CHAPTER FIVE

“THE DREAM” AND “THE DRIVE”:
A METAPHOR FOR LIMINAL SPACE AND LIBERATION

Down through the ages language has been regarded as a powerful weapon. Irrespective of cultures, races, religions, people assign specific reference to language. Language as a system of spoken sounds or symbols for communicating thought assumes much importance. It has the potential to become an incantation, when it is chanted and tuned; a poem, when it is rhymed and rippled; a prayer, when it is solemnized and whispered; and an offence, when it is manipulated and distorted. Phrases, clauses, sentences, idioms, proverbs and figures of speech are constructed with the ingenious use of words by lofty minds. Language has infinite varieties and forms. Everything the mind infers has a word to express it and language is sometimes characterized as reflective, as a neutral mirror for an objective reality. Yet there are words that convey an entirely different set of meanings, one favourable and the other less so. Word describes an object at its best or shares a state of mind in effect, but sometimes it fails to serve the purpose if it is pulled out of its context. Language has the power to manoeuvre and to victimize, and at the same time to build and create. Therefore, the dream
of a common language, divested of its politics, is worth dreaming of. In her earlier writings, Rich dived into the wreck following the aesthetic methodology of the major male poets of her time and came up with the will to change the world through the dream of a common language that expresses the silent voice of women with its subtleties.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay, “The Poet” wrote about the powers and mission of the poet. For him, the poet is a “liberating god” who, as “the Namer or Language-maker,” has the “dream-power” which all possess, but only poets know how to use (30). Rich was convinced of this dream-power and worked hard to create the kind of poetry and language which would reach out to others, which would allow her a means to release her own passion into language, and so to dream for radical change. Rich perceives it in terms of French women writers: “Everything is word, everything is word, we must grab culture by the word, as it seizes in its word, in its language you will thus understand why I believe that political thought cannot do without thought on language, work on language” (Eisenstein and Jardine 73). Language and poetry contain a power of their own. And the poet has a responsibility to that power, to the power of consciousness and growth. This chapter takes into account Rich’s power of poetry and language and how these powers have been denied, sidetracked, or ignored, how they have
nevertheless survived and have endured, and how their resources can be maintained and tapped in order to effect social change and create social space for women.

Rich pronounces her life-long commitment to poetry that opens up space in which she creates, shares her process of analyzing and testing each idea that enters a poem. In response to a question in an interview about the revolutionary power of poetry, Rich said, “Through its very being, poetry expresses messages beyond the words it is contained in; it speaks of desire; it reminds us of what we lack, of our need, and of our hungers. It keeps us dissatisfied. In that sense it can be very subversive” (Rothschild, “Adrienne Rich” 9). Writing poetry has always been a serious undertaking for Rich:

No one lives in this room without confronting the whiteness of the wall behind the poems, planks of books, photographs of dead heroines.

Without contemplating last and late the true nature of poetry. The drive to connect. The dream of a common language. (DCL 7)

Here Rich speaks about “the fresh starts, the need to keep up the intensity of the verse, by-pass disappointments, overcome the pain of broken connections” (Kalstone, “Talking with Adrienne Rich” 30). She engages directly with the struggle to
release herself from a colonizing language, “the so-called common language” (DCL 16), a language that violates the integrity and meanings of its speakers and disintegrates identity and coherence—whether of individuals, groups, races or whole cultures. Thus Rich insists upon the necessity for an adequate language that very well translates the female experience with its subtleties. The conversion of such experiences into language and action becomes an underlying theme in her writings. Her poetry that is more and more compelling by nature gives voice to a deep longing for moving words.

Rich asserts that the power of language depends upon the ingenuous capacity of the poet, the potential to create a linguistic world free from the prescriptive commands of male-dominated society. Only the language spoken from the depths of one’s self, apprehended through her senses brings the reality into existence. From the strength of such language a new perspective may be created, new figures may be brought into focus; thus social space expands. “In Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev” (DCL), Rich writes:

What does it mean “to survive”

We will not live
to settle for less
We have dreamed of this
all of our lives. (DCL 6)
Here Rich affirms the belief that women are not ready for a compromise belittling themselves, and are committed to creating not a dream-world but a world filled with dreams where they could find meaning and love, even by opposing the rules and traditions of the male-dominated society.

The tension is encapsulated in the variant readings of “the dream” and in the co-existence of Rich’s “drive” to craft a language that speaks to and for “all women” (LLS 213). It is Rich’s clear attempt to listen to and account for the marginalized, all of whose voices make up the liberation that she calls for. Ultimately, and increasingly over the course of her works, Rich figures “the common language as a multilayered conversation or chorus, not a homogenous white woman's voice” (Garber 134). In Arts of the Possible (2001) Rich writes, “Now that phrase, ‘the dream of a common language’ like the title of the book, has sometimes been read, or heard, as variously, a call for a ‘women’s language’. But what I had in mind was poetry itself as connective urge and power” (135). Rich knows that she cannot be totally oblivious of the literary world of the past but by exposing herself to the impending dangers she can seek means to empower language. Chances are many; success or failure of this enterprise depends on how women free themselves from the patriarchal associations and its influences. So she believes that
her challenge to establish an alternative outlook for women capable of reaching beyond male world-view won’t go unfulfilled.

At the same time, Rich does not employ the term “women” to construct an outlook based either on “separatism or biological determinism” (Ratcliffe 110). She frankly admits that for a period of time she could not separate her feelings toward men as individuals from her anger toward patriarchy as a system. Ultimately, she does not rule out men: “I believe that an imaginative identification with all women extends this act of the imagination as far as possible” (LSS 71). Thus, like her persona in “From an Old House in America” (UP) Rich is never inimical toward men. She simply chooses to focus on women, particularly on all the relationships possible between women. By analysing her own experiences and observations, Rich arrives at two conclusions: First, a radical strategy is needed to transform patriarchy for the welfare of all people; thus, she conceives a comprehensive outlook with the potential to transform the society. Second, women must actively participate in this social transformation if it is to become a reality. In this radical strategy Rich “posits the possibility of evolving subjectivity” (LSS 84). Rich’s first conclusion frees her from “the charges of separatism”; the second, charges of “a static biological essentialism” (Ratcliffe 111).
Rich says that women must reconfigure their potential as a force in order to change the textures of the fabric of society. Such a redefined concept of power has the potential to shift the power base from a socially privileged group to all people. And the means through which a woman arrives at this configuration of power is language. It is the medium with which one has to re-vision history, literature, philosophy, politics, and to project the achievements of women and define women's roles. Thus, such a re-vision empowers women to become active agents and participants in the transformative power of history and literature. It has its impact both on the personal and cultural aspects of one’s identity. An awareness of one’s identity, as a part of this empowering process, results in women’s personal and cultural uplift. And Rich is of the opinion that it encourages a woman to reread women's texts in order to recognize and acknowledge how their logics and styles are shaped by the male world, as it was in the case of Rich, and thus to be aware of its potential to change the actual lives of the people (BBP 5).

However, in her “Twenty-One Love Poems” (DCL) Rich reminds her readers:

we’re out in a country that has no language
no laws, we’re chasing the raven and the wren
through gorges unexplored since dawn
whatever we do together is pure invention
the maps they gave us were out of date
by years ...

but a woman’s voice singing old songs
with new words, with a quiet bass, a flute
plucked and fingered by women outside the law. (31).

The explorer’s awareness that the landscape, like the country itself, has “no language / no laws” itself becomes the motivation for the quest. Woman’s perception of herself, her relationship with other women, and their living situations increase the urgency of her mission. Since “pure invention” in the poem is the keynote of the explorer’s mission, there is a sense of determination to put these new words into practice (Vanderbosch 116). Hence, Rich's rereading and rewriting model challenges women to recollect old strategies that have silenced women in the past and to conceptualize new strategies that may be employed in reading and writing patterns aiming at the renewed perspectives. Rich’s enterprises in language through rereading and rewriting expose the type of language that reinforces patriarchal values and power, and pattern a space from which a woman’s power may emerge. In her *Arts of the Possible* Rich writes, “A radical critique of literature would take the work first of all as a clue how to live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our
language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh” (AP 11).

