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Desiring Daughters

by Renee Baert

A Thesis in the
Department of Communication Studies
Concordia University

Presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts, Media Studies,
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec

August 1991

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Abstract

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The thesis takes as its object a corpus of feminist videotapes that address the mother-daughter relation, viewed from the perspective of the daughter. At issue within the discussion of these works, which cover a period of production from 1974 to 1988, is the question of feminine identity and subjectivity within the context of patriarchal culture. For the paradox of female subjectivity and desire is its structural 'non-existence' within a symbolic order in which the phallus is the privileged signifier and in which women's access to that signifier is highly problematic.

The thesis examines the possibility of a female desire in language, one alternative to the phallus as governing symbol, and considers the stake and terms of such a possibility. The videotapes make explicit the relationship of the maternal figure to questions of female subjectivity, even as the differing approaches to the topic within these works at different periods underscores the interrelation between theoretical paradigms and feminist practice.

Renee Baert

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Desiring Daughters

Chapter One: Introduction

The question of female subjectivity has been at the forefront of the feminist engagement with the heritage of a patriarchal order. Indeed, the paradox of female subjectivity and desire is its structural 'non-existence' within a symbolic order in which the phallus is the privileged signifier, not only as the representative of the principle of separation and individuation but as the symbol of desire, power, activity and potency.

To enter a critical engagement with the terms of this discourse is thus to occupy a position at once paradoxical and political: paradoxical in that there is, ostensibly, no 'place' for women from which to speak, and political in the intervention into the relations of power which this situation bespeaks.

The problematic of female desire and subjectivity is situated within the psychic and social organizations of phallogentricity, through which male and female subjects take up their positions in relation to the differentiated categories of the masculine and feminine that prevail within a(ny) given societies, categories which privilege the masculine term within this duality.

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The problematic of female desire and subjectivity is situated within the psychic and social organizations of phallogentricity, through which male and female subjects take up their positions in relation to the differentiated categories of the masculine and feminine that prevail within a(ny) given societies, categories which privilege the masculine term within this duality.

Feminist work acknowledges the legacy of this received discourse--as it must, or be orphaned of language. It simultaneously projects a marked differentiation from that discourse predicated on other constructions of meaning, value, perception. It is at once resonant and dissonant. It is at the least a bilingualism, more a multi-lingualism. (1)

The thesis which follows is an exploration of a series of approaches toward articulating female subjectivity and desire within the context of patriarchal culture, as considered through the representational and narrative strategies within a body of feminist video art productions.

The thesis takes as its corpus five videotapes, together with ancillary work, produced in Canada between 1973 and 1988. Each of the tapes is engaged, directly or indirectly, with the mother-daughter relation, from the point of view of the 'daughter', and each is represented as autobiography.

The mother-daughter relation has itself been the subject of intense scholarship for a number of years, particularly since the release in 1976 of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience(2)--a book which not only broke, but also examined closely, the silence surrounding this central and formative relation--and with great intensity yet more recently in the feminist

psychoanalytic approaches to a re-examination of this relation and its implications for female subjectivity. As Marianne Hirsch has written,

Since Rich demonstrated the absence of the mother-daughter relationship from theology, art, sociology and psychoanalysis, and its centrality in women's lives, many voices have come to fill this gap, to create speech and meaning where there has been silence and absence.(3)

Certainly feminist art production has been a privileged site for the reconstruction of meanings within the cultural symbolic, though this writer would argue that it is the category of Woman, more than the mother-daughter relation as a specificity, that has been the primary object of scrutiny and revision. The thesis will attempt to explore the ways in which the mother-daughter relation is nonetheless a paramount issue in the question of female subjectivity and desire.

At the same time, in speaking of the 'mother-daughter relation', the thesis will seek to demonstrate there is no stability of meaning in this term; that, in the very act of "creating speech and meaning where there had been silence and absence", this relation is being modified, renewed and reinvented.

Further, the thesis will consider the inter-relation between feminist theory and feminist art production in terms of conceptions of the (female) subject, articulation of the mother-daughter relation and the question of a female desire in language. For, as follows, different

'generations' of feminism have produced different theoretical models and these have produced, and enabled, considerable modifications in the articulation of each of these areas of address.

Certainly, the sudden surge of feminist art in the 1970s succeeded in rupturing the ideology of art as universal and gender free. The feminist work of this period was inserted within a broader artistic movement away from the modernist preoccupations with purity of form, non-referentiality and formal reductiveness, privileging instead emotion, autobiography, referentiality, narrative, the use of 'low' art forms marked as traditional feminine crafts (embroidery, quilting, etc.), collage and such pluralist media as video, performance and body art.

Yet what distinguishes feminist work from other work of this period is not its stylistic or technical innovations, which can also be found in non-feminist art, but the foundation of the work itself. Feminist art set out to challenge the very character of art. As Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews describe this first decade of feminist art, it "was buoyed not only by anger but by a new sense of community, the attempts to develop a new art to express a new sensibility, and an optimistic faith in the ability of art and promote and even engender a feminist consciousness." (4) An important corollary of

this integration of the aesthetic and the social was the privileging of female spectators through choice and treatment of subject matter, modes of address, and the establishment of venues of publication, distribution and exhibition that served this newly formed constituency.

Feminist artists were also in the forefront of the development of feminist art criticism. The critical agenda of this period focused in the first instance on documenting the work, both historical and contemporary, of neglected women artists.(5) Overall, this first generation of work was engaged in the exploration of possibilities for women's art "to grow out of consciousness and experience that is typically female."(6)

In this engagement by artists, critics and historians with "issues pertaining to the nature, evaluation, and status of female artistic production"(7), there was a particular focus on a number of questions, including the critical debates of 'art vs craft', the exploration of the possibility of a specific female aesthetic and sensibility (whether conceived as 'essential' or socially determined), and the exploration of female sexuality.

In this period, a distinction also began to be made between art by women and feminist art. But if, as Harmony Hammond defined it, feminist art is "art that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in

patriarchal culture"(8), the critical object of theory and of art production shifted in a subsequent generation of work to focus on questions of representation and the construction of gender difference rather than the exploration of a specific female sensibility or creativity.

As Hester Eisenstein observes in her introduction to The Future of Difference, "early states of feminist thought" emphasized the "condition and experience of being female"; women thus "set out to document the worlds of women" and their experience, previously excluded from analysis. The "shift in emphasis" for second-generation feminists has been not to "minimize difference" but to "assert its importance as a crucial focus of study."(9)

Thus, a later generation of critics and artists has been concerned with the interrogation of how gender is produced and constructed through systems of signification, seeking to unfix (rather than to celebrate) the signs of the feminine. The project made be seen to shift from an investment in questions of female sexuality, sensibility and experience in favor of the interrogation of the figure of woman in image and representation.

However, as Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews point out, the questions raised in the first generation of work "are still without resolution." Further, as they note, "...even with the rise of the study

of 'gender difference' as opposed to 'female sensibility' the concept of the specifically female voice, whether understood as essentialist or as ideologically constructed, still imbues much feminist thought". (10)

If the problematic of 'woman' is explored and interrogated from varying points of analysis and in varying ways within particular historical conjunctions, if 'difference' is conceived as difference from man or is pursued in terms of differences between and among women, whether this difference is considered to be innate or socially constructed, if the category of 'woman' is itself by no means a determinate entity, there are nonetheless three sites in which there is a specificity, if not a defining interpretation, of 'woman'.

These specificities within the category of the female are the body, the mother/daughter relation and, particularly in relation to any feminist project, the idea of 'collectivity', the 'we' of women. These sites have, further, been arenas of fruitful inquiry and contestation over meaning, both within feminist theory and within the practices of art. Within the issues raised through the discussion of the videotapes from the perspective of the mother-daughter relation, the specificity of the female body--the maternal body, the sexual body, the existential body--as well the movement in the videotapes from the "I"

of their autobiographical content to the "we" of their implication is implicit.

The maternal body in particular has figured within work focused on the mother/daughter relation, around questions of identity and subjectivity. Julia Kristeva argues that "the consecrated (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood" (11), Jessica Benjamin argues that the phallus maintains its monopoly on representing desire through the profound desexualization of the figure of the mother, Irigaray argues that the culturally unsymbolized mother/daughter relation mitigates against women forming an identity in the symbolic order that is distinct from the maternal function, etc. In these and other theoretical works, what is seen to be at stake in the mother/daughter relation is the formation of a female identity as desiring subject, one that may be achieved in part through a separation of the terms of femininity and maternity.

In the classic Freudian/Lacanian scenario, the entry into language and culture is itself a severing of the dyad with the mother, while the female's assumption of the 'normative' feminine position is predicated on a repudiation of the 'lack' of the mother and a turning toward the paternal figure in order to obtain, by indirect means, the plenitude of the phallus; moreover, as Kaja Silverman submits, "what (the female subject) is thereby

'buying' is not just a heterosexual rather than a homosexual relationship, but the nuclear family, and by extension the whole of patriarchal culture." (12)

The articulation of the mother/daughter relation is thus completely imbricated with the theoretical work on female subjectivity in that, as Brenda Longfellow has argued, "the political urgency of both projects bears on the possibility of articulating a different economy of desire and subjectivity as symbolic resistance to the law of the Father and the interminability of phallic mediation."(13) In short, a female desire that is distinct from the maternity that classical psychoanalysis names as the 'feminine' woman's singular, normative desire.

Yet if the very category of 'difference', whether the difference of women from men or the differences between women, is meant to encompass women as empirical, corporeal, historical subjects rather than simply a repressed term within a binarist structure of language, a 'position' open for occupation, then in what 'collectivity', or even ontology, can 'women' be grounded?

Further, the very category of the subject has itself been radically questioned in the postmodern and post-structuralist assaults on the classical knowledge systems that have anchored Western philosophy and metaphysics. As Rosi Braidotti asks, "How can 'we feminists' reconcile

the recognition of the problematic nature and the process of construction of the subject with the political necessity to posit woman as the subject of another history?....How can 'we feminists' uphold both the need to assert the sexual-specificity of the female subject and the deconstruction of traditional notions of the subject, which are based on phallogentric premises... And above all, what political stand can we develop that would respect the theoretical complexity of the view of the subject that we share with contemporary philosophy, while maintaining our commitment to the women's struggle? What are the politics of the female split-subject?" (14)

Further, what would be the terms of possibility of a desire in language for the 'female split-subject' of our contemporary history? What would constitute a desire in difference?

Certainly the terms of such an inquiry must take account of the arguments put forward by Laura Mulvey in her landmark text "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"(15), an essay generally credited with having inaugurated the feminist discourse on sexual difference and the unconscious in narrative in general, and cinematic narrative in particular. For Mulvey's text specifies the terms of a masculine economy of desire.

Addressing her essay toward the classic Hollywood film text, Mulvey argues that film form is structured by

the unconscious of patriarchal society, which is itself dependent for its meanings on the image of the castrated woman. Visual pleasure in narrative cinema is constructed in accordance with male spectatorial desires. Mulvey outlines a number of dichotomies in the construction of gender within cinematic narrative: the male protagonist as possessor of the gaze, the woman as 'to be looked-at'; the man as subject of the narrative, and the identificatory processes it invites, the woman as object, both of the protagonist's gaze and, by (identificatory) extension, of the spectator's; the man as occupier of three-dimensional space (mover of the narrative), the woman as spectacle, fetish, surface (disruption of its linearity). Masculine castration anxiety is assuaged by voyeuristic and fetishistic mechanisms which serve to designate the masculine position as the site of power relative to the female position of castration, deficiency, lack.

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (16).

The dramatic narrative of classic cinema further turns on the Oedipalized scenario wherein the female molds her desire to that of the male; she "holds the look, plays to, and signifies male desire"(17). As Constance Penley

elaborates, "through identification with the male character, the spectator, then, is privileged both as the viewer of the woman exhibited as spectacle and as controller of those events on the screen, which unfailingly lead to the male's possession of the female."(18)

While Mulvey's text is addressed to mainstream cinema, and takes its departure from Christian Metz's examination of film as an imaginary signifier of particular cultural potency, she introduces into that gender neutral analysis the structural dynamic of sexual difference. Thus the discussion Mulvey advances, while addressed to the mainstream film text, has been profitably explored elsewhere. As Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof have observed about the 'symptomatic' value of not only cinematic but also literary and psychoanalytic texts--an observation that can be, and has been, extended to still other domains, not least the visual arts: "Because they serve so well as symptoms, (these) texts have provided a primary setting for the feminist psychoanalytic efforts to understand the construction of a gendered subject, to trace the operations of a system of representation which tends to return all to an opposition of presence and lack, to define questions of sexual difference and sexuality, and to negotiate the conflicts between feminism and psychoanalysis themselves (19)."

If indeed such texts are usefully 'symptomatic', the project that videotapes such as those to be considered within this thesis undertake can be viewed as more than an analysis or subversion or deconstruction of these dominant modes: they must also be read, also perhaps 'symptomatically', in their concurrent engagement with articulating an alternative register of desire.

For, as Sandy Flitterman-Lewis has argued with respect to female desire in the context of feminist cinematic production:

There is already a way of desiring--in difference--that is 'spoken' in feminist films. It is not simply a matter of 'learning' to speak a new language, nor of deploying new cinematic strategies, but of a desiring process itself that emerges from a locus of difference. 'Desiring differently' posits another logic (logic of an Other) whose terms and positions are precisely--feminine.(20)

The videotapes that form the subject matter of this thesis are all narrative in form, and the ensuing chapters offer a reading of these works based on their thematic investment at the level of content, as well as the narrative strategies--point of view, genre, authorial voice, etc.--through which the possibilities of an enunciation in the feminine is brought to bear. For what is suggested by female desire in language is the casting of alternate modes of representation grounded in concepts of female subjectivity, identity, identification and investment. Such a language would also imply new modes of address and new narrative representational strategies.

The interpretive grid brings together feminism, postmodernism and poststructuralism as a theoretical context and epistemological framework, the field of representation (and self-representation) as a domain of strategic intervention, the specificities of form and language within video, the feminist engagement with difference and with issues of female identity and subjectivity, and a psychoanalytic discourse addressing the relation of the female to desire. The productions criss-cross in various ways, and at different historical moments, these theoretical and contextual currents.

In the chapter which follows this introduction, A desire of one's own, psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin poses the question that is pursued throughout the thesis: "What alternative to the phallus is there?"(21)

The chapter examines the Freudian and Lacanian accounts of the formations of sexual identity in the Oedipal transaction and the implications of women's abject relation to the phallus as signifier of desire. Into these accounts is introduced the feminist critique of these paradigms with a view to opening up questions such as that posed by Teresa Brennan: "What would a non-patriarchal symbolic entail?"(22)

In chapter three, The motherless daughters, the principal object of study is "A Very Personal Story", a videotape by Lisa Steele, produced in 1974. The tape is a

first person account of the death of the narrator's mother and relates her accession to her own sense of subjectivity. This production is situated within the context of both video production and feminist art production of that period.

The videotapes discussed in this chapter form part of a context of performance art by women, and Mary Kelly's observation with respect to the effectivity of feminist performance art has clear parallels to these video performances: "The specific contribution of feminists in the field of performance has been to pose the question of sexual difference across the discourse of the body in a way which focuses on the construction not of the individual, but of the sexed subject."⁽²³⁾ Further, the performative aspects of the work as autobiography close the gap between narrator and author even as they leave open questions of fiction and non-fiction, 'reality' and construct, and the female authorial "I".

At the same time, the chapter will examine--in this emergence of a 'feminist' movement in relation to and contradistinction from the conventions of the 'feminine'--the feminist reconstitution of the symbolic mother.

Chapter four, The mother bereft, will focus principally on two videotapes, "My Mother is a Dangerous Woman" (1987) by b.h. Yael and "Sugar Daddy" (1982) by Ardele Lister. In both tapes, the daughter as subject

exists in a highly problematic, and problematized, relation to the mother. Thus the tapes represent a radical departure from an earlier feminist celebration of the mother as sign and offer a more complex account of a vexed relation between 'feminine' mothers and 'feminist' daughters.

In Lister's performance work, the author/producer enacts the persona of the woman whose role in her childhood had been that of a beloved mother-surrogate, but who in her adult life she discovers to have been, throughout those years and since, her father's mistress. In her performance of this role, the place Lister assumes in this Oedipal drama is highly complex, and certainly the 'feminine' place in this family drama is depicted as without reward.

Likewise in the video by b.h. Yael, the narrative recounts the difficult negotiations of identity on the part of a young woman, who seeks to renegotiate the terms of maternal identification through a distantiation from her birth mother, whose complicity with paternal law she rejects. Through an imaginary rescripting of the story of a mythological mother, she continues to seek out a maternal mirror and object in which to find a narcissistic reflection and an identificatory model.

In each of the works, the 'daughter' seeks to find a relation to the mother that would be enabling. The figure

of the father is absent, yet present as the authority and law that structures the position of the mother.

Chapter five, Desiring daughters, is a close scene-by-scene reading of the videotape Influences of My Mother (1982) by Sara Diamond, a tape in which, once again, the author, narrator and performer are one, and in which the narrative is presented as autobiography in a form of direct address to the spectator.

In this work, Diamond re-enacts a subjectivity not already extant but actively constructed through will and desire. Utilizing photographs, performance and narration, the recollections of memory and the artifacts of history, she reconstructs the 'identity' of the mother who died while she was a girl in early adolescence. In a sequence of scenes, encompassing in their turn grief, rage, denial, idealization and separation, the daughter reinvents the mother and, in the process, reconstitutes her own personal identity.

As will be argued in this chapter, Diamond reinvents the mother as a desiring subject so she can assume a place as a desiring daughter. This subjectivity is enabled by identificatory processes, but the production highlights these processes as themselves constructs, produced from the artifacts of history together with desire, memory and fantasy.

Chapter six, A doubled desire, examines a tape made by Mona Hatoum with the participation of her mother. Measures of Distance (1988) is an intimate account by the Lebanese-born artist of displacement from family, culture and a war-ravaged homeland. The tape is centered around the emotionally vibrant letters from mother to daughter and the photographs taken by Hatoum on a visit home several years earlier.

In this work, the body of the mother is treated as literally the site of a cultural inscription: the photographs are nude images of the mother over which is superimposed the Arabic script of her letters. The 'measures of distance' that are calibrated in this work are multiple, addressing not only the permanent foreclosure of the maternal body, but the distances and differences produced through language, cultural difference, exile.

As in Diamond's work, the axis of desire is orchestrated around the mother. But here the figure is not an imaginary one, but a subject of speech. Yet this relationship is itself a new construct, one which follows a renewed interest on the part of the "father's daughter" in the previously neglected mother. Mother and daughter collaborate to explore a new, altered relation between them. While this relation is a furtive one, hidden from the father and his claims, it is a relation in which the

mother is enabled to articulate her own desire, a relation in which both mother and daughter are desiring subjects.

