

CHAPTER FOUR



Playfulness, “World”-Traveling, and Loving Perception

This chapter weaves two aspects of life together. My coming to consciousness as a daughter and my coming to consciousness as a woman of color have made this weaving possible. This weaving reveals the possibility and complexity of a pluralistic feminism, a feminism that affirms the plurality in each of us and among us as richness and as central to feminist ontology and epistemology.

The chapter describes the experience of “outsiders” to the mainstream of, for example, white/Anglo organization of life in the United States and stresses a particular feature of the outsider’s existence: the outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less “at home.” This flexibility is necessary for the outsider. It is required by the logic of oppression. But it can also be exercised resistantly by the outsider or by those who are at ease in the mainstream. I recommend this resistant exercise that I call “world”-traveling and I also recommend that the exercise be animated by an attitude that I describe as playful.

As outsiders to the mainstream, women of color in the United States practice “world”-traveling, mostly out of necessity. I affirm this practice as a skillful, creative, rich, enriching, and, given certain circumstances, loving way of being and living. I recognize that much of our traveling is done unwillingly to hostile white/Anglo “worlds.” The hostility of these

"worlds" and the compulsory nature of the "traveling" have obscured for us the enormous value of this aspect of our living and its connection to loving. Racism has a vested interest in obscuring and devaluing the complex skills involved in it. I recommend that we affirm this traveling across "worlds" as partly constitutive of cross-cultural and cross-racial loving. Thus, I recommend to women of color in the United States that we learn to love each other by learning to travel to each other's "worlds." In making this recommendation, I have in mind giving a new meaning to coalition and propose "Women of Color" as a term for a coalition of deep understanding fashioned through "world"-traveling.

According to Marilyn Frye, to perceive arrogantly is to perceive that others are for oneself and to proceed to arrogate their substance to oneself (Frye 1983:66). Here, I make a connection between "arrogant perception" and the failure to identify with persons that one views arrogantly or has come to see as the products of arrogant perception. A further connection is made between this failure of identification and a failure of love, and thus between loving and identifying with another person. The sense of love is not the one Frye has identified as both consistent with arrogant perception and as promoting unconditional servitude. "We can be taken in by this equation of servitude with love," Frye says, "because we make two mistakes at once: we think of both servitude and love that they are selfless or unselfish" (Frye 1983:73). The identification of which I speak is constituted by what I come to characterize as playful "world"-traveling. To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them—fail to love them—in this particular way.

Identification and Love

As a child, I was taught to perceive arrogantly. I have also been the object of arrogant perception. Though I am not a white/Anglo woman, it is clear to me that I can understand both my childhood training as an arrogant perceiver and my having been the object of arrogant perception without any ref-

erence to white/Anglo men. This gives some indication that the concept of arrogant perception can be used cross-culturally and that white/Anglo men are not the only arrogant perceivers.

I was brought up in Argentina watching men and women of moderate and of considerable means graft the substance of their servants to themselves. I also learned to graft my mother's substance to my own. It was clear to me that both men and women were the victims of arrogant perception and that arrogant perception was systematically organized to break the spirit of all women and of most men. I valued my rural gaucho ancestry because its ethos has always been one of independence, courage, and self-reliance in the midst of poverty and enormous loneliness. I found inspiration in this ethos and committed myself never to be broken by arrogant perception. I can say all of this in this way only because of what I have learned from Frye's "In and Out of Harm's Way: Arrogance and Love" (1983). She has given me a way of understanding and articulating something important in my own life.

Frye is not particularly concerned with women as arrogant perceivers but as the objects of arrogant perception. Her concern is, in part, to enhance our understanding of women "untouched by phallogocentric machinations" (Frye 1983:53), by understanding the harm done to women through such machinations. In this case, she proposes that we could understand women untouched by arrogant perception through an understanding of what arrogant perception does to women. Frye also proposes an understanding of what it is to love women that is inspired by a vision of women unharmed by arrogant perception. To love women is, at least in part, to perceive them with loving eyes. "The loving eye is a contrary of the arrogant eye" (Frye 1983:75).

I am concerned with women as arrogant perceivers because I want to explore further what it is to love women. I want to begin by exploring two failures of love: my failure to love my mother and white/Anglo women's failure to love women across racial and cultural boundaries in the United States. As a consequence of exploring these failures I will offer a loving solution to them. My solution modifies Frye's account of lov-

ing perception by adding what I call playful “world”-travel. Then I want to take up the practice as a horizontal practice of resistance to two related injunctions: the injunction for the oppressed to have our gazes fixed on the oppressor and the concomitant injunction not to look to and connect with each other in resistance to those injunctions through traveling to each other’s “worlds” of sense. Thus, the first move is one that explores top down failures of love and their logic; the second move explores horizontal failures.

