Performing the body

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Performing the Body

by

Katarzyna Marciniak

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Approved by

[Signatures]

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Preface

Hélène Cixous’ Conception of écriture féminine: The Risky Subversion and the Celebration of Différance

Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who?—a feminine one, a masculine one, some?—several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars.

Hélène Cixous, "Sorties"

My projects arise from three different seminars: Philosophy of Art, Philosophy of Law, and Philosophy of Ecology. As a student of philosophy and critical theory, I have become drawn to the notion of the body and its cultural constitution. One cannot philosophize the body without involving an inquiry into semiotics, and issues of gender, class, race, and sexuality. Being theoretically situated within post-structural philosophies, and grounded in feminist sensibility, I work from Kaja Silverman’s assumption that "the human subject is to a large degree the subject of semiotics" (preface). What Silverman suggests here is the notion that signification (making meaning) occurs within and through discourse, that any discourse necessarily requires a subject, and that the subject itself
is an effect of discourses. Silverman’s emphasis on psychoanalytic semiotics is critical because, as one of my professors said, "The psychoanalytic framework at least attempts to involve the body, whereas other philosophical and critical discourses tend to leave the body in the hazy realm of the sensual, or simply forget about it at all."

Within my theoretical discussions, I use a variety of methodologies posed by different philosophers and theoreticians in order to embrace the faculty of the body: psychoanalytic semiotics, deconstruction, Marxist criticism, psycho-linguistics, and feminist critique, to name the most dwelt upon approaches. I also assume the interconnections between literary, cinematic, and theoretical texts to enable a look at various cultural positions where our constructedness via language happens. In my endeavors of writing about the body, I search for places of resistance to challenge the patriarchal boundaries of Western metaphysics. As Teresa de Lauretis points out in Alice Doesn’t, "Strategies of writing and of reading are forms of cultural resistance" (7).

For me, Hélène Cixous’ subversive theoretical position, whose philosophy I employ in most of my discussions, has offered some places of textual resistance. I want to devote my introduction to a presentation of Cixous’ theoretical grounds in order to present a reader with the premises of my own readings.
Attempting to dispute gendered, hierarchical and linear discourse appraised in Western culture, Hélène Cixous in "Sorties" draws on Jacques Derrida's critique of the logocentric constitution of Western thinking, and on his contention of language which through both difference and deferral always occupies the space of *différance*. Cixous' theoretical project aims at undermining the patriarchal sexual, social, and linguistic order operating on abstract truths, sharp dichotomic divisions, and reducing all categories to its own fixed terms. She attempts to subvert the logocentric ideology and to dismantle phallogocentrism. Her concept of *écriture féminine* opposes the idea that meaning is fully present in language, and resists the supremacy of the phallus as the transcendental signifier.

In order to disrupt traditional phallogocentric discourse and to claim *écriture féminine* in cultural terms, Cixous engages the concept of bisexuality. Her idea of bisexuality embraces the notion of the subject which recognizes otherness in itself, and "permits" the possibility of a mergence of all kinds of "I's." She calls bisexuality "the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes," and describes it as the unfix ed space of *différance*, the sphere of fluidity, mobility, inviting and accepting the other in oneself (148). Such a view of bisexuality not only undermines the traditional category of
closure in women, men, language, and writing, but also celebrates the inclusion of difference.

In her statement "It is only in this condition [of bisexuality] that we invent," Cixous links philosophic or poetic creativity with the mobility of the self, with the inventing subject's desire to open its horizons of vision by embracing the other, and by giving it its own voice (147). Creativity then rests on the rejection of the repression of the "selves one didn't know" (147). Cixous argues that woman is bisexual because historically she already occupies the sphere of différence where the subject accepts its occupation by the other and permits it to speak. Unlike man who fears and rejects femininity within himself and cherishes his oneness, woman lives through difference.

Culturally defined masculinity has to repress and deny the feminine in order to enjoy the primacy of the phallus. Man does not need the other to be a masculine subject; in his encouraged monosexuality he can stand alone and claim himself as a harmonious self. In fact, through its disruption and dismemberment of the monoglossic unity, bisexuality poses itself as a serious threat to masculinity.

For Cixous, woman is a category produced and subsumed by the masculine discourse; she is a metaphor in writing. Her provocative statement that "Writing is woman's" suggests that writing occupies the space of différence, and therefore displaces the rigid division between "masculine" and
"feminine" visions. Writing, understood in cultural terms, always disturbs the binary opposition of Woman/Man, and produces the realm of ambiguity. Since a woman is already speaking within the symbolic system which excludes her and situates her on the margins, she always writes from the place of ambivalence. Having no definition and no boundaries, woman travels through the unexplored and undefined space of both presence and absence. She is present because she "writes," but since there is no place for her in language, she functions as absence, both being emerged in the Symbolic Order and trying to move beyond it.

Cixous suggests that writing from the space of difféance can be liberating, but that it also poses the danger of losing oneself, of transgressing the fixed limits of one's own subjectivity. Although she acknowledges that the linear masculine logic has erected rigid boundaries which differentiate by exclusion, écriture féminine is not prescribed exclusively to women. However, men, taught to resist the feminine, are less likely to free themselves from the phallic dominance and move beyond the authoritative discourse. Also, since men occupy language and claim it as their own property, they are less prone to attempt to subvert it.

To show how écriture féminine can subvert the law of language, Cixous invokes the concept of "voler," i.e. "flying" and "stealing" at the same time. Écriture féminine
does not appropriate the masculine power, but steals language and captures its structure only to make it fly, to shift its stable paradigm. This theft of the available resources suggests the possibility of shifting and relocating the fixed meaning in the realm of the symbolic order.

Cixous’ own way of writing shows how "stealing" and "flying" work. She problematizes the question of style by displaying how content and form (and body and mind) exist and work together in fusion and cannot be separated. By writing a theoretical piece in a passionate, highly visual, and poetic way, she risks the accusation of being "emotional" and not "rational." But this is precisely her goal: she wants to demonstrate how writing lingers in the space of différence, and how mind and body operate together. Being passionate and sensual does not have to signify irrationality. In fact, écriture féminine aims at winning back our bodies and bringing them back to writing our visions.

Cixous claims that the power of the symbolic order has driven women away from their bodies. In the tradition of a male-oriented institution, Woman implies silence and subordination to the male centrality sustained by philosophy, art, and language. Phallocentrism has led women into self-distrust and self-rejection. To move beyond masculine discourse and "steal" and "fly," women need to
uproot themselves from the ideological supremacy of the male center and its binary reasoning.
Notes

1. By attacking the monolithic, logocentric tradition of meaning making, Derrida problematizes the concept of truth. His project does not strive to redefine words, but points to their inevitably problematic structure. His analysis of "différence" as a concept carrying double significance of both difference and deferral shows that meaning can never be fully formed and fully present. Signification is produced through a series of differences and is always temporally deferred. Each time we speak or write, the significance or meaning is "promised" and then deferred, so we can never "catch," stabilize or define meaning. For that reason, Derrida does not want to classify différence as a concept since it would presume a static, identifiable and singular definition. Meaning in language always depends on différence and remains in constant movement, in a "play" with other words, in a process of appearing and disappearing. The breakdown of "différence" points to the fact that there not only is a double meaning in words, but also that each word contains the power to deconstruct itself through the embodiment of the opposite meaning. In other words, the "other" is always present to the word; the word itself becomes absent from its own center. We attempt to communicate meaning through language, but language itself does not offer a clear space where we
can proclaim the ultimate significance. Being aware that language always defers and that there is no fixed meaning (and therefore no stable significance), we can only play off the tension and the promise that is produced every time we engage ourselves in linguistic discourse.
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Writing the Body: Susan Griffin's Eco-Feminist Project as a Critical Deconstruction of a Male Center and a Revision of Female Voices

We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies.

Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature*

Yet, "we-women" have never been the heroes of philosophy.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,  
"Displacement and the Discourse of Woman"

...you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes... Woman's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible. More so than men coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body (emphasis mine).

Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

Within the patriarchal realm of Western capitalism and consumerism that constantly moves us toward more complex industrial and urban spaces, the so-called "natural" environment continues to be devalued and devastated. For the past twenty years feminist scholars and activists have argued for the need to combine environmental efforts with the feminist sensibility. Because the grounds of the traditional environmental endeavors rest on the patriarchal models of domination, women's movements need to embrace the issues of environmental ethics and pierce through the dominant ideological structures that continue to oppress
both women and nature. The theory and praxis of ecofeminism (ecological feminism) have emerged out of the strong conviction that the environment is a feminist issue. My project, working from Susan Griffin's book *Woman and Nature*, attempts to provide a terrain for re-thinking the way in which a feminist critic, informed by an ecofeminist agenda, can write and perform outside the binary oppositions of mind/body that have kept both women and nature under the power dynamics of patriarchy. My discussion, then, will necessarily involve an inquiry into the legacy of Western metaphysics, the construction of language, and the position of a female subject who attempts to write her body.

In order to address *Woman and Nature* effectively, first I want to present the theoretical grounds of ecofeminism that can be treated as a framework for Griffin's literary project. In her introduction to the section on "Ecofeminism" in the anthology, *Environmental Philosophy*, a feminist philosopher, Karen Warren, explains the foundation of the ecofeminist movement: "Many feminists have argued that the goals of these two movements are mutually reinforcing; ultimately they involve the development of worldviews and practices that are not based on male-biased models of domination" (253). It is important to stress that there is no homogenous vision of ecofeminist sensibility; as Warren says, "What one takes to be a genuine ecofeminist position will depend largely on how one conceptualizes both
feminism and ecofeminism" (254). The area of ecofeminism embraces feminism, environmentalism, environmental philosophy, and philosophy in general, and it concerns itself with uncovering and breaking down the conceptual patriarchal paradigms of power that perpetuated the domination of women and nature. Ultimately, ecofeminism asks us to rethink the traditional notions of the self, rationality, moral and ethical values, and our understanding of the knower and the known. Generally, feminists who operate within this theoretical (and practical) sphere work from the premise that the patriarchal mind has historically devalued both nature and women and used them as a resource. Ecofeminism, then, challenges the realm of philosophy itself and aims "to replace conceptual schemes, theories, and practices that currently feminize nature and naturalize women to the mutual detriment of both with ones that do not" (Warren 265). The problem of "feminizing nature and naturalizing women" originates out of the mind/body dichotomy that has been perpetuated by the discourse of traditional philosophy.

Hélène Cixous in her passionate manifesto, "The Laugh of the Medusa," addresses the possibility of collapsing the mind/body dichotomy within language. I believe that Cixous' provocative statement "women are body," which I use for the motto of my discussion, attempts to respond to the tradition of Western metaphysics and its phallogocentric grounds which
continue to influence the cultural discourse of philosophy, critical theory, and linguistic studies (343).

Historically, this legacy has not only produced a mind/body split, but it has also privileged the subjectivity of the white male intellectual who claims the central place in philosophical polemics about the ontological, epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic stipulations of human experience. Within this dichotomy, philosophy itself is associated with the power of reason which traditionally belongs to the male subject. Women, on the other hand, are identified with the body, both literally (through their reproductive abilities, for example) and philosophically, placing them outside the intellectual realm of reasoning and critical thinking.

Traditional logic links women and the body, devaluing both the critical agency of women and the status of the body itself. Although it may seem that Cixous, by emphasizing the body, only asserts the position already prescribed to women, I want to suggest that her contention that "women are body" aims at disrupting this inherited logic of either/or exclusionary oppositions, forcing us to move into a more dialectical way of thinking that embraces both/and sensibility. I see Cixous performing a double move in the attempt to claim a space of critical agency for a female subject. Rather then denying the faculty of the body, and perpetuating the exclusionary dichotomy of Western
metaphysics, Cixous tries to collapse the binary oppositions of mind/body and to claim that both the body and mind exist and operate in a dialectical relationship. By reclaiming the rights of the body to be philosophical and the rights of the mind to be sensual, Cixous provides us with a subversive paradigm with which we can intervene in a traditional philosophical discourse. Through philosophizing the body and sensualizing the mind, she opens up a space for an inclusionary way of thinking.

