



Fig. A

383

T324

NC 0041081 0



M0056590NC

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

YOUR COMFORT IS MY SILENCE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF PRINTMAKING

BY

MOLLY KALLEN (MCANAILLY BURKE)

MAY 1985

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS.....	4
Chapter I.....	5
Chapter II.....	14
Chapter III.....	20
Chapter IV.....	29
Chapter V.....	36
.....	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	42

ILLUSTRATIONS

No.

A. "Your Comfort is my silence" by Barbara Kruger

B. "We Believe in the Power of Creative Imagination" by Hans Haacke

C. "What Does Possession Mean to You?" by Victor Burgin

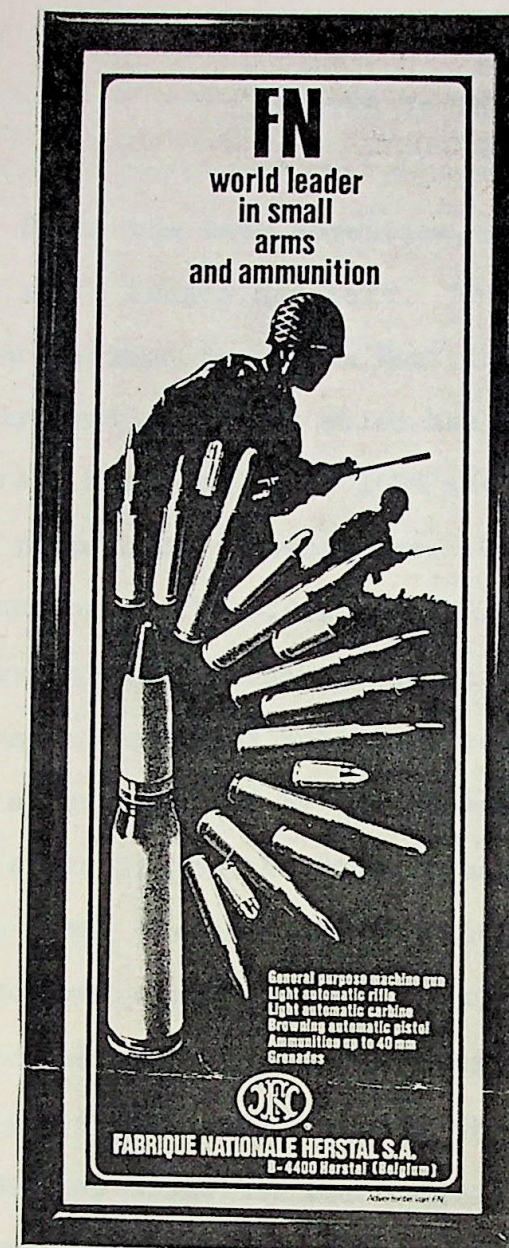


Fig. B



Fig. C.

CHAPTER 1: THEORIES OF PHOTO USAGE

Since the late Seventies, Barbara Kruger has been working primarily with photo images and text. She began her career as a designer and picture editor for Conde Nast in the early Seventies, but was concurrently producing work which has been compared to pattern painting.¹ However, her work since 1978 and into the present has been of the graphic propaganda poster genre. With little tradition of political poster production in the U.S.A., she is currently showing more widely and receiving more notice in the United Kingdom than in the United States. A greater degree of political censorship in the U.S.A. may be responsible, as exemplified by the attempts made to stop her feminist diatribe from appearing on the Times Square spectacular sign in 1984.² In this essay I would like to concentrate on Kruger's own intention and motives concerning her work, rather than its context of reception and production. I will, however, be giving special attention to concomitant theoretical research that can be shown to have a bearing on her choices of method and imagery.

Kruger's photo images are appropriated from media sources. Many of these images are not contemporary, and though her extreme use of cropping makes it difficult to locate them by date, many would appear to be from the Forties, Fifties, and Sixties. Kruger borrows imagery from a number of sources which she does not disclose, but many are suspiciously suggestive of the advertisements for tranquilisers found in medical magazines: the 'patient' in these advertisements is almost always female. Kruger's appropriated images are then enlarged and selectively cropped, and the finished product is of a standard poster size. According to Carrie Rickey,³ who reviewed a show in which Kruger took

part in 1981, an authoritative copy and larger-than-life image is the most commonly used and commanding visual hook employed by both art and advertising. When text is included with the image, the words are assumed by the spectator to subtitle a truth implicit in the photo image. The photo does not lie, and it is assumed the text exists to modify, explain, or qualify the intrinsic truth of the photo image.

Barbara Kruger is not the first to juxtapose text and photo image for political purposes. She belongs to a photo-montage tradition most accessibly exemplified by Russian Constructivists-cum-Productivists in the first few decades of the century, and carried on by John Heartfield during Hitler's rise and reign. Kruger acknowledges this debt visually in her gallery showings by the introduction of red frames to her black and white posters, as in the Annina Nosei Gallery show, 1983. The red, the white and the black have been the political poster's primary colours since the Productivists first began employing montage. Red, white and black are of economic as well as visual benefit to the graphic designer, as red, applied as spot colour, maintains an aggressive enhancement of the primary black and white contrast. Black and white photography is linked to an aesthetic tradition of photojournalism---it is an iconic representation of economy, immediacy, and the rapid dissemination of truths. Barbara Kruger's tangible and unconcealed link to both photojournalism and political propaganda poster tradition place her as a logical outgrowth of the political poster's history.

The use of photography for political purposes maintains as its axiom a concept of the photo image as a public, rather than a private language. Painting is seen as a private discourse invested with its own internal references, whereas the photo image, it is believed, pertains directly to the real. Jo Spence, in her article "Sign as a Site of Class Struggle---Reflections on the Works by John Heartfield"⁴ has described the viewer's faith in the photographic image as the "reality

effect": a belief in the camera's objectivity as a machine without personal bias. Hence, continues Spence, viewers are deceived into believing that meaning is generated freely from within themselves, and that consequently their own interpretations of the photo image are objective. In the montage tradition, however, the relationship between image, text, and context is problematised by a disruption of continuity and the introduction of contradictory elements. Sergei Eisenstein explains in terms of film montage that in the juxtaposition of disparate photo images "each separately corresponds to an object, to a fact, but their combination corresponds to a concept".⁵ The spectator's monodirectional relationship to the montaged image is interrupted, not only by the combination of disparate images, but because in so doing the montage does not efface the traces of its own production. The spectator must take responsibility for his or her interpretation and make choices about the connections between contradictory montaged elements. Thus a disabling of direct representation through photography makes possible an effective recognition and identification of the ideologically constituted "self" as a site of choices, a site of worldview observations which are both variable and negotiable.

Artists who attempt to disrupt and subvert ideological representations, like John Heartfield and Barbara Kruger, use montage to expose the fetishistic structure of representation. A fetishism of contiguity and narrative requires a directed voice which does not claim authorship or tell us who is speaking.⁶ Thus contiguity appears as contingency, and the ideological masquerades as the historical. Truth appears as an axiom innocent of motive, and visual perception, according to Spence, maintains a dependency upon "existing structures of meaning whose concealment becomes a means of social control".⁷ As well as an authoritative voice, a rigid fixity of the subject is essential to the maintenance of a dominant ideology. The relationship between

the subject and the systems of representation must be naturalised, and the fixed subject will be that to which ideological structures such as Duty, Morality, and Law may be addressed.⁸ It is upon this fixed subject that communication is predicated and therefore naturalised, thus conferring upon it a normative status whereby interpretations of the Voice outside of the dominant one may be seen as aberrant.

