

n.paradoxa

online, issue 7

July 1998

Editor: Katy Deepwell

Published in English as an online edition
by KT press, www.ktpress.co.uk,
as issue 7, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*
<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaissue7.pdf>
July 1998, republished in this form: January 2010
ISSN: 1462-0426

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Materiality, subjectivity and abjection in the work of Chohreh Feyzdjou, Nina Saunders and Cathy de Monchaux.

Pennina Barnett

This paper is about materiality, a sense of the raw stuff or substance from which things are made. It explores the interplay between making, materials and ideas. More specifically it focuses on the relationship between materiality, subjectivity and abjection in the work of three artists: Chohreh Feyzdjou, Nina Saunders and Cathy de Monchaux, using a psychoanalytic framework informed by the writings of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva.

I am often drawn to work that 'speaks of its making'; where making is, in a sense, also its subject. My interest in materiality developed while I was writing about the work of the late Chohreh Feyzdjou (1955-1996), an Iranian-born artist working in Paris. There was something about her work, a rawness of facture, that drew me to it. It is very dark work, in every sense of the word. She covered everything with a layer of black glue and pigment. Her last installation, *Boutique Product of Chohreh Feyzdjou* was shown over a period of several months at Le Monde de l'Art Rive Gauche, a gallery in Paris. It was comprised of boxes, crates and rolls of canvas containing her earlier paintings and drawings, some wrapped in plastic, others mounted on huge rusty scaffolds. On one level, the work is a critique of capitalism, of the fact that everything has become a commodity, including art. The installation was arranged to look like a shop or bazaar, but although each object bears a small label Product of Chohreh Feyzdjou, their unattractiveness denies the possibility of commodification.

Of all the work that makes up the installation, I find the boxes of tiny forms most disturbing. They remind me of trays of putrefied fruit, laid out in a market stall. Their physical presence overwhelms. Some are encrusted with feathers and



Chohreh Feyzdjou *Boutique Product of Chohreh Feyzdjou*. 1996. 3 photos
Photo: Jeremy Raphaely. Final installation, Le Monde de L'art, Paris.

bones, like clumps of mud; others contain small stretched canvasses thickly pasted with black pigment; or shattered claypipes; rolls of synthetic fur; scrunched pieces of paper and plastic; balls of horsehair, pigment and wax. Some are regular, others more roughly hewn; some are dense and hard; others weightless; some feel sticky, others soft and still malleable - touching them dirties the fingers. This is how Chohreh Feyzdjou described the process of their making:

When I started working with black wax, I remember thinking black is like darkness, you feel much better when you can no longer see the things you fear. The tactile qualities are the only thing that determine the materials I use, and black allows me to concentrate on this in a way that I can't with colour... Soft materials feel very alive...and because the wax was hot and malleable I mixed it with other materials, and the forms were coming out by themselves - it's like a dance, a dialogue with the materials...They are not really objects in the classic sense...you have to take care of them, protect them. They are very fragile - if you touch them, they have a quality of their own...they change with the heat, with shock, they have something to do with life, with animals, insects, plants or fruits.¹

The work speaks of wax rolled in the palms of the hands, or squeezed between the fingers, like a child playing with its shit. It is as if, in the very materiality of the work, the process of its making is laid bare; yet it is not only its physical making that is exposed - the mixing of wax and pigment - but also something of the psychic processes of subjectivity: the processes by which we learn to take our place in the world.



Above: Nina Saunders *Pure Thought I* (1995). upholstered white leather, 36"x47"x32" © Artist. Photo: Red Saunders

Right: Nina Saunders *Pure Thought IV* (1997). upholstered white leather, 10' diameter. © Artist. Photo: Red Saunders



From the rough materiality of Chohreh Feyzdjou's installation, to the soft, sensuous work of Nina Saunders. *Pure Thought I* (1995), is an immaculately upholstered white leather sofa. At its centre, covering the seat, is a white circular swelling like an outsize and tumorous growth. Made for the 1996 Sculpture in the Close exhibition at Jesus College, Cambridge, Nina Saunders originally intended it to be placed in a senior common room furnished with leather sofas - although it ended up in the College Chapel. Nina Saunders sees it as a provocative comments on an elite and privileged world of pure ideas and the confidence of knowledge ..which in reality isn't quite so pure....²

Pure Thought IV, a later work in the same series, is a large white sphere - ten feet in diameter - this time upholstered in white leatherette. It was first shown in her 1997 solo exhibition at the Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool. Nina Saunders describes it as: 'something that could contain hidden things, growing and bursting... as if something has grown out of all proportion and isn't quite right...It has some terrible, destructive element to it that is contained, on the edge...I've spent a lot of time wondering if I could make fear visible, what would it look like?'³

Tactility, making and materials are central to its affect. Her sofa and chair pieces are upholstered in one piece, which gives the material around the bulge a particular tautness, and sets up an emotional tension. She sees the upholstered swelling as having a transformative function, that of defamiliarising domestic objects.

This sense of the familiar made strange, is an idea an idea that Freud explored in his famous essay 'The Uncanny' written in 1919. He defines the uncanny as that

class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.⁴ Freud traces the etymology of the German word *unheimlich* (literally: unhomely), and discovers an ambiguity in its meaning. *Heimlich* (homely) has contradictory meanings: it simultaneously signifies intimacy and domestic comfort, and the hidden or withheld. So heimlich and unheimlich, which logically should be opposites, actually suggest the same thing. Freud also argues that the uncanny represents the reappearance of repressed material from childhood. In his account, the unheimlich represents the male fear of the female genitals, and of that most familiar of places, the maternal body - the prefix 'un', being the sign of the repression.

To me Nina Saunders' sofa and chair sculptures contain something of this contradiction in their play of opposites: beauty / revulsion; comfort / discomfort, homeliness / alienation: the swelling is like a symptom of something wrong. Furthermore, in the context of Freud's essay, *Pure Thought IV* might be read as an 'obscene fecundity'⁵ that must be kept at bay. In psychoanalytical terms, the maternal body is the primary object from which the infant defines its own boundaries, to differentiate between inside and outside, a me and not me. The scale of *Pure Thought IV*, would easily allow it to accommodate an adult, and stepping tentatively around its bulk, it contains a sense of both the intimacy and claustrophobia associated with the maternal body. But there is also a sense of loss. For if the mother is the first lost object, then the first lost space is the maternal space;⁶ and in *Pure Thought IV*, an object of longing and taboo, an impossible nostalgia or fantasy of 'return' is played out.

The work of Cathy de Monchaux, exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery (1997) is multi-layered and similarly refuses any single reading. It makes reference to organic forms (crustacea, fossils), animals, erotic and fetishistic imagery, turn-of-the-century decorative traditions, architectural detailing and saintly relics. Suffused with all this, yet refusing any explanation, it is like some narrative to which we are given clues, yet denied access. Cathy de Monchaux suggests that the work evokes a world with its own internal logic.

Similarly, its making appears to be determined by a set of internal rules or procedures, and like the pieces by Chohreh Feyzjou and Nina Saunders, its materiality is central to its affect. It speaks through metals riveted, bolted and pierced; cloth crushed, folded and puckered; ribbons lashed, threaded and tied. Materials here become highly charged: leather, pink and faded evokes the flesh; metals, often spikey and rusted, contain and constrict; lead, dull and heavy, evokes mortality. Further emphasising its deathly quality is the fine chalky dust sprinkled upon the surface of the work - reminiscent of the film of darkness that covers the objects in Chohreh Feyzjou's installation. For both artists, this device unifies the diverse materials and objects that make up their installations.

The materiality in both provokes an emotional and sensuous response that can be explored through Julia Kristeva's ideas on the formation of subjectivity. Julia Kristeva came to Paris in 1968 and studied with Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan.



Left: Cathy de Monchaux *Trust Your Sanity to No-one* (1996) brass, leather, chalk and diamonte. 9 parts:each 17x10x5 cm. Right: Cathy de Monchaux. Detail of *Dangerous Fragility* (1994) Brass, leather, ribbons and chalk Two parts:48x40x13cm.

A predominant feature of her work is its concern with analysing the seemingly unanalysable or inexpressible. Her early work explored the connection between language and its importance in the formation of the subject. Much psychoanalytic writing has argued that it is through language that we gain entry to the sphere of social relations, and become speaking subjects, able to articulate our needs and desires: an "I", able to differentiate itself from others. It is through language that we gain entry to the sphere of social relations, and become speaking subjects, able to articulate our needs and desires: an "I", able to differentiate itself from others.

In her doctoral thesis, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974). Julia Kristeva developed her theory of the semiotic. (This is distinct from what we have come to call semiotics - the study of signs.) The semiotic, is distinguished from 'the symbolic', that is the sphere of representation, images and all forms of fully articulated language. The semiotic (in Kristeva) is like the raw material or base of language - its sounds and rhythms. It is associated with the mother-infant dyad or union, and the state of symbiosis and dependence before the infant acquires language. Julia Kristeva writes of the 'semiotic chora', derived from the Greek semiotic, suggests a mark or trace, while 'chora' is an enclosed space or womb.⁷ The semiotic is the pre-verbal signifying realm, a realm of exchange between mother and baby which functions through sound - the rhythmic pattern of the voice, through tone, gesture, smell, touch.

Julia Kristeva argues that in order to enter the symbolic, (ie formal language and social relations), this 'other' of language must be repressed. But the repression is



Left: Cathy de Monchaux. Details of *Cruising Disaster* (1996)
Rusted steel, leather and chalk. 3 parts: each 184 x 28 x 4 cm.
Right: Cathy de Monchaux *Dangerous Fragility* (1994)
Brass, leather, ribbons and chalk Two parts: 48x40x13cm.



only partial, for the semiotic seeps through and can be perceived as a pulsational pressure within the symbolic, evident in avant-garde writing, (especially poetry), through rhythm, repetition and alliteration; and also through that which disrupts language and sense: dissonance, fragmentation, contradiction, meaninglessness, silence and absence. If the symbolic would name, the semiotic is un-nameable. It is like a memory-trace of the prelinguistic state of mother- infant symbiosis.

So how might Julia Kristeva's ideas be useful in considering the affect of materiality in these artists work? I have described materiality as a sense of the raw stuff from which things are made, a rawness barely disguised or mediated. Might we see traces of the semiotic in the work of Chohreh Feyzjou or Cathy de Monchaux - with its rhythmic repetition that ceases to signify; in de Monchaux's mixing of male and female genitalia, (eg *Cruising Disaster*) where meaning is contradictory and disrupted; or Feyzjou's tiny wax forms, objects-in-the-making.