I believe that this terrain of inclusionary, rather than exclusionary, visions that Cixous posits and her attempt to philosophize the body is exercised by Griffin in *Woman and Nature*. Griffin’s project, acknowledging that environmental issues are feminist concerns, is rooted within an ecofeminist sensibility. *Woman and Nature* is divided into four books. The first two books, "Matter" and "Separation," form, what I call, the project of deconstruction. The last two books, "Passage" and "Her Vision: Now She Sees Through Her Own Eyes," develop the project of construction. The project of deconstruction traces the history of patriarchy’s sensibility and its resolutions about bodily matters. In her introduction, Griffin describes the premise of her project as follows:

I begin the book by tracing a history of patriarchy’s judgement about the nature of matter, or the nature of nature, and place these judgements side by side, chronologically, with men’s opinions about the nature of women
throughout history. From this philosophical beginning the book becomes more actual, treating of the effect of patriarchal logic on material beings. And so the first book, "Matter," continues the analogy drawn between woman and nature into explorations of the earth, trees, cows, show horses and women's bodies as we all exist in patriarchy. (xvi)

The book on "Separation" begins with the image of woman's body isolated from her womb, her desire and her spirituality:

Her womb from her body. Separation. Her clitoris from her vulva. Cleaving. Desire from her body. We were told that bodies rising to heaven lose their vulvas, their ovaries, wombs, that her body in resurrection becomes a male body. (95)

This section reveals the splits that patriarchy requires us to make: body from soul, intellect from passion, nature from culture, to name a few. Within her deconstructionist endeavor, Griffin attacks the phallogocentric core of Western scholarship and reveals its deep-rooted phobia of woman and nature. By mapping the terrain of Western patriarchy and tracing its voice throughout 2,500 years of Anglo-European history, Griffin disturbs the foundation of male-oriented tradition. She discloses and critiques the premises of Western patriarchal metaphysics, epistemology, and the weight of its moral, religious and aesthetic values. Her project tries to show how the oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework, operating through a hierarchical logic of domination, has come to control both women and nature, and subsequently subsumed them into a masculine discourse.
The constructionist project, which starts with the third book called "Passage," marks the liberating journey of female subjectivity away from the oppressive patriarchal norms. The last book, "Her Vision," re-conceives the patriarchal vision of the earth, and women's experience on it: "The book is not so much utopian as a description of a different way of seeing" (Griffin xvi). Trying to unveil woman's presence and consciousness as separate from the patriarchal sensibility, and to reconstruct female voices, Griffin first identifies the oppressors in order to break down the patriarchal voice. The intensifying female voices challenge epistemological separations of body from soul, mind from emotion, which patriarchal consciousness requires women to make. Speaking through the body, both literally and metaphorically, these voices resist the subordination of body to mind, and refute the denotation of writing as a strictly mental endeavor. The "great chorus of woman and nature" (xvii) offers new ways of seeing and asserts that women's bodies can influence women's language and visions. Woman and Nature, then, proposes at first a deconstructionist step as a necessary phase to undo the dominant paradigms in order to provide us with a liberating, constructionist vision where women may begin reclaiming their bodies and finding an active space for their agency.

In order to explain the philosophical grounds of Griffin's deconstruction, I want for a moment to continue
the discussion of the workings of Western metaphysics and to present some feminist positions that are aimed at re-working it. Western philosophical thought has been dominated by the metaphysical logic of binary oppositions that operates on persistent juxtaposition of Matter and Soul, Presence and Absence, Being and Nothingness, Same and Other, Nature and Culture. Consequently, these oppositions allow for a hierarchy that esteems a "positive" side, and subdues its "negative" counterpart. As a result, the terms Masculine/Feminine have also been subjugated to gendered, dichotomous oppositions, prescribing to women and men specific positions in society and in the history of civilization.

First, theoretically submissive to the concept of masculinity, woman emerges as a subordinate construct. She is man's antithesis, his other, the negative of the positive. These dichotomies have dominated Western discourse and have become a vehicle of meaning for understanding human experience. This dualistic mindset clearly has excluded women from the legitimate creation of any discourse: historical, philosophical, artistic or literary. Women have been made conspicuously absent in the origination of speech and language. Cixous, for example, suggests that in order for a female subject to claim a space of agency within the cultural discourse she must construct her revolution within the linguistic realm, not outside it: "I-woman am going to blow up the Law: an explosion
henceforth possible and ineluctable; let it be done, right now, *in language* (343). The concept of "blowing up the Law" suggests the possible resistance to the law of the Symbolic Order (i.e. language and its institutions) and its cultural coercion. By stressing that the defiance must take place in language, Cixous asserts the notion that our subjectivities are not only constructed through and within language, but also that we are never outside language and its workings. In other words, we cannot think about a radical social change and a transformation of philosophical paradigms without scrutinizing our positions within the cultural place of language: "Writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (Cixous 337).

Current feminist scholars have already started exploring the possibilities of working from and against the authoritarian institutions of language that have been stifling women and their critical agency. Shoshana Felman, for example, in her article, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," analyzes female absence in language by looking at the loss of woman's identity in an overwhelmingly patriarchal culture. Attempting to decode cultural terms of gender and power, Felman genders Jacques Derrida's critical deconstruction of Western metaphysics. According to
Derrida, all Western discourse is built on the principle of "logocentrism," the domineering presence of a logos. This Logos—being God, Reason, or Truth—affirms the privileged status of a center through a hierarchical subordination of all the "opposite" qualities. Although Felman accepts the notion of a center, her argument goes beyond Derrida's construct. Focusing on a notion of presence and absence in language, she identifies the center as an overtly masculine construct, revealing its male identity, its "male self-presence and consciousness-to-itself" (8). Since the language of Western culture has been male-centered and has come to explain the world through hierarchical polarities, subsequently, Male, Mind, Culture, Spirit and Light have come to subjugate Female, Body, Nature, Matter and Darkness. Identified through a patriarchal context, woman remains deprived of a place in literary discourse. How then, does a woman writer create in a culture that has been originated, authored, and perpetuated by men?

In their essay "Infection in the Sentence," Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar engage this question in an attempt to find ways in which a woman author fits into the essentially male-centered literary history. Reduced to a marginal voice, a female writer does not "fit in;" whenever she picks up a pen "she seems to be anomalous, indefinable, alienated, a freakish outsider" (291). Thus, female writing emerges as both a revolt against patriarchal literary
authorship and a struggle to reclaim feminine identity. Rebelling against this masculine uniformity, Griffin's *Woman and Nature* not only marks and dismantles the oppressive patriarchal voice, but also creates a fresh voice, or rather an orchestration of female voices to deconstruct the statement that woman is one, same, and easily definable:

So we say, finally, we know what happens in this darkness, what happens to us while we sleep, if we allow the night, if we allow what she is in the darkness to be, this knowledge, this that we have not yet named: what we are. (168)

*Woman and Nature* is conceived in an experimental style that mixes poetry and prose, and speaks in the compelling voices of women, animals, and land that ultimately subvert and empty out the patriarchal center. Using Cixous' concept, I want to suggest that Griffin is "blowing up the Law" by resisting the patriarchal model of reasoning and by creating a new vision of philosophical discourse within language.

Revolting against the male-centered order and power, Griffin proposes original ways of rethinking philosophical language and gives voice to those who have been denied identity and kept voiceless. The very place of her writing unsettles traditional masculine discourse. By undoing the institutionalized boundary between poetry and prose, and between the literary text and theory, Griffin demasculinizes the space of writing. Within her text, she creates a dialogized space to embrace both the patriarchal voice and the multiple voices of women who speak against this unified
space. Unlike the patriarchal narrative which constructs itself as dispassionate and rational, women's voices are embodied, impassioned, and situated within the physicality of their bodies and the materiality of the land.

The multiple voices of women and animals that Griffin brings to presence not only interrupt the patriarchal voice, but also create, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology, a heteroglossic discourse. I think that Griffin experiments with heteroglossia to show how the patriarchal voice, which pretends to operate on uniformity and sameness, can be challenged and fragmented through women's and nature's multiple visions, through their difference. Historically, women's difference had to be suppressed in order to ensure the homogeneity of the patriarchal discourse. Griffin's use of a heteroglossic address shows how women's otherness unsettles and disturbs the sameness dictated by systems of male authority, and disrupts the power of the dominant narrative.

Griffin's text also rethinks traditional philosophical argumentation, which, like the patriarchal voice she is tracking, poses itself as systematic, linear, logical, and rational. The faculty of the rational, which necessarily excludes the emotional, the bodily, and the sensual, has become the embodiment of the logic of domination. Within this dominant paradigm, any discourse that does not fall into the established category of the rational is rendered as
irrational and stigmatized as invalid. Ordering its logic through binary antagonisms, the patriarchal rationale makes no personal or experiential claims, denies the validity of individual experience, and in an inexorable, objective, and passive utterance, declares itself an omniscient judgement and the only true voice of humanity. The sensibility of patriarchal thought rests on statements like "...It is decided...It is said...It is stated...It is observed...," and exemplifies the oppressive nature of an "authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin's term). "Authoritative discourse" (or monoglossia) presents itself as the privileged language of hegemony which is undialogized, transcendent, and bodiless. The patriarchal voice, which establishes the dominant narratives of Western culture, claims the domain of philosophy itself; the constructedness of the philosophical sphere is posited as the sublime experience irrevocably connected with the faculty of the mind. The concept of the body, on the other hand, is a denigrated periphery which is always spoken for. Moreover, the refined space of philosophy is claimed to be the place of Truth which pretends to be singular, absolute and unchangeable. Consequently, the space of speaking (and critical thinking) is traditionally masculine. The male literary tradition, established and fed by the authoritative, monoglossic voice, absents female word, presence, significance and desire.
I believe that Griffin goes into the unsettling research of reconstructing the patriarchal voice present in philosophy and literature to express the problem of address that this voice poses. Patriarchy has not only unobtrusively and consistently universalized and essentialized women, but it has also created a female ghostly subject: instead of speaking for themselves, women have been repeatedly spoken for and about. In a similar fashion, the faculty of the body, also universalized, strictly gendered, and categorized, has appeared only in the form of a ghostly presence. The phallocentric discourse, then, claiming the site of a transcendent truth, is built on the idea of a double deprivileging: the depreciation of the body and the dis-placement of woman (Spivak's term 3). In other words, the masculine discourse constructs itself on the premise of women's absence and on the grounds that the mind governs the body. Both the female subject and the faculty of the body have been denied the position of knowers, and instead have always functioned as objects of knowing. The displacement of women as autonomous subjects has sustained the pretended singularity of the male story. Griffin suggests that through reading and unfolding the patriarchal narrative we can read a female ghostly presence and the "hidden" intertextuality of the patriarchal voices 4. By putting together numerous enunciations of male philosophers, Griffin questions the stability of the
patriarchal subject, and reveals how, contrary to its intentions, patriarchy does not speak in a coherent and unified voice.

Tracing the legacy of Western patriarchy, Griffin's text directly talks back to the biblical teachings, to the texts of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Darwin, Freud, Marx, Pavlov, and to many other male disputants of human reality, knowledge, morality, and sexuality. Western metaphysics not only sets a spirit-matter distinction that results in a mind-body dualism, but also decides that "the nature of a woman is passive, that she is a vessel waiting to be filled" (5). Man, associated with God and Reason, claims the soul, eternity, and lightness. God is a mathematician, and consequently, all Truth can be found in mathematics and logical reasoning. Science dominates nature like the spirit commands matter: "[T]he demon resides in the earth, it is decided, in Hell, under our feet" (7). The patriarchal dogma decides that woman is closer to the earth, and therefore remains demonic and hellish, signifying material flesh and lust: "the devil's agent" (9). Despite being categorized as a witch, a woman is also paradoxically labeled as child-like, defective, frail, of impotent body and mind, and intellectually incapable of embracing spiritual essence. A woman, born of man and named by him, will always remain a secondary creation blamed for sin, corruption, and loss of innocence. The only redemption for
her inadequacy and monstrosity derives its power from the capacity to multiply the race of strong and omnipotent males. She has to stay in the domestic sphere, away from public life. Male virility, semen, and phallus, unify the power of the perfect being, potency, and knowledge: "It is decided that the ovum is passive and the sperm is adventurous" (29). Hence, men, being the legitimate agents who sustain civilization, have the right, and even obligation, to direct woman and nature: "A woman should be an enthusiastic slave to the man to whom she has given her heart, it is declared" (32).

