Discursive Strategies for Social Change: 
An Alternative Rhetoric of Argument

"Cara a cara con el enemigo, de que valen mis palabras?"
—Cherrie Moraga, "Refugees of a World on Fire"

On the morning of May 17, 1912, at the national convention of the Socialist Party in Indianapolis, a woman delegate, Theresa Malkiel of New York, moved to amend the Socialist Party constitution to read "for both men and women" in the section describing the principles to which party members subscribed. After some debate in which one man disagreed with the amendment and another ignored the motion on the floor and introduced an unrelated motion, another woman, Anna Maley of Washington, arose to address the issue. The transcript of her speech reads: "I speak not as a woman, not as a feminist. I speak as a party man (loud cheers) and as an organization man (cheers) when I tell you that if you don't put your women into the fight, the capitalists will do it for you" (Spargo 119). Maley, an organizer for the Party's Women's National Committee, was probably quite aware of the irony of her speaking position: In order to advocate the equality of women and men within the Socialist Party, she had to deny that she was using feminist discourse and even that she was a woman.¹

Maley's dilemma is a frequently repeated one for those who are located outside dominant discourses but who need or wish to participate in those discourses. She can either follow traditional rhetorical advice and adhere to the audience or else she can subvert the dominant discourses in an attempt to change them. Maley's discursive tactics demonstrate the risks of always trying to adhere to one's audience. To gain an acknowledgment of women's equality within the Party required Maley to efface herself as a woman. In the short run, her tactic might be effective, but in the long run, it leads to denial of her agency. Maley's dilemma also points to an absence in the rhetorical tradition, which offers little formal advice to those who are not already located in speaking positions within dominant discourses. The barriers that speakers and writers encounter when the principle of adherence cannot be easily invoked have been the focus of much recent scholarship on the writing of women,
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people of color, and gays and lesbians. Rather than almost unconsciously occupying a position within a discourse, a writer who cannot immediately draw on adherence often must challenge the discourse in order to create a space to speak. To challenge a dominant discourse requires alternative strategies from those offered by the mainstream rhetorical tradition.

Our project is to identify discursive strategies for social change by investigating how people have challenged dominant discourses. Under our rubric "discursive strategies for social change," we include any means of change using primarily words, whether those words are spoken, printed, or broadcast via other media. We are not so much interested in the means of distribution (although it is another issue of critical importance) than in the actual linguistic constructions themselves. By "social change" we mean a shifting in power arrangements to benefit those previously lacking in either formal or informal prerogatives or influence. Some of the previously defined categories of power differential we consider useful are class, race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. At the same time, we do not accept the idea of hierarchies of oppression. Such a notion is rarely useful except to those who wish to promote divisions among populations. Oppressions are rarely unilateral and complete, most individuals occupy multiple positions, and these positions are complex and often paradoxical. Moreover, positions are rarely rigid or fixed, but move in cultural flux, thus creating possibilities for change.

Thus we need a richer theory of the rhetorical situation than the familiar rhetorical triangle. Discussions of context based on the rhetorical triangle tend to render the speaker/writer, subject, and audience as independent entities. Context then becomes either the background or is described in terms of the immediate situation. Understanding how discursive strategies can lead to social change demands not only extending a notion of context to the histories of writers, subject matters, and audiences but also comprehending how each is located in multiple relations of power and how discourses are related to practices. If people want to change their life conditions, they must challenge certain seemingly necessary connections in social and discursive relations and construct others.

How people are located in multiple relations of power and how discourses are related to practices are the critical questions for theorists committed to social change. Although some theorists complacently view culture as merely a series of texts and suggest that scholars can only tell more stories about it, we believe that examining the practices and effects of discourses is crucial. For example, we know that the focus of the discourses of medicine on men means that far less funding is given to breast cancer research than for heart disease research, even though 46,000 American women will die from breast cancer this year alone. Our goal is to bring together the analyses of cultural studies and materialist feminism regarding webs of power arrangements with the insights
of rhetoric into discursive practices of persuasion. However, we are not just interested in analyzing the politics of linguistic constructions of reality and subjectivities but in affecting those constructions.

At the same time, though, we want to consider what the relationship is between "success" and the sorts of linguistic strategies that we describe. Maley and other women radicals cannot be said to have been "successful" in introducing a feminist program into the Socialist Party. The whole movement got clobbered by larger social forces in 1918. Thus it is important not to judge the effectiveness of any particular discursive strategy by whether it was "successful" in a given context. Language may have "a plastic action upon the real" (Wittig, *Straight Mind* 78), but it doesn't have the only action on the real. And we have to remember that different people and groups have differing access to publication of their uses of language.

**THE STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE**

*Free and leisured conversation generates abnormal conversation as the sparks fly upward.*


*I didn't confront teachers. . . . I shouted, laughed, disrupted classes by sneezing, coughing, dropping books on the floor. I expressed my disdain for their ideas and values by all means except by direct political argument.*


Contrary to Richard Rorty's suggestion that "free and leisured conversation" leads to discursive, and thus social, change, we understand that such linguistic privilege is a luxury reserved in most cultures for a few. Indeed, some situations allow for only the most basic discursive disruptions. We are listing here some persuasive uses of language occupying that space between the well-timed sneeze and the pleasant discussion among peers.

What follows is an introduction to the discursive strategies we have located. It seems important to point out that because writers use one or more of the strategies we mention below, it does not mean that they have similarly announced an epistemological system largely or even partly focused on language. Indeed, most of the writers whose work we include make no such claims. Some, such as Mary Daly, while making use of elaborate language strategies, have defined systems that do not privilege language use per se. Some writers may not have desired or imagined change of the magnitude suggested by others and thus may not have seen a need for such an epistemological overhaul. And in many cases, we simply have no way of knowing what a writer may have intended.
Moreover, as we collected the differing types of strategies, we did not confine ourselves simply to those about which writers had commented. Thus some of our entries draw on specific discussions of a writer's theories and analyses of a strategy that in his or her estimation promotes change; others are simply examples we have collected in the course of our reading, and the discussions and analyses are our own.

In a number of cases, we have found that writers will attempt to combine a nontraditional argumentative strategy with traditional argumentation. Again, Mary Daly's work is a case in point. And certainly writers also frequently make use of multiple nontraditional strategies within a piece of writing. (June Arnold's use of new pronouns within a narrative comes to mind.)

We make no claims for the utility of any strategy. Some are clearly more broadly useful than others; some require more patience or acceptance on the part of the reader; some are sneakier than others; some toy with an audience's expectations while others demand (an unlikely) adherence in advance. (It is difficult to convince most people to learn an entirely new language, for example.) In addition, we cannot claim that all putative members of a particular group will agree with the linguistic methods of one member of that group.

Finally, we should add that while it may seem that in some cases we are pointing to linguistic maneuvers that are well known and frequently used in ordinary discourse, our aim has been to point to the fact that these linguistic maneuvers can and have been used strategically for purposes of change. One type of use does not preclude another.

We begin with attempts to change languages themselves or elements of languages, then move into simple reversals of concepts. From there we look at the strategies emphasizing perspectival change such as the juxtaposition of languages, the use of nonlinguistic forms in written language, and Kenneth Burke's notion of perspective by incongruity. We conclude with even more subtle strategies: calling without naming, metaphors, and narrative—change under the guise of storytelling.

Many of our examples come from feminist discussions, which is due, in part, to the fact that many feminists have focused specifically on language as a problematic aspect of culture. Certainly, however, there are other uses of language and commentaries on language that we have overlooked. We see what we are providing here as a starting point, a place from which we hope others will be able to begin their own explorations.

New Languages

"Boobin Na delith lethath oma Nathanan," she said easily, reading off the line. . . .
Boobin: *that* is the verb, to braid. It has no other meaning, although it has a transparent relationship to the numeral three, which is *boo*. . . . Na: *that* is the subject
pronoun, second person singular, with the suffix from the grammatical class designated as 'beloved.' . . ."

