

# PINK GUITAR

**THE**

**Writing as  
Feminist Practice**

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## FOR THE ETRUSCANS

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Thinking smugly, "She shouldn't be working on Woolf." 1964. "Doesn't she know that she'd better not work on a woman?" Why was I lucky to know this. What was the threat? Dickinson? Marginality? Nin? I bought Nin's book, I threw it out. What! Didn't want it, might confront

The great difficulties in understanding the language . . . not . . . from an inability to read the script, every letter of which is now clearly understood. It is as if books were discovered, printed in our own Roman letters, so that one could articulate the words without trouble, but written in an unknown language with no known parallels.<sup>1</sup>

myself. 1979. The general feeling (of the dream) was that I was free of the testers. However, I was entirely obligated to take and pass their test. My relationship to the testers is——? 1965. My big ambition, my hemmed and nervous space. Her uncompromising, oracular poems. Her fluid, decisive writing. Her dream life, surfacing. Not even to read this? to read with contempt? "This is a Blossom of the Brain——/ A small——italic Seed" (Dickinson, no. 945).

What is going on here? 1968. Is the female aesthetic simply an (1978) enabling myth? Fish on one foot, hook on the other, angling for ourselves. Woolf: catching "something about the body."<sup>2</sup> Crash. MOM! WHAT! "You never buy what I like! Only what YOU like! (Fig Newtons.)

A golden bough. The torch is passed on. His son clutches his hand, his crippled father clings to his back, three male generations leave the burning city. The wife, lost. Got lost in burning. No one knows what happened to her, when they became the Romans.

She became the Etruscans?

Even so, there is nothing to prevent those with a special aptitude for cryptography from tackling Etruscan, which is the last of the important languages to require translating.<sup>3</sup>

Sheepish, I am sheepish and embarrassed to mention this

that for me it was always the herding. The herding, the bonding, the way you can speak their language but also have a language or different needs so hard to say this. Always: I have heard this story from many sources—they bond and clump outside your door and never “ask you to lunch” or they talk and be wonderful, lambent, but when you walk up “they turn away” or “they turn on you, teasing, making sexual jokes”

all headed in the same direction, herding and glistening, of course some don't. But it has been difficult for these to separate from the rest. Probably the reward system?

To translate ourselves from our disguises. The enthralled sexuality, the knife-edge brilliance, the intellectual doddiness, evasions, embarrassments, imprecisions, deferments; smug primness with which there is no dialogue. Combativeness straight into malice. Invisibility, visibility, crossing the legs, uncrossing them. Knights in shining amour. Daddy to the rescue. “Imposing” sex on the situation. “Not imposing” “sex” on the “situation.” “Doesn't she know she'd better not work on a woman?” She'd better now work on a woman. “I bid you take a wisp from the wool of their precious fleece.”<sup>4</sup> The golden fleece. The golden bough. The female quest?

Frankly, it was *The Golden Notebook* (1966). Which pierced my heart with its two-headed arrow.

How to be? How to be-have? I remember one preceptor who brought her little white dog to school and trotted it up and down the fourth floor of Hamilton Hall. What delightful, charming, adorable girls! The temptation of Eve was fruit, of Mary, lambs. Thinking that they followed you to school.

It is, after all, always the meaning, the reading of difference that matters, and meaning is culturally engendered and sustained. Not to consider the body as some absolute (milk, blood, breasts, clitoris) for no “body”

is unmediated. Not be of difference. Or again contexts of which are produced in the family forms of sexual preference the structure of infant in which we are psycho of the sexes through such, these differing consciousnesses, different realms of symbols and cal; different uses of language (verb parts, past

Stein says we have so we have to have haven't had the language you need others like you

And therefore there one single conscious

I am watering and horns with I must establish There. Fleishy

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Etruscan

What hold Others, the the Man

There at

is unmediated. Not body but the "body" of psychosocial fabrications of difference. Or again, of sameness. Or again, of their relation. The contexts of which are formed and reinforced gendered human beings, produced in the family, in institutions of gender development, in the forms of sexual preference, in the division of labor by gender, especially the structure of infant care, in the class and conditions of the families in which we are psychologically born, and in the social maintenance of the sexes through life's stages and in any historical era.<sup>5</sup> And as such, these differing experiences do surely produce (some) different consciousnesses, different cultural expression, different relations to realms of symbols and symbol users. Different "language," metaphorical; different uses of the grammatical and expressive resources of language (verb parts, questions, and intonation, pronouns).

*Stein says we no longer have the words people used to have so we have to make them new in some way but women haven't had them at all and how can you deconstruct a language you never constructed or it was never constructed by others like you, or with you in mind?*<sup>6</sup>

Frances Jaffer

And therefore there is female aesthetic, but not *a* female aesthetic, not one single constellation of strategies.

I am watering cattle, who are thirsty. A frisky Holstein, pointed face and horns with pink tips, pokes me, playful, calling attention to herself. I must establish that she is not male [1978]. I pick up her little curtain. There. Fleshy pink udders, she is pink, black

and white. I have watered the cattle and they have given me a guide.

Etruscan, the last important language.

What holds civilization intact? The presence of apparently voiceless Others, "thoughtless" Others, powerless Others against which the Law, the Main, the Center, even the Diffusions of power are defined.

Throughout the ages the problem of woman has puzzled people of every kind. . . . You too will have pondered this question

insofar as you are men. From the women among you that is not to be expected, for you yourselves are the riddle.<sup>7</sup>

A special aptitude for cryptography. The only ones barred from the riddle. Ha ha. His gallantry is hardest to bear. Not to think about the riddle is to remain the riddle. To break with what I have been told I am, and I am able to? am unable disabled disbarred *un sous-développé, comme tu dis, un sous-capable*<sup>8</sup> The Etruscan language can be heard, if one chooses to mouth it, but not comprehended. Pondering is not to be expected, so why bother?

What happens at the historical moment when the voiceless and powerless seek to unravel their riddle? (For Caliban does seize his voice, reject the magician of civilization in Césaire's writing of Shakespeare's *Tempest*.) *ANS.*: We are cutting into the deep heart, the deepest heart of cultural compacts. They have already lost our allegiance. Something is finished.

Now did I go downstairs, now did I cut up a pear, eight strawberries, now did I add some cottage cheese thinking to get some more or even some ricotta at the Italian Market so that I could make lasagna so that when B. comes back from New York he would have something nice and so I wouldn't have to cook again for days; now did I put some sugar on the fruit and then fill the sugar bowl because it was almost empty; now did I hang two bath mats out on the line, they are only washed once a year and it was today that I washed them; now did I and do I wonder that there are words that repeat in a swaying repetitive motion. Deliberately breaking the flow of thought, when it comes to change, and with food, with dust. With food and dust.

must here snatch time to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination and peroration should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place—culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man.<sup>9</sup>

I dreamed I was an artist; my medium was cottage cheese.

For the woman artist is not privileged or mandated to find her self-in-world except by facing (affronting?) and mounting an enormous struggle with the cultural fictions—myths, narratives, iconographies, lan-

guages—which have been  
And which are cultural

To define then "Feminist"  
logical, and thematic  
egies born in struggle  
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All the animals  
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Something I call  
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guages—which heretofore have delimited the representation of women. And which are culturally and psychically saturating.

To define then. "Female aesthetic": the production of formal, epistemological, and thematic strategies by members of the group Woman, strategies born in struggle with much of already existing culture, and overdetermined by two elements of sexual difference—by women's psychosocial experiences of gender asymmetry and by women's historical status in an [ambiguously] nonhegemonic group.

