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Do You Want to Be in My Gang: An Account of Ethics and Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Practice

Liz Ellis

A critique of the Britpack phenomenon and particularly the critical reception of Bank, Sarah Lucas and Sam Taylor-Wood.

Introduction

This work is a consideration of the role of ethics in contemporary arts practice from Britain. It has its origins in the investigation of art work that I respond to passionately, and attempts to unpick the basis for this response. As the critical thinking on my own work develops, it has become essential to see debates around art and aesthetics in a political and ethical context.

This work began with my feeling of alienation from some of the currently fashionable work including many of the group described as *young British artists* (*yBa*). Many claims have been made for this work and I want to look at some of these claims as they appear in the accompanying interviews and articles, catalogues and critical writings. Many of these artists seem to me to employ a ruthless assimiliation of the commercial and the kitsch in a way that is empty of imaginative space or invitation to the viewer. Recent shows in London like *Minky Manky* (1995), *Some Went Mad And Some Ran Away*, *Take Me I'm Yours* include many artists working in this way. This piece focuses on the work of two women artists, Sarah Lucas and Sam Taylor Wood, whose careers are booming within the framework of *yBa* and whose work has received attention but limited analysis. There are, of course many male artists using similar languages of irony and detachment, the work of "Bank" artists group is briefly discussed within this piece, a group of 3 men and one woman.

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Minky Manky, a show at the South London Art Gallery in April/May 1995 curated by Carl Freedman, included Gilbert and George and Sarah Lucas amongst many others. Freedman wrote that of one of the themes of the exhibition was :

"the artist as a subject, and (to) explore the relationship between the art on the wall and its creator, to make the whole thing more humanistic. And in there somewhere there is the beginnings of a thesis on the relationship and similarities between madness and modernism, for example, defiance of authority, nihilism, examples of extreme relativism, strange transformations of the self, irrationality, and things like that."

Given this agenda, it is then surprising to find the work of Gilbert and George represented with their repeated belief that :

"We don't believe that everyone is an artist because we do believe that the artist has to be a total outsider, totally extreme, if not it doesn't work and you are a boring normal person like everyone else. Artists have to be outside to feel the world in a different way."

Later in the same interview with the curator Carl Freedman they talk about their "horrible, horrible shock" on seeing a young male friend who "could hardly walk, his hands were like skeletons. The boy's had it...your friends completely dying in front of you, becoming like skeletons." What comes through is Gilbert and George's complete inadequacy to deal with the issues of pain, mortality, suffering and grief that AIDS has introduced to their lives with anything approaching emotional comprehension. Humanism is not the philosophical framework that springs immediately to mind in considering their work or writings.

The recent *Brilliant* show (1996) at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, U.S.A., is another example of an exhibition of young British artists, perceived in even critical publicity and press coverage, as promoting an idea of the dangerous avant-garde while actually remaining unchallenging of the establishment. Neville Wakefield, writing in the tabloid- newspaper style catalogue for *Brilliant* claims an art history heritage for this work that includes Pop art and punk and says

"For these young artists , parodic indifference and irony - the creative tools that once returned every gesture to an empty place on the deconstructive stage- have become less a question of practice than the underwriting of a sensibility ... Cultural pessimism has been transformed into conceptual energy, boredom into the impetus for action and provocation. The current generation is dismissive of the ideologically rigorous but aesthetically anaemic art leavened throughout the 1980's on the imported yeast of post-structuralism and the essentially foreign theory enlisted for its legitimisation." (my emphasis)

The supposedly anti-intellectual and in fact, positively political position that this occupies will be discussed later in this piece. Central to this discussion is my investigation of the sensibility and as an extension of this, the ethical position that is assumed in this work. Implicit in my understanding of an ethical practice is the

idea that engaging with the work extends the viewers imagination and ability to imagine change, rather than a self-reflexive nihilism . While some of the artists in *Brilliant* use materials and methods that embrace sensuality and lived experience (Anya Gallaccio , Tracey Emin) in a way that I see as being central to our experience as viewers and our involvement in the work, the choices made by other artists, including Sarah Lucas and Sam Taylor Wood, leave us as passive observers . In the accompanying interview in*Brilliant* Sarah Lucas makes it clear that she is not making work of social or political or critical meaning, she says:

'Just look at the picture and think what you like. I knew that everybody would have a response to to these pictures , whether they thought I was being gratuitous or whether they thought I was making a feminist point or whether they thought I was actually just carrying on the exploitation.'

So we seem to have returned to the old, tired familiar notion of artist as moral relativist, removed from the rest of the world, at liberty to make and say and do without the necessity for explanation or intellectual framework. This role does have social-political implications, and however weary these graduates of Goldsmiths may be, many others are passionately involved in these post structuralist debates. To choose not to join the messy debates over the language of experience, the themes of difference and otherness is to adopt a political and intellectual position. The narcissistic self-referential, free-enterprise nature of the work to the exclusion of any other outside factors ultimately locates the work as politically right wing. It is worth pointing out here that the peers to these artists in theatre, writers like Ayub Khan-Din (*East is East* Royal Court Theatre,London 1996) Shelagh Stephenson (*Memory of Water* Gate Theatre,London 1996) show no such reluctance to engage with the mess of social and political positioning. Michael Billington writes:

'The rising generation, who in Britain have all grown up under Conservative rule, see through the hypocrisy of appeals to family values and reject the notion that self matters more than society....their themes have included the Holocaust, Irish Republicanism , East End Fascism , unionism and miscegenation. .. the corruption and exhaustion of the times has bred a countervailing moral revulsion.'

It seems that it is not an inevitable result of 18 years of Tory rule that artists become individualistic and self-referentially ironic.

It is worth noticing here that the phrase *young British artists* or the label *Britpack* has been used as a commercial marketing strategy to unite artists who are different in formal style but largely share, I shall argue, a common theoretical position. The full extent of the incorporation of these *bad girls/ bad boys* into the establishment is evident in that radical letter from the edge, *Harpers and Queen* where Martin Gayford promotes their work in the London artfair Art97;

'The yBa's are ironic, super-cool, disengaged and disenchanted...there are some labels one might try to apply: Nihilism with attitude, grungism, dysfunctional' (Jan 1997 issue) as he urges the acquisition of art as 'the perfect status symbol, expensive,

exclusive" It is good to have the commercial context of this work laid bare, unvarnished by ideas of quality or value. At the same time a similar phenomenon is current in packaging young white British pop bands.

The Role of the Imagination in Arts Practice

Before discussing the work of two artists in some detail, I want to look at the role of the imagination in arts practice, which I see as being central to the discussion of aesthetics. Imagination is both a site for activity and the invitation for response from the viewer. It creates a space, or the possibility of engagement. What I understand by 'the space of the imagination' is the ability to produce a place in one's work for the possibility of change. The space of the imagination is both about an openness in the way that the work is made and, crucially, the intention in which it is to be read. If the work has imagination or the possibility for imaginative engagement within it this creates an "open" response that can allow for critical engagement. It has to be distinguished from work without that sense of possibility that appears "closed". The "closed" work may still allow for many interpretations, but there is no direction or space for the imagination to open into or develop. The place of the imagination is central in connection with my concerns for the development of an ethically aware arts practice.

One assumes that all aesthetic work involves use of the imagination. While some art practices create and promote an imaginative journey in the viewer, exploring and extending possibilities, other work, currently in fashion, appears to promote a banality of thought and an ironic detachment from feeling and commitment. These works are not characterised by any single artist or formal methods, rather the lack of an ethical dimension is the common factor. The crucial emotion informing these works seems to be connected to a distanced position combined with a refusal to locate honestly an artistic intention. Instead of an ethical use of 'the space of the imagination', there is often a cynical and self-conscious use of the mechanisms of consumerism. I believe this goes beyond individual practice and reflects a broader political and philosophical framework of ideas linked to late capitalism and post-modernism. I intend to discuss distinctions that underlie these divergent practises in relation to their ethical implications.

It is a commonplace that art has to be seen in a social and political context. The clear implication is for the art work as a 'pure' aesthetic entity as against the artist and art product in a broader context of social change. Clearly, the discussion of context for the art work is important. Walter Benjamin's lecture of 1934 'The Author As Producer' is invaluable here;

"Social relations, as we know, are determined by production relations. And when materialist criticism approached a work, it used to ask what was the position of that work vis-a -vis the social production relations of its time. ..instead of asking what is the position of a work vis-a -vis the the productive relations of its time, does it

underwrite these relations, is it reactionary, or does it aspire to overthrow them , is it revolutionary... I should like to ask: what is its position within them .. This question concerns the function of a work within the ... production relations of its time. In other words, it is directly concerned with ...technique.'

I take Benjamin's notion of *within* productive relations to be the crux of relations, networks, affinities, sympathies, contacts which defines the common interests of a particular artist, with those that show, sell, admire, promote, buy , deal or write about him or her and like minded fellow artists. In short, within amounts to belonging to *the gang*. What is important here is to note that this is not an analysis of class structure, but Benjamin advising of the necessity to examine the infrastructure that surrounds arts production. For the contemporary arts world, this is pluralistic, with a mesh of commercial and publically funded arts spaces, the arts press ranging from *Frieze* magazine to *Modern Painters*, and private collectors to institutional buyers. Currently, the work of Sarah Lucas, Sam Taylor Wood and the artists group Bank, based in Old Street, North London receive attention as avant-garde and on the edge, while operating successfully within the commercial marketplace, the arts and cultural establishment (e.g. Banks premises are funded by the Arts Council of England). While being promoted as the cutting edge of an alternative tradition, they are actively engaged in a celebration of these product relations. The mix of public and private sponsorship which now distinguishes London's ICA, the role of collectors like Saatchi and their links to other key collectors and media celebrities (e.g. Damian Hirst's well publicised associations with Dave Stewart and David Bowie) creates an atmosphere of commercial and consumer incorporation while lending to all sides the frisson of being both contemporary and risk-taking.

Historically, the avant-garde has had a more ambivalent attitude towards consumerism, since the embrace of commercial values contradicted the oppositional stance of many artists. As an example, Ad Reinhardt, a committed Communist for some of his career at least and active socialist at other times, avowed a doctrine of 'art as art' where 'art is art and everything else is everything else', including politics. This radical split between political action and art work generated a formalist approach to art practice that still has a strong following amongst artists today, for example Callum Innes. On the other side, and much in opposition to this position is the work of artists such as Nancy Spero, who have combined a life of political and collective action with an arts practice that includes specific political references and a particular open-ended approach to formal issues with a greater range of stylistic concerns. Whereas the ICA in London mounted a major exhibition of her work in 1987, shifts in the cultural and political climate, including exhibition policy make it impossible to imagine the same institution showing her work today. It is this type of cultural policy change in the last decade in Britain and the implications in terms of wider ethical and political debate and action that need further consideration...

The Role of the Ethical Dimension in Arts Practice

I do not propose that ethics need be at the forefront of every artist's practice necessarily. However, I do argue that a complete abrogation of an ethical awareness, or the establishment of an ethical vacuum, is characteristic of the imaginatively "closed" approach, evident in some of the 'yBa's work, and that this has political implications. What is revealed through attention to ethics is the subtle sense in which an ethical dimension can be placed at the heart of effective aesthetic activity; conversely the lack of it renders work dull and self regarding. This notion goes back at least to Kant, who gave it systematic treatment in theCritique of Judgement, concluding that "the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good". It should be added that Kant understands the symbolic as a mode of the intuitive and for my purposes, aesthetic judgement therefore requires imaginative faculties. It is as if the categories of the ethical and the aesthetic operate in a way that enrich each other and highlight the effect of the other's function. Herbert Marcuse takes up this argument, especially in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, but I believe that some of his views on the role of aesthetic activity are important in understanding how the ethical informs the imagination (see below).

It is important to consider the conditions in which "closed" work can operate so successfully. The crucial factor, other than the commercial art world and power structures and product relations previously referred to, is the impress of modernity. Baudelaire clarifies the difference between the modern and modernity in the following way "modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent, it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable." It is important to note that modernity for Baudelaire is not only a relationship to the present, it is a deeper integration of the current with historical and philosophical understanding, that problematises our relationship with both art and the world around us.

It is here that I see the some of the work represented in exhibitions like *Minky Manky* or *Some Went Mad* and recent Bank shows like *Cocaine Orgasm*, as lacking the second important characteristic of modernity, which is that there should be some interrogation of the languages of popular culture which characterise their practice. Foucault, in his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' amplifies this aspect of Baudelaire's thought, "for the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping in it what it is ".

This "eagerness to imagine" is clearly an aspect of "the space of the imagination" which I touched on earlier. The importance of transforming the "value of the present" is at the centre of my criticism of the irony and detachment that characterises the work without an ethical dimension. Clearly much of the current work is very concerned with the languages of popular culture and the need to be of the current (modern) , but without a wider political or philosophical awareness this becomes self-conscious and redundant. In much of the response to the work of "the young

British artists there is a clear detemination to define the modern and current in an anti-intellectual position. This operates in many ways, but generally amounts to a disdain for forms of critical practice, often sidelining it as old fashioned or earnest or marginalising it.

An example of this is found in John Robert's lecture and article *Mad For It* (*everything* magazine , Spring 1996) which clearly expresses these attitudes in his hostile comments on the Whitney Programme, a visual arts programme in New York, which has a history of issue-based arts practice. In a further article 'Notes on 90's Art' in *Art Monthly* (October,1996), he continues this theme by claiming 'punk, travellers, ecological critique and the new dance -based musics' as part of a new popular oppositional culture. As the *yBa* culture becomes more incorporated into mainstream gallery programmes and private collections, it is hard to recognise the work as part of any oppositional practice, particularly when the artists themselves are so resolute about claiming their political neutrality and their studied detachment from any socially located meaning, always preferring a position of ironic individualism.

The implications of the categories 'critical' and 'ironic'.

There a well known comment of Sartre's that irony is the last refuge of the bourgeoisie. The notion that an artist could be engaged, that is both politically committed (to social change) and no less an artist, was commonplace in the thirties and forties. It is a notion that has little following in the cool climate of ironic detached work emerging as an aspect of postmodernism. That is not to say that some of the main theorists of the post-modern are not politically committed. Foucault is one example who located his politically activity, influenced as he was intellectually by Nietzche rather than Marx, in specific local campaigns and libertarian causes. Politically active theorists or artists in the current climate are rare.

The term *critical* has a long history as signifying an oppositional stance. Originally perhaps stemming from Kantian philosophy, in its attempt to found rational and scientific knowledge, as well as correct ethical and aesthetic thinking, and then for a while implying left-wing or Marxist thinking, it now is a term that denotes a wide range of theoretical and aesthetic positions. For a while Kantian ideas have appeared to represent the ideology of a Eurocentric and paternalist Enlightenment. However Kant's ideas in the aesthetic field are now receiving fresh consideration, for example, in Jean-Francois Lyotard's book, *Lessons on the Analytic and the Sublime.* This is part of a broader attempt to locate an ethical position within post modernist culture and practice such as in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas. These implications for contemporary practice, especially in relation to the sublime, are beginning to be discussed in the art press (see Paul Crowther'The Postmodern Sublime; Installation and Assemblage Art' *Art and Design* Jan-Feb 1995 .) The sublime here is discussed in relation to the absence of a fixed centre or meaning, described

by Crowther as "ex-centric"; a consequence of this is that the whole edifice of modern media and culture is seen as being a source of the sublime. Because this makes aesthetic so much a part of everyday life, it generates on the one hand a popularist approach, but on the other a relativism that embraces commercialism unreservedly. This is made clear by statements of Damien Hirst (Damien Hirst Interview with David Bowie *Modern Painters* June 1996.)

