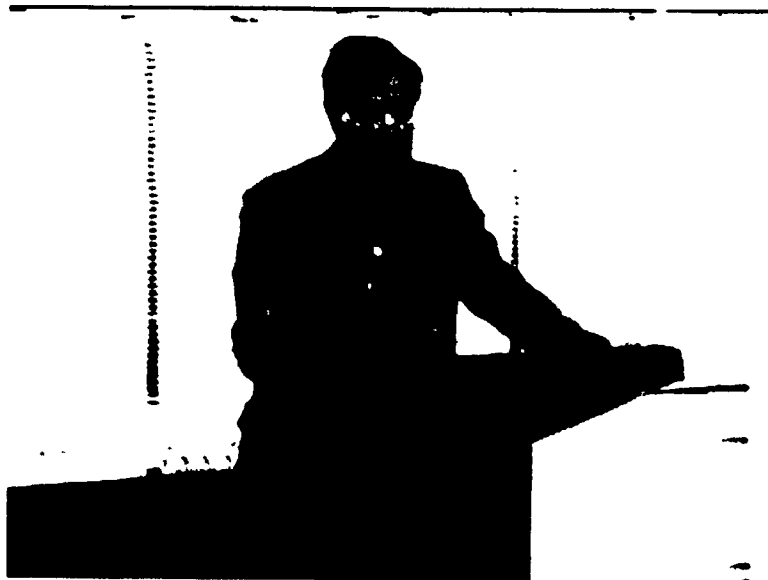
(This statement, made in 1985, echoes a discourse of disjunction made by Rainer in 1965; "...for demystifying dance and making it objective: a strategy of denial.")

No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no

² Bérénice Reynaud, "Impossible Projections"; Rainer, 1989: 30. [This statement, referring to two actors speaking past each other in Journeys to Berlin/1971, was made by Rainer in response to an interview with Reynaud in 1985.]

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

Jack exercises his body (the 'wall art' is in the background) in a manner similar to his lecturing form.



to moving or being moved.³

Why begin with these excerpts? I want to emphasize Rainer's consistent (although shifting) approach to visual fallacies, to seductive practices. Rainer continues this 'neutral' yet counteractive strategy (somewhat reformulated) from her involvement in dance to her films. It is not a disengagement from a reality, but rather a disjunctive practice wherein 'false statements' are exposed.

The approach taken by Rainer in making TMWEW appears to reiterate this process. Through the use of Deller's rambling lecture which winds through Lacan, Foucault, Chomsky and others, Rainer has created a subtle form of political outrage. The spoken text is only one text being given space. We have the disruptive levels of mumbled words (audio track on fast forward), the cameraman's muffled directions plus the roving 'camera eye.'

When the students ask questions, they use a theatrical effect - shining a spot light into Jack's face, which forces him to raise his arm against the 'blinding light'. The students'

³ Yvonne Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called 'Parts of Some Sextets' performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, N.Y., in March 1965" Tulane Drama Review 10 (Winter 1965): 168-178. Reprinted in Work, 45-51 in Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance, Sally Baines (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980) "Yvonne Rainer: The Aesthetics of Denial".

physical aggressiveness, e.g. putting their 'prof' on the spot, is furthered by their questions of the 'other', the Lacanian lack; of how we come to language; of the 'old dichotomies'.⁴ Women have been constructed as the Other, e.g. man is the active principle of culture while woman is the passive element of nature. The proverbial social violence of rhetoric is revealed in these questions which reflect the students' rebuttal to meta-talk (an overburdened verbiage). That language has a hierarchal encoding is recognized by Deborah Cameron, a writer who focuses on linguistics:

Whatever the origin of grammatical gender, it cannot be true that it has nothing to do with sex, since a long lay and linguistic tradition that it is a matter of sex clearly allows it to be pressed into service as a marker of patriarchal values and relations.⁵

The verbal layer of encoded language perpetuates stereotypical responses. But this 'talk' is only one layer. The visual tracking provides a subtext, a crucial disjunction in which to question veracity, the statements made within patriarchal language.

Another voice, Trisha's V-O, talks of the "disappeared" in the New York City urban environment, creating a link to Central

⁴ Deborah Cameron, Feminist and Linguistic Theory (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1985), [Discuss' of the 'old dichotomies' occurs in pages 57-71.].

⁵ Ibid., 65.

America countries with their cases of disappearances. Rainer, in questioning patriarchy's political agenda, refers to this link again and yet again in the film. What develops in this tension are questions: what actually constitutes 'reality'? What is the intended political agenda?

Patricia Mellencamp, a film and cultural critic, describes Jack Deller's 'monologue' / lecture as evidence of a decentered man caught in the tensions of a feminist agenda:

...[Jack] deploys language as a strategic weapon of subjugation through unremitting boredom/monotony and seduction - means of power which sometimes merge. Subjection rather than subjectivity is the effect of his knowledge....the hodgepodge of Jack's canned lecture of theory or language as obfuscation, a lazy referral without meaning yet replete with power and tedium. When Jack speaks, language is hyperreal.⁶

For Mellencamp, the meaning of this scene happens in the space between the woman's voice (Trisha) speaking of 'a politics of the real' and the subject matter she speaks of, '...the poor, displaced and homeless in the U.S., and the violence in Central America'. It is the woman's voice (already displaced, disembodied) speaking / giving voice to other displacements as a 'real' political phenomenon. Rainer takes the privileged patriarchal texts into question. Women, traditionally

⁶ Patricia Mellencamp, "Images of Language and Indiscreet Dialogue: The Man Who Envied Women", SCREEN 28, no. 2: 92.

deprived access to 'the sacred texts', practice disjunctive techniques to show how 'masculine reasoning' often abstracts the situations at hand, in order to distance the reality and thus avoid engagement. Women's activism exposes the confusing disparities in local struggles by asking questions and prioritizing the issues.

Recently, through the agendas of eco-feminists, we have an emergence of protest (mostly from women), at the local level, dealing with issues affecting daily life. Both Irene Diamond and Lee Qinby, editors of Feminism and Foucault, see this form of protest leading inevitably to political tensions:

Because so much of women's political activity occurs at the local level and stems from their involvement in the sustenance of life, they often manifest an ethic of activism that confronts domination without the smashing terror so characteristic of masculinist revolutionary action.⁷ (my emphasis)

This emergence of protest from women is a response to knowing the issues at hand, a specific knowing that resides in daily experience. The process of knowing is an activity associated with discourse, with intuitions (to name only two associations) which is accessible and attainable to many people. Lucy Lippard recognizes this form of knowing in the

⁷ Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, "Introduction", Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Diamond and Quinby, eds (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), xvi.

work of Rainer (although her work has yet to reach a mass audience).

LANGUAGING A KNOWING

Women's knowing as a phenomenon, a material reality, is a useful concept to keep in mind while addressing some difficulties I have with Foucault's discourse. These difficulties surface when I address Foucault's work within an engaged feminist critique. In other words, I find his discourse distancing and off-putting. It does not encourage or acknowledge women's knowing.

One facet in Foucault's work which is encouraging is that he has moved away from the liberal humanist tradition which advocates "a unitary nature of the subject and conscious subjectivity"⁸ seeing contradiction as negative and precarious. However, his emphasis on an individualism as site of discourse brings to mind "the sovereignty of the individual" (a left-over from liberal humanism). A feminist discourse based on collective action calls into question the position of choice (as an authentic formulation based on individual decisions). Foucault may offer a site for feminists to produce our many subject positions, but his androcentric position poses problems for me. As an individual

⁸ Weedon, 1987: 112.

I can be subject to control, to power-over oppression. We live in a contemporary world of institutionalized individualism. The so-called individual is rooted in roles dictated to us by the priorities of any said institution, be it school, work place, or social interaction. We perform 'expected' roles.

Would I be as vulnerable if in entering a feminist counter-discourse, I was able to share my strategies with other women of like mind? I am speaking of collective action based on a discourse of many (at times conflictual) identities and subject positions.

Kathy Ferguson discusses Foucault's sense of the individual and makes clear what feminists see as the collective individual:

Feminist discourse and practice entail a struggle for individual autonomy that is **with others** and for the community that **embraces diversity** - that is, for an integration of the individual and the collective in an ongoing process of authentic individuation and genuine connectedness.⁹

The connectedness with others in a collective position has a tension between individual and collective. But the emphasis on 'separate from' and competition advocated by a consumerism creates a negative connotation of individual.

⁹ Kathy Ferguson, The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 157.

Foucault bases his "historical specificity" in the body, in the site of sexuality.¹⁰ The political engagement of this position requires continual redefinition, continual deferral. Yes, this position is contextual. The individuated position creates a discourse of dissent intervening in social control. The postmodern, poststructural position(s) require feminists to re-think our subject positions in relation to other situations and events; to contextualize in an historical continuum, in a psychoanalytic field, and in the critical structures of discourse.

Foucault perceives his discourse to be functional: he would like it to be used "...to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power".¹¹ The historical documentation of 'power' is inscribed/tattooed on the body, e.g. battered women, tortured peoples. The ceremonies, the signs of power create complex patterns. What do we see from this? What can we observe? What we see are the principles of sociological prescriptions for normalization. Although Foucault, as analyzed by Paul Patton, co-editor with Meaghan Morris of Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy, appears to have a 'social conscience' concerning the formation of power and how it affects the human body throughout history, the conception

¹⁰ Weedon, 1987: Chapter 5.

¹¹ Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton, ed's Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), 115.

of power as not being "purely negative or repressive"¹² remains a regulating tactic. When Rainer appropriates Foucault's work, she is in fact questioning his patriarchal approach to knowledge. Who is the gate-keeper, the foreman [sic], the programmer in this regulating or de-regulating? Does exposing the mechanics of power proclaim its failure? If patriarchal society as dominant ideology is seen as the norm, can the formation of **collective** action subvert this tendency, rather than stigmatize the individual as dysfunctional?

In this section I am responding to Foucault's "Two Lectures" ¹³ where he addresses different forms of knowledge and power. Foucault speaks about "subjugated knowledge"¹⁴, but perceives these 'knowledges' along a hierarchal model (which he doesn't acknowledge). He believes that resistance to power resides in the popular, subjugated knowledges at the bottom of social systems. The so-called "popular knowledges", as discourses destabilizing the Knowledge of hierarchy and privilege, still maintain a **prescribe** (his words, my emphasis) methodology, i.e. "archaeology" as appropriate methodology, "genealogy" as that process wherein these "local knowledges" would interact.

¹² Ibid., 127.

¹³ Michel Foucault, POWER/KNOWLEDGE: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, Colin Goruo, ed., trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, K. Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 78 - 108.

¹⁴ Ibid., 81.

The "liberated fragments"¹⁵ allowed into circulation of accredited knowledges, must, as Foucault prescribes, be analyzed as to their power, spheres of influence in relation to economics, to class and privilege. But, if power is the flip-side of violence, and is formulated as a continuous "circulating" energy, could we not permeate this energy with alternative proposals incorporating collaborative efforts? In other words, Foucault sees individuals as "vehicles of power" rather than "points of application"¹⁶ with the emphasis remaining on the individual. However, collective strategies do not place an emphasis on privileged individuals who could possibly misuse power to oppress others. The collective strategy has the potential to reformulate power/violence into acts of responsibility, of cooperation. These strategies are not based on forms of juridical individual rights but rather on an ethos which extends into/through a community. If collective strategies could be implemented, the empowerment of the community involved, becomes a reality. Empowerment through engagement differs from power-over with its attendant manipulation and violence. Empowerment strengthens and enlightens the engaged subject. Power still appears to be static while empowerment speaks of a dynamic.

¹⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹⁶ Ibid., 98.

Foucault's approach is still riveted in linear constructs, in the individual as conduit of energy. Shifting sites of power still remain static whereas power invested in the community has been transformed into empowerment to be shared. The questions, the alternative disciplinary strategies Foucault discusses, remain within a structure of analysis not compatible with a feminist approach which responds to women's subjugation. Women are not looking for "prescriptions" or waiting for our knowing to be "accredited" and "allowed" into mainstream discourse! Women's knowing becomes accredited through our own workings of insight and critical analysis. Foucault's strategies remain outside the struggles we experience and realize.

Monique Plaza, a French feminist writer, cited by de Lauretis, identifies a contradiction within Foucault's work as residing in the "phallomorphic power" of the male. The social implications of his position cannot ignore this modality. There is no acknowledgement of a gendered discourse in Foucault's work, simply because, for Foucault it doesn't exist.¹⁷

Therefore, illuminating as his [Foucault's] work is to our understanding of the mechanics of power in social relations, its critical value is limited by his unconcern for what, after him, we might call 'the technology of gender' - the techniques and discursive strategies by which gender is

¹⁷ de Lauretis, 1987: 38.

constructed and hence, as I agree, violence is engendered.¹⁸

Foucault's analysis of power, as "mechanisms" or techniques which "put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge"¹⁹ ("apparatuses of knowledge": a distancing categorical practice discouraging any real or effective engagement), through "the discourse of discipline"²⁰, still perpetuates a precedence, a practice of prioritizing institutional forms/acts of Knowledge. Knowledge, whether "popular knowledges" or institutional knowledge as theorized by Foucault, does not reflect a process of growth but rather a recanting of the Known.²¹

The option of languaging knowledge becomes residual rather than the active, primary function of a knowing which releases mechanisms of empowerment. Empowerment focuses on one's inner power which develops when the oppressed (in this case women) become their own agents in the process of redefining and realizing this potential. Women's knowing (the existence of

¹⁸ Ibid., 38.

¹⁹ Gordo, 1980: 102.

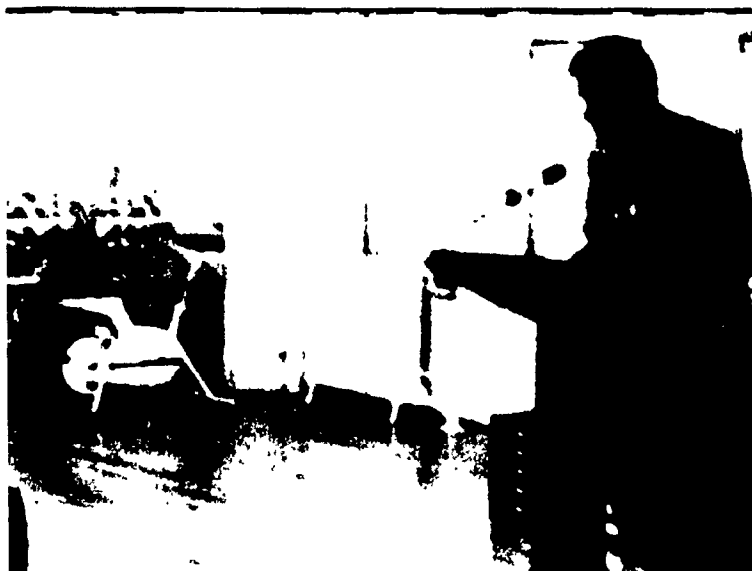
²⁰ Ibid., 106.