The final chapter, Conclusion, offers some speculative comments with respect to the trajectory of the narrative constructed within the thesis itself. As is noted, the narrative of the thesis traces neither the story of the mother(s) nor even that of the daughter(s), but rather shifts in the ways of viewing this relationship. This chapter seeks to account for what would enable the change explored within the thesis, from repression to conflict to imaginary resolution to collaboration. In particular, it examines the question of whether the mother can--in this instance at a secondary level that would nonetheless have psychic and social consequence--act as an agent of separation for the daughter, and the role of feminism as a legitimating site for the articulation of an alternate symbolic register.

Footnotes, Chapter One

1. Teresa de Lauretis describes the emerging subject in feminism as one "that is at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision." Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987, p.10. In a similar vein, Elaine Showalter has employed the term "double-voice discourse" to describe writing that embodies the cultural, social, literary and artistic heritages of what she terms the "dominant group" and the "muted" group. Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 8, winter 1981, pp. 179-205

2. Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1976

3. Marianne Hirsch, "Mothers and Daughters", in Jean F. O'Barr, Deborah Pope, Mary Wier, eds., Ties That Bind, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1979, p. 178

4. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History", The Art Bulletin, Vol. LXIX, no. 3, Sept. 87 p. 332

5. In the work of some critics, this involved inserting women within the pantheon of 'great' artists; other

critics sought to challenge the categories of greatness and of art altogether. See Linda Nochlin's landmark, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", *Art News*, January 1971 and Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 1979, as instances of the first approach and Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, in Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, Pantheon, New York, 1981, in establishing a fundamentally different inquiry. See also Peterson and Mathews, op. cit., for discussion of these and other writers and first-generation, second-generation feminism.

6. Carol Duncan, "When Greatness is a Box of Wheaties", *Artforum*, October 1975, p. 73

7. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, op. cit., p. 329

8. Harmony Hammond, "Horseblindners", in Wrappings, Essays on Feminism, Art and the Martian Arts, New York, p.99

9. Hester Eisenstein, "Introduction", in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., The Future of Difference, New Brunswick, N.J., 1985, as cited in Gouma-Peterson and Matthews, op.cit., p.346

10. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, op. cit., p. 332, p. 335

11. Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", in Toril Moi, ed., The Kristeva Reader, Columbia University Press, New York,

1986, p.161

12. Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics, Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, 1983, p. 143

13. Brenda Longfellow, "Love Letters To The Mother: The Work Of Chantal Akerman", Canadian Journal of Political and Social theory, Vol. Ixx, no. 1-2, 1989, p. 74

14. Rosi Braidotti, "The politics of ontological difference", in Teresa Brennan, ed., Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, pp. 91-92

15. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Screen, vol. 16, no. 3. autumn 1975, reprinted in Brian Wallis, ed., Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, New Museum, New York, 1988, p. 361-373

16. Mulvey, op. cit., p. 362

17. Mulvey, op. cit., p. 366

18. Constance Penley, "A Certain Refusal of Difference", in The Future of an Illusion, University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, 1989, p.42

19. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof, "Introduction", in Feldstein and Roof, eds., Feminism and Psychoanalysis, Cornell University Press, Ithica and London, 1989, p. 3

20. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, To Desire Differently, University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago, 1990, p.2-3

21. Jessica Benjamin, "A Desire of One's Own", in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986, p. 91

22. Teresa Brennan, "Introduction", in Teresa Brennan, ed., Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op. cit., p.5

23. Mary Kelly, "Reviewing Modernist Criticism", in Brian Wallis, ed., Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, op. cit., p.97

Chapter two: A desire of one's own

In her essay, "A Desire of One's Own", critic and psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin poses anew the troublesome question that has been at the crux of the problematic of constituting female identity and desire outside of the hegemonic terms of patriarchal discourse.

What alternative to the phallus is there?" she asks. "Is there another relationship to desire than the one represented by the idealized phallus?"

Citing the work of the prominent critic Juliet Mitchell, who might be seen to stand in for a range of feminist theorists who have been grappling with theories of subjectivity founded in a Continental, linguistically-based psychoanalysis, she notes: "Mitchell argues that there is none, and that until patriarchy is overcome there is no other way to represent desire, difference, or separation."

"Is she right," Benjamin asks, "or can we discern the rudiments of another way of representing desire, woman's desire, in the here and now of patriarchal culture?" (1)

The question of female subjectivity has been at the forefront of the feminist engagement with the heritage of a patriarchal order. Indeed, the paradox of female subjectivity and desire is its structural 'non-existence' within a symbolic order in which the phallus is the

privileged signifier, not only as the representative of the principle of separation and individuation but as the symbol of desire, power, activity and potency.

To enter a critical engagement with the terms of this discourse is thus to occupy a position at once paradoxical and political: paradoxical in that there is no 'place' for women from which to speak, and political in the intervention into the relations of power which this situation bespeaks.

The problematic of female desire and subjectivity is situated within the psychic and social organizations of phallogentricity, through which male and female subjects take up their positions in relation to the differentiated categories of the masculine and feminine that prevail within a(ny) given society, categories which privilege the masculine term within this duality.

But as Sandy Flitterman-Lewis points out, the very possibility of understanding "how sexual difference itself comes about, of how the inscription of feminine desire in a text is achieved, or indeed, of what the definitions of 'feminine desire' might be" (2) is an impossibility without a theory of representation that accounts for how the very categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' are unconsciously produced within a patriarchal organization of sexual difference.

Psychoanalytic theory has been an important site for

such a theorization, for it offers a compelling account of how social subjects are produced in gender, and of the arbitrary nature of identities secured neither in biology nor in any pre-given essence, but through the chain of significations into which subjects are inserted.

a) Freud and Lacan

In the Freudian account of the passage of the child through the Oedipal instant--the process through which the child comes to assume a gender differentiated identity--the signifier of account is the penis. The boy has it, the girl doesn't. Both view the girl's lack as a deficiency. The girl (consumed by penis envy!) will normatively, though rather unhappily, come to identify with the now-depreciated mother and seek to obtain the penis from the father in the form of a baby. The desire of the woman finds expression only in relation to her maternal function. The normative culmination of this moment is one in which the boy is seen to emerge as an actively desiring subject, while the girl comes to occupy a passive position, the desire to be desired.

Freud specifies that it is not only the child's sexuality that is at stake in this determinate Oedipal moment, but the constitution of its very identity. In the work of Jacques Lacan, which is a re-reading of the early Freud through the knowledge systems that proceed from structural linguistic and anthropology, this point is

repeated, though the Oedipal moment itself is translated as a linguistic transaction. With its entry into the symbolic order of language, the subject is structured by language, which is, in Ferdinand de Saussure's description, a signifying chain organized according to a differential logic--of which the terms male and female may be seen to be the most intensively marked.

In the Oedipal passage, the child must surrender its imaginary vision of totality and its dyadic union with the mother to take up a position in gender and culture. Unlike Freud, however, Lacan insists that it is not the contingent penis that is the signifier of account, but rather the transcendent phallus. It stands (upright) as the representative of the Law of the Father, of the castration complex, of the lack that structures language. In Lacan's account, the Oedipal experience inaugurates a split in the subject, a splitting that is the predicate of its entry into the systems of signification which mediate reality.

Indeed, Lacan maintains that "the Western symbolic order derives its coherence from the phallus, or paternal signifier" (3). It is the privileged signifier of the symbolic order, that is, the order of meaning and discourse, which supercedes--yet co-exists with--the imaginary order, the order of identifications and emotions which is associated with the pre-Oedipal and the mother.

For Lacan, neither boy or girl can possess the phallus, and each is marked by lack. Nonetheless, as many critics have pointed out, the masculine stands in privileged relation to the phallus, the signifier of potency and plenitude.

Thus, though there is a divergence in the two accounts, they converge on the essential point: that of the phallus as signifier of desire and of difference and the masculine subject's privileged relation to that signifier. The woman, by contrast, in the differential logic which structures language, occupies negative semantic and cultural space. For her, it is the maternal space alone that is marked as the exclusive province of feminine "jouissance".

As Mary Ann Doane has argued, in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, "sexual difference is mapped onto linguistic difference--and this is not to the advantage of women. The woman, whose access to that signifier is problematic, finds herself in a kind of signifying limbo. For the logical consequence of the Lacanian alignment of the phallus with the symbolic order and the field of language is the exclusion of the woman or, at the very least, the assumption of her different or deficient relation to language and its assurance of subjectivity."

(4)

Indeed, she continues, since the question of subjectivity cannot be extricated from that of desire, and since it is the male child who best achieves the distance from the "origin" of the maternal that is the prerequisite of desire, the male child is doubly privileged: as subject of desire, and hence as subject proper.

The implications of the woman's abject relation to the phallus as signifier of desire has been the object of fertile analysis by such psychoanalytically-based theorists as Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, who have offered shattering critiques of the staging of masculine subjectivity across the body of women and of how the symbolic is subtended by the masculine imaginary. They have further explored the place of the feminine in a focus on the pre-Oedipal maternal matrix, and have sought to theorize and enact a different form of discourse through writing female desire into language.

However, as Mary Ann Doane has argued, in a move clearly intended to extract the discourse of female subjecthood from the binary positions of the psychoanalytic scenarios: "One does not necessarily have to believe in a specifically feminine relation to language in order to agree that it is only through a disengagement of women from the roles and gestures of a naturalized femininity that traditional ways of conceptualizing sexual difference can be overthrown." (5)

b. feminism and psychoanalysis

To speak of 'woman's desire' is to speak of female subjectivity, and to return Benjamin's question to the places in which the question of female subjectivity has been taken up as an issue embedded in politics, a feminist politics in which the domain of the personal is seen to be fully imbricated in the domain of the public.

The deeply motivated efforts to destabilize, disclaim and dismantle patriarchal value systems and their institutional supports bespeaks the paucity of these social and symbolic arrangements as representations of women, their needs or their desires.

Psychoanalytic theory has been incorporated within the feminist project insofar as it has provided a framework for understanding the cultural construction of sexual difference, the workings of unconscious desire in the reproduction of patriarchal structures of social relations, and the role of systems of signification-- language and representation--in anchoring the patriarchal arrangements with respect to the differential ordering orchestrated around sexual difference.

Thus, if an early motto of the feminist movement was "the personal is political", the linguistically-based psychoanalytic paradigm deriving from Lacan's rereading of Freud has proven fruitful in accounting for the links between the social, its symbolic systems, and the

'personal'. Further, as Rosi Braidotti adds, reflecting on feminism's dual project of "deconstruct(ing) established forms of knowledge" and "establish(ing) a new order of values" which incorporates the bodily, the affective and the sexual within the framework of "the knowing process": "the personal is not only the political, it is also the theoretical". (6)

In Lacanian theory, the self is constituted through the other, and woman serves as the Other through which man secures his identity. The woman--with her complicated relation to the phallus as guarantor of self, her insertion into a cultural order in which woman is designated as not-man, her identity confined to objecthood and motherhood, her place as sign and token within the exchange structure of kinship systems--is left with dismal options.

In such a reading, the nature of masculinity and femininity is not seen as the consequence of the psychic internalization of the social order; rather, sexual difference is itself the very fundament and condition of social structuration and the symbolic order. Such a position argues against any pre-given, natural, biological category of masculine and feminine sexual identity and it stands against other psychoanalytic paradigms which would reduce the psychic to the social. At the same time, as Brennan points out, "if assumptions about a direct line

between social cause and psychical effect are in doubt, this does not mean that there is no connection between psychical and social reality...."(7)

While this paradigm has enabled the recognition that 'woman' is not "a given, biologically or psychologically, but...a category produced in signifying practices...or through signification at the level of the unconscious" (8), nonetheless the psychoanalytic model holds limitations for feminists. Not the least of these is that it constructs feminine sexuality in masculine terms or, as Flitteman-Lewis stresses, it "describes the production of a subjectivity which is irrefutably male." (9) Further, as Braidotti argues, "...although psychoanalytic theory has done a great deal to improve our understanding of sexual difference, it has done little or nothing to change the concrete social conditions of sex-relations and of gender-stratification. The latter is precisely the target of feminist practice." (10)

If such statements highlight an incompatibility in the priorities and object of focus between the spheres of feminism and psychoanalysis, the authors do not deny the motivations for such a union. And if, indeed, the end goal is "change", the recognitions obtained, through a psychoanalytic paradigm, of unconscious investments that serve to secure the prevailing gender arrangements must figure in any efforts at revisions in a patriarchal

symbolic order which guarantees these arrangements. As Teresa Brennan points out, "psychoanalysis was harnessed to the feminist project to comprehend how patriarchal sexual identities go as deep as they do, why the masquerade of femininity is such a strong act."(11)

The phallus is a privileged signifier not only in psychical differentiation--i.e. it enters as the 'third term' that inaugurates the rupture from the maternal dyad and thus enables the subject to assume a place in relation to others and in the world--but within the differential structure of language, which it 'grounds' as the transcendent signifier of the symbolic order. As Brennan argues, "the symbolic's patriarchal nature relies in part on the coincident meeting of two intervening 'third terms': language, and the structural position of the third party, currently occupied by a man." (12)

Given that a symbolic order is a necessary condition of sanity--the alternative being psychosis--the obstacle, and the challenge, to the aforementioned "change" may be one of separating these interlocked processes, distinguishing between, in the first instance, the necessity for a structuring 'third term' as a condition of social existence and, in the second instance, the orchestration of this 'third term' around the phallus and the reinforcement of patriarchal domination.(13) The question of female desire as raised within feminist

psychoanalytic discourse is, in this way, intertwined with the problematic of "conceiv(ing) of a symbolic that is not patriarchal." (14)

Thus to Jessica Benjamin's question, "What alternative to the phallus is there?", may be adjoined a larger chorus of female voices grappling with precisely this question. To cite only two of these voices, Flitterman-Lewis asks, "Is our fate as women--our representations in the dominant cultural institution of our time--so completely bound to such structures of desire?... Are there other conceptions of desire, ways of formulating different terms?" (15) And Brennan : "What would a non-patriarchal symbolic entail?" (16) Such questions situate female desire and its representations as a crucial site of inquiry for feminism.

c. the politics of difference: difference 'from'

The debates surrounding issues of sexual difference, whether conceived within a political or a psychoanalytic formulation, were initially taken up by feminist critics from the perspective of women's difference from men.

The understanding of the political project deriving from such difference from men, however, has varied in accordance with divergent theories/proposals by which such 'difference' is accounted for.

The women's movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, as historian Linda Gordon has outlined, included both an

"androgynous" vision of men and women predicated on a shared "fundamental humanity" and, conversely, a view of "female uniqueness." The former, in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, emphasized "the artificial imposition of femininity upon women as part of a system subordinating, constricting, and controlling them." The latter, in the later-nineteenth century, tended toward a view of women's moral superiority, viewed the world as "divided between a male principle of aggression and a female one of nurturance" and privileged motherhood as the "fundamental defining experience of womanhood." (17)

In the second wave of the feminist movement of the 20th century, similar arguments have been taken up anew, though with somewhat modified emphasis. In the first instance, an emphasis on equal rights for women, like the earlier 'androgynous' vision of the sexes, has privileged the mobilization of political action intended to secure for women full access to and participation within the institutions of society--such as judicial, educational, scientific, religious and medical (including psychoanalytic) institutions--which have historically excluded or discriminated against women.

Functioning in tandem with this emphasis, a 'liberal' or 'humanist' one, has been a more 'radical' stance, one which has sought to celebrate the character and moral quality of women, to assert a female value system and to

privilege female 'voice', language--and difference.

Substantial arguments have been mounted against each of these positions by feminist critics working from within the poststructuralist paradigms that have emerged from the intersections of psychoanalytic, linguistic and anthropological theory. These theories have served to challenge the 'humanist' paradigm erected during the period of the Enlightenment.

In the first instance, that of seeking 'equality' for women within the existing institutions, such a position, it is argued, fails to challenge their structurally patriarchal nature. Seeking to expand the 'humanist' model to include women in the Family of Man occludes the reality that the model itself is a problematic one in that it is founded on the exclusion of women. That is, while humanism was itself a movement intended to replace the power of the church and of superstition with secular power and scientific knowledge--with man rather than God--the very terms of humanism are predicated on a binary model in which 'woman' and 'her' correlates occupies the negative pole of the term of 'man' and 'his' correlates (reason, science, law, etc.).

In the second instance, that of celebrating the signs of the feminine, critics have argued that such a position ascribes to woman a fixed sexual identity based on innate, 'essential' qualities, ultimately reducible to

nature or biology. (This critique of the valorization of the 'feminine' per se is also relevant to the 'equality' position insofar as women's participation within patriarchal institutions is seen to bring a 'female' presence, with presumed qualities, to bear.) As Teresa Brennan has noted: "To admit even a positive argument from nature (is) to foreclose (too soon?) on the belief in an ultimately social account of sexual difference; to rule out strategies for change directed against the social order as it stands." (18) Further, in simply placing a positive valence on the previously pejorated feminine side of the dualistic equation, the feminine is assimilated to, or simply reverses, a dualistic structure, which itself remains intact.

As Kate Linker argues, "(Equal rights or gender equity) strategies, based in the elimination of discrimination and in equal access to institutional power, in no way attempt to account for the ideological structures of which discrimination is but a symptom: as Jane Gallop observes, they aim to recover, in the direction of complementarity or symmetry, the structured appropriation of woman to the order of the same, to the standard of masculine sexuality. They leave untouched in this manner, the integrated value system through which feminine oppression is enacted." (19)

Critics working from within a psychoanalytically-

based paradigm insist that psychical factors must be taken into account in the formulation of political critique. Yet even from within a poststructuralist, psychoanalytic framework, the duality of 'equality' and 'difference' persists, in positions generally characterized as Anglo-American and French Feminist.

Within the so-called Anglo-American framework (in Britain also associated with a Marxist-socialist politic), in which the work of Juliet Mitchell is of founding and paramount importance, the notion of 'equality' is predicated on the Lacanian argument with respect to the signification of the phallus. As has been discussed, the law represented by the paternal representative is the necessary 'third term' inaugurating the split of the mother/child dyad and bringing the child into culture. In Mitchell's description: "(To Lacan)...there can be nothing human that pre-exists or exists outside the law represented by the father; there is only either its denial (psychosis) or the fortunes and misfortunes ('normality' and neurosis) of its terms."(20)

However, the phallus is itself an abstraction, the signifier of a law. It is not possessed by any subject, male or female. Further, the categories of masculine and feminine are themselves signs within a closed system of signification, not qualities innate to sex; both men and women are 'equal' in not possessing the phallus and in

that each can occupy either of the positions, which "slip and slide."(21) Thus a part of any political project is unmasking the imposture by which patriarchy stakes its special claims. As Mitchell declares:

To be human is to be subjected to a law which decentres and divides: sexuality is created in a division, the subject is split; but an ideological world conceals this from the conscious subject who is supposed to feel whole and certain of a sexual identity. Psychoanalysis should aim at a destruction of this concealment and at a reconstruction of the subject's construction in all its splits. (22)

But if the terms of sexual difference are a play of difference in a closed system, the system is anchored by the phallus as signifier, and the penis--as contingent signifier and visible sign of difference--stands in privileged relation to the phallus as transcendent signifier.

