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**CHANGING PARTS. CHANGING HEARTS. CHANGING ME?**

**An investigation into my response to video art**

**Georgina Miriam Cooley**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Art Education**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Art Education**

**Concordia University**

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## Abstract

This thesis is a personal inquiry into the process of aesthetic response I as a viewer involved in the experience of watching and appreciating meanings from a chosen video, Changing Parts by Mona Hatoum.

My study has been guided by Prof. Stan Horner's proposal of how aesthetic response may be understood and encouraged. Horner emphasizes the value of the viewer's initial, subjective response as a foundation upon which additional layers of aesthetic engagement, personal realization of meaning, critical discourse and theorizing may be bases. Viewer/image dialogue is integral to each phase of the process. In the first section of the thesis the particular demands that video art makes of the viewer and critic are discussed. A discussion of the theoretical basis of Horner's work and a resume of his proposal is also presented.

The thesis continues in the form of a personal narrative of my own response experience as I viewed Hatoum's video. Into this narrative I have inserted citations from Horner's writing, from other authors, poetry, and media reports as they were most resonant for me and for the nature of my interaction with the video. These additional "voices" contribute to the expression of how my understanding of Horner's proposal, Hatoum's video, and my own learning process were expanded through this experience.

## Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my respect and appreciation to Mona Hatoum. The strength and passion of her work compelled me to take up the challenge. I have gained much from this experience.

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For my parents, Laura and Fred Cooley  
and for my daughter, Georgina.

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## **Approaching Video**

**Video has been referred to as a unique and privileged medium of postmodernism (Jameson 1988, 105). As an art medium its history is brief but its impact in present artistic practice is dynamic. Video works present a very complex viewing experience: ideas, images, colour, sound, silence, narrative, dialogue, movement, the passage of time, text, technical manipulation, all have an impact. Video as an art form presents a challenge to the viewer that is particular to the medium itself and to current artistic practice as well.**

**My interest in the question of aesthetic viewer response in the area of video art stems from an increasing use of film and video in my own artistic experience. My personal involvement provoked questions about the role that time based media, video in particular, have come to play in contemporary art practice. From my point of view as an artist, I questioned how effective my presentation of sounds and images was in eliciting my hoped-for effects and meanings for an audience. As an art educator I was concerned with how members of an audience can be assisted in dealing with the complexity of technical and artistic sophistication that they encounter when they view video works.**

**Stan Horner's course, "Image, Voice and Text: Research Through Video" was helpful in addressing my concerns both from behind the camera and in front of the monitor. Our seminar discussions centered around the issues of response to art (in this case video) as put forward by Horner in his research. His proposal, which is descriptive of a process of learning about art**

that has evolved from his observations of people in a variety of viewing situations, presents an archetypal paradigm for a viewer's interaction with any given work of art. An insistence upon the validity of individual responses to works of art is fundamental to those proposals, as is an assertion of the inter-active nature of the art viewing experience. He examines the experiential phenomena through which one sees, experiences, evolves an understanding, grasps meanings, and turns the whole experience to one's own use in ongoing discourse, including artistic practice and production.

The complexity of video as a medium complicates the task of understanding the response process. Christine Ross's article, "Video: Towards a Renewal of Art Criticism" (Ross 1988-9) draws attention to the necessity for "a renewal of the modes of interpretation, description and evaluation" in order to adequately critique video work. She notes that the electronic realization of video, its "temporal presentation", is through "an electronic beam scanning the screen (from top to bottom and left to right)" which "renders the progressive 'unmasking' of the image visible." (Ross 1988-9, 13) The image, then, according to Ross, is never constant, never completely realized, and therefore perpetually in flux. She proposes that this fluidity of the video image is analogous to the temporal complexity of any experience of viewing and interpreting and that it demonstrates a particular resistance to notions of a single perception leading to universal or fixed meanings.\* Like Horner, the critical practice for which Ross calls, acknowledges that the critic's first engagement with the work is as a subject-viewer. She also stresses the role that the subject-viewer must play in the ongoing engagement with the work, if a process of criticism consistent with the media is to be found. To

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\* This is in contrast to the long history of painting as contemplation: a still and timeless experience in keeping with the art works themselves.



that end, she contends that, "the critic must abandon the positivism of description and interpretation" (Ross 1988-9, 13) and then she locates the source of a renewed approach to video criticism,

...on what could be called the borderline between the visible and the invisible – at what Deleuze<sup>\*</sup> calls the frontier between the outside and the inside, the real and the imaginary, that place where the quest for the unrepresentable, the desire for the Other, the Elsewhere play, and unplay, themselves out.

(Ross 1988-9, 16)

Horner as well, locates the realization of meaning at this "frontier" and the process of response that he describes is an examination of how meanings are realized through the dialogue between opposites. In light of such particular demands, the strategies that Horner proposes are necessarily complex. In class our initial investigations considered several strategies for understanding how the subjective voice of the viewer, once realized, is incorporated into the full comprehension, analysis, and critique of a video work. At the end of the course "Image, Voice and Text: Research Through Video" these questions remained interesting but to my mind, unrealized.

Since Horner's present writing on this subject is most particularly, although not exclusively, concerned with still images and objects, the task of this thesis is to articulate the link between Horner's proposal and the qualities unique to the experience of viewing video art, to undertake a critical exploration of how the theory and strategy for analysis proposed by Horner can be applied to the medium of video. The thesis is an exploration towards a means through which a viewer may approach a dynamic and complex art medium for which few of us have been given adequate introduction. My purpose was to give careful consideration to the possibilities and limitations of Horner's proposal.

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<sup>\*</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, Cinéma 2: L'image-temps Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1985.

In order to examine this process thoroughly I have employed a somewhat unorthodox methodology. Since I am the subject through whom I have the most direct and unmediated access to viewer response, I have selected a video, (*Changing Parts* by Mona Hatoum, 1984) and documented and scrutinized my own process of responding to it. The documentation of my experience has taken the form of a personal narrative which incorporates the description of my process with the unfolding of my response experience. I made every effort to be as forthright and descriptive as possible. As well, I researched the background sources from which Horner developed his proposal, in order to better understand and assess his writing. The results of that research are discussed in the second chapter.

As the outline of the narrative was developing, I searched for a style of presentation that was consistent with the concepts that Horner was presenting, the process that I was experiencing and the many additional influences that were being introduced from various sources. I found it most suitable to let my narrative unfold as I experienced it and to interject, where appropriate, references from Horner's writing. What in the end evolved was a dialogue between myself and Horner's text coincident with my ongoing dialogical process with Mona Hatoum's video. In the process of writing, my approach evolved to include the insertion of other voices — the artist, other authors, a poet, public media — whose words and ideas contributed to my understanding of this particular experience with this particular tape. I placed the various citations in the text where they were the most resonant for me but with the expectation that they be read as dialogical possibilities rather than as assertions. These voices, in concert with my own, describe my "journey" through a process of aesthetic response and propose meanings that evolved

for me through my experience with the work. That text is presented in the third through the sixth chapters.

Throughout my text I have evaluated the ways and the degree to which Horner's proposed process eased my viewing and my understanding of the work. Horner insists that he is not presenting a prescriptive method or practice to be followed in a specific manner in order to achieve a pre-determined result. Rather, he feels that he is proposing a paradigm with archetypal possibilities, in the sense that he is making a theoretical proposal which has "its own internal logic" (Horner 1989,16). He describes a process which may be applicable in a diversity of art making, art critical and art educational practices, through a variety of means. It is his expectation that an understanding of theory will come through personal, inter-active experience and, that from understanding will come the ability to amend or develop the proposal in response to a particular situation. While his concepts have guided my study, I have felt at liberty to view Horner's proposal as one which is flexible, amenable to my explorations and as one which aspires to open, rather than direct, experience.

### **Situating: Theoretical Background**

**Horner's work addresses very fundamental elements of our experiences in viewing art and formulating ideas about it. In the proposal that is discussed in his series of papers, the initial aspect of the viewing experience is stressed in that the viewer is encouraged/given permission to go along with/engage with/fuse with the work of art in an intensely personal manner. Equally important however is the later aspect of the process in which the viewer is obliged to address the external pre-existing structures of language and culture as they relate to the work in question. It is in this way that an individual's voice assumes an active role in finding expression and contributing to ongoing cultural discourse. Horner investigates the nature of the transition from internal personal experience to external dialogue and proposes questions for the art educator to facilitate the process for viewers. He extends his proposal to further consider the means by which the viewer may then incorporate the realizations gained in the viewing experience into new artistic proposals in some appropriate form.**

**Horner's proposal is a response to, and a departure from, the attitudes of Modernist, Formalist criticism which became a dominant voice in North American and international visual arts in the 1950's largely through the work of art critics such as Clement Greenberg. As early as the late 1930's Greenberg began to articulate an approach to art criticism that divorced painting from the (by then politically suspect) style of American social realism that reigned during the Depression years. By focusing artistic commitment on the quest for**

"quality", the subject of critical debate became the painting itself, rather than artistic motives or social action. The defining of formal elements and the reduction of the work to the essential qualities of those elements became the function of artistic and critical practice. Painting was unabashedly privileged over all other media. While this critical approach undoubtedly provided a thorough and useful examination of the complexities of the various art media it also operated to exclude those viewers who were not schooled in that particular critical form.

In his paper, "Responding to Art: 2C and not 2B: That is Not a Question", Horner focuses his critique on the approach proposed and popularized by E.B. Feldman. With Feldman, as with Formalist and Classical literary criticism, there is an underlying assumption that the meaning is vested in the art work and the viewer must "discover" the qualities and ideas "conveyed by the art object" (Feldman 1970, 358). He proposes that if the correct procedures of analysis were followed one could acquire the "ability to recognize and evaluate excellence" (Feldman 1970, 348). His tone is prescriptive as he outlines the procedure to be followed and attitudes that *should* be assumed by the viewer. He encourages the development of observation and evaluation skills in his general readership, but he none-the-less advocates that the particular task of 'the critic' is "to persuade people of the relevance or significance *for them* of the observations and meanings *he* (my emphasis) has found in the work." (Feldman 1970, 363).