Volosinov has stated that everything ideological contains a semi-otic value;⁹ the authoritative voice relies upon stereotypes for the dissemination of controlled meaning. The reduction of an image, phrase, or gesture to a stereotype hastens the circulation of values, for, as is stated above, it treats the category of its subject of reception as a closure or axiom. Thus the fixed image does not require persuasion to inflict its message, its connotative elements become a reflex in the constructed subject of its address, as opposed to a conscious decision. The gestural stereotype as a method of ideological control parades as an icon of the natural world, and to refuse the dominant reading, to step outside of collective subjectivity, is to be seen as an act of political subversion, or else madness. The dialogue between stereotype and subject becomes totalitarian, and the subject is thus fixed in a permanent position of subservience, in accordance with the social structure and its existing contradictory relations and powers.¹⁰

Barbara Kruger's montage elements, appropriated both conspicuously and deliberately from media sources, express her desire to impede and disrupt the circulation of stereotypes. She wishes to expose the way these ideological posturings are staged in media domination, claiming a desire to ruin certain representations,¹¹ particularly those relying on the reduction of action to gesture, and gesture to pose. Many of Kruger's texts and images refer directly to the ossification of gesture as pose, and the dissemination of pose as sign. The sign, as ideological value, becomes a stereotype, and an instrument of ideological subjection.

It is the human body which is most often used as an instrument for the gestural stereotype; according to Foucault the body becomes invested with the relations of power and domination ^{according to} its economic use. A sexual or political revolt by the body, an assertion of its biological autonomy, is at first met with repression by these power relations, but repression does not have the lasting effect of exploitation.¹² The gestural stereotype may exploit the erotic and the horrific with equal effectiveness by appropriating the inherent tensions produced by shock. The technique is repetition: these originally contradiction-charged images, such as those dealing with violence or sexual taboos, are multiplied and reduced to poses that sap their invested impact. This reduction of tensions is part of the naturalising process of ideologies discussed above, involving a reification of the spectator which, according to Craig Owens, disavows agency. The body, he continues, is "dismantled as a locus of practice and re-assembled as a continuous series of gestures and poses, that is, as a semiotic field".¹³ The body thus ceases to signify, becoming an object of signification, and forcing a false collectivisation of imagery over which social control may be maintained.

The ideological function of the reduction of physical action to stereotype is, according to Foucault, an exercise of power which extends, as a central myth, the idea of a social body constituted by the universality of wills, not as collective consensus but rather, as its inversion, "the materiality of power operating on the very body of individuals".¹⁴

The motive of this inversion is an effective immobilisation of the social body. Barbara Kruger, like Foucault, may be operating against a prioritising of ideology as the main weapon of social control. The gestural stereotype reduces the individual to the particular, addresses the subject in its alienation from an already false collectivity of constitution.

In one piece a woman's silhouette is shown rigidly pinned in place, in others it is shown shattered as in a mirror, or immobilised in a statue. Never does the body as personality address the viewer in Kruger's work: it is the viewer that must engage with the stereotype and negotiate its power. The effects of power upon the body reduces it to an unassimilable construct, and the subject is at once seduced by the gesture as meaning and alienated from its own social and biological make-up. Made insecure, the subject confronts its lack, and in doing so is seduced back into the gesture as meaning in order to re-integrate with itself. Thus the subject is both socially controlled and individually prevented from finding a collective identity.

Barbara Kruger's methods of confusing the stereotype's address include the inclusion of equivocal and contradictory texts juxtaposed with her cropped photos, not only to show that the representation of the stereotype is fallacious, but to expose the construction, the false unification of gestural interpretation. She has employed religious, sexual, film-icon and art-historical stereotypes in the photo images, while frequently making references to verbal clichés. For instance, "You delight in the loss of others" shows a quick-shutter suspension of a woman's hand spilling a glass of milk: the spilt milk we should not cry over, the milk which belongs to the other, not to us. Other images include Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fingers (the text reads "You invest in the Divinity of the masterpiece") and the victorious logo of the Olympic Games, the hand holding a torch in front of a heart.

The stereotype wins by intimidation for it implies not only contemporary truth, but historically accumulated fact. Craig Owens refers to Kruger's work as employing the rhetoric of intimidation: Kruger herself has said that her work "does not pose a threat, but

but signifies a threat".¹⁵ The stereotype as a means of social control has been referred to as an apotrope, a gesture which intimidates into submission without ever having to make physical contact. Kruger, however, attempts to confuse the stereotypical codes, to render them illegible, while still maintaining their engagement of the viewer in an accusatory manner. In piece "I am your'slice of life" an innocuous verbal cliché is juxtaposed with a threatening image of three blades poised on edge, about to thrust into the surface of smooth but uncertain identity.

To return to the position of the subject as addressee, Kruger consistently refuses the viewer a secure location. If the image and the text do not directly address one another, with which can the viewer identify, and with which guerrilla pronoun? An insecurity of position for the receptor is a prescription for rage; it is impossible to tell from Kruger's means of address what the appropriate stance should be, or to whom the accusations are addressed. At the same time, the viewer feels assaulted, for the sense of objective selfhood is dismantled. For instance, in the work "You are a captive audience", which shows a greatly enlarged dental extraction, one is both victim and torturer, positionee and positioner. At the same time the viewer can be aware that he or she is neither, and maintain an embarrassed isolation at the scene of the crime, exposing a false sense of autonomy. "I can't look at you and breathe at the same time" shows a prostrate woman under water, presumably in the act of a backstroke. The text conceals her eyes. The viewer is forced into a position of complicity leading to culpability; if she looks at you she will drown. According to Jane Weinstock,⁽¹⁶⁾ here is the consequence of the "gaze", that stance of pseudo-objectivity. You can only take pleasure from looking when there is no direct engagement between subject and object, when your eyes do not meet. Thus

Barbara Kruger, attempting to ruin certain representations, also ruins our pleasure.

¹For discussion see S. Linker, "Barbara Kruger", *Black Art*, no. 10, pp. 36-7.

²Art in London, January, 1984.

³For discussion see Carrie Fisher's review of "Exxon's 19 Artists: Entering America", *Artforum*, April, 1981, pp. 56-60.

⁴Jo Sprain, "High as a Site of Class Struggle—Reflections on the Works of John Heartfield", *Block 2*, 1980, pp. 2-13.

⁵As quoted in Sylvia Marlow, *File Criticism*, May, 1965, London: BBC Publications, p. 63.

⁶Sprain, p. 1.

⁷Block, p. 3.

⁸For discussion see Jonathan Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Representation*, p. 76.

⁹Velociano, as quoted in Sprain, p. 3.

¹⁰Coward and Ellis, p. 76.

¹¹As discussed in Craig Saper, "The Madman Effect, or the Spectacular End", in *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture ICA Catalogue*.

¹²For discussion see Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Chapter 3.

¹³Coward, p. 7.

¹⁴Foucault, p. 33.