Ideas linking the world of the consumer with the production of art was clearly evident in the development of Pop art in the 1960's, which many of the supporters of yBa are so eager to claim as their artistic precursors as Neville Wakefield and Richard Flood argued in the catalouge of the "Brilliant" show. However, in 'Pop Art , the critical dialogue' Barbara Rose and Donald Kuspit helpfully analyse some of the Pop art legacy. Rose points to the disingenuousness of Pop artists in acting as if they are naive participants in popular culture, while actually being highly educated performers. While Kuspit points to the reification of popular culture as somehow being an honest manifestation of culture;

"Fine art and popular culture have the same underlying logic: they are superstructures simultaneously disguising the real workings of the world they originate in workings that show it is not the best of all possible worlds and generating allegiance to it. ...In a sense, the discovery of their mutuality, and thus ability to assimilate each other, is a way of the use of the one by the other to increase the influence of both.... Pop realism keeps the spectator from questioning media cliche images (and) encourages us to view this cliche image as a kind of dream realisation or self- fulfilling prophecy about the actual, given world: the way it looks on the the media is the way it was meant to look, for that is the way it truly is . Pop art in effect encourages the assumption that the world as known through the mass media fatalistically confirms the actual world. The media seem to say: this is the world, make the best of it, for it cannot be changed for it since it has already happened . It can only be made newsworthy and glamorous- only celebrated , for better or worse. "

Kuspit's point, made in relation to the use of mass media, pornography and advertising by Pop artists in the 1960s has relevance in the 'yBa' enterprise where the embrace of the fatalistically commercial is just as apparent.

Many writers involved in the post-modern world deal in a flip and ironic way with both theory and criticism, for example, Jean Baudrillard or the London-based critic and reviewer, Sarah Kent, so that the line between serious theory and the entertainment industry are blurred. I would define the ironic as a refusal to state a sincere political or ethical stance, or if in stating a stance, to continually undermine this, or to change it as suits. It is the opposite of what used to be called 'engaged' or 'committed' or 'sincere'. I have a suspicion, which I hope to explore, that there a sense in which it is possible to speak about an artists practice as being and having an ethical position; in these terms it would be possible to look at Jeff Koons as practising his art with cynicism.

Sarah Lucas

Sarah Lucas' work has received considerable critical attention, featuring in *Shark Infested Waters*, the Saatchi collection exhibition and catalogue of 1994, and most recently a major exhibition at Museum Boymans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, 1996. As an example of her work I want to explore the collage *Great Dates* 1992 (Saatch Collection). Sarah Lucas uses her own image, eating a banana collaged beside newspaper extracts featuring everyday tabloid sex - and - schlock stories. In addition cards advertising prostitution services and sexually explicit photographs are collaged onto the canvas and areas of newspaper painted in bright colour. Writing of this piece, Lucas says:

'With only minor adjustments, a provocative image can become confrontational... I don't take pornography as my subject, I take the acceptable stuff available at 25p, common currency rather than the deviant and the marginal.'

My view of this work and her engagement with issues of gender and sexuality is that it is precisely the minimalism of her interventions in these areas of debate that ultimately makes the work become redundant as effective engagement. In the catalogue for *Shark Infested Waters*, Sarah Kent writes of Lucas as 'an aesthetic terrorist, pillaging mainstream culture. In doing so she acts as a mirror, monitoring the sexism and misogyny routinely found there.'

In this work I see the conflation of the languages used in tabloid newspapers and the commercial possibilities of the sex industry becoming an example of the product relations that Benjamin spoke of. Crucially Lucas does not invest these languages or their treatment of the female body with any significant critical intent. To reproduce the tabloid extracts on a canvas, with her own image, does not provide an adequate reading of these languages that Lucas professes to find problematic. The inclusion of Lucas's own photograph of herself eating a banana makes reference to the role of women in pornographic imagery, however, it does not undermine or even disrupt the fragments of sexually explicit material positioning women as servicing male desire which surround her image. If anything it becomes a trite or teasing provocation. A photograph of the rapist Peter Sutcliffe is juxtaposed with imagery of newspaper 'Page 3' girls (topless models) and sports stars. It is hard not to infer that Lucas does not have a coherent theme or concern. The use of the forms of popular culture is unmediated here into a fine art context with unchallenging result.

In *Eros and Civilisation* Marcuse writes:

'Under the predominance of rationalism, the cognitive function of sensuousness has been constantly minimised. In line with the repressive concept of reason . . . . . sensuousness as the *lower* and even the *lowest* faculty furnished at best the mere stuff, the raw material for cognition, to be organised by the higher faculties of the intellect.' (pp 180-81)

This helps make sense of my criticism of Sarah Lucas's work. The use of sensation, in particular in making reference to gender and sexuality is overt, in a way that for

me closes down readings of the work, denying an open reading. If one looks at pieces like *Receptacle of Lurid Things* (1991) or say some of the phallic work the impact on one's senses is limited. They have a quality of sensation unmediated by engagement or empathy. The spectacle they present is one of a deadening affect. Marcuse would call this "unpleasure", echoing Kant. The sensuous should inform our sensation of a work of art or else the concerns of the work remain alienated, closing possible readings and inviting only a self reflecting irony.

Sam Taylor-Wood

The uses of photography and video by Sam Taylor-Wood are more sophisticated than much of Lucas' but still, to me, seem reliant on a knowing sense of self-detachment from the work and as such towards the viewer. The ambiguity of meaning ultimately becomes dissatisfying and easily passed over. *Wracked (*1996)Taylor-Wood's photographic reconstruction of the Last Supper from a Baroque painting relies on our identification of the apostles as the artist's friends , as members of the 'yBa' gang and London art scene crew. If we don't know this, or even if we do but don't care for the game, the set-up becomes uninteresting, insular. Descriptions of the work (for example the British Council exhibition in Rome 1995) make much of the high art and banality meshed together in this work.

The recent collaboration between Taylor-Woods and Bookworks, a London-based artists book organisation, in the production of *Unhinged* is similarly redundant in establishing connection or our contact with the loose theme of two adults, a young woman and older man as they are shown on and off a film set. The concertina format of the book unfolds to show us these photographic and video extracts from a narrative, but the combination of the partiality of the selection , the absence of text and the banality of the imagery leaves us detached and alienated, passive spectators, unengaged and untouched.

The accompanying press release from Bookworks describes how the "denial of a sequential format excludes the reader from the action and from interpreting the images in one particular way". One starts to feel an all-enveloping banality to the writing accruing on Taylor-Wood's work. It seems that more gets written about the absence of purpose and the significance of emptiness in the work than can be supported by the body of work in question.

On the role of the Sensous

In connection with this work, I believe that Marcuse's recommendation on the role of the sensuous and our engagement with feeling is crucial for artists to hold and to envision in work. It is integral in this writing to think about work that has a physicality, a sensuousness that feels and sweats, cries and caresses. I find the quality of irony in much current work leads to an alienated experience both for artist and viewer. The work is ironic to the extent that we are not sure what the intention of

the artist is, and that they do not care to be clear about this, either to themselves or to their audience.

I now want to consider further ideas of Herbert Marcuse in *The Aesthetic Dimension* (and also as discussed by Carol Becker in *The Subversive Imagination: Artists Society and Social Responsibilty* which she edited). Becker writes:

'For Marcuse, art is a location - a designated imaginative space where freedom is experienced... at times a physical entity, a site .. but it is also a psychic location -a place in the mind where one allows for a recombination of experience, a suspension of the rules that govern daily life, a denial of gravity.... For Marcuse , hope lies in the particularly human ability to envision what does not exist and to give that imaginary dimension shape.'

The place of the imagination is where we envision change and possibility. Becker expresses the concern, shared by Marcuse that *political art* can be limiting in its audience or its vision and asks us to think more broadly about the circumstances in which the world of the imagination is a liberating place. She sees the imagination within a political context by enabling us to take action to change circumstances.

'For Marcuse . . . . Art presents the possibility of a fulfillment, which only a transformed society could offer. It is a reminder of what a truly integrated experience of oneself in society might be, a remembrance of gratification, a sense of purpose beyond alienation.'

She continues by discussing how art can allow for this sense of possibility but need not be literal or documentary. She points to a place for eliciting emotion in artwork, where reference to the unspeakable or buried (viz the abject category of Kristeva) can be made. Clearly, as Becker recognises this is a utopian project, and at times apparently romantic and liberal humanist rather than necessarily Marxist in its terms. It is in art's estrangement, in the sense of an alternative transformed and transported reality, a transcendental art removed from *ordinary life* that Marcuse sees the potential for change.

Carol Becker (writing in 1994) comments on how little discussion there has been about what constitutes politically engaged work. She cites lack of metaphor and an overliteral portrayal of a miserable reality as inadequate artistic responses in political art and I would say in art generally. This clearly applies to the work of Sarah Lucas where a style is presented as a miserable reality, which is in turn interpreted as a valid political intervention, whilst remaining in my view devoid of content. I could point to many other examples, eg Jake and Dinos Chapman's work exhibited in 1995 at the London ICA as work concerned with the scatological, the pornographic and the violent which is equally repressive of our sensation and presented in a way that provides little space for engagement or our response. Rather, we are assaulted by the work.

How can it be possible to have art work that could deal with a range of human experience and a sense of possibilty that does not become sentimental or nostalgic?

To quote Marcuse again:

"The discipline of aesthetics installs the order of sensuousness as against the order of reason. Introduced into the philosophy of culture, this notion aims at a liberation of the senses, which, far from destroying civilisation, would give it a firmer basis and would greatly increase its potentialities.'

So, sensuous qualities are a necessary, but insufficient condition for an ethical practice. Here I'd like to consider the writings of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95) , a Jewish philosopher, whose belief in our obligation to each other led him to posit a sense of ethical responsibility to each other, especially in the recognition of difference and the other, as opposed to other philosophers who have held as central the idea of the self explored in isolation. Levinas, in his essay 'Time and the Other' (1946-7), writes of the role of suffering as entailing

"the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence... In suffering there is an absence of all refuge. It is the fact of being directly exposed to being. It is made up of the impossibility of fleeing and retreating. The whole acuity of suffering lies in this impossibility of retreat. It is the fact of being backed up against life and being."

The ability to make work that is bold enough to be concerned with an emotional charge demands an honesty in locating feeling and making it explicit, rather than attempting disassociation. The current valorisation of ironic, cool detached banal work is in itself a sign of our disassociation from each other, and the deadening of affect.

The current climate of ethical practice

This is an area that has received much critical discussion amongst contemporary cultural writers, who refer to the legacy of the Enlightenment in considering current political and cultural events. Following Jean Baudrillard 's writing on the Gulf War many cultural critics were angered by his apparent moral and ethical detachment from the issues and were concerned to combat this (see for example, Edward Said or Christopher Norris). If art is potentially, an act of freedom, as Herbert Marcuse would have us believe, then the possibilities of the subjective imagination must be the determining factor. He compares the scorn that traditional Marxist critics held for the "inwardness of personal experience with the attitude of capitalists for the unprofitable dimensions of life."

If one took the work of Bank, the small London based group of artists /curators one is struck by their complete abnegation of anything as personal as lived experience since this would be seen as an embarassing lapse of style and ironic detachment. What Bank do is invite other artists to show in their state-funded space, acting as curator and administrator, to which they then add their own pieces, often creating the whole enviroment, and certainly the title of the show and its publicity, which then usually reflects on the invited artists in an ironic way. Although they sell the invited artists work on display when they can, and sales have been made of the better

known artists, taking a commission, salaries are not drawn from Bank's funds. Nevertheless they attract considerable kudos for themselves from their shows, blurring the distinction between commentator and curator, artist and critic. Much effort is made to create a club atmosphere almost to the point of an unstated dress and style code. Having recently acquired a lease on a warehouse near Old Street through Arts Council funding, they curate exhibitions with a combination of free-enterprise thinking and detached irony that repeatedly stops short of making an engagement with any critical position.

John Roberts celebrates the work of Bank as using practices of *behaving badly* to unsettle an academic and intellectual framework that has a base in the work of Mary Kelly, Victor Burgin, Hans Haacke . My difficulties with the work of Bank and John Roberts claims (*Everything* magazine Spring no 19 1996) for the value of the Bank endeavour stems from the failure of the work to lead anywhere. The use of sensation as an end in itself (evident in their frequent Zombie references, links to cocaine, drug culture) are ultimately unsatisfying as they accumulate, deliberately refusing to accrue or resolve. It is possible to read the references to drug culture as an actual blocking of affect, with the references to contemporary drug use as both making one more detached and at the same time heightening sensation of self in isolation to others, while supporting a booming style economy.

The use of the languages of commodification, and pornography require more critical engagement than simple repetition. This simulation as stimulation ultimately becomes redundant. I am interested at how readily the retort arises, that if one is critical of these works or indeed of these artists, one is being over serious or, a worse crime, earnest, as if this is an unacceptable loss of cool or style that reflects uncomfortably on the critic. Better to be detached, an flaneur, an ironic observer, than a passionately involved arguer, whose very engagement is somehow an admission of emotional messiness and the breaking of current social style codes. John Roberts ('Mad For It' Lecture in June 1996) speaks of the "shattered expectations " that surround the practice of Bank artists in their ironic reflections of the everyday. As expectations go, its hard to feel that the circumstances surrounding a small group of graduates from the London colleges of Goldsmiths' and St Martins have been shattered too disastrously, or that their perceptions are obviously linked to anything "authentic" or plainly about the *everyday.*

In parallel with Bank one can see on a wider stage the claims behind some of the currently fashionable young British artists such as those shown in *Brilliant* at the Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis. The artists include Sarah Lucas again, but also Dinos and Jake Chapman, Damian Hirst etc. One notes the self congratulatory title, which is presented typically as if ironic. (The two most recent Bank show titles, *Cocaine Orgasm* and *Fuck off* working to similar effect). The work is seen as being avant garde, avowardly advertised as reflecting a new energy within British arts practice. I am interested in how the work, in its banality and strategies to create

detachment combined with a deliberate aesthetic and moral perversity sit very comfortably within a freemarket conservative ideology.

This group of young, mainly male, almost entirely white young London-based artists have used their state-funded education and state supported and exhibited art practice within the last vestiges of a welfare system in Britain to make works of spectacular cynicism. There is a complete failure to engage with the any ideas of difference. It is also worth noting that the deliberate absence of identity politics in much of the "young British artists" debate means that the traditional young white profile of the artist is continued. I detect a certain relief in John Roberts writing that the few young women represented in this debate are not making overt reference to feminist thought (presumably the success of Black and gay artists and writers in addressing cultural hybridity are further examples of impossible earnestness of thought , and as such, deeply un-stylish. This positive absence of debate around difference begins to assume an unsettling edge in its definition of "British.") Neville Wakefield's earlier scorn for post-structuralism also refers disparagingly to the foreign philosophy in a way that shares a broad anti-European suspicion noticed by two recent speakers at the Turner Prize debate, Tate Gallery 1996; Hans Ulrich Obrist and Ute Meta Bauer.

Mark Harris writes of the *Brilliant* exhibition in *Art Monthly* (Feb. 1996) that "It might be worth considering what possibilities of political radicalism are concealed or found intolerable by the acclaim shown this now familiar group of artists making works that 'thumbs its nose at authority'? Other than glancingly , the following issues, randomly chosen but critical to the period marking the emergence of these artists, are just not in evidence : Aids, Racism, Gay or Lesbian Activism, the consequences of the Gulf War, the intentional creation at British Government level of a new economic underclass, Economic colonialism, or the evisceration of organised labour or the decline of the welfare state. From artists regarding themselves as Thatcher's children and described as transforming 'boredom into the impetus for action and provocation' you'd expect to see occasional instances of deep engagement.