All the animals, and I knew they were thirsty. They were mine, and were very thirsty. I had to give them

Something I call an emotional texture, a structural expression of mutuality. Writers know their text as a form of intimacy, of personal contact, whether conversations with the reader or with the self. Letters, journals, voices are sources for this element,

see "no reason why one should not write as one speaks, familiarly, colloquially"<sup>10</sup>

expressing the porousness and nonhierarchic stances of intimate conversation in both structure and function. Like *Orlando*, like Susan Griffin's *Voices*, like *The Golden Notebook*, these may be antiphonal many-voiced works, beguilingly, passionately subjective, seeing emotional commitment as an adventure. [As our form of adventure?]<sup>11</sup>

"What a secret language we talk. Undertones, overtones, nuances, abstractions, symbols. Then we return to Henry with an incandescence which frightens him."<sup>12</sup>

"addressing the reader, making herself and her reader part of the narrative . . . an offhand, conversational manner."<sup>13</sup>

I find myself more and more attracted to the porous, the statement that permits interpretation [penetration?] rather than positing an absolute. Not vagueness—I want each component to be clear—but a whole that doesn't pretend to be ultimate, academic.<sup>14</sup>

Not positing oneself as the only, sol(c) authority. Sheep of the sun. Meaning, a statement that is open to the reader, not better than the reader, not set apart from; not seeking the authority of the writer. Not



even seeking the authority of the writing. (Reader could be writer, writer reader. Listener could be teacher.)

Assuming for the moment. That this description is true? or that we could find these traits and name them. One way of proving that the female aesthetic can exist would be to find reasons for the existence of this poetics in the gender experiences specific to women, in sexual difference. Deena Metzger speaks of a denial of competition and aggression in women, suggesting that these lead to nonhierarchical forms of mutuality.<sup>15</sup> But female competition of course exists (jealous, "she's said it all"; sibling, "she was there first"; smug, "she should know better than choosing to work on a woman"), wherever there are special rewards for some women at the expense of others. Or just because we are no better than anyone else. Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan argue similarly that roles and functions of women engender a different psychological orientation. Shaped by nurturance, women take both donor and recipient roles, using tactics of giving and receiving. Shaped by the interdependent and relational, women are led to "a more contextual mode of judgment and a different moral understanding."<sup>16</sup>

The second trait is both/and vision. This is the end of the either-or, dichotomized universe, proposing monism (is this really the name for what we are proposing? or is it dialectics?) in opposition to dualism, a dualism pernicious because it valorizes one side above another, and makes a hierarchy where there were simply twain.

a "shapeless" shapeliness," said Dorothy Richardson, the "unique gift of the feminine psyche." "Its power to do what the shapely mentalities of men appear incapable of doing for themselves, to act as a focus for divergent points of view. . . . The characteristic . . . of being all over the place and in all camps at once. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

A both/and vision born of shifts, contraries, negations, contradictions, linked to personal vulnerability and need. Essay and sermon. A both/and vision that embraces movement, situational. (I don't mean: opportunistic, slidy.) Structurally, such a writing might say different things, not settle on one, which is final. This is not a condition of "not choosing," since choice exists always in what to represent and in the rhythms of presentation. It is nonacademic; for in order to make a formal presentation, one must have chosen among theses: this is the rhetorical demand. Cannot, in formal argument, say both yes and no, if yes and no are given equal value under the same conditions. Either one or the other

has to prevail. But say, in case  
are right? generates another

If one does not just rest one's

Lessing has built "Dialogues" as  
a both/and vision of the world,  
rigidity, isolation, and control  
the leaf, a vulval shape in  
sensuality, pleasure, and  
does not drive a philosophy  
it. This female mode of  
nine" side) yet is similar  
scends male nihilism and  
This vision contains both  
synthesis. Makes no  
ized selves? The male  
Ramsay in Lily's poem  
side of the masculine  
same time, as the male  
stroke, which is a  
sure: the female vision

Of the voices of Richardson  
rational, legalistic, and  
tive, chatty, expressive  
is authority. But a  
defying the law of  
in a heroic, unworldly  
reason and emotion  
voice of the female

who speak  
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A constant  
and in the  
nal things  
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has to prevail. But say, in a family argument? where both, where all, are right? generates another model of discourse.

If one does not just rest silent, stuff the mouth with food.

Lessing has built "Dialogue" on an either-or opposition which becomes a both/and vision of the female. He: the tower, is nihilism, the abyss, rigidity, isolation, and control; is courage, reason and a sickness. She: the leaf, a vulval shape. She is infused with an irrational happiness, sensuality, pleasure, and openness to community. Has common sense, does not drive a philosophical position to the end and bind herself to it. This female mode of seeing holds to one side of a polarity (a "feminine" side) yet is simultaneously that force which includes and transcends male nihilism and rationality.<sup>18</sup> A constellated integrative form. This vision contains feminine, transcends masculine, asserts female as synthesis. Makes me very nervous (are we "just" valorizing our idealized selves?). This structure is parallel to the double status of Mrs. Ramsay in Lily's painting (and in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*), as one side of the masculine-feminine polarity, fit only to be surpassed; at the same time, as that stroke in the middle, the one unifying lighthouse stroke, which is love and ambition, mother and child, death and pleasure: the female synthesis.

Of the voices of Woolf's essay *Three Guineas*, one takes the trial tone: rational, legalistic, logical. The other voice discourses loosely, inventive, chatty, exploring every nook and cranny. As for facts—anecdote is authority. But as the Antigone reference ripens, and we talk of women defying the laws of the state, both masculine and feminine are sublated in a heroic, intransigent but unauthoritarian voice which combines reason and emotion, logic and defiance. This is the noncontractual voice of the Outsiders, (ambiguously) nonhegemonic

who speak the last of the important languages to require translating.

A constant alternation between time and its "truth," identity and its loss, history and the timeless, signless, extra-phenomenal things that produce it. An impossible dialectic: a permanent alternation: never the one without the other. It is not certain that anyone here and now is capable of it. A [psycho]an-



alist conscious of history and politics? A politician tuned into the unconscious? A woman perhaps . . .<sup>19</sup>

This both/and vision, the contradictory movement between the logically irreconcilable, must have several causes. Perhaps it is based on the bisexual oscillation within female psychosexual development. Nancy Chodorow shows how the Oedipal configuration occurs differently in girls and boys and that, because of the way the sexes are reproduced in the family, most women retain men as erotic objects and women as emotional objects. This oscillation between men and women, father and mother, pervades her emotional (and thus aesthetic) life. And do we also value the K-Mart version of this structure: conflict avoidance. Everybody is right. Feel like a chameleon, taking coloration—

Insider-outsider social status will also help dissolve an either-or dualism. For the woman finds she is irreconcilable things: an outsider by her gender position, by her relation to power; may be an insider by her social position, her class. She can be both. Her ontological, her psychic, her class position all cause doubleness. Doubled consciousness. Doubled understandings. How then could she neglect to invent a form which produces this incessant, critical, splitting motion. To invent this form. To invent the theory for this form.

Following, the "female aesthetic" will produce artworks that incorporate contradiction and nonlinear movement into the heart of the text.

An art object may then be nonhierarchic, showing "an organization of material in fragments," breaking climactic structures, making an even display of elements over the surface with no climactic place or moment, since the materials are "organized into many centers."<sup>20</sup>

Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, a form of verbal quilt. We hear her lists, her unstressed series, no punctuation even, no pauses, no setting apart, and so everything joined with no subordination, no ranking. It is radical parataxis. Something droning. Nothing epitomizes another. If fruits are mentioned, many are named, for unlike symbolism, where one stands for the many, here the many stand for the many. Hol-Stein, one of the thirsty animals.

May also be a form of sexuality, that multifocal female body and its orgasmic capacity, where orgasms vary startlingly and are multiple. And how we think about the body.

*She began to think about "climax" and "anticlimax"—what these mean to female and male associations.<sup>21</sup> The language*

of critical  
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"soft, m  
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aesthetic

Multiclimactic  
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of codes, a great man  
of antiquarian history  
For both the male w  
happened in a turn from  
For the woman, it is a

We intend to find our

of criticism: "lean, dry, terse, powerful, strong, spare, linear, focused, explosive"—god forbid it should be "limp"! But—"soft, moist, blurred, padded, irregular, going around in circles," and other descriptions of **our** bodies—the very **abyss** of aesthetic judgment, danger, the wasteland for artists!

Frances Jaffer

Multiclimactic, multiple centers of attention: *Orlando, Between the Acts* where the cows, the rain intervene in art, where the border between life and art is down, is down!

