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## ***Interview with Barbara Kruger by Monika Sprüth***

### **Monika Sprüth**

M. S.: *Do you think women have a different way of dealing with power?*

B. K.: Well obviously I think it varies from woman to woman. Every woman has different ways of negotiating power situations in her life just the way men do. But women as a gender have been socialized differently than men, and this difference determines their relationship to power.

I really can't give a single example that functions for all women. I think that some women try to use power to displace the conventional notions of control. Others have been very successful in repeating the conventional, so-called masculinist notions of power. Again, I don't want to label one as correct and one as incorrect. But I would hope that women would indulge in a mechanism that had a critical relationship to the conventional ways that power has been used. That they will try to undermine some of those conventional relationships and question what the dispensations of power are.

*Don't you think women are more hesitant about using power?*

I think that perhaps historically this might have been the case. But I think that increasingly, women have become more sure of their position in the world and have developed more of a self-confidence and an ability to deal with the mechanics of power and make them work for themselves and hopefully to support other women.

*What about your own situation? You just joined a new gallery!*

I frequently have said that I think that it has been important to me to enter what I call the «symbolic space of Mary Boone's Gallery». It has been an important site for the discourses of contemporary art making. And I think that it is central to the distribution of my work and meaning, that it be in a place like that.

I think that we function in a system which is relentlessly vertical, relentlessly hierarchical. I think what has always been important to me in my production is that the process itself is a very horizontal one, not a vertical one. That I don't just blow up big pictures and put them in red frames, but that I also write criticism and I also teach and I also am involved in co-curating a lecture series here in America at the Dia Art Foundation. And I see these as horizontal activities. However, because the exhibition structure for objets d'art is very vertical, in order to further my work, and to make it more possible forme to do these other activities, it is with great pleasure that I take my position within the verticality of that system also, and use that position to make changes. Because you can't locate yourself outside of the so-called «star system». You know, we are in a market structure. And the more successful and visible one is, the more effective one's work can be.

Obviously, my position is different than some other artists because I see my work as trying to dispense and suggest informations. So the distribution and the vertical structure is one that I have to deal with.

*Can you give me an example in the art world, where there has been an attempt at a more critical relationship to power?*

I would say that certainly I feel myself very aligned to Jenny Holzer in trying to address how power is used and how contradictions in that usage can be scrutinized in our work.

For instance, in terms of the relationship to power, someone asked me recently, why I still spend so much time teaching and doing lectures, and I think the reason is that teaching, to me, is one of the most effective ways to addressing people, but not only addressing them and speaking to them but have them speak to me. There's a reciprocity and exchange at work rather than the typical male lecturing or presenting himself as the bearer of knowledge and power. I prefer an exchange. And I feel that teaching is a way to somehow form ideas and create models and structures for those that have been absent. The panel series that I've been coorganizing this year is an attempt to bring new voices into this discourse of the art world via the areas of sociology, media studies, architecture and anti-colonialism.

*What do you think of the present situation in the New York galleries showing many women artists? Do you observe a change or is it an illusion?*

I believe things are changing for the better. I was in Europe this summer and I was so happy to get back here because I just feel that right now, this is the best place to be a woman and to try to live your life in the richest way possible. It is still very repressive but that there are openings here, loosening up that repression. And I think that in the art world, although we have a long way to go, there are very good changes being made.

But I think in terms of government, in terms of question of health care, in terms of question of child care, in terms of question of right to abortion, we are going through a very repressive time within the Reagan administration and the present Bork Supreme Court nomination. So I think women should not get deluded into thinking that things are over and it's easy now. I think that change is an unceasing struggle for women and for people of color and for disenfranchised people.

*How would you like to see the women behave?*

I have no desire to dictate how women behave. There are hundreds of different ways to live your life as a feminist. I think that women really have to look at how power is constructed and to see themselves within that construction, not marginalized and to figure out what are the most effective ways to make that construction congenial to themselves and other women. There are many different kinds of feminism. There is not one kind of feminism, because feminism are issues which are defined by class and race and a bunch of other factors. Each woman can work to determine her own access to self-respect and power. The method for a white woman working within a professional subculture is different than a young black woman, who is a single parent in an American inner city. We should avoid dictating the «correct» way to be a feminist.

*What would happen, if women would rule the world?*

Hopefully, women have developed a critical relationship to the idea of «ruling» I am not interested in simply reversing the machinations of power. I don't believe that men are bad and women are good. I believe that gender is biologically defined but that sexuality is socially constructed. And that makes me a kind of lascivious optimist. But never an utopian.

(In *Eau de Cologne II*, Galerie Monika Sprüth, Köln 1987).