It is clear to me, that at least in the United States and Argentina, women are taught to perceive many other women arrogantly. Being taught to perceive arrogantly is part of being taught to be a woman of a certain class in both the United States and Argentina; it is part of being taught to be a white/Anglo woman in the United States; and it is part of being taught to be a woman in both places: to be both the agent and the object of arrogant perception. My love for my mother seemed to me thoroughly imperfect as I was growing up because I was unwilling to become what I had been taught to see my mother as being. I thought that to love her was consistent with my abusing her: using, taking her for granted and demanding her services in a far-reaching way that, since four other people engaged in the same grafting of her substance onto themselves, left her little of herself to herself. I also thought that loving her was to be in part constituted by my identifying with her, my seeing myself in her. Thus, to love her was supposed to be of a piece with both my abusing her and with my being open to being abused. It is clear to me that I was not supposed to love servants: I could abuse them without identifying with them, without seeing myself in them.

When I came to the United States I learned that part of racism is the internalization of the propriety of abuse without identification. I learned that I could be seen as a being to be used by white/Anglo men and women without the possibility of identification (i.e., without their act of attempting to graft my substance onto theirs rubbing off on them at all). They could remain untouched, without any sense of loss.

So, women who are perceived arrogantly can, in turn, perceive other women arrogantly. To what extent those women are responsible for their arrogant perceptions of other women

is certainly open to question, but I do not have any doubt that many of them have been taught to abuse women in this particular way. I am not interested in assigning responsibility. I am interested in understanding the phenomenon so as to understand a loving way out of it. I am offering a way of taking responsibility, of exercising oneself as not doomed to oppress others.

There is something obviously wrong with the love that I was taught and something right with my failure to love my mother in this way. But I do not think that what is wrong is my profound desire to identify with her, to see myself in her; what is wrong is that I was taught to identify with a victim of servitude. What is wrong is that I was taught to practice servitude of my mother and to learn to become a servant through this practice. There is something obviously wrong with my having been taught that love is consistent with abuse, consistent with arrogant perception.

Notice that the love I was taught is the love that Frye (1983:73) speaks of when she says "We can be taken in by this equation of servitude with love." Even though I could both abuse and love my mother, I was not supposed to love servants. This is because in the case of servants one is supposed to be clear about their servitude and the "equation of servitude with love" is never to be thought clearly in those terms. So, I was not supposed to love and could not love servants. But I could love my mother because deception (in particular, self-deception) is part of this "loving."

In the equation of love with servitude, servitude is called abnegation and abnegation is not analyzed any further. Abnegation is not instilled in us through an analysis of its nature but rather through a heralding of it as beautiful and noble. We are coaxed, seduced into abnegation not through analysis but through emotive persuasion. Frye makes the connection between deception and this sense of loving clear. When I say that there is something obviously wrong with the loving that I was taught, I do not mean to say that the connection between this loving and abuse is obvious. Rather, I mean that once the connection between this loving and abuse has been unveiled, there is something obviously wrong with the loving given that it is obvious that it is wrong to abuse others.

I am glad that I did not learn my lessons well, but it is clear that part of the mechanism that permitted my not learning well involved a separation from my mother: I saw us as beings of quite a different sort. It involved abandoning my mother even while I longed not to abandon her. I wanted to love my mother, though, given what I was taught, "love" could not be the right word for what I longed for.

I was disturbed by my not wanting to be what she was. I had a sense of not being quite integrated, my self was missing because I could not identify with her, I could not see myself in her, I could not welcome her "world." I saw myself as separate from her, a different sort of being, not quite of the same species. This separation, this lack of love, I saw, and I think that I saw correctly, as a lack in myself (not a fault, but a lack). I also see that if this was a lack of love, love cannot be what I was taught. It has to be rethought, made anew.

There is something in common between the relation between me and my mother as someone I did not used to be able to love and the relation between women of color in the United States like me and white/Anglo women: there is a failure of love. As I eluded identification with my mother, white/Anglo women elude identification with women of color, identifications with beings whose substance they arrogate without a sense of loss. Frye helped me understand one of the aspects of this failure—the directly abusive aspect. But I also think that there is a complex failure of love in the failure to identify with another woman, the failure to see oneself in other women who are quite different from oneself. I want to begin to analyze this complex failure.

Notice that Frye's emphasis on independence in her analysis of loving perception is not particularly helpful in explaining these failures. She says that in loving perception, "the object of the seeing is another being whose existence and character are logically independent of the seer and who may be practically or empirically independent in any particular respect at any particular time" (Frye 1983:77). But this does not help me understand how my failure of love toward my mother (when I ceased to be her parasite) left me not quite whole. It is not helpful since I saw her as logically independent from me. And it also does not help me understand why

the racist or ethnocentric failure of love of white/Angla women—in particular of those white/Angla women who are not pained by their failure—should leave me not quite substantive among them.