The anti-authoritarian ethics occurs on the level of structure. We call all this "new" ("new form," "new book," "new way of writing," layered and "strudled," Metzger says), that use of the word "new" which, for centuries, has signaled antithesis to dominant values.<sup>22</sup> And which coincides with the thrilling ambition to write a great, encyclopedic, holistic work, the ambition to get everything in, inclusively, reflexively, monumentally.

Moreover there looms ahead of me the shadow of some kind of form which a diary might attain to. I might in the course of time learn what it is that one can make of this loose, drifting material of life; finding another use for it than the use I put it to, so much more consciously and scrupulously, in fiction. What sort of diary should I like mine to be? Something loose knit and yet not slovenly, so elastic that it will embrace anything, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through.<sup>23</sup>

The form of the desk, the tote bag, the journal. Interesting that for Woolf it was the form of a journal, and for Pound too it began as a "rag bag," a market mess of spilled fish, but became the form of *Analects*, of codes, a great man's laws. *The Cantos*. For Williams, it was the form of antiquarian history, local lore, wonders, layered in the City. *Paterson*. For both the male writers, a geopolitical stance, and this may have happened in a turn from the female, a reassertion of the polarized sexes. For the woman, it is a diary: her bag, her desk.

We intend to find ourselves. In the burning city.



These experiences of difference which produce different consciousnesses, different cultural expression, different relation to realms of symbols and to symbol users.

And therefore, and therefore, there is female aesthetic

from this [difference in priorities between men and women] spring not only marked differences of plot and incident, but infinite differences in selection, method and style<sup>25</sup>

as there is male

It is a commonplace of criticism that only the male myths are valid or interesting; a book as fine (and well-structured) as *Jane Eyre* fails *even to be seen* by many critics because it grows out of experiences—events, fantasies, wishes, fears, daydreams, images of self—entirely foreign to their own.<sup>26</sup>

Female aesthetic begins when women take, investigate, the structures of feeling that are ours. And trying to take them, find also the conflict between these inchoate feelings (coded as resistances, coded as the thirsty animals) and patriarchal structures of feeling—romantic thrall-dom, fear of male anger, and of our own weaknesses of nerve. Essentialist? No. We are making a creation, not a discovery.<sup>27</sup>

Yet it is also clear that there would be many reasons not to see female work as different. Why might someone object?

First, a desire to say that great art is not made by the factoring out of the sexes, is "androgynous" as Woolf uses the term in the twenties. The desire to state that greatness is (must be?) universal, that anything else is special pleading. The fear that to notice gender in any way becomes destructive to women. Thus the disincentive: if gender categories have always been used so destructively, our use of them, is it not "playing into their hands"? [There can be no greater proof of differences in the relative powers of the genders than this argument.]

Another reason women don't like their art to be seen through their bodies is that women have been sex objects all along and

to let your art be seen that way is just falling right back into the same old rut.<sup>28</sup>

Women may then respond with a strategy of self-chosen, proud ghettoization [Richardson's "feminine psyche"] or may respond as Woolf did. In that (neo-Freudian) context, Woolf's argument for androgyny is a situational triumph, rejecting the ghettos, stating that women's art contains the man, contains the woman, has access to both.

Where then is [the] "female aesthetic"? In both, in all these strategies of response to difference. Even if, even when, contradictory.

Then, there is the desire at all costs to avoid special pleading, anything that looks like women have gotten by because of our sex (ambiguous word: meaning, our gender, meaning, our sexuality). This is a rejection of the stance of the courtesan for the firm-chinned professional, who does not (in dress, in manner, in talk) call attention to her "sex." She has her babies bravely between semesters. She fears being ghettoized. Being patronized. But it happened anyway. Any way. And she did not "control" it.

Another fear: that any aesthetic is bound to be misused, misappropriated, and this one is surely extremely vulnerable, with its blurring of all the elements we have firmly regarded as setting art apart: blurring between art and life, blurring between social creativity and "high" art, blurring between one's journal and one's poem, blurring between the artifact and the immersion in experience. Such exact polarities.<sup>29</sup>

I am hungry. I am very very hungry. Have I always been this empty?

*I see that the next day I wrote in my journal. I would love someone (me!) to write a wonderful novel using the aesthetics you speak of—that are in my little list—mutuality, porousness, intimacy, recontacting a both/and, using both sides of the brain, nonhierarchic, anti- or multiclimactic, wholistic, lacking distance . . . perhaps didactic—but I think this person would have to be a particularly strong and careful artist. I have to tell you that I don't love one single novel that has come out of the 1960–70s women's movement. I don't think there is anyone concerned enough about either language or the real details of daily life. My sense is that everyone has been in a rush. (I feel in this rush too sometimes. Who wants to be a poor nobody at forty!) Sure there are wonderful moments here and there in different pieces of fiction. But no one has been concerned enough about FORM for me.*

None of this could be  
another vintage poem  
I fear too many words  
three easy lines to  
subject, keep it simple

The possible danger  
seemed familiar  
to find our words  
doubts or mistakes  
chic, layered, and  
pointed out

In my own mind  
wholeness, and  
onymic, but  
blance: "I am  
law and be  
of that man  
of tone and  
which a

As for me  
Only (me)  
poem, but  
posture, and  
discrepancy

But  
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*None of this conflicts with what you said in our workshop. It's just another vantage point. Or perhaps also a corrective, in the sense that I fear too many women can take your aesthetic and churn out crap in three easy lessons. It's really like petit-point to get so close to one's subject, keep it porous, open, multiclimate, and still keep it art.*

Carol Ascher

*The possible characteristics of a female aesthetic that you suggested seemed familiar and true certainly of my own work. Therefore I wanted to find out something else and maybe offer something else (if only doubts or impatience with the deterministic limitation of nonhierarchical, layered, "porously intimate," subjective, etc. work) but felt disappointed and thwarted.*

Mira Schor

In my essays' psychic and speculative search for contradictions, for wholeness, linear and constellated forms coexist. The work is metonymic (based on juxtaposition) and metaphoric (based on resemblance).<sup>30</sup> It is at once analytic and associative, visceral and intellectual, law and body. The struggle with cultural hegemony, and the dilemmas of that struggle, are articulated in a voice that does not seek authority of tone or stasis of position but rather seeks to express the struggle in which it is immersed.

As for female aesthetic? this essay points to one set of responses. One. Only. One among several possibilities.<sup>31</sup> Of course, for descriptive purposes, the actual traits matter, but more important are the functions I postulate, the functioning of the traits to express, confirm, illuminate, distort, evade, situations that have a gender valence.

*But to test whether this is true, whether what you are calling women's themes do appear in women's writing, would you not have to use objective methods, devise objective tests of this knowledge?*

Mirra Komarovsky

*We have covered the whole range of the anxiety inherent in scientific methodology—from Mirra's comment that the individual scholar must prove her thesis to have validation for more than herself (by the "objective," "scientific" method), to my concern that to define a female aesthetic is to establish, a rigid norm of female creativity, which*

repeats the patriarchal tyranny of an "objective" absolute way of doing things.

Lou Roberts

Can I prove it? I can prove that different social groups produce differences in cultural expression. I can prove that women are a social group. I can point to examples of differences in our relation to the symbolic order and in our cultural expression.

But I cannot prove that only women, that women only, use this aesthetic. And this failure is actually the strongest proof of all.

Women are (ambiguously) nonhegemonic because as a group, generally, we are outside the dominant systems of meaning, value, and power, as these saturate us, as they are "organized and lived."<sup>32</sup> To talk of society and culture as involving "hegemonic" practices does not mean that a hegemony is a ten-ton stone falling from nowhere to crush you into some shape.

Hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of [people] and of [their] world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally conforming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society . . . but . . . is not, except in the operation of a moment of abstract analysis, in any sense a static system.<sup>33</sup>

A hegemony, as a set of practices, has "continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified" as well as "continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged."<sup>34</sup>

Women, in a generally nonhegemonic position, barred from or quota'd into the cultural institutions of renewal, defense, and modification.

*the "mainstream" of European intellectual history was carried on without us. The clerical status of scholars in the Middle Ages automatically excluded women from the formal training which would fit them for the learned world, and as you know, this situation was not rectified in modern times until very recently. Moreover, self-study was for most women*

virtually impossible  
on in a highly  
movement), and  
person.