Simon Ford, in the March issue of *Art Monthly*, continues this political placing of this group of artists by pointing out how easily the myth of independence has grown in a culture that is so approving of the free-market and privatisation. Pointing to the promotion of 'yBa"s through the Eton-educated, Conservative minister's son Jeremy (Jay) Jopling's agenda in his London gallery White Cube, Ford points out that there are no oppositional intentions in this gallery owner's work, a clear refusal in his "non - political " agenda to promote critical work. It is time that the right-wing embrace of commercialism is recognised in this currently fashionable work. Other galleries are springing up, such as Entwistles in Cork Street and others around Fitzrovia and elsewhere that carry this agenda even further. The objects of fashionable dress and style become the very substance of art work, embracing consumerism uncritically. The previous generation of galleries in the eighties e.g

the Lisson, exhibited artists who expressed traditional aesthetic feelings often in minimal sculptural terms. The current position whilst exaggerating the commercial strategies has turned matters on their head - artists who deal with minimal feeling in unaesthetic terms. The refusal of the artists to acknowledge themselves within the orthodox arts establishment wears thin as they become more assimiliated into the Saatchi collection and contribute uncritical lifestyle articles to the British Sunday newspaper's colour supplements. Our relation to the modern world is not problematised in the work but instead uses the language of ironic detachment.

I am struck by the consistent refusal of such work to have any sense of history or space for the imagination of the viewer. The moral and ethical relativismism inherent in such work has implications within our current political climate, where the valorisation of the individual and erosion of a sense of community or society has clear social and political implications.

In the final chapter of The Ideology of the Aesthetic, 'From polis to Post modernism' Eagleton writes of the avant-garde response to the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic as'...quite unequivocal . Truth is a lie, morality stinks, beauty is shit. And of course they are absolutely right. Truth is a White House communique; morality is the Moral Majority ; beauty is a naked woman advertising perfume. Equally, of course they are wrong. Truth, morality and beauty are too important to be handed contemptuously over to the political enemy.'

Eagleton also writes of the political ambiguity in considering ideas of the aesthetic: 'There is in the aesthetic an ideal of compassionate community, of altruism and natural affection, which along with a faith in the self-delighting individual represents an affront to ruling class rationalism. On the other hand... (L)ived experience, which can offer a powerful critique of Enlightenment rationality , can also be the very homeland of conservative ideology.'

The link between the aesthetic and the ethical is to do with the sense of possibility in achieving change. Of course it is not any change that is desired, but change for the better. How is it possible to consider change without becoming a utopian romantic, a member of the Conservative moral majority or alternatively adopting a position of cynical detachment. Kant asks us to consider the link between art and ethics in relation to *the good.* The activity of exercising aesthetic judgement requires an assessment of 'the good', which is currently deeply unfashionable and suspect within intellectual circles. Whose *good* has always been the correct question at this point.

However, leaving the stage to a post-modern relativism creates an intellectual vacuum that is too readily occupied by right-wing ideologies of the free market and consumerism. The true banality of much of the *yBa* enterprise is made more overt as it becomes ever more incorporated into the commercial mainstream. Irony has political and ethical implications. That is not to say that at times irony cannot be used in the service of *the good.* The point about aesthetic and ethical judgement is these judgements must be made; they cannot hide behind a veil of detachment

without substance, sensuality or commitment. The lack of critical discussion and the silencing of opposition, partly through media complicity and partly through the endorsement of the political hegemony of the current art establishment, prevents an adequate testing of the moral vacuity and inertia of much contemporary practice. I regard it as important that we now reconsider the position of ethics in contemporary art practice.

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Contemporary Turkish Women Artists

Tomur Atagök

In the course of globalisation and given our present standpoint between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, everything is subject to re-evaluation and change. Both contemporary issues and universal value systems have forced a re-examination of our ideas at a time when questions about the center and the peripheries, the local as opposed to the universal, East and West, part and whole are being raised. Within the context of culture and an opening of its borders and disciplines, the creative process , and the conditions as well as the politics that shape it, are bringing to our attention the work of non-western participants both minorities and the once-silent majorities. The reassessment of the issues around artistic activity has been raised by many people who would not previously have had a voice in the making of contemporary art. Following the airing of many issues concerning human rights and the development of policies for equal opportunities for all, regardless of race, country, religion and sex, women artists, curators and museum people are focusing on the near-absence of women artists in the mainstream of arts.

Turkey which has always been a geographical bridge between the East and the West, is becoming a focus once again for these debates, and is forced to look back at its own history in order to reconsider its own status in the emerging debate on multiculturalism and synchronize its own artistic performance with the present Western-centered art context.

We only have to go back to the last century to compare Turkish women's standing with those in the West. We too can talk of significant dates in the education of women and women's rights like 1858 :for example, the founding of the first Secondary School for Girls, 1870: the first Teacher's College for Girls, 1883: the founding of the Academy of Fine

Nese Erdok Sick Child *(1993)*

Arts, 1914: and the founding of an Academy of Fine Arts for girls in Istanbul.

We can even elaborate on the social background of all the early women artists families and come up with a picture reflecting their society, Islamic in religion but very progressive in its attitudes towards women taking their up a place in that society. We may elaborate further, by stating that the Westernization that started in the last quarter of 1800's was accelerated by the founding of Turkish Republic in 1923, opening up new avenues for women while cutting to some extent their ties with the traditions and traditional arts. We may even underline the fact that artists wanting to depict reality moved into a new terrain, adopting the Western way of seeing away from their Eastern way of constructing the visual world. We can also note that the tendency of early works by many artists was towards portraits of people closest to them and studies of interiors showing their rebellious attitude to both Islamic traditions as well as their joy in their newly found ability to portray the society in which they lived.

However, without forgetting the continuation of Western influences in the first half of 20th century, let us dwell on Turkish women artists since the seventies for the sake of picturing the contemporary art scene.

In a society where women are traditionally taught and furthermore encouraged to engage themselves in weaving, embroidery and knitting, learning to paint is already an acceptable accomplishment. More than half of today's Turkish artists are women. Although the University Art Departments all have women as the majority of their students, the number of women artists who survive the professional struggle is few. Even more women artists gain a private training and it is after this that they too join the field. It is also striking that there are very few women educators in the faculties of the art departments while the ratio in other fields such as architecture and sciences is today more evenly balanced.

There are many possibilities for exhibiting works in metropolitan Istanbul and in the capital city Ankora. Both young and amateur artists have a chance to exhibit at the state or municipal galleries as well as the art galleries of Banks. This relatively positive picture starts to darken when one looks at the past of Turkish art in the 20th Century where few women artists appear among the leaders in the mainstream of art until one reaches the 1960s. From this point on, women artists seem to take the lead in arts because of their experimental and individualistic attitude and the fact that they move away from using the close-knit surface of painting that is a result of following the centuries-old arts of the Islamic Culture. The ingrained quality of

left :Candeger Furtun *Untitled* (1994) Macka Sanat Gallery, Istanbul.
right: Isik Tuzuner

surface decoration and schematic imagery which is a tradition in Turkey seems to have been overcome by several strong willed women using different media and techniques to express themselves.

This generation of women have a few common characteristics between them. They come from educated and above middle-class families; most are bilingual, and have travelled or studied in another country, and they are well informed about what is taking place in the mainstream of art. These women take an interest in status of women in their society, and with this knowledge and the influence of the contemporary issues, they have gradually developed a new synthesis in their content, although their medium and approach is different in each case. From their different points of view, they take up different social and cultural issues which merge with their own history, environment and approaches to working in specific sites. The artist, as an observer and social critic of today, observes the individual as a psychological and social being, thus arriving at the important question of identity. Some of these women further their creativity in writing, curating and organizing activities to provide a context for their work. This is never a group-action; each looks at the world around and is individually motivated by what they see. So, in this article, the content of these women's artists work has been the first criteria in grouping their approaches and identifying the styles which each artist has followed.

Bilge Alkor (1936), Nese Erdok (1940), Nur Koçak (1941) are all painters. Their works vary from abstractions of human relations in the soft and lyrical figures of Bilge Alkor, to group portraits which indicate human relationships in the work of Nese Erdok (see above).

Bilge Alkor Adam's Dream *(1987-1990)*

Nur Koçak uses photographic depiction of women's clothes or the possessions of women in order to convey how they place themselves in the world. Nur Koçak is the most direct amongst these artists regarding the position on women confronting her viewer while remaining indirect because of the absence of women in her paintings.

Nur Koçak Stripes or Special to the Bath with Garden *(1992/1993)*

Tomur Atagök (1939), Ipek Aksügür (1940), Inci Eviner (1956), Hale Arpacioglu (1951), Selma Gürbüz (1960), Canan Tolon (1955) who are all painters, and the sculptors, Candeger Furtun (1936) and Isik Tüzüner (1954,now based in Amsterdam), make up another group. These women use mixed-media techniques along with symbols and generally fragment the figure. Hale Arpacioglu looks at the human being from the psychological point of view in an altogether expressionistic style.

Tomur Atagök Target *(1983)*

Tomur Atagök, Ipek Aksügür, Inci Eviner are all concerned with the question of identity, and as a consequence their works are more thought- and message- oriented. Their women or figures are dissected, fragmented and made into symbols.

Inci Eviner's work seeks to open up an interior life-world. While my own work because of my experience as a commentator on women issues for a long time, depicts women in both present and past societies through symbols such as the vertabrae of womanhood . Ipek Aksügür takes a different approach with photos of her body, which she multiplies using photo-copies, and then turns them into motifs of Anatolian goddesses.

Inci Eviner *Torso* (1993)

Selma Gürbüz and Canan Tolon also use Anatolian motifs repeating or multiplying variations of this imagery. Their works are rooted in reconsidering the past but multiplication/repitition becomes a strong factor in their sculptures or installations. Candeger Furtun is a ceramist sculptor who turns carefully modeled parts of body into symbols repeating the fragmented forms in a manner similar to Selma Gürbüz and Canan Tolon. Isik Tüzüner is another sculptor who works with left-over materials painting over them to create fragmented forms. The issues of environmental protection are often suggested by her work.

Gülsün Karamustafa *Eleven Mirrors with Plastic Stripes* (1990)

Above: Nil Yalter
Below : Canan Beykal *Library detail from Chambers* (1992)

Hale Tenger *Decent Death Watch : Boznia-Herzegovina* (1992) jar, water, photo-copy, audio tape recordings

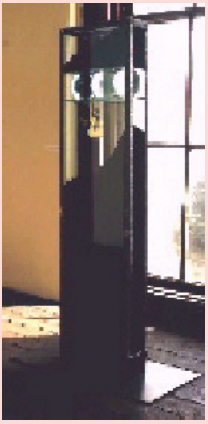
Nil Yalter (1937), Canan Beykal (1948),Gülsün Karamustafa (1946), and Hale Tenger (1960) make up another group of social and cultural commentators. These women work in installation, moving from 2-dimensions into the 3-dimensional physical space. Gülsün Karamustafa (1946) has worked for a long-time commenting upon how different cultures live together, using stories or fragments of stories to convey ideas even if these fragments work through connotation. Canan Beykal is another early conceptual artist who uses light, writing, voice, video as well as 2 or 3 dimensional visual materials. Her work dwells on ethical issues and dilemmas.

Nil Yalter (1937), based in Paris, is probably the pioneer in this work of social commentary. She is the most active in the International arena. Photography, documents, computer-video or performance are all used to reach audiences with work about human rights in an inter-active way.

Hale Tenger (1960) is the youngest but the most active of all installation artists and is another social-cultural commentator. Using large panels with an army of popular ready-mades or film from documentaries, she makes a deep impression on the viewers.

Füsun Onur (1938), Ayse Erkmen (1949) and Handan Börüteçene (1957) all work with space considering how it evokes memory. Their constructions tend to eliminate details or rather load images,materials and objects with new meanings. Handan Börüteçene reconsiders the past with reference to particular historical sites while Ayse Erkmen, a DAAD Scholar and another international artist, is interested mainly in reducing the forms to its essentials to convey a sense of the present site. Füsun Onur frequently uses unexpected or second-hand materials in a different way to make personal statements about her life.

Whether it is through representation or abstraction, by the elimination, distortion or fragmentation of imagery, these artists all deal with



Above, right: Handan Börüteçene *Between Earth and Sky* (1993)
Centre: Hale Arpacioglu *Portrait*
Left : Füsun Onur *Ataturk's Mother.*
Below, right: Canan Tolon *Print IV* (1983)
left: Ayse Erkmen *Der Weg* (1994)

the cultural environment and a social-political culture through art. Form merges with content. Life is commented upon directly or indirectly as the artist uses her chosen media to convey her observations, feelings but more precisely her thoughts. This is a long way from the anonymous women of Anatolia, who weave and embroider their hopes and sorrows in the privacy of their homes.

Tomur Atagök, Yildez Technical University

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Paradoxes and Orthodoxes in Feminism

Katy Deepwell

An invitation from the editor for debate through submission of statements, essays or comments with a view to publication on these pages

paradox: n. *a seemingly absurd though perhaps actually well-founded statement; self-contradictory or essentially absurd statement ; a person or thing conflicting with preconceived notions of what is reasonable or possible ; paradoxical quality or character [orig.= statement contrary to accepted opinion from the Greek* 'paradoxon' *neut.adj.* (para- *=beside,beyond, modification of, diametrically opposed to,* doxa*=opionion)] (Source:* Concise Oxford Dictionary*)*

***orthodoxy* : n.** *being orthodox: holding correct or currently accepted opinions esp. on religious doctrine, not heretical or independent-minded or original; generally accepted as right or true esp.in theology; in harmony with what is authoritatively established, approved, conventional. (Source:* Concise Oxford Dictionary*)*

Question 1

What are the orthodoxies within feminism which are in need of some heretical, independent-minded or original exploration ?

Question 2

What are the paradoxes within feminism which may conflict with preconceived notions of what is reasonable or possible (and on whose terms)?

Four paradoxes to question, regarding feminist theory and contemporary women's art practice:

1 a) Feminism is a paradoxical movement because of its insistence on both equality for women and difference in terms of women's viewpoints and perspectives as the result of their social and cultural experiences.
b) Feminism is paradoxical because of its insistence that women should be both separate and equal.
c) Insistence upon one type of difference can engender an indifference to difference.

2 a) Feminism is paradoxical given its appeal to all women but its use of an increasingly academic and specialised vocabulary in its debates
b) Feminism is shrinking in interest as a topic for debate even as it is gaining more and more widespread popular support for women's equality in social and political life.
c) The sex /gender distinction maybe for feminism, what class/capital is for Marxism
d) Not all women are feminists but feminism has affected all women's art practice

3 a) Feminism acts as a metanarrative about the position of women in patriarchy in an age of discredited metanarratives.
b) Feminist thought should be distinguished from anti-sexism
c) There is nothing more paradoxical than being a socialist feminist in a capitalist marketplace

4 a) Women need separate spaces but these spaces must be integrated and not allowed to become ghettos
b) Feminism has insisted on both an embodied female subjectivity and a nomadic subject in its versions of a feminist future.

Five orthodoxies in the art world in need of critical examination, regarding contemporary women's art practice and feminist theory:

1 Women artists, until 'now', have been only a marginal presence in debates on contemporary art.
(*Editor's comment:* a statement which relies on a view of history which is centred in the practice of male artists)

2 Feminism in the visual arts ghettoises women
(*Editor's comment:* this represents the fear of separatism or the fear of consequent isolation because of one's political affiliations)

3 Feminism is rendered inadequate by its failure to attend in its conceptions of sexual difference to questions of race, class, sexual orientation and ethnicity.
(*Editor's comment:* the critique of feminism as a bourgeois white middle-

class movement)

4 d) There have never been any great women artists, even if there are some women artists of interest today.
(*Editor's comment:* the discredited but prevalent assertion of artistic quality, coupled with the idea that lasting quality (in terms of a selective tradition) is absent in women's work)

5 e) There was a type of work which can be labelled feminist art practice.
(*Editor's retort:* feminist art practices are plural not singular, as feminism is a politics not a methodology, period style or a label owned by one type of work)

Email comments with your views on these and other paradoxes in feminist theory to: k.deepwell@ukonline.co.uk

For an interesting debate on the net on post-feminism: *Difficult Territory: A Postfeminist Project* An exhibition at Artspace, Australia with pages of discussion on postfeminism, curated by Kristen Elsby.