I am not particularly interested here in cases of white women's parasitism onto women of color but more pointedly in cases where the relation is characterized by failure of identification. I am interested here in those many cases in which white/Angla women do one or more of the following to women of color: they ignore us, ostracize us, render us invisible, stereotype us, leave us completely alone, interpret us as crazy. All of this *while we are in their midst*. The more independent I am, the more independent I am left to be. Their "world" and their integrity do not require me at all. There is no sense of self-loss in them for my own lack of solidity. But they rob me of my solidity through indifference, an indifference they can afford and that seems sometimes studied. But many of us have to work among white/Anglo folk and our best shot at recognition has seemed to be among white/Angla women because many of them have expressed a *general* sense of being pained at their failure of love.

Many times white/Angla women want us out of their field of vision. Their lack of concern is a harmful failure of love that leaves me independent from them in a way similar to the way in which, once I ceased to be my mother's parasite, she became, though not independent from all others, certainly independent from me. But, of course, because my mother and I wanted to love each other well, we were not whole in this independence. White/Angla women are independent from me, I am independent from them; I am independent from my mother, she is independent from me; and none of us loves each other in this independence. I am incomplete and unreal without having to be their subordinate, their slave, their servant.

Identification and Women of Color

The relations among "Women of Color" can neither be homogenized nor merely wished into being as relations of soli-

darity. To the extent that Women of Color names a coalition, it is a coalition in formation against significant and complex odds that, though familiar, keep standing in our way. The coalition or interconnecting coalitions need to be conceptualized against the grain of these odds. To a significant extent that is the point of this book. Audre Lorde is attentive to the problem of homogenization in coalition formation when she tells us to explore our relations in terms of “non-dominant differences.” This epistemological shift to non-dominant differences is crucial to our possibilities. To the extent that we are “created different” by the logic of domination, the techniques of producing difference include divide and conquer, segregation, fragmentation, instilling mistrust toward each other for having been pitted against each other by economies of domination, instilling in us the distinction between the real and the fake. Here I will not address each one of these techniques of keeping us focused on dominant differences among each other, that is differences concocted by the dominant imagination.¹ Rather, I will emphasize the epistemological shift to non-dominant differences.

To the extent that in resistance to oppressions, both men and women have historically fashioned resistant “communities,” resistant socialities that have made meanings that have enabled us to endure as resistant subjects in the oppressing ⇔ resisting relation, we have created alternate historical lines that are in connection with each other—they do not exist in isolation—lines that we do not understand, as nothing requires that we understand the spatio-temporal differences among us. Systems of domination construct women of color as subordinate, inferior, servile. We can see each other enacting these dominant constructions, even when we do it against our own desire, will, and energy. We can see and understand these animations of the dominant imaginary, but we are not sufficiently familiar with each other’s “worlds” of resistance to either cross, or travel to them, nor to avoid what keeps us from seeing the need to travel, the enriching of our possibilities through “world”-travel.

There is an important sense in which we do not understand each other as interdependent and we do not identify with each other since we lack insight into each other’s resistant under-

standings. To put the point sharply, the resistant understandings do not travel through social fragmentation. Separatism in communities where our substance is seen and celebrated, where we become substantive through this celebration, combines with social fragmentation to keep our lines of resistance away from each other. Thus, it is difficult for women of color to see, know each other, as resistant rather than as constructed by domination. To the extent that we face each other as oppressed, we do not want to identify with each other, we repel each other as we are seeing each other in the same mirror.² As resistant, we are kept apart by social fragmentation. To identify with each other, we need to engage in resistant practices that appear dangerous. We have not realized the potential lying in our becoming interdependently resistant. As resistant, we appear independent from each other to each other. The coalition sense of "Women of Color" necessitates this identification that comes from seeing ourselves and each other interrelating "worlds" of resistant meaning. To the extent that identification requires sameness, this coalition is impossible. So, the coalition requires that we conceive identification anew. The independence of women of color from each other performed by social fragmentation leaves us unwittingly colluding with the logic of oppression.

"Worlds" and "World"-Traveling

Frye (1983:75) says that the loving eye is "the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination." This is much more helpful to me so long as I do not understand her to mean that I should not consult my own interests nor that I should exclude the possibility that my self and the self of the one I love may be importantly tied to each other in many complicated ways. Since I am emphasizing here that the failure of love lies in part in the failure to identify, and since I agree with Frye that one "must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination," I will explain what I think needs to be consulted. It was not possible for me to love my mother while I retained a sense that it was fine for me and others to see her arrogantly. Loving

my mother also required that I see with her eyes, that I go into my mother's "world," that I see both of us as we are constructed in her "world," that I witness her own sense of herself from within her "world." Only through this traveling to her "world" could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her. Only then could I see her as a subject, even if one subjected, and only then could I see at all how meaning could arise fully between us. We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So traveling to each other's "worlds" would enable us to *be* through loving each other.