The aspect of Feldman's approach that is particularly problematic to Horner is the insistence that the viewer's personal, immediate response to the work must be kept in abeyance until after one has attended to description, analysis and formal aspects of interpretation. Rational, externally acquired 'evidence' is given priority, and even at this point Feldman suggests that

"Perhaps 'looks like' or 'feels that' reaction can be modified so that it fits some or all of the relationships in the art" (Feldman 1970, 364).

Horner takes serious issue with this attitude because, in his opinion, the real consequence of this is to foster the viewer's detachment from the work, to reduce the work to "an amalgamation of unconnected fragments" (Horner 1989,4) and to ultimately deny the validity of the viewer's voice in the whole discussion. The inadequacy of this position becomes a point of departure for Horner who asserts that the kind of paradigm that he is proposing "has no interest in negating modernism, but rather only in extending it." (Horner 1989, 12).

This extension is realized through Horner's intensive examination of the initial viewer/response. Like Elizabeth Freund, who states that her intention is to seek "an enhanced awareness of the limits of its (literary critical theory) usefulness, and of the perishability of its prescriptive authority." (Freund 1987, 11) Horner is careful to avoid any suggestion of prescribing a method of instruction. He concedes to the archetypal possibilities of the paradigm that he describes but offers his work as an instigation for ongoing exploration by groups and individuals in various contexts.

There are two sources that have provided Horner with his fundamental paradigmatic structure and have strongly influenced the form that his proposal has taken: literary debate concerning reader/response criticism and the psychoanalytic theories of D.W. Winnicott. The integration of these two concepts through the process of "mapping", constitutes the foundation of his new proposal.

While discussion of literary criticism is not the purpose of this paper, I think it is instructive to present an overview of the debate that has influenced

Horner's thinking. Appropriate to the medium, literary criticism, being itself composed of speech and text, has an articulated history of theoretical debate that is more explicit than is the case with visual art criticism. At various points in time and under the influence of various pressures, "poetry" has been assigned heavy responsibilities: to foster the highest standards of citizenship, promote the brotherhood of man, inspire profound human sympathies, refine perception, produce rapturous contemplation or to balance conflicting psychic impulses (Tompkins 1980, 221). While the text itself has always been the object in question, the perceived roles played by the author, the audience and the world at large in relationship to the text and its meaning have shifted in priority to privilege each camp at various points in time. The conflicting points of view of "New Criticism" and reader-response criticism which have dominated critical debate in the last half century, have set the theoretical stage for Horner's proposal.

In the early part of this century the increasing status of empirical scientific practice compelled literary theoreticians to defend the status of poetry by asserting the practical role of language in transmitting knowledge. Formalist literary criticism evolved from that attitude in that it focused on words as the medium for literary meaning. The function of poetry, its effect on the reader and the context of its creation were deemed irrelevant. "It has no transitive function, is not an agent or an instrument but an end" (Tompkins 1980, 221).

New Criticism, as formalist literary criticism was labelled, represented the pendulum swing to the extreme of privileging the text as the location of meaning and the critic as the guardian of interpretation. Poetic structure had become the focus of criticism. Words were seen to be pure conveyors of universally established meanings and with the acquisition of appropriate skills

one could comprehend those meanings as they had supposedly been placed there by the author. Interpretation "becomes the supreme critical act" (Tompkins 1980, 222) and the highly specialized academic attention that this demanded bolstered the academic status of those possessing the necessary skills. In the formalist view poetry provided an image of perfection, superior to nature and human life to which "men" could aspire.

The elitist overtones of these ideas and the exclusionary practices that resulted were alienating to readers, authors and critics alike and New Criticism itself became the focus of critical debate. In The Return of the Reader: Reader Response Criticism, Elizabeth Freund comments on the dissatisfaction with formalist principles and reports,

...a recognition that the practice of supposedly impersonal and disinterested reading is never innocent and always infected by suppressed or unexamined presuppositions.

(Freund 1987, 10)

The pendulum swung to the opposite extremity, i.e. to reader/response criticism, so that priority in the realization of meaning in the written text centered on/in the reader. Freund stated that as a consequence of this refocusing, criticism has been obliged to give serious consideration to questions generally ignored or trivialized by preceding schools of criticism;

...questions such as *why* do we read and what are the deepest sources of our engagement with literature? What does reading have to do with the life of the psyche, or the imagination, or our linguistic habits? What happens – consciously, cognitively or psychologically – during the reading process?

(Freund 1987, 5)

These questions throw the spotlight back onto individual readers and their very personal experiences, both past and present. The subjective views of each individual reader became the only accepted authority and any interpretation s/he offered had to be accepted as the "truth". Stanley Fish's



view (since revised) that the reader in fact "writes" the text in the act of reading represented the extreme position in this debate. Refreshing as this may have been in theory, in practice it was highly problematic. Complete privileging of the reader's authority over the text led ultimately to a position of solipsism that bound all experience of meaning and interpretation by the limitations of the reader's personal experience. There was no space for the role of the author, or the influences of any external factors and no tension for their inter-active development.

Freund insists that reader/response criticism points out an irreconcilable rift between theory and practice. In theory past assumptions of the differences between reader and text are put into question through the assertion of the reader's authority over the text. The realization that the context of interpretation is ever-present blurs the distinctions between subjective and objective, between the assertion of literary "fact" and the interpretive act. In practice the dualism between reader and text is maintained through the phenomenon of experience and the reader's will/desire towards the interpretation. As Horner notes,

...the swerve to the reader assumes that our relationship to reality is not a positive one but a hermeneutic construct, that all perception is already an act of interpretation, that the notion of a 'text-in-itself' is empty, that the poem cannot be understood in isolation from its results, and subject and object are indivisibly bound.

(Horner 1989, 5)

The notion of extreme reader privileging is ultimately problematic, but the demand for reconceptualizing reader/ text interaction has opened up the debate. There is new space for a more tempered approach to questions about how, and by whom, meanings are created, authenticated and authorized in/from the reading event. Critics such as Wolfgang Iser have considered these same questions with a focus on the "text/reader interaction" and have

attempted to articulate a position that values the participation of both reader and text in the appreciation of possible meanings. In Iser's view the literary text acts as a pattern, "a structured indicator to guide the imagination of the reader" (Iser 1978, 9). He acknowledges the incomplete state of this pattern; that it has 'gaps' and 'blanks' which the reader is obliged to fill in from her/his experience and present context.

From the point of view that,

Meaning is not directly accessible or even present in any way either in the reader or in the textual object, but is something that emerges (a product or assemblage) in the process of interaction between the two poles.

(Freund 1987, 142)

Iser introduces the concept of dialogue between reader and text as the practicable accommodation of the question of authority. An element of ambiguity remains as to how the process of dialogue and interpretation is actualized and it is into this space that Horner has interjected his proposal.

Horner has substituted "viewer" for "reader" and moved his inquiry into the field of the visual arts.

The work of D.W. Winnicott was also of particular importance in the development of Horner's ideas. Winnicott was an English post-Freudian psychoanalyst who carried out careful and extensive observations of very young children in their relationships with their mothers. He defined a particular pattern of development that follows the shift from the complete self-involvement of the infant within the mother/child dyad through the transition to interaction with the pre-existing environment. Operating on the fringes of "Object Relations" theory he affirmed the psychological origins of creative cultural activity as grounded in the play activity of young children.

In Playing and Reality he focuses on "the intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived." (Winnicott 1971, 3)

or, between the individual inner reality and the external reality of the world around us. He observed that a very young infant exists wholly in the warmth and plenitude provided by a mother who responds immediately to her/his needs. The infant holds the illusion "that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create." (Winnicott 1971, 12)\* Eventually it is the task of the mother to break that illusion and permit disillusionment, thus facilitating the child's realization and acceptance of the exterior world beyond her/himself. Winnicott refers to the experiencing of that realization as the "transitional phenomena". He observed that as the mother absents herself for slightly longer periods, the infant finds solace in caressing or sucking a corner of a blanket or garment. Within its first year the child appears to settle upon what Winnicott refers to as the "transitional object": the one blanket or toy of particular significance as a necessary companion in solitary moments, at bedtime, or during periods of anxiety when parental attention is withheld or simply directed elsewhere. The obvious importance of this first possession to the child alerted Winnicott to the realization that it was intimately involved with "the intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived" (1971: 3). He observed that "it seems to me that the transitional object is what we see of the journey in progress towards experiencing" (1971: 6).

It is through its investment in the transitional object that Winnicott perceived the infants's eventual development of creative play and subsequently, of adult artistic creativity. He observed, as have many parents, that the transitional object became more than a soothing companion. It eventually became the recipient of often not too gentle manipulation and

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\* 'Create' in this case means conceiving the idea of something that will meet an instinctively felt need.

abuse as well as more affectionate physical and verbal attention; it became the focus of what we know as play activity. Thus,

playing and cultural experience can be given a location if one uses the concept of the potential space between the mother and the baby.  
(Winnicott 1971, 53)

He further noted that while the first object is never discarded, eventually the transitional object loses meaning for the child because, ...the transitional phenomena have become diffused, and

have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common', that is to say, over the whole cultural field.  
(Winnicott 1971, 5)

The "cultural field" in Winnicott's meaning may originate in play activity but extends into artistic creativity and appreciation as well as religious feeling and dreams (1971: 5). The very broad definition of the term "creativity", then, is taken as "the meaning that refers to a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality." (1971; 65) and the approach that the individual takes to that reality.

The relevance that Winnicott's work has for our understanding of creativity and the implications that it holds for art critical practice are considered by Toronto artist and psychotherapist, Jeanne Randolph in her article, "The Amenable Object". (Randolph 1983). She begins by clarifying the ways in which Winnicott's work departs from Freudian concepts of the origins of human creative activity and goes on to examine the implications that Winnicott's innovations hold for the art viewer and critic.

Randolph explains how Freud perceived the creation of a work of art as a socially acceptable gratification and externalization of intra-psychic sexual /aggressive experiences that otherwise would be socially inappropriate. In Freud's 'art as neurosis' theory, the inevitable content of a work of art,

...as in neurosis, is the artist's sexual and aggressive drives in constellations and conflicts, shaped by events in the artist's infancy as he or she developed psycho-sexually, events re-awakened, aroused once again in the artist's present predicament.