On the other hand, we see the symbolic at work, containing, repressing, holding down - repetition as an attempt to order and keep chaos at bay. Cathy de Monchaux touches upon the double function of repetition when she talks of the repeating patterns in her work: it can be read as abstract pattern which becomes almost a plain surface; yet close up it remains imagery within the terms of reference she has invented, tiny animals, genitals, hands.⁸

Monchaux's works, when they were shown at the Whitechapel, created an emotional charge through their tension of beauty and horror, pleasure and disgust, outside and inside (see especially works like *Dangerous Fragility*, 1994). For me they operate within the realm of the Julia Kristeva's 'abject'. Although the dictionary definition defines this as 'despicable' and 'abased', Julia Kristeva appropriates the term for her own purposes in *Powers of Horror*.⁹ For her, the abject, which includes tears, saliva, faeces, urine, vomit and mucus, marks the bodily sites which will later become erotogenic zones - eyes, mouth, anus, nose, genitals orifices which are on the border between inside and outside. These abjects can never be fully expelled, for they are the precondition of material, that is bodily existence. In order to survive we

ingest and expel. The ingested and expelled stuff is never quite distinct from us, for it is neither part of our bodies nor separate from them. The abject is both inside and outside, dead and alive, marking the site of life itself.

Julia Kristeva relates the abject to the mother-infant dyad. Here, the infant has no sense of boundaries. In order to become autonomous, it rejects the maternal body and turns it into what she calls an 'abject'. Thus the infant's sense of self, rests upon a debasement and prohibition of the maternal body - that is the incest taboo.¹⁰ For me, Cathy de Monchaux's work elicits both disgust and horror precisely because it explores the boundaries of the body. To achieve autonomy the infant must cross the border into life; but the mother is an ambiguous figure: she is both life-giving and death-dealing, for to be born also means one must die.

If Nina Saunders' *Pure Thought IV*, large, round and fecund, evokes the lost maternal space, then Cathy de Monchaux's film of white dust and Chohreh Feyzjdjou's layer of dark pigment are like signs of mortality. Although visually different, for me, all three artists explore the body, the interplay of inside and outside, and the notion of the border as a site of demarcation and undecideability between life and death. Without the signs of the abject, life cannot continue. For as Julia Kristeva writes:

How can I be without border.....in that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything! I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders.¹¹

Notes

1. Chohreh Feyzjdjou, taped interview with Pennina Barnett, Paris, 22nd June 1995. For further information on the work of Chohreh Feyzjdjou see listings in Gavin Jantjes (ed) *A Fruitful Incoherence: Dialogues with artists on Internationalism*, INIVA, London, 1998.
2. Nina Saunders, taped interview with Pennina Barnett, cited in Pennina Barnett, 'Purity and Fear', *Make:the magazine of women's art* no 74, March 1997.
3. *ibid.*
4. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', (1919), in *The Complete Psychological Works*, vol 19, Hogarth Press, 1955, p217-252.
5. 'Obscene fecundity' is an expression used by Dianne Chisholm in her entry on the 'Uncanny' in Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis, A Critical Dictionary*, Blackwell, Oxford, ~ and Cambridge, Mass, 1992
6. see Jon Bird, 'Dolce Domum' in James Lingwood (ed.) *Rachel Whiteread - house* Phaidon Press, 1995, p119.
7. see Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p.13.
8. Cathy de Monchaux, interview with Louisa Buck, *Tate magazine*, Summer 1997

9. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, Columbia University Press, New York 1982.
10. This is drawn from Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* and the 'Kristeva' entry written by Elizabeth Grosz in Elizabeth Wright, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* op. cit.
11. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* p.4.

This was first presented as a paper at To Practise Makes Perfect Symposium at Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham, UK, 17 January 1998. It appeared first on the *n.paradoxa* website in 1998 and was revised with pictures and presented again in 1999.

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n.paradoxa : Issue No.7,1998, revised (with illustrations) for Issue No.9,1999

Diaspora/Realities/Strategies

Howardena Pindell

African-American artists in the diaspora face continuing cutbacks in American government funding of the arts due to conservative pressure in Congress, a situation which has led to the restriction and/ or curtailment of organisations serving African-American communities and the general public. The contradictory and often negative reception and rejection of their work in the mainstream American and international European-based visual arts communities has been accompanied by the suppression and ferocious censure or trivialisation of art historians and art critics who wish to change and diversify the canon. African-American artists willing to cynically indulge in producing imagery of negative-stereotypes of African-Americans often find the reception warms in the European community as their work become acceptable commodities for the consumption of mainstream Eurocentric communities. This strategy, Pindell argues, panders to racism and further enhances excuses for negative formations of public policy set in motion by conservative elements in America. Various strategies have been developed by African-American artists to counter this and cope with other complex forces that seem to implant permanently the malicious practices of the past that restricted women and non-Europeans. The dialectics of the past embedded and reproduced in the global and local corporate media has unfortunately maintained or kept in motion subtle reminders of colonial practices in today's post-colonial/ neo-colonial world. The result, Pindell argues, has been a narrowing of creative possibilities for nations across the global community, leaving diverse cultural productions once again vulnerable to appropriation and co-option. This new round of restrictions is accompanied by the exasperating implication that efforts made

to ensure a balance over a very short period of time failed to yield any instant healing of past evils because of the imagined shortcomings of those targeted and victimised by earlier colonial structures.

Diaspora/Realities/Strategies

Faced with what is dressed up as post-colonialism, African-American artists as well as Latino, Native American, and Asian artists in the US find that they must now manoeuvre in a disguised neo-colonial atmosphere. The actions and rhetorical denials pervasive within the mainstream art world have caused renewed cognitive dissonance and frustration for African-American artists. It has created the need for counter moves and carefully managed strategies by African-American artists living in the diaspora. Their cultures and creativity are now penetrated by subtle as well as aggressive forms of media-managed colonialism. This global technological control is operated through what we see, hear and are told to set before us as the standards for existence. Our inner worlds and images under this bombardment become fragile, more easily penetrated and disrupted. Our cultures undergo a restructuring because global technologies usually omit everything that does not relate to and benefit the global spheres of profit for those in power -- those who work to manipulate through their technology and military aggression.

Currently in the United States visual artists who do not cater to the bottom line (... profit) or who upset the conservative elements that are settling into many sectors of public policy are often factored out and pushed into limited commercial venues or dwindling alternative venues. One bizarre example of this, cited in *The New York Times* occurred in conservative Cobb County, Atlanta, Georgia in 1993. All arts funding was cut including children's programming, and the money was turned over to the law enforcement. Artists already ostracised from the general population in terms of support and patronage continued to be split again along the lines of race, gender, and sexual preference.

In my recent research for my book *Heart of the Question* I compared my findings concerning the number of New York City art galleries that restricted their representation to European and European-Americans in the 1980s with their numbers in the 1990s. Of the galleries surveyed, 36 were totally European or European-American in 1986-87. In 1996, 13 of these galleries had closed and four new ones emerged. Eighteen had remained completely European or European-American. It was from this pool of galleries that the majority of artists, mostly male, were selected and umbrellaed by a sponsoring museum for dwindling government funding of one-person exhibitions.

Of the 482 art galleries listed in the September 1997, New York edition of the international publication *The Gallery Guide*, only 20 (or 4.16 %) represent one, and on rare occasions two, African American artists. Native-American, Latino, and Asian artists are not necessarily represented by these galleries. Although the figures were

an increase from the 1980s, African-American artists did not feel that this tokenism is an improvement. Whereas there are now more African American art galleries in the United States in general, their artists are rarely represented in international Biennales or international art publications. African-American art galleries represent a wide range of work, including abstraction, figurative work and installation. If the European and European-American art galleries do represent an African American artist, they seem to prefer to represent work that has a clear indication of the artist's race, depicts the African-American body, or in recent years, depicts negative racial stereotypes of African-Americans.

This trend appears to have reached a hysterical pitch with the narcotic enthusiasm of the European and European-American public, as well as museums with a large European and European American membership, for the work of Kara Walker and Michael Ray Charles. Both artists use demeaning images of African Americans.¹ This enthusiasm has been further inflated by the collusion of wealthy European-American patrons and their sycophants. A number of African-American artists have referred to this trend as a continuation of the plantation system and mentality. (In late 1800's European-American artists designed posters and broadsheet with derogatory images of African-Americans mocking the African-American community. Throughout the history of colonialism, slavery and white supremacy, words and images have been assigned to stereotype target groups, mocking them and designating them as less).²

Kara Walker utilises a silhouette made of black cut paper similar to the traditional Swiss-German technique called 'scherensdnitte', which was brought to the United States by the Pennsylvania-Dutch in the 18th century. Walker cuts out the shapes of life-size figures placing them in various tableaux for example: A slumped heavily drooling black musician is depicted being wound up, as if he is a mechanical toy, by a miniature or child-like "mammy" or Aunt Jemima figure. Above and in front of the slumped musician floats a child depicted as a 'picaninny' with her legs open and the mouth of a trumpet inserted into her vagina.³

In general, Walker's subjects include stereotyped African-American men, women, and children often portrayed in demeaning postures. Sometimes they are barefoot, nude, defecating, and in some cases portrayed as child molesters and mutilators. She often exploits the "Topsy" or "picaninny" derogatory stereotype image. In her Renaissance Society exhibition in Chicago she portrays an African-American child having intercourse with a horse. This is prettied up using a volumetrically cut simplified, "cute" silhouette. It is stylistically similar to something you might see in a Disney cartoon, but pornographic. In her book published by the Renaissance Society in Chicago and underwritten in part by the Peter Norton Family Foundation and Lewis and Susan Manilow (her major collectors, funders and promoters) she drew the nude "mammy"-like image of an adult on the opposite page of an old engraving of an enslaved African man tied to a post and being whipped, by a smiling white

male. The whipping is being watched by a relaxing and smiling white male. An enslaved African holds some of the ropes that bind the man being whipped. He appears to be smiling. The "mammy" image drawn on the opposite page has her legs wide open facing the engraving depicting the beating. Like the whites she also smiles. Her large open vagina has become a split watermelon with seeds.⁴

What is troubling and complicates the matter is that Walker's words in published interviews mock African-Americans and Africans. A work is titled *African't*. She has said things such as "All black people in America want to be slaves just a little bit."⁵ She has also said "in the cartoons where African savages get pictured, the European explorers are often placed at the mercy of savages."⁶ And "Afro-Am or African- American artists are always espousing the horrors of slavery and Gen-Afro Apartheid.... But horrors are always tolerable to repressed individuals to whom they may occur. This allows for a stronger sense of masochism in future generations, makes for riots, very colorful."⁷

Occasionally whites are portrayed as villains in Kara Walker's work. Walker unconsciously or consciously seems to be catering to the bestial fantasies about black culture created by white supremacy and racism.

Michael Ray Charles, while claiming to be "exploding racial stereotypes" paints the derogatory "picaninny/sambo" image verbatim. In one painting a grinning "picaninny/sambo" image is portrayed eating a basketball that has become a watermelon. The painting is titled *Lifesaball* (1995). A press release from his New York City gallery, the Tony Shafrazi Gallery, states; a white skinned Jester pleausurably sips coffee from a cup he has placed atop the breasts of a black mammy'. The press release further refers to 'stereotypes which for generations have amused whites.' Indeed, they are so amused that the gallery does not hesitate to say that his exhibitions sell out.