¹⁵As quoted in Coward, p. 7.

¹⁶John Velociano, "What She Means to You" in *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture ICA Catalogue*.

NOTES

- ¹For discussion see K. Linker, "Barbar Kruger", Flash Art, no. 121, pp. 36-7.
- ²Art in America, January, 1984.
- ³For discussion see Carrie Rickey's review of "Exxon's 19 Artists; Emerging Americans", Artforum, April, 1981, pp. 58-60.
- ⁴Jo Spence, "Sign as a Site of Class Struggle---Reflections on the Works by John Heartfield", Block 5, 1982, pp. 2-13.
- ⁵As quoted in Sylvia Harvey, Film Criticism, May, 1968, London: BBC publications, p. 65.
- ⁶Spence, p.3
- ⁷Ibid., p. 3.
- ⁸For discussion see Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Language and Materialism, pp. 76.
- ⁹Volosinov, as quoted in Spence, p. 3.
- ¹⁰Coward and Ellis, p. 76.
- ¹¹As discussed in Craig Owens, "The Medusa Effect, or the Spectacular Ruse", in We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture ICA Catalogue.
- ¹²For discussion see Michel Foucault, Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, Chapter 3.
- ¹³Owens, p.7
- ¹⁴Foucault, p. 55.
- ¹⁵As quoted in Owens, p.7
- ¹⁶Jane Weinstock, "What She Means to You" in We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture ICA Catalogue.

CHAPTER II: DECONSTRUCTIVE PRAXIS AND THE VOICE OF POWER

"The unconscious of the subject is the discourse of the other"
 ---Jaques Lacan

In the Seventies, much feminist art had been a celebration of otherness: goddesses, vaginas, breasts, and birth-giving capacity. These images seemed ultimately to deteriorate into Jungian mythical stereotypes which feminist artists thought they could liberate from male dominance and control. Rescuing these images from male discourse seemed an appropriate strategy, but when these images were soaked into positions of autonomy, wrested from their classical dichotomies, they stood up weakly, exposed as the receiving end of the myth of duality. Judy Chicago attempted to express a feminine archetypal univocality in such a work as the Birth Project which toured the U.S.A. in 1984, but her images crouched on the stone walls of backstreet galleries claiming a gendered aesthetic to the point of inefficacy. Pride is non-discursive, and "celebration" art such as Chicago's can only become relegated to a contemporary cave painting for an outdated form of worship, leaving no political disruption in its wake.

Barbara Kruger's work exemplifies a shift in feminist political strategy, both in artistic practice and in theory. The weapon of this contemporary theoretical shift is deconstruction, and its target is binary oppositions. Helene Cixous has attacked mythological dichotomies by exposure, and suggests ways of deconstructing classical philosophical and psychoanalytic thought. Presenting a list of oppositions such as head/heart, logos/pathos, she states: "always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all of its forms, wherever a discourse is organised...thought has always worked by opposition".¹ Within a duality, she continues, the oppositions are hierarchised, and whenever an ordering intervenes, "a law or-

ganises the thinkable by oppositions...logocentrism subjects thought ...to a two-term system" which ultimately reduces to the couple: Man/Woman. Eisenstein argued early in this century that political artists should adopt a dialectical approach to ideology by exposing a false concept of "cause and effect" or unity of opposites;² like Cixous, deconstructive feminist theory has permanently destabilised the concept of binary opposition by exposing it as gendered, thus hierarchised.

Barbara Kruger's primary deconstructive thrust begins by disabling a two-party dialogue between subject and object; the exposure of a third party disturbs the aforementioned hierarchised binary discourse. This third party is the myth of objectivity, "the gaze". Its power and authority have heretofore been implicit, and therefore at the root of ideological production. Kruger, in exposing the binary discourse as constructed, thus engages the third party as complicit, therefore culpable. She exposes oppositions by a multiplicity of means, both visual and linguistic. For instance in "We won't play Nature to your Culture" the visual image is a woman's face, the eyes covered by leaves. The hierarchised and gendered opposition is engaged, exposed, and refused. Elsewhere she attacks a verbal cliché in its motive: "Your Assignment is to Divide and Conquer", and in another she breaks up words to expose their components: "Your pleasure is spas/modic and short/lived". Some clichés, however, are already contradictions in terms, and her usage of these makes them virtually oxymoronic, for instance, "captive/audience", "mistaken/identity" and "circumstantial/evidence". In so doing Kruger states that she wishes to "couple the ingratiation of wishful thinking with the criticality of knowing better".³

Principals of deconstruction for feminists owe much to the theoretical practises of dialectical materialism, semiotics and psychoanalysis. Many of these theories have conjoined or overlapped

to produce a sociological shift in artistic production and aesthetic theory. In feminist deconstruction, however, primacy is accorded to the constitution of the subject by gender. Artistic production is singular in its ability to circumnavigate as well as rupture phallogocentric operatives, such as the binary oppositions cited above, for disparate contiguities can be disorganised and consciously reassembled to provide a re-ordering of the subject-object relationship. This re-ordering or dis-ordering of subjectivity is a function of montage, according to Benjamin Buchloh. In his article "Allegorical Procedures" Buchloh claims that the montage artist "decentralises the place of the author and subject by remaining within the dialectic of the appropriated objects of discourse and the authorial subject, which negates and constitutes itself simultaneously in the act of quotation"⁴ Kruger, however, is critical of Buchloh's approach to her work, as he links it in with other montage artists, like Hans Haacke, for whom gender considerations are not primary. Her position is firm: any discourse or political movement that refuses to take account of gender as a first cause in subject construction is complicit;⁵ and she chastises these artists and critics who do not acknowledge gender as a political view.

Kruger herself however, has been branded with her own iron by critic Jean Fisher who, in her ARTFORUM review of Kruger's Annina Nosei Gallery show, 1984, suggests that at best Kruger is mapping out a new terrain within an already colonised artistic territory, and that her adherence to an authoritarian and accusative "Voice" forces her work to a dominant reading. Fisher maintains that many other artists (such as Hans Haacke and Victor Burgin) have extracted and transmuted practises or orthodox photography to show the manipulative power of fetishism in representation. Though Fisher acknowledges that it remains for feminist discourse to shatter

once and for all any notion of a unified subject of consciousness, she believes Kruger comes a bit late and perhaps ham-fistedly into the deconstructive arena. Though Kruger posits a cultural dialectic in her appropriation of slick high-tech magazine advertising techniques as a method of subverting the monodirectional authoritarian "Voice", Fisher believes Kruger's montage elements are more self-contradictory than dialogical and become "compressed into a rhetoric of power".⁶

Fisher claims that for a politically productive feminist art, the photograph as an instrument of resistance or sedition is problematic, for all views having been previously colonised, there is no space left in which to re-invent a photographic text. The codes of photography have already been conventionalised, and therefore, continues Fisher, photography's "appropriative and voyeuristic nature render it intrinsically coded in the language of the authoritarian other",⁷ that is, the logocentric univocality which naturalises and aestheticises its language of domination. Certainly Kruger would be aware of these pitfalls, and is conscious in her application of photo-montage techniques the danger of using "their" language. Julia Kristeva, a linguist and psychoanalyst known for an increasing antipathy towards collective movements, has expressed the view that a feminist practise can only define itself in negatives, at odds with the existing order of things.⁸ Kruger disproves Kristeva's reckoning, by attempting to show the existing order at odds with itself, its categories constructed to suit relations of power, yet unable to suppress its internal contradictions.