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N.Paradoxa Interview with Marina Abramovic

Katy Deepwell

This conversation with Marina Abramovic t took place at her home in Amsterdam in September 1996. In September 1996, Marina Abramovic's *The House, Five Rooms and Storage* , an installation for Visual Arts UK 96, was about to open at Middlesborough Art Gallery and a major retrospective exhibition of her work was in preparation for the Groningen Museum, Holland.

Katy Deepwell: I want to begin by asking you about your idea for the installation *The House, Five Rooms and Storage.* Is it a model of a home? Or an attempt to conceive of different metaphorical spaces?

Marina Abramovic: When I first came to Middlesborough and saw the space (a former doctor's surgery) , even though it was a gallery space, it had a homely feeling. There were old carpets, a fireplace and lots of elements remaining from its former use. It was not really a home or a gallery, it was something in between. So I was interested in what it was before. Although they told me it was a living space before it was a gallery, I like to work on locations and to take into consideration the history of the building. I wanted to return the idea of the house to the space - so I traced where was the living room, bathroom, kitchen etc. and where would be the storage space. But I didn't take it literally. I then made my own arrangement. This idea of the house is more like a spirit house and the furniture is not normal furniture, its my interpretation of that space. So, if you go to the bathroom, there is a copper bath and a copper sink but the water has become like a mirror where you can go and look at yourself or not. Copper transmits energy as a material . I like the idea of bathing

in copper. In the old days, baths were made from copper but now its just a purification or cleaning idea but the metaphor is still there. In the Bedroom, the bed looks like a cross and the material is lead and rosequartz, which I had not used before. I have made a bed for human use before, but here I made a bed for spirit use - this is a bed for a dead spirit. When I first made a bed for spirit use the idea was to make the invisible, visible. So by making a bed for a dead spirit you could become aware of what a dead spirit might mean.

The storage place has a six metre high metal construction with two glass sides of the cube. These are full of salt and coal. They are black and white, yes and no. The TV room is very simple, a TV and one high chair. The audience is invited to sit on the chair where their feet connot touch the floor facing the wall. The TV video 'Image of Happiness' is playing but the audience can only hear the video sound and look at the blank wall. The space is a metaphor.

The house also refers to my earlier works and workshops with students as these are called *Cleaning the House.* The question which house are you cleaning can refer to the body as house. Even my own house in Amsterdam is arranged so that each space has one activity at a time - a studio, thinking room, office, working room, exercise room, a kitchen for eating. The whole house has a construction that you can relate to the body. Louise Bourgeois,for example, made lots of drawings of the body as a house.

Katy Deepwell: In your work, you tend to take something concrete and simple but by adding a metaphor to it you succeed in shifting the meaning quite dramatically. This creates quite powerful dissonances - but the work affects the viewer in so far as it depends on bringing those different associations together. Can you say something about your philosophy about transitory objects.

Marina Abramovic: Using simple things? The only thing about being an artist is that you must go inside of yourself because this is the thing you really know. The deeper you go inside of yourself, the more you encounter another side of yourself on which people can project. If you take all the personal stuff out of an idea, it's no longer just a private thing. You have to transform it to shift these ideas to another perspective for things to become a kind of universal or transcendent truth for anybody else. So like the last video work I made, The Onion, I'm very proud of the title as it is so simple, in relation to women. Do you know how many men come home and the woman is crying and they say I'm just cutting the onions. This is one level, I used the onion as a tool to show something else, the suffering. This is almost a religious piece...

In the video, The Onion, Marina Abramovic, is filmed framed like a portrait against a blue background. The image echoes representations of the Madonna, particularly as the camera angle always looks up towards the face. Holding an onion in her hand, she bites through and slowly devours the entire onion. As she eats the pain becomes intense, her eyes water, but she continues eating nevertheless. The soundtrack echoes this sense of resignation and endurance :

I am tired from changing planes so often. Waiting in the waiting rooms, bus stations, train stations, airports.
I am tired of waiting for endless passport controls.
Fast shopping malls in shopping malls.
I am tired of more career decisions:museum and galllery openings, endless receptions, standing around with a glass of plain water, pretending that I am interested in conversation.
I am tired of my migrane attacks.
Lonely hotel room, room service, long distance telephone calls, bad TV movies.
I am tired of always falling in love with the wrong man.
I am tired of being ashamed of my nose being too big, of my ass being too large, ashamed about the war in Yugoslavia.
I want to go away, somethere so far that I am unreachable by fax or telephone.
I want to get old, really old so that nothing matters any more.
I want to understand and see clearly what is behind all of this.
I want not to want anymore'

Text © Marina Abramovic,1996. Dallas, USA

Photos © Marina Abramovic Stills from video *The Onion* (1996)

Katy Deepwell: In *The Onion*, you're also metaphorically peeling back the Onion revealing different layers.

Marina Abramovic: There is an essence but no core. There is the hardness of the skin and softness of the flesh. If you look in history, the most difficult thing is to work in a simple way but if you succeed you can reach everybody. I'm not sure how

many artists do this but I start with hundreds of ideas running around in my baroque mind and then I start reducing, reducing. Can I say one thing with twenty things, then with four, then 3 - finally can I say it with just one thing - a economic art. I was in the symposium Art Meets Spirituality in an Economy where there was much discussion of pollution but I think we should definitely be aware of art pollution. There are today, thousands and thousands of artists producing all kinds of art. The studios are stuffed with works - like a postoffice - producing, producing but when you think how little work really matters, how little art makes real sense, its incredible. All the really important artists of this century can really change the way society thinks, Duchamp did it, Malevich did it, Rothko,Klein,Pollock - certain key points and then the rest, you have thousands of people following their work.

Katy Deepwell: These are all artists who distil ideas, reduce to pure form.

Marina Abramovic: Yes, you need to reduce to the essence but it is a question of how to get the essence out? But then you see how their work comes from a very deep personal level and they succeed in shifting this experience into something else.

Katy Deepwell: Your work is often discussed by others in rather waffly terms of spirituality but I don't see this method of work as a very spiritual way of working. Maybe this is because of my own secular beliefs.

Marina Abramovic: I have a huge problem with the labels that are put on me - New Age - spooky! It's very interesting how the artworld today is competely allergic to spirituality, religion or any of these things. It's like spirituality is taken as a negative concept rather than a positive one and this is so strange because for me there is a spritual element in my work but not all of it. I don't agree with the labels which people project on to me.

Katy Deepwell: Maybe its necessary to use different terms to spirituality and talk about what it means to be a human being, to live, experience - not just in a spiritual dimension alone.

Marina Abramovic: Exactly, the spiritual is one dimenson and not the only one.

Katy Deepwell: A lot of descriptions I read refer to your work as emotional, intuitive. It doesn't seem to me that this is what you are doing and is more the result of prejudices of Western critics about the feminine.Even though you are using your body as a medium, there's a great deal of intellectual thought behind it.

Marina Abramovic: This generally comes after you've done something . When the idea comes, whether you're in the kitchen - or on the way to the airport, most of the time I have a fear of the idea as it's usually something outrageous. But then I know I have to do it. In my catalogues, there are many works I have done where in the beginning I have no idea why I have done them or of their relationship to other works. They came as an urge - from mind and body and only later could I rationalise why I did something and discover their relationship to other pieces. I get the idea and this always comes as a surprise - it comes from the stomach. Intuition is important , I do a lot of work on my body to be prepared to receive such an idea. That's why the body is a house. And why I do a lot of exercise, eat pure food and eliminate obstructions. To keep the house clean. The body is a receiver.

Katy Deepwell: This is like the medium, the spirit inhabing the body.

Marina Abramovic: I believe the artist should be an antenna - a vibrating antennae.

Katy Deepwell: In one of the articles I read you described yourself as the 'Grandmother of Performance Art' - along with Ulrike Rosenbach and Gine Pane - unlike the younger generation of video and installation artists or the 'Bad Girls', you always use real time, instead of using loops or technology to simulate experience. Their work, by contrast, seems less concerned with physical experience within the performance and more concerned with the ephemera of culture, language games , media games/codes.

Marina Abramovic: It is very interesting when I first met, Pipilotti Rist (a Swiss video artist) I loved the construction of her installations but they are often too much like MTV. She's a very nice girl but when she was introduced to me she was completely shocked 'Oh, you're really alive!'. It was as if there was such a difference in age and somehow I'm part of history and don't exist as a person. so I said 'Yes, I'm really alive!' The younger generation do seem ignorant or they don't want to know the work of the seventies because they repeat the same ideas and many young critics don't refer to the earlier work for comparison, which is unfair. Either they just copy or what is equally possible, they just get very similar ideas. Like sleeping in the gallery (which Georgina Starr invited an actress to do at the Serpentine Gallery in 1995), Chris Burden and Ulay and I did this but it was so funny to see the huge publicity in the British Press, but you have another ten artists after Chris Burden who did the same thing and here it is presented as the latest thing.

From my own experience, I know of lots of artists who really redo my work all over the world sometimes referencing me – sometimes not. There was a piece we were invited to in a museum in New Zealand – which borrowed from an earlier

piece by Ulay and I called *Inpoderabilia* (Bologna, 1977) – where two people stood in a doorway and the audience had to walk past but the only difference was the girl and boy were dressed not nude.

Then I got an invitation from 5 young artists in Poland to come and see a performance called *Marina Positions.* At first I was really angry but when I was watching the piece I thought it was fantastic and I understood that the idea of originality as *my-ego-my art* is completely an obstacle to the essence of performance. A performance should be like a musical score - like Mozart, subject to interperetation and it can be performend as you want. I want to promote this idea at the ICA's 50th Anniversary next year and to do a performance based on the performances of the seventies - a historical view of 6 pieces – 5 by other artists I like and the last my own. I am interesting in reperforming Chris Burden's work on Crucifixion with gold nails. I really want to do this with the permission of the artists because I want to honour their work and how it was with my interpretation. I hope that this will open up the idea of performance as a free concept and demystify the 70s. Instead of the photo and all this projection on events where you were not there. I want to perform in this series, three I did not see - one from each continent. I actually want to do these performances. I think it would be interesting to have a woman on the cross in Burden's crucifixion.

Katy Deepwell: But it would change the meaning.

Marina Abramovic: Yes and so would *Seedbed* by Acconci where he raised the floor of the gallery and masturbated under the floor. The artist's seed was supposedly inspiration.

When I was in the Art Academy, on the first day, when there were 2 women students among 17 men , an old professor came to us and said 'to be an artist , you have to have balls' I was shocked by this because all I wanted to be was a good artist with or without balls.

In another recent video work Image of Happiness *which was shown as part of the installation at Middlesborough, the camera frame is focused on Abramovic's face. This time she is hanging upside down. A fact which only becomes apparent as you watch the entire video and see the blood rushing to her face and her struggle to speak the narrative. She repeats three times, the same words, a poetic description of the moment when a wife welcomes her husband home. The image is sealed by the touch of the husband's hand on the woman's pregnant belly.*

Katy Deepwell: Would you say there was irony in *Image of Happiness* between the action and the words you are speaking?

Marina Abramovic: No,absolutely not. In the early 1970s I wanted to be very radical, extremely focused both mentally and physically. Everything else was just groovy. Ulay and I made all these works together. When we came to walking the Chinese wall, I made a big separation with the major love of my life and, for a time, everything was falling apart. When I finished the Wall, the pain was so big it took me about 2-3 years to get over it. It is only through my work that I can express my emotions At that time I was 40, ending a very strong emotional relationship, and I was intending to make my own work. I was at rock bottom zero , leaving everything behind. It was the hardest part of my life.

Then I realised one thing that everybody has many personalities inside themselves and it is all the time will-power which decides which one one presents to the world. My presentation of myself was just one aspect of me - a heavy one going out into the world. This came out in A Biography. I had reached a stage in my life where I could restage performances, pasting, cutting, knives and acting which I cannot do (I was making fun of myself). When people saw my works, they were scared to talk to me in reality but my friends who didn't know the work could not believe that I made this work because there was a contradiction in their eyes. Then I found out that there are contradictions worth exploring . I love kitsch, I indulge myself with sweets, vanity, fashion. I love to make fun of myself, a very black humour, often politically incorrect. These are all these aspects which my friends know in a private situation about me and then there other aspects of myself which I explore through the works. In 'Image of Happiness' the image is something I really wish in one part of myself but it is not all of myself. It would be a dream to have a husband , family etc. but the other side of my self is stronger and I threw it away.

At 50, I now realise I can say this is how it is. One of the most difficult things is to do things you are ashamed of. My second theatre piece was called Delusional, to show people about shame as one of the most difficult emotions.

Katy Deepwell: Perhaps this is another difference from younger women whose works are more playful, ridiculous but more obviously mediated by the popular media whereas your pieces seem to be more about real life and experiences which are full of contradictions.

Marina Abramovic: I can only talk about spaces or experiences if I have been there. Otherwise I cannot presume things. I need to be honest, to have gone through this experience and then do something from this.

Katy Deepwell: How would you define the feminine in relation to the feminist - one of the definitions from the 1970s was the idea of making the personal, political - that one should take personal experience and make it into political

statements. This seems to be what you are exploring but I don't know whether you would call it feminist?

Marina Abramovic: Do you see me as a feminist?

Katy Deepwell: Not in your presentation of your work but in the idea of exploring the self or questioning the self in the way that you do in this work, I would see you as identifying with the feminist project

Marina Abramovic: I really don't think so. I explore the self as any man does, OK but I do so as a woman. I didn't know what feminism was until I was 30 years old. I came from Yugoslavia where women are very strong. My mother was a Maitre in the Army. She was Director of Museum of Art and Revolution. All her friends were in high positions with the Ministry of Culture. women were totally equal in Yugoslavian society after the revolution. I came from this kind of background and I always thought the women were much stronger and more powerful than many men. When I left Yugoslavia, I saw this confrontation of women in the press. For me , its a completely psychological thing, if you believe in your own power, you can do anything you want. I never had in my life to do anything I didn't want to.

When I came to Italy, I had many shows and lots of work and I looked around and saw there was not one Italian woman artist in the same position , except Marisa Merz who was always hidden behind Mario Merz. And many women said 'Oh, we can't do anything'. We can do anything we want! I was very much against this idea of a ghetto. Many of the exhibitions of women's work I have seen , have been of very poor quality, because its a lot of bad art with 2 or 3 good artists invited in. I have never seen a really good exhibition of feminist art. If you put yourself in a ghetto, you deny the real meaning of art - art has to be good art whether by a man or a woman.

Katy Deepwell: Feminism is frequently only identified with as a language of oppression - or a 'ghetto' politics. This understanding of feminism as synonymous with oppression has become restrictive and many people regard it as no longer viable. I think it is necessary to go beyond this set of ideas which is not necessarily either an art world label, not is it caught only in questions about oppression and discrimination (which hasn't gone away). For example, ideas about how you express your subjectivity through embodiment are close to some French feminist writing like Irigaray or Wittig which are often problematically attached to the label feminist, more to the feminine. Are you familiar with these ideas?

Marina Abramovic: Women artists always try not to attach themselves to notions of the feminine - by wearing certain types of clothes or not wearing make-

up. There was a critic in a newspaper in Germany who wrote 'Rebecca Horn has good connections and Marina Abramovic is too beautiful to be an artist' I don't think so. Feminism seems always to be about obstacles.

Katy Deepwell: Lucy Lippard made the same argument about European women artists in her essay on 'The Pains and Pleasures of Women's Body Art' (*From the Center*) arguing that many women use their physical appearence - skin - beautiful bodies - in order to make their work accepted or acceptable to male curators. This, she states, is not the case in America.

I am interested in exploring the popular currency of certain American ideas and the differences in Europe. Everyone here is aware of discrimination and oppression against women but the point is to go on producing and speak about other kinds of experience. It is however necessary to overcome the almost-automatic dismissal of feminism. Maybe it's also particular to different situations and where you come from in terms of background.