Ellen Gallagher, on the other hand, utilises disembodied stereotyped pop eyes and thick lips as symbols detached from the full-bodied stereotype. Although disembodied, they still trigger one's memory and the knowledge of the full stereotype. They appear drawn or painted, floating or bordering flat minimalist treated areas of painted and/or collaged canvas. The "power" of the negative stereotype is implied even though fragmented and continues to reinforce the old stereotypes.

Gary Simmons has used the negative stereotype in his early work. (Fred Wilson, Carrie Mae Weems, Glenn Ligon, and James Montford have also used negative racial stereotypes. Betye Saar uses the stereotype but states she tries to "empower" avoiding 'closet racism'⁸ (New York City-based European-American art galleries represent these artists who all utilise negative racial stereotypes.) As if on cue with the commercial sectors Robert Colescott, an artist known for his use of negative stereotypes was selected to be the United States representative to the Venice Biennale in 1997.

I feel it is tragic when black artists further 'invigorate' the stereotype. Their work is, I fear, catering to racism, misogynistic at times, and self loathing in both its subtle

and more gross forms.⁹ Very few African-American artists with affirmative stereotype-busting images/messages are allowed in the same venues.¹⁰ I feel that artists who use racial stereotypes without critique become complicit. They are reinforcing the old stereotype as if to say the fabricated image is their true experience. Thus, in the visual industries uneven playing field these artists entertain, titillate, mesmerise and amuse their European/European-American admirers. They become, as Kirsten Buick, museum lecturer in the Department of Education at the Art Institute of Chicago, states, a contemporary form of minstrel.¹¹ If those who speak out against it are silenced, ostracised, and censured, it is the same old white supremacy contract in new clothes.

"One of the tragic ironies of contemporary black life is that individuals succeed in acquiring material privilege often by sacrificing their positive connection to black culture and black experience."¹²

The artists who use negative stereotypes in turn attract cunning liberal supporters who feel good and "liberal" and mask their racism by vigorously supporting an African-American. According to Michael Harris, artist and professor of art history at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, these supporters seem to eagerly push forward and fund these negative images in an attempt to persuade African-Americans to disregard history and see this as the most important work that should be seen and collected of African-American visual culture.¹³ Indeed these artists are being rewarded for mimicking the European-American artists who first created the negative stereotype image of African-Americans, Africans and other groups targeted for mocking.

Laura Cottingham critic and producer of the video documentary *Not for Sale: Feminism and Art in the USA* during the 1970s states:

'So now the gallery and museum can feature art made by women which reproduces and upholds sexism along with art by African Americans that accepts the tenets of racism. Oh! I'm sure none of the artists I'm thinking of think they are doing this; but artists' intentions mean as little to me as the stated claims of the United States, which as we know, is a nation that stands for liberty and justice for all.'¹⁴

Charles Mills in *The Racial Contract* explains the ability to produce and tolerate, among many things, stereotype images as part of a "racial contract" or "White Supremacy agreement" that puts and perpetuates power in the hands of the white power structure. He refers to it as a process of "consensual hallucination."

'By virtue of their complete non-recognition or at best inadequate, myopic recognition . . . non-whites are relegated to the lower rungs on the moral ladders. They are designated as being born unfree and unequal... There will be white mythologies, invented Orients invented Africas, invented Americas, with a correspondingly fabricated population....living in the white imagination and determinedly imposed on their alarmed real-life counterparts. One could say then, as a general rule, that white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and

self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonisation, and enslavement.¹⁵

One wonders how many museums that show this work have shown and collected other African-Americans' work or works by other people of colour.

Recently there has been a swift negative response from a number of African-American artists, art historians, and museum curators to the rapid embrace of Kara Walker and Michael Ray Charles.¹⁶ Although the protests are multi-generational, the other side insists that it is specifically, and only, older people who object. There has been, however, a muffled, restrained, fearful response from more conservative sectors of the African-American community, perhaps fearful because of the ostracism and trivialisation of those who object, by those behind the trend. In some cases, there has been opposition to the steadily growing network of protest by those who have had staunch European supporters. In the past some of these individuals have been reluctant to point to any disparity in the arts perhaps because of their fear of reprisals.

African-Americans and European-American scholars attempting to correct the omissions of previous art critical and historical texts have often been attacked for their efforts. For example: *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (Yale University Press, 1997) by Ann Eden Gibson included over 33 African-Americans, people of colour and women and was ferociously attacked by conservative art critic Hilton Kramer in *The New York Observer* (Sept. 8, 1997). He referred to her efforts as a "demolition job".

Various other strategies other than protest have been adopted by the African American community including artists becoming art historians. These include David Driskell (University of Maryland), Richard Powell (Duke University, where he is the chairman of the Art History Department), Freida High (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and Michael Harris (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill). Artists have also founded publications such as Samela Lewis's *International Journal of African American Art* (published by the Hampton University Museum)¹⁷ and *Artist and Influence*¹⁸ founded by Camille Billops with her husband James Hatch. Together they also formed an archive of African American achievements in the arts, the HatchBillops Collection. Additional publications that have sustained the African American community include *Third Text* (London)¹⁹, Okwui Enwezor's *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (Brooklyn, New York)²⁰, *Atlanticus*²¹ and *Diaspora News* (Brooklyn).²² Artists groups formed to address the issues of omission, to lessen the isolation, and to formulate projects, such as The National Council of Artists, founded in 1959. Coast-to-Coast, a group of African-American, Asian-American, Latino, Native American women artists was formed in 1987 by Faith Ringgold, Clarissa Sligh and Margaret Gallegos. *Entitled: Black Women Artists*, organised in 1996, is currently planning a website project (<http://www.entitled-bwartists.com>). Asian artists faced with the same dilemmas have formed a group called Godzilla.²³

Since the current art world climate is most supportive of African-American artists

who use negative stereotypes of African-Americans, their work is the most likely to be seen in American and international European art publications, I invited a number of artists not pursuing this approach to send me slides of their work for this talk in Johannesburg to show work that is being done independently or is being shown by African -American art dealers or European American art dealers. Artists represented by African-American dealers and shown in African American Museum's or art galleries rarely, if ever receive the wide acclaim, the exception being Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Martin Puryear, David Hammonds.

In the Biennale presentation of this talk, I showed slides by the following artists placing them in various categories:

Installation: Renée Green, Mildred Howard, Stephanie Johnson, Fred Wilson, Maren Hassenger, Houston Conwill, Adrian Piper, Carole Byard, Betye Saar, Randy Williams, David Hammonds.

Installation-painting: Raymond Saunders. Installation-sculpture/ assemblage: Leonardo Drew, Chakaia Booker, Kevin Sampson, Janet Henry, Renee Stout, Vladimir Cybil. Sculpture: Bessie Harvey, Elizabeth Catlett, Charles Searles, Allison Saar, Beverly Buchanan, Helen Ramsaran, Melvin Edwards, Tyrone Mitchell, Veronica Ryan.

Ceramic sculpture: Martha Jackson-Jarvis, Sama Musasana, Syd Carpenter.

Photography: Renée Cox, Lorna Simpson, Pat Ward Williams, Bill Gaskins, Carrie Mae Weems.

Painting-figurative: Whitfield Lovell, Philamona Williamson, Kerry James Marshall, Richard Yarde, Emma Amos, Samella Lewis, Herbert Gentry, Shirley Woodson, Vincent Smith, Valerie Maynard.

Abstraction: Sam Gilliam, Camille Brewer, Charles Burwell, Mary Lovelace O'Neal, Jack Whitten, Norman Lewis, Ed Clark, Nanette Carter, Allie Mc Gee, Carol Ann Carter, Carol Martin, Joe Overstreet, Al Loving, David Driskell. Candida Alvarez, Denyse Thomasos.

These African-American artists work within varied idioms of visual possibilities including abstraction, autobiography, issue-oriented work - work that explores various cultural traditions and utilises installation, photography, paintings drawing, assemblage, video and sculpture. Some use found objects such as rubber tyres, family memorabilia and popular culture sources such as advertising.

I have selected 10 artists from the above list and will very briefly discuss their work. In some cases I will discuss the specific slides that I showed at the Biennale conference and in other cases I will discuss the work in general.

Carole Byard lives and works in New York. She creates installations and sculpture from natural elements, including earth, wood, clay stone, sand, gourds, mud and wax. She avoids toxic commercial art materials and creates shrines and totemic forms about healing, ancestors, spirit, history and memory. Her works are reminiscent of Africa in spirit and craft while referring to urban life, bring the outdoors indoors.

Chakaia Booker lives and works in New York. *In Homage to Thy Mother*

(*Landscape*)1996 (96" x 192") and *Dialogue with Myself*1993 (84" x 48" x 48") Chakaia Booker utilises fragments of cast off rubber tyres(tires) from trucks and cars to construct a free standing or frieze of bulbous and attenuated sculptural forms. The surfaces flow in an unexpected syncopated melodic combination of shapes as in jazz. She refers to the tyre treads as being similar to abstract "African motifs used in fabrics and other artworks." Booker states that the tread patterns also remind her of scarification designs: 'The tire sculptures...are concerned with unmet needs...the need for nurturing, nutrition, the need to communicate, the need for warmth, the need for security and love"

Maren Hassinger lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland. She uses wire rope in indoor and outdoor installations as well as paper and natural materials like branches. In her *Weight of Dreams*, 1995 fax paper, 15' x 10' installed at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, a paper canopy was suspended from the ceiling and lit from above, creating a glowing environment. The spiritual component of her work includes the evocation of emotion and serenity that its often inherent in the work of African-American artists. Her titles are often poetic such as *Weight of Dreams* or *Treachery and Consolation*.

Martha Jackson-Jarvis lives and works in Washington DC She creates massive installations using clay, glass, cement, copper and wood. Her work reflects African-American southern traditions such as placing broken pottery on a grave. She often uses embellished coffin-like forms that have colourful sections of mosaic protrusions.

Carolyn Martin lives and works in New York. Her *Inspite of Everything...Anyway* 1995, charcoal on paper, 19" x 15" and *Jump Strange*.1995, charcoal on paper, 67" x 36" incorporate gestural organic forms created by lines drawn in charcoal. Writhing, twirling light and dark passages of sinuous forms seem imbued with a pulsating kinetic energy.

Valerie Maynard lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland. Her works on paper and sculpture envelop the viewer in her love of Africa. In her series *No Apartheid* she utilises sprayed acrylic and construction tools to invent configurations that create images of glowing masks and totems as well as burgeoning plant life.

Sana Musasama lives and works in New York. She creates ceramic sculpture installations that reflect her travels throughout the world. Earth colours and shapes from nature symbolise growth and imply solid roots. Her unusual tableaux utilise urn, plant vine, tree, and hand like forms, creating phantasmagoric flora.

Pat Ward Williams lives and works in California. She incorporates photographs and found elements like window panes and tar paper to create installation assemblages. She additionally includes text to empower the image with statements about racism as in *Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock*, 1986, 64" x 72". An African-American man is shown brutally lynched. Text in the work includes "screaming mouth...Who took this photograph?...Can you be Black and look at this without fear?"

