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"Purple People": "Sexed" Linguistics, Pleasure, and the "Feminine" Body in the Lyrics of Tori Amos

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“PURPLE PEOPLE”: “SEXED” LINGUISTICS, PLEASURE, AND
THE “FEMININE” BODY IN THE LYRICS OF TORI AMOS

A Thesis

Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Megim Alexi Parks

March 2014

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ABSTRACT

The notion of a “feminine” style has been staunchly resisted by third-wave feminists who argue that to posit a “feminine” style is essentialist. Yet, linguists such as Norma Mendoza-Denton and Elinor Ochs discuss indexicality and shifting through *salient variables*, a process called *entextualization*. Further, French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva use the linguistic concept of intertextuality to explain certain poetic uses of language that might cause what Luce Irigaray calls “irruption of the semiotic chora”—moments within language where boundaries in the semiotic chain of signification are “blurred.” Thus, while current feminism has moved strictly away from the idea that there is an exigent “feminine” to which all women must aspire, there exists a tenuous, but salient connection between the linguistic concepts of indexicality and intertextuality on one hand, and *jouissance* and “irruption of the chora” on the other that can inform those styles we might term “feminine” and allow for a more productive and responsive perception of “femininity.”

Amos’ lyrics illustrate these theories working together; Amos’ lyrics represent such a “feminine” style as indexed through use of salient variables; thus, Amos’ lyrics represent a sociolinguistic phenomenon wherein gender-based salient variables reform what “feminine” is and means, challenging social attitudes and the specular feminine persona within both the personal and public spheres. The implications of these theories could eventually influence

perceptions of women in any particular profession or sphere, as gendered linguistic markers influence gender roles and implications, which, in turn, inform social change.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to Tori Amos for her songwriting, not to mention for the ways she has helped me revision the “feminine” and to revision myself in relationship to that ideology; and to the mainstays of my theoretical approach I have a profound respect, namely, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Elinor Ochs, Penelope Eckert, and Roland Barthes.

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CHAPTER ONE

THEORY

What is gender? Does it reside in the body? In biology? What about a “feminine style”? Does a quantifiable feminine style exist? Is it possible to write or read or think in a “feminine” way if gender is, as sociolinguists and body theorists argue, a societal construct that is “always contestable” (“You Da Man,” Bucholtz 444)? Radical French feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray and linguists such as Julia Kristeva argue that there are feminine linguistic traits and feminine ways of communicating which favor duplicity, complexity, and subjectivity in meaning. While current feminism tends to leave the thought of a definable “feminine” in the past, Judith Butler posits that the materiality of the body and its conception as feminine can inform our reading of literature and society, allowing us to see and contest the ways in which we reiterate any particular gender, expressly femininity.

Specifically, the French feminist idea of a “feminine” language—a language that would defy “patrilinear” rules of language use—heavily implies social and linguistic language *change*. Singer/songwriter Tori Amos’ oeuvre indexes just such a dissonant “feminine” identity through a “double-voicing” similar to that mentioned by Bucholtz (“You Da Man” 450), wherein the identity of

the “hegemonic masculine” is referenced, called to task, and refuted. Might we learn—by analysis of texts identified as puzzlingly, yet pleasingly “feminine” in style—more about the ways in which women might index their status as “speaking subjects” and contest their relationship to hegemonic femininity? What changes must be made to our ideas (even some of those ideas held by women about themselves and other women) of “femininity” in order to reclaim it from hegemony? Can women identify a new genre of “feminine” that is not “less” and “lack”?

An Overview of the Specular and Textual Pleasure

Second-wave feminist theory has been criticized for its tendency to generalize too much; scholars and laypersons alike are averse to any idea that gender is something that can be quantified or “essentialized.” According to Christina Hughes, second-wave feminism’s treatment of women as a “unitary category” ignored certain differences between women (10). In addition, third-wave feminism sees second-wave feminism as ignoring its own very white, heterosexual middle-class view of feminism and its privileges. Hughes notes that identity politics, beginning in the 1980’s, especially called for a revision to second-wave’s Western, heteronormative assumptions (10). French feminist theories of gender and language have been seen as falling into the same essentialist loop; however, some French feminist theory, such as Julia Kristeva’s use of *jouissance*, which may shed some light on current linguistic and identity

theories related to identity and style construction.

According to Nikki Sullivan, “identity politics ...could be said to be based on the assumption that sexual inclinations, practices, and desires are the expression of a person’s core identity” (81). But because, as Sullivan and others argue, identity is a social construct, gender is, as Simone de Beauvoir asserts, a “learned set of attributes and actions” (qtd. in Sullivan 81) which is constructed for the speaker, rather than by the speaker. According to Judith Butler, “(g)ender is the performative effect of reiterative acts...which are repeated in and through a highly rigid regulatory frame, (and which) ‘congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being’” (qtd. in Sullivan 82).

Thus, linguists perceive identity as indexed through linguistic means, through what Penelope Eckert calls “stylistic moves” (458). Butler, too, argues that “(i)ntity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures, or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (qtd. in Sullivan 82). So, French feminist theory and linguistic theory have—unknowingly, it seems—danced around each other for the last fifty years or so, both referring to elements of language based in intertextuality and finally resting on linguistic change made through purposeful use of language.

According to third-wave feminists and linguists, gender is not an “essential” quality, but rather a societal construct that is “always contestable,” because, as Mary Bucholtz (and others such as Norma Mendoza-Denton)

suggests, “local forms creatively respond to dominant ideologies rather than mechanically reflecting them” (“You Da Man” 444). Bucholtz posits that race and gender are both constructed “in the narrative choices of the storytellers” (“You Da Man” 445). Thus, this view of gender sees it as the process and the product of a collective narrative. Similarly moving beyond the idea of a feminine “essence,” body theorists such as Judith Butler argue that gender is contextual, and, therefore, resists definition (54-55). Linguistic theorists, too, assert the contextual nature of gender construction. In this thesis, I will demonstrate, using a particular site of language, that a very tenuous, but salient, resonance exists between current feminist, linguistic, and body theory on one hand, and the French “essentialist” feminists (or second-wave “cultural” feminists), on the other—namely, the lyrics of musician Tori Amos, which are complex and “baffling” in the very style of Helene Cixous’ “The Laugh of the Medusa.”

Foreground: Identity Through Stylistic Moves

Linguists have discussed gender as a phenomenon that is styled (i.e., constructed and refuted) by language and other “effortful” activities (Eckert 469). Elinor Ochs observes that “gender ideologies are socialized, sustained, and transformed through talk, particularly through verbal practices that recur innumerable times in the lives of members of social groups,” referring to Althusser’s and Pascal’s ideas that human subjectivity is based in human action (336). Indeed, language is widely discussed in the field of linguistics as a

positioning of the self, the subject, through what Ochs calls “stances” and other “social acts” (337). For example, a woman who uses “baby talk”—high-pitched and simplistic sentences and vocabulary—positions herself as a mother, expressing a particular gendered, expected “stance” in relation to any audience (349). Gender becomes, in this way, an expression of social meaning (337). Of course, any particular gender construction is contextual. The construction of gender through language is variable (dependent upon context) even for one particular women.

Language is contextual, referential. Therefore, a speech act that positions the self betrays some social information about the speaker; Ochs and others would identify this linguistic phenomenon as *indexicality* (339). And while language is not supposed to directly index gender, *per se*, it is indirectly related to the development of a gendered *persona* that might be adopted and reinforced by a speaker (340). In this way, commonly known linguistic markers might “recast the past” and “precast the future,” according to Ochs (346). However, while certain acts and markers exist which correspond to gender stereotypes, there are instances of transformation, when a particular marker or linguistic form might be reinterpreted over time or by various groups, lending to certain utterances a “multifarious signalling” [sic] (Ochs 338).

Penelope Eckert discusses variation and the indexical field, wherein certain “salient” variables might operate within a “field of potential meanings—an indexical field, or constellation of ideologically related meanings” (454). These

constructed linguistic meanings, paired with other elements of style such as dress and gesture, feed into personae, and are an example of what Eckert would call *enregistered voices*, which “locat(e) register in continual process of production and reproduction” (Ochs 456). Interestingly, while Eckert asserts these stylistic variations may be mostly “local,” meaning they reflect and work to express local identities and ideologies, eventually they function as “linguistics signs” that connect these local identities and ideologies to the larger “political economy and more specifically to the demographic categories that both emerge from and constrain local practice” (456). Basically, then, stylistic variations are what Eckert calls “salient” elements in language that act as signposts in the semiotic chain of signification. Eckert describes these stylistic practices as a ‘bricolage [Hebdige 1984], in which individual resources (in this case, variables) can be interpreted and combined with other resources to construct a more complex meaningful identity” (457). Thus, stylistic moves become an indirect means of gender indexicality. And, just as Ochs refers to a “multifarious signalling,” Eckert argues that linguistic opposition to a certain community can be indexed through linguistic variables. Certain variables may even be hyper-articulated—what Eckert calls “recursiveness”—to exert such an opposition (459). Variables are further used to index “authenticity” within social context (462). In this way, according to Eckert, variables are used to make certain “ideological moves” in the creation of identity. Linguistic variables, then, are reflective of stance, and thus are political statements because of their capacity to

embrace, comment on, and refute group mentalities. As Eckert states, “meanings associated with variables (are) based in highly salient ideological issues” (466). It follows that gender, as a sociolinguistic construct, is a phenomenon that can be refuted and assisted by politicized linguistic variants.

Variables are, finally, closely related to power (or the lack thereof), class affiliation or the maintenance of or resistance to institutional alliances, and affiliation with or opposition to social groups (Eckert 470). Because linguistic variables may be linked to disparate social groups, they have immense power to effect change. As Eckert so poetically terms it, “all change unfolds in the course of day-to-day exchange, and that exchange involved local reinterpretation and repositioning” (472). In other words, it is in the small speech events that take place between people that linguistic change occurs.

Norma Mendoza-Denton discusses the tenuous phenomenon of identity indexing in the positing, using “creaky voice,” of the Chicana gang persona. Using the catch-phrase *semiotic hitchhiking* for intertextuality, Mendoza-Denton identifies “creak” as a contextualization cue across contexts of usage (Eckert would say that “creak” is a “salient” variable). Mendoza-Denton details the ways that “creak,” used by Chicana/o gang members originally, has now been appropriated by rappers in the mainstream, and how creak has also appeared in video games and other media—such as the internet—as an exaggerated and mocking racial marker (273). While “creak” itself is not a marker I will discuss in this thesis, “creak” is a poignant example of how “effortful” (Eckert 469) choices

are made in the positing of identity by individuals within a social group, and which can change over time to expand and transform. Mendoza-Denton writes that “creak,” originally used by males to indicate masculinity, first transferred to a feminine marker of Chicana gang members trying to keep their emotions under control, to appear “hardcore” (266). In the light of “creak’s” manifestation into a social comment (Mendoza-Denton would say this is *entextualization*, a recontextualization of a variable used in another context other than originally intended [269]), “creak” shows how a discourse device can be recycled and repurposed. In Mendoza-Denton’s words, “creak” is part of a “counterhegemonic gendered performance” (270). I argue there might be other ways in which women might entextualize gendered markers to indicate opposition to and alliance with the social hierarchy.

“Creak” is just one salient example of linguistic entextualization that duplicates “prior texts” while making use of double meaning and subjectivity. In the past century, linguists such as Deborah Tannen and Robin Lakoff and French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have conducted this very conversation about “feminine” ways of communicating which favor duplicity, complexity, and subjectivity in meaning—as opposed to the Westernized, male way of communicating in a short, direct, unilateral manner and a “business-like” tone. Thus, Mary Bucholtz, in her “Editor’s Introduction” to the revised and expanded edition of Robin Lakoff’s *Language and Woman’s Place*, clarifies that, for Lakoff, “‘woman’s language’ is not fundamentally about gender but more

basically about the displayed lack of power” (6). Similarly, Shari Kendall argues that women have held more “socializing roles, all of which involve the modeling of or explicit instruction in ‘ladylike’ language” (qtd. in Bucholtz, “Introduction” 7), reiterating the idea that “woman’s language” is implicitly taught to girls as a way to enter into a sort of exclusive clique, and that this language is then implicitly reinforced by its continued usage. Ochs’ example of baby talk is just one such example: baby talk is mastered by young girls from their first words, when they practice mothering with dolls and practice being hostesses with “tea parties.”

But third-wave feminism asks the world to develop new ways of identifying what is feminine. It asks that we address not only the white, middle-class or elite, Western idea of what is feminine, but to move beyond the conventional idea of femininity toward a much more inclusive definition of what is “woman” and what is “feminine,” to welcome women of all cultures, races, and “genders.” Kira Hall and Bucholtz, in the “Introduction” to *Gender Articulated*, very succinctly cover three major veins in philosophy regarding “woman’s language”:

The investigation of how cultural paradigms of gender relations are perpetuated through language; the study of woman’s innovative use of language to subvert this dominant belief system; and the examination of how women construct social identities and communities that are not determined in advance by gender ideologies (9).