(Randolph 1983, 32)

Randolph points out that, since in Freud's view, "the sole aim of primary process (the activity of the unconscious) is the discharge of any accumulated erotic or aggressive arousal" (Randolph 1983, 32), the realization of symbols becomes an alternate means by which intra-psychic quiescence is re-established and pleasure is realized. The activity of primary process operates to over-ride logical, rational, common practicalities and to assemble and refine various, perhaps trivial, qualities and fragments of things and images into symbols that are manifest as works of art. Artmaking is seen as the consequence of the desire to re-establish intra-psychic equilibrium.

The assertion of this fundamentally conservative motivation for human creative activity is very much at odds with notions of art as a socially progressive or revolutionary force. As well, the implication is that a very limited and explicit content is vested in the work by the artist and that only that reading of the work is possible to the viewer.

Randolph points out however, that it is equally important to consider that, as primary process functions to establish quiescence through the creation of symbols, it acts,

...without convention, definitions or precedent. It distorts the boundaries of convention, suspending the validity of definitions, ignoring precedent in the form and function of things.

(Randolph 1983, 32)

Thus, while the task may be seen as ultimately conservative, the various means of achieving equilibrium defy the understood conventions of the conscious world. It is in the ambiguity of this seemingly contradictory situation that Randolph finds a role for Winnicott's concept of artistic

creativity in much the same way that Horner has. In the work of Winnicott she finds the possibility that,

...the model of the art object is of an object amenable to an interaction with the viewer, reflecting the hypothesis that in some way the materials and methods of which it is made had been rendered by the artist into something amenable to his subjective interventions, a subjectivity very much like primary process yet exploratory, not reactionary.

(Randolph 1983, 32)

She finds that not only does Winnicott affirm the active role of the artist in the creation of the art object but he also invites the view that,

...art criticism can be the articulation of an experience, with no denial of the writer's aim to interact with the work.

(Randolph 1983, 32)

The possibility is open for the viewer and critic to engage in dialogue with the work and to regard the work as an object amenable to interaction. Thus criticism can become a transformational process through which the experience of viewing is extended into new forms of creative activity.

In her wish to adapt Winnicott's theory to the field of art criticism and thus permit "exploration without disrupting subjectivity" (Randolph 1983, 33), Randolph's inquiry coincides with Horner's proposal. She also provides me with support for a position for the very subjective method of exploration that I employ in this thesis.

### **Responding: A Proposal of Process**

**Horner has analysed the phenomenon and articulated the process that has guided my inquiry and which is itself amenable to the needs of artists, art educators and critics.**

**Horner's proposal for a process of responding to art is most completely laid out in "Responding to Art: 2C and Not 2B: That is Not a Question". In this article he also discusses the concepts on which it is based. He asserts that:**

**...viewers do not come like blank slates, empty and in search of a "message", a sort of information to be picked up, stored and/or passed on; but rather, that meaning emerges at the intersection where expectation schemata of a viewer's desire meet with those of an author's desire. Since each is unique for each viewer, there is no way of forecasting what any individual response may be.**

**(Horner 1989, 8)**

**Horner proposes four phases of subjective, inner image response which are followed by four phases wherein the subjective response interacts with the external, objective elements that pertain to the work in question. He presents the paradigm as a developmental, "analogical" sequence which "will undoubtedly never occur in such elegance in the real world" (1989: 16) but which offers a means through which the complex process of responding to art may be practised. He places considerable emphasis on the initial phases of the process of the viewer/object interaction wherein the viewer's subjective experience is indulged and validated. He is proposing that as art educators,**

**...we encourage students to trust their responses, follow them, enrich them, track them, reflect on them, and use them to unveil outside the experience that the teacher has proposed.**

**(Horner 1989, 3)**

**Forgetting, Phase 1, is analogous to the infant's state of illusion wherein all is complete and the subject's desire is pulled towards a fusion with the work. To that end Horner encourages the viewer to "journey" through the work, privately and silently, being as open as possible to the free flow of impressions, images and associations. The viewer can proceed to enjoy or to struggle with whatever the work presents without anxiety or contradiction or apology for an attitude of self-indulgence. For the moment one may enjoy the illusion that the work can be whatever one finds it to be. Horner asserts that the individual inevitably brings to the occasion their personal reflection of the experiences they have lived. The whole individual is participating in this particular journey into a fusion-dialogue with the artwork. Horner points out that,**

**What the viewer gains and retains then, is not 'the significance of works of art', but rather the enrichment of an inner image encounter with transformational experience as held and stored in the inner-image memory.**

**(Horner 1989, 7)**

**As one returns from the journey and exits from the illusion attained through forgetting external expectations, one carries away the memory of the inner-image experience. Through Remembering, Phase 2, the memory of that inner image is brought to the external world, where, in order that it may be shared with others, the subjective experience must be expressed through language. Horner asserts that the process of Remembering,**

**...is not just a translation, or the same thing merely expressed in social language. Rather it is a new work born out of the dialogue between the demands of the inner-image and the demands of language as a fluid system of social interaction.**

**(Horner 1989, 9)**

**Just as the infant's illusion of omnipotence will inevitably be broken to accommodate the reality of the external world, so too must the viewer make**



that accommodation in order to bring "the special haptic / auditory / visual language of the imagination" (1989: 9) into the structured language of social, verbal communication.

Remembering permits the viewer to move outside the experience, to separate from it, to recognize the work as "other" than oneself. As Randolph (1983) suggests, when the work can be seen as an "other" it can become an object amenable to the viewer's manipulations. Within the Winnicott paradigm it has become the transitional object with which the viewer can play. Reflecting, Phase 3, is a term that more clearly suggests the nature of the play activity. The engagement with the work is still personal and intimate as one reflects on the prior experience and seeks aspects of "the self" within the work, "to propose another self that we can see outside, as over and against our continuous self;" (1989: 10) The possibility exists for a kind of role playing which, in a group context, can be shared with others. As they realize the variations among the proposals, viewers are obliged "to imagine new ways to extend themselves and/or provide an awareness of other frames of reference" (1989: 10) beyond what was personally imagined. Reflecting may, however, be a private engagement, carried on through an external dialogue of thoughts and imaginings.

Through Revealing, Phase 4, Horner encourages the viewer to continue to play with her/his subjective perception of the work through a kind of imaginary deconstruction of the work itself. Through an imaginary peeling away of elements, one reveals the aspects of the work which are particularly valuable to our individual experience with the work. Horner proposes that, depending on how willing one is to revise another artist's work, one could attempt to recreate a work of one's own around the elements that one is moved to transform.

This phase moves the viewer towards a sense of closure and Horner suggests that,

It is at the end of this process that we may be ready to release ex-tensions as documents of a process, or extensions as works of art into the public domain.

(Horner 1989, 11)

Horner characterises Phases 5 and 6 as "Describing and Structuring: 'The Voice of the Subject Discipline'". At this point he proposes a shift to a more objective understanding of the work. However, the memory of the earlier phases is inevitably sustained and is the foundation for external responding, the extended dialogue between subject/viewer and object/art. **Describing**, Phase 5, is a process of seeking data, identifying and isolating the individual elements of the work, naming them, decontextualizing them. This kind of fragmenting is unsatisfying in light of the completeness of the earliest inner image and it is inevitable that through **Structuring**, Phase 6, one undertakes to reconnect the pieces and make the connections that organize the data into a whole again. The "dialogue that has consistently emerged in the transitional zone between a beholder (inner image) and a beheld (outer image)" (1989: 13) continues to facilitate the viewer's realization of the forms that Structuring reveals.

**Interpreting**, Phase 7, is the process of defining and articulating meaning as it emerges, through dialogue, between the viewer/subject and the art object. It is the process of bringing together our initial inner subjective experience, our objective observations, connections and associations and our lived experience within a particular social context.

**Retro-activating**, Phase 8, is an attempt to find a sense of closure through an assessment of one's "journey" within the particular context in which it has transpired. Rather than judging the work, this phase involves the

consideration of interpretations made by other viewers (discourse) in relation to one's own. Through this meta-discourse (discourse about discourse) viewers can confront that which already exists in the public domain, and as active subjects, empowered by the validation of their personal responses and their objective understanding, construct their own reading of the work.

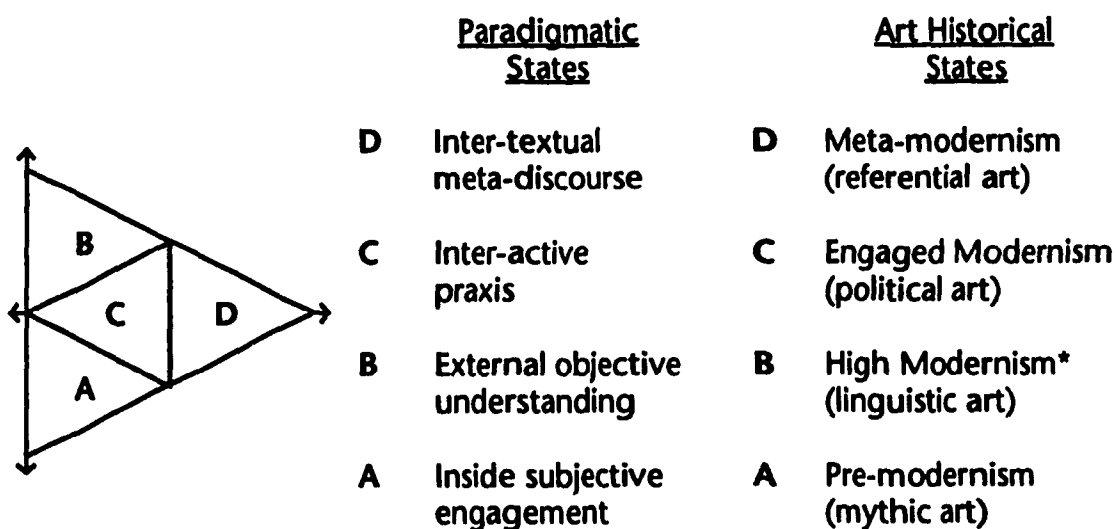
The diagrams/maps that are included as Appendix A at the end of this chapter represent the sequential grouping of phases of experience (p.22) and suggests how Horner sees their correspondence with art historical states. The four phases of subjective response (A, Appendix A, p.22) are followed by the four phases (B, Appendix A, p.22) that address the objective elements. The third area in the sequence (C, Appendix A, p.22) represent the various forms of praxis evolving from the interaction that occurs during the first eight phases. One's interaction with the work may carry on to engage in theoretical, textual discourse (D, Appendix A, p.22).