²¹ That institutional knowledge often serves the interests of oppression, is well discussed by Paulo Freire as "the banking concept of education" in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1984), 64.

which Foucault doesn't acknowledge in any of his writings), based on experience (often gut-rendering), on insight, and yes, on a deep intuition, disclaims the need to consider the power (over) as part of our languaging. In making this statement, I am not reducing women's knowing to these factors alone but acknowledging the fundamental depths out of which, we, as women draw our languaging. Women actively language while many men possess language as an object - to actively language requires the practice of critical reflection and of a feminist ethos. The complexities of women's knowing as a phenomenon to be considered and acknowledged cannot be reduced to one position, e.g. essentialism. There are too many positions to be considered, e.g. the social, cultural, and psychological.

Yes, there is need to address the workings of power/control and its attendant violence, as it is present everywhere within society, the institutions of social repression. But languaging a knowing involves a political practice of contextualizing, which involves a critical response. This response engages women in their realities. In TMWEW, Rainer makes use of film to contextualize her political practice. She exposes the violence of individual power (over) which tends to fragment, to dislocate any possible recourse for an interactive, shared knowing. Foucault might perceive other knowledges as acceptable, but his approach to a critical

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Both Dellers take turns standing to lecture at the podium.



analysis diminishes any 'potentia'²² for lateral considerations, e.g. a contextualized sharing.

Foucault might have given new status to discourse, but he fails to take into account the relations between masculinist authority and language, discourse, and reason. Language, feminists claim, is never gender-free. Although Foucault points to the ways in which rationalizing discourses suppress discourses of marginalized groups, and claims that such discourses are sites of resistance, his work only rarely attends to such discourses and virtually ignores those of women. His almost exclusive focus on works by men pushes women's discourses of resistance to the margins of his texts.²³

As both Quinby and Diamond have noted, Foucault's discursive method for analysis still embraces and augments certain criteria, e.g. a strong androcentric approach based on classical Knowledge. There does not appear to be an approach to knowing that is 'risk-taking'. Women's knowing outside the prescribed social 'guidelines' is always risk-taking.

Foucault's analysis of power, with his lack of gendered interpretation within this analysis, is a major concern for me. The discourse which he presents may be insightful in understanding the many sites of power, but his ignorance, his deliberate omission, of other openings into this discourse denies accessibility to many people. Strategies of/for power as a force for manipulation in order to control segments of

²² Rainer, 1989: 185. [language..."exists as potentia"]

²³ Diamond and Quinby, 1988: xv, xvi.

society, need considerable study. But an androcentric approach is only another patriarchal construction. The process of knowing is an activity with many associations readily accessible and attainable to anyone. Lucy Lippard recognizes many forms of knowing in the work of Rainer, e.g. the inter-textuality of words and images (an image/word conjunction), ambiguity and paradox, the spaces of possibility.

Consider what Lippard, as art historian/critic, says concerning Rainer's approach to a knowing in relation to her filmmaking:

Rainer uses words and images as though they were the same medium, as though you could start a sentence verbally and finish it visually. Thus for all the extremely familiar situations, phrases and activities, the viewer must finally give up the idea of knowing exactly what is going on. One the connections, but they are difficult to articulate senses and the film's impact is broadened by the associations and possibilities that exist in the interstices.²⁴

Rainer, admittedly, allows 'loose connections': she invents as the film develops itself. This process encourages, not a prescribed methodology, but rather "a meandering quality, constantly turning corners."²⁵ Isn't this primary to the knowing process? In the "loose connections" our reference

²⁴ Lucy Lippard, "Yvonne Rainer on Feminism and Her Film", The Feminist Art Journal 4, no. 2 (1975): 267.

²⁵ Ibid., 277.

points evolve and are recognized by us. It is within Rainer's filmic spaces (the conjunctive spaces she has created for our contradictions) that the voices of deconstruction question Deller's lecture.

The problems of overturning, of refuting particular bodies of knowledge, become redundant in a 'knowing' which has as its premise the continual shifting of structures grounded in an ethics, i.e. a feminist ethics. We continually address our positionalities, thus creating 'different' and valid positions to be considered. When we consider our engagement in daily-life practices, it is our responsive actions which contextualize the situation. The approach we take towards a situation speaks of an ethics, and that ethics is integrated into our subject positions. A feminist ethics speaks of contextualized knowing practices which in turn languages our propaganda. Considering the ethical implication suggested in this proposal (a knowing through engagement), the objections to Foucault's position can be temporarily deferred.

The conflicts in establishing agendas for political action can be difficult to define. Situations become conflictual when subject positions are put into question. To make our voices heard through the dominant culture requires an active languaging of empowering propaganda.

LANGUAGE PROPAGANDA

[A]t what point does visual or verbal rhetoric take over and either authoritarianism or an insidiously persuasive vacuity overwhelm dialogue? This is the point at which the image/word is no longer good propaganda (socially and aesthetically aware provocation) but bad propaganda (an exploitative and oppressive economic controlling mechanism).²⁶

At this time in the discussion, propaganda raises its ambiguous head. There are many facets and levels of propaganda, as Lippard has indicated. I would like to begin with the issue of 'encoded inferiority' with reference to women and minority groups, which a female student at the lecture in TMWEW alluded to when she spoke of the "old dichotomies: heredity/environment, biology/culture".²⁷

Gendered dichotomies appear to reflect a conflictual strategy wherein women in relation to men are situated on the lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder. By placing an emphasis on division, on opposition, theoretical discourse develops 'binary binds' (a case of the bends).²⁸ When this occurs, there is a freeze, a kind of 'death', caused by an imposed set

²⁶ Lucy Lippard, "Some Propaganda for Propaganda", HERESIES no. 9 (1980): 36.

²⁷ Rainer, 1989: 186.

²⁸ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1981) s.v. bends: caisson disease wherein the gases enter the body tissue causing death or/and severe pain. [Discussions involved in dichotomic sparring can cause pain and/or death to the discussion.]

of boundaries placed on what should be an open-ended inquiry. This often happens when we discuss the pros and cons of a situation rather than opening up the discussion to many view points. The reductive inaccuracy of this positioning creates the position of 'other', the 'we/us' syndrome. The practice is negative and creates negative attitudes. Sites of exclusion result. Gender binaries, with their attendant distortions, reduce and encode specific responses which have the tendency to prevent genuine gender analysis. (This form of analysis also affects the way we perceive racism, classism, etc.) The focus becomes antagonistic and abstract.

We already know about women's position in the cultural/biological determinist model, e.g. 'it is not woman's nature to be cultural producers'. The theories based on 'natural gender' / 'the biological sex' postulate woman as the reproductive gender, not capable of being a producer. The stereotypical responses which these theories promote can be seen mirrored in the global issues of disinformation. The debate on gender differences spills over into the controversy of multi-levelled oppressions (e.g. Central America, displaced peoples, poverty and more, to which Rainer continuously refers in the film) which can be recognized and demonstrated through the ongoing phenomenon of human identity deprivation in the hierarchical 'market'; this 'market' being the Western patriarchal construct which promotes a capitalistic, consumer

ideology.

With these points in mind, I would like to bring into consideration the words of Noam Chomsky, Deborah Cameron and Lucy Lippard. Each writer discusses the term 'propaganda' within their various fields of study:

Chomsky is concerned with disinformation in a global context:

The process of creating and entrenching highly selective, reshaped or completely fabricated memories of the past is what we call "indoctrination" or "propaganda" when it is conducted by official enemies, and "education", "moral instruction" or "character building", when we do it ourselves. ²⁹

Cameron's studies involve the distortions of gender difference in our language:

Men may efface their masculinity, but femininity can never be effaced. This produces the effect that women are an exception to the male norm. ³⁰

The propaganda that Lippard discusses involves the art process as a political, "functioning element in society":

The transformation of society, at the heart of both feminism and socialism, will not take place until feminist strategies are acknowledged and fully

²⁹ Noam Chomsky, "DISINFORMATION", catalogue essay for DISINFORMATION, an exhibition at the Alternative Museum, New York City (1987).

³⁰ Cameron, 1985: 69.

integrated into the struggle. ³¹

I have placed these quotations in this order to emphasize the conjunctive implications each has towards the other: each writer, within the topic of propaganda, discusses societal mal[e]-functions with the implication that much work must be done to reveal these damaging practices.

Chomsky reads through historical formulations and events to forefront the ambiguities in propaganda. To arouse a public to action, to an understanding of what is happening to them / to us, prevents (at least attempts to prevent) the total oppression and subjugation of our / their own identities and of the intrinsic worth of our / their actions as subjects. The gender issue forefronts manipulation within a patriarchal society wherein man is the generic term for all (men, women and children). This generic term has a tendency to monopolize and subjugate all and everything by creating 'the male norm'. The 'male norm' also perpetuates homophobia by not recognizing our many sexualities.

Cameron continues Chomsky's argument into the area, "sexism of language" which, if allowed, can cause adverse social and political false dichotomies. It is within our power (Cameron

³¹ Lucy Lippard, "ISSUE and TABU", ISSUE, ICA catalogue for Social Strategies by Women Artists (14 November - 21 December 1980).

agrees with Foucault's analysis of power as residing in the individual) "...to destroy the pernicious belief that we have to be controlled and oppressed by our language."³² Cameron does not see language to be necessarily binding or gagging.

Lippard proposes propaganda as an active strategy to effect change. Propaganda, as a populist approach to promote change, resides in the complex languaging of a peoples struggling to surface through oppressive propaganda. For Lippard, "...the making [of] connections between feminism and the anxiety, alienation and assimilation of the bicultural experience"³³ offers positive images for women and her culture. It is in the connections, the contextuality, where women find their strengths. Our many cultural realities wherein women's meanings are generated offer positions of resistance. Our direct dialogue cuts through oppressive propaganda.

One strategy is proposed by Margia Kramer as she discusses the importance of revolutionary posters as critiques of social mal[e]-practices. Her article gives an historical significance of this tactic, which has been a strategy for workers seeking support in strike action.

³² Cameron, 1985: 173. [I would also stress the very liberal feminist position this statement reflects. Cameron does emphasize the individual as locus for change within the community.]

³³ Lippard, 1980: 3.

Revolutionary posters are made in connection with political upheavals and social movements toward classless societies; they are directed from a specific point of view toward the shared interests of groups, of viewers. Long texts which present information withheld, p is critical, transformational, alternative and admonitory scenarios are often combined in these works. Their forms of address and styles can be radical breaks with the present and past, for the purpose of ideological mobilization away from the given reality toward the desired reality. Revolutionary posters are structural critiques, with agendas for changing the system. Their forms and contents herald new communities.³⁴

A feminist use of propaganda provides an empowerment for all oppressed and subjugated peoples. It is a communication, a visible counter strategy for survival which Rainer also employs.

LANGUAGE AS COMMUNICATION

This [daily communication] more intimate kind of propaganda seems to me to be inherently feminist. It might be seen as gossip, in the word's original sense: "Godsib" meant godparent, then sponsor and advocate: then it became a relative, then a woman friend, then a woman "who delights in idle talk"³⁵, "groundless rumor" and "tattle". Now it means

³⁴ Margia Kramer, "Cracking the Concrete: Intervention Posters", UPFRONT (a publication of PADD, N.Y.C.) nos. 12/13 (winter 86-87): IV.

³⁵ Diamond and Quinby, 1988: 139. "Foucault and Feminism: A Romance of Many Dimensions": "Thus even as we engage ourselves, making the aveu [confession] that allows us to enter discourse, it might be well to keep an ironic distance, bring humor into play, subverting simultaneously from above and below the discourse within which we are produced."

malicious and unfounded tales told by women about other people. All this happened through the increased power of patriarchal propaganda, through men gossiping about women and about each other on a grand scale (history). Thus, in the old sense, spoken propaganda or gossip means **relating** - a feminist style of communication either way.³⁶

Yvonne Rainer speaks of her film voices, particularly Trisha's voice-over, as 'gabby'. Rather than positing a dogmatic film text (a traditional seductive narrative), Rainer offers the female protagonist as a 'disruptive voice', cutting through the rhetorical game-play of the audio / visual tracks. During the dinner shots, the women's voices talk stories, a form of gossiping which communicates through anecdote and subverts restrictive female roles. Trisha's talk grounds and contextualizes the reality of urban and global violence. She offers a resistance to patriarchal patter through engaged insights, speculations, and anger. A form of communication, of sharing, of connecting interrupts our complacency. In Rainer's own words:

This film [TMWEW] is about housing shortage, changing family patterns, the poor pitted against the middle class, Hispanics against Jews, artists and politics, female menopause, abortion rights. There's even a dream sequence.³⁷

³⁶ Lippard, 1980: 37.

³⁷ Yvonne Rainer, "More Kicking and Screaming From the Narrative Front/Backwater" Wide Angle 7, nos. 1/2 (1985): 11.

In the lecture scene, Jack as "postmodern subject"³⁸ simultaneously speaks of "everything and nothing" through "theoretical drag, masquerading as feminist"³⁹ but embodying all the power nuances of patriarchy. His lecture runs the full gamut of "barren politics". While speaking through the mouths of 'the others' (Foucault, Lacan and Co.), his words stultify rather than illuminate 'the class' or us, the viewers. This is not communicating, sharing or connecting. Rainer intercepts this burlesque by fast-forwarding the audio (the lecture), by having the camera reveal the physical opulence of the 'class room', ex-artist loft, now condo. The muffled voice of the cameraman provides tracking directions. Are we in search of something?

The intertextual 'bouncing' not only relieves us, the viewers and listeners, from the unmitigated boredom of the lecture, but engages us in a feminist reading. Rainer has brought her engagement to us. What are we looking at? What are we to believe? Again, questions are asked. Communication is a living phenomenon making connections.

³⁸ Weedon, 1987: 125, 106. [The 'postmodern subject' who is schizophrenic, anti-humanist, and trying to survive the shift of signification which involves the notions of "decentering the autonomous subject", 125 and "of denying the principles of difference and deferral." 106]

³⁹ Mellencamp, 1980: 91.