Marina Abramovic: Background is very important. If you come from Germany where it definitely is a rule that the major artists are all male and its very difficult to get a job if you are female. Whereas in Yugoslavia , you're a hero!

Katy Deepwell: As you get older, are you still interested in making works which push your physical body to the limit?

Marina Abramovic: Oh yes, more than ever. Being 50 in American culture is something to hide, in my culture, this is dignity, something you really get to know on another level of consciousness - another part of my life. As an artist you really have to know when to stop and when to die , because so many artists repeat themselves. In a lifetime you don't have 30,000 good ideas. In one artist's lifetime, he or she may have one good idea.

Katy Deepwell: There are lots of artists who go on working until they're 90 - look at Louise Bourgeois or Louise Nevelson.

Marina Abramovic: No, no, I want to go on to 100. This is not the problem. You have to concentrate differently. It is not important whether to stop here or here. There are real projects which can help you go further and it's a question of stopping, focusing, recentering on what you should be doing.

But at 50, the administration for an artist is frightening, letters,faxes, send things here, there and you are overbooked.

I want to make a performance work which is about the limits of the Eastern body and the limits of the Western body.

Katy Deepwell: How would you define these distinctions?

Marina Abramovic: Well , it's using the knowledge of people from the East, taking the body beyond our physical limits (through fasting, meditation, levitation). The West doesn't live though the body it lives through the brain.

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A Dialogue between Jill Scott and Katy Deepwell, developed in person and through email for n.paradoxa

Jill Scott (b.1952) grew up in Australia where she completed a Degree in Film,Art and Design. From 1975-1982 she lived in San Francisco where she finished a Masters Degree in Communications and became Director of Site. Inc-an experimental gallery funded by The National Endowment for the Arts. During this time, she was also exhibiting internationally as a video and performance Artist . Her work is mainly focused on the relationship between the body, history and technology. In 1982 she returned to live in Australia to work as a Professor in New Media at the University of New South Wales, Sydney and exhibited video installations in USA, Europe and Japan.

In 1985, sophisticated video post production techniques led her to experiment with computers and 3D Animation. From 1992-95, she was the Guest Professor in Computer Animation and Interactive Art at the Kunste Hochschule in Saarbrucken Germany and now works as a co-ordinator and Artist-In-Residence for the ZKM, Medien Museum in Karlsruhe, Germany. She is also a research fellow at CAiiA (The Center for Advanced Inquiry into the Interactive Arts) University of Wales., Great Britain, leading towards a Ph.D. in Media Philosophy.

Katy Deepwell: I became interested in finding out more about your work after seeing your installation *Frontiers of Utopia* at the DEAF exhibition in Rotterdam called *Virtual Frontiers*, September 1996. Frontiers of Utopia is a computerized sound and video installation which at four 'interactive' stations presents the lives of eight different women in the twentieth century. Through the computer scene and interactively triggered film clips, aspects of their lives, aspirations and political credo are presented. Other objects of interaction are

electronic suitcases and by using a key the viewer can unlock archival footage, sounds or graphics from the timezones. Viewers may further prompt the character with questions and are offered brief reflections from the character in response. These fragments of autobiography allow the viewer to gain an understanding of what has happened to them, the development of their political views and their personality. These 8 characters are linked by their attendance at a Virtual Dinner party, in a interactive photograph on a central table where the viewer may initiate dialogue between any two of the characters Is *Frontiers of Utopia* your first work of this kind?

Jill Scott : Actually, it is the final work of three works about memory, idealism and technology. Other the related works are documented on my new WWW Site http://www.zkm.de/artists/scott/

Before this, in fact as early as 1976 I created interactive performance artworks, which fed these issues including the use of video surveillance in installations. I was always interested in the idea that the viewers could become performers in the installation space or editors of various parts of information about the relationship between history and herstory, idealism and the body.

Katy Deepwell : Do you think different media provoke a different kind of audience response or level of engagement ?

Jill Scott : Yes, definitely. Mostly, we are taught not to touch an Artwork, in multimedia or in Virtual Reality, we are encouraged to participate by making associations through real touch or the illusion of touch. This idea ties in with cognition and the way our memories work, and for some artists who are working with history, transportation through these devices has a great appeal. The interactive style fits with and emphases the type of content. I wish to explore.

Katy Deepwell : The eight characters in Frontiers of Utopia represent different ideals and aspirations in women's political struggles : from 1960's student activism; the hippie movement; struggle of and for the proletariat ; to 'technocracy'. Do you see the combination of characters - ranging from revolutionary to utopian as a challenge to essentials views of women's history or 'utopian' liberal / progressive models because you are showing the enthusiasms and the pitfalls of such positions ? Or do you see it collectively as a commentary upon the many plural strands which exist simultaneously within feminism?

Jill Scott : Actually, I was interested in taking an archetypal set of idealism from this century and rewriting the history to include Herstories. Women need to be written into history, by women. All of the characters are based on interviews with real women

who lived during this century and they were dreamers. Utopia also means no-place, and a Frontier is always at the edge of change. In this way Frontiers of Utopiais both a comment on feminist theory, but also a more universal comment on the fact that this century, change is running behind industrial progress.

Katy Deepwell : Are people able to recognize the kinds of identity politics/ types that each of the characters represents?

Jill Scott : Yes, people can easily recognize the types, simply from the fashion and the attitudes, however, deeper investigation yields more knowledge

Katy Deepwell : Can you give an example ?

Jill Scott : Yes, perhaps two cases would be interesting. Gillian, a socialist Marxist from the 1960s seems a clear enough cliché, but when you start to click on her suitcase archives, you find out about her disappointment. Her lover has disappeared to China to join the peasants, and she reveals her middle class education as she shows this disappointment. In another case, we find out about one of Zira's reasons behind her *new age* idealism, as she has struggled with the fears of breast cancer.

Katy Deepwell : In G.Bender and A.Ross' *Culture on the Brink* (Seattle,Bay Press,1994), Margaret Morse describes VR as operating with an immersive environment which she says is more like 'oral logic' than 'identification' processes used in film. What she mans by this is that it seduces you into incorporating, consuming or digesting the world from a singular viewpoint collapsing the boundaries between the simulated world and the 'real' : unlike 'identification' where the representation acts like a mirror against which one compares oneself. I wondered what you thought about this distinction - in terms of the scenarios for the viewer that you design and given your interests in film and as you recommended the book to me?

Jill Scott : I think that the challenge of interactive cinema is to put the viewer in the role of the editor, allowing for personal mix and match of information. I guess I'm still a filmmaker. I tend to disagree with Morse, I would hope we all carry a desire for identification on our shoulders, even if it means extending our notion of self to include multiple selves and multiple identifications. Once a secretary from the ZKM said to me. 'I really see myself up there in all your characters' and I was pleased for her..as both her memories and her sense of self were multiplied.

Katy Deepwell : You have said Brecht provided you with a means to approach the characterization. Can you explain what interests you about Brecht - his use of typical characterization (even stereotypes) and the idea of distinction for example - in relation to Frontiers of Utopia?

Jill Scott : Brecht was in fact, a big influence. In the social realism of the Dinner Party section of Frontiers of Utopia, these characters can meet from different time zones. People find it very appealing to matchmaker and see the generation gap clearly. for example, the viewer can select Pearl, the thirties aboriginal to talk to Ki, the Chinese from 1990 and surprisingly enough they are too shy to talk. A great deal of time went into writing over two hundred conversations, while always keeping in mind the essence of the characters reactions and the paradox of meeting over time.

Katy Deepwell : Is there a relationship between this dinner party and Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*? Or any other aspects of feminist herstory?

Jill Scott : Yes it is a sequel if you like, but in Chicago's *The Dinner Party* the people are absent and I was interested in experimental documentary and creating more of metaphor for time travel. The feminists references are explicit in both Chicago's work and my own but she was interested in very sexual references.

Katy Deepwell : *Frontiers of Utopia* rather than simply presenting an immersive experience for the viewer, was through interactivity asking the viewer both to connect with the character's memories and histories but also reflect upon their own identifications through the presentation. I have seen this described as a presentation of non-linear time, what do you think is the significance for women of this style of herstory? Do you know Julia Kristeva's essay 'Women's Time' where she discusses cyclical and monumental time in contrast to linearity?

Jill Scott : Yes, of course I am a fan of Kristeva. I particularly like the way she fuses the notions of fluidity and the effermeral, with the crossing of time. I think that webs of consciousness are non-linear networks, terribly wet and organic slippery concepts. This makes it extremely difficult to reflect on experience and on history as a sequential set of events, though most men try to do so.

Katy Deepwell :. What kind of responses have you received to Frontiers of Utopia? From men?, Or from different women?

Jill Scott : It is a very popular work, mainly because the social and political issues discussed in it are still under discussion. Access to it relies heavily on the level of

curiosity of the viewer as well as his or her interest in the concepts of memory and associations. It is also quite humorous. For the women it is like a mirror, for the men it reminds them of the other (including their mothers and sisters)

Katy Deepwell : In an interview recently with Josephine Grieve, you said that *Frontiers of Utopia* appeared very relevant in Europe because the issues it represents are still under discussion, can you say more about this (vis-a-vis feminist politics) and why Australian (or American?) audiences reactions were different in character ?

Jill Scott : Perhaps the diversity of representation of idealism could be listed here keeping in mind that almost all the characters in Frontiers of Utopia have European roots. Mary (1900's) is a rural Irish socialist Idealist who immigrated to South America to start a Commune, Emma is based on the famous Russian immigrant, Emma Goldman (1900's) who was an anarchist and free speech avocet, Margaret (1930) is the capitalist, a designer's secretary from America, Pearl (thirties) is a servant and is concerned about equality and freedom for her aboriginal people, Gillian is a student radical from the sixties and art student, Maria is the classic hippie, escapist and feminist from the sixties, Zira is a new age programmer from the nineties and Ki has just been given political asylum in Australia after her involvement demonstrations in Tienanmen square. The diversity of politics is representative of the diversity of politics still questioned here in Europe, where the new closer encounters with its eastern half and problems with immigration raises the same questions.

Katy Deepwell : Your work seems to concentrate on memory and conflicting historical realities, even if in a time traveling mode - do you think this could be described as a gendered contrast to male fantasies of technology i.e. Baudrillard who conjures up an image of the (male) viewer lost in a world of hyperreal surfaces and overload of images or even Stellarc's fantasies in PingBody of 'remote control'?

Jill Scott : Well I am a women and I work from a woman's point of view, however I am not too sure if issues of memory and historical realities are a gender specific rather processes and attitudes towards it may be more or less sensitive depending on the person. I do know I am pleased when I discover men's work to be fluid, poetic and less tied to bombastic construction or shock value, like the work of the people you have mentioned.

Katy Deepwell : Perhaps it's necessary to be more explicit here about what constitutes a woman's point-of-view - since you've created a work trying to point two eight different positions which women have occupied in the twentieth century- how is this informed by your views as a socialist or as a feminist if one

talks within the framework of identity politics ? Or if one is talking about feminist perspectives as insistent on both a critique of the status quo and an insistence that the world is seen differently by women because of their social, historical, ('biological?') economic, even technocratic, position within it ?

Jill Scott : Lets see, well frankly these are my views and I am not ashamed that they show how old I am. Firstly, I still believe that women constitute fifty percent of the worlds population and in this light they must be given a voice by both women and men. This of course included the old feminist ideals of equal pay and equal representation. Now, I am interested in a type of resistance from within the system rather than an escape, and I think that if women do not get involved in Technology they will be left out of it in the future, particularly if they ignore the implications and ethics of genetic and micro biological progress I am also interested in another more controversial realm: an emergence of both female and male energies could occur in one body, a type of post-gender world, where cyborgs replace the notion of the goddess. Donna Haraway is a great influence on my ideas at present.

Katy Deepwell : As someone who has presented a view of certain shared idealism's and strategies for scrutiny through your virtual characters, do you believe feminism may still present a metanarrative for women (even in Lyotard/ Jameson's versions of postmodernism as a critique of metanarratives), or could you say something more about your own situatedness in certain political/art structures as a woman/feminist ?

Jill Scott : Yes, I think it is interesting for women to make meta-narratives, Forme appropriation is a service to collect and distribute archival research and then to rewrite history. As an artist I see my role as a funnel for transformed information but I also think being an Artist is an anarchistic action, certainly the level of obsession is similar.

Katy Deepwell : Do you think there is a set of gendered approaches to women's use of new technologies in installations or internet projects ? Some people have suggested that this is centered in an idea of connectedness....?

Jill Scott : This is an interesting question, on one level I hope that the non-linear and poetic sensibilities of some virtual and multimedia environments can be extended by women's alternative approaches, but on the other hand I do believe strongly in invention, lack of reaction or conformity and individual approach. Someone should make a study about this, I would like to see the results.

Katy Deepwell : What seem to you to be the most pressing issues in feminist theory in relation to women, art and technology ?

Jill Scott : Mm.. Perhaps the most pressing issue is to join the Women-in-Technology Movement, if we do not become involved in re-designing the future, we may well be left out of it all together. This means being recognized as having a voice, and of being committed to a level of professional practice and organization, again resistance from within.

Katy Deepwell : Is women-in-technology a group? Or is it just the idea of women becoming more involved in the use of technologies for feminist ends?

Jill Scott : Yes, I think there is a loose group, and many of us know each other but it could be much bigger, I imagine there are many isolated cases.

Katy Deepwell : Can you describe your current project and Ph.D. work called *The Digital Body Automata* and what is the Bionic World View ?

Jill Scott : Sure, *The Digital Body- Automata* is about the transformation of the body through technology. It explores transformations of the body which employ digital, mechanical or molecular technologies; I like the idea of a movement beyond conventional representations of the organic body, but also find it scary. This mixture of fascination and horror is a great place to start building an Artwork from. Anyway in the Digital Body, there are three parts-

A Figurative History has five different historical characters in it who are comments on the desire for different types of transformation. They are Frankinstein's Monster, Pandora, The Data Body, The Cyborg and Lady Miso (Robot).

In a second section called Interskin, I present some contemporary fictional and factual metaphors and references to art and medicine. which may yield new interpretations of the body from the different identities of men, women, children and other.

In the third part, Immortal Duality, the exploration of genetic engineering is discussed, particularly the relationship between bioengineering and nanotechnology, as well as myths surrounding ideas of alternative states of immortality.

The final aim here of the three works is for the viewer to be able to identify the specific role of women in the representation and transformation of the body, and the possible impact of biotechnology on the process of human reproduction and procreation.

Katy Deepwell : Could you say something about the background to this research?

Jill Scott : Well for the last two years I have been reading a lot of books-but since 1976, I have explored the relationship between technology and the body, through a

set of theoretical and visual concepts. Focusing on the body as a sculptural material, manipulated by digital and analog media, and as a performance artist, I was influenced by the transformation of the body in the 1970s through the treatment of the body as an art-material. Later, through Media Art, I stayed aware of the more recent Post -Modern discussions about appropriation of the organic body. I am interested in transformation. I guess the end of the century is an appropriate time to think about it and recently I spent a good deal of time in California looking at simulated models of protein growths and hearing about analysis of biomedical research. I think we are heading for a change in the notion of reality as we know it. Last week a sheep called Dolly was cloned and there will be more strange news coming.

Katy Deepwell : What ideas in the proliferating literature on representing the bodyinterests you most ?

