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Hegemonic disguise in resistance to domination: the Clothesline Project's response to male violence against women

Patricia Coral Hipple
Iowa State University

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Hegemonic disguise in resistance to domination:
The Clothesline Project's response to male violence against women

by

Patricia Coral Hipple

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Sociology

Major Professor: Peter F. Korsching

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

1998

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Committee Member

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Committee Member

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Committee Member

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Graduate College

**Dedicated to the women of The Clothesline Project
and to those who strive to eliminate violence against women**

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ABSTRACT

This case study of The Clothesline Project extends the theories of James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* to gender domination and resistance. It demonstrates how communication encoded in a women's folk medium comprises a hidden transcript of subordinate political discourse that refutes official and popular notions about gendered violence and female subordination. It also demonstrates how this folk medium disguises the identity of those who participate in the Clothesline Project so the transcript of their experiences can be publicly revealed with reduced risk of violence and retribution. By providing a sequestered physical and discursive space in which women are free to privately articulate their experiences of violence without censure or threat, The Clothesline Project nurtures and nourishes the hidden transcript. At the same time, it provides a forum for the public articulation of the political discourse contained therein. Accumulated in textual, imagistic, and symbolic forms, the initially concealed testimonies of women first insinuate, and then thrust, themselves into the public forum where they interrupt prevailing discourses about gender relations, negate the dominant discourses about violence against women, and challenge the public transcript. The threatened hegemony of dominant discourse, including the silence that enshrouds gendered violence, are refuted by an emerging public testimony of thousands of women who have been battered, raped, sexually molested, abused and terrorized, as well as by the concurrent testimony of thousands of their allies. Each testimony is communicated through public displays of Clothesline shirts. As a collective cultural product, The Clothesline Project is a vehicle for individual empowerment, a potent instrument of ideological insubordination, and a tool of praxis--action toward transformation and collective social change.

This research demonstrates how a hidden transcript is generated, elaborated, and publicly declared under the most severe forms of gender domination--gendered violence, including murder, battering, rape and sexual assault, incest and childhood sexual abuse, and lesbian-bashing. Shirt designs and texts, along with other discursive elements of the Clothesline, challenge hegemonic discourse about violence against women. Material and symbolic aspects of the body, clothing, and women's work are used to express resistance to patriarchal hegemony and female subordination. The Clothesline Project, as an example of women's expressive culture, uses art, ritual, and folklore practices to resist gender domination.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A long-sleeved flannel shirt of teal and black plaid flutters wildly in an unexpected gust of wind. It hangs from a clothesline suspended between two trees that are planted amid the concrete and paving bricks that define a small, outdoor pedestrian mall. As the wind subsides, the shirt relaxes to expose a shocking message emblazoned across it in white block letters; "My father is a rapist." Secured by wooden clamp-style clothespins, the shirt is joined at the shoulder to another, a plain yellow T-shirt inscribed in bold black letters with the message, "Mo, I know you are still hitting her." This shirt too is joined at the shoulder by another, and another, and another, and another. There is a rose colored cotton turtle-neck, its lamentation painted with thick black strokes, "Sweet 16 and never been kissed, but anally raped." There is a small blue T-shirt on which two hands are drawn, their six tiny extended fingers point toward the words "I was this little and this many years old when it started." And there is a yellow T-shirt painted with sanguine colors that drip down the knit fabric like blood, pleading and demanding, "Stop hitting Mommy."

This line intersects another that snakes its way along the pedestrian mall bearing still more shirts: a blue jumper with lurid appliqué hands that fondle the breast and pubis; a white T-shirt silk-screened with a color photograph of a woman framed with the message, "Murdered 8/29/93"; a black T-shirt painted with the rays of a sun illuminating the text "I will survive! Peace!" and a multi-colored T-shirt on which is crudely etched "End Domestic Violence, Stop the Silence."

Sometimes hanging motionless, at other times stirring gently in the breeze, at other times flapping defiantly in the wind, the shirts hang shoulder to shoulder at this outdoor display. In addition to the graphic visual imagery of the shirts, itself a provocative physical, indeed visceral, testimony, there is a deliberate auditory component to this display: the percussive sound of a gong, the shrill of a whistle,

and the tolling of a bell reverberate in the air. Almost meditative in their regularity, the gong sounds every fifteen seconds to signify that another woman has been battered, the whistle screams every minute to declare that another woman has been raped, and the bell tolls four times each day in eulogy to the four women killed each and every day by their intimate partners in the United States.

Some pedestrians on the mall scurry by the Clothesline display as if oblivious to its presence, while others skirt the fringes of the exhibit with piqued curiosity, yet restrained, reluctant, or even repelled by the startling revelations of the shirts. Some viewers cautiously approach, studying the bold designs and text from a measured, safe distance. Others, however, come right up to the shirts as though drawn, arrested, and transfixed, losing themselves in the maze of clotheslines, surveying and scrutinizing each shirt carefully. Their faces register pain and incredulity; their body language betrays their discomfort.

Some of the shirts are difficult to read, the dark print and designs on even darker shirts are hard to make out, or their text is so small that the viewer has to get very close just to read the words, or the drape and folds of the hanging shirt obscure part of the image. Occasionally a gust of wind will toss a series of shirts about, obscuring the words and design altogether. Viewers gently seize these shirts, holding them still and close to read their messages. Or at least it initially appears that this is why people reach out to these shirts; in reality, they want to touch them, to connect with them.

Silently viewers wind their way through the seemingly endless rows of shirts, "listening" to the stories of the women who designed them—for these shirts speak. They are "talking textiles,"¹ and they speak in whispers and whimpers, in screams and in shouts. They utter warnings, declarations, proclamations, and curses. Some use measured prose and poetry, others use explosive epithets, still others offer calm

¹ I am indebted to Judith Elsley (1992; 1996) for this expression.

and reasoned testimony, evidence, debate and rebuttal. They speak through words written upon the shirt and they speak through pictures and metaphoric imagery applied to the fabric. Some shirts seemingly talk to themselves, questioning the meaning of the experience they retell; others seem to be communicating with someone in particular—a victim, a survivor, a perpetrator, a witness. Some speak in soliloquy to the audience who has come to engage them; others question, challenge, respond and argue as if in dialogue or conversation. Collectively, their messages comprise a discourse and discussion with the hearts and minds of viewers.

Signs posted at the site declare this “The Clothesline Project: Bearing Witness to Violence Against Women.” Nearly 400 shirts are suspended from clotheslines that wind their way throughout a quarter block of the brick paved pedestrian mall. These shirts, and the seemingly endless intersection of clotheslines, create a veritable maze of color, fabric, and texture, as well as powerful (some say overwhelming) emotion.²

While women who design the shirts are free to choose any color shirt to express their experiences of violence, a recommended color scheme serves as their guide. It also serves as a “visual statistic” for viewers of the display: red, pink and orange shirts for women who have been raped or sexually assaulted; yellow and beige shirts for survivors of battering and domestic assault; blue and green shirts for women who survived incest or childhood sexual abuse; lavender and purple shirts for women attacked specifically because they were, or were perceived to be, lesbians. White shirts, created by friends or family members, commemorate “victims,” the term reserved for women who were murdered or died as the result of violence perpetrated against them. This ensemble of colors is a dramatic illustration of the incidence and prevalence of violence against women in this community and

² A description of several variants and versions of Clothesline Project displays follows. For descriptions of other styles of display, see Laura Julier 1994, and Constance Ostrowski 1997.

every community, and it represents the wide spectrum of abuse that women are subjected to.

The Clothesline Project is a visual display of shirts designed by women who have survived violence, and by loved-ones of women who have died. This Clothesline Project is one of hundreds that are active throughout the United States and around the world. The group that organized this display is part of a loosely organized international network of Clothesline Projects committed to raising public awareness of the incidence and prevalence of violence against women and providing survivors with a safe place to reveal, heal and empower themselves. Activist groups create local Clotheslines by inviting women, or their allies, to contribute designed shirts, and by organizing periodic public displays of those shirts in their communities.

The very first Clothesline was the inspiration of a small group of women in Massachusetts. Known then as the Cape Cod Women's Agenda,³ this group of feminist activists organized the first Clothesline and displayed it on the village green in Hyannis, Massachusetts in October of 1990 as part of Cape Cod's "Women Take Back the Night" observances. A single span of clothesline strung between giant oak trees held just 31 shirts that day. In the ensuing years, the Clothesline Project has been adopted by more than 300 local groups around the world and the number of shirts has grown from 31 to more than 35,000.⁴

The shirts contain textual and/or pictorial messages about women's experiences of violence, providing graphic illustration of physical and psychic injury and its consequences for survivors of battering, rape, sexual abuse, and lesbian

³ The Cape Cod Women's Agenda was a group of approximately 10 women engaged in feminist activism in Massachusetts. Following creation of the Clothesline Project, they abandoned the name Cape Cod Women's Agenda. The group has since disbanded, although many of the originators continue to organize Clothesline Project displays locally, regionally, and nationally.

⁴ These estimates were based on 1995 documentation, but the rapidity with which organizations and communities have adopted Clothesline Project during 1996-1998 leads me to suspect that the number of projects is much higher, and the number of shirts may now have reached more than 100,000. Local Clothesline Projects exist in each of the 50 United States, and there are projects throughout the world, including ones in Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Eastern Europe, Great Britain, Israel, The Philippines, Tanzania, and the Virgin Islands, among other places.

bashing. The shirts also tell stories of healing, recovery, empowerment and resilience. The Clothesline Project uses clothing and fabric art as a medium of artistic expression, weaving in metaphors of women's traditional domestic responsibilities as a way to communicate women's experiences of gendered violence, to commemorate and memorialize victims, and to honor and "bear witness" to women who have survived. The Clothesline Project display draws attention to individual acts of gendered violence—to "break the silence" about the level of violence against women in our culture and to protest the complicity of individuals and social institutions in that violence. The Clothesline Project provides a forum to challenge the complicit involvement of law enforcement, the courts, the medical community, the media, educational institutions, and human services agencies in that violence. As an expressive folk medium and example of women's folk culture, the Clothesline Project amplifies the voice of women who traditionally have been silenced in discourses about male domination, female subordination and gendered violence.

Statement of the Problem

This study of the Clothesline Project demonstrates how this folk medium expresses and enacts resistance to gender domination in its most virulent form, gendered violence. According to James C. Scott (1990), folk culture provides a unique lens through which to view domination, resistance, ideology, and hegemony. Folk culture plays a critical role in the political discourse⁵ of subordinated groups, providing a medium through which "non-hegemonic voices and practices" can be expressed. Folk culture contains evidence of the *hidden transcript*, those "offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the *public transcript*," the formal and official discourse promulgated by the dominant group (pp. 4-5). Generated and elaborated by subordinate groups in sites

⁵ For Scott, the concept of discourse is not limited to language or linguistics, but ideology communicated or conveyed through extralinguistic behaviors and practices as well.

sequestered from the surveillance of powerholders, the hidden transcript is a refutation of hegemonic messages contained in the public transcript. It is a discourse rich in "dissident, contrapuntal, and anti-hegemonic expression" (p. 25). Because it is subversive in nature, the hidden transcript threatens existing power relations, and for this reason, dominant group members try to repress not only overt expressions of resistance, but the hidden transcript as well. Denied open public expression, the hidden transcript must therefore insinuate itself in the public forum through a "politics of disguise and anonymity" (pp. 183-84). Folk culture provides the sequestered site—either as separate physical space, separate discursive space, or both—in which the political discourse of subordinates is generated and elaborated. Folk culture also provides the necessary disguise and anonymity for the articulation of that political discourse by means of linguistic and artistic strategies that disguise the message and behavioral strategies that disguise the messenger. Folk culture thereby allows subordinates to publicly articulate their material and symbolic resistance to domination.

Scott's focus is based on institutional forms of domination; he provides ethnographic and historical evidence from slavery, serfdom, untouchability, stratified peasant societies, and racial domination including colonialism. Although he acknowledges a debt to feminist theory in the development of his ideas and makes periodic reference to "patriarchal power relations," Scott ultimately doubts the merits of his approach for gender-based domination:

In the case of women, relations of subordination have typically been both more personal and intimate; joint procreation and family life have meant that imagining an entirely separate existence for the subordinate group [women] requires a more radical step than it has for serfs or slaves. . .the case of gender highlights the importance of specifying exactly how separate separate spheres are (p. 22).

In other words, Scott suspects that women are deprived of the off-stage, sequestered sites which are the necessary precondition for generation of the hidden transcript.

Despite his reservations, I believe Scott's approach has much to offer in the analysis of a contemporary folk medium designed by women to critique hegemonic discourse about male violence against women. The Clothesline Project demonstrates how a hidden transcript is generated, elaborated, and publicly declared under the most severe forms of gender domination, male violence against women, including murder, battering, rape and sexual assault, incest and childhood sexual abuse, and lesbian-bashing. Shirt designs and texts, as well as other discursive elements of the Clothesline, challenge hegemonic discourse about violence against women. Material and symbolic aspects of the body, clothing, and women's work are used to critique patriarchal hegemony and female subordination. The Clothesline Project uses art, ritual, and folklore practices to resist gender domination. As an example of women's expressive folk culture, the Clothesline Project constitutes and conveys the political discourse of women subjugated by sexism and gendered violence.

The Theoretical Context: Domination and Gendered Violence

Domination, according to Scott (1990), is a process of appropriation and extraction. Members of the dominant group appropriate and extract "material taxes" from subordinates in the form of labor, service, cash, and other resources at the same time they appropriate and extract "symbolic taxes" in the form of deference, demeanor, posture, verbal formulas, and acts of humility (p. 188). Institutional forms of domination are characterized by a "strong element of personal rule. . . infused by an element of personal terror, arbitrary beatings, sexual violations, and other insults and humiliations" (p. 21). Scott acknowledges a high level of covert resistance to this domination, but states that "the greater the power exercised over them, the more incentive subordinates have to foster the impression of compliance, agreement, and deference" (p. 90).

Scott's conceptualization of domination encompasses existing power relations between men and women. Women's gender roles and economic contributions have historically been key foci of male control (Stark and Flitcraft 1996), and violence against women is among the most effective mechanisms enforcing that control. Despite its popular characterization as an impulsive act of passion, gendered violence, in reality, is a pattern of methodical behaviors employed to hurt, intimidate, coerce, isolate, humiliate or control women (Stark and Flitcraft 1996; Dobash and Dobash 1992; Gelles and Straus 1988; Walker 1984; Martin 1983; Brownmiller 1975). Violence against women is employed, to use Scott's words, to "appropriate and extract" labor, financial resources, housework, childcare, and sex, as well as deference to male hegemony and authority. In domestic battering, for example,

Repeated episodes of physical abuse, usually by a spouse, ex-spouse, lover, or dating partner, are accompanied by sexual assault, threats and intimidation, verbal abuse, the destruction of property, threats to significant others including child abuse, stalking, degradation, isolation from friends and family and other potential sources of support, and a pattern of coercive control over key aspects of the victim's life, including access to money, personal items, food, sexuality, physical appearance, social life, telephone, transportation, work, religion, and access to help, sources of care and protection (Stark and Flitcraft 1996:203).

With regard to sexual violence, Herman (1996) explains that reported rapes are not spontaneous acts committed by men overwhelmed by the sexual provocation of women, rather 71% are prearranged and another 11% are partially planned (p. 53). A "violent repudiation of anything feminine" according to Herman, rape often includes some form of ridicule or sexual humiliation, such as "urination, anal intercourse, fellatio, ejaculation in the victim's face or hair, insertion of broomsticks, bottles, or other phallic objects" (p. 52).

As Stark and Flitcraft (1996) explain, "virtually every aspect of abusive relationships—from the parts of the body targeted in assaults through the occasions on which coercion is exercised to the areas of female resistance—involve women's

'work'" (p. 32). For example, domestic violence frequently occurs in disputes about childcare, sex, cooking and housework, women's employment, and money (Berns 1997; Berkey-Abbott 1992; Dobash and Dobash 1995, 1992, and 1979; Stanko 1985; Walker 1984), and men who rape often express a sense of sexual entitlement to women—as though it is a woman's job to satisfy male sexual desire—even if that means submitting to coerced sex and violent assault (Herman 1996; Mackinnon 1995; Searles and Berger 1995; Kelly 1988; Finkelhor and Yllo 1985; Brownmiller 1975; Griffith 1971).

Social institutions are complicit in violence against women: mediated through structures of inequality, individual male strategies of domination converge with discriminatory structures and institutional practices, culminating in female subordination (Stark and Flitcraft 1996:4-7). Legal, educational, medical, social, and protective services "codetermine traditional sex hierarchies" and suppress women's attempts to overcome such hierarchies (pp. 5-6). Stark and Flitcraft argue that these institutions "function today as a reconstituted or extended patriarchy, reinforcing female subordination" (p. 7). Institutional responses to violence—neglect, minimization, labeling, and victim blaming—directly contribute to women's isolation and vulnerability. Attempts by women to empower themselves against violence and control are "frustrated, blocked, and subverted by the very institutions they turn to for help and protection" (p. 80). Stark and Flitcraft's main thesis is that gendered violence is a "defensive response to women's progressive liberation from material and domestic servitude" (p. xix). They argue, for example, that

battering reflects the erosion of male authority, that domestic violence stands on a continuum with normative forms of male domination, and that woman battering grows out of women's struggles to overcome their contradictory status, not from their compliance with or dependence on men (p. 6).

Violence against women is a manifestation of gender domination in its most oppressive forms. Scott argues, however, that wherever there is oppression, there is resistance to that oppression. The Clothesline Project demonstrates and

communicates women's resistance to gendered violence, but it also evidences the strategies women use to resist gender domination in its broader context.

Overview of Subsequent Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate the relevance of Scott's approach to gender domination, particularly how the Clothesline Project constitutes and conveys a hidden transcript that refutes hegemonic discourse about violence against women. Chapter 2 sets the theoretical foundations for Scott's work and elaborates his approach. A brief discussion of theories of domination, resistance, ideology, and hegemony is included, along with a review of the role of discourse in perpetuating and challenging exploitative power relations. This is followed by an extrapolation of Scott's formulations on the public transcript, the hidden transcript, infrapolitics, and saturnalias of power.

The three chapters of Section I situate the Clothesline Project as folk media. Chapter 3 provides an overview of women's traditional expressive culture that constitute key antecedents of the Clothesline Project. Chapter 4 provides thick description of a variety of Clothesline Project displays based on personal experience, interviews and observations. Chapter 5, also based on interviews and observations, reports the experiences of survivors and allies who make and hang shirts for public display.

Section II demonstrates how shirt designs and texts, along with other discursive elements of the Clothesline, generate and elaborate the hidden transcript. In Chapters 6 through 12 describe the disguises that cloak participants and facilitate their stealth political activity or "infrapolitics." I explain how material and symbolic aspects of the body, clothing, and women's work are used to express and enact resistance to patriarchal hegemony and female subordination. And I discuss the ways art, ritual, and folklore practices are used to resist gender domination.

Section III, Chapter 13, describes how, through hegemonic disguise, the Clothesline Project simultaneously constitutes and conveys the hidden transcript and

enacts infrapolitics and saturnalias of power in resistance to violence against women and broader systems of gender domination. I present evidence from interviews and informal discussions that explains how the Clothesline Project encodes messages of resistance and how gender socialization and experiences differentially equip women and men to decipher those messages and interpret the meaning of the Clothesline Project.

An Afterword concludes the analysis with a brief reiteration of the resistance strategies used by Clothesline Project originators, organizers, and shirtmakers, a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Scott's theory, an examination of how this study extends Scott's approach to gender domination, and a discussion of the implications of this research. A discussion of the research methods used in the study is provided in Appendix I, and examples of shirts from Iowa Clotheslines are provided in Appendix II.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this chapter I provide an overview of selected theories of domination, ideology, hegemony, and resistance that inform Scott's work, along with a discussion of the role of discourses, language and symbolic communication, and cultural forms and practices in perpetuating and challenging exploitative power relations. I elaborate on Scott's theories with a description of the four components of political discourse and activity that ground his work—the public transcript, the hidden transcript, infrapolitics, and saturnalias of power. Because I seek to extend Scott's approach to gender domination, a realm of domination and resistance that Scott neglects, I conclude the chapter by introducing a typology of strategies used in women's expressive culture to encode critiques of female subordination.

Theoretical Overview

Domination

Scott defines domination as material and symbolic appropriation. His conceptualization includes three domains: the domain of material appropriation, the domain of public mastery and subordination, and the domain of ideological justification for inequalities. The term "appropriation" precludes the possibility of willing consent, and thus compliance with material and symbolic appropriation must be explained either as the hegemonizing influence of ideology, or as Scott demonstrates, a feigned activity to thwart escalating exploitation.

By this definition of domination, Scott enfolds both Marxist and Weberian perspectives on power. The former envisions domination as rule by force, sanction, or threat, especially through economic means, and the latter specifies domination through legitimated authority, specifically traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal

authority. Marx's scenario suggests coercion, while Weber's suggests a level of consent.

Weber (1968) introduces another aspect of power, however, that is not consensual, "exclusionary closure." Exclusionary closure involves efforts by a group to gain resources, privileges, and power for itself "through tactics which give rise to a social category of social ineligibles or outsiders" (Miller, Rowland, and Tilly 1989:7). There are two strains of social closure: exclusion and usurpation, the latter suggesting Scott's notion of appropriation. Through exclusionary closure, access to power resources,⁶ rewards and privileges is closed off to those deemed inferior or unworthy by those "monopolizing the definition of values" (p. 7). Gender subordination is one result of these exclusionary practices; hierarchies constructed on the basis of supposed racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual difference provide other examples.

Social categories such as "ineligibles" or "outsiders" are constituted and sustained through ideology. An example of ideology is Enlightenment thought which extracted human from nature; seeing nature as "other" than human legitimated dominance over nature. This domination of nature is directly linked to and implicated in social domination. Scott's main argument, of course, is that ineligibles and outsiders, in a word, subordinates, actively resist domination. Indeed, Scott contends that "forms of domination are devised, elaborated, and justified *because* the effort to bend others to one's will always encounters resistance" (p. 111 fn5). He elaborates on the role of ideology:

Practices of resistance may mitigate the daily pattern of material appropriation, and the gestures of negation in the hidden transcript may answer daily insults to dignity. But at the level of systematic social doctrine, subordinate groups confront elaborate ideologies that justify inequality. . . [for this reason] resistance to ideological domination requires a counter-ideology (pp. 117-118).

⁶ These include, among other things, economic wealth, control over jobs, organizational capacity, numerical support, competence, expert knowledge, control of information, occupations in prestigious positions, control of the instruments of force, and reputation as power itself.

Ideology

While most social theorists agree that a dominant ideology prevails in society, the concept of ideology itself has many disparate definitions, while the dominant ideology is rarely specified. In *Ideology: An Introduction*, Eagleton (1991) provides no fewer than 17 definitions of ideology. Tilly (1991), however, cautions that definitions of ideology (as well as definitions of hegemony) should be contextually specific, that any absolute, unchanging definition is doomed to failure, and the absence of a concrete definition should be seen as productive. Detractors, on the other hand, may not be so permissive. In discussing dominant ideology, Scott admits that "precisely what this ideology is, how it is created, how it is propagated, and what consequences it has is hotly contested" (p. 71).

The role of ideology in reproducing social domination has been the key focus of Althusser (1970). For Althusser, ideology involves a system of representation that positions people as subjects subordinated to the interests of the ruling elite. Elite controlled institutions such as politics, economics, religion, education, the family, and the media are the "ideological state apparatuses" through which societal values, beliefs, and hierarchies are promulgated, while "repressive state apparatuses," i.e. legislatures, police, courts, military, welfare systems, and the therapeutic community, enforce these hierarchies and coerce individuals into compliance with these values and beliefs. Agency, according to Althusser, is an illusion, for an ideology that purports to oppose the dominant ideology is constrained by dominant concepts, categories, and values that reproduce conditions of domination. In short, agency is constituted by dominant discourses and practices, the very discourses and practices that legitimate inequality, appropriation, and exploitation. Ultimately, Althusser argues, power limits the options available to subordinates.

Stark and Flitcraft (1996) present an Althusserian perspective on the interaction between ideology and domination when they contend that "policy

deploys social knowledge and social therapy, exercising its power less by directly oppressing us, less as a power over or external to us, than by circumscribing our field of belief and action" (p. 48).

Hegemony

Like ideology, hegemony is disparately defined. Bocoock (1986) offers a benign, if not downright benevolent, definition of hegemony as "moral and philosophical leadership. . . leadership attained through active consent of major groups in society" (p. 11). His focus on consent is indicative of Gramscian influences in his definition. In contrast, Althusser perceives hegemony as ideological domination, a definition compatible with Scott's perspective. Moderating these positions is Hamilton (1986), who stresses the intimate link between hegemony and ideology. Key to hegemony is an "all encompassing" dominant ideology that "permeates" every sphere of social life. According to Hamilton, hegemonic ideology is "a world view that congeals dominance" of one group over another "into cultural permanence" (p. 7).

Hegemony as conceived by Gramsci entailed not only coercive elements, but the negotiation process to achieve consensus. In non-dictatorial societies, power, authority, and dominance are sustained because a significant majority perceive social relations as legitimate and therefore consent to participate. Gramsci, however, recognized consensus as temporary, with power relations continually being challenged and contested. The hegemony of the dominant group, as a result, must continually be defended and secured. For Gramsci, the notion of hegemony was central to understanding the processes of negotiation and contest through which subordinates transpire from passive reproducers of dominant ideologies to purveyors of a new oppositional hegemony.

Theories of hegemony built on Gramsci's foundation have sought to explain why subordinates participate in relationships contrary to their objective self-interests. As Scott explains, these theories try to understand when and why people

obey, why they appear to collude in or positively accept their own inferior social position, oppression or exploitation, and even in some sense be oblivious to what appears to be their subordination.

Resistance

If, as Scott contends, domination is appropriation, resistance to domination involves strategies to thwart appropriation. Such strategies target both material and symbolic exploitation. Resistance is not only the struggle for material and power resources, but also the struggle to reshape culture and create a counter-ideology. Gaventa (1991) explains that resistance is the means "through which the powerless create dignity and autonomy" (p. 344). Miller, Rowland, and Tilly (1989) state it another way: resistance is a metaphor for "enlarging and clarifying human consciousness" because "freedom is the ability to see through dominant (hegemonizing) ideology" (p. 13).

Instruments of Domination and Emancipation

Discourse

Like Althusser, Foucault introduces a problematic to such resistance, however. In Foucault's view, power is diffused throughout culture by means of normative discourses. These discourses, which exist in written and oral forms as well as in social practices of everyday life, are the primary vehicles through which domination and control are exercised. "Domination especially results when one discourse becomes hegemonic through its claim to privileged and unquestioned access to knowledge and universal truth." Using the idea of discursive fields, Foucault describes how institutions impose discipline through legal, medical, therapeutic, and educational discourses, among others, and how normalized institutional practices of surveillance become mechanisms of repression. In addition

he explains how subjectivity is culturally constructed through discourses that constitute and govern individual subjects.

Foucault's is a pessimistic perspective, in that the ideology these discourses disseminate is so naturalized as to be impervious to view. But while Foucault identifies discourses as the instruments of oppression, Bourdieu (1977) identifies language and cultural forms as the instruments of oppression. Power is manifest through mundane "material taxonomies" whose normative order permeates daily life, according to Bourdieu.

Language and Cultural Forms

If we understand language to be not only linguistic and written forms, but symbolic communication more generally, then we can begin to understand how ideology is embedded in cultural forms. Elements of culture, be they language or material objects, not only manifest, but also help construct and determine rules, behaviors and ideas. Baudrillard (1994) offers the heuristic of simulacra, cultural objects in which ideological messages are woven or inscribed, their constructed meanings appearing as natural. Post-structuralists maintain that it is through language that social meaning is constructed and constituted.

Ideology saturates everyday discourse and cultural forms. The mass media especially, are infused with subtle ideological meanings that reinforce the status quo. In this way, Stuart Hall (1976) contends, hegemony is maintained as dominant classes circumscribe meaning by framing all competing definitions within their purview. Hebdige (1979), however, demonstrates how subcultures (read subordinated cultures) co-opt hegemonic language and cultural forms and turn them against the dominant group. Subordinates "borrow, distort, exaggerate or invert" dominant symbols, rituals, values and beliefs, and through processes of negotiation and hybridization, articulate their counter-hegemonic messages. A semiotic approach guides the Birmingham School's examination of Gramscian hegemony.

The struggle between different discourses, different definitions, and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life. 'Humble objects' can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry "secret" meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination (Hebdige 1979:367).

Lachman (1988) argues, however, that the dominant culture is likely to respond to the subculture's challenge either by repressive or cooptational responses. Indeed, the Birmingham School has been criticized for underestimating the power of commercial culture to appropriate and produce counter-hegemonic styles.

"Marxist formulations," according to Hall and Neitz (1993), "fail to adequately appreciate the possibilities for cultural conflict because their framework tends to assume that the dominant culture effectively precludes alternatives" (p. 233). In contrast, Gottdiener (1985) argues that consciousness cannot be controlled, even when elites control the production of culture, they cannot control the interpretations that individuals give to cultural products." Gottdiener claims a dialectical struggle over symbols is waged within culture.

In post-structural formulations, discourse, language, symbol, and meaning become the fundamental sites for political struggle and resistance, with culture the site of debate and negotiation over meaning. How meaning is made, how something means, what meaning is made, who makes meaning, and for whom, become key questions.

Summary

Cultural forms may be used to assert the dominant cultures' ideological agendas, but they may also be used by subordinate groups to resist those agendas. Through control of discourse and through hegemonic representational practices the dominant group can misperceive and misrepresent subordinates, resulting in distortions that disempower subordinates. Resistance, then, involves correcting

these distortions, and in turn, exposing how elites misrepresent themselves. The dominant group can not sustain exclusionary closure in the face of such resistance. “Ideological control in modern society can never attain closure when there is a struggle over meanings for cultural objects and events” (Gottdiener 1985:999).

This struggle over discourse, language, symbols, and meaning, however, is only meaningful if it improves the material circumstances of subordinates. As Scott argues,

Virtually every instance of personal domination is intimately connected with a process of appropriation. . . .every public act of appropriation is, figuratively, a ritual of subordination. The bond between domination and appropriation means that it is impossible to separate the ideas and symbolism of subordination from a process of material exploitation. In exactly the same fashion, it is impossible to separate veiled symbolic resistance to the ideas of domination from the practical struggles to thwart or mitigate exploitation. (188)

“Domination and the Arts of Resistance”

Scott disputes theories of ideological hegemony which claim that subordinates either willingly consent, or are resigned to domination, arguing instead that members of subordinate groups are continually engaged in resistance to domination, albeit disguised resistance. Passivity and acquiescence—traits commonly attributed to subaltern groups by elites and used as justification for the assignment of inferior social status to subaltern group members—are strategic facades behind which subordinates conceal their subversive activities.

Under systems of domination, individual members of the powerful group engage in assaults to both the dignity and the body of subordinates, at the same time they frustrate any opportunity for subordinates to publicly respond or defend themselves. Coercion, enforced by violence, threats of violence, or other elements of personal terror, are hallmarks of domination. Arbitrary beatings, sexual brutality, insults, and public humiliation are capriciously used to enforce the appropriation of labor and property, obedience and deference. Institutions are not only complicit in

the domination, they are instrumental, because they fail to protect members of the subaltern group, but more importantly because they are key purveyors of an ideology that naturalizes, rationalizes, and/or justifies existing power relations that condone and even promote violence.

Denied institutional support or even a public hearing, members of the subordinate group go underground in their attempts to thwart the control of the dominant group. As a result, mutual surveillance and disguise permeates relations between the powerful and the weak. In public exchanges, "subordinates have a vested interest in avoiding any explicit display of insubordination," states Scott (p. 86). To avoid intensified surveillance and to minimize sanctions, repression, control and violence, subordinates feign compliance and deference to authority; the greater the power and coercion exercised over them, the greater the incentive for subordinates to conform and obey. Of course, the coercive apparatuses of the dominant group are disguised to avoid detection as well, so this leaves only the subordinate display of conformity and deference publicly visible, and such public exchanges provide convincing evidence to support an interpretation of ideological hegemony.

Scott argues, however, that subordinates conform and obey, "not because they have internalized the norms and values of the dominant group or are resigned to their status, but because the structure of surveillance, punishment and reward makes it prudent for them to comply" (p. 193). Behind the scenes and beyond the surveillance of the dominant group however, subordinates actively engage in resistance and publicly enact that resistance through language, behavior and activity disguised to avoid detection. A system of visible and invisible political activity results, with the public or visible behavior of dominants and subordinates comprising a *public transcript*, and the private or invisible behavior comprising a *hidden transcript* of political life.

Theories of ideological hegemony have been convincing, argues Scott, because social research has focused almost exclusively on dominant accounts of

official public discourse—the public transcript—discounting disguised mechanisms and patterns of coercion by dominants and failing to recognize as political a whole range of underground or guerrilla tactics engaged in by subordinates. When these “invisible” patterns of political behavior become the focus, however, theories of ideological hegemony are seriously brought into question. Scott argues that there are four manifestations of power relations between the powerful and the weak that should be the focus of research—the *public transcript*, the *hidden transcript*, *infrapolitics*, and *saturnalias of power*.

The Public Transcript

The *public transcript* is the sanitized account of political discourse. It contains the “formal and official” exchanges between the dominant and subordinate groups, as well as the ideology that serves to legitimate existing power relations. The dominant group exercises power by privileging its own discourse, and by controlling the discourse and behavior of subordinates. The public transcript expresses the beliefs, values and truths of those in control, while it marginalizes and silences contradictory perspectives. The dominant group determines which persons and points of view will be celebrated and which stigmatized. Public articulations of mastery and subordination, including natural and rational justification for unequal power relations, comprise much of the public transcript.

The Hidden Transcript

But despite outward appearances, subordinates neither agree nor comply with the public transcript; a *hidden transcript* is in constant argument with the public transcript. As a result of what Scott calls the “systematic frustration of reciprocal action” (p. 37) subordinates develop a private discourse rich in “nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, and subversive expression” (p. 25). “An individual who is affronted may develop a personal fantasy of revenge and confrontation, but when the insult is but a variant of affronts suffered systematically by a whole race, class,

or strata, then the fantasy can become a collective cultural product" (p. 9). That collective cultural product is the hidden transcript. It contains the evidence to challenge the dominant groups' claims to legitimacy and it discursively negates the hegemonic messages of the public transcript. The public transcript sets out the ideological rationale and justification for inequalities that serve to legitimate domination and justify the system of punishment and reward to keep subordinates in place. Conversely, resistance expressed through the hidden transcript is an attempt by subordinates to minimize appropriation, assert their self-worth, and negate the ruling ideology.

Scott succinctly encapsulates his conceptualization of the public and hidden transcripts in a single paragraph of *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*:

By definition, we have made the public transcript of domination ontologically prior to the hidden, offstage transcript. The result of proceeding in this fashion is to emphasize the reflexive quality of the hidden transcript as a labor of neutralization and negation. If we think, in schematic terms, of the public transcript as comprising a domain of material appropriation (for example, of labor, grain, taxes), a domain of public mastery and subordination (for example, rituals of hierarchy, deference, speech, punishment, and humiliation), and, finally, a domain of ideological justification for inequalities (for example, the public religious and political world view of the dominant elite), then we may perhaps think of the hidden transcript as comprising the offstage responses and rejoinders to the public transcript. It is, if you will, the portion of an acrimonious dialogue that domination has driven off the immediate stage (p. 111).

Infrapolitics

The hidden transcript is itself the object of repression because it undermines the authority of those in power and threatens existing power relations. It survives only to the extent it is "practiced, articulated, enacted, and disseminated" through disguised discourse or in sites sequestered from the surveillance of dominant group members. Denied open public expression, the hidden transcript must insinuate itself in the public forum through a politics of disguise and anonymity, that which Scott

calls *infrapolitics*. Infrapolitics include strategies designed to disguise the political message, the messenger, or both.

In his use of the term "political discourse" of subordinate groups, Scott refers not only to linguistic forms, but also to activities, behaviors, and sets of practices that articulate a great deal about the power relations between dominants and subordinates. Infrapolitics include linguistic strategies as well as low profile behavioral strategies. Political subversion is disguised through linguistic strategies such as rumor and gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, codes, euphemisms, metaphor, dialects and linguistic tricks, as well as behavioral strategies such as deception, indirection, stalling, poaching, tax evasion, dreams of revenge, carnival, masquerade, offstage parody, and ritual inversion.

Infrapolitics and the hidden transcript are designed to be invisible to the uninformed and uninitiated, or to be so ambiguous, innocuous or indirect as to be capable of multiple interpretations, particularly interpretations that appear to support the hegemony of the public transcript. Although conducted and articulated within public view, the meaning of this political discourse or behavior is often discernible only to those with intimate knowledge of the folk culture of the subordinate group. The "polysemic elements of folk culture mark off a relatively autonomous realm of discursive freedom," writes Scott (p. 157).

What permits subordinate groups to undercut the authorized cultural norms is the fact that cultural expression, by virtue of its polyvalent symbolism and metaphor, lends itself to disguise. By subtle use of codes one can insinuate into a ritual, a pattern of dress, a song, a story, meanings that are accessible to one intended audience and opaque to another audience the actors wish to exclude (p. 158).

Scott further explains that "one of the most effective and common ways subordinates may express resistance is by embedding it in a larger context of symbolic compliance" (p. 166fn). Symbolic compliance is key to infrapolitics because although members of the dominant groups may be unable to interpret the behavior of subordinates, they do suspect seditious intent, and for this reason they

attempt to control the physical locations and discursive spaces of subordinates. Following from Stallybrass and White (1986), Scott argues that “the social [and discursive] spaces where the hidden transcripts grow are themselves an achievement of resistance; they are won and defended in the teeth of power” (p. 119).

Saturnalias of Power

When the accumulation of insults, grievances, and injustices suffered by subordinates at the hands of the dominant group leads to an explosive response, Scott calls the result *saturnalias of power*.⁷ During these “epidemics of political courage” there is a “public rupture” between the public and hidden transcripts. These are moments of challenge and open defiance in which subordinates give “full-throated voice” to their grievances. An electrically charged time, both exhilarating and authenticating for participants, it is also a dangerous time, because it can invoke retaliation and greater repression on the part of dominant group members. “The first open statement of a hidden transcript, a declaration that breaches the etiquette of power relations, that breaks an apparently calm surface of silence and consent, carries the force of a symbolic declaration of war,” writes Scott (p. 8).

Gender Limitations of Scott’s Work

In refuting theories of ideological hegemony, Scott argues that subordinated groups, although admittedly constrained at the level of action, are less constrained at the level of thought, and devise imaginative—albeit disguised—ways to formulate a hidden transcript of resistance to domination. In light of this claim, Scott’s reservations about applying his approach to gender domination are worrisome. Is he implying that women do not comprise a subordinated group? Is he implying that women, as a subordinated group, lack the sequestered site needed to generate and

⁷ Scott borrows the term *saturnalia* from the ancient Roman festival of Saturn which was characterized by its excess, lack of restraint, and frequent licentiousness.

elaborate the hidden transcript? Is he implying that women have neither the independent physical location nor discursive space in which to develop an alternative political discourse? Is he implying that women cannot gain the requisite distance or autonomy from men to engage in infrapolitics or enact the saturnalias of power that Scott describes as “epidemics of political courage”? Although Scott nods to the insights of Friedman (1989) that women’s narratives provide an “insistent record—a trace, a web, a palimpsest, a rune, a disguise—of what has not or cannot be spoken directly because of the external and internalized censors of patriarchal social order,” he nevertheless neglects gender domination in his discussion.⁸

Although not developed in response to Scott, the work of Radner and Lanser (1993) on coding in women’s expressive culture provides important linkages between Scott’s work and its application to gender domination, especially male violence against women. Radner and Lanser demonstrate how women create separate discursive spaces through encoded language and symbolic communication.

Coding in Women’s Expressive Culture

Radner and Lanser recognize that it is often necessary for women to encode their critiques of female subordination by “communicating through a set of signals—words, forms, behaviors, signifiers of some kind—that protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing particular messages” (p. 3). Although in later work Radner (1996) discusses the use of coding for play or privacy, her main focus is on covert or concealed coding that “takes place in situations of significant risk” (p. 147). She explains that coding is inherent in “traditional creations and performances of *dominated cultures*.” These often contain “covert expressions of resistance—ideas, beliefs, experiences, feelings, and attitudes that the dominant culture would find disturbing or threatening if expressed in more overt forms” (p. 147, emphasis added). According to Radner, dominated cultures can encode “blistering critiques”

⁸ Littlewood (1991) argues that Scott’s rationale for excluding gender from his discussion is done “on not entirely convincing grounds” (p. 554).

of their own subordination while reducing their vulnerability to sanction, censure or control.

In identifying the codes used in women's cultural expression to disguise feminist messages, Radner and Lanser (1993) developed a "provisional typology" of coding strategies that distinguishes between three kinds of coding: explicit, complicit, and implicit. *Explicit coding* is usually employed in low-risk situations, situations in which neither the code nor the overt act of coding is of serious consequence. Most likely used for play or privacy, explicit coding is intentional and recognizable. Although not everyone is equally competent or willing to decode the message, it is obvious to all that coding is taking place. But the message poses little threat to extant power relations, so the messengers are relatively free to engage in this pseudo-covert communication. *Complicit coding* is employed in situations of higher risk, so both the code and the act of coding are opaque, that is, disguised to avoid detection. Collectively determined ahead of time, the code and its meaning are "consciously employed among members of a folk group united by a shared culture and a shared sense of threat" (p. 147). If the messenger and receiver are successful at communicating the code and competent to decode the cryptic message, they defy detection by the dominant group and avoid censure and control.

Implicit coding is also employed in situations of high risk, situations in which communication has subversive intent and is a threat to existing power relations, so the consequences of detection could be quite negative and the censure severe. Implicit coding, however, is more subtle and nuanced and therefore more difficult to identify and analyze. Indeed, implicit coding may not be intentional. According to Radner (1996), "both explicit and complicit acts of coding are *manifestly intentional*, undertaken knowingly and purposefully. . . [but in] implicit coding, even the existence of a coded message is arguable and may be denied by the creator; not only the message, but coding itself is concealed and may be subconscious" (p. 147; emphasis added). In other words, not only are the code and act of coding opaque and difficult to recognize and decipher, but messengers claim no intention to

communicate a covert message. Indeed, they frequently deny that their messages are coded at all or they fail to recognize ambiguous meaning in their communication. Is this denial an attempt to protect the encrypted message? Or is it the result of coding that is subconscious or unconscious and therefore not fully recognizable even to the messengers? Radner concedes that both may be the case, but she asserts:

With careful and respectful scholarship grounded in the specific cultural context of the performance, however, it is feasible to posit at least the possibility that an act of coding has occurred. A context for concealed coding (complicit or implicit) exists when, for a particular individual or folk group, there exists a situation of oppression, dominance, or risk; when there is some kind of opposition to this situation that cannot safely be made explicit; and when there is a community of potential 'listeners' from which one would want to protect oneself (p. 147).

Radner and Lanser identify six implicit coding strategies in their typology: appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization, and incompetence. These are employed singly or in combination to disguise subversive messages and express resistance. Through *appropriation*, women adopt and adapt traditionally male or masculine forms and practices (or androcentric images of the feminine) to suit feminist purposes, that is, to critique some aspect of women's subordination. Greater credibility or legitimacy may be gained through appropriating higher status forms and practices, while conversely, the use of exaggeration, ironic mimicry, symbolic inversion, or parody may be used to critique those forms and practices and expose them. *Juxtaposition* involves the "ironic arrangement of texts, artifacts or performances. . .an item that in one environment seems unremarkable or unambiguous may develop quite tendentious levels of meaning in another" (Radner and Lanser 1993:13). *Distraction* involves strategies that obscure, overpower, interfere with, or draw attention away from subversive messages. Distraction includes phrases that "bury 'sense' with 'nonsense'."

Perhaps the most common type of coding is *indirection* or distancing, including the use of metaphor, impersonation, hedging, and metonymy. Through

indirection, the coder deceives by circuitous route, by creating enough ambiguity in the message as to confuse the unintended audience about its meaning. *Trivialization* or minimalization [sic] “understates, minimizes, or ‘normalizes’ the subversive power of a message” (Radner 1996:148). This coding strategy deliberately deploys forms, practices and genre considered unimportant, petty, insignificant, innocuous, or irrelevant by the dominant group. Because these forms have lower status, they are likely to be overlooked, discounted, or ignored, and can therefore be used to avert dominant attention away from topics of critical importance to subordinates. Through trivialization, women can “hide” behind forms which men or patriarchal institutions consider inferior.

The final coding strategy, *incompetence*, is the feigned inability of subordinates to perform functions and activities traditionally expected of them. Rather than appearing as defiant by refusing to perform to role expectations, women may, for example, claim or demonstrate incompetence at conventionally feminine tasks. In this way their “incompetence” encodes protest against their expected gender role. Radner and Lanser explain that incompetence at women’s activities signifies masculinity and thus it is an appropriative act. This brings the coding strategies full circle, underscoring the complexity of coding. Coding strategies overlap, intersect, and merge, making their detection, analysis and interpretation tricky. Yet it is this very trickiness or complexity that provides the disguise for anti-hegemonic political critiques.

As this research demonstrates, the Clothesline Project uses each of these strategies—appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization, and incompetence—to encode women’s resistance to gendered violence, female subordination, and patriarchal domination. These codes are embedded and imbued in the linguistic, material, practical and performative aspects of the Clothesline. The following section examines the Clothesline Project as a folk medium by identifying the traditional precedents to this form of folk expression and providing detailed descriptions of Clothesline Project displays, shirts, and shirtmaking processes.

SECTION I
THE CLOTHESLINE PROJECT AS FOLK MEDIA

CHAPTER 3

ANTECEDENTS TO THE CLOTHESLINE PROJECT: WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL EXPRESSIVE FORMS

Scott uses the expression "folk culture" unselfconsciously, seemingly unperturbed by the controversial nature of the terms "folk"⁹ and "culture"¹⁰ within sociology and anthropology. He provides no formal definition,¹¹ rather, he defines it by way of example; according to Scott, folk culture includes folksong, folktale, jokes, rhymes, carnivals and fetes, gestures, theatre, codes, symbolic inversion and rituals of reversal, and even rumor, gossip, euphemism, and grumbling. The Folklorists

⁹ Use of the term "folk" is problematic within sociology, owing in part to an anthropological legacy that continually implicated "folk" at the bottom of a hierarchy of cultures and societies. Study of the "folk" was the study of "simple societies," meaning rural, backward, and uneducated. Labeling genres as "folk" was a pejorative evaluation that signified the genre as unsophisticated, primitive, or naive. Dichotomous models distinguished between the high culture of elites and the popular or folk culture of the masses (Gans 1975), while tripartite models distinguished further between elite, popular, and folk cultures (Santino 1996:577). In early sociological literature, the term "folk" was contrasted with "urban" or "modern"; identification of these *ideal types* was intended to encapsulate the distinctions between mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim [1915] 1976), *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 1957), and industrial-urban and pre-industrial societies (Redfield 1940). In common parlance, "folk" was used to designate people with whom the speaker shared an affinity, in other words, people with whom the speaker felt comfortable because they were unpretentious. In scholarly evaluation, however, "folk" repeatedly signified the deficient position.

¹⁰ "Culture" is another problematic term within the social sciences. There is no agreed upon definition in either anthropology or sociology. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963) identified nearly 300 different uses of the term "culture" in anthropological literature. Among the most well known is Tylor's (1871), "culture. . . is that complex who which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1). Kroeber (1963) maintained it the "mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values—and the behavior they induce" (p. 8). In more recent formulations, Geertz (1973) defines culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89), while Murphy (1980) has written: "Culture means the total body of tradition borne by a society and transmitted from generation to generation" (p. 14). Swidler (1986) proposes that culture be thought of as "tool kit" with which people solve problems in their environment (p. 273). Popular notions of culture include two conflicting definitions of culture. There is culture as a standard of excellence or refinement, in other words, culture as art, and there is culture as a whole way of life, the complex of symbolic and learned aspects of human society that includes material, behavioral, and ideological components.

¹¹ At times Scott uses "folk culture" and "popular culture" interchangeably, a practice acceptable to many scholars (see Brunvand 1996:286), however among many American social scientists the terms are antithetical and highly problematic.

Georges and Owens (1995) explain that “the word *folklore* denotes expressive forms, processes, and behaviors (1) that we customarily learn, teach, and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions, and (2) that we judge to be traditional (a) because they are based on known precedents or models, and (b) because they serve as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space in human knowledge, thought, belief, and feeling” (p. 1). Their definition evolves from often contentious debate about the characteristics of folklore that distinguish it from other kinds of cultural expression.¹² Folklore is argued to have antecedents in traditional forms and content, performative repetition resulting in distinctive variants and versions, transmission through demonstration and imitation, anonymity as to origin, and interactivity, that is, the audience has a formative influence on them (Bauman [1977] 1978; Ben-Amos 1971; Jones 1980; Brunvand 1996). I focus on these characteristics to situate the Clothesline Project within folk culture or folklore—what I prefer to call “folk media” to reinforce the communicative and discursive function of these forms and practices, be they material, textual, behavioral, or ideological.

The Clothesline Project is a folk medium that uses fabric art as a medium of expression, weaving in metaphors of women’s traditional domestic responsibilities to

¹² As with the terms “folk” and “culture,” however, there is little consensus on a definition of “folklore.” Even the well-established discipline of Folkloristics proffers no single definition. The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legends (1949) includes no less than 21 definitions of the term. Originally coined by William J. Thoms (1846), the term “folklore” was intended as an alternative to “popular antiquities”—it meant, quite literally, “the lore of the people,” inclusive of “the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverb, &c., of the olden time.”¹² In contrast, a 1984 booklet published by the American Folklore Society announced, “We now speak of folklore/folklife as song and story, speech and movement, custom and belief, craft and ritual—expressive and instrumental activities of all kinds learned and communicated directly or face-to-face in groups ranging from nations, regions, and states through communities, neighborhoods, occupations, and families” (Brunvand 1996:286). The terms native, indigenous, ordinary, and customary have frequently been substitutes for “folk,” while folklife, expressive culture, traditional culture, vernacular culture, vernacular arts, and local cultural production have been alternative expressions for “folklore.” Ben-Amos (1971) defined folklore as “artistic communication in small groups” (pp. 12-13); in his formulation, small groups replaces “folk” and “lore” becomes artistic communication. Oring (1986) ultimately argues that definitions are inappropriate in a field still being mapped, while Jones (Georges and Jones 1980)

communicate women's experiences of gendered violence, to commemorate and memorialize victims, to bear witness to survivors, and to enact resistance to patriarchal domination. The Clothesline Project, by design and serendipity, borrows from a long history of folk media forms and practices, especially women's textile work, fabric arts and needlecraft, costume and dress, decoration and adornment. It also borrows from women's vocational endeavors within the home—the housework that Levin (1993) argues should be included in studies of occupational folklore. While the Clothesline Project provides an excellent example of women's folk culture, it is simultaneously an example of "new genre public art" (Lacy 1995) which situates it within the contested terrain of popular culture and fine art as well.

Folklorists have long recognized the role of folk culture in political discourse and debate, propaganda and political manipulation, and social protest (Shuldiner 1996; Dow and Lixfeld 1994; Ferrero, Hedges and Silber 1987; Davis 1985; Zipes 1983; Greenway 1953). Traditional forms, including story, song, verbal games, gestures, dance, mime, theatre, puppetry, textiles and clothing, occupational jargon and practices, festivals and parades, ethnic and religious rituals, as well as sacred and secular material objects, have been deployed for social commentary and protest (Brunvand 1996). As these forms and practices suggest, commentary and protest are not only articulated verbally or linguistically, but through material and performance elements as well. In addition, these forms and practices may be individual or collective in nature, and the messages conveyed may be explicit and accessible to all or coded and accessible only to a limited audience.

Cultural work may be embedded with either legitimating or subversive messages, and perhaps both at the same time. Because cultural work is frequently permeated with ambiguity, multivocality, and significance beyond even the author's conscious intention, analysis requires the untangling of complex ideological messages. Groups prohibited from overt cultural practices will use traditional forms

proposes that we focus on the "hows" and "whys" of behavior rather than on the origins of objects or texts, whether folk or popular (p. 326).

and develop new forms to carry covert messages. Women, in particular, have "carried on covert protest against inequity through their activities in the socially assigned realm of the 'domestic' arts" and women's culture (Shuldiner 1996:675). It is possible, through close examination of the physical evidence, to identify the mental and behavioral processes at work and give an interpretive reading of the political, economic, and social implications. Bower (1994) offers "reading lessons" to those interested in learning to interpret these meanings of women's culture.

By use of the phrase "women's culture" I am not arguing an essential or biological predisposition to particular expressive forms and practices. Rather, my use of the phrase is an acknowledgment that men and women have access to different cultural traditions as a result of gender socialization. Certain media may be either prescribed or proscribed for men or women as a result of restrictive gender norms that segregate social activities and modes of expression along gender lines. As a result, many of the traditional forms created by women have their origin in women's domestic activities which historically provided the few accepted outlets for women's creative expression. Among these are weaving, pottery-making, needlework and textile art, doll making, folk costume design and adornment, and makeup. In addition to fulfilling utilitarian or instrumental needs by women, these forms have also been used overtly and covertly to express allegiances, communicate and support dominant cultural values, voice dissatisfaction with social, economic, or political conditions, and critique power relations.

"Material" Culture

In Western culture, women have traditionally been responsible for the spinning and dyeing of yarn, the weaving of cloth, and the sewing of blankets and apparel to meet family needs. While these activities have obvious instrumental functions, the construction and embellishment of cloth have served expressive functions as well. Weaving and sewing have been used to create narrative tapestries, samplers, commemorative embroideries, decorative items, and symbolic

textiles, to name a few. "Textile" and "text" share the same Latin root (*texere*) which means *to weave*, and it is through textiles that women have so often woven the stories of their lives, inscribing the material fabric with narratives of their material experience.

Narrative textiles, of course, have not been limited to the West. An Asian form of narrative textile is the "story cloth," a textile embroidered with stories, explanations, and illustrations of traditional Hmong life. Begun by Laotian Hmong artists exiled from their mountain homeland and living in Thai refugee camps, the story cloth describes their daily activities and significant historical events, particularly Hmong experiences of the horrors of war. The story cloths constitute the collective memory of the Hmong people; they document Hmong history at the same time they convey cultural values and cultural identity. Peterson (1988) calls story cloths "key texts" (p. 6) that do more than reflect the history, culture, and identity of the Hmong; they actually "shape the reflections of those who view them" (p. 20).