Rich is aware of the liberative power and self-fulfilling function of language. She admitted that there really were times when, as a poet, she felt she would simply like to be able “to create something like a monumental head, some kind of great unitary visual image that would possess its own force and power, and stop this entire struggle with words and meanings” (Montenegro 6). With reference to this, to a question in an interview about how she dealt with the double edge of language and her means of using language without being used by it, Rich said: “One of the underlying themes of my poetry is that tension between the possibilities in language for mere containment and the possibilities for expansion, for liberation. But there is also the fact that ultimately language alone cannot liberate us” (Montenegro 7). Being aware of the full potentials and limitations of language, in “Cartographies of Silence” (DCL) Rich said, “language cannot do everything”(19). Evaluating the liberatory efforts that she made, she says, “All movements have a tendency to in-group language, and that language can become abstract, a language of stereotype. And yet, it’s a powerful thing to talk about my concrete experience in its unique details and then begin to abstract from it” (Montenegro 15). Thus, Rich confesses,
“A language is a map of our failures” (CEP 366). That was really what happened in those early consciousness-raising groups.

If the society in which women live marginalizes their existence, if language has lost its revitalizing capacity, women have to visualize a world where they can exercise their imagination revoking the power of language. The way in which Rich defines language gives a clear understanding of her attempt in the relocation of language:

Language is as real, as tangible in our lives as streets, pipelines, telephone switchboards, microwaves, radioactivity, cloning laboratories, nuclear power stations. We might hypothetically possess ourselves of every technological resource on the North American continent, but as long as our language is inadequate, our vision remains formless, our thinking and feeling are still running in old cycles, our process may be ‘revolutionary’ but not transformative. (LSS 247-48)

This concrete texture and the immensely abstract liberative potential of language cause Rich to seek to ensure the participation of all for the transformation of the society.

In order to be enriched by language's transformative potential, a woman must recognize Rich's three interwoven language functions: communicative, socializing, and imaginative. (Ratcliffe 114). Rich understands that the communicative
function of language is crucial for women because its precision, authenticity and effectiveness are central to the quest for survival of any group (BBP 85). Language being a basic socializing agent, it has tremendous influence on women’s lives. It affects women’s ways of living, thinking, speaking, and hearing. If women are aware of the possible language moves that aim at the liberation of women, they benefit from it. As such, Rich believes, language has the potential to shape one’s world. The imaginative function of language is crucial for women because it affects their consciousness as well as their material existence. By making use of these three language functions, Rich believes that a woman can discover and state her ideas in writing and speaking and help to shape her own subjectivity as well as that of others.

In “Cartographies of Silence” (DCL) probing into the possibilities and the impending dangers of the language, Rich gives vent to her longing for a language that would be pure. In an apartment full of books by men, the poem expresses the anxieties and the difficulties faced by women in the patriarchal tradition: “the ghosts –their hands clasped for centuries– / of artists dying in childbirth, wise-women charred at the stake, / centuries of books unwritten piled behind these shelves” (DCL 27). Such a predicament makes her think of silence as a
linguistic strategy that would render the so far unheard voice into meaningful expression:

Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed
the blue print to a life
It is a presence
it has a history a form
Do not confuse it

with any kind of absence. (DCL 17)

But Rich comes to the realization that the poem like “Cartographies of Silence” can only temporarily resolve the underlying linguistic questions. So this is one of the issues Rich returns to throughout her works. In every attempt the poet enters into another eerie awareness: “Your silence today is a pond where drowned things live; I fear this silence, / this inarticulate life” (DCL 28). Thus thrust is to be focused on to control the very language as such. But such a strategy, as it is employed in the “Twenty-One Love Poems” (DCL) and other poems, does not necessarily release the poet from her own linguistic and existential anxieties, as language can never get rid of its traditionally accrued meanings.

Knowing this, Rich turns away from the outspoken word, the power of the voice, to advocate a language that borders on silence. So the poems in the collection, The Dream of a Common
Language (1978) address “the need to minimalize language, to divest the word of its accumulation of power by replacing it with actions identified as preserving and sustaining a woman’s integrity” (Diehl 544). In “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” Rich explores the significance of silences in her poems and essays. Speaking to an interviewer in 1980, about the importance of breaking insidious silences, Audre Lorde refers to Rich: “As Adrienne has said, what remains nameless eventually becomes unspeakable, what remains unspoken becomes unspeakable” (Hammond 18). Rich’s first prose collection, significantly titled On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978 takes silence as a central theme. In “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying” (1975), Rich combines the themes of silence as Rich boldly admits, “that silence makes us all, to some degree, into liars” (LSS 190). Rich has learned, as she writes in “North American Time” (YNL) in 1983, that “Words are found responsible / all you can do is choose them / or choose / to remain silent” (34).

If Rich’s words go beyond her intent or she cannot trust even the words she writes, she has to think of a different strategic technique in her poems. The notion of the poet as “language-maker” (Emerson 30 ) and the question of renaming the world are at the heart of her poems because Rich perceives the necessity of escaping the boundaries of convention to make a
“new world ... by women outside the law” (DCL 31). The poems in *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) also mirror the conviction that only by choosing one’s own life freely and by making one’s choice into a language, can women begin to redefine poetry, appropriating for themselves the power of naming. The “Twenty-One Love Poems” (DCL) close with Rich’s assertion of the autonomy she seeks:

> I choose to be a figure in that light,
> half-blotted by darkness, something moving
> across that space, the color of stone
> greeting the moon, yet more than stone:
> a woman. I choose to walk here. And to draw this
> circle. (36)

Though she aspires to autonomy, in actuality, the woman poet cannot discard traditional linguistic images because she cannot improvise new ones befitting the expression of her thought.

Language is endowed with tremendous creative power but it cannot rid itself of centuries of connotation. And the poet comes to the awareness that she is losing ground:

> How do I exist?
> This was the silence I wanted to break in you
> I had questions but you would not answer
> I had answers but you could not use them
> This is useless to you and perhaps to others
Language cannot do everything—. (DCL 18)

Though Rich knows this, “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” (WC) is intimately connected to the concerns for discovering truth in language and language as the proper vehicle for truth. The opening lines of the poem significantly introduce a linguistic motif: “My swirling wants. Your frozen lips /The grammar turned and attacked me” (CEP 400). Language intercepts and corrupts, but the woman wants to control, rather than submit to the only power she may own: “To do something very common, in my own way” (CEP 400). Making an attempt to break through language to meaning, she resigns herself to looking for change. This retreat makes her aware of the common goals and the need to go beyond the contention of individuality, so as to speak, for others. This is the emotional mindset in many of her poems. Tenderness replaces terrors; speaking for others allows her to speak for herself. Rich realizes that in order to clear up such matters our ordinary language is too coarse, that we need a subtler one.

However, a woman may use her situation as a location from which she can articulate her silence, but Rich says, “breaking our silences, telling our tales, is not enough” (BBP 145). In striving against the assaults of both language and life, women must also consciously consider the ethics that govern their lives, namely, what to do with their stories and when to
take action. Rich, in her essay “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” (1984), demands such accountability, that is, a struggle to account for her relative privilege and to affirm her earlier proclamations on “the common oppression of women” (BBP 211). First railing against its repressions in the conclusion of “Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia” (1978), Rich argued:

as I thrust my hand deeper into the swirl of this stream--history, nightmare, accountability--I feel the current angrier and more multiform than the surface shows: There is fury here, and terror, but there is also power, power not to be had without the terror and the fury. We need to go beyond rhetoric or evasion into that place in ourselves, to feel the force of all we have been trying--without success--to skim across. (LSS 310)

For Rich, one such action is writing. She believes that writing is “precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (Eisenstein and Jardine 76). Therefore, she is of the view that “women must at once speak of the place without violating its presence and find a common language that repudiates the mode of aggression of the male-dominated society” (Diehl 533).
In response to this challenge Rich made an attempt to conceive a common language that would be radically different from the patriarchal, symbolic structure of language. The motive behind such a position rests in the argument that “women feel rejected from language and the social bond” (Ularý 130). Elaine Showalter has aptly assessed it: “The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women’s consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism and circumlocution” (193). Because language encodes and decodes meaning, and defines the social relationship according to the precepts of patriarchal society, it highlights the values put forth by that patriarchal society and culture. As a consequence of this patriarchal dominance, women are deprived of their freedom to voice their rights; they are forced to conform to the generic law that has been designed by the male society. Rich believes that the given codes are to be broken in order to find other alternatives.