Jill Scott : Lots. I am interested in the enrichment of our imaginations and the amplification of our powers of cognition and perception that Brenda Laurel talks about. For the representation of the body and the processes of binary technology, I think Barbara Maria Stafford's books on mapping the body are great (e.g. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art & Medicine* (Boston: MIT Press, 1993) *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Boston: MIT Press,1996). Some current scientific and technological research suggests the possibility of actually re-designing the organic body, at a micro-mechanical, digital or molecular level and I read lots of this stuff to get to know what the maniacs are really thinking of doing (e.g. Hans Morovec) I am interested in particular developments in molecular Biology which could lead us to see our bodies not only as technical interfaces but also as re-designed constructions. Donna Haraway is the most interesting for me in terms of the liberation concerned with the impact of new science on human behavior and values and my favorite piece of literature for its empirical notions of time space is *Written on the Body by* Jeanette Winterson. (e.g. Donna Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs & Women* (London & New York: Routledge,1989) see also C.Gray *The Cyborg Handbook* (London & New York: Routledge,1995)

Katy Deepwell : Kathleen Woodward, again in *Culture from the Brink*, made for me two very interesting points 1) the postindustrial prophets focused on information as at the center of the communications revolution, rather than biotechnology's and 2) that the same new communications and cybernetic networks as they entered the body in more fantastic and spectacular ways through medical imaging increasingly rendered it as immaterial, 'unseen' - the delusion of an impregnable body disappeared as the body itself dissolved in hyperspace. This she argues is at the root of many fantasy scenarios in films

and video games. She also points to the crisis which both age and sexual reproduction present to these images? I wondered how you saw you own work with the body intervening in this realm?

Jill Scott : The second point you mentioned from the analysis of Woodward interests me, as through the constant mapping and coding of the body, old reductionist attitudes about ourselves are constantly re-inforced. I would say that if these conditions of science continue, new ethical issues about the concept of mother and gender will have to be addressed yet again. But hyperspace is a different story and may be even present a preferable existence for some, as there the data body could become manuable and multiple, able to transform into any shape or construction. However, in both of the above scenarios if women continue to wait around in the background, their bodies may well be left out of both worlds altogether. So come on girls, you can appear in all forms and shapes and technology cannot only be fun, but you can speak through it!

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Nine Snapshots from living and working in Belfast

Hilary Robinson

My talk contains snapshots about living and working in Belfast and I want to begin by making five brief points. In a timeslot of 15 minutes, I could have selected to discuss any number of different points or snapshots, what I have selected represents only one particular slice, a selection. Secondly, this word *internationalism* is a word I have always had real problems with and prefer to resist using it if at all possible because if you buy into the concept of internationalism, you buy into the concept of nation states and that's quite a difficult concept to deal with and one that needs disrupting. So I prefer to think of things locally and globally rather than internationally.

The third point is, when I come to North America – though this is my first time in Canada – in the United States, when I come to speak about Irish artists and Irish women artists in particular I find I have to both disrupt and resist certain expectations. I find that I have to disrupt an assumption about Irishness which is generally steeped in a kind of sentimental attachment to notions of authenticity , of primitivism, which I think is a form of racism, even if it's couched in *positive* terms. Part of my resistance is that I do not want to be seen as representing Irish women as I've said its not a view I can put forward in such a timespan. I have brought a booklist for those who are interested. The fourth point I want to make is that feminism is not a methodology, it's a politics and as such it takes its place in a web of other political positions so I will be discussing the day-to-day political positions within Belfast and fold this back onto a feminist position.

My last point is, if I lose any friends by the end of what I have to say, I am not talking in simple terms of positions within a binary opposition, I am speaking from

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one position within a web of other power positions - so even the accent I speak with and the complexity of my own position , needs to be considered. You will understand this when I get to the end.....

The whole of Northern Ireland might be described as a border between notions of Irishness and notions of Britishness. Borders imply a strengthening of identity, not a weakening: it is at the border that the identity is defined, given its edge. Thus in Belfast you will find, for example, a loyalty to the constitutional monarchy more fervent than that found in London, where monarchism tends to be replaced with a sentimental attachment to an individual backed up with spurious references to the tourist trade. Another example could be a commitment to the Irish language that many in Dublin would find bemusing or shrug off as an unwelcome reminder of schooldays. Borders also imply a binary opposition - polarity rather than plurality - and a slippage into identity politics, rather than articulation of developed, and developing, political positions. And yet there are artists working here, people making art, which, if it means anything at all, must surely mean the articulation of possibilities. The task for me in trying to provide an audience In the USA context, this is to do so without pandering to voyeurism, sensationalism, or over-simplification. Art after ail is not a symptom of its context, but the result of choices made and practices engaged with. It feeds back into its context and thus is co-productive of its future Context.

Snapshot 1: At a conference in Now York I meet an art historian and exchange pleasantries. 'Oh goodness, you live in Belfast! she exclaims. 'Do you feel safe there?'. She didn't realize I would find her question deeply ironic.

This essay is being written in Belfast just a couple of weeks after particular sets of imagery from here have been sent around the world by news and current affairs media. The stand-off at Drumcree, the Orange Order parades, the throwing of petrol bombs, the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) beating protestors or barricading people in their homes, the leafy roadside where a taxi driver was shot: I wonder what the images were that were given priority by the news programmes in the USA, and what terminology the news readers used when discussing them. I wonder also which scenarios will have stayed in the minds of those elsewhere whose understanting of events here is of necessity based upon sound bite, image bite reportage. I try to think of an equivalent, a mirror to the gap between the media's inevitably sensationalist reporting of spectacle, and the everyday subtleties of a given situation. The one that returns to my mind is the reporting here of the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles and the subsequent events – brutal, sensationalist, and apart from the rare five or ten minute *in-depth report*, superficial. I can only guess at tho complexities and realities lying behind those events, and can do little better than recognize that the histories and politics will be different from those that have led to similar scenes on the streets of Northern Ireland being shown on the TVs of the USA.

Snapshot 2: On the local TV news one night are scenes of the RUC. In riot gear in confrontation with young men throwing petrol bombs. Armoured RUC vehicles have barricaded the road and will barricade many roads in this area over the next few days. I recognise the church on the corner: it is just 200 yards from the house of a friend. The next day when I speak to him, he is surprised. 'Didn't know a thing about it' he says. A couple of days later he says 'We go out to the local shops once or twice a day for for a pint of milk or a newspaper, just to make the point that we will get through '.

One thing which is hard to explain to people from elsewhere is the utter banality and ordinariness of the day-to-day street scenes we live with here - on the surface Belfast, Derry, Coleraine and the rest are unexceptional small provincial towns. Just a couple of days after the last scenes of protest and riot would have been broadcast worldwide. local areas were 'back to normal'. In the city centre teenagers were just hanging out during their school vacations, and the shops started their annual summer sales, their only concession being to cancel the weekly late-night shopping on Thursday July 11. The only visual reminders a week later were the remaining scars on the road surfaces where vehicles had been burned and petrol bombs thrown, and the newly boarded-up houses (between 300 and 600, depending which newspaper you read) indicating where families have been intimidated out - mainly Catholics living in predominantly Protestant areas; some Protestants in Catholic areas: some mixed marriage families. Another thing hard to explain in its depth to an outsider is the utter distrust and fear that both nationalist and unionist, republican and loyalist communities have of the accommodation that political closure of this particular narrative might mean. It behoves anyone in a position of struggle to keep the narrative open. In Northern Ireland as it is presently constituted, Catholics are some 35% of the population. In a potential united Ireland, Protestants would be about 20% of the population. (Minority groupings - Jewish, Muslim etc - form under 1%.) Both experience their culture as under threat. One thing is certain, in practice 'cultural diversity' means something different here from what it might mean elsewhere,

Snapshot 3: I take a small group of Fine Art students from Belfast to a conference in England, where they hear African-American artist Carrie Mae Weems talking about her work. Afterwards one, a mature student Catholic, married to a Protostant man, says to me 'I've never quits understood before what you meant about the possibility of working with visual cultural identity in Belfast. Now I do'.

The London-based American artist Susan Hiller remarked to me that Belfast is in some ways similar to a city in the US in that the neighbourhoods can change from block to block. Much of the visual coding designating the identity of an area may be missed by outsiders used to other forms of differentiation - such as whether the young men are Wearing the colours of one of the big Glasgow football teams, Celtic

(Catholic) or the other, Rangers (Protestant); or the use of Irish script over shop fronts. The most strongly visual codes however are carried out with paint and brush, particularly in working class areas. Kerb stones, lamp-posts, post boxes, road signs and other street furniture will be painted either green, white and gold, or red white and blue, colour-coding the city.

More noticeable still are the murals. Produced by people usually with no formal artistic training, their aim is threefold: to provide visual identity for the community; to comment on particular events; and to warn others away. Many are found on the gable-ends of housing, walls uninterrupted by windows. All are didactic in composition and imagery, with figurative representations or symbols backed up by text. The paint is applied usually on a white background in areas of flat colours, often with black outlines. Some of the types of imagery are similar for both traditions, particularly In tne murals explicitly supporting the paramilitaries - the IRA on one side, the UDA, UVF, UFF and related groups on the other. Here, the murals will have insignia, symbols and colours, images of armed men in combat gear, memorials for those who have died for the struggle, and so forth.

Of the broader historical murals in Protestant communities, some commemorate the hundreds of soldiers from the North who died in the Battle of the Somme fighting for Great Britain in the First World War. Many more depict King Billy. It is interesting to note that it is the Protestant Loyailsts and Unionists who have developed, in their imagery of King Billy, a form of representation akin to the traditions of icon painting. All of the images seen are copies of copies of original paintings of King William III celebrating his victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The Protestant denominations of course were founded upon iconoclasm, leading to a highly austere aesthetic in their places of worship, which is still found in Northern Irish Protestant denominations. The Protestants here have very little visual cultural tradition - the main reason, I think, for the extraordinary strength that the images of King Billy - and the insignia and banners of the Orange Order - have for them. These images form the Northern Irish Protestant visual identity virtually in its entirity; they are the visual representations of the culture they are scared will disappear in a united Ireland. Hence their re-iteration, and emotional and political power.

Republican and Nationalist imagery is more flexible, confident in the wealth of representational forms not only within Catholicism, but also in Irish historical, mythological and Celtic imagery. All those strands are made use of; and sometimes much freer painting styles are used, often expressionistic or romantic. Romanticism is clear, for instance, in many of the representations of women in Republican murals (Incidentally, women are all but absent from Loyalist murals). Woman are there as allegorical figures, as mythological embodiments or as symbols - Mother Ireland, Maeve, and so forth. They are there as foils to the male figures the named historical figures, the men of action. Occasionally those forms of representation are disrupted by a representation of more recent historical events. One on the Falls Road, for

instance noting 25 years of resistance, shows women of the late 1 960s banging dustbin lids on the ground - both aural warning of, and unarmed resistance to, the British Army. The mural is painted in black and white in a style that is a bricolage of newspaper photography. Expressionism can be seen particularly in the Famine or Great Hunger commemoration murals; a response, I think, to the huge emotional importance of the Famine in the history of Ireland, and also to the lack of any 'authoritative', Irish, visual imagery of it. The freedom exists to make new populist representations of this Chapter of Irish history

Where the two traditions collide in the murals, they have done so in a manner that is indicative of the complexity of the cultural context. In recent years, Loyalists have done some reclaiming of Ulster mythology, and in particular of the mythological hero, Cuchulainn, the ancient king of Ulster. In a *gallery* of some five gable ends produced three years ago he has been painted in juxtaposition with a text warning 'Irish out of Ulster: the struggle is about nationality', and naming him as 'defender of Ulster against the Irish' (a reference to his battles against the three other ancient Irish kingdoms of Leinster, Munster and Connaught). The image used of Cuchulainn is (like the images of King Billy) a copy of a previous artwork. Oliver Sheppard's 1912 bronze sculpture of the dying Cuchulainn was installed in the Dublin post office in 1935 to commemorate the site of the 1916 Easter Rising by Republicans in Dublin, and to act as a memorial for those killed by the British. In that instance, the Cuchulainn sculpture was chosen for a symbolic representation as the defender of Ireland against the English - a choice which some Republicans at the time found inappropriate. Since then, it has also been used in Derry in a Republican mural, symbolising the defense of Ulster again, but against the British. While the image of the heroic martyr is a powerful one, and the Image 'works' as well in that respect in Belfast as the original sculpture does in Dublin (though with less poignancy), one can only wonder at the thinking behind its usage here. Is it a sophisticated and subversive appropriation? Or a knowing and cynical move, producing it as an icon for an audience which may well not know the present placing and use of tho original? Or an opportunistic and naively inappropriate adoption of imagery? Whichever, it indicates that the complexities of Irish politics do not stop at issues of culture and representation.

Snapshot 4: Landing at Belfast City Airport, I take a taxi to the city centre. The taxi-driver, hearing my non-irish accent, asks me where I'm from. I play the unknowing visitor, telling him (truthfully) I've flown in from Edinburgh. After saying what a lovely place Scotland is, he confides in a broad Belfast accent: 'Of course, I'm not Irish; I'm 'Ulster-Scots'.

For its small population - 1.5 million - Northern Ireland has a healthy number of people practicing as artists, mainly concentrated in Derry and Belfast. Most are from the North ; but a good number are from elsewhere, particularly from the Republic or

from Britain - England, Scotland, Wales ; usually people who have come here for their BA or MFA Fine Art education and stayed on. After 26 years of *The Troubles*, all Northern Irish artists aged up to their mid fourties will have matured as artists against a background of what can best be described as chronic low-grade civil war. What might surprise the visitor to the School of Fine and Applied Art at the University of Ulster is how infrequently these issues of identity from Other tradition or of conflict are played out in the work of students - it contrasts markedly with the number of women students who deal overtly with issues of female experience or femininity. This is partly, I think, due to the didactic fixity of most of the visual markers in the North sitting uneasily with even the broadest notions of what constitutes Fine Art practice or even the aesthetic mediation of lived experience. But it is also due to an understandable reticence with schooling even more extremely segregated than housing, for most students University provides their first sustained contact with individuals from *the other side*. Tho Belfast proverb 'whatever you say, say nothing' kicks in, as the students don't know who their peers are, what their family connections and 'involvements' might be. Visual markers are illegal in the workplace as they can constitute harassment or intimidation - this includes not only the most overtly sectarian imagery, but also religious tokens and certain sporting tokens. While staff would interpret this liberally in terms of imagery in art work, it clearly takes a level of confidence and maturity in a student to begin to engage with the issues and imagery in tho open environment of Fine Art Education, with its group crits, student presentations and so forth.

Snapshot 5 : I read an article by 2 U.S. writers which comments on English feminist art criticism. I wonder whether they are deliberately excluding writers from Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

Permission, in the form of work dealing with such issues by established artists, may also be needed. Among the artists in Ireland dealing with broadly political concerns overtly in their work, it is the men who are more likely to deal with the up-front politics of nationality, history and political violence (see Willie Doherty's photoworks and video installations [shortlisted for the 1994 Turner prize], Ken Hardy's work deconstructing colonialism, Micky Donnelly's palnterly recreation of republican symbolism, Paul Seawright's documentation of the Orange Order). Women artists are more likely to deal with the politics of identities and cultural changes as they manifest on place and body. Many Irish women return again and again to the body as the place from which - and the medium through which they must speak. Not as an unproblematic, pre-verbal or pre-patriarchal place of retreat, but as a site of struggle - struggle for control, strange for meaning - from which it is important not to become alienated.

If Irish women have turned to the poetics and politics of the body, rather than the body politic, then the impetus is not to be found in a lack of political activist but

it's to be found in the occupation of the site of some of the fiercest of Ireland's political battles, precisely the female body. An occupation enforced by the Church, both Protestant and Catholic, and policed by the state to be disempowered and silent. And Ireland is not particularly retrograde in this matter.

Snapshots 6,7,8 & 9 Towards a feminist family album of Belfast.

Snapshot 6. I read another US article berating the English art historian Griselda Pollock - who is in fact from South Africa - for her concentration on the English artist Mary Kelly who is in fact Canadian.

Snapshot 7. My bookshelves at home spilling over with books on women's art. Many wonderful books by many wonderful American women. I flick through the pages and note that in the American publications the images are almost exclusively of works by American women artists. The new Jo-Ann Isaak book is an exception to prove the rule here. I could not function without the contribution these women make to our debate. I wonder could they function without our contributions.