I hope the sense of identification I have in mind is becoming clear. But to become clearer, I need to explain what I mean by a "world" and by "traveling" to another "world." In explaining what I mean by a "world," I will not appeal to traveling to other women's "worlds." Instead, I will lead you to see what I mean by a "world" the way I came to propose the concept to myself: through the kind of ontological confusion about myself that we, women of color, refer to half-jokingly as "schizophrenia" (we feel schizophrenic in our goings back and forth between different "communities") and through my effort to make some sense of this ontological confusion.

Some time ago, I came to be in a state of profound confusion as I experienced myself as both having and not having a particular attribute. I was sure I had the attribute in question and, on the other hand, I was sure that I did not have it. I remain convinced that I both have and do not have this attribute. The attribute is playfulness. I am sure that I am a playful person. On the other hand, I can say, painfully, that I am not a playful person. I am not a playful person in certain "worlds." One of the things I did as I became confused was to call my friends, faraway people who knew me well, to see whether or not I was playful. Maybe they could help me out of my confusion. They said to me, "Of course you are playful," and they said it with the same conviction that I had about it. Of course I am playful. Those people who were around me said to me, "No, you are not playful. You are a serious woman. You just take everything seriously."³ They were just as sure about what they

said to me and could offer me every bit of evidence that one could need to conclude that they were right. So I said to myself "Okay, maybe what's happening here is that there is an attribute that I do have but there are certain "worlds" in which I am not at ease and it is because I'm not at ease in those "worlds" that I don't have that attribute in those "worlds." But what does that mean?" I was worried both about what I meant by "worlds" when I said "in some 'worlds' I do not have the attribute" and what I meant by saying that lack of ease was what led me not to be playful in those "worlds." Because, you see, if it was just a matter of lack of ease, I could work on it.

I can explain some of what I mean by a "world." I do not want the fixity of a definition at this point, because I think the term is suggestive and I do not want to close the suggestiveness of it too soon. I can offer some characteristics that serve to distinguish between a "world," a utopia, a possible "world" in the philosophical sense, and a "world" view. By a "world" I do not mean a utopia at all. A utopia does not count as a "world," in my sense. The "worlds" that I am talking about are possible. But a possible "world" is not what I mean by a "world" and I do not mean a "world"-view, though something like a "world"-view is involved here.

For something to be a "world" in my sense, it has to be inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people. That is why it cannot be a utopia. It may also be inhabited by some imaginary people. It may be inhabited by people who are dead or people that the inhabitants of this "world" met in some other "world" and now have in this "world" in imagination.

A "world" in my sense may be an actual society, given its dominant culture's description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a "world" can also be such a society given a nondominant, a resistant construction, or it can be such a society or a society given an idiosyncratic construction. As we will see, it is problematic to say that these are all constructions of the same society. But they are different "worlds."

A "world" need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society.

It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some “worlds” are bigger than others.

A “world” may be incomplete. Things in it may not be altogether constructed or some things may be constructed negatively (they are not what “they” are in some other “world”). Or the “world” may be incomplete because it may have references to things that do not quite exist in it, references to things like Brazil, where Brazil is not quite part of that “world.” Given lesbian feminism, the construction of “lesbian” is purposefully and healthily still up in the air, in the process of becoming. What it is to be a Hispanic in this country is, in a dominant Anglo construction, purposefully incomplete. Thus, one cannot really answer questions like “What is a Hispanic?” “Who counts as a Hispanic?” “Are Latinos, Chicanos, Hispanos, black Dominicans, white Cubans, Korean Colombians, Italian Argentinians, Hispanic?” What it is to be a “Hispanic” in the varied so-called Hispanic communities in the United States is also yet up in the air. “We”⁴ have not yet decided whether there is something like a Hispanic in our varied “worlds.” So, a “world” may be an incomplete visionary non-utopian construction of life, or it may be a traditional construction of life. A traditional Hispano construction of northern New Mexican life is a “world.” Such a traditional construction, in the face of a racist, ethnocentric, money-centered Anglo construction of northern New Mexican life, is highly unstable because Anglos have the means for imperialist destruction of traditional Hispano “worlds.”