Mellencamp perceives "parody [as] a major point of the film."⁴⁰ Rainer deliberately throws us, the viewers, into situations where we can see the paradoxical irony of life's contradictions. For us, as feminist viewers, it is necessary to see how Rainer has turned the theoretical rhetoric around into a direct political critique. The redundancy of the lecture was catapulted into an engaged critique. Rainer is languaging communication. This lecture scene as the site of a postmodernism has brought us into a perpetual present where situations / events collide in a schizophrenic frenzy in order to cope. Schizophrenic survival marks the postmodern 'condition' in its attempt to language, to communicate, to connect with all peoples. What do we do when we hear voices shouting out the fear, the anger of urban and global displacements?! How do we cope with reality's contradictions?

In the following, last section of this chapter, I am addressing the realities of lost, negated identities. The erasure of identity, of language, perpetuates cultural and economic domination. Displacement through identity and language loss fractures the possibility of discourse. I am relating Rainer's filmic engagement with actual life situations, the kinds of situations she questions within her films.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 95.

LANGUAGE STRUGGLE (RECUPERATING MEANINGS)

Omission is one of the components in oppression which causes us to struggle, to challenge the language / the system of the status quo. "Seldom are women allowed to speak for themselves and define the issues from their own perspective."⁴¹ This statement is in reference to immigrant women who are usually being defined "by their more privileged counterparts, whose jobs and careers enable them to fit writing into their schedules."⁴² I have begun this section with the problems of articulation as discussed by the immigrant women's editorial collective. Dislocation and poverty bind women. Their voices are often omitted in 'mainstream' feminist analysis. This negative practice illustrates the oppression women exert upon each other.

In the article by Himani Bannerji, involved in making political and social films about women, she speaks of racism as a form of omission presented and perpetuated by the "imperialist capitalist society."⁴³ Racist oppression, being part of the "norms and forms of daily currency", tends to

⁴¹ The Immigrant Women's Editorial Collective, "Immigrant Women in Canada: the Politics of Sex, Race, and Class", RFR/DRF 16, no. 1 (1987): 3.

⁴² Ibid., 3.

⁴³ Himani Bannerji, "Introducing Racism: Notes Towards an Anti-Racist Feminism", RFR/DRF 16, no. 1 (1987): 10-12.

discount the multiple experiences of many women. A conscious effort to rethink ourselves at the level of theory, of practice, can develop through a sense of diverse communities (communities of cooperative organization recognizing the empowerment / the creativity of a non-homogeneous sensibility). The fragmentation of the lives of immigrant women through socio/political norms (one site of oppression) weakens their resistance, their struggle against sexist, racist and class oppression. The notion of 'universal entities' fractures discourse. What is feminist discourse but a recognition of the many forms of discourse present in society? To take issue with hegemonic utterances becomes an engagement for feminists who perceive patriarchal ideology as a blatant example of exclusion of women's voices, of all women's voices.

As at the level of method, one moment stands in for others in a controlling, hegemonic relation to the rest, so that in the actual writing, one group of women's interests (however valid for them) is smuggled in, masquerading as the interests of all women. And all this fits right in with the racist common sense of a people, whose self-definition and social organization not to mention economic organization, has been fundamentally based on racism and imperialism.⁴⁴

The point I'm making here is that many feminists in the dominant culture tend to articulate 'the needs' of women who are oppressed by racism and/or class, thinking that all women

⁴⁴ Ibid.

have the same needs under oppression. This is not the case. We cannot impose, in missionary zeal, our reality upon another reality. To language struggle literally means to reveal the struggles through hearing all the voices (languageing our propaganda) in the many different realities. Recognizing difference as a quality can help break the bonds of racism, classism, sexism...

In an article, Marlene Nourbese Philip speaks of the lost lives of those people who were 'shipped' here as slaves. The erasure of memories, of identities, of language was imposed upon the African slave, so any resistance or rebellious tendencies would perish (or so the Western slave owner had hoped):

The policy of all slave-holding nations was to wipe clean the mind of the African slave; how else to prevent rebellion, ensure passive workers and guarantee good Christians? The effect of this policy was the separation, where-ever possible, of slaves from the same linguistic groups. Slave owners prohibited and punished the expression of African culture: music, religion, or dress; denied any validity to their world view.⁴⁵

Trading in people meant economic gain for the New World, but meant suicide to a peoples. The concept of controlling a human being became a position of fact in this society; at present, that control to oppress, to subjugate, continues to

⁴⁵ Marlene Nourbese Philip, "I'se a Long-Memored Woman", FUSE X, no. 3 (1986): 48.

deny our many identities. Chomsky well articulates the forms established to maintain conformity:

Those who rule by violence tend to be "behaviorist" in their outlook. What people may think is not terribly important; what counts is what they do. They must obey, and this obedience is secured by force. ⁴⁶

This form of control can be seen in Central American massacres (promoted by U.S. intervention) of the indigenous peoples, the people who are of their land. (See the 'wall-art' in TMWEW)

Take a look at our 'democratic processes':

Democratic systems are quite different. It is necessary to control not only what people do, but also what they think. Since the state lacks the capacity to ensure obedience by force, thought can lead to action and therefore the threat to order must be excised at the source. ⁴⁷

Yes, these are the realities, and the struggle to reverse these negating strategies lies within our collective political practices. Yvonne Rainer utilizes film as a collective political practice. The making of film requires many people working together. Rainer encourages discussion and full engagement of her film crew. The disjunctive practice discussed in this chapter extends the counter-discourse, the polemic of the last chapter.

⁴⁶ Chomsky, 1987: 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CHEWING THROUGH THE LAYERS (the density of a socio-politics)

"Chewing through the layers" directly refers to the densities and complexities of our socio-politics, the public sphere wherein women strive to be heard. Before we externalize our concerns, the substance of these concerns is discussed through a shared discourse among women (an optimum situation). As in the sparring sessions, practising practice produces strong women. In this case, chewing through the double-talk, the negative propaganda, requires sharp teeth. The colonizers call the oppressed aggressive when we say 'no' to **their** aggressions; when we want to be heard; when we resist their controlling tactics. To refute the imposed gender dichotomies which distort the many images of women, women communicate through languaging, thus giving credence to the many layers of women's realities.

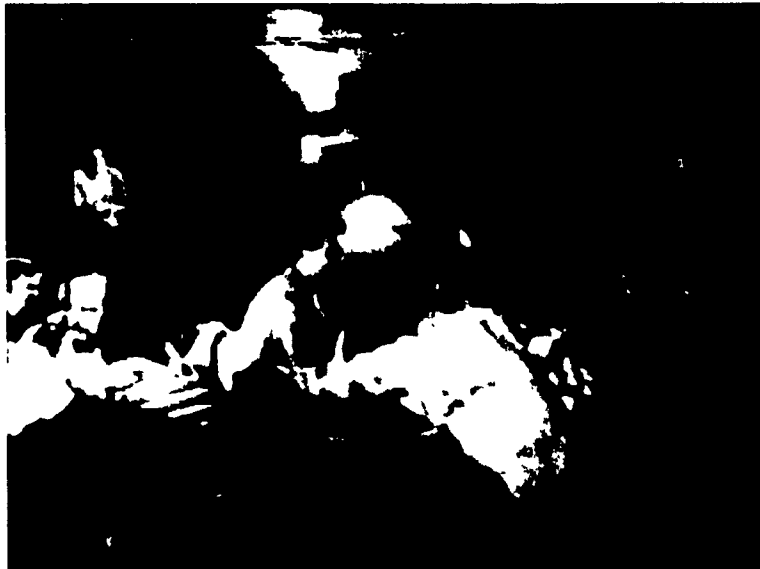
The notion of gender as a "socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles and character traits"¹ has, as its corollary a socially determined violence. This violence is based on binary patterns supported by a culture dominated by capricious codified terms, terms governed by patriarchal whimsy, lacking any sense of reciprocity. The regulation of sexuality can be seen as a form of social determinism, of behavioural modification.

¹ Kramarae and Treichler, 1985: 173.

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What we see here is one of the most visual/verbal densities of the film: Jack in the upper left, a film clip, the audience and voice-over.



In this chapter, I propose to foreground the layers of socially accepted behaviour based on sexist assumptions (and presumptions), that label and distort communication and representation. The power images of social distortion and mis[s]-representation, through normative codes, exhibit women as patriarchal puppets. The process of interactive communication can alleviate this distortion. The conceptual polarity of feminine / masculine exacerbates the situation and makes it into a problematic. The feminine / masculine vision determined by a polarity perceives difference as negative which in turn suppresses other meaningful differences. And in these distortions sexist attitudes flourish.

The ways in which women's languaging responds to the distortions of sexist manipulation will be discussed within three sub-headings:

- languaging terminology;
- languaging socialized behaviour;
- languaging our collective images.

LANGUAGING TERMINOLOGY

For hundreds and hundreds of years they [women] had to please men with their looks, their charm, etc. Inevitably it must have left somewhere in their minds a deep intelligence about sex, because once that was all they had. Women have to be treated with great tenderness and consideration - because they are women. - God, how little any man can know

about women.²

This quote, made consecutively by both Dellers, presents a deliberate categorization, a labelling predicated on behavioural conformity. The inference of a biological determinism indicates a socialized acceptance of normative genderization, e.g. socially determined sexuality through patriarchal patter. Women are seen as weak, sex-marked objects to be 'handled' with considerable care. The realities of women are not recognized. Woman appears as a generic burden imposed upon society which attempts to divert / fragment our attention. Rainer places this perception squarely before the spectator through the Hollywood film clips and through Deller's mouth.

Attendant on the practice of dividing and conquering is the capitalistic focus on consumerism. Sexism marks the advertising that Western consumerism directs towards women. The display of women as sex-marked objects constitutes the illusions of the sales trade. Women who are in a lower economic class, the working poor, are often the targeted group. If a woman is not glamorous enough, as determined by the advertising industry, then she is lacking, worthless, invisible. This in turn causes frustrations and insecurity

² Rainer, 1989: 192. Rainer has taken these words from the letters of Raymond Chandler, a legendary writer of the detective genre.

for women. The appearance of glorifying the female sex translates into an institutional practice which controls women through consumer seduction. Our society refuses to recognise that sexism is socially constituted through a patriarchal system of trade-offs. By constantly referring to the generic woman, gender identities are mis[s]-construed as binary oppositions which result in sexist, classist attitudes. With this brief analysis, which is not meant to be comprehensive, the female subject who is socially produced reflects the dominant ideology's idea of what constitutes woman and herein lies the generic woman.

Informed by other related developments in psychoanalysis and linguistics, 'Ideology' implies not only the production of ideas and beliefs, but the very making of identities, of subjects for those meanings. That is to say, it is by means of social processes that we are produced as subjects, gendered and classed.³

The generic woman continues to be that object that men perceive to be the 'other'. Woman has become a category-in-opposition, which Kristeva refers to as the "unspoken", not represented, "that which is left out of namings and ideologies."⁴ This unspoken socially constructed entity embodies the admiration and abhorrence men 'wish' to see.

³ Griselda Pollock, "Feminism and Modernism", Framing Feminism Rozsika Parker and G. Pollock (London and New York: Pandora Press, 1987), 89.

⁴ de Lauretis, 1984: 95. [reference is being made to a reading of a work by Julia Kristeva]

This embodiment represents man's 'other', as in reflecting what he is not and thus satisfying that need to confirm his own existence. But what is seen in this approach to affirmation of an existence is the dismissal of another existence. Subject identity of woman is denied.

The generic woman reflects the generic man. What is this saying? It speaks of displacement, of safe distance from... It speaks of non-entities. If generic woman reflects generic man, then what remains are cardboard cut-outs of the 'real' thing. Distortions create displacements. Rainer plays with distortion, re-creating the myths in order to expose them and disclose their tenacious forms. The 'whore / virgin' fiction is another distorted dichotomy expressed in the film.⁵ The attending social violence of the polarities, the binary patterns, can be seen through the filmic layers Rainer has constructed. Rainer exposes the blatant impossibility of binary systems.

LANGUAGING SOCIALIZED BEHAVIOUR

The sequence in TMWEW which I will be using reveals the rage and terror normally suppressed, but lurking within our social

⁵ Rainer, 1989: 193. Reference is to the film Mother and the Whore, where the generic woman is either virgin-mother or lover-whore.

fabric. Rainer works the sub-conscious conflicts hidden inside our screaming selves. The conscious removal of the layers can find its metaphor in the peeling of an onion: our eyes are tearing only to find a hollow centre.

Each Deller (the schizoid man) in discussing his interactions (if they can be termed as such) with women in the therapy sessions, seems to perceive women as emotional bundles to be 'handled' with care. Rainer addresses this 'treatment' of women when she uses Raymond Chandler's dated remarks and sees new forms in "the feminist man" taking place:

[T]here is this obsession and anxiety about knowing and controlling women. He [Jæ~k] cannot know women well enough. He constantly obsesses over this knowledge by which he assuages his anxiety. This, I think, is something that has taken a new form. The feminist man. Feminism as it is used by certain kinds of womanizing men.⁶

The first film clip (as shown behind Deller when he's in the therapist's chair) is of the slow motion body movements of the dancer, Trisha:

In the midst of these images [the films noirs of Jack's fantasy theatre], light, aerial, incongruous, the figure of Trisha Brown...At the same time, Jack, without seeing her, talks about his marriage with her and his compulsive philandering.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁷ Ibid., 28.

Her body becomes her language, a fusing of moment with body identity. Rainer sees this form of languaging as a sharing of an emotive power. In other words, the body as conduit for languaging directly empowers the shaping of the text. (In contrast Jack appears totally out of touch with his talk. His babbling becomes inconsequential.) Trisha takes the 'emotional risk' Deller is attempting to articulate, by occupying her space in her text. For example, when I speak out my thoughts on housing, poverty and ageism as they concern women, I become a vulnerable target in a society where lip-service is the only service offered. But I take that 'emotional risk', I imperil myself by articulating my space, my needs. And this is my affirmation of who and what I am. For Rainer this film clip is an affirmation of women in control of our text(s). The recognition of negative gender politics (as described by Deller) becomes blatant mis[s]-representation.

The second film clip has the woman talking herself down before a man⁸, as some weak thing who couldn't perform a task to his expectations. Here the female character plays the socialized role of woman as 'other than'; woman as deceptive, incapable, deviant. In this clip the emphasis is on the perpetual negative representation of women, as Teresa de Lauretis so well describes:

⁸ Ibid., 192.