Bucholtz and Hall refer specifically to Mendoza-Denton’s work, which recognizes

that “time-honored democratic institutions and practices may in fact engender asymmetrical power relations between men and women,” but adds that women are “able to draw upon counterstrategies that may serve as new methods of empowerment” (11). Further, they note that Mary Talbot’s “[demonstration] that the construction of femininity itself is a practice in which institutions and individual women work together, often to women’s detriment” (12). Next, Bucholtz and Hall note that “women as producers of language [might] resist or subvert hegemonic notions of gender” and “present women as agents who may defy or embrace gendered expectations of language behavior for their own purposes” (13). Finally, Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet demonstrate that “because speakers of every community invoke language ideologies together with their own local ideologies and practices in order to establish positions of power, language analysts must become aware of these belief systems before embarking on the study of discursive identity” (qtd. in Bucholtz and Hall, “Introduction” 8). Of course, the summative argument is that gender is societally constructed, and that women do not have to accept the gender definition handed down to them. Linguistic theory indicates that gender shows the sociolinguistic construction of the self: women have the power to frame and reframe society’s expectation through linguistic moves.

Revising an Old Saw: Finding Peace Between Disparate Theoretical Approaches

However, French feminists have argued that femininity might be defined as a certain essence of plurality. Irigaray elucidates this viewpoint:

'She' is indefinitely other than herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious...not to mention her language, in which 'she' sets off in all directions leaving 'him' unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. For in what she says, too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished....When she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere. From another point of pleasure, or of pain. One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an *'other meaning' always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them.* For if 'she' says something, it is not, it is already no longer, identical with what she means. What she says is never identical with anything, moreover; rather, it is contiguous. It touches upon. And when it strays too far from that proximity, she breaks off and starts over at 'zero': her body-sex (29).

I quote this passage at length because it reflects what Irigaray argues about the "body-sex;" from this passage one can infer that women are, as Irigaray puts it,

“plural” (28), in body and in mind. What a tall order—from this passage a woman might develop an inferiority complex if she were not, say, bisexual and schizophrenic. And yet, I hear in this somewhat parallel explication of the “feminine mind” alongside body-sex, something of “multifarious signalling” and of Mendoza-Denton’s “counterhegemonic gendered performance.” It may be that women have become, by necessity as subjected beings, experts at subversion and multiple voicing.

However, it may be that the issue of gender identity cannot be discussed without reference to the actual biological difference(s) between men and women; indeed, we know from linguistic and identity theory that we are all bound by societal traditions and expectation. But our bodies, too, are bound in this same way. In this vein of thought, body theory was born. Judith Butler, author of the seminal *Bodies That Matter*, posits that because of the traditional Greek philosophy that only a male can be a subject--which is divorced from the body as it transcends materiality--the concept of an identifiable “feminine” may be contained in the materiality of the body, having been “left behind” by societal conception (54-55). In other words, because (1) women throughout history have been denied education and citizenship by male society; (2) women have been seen as the origin of sin from the time of Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden; and (3) women have been tied to the work of their bodies--namely, that of producing and caring for children; women have been denied the ability to transcend the body, conceptually and practically. If, then, the materiality

of the body is conceived as a decidedly “feminine” phenomenon, this conception can inform our reading of literature and society, to unearth a “feminine” characterized by Otherness.

But herein lies the rub--if third-wave feminism agrees with French feminism in the “plurality” of the feminine, could there not be a tenuous peace made between the two groups--a further clarification and reworking of their two approaches? Can these two theoretical perspectives become friends?

The Nonthemmatizable, Pleasurable Other

For the French feminist Irigaray, the world operates according to the symbolic order of language, and she speaks of a “‘specular’ outside” which represents the “nonthemmatizable” area outside the male conception of the (male) speaking subject. If women operate as part and parcel of this “nonthemmatizable” outside, their language, too, would be characterized as “nonthemmatizable.”

Cixous’ “The Laugh of the Medusa” portrays such a “feminine” that welcomes communion with the Other—“togetherness with the Other”—which multiplies its own existence and identity, which “transform(s) by the thousands”... “without danger, without pain, without loss--of moments of self, of consciousness, of persons one has been, goes beyond, leaves. It doesn’t happen without expense--of sense, time, direction” (43). In other words, Cixous seems to say that women transcend themselves within themselves; women transcend the material body while occupying it. This is a novel concept; in Westernized Judeo-

Christian society especially, the goal of the educated man has always been to transcend the physical bondage of the material body, to reach--or to at least approach--divinity by communion with God. In this light, Cixous' remarks about the ability of woman to transcend the body while occupying the societal conception of its materiality is a literal and a figurative statement of feminine power, since to many women, our bodies cannot be divorced from their functionality. Indeed, this irrevocable tie to functionality provides the impetus for linguistic ideas of a "woman's language." But there is hope.

Butler suggests that "sexed" language is associated with the *natural*, leaving "sex" to represent something "pre-linguistic" to which there is no "immediate access." Al Becker asserts that "The actual a-priori of any language event...is an accumulation of remembered prior texts" (qtd. in Tannen 37). Hence, style, like sex, is also thought of as "a-priori" or *rooted in intertextuality* (Tannen 37), meaning that any citational practice mimics citational practices which have come before it. Thus, gender, like style, might be termed an "accumulation of remembered texts." If to be a woman is "natural", then to be a woman is to be a versatile original, and the gendered frame of the woman is a copy, or the *specular* image of the woman (Butler 43-45). In effect, the specular woman is the "accumulation of remembered texts" to which Amos conspicuously chooses to allude. In *Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes writes: As "language is redistributed...two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge... and another edge, mobile, blank, (ready to assume any contours)."

Finally, by indexing multiple versions of Irigaray's "specular" woman--the woman society continually frames and expects--Amos shows the versatility of the "natural."

Barthes describes the "erotic" as the "flaw" or "seam" between culture and its "dismantling" (6-7). Thus, in a text analyzed as skillfully, subversively "feminine" in style, the "edges" being created might be termed the "specular" and the "natural." These edges would be marked by erotic, "pleasurable" points in the text in which there is a blur between the signifier and its signified.

What linguists and French feminists do agree on is that societal norms influence the modes of discourse which are acceptable; there is an undisputed idea that the dominant portion of society decides the accepted modes or mores of conversation and interaction. According to many a linguist, the "signifier," or the symbol used to represent a "sign," or physical object, is "slippery" and easily misread. This means that the signification of any sign is negotiable, just as the discursive practices used to signify it are negotiable. Thus, goes the theory, language, including any signifier and the discursive practices used to identify it, can be "co-opted" by any speaker.

Tannen, in a chapter entitled "Repetition in Conversation: Toward a Poetics of Talk" refers to what she calls "pre patterning" in language, which is a certain "idiomaticity" or "ubiquity of prepatterned expressions *per se*" (38). Further, she argues that "it is the play between fixity [expressions which have been "handed-down," so to speak, over time] and novelty [new, "original" ways of

patterning language] that makes possible the creation of meaning” (37).

Stunningly, Tannen makes no reference to Julia Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language* in this chapter; Kristeva’s work seems an oeuvre designed to provide the basis for Tannen’s thesis here. But what Tannen does refer to is a bit by Mikhail Bakhtin:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist -- or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of a line of words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents ...

The living utterance...cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads.... (I)t cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance of ideas arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it -- it does not approach the object from the sidelines (qtd. in Tannen 43).

Similarly, Leon S. Roudiez, in his introduction to the English translation of Kristeva’s *Poetic Language*, remarks that considering Kristeva’s method of what he terms “textual” rather than “literary” analysis, “(t)he text that is analyzed is actually the effect of the dialectical interplay between semiotic and symbolic dispositions. Here it would be helpful to keep in mind the etymology of the word and think of it as texture, a ‘disposition or connection of threads, filaments, or

other slender bodies, interwoven' (Webster 2)" (Roudiez 5). Kristeva asserts that if any text can be analyzed in this way, it means that "linguistics is opened up to all possible categories, including philosophy, which linguistics thought it would be able to escape" (Roudiez 23). Due to this attendance to a new kind of linguistics which would refer not to "arbitrary" semiotics and "mathematized" semiotic practices, Kristeva's textual analysis might be seen as divorcing linguistics from traditional logic, such as that of Aristotle and Plato (Roudiez 25-26).

Cixous, in "The Newly Born Woman," speaks about the same societally constructed "logocentrism and phallogentrism" framed by Irigaray, and she asks "what would happen to the order of the world if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble?" (39). Similar to Cixous' idea of a "crumbling" of logocentrism is Kristeva's idea that a "shattering of discourse" can occur within language. According to Kristeva, "linguistics changes constitute changes in the *status of the subject*" (15). In Kristeva's view, this "shattering" enables participants in language to see the signifying process for what it is: a visibility within culture. Finally, she asks to what extent this "shattering" is itself "always already written"? Kristeva asks, "Under what conditions does (this shattering of discourse become indispensable, censured, repressed, or marginal?... And under what conditions does it remain a blind alley, a harmless bonus offered by a social order which uses this 'esoterism' to expand, become flexible, and thrive?" (16). The idea that second-wave feminism, thought to be so old-fashioned, can have been on the cusp of something so modern as indexicality is stunning. Can a

woman repurpose her body, even herself, through linguistic variables?

Barthes: Pleasure, Intertextuality, and Desire

Notably, both Kristeva and Tannen refer to the idea that the text is “always already written.” In short, Barthes is high in the minds of both Kristeva and Tannen. And in the end, it is Barthes’ theory of intertextuality that provides the centrifuge for the theories I explicate here -- to show a possible place for a non-essentialist, revisionist-type of “feminine” style.

But which is it? Is linguistics a “mathematized” science moderated by “language doctors,” such as that which Kristeva’s very doctorate would describe her? Have we, in recognizing Kristeva’s “anti-logic” of sorts, left behind Aristotle and Plato? Or is it, as Tannen asserts in “Repetition in Conversation: Toward a Poetics of Talk,” that “language is less freely generated, more pre-patterned, than most current linguistic theory acknowledges” (49)? Tannen does offer a deceptively simple solution to this conundrum: “It is the play between *fixity* [prepatterned phrases and language formulas] and *novelty* [new takes on old phrases, new combinations of words or mixed formulas] that makes possible the creation of meaning” (49). And Amos makes use of this interplay between fixity and novelty as a jumping-off point: a pathway to “bliss.”

Barthes writes in *The Pleasure of the Text* about the “redistribution” of language, in which he posits that two edges are formed: “an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge...and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to

assume any contours)" (6). This blank edge he sees as "the place where the death of language is glimpsed" (6). "The site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss" (6). If, as Barthes asserts, culture is an edge, blissful language rubs against this edge. In this blissful text, as in poetry, or in Amos' case, lyrics, "the text no longer has the sentence as its model" (6), and the edge will be clearest in "its lexicon, its metrics, its prosody" (6). The text will be a "powerful gush of words, a ribbon of infra-language" (6). But Barthes explains that this more raw edge will collide with the language of tradition, such as "(decasyllabic) meter, of assonance, of plausible neologisms, of prosodic rhythms, of (quoted) truisms" (7). In other words, culture-language history and usage is the other edge created by the blissful text--the "age-old culture of the signifier" (7). If I can identify the edges created by a blissful text, then I might glimpse the "dismantling of language" which "is intersected by political assertion" (7). In other words, I might prove that a bliss-ful text could change that very culture.

What is more, Barthes refers to *intertextuality*. In the way that Barthes describes the function of the blissful text, he seems to say that a blissful text makes use of the ways in which words and phrases and rhythms have been used before. Barthes' intertextuality is somewhat synonymous with Kristeva's term *transposition*, which, she explains, is the process of the unconscious whereby a term, phrase, or other textual artifact is "*pass(ed) from one sign system to another*" (59).

According to Kristeva, poetic language has the potential to displace or “breach” the *thetic*, or posited subject, through *mimetic* language (57), or language that mimics and makes use of the symbolic order. In Kristeva’s view, mimetic language displaces the thetic when it--through transgression of grammatical rules--destroys not only denotation, or the representation of an object, but also *meaning* itself, posited by the speaking subject (57).

These ideas are easily readable: what Kristeva refers to as the “enunciating subject” is necessary to found and to sustain the symbolic order. If the subject is subverted by poetic language, the symbolic order is disrupted. Meaning “shatters” in the face of an “instinctual glossolalia” (58). In other words, when meaning is displaced by prosody and grammar transgression, there can be *revolution in poetic language* because, as Kristeva puts it, “mimesis and poetic language...go through [the thetic’s] truth (signification, denotation) to tell the ‘truth’ about it” (60)—when grammar and semantic rules are broken, the (patriarchal) structure that animates language can be exposed at its root.

Interestingly, Kristeva delves into theology in her discussion of the implications of such language revolution; “on the strength of their confrontation with *Bedeutung* (denotation and signification), mimesis and poetic language “assume the right to enter into the social debate” (61). But, she adds, the debate is more than social; it is theological, because, she writes, mimesis and poetic language may prevent the “theologization” of the thetic (61), acting as “protestors against [religion’s] posturing” (61). In other words, grammar, syntax, signification-

-all the rules of language--are not divine. Instead, these linguistic rules are cultural mores, which can be tested and refuted; however, these rules are thought to be of divine source -- and of divine consequence -- in any language system, as Kristeva argues.

The moment in which the thetic is confronted by *jouissance* is what Kristeva calls *sacrifice*, in which the symbolic order is reinforced (78). According to Kristeva, all linguistic systems contain sacrifice, as a celebration, not of violence, but as a celebration of “the positing of violence, the ‘boundary to the infinite’ which, though fragile under the attack of violence, violates and calls upon violence, thus constituting a precarious but indispensable guarantor of its accomplishment” (79). In other words, sacrifice exists in linguistic systems to *bound* the thetic—to reinforce boundaries to the always-already thematized. Kristeva posits that sacrifice stands directly in opposition to art or poetry—or lyrics in music, as it were—in which the symbolic order is dissolved or shot through with its own precariousness, in which the fragility of the signification process, or *thesis*, is revealed not to be divine, but instead posited and unstable.