Philamona Williams lives and works in New York. Her paintings are

autobiographical and portray her as a child playing games with a playmate, Figures and antique furniture or set in an askew environment) creating a tension that shifts the odd reality into, at times, the foreboding menace of a nightmare.

Helen Ramsaran lives and works in New York and is currently residing in Ghana, West Africa. She has travelled widely through Africa, China, and Japan. *Sanctuary-Sacred Grove*. 1994, bronze, 108" x 144," and *House of Healing Spirits*. 1993, bronze, 17" x 9" x 4" reflect her experiences in Africa and interest in architectural forms as well as scarification and design motifs of ceremonial symbols. Working with both intimate scale works and large scale environments, she states that she is interested in issues concerning the house, home, path to the home, and the community as well as in skeletal, wing, arrow and flame shapes.

This was first a Conference Paper from 'Trade Routes, History, Geography, Culture: Towards a Definition of Culture in the late 20th Century', Johannesburg Biennale, October 1997. It was updated with a postscript, Jan 2002, plus a second post-script, October 2007.

Howardena Pindell © 1998, updated 2002.

Postscript, Jan 2002

Rasheed Araeen in his article 'The Art of Benevolent Racism' in *Third Text* (London, Summer 2000) examines what he calls the "positive stereotype" which he feels is encouraged by "benevolent racism". The "positive stereotype" is the expectation that artists of color will create work about their ethnicity, therefore locating themselves outside of the mainstream, separate and different. The mainstream feels that it is not racist in encouraging and embracing the work, but if the mainstream embraces the work, it will not tolerate or acknowledge work by non-whites that is not ethnically based in difference. White artists, on the other hand, can create work which is avant-garde and addresses a wide range of issues.

The current situation, Araeen feels has increased in complexity as artists of color are up against both the white establishment as well as up against the new functionaries of color appointed to protect neo-colonial power and beliefs. In other words, artists of color are damned if they don't and damned if they do. The use of "negative stereotype" reproduces and perpetuates an "apartheid" imperialistic culture while the "positive stereotype" makes it look benign.

Postscript 2, October 2007

A Kara Walker one-person exhibition opened on 11 October 2007 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. There have been a flurry of articles about her work in the conservative white art and non-art press including *The New Yorker* and *Art in America*. I was invited since I am not "pro" to be interviewed by the conservative newspaper *The New York Sun* to take part in a web-based video about

Kara Walker's work. The video is supposed to include some of the people who support her work as well as those that question it. It is interesting to note that just before and after the opening of Kara Walker's exhibition there have been a series of bias/hate crimes at Columbia University (New York) where Kara Walker teaches, including a noose hung on the office door of another Black professor and swastikas drawn in a public bathroom. A Black sports team was scheduled to play in Staten Island, a predominantly white borough of New York, and someone had written the word "nigger" across the benches where they were to sit. The Black team won the game anyway. An Indian man was beaten in his housing complex in New York. These kinds of occurrences highlight the sobering fact that racism is alive and active.

I wrote the following in preparation for *The New York Sun* video interview and feel that it clarifies my position since my presentation at the 1997 conference during the Johannesburg Biennial, ten years ago. I stand by what I said earlier and submit to you my new observations:-

1. Kara Walker's work is being used as a weapon against the Black community in general to reinforce and maintain restrictions upon any visual dialogue with other artists of color and the wide range of work they produce.

2. The powers behind her who fund her work represent a backlash of the same order as that of the U.S. conservative congress that eliminated the funding for visual artists because of their use of sexually explicit material, their exploration of issues pertaining to homosexuality, their use of bodily fluids and emanations from the body such as urine and excrement (for example Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*) as well as their exploration of political issues too thorny for the conservative Right wing. This backlash is also against civil rights achievements, the women's movement and the movement to expose the abuse of women and children because it uses exploitative images of women and children without a counter visual dialogue or any dialogue at all in the same arena.

3. The 2000 pound elephant in the room is the pattern and practice of racism in the U.S. art world and the world in general. This includes white art dealers who wish to show non-whites being warned against it by other white dealers or being threatened. It includes the nearly white face of the staff in most U.S. cultural institutions. It includes the harassment of the few non-white staff who are employed by these institutions. It includes white staff in some cultural institutions objecting to their institutions being visited and utilized by non-whites. It includes the favoritism and lionization shown to artists of color who utilize negative racial stereotypes of their own people. It includes the refusal to fund and the ostracism of those who do not support this. It includes the active silencing or attempts to silence or open harassment of those who are critical of this situation and have a dissenting opinion and the stifling of dialogue with them unless the powers that be fund and control the discussion. It includes the open hostility, threats and retaliation faced by artists of color who work with issues seriously and directly such as slavery,

lynching, etc. but who do not use negative racial stereotypes, flip irony or humor. It also includes the erasure or boycotting of the work of artists of color who do not deal with issues of race or identity.

If the subjects of other holocausts were explored or presented in this manner would the embrace from the art world be as warm?

Postscript: November 2010

A number of individuals expressed a desire to be heard in print concerning Kara Walker. In 2009 Midmarch Arts Press (midmarchartspress.org/women.html) published *Kara Walker-No/ Kara Walker-Yes/ Kara Walker-?.* In the volume are 28 essays contributed by a diverse group of artists and art historians. There is also a blog, if you want to express your opinion one way or the other (anonymously, if you wish) The blog web address is <http://karawalker-no-yes.blogspot.com>. Shortly, my essay ('Kara Walker: Evasion/Denial/Privilege') which was too long for the book, will be released and will also be available from Midmarch Arts Press.

Notes

1. "Extreme Times Call for Extreme Heroes," *The International Review of African American Art (Stereotypes Subverted? or For Sale?)*(Hampton, Virginia), vol. 14, nn. 3 (1997).
2. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven: Yale University 1992, p.29.
3. Kara Walker, *Kara Walker*. Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1997
4. Ibid
5. Jerry Salz, 'Kara Walker; Ill-Will and Desire.' *Flash Art*, November/December (1996) p. 86.
6. Ibid
7. Ibid. p.84. Also see "Extreme Times Call for Extreme Heroes," *The International Review of African American Art (Stereotypes Subverted? or For Sale?)*(Hampton, Virginia), vol. 14, nn. 3 (1997).
- 8 Ibid, "Extreme Times Call for Extreme Heroes," p.10. Also see Bill Van Siclen, "Kara Walker's Racial Images Under Fire." *The Providence Sunday Journal*, May 10, 1998.
9. Bill Van Siclen, 'Kara Walker's Racial Images Under Fire' *The Providence Sunday Journal*, May 10, 1998.
10. Howardena Pindell, *Heart of the Question* New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997,
11. "Extreme Times Call for Extreme Heroes," p.12
12. bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999, p.160.
13. Telephone conversation with Michael Harris, August 1998.
14. Howardena Pindell, *Heart of the Question* p.4
15. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997, pp.18-19. I feel that this mind-set is also required for white supremacy to have continued its guilt free and remorse free enjoyment of ill gotten profit from past generations of exploitation and also the present exploitation of others.

16. Four symposia have been held concerning negative racial stereotypes. Two were organized by Ed Spriggs, director of Hammonds House in Atlanta, Georgia. *Stereotypes About Us By Us 1* was held October 26, 1997 and *Stereotypes About Us By Us, II* was held July 17, 1998. It was a "national debate with artists and cultural workers, on the use of derogatory images by Black artists." A symposium was held in New York City at the American Museum of Folk Art on December 10 1997. Harvard University held a symposium called 'Change the Joke and slip the Yoke' at the Fogg Museum in April 1998, during the Kara Walker exhibition at Harvard's Carpenter Center. It was less a debate and more public relations event for negative racial stereotypes. It was co-sponsored by Harvard's W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African-American Culture and funded by Kara Walker's main promoters, collectors, and funders: Lewis Manilow and the Peter Norton Family Foundation. Lewis Manilow explained on a panel how he has promoted Kara Walker's work and how he personally arranged the show at Harvard, exhibiting the work that he owns. One white male panelist in response to an African-American artist's comment from the audience that the symposium was an insult to the black community was told that it is backward and old fashioned to care about the community (See Ronald Jones, "Crimson Herring: Slant Ronald Jones on "Black Kike Who?" *Artforum* Summer 1998, p. 17 and Bill Van Siclen, "Kara Walker's Racial Images Under Fire," *The Providence Sunday Journal* May 10 1998. In 1998 the Hampton University Museum published an issue of the *International Review of African American Art* which included commentary and reactions to the work of Michael Ray Charles and Kara Walker as well as a dialogue between Lowery Sims, 20th Century Curator at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and Michael Harris a professor of art history at the University of North Carolina, in Chapel Hill, concerning negative racial stereotypes in "fine art and popular culture."

17. *International Review of African American Art*, Hampton University Museum Hampton, Virginia 23668 USA.

18. *Artist and Influence*, Hatch Billops Collection, 491 Broadway, New York, New York 10012 USA.

19. *Third Text*, P.O. Box 35097, London, NW6 3PQ, United Kingdom.

20. *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 247 Carlton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11205 USA.

21. *Atlanticus*, Centro Atlantic de Arte Moderno, Los Balcones 9Y 11, 35001, Las Palmas de Grand Canaria.

22. *Diaspora News*, 190 Maple Street, Brooklyn, New York 11225,USA/

23. *Godzilla*, P.O. Box 1116, New York, New York 10276 USA.

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n.paradoxa : Issue No.7, August 1998 and revised.

Uncanny Resemblances

Sally Mann's *Immediate Family* (Phaidon 1991)

Jane Fletcher

Already, there is something tiresomely familiar about Sally Mann's *Immediate Family* and the controversy it provoked. It is as if the criticism that closed in on her photographs exhausted their potential in a hopeless attempt to establish a black and white argument concerning pornography, photography and representations of children. The result is that few people look at Mann's images anymore. However, I believe that Mann's photographs of her children remain the key to more curious and less reductive debates about childhood (and motherhood) than many reactions to date have provided. There is a potency that resides in the contradictions that characterise Mann's images. *Immediate Family* situates traditionally opposing 'states' and attitudes side by side in an, albeit turbulent, relationship which challenges the usual logic of binary opposites. Likewise, by considering Mann's images in terms of H el ene Cixous' interpretation of the Uncanny, a more fluid, if necessarily unstable, reading of *Immediate Family* can be produced. Cixous is a philosopher, novelist and critic who champions a form of 'feminine writing' which undermines the logic of patriarchal thought. Her analysis of Sigmund Freud's 'The Uncanny' opens up possibilities for a 'feminist'¹ re-evaluation of Mann's photographs by refusing to submit to the 'laws' of 'patriarchal binary thought'.² Significantly, such an interpretation also corresponds to the 'duality of perception' that Mann considers best describes her own work.