In a “world,” some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that “world.” So, there may be “worlds” that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or, it may be that I understand the construction, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be *animating* such a construction.⁵

One can travel between these “worlds” and one can inhabit more than one of these “worlds” at the same time. I think that most of us who are outside the mainstream of, for example, the United States dominant construction or organization of life are “world” travelers as a matter of necessity and of survival. It seems to me that inhabiting more than one “world” at the

same time and traveling between "worlds" is part and parcel of our experience and our situation. One can be at the same time in a "world" that constructs one as stereotypically Latina, for example, and in a "world" that constructs one as simply Latina. Being stereotypically Latina and being simply Latina are different simultaneous constructions of persons who are part of different "worlds." One animates one or the other or both at the same time without necessarily confusing them, though simultaneous enactment can be confusing if one is not on one's guard.

In describing my sense of a "world," I am offering a description of experience, something that is true to experience even if it is ontologically problematic. Though I would think that any account of identity that could not be true to this experience of outsiders to the mainstream would be faulty, even if ontologically unproblematic. Its ease would constrain, erase, or deem aberrant experience that has within it significant insights into nonimperialistic understanding between people.

Those of us who are "world"-travelers have the distinct experience of being different in different "worlds" and of having the capacity to remember other "worlds" and ourselves in them. We can say "That is me there, and I am happy in that "world." So, the experience is of being a different person in different "worlds" and yet of having memory of oneself as different without quite having the sense of there being any underlying "I." When I can say "that is me there and I am so playful in that 'world,'" I am saying "That is *me* in that 'world'" not because I recognize myself in that person; rather, the first person statement is noninferential. I may well recognize that that person has abilities I do not have and yet the having or not having of the abilities is always an "I have . . ." and "I do not have . . ." (i.e., it is always experienced in the first person).

The shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call traveling. This shift may not be willful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different in a different "world," and may not recognize that one is in a different "world." Even though the shift can be done willfully, it is not a matter of acting. One does not pose as someone else; one does not pretend to be, for example, some-

one of a different personality or character or someone who uses space or language differently from the other person. Rather, one is someone who has that personality or character or uses space and language in that particular way. The “one” here does not refer to some underlying “I.” One does not *experience* any underlying I.

Being at Ease in a “World”

In investigating what I mean by “being at ease in a ‘world,’ I will describe different ways of being at ease. One may be at ease in one or in all of these ways. There is a maximal way of being at ease, *viz.*, being at ease in all of these ways. I take this maximal way of being at ease to be somewhat dangerous because it tends to produce people who have no inclination to travel across “worlds” or no experience of “world”-traveling.

The first way of being at ease in a particular “world” is by being a fluent speaker in that “world.” I know all the norms that there are to be followed. I know all the words that there are to be spoken. I know all the moves. I am confident.

Another way of being at ease is by being normatively happy. I agree with all the norms, I could not love any norms better. I am asked to do just what I want to do or what I think I should do. I am at ease.

Another way of being at ease in a “world” is by being humanly bonded. I am with those I love and they love me, too. It should be noticed that I may be with those I love and be at ease because of them in a “world” that is otherwise as hostile to me as “worlds” get.

Finally, one may be at ease because one has a history with others that is shared, especially daily history, the kind of shared history that one sees exemplified by the response to the “Do you remember poodle skirts?” question. There you are, with people you do not know at all and who do not know each other. The question is posed and then everyone begins talking about their poodle skirt stories. I have been in such situations without knowing what poodle skirts, for example, were, and I felt ill at ease because it was not *my* history. The other people did not know each other. It is not that they were humanly

bonded. Probably they did not have much politically in common either. But poodle skirts were in their shared history.

One may be at ease in one of these ways or in all of them. Notice that when one says meaningfully "This is *my*'world,'" one may not be at ease in it. Or one may be at ease in it only in some of these respects and not in others. To say of some "world" that it is "*my* world" is to make an evaluation. One may privilege one or more "worlds" in this way for a variety of reasons: for example, because one experiences oneself as an agent in a fuller sense than one experiences oneself in other "worlds." One may disown a "world" because one has first-person memories of a person who is so thoroughly dominated that she has no sense of exercising her own will or has a sense of having serious difficulties in performing actions that are willed by herself and no difficulty in performing actions willed by others. One may say of a "world" that it is "*my* world" because one is at ease in it (i.e., being at ease in a "world" may be the basis for the evaluation).

Given the clarification of what I mean by a "world," "world"-travel, and being at ease in a "world," we are in a position to return to my problematic attribute, playfulness. It may be that in this "world" in which I am so unplayful, I am a different person than in the "world" in which I am playful. Or it may be that the "world" in which I am unplayful is constructed in such a way that I could be playful in it. I could practice, even though that "world" is constructed in such a way that my being playful in it is kind of hard. In describing what I take a "world" to be, I emphasized the first possibility as both the one that is truest to the experience of "outsiders" to the mainstream and as ontologically problematic because the "I" is identified in some sense as one and in some sense as a plurality. I identify myself as myself through memory and I retain myself as different in memory.