Yet still (Margery's)

At least once  
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in the common  
language, the  
to the formal

While it is generally  
majority, to hegemony  
(ambiguously) and  
social practices, the  
communities, but  
the dominant class

Why are women  
may be joined to  
race (say, white)  
but not by her  
gender. May be  
tions (working  
ness towards  
Negro lady' and

(Ambiguously) and  
nant system  
may be a part  
the divided

Again, it is  
splitting  
when  
become

That thing  
the ontology  
our relation

*virtually impossible because the formal training was carried on in a highly technical Latin (and Greek after the humanist movement), unintelligible even to the ordinary literate lay person.*

Yet still (Margery of Kemp, Christine de Pisan)

*At least once before in Western history, women did make a substantial contribution to the formation of what might—in the context of our workshop—be called a nonpatriarchal language, the “mother-tongue” which they spoke in contrast to the formal language of scholars.*

Jo Ann McNamara

While it is generally asserted and assumed that women belong to the majority, to hegemony, I could suggest that women are virtually always (ambiguously) nonhegemonic. A great number are formed by residual social practices: ethnic, kin-based, male- and child-centered female communities. Some may be emergent, “alternative or oppositional to the dominant elements.”<sup>35</sup>

Why are women as a group (ambiguously) nonhegemonic? A woman may be joined to a dominant system of meanings and practices by her race (say, white), yet not by her gender; she may be joined via her class, but not by her gender; joined thru her sexual preference, but not her gender. May be oppositional, with many sources of alternative conditions (working class, black), but still oriented in ideology and consciousness towards hegemonic norms. (June Jordan’s poem “If you saw a Negro lady” speaks of this possibility.)

(Ambiguously) nonhegemonic. For women, then, existing in the dominant system of meanings and values that structure culture and society may be a painful, or amusing, double dance, clicking in, clicking out—the divided consciousness. For this, the locus classicus is Woolf.

Again if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical.<sup>36</sup>

That shifting focus, bringing the world into different perspectives, is the ontological situation of women because it is our social situation, our relationship to power, our relationship to language.

What we here have been calling (the) female aesthetic turns out to be a specialized name for any practices available to those groups—nations, genders, sexualities, races, classes—all social practices which wish to criticize, to differentiate from, to overturn the dominant forms of knowing and understanding with which they are saturated.

Nineteenth-century Russian fiction has analogues with women's writing; both are nonhegemonic practices " 'pointless' or 'plotless' narratives stuffed with strange minutiae, and not obeying the accepted laws of dramatic development, lyrical in the wrong places, condensed in the wrong places, overly emotional, obsessed with things we do not understand, perhaps even grotesque."<sup>37</sup>

*Négritude* has analogues with women's aesthetic practices.

Consider then the white European standing before an object, before the exterior world, before Nature, before the *Other*. A man of will, a warrior, a bird of prey, a pure act of watching, the white European distinguishes himself from the object. He holds the object at a distance, he immobilizes it, he fixes it. Equipped with his instruments of precision, he dissects it in a cold analysis. Moved by the will to power, he kills the *Other* and, in a centripetal movement, he makes it a means to use for his own practical ends. He *assimilates* it. . . . The black African is first of all in his colour as if standing in the primordial night. He does not see the object, he *feels* it. He is like one of those worms of the Third Day, a pure sensing field. Subjectively, at the end of his sensing organs, he discovers the *Other*. . . . So the black African sympathizes with, and identifies with the *Other*.<sup>38</sup>

For blacks excluded from a Western world of whiteness will affirm a connection to rhythms of earth, sensuality, intuition, subjectivity, and this will sound precisely as some women writers do.

High modernists are the most problematic nonhegemonic group, because they make a conservative, sometimes *fascisante* criticism of bourgeois culture, with "positive" values ascribed to hierarchical social order, sometimes buttressed by religion, but also, astonishingly, linked to peasant-based agriculture (as opposed, of course, to our urban, industrial morass). These writers constitute themselves as a group-against, whose common bond is opposition to the social basis on which their world in fact rested. Modernists show the strength of a politicized

culture based on a shared sense of the past, to the Russian Revolution, to the residual values (Eliot, Pound) responses to a once-existing culture in peasantry and patriarchy, the right.

Literature by women is a culture with the equally narrow of culture. (Most—this more than just as in modernist, the cultural transformation in modernist, then invents a new and work, like the modernist.

And contemporary encyclopedic texts critical texts and Chicago's *The Ecology*.

Then, literature is a culture with postmodernism of William A list of the traits of women now (Levermore of consciousness with postmodern "man" (industrial as soon as a values. For turns up a moves along just "let a structure.

As my poem nox] as a female intuition.

culture based on a shared revulsion to World War I, on one hand, and to the Russian Revolution on the other. This set of individuals with residual values (Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Lewis, Lawrence) depends on responses to a once-existing, and somewhat mythologized, social basis in peasantry and patriarch. Aristocrat, head, *il capo*. A revolution from the right.

Literature by women, in its ethical and moral position, has analogues with the equally nonhegemonic modernism in its subversive critique of culture. (Most—Woolf, Lessing, H. D.—are in no way right wing; this more than just an “interesting observation.”) In women’s writing, as in modernist, there is a didactic element, related to the project of cultural transformation, of establishing values. In women’s writing, as in modernist, there is an encyclopedic impulse, in which the writer invents a new and total culture, symbolized by and announced in a long work, like the modern long poem.

And contemporary women have produced just such works, often in the encyclopedic form of essay, compendia, polemic, collage, sacred and critical texts and images: Susan Griffin’s *Women and Nature*; Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*; Tillie Olsen’s *Silences*; Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology*.<sup>39</sup>

Then, literature, by women, in its phenomenological position, is associated with postmodernism, and with the democratic tolerance and realism of Williams, or the generative blankness and fecundity of Stevens. A list of the characteristics of postmodernism would be a list of the traits of women’s writing: inwardness, illumination in the here and now (Levertov); use of the continuous present (Stein); the foregrounding of consciousness (Woolf); the muted, multiple, or absent *telos*; a fascination with process; a horizontal world; a decentered universe where “man” (indeed) is no longer privileged. But women reject this position as soon as it becomes politically quietistic or shows ancient gender values. For when the phenomenological exploration of self-in-world turns up a world that devalues the female self, when that exploration moves along the tacit boundaries of a social status quo, she cannot just “let it be,” but must transform values, rewrite culture, subvert structures.

*As my political analysis became more sophisticated [wrote Sara Lennox], as I became a Marxist shaped by the Frankfurt School and then a feminist, I was able to present a theoretical explanation for my intuitions (they were mine, and were thirsty). I understood that, at least*



for middle-class Americans under late capitalism, the form (structure, "language") of the culture is the sustaining force of social domination. But though I was implicated in those forms, I also knew—perhaps because of my somewhat marginal position as a woman, a petite bourgeoisie? (She became the Etruscans?)—that I recognized these forms to be, not self-evident and natural, but intolerable and changeable, and that occasionally I discovered, and tried to transmit through my teaching and writing (printed in our Roman letters), examples and visions of how things could be other and better. It's been clearer and clearer to me, since I've been a feminist (some ricotta at the Italian Market) that we women were never completely integrated into the structures of capitalism ((ambiguously) nonhegemonic) and that our difference (a vulval shape), whether only psychosocial or somehow biological as well, has given us a privileged position (horns with pink tips) from which to rebel and to envision alternatives. What's difficult, though, is to believe in those glimmers (entirely obligated to take and pass their test), to hold fast to them, even more, to model them out and explore them. And this is the importance to me of women's writing (her diary, her bag, her desk). If it's really the forms, the language, which dominate us, then disrupting them as radically as possible can give us hope and possibilities. What I'd like to try to understand and explain to other people (you yourselves are the riddle) is how the form of women's writing is, if ambiguously (of double, sometimes duplicitous needs) nonetheless profoundly revolutionary (as are, in their confusing ways, modernism and postmodernism, also written from positions of marginality to that dominant culture).