Uncovering the misogynistic core of the male center, Griffin confronts and re-evaluates Christian thought which has assisted in reinforcing hierarchical dualisms. She strips this religion of its spiritual and ideological facade, identifying it as a male-oriented faith. The Judeo-Christian canon has pushed women to the margin, not only placing guilt on them but also manipulating their consciousnesses to the point that they are forbidden to claim themselves:

Yes, they argued, considering only justice, the life of the unborn should be sacrificed to save the life of the mother. Yes, they exclaimed, they are not opposed to natural beauty. But does not charity ask that the mother prefer the life of her unborn infant over her own life? they asked. (118-119)

We were urged to weigh the mother's life against the life of her unborn. We were urged to weigh our lives against the lives of our children. (119)
The Church, which through its biblical word assigned divinity to men, authorizes the condemnation of woman and nature. The Fall, caused by Eve's lascivious alliance with the Devil, removes from the earth its sublime bliss: originates mutability, decay, and death. The earth becomes the seat of sin, a vessel of darkness and bodily desire, ultimately subservient to the Divine Light. Nature is only ignorant matter with no vision, erudition, intelligence, or ability to comprehend itself. In a parallel way, woman's body carries carnal passion, deceit, and a mark of death: "all sin originated in the flesh of the body of a woman and lives in her body" (11). The Church, claiming to carry a torch of light and salvation, wages a war against women-witches who, in the dark wilderness of nature, make a pact with the devil: "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust which is in women insatiable" (11). After women become objects of scrutiny, persecution, investigation, and torture, they are objectified, tormented, dehumanized, and burned. By first ascribing to women the power of black magic and then attempting to exterminate them, the patriarchal voice not only admits its fear of women but also asserts their power. Her menstrual blood, her bodily fluids, her corporeality, her womb, her nature are dangerous and threatening to the masculine sensibility. Either she will be consumed in flames or she will learn to fear her own nature, deny her sexuality, and become socialized as a
compliant and mute counterpart of man. After all, "a virtuous wife is one who obeys her husband, as the Church obeys Christ" (10).

Above all, however, patriarchal discourse professes female sexuality as subaltern and deficient: "And it is said that girls are born castrated. And it is said that small girls develop an envy of the penis and that women bear a natural hostility toward men, a jealousy" (44). She is declared to be passive and born nonresistant:

*We are the empty vessel, the background, the body. We were told that since it is in our nature to be needed, that his need is our need, and that his happiness is our happiness in all things. And if we should suffer at his hands we must have wished for this suffering, that his sins are our sins, that without him, we are not. (102)*

As a little girl, a woman suffers the discovery of a lack of penis which results first in self-abasement, later in a hatred of her mother, and ultimately in a scorn of all womanhood. Suffering from penis-envy, a woman with "the atrophied penis, a girl's clitoris" is lack, incompleteness, and jealousy, surrendering to the phallus: the only sexuality in which human worth and power reside (88). Secretly, she desires to be hurt, raped, and consumed since her destiny is pain: "the grown woman wishes to be pierced," and "the ovum...is primordially masochistic" (45). And, like women, the earth is pronounced as passive, ready to be discovered, conquered, altered, named and possessed. Animals are waiting to be tamed, trained, and hunted: "He
breaks the wilderness. He clears the land of trees, brush, weed. The land is brought under his control" (52).

Unraveling the perverted logic of patriarchy in all of its manifestations, Griffin shows how phallogocentric, analytical and deductive reasoning rationalizes women's exploitation, abuse, rape, female circumcisions, hysterectomies, and breast surgeries. She aptly illustrates how nature is invaded, technologized, radiated and polluted; how women's bodies and land, being just the instruments and vehicles for affirmation of male ownership and power, serve as vessels to perpetuate the history of male creation:

He has pierced the veiling mountains, ridden the rivers, spanned the valley, measured the gorge: he has discovered. Now nothing of this place is unknown, and because of his knowledge, this land is forever changed. (48)

*We have not learned the name for clitoris. We do not know what to call our vulvas. We have never seen our own vulvas. We know nothing about our wombs. These belong to men, we learn, only the men touch them, only the men seize them, name them, only the men have seen them. These are not part of us.* (91)

Griffin reveals how both women and animals are conceptualized as objects rather than autonomous subjects, while men are viewed as conquerors, name-givers, penetrators, and possessors. She discloses the ways in which the fertility of women and nature is manipulated and controlled, and men are made capable of and responsible for "measuring" life:
He counts the number of children being born. He measures the growth of food. He calculates the sum. He says that through quantities we find ultimate reality. (126)

The multiplicity of female voices that Griffin brings to presence talk back to the patriarchal discourse which dictates the separation of thought and feeling, the categorization of human significance, and which drives the search for the objective, universal Truth.

Bringing silence to language, by drawing upon women's unheard voices, *Woman and Nature* also questions and rethinks the aesthetic values of the patriarchal mind. Griffin, critical about these values, reworks their significance and reveals the reality of different aesthetics for women. Western art paints both women and land as territories submissive to the male gaze. The standard of beauty, when applied to women, is bound to be competitive and aimed at the pleasure of the male voyeur. Classical paintings celebrate male voyeurism by displaying women as beautiful yet passionless aesthetic objects: sexually obtainable, always available, silent, aware that the male spectator is judging their value. In the eyes of male authors, who use images of women as instrumental mediums, womankind is always looking for the assertion of her identity in male adoration. In the tradition of Western art, woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey's term 6) grants man the visual pleasure and the power of the look. The way she appears to others is the source of success and validity of her life. HEAD OF A
WOMAN, SEATED NUDE, THE MODEL, STANDING NUDE WITH RAISED ARMS, RECLINING WOMAN, NUDE WOMAN, WOMAN WITH FAN, WOMAN AND BIRD CAGE BY WINDOW are only a few of Griffin's illustrations of women being the equivalent of objectified flesh, always as articles of male desire, trapped by the eye of the beholder-owner:

_We testify that we were called woman. We were called woman and we were called nature and we were the objects of his art._ (98)

This art, which has bequeathed to us abundant images of nude women-objects and dressed men-owners, constitutes the artistic history of male creation. Displayed female nudity is another garment woman wears. She is not a sexual, active participant; her passion is repressed and subjugated. Woman's body not only belongs to her husband-possessor but is also converted into flesh and refused any sensibility: "[S]he is the flesh, and he is the head" (100). In the legacy of male aesthetics, WOMAN has become a rational category of virginity, wifery, motherhood, or prostitution subject to being taken, owned or given to: "she is part of the body of the husband" (100). She has become everything but an active and independent agent. She has been prescribed numerous identities as her definitions:

_we were called_ Lady Brett Ashley, _we were called_ The False Duessa, harlot, heifer, mare and the nagging wife of Rip Van Winkle..._we were called_ quail, slattern and Lady Macbeth..._we were called_ shrew, _we were called_ sow, _we were called_ vixen... (99)
Throughout the tradition of male creation, WOMAN emerges as a patriarchal construct with no history, no culture, no politics she can call her own. The validity of her being has been defined through the construct of masculinity and through its obsessions and aspirations for prestige, glamour, and ownership.

The patriarchal mind gives no space for woman's needs, desire, or passion. Western art plays on passion, but the generated desire never belongs to a woman; she is consistently the desired one, not being permitted to desire herself. The spectator-owner has the monopoly on passion, and paradoxically, a portrayed woman is denied the right to be sexual. John Berger's film, Ways of Seeing, engaged in a similar project of verifying Western art through the exploration of visual language, grasps the underlying messages of portraying women as objectified, packaged, and consumed images. His distinction between nakedness and nudity captures the contrast between being oneself and being seen naked by others, yet not being recognized for oneself. Similarly, Griffin recognizes the male gaze as self-serving, aimed at the pleasure of the male spectator. Nude, dismembered, and displayed bodies, overtly saying that "the meaning of woman is to be meaningless," (100) carry bitter testimony of women's pain, humiliation, and absence.

Torn by the contradictions of patriarchy that ask women to be at once untouched yet attractive and luring, passive
yet seductive, erotic yet motherly, women are placed in the labyrinth of male manipulation. This labyrinth positions women against other women, asks them to stay immature and dependent, teaches them to fear their own body, schools them in beautifying techniques, warns them not to get old, forces them to keep themselves at a distance from other women, and traps them in a circle of confusion:

The room in which the women fear time. In which she is afraid of becoming her mother. This labyrinth. The room in which women praise their clothing and sigh that they are no longer children. The room in which time is a mirror. The labyrinth in which the women fear aging. (156)

Without a doubt in Western culture women fear aging. The natural process of changing and growing older has been devalued and rendered one of the major sources of women’s anxiety. Women are taught to aspire to achieve, what this culture labels as, "ideal female beauty," through a perpetual struggle to alter and disguise their bodies. They are manipulated into losing contact with their bodies. Within the patriarchal culture of consumerism, plastic surgeries, cosmetics, and special diets acquire a magical power offering success, love, and fulfillment. The media, playing on women’s fear of not being desirable, stimulate them to purchase products instead of encouraging them to make vital political decisions for themselves. Images of women entangled in this patriarchal labyrinth have also been researched by Jean Killbourne in her video project Still Killing Us Softly. 8 Killbourne links the objectification
and fragmentation of women's bodies in commercial culture with the devaluing of feminine attributes, and most of all, with sexual violence and abuse.

These propagated images of women have also been reworked by French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, both advocates of *l'écriture féminine*, "feminine writing," which aims at defying phallogocentric discourse. They claim that the patriarchal sexual and social order, which operates on abstract truths, sharp divisions, and which reduces everything to its own fixed terms, can be resisted and consequently subverted by the power of *jouissance*. Through the concept of *jouissance*, Cixous and Irigaray pose the existence of a unique way of seeing, experiencing, and writing, which disputes the gendered, hierarchical, logical, and linear discourse privileged in Western culture. Wanting to bring the representations of the body back to language, their discourse attempts to resist the traditional inferiority of body to mind. Cixous postulates: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (338). She celebrates the female body and its faculty, and, like Griffin, raises the issue of women's power and significance that has been filtered through the primacy of the phallus. Cixous writes:

> Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs. (336)
Refusing to be entangled in the patriarchal labyrinth, Cixous empties it out: 
"[W]e the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies--we are black and we are beautiful...Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous" (336). Irigaray, repudiating traditional concepts of women's sexuality rationalized through masculine boundaries of phallic singularity, moves even further to suggest that woman is autoerotic. Marked by labial lips in continuous contact, "she is already two" (351) and, consequently, her sexuality is not one and "lacking," but multiple: "Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural" (353). Thus, the female imaginary, and female pleasures and language are not singular, but like her orgasm, they are multi-layered, multifaceted, and multidimensional.

Like Griffin, writing through a fusion of female voices, Cixous also resists the uniformity of womanhood: "[N]o general woman, no one typical woman..."(334). Women have been taught to keep themselves in the dark, to devalue their passions and drives, to be swallowed by shame and fear, to feel guilty. Irigaray, using Marxist terminology, examines this historical exploitation of women:

For woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity. As such, she remains the guardian of material substance, whose price will be established, in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by "subjects: workers, merchants, consumers. Women are marked
phallicly by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce. Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men, including the competition for the possession of mother earth. (355)

Above all, however, women have been driven away from their bodies. In the tradition of male-oriented institutions, WOMAN implies marginality. She is placed in the realm subordinate to male centrality, which has been sustained by the workings of philosophy, art, and language. "Parental-conjugal phallocentrism" has led women into self-distrust and self-rejection (Cixous 335). To move beyond a patriarchal narrative structure, women need to uproot themselves from the constraints of the male center and its binary reasoning. Both Irigaray and Cixous suggest the realm of sexuality and female bodies as a site for the re-evaluation of women's positions. The metaphor of "writing from the body" can verify and shift realities in which women live, and eventually open new contexts for female discourses. The radical socioeconomic change can come from women themselves who will refuse categorization and classification into male codes, and who will question their prescribed identity by examining the history of their oppression.

Griffin argues that patriarchal epistemology, obsessed with numbering, measuring, categorizing, and naming, does not negotiate an active space for female agency. The labyrinth entangles the female subject in renouncing her
needs, her fears, her sensuality. It educates her in how to hide her face by wearing a social mask of make-up. Year by year, she struggles with burying her intimate image, her feelings, her passion. The chapter, "The Room of The Dressing," where "women lament the darkness of women," puts continual demands on women to meet beauty standards according to male criteria (156). In this room, familiar to all women, they cover their bodies, paint their faces, dress their words, hide their secrets. They desire to speak and untangle the labyrinth, but they have no words: "the temptation to speak becomes large and the fear of speaking larger" (156). Engaged in a beauty contest, they never touch, never feel each other’s warmth, never trust each other. It is the room, "where the daughter denies she is anything like her mother" (156).

Since all spheres of human discourse have been claimed and subsumed by male power, even intimate acts like writing are not her own: "Maybe the language did not come to her, she could not find the words. Maybe what she felt got turned in her mouth into other words" (ll). She lacks words to describe her experience; she has no communal language, no written history. If she wants to be a successful speaker or writer, she has to familiarize herself with the male word and carry it on.  

