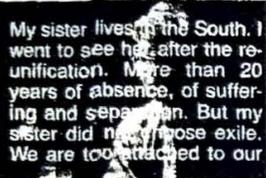
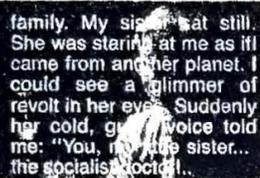


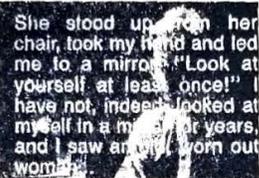
## Questions of Images and Politics\*



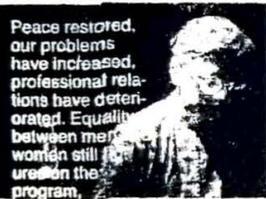
My sister lives in the South. I went to see her after the reunification. More than 20 years of absence, of suffering and separation. But my sister did not miss exile. We are too attracted to our



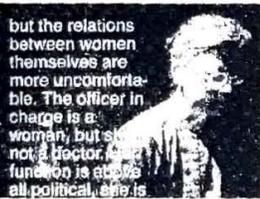
family. My sister sat still. She was staring at me as if I came from another planet. I could see a glimmer of revolt in her eyes. Suddenly her cold, gray voice told me: "You, my sister... the socialist doctor..."



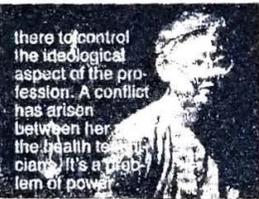
She stood up from her chair, took my hand and led me to a mirror. "Look at yourself at least once!" I have not, indeed, looked at myself in a mirror for years, and I saw an old, worn out woman...



Peace restored, our problems have increased, professional relations have deteriorated. Equality between men and women still figures prominently in the program.



but the relations between women themselves are more uncomfortable. The officer in charge is a woman, but she is not a doctor, her function is above all political, she is



there to control the ideological aspect of the profession. A conflict has arisen between her and the health technicians. It's a problem of power.



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*Let me start by asking myself: what do I expect from a film? What I expect is borne out by what I work at bringing forth in my own films. The films I make, in other words, are made to contribute to the body of film works I like and would like to see.*

*Through the way a film is made, the way it relates to its subject, as well as through the viewers' receptions, I expect that it solicits my critical abilities and sharpens my awareness of how ideological patriarchy and hegemony works.*

The commercial and ideological habits of our society favor narrative with as definite a closure as possible once the narration is consumed one can throw it away and move on to buy another one. clear linear entirely digestible.

*More and more, there is a need to make films politically (as differentiated from making political films). We are moving here from the making of a genre of film to the making of a wide range of genres of film in which the making itself is political. Since women have for*

\* Lecture delivered at the "Viewpoints: Women, Culture & Public Media" Conference at Hunter College, New York, November 1986. First published in *The Independent* (Film & Video Monthly), Vol. 10, No. 4 (May 1987).

decades worked hard at widening the definition of "political"; since there is no subject that is "apolitical" or too narrow, but only narrow, apolitical representations of subjects, a film does not necessarily need to attack governmental institutions and personalities to be "political." Different realms and levels of institutional values govern our daily lives. In working to shake any system of values, a politically made film must begin by first shaking the system of cinematic values on which its politics is entirely dependent.

never installed within transgression never dwells elsewhere

*Patriarchy and hegemony. Not really two, not one either. My history, my story, is the history of the First World/Third World, dominant/oppressed, man/woman relationship. When speaking about the Master, I am necessarily speaking about both Him and the West. Patriarchy and hegemony. From orthodox to progressive patriarchy, from direct colonization to indirect, subtly pervasive hegemony, things have been much refined, but the road is still long and the fight still goes on.*

*Hegemony is most difficult to deal with because it does not really spare any of us. Hegemony is established to the extent that the world view of the rulers is also the world view of the ruled. It calls attention to the routine structures of everyday thought, down to common sense itself. In dealing with hegemony, we are not only challenging the dominance of Western cultures, but also their identities as unified cultures. In other words, we call attention to the fact that there is a Third World in every First World and vice-versa. The master is made to recognize that his culture is neither homogeneous nor monolithic, that he is just an other among others.*

*What every feminist, politically made film unavoidably faces is at once: 1) the position of the filmmaker 2) the cinematic reality 3) and the viewers' readings. A film, in other words, is a site that sets into play a number of subjectivities—those of the filmmaker, the filmed subjects, and the viewers (including here those who have the*

*means or are in a position to circulate, expose, and disseminate the films).*

*The assumption that the audience already exists, that it is a given, and that the filmmaker merely has to gear her making towards the so-called needs of this audience, is an assumption that seems to ignore how needs are made and audiences are built. What is ideological is often confused with what is natural—or biological, as is often implied in women's context. The media system as it exists may be most efficient for reaching the audience desired, but it allows little direct input from the audience into the creative process (critics and citizen groups are not defined as part of the audience for example).*

