

From the National Film Board of Canada

"I have the feelings of a woman, but I have only the language of men."

VIRGINIA WOOLF 1920

Over half a century after these words were written, feminist writers from Quebec and English Canada meet in a small restaurant in Montreal to discuss the absence of female reality in language.

The group includes: Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, Susan Crean, Dorothy Todd Hénaut, Jovette Marchessault, Daphne Marlatt, Gail Scott and Betsy Warland. Writer Keith Harrison describes their work as "re-creating language to voice what has been unvoiced...unfiltered by male form and sensibility." Writer Betsy Warland calls it "dis-covering words."

fragments is a lively tête-à-tête in which the participants compare - and transcend - cultural differences to explore the complex issues of women, politics and language.

A Studio D production.

Director: Nora Alleyn
Producers: Dorothy Todd Hénaut, Margaret Pettigrew

19 minutes 01 seconds
Order number: C 9190 056

STUDIO
D

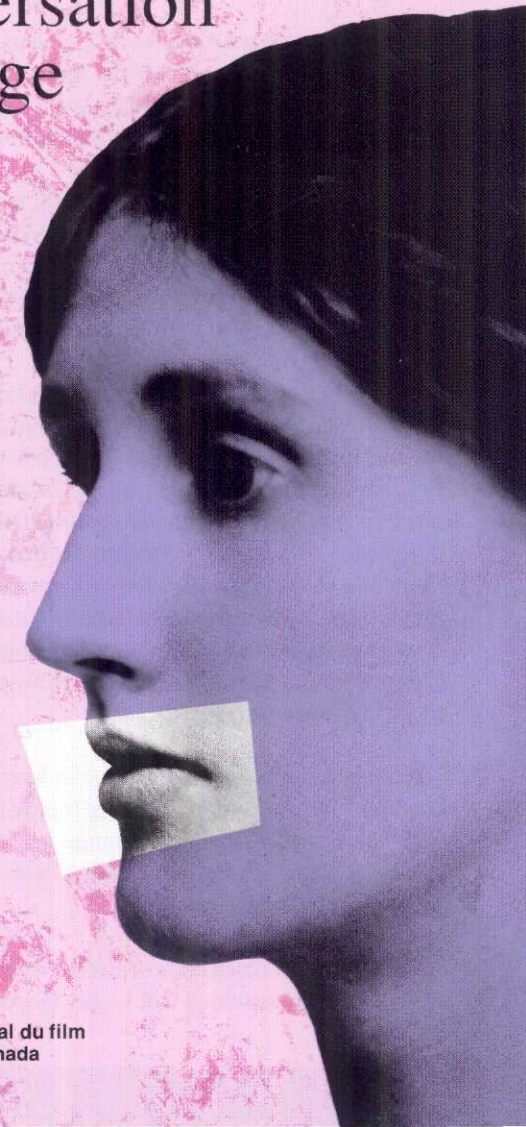
fragments


of a conversation on language

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 Close-captioned for the deaf and hard of hearing.
A decoder is required.



VHS
113C
9190 056



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fragments of a conversation on language

"God created man to his own image."

— BOOK OF GENESIS

"One is not born a woman. One becomes one."

— SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

The juxtaposition of these two quotations carries a significant message. Man is, woman becomes.

Words are one way human beings can communicate. Words enable us to identify and reflect upon such concepts as sexism and patriarchy. What does not have a name is difficult to discuss. Words provide us with valuable tools for change.

Is language man-made? In English, for example, why are there so many more positive words and expressions for males than for females? If a man acts like "an old woman," an insult is implied. Spinster is pejorative, bachelor is not. And for centuries, generic man has been used to include both women and men.

In *fragments*, a group of feminist writers from Quebec and English Canada meet in a small restaurant in Montreal to discuss the feminization of language. Their discussion reveals that in English Canada, geography and isolation hampered the linguistic work of feminists. In Quebec, nationalism brought together politicians and artists and indirectly became a catalyst for linguistic change. Women found centre stage with feminist playwrights who gave expression to their identity. The conversation swings easily between English and French as the group attempts to explain the innate absence of female reality and experience in language.

Women are a humanizing force in language. In *fragments*, Daphne Marlatt says, "Changing the world with words is the only alternative to trying to change it with nuclear arms. We have to change the thinking. And how do you change the thinking, except through the language?"

Designed as a discussion-starter, *fragments* encapsulates a variety of themes which can be developed further by viewers.

THEMES

- Sexism — visible and invisible
- Factors affecting language: gender, class, culture, politics, geography, power
- Women's reclaiming of language
- Role of the "imaginary" in language
- How language shapes the world we live in
- How we are shaped by language
- Interculturalism
- Interconnectedness of imagination, language and identity
- Perceived difference between writer and woman writer
- Universal values beyond cultural differences
- Translation, and the difficulties of translating the new women's language
- Differences between English Canada and Quebec

AUDIENCE

General. Education: senior secondary level to university (political science, sociology, language arts, literature, values education, ethics, women's studies, comparative cultures). Writers' workshops, community groups concerned with language.

RELATED NFB FILMS AND VIDEOS

Firewords: Louky Bersianik,
Jovette Marchessault, Nicole Brossard
(C 0186 072)
Adam's World (C 0189 005)
Mother Earth (C 0091 001)
A Writer in the Nuclear Age:
A Conversation With Margaret Laurence
(C 0185 077)
Some American Feminists (C 0177 226)

DIRECTION, WRITING,
EDITING, NARRATION
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Dorothy Todd Hénaut

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