South America offers another example of narrative textiles. *Arpilleras* are embroidered weavings created by Chilean women to denounce the authoritarian political regime that occupied their country during the 1970s and 80s. Inscribed with images of terror, torture, disappearances, and death, *arpilleras* were used by women to protest the destruction of their families and the torn fabric of Chilean social life. Agosin (1994) calls *arpilleras* the "repositories of the nation's memory. . .and the conscience of the country" (p. 14). In creating *arpilleras*, women subverted a domestic tradition to expose public atrocities. Agosin writes of the *arpilleristas*, the women who created the *arpilleras*,

By means of the tapestries, they undertook a collective dialogue grounded in social justice and the commitment to transform an authoritarian culture into a democratic and cooperative one. . . The *arpilleristas* were among the principal aesthetic voices in the struggle to awaken the international community to the horrors of the Chilean political situation (p. 13).

Political Needlework

In "Women, Fabric Art, and Social Commentary," Linda Pershing (1996) traces the traditional and historical antecedents to *The Ribbon Around the Pentagon*, a collaborative needlework project in which thousands of women and men encircled the Pentagon with a continuous ribbon of quilt blocks they had designed to protest militarism and nuclear proliferation. Pershing demonstrates that the use of textile arts to promote social and political causes is a "well-established tradition among women" in the United States (p. 85). She provides a broad overview of this tradition, tracing the discursive use of fabric art during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and throughout its use by proponents and opponents of abolition, temperance, women's suffrage, civil rights, the women's liberation movement, nuclear proliferation, and environmentalism, to demonstrate that women would use their needlework in a visual debate and rebuttal of political issues.

Political needlework has proliferated during times of war, international conflict, and increased militarism, according to Pershing. During such times, needlework is taken up to express national and ethnic allegiances, to support or protest military involvement, and to commemorate the dead. In contrast, the use of needlework during the women's suffrage campaign and the early decades of the women's liberation movements dramatically declined because it was seen as a symbol of women's oppression. Needlework was seen as antithetical to female empowerment because it accentuated women's confinement to the domestic sphere, the devaluation of their work, and their "inferior status as unpaid workers in the home and underpaid and exploited laborers in the textile merchandising" (p. 61). Pershing documents a resurgence of needlework within the past two decades, however, as women attempt to express a revaluation of women's cultural forms and practices and a renewed appreciation of women's traditional arts. This renaissance of fabric art has served as a "catalyst for building women's self-esteem and enabling their involvement in other social issues" (p. 68). Pershing pays particular attention to the contemporary use of fabric art in four protests led by women: Greenham

Common, the Seneca Peace Camps, the Ribbon Around the Pentagon, and the Boise Peace Quilt.

While the visual and tactile qualities of textiles have great significance to women, needlework has been the medium of choice because it has historically been among the few accepted outlets for women's aesthetic or political expression. The use of domestic and textile arts not only serves to protest their devaluation, but also to resist the denigration of female experience. Pershing argues that needlework is like a "secret language." Discursive messages are often manifest in the needlework, but messages of protest and resistance are frequently latent, embedded within the design. For example, women's quilt designs reflect hierarchical and egalitarian characteristics of the social structure, and Shuldiner (1996) explains that the crazy quilt was actually a rebellion against "rigid design standards" required in quilting and a symbolic protest against "constricting social codes for women" (p. 675). Even the names of quilts can be symbolic of liberation, suggesting resistance to gender subordination (Pershing 1993).

Quilts

The most widely studied of women's fabric arts is the quilt, a traditional form that has received recent critical attention from folklorists, art theorists, literary scholars, historians, and social scientists alike (Elsley 1996; Hawkins 1993; Hillard 1994; Krouse 1994; Torsney and Elsley 1994; Elsley 1990; Ferrero, Hedges and Silber 1987; Robinson 1983; Hedges 1980). Several broad and general surveys of quilt-making and quilts have emerged which discuss their utilitarian and symbolic functions (Pershing 1996; Elsley 1996; Ice 1993; Benson and Olsen 1987; Roach 1985; Lippard 1983; Dewhurst, MacDowell, and MacDowell 1979; Mainardi 1973). Following from her ethnographic semiotic analysis of the quilting bee, Roach (1985) argues that to understand quilts and the quilt-making process we must "understand their overlapping functions and relationships" (p. 64).

The Functions of Quilt-making

Quilt-making is an expressive activity done primarily by women, either singly or in groups, that functions for women as an outlet for their artistry and creativity, as well as a forum in which to demonstrate their skill and technical expertise. The quilting bee is one of the ways quilt-making skills—piecework, cutting, sewing, stitchery, embroidery, appliqué, pattern-making and design—are learned. Inexperienced quilters practice these skills and customs along-side more experienced and accomplished women. In this way, quilting is informally passed from generation to generation, from grandmother to mother to daughter, or from neighbor to neighbor. Lasansky (1985) provides a chronological narrative of quilting as it mirrors the various roles of women. Using quilts, she documents the continuity and changes in women's attitudes and roles over time.

Quilt-making provides a space for social interaction, conversation, and bonding. The quilting bee becomes an interactive community—a prudential society for mutual benefit and support—that women have used for self-improvement, consciousness-raising, group therapy, and group empowerment. Elsley (1990) contends that quilt-making has been a means for women to find their own voices in an androcentric world.

The Functions of Quilts

Multi-disciplinary research demonstrates the many functions of quilts. Quilts are used as warm bedcoverings, home decoration and objects of art. They are also a way to recycle cloth remnants. Quilts are an outlet for women's creative and artistic expression and a showcase for their skills and technical expertise. As a family heirloom, they are a family album that reaffirms the continuity of the family line. Quilts are a way to commemorate the dead and provide an outlet for personal and collective grieving (Lewis and Fraser 1996). They are a kind of diary that records women's personal experiences, and they are an historical document that records social and political events (Ferrero, Hedges, and Silber 1987; Hedges and

Wendt 1980). Quilts also provide a means for conversation and debate among women.

Quilts have been likened to a "text" on which women's experiences are inscribed, to "journals in cloth," and to a "mouthpiece" through which women's voices are amplified (William 1990:5). As a "channel of communication" (William 1990:3), quilts transmit aesthetic, as well as political, information. Hillard (1994) claims that quilts have a democratizing function; they provide a vehicle to express cultural values and beliefs, social critique, and protest, especially by countering dominant discourse and interpretations, and reconstructing collective memory and public meaning. Aptheker (1989) reports that quilts have provided "a means for women to come together and give meaning to their shared experience 'under conditions of enslavement, persecution, and subordination'" (p. 74).

Elsley (1990) presents the "herstory" of North American quilting from the eighteenth century to the present, focusing on the social and political use of quilts by marginalized groups. She claims that quilting was an "art practiced mostly by those who were denied a voice. . . just as women's voices were unacknowledged, so was their art" (p. 29). Using the Crystal Quilt, the Boise Peace Quilt, and the Names Project AIDS Quilt as illustrations, Elsley explains how marginalized groups "conjoin politics and poetics" using quilts to communicate "what words do not say powerfully enough."

Quilt-making and Quilts as Metaphor

The instrumentality of quilt-making and quilts is not their only significance, however; equally important are the symbolic meanings of quilt making and the cultural processes and products they reveal. Needlework is imbued with meaning through a variety of metaphors—metaphors that carry much of this meaning. Salvaging, cutting, stitching, mending, and reworking of patterns are all metaphors for reclamation and restoration. Through quilt-making, women examine their material existence and assess the fabric of their lives. They evaluate the material

world, salvage pleasing remnants, rework the damaged structure, and make alterations to the status quo. By enacting a deconstruction and reconstruction of cloth, quilt-making becomes a metaphor for taking apart the ruling order, transforming the material circumstances of their lives, and weaving new possibilities. Through quilt-making women mend the social fabric. In addition, the buzzing of the quilting bee is the buzz of communication between women.

Lippard (1983:32) sees the quilt as a metaphor for women's lives as well as a means to interpret women's lives. Torsney and Elsley (1994) have called quilts "repositories of signs" (p. 4). They have much to communicate to those with "textural and textual literacy" (Bower 1994:33). Women's fabric arts preserve history in fabric at the same time they preserve the fabric of history. The quilt demonstrates the tangible effects of structure, while it represents relations of gender and class. As a metaphor for protective covering, the quilt is significant in healing and transformation. In addition, the diverse patterning of the quilt suggests community, relationships, and wholeness.

The AIDS Quilt

The irony in the spate of research on the quintessential example of women's traditional folk media—the quilt—is that the quilt which has received the greatest scholarly attention in the past decade is not the creation of women, but of gay men. The Names Project, better known as the AIDS Quilt, was begun in 1987 by Cleve Jones as a single quilt block to commemorate the loss of his good friend, Marvin Feldman, to AIDS, but the Project quickly burgeoned. As of this writing, there are more than 45,000 quilt blocks. Following from women's historical use of quilting and needlework for commemoration, the AIDS Quilt functions to commemorate those who have died of the disease, as well as those who still suffer, and it functions therapeutically to facilitate personal and collective grieving.

In "Reading the Text(ile)," Elsley (1992) describes the public display of the AIDS Quilt, particularly the ritual opening of the Quilt and its unending renditions as

more quilt blocks are added and more displays are staged. Elsley emphasizes the importance of the Quilt's mobility and fluidity; rather than being fixed at one location, the quilt travels around the country being reconfigured at each new display site. This "organic nature" means that the quilt can accommodate a potentially unending number of victims/survivors, with its size a testimony to the magnitude of the tragedy of AIDS. The AIDS Quilt, writes Elsley, is an example of a "fluid genre," an "open ended, protean, populist, cultural critique, resembling a novel" (p. 191). She calls it a "textile text," borrowing from Bakhtin (1981) to explain that its "[h]eteroglossic language shifts the focus from individual author to a concatenation of voices within and outside the text(tile). . .to create a continuous polylogue not privileging any one component" (Elsley 1992:191-92). In concurrence, Hillard (1994) calls the AIDS Quilt a "democratizing text" that offers possibilities for multiple readings.

Much of the research on the AIDS Quilt focuses on its rhetorical significance and discursive uses in protest and "cultural resistance for gay communities." Krouse (1994) calls the AIDS Quilt a "text that resists the marginalizing, stigmatizing and 'othering' images of dominant discourse" (p. 78). She explores the Quilt's response to condemning discourses about gay men and explains how it counters these discourses by "deconstructing objectifying images" (p. 72) and reconstructing positive, affirmative images. The Quilt "draws gay men out of physical and social isolation into a collective experience and positive reconstruction of gay identity" (p. 65) and in this way it is a tool for community-building as well as a metaphor for community reintegration. Lewis and Fraser (1996) argue that the AIDS Quilt provides an "alternative conception" of collective memory regarding AIDS deaths because it reconstructs public experience of gay men and AIDS in contradiction to the official ideology and dominant interpretation of cultural events (p. 436).

The Occupational Folklore of Housework

Perhaps a more obvious antecedent to the Clothesline Project is the use of clotheslines in the conduct of domestic labor, in other words, housework. Clotheslines are indicative of housework, expressive activity within the home that Levin (1993) argues should be included in contemporary studies of occupational folklore. The early focus of occupational folklore in the United States was concentrated on verbal expressions within particular occupations, most notably the narratives, stories, songs, jokes, and jargon of men engaged in logging, mining, farming, military service, railroading, trucking, and the like. The subsequent focus of occupational folklore incorporated an examination of the particular work skills required by craftsmen, as well as the production and use of tools of their trade. Today occupational folklore is a more widely diffused exploration of work cultures, including the rituals, ethics, and material expressions—the products, processes, methods, results, and meanings—shared by occupational group members.

Despite this shift to a “performance-centered” folkloristics, the labors of women within the home have been largely ignored in occupational folklore studies, and the products, processes, methods, results, and meanings of domestic cultures neglected. Levin observes, for example, that quilting and cooking have been studied by folklorists, but other household tasks such as sweeping and dishwashing (and by implication, laundry and clothesdrying) have been overlooked. This neglect stems from a characterization of housework as “trivial, mindlessly repetitive, invisible, productless, and isolated” and therefore unworthy of attention by a discipline concerned with “expressive, creative, traditional, skilled cultural performances” (p. 289).

According to McCarl (1996), occupational folklore studies the “entire range of expressive behavior in work settings, from the techniques required to succeed and survive on the job to the customs marking passage through the work culture and the verbal arts that provide a context for a range of experiences, both on and off the job” (p. 522). Although concerned with the expressive culture of the workplace,

occupational folklore has failed to acknowledge that housework is an expressive activity performed with the home as the work setting.

Levin (1993) argues that housework exhibits the very qualities that have garnered attention for other occupations. Housework is informally learned, is a locus for social interaction, and exhibits the same kinds of creative and playful responses to escape its alienating monotony and drudgery as many of the traditional occupations that have been the focus of occupational folklore. And like them, housework includes tasks that are aesthetically pleasing and emotionally rewarding, that provide performers with a sense of "creation, transcendence, and mastery" (p. 291).

It is because housework consists of culturally defined and variable tasks, techniques, and attitudes that one can ask what is shared and what is specific to an individual, neighborhood, region, ethnic group, family, generation, class, or gender. . . Even when people define housework as including roughly the same group of tasks, their understanding of why, how (by what methods, with what technology), when, by whom, how thoroughly, and how often the tasks need to be accomplished are likely to vary. The social, emotional, and associational meanings of the tasks are not the same for all people who perform them (p. 290).

Accordingly, Levin concludes, "a rich and diverse folklore of housework exists and should be studied" (p. 295).

The Clothesline Motif

Levin chooses washday rituals and the clothesline to support her argument, introducing us to "Clotheslines," the documentary film by Roberta Cantow (1981). Cantow's film was released during a time when clotheslines were becoming a repeated motif in the cultural and artistic expressions of women. The film illustrates the dynamic tension between women's aesthetic appreciation of the clothesline and their loathing of the work expectations required by their domestic role. There is beautiful footage of clotheslines, and an admiration for the artistry of women's work, but the sensuality of clotheslines, the rhythms, patterns, and sensory delights of

sunshine and breezes that they evoke are juxtaposed with testimony of the exploitive and oppressive nature of domestic labors and the home environment. At the same time, the film demonstrates the social and communicative aspects of laundry and of clotheslines, and that hanging clothes hold both functional and symbolic meaning. There are rules, protocols, techniques, and methods expected of one performing the task, and these prescriptions for doing this household task “the right way.” The film also demonstrates that patterns, rhythms, sights, sounds, aromas, textures and other sensations all hold significance for women who perform this work. Finally, the film recalls the verbal lore that has grown up around the clothesline, including children’s stories, riddles, and jump-rope rhymes. While not explicitly a work of protest, the film offers testimony to the contradictions of women’s role in society, at the same time it celebrates women’s work and women’s societal contributions, resisting the devaluation of both in American culture.

In recent decades, clotheslines have served as an iconic image in several protests and performances staged by women. In 1976, for example, a Los Angeles-based women’s art collective called “Mother Art” staged five “ritual celebrations of cleansing and women’s work” in a protest against environmental degradation (Lacy 1995:267). They hung photographs of laundry from clotheslines set up in public laundromats in odd juxtaposition to the myriad electric clothes washers and dryers. Their work was a plea to “transform the environment,” not just through reduction of energy and resource consumption, but more importantly through a radical rethinking of the way we engage the earth and each other.

In the early 1980s, “ritual performance artist, peace activist, and ecofeminist” Helene Aylon, repeated the clotheslines motif when she created “The Earth Ambulance,” an ecology-based campaign against nuclear disarmament. Aylon organized more than 800 participants—mostly women, mostly non-artists—in what she called “large-scale ceremonies of cooperation.” These participants rescued “endangered earth” from twelve nuclear weapons sites in the United States, heaping the dirt into pillowcases or “SACs” that women had inscribed with their dreams and

nightmares, signifying that they could not rest easy with the threat of nuclear annihilation. SAC stands for "survive and continue," not Strategic Air Command, and the SAC served as a symbol of women working together to gather the essentials for survival and healing. The SACs were picked up by Aylon's Earth Ambulance in a cross-country caravan and delivered via old army stretchers to the United Nations where they were emptied and hung on a clothesline across Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. These pillowcases were later exchanged with pillowcases supplied by women of the Soviet Union, and in 1983 an international group of women re-hung the pillowcases on a clothesline in the UN Plaza, camping under them for two weeks.¹³ In 1992, a new installation of the Earth Ambulance was staged under the Brooklyn Bridge; in this case pillowcases that had been filled with blue corn seed from Pueblo lands were subsequently hung on the clothesline (Lacy 1995:201).¹⁴

The Use of Domestic Symbols to Confront Gendered Violence

While the clothesline has been incorporated in protests against environmental violence and military violence, other symbols from the domestic realm have been used to protest gendered violence. The work of two activist artists—Marilyn Keating and Peggy Diggs—is illustrative; both artists appropriated and subverted domestic objects to critique gendered violence.

Keating, a sculptor who taught carpentry and electrical skills to low-income women, created a series of wood sculptures depicting familial abuse. In one of these works, a common straight-backed chair is painted to suggest a suited man, his

¹³ Pillowcases were also delivered to the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment in upstate New York where they were used to cover two miles of military fence, and in 1985 survivors of the atomic bombing of Japan wrote on pillowcases that were subsequently filled with sand from Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

¹⁴ In similar protests women's material culture was used to communicate resistance. Participants in the Women's Strike for Peace carried hundreds of dishtowels past the White House to protest nuclear proliferation (Pershing, 1996, p. 70). The dishtowels, symbolic of women's domestic and caretaking roles, were inscribed with signatures of those protesting the nuclear arms race. In another demonstration, "spinsters" protested the threat of nuclear power by spinning webs around the site of a nuclear reactor in upstate New York. The webs symbolized the analogies between weaving and peacemaking.

pin-striped suit is replete with white shirt and complementary tie. A head affixed to the top of the chair back, along with the pin-striped chair seat and legs that suggest his trousers, complete the illusion of a seated man. Perched awkwardly on the seat of the chair—on the man's lap as it were—is a small wooden doll, her jointed arms and legs hang limp in contrast to the rigid male form. Protruding up through the girl's lap, literally shearing her little dress, is an erect dagger-like phallus. The work is titled, "Father Knows Best" (Capasso 1992:28-29).

Diggs protests incest and childhood sexual abuse also, but hers is a more subtle rendering of the subject. Her untitled multi-media work, referred to as "Memorial," uses the frilly dress of a toddler mounted to a black background and framed behind Plexiglas. The hem of the dress is gathered to create a "phallus" of cloth that protrudes through a round hole cut in the glass. Patricia Phillips (1995) reports on the installation.

Not only was the notion of a protected and hermetically sealed art object dismantled, but the glib assumption of a safe, carefree childhood was replaced by the grim recognition that this is a period of unspeakable misery for some young girls. The lovely dress itself was lifted, grabbed, and made to form the instrument and environment of either the child abuser or the pedophile. . .The penetration of the hem of the dress through the glass inscribes a physical abuse that not only harms the victim but renders the concept of childhood innocence obsolete (pp. 289-91).

"Memorial" is one of a series of works in Diggs's "Domestic Violence Project." Another, titled "Objects of Abuse" was a large black steel grating to which were affixed myriad domestic items. Of this installation Phillips writes,

Strapped to its surface was a bizarre and ghastly collection of objects used by abusers to control, attack, injure, or kill their partners or children. These commonplace accoutrements of the home—all items and appliances otherwise routinely and reflexively used—suddenly became a bleak trail of evidence when held up before an audience. Arranged with meticulous care, these objects—a hairbrush, a boot, an enema bag, a lamp, a pillow—formed a tidy, scientific display of selected specimens of domestic warfare. . .Ordinary domestic paraphernalia became the sinister instruments of repeated, wretched assaults (p. 289).

Perhaps Diggs's most ambitious work was "The Domestic Violence Milkcarton Project." Following extensive research and interviews with battered women and experts on family violence, Diggs created four designs for imprint on the sides of half-gallon milkcartons. One depicts a chair in flight, and is inscribed with the question, "What if someone came into your home, called you names, threw a chair, tore your clothes, and knocked you down? Now, what if that someone was your spouse or mate?" Another depicts an outstretched hand in a protective gesture, a gesture that communicates "stop," as the text explains, "No one deserves to be hit or beaten. . .to be forced to have sex against their will. . ." Another design questions, "What if someone close to you hit you, made fun of you in public, kept you from having a job, didn't let you see family and friends, made all the decisions in your household, and managed all of your money against your will? Now, what could you do?"

The final design may be the best known because it appeared on a million and a half milkcartons sold in New York and New Jersey during a two-week period in 1992. Emblazoned with the silhouette of a thick menacing hand, the milkcarton read, "When you argue at home, does it always get out of hand?" The toll-free number of the Domestic Abuse Hotline accompanied each of the designs. Of these milkcartons, Phillips writes,

Milk is consistently promoted for its wholesome qualities. . .It is the family-values food, representative of all that is healthy, harmonious, and productive in the conventional nuclear family. Diggs's appropriation of this dairy product exploited all the ironic potential . . .bright virtues of the consumer product as a highway to the center of the dark realities of family violence (pp. 293-94).

The Clothesline Project

Women's fabric arts, political needlework, quilts and quilting bees, the occupational labor women conduct within domestic environments, the repeated use of the clothesline motif to critique women's subordination and protest violence, and the appropriation of humble household objects by activist artists to critique

gendered violence—these are among the precursors and antecedents to the Clothesline Project. With the exception of the AIDS Quilt, however, the Clothesline Project originators that I interviewed expressed no awareness that these other forms and practices influenced or preceded their adoption of shirts and clotheslines to politicize violence against women. Nor did other Clothesline Project participants, organizers, shirt-makers, or viewers express awareness of these antecedents.

The Clothesline Project is often compared to its contemporary commemorative counterparts, the Names Project AIDS Quilt and the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial,¹⁵ commonly known as "The Wall." Indeed, both the AIDS Quilt and a small replica of "The Wall" had been exhibited on Cape Cod prior to the creation of the Clothesline Project, but the Cape Cod Women's Agenda member who came up with what Julier (1994:252) called the "framing concept" maintains that inspiration for the initial Clothesline design came from elsewhere. With a long history of community theater work, designing stage sets and painting scrimms; this woman was accustomed to working with large surfaces or "canvases." Perhaps more significant, however, was her ongoing fascination for the work of the artist Christo who is renown for art installations that cover miles of landscape and involve the collaboration of hundreds of community members, most notable of which are *Valley Curtain* and *Running Fence*.

But this is not to say that the AIDS Quilt and Vietnam Veteran's Memorial had no influence in the evolving design of the Clothesline Project. In actuality, "the Wall" was the impetus for the Clothesline Project. Following a moving encounter with the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial "Travelling Wall," a miniature version of the Memorial that toured Cape Cod in the spring of 1990, a member of the Cape Cod Women's Agenda member challenged other members with the question, "Where is our wall? Where is our memorial to the victims and survivors of gendered

¹⁵ For an exploration of the instrumental, expressive and symbolic functions and meanings of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall, see Berdahl 1994, Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991, Sturken 1991, and Fish 1987.

violence?" Her question stemmed in part from her outrage at a statistic compiled by the Maryland Men's Anti-rape Resource Center (MARS). MARS estimated that during the 16 years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, a war that claimed the lives of 58,000 men in Southeast Asia, more than 51,000 women were murdered in this country by their husbands, male friends, dates, and casual male acquaintances.¹⁶ "Where is our wall—the wall that commemorates the 51,000 women killed by intimate partners—the wall to honor veterans of the *war against women*?" The Clothesline Project was created in answer to this question as a place for women to bear witness to violence perpetrated against them as women.

As Chapter 4 will describe, the Clothesline Project is a folk medium designed to bear witness and to break the silence around violence against women. It is intended to commemorate victims, empower survivors, refute dominant discourses about women, patriarchy, and gender relations, protest institutional complicity in women's subordination, and resist gendered violence and gender domination.

¹⁶ The original source for these statistics were never identified, and the estimate has been contested. Recently, however, the U. S. Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women estimated that more than 50,000 women die every five years as a result of domestic violence (Boswell 1998).

CHAPTER 4

SCENES FROM CLOTHESLINE PROJECT DISPLAYS VERSIONS AND VARIANTS

Calhoun Mall - Minneapolis, Minnesota

My first encounter with the Clothesline Project is in the spring of 1993 as I wander the second floor of a small shopping mall in a bohemian downtown neighborhood of Minneapolis. To one side of me are various one-of-a-kind boutiques, eateries, bookstores and espresso bars to line my walk, while on the other side is the balcony railing that overlooks the first floor atrium. From this vantage point I can chart the progress of my friend as he wends his way through various shops below. He loves to shop; I do not. But I do enjoy wandering the mall and people-watching, and this is a great place for that. Mostly I stand at the railing for my bird's-eye-view of the activity below, watch the parade of shoppers go by, and survey window displays, but occasionally I duck into a shop that piques my interest.

One window display is particularly intriguing, and very perplexing, and I feel drawn to it. Many white shirts are hung on a clothesline in the display window. But this is not a typical window dressing. Although there are some frilly blouses, several button-down oxfords and pull-over jerseys, most are T-shirts. Each is inscribed with words and/or designs. But the display does not focus on fashion like so many storefront displays do, for these are not new shirts, rather they are old and used. Inside the store there are many more shirts like those in the window. Secured to a line by wooden clamp-style clothespins, they wind their way from the front to the back of the shop, row after row of assorted used shirts, each painted, embroidered, appliquéd or drawn with a message or design.

The store is confusing, and I wonder almost aloud, "What is this? A consignment shop? A T-shirt emporium? An art gallery?" I remain perplexed and confused. I read a shirt. It says "Claudia Olson, bludgeoned to death by her

husband Richard, September 4, 1990.”¹⁷ Adjacent shirts bear similarly shocking messages.

“Oh my god! This is so private! I must have intruded upon some kind of memorial,” I think to myself. Embarrassed, I quickly leave the shop to regroup outside its front entrance. But I look back to the window display and the store front—for a store name, a sales banner, a “no admittance” sign, anything that will give me a clue what this is. Nothing does, except a small sign on the display that says “The Clothesline Project: Bearing Witness to Violence Against Women.”

Drawn by curiosity, I return inside the shop, again to read a shirt, and another, and another. I look around to see if anyone notices my presence and objects to my intrusion. No one does. The shop is eerily quiet, the only audible sounds come from florescent lights overhead and the faint splashing of water in the atrium fountain below which drifts up and into the stillness of this space.

There are two other people looking at the shirts, one lone woman and one lone man, each wandering through the rows of shirts. They don’t seem to notice me, for they are both absorbed in the display, reading the messages inscribed on the shirts, pausing to contemplate a design, a word, a phrase, pausing to hold a hem or sleeve out in order to more clearly see what is written or painted there, pausing to take a deep breath.

At the rear of the shop three people cluster, engaged in hushed conversation. “Are they sales clerks? Store detectives? Fellow shoppers?” I wonder, yet as I survey my surroundings, I see no price tags, no cash registers, no sale signs, no hangers or clothesracks, no clothing neatly folded and stacked on shelves, no

¹⁷ I am reconstructing this display to the best of my recollection, and fabricating what I can not remember specifically. Clothesline Project organizers in Minneapolis might well argue that they never organized a display quite like this. While the visual detail of the exhibit is somewhat hazy, my reactions and emotions of that day are vivid. Through this reflective account I hope to create an impression of what a first encounter of a Clothesline Project display was like for an unsuspecting viewer. Not everyone comes upon the Clothesline unaware; project organizers publicize displays in advance and issue invitations to interested constituents. All subsequently described scenes are reconstituted from careful fieldnotes and/or documentary evidence contained in my database for my case study.

mannequins draped in the latest fashions. "Are these three docents or ushers or gallery designers?" Yet I see no picture frames, no prints or paintings, no indirect lighting to accentuate oils and acrylics, no spotlights focused on sculpture or pottery, no labels to announce artist and title. All I see are rows and rows of shirts, hanging at eye-level from clotheslines that scallop their way through the shop.

No one seems to object to my presence, so I remain, reading shirt after shirt. Eventually I come upon a sign that explains the shirts. These white shirts honor women who died violent deaths in Minnesota during the past 5 years. The shirts disclose that these were women killed by partners, loved ones, strangers. These were women beaten, bludgeoned, raped, tortured, burned, dismembered, stabbed, strangled, shot. These were women murdered while they slept, or as they prepared dinner, or as they cared for children, or as they labored for wages. These were women who died in their kitchens, in their bedrooms, in the yards of homes they shared with loved-ones, in their offices, or on the shop-floor, or in parking lots where they worked. They were wives, girlfriends, dates, acquaintances, and strangers of the men who killed them. Solitary unsuspecting women who died alone, estranged women murdered when they came home to retrieve their belongings, vigilant women murdered in the presence of their children or parents or friends or law enforcement officers. There is a white shirt for each woman killed in Minnesota. And there are many, many shirts.

I have a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, but I cannot take my eyes off the shirts. I am drawn to read each and every one.

As I come upon a small table, not much larger than a card table, arrayed with papers and brochures, I become aware that the three people in the back have been keeping a watchful eye on me. One of them approaches to ask if I have any questions, but I am feeling confused and disorientated and don't immediately respond. Besides, I am speechless, I don't know what to say. She offers me a brochure, but I decline, still feeling a bit embarrassed that I may have intruded where I don't belong. But there is nothing unwelcoming in her manner. Quite the

opposite. She seems gentle and inviting. Nonetheless, in my awkwardness I decline any assistance.¹⁸

I want to read more shirts, but I am feeling extremely self-conscious and, having lost all track of time, fear that I may be overdue in rejoining my friend downstairs. I leave the display of shirts and meet up with my friend not far from where I had left him. He has not ventured far in his wanderings, but I on the other hand, feel strangely dislocated and disoriented, still reeling from the messages of the shirts. Despite my discomfort, or perhaps because of it, I do not share my experience of the Clothesline Project with him.

As strongly as I was affected by the shirts however, I quickly get immersed in routine and forget about the display. It is recalled for me several years later in a writing assignment submitted by one of my students.

She had been raped in her dorm room just a few weeks earlier by an athlete celebrated at our university. Despite a witness, despite photographic evidence of bruises and contusions, despite laboratory evidence gathered during an humiliating medical exam, despite personal evidence acquired in demeaning police interrogations, she had just learned that there was "not enough evidence" to pursue the case. She poured her disabling grief and rage onto a series of shirts and wrote of them in a class essay.

The front of her white shirt bore a screaming woman, "and on the back was an account of everything that had happened. It was a poem about how they got my hopes and aspirations up and said they'd arrest him and do all this stuff. Then all of a sudden the county attorney decided to drop it because she didn't think she

¹⁸ I suspect that many of the viewers to the Clothesline Project who come upon a display "unaware" share similar experiences of confusion and disorientation. Even "informed" viewers who come in response to invitations or notices report that they feel disoriented after they have engaged the Clothesline. In part, my response may be the result of the disturbing nature of the messages borne by the shirts, but I also believe my confusion and dislocation were exaggerated because the venue (a shopping mall known for unusual boutiques) complicated any quick comprehension of the display that I encountered.

had a good chance of winning. And it was about the day she told me. It was all written. It got big and it got really small and then big again.”

When she first considered designing a shirt she was extremely hesitant and thought, “I don’t want to do this, ‘cause I don’t want someone to look at a shirt and go ‘well there’s another one.’” Despite her reservations, she joined with a friend to design a shirt. In an interview with me she described their process. “She’s a person who sees life through images and I see through words. So I wrote like notebook and notebook just full of emotions. She drew pages and pages.” Together they airbrushed their design and message on an old red shirt with racing stripes. “She’s got a woman and her hands are clenched and her mouth open and she’s screaming, and on the back it’s got the numbers, six million, five hundred thousand something. It’s got the cross-out sign that says, ‘I am not a statistic. Don’t make me a number.’ Yeah, that’s exactly where we were, ‘cause at the time I was being told by the university that ‘you’re not the only one, you know. This happens all the time.’”

She got the idea for creating a shirt from a rape chat line on the Internet. The idea originated with a grass-roots organization called “The Clothesline Project.” As I read her paper and talked with her about the project, I was propelled back to the unsettling display in the mall several years earlier.

DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park - Lincoln, Massachusetts

Huge oak trees, some nearly five feet around, have been enlisted to hold the Clothesline on a breezy September day. Plastic-coated wire, the ends of which are tied with the precision of sailor knots, encircle these trees, providing ample support for the scores of shirts. Strung from tree to tree to tree is a single line which bears the original 31 shirts of the Clothesline Project. A bit faded and threadbare, these shirts are joined by dozens of newer ones from the Cape Cod Clothesline Project.

This site is an outdoor sculpture park, part of an art museum that overlooks a silver blue lake from acres of wooded rolling hills and spacious grassy lawns. An impressive stone and brick mausoleum sits on the crest of a hill, housing multiple

galleries of contemporary art, while numerous smaller buildings—the administrative offices, maintenance garage, gift shop and lounge—stretch below the hill. The setting feels very rural, belying its location within a major metropolitan area. Here, amid huge abstract sculptures of carved wood, rusted steel, polished alloy, and patinaed bronze, colorful fabric shirts sway in the breeze.

In contrast with the landscape and elaborate sculptures, the shirt display is small, sharing just a tiny fraction of the display space, but it is not dwarfed. Its position on the gently sloping center lawn gives it a place of prominence, and it is plainly visible to all visitors entering the park. While several of the sculptures are kinetic and invite touch, the Clothesline shirts literally seem spirited, the wind blows life into them and their continual movement captures and holds the attention of visitors who individually or in small groups engage the Clothesline.

Pinned to the Clothesline is a light colored blouse with a Peter Pan collar. A pair of spectacles is painted on the front of the blouse, along with the message, "The only time I got new glasses was when you punched me in the face, John." Solitary words on the front of a light blue T-shirt ask, "What's that he's doing?" and continue on the back with "I can't breathe. I'm 10." Nearby is a shirt elaborately appliquéd with a fabricollage of brown and creme cotton, black felt, beige canvas, calico quilting, blue satin, and doll's hair, which comes together to depict a poignant scene—a woman pressing her face into the neck of a horse, seeking comfort and solace. On the front of the shirt, which is a bright yellow surgical scrub shirt, part of a poem is penned, ". . .crying into a blotter doesn't ease like crying into a mane," along with the message, ". . .raped and beaten. . .1979." These shirts, and the stories they tell, are connected one to another on the Clothesline.

Viewers walk beside the line studying each shirt. Here a painted snake slithers across a pink T-shirt, poised to strike at the heart, while a nearly opaque red burst of tempera (poster) paint explodes from the breast. Scarcely visible beneath the red, perhaps not intended for detection, is a tiny Union Jack flag, but no text accompanies the design. Here the message "*A ti, mujer latina*" is skillfully

embroidered into a gauzy white blouse, the words framed by elaborately scrolled designs and the likeness of an ancient Incan or Aztecan warrior or god. Here a lollipop is sewn into the pocket of a navy T-shirt, with only the white paper stick handle exposed. Initials on the pocket identify the woman, who, as a little girl, was lured by the promise of candy and then sexually assaulted. And here, on the back of a yellow T-shirt several sprays of tiny pink flowers are painted, reminiscent of the rosemaling done on Scandinavian woodwork. Across the shoulders the shirt designer has identified herself, and down the full surface of the back proclaimed in fine blue script, "You can batter my body, But you can't kill my spirit. Silent no more."

Two child-sized sweatshirts hang from the Clothesline, sewn together at the sleeves. One sweatshirt is blue, the other green. On the first is a child-like drawing of three stick-figures, each identified as a mother, child, and father. The mother's hands are thrown up as in exasperation or despair; the child, bearing suspicious marks suggesting bruising and violation, is sobbing, big blue teardrops falling from her eyes. Prominent on the rendering of the father, one of the few images that diverges from the stick-figure motif, is his large, red penis. On the adjoining sweatshirt a creamy oval face is appliquéd, its features—closed eyes and fine yellow hair worn in a flip—are embroidered to the surface of the shirt. A bandage adheres to the face where the mouth should be, and overhead the name Susan is embroidered, but each "S" is turned backward, to suggest a child just learning to write, or perhaps a child with dyslexia. On the backs of both these sweatshirts are appliquéd detailed letters written by each adult shirtmaker to herself as a young child. These letters, along with the images on the fronts of the shirts, are covered by sheets of clear plastic sewn into the shirt to protect the appliqués from deterioration. Like a mirror, this plastic reflects the image of every viewer who engages the shirts up close.

Dozens of shirts like these are pinned shoulder to shoulder the length of the line, hanging as though drying in the midday sun on a picturesque day. Their

messages are both transparent and opaque, explicit and esoteric, conveying anger, bewilderment, and despair, but also conveying pride, joy and defiance. For some viewers the cumulative effect of the shirts is depressing, but for others it provides catharsis and hope. Messages on the Clothesline shirts connect visitors to an exhibit continued inside the museum gallery, entitled "Good Bye to American Pie: Contemporary Artists View the Family in Crisis." The exhibit will be installed for almost ten weeks, but the Clothesline is here for just one day.

On the breeze the songs of birds, the rustling of leaves, the muted conversation of viewers, and the gentle stirring of shirts blend with the meditative insinuation of a gong, whistle and bell. This peaceful, idyllic setting is matched against the disquieting messages of the Clothesline and the realization of the immediacy of violence against women. The result is a quietly solemn atmosphere that evokes an aura of reverence.

Worcester Community Center - Worcester, Massachusetts

Outside the day is gray and blustery, but inside the community center is awash with color, the color of hundreds of Clothesline shirts. A gently sloping expanse of hallway opens onto the interior of the community center's recreation room. The brick walls of the entryway stop midway to the ceiling, leaving a vertical space in which many white T-shirts hang suspended from clothesline. The line is tied to structural ceiling supports ensuring that the elevated shirts are unobstructed from view, easily readable to all who enter.

The first shirt announces "Women and Children Murdered in Massachusetts since the Clothesline Began, Aug 1990 - Oct 1992." Void of pictorial design, each white shirt bears the name of three individuals, their age, the day they died, and how they were murdered. Only three of the many white shirts are needed to illustrate their power:

4-12/92
Karen Coughlin
Age 36 Strangled

4-27-92
Kathleen Ahern
Bludgeoned to Death

5-12-92
Patricia Rose
Age 26 Stabbed

5-25-92
Suzanne Becker
Age 27 Beaten
While Children Watched

5-30-92
Kristen Lardner
Age 22 Shot to Death

7/18/92
Pat Hildreth
Age 49 Shot While She Slept

9-6-92
Thoung Nguyen
Age 22 Beaten

9-24-92
Cheryl Nunes
Age 34 Stabbed

9-29-92
Karina Tombley
Age 22 Shot

This line of white shirts is known as "The Victim Line." It serves as a memorial to women who have been murdered, as it documents the severity of violence against women.

In addition to the white shirts elevated overhead, multitudes of colored shirts hang at eye level. The floor has been cleared of furniture and equipment specifically for this display, and the Clothesline is strung from pillar to pillar to post throughout the community center. Where pillars, posts and other architectural fixtures are unavailable, vertical white pine two-by-fours stand in, supported by plywood platforms weighted with sand bags or submerged in five gallon buckets of dried concrete for heft and balance. Whatever the means used to secure the line, the dependence on existing architectural structures results in a makeshift Clothesline that meanders throughout the community center, defying any recognizable pattern. There are more shirts here than a single swath of line can hold, so parallel lines are strung from each pillar to accommodate twice the number of shirts. Shirts with two-sided messages are hung singly on the line so that both their fronts and backs are exposed to view, but shirts with text or design on one side only (almost always the front side) are clothespinned back to back, doubling the number of shirts that can hang from a line.

The maze-like configuration of lines sometimes creates partial enclosures for viewing shirts in relative privacy. This is ideal because, for most people, viewing is a solitary experience. Even people who arrived with friends tend to engage the Clothesline alone, reading the shirts in solitude. At times it seems that every way you turn you are confronted by more shirts, more gruesome stories, more expressions of pain. This can be overwhelming for many viewers, especially those who have experienced similar abuse, but volunteers stand nearby, keeping a watchful eye, and offering support to anyone who looks like they need a question answered, a tissue to dry their tears, a consoling hug, or words of encouragement. But volunteers are careful not to intrude uninvited. Many viewers actually get the support they need from the Clothesline itself, because it also radiates messages of hope, defiance, resistance, and possibility.

A blue T-shirt declares from the line, "Dad, you can't destroy my spirit. I am stronger than you. Bonnie." A red T-shirt hangs from the line, announcing, "This is for my friend Nancy who was gang raped at her college in 1982 and told it was her fault because she had been drinking." A long sleeve turtle-neck of red hangs from the line, its nostalgic message begins, "I remember when I was little and believed in things like Santa Claus. . .when something hurt, a kiss made everything all better again," but a curse abruptly interrupts, "You Bastard. Who are you to inflict this kind of pain?" And a white shirt hangs from the line, text sketched into its checkered pattern reports, "I was alone with R. I was 15. I didn't call it rape."

On yet another shirt the stick-figures of a man and woman are drawn in the center of a red circle. The man holds a bat raised ready to strike, while the woman's arms are extended in alarm and shock. Fear sparks from her face. In the drawing tiny child is drawn as though hiding in the adjacent breast pocket; her Kewpie-doll curl and hair ribbon stands on end as she frightfully peeks out on this scene. The circle in which the stick-figures stand has a red slash through it and the words "Stop Domestic Abuse!!!" frame the scene in loud proclamation.

Many of these shirts were hung on the Clothesline today by project volunteers, people in the community who work with survivors at rape crisis centers, domestic abuse shelters, women's advocacy organizations, and other human service agencies. But many shirts were hung by the women who created them. A ritual of shirt hanging provided each woman with the opportunity to publicly hang her shirt on the Clothesline, to publicly share her story in an environment ready to support her, to bear witness, and validate her experience. At the conclusion of the shirt hanging, survivors and supporters stood hand in hand, letting the Clothesline encircle them as they gazed and reflected upon the shirts they have designed and contributed, as well as those made by friends and acquaintances, even total strangers, all of whom now share a special bond and connection.

Marshalltown Community College - Marshalltown, Iowa

Splayed across a ten foot by ten foot wall panel that serves as a room divider, sound barrier and bulletin board for the commons of the area community college are sixteen shirts, four red, one peach, one canary yellow, six in various shades of blue, and four white. Brightly illuminated by a filtered florescent light, the shirts are accompanied by small irregularly cut, crudely printed signs which explain "The Clothesline Project" and report statistics on violence against women. This local project and display is sponsored by Domestic Violence Alternatives/Sexual Assault Center, a local shelter and service provider for women who have been battered or raped. Unlike the displays in which shirts actually hang from the Clothesline, this display has shirts fastened to the wall with stick pins and masking tape, exposing only one side of each shirt to view. The shirts are skewed left and right for visual effect as well as space considerations. This is a limited space to accommodate sixteen shirts, and as a result parts of the shirts overlap, with a layering of sleeves and hems that obscures some of the text and design. Because only one side of each shirt is visible with this arrangement, the designs and messages that span both the front and back of shirts are truncated, but to the unknowing, this interferes little

with communicating the message. This method of display tends to accentuate the visual and visceral impact of the shirts, while making less accessible their tactile, kinetic, aural, and olfactory qualities. Messages from the shirts announce themselves nevertheless.

Three black tears drop onto the breast pocket of a peach colored T-shirt. There, rendered in a firm black outline, is a hand, its index finger extended as if to suggest it should be placed over pursed lips. This gesture for silence is reinforced with black text that echoes, "Sh-Sh-Sh." Juxtaposed to this shirt is a rich periwinkle T-shirt adorned in silver with hands extended toward a bouquet of small heart-shaped balloons appliquéd in red, purple and gold. Framing the hands is clear silver script that urges, "Reach out. . .someone will hear." Opposite these shirts is a T-shirt of aqua-marine with bears a Janus-faced woman. The left side of the silhouette is rendered in blue, with the woman frowning and tearful, while the right side of iridescent gold portrays her with a pleasant smile and dancing eyes. Two indiscernible objects float in her head like memories. To the side of this shirt is a white T-shirt on which two smaller T-shirts are drawn. In the center of each of these is a small yellow handprint, text below identifying the first as a 3 year old girl's and the second as a 5 year old boy's. Blue letters cascade down the front of the T-shirt to announce "5 months w/out abuse."

The wall panel to which these shirts are secured runs on a track installed in the ceiling. The panel can be repositioned or stored away for safe keeping. These shirts will remain on the wall panel to inform students, staff and faculty of upcoming violence prevention activities in the community. Perhaps a volunteer from the sponsoring organization will come to rearrange the display, exchanging these shirts for others in an effort to amplify the voices of more women who have experienced violence in this community.

Take Back the Night March - Marshalltown, Iowa

A long expanse of clothesline undulates down the street as it is held aloft by a cadre of women marching in the annual Take Back the Night Rally. Securely fastened to the line, shirts are paraded past the courthouse of this small Midwestern town to raise awareness of the extent of local violence against women. Throngs of other women and men, bolstered by student activists from the nearby private college, follow behind the shirts in a festive, yet deliberate statement of concern for women's safety.

Although spectators are probably unable to see the detail in the designs and text as the shirts pass by, the shirts reinforce the message of the march. A mint green sweat shirt proclaims "Our right. . . Safe homes, schools, streets, communities," while a red T-shirt announces "I am a rape survivor. Men who do this crime should be punished." The shirts also publicly profess the once private pain and suffering of women violated. A marigold T-shirt beseeches in bold dark text, "How could you? I loved you"; and large blue and white tears fall onto an aqua shirt from a metallic red heart that is figuratively and artistically torn apart.

A pink long-sleeve sweatshirt is covered from collar to hem in dark black script so dense that viewers might skip over it rather than read every word. For those able to study the shirt, however, the following message is revealed: "When you raped my daughter you raped everyone who loved her—She was a young woman, but she was my baby & you hurt her in a way that I couldn't fix. You took the light out of her soul. It's been 10 years & while we've all gone on with our lives, I still see the fear that you put in her come through her beautiful eyes sometimes. I dream of killing you, but I know that God will have his own revenge & it will be much sweeter than anything I could ever do. Always know, Chris, that I know who you are & I will warn anyone who will listen!"

Along with the pain, self-doubt and rage expressed by the shirts, are powerful messages of resistance, resolve, and gratitude. A red sleeveless pullover declares, "What you did does not define me. Survived and am stronger. Thanks to

all of the brave men and women who have supported and inspired." The white outline of a handprint on one shoulder of a turquoise T-shirt is contrasted with black script on the other that explains "My life wasn't mine after the rape. I'm not sure it ever will be," and questions, "Will women ever be safe?" But this is dwarfed by the shirt's demand to "Stop Violence." Also on the line as it parades down the street is a tie-dyed T-shirt, striated in pinks and reds from shoulder to midriff and reds and blues from midriff to hem, that proclaims across its chest in clear white letters "Able to enjoy another sunset."

J. B. Young Junior High School - Davenport, Iowa

On a cold Saturday in mid-winter the gymnasium of the junior high school serves as a Clothesline Project display site. Sturdy poles that normally support volleyball nets are today substituting as clothesline poles. Nearly one hundred shirts in a full spectrum of colors hang from 300 feet of clothesline, arranged deliberately to zig and zag around the perimeter of the gym floor.

This Clothesline is sponsored by Family Resources, Inc., a bi-state agency that provides crisis intervention and shelter services for survivors of domestic violence and rape. Themes related to battery and sexual assault are reflected in the displayed shirts. A white T-shirt hangs in the gymnasium, its message, written in purple, green and red marker, is as simple as an elementary school reader, "See Dick. See Dick punch Linnea. See Linnea run, run run!!!" Also on the Clothesline is a gray T-shirt on which is drawn the face of a woman. Cotton balls are stuck where her ears should be and tape covers her mouth. Beneath the face it says "Society's way of dealing with incest and rape." Another shirt on the Clothesline, a pink T-shirt, has a large hole cut into its side, while several other cuts and tears at the neck and torso are mended with pink thread. They look like sutured wounds. "Almost as good as new," the shirt announces, "Patched so I can go on functioning. Each day another stitch. . . ." On the back of the shirt, where a rambling 24-inch suture cuts

diagonally across the shirt, the message continues “. . .the seams and scars to remind me of where I’ve been and where I’m going.”

From line to line around the gymnasium, clothes-pinned shoulder-to-shoulder, the shirts continue. A white T-shirt announces, “Love doesn’t have to hurt.” A black T-shirt, printed in muted yet contrasting yellow, threatens, “I won’t let you forget.” A lemon T-shirt inscribed with “Promises to Myself” lists each promise in purple marker, the key words underlined with a strong green stroke for emphasis: “To find joy in every day; to surround myself with people who love me; to take good care of my body, mind & spirit; to discover the gifts I have to share; to share my gifts generously; to teach my children love, respect, kindness and patience; to never let anyone stand in the way of my promises again.”

In contrast to the many virtually silent displays, this one is not quiet; rather, it is an event, with a large contingency of domestic violence and sexual assault activists and their allies in attendance. It is obvious by the level of activity and conversation that many of the people here know one another. Their cumulative banter reverberates off the ceiling and walls of the gymnasium. At the same time, you can tell that they are trying to be considerate of those engaged in viewing the display. They cluster in the center of the room away from the Clothesline and converse in deliberately muted tones. It is an odd juxtaposition of reverie and solemnity, the quiet stillness with which some engage the shirts matched against the laughter and conviviality of organizers and other guests. Yet for many the laughter is not levity, but catharsis, an emotional release from the pain encountered and expressed through the shirts. The Clothesline has a way of transforming grief.

The event is both serious and celebratory. Periodically there is a the crackle of a public address system that will announce the beginning of speeches and acknowledgments. Visitors mill about the gymnasium long after they have viewed the shirts, returning repeatedly to shirts they find particularly arresting, coaxing friends to follow them to certain shirts that have captivated them.

"I don't tolerate rape. My voice will be heard" proclaims a light blue polo shirt, which in smaller script advises, "Believe in yourself. . .Stick together. . .Unite to fight all violence. . .Love yourself." The figure of a woman with outstretched arms is collaged on a pale yellow T-shirt. She is dressed in an appliqué of solid gray pants and deep purple shirt, the collar made of white, translucent lace. Dark bric-a-brac creates her hair, reminiscent of natural curls, or even dread locks. The feet, hands, and face are drawn with puff paints, eyes wide open and smiling bright red lips. Framing her image is the message: "Guys, Listen to country music! 'Don't take the girl.'"

It is hard to tell if anyone is coming upon this display for the first time. Staged in the interior of a public school, visitors to the display make considerable effort to find it. Unlike an outdoor venue or more trafficked area of civic buildings, it is less likely that unsuspecting visitors will stumble upon this display. Most have come as the result of direct invitation or in response to announcements in the press. But it is possible that some have come not knowing what to expect of the display. It has a way of catching even the more vigilant off-guard.

Vander Veer Park - Davenport, Iowa

In warmer weather, Family Resources, Inc. joins with other advocacy groups to sponsor a large Clothesline display at the Take Back the Night rally held opposite the rose garden in the city's botanical park. Here huge deciduous trees are enlisted to hold the Clothesline, but the trees are too far apart to bear the weight of so many shirts, so wooden shims are used every twenty or thirty feet to prop up the sagging line. It is very windy and the shirts toss about vigorously. Threatened by rain clouds and strong winds, the display looks as though it could collapse, but it doesn't. Nonetheless, the precarious nature of the display puts organizers on edge and they consider disassembling the line and packing up earlier than originally planned, but not before dozens of viewers, residents from the neighborhood, cross-town visitors to the park, and interested constituents have had a chance to see it.

The line is really two lines hung in vertical parallel rows, one above the other. One row of shirts is raised above the heads of viewers slightly, while the other is about a foot or so below eye level. The shirts are so active in the wind that viewers need to hold each one steady to be able to read them.

There is a black T-shirt bearing a gold banner across its chest that says "My name is Linda." A second red banner beneath this explains, "This is my hatred." The drawing that it references covers the entire bottom half of the shirt. Fine lines of intense red paint create a huge chaotic scribble that throws epithets onto the shirt, "I hate Uncle Don. . .I hate Craig. . .I hate. . .Molesting bastards. . ." The "I" is always highlighted with contrasting blue color. On the back of the shirt is a poem, each word in alternating red, purple, yellow, green, blue, pink and orange, along with carefully placed black words that are camouflaged or absorbed into the black shirt. "I shall pierce you like a dart of singing steel shot through still air at eventide. Or solemnly as pines are sober when they stand etched against the sky. Hating you shall be a game played with cool hands and still fingers. Your heart will yearn for the still splendor of the pine trees, while rekindled fires in my eyes shall wound you like swift arrows. Memory will lay its hands upon your breast and you will understand my hatred."

There are three shirts that stop almost every viewer in their tracks. The first is a long green T-shirt, long enough to be a night shirt, the second is a vivid yellow T-shirt, and the third is a pink T-shirt. On the back of the green night shirt is a simple blue stencil that reads, "My name is Debbie," but on the front is the elaborate collage and appliqué of a little girl's pink shirt-waist dress, replete with ruffles and lace, worn by an appliqué girl, her creamy cotton face framed by lush brown curls. The surprise on her face registers, even though a large hand is clutched over her mouth to silence. She is off-balance, as though being abducted and dragged away. On the left shoulder of the shirt across from the girl's startled and fearful expression are the words, "Can anyone here (sic) me?"

The vivid yellow T-shirt is appliquéd with a house and tree of colorful fabric. This seemingly tranquil domestic scene is locked behind a cage constructed of shiny, gnarled aluminum bars sewn into the fabric. Beneath this scene the text reads: "Janet, Survivor of abuse. Victim of the system." On the back of the shirt where words from the Pledge of Allegiance trace the perimeter of a small American flag, the message is punctuated with doubt. "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty? and justice? for all???????" This shirt was designed by women in solidarity with another who was convicted of conspiracy in the death of her battering husband.

In contrast with the elaborate messages inscribed on the preceding shirts, an equally elaborate message is more simply rendered on a pink T-shirt. Plainly printed with black marker are these words, "I was raped...Now I have AIDS! Jody."

Lutheran Hospital - Des Moines, Iowa

Beyond Abuse, an advocacy group for survivors of domestic violence, sponsors the Clothesline Project in the capital city of this Midwestern state. They are determined to do a display each day of October to promote Domestic Violence Awareness Month. One such display was planned for the emergency room of a private hospital, but renovations in that part of the facility forced relocation of the display to the basement, around the corner from the cafeteria.

One lone stretch of clothesline runs the length of the corridor in front of the elevators adjacent to the cafeteria. It is suspended from three fragile, upright tree limbs, each abstractly designed to suggest the form of a woman whose arms are extended skyward. These "woman trees" are painted in muted tones of blue, teal, magenta, and yellow, and adorned with icons of nature, the sun and moon, a bird and nest, and a large wooden bird house. The trees are "planted" in heavy wooden boxes painted with bright complementary colors. Spaced a measured distance apart, the three trees support a swath of line, holding eight to ten shirts. Despite

the heft of the boxes that serve as its foundation, the display has a fragile quality. The Clothesline precariously sags under the weight of the shirts which hang about knee high. Curious viewers are required to lean forward to read the sometimes obscure messages imprinted thereon. A few viewers crouch or kneel before the display to put the shirts at eye level for easier reading. Most viewers however, read the shirts from a distance.

