

Note: Penultimate Draft

SEXUALITY, POWER, AND GANGBANG: A FOUCAULDIAN DECONSTRUCTION OF ANNABEL CHONG

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In January 1995, at the age of 22, Annabel Chong (whose real name is Grace Quek), a former pornographic actress/director set a world record (which has since been topped) for having the most number of sex acts, 251 with about 70 men, over a period of about ten hours, for a film called the *World's Biggest Gangbang*. Chong claims in subsequent interviews that more than anything else, she did it to challenge the stereotypical notion that female sexuality is *passive*—that women like to be “seduced, kissed and cuddled, and [are] basically biologically monogamous”.¹ She quips that “if a guy did 251 women in one day . . . everyone would think he’s a real stud”; But if a girl does the same “she’s considered a terrible slut.”² This paper is my attempt to investigate what Annabel Chong’s *dissent* means for feminism: Is Annabel Chong the *quintessential* feminist, defying an oppressive system, asserting her individuality, redefining the parameters of a gender-determined sexuality? Or is she a victim of her own misguided *ideals*, *objectifying* herself in the belief that this affirms her subjectivity, submitting herself to domination to reclaim control, eventually propagating the same oppressive system she professes to end?

I want to approach this inquiry using Foucault’s framework of power-discourse-sexuality for two reasons: First, I believe that Foucault’s genealogy of sexuality successfully exploits how sexuality as a discursive construct is used as a technique of control; Second, I believe that Foucault provides us a way of understanding how an individual responds to various systems of control, as well as a framework that explains the many *power relations* that determine an individual’s mode of existence. However, since in effect, I would be presenting a Foucauldian analysis of the gendered experience of a *feminist subject*, I find it necessary to first overcome what I consider as theoretical barriers, alluding to the ongoing debate concerning the usefulness of Foucault’s framework for feminists.

To address this issue, I will present a brief survey of the criticisms directed to the inadequacy of Foucault’s theory of the subject posed by some notable feminists, as well as the proposed resolutions to them. This also establishes the framework on which I ground my inquiry. My contention is that to some extent these

¹ Goodman, Amy. “Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong.” (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).

² Clinton, Paul. “Sex Sobers in Controversial Sundance Documentary.” (February 10, 1999) <http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9902/10/annabel.chong/> (accessed June 14, 2010).

criticisms have already been resolved, and that it is now possible to present an analysis of the gendered experience of the feminist subject using a Foucauldian framework.

The paper thus is divided into three parts: (1) I will present an elaborate exposition of Annabel Chong's case drawing mostly from the documentary film *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story* and transcripts of her interviews; (2) then a brief survey of feminist objections to the Foucauldian subject and the proposed resolutions to them; and finally (3) my analysis of Annabel Chong's *dissent*.

ANNABEL CHONG'S *DISSENT*

Who is Annabel Chong?

Annabel Chong whose real name is Grace Quek (born and raised in Singapore) was a former pornographic actress and director. In January 19, 1995, at the age of 22, she made headlines after engaging in 251 sex acts with about 70 men over a period of about ten hours, setting a world record (which has since been topped), for a film called the *World's Biggest Gangbang*.³ Four years later a documentary film about her entitled, *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story* was nominated for the Sundance Grand Jury Prize.⁴ The world soon after learned that Annabel is not the typical *porn star*. She was a student at Raffles Girl's School and Hwa Chong Junior College, where she was enlisted in the country's Gifted Education Programme. She studied law at King's College London under a scholarship but then dropped out and went on to finish her graduate studies in photography, art and feminist studies at the University of Southern California (USC) with a G.P.A of 3.7 (4.0 is the highest).⁵ In 2003, she retired from porn—on her website she stated that “Annabel is dead”.⁶

Not Loving Vanilla Sex

Staged in a Hollywood studio, *The World's Biggest Gangbang*, documents Annabel's record breaking sexual engagement with 70 men (five at a time). The men were recycled, until the number of sex acts reached 251. The resulting video became one of the highest grossing pornographic films ever made.⁷ Annabel claims that the video's Roman theme, a Roman playground with a bed in the middle, was inspired by the Roman

³ Clinton, Paul. “Sex Sobers in Controversial Sundance Documentary.” (February 10, 1999), <http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9902/10/annabel.chong/> (accessed June 14, 2010).