Do Purple Bodies Matter?: Bodies By Butler

Taking into account the concept of the thetic with that of gender identity, Butler remarks that it is easy to “[fall] into the trap of cultural determinism” while trying to weigh the importance of the “constitutive and compelling status of gender norms” (x), and argues that bodies only “figure”—“only appear, only

endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas” (xi). Further, she argues that “[t]o claim that sex is already gendered, already constructed, is not to explain in which way the ‘materiality’ of sex is forcibly produced” (xi). Butler’s remarks here tellingly coincide with those of Kristeva as she writes about the breach of the thetic:

The semiotic’s breach of the symbolic in so-called poetic practice can probably be ascribed to the very unstable yet forceful positing of the thetic. In our view, the analysis of texts shows that thetic lability is primarily a problem with imaginary captation (...scopophilia, the need for a mirror or an identifying addressee, etc) and a resistance to the discovery of castration (thereby maintaining the phallic mother who usurps the place of the Other) (63).

Taking both of these remarks into account, one might say “sex” is an example of the “very unstable, yet forceful positing of the thetic,” which according to Kristeva, “gives rise to ‘fantasies’” and “attempt[s] to dissolve the first social censorship--the bar between signifier and signified”--even as it “fail[s] to prevent the constitution of the symbolic” (63). Kristeva notes that in this event, “[l]anguage thus tends to be drawn out of its symbolic function (sign-syntax) and is opened out within a semiotic articulation” (63). This is the “*irruption of the semiotic chora.*” When irruption takes place, signs seem to stand for new things, or they stand for their language histories, not for the objects they were meant to signify.

When this irruption takes place in what Kristeva calls *poetic language*, there is the possibility for *jouissance*--poetic language "introduce[s] through the symbolic that which works on, moved through, and threatens it" (81). In short, grammar, syntax, and signification represent what is "thematizable" for the culture in which a language is used; when poetic language is used, these rules are broken, creating an erotic "seam" (to borrow from Barthes) that disrupts the signification practices of the culture, while allowing poetic language to comment on, revise, and refigure the signifying culture's language. Kristeva remarks: "In contrast to sacrifice, poetry shows us that language lends itself to the penetration of the socio-symbolic by *jouissance*, and that the thetic does not necessarily imply theological sacrifice" (80). In other words, when *jouissance* occurs, grammar, syntax, and language are plainly revealed as cultural iconography rather than divinely inspired edicts.

How do *jouissance* and the theologization of the thetic figure the feminine? Wordplay, multiple meanings, and the blurring of meaning reaffirm that culture can be reshaped, and that their shape is a cultural phenomenon. If sex, then, is a societal construction, sex is something that can be reshaped, revised.

Butler asks: "What are the constraints by which bodies are materialized as 'sexed,' and how are we to understand the 'matter' of sex, and of bodies more generally, as the repeated and violent circumscription of cultural intelligibility? Which bodies come to matter--and why?" (xii). And her answer is simply that through language participation and through tacit acceptance of societal rules and

mores, some of which have been handed down to us from the days of Plato and Aristotle. Kristeva writes that “the sacred—sacrifice—which is found in every society, is, then, a theologization of the thetic, itself structurally indispensable to the positing of language” (78). According to Butler, the Western world’s reliance upon the logic of these two philosophers—Plato and Aristotle—for its system of logic and persuasion shapes our ideas of who can speak—of who is visible in our culture. Aristotle’s idea of matter: “[M]atter is potentiality [*dyanameos*], form actuality.’ In reproduction, women are said to contribute matter; men, the form” (qtd. in Butler 31). Thus, as Butler explains, “insofar as matter is clearly defined by a certain capacity to originate and to compose that for which it supplies the principle of intelligibility, then matter is clearly defined by a certain power of creation and rationality” (32). Butler continues: “For Aristotle the soul designates the actualization of matter, where matter is understood as fully potential and unactualized” (32). In other words, Butler remarks, matter “only appears under a certain grammatical form” and its intelligibility “is indissoluble from what constitutes its matter” (33). What Butler means here is that the form of the human body has, in some manner, shaped the grammar and syntax used to describe it.

Next, Butler refers to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, wherein he describes the soul as “an instrument of power through which the body is cultivated and formed” or “a power-laden schema that produces and actualizes the body itself” (33). In other words, without the soul *invested with power*, the body is not actualized, does not figure or read as *visible* in our culture (34-35).

Indeed, if we rely upon these two for our traditions for signification, the only subject can be male. And this is a crucial point for bodies *that matter*, even for *people who matter*—people who signify. If a body cannot be linked to a soul invested with power, the body itself is depreciated, unimportant.

A Final Note: Feminine Identity Styling/Performance

Butler, commenting on the performativity of gender, asks: “If I [persist] in this notion that bodies [are] constructed, perhaps I really thought that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance?” (x). According to Kate McCarthy, “the female body is presented not only as a locus of oppression, but as a kind of performance site, where cultural expectations about gender are rehearsed ... manipulated and resisted” (70). Similarly, then, gender is conceived as performative, where the body as a *site of performance* becomes doubly significant in meaning and power. But Butler addresses the problems with this conception in the “Introduction” to *Bodies That Matter*:

...(I)f I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke up in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night. Such a willful and instrumental object, one who decides *on* its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided *by* gender. Certainly, such a

theory would restore a figure of a choosing subject--humanist--at the center of a project whose emphasis on construction seems to be quite opposed to such a notion (x).

What Butler stipulates here is that gender cannot only be seen as performance; that is, gender is not a choice. Gender is constructed for the speaker; it is a collocation of meanings taken together as an identity marker—a set of “remembered texts.” Indeed, Butler argues that the only agency a speaker can have is to “be constituted in and by the signifier, where ‘to be constituted’ means ‘to be compelled to repeat or cite or mime’ the signifier itself” (220).

Musical Artists in General and Amos in Particular

Musical artists quintessentially comment on and break societal expectation. Joanne Hollows discusses popular culture’s capability to “make over the popular” (190). But Amos isn’t the only female artist making over the feminine image. Karina Eileraas, along with Lori Burns and Melissa LeFrance, authors of *Disruptive Divas*, and Sheila Whiteley, author of *Women and Popular Music*, investigate the ways that popular media icons such as Fiona Apple, Courtney Love, Pink, Gwen Stefani, and Tori Amos, along with other feminine punk, rock, ska and other artists play with the societal idea of the female image by “performing ugliness,” subverting the societal expectation that they exhibit girlish “prettiness,” while breaking cultural boundaries.

Amos is distinct here, however, in that her lyrics might be said to redefine

the terms on which we base what “feminine” means, and it is through her lyrics, more than through the lyrics of other artists, that I see correspondence between this *a priori* gut-feeling I have about her work, and the linguistic and feminist theories I use here to analyze her lyrics. Moreover, historically speaking, I argue that women have become masters at manipulating a dualistic “edge” through their linguistic and “feminine” discursive practices, and that Amos’ lyrics are a signpost for these discursive practices. (Maybe that is why so many women connect with the lyrics of Amos.) Finally, if Amos, as a woman and as a performer, is using the “phallogocentric” language of dominant discourse, she may decide to mix it up. But given also that Amos figures “outside” the land of male specular-ity, she herself is as slippery as, say, the famous “woman behind the wallpaper” in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s famous work “The Yellow Wallpaper.” In fact, her status as a performer makes her linguistic decisions all the more poignant, effective, and overall, more damaging to logocentrism.

It is this “crumbling” alluded to by Cixous—the bringing down of logocentrism, which Amos’ lyrics accomplish through their subversion of words and their meaning within Amos’ sphere. Amos works with words to blur, mute, and revise their meanings. This muddying corresponds to Cixous’ definition of writing for women: “Writing is woman’s...woman admits there is an other....Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me.” Writing “gives neither rest nor security, always disturbs the relationship to ‘reality,’ produces an uncertainty that gets in the way of the

subject's socialization" (42). Thus, the lyrics of Amos disrupt notions of femininity, and, with "other-ness"—these lyrics do the work of de-socialization.

Taken together, Amos' oeuvre represents three stages in the feminine body's actualization. First, there is girlhood and shyness, and self-hatred incited by the inevitable wounds inflicted upon her for the reason of her femininity. Here, the wounding results in shame. Here, too, a girl develops her "breadcrumbs," her only means of signification while maintaining her feminine place. In the second stage, the woman begins to manufacture signs who she is beneath/behind/through the specular image placed on her. This stage is characterized by sexual experimentation, rage and raving as she begins to realize her "bounded"-ness. In the third and final stage, the woman becomes an actualized body, independent of the need for a phallus. She successfully wields poetic language to achieve *jouissance*. She develops any one of several paths to this independence, in which she breaks through/beyond the specular image. In this stage, either/or thinking is replaced by both/and/all-together logic and in which old schematic and thematic ruts are eradicated in favor of a "new," inclusive and actualized "feminine" style. I am using "Mother" and "Girl," and "Cloud On My Tongue" to explicate the first stage in the development; "Professional Widow" and "Code Red" to explicate the second stage; and "Velvet Revolution," "Body and Soul," and "Dragon" to explicate the third and final stage.

Case In Point

According to Irigaray, the “body”--the “feminine” body--is “the *site* of inscription that cannot be explicitly thematized” (qtd. in Butler 38). Thus, as Butler states, the feminine is...nonthematizable materiality” (42). In Amos’ “Purple People” the speaker reflects, “just when you escape/ you have yourself to fear;” to find or define oneself as a woman is to tolerate an inaccurate specular identity--a specular definition, denoted by a signifier/signified blur--and yet, to place oneself outside the male system of representation is to have no signification whatsoever. Thus, when the speaker asks, “Do you do judo when they surround you,” she implies the split of the body from masculine historicity--the “lily-white matricide of vicious words.” The “natural” body, exiled from the specular woman, is banished from matter, and thus, from meaning (Butler 32).

I watch me be this other thing, i never know
if I’m marooned or where the purple people go
then lily white matricide from vicious words
it doesn’t leave a scratch so therefore no one’s hurt.

Next, the speaker muses, “I watch me be this other thing and I never know/ if I’m marooned or where the purple people go.” Here, “the lily-white matricide of vicious words” is slippery, because according to Irigaray’s theory of iteration, when a woman utters herself, she iterates phallogocentric speech that erases her even as she is expressed. In addition, because the mother signifies as less than a person, “it doesn’t leave a scratch so therefore, no one’s hurt.”

The speaker in “Purple People” asks whether the specular “thunder,” a

sound that “wishes it could be the snow,” or physical sign, can be expelled by the woman through “a little mental yoga,” enabling her to enjoy the natural “gifts” of the actualized body that exist “for her, for you, for me.” This realization of the actualized body found in Amos’ lyrics--the “explicitly nonthematiz(able)” body, the site of immateriality--is boldly indexed through linguistic identity styling, which ultimately reads as a poignant example of a salient, various “feminine” body come to matter.

In my next chapter, I will elucidate how theories of gender, femininity, and the “feminine” body come-to-matter come to fruition in certain sites in Amos’ oeuvre. I will prove through detailed analysis that not only do Amos lyrics perform gender, but they also achieve “bliss” a la Barthes, through which irruption of the semiotic chora, and thus, the feminine body come to matter, are discernible. Might a feminine body come-to-matter—signifying as an original and not as a part or as a copy—implicate strict revisions to our logical systems? How can we reconceive the “feminine” and what it means in our culture to be perceived as “feminine”?

CHAPTER TWO

EXPLICATION

Stage One--Mother, Shame, and the Wound

The French feminist idea of a “feminine” language—language that would defy “patrilinear” rules of language use (Kristeva)—implies social and linguistic language change. Amos’ lyrics provide a very specific example of such language change as Kristeva suggests, and while she indexes various female personae in her work, she does not favor an essentialist definition of what it is to be ‘feminine.’ Rather, she accomplishes a certain “double voicing” similar to that mentioned by Bucholtz (“You Da Man” 450), wherein the “hegemonic masculine”—and the hegemonic feminine, for that matter—is referenced, called to task, and refuted. Sociolinguistic theorists such as Bucholtz, Kira Hall, and Ben Rampton have teased out the relationship between gender and hegemony, arguing that gender identity “occupies a hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations “ of which “only a certain subset are acceptable” (“You Da Man,” Bucholtz 444). While no gender identity is “monolithic,” certain gender identities, in particular contexts, are figured as “feminine,” while others are not.

Further, Eckert, Ochs, and Mendoza-Denton have discussed how certain “salient variables” may be used to make stylistic moves, to create and revision

identity, to position the self as “authentic” within one group while positioning the self against another group. Through the process of entextualization, which relies on Barthes’ theories of intertextuality, Eckert argues that variables can be used to transform one’s identity, and that these same variables might transform in their meaning over time. As Eckert asserts, “Participation in discourse involves a continual interpretation of forms in context, an in-the-moment assigning of indexical values to linguistic forms” (463), and even “(a) word’s denotation can absorb connotations through associations with aspects of the context in which it was used and most certainly, stances” (464). While Kristeva notes in her discussion of *jouissance* that the signifier is shown to be unstable—it signifies “multiply” or in ways that are “blurred” when used purposefully to expose the hidden prejudices inherent in the signification process—Eckert sees the signifier as changeable, as an unstable sign within the unstable, yet fixed (by repeated citation) sign-chain of signification. Thus, one might say that signification is an interplay of fixed and unfixed forces—a mixture of language devices used purposefully, which stabilizes and destabilizes the sign-chain itself. I argue that it is in just this way that a “feminine” style, especially in artistic works, might be identified; a persona is indexed through alliances with and against certain social groups, in which one makes use of an implicit understanding of salient variables, semiotic hitchhikers. Moreover, though this use of semiotic hitchhikers, language change at the level of signification can occur; new/unstable identities indexed and formed; and language tradition contested, even as it is being cited.