When I travel from one "world" to another, I have this image, this memory of myself as playful in this other "world." I can then be in a particular "world" and have a double image of myself as, for example, playful and as not playful. This is a very familiar and recognizable phenomenon to the outsider to the mainstream in some central cases: when in one "world" I animate, for example, that "world"'s caricature of the person

I am in the other “world.” I can have both images of myself, and, to the extent that I can materialize or animate both images at the same time, I become an ambiguous being. This is very much a part of trickery and foolery. It is worth remembering that the trickster and the fool are significant characters in many nondominant or outsider cultures. One then sees any particular “world” with these double edges and sees absurdity in them and so inhabits oneself differently.

Given that Latinas are constructed in Anglo “worlds” as stereotypically intense—intensity being a central characteristic of at least one of the Anglo stereotypes of Latinas—and given that many Latinas, myself included, are genuinely intense, I can say to myself “I am intense” and take a hold of the double meaning. Furthermore, I can be stereotypically intense or be the real thing, and, if you are Anglo, you do not know when I am which *because* I am Latin American. As a Latin American I am an ambiguous being, a two-imaged self: I can see that gringos see me as stereotypically intense because I am, as a Latin American, constructed that way but I may or may not intentionally animate the stereotype or the real thing knowing that you may not see it in anything other than in the stereotypical construction. This ambiguity is funny and not just funny; it is survival-rich. We can also make the picture of those who dominate us funny precisely because we can see the double edge, we can see them doubly constructed, we can see the plurality in them. So we know truths that only the fool can speak and only the trickster can play out without harm. We inhabit “worlds” and travel across them and keep all the memories.

Sometimes, the “world”-traveler has a double image of herself and each self includes as important ingredients of itself one or more attributes that are *incompatible* with one or more of the attributes of the other self: for example being playful and being unplayful. To the extent that the attribute is an important ingredient of the self she is in that “world” (i.e., to the extent that there is a particularly good fit between that “world” and her having that attribute in it, and to the extent that the attribute is personality or character central, *that “world” would have to be changed if she is to be playful in it*). It is not the case that if she could come to be at ease in it, she would be her own playful self. Because the attribute is person-

ality or character central and there is such a good fit between that "world" and her being constructed with that attribute as central, *she* cannot become playful, she is unplayful. To become playful would be, for her, to become a contradictory being.

I suggest, then, that my problematic case, the being and not being playful, cannot be solved through lack of ease. I suggest that I can understand my confusion about whether I am or am not playful by saying that I am both and that I am different persons in different "worlds" and can remember myself in both as I am in the other. I am a plurality of selves. This explains my confusion because *it is to come to see it as of a piece* with much of the rest of my experience as an outsider in some of the "worlds" that I inhabit and of a piece with significant aspects of the experience of nondominant people in the "worlds" of their dominators.

So, though I may not be at ease in the "worlds" in which I am not constructed playful, it is not that I am not playful *because* I am not at ease. The two are compatible. But lack of playfulness is not caused by lack of ease. Lack of playfulness is not symptomatic of lack of ease but of lack of health. I am not a healthy being in the "worlds" that construct me unplayful.

Playfulness

I had a very personal stake in investigating this topic. Playfulness is not only the attribute that was the source of my confusion and the attitude that I recommend as the loving attitude in traveling across "worlds." I am also scared of ending up as a serious human being, someone with no multidimensionality, with no fun in life, someone who is just someone who has had the fun constructed out of her. I am seriously scared of getting stuck in a "world" that constructs me that way, a "world" that I have no escape from and in which I cannot be playful.

I thought about what it is to be playful and what it is to play and I did this thinking in a "world" in which I only remember myself as playful and in which all of those who know me as playful are imaginary beings. It is a "world" in which I am scared of losing my memories of myself as playful or have

them erased from me. Because I live in such a “world,” after I formulated my own sense of what it is to be playful and to play, I decided that I needed to look go to the literature. I read two classics on the subject: Johan Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* (1968) and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s chapter on the concept of play in his *Truth and Method* (1975). I discovered, to my amazement, that what I thought about play and playfulness, if they were right, was absolutely wrong. Though I will not provide the arguments for this interpretation of Gadamer and Huizinga here, I understood that both of them have an agonistic sense of play. Play and playfulness have—in their use—ultimately, to do with contest, with winning, losing, battling. The sense of playfulness that I have in mind has nothing to do with agon. So, I tried to elucidate both senses of play and playfulness by contrasting them to each other. The contrast helped me see the attitude that I have in mind as the loving attitude in traveling across “worlds” more clearly.