French feminism has, as Brennan puts it, "tried to find ways around the male dominance implied by Lacan's symbolic law". (23) Given the symbolic's bearing on psychical organization, and its orchestration around the penis/phallus, French feminism has sought ways of countering patriarchal language and thought while holding to the necessity of accounting for--and potentially altering the terms of--psychical differentiation and organization.

French feminism has focused its concern on questions of sexual difference, language and the critique of

'phallogocentrism': that is, the critique of phallogocentrism and the critique of 'logic' as a Western metaphysical tradition itself predicated on tropes of presence and lack as well as on a dualistic model of knowledge in which the 'masculine' is associated with the rational and scientific--i.e., 'knowledge' itself--and the 'feminine' with unreason, emotion, myth, etc. As Brennan summarizes, "French feminism is meant to be about the insistence that women are difference, and a challenge to phallogocentric thinking and patriarchal structures of language." (24)

Thus French feminist theorists have focused on women as difference, have sought to develop alternatives to the patriarchal structures of language through an écriture feminin, have challenged phallogocentric thinking through the deconstruction of both its 'logic' and its symptomatic slippages, gaps and absences, have given currency to efforts to theorize anew the maternal figure, and have sought another way of understanding or grounding the notion of 'difference' that does not return the term of difference to the masculine.

As Toril Moi underscores, French feminist theorists "reject 'equality' as a covert attempt to force women to become like men." (25) Thus the question posed by Jessica Benjamin, herself a psychoanalytic theorist working within the object relations school, is a question also taken up

within the Lacanian-based French feminist theory: "What alternative to the phallus is there?"

d. the politics of difference--difference within

If French Feminism has been preoccupied with questions of sexual difference around issues of language and of feminine specificity and discourse, in contrast to the Anglo-American use of French theory to provide a feminist critique of ideology, each of these paradigms is predicated on a feminist deconstruction of the terms of 'man'/phallus/father/law, etc. Whether accounting for 'equality' or 'difference', both positions find their point of reference within the (masculine/feminine) dualisms that anchor Western science and metaphysics.

Further, the very project of 'difference' underscored in French Feminism is one which can lend itself to the collapse of pluralities and heterogeneity into the monolithic. As Linda Gordon observes, "...the emphasis on a 'unique' female voice almost always becomes an assumption of a homogenous female voice. Naturally, people get angry at arrogant uses of 'we'." (26)

Trinh T. Minh-ha also argues against what she terms a "yearning for universality" in the use of the term 'woman' in any generic sense. In a statement challenging the Eurocentric premises that have imbued much feminist

writing, she argues that: "Just as 'man' provides an example of how the part played by women has been ignored, undervalued, distorted, or omitted through the use of terminology presumed to be generic, 'woman' more often than not reflects the subtle power of linguistic exclusion, for its set of referents rarely includes those relevant to Third World 'female persons'." (27)

As Gayatri Spivak has insisted: "The difference between French and Anglo-American feminism is superficial. However unfeasible and inefficient it may sound, I see no way to avoid insisting that there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?" (28) Such a focus invites what Trinh terms the "exploration of difference within duality itself". (29)

Teresa de Lauretis has succinctly outlined two limitations of the concept of "sexual difference". In the first instance, it "constrains feminist critical thought within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition (woman as the difference from man, both universalized; or woman as difference tout court, and hence equally universalized"), thus mitigating against the possibility of articulating "the differences of women from Woman, that is to say, the differences among women or, perhaps more exactly, the differences within women." In the second instance, it "recuperates the radical epistemological

potential of feminist thought" inside what Audre Lorde has termed 'the master's house' rather than opening up to a new conception of the social subject, one constituted not only in sexual difference but also in race, class and other cultural relations: "a subject, therefore, not unified, but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted." (30)

The move these statements trace is two-fold. In the first instance, 'sexual difference' is extricated from its imbrication with 'gender'; as de Lauretis specifies, "a subject (is) constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone."(31) And at the same time, these statements position the other woman as a/the privileged interlocuter, shifting the frame of reference from an emphasis on women's difference 'from' men to differences between, among, and within women.

Jane Flax has termed the problematizing of gender relations "the single most important advance in feminist theory." At the same time, however, she points out that there is by no means a consensus on what would constitute a definition of 'gender'. "What is gender?", she asks. "How is it related to anatomical sexual differences? How are gender relations constituted and sustained (in one person's lifetime and more generally as a social experience over time)? How do gender relations relate to other sorts of social relations such as class or

race?...What are the relationships between gender relations, sexuality, and a sense of individual identity? What are the relationships between heterosexuality, homosexuality, and gender relations? Are there only two genders?", etc. (32)

If there is not a consensus on the answers to such questions, it also clear that 'gender' can no longer be naturalized, taken as a given, or reduced to sexual difference. Rather, gender is the social constitution of a duality in which differential meanings are assigned to the terms of 'male' and 'female' within any given culture, race, class, etc. As Flax notes, "gender, both as an analytic category and a social process, is relational." (33) It represents a complex set of social relations produced across race, culture, class, within concrete social practices. While such relations intersect with every aspect of social experience, their specific meanings, consequences and practices are variable across time and cultures.

Thus a theory of gender problematizes the term of 'man' as fully as that of 'woman'. As Trinh Minh-ha argues, the concept of gender "is open enough to deal with both differences between and differences within entities, while the concept of sex reduces the interactions between men and women to an even exchange or a mere opposition of identities." (34)

This shift from a view of women defined by sexual difference (from man) to one that situates the female as a site of multiple, even contradictory, differences is a shift in the understanding of female subjectivity itself. As Linda Gordon observes, "...once it is understood...that these differences not only constitute each woman's consciousness and subjective limits but all together define the female subject of feminism in its very specificity, its inherent and at least for now irreconcilable contradiction...these differences, then, cannot be again collapsed into a fixed identity, a sameness of all women as Woman, or a representation of Feminism as a coherent and available image."(35)

This "female subject of feminism" is, in a term used by Teresa de Lauretis, a "subject in process", a theoretical construct distinguishable both from Woman as the category of Other to the masculine and from women as concrete historical subjects. (36) This "subject in process" may be seen to be a figure constituted in gender relations across varying social determinants and, further, hostage to the laws of language and of psychic differentiation that psychoanalytic theory has so persuasively outlined.

But if 'difference' between/within/among women is not an exemption from such laws, it is perhaps a means for their mitigation and mutation. Whether this sense of

'difference', with its privileging of the other woman as the point of reference, is understood in political terms or in psychoanalytic terms, it is a move which insists on the rupturing of binary, dualistic models. It is a move which enables, as Trinh Minh-ha terms it, "the tentative exploration of a difference within duality itself"(37)-- with all that this implies in the context of the entire history of Western civilization.

As Rosi Braidotti has argued, psychoanalytic theory is delimited in its usefulness to feminists in their project of "change" in that, in its theoretical models, it constructs women in relation to, and as the negative of, man. Conversely, feminist practice, "having stressed from the start the lack of symmetry between the sexes" recognizes the other as woman. It "posits the necessity of the relation to the other woman as the privileged interlocuter, the witness, the legitimator of the self....It even posits the recognition of the otherness of the other woman as the first step towards redefining our common sameness, our 'being-a-woman'." (38)

If both French-Feminist and Anglo-American psychoanalytic models have utilized strategies of deconstruction and negation to 'undo' patriarchal authority and identity (the one in this fashion speculating about women's discourse, the other refusing such a project altogether), the framing of 'difference'

around the figure of the other woman has invited an alternate strategy, one engaged not only in the deconstruction of patriarchal relations but in the construction of (new) social identities. In such a formulation, the term of identity is not seen as 'essential', fixed, immutable or even singular, but itself contingent, provisional, historical, its authority constantly deferred--but nonetheless meaningful, and of consequence.

In the productive tension between these contradictory concepts of 'difference' it may be possible to locate some provisional responses to the questions posed by Benjamin: "Is there another relationship to desire than the one represented by the idealized phallus?...Can we discern the rudiments of another way of representing desire, woman's desire, in the here and now of patriarchal culture?"

Footnotes, Chapter Two

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34. Trinh T. Minh-ha, op. cit., p. 106

35. Linda Gordon, op. cit., p. 14-15

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38. Rosi Braidotti, op. cit., p.98

Chapter Three: The motherless daughters

Lisa Steele's videotape, "A Very Personal Story", made in 1974, is among the first of a body of videotapes by the artist that span a period of nearly twenty years. While many artists working in video in the early 1970s worked as well in other media, or moved away from video into other media of production in subsequent years, Steele has worked virtually exclusively in this medium since the early 1970s. In an artistic career as enduring as Steele's, therefore, with its highly varied, frequently changing approach to production, this video document is all the more compelling as a work highly emblematic--both within her own body of work and in relation to work by other artists--of the use of video in this period.

Certainly the new availability of portable video equipment by the early 1970s had provided artists with an exciting new medium. As critic Peggy Gale wrote at the time, "Video has captured our imagination." (1) The medium, a small-format version of the technology of television, offered the possibility for an active critical engagement with both the form and content of this powerful mass medium. Further, with the rupture of postwar modernism, with its tenets of formal self-referentiality and its privileging of painterly gesture, artists were exploring a range of media from video to performance to

multimedia to installation. Earlier art movements (Dadaism, Futurism, Fluxus) had already led the way toward an approach to art which emphasized process and immediacy over materialization and permanency. The early 1970s witnessed a virtual explosion of work within and across various media, in particular under the general rubric of conceptual art. Video in the early 1970s was a privileged medium for the pursuit of contemporary aesthetic, critical and social issues.

Thus "video" or "video art" as a term has tended to designate an eclectic range of non-commercial production activity originating in individual (and collective) preoccupations with both specific and broad aspects of the medium's formal, technological and cultural properties. The use of a common technology, however, does not act to unite the divergent applications of that technology, and during video's brief history, a number of defining terms have been employed to describe its various genres or categories of expression, from synaesthetic to collage to personal/autobiographical to video verite to narrative to documentary, etc. The combinations and inter-relationships between their elements, however, continue to defy the application of a traditional formal grid to categorize the range and scope of video activity.

This new medium required the elaboration of a 'new' language, and during this period, artists made form and

virtue out of the limitations of the technology. They began to isolate and employ the formal properties of video, including simultaneity of the image and its reproduction, the time base (manipulated or employed as 'real time'), the flat, two-dimensional surface with its demands for a highly structured image; the texture of the image and its dynamic quality; the fluidity of the camera and its specific characteristics (zoom, pan, focus, frame); spatial aspects; inclusion of language as a material; the potential for juxtaposition of visual and aural elements; the technological capability of electronic image manipulation; the portability of the medium, and its capability of instant replay.

In addition to the formal explorations of this medium, artists during this period also began to use their lives as material through which to approach larger fields of investigation. If television is a mass medium, seen as impersonal, distanced, objectifying, formulaic and commercial, artists appropriated for video the realm of the personal and subjective. This in turn led to a different understanding of the audience, from one of the "mass" public of television to that of a direct receiver/participant (often in an intimate environment), in a direct, one on one, communication. Such intimacy is a hallmark of Steele's videotapes during this period.

"A Very Personal Story" begins without introduction or title. The opening shot is of a bare wall. Lisa Steele, the performer in the videotape, appears suddenly in the frame from the righthand side of the screen, and sits down cross-legged on the floor between the wall and the camera. She is naked above the waist and the camera, set low to the ground, frames her head and bare shoulders.

Her elbows are evidently perched on her knees; her hands, which she joins and unjoins by knitting and unknitting her fingers and nervously groping and touching them, obscure a full view of her face. The apex of the triangulation created by the perched arms is joined at eye level; by raising or lowering her hands, Steele can hide her eyes or make their movement, toward or away from the viewer, visible.

For some 20 seconds after she is seated, Steele does not speak. She looks to the side, at the camera, and away, she focuses on her fingers, she fidgets. Finally, facing the camera directly, she begins: "I have a story to tell you", then faces away, "a really, a very personal story."

As she continues, always in the same position, her eyes shift between a direct gaze at the viewer and away. "This isn't a...uh, I'm going to tell you, I'll tell you the end first, the end is about that, uh, my mother dies,

in the end, (pause), but, so there isn't any, there won't be any, punchline, so you know that part before we start, so we can start the story now."

In these first few moments of the videotape, there can already be witnessed the convergence of a range of discursive, aesthetic and political moves that situate the work as one highly emblematic of its period. With its direct address to the viewer, its autobiographical (not to say confessional) form, its excavation of personal history, its unscripted immediacy, its intimate scale and closely recorded gestures and its highly personal yet anti-dramatic narrative, it is also part of a broader movement toward an embrace of narrative within art practice, again in contradistinction to both the legacy of mass media and the heritage of modernism.

If the videotape can be readily situated within a wider stream of art practice not specific to gender, in what can be said to lie its specificity as a female or feminist production? Does the new language which it employs constitute in any way a desiring female production? And where, and in what ways, does the production situate its protagonist as a subject in/of history?

Certainly "A Very Personal Story" predates the rigorous critical attention that would be the object of focus in the later 1970s on the unconscious in narrative, in

particular within film, but also in literary, psychoanalytic and other texts, and the relations between dominant aesthetic forms and patriarchal ideology. But if it predates these debates, it also can be seen to anticipate them, even, perhaps, to exceed them.

As already noted, the 'story' Steele recounts begins with its conclusion: the death of the mother. The remainder of the 17-minute tape is given over to a detailed account of the day in which this event occurred: Steele and a girlfriend preparing "grilled toast in the electric skillet" before school, a school day uneventful but for remembered details of a class reading of the play "Romeo and Juliet", time spent "messing around, not really doing anything...at all" after school with her boyfriend, returning home and recognizing from the unlit house and the open door visible at a distance on this December day that "something had happened on that day that hadn't happened on previous days", mounting the snow-drifted steps, placing her hand on the doorknob ("but there wasn't any question for me about what was inside"), entering the house, discovering the body, and then an account of the reaction and reflections she had in the brief interlude before leaving the house to "get help, tell somebody".

As with the opening moments of the videotape, in which visible signs situate the work within a given context and period of production, so too the basic

narrative line of the work invites a preliminary reading of the video in relation to the critical agenda advanced by Mulvey with respect to the ways in which the tape might be situated relative to patriarchal forms of narrative.

Steele's videotape can be seen to be, in the substance of its production strategies, a repudiation of the classical Oedipal narrative. Yet at the same time, it is a negotiation against and across this script, both implicated within it and standing apart from it.

As is immediately evident, the position of enunciation of the videotape is a feminine one, and doubly so in a production in which the producer and protagonist are one. As Sandy Flitterman-Lewis notes, "...a feminist cinema must necessarily posit its enunciative position as feminine"(2), a preliminary condition of a feminist discourse.

Yet a female position of enunciation does not in itself either suggest or guarantee a disruption of representational codes. A different locus of desire would clearly entail a difference from the norms that have grounded visual representation, notably, as has been argued in cinematic studies, the processes whereby the gaze is subtended to a masculine vision and wherein the patriarchal narrative is endlessly recast.

As Flitterman-Lewis elaborates, "While a feminist cinema must necessarily posit its enunciative position as

feminine, this does not simply mean that there is a feminine 'content' or 'expression' that emanates directly from the woman's place. Rather, the notion of authorship/enunciation in the feminine raises the question of female desire, indicating a terrain of representation from which various new positions can be engaged, scopic modalities which imply alternative conceptions of female subjectivity and desire." (3)

As Flitterman-Lewis makes evident, to consider the relation of the videotape to patriarchal conventions of narrative and to questions of a feminine language of desire requires more than an analysis of its narrative content; it requires a closer reading of the tape in its critical, narrative and textual strategies.

As noted, the position of enunciation of "A Very Personal Story" is occupied by a woman and the tape is orchestrated around the memory, perception and experience of this figure. Yet this figure clearly does not occupy the classic feminine position in patriarchal narrative: the fetish, the object of a sexualized fantasy. She does not reproduce the 'story' for women as Rachel Blau Duplessis describes, one which "has typically meant plots of seduction, courtship, the energies of quest deflected into sexual downfall, the choice of a marriage partner, the melodramas of beginning, middle, and end, the trajectories of sexual arousal and release." (4)

Rather, the woman is here the 'maker of meaning', the mover of the narrative, the site of both power and the videographic 'fantasy'. Yet, as will be further argued, this command of the position of enunciation is not simply a displacement of the masculine position onto that of a female, a simple reversal. For not only is the narrative not constructed around the stable figure of the Father, it eliminates this position altogether, orchestrating the narrative around the figures of daughter and mother.

The identificatory processes the text engages are with this female protagonist. But the protagonist is not the conquering hero of the masculine text. Indeed, she is not a hero at all, but a child of fifteen brought abruptly to adulthood. Yet she is not without her own relationship to the drama of the 'quest', of the transformative passage through a difficult task, and as she makes clear, it is through her own imaginary identification with fictional heroes, male and female, that she is able to project her own survival and seize upon her own subjecthood.

"...I just knew, I knew I had grown up a lot, that I would have to. I had no other family, basically--I had a brother but nothing, nobody else to stay with, and that I would, I would be on my own from then on.

I'm a very dramatic person and I thought to myself right then, I thought, 'Well, Lisa, this is it'. And I felt like David Copperfield, Jane Eyre, somebody, getting on the stagecoach or something. And I would make it, you know, I would get to the next station and everything would be all right."

This is not the feminine drama of the failed quest, the foreshortened adventure of the patriarchal text. But neither is it a copy of the masculine quest. What she brings 'home' from this transformative journey is not her origin (the found father, the symbolic Law) nor the (rescued) mate, the corrolary sign. Steele presents neither an Oedipal narrative in which the daughter might seek the desire of the father, nor yet a pre-Oedipal one of melding with the mother. What she accomplishes, what she returns with, is her own sense of self.

Indeed, the primary focus in the diegesis of the videotape is not on the mother, or even on her death, but on the daughter's sense of her own being, not only in the minutely remembered details of that day in her life, but specifically in the articulation of her precipitation into an intense experience of her own subjecthood.

"My mother was on the bed, and she was obviously dead. She was dead, just gone. And I guess I felt really (long pause) more, more like myself right then than I'd ever felt before."