In this chapter, I will flesh out the three stages of development toward an actualization of the “feminine” represented in Amos’ work, as I see it. Using Butler’s body theory, French feminist theory—especially that of Kristeva and Irigaray, and the theories of intertextuality (i.e., language threads) as discussed by Barthes and Tannen, I will clarify several poignant moments in Amos’ work that exemplify moments of “feminine” style. Precisely at these moments, too, are moments of semiotic “hitchhiking” and identity indexing such as Mendoza-Denton and Eckert describe. Thus, the moments of intertextuality become moments of the sort of *jouissance* that Kristeva would term “revolution in poetic language,” or an activist brand of “feminine” style.

“Mother” and Barthes

Susan Bordo notes in her “Introduction” to *Unbearable Weight* that the “continuing power and pervasiveness of certain cultural images” have led women to “internalize (an) ideology” of guilt, which “festers into unease with our femaleness, shame over our bodies, and self-loathing” (8). It is this “ideology of guilt” which characterizes the first stage of a woman’s development; she learns how the world works, and she learns her own (subjective) place in it. Specifically, women are shamed, even as they have been allowed signification—as Kristeva or Butler might say—only as an “outside,” divorced from mattering. Just as in “Purple People,” in which the feminine body is promised its materiality, Amos’ “Mother” presents a similar image—the mother as a the body or the *chora*, as

Butler terms it (41)—but also as a site of pleasure (Barthes 6).

Go, go, go, go now

Out of the nest it's time

Go, go, go go now

Circus girl

Without a safety net

Here here here here now

Don't cry

You raised your hand for the assignment

Tuck those ribbons under

Your helmet

Be a good soldier

First my left foot

Then my right behind the other

Pantyhose running in the cold

Here, the mother has been equalized with the *chora* (that image which is only fixed [by language] in the mind and cannot change, and cannot signify). Although the mother as the *chora* represents the constant who will remain after being entered and left (Butler 41) —who will “leave the light on”—presumably, for the daughter, the speaker, leaving to “dance with him”—and who begins by telling her daughter to “go out of the nest/it's time,” she still instructs her daughter to “tuck those ribbons under (her) helmet/be a good soldier.” This pleasurable edge

could signify in several different ways: the speaker may be asking the girl to “tuck her ribbons under” to avoid being seen as a girl; or, rather, it may be that she is to simply remain strong as she goes into the battlefield, a place reserved traditionally for men. This “Mother” may herself be a “plagiarizing” and “conforming” edge, or is she an edge “ready to assume any contours” (Barthes 6)? Of course, the mother may be simply advising her daughter to be strong in the face of offenses against her femininity, or this mother may simply hope her daughter will participate in society by properly “lik(ing) the dancing”, and by marrying and having children, as a “good girl” should do. In short, the “girl” in this song may conform, or she may adopt a male persona—further, she may decide on something in between, a gender-identification of her own construction.

“Go, go, go, go now/out of the nest/ it’s time,” urges the mother. What time signifies in this first verse? It may be time to breach the thetic, or is it “time” for the girl to become a woman by participating in her own destruction/erasure? The helmet may be “just a helmet,” as Freud might say -- or it may be a phallus. This may be a way in which the feminine “transgresses” or is “excessive” (Irigaray 28-33). This girl may misbehave, or she may simply learn how to be in her (woman’s) body—to make it conform to expectation—in this (man’s) world.

The guilt-ridden ideology referred to by Bordo is apparent most readily in Amos’ second verse:

I walked into your dream

And now I've forgotten how to dream my own dream

You are the clever one aren't you
Brides in veils for you
We told you all of our secrets
All but one
So don't you even try
The phone has been disconnected
Dripping with blood
And with time
And with your advice
Poison me against the moon

In other words, women have been taught to view their own bodies with shame: as young girls, women learn to be embarrassed by their parts and bodily functions—the menstrual cycle—because their bodies have always been the reason for their subjection. Further, because young women have been taught to internalize a male fear or hatred for the female form/body/functionality, the speaker muses: “I walked into your dream/and now I’ve forgotten how to dream/my own dream,” she refers to hegemonic practices, e.g. marriage—“brides in veils,” “he’s gonna change my name”—which have shaped her idea of herself as a “successful” woman (mother and wife) that represents the societal ideal. Kristeva writes about the idea of “sacrifice,” in which a symbolic replacement of violence for a specific violent act of murder reinforces the symbolic order. In some way, the “girl” at the center of the narrative in Amos’ “Girl” represents the

sacrifice women must make to reinforce the symbolic order of society—father, mother, child—or the positedthetic, bounded and reproduced by the chora (72-81).

Further, the speaker accuses, “we told you all of our secrets/all but one/so don’t you even try.” I argue that the secret to which she refers is that of how women create life. But instead “The phone has been disconnected/dripping with blood/ and with time and with your advice/poison me against the moon” because women are “poisoned” against themselves by hegemonic practices, which fault them for their bodies because of their functionality, their capability of producing life.

The functionality of the female body is what has classically linked it to its status as specular--as what Irigaray terms as “outside” the scope of male representation. If to be male is to be, for example, made in the image of God, then to be a woman is to be something else, something “outside” or, as Kristeva proposes, “nonthemmatizable” (qtd. in Butler 42).

In the coda, the speaker muses:

I escape into your escape
into our very favorite fearscape
it’s across the sky and I cross my heart
and I cross my legs
oh my God.

Here the speaker refers not only to the specular “outside” but also to its lack of

signification, or possibly to the “woman’s world” as represented by Mary Wollstonecraft, wherein “from their infancy (women are taught) that beauty is woman’s scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and running around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison” (qtd. in Bordo 18), resulting in what Pat Manairdi might term the senseless and irrelevant “‘micropractices’ of everyday life” for women (qtd. in Bordo 18), such as “breadcrumbs lost under the snow.”

These micropractices Amos refers to result in what Irigaray’s *catachresis*, or “an improper transfer of sense” (qtd. in Butler 37) because as Lakoff notes:

...a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn’t. If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human. These two choices which a woman has--to be less than a woman or less than a human--are highly painful (*Language and Woman’s Place* 41).

In other words, an “improper transfer of sense happens” when what is purported to be “woman’s language,” or sometimes what is a women’s activity, such as leaving breadcrumbs on the ground for the birds, becomes covered with the specular—in this case, the snow. In this way, women’s language *and* women’s identity markers--these “micro practices” referred to so poignantly by Wollstonecraft--become symbolic of repression and become “co-opted” (Bucholtz), using language that Barthes would say is pleasurable for both its

“plagiari(sm)” and its “unbounded...contours” (6).

Amos’ speaker indexes the specular and its outside as she describes a girl who seems lost in the shadows. But what are the shadows, exactly?

from in the shadow she calls
and in the shadow she
finds a way finds a way
and in the shadow she crawls
clutching her faded photograph
my image under her thumb
yes with a message for my heart
yes with a message for my heart

The woman crawling “in the shadows” is separated from historicity by the male specular ideal, but still “clutching her faded photograph,” which, ironically, the speaker of the song says is her very own image. The crawling woman may speak for all women who long to find feminine expression. The photograph might be the feminine body, come to matter. The speaker here seems here to speak for all women, and yet for no one in particular.

The speaker promises a redemption of sorts: “She’s been everybody else’s girl/maybe one day she’ll be her own.” In other words, one day soon, specular femininity may be invested with materiality, may become visible in our culture. Ironically, this materiality seems to come to fruition through the poetic language of these very lyrics.

The next verse in the song is a salient example of the “instinctual glossolalia” Kristeva refers to as poetic language.

And in the doorway they stay
and laugh as violins fill with water
screams from the bluebells
can't make them go away
well I'm not seventeen
but I've cuts on my knees
falling down as the winter
takes one more cherry tree

In this verse, the young woman realizes that she is effectively on a stage, to wit, the specular stage—where she is being closely watched by phallogocentric society for signs of womanhood. She is painfully aware that she is being labeled as a woman, and the cuts on her knees are already a sign of the actual process of being taken for a woman. Specifically, “as the winter takes one more cherry tree” might refer to her virginity being taken from her as she is bent over--thusly, the cuts on her knees. In a sense, the verse serves to speak of the collateral damages¹ of being identified and labeled as a woman in phallogocentric society, which begin at a very young age, “not seventeen.” Reading this verse in the context of collateral damages, one might say the “screams from the bluebells”--a

¹ These damages may be assumed to be an inferiority or misogyny complex, low self-esteem, self-loathing, and, of course, rape.

woman's attempts to break the bounds of language or of her signification as female--are not only regarded as craziness, but they are regarded as nonsensical; ergo, the lyrics of Tori Amos. Indeed, the phrases used here—"screams from the bluebells," "violins fill with water," and "takes one more cherry tree"—are performing what Kristeva and Barthes would refer to as "plagiarism" and "blank[ness]." While their signification is by no means certain, their *intertextuality* causes them to signify in new ways, creating a *jouissance* in which the message of feminine historicity is boldly visible, even if ambiguous or "unbounded."

Linguistically, the intertextuality of a phrase such as "on my knees" or an object such as a cherry tree are what Mendoza-Denton might term "semiotic hitchhikers"—images and well-known markers indicating sexual acts performed by or on women. But these two pieces of language are "salient variables" used by Amos, I would argue, to make a comment. Instead of derision toward a woman performing a specific sexual act (such as the derision felt by a group of men talking about these acts being performed), the listener feels a vague disgust, as if truly "seeing" these things for the first time. What is more, any frequent listener to Amos can feel a certain subversive mockery of gendered stereotypes in her work. Just as Mendoza-Denton notes that "creak" has become part of a stereotypical—to the point of mockery—characteristic of chola behavior indicating prejudice ("Creaky Voice" 272), so "on my knees" and the image of the cherry tree have become derisive elements in a very female—thus, very

“feminine”—sexual historicity, in a Western, Judeo-Christian society prejudiced against femaleness.

The last verse of the song completes the image of the girl as she comes to full realization of her staid place in society. Here, she comes to terms with her lack of signification:

And in the mist there she rides
and castles are burning in my heart
and as I twist I hold tight
and I ride to work
every morning wondering why
'sit in the chair and be good now'
and become all that they told you
the white coats enter her room²
and I'm callin' my baby
callin' my baby callin' my baby callin'

“Castles,” though they may be nice for fairy tales, do not exist in the real world. At this stage, the “speaker-girl” is disillusioned by what she has been told her life will mean. Rather, she realizes her life is bound by constraints of her gender and her body. She cannot, at this point, break out of her place, though she has ceased to believe the story she has been told about herself and her identity as a woman.

² While it is easily perceived that the “white coats” are psychiatrists, who are remembered historically for offhandedly classifying women as insane, I am interested in focusing on the more theoretical rather than the pat readings of Tori Amos' oeuvre.

What she has been told, she realizes, is the fairy tale. Thus, the “burning” of the castles.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich remarked that “seldom do well-behaved women make history.” And the speaker has been told to behave, which she apparently has not done, by the end of the verse. But her behavior leaves her flat; she finds no meaning in it, and she finds herself misrepresented when she is represented at all--“and I ride to work every morning/wondering why.” Moreover, the speaker’s “wondering why” can be taken as a lack of sense, or an improper transfer of sense--the very catachresis which is referenced earlier in the song by the “breadcrumbs lost under the snow.” For example, the reader seems not meant to understand the signification of the speaker’s wondering why she is going to work. She wonders why she has been asked to be a good girl, or why she has complied with the request to behave. Or, finally, she wonders why her thoughts, as woman’s language, are trivialized even as they are expressed. Possibly she simply has no acceptable mode to correctly and accurately express herself in a phallogocentric society which brands every word that comes out of her mouth as a “sign” of her femininity, and thus, her inferiority. Certainly, the micropractices mentioned in the coda—“sit in the chair and be good,” “ride to work,” and “become all they told you”—figure as new, even meaning-less phrases, even given their intertextuality in the context of the Women’s Rights movement and its call to women “to have it all,” to divorce themselves from the material work of their bodies and to *figure* in the workforce.

“Cloud on My Tongue,” too, offers the perspective of a girl growing into a woman, with the promise that she will find the signification she seeks. In same way that “Girl” raises questions of the *meaning in micropractices*, “Cloud on My Tongue” also refigures meaningful “feminine” activities:

someone’s knockin on my kitchen door
leave the wood outside, what
all the girls here are freezing cold
leave me with your borneo
i don’t need much to keep me warm

Here, the speaker asks that she is remembered as the specular when she tells the listener to “leave me with your borneo,” to remember her as he would like to remember her—as a girl in the kitchen, delegating the task of bringing in wood for the fire. This verse also acts as a stance—the speaker identifies herself as a woman acting in a traditional role by locating herself in the kitchen. As Eckert notes, “we construct a social landscape through the segmentation of the social terrain, and we construct a linguistic landscape through a segmentation of the linguistic practices in that terrain” (455). By indexing the kitchen, the speaker segments the social terrain; once she has done this important work to create the persona, she can make certain stylistic moves to comment on the terrain.