"And the whole line," said Father Dorien slowly, "is to be translated 'Thou braidest my hair with Thine own hands.' . . . And that is supposed to be the Langlish translation of 'Thou anointest my head with oil'?

"Yes, Father. . . . A woman would not wish to be anointed with oil. That would be a messy procedure, you see; afterward, she would have to wash her hair, and probably her clothing as well. . . ."

—Suzette Haden Elgin, Native Tongue II: The Judas Rose (209-11)

In an attempt to push linguistic, and thus material, change, some writers have constructed entirely new languages. In Delphos: The Future of International Language, E. Sylvia Pankhurst describes the history of the movement to construct or adopt an international language. Although the movement traces its history back at least to the use of Latin as an international scholarly language and more recently to attempts by Descartes and Leibniz to speculate upon or actually construct universal languages, the industrialization and international commerce of the nineteenth century brought renewed interest in universal languages. Then, after the carnage of World War I and the establishment of the League of Nations, scholars again worked to develop a language accessible to all. According to Pankhurst, the desire for 'world-friendship' is the strongest 'of the influences urging towards Interlanguage' (7). There have been many attempts to construct a common language, though the one that has experienced the most success is Esperanto. According to Humphrey Tonkin,

speakers of Esperanto maintain that the multiplicity of languages in use in the modern world creates vast problems of communication at the most elementary level, forcing up costs and resulting in loss of efficiency. . . . The use of national languages in international meetings is . . . not only costly but also results in discrimination against those whose languages are not used. (1-2)

There is no shortage of language inventors, though most seem to be of European or American background. Perhaps the earliest known language inventor was Hildegarde of Bingen (1098-1179), who "constructed a language of nine hundred words with an alphabet of twenty-three letters" (de Lotbiniere-Harwood 109). This language is now lost, however.

By the early twentieth century, proponents of Esperanto had discovered problems with the language. Some proposed variants to Esperanto, such as Ido, Ilo, Antido, Lingvo Kosmopolita, Esperantido, and NovEsperanto (Pankhurst 35). One of the problems with Esperanto is the construction of words by means of negatives. For example, old is constructed as not young, and bad is
constructed as not good. This creates problems in meaning. Pankhurst points out the difficulty by quoting Blake's poem, partially rendered in translated Esperanto: "Not big lamb, who made thee?" (65).

In addition to problems in meaning-creation, neither Esperanto nor Alwato nor any of the other so-called Interlanguages attempts to shift power arrangements in any other way than as a tool which is available universally. Laadan, however, is a language created by science fiction writer Suzette Haden Elgin for the express purpose of articulating experiences otherwise unsaid, particularly the experiences of women. "Laadan" translates "the language of those who perceive" (Penelope 223). Elgin designed Laadan "to create a universally accessible language that facilitates the expression of women's perceptions" (Murphy). She was struck by the notion from Douglas Hofstadter's Gödel, Escher, Bach that "for every record player there were records it could not play because they would lead to its indirect self-destruction" (224). When applied to language, this idea suggests that there are languages which, if used, would lead to the collapse of certain cultures.

Laadan is built on the assumption that women have more flourishing inner lives than do men and that these lives are inarticulable in English and other Indo-European languages. Feminist linguist Julia Penelope points out the "most significant structural assumption of Laadan: Inner sensory information becomes as important as outwardly obvious material phenomena if we have the words to describe it" (224). Thus, Laadan includes markers to indicate "how confident a speaker is about her source of information and the accuracy of a description" and suffixes which can be used to indicate how a speaker feels about what she is saying, as well as "degree markers, repetition morphemes, and state of consciousness morphemes" (225). Penelope notes, however, that despite the revolutionary potential of Laadan, it is not as inclusive as one might like. While there are words for "jesus of nazareth, penis, and testicle," there are "none for clitoris or Lesbian" (227).

**New Pronoun Constructions**

_The therapist must also be aware of the ways in which conventional beliefs have biased theory, scientific research and psychological assumptions (Lvenson, 1972; Bernard, Note 2). They will need to reevaluate theories about women, especially those theories of Freud._

—"Report of the Task Force on Sex Bias and Sex-Role Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice"

Some writers have attempted to adjust pronoun usage within languages rather than develop entirely new languages. Assuming, perhaps, that because pronouns are the most direct representation of the subject, a change in pronoun will necessarily affect the cultural construction and expectations of the subject,
such writers as June Arnold, Monique Wittig, Marge Piercy, and Mary Orovan have either shifted the spellings of pronouns or have developed gender-neutral pronouns. The fact that "pronouns belong to that part of the language which is the most conservative, the most resistant to change" has not seemed to daunt language visionaries, although none of the new forms has caught on (Finke). The following are examples of uses that have been made in English and other languages of what we will call neo-pronouns.

**Co—**Co is a gender-neutral pronoun introduced by Mary Orovan in "Humanizing English," an eight-page pamphlet first published in 1970 (Miller and Swift 116). Miller and Swift note that in 1977 the word was in use in several alternative communities in Virginia and Missouri and "is used in a book on radical therapy published in 1973 by Harper and Row and . . . routinely replaces 'he or she' or 'he/she' in the magazine *Communities*" (116). However, rather than substituting for a particular *he* or *she*, *co* is used only to replace the generic *he*. Thus no attempt is made to change the system of gender markings in language with this word.

**Ter, tey, tem**—Likewise, in an article published in *The American Psychologist* in December 1975, members of the Task Force on Sex Bias and Sex-Role Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice used neuter gender pronouns instead of the generic *he*. Task Force members substituted *tey* for *he/she*, *ter* for *his/her*, and *tem* for *him/her*. They comment in a footnote that they have used these pronouns "in order to raise the consciousness of the reader to the sexist effect of the structure of the English language" (1169).

**Na, nan**—In an introduction to her 1973 novel, *The Cook and the Carpenter*, June Arnold says:

> Since the differences between men and women are so obvious to all, so impossible to confuse whether we are speaking of learned behavior or inherent characteristics, ordinary conversation or furious passion, work or intimate relationships, the author understands that it is no longer necessary to distinguish between men and women in this novel. I have therefore used one pronoun for both, trusting the reader to know which is which. (n.p.)

What is unusual about Arnold's book is the fact that for every occurrence of the personal pronoun, *na* has been substituted. And for every occurrence of the personal possessive pronoun, *nan* is used. Names for characters are likewise often ambiguous. This lack of gender definition forces readers to guess at the gender of each character—and to reflect upon their need to know. Although her new pronouns did not catch on in general usage, Arnold's use of both the conventions of narrative and the new pronoun constructions serves to introduce notions of determination of subjectivity.
Per —In her utopian novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* Marge, Piercy introduces the pronoun *per*, derived by backformation from *person*. The structure of the novel is such that the utopian sections contrast with the remainder of the novel, set in contemporary New York City. By means of this contrast, Piercy portrays current conditions in NYC, especially for a working class Hispanic woman, as dystopian. Because many of Connie's problems stem from her status as a woman, the lack of gender identification in Luciente's culture is seen by readers as entirely sensible and, indeed, as a welcome relief from oppressive New York City (or any US city) conditions.

On, *elles, J/e*—Monique Wittig's article "The Mark of Gender" is her discussion of her fictional exploration of subjectivity and pushing of limits of socially condoned subjectivities. Wittig's play with pronouns is difficult to translate; thus English translations of her work are incapable of holding the multiple meanings she builds into the French constructions. Nonetheless, she points out that both French and English force division according to gender. She observes:

> As soon as there is a locutor in discourse, as soon as there is an 'I,' gender manifests itself. . . . One knows that, in French with je ('I'), one must mark the gender as soon as one uses it in relation to past participles and adjectives. In English, where the same kind of obligation does not exist, a locutor, when a sociological woman, must in one way or another, that is, with a certain number of clauses, make her sex public. (79)

Wittig has worked in her writing "to destroy the categories of sex in politics and in philosophy, to destroy gender in language (at least to modify its use)" (81). In her first novel *The Opoponax*, she wrote without using gendered pronouns, relying instead on the French pronoun *on*. Unfortunately, her translator could not bring himself to use the logical substitute in English: *one*.