For if the work of the mythical structuration is to establish distinctions, the primary distinction on which all others depend is not, say, life and death, but rather sexual difference. In other words, the picture of the world produced in mythical thought since the very beginning of culture would rest, first and foremost, on what we call biology. ...[T]he mythical subject is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life and death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.⁹

The representation of difference as identified by de Lauretis is expressed throughout many of the film clips Rainer uses. The socio-politics can be seen when Rainer makes the connection between "sexual impasse" of representation and man's hunger for competitive control in global politics, as discussed by Berenice Reynaud:

Men spend their lives alternating between punishing and seeking mothering from women and carrying their rage and terror out of the family realm and into the public." (Dorothy Dinnerstein) This analysis enables Rainer not only to develop a vision of "sexual impasse", but also to connect it to political concerns: men's hunger for control is exerted not only over women, but also in the realm of economic competition, in real estate speculation, in war, against peasants in Latin America...¹⁰

⁹ de Lauretis, 1984: 119.

¹⁰ Rainer, 1989: 27.

An example of Rainer's dense layering techniques in TMWEW, making visible the constructed subject, occurs in the scene where a clip from Night of the Living Dead plays behind Deller who sits speaking to his analyst. Soon, we see his talking image remaining without sound. What we then hear is Trisha's voice-over speaking of family life. This scene portrays domestic violence in the film clip, where daughter stabs mother, and general slaughter ensues. The violence is echoed in the screen audience as they slowly become restless, later to be violently aggressive with each other.

What we have in this scene is one of the most visual / verbal densities of the film: Jack discussing the fragile generic woman; the domestic violence of the film clip; the echoed violence in the audience; Trisha's voice-over ruminating about what actually constitutes 'the family'.

This four-layered scene could find its theoretical response in: 1) the fiction of/denial of the many identities of women; 2) the fascination of the enigmatic family (the love/hate reality); 3) the filmic correspondence with a social reality; 4) society as that construct based on the family unit, the tease of domestic harmony. Rainer's technique of dense layering reflects how we are constructed. Here Rainer is disrupting the assumed societal guarantees of an imposed reality which only exists positively in the imaginary. The

imagination holds a subjective construction of reality. When we enter the dailiness of living, there are times when the imagination takes over to re-work the imposed reality (what is fraud? what is phoney? what is real?).

When discussing the questions of reality, Jean Baudrillard, a French social critic and writer, makes an interesting, if depressing, reference. In his analysis, the public absorbs the images and the texts media present to the public as the 'real'. In other words, the media, e.g. T.V., radio, film, newspaper and magazine reports, has become a speculum of our existence. Rather than giving credence to what we, as the general public, experience through our own thinking and knowing capacities as reality, people accept media **illusions** (a patriarchal ploy?) as the undisputed reality. 'T.V. is more real than reality.' Rainer cinematically examines this concept, while Morris discusses it in relation to "Room 101".

A response that Meaghan Morris made in her essay "Room 101"¹¹ to Baudrillard's **doubling realities** (a hyper-realism brought about by media illusion / manipulation which attempts to replace our 'realities' with their imposed realities) speaks

¹¹ This room number makes reference to George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four. It is a room that holds 'the worst thing in the world' depending on an individual's own particular sense of horror, e.g. rats, dripping water, being buried alive. The horror can also be something quite trivial.

about the exchange of meanings, of oppositions which "short-circuit" themselves in the attempt to create a meaning without recognition of the "exchange between meaning and the real."¹² Nostalgia replaces the real. The attributes of a reality (for it to exist) must be grounded within an historical continuum of social references based on subjective identities. In other words, a social reality is only made possible by its inter-realizing subjects, who as agents of discourse refute the hierarchial paradigms placed upon them, e.g. social/behaviourial determinism. The seduction of the imposed "believabilities" rests in the forms of nostalgia, the 'wished-for' reality. When this nostalgic reality does not occur, we witness violence.

Fabrications for survival become fables for reality. Where do we enter 'the fable' to upset the patriarchal apple cart? The story as echo, retells oppressions through images which 'capture life' as our own distorted reality. What we see is not necessarily what we would interpret to be real. Women are fooled / seduced into accepting a version of reality not of our making. "Our reality' becomes a programmatic reality of which we are **not** the subjects. Do we "inhabit an obscene world of total transparency?"¹³

¹² Morris, 1988: 197.

¹³ Ibid., 192.

The real is growing and enlarging, so the real no longer exists. The social is both residual, and swelling. The escalation of information itself generates the implosion of meaning in the media. Reality can only exist, be positively itself, be 'real', if it is different from and opposed to the imaginary.¹⁴

Although Morris utilizes Baudrillard in the dreaded "Room 101", in reference to the "jail house of language" (that being our ultimate reality), she places her analysis into a bleakness where we know our despair in that knowing. The analysis is mirrored in this scene. Rainer, however, by positioning herself inside the abstract constructions of social horror, allows the spectators an engagement as subjects / as our own agents to this discourse. This happens in the scene when the audience refuses to stay complacent. Rainer by embodying her theory (taking her feminist film theory into art practice) empowers the viewing subjects. Rainer opens up the illusion. When the scene moves onto the telephone conversation between Trisha, 'her brother', and her sister-in-law, there is talk suggestive of violence, of violence between women:

Trisha: Bye, Barbara. That's what I was trying to tell you about those books. The trauma for the enfant in having to give up that first sense of harmony with the mother is much greater for the male than for the female and results in both the mother-whore syndrome and the H-bomb. Men spend their lives alternating between punishing and

¹⁴ Ibid., 194-196.

seeking mothering from women and carry their rage and terror out of the family realm and into the public.

Barbara: Why the name "Jack"?

Trisha: Barbara, you're still there. Well, it's about good old Anglo-Saxon rhymes: The House that Jack built; Jack Sprat could eat no fat; Little Jack Horner sat in a corner; Jack and Jill went up the hill; Jack be nimble, Jack be quick...

Donald: Get in and out with your big fat prick!

Trisha: Hey, did you make that up?

Barbara: Of course he did.

Trisha: Maybe I'll call him Jack Teller.

Barbara: Just don't send him any more books.

Trisha: Barbara, I'm going to hop on the next 747 and come out there and kill you with an ax.¹⁵

We have also heard Morris's response to a public consciousness for change. These scenes have mirrored potential situations, but we have not yet been captured by the mirror. The 'mirror' metaphor refers to the splintering of our images. This splintering within the patriarchal mirror tends to fragment, to falsify women's many images. It is time to crackle the patriarchal mirror, as Rainer has been doing, and reclaim what we see as our own collective images.

¹⁵ Ibid., 194.

LANGUAGEING OUR COLLECTIVE IMAGES

In this section I want to examine the possible correlation between women as objects of subjugation (with an emphasis on Latin women who are doubly colonized) and 'third world countries' as sites of oppression. Through this examination will be seen the subject matter of Rainer's concerns.

This analogy becomes politically salient when we feminists from the west see our own oppression as part of a larger global oppression and we, belonging to the affluent oppressor countries, look to third world people for guidance in our own liberation. It is also possible that the analogies may help third world men to see that some of the attitudes they hold against their own women are very similar to the ones the colonizers or imperialists hold against third world people.¹⁶

In this article, Brock-Utne emphasizes the oppression of Latin women perpetuated by a unity of men termed patriarchy. This patriarchal attitude can be seen reflected in the attitudes of industrial countries towards the so-called "underdeveloped" countries.

To become "developed" very often means to become like one's masters because powerful countries in the world have the power to define what it means to be "developed".¹⁷

¹⁶ Birgit Brock-Utne, "Women and 3rd World Countries - What Do We Have in Common?", Women's Studies International Forum 12, no. 5 (1989): 495. The analogy Brock-Utne refers to is that "relationship of women vis-a-vis men with the relationship of developing countries vis-a-vis the 'advanced' industrial world of the 80's."

¹⁷ Ibid., 498.

Tarzie Vittachi furthers Brock-Utne's analysis, by referring to how language has been abused in the oppression of many peoples:

The inheritors of the imperial mantle - United Nations bureaucrats and their camp followers in the 'development community', have learned to avoid the mistake of democratizing their language. The very label they have given themselves - 'development community' - sets them apart from those whose life conditions they purport to 'develop'.¹⁸

It is in this sense that the colonizer denies the self-respect and destroys the identity of the colonized. The imposed designation of inferiority devalues any prior system of self-esteem the abused may have had. What is praised (including woman as vessel of femininity) are subservient features; e.g., false humbleness, lavish servitude, passiveness and any other character trait that negates human identity. Marilyn French is quoted by Brock-Utne as saying that feminism is a revolutionary moral movement which examines the split between rhetoric and action:

She finds that feminism in seeking to have women realize themselves as independent, autonomous human beings, necessarily has to reject social systems having ideologies that exploit and dominate.¹⁹
(my emphasis)

¹⁸ Tarzi Vittachi, "Leaving the Peasants in the Dark", The NI, Issue on Language: SAY;WRITE;SCREAM, no.19 (Jan. 1989): 11.

¹⁹ Brock-Utne, 1989: 497.

Within these social systems which advocate individual advancement, the co-operative, collective endeavour is ignored. The unilinear mechanical approach to developmental growth only benefits the system in power. And in that system of power, 'white' women who are in positions of privilege benefit a great deal in relation to 'third world' women.

There are questions I need to ask:

- who is benefiting from this work? and why is this happening?
- who defines the procedures of operation?
- who loses (most) when the native system is replaced?
- what actually happens to the existing quality of life?

(we know the answers to these questions)

There are very few positions which do not exclude; which do not create concepts of "outsider". Simply because there exist developmental programs, the notion of 'sub-culture' is reinforced.

[T]he 'alien culture' theory used in the investigations into national and ethnic difference, particularly with regard to the peoples of the 'Third World'; the category of 'sub-culture' used as a term for the excluded and oppressed groups within the spatial and temporal context of a ruling culture; and the concept of the 'outsider'.²⁰

²⁰ Gisela Ecker, ed. Feminist Aesthetics, trans. Harriet Anderson (London: The Women's Press, 1985) "Double Focus", Sigrid Weigel: 62.

When Sigrid Weigel speaks of a 'sub-culture' in relation to women, she in fact sees that mirror distortion that results from a shadowy existence. The many different ways women are colonized often force women to live outside ourselves (remembering an alternative existence) to better see and survive the exploitation. The notions of subjugation, of relative dominance (women as helpers to 'their' men), of mutual dominance (women collaborate in their oppression!?) are the repeated sexist and classist assumptions of a reality not defined by those who make it. The mechanisms utilized in the oppressions are the same that maintain a structure of mixed terms, of double talk (a created pathology, based on humanist assumptions of debilitating contradictions). Capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy unite to form the linking chains of hierarchical supremacy exploiting the workers (both women and men) in countries wherein raw materials are produced for a Western consumer society. 'Cheap labour', which often means women workers, is the name of this exploitation in which the enforcement of inferiority and silence destroy (attempt to destroy) creative initiatives for change.

In the catalogue for an exhibition of thirteen Chilean artists, "Women, Art and the Periphery"²¹, the appearance of

²¹ Diamela Eltit, Nelly Richard, Lotty Rosenfield, guest curators. Women, Art and the Periphery: Mujer, Arte y Periferia, An Exhibition of Thirteen Chilean Women: Chilean Artists' Contemporary, Multimedia Works, catalogue essay (November 11 - December 19, 1987) at Women in Focus,

a discrepancy between an official discourse of an official history and what the collective history of a peoples confirm creates a paradoxical space. It is within this space that the women have worked to break down institutional conventions through transformation and reappropriation - this is a story of chewing through the layers. Nelly Richard speaks of the situation (Latin America) as that site of postmodernism where the periphery becomes the 'privileged site' of discourse. The practice of collective subjugation through labour practices (the colonizer usurping the labour of developing countries) exacerbates a fragmentation. This fragmentation finds its reality in the 'worker woman' (the sub-labourer woman).

So we return to the discourse in which the paternalistic attitudes found in colonization fragment the collective body into diverse forms of marginalization. Diamela Eltit, guest curator of the show, speaks of the Latin American Woman and her artistic production:

This negation (women as non-subjects) is found throughout Chilean and Latin American history in general. Woman, valued only as reproducer and socially circulated for this sole function, has been deprived of generating her own meanings, and has had to reduce herself to social representations coming from male imagery which place her in a binary reality: mother-virgin, the perfection of her body; or witch-prostitute, the greatest perversion of her body/function.²²

Vancouver, B.C.

²² Ibid., 3.

Women must "reformulate their own spatial tradition" (from men and institutional systems) while addressing this denigration.

This framework is articulated in the conjunction between the "female" and the "latin american", taken not as essential categories, but rather as discursive strategies. The strategies consist of positional interplays within the subject of discourse that is continually refining tactical models for reverting or subverting (plotting between the lines) the enunciations of dominant culture.²³

In this statement Nelly Richard sees the work of these women as "transformational potentialities" which become acts of disobedience against routine submission and the rhetoric of linearity. Working on the periphery, these women articulate resonances that challenge the patriarchal jargon. In the position of omission, the works (performance work on the street, video art, writings) frame this negativity to posit, to expose this fracture, this schism. When this occurs, a connection has been made providing, not a linear reading, but a reading which returns in affirmation, remembering times when there was no domination, conquest, or disappearance.

A story whose wounds and sutures narrate the Chilean trauma of the disappearances. The story of a "missing body" which cannot even "document its own death". Its disappearance then, entails a double death: that of the living body, and that of the corpse.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 7.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

Marjorie Agosin ²⁵ studies the metaphoric and symbolic content of women's protests against violence. The collective nature of protest by the Mothers of the disappeared, against the disappearances, becomes a non-violent action of profound significance.

The white kerchiefs worn by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo that came to be recognized by the entire world serve as an example of the metaphors of female political symbology. The white kerchief is a symbol that forms part of the collective memory of the female in many societies. The kerchief is knotted, implying the lack of freedom. The fact that the hair remains covered is a symbol of repression within the ideology of women. Within rhetoric of dress, the kerchief represents the female role. Nevertheless, the kerchief worn by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo has been changed, revised, and elaborated upon under a new canon: the kerchief is embroidered with the name of the disappeared child. ²⁶

The silent accusations of these women towards the dominant ideology speak more strongly than any aggressive verbiage. They have taken the imposed silence 'conferred' upon women for centuries, to emphasize the act of memory, of remembering. The reflection of this public suffering in the women's use of images, of practice, provides an essential act of protest. In that the pain has become public, the strategy of this political task makes visible the common, collective power of

²⁵ Marjorie Agosin, "Metaphors of Female Political Ideology: The Cases of Chile and Argentina", Women's Studies International Forum 10, no. 6 (1987).