At this moment in the videtape, Steele looks directly at the camera, and drops her hands. From this point forward, her hands, which had partially hidden her face (in a 'veiling' that offered a radically different meaning from that of feminine seduction or allure) are no longer in view of the camera, no longer constrain her gaze outward nor obstruct the viewer's toward her.

In this daughter's accession to subjecthood with the death of the mother, there is a curious aspect that is not without metaphoric links to other texts. For if "A Very Personal Story" is not a story of the sons, it has a certain resonance with the narratives of other 'daughters', and particularly those of this historical period.

The tape forms part of a larger body of visual art work produced within the first surge of a postwar feminist movement in the early 1970s. And in many respects, this moment (has) held within it a paradox: that even as 'motherhood' as an institution was being refuted and the 'women's liberation movement' was directed toward challenging, undoing, transforming the normative feminine position, typically occupied by the mother, at the same time, there abounds everywhere the search for the mother--the apt, not deficient mother.

This search is, in this sense, displaced onto other forms: in the embrace of Goddess mythology and ancient matriarchally-centered forms of spirituality; in the reclamation of lost female figures of history; in the rewriting and reinterpretation of classical Western myths and other resonant material including folk tales and religious or biblical stories, not least to reposition women within them--what Teresa de Lauretis describes elsewhere as "a reading of the sacred texts against the

passionate urging of a different question, a different practice, and a different desire."(5) In short, the search for a matrilineage at the symbolic level of culture.

The first generation of feminist work might be seen to be a convergence of a complex of approaches the complications of which would only be theorized and articulated in a later generation of theory and practice. For within it are three distinct, not fully compatible, orientations: the desire to reclaim the mother--literally, historically, mythically--and to valorize the sites of the 'feminine' in what Rachel Blau Duplessis has termed "a poetics of domestic values--nurturance, community building, inclusiveness, empathetic care"(6); the desire to claim the self as subject, in a cultural framework wherein the male is privileged as subject and the female delivered as object; the desire to break from the mother and take up the privileged masculine position, "usurping the mantle of the Father's text." (7)

The theme of female 'emergence' is an often repeated one, explicitly narrativized as a coming-to-self, but a tale implicitly that of the 'motherless' daughter. A striking example of this is another videotape produced during this period, Julie Geiger's "Spring Sowing: Emergence", shown at the 1973 Women and Film Festival in Toronto. It is perhaps noteworthy that Steele was herself a co-organizer of the video program of this landmark event.

In a review of the video program, Carol Zemel offers the following description of Geiger's tape: "In this videotape event,a supine woman was slowly and carefully cut out of her clothes. The camera focused relentlessly on knife, hands, clothing and parts of the body, squeezing out of frame any reference to a whole person, or conventional portrait imagery. The dialogue and pacing were personal and informal, with commentary by the three women (cutter, 'victim' and camerawoman) on how things were proceeding, so that an easy chit-chat accompanied the event. Conversation with the camerawoman enhanced awareness of the video process, retaining a sense of intimacy; the calm pace and relaxed mood contrasted with the intensity of what was actually going on - a woman being cut out of her clothes. Slowly and deliberately, covering cloth was stripped away, so that when a naked and pensive woman rose from her cut-away shell, the psychic release was monumental. It was an assertive and liberating moment, at once poignant and ecstatic, as the now freed woman knelt, almost bowing, to her former being lying empty beside her."(8)

This "emergence" and rebirth of the fully grown woman, the motherless daughter 'born' anew with the aid and ministrations of her peers, might be seen as a for the repression of the vexed question of the psychic and familial relations of mothers and daughters in this

period. Indeed, the very emphasis on the female body in so many works--four in this same video program included Lise Noisieux-Labrecque's "Les Seins de Louise", Jill Bellos' "Women and their Bodies", Laurie McDonald's "Body Tape" and Amy Greenfield's "Dervish", not to mention a 'birth' tape by Viva--seem, over and above their evident concerns with the exploration of new modes of representation and self-representation by women, in some ways symptomatic of a deep investment in defining, inventing, a new female figure of history that is independent in her subjecthood.

"Birthday Suit: Scars and Defects", another tape by Lisa Steele made in the same year as "A Very Personal Story", might similarly be seen in this way. The tape begins with a shot of Steele, naked, framed from above the top of her pubic hair to her knees. She turns and walks away from the camera to the end of the room, then turns again to face the camera in a full shot. "September 22, 1947 to September 22, 1974", she announces. "In honour of my birthday, I'm going to show you my birthday suit, with its scars and defects."

Steele slowly turns a full circle, pausing at frontal view, side view, back view, (other) side view. She advances toward the camera to her original position, then kneels to adjust her body so as to place in macro close-up a scar on the nape of her neck. She circles the scar with

her finger; "1947. Surgery at birth to remove goiter."
Again she adjusts her body, brings her foot into the camera frame, and moves her finger back and forth across a scar: "1947. Transfusion because of serious illness, 3 months old." The tape proceeds through a succession of these close-ups, with the artist circling each scar with her index finger and recounting, in chronological order, the narrative of its origin. At the conclusion, she moves again to a full frame, replaces her clothes, sings a full chorus of "Happy birthday to me", then leaves the frame of vision; we hear her footsteps and then the screen goes blank as she turns the equipment off.

In "Birthday Suit", the scars are the narrative index of a life, the mark of passage of the self through the world, the material evidence of memory and existence. The body is the ground of experience, the evidence of action, the "I".

This "I", the existential individual, is precisely what is at stake in "A Very Personal Story", for Steele is literally alone:

"....I sat down, softly, didn't move her at all, and that was it. It just, I knew, I knew that my mother had gone away from her body, umm, forever, she would never be back, and that I was still there...."

Nothing else happened. I got up....I walked down the length of the bed, I turned to the left, I walked across to the end of the bed, then I put a hand on the doorknob and I look back, you know, I just knew, I knew I had grown up a lot, that I would have to....I would be on my own from then on....

And I also knew that anyone who came into that space with me that night...and probably my friends for the rest of my life, would never understand what I understood right then, unless it happened to them...And I knew that I was really alone, then."

But if she is indeed now bereft of family and mother, and, though she can count on help, fundamentally "alone" in the world, this picture of the motherless daughter is, in another sense, not unique to Steele's particular situation. And while the tape is perhaps unusual in its time in dealing directly with a mother-daughter relation, and with the loss/death of the mother, it is less unusual in how it is this very topic that is itself repressed even in the telling.

As has been noted, the "end" of the story is of the mother's death: Steele herself declares this at the beginning of the tape. Yet for the conclusion of the story to be the mother's death, this would ostensibly have to be the key element of the tape, what the story is 'about', or at least leads to. But this is not the case. The narrative is focused not on the death of the mother but on its significance in bringing to adulthood the daughter. Indeed, Steele herself places the emphasis still elsewhere: "The really important part uh about the story is all, is the whole day, as it happened, because it's kind of a funny day--not a funny--weird, a weird day."

Yet the tape IS, indeed, about the death of the mother and its impact on the daughter. But this story is told not in the diegesis but in another way, through Steele's own self-exposure to the unyielding eye of the camera. Because, as Carol Zemel has noted of video's capabilities as a penetrating psychological tool, "video's organization of experience and information is tied to its immediacy and intimate, human scale....it seeks to instantaneously picture uninterrupted, even awkward sequences of subtly unconscious movements, to record the raw accident or unrefined crudity of closely scrutinized behaviour." In short, "videospace is not a comforting, conventional mirror, but an instantly visualized reality" (14). And what the camera presents is not the coherent, autonomous "I" but the split subject.

It is in the gaps and silences, the slippages in words and the nonverbal gestures that the mother's effect is felt. The difficulty of telling this story of loss is itself evidenced in the first moments of the video, in Steele's anxious fidgeting, the reluctant silence that precedes her speech, her run-on, scattered sentences and her wilful gaze toward, then nervous, private turn away from, the viewer. This latter movement can be indicated by underscoring in the text the moments when she does engage an 'eye to eye' communication with the viewer:

"(silence)....I have a story to tell you, a really, a very personal story. It took place in December, uh, I don't remember the date, in the middle of December, in 1963 (pause, eyes down). There isn't a, uh, I'm going to tell you, I'll tell you the end first, the end is about that, uh my mother dies, in the end (pause) but (looks down), so there isn't any, there won't be any, punchline, so you know that part before we start, so we can start the story now."

As she speaks, her clasped fingers continue to veil parts of her face, but at each moment of emphasis, her hands drop below her eyes to establish contact. As she begins her story, and particularly in the moments following her entry into the house, her discovery of the mother lying as if asleep, but clearly not asleep, in her bed, and the moments she spends with her, her voice alters and in its registers can be heard the younger girl's voice. But at a particular point in the tape, there is another change:

"My mother was in the bed, and she was obviously dead. She was dead. Just gone. And I guess I felt really more like myself right then than I'd ever felt before."

As has been noted, at this point she moves her hands down and away from her face. But from this point, the register of her voice also drops to a normal tone.

The story she continues to tell is not one of loss, but one of competence--of self-possession--at this traumatic moment:

"...I wasn't surprised. It wasn't scary, awful. I spent the next 2 or 3 minutes just standing beside the bed, looking around" (as if for someone to explain what had 'happened'). "One more turn around the room and I looked back at her and I thought...I should check." She

holds a mirror in front of her mother's lips. "I felt I'd done what I should do, I'd checked if she was dead, and she was.

I had another 2 or 3 minutes before I went back out to get help, tell somebody--I had no thought of taking care of it myself.

But I had a couple of minutes and I stood there and then I sat down, softly, didn't move her at all, and that was it. I knew that my mother had gone away from her body, um forever, she would never be back, and that I was still there..."

Steele introduces a story in which the 'end' is the death of the mother, then she tells another story, of a day, of a daughter, of a self, yet in the 'end' tells the story she said she would tell, and in this indirect way, even more poignantly than if she had spoken it.

Her voice tells a story. Her hiding hands tell a story. She tells us that, for eight years, she had been unable to remember a detail of the day, the time she had spent after school with her boyfriend, the last event before this loss. The (otherwise) acutely remembered details of the day tell a story, as does the lack of detail about the mother herself, who emerges only once, at breakfast, from her sickroom, already a ghost, her words (if any) not reported, so vaguely present as to be already absent. The struggle to tell the story at all tells a story.

The story is a story of loss, of the missing mother, even of ambiguity toward the parental figure: "...Nobody wants to lose their parent no matter how much you

ha...dislike them or don't get along with them. You don't want to lose them."

It is not the masculine story of the search for 'origins', for authority, for mastery and completion. But it is, both intentionally and symptomatically, a story about the daughter(s) bereft of the mother(s), a story about 'missing' stories told in its own gaps, lapses, silences and fissures as much, more than, in the words that are spoken. And it is a story that will be told again, in other forms, by other daughters likewise seeking the possible terms of their desire.

Footnotes, Chapter three

1. Peggy Gale, "Video has captured our imagination", Parachute 7, summer 1977, p. 16-18
2. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, To Desire Differently, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1990, p. 19
3. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, p. 19-20
4. Rachel Blau Duplessis, "Beyond the hard invisible horizon", in Writing Beyond the Ending, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985, p. 151
5. Teresa de Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative", in Alice Doesn't, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1984, p. 107
6. Blau Duplessis, "Kunstlerromane by women writers", in Writing Beyond the Ending, op. cit., p. 103
7. Phyllis Lassner, "Escaping the Mirror of Sameness: Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping", in Mickey Pearlman, ed., Mother Puzzles, Greenwood Press, New York, Westport, London, 1989, p. 49
8. Carol Zemel, "Women & Video", arts canada, october 1973, p. 37
9. Carol Zemel, op. cit., p. 31

Chapter Four: The mother bereft

In the 1970s, as the feminist movement began to position women as subjects, there was a concomitant search to locate different personal and cultural female models from those already prevalent. This search, as Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers have remarked, "concurrently thrust the mother-daughter relationship into new discursive prominence". (1)

As they note, "...of the possible structural permutations of parent-child relationships inscribed in our literary, mythic, historical, and psychoanalytic texts, the father and son are the first pair most frequently in focus, and the mother and son the second....Of all the binary sets through which we familiarly consider family relationships, the mother-daughter and father-daughter pairs have received the least attention, a hierarchy of value that isolates the daughter as the most absent member within the discourse of the family institution." (2)

Yet if the daughter may be seen as "absent" from the family story (though her spectral presence as the hysteric haunts the pages of the psychoanalytic text), the mother is no less "absent" from the perspective afforded by a feminist optic. For the mother's identity as a subject is foreclosed in favor of her maternal role

and further, in the mother-and-son dyad in which her 'presence' is given account, the mother obtains to privilege either in her lingering power as the imaginary Phallic mother of pre-Oedipal identifications or through the agency of the son (by whom, in psychoanalytic terms, she obtains the envied penis), not as a subject proper.

Thus, though the maternal figure is culturally overdetermined, mother and daughter share the fate accorded to Woman, as the representational site of deficiency and lack.

However, all mothers are daughters and most daughters will become mothers; as women write the narratives of their own desire, it is not surprising that the mother/daughter relation has become a rich terrain of feminist exploration and representation.

As discussed, a first generation of feminist art production at once focused on the 'emergence' of the daughter as subject, explored a matrilineage through personages of history and figures of ancient mythology and concurrently challenged the tenets of the Father's text. As Phyllis Lassner observes, "in the feminist revision of the search for origins, daughters are in conflict with the Law in the name of the Mother." (3)

Consistent with this project was a valorization, and even a glorification, of Woman, the maternal and the sites of the feminine. Indeed, as a first strategy in countering dominant representations of the female, there was a privileging of what has been termed a strategy of 'positive images', to articulate the feminine as a positivity rather than the negativity to which it had been culturally assigned.

In the displacement of the mother-daughter relation onto the 'mothers' of myth and history, in the denial of discord through the affirmative action of 'positive images', in the emergence of the 'motherless' daughters, there was little sign of the conflict and vexation in the mother/daughter relation that other work would explore a decade or more later with the aid of psychoanalytic tools. The very site of the mother is a stake for the daughter in her own claims to identity and subjectivity, and even prior to the widespread attention to the psychic and the psychoanalytic, this conflict began to be specified in a subsequent generation of work.

Consider Jane Northey's "Casting Off" (1983, 11:00), a videotape in which Northey depicts a daughter seated in a rocking chair, trying to reproduce the knitting skill of her mother and grandmother. But she can't get it 'right' and finally, abandoning the project, chooses to 'cast off' from the feminine skill of 'casting off'. In

her own description of this videotape, Northey describes it as "the struggle of a young woman to conform. It illustrates how young women acquire gender identities through role models and social structures such as families." In voice-over the performer speaks about "her mother, grandmother, father, friends, job and school. We learn how she has been led to follow her models. Just as she becomes frustrated with her tangle of knitting, she begins to realize she has been fooled. Her models are not what they seemed to be." (4)

Wendy Walker's videotape "Ritual of a Wedding Dress" (1984, 14:00) offers a brief scenario in which a daughter unpacks her mother's wedding dress from a trunk and tries it on, but the dress simply doesn't 'fit'. As she describes this work, "What do mothers expect when they save their wedding dresses for their daughters? This ritual of a wedding dress is the culmination of cultural predispositions instilled throughout girlhood and adolescence. The expected path of life becomes a hypnotic drill exercise; recalled by the unconscious, it is haunting, following and demanding. A young woman confronts her mother's wedding dress and finds that it doesn't fit. By analogy, neither do the values it implies. A struggle ensues, identity and freedom is (sic) questioned."(5) The soundtrack of the videotape is

an electronically reworked song which constantly reiterates the phrase, "from Miss to Mrs."

These are not tapes that enact an extant sense of female subjectivity, but rather that articulate problems in obtaining to it, problems located specifically around processes of identification at the site occupied by the mother. Yet the tapes are themselves symptomatic of the problem in representation. In "Ritual of a Wedding Dress", the intense symbolic register of the wedding dress holds a coherence and power that the protagonist's struggle against this symbol does not share. In both tapes, there is no alternate symbolic treasury to call upon. Unlike the first generation of work, with its unproblematic claim to the first person pronoun and its embrace of the feminine, here there is no ready positivity for the author/performer/protagonists, only the possibility of negation.

The situation so enacted and represented has clear parallels to that which Luce Irigaray notes when she describes the position into which the little girl is thrust in relation to the nonsymbolization of her desire for origins, "It is not that she lacks some 'master signifier' or that none is imposed upon her, but rather that access to a signifying economy, to the coining of signifiers, is difficult or even impossible for her because she remains an outsider, herself (a) subject to

their norms. She borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark, or re-mark upon them." (6)

The struggle with signification faced by the female in patriarchal culture is one explored in this thesis, but here at issue is not the "little girl" searching for a symbolization where there is none, but a group of artists producing works that circulate as symbols (however marginalized by virtue of both medium and content) within culture. Thus we cannot take Irigaray's description of a problem for the female in culture as a finality, but will question whether there might be a female desire in language, and what the terms of this desire--and this language--might be. Within this consideration, the place of the mother in any reconfiguration of the modalities of the father-mother-child triangulation (which in dominant culture places the 'third term' of the father at the apex/crown) figures importantly.

This entanglement with the mother at the locus of female identity and desire is explored in a more complex trajectory in In B.H. Yael's "My Mother is a Dangerous Woman" (1987, 16:00). The tape begins with a long shot of a street, the image centered on a grocery store. An attractive middle-aged woman emerges from the store, carrying two grocery bags. The camera moves in a series of progressively closer shots toward this bag-burdened

figure, as the soundtrack plays the theme from "Peter Gunn". A female voice-over declares, "This is a dangerous woman. I know she doesn't look dangerous, but she is." The title appears, with the word 'dangerous' in vivid red letters.

As the narrative begins, the female protagonist, the daughter, is seen seated at a table before a typewriter. The narrative line is delivered in voice-over, "I started to write a story today. I wanted to write about a woman whose self-consciousness made her constantly feel as if she was being watched, several eyes were always upon her. And at times she found it comforting to know that she was being watched and performing well. But at other times she could not relax or be herself. Somehow I couldn't go any further, so instead I decided to write about Demeter."

The shift in topic is a signal one, from that of a woman in culture, in the ambiguous experience of her 'to-be-looked-at-ness'(7), to that of a mother in mythology, the goddess who searched the world to find and retrieve her daughter Persephone, abducted by Hades and taken to his underworld kingdom.

The personage of the protagonist, however, is not delimited to her identity as a writer, but is shown as divided among four 'identities' in intertwined relation:

as her mother's daughter, as daughter of the f/Father, as a mother to her own daughter, and as an author.