In *Les Guerilleres*, Wittig uses the collective pronoun *elles*, universalizing it. However, because English does not have such a pronoun, the translator "found himself compelled to make a change, which for me destroys the effect of the attempt. When *elles* is turned into *the women*, the process of universalization is destroyed. All of a sudden *elles* stopped being *mankind*" (86). A more appropriate translation, she feels, would have been simply the pronoun *they*, "which rightfully belongs to the feminine as well as to the masculine gender" (86). In the third part of the book, Wittig notes, "the war section, they cannot be shared by the category to be eliminated from the general. . . . The masculine must not appear under they but only under *man, he, his*" (87).
Finally, Wittig notes that "the bar in the j/e of The Lesbian Body is a sign of excess" (87). "Nothing resist this 'I . . . , which spreads itself in the whole world of the book, like a lava flow that nothing can stop" (87).

Neologisms

**COLOR-STRUCK**

Is a term used within Black culture to denote the identification by people of color with Euro-American aesthetic and racial values. Black females sometimes make this charge of Black males who appear to have internalized, via work and personal relationships, white values (John Langston Gwaltney 1980, xv).

—Qt. in Cheris Kramarae and Paula A Treichler, Amazons Bluestockings and Crones

Far more easily implemented than either entirely new languages or new pronouns are simple neologisms. Although these efforts do not constitute new languages, they are in some respects moves in that direction, in that they are attempting to shift fundamentally the basic elements of language. Feminists in particular have actively sought to create new words to express concepts they have believed were missing from the standard lexicon. One means frequently employed is *neutralization*, the process of creating synonyms for words or phrases which are otherwise sex-definite (de Lotbiniere-Harwood 113). For example, for *postman* we can substitute *mail carrier*.

Some of the more successful attempts at language change have been what Suzanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood calls the feminization of language, that is, coining terms for experiences that are familiar to women but that have had no name. Some examples: *date rape, sexual harassment, battered women* (de Lotbiniere-Harwood 117-19).

While we have been unable to locate lists of neologisms or redefinitions compiled by other groups, there are three relatively well-known dictionaries that document these moves on the part of feminists: Mary Daly's *Wickedary*, Chris Kramarae and Paula Treichler's *Amazons, Bluestockings, and Crones* (formerly *A Feminist Dictionary*), and Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*. These dictionaries contain words and phrases ranging from new constructions to new definitions for words currently in English to importations into English from other languages. Julia Penelope points out, "Feminist and Radical Feminist dictionaries challenge our ideas about the function of dictionaries: standardization is not only not the purpose, implied or otherwise, of their definitions, it is simply unworkable, as is any pretense to completeness" (218). Such dictionaries may comment on the language. For example, Kramarae and Treichler's definition of *cuckold* is: "The husband of an unfaithful wife. The wife of an unfaithful husband is just called *wife"* (111). Two other dictionaries produced by feminists include *The Nonsexist Word Finder: A Dictionary of Gender-Free Usage* by Rosalie
Maggio and Womb With Views: Contradictionary of English Language by Kate Musgrave.

Because neologisms in general are too numerous to mention, we have listed only the names of a few writers who have consciously employed neologisms in their work and one historical instance, to demonstrate the fact that neologisms are hardly "new" as a means of social change.

Les precieuses were "a group of mid-seventeenth-century French women who initiated a language reform spurred by their proto-feminist consciousness. . . They created words describing forty kinds of smiles, twenty kinds of sighs, eight categories of beauty, and so on" (de Lotbiniere-Harwood 110). Among their suggestions were ideas to eliminate the masculine gender from the French language, and to simplify spelling, in order to aid women, who were not allowed to be educated to the same degree as men (de Lotbiniere-Harwood 110).

In her 1977 novel, Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes, Norwegian writer Gerd Brandenberg introduces a number of words that are, in effect, reversals of gendered language as we know it. Her story tells of a society in which sex roles are entirely reversed. Thus women are administrators and heads of families and the initiators in sexual liaisons. Indeed, men exist for the use and pleasure of women. Rather than using the word men as the basis for the development of other words, as we do in the English women, Brandenberg coins the terms wim and menwim.

In their small volume, Lesbian Peoples: Materials for a Dictionary, Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig list both current words in English with new definitions, newly coined words, and names. Rather than providing terse and succinct definitions, Wittig and Zeig often take the opportunity to tell stories. These stories collectively are an attempt to create a community mytho-history.

Perhaps the most well-known feminist purveyor of neologisms is Mary Daly. Daly's neologisms are part of a larger feminist philosophical system. What forms the rationale of many of Daly's neologisms is an emphasis on movement. The god-term, if it may so be called, in Daly's system, is be-ing. "Be-ing" is defined as "1: Ultimate/Intimate Reality, the constantly Unfolding Verb of Verbs which is intransitive, having no object that limits its dynamism 2: the Final Cause, the Good who is Self-communicating, who is the Verb from whom, in whom, and with whom all true movements move" (Wickedary 64).

Daly calls her neologisms "New Words." Although she does not discuss the linguistic make-up of the New Words, it is apparent that she uses several basic patterns, all of them relying on current or archaic English words. One is capitalization. By capitalizing words such as Self and Presence, she infuses them with a sort of divinity and separates them from their lower-case counterparts, just as traditionally god is distinguished from God.
Another method is hyphenation. Daly inserts hyphens between prefixes and their roots and between roots and suffixes. Although these words were originally composed of roots and affixes, the meanings of these combining forms may shift in Daly's reworking. Thus, *amaze* becomes Daly's *a-maze*. While the original word is of Old English origin, the new one makes use of the Greek prefix *a-* and the Middle English *maze*. *A-mazing*, according to Daly, is the "essential process in the Journey of women becoming: breaking through the male-ordered mazes of the State of Reversal, springing into free space" (*Wickedary* 103).

Finally, Daly uses the more common method of creating new words by derivation, that is, combining bases and affixes. Her bases and affixes, however, may or may not be part of what would be considered the usual pool of such forms. In the case of "botcher" ("one who painstakingly and methodically spoils, ruins, and bungles any given task: archetypical technocrat" [*Wickedary* 186]), she uses the standard noun-agency suffix -er meaning "one who does something" (Gaeng 111). Many of Daly's neologisms are puns. She defines "papal bully" as "the supreme sacred bully" and gives as an example: "pope John Paul II, who told an audience of 4,000 women from around the world who work as maids for priests that they can never thank the Lord enough for letting them serve the clergy" (*Wickedary* 187-88).

**Redefinitions and Reclamations**

*Dyke* is one of the words that has been negatively and violently flung at us for more than a half-century. In the Lesbian/Feminist 1970s, we broke the silence on this tabooed word, reclaiming it for ourselves, assigning to it positive, political values.