Snapshot 8. In San Antonio I meet another art historian known for her insightful writing about issues of identity in Chicano and Mexican artists. 'Ah, Belfast' she says, 'I've never yet visited Scotland'.

Snapshot 9. I have to ask someone about the difference between Chicano and Latino.

End.

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Questioning stereotypes of feminism in the visual arts

Katy Deepwell

I find it very difficult to position myself within feminist aesthetics because I see myself as a feminist art critic: i.e. someone who looks at art practice first and then writes and thinks about it rather than someone who writes philosophy but this is not to say reading philosophy doesn't help me think. Aesthetics as a form of philisophical practice is useful to feminist thinking and aesthetics itself may be changed and challenged by a critical examination of women's art practice.

Does feminism have a particular aesthetic? What's the difference between a feminine and a feminist aesthetic? If there did exist a feminist aesthetic in the singular, would all feminists then be obliged to subscribe to the same aesthetic? Or would ownership or, at least, recognition that one practiced within such an aesthetic force one to label oneself feminist? Does feminism propose a separate aesthetic from the range of aesthetic theories already in circulation? Does a feminist aesthetic arise when a feminist – or a feminist perspective – critiques a theory within aesthetics?

These are the kind of questions which spring to mind when feminist aesthetics is raised as a topic of conversation. As a result of such questions I find it very difficult to subscribe to the idea of a singular feminist aesthetic or the idea of feminist aesthetics, even conceived in the plural. So, if I prefer to use feminist art criticism when speaking of the question of feminist aesthetics in an international frame, I want to use this term to refer to the problematic proposed by feminism when discussion of women's art practice takes place.

To frame this more precisely, my paper refers to several examples of work discussed as feminist work from North America and Europe. Through reference to these works and the questions raised in relation to them I want to challenge the

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conception of contemporary feminism in North America and Europe. The works chosen as examples are neither a comprehensive nor a truly international selection since many continents of the world are not represented by this discussion or this forum. I've picked women who are very much in the mainstream in the gallery system in the art market of North America and Europe to raise the point that this frequently Eurocentric view is what is readily identified as a spurious internationalism - in so far as it is an exchange between nations.

How can we discuss an internationalism in feminism ? Given that many of us would not readily subscribe to an internationalism based on the Eurocentric view above - in terms of any exchange between Ist world nation states - or another model of international exchange, which forces consideration of nationality through crude stereotypes or character traits from different national identities and how these supposedly distinct identities might meet. In the artworld, this type of exchange regularly takes place primarily in government sponsored international forums and art fairs like Biennales or in festivals and exhibitions organised in major museums. The idea of 'internationalism' in the art world is premised on institutional meetings through biennales. Period and nationality still act as dominant classifications in terms of the presentation and curation of exhibitions within this context. One cannot simply dismiss this or pull it apart, since this is the major organising framework in which artists become subjects of such discourses as aesthetics. Most feminists remain extremely critical of the operations of such institutions in terms of their exclusions and selections but so also do many critics of the Eurocentrism within such a system, based as it is on privileging certain trade routes or cementing political exchanges between nation states.

As someone who positions herself as a feminist art critic, I would like to try in my writing to find categories, correspondences or relationships in discussing the work of women artists which may cut across this situation while problematising the structures which maintain it. One cannot escape from the fact that one is dealing with a question of power, of vested economic interests in the artworld, in business and in political life. The temporary illusion one may have that one is free to write on any subject, to draw conections as one pleases, is never so simple given the embedded nature of scholarship, of canons and critical/aesthetic models in which one has of necessity to position oneself in order to be heard. I say this to highlight the limits of intelligibility within certain discussion not just the restraints one experiences in making connections between ideas, artworks, people, places.

Feminist criticism has had much to say on the inherent biases within scholarship which prejudice women, but as women we also have to be aware of the limits within the models we borrow, the ideas we use and the limits of the discourse we may want to initiate given the subjects we focus on, the audeinces we strive to find. In this sense, one does not have the 'freedom' to position artworks within a field of autonomous aesthetised objects that one can simply rearrange at random in free-

floating aesthetic dialogues. Constantly one must be alert to the relations of power which may present to one a chosen subject or topic as *of interest* and the limits of the discourse with which one speaks or tries to speak about that subject. In the artmarket, a differential structure amongst artists is formed along many axis: those of maturity, of market stature, market value, of the success of the last exhibition ; of the way certain types of images or ideas have a fashionable currency. This is another dimension to the politics of representation in terms of who gets elected for retrospectives, how many one-person shows are organised across different national capitals, at what age someone has their first retrospective. It is necessary to refer back to these axis of power whoever one is discussing. In international biennales, one comparison lies between the representation of women and the representation of men, but such axis of power also operate across other axis as the under-representation of Hungary or the Pacific rim.

If feminism, as Hilary Robinson has just suggested, is centred in the aesthetic mediation of lived experience then the question of how feminists continue to talk of the personal as political is always a question of ethics combined with aesthetics. Feminism has placed great stress on its role as intervening through critique to change assumptions, stereotypes of femininity, of the roles of men and women.

To most men the castrating side of feminism - man-bashing agressive women - might be represented by two very different images. Diane Dimassa's *HotHead Paisan,Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist* cartoons/poster images offer a humorous and biting look at stereotypical dilemmas and blatant prejudices of living in a homophobic world. In Valie Export's action *Genitalpanik* Export cut the crotch from her unisex jeans and paraded / and posed with a machine gun. These two images neatly contrast one set of shifts between the 1970s and the 1990s. Diane Dimassa's ironic cartoon, her use of *zine* and poster-type formats, invokes the lesbian terrorist as the nineties figure of resistance – a *Bad Girl*. Valie Export's work is a seventies performance documented as a photograph. In the performance, she invokes quite different ideas of classic guerilla tactics of the late sixties derived from Che Guevara or Baader-Meinhof. The shock value is the contradiction of guerilla=woman, jeans revealing not masking the sex of the wearer a unisex. (Unisex jeans a typically 1970s term).

This example raises one of the pressing questions of feminism which generation of women - and whose cultural experiences within feminism - is one considering. There is an increasing need to be more specific, to particularise, to recognise generational differences as central to contemporary feminist debate. In another image by an Austrian artist, Eva Grubinger, a photo-type poster called *Hit* features a mock girl band standing in grunge-type 1970s revival gear. Such an image may signify a kind of in-your-face everything is possible now but it remains caught by the language of the popular media and the illusion that everything in identity is subject to repackaging and ultimately marketable. In typical images of bands in

pop consumer culture, these girls are adopting the position usually reserved for the male bands, mimicking their snarling expression and posing. Does mimicking always carry with it the potential for critique or does it reproduce more of the same? How different from the real success stories of women in the music industry, like The Spice Girls and the way they are packaged, dressed,marketed and sold as different models of individualised *sexiness.*

Acquiring armour - in the sense of a dress-code or styleconscious avantgarde appearance - and armour against other people's view of the self may serve as an internal defense mechanism but when is this just a fashion and when is it critique. Representation as self-portraiture is a dominant subject in many women artist's work. New dress codes and new 'identities' emerge all the time in the cycles of style and fashion. Where is the feminist critical moment in their production as opposed to the constant cycle of the feminine? Those private rehearals in front of the mirror where one seeks to model oneself on another's identity - pose as one's idols, have not gone away. But does the mainpulation or presentation of these performances necessarily reveal any critical distance?

Jo Spence's work offers a very different model of another kind of *Guerrila* tactic for feminism. The series of her work which is most relevant here is Cultural Sniper. The work is made from a phototherapy session exploring feelings and attitudes towards class differences in how people view you, and how you both internalise and externalise class difference. Phototherapy is itself a form of therapy with photography developed with Rosy Martin by Jo Spence - would such originality provide a claim for its precedence as art? (another question from aesthetics). (and similarly - what weight would this then have on evaluating it / classifying it as art or therapy?) These powerful photographs of a woman putting on war paint(not make-up), as she writes out in large pen on the studio backdrop a literal rehearsal of past memories in relation to attitudes, traumas, phrases spoken and their implications in her reactions. In this series, *Cultural Sniper*, Spence examines her own reactions to the internalisations and externalisations of class difference. Her external appearance - naked and daubed with paint, wearing a terrorist style balaclava - becomes a way to mark, project, and examine conflicts and emotions which are fundamental to the formation of a social identity- in this case, the transition for working-class background to middle-class life status as a mature university-educated artist - it is not merely the adoption of a dress code to style the self.

These first four crude stereotypes from feminist work spanning the last twenty years, lead to a fundamental problem with canons within aesthetic scholarship (in so far as it claims to generalise about perceptions of artworks. The problem lies in how do transform a culture where women artists continue to be rendered as absent? Here again are two very different strategies within feminist work : Lyn Malcolm in 1985 made a piece called *Why have there been So Few Great Women Artists?* - taking its lead from Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay 'Why have there been no Great Women

Artists?'. The piece is an installation of a corner of a room with a table laid out with tea things. All the stereotypical signs of civilised , middle-class, bourgeois femininity are present Laura Ashley wallpaper, an embroidery hanging in a glass frame, a tablecloth, crocheted knickknacks, the cooking of sweet cakes, but the work asks a troubling question while pointing to an answer in this context. The energy, devotion and excess lavished on the domestic environment is suggested by the work itself as why women do not achieve 'greatness' as artists. The work was shown as part of an exhibition of contemporary women's art practice using textiles called *The Subversive Stitch,* developing the thesis advanced by Rosika Parker's book of the same name. In *The Subversive Stitch* Rosika Parker draws attention to the messages about the bind of femininity which reinforces the separation of creativity between public and private, between conforming to models of feminine achievement and the limited scope for transgressing them.

A contrasting strategy to this given women's position in art history as separate and Other, lies in attending not to the absence of women because of their devotion to duty but in presenting evidence of the presence of professional women artists in another kind of devoted duty : the archive. A travelling exhibit in Germany developed because of a protest at the absence of women at the last Documenta in Kassel curated by Jan Hoet is a good example of this. The project called *'Informationsdienst' / Information Servic*e was produced by Ute Meta Bauer, Tina Geissler and Sandra Hastenteufel and contains file upon file of information,catalogues, press cuttings on women who Jan Hoet might have selected for *Documenta 9*(1992). But then, as Sabeth Buchmann suggests there remains the troubling question, when it is not hard to accumulate more and more information on women and their work, to prove visibly and repeatedly that women are not absent, just routinely ignored and devalued, how do you change a culture in which women disappear? (see Sabeth Buchmann 'Information Service: InforWork' *October* 71,Winter 1995). How do you provide not just more facts, but better interpretative models whereby women's exclusion as example is not automatic,routine, a matter of thoughtlessness?

The attempt at recovery can equally be problematic:

The American group, Stuveysant, a collective brand name for a group of women's practice is premised on a strategy of feminist re-appropriation. In one work, they take back the American artist Robert Gober's work, his use of installation with repeated wall-paper and props, stealing back the appropriations by men of women's creativity.Repreating his vaginas and phalli wallpaper and positioning a copy of an immaculate white bride's dress from another of Gober's work they try to over-emphasise the stereotyping of femininity in his work.

Hearing women's voices, recognising women's memories as of value, as worthy of consideration lies behind women artists frequent advocacy of collective and participatory artworks. Suzanne Lacy's *The Crystal Quilt*, a performance involving many older women, in a shopping mall where the performers are ritually dressed

and the performance staged on a dramatic setting of cloths and carpets laid out in the manner of a quilt is premised on a sharing of collective memory between women and audience.

Perhaps, we need more than facts, more than tributes, more than celebration, greater attention to reasons behind the limited arguments raised against women. Maybe it's just a naive hope to see a possibility beyond the presentation of women's position to means out of the traps in which we are caught. Maybe, my version of a feminist critical consciousness has to do with demonstrating what other aspect is being shown of women's lives, of the dilemmas within constructions of femininity. With so much work circulating on consumer commodity culture in European and North American galleries, the question still remains about how a subject,idea or issue tackled, which is, is this endorsement or critique? Is a politics of consumption critiqued by the American artist Sylvie Fleury's twee video *Twinkle* where one sees a woman, like Marie Antoinette, masquerading, adopting different identities by the trying on of different shoes.

To show the contrast I would point to an example of earlier feminist work where the critical element was central to the analysis advanced in the women's liberation movement. In one of Alexis Hunter's photo-text pieces*Approach to Fear VII-XIII: Pain-Solace: Pain-Destruction of Cause* a silver platform shoe - the origin of pain in calloused and bruised feet is ritually removed and burnt as one scans the sequence of photographs laid out as in a film clip. This trapping of femininity is no longer enough to secure a reasonable life.

The same question in a different formulation also applies to the next example; do these works represent critique of social relations or do they merely present them? In Gillian Wearing video installation *Talking Heads* the viewer hears and looks at a line of TV screens on which are filmed different people singing their favourite songs. No one sings well, but it is clear that personal appreciation rather than performance is the key as to why they have been selected. The viewer hears individual voices drowned by the multiple cacophony of sounds which are not so much choreographed as randomly produced. No one's personal favourite is the same, no one hears another person's version as adequate or complete. As individuals' they remain locked within their own individual view of the world. But it's a nice idea, if one there were communication between people or is one's own subjectivity the only paramount thing in the world !?!

In a considerably more complex work, Vera Frenkel's *Transit Bar*, also viewable in a different form on the web, which has been shown in several galleries after the last Documenta 9(1992) where it was first produced, the same questions arise but very different answers are reached. The viewer enters what is to all intents and purposes, a working bar installed within the gallery space, with carefully placed TV screens and newspapers to read. The artist is occasionally present as one of the bartenders who serve the audience drinks. The assumption that this work might

not be made by a woman in her fifties who is serving you drinks is part and parcel of the piece's slow and steady unsettling of what one accepts as normative in the context of a bar - albeit that its still a bar in an art gallery. As one slowly acquaints oneself with the room, orders a drink, choses a newspaper to peruse, starts to watch the fragmented talking heads on the TV screens, one starts to realise that it is only partially familiar. The text of translations flickering on and off the screens are both familiar and then unfamiliar. In closer examination - do all artworks get this kind of attention - one discovers - as discovery is one mechanism for enjoying a work of art - that the people are speaking in Yiddish, the text is translated into German, English and French. The papers are from the different language communities available locally and are not a typcial cross-section of the national daily papers. The piece points to the misunderstandings of translation form of cultural exchange. fragmentation of knowledge about the experiences of migration.

The last two contrast examples refer the debate back to the female body but one still has to address the mass communications industry in the spread of pornography. Annie Sprinkle's Anatomy of a Pinup analyses through an instruction map of ideal poses gestures, practices, scribbled over herself dressed as the stereotypical pinup photograph in the sex industry. Such works reveal Sprinkles' work around the pornography industry's adherence to coding the women's body as pronographic subject. Its appearance as a critique is underscored by her use of autobiography to announce her role - the personal as political, perhaps the credo of contemporary feminism. In this respect it fits many ideas from 1970s feminist thought.

However if one looks at Carolee Schneemann's work of the late 1960s and early seventies and a piece like Interior Scroll - represented now only through a photograph from the performance - one might see a deeper challenge to this illusion that at one level there existed continuity between early feminist work and *Bad Girl* type work today. Schneemann's performance involved the artist naked, pulling from a scroll from her vagina. As she did so, she read a text, a fictional dialogue between a structuralist film-maker and a woman artist as they discuss processes for making work. The structuralist film-maker tries to persuade the woman artist to adopt his own method of working, to become rational, systematic, to attend to structures whcihf rame thought. The woman inisists on the vailidity of her own perspective, the contradictions, the conflicting emotions and striving to find her own voice.