At the same time, critically evaluating the dormant nature of the liberatory potential of women, Rich adds that sometimes women like to confine themselves within the four walls of the "prison-house of language" (Ularý 130). Their efforts are not passionate enough to free themselves from this despicable situation. Rich would advise, like Ezra Pound, “learn the
meaning of words” (qtd. in Froula 164) realizing that perhaps only a poet can liberate language that leads inevitably to liberation of power. As long as women continue to desire and conform to what the male subjects desire, they lack inner freedom. That is, they fall short of becoming autonomous, free subjects.

For this reason, Rich is convinced that she should be looking for ways to more effectively change women’s position with respect to “patriarchal language and symbolic discourse” (Ulary 130). Under the current laws that govern language, women are left with no hope for change: “their exclusion is internal to an order from which nothing escapes: the order of man’s discourse” (Irigaray, TSW 88). Insisting that women must find appropriate syntax, images and metaphors to create their realities, Rich asserts that women must actively work to create a vision that captures their relation to the deepest forms of life. She feels that the conflict runs so deep that it affects the most basic perceptions of human life. Rich states that “this is the war of images and language is power” and “poetry can be used as a means of changing reality” (Martin, TCWM). Thus Rich is convinced that many forms of this new prospective language,–opposed to the masculine, symbolic language–can be imagined only by giving up the loose ends of the symbolic structure. There appears to be an unbridgeable gap between these two distanced
polarities: the rational, representational, logical structure of language i.e., the symbolic structure and the expressive, affective human “drive / to connect” i.e., the real structure (DCL 7). By accepting this structural gap, one is left with the provision either to become a submissive subject in the symbolic structure, or to become a passive agent who denies the possibility for a subject position between these two extremes. So the real challenge is to face “how linguistics and learned discourse, as symbolic systems, are able to capture an object in principle beyond any symbolic system” (Nye 677).

Rich knows that the potential “to speak new language” (DCL 75) that she wrote in “Transcendental Etude,” the final poem in The Dream of a Common Language, which some writers later seem to interpret in the literal sense, is negligible. In an interview with Susan Stewart, Rich emphatically asks, “Do I want it in a literal sense, that each word or line I write has the same meaning for everyone as it does for me. No. Do I think words used according to dictionary definitions? Obviously not” (AP 135). On the one hand, the form of natural language is organic by nature and is conceptualized by the human mind; and on the other hand, language is inextricably related to the culture and society. Thus it is grounded in history. Mere individual acts of the will to change do not change it, nor can it be re-invented from scratch. So the notion of a totally different
language, outside the grammatical structures, cannot be a description of an actual possibility. Whatever be the collective efforts to bring about changes in perception and expression, it won’t be free from the baggage of history in the domain of language. Thus Rich is convinced that it’s high time to figure out a new time-aesthetic that embodies an alternative poetics. In “Transcendental Etude” (DCL), Rich envisions such a world: “a whole new poetry beginning here / Vision begins to happen in such a life” (76).

In this newly envisioned poetics Rich’s approach to the language is one of relocation (Hedley 46). Through the process of relocation Rich ascribed a different semantic context to the words. She does this by reviving the subtle meanings and connotations that have not completely disappeared and can therefore be relocated without extraordinary measures by the context in which a word is set. Lexical meanings offer reports of how particular populations at particular times are using particular terms. They do not offer theoretical grounding concerning the underlying nature of language; nor do they reflect to any great degree the role of so-called secondary or connotative meanings in the usage patterns they report. Relocation would be a better description for these words in Rich’s hands. In A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far (1981), poems written during the
period 1978 through 1981, Rich continued to engage in feminist relocation of important words like ‘freedom’ in “For Memory”:

Freedom. It isn’t once, to walk out
under the Milky Way, feeling the rivers
of light, the fields of dark –
freedom is daily, prose-bound, routine
remembering. Putting together, inch by inch
the starry worlds From the all the lost collections. (WP 22)

Not only the title words but also the ordinary words like ‘protection’ in “Coast to Coast” ‘integrity’ in the poem “Integrity” ‘escape,’ ‘emancipation,’ ‘suffrage,’ ‘matrices’ in “For Julia in Nebraska” and ‘exceptional’ in “Heroines” are certain examples that show a different semantic context.

Although Rich does not stipulate specific textual strategies that will apply to every particular situation, she exhibits contextual considerations of form, content, and dynamism of consciousness within her texts. Her poetic improvisations—for example, breaks between stanzas, spaces in the middle of lines, line endings, first person personae, womanly voices, woman-centered images and metaphors, punctuation and italics, and words—show this interweaving, emerging as reflections and constructive elements of her feminist consciousness. For example, the persona in “Natural Resources” (DCL) claims that
she will never use the terms ‘humanism’ or ‘androgyne’ again because they do not speak to her current experiences. The persona in “Diving into the Wreck” experiments with language, using words as ‘maps’, in the hope of creating new words and new myths that celebrate the power of women buried in the wreck. Rich's prose choices also capture and construct her radicalism. For example, in “Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman” (1977) Rich claims that common words must be continually critiqued: “they are having to be sifted through, rejected, laid aside for a long time, or turned to the light for new colors and flashes of meaning: ‘power,’ ‘love,’ ‘control,’ ‘violence,’ ‘political,’ ‘personal,’ ‘private,’ ‘friendship,’ ‘community,’ ‘sexual,’ ‘work,’ ‘pain,’ ‘pleasure,’ ‘self,’ ‘integrity’...” (LSS 247).

Thus, through a critical and constructive process Rich sets her writing in the context of domestic living, housecleaning, setting the table, preparing meals, reading, typing, gardening, collaborating, and arguing. In the poem “Rift” (WP), focused on a lovers’ quarrel about the disagreement about language, Rich suggests that the price of an outright rejection of standard usage is unacceptably high. So in Rich’s politics of language, she has been concerned to demonstrate that words could be used differently: “Politics, you'd say, is an unworthy name for what we're after. / What we're after is not all that / clear to me, if politics is an unworthy name” (WP 49). As a result, in her recent
writings Rich shows the tendency of accepting standard usage of language as a part of the programme of relocation and being less concerned with the repossessing of language.

During the 1970s, the attempt to repossess language was the major concern of second-wave feminism in the United States. In 1977, in her introduction to the collected poetry of Judy Grahn, Rich wrote, “when we become acutely, disturbingly aware of the language we are using and that is using us, we begin to grasp a material resource that women have never before collectively attempted to repossess” (LSS, 247). Many were obsessed with the repossessing of language and understood it as “the great he/she battle” (Nilsen 153). It reached to the extent of a struggle to dispense with ‘generic he’, along with a large set of nouns that are formally gender neutral but have been put in masculine gender as normative for the human species as a whole. This battle was for equal opportunity, with a major emphasis on the ways in which standard usage ensures women’s efforts to hold their status in public life. However, feminists found it more important to stress that “the oppressor’s language” (CEP 366) interferes with women’s ability to communicate and to be in communion with others. Thus, for example, in a poem called “Natural Resources” (DCL) Rich announced:

There are words I cannot choose again:

humanism, androgyny
Such words have no shame in them, no diffidence before the raging stoic grandmothers: their glint is too shallow, like a dye that does not permeate the fibers of actual life as we live it, now. (66)

Though the patriarchal language curtails freedom, Rich is convinced that an equal-opportunity agenda is not radical enough to be liberative in its potential. Gender-neutral language use cannot grasp the uniqueness of women’s experience in the present, and it is not capable of reviving the unheard voice of women from the dark passages of history. In 1978, Mary Daly spoke in very similar terms: “There are some words which appeared to be adequate in the early seventies, which feminists later discovered to be false words. Three such words which I cannot use again are God, androgyny, and homosexuality” (xi). It involves, as Daly perceived, “a process of freeing words from the cages and prisons of patriarchal patterns” (Daly and Caputi 3). She invites her readers to conceive of language itself as a fabric that was originally woven by women in communication with one another to convey that she is once again actively engaged in language making.