—JR Roberts, "In America They Call Us Dykes: Notes on the Etymology and Usage of 'Dyke'"

Closely aligned to neologisms, redefinitions are frequently employed by those wishing to instigate change. Indeed, one of Mary Daly's techniques for creating New Words is reclaiming old ones and redefining them. Julia Penelope notes, however, that "reclaiming specific words, for example, isn't simple, and numerous problems present themselves as we contemplate the choices we have. How should we decide which words we can reclaim without also reenforcing the patriarchal ideas they denote?" (215). She suggests that "the words we decide to reclaim should be those that name a behavior or attitude that enables us to move outside the world as men have named it." They should denote actions and ways of being that reflect a radical valuation of ourselves and of which we can be proud" (215). Thus Mary Daly announces new definitions for such terms as *spinster*, *crone*, and *hag*. Indeed, she uses these terms as the bases for whole groups of terms crucial to her larger philosophical project.
Another question reclaimers need to ask themselves is whether the reclaimed word is to be used by everyone—introduced into the general linguistic stock—or if it is to be kept for the use of members of the concerned group alone. When African-Americans reclaimed the word black, they did so in order to replace the term Negro in general parlance. Likewise, gay men pushed for the usage of gay rather than homosexual. However, fag is used only within some segments of the gay community; any use by someone who is not of that group is considered derogatory. Currently the term queer is undergoing rehabilitation in some circles. It is certainly considered derogatory when used by "straight" persons, unless when referring to specific organizations such as Queer Nation. However, its current use in the gay community is not by any means universal; rather it is used pointedly by some (usually) younger and more radical gay men and lesbians in order to construct and own an identity free from circumscription by the dominant culture.

Often reclamations are generationally defined. While feminists of the late 1960s and early 1970s made it a point to designate any female over the age of about sixteen as a "woman," younger women now are consciously using the term girl as a means to overcome what they see as the limitations in the earlier movement. In the summer of 1991, the Riot Grrrl movement started in Washington, DC, and Olympia, Washington, and soon spread to many other US cities. Riot Grrrl activities include fanzines and forums to discuss "political, emotional, and sexual issues. . . . The Riot Grrrl ethic combines a fierce reclaiming of things girlish, a push for girl love unpolluted by competition and male domination, and an insistence on being heard" (Klein 7). Unlike earlier feminists, Riot Grrrls are not "interested in creating positive images of women" (Klein 7). Thus in their reclamations, which include such terms as slut, they move directly away from Penelope's advice, seeing these terms not as controlled by the patriarchy but as a means of creating images "that are created by women rather than images of women that are created by men" (Klein 7). Part of their justification includes their sense that positive and negative are undefinable. Melissa Klein states that she is "creating from negative space. I'm creating something that doesn't to this point, exist. To me that's the challenge. And it's going to be complex. It's going to have negativity and positivity involved in it because I don't think you can ever say anything is purely negative or purely positive" (7).

Reversal

As I was passing by a construction area one afternoon on my way to class, I noticed several of the construction workers were on their lunch break. They all sat together on the grass watching the students go by. Suddenly, one of the men let out a loud, provocative whistle and shouted to a female student walking in front of me . . . "Hey! Nice piece of ass!" Everyone walking by turned to look at them and when I saw
them laughing, smirking, and poking elbows at each other, it just struck me. My God. They have PMS!

Yes, that's right. Blink your eyes if you have to, but the truth is—some men are also plagued with a serious problem similar to Premenstrual Syndrome known as Pubertal Masculine Syndrome (also coined PMS). . . . The fact is, men can be as downright nasty as women when the symptoms strike.

—Dieu Nga Truong, "PMS: The Burdens of Masculinity"

Reclaiming words is a particular way of reversing or shifting meanings. Some writers make use of reversal on a much larger scale, however. Yet those who discuss reversal as a mechanism for provoking change disagree as to its effectiveness. Writers who promote or encourage reversal may see it as a comic or ironic strategy, containing within itself the means of critiquing normative conditions.

Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World is an extended discussion of the revolutionary possibilities of carnivalesque reversals. What carnival does, according to Bakhtin, is upend established institutions by means of laughter. Many readers have tried either to expurgate or to explain away seemingly coarse language in Rabelais. According to Bakhtin, however,

for the correct understanding of these carnivalesque gestures and images we must take into consideration that all such gesticulations and verbal images are part of the carnival as a whole, infused with one single logic of imagery. This is the drama of laughter presenting at the same time the death of the old and the birth of the new world. (149)

Other discussions of reversal also emphasize the notion of wholeness. Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction is based on the notion that nothing exists until it is supplemented. Supplementation works in contradictory ways: It reinforces presence, but reminds us of absence as well. Reversal is simply making obvious the absence. In other words, if we see that the basis of human knowledge does not arise from self-identity or presence but from difference or absence, then we become aware of possibilities for reversal. The metaphysics of presence is full of hierarchical oppositions, although the dominant culture works hard to obscure the dynamic nature of these oppositions. What is uppermost in the hierarchy can always be shifted into a lower position (as in carnival, as Bakhtin points out). While Bakhtin's discussion is a celebration of freedom and change, however, Derrida's is an announcement of "no way out." (See, for example, Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."
Feminists have often made use of reversal as a means of startling people into an awareness of the lack of necessity in social organization and cultural practices. Judy Syfers' often-anthologized "I Want a Wife" is such a reversal, as is the bumper sticker which reads: "God is coming, and is She pissed!" A longer example of feminist reversal is Gerd Brandenberg's fantasy novel *Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes*, in which biological females take on stereotypical male sex roles and biological males take on stereotypical female sex roles.

Reversal cannot be said to be congruent with feminism, however. Mary Daly, assuming an essential and preexisting female knowledge, uses the term *reversal* to mean the means by which institutions of patriarchy scapegoat women. She defines reversal as the fundamental mechanism employed in the world-construction and world-maintenance of patriarchy; basic method employed in the making of patriarchal myths, ideologies, institutions, policies, and strategies; . . . . Examples a: the absurd story of Eve's birth from Adam. . . . (Wickedary 93)

Daly points out that women who refuse to go along with the practices of these institutions are labeled "separatists" and roundly condemned, whereas the original *separation* she believes takes place in the establishment of institutions that are based on systems of "othering." These systems effectively separate women from their elemental selves. Daly writes:

The perpetual bombardment of women's psyches with overt and subtle insults, often guised as courtesy, consideration, and respect, also inflicts the presence of absence within that immobilizes the impulse to anger. The dissociation that results will not be recognized as such within the State of Separation, which is also the State of Reversal. Rather it will be accepted and fostered as normal and healthy. (Pure Lust 371)

Speaking in conversation with bell hooks, Cornel West notes the problems with reversal and develops the strategy beyond a simple inversion or switching of positions. He says:

Aesthetics have substantial political consequences. How one views oneself as beautiful or not beautiful or desirable or not desirable has deep consequences in terms of one's feelings of self-worth and one's capacity to be a political agent. This is something Marcus Garvey understood. One of his great insights was the knowledge that
aesthetic appearance had to be reversed before Black people could become full political agents. Again, the problem has to do with simplistic reversals. One can't simply have an inversion which is Black supremacy. Garvey himself never promoted Black supremacy, though Elijah did. But what we as a people need is a sincere appreciation of African Beauty that remains intact even as we interact with other peoples. So that we are able to affirm ourselves without putting others down. That is the sign of moral maturity. (117)

An ironic reversal is nonetheless possible. In *De oratore*, Cicero has Gaius Julius Caesar comment on the difference between a standard reversal and an ironic reversal: "Ironical dissimulation has also an agreeable effect, when you say something different from what you think; not after the manner to which I alluded before, when you say the exact reverse of what you mean . . . but when through the whole course of a speech you are seriously jocose, your thoughts being different from your words" (162). Ironic reversal is one facet of the African American practice of signifying, discussed at length in Henry Louis Gates' *The Signifying Monkey*.6

**Juxtaposition of Languages**

*Wrote on the back of a Don’t-Mess- With-Texas postcard: HAPPY TO REPORT AM WORKING AGAIN. AS IN REAL WORK. NOT THE JOB THAT FEEDS MY HABIT—EATING. BUT THE THING THAT FEEDS THE SPIRIT. COME HOME RAGGEDY-ASSED, MEAN, BUT, DAMN, I'M PAINTING. EVERY OTHER SUNDAY. KICKING NALGA LOOKS LIKE. OR AT LEAST TRYING. CUIDATE, GIRL. ABRAZOS, LUPE.*

—Sandra Cisneros, "Bien Pretty," Woman Hollering Creek

If reversal suggests a stable completed shift in power relations, Mikhail Bakhtin's explanation of *dialogism* points out a more dynamic, unfinished means of moving power. Bakhtin, Russian theorist active from the 1920s through the 1970s, defines *dialogism* as the juxtaposition of languages, creating struggle within an utterance.7 Although many language theorists have used Bakhtin's ideas, there has been a tendency among these theorists to sanitize the ideas, moving them far from the political situation—and notions of power in general—that gave rise to them. However, other situations with similarities to that of the Soviet Union in the 1920d and 1930s have fostered discussions of struggles within languages. Because these situations are more immediate—the use of French in Canada, Spanish and African-American dialects in the United States—theorists are unable to excise the crucial power issues from the discussions. Such discussions include those of Gloria Anzaldúa, Renato
Rosaldo, Henry Louis Gates, Gayl Jones, and Suzanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood. Most of these examinations look not only at the conflicts between national languages but at the types of struggles engendered by pushing various codes or registers up against one another in discourse. Gloria Anzaldua says, for example, in the preface to her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-US Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (n.p.)