Griffin’s radical construction project is left open, stressing the belief that women are in the process of
finding their identities and voices. Unweaving the patriarchal labyrinth, they are finding the space of agency. This place of agency is necessarily complex in order to challenge the monolithic construct of pleasure. Women are falling out of the oppression of the Dressing Room. They are slowly leaving this callous closure to enter a liberating space where they can finally embrace their bodies, passions, visions, and selves:

Where we uncover our bodies. Where we meet our outcast selves... Where we go into darkness. Where we embrace darkness. Where we lie close to darkness, breathe when darkness breathes and find darkness inside ourselves... Where we are not afraid. Where joy is just under the surface. Where we laugh. Where laughter fills us utterly when we see what we thought was horrible. Where our demands are endlessly received. Where revelation fills us with glee. (157)

"The Room of the Undressing" is a symbolic place where women re-think, re-claim, and re-possess their bodies, language, and sexuality. Dressed in female dreams and wants, this new space ruptures and subverts the male order. In Griffin’s vision, the roaring inside women bursts and unleashes their spirits. The undressing room is the room where "words are undressed," (157) and where women are no longer vessels perpetuating men’s names. This re-claimed labyrinth refutes the patriarchal argument by embracing darkness and chaos as women’s own: "We are disorderly. We have often disturbed the peace. Indeed, we study chaos--it points to the future" (175). This unveiled space, not separated from matter, has no center, no ending: "Space
where, in her circling motion, she found an opening" (171). This metaphoric opening is filled with the memory of female mutilation, with anger that arrives roaring, with women's presence that breaks open, questions, alters, and restores the real beauty of women and land. It is the space where women declare their desires, re-make their time and collect their power:

The time of her growing awareness. The days of her bleeding. When she felt her body becomes strong. The year when her anger gave her clarity and all her weeping was filled with intelligence. The morning of her full powers. The celebration of her first gray hairs. The solemn recognition of her coming age. (174)

In this new dimension filled with her private images, a woman creates her own weaving, her own art. WORKING WOMAN, OLD WOMAN FROM A POORHOUSE, PORTIA WOUNDING HER THIGH, BISON'S FLEEING A FIRE, WRAPPED IN SILENCE, LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING, COW'S SKULL WITH CALICO ROSES. She paints her pain, the river's pain, desert, wind, storm; she paints her rights and her time. She paints the loss of her name, marks rape, rage, isolation. She paints her body. "The Anatomy Lesson," in which a collage of voices speaks about body awakening, suggests the opening of the revision. If we are dedicated to reclaiming our selves, our past and history, we have to start with our bodies. We have to learn how to celebrate our bodies, how to take pleasure in our own locus. Female bodies, scared, worn out and altered by birthing, carry a testimony of women's lives: "We know that it was in
her body that we began. And now we say that it is from her body that we learn. That we see our past" (209). Griffin visualizes woman's rebirth in a womb-like and earth-like cave, in a close connection to water, mountains, wind, and sand:

For we did not invent the blackbird, we say, we only invented her name. And we never invented ourselves, we admit... We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. (226)

Talking with voices of wind, waves, birds, and light, Woman and Nature refuses to name and categorize woman and to call nature. The inseparable union between humans and nature that Griffin suggests, acknowledges and honors the origins of our being.
Notes

1. According to Jacques Derrida, Western metaphysics has organized itself around the domineering presence of a "central transcendental signified," or Logos. This central signified affirms the privileged status of a center through hierarchical subordination of all the "opposite" qualities. The word "transcendental" is crucial for an understanding of this concept. It suggests that this privileged signified—God, Reason, Truth—"transcends" the given signifying system (language), that it is autonomous and independent of the system in which it operates, and that it is capable of going beyond it. The central signified's transcendence also suggests that this concept surpasses human experience and, therefore, can claim its superiority. Its centrality, on the other hand, implies that the whole system relies on it and is built around it. The center becomes a point of reference and presence that holds the Truth. Examining this organizing structure (also language) which builds itself upon a center, Derrida points out the sliding of privileged signifieds. He claims the possibility of replacing one privileged term by another, for example: Monad (center of Neo-Platonism) -> God (center of Christianity) -> consciousness (center of Romanticism).

Derrida's deconstructive project rests on the assumption that "there was no center," i.e. that language is
a system of differences with no "natural" or "universal" terms that exist outside culture and can be claimed as inherently and eternally "positive" or "singular." Also, Derrida's disclosure of a constructed center suggests the opening of language and interpretation. In other words, by acknowledging that "there is no center," Derrida argues that not only language is open to play, mutability, and limitless signification, but also that "one," stable, absolute and fixed meaning (like God, Monad or Logos) is an illusion. Moreover, Derrida's "deconstruction" of these privileged terms suggests that there are no "final" concepts that can limit signification. So, if there are no absolute signifieds, then each signified can again function as a signifier, making the process of signification a constant play. See *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

2. I am using here Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology concerning the theory of language in *The Dialogic Imagination*. The term "heteroglossia," in other words multivoicedness, is a discourse which undermines and disrupts "authoritative discourse," or "monoglossia;" i.e. a discourse that desires to hold to one voice. Defying the norms of systematic linguistics which tries to provide a unified and orderly model of a language, the notion of heteroglossia, permits a variety of discourses and suggests that meaning in any utterance is contextual and positional.
Bakhtin calls the discourse which uses heteroglossia, "dialogism." Dialogism rests on the assumption that there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. See *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holoquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

3. I am referring to Spivak's notion of "double displacement" which she explains in her article "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman" (1983). Spivak renders the deconstructionist project problematic for a feminist critic. She argues that Derrida's critique of phallogocentrism still privileges masculine agency. Taking woman as his model ("Woman will be my subject") and writing about hymen, Derrida retains the concept of sexuality defined from the point of view of a masculine thinker (penetrator). She further argues that historically woman has been denied the position of a knower, and always functioned as an object of knowing. The metaphysical tradition, explicating masculine desire, has always displaced woman. In Derrida's deconstructive reading of that displacement, woman is displaced again because he speaks from the point of view of a penetrator.

4. According to the *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the notion of "intertextuality" was introduced by Julia Kristeva to mark the interdependence of literary texts. Kristeva suggests that texts (philosophical, literary, etc.) are not
isolated phenomena but rather that texts feed off one another. In other words, any signifying practice rests on "transposition;" i.e. on interconnectedness of meanings in various kinds of discourses. With this contention, she challenges the traditional notions of "originality" and singularity of meaning.

5. In Women and Film, Ann Kaplan discusses the male gaze as a patriarchal concept which defines and dominates women as erotic objects. Relegating women to silence and marginality, the male gaze carries social, political, economic, and sexual power, which refuses female presence. The sexualization and objectification of women in Hollywood cinema is not only for the purpose of eroticism; it is designated to invalidate the threat that women pose. Accordingly, Hollywood productions, based on the idea of the male gaze, repress the image of women as socially and sexually conscious and active beings who are prepared to negotiate their positions in society.

6. Laura Mulvey in her landmark essay on cinema, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (1975) analyzes how Hollywood films construct a "normative" heterosexual male viewer and his gaze. Mulvey suggests that the cinema lures a viewer through scopophilia, the pleasure of looking. For a viewer, the act of looking itself, voyeurism, becomes the source of gratification. Freud, for example, identifying scopophilia as one of the sexual instincts, understands it
as looking at others as objects and submitting them to a dominant gaze. Drawing on Freud, Mulvey suggests that, in the traditional cinema, scopophilia implies the objectification of women who function as sexual objects of erotic spectacle. The male spectator consumes the seductive image of a woman, and woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" grants him the visual pleasure and the power of the look. See "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Erens. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 28-40.

7. Berger argues that in Western art nudity implies submission and an awareness of being seen by the spectator. A nude woman is often painted looking at herself in a mirror, which is meant to symbolize female vanity. Paradoxically, however, this image reveals the spectator's vanity who considers himself the ultimate judge of female beauty and perceives himself to be the source of woman's satisfaction and self-respect. Significantly, women are painted without pubic hair since hair is associated with threads of passion, energy, and sexuality. Berger believes that the importance of art and its aesthetic value representing a sublime human experience has been shifted. Paintings have become valuable objects to own, and if you buy a painting, you also buy the look and prestige it represents. Accordingly, your identity and value are being judged by what you possess.
8. Researching the influence of advertising as a powerful force that influences us cumulatively and unconsciously, Killbourne argues that regardless of their age, women are surrounded by messages telling them they are inadequate and unacceptable the way they are. To be acceptable and thus successful, women have to strive to transform themselves. Advertising polarizes feminine and masculine qualities through juxtaposing strong, invulnerable men with sexually-willing, submissive women. Above all, however, women are trivialized and brutalized by being turned into aesthetically pleasing objects that can be obtained and eventually consumed. Killbourne does not condemn the sexual imagery that advertising uses so extensively; but instead criticizes culture’s pornographic attitude toward sex and its contempt for women which this attitude promotes.

9. The undertones of the French word jouissance ("pleasure") have been explained in New French Feminisms: An Anthology:

This pleasure, when attributed to a woman, is considered to be of a different order from the pleasure that is represented within the male libidinal economy often described in terms of the capitalist gain and profit motive. Women’s jouissance carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration. It is a kind of potlatch in the world of orgasms, a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure. (36)

Jouissance is a concept in French theory signifying a totality of satisfaction: intellectual, spiritual, physical,
and sexual. Julia Kristeva, for example, argues that jouissance exists outside of linguistic norms in the realm of poetic language. Jouissance resists and disrupts the symbolic level of language, refusing to be ordered, structured, and controlled by political and cultural constraints.

10. As I struggle to write this essay, I find more and more that while arguing against masculine linear, logical reasoning, I consistently compose my writing using sophisticated, approved, academic language. I see myself trapped, feeling that I undermine my own grounds, at the same time realizing that I can't work against patriarchal discourse without using its terminology and methodology in order to dismantle it effectively. In my subversive attempts, I remember, however, that language as a signifying practice is the site of both cultural coercion and resistance.
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Jacques Lacan’s concept of the Mirror Stage has been widely theorized in various philosophical and literary discourses. The Lacanian Mirror Stage formation of the self, which has permeated studies across disciplines, has drawn substantial attention from feminist scholars. My project, following Julia Kristeva’s revision and critique of Lacan’s construction of subjectivity, discusses the status of the maternal body in the Mirror Stage.

Unraveling the maternal body from within the Lacanian Mirror Stage is an unsettling task of reading a ghostly presence of mother, or more specifically, of reading her absence. My writing, then, addresses the maternal as both present and absent in the Mirror Stage. In my analysis, I focus on the phobic model of the subject, which is built on and invites misogyny. I argue that this construct of subjectivity insists on maintaining the Symbolic ¹ at work through the refusal to read the maternal. The erasure of the maternal, then, opens up a space for male subjectivity, making the female subject the bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning. As a cultural example of the consumption of the maternal body, I offer a cinematic analysis of Ridley Scott’s Alien and James Cameron’s Aliens.
To situate Lacan's concept of the formation of the unstable human subject and its relation to language, it is important to describe the notion of subjectivity itself and the way it has been theorized in opposition to traditional views of the human individual. In the tradition of Western metaphysics the human being has been perceived as a stable, autonomous "ego" that determines its own being. The Cartesian model governing that tradition, "I think, therefore I am," has set up the ego as a unified "I" who rules its being and controls the surrounding world through the power of its intellect. In this model, the individual not only shapes the world around him or herself, but also functions as the author/creator of meaning. Moreover, the "human condition" is characterized as universal and fixed.

Rejecting the notions of universal human nature, Lacan's concept of subjectivity replaces it with cultural, social, and historical discourses. These discourses create the individual subject and shape its sensibility, still leaving a moving space for its transformation. Thus, the subject is open to change, shift, and fluidity. While the Cartesian transcendental ego defines itself as if it were in a political and social vacuum, the concept of subjectivity takes into account the social context of race, class, and gender. The notion of subjectivity also opposes the idea that "being" exists prior to linguistic practice, and it
problematizes the relationship between the individual and language.

Theorists who work within these assumptions argue that our subjectivity is not pre-linguistic—i.e. that being or essence precedes existence and language—but constructed through various discourses. Ferdinand de Saussure, for example, undercuts the "natural" link between the signifier and the signified, arguing instead that there is a cultural connection between the two. The "match" between the signifier and the signified is culturally enforced in order to affect and perpetuate the construction of reality. Prior to Saussure, the notion of the "natural" correspondence between the signifier and the signified assumed the existence of universal "being." Saussure subverts the belief in the inherent connection between the signifier and the signified, and points out that the concept of the signifier answering the signified is an illusion.