Kristeva disavows a collective gendered identity, but respects a feminist practise which, "by its negativity, indicates what is otherwise repressed: that 'class consciousness'...is not unrelated to the unconscious of the sexed speaker".⁹ This is similar to Lacan's "discourse of the other" in the chapter quotation. The danger of

a totalised gender identity, continues Kristeva, lies in its capability of being co-opted by power unless it relinquishes a belief in its own identity. Like Fisher's criticisms of Kruger, Kristeva warns against a tendency for feminists to move over to the side of symbolic power. Extolling women's negative functioning, Kristeva urges feminists to resist everything structural or defined in the existing state of society, to stay on the fringe of centralised power, the "side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary movements".¹⁰ As Fisher suggests, when Kruger takes over "I" as first person, she does, in fact, side with power, but with the motive of exposing the machinations and posturings of power through the displacement of the subject.

As can be seen from the debates I have presented above, whether or not a feminist practise can be effective without appropriating the rhetoric of power is an issue of major contemporary concern. Can a political artist find the interstices in a capitalist and patriarchal superstructure, dismantle it, and rebuild a workable model from the same materials? Working with language and the authoritative voice enables this analogy, for as Antoinette Fouque has observed, inversion does not automatically facilitate the transition to another kind of structure.¹¹ The co-opting of feminism into the corpus of power is seen as a trap by many feminists, and if the weapon is language, as it is in Kruger's work, the power relations are already implicit in the ordering of pronouns. In the following chapters I will explain Kruger's motives in her language usage, and her negotiations of pronoun power relations, and the difficulties other politically motivated artists have with this same issue.

NOTES

- ¹ Helene Cixous, "Sorties", in New French Feminisms, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., p. 90.
- ² Spence, p. 4.
- ³ John Roberts interview with Babbara Kruger, Art Monthly, Dec/Jan, 1983/4, p. 18.
- ⁴ Benjamin Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures", Art Forum, September, 1984, p. 54.
- ⁵ Roberts, p. 18.
- ⁶ Jean Fisher, a review in Artforum, September, 1984, p. 115
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ As discussed in Julia Kristeva's "Woman Can Never Be Defined", in New French Feminisms..., pp. 137-141.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 141.
- ¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, "Power and Denial", in New French Feminisms..., p. 166.
- ¹¹ Antoinette Fouque, "The MLF is you, is me", in New French Feminisms..., p. 117.

CHAPTER III: SEX, TEXT, AND GENDER

Barbara Kruger is not alone in her choice of the purloined photo image as a weapon of ideological intervention, nor is she alone in her location of language as a fundamental ideological structure to be reckoned with. The juxtaposition of contradictory text and images to expose social and political contradictions places Kruger within a tradition of political postering as discussed in Chapter I. Since the 1970's, however, the image/text montage technique has been given new impetus by such artists as Hans Haacke and Victor Burgin, both of whom have direct and unconcealed political motives in their work.

Hans Haacke, who has been contending with issues of censorship in the Tate Gallery in recent years, has stated that he wishes to reveal the mystification that art works have generated and are at the same time subject to, but finds that, in the contemporary context, an art work cannot be effective unless it generates an aura or mystification of its own.¹ But Haacke believes this secondary, or inverted, mystification both mocks and exposes the mechanisms of auric production. An inversion of authority or exposure of the ideological motives both in visual presentation and representation link Haacke and Kruger's work at a political level; they both recognise the art market as a microcosm of a larger economic arena, and the difficulties of functioning as a political artist within that structure. For Haacke, however, the economic functioning of the artmarket is the primary focus of attack. In Haacke's Tate Gallery Catalogue, Lucy Lippard has accorded Haacke the classic artist's function of teaching people to see, that is, to expose for the viewer the construction of meanings.

Haacke's texts are generally appropriated whole, from statements

put out by corporation owners concerning the importance of investments and interventions in the arts. This appropriated text is then juxtaposed with the products or slogans of this corporation, and by implication, the ramifications on the cultural or political life of the economy it affects (see Figure B). Benjamin Buchloh, in his article "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art", lauds Haacke's work as exemplary political deconstruction, claiming that Haacke exposes art history as commodity history. After such statements, continues Buchloh, "any return to an unconditional autonomy of art production would be mere pretense, lacking historical logic and consequence".² Gender as a locus of class never enters into Haacke's art or Buchloh's critique, however, and it is due to this issue that Barbara Kruger dissociates herself from them both.

Another politically conscious but non-gender oriented male artist is Victor Burgin, who is extremely analytical of his own political progress. Burgin has, in recent years, attempted to at least acknowledge, if not engage, gender as a political view. Discussing his own work and ideological evolution in an extremely enlightening interview with Tony Godfrey in Block 7, 1982, Burgin explains how he has moved away from a previous antinomic oppositional strategy. His original motive, he states, was to expose ideology as "false consciousness", a position stemming directly from Marx's writings. Now, says Burgin, it has come to light that there is no "seeable" reality outside of representations, and that these representations conform to a complex of institutions founded on and including language.³ Photography, continues Burgin, "is on the side of information, and...has a current social coinage". In other words, photography is on the side of logocentrism, the authoritarian voice, the side of what Jo Spence has elsewhere described as the "reality effect",

as opposed to the arbitrary information of painting.

According to the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, society is constructed in a triangular fashion, with the economic at base, and the sides being the ideological and the political.⁴ Following from Althusser, Burgin sees art, as well as advertising in the ideological rung of state apparatuses which are capable of reproducing interests that serve the needs of capital. Given a relative independence of ideology from direct economic determining it becomes necessary, according to Burgin, to intervene at the cultural level in those ideological state apparatuses. Culture then becomes a site of class struggle. To do so, Burgin uses techniques appropriated from advertising, for he wants his work to be eye-catching, and not as intellectually cumbersome as Haacke's. Burgin, however, is aiming for a different audience than Haacke, who wishes to intervene at the gallery level, and by extension, ^{subvert} the educated and upper-class. Burgin wishes to intervene at a more popular level, and will go so far as to incorporate sexual elements (as does advertising) to make statements about material ownership (see Figure C).

Burgin, like Kruger, works predominantly in black and white, maintaining that colour photography, like painting, is more on the side of illusion. In this aspect, Burgin's choice of black and white links his work more to a tradition of art photography and photojournalism (as discussed in Chapter I) than advertising. Burgin states that the black and white image reads more as a text than a seduction, and that being read is his primary concern.

Though Burgin, unlike Kruger, takes many of his own photographs, he does not consider himself a photographer. A photographer, he maintains, is someone interested in image, whereas Burgin considers himself involved in what he calls a "scripto-visual discourse", involved with the way words and images mesh together. He continues,

"even when one looks at a photograph with no writing alongside it, a text always intrudes---in a fragmentary form, in the mind, in association, mental processes exchange images for words and words for images".⁵ Once an artist becomes involved in photography as a discursive form, claims Burgin, that work must be accepted as a social fact, and at that juncture of word and image, one is bound to accept the inclusion of text.