When the elevator door opens and empties visitors into the corridor, they are immediately confronted by a line of yellow, gold, beige and white shirts, but it is the tiny stained floral dress with the ruffled bodice that catches the eye first. Although sized to fit a toddler, the bodice of the dress bears the neatly printed message of an adult hand, "I was wearing this dress when my daddy smashed my mommy's head into the cupboard. My mom was holding me in her arms. Her head was bleeding a lot. The blood got on my dress. After my mom went to the doctor the police came to our house and took my daddy away. He never came home again. . .I miss my daddy, but I don't want him to hit my mom." The dress is signed, "We are safe now, XXX, 3 years old." The text confirms suspicions that the faded brown stains on the dress are indeed blood stains.

At noontime the corridor is congested with people heading for the cafeteria. Many wear uniforms that identify them as hospital employees, but a large number are dressed in streetwear, and their confusion coming off the elevator or down the hallway suggests that they are infrequent visitors to the hospital. Many people pass the Clothesline display, seemingly without noticing it. In their disorientation, the display is just a visual distraction from finding their way to the cafeteria. Frequently the hallway is so congested with hospital visitors that view of the display is obstructed by people passing by or waiting for the elevator. To avoid creating a traffic jam in the corridor, interested viewers quickly glance at the shirts and move on. But when the crowd thins and individuals find themselves alone with the display, they pause and spend a little time attending to each shirt, each message inscribed thereon, each embellished text and design.

A woman's golden yellow T-shirt lists "just the facts," "broken bones, broken home, broken family. Fear. 54 years wasted." Alongside this shirt is another of the same hue that declares, "You abusers are the big losers." Diabolic hands drawn on the shirt reach for an escaping dove. A chain with broken links offers release as the dove takes full flight with other birds heading toward a rainbow.

There is no "getting lost" in this display, no place to hide among shirts on this line, so if viewers feel strong emotion, they are constrained in expressing them. Viewers, looking self-conscious, occasionally survey the hallway to see if they are being watched. The display is very public, an curious juxtaposition to the very private disclosures of the shirts. The shirts are poignant and painful, hopeful and celebratory, but because there are only ten shirts, the display doesn't overwhelm the viewer. The cumulative effect of reading these few shirts is different from a display of hundreds. The single line with its ten or so shirts requires only a few minutes to read and contemplate.

The hallway is artificially lighted by cool florescent lamps, because there are no windows in this basement venue to introduce sunlight. It is difficult to simulate laundry hanging to dry. The shirts hang motionless, except for the few times a viewer grasps one and pulls it closer to read. There are no sounding gongs, no screaming whistles, no tolling bells, just the sound of conversation, foot traffic in the hall and a buzzer announcing the elevator doors as they open to deliver more visitors to the cafeteria.

A single sign on the wall announces this "The Clothesline Project." Brochures and flyers for the domestic violence resource center are stacked on an adjacent counter, along with informational material on the incidence and prevalence of violence against women.

During the lunch hour two hospital employees, one female and one male, sit beside the display to answer questions and provide assistance, but they do not seem very knowledgeable and are frequently engaged in jovial conversation with fellow hospital workers who pass by. The volunteers make terse comments, not

uncaring nor disrespectful, but guarded in speech and affect. When viewers make inquiries about the shirts and display, the volunteers apologetically shrug, express their uncertainty, and refer to the printed material on the counter.

Despite my presence with camera in hand, I am largely discounted, easily mistaken for a guest waiting for the elevator. Neither of the volunteers take any notice of me, nor do Clothesline viewers. There is no confidential place to question viewers about their thoughts and opinions of the line, but casual comments made to others in the hallway are easily overheard. "What is this?" "Who made these shirts?" "Are all these shirts from our town?" "How's your sale going?" "Did you read this dress?" "Look at this shirt." "How could anyone do such a thing." "I knew someone who. . ." "My sister-in-law's first husband. . ."

When the hallway is quiet, devoid of passersby, and nearly empty, the silent stillness of the shirts can be deafening, and I think of this as a metaphor for violence against women. Unspoken and unspeakable, yet an ever-present reality for many women, and a lingering presence for us all. Perhaps I bring this meaning to the display, but it is also expressed metaphorically through the Clothesline and shirts themselves.

Polk County Courthouse - Des Moines, Iowa

Today's Beyond Abuse display of the Clothesline Project is scheduled for the county courthouse; I did not anticipate that my visit would require entering a building heavy with surveillance equipment and security personnel, a protocol that is now matter-of-course for this facility. I find the small shirt display installed behind a broad open staircase, immediately across from an entrance fitted with metal detectors. Visitors to the courthouse who come through this entrance can't help but see the display, but most pass by with little notice as they make their way to various law enforcement offices on this floor or the courtroom and judges chambers at the top of the stairs.

A thoughtfully designed story board is open on the floor, announcing the shirt display, and providing a history of the project and sponsoring agency, a list of services provided, and a group photograph of the women who sponsor this Clothesline, most of whom are survivors of battering and domestic abuse. On a table positioned in the forefront of the display is a selection of brochures, along with business cards sporting agency names and contact numbers. The Clothesline shirts are stretched on a waist high line behind the table, supported by the "woman tree" stanchions. Only the fronts of the shirts are visible because the display is erected abutting the back wall of the staircase which makes the backs of the shirts inaccessible to view.

The expanse of foyer in the courthouse allows people to give the Clothesline display a wide berth. Few visitors move in close to read the shirts. When I arrive, it appears that the display is unstaffed, but I later realize that the volunteer is unobtrusively poised on a bench against an adjacent wall. Occasionally she gets up to greet visitors to the display, but usually her presence is undetectable from the many courthouse guests who are similarly perched on hallway benches.

I position myself on a bench on the opposite side of the foyer about twenty feet from the display. Here I can witness visitors as they come upon the display, and see the profile of those who engage the shirts directly. This side-view only gives me clues to their facial expressions, but their body language is very "readable" from this distance. Frequently I approach the display and engage the shirts myself. I am familiar with most of the shirts displayed, although they appear in a different sequence on the line than I've seen them in the past. As I stand reading the shirts, a newspaper photographer interrupts to ask if he may take my picture as I study the display. I am both encouraged and embarrassed by his request—encouraged that he could not detect that I am here to do research, but uncomfortable that I am an inappropriate person to represent Clothesline viewers. At the same time I am pleased that he didn't interrupt and intrude upon someone coming upon the Clothesline for the first time, so I relent. He asks for my name so he can identify

me in the photo caption, but to my knowledge the picture never appears in the paper.

More than any other venue I have visited, here I am keenly aware of the potential that perpetrators may be walking by and I suspiciously study everyone who passes to detect nuanced responses to the display, but no one gives themselves away, unless ignoring the display is a clue and then most people here are guilty. Uniformed law enforcement officers address the shirts in quiet reflection and I imagine that many of them know the specific situations that are recounted by the shirts. One viewer, dressed in an expensive business suit, white shirt, tie and freshly polished wing-tips complains to the volunteer that the display is biased. "Men experience more violence than women do, and this doesn't admit that men are victimized by women too." I cannot hear the reply of the volunteer, but I can tell by the man's insistence that he is unconvinced.

Nor do messages on the shirts convince him. He is apparently unpersuaded by the white cotton oxford on which a stick-figure person struggles to keep its head above sharp waves suggested by scalloped blue felt fabric. Perhaps the person is drowning in his or her own tears, for tears stream from the eyes as, with outstretched arm, he or she pleads, "Help me." Across the button placket of the shirt another figure, frowning, arm outstretched, asks, "How?" The divide that separates their hands and prevents their grasp is filled with question marks. But the answer is written on the shirt tail, "Stop abuse. Educate yourself. Listen. Care. Don't be afraid of my feelings. Talk to me. Hold me. Love me - without hurting me."

The courthouse feels in continual chaos, with heavy traffic, ambient noise that echoes through the cavernous foyer, and the determination of most who come through the hallway. It seems that people who come here have specific agendas; few take much time to study the display of shirts. But I am only able to stay here a short time, less than two hours, so I am unable to detect whether the mood in the building, or visitors' responses to the display, change as the day progresses.

Broadlawns Hospital - Des Moines, Iowa

This time the Beyond Abuse Clothesline display is scheduled for the county hospital, and as it was at the private hospital, the display is positioned outside the cafeteria on the lower level. As you descend the staircase from the hospital entrance, a small display of shirts comes into view as it hangs near the base of the stairs just to your left. The backs of five shirts are visible from the stair landing, but it's hard to read them from this vantage point. Intrigued, viewers reach the foot of the stairs and turn to face the display. It is a curious and disturbing sight.

A white cotton oxford with long sleeves captures their attention first. On the left breast pocket is painted a silver and white revolver, a long barrel variety. Although the gun is reminiscent of the tiny holstered version that many children in the 1950s used to fend off masked bandits in cowboy hats, this gun is anything but playful. It points toward the following inscription: "Linda XXXX, loved life, children, the elderly, animals, and nature. Killed by G.L...and Linda's love for all of the beauty in life ended__forever." To this shirt is clothespinned a vibrant yellow T-shirt describing, in both poetry and prose, the shattering impact of domestic battering, "Broken dreams, broken things, broken screams, Wasted years, wasted tears, wasted career, So ashamed, but not to blame, bad scars remain. I'm free they say. I've broken the generational curse."

Shoulder to shoulder, ten additional beige, yellow and white shirts hang motionless from the line. Sunlight streams through the substantial windows overhead, dappling the shirts in bright light and shadow. The shirts are reflected in shadow on the floor, shadows that will move throughout the day as the sun wends its way through the sky. Planters filled with greenery suggest the outdoors amidst carpeted floor, brick walls and the metal-framed staircase.

I position myself at a table just inside the cafeteria entrance so I have an unobstructed view of the display, the information table, the volunteers station, and the stairway on which people descend to the display. This vantage point allows me

to see the response of each person as he or she first sets eyes on the Clothesline display, but once they face the shirts, their backs are to me, so I must rely on body language and timing rather than facial expressions for clues to their response.

A few visitors are oblivious to the display, their eyes so intent on the entrance to the cafeteria that they don't heed the shirts at all. But those who see the display from the staircase can not ignore it. They frequently seem uncomfortable, either pained by the shirt messages or embarrassed to be looking at such intimate expressions in public. They glance around furtively to see if anyone else is looking at the shirts or at them. Or perhaps they are trying to make eye contact with others for reassurance or mutual support. Most viewers address the shirts for only a brief moment, walking on without comment. Some surreptitiously grab an information card that bears crisis-line phone numbers.

It is midmorning, and although there is a fairly steady stream of visitors who must pass by this display to reach the cafeteria, it is not crowded, and the hallway is quiet, except for the steady drone of activity coming from inside the cafeteria, but this provides white noise rather than distraction or disturbance. Most people who engage the clothesline display appear calm yet solemn, unperturbed by the activity nearby. And because the display is small, most viewers can take it all in with just a few moments pause. Or can they? Viewers come and go, but many return repeatedly throughout the day to re-engage the shirts.

The now familiar "woman trees," unique to this project, support the shirts. Many viewers lean in toward the shirts, perhaps to see tiny detail in the design or to block the sunlight which obscures some of the text, but it looks as though they lean in to hear a whispered secret, for many of the shirts share what has only been shared before in the strictest of confidence. Here again is the stained floral dress, the white shirt with the drowning figure pleading for our help, the vibrant gold T-shirt with dove in flight just beyond the grasp of devilish hands, the yellow T-shirt containing "just the facts."

To the left of the display, beyond the stairs, is a table arrayed with flyers and brochures, and signs that explain the display. A volunteer sits unobtrusively, her gaze averted from the Clothesline viewers in an attempt to provide them privacy. Only if approached and questioned does she engage people in conversation.

Just before the lunch hour a new volunteer arrives, eager to provide a break for the woman who has been staffing the display since early morning. The newcomer immediately sets about to reorganize the display and replenish the stacks of brochures. She surveys the site and determines that too few shirts are displayed. There are many more shirts in garment bags under the table, so she begins to string extra line along the top of a room partition that serves as the backdrop to the information table. She rolls a nearby coatrack over to the side of the table as well, and begins to remove shirts from the garment bag. Each shirt is on a hanger, so rather than remove them, she simply puts them on the line, hanger and all, with shirts turned to expose their fronts to view. She hangs more shirts on the coatrack, turning a few shirts perpendicular to the rack so that their fronts are also exposed, although the messages of many are obscured by this arrangement. This, however, presents an invitation to viewers to file through the shirts, much like you would clothing in your closet, pushing each back in turn to read and review. This new addition of shirts more than doubles the number available for view.

A beige blouse has been added to the display, the word "control" repeats across it in various color, size and script. "Control here. Control there. Control everywhere," is its refrain. It hangs beside an orange jersey appliquéd with a leash. "100% human," declares the text, "so why do you treat your dog better?"

The noontime rush is beginning and many employees of the hospital stop by the display. A similar display of shirts was installed here last fall, and several visitors express recollections of that display. They speak freely with the volunteer, a nurse that many have worked with in the past, although she is not an employee of this hospital. Much of the conversation is greeting and updating, but all of them begin by discussing the display. Despite their acquaintance, few knew the volunteer had

survived life-threatening domestic abuse until they speak with her at the display today.

Among the newly displayed "shirts" is a white lab coat made of cotton eyelet. On the bodice near the shoulders are appliquéd three small round photographs of young boys, framed with cross-stitched hearts of purple and magenta. On the lapel is pinned a small purple ribbon, the insignia of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Many of the hospital staff knew the woman for whom this coat was designed, a nurse who was murdered by her husband in the presence of their three sons. The white lab coat is her memorial. The coat evokes reminiscences and sympathetic comments from viewers, many of whom express incredulity that such violence could happen to someone from within their ranks. The volunteer later recounts to me the high incidence of domestic violence perpetrated against nurses, women trained as nurturers and care givers, a socialization that the volunteer believes makes them particularly vulnerable to violence.

Shortly after the lunch rush, things become quiet again. The volunteer can stay no longer, and I offer to staff the display in the absence of any other volunteers, stating that the experience would give me a new vantage point from which to understand the display. The volunteer is hesitant, feeling protective of the shirts. Not that she believes I will harm the shirts, but they deserve respect and nurturance. This tenacious protection of the shirts is a trait I have seen in every volunteer involved in the Clothesline Project. I reassure her that I understand this deference, and for several hours am allowed to staff the display alone.

This is a very quiet time for the display. Few visitors come. Most of those who do silently engage the shirts and then walk on. Only a few come to the display table to leaf through brochures. The conversation is pleasantries, mostly, with a few comments that suggest the power the shirts have for visitors. Some people come to the table literally to catch their breath because some of the shirts' messages can knock the wind out of you. But many simply come to the information table because

now there are shirts displayed on the room partition overhead and on the adjacent coatrack.

Most of the afternoon I am alone with the shirts, and I am able to photograph and read each shirt uninterrupted. The quiet stillness of the shirts is striking. It reminds me of a visit to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. During a private moment in a tiny corner of the exhibit, I swear I heard the whispers of Holocaust victims and I strained to listen, thinking perhaps they were being broadcast somewhere else in the building. But I was never sure of their source and thought perhaps it was just my imagination. That feeling returns to me through the silence of the shirt display. All around me are silent shirts, but I can hear women's mournful voices communicating very loudly.

Downtown Outdoor Pedestrian Mall - Iowa City, Iowa

This is a small Midwestern city, home to a public university. It is a prosperous and progressive community of 50,000 that swells to 70,000 during the school year. The Clothesline is sponsored by the Rape Victims Advocacy Program and Domestic Violence Intervention Program, organizations that provides both rape crisis and domestic violence services in a community known for women's advocacy and activism. In just eighteen months this Clothesline Project has accumulated more than 400 shirts.

Local project organizers have agreed to my participation and study of what will be the largest display in the state. I arrive at the display site before sunrise because I am eager and I want to orient myself to the site. I sit on a wooden bench between the street and a paved pedestrian mall clutching a cup of coffee in my hands, for it is cold in the pre-dawn hours of October. I am in the heart of the downtown where community and campus converge in a central shopping district. City hall, the public library, the police station and other municipal services are just a few blocks from here. Brick buildings, some dating from the turn of the century, surround me, housing restaurants and coffee shops, clothing merchants, a hardware

store and drug store, several bookstores, a music shop, a jewelry store, numerous gift boutiques, several banks, and a movie theater. The immediate corner of the pedestrian mall where I sit is an area about one-eighth of a block in size abutting a pizza parlor. Because this is the fringe of the campus district as well, many nearby buildings house classrooms, faculty and administrative offices, research laboratories, and student residences.

The pedestrian mall is a four block area which has been permanently closed to vehicular traffic. Paving bricks replace the asphalt street and form the adjacent sidewalks, while trees and flowers grow in planters constructed of railroad ties and earth. The area is dedicated to foot traffic, technically off-limits to anything on wheels. Here people shortcut their way between home, classes and work, window shop, walk dogs, or converge upon the many eateries at meal and break time. Often a bit frenzied with activity, this is also the place where people come to pause, relax and refresh. A generous supply of benches and sturdy leaning rails invite people to linger.

Although it is desolate at this pre-dawn hour, it will be filled with street life and activity later. The vast majority of street life who stake claim to this territory however are male. Groups of young men play hacky-sack or throw Frisbees or mill about in small groups in front of shops and storefronts; pedestrians often have to compete with errant skateboarders and rollerbladers, and dodge an occasional bicycle.

A van filled with Clothesline Project equipment and supplies pulls up to the curb not far from where I sit, its parking brake set and warning flashers punctuating the gray dawn. A woman gets out and greets me with an introduction, inquiring the whereabouts of other volunteers. She suspects they will be late and when I tell her I've seen no one else yet this morning, she grumbles under her breath. To be unloaded from the van are suitcases, baskets and hampers filled with shirts, boxes filled with rope and plastic-coated clothesline, bags filled with wooden pinch-style

clothespins, a card table with boxes of brochures, buttons, and bumper stickers, a stereo unit with speakers, an extension cord, and a variety of tools.

We immediately begin to unload this equipment, carrying it across the sidewalk to a recessed corner of the pedestrian mall. Within minutes we are joined by another volunteer, a man who is a veteran of several Clothesline displays. The three of us confer about how and where to hang the line. Although the Clothesline has hung here before and they have a basic idea where it goes, the number of shirts has since doubled. We will need to be creative to accommodate all of them. Our fingers are stiff from the cold October frost, making it difficult to grasp and tie the line around tree trunks, light poles, portable wooden stanchions and architectural fixtures that protrude from adjacent buildings. We are soon joined by other volunteers, a woman who delivers some forgotten supplies and immediately leaves, a woman who helps secure the line, and four women who begin to ready the shirts.

The shirts come out of the suitcases and boxes neatly folded, many rapt in wax paper to protect the puff paint with which they have been designed. Puff paints are delicate and they get tacky when exposed to heat. The waxed paper prevents shirts from sticking together. The women remove the shirts with gentle care and lay them on benches and planters to relax some of the wrinkles. They sort them according to whether the shirts have designs both front and back or only on one side. It is apparent that these volunteers are experienced at setting up displays, they are facile while I fumble. Despite the amount of work ahead of us, however, they are uncritical and in good humor, joking about my novice status.

We work quickly and methodically with only momentary pauses to map our strategy, review our progress, and implement contingencies. Most of the set-up is done rather mechanically. There is no grand plan for the hanging of shirts as long as a variety of colors alternates to avoid a repetition of any one color on the line. Shirts with two-sided messages are hung singly on the line so that both their fronts and backs are exposed to view. Shirts with messages on one side only are hung from line where building or landscaping obstructions deny access to the opposite

side. There are a preponderance of shirts with designs on one side only, so many of these are hung back to back sharing the same clothespins. In this way their design is exposed, yet double the number of shirts can be accommodated on a stretch of line. The line is elevated approximately seven feet from the ground while the shirts, clothespinned shoulder to shoulder, hang at eye level.

We work in pairs, one person transporting and holding shirts while the other person hangs them on the line overhead. (We are always dropping clothespins, so I clamp a dozen or more in intervals on the line so they are within easy reach of the persons hanging shirts.) In some locations it is necessary for the shirt hanger to stretch precariously from a bench or planter in order to reach the line. At these places a third person is needed as a spotter, to provide support or break a fall.

The stereo and dual speakers are strategically positioned in a center of the display, a place where they are safest from harm and where the sounds of the gong, the scream of the whistle and the tolling of the bell can quietly saturate the display area. An electrical outlet on a nearby building supplies power to the stereo, and the extension cord is secured with tape to prevent a tripping hazard. We test the volume to assure that it doesn't overpower the space, and the sounds of the gong and whistle quietly reverberate from surrounding buildings to blend with those of the rustling leaves, chirping birds and periodic flapping of shirts caught by a gust of wind.

It takes us nearly three hours to string the line and hang the more than four hundred shirts.¹⁹ Long before we've finished however, visitors have converged on the display, and passersby have paused to engage the shirts. We work quietly around them as they read and review the shirts. As yet no signs are posted to explain the display, no information table is spread with visitor brochures. A few

¹⁹ Of the nine volunteers that morning, eight were female and one was male. We ranged in age from twenty-something to forty-something. Two appeared to be "women of color," although they did not disclose and I did not inquire. Several were gay or gay-friendly as I deduced from conversations or symbols worn on clothing or jewelry.

visitors ask questions of the busy volunteers, but most engage the Clothesline without comment.

Delayed a bit for want of a stepladder, we finally secure a step stool from a nearby merchant and hang the last of the shirts, remembering to leave an empty stretch for any shirts made on site today. Only after the final shirt is hung do the volunteers hurry off to their regular jobs. Two women remain to staff the display, and they are now free to post signs, stock the information table with brochures, promotional material, pledge cards, and fund-raising items, and put the finishing touches on the display. They also set up a special area adjacent to the Clothesline, a secluded place for shirt-making. They enclose a gazebo-like structure with sheeting and stock the inside with shirts, paints and sewing supplies. Signs declare this area off-limits to journalists and cameras, and request that visitors respect the privacy and confidentiality of shirt-makers within.

I am now free to wander the rows and rows of shirts, photograph and video tape the Clothesline, and observe people as they engage the display. Many people pause momentarily in their hurry across the mall, although just as many sidestep the display altogether. A steady number of visitors wend their way through the display, taking a long, deliberate time viewing each shirt.

Here hangs the teal and black flannel shirt declaring "My father is a rapist." On the back it continues, "I got out 3 years ago. Now I'm dancing. I have a loving partner. I also have a great therapist and a supportive mom. I do have memories and pain though." It is signed, "Deborah, spring 1995." Next to this hangs the yellow T-shirt that says, "Mo, I know you are still hitting her." Continued on the back is, "XXXXXXX! I'm so sorry. My attention lapsed. I thought you were safe. I was wrong....Please come home." At its hem the shirt concludes, "Mohamed, let her go. You have to."

Here, too, is the small pastel blue and white jumper appliquéd with a collage of lurid green hands, connected at the wrists by something that looks like a watch chain. The hands are inscribed with black words and phrases appearing on the

palm, the fingers, the thumb. "Come here. . .Close the door. . .Rub it like your Mommy does. . .Wake up. . .Shh. . .My special girl. Daddy's girl. You want a fat lip? Don't tell. . .or else!!! Don't you say 'no' to me!!! Give me a kiss. It won't hurt. . .Open your door now!! Lay down. Do you want me to hurt your dog? I said do it! I'm your Father." Shocks of red fabric flare out from several of the fondling fingertips and from the back of a small red plastic heart that is pinned to the chest of the jumper. The jumper also contains the appliqué of a white birthday cake, trimmed in red frosting, and inscribed with "Happy 25th Birthday, Gwen. You'll always remember this birthday! From your rapist, Don."

This Clothesline display catches many off-guard as they round the corner to the pedestrian mall, but the display is visible from several hundred yards, so those who want to avoid it can easily circumvent the block. Several of the shirts broadcast their messages in huge letters that can be read from quite a distance, so potential viewers are forewarned of the nature of the display. Many people are attracted by the curious sight of a clothesline in the center of town, but they read only a few shirts before they pull back and walk away. Throughout the day, however, women and men, alone and in small groups, converge on the Clothesline and stand before shirts in wrapped attention, fascinated and repulsed, captivated and encouraged, incredulous and supportive.

At times the display is crowded, although viewers give one another lots of space, careful not to intrude on one another's reading of a shirt. It is as though an invisible enclosure surrounds each shirt so visitors can read the messages and designs in relative privacy. But in mid-morning visitors compete for space with the cameras and recording equipment of local TV reporters who broadcast live from the scene or tape features for later showing. Panoramic images of the display provide a sense of the Clothesline's impact in the three-minute news spots, and they capture well people's want to touch these shirts, the kinetic quality of shirts moving with the wind, and the peaceful yet eerie sound of the gong, whistle and bell mixed with the

ambient noise of traffic on the adjacent street. The sounds unfortunately are often overlaid with the commentary of reporters and the interruption of staged interviews.

The cameras pan the shirts, but they move much too fast to capture detail of the designs or allow home viewers to read the sometimes elaborate inscriptions. They film in disjuncture, making it impossible to recognize the messages of shirts continued front to back, and they film in a quick staccato of images that decontextualizes individual shirts from the messages conveyed by the larger image of the Clothesline itself. For example, they cannot capture the poignancy of a plain white T-shirt silk-screened with the photograph of a long-haired brunette woman, dressed in blue jeans and a T-shirt. Casually posed, she is smiling into the camera. Caption clouds float across the shirt, identifying the woman by name and describing her as, "Foxy Roxy. . .Everybody's best friend. . .The best Malto-meal maker. . .Beautiful mother of 3. . .Poet. . .Grandma. . .Funloving party girl. . .The smartest and the most stubborn woman on earth." In the midsection of the shirt, the face of a horned devil surrounded by hellish flames serve as a backdrop to the name "James," as the message declares, "Murdered by James," then continues "How can you say it was self-defense when you are a 6'5" giant and Mama was so tiny?" On the back of the shirt appears another silk-screened photograph, this one of four teen and pre-teen children, dressed in shorts and sandals, standing in a row, their arms around each other's shoulders as they mug for the camera. Dark black lines interrupt the scene, as though the photo were framed behind shattered glass. Carefully printed words announce: "To the beast who killed our mom. Do you have any idea how it feels to be brutalized by someone you thought you could trust? You destroyed our family." The news camera cannot match the level of detail captured by viewers who engage this shirt, nor can it provide the multi-sensory experience of its message.

All this media activity undoubtedly discourages some people from approaching the display, but others are drawn to the Clothesline because of this quiet commotion. Many visitors have come to the display specifically as the result of

such media reports, newspaper announcements, and promotional posters, but the display also catches the attention of students and faculty, merchants and shoppers, and downtown workers who spy the Clothesline from a distance and take a break from their routine to visit the display. Despite the media's presence, most visitors persist with the line, trying to sidestep camera equipment, giving reporters a wide berth. By late morning reporters and camera crews are gone and the display quiets, a lull before a noon-time flurry of activity.

In the momentary stillness it is easy to imagine voices speaking aloud from the Clothesline. A rose colored turtle-neck hangs from the Clothesline disclosing the anal rape of a 16 year old, a white T-shirt and a blue denim jacket both hang in memorial to women killed by men who supposedly loved them, a multi-colored T-shirt is crudely etched with the words ". . .Stop the silence," while a purple shirt, imprinted with the large pink triangle that marked the homosexual in Nazi concentration camps, is etched with the words "Stop Homophobia."

A long-sleeved turquoise turtle-neck hangs from the line, a large acrylic handprint in the pit of each arm mirrors the bold black message, "He always held me under my arms as he raped me." At the bottom of the shirt in smaller text, the message continues, "No milk and cookies. No playful days. No friends. No security. Just a daily fear for my life from my brother." Running the length of its long sleeves, beginning on one and completed on the other, is the message: "But now I have. . .my voice," and the shirt-maker identifies herself in bold black letters on the hem of the shirt.

Another shirt, a lemon yellow T-shirt, is designed with a wide open mouth, its teeth and tongue inscribed with "I have words. I have voice. I use them!" In bold red and black the shirt's message continues, "It might have taken 39 years (and some beatings and an attempted rape and having my child molested and finding a loving relationship) but I GOT it! and I will not be silenced! Not ever."

The voices of these shirts are amplified by the Clothesline, but they are not the only shirts to break the silence and demand a right to speak and be heard. Also

heard from the Clothesline are shirts that, with very few words, speak profoundly of their violent experiences. Furious black lines and dots scribble across the front of the shirt, uprooting small flowers like a hot summer gale. Devastating in its wake, the chaotic drawing continues on both sleeves of the shirt, this time with gold and green pigment caught up in the swirls of black. On the left breast in block letters of gold and green the shirt simply states, "Your violent experience."

Other shirts, while appearing mute, are also audible, but their messages are muffled in ways that leave viewers puzzled. The long sleeves of a red turtle neck are wrapped around a tiny flannel baby blanket of white, light blue striping, and pastel design. The blanket is folded to suggest a child swaddled within, as the red shirt tightly clutches the blanket to its bosom. No text is required to communicate a powerful message, although each visitor may hear or read something a little different in its meaning.

The Clothesline display is filled with visitors during the noon hour. The information table, originally situated in the morning sun to gather warmth, has been moved to a shady area to keep the women staffing it cool. Volunteers come and go throughout the day, but one remains the duration, and she stays close to the information table for easy access, to protect brochures from the occasional gusts of wind, and to safeguard valuables sold to raise funds for the display. Other volunteers stake visible posts around the perimeter of the display, or wander the rows of shirts sharing in the experience of visitors. They remain available to any visitor who might need support, although visitors may express that need very subtly, for I see no one overwhelmed with emotion. Nonetheless, volunteers remain accessible to viewers who might approach with questions, concerns or comments, but they do not draw attention to themselves.

Throughout the day I have been variously seated on benches within and without the display, and wandered the rows of shirts reading each, returning over and over to those that resonate in me, that most profoundly make their point, that teach me what I did not know. Only when the display is empty of visitors do I

photograph shirts or videotape the display. The movement of shirts as they resist and submit to the continual light breeze and unexpected gusts of wind is captured on my video. The sounds of the gong, whistle and bell register on the video as well, and I am intrigued that these sounds have continued to drift in and out of my consciousness throughout the day, reinforcing the immediacy of violence against women, that with each gong some woman is being beaten, with each shrill some women is being raped, with each bong a women is being killed.

I hear viewers talk about how painful some of the shirts are, how overwhelmed they feel by some of the messages, how intrigued they are by this clothesline in the middle of town, how discomforted they are by such private stories in such a public place. And I hear them express wonder at the resilience, resistance, and courage of the shirtmakers.

As the lunch hour wanes, many viewers depart, leaving only a few to engage the shirts; throughout the afternoon there is a continual rotation of visitors. Two women, each in her mid-thirties, wander amid lines of shirts in the early afternoon, seemingly unaware of each other's presence. Both are casually clad, one in cotton pants and a pullover, the other in a light blouse and long floral skirt. They bump into each other where several lines of shirts converge and it immediately becomes apparent that they know each other. A bit embarrassed to be intruding upon the others' intimate moments with the shirts, they pause in awkward exchange, but then begin to share their reactions to the Clothesline display.

In hushed conversation, they stroll together, slowly wandering through the shirts again, retracing their earlier steps. Each woman points out shirts to the other, sharing those they found particularly arresting, appealing, or poignant. They stop in front of a long line of T-shirts: a bright yellow one imprinted in black marker with the question, "Did I (we) deserve the abuse?"; a deep orange one inscribed in metallic blue acrylic with the words "Feel better now, Fucker?" framing an erect golden penis impaled with the tiny lifeless blue body of a woman; a green-blue T-shirt that virtually shouts "I did not enjoy it!"; a white one, its front decked with a

simply rendered rainbow and text subtly applied with a red marker to say, "We miss you everyday," and a shirt of goldenrod yellow, playfully inscribed with contrasting multi-color block letters that declare, "I will have all the colors."

Absorbed in quiet conversation the two women take seats within the display occupying a wooden bench backed by one row of shirts and broadly encircled by others. Their bench rests beside a large raised planter filled with youthful trees whose autumnal colors dapple the women with shade. Their discussion appears very serious, with tearful exchanges and gentle touches that console. Their solemnity is occasionally broken by muted, almost embarrassed laughter, but it is a laughter of catharsis and release, not irreverence. This is a quiet time of the display, early afternoon, and there are few visitors to disturb.

In a far corner of the display beyond several rows of shirts that obstruct the view and create a tiny sanctuary of relative privacy is the stretch of line reserved for new shirts. Two young women sit cross-legged facing one another on a planterbox beneath these shirts. The smaller-framed woman with short sandy hair can't be much more than twenty years old. Having just hung a shirt overhead, she sits restless, nervous, almost agitated. Her dark-haired companion is quiet, but attentive; she doesn't seem to know what to say or how to respond to her distracted friend. Suddenly the sandy-haired woman spots a young man across the mall, calls out to him and excitedly runs in his direction.

He is about her age, but tall and thickly built. He wears his hair in a butch and his blue jeans ride low on his hips, covered by a long black T-shirt. As he approaches her, she points back over her shoulder to the shirt that hangs on the line and begins to explain, but chokes mid-sentence, wraps her arms around his neck and buries her head in his chest. His arms muffle her sobs. Although visibly perplexed, he holds her there for a very long time, silently stroking her hair. When her tears subside, she walks him toward a long-sleeve white sweatshirt that reads: "My new friends, they said it was a party. I believed them. 10 men watched as 5 raped me! I was a gang initiation!! I was only 14. They threatened to kill me! The

cops did nothing, but I survived!!” The young man lowers his head sadly, but does not register surprise or incredulity; it seems he already knows her story.

These three young people spend a long time in quiet conversation in front of the shirt, then drift from sight. They reappear sometime later from the tent-like enclosure provided for shirt-making. The young man carries a shirt in his arms as he approaches the Clothesline. He hangs a T-shirt shoulder to shoulder, joined by a single clothespin to the shirt of his friend. And there they stand in quiet contemplation of their shirts.

Not far from this scene, two men spread out on a bench under a row of shirts. Clothed in dress shirt and slacks, their ties loosened for comfort, they talk beneath the Clothesline as they sip hot coffee, seemingly oblivious to the display around them. At no time do they engage the shirts, view the designs, or read the inscriptions, but here they remain, inside the perimeter of the display, for more than half an hour. Most visitors to the display avoid altogether the shirts in the vicinity of these two men, while others try to read the shirts from a distance. There is a yellow T-shirt inscribed in black and red with a child’s defiant plea, “Stopping hitting Mommy,” the sanguine red pigment with which “Mommy” is drawn drips down the shirt like blood. There is a red T-shirt that in black magic marker simply says, “For fellow officer raped in line of duty.” This shirt is joined at the shoulder with a yellow T-shirt and a long-sleeved red jersey pull-over, each inscribed with bold text, “No Means No!” and “Stop Domestic Violence.”

In contrast with the bold commands of these shirts though is a pale yellow T-shirt that hangs nearby, its question meek and bewildered, “What did I do wrong?” Straw-colored yarn, suggesting hair, frames the drawing of a woman’s face, and vacant blue eyes stare out at the viewer. Above the left eye stitches are drawn to suggest a sutured wound, while below the right eye is an inflamed cheek. The two men drink their coffee, seemingly oblivious to, or at least unmoved by, the messages of these shirts.

A few benches away, still within the confines of the Clothesline display, another man stretches out to sleep. He has removed his shirt and tucked it beneath him for a pillow; his long tangled brown hair and beard are accentuated by his bare chest. Lying supine he sleeps, bare-chested and bare-footed, for an hour or more. Few visitors venture in his direction to read the shirts that flutter over him in the breeze. Were it not for this sleeping man, visitors would see a vibrant red T-shirt, its iridescent green paint drawn to suggest the outline of a car in a wooded setting. The car's back window is shaded with the same iridescent green, but with close attention to detail viewers can see an ominously aggressive scene in the back seat. The shirt reads "No! Stop!" "Just shut up and lay still." "???This is supposed to be a date??? No, this is rape!" Were it not for the sleeping man, viewers would see a faded light blue T-shirt on which the myriad tears of a blonde child cascade into pools of blue. Her eyes are wide and her mouth agape, imploring the viewer to "PLEASE. . .Believe the children! Their OUR pain is real." Were it not for the sleeping man, viewers would see the collage of a woman's face appliquéd onto a red shirt, her features nearly hidden behind her hands, her despairing countenance matched by the message over the breast pocket, "I'll always regret not screaming."

On the perimeter of the display beneath several shirts, a man crouches with pallet and brush in hand. Having set paints and supplies against a planter and stanchion that supports the Clothesline, he gazes beyond the display to a scene across the mall. Paying no heed to the shirts hanging overhead nor those which envelop him, he paints a distant street scene on the small three-by-five plaque that he holds in his hand. He doesn't see the bright yellow shirt that flaps defiantly in a furious gust of wind, a blood red circle prominently displayed in its midsection, the black imprint of a boot at its center, the rendering of a fetus flattened by its tread. Black script around the circumference of the circle repeats "Isaac survived. Born February 9, 1994. He can say Mama. Not Daddy. Not Daddy. Not Daddy. Not Daddy. Not Daddy. . ."

Nor does the painter see the white T-shirt silk-screened with more than a dozen assorted photographs of the same female—as a child holding a kitten, as an awkward adolescent in school pictures, as an older teen mugging for a photo with her friends, as a bridesmaid donned in formal gown, as a young mother with daughter by her side, as a grown woman gazing pensively yet self-consciously into the camera. She is identified by name in block print over the photographs, while additional words frame the ensemble of photos as well. They read “Stalked. Terrorized. Abused. Murdered.”

By late afternoon, the Clothesline display is again filled with people. Gone is the painter, the slumbering man, the coffee-drinkers, the young three-some, the two women, all having relinquished the space to the many visitors who now engage the shirts. For the next two hours many other men and women congregate in front of the shirts, reading their messages and studying their designs. Activity wanes toward the supper hour however, so as long shadows announce the oncoming dusk, we begin the process of dismantling the display. Several of the morning volunteers have returned and a few display visitors have lingered to offer assistance.

The shirts come down from the line in neat piles, several draped over an arm and carried to a waiting table or bench. Clothespins are gathered and tossed into plastic grocery bags for future use. A few people unstring the line and wind long stretches of it between elbow and hand, tying the line in secure bundles. These, along with signs and stanchions, are quickly collected and returned to the van, as a small assembly-line of shirt folding ensues. Women take deliberate and gentle care to fold each shirt, wrapping in waxed paper those most delicate, and returning them all to the boxes, suitcases, and baskets from which they came. This is done quietly, methodically, almost ritualistically. Conversation is subdued, perhaps out of fatigue, for it has been a long and emotional day for many, and perhaps out of reverence, each woman respectful of the shirts and busy with her own thoughts. There are occasional exchanges, and some laughter, but it is not raucous.

In contrast with the three hour set-up, it takes less than an hour to disassemble the display. But it is now dark and the last of the shirt-folding occurs under the streetlights. There is no choreographed finale, no closing ceremony, rehearsed or impromptu, just a gradual parting and leave-taking once the work is done. A group of women go off together for supper, others depart singly, in twos, and in threes. I make a final survey of the site to insure that nothing has been left behind. There are no visible indications that the Clothesline was even here today, no tell-tale signs, nothing gives it away. The pedestrian mall is once again empty, and the loaded van pulls away from the curb.

CHAPTER 5

THE SHIRTMAKING EXPERIENCE: DEMONSTRATION AND IMITATION

Just as Clothesline displays are manifest in great variety and multiple versions, so are the processes by which shirts are made. But each of the various processes demonstrate that shirtmaking and display organizing are learned largely through demonstration or imitation, a third characteristic that identifies folk media. An originator of the Clothesline Project who organized public displays from 1990 through 1994 spoke of the various ways in which women participate in shirtmaking for the Project.

Each individual has their own process, their own time to break their silence. Some women need a group of women to do it with. It's a communal kind of thing. They need that support. They need that motivation. Other women do not. And even if they're in that situation, they might sort of knock off something or they might not. There are women who have been making their shirts since the Project began. There are women who make shirts and never give them to the Clothesline. There are women who make shirts and have buried them in a graveyard. There are women who have made shirts and burned them in a ceremony. Many, many times I've been somewhere where people knew I was going to be, and sort of clandestinely, sort of surreptitiously, I get passed this bag. They come in all ways.

Shirtmaking²⁰

I discussed previously the experience of one woman who, having learned of the Clothesline Project via a rape "chat-line" on the Internet, joined with a friend to design and execute several shirts. There was no Clothesline Project in their community and they knew no one locally who had designed a shirt. Indeed, neither of them had ever seen a Clothesline Project display, but the homepages of several distant Clothesline Projects provided brief descriptions and explanations, and several

²⁰ "Shirtmaking" is actually a misnomer, for there is no expectation that women literally weave cloth, cut a pattern or sew a shirt. Shirt embellishment, shirt decoration, or shirt design may be more accurate expressions, but shirtmaking is the term used by Clothesline Project originators, organizers and shirtmakers.

computer websites featured photographs of some shirts. The women were guided through their shirtmaking process via conversations on the rape chat line, and they were inspired by shirts they had seen online.

Each woman spent many hours planning designs for her shirt, one by writing and journaling, the other by sketching and painting. They selected T-shirts from their personal wardrobes and applied the designs and text to these shirts with an airbrush, compressor, and paints from the garage workshop of one of their fathers. During the process they talked for long hours with one another about their rape experience, and shared their stories and shirtmaking plans with several other women on campus who had been raped. As a result, each of these women decided to make shirts as well. But because there was no Clothesline Project in their community, their shirts were never contributed to a project nor hung for public display. Instead, the women gathered at someone's home, each wearing her Clothesline Project shirt. They sat together in the glow of candlelight sharing their shirts and their stories of violation.

Despite the fact that their shirts were never publicly hung and displayed, these women felt very much a part of the Clothesline Project. Their "computer-mediated" introduction to shirtmaking is relatively rare however. Usually women learn of the Clothesline Project by seeing a display and/or by talking directly with others who have made shirts. Of course, this was not the experience of the very first Clothesline Project shirtmakers.

To develop the initial Clothesline Project, the Cape Cod Women's Agenda (Agenda) solicited designed shirts from women in their communities. Invitations went out from the Agenda via word-of-mouth, organizational newsletters, and announcements in Cape Cod newspapers. Agenda members were networked with rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, private therapists and psychologists, lesbian social organizations, women's advocacy groups, and people within the peace and justice movement on the Cape. Within these networks, Agenda members described their idea for a Clothesline display at the Take Back the Night rally and

march four months hence. They invited women to design and contribute a shirt for that display which would "break the silence" about violence against women.

Suggestions and guidelines were minimal. Shirtmakers were free to use any style new or used shirt, and were encouraged to use any medium of fabric art to express themselves. Agenda members had devised a color guide and suggested its use by shirtmakers. This color scheme was intended to visually represent different kinds of gendered violence: red and orange were the shirt colors to designate rape and sexual assault, yellow and beige for battering and domestic abuse, green and blue for incest and childhood sexual abuse, and lavender and purple for violence perpetrated against women because they were, or were perceived to be, lesbian.²¹ White was the shirt color designated to commemorate "victims" of violence, women who were murdered or took their own lives following violent trauma.

Within weeks of the solicitation, shirts began to arrive through the mail, and more shirts arrived on-site the day of the display—T-shirts, sweatshirts, a surgical scrub, a broadcloth shirt with tapered collar, tanktops, a campshirt, a button-down oxford, a camisole, and long-sleeve turtlenecks—thirty-one shirts in all. Women had answered the call to make shirts, responding with designs both simple and elaborate, using fabriccollage, appliqué, embroidery, cross-stitch, quilting, trapunto, ink, stain, dye, acrylics, tempera, and magic marker.²²

Some of the shirtmakers "went public" during the display by hanging their own shirt for all to see. Several members of the Cape Cod Women's Agenda were themselves the survivors of abuse, rape, incest, and/or lesbian-bashing, or knew women who were. They made shirts for themselves or for the women they knew. The Agenda included members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the National Organization for Women (NOW), as well as volunteers with the domestic violence center, crisis line and women's shelter on the

²¹ The color scheme was soon expanded to include pink shirts for rape and sexual assault, and brown shirts for battering and domestic abuse.

²² The Names Project AIDS Quilt had recently been displayed on Cape Cod and it is likely that quilt pieces inspired the design of some shirts.

Cape, so a number of shirts came from these sources as well. But the majority of shirts arrived anonymously, and although many of the shirtmakers subsequently identified themselves, several have maintained their anonymity; no one knows who they are.

The invitation to make and contribute shirts preceded "Take Back the Night" by four months. This gave shirtmakers significant lead time to reflect on what they wanted a shirt to say, to select the shirt they would use, to gather fabric, notions and other art supplies, and to execute their designs. Many of the first thirty-one shirts contained elaborate detail that required long hours of handwork, needlework or machine skills. The majority of these shirts, no doubt, were solitary creations made within the shirtmaker's home, but several were the result of collaboration. Using their own shirts, whether new or old, the shirtmakers planned and executed creative expressions of their violent experiences. Some shirts were simply executed with text or design that powerfully communicated messages both explicit and esoteric. Other shirts were elaborately rendered with skillful embroidery, quilting, and appliqué. Only a few were the work of women who consider themselves to be artists; the majority were done by women with no formal training and who claimed no special creativity or skill. Nevertheless, the shirts demonstrated beautiful needlework, sewing machine, and handwork skills along with drawing, calligraphy and design talents to convey poignant images and messages.

Still common at Clothesline displays are shirts made this way—as solitary, anonymous endeavors in the privacy of a woman's home—similar to the many domestic tasks done in relative isolation by woman, including knitting and crocheting, cross-stitch and embroidery, sewing and mending. But it is also common now that shirtmaking is a communal activity, similar to sewing circles and quilting bees in which women gather together to work independently in the company of other women or to collaborate on a joint textile project. At least four kinds of communal shirtmaking are common. The first is when family and friends collaborate on a shirt to commemorate a victim or bear witness for a survivor. The

second occurs when shirtmaking is a scheduled event, organized by Clothesline Project volunteers on-site at displays. The third involves groups of survivors and activists who sponsor shirtmaking in abuse shelters and support groups. The fourth involves the orchestration of shirtmaking by counselors and advocates working in therapeutic environments with survivors and their families. The computer-mediated shirtmaking illustrates a fifth, although less common, kind of communal shirtmaking, in which survivors take it upon themselves to collaborate on designing a shirt.

Commemorative shirts, shirts created to remember and honor a victim of violence or to bear witness for a survivor, are commonly the result of collaboration. Family and friends work on these shirts at home, collecting photographs, stories, and other memorabilia from the woman's life to use in the shirt design. While one person may actually execute the final design, many may have taken part in planning the shirt. Commemorative shirts are frequently among the most elaborate, with shirtmakers spending a long time with their design and execution.

When visitors see a Clothesline display, some are compelled to make a shirt themselves. For this reason, many large Clothesline Projects create a safe and confidential space for shirtmaking on or near the display site. Project organizers solicit funds and supplies in advance and stock the site with fabric, sewing notions, paints and markers so that visitors can design a shirt immediately. New and used shirts of many colors are available on site, having been donated by individuals, retailers, and manufacturers, or gathered from consignment shops, garage sales, Good Will, Salvation Army, and St. Vincent de Paul. A wide variety of shirts, blouses, and pullovers are contributed, but T-shirts predominate.

Some Clothesline Projects host public shirtmaking sessions at other times as well, fixing a date, time, and location for interested women to come and make a shirt. Volunteers are on location to not only organize supplies and orient shirtmakers, but more importantly to listen and encourage, to support shirtmakers in their grief, and to ensure the safety of shirtmakers during the experience. While most shirts made at these sessions join the collection of the sponsoring Clothesline

Project, they may be retained by the shirtmaker, or, if she resides in another locale, forwarded to a Clothesline Project in her home area.

Women's shelter staff, along with psychologists, therapists and counselors working with women who have been battered, raped or assaulted, may also organize shirtmaking sessions for individuals or groups, frequently as a therapeutic and empowerment opportunity. The public display of these shirts is an important component of healing and reclaiming power, so most of these shirts are contributed to local Clothesline Projects. Frequently these shirts are displayed following a therapeutic ritual in which a survivor participates by privately or publicly hanging her own shirt.

Regardless of the venue, the key function of organized shirtmaking is to provide a safe, supportive environment where women can express themselves without censure, sanction, fear of retribution, or violence. Shirtmaking is frequently a time when a woman feels particularly vulnerable; breaking the silence about violence is extremely risky for many women. By providing a sequestered site for shirtmaking, organizers are trying to protect shirtmakers from intrusion, insensitivity, and judgment, and provide an atmosphere which welcomes disclosure to break the silence and bear witness.

While organizers endeavor to create an environment conducive to disclosure, time, material, space and privacy constraints are reflected in the design of shirts. Organized shirtmaking sessions last only a few hours, and for this reason are rarely conducive to refined needlework or handwork. While paints and markers are usually in generous supply, embroidery rings, crochet hooks or knitting needles, are usually lacking, and the supply of fabric and sewing notions is often limited. Sewing machines are rarely available on-site. This precludes the most elaborate and time-consuming designs from being done onsite. These are usually done elsewhere and shipped to a Project or brought to a display. Shirts made at home are more likely to emphasize design than text, due in part to the protracted time permitted for

development of the design and the availability of space and supplies with which to embellish the shirt.

In marked contrast to the elaboration of homemade shirts, are shirts made impromptu at public shirtmaking sessions where only a minimum of material and supplies are available. Shirts created with the immediacy required at such shirtmaking sessions are more likely to emphasize text than design and result in shirts whose inscriptions express strong, transparent emotion, or what Scott would call "raw declarations."²³ The contracted time often precludes shirts with words and/or designs on two sides,²⁴ and therefore may result in a message that is unintentionally truncated and incomplete.

Although time, material, space and privacy may limit design options, they do not necessarily limit the aesthetic appeal of a shirt or its message. Nor are shirts made by women who identify themselves as artists necessarily more compelling than those made by women who don't even consider themselves creative. As the curator for the Clothesline Project display at the DeCordova Museum observed, "Some of them are not very well executed artistically, but people can see that it doesn't have to be some masterfully wrought thing. What's important is the truth of the message and the power of its visual expression."²⁵ His sentiment was echoed by an originator of the Clothesline, "Some of the shirts are works of art [and] some of them are so simple they say two words, but they reach you right here [in the 'gut']."²⁶

²³ Scott (1990:216) borrows this term from Claude Levi-Strauss.

²⁴ Paints, especially puff paints, take a long time to dry. There often isn't enough time at a public session for the first side to dry so that the shirt can be turned over and the design continued on the reverse side.

²⁵ Personal interview, July 19, 1996.

²⁶ Personal interview, July 15, 1996.

Shirtmaking Experiences in Iowa

Members of the support and advocacy group Beyond Abuse were looking for an activity to raise awareness of domestic violence in the Des Moines area when they learned of the Clothesline Project at a meeting of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Encouraged by reports of the effectiveness of Clothesline Project displays in other communities, they made the decision to create a local Clothesline Project despite not previously seeing a Clothesline shirt or display. They sent for an instruction packet from the national office of the Clothesline Project on Cape Cod, and then they solicited donations of new and used shirts, purchased puff paints and markers, scheduled the first shirtmaking session for their regular monthly meeting, and booked a room with eight-foot tables and chairs, supplying it with shirts, arts supplies and sewing notions.

Beyond Abuse members gathered in a meeting room at the women's shelter for three hours on a Monday evening. They were free to choose from an assortment of donated shirts, all of them yellow, beige, brown or white in accordance with the colors suggested for survivors and victims of domestic violence; several members brought new shirts with them for the occasion. Each woman sat in quiet contemplation of the vacant shirt spread before her on the table. Although the shirtmaking activity had been announced several weeks in advance to give each woman time to consider her design, most of the women said they had no idea what to put on their shirt until they looked upon it that evening. There was nervous tension in the room as each deliberated on her shirt in hushed silence, but loud sighs, exasperated curses, tears, and self-conscious laughter broke the silence. Beyond Abuse members had been together in the support group for over a year and had previously dealt with some of the more painful aspects of their abuse. Nevertheless the shirtmaking stirred strong emotion, rhyme, and reason, much of which they inscribed on their shirts that evening. As they worked, some members freely shared the meaning of their designs. This permitted others to speak out

about their shirts as well. The shirtmaking provided insights into their personal histories and stories that had previously not been recognized or disclosed.

Beyond Abuse conducts periodic shirtmaking sessions for domestic violence survivors who want to contribute to the Clothesline, but they rarely, if ever, sponsor public shirtmaking sessions. Most of the shirts in their collection come from shirtmaking sessions held for women living in the abuse shelter or participating in support groups there. Sometime after their first shirtmaking session Beyond Abuse acquired a fifteen-minute video entitled "The Clothesline Project."²⁷ This video explains the project and provides film footage of several displays, numerous shirts, and excerpted interviews from shirtmakers and display viewers. This video is shown during the shirtmaking session and examples of earlier-made shirts are also available to provide additional motivation and design ideas. In this way, Beyond Abuse provides information on the Clothesline Project, the purpose for shirts and displays, and instructions and models for making a shirt.

Of course not all shirts in the Beyond Abuse collection are made in organized shirtmaking sessions like these. Many come from women who preferred to make theirs at home rather than in a group setting. Shirts made at home are usually more elaborate. White commemorative shirts are among the most ornate in the Beyond Abuse collection and demonstrate the most variety in design and application. A few shirts have been forwarded to Beyond Abuse from a rape crisis center in the community, but none of these are red shirts and it is difficult to distinguish them from other shirts in the collection without very close attention to the detail of their text and design.²⁸

There is a great deal of similarity in the designs of Beyond Abuse shirts, owing to their almost exclusive focus on domestic abuse, to their adherence to the yellow, beige, brown and white color scheme, to their reliance on paints and

²⁷ Wellsby, Deborah. 1992. "The Clothesline Project." Part of the Progress Productions.

²⁸ Despite the high incidence of marital rape experienced by women who have been battered, this theme is almost undetectable in the yellow, beige, and brown shirts made by survivors for this Clothesline Project.

markers for applying the design, and perhaps to their inevitable imitation of one another's shirts during group shirtmaking sessions. Text is predominant in Beyond Abuse shirts; most shirts tell their story "verbally," often incorporating poetry and prose to convey the message. The most common mode of expression is words applied with paint or ink. Graphics and pictorial design are less common in these shirts, and collage, appliqué and embroidery are rare.

DVA/SAC, the joint domestic violence and sexual assault service agency which sponsors the Marshalltown Clothesline Project, hosts shirtmaking sessions in their women's shelter for survivors of battering, rape, and sexual abuse. They counsel and advocate for survivors of sexual assault and incest in addition to domestic violence, so their shirt collection contains shirts of every color, but because they conduct shirtmaking sessions at the women's shelter, few DVA/SAC shirts are elaborated with fabriccollage, embroidery, or appliqué which require a long time to produce. Instead their shirts use markers, paints, glitters and puff paints to convey designs which are textually oriented and simply executed.