Following Saussure's insistence on the arbitrariness of language, Lacan collapses the traditional notion of "being." He argues that the process of the construction of subjectivity is not universal but historical. Suggesting the linkage between the notion of the Symbolic (i.e. language and its institutions) and the subject, Lacan proposes the idea that subjectivity is both constructed and determined through language.
His conception of the subject opposes the Cartesian cogito which places itself in the epistemological center, and presents itself as fixed, coherent, intact, and universal. The subject, with its mobility, fluidity, and particularity undercuts the classical understanding of "being." The concept of the Cartesian transcendental ego privileges wholeness and fullness, trying to "fix" identity and to deny subjectivity as process. In this model "being" is presupposed as a stable and harmonious phenomenon. The subject-in-process, on the other hand, rests on fragmentation and splitting, problematizing belief in direct access to ourselves, our meaning, and truth. The unstable position of the subject defies permanence and moves "being" toward a dialectical dimension.

Within the Cartesian tradition, which is often referred to as the humanist tradition, the study of language had been "diachronic;" i.e. words were studied comparatively through their chronological advancement and analyzed through history. Lacan's psycho-linguistic theory of subject construction moves the study of language out of the abstract realm of grammar and lexicon, and links it with the enunciating subject. His dynamic vision of language stands in opposition to the traditional structural linguistic model which leaves out the body and privileges the intellect as capable of embracing and understanding the workings of language. Lacan's analysis not only problematizes and
destabilizes the "I," but it also points to the dialectical relationship between the subject and language. The body and language are no longer locked in an exclusive binary scheme, but instead become mutually dependent and always in motion. Lacan insists that language speaks us as much as we speak it. His destabilization of the "I" carries powerful political implications: we are in a culture that has privileged the static "I," and once this stability is removed, the unstable self becomes coded negatively and rendered an object of violence.

Lacan believes that one of the earliest stages of coherence in the construction of the "I" happens in the Mirror Stage, a stage in the development of subjectivity prior to the entry into language. He characterizes the Mirror Stage in terms of "spatial captation" (4). The child finds itself through its reflection in an image. However, what the subject experiences is not the wholeness of its "being," but the fragmentation of its body. Lacan argues that the privileging of the subject and its power invites the "misrecognition" of coherence, unity, and control since the very nature of the subject is difference. The Mirror Stage occurs before the subject finds itself in the Symbolic order, i.e. before the subject becomes objectified in the dialectic identification with the other, and before it is formed and determined in social terms. Lacan argues that in
this stage a distinction is introduced between the self and the other.

Lacan describes the Mirror Stage as an "identification" stage, i.e. the transformation that takes place in the subject when it assumes an image (imago). By rendering its image, the subject becomes deluded by its autonomy and seduced by the novelty of the "spatial identification" (4). Lacan suggests that this position situates the subject in the imaginary realm, and sets up a split between the "I" and the subject's body. In other words, he argues that there is no "pure" subjectivity and no literal signification. His position, then, suggests that the very notion of the "I" is not inherent and "natural," but culturally constructed and variable. The "I" relies on what is other than itself. According to his theory, through the recognition of a female "other" who lacks access to the signifying effects of the phallus, the human subject gains entry into the Symbolic order of human culture. Significantly, the phallus, the symbol of the patriarchal privilege, functions as the governing signifier and the guarantor of meaning. The subject's identity, then, rests on its difference reflected back from the other. This curious other, the maternal, becomes erased, however, from the stage of subject construction. The only sign of the maternal in the Mirror Stage is the child's reflection in the mother's eyes.
The maternal then is both present and not present in the Mirror Stage: present as a mirror and a mere platform, as a reflection for the human subject: passive, static, unchangeable, and therefore universalized; not present in a sense that it has been theorized as the dis-embodied, dispassionate, and dis-connected place of "the maternal organism" (4). The maternal place of absence subsumes woman and her difference, and more importantly, differences between women.

Moreover, in the Mirror Stage, the Mother (necessarily with the capital "M" since Mother in this construct figures as an abstract idea) is freed from bodily pleasure, desire, and pain, and separated from the presence of blood and physicality. The Mother's obligatory spatial confinement not only traps her, but it also secures her invisibility. This exclusion of the representation of woman's pleasure becomes essential for the power of the Symbolic.

The only way Lacan writes about the relationship between the infant and the mother is through the negatively charged concept of a "primordial Discord" (4) between the two. His analysis instills the notion of the contamination of the subject by the maternal body which serves as a vessel. Supporting his suggestion with the research done by embryologists, Lacan claims that the infant is endowed with "the presence of certain humoral residues of the maternal organism" (4).
The fact that there is no reciprocation or dialectical involvement between the infant and the mother privileges the infant, leaving the mother defaced, disfigured, unmarked, and reduced to the role of the "automaton" (3). Again, the maternal is then both "marked" and "unmarked": marked through the Symbolic and the cultural representation of the mother, and unmarked because it is rejected and repudiated. The representation of woman's pleasure is necessarily left out since it cannot be measured in phallic terms. This exclusion perhaps helps construct Lacan's compulsory insistence on the universality of the formation of the subject.

The Mother, her agency, her painful and pleasurable circumstances, her desires, and needs disappear in the mirroring. Although the maternal is readable, it is consistently and purposefully not read. As the unsignified mirror site of the mirror, the maternal is marked as negative, reduced to the workings of "the phantoms" (2), and eventually eradicated from Lacanian analysis. Thus, the textual analysis of the maternal in the Mirror Stage has to come through reading the maternal absence. The consumption of the maternal points to its threatening presence and to the male subject's anxiety about the powerful faculty of the maternal.

One of Lacan's revisionists, Julia Kristeva, takes up the notion of the erasure of the maternal and attempts to
reinstate its territory. Kristeva's recognition of the maternal role is not only a gesture to rescue the maternal from the abyss of mirror representation, but it is also a radical revision of Lacan's ethical position. In her essay, "From One Identity to An Other," Kristeva writes about the repression of the maternal element: "Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother" (136). However, to understand Kristeva's concept of the maternal, its powerful ethical and political implications, it is necessary to consider her rendition of language as a signifying process.

In "The System and the Speaking Subject," Kristeva, like Lacan, argues against the Cartesian conception of language and its transcendental ego that is "cut off from its body" (78). She also undercuts Noam Chomsky's model of Generative Grammar which discusses language only in abstract terms. Instead, she proposes a new linguistics which embraces both the signifying practice and moments of incomprehensibility, undecidability, disruptions, and silences. She centers her analysis on the transgression of the law of the Symbolic through the power of the Semiotic, arguing that the symbolic and the semiotic both create the signifying process. Both are cultural constructs which remain in a constant dialectical movement, always mutually intertwined. Kristeva writes:
Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both. ("Revolution" 93)

While the symbolic represents the paternal law under which the official linguistic structures operate, the semiotic embraces the disruptive forces of language which play with syntax, undermine its order, and mark the realm of the sensual. Thus, the semiotic disposition, as Kristeva calls it, can be traced particularly in the poetic language which refers to non-linguistic sounds, rhythm, music, painting, dance, and bodily gestures. She also attributes "the transymbolic, transpaternal function" to the poetic language (Desire 138). Thus, the subject of poetic language "maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element" (136). She links the semiotic, which "introduces wandering and fuzziness into language," both with the instinctual and the maternal (136).

Kristeva's investigation of maternal alterity is perhaps most visible in her essay "Stabat Mater." As Toril Moi writes in her introduction to The Kristeva Reader, Kristeva’s study of the Virgin Mother coincides with her own experience of maternity (160). What is unusual about this essay is Kristeva’s deliberate fragmentation of her writing and juxtaposition of her personal poetic language with theoretical religious discourse.
This stylistic move suggests, on the one hand, the radical splitting and othering of a pregnant woman, and on the other, the inadequacy of an official paternal discourse to embrace motherhood. Kristeva problematizes the question of the representation of the maternal by displaying both the symbolic and the semiotic dispositions working side by side. By writing a personal piece on the maternal in a passionate, highly visual, and poetic way in contrast to a theoretical "study," she risks the accusation of being "emotional" or "irrational." But, I think, this is precisely her goal: her visually mapped writing demonstrates how writing as a form of signifying practice lingers in the space of both the symbolic and the semiotic and how the personal narrative of the maternal always already works next to the historical discourse on motherhood.

Reevaluating the cult of the Virgin Mary, Kristeva argues that Western Christianity obliterates and disfigures Mary herself. Again, like the maternal itself, Mary is "marked" and "unmarked": marked through the miracle of the immaculate conception and her position as the Mother of Jesus, and unmarked because impregnated without sexuality, having her body reduced to "the ear of the virginal body, the tears, and the breast" (194). Through her peculiar construction, the Virgin Mary becomes the "guardian of paternal power" (188). Kristeva sees Mary's ambivalence as having serious political and historical implications:
[S]he is informed that filial relationship rests not with the flesh but with the name or, in other words, that any possible matrilinarism is to be repudiated and the symbolic link alone is to last. (188)

While reading Kristeva’s theoretical argument, it becomes clear that the religious discourse of the West has worked to sanitize Mary of bodily pleasure, pain, or rage, and it has relegated her to the inaccessible sphere of the "virginal maternal" (199). By contrast, Kristeva’s account of her own pregnancy shows the interweavings of her euphoria, affection, anguish, pain, and anger. The maternal she experiences cannot be translated into or controlled by the symbolic law: "My body is no longer mine, it doubles up, suffers, bleeds..." (190). The language of the symbolic paternal agency is at best deficient to illustrate the immeasurable and unconfinable maternal body: "[L]anguage is powerless to locate myself for and state myself to the other..." (196). Kristeva’s insistence on a bodily division, scatteredness, and separation stands in opposition to the symbolic construct of the maternal which gives it either a space of "an exacerbated masochism" or a censored place of jouissance (200).

Kristeva hypothesizes that the concept of maternal virginity is a way of dealing with "feminine paranoia" (199). She claims that belief in the mother is not only based on the repression of the maternal eroticism, but is also rooted in fear. Her own writing of the maternal works
against this phobia, and, at the same time, recognizes that
the paternal agency rests on the idea of controlling the
maternal.

**Aliens as an Example of the Colonization of the Maternal**

Treating film as another signifying practice, I want to
offer a discussion of Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and its
sequel, James Cameron's *Aliens* (1986), as examples of the
cultural narratives which attempt to misconstrue, repress,
and control the maternal. These unsettling science-
fiction/horror constructs of Hollywood production have
attracted the attention of feminist scholars who discuss the
notion of woman as an alien, and the representation of
motherhood as monstrosity. For example, in "The Battle of
the Big Mamas': Feminism and the Alienation of Women,"
Susan Jeffords argues that *Aliens* "presents a 'feminism'
that can succeed only by making women 'alien' to themselves"
(73). Lynda Zwinger, on the other hand, in her article,
"Blood Relations: Feminist Theory Meets the Uncanny Alien
Bug Mother," addresses the issue of an uncanny figure of
Mother who not only needs to be controlled but destroyed as
well: "[T]he asexual-virgin mother Ripley appropriates the
big phalli of the Colonial Marine Corps and becomes a
monstrous killing machine in order to fight an even more
monstrous mother (supplied with multiple organic phalli) and thereby defeats the monster/mother in herself as well" (82).

To expand the idea of mother as monster, and to expose the cultural anxiety about motherhood which these texts disclose, I want to consider the birthing process in Alien/s as the fierce disruption and rupture of the body. I want to argue that the masculine diegetic space 3 of Alien/s attempts to colonize and control the monstrous female body which is constructed, policed, and eventually abandoned ambiguously by this very narrative (the closures of both Alien and Aliens leave the "monster" merely floating in outer space). The ideological discourse of these films abjects the Alien-Mother-Monster to preserve its own coherence and to present us with the image of the paternal colonizing victory. This unnerving theme of abjectness guides the films' structures, which attempt to preserve patriarchal signifying practice.

Both films address the question of women's access to power. While both female and male characters are presented as possessing seemingly equal power against the unknown horrifying strength of the Alien, the female protagonist, Ripley, gains access to power only in outer space, possibly suggesting that her feminism has no place yet within the human social structure. In one of the opening scenes of Aliens, when Ripley makes a report to the Company's executives about the deadly encounter with the Alien, her
story is not believed and the "case" is closed without a command for further investigation. Her license to operate as a flight officer is suspended and she is given a mediocre job. Clearly, Ripley is powerless within the capitalistic operations of the Company. Her story is not only dismissed as invalid, but she is also punished for assuming the role of a "leader-survivor." It is only in cosmos that Ripley "wins": she overrides the Company's technology and becomes staged as a "natural" commander who moves beyond the space of cold calculations and impersonal mediations. In other words, she rejects insensitivity, ruthless aggressiveness, and save-myself-first sensibility in order to face the Alien. As Jeffords warns us, however, "she is employing these characteristics (nurturing, unmediated communication) to reject the alien—the image of woman as reproducer" (7).