Sally Mann lives in Virginia, USA. She has exhibited and taught all over the States. Her work can be found in various collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Likewise, *Immediate Family* needs to be considered within the cultural and social climate that produced it; an America which was busy legislating to prevent

Federal Funds being used to "promote, disseminate or produce" material depicting "sodomasochism, homo-eroticism, the exploitation of children or individuals engaged in sex acts".³ In *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* Anne Higonnet gives a fascinating history of the invention of 'Romantic Childhood' in the 18th Century and its current crisis as we move towards the millennium.⁴ Towards the end of the book Higonnet presents a detailed account of the various bills and key legal cases in the States⁵ that focused on the issue of child pornography, and describes their implications in relation to child nudity, photography and the fears and reality of paedophilia. Carefully differentiating between crimes against children and interpretations of photographs, Higonnet states, 'The Child Pornography Act ... was passed in October 1996, tucked into an ominous spending bill. Punishable by penalties ranging from five to thirty years, child pornography had come to mean any image of any child's body.'⁶ The primary concern feeding this legislation is whether the availability of child pornography results in direct child abuse. Legislating against photographs of children is problematic, however, and depends amongst other things on the contentious definition of what constitutes pornography. Photographs of children engaged in sexual acts are one thing. Photographs of naked children are another. In the former case, the crime has been committed. The photograph is evidence. In the latter, it is left the judgement of another to determine whether a crime will occur as a direct result of visual stimulation, and what provides that stimulation.

The child pornography debate is not exclusively American. In 1996 the king of Belgium called for a 'moral revival' after the 'child murderer, rapist and pornographer' Marc Dutoux had been ineptly prosecuted.⁷ The same year, delegates from 122 countries gathered in Stockholm for the first World Congress on the Commercial Exploitation of Children. As California considered chemical castration for child molesters and fears of a paedophile ring in Scotland escalated, an advert in the British Press read "Channel 4 Television seeks parents (including fathers) ... for a documentary about the dilemmas of dealing with intimacy in the family. Are you uncomfortable about bathing or sleeping with your children? Have you stopped taking photos of them naked?"⁸ (my emphasis). Photographs of children and child pornography were quickly becoming synonymous.⁹

The depicted nudity and Lolita-like sexuality of Sally Mann's children in certain photographs has concerned critics, as has the transferral of 'private' family imagery into the public domain. (Interestingly, Mann sought the advice of a lawyer prior to publication.) The reception of her work reflects the contemporary concerns about child abuse and the nature of childhood. More often than not, criticism of her photographs has occupied two diametrically opposed positions regarding censorship of images in relationship to the exploitation and abuse of children. Such criticism has tended to negate the

subtlety of Mann's work. Sally Mann's representations of childhood depict child sexuality and innocence. This duality is important and representative of a series of dualities present in the making of and content of her photographs.

My intention is to present an interpretation of three of Mann's photographs informed by Cixous' reading of the Uncanny in her paper 'Fictions and its Phantoms' (1976) and, in particular, the significance she attaches to a key motif in E T A Hoffmann's *The Sandman*.¹⁰ My purpose is not to attach Cixous' theory to Mann's imagery but rather to demonstrate how through a textual knot of references and associations Mann's images can be accessed in a manner which prevents closure precisely through the blurring of boundaries that Cixous advocates. Cixous states that Western philosophical and literary thought is tied to binary oppositions (man/woman, Activity/Passivity, Culture/Nature, Head/Emotions) which, in turn, prop up value-systems within patriarchal society. In contrast, to allow the co-existence of what is traditionally considered diametrically opposed, is to offer an alternative and useful paradigm of thought. Mann's photographs exhibit blatant and difficult contradictions. I believe Cixous' analysis of the Uncanny allows for these contradictions to co-exist while subverting the unifying logic of Freudian analysis and patriarchal thought.

I will begin with a summary of Sigmund Freud's description of the Uncanny, followed by Cixous' critique. I will then present an analysis of three of Mann's photographs, *The Wet Bed*, *Fallen Child* and *Virginia in the Sun*, using the 'doll motif' derived from Cixous' interpretation of *The Sandman*. I will conclude by considering Mann's role as mother and photographer, and photography's relation to the 'real'.

In the introduction to *Immediate Family*, Mann writes, 'we are spinning a story of what it is to grow up. It is a complicated story and sometimes we try to take on the grand themes: anger, love, death, sensuality, and beauty.' Such lyricism characterises Mann's foreword, a text that incorporates ludicrous anecdote, elaborate myth-making as well as some reproductions of 'sculptures' made by her father. (This body of 'whimsical art' includes a petrified dog turd and a headless mannequin with a skeleton hand scratching at its sealed plastic crutch.) However, Mann's description of Beckett's madman (who sees ashes where there is ripening corn) and her translation of the Japanese term for dual perception: beauty tinged with sadness, corresponds with aspects of Cixous' interpretation of the Uncanny through which some of the most haunting of Mann's images can be accessed. That Mann's introduction somehow mirrors her photographs, and that her photographs are metonymically constructed out of the psychic debris of personal histories, visual remnants, 'individual' fantasies and cultural memories, further situates her imagery within the psycho-analytical paradigm which stresses association and misrecognition and where the familiar becomes unfamiliar and potentially disturbing. That is, the Uncanny.

Sigmund Freud begins his description of the Uncanny with an extended dictionary definition of heimlich and unheimlich (literally (un)homelike). Its purpose

is to demonstrate that 'among its different shades of meaning the word heimlich exhibits one which is identical to its opposite, unheimlich...'¹¹ While denying the possibility that fairy tales might provoke the Uncanny, it is through a psycho-analytical reading of E T A Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman* that Freud chooses to locate and demonstrate the nature and cause of uncanniness.

To summarise *The Sandman* requires a selectivity that invariably privileges the significance of any one motif in a complex story. Freud's own summary has been ruthlessly criticised. He locates the Uncanny, in Hoffmann's narrative, in the fear of losing one's eyes which, he states, is a metaphorical substitute for the fear of castration. According to Hélène Cixous, Freud's 're-writing' of Hoffmann's tale transforms the story into "a linear, logical account of Nathaniel (the protagonist),...strongly articulated as a kind of case-history, going from childhood remembrances to the delirium and the ultimate tragic end."¹² She claims Freud brings the 'fantastic' back to the 'rational' and 'minimises the uncertainty revolving around Olympia', Hoffmann's automaton or doll.

The event that triggers Nathaniel's first bout of insanity in *The Sandman* is the barometer man calling at his house. Nathaniel believes that "he has recognised the phantom of horror from his childhood in the itinerant optician, Coppola."¹³ He believes Coppola is Coppelius, alchemist and lawyer and the man he blames for his father's mysterious death many years previously.

Nathaniel's fear of the sandman,¹⁴ of Coppola, Coppelius and of the dark holes which signify Olympia's lifeless eyes-sockets, converge in a hallucinatory nightmare so that Nathaniel, raging and deranged, is taken to the madhouse. For Freud, this demonstrates that 'the feeling of the Uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the sandman', that is, to the idea of losing one's eyes. Cixous argues that this account ignores the complexity of *The Sandman*, and that the many themes running through Hoffmann's tale are lost in Freud's search for a unifying solution to the problem of the Uncanny.

The Uncanny is characterised by a Strangeness that elides resolution and which shifts between the traditionally fixed boundaries of what is considered to be 'real' and what is thought to be 'imaginary'. The Uncanny "uncovers what is hidden (anxiety) and by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar."¹⁵ Nathaniel almost personifies 'uncanniness' in his inability to determine what 'is' and what 'seems'. He cannot distinguish fact from fiction. Such is the significance of his love for Olympia in Hoffmann's fantastic tale. The lovely Olympia is a monstrous creation of a certain Prof. Spalanzani (aided and abetted, probably, by Coppelius/Coppola). Nathaniel's love for Olympia is dependent on, and demonstrates, his inability to recognise that she is an automaton (or 'doll'). Olympia inhabits a strange space somewhere between the boundary of (in)animate.

According to Jentsch, whom Freud quotes before dismissing, the most successful device for creating uncanny effects is the ability to leave the reader in an "uncertainty

as to whether a particular figure in [a] story is a human being or an automaton." ¹⁶ Jentsch adds that "Hoffmann has repeatedly employed this psychological artifice with success in his fantastic narratives". He also states that waxes and ingeniously constructed dolls provoke intellectual uncertainty in the viewer because they engender doubts as to whether they are 'living or inanimate'.¹⁷ It is this uncertainty that Cixous focuses on in contradistinction to Freud's emphasis on the (male-orientated) fear of castration.

The episode with Olympia is actually very funny to read, although evidently confusing and threatening for the silly and vain Nathaniel. (Olympia tends to resemble Aunt Sally in the mind's eye rather than some sinister demon-toy more characteristic of contemporary horror.) Nevertheless, as Freud's definition of heimlich reveals, the Uncanny belongs to the 'class' of frightening things; repressed fears that resurface. It 'arouses dread and horror' even if the repressed emotional impulse was not originally anxiety-provoking. The Uncanny can also be defined as residing in 'primitive thought' or superstition. It triggers emotional disturbances returning us to repressed phases in our evolution. Thus, I would argue that Olympia, apparently undaunting in herself, triggers in the reader a chain of associations which return him/her to a repressed and pre-logical mode of thought. The effect of Olympia is to unleash a chain of associations or irrational fears that disturb the equilibrium of our apparently rational thought. Although superficially not especially frightening, Olympia remains the perpetrator who traverses the border between the animate and the inanimate. While the reader is aware that Olympia is an automaton, she courts 'the old, discarded beliefs' that the dead can return. In doing so she allows further hidden anxieties - repressed infantile complexes to surface. Like Victor Burgin's description of photography and dream, Olympia is a detail in a literary composition, an 'element' in a 'rebus', who becomes the manifestation of latent fears.¹⁸

Hélène Cixous refutes Freud's 'finding' that Olympia is "nothing else than a personification of Nathaniel's feminine attitude to his father in his infancy" ¹⁹ in order to stress the significance of Olympia as one who subverts the border dividing life and death. For Cixous, the doll's animation signifies a blurring of boundaries and encapsulates the notion of metamorphosis where divisions cease to be absolute. This idea parallels the shifting meaning of heimlich, which transforms itself into its opposite. Olympia's animation defies the binary opposites of 'rational' thought, and in doing so, introduces the Uncanny into Hoffmann's tale.

Crucial to Cixous' analysis is her belief that it is through Olympia that death is signified, while not being directly represented. Such a statement requires justification. Cixous equates the Uncanny with thoughts of mortality and death. But death has no representation. It "signifies without being signified."²⁰ Likewise, the Uncanny (and death) must be arrived at metonymically. The doll evokes uncanniness because its artificial life signifies death. If the Uncanny signals a regressive return to 'primitive thought' where impossibility is not restricted by

rationality, the primitive fear of the living dead surfaces in the face of the automaton because, by transgressing the border between life and death, the animated doll "asserts a gap where one would like to be assured of unity."²¹

Sally Mann's photographs contain a dual perception of 'beauty and sadness', as she states "of innocence and sexuality, youth (life) and death, as I claim". Their meanings shift continually across the prescribed boundaries of what 'is' and what 'seems', often entering proscribed territory. Like the madman in Beckett's endgame, her photographs lead us from a visual confirmation of (young) life and youthful bodies, to a deep-seated fear of death.