The over-riding goal of DVA/SAC shirtmaking sessions is therapeutic. Shelter counselors structure shirtmaking to avoid interference with the potential for catharsis that shirtmaking provides. Although samples of Clothesline shirts are available for shirtmakers to get ideas for their own designs, DVA/SAC provides no video, no music, no refreshments, and no other activity which might detract from shirtmaking itself or "medicate" survivors from the healing pain that shirtmaking inevitably evokes.

Students and staff from Grinnell College also contribute shirts to the Marshalltown Clothesline Project, and their shirtmaking sessions contrast markedly from the therapeutic focus of the women's shelters. Grinnell shirtmaking is a deliberately politicized event, motivated, in part, by the college community's response to the abduction and murder of a Grinnell coed in 1992. Returning to Grinnell following Christmas break, Tammy Zywicki was abducted when her car broke down on an interstate highway in Illinois. Her body was found three weeks

later in a roadside ditch in Missouri. She had been sexually violated and stabbed to death. Grinnell students brought national attention to the abduction, worked tirelessly during search efforts, and were devastated by her gruesome death. As a result, they have been politically mobilized around violence against women ever since. While their public shirtmaking sessions provide opportunities for individual and communal healing from the devastation of Tammy's death, the sessions are conducted with a zest and fervor that is unabashedly political. Shirtmaking sessions focus student activities around violence prevention.

RVAP, the Rape and Violence Assault Prevention program in Iowa City, conducts the most aggressive shirtmaking campaign of all the projects in Iowa and this is evidenced by their accumulation of more than 400 shirts within the first 18 months of the Project. Public shirtmaking, similar to the curtained gazebo described on the pedestrian mall, is provided for all large public Clothesline displays. In addition to these impromptu opportunities for shirtmaking, several groups in Iowa City organize public shirtmaking sessions at the university, in the Women's Center, and in-house at domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers. RVAP provides a sequestered area for shirtmaking, and as demonstrated earlier, men are welcome to make and contribute shirts to the line.

Iowa City students join with activists from the women's community to conduct shirtmaking sessions on the campus of the University of Iowa. The general public is invited to make shirts, but the site is sequestered and invitations are usually directed to specific audiences rather than widely disseminated. Nonetheless, men and women alike may design shirts to address issues of violence against women. Indeed, the Tammy Zywicki abduction, rape, and murder have provided inspiration for several shirts in the collection of the Iowa City Clothesline Project as well.

Family Resources, Inc. of the Quad Cities also conducts an aggressive shirtmaking campaign, as organized activities in local women's shelters, in survivor support groups, and on-site at public displays. Staff and volunteers protect the

anonymity of survivors through private shirtmaking sessions, but they also provide a shirtmaking area at Clothesline displays that is open to public view. A large table outfitted with shirts and supplies is adjacent to the display, and its visibility boldly demonstrates the function of the Clothesline Project to bear witness and break the silence about violence against women. In this way, shirtmaking becomes not only a sequestered and disguised activity, but also an open expression of defiance and resistance.

Shirtmakers' Relationships to Their Shirts

While many of the shirts provided at shirtmaking sessions are donated, shirtmakers frequently select a shirt from their own wardrobe to design. They may choose a shirt that is associated with the violence in some way, such as a shirt worn at the time of an attack, or a shirt that has special significance, perhaps one in which the survivor feels particularly safe or comfortable. On the other hand, many shirtmakers prefer to use a brand new shirt or a recycled donation. This is particularly the case for shirtmakers who want a child's shirt to depict experiences of incest or childhood sexual abuse but have no such shirt available to them at home. This is also the case for women who want their shirt to be a "blank slate"—empty and void of any earlier association—on which they can metaphorically begin anew by inscribing not the past, but the future.

Shirtmakers and organizers alike express and demonstrate a very personal and almost mystical relationship with the shirts. I did not participate in a Beyond Abuse shirtmaking session, but I witnessed the power of their shirts during a focus group interview with Beyond Abuse members. The environment was warm and welcoming, the women friendly and enthusiastic. They were extremely articulate, speaking forcefully and convincingly. However, their explanations seemed matter-of-fact and sometimes stoic, if not guarded. Although the atmosphere was comfortable, the discussion was quite cerebral. When I asked them to hold their shirts, tell me the story of their shirtmaking and share the meaning of their designs,

however, the atmosphere in the room changed dramatically. Each woman immediately softened, became more subdued, visibly emotional and tearful. One stroked the fabric of the shirt on her lap, another repeatedly traced the raised text with her finger, another caressed the shirt as she held it to her bosom, and another draped it across her chest as though wearing it so that each time she referred to the design she was pointing to herself. There was no haphazard treatment of the shirts; they held them with tender care. And the interview took on a different timbre, less academic, less guarded and protected, deeper, more vulnerable, and more emotionally revealing.

A support group facilitator in the Quad Cities identified the source of some of the vulnerability experienced around the shirts. "The shirt is like somebody's journal or diary, very personal, very private. . .and they've made the choice to make it public." "Going public" induces fear and exhilaration, and shirtmaking sessions provide the first evidence of this. "They pour their emotions into this thing. When we made them [the Clothesline shirts], they started crying at the beginning and at the end they were hysterically laughing. It's a whole range of what you go through."

An incest survivor who for months stored shirtmaking material in the closet of her college dorm room remarked, "Once I started working on it, I had to finish it and get it out of the room. I couldn't keep it there. It took on a life of its own." But while this survivor felt compelled to give her shirt to a local Project, another felt compelled to remove her shirt from the line for a period of time. "I took my shirt back. I didn't think it was safe on the Clothesline."

Shirtmaking as Contested Space

The existence of organized shirtmaking sessions does not guarantee that shirtmaking will be a communal or collaborative activity. Sometimes there are only one or two women making shirts on-site, while at other times a large number of shirtmakers may be on-site and working on their shirts simultaneously. If these

women are strangers to one another, there may be little interaction, although volunteers may encourage shirtmakers to share their experiences in efforts to build community among them. But some women prefer to make their shirt in solitude, while others want the presence and support of other shirtmakers. Still others want to be accompanied by supportive friends or family members, but if their support-person is male, the shirtmaking area can become contested space.

Some survivors need, and insist on, a gender-segregated space for making shirts. Distrustful or uncomfortable around men, they feel safer making a shirt in an environment where none are present. In response to this need, some Clothesline Projects prohibit men from the shirtmaking area.²⁹ When survivors are accompanied to these displays by a male friends or family members, they must either deal with being abandoned of their primary support or forego shirtmaking altogether. Some Project organizers solve this problem by providing two spaces for shirtmaking, a woman-only space and a male-friendly space.

Not that women are the only shirtmakers, of course. Young girls who have suffered rape, incest or sexual abuse are always welcome to make shirts for the Clothesline, and many such shirts hang from Clothesline displays.³⁰ It is also common for girls and boys residing in domestic abuse shelters to make shirts alongside their mothers, because children are often survivors themselves or have witnessed the violence perpetrated on their mothers in the home. Shirtmaking may have important therapeutic or empowerment potential for these girls and boys as well.

The display of these shirts, however, may be contested, as is the making and display of shirts by men. Men may seek to make shirts in support of female friends

²⁹ This was the case at the national display of the Clothesline on the mall in Washington D.C. at the "Rally for Women's Lives" sponsored by the National Organization of Women in August of 1995.

³⁰ With the many child-sized shirts or shirts employing child-like design motifs, it is difficult to discern which were made by young girls reporting contemporary sexual abuse and which were made by adult women reporting sexual abuse in their childhood, but the predominant opinion is that adult women design the majority of such shirts as they reflect on their own childhood experiences.

or family members or to express solidarity with women survivors and victims. And on occasion a perpetrator may seek to make a shirt in penance for violence done to women. Rarely do such requests meet resistance. But many Clothesline Projects resist when men seek to make shirts addressing their own experiences of violence; they are resisting male appropriation of a medium that women have created, and they are resisting the care-taking role that is implied by men's insistence on participating without assuming responsibility for organizing a line of their own. But just as women have challenged the inclusion of men's shirts on the Clothesline, men have challenged their exclusion. Shirtmaking itself becomes the site of political struggle.

Indeed, the Cape Cod Clothesline Project, the very first line begun by the Cape Cod Women's Agenda, prohibits all men's shirts from the line. This prohibition is not a denial of the toll that violence takes on men. They recognize that some men are themselves survivors of domestic or family violence, childhood sexual abuse, or gay-bashing who earnestly want to break the silence and express solidarity with women by telling their story on the Clothesline. But Project organizers resist male appropriation of the line and of women's labor, and they oppose efforts to redirect the focus away from violence against women and toward violence in general, a focus that denies the gendered nature of domestic violence, rape, incest, and lesbian-bashing, and that obscures the unique characteristics of violence against women. Organizers are also mindful that women have historically been silenced about gendered violence and even shirts by the most supportive of men have a way of speaking "for" women and thus perpetuate women's silence.

As a point of compromise, Clothesline Project organizers have offered to assist men to establish their own Clothesline Project. Even the suggestion, however, places organizers in a paradoxical position of resisting the appropriation of their labor and care-taking role by offering to help men establish an "independent" line,

and relieving men of the responsibility of doing their own emotional work.³¹ Of course, this may be a moot point because to date, no men's group has initiated a project.

Men's challenges to their exclusion from the Clothesline, along with women's resistance to the dilution, diversion, or discrediting of their messages about violence against women, is no petty concern. It cuts to the heart of issues of domination and subordination. Clothesline Projects have been publicly accused of discrimination against men and denied funding due to their exclusionary policies. For example, funding for an Americorp sponsored Clothesline in Michigan was withheld until they agreed to allow men's shirts on the line.

The Cape Cod Clothesline Project remains steadfast in their exclusion of men's shirts, a issue about which there is some disagreement even among the original Cape Cod Women's Agenda members, but they have relented to including men's shirts on a secondary line established for educational display in high schools. The more than 300 local Clothesline Projects, however, are completely autonomous from the original Cape Cod Clothesline Project and free to make their own rules. Many allow, in fact invite, men to contribute shirts.

The designed shirt and/or clothesline motif have been adopted by other groups to raise awareness about other social issues. For example, there is a Gay men's T-shirt project in New York denouncing homophobia and gay-bashing, a T-shirt project in New York depicting the toll of street violence on urban teens, a "Pro-Life" clothesline in Ohio whose shirts decry abortion, and a clothesline in Albuquerque to raise awareness about breast cancer. While the adoption of designed shirts or the clothesline motif is not resisted by national Clothesline Project organizers, they ask that such groups refrain from using the "Clothesline Project" name in association with their shirtmaking and displays.

This final note on the adoption by other groups of designed shirts and clothesline motifs brings our discussion of the Clothesline Project full circle. We

³¹ The work of Arlie Hochschild (1975) is an influence here.

began by examining the antecedents to this folk medium, demonstrating how traditional forms and practices are adopted and perpetuated. We continued with the description of the variants and versions taken by the Clothesline Project, and concluded with a discussion of how these forms and practices are learned and disseminated through demonstration and imitation. Indeed, the imitation of the clothesline motif by groups other than those concerned with gendered violence demonstrates how these media evolve from traditional practices, are manifest in a variety of forms, and are perpetuated through intimate contact and learned through demonstration and imitation.

Conclusion

Chapters 3 through 5 of Section I were ostensibly designed to situate the Clothesline Project within the realm of folk culture and folklore, or more precisely, what I refer to as “folk media.” The characteristics that distinguish folk media—antecedents in traditional expressive forms, repetition in variety and version rather than identical replication, taught and learned through demonstration and imitation, performative aspects conducted within small group, usually face-to-face interaction—are each manifest in the Clothesline Project. The Clothesline Project has clear antecedents in traditional expressive forms, including weaving, needlework, quilting, and decorative arts, all of which have been deployed, in addition to their utilitarian functions, for social commentary and social protest. The Clothesline Project also takes precedence from women’s occupational practices within the home, many of which demonstrate how housework expresses both practical and aesthetic concerns while also communicating women’s attitudes, values, ideas, beliefs, experiences, and relationships. The Clothesline Project is repeated in a seemingly endless variety of shirts and display configurations. With more than 300 local projects worldwide organizing multiple exhibits of shirts every year, the variety and versions of shirts, as well as display locales and designs, seem infinite. No two shirts and no two displays are identical; their essence is changed

with each new rendering. Whether displayed indoors or out, suspended from clotheslines, mounted on the wall, hung from hangers on coat racks, strung from the ceiling, or paraded down main street, the shirts have characteristics that are unmistakably marked as Clothesline Project shirts. And the diversity of venues for public display are as varied as the shirt motifs and display designs, with exhibits staged in police stations, court houses, hospital corridors and emergency waiting rooms, the rotundas of state houses, school gymnasias, public parks, atriums of commercial buildings, store fronts, community centers, parades, shopping malls, and even the national mall in Washington, D.C. Shirtmaking is either a solitary activity undertaken by a survivor or ally after seeing another Clothesline Project shirt, or a communal activity orchestrated by experienced volunteers who guide individuals or small groups of women in designing shirts for display. While the mass media are enlisted to inform survivors and allies of the Clothesline Project, shirtmaking and display organizing is learned almost exclusively through demonstration and imitation. The variety and version of shirts, displays, and venues is matched by the diversity of groups that sponsor or participate, and the novel and innovative ways the Clothesline Project is performed or expressed. Each display is different, created and recreated by organizers, shirtmakers, and viewers.

Perhaps the more important purpose of this section, however, was to demonstrate Scott's (1990) contention that folk culture provides evidence of a hidden transcript generated and elaborated by subordinate groups in sites sequestered from dominant group members. Via *thick description* I not only introduced the reader to the Clothesline Project, but previewed evidence that a hidden transcript exists to counter dominant assertions about gendered violence. That hidden transcript has been generated and elaborated by women who have experienced male violence, and it refutes hegemonic discourse about violence against women, discrediting popular notions about battery, rape, incest, lesbian-bashing, and murder, as well as misconceptions about victims, survivors, and perpetrators of gendered violence.

Section II will detail the processes by which the Clothesline Project resists gendered violence, female subordination, and patriarchal domination. I will demonstrate how the shirts and displays constitute the text of the hidden transcript, along with ways they constitute the sequestered site in which that hidden transcript is generated and elaborated. I will explain how each shirt, each display, and the Clothesline Project *en toto* enact the infrapolitics that enable that hidden transcript to be publicly declared in a saturnalia of power. I will demonstrate how the literal and symbolic properties of shirt text and design, and display organizing and configuration, along with metaphors and rituals of the body, dress, laundry and washday constitute, contain, and convey anti-hegemonic discourse of women as a subordinate group. The cumulative evidence will confirm the merits of Scott's theory to gender-based domination.

SECTION II
THE CLOTHESLINE PROJECT AS "ARTS OF RESISTANCE"

CHAPTER 6

THE CLOTHESLINE PROJECT AND SHIRTS AS THE HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* Scott challenges theories of ideological hegemony by arguing that subordinates have neither dominated nor domesticated consciousness but rather the “imaginative capacity. . .to reverse and negate dominant ideologies” (pp. 90-91). While Scott concedes that there are two possible situations in which subjugated individuals may come to accept, or even legitimate, their own subordination, he stresses the temporary nature of these hegemonizing influences. In one situation, subordinates may have reasonable hope of someday being elevated to positions of power, and for this, they will not only remain patient for a period of time, but may actually conspire in the subordination of others. In the other situation, subordinates may become so atomized or isolated that they lack the discursive freedom necessary for the generation of a hidden transcript. This isolation is usually the result of intense surveillance and fear, but geographic and linguistic barriers also contribute. “[T]he impossibility of validating one’s feelings and anger with others in the same situation—of creating an offstage hidden transcript, a different social reality—allowed the captors to exercise a temporary hegemony,” according to Scott (p. 82).

Despite this concession, Scott ultimately contends that both conditions are so stringent as to be inapplicable to the large-scale forms of domination addressed in his work (p. 85). But his disclaimer is troubling in light of his reluctance to apply his theory to gender domination. Recalling Scott’s statement that “in the case of women. . .imagining an entirely separate existence for the subordinate group requires a more radical step than it has for serfs or slaves. . .the case of gender highlights the importance of specifying exactly how separate spheres are,” we are led to conclude that gender relations deprive women of the discursive freedom needed to articulate a hidden transcript. Such a situation, according to

Scott, makes subjugated groups vulnerable to "temporary hegemony." Is he then implying that women "have come to accept, and even legitimate, their own subordination?" Such would be a common assertion of the public transcript used to justify patriarchal authority and gender domination, but it flies in the face of Scott's main assertion that subordinated classes are relatively unconstrained at the level of thought and ideology since they can in secluded settings speak with comparative safety" (pp. 90-91). The sequestered speech to which Scott refers is the hidden transcript.

In systems of domination, subordinates are frequently subjected to indignities to which they cannot respond, and their survival often depends on the ability to "swallow one's own bile, choke back one's rage, and conquer the impulse to physical violence" (p. 37). This "systematic *frustration of reciprocal action*," shapes much of the content of the hidden transcript, according to Scott. When, in sequestered sites, subordinates are able to articulate their frustration, the result is often a hidden transcript that, in its most elementary form, is filled with indignation, fury and rage, what Scott refers to as "raw declarations."

Raw Declarations

One of the first characteristics evident in Clothesline Project shirts is that their text and designs are filled with raw declarations (973). Shirts hurl textual epithets at male perpetrators of violence and they rail against insensitive institutions and their representatives. Long repressed rage explodes in words and images across shirts. Anger and disgust inscribed on the shirts erupt in explosive accusations. "I hate you!" "You bastard!" "Feel better now, Fucker?" These raw declarations indict and excoriate the perpetrator. "How could you?" "How dare you?" "Who do you think you are?" The shirts reiterate these interrogations. From the relative safety of the Clothesline, shirts rebelliously taunt, accuse, denounce, and rebuke the batterer, the rapist, the abuser, the pedophile, the homophobe, and the murderer. They likewise incriminate and reproach the complicity of institutions and viewers. Raw

declarations are a blatant, undisguised aspect of the political discourse of subordinates. The inscription of raw declarations on Clothesline shirts makes public the hidden transcript.

Clothesline Project shirts narrate in the most graphic ways the subjective experiences of survivors of violence. Scott's concern, however, is "less with the subjective experience of an isolated individual in openly declaring a previously hidden transcript than on the collective experience of groups that have shared a more or less common subjugation and, hence, a more or less shared hidden transcript" (p. 210). It is to this collective expression that we now turn.



Figure 1. "Bill." Raw declarations are not only expressed linguistically, but stylistically as well. The power of this rendering demonstrates a raw declaration that is both visual and visceral. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

Interrupting Prevailing Discourses

In her analysis of the Clothesline Project as a therapeutic text, Julier (1994) explains that shirts provide a means for transforming the rhetoric about violence against women. According to Julier,

The rhetoric of the Clothesline Project. . .seeks to break through current discursive practices about its subject. . . .The repeated juxtapositions of rage and hope, pleading and proclaiming disrupt any inclination to prefer a single reading. Because it invites other women to participate, to join individual voices to the collective, it offers what may be an alternative way of constituting the meaning of their experience. . . .Adding one's voice to a collective—and thereby entering a different discursive space—invites a woman to re-vision 'what have been experienced as personal failings' as, instead, 'socially produced conflicts. . .shared by many women in similar social positions'. . . .The Clothesline Project creates a discursive context. . .it makes room for—and invites women to create, find, construct—a subject position alternative to what has been a dominant discourse about violence and women. By constituting space in which a woman has control over what is said and how her experience is represented, the Clothesline Project re-constructs the power relations within which the 'text' of her experience is voiced. What has been spoken of only as personal is re-configured as part of a social pattern—a socially produced conflict shared by many other women—and therefore subject to change through collective action. It creates a discursive context which is alternative to the discursive contexts of other social structures—for instance, within the family, a marriage or other sexual relationship, within the courts, within peer groups. As such, it provides a means to resist the more visible and loudly-voiced meanings ascribed to her experience: it didn't happen, it's all your fault, why didn't you keep quiet, why weren't you smarter, why were you out alone anyhow. You find that on the shirts these words, these lines said to women, are often reproduced and then often countered. The writer talks back to them (pp. 251-254).

Although she frames her argument in terms of the subjective experience of shirtmakers and their individual responses to what Scott would recognize as the public transcript, Julier recognizes the Clothesline Project as a collective effort to interrupt prevailing discourse about gendered violence.

Discursively Negating the Social Contract

The public transcript is designed to legitimate the dominant group's claim to power, in part by providing the rationale and justification for inequality. The public transcript implies a social contract, a normative agreement on the responsibilities and duties that can be expected of the dominant group by subordinates. The dominant group is vulnerable to criticism if they fail to perform appropriately under the social contract (Moore 1987). Subordinates can gain an advantage if they are able to expose any breach in the social contract, either on the part of individual elites or the collectivity of dominant group members. Scott explains,

Inasmuch as the principles of inequality unavoidably claim that the ruling stratum performs some valuable social function, its members open themselves to attack for the failure to perform these functions honorably or adequately. The basis of the claim to privilege and power creates, as it were, the groundwork for a blistering critique of domination on the terms invoked by the elite. . . Subordinates, then, will use the language of the public transcript in their critique of the powerful (p. 103).

In other words, the social contract can be "discursively negated" by conduct that violates its tenets. If the public transcript contains the claims to legitimacy or rationale for an advantaged position, then we should expect the hidden transcript to refute these claims, specifically to critique the failure of men and patriarchal institutions to honor and protect women. Messages from Clothesline Project shirts level just such a critique.

Religious institutions, specifically the Catholic church, comes under attack by the long green T-shirt that declares in vibrant red, yellow, and orange "Our Father, You Are Not From Heaven—Molested by a Priest." In similar fashion, a second shirt veritably echoes the first. This shirt in actuality is a cleric's black tunic replete with the message "Hallowed be thy SHAME." What is significant about these shirts is that neither identifies the particular individual perpetrator; neither reports, for example, "molested by Father Patrick." Instead, they appropriate the language of The Lord's Prayer, a sacramental discourse of the church, to discursively negate the

church's legitimacy claims regarding their guidance and protection of members of their flock.

Medical and health care institutions are also implicated by messages on shirts for failing to recognize, failing to intervene, ignoring or discrediting survivors' testimony, and equating women's resistance with pathology. A shirt that graphically illustrates the dehumanizing experience of an impersonal gynecological exam following the shirtmaker's rape is a discomfiting indictment of the insensitivity and skepticism of some health care professionals. The woman is partially clad and prostrate on the examination table with feet up in stirrups; the desolate expression on her face provides a discursive negation of the physician's claim as a helping or caring professional. Rather than depicting a nurturing, protective environment, the shirtmaker accentuates the cold, detached indifference of the doctor, rendering herself as an objectified, albeit terrified, specimen.

Another shirt targets two institutions simultaneously. It begins, "I am angry! On March 13, 1983 I was raped in Falmouth and beaten in Falmouth by a masked perpetrator. I was further violated on another level by the doctor and the police department by their insensitivity. Statistical records for 1983 show 0 rapes for the year in the town of Falmouth." As this shirt demonstrates, law enforcement comes under attack by these critiques in addition to the medical establishment. In another example, twin shirts expose the badge number and department insignia of an officer who battered his wife and sexually molested his daughter, implicating not just the perpetrator, but the police department as well.

The legitimacy of the criminal justice system is challenged by many Clothesline Project shirts. Usually these shirts refer to judicial responses to rape. The testament from parents to their child inscribed on a teddy-bear adorned pink T-shirt reads,

To our daughter XXXX (16). He stole your smile on 11/25/94 He stole your laugh He stole the funny girl we knew He stole your childlike innocence Left with emptiness & sadness No smile No laughter No cheer For our daughter

We always knew, there are only many, many tears. We love you, Mom and Dad. . . .He was found not guilty.

Likewise, a red shirt reports, "Found guilty of stealing two jackets. . .but not for rape." A light blue T-shirts explains, "Rape is a life sentence for me. He only received 3 years." And another red T-shirt declares, "I am a rape survivor. Men who do this crime. . .should be punished."

But shirts also critique the Court's action or inaction in cases of domestic violence, battering and assault. The shirt with appliqué metal bars on a yellow shirtfront, locking behind them a tranquil domestic scene, discursively negates the legal system's rebuttal of self-defense as it identifies a woman who conspired to have her battering husband killed. The shirt reads, "Survivor of abuse. Victim of the system" and then it prints the Pledge of Allegiance around the border of an American flag, punctuating the words "liberty? And justice? For all???????" with questions marks. Another shirt reproofs the wisdom of judicial authority with a message that explains and implores, "The judge gave my children to my batterer, so I went back. I'm still there. Pray for us!"

Perhaps no institution is criticized more stridently by the shirts than is the institution of marriage or the family (Figure 2), for not only are battering husbands and incestuous fathers identified as perpetrators of horrendous abuse, but the very rhetoric of marital bliss and family values is appropriated to level the critique.

A short-sleeved yellow shirt is inscribed with "So you say you want me for a wife? How many are you planning on collecting? And how do you plan to win them by assaulting them all?" The hint of a marriage proposal in this shirt is met with a familiar refrain in another shirt, but with an unexpected twist. This bright yellow shirt retorts, "Until death do us part. . .NO WAY! Never with you, A.K.S." It is as though this shirtmaker anticipated the response of another, for on the front of a third yellow shirt appears a listing of "MARRIAGE VOWS." It reads, "To have and to hold, Not To hit and to strangle. Through sickness and in health, Not Through beatings and cut downs. Until death do we part, Not Until you have killed me."

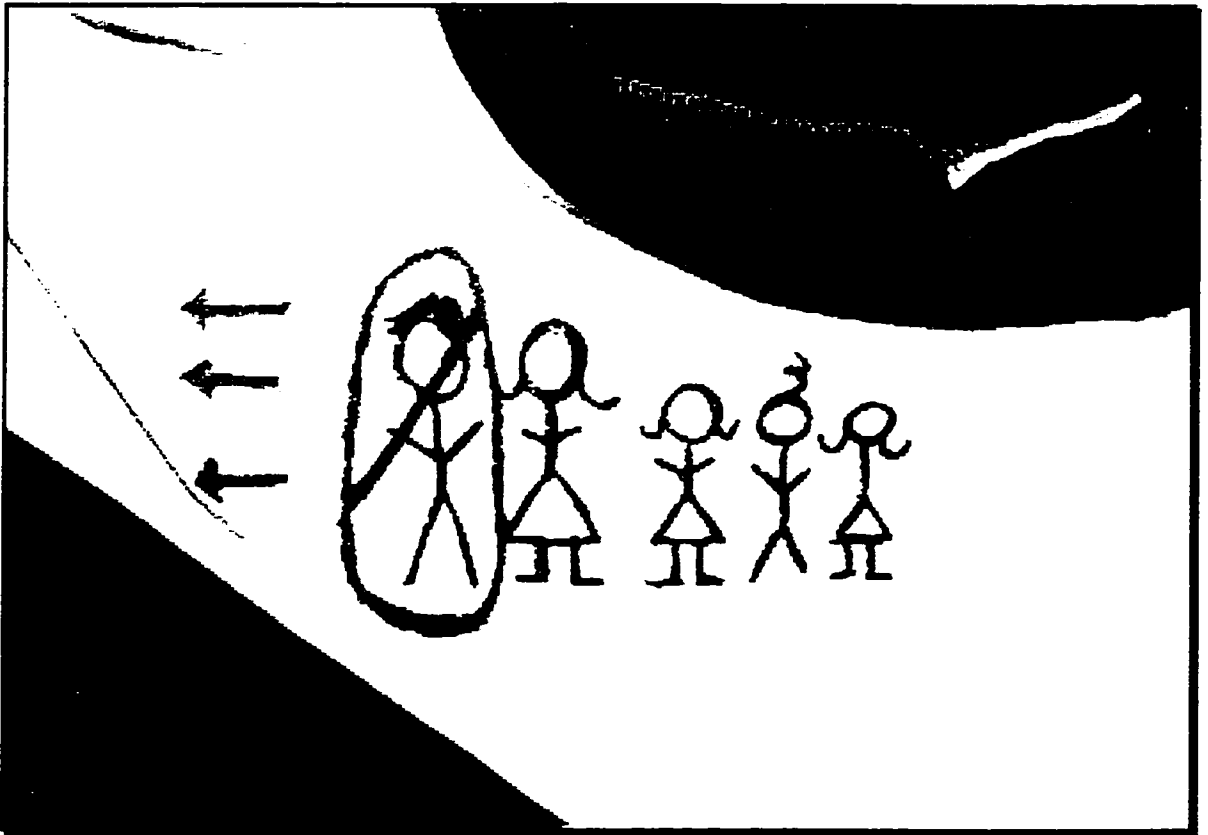


Figure 2. "Daddy Must Go." The image of the "ideal" American family is betrayed by the expulsion of the father for incest. The discursive negation of rhetoric about the idealized family is accomplished by rendering the survivor, the youngest child and daughter, alienated from her family (turned outward toward the viewer) and deformed by her father's sexual predation (she has no arms). Photo by P. C. Hipple.

Scott argues that the conflict inherent in the discursive negation of institutional authority and the legitimacy of elites will "take a dialogic form in which the language of the dialogue will borrow heavily from terms of dominant ideology prevailing in the public transcript" (p. 102). By appropriating religious vestments, official insignia, oaths of office, sacred texts, and secular norms then juxtaposing them with evidence of gendered violence, Clothesline Project shirts subvert the legitimating intent of these symbols. In this way, the Clothesline Project exposes individual and institutional breaches in the social contract and discursively negates the rationale for patriarchal authority and subordinating gender relations.

Blatant and Latent Meaning in the Hidden Transcript

Tilly (1991) observed that domination is theorized almost exclusively at the systems or macro-level, while resistance is theorized almost exclusively at the individual or micro level. This disparity in levels of analysis blurs our view of resistance to domination. By focusing on the collective expression of the shared hidden transcript, Scott provides us a space to study resistance to domination on the macro level as well. But in this space the messages of resistance are not as blatant. "The undeclared ideological guerrilla war that rages in this political space," writes Scott, "requires that we enter the world of rumor, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity" (p. 137). In much the same way that Radner and Lanser advocate "careful and respectful scholarship" to detect women's coded communication, Scott warns that much of subordinates' political discourse and action requires interpretation "because it is intended to be cryptic and opaque" (p. 137). In this political space we might expect the hidden transcript to be latent rather than blatant.

What do shirts mean? What do shirts hanging on a clothesline mean? Perhaps more important, how do they mean? How is meaning made? What do shirts and clotheslines have to do with female subordination and violence against women? What messages do Clothesline Project shirts and displays convey? How do the shirts and the Clothesline constitute a hidden transcript of women subordinated by male violence? How is their hidden transcript of grievances, refutations, and resistance generated, elaborated, and publicly declared? In what ways does the Clothesline Project resist gender domination? In other words, how do folk media communicate resistance to domination, and how do folk media mean? Meanings attributed to the material and symbolic elements of the Clothesline Project provide a window onto the latent content of the hidden transcript as well as means by which that hidden transcript is generated, elaborated, and public declared in resistance to gender domination. It is to these meanings that our attention now turns.

CHAPTER 7

THE MEANING OF COLOR

There is a wealth of folk, literary, and psychological evidence to suggest that people make deep, resonant, connotative meanings of color.³² For this reason, one of the first places I looked for either blatant or latent meaning in the Clothesline Project was to the colors chosen by originators, organizers, and shirtmakers for the various shirts. The original color scheme suggested by the Cape Cod Women's Agenda denoted various kinds of violence against women: red and orange for rape and sexual assault; yellow and beige for battering and domestic abuse; blue and green for incest and childhood sexual abuse; purple and lavender for assaults on women who were, or were perceived to be, lesbian; and white for women who were murdered or committed suicide in response to violent trauma³³. For these color choices the originators were motivated more by practical concerns than by symbolism. Their goals were to provide a "visual statistic" of the incidence and prevalence of different kinds of gendered violence while illustrating the similarities, patterns and connections between them. They wanted to do these things in a way that was visually and aesthetically appealing.

Indeed, for some project organizers there was no symbolic association with the colors. When I asked originators of the Clothesline Project what the colors "meant," several replied, "there was no 'meaning' to the colors. We just started assigning colors for different kinds of violence." One of the Cape Cod Women's Agenda members remarked "I never knew which was which and never got into the colors. They didn't mean anything to me."

For other members, however, the colors had symbolic significance. "I remember some discussion about using black shirts for the women who died. . . There is an analysis around racism that says as we use the color black for

³² Byrne and Hilbert 1997; Oxford 1997; Hardin and Maffi 1997; Birren 1963; Gage 1993; Nassau 1998; Kuehni 1997.

³³ Pink shirts for rape and brown shirts for domestic violence were added subsequently.

everything negative, we are setting up a dichotomy with race. You can look at 'blackmail' and all the other things that we use 'black' for. It feeds those racist attitudes." As a result of these discussions, the Cape Cod Women's Agenda chose white shirts to commemorate victims of violence. One Agenda member observed, "White is the Eastern color of mourning. [It] is the perfect color for women who have been killed. . . .It's a release from this world and suffering. White is the color for me for purity, and death is. . . .a transition into that pure state. The white light at death is the spiritual path; it guides them."

While other colors held no symbolic meaning for the Cape Cod Women's Agenda as a whole, the meanings of colors for individual members undoubtedly influenced the group's color choices, even if those meanings were not articulated at the time, for in later interviews several of the Agenda members were adamant: "They are just the 'right' colors. What, you're going to do yellow for rape? That just doesn't make sense. . . .Red is the right color for rape. . . .There's an intensity to that color." "The color red is 'natural' for rape." "Red for rape as rage-filled." "I associate blood with rape."

"I don't remember specific reasons for each of the colors, but I do remember that domestic abuse shouldn't be a 'cheerful' color." "But I would have used blue for battering, because you turn black and blue." "In this culture people often see pink and blue for little children [girls and boys respectively]. We often divide it up along sex lines, which I believe is an important thing to confront." "Lavender and purple for lesbian-bashing is the 'right' color too." For some Cape Cod Women's Agenda members, however, the color scheme was seen as an imposition. "It felt to me a little restrictive—to try to organize that and force it or standardize it."

Indeed, the color scheme has been somewhat problematic. Although it was intended merely as a guideline, some Clothesline Project organizers followed it to the letter, unwittingly restricting the color choices of shirtmakers. Many women have survived multiple kinds of violence and the color scheme potentially constrains the expression of their multiple experiences. More troublesome though are the

limitations that the color scheme placed on representing other kinds of gendered violence not anticipated by the Cape Cod Women's Agenda in their original plans. As local Clothesline Projects proliferated, organizers wanted to designate shirts for pornography, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, female feticide and infanticide, bride-burning and dowry murders, and rape as a strategy of war and ethnic cleansing. They wanted shirts in tribute to *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*—the women who lost loved ones and experienced the violence of *desaparecido* during repressive regimes in Chile and Argentina. And they wanted shirts in recognition of the violence of gender discrimination in health care, and the feminization of poverty. But all the colors of the spectrum had previously been assigned to rape, battering, incest and lesbian-bashing, and so were unavailable to differentiate between other kinds of gendered violence. "We used up all the colors in the initial idea. . .there weren't enough colors to go around," reported Agenda members.

But while organizers expressed regrets that there weren't "enough colors to go around," shirtmakers seemed undaunted. They would choose a shirt color most salient to them, choose a multi-color shirt, incorporate multiple colors into the designs of their shirt, or create multiple shirts of different colors to express their different experiences. And if these strategies weren't sufficient, they could always make their point with text alone or with text supplementing the graphics on their shirt.

This is not to suggest that the color scheme is unimportant to shirtmakers. To the contrary, color is quite significant, for both instrumental and expressive reasons. Many shirtmakers chose their shirt color not only to denote the type of violence they had survived, but also as an important design element, to connote mood, to express identity, or to embed esoteric meanings. In interviews, shirtmakers would readily admit, "that's exactly the right color for my experience." "For me, those colors are really right on!" Some shirtmakers deliberately used the most vibrant shades of color to design their shirts. "I wanted it to stand out, to

show my pride, a bright yellow that says 'I will survive.'" "I wanted a loud color, one that would shout, not one that was muted." Of particular importance to many shirtmakers was that the color code suggested uniformity, solidarity, and community. "To be a part of this, one of many, many. . .I'm just in awe of the number of women. It's overwhelming." The color guide not only allowed them to identify with other shirtmakers who had been similarly violated and abused, but also to demonstrate their solidarity and sense of community with these anonymous shirtmakers. They did this by conforming to the suggested color scheme.

This color "coding" is an example of what Radner and Lanser identify as *explicit coding*. It is obvious to that some shirts are encoded with color—the colors denoting different kinds of violence—and this code can be deciphered by almost anyone because promotional material, posters and shirt text announce the meaning of the code. But there may be other coding as well, less decipherable coding, both *complicit* and *implicit*. For example, Cape Cod Women's Agenda members agreed to refrain from the use of black shirts for victims of violence because they wanted to avoid the negative denotations of "black" that feed racist stereotypes. Yet, it is unlikely that viewers to the Clothesline recognize or decipher white shirts as a *complicit code* to resist racism.³⁴ Likewise, individual shirtmakers may have chosen their shirts for reasons of practicality, but it is also likely that they chose a specific shirt color or design colors to encrypt hidden meaning, meaning that is only accessible to those initiated by violence.

The colors of shirts play a role in resistance to domination, whether it be resistance to racism by refusing to denote death with black, resistance to gender stereotyping by suggesting blue shirts for young girls, resistance to being silenced by the deliberate selection of "loud" rather than "muted" colors, or the resistance to homophobia by the use of lavender shirts that demonstrate gay pride. Individual

³⁴ Unfortunately, quite the opposite intention could be read into the use of white shirts, because the association of white with purity and spirituality may mirror unconscious racism and act as an *implicit code* for the very racist attitudes they are challenging. In addition, the scarcity of black shirts from the line may be interpreted as exclusionary.

shirtmakers may be expressing messages of resistance in the color shirts they've chosen. Of course shirt colors may merely be a reflection of what was available at the time and have no particular meaning. Because it is most readily decipherable, it is the instrumental or denotative meanings of the colors rather than their expressive or connotative meanings that hold the most immediate significance to viewers. Paradoxically, both the strong preference for certain colors on the part of some survivors as well as the indifference to colors on the part of other survivors result in many shirtmakers deviating from the recommended color scheme. Indeed, the Cape Cod Clothesline, the very first Clothesline Project, has all but abandoned the color scheme. "We originally paid a lot of attention to the color code, but now we don't."

There is a particular element of the color scheme that holds meaning for many organizers, shirtmakers, and viewers alike, and that is its suggestion of the rainbow. When arrayed, the shirt colors create a full spectrum. Any allusion to a prism or rainbow, however, is coincidental according to Cape Cod Women's Agenda members. But despite this lack of intention, the rainbow is exactly the image conjured and the meaning imputed for many organizers, survivors, and viewers. The Family Resources Clothesline Project, for example, has even incorporated the rainbow image into promotional material about their project, spelling out "The Clothesline Project" in spectral color. A woman who facilitates shirtmaking sessions and insures that every color shirt is available, was adamant about this imagery.

The Rainbow really makes you think of a promise, a symbol of hope, a symbol of good things to come. I think that's one of the reasons the Clothesline is so important. It's not a depressing thing. . .I always leave with a good feeling. . .This touches people but leaves them with hope that there is something we are doing to try to make it better.

Her friend and colleague sees the colors as a metaphor for the empowerment experienced by many survivors of violence, even stating it metaphorically, "Yeah, after the rain there's a rainbow."

CHAPTER 8

THE MEANING OF SHIRTS

Shirts provide the tablet on which messages of resistance are written. In this way shirts convey the hidden transcript. Discursive messages on shirts are, perhaps, the more accessible evidence of the hidden transcript, but non-discursive qualities of the shirts refute popular conceptions of female subordination and violence against women in ways that are equally compelling. Indeed, while shirts communicate the hidden transcript, symbolic attributes of the shirts actually constitute part of the hidden transcript as well.

Originators of the Clothesline Project explain that they chose shirts as the medium of expression for reasons of practicality and functionality. They wanted a medium that was lightweight, durable, portable, transferable, easy to store and easy to use. At the same time they wanted a medium that provided visual continuity and a large surface or “canvas” on which to place designs and/or text. More importantly, however, they wanted a medium that was closely associated with the personal, one that would represent an individual woman. While bolt fabric, linens, drapery, bed sheets, and towels are associated with women through their traditional domestic duties, and would provide an adequate canvas and visual continuity, Project originators argued that such textiles lacked the individuality suggested by apparel. But if they wanted a medium that would represent an individual woman, why did they choose shirts? Why not dresses, gowns, capes, coats, skirts, pants, or lingerie?

The ubiquitous nature of shirts in the United States, especially T-shirts, made them affordable and widely accessible through purchase, recycling, or donation. In addition, the common use of iconographic T-shirts in Western culture to advertise products, designate group membership, or express social commentary meant their use was immediately transferable to the conveyance of other messages, such as those about women’s experiences with violence. One Project originator reflected,

“well, I use myself to advertise ideas, but certainly in this society, T-shirts, message T-shirts of all sorts—political, commercial, silly, crude—have become so universal.” However practical concerns such as these convey little of the meaning of the Clothesline Project. Rather it is the expressive and symbolic qualities of shirts that make them a particularly suitable vehicle to convey messages of resistance to male domination. Not merely a canvas on which survivors record artistic interpretations of their experience, shirts inscribe messages of resistance.

Shirts are the official document that records the hidden transcript and, through shirtmaking sessions and display, they are the means by which the hidden transcript is elaborated and publicly declared. The discursive messages on Clothesline Project shirts challenge hegemonic discourses about women, violence, gender relations, and institutional responsibility. They refute popular conceptions of female subordination and violence against women, expressing and enacting resistance to gender domination through design elements as well as text. The cultural role of clothing plays a critical part in this resistance.

The Social Significance of Textiles and Clothing

Cross-cultural perspectives on textiles and clothing help us to understand the psychic, therapeutic, social, and political importance of shirts on the Clothesline. In their reflections on dress of the Karen people of Thailand, Hamilton and Hamilton (1989) describe clothing as a “pan-human expression of culture and therefore of being human. . . [Clothing] can be an extremely powerful, symbolic, ritualized way of expressing and reinforcing subtle values, relationships, and meanings in human culture” (p. 22). Karen dress, for example, demonstrates how clothing encourages individual psychological adaptation to societal expectations. Wahab (1996) describes Nigerian textiles as “amplifiers” of the human community because they invoke physical, psychological, spiritual, and social well-being. The warmth of cloth promotes good health, dress hides bodily deformities and imperfections, and thereby heightens self-esteem, while the color and rhythmic pattern of designed cloth holds

healing properties. Textiles also facilitate identification, interaction and social cohesion. Littrell (1985) argues that individuals use textiles and clothing to convey information about themselves and facilitate social encounters with others. She illustrates this with the ways Ghanaian wax prints are worn as personal commentary about aspects of daily life. And in his study of silk-screened iconographic T-shirts in Australia, Symes (1991) identifies T-shirts embellished with slogans and images as "vestimentary placards." He describes them as garments in which "textile becomes textuality" (p. 88) which conveys key information about the wearer.

Eicher and Erekosima (1987) argue that the delicate, perishable nature of fabric is symbolic of relationships within Kalabari families and communities. Such symbolism accounts for the use of cloth displays to honor the life of deceased Kalabari, to promote the catharsis of grief among the mourners, and to visually represent and reinforce the social fabric of Kalabari life. Likewise, in their discussion of the Hmong New Year, Lynch, Detzner, and Eicher (1995) demonstrate the ritual importance of clothing by describing the ceremony in which community members walk through passageways constructed of clothing bundles. Movement through the clothing bundles symbolically undresses and redresses participants, stripping them of old cares, purging them of evil influences, and then visually reintegrating them into a renewed community.

The symbolic potency of textiles and clothing extends beyond their use for personal adjustment or ritual transformation, however, to their ability to communicate interpersonal as well as international resistance. Michelman and Eicher demonstrate how gender and power are being societally negotiated at the level of the body with an example from the dress of Kalabari men and women. "Social control of women, visually defined and reinforced through gender-dichotomized patterns of indigenous dress, has helped protect the cultural, political, and economic domains of Kalabari men" (p. 129). As a result, the adoption of traditionally masculine elements of dress by Kalabari women represents resistance to male control. Arguing that dress, as an extension of the physical body, also

represents the social body, they reinforce Douglas' (1982) theory that conflict, symbolically represented by the body, is an attempt by social institutions to resolve contradictions in societal values.

In pan-cultural experiences, Femenías (1994) described how the use of certain material and symbolic media by fashion artists in Peru was actually a strategy enacted to minimize appropriation by dominant Western influences. And Michelman and Eicher (1995) discussed how clothing has been used in India and Nigeria to communicate ethnic identity and political resistance to imperialism.

This research provides critical insights into the meaning that textiles and clothing hold for people, as well as their instrumental and expressive use in resistance to domination. The question before us with the Clothesline Project is why would women choose shirts hanging from a clothesline to critique and resist gendered violence and challenge patriarchal domination?

The Role of Shirts in Resistance to Gender Domination

Just as clothing is imbued with a variety of meanings cross-culturally, shirts in Western culture are key signifiers as well. They articulate or evoke bodily sensations, experience and ideas through which Clothesline Project participants and viewers make meaning and come to recognize and understand the subversive quality of a display. Shirts communicate resistance through myriad ways, including: their role in disguise to provide anonymity and license to survivors; their role as body surrogate, protective armor and active agent; their use as a uniform to suggest courage and community; their democratic and androgynous qualities; their allusion to figuration and resistance to objectification; their role in ritual; their metaphor for revelation and concealment; and their significance as a feminine form or genre.

Disguised Resistance: Anonymous Shirts

Scott (1990) reminds us that surveillance plays a key role in power relations between dominant and subordinate groups, so members of subordinate groups must engage in disguise to insinuate their resistance into the public forum. Disguise techniques include those intended to disguise the message as well as those intended to disguise the messenger. Scott identifies ways subversive messages are disguised by linguistic codes, gossip, rumor, euphemism, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, dialects, and gestures. Radner and Lanser (1993) outline specific coding strategies that women use in cultural expressions to camouflage messages of protest and resistance. Rebellious messengers are disguised by means of costume, cover, and crowd. Costumes, masks, false papers, camouflage, and the "veil of darkness" are used to disguise messengers and protect their identities. Individual identity is also protected by the anonymity of the crowd, being an indistinguishable one of many, and benefiting from the safety in numbers.

Shirts on the Clothesline confer and safeguard the anonymity of survivors (Figure 3). They are the costume or mask, the cloaking device, as it were, behind which women's stealth resistance is enacted. Assembly provides shirtmakers a measure of anonymity and disguise as well; the veritable number of shirts in many Clothesline displays provides the "crowd" in which the individual identity of survivors can get lost and be protected. While violence threatens to deny a woman agency, a shirt becomes her agent. She can express resistance while shielding her identity behind her shirt. The shirt carries the message while it disguises the messenger.

"To break the silence around domestic violence—to give testimony to one's own victimization—is an act of courage and empowerment," said a national organizer. "For many of the women, making a shirt and hanging it is their first articulation of the violence, the first time they have ever disclosed, privately or publicly, that they have been battered, raped, incested, sexually assaulted, or beaten." Such a disclosure places many survivors at mortal risk. The anonymity



Figure 3. "A Clothesline Project Display." Iowa City, Iowa in October of 1997. Shirts mask the identity of shirtmakers who wish to remain anonymous. The assembly of 400 shirts provide additional disguise—being one shirt of many provides another level of anonymity, "safety in numbers," and the ability to get "lost in the crowd." Photo by P. C. Hipple

afforded by the disguise of the shirt, as well as the sheer number of shirts displayed, makes the testimony of survivors and their allies possible.

Although many women boldly declare themselves on the Clothesline, by placing their names or photographs on shirts, by publicly hanging their shirts at a display, or by volunteering at a display, and publicly acknowledging that they are survivors, other women need the mask of anonymity to be able to speak. The shirt provides that mask and provides survivors a relatively safe vehicle to express, in words, design, or both, what happened or is happening to them. A local project organizer provided a metaphor appropriate to the medium—shirts on the Clothesline allow women to break their silence *"without putting themselves on the line."*

By camouflaging the identity of individuals, the disguise offered by Clothesline shirts strengthens the credibility of their testimony. One function of the public transcript is to distort and discredit the experiences of subordinated people. The public transcript does this by exaggerating atypical situations or fabricating information about individuals and groups, portraying them in negative light. The deficiencies and inadequacies of subordinate groups are then used to justify existing power relations. Often facilitated by dominant discourse that focuses on individual personalities, presenting their idiosyncrasies as though they are representative of all members of the subordinate group, public discussions deteriorate into debates over the accuracy of the portrayals, detracting from the testimony of subordinates and dismissing their claims of injustice. The anonymity of Clothesline shirts resists this. Disguises preclude identification of individual personalities. The shirts potentially stand for "every woman," and in this way, the disguise makes it more difficult to discredit messages on the shirts.

Disguises not only provide anonymity, they also provide their wearers an alter ego, that is, an alternative self-image imbued with latent characteristics they may not recognize within themselves. The disguise of a Clothesline shirt offers survivors another persona with which they can take on traits and assume behaviors that they don't normally allow themselves. Like the costume and mask of the Halloween prankster or the debauched carnivale reveler, the disguise unleashes normally constrained behavior. The protection provided by the Clothesline shirt encourages and emboldens their speech (Figure 4). It provides a license to disclose even the most intimate and stigmatized details of their violent experiences, a disclosure that many women could never make in face-to-face encounters. As a result, many of the messages on shirts shock with language and sentiment that few women would publicly reveal if not in disguise. The red shirt that painfully reports, "Sweet 16 and never been kissed, but anally raped. . ." illustrates this, as does the many expletives that reverberate from shirts, including "Feel Better Now, Fucker"



Figure 4. "Feel Better Now, Fucker?" The disguise afforded by the Clothesline Project shirt provides license to disclose shocking testimony that women might not be able to voice under normal circumstances. The text taunts the rapist with a raw declaration; the shirt's design depicts a woman impaled on an erect penis. Photo by P. C. Hipple

emblazoned across a vibrant orange shirt that bears the bold rendering of a large erect penis on which the tiny, lifeless body of a woman is impaled. Such speech may not be possible without the anonymity and safety conferred by the shirt disguise.

Bodily Resistance to Cultural Denial: The Shirt as Body Surrogate.

Unique to human beings, clothing is our protection, our armor. Clothing not only represents the human body, it re-presents the person who has worn it,

communicating for the body and the person as well. Felshin (1995) explains that "empty clothing suggests the body of the absent wearer" (p. 20). The body is a means of communication, evident through body language, and embodied speech, as well as "readable" cultural inscriptions on the body.³⁵ An empty Clothesline shirt not only suggests the body of the woman for whom it was made, it also represents her; the shirt acts as a surrogate for the survivor of violence, suggesting her presence despite her physical absence, providing her agency despite constraints on her physical body.

The body is the site and experiencer of violence, both physical and emotional trauma. As the body surrogate, a shirt on the clothesline provides actual and symbolic evidence of the violence done to the body; it provides proof of assault, as well as testimony of the psychic injury done (Figure 5). Some displayed shirts are those that were worn by women at the times they were assaulted. Rips and tears, blood stains, knife and bullet holes, as well as medical specimens and police reports appliquéd to the shirts, offer physical evidence of violent injury.

This is wrenchingly demonstrated by dual shirts, sewn back-to-back and appliquéd with excerpts from Department of Criminal Investigation laboratory reports. These lab reports describe the gruesome details of a mother brutally raped in the presence of her battered and terrified toddler daughter. The mother's shirt includes cut-outs from a crime questionnaire completed by the criminalist who conducted the "Sexual Abuse/Domestic Abuse/Child Endangerment Investigation," which includes a scale of the severity of the physical injury and emotional trauma. The daughter's shirt contains the following brief case synopsis:

Victims 2 year old child was pulled out of victims' hands. Child received a small head wound. Child was present during entire assault. . . .Not only was [she] a victim of the violence when she hit her head and had blood smeared over her face, she witnessed or heard things so terrifying that she remained in one position, stoic and too terrified to move for 1½ to 2 hours.

³⁵ Turner 1996 and 1991, Frank 1991, Jaggar and Bordo 1989, Bordo 1989, Berthelot 1986, Irigaray 1985.

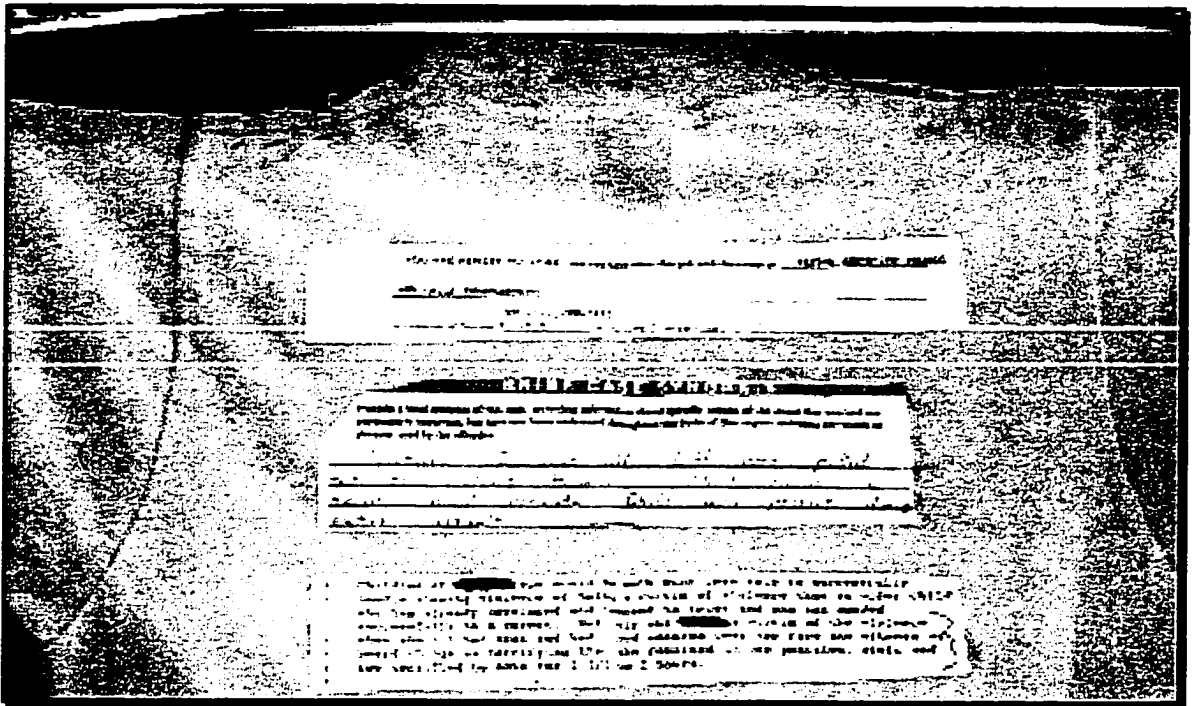


Figure 5. "Crime Lab Reports." The appliqués on these shirts are excerpts from crime lab reports describing the violent rape, battery and terrorism perpetrated against a mother in front of her toddler daughter, providing an "inventory" of the physical and psychic trauma experienced by both females. The child's yellow shirt is stitched to the mother's red shirt. These shirts provide graphic "evidence" of gendered violence. Photos by P. C. Hipple.