The character of the mother, a role played with wig and make-up by the same actress who performs the role of the daughter, is depicted as a representation within a representation, already the fragment of a memory, on a television screen within the video frame, a screen before which her grown daughter stands, listening, watching, even groping. Whereas the goddess of Greek mythology brought the fertility of the world to a halt to force the return of her abducted daughter, the 20th century mother proffers advice on the necessity and naturalness of female accommodation to male authority.

"Your dad knows best. He's trying to teach you good. And one day you'll be grateful to him for being so hard on you.

"Suffering isn't bad. Good feelings and a strong character come from suffering. Your dad formed you to be good and strong, that's why it's important that you obey him. Even if you think he's wrong, you have to obey", etc.

That the "good" toward which she would persuade the daughter is clearly tinged with masochism is fully consistent with the idealized feminine position. As Julie Kristeva has noted in her discussion of the Virgin Mary as symbolic apex and matrix of the feminine ideal in Western Christendom, "an actual woman worthy of the feminine ideal...could not be anything other than a nun

or a martyr." (8) And the objective of this sacrificial logic is to maintain a homeostasis within the phallic economy, with the maternal as the site of constancy and stability, charged with "preserving, regenerating, and rejuvenating." (9)

"Believe me, I suffered a lot. I endured. But it was all for the good. You and the other children would have never had a stable home, you would have never learned the important things of life. What do you think? You can just get up and walk out if you don't like it? No. You have to stay, you have to make it work. If not him, then you, you can change your attitude. It's all in the attitude you have."

The only scene of the mother's 'jouissance' that the video allows is one in which she is depicted as quite excessively flushed and joyous as, polishing a mirror, she sings a popular melody from the musical "The Sound of Music": "...totally unprepared in life/to greet the world of men/timid and shy and scared am I/of things beyond my ken..."

This gentle-spoken, loving, subordinated mother, soliciting obedience and identification, is a danger to her daughter. But in a subsequent scene, the daughter in turn finds she is seen as a danger by her own schoolgirl daughter, who is less than won over by her mother's attempts to prepare her for her future. "I know, Mom. You want me to be a (sneer) career woman."

The protagonist's relation to the father is rendered along three trajectories, none of which depicts a

character but only paternal symbolic authority. In a sequence of scenes in which the visual image is of the naked torso of a man holding a naked child, a male voice-over reads from an 18th century manual on childcare, which emphasizes instilling parental authority and breaking the will of the child, training it to obedience and a love of order. The father appears indirectly in the sequences with the mother, who endorses his authority to the rebelling daughter. And in a further sequence of scenes in which the protagonist is dressed in a 'masculine' trenchcoat and fedora, we obtain an account of her challenges to the father, her resentment conspicuous for being expressed primarily indirectly or through fantasy.

"The gun was always there. It could have been mine to use. I tried pointing it sometimes."

But while she does not 'seize the phallus' in this way, she does unconsciously 'act out' her sentiments, as she relates in an anecdote in which the instrument of aggression is a deployment of precisely a residue of the 'excess' of the feminine body.

"It got to the point where I started doing things I didn't mean to, like flushing my pad down the toilet and clogging the whole system. My dad had to get the snake to get it out."

But while paternal power and its directives toward the daughter are at issue, these are not the declared

source of her pain. Rather, it is her sense of betrayal by the mother, her mother's capitulation to this authority.

"She lived with it. It was part of her life...Maybe she's hurt me so much that I'm trying to get back at her by making you not trust her."

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the daughter's love for the mother must turn to hate (she is castrated, deficient, etc.) to initiate her turn toward the father. As Irigaray writes in her critique of Freudian theory, "Desiring a representative of the 'opposite' sex entails, at least for the little girl, rejecting a representative of one's own sex and, indeed...the representation of one's own sex" in that, as she specifies, "the a priori and the desire for sameness can be maintained only if a single desire is in control"(10).

But if the daughter/protagonist rejects the mother, and rejects her precisely in her 'femininity', that is, in her submission to the discourse and desire of patriarchal law, she also refuses the rejection of "the representation of (her) own sex", desiring instead to locate a (symbolic) means by which she might secure it.

The protagonist searches out another maternal figure in the person of Demeter, seeking her out "in books, in history, where the residue of our collective psyche lies". And, as the voice-over narrator relates, she begins to rewrite this mythical story. She places

Demeter in Los Angeles, searching for her daughter among the street prostitutes. She places her in Argentina, marching with the mothers of the Playa de Mayo: "Demeter could not distinguish their despair from hers. She supposed that Persephone could be there or she could be anywhere."

Finally she rewrites the ending of the story from that of classical mythology. In the ancient version, Demeter not only refuses to forego her mourning and search, she withdraws from her nurturant functions. As fertility withers and famine strikes, Zeus finally responds and sends a messenger to Hades. The resolution of these competing claims for Persephone is a compromise, one in which Demeter must share her daughter with the underworld and Hades. But the protagonist, shown working at her typewriter, refuses this version.

"Forget waiting on Zeus. Forget Hades' hold. I decided Persephone would go under and get her daughter back. After all, is there anything a mother cannot do?"

If Freudian theory is centered on the mythical tale of Oedipus, Jungian psychoanalytic theory has focused on numerous mythical archetypes. Within Jungian theory, the archetypal motif of Demeter-Persephone is "a myth of the disruption of the participation mystique (i.e. pre-Oedipal relation) of mother-daughter experience, and the consequent 'rape' and 'initiation' of the maiden"(11).

In this account, "archetypally, Persephone becomes ready for the rape/initiation by Hades, so she can eventually take her place as queen of the underworld". (12)

In a discussion of this myth, Jungian analyst Laurie Layton Schapira describes Demeter as the representative of "a positive maternal container" (13). The protagonist's preoccupation with this figure suggests her desire for a positive narcissistic identification with the maternal, through which it might be possible to articulate a desire in difference from that subordinate to patriarchal law. Yet in reworking the myth, the protagonist eliminates altogether the male figures (Zeus, the messenger, Hades) through whom, and upon whom, Demeter exercised her power. Might one view the protagonist's rewritten version as 'advancing' a regression, the desire for 'rescue' from sexual difference and sexuality into a "participation mystique" with the plenitudinous mother? Or might one question what the tape would seem to question, "rape" as feminine "initiation" into sexuality, with the concomittant desire to articulate a place of possibility outside of the patriarchal norms, one wherein the female might possess potency and an alternate representational economy?

In the closing scene of the tape, the protagonist removes the wig which has disguised her depiction of the

mother; the gesture is accompanied by a spontaneous grimace of relief. It is a revealing moment in the tape, one in which the 'daughter' underscores her distance and separation from this figure. Yet the gesture itself suggests that, even as a performance, there exists a deep embeddedness in the body and a ripe assimilation in the psyche of the figure of the mother--one which the performer is glad to escape.

While each of these tapes is constructed primarily along the mother/daughter axis, the "desire to desire" (14) articulated in relation to the mother rather than through the father, a still earlier tape enacts a family drama in a triangulation of mother/father/daughter. In Ardele Lister's "Sugar Daddy" (1980, 28:10), the abjectness of the feminine position--its impoverishment and diminishment and bereftness--is rendered even more explicit and the conflict between generations of women more pronounced.

The tape begins with the camera framed on a blank polaroid image. On the soundtrack, a woman is absently singing the song "Once in Awhile". She breaks from this activity to address Lister, and as she speaks, other photos appear on screen, of Lister, of another woman and a photograph which anticipates the last scene of the video. "I'm sending all my tapes for you", she says. "Every one....see what you can with it, you might not

have to use it but..." The sequence announces the principal source material that will be used throughout the video, soundtracks and manuscripts sent by this woman, named Eva, to Lister.

In a subsequent scene, another scene which, like that of "My Mother is a Dangerous Woman", places the female protagonist in the action of writing--traditional scene and site of language and the father's law/authority--Lister is shown at a typewriter, and her voice reads from the text she is composing.

"She was my father's mistress. But at the age of 8, how was I to know? As far as I was concerned, she was the woman who worked in the store with him, his right hand, a good-hearted, warm, coarse, funny person whom I loved almost as though she was my mother. In fact, I wished she was.

I asked him once why he didn't marry her instead of Mom. The uncomplicated child must have seen the simple uncomplicated love pass between them that I'd never seen between my parents. How could I know that I'd hit the nail on the head with that question."

Their relationship is a doubled surrogacy, for if Eva is a surrogate mother to Lister, so is Lister a surrogate daughter to Eva, whose own daughter, one year younger than Lister, was institutionalized for much of her life for medical reasons.

"I was in a way the daughter she didn't have....Eva could talk to me, play with me, love me, with none of the endless pain intertwined with her own daughter."

But Lister's narrative recounts the shattering of this dyadic union and of the illusions, held in respective ways by both Lister and Eva, that had anchored

important aspects of each of their lives. The agent of this annihilation is "J.", or "Mr. L." (Lister's father) in particular, and masculine figures in general. In short, it is a tale of the discovery of the mother's castration. Significantly, as Eva displaces the wife in the affections of both husband and daughter, the absence of the birth mother from the scene of the narrative, her overwhelming presence AS absence, serves to redouble the daughter's affliction at the site of the maternal nexus.

In her voice-over, Lister relates how she had been ignorant of the actual relation between Eva and her father until two to three years before the making of the video. However, on a visit home by Lister, Eva "took it upon herself" to provide her with a "general description of her affair" with Lister's father. "SHE said that SHE thought it would 'help' me if I knew, and that I should know and that it was time I knew."

Lister's reluctant, skeptical tone is understandable, for with the tapes, letters, photos and other evidences, Eva has irrevocably altered not only the relationship between them, but the (auto)biography of Lister's family. For if Lister was able to love Eva like a mother, perhaps it was in part precisely because she was NOT the complex figure that is the actual mother in the mother-daughter relation; at the same time, the normative rivalry the daughter would feel toward the mother in her competition

for the love of the father could in this scenario only be vaguely understood to be somehow skewed in its object, in the young child's inarticulate awareness of something amiss in that wife-husband relation; further, along with the discovery of the extent to which Eva has usurped the mother's place--both in terms of the 'simple' love of the father and of the child--the father as well must undergo a redefinition.

Yet the relation with the father is only one part of the revealed story. For as Lister recounts, "What I didn't know, when I was 8, or 10, or 12, was that the few vacations we did take were paid for by Eva's prostitution." In the scenes from a home movie which accompany this revelation, the camera opens onto a holiday scene, showing the father, then swinging toward the daughter, who is herself looking toward his advancing figure, then back to the father, closing on the image of a tall, young, handsome man; the given image, of the father in a happy domestic scene, is now augmented by the narrative account that has revealed his fuller identity as unfaithful husband, duplicitous father, illicit lover and, if not overtly procurer or pimp, certainly (by the daughter's testimony) the beneficiary of Eva's sexual labour.

Eva has sent to Lister tapes she began making

fifteen years previously, as well as photos and letters, some "from and of" her father, placing Lister in the position of voyeur to their intimacy. "She wanted me to write her book." But Lister appropriates the material to another project, one which is at once Eva's story and her own.

The narrative mode she employs is constructed along a triple register of voice and image. In a sequence of scenes, the soundtrack is the direct replay of the tapes, with Eva's passionate voice, with its residual East European accent, hurling out from a blank colored screen. Another sequence of scenes is the voice and image of Lister herself, depicted at the typewriter speaking in voice-over, or in close-up images speaking directly to the camera, her address in the first-person pronoun. But the major portion of the tape is the words of Eva as spoken by Lister in a dramatic enactment of Eva.

In this performance, Lister places herself in an incestuous position as her own father's mistress, in a family romance at once about love, sexual desire and death/betrayal/castration. Eva/Lister is a character fully inscribed within what Irigaray terms "the discourse-desire-law of man's desire" (16), herself a motherless (orphaned) daughter whose pleasure is coded within the "single desire" in command.

Lister re-enacts, in the persona of Eva, her father's pursuit and the initial scene of seduction, a scene in Mr. L's fur store in which he wraps the girl in mink, closing his arms around her as he closes the coat. "And there we were", Lister simpers, "just me, little old me, in my yellow angora sweater, wrapped around with a mink coat and a businessman. Inside, I kind of feel like I scored a touchdown."

Her "scoring" is not, however, confined to Mr. L., and Eva/Lister recites a litany of lovers, in an account which suggests a childlike dependency on men to fulfill both her paternal and displaced maternal needs and longings.

"I loved so many in my life. I loved Jack, because he learned me everything, how to be a woman. And I loved George, because he was an honest type of a man. Somehow I always feel like a little girl. If a man holds me, I feel secure, like my life's completed. I loved Richard, he took me out from my mother's house. I loved Harry, he gave me security and a name. I loved Norman, he taught me a little bit of English. I loved Ken, he was so weak, he used to help me, and I loved Rico, in Africa, because I was so young, say I loved--who did I love?--say I loved Franco..." etc. etc.

Eva/Lister recounts her love of movies and her imaginary identification with such screen temptresses as Scarlett O'Hara (in *Gone With the Wind*) and Jean Harlow. "It's always make believe my life. Not what I've done, but I make believe." The fantasies and the realities are not in sync; she tells her 'real' stories to the tapes: "I don't like to remember it so much, I figured if I put

it on the tape, then maybe I could forget it and start over."

Indeed, in the audiotaped voice-over with which the video commences, Eva speaks of a new beginning: a beginning that follows an unsuccessful suicide attempt. "I decided I'm just going to live once in my lifetime, starting tonight, for myself. And I have to live and enjoy my life. I cannot live for my father, for my mother, for my daughter, for my son. I cannot even live my life for the man I love."

But if the 'origin' of the videotape is Eva's decision, after having "kicked back" from her suicide attempt, to send Lister audiotapes and documents, with the view that Lister might make a book of her life, Lister situates the 'origins' elsewhere and appropriates this material to tell a story of psychic murder and death.

When Eva regains consciousness after four days, Mr. L. comes to her aid. And her death becomes a metaphoric rebirth, with a determination: "Like I said on the tape, "no son of a bitch ever going to put me down."

But in Lister's rendition, this possibility of rebirth is shown as already foreclosed, in the almost unrelenting account that ensues of false hopes followed by disappointment, betrayal, abuse, despair. Eva's raw

voice calls out from the tape across a blank coloured screen:

"...I had more men in my body than the sky has a clouds. I had more disappointment in my life than the tree has dead leaves. I had most sadness in my life than the dandelion what killed the grass. I had more rage in my body than the waters as an ocean. I never was loved by anyone..."

While Eva's opening statements speak of regeneration, the concluding scene is one of abjection and loss. Eva/Lister is seen lying facedown on a couch, in disarray and maudlin drunk. "I'm sick and tired of everything. I've had it. I'm fed up. I don't need it anymore. I had enough of aaaaa the bullshit. Ardele? Can you hear me? Ardele?...." She falls off the couch, knocking over a drink. This image, of Lister as Eva in a lowcut leopardskin dress and bleached blonde curly wig, passed out on the floor with the taperecorder and an overturned bottle, is the freeze-frame snapshot that has appeared in the introductory sequence of the video.

While the origin of the video is Eva's decision to turn her lifestory over to Lister, Lister's account of Eva is one that finds the 'origin' of her abject situation in the impossibility of her position as a woman psychically (as well as economically and sexually) dependent on men. Her anger is directed masochistically, suicidally inward and mourning becomes melancholia. She is not the subject of desire but the object of men's use.

"I had all the crappy, lousy men in my life,"

Eva/Lister declares, in a reversal of her earlier account of love.

"I hate Louie, that man made me so miserable. I hate Franco, I hate Ricardo, I hate George, I hate Frank. I hate every last one of you. I don't even want to think of the NAMES because I have NOTHING but hatred inside of me for you. And sometimes I think maybe it would be better to be dead, maybe it would be better to be dead for a change. Maybe for two weeks, and then wake up and then see how I feel. None of you ever done nothing for me. And all my life, I've done everything for you."

The position Lister occupies within this narrative is highly complex. In the first instance, in her enactment of the persona of Eva, she establishes a direct, even bodily, identification with Eva, a doubling in which both are seduced by her father, both love him and what he represents, both are destroyed. But Lister's enactment is itself set against the 'evidence' of Eva's own voice, which establishes a difference between them, not least in Lister's incapacity to masquerade the passion, urgency and power that Eva's voice conveys.

Lister's account is a narrative of the death of the (surrogate) mother: Eva's attempted suicide, her obsession with death as a solution, and the implied closure to Eva's story as an account which must either end in physical death or endlessly repeat the process of psychic wounding/death. Either death is predicated on the bereftness of her position, a woman subject to male power and without her own desire. And, in her rejection

by the daughter, she is figure now further bereft.

The story is at the same time one of a betrayal and murder, with Lister metaphorically 'killing' Eva--who has been not only her rival and surrogate mother but the woman who displaced her own mother, with whom this rivalry for the father would normally take place--even as she also 'kills' her romanticized father/lover.

In the final scene, the scene which abjures the possibility of renewal that the tape commenced with the promise of, Eva calls out to Lister. In the coda which follows, the camera moves in on a closeup of Lister, as she disengages from her role, removing the wig, reassuming her own person, and looking directly toward the camera. As in "My Mother is a Dangerous Woman", a distance is marked between the performer and the impersonation, between the author and the character--just as in both tapes, the composite image of the daughter/writer announces a claim.

All of the tapes discussed in this chapter mark their distance from the feminist endeavours of the early 1970s. Certainly we can witness in these tapes the shift from exploring the condition and experience of being female to examining the social construction of gender and the position of women within these gender arrangements. Yet within the realm of production itself, despite technological advances that permit colour, editing, etc.,

there remains within these new dramatic narratives an enduring link to the earlier tapes, with their autobiographical focus, their use of direct address, and the on-camera performance of the producer. Yet there is a new focus on scripted narratives, more didactic analysis, the use of visual sources from other media (often mass media) and, as in b.h. Yael's work, a more complex production in terms of cast, camerawork, post-production, etc.

All four tapes utilize distantiating devices by which the authors and protagonists not only highlight conflicts in the mother/daughter relation but explicitly disavow an identification with the appropriate cultural position represented to the daughter in the character of the mother. Yet even as these moves imply an alternative desire, the means which would secure this desire are left unstated. We know only that the knitting has been cast down, the wedding dress set aside, the mother's call refused. We know that the productions are desiring productions, and in their narrative content and strategies speak toward a desire for a different desire. But, in refusing to conform to the father's law and the father's desire, in what might the daughters symbolically affirm, and represent, a desire of their own?