⁴ Shi'an, Tay. “From Sex Marathons to Real Marathons.” (August 20, 2008), <http://www.asiaone.com/Just%2BWoman/News/Women%2BIn%2BThe%2BNews/Story/A1Story20080819-83147.html> (accessed June 14, 2010).

⁵ Goodman, Amy. “Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong.” (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).

⁶ Whatever Happened to Annabel Chong? <http://web.archive.org/web/20030523122918/http://www.annabelchong.com/> (accessed June 14, 2010)

⁷ Goodman, Amy. “Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong.” (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).

empress Messalina's successful attempt to be the top prostitute of Rome.⁸ Annabel was never paid the US\$ 10,000 salary she was promised, she insists though that it was not an issue—she was not just in it for the money;

"I did the gangbang partly in response to the stereotype that women are compassionate and loving and they only like vanilla sex. It just seemed so condescending—that women couldn't go for the rough and tumble, that women are like these really precious wilting violets or vessels of purity. That stereotyped really annoyed me when I was growing up and it continues to annoy me now, so in that sense it is sort of a feminist statement insofar as it is targeting stereotypes of women."⁹

Chong claims that what she did, "plays into the whole reversal of gender roles."¹⁰ Her motivations, she claims, are both personal and in a sense political; "what I hope to accomplish firstly was to explore my own personal sexuality, my boundaries, and I think I accomplished that."¹¹ She insists that female sexuality has a more aggressive side, that which is 'socially unacceptable' and 'politically incorrect'.¹² And that the notion that female sexuality is passive and the whole thing about 'femininity' is a form of control:

"Don't you think that by putting women on this terrible pedestal, where they are all pure and perfect, is kind of terribly constraining on women? It really puts this terrible limit on what they can do in life. It's just another way of controlling -limiting the avenues of exploration that women are allowed to."¹³

Not a Slut, Not a Victim

Gough Lewis, a university film student, intent on unveiling the story behind Annabel's achievement decided to make a documentary film about her. Tickets for the resulting documentary film, *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story*, sold like pancakes at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival.¹⁴ *Sex* offers a glimpse of Grace Quek, as

⁸ Goodman, Amy. "Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong." (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).

⁹ Goodman, Amy. "Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong." (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).

¹⁰ Goodman, Amy. "Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong." (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).

¹¹ Clinton, Paul. "Sex Sobers in Controversial Sundance Documentary." (February 10, 1999), <http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9902/10/annabel.chong/> (accessed June 14, 2010).

¹² Brook, Tom. "Shockumentary Hits Cinema." (February 12, 2000), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special_report/1999/03/99/tom_brook/639080.stm (accessed June 10, 2010)

¹³ Clinton, Paul. "Sex Sobers in Controversial Sundance Documentary." (February 10, 1999), <http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9902/10/annabel.chong/> (accessed June 14, 2010).

¹⁴ Clinton, Paul. "Sex Sobers in Controversial Sundance Documentary." (February 10, 1999), <http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9902/10/annabel.chong/> (accessed June 14, 2010).

she justifies her created persona, Annabel Chong. Grace claims that the *Gangbang* was her attempt to explore her own sexuality while challenging the notion that female sexuality is passive, citing that if a guy has sex with 251 women he is a stud, but if a woman does the same she is either a *slut* or a victim. *Sex* discloses the hidden life of Grace Quek. Lewis highlights significant phases in his subject's life: Grace the articulate university student, Grace the rebellious Singaporean woman, and Grace the prodigal daughter. It explores Grace's complex emotional issues, as she struggles with the possibility of her contracting HIV after the infamous *Gangbang* experience—which apparently, she claims, was “good enough to die for.” In an interview, however, she clarifies that this statement was taken out of context; “. . . that specific event was worth taking a risk. I decided to take that risk and made a conscious decision; if anything goes wrong I take the responsibility, I'm not going to sit there and cry and say I'm a victim.”¹⁵

Sex also contains footage of Grace's conversation with her mother, who until then was not aware of her career as a porn actress. It also reveals that Grace was gang raped when she was studying in London. In an interview she talked more about this experience:

“The immediate outcome of [the entire rape event] was that I was sent through the legal system *and* National Health Service counseling system, which was incredibly dehumanizing. I felt that I was nothing but a statistic. Then I looked on my entire life in Singapore and realized that all my life I had been processed. I led that perfect life. I went to all the right schools, I attended the right social functions, hung out in the country club, went to church, got the humanities scholarship. I was the perfect child, but none of it was really my choice. First thing I did was to quit law school and go to art school. It was a big issue. My relatives bless them, actually called my parents to offer their condolences. ‘She's going to starve. We feel so sorry for you.’ So it affected me in the sense that control became a huge issue in my life. I think what you see in the documentary is the process of regaining control, and it really is a work in progress. Even today, I'm asking myself whether I'm in control of situations.”¹⁶