²⁶ Ibid., 572.

women refusing to be made invisible (or to let the losses be forgotten). This emphasis on living life defies the oppression of death through hunger and torture. It also brings forward the need for changes as demonstrated through these rituals of openness, of confronting the situation at hand. Here we have another instance of engagement by women in a political reality. The collective imagery of the women says 'no' to any form of violence. This political imagination is a distinctive mark of women's languaging:

The occupation of various public spaces, as well as the covering of walls with faces of the victims of the dictatorship, are parts of the metaphorization and daily activity of these women in cities oppressed by dictatorship, hate, and continual hunger. The women wear their hair out, loose, and they wear light colored clothing. Their step defies fear, and their hands are always open to reflect another of their slogans "We Have Clean Hands". Their hands have never burned or tortured anyone. This metaphorical ritual of openness contrasts with the police in Chile, who wander through the streets after sunset with their faces painted black and their uniforms full of weapons.²⁷

The accounts of these political actions taken by women language a protest, a resistance to socialized behaviour, to the sexist / classist assumptions (and presumptions), to the attendant violence these attitudes advocate. Are these demonstrative forms of 'chewing through the layers' of a social-politics? Yes, I see these collective actions as

²⁷ Ibid., 574, 575.

affirmations of lived realities. And it is within these images of our many realities that Rainer narrates her visions.

CHAPTER 6

SEDUCTION VIA THE 'ART OF SHADOW BOXING' (subject-positions in flux/in tango)

description of 'corridor' scene in TMWEW:

[Corridor. Jackie and Jack Deller # 1 are doing a "minimalist song and dance" of seduction, ambivalence, attraction and withdrawal - via exchanges of gaze, gesture, and moves, all of which run parallel with their recited texts, neither "discourse" dominating the other, neither the verbal or visceral.¹]

Shadow-boxing is usually defined as a training exercise for the 'real thing'. The activity of a single person engaged with her shadow \ her-self is preparation for her engaged position in the public domain. This exercising has a correspondence with the sparring sessions mentioned earlier and is an empowering activity. When I speak of seduction, I refer to that wonderful realization that 'I am agent of my own action'. I have tempted myself out of the shadows. The seduction is a positive reflection of one's self knowing.

Rainer, in her treatment of the subject in TMWEW, encourages many possible positions to develop. The dynamics between her characters as they act out the contradictions inherent in their ever shifting positions speak to Rainer's insight into patriarchal fallacies. If we examine the subject positions within TMWEW, the contradictions within an ambiguity, Rainer's

¹ Rainer, 1989: 208.

political strategy becomes clearer.

Women's subject positions continually re-contextualize through our daily encounters. As my sites of reference change, so do my relationships to the phenomena around me change. Sometimes, I find this shifting from one subject position to another confusing and contradictory. Is this an act of survival, trying to skirt the phenomenon of schizophrenia? Are we deluding ourselves by continually doing a tango, a shifting of subject positions, to fit the present needs? Can women, as practising feminists, survive and become strong within our contradictions? De Lauretis argues that to occupy a feminist position incurs contradictions. Contradictions within women's subject positions exposes the many positions through which we maneuver. It is within these spaces of contradiction that critical reflection becomes possible. De Lauretis notes that

to inhabit both kinds of spaces at once is to live the contradiction which, I have suggested, is the condition of feminism here and now: the tension of a two fold pull in contrary directions - the critical negativity of its theory, and the affirmative positivity of its politics - is both the historical condition of existence of feminism and its theoretical condition of possibility. The subject of feminism is en-gendered there. That is to say, elsewhere.²

² de Lauretis, 1987: 26.

It is a position wherein theory and politics play out their binary frustrations. It is within the feminist position when women most often find themselves in contradiction. And as this paper is premised on a feminist perspective, the possibility of not being in contradiction is nil. Contradiction as an underlying principle is meant to be empowering, not debilitating or negative. When we expand the realization of our constructed subject positions, the contradictions become facets of illumination. Contradiction is attendant to all positions under discussion in my thesis.

If women re-construct and determine our own subject positions (and not in the guise of tolerance or being allowed to by 'others') then we are agents of our own actions and this is authentic. A positional inconsistency (false-consciousness) comes when a woman seduces herself into believing that her position is the only authentic position among many, thus dismissing the many positions of women who are in the process of regaining their own identities. The voices of women are many and our positions vary considerably.

In this chapter, I am naming five subject positions I see demonstrated in the 'corridor scene' within the film, TMWEW. Although mentioned indirectly, throughout the preceding chapters, the issue of women's positions as subjects has not been fully addressed.

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN



In the corridor scene a changing contextuality is revealed through the shifting subject positions of Jackie and Jack.



In the corridor scene a changing contextuality (interrelational conditions are always in flux) is revealed through the shifting subject positions of Jackie and Jack as they "do a minimalist song and dance". Here, the spectator witnesses the 'tango' danced by the woman protagonist as she goes through her paces as subject.

This 'tango' has taken on a deeper, more intense meaning in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa whom I have introduced in chapter one. The last section of this chapter considers "the crossroads" as a subject position, Anzaldúa's proposal. She sees this position as "...a symbol of synthesis and survival...a strategy of resistance and reclamation of herself as a woman."³ This position negotiates the contradictions women encounter in our lived experiences.

The following subject positions require consideration in my proposal for languaging; the sites from which we language our angst, our needs, ourselves:

- languaging privilege as a subject position;
 - languaging 'performer, patient/prisoner' as subject positions;
 - languaging an androgynous subject position;
 - languaging the dreamer as subject position
- deconstructing and reclaiming women's imagination;

³ Aptheker, 1989: 250.

- languaging "the crossroads" as subject position.

LANGUAGING PRIVILEGE

After Jack speaks of power, the notion that power cannot be possessed (a concept previously discussed in reference to Foucault), but is 'in play' between factions (in that conjunctive space), the documentary film clips of the Board of Estimate Hearing are interjected. We see people who have come together to argue their positions within a community where housing is scarce. Rainer has provided the film spectator with first hand examples of power in play. Within this filmic space, within the arena of power-plays, Rainer confronts the socially imposed duality established between artist and immigrant, a false dichotomy based on mis[s]-conceptions. This confrontation provides an opportunity for Rainer to language the questionable position of privilege, its provisional character; e.g. positions of privilege are always conditional. Through the clips, we see the socio-political decisions of a democratic hearing being played out. Languaging exposes these manoeuvres within this position. Rainer by appropriating Foucault, refutes these power-over manipulations through Jack's voice:

Clearly there is within the social field "a class" which, looked at strategically, takes up a privileged place and can assert itself, score up victories and can achieve an effect of superior power for its own benefit. But power is never

monolithic. It is never completely controlled from one point of view.⁴

The spectator then hears and sees Jackie enter the dialogue (via the words of Meaghan Morris) to question the "privileged areas" wherein theory and action collide within a marxist/feminist debate. "Subjective contradictions" are said to be neither visible nor allowed.

Feminist theorists have taken up the same questions which Rainer addresses. Individual subjectivity at times can repress an exchange of thoughts. To understand the many forms of feminist discourse encourages connectedness rather than separateness. This situation occurs within the feminist debate, as previously mentioned by de Lauretis.

Morris argues that often contradictions between women make divisions between women, thus positing the term 'other'. It is 'other women' who are the enemy and not men (looking at the history of white middle-class privilege). Perhaps, it is here that we see the point of breakdown, where feminist politics fall apart. Barbara Christian articulates the complexity of formulating feminist theory:

⁴ Rainer, 1989: 209.

Nor seldom do feminist theorists take into account the complexity of life - that women are of many races and ethnic backgrounds with different classes that have different concerns. Seldom do they note these distinctions, because if they did they could not articulate a theory. Often as a way of clearing themselves they do acknowledge that women of color, for example, do exist, then go on to do what they were going to do anyway, which is to invent a theory that has little relevance for us. [black women]⁵

One way distortions are created is by stereotyping, and in most instances fabricating, problems of difference. When feminist theorists form questions which reflect a specific problematical approach, chasms can be created. This approach perpetuates a negative power structure already in place, a continuation of a colonialized sensibility. The structure, acclaimed and substantiated yet further, preserves the notion of 'other', of 'outsider'/'insider' binaries. The alleged 'subject position' expresses the 'power-over' syndrome, rather than the empowerment of each subject position. In this way the speaking / acting subject falls into a phallo-centric position, a position of male privilege which invalidates any form of a feminist ethics. The understatement of omission, of denial with its attendant 'allowance and tolerance' buys into a paternalistic domination remote from any languaging by women as subjects. In this capacity, women undermine the very collective contextuality that builds and nurtures women as we

⁵ Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory", Cultural Critique #6 (Spring 1987): 59.

speak our stories, languaging difference as a quality of empowerment (remembering Audre Lorde's response towards difference).

Elizabeth Spelman in her chapter "Now You See Her, Now You Don't" speaks of this attitude which silences by the statement of privilege, by marginalizing women's many voices:

However, as we have begun to see, tolerance can itself be an expression of privilege, and for that reason it is not necessarily something that undermines privilege. The locution "Yes, I'll tolerate you" leaves me the same. If one is in a position to allow someone else to do something, one is also in a position to keep that person from doing it. To tolerate your speaking is to refrain from exercising the power I have to keep you from speaking. In tolerating you I have done nothing to change the fact that I have more power and authority than you do. And of course I don't have to listen to what you have to say.⁶

Traces of privilege become evident through the use of race / class language priorities, that is, 'how we say, what we say (as women)' reflects ingrown sites of authority, control, violence and power. Bettina Aptheker reiterates Spelman's concerns by seeing the phenomenon of tolerance as a conditioner of subjugation, of the internalized, colonialized mind where expression of identity is lost:

The process of colonialization is not only one of limiting access, of subjugation, of political domination, of racial superiority, of a poverty of material resources. It also involves an internal

⁶ Spelman, 1988: 182.

corrosion, a loss of esteem, a loss of confidence in one's knowledge, an inability to give expression to experience.⁷

As women (albeit in varying ways), colonized through socialization, religion, and education, we are oppressed in our perceptions of ourselves as well as vulnerable to socio-political change. In other words, the apparent inescapable burden (doubled, tripled, quadrupled) of being women is compounded by our trying to function in a language system which is both oppressive and deceptive.

Despite our cautiousness, as women, we can't completely eliminate or bring to feasible resolutions, or even clearly understand the positions into which culture / society has placed us. The baggage of years of oppression, of double-talk confuse our minds, our bodies, our emotions. Can we 'unpack' this baggage? Can we, as white feminists, shake off the cloak of privilege? As self-speaking women, how can we possibly assume our subject positions under a mantle of privilege? When we language our various subject positions, we are responding to different sets of criteria and the site of privilege speaks of inconsistency, of false consciousness. To begin talking our positions encourages open-mindedness and alleviates the practices of privilege, of prescriptive attitudes. Rainer, through the practice of filmmaking,

⁷ Aptheker, 1989: 135,136.

articulates her position. We can see her concerns expressed by Trisha, by the women joking in the diner, by Jackie in the corridor scene. Rainer also addresses the question of privilege through the film clips about the housing situation, about U.S. intervention in Central America.

What I would like to discuss now are the subject positions assumed as performer, patient / prisoner. I find these three 'positions' connected and closely aligned to the societal roles which are imposed upon women. These dance steps are designed to entangle many women. What are the similarities between these 'positions' and that of 'privilege'?

LANGUAGING 'PERFORMER, PATIENT/PRISONER'

Women as performers are expected to entertain, to pacify potential agitation within a society, tense with socio-political conflicts. The film clip, Caught, screened during the corridor section of the film, shows a particular aspect of woman as entertainer: e.g. in an evening out, the dutiful woman tries to relax her male partner, so the evening will be a success. In the domestic realm, women perform tasks to ensure domestic bliss; e.g., meals on time, tidy households, laundry done, and no-stress sex. If women reject the positions of smiling performer (albeit often a pretender) or supporter to patriarchal structures (receiving little or no

personal encouragement)⁸, she may find herself a prisoner of popular medicine; medication to take the 'stress away', to 'relieve tensions' - in other words, to keep her under control. This control blocks woman's potential to respond. The woman has been relieved of her duties as performer, pacifier, she who keeps 'things' on an even keel and is now being pacified out of her knowing existence. Women under medication find any form of self-definition a difficult task. The potential for active subject positions has been removed. If I am to say "I am a patient", I must consider what are the implications. Whose patient am I? and for what reasons? and who is listening to hear what I have to say?

Kate Millett's response to her nightmare, when she surrendered her mind to drugs and her body to confinement, becomes an impassioned story of resistance:

Why would one of the thousands and hundreds of thousands who have known the pit and the betrayal - the fear of madness or madness itself - not tell of it? Break the taboo of respectability which has been broken so seldom. Challenge the system that keeps millions in line. Try to explore the region from whose bounds only silent and censured travelers return.⁹

⁸ 'If the man claps, she has entertained well; if the woman claps, he has said something significant.'

⁹ Kate Millett, The Looney-Bin Trip (New York City: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 313.

Aptheker describes the medical colonization of women where women's survival is based on the ritual of self-hatred:

This is colonization. Women hissing at each other; women shredding their bodies, assaulting their systems, shaving, vomiting, starving themselves, even to death. Millions of women in this country are drugged by doctors. They are on tranquilizers, antidepressants, barbiturates, and the like. Maimed by the conditions of their lives, they are "treated", numbed into compliance, while remaining "serviceable" and functional, the miracles of modern medicine.¹⁰

The power-over within the institutions of medicine has transformed women into objects to be diagnosed, manipulated and processed, under the guise that any 'doctoring', any medication is to our benefit. The system of medical practices processes the sick as well as the healthy into a dependency. Controlled through drugs, women, in particular older women living in poverty, are kept under surveillance. Foucault's analysis of a prisoner kept under Bentham's plan of a controlled society, a society under surveillance through Panopticism (the ability to see the prisoner's every move from a central position without being detected) illustrates the systematic central control of a 'body'. A patient, a woman as prisoner of medication, is an object of scrutiny within a phallo-centric society. Mal[e]-practice has become the norm within the system wherein women are vigorously denied their voicing selves, and made to experience inadequacy and self-

¹⁰ Aptheker, 1989: 139.

denial.

Rainer, through the words spoken by Jackie, in TMWEW, speaks of the depths of subjectivity which feminists plumb to find the contradictions, to find a new position of the subject within the labyrinth of language. The humanist position for the female subject conjures up too many patriarchal "ism's" and abstract unification scams. These formulations leave no room for a subject who wants / needs to respond, to resist these tactics of power. When Jackie and Jack are in a tight embrace, Jack as seen in a film clip, is a patient, while Jackie, as feminist, questions the value of theory within political practice.

