

Chapter 44

Shelter: A Place of the Telling a chimerical cookbook

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Shelter is thought of as an enclosed space, a refuge of safety, hidden. Institutional shelter is defined in the moment of re-domestication. "Not conforming to the dearly held ideals of hard work, property ownership and family membership" (Lesley Harman, *When a Hostel Becomes a Home*, p.21), vagrants are perceived as a threat to society and must be controlled. Forced back into the fold, they return to the invisible state of submission. The language of the institution becomes unacceptable in its intransigence. There is a need to invent a language that is neither shameful nor pejorative, a language that includes and places. This becomes the language of the telling, a language which merges desire and action. The language of the institution separates desire from action especially when those desires do not coincide with the agenda of the institution.

We are re-defining shelter of the displaced other, of the woman without her home. The hope is that she may create a place for herself, beyond the interminable structure of the institution. We need to reinvent the strategies to make ourselves, to realize our own stories. Throughout time, his-story has been considered fact, documentable truth, denying interpretation. Her-story has been seen as fiction, hysteria, old wives tales, stories for children. The woman has remained invisible, without a visible place to speak, without a place to tell her-story. Because she can not tell, given neither the opportunity nor the vehicle. She keeps. "Women hold the repositories of life and death, or of time in them, women know that both the material and the measure of living is time." (Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam To Identity*, p.156)

Silence will not protect us from our fears. We must challenge our fears beginning the search of woman as miner, woman as time-keeper (with her own time and rhythm). Woman as story-teller, visible and no longer shamed by her-story or visibility. The ritual of mining empowers her to collect/access the fragments of her memory/time. In the moment of the telling, the woman begins to weave the found/mined fragments visibly, creating for herself a place and an identity, unrestricted. Shelter is defined in the moment of telling. Shelter strives to release her from the dependency on the institution by imparting the tools for mining her own identity. Digging through and under white male doctrine and history, shelter becomes a place for the telling, a place for the under-mining. Digging deep into her own truth/time/memories she invents her own language, weaves her own identity, tells her own story.

Entering into a dialogue of questions, rather than a monologue of polemics, we explore the definition of shelter. Not only for women, but for all people who fall out of the putative culture, people who do not fit neatly into the graveclothes of hegemony. This is a collaboration relying on serendipity revealed through action, an associative dialogue rather than a categorical examination. We are encouraging people to step away from their houses and onto the streets, to challenge themselves and reflect upon the definition of shelter. "If identity is a house, then what is safety?" (Kathy Acker, In Memoriam To Identity, p.119)

Through this paper we hope to define shelter in terms which extend beyond the limits of accommodation and begin to deal with issues of place involving the individual and the personal within society. The traditional (institutional) notion of shelter (an enclosed space of protection, a refuge of safety, a place of hiding) with its objective of correction, is not capable of extending beyond accommodation and addressing questions of fundamental concern to our social/urban existence. To attempt the re-domestication of those who have fallen out of the putative culture merely reifies the position and the legitimacy of that culture. Laying claim to the fact that the women/people in question must adapt to the unbending norms of that culture. Adaption is required to survive within a structure dominated by the language of mathematical reason, the facts of logic and proof, a structure built up to preserve the power of the status quo.

There is a need to explore a model for making shelter that is based on transformation, rather than adaption. A model which openly instills invention and dialogue, asserting the position of the personal as valid. A model which questions the relation between personal and public by challenging the objective with the subjective. A mode of operation that is driven more by association than by logical progression.

The cookbook is borrowed here as an organizing vehicle, an active model to contain (house-hold) the work of the under-miner. The cookbook is an analogy. A practical handbook. It serves as a vehicle to focus and empower the prevailing kitchen table talk. It presents a strategy for the formation of a collective voice, an opportunity to generatively weave personal, public, and political forms of knowledge.

Packed with heterogeneous components, the cookbook contains ingredients which can be used to compose a discourse (dialogue) on transformative shelter. A working model of collection and distribution. The cookbook is a conductive demonstration, merging action

and reflection in a theory (critical) which is both visible and accessible.

The cookbook is a deliberate attempt to provide a frame of research which engages both the symbolic and the analytical modes of inquiry.¹ It does not lend isolated, objective, answers. Instead it orients a specific direction. It establishes momentum.