Not all physical evidence is this graphic, however. Violence to the body is subtly suggested by the pink knit shirt, its fabric cut and torn, but stitched closed like sutured wounds. And the psychic damage that results from violence is symbolically revealed by the red T-shirt that bears the thick strokes of red and white oil paint. The red creates the stylized outline of a body, almost invisible against the red backdrop of the shirt. Chalky white suggests the body's soft interior or skeletal frame. Sharp streaks of black oil paint interrupt the continuity of the white lines and cut through the body outline with streaks that attack or break the line at the arms, the legs, the torso, and head. Although the design is expressive, the front of the shirt is linguistically mute. No text reinforces the message conveyed. But on the back of the shirt, alternating in vibrant white, nearly invisible red, and bold black, its message is confirmed, 'trapped, fragmented, someone died inside me' (Figure 6).

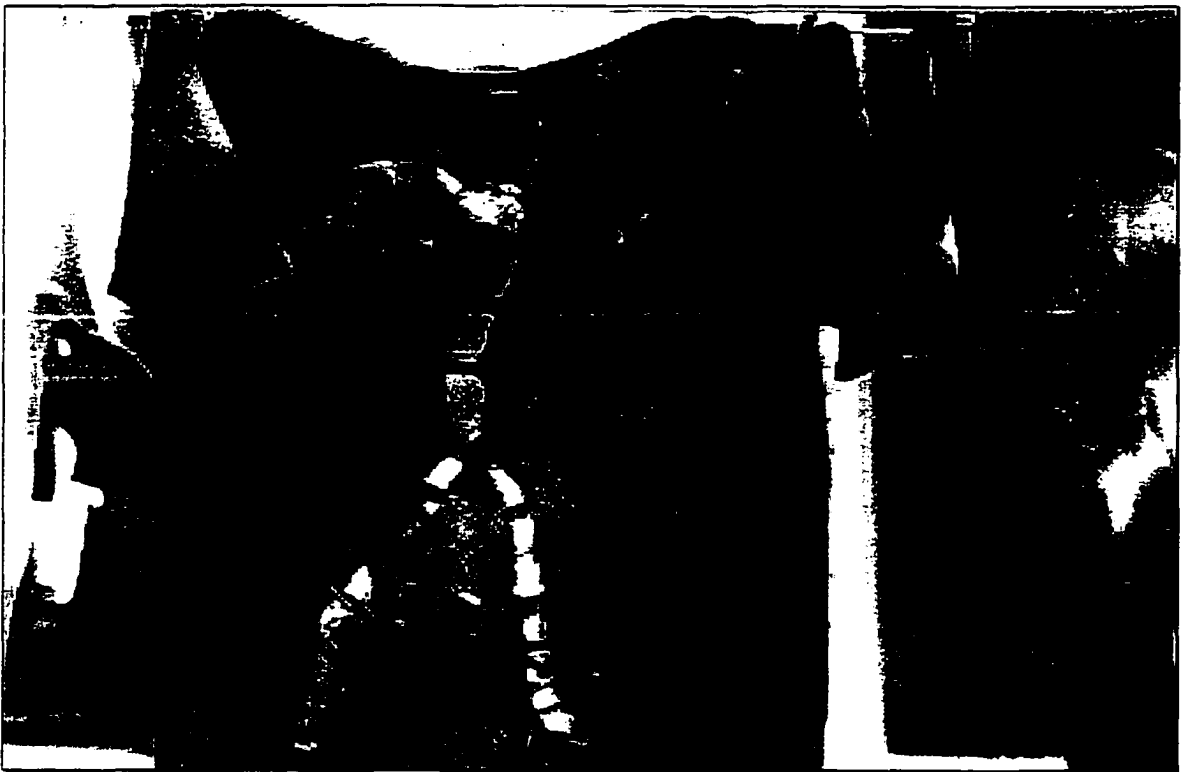


Figure 6. "Fractured." This shirt depicts the fractured body, a rendering less of the physical than the psychic and emotional abuse experienced by the shirtmaker. The text provides evidence of the physical manifestations of violence which are frequently overlooked. Photo P. C. Hipple.

While designs and/or text on the shirts movingly recall, reconstruct, and represent the violence done to the body, the shirt itself is emblematic of the violated body. In assaults on women, the predominance of injuries are to the central body, the chest, the breast, and the abdomen, with high incidence of abdominal injury during pregnancy (Stark and Flitcraft 1996:11). A shirt literally covers and symbolically represents that region of every woman's body that is most vulnerable to violent assault. This is graphically demonstrated by a yellow T-shirt that bears the dramatic black imprint of a boot across its belly (Figure 7). The boot print partially obliterates the rendering of a fetus underfoot, while text encircling the blood red womb suggests the story of a woman stomped in the abdomen when she was pregnant.



Figure 7. "Not Daddy." The footprint partially obliterates the rendering of a fetus in a blood-rich womb. The text encircling the abdomen reads, "Isaac survived. Born February 9, 1994. He can say Mama. Not Daddy. Not Daddy. Not Daddy. Not Daddy. . . ." Photo by P. C. Hipple

Jones (1995) reminds us that clothing represents moral consciousness, the awareness of our nakedness and vulnerability. She goes on to say that "clothes are the external symbols of spiritual potency," (p. 316) the outward and visible shape of inner character. For many women, the shirt does not represent protection or armor. Instead it represents the vulnerability of the body. A woman who had survived 54 years of spousal battering suggested that her shirt was a metaphor for her psychic state during the marriage. Her shirt represented the "mere shell of a person."

I lost my sense of self, my sense as a thinking, feeling person. I existed without emotion. I learned to 'give up, shut up, and put up.' So my shirt expresses 'just the facts.' For years I didn't have my own emotions. I had his.

Clothing symbolizes consciousness and our awareness of our nakedness and vulnerability. Such expressions of exposure and vulnerability are among the most poignant and painful of messages conveyed by Clothesline shirts. As body surrogate and agent, the Clothesline shirt provides the testimony and evidence of male violence against women. By so doing, it counters messages in the public transcript that deny the incidence, prevalence, and severity of rape, battering, incest, and lesbian-bashing. And in this way, the Clothesline shirt resists cultural denial.

The Shirt as Uniform

Carlos Drake (1969) uses the term "persona" to describe the "mask" that people wear before the world. Clothing, according to Drake, is often part of an individual's persona and is associated like a uniform, with his or her role (cited in Georges and Jones 1995:242-43). Dress is used institutionally to identify group members and signify the status, role, and duties of individuals. The robe of the church cleric and habit of sisters religious, the uniform of military service personnel, the athletic apparel worn in team sports, and the uniforms required of many service workers and professionals are all cases in point (Michelman 1997; Kaiser 1990; Lurie

1981; Flugel 1969). Kaiser (1990) explains that trophyism—uniform design, adornment or decoration used to show off the wearer’s strength, courage, or skill—is a common aspect of dress. The styling of military uniforms, war medals and merit badges, in addition to aggressive mascots and insignia for athletic teams are ready examples, as are the wearing of laboratory coats by scientists and black robes by judges. Paramilitary design influences in fashion, for example, borrow against sentiments of patriotism, discipline, asceticism, and prowess. Clothesline shirts may signify the uniform of victims and survivors of violence (Figures 8 and 9).

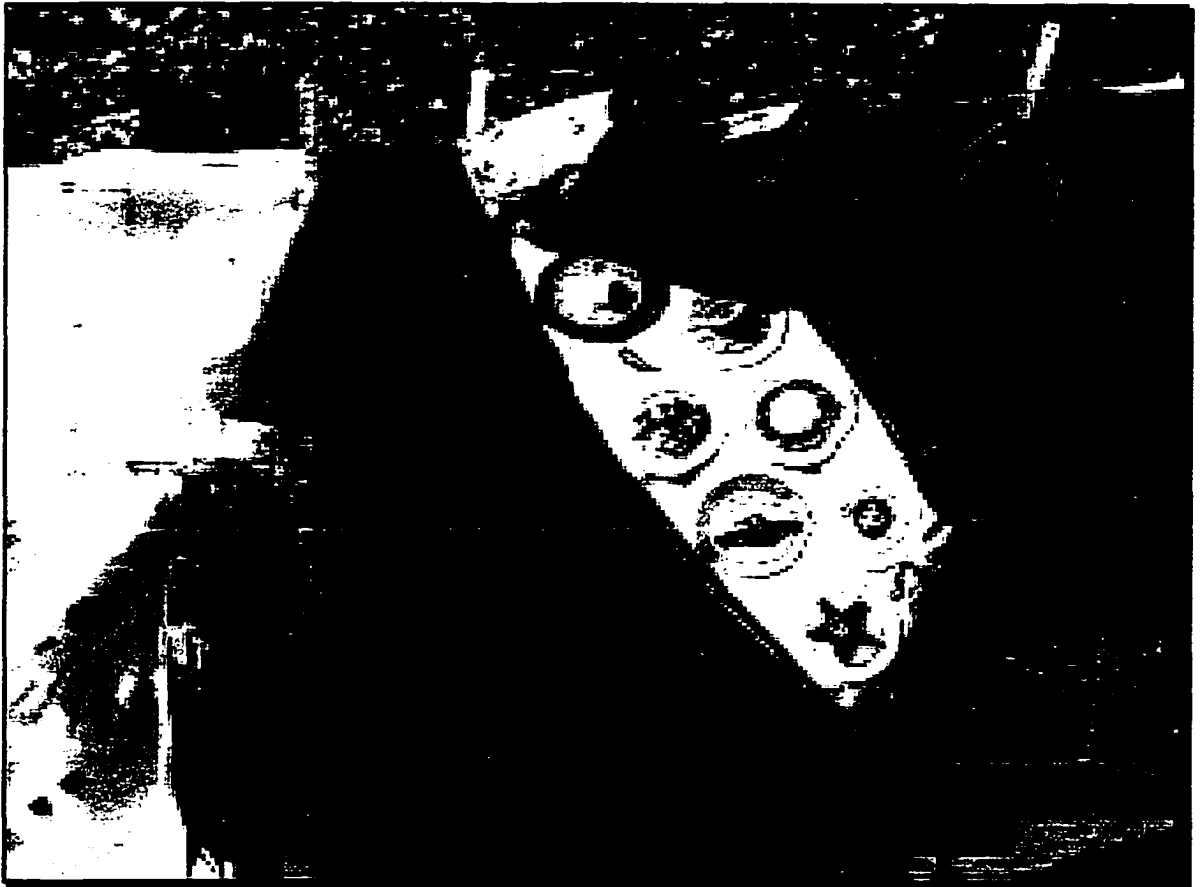


Figure 8. “Badges of Honor.” Trophies, insignias, and awards bedeck many shirts; merit badges paying tribute to women’s courage in the face of gendered violence. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

Clothesline shirts often demonstrate these elements of trophyism. Occasionally the trophy is reminiscent of scouting, but military references are also quite common. Occasionally shirtmakers will appropriate war imagery or rhetoric to communicate the extent and severity of violence against women. Shirts become a survivor's declaration of bravery and perseverance in the face of gendered violence.

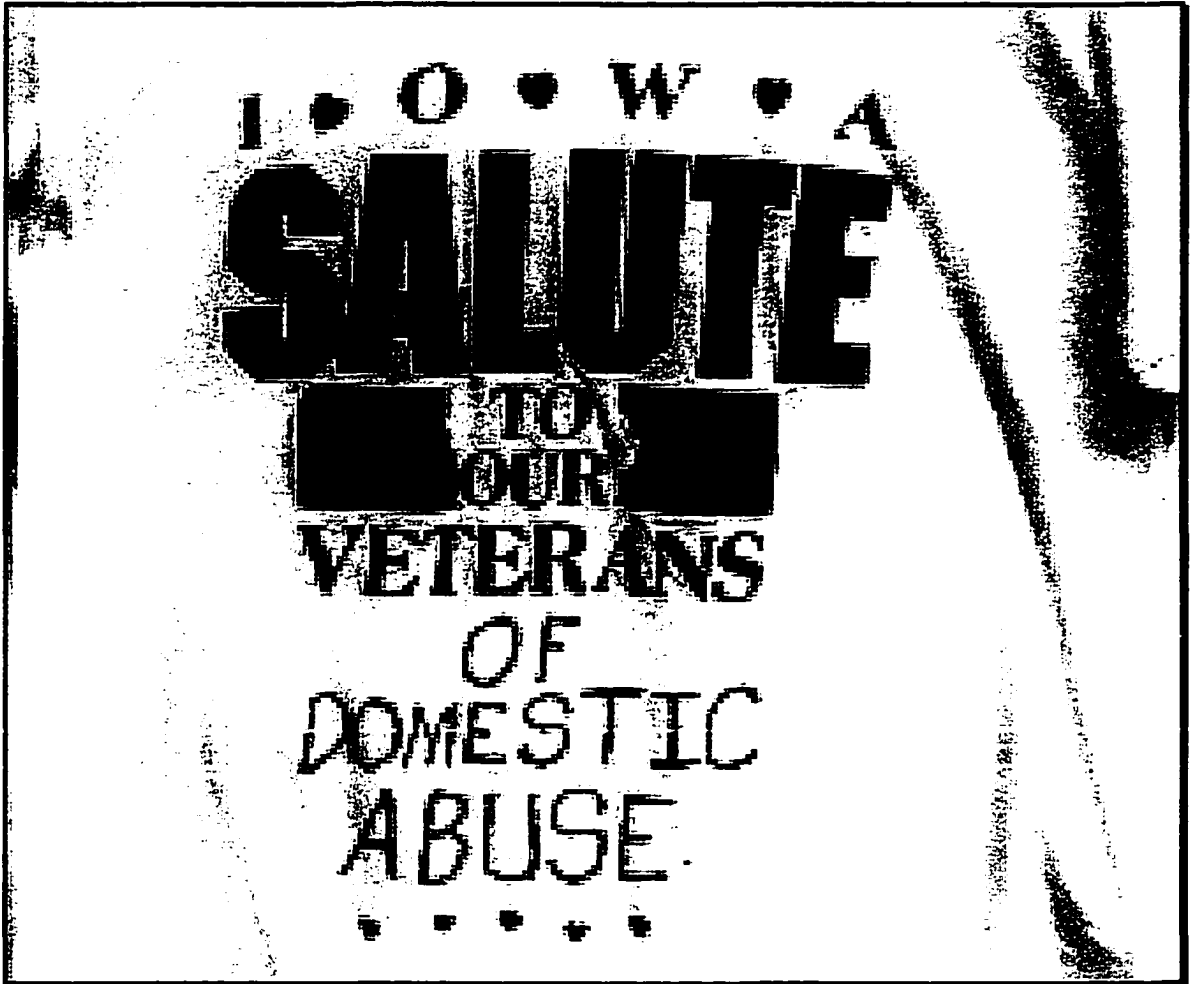


Figure 9. "Veterans of Domestic Abuse." In addition to trophyism, Clothesline shirts often appropriate war imagery and rhetoric to reflect the harrowing experiences suffered by victims and survivors, likened by many to living in a war zone. This also reflects the camaraderie that builds among survivors, not unlike the bond between veterans of war. This rhetorical strategy borrows against the legitimating function of dominant discourse. While the public transcript lauds those who have served their country in battle, the use of war symbols and metaphors in the hidden transcript is a way to insinuate the parallels between victimization that is rewarded and that which is stigmatized. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

Equivalent to the Distinguished Service Cross or the Purple Heart for some women, the Clothesline shirt recognizes the mortal sacrifices made by victims, the valor displayed and wounds suffered by survivors, and the dignity and resistance in serving in the "war against women." Shirt designs suggest women's role as stealth warriors and underground resistance fighters against gendered violence. Regardless of the allusion to heraldry on many shirts, however, all Clothesline Project shirts take on the semblance of a uniform that reinforces feelings of commonality and community among shirtmakers.

A Community of Resistance

Although similar to a uniform in conferring identity to survivors of violence, Clothesline shirts paradoxically resist identification by rank and status. As Clothesline participants emphasize, "shirts are not 'dress-up', everybody owns a T-shirt." A local organizer remarked, "you can't watch the development of fashion on the clothesline," suggesting that Clothesline shirts resist identification by social class and economic status. They can also disguise the race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and even gender of the shirtmaker whose stories they tell, as a woman who organizes local shirtmaking and displays attests:

A lot of women of color and poor women participate in [this] Clothesline Project, but many are distrustful of systems and have been painted as the victims, stereotypically. It's hard for them to trust because so many systems are discriminatory. . . . That's one thing great about the shirt. It doesn't separate between socio-economic classes, between races. You are identified as being a survivor. Survivors of every color, or every moneyed class. Maybe that's a good thing about having it on a clothesline. Nobody's higher, nobody's lower, nobody's in a different space. We're all equal and we're all going through things that affect each other.

The public transcript functions to isolate members of subordinated groups by stereotyping and exaggerating differences between group members. As both a vehicle for and content of the hidden transcript, Clothesline shirts resist the isolation that is a hallmark of gendered violence. Rather than accentuating differences, the

uniformity of shirts stresses women's commonalities. Rather than alienating display viewers from survivors and separating them, Clothesline shirts accentuate what the audience and survivor have in common. They thereby foster empathy and understanding. A Clothesline viewer is less likely to think of the shirtmaker as "one of them" and more likely to see her as "much like me." As one viewer remarked, echoing the sentiments of many, "what it really does is show the community that it could be your neighbor, it could be your mother, it could be your sister, it could be anyone that you know."

Despite this uniformity of shirts, however, there is no denial of the individuality of each victim or survivor. The uniqueness of each design and message underscores this individuality. While a viewer to the Clothesline can see the things women have in common, they can not look at a display and say "all these women are alike." As a national organizer explained,

Every shirt on that line is a representation of each individual person, what has happened, who they are. Whether it is their rage, anger, healing, whatever, it is a representation of the spirit of the person that's involved. And it's reaching out to the spirits of those around them.

At times, however, elements of the shirts are used to accentuate differences between women. For example, each of the colors potentially identifies women by the kinds of violence they have endured. The use of lavender and purple shirts to signify women attacked because they were, or were perceived to be, lesbian is a particular case in point. But while these distinctions risk alienating some shirtmakers or viewers, their purpose is to demonstrate the connections between the many kinds of violence perpetrated against women and demonstrate the similarities in motivations for gendered violence.

Clothing is used to identify members of a particular community, be it religious, ethnic, cultural, national, or ideal. Clothesline shirts have become symbolic of the community of women bonded through their mutual experiences with violence or, as Scott would explain, bonded by their shared hidden transcript. This

sense of shared community is reflected in the words of a survivor of domestic battering who became a shelter volunteer and international organizer for the Clothesline Project. Referring to her first encounter with shirts at a Clothesline display, she remarked:

For me, just the fact that there were hundreds of shirts together meant that there were hundreds of people all feeling the same way, violated and hurt and wanting to heal. And that gave me a lot of strength just to know that I wasn't the only one.

Her feelings were shared by a survivor of childhood incest as she recalled the day she hung her shirt for the first time.

I went up and down the rows reading the shirts and I just started crying. I just cried and cried and cried. It was a crying of joy and freedom—that I wasn't alone. . . .My shirt wasn't alone, I wasn't alone. Here was a community of women!

The counselor at a battered women's shelter who also organizes shirtmaking sessions confirmed these experiences. "The power was so apparent even from the beginning. The sense of community and togetherness and how the Clothesline brought them together, watching them make shirts and support each other." She went on to explain. "When the shirts are hung shoulder to shoulder it says something different than when they are hung alone. It says, 'I'm your sister. I'm next to you, standing through this.'" Her sentiments were reinforced by a rape survivor who declared,

For your shirt to be hanging shoulder to shoulder with all these other shirts, now that is totally empowering for many women. To feel, after the silence and the isolation, that there are other people out there. It's creating a community.

Originators of the Clothesline Project sought to express and foster a sense of community among women who are the targets of gendered violence, as one of them explained,

The Clothesline is about individual people. It's about each person that makes a difference on the line. And we are really lost in our society as individuals.

We really are disempowered at a very basic level of 'who am I and how can I make a difference?' 'Do I have a purpose?' Everybody's story, however they're written, whether it's one word or this elaborate design, it makes a difference. It's important. . . .So to build community, that which has been missing in so many of our lives. . . The isolation! What the Clothesline has done is reverse that at a very basic level.

While it is Clothesline shirts that convey the solidarity of this community of women, it was the organization of the Project—the grassroots, voluntary, non-hierarchical organizational structure of the Project—rather than the shirt that was designed to foster that sense of community. According to one of the Project's originators,

By creating a sustained community that models different ways to operate, by resisting the isolating and separating dynamics of this culture, the Clothesline's creating community is part of its anarchy and its resistance.

Rituals of Resistance

Clothesline shirts play another role in generating, elaborating, and articulating the hidden transcript, and that is a ritual role. Clothing includes signifying elements in rites of passage and rites of intensification (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969). Clothing serves as a scapegoat, where in many cultures it is hung from trees as substitute for clothed figures or mortals and offered to deities for favor, blessing, or retribution. Because dress suggests the form or figure of the individuals, it is used in rituals of "transformation" and "transfiguration" that have therapeutic benefits for participants and the group. Individuals and groups are prepared for new social roles through the ritual treatment of clothing. Clothing "sacralizes." For example, a religious pilgrim changes from everyday dress to a special garment, trading in the secular and contaminated garb for apparel that is purified. Michelman (1997) describes the transformational experiences of sisters religious as manifested in their choices to adopt or discard the prescribed hat of their order. Titleman (1996) describes taking the habit of a religious order as akin to a second baptism (p. 313),

while doffing a uniform, casting off a particular dress, can be interpreted as a denial of membership and rejection of the assigned status or role. For women who participate in the Clothesline Project, clothing plays a therapeutic role through its symbolic importance in rituals of transformation. A survivor of spousal battering explained the ritual symbolism of making and displaying her Clothesline shirt quite matter-of-factly when she said, "It's like you give up these clothes and now you wear these clothes. Like you're going to change your wardrobe, saying 'This isn't the life I'm living anymore'."

Many shirtmakers use their shirt to express their transformation. Organizers and shirtmakers alike draw significance from the dual capacity of the shirt to chart the progression from contamination to purification. "The front has the horror, and the back has the recovery," said a survivor about the design of her shirt. "Shirts that tell the story of pain also tell the story of recovery. There's a good side and a bad side," explained a local organizer. Concerned that her shirt would give the impression that women are defeated by violence, an incest survivor countered:

There's more to this. I don't just want people to think I died afterward. Here I am doing this and I think that I have a good life. That's when I thought, 'there is another side to this', and so I turned the shirt over. . . And I added things to it later.

The behavior of shirtmakers expresses this transformation as well. A national organizer reported, "some women have removed their shirt from the line for a period of time. Some women no longer like their shirts, saying 'I've grown beyond that.' Others have expressed that they want to make another shirt, expressing their experience since the first shirt."

The Clothesline shirt and display not only signify personal transformation, but social transformations as well. The Project makes visible and palpable the discrepancies between the public and hidden transcript, responding to distortions contained in the public transcript with "there is another side to this." As previously demonstrated, what frequently appears on one side of a shirt is a reiteration of

dominant discourse about violence against women contained in the public transcript—the myths, accusations, exaggerations, threats, and recriminations—which are then challenged, countered, refuted and negated by messages from the hidden transcript inscribed on the opposite side of the shirt. Literally and symbolically the shirt demonstrates that there are two sides to the story, including the story told by the public transcript and the story told by the hidden transcript.

Members of the dominant group will work to censor the hidden transcript, frequently by blaming, discrediting, stigmatizing, or silencing subordinates. Survivors of gendered violence are vulnerable to this censorship, within the home, the community, and institutions. Shirts protect victims and survivors from recrimination and censure by providing anonymity to individual women. Individual survivors are not easily identifiable through their shirts, despite the nature of their testimony. In this way, the shirts act as scapegoats, receiving both praise and critique, and absorbing any criticism or retribution threatened by dominant group members, while they protect the shirtmakers from abuse.

Resisting Gender Stereotypes, Traditions of Representation, and the Objectifying "Male Gaze"

In their discussion of women's coding strategies, Radner and Lanser (1993) allow that dominant and subordinate group members may deny that their communication and/or behavior is coded, not only to protect an encrypted message, but also because they are unaware of their own coding practices—"not only the message, but the coding itself is concealed and may be subconscious" (p. 9). But Radner (1996) asserts that "through careful scholarship it is feasible to posit at least the possibility that an act of coding has occurred" (p. 147). I want to suggest that Clothesline shirts encode another kind of resistance, but warn the reader that I have neither shirt testimony nor evidence from interviews to support my contention. Nonetheless, I am supported by other scholarship that subconscious or unconscious, implicit coding may be involved in the choice of shirts as medium of resistance.

The individual expressive medium of the Clothesline Project is the shirt, not the blouse, nor the dress, nor the skirt, nor lingerie. Neither is it linens nor other textiles. And in the majority of the cases that shirt is a T-shirt, a piece of apparel in the United States that is worn by men and women alike. Until recently, shirts have had an almost exclusively masculine connotation in this country; blouses, dresses and skirts are more frequently considered feminine women's apparel. Increasingly, however, there is an androgynous quality to the word "shirt" and the manifest T-shirt. Female appropriation of clothing associated with masculine attributes is an indication of how gender is being re-negotiated in this culture. In this way shirts symbolize and enact resistance to the prescriptions of femininity that place women at a relative disadvantage to men both physically and symbolically.

Although some women choose to display a blouse, dress, or skirt on the Clothesline, the vast majority of shirtmakers comply with the suggestion to make a shirt. By designating shirts as the apparel of choice for design and display, the Clothesline Project provides women with an opportunity to resist the gender stereotypes frequently accentuated by much of women's clothing. By eschewing dresses, skirts, lingerie, and other garments, the Project encodes resistance to the weakness, dismemberment, and sexualization of women's bodies that is semiotically constructed through such "feminine" apparel. Shirts cover much of the torso, resist allusions to dismemberment, and thus better represent the whole body. Adoption of shirts may be interpreted as the appropriation of a male form and the appropriation of "masculine" attributes such as power, strength, logic, and stability. By capitalizing on these attributes, the Clothesline shirt gains credibility.

In her discussion of the art of empty clothing Felshin (1995b) finds added significance in the body's physical absence, stating there may be "meaning in what is not represented" (p. 22). With reference to feminist scholars of visual media (Mulvey 1989; Betterton 1987; Cowie [1978] 1990; among others), Felshin argues that media representations of women were premised on the existence of a universal viewer—the notion of the male gaze. Women's sexual identities are constructed and

reinforced through male representational practices in art and other media that privilege male sexual desire as the determinant of aesthetic decisions of representation. According to Felshin, a "notion of gendered looking describes an unequal power relation in which women are prevented from determining the images that shape their identity" (p. 20). Empty shirts on the Clothesline suggest a refusal to represent the body. Through this refusal, designers of the Clothesline Project may be resisting objectification of the female body. Many of the Clothesline shirts, although "empty" of the embodied woman, re-present women's bodies through text and visual images incorporated into the design of the shirts. These representations are the free choice of shirtmakers; there are no prescriptions for women's shirt designs or messages.³⁶ Such representations allow these women, both as women and as survivors, to resist self-images that have been imposed on them, to resist objectification by those who have the power to objectify them, and to construct self-identifying images of their own.

Another signifying aspect of the Clothesline shirt is its allusion to women's role in fashion and consumerism, women's work and women's modes of expression, all of which have been undervalued and often treated disdainfully. The Clothesline shirt evokes a set of domestic practices associated with women and their domestic servitude. Appropriation of this androcentric image in the name of gender resistance constitutes a symbolic inversion. The significance of clothing, cloth, fabric and weaving as feminine form and genre, the evocation of softness, with tactile, kinetic, and multi-sensory properties constitutes a revaluation of women's tradition forms and genres and resistance to their trivialization under patriarchy.

³⁶ There is only one proscription in shirt designs. Shirtmakers are prohibited from identifying the entire name of the perpetrator unless he has been convicted of the violence reported by the shirt. (Initials are acceptable, as are the use of first OR last name only.) This prohibition is to protect Clothesline Project organizations from liability for slander or libel.

Conclusion

Clothesline Project shirts challenge the public transcript regarding patriarchal domination, female subordination, and gendered violence in a number of ways. While the shirts literally record the hidden transcript and provide the vehicle for its elaboration and public declaration, the Project uses shirts in non-linguistic ways to refute hegemonic discourse about rape, domestic violence, incest and lesbian-bashing as well. The project uses shirts as disguises to protect women as they testify to the incidence, prevalence and severity of violence, to embolden their speech and amplify their voices. The shirts provide evidence of bodily and psychic injury to resist cultural denial of gendered violence. The shirts provide a uniform and a sense of allegiance and solidarity in the "war against women." The shirts resist gender stereotyping that is a detriment to women's empowerment, and they resist practices of representation that distort women's experiences and objectify their bodies. Shirts provide a canvas on which women can construct self-identifying images.

Survivors of battering, rape, and sexual abuse express that violence "strips" them physically, emotionally, and psychically. With no protective armor, they are left vulnerable to repeated assault. And because the reality of violence against women is culturally denied, or minimized, or justified in certain circumstances by blaming the victims, survivors of violence feel like the emperor with new clothes, exposed and ridiculed, yet paradoxically invisible. Shirts are used by the Clothesline Project to metaphorically "recover" that which has been stripped away and to "re-dress" survivors' grievances.

CHAPTER 9

THE MEANING OF CLOTHESLINES

If shirts provide the tablet on which the hidden transcript is inscribed and through which messages of resistance are communicated, then the clothesline is the medium or channel that amplifies those messages so they may be heard by a much larger audience. The clothesline doesn't just publicly articulate the hidden transcript, however, it constitutes part of the hidden transcript as well. Symbolic qualities imbued in and imparted to the Clothesline hold much of the meaning of resistance. Although shirts provide powerful rebuttal of hegemonic messages about gendered violence and female subordination, when those shirts are suspended from a clothesline in public display, the synergistic effect of textual, metaphoric, and evocative messages multiplies the subversive content of the Project.

From an instrumental point of view, originators of the Clothesline Project maintain that a clothesline was a logical way to exhibit shirts. Where else might one consider seeing a shirt, but worn, on a hanger in the closet, folded in a drawer, crumpled in a laundry basket, draped on a store mannequin, or hanging from a clothesline? A clothesline provides a way to display many shirts at once, elevates the shirts for easy viewing, and reveals both the front and back of each shirt. The ease with which organizers can set up a display was a factor as well. Several Project originators echoed each other's sentiments when they said, "You can put up a clothesline anywhere. All you need is the line and something to attach it to." Originators claim that, like shirts, clotheslines are quite practical. They are relatively inexpensive, lightweight, portable, simple to store, easy to assemble and disassemble, and amenable to many shapes, sizes, and installations at different and various locales. And yet, one does not expect to find a clothesline at just any locale. Usually clotheslines are restricted to basements, suburban back yards, tenement courtyards, and farmsteads. Often, they are restricted altogether; clotheslines are

disappearing from the domestic landscape, replaced by technological substitutes, most notably gas and electric clothes dryers.

Why then would women intent on raising awareness and educating people about violence against women choose the venue of a clothesline to communicate their message? To focus only on practical or instrumental explanations for their choice is to neglect the importance that symbolic or expressive qualities of clotheslines have to understanding the meaning of the Clothesline Project.

The Social Significance of Clotheslines

In a 1967 newspaper essay Erma Bombeck (1996) dubbed the American clothesline "the greatest communication medium the world has ever known." More than a "flapping news bulletin," it was the "housewife's answer to Radio Free Europe" (p. 100). Bombeck contends she "could read Monday's wash like a gypsy reads tea leaves," learning much about her neighbors by how and what they hung from the line. "Mama always said you could judge a woman by the underwear she hung and her character by the way she acted when her clothesline broke," wrote Bombeck (p. 100).

The clothesline carried essential and esoteric communiqués. Housewives could chart the growth and progress of neighbor children, predict upcoming community events, and analyze world affairs by what was on the clothesline. The clothesline would herald family celebrations as well as family tragedies, the success or failure of marriages, and the emotional state of neighborhood women. Housewives were competitive with their clotheslines; the line announced their labor, their skill, their creativity, and their endurance. For Bombeck, the clothesline was "group therapy, . . . a lull in the busy day. . . a wave and a hello. . . a breath of fresh air. . . a glance upward at the sky . . . the smell of rain. . . the chill winds of winter to come. . . the fluffed-up chenille and the sweet-scented sheets that would never see an iron" (p. 100), and her essay mourned its passing.

Many of Bombeck's sentiments are echoed in Roberta Cantow's (1981) documentary film entitled "Clotheslines." The film presents the voices of women as they reflect on washday memories and experiences, as an assortment of cross-cultural images of laundry, clotheslines, and women laboring at domestic chores float across the screen. The women talk about the social and aesthetic qualities of laundry and clotheslines as well as the artistry and drudgery with which women performed household tasks. The beauty of the visual images evoke a romanticized nostalgia for washday, but the women's words make clear their ambivalence about laundry and their assigned domestic duties. The film conveys the manifold meanings of the clothesline.

As a symbol of the domestic realm, the clothesline is closely associated with women; it is a symbol of the maternal and the feminine. "More than anything it was the wash—my mother and the wash," mused one woman, while another revealed, "I always think of my mother when I'm hanging up the clothes. When I'm putting the clothes in the dryer, I don't think of my mother." One woman announced, "when I hang up the clothes I feel connected to all other women. . .it's something we have in common, that we share together," and another reported, "when I look at other women's clotheslines, I want to know more about them." The connections and commonalities among women are important aspects of clothesline symbolism.

The clothesline also represents women's discursive space and the significance of women's communication. This is evident in the words of one of the women in Cantow's film as she describes a typical courtyard scene on washday,

The women would all hang out the windows and spread the news of the neighborhood to each other—who died, who got married, whose kid fell down. The news, the essential news of the neighborhood, was not transmitted by the men, but by the women.

While circulating neighborhood news, the clothesline provided women a way to keep a watchful eye on one another, but this surveillance could be both protective and invasive. "People would read your fortune by your clothesline,"

asserted one woman, while another mused, "laundry was like a confession, you know." The "confessional" quality of laundry meant the clothesline could be a place of judgment and a mechanism of social control. "I knew them people were looking at my laundry," recalled one woman; her suspicions were confirmed by another who claimed, "You looked at your neighbor's clothes. You really did. And you sort of measured her that way."

But just as women were judged by their clothesline performance, it offered a chance at redemption as well. Women in the film speak of laundry as a ritual of ablution, of cleansing and renewal. Laundry is therapeutic for women and the community. Reciting the remnants of a poem, one of the women suggested the curative and restorative potential symbolized by the clothesline, "How could I ever calculate the depth of peace and security this ritual of weekly cleansing had accumulated in me?" Clean clothes on the line were "a kind of rebirth, a new beginning. . . a fresh start," according to these women, and the clothesline was a symbol of renewal. As one woman in the film noted, the clothesline reminds you "there's always tomorrow. No matter how dirty everything gets, there's always a fresh beginning. There is a spiritual feeling with laundry. I don't think you get it with any other household task."

The aesthetics of the clothesline—the senses stimulated and the artistry exhibited—contribute much to its meaning, and the sensuous qualities of clothes on the line convey much of its significance. Many of the women in Cantow's film fondly recalled childhood memories of the clothesline. "I can remember as a child very good sensual memories," recalled one woman,

I can remember walking in between the lines and the sheets blowing in the sun. Those were good feelings. And the idea of clean sheets—I don't think there is anything nicer than clean sheets that have come in from being out in the sun.

Clothes that hang from the line have great aesthetic appeal for many people. "They are like pieces of sculpture," mused one woman, "women who don't consider

themselves artistic put a great deal of themselves into their household tasks." "I used to hang them nice," divulged another, "you know, I used to put `em out in colors; I used to play games." This was reinforced by other women as well. "There was a particular art about hanging your clothes," maintained one woman, while another, reminiscing about her mother on washday stated, "it was sort of like an art, the way she did it."

The aesthetic experience did not guarantee pleasure, however. One woman remembered the skill with which her contemporary did the clothes.

She was really a perfectionist and didn't have an outlet for the perfectionism. It seemed to take form in the way she did clothes. There was a very strict ritual for the way in which the clothes were then to be folded, and put away, and put aside. And they were done beautifully, with a skill and a craft and a kind of a mastery that she did not enjoy. I think its important to realize, she did not enjoy it.

Despite romanticized imagery, the clothesline did not evoke universal appreciation. For at least one woman in Cantow's film, the clothesline was despised. "I hated laundry with a passion you can not imagine. It was the bone in my throat. . .it was the worst burden that I could ever remember."

Washing and hanging the laundry were not just loathed by some, but also feared, because the clothesline held malevolent meaning as well. As one woman recalled,

people used to say if you left your clothes out once it got dark they were no good because the devil would get in them. All the evil spirits would get in there.

Another woman recounted her mother's recurring dream of laundry blowing in the wind as a premonition of a loved-one's death, and yet another woman mused that clothes hanging from the clothesline "evokes the ghosts of the people that wore them."

American folklore is replete with malevolent symbolism attributed to laundry and clotheslines. To wash clothes on a holy day was to invite bad luck. To dream

of washing clothes meant that hard work was coming. To dream of dirty clothes was a sign of trouble in the family. There were prescriptions for how to hang clothes: hang stockings from the top so your luck doesn't run out, and always hang your husband's trousers on the line first to remind yourself that he is man of the house. There were prohibitions about laundry as well: you were not to wash on Friday, except for need and if you washed on Saturday, "you were sluts indeed."³⁷ There were folk beliefs about the breaking of the clothesline, the curling of the clothesline, diapers on the clotheslines, dreaming of a clothesline, walking under a clothesline, and attracting lightning with a clothesline. And there were folk beliefs that equated washing clothes with death: to dream of white clothes on the line would divine the death of friend or relative and to dream your white sheets were becoming dirty was a sign that someone near you would die.

Folklore is also replete with laundry metaphors. Washing is a act of purification, an ablution preliminary to sacrifice, the purge of guilt and responsibility, a sign of respect, an omen of death, a cleansing that stimulates healing and fecundity, and a means to obtain the mystical powers of water.

As Bombeck, Cantow, and folklore traditions demonstrate, clotheslines are important in conveying meaning because they signify women's work, women's discursive space, a sense of shared community, connections among women, judgment and redemption, confession and therapy, rituals of renewal, and the aesthetics of domestic experience.

The Role of Clotheslines in Resistance to Gender Domination

Scott (1990) maintains that to understand resistance we must understand the sequestered social sites where it can be nurtured and given meaning. Scott uses the term "social sites" because they are not just physical locations, but discursive spaces as well. Created and maintained by the use of codes and disguise, these

³⁷ Hand 1981:685.

social sites provide a safe place to articulate the aggression and hostility, as well as the self-assertion, that is denied by the public transcript.

Within this restricted social circle the subordinate is afforded a partial refuge from the humiliations of domination, and it is from this circle that the audience for the hidden transcript is drawn. Suffering from the same humiliations or, worse, subject to the same terms of subordination, they have shared interest in jointly creating a discourse of dignity, or negation, and of justice. They have, in addition, a shared interest in concealing a social site apart from domination where such a hidden transcript can be elaborated in comparative safety (p. 114).

Women's Discursive Space

The Clothesline Project provides both the restricted physical location as well as the protected discursive space in which women can articulate their experiences of violence and where their hidden transcript can be "nurtured and given meaning." By suggesting the site of women's work as well as women's gathering place, the clothesline demonstrates how the social site has both material and symbolic implications for resistance.

The remarks of a local project organizer allude to a host of images and ideas important to the Clothesline Project—the clothesline as women's physical and discursive space, the ritual aspects of the clothesline, the sense of community it facilitates, and a hint of its aesthetic importance.

I like the whole idea of a clothesline. I like the whole concept of what that's about, everything from my own personal images of my mother, at my age certainly, my mother hanging that laundry and what that meant as a woman. That was such a ritual and a time that maybe you would visit with your neighbors and life would center around that. And so that had a lot of significance to me personally, in what that's about, in what that means.

"The clothesline is such a direct way of communicating," said an incest survivor whose tiny blue shirt with gutted teddy bear hangs from the line. "I take it and I say what I have to say on it and put it on the Clothesline and it goes where other people can read it." Survivors are inclined toward the clothesline because it

conveys sanctity. The words of an international organizer—a domestic abuse survivor on whose yellow shirt appears the sketch of her husband’s work boot, the one he wore to kick and stomp her—reveals a startling contradiction of the line.

The beauty of the Clothesline is that it’s a place where women are comfortable ‘cause it’s their work and it’s where women gather—the neighborhood, talking across the fence, that sense of camaraderie and ‘home sweet home’ kind of feeling that comes for the clothesline. . . .I’m always drawn to a house that has clothing hanging on the line. I feel like I’m more welcome than where you can’t tell anyone lives there.

Despite its use to broadcast stories of domestic atrocities and community dangers, the Clothesline evokes images and feelings of safety, serenity, domestic tranquillity, and communal strength.

Several shirtmakers likened the Clothesline to other traditional forms of women’s culture that have brought women together throughout the ages. “The Clothesline reminds me of a quilting bee or a sewing circle,” reported a local organizer, “a place where women would communicate and talk about the most intimate details of their lives.” “It reminds me of the kitchen sink,” said another, “standing around drying dishes and bearing your soul.” This woman went on to say,

Of course the menfolk just say ‘those women are just talking that girltalk or whatever it is the womenfolk do. We are going, meanwhile, to be over here and have this real life. And the only thing that’s significant is what’s happening in the men’s room.’ Which is just so not true.

Her musings reflect key areas of resistance to gender domination signified by the Clothesline, resistance to the devaluation of women’s work, women’s words, and women’s contributions.

Women’s Work

Doing the family laundry has traditionally been women’s work, a task assigned to women because of their gender, and Clothesline Project participants view the line as an integral representation of this, as well as a symbolic protest.

It's a 'woman thing' within our society. Laundry and clothes have always been relegated to women, whether that's makin' 'em, ironin' 'em, washin' 'em, hangin' 'em out. Women are responsible for that and we bear a lot of burdens and many lives have been given over. You simply sacrifice your life for your family. That's the woman's role. And so somewhere within all of that, be it your handwork, or your cooking, or your cleaning, or your clothes, you find you and you find connection with other women in a way—in a sublife that's going on—that you certainly are able to communicate with other women on that level. They are there. They're living that. And so you have this kind of life going on transposed on another life.

One of the organizers maintained that women's resistance to their domestic role is being symbolically and playfully enacted on the Clothesline by hanging the shirts "wrong." "There's all this propriety," she said. "There are rules."

There are rules about how you hang the clothes, the kinds of pins to use, whether to fold over the corners as you pin, whether to pin together or separately. A mutual clothespin? Only if you have to! Pants you hang by the waist because all that bulk of fabric takes a longer time to dry, so when the water goes out it goes away from it. Socks you hang by the toe. Shirts hang upside down and they are clamped at the hem so the mark from the clothespin doesn't show. . . I once knew a woman related to me who wouldn't allow me to hang diapers or clothing at all on Sundays because it wasn't 'proper'. You can only hang clothes and underwear at a certain time or where they can't be seen. The clothesline is supposed to give a message.

And then she added with feigned haughtiness, "The way we hang the shirts, by the shoulder, is not really the 'correct' way to hang a shirt. So it's kind of anarchy. Yeah, we're really stepping out there."

As a symbol of domestic isolation and domestic servitude, the Clothesline draws attention to the exploitive nature of women's unpaid and undervalued labor. The sexual division of labor, exaggerated by the process of industrialization and codified through the doctrine of separate spheres, became reified and rigid, with the "private," "female-dominated," "nonproductive" domestic sphere distinctly demarcated from the "male world of work." This division of labor has been the source of great inequity between the sexes. Women's unpaid domestic labor, including housework, child rearing, volunteer assignments and other kinds of

emotional work, often isolates women; this economic exploitation of women by men provides a significant hidden subsidy to the economy. Women's autonomy and self-sufficiency are thwarted by economic dependence on men and this converges with women's isolation within the home to increase their vulnerability to violence, domination, and ideological hegemony. By invoking a symbol of women's isolation within the home, the Clothesline demonstrates ways women's vulnerability to violence is intensified. By invoking a symbol of domestic servitude to carry messages of gendered violence, the Clothesline makes connections between violence and other systems of gender domination.

Ironically, it is the evocation of women's isolation which explains how a sequestered social site—both physical location and discursive space—is made possible. Although atomized by violence and prone to intensified male surveillance, the gendered division of labor and doctrine of separate spheres offers women the possibility for a physical location relatively free of dominant males, in part because their work and discourse represents forms and practices devalued under patriarchy and deemed unworthy of male attention. The "insignificance" of the Clothesline makes it appear an unlikely site of sedition. Ignored or misunderstood, it can be the sequestered social site for generation, elaboration, and articulation of the hidden transcript.

As a symbol of women's work, the Clothesline is also a reminder of women's contributions—to their families, to men, to children, to their communities, and to capitalism. This reinforcement of the important role played by women challenged the devaluation of women's work and women's contributions. Bear in mind that "virtually every aspect of abusive relationships—from the parts of the body targeted in assaults through the occasions on which coercion is exercised to the areas of female resistance—involve women's 'work'" (Stark and Flitcraft 1996:32). Women's work therefore, is a key signifier in the Clothesline Project's response to gender domination. Rather than promoting a "domesticated" consciousness, the Clothesline is literally and symbolically the forum for anti-hegemonic discourse.

Breaching the Private/Public Divide

As the Clothesline provides a symbolic refutation of the doctrine of separate spheres by revaluing women's economic contributions, it physically breaches the divide between the private and the public spheres by constructing icons of domesticity in the heart of the commercial and government districts. Clothesline displays are staged in parks, shopping malls, libraries, hospitals, police stations, courthouses, capital rotundas, and civic centers. The clothesline not only insinuates the hidden transcript into public discourse, it insinuates private symbols into public spaces. Frequently it appropriates space on the site of the very institutions it implicates in violence against women. This "intrusion" has great significance for Clothesline Project participants, as reflected in the words of a local organizer,

There's still a lot of people that think violence against women, be it domestic violence, or rape and sexual assault, is some dirty little secret that needs to be hidden. And this obviously is saying 'this doesn't need to be hidden'. It can be out in the air and the sunshine, or the clouds as it has been, or the snow as it was yesterday. But it can be out in the open where people can see it and talk about it. It doesn't have to be hidden. It shouldn't be hidden. That's part of what perpetrates it, is hiding it and minimizing it.

The significance of this breach of the private/public divide was first discussed by Julier (1994) in her analysis of the Clothesline Project as "private texts." Julier wrote,

'Private' is often a designation in which are embedded certain power relationships, relationships which are in turn dependent upon the isolation and/or silencing of certain voices and meanings. . .Defining an experience as private prohibits the discovery of alternative discursive contexts in which meaning may be signified. To go public, on the other hand, challenges existing power relations, by contesting the authority to name and define experience (p. 254).

Not only is private testimony made public by the Clothesline, but domestic symbols are being recontextualized at public sites to produce new meaning. In his report on Greenham Common, a military installation at which women staged an

ongoing demonstration by, among other things, decorating the security fence with personal treasures and fabricated mementos, Guy Brett (1987) explains the significance of the breach of the private/public divide,

One of the most active aesthetic principles at work at Greenham Common has been the translation of context. It could take different forms: putting on public view things from the private world, or working up something exquisite and beautiful from 'rubbish.' It is not the object itself, familiar to everyone, but the transgression of its 'proper' place, which carries the psychic charge (p. 152).

This "aesthetic principle" is at work in the Clothesline Project. Previously private testimonies of women are publicly displayed on a quintessential domestic icon deliberately situated in public space. The transgression of the clothesline's "proper" place carries its subversive message and its "psychic charge."

Brett describes other principles at work at Greenham Commons that have application to the Clothesline Project as well, including the use of oppositional imagery and heightened juxtaposition, the importance of accumulation to powering the psychic charge, the transformative power of reflection, and the radicalizing process that results from increasing involvement in the demonstration.

The women accentuate the visual antithesis between the world inside and the world outside the military compound. Rather than perceiving the personal, the fragile, or the sensual as weaknesses, women who decorate the fence present these as desired alternatives to military violence. . . Aggression was met not by closing oneself in, armouring oneself, but by exposing one's vulnerability, by making visible what the dominating power excludes or denies (p. 149).

The Clothesline deploys images considered degrading or *déclassé* by some—T-shirts and clotheslines—and transforms them into works of art. It takes images associated with the private, the domestic, and the compliant and thrusts them into the public forum. It juxtaposes soft fabric and sensual images with scenes of rape, domestic violence, battery, assault, and murder to condemn male aggression and domination.

Articulating a Physical Hidden Transcript

In addition to the aesthetic principles outlined by Brett (1986), the methodical, meditative, ritual aspect of hanging laundry suggested by the Clothesline display and demonstrated by its installation requirements also plays a role in resistance. Volunteers spend long periods of time stringing the clothesline, fastening shirts to the line with wooden clothespins, watching shirts sway in the breeze, witnessing people reading and caressing the shirts, removing shirts from the line, carefully folding them for storage, and disassembling the line. Viewers witness this as well, and the display of shirts evokes memories of their own experiences of laundry on washday. Clothesline participants are lulled into sensual reflections of washday whenever they engage the clothesline. A rape survivor and regional organizer whose red shirt dons the Clothesline vividly recalled childhood memories of laundry,

I remember hanging clothes, making sure you don't wrinkle shirts when you hang them, the warmth of sun and the smell of old heavy cotton sheets, and the frustration at dropping clothespins. I hung the laundry alone as a chore, and I recall lugging the heavy baskets from the basement, and trying to hang sheets without having them touch the ground.

A Clothesline originator who had survived domestic battery and rape likewise mused,

My grandparent's farm was a real special place to me. . .I remember doing the laundry or the weekly washing and about that whole process and the whole rhythm of the day and the rhythm of the week that follows. Do the laundry on Monday, do the ironing on Tuesday. That whole process of going through the different steps with your wringer washer and the two washtubs and finally getting them into the basket and going out and hanging them up. How wonderful laundry smells when it comes in from off the line. . .you have to fold the shirts carefully so the buttons don't pop off when it goes through the wringer . . .and if you hang your sheets properly you can take them off the line and put them right back on the beds. So a clothesline is really important to me. It's just a part of my growing up.

This focus on the sensual pleasures of laundry and the rhythms of the domestic workweek is not merely romantic nostalgia. In "A Feeling of Form, as

Illustrated by People at Work" the folklorist Michael Owen Jones (1980) describes strategies that workers use to make monotonous tasks less tedious and the playful ways they manipulate the work environment to make their labors more satisfying. By discovering or creating patterns and rhythms in their work, accentuating the multi-sensory experience of their labors, and adapting (or adapting to) their work environment—what Jones calls "getting into the 'groove' with a task or a machine"—workers can find enjoyment in even the most drudging of tasks. Jones argues that occupational folklorists should focus on the "process-oriented aesthetic" which values the worker's sense of mastery, creativity, or transcendence (pp. 262-63).

Despite the frequent characterization of housework as trivial, mindlessly repetitive, invisible, productless, and isolated³⁸, many women find aesthetic pleasure in housework, and the testimony of Clothesline Project participants demonstrates that they revisit those sensory pleasures when they consider or engage the Clothesline. Among these aesthetic pleasures are the Clotheslines evocation of the seasons, weather, time, bodily rhythms, kinetics and kinesthetics, aromas, and sounds.

Scott speaks of "hegemonic poses," the physical gestures and postures of deference that are required of subordinates by the public transcript, in his discussion of carnivale and Bakhtin's (1968) recognition of the importance of physical release provided subordinates by festival and parade. Scott argues that "the control of body, voice and facial expression may, while it is imposed, create something of a physical hidden transcript that is released in movement" (p. 224fn.). While Bakhtin's and Scott's formulations suggest the purgative function of licentiousness and gross body movements, I would argue that the subtle kinetic movement and sensory stimuli evoked by the Clothesline also provide a release and articulation of the physical hidden transcript. And this is part of its resistance.

³⁸ de Beauvoir 1961, Friedan, 1964, and others.

Rituals of Empowerment

“When I first strung my clothesline, it was a symbol of spring,” said one of the Project originators about the line she uses at home to hang her laundry. Her words are indicative of a meaning many participants attribute to the Clothesline; it is a symbol of renewal. Empowerment is critical to resistance, and the clothesline evokes rituals of renewal that lead to personal empowerment as it publicly articulates the hidden transcript, a collective cultural product, to foster community empowerment.

Clothesline participants credit the Clothesline for facilitating an empowering rite of passage—from victim to survivor, from guilt and shame to resilience and pride, from self-blame to self-assertion. A Project originator was enthusiastic about the Clothesline’s role in rituals of resistance.

I think one of the images around a clothesline for me is that the shirts are clean then. And I love that idea of, you’ve done the work, you’ve washed away some of the pain, you’ve washed away some of the - you haven’t washed away some of the pain maybe, but you’ve processed the pain so it doesn’t have to affect you anymore. It’s been processed out. You’ve discharged some of it. And then, you can go on with a fresh approach. With renewed energy and vigor. And I love that about that part of the Clothesline. The cleansing. Cleansing is a really important concept.

An incest survivor expressed the potential catharsis and empowerment of Clothesline symbolism as well.

It’s a wonderful picture, a wonderful metaphor. Women who had it all pushed down inside—it was a lethal thing—when women are able to take it from inside themselves and put it out, that’s a part of healing. Take the damage, the sense of being dirty, guilty, used, worthless, seductive, that it’s their fault. To take that out and hang it up in the wind and sunshine, it’s taking the decay and rottenness being carried around inside of them all these years.

The Clothesline constitutes a ritual of ablution, a cleansing to stimulate healing, a purgative against guilt and shame, and a conveyance of self-esteem, and respect for other women. In another respect, this cleansing is a ritual enactment of

washing away old discourses, expunging the record of dominant discourses that stigmatize victims, survivors, and all women.

Making Connections

In many ways, the resistance of the Clothesline is accomplished by making connections. This has already been demonstrated by the Clothesline's ability to foster and build community among survivors and allies; it is reinforced by a symbol that represents women's historical service to one another, assistance rendered in extended families, friendship networks, neighborhoods, and communities. But the Clothesline makes other connections as well.

The Clothesline ties together the multitude of structural and symbolic mechanisms that contribute to women's vulnerability to violence and thwart their sovereignty. A national organizer who survived intruder rape and the ordeal of a trial and acquittal of her rapist spoke of the connections.