The narrative of Alien/s is occupied by historically masculine constructs: the capitalist Company, referred to as "Mother," its technology and warfare gear, the aggressive Marine platoon fixated on the idea of destruction, and the masculine space of colonization itself. In this space, women characters are repeatedly alienated from each other, securing the order of the paternal law. In both films, Ripley does not bond with any female characters except for a child. In Alien, another female on board, Lambert, is represented as weak and passive, while in Aliens, a female Marine, Vazquez, is masculinized to the point that she blurs
gender boundaries; "Hey, Vazquez, have you ever been mistaken for a man?" she is asked by her Marine comrade.

Ripley's character, meant to "rip," is explicitly masculinized in order to render her a suitable heroine for the colonizing process. From the very beginning she opposes "studying" the Alien and agrees to participate in the colonial trip only to destroy It. Throughout the narrative there are various codes of masculinity attributed to Ripley: her muscular body, her short hair, her smoking, her aggressiveness and leadership, and the harsh language she uses, just to name a few. At the same time, to prepare her for the role of mother—in a revised version of the nuclear family which emerges at the end of Aliens—Ripley is endowed with some overtly feminine, nurturing features. While both opening scenes show Ripley frozen in hypersleep with her cat, most of the scenes of Alien/s in outer space are devoted to her obsessive rescuing of a cat and a little girl-survivor, Newt. Clearly, the emphasis on the maternal drives, to use Kristeva's term, points to Ripley's future role as a mother. Ripley's position as "mother" is produced to reactivate the discourse of the family. Paradoxically, however, Ripley is linked with a child to whom she has not given birth, suggesting that, in fact, she is free from the bodily maternal.

To disclose the workings of "feminine paranoia," I am particularly interested in the battle scene between Ripley
and the Alien which takes place in the gruesome vaginal abyss of the Mother/Monster ("Stabat Mater" 199). An asexual woman-warrior, Ripley is designated to fight the slimy, bountiful, and uncontrollable womb which poses a threat to humanity itself through its excessive and expandable power of reproduction. It becomes clear that the Aliens' destructive reproductive power is the most menacing concept to the colonizers. The Alien is threatening precisely because it is capable of giving birth to itself, of multiplying her body and powers beyond any imaginable control. As Jeffords observes: "The alien is an emblem of fertility gone out of control, its power to reproduce unbounded, its desire unlimited" (80). Mothering and the woman-as-reproducer are the films' subtexts which, with the narrative closure, become subsumed by the triumph of the paternal Symbolic Order.

Kristeva, who complicates the concept of the Symbolic by introducing the notion of the abject, can be of help here. The abject "is radically excluded" from the established order and occupies the place where "meaning collapses" (2). Thus, the abject, which is the site of banishment and uncleanliness, stays at the borders of signification. Kristeva claims that the Symbolic Order thrusts the abject aside in order to stay pure and unaltered. The abject, then, secures the position of the Symbolic as intact: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or
health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (4). As she suggests, "the abject does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). In this case, the Alien is clearly the abject: "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1).

Throughout both films, the Alien-abject is referred to as "It," "They," or "She," suggesting the impossibility of pinning it down. Thus, the Alien's moveable identity poses a threat to the phallocentric Symbolic Order which constructs its system according to singular borders of identity. Clearly, the Alien-signifier transgresses the boundaries of homogeneity, gender, stability, and origin, and it becomes the site of collapsing meaning. The Alien successfully disrupts signification. Till the end, the spectator never finds out where the Alien comes from, where it belongs to, and where it is going. Thus, the narrative busily works towards the annihilation of the Alien-abject in order to restore a space where meaning finally "makes sense." The Alien's powerful fragmentation, multiplication, alteration, and gender mobility need to be suppressed to restore the disturbed power of the Symbolic.

The Alien's power and intelligence are unquestionable: its acidic blood melts both the human species and their technology; it can transgress all spatial boundaries; it can reproduce beyond any imaginable control; and it can fight with its own body. The Alien, unlike the colonizers, does
not need any sophisticated weaponry to defend itself. Through its fragmented, yet omnipotent body, the Alien is expandable, excessive, truculent, and indestructible. The Alien is a survivor. The Mother/Monster clearly not only violates the patriarchal order, but it also trespasses its prescribed cultural boundaries.

The Alien becomes both the abominable threat to the colonizers and a curious specimen which they want to possess and control. Through the representation of its body, the Alien is the site of repulsion and terror, but also of desire. The Alien's revolting and slimy "otherness" serves as the colonizers' excuse to cover up their own aggressive intentions and their colonizing ruthless expansion beyond space and time. In Alien, for example, Ash, the Company's android, enraptured by the Alien's "perfect organism" says, "I admire its purity," and opts for testing the Alien, even at the cost of endangering the crew members. The computer-Mother reveals to Ripley that the very mission of their ship Nostromo was to investigate and to bring back any intelligent organism. As Zwinger remarks: "The real story is utterly monstrous: the Company has decided to use the human crew as whatever kind of fodder it takes to bring back a truly appalling organism for the corporate biological warfare division" (75). In Aliens, Burke-the-ruthless colonizer, who even attempts to impregnate Ripley's body with the Alien's embryo by letting the baby-alien out of the
testing canister while she is asleep, carries Ash's mission of appropriating the Alien for the Company's needs because the Alien is an "important species."

Although Alien/s attempts to privilege the clearly defined category of "the human," the very structure of the narrative successfully disrupts the human/animal, human/machine, and mother/monster distinctions. The moment the narratives of Alien/s set up these dichotomies, they become shifted, displaced, and confused. Thus, the constant interaction between the animal, machine, and human worlds becomes an underlying structure of the two films. The borders between humans and animals are set in the very beginning of Aliens when the belligerent and anxious Marines want to know if their mission is "just" another "bug-hunt." The Marines' impatient and ironic "yeah, yeah" during Ripley's lecture about the Alien's omnipotence suggests their unquestioned faith in the superiority of their technology. Curiously, the Marines label the Alien not only as a "bug," but also as an "illegal-alien," resonating xenophobic trepidations about the disruption of cultural "purity."

However, it is curious that the Marines also blur the division between the human and the machine. They are, to some extent, aliens themselves. They are "cyborgs"—hybrids of human and machine—whose aim is to terminate the enemy without any sentiments. The Marines-cyborgs represent the
technological power of late capitalism at its best. They are "state-of-the-art" soldiers, "bad-asses," whose bodies blend in with the completely automated weaponry they possess. They have cameras attached to their heads, carry powerful guns glued to their hips, wear locators on their wrists and motion trackers. Their bodies carry knives, grenades, pistols, and as a fusion of automatons and humans, they are posed as capable of transgressing the boundary of human endurance and aptitude.

The very mise-en-scene of Alien/s unsuccessfully strives to fix the unruly human/animal boundary. The human characters are usually fully lit and well visible, unlike the Alien which occupies the concealed and ambiguous space of murkiness, ugliness, and repulsiveness. The constructed coherence and congruity of the human cast is constantly juxtaposed with the Alien’s fragmentation and displacement. The Alien’s space, however, is the Company’s construct itself: the alienated station-colony, entangled metal constructions, the maze of confusing hallways, wires, hanging chains, air-shafts, and claustrophobic laboratories.

The confusion of human/animal borders is displayed through the interaction between the crew members as well. When, in Aliens, Ripley understands that Burke serves as a merciless executor of the Company’s colonizing interests, she expresses her disgust about his slimy intentions, thus upsetting the human/animal boundary again: "I don’t know
which species is worse." Later, when the crew has already lost several of its invincible Marines, and when an uncontrollable terror and darkness permeate the atmosphere, Ripley suggests: "They got the power." One of the Marines, Hudson, who already lost his "cool," screams: "What do you mean they got the power?! How could they cut the power, man, they are god-damn ANIMALS!!!

However, the ultimate disruption of human/animal borders and confusion of who the mother is and who the monster is comes with the staging of both the Alien and the Company itself. In Alien, the navigating Computer-Mother is not only programmed to bring the Alien back to earth, but it also betrays Ripley when its self-destructive mechanism refuses to turn off. Watching Ripley's desperate flight for survival, we are presented with the question of which monster is worse: the unknown Alien or the supposedly familiar Mother-Company? Aliens, however, more so than the first film, reveals colonizing impulses which are aimed directly at the body. The colonized body, then, assumes the faculty of the maternal. Both the Company and the Alien operate within the same colonizing sensibility. Although the narrative attempts to romanticize the crew's struggle to rescue "humanity" itself from the aggressive "Big Mama" who is "running the whole show," the violent intrusion into the body is actually performed by both the Company and the Alien. The Company surgically implants PDTs (Personal Data
Transmitters) in order to "possess" its colonists, just as the Alien penetrates the human body to lay its eggs inside it. As Jeffords concludes: "[T]he alien is the embodiment of the Company's suppressed desires for control through complete colonization/inhabitation of the body" (76).

The Alien-mother, thus, is entangled in a mode of double colonization: while she is the target of the Company’s colonization, she herself attempts to colonize the human body and to blur the imaginable limits between what is human and what is animal. Her mergence with the human body, then, culminates in violent birthing. The Alien's reproductive cycle is crucial for understanding the idea of birth as a shattering intrusion and fracture. Mother/Monster’s egg produces a spider-like flying creature that impregnates a human being with the Alien’s embryo. The seed then expands within the human breast and eventually births itself by piercing and rupturing the human body. The burst destroys the human body-base. Curiously, however, while in Alien the first victim of the Alien is a man, Kane, who dies through the Alien’s birth (Zwinger calls it "[T]he bloody birth parody," and "a horrific erection parody"), Aliens shows only women’s bodies as being disrupted and violated (75). While the male characters are being devoured by the Alien in off-screen space, the female characters (excluding masculinized Ripley) and the Alien become visible objects of violence. For example, the first colonizer whom the Marines
find already in the Alien's slimy and oozing cocoon is a
woman. Contaminated by the alien—as Jeffords says,
"[C]ontaminated by reproduction"—a woman begs to be
destroyed (80). What this scene performs is the idea that
reproduction itself is a threat and that it needs to be
violently controlled. This unnerving phenomenon of
rupturing women's bodies through birth, constructed to feed
the spectatorial anxiety, reveals the phobic fear of the
maternal that Kristeva writes about and the compulsive need
to control it.

The happy-end emergence of the nuclear family with
vulnerable, crippled father Hicks, triumphant-aggressive
mother Ripley, and an adopted enduring child Newt does not
challenge the patriarchal norms. As Jeffords observes:
"Hicks is not simply a man Ripley met in space, but is
instead a Marine sent there to protect the Company's
interests; Newt is not Ripley's child, but is instead a
daughter of the Company's colonizing strategies. The new
family, product of the new 'feminism,' can now afford to
stop fighting the corporate because it is the
corporate" (77). The Alien's transgressing body, however,
left drifting in the cosmos, holds the question of the
maternal unresolved, still feeding the paternal agency with
the trepidation about maternity.
Notes

1. Linda Kintz in her chapter, "Relearning Language: A Clean Break or the Mess of Coagulation," offers a comprehensive explanation of the Symbolic: "[T]he Symbolic—the larger, symbolic structures into which we are all inserted, the system of signs that organizes naming, syntax, semantics, denotations that historically precede us" (101). See The Subject's Tragedy: Political Poetics, Feminist Theory and Drama. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).

2. Saussure claims that a linguistic sign, e.g. a word, unites a concept and an acoustic image, not a thing and a name. He calls the concept "signified" and the acoustic image, a sound, "signifier." The unity of the two forms a complete sign, a verbal sound, a word. So, the "signifier" is the "sound-image," and the "signified" is the meaning generated by this sound. The signifier and the signified are always moving together and cannot exist separately.