Although Bakhtin defines the juxtaposition of languages as a function of the novel, it can be found in many communicative situations, as Anzaldua points out. Moreover, Bakhtin categorizes several ways in which struggle takes place in discourse: "hybridizations" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 358), "dialogized interrelation of languages" (358), including "stylization" (362), "parodic stylization" (312) and "variation" (362), and "pure dialogue" (358) or "the language used by characters" (315). He also lists "play with a posited author" (312), "the language used by characters" (315), "character zones" (316), "a pseudo-objective underpinning" (317), "incorporated genres" (320), "incorporation of every possible kind of maxim and aphorism" (322). (Bakhtin's precise categories are somewhat difficult to discern.)

While dialogism—two voices within an utterance—pervades the structure of a discourse, another factor determining the nature of the dialogic exchange is the particular historical moment and place. The linguistic elements combine with contextual factors to produce the entire utterance. Political factors constrained Bakhtin's ability to discuss specifically some of the linguistic struggles he probably had in mind in the Soviet Union during the 1970s and before. North American writers, while operating under other constraints, have been able to name their linguistic locations. Renato Rosaldo may have been the first to refer to the "border" as a place of contested discourses. In his 1985 article "Politics, Patriarchs, and Laughter," he says, referring to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of minor literatures, that "Instead of deterritorialization, I suggested that the creative space of resistance for Chicanos be called the border, a site of bilingual speech, rather than English only. For Chicanos, the border is as much a homeland as an alien environment" (67). Gloria Anzaldua, however, has developed the notion in much greater detail. "Borders," she says,
are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." (3)

Anzaldúa brings together notions of self-hood, place, and language to define border cultures. What choice do people have, she asks, if they inhabit a borderland, other than to create their own language—a patois? Anzaldúa's project—and that of many other borderland inhabitants—is well described by French-Canadian writer Suzanne de Lotbiniere-Hanvood in *Re-Belle, Infidel*: "you're trying to topo-graph this nomad's land where friction between tongues generates 'emotional ground'" (82).

A key word in de Lotbiniere-Hanvood's discussion is *quadrophenia*, the dissonance created when one is hearing simultaneously "four voices—English, French, masculine, feminine" (99). As a translator, de Lotbiniere-Harwood works to bring the discourse of one language into that of another. As a feminist, she finds that her problems are made even that much more difficult, given the unreliability, or inhospitableness, of Standard French and Standard English for women's discourse. ("It's the same damn malaise the logos has in conceptualizing the feminine" [de Lotbiniere-Harwood 82].)

Thus de Lotbiniere-Harwood's task is "re-writing in the feminine." Such a practice involves working with the specific gender markings of languages. French, for example, is highly gender-marked, while English allows for much more gender equality. Which is preferable? What are the problems with each language system? While she mentions the possibilities of "desexization" and "neutralization," ultimately she sees a need to "resex language" (117). "Feminization goes beyond neutralization and desexization. It includes strategies such as avoiding pejorative words designating women, encoding new meaning in existing words and coining new words, often using etymology as a resource" (117). As an example, she mentions a word she adopted—*hystory*—to serve for *l'histoire des femmes*. De Lotbiniere-Harwood notes the problems that can develop when one is working with publishers intent on preserving the dominant language:

I made a compromise decision probably due to inexperience and contextual complexity: I translated *l'histoire des femmes* by the entirely redundant "women's hystory (sic)." The "sic" was intended
to indicate that the y wasn't a typo. When the piece appeared, my political act had been changed into the perplexing "... women's history (sic)." The "(sic)" remained, no questions asked. Quel mess! (121)

Making use of typography is another of de Lotbiniere-Harwood's strategies. She notes that feminists writing in French have worked with the language to "semantically and symbolically realize the feminine" (129). Because French is highly gender-marked and English is not, bringing these meanings into English as a target language is often difficult. Thus using typography to change words in ways similar to the ways they were adapted in French is one means of stretching English to accommodate this feminization. De Lotbiniere-Harwood has used both italics and boldface type to shift meanings.

Exploring the multiple language uses of African-American writers, Henry Louis Gates defines the invention of the "speakerly" text as Zora Neale Hurston's "rhetorical strategy." It "seems designed," he says, "to mediate between . . . a profoundly lyrical, densely metaphorical, quasi-musical, privileged black oral tradition on the one hand and a received but not yet fully appropriated standard English literary tradition on the other hand" (174). Gates' discussion is informed by Bakhtin's notion of double-voiced discourse, and, indeed, in describing Hurston's work, Gates quotes a Russian Formalist definition of skaz (181). Tracing developments in African-American discursive practices, Gates points to discussions of the politics and aesthetics of dialect representation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly James Weldon Johnson's condemnation of dialect use in written texts. He then points to Hurston's use of dialect as a "virtuoso display of verbal placy [which] constitute[s] Hurston's complex response to the New Negro poets' strictures of the use of dialect as a poetic diction" (194). What Bakhtin refers to as "character zones," Gates, following Michael Ginsburg and others, calls "free indirect discourse" (208ff.) In either case, the method is one which brings together in a state of tension the discourses of two or more status groups.

Musical Forms

Some say he's from Georgia
Some say he's from Alabam
But it is wrote on the rock at the Big Ten Tunnel,
John Henry's a East Virginia Man,
John Henry's a East Virginia Man. (74)

—Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds.,
Book of Negro Folklore. Qtd. in Gayl Jones,
Liberating Voices: Oral Traditions in African American Literature
While written discourse tends to be standardized by the hegemonic mechanisms of education and publication, oral language is more easily able to sustain difference. One way for members of subordinated groups to expand their discursive universes is to incorporate these differences into written language. Henry Louis Gates notes the fluidity of movement between musical and oral and written discursive forms. "Signifyin(g) in jazz performances and in the play of black language games is a mode of formal revision, it depends for its effects on troping, it is often characterized by pastiche, and, most crucially, it turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences" (52). In Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature, Gayl Jones points out the rhetorical nature of the use of musical and other oral forms in written discourse. Jones's main point is that the use of traditional oral forms enables writers to free the voices of African-Americans and others who have "held a position of subordination" (178). "The voices of the less powerful group, 'the other,'" she says, "always must free themselves from the frame of the more powerful group, in texts of self-discovery, authority, and wholeness" (192).

