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Cut intervention as posed in Ruby's paper, tends to preclude an interrogation of the intersection between feminism and cinema where meanings are produced between text and audience. This closure is effected by promoting the language of criticism, of illumination as an oppositional answer to the language of obfuscation, and thus posing language as a problem only in terms of inadequacy or abuse. A difficulty is thus sidestepped, to do with the question of difference, the difference between the old language and the new, between cinematic language and the language, written and spoken, which attempts to speak 'about' that cinematic language, between male and female language, between masculinity and femininity as structured by various languages.

The argument for naming evades certain difficulties but it is inserted within the dilemma of how to build a new language. In part it is a reaction against a tendency which whilst refusing fixity, classification, nevertheless invokes key terms such as 'heterogeneity' with a confidence and repetition that is tantamount to nomination. The problem has to do with the intersection of different political and class positions, that constitute an audience. This is a real problem for, if films do not speak for themselves, neither does theory. There is an inevitable disjunction between cinematic language and the metalanguage of theory but there are more possibilities for transformation in confronting this disjunction, than a correspondence between the metalanguage of criticism and the object language of film. Whilst we need to be wary of the way theoretical language is used, to acknowledge it as a site of struggle seems much more politically productive than to regard it as intrinsically male and deliberately obscure. Experimentation with film language invokes problems about speech — how to speak the new and how to transform not just content but the articulation of ideas and desires? The Chantal Akerman

films shown in a retrospective of the festival pointed up many of the difficulties to do with language — Ruby Rich takes Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles as an example of naming malpractice:

The film is a polemically feminist work on every level of its analysis, style, and representation, but it has been received in critical language devoted to sanctifying the aesthetics stripped of political consequence.

It is described as

the first film to legitimise housework, showing a woman's activities in the home in real time, to communicate with veracity the alienation of woman in the nuclear family as it exists under advanced industrial capitalism.

For some women at the event *Jeanne Dielman* was not a 'polemically feminist work', it was not even considered feminist on any level. For others it was seen as feminist but not immediately so. For others the film's feminism had little to do with a polemic on housework and an analysis of the nuclear family under advanced capitalism but was to be located in the fact that the film's subject was a woman and her personal space, looked at from a female viewpoint, thus breaking with voyeurism. For others this viewpoint was interesting not because it was the result of woman using the camera but because of its implications for the viewer, for a structuring of feminine desire. These different responses demonstrate not only that the film's meaning is constructed diversely by the diversity of the audience but also that the film, in provoking questions about its inscription of feminism resists a singular, theological meaning. Ruby Rich's description of the film tends to foreclose discussion in an attempt to suppress the difficulties, to force the film into a strait-jacket of the relevant and comprehensible, to stress its political

importance by the activity of naming.

The Akerman films (*Je, Tu, Il, Elle*, *Jeanne Dielman*, *News From Home* and *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna*) occupied a privileged position in that they constituted a body of work, by an identifiable author with a place in film history, as a retrospective within the main Film Festival. The films served as useful focus for question to do with language and audience. None of them are overtly political but they do raise questions about the cinematic articulation of a feminine and/or feminist point of view, and therefore generate a discourse on politics and pleasure. They also raise questions about reaching/constructing audiences, and about challenge and change through the subversion of marginality or the accessibility of success.

Is the move from more experimental and avant-garde film-making into big budget productions to be seen as a progression, a break with the restricted audience for feminist films, or is it a compromise? Ruby Rich suggested that *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna* represents a retreat into the cinematic at the expense of feminist concerns. She argued that the emphasis on formalism has meant that what has gone unnamed in criticism of the Akerman films is the area of sexuality. It seems to me that this is not attributable to a refusal of feminism, either within the films or criticism, but because it is extremely difficult to identify the textual discourse on sexuality. It is not as though form has been privileged over content, for where indeed is the content? One could argue that *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* depicts a lengthy fucking scene between two women and that *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna* shows Anna's relationships with men but only refers to her female lover as an absence. But to deduce from this a progression (or regression) from positive to negative is positively perverse for what it assumes is categories of social sexuality which are validated (or negated) by the act of representation. What it refuses is the way in which the text disintegrates

notions of any coherent, fully constituted sexuality. The scene referred to in *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* is not a literal representation and indeed subverts, through excess, the female form as spectacle for voyeurism. Neither can the scene be read as a discrete representation — it is inserted within the text in a discourse on writing, the impossibility of writing, writing as feminine desire, writing as provoked by absence but writing which is absolutely not representation. The opening sequence in which the woman attempts to write to an absent lover has to do with the body, with sexuality but it is not a representation of the body rather it is a difference dispersed in the body of the text. At the centre of *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna* is the sequence in which mother and daughter are lying in bed together and Anna speaks of making love with another woman 'and for some strange reason I thought of you'. This is neither a negative nor positive 'view' of lesbian relations but the voice of the unconscious; the mother/daughter relationship is reworked to explore the way in which a heterogeneous sexuality is structured through mechanisms of repression to construct sexual difference, a repression which for women is never successfully resolved, always turning on a paradoxical identity with the mother.

Much discussion of these films revolved around the question of identity and the cinematic structuring of point-of-view where this is not confined to the look but to questions of who is speaking and to whom. Where to locate the feminine, how to read a feminist inscription within the workings of the film language? Ruby Rich raises a pertinent point about that which has gone unnamed in criticism — sexuality; but it is not a problem to do with nomination or necessarily a male oppression of feminist content. For women too it is difficult to articulate, partly because the film language refuses translation, but also because it inserts the question of the feminine within a problematisation of heterosexuality. The