Next, the speaker refers to the “horror” of the sex that “is not one” (Irigaray). Here, there is a cunning interplay of double meaning, in which the “ugly one” can read as the female genitalia--the sex which is characterized by

“lack”—or as the girl in transition to womanhood; the proverbial “ugly duckling” to the swan.

don't stop now what you're doing
what you're doing my ugly one
bring them all here
hard to hide a hundred girls in your hair
it won't be fair if i hate her
if i ate her
you can go now

Having positioned herself in the kitchen, the speaker can speak for herself and other women, too, who are trying to come to terms with their sexuality or with their transition into womanhood. Here, the speaker is already changing—“already in there”—meaning she retains the capability to become her own person, to signify as a person and as an actualized feminine body.

The middle and end of the verse furthers the Irigarayan symbolism of the “horror” of “lack” (“This Sex Which Is Not One,” 23). For example, the hair hiding a hundred girls might even refer to the pubic hair; the hatred of the girl— “it won't be fair if I hate her/if I ate her”—to a self-hatred of the specular outside, the girl she is becoming, whose body is not sanctioned, or “nonthematisable.” Of course, this couplet also refers to the horror of lack, a fear of being “swallowed up” by the enveloping female sex organ. According to Irigaray: “(A woman's) desire is often interpreted, and feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow

you whole” (“This Sex Which is Not One,” 29). Finally, the Irigarayan idea of autoeroticism is implied with the line “you can go now.” The girl realizes that she is, in fact, capable of stimulating herself *by herself*. She has two lips which “touch each other all the time” (Irigaray 26).

Furthermore, the semiotic hitchhiker yet again appears, in the mention of “in your hair.” Having positioned herself in the kitchen, the speaker can use “hair” as a salient variable to comment on her own social position and to display opposition to other social groups. Plainly, “hair” is a double referent to the long hair of a woman, capable of hiding things, but also, of course, to pubic hair, associated by proximity to the vagina. This image of hair is made even more crucial when one considers that, throughout anthropological history, much ado has been made about the significance of hair. Hair has been made to signify evil, and the absence of hair has been made to signify cleanliness, innocence, virginity. But the use Amos makes of hair in this verse is playful—mocking, even—of conventional, historicist attitudes against hair, quipping that “it wouldn’t be fair...if I ate her.” In other words, she plays against the fear of the “evil” hair, and uses it only to redouble a threat, as a metaphorical feint, and I argue, asking other women to laugh along with her. This is indexicality in Amos’ lyrics; she uses semiotic hitchhikers like “hair” to skillfully index a “feminine” identity, making stylistic moves to comment and refute traditional ideas about femininity itself.

In essence, then, “Cloud on My Tongue” is about the ugliness of the transition of the sexual development, and by metaphor, the signification or

actualization of a girl. It's a fearsome, loathsome process. And yet, the speaker promises that the girl is destined to make the leap: "you're already in there/I'll be wearing your tattoo." Therefore, despite the spinning in "circles and circles and circles again" as she attempts to gain her actualized body, she can be patient with the "ugliness" of the transition, until she finally makes it "over the bridge."

Stage Two: Sexual Rage and Irruption of the Chora

Once a woman experiences shame and wounding at the hands of men, there is the inevitable rage, alongside a realization that she is viewed as property, more or less, according to the time, place, and cultural practices to which she finds herself subjected. This is stage two of the process of becoming an actualized woman. Here is a signification fraught with irony; she is capable of things a man cannot do, and yet, she is treated as chattel. She is enraged, and in a manner of speaking, she becomes insane.

Irigaray writes in "Women on the Market:"

The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom. The passage into the social order, the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves, according to a rule known as the *incest taboo* (170).

In "Professional Widow," the speaker refers blatantly to the cycle of the incest taboo; the speaker confronts the phallic fear of the female sexual organ on one hand, simultaneously criticizing the idea that to have a big(ger) phallus is to be more of a man.

slag pit

stag shit

honey bring it close to my lips

yes

don't blow those brains yet

we gotta be big boy

we gotta be big

Here, not only does the speaker imply that the hearer may be fearful of labia, but also, she implies that she is, in reality, only massaging the male ego with her mocking admiration of the phallus. This is a direct female appropriation of the phallic (Kristeva), and also a linguistic move which serves as what Eckert would term a gendered marker, repurposed to indicate an opposition to the social hierarchy (459) that values the phallus. Further, the speaker here criticizes marriage practices:

starfucker just like my daddy

just like my daddy selling his baby

just like my daddy

gonna strike a deal make him feel like a congressman

it runs in the family

The speaker likens marriage to a prostitution³ of sorts; later she concludes the song with “she will supply.” In other words, the woman will supply her husband with sexual pleasure on demand.

it runs in the family

mother mary

china white

brown may be sweeter

she will supply

mother mary

china white

brown may be sweeter

she will supply

She seems to ask: Where are our principles, allowing this lawful sex trade to exist in civilized society? In short, marriage has been a “landslide of principle,” wherein everyone participates—“everywhere a Judas as far as you can see.”

In this coda we see also the *irruption of the chora*, wherein signs come to mean things they were not meant to signify. For example, “mother mary” seems here to mean something profane rather than sacred, and as “mother mary” is

³ The speaker also refers to the religious symbolism associated with marriage, in which the bride is to be chaste virgin; however, a man may enter the marriage contract with sexual tastes and preferences: “mother mary/china white/brown may be sweeter.” Possibly in 1950’s American society more than any other in the world, a woman was, of course, expected to embody a “beautiful angel” with a persona all “peaches and cream,” urging her tired husband to “rest your shoulders” after a long day at work. Naturally, she might cater to his interests, proudly proclaiming “we got every re-run of Mohammed Ali.”

juxtaposed with “china white” and “brown may be sweeter,” it seems to refer to skin, or to the sex organ itself. Whatever the interpretation, the impact is the same: women are available for men to choose—china white or brown, and innocent as “mother mary.” Thus, all three are highly sexualized, and what is theological by cultural standard—“mother mary”—is made to be an ordinary woman who is prostituted, cheapened.

This *irruption of the chora* which occurs here also figures as *entextualization* according to Mendoza-Denton (269-270); the image of mother Mary is a salient variable—it is salient culturally and religiously in the Western hemisphere—and here, it re-figures as an image of prostitution. Through intertextuality, this salient variable is reinterpreted. As Eckert explains, through a process of bricolage, “individual resources...can be interpreted and combined with other resources to construct a more complex meaningful entity” (457). In the case of the mother Mary variable, widely used in our society to indicate the religio-social entity of the virgin/bitch stereotype (e.g., obsession with the candy skull and Virgin de Guadalupe, pinups and geisha), takes on a new meaning. Mother Mary in the context of this song is used to lay bare the moral depravity behind the social practice of marriage, and even society’s treatment of women in general. The image of mother Mary as a supplier of sex is a grotesque caricature of the treatment of women, and in this light, it is much like that of “creak” when it is used to index a chola/o identity in the larger media. As Mendoza-Denton notes, “creak” takes on a certain racist connotation when used in the “how-to” manuals

she describes. "Professional Widow" is, indeed, strikingly similar in tone, if one considers it a sarcastic "how-to" manual for women.

In "Code Red," the speaker comments on the illusive sexual agency of the feminine. Here, the speaker "Slip(s) and slide(s) (her) way through this charade" of being--or of feigning to be--the specular woman that society demands. But the speaker feels a certain victory over her slippery signification, as, she quips, "I know all the players and I must say/ Do this long enough/ you get a taste for it." Ironically, though she is bitter about her plight as a woman in a man's world, the speaker here does feel at ease in her finessing role: "Some say that I will and some say I won't/ Victory is an elusive whore/ She is as easily mine/ as she is yours." In other words, she seems to say: "Be careful--I might be getting good at this."

Ultimately, however, the speaker in this song knows she needs to get out or to break out of her oppression, as evidenced in the chorus: "I'll do this last one and I'll grow me some wine/ Leave them troubled boys all behind/ What you stole, I would have given freely/ Code Red you're staring Code Red staring at me." She is determined and she is biding her time until she can leave; she knows she must leave before she dies/is suffocated/killed. She has had her fill of being the "sheath" and of being without agency, without will: "Well sometimes he do and sometimes he don't/ Sometimes I love myself best alone/ Do this long enough/ you get a taste for it." As Irigaray argues in "This Sex Which Is Not One":

Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging

prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. Thus she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants (25).

In this passive state, the speaker of the song languishes close to despair, musing "being trusted and lusted/ it could be worse than that." The speaker here has accepted a somewhat liminal signification; she is integral to the life of her man, but she is completely resigned to never being seen as herself. She simply threatens to disappear—to fall off the map—but she notably does not voice this plan to her husband. She lives her life as a "second-class citizen." She signifies only halfway because her job is simply to be content with her life as it is; stunningly, this sort of half-life is still experienced by women who consider themselves "modern women" in today's society.

Thus, the fate of the woman in the second stage is to always already be at the beck and call of her male counterpart, and to secretly yearn for a life outside the bounds of her liminal life. She is living in a stagnant state. She may even have all the modern conveniences, like the woman of the fifties who got bored

with her life of martinis at five o'clock and a roast for dinner, reading *The Feminine Mystique* only to find what she knew instinctively—that her life of washing machines and perfectly-placed vinyl furniture was a newly-fangled prison.

Susan Faludi's *Backlash* speaks in a timely manner on this struggle: are women to feel they "have it all" when they choose to work outside the home, or are they to feel they have abandoned their original calling as wives and mothers? Are we more accepting of women of all body types now than we were in the 50's? Do we regard gay and straight women as equally feminine? Or, would it be that to be a "real" woman is to leave "femininity," as a construct, behind? Ironically, the past fifty years have not made this question simpler to answer. The conventional wisdom of the current age seems to be simply that there *is* no conventional wisdom. What is the answer to being fulfilled as a woman? There is no one choice that yields a satisfying result for the women of our age.

Stage Three: Change/*Jouissance*

And yet, there seem to be some moments of actualization. We all know women who are happy, who have achieved balance. Might there be, however, a better chance for more women to feel as if the choices we have made are acceptable? I argue here that the necessary ingredient to a healthy definition of "femininity" is to make a certain theoretical leap. By accepting the theories of Butler in conjunction with Kristeva and other linguistic theorists, we might arrive

at a certain *jouissance*, shall we say, which may allow for our linguistic theories, backed by the “‘age-old’ culture of the signifier” (Barthes 6) and all it implies, to be challenged and even changed.

“Velvet Revolution” provides a view of a sexual revolution in which the body of the woman becomes actualized. First, the speaker makes reference to history and social position, through the metaphor of fabric: “Feeling radical in Cotton/ Purified in my Satin/ But the bomb of the season/ is a Velvet Revolution.” The cotton is the radical movement, possibly the women’s movement and also associated with religious fanaticism. Next, she refers to satin, which the fabric of evening gowns and wedding dresses. And finally, she says, it’s time to break out the velvet—clearly the fabric of the harlot. Or, in this case, the plush fabric with all the richness of the female sex organ. Tellingly, she says the “bomb,” which may be read as the “balm” of the season, is velvet. In other words, it’s the answer. Even as “prophets (cry),” the speaker says she looks to the “true Divine Creator” for assistance.

I look at the sky
and feel the tears of the
Prophets crying
I look at the sky
and feel the rain
the rain of tears (Amos, “Velvet Revolution”)

The speaker here is answered by the “rain”—or is it the “reign”?—of tears. I

argue that the speaker refers here to the reign of man over woman, the reign of phallogocentrism and the fear of women. Besides, she asserts, men have not done such a wonderful job at ruling the planet; in other words, maybe it's time to give the women a shot at it.: "All you killers of the children/ there's a new Commandment/ the true Divine Creator wants a/ Velvet Revolution."⁴ Who is this "true" Divine Creator? I argue that Amos actually refers to a new way of figuring the Judeo-Christian God. She asserts that the "true" God has not sanctioned the actions taken by men in their possession or exchange of women.

In "Body and Soul," the speaker invites the listener, or the audience, to commune with her, to "come and live with (her)/ body and soul." This "sweet communion," although it may read simply as a sexual invitation, is made spiritual and metaphysical, even rhetorical, as she urges "lay your law down on me love." In other words, Aristotelian logic may not hold here, the *chora* may be disrupted and cause a "fissure" of phallogocentric logic, but it may instead be that the law must seek another (*more feminine, not male*) body upon which to base itself. Thusly, she asks the male hierarchy to literally lay its law down on her, the *chora*, which may cause an *irruption*. The reference is made again to Judeo-Christian religion: "Seven devils bring them on/ I have left my weapons/ Cause I think you're wrong/ These devils of yours they need love" (Amos, "Body and Soul"). In other words, sin, which, according to the Bible, originated with women because of Eve's indiscretion with the snake in the Garden of Eden, must be reevaluated

⁴ Would this Divine Creator be a female? A mixture of both female and male?

because women are no more evil than men, who have sinned against women throughout history. These lyrics are, I argue, an almost literal plea for the irruption for which the speaker refers. If the irruption she speaks of were to occur, the “devils” she refers to might be reevaluated in terms of their capacity for good, simply because women, who have been blamed for original sin, might not be as evil as Judeo-Christian religion portrays.