But I've also been thinking recently that we need a writer who would be for feminism what Brecht was for modernism—who understands, to put it a little crudely, that literature doesn't change things, people do (a process of making, human choice and necessity). Our literature and thinking still seem quietistic to me, in that they require us to understand and respond, but not to act on our understanding, certainly not to act collectively (a room where clippings paper the walls.) Moreover, I think we haven't even grasped the most radical implications of feminism for a theory which mediates back to practice: that we have a vision which men have barely glimpsed of what dialectical thought is really about—about a total, specific, feeling and thinking subject, present in her interaction with "objective" materials, overcoming the division between thought and action. (The golden bough. The golden fleece. The female quest?)

I've been angry recently that, while theory proliferates, we have given up on what was compelling about the late sixties and early seventies—

that feeling of...  
differently...  
victim to the...  
exhaustion

Exploration...  
new world...

given our...  
a nonpatriarchal...  
productive...

*that feeling of infinite possibility which challenged us to think and live differently. So many of those experiments have fallen by the wayside, victim to the economic situation and our own discouragement and exhaustion.*

Sara Lennox

Exploration not in service of reconciling self to world, but creating a new world for a new self

given our revolutionary desire (that feeling of infinite possibility) for a nonpatriarchal order, in the symbolic realm and in the realms of productive, personal, and political relations.

for the Etruscans  
1979/1984

## THE PINK GUITAR

1. The torso, the turban, the turned-away face of Ingres' 1808 painting called *La Baigneuse de Valpinçon* or *The Large Bather* reappear, amid some clutter of bodies, in his later orientalized paintings: the *Harem Interior* (1828) and the *Turkish Bath* (1863).<sup>1</sup> The *Turkish Bath* has, in its great circle, over 20 female figures, two black, two brown, all nudes, most erotic in conventional gesture, some overtly sexual: playful, lubricious, languid, narcissistic, preening, posturing for the viewer, fiddling with themselves. Whatever all those words mean. That foregrounded back-turned torso, the hidden, inward face of *The Large Bather* were clearly iconic for Ingres, and mysteriously so, for in its interiorized, non-frontal "purity" it withdraws as much as is exposed in the tarted-up meat-markets of the later works. In his final use of this image, in *The Turkish Bath*, Ingres has given the female something to do. She is playing a hidden instrument, perhaps a mandolin. Her mandolin as hidden as her face.

These well-known images by Ingres, themselves palimpsests of each other, were further over-written in Man Ray's tampered photo (1924) of Kiki of Montparnasse [a.k.a. a woman artist, Alice Prin].<sup>2</sup> Ray posed his model to evoke the Ingres and drew knowingly upon the progressively more overt orientalizing Ingres proposed for the torso, for Kiki is marked with her turban, her gypsy-like earrings, and the exotic silk on which she sits, wide-hipped, a great shadow where her buttocks crack at the base of the spine. Her enfolded arms are hidden, her agency thereby removed. Her solid, curved, lush back has, imposed upon it, brilliantly placed sound holes, black f-openings (f-openings!) which recall the *f* for function in mathematical symbol, force in physics, forte in music, and the abbreviation both for female, and for feminine gender in grammar. She is thereby made sonorous with cultural meanings. Once by Ingres, she becomes, by Man Ray, the *Violin d'Ingres*, the hobby-horse which plays with the representation of women and sexuality without altering the fundamental relations of power, proprietorship, and possession so succinctly evoked.

Homme-age. I. ngres. These wry and salomesque swirls of veils of other texts. Man. Ray. I am dressed therein. I drape them, they drape over me, they are some of that thru which I see.

Violon d'Ingres. Violin d'anger. Vial in danger.

It "just means hobby in French" it "just means that women are his hobby" "you see, Ingres was really a painter, but he also played the violin" "sort of like our saying 'Sunday painter,' meaning they weren't really serious about"

I am deadly serious.

I pick up this guitar.      It is  
   ↓↑      a woman! I say  
   I am

For when I pick it up, how do I "play" the women whom I have been culturally given?<sup>3</sup>

And find that the languages, the words, the drives, the genres, the keyboards, the frets, the strings, the holes, the sounding boards, the stops, the sonorities have been filled with representations that depend, in their deepest satisfactions, on gender and sexual trajectories that make claims upon me (and could compromise what I do).

My pink guitar has gender in its very grain. Its strings are already vibrating with gender representations. That means unpick everything. But how to unpick everything and still "pick up" an instrument one "picks," or plucks. How to unpick everything, and still make it "formal," "lyric," "coherent," "beautiful," "satisfying," when these are some of the things that must be unpicked. (Kristeva used the term "the impossible dialectic."<sup>4</sup>) The writing therefore becomes unpalatable, difficult, opaque, shifty, irresponsible, suspect, and subject to many accusations.

And could I change the instrument (restring, refret, rekey, retool, rehole)

Invent  
new sonorities  
new probes  
new combinations  
new instruments

I struggle  
From the  
playing

with a

2. How

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gendered

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thru which  
These rhyth  
of motion  
tions are a  
plots of feel  
correspond  
the social  
relation to

I struggle for a tread. Everything must be reexamined, re-seen, rebuilt. From the beginning, and now. And yet I am playing, I am playing. I am playing

with a stringed lever.

## 2. How much insomnia can any one person stand?

It was an unbreakable drama of silence, to protect his obsessive and incessant speaking. By tag finishings. Polite interruptions. No rage. No, or little, spontaneous laughter. No puncture. The seriousness of his obsession and its vulnerability were patent. I had been commissioned with the unspoken responsibility of guardianship. If I had really "had it," I walked away. But that communicated, as it happened, nothing. Or very little. As far as I know. This whole thing was undiscussable, although it occurred for many years. My silence and little spurts of pleasant sound became a canvas, a terrain, a geography he could enter with his words. Irrespective of me. There was no me as me, the only "me" was a necessary, even crucial, occasion ("The Listener"). I certainly was not "attentive," except on the surface of my face. What, then, was "listening"? and what relation had it to really hearing? By which, and thru which repeated events much was damaged, and much was destroyed. And much was learned.

But most cannot be said.

They speak of bi-focal. Or the metaphor of "bi-lingual" for the multiple negotiations into the different cultural practices in which we are constituted. I am bi-silent, tri-silent, am made of dual/duel, trebled/troubled, base/bass and impacted silences. Which test, temper, distort, and suspect fluencies. This blankness is social (silence is social as speech is social; silence, says Cora Kaplan,<sup>5</sup> silence protects others' speech); it is gendered (or in relation to hierarchies of power).

It is like the ground of the page. The blankness already filled with words thru which one negotiates. The page paradoxically both open and filled. These rhythms—of start and stop, the praxis of randomness, the choices of motion over, under, through, small tunnelings and explosive rejections are a socially grounded set of structures. These structures or plots of feeling, and the feeling patently evoked (that I want to evoke) correspond to something, some outline of emotions and practices in the social and familial world—the shapes of the social structures in relation to the shapes of the art.<sup>6</sup>



" 'Tell me, given the options, where would your anger have taken you—where has it taken you?' "

3. titles dog food telephone trash bags bath powder (harried mother) decaffeinated coffee dog food network cold medicine toothbrushes hemorrhoids (the rh for redness) toys skin moisturizer women's laxative network local department store tomatoes cookies - sauces drain opener coffee stockings toys bacon cough medicine sales batteries (for toys) air freshener credits"

To enter from the shifting ground of interstices "between the acts"

I wanted not catharsis but engorgement, not mimesis but uncovering, not mastery but plurality, not a "form" but a method—of montage, of interruption . . .

then ate, walked around, and left my light burning.

4. The man, he said, plays a transformative blue guitar. He bespeaks his difference in a flat, factual, and informative tone. "Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar." The doubling of "are," by its very awkwardness, bolsters the authoritative apothegm. The balance of the situation as Wallace Stevens constructs it: he and them; artist and curious onlookers; a unique one and a group from which he is quite distinct. But still there is a fittedness between them and him, many and one, audience and Man of Imagination. The pleasant sing-song aphorisms harness a nursery rhyme or folk melody to the depiction of modernist claims. This makes an endorsement of those claims. However, there is one distinction. The crowd says "A blue guitar." The man says "the blue guitar." The crowd allows for numerous like-colored instruments; the particular artist claims his is the one, perhaps a temporary myth that enables the writing, perhaps a more intellectually aggressive erasure of any other practitioners.