Burgin's typeface is small, and does not entice the viewer from a distance, as does Kruger's. In this aspect, Burgin's work, like Haacke's, has more in common with the magazine editorial than popular advertising. Because of textual reliance, both Haacke and Burgin may be accused of academic didacticism. Their work is politically correct in motive, but how does it affect the untheoretical eye? This small-text work, claim some, is elitist, a seduction of the educated, as well as being self-conscious and intellectually contrived. In his own defense, Burgin links the influence of romanticism to the myth of expressionism. Only since the nineteenth century, he says, has artistic production been equated with the un-selfconscious.⁶ Kruger, similarly, was criticised by Jean Fisher (as discussed in Chapter II) for allowing the text of her work to ground its impact in a dominant reading. However, Kruger's and Burgin's use of text is widely dissimilar, for Burgin addresses the viewer as a unified entity whereas Kruger's text is self-questioning, aiming as well for a displacement of the subject of its address.

Donald Kuspit, award winner for distinction in art criticism,⁷ has produced a more suspicious critique of artists' language use in a review of a show at the Franklin Furnace, 1983, and published in Artforum the same year. Kuspit maintains that there is nothing noteworthy in political artists' use of language, including Haacke, Kruger, and Burgin. Kuspit compares artists' use of text invidiously to literature, claiming that these artists' works contain a paucity

of information and an attempt to manipulate the self-evident. He cavalierly attempts to reduce the entire text/image discourse to a cipher, stating that there is nothing in "their" work "we" don't already know, exposing his own position of phallogocentric authority. Thus Kuspit as critic and Kruger as artist exemplify a veritable war of pronoun appropriation, expressed in a later review by Kate Linker,⁸ where she castigates Kuspit for his linguistic enslavement to patriarchy.

Burgin, though politically cognisant of the necessity for gender deconstruction, takes a frustrated view of his own ability to intervene on that level, due to his own gendered privilege. He takes up, or takes refuge in, the Freudian postulate of a universal pre-Oedipal psychic bisexuality that allows for a subjectivity "which can take up positions, more or less freely, on either side of the divide of gender, or even both sides simultaneously".⁹ This position is predicated on a notion that aesthetic experience is rooted in the pre-Oedipal phase, a suggestion which has been posited by analysts such as Julia Kristeva,¹⁰ and reduces to another Freudian concept of the singular, therefore phallic, libido. Burgin maintains that the "desiring subject" will take advantage of pre-Oedipal regression in its quest for pleasure, colluding the female subject in a narcissism, or fetishism, of her own form.¹¹ Laura Mulvey has criticised this position from a feminist stance, stating that

the terms (Freud) uses to conceive of femininity are the same as those he mapped out for the male, causing certain Problems of language and boundaries of expression. These problems reflect, very accurately, the actual position of women in patriarchal society (suppressed, for instance, under the generalised third person singular); one term gives rise to the second as its complementary opposite, the male to the female, in that order.¹²

Freud's view, according to Mulvey, does not allow the feminine to be conceptualised as different, but either as an antinomic opposition,

or else as similar, as in the phallic or pre-Oedipal stage. Mulvey's position, like Cixous' in Chapter II, maintains that the structural relation of the male to the female under patriarchy cannot be defined within the terms Freud has offered.

Mulvey further contradicts Burgin's pre-Oedipal cop-out by her attack on notions of feminine aesthetic transexuality. "As desire is given cultural materiality in a text, for women, trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second-nature."¹³ Burgin, by his own admission, sees this transexuality as natural, or at least an irremediable by-product of patriarchy, as ~~does~~ most psychoanalysis. Mulvey, however, sees it as conditional, more a safety device for women within patriarchy: to be subsumed into the voyeur's position distances her from pure victimisation, and allows her a modicum of pleasure. This schizophrenic transsexual identity is not without danger to the gendered identity, for in being drawn into this bisexual posture the female spectator is colluded in the process of objectification from which she herself as a social subject suffers. Hence she blames herself for her objectified position, and her own creative output is deformed by a narcissism which infantilises her statements. According to Susan Gubar, in her article "The Blank Page",¹⁴ the woman becomes locked in what Lacan has called the mirror stage,¹⁵ a limniscate of perpetual becoming, and a bounded autism.

In the Block 7 interview, Burgin attempts to come to terms with the feminist position such as held by Mulvey, Gubar, and Kruger, but considers himself unable, as a male, to engage gender deconstruction as a political weapon. Though he regards a potentiality in regards to a possible specificity of representation of women by women, he feels unable to find a way to contribute to it. "The man's relation to the whole problematic (i.e., representation and pleasure) differs fundamentally from the woman's: the woman must, by discovery

and invention, locate herself-for-herself in representation; the man, on the other hand, is everywhere in representation in his own interest, and his interest seems predominantly to allay his castration anxiety".¹⁶ In another article he expands upon this Freudian position in terms of the male desire for subsumption of the entire female form as phallic substitute, making up for her "lack", the lack of a phallus. Thus, he continues, a man's desire is for that which can be seen. The penis serves as a privileged signifier due to its visibility; Burgin criticises artists such as Judy Chicago for operating on the side of phallogentrism by privileging the visible and, for halo effect, evoking Luce Irigaray's argument in favour of feminine sensitivities such as touch, speech, and scent.¹⁷ Ultimately, however, Burgin's adherence to Freudian language allows him a trap door which he imagines opens out into a world of welcoming radical feminists, for Burgin attempts to force a feminist responsibility in discovering another language, a woman's code, to which he himself owes nothing.

It is understandable, given Burgin's erudite, if guilt-motivated position, why much contemporary feminist criticism and practice discredits the political viability of male artists who adhere to a Freudian operative where gender considerations are made primary. "Your comfort is my silence", (see Figure A) illustrates Burgin's phallic complicity on several levels. The male silences the woman for his own comfort, while also using his own castration complex as an excuse for silencing himself, ostensibly for her comfort. This multiplicity of address points to Kruger's strength and Burgin's weakness, for she has phallogentrism addressed on every level of its operation. Kruger has elsewhere expressed that whilst "ruining certain representations", she wishes to welcome the female spectator into the audience of men.¹⁸ It may well be that she is addressing the Freudian cop-out of a "natural" trans-sexual spectatorship by forcing

women to consider, by means of ambiguous pronouns, who is being silenced, who is doing the silencing, and who is complicit in the maintenance of both. If she is criticised from a more radical feminist position (such as Irigaray's or Fisher's) it may be that she discredits the potential of "women's language" as a viable oppositional strategy as long as representation is dominated by a male discourse, castrated or otherwise.