An agonistic sense of playfulness is one in which *competence* is central. You’d better know the rules of the game. In agonistic play, there is risk, there is *uncertainty*, but the uncertainty is about who is going to win and who is going to lose. There are rules that inspire hostility. The attitude of *playfulness* is conceived as secondary to or derivative from play. Since play is agon, then the only conceivable playful attitude is an agonistic one: the attitude does not turn an activity into play, but rather presupposes an activity that is play. One of the paradigmatic ways of playing for both Gadamer and Huizinga is role-playing. In role-playing, the person who is a participant in the game has a *fixed conception of him- or herself*. I also think that the players are imbued with *self-importance* in agonistic play since they are so keen on winning given their own merits, their very own competence.

When considering the value of “world”-traveling and whether playfulness is the loving attitude to have while traveling, I recognized the agonistic attitude as inimical to traveling across “worlds.” The agonistic traveler is a conqueror, an imperialist. Huizinga, in his classic book on play, interprets Western civilization as play. That is an interesting thing for Third World people to think about. Western civilization has been interpreted by a white Western man as play in the ago-

nistic sense of play. Huizinga reviews Western law, art, and any other aspects of Western culture and sees agon in all of them. Agonistic playfulness leads those who attempt to travel to another "world" with this attitude to failure. Agonistic travelers cannot attempt to travel in this sense. Their traveling is always a trying that is tied to conquest, domination, reduction of what they meet to their own sense of order, and erasure of the other "world." That is what assimilation is all about. Assimilation is an agonistic project of destruction of other people's "worlds." So, the agonistic attitude, the playful attitude given Western man's construction of playfulness, is not a healthy, loving attitude to have in traveling across "worlds." Given the agonistic attitude, one *cannot* travel across "worlds," though one can kill other "worlds" with it.⁶ So, for people who are interested in crossing racial and ethnic boundaries, an arrogant Western man's construction of playfulness is deadly. One cannot cross the boundaries with it. One needs to give up such an attitude if one wants to travel.

What, then, is the loving playfulness that I have in mind? Let me begin with one example: We are by the riverbank. The river is very low. Almost dry. Bits of water here and there. Little pools with a few trout hiding under the rocks. But it is mostly wet stones, gray on the outside. We walk on the stones for awhile. You pick up a stone and crash it onto the others. As it breaks, it is quite wet inside and it is very colorful, very pretty. I pick up a stone and break it and run toward the pieces to see the colors. They are beautiful. I laugh and bring the pieces back to you and you are doing the same with your pieces. We keep on crashing stones for hours, anxious to see the beautiful new colors. We are playing. The playfulness of our activity does not presuppose that there is something like "crashing stones" that is a particular form of play with its own rules. Instead, *the attitude that carries us through the activity, a playful attitude, turns the activity into play*. Our activity has no rules, though it is certainly intentional activity and we both understand what we are doing. The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an *openness to surprise*. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the "world" to be neatly packaged, ruly. Rules may fail to explain what we are

doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are *open to self-construction*. We may not have rules, and when we do have them, *there are no rules that are to us sacred*. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful, we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular "world." We are *there creatively*. We are not passive.⁷

Playfulness is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred, and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight.

So, positively, the playful attitude involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the "worlds" we inhabit playfully, and thus openness to risk the ground that constructs us as oppressors or as oppressed or as collaborating or colluding with oppression. Negatively, playfulness is characterized by uncertainty, lack of self-importance, absence of rules or not taking rules as sacred, not worrying about competence, and lack of abandonment to a particular construction of oneself, others, and one's relation to them. In attempting to take a hold of oneself and of one's relation to others in a particular "world," one may study, examine, and come to understand oneself. One may then see what the possibilities for play are for the being one is in that "world." One may even decide to inhabit that self fully to understand it better and find its creative possibilities.

Conclusion

There are "worlds" we enter at our own risk, "worlds" that have agon, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos. These are "worlds" that we enter out of necessity and that would be foolish to enter playfully in either the agonistic sense or in my sense. In such "worlds," we are not playful. To be in those "worlds" in resistance to their construction of ourselves as passive, servile, and inferior is to inhabit those selves ambiguously, through our first-person memories of lively subjectivity.

But there are "worlds" that we can travel to lovingly, and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason I think that traveling to someone's "world" is a way of identifying with them is that by traveling to their "world" we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have traveled to each other's "worlds" are we fully subjects to each other. (I agree with Hegel that self-recognition requires other subjects, but I disagree with his claim that it requires tension or hostility.)

Knowing other women's "worlds" is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them. Notice that the knowing can be done in greater or lesser depth, as can the loving. Traveling to another's "world" is not the same as becoming intimate with them. Intimacy is constituted in part by a very deep knowledge of the other self. "World"-traveling is only part of the process of coming to have this knowledge. Also, notice that some people, in particular those who are outsiders to the mainstream, can be known only to the extent that they are known in several "worlds" and as "world"-travelers.

Without knowing the other's "world," one does not know the other, and without knowing the other, one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one.