Into this scene gallumphs the female artist, hauling a different colored "lyre, guitar, or mandolin." You want difference! she says, heehawing into all that elegance and ideological balance. I'll give you difference!

A pink guitar upsets a lot of balances. Including, and first of all, mine.

A rosy writing space, a rose colored instrument, a new kind of pinko, which I hold and, by my play, try: to hear its sounds, to read its marks.

5. A woman  
attributes  
contradiction  
tion as in  
singled out  
claims  
both "un-  
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interpret  
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or inflec  
marks  
those  
marks  
gender  
remain  
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For any  
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6. "It  
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5. A woman writer is a \*marked marker.\* She is marked by the cultural attributes of Woman, gender, sexuality, the feminine, a whole bolus of contradictory representations which are as much her cultural inscription as ours. She is marked by being variously distinguished—defined, singled out—by her gender. Others may note it even if she does not, or claims not to. She is marked by some unevenly effective traditions of both “unspeaking” and “unspeakable” female self, and by some also uneven set of incentives to cultural production, although she makes many many things. She—any woman—is culturally represented and interpreted [in all forms of representation from pop song to prayer, from B-movies to modern paintings]. The works and the workings of these representations, in picture and text, in ideologies and discourses, mark or inflect precise configurations of her personal markings. Her own marks on a page — writing, drawing, composing; her capacity to make those marks; and what she can, or may, mark [or notice] will bear some marks of this matted circumstance of gender. Many possibilities for gender valences of a woman and her artworks are suggested by my remarks. As a \*marked marker\* a woman writer may not, or need not be circumscribed or limited by gender, but she will be affected. Marks of these gender narratives can be made legible in feminist readings.<sup>10</sup>

For any woman, and especially for a cultural producer, a vital question is how to imagine herself, and how to imagine women, gender, sexualities, men and her own interests when the world of images and, indeed, basic structures of thought have been filled to overflowing with representations of her, and displacements of any “her” by the representations others make. Thus: how to create an adequate work Of and About women (but never exclusively of or about women), while being By a woman, when strata of previous images of women, some quite culturally precious, suffuse and define culture, consciousness, and individual imaginations.

6. “If we had a non-patriarchal symbolic order, what would the language be in that situation? What would the non-patriarchal ‘word’ be?”<sup>11</sup>

7. What is entering this page space, and who is in charge here? what singing cometh, and who’s singing what song? and is this “autobiography”? And so on. As very hungry herself, hungry, mostly open and thirsty. Given their thirst they step so lightly, O all right, Holstein, hard not to be sentimental. Once I wrote “giving birth to myself” sincerely. Yet I was never giving birth to myself, but to a labor: cultural critique. “Birth” was always an odd metaphor, because what comes out at birth still enters into—already was entered into—nettings of social materials, is not formed in and of itself. Enters and is joined into

multiple praxes. It is the newness of the child, the promise of something different, the child as utopian moment. . . . The cows line up, jump, heave their silly weight up. They hunch. Many bones, skin, nouns, many stomachs and no memory, and the turmoil of regurgitations. Black muck. The stench of the manure pile, the flies against her flank. Soooo Bos. Whose bossy head was second in all the alphabets. In London, 1964, I tore a label [beer: Courage and Barclay] until the word that was thereby isolated in a broken circle is the rip of "RAGE." Make that a collage! The history and relationships, the memories associated with, the meanings, the linkages, the fissures among, the differentials, the fallow and the shunned, if I were to pick up every item and associate across the bondage of memory (I have covered about 20 inches of space, and, honest enough, have already been singularly selective). . . . Stepping into the same diary twice. So pour the milk back over the cow. This fleisch is milchig. Cows not to convert. Cows not to channel. Cows not to instruct. Only the silky, and o they are milky.

8. Are the facts of my life [like "my best selling novel." "my face staring from . . ." my rose-colored living room, with "its dramatic ochre entry." my feet tucked up under. "my casual yet my elegant." my half-finished cup of cold coffee.] here? I'd rather eat myself than be consumed. RAVISH myself. "I'm ravished." A slip for "I'm famished." Bad enough, but in front of my uncle?

It is a voice, it is, in fact, voices—and from where. If I said "midrash," it would have some cultural charm, although Hebrew was Greek to me, and Greek was a botch, and it did have something to do with "my father." But by midrash I mean the possibility of continuous chains of interpretation, thinking into

9. the relations of things. It's like when you open a catch-all drawer and everything there including your hand, and your gesture, means something, has some history, of its making, and of its being there. A focused catch-all. Where the production of meanings is, if not continuous, so interconnected that one has the sense of, the illusion of, the "whole" of life being activated, and raised to realizations and power. Thru language.

The today, the practice of thought as the practice of writing. A pressure a vision a set of interactions feeling curious sometimes feeling despised.

the neon bleakness of desire in the mall. The blank page (or screen), the open silent space, and the words well up, as from a conduit. What writes?

"For  
essay  
quest

So that  
if I am  
sense  
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but th  
of scal  
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ARE

gallop

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inter

"For it is against itself (and against the world as discourse) that the essay struggles. It drifts, it wanders in order to trace a map of its own questionings. . . ."12

So that my "fig newtons" stand for your "diaper pins" and it looks as if I am getting all of it, in. When the all is not whole (in the globular sense) but not fragmented (in the painful sense), but just slowly in pieces and together, wandering across the page, lunch boxes of violence rejected yet yearned for, night images right at the borders of sense and pleasure, red ribbons invested with symbolic intent, me in contradictory and "uneven development," and the one good Phillips head screwdriver in the house, where is it! It is not women only who live this way, but the sliding up and down the scales of importance, the destruction of scales of importance, the indomitable horizontality of structures, the insistence of non-transcendent heights, and material depths—

ARE

galloping and gulping, elusive, hybristic, subversive

the essay.

*"as if hearing an 'other  
meaning' always in the  
process of weaving itself, of embracing  
itself with  
words, but also of getting rid of words  
in order  
not to become fixed, congealed in them"*  
(L. Irigaray)  
"constructivist writing" (C. Bernstein)  
"Semiotic/symbolic" writing (J. Kristeva)

multi-discursive, interrogative, polyvocal, heterogeneous  
interactive

recognizing "subjectivity" (S. Griffin)  
no more "confines of relevance" (B.  
Dahlen citing G. Steiner)  
"moments of linguistic transgression"  
(M. Jacobus)

associative, critical

"to question the apparatuses" (G. C. Spivak)

"make it impossible for a while to predict whence, whither, when, how, why . . ." (L. Irigaray)

a motion captured in motion

"vatic bisexuality" (H. Cixous)

hysterical, site-specific

an interested meditation

"atopical or hypertopical mobility of the narrative voice" (J. Derrida)

"washed by heteroglot waves from all sides" (M. Bakhtin)

the site of many centers

a non-transparent textuality

"form as an activity" (L. Hejinian)

contradictory

its multifariousness AS resistance

It is a Way: of talking, of listening; the intense calm of everything connected, everything ruptured; the pleasure of a babble of

10. Touch on any part, on any sight, a sock, a hole, a wall, pictures, a resistance to museums, yet pictures always on the wall, and defining eras by those pictures. Wander looking for the odd lots, stop in front of something smallish, a little unofficial, by someone who did the best he could. That's all. Or a self portrait by a woman no one ever hears of. She. Sincere, intransigent. Or a few squares floating, by an escapee. One or two lines on a page. That's all I need . . .

the entrance into this otherness is fraught discourses come through us and we choose and are chosen by them. But "Otherness" is a dangerous metaphor. Some "I" am very much here, working in a set of spaces and practices. So never writing in the illusion that this play is only textual.<sup>13</sup> This is serious; in many ways its play is a measure of its grief. The material figure of the writer-gendered-female stands, in her political, visceral need

for the { writing of this { reading  
reading writing

"Otherness" and then  
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"Otherness" is a cultural construct like "the feminine," against which and through which I struggle. It is sometimes attractive and confirming that these textual practices are called "feminine," but the argument draws sub rosa on the power of those binary formations that it would reject and overturn. The feminine is where I am colonized. The feminine is the dream of an elsewhere, a someplace uncolonized. The feminine is orange/blush/pink/peach/vibrant red "in" this year. The feminine is a short blue one, or a long plaid one, but never a short plaid one or a long blue one. It is that kind of knowledge.