The Clothesline ties the issues of violence against women together. It shows that battery, incest, rape, lesbian-bashing are not isolated incidents, but an ongoing pattern. If you tie it all together, what does it mean? It means there is a level of misogyny in this culture that no one wants to admit.

The Clothesline also connects violence against women to violence against the planet as well, resisting that violence in subtle and symbolic ways. "I like the simplicity of the clothesline," said a national organizer. "Plus, it feels real anti-technology." In her study of male dominance in 150 societies, Peggy Reeves Sanday (1981) reported that male dominance, characterized by among other things frequent wife-beating and the institutionalization or regular occurrence of rape, is associated with increasing technological complexity. The higher the level of technological sophistication within a culture, the higher the level of male aggression towards women. This connection is not lost on Clothesline Project participants. One of the Project summarized,

The mentality, the motivation that breeds violence against women is the same kind of mentality that is breeding violence against the earth. The

violence against the earth is having an impact on our world where there's a part of me that feels we're probably not going to survive. Violence to the environment—it's coming from the same mentality—and a clothesdryer contributes to that.

The "simplicity" of a clothesline is offered as an alternative to "technological complexity" which is a correlate to male dominance. Environmentalists have suggested reverting to use of clotheslines to conserve fuel and reduce toxic emissions (Bennett 1993; Durning 1995). A clothesline provides a way to resist environmental violence by returning to a low-cost, energy-efficient method for drying clothes. In a subtle way, the Clothesline resists yet another kind of violence and domination.

Conclusion

A clothesline is a meaningful venue for "bearing witness to violence against women," said a Clothesline Project originator, because it "bears the weight of hundreds of shirts and the burdens of thousands of women." It also bares the reality of gendered violence perpetrated against women who have been raped, battered, sexually abused, tortured, and/or murdered. The clothesline, a traditional symbol of women's work, is reinstated as a source of community support for women, a line connecting women to one another, a line reconnecting severed relationships. It symbolically offers a lifeline to women threatened by violence.

CHAPTER 10

CLOTHESLINE METAPHORS

The meanings imbued and imported to the Clothesline Project through color, clothing, and clotheslines are frequently communicated through metaphor. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), "metaphor is a matter of imaginative rationality,"

It permits an understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another, creating coherences by virtue of imposing gestalts that are structured by natural dimensions of experience. New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities (p. 235).

Lakoff and Johnson explain that personal and cultural metaphors are partially "preserved in ritual" and "propagated by ritual" (p. 234). Much of the metaphor of the Clothesline Project is expressed through rituals and processes that provide new experiential gestalts and metaphoric coherences for those who engage a shirt display. The metaphors that derive from experiences, practices, processes, and rituals evoked by the Clothesline Project are not merely a matter of language or intellect, however, they are a matter of "conceptual structure"; they involve all the natural dimensions of experience, including sense and aesthetic experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:235).

Stated another way, Hodder (1994) explains that material culture communicates in at least two ways, through rules of representation or through practice and evocation. While some material culture is not produced to "mean" anything, some is designed to be communicative and representational, with meaning organized in ways similar to language. But most material culture does not work through rules of representation, using a language-like syntax. Rather, it works through the evocation of sets of practices within individual experience. Insofar as members of society experience common practices, material symbols can come to have common evocations and common meanings" (p. 397). In other words, people both "read" and experience material culture meanings. The Clothesline Project

communicates resistance to gender domination by evoking metaphors for violence, oppression, scapegoating, denial, grievance, protest, coded communication, disguise, and breaking the silence. This chapter demonstrates how metaphor imbues the Clothesline Project with meaning.

Being Clotheslined

Long after dusk on a summer evening when I was eleven, a small gang of neighbor kids was playing hide-and-seek in my front yard. As the counting began, other kids scurried to find their hiding places within the safety of the lighted front yards, but I ran behind the house and bounded into the darkness of our neighbor's back yard where, I was certain, no one would venture to look for me. It was a risky proposition for a youngster—especially a girl—to penetrate that darkness, because all us kids knew that beyond the reach of porch lights lurked the dreaded, evil bogie man.

Suddenly, without warning, I was grabbed by the throat and thrown to the ground, landing flat on my back with such force that the wind was knocked out of me. I lay gasping for air, my eyes frantically searching the darkness to locate my assailant, but I could see no one. Stunned and frightened, I struggled to focus in the charcoal light, but there was nothing but the twinkling stars and a sliver of moon overhead. Then I caught sight of my assailant! It was not some sinister stranger who had tried to choke the life from me, mine was a familiar offender.

I had run into the darkness with such speed and abandon that I failed to see the neighbors' low hanging clothesline obstructing my path. The taut cord caught me just under the chin and my feet went out from under me. I sensed a moment of suspended animation before crashing to the ground. No bogie man, no masked marauder, no sinister monster lurking in the bushes. In the parlance of my neighborhood, I had been "clotheslined." Too embarrassed to admit my folly, I was later betrayed by the raised and reddened welt across my throat.

Some years later, sitting in the stands at a hometown football game, I witnessed something that brought back the memory of that evening. During a confused and frenetic play on the field, a defensive lineman extended an outstretched arm and caught the running back squarely across the Adam's apple. The running back somersaulted backward, crumbling to the ground as the flurry of referee whistles was drown out by the collective groan of the crowd. The running back had been "clotheslined."

While my examples in no way compare to the terrorism and brutality that women endure, I draw on them to illustrate that regardless of their personal vulnerability, women and men alike have some understanding of the violence implied by the expression "being clotheslined." Whether it's running full-force into a taut cord strung across the yard or running headlong into a lineman's outstretched arm, being clotheslined is a painful, violent, indefensible, and illegal experience. "Being clotheslined" serves as a metaphor for violence³⁹.

Being Hung Out to Dry

"Being hung out to dry" is an expression associated with the tanning process by which skins and hides are made into leather. In this process, oil, mineral, or synthetic tannins are applied to pelts which are then stretched, immobilized, and hung to dry.⁴⁰ Today the process takes only hours, but originally it took more than

³⁹ Variants of an American folk belief circulating as recently as the 1970s maintained that if a woman walked under a clothesline when pregnant, she would have a hard labor, or the baby would have a birthmark, or the baby would be strangled by the umbilical cord during birth. From a functional perspective the belief that a clothesline could endanger a pregnant woman or the fetus in her womb might be explained as a rationale excusing expectant mothers from the strenuous, taxing toil of laundry—an ideational talisman against maternal death and infant mortality and a behavioral prohibition intended to promote healthy pregnancies. The sinister attribution of a clothesline presenting a threat to women and children is a chilling precursor however to the recent disclosure by the Easter Seals Society that a major cause of birth defects is male violence against pregnant women. Because pregnant women are disproportionately the targets of domestic violence (Stark and Flitcraft 1996:11), the association of the clothesline with fetal and maternal danger presents a curious coincidence with messages and metaphors of the Clothesline Project.

⁴⁰ The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia. 1995. NY: Columbia University Press. Electronic Version.

a month to complete. "Being hung out to dry" is also an expression associated with the laundering process, and although a benign reference to drying clothes on a line, it has a sinister component as well; being hung out to dry suggests being exposed to the elements—the heat of the sun, the buffeting of wind, and the ever-present threat of inclemency. A variant of these expressions is "to be left hanging"; this introduces the suggestion of judgment and punishment, as though one were left dangling at the end of a noose. If not lethal, it is at the least a precarious position that leaves one powerless, for not only are you left exposed and vulnerable, but you remain that way—up-in-the-air—for an indeterminate length of time.

Although these expressions could imply justifiable punishment—getting what you deserve—they more likely suggest the opposite. Being hung out to dry suggests a betrayal and being left hanging suggests uncertainty and injustice. Both expressions suggest abandonment and scapegoating as well.

Originally the term "scapegoat" referred to a sacrificed animal, frequently left hanging from trees to pacify celestial spirits. Today, however, scapegoating is used to absolve oneself of responsibility by unjustly blaming an innocent party. Metaphorically then, being hung out to dry suggests being skinned and flayed, laid bare and immobilized, publicly exposed, disempowered and vulnerable. Thus "being hung out to dry" serves as a metaphor for being betrayed, abandoned, blamed and scapegoated.

Clotheslining

As Farrer (1975) explains, clotheslining is a gendered reference to gossip. Gossip has traditionally been attributed to conversations between women, as well as women's style of communicating, implying that much of women's speech is idle or malicious chatter. Akin to rumor, gossip is seen as back-fence prattle, but of a sensational and intimate nature. Gossip is usually suspect of embellishment if not total fabrication, so its veracity is always in doubt. To label talk "gossip" is to minimize or trivialize such speech. The "gossip" of women is viewed as less

important or significant than the “conversation” of men. Between women, gossip or clotheslining can become a means of social control—a way to keep community members “in line,” compliant with social expectations if they are to avoid being its subject.

Farrer explains that “clotheslining”⁴¹ is also the pejorative label given to women’s expressive genres: “women’s genres have been named (by men?) as ‘gossip’ or ‘clotheslining’—value-laden and derogatory terms” (p. xx). The label serves to trivialize women’s genres and women’s expressive contributions, as Farrer goes on to explain,

Usually in Western societies it is the male genres that have been used to define the recognized universe of artistic expression within a group. These recognized, usually male, genres assume the status of ‘legitimate’ folklore genres. Female expressive forms either fit the male mold or they are relegated to a non-legitimate, less-than-expressive category. For instance, we have ‘tall tales,’ a male genre of storytelling; the female corollary is exaggeration. Men have ‘stories’ or ‘yarns;’ women ‘gossip’ or ‘clothesline’ (pp. ix-xx).

Although women often recognize the genres which are labeled “clotheslining” to be significant “exchanges of information or memorates germane to a given topic,” Farrer argues that they should also be thought of as “expressions of [women’s] verbal artistic creativity and performance” (p. xx).

Despite the use of the clotheslining label to trivialize women’s speech, the expression paradoxically suggests the effectiveness of women’s communication. It is as though the words women speak, as well as their symbolic communications, are telegraphed along the very lines they used to dry the family’s clothes. The effectiveness of such conversation is suggested in another way as well. Clotheslining is a reference to the highly successful medium used in the 1800s by the Underground Railroad. Conductors on the Underground Railroad could signal

⁴¹ Farrer credits Roger D. Abraham for calling this term to her attention.

safe passage for fugitive slaves escaping north by hanging various textiles from clotheslines (Radner 1996:147). These textiles carried the codes instructing run-aways of escape routes, "travel schedules," and safe houses. Because these codes were so successful, "clotheslining" serves as a metaphor for effective and encrypted communication.

Domestic labor serves simultaneously to isolate women and to bring them together, and the clothesline serves both as a symbol of that isolation as well as the site where women congregated and conversed. Clotheslining alludes to one of the places women traditionally convened to talk. "Clotheslining" was the means by which women conveyed essential news, and it was the place where women worked side-by-side, helping one another with domestic chores. As a metaphor then, "clotheslining" stands for mechanisms of social control, women's communication styles, women's expressive genres, women's discursive space, and the possibility of women helping each other in time of need.

Airing Dirty Linen in Public

"Airing dirty linen in public," and its variant, "hanging dirty laundry in public," are references to "personal affairs that could cause embarrassment or distress if made public"⁴² and "giving publicity to family disputes or scandals."⁴³ Although suggestive of protecting privacy in individual or familial affairs, the phrase is usually attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, who upon return from Elba in 1815 admonished the French Legislative Assembly for exposing rifts in the affairs of state that tarnished the reputation of the French Empire. Napoleon reportedly protested with, "*c'est en famille, ce n'est pas en publique, qu'on lave son linge sale*"—"I alone am

⁴² The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. Third Edition. 1992. NY: Houghton Mifflin Co. Electronic Version.

⁴³ Ibid. The expression may also be an implicit reference to menstrual blood and the blood of the ruptured hymen, reflecting the taboo associated with female biology.

here the representative of the people. Even if I had done wrong you should not have reproached me in public—people wash their dirty linen at home.”⁴⁴

Today, the expression “airing dirty linen” seems counter-intuitive, because we rarely think of airing dirty laundry, but rather hanging freshly washed laundry to dry. Yet prior to modern laundry conveniences, it was common to air linens and clothing between laundering. As my grandmother used to say in her own inimitable way, you aired dirty linens to “get the stink blowed out of ‘em.” Levin (1993) explains that in some cultures today, it is still considered important to air linens and apparel. For example,

in Italy. . .even in major cities and in homes or hotels that possess extremely ‘hi-tech’ washing machines, laundry is hung out to dry (just as rugs are hung out windows to be beaten and aired) because air is important. One hangs wash outside not just to take the water out of it, but to let something into it. In the same way, one ‘changes the air’ in one’s house each day by opening the windows (p. 293).

In many ways, the more literal meaning of “don’t air dirty linen in public” is a warning to women against publicizing any incompetence in their traditional familial role—again, a social control mechanism. Similar to the effective, yet despised, commercial for laundry detergent that taunts women with “ring around the collar,” this expression ridicules women who are unable to adequately perform their assigned domestic role, holding women to unreasonable standards of cleanliness while ignoring men’s responsibility for their own dirty necks. Airing or hanging dirty linen suggests publicly exposing a housewife’s incompetence—an effective mechanism to socially control women because it detracts from male abdication of responsibility—from who or what made the linen “dirty” in the first place.

To flaunt the admonition against airing your dirty linen in public then is to resist that social control, to dismiss accusations of incompetence, to expose the source of soiling, to redirect attention from the private affair to the public responsibility, and to breach the divide between the private and the public realms.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

A core metaphor of the Clothesline Project, “airing dirty linen in public” challenges the arbitrary divide between women’s and men’s traditional spheres of “control”—the private and public spheres, the domestic and worldly spheres—reinforcing the feminist invocation that “the personal is political.” It challenges the traditional reluctance of the state to intervene in the domestic realm, the home and family. Flaunting the admonition against airing dirty linen in public is a way that women insinuate themselves into the public realm, airing or broadcasting their concerns, resisting trivialization and refuting distortion of their experiences.

Putting It on the Line

“Putting it on the line” implies a bold, daring, and often courageous act. For example when a fire fighter attempts a rescue in a three-alarm blaze, that fire fighter puts his or her life on the line. When you “put it on the line,” you take a risk, sometimes a grave risk, often gambling what is most valuable to you, including your wealth, your reputation, or your security. The expression suggests a willingness to gamble in order to achieve a goal. Usually that goal is considered worthwhile and admirable, although sometimes putting it on the line can look like a foolhardy thing to do—some may question whether the gamble is worth the risk. “I put it on the line” may be said with pride, as well as a bit of relief, but it can, conversely, be phrased as a challenge or a dare, a persuasive manipulation to “put it on the line.”

The expression is akin to the command “lay it on the line” which also means to be forthright and direct. And it is akin to “what’s the bottom line?” and “don’t give me that line,” expressions that attempt to invoke honesty and integrity. These expressions are another way of saying, “Tell me the truth, with no hedging and no embellishment. Give me the facts, the critical, essential facts. And don’t lie to me.”

While many of the clothesline metaphors were readily evoked in my encounters and observations with the Clothesline display, I am indebted to a local organizer for revealing this final metaphor. In explaining the benefits of the

Clothesline Project she said what's most important is that the display gives women "a safe forum."

It's helpful, even if the shirts were never displayed, it would be healing and therapeutic. But there are women who want their story out there, who want people to know 'this happened to me and I'm not alone. It happened to all these women too.' And this is a way for them to do it safely. They are able to say what happened to them, either in words or visually or in combination, *without putting themselves on the line*, without having to talk to a group of people or go to the press with their story. It's a way for them to tell their story to others.

"Putting it on the line" then serves as a metaphor for taking risks and for telling the truth. It represents breaking the silence despite risks of retaliation, retribution, censorship, increased surveillance and repression, or escalated violence.

Meaning Through Metaphor

These are the metaphors of the Clothesline: being clotheslined, being hung out to dry, clotheslining, airing your dirty linen in public, and putting it on the line. While the Clothesline evokes other metaphors as well,⁴⁵ I chose to focus on these because as core metaphors they demonstrate concurrence with Scott's formulations of domination, the public transcript, the hidden transcript, infrapolitics, and the saturnalia.

⁴⁵ Among other metaphors evoked by the clothesline are "lines of communication," "line of inquiry," "line of evidence," and "line-up." Each imbues the display with meaning, especially as they reference women's testimonies of the violence they have endured, and as they implicate perpetrators of violence. Shirts evoke their own series of metaphors which imbue shirtmaking and shirt displays with meaning. For example, "being red-shirted" means to be separated from the team, disqualified as the result of injury, and prevented from getting back into the game until recovery is complete. "To lose your shirt" suggests that you have lost something of great value or perhaps sacrificed everything. "Being shirty" is an expression for being angry, caustic and disagreeable, while "to get someone's shirt out" is to be annoying. The command to "keep your shirt on" is an admonishment to be patient, and "wearing a hairshirt" is to subject oneself to great discomfort, usually as an act of penance. "To wear it on your sleeve" is to express strong emotion, especially to show one's vulnerability in public. To gripe and grumble about injustice in an effort to purge oneself emotionally is called "getting it off your chest." To bear witness, to stand ready to help someone who needs it regardless of the risk is a willingness "to give the shirt off my back," and if I'm not telling the truth, "I'll eat my shirt."

Each of the Clothesline metaphors provides insights to Scott's typology. They signify violence, denial and scapegoating, gossip and communication, coded discourse, and risk-taking. The violence of "being clotheslined" is the metaphoric counterpart to gendered violence, a form of domination. Domination, as Scott reminds us, frequently has an element of personal terror—coercion is enforced by arbitrary beatings, sexual brutality, insults, and public humiliation. "Being clotheslined" reflects the violence of gender domination. "Being hung out to dry" is the metaphoric counterpart to the denial, minimization, and scapegoating communicated through the public transcript. By blaming women for their own victimization, excusing male aggression as a biological given, and negating the level of misogyny that motivates much of the violence, perpetrators and institutions abdicate responsibility for gendered violence. "Clotheslining" is the metaphoric counterpart to the hidden transcript. It suggests the sequestered physical and discursive space where women are able to share their stories and support one another. It also suggests gossip, a linguistic strategy identified by Scott (1990:142-43) as generating and elaborating the hidden transcript. It explains how the hidden transcript of grievances against perpetrators and patriarchal social institutions is generated and elaborated among survivors and allies. "Airing dirty linen" is the metaphoric counterpart to the disguised and encoded discourse and practices—the infrapolitics—through which the hidden transcript is further elaborated and publicly articulated. And "putting it on the line" is the metaphoric counterpart to the saturnalia—breaking the silence—the courageous public refutation of dominant discourse, the truth telling, as it were, of the politics of gender domination.

For participants of the Clothesline Project to have an awareness of any of these metaphors portends that they have the potential to recognize and/or decipher the subversive content of this folk medium. I am not suggesting that every display viewer or participant is cognizant of each of these metaphors, but I am suggesting that these metaphors are part of a cultural reservoir in which we are immersed and

from which we may draw meaning to suffuse our understanding of the world.⁴⁶ Viewers and participants draw meaning from these clothesline metaphors to suffuse their understanding of the Clothesline Project. While design and textual messages on the shirts provide much of the obvious discourse of the hidden transcript, the hidden transcript is also constituted by meanings imbued and imparted to physical elements or material objects of the display, especially shirts, clotheslines, and other washday symbols. Additionally, much of the meaning of the hidden transcript is derived from metaphor and ritual. Knowledge of any or all of the Clothesline metaphors and rituals imbues the display with added meaning.

The following chapter will demonstrate how shared meaning is derived through the evocation of sets of practices common to many who engage the Clothesline Project.

⁴⁶ I am an English-speaking professional female of European extraction raised in a working-class neighborhood of suburban Minneapolis in the 1950s and 60s. In terms of age, ethnicity, education, and social class, I share much in common with the originators of the Clothesline Project. The metaphors I outline are part of my "cultural reservoir." It is likely that individuals from different backgrounds and experiences may find my illustrations "meaning-less" but will have other metaphors that imbue their encounters of a Clothesline display with meanings that allude me. It is this polysemic quality of folk culture that provides the disparate and sometimes contested meanings that disguise communication and evade detection of their subversive content.

CHAPTER 11

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE AND SYNESTHETIC SOUND

The Clothesline Project logo is a sketch of three T-shirts suspended from an undulating line. A single word adorns each shirt, "Break The Silence." As one of the national organizers explains, this is a key objective of the Clothesline Project:

The biggest thing the Clothesline does is break the silence around the issue of violence against women. It does so personally; my own testimony being that I didn't even know I was a survivor—I wouldn't have classified myself in that way. The second way is, by hanging these shirts out for everyone to see—again airing society's dirty laundry in the most graphic way that these stories are told—and listening to these sounds breaks the cultural silence around the issue of violence against women. It says, 'Here we are, in your face. Now you can not ignore the fact that we are here anymore. You can dismiss me back to my living room or you can dismiss this child back to its bedroom, but you can't dismiss these stories once they are out in the air.' It's almost like you're exposing them to the air and they take on their own life. And as I said before, nobody that I know who has seen the Clothesline project walks away unmoved. It shatters that whole illusion that this problem doesn't exist, and it breaks down the wall of silence that has imprisoned women, sometimes for half a lifetime.

The Meaning of Silence

Silence is a phenomenon rich with ambiguity, and the Clothesline display capitalizes on this ambiguity, using silence tactically and paradoxically to communicate resistance. Silence is simultaneously an acoustical phenomenon—the absence of sound—and a communicative phenomenon—imbued with meaning. While there are profound cross-cultural differences in the metaphors, interpretations, and meanings attributed to silence, it is at the same time, universally understood as a means to communicate. Silence is an object and an activity, a product and a process (Ehrenhaus 1988:41). Silence marks the boundary between words and between speech acts. Although we commonly think of silence as the absence of speech, it is frequently interpreted within the context of speech. "Utterances, for example, are often completed in silence when the topic is delicate

or taboo, or when the situation is emotionally loaded and the speaker is 'at a loss' for words" (Saville-Troike 1985:7).

Tannen (1985) argues that silence and speech are functional equivalents. As communicative devices, silence and speech can both either facilitate or obstruct understanding; both silence and speech can be used to reveal or conceal, to distort or illuminate, and both are used as a means of emotion management and display. Despite the common notion that we communicate only through speech, we communicate through silence as well. Speech can be unintelligible at the same time that silence can be "deafening."

Speech can be used to control and oppress, but so too can silence. Speech can be used to protect and defend, but so too can silence. Discourse can be deployed to silence others, while silence can be deployed to negate discourse. Finding one's voice can be a liberating experience, but quiet contemplation can be liberating as well. de Gaulle's (1940) observation that "nothing strengthens authority so much as silence," finds its rejoinder in Thoreau's (1849) assertion that "silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourses and all foolish acts," and St. Paul's biblical admonition (I Timothy 3:8-15) that "woman learn in silence with all subjection, [suffering] not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence," insists on the silence of women as the submissive enactment of their subordinate role (Saville-Troike 1985:4).

In "The Politics of Silence and the Silence of Politics," Jaworski (1993) draws on the work of a number of communication scholars⁴⁷ to identify mechanisms by which dominated groups have been silenced. His main thesis is that individuals and groups that have an ambiguous status; women in particular, are most vulnerable to external and internal censorship.⁴⁸ He argues that women's ambiguated status has

⁴⁷ Enninger 1987, Saville-Troike 1985, Tannen 1985, Bruneau 1982, Amundsen 1981; Bennett 1981, Kramarae 1981, Brummet 1980, and Spender 1980.

⁴⁸ Jaworski argues that women's status in Western culture has historically been ambiguous. Legally disenfranchised and unrecognized as citizens, women were considered the property of men—first their fathers and then their husbands. They were neither viewed as adults, nor were they

been constructed, perpetuated and manipulated by patriarchal institutions and practices that render women both invisible and inaudible.

Jaworski identifies the following mechanisms which are used to silence women: (1) interpersonal silencing of speakers in cross-sex dyads—specifically male interruption of female speakers; (2) the imposition of masculinized language standards coupled with the devaluation of women's language styles and forms; (3) male monopolization of public discourse and control of mass media with the resulting proliferation of distorted images of women; (4) the trivialization of women's personal and social concerns; (5) neglect and denial of women's historical contributions; and (6) a host of other silencing forms including "denial, secrets, taboo subjects, erasure, false-naming, non-naming, encoding, omission, veiling, fragmentation, and lying" (p. 119).

According to Jaworski, the distorted image and ambiguated status of dominated groups causes their members anxiety and conflict in self-identification and self-expression. In the case of women, their ambiguated status, and the censorship that attends it, results in two kinds of silence, "the silence of women as a sign of their submission and the silence of women as reaction to their ambiguous (taboo) status" (p. 126). Breaking the silence, then, is a path to women's emancipation, and Jaworski states that "women have chosen certain *radical* and *unconventional* means of breaking their silence" (p. 120).

While much of Jaworski's argument supports theories of ideological hegemony (he discusses the powerlessness that results from "brainwashing" and "indoctrination"), his work has several important parallels with Scott's. He identifies ways, both subtle and blatant, that public discourse and practices undermine the tenuous status of subordinated groups. He demonstrates ways in which

viewed as children. In psychological literature women were portrayed as "defective males." In spiritual literature women are represented as either innocent or temptress, virgin or prostitute, with few other representations in between. And Jaworski argues that women's status remains ambiguous today through tensions between the doctrine of separate spheres and women's assertion of participation in social life, which strands them in a medial position between the private and public realms, securely occupying neither.

subordinated groups are thwarted in publicly expressing resistance to their status, and he supports the contention that the dominant ideology (Scott's public transcript) seeks to prohibit from the public stage alternative conceptualizations of social life. In his arguments, however, Jaworski presents a rather sanitized version of censorship, failing to acknowledge the level of coercion, threats, force, and violence used by individual men and patriarchal institutions to silence women.

Women's Responses to Gendered Violence: Silencing Mechanisms

Despite its allusion to washday, the Clothesline Project presents no sanitized version of the mechanisms used to censor and silence women and girls. The shirts describe silencing "strategies" used at the micro-level by individual perpetrators of violence, as well as those used at the macro-level by institutions and the public (Figure 10). They illustrate how silence is super-imposed and they illustrate how silence is self-imposed by the survivor in response to guilt, shame, and fear.

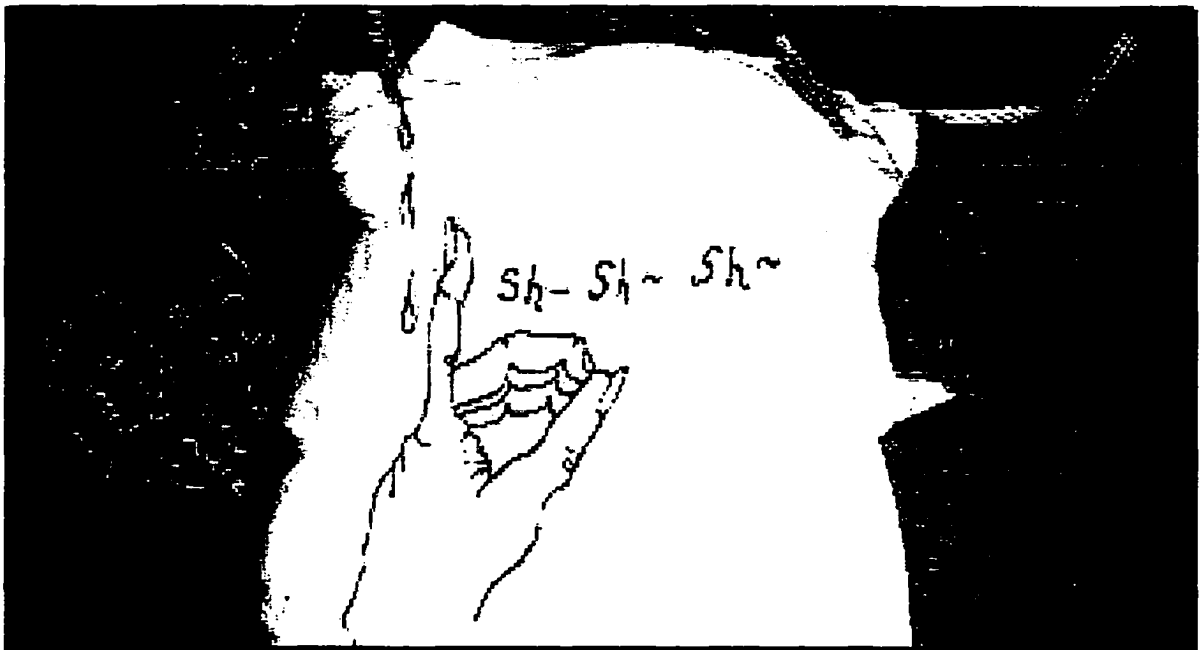


Figure 10. "Sh-Sh-Sh!" The strategies to silence women and girls about gendered violence have many manifestations, some subtle and some blatant, but the silencing is a near universal experience of victims and survivors. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

Silencing by the Perpetrator

According to Clothesline Project shirts, external censorship is achieved through physical force, threats of violence, coercion and manipulation, the calculated erosion of a female's self-esteem and sense of reality, the imposition of taboo and stigma on victims of gendered violence, and trivializing the experiences and concerns of survivors. Although by now the reader should be able to recall evidence of such messages conveyed by Clothesline shirts, some specific examples are warranted. Physical force is powerfully suggested by the green nightshirt that bears an appliqué of a young girl in pink shirt-waist dress with the massive hand of an abductor clasped over her mouth. Threats of violence are apparent in the text inscribed on the lurid hands that fondle the breast and pubis of a girl's blue jumper. With black marker inscriptions the hands menace, "Shh...You want a fat lip?...Do you want me to hurt your dog?...Don't tell...or else!!!" Each suggests a level of intimidation that would silence many a girl, but the continuous and cumulative effect of these threats would be effective indeed.

The more subtle form of coercion is demonstrated on the back of a blue T-shirt that taunts, "Fat ass. Big nose dummy. C___ Sucker. You're crazy. You're nuts. Don't tell anyone. They won't believe you anyway!" As this shirt suggests, the erosion of a woman's self-esteem also serves to silence.

Institutional Complicity and the Silence of Institutions

But silencing is not only undertaken by individual perpetrators of violence; institutional silence about gendered violence is a kind of complicity with the violence, and many shirts denounce that institutional complicity. These shirts demonstrate that institutional silencing can take at least three forms: institutions are complicit when they protect members who are perpetrators of violence against women; institutions are complicit when they remain silent, unwilling to acknowledge the truth of violence against women; and institutions are complicit when they censor and censure, taking measures to prevent women's testimony from being heard.

Twin T-shirts demonstrate this in a simple yet dramatic way. One is yellow and the other blue. They bear identical renderings of a police badge, replete with department and badge number. On the first shirt the badge is framed with the words "Husband, Wife-Beater" and on the second with "Father, Pedophile." Several shirts report violence perpetrated by members of the clergy whose institutional support, or lack of public censure, have been notorious until recently. A green T-shirt scrawled in red and yellow paints with "Our Father, you are not from heaven — Molested by a priest" is completed by words on a cleric's black tunic, "Hallowed be thy shame!" Another shirt reads, "This shirt is for my friend Nancy who was gang raped at her college in 1982 and told it was her fault because she had been drinking." A blue T-shirt bears the following message, "Please... Believe the children! ~~Their~~ OUR pain is real." And a gray T-shirt bears the face of a woman, appliquéd with cotton balls where her ears should be and tape across her mouth, this image explained by text that reads, "society's way of dealing with incest and rape." Censors are powerfully rendered, albeit often in symbolic form (Figure 11).

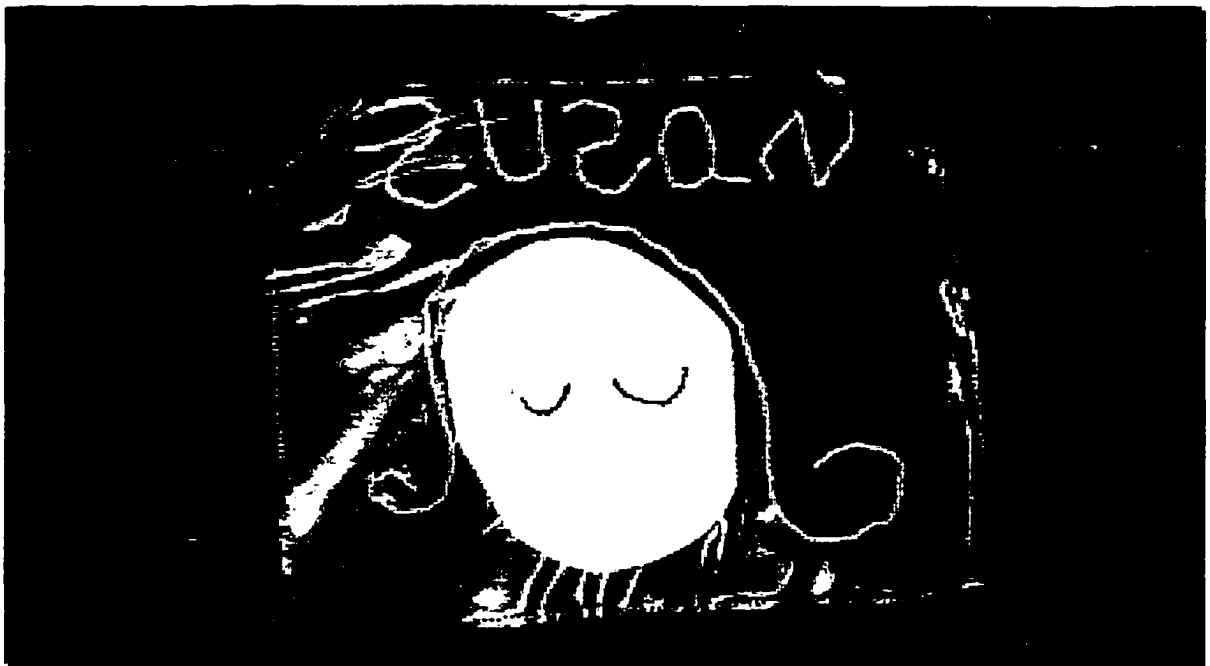


Figure 11. "Silent Susan." Blame, stigma, and taboo are social reinforcements that silence children who experience incest and sexual abuse. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

The subtlety with which many shirts critique silence is often powerful in itself. Shirts symbolically portray the muted voices of victims and survivors, through repeated motifs of covered mouths, zippered lips, or mouthless faces. Clothesline Project shirts critique self-imposed silence as well, recognizing that internal censorship is often a response to fear, guilt, or shame. Shirts lament and warn, "I'll always regret not screaming" (Figure 12) and "silence is sorrow."



Figure 12. "I'll Always Regret Not Screaming." Silence may be super-imposed through force or censorship, but it may also be self-imposed as a result of social conditioning, self-consciousness, stigma, guilt, shame, and fear. The text on this shirt, made by a survivor of rape, reads, "I'll always regret not screaming!" Photo by P. C. Hipple.

Breaking the Silence

Shirts also rally women to resist silencing. A charcoal green short-sleeved sweatshirt, for example, bears the following message, "We will not be controlled exploited coerced beaten raped killed. We will not be frightened. There will come a day. . . We will not be silenced." Many Clothesline Project shirts proudly and defiantly testify to breaking the silence with statements like the following, "I have my voice." "The sound of shame is silence. I will be heard." "Free to soar. Silent no more." "I have words. I have voice. I use them!. . . I will not be silenced! Not ever." These are oft repeated phrases and sentiments expressed by the shirts.

While making a shirt breaks the silence of an individual survivor or ally, hanging that shirt in unison with others literally and symbolically enacts a collective breaking of the silence. A Clothesline Project originator speaks to the importance of breaking the silence at this level.

The silence, you know, the 'emperor-has-no-clothes' kind of silence, is what enables the system to continue in its abusive way on a national level or in households. So to break that silence, somehow to speak out, to point out that the emperor has no clothes, is a highly courageous. . .and political act.

Survivors experience the silence of institutions and the silencing done by institutional representatives as a "revictimization," or being "abused by the system." Designing a shirt that "talks truth to power" is a way to resist. A woman who organizes shirtmaking sessions at a shelter for battered women's explained:

We did it in my support group and they felt they finally really had a voice. They're battered. They call the police. The police make them feel powerless. 'Why did you stay? Why didn't you leave? Why didn't you run?' Then they get involved with the court system. The court takes their power completely away. It's no longer a case of the victim versus the perpetrator, it's the state versus the perpetrator. They feel like they have no say in that. And then, even when he is found guilty, he does two days in jail. And I hear women say so many times that they feel re-victimized and that nothing they say matters. And in the group just being able, one of my clients put it, it made her feel like she was shouting 'hey, this is what happened to me!' She made the shirt really explosive so she could get her anger out at not only the fact that she had been battered, but that her voice had been taken. And she felt

that the shirt was such an amazing way to let her shout and say 'I matter. What happens to me is important.'

Scott argues that public declaration of the hidden transcript—breaking the silence—is experienced by subjugated people as a “moment of truth” and “personal authentication,” because it exposes an aspect of the person’s character that has been distorted, concealed and silenced. Breaking the silence, according to Scott, “restores a sense of self-respect and personhood” (p. 120). This is reflected in the experience of a rape survivor who described her shirt as a way of “letting the truth be the truth—and having it be part of me.” She explained,

What happened at the rape trial is that they took my story away from me, because they said I lied and it didn't happen. The other thing that happened is the lawyer wouldn't let me sit in on the trial. They removed me from the experience. So I wanted to own it again as part of the healing. In a rape trial—and this may happen in other issues of violence against women—because there's denial and because you can't openly express what happened to you, it becomes part of who you are. When you're victimized, you have to hide that part of yourself in our society. To have to hide that piece of yourself is a very traumatic thing. It reaches the soul, so your soul is changed when you're victimized like that, and the soul is the essence of your very being. So when you finally get to a place where you don't have to hide it anymore, to be free to express that and to *wear* that on the surface of your life is incredibly empowering.

Scott also explains that the political act of publicly declaring the hidden transcript is a therapeutic one; the “sense of personal release, satisfaction, pride, and elation—despite the actual risks often run—is an unmistakable part of how this first open declaration is experienced” (p. 208). His focus is not on the subjective experience of any one individual, however, but on the collective experience of subjugated groups. The bond that develops between those who have broken the silence, the sense of camaraderie and community, is “not some mystical link of human solidarity,” but “the shared discourse of the hidden transcript” (p. 210).

The power of the hidden transcript once publicly declared by women who had been silenced by gendered violence is well illustrated by the words of an incest

survivor. She prefaced her comments with this musing, "You know, the taboo isn't against incest, it's against talking about incest."

When you are sexually abused, you learn you can't trust anybody. You can't trust the big people. All of us live in a world where straight white males are running everything—legislators, police. Women have had to be silent, isolated from other women who might talk among themselves. So the fact that a bunch of women get together and start shouting to the skies what has been done to them, most often by males, is an incredibly powerful experience. . . . [S]eeing rows and rows of shirts where other women have screamed out 'this is happening to me!' It is absolutely mind-boggling to me. It enables others to speak, and let others know who walk up to that clothesline—that their pain isn't something they have to keep inside of them. . . . here is a community of women.

Metaphors of speech and silence convey much of the meaning of the Clothesline Project. The admonition against "airing your dirty linen in public" is a core metaphor for the phenomena of silencing and resistance to it, as a local organizer recalled,

You know the cliché, 'you don't do your laundry in public?' I grew up with that. You don't ever talk about things. You don't air your laundry in front of others. And that has been such a problem with women and violence that we were told not to tell. 'That's just part of being in a couple,' 'It's just part of being a woman.' With the Clothesline Project, finally you're airing your laundry in front of everybody!

The paradox in using Clothesline shirts to break the silence around violence against women is that the shirts and display do so silently. As material objects, the shirts are vocally mute, and yet they speak on behalf of women, and they do so in a display environment that is uncannily quiet. Bauman (1983) explains that entire communicative events are often staged without sound. In fact, "the absence of sound, or more accurately, the absence of speech, is the key communicative element." Especially in ritual context "silence may be conventionally mandated as the only form which could achieve the event's communicative goal" (Saville-Troike 1985:9). Abrahams (1979) elaborates this point: "The greater the level of sound or noise, the more profound will the silence be interpreted to be and to mean. . . ."

Silence is employed as one of the most important devices in the vocabulary of intensification" (cited in Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985:10).

Elements of a Clothesline Project display can be very ritualistic, with the display a performance staged to invoke and evoke silence while simultaneously breaking the silence. A Clothesline Project originator who now organizes regional displays described the prevailing mood of every display she has attended:

The atmosphere around the Clothesline is something you could cut with a knife. It is profoundly serious. There is no levity. People are speaking in hushed voices. The pain exhibited there so influences those walking around and viewing it. Children feel it. Grown-ups feel it. Even people walking along the sidewalk feel it. You can feel it. It's almost palpable. It's like walking into an enormous cathedral. It's profound.

Viewers to the display stand in rapt attention, speechless before the shirts. While some are quiet out of reverence for shirtmakers or in respect of other viewers, they are also at a loss for words, struck dumb by the unspeakable horrors portrayed by the shirts. Choked by strong emotion and incredulity, theirs is a stunned silence. Ironically, viewers report that they are keenly aware of ambient noise that envelops a display. Indoors it is the sound of gentle footfalls, muffled coughs or sniffles, and the humming of florescent lights or heating and cooling systems. Outdoors it is the song of birds, rustle of leaves, wind in flapping shirts, and the sound of distance traffic. Personal exchanges, conversations, questions and answers can also be heard, but they are almost always muted, whispered, barely audible.

Acoustical Resistance

At many displays, as viewers stand in stunned or reverential silence, the sounds of the gong, whistle, and bell also insinuate themselves on their consciousness, literally and figuratively breaking the silence in yet another way. The steady, measured tones drift in and out of viewers' awareness: the reverberating gong breaks the stillness every fifteen seconds to remind viewers that another woman has been beaten, the whistle blows every minute to remind viewers that

another woman has been raped, and the bell tolls every six hours to remind viewers that no less than four women are brutally murdered each and every day. This quite literal repetitive breaking of silence is, as Bauman (1983) explains, "acoustic repetition that may bring audiences to higher 'meditative-like' levels of consciousness, reflection, and understanding" (pp. 30-31).

The irony of all this quiet and stillness is that the shirts are "heard" by viewers as "screams" and "shouts," as angry barrages, strident appeals, and piercing critiques, as well as resounding declarations and sometimes as boisterous jubilation. The shirts amplify the voices of survivors and allies in ways that resist silencing. While individual shirts may seem meek and mute, the accumulated testimony of shirts is perceived as a cacophony of voices not easily shouted down in public. The quiet insinuation of the gong, whistle, and bell offer further testimony of violence against women that is not easily disputed in public. As one viewer aptly stated, "when you *look* at a shirt, you have to *listen* to the woman's story,"—looking to listen, a kind of synesthesia in which voices are heard by visual, tactile, and kinetic means. It is as though personal, public, and institutional denial are pseudo-sonically drowned out.

Breaking the Silence through Visual and Representational Resistance

My argument to this point has been rooted in the Clothesline Project as exemplary folk media, but the Clothesline Project is also an example of new genre public art (Capasso 1996:20). Coined by Lacy (1995), "new genre public art" is "visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact. . .operating either as a concrete agent of change or functioning symbolically to affect change" (p. 19). Works as diverse as the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall, The Names Project (AIDS) Quilt, the Holocaust Museum, and Helene Alyon's Earth Ambulance have been cited as examples of new genre public art. Capasso (1996) argues that such artworks are characterized by "undisguised

progressive political agendas, based on community activism and social intervention" (p. 20).

Lacy explains that new genre public art is distinguished by its concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention. Public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language; the audience becomes a participant, even a collaborator, in the work (p. 19). Its purpose is always critical, with the artist as analyst and commentator of the social world.

New genre public art is subversive in another way as well; it challenges the dominant discourses of art history and art theory. Identifying what she calls an "underlying aversion" in the dominant aesthetic "to art that claims to 'do' something," Lacy insists that "appropriated, performative, conceptual, transient, and even interactive art are all accepted by art world critics as long as there appears to be no real possibility of social change" (pp. 20-21).

New genre public art reacts to this with insurgence, promoting an alternative aesthetic that critiques and challenges hegemony within the art world. For example, it defies the requirements set by dominant art discourses for an "appropriate scale, presence, material and subject matter" for public art by experimenting with form and content. In the process of this experimentation, new genre public art frequently subordinates craft to function and substitutes process for object. "Where and how the artist locates her voice within the work's structure is critical" according to Lacy "the discursive aspects of the work become as urgent as the aesthetic" (pp. 39-40). The visual appeal of imagery may be superseded by textual properties of the work that challenge conventions of "beauty" in art.

Although it does not claim to be, nor is it touted to be, a challenge to modernist art imperatives, the Clothesline Project adopts particular aesthetic strategies to communicate the hidden transcript of women who had experienced violence and in so doing resists yet another mechanism which threatens to marginalize and silence women.

Pollack (1988) argues that art history is not just indifferent to women, it is a "masculinist ideological discourse."

High culture plays a specifiable part in the reproduction of women's oppression, in the circulation of relative values and meanings for the ideological constructs of masculinity and femininity. Representing creativity as masculine and Woman as the beautiful image for the desiring masculine gaze, high culture systematically denies knowledge of women as producers of culture and meaning (p. 17).

Although professional artists were among the originators of the Clothesline Project, the majority of women that contribute shirts or organize displays would deny that they are artists. Many, indeed, would deny that they are at all creative. And yet, they have collaborated in the creation of a premier example of new genre public art that challenges conventions of art production, distribution, and reception. Along with other feminist art, the Clothesline Project challenges contemporary discourse about women, about domination, and about art itself.

This brings us back to an earlier discussion of the role of empty clothing in art to express resistance to the traditions of representation and the objectifying male gaze. Shirts on a clothesline provide a medium that allows women to resist self-images that have been imposed on them and construct self-identifying images of their own. On the Clothesline, women are subject rather than object, active speakers not passive themes. The dialogic structure of the Clothesline is the result of collaborative and interdependent processes. The multi-vocal expressions of women call into question traditional notions of authorship, replacing what feminist art critics have called the "egotistical monologue" with a collaborative and interactive dialogue (Broude and Garrard 1994:22). Indeed, Julier (1994) argues that the Clothesline Project demonstrates ways in which collaborative texts may function to enable speech rather than silence individual voices" (p. 252).

Dominant art discourses place figurative painting and sculpture at the top of the aesthetic hierarchy and relegate decorative arts to the bottom. In contrast, the Clothesline Project elevates fabric and decorative arts, resisting the trivialization of

women's traditional art forms. Its medium is based on immediate skills derived from women's social conditioning and life experiences, particularly women's domestic labor, needlework and fabric art, as well as costume and dress. It incorporates private subject matter through coding and disguise, using icons of women's work to convey its message, but subverting precisely those images and materials that have become the marks of women's oppression.

The Clothesline Project blurs the distinctions between the private and public spheres, and like other new genre public art, conflates the traditionally perceived separated domains of production and reception. Originators of the Clothesline Project chose an expressive medium that accentuated the hallmarks of new genre public art: content, collective production, autobiography, craft, process and performance.

Jaworski Reprised

I would like to conclude this chapter by returning to the mechanisms that Jaworski identified as silencers of women and reiterating the ways the Clothesline Project resists that silencing. Jaworski's mechanisms included interpersonal silencing, specifically male monopolization of conversation, the imposition of masculinized language standards and the concomitant devaluation of women's language styles and forms, male monopolization of public discourse through control of mass media and the resulting distortion of images of women, the trivialization of women's personal and social concerns, and the host of other devices such as denial, secrets, taboo subjects, erasure, false-naming, non-naming, encoding, omission, veiling, fragmentation, and lying.

The Clothesline Project resists interpersonal silencing, both self- and super-imposed, by creating a discursive space for women, one which invites them to communicate any message in any form by designing a shirt and hanging it for public display, thus breaking the silence around violence against women. The Project assures that it is women who get to tell the story of gendered violence on the

Clothesline. Men's participation in making and displaying shirts is restricted in an attempt to thwart male appropriation of the line and to amplify the voices of women who do participate.

The Clothesline Project resists the imposition of a masculinized language standard and the devaluation of women's language styles and forms by communicating political discourse through a genre traditional to women and thereby elevating its status beyond the restrictive domestic sphere to which it is usually assigned. The Clothesline medium accentuates multi-sensory, aesthetic aspects of communication, de-centering textual and linguistic modes of expression and reinforcing the non-linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects of symbolic communication. The choice of shirts on a clothesline is an assertion of the power and legitimacy of women's expressive culture and a challenge to its devaluation. The Clothesline Project elevates vernacular communication to an art form.

Access and control of media is key to the ability to publicly articulate the hidden transcript. The Clothesline Project resists male monopolization of mass media and public discourse by creating alternative media—folk media—that are decentralized, democratic, and communally rather than corporately controlled. The Clothesline Project is a woman-controlled media. By circumventing male controlled communication channels and instituting an alternative media, the women of the Clothesline Project have provided a channel through which women communicate self-identifying messages that counter many of the distorted images of women perpetuated by electronic and print mass media. Particularly it resists the continually distorted images of women who have experienced, or are vulnerable to, violence. Shirtmakers are free to put anything on their shirts, to define themselves and reflect their own sensibilities and realities, and to reclaim their subjectivity. Ironically, at the same time the Clothesline Project circumvents the monopolistic mass media, it has done so in a way that is unique, creating a news-worthy event that garners a great deal of attention and coverage from the mass media. This

ability to manipulate mass media allows the Clothesline Project to publicly articulate resistance to gender domination over channels that are male-controlled.

The Clothesline Project resists trivialization of women's personal and social concerns by honoring autobiography, demonstrating the importance of each woman's story, and reinforcing the credibility and truth of the testimony of survivors and the allies of victims. And the Clothesline Project resists the host of other silencing mechanisms—denial, secrets, taboo, erasure—by providing the means for generation, elaboration, and public articulation of the hidden transcript; by airing and broadcasting the refutations of the public transcript in ways that are difficult to immediately challenge or refute and by demonstrating that the silence of social institutions is complicit in violence against women.

The Clothesline Project resists silencing at both the micro and macro levels, ironically using silence to achieve this objective. The shirts and clotheslines speak despite being orally or aurally mute. They speak visually and viscerally by weaving their testimony in text and design, and by creating an amalgam of metaphors, not purely linguistic in character, but based on process and practice as well. As Jeff Kelley explains, "processes are also metaphors; they are powerful containers of meaning" (cited in Lacy 1995:45). The Clothesline Project silently evokes memories, experiences, and processes that are imbued with meaning for participants and viewers. By evoking sets of practices that both create and hold meaning, shirts hanging from a clothesline break the silence in myriad ways

CHAPTER 12

SPIRITED RESISTANCE EVOKING AND INVOKING THE IMMATERIAL BODY

A national display of Clothesline Project shirts was staged in Washington D. C. on April 8 and 9, 1996. An estimated 6,000 shirts from more than 180 local lines from across the country were hung from clotheslines supported by scaffolding constructed on the national mall specifically for the display. Despite its festive appearance in a park frequented by ebullient tourists and surrounded by urban traffic, the display site itself was uncannily quiet. A local organizer in attendance during the two days observed, "outside the display it was so noisy, with children playing and yelling, but once they got three feet inside the display, it became as quiet and reverent as if you were in church." She described the display as though it were a religious experience for her. "I couldn't stand while looking at the shirts because it seemed so inappropriate. I had to either sit or kneel" (Abb 1996:1). Her words hint at qualities of the Clothesline felt by many participants; the Clothesline has a spirited, haunting quality and the display space is hallowed, sacred ground.

In a recent article Bell (1997) describes what he calls "ghosts of place. . .the felt presence—an *anima*, *geist*, or genius—which possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to a place." In using the term "ghosts," Bell is referring not only to "the scary spirits of the unsettled dead. . .who haunt our anxious memories," but also those which are "rooted, friendly, and affirming" (p. 4). Bell draws from the major schools of sociological thought (Durkheim [1915] 1976; Weber [1921] 1968; Benjamin 1968; Mead [1934] 1967) to support his argument. Durkheim's contention that material objects have a "sacred presence" is reinforced by Weber's assertion that material objects have "charisma" or "the presence of '*mana*.'" Benjamin's argument that artworks are imbued with an energy or life-force which he called "the aura of the original" is supported by Mead's claim that "inanimate objects. . .form parts of the generalized and organized—the completely socialized—

other." Taking a phenomenological stance, Bell argues that material objects as well as physical places are "imbued with spirits and personified sentiments" (p. 5). While he maintains these spirits and personified sentiments are "fabrications, products of imagination, social constructions" that imbue an object or place with social meaning, he warns that they are not reducible to collective memory for they contain a "spirited and live quality," not just of the remembered past, but also of the present. Bell contends that our sense of the spirited nature of place leads us to consider the physical objects and spaces therein as sacred, and as a result we treat such places with reverential deference, respectful distance, and ritual care. These places are also vulnerable to contamination, however, and haunting by profane, unclean, and disturbing ghosts which must be "ritually exorcised" if we are to maintain or reclaim the sacred and spiritual nature of place.

Spirited Resistance

The quiet and sober atmosphere that permeates a Clothesline Project display gives the site a haunted and haunting quality. Or perhaps it is this haunted, haunting quality that induces the quiet sobriety. Whichever, the uncanny hush of the display reminds many participants of sacred space, "like walking into an enormous cathedral" or "a church."

This sense of the sacred is no doubt facilitated by the meditative intonation of gong and bell, sounds ostensibly intended to draw our awareness to women battered, raped, abused, and murdered, but sounds frequently associated with the spiritual and used to evoke reflection and contemplation. Not all displays, however, use these acoustic effects and yet participants report the spirited, haunting quality of the Clothesline.

Frequently, it is the setting that evokes this sense of the spiritual. Although shirt displays may be small and open with all shirts easily visible, many displays are large, with lines that meander and intersect to create small labyrinths, tiny alcoves, and temporary seclusion that offer momentary privacy for viewers engaging the

shirts. While the whole display offers an opportunity for reflection, these spaces offer a place to express strong emotion with minimal intrusion. These, along with the sequestered shirtmaking areas, provide sanctuary to shirtmakers and viewers.

But just as the Clothesline suggests relative safety, it can be discomfoting as well. Often the difference lies in where the display is staged. Participants commented, for example, on the different feelings evoked by indoor and outdoor displays.

In outdoor displays, the sun, breeze, and openness feels less oppressive and more hopeful," stated a project originator and national organizer. "Inside it's trickier, although you have more control over the setting. Inside can be trickier because it can get claustrophobic being surrounded by so much pain. The setting needs to be open.

The importance of place was corroborated by a survivor of incest who organizes local displays: "The shirts don't move inside. When they're outside, they're alive. They have motion and freedom and energy and positive things. When they're inside, they just hang." A regional organizer elaborated this point further,

People can deal with it better when it's outside, because being outside, you feel like you're not enclosed totally with it. There's space to step back. It's just a different atmosphere. When you're inside a building it's so powerful that it's sometimes overwhelming. You're trapped there.