Thus in 1977-78, it seems that Rich and Daly shared the same dream, “dream of a common language” (DCL 7), that gave
direct expression to a politics of language bonding women and woman identification. Daly went on with Rich’s dream of a common language and woke up with an “uncommon quest for ‘a common language’ ” in her *Gyn / Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Daly xvii). Daly’s uncommon quest ended up ten years later in *Webster’s’ First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*. Meanwhile, Rich came to understand her own relationship to language on an entirely different plane. In the introduction to the poetry of Judy Grahn, Rich asserted, “The ‘new words’ which are written by women, writing entirely to and for women is not the ‘exclusion’ of men; it is that primary presence of women to ourselves and each other first described in prose by Mary Daly, which is the crucible of a new language” (*LSS* 250).

In the 1980s, Rich explained her conviction in her essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”: “The power men everywhere wield over women has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control” (*BBP* 68). But Rich, apparently with the same vigour and commitment, distanced herself explicitly from this position during the 1980s in her essay, “Notes toward a Politics of Location” (1984). Looking critically upon the prevailing situation at that time, Rich wrote: “a form of (American) feminism so focused on male evil and female victimization that it allows for no differences
among women, men, places, times, cultures, conditions, classes, movements” (*BBP* 221). The approach Rich preferred by 1984 was one that would give an entirely new thrust to the primary question about language: “the dream” and “the drive / to connect” (*DCL* 7) thus broadened her strategies by acknowledging that “most women in the world must fight for their lives on many fronts at once” (*BBP* 218).

Rich, who believed in the creative power of words, was more obsessed with “the drive to connect”—the communicative function of language. Thus her poems are “bound to be restless, bound to be looking constantly for new beginnings, because they will never resign themselves to solitude” (Kalstone, *Five Temperaments* 162). In her foreword to *The Fact of A Doorframe*, a comprehensive selection of her poems from 1950 to 1984, Rich confessed that her worst fear as a poet had always been “that these words will fail to enter another soul” (xv). Accordingly, “Rich’s approach to the relocation of language was—and still is—context or use-oriented” (Hedley 53). Rich favours contextual discourses, as she struggles to keep the language of her poetry grounded in “the real world” (*BBP* 94). This strategic technique shows her faith in the real situations of language in use. Her poetry overtly says that there is no question of getting any word’s meaning finally right and meanings are not exclusively in words but in contexts too. With Wittgensteinians, Rich recalls the fact
that “language is a way of life. Without the way of life, the language is just so much wind” (Tirrell 46).

This is a holistic approach to language. The holistic perspective of language is strongly supported by a theory of meaning, which offers a powerful conceptual framework for analyzing the social problems reflected in language and the problems resulting in language use. According to this view, the meaning of a sentence depends upon its place in a pattern of inferences. The meaning of a word or expression depends on various actual and possible functions in the structure of a sentence. These patterns of inferences in meaning are governed by commitments and responsibilities approved by the speaking community. What commitments a speaker may make depends on the speaker’s social, cultural, and linguistic context. The speaker’s social and linguistic community licenses or entitles nearly all its members to make certain kinds of basic linguistic commitments (Tirrell 47). This kind of usage-oriented change that Rich advocated in her writings gave her readers a window toward the future as well as the past.

“Transcendental Etude,” a poem from the collection, *The Dream of a Common Language* that characterized Rich’s vision of art suggests this type of contextual restoration of meanings of words that have been obscured by patriarchal usage. Here Rich’s approach was conspicuously in line with the commitment that
words mean no more, and no less, than what they have been used to mean in particular contexts. Rich has been consciously employing context-oriented standard usage of language both in her poems and her prose writings in recent years. When she calls attention to particular words and their meanings in her writings, she emphasizes that a particular word has meant different things to the same person at different phases in her life. In *Arts of the Possible*, Rich asserts, “It could be one influence on consciousness—I hope, in the direction of enlarging the imagination and not shrinking it. I don’t believe that there is only one way, it acts on our consciousness in different ways, and at different times in our lives” (134). She argues that different approaches to language and differently located usages need to be accepted. In this respect, Rich is a holist for whom a sign design is a word only in the context of a language, and a language has significance only in the rich context of culture. Social context and social dynamics shape the meaning of words and give language its power.

Rich’s context-oriented approach is radical, in the sense that language itself is what she has sought to change (Hedley 49). Here Rich’s perception of language comes closer to that of sociologist Peter Berger who conceives human society as a “world-building enterprise” (Berger 73), and language as the means by which the social order is constituted for its members
for a meaningful existence. He implies that “the world is the word; it is experienced phenomenologically as a vast text which encompasses the sum total of human symbolic systems” (qtd. in Eisenstein and Jardine 74). Berger explains further saying, “every empirical language may be said to constitute a nomos in the making, or, with equal validity, as the historical consequence of the nomizing activity of generations of men” (Berger 20). From the perspective of language’s creative potential, language is an on-going, open-ended activity that expresses the human craving for meaning; but as the product of this activity, language sets linguistic constraints and conventions on its users. Berger adds,

The original nomizing act is to say that an item is this, and thus not that. As this original incorporation of the item into an order that includes other items is followed by sharper linguistic designations, the nomizing act intends a comprehensive order of all items that may be linguistically objectivated. (21)

Like Berger, Rich understands language as an open-ended activity to constitute an order, but for Rich “the nomizing activity of generations of men” has been “the power of language to hide and to distort” (Spiegelman 141). Rich explores this both in her poetry and prose: “I think it has been a peculiar confusion to the girl or woman who tried to write because she is peculiarly susceptible to language. She goes to poetry or fiction looking for
her way of being in the world ... and over and over in the ‘words’
masculine persuasive force, she comes up against something
that negates everything she is about” (“WWDA” 39). By claiming
that words have a “masculine pervasive force,” Rich shows
awareness of politics of language use and language function that
play an integral role in constructing a woman’s subjectivity. By
claiming that a woman has “her way of being in the world”
(“WWDA” 39), Rich is also aware of other factors apart from
language, namely a woman's situated experiences within her
culture. Rich analyzes the implications of this and argues that in
reaction to the negation a woman encounters in language, her
dream of a common language serves “as the desire for
commonality for the expression of conflicting desires” (Ratcliffe
107).

Rich’s dream of a common language is a vehicle for a
woman to translate her desire into action. Such a move
empowers women to become active agents in social change
through the process of re-vision. And such re-visionary action
requires two steps: first, “each subject must be aware of her own
evolving subjectivity”; then she must be daring enough to
acknowledge her existence as a subject within a specific
community (Ratcliffe 108). This doubled action enables a woman
to evaluate the possibilities and limits of her autonomy within a
patriarchal system. It enables a woman to evaluate her life,
revise her history, and design her future. Then the dream of a common language emerges as a celebration of the differences among women. But in order to realize this doubled action, a woman must also relocate her language for Rich believes, “our words stand become responsible” (YNL 33). Rich’s vision to relocate language posits interrelated issues about language function. Rich writes, “Those who still believe that language is ‘only words’ and that an old language is good enough for our descriptions of the world we are trying to transform” (LSS 247). Thus Rich’s discourses and the dream of a common language are to be viewed as possibilities for the transformation of society. In this process of relocation, Rich’s dream of a common language conceptualizes women’s silences within patriarchy as well as the reasons for these silences. It also conceptualizes a social space for liberation and strategies for transforming women’s silences into language.