But to intermingle the utopian "feminine" space (of religious and a-social aura, of "ultimates") with an attracted loathing for the blush/red etc. feminine with a rooted feminist lust for material social justice in the quirky voice of a person mainly gendered female—well, this is approximately the practice. Have I "undone the binary"? Was it in my power? I did make trinaries, quadrinaries. I have made permanent quandaries.

11. The practice of language. The anguish of language. The anger of language. "A 68er" said Meridith Tax: and this is what it means to this work.<sup>14</sup> Inchoate in the 60's, coming to focus abruptly in 1968, the idea that culture was a political instrument, that language, hegemony, discourse, form, canon, wrongness, allowable and taboo were always historically formed, and were notions constantly debated, reaffirmed and disallowed. That culture was an arena of struggle.<sup>15</sup> And furthermore, to see from where I was standing meant to see with a specifically formed kind of female eyes. Cross-eyed; cock-eyed. Funny evocations. [It was the female that was the most startling to think about, since it was that around which the most intense contradictions of affirmation and denial occurred.] If one sees inside one's gender, class, race, sexuality, nationality, and these from and engaged with one's time, then culture is a process of rereading and rewriting, a practice. Soon after, by 1969–70, I had seen in a startled and famished (ravished) flash the necessity of the feminist cultural project. No less than the reseeing of every text, every author, every canonical work, every thing written, every world view, every discourse, every image, everything unwritten, from a gender perspective.

This is a major cultural project, intimately linked to the practice of questioning powers of all sorts, to the uses of culture in all arenas, to the nature, or definition of culture. And this is a central project of our generations (of women), this feminist cultural practice.

12. June 1979. Some anger. That is what is framing and saturating this writing. There is an anger and about what? about my life, and how to be female at this moment, the challenge of creating a new self which I am failing.

the problem of masculine and feminine

paralyzing conflict. Cut off, burned out

the defenses which are the only thing I nurture.

But how can I insist on anger?

Even in these "essays" there must be some decorum!

The reader does not need to be informed of the despair of the writer, a despair compounded by [of] the very difficulty of writing at all, a kind of self-hatred, existing in proportion to the fascination of this writing which I am driven to use while also saying, and hearing others say, it is "too easy" and therefore suspect.

("I have a sense of the writer drunk on her own shrill voice") ("confessional") ("repeatedly questioned the integrity") ("not authentic") ("too experiential") ("healthy self-doubt nonexistent") ("garish") ("untransmuted, not art") ("personal") ("narcissistic")

and therefore suspect.

Don't apologize and too trite and too personal and too busy and too hard and too easy. You get the picture? being no dope and "reader, it was not to have ended here."<sup>16</sup>

13. Therefore the metaphor of quest. A trek. A climb. A struggle toward—the transfigured. Probably the largest shift in this writing, between the late 70's of its beginning, and the continuations of the mid-80's was a muting of the visionary sense of transfiguration. What substituted was something closer in, closer to the ground, examining what I really felt, no matter the contradictions—as in Duchamp. If sincerity

led to  
loss of  
no loss  
what  
terms  
can be

So, ques  
changi  
the sil  
hounds  
Cloak

That  
flected  
H.D. B  
uncom  
ground  
appea  
dence  
for gra  
I began  
that n  
They  
of nup

My b  
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And  
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led to unresolvable contradiction, the very datum became pivotal. The loss of the quest for (what was essentially personal) "wholeness" was no loss. But what that quest said by using that term remains vital. And what was that? Was it a desire for justice? Was it hope? (Pretend these terms have been properly "deconstructed," yet still, though battered, can be sustained or understood.)

So, quest. (butterfly, spinning sac, threads, cocoons) like an earthworm changing into an airplane. Pupa, chrysalid, butterfly; silkworm weaving the silkword "metamorphosis." Psyche. Haunted by psyche, and hounded by the glories of that telos: Monarch! Swallowtail! Mourning Cloak!

That "psyche" image bound for glory fueled my ambitions and is reflected in certain essays of the 1970's; it also appears in the work of H.D. But there was something about quest narratives that I became uncomfortable practicing. That modified my practice, or drove it underground. The plots and triumphs were too given, and they drew for their appeal on structures of feeling (apotheosis, climax, ending, transcendence) of which I was agnostic, suspicious, and would no longer take for granted. Did quest end? Was there triumph? fulfillment? synthesis? I began to think of these as religious structures, but worse, of the writing that might practice them as "sermon." Sermon, as opposed to essay. They did not narrate the ongoingness and mixed struggles of the writing of rupture and critique: that practice.

My butterflies change. A cabbage white is plain enough: persistent, ubiquitous, almost the mosquito of butterflies, and as textual as a little page with its shimmering black spots. Though not to make "textual" the new sentimentality.

And "textual" heras: Arachne, challenging even the goddess with her weaving which depicts the rapes of women by gods. Philomel, muted, mutilated, weaving the depiction of her rape and mutilation; Procne, the reader. Penelope, buying time for personal loyalties and choices with the studied, strategic destruction and remaking of her weaving. Names, identified as constructive agents, figures who make and unmake texts, or, to use an old-fashioned word, works. Who are workers in "writing."

Their strategies of resistant representation.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis to fall on the struggle to make the works. The career of that struggle. But/and the utopian project is not ended.

14. 23 November 1981. "I" cannot be displaced I cannot I just got here! feminists the last humanists, yet I have become decentered. I am a walking margin the first decentered creature in the sunny depths harsh crisp color and a triangular shape blurred. Yes. Where there is looking. So hard to compare. But always "I" or I, know.

For when I say "I," I hear voices,  
I want to say I (and also some other pronouns),  
some me itted,  
or she me'd,  
yet when I say I  
I mean I,  
and yet is only a smallest part of I that I can use.  
And when I say I what might be meant is  
"i"

meaning a quarter I or an eighth,  
to measure it,  
maybe with a little round heart on top to dot it,  
to dot the 12-year-old self,  
in turquoise ink or a round blank circle of the wide-eyed girl

what I indeed.

So when I say I  
what  
I mean is an i  
which is it speaking  
it speaks as I speak,  
(and Creeley knew it and Rimbaud)  
squeaked speaked.

At doing the I as she,  
the I as me,  
a her, a we, a they, a them,  
doing the I as he . . . as you  
anarchic, wayward, flaw-ridden, maddening  
As much no-me as me.

Deployed in playful language.

There is no I when I "speak"  
but places of gridded and bubbling social voice  
a tone a humming thru a "G" perhaps  
or a "B flat"

girl and  
a sol fa  
no I no  
just an

15. I start  
and move  
thinking  
into dial  
creating  
an instan

To multi  
existing

To accom  
the ang  
into frun  
set of ap

And "I

Fighter  
sky, and  
Why is  
said. Is  
some p  
"them"  
showing  
these p  
banalizing  
tion of  
planes

But I  
which  
to a ge  
of its  
narrative  
lia, gl

writing  
lines, s

girl and boy  
 a sol fa la, a solfeggio moment of the resonant throat  
 no I no "I" no i  
 just an mmmmmmm trying to figure justice.

15. I start writing. "January 1982. To honor the plurality, porousness, and mobility of discourses; to combine personal and analytic; to reveal thinking as a heart-felt activity; to bring 'subjective' and 'objective' into dialectical exchange and mutual translation; to name the interests creating interpretation; to reveal the revealer; to fabricate the text as an instance of social and ideological need . . ."

To multiply the tones, the positions; to saturate oneself inside the existing heterogeneity of speaking

To account for the different textures and discourses of life, to include the angry whine of a child, to bring decorums, pleasures, and taboos into fructifying mixtures (and a great deal is left out; a whole, different set of options; they are, in part, censored by the writer).

And "I don't write fiction." ("You're kidding!")