An incest survivor who created a shirt for the Clothesline marveled at organizers and volunteers commitment and longevity with the Project.

I couldn't have been so close to it on an ongoing basis. It's almost as if it's alive, to me. The Clothesline is alive because it's the spirits of all these women, so damaged and so destroyed and look at them now speaking out.

But it is not just the display site that is "imbued with spirits and personified sentiments," it is the shirts themselves. An incest survivor explained that she had to turn her shirt over to the local Clothesline Project immediately after she completed it. "Once I started working on it I had to finish it and get it out of the room. I couldn't keep it there. It took on a life of its own," she said. Her words reflect the

ghostly quality of her shirt, a quality that garnered her respect, but instilled her with much discomfort, a quality from which she needed to distance herself.

Many viewers keep their distance from the shirts, but others engage them in very intimate ways. An incest survivor observed,

I have seen women go down the row [of shirts] touching and reading each one, honoring the presence of each shirt, honoring the presence of the person who made it, honoring the pain of the person involved and the situation that caused the shirt to be made, but I have also seen people keep their distance from the shirts. It's a distancing from others' pain and a form of denial, as if to say, 'we'll go only so far right now.' It's overwhelming and the people are protecting themselves.

A local organizer had a different perspective on touching and distancing from the shirts however, saying, "distance may be defensive or it may be respectful." She went on to explain. "There's respectful touch, appropriate touch, and a respect for the process. . .observing boundaries is part of the respect a viewer transfers to the shirt."

Just as the shirts evoke a painful or respectful distance, they also instill participants with a feeling of serenity and tranquillity. A rape survivor who is now a regional organizer poignantly described this as she expressed the reverence and deference that the shirts inspire in her.

I have these private moments, sometimes, because I used to keep the shirts here. I used to have to go in to the shirts for one reason or another. . .I don't know any of the people, but the shirts have their own identity. I will pick up a shirt and [think] 'I remember you. Oh, I remember you.' I remember the story and it's almost as if I know who the person is. It's the identity of the shirt itself that I have established a relationship with in some way. Maybe it has to do with my own personal experience with that shirt. Every shirt is so uniquely different and there's an essence about each one that's there. . .picking that shirt up and knowing their energy left in the shirt. I know this was somebody's shirt. Somebody sat down and put a piece of themselves on the shirt. And it's here forever. And for me it's an incredible honor to be able to pick that shirt up and carry it safely. . .I always have the same feeling when I pick this pile of shirts up and I carry them; it's very ritualistic. It's like I'm carrying the soul or something of these people. . .and it's an incredible honor. . .to give them their right to be seen and be heard.

Such feelings of reverence and acts of deference result in a protectiveness of the shirts; protecting the shirts from desecration is the symbolic equivalent for protecting women from violence, something that patriarchal institutions have failed to do, and it is a way that organizers, viewers, and other participants bear witness to violence against women.

Evoking the Immaterial Body

In *Ghostly Matters: Hauntings and the Sociological Imagination*, Gordon (1997) uses the metaphor of ghosts to describe those allusive forces that make their presence known despite their invisibility. These ghosts, according to Gordon, are “alive,” importing a “charged strangeness” into the spaces they haunt, “unsettling the propriety and property lines that delimit a zone of activity or knowledge” (p. 63). And they are primarily a symptom of what is missing; they represent loss—of life or opportunity—while at the same time, they represent hope and future possibility (p. 64).

Clothesline shirts have these haunting qualities. The shirts not only represent women, they are the women.

You almost know the women, even though they might not be on the site. You know the women by looking at their shirts. You can feel their pain by seeing their shirt and reading it and holding it and looking at it and being there. Some of the shirts are so expressive that you can't help but know the woman.

The shirts draw attention to the absence of the women they represent, women who must remain sequestered, disguised, and invisible for safety's sake. And they draw attention to the many losses suffered as the result of violence. Their psychic charge is achieved by evoking spirits, or more specifically, the immaterial bodies of victims, survivors, perpetrators, and viewers.

Evoking Victims and Survivors

In her discussion of the art of empty clothes, Felshin (1995b) contends that “empty clothes [are] a literalization of loss or a *memento mori*, a reminder of death” (p. 20). The Clothesline demonstrates this literalization of loss through the use of white shirts—the many commemorative shirts that hang from the line (Figure 13).

These white shirts, made by friends, families, and other allies, memorialize women who have been brutally murdered or eulogize women who took their own lives in response to violent trauma. They are clear and deliberate *memento mori*—reminders of death. But every shirt that hangs from the line is a symbol and literalization of loss, because survivors’ shirts suggest loss as well. They represent the loss of child-like innocence, loss of trust, loss of dignity, loss of freedom, and

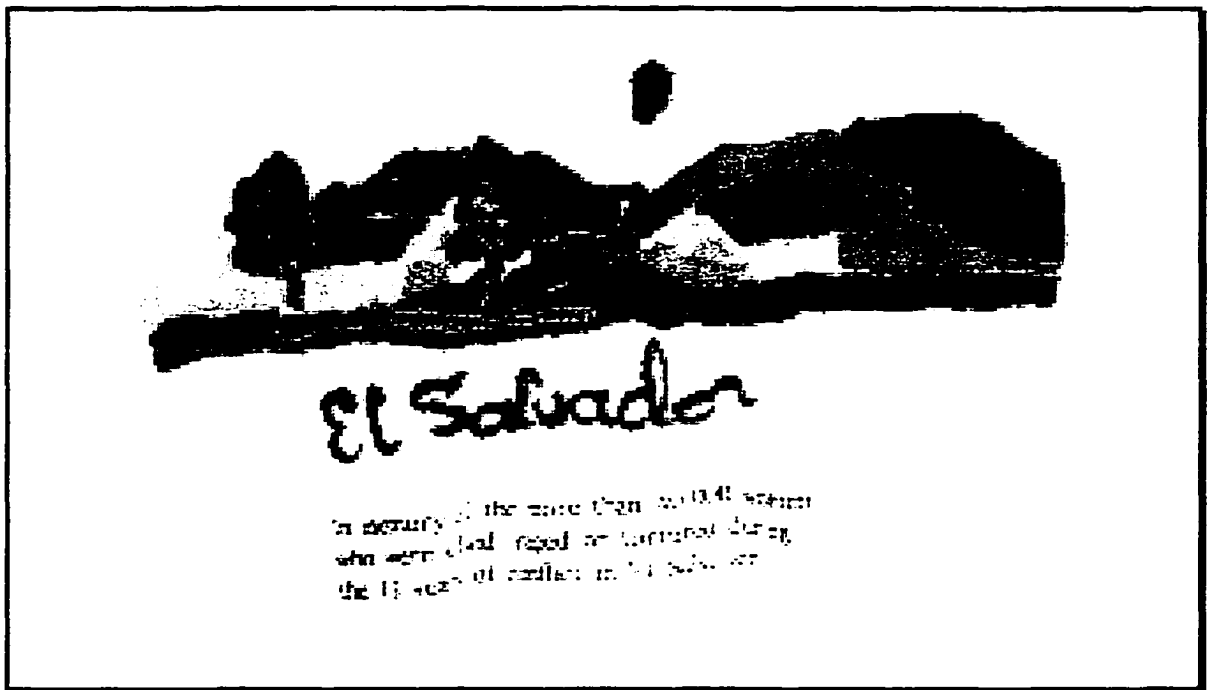


Figure 13. “El Salvador.” White shirts provide visible and tangible reminder of those who have died. This is tribute to the “40,000 women who were killed, raped or tortured during the 12 years of conflict in El Salvador.” Photo by P. C. Hipple.

loss of hope. "No milk and cookies, no playful days, no friends, no security, just a daily fear for my life from my brother," reads the robin's egg blue turtleneck (Figure 14). "I remember when I was little and believed in things like Santa Claus. . .when something hurt, a kiss made everything all better again" reads a red t-neck that ends virulently, "You bastard. Who are you to inflict this kind of pain?" Such shirts not only remind us that the perpetrator robs victims of their lives and survivors of their independence, they also show us ways that institutional responses to women's resistance reduce women's options and thwart their attempts to free themselves

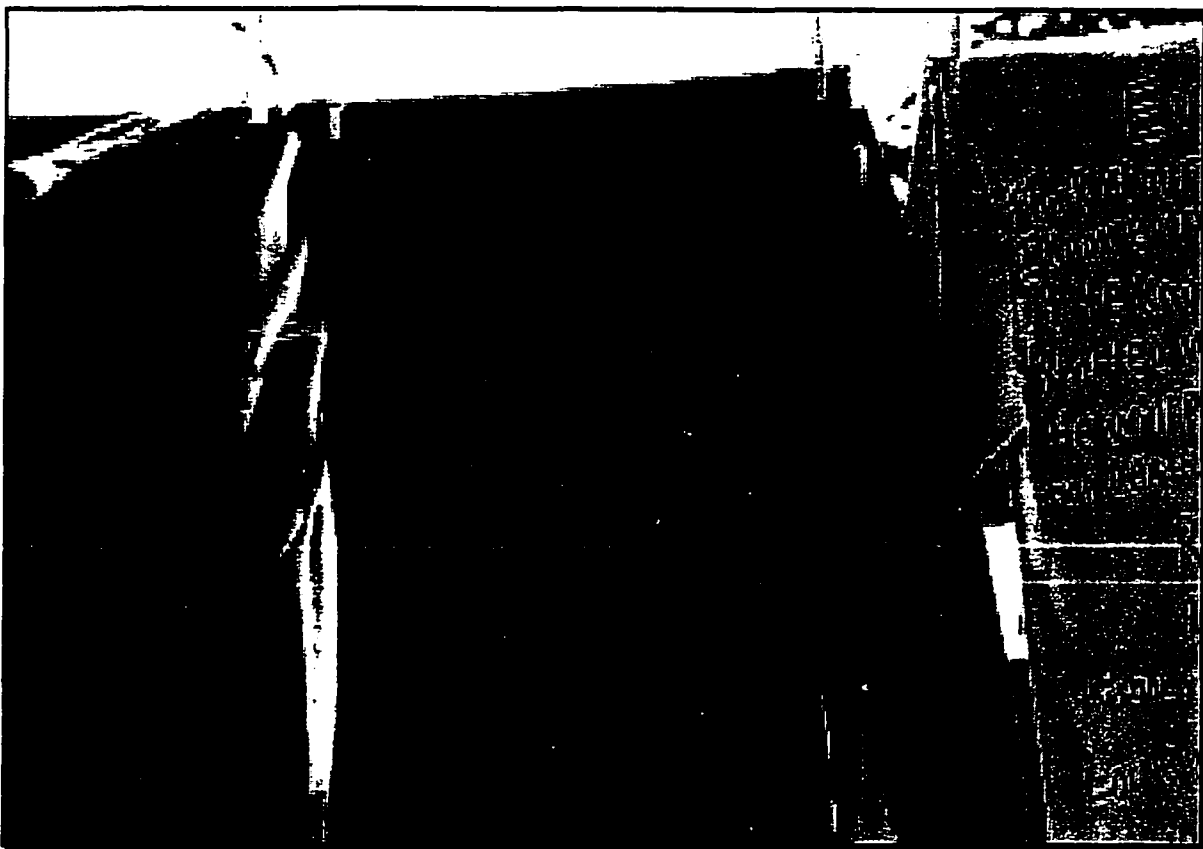


Figure 14. "No Milk and Cookies, No Playful Days." The loss of childhood innocence is poignantly and painfully reported by this shirt, but so too is the quest for some kind of reclamation. While it discloses "a daily fear for my life..." across the shirt front, the following words transverse the sleeves, "I Have My Voice." And beyond the frame of this figure, near the hem of the shirt, the shirtmaker boldly signed her name. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

from domination. The yellow shirt that protests a woman's long imprisonment for conspiring to kill her abusive husband is an extreme example (Figure 15), while the creme color T-shirt presents an all-too-common example as well. "The judge gave my children to my batterer, so I went back. We are still there. Pray for us!"

While shirts express material and psychic loss, at the same time they express the amazing resilience of survivors as well (Figure 16). Individual shirts, and the collective ensemble of shirts on the line, represent future possibility and hope.

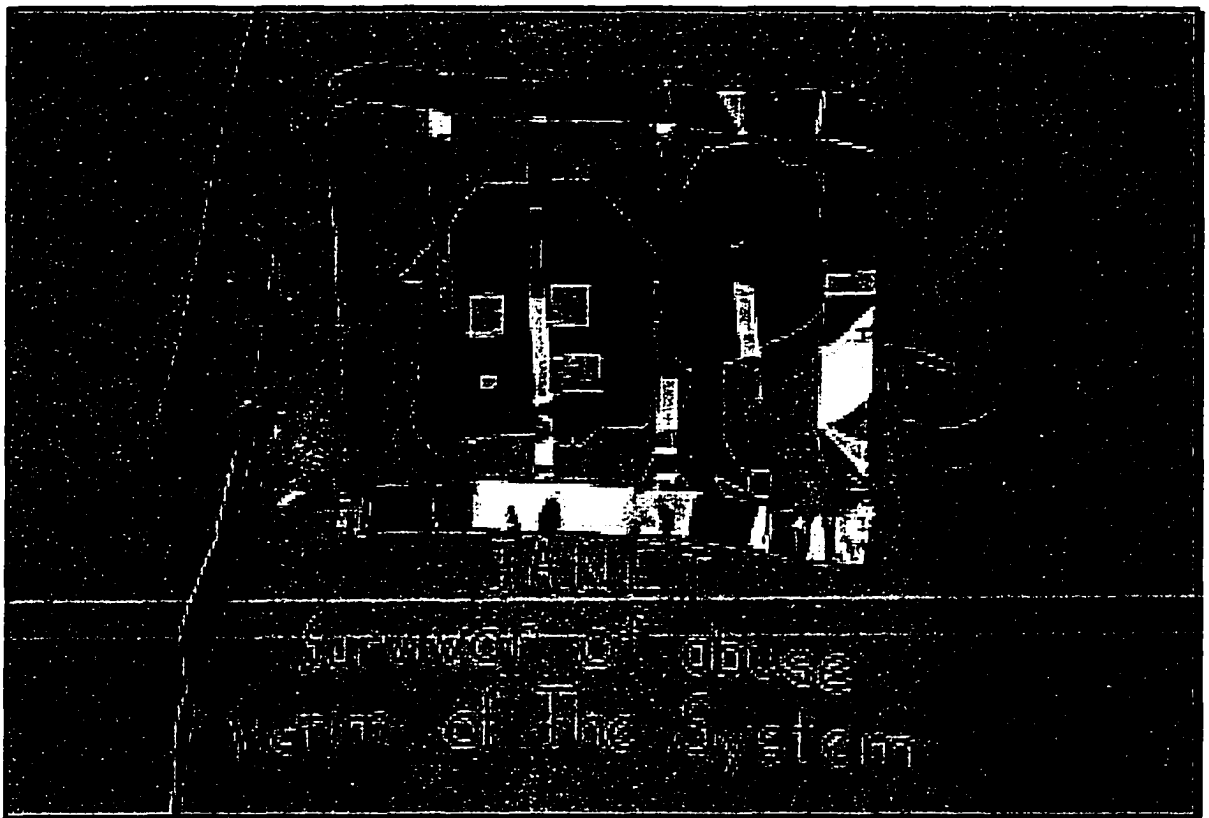


Figure 15. "Survivor of Abuse, Victim of the System." Angered by the conviction of a woman for the murder of her battering husband, this shirtmaker pays tribute to "Janet" while depicting two kinds of prison, the domestic sphere in which daily abuse took place, and the jail cell behind which the woman is now confined. A small American flag adorns the back of the shirt, outlined with "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of American and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with Liberty? And Justice? For All???????" Photo by P. C. Hipple.



Figure 16. "Resolution." Reclamation, resilience, and recovery are central themes of Clothesline shirts. The indomitable perseverance and spirit of survivors is a repeated message. These three individuals ascend from the violence depicted in Figure 17. On the back of the shirt is the message, "Freedom from Oppression." Photo by P. C. Hipple.

Through messages of reclamation, these shirts describe the quest to regain what was lost—safety, security, autonomy, sovereignty, power, and a sense of self. A shirt reads, "raped me, beat me, and stole my pride and faith, and made me afraid. . . . But my spirit rose up and I found courage and hope. I did not die!" (Minor 1995:1) Another echoes, "You can batter my body but you can't kill my spirit." Another, suggesting the personal transformation that empower the shirtmaker's spirited resistance, proclaims, "You can't hurt me now! I am a strong and beautiful woman." These are joined by throngs of other shirts all with similar messages of resilience, defiance, and resistance.

In Cantow's (1981) documentary film about women's experiences with laundry, a woman reflects on washday memories, especially the sight of clothing

fluttering on the line as it dries in the wind. She muses, "I think that it evokes the ghosts of the people that wore them." Such ghosts and spirits are evoked by shirts on the Clothesline and the display setting feels alive with their presence. Movement of shirts as they sway in the breeze is a powerful evocateur; indeed the Latin word for wind is *spiritus*, which is also the root of spirit. Clothesline shirts conjure the ghosts of the women who wore them, and they conjure the spirits of the survivors and allies who made them. Most importantly, they conjure the spirits of the women they represent, victims and survivors whose stories unfold via the shirts.

Evoking Perpetrators

But Clothesline shirts evoke not only the revered spirits of victims and survivors, they evoke vulgar spirits as well. The spirits of perpetrators—their presence strongly felt—haunt the Clothesline display. Cantow's film is again illustrative: "People used to say if you left your clothes out once it got dark, they were no good, because the devil would get in them. Evil spirits would get in them." Evil spirits abound in the Clothesline; shirt designs express and evoke these spirits as the immaterial bodies of perpetrators.

When portraying the perpetrator, shirtmakers incorporate a number of common motifs. Perpetrators appear as demons and satyrs, snakes, lizards, spiders and vicious dogs. They also appear as fragmented body parts, bulging or leering eyes, contorted faces, sneering lips and growling mouths, clutching and fondling hands, enlarged and erect penises, clenched fists, or heavy booted feet poised to kick and stomp. Perpetrators are repeatedly portrayed enacting or threatening violence (Figures 17 and 18). Sometimes blatant brutalities are depicted, but at other times the abuses are more subtly expressed, often with chilling, if not sickening, visual and visceral effect. These depictions, along with the renderings of images of the perpetrator, evoke the felt presence of the batterer and sexual predator despite his physical absence from the site of the Clothesline display.



Figure 17. "Battered and Shattered." Perpetrators are frequently depicted on Clothesline shirts in the throes of violence. Figure 16 illustrates the transformation and resolution for this family, but it is rendered in such a way that it is perhaps only a dream—a goal yet to be achieved. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

This evocation of immaterial bodies is achieved through artful images rendered on the shirts and through single words and detailed stories imprinted thereon. Clothesline participants sense the presence of perpetrators and their qualities are most unsettling and most haunting. Viewers sense the danger and share the feelings of vulnerability. Pictures, words, and stories on shirts are menacing and threatening, and they feel alarmingly immediate. Just as the shirts suggest that the victim could be any woman, these designs and narratives suggest that the perpetrator could be any man — not just the woman down the street, but the man down the street as well. This suggestion challenges viewers' illusions of



Figure 18. "I Wish I Had a Bat!" When not depicted enacting violence, perpetrators are portrayed threatening to batter, rape, or assault. Photo by P. C. Hipple.

safety. According to a local organizer, "it takes everything you think to be true and says, hey, that's not always the way it is."

The immaterial bodies of perpetrators contaminate the site of the Clothesline display, instilling much discomfort in many viewers. Although the Clothesline display suggests a place safe from violence, the conjuring of the spirits of perpetrators recalls the immediacy of violence. With these shirts particularly, viewers are likely to maintain a "safe" ritual distance.

But it is here that the rituals of washday suggested and enacted by the Clothesline serve their therapeutic role. The Clothesline symbolizes a ritual of ablution. By putting their experiences on shirts, by describing the violence and then hanging the shirt on the line for all to see, women are purging themselves of pain and shame and exorcising the spirit of the perpetrator from their lives.

Evoking the Body Politic

Often equally discomfoting is the evocation of the spirit of the viewer, because the Clothesline demands not passive engagement, but active involvement in ending violence against women. The Clothesline Project challenges viewers to recognize ways they are complicit with the violence, either as perpetrators or as individuals who have blamed, stigmatized, and silenced women. Messages on shirts continually admonish the spectator to "Take action," "Break the silence," "Believe the children," "End homophobia," "Stop violence against women."

A white T-shirt adorned simply with words powerfully demonstrates this point (Figure 19). With this shirt, the maker honors his grandmother who was raped by border crossing guards during her attempt to flee Russian pogroms in the early part of this century. Physical and sexual violence is a price unwillingly paid by many women and their families during times of war, when brutality, rape and sexual humiliation are used as deliberate strategies of political, religious, and ethnic persecution and terrorism. With this shirt the maker also beseeches men to recognize ways they are implicated in gendered violence and to recognize their role in ending violence against women. With the exclamation "You can do something about it!" he encourages viewers of this Clothesline Project display that social change is possible.

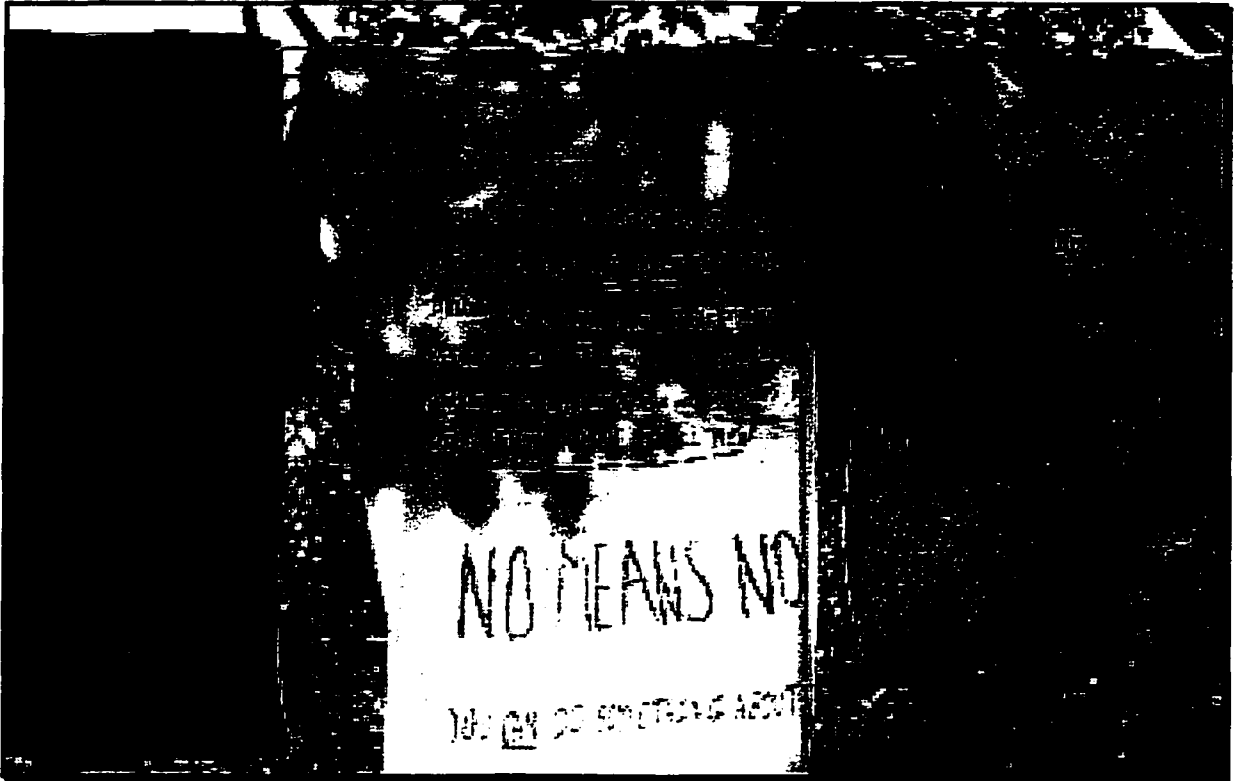


Figure 19. "No Means No." With this shirt, the maker honors his grandmother who was raped by border crossing guards, the price unwillingly paid by some women and their families fleeing Russian pogroms. Her story is inscribed on the front. The back of the shirt beseeches men to stop rape: "this problem affects us all. The next time it could be your mother or sister, your friend or your lover or your wife. From a man to all men, NO MEANS NO! You can do something about it." Photo by P. C. Hipple.

The Clothesline evokes strong visceral responses from participants and viewers. Those who have experienced its effect say, "there is a place when you're dealing with the clothesline that is completely primeval and emotional." Through the Clothesline you "enter into a world and experience it personally. It grabs your gut, gets under your skin, and won't let you go. The pain hooks you." "And that's always been the power of the Clothesline. You just can't maintain any defenses against it."

Ultimately, it is the specter of violence that haunts us, and its immediacy, evoked by the spirits of victims, survivors, perpetrators, and spectators that inhabit the Clothesline. It is the specter of violence that we fear, because the clothesline

makes clear that the threat of violence oppresses all women. The emotional power of the Clothesline, along with the visual impact, results from the conjuring of these ghosts. Ultimately it is the specter of violence that creates the psychic charge that so strongly affects participants and viewers. It is the evocation of the specter of violence juxtaposed with sacred space, sanctuary, immaterial bodies, and ritual enactments of ablution and exorcism that I refer to as "spirited resistance." Spirited resistance also serves as a metaphor for the invisibility of stealth resistance, the phantasm of disguised subversion that suggests itself as a hallucination or apparition, but has material effects on domination.

In arguing against ideological hegemony, Scott states that subordinates are constrained at the "level of political action and struggle, where the daily exercise of power sharply limits the options available" (pp. 90-91). Richard (1996) argues that the body is a "support structure for the forms of obedience and discipline already in place. . .[conversely] images of the body liberate a level of speech that has been censored" (p. 31). Appropriation and violence that characterize domination occur at the level of the body to deny subordinates bodily agency. By evoking the immaterial body of victims, survivors, perpetrators, viewers and allies, the Clothesline frees the immaterial body to act as agent. The body knows and communicates what the brain can not reason logically, what the tongue can not articulate. Therefore the evoked immaterial body liberates a level of speech (i.e., the hidden transcript) that has been silenced by dominant discourse (i.e., the public transcript). In this way, the Clothesline Project provides women with another way to insinuate their resistance to gendered violence, despite the forces and structures working against them.

The more skeptical reader may feel that all this talk of ghosts and hauntings is nothing but pure superstition, a point I will concede on condition that the reader consider that the Latin root of the word superstition. It is *superstitio*, which means to stand over as a witness, victor, or survivor, that is, to *bear witness*.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. 1981. Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Co, p. 1161.

SECTION III
HEGEMONIC DISGUISE
IN RESISTANCE TO DOMINATION

CHAPTER 13

HEGEMONIC DISGUISE IN RESISTANCE TO DOMINATION

Scott contends that "one of the most effective and common ways that subordinates may express resistance is by embedding it in a larger context of symbolic compliance" (p. 101), a form of disguise he refers to as "clothing their defiance in hegemonic dress" (p. 166fn). Scott explains that to disguise their resistance "the rebellious subordinate group invokes the ritual symbols of a conservative hegemony." As a symbol of "women's work," women's role under patriarchy as keeper of the domestic realm and women's compliance with traditional gender expectations, the Clothesline provides a hegemonic disguise. By decorating items of apparel and hanging them on a clothesline—acts consistent with women's socialization for femininity and domesticity—women of the Clothesline Project cloak their resistance in symbolic compliance.

Gendered Cultural Expressions

Central to Scott's thesis is that the folk culture of different groups has unique characteristics that stem from their distinct social location. The folk culture of each "social class or strata" contains evidence of their particular values, beliefs, and ideology. In particular, the folk culture of subordinated groups is laced with critiques of the dominant group, as well as refutations of the dominant ideology and discourse that supports it. These critiques and refutations, however, will be encoded to protect subordinate group members from retaliation. According to Scott,

What permits subordinate groups to undercut the authorized cultural norms is the fact that cultural expression, by virtue of its polyvalent symbolism and metaphor, lends itself to disguise. By the subtle use of codes one can insinuate into a ritual, a pattern of dress, a song, a story, meanings that are accessible to one intended audience and opaque to another audience the actors wish to exclude (p. 158).

It is unclear whether Scott considers women a distinct social class, strata, or subordinate "group" because he all but exempts gender relations from his

discussion. In contrast, Radner and Lanser (1993) make clear that the social location of women produces distinct “experiences, material circumstances and understandings” that leave their traces in women’s cultural expressions (pp. 2-3).

Central to Radner and Lanser’s thesis is the “existence of. . . women’s culture and the ability of women within a particular culture to communicate with one another in code” (p. 2). Radner and Lanser contend that women “constitute an interpretive community” that makes them able to decipher “*feminist messages* — that is, messages critical of some aspect of women’s subordination” (pp. 2-3). This ability to decipher such codes and messages is learned as a process of gender socialization.

[T]here is a realm of practice that is primarily or exclusively women’s domain, through which women may develop a set of common signifying practices (beliefs, understanding, behaviors, rituals—hence a *culture*) whose meanings are not necessarily accessible to men of the same group (p. 2).

Radner and Lanser explain that this distinct “realm of practice” results from the social construction of gender which prescribes a sharp separation between men’s and women’s spheres of activity. Radner and Lanser counsel,

[t]his separation of spheres does not, however, generate parallel male and female cultures, each of which is inaccessible to the other group, for the two usually exist in a relationship not simply of difference but of dominance. While men in a particular community may be able to articulate both solidarity among their sex and opposition to ‘women’s culture’. . . women’s attitudes and understandings cannot always be openly acknowledged because of their social, economic, and emotional dependence on the goodwill of the men. This also means that women are normally more knowledgeable about the “male” world than men are about the “female,” because dominated people need this knowledge to survive (p. 2).

Radner and Lanser emphasize that “sexual difference provides the foundation for ‘women’s cultures,’” but “sexual dominance makes women likely to communicate with other women through coded means” (p. 3). Coding then, according to Radner and Lanser, is the “expression or transmission of messages potentially accessible to a (bicultural) community under the very eyes of a dominant community for whom

these same messages are either inaccessible or inadmissible” (pp. 2-3). What Radner and Lanser describe here parallels Scott’s formulations of the hidden transcript and infrapolitics. Coding within women’s cultural expressions is one way in which women’s hidden transcripts—their critique of patriarchal control and male domination—are generated, elaborated and publicly articulated.

The Clothesline Project contains many blatant messages of resistance, defiance, challenge, and critique, but it also contains many subtle or coded anti-hegemonic messages that are not easily discerned by all who encounter it. The Clothesline Project manipulates much of its meaning to attract those sensitive to its message while eluding or repelling members of the dominant group who might respond with increased violence, coercion, repression, or appropriation.

Gender Differences in the Ability to Decipher Women’s Codes

Although laundry has traditionally been women’s domain, shirts are ubiquitous and clotheslines strung with laundry have been a familiar scene on the American landscape; they are part of a cultural heritage shared by both men and women. How then is the clothesline imbued with meaning that men are less equipped to interpret? How might the messages of the Clothesline Project be inaccessible or inadmissible to men? What evidence do I have that men and women might interpret meanings of the Clothesline Project differently?

During field observations I witnessed several men who appropriated Clothesline display space with seeming disdain for or indifference to the shirts and the project. Nonetheless, it was difficult during these observations or formal interviews with participants to detect specific differences in the interpretations⁵⁰ that men and women brought to the display. Informal discussions with men and women who had no knowledge of or experience with the Clothesline Project, however,

⁵⁰ Only supportive or sympathetic participants were questioned during the formal interviews. Reticent, reluctant, or hesitant observers did not participate in interviews. As a result, the interviews surveyed participants who were likely more adept at interpreting the subversive content of the Clothesline.

provided clues to the different interpretive "skills" that men and women bring to the Clothesline. Although these discussions were with groups too small for broad generalization, they do suggest differential capacities of men and women to detect the hidden transcript embedded in the Clothesline Project. While these discussions raised more questions than they answered, they did reveal a discernible pattern in men's and women's perception of clotheslines that provide us insight to their differing abilities to decipher the code.

In general, the men's attitudes toward clotheslines were indifferent, disdainful, or hostile. Their perceptions were based almost exclusively on visual criteria, evoking urban scenes of congestion, clutter and dirt. Never did they recount personal experiences of washday, laundry or clotheslines. Women's attitudes toward clotheslines, on the other hand, vacillated between annoyance, ambivalence, appreciation, and affection. Women's perceptions were based on multi-sensory and experiential criteria, evoking idealized exurban scenes of mild summer days.

While some of the women in these discussions reported the sight of clotheslines distasteful, they were quick to offer reflections on personal experiences with clotheslines: memories of hanging laundry with their mothers and grandmothers; how awkward it was to lug the heavy laundry basket up from the basement; the frustration of dropping clothespins; running out into a sudden downpour to rescue clothes from the rain; the day the squirrel chewed through the line; the time the line broke dragging freshly laundered clothes on the ground so they had to be washed all over again; washday rules about how to "properly" hang clothes; strategies used to hide "unmentionables" on the line from public view; how much longer clothes last that have been dried on a clothesline rather than battered about in a hot dryer; the sensual pleasures of clothes and linens dried outdoors; techniques to ease the burden of washday. Women immediately spoke to the sensual qualities of clothes on the line, bodily experiences of washday, the sounds and aromas, the textures and tactile pleasures, the kinetic movement and

kinesthetic sensations evoked by a clothesline. "There's just something about something that's been dried outside!" they would each exclaim, each in her own way.

The men were enthusiastic about these discussions and listened attentively to the women, but several expressed indifference to clotheslines and others were quick to declare their disapproval. "Clotheslines look 'tacky', 'junky', 'ugly,'" were their common descriptions. Basically the men found clotheslines lacking in visual appeal, and occasionally their disdain verged on hostility. The men basically agreed with the assessment of one of their fellows.

I hate clotheslines! They're dirty. Our yard is small and the houses are too close together; it's too crowded for a clothesline. If you put a clothesline in it, it would look junky. I'm not saying clotheslines are lower-class, but they remind me of slums.

Despite his disavowal, the social class implications of his remarks are undeniable. Why would an emblem of middle-class suburbia evoke "lower-class" imagery for men? Does the relative affluence suggested by ownership of gas and electric clothesdryers result in the clothesline being assigned lower status, or does the association of a clothesline with women connote the lower status? In addition to this lower status, men commonly referred to clotheslines as "dirty." Why would men see clotheslines as *dirty*? The era of airing dirty clothes has long past, and clotheslines are intended for drying freshly cleaned clothes. What, then, is this connotation with dirt? Anthropologist Mary Douglas ([1966] 1984) argues that dirt is a symbol for matter out of place in society's classification system, or a symbol of taboo (p. 68). What, for men, is "out of place" about a clothesline? Why is a clothesline taboo? Is it the stain of ill-washed clothes? Is it the indecency or obscenity of underwear (i.e. "unmentionables") displayed within public view? Is it the visibility of women's work? Women's (re)productive labor made public rather than private?

The men found clotheslines aesthetically displeasing. Instead they were enamored with mechanization, preferring the technology of clothesdryers. These they appreciated for their ease and efficiency, intriguing attributes considering that none of the men disclosed or admitted to ever doing the laundry as adults or children and thereby benefiting from the supposed ease and efficiency.

I am not suggesting that the women preferred the heavy, time-consuming labor of hanging clothes on an outdoor line (or continually betting against inclement weather), but I do know that women report that the introduction of an automatic washer and dryer, rather than saving labor, actually increased their workload, because the perceived "ease and efficiency" of these machines lead to raised social standards for clothing cleanliness and raised expectations within their families for clothing readiness. Several of the women debated that they may actually spend more time doing laundry today with automatic washers and dryers than they did in the past with wringer washers and clotheslines; in the past they spent one day each week washing and hanging clothes to dry, but today they do several loads of laundry on a daily basis.⁵¹

Although all of these discussions were held in rural areas, resort towns, and small cities, the visual images recounted by men were of urban scenes: clotheslines sagging between brick buildings and flats; shirts hanging limply between dingy tenements, lower class and ugly; references to crowded impoverished "slums." In contrast, the images and experiences recounted by women were almost always of suburban or rural scenes: clean white sheets swaying in the breeze from a line in the back yard. Nostalgic and frequently idealized, these scenes were usually childhood memories replete with recollections of their mothers or grandmothers.

⁵¹ I did not talk to people about their reminiscences of ironing. I suspect that perma-pressed clothing, and innovations in no-iron fabrics have resulted in real or meaningful time and labor savings. In addition, smaller families, increased use of dry-cleaning, and changes in expectations as the result of increasing numbers of women working outside the home may also contribute to a reduction in time spent in these tasks.

For the men the images were always of someone else's laundry. For the women the images were of laundry that belonged to them, their immediate or extended family.

The results of these discussions suggest that, if gender socialization provides the skills to decipher the codes embedded in women's cultural expressions such as the Clothesline, men are equipped for a visual read, but they may lack the experiential and multi-sensory skills needed to interpret much of the subversive content of the medium. Because the Clothesline communicates much of its message by recalling sets of practices, evoking metaphors, conjuring spirits, and using aural, olfactory, tactile, kinetic and kinesthetic means of expression, the messages so conveyed are more likely to remain inaccessible to those men who are reliant on visual criteria alone.

Much of the Clothesline's hidden transcript evades detection also because it is communicated through forms and practices little valued by dominant culture; some of the subversive content of the Clothesline Project is simply overlooked within this "trivial" medium. Every display organizer has stories of men who have supported the Project, provided supplies or funds to advance Project efforts, invited a local Project to display the Clothesline in a facility they owned or managed, expressed appreciation for the work of the Project, brought flowers to organizers and volunteers on duty, volunteered at a display, marched in "Take Back the Night" rallies in solidarity, made shirts on behalf of women, been so moved that they broke into tears at a display, or related stories of women they care about who have been murdered, beaten, raped, abused, or assaulted. But every display organizer also has stories of men who cavalierly saunter passed the display shaking their heads, rolling their eyes, sniggering, or mumbling criticisms under their breath. And I watched as men appropriated the display space for their own purposes, ignoring the shirts and feigning oblivion to the activities of the Clothesline Project underway. It is not clear whether their hostility was a response to messages broadcast by the shirts, or to the appearance of a clothesline in a public place. Was their disdain for the message, the medium, or both?

Disdain for clotheslines is not limited to the display sites of the Project. Perhaps nowhere is hostility toward clotheslines more manifest than in the common and widespread restrictions against clotheslines in new housing developments. Developers' plot descriptions and the covenants of neighborhood associations prohibit clotheslines, relegating clothesdrying indoors to the basement, laundry room, or commercial laundromat. Apartment dwellers, condominium and townhouse residents, and land owners alike are expected to rely solely on the mechanization of gas and electric appliances to dry their laundry, the occasional clothesline strung in the basement notwithstanding. While it is unclear what developers and neighborhood planners find objectionable, clotheslines are disappearing from the urban and suburban landscape. What is the aesthetic objection to backyard clotheslines? Why would clotheslines, once emblematic of middle-class suburbia, now be unwelcome there?

Hegemonic Disguise in Resistance to Gender Domination

Aversion to the image and meaning of a clothesline is not limited to men, of course. Some of the women confronted with the Clothesline Project have objected to the use of an image that perpetuates stereotypes of women. Some found the clothesline a degrading symbol, counterproductive to women's empowerment. Such were the first impressions of a local organizer,

To be honest, when I first heard about this project, my first thought was that we're just thinking of women doing laundry—like all she can contribute is doing laundry, doing dishes, cleaning the house. . .it just seemed so—I don't want to say 'traditional' cause that's not a bad word, not demeaning—but I thought it just seems kind of patronizing to women. 'We'll keep her in the kitchen or doing laundry'.

Her comments suggest that the meaning of women's encoded messages may not only elude men, but may create interpretive problems for women as well. Obviously, not everyone will be equipped to the same extent to detect the hidden transcript or interpret its subversive messages. Still, the multivalent, polysemous

quality of these cultural expressions make possible multiple readings that can lead to understanding, as her concluding comments also suggest.

After getting more information and hearing it compared to the AIDS Quilt, well that started making more sense. When I think of a clothesline I do think of fresh clean sheets and a clear sunny day and good memories of clotheslines. That fresh, clean, new, refreshing feeling. I never had a negative feeling about a clothesline, but I was thinking laundry, and who likes to do laundry?!

Scott argues that public articulation of the hidden transcript is conditioned on its expression being "sufficiently indirect and garbled that it is capable of two readings." It is these "ambiguous and polysemous elements of folk culture that mark off a relatively autonomous realm of discursive freedom" (p. 157). But this possibility for confusion and misinterpretation of encoded messages present a challenge for the public articulation of the hidden transcript. In her assessment of the Clothesline Project, Julier (1994) borrows from a critique of protest quilts to counsel that "[t]he use of a traditional feminine symbol 'offers a problematic, double-edged model of empowerment' (Weinberg 1992:39)" (In Julier 1994:255).

The clothesline concretizes what is common in their experience of violence—by stringing together their voices, and it reclaims a traditional symbol of women's conversational space. The clothesline is a site which often bridged the isolation of households owned by men who determined acceptable discourse. . . .But the clothesline thus also recalls, as a marker of women's oppression, the isolation of the woman working in the home, the setting often of the very violence about which the project speaks. The Clothesline is an emblem of the rigid separation of roles and spheres that leave women often without social, economic, or political power, in the home washing, isolated, rather than in public arenas where their speaking might affect the conditions of their lives (p. 255).

At the same time, it is this very contradiction of images and manipulation of domestic symbols that delivers the display's "psychic charge." The Clothesline is not only a protest of gendered violence, it constitutes a broader discourse about gender domination in its many manifestations. Foucault asserted that cultural forms are deployed to assert the dominant cultures' ideological agendas, but at the same time

they are used by subordinate groups to refute and resist the dominant discourse. Fox (1993) argues, "it is through discourse that challenges and disrupts established symbolic structures. . .that women may actively redirect their experience" (p. 38).

This use of hegemonic disguise through the Clothesline Project—"invoking the ritual symbols of conservative hegemony"—is an example of what Babcock calls symbolic inversion. Babcock's (1972) work demonstrates how women subvert "masculine discursive control" and disturb the distribution of power by means of symbolic inversion. Through their expressive behavior, women may "borrow, distort, exaggerate or invert" the symbols, values and beliefs of the dominant group and "invert, contradict, abrogate, or in some fashion present an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political" (p.14). In so doing, women bring their voices into public discourse.

In her discussion of *The Ribbon Around the Pentagon*, Pershing (1996) explains that women's choice of a particular medium is motivated by their attraction to the symbolic meanings the medium embodies.

In political needlework, for example, women have acknowledged and manipulated the conceptual association of the fabric arts with femininity, domesticity, and compliance with socially prescribed gender roles. They have learned to *use this to their advantage in order to convey their views through a medium that has been acceptable to the general society and readily accessible to women* (p. 85; emphasis added).

The clothesline is a medium that is "readily accessible" to women; originators and organizers praise the practicality of shirts and clotheslines, their ubiquity, ease of procurement, ease of storage and installation. Its acceptability to the general society, however, may be questionable considering the level of hostility expressed toward it, especially by men. But its use, despite this hostility, to critique gender domination is itself a calculated act of subversion. The Clothesline's hidden transcript evades detection, in part, because it is communicated through forms and practices little valued by dominant culture; its message is simply overlooked amid

images of feigned compliance and symbolic hegemony. Meanwhile, the deeper symbolic meanings—inspired by the sets of practices, metaphors, and rituals evoked and embodied by the clothesline and shirts—provide the “Rosette Stone” for deciphering much of the subversive content of the Project.

The Clothesline is most accessible to women, the threatened targets of gendered violence, and particularly survivors, whose distinctive bodily experiences of gendered violence equip them to understand and interpret one another’s coded messages of resistance. As a woman who survived incest explained, “The Clothesline pulls a lot of emotion from women who know that place, who ‘get’ it, who can simply look at something in a way and say, ‘oh yea, I know what that’s all about!’”

If, as Radner and Lanser explain, “the production of coded messages is a sign of oppression and censorship,” then the articulation and deciphering of such messages “may be the very process through which liberation becomes possible” (p. 3). Originators of the Clothesline Project understood this well, and it is therefore appropriate that they should have the last words. With a deliberately coded understatement and a twinkle in her eye, one of the international organizers confided, “There’s a little element of anarchy in the Clothesline!” Her colleague was less ambiguous:

There’s a part of the Clothesline Project that has to do with servitude. And serving people can be a plus and a minus. It depends on whether it’s a form of slavery or whether it’s a form of liberation. . . .I thought to take this concept and put it squarely in the lap of liberation was really important.

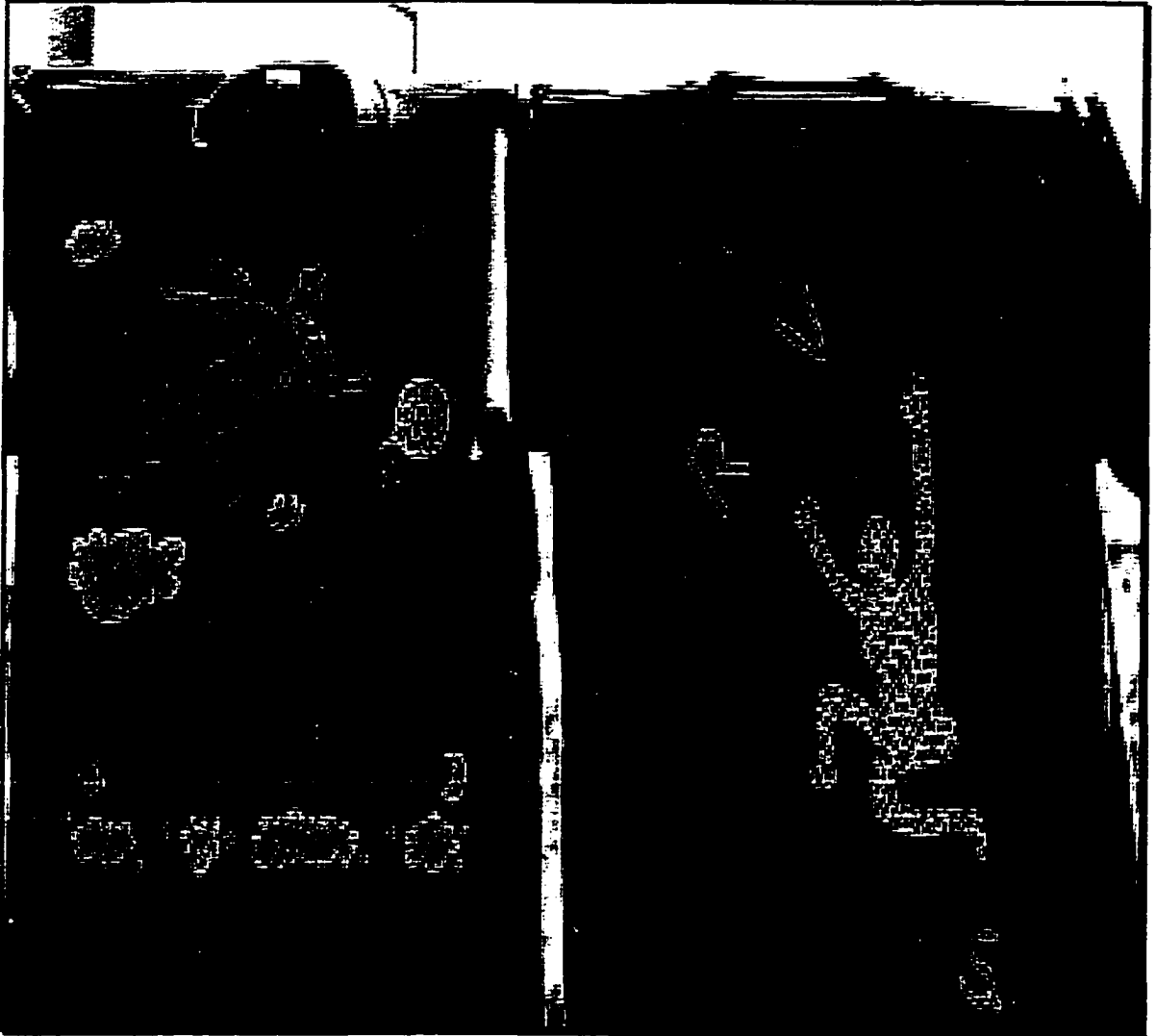


Figure 20. "I Survived, and I Continue to Rise."

Photo by P. C. Hipple.

AFTERWORD

This case study of The Clothesline Project extends the theories of James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* to gender domination and resistance. It demonstrates how communication encoded in a women's folk medium comprises a hidden transcript of subordinate political discourse that refutes official and popular notions about gendered violence and female subordination. It also demonstrates how this folk medium disguises the identity of those who participate in the Clothesline Project so the transcript of their experiences can be publicly revealed with reduced risk of violence and retribution. By providing a sequestered physical and discursive space in which women are free to privately articulate their experiences of violence without censure or threat, The Clothesline Project nurtures and nourishes the hidden transcript. At the same time, it provides a forum for the public articulation of the political discourse contained therein. Accumulated in textual, imagistic, and symbolic forms, the initially concealed testimonies of women first insinuate, and then thrust, themselves into the public forum where they interrupt prevailing discourses about gender relations, negate the dominant discourses about violence against women, and challenge the public transcript. The threatened hegemony of dominant discourse, including the silence that enshrouds gendered violence, are refuted by an emerging public testimony of thousands of women who have been battered, raped, sexually molested, abused and terrorized, as well as by the concurrent testimony of thousands of their allies. Each testimony is communicated through public displays of Clothesline shirts. As a collective cultural product, The Clothesline Project is a vehicle for individual empowerment, a potent instrument of ideological insubordination, and a tool of praxis--action toward transformation and collective social change.

Critiques of Scott's Approach

Since its publication in 1990, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* has been reviewed in journals as seemingly disparate as *Agricultural History* and *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*,⁵² an indication of the wide attention Scott's ideas have received. His theories have been extremely influential, but they are not without detractors. Here I fault Scott for his neglect of gender domination—MacLeod (1993) and Littlewood (1991) have leveled similar critiques—but I am grateful for an opportunity to provide corrective.

Notwithstanding Surette's (1992) insistence that Scott explodes the "deeply entrenched axiom of current sociological theory—that social structures are maintained by internalized ideologies more than by power relationships" (p. 220), Hanson (1991) contends that Scott fails to provide a "generalizable theory of domination" (p. 255). But Scott's goal was less to formulate a theory of domination than to formulate a theory of resistance in order to counter claims that subordinates are compliant and thereby complicit in their own oppression. Scott demonstrates that subalterns actively engage in ideological insubordination as well as material and symbolic resistance to thwart appropriation and exploitation by members of the dominant group. MacLeod argues that Scott's claim of "family resemblances" in forms of resistance "runs counter to the force of recent arguments trying to contextualize resistance rather than to abstract and generalize across culture, time period, class, race, and ethnicity" (p. 690). My research contextualizes resistance to gendered violence within broader strategies by women to resist gender domination, and although specific coding strategies may be unique, the forms of resistance

⁵² Reviews appeared in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Conquergood 1992; *Social Science Quarterly*, Corrigan 1991; *Rural Sociology*, Falk 1991; *The American Historical Review*, Field 1994; *Cultural Anthropology*, Gal 1995; *Contemporary Sociology*, Gaventa 1992; *Latin American Perspectives*, Gutman 1995; *Comparative Political Studies*, Hanson 1991; *American Quarterly*, Kelley 1992; *Political Theory*, Little 1993; *Sociology*, Littlewood 1991; *Journal of American Folklore*, Lord 1992; *American Political Science Review*, Lukes 1991; *Signs*, MacLeod 1993; *College Literature*, Myrsiades 1992; *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Rogers 1992; *American Journal of Sociology*, Scribner 1991; *Agricultural History*, Segal 1992; *Queen's Quarterly*, Surette 1992; *Sociological Forum*, Tilly 1991; and *The Annals of the American Academy*, Van der Veer 1991.

engaged in by the Clothesline Project have strong “family resemblances” to those generalized by Scott.

Lukes (1991) laments in Scott’s work the neglect of Horkheimer and Adorno, specifically *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, arguing that without specificity to the source of domination, Scott slips into a “romanticization of defiance” claiming that autonomous acts of resistance, although exhilarating, are quite rare. To the contrary, Lukes argues that “such acts are not rare—they only seem so because so few live to tell about them” (p. 1454). I don’t think Scott would disagree with the latter statement, but his Scott’s focus was on collective acts of open defiance rather than individual insubordination.

Although Corrigan (1991) chastises Scott’s conflation of domination and hegemony, emphasizing that “the great world systems of exploitation, oppression, subordination, exclusion, and denial—sexism, racism, classism—have never . . . captured the ‘Hearts and Minds’ of the majority” (p. 625), he seemingly ignores ways the majority colludes in sexism, racism, and classism. In contrast, Kelley (1992) regrets that Scott brings us no closer to understanding the “retrograde forms of ‘resistance’ to domination,” for Scott’s approach fails to explain “how difference and conflict with and between subordinate groups shape infrapolitical opposition to dominant groups” (p. 296). Field (1994) concurs that “some serfs enserf others” (p. 195), and explains, for example, “women have generally been subordinates with respect to gender, but some exercised domination by virtue of class, status, wealth, or ethnicity” (p. 196). Similarly, in the case of organized labor, the animosities of white, male workers have frequently been turned against racial and ethnic minorities and women rather than against the capitalist system (Miller et al. 1989). Likewise Rogers (1992) asks, “how should we interpret resistance to Soviet power that takes the form of anti-Semitism?” (p. 703). This research could pose a comparable question: Why do those males subordinated by racial, ethnic, religious, and class ideologies participate in systems of gender domination that oppress women? Such situations leads Tilly (1991) to ask, “Why do underdogs who are so subtle,

discriminating, aware of their interests, and committed to their distinctive beliefs and identities become such crude opportunists in moments of rebellion?" (p. 599).

Hanson concludes with a common critique that I believe represents a misreading of Scott,

Scott admits that his argument is "less relevant to forms of impersonal domination by . . . 'scientific techniques', bureaucratic rules, or by market forces of supply and demand" (Scott 1990:21fn). But the case of impersonal or rational-legal domination, because of its crucial role in the capitalist West, is the central focus of most of the theorists of power and domination Scott criticizes. Scott's dismissal of Marxist theories of "false consciousness," as based on an overestimation of the degree of passivity of oppressed people, for example, misses the point, because such theories were developed to explain mass acceptance of the impersonal domination of the capitalist system, not of the personal domination of particularly exploitative capitalists (p. 256).