Finally, in “Dragon,” Amos’ speaker charges that it is a lie that this same sin--original sin--began with women: “Don’t tell me/ A woman did this to you/ Candy lies/ Candy lies/ Candy lies.” The speaker here argues against the traditional either/or thinking of Aristotle and of the Bible: “You touched my hand/ I felt a force/ You called it dark/ but now I’m not so sure/ Just stay awhile...” She argues that the forces of darkness identified by Judeo-Christian religion may not, indeed, be evil. Next, the speaker uses the imagery of fairy tales to solidify the notion that our belief-system and our logic needs to be broken, by referring to the dragon as not an evil thing that “needs slaying,” but instead a beast to whom she will bring kisses. Thus, just as in “Body and Soul,” “Dragon” refutes either/or thinking for the perspective of both/and inclusiveness.

Clearly the speaker places Judeo-Christian religion at the heart of the oppression of women throughout history, as well.

When I look back over
documents and pages
Ancient savageries

Christened those inflated.
Now it has come to light
the Gods they have slipped up
They forgot about the power
of a woman's love

In other words, claims the speaker here, a complete and total reevaluation of the impetus for our moral base must be conducted if we are to truly eradicate the roots of misogyny from our culture and language.

The refrain contains an example of semiotic hitchhiking, as the “Dragon’s” speaker tells the audience: “Your dragon needs slaying.” In this case the dragon represents the prejudice of the male hierarchy against women, which, once slain, can eradicate prejudiced practices from Judeo-Christian culture. In this case, the audience being addressed appears to be male, and the terms used to describe the hierarchy clearly oppose it. Thus, “dragon” appears as a salient variable for the entextualization of a “feminine” marked stance.

So what? What if the signification process undergoes revision? One might argue that we have already done this important work if, as Kristeva might say, we have allowed such language as that in Amos’ lyrics to signify at all in our culture. One might say we have already shot our language through with its own posited condition and analyzed the roots of its logic—and even displaced its logic—if we have understood what Amos “means” in her lyrics. Or one might argue that this work might not really change our language or the way women figure in our

society. What difference does it really make to our lives? How does this awkward transition in thought signify in our language, if at all?

Indeed, there are certain theoretical leaps which must be attended to if we accept the message in Amos' lyrics along with their precarious reference to Butler's body theory and the linguistic theories of Kristeva, Tannen, and Eckert. Namely, an acceptance of these theories would entail a rejection of either/or thinking for both/and thinking—a rejection of the logic of Aristotle and Plato, which, not without reason, is that of the Judeo-Christian logic very oppressive to women. This revision of our logic would entail a reevaluation of our morals and belief systems. And finally, because this reevaluation of these structures might lead—backwards—into a reevaluation of linguistics and theology, we might even reevaluate our ideas of how we as a species came to signify at all. We may revision the concept of *deity*.

I have argued that connections exist between French feminism on one hand, and body theory, third-wave feminism, and linguistic theory based in intertextuality on the other. The nexus for these theories are the stylistic moves noted by Eckert and Mendoza-Denton in the creation and maintenance and reinterpretation of identity (Eckert 456; Mendoza-Denton 270). If identity exists as a collocation of meanings called a "style," then a "feminine" style might exist which can be quantified not in essentialist terms.

But not only does this mean that the theorists can bury their hatchets; it means also that a revision of what it is to be a woman must be accomplished.

This is the why of Amos' lyrics; she approaches these questions of the elusive "feminine" and of the male hierarchy by making just the stylistic moves necessary to locate the feminine in a space of inclusion and of a certain freedom from the Judeo-Christian bounds which have made the very of a "feminine" style distasteful to both men and women alike, for so long.

In my final chapter, I will clarify the implications of *jouissance* or "revolution in poetic language" according to Kristeva, and correlate this phenomenon with Mendoza-Denton's concept of semiotic hitchhiking, to show that a "feminine" style rooted in intertextuality might mean certain changes in our way of thinking about the functionality of the body and its relationship to language, about our ideas of the body and its relationship to society, and ultimately, about what/who God might be. Specifically, I will show Kristeva's notion of the theologization of the thetic as it pertains to our perception of God, and how this perception has affected the relationship of the body to language and to our ideas of who should be doing what work and holding what status in our society, showing that once Kristeva's notion of *jouissance*—alongside Mendoza-Denton's idea of semiotic hitchhiking—is employed, these structures crumble, and "lay bare" (Kristeva 78-79) the true, historic relationship between language, functionality, and deity. Lastly, I will propose a revision of our practices with regard to the functionality of the body and how it is embodied, or entextualized, through language, to show that a revision of deity, through language, can mean a certain revision of what we term as "feminine."

CHAPTER THREE
BUTLER, THE SACRED AND THE *DISIDENTIFICATION*
OF NAMING

I have argued that certain “stylistic moves” (Eckert 458), as explained in the first chapter, can be styled as “feminine” within localized discourses, and that these same moves can be utilized as “rallying points for a liberatory contestation” (qtd. in Sullivan 82) of what “feminine” is and means. In Amos’ lyrics, we can see such counterhegemonic references to the Bible, sex, marriage, sexuality, gender, and womanhood. As explained in chapter one, Ochs’ and others view language as a mode of positioning the self, through “stances” and other “social acts” (337). According to Ochs, any speech act betrays information about the speaker, through what Ochs call the linguistic phenomenon of indexicality, whereby a persona is developed (340). Thus, we might say that Amos’ lyrics provide an example of localized “social acts” and “stances” that index certain forms of “femininity.” Further, as Eckert notes, certain “salient” variables might operate within a “field of potential meanings—an indexical field, or constellation of ideologically related meanings” (454). This process, called enregistration, links local linguistic practices/forms with practices in the larger “political economy” (Eckert 456). As noted in chapter two, Amos refers to certain “social acts,” such

as “crawling” and “on my knees” (“Girl”), which have a particular context within the socio-sexual historicity of woman. Further, in “Cloud on My Tongue,” Amos refers to the salient variable “hair” as she positions herself in the kitchen, a “stance” that indexes womanhood, thus “creat(ing) a linguistic landscape through the segmentation of the practices within (her social) terrain” (455). By repeatedly indexing and segmenting the social terrain of womanhood, Amos illustrates Mendoza-Denton’s concept of intertextuality, called “entextualization” (269), which occurs when salient variables come to stand for concepts for which they were not originally intended, as explicated in chapter one (Amos’ use of Virgin Mary as a prostitute to comment on the social conditions for women).

Finally, I have shown that Amos’ language usage falls uniquely into that milieu which Kristeva and other French feminists might term a “feminine” language or discourse, and that with a thorough examination of Amos’ lyrics, we might discover an encouraging message about the “feminine” body come to matter, as Butler suggests. The connection here—between the linguists on one hand the French feminists on the other—is intertextuality, as explained in the previous two chapters. When Kristeva says “irruption of the chora,” Mendoza-Denton says “entextualization.” Mendoza-Denton describes entextualization as recontextualization of a variable in a context other than originally intended (269), whereas Kristeva describes the irruption of the chora as an event in which “[l]anguage thus tends to be drawn out of its symbolic function (sign-syntax) and is opened out within a semiotic function” (63). In effect, then, Amos’ use of salient

variables is one example of the entextualization of those variables, wherein the social constructs behind variables like “hair” and “Virgin Mary,” just to name two, are laid bare. In this way, Amos’ use of these salient variables is a sociopolitical act of resistance to hegemonic femininity and an encouragement to women and to all people yearning for ways to come to matter. This final chapter will elucidate this affirmation and its implications for our logical systems.

Foreground

I have shown how a revision of French feminist theory, seen through the lens of current body and linguistic theory, might be used to obtain a relevant understanding of “feminine” identity and style construction from a theoretical standpoint. Third-wave feminism has come away from the essentialist argument, quoted at length in chapter one, that woman “is indefinitely other than herself” (Irigaray 29) and that any truly “feminine” language would be part of a “nonthematizable” outside (to which anything feminine would be relegated by to the stricture of the patronymic order of language and signification). Third wave feminists and body theorists have arrived at a more measured approach to gender; specifically, Butler discusses the concept of the “specular woman”—that which society expects and reiterates—and refutes this identity. Butler argues that a lessened form of identity has been foisted on women: women are (improper) copies of a male original. But using Aristotelian logic against Aristotle’s syllogisms, she presents an alternative to the idea that women are bad copies.

Instead, she asserts that “woman” is the original, and that through performativity, women enact our gender by compulsively mimicking the “specular” (43-45).

As noted in chapter two, Barthes asserts, as “language is redistributed...two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge...and another edge, mobile, blank, (ready to assume any contours)” (6-7). Using Becker’s theory that “the actual a-priori of any language event...in an accumulation of remembered prior texts” (qtd. in Tannen 37), Butler asserts that gender (i.e., any identity) is an “accumulation of remembered texts,” and if our positions and even our salient variables are “remembered,” then these “edges” to which Barthes alludes are political. In other words, moments of “pleasure” in the text in poetic language have a transformative power. The power of the seeming il-logic of Amos lyrics could change our worldview. Indeed, there are real-world implications for the use of these theories in our daily lives, language, and language practices.

Acceptance of these theories entails a rejection of our rhetorical system of beliefs and discursive practices, as an outgrowth of rejection of the Judeo-Christian oppression of women using religious texts, which have been translated from Hebrew or Greek, using Aristotelian logic as their basis----which means that we have to reevaluate our morals and belief systems using a more inclusive logic. Women, once thought weak, could be strong. Women, once thought to be bad copies of men, are “original.” Women, once thought illogical, could be logical. Women, once trying to be more like men to prove their worth, could be in their

natural bodies, could be valued for their womanliness without any of the pandering and patronizing.

What would this new logic entail? Tori Amos clearly believes that we should look at our God again--could He be a She? Could He be a non-gendered or dual-gendered being? What does this imply for the way that Butler has proved that our logic bases itself upon the male body as the site of actuality? If a woman's body is the site of actuality, how might this change our perceptions of reality/truth/logic? A detailed analysis of Amos' lyrics shows us how the woman's body as the site of actuality in language might work, and how it might revision our phallogocentric logic.

Butler and the "Tacit Cruelties" of the Bound Thetic

Much of our current rhetorical systems and laws are based on Aristotelian syllogisms regarding classification and naming. Through naming and categorizing, women have been kept "in their place" for thousands of years. Because Butler offers some very practical interpretation of our current system's reliance upon Aristotelian rhetorical hierarchies, and some stunningly simple and practical advice for a revision of our cultural belief systems, Butler's theories will serve here as the mainstay of my resolution to the problem of the "feminine" and its figuring in our (Western, Judeo-Christian) culture.

Butler bases her theories of gender identity and the "feminine" on the French feminist theories of Kristeva and Irigaray. As noted in the first chapter,

Kristeva asserts that poetic language has the potential to displace or “breach” thethetic, or posited subject, through mimetic language (57), or language that makes use of the symbolic order. Butler is careful to explain that the “symbolic order,” or the societally accepted chain of signification, is upheld by proper use and transfer of ideas and categories from one person to the next, or from generation to generation.

Butler refers to the symbolic order as a set of “socially contingent rules of subject-formation,” separate from, but working implicitly with a “set of ‘laws’ or ‘structures’ that constitute the invariant mechanisms of foreclosure through which any subject comes into being” (190). This law produces what Butler calls “normativize(d) sexed positionalities,” or genders, and in doing so, “engages the traumatic production of a sexual antagonism in its symbolic normativity... rendering culturally abject...(those) cultural organizations of sexuality that exceed the structuring purview of that law” (190-191). In other words, the construction of gender is rife with “tacit cruelties” (115) which mean the figurative or cultural death to those who signify uneasily within the symbolic order. Furthermore, Butler notes, “the risk, of course, is that contingent regulatory mechanisms of subject-production may be reified as universal laws, exempted from the very process of discursive rearticulation that they occasion” (191). The danger is that a society has no frame with which to evaluate its own laws of signification; hence, these “tacit(ly) (cruel)” laws are simply reiterated, handed down from automatically from our *forefathers*.

The idea that discursive practice might be exempt from critique is not new; Kristeva, too, notes this cultural exemption in her notion of *sacrifice* and the *theologization of the thetic*:

The sacred—sacrifice—which is found in every society, is, a theologization of the thetic, itself structurally indispensable to the positing of language. This theologization takes on different forms depending on the degree of development of the society's productive forces. It represents either the signifying process' dependence on natural forces and the surrounding ecological system, or its subordination to the social relations between subjects caught in kinship relations (78).

Kristeva refers here to discursive patterns such as the functionality of the body and its relationship to language in our society. The thetic is bound through sacrifice—through what Kristeva calls the “positing of violence” or the “bound(ing) of the thetic” (78)—to constrain discursive practices, including those that represent gender. Just as Butler notes, these discursive practices and the laws that order them are not examined; rather, they are simply reiterated, and what is more, they are viewed as somehow “sacred.” Yet, Butler, like Amos, I would argue, agrees the time has come to question this tacit ostracism from the male chain of signification.