*Academic men and women engaged in the production of feminist theory must be responsible for setting up ways to disseminate feminist thought that not only transcend the boundaries of the university setting, but that of the printed page as well. It is also our responsibility to promote and encourage the development of feminist theory by folks who are not academics. As long as the university remains "the" central site for the development of feminist scholarship, it will be necessary for us to examine the ways in which our work can and is undermined.*²

There is a need to undermine the language of mathematical reason with a mythos, a variable order, a personal voice, which embraces chimera as a valid and intersubjective mode of operation.³

chimera 1 a : a she-monster in Greek mythology represented as vomiting flames and usually as having a lion's head, goat's body, and dragon's or serpent's tail **b :** a similar imaginary monster : a grotesque animal form in painting or sculpture compounded from parts of different real or imaginary animals **c :** a horrible or frightening manifestation **d :** an often fantastic combination of incongruous parts, esp. a fabrication **2 :** an illusion or fabrication of the mind or fancy **3 :** an individual, organ, or part consisting of tissues of diverse genetic constitution occurring esp. in plants and most frequently at a graft union⁴

Notice the connection between SHE-monster and fantastical schemes, improbable notions and incongruous parts (non-conforming action). Is the monster a she because fantastical schemes and unrestrained imagination are her characteristics, or is it because when she has visible dreams and unrestrained imagination, does she, by virtue of this, transform into a monster?

"chimera ... are much more permanent reference points than fixed mile markers—in the manner, for example, of the right and the left, which also change as one turns.... When one considers that thought is constant mobility, in the end it may only be chimera that are usable references, pole stars."⁵

Shelter, a place to mine for clues, gaps, pole stars.
Shelter is created with Chimera in mind.

Chimera is becoming.

She is the process of transformation. Her transformation is not only internal, but also visible. She pursues the links, the connections by under-mining all she can access.

Culture, Society, History, Language

Chimera is becoming a model because she is thought to have "unattainable" goals and "unrealizable" dreams. She is chimerical because she has an intention to affirm and weave herself into an active subjective position within culture.

Because she wants to work within a context that will not accept her, except as a dupe of itself, she under-mines and dis-mantles the deceptions of language that have been forged upon her.

The fundamental axiom of the sciences since 1800, as well as of the humanities, has been 'invariance,' which rejects, or at least is unable to cope with the richness and ambiguity of symbolic thought.⁶ The rhetoric of scientific proof has debased the validity of personal story and myth. As an independent entity, the power of logical and mathematical reason is a force which has affected our entire culture. The language of objective reason has been appropriated to support a patriarchal system of oppression and exploitation. As a language of control, it dictates the conventions of production for a truly "modern" knowledge, that is, a universal knowledge, information devoid of the personal, subjective, or symbolic. Information relegated to the realm of verifiable facts. The voice of the personal has been systematically displaced from the language of our culture.

Digging deep into her mine she re-collects memories, pieces of her-story. Chimera is the tool of the under-miner. Subverting the material that has traditionally appropriated her,⁷ she weaves it into a context that includes, affirms, and encourages her participation. Chimera re-means what she dis-covers to allow her own voice to e-merge from the mine. The under-miner adopts a subjective position.

Throughout time, his-story has been considered fact, documentable truth, denying interpretation. Her-story has been seen as fiction, hysteria, old wives tales. The woman has remained invisible, without a visible place to speak, without a place to tell her-story. Because she can not tell, because she is given neither the opportunity nor the vehicle. She keeps. *"Women hold the repositories of life and death, or of time in them, women know that both the material and the measure of living is time."*⁸

Reconstructing, she begins the ritual of telling. Gathering her voice. It becomes her mission to affirm her own self, dis-covering the subjective, weaving a dialogue that merges the personal within a visible, public context.

*"To write in public with others carries a quite different meaning: the construction of another space for the manifestation of the plural word, the place of confluence of different voices, currents, traditions."*⁹ Made visible, the collective voice of renga¹⁰ is not monolithic. Neither authoritarian nor objective it is a voice of broken units, individual threads conjoining to weave a fabric of personal dialogue. Not a product of generalization, *"renga is, before everything, a mode of practice."*¹¹ An active model of confluence and transference. Reading and writing the collective voice.

Chimera is not anarchistic. Chimera is the under-miner. She uncovers the tools which assist in dis-mantling the facts that have been inscribed upon her by the dominant patriarchal structure. Under-mining is not merely an exercise in demolition. She develops a place of resistance.

*"... we have to create ... 'communities of resistance' — so that there are places where we can recover, and return to ourselves more fully."*¹²

The material is re-worked in a way that re-asserts it into a public context, a way which includes memories, stories, as they begin to unwind and disclose themselves.

Renga provides a model for the re-assertion of the personal within the public. Renga is an act of collaboration, a series of incongruences, split or broken verse. Operating with simple rules of tangency (association), renga creates an opportunity for chance to appear within the construction of a collective voice.