Jones argues that African-Americans have been allowed to develop music in more complexity than they have written language, largely because of early proscriptions against teaching slaves to read and write. Only the "talking drums" were forbidden in slave communities. However, writers now can and do make use of these well-developed musical forms, particularly blues and jazz structures and spirituals. "Blues forms include worrying-the-line, call-and-response, shouts, 'field hollers,' and other interjections" (195). "Worrying-the-line" is the use of both repetition and development in a piece of discourse. The first line of such a discursive piece or section is the "lead line." It is followed by sentences or phrases that consider the "lead line" in detail, problematizing it, opening it up for examination. Blues structure also includes particular blues language, which is

generally concrete, graphic, imagistic, immediate. It can also include scatological expressions, generally "double-entendre," as in the "Jelly-Roll Blues." . . . Blues has a number of complex rhetorical and expressive strategies, as Houston Baker, Jr., has noted, from parody to irony. Paul Oliver points out that the blues can also be obscure. There are incongruities in language and juxtapositions of moods and images. . . . Blues can also be surreal and lyrical. Says Baker in Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature, "blues (is an) affirmation of human identity in the face of dehumanizing circumstances" (p. 190). In this sense its language can be resonant, revivifying. (196-97)
Jazz rhythms include "flexibility and fluidity . . . such as nonchronological syncopated order, pacing, or tempo. A sense of jazz—the jam session—can also emerge from an interplay of voices improvising on the basic themes or motifs of the text, in key words and phrases" (200). Jones notes that the use of jazz structures in discourse tends to create a more complex and abstract piece of writing than does the use of blues. Jazz, however, "shares with a blues text a sense of extemporaneity in its fluid rhythmical design and syncopated understructure, its sound and meaning systems, its rejection of duality" (200). Jones notes also that "the riddle is . . . broadly connected with jazz, particularly as it is used by Ralph Ellison; that is, riddles are introduced, they recur, and metamorphose improvisationally throughout" (141-42). Jones places the riddle in the context of African form, contrasting it with European-based riddle structures. While European riddles are often questions to be answered with puns and plays on words, African riddles are outwardly statements to which listeners respond, often with plays of images, sounds, and situations (142). The riddle, Jones points out, is actually a joke/riddle.

What is achieved by means of these technical devices? Certainly they point to the centeredness of African-American culture (155). Moreover, using traditional musical forms is a means to "seize" the "territory" and to "free" the "voice" (139). What is represented, then, is "the range and dynamics of personalities," a sense of wholeness and complexity. (164).

**Perspective by Incongruity**

After reading a story informing him that nearly 10 percent of living things go that way, a reader from Surrey has written to the editor of the Spectator posing his problem: "I strongly suspect that some of my so-called 'farm fresh' eggs are homosexual."

"In my opinion," writes M. J. H., "supermarkets ought to do more to identify and isolate such eggs before they are passed on to the consumer." The writer of the letter insists that he is not homophobic. "Some of my best breakfasts have no doubt been gay. My only concern is that homosexual eggs might become mixed with those of a more conventional sexual orientation in a single meal. As a result, one would risk producing an omelet or quiche which was confused."

M.J.H. recommends routine testing of all eggs. "Presumably this could be done by giving each a little top spin and then observing its motion. Those that veered leftwards would be separated from the rest and decorated."

—Leah Garchik, "Over Easy or Scrambled"

While the use of oral forms in writing allows the speakers of those traditions to occupy the center of discourse, momentarily ignoring dominant cultures, this setting aside of dominating voices is not always desirable or possible. In some cases writers may wish to point out the absurdity of commonly held assumptions about a people, without engaging in traditional argument. "Perspective by incongruity," or setting one assumed truth into an
incongruous situation to undermine its truthfulness, is a transformational method discussed by Kenneth Burke in *Permanence and Change*.

This method relies on Burke's notion of "piety." "Piety," Burke says, "is the sense of what properly goes with what" (74). It is "the yearning to conform with the 'sources of one's being'" (69). Although piety is commonly thought to be a term associated with religion, Burke uses it to mean *appropriateness* in the widest possible sense. Burke throughout his writings treats nonreligious matters in religious terms to demonstrate our devotion to them.

By juxtaposing incongruous ideas, Burke says, we "shatter pieties." In other words, by juxtaposing one ideological correctness together with another, of a different ideological stripe, the two call each other into question. And it is more likely that the less powerful one will act upon the other in such a way as to reduce its power; the piety will thus be "shattered."

Burke tells us that the notion of perspective by incongruity came to him as a result of his reading of Nietzsche. Perspective, Burke says, is Nietzsche's word. Combining that word with what he felt was the "dartlike" quality in Nietzsche's writing—"like a spring without a ratchet" (88)—Burke came up with his own idea.

Nietzsche establishes his perspectives by a constant juxtaposing of incongruous words, attaching to some name a qualifying epithet which had heretofore gone with a different order of names. . . . Nietzsche knew that probably every linkage was open to destruction by the perspectives of a planned incongruity. Throughout his life he 'undermined,' carefully qualifying his nouns by the juxtaposition of modifying matter that had the 'wrong' moral inclination. (90-91)

Burke notes that while Nietzsche exemplifies perspective by incongruity, he does not provide a rationalization for it. This rationalization, Burke says, will be found in *The Misuse of Mind*, a discussion of the work of Henri Bergson by Karin Stephen.

**Calling without Naming**

_They said they said they said when they said men._

_Men many men many how many many many men men men said many here._

_Many here said many many said many which frequently allowed later in recollection many many said when as naturally to be sure_

_*****_

_When she was as was she was as was she was not yet neither pronounced so and tempted._

_Not this this is the way that they make it theirs not they._

_Not they._

_Patriarchal Poetry makes mistakes._
Rather than setting up incongruous contexts to indicate the absurdity of commonly held assumptions, writers may use shifting meanings of words and syntax to point beyond assumed categories and divisions. "Calling without Naming" is a phrase used by poet and theorist Judy Grahn to describe Gertrude Stein's ability to write lesbian and, more specifically, gender-challenging, prose in a thoroughly gendered universe. If fixed categories—names such as "men" and "women" or "wife" and "husband"—have limited us, then dispensing with those names moves us beyond the limits. While Grahn only considers Stein, this phenomenon may be found in the work of other writers who are aiming to undermine traditional classificatory distinctions in order to remove reasons for oppressive behavior.

Discussing Stein, Grahn says: "Completely functional in a male-dominated world, while at the same time producing work that is solidly woman-centered, Stein moved beyond gender, beyond definitions or names" (267). Rather than focusing on "men" as the cause of problems, Stein's writing "diffus[es] into little electron arrows seeking whatever is rigid and prejudiced in me, the reader, of whatever gender or other names I might go by in daily life" (268). Gender is a place, one which can be entered or left, not an identity. Every time we act, we act gender. Thus, gender is like a character. It can be changed at will.

Grahn discusses Stein's strategies by referring to the ideas of Hermes Trismegistus. This particular strategy, she says, is related to the first Hermetic principle that "Everything is Thought, or the Steinian, and more currently accurate statement: everything is thinking. Thinking is not name. Name, in Stein's philosophy, is not yes" (269). "Yes" for Stein, according to Grahn is "the ever-expanding landscape" or "endless possibility" (261, 253). "She doesn't rename, she unnames. She UNNAMES! She calls, not names" (269). By means of this strategy, Stein attempts to equalize. If everything is alive, and if everything is thinking, then there can be no hierarchies. "If there are no inanimate parts of speech there are no inanimate parts of life either" (269).

Metaphor

The children gave me the idea for a little booklet, Tradition! Tradition! I was experimenting with how we can work with women to raise their consciousness about their position in society. Genital mutilation is basically a social practice, with a health consequence. Generally, people have been dealing with it on the health side, and my impression is that if you don't get to the roots, which is the social meaning of it, we will never be able to deal with it. So I was experimenting. And the
first thing I did was, I had a group of women write a drama, because I realized that in Africa, we are dramatists. . . . So get them to write their own story, and then we will put it onstage, and we'll dramatize this for more women. . . .

But when we finished, and we were ready to put it on, they said to me, "Efua, if we put this drama on, we will be killed." And I had to listen to the women. Women can be killed. For one week I couldn't sleep. I said, We still have to have that drama. And the idea of using symbolism, the story, the tradition, came to my mind. Why don't we use a symbol, make it funny, you see. A society where all women have one leg amputated—the symbol of the mutilation, which is acceptable, because you are not talking about the genitals, which is taboo.