And when asked to address the connection between the gang rape and the *gangbang*, she admits that, “on a subconscious level, in retrospect, maybe there is an element of trying to take back control in the *gangbang*, but it's not something I was thinking about before the event. It was only after that. Looking back at my life, I realized that a lot of things I've done seemed to be totally out of control. All that trying to get away from my coddled life was because I was trying to take back control by being out of control, which is kind of a paradox.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Penny, Mark. “One on One with Annabel Chong.” (October 15, 1999), http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/annabel.html (accessed June 14, 2010).

¹⁶ Askew, Robin. “Annabel Chong: Sex: The Annabel Chong Story” <http://www.spikemagazine.com/1000annabelchong.php> (accessed June 14, 2010).

¹⁷ Goodman, Amy. “Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong.” (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).

Though *Sex* portrays Annabel as someone both depressed and confused, who, in denial, projects an image of herself as confident and committed to her ideals (a rather disturbing scene shows Grace cutting herself, just for her to feel anything), her interviews exposed a side of her that I think is worth deconstructing. At the very least, I believe that her *resistance/dissent* deserves the especial attention of anyone who intends to understand the power relations that determine gendered experiences. But the question remains, is Annabel Chong the *quintessential* feminist, defying an oppressive system, asserting her individuality, redefining the parameters of a gender-determined sexuality? Or is she a victim of her own misguided *ideals, objectifying* herself in the belief that this affirms her subjectivity, submitting herself to domination to reclaim control, eventually propagating the same oppressive system she professes to end?

THE FOUCAULDIAN FEMINIST SUBJECT

Feminists Critique of the Foucauldian Subject

Maureen McNeil compares the relationship between Foucault and feminists to a dance, “constant movement—now coming together, then moving apart—and so on.”¹⁸ This pretty much sums up what Foucault means for feminism, for while most feminists consider Foucault as an ally, and all too eagerly collaborated with him, some are not as enthusiastic, expressing concern over Foucault’s critical limitations and inherent contradictions.

Diamond and Quinby¹⁹ identify four convergent points in feminism and Foucault: both identify the body as the ‘locus of domination’, that is, the kind of power that gives rise to both docile bodies and constituted subjectivity, both highlight the significance of local and intimate power relations, both emphasize the role of discourse, the dominant and marginalized ones, in power relations, and both criticize Western humanism’s privileging of the ‘masculine elite’ and universal proclamations about truth, freedom, and human nature. All four convergences are well within the power/knowledge framework.

Passive Subject?

This Foucauldian framework offers an account of the body that supports the feminist critique of the notion that the body bears a fixed biological or prediscursive essence. In fact, Foucault, stresses that his method, genealogy, works within the paradigm that identifies the body as both constituted and destroyed by history;

“The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the

¹⁸ Mc Neil, Maureen. “Dancing with Foucault: Feminism and Power/knowledge” In *Up Against Foucault: Some of the Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, edited by Caroline Ramazanoglu, London: Routledge, 1993, 147.

¹⁹ Diamond, I & Quinby, L. (eds), introduction to *Feminism & Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, xi–xix. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body."²⁰

Foucault's emphasis on the discursive constitution of the body, however, led him to reject the subject. He argues that, the transformation of human beings into subjects is a form of objectification, brought about by external elements of power imposing themselves on the body;

"I . . . believe that there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere. I am very skeptical of this view of the subject . . . I believe, on the contrary, that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection."²¹

Thus the objective of his work, as a genealogy of the human subject is "to create a history of the different [objectifying] modes by which . . . human beings are made subjects."²²

Moreover Foucault seemingly downplays the subject's supposed autonomy arguing that this too is conditioned by forces beyond the subject's control;

"[T]he subject constitutes himself in an active fashion by the practices of self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group."²³

Feminists find this problematic. They argue that a determined subject and/or a passive body conflicts with the aim of feminism. McNay, for instance, claims that;

"the emphasis that Foucault places on the effects of power upon the body results in a reduction of social agents to passive bodies and cannot explain how individuals may act in an autonomous fashion. This lack of a rounded theory of subjectivity or agency conflicts with a fundamental aim of the feminist project to rediscover and re-evaluate the experience of women."²⁴

Gender Blind?