Affirming her place within, she gains empowerment and accountability in becoming part of the collective.

Dialogue is transformative.

In telling she transforms.

"True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and men and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action,

but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved."¹³

The circulation of personal stories within a social/public context is critical. History as the preservation of old facts and hard exclusive evidence has atrophied into cultural rigormortis.¹⁴ The permutable nature of reality is denied, left out, displaced, hidden.

*Chimerical shelter is metamorphosis,
not carapace.*¹⁵

Shelter is a place of be-coming visible. Indoctrination. Suggesting that myth become an active agent of transformation. A way to gather material for re-invention and re-imagination. Chimerical shelter is a visible and resumptive process, not a refuge or an ephemeral glance at safety.

*If identity is a house, what is safety?*¹⁶

The distinction between house as object, and home as subject is crucial. When the house becomes an object of identity, describing a position within society, the values and needs of home as subject are buried, hidden, displaced, left without a visible place to speak.

Chimerical shelter provides a place to strip oneself of the identity of house. An identity that has been inscribed onto us by the dogma of the dominant social structure. Required to wear the dog obediently and faithfully, we are cloaked in graveclothes. When we bark too loud or begin to shed in the process of becoming visible, we are ushered into the house and retrofitted for another suit. The same constricting, homogenous suit.

*Control always works through the imagination by making it invisible and domesticating it.*¹⁷ Women are especially (deliberately) alienated in the market place society. Made to stay, behave, be invisible, obey the norms, buy the right deodorant, be good and obedient consumers. When visible fallout occurs they are shuffled into a shelter for re-adaption, or re-integration as it is commonly referred to. Questions that challenge culture are never raised in the process of re-domestication.

Chimera recognizes the need for women to emerge from the carapace of culture. To work within, embrace, what has traditionally been used to subordinate them (feminism, fantasy, incoherence, emotion, ambiguity, subjectivity, and the ability to cook). To begin to strip the graveclothes and dig into the mine. Not mine as for

me, but mine as my connection to it/you/us. My place in the collective voice of difference. Mine as in we. We mine within the existing material in search of e-merging our-selves into our-culture. To collect and tell our stories.

We are searching to uncover the material that makes us, to collect the fragments of our time and being, to affirm our existence as something other than a market share, to weave our stories (personal) into culture which has abandoned the need for mythos, for a subjective body of knowledge that is passed on between people. Clues of survival. Sense-making (sense not in terms of facts, but in terms of existence. sense of place and being).

Storytelling

*the story depends on everyone of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being ... they call it the tool of primitive man, the simplest vehicle of truth. When history started separating itself from story, it started indulging in accumulation and facts.*¹⁸

Rituals are tools to access memory.
Not made by history, but through informal participation, rituals define personal memory.
The story to be told.

Stories include and circulate. Nomadic wanders.
Restless. Transmutable. Stories invoke the teller to re-invent their lives through collection and distribution.

History claims its ground in facts. Denying the transfer of personal engagement. Essentially removing itself from anything but the epitaph on its tombstone, which reads,

*here lies history
frozen
will spoil if opened
please don't touch.*

The story, her-story embodies exchange, a dialogue that is permutable, that can be passed on.

*for the vision of a story that has no end, no middle, no beginning, no start, no stop, the vision of a madwoman ...*¹⁹

Chimera tells her story. Inter-weaving the past and present, en-visioning and re-working the language of the future.

... incorporating into a language of the future, which means that one must learn to argue with unexplained terms and to use sentences for which no clear rules of usage are as yet available. Just as a child who starts using words without yet understanding them, who adds more and more uncomprehended linguistic fragments to his playful activity, discovers the sense-making principle only after he has been active in this way for a long time ... in the very same way the inventor of a new world view must be able to talk nonsense until the amount of nonsense created by him and his friends is big enough to give sense to all its parts.²⁰

Through telling Chimera re-leases and re-kindles. Taking up the work of Time. She cooks. Telling invokes transformation. Affirming in its state of alterability. Taking an active role in the re-making of the self and the world.

Alchemy takes place in the same spiritual category: the alchemist takes up and perfects the work of Nature, while at the same time working to 'make' [her]self.²¹

Chimera undermines language to un-cover the things which oppress and objectify her. Digging in the gaps, she cooks up her itinerary of meaning, she e-merges as her own being.