Footnotes, Chapter four:

1. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers, "Introduction", in Boose and Flowers, eds., Daughters and Fathers, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1989, p. 2
2. Boose and Flowers, op. cit., p. 2
3. Phyllis Lassner, "Escaping the Mirror of Sameness: Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping", in Mickey Pearlman, ed., Mother Puzzles, Greenwood Press, New York, Westport, Conn. and London, 1989, p. 49
4. Jane Northey, V/Tapes Distribution Catalogue, Toronto, Canada, 1991
5. Wendy Walker, V/Tapes Distribution Catalogue, Toronto, Canada, 1991
6. Luce Irigaray, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry", in Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Cornell University Press, Ithica and New York, 1985, p. 71
7. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Screen, vol. 16, no. 3, autumn 1975.
8. Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., The Female Body in Western Culture, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1985, p. 115
9. Irigaray, op. cit., p. 53
10. Irigaray, op. cit., p. 40, p. 43

11. Neil Micklam and Mary Williams, "A Study of Hysteria in Women", *Journal of Analytic Psychology*, vol. 2, 1956, p. 179, cited in Laurie Layton Schapira, The Cassandra Complex, Inner City Books, Toronto, 1988
12. Schapira, op. cit., p. 92
13. Schapira, op. cit., p. 90
14. Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire, Indiana University Press: Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1978
15. Irigaray, op. cit., p. 42

Chapter Five: Desiring Daughters

The opening image of the videotape, The Influences of My Mother, (1982) is a tight close-up on a dated, somewhat faded portrait of a young woman, perhaps in her mid-20s. The date of the black and white photograph is uncertain, but its representational style suggests a studio photograph from around the period of the World War II. The frame highlights a pair of intelligent eyes, set in a gentle, expressive face. The register of the image is rich in iconographic associations. The image slips out of focus then is focused anew, a metaphoric rendering of the process the videotape itself enacts in its account of a daughter's relationship to her mother.

As the opening sequence continues, the camera opens out to a medium shot , revealing first the full portrait-- a head-and-shoulders photo of the woman, set in a plain frame--then its anchorage on an otherwise bare wall. A female off-camera voice addresses the viewer: "It is usually the parent who constructs the identity of the child."

The camera continues opening to include in its frame a young woman seen standing at an adjoining wall, facing the portrait. There is an uncertain resemblance between this person and the figure in the portrait. The voice-over continues: "In my case, it was to be the child who would

construct the identity of the parent."

The character on camera and in the voice-over is that of the video-maker, Sara Diamond. The videotape is at once enactment and re-enactment of the processes by which she has imagined and reconstructed the person of the mother who died while she was a girl in early adolescence.

The figure Diamond presents is the paradoxical one of a daughter constructing her subjectivity through imaginary identification with, and through irrevocable separation from, a maternal parent whose identity she is also constructing.

The combination in the work of autobiography and fantasy, memory and desire, history and interpretation, artifact and invention further position the document as one which blurs the distinction between personal and public and between fact and fiction. This desiring production is a "serious fiction"(1), an enabling process by means of which she might alter and construct her own sense of identity.

That this subjectivity is enabled by identificatory processes is made immediately evident. In the next scene of the introductory sequence, as she faces the camera, a figure in the foreground is seen combing and re-styling Diamond's hair. The scene concludes with a close-up of Diamond posed next to the photograph: two figures of the same age, dressed in similar tailored jacket and blouse,

curly hair arranged in the same manner, faces posed at the same angle, the physical resemblance now certain.

But the very similarity of the two portraits, now framed together in one image, also highlights the differentiations between the two figures. They are similar: but they are not the same. And it is the passage from the recognitions of sameness to the recognitions of difference, from the process of imaginary identification to that of symbolic rendering, that is embodied within the narrative of the video and produced within its textual strategies.

At each stage of the video, which is organized in six acts, the relationship of mother and daughter undergoes a new definition, but each new 'identity' of the mother is anchored in the daughter's interpretation of her. In this way, the daughter constructs the mother. In these representations by the daughter, the mother is transformed, as the tape proceeds, from a figure whose principle attribute to the remembering daughter is that of an overwhelming power to a separate being who is herself a willing, active subject--a desiring subject. And the recognition and acknowledgement of this subject as both woman and mother enables the daughter's constitution of herself as female subject and daughter--a desiring subject, a desiring daughter.

"How do you go about recreating a once-living woman through whom to see yourself?" she asks, off-camera. "The remnants of a person's life exist as fragments, memories, legends, objects left behind, representing a moment in time. Perhaps impression of their life through their own eyes. And an historical context. But memory is selective. None of these represent the truth. All are idealizations, partial and highly selective impressions."

From the start, Diamond makes evident that it is not the 'truth' of the mother that is at stake, but her meaning, specifically her meaning to the daughter. The absence of the mother enables the daughter to project upon this vacant screen her own memories, fantasies and desires. At the same time, the identity of the mother is also retrieved from the empirical evidences of oral narrative, documents, photographs, testimony and the artifacts of personal and social history: but these, too, are partial and selective. Thus she is not only remembered but discovered and invented, not only the object of the daughter's search but the subject so retrieved and produced.

"It is usually the parent who constructs the identity of the child." But Diamond's work proposes that these positions, like the identities they give rise to, are inherently unstable. The work further suggests that the process which produced these positions and their meanings

can be reactivated, secondarily and retroactively, to different effect.

In a psychoanalytic reading of the construction of subjectivity, the parent enacts a role well-positioned within a wider cultural narrative, the endlessly looping drama of the Oedipal struggle. It is through the place the child takes up in this narrative that its identity is formed.

However, the Oedipal moment, and the identifications that ensue from it, are themselves constituted retroactively. As Kaja Silverman notes, "The moment isolated by Freud as inaugurating the division of the sexes must be understood as the product of intense cultural mediation, as an event which is experienced retrospectively by both male and female subjects....Both refer back their cultural status to their anatomical status after the former has been consolidated, and they do so at the suggestion of the society within which they find themselves." (2)

The process which Diamond re-enacts in the tape is likewise a retroactive one, and certainly situated within the conscious level of the secondary psychic processes. Yet it is an account of an experience and a negotiation in which her sense of identity as a female subject is at stake. As in the Freudian scenario, she takes up a position of identification with the maternal figure, but

in so doing she subverts the culturally ascribed meaning of this feminine position. She positions herself, and the viewer, not in terms of Oedipal desire and its privileging of the masculine but in terms of female longing, along the axis of the maternal signifier.

The representation which ensues is not a testament to the 'failure' of a proper Oedipalization with its inflections about consequent neurosis and masculine protest, but rather an evidence of the protagonist's capacity to claim an identity as subject of history through the mother as imaginary agent of both identification and separation. In this instance, the "intense cultural mediation" that grounds the retroaction may be seen to be situated within a discourse resolutely alternative to that of the patriarchal, the discourse of feminism.

In the Freudian scenario, the normative result of the Oedipal transaction is an anti-feminism. The male normatively 'dissolves' the Oedipus complex through the formation of the super-ego, i.e, through his internalization of cultural prohibition and the authority of the father. He is thus enabled, psychically if not always materially, to take up his 'place' within the discourses, apparatuses and institutional sites that support the culture's dominant values. In Freud's account, however, it is not deemed necessary for the

daughter to relinquish her Oedipal desires. "It does little harm to a woman if she remains in her feminine Oedipus attitude", he writes in Outline of Psychoanalysis. "She will in that case choose her husband for his paternal characteristic and be ready to recognize his authority."(3)

The feminine Oedipus attitude is one in which the daughter takes up an identification with the mother, and turns to the idealized father as object of desire. But this identification with the mother is a highly troubled one. In the first instance, she has tried to achieve a distance from the mother: to escape her phallic power, to avenge her disappointments and, on discovering the mother's castration, to flee the consequences of this knowledge. Only when it becomes evident to her that she cannot possess the penis/phallus directly does she accept this identification--if she does. Thus it is her sense of deficiency--a deficiency shared by the mother, whom she blames for this fate--that will lead her to the intense investment in and idealization of the father and the substitutive, passive desire to obtain the phallus in the form of a child. Further, the very identification with the mother is seen to mitigate against the separation and individuation that mark the distance from the mother, and hence subjecthood, and desire.

Freud does not posit desiring daughters.

But it is this Oedipalized cultural space that Diamond returns to and destabilizes in her construction of both mother and daughter as desiring subjects. Thus as the narrative proceeds along the trajectory from child to adult, the feminine position of the daughter/child is augmented by a feminist positioning, one which rearranges the character of her identity and the very mechanisms of interpretation by which she is enabled to newly structure her identifications. Thus 'identity' is itself represented not as a fixed state, but a mobile one, positioned in relation to a social discourse.

The videotape is organized into six chronological "acts", each of which retrieves a particular point in the history of the process Diamond is re-enacting, and the cluster of emotions and signifiers which marked that stage. Each scene, though derived from memory (the entire production a retroaction) is presented and embodied in the present tense, with Diamond re-enacting her perceptions at various ages of her life.

In the first sequence, the mother in her absence is a presence of imperial power. The sequence is constructed of three images. Diamond, facing the camera, turns her head sharply away: THE FIRST ACT: DENIAL. NO MOTHER AT ALL. The child is unable to accept the loss, or to accept the acceptance of the loss on the part of others. She holds tight to the void, and pushes the memory of the mother

away. The camera establishes the image of a family photograph of mother and daughter only to pan across it so as to exclude the mother, focusing on the daughter alone. The final image is that of a later photograph, the adolescent daughter standing alone, hands jauntily on hips. The camera pans first down and then up again, in a movement that mimes the back and forthness of her spoken sentiments: "I pushed her away, but to say that it is as though she never existed IS to acknowledge her presence. She was unknowable, mysterious, larger than life."

In THE SECOND ACT: JUDGMENT. THE NEGLIGENT MOTHER, the sequence is introduced with the identical photograph of the mother with which the videotape began, but now it is held in the daughter's hand, and it is turned upside down. The judgment, evidently, is negative.

"My mother did not want me. That much I KNEW from the beginning. I dreamed recurringly that she led me to the top of a volcano. The trip up was filled with wonder. At the top, she picked me up and threw me off the volcano. EVERY pleasure was followed by hardship. Even the botanical gardens, a wonder, were followed by the torture of the children's zoo....Couldn't she see my anguish?....I became convinced that she was bent on my destruction."

The various stories enacted here are adjoined under the rubric of the "negligent" mother--the good object has become the bad, persecutory object, the powerful parent revealed as painfully inadequate to the needs and wishes of the child. The opening, upsidedown image is projected over a row of family photographs laid out on a carpet,

illuminating a vertical line in the center of an otherwise dark screen. Throughout this sequence, the videotape alternates between this image and close-ups of family photographs and letters.

A subtle shift marks the tale of her trials. In the initial stories Diamond relates in voice-over, the mother/daughter relationship is that of parent to child, in which the child feels doubly persecuted: in the first instance by her sense of physical danger, and in the second instance by her sense of humiliation at failing to meet these dangers with the requisite courage.

The latter humiliation is one already deeply invested in the sense of proper social categories of emotion and behaviour. It is these categories that are offended anew in the mother's other form of inadequacy: this time less as mother to child than as woman to girl. The mother does not conform to the ideal figure of femininity with which the (properly Oedipalized) daughter is identified. "SHE humiliated me. She wore no make-up. She refused to dye her hair. She worked, unlike other mothers." She does not exhibit the traits culturally valorized in women. What is more, she exercises her parental authority over the daughter's clothing and activities. The humiliation the daughter experiences is no longer a personal one: it is a social one, exercised from within the judgments of peers.

The pain and rage of abandonment, the anguish of loss,

as well as the daughter's narcissistic relationship to the mother, the inability to recognize the mother's existence separate from the child's deep needs, are related through an evocative account of the mother's illness and death:

"We were always politely distanced from each other. Suddenly she was suspiciously nice to me. She entered the hospital. She came out. Still distanced. Too friendly.

I was really confused. She took me to Bermuda. It was an experience that reeked with solemnity, a truly Special Occasion. I ate lobster. We came back. She grew thin, faded, unrecognizable, a distant animal screaming with pain in a room in our apartment. No part of me. She stopped talking to me.

Nice day. Trip to New York. Come back--and she's gone.

I'd been right all along: she would go to any lengths to get rid of me. A real bitch!"

The corrolary to the process of judgment follows upon it: the ascription of blame. Who or what can be held to account for the mother's disappearance, her unspeakable rage-inducing abandonment. The cancer? The father? The child? Her own self? A pair of feet stomp over the photographs, as the sequence ends with a voice-over proclaiming a cynical denial: "She never died. She was just hiding."

In the THIRD ACT: A MEDLEY OF MIXED EMOTIONS, the mother is no longer the mother of personal memory, but that of social archetype, as expressed in popular music. The opening image is the live action shot of a figure wearing cowboy boots, shot from below the knees. The camera pans up the figure to end in a medium close-up of Diamond, microphone in hand, crooning in pantomime to the

soundtrack, a "medley" of sentimental, melancholy tunes on the theme of mother loss, or loss of the love, union and plenitude she symbolizes. "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child....", "Oh where oh where is love, could it be in stars above?....", "....the mother and child reunion....", "When I'm in my hour of darkness, Mother Mary comes to me...." As the songs proceed, the camera is guided to its obsessive return to the family photos, the image of mother, of daughter, of mother and daughter. Paradise lost.

If the videotape is about a formation of identity, it is also concerned with the process of loss and mourning, and in this respect suggests, in its negotiation of subjecthood, a variation on the process of mourning as outlined by Freud. In his essay on "Mourning and Melancholia"(4), Freud describes the normal passage through mourning as one in which the mourner psychically internalizes the attributes of the mourned one; when something blocks the process of mourning, the mourner is unable to complete the process and remains locked in melancholia. In Diamond's enactment of her history, however, it is not sufficient for her to incorporate the mother as she has known her. Rather, to complete her mourning, she seeks to establish a different relationship to her, acquire an entirely different knowledge of her. Thus the 'mother' Diamond internalizes and achieves a

separation from is not the 'mother' whom she lost.

There are several losses which have placed this daughter in a state of psychic exile. The irreparable loss that follows the Oedipal transaction and what prefigures it (the loss of the breast, the territorialization of the body, the mirror stage), i.e., the division from plenitude that the songs obsessively mourn in the figure of the mother. And with this exile from plenitude with the entry into the symbolic order, a doubled exile in that the register of the female within this order is itself that of lack and dereliction. And the actual loss, through death, of the mother, hated and feared, beloved and idealized, yearned for.

By THE FOURTH ACT: DEFINITIONS, Diamond is a young adult, and her growing physical resemblance to the mother stimulates a renewed interest in her person. "I searched for a recognition of myself within HER image. To reconstruct her would be to locate myself." The moment remains a narcissistic one, with an emphasis on imaginary processes--identification, correspondences, homologies. The opening image of this sequence echoes that of the introductory sequence, with the side by side image of mother and daughter, the one an archival photograph, the other a black and white still from the live recording, but both now conjoined as parallel black and white still images in the same visual frame.

Memories long repressed revive, and new sources are sought out with a masculine fervor: "I began with unsolicited information and then, secretly, I probed." Her newly reactivated memory is further augmented by the stories of others and with documents and material evidences. "I learned," she declares, "that there is no neutral evidence in history". The camera displays physical objects now associated with the mother. These trigger memory and take on metaphoric meaning. "Was she created for me, though, or did I create her myself?", she wonders. "She became less abstract, more tangibly human."

The daughter who begins with a research into her mother's history begins to situate that personal history within a broader account of social and political history. "From my secret desire to recreate her history, I developed an overt fascination with her context. I searched for her in every potential historical situation." In a live action sequence, she points to photographs found within the piles of books heaped on a desk, retrieving some caption of family history from within the anonymous images of immigrants from Ellis Island, of the working class ghettos on New York's lower east side, of garment factories, of unions, of demonstrations...

In this, the Fourth Act, the mother becomes a subject of history. A communist. A labor organizer. A figure who refused to testify before the House Un-American Activities

Committee. "I wonder how she felt....", "I wonder how she felt when....", "I wonder how she felt after...." She becomes a figure separate from the daughter, who now faces a disjuncture between what she can remember and what she has come to know.

In the last episode of this sequence, she also faces another disjuncture, one in the life of the mother: her transition from active agent of history to a more traditional gendered position as wife and mother, subject to her husband's destiny. "Later, in Toronto alone (a war bride with the firstborn child), I wonder how she felt, after all those years of being in the center of people and struggle", Diamond muses. "She must have been really isolated."

In *The Fifth Act: The Heroic Mother*, the once-depreciated mother obtains to idealized status. The daughter seeks to learn her gestures, to copy her example. She remains in a polarity but has reversed its order of meaning: "I denied all that was negative, incongruent with her model image." Old stories bear new interpretations. "My mother had loved me. She threw me OFF that volcano, not into it. She saved me! "

But if the mother is seen anew, what accounts for the capacity of the daughter to see her anew? The on-camera images are not transformed: they remain the now familiar family photos. From what 'place' would she speak her

fascination with this now-glorious mother? What accounts for the shift from her humiliation at her mother's failure to conform to feminine and maternal ideals to an investment in the very part of her life that was independent of the daughter? What would subtend her idealization of this mother?

"To reconstruct her would be to locate myself," she has earlier said, a statement carrying its own implication: that it is her desire to 'locate' herself somewhere else . A new point of reference is required in order to locate oneself anew, to obtain new bearings. But the statement "to locate myself" does not speak of locating the self anew: rather, under the circumstances, the implication is that it is a question of locating oneself at all. For the circumstance for the female is that her location symbolically is a no place: an absence, a negative, a gap, a blank.

In seeking a locus, a place, however, what is being sought is not a monadistic autonomy but a psychic/symbolic place in relation to another. For the daughter, the locus of possibility for securing a sense of self, of identity, of place, is in relation to the mother. Yet it is an imaginary relation, a blending of identification and fiction, one which will secure those identifications in allegiance with a socially grounded matrix of values. It is not only memory that is selective, but the mechanisms of interpretation.

That the social ground of feminism is the 'place' where Diamond is looking from in order to look back at what she was looking toward is made most explicit in the final act, "THE RECONSTRUCTED MOTHER: MOTHER AS SUBJECT." For if the videotape has already suggested a feminist intervention in the entirety of its mode of construction, this is made explicit when Diamond, in close-up, addresses the audience directly, an address that privileges the female viewer.

"My mother was one of many millions of women of her generation, and what has struck me so strongly in making this tape is the ways our mothers' power and strength and beauty were taken away from us by this society."

In the binaries which structure language, 'power' and 'strength' are culturally positioned as correlatives of the masculine. The inclusion of 'beauty', a correlative of the feminine, within the attributes denied to women within the psychic, social and linguistic structures of the social order, position all three terms within another framework of definition and interpretation. Thus what has been "taken away", negated and denied, is a set of possible meanings around these terms ensuing with the prescriptive mapping of language onto gender.

"And it seems to me more than ever essential that we reclaim who they were and who they aspired to be as our own, and that to know them and to understand them is to really understand ourselves."