²⁰ Foucault, Michel. *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by P. Rabinow, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 83.

²¹ Foucault, Michel. *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*. L. Kritzman (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1990) , 50.

²² Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power " In *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* edited by H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 208.

²³ Foucault, Michel "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" In *The Final Foucault* edited by J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988), 11.

²⁴ McNay, Louis . "The Foucauldian Body and the Exclusion of Experience," *Hypatia* 6 (1991): 125-37.

Feminists also find Foucault's 'gender blindness' problematic. They stress that this supposes that gender is naturally given. And unsurprisingly, they disagree, Teresa de Lauretis explains that:

"Like sexuality, we might say, gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings, but "the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations," in Foucault's words, by the deployment of a "complex political technology."²⁵

Hence, McNay argues that "Foucault needs to elaborate on how the systematic affect of sexual division is perpetuated by the techniques of gender that are applied to the body."²⁶ Similarly, Anne Balsamo notes that gender is itself a discursive construction and that Foucault's gender neutrality "contradicts his analytical intentions to consider the system of differentiations that make the body meaningful."²⁷

For Eloise Burker Foucault's gender blindness is actually a form of gender bias, she cites for instance that "*The History of Sexuality* treats female sexuality as a product of male sexuality"²⁸ and that "rather than deconstructing the ways in which male and female sexuality is created, Foucault shows how male sexuality is created and how female identities emerge from that creation."²⁹

Efforts to use Foucault in feminism are thus restricted by the seeming inadequacy of his theory to provide a framework for evaluating the gendered experience of the feminist subject, a normative framework that, as McLaren rightly puts, supposes a *feminist* (gendered) subject capable of political and moral agency.³⁰

The Prisoner of Gender

In her essay entitled, *The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body*³¹, Angela King addresses Foucault's gender neutrality. She argues that, although this poses a serious problem for feminists collaborating with Foucault, it does not negate his framework and that it can be "adopted and adapted ... fruitfully exposed, explored, and remedied."³²

King faults Foucault for failing to recognize gender as a form of *technique that fabricates the individual*. She notes however that Foucault's analysis of other forms of fabricating techniques provides a framework for

²⁵ de Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

²⁶ McNay, Louis. *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self*. (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1992), 33.

²⁷ Balsamo, A. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. (Duke University Press: London, 1996), 21.

²⁸ Burker, Eloise A, "Hidden Desires and Missing Persons: A Feminist Deconstruction of Foucault." *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 43, No. 4 (Dec. 1990): 829.

²⁹ Burker, Eloise A, "Hidden Desires and Missing Persons: A Feminist Deconstruction of Foucault." *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 43, No. 4 (Dec. 1990): 829.

³⁰ McLaren, Margaret A. "Foucault and the Subject of Feminism." *Social Theory and Practice* Vol. 23, No 1 (Spring 1977) : 110

³¹ King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Mar04/King.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2010), 29.

³² King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Mar04/King.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2010), 29.

feminists to develop a genealogy of the female gender, stressing that gender is itself a discursive construction. She then explores the construction of femininity citing two focal points: the manipulation of the female flesh and the requirement of beauty.

First she argues that the discipline requirement imposed on the body by most female fashions makes it possible for feminists to draw an analogy with Foucault's writing on torture. She states that,

"Female fashions, particularly the Victorian era, seem to have been especially concerned with marking difference spectacularly on the body by constantly drawing attention to sites of 'otherness' such as the breasts, waists, buttocks and hips which have been exaggerated by corsets, bustles and bras. Considering the well documented discomfort, breathing difficulties and internal organ displacement caused by the 19th century corset in particular, it is possible to draw an analogy with Foucault's writing on torture."³³

She stresses that pain inducing female costumes serve as a form of punishment that both constrains and corrects the female flesh; noting that techniques of discipline and manipulation are still imposed on the female body in varying degrees, citing for instance "high heeled or stiletto shoes that cause discomfort and deformity and even restricts mobility".³⁴

King then explores how cosmetic products feed on the prevalent idea that women are required to be beautiful. She claims that this *requirement* is imposed as a standard of normality that compels a woman to undergo various treatments to make the *body* fit the norm;

"Women are exhorted to follow a detailed daily beauty regime and to choose the correct preparations, far too numerous to list here, designed for 'treating' and transforming the skin on all parts of the body. Then there are the numerous cosmetics applied with various instruments that women are expected to master, not to mention false eyelashes, hair-pieces and nails. There are specific products and processes designed for the removal of hair from different parts of the body; from the eyebrows, upper lip, underarm, leg and 'bikini' by plucking, shaving, waxing, buffing and electrolysis. And as for the hair that remains on the head, a myriad more treatments and products await."³⁵

King concludes that though Foucault's neglect of gender renders his analysis inadequate in terms of accounting for the discourses that surround and discipline the body, his framework may be used to show how the historical association of women with the body perpetuates 'restrictive ideals of womanhood'.³⁶ King

³³ King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Mar04/King.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2010), 34.