A more detailed breakdown of the response phases, as discussed in my text above, is shown on page 23. The triangular grouping of Phases 1, 2, 3 and 4 on page 23 correspond to A on page 22, and so on. The triangular formation permits Horner to suggest the intra-active relationship of the phases. For example, Triangle 3, inserted between 1 and 2, represents a zone of activity which calls upon the experience of the two previous phases. Similar readings are suggested for triangles 7 and C. Triangles 4, 8 and D which abut onto Triangles 3, 7 and C respectively, and which project out from them, suggest that these phases are based on the experience of the preceeding phases and that their activity is an extension from those experiences. The text accompanying the diagrams should be read from bottom to top.

## Appendix A

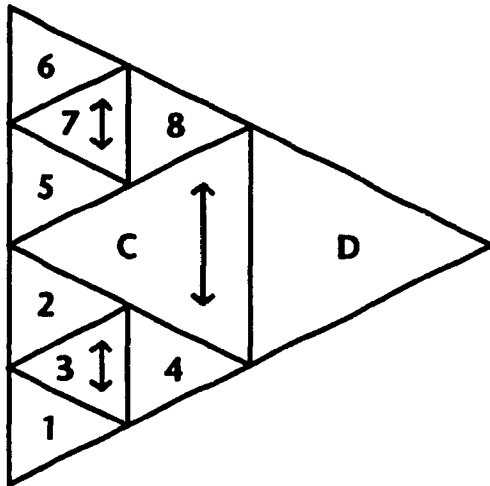
### Meta-Mapping the paradigm

Horner meta-map/paradigm charting intra-active phases of responding, (named to make explicit the fact that it is not intended to stand for the "truth, but rather is merely my map projection of my selection of dynamics.")



\* Modernism attained its purest form during phase B. Phase A accordingly is pre-modern, and phases C and D are post-modern.

## Responding Phases



- D Theorizing meta-discourse
- C Practicing discourse
- 8 Retro-activating the perceived values (loses and gains) for future applicability. (mentoring)
- 7 Interpreting dialogically the apparent meaning of the other as a distinct subject with its own raison d'être. (monitoring)
- 6 Structuring the underlying analogical pattern that sustains an other with a life of its own.
- 5 Describing disinterestedly the living digital bits and pieces of the other.
- 4 Revealing the potential self by transforming it through the other. (modelling, "mentoring")
- 3 Reflecting the self by projecting it as an other. (mirroring)
- 2 Remembering that there was after all a split between the internal and external experience, and creating the split between the experience itself and its linguistic version.
- 1 Forgetting that the work is separate and differentiated from our self as a responding subject.

## Articulating a Response Experience

*Forgetting...*

*...When we enter into a dream time-space, engaging the "active imagination" (Jung), we are drawn into a world of analogical flow, of associations, puns and put-ons.*

*(Homer 1989, 6)*

The first time that I watched this particular video tape was at the V.A. building in Studio 215. Mona Hatoum had been invited to show her tapes and speak in the Women in the Fine Arts class. A general invitation had been extended to other women in the art school to attend, and consequently, the room was quite full of people, many of whom I knew, I felt mildly in conflict because I was skipping one of my regular classes to attend this screening but I was sure I was making the right choice. The seating arrangement was the usual conglomeration of chairs, benches and stools. There was only one monitor and I found a place about three rows from it.

From the introductory remarks I learned that Hatoum is a Lebanese-born Palestinian living in exile in London, England. Her parents still live in the everpresent danger of Beirut. Her earlier artistic practice was primarily in performance work and has evolved into film and video. Her video work has been realized in conjunction with Western Front in Vancouver. How this collaboration came about was not discussed. Three of her tapes were shown that afternoon: So Much I Want To Say, Changing Parts and Measures of Distance, in that order.

So Much I Want To Say was realized in black and white and exploits the electronic roll that is a feature of video technology. As the camera holds onto close-up, still photographs of a woman's face with someone's hands, perhaps a man's, coming from behind her and covering her mouth, the horizontal line that defines the roll moves steadily and repeatedly from top to bottom.

### *Forgetting...*

*...as conceived of in the present situation, is essentially very different from that held by a strictly phenomenological position. In layer 1 (phase 1) rather than break the natural attitude with imposed, preset demands that necessarily keep the viewer on guard, I am proposing, as an alternative, that initially we provide students with a means to focus within the work, to take the natural attitude with them, thereby enabling them to discover their assumptions in action and to sustain essential continuity. This can be done, I suggest, by helping students to situate themselves inside the passage of time and/or the "shape" of space.*

*(Horner 1989, 5)*

Initially I knew that I was resisting any involvement with the piece because of many past experiences with prolonged, tedious, tapes by artists who, it seemed to me, were intent on indulging some personal fascination with minutia. I was very conscious of antipathy to the repetitive image and as Stan Horner observes, that attitude went along with me as I attempted to engage with the work, to 'enter' the experience. Perhaps because my (all be it negative) attention was focused on the electronic roll, it became the "hook" that drew me into the piece. As my resistance began to relax I was able to become involved and appreciate the gradual transitions of image and sound that were taking place. The relentless electronic roll became almost hypnotic

as the configuration of fingers obscuring the face and gagging the mouth increased in complexity. The phrase "Say what you want to say." was repeated like a mantra and I cannot say at what point I realized it had changed to "So much you want to say."

After the tape Hatoum talked briefly about the artistic concepts and political intentions of her work. I made an effort to make some brief notes during her remarks between tapes and during Changing Parts, the second tape. From previous efforts to carry out detailed mapping of video viewings I had learned that attempting to make notations of the viewing experience is distracting and incompatible with the kind of sustained personal involvement that time-based media demand. Therefore these notes were very brief and taken mostly during her remarks.

Speaking from her position as a Palestinian and an exile, Hatoum stressed her intention to address the issues of physical and psychological division between Third World and Developed countries. In response to a question she commented on her use of duration and repetition as artistic devices to emphasise qualities of endurance in her work. She explained briefly that the next piece was developed through the use of photographs taken in her parents' home as well as black and white footage of her installation/performance piece, Under Siege, which had been presented in London in May, 1982.

My initial interaction with Changing Parts was not an easy one. It was and remains, powerful and disturbing. Repetition and duration certainly were fundamental elements and although Hatoum's remarks and my experience with the first tape had prepared my expectations, I resisted the extremely slow pace of the introductory segment. I had missed the title of the music in



the opening credits and the laborious droning of the cello did not inspire my curiosity as to its origin. Black and white close-up still images of the surfaces and features of a bathroom dissolved from one to another and the transition seemed to take forever. However, even as I felt myself sinking into a "Ho hum, here we go again!" attitude, a fragment of an ornate object in the corner of an image caught my attention because I was still looking for the object that had sparked my curiosity. Curiosity quickly overcame the attitude that had been blocking my involvement with the video tape and I began the watch with heightened interest and attention. As I was moving into the flow of the images I started to sense the safe, secure, personal space of the room that Hatoum presented. I recognized certain personal objects, like a shaving brush and a sponge. It never became clear what the object was that had first caught my attention: a table leg? a heating fixture? Shapes, patterns and textures of surfaces and objects drew my interest.

I will have what I want, diversion from further knowledge of my objectivity, my rage, the resultant guilt. What I really want from these fabricated objects, these sanctuaries, is a way to devalue the damage done to me by everyday reality. I don't want the damage to matter.

(Randolph 1984, 30)

The music receded from my awareness. I relaxed and began to enjoy the simple formality of the images.

*forgetting...*

*Art, being itself an illusion (a framed context), enables us to re-experience empowerment without, at the same time, having to worry that our everyday real world might be in jeopardy.*

(Horner 1989, 6)

The first interruption of static sound was very startling; a blast of audio electronic interference. The image was briefly replaced on the screen by gray-white 'snow' that reminded me of the perpetually bad reception on the first black and white T.V. that I watched when I was a child. Then both the dissolving stills and the cello resumed as before. Now I was on edge. Was that supposed to happen? Was the equipment destroying her tape? What else was in danger?

Then the image changed and I was confronted with a grainy black and white image of a woman's face with her hands moving across some sort of transparent surface between her and the camera. It was accompanied by another blast of static. My apprehension was valid. The image appeared only briefly and then the cello and the photos of the bathroom reappeared. My tension eased a little.

Presently the moving image of the woman returned for a longer period and since the camera had drawn back from the subject, her nudity was apparent. Her gestures, as she seemed to scrape and scratch at the barrier, were much more emphatic. The still images returned only to be replaced by the moving image. At one point, as the moving image returned, her movements began to leave marks on the barrier; it was red in my mind even though there was no actual colour on the screen. Eventually the stills and the cello were replaced completely by the image of the struggling woman and the confused, static sound.

As I watched I could feel the anxiety and tension close in around my body. I sensed a disintegration of all the elements as the tape progressed. The woman's movements against the surface were building up an almost opaque covering of markings that I was trying to see through. The cloudy, grainy quality of the image, which I recognized as being from a Super 8

original transferred to video, further obscured the subject. The sound took on the quality of a radio late at night with several distant stations overlapping and interfering. I really wanted it to go away but instead the cacophony intensified. The woman struggled to stand but repeatedly fell to the ground, rolled into a fetal position, then tried again to stand. I sensed the vulnerability of her nudity and her determination to carry on. I felt that I was watching a beating or a rape and could only sit and watch it happen. She was still struggling as the tape ended.

I had a great sense of relief when the final image passed but I was left in a state of distress; agressed, confused, speechless. Hatoum responded to several questions from the audience. She discussed her reasons for no longer appearing nude in her performance work. She had come to feel that because of the heavily coded social perceptions of the nude, female body in our society, there was an inevitable challenge for the audience to get past those perceptions before they could become involved in the artistic and political issues that are the priorities for her in her work.