NOTES

- ¹Hans Haacke, from the Tate Gallery Catalogue from a show 25 January to 4 March, 1984, written by Catherine Lacey.
- ²Buchloh, p. 48.
- ³For discussion see Tony Godfrey's interview with Victor Burgin, "Sex, Text, Politics", Block 7, 1982, pp. 2-26.
- ⁴For discussion, see Coward and Ellis, Chapter 5.
- ⁵Burgin, p. 8.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 19.
- ⁷Frank Jewett Mather Award, 1981-82, conferred by the College Art Association for distinction in Art Criticism. From "Artist's Use of Language" part one (review), Artforum, 1983, p. 69.
- ⁸Linker, p. 77.
- ⁹Burgin, p. 24.
- ¹⁰See Kristeva, in such works as "Histoires d'Amour" in Desire, ICA Pamphlet, 1983, p. 18-21.
- ¹¹Burgin, p. 24.
- ¹²Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative", Screen, January, 1982, pp. 13-14.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴As discussed in Susan Gubar, "The Blank Page", October, January, 1981, p. 243.
- ¹⁵See Jacques Lacan, Ecrits, for his discussion of the mirror stage.
- ¹⁶Burgin, p. 25.
- ¹⁷Luce Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One", in New French Feminisms..., pp. 99-106.
- ¹⁸Roberts, p. 17.

CHAPTER IV: LANGUAGE, FEMINISM, AND DESIRE

Benjamin Buchloh has described feminist intervention as a condition of "otherness",¹ and attempts to venerate this otherness as a viable oppositional strategy. However, in so vocalising, Buchloh seems to suffer from the same binary reductionism as Burgin and others who attempt to tackle, or understand, feminism as a "body". Buchloh lists Kruger amongst a host of other feminist artists such as Dara Birnbaum, Jenny Holzer, Martha Rosler, and Sherrie Levine, according them a position of cohesive and lucid oppositionalism, but as a whole. Certainly the aforementioned artists represent a departure from the non-analytical woman-as-being school of feminism, who, to use Burgin's terms, may have been more concerned with representation of politics than the politics of representation. Earlier contemporary feminist artists, such as Judy Chicago, believed a changed image could induce a changed meaning, but as has been discussed in previous chapters, an inverted, antagonistic or antinomic image carried the danger of re-inversion if its means of representation are not shattered once and for all.

Jane Weinstock, in her review of the 1983 Protetch-McNeil Gallery show, "The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter", warns against a categorisation of "Otherness",^{1A} that women's art which can become "Victims of the capital letter". The new feminist artists like Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger are, according to Weinstock, attempting to expose myths and their mechanisms rather than create them. The weapon of these artists is language---in Holzer's work, exclusively so. Elaine Showalter, in her article "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", explains that the appropriate task of feminist ideological rupture of patriarchal representations must insist on a

shift from androcentric to gynocentric criticism. The method most appropriate to this goal is a concentration of women's access to language, "on the available lexical range from which words can be selected, on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression".²

Showalter goes on to explain that the problem is not that language, as it exists, is insufficient to express women's consciousness, but that "women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution", expressed by other feminist critics as subterfuge.

Jenny Holzer's "Inflammatory Essays" (in the aforementioned "Power of Women's Laughter Show") are large colour-coded texts, seven of which are repeated from two to five times, forming a twenty-five unit grid. The piece is visually symmetrical, forming two mirror-imaged triangles. With an acknowledgement to Jane Gallop and Luce Irigaray, Weinstock suggests that these images represent a masculine myth of order and symmetry (such as the binary oppositions discussed in Chapter II), in addition to the popular Oedipal triangle: mother-son-father. Weinstock also points out Holzer's references to popular idioms and clichés (as Kruger has done), such as "the writing on the wall", personality as "square," etc. Holzer's work as a totality literally becomes figures of speech. Like Kruger, Holzer utilises the pronoun, but as an address towards a whole, if mythified subject, as opposed to Kruger's deconstruction. In Holzer's work "Truism", statements such as "you should travel light" and "you are a victim of the words you live by" suggest, according to Weinstock, that in a unified subject of address, "power shifts the shifter",³ i.e., the pronoun as linguistic shifter only shifts power relations. Holzer's technique of unified address intentionally does not succeed in effecting any shift in power relations, and exposes this failure to the addressee. "You" is on the side of power, wherever located. the over-all effect of this work is to expose a major credibility

gap in the "Voice".

Kruger, as previously discussed, implicates a second and third party in her pronoun usage---Weinstock refers to this as linguistic intersubjection. Because her "I" and "you" have no fixed identity, the pronouns are like desire, not subject to permanent address. A shifting address does not claim the object of desire as much as demand an acknowledgement of that desire on the part of the Other; Victor Burgin elsewhere expresses that "desire is for an image via the detour of an object".⁴ The object, of course, is a permanent figure of address. Though Kruger's pronouns, unlike Holzer's, are shifting, they are not sexually indifferent, they do no attempt to congeal the male other as a univocality. Kruger's "you" is power, thus it is not merely sexed, but ordered by class, culture, race, etc. Kruger's motive is clearly summed up in her statement to John Roberts in her 1982 interview: "any questioning or displacement of the subject that is going to change the strictures of that construction is going to be an attack on class. To change the dominant position of the subject is to change class".⁵

The ideological content of language, and its relative autonomy as regards the production of consciousness, is of particular concern to feminist artists and critics. The status of language as the core of ideological control, and the sexual ordering which seems endemic to it, has been elevated for analysis in recent years by any field of research which resists a static biologism. An anti-humanist feminism may first be required to militate against what Saussure has called "Langue/Parole"; i.e., language and a supposed freedom of the internal dialogical imagination.⁶ According to Saussure, the code and the message, i.e. the collective and the individual, combine towards an evolving production of meaning in relatively equal relations. As discussed in previous chapters, a binary reductionism such as this is flawed in the first instance, for one of its poles has no

material base, and is predicated on a thinking subject which has a free range of interpretation. This subject, for the safety of Saussure's postulate, must necessarily be as one.

It has been left for feminist theorists to explode once and for all the myth of an androcentric subject, speaking, thinking, or otherwise. A marxist-feminist position disaffiliates with a bourgeois feminist position which attempts to engage the patriarchal superstructure in a discourse of acknowledgement from a marginalised position within that superstructure. It also disaffiliates with a non-feminist marxism which does not perceive a relationship between gender and class, nor the multiplicity of codes required for ideological rupture.

If words cannot be apprehended or interpreted separate from the voices that speak them, then every word raises a question of authority and origin.⁷ Discourse, then, is the confrontation of competing histories. If language is an intersection of the social, historical, and the "individual", then before further analysis can be made, it must be perceived that the individual is an intersection of the social and political with language. If the interpretation of language is gendered, then access to language, and hence discourse, is of an uneven and unequal nature. For a marxist feminist, a puzzling debate is made manifest. If, as discussed in Chapter 1, the subject is shattered, laid bare in its socio-political and gendered nexus, what is the next step in reconstruction except by language?

Whatever the constitutive elements of discourse are, the welding material is power. The single most difficult debate for a marxist feminist is whether or not to side with the organisation of power. And yet, few rights have ever been won without it.

Barbara Kruger has claimed that a displacement of the subject is an attack on class, she shatters and exposes power relations, but reconstruction is not the order of the day. Jo Spence has articula-

ted a possible weakness in the strategy of subject shattering, which, as a marxist position, can be linked to a Lukacsian argument from the Frankfurt school debates of the Thirties. Spence calls for the maintenance of some form of collective "I" against a continuously shifting of individuated subject, otherwise, how may issues of class be addressed?⁸ Kristeva, as well as others from the psychoanalytic school of feminism, operate against a collectivisation of power by class or gender. From a marxist point of view, it might be seen from the evolution of the feminist debate has elevated gender at the expense of class, to the detriment of class as a viable force, only to find that a gendered identity is an insufficient category as well. How then to organise for progress?