Theory as watchdog is a poor creature: not because it is nasty or destructive, but because for attacking the analysis of confrontations, it simply has no teeth.¹¹

Here the woman assumes her subject position in response to the errors and dangers implicit within a theoretical discourse that takes into account an androcentric perspective. Jackie is not a performer, a patient or a prisoner. Her subject position as a feminist critic responds to statements which condemn many women to delirious states of confusion, believing the schizoid probability of shifting subject positions.

¹¹ Rainer, 1989: 210.

Rainer has squeezed a man and a woman into a corridor where they encounter language as an experience of 'thrusts and parries', not of communication. Sometimes at odds in the sexual implications exchanged through posturing the intervening space, they pause to stare past each other. That space, however, provides a visual conjunction of possible trailers (blank film at the end of a reel), left unmarked. The corridor, as passageway, becomes the ritualized place of sexual bantering where binaries are in continual flux.

LANGUAGING ANDROGYNY

Are there times when I need to be androgynous - to bridge both genders in order to understand gender implications? When I speak of this subject position, I am not referring to physical hermaphroditism (an individual having both sexual characteristics), but rather the psychological construct this implies: eliminating internalized sexual stereotyping. Can this thinking have any relevance? Some people advocate this state of flux as a way out of binary thinking. However, what actually occurs is a reductionism. There appears to be a 'sucking-in', a black hole situation. The variations of sexuality define our subject positions. This cannot be denied. But then, perhaps, androgyny can assist in reformulating the questions. To abandon societal constructs, I find a healthy, liberating practice. To respond from an androgynous subject-

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

The inclusion of the 'dream' sequence interrupts the language of theory being spoken by Jack and Jackie.



position could facilitate a less determined masculine/feminine dichotomy. However, the question of androgyny I find complex and contradictory.

Within Jackie's polemical subject-position Jackie argues a feminist engagement in political practice while Jack is locked into Foucault's discussion on (static) sites of power, a discourse around normative (male) behaviour. During this particular verbal exchange two incidents take place in the film: (1) we see a young woman enter and leave the bathroom which is off the corridor; (2) Jackie has a quick costume change from lame dress to coveralls to lamé dress. What is the significance? The coveralls suggest 'cross-dressing' while she discusses codes of behaviour, feminine impersonation, and "the wrong style of argument."¹² The young woman, looking their way as she enters the bathroom receives no response from either person. (Jackie is in coveralls.) However, when she leaves the bathroom, Jackie now in her lamé dress, stares defiantly at the young woman, much to her surprise. There is evidence of different responses depending on dress codes. A woman in man's clothing has been neutralized in society's eyes. In a feminine dress code, the woman is feminized. Here in a brief instant, Jackie's subject position changes. How do we perceive this? Perhaps as a parry, illustrating Jack's attempted verbal seduction:

¹² Rainer, 1989: 213.

that words are behavioural, determining actions and thought.

A positive subject position which empowers the participant can be seen in the dreamer who reclaims the imagination. By deconstructing fallacies, women reconstruct contextualized situations and events. A collective effort, functioning on many levels, presents the subject in a fluctuating position.

LANGUAGEING THE DREAMER

When women speak of re-visioning our realities, a tension arises between what the dominant culture (the patriarchy) considers to be 'the real' (see chapter one), and what women experience to be real. The experienced realities of women make up the fabric/the quilt of our lives. Rainer's dream sequence, inserted into the corridor scene, throws the spectator's expectations into a tailspin. The inclusion of the dream sequence at this time in the film I find an interesting ploy. Rainer intentionally interrupts 'rational' language, the language of theory with what is known as 'irrational' play. There are time cross overs when past interrupts the present to become the future. "Hey! What's this? I must be dreaming."¹³

¹³ Ibid., 212.

This phrase, 'I must be dreaming', is applicable to the entanglement of the patriarchal language system wherein women's varied existences "are rarely observed or credited".¹⁴ Rainer has Jackie make a response to Jack's decanting of Foucault's observations on control and legal institutions:

Can a structure of a brain inhibited and weakened by thousands of years of patriarchal oppression be modified by sudden and rapid social change? Shall we invite the men to flaunt and fling and giggle with the girls? Shall we make the priests tremble by showing them our "sexts"? Shall we create a culture of disruption and revelation, savagely ingenuous and unsusceptible to the teasing of pricks?...¹⁵

Yvonne Rainer invents, inverts probable situations. In so doing, she puts into question the patterns of commitment, of communication, of legitimization.

Words are uttered but not possessed by my performers as they operate within the filmic frame but do not propel a filmic plot.¹⁶

In the dream sequence, the acting becomes exaggerated, thus pushing 'logic' into disintegration, into a disjunction of 'realities'. There appears an element of anarchism, as Rainer takes her subjects and fabricates subject positions which

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Rainer, 1989: 214.

¹⁶ Yvonne Rainer as quoted by Teresa de Lauretis in de Lauretis, 1987: 107.

contradict each other. Feminist politics surface as we recognize the absurdity, the humor of her strategy. Codes of power disintegrate into spasms of counteractions. Time overlaps itself. There is no beginning, no end. Each phase in the dream is equivalent to all the others. Spectators watch a sequence knowing that sideways is another possible entrance to a situation. Women's subject positions are not always clearly defined.

When Trinh T. Minh-ha speaks of clarity in writing, she makes reference to clarity as that attribute that reduces language to only a vehicle, not an act in itself:

Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose an order. Let us not forget that writers who advocate the instrumentality of language are often those who cannot or choose not to see the suchness of things - a language as language - and therefore, continue to preach conformity to the norms of well-behaved writing: principles of composition, style, genre, correction, and improvement. To write 'clearly,' one must incessantly prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify; in other words, practice what may be called an 'ablution of language' (Roland Barthes).¹⁷

Languaging our subject positions is an action in itself, without reductionism, speaking our positionality, our sites of reference. And our positions do not claim a vertical,

¹⁷ Trinh, 1989: 16, 17.

hierarchical order. Languaging exposes the unspoken implications, prejudices, manipulations, hidden agendas in language. Women language; men pocess language.

Rainer's strategy in the dream sequence politicizes the redundancy of closure within narrative, within the subject position. Narrative has no pre-ordained structure, no 'correct order', that requires a beginning and an end. Rainer's narrative reclaims a subject position in flux, turning time closures into absurdities. People talk and no one listens. Yet, people talk to hear themselves establish a position which sees through the fallacies of society. Hence, the dreamer deconstructs situations to find a workable position without domination or mystification within the language system. Dreamers language through contradictons, providing open-ended structures engendered for engagement and empowerment.

LANGUAGING "LA ENCRUCIJADA" / "THE CROSSROADS"

The last section of this chapter examines a subject position proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa which acts for her as a strategy for survival, as empowerment for her identity. I see this proposal as an extension to the reclaiming response of the dreamer. In this position Anzaldúa claims her space to form her own "feminist architecture".

...two worlds merging to form a third country - a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and underdetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.¹⁸

The "borderland", about which Gloria Anzaldúa speaks, can be seen as a metaphor for the physical, cultural and religious locations in which she figures, in which she is present. To live her life as an effective, 'whole' woman, Anzaldúa has integrated the differences, the contradictions inherent in these locations into an empowering re-presentation: "La encrucijada" / "the crossroads". Aptheker considers Anzaldúa's approach as "...a strategy of resistance and reclamation".¹⁹ "La encrucijada" becomes a symbol of survival wherein Anzaldúa's subject position occupies that "...space between the borders." Contradictions and ambiguity reject the patriarchal concept of binary oppositions, of dualities perpetually locked in battle. TMWEW continually demonstrates this process as well. "Crossroads" as a position of passage uproots dualistic thinking.

The contradictions within the actual physical space between Mexico and the United States; her cultural worlds of Indian,

¹⁸ Anzaldúa, 1987: 3.

¹⁹ Aptheker, 1989: 250. [the other quotes discussed cover pp 248 - 251 unless otherwise noted]

Mexicano and Anglo; her spiritual world between the serpent, Coatlicue and the Virgin Mary, create connections. Anzaldúa's way of thinking turns a situation of oppression into one of reconciliation. By proposing a "crossroads" position, Anzaldúa has carved out her own strategy for survival. Being at "La encrucijada" is being at the center, yet acknowledging the borderlands as a similar spacial position. "It is where we as women are in fact located because we live in a patriarchal, racially supremacist, class-conscious system." Her identity as Chicana, lesbian poet and feminist resists colonization. In the "crossroads" we, as women, negotiate contradictory cultures and social systems "...to shift contexts, relate differences, make adjustments, integrate, synthesize, move with the spirit of a place." In this process, Aptheker believes women will be able to "...abandon oppositional ways of thinking" without falling into reductionism or homogenism which the patriarchal system so much wants to see happen. The "...dailiness of our own lived experiences" provides the grounding for our survival strengths.

Homophobia, racism and class privilege frustrate women's communities. Intrigues still circulate undermining the connections made by women's work, by our labours. Disillusionment can be the result. A strategy that connects through "La encrucijada" is one of 'networking'. As we become

involved in this process, intrigues are often exposed for what they are through open discussion. In this way 'networking' strengthens the core of women's communities. The traumas of homophobic, racist and class accusations can better be endured if women have developed strategies for subversion. Expanding the boundaries imposed upon us by misogynist individuals (and often ingested and assimilated unconsciously) also encourages our resistance through communication: 'Let's talk this through'. This internalized oppression can become a pattern of social behaviour if we don't question what is happening: 'Something is out-of-sync. What is it??'

I find Anzaldúa's subject position both empowering and expanding. The concept of women being central to change, networking for political change posits a strategy knowing no 'boundaries'. This process acknowledges the ever-shifting crossroads and its relation to the borderlands. Rainer follows a parallel approach in her filmmaking, in the political strategies which place women as inquiring subjects on center stage.

CHAPTER 7

MEDIA MANIPULATIONS (revoking ingested hype)

description of 'the wall art' in TMWEW:

The first is a photo of a man staring spectrally at the camera accompanied by the title, How I Was Broken by the KGB. #2 is a page of text titled About Men. A small colored drawing of a man's upper torso and head is inserted on the left. The upper portion of the head is cropped to eliminate the eyes and forehead. A large tear seems to be rolling down the cheek. #3 is a cigar ad. A handsome well-heeled Anglo-Saxon man holds a large cigar and sits in a lush meadow behind two pedigreed dogs. The phrase The sweet smell of success appears in the left-hand corner. #4 is a horrible color photo of decapitated corpses and several heads, victims of a Salvadoran death-squad murder. #5 is an ad from a medical journal for estrogen-replacement therapy, including a photo of a tired middle-aged woman.¹

This chapter discusses the implications of the five media images seen throughout the film on the wall in Jack's loft. As Jack changes them around and Yvonne Rainer with Martha Rosler comment on their distortions of reality, the viewer becomes aware of the counter-strategy being implemented by Rainer. The images come to suggest cultural, sociological mal[e]-practices in their appeal to a public. The power mechanisms within media are being exposed and questioned.

By following the analysis being made by Rainer and Rosler through the actors, Trisha and Jack, the media deceptions become obvious. And yet Rainer and Rosler don't always agree.

¹ Rainer, 1989: 178-180.

The film isn't positing or giving us the 'right answer'. Rainer, as director, resists becoming an authority, a voice of authority. By constantly retracing events within TMWEW, Rainer reveals essential differences; e.g. the continual referral to 'the wall art' throughout the film renders a variety of responses.

The information transmitted through the media by the dominant ideology is being seen by critical analysts, by those who are questioning what they see and hear, as so many illusions, as 'disinformation' (a Noam Chomsky term referring to information that manipulates and distorts reality). Language can manipulate through its complex forms of oppression. "Word-prescriptions"² tend to spread the hegemonic disease of 'disinformation', the pernicious domination of power-over and manipulation of 'others'.

I will examine 'disinformation', its overt transparencies, via 'the wall art' in the following sections:

- listening to patriarchal rumours;
- 'reading' the wall images;
- colonizing for consumption;
- marketing the 'catch phrase'.

² Trinh, 1989: 52.

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

The cigar smoking ad addresses manliness and success.
The people of Central America are victims of terrorism.
Woman is portrayed as hysteric and sick.



The last section looks at the 'eavesdropping' done by Jack (a reversal from women eavesdropping on the master's voice) as he listens to the stories, the 'truisms' told by women to women, told by passers-by to each other. These stories as 'truisms', take on a dubious form of stereotyping events and people. This is also 'disinformation' but in another guise which passes as popular culture without much awareness as to what is actually happening. Often we listen, we laugh, we forget. But we do listen, and some of these 'truisms' leave residue echoing in our minds; e.g. how 'true' was that? was there some grain of 'truth' in what I just heard?

LISTENING TO PATRIARCHAL RUMOURS

The process for women to gain access to patriarchal discourse remains limiting. For many women the significance of this process is accepting a particular code of behaviour, of response; e.g. buying into a capitalist system which is in partnership with patriarchy. When we implicate ourselves into this system, we participate in a reductionism which is informed by patriarchal privilege. This reductionism is seen in the media's portrayal of women. Women are 'endorsed with sexist attributions' (similar to counter-top lamination) which in turn arouse hierarchical oppositions in men towards women. Conflicts of gender binaries develop. The syndrome of 'divide and conquer' ensues.

Within the process a continuous releasing and absorbing set of circumstances takes place which perpetuates colonialization. The colonized woman absorbs the dictates of the white supremacist male as does the 'native' when pressured under co-alliance. In both situations the colonizer has spread his power as a mantle to cover, to obscure and to erase. The assumed images which are then projected are those of the colonizer. Woman's identity and native identity have been assimilated. We have both been subsumed under the category of 'savage' needing to be civilized; the mission of the white supremacist. The process does vary in that the 'white' woman has an option to be co-opted into the system through marriage and thus be credible whereas the native woman remains outsider no matter what she does, as does the lesbian. Woman's function is to assume his spoken word, to act out a knowledge not her own. Trinh T. Minh-ha speaks of this knowledge in relation to native and to woman as coming nearer to a questionable equality:

Knowledge belongs to the one who succeeds in mastering a language, and standing closer to the civilized language is, as a matter coming nearer to equality.³

This 'equality' as discussed by Trinh is a specific, a universal wherein identity is lost to the colonized. The transparency of this Knowledge enforces the separation of the

³ Ibid., 56.

subject from the object to be known, and is therefore completely contrary to the feminist concept of contextuality.