Measures of Distance, the final tape shown that afternoon, was a tape that comes very directly from Hatoum's experience as an exile from her homeland and her family. This tape also presented layers of meanings, gently but compellingly. The images were nude photographs that she had taken of her mother. The colour images are jewel-like in their obscure focus and appear behind a grid overlaid with Arabic script. The narration, quoted from letters written by her mother, touched on questions of violence, absence, loss, intimacy, and female sexuality in direct and very personal ways. I found myself completely seduced by the lushness of the images and deeply moved by the poignancy of the text.

My attention to the tape was briefly distracted as Hatoum quietly left the studio. Later she admitted that the process of editing this material had been a very painful one for her and that she is generally unable to watch this particular video and maintain her composure. Although my experience of separation from family is minor by comparison to Hatoum's, I know I wish only to hold the memory of that tape — unexamined.

*remembering...*

*It is this remembered inner object / image / event as experienced that can now, in the second phase, be transformed with and through language. This process of bringing to light, i.e. Remembering, (2) is itself a transitional experience; on one side the individual "dream" experience, as remembered, calls for an authentic account of itself; on the other hand, the social experience of language calls for articulate syntax...*

*(Homer 1989, 8)*

I was very moved by these tapes; by the way that they so effectively addressed personal, political, and artistic issues. I left the screening immediately after Hatoum's final remarks. I didn't really want to talk about the tapes then; there certainly wasn't any simple thing to say. I went to what remained of the class that I had been skipping.

On my way home that evening I stopped to visit my filmmaking partner and close friend and I described all three tapes in detail to her. It was a very informal process of remembering but one that fell very natural into my usual round of activities. I had the opportunity to recall and articulate my entire experience of viewing the videos in a comfortable environment and in empathetic company of my own choosing. The content of what I said was very similar to what I have reported above. My response was still very

emotional and my friend was somewhat preoccupied by some personal concerns so our conversation did not push for interpretations or meanings. The following morning I wrote an expanded set of notes that both described my memory of the tapes and my responses to them.

*reflecting...*

*...can be a solo process — a dialogue between the subject and his/her object of desire...*

*(Horner 1989, 10)*

Over the next four months I spent a lot of time thinking about my experience with Hatoum's tapes and questioning why they had affected me so strongly. In terms of world politics and economics, my life has been one of relative privilege. I have not been bombed, exiled, beaten, tortured or raped. However, there were aspects of my personal life that are analogous to the issues Hatoum raised.

The parallel to So Much I Want To Say was fairly apparent. Being incapable of speaking above a whisper was a very real and frightening experience for two years of my life. I know the intense frustration of having "So much I want to say" and being prohibited from "Saying what I want to say." At one point a friend told me that my personality seemed to have changed along with my voice and I became intensely aware of how intimately one's "voice", in the sense of power to assert, is tied to one's actual voice as it is heard by others. The fragility of my voice continues to be a decisive factor in professional decisions I make.

Measures of Distance also touched some personal chords, albeit in less drastic ways than for Hatoum. Although the voice problems mentioned above

necessitated many changes for me, it is by my own choice that I am half a continent away from my parents. They are beset by health problems, financial concerns, the weather and the fate of the world wheat prices. I am unable to change these things about rural life in Manitoba just as Hatoum is unable to stop the bombs that threaten her parents. I too have come to treasure the fragile communication of letters, phone calls, and infrequent visits.

Changing Parts was more resistant, or perhaps I am the one who resisted a confrontation with self in the work.

...This damage must remain prosaic, must not signal a crisis. To personalize my distress would be to magnify my responsibility, accelerate my guilt. I want to be persuaded instead that my discomfort is unjustified that my discontents are inconsequential.

(Randolph 1984, 30)

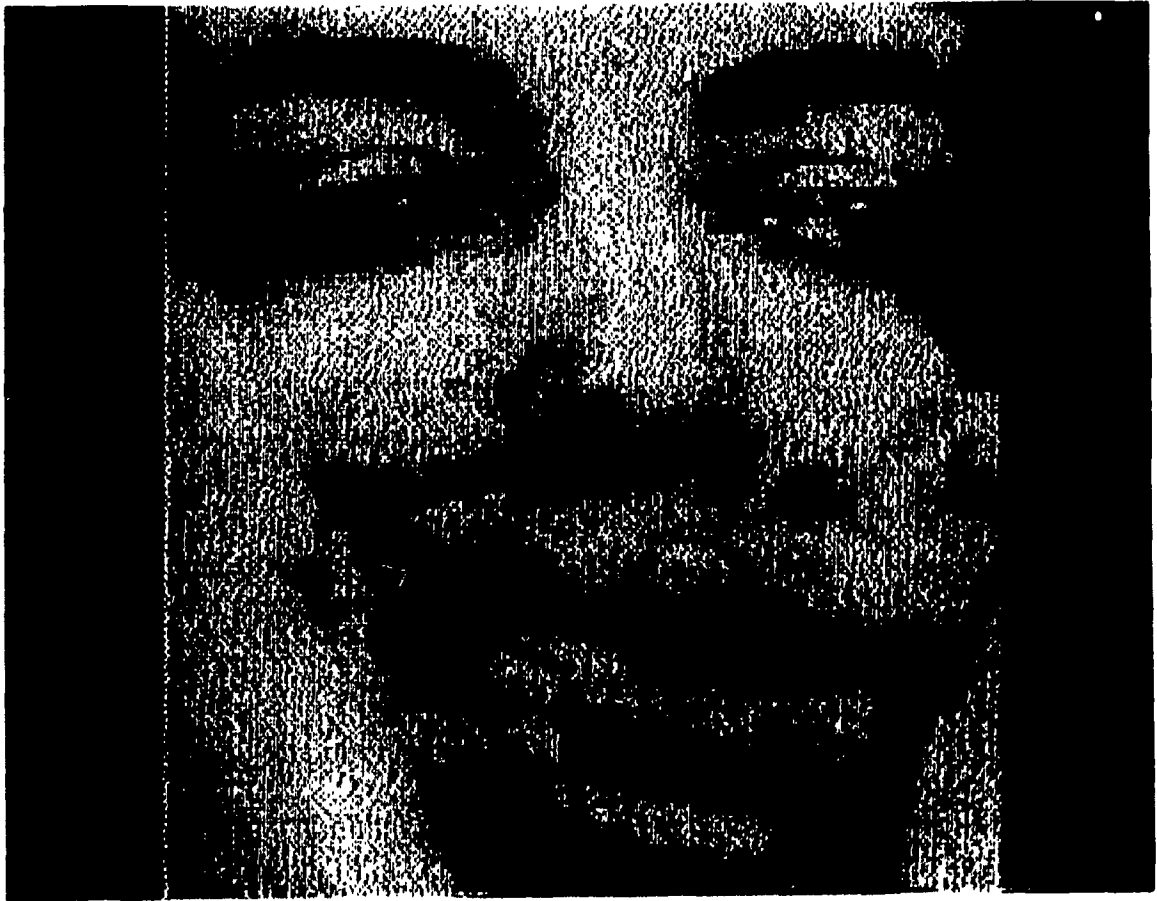
Direct violence has never been my personal experience but I am aware of my vulnerability as a female and of the ever present threat of male aggression to which women feel subjected. By virtue of my upbringing, education and the experiences that have come my way, I would like to think that I can have a compassionate understanding and intelligent analysis of international issues. I am also aware that in the eyes of many in the world, the whiteness of my skin and the language that I speak put me in the ranks of the privileged. As I reflected upon Changing Parts I *felt* an identification with the struggling woman but the complexity of the multi-layered issues resisted immediate articulation.

*revealing...*

*...If it has moved us deeply, if we have come to regard it highly, we will probably not want to change it;...*

*(Homer 1989, 11)*

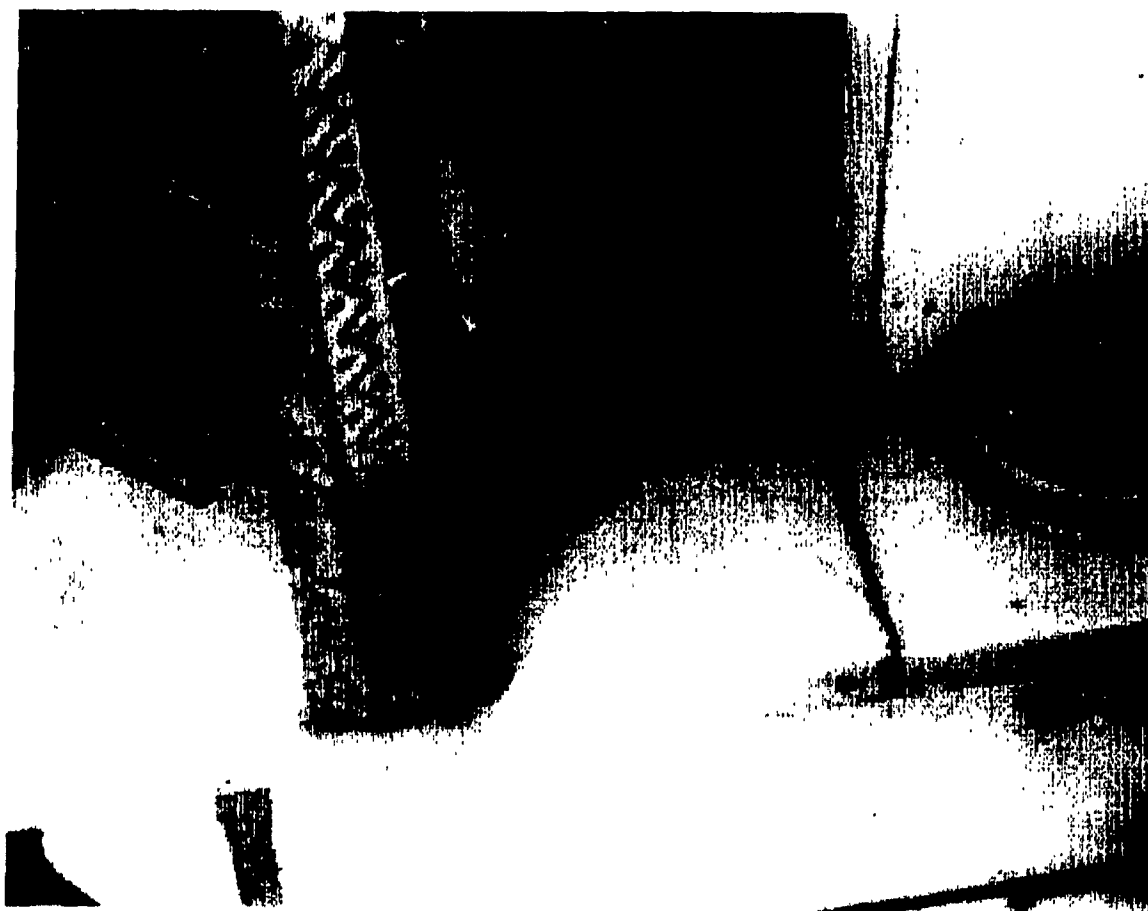
The decision was gradually solidifying that Changing Parts would be the subject of my thesis study. I felt no desire to interfere with the work as Hatoum had presented it but I couldn't just leave it as an interesting experience and go on to something else. I was finding accommodation for the persistent ambiguity of my relationship to the content of the work in my growing understanding of the ongoing critique of art video as a medium. The complexity of these factors demanded that I re-examine them and find the appropriate means of expression for my eventual interpretations.