Virginia is Mann's youngest child. *The Wet Bed*, *Virginia in the Sun* and *Fallen Child* all depict her motionless. Though everyday events, which according to Mann, every mother has seen, the photographs provoke a feeling of strangeness, a 'dread and horror' which is elusive but insistent. At a glance, despite the beautiful arrangement of the child and her hair, the cut grass that zigzags across Virginia's back in *Fallen Child* resembles razor cuts that puncture the aestheticism of the photograph and call up images of violence incised into the body.

The Wet Bed depicts Virginia asleep on a stained mattress, a stain which is explained away by the picture's title and the youth of the child, as an ordinary accident. She is naked and asleep. In some respects this is a touching image, but it is also a taboo image, something only the family should see. It is disconcerting because of the contradictory states of childish innocence and adult sexuality that it simultaneously points to. Virginia is painfully vulnerable, but she lies with her 'legs apart' in a grotesque visual parody of that which the phrase connotes. Further associations register in the mind; involuntary urination is often a part of the process of dying. Likewise, Virginia's smallness and her deep sleep recall the post-mortem photography of dead babies and children, suspended for ever in the euphemism that describes 'death' as 'sleep'. *The Wet Bed* evokes death, and holds it in an unstable and troubling relationship with sexuality. It is tender and terrible simultaneously. The familiar becomes unnervingly unfamiliar.

In *Virginia in the Sun*, Virginia is probably awake; her fist is clenched. Despite the title, there is little indication that she is Virginia nor that the picture was made in sunlight. It is dark and eerie. The folds in the thin veil of cloth that covers the unidentifiable, faceless body resemble a fine network of blood vessels. For this reason, the image is reminiscent of Lennart Nilsson's photographs of the child in the womb. In contrast, it also evokes death through the rigidity of the pose that resembles rigor mortis, a still-born rather than an unborn child.

Resemblances are integral to the Uncanny. Sarah Kofman states that what causes Nathaniel so much distress is the tendency of figures to 'merge into one another'.²² Olympia resembles a beautiful woman; Coppélius is Coppola is the sandman. Confusion does not only arise from mistaken identities, but also from misinterpreted states of being. Everything and everyone resembles something or someone else.

Everything and everyone reminds us of something other. Nothing is certain. Everything is ambiguous. The photographs of Virginia resemble, at times, an unborn child and a dead one.

That Cixous places so much emphasis on Olympia is particularly interesting when considering these three images by Sally Mann's in relation to the uncanniness they provoke. In *The Wet Bed* there is a doll lying face down in the shadow of the bed. It is a detail that may be easily overlooked, and yet I consider it to be essential to the analysis so far. By attributing to the doll in *The Wet Bed* the characteristics attributed to Olympia in Cixous' discussion of the Uncanny, the discarded toy acts as a pivot on which these three images hinge. The doll signifies, through a process of displacement, that which cannot be signified: death. She/it is also a visual synecdoche whose ambiguous status (in\animate) functions as a detail which represents the ambiguity that the photographs display en masse.

Fallen Child initiates a confusion in the spectator provoked by the uncertainty as to what the lines on Virginia's back represent. In *The Wet Bed* death confronts the viewer through a chain of associations that manifest themselves in the sleeping child's body. In *Virginia in the Sun* death is 'encountered' through the irrational fear of that which is literally and metaphorically veiled, and which cannot be mastered by sight or represented except through a process of mental displacement. Death permeates Mann's pictures, yet can only be arrived at metonymically, an idea made manifest by the inclusion of the doll in *The Wet Bed*.

Cixous' analysis of the Uncanny (unlike Freud's) provides a space to explore contradictions and dichotomies which critics often seek to minimalise. It is part of her larger theoretical project which aims to undermine the "binary schemes where logocentricism colludes with phallogentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women"²³ By allowing us to think beyond binary oppositions, Cixous enables us to accommodate the contradictions that Mann and her images exhibit: sexuality/innocence, mortality immortality sophistication/naiveté. Confronted with the explosive subjects of child nudity, sexuality and 'death-by-proxy' there is the tendency to over-rationalise *Immediate Family*, to deny the (irrational?) fears they provoke in the twentieth century viewer. As Mavor points out, however, "a rational discourse [...] blocks our way to confronting the contradictions that [the] pictures play out."²⁴ The particular contradictions that are peculiar to our period need to be acknowledged rather than disavowed and displaced onto related, but not equivalent, debates. Mann expresses the contradictions that are inherited from a romantic myth that positions children as sexless and childhood as eternal. In doing so, she reveals and perpetuates simultaneously a crisis in how we depict and consume pictures of children.

For Cixous and other French feminists, women speak differently from men²⁵ and this potentially fertile 'difference' should be exploited and championed. It is in this context that I want to turn to the issue of Mann as mother and photographer. It is no coincidence that Mann, as one who moves across a set of prescribed opposites herself

artist/creator v. mother/procreator - should engage with the contradictions of childhood that her children exhibit. Nor, unfortunately, is it a surprise that critics accused her of bad-mothering in a final attempt to discredit her troubling images. Traditional psychoanalysis has tended to endorse the (already established) idea that a "motherly woman can give up her other interests in favour of the reproduction function."²⁶ The Victorians firmly believed that "mothers must not dream of activity beyond the domestic sphere until their families are grown."²⁷ Art and motherhood are traditionally considered naturally and diametrically opposed.²⁸

That Mann's position as mother of her photographed subjects altered the manner in which her photographs were viewed is evident in her complaint lodged with Anna Douglas in 1994 during an interview.²⁹ (It also points to the blurring of another boundary, the boundary between reality and representation which is inherent in the photographic medium.) Mann is quoted as saying, 'I am so grateful to Val Williams who never assumed I was a bad mother. She understands that all photography is fiction.' Mann's statement is curious, and I feel, misleading. It implies that Williams dismisses the charges of bad mothering because all photography is fiction. If photographs are fictions, then Mann's 'real-life' role as a mother is not implicated by her images. The roles of mother and photographer (read 'artist') remain distinct and maternal duty is not compromised. However, if we acknowledge that the distinction made between photographer and mother is not in actuality clear cut but belongs, instead, to a specific system of binary thought, *Immediate Family* once again subverts an ideal; the ideal of motherhood.

Sally Mann's photographs confound idealised notions of children and childhood. Furthermore, they explode myriad myths of mothering. Historically, the ideal of woman has closely mirrored the romance of childhood; ³⁰ 'ladies' were pure and innocent, aligned with nature rather than culture. In addition, the 'mother' has been set up as "selfless guardian of the domestic sanctuary."³¹ *Immediate Family* violates sentimentalised images of childhood and also dispels notions of the mother as secondary to the child: secondary and silenced. Mann is an ambitious practitioner and a proud mother. Her desires are ambivalent and ambiguous yet she confidently articulates them simultaneously displaying astonishing technical skill. Like the fictional mother in Rosellen Brown's novella, *Housekeeping*,³² Mann combines photography and motherhood to produce an alternative discourse of childhood and maternity. To mother and to photograph cease to be two distinct occupations; they sustain one another. In doing so, they upset our cherished ideas about what motherhood and childhood should entail. *Immediate Family* is important because it subverts patriarchal ideals and reveals in its contradictions.

Finally, it is fitting that the 'collapse' of boundaries which characterises Mann's images (between children and adults, mothers and artists, life and death) should be played out through the photographic medium. Photography's relation to the real has always been disputed. Linked to its referent like a child is linked to its mother,³³

the photograph is both truth and not truth, reality and representation. It also always figures death through a metonymic chain of associations.³⁴ Using photography and depicting an apparently unorthodox vision of childhood, Mann speaks "a surprising mother-tongue that enlarges our vision of the relationship that motherhood, sensuality, sexuality and death share."³⁵ Significantly, it is a vision that Mann finds most lyrically worded in a foreign language, not her mother-tongue: "The Japanese have a word for this dual perception: *mono no aware*. It means something like 'beauty tinged with sadness'³⁶

Sally Mann's *Immediate Family* is riddled with contradictions about childhood, motherhood and photographic representation. Simultaneously seductive and horrifying, hers are uncanny images that disturb and challenge the viewer at every level. By engaging with Cixous' interpretation of the Uncanny and the implications of her text (which explicitly criticises Freud's analysis) I believe that Mann's images can be 'liberated' from the general criticism that persists in limiting their expression. This is not to advocate an uncritical celebration of what either Mann or Cixous offers us, but to acknowledge the danger of foreclosure through patriarchal discourse and recognise a potential, 'feminine' alternative to it.³⁷

This essay was developed from the author's MA dissertation entitled 'Grim Fairy Tales?; The Uncanny Effect of Sally Mann's *Immediate Family*' MA in Social History of Art, University of Leeds, September 1996 revised July 1998

Notes

1. Cixous adamantly denies being a feminist where she see feminists as being women who want to hold power within a patriarchal order. She is, however, fully supportive of the women's movement. Toril Moi writes in her thorough criticism of Cixous, "Her refusal of the label 'feminism' is first and foremost based on a definition of 'feminism' as a bourgeois, egalitarian demand for women to obtain power in the present patriarchal system" (*Sexual Textual Politics*, 1985, p.103) and "I have therefore no intention of following Cixous' lead on this point: according to accepted English usage, her indubitable commitment to the struggle for women's liberation in France, as well as her strong critique of patriarchal modes of thought, make her a feminist." (ibid. p.104)

2. ibid

3. *Creative Camera* (10/1989) p.5

4. A. Higonnet *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (Thames and Hudson, 1998)

5. These include *New York v. Ferber* in 1982 and *Massachusetts v. Bakes* in 1989, *Knox v. the United States* 1991

6. ibid p.185

7. This information is derived from Higonnet ibid

8. *The Guardian* 28 8 96

9. For further reading on the controversy sparked by *Immediate Family* in Britain see B. Campbell

and V. Williams 'Immediate Family' *Portfolio* Vol 17 pp 19-14 and pp 15- 16; E. Cooper 'Family Affairs' *Creative Camera* Dec/Jan 1994 pp46; A. Douglas, 'Childhood: A Molotov Cocktail for Our Time and Blood Ties: An Interview with Sally Mann' *Women's Art Magazine* No 59 pp.14-18, 20-1 and 'The Dangers of Masquerade' *Creative Camera* Aug/Sep 1994 p.42 and V. Williams, 'Childish Pursuit' *Creative Camera* Feb/Mar 1993 p50.