Particularly, in Amos' “Pancake,” the speaker refers very plainly to the sacred enacted by Judeo-Christian religion, in which she places strategic

references to the discursive power of the notion of sacrifice: “Seems like you and your tribe/ decided you’d rewrite the law/ segregate the mind/ from Body from Soul.” Here, the speaker blatantly refers to the dissection of the maternal body from iteration, and calls for “A change of course in/ our direction/ a dash of truth/ spread thinly” in the face of Christianity’s misogyny and homophobia. Finally, the speaker in “Pancake” seems to refer to the force of iteration that women have experienced through exclusion from the divine will:

Oh Zion please
remove your glove
and dispel every
trace
Of His spoken word
That has lodged
In my vortex

Here, the speaker asks for Christianity to leave her consciousness. Finally, the speaker indicts the male world and God for this exclusion: “You could have spared/ her — oh but no/ Messiahs need/ people dying in their name.” Here, in a sense, the speaker indicts God for using a male figure rather than a female one for the sacrifice, and for allowing the implications of the Messiah’s gender to be conflated by the patriarchy throughout history. “Why a male? Why allow this?” she seems to ask. Because the naming of the Messiah is a patriarchal sacrifice, which correlates to Kristeva’s notion of the sacrifice, we have been constantly

aware of the male examples of such a sacrifice (epic heroes are almost always male, and when thinking of heroes, we tend to think only of male firefighters, male police officers, and male soldiers as committing sacrificial deeds), while being inept to the force of iteration of female sacrifice, which has been enacted for years, without being recognized as such (Mary, virgin sacrifice). Thus, any mimesis of this sacrifice which is effected by women is not read as sacrifice; it is something else, something Other. Thus, we cannot “thematize” the tears of the Virgin of Guadalupe or of the candy skull. We reproduce them compulsively in pop culture, hoping that they will reveal themselves to our consciousness, but because they do not represent a male sacrifice, we cannot fathom the sadness of the Virgin. Why, pretty girl? What sadness? What speaking (“feminine”) subject? It is this theoretical leap, from the vision of the Divine—and by extension, the Divine sacrifice—as male, to the vision of the Divine and the Divine sacrifice as female/Other, which Amos’ lyrics utter into existence.

The Sacred Act of Naming

As Butler writes, one cannot deny the violence inherent in the act of naming. By naming and constraining gender, discursive practice enacts a “chain of iteration” that cannot be divorced from historicity (Butler 187). Thus, gender is not “performative” in the sense that the subject chooses to enact its gender; rather, gender is constrained by a set of discursive practices that allow or disallow a particular body to be intelligible, conceivable, or uttered at all (187). In

other words, gender performativity, or any performativity, is a “forced reiteration of norms” (94). What this means is that any identity definition is conditioned by its “outside.” The violence inherent in naming is, then, the erasure, or cultural death, of any phenomenon that occurs outside the norm. This violence is a cultural refusal to recognize, or, to quote Kristeva, to “thematize” that which exists outside the norm—in effect, to deny the existence of the referent altogether.

Yet, as Butler writes, “the constitutive outside means that identity always requires precisely that which it cannot abide” (188). To create a coherent gendered image of what is “woman,” there must be an image of what is *not*. Any identity formation includes what Butler calls “the abasement through which coherence is fictively produced and sustained” (115). Butler continues,

Something on this order is at work most obviously in the production of coherent heterosexuality, but also in the production of coherent lesbian identity, coherent gay identity, and within those worlds, the coherent butch, the coherent femme. In each of these cases, if identity is constructed through opposition, it is also constructed through rejection. It may be that if a lesbian opposes heterosexuality absolutely, she may find herself more in its power than a straight or bisexual woman who knows or lives its constitutive instability. And if a butchness requires a strict opposition to femmeness, is this a refusal of an identification or is this an identification with femmeness that has already been made, made

and disavowed, a disavowed identification that sustains the butch, without which the butch qua butch cannot exist? (115).

In other words, simply to negate the existence of opposing subject-positions might not be enough to explain or to guarantee the status of a referent; indeed, at some times, the denial of the opposition does as much damage to one ideology as it does to its opposing ideology. I quote this passage at length because it illustrates the central point I am trying to make about how our logic at this moment in history relies on either/or thinking. There is, in our way of thinking, as Butler states, “either ‘A’ or ‘not A’” (35-37); nevertheless, one can see the problems with this logic.

What Butler recommends is not a simple rejection of Aristotelian (either/or) logic and its replacement with both/and logic, however. What Butler advocates is rather a reworking of our system of “repudiation... subordination...or exploitative relation” (118). Sometimes, in this new system of logic, “A” might mean the existence of a “not A,” but in others, “A” might entail a “sometimes A.”

Butler refers to the term “women” as a “political signifier,” and notes that

No signifier can be radically representative, for every signifier is the site of a perpetual *méconnaissance*, it produces the expectation of a unity, a full and final recognition that can never be achieved.

Paradoxically, the failure of such signifiers—“women” is the one that comes to mind—fully to describe the constituency they name is precisely what constitutes these signifiers as sites of phantasmatic

investment and discursive rearticulation. It is what opens the signifier to new meanings and new possibilities for political resignification. It is this open-ended and performative function of the signifier that seems to me to be crucial to a radical democratic notion of futurity (191).

In other words, the only way to avoid a “paralysis” in terms of signification with regard to identity politics is to take into account not only the historicity of a word, but also its possibilities, its future (193). Butler argues that conceiving of identity as a uniform entity treats it as an end, when it should instead be the means to a greater end. Instead, identity, she argues, should be a jumping-off point for a reexamination of our discursive practices.

Butler advocates an “anti-descriptivist view of naming” which might see the name as possibly “designat(ing) a contingent and open organizing principle for the formation of political groups,” thus “provid(ing) a linguistic theory for an anti-essentialist identity politics” (208). From this perspective, one must admit that any attempt to unify a multiply-constituted referent through a signifier is “phantasmatic” and, thus, functions as a “*dis*identification.” In this case, Butler argues, “politics holds out the promise of the manageability of unspeakable loss” (209), to *perform* rather than to *represent* identity or any ideological formation (210).

In the view of Jacques Lacan, ““(t)he essentially performative character of naming is the precondition for all hegemony and politics” (qtd. in Butler 211).

Yet, Butler notes, it is this moment in signification that gives way to what she calls a “radical democratic politics” (210) because, “if the process of naming objects amounts to the very act of their formation, then their descriptive features will be fundamentally unstable and open to all kinds of hegemonic rearticulations” (210). Butler observes: “It is of no small significance that proper names are derived from the paternal dispensation of its own name, and that the performative power of the paternal signifier to ‘name’ is derived from the function of the patronym” (211). Indeed, the act of naming is, according to Saul Kripke, a discursive practice—the “fixing of the referent”—which can be traced back to the Bible, to the original naming that God performed on Adam (qtd. in Butler 212). In this way, naming is a citational practice, “a reiteration of the divine process of naming, whereby naming the son inaugurates his existence within the divinely sanctioned community of man” (212).

The implications of this view of naming are crucial to our understanding of “women” as a multiple referent; if “women” is something “outside” which cannot be named, and whose constituents receive no named continuation of the patriarchal line, then “women” are seen, even linguistically, as existing outside the divine community of man sanctioned by God. Women not sanctioned by God?

According to Kripke, language users are bound by a “chain of normative usage,” indicating, through naming, a “causal link” which normativizes their “intention” (qtd. in Butler 213). In this process, Kripke specifically names the act

of baptism as a discursive practice to mark the naming of a subject (qtd. in Butler 214). In this way, the act of naming secures a place for the referent within the divine will of God; Butler comments that

It appears to follow, then, that the fixing of the referent is the forcible production of that fictive homogeneity, and, indeed, of that community: the agreement by which the referent becomes fixed (an agreement which is a continual agreeing again that happens over time) is itself reproduced on the condition that the reference is fixed in some way...it is the reiteration of the divine performative and, perhaps also, the extension of the divine will in its uniformity, then it is God the father who patronymically extends his putative kingdom through the recursive fixing of the referent (qtd. in Butler 214).

Thus, naming of people and objects, such as baptism or even conferring upon a multiply-constituted group a particular name (such as that of “women”), is an act which reiterates the notion of what *God* thematizes. Thus, naming functions as a *theologization* of the thetic.

Amos refers to this theologization of the thetic in “Muhammed, My Friend,” wherein the speaker suggests that the Messiah was actually a woman:

Muhammad my friend
it's time to tell the world
we both know it was a girl back in Bethlehem
and on that fateful day

when she was crucified
she wore Shiseido red and we drank tea
by her side

Here, the speaker refutes the idea of male sacrifice and the male sacred order. In a patriarchal society, there must a patrilinear blood-line, in which there must be a sacred son, not a sacred daughter.

As Butler notes, the sacred order is promoted and continued through “rigid designation,” combined with “patronymic production and transmission of a uniformity of intention.” In this way, it is possible to “secure the lines of this transmission through time through the production of stable kinship, that is, strict lines of patrilineality...and through the exclusion of catachresis” (215). What is significant to my thesis in this remark is that all these totems, so to speak, must be in place to achieve the continuation of patrilineality, but alongside the *exclusion of catachresis*: the very phenomenon which makes *jouissance* possible in language must be excluded in order to exert the theologization of the thetic.

The Performative Power of the Name

According to Butler, the “performative power of the name...cannot be isolated from the paternal economy within which it operates, and the power-differential between the sexes that institutes and serves” (216). But using Kripke’s notion that “‘the referent’ depends essentially on those catachrestic acts of speech that either fail to refer or refer in the wrong way” (Butler 217), Butler

argues that this im-proper naming of things can open possibilities for new meanings (218). Butler indirectly deals with the question of what happens when a woman, member of the catachrestically identified group “women,” speaks: she argues that the term “women” as an identifier “will gain and lose its stability to the extent that it remains differentiated and that differentiation serves political goals” (218). But Butler resists the temptation to categorize “women” as the lost referent. Instead she argues that “(t)o call into question women as the privileged figure of ‘the lost referent,’ however, is precisely to recast that description as a possible signification, and to open the term as site for a more expansive rearticulation” (218).

But the danger is that danger which is so easily gleaned from reading Irigaray’s description of “women,” quoted at length in chapter one, which poses that a woman is “always something other than herself.” Butler argues that “if women are positioned as that which cannot exist, as that which is barred from existence by the law of the father, then there is a conflation of women with that foreclosed existence, that lost referent, which is surely as pernicious as any form of ontological essentialism” (219). Butler argues that the answer is to “make the signifier into a site for a set of rearticulations that cannot be predicted or controlled, and to provide for a future in which constituencies will form that have not yet had a site for such an articulation or which ‘are’ not prior to the siting of such a site” (219).

Amos herself refers to the patronymy of naming. In “Crazy,” the speaker

refers to the fall of Eve, which places her, and all women, in the subjective position.

Not sayin'
Not charmed at all
Not sayin'
that you weren't worth
the fall

Next, the speaker refers to the “real” that Butler also notes, from Foucault and Žižek:

So I let Crazy
take a spin
Then I let Crazy
settle in
Kicked off my shoes
Shut reason out
He said “first let’s just
unzip your religion
down’

The speaker lets herself be subsumed under the term “women” by patronymic naming and ideas of the specular woman. But, she resists this naming, naming resistance “crazy.” In other words, any rejection of patronymic naming is seen as insanity, because it is outside the thematizable. The speaker’s identity—

“women”—constitutes what Žižek terms the “real” (207), what is unsanctioned by the patronymic and, by proxy, divine, discursive practice of naming. In order to reject it, she must “unzip (her) religion,” which has placed her logistically, and, therefore, theologically, outside divine will.

Finally, the speaker refers to naming:

Found that I
I craved at all
Saw me melt
into your
native shelter
Where you carved my
name
Paper tigers scare
and came
Alive

When the speaker comes to “crave,” or speak, at all, she speaks as a “lost referent” who must “melt into (her) native shelter,” womanhood—a seemingly subconscious, a-priori linguistic and discursive practice of occupying a certain thematizable sexed, sociopolitical position in society—in order to signify.

Signifying as a woman is a somehow half-signification.

Further, “paper tigers scare,” meaning something that seems so harmless, like a name, can be threatening. And yet, she notes these paper tigers

came alive
through the dawn
through the light
through the time
when you said
you could
drive all night

In other words, the name of “women” must be reopened, as Butler argues, to new signification:

Heard that you were once
'Temptation's Girl'
And as soon
as you have
rearranged the mess
in your head
He will show up looking
sane
perfectly sane
If I know Crazy

In other words, “women,” having born the signification of original sin, can reopen the term “women,” reifying the term, giving the term a futurity that contradicts its historicity—a notion which, in itself, demonstrates the new logic entailed by an

acceptance of the theories I orchestrate in this thesis. Amos argues that if we “rearrange the (logical) mess in (our) head(s),” “Crazy,” the *named* personification of the “real”—what is currently seen as insanity because it is outside the thematizable—will look “perfectly sane.”

In fact, an improvisation Amos performed on *Radio Uno Italy* on October 16, 2002, further emphasizes the theme of naming found in these lyrics:

tell me
do you see
the same face
when I say the name
crazy
tell me
do you see
the same face
when I say his name

Here the speaker reiterates the (patronymic) discursive practice of naming in order to subvert its patronymic claim over her identity. She effectively pokes holes in the process of naming and all of its innate structures and consequences.

Butler argues that “failure of identification is the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference” (219). By asking what the audience sees when she says “his name,” the speaker alludes to the very *disidentification* to which Butler continually refers. If “Crazy” is the resistance to

the thematizable, then to understand “crazy” is to understand the “real,” the constitutive outside. Indeed, she argues that “through a certain insistent citing of the signifier...a repetition compulsion at the level of signification...an iterable practice that shows that what one takes to be a political signifier is itself the sedimentation of prior signifiers...” (219-220).