... thus if the dead, if those who are to come, need an abode, what refuge could be more agreeable ... than this imaginary space? this enforces the connection that they wish to make, an abode for those yet to come ... which would be domiciliated neither in outer space nor entirely in inner consciousness ... but rather an imaginary space from which we can hear one another.²²

Searching to join the personal (chimerical) within a visible public context she dwells in the gaps she has uncovered. She begins to speak and listen at the same time. Breaking down the dichotomy of speaking and listening in oppositional terms. Communication links cooperating subjects.

No longer can the work of shelter (the voice of women, personal) be contained. It spills out into the street. Kitchen table talk begins to mobilize as we share recipes. Making the cookbook. Chimera e-merges from the kitchen. Pushing the kitchen table out onto the street.

Chimera is becoming.

Notes

1 Gregory Ulmer, "The Eutetics of Alice's Valise," *Journal of Architectural Education* (November, 1991)

Ulmer's study of eutetics contains clues for the construction of this new frame of research. *Eutetics is a cognitive practice coming into formation as an alternative to (not opposed to, but supplementing) hermeneutics and critique. The term, related to 'Eureka! I found it!,' is synonymous with thinking as discovery rather than as interpretation.* (Ulmer, 1991, p. 4)

2 bell hooks, *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black* (South End Press, 1989), p. 36.

3 Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, 1983)

For many architects, myth and poetry are generally considered synonymous with dreams and lunacy, while reality is deemed equivalent to prosaic scientific theories. In other words, mathematical logic has been substituted for metaphor as a model of thought. Art can be beautiful, of course, but only seldom is it understood as a profound form of knowledge, as a genuine intersubjective interpretation of reality. And architecture, particularly, must never partake of the alleged escapism of the other fine arts; it has to be, before anything else, a paradigm of efficient and economical construction. (Perez-Gomez, 1983, p. 6)

4 Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Inc., 1986), p. 389.

5 Jean DuBuffet, *Asphyxiating Culture* (Four Walls Eight Windows, 1988), p. 70

6 Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* p. 6.

7 Peter Sloterdijk, *A critique of Cynical Reason* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

What Diogenes demonstrates to his fellow citizens through his life-style would be designated now to the level of an animal. Because of this, the Athenians deropatorily call him "dog," for Diogenes had reduced his requirements to the living standards of a domestic pet. In doing so, he had freed himself from civilizations chain of needs. He thus also turned the Athenians' nickname around against them and accepted the insult as the name of his philosophy. (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 165) As Diogenes embraced and identified his title of dog, we work through ours as miners, working beneath the surface of our institutional existence, under-mining ourselves in order to embrace and identify ourselves.

8 Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam To Identity* (Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), p. 156.

9 Octavio Paz, *Renga: A Chain of Poems* (George Braziller, 1971), p. 27.

10 Hiroaki Sato, *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English* (Weatherhill, 1983)

Renga is a collaborative form which evolved in Japan between the Heian period (794-1192) and the Momoyama, in the fourteenth and

fifteenth centuries. A *renga* consists of two to a hundred alternating parts of 5-7-5 and 7-7 syllables, usually written by two or more persons, with the linking made in such a way that any two consecutive parts must make an intelligible whole, but three may not. ... AB, BC, CD, but not ABC, BCDE, DEF, and so on ... It is collaborative poetry with 'disjunctive linking.' (Sato, 1983, p. 3-18)

- 11 Octavio Paz, *Renga: A Chain of Poems*, p. 18.
- 12 bell hooks, interview in *Angry Women* (Re/Search #13, 1991), p.85
- 13 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum, 1984), p. 81.
- 14 Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, 1983).

In the history of modern architecture this predicament is clearly visible. The provable themes of mathematical reason and universal truth continue to direct the making of architecture and the values of a culture which consumes it. The quest for universal knowledge, for an architecture of truths (to be applied anytime, anywhere), continues to plague the evolution of architectural theory and practice. [The] functionalization of architectural theory implies its transformation into a set of operational rules, into a tool of an exclusively technological character. Its the main concern becomes how to build in an efficient and economical manner, while avoiding questions related to why one builds and whether it is justified in an existential context. (Perez-Gomez, 1983, p. 4)

- 15 **carapace 1 a** : a bony or chitinous case or shield covering the back or part of the back of an animal **2 a** : a hard surficial crust **b** : any hard protective covering (Webster's Third New International, Dictionary 1989, p. 335)
- 16 Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam To Identity* (Grove Weidenfeld, 1990)
- 17 Ibid., p. 141.
- 18 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 1989)
- 19 Ibid., p. 123.
- 20 Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (NLB, 1975), p. 256-257.
- 21 Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and The Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy* (Harper & Row, 1971)
- 22 Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (University of Nebraska Press, 1989)