10. Hoffmann, E T A (1982) *Tales of Hoffmann*

11. Freud, S (1985) *Freud: Art and Literature* Penguin p.345

12. Cixous, H (1976) 'Fictions and its Phantoms' *New Literary History* Vol 7 p.533

13. Freud, S op cit. p.350

14. a 'wicked man who comes after children when they won't go to bed and throws sand in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bloody...' according to Hoffmann

15. Jackson, R (1981) *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.65

16. Freud S op. cit. pp.347-8

17. Barthes and Rilke have also written on the 'unnerving' resemblances of dolls and waxes to real figures.

18. (ed) Burgin, V (1982) *Thinking Photography* p.211

19. Cixous, H. op cit p. 538

20. ibid p.543

21. Jackson, R op cit p.68

22. Kotman, S (1990) *Freud and Fiction*

23. Moi T. op cit p.105

24. Mavor, C. op cit p.9

25. For Cixous, 'feminine writing' does not exclude the possibility of male 'authors', however, she believes that "writing is produced and understood in relation to the body" Sarap, M (1988) *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism* p.112

26. Hélène Deutsch quoted in Suleiman, S R (1994) *Risking Who One is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* p.19

27. ibid

28. The dilemma is visible in the practice of Julia Margaret Cameron who, portrayed as an eccentric yet ardent 'amateur' photographer, nevertheless waited until her children were grown up before developing her passion for the medium. In fact, her camera was a gift from one of her daughters, to provide Cameron with an occupation once her days of 'mothenng' were over.

29. Douglas, A (1994) *Women's Art Magazine* No 59 pp14- 18 Accusations of bad mothering ranged from an the general irresponsibility of placing these images in the public domain to specific photographic instances where, for instance, Mann apparently photographed a bloody nose before cleaning it up.

30. Higonnet writes with regard Thomas Lawrence's Portrait of Mrs. John Angerstein and her son John Julius William (1799), "When we look at John Julius William alongside his mother, Mrs Angerstein, their double portrait makes adult femininity childhood look similar: flimsy white gowns with high waists, short sleeves and sashes."

31. Higonnet, A ibid p196

32. summarised in Suleiman op cit.

33. This wonderful analogy is made by Mavor, in her usual inimitable style, "Like a photograph, the child is always connected to its referent: its mother. A photograph carries its referent with it, just as a mother carries her child with her body, even after birth." op cit p53

34. For a lyrical discussion of photography and death see Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* for example.

35. Mavor C op cit. p.57

36. from the introduction to *Immediate Family*. My interest in Mann's use of a foreign language to describe her practice is greatly influenced by Ulrike Sieglorh's interesting analysis in 'Focus on the Maternal: Female Subjectivity and images of motherhood' *Nexus* (London: Scarlet Press, 1998)

37. As a last word I would like to quote Toril Moi on Cixous, a final twist in the plot. "Her style is often intensely metaphorical, poetic and explicitly anti-theoretical, and her central images create a dense web of signifiers that offers no obvious edge to seize hold of for the analytically minded critic...Cixous believes neither in theory nor analysis (though she does practise both); nor indeed, does she approve of feminist analytical discourses: she is, after all, the woman who first flatly declared that "I am not a feminist" (...) and later went on to say that "I do not have to produce theory" op cit. pp.102-3

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n.paradoxa : Issue No. 7, 1998

Female Art through the Looking Glass

Suzana Milevska

This text is attempt to consider the problems of understanding the difference between male and female ways of creation with consciousness but the result is not going to be any final and clear distinction. My argument about how gender is treated in the work of Macedonian artists follows from the debate on the pages of the Nordic magazine *Siksi* in three recent issues.

The discussion started when the British feminist art critic Katy Deepwell published the text "Sassy, or not?" in the winter issue of the magazine in 1996. The text was a critical essay on the exhibition *Body as Membrane* (Kunsthallen Klaedefabrik, Odense, 1996). Starting with the comparisons both between 1970s and the 1990s feminist art and across different national socio-economic structures she tried to locate the differences mostly between European and Anglo-American reception of women's art. The main point she argued was that recent body and performance art and its revival could offer a possible site for gendering the art against the neutralized art made by women. The danger, according to Deepwell (returning to Lucy Lippard's arguments from the 1970s) is that the reception of the most female art dealing with the body is caught in the vicious circle of being narcissistic and exhibitionist given that it is seen as arising from a neurotic dissatisfaction with self. The key question in this debate becomes whether the main aim of the art of women is able to escape the patriarchal structures of interpretation and whether it can offer any possibilities of liberation. The critique of representation and stereotypes of femininity often work differently both for male and female reception of this problematic.

The best proof that this question is not easy to answer is the fact that after the

publishing the text by Katy Deepwell, the magazine received several articles. The most striking was the text by Kristine Stiles ('The Empty Slogan of Self-Representation', *Siksi*, Spring, 1997) whose essay was cut from the catalogue of the exhibition *Body as Membrane* that was the main subject for Katy Deepwell's article. The reason that her article was censored (or edited as it was argued in the another occasion at The New Museum for Contemporary Art in New York where a similar act of "censorship" happened) was the too "angry and defensive" tone of the essay that criticised the way that the participants of the show were perceiving and representing their own bodies. How female art is perceived by others is its central question. The perceiving the female art by the audience and professionals is a problem that goes together with the conception and perception of the artists themselves because they are part of the same context.

When we talk about the differences in various social and national environments for the reception of the same artworks, I would like to stress that in the polemics that I started with it was not mentioned the biggest difference that could be seen in today's art and art theory is the difference between the feminine art in the Western world and that in the Eastern European societies. Some of the arguments of the last published text in *Siksi* ('Fishy Bodies and Closed Minds' by Tania Orum (*Siksi*, Summer, 1997), I believe, could be used more generally. Namely, the most important problem that arises in each society considering the representation of the different sexes is not only who has the power to represent but also how deep is established the semiotics of meaning that directs the way the signs are read "as if it produces the same signifying structure whether created by men or women"(Orum).

The art critics from the Eastern post communist societies often use as a differential point between West and East, the fact that the legal status of the women in the communist societies was much more developed and their social rights were taken care of. The laws and social policies were in favour of a new developed image of the women not only seen as mother and wife but also as an equal creator of the new society. This made-up character was needed in order to employ this half of the society in the hard battle for new values. Women were seen as being mothers and as the central pivot of education in the less developed societies and the government of the new empowering state was clever enough to use these strategies as the best way to raise a new generation. The only problem is that this division of the power of representation did not change the chain of signification as this was established much deeper than the vision itself.

In the East, the main victims of the dissimulating power of this deliberation of representation are the women artists themselves who do believe that there is no need for reflection on the gender difference. Not taking account of the fact that there is no law which can create a site for identification and subjectivisation, they avoid any issue which relates their works with everyday life. This is almost the totally opposite practice to the one in the West where the radical approach of the feminists caused a paradoxical emerging of their discourse in a vulgar exploitative system of signification.

This brief outline of the differences in the perception of the female art within different social contexts does not sound very optimistic. It seems that the arguments offered in the Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 1997) may shed some more light on this non-decipherable puzzle. She examines the question how it is possible that, even given in their own hands the power of representation, this can turn into a prison for the women by considering the thesis that for constitution of the subject an external power is needed. The formation of the self is conditioned by the existence of some forceful power that creates the consciousness and the conscience (psyche) itself which then anchors that power within subjectivity. This vicious circle had been used in the so-called "socialist" societies: in so far as the power of representation was deliberately given up and this caused a deprivation of this external power which would help the women to establish a critical view of the gender policy.

In what I have just said, I am not negating the possibility for exceptions to this general rule. There are some women who deal with strong socially engaged issues in their art work but the motivation for this creative method comes from a mostly metaphysical and mythic approach toward gender and the question of female art creators lies often outside of this argument: whether it is the only way to court the foreign art institutions or curators or it is a subconscious following of trends. I am not saying that an honest feminist approach is not possible at all but I am only trying to find the reason why whenever asked about their art as being female the most prominent female artists in Macedonia and in other Eastern countries answer that they feel their art is sexless and does not have anything to do with the fact that they are women.

This issue is not only relevant because of the contemporary flourishing of the art created by women but also because there were several events that signified that the female artists from Macedonia at this moment are often present in the international and local art scene. Namely, artists as Aneta Svetieva, Zaneta Vangeli and Iskra Dimitrova are very often presented at some major exhibitions abroad, and, alongside these women, at the group exhibitions in the country a very high percentage of the art works are by women artists. Recently (in 1996) there was a big international group exhibition organized both in Skopje - Macedonia and Providence - USA which included only female artists.

This project had a particularly typical feminist title chosen by an artist, it was called *Liquor Amnii (Amniotic Fluid)* and the work of the artists included raised many questions. The Macedonian artists were included in the two exhibitions held in 1996 in the Old Turkish bath Cifte Amam during the Skopje Summer Festival and in Providence at the bank of the Providence River during the Convergence X Festival. The artists were for the first time put in a position to explain their work to the audience when the Mobius artists group organised a lecture on the project at their Art Center in Boston. A further lecture on the project was organized at SCCA in Skopje

on the artists' way back to Skopje, after the accomplishing of the whole project. It is very important to state that the Macedonian artists' presentations of their works differed from the presentations by the American artists in terms of the importance they gave to the issue of gender in their work: while most of the works by the American artists: Margaret B. Tittmore, Meredith Davis, Marilyn Arsem, Cathy Nolan and Mary Novotny Jones were dealing with some social or historical problems connected with the gender difference, the Macedonian artists Zaneta Vangeli, Iskra Dimitrova, Mirna Arsovska, Margarita Kiselicka Kalajdieva and Nora Stojanovic did not put emphasis on this difference but they presented their work as dealing with mostly symbolic, mythological and artistic structures and concerns. Only Nora Stojanovic, who was the youngest and least experienced, was influenced by her foreign colleagues and during the stay in USA she changed and expanded her project and its discursive explanation to the examine how the representation of women in the male and patriarchal societies was largely treated as flesh. More typical however of the indifferent approach to the feminist issues is Aneta Svetieva, who represented Macedonia at the Venice Biennial 1997, and in the program on local TV A1 "Ars Futura" she claimed complete negation of the importance of her sex in her art concepts.

Gender and sexual difference would be discussed more if this intimate approach should be taken as only relevant interpretation of an account of the art works themselves. Namely, the art cycles by Aneta Svetieva *The Beauty and the Beast* which explicitly deal with the question of the fear from the other, or Iskra Dimitrova's project which examines ambivalence in the sexual difference in her work *Androgin*. Many others could also be interpreted as influenced by women artists who proclaim their work as feminist. Still, the thesis of this short text is not to argue for any relativistic interpretation but to highlight the individual conceptualisation of gender or sexual difference by the artists themselves.