—Efua Dorkenoo, qtd. in Warrior Marks by Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar

One method of "calling without naming" is the use of metaphor or analogy—any substitution that renders a subject discussable. To say the unsayable, writers have often substituted one safer representation for another more definitive one. This sort of representation is not unlike perspective by incongruity as well. In fact, Kenneth Burke follows his discussion of perspective by incongruity with a chapter on argument by analogy. Yet Burke's analysis at this point concerns itself more with the ways that we organize our knowledge than with the ways that we change it. "Indeed," he says, "as the documents of science pile up, are we not coming to see that whole works of scientific research, even entire schools, are hardly more than the patient repetition, in all its ramifications, of a fertile metaphor?" (95).

Likewise, Paul de Man's article, "The Epistemology of Metaphor" and the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, especially Metaphors We Live By, also can be classified more as explanation of our thought and knowledge processes—at the most a method for analyzing those processes—than as a method for changing those processes. Lakoff and Johnson do, however, say that they "see metaphor as essential to human understanding and as a mechanism for creating new meaning and new realities in our lives" (196).

The work of Burke, de Man and Lakoff, and Johnson indicates to us the metaphorical ground of human language. Wayne Booth reminds us that despite this indeterminacy, we still may ask, regarding metaphors: "Which are the good ones?" (51). Asking this question puts us, he says, in the realm of rhetoric. Thus, Booth says, "the study of metaphor is for me . . . a quest for ways to improve my culture and myself" (64).

Though such analyses may well be adaptable by scholars interested in applying their ideas about metaphor to methods of change, a more specific discussion of the subject can be found in work by Regina Barreca. In an article published in 1988 in Women's Studies, Barreca describes a technique for change she calls "metaphor into narrative," or "reliteralizing what has become merely symbolic" (243). This technique, she says, is often used by women writers. (An examination of writings by others who are subjected to unfavorable
discursive treatment would probably reveal use of this technique by them as well.) Women, Barreca notes, following Gayle Rubin's analysis, are signs within the symbolic order. They are supposed to participate only by means of their value as objects of exchange by men. But because women do have the capacity to participate in discourse, if partially, they do have some power to affect changes in the cultural system. By literalizing dead metaphors, women writers call into question the fixed meanings that we have come to rely on for our sense of reality. According to Barreca, "the sense that language is self-referential and that the apparently immovable structures of reality can be undermined and shaken apart: these are the lasting effects of metaphor-into-reality" (252).

Perhaps the best commentary on the language of indirection is Henry Louis Gates' work on the broader linguistic system of signifying. Although Signifyin(g), Gates' term for the African-American rhetorical practice, includes other tropic forms, Gates notes that "the most important defining features of Signifyin(g) are "indirect intent" and "metaphorical reference" (85). What the signifier attempts to do is draw the attention of the audience to an "absent meaning" that is invoked by another referent (86). This process depends upon certain shared understandings between signifier and audience. When someone lacks that understanding, and is nonetheless signified upon, irony results for those who do understand. As Gates points out, "a simultaneous, but negated, parallel discursive (ontological, political) universe exists within the larger white discursive universe" (49). Signifyin(g) is "a technique of indirect argument or persuasion" that allows "the black person to move freely between two discursive universes" (54, 75).

**Narrative**

Was about the time that I was riding a motorcycle. Going down a mountain road. At a hundred and fifty miles an hour. Playing my guitar. On one side of the mountain road there was a mountain. And on the other side there was nothing. There was a cliff and the air. You know, when you're going down a mountain road at a hundred and fifty miles an hour, you've got to be very careful. . . . I wasn't paying attention. Luckily, I didn't go into the mountain. I went over the cliff. . . . I knew it was the end. . . . and in my last remaining seconds in the world, I decided to write one last farewell song to the world:

I don't want a pickle,
Just want to ride on my motorcycle.
I don't want a tickle,
I'd rather ride on my motorcycle.
And I don't want to die,
Just want to ride on my motorcycle.

I know it wasn't the best song I ever wrote, but I didn't have time to change it. I was
coming down mighty fast. But as you all know, and as fate would have it, I didn't die. I landed on the top of a police car. And he died.

—Arlo Guthrie, "The Motorcycle Song" (Reprise Records, 1970)

Over many centuries political resistance has been shaped and inspired by narratives. As far back as we have records of direct observation of popular culture, we find people telling stories and singing songs about their own lives that challenge the representations of their lives in dominant discourses. The resiliency of folk songs as a genre is a case in point. Folk songs have always given voice to political protest and have celebrated marginalized people. When workers in the United States began to organize in the 1880s, they adapted melodies sung by soldiers in the Civil War. In the 1930s left-wing performers and song-writers such as Paul Robeson, Woody Guthrie, Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly), and Aunt Molly Jackson relied on traditions of hymns, folk songs, and African-American blues to protest social conditions. In the midst of the political quietist 1950s, folk songs told stories that critiqued social conformity and the dangers of nuclear war. In the 1960s the civil rights movement and the movement against the Vietnam War brought a strong resurgence of folk music. Indeed, folk music itself became synonymous with antiwar sentiment. Since the 1960s folks songs have become important to the women's movement and the environmental movement. The history of folk music is a continuous recycling of old tunes, verses, and narratives to engage new political situations.

What can be said for folk songs can be written about any popular narrative genre, be it short story, novel, drama, or film. The forces of heteroglossia that Bakhtin claimed for the novel can also be found in contemporary electronic forms such as the documentary film or rap music. The problem in placing so much potential power of resistance in narrative is that nearly every discursive act can be interpreted as some form of narrative. In The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard argues that the discourses of science are disingenuous in dismissing narrative as unscientific because they rely on a grand narrative of scientific progress. He disputes the claim of the discourses of science to be superior in truth or knowledge to contingent narratives.

A similar argument is made by Walter Fisher, who maintains that all human communication relies on narration because all reality is understood as being part of a larger story. Fisher agrees with those who characterize people as "story-telling animals." He understands narrative as a basis of cognition or what he calls a "paradigm," which he places in opposition to an argumentative paradigm. Fisher argues that rationality can also be understood in terms of "narrative probability" and "narrative fidelity"—whether a particular experience matches what people can predict to happen according to their previous life experiences. Narrative rationality thus is an alternative way of
understanding rationality. Narrative rationality cannot be based on universal logic because it grows out of particular experience. Because it is rooted in experience, Fisher claims that narrative rationality is inimical to elitism. It is a logic of the people that denies a privileged position from which to judge.

Fisher's effort to link narrative with progressive politics is understandable, but his broadly encompassing view of narrative makes an unquestioned political linkage untenable. In an essay that uses Fisher's theory of narrative, William F. Lewis examines the popular appeal of Ronald Reagan as the "Great Communicator." Lewis notes that even though Reagan was often criticized for being irrational, simplistic, and poorly informed on major issues, he retained great popularity among large segments of the voting public. Reagan's rhetoric drew vastly different responses from critics and supporters. Reagan relied heavily on story-telling throughout his presidency. Lewis proposes that different responses to narrative are at the root of responses to narrative. Critics who applied a "rational" standard to Reagan's speeches faulted him for inconsistency and lack of realism. Those who responded favorably to Reagan credited his narratives for providing vision and inspiration.

Lewis's example of Reagan's narrative of America challenges Fisher's conclusion that narrative offers a superior and morally preferable alternative to rational, argumentative discourse. Lewis claims that the popularity of Reagan's narrative of America "seem[s] to show that there is a preference for clarity over complexity, for consistency over aberration, for positive direction over acceptance of limitations, and for self-justification by the derogation of one's enemies" (297). When narratives are mixed with historical events, witness the Afrikaners' account of the Boer's resistance to Britain, they can become the self-justification for ongoing oppression of other people such as system of apartheid.