With this statement, Diamond makes explicit the shift from personal to political, and from individual process to

collective one. The 'reconstructed mother' is neither the mother of narcissistic need, feared or idealized, nor of a complete identification that precludes the separation necessary to subjecthood, but the object of a partial identification, reconstituted from within a social matrix. Further, Diamond makes clear that this identity, of self and of mother, is not fixed: "The process of understanding who my mother is and was to me is one which will continue for the rest of my life and will change as I change." The images that are intercut with Diamond's direct address alternate between images of her mother and of herself.

In her desire to constitute herself as a desiring subject through identification with a maternal parent as desiring subject, Diamond has had to augment and exceed her own memory and experience of her mother, and to do so in the absence of this figure. She is able to locate in her mother's past a subject and agent of history, whose person she imagines, recreates and invests with value, and with whom she can identify as both self (in that she is a construct of the daughter's own desiring production) and other (in that she is a figure in history, to whose separate existence independent stories and memories and artifacts attest). Thus Diamond makes explicit that it is not only the mother as she has been that is uniquely of import, but also what she has aspired to be, in her very wishes, fantasies, desires and projections. Yet the

mother's wishes are ultimately unknowable to the daughter. So again she invents the mother, imagining these desires from the residual evidence of the mother's life, and in so doing both builds the tools and employs them to locate herself in relation to the maternal parent rather than no place.

The tape concludes with an extreme close-up on the mother's eyes, below which a character-generated text reads, "there is no neutrality in history", followed by an extreme close-up of the daughter's eyes, with the somewhat portentous text, "We bear the realization of our mother's decisions". The text both retroacts the preceding process and production and points outside of the frame toward an anterior collective process and production. The close-up of the eyes likewise has a double refraction, one in which the two figures are both objects held intimately within the spectator's gaze and representations of the figure of woman as possessor and subject of that power.

The tape made in 1982, is a low budget production, made on small-format video equipment, and it employs a limited range of production procedures. The performance elements are informal and somewhat self-conscious, the camera work is choppy throughout, the image repertoire limited, the editing imprecise and the sequencing uneven. But despite the many technical flaws in the work, its textual strategies are conceptually sophisticated, mining

an awareness of representation as construct, mapping a family narrative outside of patriarchal norms, organizing its representational strategies in an admixture of traditional and nonconventional narrative codes, and organizing an alternative and feminine register of the gaze.

If the classic narrative is one organized around the logic of masculine desire, in which the female is defined in male terms and her disruption of the masculine subject's stability is endlessly recuperated within the classic, male-privileging Oedipal scenario, The Influences of My Mother undercuts altogether this canonic scenario. It not only absents the male representative from the scene, it not only makes the female the active protagonist, but it also organizes the narrative along a double register, that of mother and of daughter. The central character (the daughter) and the organizing image of the narrative (the mother) are doubled, alternated and set in relation. The text, in establishing a set of relations in which one term cannot be divorced from the other, deviates strongly from the classic narrative of the conquering autonomous hero.

Further, it is not a stable (masculine) subject which is being retrieved from the threat of instability, but an unstable 'pair' of subjects-in-process being constructed and located. Not only is the female protagonist inscribed

as the locus of subjectivity within the narrative, but the textual strategies deployed by Diamond in the organization of its subject matter and first person mode of address privilege a viewing subjectivity defined in female terms.

The scopophilic regime that governs the classic cinematic narrative and is enjoined to a sexuality of (masculine) voyeurism and (female) exhibitionism is here displaced onto the act of looking as a form of desiring production in search of "a desiring position of vision, a position organized in terms of female desire" (5)

The episodic structure of the tape, with its division into a series of "acts" that foreground the 'act' as the staging of a process as much as the separation of sequences, together with the mode of direct address, foregoes any attempt to render the place of enunciation transparent, instead foregrounding the construction of the video object, itself a construction of subjectivity of which the spectator is invited to participate.

The use throughout the tape of the photographic image as evidence of history, of desire, and of loss (in its distance from that which it would represent), and the organization of these images around the figure of the mother--who is both lost to the daughter and is a figure whose own subjectivity is 'lost' beneath the accumulations of her symbolic cultural meanings--blurs the distinctions between private and public, between memory and history. If

the mother initially has 'meaning' only in terms of her daughter's primary and narcissistic needs--in particular her need to feel loved rather than abandoned--her 'meaning' acquires a social valence as the tape proceeds, and as the video document itself is inserted into a public discourse in which the term of the 'mother' has been one possessed by the sons and fathers.

Footnotes. Chapter five

1. James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, London, 1988, p.10
2. Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics, Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, 1983, p. 140
3. as cited in Silverman, op. cit., p.143
4. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", vol. 11, The Pelican Freud Library, On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis, Penguins Books, 1984, p. 245-269
5. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, To Desire Differently, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1990, p. 40

Chapter Six: A doubled desire

In Mona Hatoum's videotape, Measures of Distance (1988, 15:00), the mother is also an absence, but in this instance it is not by death or distanciation, but by the daughter's exile from the war-torn country in which her mother remains resident. The tape is located within two historical specificities which are fully intertwined throughout the work: that of the exile of the Palestinian people from their homeland, and that of the "psycho-sexual determinations of loss in the mother-daughter relationship"(1).

Unlike Diamond, who must construct the figure of the mother within an imaginary set of relations drawn from memories and memorabilia, Hatoum constructs her videotape from materials provided by, or in collaboration with, the mother and used with her consent. That this consent is a furtive one, withheld from her husband's knowledge ("don't mention a thing about it to your father"), highlights the sense of the mother-daughter bond as a trespass upon the centrality of the paternal representative within patriarchal law.

The governing image of the work is a series of still photographs of the mother, taken by Hatoum on a visit to her family in Lebanon five years before the tape was made. These are not, however, photographs such as those found in Diamond's family archives. For what these photographs

document is a scene of unusual intimacy.

The photographs show the mother at her bath, in an extended sequence of documentation in and out of the shower, the images sensual, the naked woman sensual. In one of the mother's letters, reference is made to the photo session, with particular reference to the father. Yet the canonic scenario of the Father's intervention into the dyadic union with the mother in this instance does not quite conform to that script...:

"Do you remember how he was shocked when he caught us taking the pictures in the shower during his afternoon nap. I suppose he was embarrassed to find us both standing there stark naked. And we just carried on and ignored him. We laughed at him when he told us off, but he was seriously angry."

In the video image, the mother's body is partially obscured through a second image which overlays it, that of neat delicate rows of handwriting in Arabic script from letters written by the mother to her daughter. Thus the video pictures language as, literally, an inscription on/across the mother's body. As Desa Philippi has written of this work, (the) "writing as visual trace underlines the movement of the hand and thus the body, whereas as a text to be read, translated and interpreted, it creates a distance underscored by a grid which holds writing and image in place." (2) Yet the language of the fathers is here appropriated, used to give voice to the co-respondance between mother and daughter--the (m)other tongue.

The letters by the mother are read in translation by the daughter. There is a doubling in this activity, in the daughter's 'translation' for the viewer of both the letters and the mother, that has parallels with Lister's Sugar Daddy. In both it is the words of the mother (or surrogate) that are spoken, but this source is controlled by the daughter, and spoken (in Lister's case also performed) by her. It is she who reads the mother to/for us. It is the daughter who, even as she is also the subject of an address originating with the other figure, even as she assembles the evidences provided by the mother, constructs our view of that figure.

Yet in each tape, the other voice is also heard: in Lister's tape through the replay of the audio recordings sent by Eva to Lister, in Hatoum's tape in laughter-punctuated conversations between the mother and daughter in Arabic, recorded on the same visit home. In Eva's tapes we are positioned as witnesses to despair and death; in the letters from the mother, Hatoum offers the evidences of intimacy and love.

The layering of sound and image in Hatoum's tape, while very simple in its modes of production, works to create a complex oscillation between its different elements. Certainly the tape recorded conversations in the Arabic language, in a videotape produced in English in Canada and circulated by British and Canadian

distributors, accentuates cultural difference and the impossibility of a complete 'translation'. The spoken letters provide a link for the Western viewer between the other elements: the impenetrable tape-recorded conversations and the images of the woman whose words are being spoken. The images themselves shift and alter, at one moment in close-ups so tight as to abstract the body, then framed from a distance, a recognizable figure. Yet the images are never completely sharp, and this constant blurring of the images in terms of movement, incomplete detail, framing too tight or too distant for the image to be fully clear, combines with the video monitor's technological incapacity to render a completely precise image, producing a particular effect: the image appears porous.

Hatoum's figuration of the mother can itself be seen as a critical stance at odds with the virtual proscription against the imaging of the female body that had assumed a powerful critical consensus in feminist work by the late 1970s and through the 1980s. At the same time, however, Hatoum's alternative is itself a response to precisely the overdetermined cultural meanings of the female body that had sponsored such a critical approach.

Hatoum's representations of this female body, and specifically this maternal body, are mediated to privilege a different modality of viewing: through the privileging

of the female spectator, through the grid of language superimposed on the images, through the fluctuations of the image, through the soundtrack which gives a 'voice' to the image and through the layering of image, taped voices and spoken letters which together situate the narrative and the mother in a feminine scenario unbound from the father's gaze.

The intimacy of the photographs extend to the terms of address and the subject matter throughout the tape. Each letter begins with a salutation to the daughter of extraordinary warmth: "My dear Mona, the apple of my eyes, how I miss you and long to feast my eyes on your beautiful face that brightens up my days...."; "My dear Mona, you will never know how much I miss you and long for you to come and visit again soon...."; "My dear Mona, I long to see you, my little one. You are so close to my heart yet so far away from me...."; "My dear Mona, the love of my heart, how I miss you and long to hold you in my arms, even if only for one minute...." (In the fifth letter, the last of the series, the daughter begins, "My dear Mona, et cetera, et cetera....")

The major topic of the letters pertains to their (changing) relationship, but the relation between them is constantly pulled into and shaped by the social and political forces that have determined for each of them a situation of exile from the land of their birth, the

mother from Palestine, the daughter from Lebanon. Indeed, in each of the letters, the effusive greeting is inevitably followed immediately by a reference to the ongoing war and its disruption of the family unit before proceeding to other topics. In the last letter, sent with a cousin who had left Beirut, the war is the absolute determinant governing the mother's communication with loved ones; the local post-office destroyed in a car bomb, the nearest other one avoided "because there are always rockets falling on the main roads" and visits to relatives, whether in the neighborhood or further afield, severely curtailed: "I've not seen any of them for the last eight months now." The shadow of the war thus presses with increasing urgency in each letter. Yet prior to the final letter, which announces a virtual end to the possibility of further communication for an indeterminate time, the letters have been focused within the close bonds of their inter-relationship. The very circumstances which surround the writing underscore how subjectivity is determined not only in gender but in a multiplicity of determinants, of race, class, geographic location, circumstance.

While the relationship in the letters is one of intimacy, the videotape also makes evident that this intensity of relation between mother and daughter is in part a new construct. As the mother writes, "I suppose he

(Hatoum's father) is wondering why you're not communicating with him in the same way. After all, you've always been your father's daughter and I remember that, before you and I made those tapes and photographs together during your last visit, your letters were always mainly addressing him."

The mother, in another letter, further delineates the moment where the daughter might be seen to have begun the change from mother's daughter to father's daughter. In the correspondence which follows upon the altered relationship between them that originates with Hatoum's visit home, a relation in which the "father's daughter" returns with renewed interest and identification to the mother, old family accounts are pursued anew:

"Maybe it doesn't make sense to you now, and I must say I'm surprised that you still remember every word I said to you on that afternoon. When you think of it, it was over 20 years ago now, yet you are still thinking about it and analyzing it. Well, I suppose it's a very important instant in a little girl's life, and it seems to have created an identity crisis for you. From the little devil you were, you turned into a quiet and shy little girl.

I was only trying to console you because you were very upset at the sight of the blood and you were crying very hard. If I remember well, I said you should consider yourself very lucky to be a woman, because we only have to think about it once a month, whereas men have to shave everyday. I suppose, thinking about it now, it's a strange way to describe the difference between men and women, but I was only trying to cheer you up and make you feel good about being a woman."

Thus one of the topics the two pursue is precisely the reconstruction of this moment of sexual and gender differentiation. And a principal means by which this

topic is pursued is through a discussion of the mother's sexuality, a discussion initiated by the daughter.

Like Diamond, Hatoum has become motivated to pursue a knowledge of the mother different from that of her memories and of the mother's given place in her life, and subversive of the daughter's normative privileging of the paternal figure. Like Diamond, she has begun to search for other evidence. "I've been enjoying your letters enormously," writes the mother, "and I enjoy answering your questions, although they are sometimes weird and too probing for my liking." Like Diamond, the daughter also 'constructs' the mother anew, in language, voice and vision: "Still, they make me think about myself in a way that I hadn't looked at before..." she writes, and: "I enjoyed very much all those intimate conversations we had about women's things and all that. You know, I have never talked in this way before."

At the same time, this discussion arouses the father's jealousy and anger. "When you asked me questions about my sexuality, your father said, 'What's all this nonsense she's occupying her mind with?'...I suppose he still can't forgive you for taking those pictures of me in the shower. It's as if you had trespassed on his property, and now he feels there's some weird exchanges going on between us from which he is excluded. He calls it 'women's nonsense'." The dynamic so described, in

which the mother pursues her own desire with respect to the daughter in a transgression of the father's will, yet does so in secret, is itself a notable instance of the female 'bilingualism' referred to in the introductory chapter, while the gap between the father's pejorative interpretation of their exchanges and their deep interest and investment in them highlights another 'measure of distance'.

The mother embodies fully the feminine maternal aspect in her relation to her child, and the letters vibrate with love and longing for the absent daughter. But through the correspondence with Hatoum, the mother begins to articulate for the first time ("you know I have never talked in this way before") her own desire as a sexual subject ("Your last letter made me laugh a lot. I can't understand this expression, 'Lie back and think of England'!").

This desire is situated in relation to her marriage, and she urges the daughter to this end--one she equates with sexual pleasure: "You mean they believe that women are not supposed to enjoy sex? Well my answer to that is of course we do, as much as men if not more. Why do you think I keep telling you you should get married. After all, life is not worth living if it's all hard work and no fun."

But her desire also finds expression in an erotics of

intimacy that extends to include and embrace the daughter in their shared exploration of their own experience.

In this exploration, they are outside of the jurisdiction of the husband/father, who is threatened by this intimacy and his exclusion from (centrality within) it. "We laughed at him when he told us off, but he was seriously angry. He still nags me about it, as if I had given you something which only belongs to him." as if. The Oedipal order, and its implied male-to-female relations of mastery and even of property, is seriously undermined in this inscription of another locus and relation of desire. The authority of those cultural and familial limits is at once flaunted and observed through a conspiratorial secrecy, as if such a desire were transgressive, as if it could only be spoken from the margins of the Oedipal boundaries, as if, as in Diamond's video, the exclusion of the father was a necessary precondition for this articulation of a female subjectivity--a subjectivity of desiring mothers and desiring daughters.

Through their correspondence, the two figures construct a separate and private space, one in which language and emotion are intertwined. This language is neither univocal nor masterful: it is doubled and split, statement and ellipse. The spoken texts are excerpted from longer letters and selected from a wider correspondence;

there are pauses in the reading and delays in the flow of sound; there are partial references to ongoing dialogues and topics taken up and left behind; there are relays of situations and circuitous movements of narrative.

The soundtrack carries the words of the mother, as taken from her letters, but her words are spoken by Hatoum, a doubling of their voices. The words are in turn spoken in translation, a doubling of language. These doublings bring about a union between each of the two elements, but a union that also highlights what is missing and different, further underscoring the losses incurred through mediation, translation and representation. Similarly, the shared intimacies of mother and daughter speak to identifications between them, but also highlight differences that have their own specific historical, discursive and familial boundaries, which rebound within their relationship.

In the correspondence, the mother maps onto the daughter's expressed sense of loss--of a "gap" between her and her mother and an absence of childhood memory of the mother--the story of another loss, the exile from Palestine with its losses of family, of community, of identity.

"Yes of course I suppose this must have affected you as well, because being born in exile in a country which does not want you is not fun at all. And now that you and your sisters have left Lebanon, you are again

living in another exile, in a culture that is totally different to your own. So when you talk about a feeling of fragmentation and not knowing where you really belong, well this has been the painful reality of all our people."

These exchanges locate the particulars of identity within specific cultural, linguistic and historical boundaries. Over and above the 'universality' of the mother/daughter dyad are the specificities of situation, location, position in which the relationship is enacted. These differences that the two figures negotiate are made visible to the viewer, but the very structure of the tape emphasizes that the 'translation' can only be incomplete and inexact. As Desa Philippi observes, "The viewer's relation to the piece is mediated by gender and generation as well as cultural difference which includes differences in experience, knowledge, language and so on."(3)

In a tape circulating within the conduits of Western discourse, the work marks out its incommensurabilities. The sound of the mother and daughter speaking in Arabic and the impenetrable script elude possession, appropriation and the illusions and politics of knowledge and mastery, as the production itself addresses the incommensurability of the desiring mother, the incommensurability of the figure of the Palestinian exile.

There is a shift in registers between the precise given and the unknowable, between convention and transgression, between autobiography and history, between gender and

sexuality, between fixity and mobility. There is also a doubling and splitting of other registers: of loss, of exile, of language, of voice, of desire. These shifts and doublings create slippages and complexities in the categories and stereotypes where the place of the mother is defined. They create the calibrations for the videotape's many measures of distance.

These registers, at once personal and social, are mapped directly onto the body of the mother. She is speaker and spoken, with her words, from her body. She is writer and written, with her words, a handwritten scrim across her body. Her words are mediated by the daughter-- the person whom the mother speaks to, the person who in turn speaks the mother, the person who constructs the object of the mother as subject, the person who confronts and represents the gaps, openings, slippages and incommensurabilities in the very center of an intimate relationship.

If this penetration of the surface is a masculine "probing", the position the daughter occupies cannot simply be read as a displacement of the father. Indeed, referring to the photograph sessions in the bathroom, the mother comments, "I actually enjoyed the session, because I felt we were like sisters, close together and with nothing to hide from each other." But neither a displacement of the father, nor a union through

identification with the mother, nor an improbable 'sibling' relationship with the maternal figure aptly characterizes the position that Hatoum occupies. What is at stake is the invention and articulation of a relationship, a mother-daughter relationship, culturally unmapped.

Footnotes, chapter six

1. Desa Philippi, "Mona Hatoum, The Witness beside Herself", Parachute, no. 58, apr-june 1990, p.14
2. Philippi, op. cit., p. 14
3. Philippi, op. cit., p. 15

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The first chapter of this thesis began with a question posed by critic and psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin: "What alternative to the phallus is there?"