The subliminal, repeated themes directed towards women, reject our experiences, our knowledges, our sense of self-worth. Martha Rosler responds to this oppression by elaborating on the confusions which society presents to women:

It seems that for any questions we might have about how we live, there are ready explanations offered by 'common sense', cultural wisdom and beliefs, organs of the State, books, and the endlessly explaining mass media, by friends and people we work with, and by bloodsuckers in the business world. Our increasing uneasiness, perhaps desperation, about how we live is increasingly matched by a ballooning variety of messages meant to increase our confusion and passivity, superficial placatory explanations or divertingly inflammatory ones, that keep us off balance and uncertain about causes, meanings, and remedies, and afraid to challenge authority.⁴

Women's work towards change addresses these exploitive givens. To resist these tendencies which confuse and terrorize women, women implement strategies which build credence and confidence into our actions. In this way the political practices of women's actions unwrap the mythic premises supported by patriarchal dogma. The patronizing indictment of women made by the prevailing patriarchal culture only translates into a pathology, which is tiresome and depressing to the women concerned. The numerous accounts of women expressing their

⁴ Martha Rosler, "I'm thinking about making art about life..." Social Works exhibition catalogue: LAICA (1979).

powers, the incidents of their lived experiences regenerate a knowing. Women may lament, but their screaming innards are eventually going to explode into a languaging that refutes "...the symbolic codification of perception [that] the male experience [has] already embedded in the language." ⁵

In response to this perception of white male dominance in language, Trinh T. Minh-ha uses the pronoun 'him', the non-person pronoun, to frame his claim as spokesman for all the human races. She notes

...for my human language-net excludes totalization, and my gesture is a continuation striving for continuation. One of the rules of my game is to echo back his words to an unexpected din or simply let them bounce around to yield most of what is being and has been said through them and despite them.⁶

Aptheker sees this struggle for women's language (a languaging) as a shared, knowing process, resonant in its depth:

We are witness to and participate in the painstaking reconstruction of another way of seeing reality, lodged for centuries in the mind's eye, a memory for which there often has been no language.⁷

⁵ Aptheker, 1989: 141.

⁶ Trinh, 1989: 49.

⁷ Aptheker, 1989: 141.

We are building a culture of resistance which challenges patriarchal rumours. Women transform these rumours. By naming (which can have the negative potential to incorporate rather than transform) the forms of oppression, women can effectively reformulate our struggles; e.g. rather than following patriarchy's lead in erasing cultures, we deconstruct dominant 'models' by addressing the situations in context. If we are being conscious of contextuality, the potential of incorporation is neutralized. Incorporation (a coming together of separate units) speaks of transparency (the separation of the subject from her/his objective reality) and not the interrelation of positions and/or events which is contextual. One example of patriarchal policy is the erasure of 'native' languages which carry cultural codes. Rather than trying to understand an aboriginal culture, the colonists dismiss them as childish and erase their identities.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, in her chapter "The Language of Nativism"⁸, writes of the systematic denial of anything, anybody which/who does not subscribe to a universal white man's 'code'. The process of erasure remains alive and well. She describes this "flattening out of all individualities" as the "human disease". The programmed dismissal of culture(s) into a consistent culture refutes the 'natural' contradictions of lived experiences. They no longer exist. The colonial mind-

⁸ Trinh, 1989: 47-76.

set dismisses any sense of personal identity, of collective integrity. Trinh compares 'nativism' (colonialization), a racist trap, to "human dis-ease", a generic trap entangling women as 'other' within a sexist dichotomy. In both instances the colonizer absorbs the colonized and releases her/him as his own image, a single homogenized 'person'.

Deconstructing, as practised within the many positions of feminism, is not a process of erasure. Rather, it is evidence of a continuum which reconstructs in a contextual manner, thus giving credence to the labour, to the subjects present.

The explicit politics of a feminist agenda exposes patriarchal patterns of abuse, of ridicule, of omission. For Aptheker, women 'traipse' back and forth gaining insight, sharing energy to successfully negotiate paths to resistance, to locate patriarchal rumours and to unveil them for what they are:

Hemmed in by patriarchal, racist, and class restrictions, the over-whelming majority of ordinary women have made their existence around the cracks and crevices allowed them by this multifaceted authority.⁹

⁹ Aptheker, 1989: 174.

'READING' THE IMAGES

The two images in 'the wall art' which refer to ng
 terrorized and/or victimized are the one concerning the KGB
 story and the column About Men. Both show images or parts of
 images of 'broken' men. The consideration of men changing
 their attitudes still does not change an androcentric
 mentality. The About Men column is viewed to be both obscene
 and disgusting by both Rosler and Rainer. Both agree that
 this emphasis, on men suffering from lack of emotions, of
 being brought up to be stoic, is ridiculous. What mention is
 there of women's silent suffering and how "the rest of us
 [society] **suffer** from the way that men are." ¹⁰

Rainer imagines the torturer requesting sympathy because he is
 stressed-out psychologically due to his lack of emotions. The
 emphasis expressed in the column locates the individual
 outside any historical or socio-political context. Rosler's
 response to both of these columns sees the man in the position
 of privilege, crying out that women are getting too much
 attention:

You know, it kind of suggests again that somehow
 women have gotten ahead of the game and you have to
 redress the balance. Again, it's about men
 catching up with female privilege, in this case the

¹⁰ Rainer, 1989: 200.

privilege to cry. ¹¹

The cigar smoking ad addresses manliness and success. The dogs shown are hunting dogs. In that the left-hand side of the spread is the KGB story and the right-hand side is the success story, what are we to surmise? The man on the left is crying wolf while the wolf on the right is quite satisfied with his position. But then we should do a double-take. This KGB story wherein the man is crying wolf is actually being heard. Would a woman having experienced a 'battering' either physical and/or mental be heard in the magazine section, in any prominent section of the media? Or would our suffering be relegated to the home section along with home furnishings? Would women be quoted and accredited for our suffering? Rainer thinks not.

When Jack discusses the cigar smoking ad, he sees the phallic symbol as primarily a manly symbol. He does not associate the symbol of virility with power. Without considering the political elements of power, domination, control and violence, Jack only sees the cigar as a 'manly' product, albeit a product of cheap labour. Whose cheap labour and under what conditions is it being done should be of primary significance.

¹¹ Ibid., 204.

Rainer's questions concern the politics involved in making that cigar, e.g. the industry's control over the workers in Central America. The terror imposed through acts of violence by the "CIA and Company" insures the continued production of the product. What else can we surmise?

The industry, in order to make a profit (profit being the only motive for production in this consumer society), holds the lives of the workers for ransom, - useful arable land is taken away from them, the rightful owners, to be used to produce export products which have nothing to do with their survival. They are 'rewarded' with inadequate pay (no land, minimal housing) which doesn't cover the cost of food, of shelter, of self-respect.

Yes, this is power-over through domination and control which, when workers ask questions and resist, leads to violence, massacres of a living peoples whose culture, whose society pre-dates the oppressors. Does this sound familiar? When the workers (women, men and children) do organize themselves in order to regain their land, to rebuild their lives, so they can live without subjugation, without fear, without the fear of what tomorrow may or may not bring, then villages, crops, people are mutilated, tortured and burnt.

Returning to Jack as he ponders on the origins of the cigar, he also reflects on island tourism (the tourist trade which makes the native population objects of voyeurism, again the transparency between subject and object):

...they [CIA and Company] don't want to go around beheading a bunch of peasants. They would much rather thwart social revolutions by so-called democratic means, which they have succeeded to do in Jamaica. And now they have 199-dollar round-trip plane fares and readers of the NY Times can fly down to Jamaica for cheap vacations where they can come back and say, "Gee, that place is beautiful and cheap but people seem to hate us down there. Why do they hate us [USA citizens] so much?"¹²

What appears as off-side commentary by Jack, underlines the use of theoretical speculation as a form of distancing. I don't find Jack's analysis as engaging as that offered by Rainer, Rosler or Trisha. It appears to be frivolous.

Rosler suggests that the ultimate terror in mass destruction can be seen in the image of the decapitated bodies. What possible thinking (in a so-called civilized society) can take this kind of action against a peoples for their political beliefs. Perhaps, the following quote, from Le Monde in 1983, will provide some insight into the discussion:

¹² Ibid., 202.

A big arrival in the supermarket of ideas: products guaranteed as Western and proud of it, purified of all Marxo-Christian weakness toward that second-hand and worn-out idea, the Third World. Long live us, to the devil with shame, let the poor fend for themselves! ...What threatens the West is its "physical and moral aging." Underdevelopment is not our fault, but that of the socialist countries...It is Third World governments, not ours, that pillage the inhabitants and massacre their cultures.¹³

Technological advancement (another patriarchal construct) is not questioned. Local differences are homogenized. Multinationals spread their environmental poisons to every society and culture they touch, thus crippling and destroying peoples, villages, countries. The perpetuation of an image of virility, of rugged individualism (e.g. the exploitation of the American West which destroyed the indigenous peoples, their lands, their way of life) furthers hegemonic and androcentric attitudes.

The formation of artificial needs, based on profit margins, creates poverty and malnutrition. And this condition lives side by side with the sweet smell of success. Thus the placement of 'the wall art' is a telling strategy Rainer has employed. The emphasis of two image/texts on the male whose self (he thinks) is denied, questions our androcentric

¹³ B. Poirot-Delpech, column in Le Monde (May 27, 1983) as quoted by Martha Rosler for her video, "The Art of Memory: The Loss of History" New York City: New Museum of Contemporary Art (23 November - 19 January 1986) curated by William Olander.

society; next we see the white Anglo Saxon male image of privilege to money, power and 'success'; beneath is the image of the death toll that this approach to life and living demands - the non-European or non-Western nations are seen as the galley slaves whose lives are expendable; and finally there is the woman who in these historical times and for many past years, is portrayed as someone in need of medication simply for being a woman. Women seen as problems require continual surveillance. The middle-aged woman placed to the side, moved and covered over by Jack, disturbs society's progress. This woman has lived beyond her 'usefulness' (e.g. reproduction being seen as the only female value). She is portrayed as hysteric, reduced to a state of inner disorder, "nervous, anxious, irritable, fatigued, [with] restless nights".¹⁴ Many women are victims of biological determinism, the people of Central America are victims of colonialism. Are we not both colonized and oppressed by similar acts of androcentric, of hegemonic power/violence controls, perpetuating domination?

Rosler speaks of the myths of this society, the ultimate images of dead bodies, the lack of responsibility by our policy makers:

¹⁴ Rainer, 1989: 204.

I would feel I was being tricked into trying to deal with things that have become incommensurable, as though they weren't incommensurable. That I was being told that the myths of civility at home and the problems of daily life are only a veneer over the truth that the state destroys people.

It is a matter of interest whether men are or are not presented as hard surfaces that exude the smell of success from their very physical appearance. It does matter what this man is complaining about, which is a problem, which is that masculinity is defined as uncaringness and unthinkingness and unfeelingness. It does matter because it does determine how we conduct our [USA] foreign policy. It isn't only a matter of economic interest, but how we choose to pursue that interest. If we're willing to grind up people because we can't be bothered to feel about them then it does matter.¹⁵

There appears to be a conscious contradiction here. Rosler appears to say that men also need healing, whereas Rainer emphasizes the healing of women. Rainer is telling us to think for ourselves about this issue. The film does not speak from one position. Both women voice their opinions and do not necessarily agree on all points. These statements do reflect a concern about practice, about the responsibility for one's actions. But in this world of drugged/brainwashed women, my concern is with Rosler's belief that if men are heard and 'healed', there's a chance that government policy would change. Will this suffice? Can this practice provide sufficient changes in this society's attitudes? I question a society which brutalizes women and then legitimates their continued brutality.

¹⁵ Rainer, 1989: 216.

COLONIZING FOR CONSUMPTION

And language is one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and unconscious servility. With each sign that gives language its shape lies a stereotype of which I/i am both the manipulator and the manipulated.¹⁶

When Trinh makes this reference to language, she sees one of the problems of writing and speaking in the fact that we are born into a language code already set in place. And this language code has a hegemonic prescription already encoded. Domination is deeply rooted within institutional systems.

The colonizing mind-lock of Western and European societies has its pathetic metaphor in the anorexic woman. I am not connecting anorexia 'to food as weapon' for personal identity which Rosler speaks about in her video Losing: A Conversation with the Parents. I see the anorexic woman as a woman desperately seeking control over her body. She would rather 'starve' to death than lose that control. It's the only control over 'something' she can have. Otherwise she sees herself as having no control over anything. Society is always into controlling something or someone, thus perpetuating an approach to power-over. Where is the encouragement for empowerment? Power-over can be seen mirrored in consumer society which drives people to extinction when we/they begin

¹⁶ Trinh, 1989: 52.

to consume each other.

- Can control be transformed?

power = control = domination
violence = death

TO

politics = languaging = empowerment
practice = life

- How can changes be implemented?

- Can practice be recognized as that site for change wherein collective actions are made in response to the needs expressed? Rosler speaks towards these changes.

In the following 'dialogue' I am responding to some comments made by Rosler (M.R.) concerning 'the male position'. I acknowledge the importance of what she is saying; however, I am disturbed by the omission of women in her suggestions. The intention behind utilizing the format of a 'dialogue'¹⁷ is to speak simply and directly to what she has said and to contextualize her assertions.

M.R. restructuring the economy, eliminating the profit motive;

-stop colonizing women as free trade collateral;

M.R. addressing male behavioural aberrations;

¹⁷ The following dialogue does not represent a direct quote from Rosler, but rather a compilation of statements derived from the film, TMWEW and the commentaries made in her writings.

-stop medical management of women;

M.R. sounding-out various resolutions;

-listening to the many voices and suggestions given
by women;

M.R. rephrasing the language of penetration into;

-languaging a continuum not pricked by penetration;

**M.R. venting deep emotions of anger, of frustration, of
fear which evidently the male harbours;**

-listening to the deep emotions of anger, of frustration,
of fear which women are told to suppress;

**M.R. liberating the possibilities for men to 'soften'
their surfaces;**

-liberating women from the bonds of the 'feminine';

M.R. practising self-actions which define personal attitudes;

-languaging women's propaganda as political practice;

**M.R. exposing institutionalized 'starvation' schemes,
e.g. deleting thinking, knowing, feeling, caring,
sexuality;**

-encouraging collective action to re-energize women's
many ways of thinking, knowing, feeling, caring,
sexuality.