So Much I Want To Say

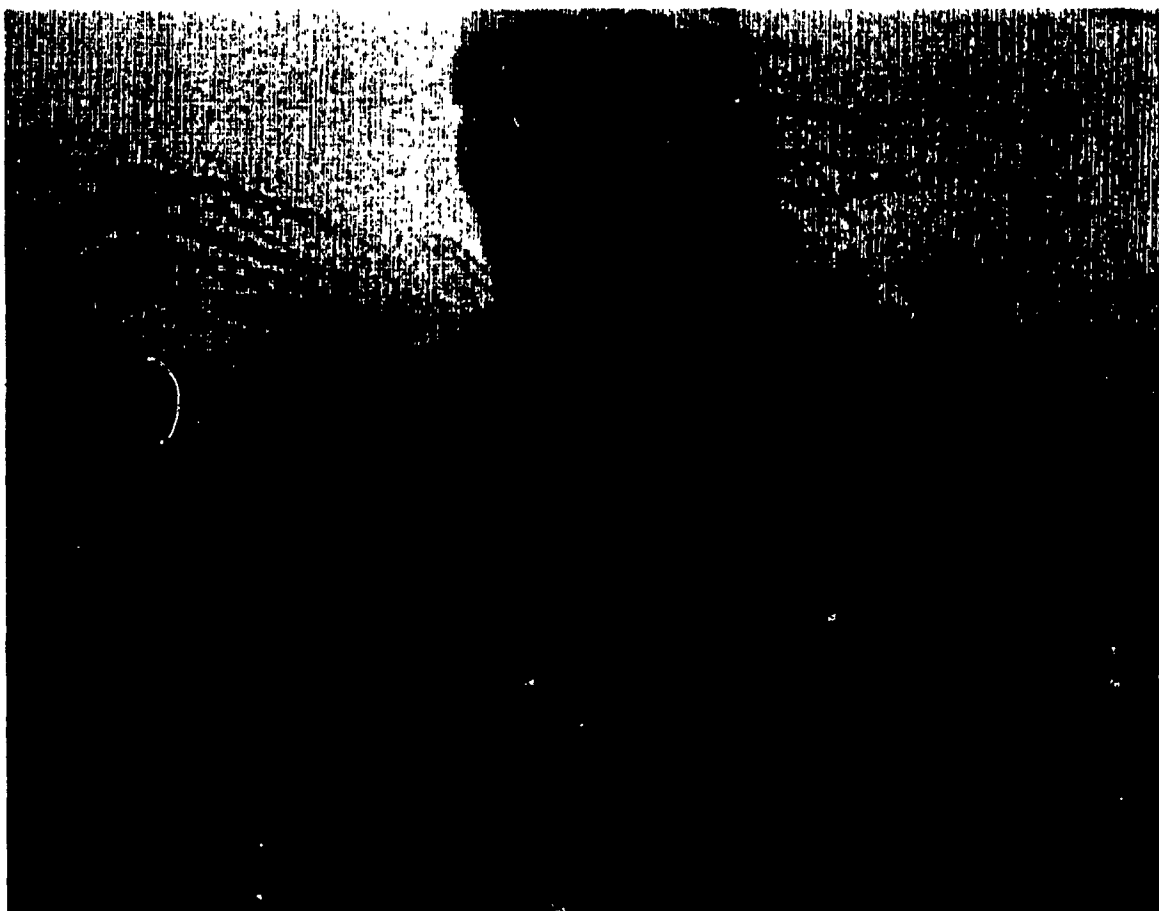
1983





Changing Parts

1984



Changing Parts

1984



Measures of Distance

1988

### Articulating a Response Text

I started my intensive consideration of Changing Parts by viewing the tape a second time. PRIM VIDEO has a copy of the tape in its collection and it was very easy to make arrangements to see the tape there. I invited a friend to watch the tape with me. The viewing room at PRIM is a small private space with a comfortable sofa and subdued lighting. The only distraction during our video was a brief technical problem about five minutes into the tape. This necessitated rewinding the tape and starting again from the beginning. Although this was unfortunate, neither of us was too disturbed by the problem. It was easy enough to re-start our viewing along with the tape.

Of course, I already knew what I was about to see. From my research, I knew a great deal about her background and her approach to the production of the tape.

... The tape has been constructed using shots taken inside my parent's home in Beirut (Lebanon) and some footage from the documentation of a live performance entitled "Under Siege" (May 1982 London Film Makers Co-Op). The soundtrack uses Bach's Cello Suite #4 which fades into a multi-layered track of noises, busy street sounds and two different layers of news reports...  
(Hatoum 1985)

I had given my friend very little information about the content of the tape. However, she did know that I had previously responded very strongly to

it. She asked if I had any special instructions for her and I suggested that she just go along with what the tape presented and to let her thoughts and feelings flow as naturally as possible.

My second viewing experience was much more attentive in some respects than my initial encounter. I was still intimately involved with what I was watching but at the same time I was much more aware of the formal and structural elements of the tape. I was also quite deliberately aware of my responses as they came and went.

*describing...*

*In phase 5 (unlike phase 1), it is quite appropriate to verbalize (out loud) the names (words, phrases, descriptions) as they are identified because there is no need to forget ourselves inside a continuous imaginary experience as we did during phase 1.*

*(Horner 1989, 12)*

This time it was possible for me to take brief notes without feeling that my involvement was distracted. My notes were descriptive of the observable elements of the images, their sequence, and the changes of the sound tape in relationship to the images.

*describing...*

*...To describe, as understood in our present context, is to focus on the "bits and pieces", to look at each moment in time and each object in space as if it were a whole in its own right.*

*(Horner 1989, 12)*

*Bach Cell Concert #4 — slow, tonal, resonant  
Black and white stille — clean, clear, precise  
Tiled floor — black squares, corner of room*

I watch the measure-by-measure dissolving one image into the next as Hatoum carefully, deliberately, examines the surfaces of the bathroom. At the first viewing this had seemed strained. I was not attentive to the details and qualities of each image and was drawn into the moment of transition from one into another, the way one particular line or space gave way to a matching position in the next image.

*Window*

*Corner of window ledge*

*Corner of bath tub — other corners of room*

I began consciously to make associations and ask questions.

*Paint — skin texture*

*Part of leg of metal work object — chair? heater?*

*Plumbing*

*Faucets — elegant, ornate — from another time/place*

*Marble — cool*

*Dissolve to large piece of floor — drawing back*

*Shower, another window corner*

There was an almost voyeuristic seduction in viewing the photographic images. The repeated moments of disappointment, as each one was taken away from me and replaced by another, provoked a sense of mild frustration. My desire for what I could not hold became a conscious sensation. The warm tones of the photos (the white was really a pinkish/sepia and the black was a dark brown/umber) was seductive and evoked a feeling of comfort that conflicted with the increasing frustration and panic that I was feeling.

I began to realize how the pace of the music held me, and controlled the pace of my movement through the video, matching the pacing of the gracefully dissolving images.

I want to be persuaded that I will always be sustained by a vast, self-evident order.

I offer myself to the sanctuary, to the entertaining object, to "the pliable medium" as if it were a machine whose function is to fabricate a simile for this vast self-evident order, a simile that places me safely within it. I certainly don't want to depart the machine, the sanctuary, believing I was indeed powerless, enraged, guilty.

(Randolph 1984, 30)

Although on one level, I gladly embraced the illusion of graceful orderliness that this segment of the tape offered me, an almost imperceptible tension had begun to build across my shoulders. I was feeling a sense of panic before I realized it.

*Radio interference over red violet still  
Male voices, far away*

The first spasm of static...grey visual noise...startled me as much as before.

*...but the air is full of darkness,  
telepresences, moving stones, talking heads, wizards,  
devices, shaky people moving without hands,  
devices, radio waves, refuelling aircraft.*

(Jiles 1989, 15)

...and yet, I had the reassurance that my anxiety was justified.

The cello continued and images of ornate fragments of water pipes, heaters and basins continued to dissolve gracefully one into the next as if nothing had happened.

But I'm waiting for trouble:

*I sit up late, listening to Shaman Radio.*

*(Jiles 1989, 15)*

As the still images continue at a perhaps even slower pace, I realize that only one image included any representation of the artist's presence; her feet at the bottom edge of one image. When I noticed them I was immediately aware of the absence of humanity from all the other images, although the inclusion of personal items like a shaving brush, a toothbrush or a sponge, suggested human presence in the past and presumably, in the future.

Amidst the pristine coolness of the marble floor and the porcelain fixtures, and in spite of the way that she permitted only glimpses or fragments of objects and spaces, fleeting sexual suggestions enter my awareness. Maybe it is simply that nudity is "the natural attitude" in the bath. Shadows fall sensuously across the smooth surface of the tub. Drains suggest orifices and a vent suggests a nipple. A sponge in the corner of the tub looks like pubic hair if one looks down one's nude body.