Being aware of the limits and scope of this transformative process, Rich gives expression to this contrast through a metaphor of a woman communicating and a woman driving. The woman driving is governed by the make of her car as well as by the laws that govern the road. In the same way, the woman communicating assumes a symbolic position similar to that of the woman occupying the car; this position is always speaking through a particular woman even when she is speaking against
it (Ratcliffe 115). In the face of a woman's desire to control language so that she can, in turn, control herself and her world, she is never totally free. In Rich's language relocation process, a woman has both endless possibilities and limits. Here the infinite possibilities and limits constantly interact with each other. To fulfil the possibilities, she must reconcile herself to the limits. In the ultimate analysis she must recognize that “language cannot do everything” (DCL 19).

With an awareness of these differences, along with her commitment to what she calls “poetry of the actual world” (BBP 173), Rich visualizes her linguistic programme. In fact her own approach to the relocation of language had always had a different emphasis. The common language Rich was dreaming of in the 1970s was to be common not only in the sense of enabling women to “re-member a common heritage” but also in the sense of being an ordinary language, a language of everyday use (Hedley 42). Aware of the passion in her poetry and her language, Rich says, “For a very long time, poems were a way of talking about what I couldn’t talk about any other way” (Montenegro 20). To the question of why she is not able to talk about certain things, she adds: “It’s because they are the points of danger; I feel that in the social fabric, I feel you are forbidden to raise this question. That is the threatening place, and of course it becomes a place of great fascination too. I was
equipped from a very young age to use language in this way because poetry was available to me as a choice” (Montenegro 20). Thus, Rich was using her poems to engage in a subtler process of contextual reorientation—one that would acknowledge as fully as possible the lives her words had already lived in other contexts. Meaghan Morris took issue with this position and wrote in clear terms: “I do not believe that ‘meanings’ are in ‘words’ but that meaning is produced in specific contexts of discourse” (32).

Rich too is convinced that her strongest imperative as a poet has always been communication in actual life situations, and increasingly this has meant hearing and listening to other people. It has also meant grappling with the problem of language use in actual contexts: “When language fails us, when we fail each other / there is no exorcism” (WP49). In her forward to The Fact of A Doorframe: Selected Poems 1950-2001, Rich acknowledged that for her “the learning of poetic craft was much easier than knowing what to do with it—with the powers, temptation, privileges, potential deceptions, and two-edged weapons of language”(xv). Taking the same vein of thought, she adds, “we need to support each other in rejecting the limitations of a tradition—a manner of reading, of speaking, of writing, of criticizing—which was never really designed to include us at all” (BBP 89). Rich is a poet who has always mistrusted the poetic
function of language which, she says, would “deprive us of language and reduce us to passive sufferers” \((WFT\ 10)\). Rich adds, “I was using my poetic language as protection in those years, as a woman, angry, feeling herself evil, other” \((WFT\ 167)\).

In 1979, Rich talked about the poetic function of language when she explained in her introduction to the poems of Judy Grahn that poetry is “above all a concentration of the power of language” and “in setting words together in new configurations... in the relationships between words created through echo, repetition, rhythm it lets us hear and see our words in a new dimension” \((LSS\ 248)\). With the same emotional bent Rich wrote, “Poetry is relationship to language, and language, for a poet, is often an almost physical, sensuous thing” \((Montenegro\ 21)\). If women’s experience is finding a voice, Rich categorically asserts that this should change the sound or feel of language.

In “Twenty-One Love Poems” \((DCL)\) she expresses a different sensibility and in a changed language. In “North American Time” \((YNL)\) dated 1983, she focused on an aspect of this power that troubled her, soberly reminding other poets that “whether we like it or not” the words of a poem “stand in a time of their own” \((35)\):

We move but our words stand
become responsible
for more than we intended...
and this is verbal privilege

..............................

It doesn’t matter what you think.

Words are found responsible. (33-34)

A poem makes one see and hear words ‘in a new dimension’ by detaching them from the circumstances to which they originally spoke \((BBP 168)\). This is a high price to pay for its “concentration of the power of language” \((168)\), because of the risk that this power will later “be used against us / or against those we love” \((YNL 35)\)–that the poem’s words may deliver, under other circumstances, a message the poet would never have wished to send.

In order to resist this tendency, Rich dates all her poems so as to locate them in the actual context in which they were originally written. In “Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet” \((1984)\) she explains that this practice, which she began as early as 1956, “was an oblique political statement–a rejection of the dominant critical idea that the poem’s text should be read as separate from the poet’s everyday life in the world” \((BBP 180)\). This strategy was even reflected in one of Rich’s earliest formulations of the problem in which her radical perspectives of language would come to expression: “This is the oppressor’s language / yet I need it to talk to you” \((CEP 364)\). In this pair of lines, Rich made her stand clear and boldly professed her
integral vision about language. This generalization has been formulated as a particular instance of discourse through the use of deictic words such as, this, I and you. These words take into account the subjective experience of a particular woman and connect it with a particular historical period, resulting in an active communication with others. Rich’s formulation thus calls attention to the two different modes of language: First, language as a system of already encoded meanings; second language as ongoing, open ended meaning making activity (Hedley 49).

To keep her poems firmly grounded in everyday life, Rich sets them up for the reader as discourse events in particular contexts. Talking her new form of writing, Rich affirms, “it’s wearing its own skin, in a sense. Well, I certainly had to find an equivalent for the kinds of fragmentation I was feeling, and confusion. There, I found a structure and once I saw how that worked, I felt instinctively, this is exactly what I need” (Montenegro 17). She does this by using deictic words and background detail to give each poem’s speaker a specific situation or context. Here deictic words specify identity or spatial or temporal location from the perspective of a speaker or hearer in the context in which the communication occurs. Rich shows how these words introduce particulars of the speaker’s and hearer’s shared cognitive field into the message:
Look: this is January the worst onslaught
is ahead of us (YNL 83)

It’s June and summer’s height (MS 33)

Night over the great and the little worlds
of Brooklyn the shredded communities
in Chicago, Argentina, Poland in Holyoke
Massachusetts, Amsterdam night falls
the day of atonement begins (YNL 92)

Walk along back of the library
in 1952 Vic Greenberg in his wheelchair (YNL 38)

There is bracken there is the dark mulberry
there is the village where no villager survived. (YNL 16)

Two horses in yellow light
Eating windfall apples under a tree (PSN 211)

These are the opening lines of some sections of the poems giving
deictic details such as time and place, adverbials, definite
articles, proper names, personal pronouns, and demonstratives
with which the poet creates particular discourse events pointing
toward a specific temporal, geographical and interpersonal
context for the poem’s content or message; for Rich believes that “poems are made of words and the breathing between them: that is the medium. I believe as well that poetry isn’t language in the abstract” (AP 114).

Thus Rich employs these deictic words in order to produce “a conversion of language into discourse” (Benveniste 143). In view of this, Rich says, “Language is this medium that we hand back and forth between us in all human relationships all the time .... . It’s this coinage in which we keep trying to get a hold of each other or make ourselves clear” (Montenegro 20). This discourse strategy serves as Rich’s efforts to resist the patriarchal symbolic, what Jacques Lacan calls “the master’s discourse” (qtd. in Ulary 132). This patriarchal language causes women to lack both autonomy and self-recognition. Consequently, “if women are defined according to masculine interests, given no place as active, self-defined subjects and no language to speak their specificity, then change is impossible” (Grosz 132). Rich’s relocation of language in the form of discourses posits an autonomous position to the subject where “we are born into language and language speaks us, language dictates its law” (Eisenstein and Jardine 74). Here Rich perceives “a living language, something that is still spoken, aloud or in the mind, muttered in secret, subversive, reaching around the corners, performed to a community, read aloud to the dying,
recited by heart, scratched or sprayed on a wall. That kind of language” (AP 114).