But the hidden transcript is not the solitary response of subordinate individuals "talking back" to those in power. Rather it is a *collective cultural product* containing the cumulative testimony of subordinates insinuated into the public forum to contest power relations and the ideologies that support them. Scott is less concerned with "personal domination by particulars" than by structural and systematic forms, recognizing that the individual perpetrator is ensconced in a system of hierarchy that legitimates oppression. Indeed, I think Scott underestimates the relevance of his theory to forms of impersonal domination such as scientific techniques, bureaucratic rules, or market forces. As this study of The Clothesline Project demonstrates, public articulation of the hidden transcript reveals not only raw declarations of anger and indignation, but testimony that interrupts prevailing discourses and counter-ideologies that discursively negate the public transcript. But even when it retains much of its symbolic and coded communication, the folk media that embeds the hidden transcript permits the reappropriation of material and symbolic resources used as instruments of impersonal domination by scientific techniques, bureaucratic rules, and even market forces.

Ethical Considerations of this Kind of Research

Several of his critics recognize the limitations imposed on Scott by the nature of the disguised political discourse that he examines. Van der Veer bluntly questions how you detect that which is hidden. In concordance, Little asks, "How is the investigator to gain access to the hidden transcript, as it is generally members of the dominating group who observe and record the behavior of the dominated groups?" Nonetheless, he applauds Scott's demonstration "that the voice of the powerless is audible" (p. 154).

But amplifying the voice of the powerless through research that exposes the content and meaning of the hidden transcript has serious ethical implications. If meaning is encoded to evade detection by censors and protect individual subordinates from retribution, the disclosure of the code—the deciphering and publication of the encrypted message—potentially places subordinates at risk. At the same time, revealing the hidden transcript is one of the ways it is generated, elaborated, and publicly articulated. In this research I sought to protect the identity of those whose decoded testimonies are reported here. I deliberated long regarding whether to identify by name the Clothesline Project participants who collaborated in this research, to use pseudonyms, or to refer to them as unnamed women. I chose the latter, but the consequences of this decision are not entirely satisfying. Much like the contemporary adage, "Anonymous was a woman," this strategy prohibits me from personally acknowledging these women for the cultural and political contributions they make. Occasionally my secrecy verges on the ludicrous, because I am referring to women who are well known in their communities for the work they have done with the Clothesline Project—women who have little need for the protection afforded by this anonymity. Nonetheless, I feel the potential risk to others warrants maintaining the confidentiality of all. While I certainly could have asked each collaborator whether she would like to be identified in this work, I could not ask that of the anonymous shirtmakers whose testimonies are of equal importance to the evidence I present here. To reduce risk to any Clothesline Project

participant, I chose to refrain from identifying collaborators or shirtmakers either by name or pseudonym. I trust that they will understand and not feel slighted by my decision. Of course, I engaged in some coded communication of my own and it is highly likely that as they read this manuscript, my collaborators will be able to recognize themselves and each other as well.

Limitations of this Study

The chief limitation of this study is its inability to gauge the degree to which social change results from public display of The Clothesline Project. Nor can this study assess the influence of The Clothesline Project on men, especially the reactions of male perpetrators of violence. I have been challenged by two questions. "Does the Clothesline Project lead to social change?" and "How does it alter the structural and systematic oppression to which women are subjected?" My partial response requires shifting the focus from the hidden transcript solely as an expression of self-authentication, self-assertion, and personal emancipation (significant social change, indeed) and refocusing on the folk medium which publicly articulates the hidden transcript as a collective cultural product that interrupts prevailing discourses and negates the public transcript. According to Gaventa (1992), Scott's insights "provide the foundation for action upon which more open forms of social movements and rebellion may build and through which their emergence and significance can be understood" (p. 344). I believe The Clothesline Project does this as well.

For its originators, The Clothesline Project was intended, first and foremost, as an organizing tool. And it continues to be that for the Massachusetts and Iowa organizers who collaborated in this study. Certainly the proliferation within the past seven years of more than 300 projects worldwide indicates a burgeoning network of individuals and groups working to eliminate gendered violence through this folk medium. But the answer to the ultimate question of whether (and how) The

Clothesline Project realizes social change alludes us. It is a question that originators of the project continue to grapple with, as the reflections of one attests:

Organizing is galvanizing other people around a common framework, idea, effort, or goal to become powerful, more powerful than any one of us is individually—to build community, which is what is missing in so many of our lives. So whatever helps you to come together as an organizing principle or tool is extremely important. If a woman hangs a shirt and that has moved her life and helped to empower her and helped her empower herself and do some healing, I think that has enormous value. But if that's all that happens—and it isn't—but if it were, then it just remains a collection of individuals and not a community and it doesn't change anything. So there will be women making and hanging shirts until we destroy ourselves with our failure to change the fundamental violence in which we all live.

Of course the hope of Clothesline Project participants is that they will not fail to change that fundamental violence.

Directions for Future Research

I foresee at least four directions for future research: 1) an examination of male responses to The Clothesline Project; 2) an analysis of the hidden transcript in resistance to violence perpetrated by women; 3) an exploration of how the intersections of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender influence and are reflected in The Clothesline Project; and 4) cross-cultural analyses of Clothesline Projects operating in communities and countries beyond the focus of this case study.

Because I interviewed originators, organizers, and shirtmakers, rather than display viewers, I was unable to assess men's responses to The Clothesline Project. Instead, I extrapolated from men's candid opinions of clotheslines in general. But these cannot provide insight into how men experience Clothesline Project shirts and displays or how they read and react to the revealed hidden transcript. Research that focuses on men's experience of The Clothesline Project is needed. Of special interest is the response of those hostile to the messages conveyed, for these may provide a key to counter-resistance and changes in the public transcript.

While my sample of applicable shirts was insufficient to explore the possibility of a hidden transcript in resistance to violence perpetrated by women, Clothesline shirts do report such violence, especially the violence of mothers against their children. Examining these shirts could provide insights to the questions of why some subordinates oppress other subordinates.

Kelley (1992) reproofs Scott for his inattention to racial ideologies. The same critique could be leveled against my work. Women of color participate in The Clothesline Project, but they are underrepresented in this research. Much like me, the majority of women who collaborated in this research are white, middle and working class women, many of whom are highly educated though underemployed or poor. Although Clothesline shirts bear marks of racial and ethnic diversity (see Appendix II), the anonymity afforded by the shirts screens the racial, ethnic, and social class identity of most participants. This makes difficult the recognition of racial and class ideologies that may compound the incidence of gendered violence and therefore be reflected in critiques embedded in the hidden transcript. Collaboration with women of color, as well as with women subordinated by class and other ideologies, would enrich our understanding of how such ideologies are transgressed by The Clothesline Project.

What are the cross-cultural implications of this research? Cultural meanings and evocations are different between and within different cultures. For example, organizers who adopted the Clothesline Project in Great Britain chose tea towels instead of shirts as their medium of expression. Latinas in Massachusetts chose aprons. In the Caribbean clotheslines are prohibitively expensive so women dry their clothes on trees, bushes, or isolated roadways, while in the U.S. younger women have grown reliant on gas and electric clothesdryers and have little experience with clotheslines. As a result, Caribbean and younger U. S. women participating in the Clothesline Project might abandon use of a clothesline in lieu of some other form of display. How do such changes in the expressive medium of the Clothesline Project change the meaning imbued in and imparted to it? In other

words, what does The Clothesline Project mean in cultural translation? Likewise, are there non-English equivalents to metaphors which inform our understanding of The Clothesline Project and the content of its hidden transcript? What similarities and differences exist among hidden transcripts shaped by the specific cultural traditions and practices of those communities and countries where the project is adopted? International research focused on these questions could provide us cross-cultural perspective on the ways women encode resistance to gendered violence, female subordination, and patriarchal domination.

APPENDIX I

RESEARCH METHODS

According to Scott (1990), differences between the public and hidden transcripts reveal a great deal about the effect that domination has on discourse, but such differences are rarely recognized by social scientists because their research has traditionally focused on the public transcript alone. The almost exclusive reliance on the dominant discourse expressed through official records, public documents, print and electronic media reports, and observation of overt public behavior has resulted in an incomplete analysis of power, one which is blind to the hidden transcript which could elucidate the political discourse of subordinated groups. Recognizing the hidden transcript requires a "fundamentally different form of analysis than that traditionally applied to political discourse of the powerful" (Scott 1990:5).

Scott uses ethnographic techniques, in tandem with historical and literary analysis, to uncover the hidden transcripts of subordinated groups and to identify ways in which these transcripts are generated, elaborated and publicly declared. But because many areas of experience, particularly experience of subordinates, are hidden from language, I would argue that a research approach focusing on the material culture of subordinated groups has added value in detecting covert discourse. If, as Scott contends, the hidden transcript lies encoded in folk culture, a sociological analysis of material culture, complemented by insights from Folkloristics, has much to contribute toward our understanding of the hidden transcript and its response to domination.

As a folk medium, The Clothesline Project is comprised of material, behavioral, and ideological components, and these are expressed through material, ideal, textual, or performed channels. Folk media are cultural objects, but all too often such a conceptualization leads to reification of the cultural object as a social fact; abstractions are regarded as physical things and attributed causal powers.

Cultural objects have material, behavioral, and ideal elements; perceiving them as social facts leaves unquestioned the meanings of cultural objects and how such meanings are communicated or expressed within a social system. An ethno-methodological perspective would posit that the world of "social facts" is accomplished through interpretive work.

Dissanayake (1986) argues for a hermeneutic or interpretive approach to the study of folk media which would contribute to understanding the reciprocal influences of folk media and the social, political, and cultural environments in which it is embedded. Likewise, Denzin (1992) argues that cultural objects are "interactional creations"—meaning resides not only in the objects themselves, but is imparted to objects through interactions from outside. Meaning can be discovered by focusing on the field of interaction of which the cultural object is a part.

Griswold (1984, 1987) developed an heuristic device to help locate the meaning of a cultural object within its interactional field. Referred to as the "cultural diamond," it serves not only as a practical model to identify players within the field, but also as a metaphor reflecting the multi-faceted nature of interactions that imbue the cultural object with meaning (Griswold 1984:8).

Players within the interactional field include the cultural object, its creative agent, its audience, and the context in which it evolves; Levine (1992) handily refers to these as the creation, the creator, the constituents, and the context.⁵³ Griswold argues that the focus of cultural analysis should be on the interaction between and among these players, for it is from these interactions that meaning is derived. Specifically, she argues, meanings lie in the interactions between the *comprehension* of cultural objects in terms of their intrinsic attributes, the *intentions* of creative agents, audience *reception* over time and space, including rejection or re-creation of the cultural object, and *explanations* of the extrinsic characteristics of the social

⁵³ In their various manifestations these players are referred to in the humanities as the text, author, reader, and context, in the arts as the art, artist, audience, and context, in Marxist formulations as the product, producer, consumer, and world, and in Folkloristics as the folklore event, performer, participant/audience, and context.

structure, as well as the cultural experiences of social groups, which enable and constrain meaning (Griswold 1987, emphasis added).⁵⁴ Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of the cultural diamond to serve as a foundation for subsequent discussions of the methods used in this research.

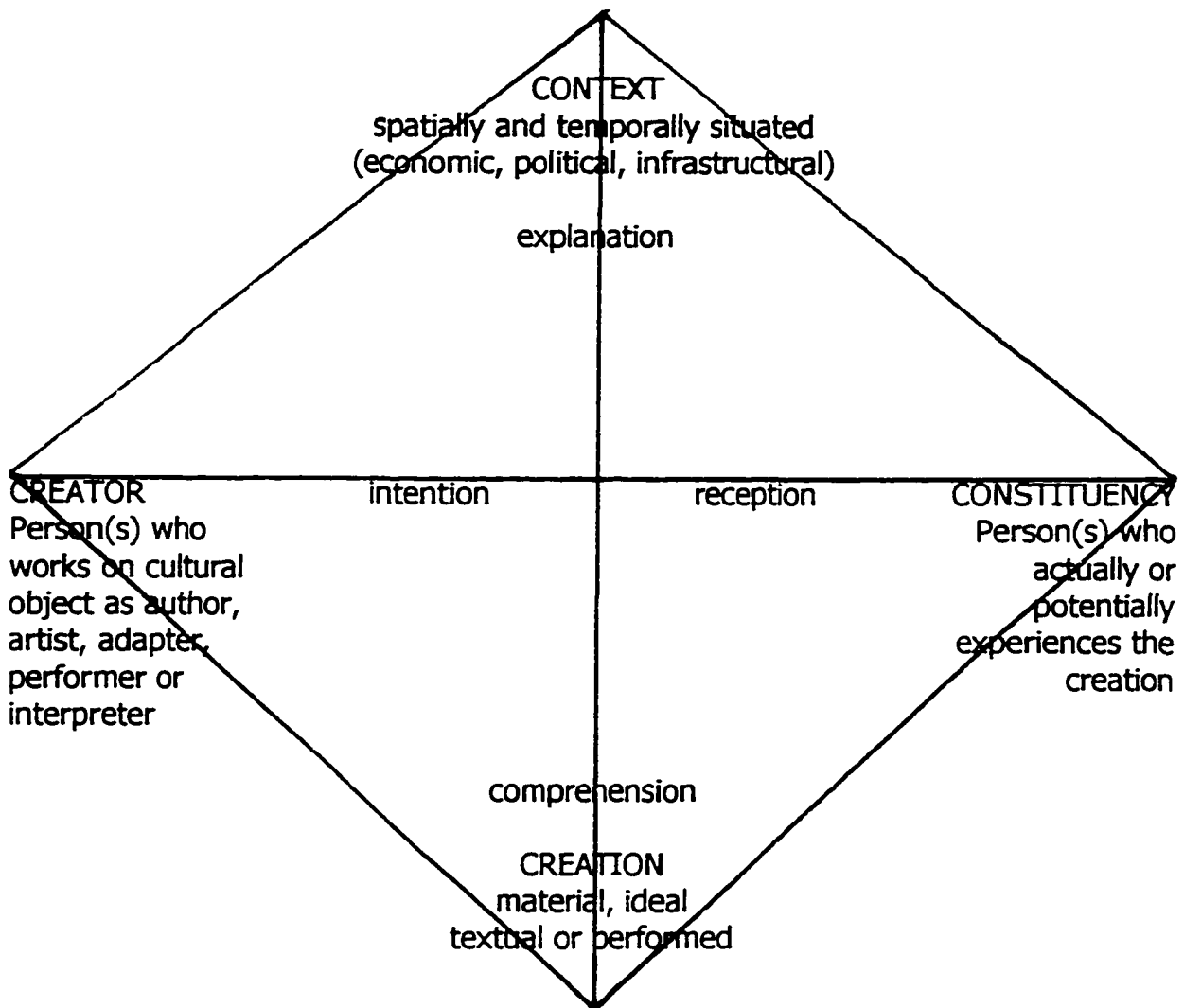


Figure 21. The Cultural Diamond. Griswold, 1984:8.

Research Questions

What do shirts mean? What do shirts hanging on a clothesline mean? Perhaps more importantly, "how" do they mean? How is meaning made? What do

⁵⁴ Here Griswold follows Baxandall's (1985) conceptualization of the "brief."

shirts and clotheslines have to do with female subordination and violence against women? What messages do Clothesline Project shirts and displays convey? How do the shirts and the Clothesline constitute the hidden transcript of women subordinated by male violence? How is that hidden transcript generated, elaborated, and publicly declared? How does the Clothesline Project resist gender domination? How do folk media communicate resistance to domination, and "how" do folk media mean? The research design needed to answer these questions must attend to the multifaceted, multivocal, and polysemic qualities of folk media.

The Clothesline Project presents particular challenges for analysis because it operates on multiple levels. At the micro level are individual shirts made by survivors or supporters for therapeutic purposes and an unspecified audience. At the meso level are collections of shirts assembled by local Clothesline Project organizers for purposes both therapeutic and political and audiences both supportive and hostile. And at the macro level are over 70,000 shirts comprising the collections of more than 300 Clothesline Projects worldwide whose grass-roots organizers are part of an international social movement to end violence against women. At each of these levels the cultural object, creative agent, audience, and context change. The paramount complication for the analysis, however, is that the "interactional field" surrounding the Clothesline Project is composed of disguised players engaged in coded behavior and communication about issues that are extremely sensitive, painful and stigmatized.

The complexity of The Clothesline Project demands a multifaceted research approach. To overcome the inherent weaknesses of solitary approaches, Denzin (1978) advocates a multiple triangulation strategy, outlining four basic types. These include: (1) investigator triangulation which brings a team approach to the research effort, (2) theory triangulation which brings multiple perspectives or paradigms, (3) methodological triangulation which brings the power of multiple data collection methods, and (4) data triangulation which brings temporal, spatial and interpersonal differentials to the fore as analytical considerations. Janesick (1994) suggests a fifth

strategy, interdisciplinary triangulation, which expands the viewpoints and tools available for research. Through the use of triangulation, more resources can be brought to the research effort, and the combined micro and macro level analytic strategies can be mutually informing as well as mutually reinforcing to achieve robust research results.

Multiple triangulation strategies guide the research design for this study. Of necessity, the design is interdisciplinary, drawing on perspectives and tools from sociology as well as folkloristics, the humanities, women's studies, textiles and clothing, art theory, and anthropology. Taking a mediated position between interpretivist/constructionist and conflict perspectives, the design draws on structuralism, neo-Marxian and feminist theories, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and semiotics. The research methods include participant observation, qualitative interviewing, photographic and visual methods, as well as content analysis and semiotic analysis. And data for analysis include archival documents, observations, field notes, interview tapes and transcriptions, photographs and video film, and secondary sources as well. While the independent research requirements of a dissertation preclude a team approach, I was able to achieve a level of investigator triangulation by following feminist methodologies of collaboration. Several research participants reviewed interview transcripts and drafts of the manuscript and their correctives and comments were incorporated into subsequent revisions.

A case study format is used as a framework for the design and report. According to Yin ([1984] 1989), the case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon or set of events within their real-life context when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident, and the relevant behaviors are beyond control of the investigator" (Yin, 1989:23). The case study is a highly flexible research strategy that allows for manifold triangulation and multiple levels of analysis within a single study (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 1989). The strengths of the case study method lie in its

ability to generate novel emergent theory through the accumulation of theory-building and theory-testing empirical studies. Its weaknesses are expressed in Pettigrew's (1988) caution against "death by data asphyxiation," or what I prefer to call multiple triangulation. In addition, Eisenhardt warns that the intensive use of empirical evidence can yield theory which is overly complex, idiosyncratic or narrow (p. 547).

The case under study is The Clothesline Project, but embedded within this single case are five components, the original Clothesline Project as conceived in 1990 on Cape Cod, Massachusetts and since known as the Cape Cod Clothesline Project, and four⁵⁵ Projects active in Iowa during 1996 and 1997.

Griswold's cultural diamond serves as an analytic guide to the case study. To understand the intentions of creative agents of the Clothesline Project, I reviewed archival material and conducted interviews with project originators, organizers, and shirtmakers in Massachusetts and Iowa. To understand audience reception to the Clothesline Project over time and space, I reviewed guestbook entries, and essays by student viewers, conducted interviews with display viewers, and engaged in direct and participant observation of shirt displays. To understand the intrinsic attributes of these cultural objects, I read secondary sources, photographed and video-taped shirts and displays, conducted a content analysis of shirt text and designs, and conducted a semiotic analysis of clotheslines as a medium of communication. And to understand the extrinsic characteristics of the social structure and contextual variables that enable and constrain meaning, I relied on

⁵⁵ At the time there were five projects in Iowa, but I chose to examine only those four that were active. One of the projects was dormant: there had been no recent displays and I could not identify the original organizers of the project, many of whom had moved or withdrawn from the project following a dispute over project sponsorship. Few of the shirts from this project could be located; many shirts had been reclaimed by their makers following the dispute. A new group was in the process of reconstituting the Project, and while this process of project dormancy and rejuvenation would have been interesting to examine for this research, but my time frame did not allow for its inclusion. Since the end of my fieldwork, three additional projects have begun in Iowa, all of them in small rural counties. Each of these three projects has only five to eight shirts, but they are able to do larger displays by networking with one another and by adding shirts from neighboring projects.

archival documents, secondary sources, and participant observation, as well as on conversations about laundry and clotheslines with individuals who knew nothing of The Clothesline Project.

I used myriad deductive and inductive approaches to the case, weaving together data collection and analytic methods. In the following discussion I will try to disentangle the various methods by imposing a superficial structure to the discussion. Such a structure would suggest that data collection and data analysis occur in linear, ordered fashion, when indeed, they do not. An interactive process of data collection and data analysis followed by iterations of data collection and data analysis alternating between fieldwork and home base, resists orderly discussion. I ask your patience while I discuss all the data collection methods first, followed by a discussion of the analytical methods used, understanding that they did not occur in the order presented. I will then conclude with a brief explanation of how the findings will be presented.

Data Collection Methods

Pilot Study

In April 1996, I initiated a pilot study of a small local shirt display in Iowa. During the pilot I observed the display and viewer response, conversed with viewers, interviewed organizers, and photographed shirts. This pilot enabled me to refine interview questions, develop appropriate photography techniques, and devise ways to minimize my visibility and intrusion in the field. During the pilot, I became concerned about intruding on viewers as they engage the display—a very emotional experience for many. Project organizers shared my concern. As a result, I altered the research design, deciding to conduct future interviews off-site, removed in time and space from the display. While this potentially introduced retrospective recall bias, it was critical to gaining access to the field.

A drawback to the pilot, however, was that I unknowingly chose an atypical display⁵⁶ and it took several weeks in the field to dispel my initial misconceptions. This ultimately served to reinforce and reward my decision to use a variety of research methods.

Fieldwork

The pilot was followed by seven months of fieldwork. July 1996 was spent in Massachusetts with Clothesline Project originators and regional organizers, and September 1996 through February 1997 was variously spent in four Iowa communities where local organizers sponsor Clothesline Project shirtmaking and displays.

Archival and Documentary Review

Throughout the research process I studied a number of documents, film documentaries, and secondary sources. These included: private photo albums of shirts and displays;⁵⁷ newspaper articles and Internet web sites related to Clothesline Projects and shirt displays; the "Dear Sisters" informational packet supplied to organizers by the national Clothesline Project office; promotional brochures developed by local and regional Clothesline Project organizers; guest book

⁵⁶ This three-hour display accompanied a university lecture on the portrayal of women in media advertising. The display was set up an hour in advance of the lecture so attendees could peruse the shirts before or after the event. The shirt display remained in the room throughout the lecture, but its location near the back of the room made it barely visible to the seated audience. The display seemed in odd juxtaposition to the event, the lecturer made no reference to the display, nor were connections made between the lecture and the shirts to create a context for the display. Despite this, viewers were extremely attentive to the display, reacting with stunned disbelief, sadness, guarded grief, and visible emotion to the messages conveyed by the shirts and the display. As a result, the mood of attendees seemed subdued throughout the lecture.

⁵⁷ Among these displays were three in Hyannis (including the first), several high school displays on Cape Cod, and one each at Falmouth, Plymouth, Boston, Smith College in Northampton, the Worcester Community Center, Grove Street Gallery in Worcester, and the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, all in Massachusetts. Additional displays included those at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, Providence, Rhode Island, a park across from the cruise line embarkation point on St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, the women's center on St. Croix, Virgin Islands,

entries and essays written by display viewers; the journal article by Laura Julier entitled "Private Texts and Social Activism: Reading the Clothesline Project"; Deb Wellsby's documentary film entitled "The Clothesline Project"; Roberta Cantow's (1981) documentary film entitled "Clotheslines"; an essay by Erma Bombeck ([1967] 1996) entitled "The American Clothesline"; an audiotape of Clothesline Project sound effects entitled "The Sounds of Sexism" (n.d); and numerous sources of folk expression, folk life and folk art that reference clothing and laundry.

Interviews

I interviewed 22 Clothesline Project participants—eleven in Massachusetts and eleven in Iowa. These interviews were arranged by local organizers acting on my behalf. I supplied letters introducing myself to prospective participants, explaining the purpose of my research and what would be expected during an interview, and invited project originators, organizers, shirtmakers-survivors, and display viewers to participate in interviews. In Massachusetts these letters were distributed to ten prospective participants and eight consented to an interview.⁵⁸ Through an incidental "snowball technique," three additional participants gave consent as well. In Iowa the number of prospective participants was not disclosed, but by coincidence, eleven individuals consented to an interview as well. Not until after consent was granted did the local organizers supply me with contact names and phone numbers for scheduling the interviews. In this way, the anonymity and confidentiality of prospective participants was maintained.

To further insure their comfort and security, I requested that participants choose the location for the interview. As a result, four interviews, including the three focus group interviews, were conducted in a women's shelter or its sponsoring agency. Three were held at the participant's place of work, including one in the

and the national display on the mall in Washington, DC in August of 1995 as part of the National Organization of Women's Rally for Women's Lives.

⁵⁸ While I am uncertain why one prospective participant declined, another was traveling abroad and would not be available during the time of my fieldwork.

national office of the Clothesline Project. One interview was held in a college dormitory and adjoining cafeteria, one in a local coffee shop, and one onboard a harbored sailboat—the only place this woman felt safe when she was a child. Six participants invited me to their homes, each offering a meal or snack in conjunction with the interview. (This “breaking of bread” was significant in that it illustrates the mutual effort made to establish rapport during the interview.)

Of the eleven Massachusetts interviews, ten participants were female and one was male. Five were project originators, eleven had organized displays and/or shirtmaking events, six were survivors⁵⁹ who had designed shirts (including two whose shirts were among the original 31 hung at the very first display), and all had viewed multiple displays. These were qualitative interviews, one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured, and open-ended, using photo-elicitation techniques. A method advocated by Harper (1986a), photo-elicitation is a “reflexive method in which photographs are used as part of the research process as well as a result of the research process” (p. 209). Photographs of shirts and displays from Clothesline Project albums and scrapbooks were used to facilitate discussion, assist memory, evoke emotion, and elicit the meanings that participants attribute to shirts, clotheslines, and The Clothesline Project. Photo-elicitation was used off-site in lieu of on-site interviews to avoid intrusion into the emotionally charged atmosphere of a display, but it risked, in this case, the camera mediating the folk media under study.

In Iowa I conducted one individual interview and three focus group interviews ranging in size from 2 to 5 women. Among the eleven Iowa participants, ten had organized at least one display and/or shirtmaking event, six were survivors⁶⁰ who had designed shirts themselves, and ten had viewed at least one display in addition to the one they organized. Although photo-elicitation was used in the

⁵⁹ One was a survivor of rape, one was a survivor of battering, one a survivor of rape and battering, two were survivors of incest, and one was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

⁶⁰ One was a survivor of rape and five were survivors of domestic battering, but it should be understood that domestic battering often includes rape. Although five of the 22 individuals

individual interview, I substituted "shirt-elicitation" in the focus group interviews. In this technique, rather than using photographs to facilitate the interview, I used the actual cultural object, the shirt. During the interview I asked each participant to take up her shirt and tell me its story—the meaning of the design, the antecedents and consequences of making the shirt and the shirtmaking experience itself.

In addition to elicitation techniques, I used an outline of interview questions to serve as a springboard for discussion.⁶¹ The outline allowed considerable flexibility to probe for detail or explanation as well as to pursue other themes that arose in the process of the interview. I had not originally anticipated the significance of organizational tensions for imbuing meaning in the Clothesline Project, but these issues repeatedly surfaced in the early interviews, so pertinent questions were subsequently added to the outline.

Estimated to take 90 minutes, the interviews lasted from 2 to 4 1/2 hours. Each was audio-taped with the consent of participants, but to protect their anonymity and confidentiality, I personally transcribed each tape.

Precautions taken to ensure the safety of participants imposed limitations on the research design. For example, reliance on emissaries to select interview participants reduced my ability to insure a "representative" sample, and my transcribing of the interviews may have introduced unconscious bias. These limitations were nevertheless acceptable to me considering the potential risk that some women face by participating in the Clothesline Project, and by extension, this research. Another precaution, the focus group, proved extremely beneficial to the research, however.

The focus groups were comprised of women who had met one another in crisis shelters, recovery groups, empowerment programs and through volunteer work with the Clothesline Project. They knew one-another's stories well, and had

interviewed in Massachusetts and Iowa identified themselves to me as lesbian, none disclosed that they had made a shirt in response to lesbian-bashing per se.

⁶¹ A copy of the outline of questions is available for audit.

great trust and affection for one another. Their numbers and mutual support protected them against naiveté or insensitivity on my part, and as a result, we were quickly able to establish rapport.

Photo-elicitation and shirt-elicitation were also strong assets to the design. The photo-elicitation technique provided excellent content and contextual information, especially personal histories and experiences of shirtmaking and displays. Shirt-elicitation shared these strengths while providing something additional, the evocation of affect that mirrors the emotion expressed at shirt displays. Despite its benefits though, photo-elicitation, presented an insurmountable problem during the fieldwork—respondents would lower their voices so markedly during discussion of the photographs that these parts of the interview are barely audible on the tape and I had to rely on field notes to reconstruct much of the information.

Observation

I attended six Clothesline Project displays in Iowa scheduled during the month of October 1996 in recognition of Violence Awareness month. One of these was an outdoor display of more than 400 shirts, while five were smaller indoor displays ranging from 20 to 45 shirts. I spent 26 hours observing these displays, 13 hours in direct observation and 13 hours in participant observation. With particular attention to audience reactions to the display, I also studied the designs of displays, the display setting, on-site shirtmaking facilities, and shirt messages.

I recorded my observations, experiences and impressions in field notes during and immediately after each display and I used a pocket-sized tape recorder to describe, in detail, shirt designs and textual messages. This tape recorder became a reflexive journal of my field work as well. To complement these observations, notes and tapes, I took photographs of shirts, the setting and context of display. I also used a video camera with a built-in audio-recorder, not to capture human activity or

voice, but to capture such things as the movement of shirts blowing in the wind and ambient sounds within the display environment.

My observations were covert. I had the permission of local Clothesline Project organizers to conduct research on-site, and although I announced my arrival to display volunteers, I did not make my presence as a researcher known to other display viewers. Organizers designated an hour of display time for the media and press officials, including photojournalists, and it was during this hour that I took the majority of photographs and film footage, but I captured images of shirts, the display, and the setting throughout the day as well however. To minimize any intrusion on visitors' experience of the display, I refrained from photographing people. I was, unfortunately, unable to observe the shirtmaking process during my fieldwork, and had to rely solely on interview reports of the setting and the experience.

Other Photographic Methods

In addition to photo-elicited interviews and photographs taken in the field, I reviewed the photo album which catalogues the 394 shirts in the Cape Cod Clothesline Project and made color photocopies of each album page. These were of limited use in analysis, however, because they only recorded one side of each shirt and many shirts have text and designs on both sides.

I was given the original 31 Clothesline Project shirts to keep for a week, visually examine and carefully photograph. At the national Clothesline Project office I photographed another 31 shirts from a collection used for educational presentations in high schools. In Iowa I photographed 659 shirts comprising the entire collections of the four Clothesline Projects under study.⁶² These photos were taken on color print film using a 35mm camera, with flash attachment, either

⁶² This includes 62 shirts from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, 59 from Marshalltown, Iowa, 119 from the Quad Cities (Davenport/Bettendorf, Iowa and Rock Island/Moline, Illinois), 81 from Des Moines, and 400 from Iowa City.

mounted on a tripod or hand-held. Although wide-frame and close-up shots were taken, careful to capture the detail of the design and text of both sides of these shirts, they were not artistically composed, but were merely snapshots developed at the local drug store.

Of the total 721 photographed shirts, 400 were photographed in the context of a display, hanging from the Clothesline, but 321 were photographed out-of-context, either mounted on clothes hangers or pinned to a line for purposes of the photo shoot. Since many of these shirts were contributed to the Clothesline Project anonymously, I could not inform shirtmakers that their shirts would be data for my research.

Casual Conversations and Directed Discussions

While the above methods were designed to explore the meanings intrinsic and imparted to the Clothesline Project, they were insufficient for understanding the meaning of shirts and clotheslines for non-viewers, that is, people who have no knowledge of the Clothesline Project and have never seen a shirt display. The perspectives of non-viewers, a potential audience, may be critical to understanding how and what this folk medium communicates. If, as Griswold argues, meaning is dependent on the context of interaction between the cultural object, its creator and its audience, then the meaning imputed to shirts and clotheslines by people who do not view a Clothesline Project display may help to isolate which attributions of meaning are not dependent on context, but instead are imbued in the cultural objects themselves or are part of a more generalized cultural meaning attributed to them.

I stumbled upon a solution to this during my fieldwork when a coffeeshop patron inquired about the contents of my notebook. When I replied that I was doing research on clotheslines, a lively discussion of washday and clotheslines ensued, with every patron joining in. I capitalized on the apparent enthusiasm for the topic in Massachusetts and Iowa by instigating three such coffeeshop

discussions with groups of people who knew nothing of the Clothesline Project. These three groups ranged in size from two to eight, for a total of 13 individuals. Of these 13 individuals, five were men, including the individual who initiated the first coffeeshop conversation. This was covert research. I did not seek their consent nor inform them that their impressions would become data for this research. Because the first conversation was impromptu and unplanned, I had no tape recorder, so I later recorded field notes based on my own recall. I used this same procedure for the other discussions as well.

Methods of Analysis

A combination of deductive and inductive methods was used in the analysis of these data, due in part to the differences in types of data which are variously amenable to different analytical approaches, but more importantly due to the nature of the research questions. It should be recalled at this point that four types of questions were asked of this case study. First, does this case illustrate the ideas or propositions set forth by Scott, namely that resistance to domination is expressed through a hidden transcript embedded in folk culture? Second, if so, how is this hidden transcript generated, elaborated, and publicly declared? Third, what is the content of the hidden transcript? And fourth, what are the meanings communicated through this folk medium and how do these meanings express resistance to domination? While the answers to some of these questions can be explored through a deductive process comparing Scott's findings with this case, the answers to others must be explored through an inductive approach to grounded theory.

Qualitative Analyses

The interviews resulted in 35 hours of tape which were transcribed; each interview comprised a separate computer document. Several interviews were transcribed verbatim and *in toto*; the remainder were transcribed in an abridged form, with salient topics and verbatim quotations identified with their corresponding

tape-count number to ease re-locating them if needed during the analysis. Before archiving the original Word documents on disk and in their print versions for the case study data base,⁶³ I made two print copies of each for use in the analysis.

By the time I had conducted each interview, replayed each tape to revise subsequent interview strategies, and transcribed each interview myself, I had heard the content of each interview at least three times, and thematic and descriptive categories were already beginning to emerge. The systematic analysis of print transcripts, however, combined both deductive and inductive strategies. Propositional categories from the scholarly literature, especially the extant theories formulated by Scott (1990), were used in a series of pattern-matching exercises (Campbell 1975), and categories grounded in the data emerged through a process of constant comparative analysis (Glazer and Strauss 1967).

Using (erasable) colored pencils—my own personal metaphor for coding shades of meaning, the tone of a message, and my color commentary—I began to highlight divergent themes within the text of each transcript. Different colors corresponded to different categories. This color highlighting allowed me to identify multiple themes, characteristics, and categories within a single paragraph while maintaining the textual continuity necessary to identify each speaker and the coherence of each speaker's thoughts and constructions. (It also prevented my having to duplicate the already voluminous data.) Through this highlighting, data was sorted into provisional categories which were subsequently refined through an iterative process. I identified broad categories through open-ended coding, while axial coding within those broad categories revealed more subtle and nuanced schema. Eventually the transcripts were both visually and conceptually saturated (Strauss 1987). The highlighted transcripts were used to assign text-based category

⁶³ Neither the original tapes nor transcripts that contain identifying information about research participants will be made available, but transcripts stripped of all identifiers are available for audit.

codes to hard drive copies of the documents before the color highlighted transcripts were retired to the case study data base.

The hard drive versions of the transcripts were computer coded with a string of category identifiers and merged into a single, sizable, document that was subsequently sorted by the simple sort function provided in Microsoft Word. This sort resulted in the unitizing of sentence and paragraph fragments related to particular themes, characteristics, and other criteria from all the interviews (Lincoln and Guba 1985). I inserted hard page breaks in the reordered interview transcripts to organize and set apart the unitized categories and textual evidence supporting each category, and the resulting document was printed for inclusion in the case study data base. This document provided easy reference in the report writing phase when quotations supporting my assertions were easily retrieved as evidence.

A less formalized process was used with field notes, including those that reported the results of casual conversations and discussions with non-viewers of the Clothesline Project. This process was exclusively inductive, using an interactive process of data collection and data analysis, with resulting classification categories grounded in the data.

Content Analyses

Shirts, including their text and designs, were qualitatively content-analyzed. My original plan was to draw a stratified, random sample of shirts based on color, type of violence explicated, location of sponsoring Clothesline Project, and other salient features, but I was warned by interview participants that such a stratification was ill-advised. (Shirtmakers often have little choice in the color of shirt used, the type of violence is frequently not identified on a shirt and cannot be assumed from the shirt's color, and local Clothesline Projects may display shirts made elsewhere.) In lieu of a stratified sample, I drew a purposive sample of shirts, first culling

unusable photographs,⁶⁴ then choosing the photographs of shirts that had generated marked reactions from display viewers or significant comments during interviews and observations, and finally choosing an approximately equal number of shirts at random. The resulting photographs of 172 shirts, along with detailed written descriptions of these shirts, became the data for analysis. Two photo albums of shirts, along with the catalogue of written descriptions is included in the case study data base.

The content analysis combined inductive and deductive strategies, identifying emergent categories induced from the iterative process of grounded theory and propositional categories deduced from scholarly literature on gendered violence and resistance. Manifest content, including textual and design elements, was examined, as was latent content, including themes, symbols, and semantics. I sought corroboration of latent meaning from evidence suggested in archival, interview, observational and secondary data.

Like the analysis of interview data, categories devolved from a process of open-ended coding, and were further refined through axial coding. These categories were the "sensitizing concepts" used to explicate the content of the hidden transcript. Unlike the interview data however, which were easier to disassemble and reassemble into meaningful constructs, the photographs were not so easily dissembled and frequently had to be analyzed as a gestalt. Written descriptions of the shirts, on the other hand, were easily dissembled and reassembled, and I relied on them to assist with analysis of the photographs.

⁶⁴ Some photographs were of poor quality, their image obscured or the design and text incomplete. Occasionally it was not possible to match the front and back of a shirt that had designs on both sides. More frequently, however, is that it was impossible to discern the dark text and designs on equally dark shirts, and therefore the resulting photographs were unusable for analysis. This may have introduced bias into the sample because underrepresented are those shirts that use dark on dark as a deliberate design strategy to express a mood, evoke an emotion, or code particular communication.

Semiotic Analyses

The systematic process of grounded theory and qualitative content analysis used with the interview data and shirts gave me confidence that my intuition about the meanings of the Clothesline Project were sound. Bolstered by this confidence, I engaged in a less formalized semiotic analysis of material objects that comprise the major signifying elements used by the Clothesline Project to convey meanings and messages.

Although based on language, semiotics is also applicable to other modes of communication, including mathematics, music, gestures, art, and material objects.⁶⁵ But we need not merely read each of these objects as text. While some material culture is designed specifically to be communicative and representational, with meaning organized similar to language, most material culture works through the evocation of sets of practices within individual experiences (Hodder 1994). Therefore, the item does not “mean,” rather it is embedded in a set of practices that include class, status, goals, aesthetics, and so on. “Insofar as members of society experience common practices, material symbols can come to have common evocations and common meanings” (p. 396). People both “read” and “experience” the meaning of material culture.

Semiotic analysis of the key signifying elements of the Clothesline Project was used to explore the meanings intrinsic and extrinsic to this folk medium, as well as to provide an understanding of how its symbols express resistance to domination. The semiotic analysis focused on three primary sign systems used by the Clothesline Project—shirts, clotheslines, and laundry. While each has an instrumental function to a display, it was their expressive functions that were of concern here.

Using interview transcripts, fieldnotes of casual conversations, and secondary sources as data, I searched for references to each of the three sign systems—the

⁶⁵ Although the text and design of each Clothesline Project shirt is amenable to semiotic analysis, I chose content analysis as a more expedient way to identify their composite/shared meanings and messages.

signifying and signified elements that comprise them—to explore their various linguistic meanings as well as the sets of practices that are evoked to convey mood, emotion, experience, and meaning. Shared meanings provided a window on the ideas, rules, practices, and codes that operate within this folk medium to disguise its resistant and subversive intent.

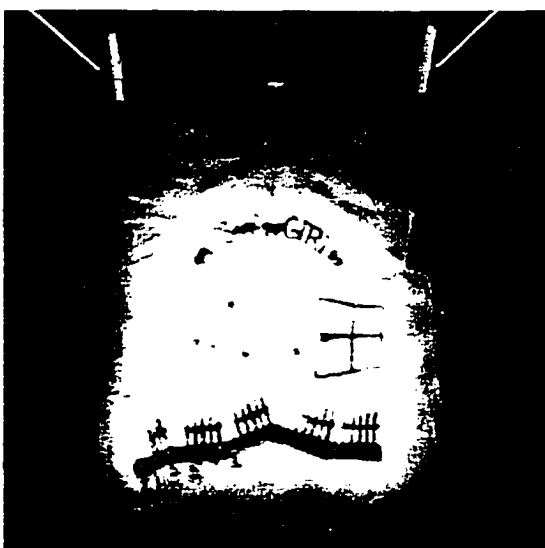
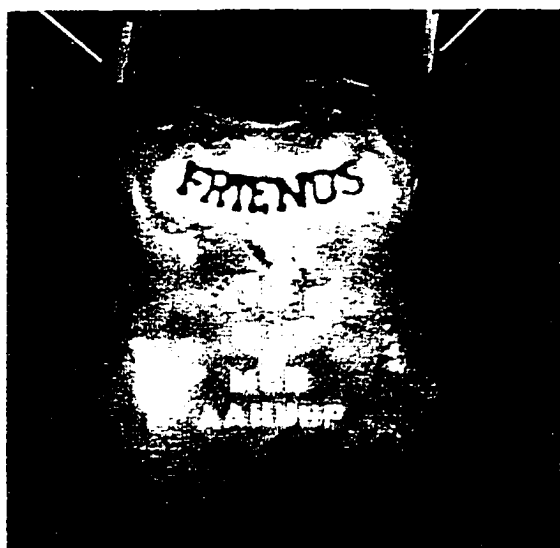
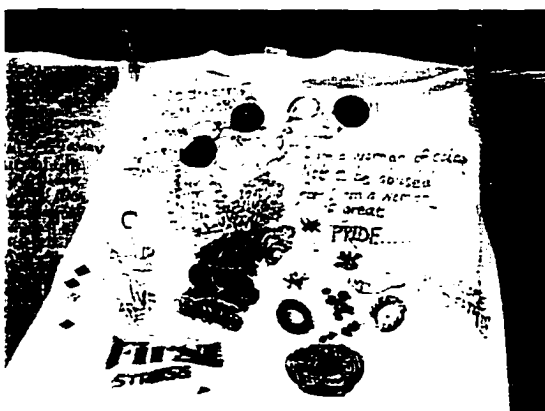
Presentation of the Findings

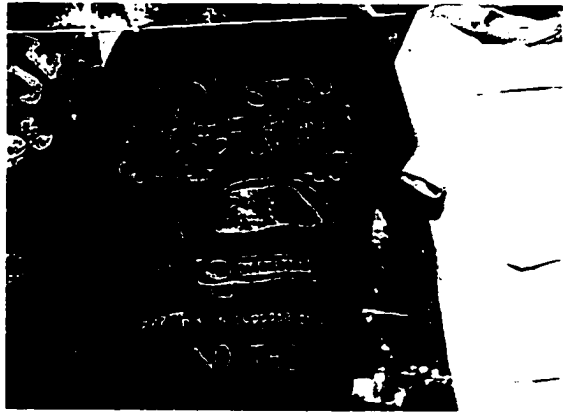
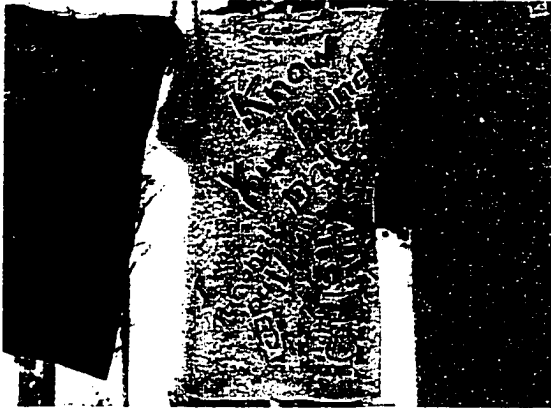
Findings are presented through descriptive narrative, with supporting or substantiating evidence provided by quotations, shirt descriptions, and observations from the field. Through focus on a particular case, I was able to develop a “thick description” of the Clothesline Project, an “intensive, small-scale, dense description of social life from observation, through which broader cultural interpretations and generalizations can be made” (Geertz 1973:8). According to Geertz, “the essential task of theory-building. . .is not to codify abstract regularities, but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them” (p. 26). While some may fault my combination of grounded theory with thick description, my presentation of findings seeks a balance between description and interpretation, following Denzin’s (1989) assertion that thick description makes thick interpretation possible. According to Geertz, such an analytical process is analogous to “penetrating a literary text” (p. 448).

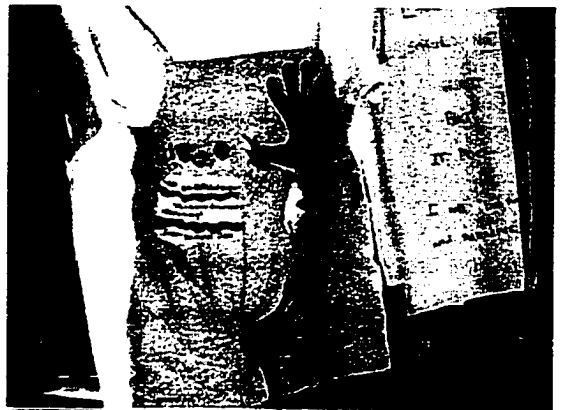
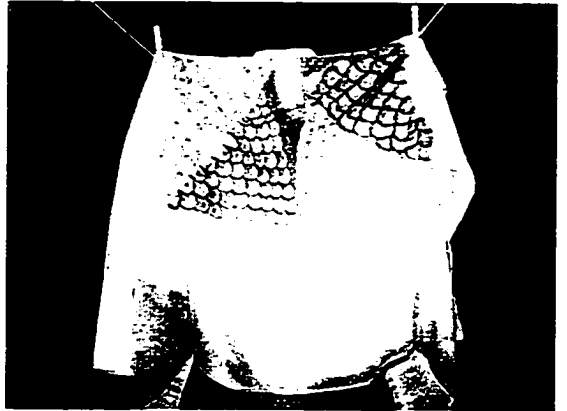
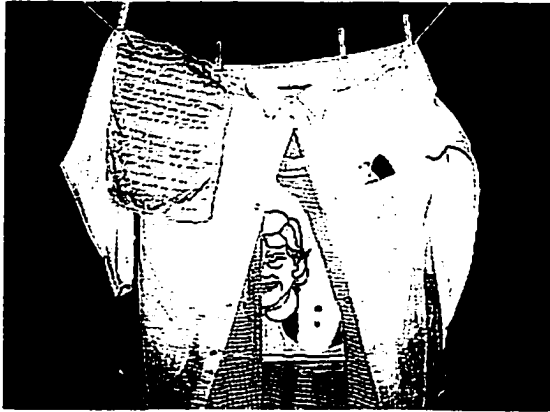
APPENDIX II

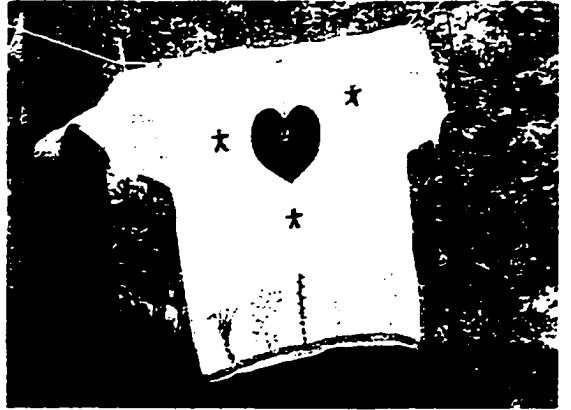
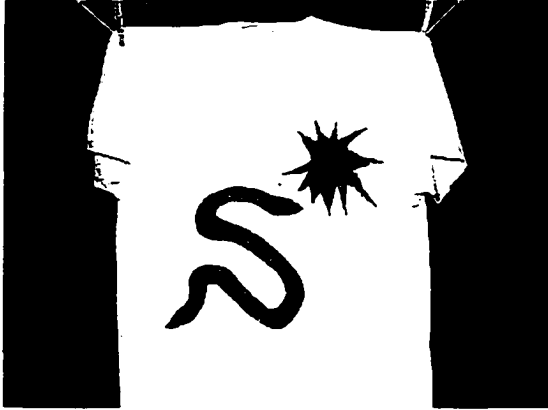
EXAMPLES OF CLOTHESLINE PROJECT SHIRTS

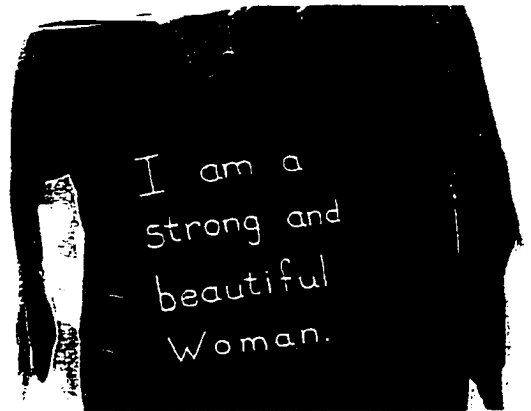
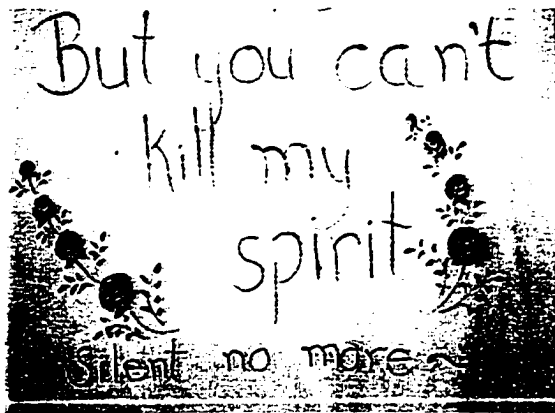
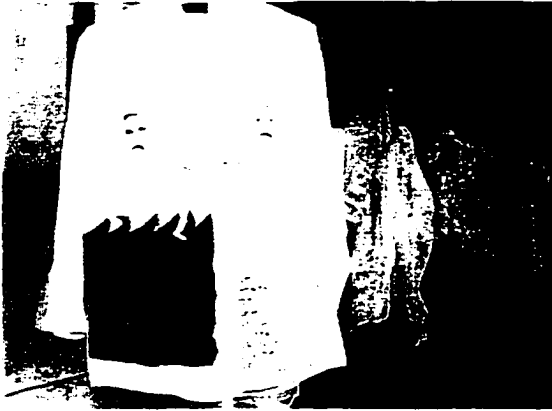
Photos by P. C. Hipple











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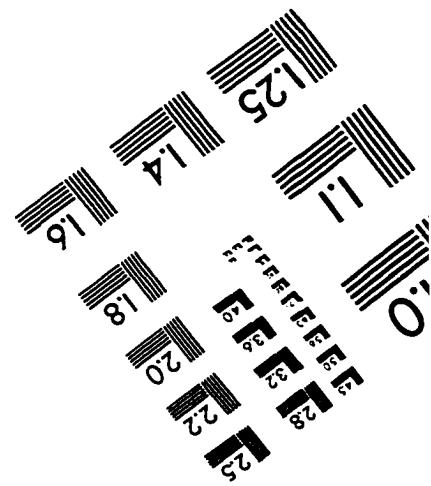
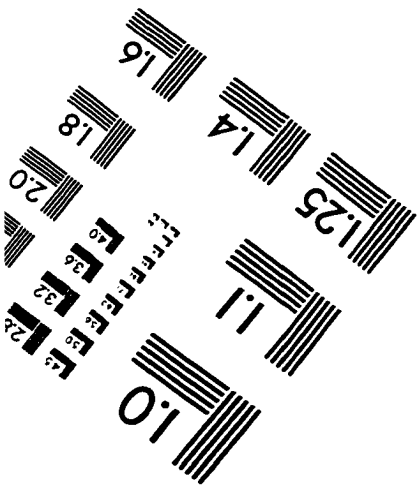
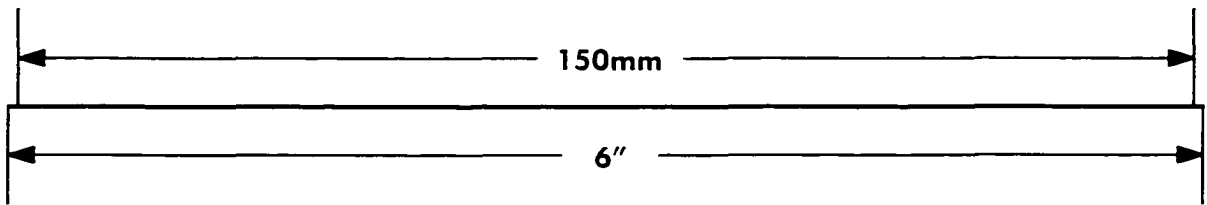
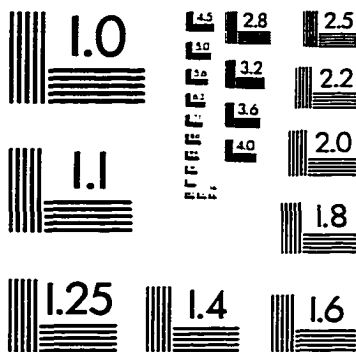
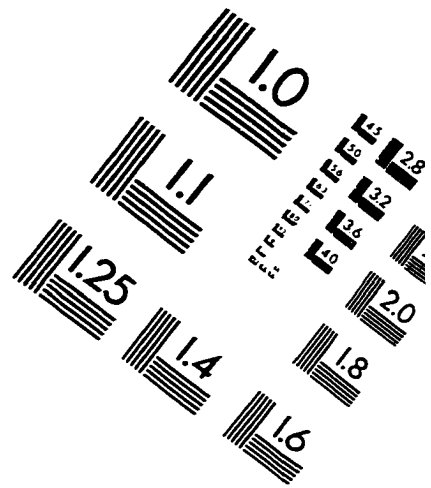
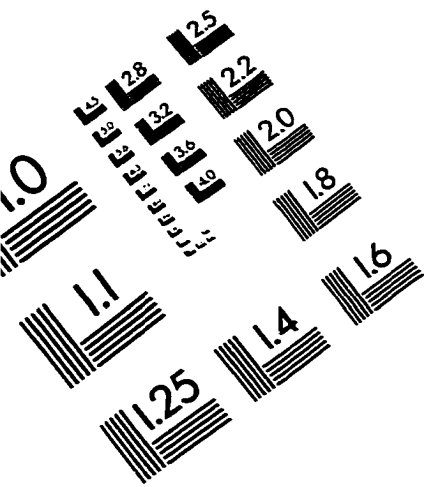
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