*structuring...*

*Structuring tries to reveal the underlying patterns of space and systems of time, to make explicit the context that lies hidden behind the proliferation of surface details.*

*(Homer 1989, 13)*



Another blast of static intruded into Bach. My visual pleasure in the graceful clarity of the photographic stills was destroyed by the appearance of the first grainy, grey moving image. The halting movements of hands scraping against some invisible surface were vague images on the screen. My sense of uneasy, anxiety and frustration returned full force for the duration of the tape.

*Listen, Take thought, think. Listen. Watch.*

*(Jiles 1989, 17)*

The image of the woman on the screen was clouded, obscure. The distressing sounds persisted. There was an increasing urgency in the clutching, grasping, tearing gestures that she made.

On average, a battered woman in Quebec takes 32 beatings before she even calls the police.

*(Goveas 1990, 7)*

*Back to image of the woman (Step printed 8 mm.)  
Close up on face, shoulder, hands  
Face distorted — mouth particularly  
Hands near mouth*

I was face to face with a woman who seemed to be trying to come through an invisible barrier to me. I cannot go to her.

*I am trying to reach you by radio telephone, waiting for the sun to come back.*

*(Jiles 1989, 17)*

The surface between us — the monitor screen, the camera lense, the material that encloses her, time itself — all stood between us.

Between retina and world is inserted a screen of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena.

*(Bryson 1988, 92)*

*Returns to stills.*

*Hands tearing*

*Tiles — move out of focus*

*The screen filled with a few seconds of red-violet still.*

*Radio interferences, voices.*

*Face moves across screen*

*Leaves a dark mark — I see it as red — blood*

*Hands move — leave marks — many marks*

The woman's movements against the barrier began to leave marks that I continued to see as marks of blood. Associations of woman / menstruation / child-birth / blood / violence had been evoked but I still realized that by inserting a few seconds of red-violet still immediately before the sequence, the artist had enhanced those associations by using colour subliminally and by playing with the retention of colour in my mind.

**...is rather a sort of strait between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and make diverse regions of the coloured or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world — less a colour or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colours, a momentary crystallization of coloured being or visibility.**

**(Merleau-Pony 1968, 132-3)**

***Marks on the surface  
Hands grasping, clutching at transparent barrier  
Trying to tear it apart***

**The camera pulled back, moving me away from the intensity of the face to face encounter. I was then able to see that she was restricted within a space defined on all sides by transparent sheets. She was trapped, nude, vulnerable. Within that space her hands and arms moved against the barrier as she continued her futile struggle to find a way through, a way out. The camera moved closer. Again I was confronted and locked into an exchange with her; one that could become far too personal for comfort.**

**The antidote, (for ideological self-righteousness I suggest, is confrontation of the sinner with the evidence of the sin: the rationalizations, the subconscious defense mechanisms, the strategies of avoidance, denial, dismissal, and withdrawal...**

**(Piper 1981, in Wallis 1987, 129)**

**Her face was pressed against the intervening transparent surface. Her features were abused and distorted as she was pushed down and across by**

some powerful but invisible force. A long time passed. It seemed interminable. She continued to move and struggle, rolling away from the surface, into the centre of the enclosure. She drew her knees up and curled her body into a fetal position, seemingly to protect herself. I was overwhelmed by the sense that I was witnessing a terrible violation, the beating, the rape, the torture that are the bitter reality for millions of women.

*One sister died in the bombardments  
and the other sister refugeed with her children  
to the countryside. One sister married a tall dark man  
and went underground for six months  
because she ate his seed, and she liked it,  
and zinnias sprouted out of her mouth like words.  
Three sisters died in the riots in the square  
and the last sister made it to the countryside with  
two mattresses, three blankets, four children  
and a water container.*

*(Jiles 1989, 37-8)*

### *Interpreting...*

*...if seen more as a process than as a method...is a form of social discourse.  
Even if one dialogues alone, one unveils glimpses of the particular social  
infrastructure that one interjected while growing up.*

*(Homer 1989, 14)*

My most immediate association was with the domestic violence that we know is part of our society and all others world-wide but other ugly associations crowd in.

Chateauguay, P.Q.

Christian Larose, 22, caryring a skull and crossbones flag, was part of the crowd that had chased the girl. "We can't go there, so they have no business coming here," he said. "If we'd caught her, she would have got a good beating."

(Heinrick & Hamilton 1990, 1)

From her comments and from what I have read about her work, (Goldie 1985, Diamond 1987, Horne 1988, Christakos 1988), I knew that Hatoum's intent extended the interpretation of that reality of violation to encompass her personal experience, the agony that is the military and political chaos of her homeland, and her compassion for others who endure similar tragedy.

As a Palestinian woman this work was my first attempt at making a statement about a persistent struggle to survive in a continuous state of siege. Members of the audience, according to their background, spoke of various powerful images of oppression: the Irish hunger strikers, prisoners in solitary confinement, Bantustans.

(Hatoum 1983)

### *Interpreting...*

*...What emerges out of socio-psychical interpretation is the coexistence of diverse readings. Individuals sort them out, value the ones that strengthen their identity with their emerging ideology, whether in the context of in/house/peer-group responses or of expert responses in the public domain. It needs to be stressed that these are responses, and not critiques.*

(Horner 1989, 15)

I cannot know that reality but as I watch the struggling woman on the screen, my mind is flooded with words and images from films, from television, from personal reports.

*A hundred sisters died in the siege and a few made it to the countryside  
and married tall dark men and went underground anyway.  
A thousand thousand thousand thousand sisters died  
in the fires and the falling buildings  
along with their fathers and their brothers and  
their uncles and their mothers  
and their children and their cousins  
and their neighbours  
and the unborn  
and the unborn  
and the unborn*

*(Jiles 1989, 38)*

I watched the gesture of her fingers scraping, grasping, clutching at the transparent barrier, trying to tear it apart, to find an escape. Her efforts seemed futile but she persisted.

**As a person from the 'Third World',  
living in the West, existing on the  
margin of European society and  
alienated from my own . . . this  
action represented an act of  
separation . . . stepping out of an  
acquired frame of reference and  
into a space which acted as a point  
of reconnection and reconciliation  
with my own background and the  
bloody history of my own people . . .  
(Hatoum 1983)**

Again both the visual and audio presentation are disrupted by another blast of radio interference over a red-violet still. I distinguish far away male voices in the midst of other less specific, but very insistent sounds.

**The live action was repeated over a duration of 7 hours and was accompanied by three different sound tapes repeatedly blasting the space from different directions creating a collage of sounds: revolutionary songs, news reports and statements in English, French and Arabic.**

**(Hatoum 1983)**

The final sequence was as brutal and difficult to watch as it was the first time. The barrier is eventually rendered opaque by the repeated overlaying of smears and marks. She continues to try to find a clear way through except that each attempt only makes another mark. The task seems impossible. In spite of all I understand about the larger intent of Hatoum's work, I am inevitably brought back to the level of the personal.

**A human figure reduced to a form covered in clay, trapped, confined within a small structure, struggling to stand up again and again...slipping and falling again and again...**

**(Hatoum 1983)**

I realized that the sound, the cacophony of news reports, static and male voices had completely overtaken Bach's stately concerto. How seductive

and dangerous the male voice is in the lives of women. It was apparent that the sound is the weapon, the force that pushes her down, but I still found myself trying to make out the words, wanting to know what they were saying. Was I fearful that I might miss something that I needed to know?

*I sit up late, listening to Shaman Radio.  
The seductive and fraudulent voices tell me of murders  
in far places, committed with enthusiasm and skill.*

*(Jiles 1989, 15)*

**A week later came the invasion of Lebanon, the siege of Beirut and the horrific events that followed, making the extent of their suffering clearly visible.**

**(Hatoum 1983)**

At some point in this trial, the experience had engulfed me. I could "become" the struggling woman. There was still no visible antagonist as she again rolled away and curled herself into a fetal position, but the oppressive bombardment of static and out-of-tune radio voices filled that role more completely than any one image could have done. There is no single madman with a gun, no Hitler, but rather an expanded field of aggression.

I am numb. There is an empty, fearful, sensation in my body. I clung to the only thread of optimism that Hatoum offers me; the woman is still fighting to survive as the tape ends. No matter how often she was pushed back and down, she kept struggling to rise and to carry on.

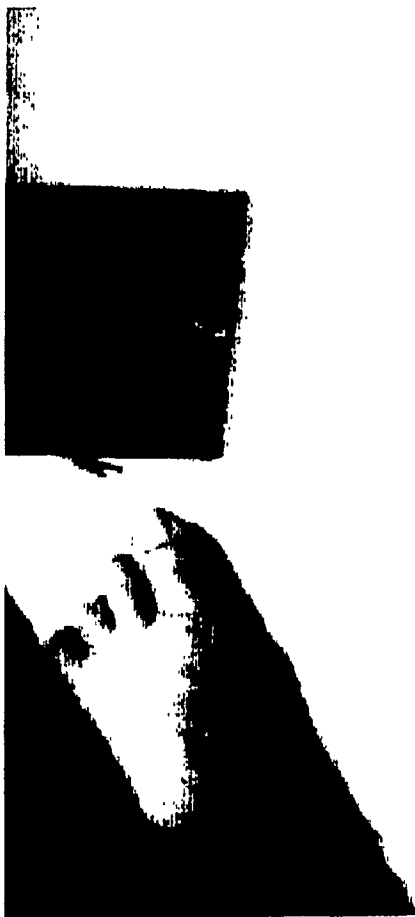


Both my friend and I were quiet while the tape rewound. We seemed to need a bit of time to adjust to what we had seen. I made some additions to my notes to elaborate on the various structural elements that I have commented on above. I realized more completely how the piece shifted from order to chaos on a number of levels: emotionally, visually, audibly, culturally and politically. However, I also began to grasp more fully how Hatoum had integrated the two realities that she presented. They were not simply set in opposition to one another. In spite of my wish to deny it, I had come to anticipate the violent action during the formal, orderly sequence of stills, and I carried the comfortable memory of the photographs with me as the action and violence accelerated.