Rich believes that this paradigm shift would liberate the human subject from the constraints of repressive patriarchal language. It is the configuration of sound elements or other linguistic symbols representing a word or other meaningful unit in a language that seems to have been programmed according to male-dominant society. These signifiers restrain women from the very act of speaking and desiring for themselves. Thus this radical attempt ensures a sense of fulfilment to the subject in using the language, satisfying their inner desires. Rich who set her poems as discourse events believed that women and other marginal subjects can make use of this strategy in order to escape the intimidating presence of the “symbolic Other” that Rich understands as patriarchy.

Likewise, everything organized as discourse–art, religion, family, language–being parts of a symbolic system, can at times meet with failure in its liberative potential. All these concerns can be seen in Rich’s analysis of women’s relation to the language and the revision of the structural pattern of the language. Discourse seems to be the necessary condition for liberating the human subject from both psychological and material oppression. Earlier in her writings, Rich had taken into account silence as a planned action, but now she is convinced
that only when women tell their stories, talk out their existence, does the possibility of freedom exist (LLS 202). Rich has come to the firm-rooted belief that silence leads them nowhere. Further, Rich realized that women adequately express their dreams and desires only once they come into the realm of language. Outside the realm of language their isolated attempts would remain only incoherent, leaving no ripples in the mainstream of society.

Once women come into language, they can make their collective presence felt by their demands and desires in a logical manner, but Rich is aware that for the approval of those demands the price they have to give to the patriarchal Other is exorbitant. Rich states that the Other can adopt many faces, such as another human being, or God, or society at large, or parents, or the laws, customs, and traditions of a culture. Rich recognizes the face of the Other in patriarchy as one that is not simply the tracing of descent through the father..., but any kind of group organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what parts females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystical and aesthetic and excluded from the practical and political realms. (LSS 78)

These patriarchal patterns and its variants are repeated and reinforced in classrooms, in workplaces, and in culture at
large. By discussing both particular subjects and the value of their socially constructed roles, Rich demonstrates that patriarchy functions in all possible forms and shapes in an appealing manner to the less observant eyes. Thus she further defines its effects:

At the core of the patriarchy is the individual family unit with its division of roles, its values of private ownership, monogamous marriage, emotional possessiveness, the 'illegitimacy' of a child born outside legal marriage, the unpaid domestic services of the wife, obedience to authority, judgment and punishment for disobedience. Within this family children learn the characters, sexual and otherwise, that they are to assume, in their turn, as adults. (LSS 79)

So for the most part, this Other who is patriarchal and social, shares the symbolic realm as speaking beings. They are partakers in the symbolic system as soon as they come into language and in return the symbolic sets down the law.

At this point Jacques Lacan’s rereading of Freudian theory in the light of linguistics finds relevance. According to him, it is only through the system of language that we can make sense of the world. Lacan terms language the ‘symbolic order’ that represents the total structure of meaning. From the Freudian understanding of the pre-Oedipal phase Lacan argues that once
the child is separated from the mother he or she has the need to speak to ask for whatever is needed. Hence, Lacan argues, language is based on lack. He centralizes the phallus as its primary signifier, which forces women into the margins of language. As women cannot identify with the language of the Father, they are always alienated from language. Femininity is marginalized as the only language available is a masculine one. The language available to women cannot accommodate them as female subjects.

As Lacan formulates, “Law of the father is that signifier which bars the desire of the woman, thus instituting primal repression. This is the law that sets the parameters outlining what is communicable and what is non-sense” (qtd. in Ulary 133). As patriarchal, the law is programmed to restrict women’s free play of language, while men “have the law on their side and they don’t hesitate, when the occasion arises, to use force to lay down the law to women” (Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* 74). These different spaces within the symbolic structure occupied by men and women and the irreducible distance that exists between these spaces make Rich feel as if she is speaking “the oppressor’s language” (*CEP* 364). She adds, “This was the silence I wanted to break in you” (*DCL* 18). The setbacks received in woman’s attempt to deny or bridge this symbolic gap sometimes cause Rich to retreat into what she calls the “dream
of a common language” (*DCL 7*) in her work, *The Dream of a Common Language*. Rich aims to transform silence into language and action through poetry, recognizing that the journey can be hard but the rewards are great: a new vision and “a whole new poetry” (*DCL 76*).

At a glance, this dream proffers an obvious solution to the problem, creating common grounds for women and men within the symbolic realm. But when it reaches the heart of the matter, the dream of a common language highlights the danger involved therein. It tempts women and the marginalized to dwell within this dream, thus perpetuating their own marginalization. Many women later realize that this dream is indeed only a dream and that at their waking reality frequently stares at them with an uneasy silence. Going further, the dream of a common language may be used to identify powers that a woman may gather within its constraints. But this silence of the marginalized that has been reinforced by different institutionalized agents should not be read as simple conformity.

Indeed, Rich says that this rigorously programmed silence may take many forms and serve many functions. So Rich strategically warns the speaker/writer to be prepared to do the following:

To question everything. To remember what it has been forbidden even to mention. To come together telling our
stories, to look afresh at, and then to describe for ourselves.... To do this kind of work takes a capacity for constant active presence, a naturalist’s attention to minute phenomena, for reading between the lines, watching closely for symbolic arrangements, decoding difficult and complex messages left for us by women of the past. It is work, in short, that is opposed by, and stands in opposition to, the entire twentieth-century white male capitalist culture. (LLS 13-14)

So the acts of questioning, remembering, telling stories, describing, reading between lines, analyzing the symbolic, and deconstructing women’s texts—all are invention strategies that women may adopt to their own ends for particular situations. Other strategies include educated guesses, or intuitive recollections based on the facts at hand, and disobedience, or breaking the rules of logic, invention, style, and so on (BBP 148).

At one point Lacan claims that “women are not worth listening to, implying that their speech is filled with utter nonsense or stupidities” (qtd. in Ulary 133). Lacan says that women utter the most stupidities when asked to describe their intimate desires. Rich in her “dream” finds a “drive” to question whether women can articulate anything meaningful at all, whether they can be heard. It is her clear attempt to listen to and account for diverse women, all of whose voices make up “the radical
complexity” (LSS 193) she calls for. Lacan probes into detail and affirms that there are spaces within symbolic language and discourse where women can speak their desires. In one of his Seminars, Lacan wrote: “Were there no analytic discourse, you would continue to speak like birdbrains” (qtd. in Ulary 129). Believing in such a Lacanian response, Rich confirms that there are such spaces of liberation within her discourse; such symbolic articulations have the potential to liberate the subject from the desire of the Other.

Of its own accord, Rich’s politics of language presents different modes of how the subject is either inhibited by the Other or liberated from the Other. The transformation is one that reveals a linear progression as the subject moves from one type of discourse to another and back again. It is a progressive movement from being in a position constrained by the patriarchal, symbolic Other or the law toward a position free from the condemning gaze of the Other (Ulary 134). Then “the future would be incalculable, the historical forces would, will, change another thinking as yet unthinkable, will transform the functioning of all society” (Eisenstein and Jardine 74). Relying on Lacanian formulation of analytic discourse, Rich confirms that it answers the question of discursive liberation effectively. Only therein can the subject transform her position in relation to her inner desire and in relation to the other. It transforms “the silent
woman who has no access to authoritative expression to have power to seize speech and make it say what she means” (Ostriker, “The Thieves of Language” 68). Lacan’s view reinforces the fact that “discourse always aims at the least stupidity, at sublime stupidity. Stupidity nevertheless has to be nourished” (qtd. in Ulary 134). Different discourses can be seen to produce certain psychological effects in the subject. If these effects extended beyond the individual subject to culture or society at large, perhaps they might have more wide-ranging social implications. Here Rich’s dream comes closer to Kristeva’s philosophical quest for liberation: “The current transformations of psychic life may foreshadow a new humanity, one whose psychological conveniences will be able to overcome metaphysical anxiety and the need for meaning” (Kristeva 8).