Fighter bombers patrol the borders, cruising along a line drawn in the sky, and it is a low line, 300 meters, they say. Accidents happen. F-16s. Why is it necessary to "train" pilots to fly that low? Below radar, it is said. Is there a prediction that they will be someday flying somewhere, some place so obscure and miserable that it does not have radar, some "them" underneath the rumbling machine? Perhaps they are really showing "us," those in whose name this occurs regularly. The job of these planes is control of their own nation and its neighbors by a banalized terror. The terror is the teasing half-memory, half-visualization of what is possible from those planes, what is carried inside those planes, and who is, with serious casualness, flying them.

But I am writing. A deliberate intermingled generative. Some voice which thinks, thinking, the process of picking and unpicking, returning to a generative body of work. A voice which accumulates the pressures of its situation and spurts it in allusions to genres: poems, essays, narratives, epigrams, autobiographies, anthologies, handbills, marginalia, glossolalia, wire services

writing in the interstices of texts, boring thru the white between the lines, scribbling on the margins



rhythms [of responding of ceasing of picking up again]

converging and dispersing sightlines

not finished not caring

16. Her body was more or less her own—she could experience some of its feelings, but as she gridded those feelings or sensations with words, she participated in a cultural knowing in which female bodies have been variously type-cast. Her body was traversed with these ideas, sometimes they were "water off a duck's back," sometimes "they stuck like leeches." Her body, her mind, while they remained private possessions of a named person, were certainly saturated with, brimming with concepts, dunked in the culture, stained with it, the little vasicles, fascicles of "self." All cells are cultural cells.

What body, then, is speaking? Does her body speak? Is it a body of words? Of cultural ideas? A body of language? A body of words inflected with its female body? A body of pulses, impulses, fissured, hopeful and afraid inside of and dyed with a complex of rich and contradictory readings of the female body? A body to whom things have happened AS a female body, rape, for instance, and other tragedies still. Does this statement immediately color things (do you see red; have I willfully made you see red)? If this language appears defenseless, unguarded, if it mentions certain blood, if it strips itself and waits for impulsive behaviors to strike, waits for the play of association, if it provokes feelings of bemused recognition at quotidian interruptions

then what? From what is she writing?

Does simply saying "female writer" reduce her to gynecology, when, by the same token, there is no way to take her as anything but a female body speaking words inflected by her being constructed female. In awe. A body speaking words in awe, marginality and resistance.

I would not erase or discount her (or anyone's) experiences  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{in a} \\ \text{as a} \end{array} \right\}$  body.

I would not discount male experiences in a body. How do we know "things" except mediated? Is not the "body" part of this mediation? An African-American writer "writes the body" when he speaks of the multiplicity of experiences that follow from his melanin-laden skin.

But one wants, by the same token, no one reduced to body. Isn't isolating "the body" conceptually still an unhelpful gesture from a long-criticized, though apparently inexhaustible, mind/body split that should immediately be declared moot? I am admiring the quality and extent of my own uncertainty. But, yet, do women (do men) write from the body? Does that question remain important? Why was that question posed in that way?

If the effect of this question is to make female writing "natural," down-playing agency and artistic choice, if the question freezes "body" as if there were just one giant Female Body effectively present throughout time and in representation. . . . then? If the effect of this question is to free taboos, accept the unacceptable, and promote knowledge that female writing, female emphasis may differ . . . then? If the question allows for the variety and play of that potential difference, but does not penalize if it is "absent" . . . then?

And/But the body is not the body. It is language, it is writing, it is inscription, it is representation, it is hungry, it is sick, it is in political networks of care or rejection, it is mediated, it is not purer, more primal

than what?

One cannot write "the body" for there is no one spot where she can satisfactorily denominate "the body," although it would be folly to go to the other extreme and deny the specificity of her body. One can write bodies, languages of body, languages embodying positions. One can write of bodies criss-crossed, scarred and striated with their matter, their material situations, their embodiments. The body? I think the question occurred that way as a stage on a way to saying "socially and culturally embodied practices."

but then what?

17. Women's shoes.

"Dear Parent: Your daughter's name was referred to us as possibly being an excellent candidate for the 1989 LITTLE MISS PHILADELPHIA GLAMOUR GIRL PAGEANT. . . . Because of her beauty, poise and appearance I am VERY interested in learning more about her. If you feel she would like to gain some Modeling Experience, Portfolio's, and Talent Scholarships, all you need to do is fill out the enclosed information sheet and submit that along with a recent snapshot of her.

... There is NO PERFORMING TALENT in this pageant. Judging will reflect Beauty, Photogenicity, and Poise. ... Our winner's will reign over Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as the 1989 LITTLE MISS PHILADELPHIA GLAMOUR GIRL, and will be making guest appearances at her convenience. We feel this opportunity will open doors for every little girl involved as our judges are all highly respected and well known in their fields of beauty, modeling and theatrical activities."

Information sheet question: "Does she enjoy having her photograph taken and posing for them?"

Questions: What is "photogenicity"? And who is them?

I am also interested in the possessive's being confused with the plural.

18. I am not writing the personal. The odd and somewhat debased notion of having a voice, or finding a voice, of establishing a consumable personality complete with pix, of engaging in self-revelation, even of engaging in autobiography is precisely the opposite of my deepest feelings about this work. I am not finding a voice, I am losing one.

When I write, I am not writing for myself, or even (*grosso modo*) as myself. I am writing the voice, a voice, one bricolaging, teasing voice of a working. A raw exhilaration. At ruptures. At relativizing the "universal." At erolizing the "metropole." At writing a feminist-feminine-female bolus of scrapping and loving orts into existence. Writing not as personality, writing as praxis. For writing is a *practice*—a practice in which the author disappears into a process, into a community, into discontinuities, into a desire for discovery.

Pluralist  
discontinuous  
interplays  
of *interference*<sup>18</sup>

not just "language" but "pursuit"<sup>19</sup>

shrill, hysterical, sentimental, washing up then dirtying, obtuse, querulous, unsuccessful, critical, synthetic, ruining

"In other words, in the realm of thought, imprudence is a method."<sup>20</sup>

"Art should expose, not remove contradictions."<sup>21</sup>

I am doing work, and what kind of work is it? for whom am I working?  
and what am I bringing into being?<sup>22</sup>

19. I am not a writer, as such. I am a marker, maybe that is a way to  
say it. All the signs that emerge on the page (I put them here, they came  
here through me) (some were already there, in the weave of the paper,  
no *tabula rasa*)

demand my reading. The responsibility for making words is the respon-  
sibility for reading. The practice of writing is already a reading, of the  
writing already written, of the saturated page,

smitten with that already-written, in

language, language I am some character in a little folk tale, call me "a-  
reading-a-writing."

20. A desire to change the authority relations to the text and possibly  
to language

A practice of interference, or trying to stop a normal, normative, coher-  
ent, flowing and consumable practice.

I am not even writing essays. I am writing, to take seriously this typo,  
essaus. Essaus. They are hairy and ungainly things, coming a little too  
late, and earnestly with their little savory stew, and not thinking  
quickly or slickly. My birthright? A kind of confusion about what  
happened. About tricks and tests. A Rachel goes backward into her  
generations, writes essaus: Some justice there.

The struggle on the page is not decorative.

I am writing a kind of reverie, a textual practice of feminist leverage, a  
counter TO culture as it exists, a sincere artifice that raises

21. Say imprecision (I cannot know what I need to know) say grief  
(I can barely mourn and yet I am filled with mourning for the lost,  
for the costs, for the dead of incomplete revolutions) say repressed  
arousal (the shards of injustice around us, we stumble on, pierced  
by) say longing (for another kind of identity, another kind of  
nation, other sets of social relations) say inarticulation from  
blinding sun to blinding rain scotoma, scotamata dizzy, dizzy,  
dark areas or gaps in the field of vision, those things that float across

the eyes, like fast scudding clouds. Is that what we want? what we can barely see?

Wo and Woe. wie wee que qui ween queen wean. A mental image of myself strumming tunelessly unstopping, at the same time weeping wee and quee. I stop it and resist it. I stop. But I have written some of it.

August 1989,  
from materials  
as early as 1979.

With  
Robert  
not al  
kind  
throu  
people

1. E

2. 1

3. 1

4. 1

5. 1

6. 1

7. 1

8. 1

9. 1

10. 1