My friend began to "remember" her experience and to tell me about it as we prepared to leave and she continued to talk about her experience at the restaurant where we went for coffee. At my request, after a week or so of personal reflection, she wrote a brief text which is included as Appendix B. I requested her participation in this way in order that I would have another stated response to the video besides my own. Although it is interesting to me that there are many similarities between her response and my own, I didn't feel that I needed her text as an affirmation of my own responses. I respect the integrity of each response and feel that my efforts can stand on their own. My friend's text does however, provide a counterpoint\* to my own which may be interesting to readers. Her text also provides me with an initial piece of data for further enquiry as I examine how my subjective insights, gained through this study, can be useful in promoting and understanding aesthetic response processes of others.

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\* as in music: "a melody added to another as an accompaniment."  
Gage Canadian Dictionary 1983.



Changing Parts  
1984



Changing Parts

1984

## Retro-activating on a Response Experience

### *Retro-activating...*

*...Within the illusion that is a Meta-modernist paradigm, we can only let go of an experience when we have a sense that what has transpired, that the process as experienced unveils itself to us, gives us permission to move out and on. We can at last assess our journey (phase 8).*

*(Horner 1989, 15)*

The writing of my narrative has been a prolonged and intensive exercise of Retro-activating, far beyond what would reasonably be expected of students in a classroom situation. Certainly, this has been a task that I set myself and my progress through it has been beset with delay both from my own procrastinations and from external demands. But I am also aware that I am reluctant to conclude this experience. I am having difficulty leaving this video behind me and I am reluctant to confront my reasons for this hesitation. There seem to be questions that I cannot answer and I sense that there are many questions that I am not yet ready to ask.

As Christine Ross considers the challenge to the viewer/critic posed by the transitory and perpetually incomplete video image, she points out that one is obliged to draw heavily upon one's memory as one pursues interpretation and meaning. Both one's memory of the impermanent video work and one's personal memories of lived and imagined experience come into play. Her subsequent query, "If the representation is not physically contained in the

image, how can one talk about it and describe it without describing oneself?" (Ross 1988-9, 14), suggests the source of my hesitation. Monda Hatoum's work has moved me deeply and my engagement with it has forced me to scrutinize my personal, artistic and political ideology. The method of this research and the content of Changing Parts, has required that I undertake an exploration of my "frontier" as well as the theoretical one presented by video work.

In one sense, that frontier exists on the conscious level of human interaction and some aspects of my concerns on this level have been touched on throughout my text. But a more complex inter-relationship exists. The most fundamental level of the frontier exists in the anarchistic operation of primary process which draws together fragments to create a whole, just as video technology creates transitory images from electronic fragments. For me, Paulette Jiles' metaphor, "Shaman Radio, the Shaman within us all" (CBC Radio, July 1990) linked the radio cacophony in Hatoum's piece (a manifestation in/of lived experience) with the mysterious spiritual power of the Shaman, as analogous to the deep inner workings of primary process, determinedly oblivious to conscious obligations in its quest for the pleasure of quiescents. (Randolph 1983) The implications of the analogy drawn from this video (Changing Parts), from this poem ("Song to the Rising Sun"), from Mona Hatoum as an artist and from myself as a viewer in relation to video technology reaffirms the personal/political potential of the media. The possibility exists that the "inner" can be manifest in the physical world, that it can be appreciated and can be made "amenable" to artistic discourse and practice.

*Retro-activating...*

*...we are assessing our experience, joining the discourse, proposing selectively when our ideology can be propelled forward, perfecting a technic/linguistic means that will give it articulate validity in the social discourse that enables us to become subjects and that sustains our continuity as subjects.*

*(Horner 1989, 16)*

This work is an explicitly subjective case study through which I have explored my own process of responding to an art work. Not only is it particular to me and to the work that I viewed but it is also particular to the summer of 1990 in Montreal and to influences and experiences that came my way. This is precisely the point, as I see it, that Horner intends to make. The meaning of this video exists for me in the way that I have come to understand it because of the dialogue that has unfolded between Mona Hatoum's artistic extension (Changing Parts) and the woman who I am, my personal history, and the context and historical moment in which I live.

I am now aware that when I engaged with Mona Hatoum's Changing Parts through a process that demanded a subjective response, the kind of personal confrontation that Adrian Piper advocated was almost inevitable. Hatoum's work is powerful and I think it would have had a strong impact on me in any situation. However I doubt that a more formalistic approach to the critique, one which permitted me to maintain a safe intellectual distance, would have registered such a particular and personal sense of responsibility. I was reminded of how arrogant it is to think that one is not arrogant, and I have a renewed awareness that, as Piper says,

The result (of ideological insistence) is blindness to the genuine needs of other people, coupled with the arrogant and dangerous conviction that you understand those needs better than

**they do: and a consequent inability to respond to those needs politically in genuinely effective ways.**

**(Piper 1981, in Wallis 1987, 132)**

**When we live in a world where the possibilities for personal and political agency seem to be blocked at every turn,**

**...the interaction between image and subject indicated by video images allow us to envisage the possibility of renewal and change.**

**(Ross 1988-9, 14)**

**Such optimism is as essential for educational practice as it is for the renewal of critical practice that is Ross's concern.**

## Closure

I undertook this project with a predisposition to the concept of valuing the subjective voice and a commitment to exploring how I personally engaged in the process of understanding and speaking. I have gained insight not only to the theoretical elements of Stan Horner's work but to its practical consequences as well. When I encountered and became involved with Changing Parts I was aware of how Horner would encourage the viewer to engage with the work in the first two phases. To that extent I "followed" his proposal. My experience from that point on was that my interest, the nature of the work and various elements in my environment propelled me through my experience. The citations from Horner's writing were inserted into the written description of my experience as they corresponded with the narrative that I had written. Horner's expectation that the "internal logic" of the paradigm would unfold for the student has been borne out in my experience.

Through the documentation of my "journey" I have provided "un histoire" of one possible experience with the process. My writing is itself an extension, which as Jeanne Randolph pointed out is now amenable to the responses of others. Horner has defined this as the first step in Practising (Phase C, Appendix A); an intra-active praxis intent on the presentation of new cultural extensions/discourses.

From this foundation, grounded in my personal response and the ensuing dialogue with this video, I am at a point from which I could undertake an intensive discussion of Changing Parts in relation to Hatoum's complete



oeuvre and what others have written about it; that is, I could engage in art critical discourse. Within the context of Horner's paradigm this would constitute a second step of Phase C. The process becomes more abstract in the sense that the responder engages directly with the existing discourse of the external authority. Since this kind of art critical discourse is not the purpose of this paper, this phase has not been exhaustively pursued here.

To complete the paradigm Horner outlines Phase D, Theorizing, and it is at this level that I find particularly interesting possibilities for future research. Through "Theorizing about responding as an analogical process in search of the meaning of meaning" (Horner 1989, 20) (D-1, Appendix A) one can explore the many aspects of the shaman / mythology / psychological / technological / subject / object / analogy that I presented above. The implications for video in the context of contemporary art practice exemplify a possibility for a final level of theorizing (D-2); "Theorizing about response as a logical method explaining the meaning of meaning" (Horner 1989, 20). At that point new and diverse questions about the nature of psychological / artistic / technological issues arise and the possible avenues for discourse become truly expansive.

My curiosity about how Horner's work can be realized as experience has been satisfied. The quest for meaning and the pursuit of theoretical concerns that I have outlined above are important issues to understand if one is going to take responsibility for presenting art education programs to students. The understanding of Horner's proposal that I have gained through this investigation motivates me to seek a means for its integration into my classroom practice. There is potential for continued research into how my understanding of subjective response experiences can be used to create a learning environment and a diversified teaching practice to meet the

demands of various teaching situations. I am particularly aware of how my own inter-action with the work would influence my approach as I guided a group through the process of responding to their own work or works by other artists.

Aesthetic response and critique of video art demands awareness of the layers of meaning that are inherent in the medium. Stan Horner's proposal of how the process of response can be realized directed me into an experience that promoted that awareness and involved me in a process of personal learning that was profoundly meaningful to me.

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## Appendix B

All I knew about this video was that it was made by a Lebanese woman.

Initially I watched a series of images in black and white which changed so rhythmically that it only slowly became obvious that I was seeing still pictures in a series. The images appeared aesthetically beautiful to me. The pictures were clear; from interesting, but not unintelligible angles; close, giving a feeling of intimacy; like touch. Movement from one photograph to the next gave an idea of moving towards a structural whole, my mind filling in the gaps so that I gradually realized that I was viewing what appeared to be a large, beautiful, old bathroom. I couldn't help thinking after viewing this gorgeous, immaculate bathroom for some minutes, "Who cleaned it?"

Movement from one image to the next was so predictable it had a very soothing almost hypnotic impact on me. This same rhythm continued so that I only gradually became aware that the pictures were no longer in frame but were filmed by a movie camera moving very slowly. I was not aware of the shift technically due to the speed of the movement being mirrored so I did not perceive at first the change from stills in a series to moving images produced by a video (?) camera. There is another reason for my lack of awareness of the change; I had a strange emotional reaction to and with the images I was seeing. I realized I was seeing a woman's body moving slowly in behind the clouded glass of a shower door. The image was blurred and moving slowly. A dark substance was slowly smeared on the glass of the door, giving the undeniable impression of blood. While the same slow pace as the pictures

continue, my mind constructs a horrifying story to accompany the film before my eyes. Finally, it ended. What a relief! Like waking up from a nightmare.

After thoughts: I have the same feelings now as I had when I saw it; clear memories of beautiful images contrasted with the emotional reaction to my own imaginary construction of what I saw applied to the moving film section. Yet, what is the difference between still pictures and moving pictures? Perhaps the question is more in terms of how the artist manipulated the viewer by the shift in mediums (for I definitely felt manipulated. But that also was part of feeling sucked into the artist's reality, or an experience she had constructed.) How did the artist conceive of and accomplish the shift? What kind of intervals did she choose in order to so perfectly match the movement of the first part to the moving film?

In retrospect, I don't remember the soundtrack; maybe soothing classical music with the still photos?

SJS. June, 1990.