Rich is convinced that patriarchal discourse or in Lacanian terms “master’s discourse” has marked psychological effects on society. It is evident that “the rage is all the more intense because the writers see themselves as prisoners of the discourse they despise” (Ostriker, “The Thieves of Language” 67). The “master's discourse” or the effects of patriarchy appear to dominate the realm of all discourses. In general, the “master’s discourse” is one that completely dominates and subordinates the subject, particularly the woman, producing in her a sense of servitude and submission to the commands of the governing
authority. It does not merely exist in the concrete organization of economic, political, or social structures but “embedded in the very foundations of the Logos, in the subtle linguistic and logical processes through which meaning itself is produced” (Eisenstein and Jardine 75). Only by exposing the intricacies involved in the “master’s discourse” can the visualized transformation be realized. Rich also believes that no socio-political transformation is possible, which does not constitute a transformation of subjects. In analytic discourse or the discourse between “the analyst and the analysand” (Ulary 135), it is possible for the subject to truly transform her position in relation to her inner desire and in relation to the Other. Here is where the subject’s transformative power becomes actualized and reconfigured into a liberatory power.

According to Lacan “language is a ‘jouissance’ mechanism where the subject finds pleasure (jouis-) in meaning (-sens)” (qtd. in Ulary 135). Perhaps the one common element among all discourses is that in every discourse there is an amount of discontentment in the search for meaning in language. This creates a paradoxical situation: the subject loses something to language; at the same time, language gives fulfilment that fills the subject’s loss or lack, so as to satisfy the desires of the subject. In view of this, Lacan writes, “the fact that one ‘says’ remains forgotten behind what is ‘said’ in what is ‘heard’. Yet it
is in the consequences of what is said that the act of ‘saying’ is judged” (Ulary 137). Thus ‘saying’ is the function of the ‘written’, which corresponds to the level of the ‘real’ while the function of the ‘read’ and ‘said’ corresponds to the level of the symbolic. As such, this ‘real’ dimension of the ‘saying’ is beyond the laws of language and “is not in the same register as the signifier” (Ulary 137).

The essence of these laws, says Lacan, is “to divide up, distribute, or retribute everything that counts as jouissance” (qtd. in Ulary 137). The ‘real,’ ie. ‘saying,’ the function of the ‘written’, is characteristic of the speaking subject insofar as it is that which is lost or not understood, or repressed, in what is said. As structures, says Lacan, “both language and the unconscious must be talked out or said for the emergence of the subject” (qtd. in Ulary 136). Thus through the process of the unconscious the subject comes into an existence that was not there before. Here the analyst can only deal with and interpret the subject’s unconscious based on what is said by the analysand. As a result, one speaks in order to master one’s loss, or to go beyond one’s loss so as to fulfil the inner desires. Discourse, then, not only represents the way in which a subject finds contentment in her search for meaning, but more specifically, it represents the peculiar way in which language is
used as a mechanism of fulfilment of the inner desires of the subject.

Now the subject begins to see that the denied or repressed aspects of her discourse are the thrust of the real—her unconscious drives. The subject now becomes the agent who questions the master signifiers. Rather than working in service of the master, the subject assumes a dominant position. There exists “a subterranean current below the surface structure of male-oriented language” (Ostriker, “The Thieves of Language” 68). Thus the challenge is to: “Break down the walls around the one who speaks.... Her task is to go back through the house of confinement and the darkness of the night until once again she feels the light that forms and other speculative veils had shrouded from gaze” (Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* 191).

Rich, who believes in “dream- power”—the poet’s creative power of language—thinks that liberation can only come about in such a discourse, where she is a “liberating-god” (Emerson 30) who can engage the buried language of her unconscious where she is free to express herself as she desires. At the same time Rich is convinced that there is, however, one question that every woman has in common: “If I could know / in what language to address the spirits” (*DCL* 69). Such a language opens in analytic discourse wherein she, as analysand, can speak and be heard by
the other, as analyst. There she can speak, be heard and interpreted. She becomes truly radical by moving beyond this preliminary stage of recognition to the stage of recognizing herself through the other. Analytic discourse reveals this underground, unconscious surface that has always been repressed. In revealing it to her, she then speaks it and becomes the cause of her own desire. At the same time Rich says,

there is a peculiar tension between an old idea system from which the energy is gone but which has the heaped-up force of custom, tradition, money, and institutions behind it, and an emerging cluster of ideas alive with energy but as yet swirling, decentralized, anarchic, constantly under attack, yet expressing itself powerfully through action. (OWB ix)

In order to resolve this tension the subject must progress beyond the mastery of the Other's signifier to the point or position where she creates or produces her own signifiers and consequently becomes the cause of her own desire. In advocating a Lacanian answer, Rich’s dream supports the idea that the only hope for liberation in language comes through the analysand’s engagement in something like analytic discourse. In such a language one gives a different reading to the signifiers that are enunciated from what they signify.
As a result, what has been considered unspeakable is challenged and the speakable gets further expanded. This process gives a woman's experiences new values, a woman may come to voice, and a woman may take action based on this voice. With that, women enter into the new subject—that of the unconscious, to draw consequences from her words—words that cannot be taken back. Thus Rich encourages a woman to read the absences, the gaps, the blank spaces in literature, history, science, politics, and the like. It should also be accompanied by critiquing of one's own life for meanings exist there as well. Such action may take the form of analyzing symbolic actions—that is, constructing texts through speech and writing—in order to reveal strategies that work for women as well as those who are marginalized. It may also take the form of deconstructing women's texts written in the past as well as in the present, reading them from new angles so as to consolidate information from new perspectives. According to Lacan, such an analysis announces that there is knowledge that is not known, knowledge that is based on the signifier as such. When no lines exist to read between, the best a woman can do is make educated guesses, intuitive rememberings based on the facts at hand (BBP 148).

In Rich’s politics of language this type of discourse provides an alternative to the either/or situation: women are no longer
forced to choose strictly between the patriarchal symbolic and
the psychotic or hysterical types of discourses. Instead, they are
invited to develop their own discourse based on their own
desires, and to experience liberation from within the dynamic
structure of discursive language (Ulary 141). They no longer have
to give up all remnants of the symbolic in order to speak their
desires. Consequently, such discourses cannot be accused of
being exclusionary or merely the reverse of the patriarchal
language. Analytic discourse is open to anyone who desires to
speak. Rich does not attempt to get rid of master signifiers, and
because of this, even analytic discourse takes on some of the
characteristics of the master’s discourse. But here the subject is
no longer given the master signifier by the other who imposes it,
but she creates her own signifiers.

This new signifier is not imposed from outside in a rigid
way which mandates the subject’s identity and the subject is
now in the commanding position, and “where it speaks, it
enjoys” (Ulary 142). These analyses imply that women are then
able to speak and enjoy their desires rather than be tormented
and tortured by patriarchy. That which has always been
oppressed is now free to speak and move according to its own
laws and desires. In Lacan’s view, it is by taking up this position,
and by failing to give in to the demands made on him/her by the
subject, that the analyst promotes psycholinguistic changes in
the analysand. In doing so, the analyst reveals the basic aspiration that is the cause of the subject's desire. The analyst’s purpose is to analyse psychic life, that is, “to break it down and to start over ... to revitalize grammar and rhetoric, and enrich the style of those who wish to speak with us because they can no longer remain silent and brushed aside” (Kristeva 10).

Analytic discourse implores women and other marginalized subjects, who typically have been silenced or reduced to inarticulate cries, to become part of the fluid dynamics of discourse. Analytic discourses investigate and interpret how subjects, and society at large, participate in and constitute themselves in relation to the position of mastery. They investigate and interpret how women have been constituted in relation to the Other's mastery and provide an effective response to women's call for liberation.