Amos refers very plainly, it seems, to a reopening of signification in “liiii.” First the speaker starts with wordplay, an element of jouissance, “With your E’s/ And your ease/ And I do one more,” referring next to the patronymy and its hold on language:

Need a lip gloss boost

In your America

Is it God's

Is it yours

Sweet saliva

Here, the speaker asks for an end to patronymic traditions in language and signification, quipping that our discursive practices here in America need a “lip gloss boost,” possibly even referring to an “instinctual glossolalia” much like what Irigaray describes as a more woman-centered language. Next, she calls the theologization of the thetic to task by asking if “saliva” belongs to God. Has God ordained the naming of saliva, as such?

Next, the speaker refers to Kristeva’s notion of linguistic sacrifice, and the effect of cultural abjection:

I know we're dying
And there's no sign of a parachute
We scream in cathedrals
Why can't it be beautiful
Why does there
Gotta be a sacrifice

Here the speaker asks why patronymic signification must result in exclusion. *Jouissance* is in effect here, indicated by wordplay and inclusion rather an exclusion. Further, the speaker refers to patronymic threat of hellfire, the ultimate expression of the constitutive outside which, in this thesis, signifies a place outside the divine plan, as she asks God to “Just say yes/ You little arsonist/ You're so sure you can save/ Every hair on my chest.”

Next, Amos seems to encourage a rejection of our rhetorical system of beliefs and discursive practices and a rejection of the Judeo-Christian oppression of women through religious doctrine and theologized discursive practices. In “Virginia,” Amos refers to a woman, Virginia (a personification of the state of Virginia):

she may betray
all that she loves
and even wait
for their
Savior

to come

Here the woman, Virginia, “can’t remember (her) name” after she has given up all that she loves, waiting “for their Savior to come.” Amos seems to argue that the time to change our signification of women is urgently approaching, as

(Virginia) loses
a little each
day
to ghetto pimps
and presidents
who try and
arouse
her turquoise
serpents
She can’t recall
what they represent
and when you
ask, she won’t know

Here, although Virginia has not completely been broken down (or taken over) by the patrilinear logic—“she can’t recall/ what they represent”—she “loses a little each day.” And yet, she “lay(s) down her Body/ covering him all the same.” This reference to “covering” bears eerie resemblance to Butler’s discussion of the catachresis inherent in the naming of a multiply constituted category such as

“women.”

Agency and Performative Power

Butler argues that “to take up the political signifier (which is always a matter of taking up a signifier by which one is oneself already taken up, constituted, initiated) is to be taken into a chain of prior usages, to be installed in the midst of significations that cannot be situated in terms of clear origins or ultimate goals” (219). As clarified in chapter one, because of this instability, Butler argues that agency can never be understood as a controlling authorship over that signifying chain, and it cannot be the power, once installed and constituted in and by that chain, to set a sure course for its future;” rather, agency in this light is what Butler describes as a

‘chain’ of signification (which) operates through a certain insistent citing of the signifier, an iterable practice whereby the political signifier is perpetually resignified, a repetition compulsion at the level of signification...(wherein) what one takes to be a political signifier is itself the sedimentation of prior signifiers, the effect of their reworking (220).

Butler asserts that to use a term such as “women” or “queer” is to “install a (false) identity through repetition,” a term which acts as a “disloyalty against identity—a catachresis...a disloyalty that works the iterability of the signifier for what remains non-self-identical in any invocation of identity, namely, the iterable or temporal

conditions of its own possibility” (220).

This concept of a “disloyal” signifier is what is being employed when Virginia covers “him.” Although she knows she is not being fairly described, she uses her Body (with a capital “B”—to indicate that the female body is being reopened to divine will?) to smooth over the rough spots in signification, to reach an uneasy peace, wherein she, as the lost referent, is sacrificed, linguistically, physically, and theologically.

This theological and linguistic sacrifice is addressed very clearly in “Mary,” in which Mary, the virgin Mother, acts as a catachresis for “women” within divine will. Here the speaker laments the way in which the divinity of Mary has been cheapened by efforts to find a culturally-readable image for women: “everybody wants you, sweetheart/ everybody got a dream of glory/ Las Vegas got a pin-up girl/ they got her armed as they buy and sell her.” But instead of sexualizing or cheapening the image of Mary (in order to deny or denigrate the divine in “women”), as Las Vegas has done, the speaker wants to reopen her signification.

Oh Mary, can you hear me?

Mary, you’re bleeding

Mary, don’t be afraid

we’re just waking up

and I hear help is on the way

Clearly, the speaker here believes that the Judeo-Christian community is ready for a new perspective on Mary, her divinity, and the ordination of women within

divine will. The speaker laments, “When I think of what they’ve done to you/ oh Mary, can you hear me?” arguing that “Butterflies don’t belong in nets.” Here the signification of the butterfly is that of linguistic and theological sacrifice; Mary, and the cultural signification of all women, has been sacrificed; and yet, promises the speaker, “help is on the way... ‘cause even the wind/ cries your name.” Here the speaker seems to refer to Luke 19:40, in which Jesus tells his disciples that even if they did not praise him, “the rocks would cry out” (ESV). Amos’ allusion to this verse here is a literal call to nature to “cry out” against the denigration of Mary, who she argues is a feminine divinity which has been excised and excluded by Judeo-Christian patronymy due to her femininity.

Reopening Terms: “Women” and “Queer”

Butler argues that the “failure of the signifier to produce the unity it appears to name is not the result of an existential void, but the result of that term’s incapacity to include the social relations that it provisionally stabilizes through a set of contingent exclusions” (221). Further, she asserts that to attempt to quantify a multiply-constituted category naming is futile; “that there can be no final or complete inclusivity is thus a function of the complexity and historicity of a social field that can never be summarized by any given description, and that, for democratic reasons, ought never to be” (221). Thus, she argues, “non-referential terms (such as) ‘women’ and ‘queer’ institute provisional identities and, inevitably, a provisional set of exclusions,” which “creates the expectation that a

full and final enumeration of features is possible (221). This fallacious expectation “orients identity politics toward a full confession of the contents of any given identity category” (221), resulting in what Butler calls “foreclosure” (221).

But, according to Butler, it is this foreclosure which allows the (affirmation) of the “anti-descriptivist perspective as the open and democratizing potential of the category” (221). Thus, Butler argues, to “ameliorate and rework this violence, it is necessary to learn a double movement: to invoke the category and, hence, provisionally to institute an identity and at the same time to open the category as a site of permanent political contest” (222), in order to “perpetually interrogate the exclusions by which it proceeds” and “to learn to live the contingency of the political signifier in a culture of democratic contestation” (222).

But, Butler asks, how does a term like “queer” come to be an acceptable term, given its historicity? “Is this a simple reversal of valuations such that ‘queer’ means either a past degradation or a present or future affirmation?....When and how does a term like ‘queer’ become subject to an affirmative resignification for some when a term like ‘nigger,’ despite some recent efforts at reclamation, appears only capable of reinscribing its pain?” (223). Further, she asks, “How is it that those who are abjected come to make their claim through and against the discourses that have sought their repudiation?” (224).

Butler, in answer to her own queries, argues that “‘queering’ persists as a defining moment of performativity” because “(p)erformative acts are forms of authoritative speech...that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power⁵” (225). Further, Butler notes that “if the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse” (225). Thus, there is no power as such, argues Butler, but rather, there is the citational act which is “a nexus of power and discourse that repeats of mimes the discursive gestures of power” (225). It is not the speaker who exercises power in this situation—“it is the power of the citation that gives the performative its binding or conferring power... the citational legacy by which a contemporary ‘act’ emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions” (225).

The Forming of a (Logical) Subject

“(R)ecognition is not conferred upon a subject, but forms that subject” (Butler 226). I have attempted to reconcile here the idea that a subject can be constituted by a society that decides it for itself and bounds it, borders it, as it were, into a cage, just like the butterfly in “Mary,” with the idea that women, as

⁵ Such an argument is (however hidden) at the heart of the gay marriage debate, for example. Because a marriage certificate and the conferral of a marriage license is a performative and authoritative act that “exercises(s) a binding power,” people (actually very correctly) see the act as an important signifier in our culture, because it represents a discursive pattern change.

speaking subjects, can change the conception of what we are as a multiply-constituted referent. Summatively, I have used Butler's ideas to show that we are constituted in and by the logic of the signifier and by the logic of the signifying chain itself. I have, finally, reached the conclusion that a new logic is necessary in order to conceive of a new category of "women" in our society.

Might we revisit a "generative" logic such as that of Bakhtin? Is not such a logic, in fact, exactly that to which Butler points when she writes about the opening of possibilities and linguistic "futures" for terms of identification? Butler argues that a term such as "queer," "through repeated invocation...become(s) linked to accusation, pathologization, insult," and over time, forms "a social bond among homophobic communities" (226). But Butler argues next that such a bond necessitates a certain "turn *against* this constitutive historicity" (227). I argue here that such a bond works in much the same way in which the constitutive outside works: such a community created through language use also creates the community shamed by such a usage. The co-opting/reversal/reclamation of the term "bitch" is a prime example. In the case of both "queer" and "bitch," I argue that these terms can be seen, referring back to Mendoza-Denton, as "semiotic hitchhikers," which have been "entextualized" and transformed (270). Indeed, her description of the effects of "creak" are eerily similar to the roles of the usage of the terms "queer" and "bitch:" "distinguishing the (identity of the speaker's) voices;...in orienting the narrator in the moral landscape of the events;...(in) cu(ing) differences in participants and points of view" (269). Here, the term

“women,” chosen by Butler as one of her cases in point, follows suit in its subjectivity to entextualization and re-entextualization, as it were.

“And yet,” she notes, such an “interrogation of those constitutive and exclusionary relations of power through which contemporary discursive resources are formed...is crucial to the continuing *democratization* of queer politics” (227) because “it constitutes a self-critical dimension within activism” (227). In other words, Butler argues that we must allow an ongoing interrogation of these terms to keep them “fresh.”

A key point of my thesis is that an end to the oppression of women using religious texts translated from Hebrew or Greek, using Aristotelian logic as their basis, compels a reevaluation of our morality and belief systems using a more inclusive logic, such as the logic so ingeniously detailed by Butler and so cunningly employed in the lyrics of Amos. Mendoza-Denton mentions, in her discussion of “creak,” *intonational shadow* in the narrative of Don Gabriel in an article by Jane Hill, which “breaks the narrative down in to a Bakhtinian interplay of voices” (269). Such a narrative provides Mendoza-Denton with a key piece in her analysis of “creak,” and here also provides a key example of the kind of logic necessitated by my discussion of Kristeva’s notion of *jouissance* and its connection with Butler’s notion of an expansive democratization of the political signifier “women” and “queer.”

It is this very democratization of the signifier “feminine” which I attempt to

accomplish in my thesis. Maybe it is time to reopen the signifier “feminine.” By keeping in mind Butler’s cautionary tale against foreclosure and her advocacy of the democratization of the signifier for the multiply-constituted referent, while giving proper attention to the moments of *jouissance*, of *catachresis*, of improper sense and semiotic hitchhiking in signification, it is possible to reach a non-essentialist and non-descriptivist conception of the term “feminine.” The term “feminine” is a term with a rich historicity, and while it is not necessary or possible to deny this historicity, it may, as Butler argues, be possible to “learn to live the contingency” of the category of “women,” “queer,” or “feminine.”

The women of Amos’ lyrics contain all of those versions of “feminine” which have been foreclosed, conflated and used as “sutures” which, according to Žižek, *disidentify* and “cover over” the *catachresis* associated with collective terms (qtd. in Butler 195) like “women.” From their various subject positions—bitch, prostitute, virgin, lesbian, mother, daughter, girl, woman, wife, *divorcée*, porn star—they utter collectively that which has been *catechistically disidentified*. Moreover, Amos lyrics expose those hidden functions of language, bringing to light the misogyny of Western language and language practices because of their theologization, reinforced through Judeo-Christian religious doctrine. And finally, Amos’ lyrics revision for us a self-aware, powerful, spiritual category of women who are infused with a divinity denied them in the past. In “Cloud on My Tongue,” the speaker wishes this kind of fulfillment for all women:

You're already in there

I'll be wearing your tattoo
You're already in there
Thought I was over the bridge now
I'm already in
Circles and circles and circles again
The girl's in
Circles and circles
Got to stop spinning
Circles and circles and circles again
Thought I was over the bridge now

Here, as she speaks first from the perspective of the woman who successfully gotten “over the bridge,” and next from the perspective of the girl who is still “spinning,” the speaker of the song identifies the kind of reassurance all women can have once they have moved past the shame of the wound and the self-hatred inflicted upon femaleness, “femininity,” and womanhood by the Judeo-Christian concept of original sin and the functionality of the female body, reopening the term “women”—and even the term “feminine”—to new possibilities.

Afterword

Is it possible that the terms “feminine” and “women” can be newly conceived? Butler asserts that it is to be done only by using these terms, to allow them to be on the tongues and on the minds of people, to be redefined locally

and “redistributed,” much in the way that Mendoza-Denton or Barthes might suggest. Through entextualization of the salient variable, “feminine,” we might begin to see small changes over time, which might stem to larger changes over a longer period. But first, as a culture—beginning with feminists, I would argue—we must reclaim the word “feminine” from its historicity. Many women, even as feminists, are guilty of misuse and of pejorative use of the word “feminine” and of the term “woman.” To reclaim these terms, we must again become comfortable with difference all over again: women are not men. We are women, we are “femme”-inine. We are women. To begin, we must confront Judeo-Christian and Aristotelian prejudice against women wherever we find it, and we must speak out in resistance. We must point out these prejudices to other women and to men, wherever we find them. And we must broadcast, as Butler suggests in her discussion of “anti-descriptivist perspective” (221), that difference can be a starting point for open discussion.

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