3. In Aesthetics of Film, Jacques Aumont employs the literary terms of the narrative, narration and diegesis as useful for the study of cinematic images. The narrative is a literary term referring to telling a story. In cinema, however, the narrative is more complex as it embraces images, spoken and written words, sounds and music. Also,
the film narrative is presented as a closed discourse. *Narration* concerns itself with the relation between the enunciator and the enunciation. *Diegesis* (a story) is characterized as the signified content, even if the content lacks "dramatic intensity." Diegesis presupposes the implementation of fictional elements (attracting the viewer's attention more to the imaginary than to the real). Diegesis refers to the story which is formed by a viewer/subject who composes his/her unique narrative out of given elements. See *Aesthetics of Film*. Trans. Richard Neupert. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).
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In the patriarchal landscape of modern culture, at the time when the intensification of violence against women is still rising, pornographic imagery has come to be treated as an enactment of male brutality. Trying to situate myself theoretically to write about pornography, I find myself amidst the split which has occurred within the feminist movement along the lines of what pornography might signify. Although both the anti-pornography and pro-pornography feminists critique violence against women, and objectification and fragmentation of women's bodies always available to the male consumers, they come up with different interpretations of how to "read" pornography and even dispute whether to read it at all.

The anti-porn feminists like Robin Morgan, Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon, or Catherine Itzin generally equate male sexuality with violence, and perceive pornography as a depiction of this violence. In the 1980's, in Minneapolis, MacKinnon and Dworkin drafted a bill outlawing the depiction of sexual subordination of women, and defined pornography as "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words" (MacKinnon 300). On the other side of the spectrum, pro-porn feminists dispute this proposed definition of pornography and its suggested implication of women's protection against
subordination and objectification. Lynne Segal, a pro-porn feminist, in "Does Pornography Cause Violence?," describes the convictions of the Feminists Against Censorship group in this way: "They see it as a complete mistake to reduce the dominance of sexism and misogyny in our culture to sexuality and its representations" (8). Generally, the pro-porn, anti-censorship feminists suggest that what we need is not the termination of pornographic imagery, but more sexually outspoken materials produced by women coming from different racial and class backgrounds. What becomes critical in their discussion is also the need to debate a diversity of sexual representations in women's lives like masturbation, S/M relations, bondage, or homosexuality, together with the pressing economic and social issues of women's exploitation. My project stands on the pro-porn side. While closely examining the binary opposition between pornography and erotica, which appears to stand at the center of the anti-porn debate, I want to seek the possibilities of a feminist re-reading of power, pleasure, and the politics of the gaze.

The unsettling and multilayered discourse of pornography not only consistently refuses to order itself in a coherent fashion, but it also resists a stable and fixed interpretation. It seems crucial to stress that the discourse of pornography has not been the monolithic construct it is often presented to be. Carol Clover in her
introduction to *Dirty Looks*, an anthology which stands on the anti-censorship side, writes:

It [pornography] comprises a great variety of images and scenarios, many of which fall outside the standard scheme of male-female relations, many of which contradict one another, and many of which have little to do with women (as in the case of gay male or male transvestite pornography, for example) or even with men (lesbian pornography). (2)

What Clover rightly addresses is the complicatedness and multiple layering of pornographic imagery. She draws our attention to the fact that we cannot address pornographic sensibility solely in terms of the heterosexual dominant structure. The heterosexual normative model which has historically presented itself as the "universal," and therefore the legitimate mode of being, is constantly being resisted by both theory and praxis. For example, Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* undermines the Lacanian concept of the phallus as the transcendental signifier which always guarantees full meaning (89). She suggests that because the phallus is only a part of the signifying practice and not its origin, it is as "moveable" as any other signifier. In other words, the phallus as a privileged signifier is not static and fixed, but fluid and open to signifying modulations. Butler claims that the notion of the phallus as a privileged signifier comes from its cultural reinforcement, but precisely because it is constructed, it can be manipulated and deprivileged.
Butler herself performs such a manipulation in the chapter "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary" where she introduces the idea of the lesbian phallus, which displaces the notion of the penis as the imaginary site of power. By displacing the idea of the penis—as the symbol of the heterosexist scheme—Butler suggests that sexual difference does not depend on the anatomical parts themselves. The lesbian phallus frees bodily desires from the monolithic concept of pleasure. Butler also proposes that to say the phallus is lesbian both suggests that it is and it is not the site of masculine power. The lesbian phallus evokes the equation of the phallus with the penis, but at the same time, through its reconfiguration, it undercuts this equation. Thus, the lesbian phallus elicits the idea of the penis and erases it. By constructing the notion of the lesbian phallus, Butler undercuts the normative, heterosexist model of "sex" which seeks to fix gender. Resisting this assumption, she insists that the concept of sexuality is not locked in a fixed heterosexual framework, but that it is open to the workings of the signifying practice itself. Thus, a "reading" of pornography necessarily needs to overstep the boundary of the heterosexist frame in order to challenge the normative vision of sexuality.

The deprivileging of the imaginary phallus and the factual penis that Butler talks about can be seen, for
example, in *On Our Backs*, a pro-porn, anti-censorship magazine "for the adventurous lesbian." The March/April 1994 issue of *On Our Backs* features, as its special concern, questions and representations of lesbians, sex, and motherhood. The magazine boldly embraces the idea of the pornographic body (Clover's term) by presenting women who are nude and pregnant. I think that the unsettling black and white photographs of OOB successfully collapse the rigid binary of "pornography" and "erotica" set by pro-censorship feminists. Instead of maintaining firm borders, these photographs start occupying the space of fluidity which resists clear-cut codification.

The pornography/erotica split has played a crucial role in the anti-porn and pro-censorship debate. In her book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Andrea Dworkin, who has provided one of the strongest feminist voices in the anti-pornography campaign, refers to this division:

Feminists have made honorable efforts to define the difference [between pornography and erotica], in general asserting that erotica involves mutuality and reciprocity, whereas pornography involves dominance and violence. (preface)

This boundary of difference between "mutuality" and "violence," however, refuses to stay fixed. For example, one of the articles in this issue of OOB presents an image of a pregnant woman with an attached dildo harness. This photograph might be interpreted as violent, but, as a photographic representation of a text, this picture becomes
a visual enactment of the writing, which describes a love scene between two lesbians, one of whom is pregnant (30-31). The impossibility of determining a fixed enclosure between "violence/dominance" and "mutuality/ reciprocity," that Dworkin stresses as the critical distinction between pornography and erotica, shows in this particular instance not only a resistance to this strict dichotomy but also an effective explosion of its theoretical framework.

I analyze the image of a pregnant body with a dildo harness to challenge and complicate Dworkin's argument about the position of a woman in heterosexual intercourse, where the female is portrayed as the passive object/recipient of the invading male sexual power, and where male violence is projected as "natural." Dworkin also assumes the heterosexual model as the normative sexual mode of expressing one's desire:

Sex, a word potentially so inclusive and evocative, is whittled down by the male so that, in fact, it means penile intromission. Commonly referred to as "it," sex is defined in action only by what the male does with his penis. Fucking--the penis thrusting--is the magical, hidden meaning of "it," the reason for sex, the expensive experience through which the male realizes his sexual power. In practice, fucking is an act of possession--simultaneously and act of ownership, taking, force; it is conquering; it expresses in intimacy power over and against, body to body, person to thing. "The sex act" means penile intromission followed by penile thrusting, or fucking. The woman is acted on; the man acts and through action expresses sexual power, the power of masculinity. Fucking requires that the male act on one who has less power and this valuation is so deep, so completely implicit in the act, that the one who is fucked is stigmatized as
feminine during the act even when not anatomically female. In the male system, sex is the penis, the penis is sexual power, its use in fucking is manhood [emphasis added]. (23)

I quote this long passage to show that ultimately Dworkin does not challenge the patriarchal structure at work and does not negotiate an active space for female subjectivity. Rather, she reinforces male privilege, and, by using pornographic language, she further objectifies and victimizes the female subject. I want to argue that Dworkin universalizes the female body while neglecting its specificities and particularities amidst the multiplicity of sexual practices. She also ascribes passivity to female subjects as their "normal" sexual mode. Female desire is presented here as either non-existent or static at best, and it constructs itself as forever fixed by the workings of the masculine power. Describing heterosexual intercourse in such a way, Dworkin privileges male desire by locating the penis at the center of her discourse. Linda Williams in her book Hard Core challenges this very assumption:

If phallic sexuality is contaminated by power, this tactic seems to say, if it is essentially violent and perverse, then female sexuality shall be defined as its opposite: as not-violent and not-perverse--a pure and natural pleasure uncontaminated by power. (20)

As Williams appropriately suggests, the relations of power cannot be left out of the discussion on female sexuality. In other words, Williams opposes Dworkin's idea that male sexuality is inherently violent and that women are asexual
beings occupying the space of sensual gentleness, free of power relations.

The female lovers described in the text next to the dildo-with-a-harness-photograph both metaphorically and literally possess the "lesbian phallus." More importantly, however, the dildo/phallus belongs to both women. The interchangeability of the dildo/phallus suggests the shifting power positions between the lovers and their attempt to collapse Dworkin’s sexual categories of subject/object. Moreover, the pregnant woman, whose "natural" mode might be thought of as gentle and non-violent, is instead portrayed as the instigating seductress who acts roughly and fervently. The lesbian women, who both "own" the penis, undercut Dworkin’s assumption that the owner of the penis is inherently the powerful male subject performing the violent act of penetration. Clearly, the artificial penis does not become the center of their intercourse, as Dworkin would like to have it, but rather it is used as one of the many ways in which their sexual play is expressed.

This pornography/erotica split inevitably emerges in almost any discussion on pornography. For example, in the documentary film Patently Offensive: Porn under Siege (1992), one of the representatives of Women Against Pornography describes this separation in the following way:

We make a distinction between pornography and erotica. We define erotica as any kind of
sexually explicit material premised on equality, mutuality, reciprocity. One of the unfortunate problems is the pornographers have a habit of calling a lot of the material they produce, that is very demeaning to women, that subordinates women, "erotica." So, there is a little bit of a problem with language [emphasis added] here.

Ruby Rich in her discussion of yet another documentary on pornography, *Not a Love Story* (1983), addresses this very issue of language. I believe that she attempts to reveal and undermine the disorderly distinction between porn and erotica and to move us into a more dialectical space of understanding language:

> But, what is pornography and what is eroticism? One is bad, the other is good (guess which). Fixing the dividing line is rather like redlining a neighborhood: the "bad" neighborhood is always the place where someone else lives. Porn is the same. If I like it, it's erotic; if you like it, it's pornographic. (410)

The arbitrariness of signs becomes critical to this question of meaning because language itself, as a signifying practice, refuses to signify universally and to provide a timeless interpretation regardless of the specificity of social and historical conditions. ¹

Butler's discussion of language can aptly illustrate the impossibility of fixing language and interpretation. Working off the assumption that we cannot fully control or own the discourse, Butler undermines the idea of the "authorial intention." Language inevitably "escapes" the writer (writer understood in a broad sense of this word to
include those who "produce" pornography as well) and refuses to order itself in an unchangeable and stable fashion. The one who produces speech always already works in a space of moving signification and, therefore, neither can fully control his/her discursive production nor prevent signification from working against his/her intentions. Butler also argues that we cannot own signification; interpretation of one's words always leaves us in an open, often vulnerable place where we speak and are spoken at the same time (241). Thus, in the light of this assumption, the very idea of deciding to produce or "read" pornographic materials in terms of fixed meaning becomes futile at best. I believe that post-structural theory, which addresses the notion that "meaning" is not stable but positional, stays crucial for decoding the pornographic sensibility.  

And one may ask now why is the discussion of language vital to the debate on pornography? Being situated in a post-structural theoretical framework, I believe that we cannot talk about cultural representations (porn being one of them) without reminding ourselves that we are always already creating within the linguistic space of a historically specific culture. We need to look at the institution of pornography as a cultural form that is unstable and historically shifting. By doing this, we may start challenging the anti-porn position that the very institution of porn refuses a space for female agency. We
may also start looking at places, like the performance art of Annie Sprinkle, Susie Bright, or Valie Export, where women can negotiate a dynamic space for their agency within the heterogeneity of sexual representations. Porn is language, and yet, it has often been talked about as if it existed outside language, outside specific cultural and socio-historical contexts. Relating post-structural theory to the persistent porn/erotica distinction, I want to emphasize, using Linda William's words, that "one person's pornography is another person's erotica" (6).

The marginalization of the pornographic discourse and its degradation to the lowest ranks of art is also historically connected with traditional perceptions of artistic creation. The porn/erotica debate is inevitably linked with the polemic on high and low art. Traditional aesthetic concepts consider art as a sublime value which can be embraced only by a sophisticated audience. Within this theoretical framework, art is positioned as a separate sphere of experience, accessible exclusively to preferred spectators and participants. Thus, the intellectual (historically white male) is destined to experience sublime art, which poses itself as "true." The "ordinary" spectator, not being refined enough, is left out and denied access to this experience. Considering this notion of art alongside the issue of pornography, I want to quote Clover who addresses this situation in the following way:
"Pornography's shame lies in the fact that it has one simple, unequivocal intention: to excite its consumer. We are in general suspicious of forms ... that aim themselves so directly at the body ..." (3). Clover draws on an assumption which claims that there are two separate spheres of experiencing art forms: through the power of the intellect and through the body. Not surprisingly, forms that are considered intellectual (psychological dramas, experimental films, for example) are traditionally linked with the mind, while "lower" forms like melodramas or horror films (Clover's example) are associated with bodily experience. Without a doubt, pornography falls into the category of low art; whereas erotica occupies the realm of high art.