By traveling to other people's "worlds," we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. I always imagine the Aristotelian slave as pliable and foldable at night or after he or she cannot work anymore (when he or she dies as a tool).⁸ Aristotle tells us nothing about the slave *apart from the master*. We know the slave only through the master. The slave is a tool of the master. After working hours, he or she is folded and placed in a drawer until the next morning.

My mother was apparent to me mostly as a victim of arrogant perception. I was loyal to the arrogant perceiver's construction of her and thus disloyal to her in assuming that she was exhausted by that construction. I was unwilling to be like

her and thought that identifying with her, seeing myself in her, necessitated that I become like her. I was wrong both in assuming that she was exhausted by the arrogant perceiver's construction of her and in my understanding of identification. I do not think I was wrong in thinking that identification was part of loving and that it involved in part my seeing myself in her. I came to realize through traveling to her "world" that she is not foldable and pliable, that she is not exhausted by the mainstream Argentinian patriarchal construction of her. I came to realize that there are "worlds" in which she shines as a creative being. Seeing myself in her through traveling to her "world" has meant seeing how different from her I am in her "world."⁹

So, in recommending "world"-traveling and identification through "world"-traveling as part of loving other women, I am suggesting disloyalty to arrogant perceivers, including the arrogant perceiver in ourselves, and to their constructions of women and to their constructions of powerful barriers between women. As Women of Color, we cannot stand on any ground that is not also a crossing. To enter playfully into each other's "worlds" of subjective affirmation also risks those aspects of resistance that have kept us riveted on constructions of ourselves that have kept us from seeing multiply, from understanding the interconnections in our historico-spatialities. Playful "world"-travel is thus not assimilable to the middle-class leisurely journey nor the colonial or imperialist journeys. None of these involve risking one's ground. These forms of displacement may well be compatible with agonistic playfulness, but they are incompatible with the attitude of play that is an openness to surprise and that inclines us to "world"-travel in the direction of deep coalition.

Notes

1. It is an important aim of this book to come to understand these barriers to the possibility of coalitions of understanding. Most chapters in the book are relevant to this question, but I call your attention in particular to the treatment of these difficulties in chapter 7 ("Boomerang Perception and the Colonizing Gaze"). I consider the failure of nationalisms and separatisms to escape these difficulties. The distinction between split-separation

and curdling-separation that I introduce in chapter 6 ("Purity, Impurity, and Separation") is also relevant. The distinction between intermeshing oppressions and the interlocking of oppressions that I develop in the Introduction and in "Tactical Strategies of the Streetwalker" (chapter 10) address the complexities of these barriers.

2. See Audre Lorde's treatment of horizontal anger in "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" (Lorde 1996). Lorde understands black women seeing the servile construction of themselves in each other with anger, hatred.

3. It is important that I have been thought a person without humor by whites/Anglos inside the U.S. academy, a space where struggles against race/gender and sexual oppression require an articulation of the issues. I have been found playful by my companions in struggles against white/Anglo control of land and water in the U.S. Southwest. Those struggles have occurred in the space-time of Chicano communities. Being playful or not playful becomes in those two contexts deep traits, symptomatic of larger incongruities.

4. This "we" embraces the very many strands of Latinos in the United States. But this "we" is unusually spoken with ease. The tension in the "we" includes those who do not reject "Hispanic" as a term of identification.

5. Indeed people inhabit constructions of themselves in "worlds" they refuse to enter. This is true particularly of those who oppress those whose resistant "worlds" they refuse to enter. But they are indeed inhabitants of those "worlds." And indeed those who are oppressed animate oppressive constructions of themselves in the "worlds" of their oppressors.

6. Consider the congruities between the middle-class leisurely journey that Wolff describes and the agonistic sense of play (Wolff 1992). Consider also the discussion of travel in the Introduction.

7. One can understand why this sense of playfulness is one that one may exercise in resistance to oppression when resistance is not reducible to reaction. Nonreactive resistance is creative; it exceeds that which is being resisted. The creation of new meaning lies outside of rules, particularly the rules of the "world" being resisted.

8. But I can also imagine the Aristotelian slave after hours as an animal without the capacity to reason. In that case, roaming in the fields, eating, and copulating would be distinctly passionate activities where passion and reason are dichotomized. Imagining people who are taken into servility in this manner is what leads oppressors to think of those they attempt to dominate both as dangerous and as nonpersons.

9. The traveling also permitted me to see her resistances in plain view in my daily life. She did not hide resistance.

References

- Frye, Marilyn. 1983. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1975. *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1968. *Homo Ludens*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Emecé Editores.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger. In *Sister Outsider*, edited by Audre Lorde. Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press.
- Wolff, Janet. 1992. On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism. *Cultural Studies* 7 (2): 224-39.