Rosler's commentary is both insightful and disturbing. For society to change, changes within the patriarchal system need to be studied. Institutional policies are far removed from the actual needs of a peoples. Changing an androcentric,

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

Deller eavesdrops on women in a diner.
Later, Deller returns to his flat to reconsider
the 'wall art'.



hegemonic sensibility requires an openness in political thought and practice, not prescriptive remedies. This openness is the hearing time when we give ourselves that time to actually communicate with each other. The reciprocity of a mutualism then has a chance to arrest the pathological politics of domination.

Colonizing for consumption has been and remains an act which disregards the relationship of the oppressed with an identity of a lived experience. In other words, consumer societies literally "grind up people". Access to a relation of meaning between subject and real conditions doesn't exist. A wedge has been placed into social relations which divides peoples. Fragmentation has historically been a weapon used by colonizers to scatter people's thinking and acting. Colonization has become a sanctioned institutionalized practice, disguised as bringing civilization to the 'savages', bettering 'their' living conditions and providing 'them' with a democratic system of government. Espouse one thing, and do another has been the policy of the colonizer: never let on that colonization is happening. Trinh sees the issues of hegemony, racism and sexism as part of a feminist mandate. We can not close our eyes, our ears, our mouths to these issues because we are of, contained in that 'body' of, colonized peoples.

The inability to relate the two issues [racism and sexism] and to feel them in my bones, has allowed me to indulge in the illusion that I will remain safe from all **my neighbor's problems** and can go on leading an undisturbed, secure life of my own. Hegemony and racism are, therefore a pressing feminist issue.¹⁸

Another reversal strategy Rainer employs in TMWEW, expanding a feminist languaging, occurs when she has Jack eavesdrop on conversations between women, between passers-by on the side walk. What is heard are popular myths, 'truisms', common expressions which can stereotype people and/or events. This is also evidence of a vernacular, a 'native tongue', talking out society's contradictions and absurdities.

MARKETING THE 'CATCH PHRASE'

TMWEW begins with Jack in a coffee shop, eavesdropping on a conversation between two women who banter on about men and that the "committed feminists...must...give up men" ¹⁹ Rainer has turned the normative position around - men were 'historically' seduced by women who eavesdropped on their 'illuminating' conversations.

¹⁸ Trinh, 1989: 86.

¹⁹ Rainer, 1989: 174.

The periodic interjection of these scenarios reminds me of the clown acts in the circus. The clown comes by to relieve the tensions from the aerial acts, to distract our attention from the centre ring. The clown also reminds the audience that what we see is fantasy, is fiction. The clown as an androgynous figure brings multiplicity to the situation. However, with these 'one-liners', Rainer appears to be introducing a pseudo-documentary text. These texts consist of conversational bits and pieces acting as 'catch phrases', as 'truisms' gleaned from popular culture while seen and/or heard and/or read in the media.

The second snatch 'heard' by Jack while walking the streets is: the horror of fetal erections; sleeping with smart men will make smart women; "only gays and women get emotionally involved in love" (to be virile is to be manly is to be stoic); "a feminist is a man who's found a new way to meet broads"; gays make good house-fraus; "...women don't get harassed on the streets of Managua"; the 'business' of getting a man into bed. ²⁰

Have you heard some of these 'truisms' stereotyping groups of people? Have you wondered how much of the phrase was actually 'true'? This form of verbal activity can open up the contradictions in social practices, the normalization inherent

²⁰ Ibid., 182.

in socialized behaviour. Media markets these vernacular forms of pseudo-documentary for audience consumption, e.g. the t.v. sit-coms which display people as paper-doll-cut-outs to be manipulated and discarded. We, as audience, actually experience these cutting phrases without impunity.

From the third grouping, again 'in the streets', a sexist, racist comment:

There's this American Indian myth about a man going around with a big stick to plug up a devouring vagina...But you know the bottom line is, women really do want to devour men. [man speaking to woman]²¹

In the fourth street scene we witness: again a predominance of sexual, racial implications by referring to the emotions as something synthetic; reference to racial incest; 'material grabbing female', e.g. "...when are we getting married so I can have your apartment after we get divorced?"; stigmata represents women's menstruation for men.²²

The last snatch is a return to the coffee shop where women discuss the implications of the phallus as a symbol of power in a patriarchal society. Reference is made to Kristeva's analysis of women within the symbolic order who as "... virgin[s] impregnated by the Word, ...live and think...as male

²¹ Ibid., 191.

²² Ibid., 203.

homosexual[s]" How can women not be "male identified", they ask. It's the society we live in. Solidarity with other women means 'Jack-shit'. "I submitted as if I was a man who thought he was a woman, to a man who looks and acts like a man but would rather be a woman." In essence, the two women conclude that "...we are **all** men" : ending with "man is a human being with a pair of testes attached, while woman is a pair of ovaries with a human being attached." ²³

The references made in these pseudo-documentary scenarios suggest that Rainer, by incorporating this strategy into her film, reveals the contradictions of socialized behaviour. The 'catch-phrases' are institutionalized through the media for marketing control: a control over a populace who have grave doubts as to what they're about. Marketing manipulations often disregard actual needs and institute artificial, peripheral 'wants', not 'needs'.

The ingested hype suffered from media manipulation can be revoked by deconstructive analysis. Reading the sub-text often helps. Rainer insists on making us aware of sub-text. The political strategies in all her films make blatant use of sub-text. It is part of the feminist revolutionary agenda. Intervention through media awareness undercuts situations of sexist, racist and class colonization. Linguaging awareness

²³ Ibid., 215.

develops the inherent strengths of women's thinking through experiential knowledge. In the conjunctive space, words and images cultivate the changing perspectives of women. The issue calls out for an ethics in changing media 'disinformation'; how it portrays women and all oppressed peoples.

AFTER-WORDS

(rephrasing for the time warp)

Languaging continues to develop political strategies which will resist oppression. Making space (that conjunctive space [the gap] from which we spar and do our shadow-boxing) is a form of deconstructing in which re-constructing is present; a situation which Hélène Cixous might use as a **double entendre**. One process contextualizes the other. Space is generated through the implication of space. The open silence(s) of women and all oppressed peoples are mutually preferred (silence, when done as a critique, can be very effective) to the theoretical rattle of men [the patriarchy].¹ Open silence(s) generate a deeper space without quantitative measure, a space of another means disclosing shifts without threats.² Within this other space prescriptions are not pronounced, nor the notions of gain, of accumulation declared.

The exchange dichotomy of women and words has become debatable. Although women were/are the exchange value of a social order and words were/are the linguistic exchange system, this policy (as it has existed/is existing in society) can be brought forward openly for evaluation. Communication is not based on subjugation. This is where/when the spaces are so relevant. The spaces of disjunction and/or conjunction

¹ Marks and de Courtivron, 1981: 111.

² Theresa Hak Kyuang Cha, DICTÉE (New York: Tandem Press, 1982), 157.

interrupt the control mechanisms inherent in the systems of exchange within the dominant social structures.

One area which is currently being addressed by feminists is feminist theory as it is seen within the confines of academia. The possible closure of an academically based theory can generate problems. Academia tends to problematize rather than perceive the accessible. Aptheker articulates the genesis of these problems: "we are trained to slice; sometimes to devastate" ³ the work of other women. Her response to this practice:

- emphasize the connecting (wherein lies resistance) within a contextual analysis;
- encourage different readings of the subject matter without universalizing or homogenizing;
- look at what categorizing does to issues and/or events - is it not a form of stereotyping?
- respect the varied positions from which women give voice - not to denigrate a woman who has not had exposure to 'feminist insights';
- recognize and respect our differences as qualitative and enriching.⁴

³ Aptheker, 1989: 20.

⁴ Ibid., 19, 20.

Aptheker's insights demonstrate the empowering process available for women. This is not to say that the difficulties inherent within this process of caring are ignored but perhaps we could re-learn the attentiveness of hearing each other. The urgency felt by many feminists to construct a successful feminist theory often violates the very principles it is attempting to enunciate. I suspect this quandary results from the fact that each woman is attempting to make **THE** definitive theory rather than understand that hers is only one possible theory out of many being presented. The cynicism women display to other women who do not know or possibly do not care to know about feminist practice destroys the effectiveness of political action. If feminist practice is meant to empower women and analyze the many forms of oppression, then to be 'oppressive' through the notions of tolerance/intolerance (a form of censorship) is counter-productive and irresponsible.

I have mentioned the notion of risk-taking, that women are continually on a cutting edge to be able to exist as women. When I apply this notion to feminist theory, I find that in order to be published, revoking the patriarchal dogma is a risk as well. Risk-taking feminist theory, such as the theory practised by Anzaldua and Brossard, does not invalidate or trivialize other theory that may empower women by giving 'hugs' or providing the necessary confidence to do action.

Rosler recognizes theoretical discourse as a possible stumbling-block in the course for political action. Rosler indicates the necessity for political action, unmediated by theoretical jargon, when being interviewed by Jane Weinstock for the October periodical⁵:

Weinstock: You've just talked about discourse. Is there anything outside it?

Rosler: There's political action.

Weinstock: That's always mediated through discourse.

Rosler: Oh, yes, but discourse becomes a stopping point, because you can always have another argument, you can always say, "But wait..."

Weinstock: But now you're talking about discourse in another way.

Rosler: But don't the levels tend to slide, one into another?
...I must insist on some crude observations as to the manner in which occupation with discourse as such has tended to function: it academicizes questions of everyday life, of meaning, of interaction, and social change. It fetishizes theory, and creates a [distancing] relation...to an audience...

In this thesis I have used Yvonne Rainer's film, TMWEW, as a catalyst to further my thoughts on 'linguaging'. Linguaging our concerns, our anger makes visible and audible our resistance. Linguaging speaks of an open process for political practice(s) without prescription, without 'shoulds'

⁵ October, #17 (summer 1981): 69.

and 'oughts', without advocating 'the correct [and only] political response'.

Rainer's political practice circulates women's propaganda and underscores the oppression of all colonized peoples. By reclaiming our many voices shouting to be heard (whether in silence or in sound or in image) we make evident the struggle which is disrupting the mantle, the topography of all dominating patriarchal societies. Western consumer society, so prevalent, so plague-spreading at present, "grinds up people" and the environment as so much material for 'continual growth'. This devastating practice eventually will run its course, but hopefully we can stop it before it has consumed everything in its path.

Women as polemical realities are busy with hands and minds exposing patriarchal jargon, the patter of negative propaganda. Chewing through the layers actively disengages the strong-hold of androcentric mandibles. To acknowledge our many subject positions, particularly the openness of a 'crossroads' position, breaks the patriarchal bonds prevalent in media manipulations. The voices of the oppressed communicate our/their collective energies to turn things around, inside-out, and upside-down; to change the imposed 'believabilities' into positive languaging of a re-constructing. Aptheker clearly sees women's resistance as

positive, continual responses to the many "vagaries of power and politics":

We have spun theories, waged protests, conducted research, exposed and condemned, beseeched authorities for funds and legislation and relief. But until and unless that relief comes, and when it does it is almost always eventually subverted, life must be propelled in practical ways, every day. That propulsion is woman's resistance, driven deep underground, affected by but frequently impervious to the vagaries of power and politics, often disguised by design, and simultaneously marginalized or made invisible by the underpinnings of social theories we have ourselves endorsed. Yet, "women's daily resistance [is] like water on a boulder," (Sacks and Remy, My Troubles, 10) as the anthropologist Karen Brodtkin Sacks truly put it, that grounds the life of the planet, a relentless, restorative cascade.⁶

The interslicing of theory with poetry, with dialogue, I find most appropriate to a feminist analysis. This approach contextualizes issues and validates the openness within the narrative. Very often women establish a subject position between the words, in the fictional / factual space of occurrence. Women's lives are often seen as fictions by the patriarchy but we know our lived experiences to be fact. It is within our shared stories that our realities are formed.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha questions the colonized, fragmented language of penetration perpetrated by the colonizer, erasing memory and identity. When this happens, language has been

⁶ Ibid., 228.

forced upon another, a form of verbal rape.

Mother, you are a child still. At eighteen. More of a child since you are always ill. They have sheltered you from life. Still, you speak the tongue the mandatory language like the others. It is not your own. Even if it is not you know you must. You are Bi-lingual. You are Tri-lingual. The tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue. You speak in the dark. In the secret. The one that is yours. Your own. You speak very softly, you speak in a whisper. In the dark, in secret. Mother tongue is your refuge. It is being home. Being who you are. Truly. To speak makes you sad. Yearning. To utter each word is a privilege you risk by death. Not only for you but for all. All of you who are one, who by law tongue tied forbidden of tongue. You carry at center the mark of the red above and the mark of blue below, heaven and earth, tai-geuk; t'ai-chi. It is the mark. The mark of belonging. Mark of cause. Mark of retrieval. By birth. By death. By blood. You carry the mark in your chest, in your MAH-UHM, in your MAH-UHM, in your spirit-heart.⁷

This piece of writing so well states in form and content, the basic premise I have set forward in my thesis proposal on women's languaging. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha has gone inside the concepts of a languaging to speak of a politics, of a propaganda, of a practice. Languaging can be that practice which feminists embrace to talk-back what bothers our bodies, our minds and our hearts.

⁷ Hak Kyung Cha, 1982: 45,46.

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SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY OF YVONNE RAINER

1972 Lives of Performers 16mm, b/w, sound, 90 minutes

1974 Film About A Woman Who... 16mm, b/w, sound, 105 minutes

1976 Kristina Talking Pictures 16mm, color & b/w, sound, 90 minutes

1980 Journeys From Berlin / 1971 16mm, colour & b/w, sound, 125 minutes

1985 The Man Who Envied Women 16mm, colour & b/w, sound,
125 minutes

1989 Privilege 16mm, colour, sound, 100 minutes

Distributed by First Run/Icarus Features
153 Waverly Place
New York, New York, 10014

Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre
67A Portland Street
Toronto, Ontario, M5V 2M9

SELECTED VIDEOGRAPHY OF MARTHA ROSLER

1975 Semiotics Of The Kitchen B/W, 6 minutes, Women In
Focus (Vancouver).

1977 Losing: A Conversation With The Parents colour,
20 minutes, Women In Focus (Vancouver).

1977 Vital Statistics Of A Citizen, Simply Obtained colour,
38 minutes, Women In Focus (Vancouver).

1983 A Simple Case For Torture, Or How To Sleep At Night
colour, 62 minutes, Video Data Bank (Chicago).

1985 If It's Too Bad To Be True, It Could Be DISINFORMATION
colour, 17 minutes, made for TV distribution.

1988 Born To Be Sold: Martha Rosler Reads The Strange Case
of Baby SM colour, 35 minutes, Video Data Bank
(Chicago), Groupe d'intervention video (Montreal).

Martha Rosler is represented by The Kitchen, New York.

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