³⁴ King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Mar04/King.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2010), 35.

³⁵ King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Mar04/King.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2010), 35.

³⁶ King, "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Mar04/King.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2010), 36.

demonstrated this in her deconstruction of femininity, however brief it was. But more importantly, she asserts in the end of her analysis that within such framework *resistance is possible*.³⁷

Constituted Yet Resistant

In her article, *Foucault and the Subject of Feminism*, Margaret McLaren recognizes that Foucault's conception of the subject is problematic. However she contends that Foucault's later work, especially in *Care of the Self*, introduces socially constituted subject capable of resistance. And that while she admits that Foucault's notion of resistance is *underdeveloped* (thus she warns feminists not to uncritically adopt it) she argues that Foucault's resistant subject "is not only compatible with feminism, but bears on the surface a significant similarity to a feminist relational subject."³⁸

McLaren clarifies that Foucault's rejection of the subject is born out of his hesitation to begin from a *theory of a subject* and that such refusal, contrary to what some feminists think, does not reduce individuality or subjectivity to forces that construct it but actually liberates it from them:

"On Foucault's view, refusing what we are would enable us to liberate ourselves from the type of individuality (subjectivity) that has imposed itself on us through disciplines and practices for the last several centuries. The refusal to be what we are, to be a subject and hence subjected, opens up new possibilities for being."³⁹

She further argues that the Foucauldian subject is both constituted and self-constituting. On the one hand the subject is constituted, as disclosed by Foucault's analysis of subjectification, laid out in his genealogy of the subject; however the subject *also actively constitutes* himself/herself. She then stresses that for Foucault, the subject's self-constitution is not merely determined by the social forces that act on it, for it discloses itself as the subject's active and original response as opposed to being a mere passive recipient of these forces. McLaren cites this passage from *The Care of the Self*⁴⁰:

"Hence the cultivation of the self would not be the necessary consequence of these social modifications; it would constitute an original response to them, in the form of a new stylistics of existence."⁴¹

³⁷ King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body" <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Mar04/King.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2010), 36.

³⁸ McLaren, Margaret, "Foucault and the Subject of Feminism," *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 23. No 1 (Spring 1977) :123.

³⁹ McLaren, Margaret, "Foucault and the Subject of Feminism," *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 23. No 1 (Spring 1977) :123.

⁴⁰ Foucault, Michel, *The Care of the Self, vol.3 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

⁴¹ Foucault, Michel, *The Care of the Self, vol.3 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 71.

She argues that this *new stylistics of existence* epitomizes the subject's active self-constitution, and that this supposes a subject capable of resistance. Hence, the social constitution of the subject, the process of subjectification, does not only make resistance possible, the resisting subject, precisely in resisting, actively constitutes herself. McLaren writes,

"Foucault's subject as sketched out in his later works is constituted through disciplines and practices but not determined by them. On the contrary, it is only through the process of subjectification that we become subjects capable of resisting the institutions, discourses, and practices that constitute us as subjects."⁴²

McLaren stresses that the Foucauldian socially constructed yet resistant/self-constituting subject is similar to the feminist notion of a subject that is embodied and thus situated, immersed in a network of relationships but capable of political and moral agency. Thus she concludes that the Foucauldian subject, similar to the feminist subject, is both relational and resisting.⁴³

DECONSTRUCTING ANNABEL CHONG

While the proposed resolutions I presented do not definitively end the Foucault-feminism debate, they do open up the possibility of constructing and deconstructing the gendered experience of the feminist subject in Foucauldian terms. I thus ground my analysis on three suppositions: (1) the Foucauldian feminist subject is situated within a system of power relations sustained and propagated through discursive practices that in varied extent determine the way she behaves and thinks, (2) sexuality is coextensive with gender in that they are both (a) techniques of control and (b) discursive constructions framed within equally repressive systems of control, and (3) dissent is the subject's *creative* assertion of power but this does not adequately translate to liberation from power relations; for dissent is constituted within a *relational system of power*.