Thus a simple valorization of narrative is not useful for a rhetoric of social change. Narrative can supply the basis of stereotypes and become a strong conservative force by justifying inequality. A distinction needs to be drawn along the lines of Lyotard's attack on grand narratives with little narratives. If grand narratives offer positions within dominant discourse as common sense, little narratives challenge those positions by providing stories of lived experience that contradict common sense. They challenge the mythic quality of grand narratives by describing the local and particular.

Little narratives have been a primary means of raising issues of human rights and countering political wrongs. During the rule of the military junta in Argentina from 1976 to 1983, thousands of civilians "disappeared" into prisons and detention camps, of which more than thirty thousand were killed. This reign of terror was condoned by the Catholic Church, other nations in Latin America and the West, and to some extent by a majority of the citizens of Argentina. Opposition to the reign of terror came principally from the mothers of the desaparecidos, who began a weekly vigil in the Plaza de Mayo. Their
presence initiated the first stirrings of public conscience against the torture and murder of the military junta. After the military government was deposed, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo continued to insist on a public accounting of the clandestine reign of terror, even after the new government under President Raul Alfonsin had in effect pardoned nearly all of those responsible for the killings. The women used their narratives of personal grief as a collective memory directed toward respect for human life.

The awareness of the atrocities of the military junta led the Alfonsin government to mandate a collective project of investigating the crimes against the Argentinean people. The Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) interviewed thousands of witnesses and sorted through warehouses of documents to tell the story of "The Repression." The resulting volume, Nunca Mas, narrates what happened to the thousands of people murdered and detained by the junta. By collecting the stories, the Commission shows conclusively that the "disappearances" were not random acts but a systematic effort to control the people of Argentina through the illegitimate use of government authority. The ongoing struggle against the governmental practice of torture in many nations uses little narratives to force governments to account for their breach of responsibility to the people they claim to represent.11

Where to Go from Here

We've presented many examples of people wresting discursive power by whatever means are available to them. These examples suggest that rhetoricians need to reevaluate the traditional assumptions upon which the teaching of rhetoric has been founded, particularly assumptions about the relationship between writer and audience. Although education may function to some degree as a leveler, severe differences in access to power remain. We do our students and ourselves a disservice by pretending that facility in the construction of logical arguments is all that will be necessary to shift entrenched social structures.

Examining how power is exercised through rhetoric raises issues that many college writing teachers would rather not confront directly, including their own often-conflicted relationship with the institution where they teach. It is not so much that writing teachers avoid the issue of power in rhetoric; indeed, they often begin their courses by appealing to students about the power of rhetoric. Where the issue becomes more difficult is when actual structures and patterns of power are introduced.

Thus writing teachers need first to develop awareness of how power differences underlie texts and then present ways of addressing these differences. But we also need more research on how particular groups have been able to
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claim discursive space and how such moves have led or not led to actual material change. Even though we are critical of the unproblematic representation of writer/speaker, subject matter, and reader/audience in much rhetorical theory and instruction, we recognize that at least rhetoricians give some attention to the components of a discursive situation. Moreover, rhetoricians provide us with the concept of persuasion, the notion that humans effect change in one another and in social situations by means of language. We believe this tradition can be usefully modified by recent theory in general that has directed interest toward those at the margins. Rhetoric, like other disciplines, has begun to recover the voices that have long been suppressed in the interests of an unproblematic unity.

Notes

1 The authors wish to thank Sonoma State University for a research grant, which sped the development of this essay. Thanks are also due to members of the Sonoma State University writing group who offered useful critiques of the essay, to researcher Kris Kellejian, and to RR reviewers Andrea Lunsford and John Schilb.

2 Not all linguistic innovators have in mind changes in material conditions, of course. Some may be concerned with simply expressing ideas otherwise difficult to convey; others may wish only to entertain.

3 For more nonsexist writing strategies, see Miller and Swift; Sorrels; and Dumond.

4 Notice the similarity between New Words and New Testament, Word and Logos. Daly often relies on the Christian framework in which she is so well schooled, despite her scathing comments both on Christianity and on education (e.g., "the pseudowhole of the university's fragmented universe . . . the black hole/void of its re-versing 'education'" G/E 394). Some of the remnants of Catholicism that we find in Daly's work include trinities, such as the three passages, and notions of divinity, hierarchy, and victimage.

5 Penelope is specifically discussing women. Other groups will consider the persons or classes that have colonized or oppressed them.

6 It should be noted that Gates' work emphasizes the aesthetic qualities of signifying more than the rhetorical qualities; nonetheless, the practices are inescapably rhetorical, and Gates' work is a useful descriptive reference.

7 For more on Bakhtin's ideas, see Marxism and the Philosophy of Language by V. N. Voloshinov.

8 See following entry.

9 Compare the work of French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari on minor literatures. A minor literature is that which a subgroup within a dominant culture "constructs within a major language" (16). Examining and reinterpreting the work of Kafka, Deleuze, and Guattari indicate three features of a minor literature. (1) "in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (16); (2) "everything in [minor literatures] is political" (17); and (3) "in [a minor literature] everything takes on a collective value" (17). Two special issues of Cultural Critique in 1987 were devoted to discussions of minor literatures. Other discussions of minor literatures include Karin Cope's "Plastic Actions: Linguistic Strategies and Le Corp lesbien," a discussion of Monique Wittig's novel, Le Corp lesbien, published in Hypatia in Fall, 1991, and Carole Boyce Davies' "Writing Off Marginality, Minoring, and Effacement," an exploration of the relationship between African women writers and the traditional literary canon, published in Women's Studies International Forum in 1991. The only book-length study using the concept of minor literatures is Louis Renza's "A White Heron and the Question of Minor Literature," published in 1984 by the University of Wisconsin Press.

10 See also Gayl Jones's discussion of the incorporation or adaptation of folktales in written discourse. Like dialect, the folktale can be used simplistically, or it can be used to place a character at the center of the discourse, depending upon how the tale is deployed. Jones suggests that Toni Morrison,
"by welding together the vernacular and standard literary prose . . . has succeeded in overcoming and resolving our sense of the aesthetic tension that often exists in novels that merely incorporate folkloric elements" (171).

In addition to using little narratives to undermine grand narratives, writers seeking to establish a discursive space may take a well-known narrative "vessel" and refill it with stories of other conflicts, thus undoing the links made in the original. For example, in Across the Acheron, Monique Wittig empties out Dante's Inferno and, shifting the location away from an "afterlife" and into a very present and earthly San Francisco, refills it with scenes of women enduring rape and otherwise being in thrall to various forms of patriarchal domination, unable or unwilling to take steps to remove themselves.

Other less specific takeovers include the subgenre of the "hardboiled" detective novel, which Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton, among others, have populated with their characters V. I. Warshawski and Kinsey Milhone, respectively. Likewise, the mystery novel featuring an "unlikely" feminine protagonist, such as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, has been claimed for working-class African-American women by Barbara Neely with her Blanche on the Lam. Some subversions of already-established forms become parodies or burlesques as they sabotage the original narratives. Virginia Woolf's epic parody Orlando skewers accepted notions of patriotism and heroism, while managing to upset definitions of biography and Edwardian conventions of gender at the same time. And Mabel Maney takes on Cherry Ames as the standard representation of female subjectivity for girls in her Case of the Not-So-Nice Nurse.

Works Cited
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Julia Allen’s most recent publication is "Dear Comrade": Marion Wharton of The People’s College, Fort Scott, Kansas, 1914-1917" (*Women’s Studies Quarterly* 22 Spring/Summer 1994). She is Associate Professor of English at Sonoma State University.

Lester Faigley is Professor of English and Director of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Texas at Austin. His most recent book is *Fragments of Rationality* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

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