The weight of this logic suggests that erotica is the legitimate sexual mode expressed in art, while porn is the dirty discourse capable of dangerously exciting the body. Because pornography is often thought of as aiming only at the body, the arising implication suggests that porn does not have to be embraced by critical thinking. Making an attempt to philosophize the body, Butler claims that signification is traditionally talked about as if it were an abstract and universal entity with no connection to the body. She insists that we should include the body in the debates on hegemonic ideology to examine how the subject is culturally produced in terms of gender (231). In her
preface to *Bodies that Matter*, however, Butler acknowledges the difficulties of writing about the body and its materiality:

> I reflected that this wavering might be the vocational difficulty of those trained in philosophy, always at some distance from corporeal matters, who try in that disembodied way to demarcate bodily terrains: they invariably miss the body or, worse, write against it. (ix)

I believe that the anti-porn argument, by insisting on the porn/erotica segregation, does write against the body. Wanting to find places that insist on addressing the body, we may look at the controversial performance art of Annie Sprinkle, as an attempt to embrace the body in praxis and to open up this mystified realm of high art. Her performances aim at removing art from the pedestal of high culture and making it available to the masses. In that sense, Sprinkle’s performance is a political maneuver. She is clearly politicizing and problematizing art by bringing an awareness of the diversity of sexual representations to aesthetic sensibility.

The discussion of high/low art and the erotica/porn split is a legacy of Western metaphysics which has organized itself around Aristotelian logic. This phallogocentric dichotomy, which is based on either/or exclusionary oppositions, has privileged oneness, and denied dialectical way of thinking that would be based on a constant movement. This logic disciplines us to think in terms of binary oppositions like man/woman, self/other, civilized/savage,
culture/nature, mind/body or the discussed erotica/porn dichotomy. Consequently, in the established hierarchy, the place of agency historically belongs to the privileged white male intellectual who claims the cultural space of art and its interpretation. I want to go back to Rich's discussion of Not a Love Story to illustrate how this film is constructed within the realms of this binary thinking and how it ultimately preserves the historically privileged space of the male viewer of culture. I also wish to show how language escapes the producers of the film and how it starts signifying against the authors' intentions. I hope to provide a subversive reading of Not a Love Story by using it to challenge the anti-porn stance, a position which this film attempts to embrace.

Rich provides an extraordinary analysis of Bonnie Klein's Not a Love Story, the first documentary addressing the issue of pornography from a woman's perspective. Rich is very critical about the film's use of the camera, its religious preaching, its manipulation with voyeurism, and its limited political and social focus. She argues that the film ultimately does not help in looking critically at the issue of pornography, but that it participates in the voyeurism and objectification of women perpetuated by patriarchy. She believes that the camera's work is representative of the whole film's structure: the camera along with the male customers are invisible and protected by
the filmmaker. Often the camera is positioned behind the
shoulder of the male client, and it never offers a shot from
the point of view of the women on stage. The film also
leaves out the economic forces and social pressures that
make women move into the porn industry. Although the
filmmakers mention the connection of pornography and
advertising, they never explicate the crucial correlation
between the two. They also omit an analysis of consumer
capitalist culture which propels pornography, and even more
importantly, they free the film from the issues of race and
class.

Rich believes that the issue of pornography
depersonalizes the discourse of sexuality, and that the porn
debate locks itself within the futile eroticism-versus-
pornography distinction. Moreover, the whole debate is
framed within the terms of heterosexuality. Ultimately, *Not
a Love Story*, embraced by the mass media, does not pose any
threat to the male privilege. In its highly emotional
appeal, it safely overlooks social analysis, historical
perspectives and larger questions of representation.

I agree with Rich's analysis. What interests me here,
though, is the film's attempt to freeze and singularise
female desire, while preserving the masculine codes of
looking. The act of looking, the gaze, is intertwined with
relations of power. Since historically the male subject
occupies the place of active agency, consequently, the gaze
and the power which governs its course belongs to the male who dictates the acts of looking. However, this is not to say that women do not look and that they do not produce forms of art that subvert the traditional constructions of looking. On the contrary, as the British photographer Grace Lau argues in her essay "Confession of a Complete Scopophilec," women artists are fiercely piercing through the male-monopolized industry of visual imagery, claiming their space as both active producers and lookers (193).

Not a Love Story, however, does not negotiate a space for critical analysis about pornography, nor does it challenge the structure of a male gaze. Instead, the film speaks to the female spectators through tears of the participating women researchers, assuming the uniformity of female readings of pornography. The film attempts to scrutinize the workings of scopophilic pleasure generated by pornographic sensibility, but it ends up reinscribing the gaze where it traditionally belongs: to the male viewer. Watching the stripper's, Linda Lee Tracey, cathartic crusade through the porn world, we are coerced into thinking that women do not derive pleasure from looking. The film also suggests that those women who still participate in the production of porn for a variety of reasons, simply have not awaken yet to see clearly their sins.

In the very beginning, director Bonnie Klein gives us her reasons for exploring the world of pornography: "I need
to understand what is going on behind these doors and how it affects my own life." Her way of understanding, however, is premised on the assumption that pornography is filth that pleases only the male viewer who always has the privilege of experiencing voyeuristic pleasure. The camera's insistence on showing the satisfied male spectator over and over again suggests that males are inherently the ones who look. When eventually Linda becomes an active spectator as well, she takes no pleasure in looking. Linda and the director visit a live theater/video porn arcade in New York, where Linda asks the owner to show her something "interesting." After he plays the scene for her where a woman is shown in bondage, she comments: "That hurts. That really hurts a lot. That did not turn me on. Do you have any films where they are really making love together, having a good time, without any heavy power?" In turn, she is shown another scene where a woman performs fellatio. She seems to be revolted again: "Look, she is doing it all to him." Two things happen here. In the first instance, Linda assumes that pain is universal; i.e. that her pain is also the portrayed character's pain, and that there is one legitimate category of materials that turn us on. She also assumes that the film could offer her a spectatorial pleasure if the sexual scene she has just seen involved no power play. Moreover, she suggests that the film could become "erotic" if only "he was doing it all to her." The implications here
resonate with Dworkin's presumption about the passivity of a female subject involved in sexual relations.

What follows as an attempt to escape the filth of pornography is the hugging scene between Linda and Bonnie Klein:

Bonnie: "Does it make you worry that...about your own perception of yourself?
Linda: "No, no, no. It's starting to get to me on an emotional level, on the humanity level."

Klein refers here to Linda's own situatedness as the stripper who started this journey being convinced that she earns money in a legitimate way. The purpose of the film's narration is to awaken Linda from the darkness of false consciousness and to show her the misery and hopelessness of her own position. And the film is undoubtedly successful: as we watch the unfolding of the narrative structure, Linda goes through the transformative act of awakening. It is Linda's "humanity level," which is being shaken by the unsettling pornographic imagery, that needs to stay intact. And it is her "emotional level" which is supposed to strike our empathy as the ultimate proof about the dangers of pornography. One of the final comments of the film is given by a disembodied female voice: "I think that what we have to do is to reject the pornographic images of ourselves." The concluding implications suggest that we need to embrace our "humanity level" by leaving out the body in the fuzzy realm of erotica where it would stay free from power relations and
free from the power of looking.

Although the film glances at S/M relations, S/M dynamics are neither explained in their specificities nor are they suggested as one of the many possibilities of sexual representations. The anti-porn logic, that clearly functions as the premise of *Not a Love Story*, can be further challenged and complicated when we do think about controversial S/M relations whose discourse consistently insists on highlighting the body. Williams, for example, suggests that S/M manifestations effectively disrupt the homogenous construct of sexual representations:

> Sadomasochistic scenarios present an even more difficult problem in the Meese Commission's assessment of violence in sexual representation, for here the violence is depicted not as actual coercion but as a highly ritualized game in which the participants consent to play predetermined roles of dominance and submission. Discussion thus often ignores the fact that in these scenario women can just as well be--and often are--the dominators. (18)

Describing the detailed workings of the Meese Commission and the *Women Against Pornography* movement, William notes that the commission's condemnation of violent pornography plays on the valid concerns about the escalation of violence against women in the contemporary society at large. However, the critique of violence rests on the sexual nature of pornographic materials and fails to identify violence prevalent in other non-explicitly sexual genres, for example, in "slasher" films (18):
The commission then contradictorily continues to indict pornography as if it were the ultimate harm, thus displacing legitimate concern for runaway violence and violent sexual crimes onto the legally vulnerable scapegoat of pornography. (Williams 18-19)

Furthermore, Williams scrutinizes the commission's rhetoric based on puritanical moral and ethical values which endorse "normal" sexuality and condemn any other unconventional or "dangerous" sexual practices. Clearly, S/M scenarios fit right into the category of both perversion and violence since they do not conform to the prescribed norms of "proper" sexual behavior. Because S/M subculture defies prescribed heterosexual practices, it further undermines and complicates any homogeneous understanding of pornography. Williams, for example, who treats pornography as a genre, suggests that in order to introduce the alternative position of women's power and pleasure we need to be wary of the anti-porn arguments which claim that pornography is incapable of addressing the whole truth of sexuality (22):

Here the implication is that a whole truth of sexuality actually exists, outside of language, discourse, and power. This idea, I argue, is the central fallacy of all the anti-porn feminist position: that a single, whole sexuality exists opposed to the supposed deviations and abnormalities of somebody else's fragmentation. (23)

Following Williams' line of argumentation, I think that instead of being fixated on protecting the notion of "natural" sexuality, a more complex feminist position on pornography and sexuality must be negotiated. The anti-porn
belief that if we could get rid of pornographic materials, which supposedly cause harm, women would be free from objectification, victimization, brutality, and rape, needs to be challenged: "the idea that pornographic material causes men’s violence tends to excuse the behavior of men who are sexually coercive and violent, by removing the blame on to pornography" (Segal 17). Instead of blaming pornography for causing violence against women, we can concentrate on challenging and resisting the misogynistic culture and its dominant fiction. 5 One of the modes of resistance may be, for example, "reading" the most "innocent" cultural materials like mainstream films and commercials which portray and often also encourage violence against women. It is this "innocence" of various cultural productions which disguises the workings of the phallocentric logic and its phobic tendencies manifested through the concepts of heterosexism, gender, and race purity. We cannot deny that we are historically placed within the capitalistic moment where commodification and objectification happen; but we can, I believe, intervene in the process of cultural constructedness and find pleasure in subverting cultural texts by using them in a way they have never been intended to be used.
Notes

1. I am referring here to Saussure's discussion of the arbitrariness of language and his claim that language has neither ideas nor sounds that exist before the linguistic system. Saussure suggests here that words cannot reflect a reality outside language. This is his controversial claim that nothing exists prior to the linguistic practice and that there is no inherent "meaning" in words, only differences. His claim that neither the signifier nor the signified precede the linguistic system suggests that the "meaning" does not precede language either, and that it does not occupy a sphere outside language. Instead, meaning is produced and negotiated through differences within language. See Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

2. I am using here Derrida's notion that "meaning" is not a separate "entity" and that it does not exist outside the linguistic system, but that instead it is mediated through "différance" within that system. Unlike Saussure, who privileges the signified as a reference point, Derrida argues that all terms are secondary because they carry "traces;" i.e. they carry elements of other terms with which they are interconnected and with which they interact. The fact that the signified is also a signifier for another signified points to the endlessness of play within the
signifying practice. The concept of "traces" suggests that there are no "pure" terms in and of themselves, but rather that language rests on the principle of deferral; i.e. on the idea that signification is produced through a series of differences and is always temporally deferred. In other words, each time we speak or write, the significance or meaning is "promised" and then deferred so that we can never "catch," stabilize, or define meaning. See excerpts from "Difference" (1968), *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. by Anthony Easthope and Kate McGowan. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 108-132.


5. I am referring here to Kaja Silverman's discussion on the dominant fiction. She complicates the Althusserian model of ideology and instead uses the term of the dominant fiction which embraces society's mode of production, historical issues of gender, class, race, and the Symbolic Order (language and its institutions). See *Male*
**Works Cited**


Patently Offensive: Porn under Siege. Videorecording.