*A responsible work today seems to me above all to be one that shows, on the one hand, a political commitment and an ideological lucidity, and is, on the other hand interrogative by nature, instead of being merely prescriptive. In other words, a work that involves her story in history; a work that acknowledges the difference between lived experience and representation; a work that is careful not to turn a struggle into an object of consumption, and requires that responsibility be assumed by the maker as well as by the audience, without whose participation no solution emerges, for no solution exists as a given.*

*The logic of reaching "everybody" often encourages a leveling of differences—a minimum of elements that might offend the imaginary average viewer, and a standardization of content and expectations. To work against this leveling of differences is also to resist the very notion of difference, which defined in the Master's terms, always resorts to the simplicity of essences. Divide and conquer has for centuries been his creed, his formula of success. But for a few decades now, a different terrain of consciousness has begun to be explored among marginalized groups. A terrain in which clear-cut divisions and dualistic oppositions—such as counter-cinema versus Hollywood, science versus art, documentary versus fiction,*

objectivity versus subjectivity, masculine versus feminine—may serve as departure points for analytical purposes, but are no longer satisfactory, if not entirely untenable, to the critical mind.

I have often been asked about what some viewers call the "lack of conflicts" in my films. Psychological conflicts are often equated with substance and depth. Conflicts in Western contexts often serve to define identities. My suggestion to this so-called lack is: let difference replace conflict. Difference as understood in many feminist and non-Western contexts, difference as foregrounded in my film work, is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness. Difference, in other words, does not necessarily give rise to separatism. There are differences as well as similarities within the concept of difference. One can further say that difference is not what makes conflicts. It is beyond and alongside conflict. This is where confusion often arises and where the challenge can be issued. Many of us still hold onto the concept of difference not as a tool of creativity—to question multiple forms of repression and dominance—but as a tool of segregation—to exert power on the basis on racial and sexual essences. The apartheid-type of difference.

Let me point to a few examples of practices of such a notion of difference.

The positioning of voices in film: In documentary practice, for example, we are used to hearing either an unified voice-over, or a string of opposing, clashing views from witnesses which is organized so as to bring out objectively the so-called two sides of an event or problem. So, either in unification or in opposition. In one of my films, *Naked Spaces*, I use three different voices to bring out three modes of informing. The voices are different, but not opposed to each other, and this is precisely where a number of viewers have reading problems. Some of us tend to consume the three as one because we are trained to not hearing how voices are positioned and to not having to deal with difference otherwise than as opposition.

The use of silence: On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lapse and blank in rejecting

the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity (Kristeva) and to work in "undertones" (Irigaray) in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so commonly set in opposition with speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay, a language of its own, has barely been explored.

The Veil: If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out, or more precisely, on how and where women see dominance. Difference should neither be defined by the dominant sex nor by the dominant culture. So that when women decide to lift the veil, one can say that they do so in defiance of their men's oppressive right to their bodies; but when they decide to keep or to put back on the veil they once took off, they may do so to reappropriate their space or to claim anew difference, in defiance of genderless hegemonic standardization. (One can easily apply the metaphor of the veil here to filmmaking.)

Making films from a different stance supposes 1) a re-structuring of experience and a possible rupture with patriarchal filmic codes and conventions; 2) a difference in naming—the use of familiar words and images, and of familiar techniques in contexts whose effect is to displace, expand, or change their preconceived, hegemonically accepted meanings; 3) a difference in conceiving "depth," "development," or even "process" (processes within processes are, for example, not quite the same as a process or several linear processes); 4) a difference in understanding rhythms and repetitions—repetitions that never reproduce nor lead to the same ("an other among others"); 5) a difference in cuts, pauses, pacing, silence; 6) a difference, finally in defining what is "cinematic" and what is not.

The relationship between images and words should render visible and audible the "cracks" (which have always been there; nothing new . . .) of a filmic language that usually works at gluing things together as smoothly as possible, banishing thereby all reflections, supporting an ideology that keeps the workings of its own language

as invisible as possible, and thereby mystifying filmmaking, stifling criticism, and generating complacency among both makers and viewers.

Working with differences requires that one faces one's own limits so as to avoid indulging in them, taking them for someone else's limits; so as to assume one's capacity and responsibility as a subject working at modifying these limits. The patriarchal conception of difference relies heavily on biological essences. In refusing such a contextualization of difference, we have to remain aware of the necessary dialectics of closure and openness. If in breaking with patriarchal closures feminism leads us to a series of must's and must-not's, then this only leads us to other closures. And these closures will then have to be re-opened again so that we can keep on growing and modifying the limits in which we tend to settle down.

Difference is not otherness. And while otherness has its laws and interdictions, difference always implies the interdependency of these two-sided feminist gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" while pointing insistently to the difference; and that of reminding "I am different" while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at.

## *The Third Scenario: No Light No Shade*