By engaging in analytic discourse, the subject's primary task is to free up these forbidden inner desires in order to liberate herself from the Other's masterful discourse (Kristeva 143). The analysand, in dialogue with the analyst, answers the call for liberation by producing her own signifiers and satisfaction of her inner desires. These invention strategies based on Rich’s politics of language emerge at both general and
particular levels. In her essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” (1971) Rich asserts this predicament that is quite unique to women:

No male writer has written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women's criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his themes, his language. But … every woman writer has written for men even when, like Virginia Woolf, she was supposed to be addressing women. (LSS 37-38)

Since women occupy a symbolic space in the language that is different from that of men, they must interpret Rich's invention strategies in ways that enable them, as outsiders, to communicate within prevailing ideologies.

At all levels, Rich's invention strategies shape woman's consciousness but do not determine “what a woman sees and how she values what she sees” (Ratcliffe 133). Thus, they affect what she deems to be important questions as well as “what dreams she will dream and what dreams will dream her” (ADW 23). Rich's strategies in politics of language, therefore, are neither simple nor without consequences. A woman employs Rich’s strategies to find languages and images for a consciousness that has not yet been conceptualized; if it has been conceptualized but there is no record of it, language doesn’t form part of tradition. As a result, Rich advocates that each
woman must visualize new languages and images on her own (LSS 30). It should be, what Toni Morrison calls, “the struggle to interpret and perform within a common language sharable imaginative worlds” (AP 113). But Rich warns that everything a writer composes may be used against her and her loved ones, for words, once they are written, take on meanings far broader than a writer ever intends: “our words stand / become responsible / for more than we intended” (YNL 33). Rich admits, “contempt for language, the evisceration of meaning of words, are cultural signs that should not surprise us” (AP 107). But as the persona in “Contradictions” (YNL) claims, the worst thing that can happen to a woman is not to know who she is or where she has been. This type of process reminds women that there is knowledge that is not known, knowledge that is based on the signifier as such. Despite their risks, speaking, reading, and writing help her to attain such knowledge.

Rich’s strategies emerge from the stories, observations, and analyses of her life and of other women’s lives. Thus, Rich knits together such accounts in her writings about which she says,

Such a composition has nothing to do with eternity, the striving for greatness, brilliance—only with the musing of a mind one with her body . . .

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with no mere will to mastery. (*DCL 77*)

In these brief lines, Rich opens up space for reflection as well as speculation. These spaces create a site where a woman may change discourse through her textual strategies. To Rich, changing discourse involves conceptualizing textual strategies that have silenced a woman in the past and discovering other textual strategies that may be employed in the present and future to empower a woman. As one Rich persona confides, she constantly looks for “new forms” and for “old forms in new places”; her search is complicated because she both “knows and does not know what she is searching for” (*DCL 42*). So a common form or analytic pattern emerges in Rich’s writings: First, Rich locates herself within the present, then chooses her own strategies as well as the chosen topic and the occasion for writing. This helps her to recollect stories from her own life and the lives of others that are somehow associated with her politics, topic, and context. Rereading of these stories helps her to explain the present, thus building a powerful argument. The purpose of this pattern is to discover new starting points, new questions and equations that will pose questions in herself and in her readers.

In her *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* Rich addresses her readers by adopting such a strategy using “many kinds of testimony, actions, new experiences within her
individual limits” (xi). With all of her textual strategies, Rich encourages other women writers to assert power in the writing process:

Go to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being in the world, since she too has been putting words and images together; she is looking eagerly for guides, maps, possibilities; and over and over ‘in the words masculine persuasive force’ of literature she comes up against something that negates everything she is about. (AP 16)

According to Rich, asserting such power necessitates invoking both unconscious and conscious processes. Describing her own writing process that involves the conscious and unconscious powers, Rich acknowledges that she has become more and more open to her inner voice. So Rich employs her unique style in her writings as meaningfully as possible, even when dealing with personally tormenting and painful topics. Rich believes that “if discourse can change, so too can people’s minds and so too can their intolerance about realities within patriarchy” (BBP x).

Rich does not perceive the transforming power of language in terms of simple cause and effect. She knows that consciously changing discourse will not all of a sudden change a person or a culture. But a woman’s reading or writing or speaking or listening differently is a beginning, an action that is within each
woman's power. Such actions, however, cannot be prescribed; they must reflect a woman's particular experiences within her culture. It could be through renaming of one's experiences, telling new and forbidden stories, articulating a different kind of logic, or speaking the so-called unspeakable experiences. If such action is not taken, that passivity “keeps our actions reactive, repetitive and perpetuates abstract thinking, narrow tribal loyalties, every kind of self-righteousness, the arrogance of believing ourselves at the center” (BBP 223).

It is a concerted effort to speak “through the cracks in the syntax, semantics, and the logic of male language” (Eisenstein and Jardine 76). But Rich believes that “language, the medium, ‘autonomous and self-sufficient’, must do its work by its own methods” (AP 117). Thus language that is “charged with meaning to the uttermost can become something that can enter the consciousness of others” (AP 134). As a result, women create their own identity through the process of writing. This new self-designated identity is not imposed from outside in a rigid way. Consequently, a woman's style is influenced by patriarchy, but at the same time women are autonomous subjects who freely exercise their volition. For a while Rich learned her lessons well and acquired mastery through imitation, as indicated by W. H. Auden's introduction to A Change of World: “the poems a reader will encounter in this book are neatly and modestly dressed,
speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them” (278).

As a woman and poet, however, Rich’s style is formed by her desire to tell the truth about herself and other women and about their lives. Rich describes herself as trapped for more than fifty years “in a continuous tension between the world the Fathers had taught me to see, and had rewarded me for seeing, and the flashes of insight that came through the eye of the outsider” (BBP 3). The tension between these two identities has been resolved through self-exploration. Rich is convinced that “the movement for changing is a changing movement, changing itself, demasculinizing itself, de-westernizing itself, becoming a critical mass that is saying in so many different voices, languages, gestures, actions: it must change; we ourselves can change it” (AP 76).

As a writer and activist, Rich tells her readers how to read her texts and how to live their lives: look for meanings not in static categories but in blurred edges. Rich writes, “I am thinking how we can use what we have / to invent what we need” (L 56). Thus ‘the dream’ and ‘the drive’ give voice to the silenced and unnamed experience of women. It literally puts words in the mouths of some women, such as the mountaineer Elvira Shateyev in “Phantasia for Elvira Shateyev” (DCL) and the painter Paula Becker, close friend to the wife of the poet Rainer
Maria Rilke, in “Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff” (DCL). Other poems, such as “Sibling Mysteries” (DCL), “A Woman Dead in Her Forties” (DCL) and a number of poems in “Twenty-One Love Poems” (DCL), speak what has been left neglected in relationships of her own. Several poems speak about women’s lives and relationships more generally in an essentialist way: “the raging stoic grandmothers” in section thirteen of “Natural Resources” (DCL 65), the mother who is “the woman / making for the open” of “Mother-Right” (DCL 59), the “woman” and the “we” running throughout “Transcendental Etude” (DCL), “the daughters and the mothers / in the kingdom of the sons” in section three of “Sibling Mysteries” (DCL 49).

Rich believes that “if you live when an idea is born, and a great revolution in the world is born—it doesn’t make any difference where you are; that becomes the next stage of development of humanity” (AP 84). In this respect she may be more like the astronomer Caroline Herschel, in Rich’s poem “Planetarium” (WC) who discovered eight new stars. Identifying more explicitly with her subject the astronomer Caroline Herschel, Rich wrote in 1972 that “the woman in the poem is the woman writing the poem become the same person” (LSS 24). In the middle of the poem she has been carried away by a vision of the heavens in which the blurred edges that divide the subject and the object cease to exist: “What we see, we see and seeing is
changing” (*CEP* 362). In the final section Rich identifies with the woman who struggles to re-envision herself: “I am an instrument in the shape / of a woman trying to translate pulsations / into images and the reconstruction of the mind” (362). Caroline Herschel used her talents to discover new places in space. In the same manner, Rich discovers “‘new space’ within language and on the borders of patriarchy” (“WWDA” 49). She holds up “the mirror of language to a society in fracture, porous with lying and shrill with contempt for meaning” (*AP* 113), to create another kind of space where meaningful human and verbal relationships are possible.