It may be that reconstruction is the business of theory rather than art, but when art calculates to shatter the subject, and as Kruger puts it, "loiter outside of trade and speech"⁹ it is well to be aware of the inherent dangers. In this regard the older debates over expressionism and realism may be re-applied to feminist gender deconstruction, such as Lukacs' argument against abstractivism's "collusion in ideological decay" with the bourgeoisie.¹⁰ For Lukacs, the shattered subject is a shattered worldview, an expression of alienation, a cry in the dark. Jo Spence's position follows more from the Lukacsian angle, suggesting that in a decaying societal structure, it may be preferable to try to overthrow the egocentric individuated subject, exposing its crisis of alienation when detached from knowledge of group activity.^(10A) Brecht, however, took a more liberal view of expressionism, for he had faith in an unforeseeable result of what is now called deconstruction, believing that it was up to the people to pick up the pieces left over by the shattering process and thus determine their own direction.¹¹

Julia Kristeva discusses the dialectic of deconstruction and reconstruction in Desire and Language, inreference to what the Russian

Formalists call poetic language. Poetic (or paradigmatic) language, by its very economy and the particularity of its signifying practises, "is an unsettling process---when not an outright destruction---of the identity of the meaning and speaking subject...On that account, it accompanies crises within social structures and institutions---the moments of their mutation, evolution, revolution, or disarray".¹²

She goes on to claim a similarity between artistic paradigmatics and psychosis, totalitarianism and fascism, and calls for an analytic theory of signifying systems which search out the phenomena which produce this unsettling of meaning. The signifying economy calls attention to the undecidability of a so-called natural language, and threatens to disrupt the dominant mode of discourse, which is a scientific or rational at base. A threat to syntactic structures poses a danger to social concord, hence a link of art to politics.

The similarity between artistic production and psychosis is not inconsiderable, for both are treated as social symptoms which must be isolated to be cured; for art it is the gallery, for psychosis, the asylum. Confinement keeps these from social penetration, disavowing any semaphorical content to their expression. Craig Owens also notices the link between expressionism and psychosis in his article, "Honour, Power and the Love of Women", Art in America, January, 1985, though he makes a distinction between "pseudo-expressionism" and expressionism, positing the first as the locus of what he calls cultural implosion. Following from Lacan, Owens suggests that failed expressionism has lost its capacity for negation and does not recognise the law of contradiction, as in schizophrenic discourse. Owens posits that a failed contemporary expressionism simulates schizophrenia "as a mimetic defense against increasingly contradictory demands---on the one hand, to be as original and innovative as possible; on the other, to conform to established norms and conventions".¹³

NOTES

- ¹For discussion see Buchloh, op. cit.
- ^{1A}Jane Weinstock, "A Lass, A Lad, A Laugh", Art in America, Summer, 1983, pp. 7-10.
- ²Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", Critical Inquiry, 1981, p. 193.
- ³Weinstock, "A Lass....", p. 9.
- ⁴Burgin, "Man-Desire-Image" in Desire...., p. 32.
- ⁵Roberts, p. 17.
- ⁶Discussed in Caryl Emerson, "The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky and the Internalisation of Language", Critical Inquiry, December, 1983, p. 246.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 248.
- ⁸Discussed in Spence, op. cit.
- ⁹Owens, p. 11.
- ¹⁰Quoted by Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism" in Aesthetics and Politics, Ronald Taylor, ed., p. 17.
- ^{10A}Spence, p. 5.
- ¹¹Discussed in Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukacs" in Aesthetics....
- ¹²Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language, p. 125.
- ¹³Craig Owens, "Honour, Power, and the Love of Women", Art in America, January, 1983, p. 11.

CHAPTER V: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE PRONOUN

Whether or not Barbara Kruger's strategy of subject disjoining will amount to any more than a schizophrenic breakdown, or a failed expressionism will be a matter of retrospective judgement. Nonetheless, in attempting an analysis of her methods and motives it is important to take stock of the psychoanalytic discourse which may lend insight into the psychic etymology of pronouns and language acquisition. Desire for creation, according to Julia Kristeva, is related to an amorous crisis, a discourse with the "imaginary father" which manifests itself in the third person to which the subject "I" identifies itself in the process of constitution, and permits the investing of drives in the symbolic. The liberation of the imaginary, claims Kristeva, allows for the possibility of a controlled or fashioned narcissism which subtilises the ideal.¹

For Lacan, desire is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation, and fundamentally insatiable. Desire, and the need for creative expression, is locked in a perpetual dance with the object that causes it, rather than the object that would satisfy it;² recall here the statement by Burgin that "desire is for an image via the detour of an object".³ Hence the creative urge, desire, is never finite. All speech is demand, and calls for a reply; demand is created with a sense of urgency, which is then superseded by speech.⁴ For Lacan, then, the Other and the One are engaged in a limniscate of insatiable desire, an unseverable discourse of symbolic relations. This discourse speculates on a faith in testimony, for it always presupposes an audience, a subject of address.⁵ Language, according to Lacan, exists not to inform but to evoke; however, the more functional language becomes, the less it evokes, and therefore, it becomes improper for speech. Thus, a too rigidly fixed correlation

between signs and the reality they signify neutralises the signifier. Conversely, a more personal and less correlative signification runs the risk of losing its function as a language. Desire thus requires an alien signifier: the Other is invoked, symbolically assumed, and discourse progresses as an act of faith.

Radical feminist positions on psychoanalysis and language have necessarily taken stock of Lacan's and Kristeva's theories, but with a motive of subverting what the psychoanalytic position posits as irremediable. If the axis of gender, and hence psychic functioning, is language, then language is the weapon of subversion. Barbara Kruger, above all, has formulated a direct and strongly motivated attack on the psychoanalytic assumption. She is not merely shattering the subject, but altering the position of power, by changing the dominant position of that subject. The primary method is a disabling of subject address through pronouns. The "I", which is feminine, seizes control, attacks the "you", which is then shattered into two paralogical strands, thus disjoined, and made inefficacious. "You" as victim of attack wonders what he has done wrong, attempts to escape from "you" who knows and would bolster his own position, and "you" the pseudo-objective: who says "who, me?" and would walk away unperturbedly. "You" are addressed on every level.

"You", as an initially unsexed pronoun, may proceed to attempt a side-stepping of the gendered identity that Kruger imparts to it. Says Weinstock, "My 'you' may only be a position designated by a particular act of speech, but it is a masculine one, a position of power in the phallic order of things. My manias do not become science. My fictions do not become history".⁶ In very few of Kruger's works are "you" not addressed, and even then, the "you" is implicit. The use of "we" as a collectivised feminine position invokes the "you" that positions it. For instance, "We have received orders not to

move" implies that "you" gave the order. "We Construct the Chorus of Missing Persons", whose image suggests both an entrapment and a calculated arrangement, suggests "you" as a prison camp warden. In "we are being made spectacles of", a male "you" is directly represented, in the act of positioning the woman as a spectacle.