In considering this question in its relationship to a female language of desire, the thesis has taken as its object a series of feminist video productions produced over a period of nearly 20 years, beginning with work in the first flush of the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s to recent work deeply imbued with contemporary critical and theoretical thought.

The thesis has explored questions of female identity and subjectivity raised in these video productions, each of which offer a specific engagement with the mother/daughter relation. Within this framework, the trajectory of the thesis has been concerned with how the videotapes enact/depict the "daughters'" negotiation of a subject position within patriarchal culture. Crucial to this negotiation, represented from various perspectives within the videos discussed, has been role of the maternal figure in the female subject's sense of her own cultural location.

As has been argued, with reference to the paradigms of linguistically-based psychoanalytic theory, the female place in patriarchal culture is a 'no place', the

female position that of the Other who enables the constitution of a masculine identity. The crisis of feminine identity in its relation to desire has been linked to the female relation to the phallus as sign of difference and desire. While the phallus enjoys a doubled status as the privileged signifier in language and in psychical differentiation, the female's relation to this governing symbol is highly problematic, not to say bereft.

In raising the possibility of an alternative to the phallus, Benjamin raises the question of whether there might be a female desire and language in difference from that orchestrated by a phallic logic. "Can we discern the rudiments of another way of representing desire, woman's desire, in the here and now of patriarchal culture?", she has asked.

It has been the suggestion and implication of this thesis that the answer to this question is a qualified "yes"--"qualified" in that the videotapes under discussion stage precisely the impasses and travails of such an undertaking. For the narrative accounts within these works highlight the struggle at the level of identity and subjectivity--and thus by implication at the level of language--for the female in patriarchal culture, whose access to a signifying economy has historically been delimited, whose relation to dominant cultural

representations and symbolizations is bedevilled by contradiction and conflict and who does not possess a ready alternative symbology or language of desire.

At the same time, the strategies of production and narration within the videotapes speak to an economy of desire notably different from that of the classic Oedipal narrative, and explore alternate modes of enunciation. The modalities of this exploration include the use of double or triple registers of voice; the exploration of narrative voice, including not only the use of multiple registers of voice but also new narrative strategies around point of view and identificatory processes; a deprivileging of the masculine gaze and a privileging of the female viewer; the shifting of both object and gaze from governance by a phallic logic toward a desiring relation along a female axis.

In its emphasis on the mother/daughter relation, the thesis raises questions of an alternate language of desire in tandem with questions about the symbolic (and psychic) place of the maternal figure within a female economy of desire. The very complexity and difficulty of the relation of the female subject to the maternal object within the context of the daughters' claim to a 'place' and a desire within a culture that is patriarchal bespeak the force of the psychic and cultural imperatives, and the position of Woman within them, that the female subject must negotiate.

Within these videotapes from different periods, we have looked at the displacement of this relationship as a specificity onto symbolic sites of the feminine/maternal (chapter three), traced the conflicts at the level of identification between the feminist daughter and the maternal representative bound to patriarchal law (chapter four), depicted the struggle of one 'daughter' to imaginatively recreate the identity of the mother as desiring mother/subject in order to assume her own position as desiring daughter/subject (chapter five) and finally discussed work which positions the mother as a desiring subject and in which, through a collaboration between mother and daughter, the mother-daughter relationship is re-established in different terms (chapter six).

The thesis itself constructs a narrative, telling a story of daughters uncomfortably bound to the psychic and historical legacy of mothers. It traces a trajectory from repression of the dynamic of this relationship (The motherless daughters) to overt conflict (The mother bereft) to imaginary resolution (Desiring daughters) to a reordered relation between daughter and mother (A doubled desire).

Yet it must be noted that the principal protagonist in these accounts (i.e. in the thesis and in the videotapes) is the daughter, not the mother. As Diamond

makes clear in her own tape, the relation of these 'daughters' to these 'mothers' is an imaginary one: "the process of understanding who my mother is and was to me is one which will continue for the rest of my life and will change as I change", she says. And indeed what the narrative of the thesis traces is not the the story of the mother(s), nor even, despite the autobiographical emphases, of the daughter(s) but rather shifts in the ways in which the feminist subject might be said to 'see' and experience this relation.

In these shifts of perspective can be found trace evidences of the shifts in the currents of feminism itself, from an unproblematized and untheorized celebration of the female sign to an interrogation of femininity as it is constructed in familial and social relations, from repression of the psychic dimension of the mother/daughter relation to its considered exploration, from a preoccupation with 'difference' in relation to the masculine cultural text to an exploration of feminine desire in relation to the other (as) woman.

Within the narrative strategies of the videos, however, may be seen certain enduring themes and approaches that cross the different generations of work. If the governing motto of the first generation of feminism was "the personal is political", the videotapes of subsequent generations of artists continue to mine this

vein, working within autobiography and intimate personal experience to address larger social questions. Similarly, the performative aspects within these videotapes, in which the author of the narrative, the producer of the video and a/the principle protagonist in the diegesis are the same person, recur consistently. Related to these elements is the privileging of the first person pronoun.

This "I", the female "I", woman as (speaking) subject, is itself at the core of these works, even as the narrative approaches vary from a solitary on-camera protagonist (Steele, Diamond) to works orchestrated through one or more other characters depicted in their relation to the protagonist (Yael, Lister, Hatoum). Thus, despite the fact that the protagonist's gaze is ever fixed on another--whether that person is depicted on-screen or is absent from the frame of vision--what is at stake in each instance is the "I", the identity and subjectivity, of the principal protagonist. Through the diegesis, however, this identity is shown to be intricately related to the subject's relation to another primary figure, specifically the mother.

It is perhaps not irrelevant to this thesis that such 'intersubjectivity' has itself been posited by Benjamin, in theorizing a response to her own question, as a possible alternative mode to the phallic. Benjamin's intersubjective model is set in contradiction to what

she terms a Freudian "intrapsychic" model: "Whereas the intrapsychic perspective conceives of the person as a discrete unit with a complex internal structure, intersubjective theory describes capacities that emerge in the interaction between self and others....The crucial area we uncover with intrapsychic theory is the unconscious; the crucial element we explore with intersubjective theory is the representation of self and other as distinct but interrelated beings." (1)

While this writer would dispute whether the 'intrapsychic' (i.e. Freudian) model does indeed conceptualize the subject as a "discrete unit", we will nonetheless return to Benjamin's comments on the intersubjective and to her questions with respect to the phallus as signifier of desire. For insofar as the mother-daughter relation in these videos might be seen as emblematic of such a possible "intersubjectivity" (as will be subsequently discussed), it finds a further echo in the writings of Luce Irigaray. As Rosi Braidotti elaborates, with reference to Irigaray, in her own discussion of the "mother-daughter image" as "a new paradigm":

It is an imaginary couple that enacts the politics of female subjectivity, the relationship to the other woman and consequently the structures of female homosexuality as well as the possibility of a woman-identified redefinition of the subject. In Irigaray's thought, this couple is endowed with symbolic significance in that it embodies a new vision of female inter-subjectivity which is presented as a viable political option. In a phallo-logocentric system where the Name-of-the-Father provides the operative

metaphor for the constitution of the subject, the idea of 'a feminine symbolic function' amounts to the revendication of the structuring function for the mother. It attempts to invest the maternal site with affirmative, positive force". (2)

Yet as we have seen, while a first generation of feminist artists, critics and theorists actively celebrated the mythic and historic Mother and celebrated the sites of the feminine, the videotapes we have been discussing do not unproblematically invest the maternal site with such a positivity. There is a struggle with this figure.

Thus of interest is the terms whereby--given the nature of this struggle on the level of identification and identity between the feminist 'daughter' in her resistance to patriarchal law and the 'mother' in her ostensible acceding to it--a reconciliation is seemingly achieved in the videotapes of the last two chapters.

To arrive at a hypothesis that might account for this, I will return to the question of the phallus as signifier of differentiation, to inquire whether and how the maternal figure might also figure as an agent of separation. Certainly this notion has been explored in feminist theory, to no final determination, whether, as has been variously argued, because it is not considered a feasible outcome or because prevalent gender arrangements mitigate altogether against it.

"In the oedipal model", Benjamin writes, "the father, in whatever form--whether as the limiting superego, the phallic barrier, or the paternal prohibition--always represents difference and enjoys a privileged position above the mother. Her power is identified with early, primitive gratifications that must be renounced, while the father's power is associated with development and growth....But the devaluation of femininity in this model undermines precisely what the Oedipus complex is purported to achieve: difference, erotic tension, and the balance of intrapsychic forces. The oedipal model illustrates how a one-sided version of individuation undoes the very difference that it purports to consolidate." (3) This description of the failure of difference within the difference that the phallus ostensibly secures finds its Continental counterpart in Irigaray's acerbic descriptive, "The Law of the Self-same"(4).

It is Benjamin's contention that both parents have the potential to assume the role of agent of separation, each parent providing a model of identification for each child in parallel to the earlier stage of rapprochement: "Rather than opposing paternal superego (i.e. as "progressive") to maternal ego ideal (i.e. as "regressive"), we can distinguish between a maternal and a paternal ideal, and a paternal and a maternal superego." (5) She maintains, however, that the cultural derogation

of the female and the desexualization of the mother mitigate against this possibility, leading to a repudiation of, rather than a (self-other) distancing from the mother.

"Though the image of woman is associated with motherhood and fertility," she writes, "the mother is not articulated as a sexual subject, one who actively desires something for herself--quite the contrary. The mother is a profoundly desexualized figure. And we must suspect that this desexualization is part of her more general lack of subjectivity in society as a whole." (6)

In the first videotape which we examined, Lisa Steele's "A Very Personal Story", it is the death of the mother that initiates the daughter into a sense of her own self. The mother does not figure in the tape in terms of her own identity, such as this might be described by the remembering daughter. Rather, it is as if the 'death' of the mother were, at least metaphorically, a condition of distance necessary for the daughter in order for her to assume the "I", identity, speech. "In the beginning was the end of her story", Irigaray has written (her emphasis) about (Freud's version of) feminine desire, "...from now on she will have one dictated to her: by the man-father". (7) But in this videotape, it is rather as if the end (the death of the mother) is the beginning, not only of the videotape but also of this female subject's identity as speaking and desiring subject.

At the same time, in speaking the mother, the affective residues of relation and loss are evidenced on

the speaker's body.

In the next chapter, the mother does not die: in effect, she is 'killed'. The action at the conclusion of both b.h. Yael's and Ardele Lister's narratives, wherein the performer in each tape removes the wig that has disguised her depiction of the maternal figure, is a vivid metaphor of separation and distance, a 'putting away' of the other figure. Again, the place of speech and narrative (the possibility, even, as in Lister's videotape, to tell the other's story) derives from a distance from the maternal figure--but one which, as with Steele, leaves the daughter motherless.

It is in the videotape by Sara Diamond that we are introduced to a quite different negotiation of this relationship. Here again we find a tale of physical death and loss, and also, in the oscillations of this imaginary relationship, an expulsion of the mother and a 'matricide' as the daughter stomps with heavy shoes all over the family photos. Yet Diamond persists in seeking a possibility of identification with the mother that would be narcissistically satisfying, not hostage to the cultural derogation of the female. Thus she seeks to locate an identity for the mother outside of the confines of the family narrative in which her identity is delimited to mother/wife, and discovers her identity as an active agent in society and of history. This then allows Diamond

a retroaction in which the mother's previous role and actions are invested with a new set of meanings.

In short, as Diamond variously discovers/invents/acknowledges the mother as an active, desiring, sexual being, the mother becomes less a 'mother', and more a subject, or indeed, a mother-as-subject. In becoming (for the daughter) more individuated as a 'subject', that is, in the daughter's recognition of her difference from her maternal role, she also becomes more an object, permitting a new distancing and separation and a new set of self-other object relations.

In the classical Oedipal scenario, it is the father who is the mother's desire, thus establishing and confirming his potency as the powerful third term splitting the dyadic union. But in both Diamond and Hatoun's videos, even as the father is an acknowledged presence within the field of desire, the mothers have (or have had) other desires, desires by which they situate themselves in the world and in their relations, desires of their own. Thus these videotapes propose an alternate scenario to the earlier tapes, in which there is no representation of the mother's desire (Steele) or the woman's desire, be she wife (Yael) or mistress (Lister) exists only in relation to that of the male figure.

As Irigaray has written in her close, critical reading of Freud's essay "Femininity"(8): "The words

'female libido' cannot mean anything, since the possibility that they might mean anything would inevitably lead us to question the project and projections of that meaning itself. The 'unjustifiable', intolerable nature of those words, 'female libido,' would be one symptom of something outside that threatened the signs, the sense, the syntax, the systems of representation of a meaning and a praxis designed to the precise specifications of the (masculine) 'subject' of the story.(9)" Yet each of the videotapes, and in particular those of Diamond and Hatoum, points to a desire "outside" of this economy.

This conception of the mother as a subject of desire is particularly pronounced in the videotape by Hatoum, in which the mother's desire--which in the videotape ever begins, by virtue of the epistolary framing, with a loving and maternal enfolding ("My dear Mona, the love of my heart, how I miss you and long to hold you in my arms", etc.)--is seen to be expansive, flexible, extrovert. And significantly, as the daughter undertakes to explore a new relation to her mother, so does the mother expand the nature of her desire in relation to the daughter: thus both mother and daughter rework separately as desiring subjects the self-other, the inter-subjective, relation of the mother-daughter.

What is being considered through this (thesis') exploration of the narrative content of the videotapes is

not the question of whether the mother could act as an 'agent of separation' at the primary level, an hypothesis beyond the purview of this discussion and not directly pertinent to the tapes, but a consideration of whether, at a secondary level, it is this symbolic 'separation' from the mother through the recognition of her as a sexual subject and separate being (rather than a 'separation' through the 'death' of the mother), that enables the feminist daughter to constitute herself as a desiring subject, rather than as a bereft daughter, thus subverting the tenets of patriarchal culture.

Yet, if the daughter is able to 'see' the mother in different terms, what could be said to account for her capacity to do so?

As has been noted, it is possible to see in these shifts of perspective changes within the ground of feminism itself. But perhaps, even as the tools of analysis within feminism have undergone developments within the past two decades, enabling new theorizations, of abiding importance is the constant of 'feminism' itself as a site of legitimation for women.

Historically, patriarchal authority has itself been anchored in the sexual division of labour wherein men have occupied by public domain--guardians of language--while women have been confined by law, convention and punishing social sanctions to the domestic sphere--caretakers of the

emotions. The realm of cultural production, the very heart of the symbolizing mechanisms of Western society, has over the centuries been carefully patrolled to ensure a virtual male monopoly on the production and interpretation of meanings and value.

Feminism as a social movement, however, has been instrumental in constituting a female community with diverse strategies and a multitude of sites in which women have been able to reclaim a lost heritage, organize for social change and articulate different forms of social and personal desire.

Teresa Brennan has argued that the various discourses of feminism might themselves figure as site and source of multiple ego ideals. While these would not be the primary structures associated with the mirror-stage, they would nonetheless be pertinent to that part of identity (the super-ego) formed in relation to social prototypes:

"A contemporary social identification of the ego-ideal with another could offset the more traditional super-ego; which might help explain how it was ever possible to think outside patriarchy...We can postulate that an ego-ideal identification with feminism, in the form of a person, people, or a body of writing, suspends the ego-ideal's existing prohibitions, that it permits different thinking. For when the ego identifies its ego-ideal with a social other, it is permeable to the wish, will, or ideas of that other." (10)

This diverse, even conflictual, female community, while positioned culturally in the marginalized space allocated to female activities (whether these are feminine

or feminist) nonetheless constitutes a public domain, one which offers an alternative to the dominant discourse for the legitimation of the discourses formulated by women.

If woman "constitutes the silent ground on which the patriarchal thinker erects his discursive constructs"(11), the feminist project has focused on female self-representation, on the 'voice' emanating from this once silent ground. The figure of the 'speaking woman' in public discourse constitutes a rupture breaking the complementary, binary dyad of speaking man/spoken woman.

The videotapes in question, however, have been engaged not only in an act of self-representation but in the production of a symbolic construct that articulates a voice for the mother and a dialogue with her.

The voice of these 'daughters', as has been noted, does not conform, in position of enunciation, narrative structure, spectatorial desires, videographic form or content to the tropes of the classical Oedipalized narrative. In particular, the axis of desire moves along a feminine trajectory, in a doubled relation of woman to woman. Here, the female desire in language is orchestrated along, and grounded in, the possibilities of female inter-relations.

While the first generation of feminist theory and art displaced the actual mother/daughter relation onto symbolic signs and historic personages, repressing the

vexed relation to the familial mother, perhaps the legacy of this desiring insistence on a 'positive' maternal history and symbology--however its (essentialist) terms have been disputed in later work on the social constitution of gender difference--has played a part in enabling the subsequent deeper exploration of the actual mother/daughter relation. That is, through excavation (of history), interpretation (of the Father's text) and production (of new feminist cultural texts), an alternate symbology that valorizes the depreciated female/mother has achieved a certain degree of cultural presence, a symbology alternate to that of both the preoedipal phallic mother and the castrated woman/mother; this 'presence' at the site of 'lack' and 'no place' may in turn enable a greater psychic resilience in both the challenge to the patriarchal text and in the reclamation of the mother.

As I have proposed, Diamond and Hatoum symbolically reconstitute the mother as a desiring figure. In the process, especially as specified by Diamond, this desiring mother is the ground of the daughter's claim to a desire of her own. Yet, I would argue, it is feminism itself that permits and enables this process, that 'grounds' the very exploration of the mother as desiring figure, that permits the "father's daughter(s)" to reclaim the depreciated mother.

Might such a fema. relation to the
the mother as desiring subject--constitute a "way around
the male dominance implied by Lacan's symbolic law?" (11)

Footnotes, Chapter seven

1. Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, Pantheon Books: New York, 1988, p. 20
2. Rosi Braidotti, "The politics of ontological difference", in Teresa Brennan, ed., Between Feminism & Psychoanalysis, Routledge: London and New York, 1989, p. 96
3. Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, op. cit., p.159
4. Luce Irigaray, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry", Speculum of the Other Woman, transl. Gillian C. Gill, Cornell University Press: Ithica and New York, 1985,p. 32
5. Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, op. cit. p. 152
6. Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, op. cit., p. 88
7. Irigaray, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry", op. cit., p. 43
8. Sigmund Freud, "Femininity", in Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, transl. James Strachey, The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 2, 1973, pp. 145-170 (original in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Hogarth: London, 1961)
9. Teresa Brennan, "Introduction", in Teresa Brennan, ed., Between Feminism & Psychoanalysis, Routledge: London and New York, 1989, p. 10

10. Toril Moi, citing writings of Luce Irigaray, in Sexual/Textual Politics, Methuen: London and New York, 1985, p. 131
11. Brennan, op. cit., p. 2 (question cited in chapter two)

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