I chose these examples above to play on differences in attitudes and perceptions towards feminism in the visual arts. I was aiming to destabilise the notion that feminism in the visual arts is one kind of practice - a type of work, an attention to media, and to reveal some idea and questions which women artists are exploring and highlight their relationship to broader ideas in feminist theory. I wanted to raise some specific examples from practice to point to the difficulty of trying to generalise about international perspectives within feminism and art. There remain overloaded associations and connotations with the word feminism but the word covers the

actucal plurality of ideas feminism encompasses. It remains necessary to speak of feminisms within and across practices just as it is also necessary to recognise different approaches to feminist ideas in different nation-states around the world. This is not to ally feminism with nationalism's but it is necessary to recognise that there are differences in perception of what the stakes are for feminism and the different historical circumstances in which those distinctions emerge. In this respect, I want to clarify that I am trying to point to distinctions in modes of thought, which increasingly are not simply geographical but to do with intellectual resources and exchange of ideas which characterise different communities - if women artists can actually be said to represent a community - and their conflicting models of interpretation vis-a-vis some questions in aesthetics.

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Of Identities and Nationalism seen from near and far: Narelle Jubelin and the Politics of Space

Shelley Hornstein

Canadians wax nationalistic very often these days. Well perhaps they do, and then perhaps they don't. After all, here in Quebec, where the ASA conference this year was held, nationalistic can mean different things to different people. My sense is that at least for artists and researchers on art and culture, specifically, flag-raising national fervour comes in the form of a hesitant commitment: the garden may flourish on Canadian soil, but the perennials are not always indigenous. In other words, art production might very well be local but for many, an operative international art agenda is ever-present.

In an increasingly diverse world where different people may share physical soil but cultural differences, assisted in large measure by technological connections, continually encourage the negation or mutations of physical place, one indivisible nation seems increasingly difficult to accept as sustainable for all. Difficult, that is, for those who want nationalism to be squarely determined in the name of cultural homogeneity and the neutralizing of race and gender. On the other hand, for those who are keen to dissolve traditional, nationalistic boundaries and address the notion of racial or female identity while navigating cross-culturally (transnationally, one would have said recently) or shifting boundaries (of nations, canons, and so on), might seem much simpler and offers the possibility to radically alter fixed discourses of national identity and its attendant ideology of genius-making and preservation.

It is a complicated process to be an artist, to write, critique, or teach about art production, or be any sort of cultural player in Canada these days – whether inside or outside its geographical boundaries. This country has always been subject to issues of unity.[1] There seems to be a hint of required allegiance to the nation and its

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historical legacy yet no less than a working knowledge of international art as well as theory. It is an unreasonable but nevertheless real pressure that is a function of our temporal and spatial place: we live in a society where collectively some seem to be at once torn and fused by identity politics. Canada cannot possibly be in the process, as some would have it, of becoming unglued, since it has never been glued: rather it is a nation taped and stitched. Riveted by political, economic and cultural differences, nationalism, with its natural and unnatural divisions, necessarily includes culture-makers of every sort, many of whom now aim to challenge the notion of cultural congruity across the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, or class. There is a new-found ability to exercise control over naming our own narratives such as, who am I in this world? Or, what does it mean to be a Canadian and does it matter? What is, and is there, local production and what is, and is there, global production? And when exhibitions by international artists take place in Canada, for example, there is a mixed reaction to the value of hosting such a show: has the funding denied some local artist the possibility to show work? Is this the non-Canadian artist to be inviting at this time, that is, is this artist relevant when considering the vast bank of artists available internally (read, Canadian) from whom to choose? Is there such thing as a (collective) cultural community in this nation-state or is the cultural community international and outside the boundaries of Canada? Where or with whom do I belong? What is or will be the shape of the Canadian canon of art if nationalism is at risk? How are issues of national unity and internationalism addressed? What takes place in the space between art carrying a national voice and *imported* art, that is, art exhibiting on Canadian soil? But moreover, what happens when that imported product refuses to be isolated as a precious foreign object but rather insists on integration, however subtle, with the local fabric.

In order to highlight these issues, I would like to offer the example of Narelle Jubelin. She is Australian, lives in Madrid, exhibits internationally, and recently showed in Toronto at the AGO (Art Gallery of Ontario) and the AGYU (Art Gallery of York University) simultaneously. She is preoccupied in her work with issues of tourism, migratory patterns and cross-culturalism as they highlight the contexts of cultural authority and identity. Narelle Jubelin likes say that her work focuses on an ethics of displacement. While her project may at times seem hopelessly sanguine, still, she is attempting to come to terms with positions of discomfort, periods of anxiety and fear (after Jameson), of cross-cultural complexities in her work such as the blasphemy, for many, of transgressing cultural place. She is mindful in her work - and compulsively so - of the complicated issues of how international exhibition (that is, moving across international borders and being parachuted into foreign countries as an invited guest artist) may exacerbate issues of race and gender when generic (that is, pan-world, uniform, unidentifiable) works seem no longer to reflect local individuals, gendered and racial positions. And as we are aware, accounts of

racial and gendered production are in and of themselves fragmented and marginalized in a minority discourse.[2]

Thinking about Narelle Jubelin's work and issues of national and cultural identity underlines that belonging is the operative term of my argument. It is woven into a fabric of identity-building. At the heart of cultural production, after all, is very often an aching identity issue, a politic of who is this artist, what is the nature of the work, and what connects the two?[3] So to look at issues of identity is really a micro-inspection of nationhood, with its corpus of related matters such as what a "collective" sense of belonging (to a group, to a set of ideas) means and in what ways that sense of belonging ties the artist, the critic, the group to other artists, critics, communities, races, religions, genders or nations.[4]

The anxiety of attempting a uniformity of vision and a uniformity of production across a geographic space (such as Canada) where issues of nationhood are constantly at play is an impossible and in fact unimportant task. Furthermore, in a world of fragmentary production (that is ideas and things produced in bits and disjoined parts between diverse participants or a transnational effect at perceiving culture, as would have it Fredric Jameson[5] in the new mapping of a global and postmodern world), even the notion of a localized, geographically specific cultural construction needs to be re-evaluated since the idea of what is local, as we think we have known it, is somewhat at risk. I use the term risk advisedly, since, as Homi Bhabha warns, in the move to a transnational global subject traced on a "decentred, fragmented subject"[6] we are fraught with anxiety because what must take place is what Jameson's has forecast as the attenuation of local space. Bhabha, however, prefers to offer the image of the in-between space for a cultural globality. Partha Chatterjee proposes yet a third space: the idea of a capital community (vs. state-civil society) that focuses on occluded partial presences of the idea of community. And this idea can be traced in a "subterranean, potentially subversive life within [civil society]...because it refused to go away."[7] Yet whichever of the metaphors one struggles to define, what we have before us is the necessity to struggle with gendered and racially encoded spaces of cultural production and the need for some sort of as yet unmappable international space that holds news sets of cultural expression and is not fixed in a geographically physical site nor bound by temporal exactness, however unrealistic or optimistic this may sound.

In short, the linear narratives of nationhood (or how we belong and identify) are in the process of very serious reconsideration (as they either buttress or demolish existing ramparts) because they do not seem to fit any longer into, around, with a spatiality and a temporality that transforms existing notions of the representable. It is clearly a move toward commensurability with others beyond the geographic limits (through international media-fication: internet, the 19th invention of magazines and subscriptions disseminated internationally, and all that Harold Innis or Marshall McLuhan after him teach us about the effects of cultural brokerage),

and an incommensurability with the effects of historical narratives and homogeneous wholeness within borderlines anywhere. [8]

Hence the double bind of naming identities and splitting or dismissing of the subject. In thinking about feminist cultural production any attempt to underline positions of the destabilization of place - issues, I would argue, that have been the mainstay of feminist art. To think of work that gently nudges at the boundaries of national definition is one of the approaches to addressing the problem of a perceived unity and homogeneity of the people. Imagining Chatterjee's subterranean (which is a spatial) metaphor across geographic divides of nation-states, Jubelin's strategy may be seen as one in-road (again that spatial metaphor we have difficult reconfiguring) for disrupting two-dimensional images of homogeneous, national, communities. However, Jubelin attempts to force us to remember the recall local geographic memory in a referencing of the interdependence of local, global and the in-between while problematizing the simple *separatist* notion of the act itself.

We dispose already of some mechanisms that navigate transnationally. These are sights of 'media-fication' (taking to heart the lessons of cultural brokerage foregrounded in the work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan) such as: the internet in our 20th century, magazines and subscriptions that disseminate internationally but originated in the 19th century, and of course, we can move right back to the printing press and to the origins of trade. But it is here and now, in the example of Narelle Jubelin, that I see many of these ideas converge. For it is in her work that the early stages of some formulation of the shocking cancellation and affirmation of the relevance and ambiguity of place is addressed. Her aim is double-pronged: to declare the presence of the local and its sense of place while concurrently subverting it with strategies of destabilisation. Take, for example, her highly patterned fabrics and busily-textured cloths in painfully subtle colorations that render the dialectic between image and surface close to invisible. And it is this will to fix and displace, among others, that mark it as profoundly feminist. She at once names the subject, identifies the objects (obsessively so), immerses herself in the task of transposing texts (again, obsessively so) in order to simultaneously dismiss the subject. This act of declaring and dismissing the subject forces us as viewers to re-position ourselves, to find our own place within the spaces she has at once re-created and undone. The quantity of potential links between this or that object, between this or that text, between this or that archival document, are mechanisms to tug at the seams of a written, canonical, national narrative. It is this undoing that forms an environment that is highly destabilising, yet its strength lies in its inherent ability – by a sparsity yet rich textural density of elements – to recover the threads and begin anew.

That she is Australian (a fact we articulate in all the literature but curiously deposit with our coats and packages at the door), and now resides in Madrid, exhibits internationally, and is preoccupied in her work with issues of cultural authority,

identity and what she calls the "ethics of displacement" is not to be discounted. The accompanying literature to any of her shows ensures that her nationality is clearly announced. Then, knowingly and above all, slowly, we unravel a thesis that helps us speculate ourselves. Jubelin forces us to remember the recall local geographic memory through her elaborate scheme of referencing local events, objects and features, as well as local aspects of Sydney, Madrid or Philadelphia, while problematizing the simple separatist notion of the act (of destabilisation) itself.

In *Soft Shoulder* (The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 1994), Narelle Jubelin sets up possible links between disparate narratives and objects around the unpublished autobiography of Marion Mahony Griffin (former architect in the office of F.L. Wright, Chicago). Part of this "collection" includes correspondence between Anaïs Nin and the Australian writer/bookseller/publisher, David Pepperell. I am describing this work only briefly for two reasons: the first is that I never saw this work save from slides and catalogue reproductions, so I cannot enter as easily into the discussion or participate in the work quite as well. [9] But the second reason is to demonstrate the earlier grappling in her work with the notion of destabilisation. Through a laborious exercise of playing archivist (that is, by establishing a solid material trail of her presence within a site and between sites) she has constructed a collection of living traces set out as a treasure hunt with not determinable treasure. But cleverly, she has also managed, by the deposit of diaries, correspondence, found and/or precious objects, to abandon us, to lead us to believe that there are - through the possibility of multiple connections - no connections at all: that local objects, personal threads, a strategy of displacement and destabilisation may at once evoke a pathway through a subterranean passage underneath the local site of the installation, but as well, a labyrinthine multichannelled opportunity to explore the realms beyond any pre-determined boundaries (creating thereby endless possibilities for new ones).

In *a la vez* Narelle Jubelin at the same time, we are presented with two specific art-bound and defined sites (could this be a possible site of location as well in order to effect dislocation?): the AGYU and the AGO. The site downtown assembles a sumptuous pink and reddish silk curtain inscribed with the hand-written text of the Penelope section of Ulysses by James Joyce. We may begin to guess, but we are also told in the accompanying literature that is a requisite part of the journey (ours and hers), that this is a transcription by the artist, by her own hand; that is, of the version of the original text she accidentally discovered in Philadelphia during her research trip there to work at the Fabric Workshop.

The site also presents us with photographs by Günther Förg of the reconstruction of the German Pavilion in Barcelona by Mies van der Rohe, commonly called thereafter, “the Barcelona Pavilion”. In an adjacent small room, the exhibition includes wall vitrines with photographs of objects by her friend, Jacky Redgate, as well as the inclusion of *Moon Head* (1964) by Henry Moore.

At the Art Gallery at York University, Canada Narelle gives us three texts on Mies (Quetglas, Colomina and Vinci) again on sumptuous pieces of cloth, as well as texts running across some of the painted surfaces alluding to the memory of the Barcelona Pavilion, a photograph and two vacuum cleaners. I do not wish to embark on multiple interpretations of the work and the infinite relations each of us can begin to establish here (if we give it the time it deserves). I do, however, want to point out that with diligent and meticulous reference, her archival manner of documenting provenance (of cloth, texts, letters, photograph, vacuum cleaners and so on) recorded in her *Notes to the Exhibition* which she sees as a crucial element among many in this massive yet minimal assemblage. She is concurrently burying and recovering the links that are not there and are always present in our everyday lives. We see this all the time, everywhere. When we want to buy a yellow car, suddenly all the cars on the road seem to be yellow. She is underlining the common significant and insignificant practices in our everyday lives, the things we do not normally see. And when she names those things, she also erases them: a necessary strategy then, to undermine and displace historical continuum and national narratives.

The installations she arranges have been described as a presentation of disparate objects, events or narratives that are emblematic of travel and the necessities of displacement. But rather than observing this work as Narelle's voyage, let us turn this around and fashion our own voyage through the discursive space that results from the travel from the site downtown to the site uptown, between the objects near and far. Janet Wolff has pointed out in her anthologised review of the differences she has observed between male and female travel, that feminist critique of travel and displacement is not about nomadic (as Deleuze would have it) wandering but rather a critique of stasis. [10] That in order to achieve a critique of stasis, it is crucial to first, acknowledge the dominant centre and second, demonstrate that a critique of destabilisation originates from a place. These are useful guides for exploring the work of Narelle Jubelin. She quickly spells out for us that the dominant centre she problematizes is the very soul of nationalism and identity within it, while her place of origin can be labelled as woman, Australian (far away and down under, or, a historical link to our concept of previously colonised, now nation-state, artist with an agenda of international exhibition). In other words, her position of dislocation is within the margins of culture.

Her work signals the conflictual moments of an operative strategy that is not about migration (which is the moving of one place to another usually understood as the settling in one place from another), but rather is about the possible ability or inability to transgress and translate, to transform narratives of nation-hood that are pre-occupied with notions of linearity and identity. She tears at the seamless fabric of cultural and national oneness and at the same time, subverts

any ideological nationalism. It is a work of that subterranean meandering, infected and affected all the while by the roots of modernism, indeed the very strictures of the Miesian modernism she attempts to unravel yet honour as one and one only agent of change.

Notes

1) See, for example, Robert Thacker's "neverendum" reference regarding what he sees as the ongoing tedium of discussions about the place of Quebec in Canada, in "Editorial: English Canada and Other Proximations" *The American Review of Canadian Studies*, 25, 2 & 3, Summer/Autumn 1995, p. 173.

2) Cornel West quoted in Homi K. Bhabha *Location of Culture* (Routledge,1994) p. 229.

3) I will not and cannot speak for artists, I can only make highly subjective and random collections of thoughts about what some artists, critics, etc. say or write.

4) I defer to that trusty canon of thinkers who have contributed to this argument over the decades in far more sustained ways (Innis, Grant, Frye, McLuhan, etc.

5) F.Jameson *Postmodernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

6) Homi K.Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, see Chapter 'How Newness enters the World,..' pp. 212-235.

7) P. Chatterjee, 'A response to Taylor's 'Modes of civil society', *Public Culture*, Fall 1990. (U.S.A.:Princeton University Press), p. 130.

8) We have only to recall Germany and W.W.II or Bosnia as two cases that demonstrate this point.

9) What is interesting about Narelle's work is that because it assembles bits and pieces from local and distant communities, its success is guaranteed by the intertextual play and continual engagement that each object contributes as well as the investment each of us as viewers make in the work. For we find ourselves always asking, just where is the work located?

10) Janet Wolff *Resident Alien: feminist cultural criticism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), refers to this in various passages.

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