Constructed Dissent

Annabel Chong's dissident act challenges an oppressive system that employs *sexuality* and *gender* as techniques of control: a system that imposes *ideals of femininity*—ideals that she finds *condescending, limiting and controlling*. However, her *dissent* is framed within the very system it resists, constituted within the very system it challenges, and structured using the same controlling techniques it attempts to do away with, namely, *sexuality* and *gender*.

⁴² McLaren, Margaret A. *Foucault and the Subject of Feminism*. 1997, *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 23. No 1 (Spring 1977). P 119

⁴³ McLaren however points out that some feminists may still find this problematic since Foucault does not offer a normative framework that determines what to resist. She points out however that Foucault's implicit appeal to norms such as freedom from domination may serve as a guide in establishing such a framework.

Chong attempted to free herself from the limiting constructed notion of *female sexuality* by assuming an *alternate sexuality*. The latter, however, is itself a constructed notion, a technique of control. Her *dissent* does not really liberate her from the oppressive system that *dominates* the power relationship that greatly determines her mode of existence. On the contrary, it affirms her participation in the *play of power*.

Dynamic Power Play

The system that constructs the *limiting* role of the feminist subject is the same system that constructs the alternate *roles* she may choose to assume instead. Assuming a different role, however, does not liberate her from the *role playing* relationship determined by the same system.

Thus, Chong's dissent is not a *liberating* act in the sense that it frees her from the power relationships that construct her *subjectivity* within an oppressive system of control. It is rather a constructed *response* that creatively affirms the bipolar nature of power relationships: for whilst power relations constitute the subject's mode of existence, they impose constructed ideals, employ techniques of control, and even give rise and define the parameters of dissent; the *resisting* subject, precisely in resisting, plays an active involvement in the constitution of these relationships. In other words, though Chong's dissent does not free her from the system of power and control, it uniquely engages the discourses on gender and sexuality and through this effectively opens up a horizon that redefines the manner by which this system asserts its control, it revives the *dynamism* inherent in any *play of power*.

Self-Constituting Role

Her *dissent* is an assertion of her *self-constituting role*, while it still works within the very system it resists, it nevertheless fashions the system in a unique way, thus reaffirming the reality that the system and the subject together form a *constitutive unity*: both are irreducibly given. The system of discourse that constructs different techniques of control is a system *shared* within a relational system of power, the nature of discourse is such that it is both *constructing and constructed*: gender and sexuality as discursive constructs are both constituting and constituted. Hence, Chong's limited dissent does not translate to passivity. On the contrary, it demonstrates that there is in us an *inherent potential* that keeps us from being reduced to mere social constructs: the potential to *shape the discourses that shape us*:

“. . . a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions open up.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ “Foucault, Michel, “How is Power Exercised?” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 216-226. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 220.

CONCLUSION

"Once you put something out there people can interpret it any which way they like. Nothing contains a specific meaning; nothing is essentially degrading for anybody. It depends on how you want to read it, and how you read something depends on your values and your environment. Chances are people read it in accordance with what they call the dominant discourse. Corny term, but . . . my work starts when the gangbang ends – offering various ways of looking at the gangbang that counter the way it is commonly taken."⁴⁵ – *Annabel Chong on whether the gangbang offers a new idea of female sexuality*

My analysis exposes the paradoxical nature of Annabel Chong's dissent: On the one hand, it demonstrates why resistance seems futile in a framework that immerses the subject in relationships of power, in which oppressive systems employ discursive constructs as techniques of control; But on the other hand, the merit of Chong's dissent lies in the extent of its effect on the discourses that shape our understanding of *sexuality* and *gender*.

While some may argue that she is not the *quintessential* feminist, I believe that her *dissent*, born out of her seemingly misguided ideals of freedom and control, has restructured our conceptions of *sexuality* and *gender* for better or worse. Chong's *gangbang* put forth questions that compel us to once again evaluate the discourses that shaped and those that continuously shape our understanding of sexuality and gender, thereby tapping our potential to assert the *constitutive* role we play in this game of power and control.

⁴⁵ Goodman, Amy. "Voice: An Interview with Annabel Chong." (June 22, 1999), <http://www.nerve.com/dispatches/goodman/chong> (accessed June 14, 2010).