Kruger's constructed "you" is not consistent. As discussed in previous chapters, the third person "you" has a masculine outlook while pretending to speak for a unified subject. Thus, in "you are not yourself", which shows a female sufferer reflected in shattered glass, the myth of the androcentric subject as constructed for the maintenance of patriarchal discourse is exposed, and hopefully expunged, once and for all. To this effect, "You" is positioned differently in each work, to expose the multiplicity of androcentric readings. According to Weinstock, this serial usage of "you" denies each work its completion and self-containment, thus refusing objectification. She states, "by definition an active drive, and at least historically a masculine one, the desire to look, to subject to a controlling gaze, cannot be done away with. Like language, the look reasserts your power, but also like language, it can be tampered with ... Kruger's work may thus be described as imaginary".⁷

Positionality is endemic to language, and most especially personal pronouns. According to Craig Owens, these pronouns (I/we, you) "do not designate objects that exist independently of discourse, but manifest subject positions of partners in a conversation".⁸ Personal pronouns first entered Kruger's work in 1977, when she started using "you" as an economical method of direct address, a way of greeting and incorporating the viewer, and has been using them consistently since 1980. Positionality, as described by Cixous, is intrinsically hierarchised,⁹ thus a subject of the pronoun is necessarily addressed according to a sexual perspective. Kruger is not posing semiotic theories; she is attempting to interrupt gendered stereotypes through

modes of address. The female spectator must confront the outlook of men, not as Objects of the male gaze, but as complicit in what Barthes has called the fascism of language.¹⁰ The female spectator cannot acquire the information in Kruger's work passively, for Kruger works toward a linguistic inversion of the process of gender reification that has relentlessly held women in a position of subjectivity. Hence, though Kruger has expressed no desire for single interpretation of her work, she has criticised a tendency in critics to concentrate on the formal aspects of her deconstructive methods rather than her actual, and often stated, political motive: attack on class through the displacement of the gendered subject.

Engagement and threat is the first noticeable trait of Kruger's work. Her pronoun usage forces the spectator to consider whether he or she is being implicated in what is essentially a terrorist linguistic attack. Confronted by Roberts about this engagement for attack, Kruger responded that her work did not pose a threat, but signified a threat.¹¹ This attack on a totalised notion of self by means of pronouns presupposes a belief in the thinking subject, self-consciously presupposes an ability to engage, and address the other. This presupposition alone can be unnerving in Kruger's work. Kruger's entry into theoretical aesthetics poses a forced confrontation with discourse analysis, while still engaging the addressee at a crude and direct level. It suggests, for one thing, the way in which information has been personalised in advertising. The spectator, at first considering that the engagement and address is chosen, that he or she is in control, becomes seduced, overpowered and intimidated by the inanimate.

According to Tamar Garb, the accusitive strategy, such as employed in "you substantiate our horror" and "you re-enact the dance of insertion and wounding", suggests that Kruger is establishing for

the viewer a mythic enemy. This authoritarian absence is invoked but never uncovered in advertising; it is the source of the phallogocentric voice of authority.¹² Referring to her days in graphic work at CondeNast, Kruger describes a situation where she was working with and cropping photos for which no texts have yet been written. When she began using text and images in her own work, she saw her task as a way "to make meaningful, or audible, that which (previously remained unseen or unheard".¹³ Heavy use of cropping, claims Kruger, suggests issues of access and denial, invitation and refusal.

In addition to her artwork, Barbara Kruger is a lecturer, film critic, and currently engaged in producing a film with the critic Jane Weinstock. Kruger claims that at this juncture, film is more engaging to her than art work in galleries, because of the authority with which films engage the spectator. She says, "you realise the degree of power that (film) engages, its vigilance in protecting that position, that cachet. To me these picturings beg for rupture and demand change".¹⁴ The film in which she and Weinstock are collaborating will attempt to appropriate a narrative principal not dissimilar to the visual/textual style Kruger uses in her gallery work. She wishes "to insinuate (the narrative) into the spectator's view, and to say or show things that have not been seen...in the area of women's relationships to consumption, to sex, to love, to murder".¹⁵ The mode of the film will be comedy, for comedy, claims Kruger, has rarely been used in a critical sense. She intends to combine displacements and subversive machinations within an accessible narrative framework, hoping for a wide and popular distribution. She hopes that an entry into popular culture through film will keep her statements from being unseen and unheard, like women's history has previously been.

NOTES

- ¹Discussed in Kristeva, "Histoires d'Amour..."
- ²Translators note, from Lacan, p. viii.
- ³Burkin, Desire..., p. 32.
- ⁴Lacan, p. 34.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 43.
- ⁶Weinstock, "What She Means...", p. 12.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁸Owens, "Spectacular Ruse...", p. 6.
- ⁹Discussed in Cixous, op. cit.
- ¹⁰Roland Barthes, from untranslated article 'Leçon'.
- ¹¹As quoted in Owens, "Spectacular Ruse..." p. 7
- ¹²Tamar Garb, review. Artscribe Feb-April '84 no. 45 p 39
- ¹³K. Linker, "Barbara Kruger", Flash Art, 1985, no. 121, p. 36.
- ¹⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁵Ibid.

Bibliography

- Burgin, Victor. Interview, Block 7, 1982 pp 2-26.
- Buchloh, Benjamin. "Allegorical Procedures", Artforum Sept. 1982.
- Coward, Rosalind, and Ellis, John. Language and Materialism. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1977.
- Desire London:ICA Publication 1983.
- Emerson, Caryl. "The Outer Word and Inner Speech...", Critical Inquiry, December, 1983.
- Fisher, Jean. Review, Artforum, Sept. 1984, p. 115.
- Foucault, Michel. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Garb, Tamar. Review, Artscribe No. 45, Feb.-April. 1984, p. 39.
- Gubar, Susan. "The Blank Page", October, 1981.
- Harvey, Sylvia. Film Criticism, May 1968, London: BBC Publications, 1980.
- Kosuth, Joseph. "Necrophilia Mon Amour", Artforum, May, 1982 pp. 59-63.
- Kristeva, Julia. Desire in Language, London: Basil Blackwell, 1980.
- Lacey, Catherine. "Hans Haacke", Tate Gallery Catalogue, 1984.
- Lacan, Jacques. Ecrits. New York: W.W. Norton and Co (Tavistock), 1977.
- Linker, Kate. "Barbara Kruger", Flash Art, no. 121, 1985 pp. 36-37.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative", Screen, Jan. 1982 pp. 13-14.
- Marka, Elaine, and De Courtivron, Isabelle. New French Feminisms, Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980.
- Owens, Craig. "The Medusa Effect, Or, The Spectacular Ruse", We Won't Play Nature To Your Culture, London: ICA Publication, 1983.
- Owens, Craig. "Honour, Power, and the Love of Women", Art in America, Jan. 1983 pp. 13-14.
- Rickey, Carrie. Review, Artforum, April, 1981, pp. 58-60.
- Roberts, John. Interview with Barbara Kruger, Art Monthly, Dec-Jan 1983-1984, p. 18.

Bibliography, Cont.

Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", Critical Inquiry, 1981.

Spence, Jo. "Sign as a Site of Class Struggle", Block 5, 1982, pp. 2-13.

Taylor, Ronald, (ed.), Aesthetics and Politics, London:NLB, 1977

Weinstock, Jane. "A Lass, A Lad, A Laugh", Art in America, Summer 1983, pp. 7-10.