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n.paradoxa : Issue No.7 , 1998

OUT OF ACTION / OUT OF MIND

Katy Deepwell

A review of *Out of Actions - Aktionismus, Body Art & Performance, 1949-1979*

MAK, Vienna in conjunction with MOCA, Los Angeles. (MOCA, Los Angeles 8/2/98-10/5/98 ; MAK, Vienna 17/6/98-6/9/98 ; Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona 15/10/98-6/1/99; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo 11/2/99-11/4/99). Catalogue : Edited by Paul Schimmel, with essays by Shinichiro Osaki, Hubert Klocker, Guy Brett, Kristine Stiles (forward: Peter Noever, Richard Koshalek)

36 Women Artists / 155 Artists in Total = 23%

Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconci, Genpei Akasegawa, Laurie Anderson, Eleanor Antin, Rasheed Areeen, Mowry Baden, Artur Barrio, Jerzy Beres, Mark Boyle & Joan Hills, George Brecht, Stuart Brisley, Robert Delford Brown, Rhet Delford Brown, Gunter Brus, Chris Burden, James Lee Byars, John Cage, Marc Camille Chamowicz, Lygia Clark Pinchas Cohen Gan, Houston Conwill, Paul Cotton, Coum Transmissions, Guy de Cointet, Jim Dine, John Duncan, Felipe Ehrenberg, Roberto Evangelista, Valie Export, Robert Filiou, Rose Finn-Kelvey, Sherman Fleming, Lucio Fontana, Terry Fox, Howard Fried, Gideon Gechtman, Victor Grippo, Red Grooms, Guerrilla Art Action Group, David Hammons, Al Hansen, Maren Hassinger, Lynn Hershman, Dick Higgins, Tatsumi Gijikata, Susan Hiller, Hi Red Center, Rebecca Horn, Tehching Hsieh, Joan Jonas, Kim Jones, Michel Journiac, Akira Kanayama, Taduesz Kator, Allan Kaprow, Mike Kelley, Jurgen Klauke, Yves Klein, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Gruppe Kollektive Aktionen, Komar & Melamid, Jannis Kounellis, Shigeko Kubota, Tetsumi Kudo, Yayoi Kusama, Leslie Labowitz, Suzanne Lacy, John Latham, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Lea Lublin, George Maciunas, Leopoldo Maler, Piero Manzoni, Tom

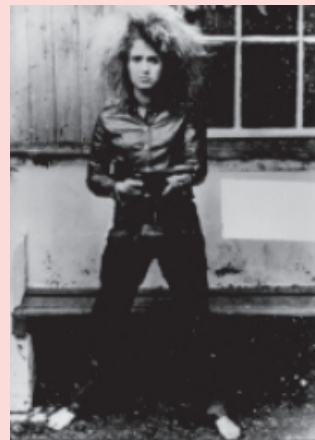
Marioni, Cusi Masuda, Georges Mathieu, Gordon Matta-Clark, Paul McCrthy, Bruce McLean, David Medalla, Cildo Meireles, Ana Mendieta, Gustav Metzger, Marta Minujin, Jan Mlcoch, Linda Montano, Charlotte Moorman, Robert Morris, Otto Muhl, Saburo Murakami, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, Bruce Nauman, Paul Neagu, Senga Negudi, Joshua Neustein, Hermann Nitsch, Helio Oiticica, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, Orlan, Raphael Montanez Ortiz, Lorenzo Pace, Nam June Paik, Gina Pane, Lygia Pape, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, Adrian Piper, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Jackson Pollock, William Pope L., Robert Rauschenberg, Carlyle Reedy, Klaus Rinke, Ulrike Rosenbach, Dieter Roth, Zorka Saglova, Niki de Saint Phalle, Alfons Schilling, Tomas Schmit, Carolee Schneemann, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, Bonnie Sherk, Shozo Shimamoto, Ushio Shinohara, Kazuo Shiraga, Barbara T. Smith, Danial Spoerri, Stelarc, Petr Stembera, Wolfgang Stoerchle, Jiro Takamatsu, Atsuko Tanaka, Mark Thompson, Jean Tinguely, Rasa Todosijevic, Kerry Trengrove, Ulay, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, Franz Erhard Walther, Peter Weibel, Franz West, John White, Hannah Wilke, Emmett Williams, ZAJ.

Another major international touring exhibition of post-war art, another exhibition in which women artists form a minority of the artists. Is there anything new in this exhibition ? A superficial glance across the list of artists reveals some familiar and well-known women artists from different parts of the world - although the emphasis is on women from America. A superficial glance might suggest that women artists have been given their due - a predictable list of high achievers - and the inclusion of some well-known feminist artists.

However, shouldn't we be examining more carefully the ways in which the basis of the exhibition might marginalise the contribution of women in the visual arts, even as it seeks to highlight the history of Japanese performance and its links with



Left: Atsuko Tanaka
Denkifuku (Electric Dress) 1956.
Right: Valie Export
Aktionhose "Genitalpanik" 1969.





Left: Gine Pane *Le corps presenti* 1975.



Right: Carolee Schneemann *Eye Body* (1964)

America, to look more carefully at the work of Eastern European artists and highlight the work of Latin American artists for the first time in a show documenting performance works.

To analyse the work by country - country defined in terms of where the artist worked for the majority of their lifetime, not nationality - reveals the marginal picture that this show presents of women artists. And the absence of most women artists from the picture presented of the 1950s. Although women are represented who worked in Japan, principally Kusama, the picture of Japanese art is a predominantly masculine one, centred on the Hi-Red Center group and their influence and exchanges through the fluxus movement. Atsuko Tanaka is represented however. From Austria, Valie Export is singularly the only woman amongst the performance artists from the 1960s. In Fluxus, the American women artists, Alison Knowles, Joan Jonas and Yoko Ono are strongly featured, as are any personal, social or professional links by male members of the Fluxus movement to any of the women artists. The percentage of women represented is higher from Latin America where Lygia Clark, Marta Minujin, and Lygia Pape were selected, forming half the number of artists from Latin America and so too from the UK with Susan Hiller and Rose Finn-Kelcey. Add to those already named here, Zorka Saglova, Ulrike Rosenbach, Orlan, Gine Pane, Niki de Saint Phalle, Rebecca Horn, Marina Abramovic and Joan Hills and one recognises that over half the artists highlighted above have worked most of their lives in America. With a nod towards Stellarc, the history of Australian performance art, to name one example, where there were also strong currents of feminist practice, is barely represented. Partnerships between men and women (notably Ulay & Abramovic) are another strong feature of the show - almost as a counterbalance between the masculinism of Japanese action art or American macho heroes from Chris Burden to Mike McCarthy - sorry, I should say in rhetoric

artspeak that they 'deconstruct'/play with conventions of heroic masculinity - and the protests of feminist performance like Lacy & Labowitz.

The history of feminist performance work in California which has been fairly well-documented and resulted in some major books, and this is well represented in this exhibition (by comparison with other areas). The attempt to bring together works which have provoked controversy or stood as key examples of the genre at its best is certainly the aim of this exhibition. However there are also some remarkable examples included by women artists, Zorka Saglova's *Hay-Straw* piece - bales of hay - exhibited for free arrangement by the viewers to the exhibition in Prague in 1965 - which according to the exhibition notes resulted in her being banned from public exhibition for 30 years. Marta Minujin's *Obelisk of 30,000 Panatone* (Pan Dulce/Rosinenbrotchen) in 1979 in Buenos Aires, Argentina is another exceptional piece of work.

However, attempts to broaden the picture of Euro-American art history have been singularly weak when it comes to including the work of women artists in other continents, especially Latin America, Asia and Africa. (If any n.paradoxa readers are writing about these areas, I would be glad to hear from them with a view to publishing their work).

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n.paradoxa : Issue No. 7, August 1998

Diary of an Ageing Art Slut from London, the Montmartre of the Millennium

March-June

March 14

Beware the ides of March!!!

How true that is today as in the time of Caesar. Poor old near and dear has been very ill. Terrible high temperature and even delirious. Something I managed not to take too seriously because I thought he was being his normal vague self when all the time he was trying to tell me about the men in the room on elevators whenever he closed his eyes. I am knackered from not getting any sleep for two nights and three days trying to get his temperature down. I have had to take issue with the local health practice because the young and extremely supercilious doctor on the phone did not think he was ill enough to make a house visit. Apparently coughing up blood and having a temperature of 104 and being delirious is not serious enough to come out for a visit! Wait till she hits middle, and more than likely desparately single, age. When somebody did visit on the Monday morning they were rather shocked to find he had pneumonia. So I wrote a rather smug "I told you so" letter of complaint. But poor n. and d.! However he has made enough of a recovery in the fourth week to try golfing twice but even he had to admit defeat and only play nine holes then come home and sleep for three hours, get up, eat and go back to bed. One good thing is that we have been having rather nice breakfasts in bed in the mornings with my fantastic fiftie's molded ply wood tray with pop up legs; such a great find in the local junk shop.

The other great little treat is that I get to have the mobile 'phone when I've been out and about...they can be useful. I suppose it sort of makes up for no sex.....

24.3.98

Grim but true, I had a weird trip to Birmingham for the opening of the New Ikon gallery. It seemed a good idea at the time but what G. had forgotten to mention 'til the day before was that you needed a ticket for the party afterwards. Trying to get in without one was like trying to get near and dear interested in sex when there's a golf game on television. Even though I pointed out to the arty- farty young administrator on the 'phone that I had had a one person show there, a good decade ago I admit, still a one person show, but to know avail. Apparently artists aren't as important as arts administrators these days. It might have helped if I had been a Young British Artist - with a very big emphasis on "Young".

So having had a wonderful opening I had four hours to kill before the bus arrived to take us home. Now, there begins a tale. Instead of forfeiting my ticket for the bus ride I stuck in there hoping I could gatecrash. Obviously I had lost the touch. There are some very big bouncers being used these days.

So with time to kill I went for a decent meal and a drink. Well, the centre of Birmingham on a Friday night when you are single woman is something you don't want to know about. The respectable hotel wouldn't let any unaccompanied women drink alcohol on their own. I was so incensed that I did my irate matron act only to have the creeps call the police.

This is where it really got really silly because who turns up but my niece PC Gigi. Only she is known outside the family as Mary, her second name. Apparently it's just the family that call her that silly name her mother thought was so sophisticated all those years ago. Just guess how many times her mother saw "that" movie when she was young and foolish and pregnant !!!

When I saw her I thought, "Ah hah ! this will show those chauvinistic pigs." But of course I blew it because when I saw her I naturally said "Hello Gigi ", as one does when greeting your niece. She went white, grabbed me by my elbow and briskly marched me out of there hissing at me not to call her that name. Oh yes, I should mention I was a bit tipsy from all that wonderful free booze.

Her partner was pissing himself laughing when he joined us a few moments later, at the fact her real name was not Mary. I meanwhile was protesting that "How should I know that she never used her first name anymore and that I had always called Gigi like everyone else in the family." She was a bit embarrassed about me and suggested that as she was on her way back to the station perhaps I would join her for a coffee and a spot to eat. Her colleague, Bob, was most interested in me; her aunt and an artist to boot. He actually remembered my show at the old Ikon Gallery because his art class in secondary school had gone there during the exhibition. He was most chuffed at having met me after all these years and kept saying " Well Gigi wait till the boys back at the station hear about this." She just kept hissing at him, "You're dead if this gets out."

In the end I had a lovely visit with " Mary" and I promised not to call her anything but that in the presence of anybody who isn't immediate family and that I wouldn't tell

her mother that she doesn't use her name professionally. When she did quiet down we had a bit of a giggle about it all. She asked after her uncle, my nearest and dearest, who is her mother's brother. She confessed that she was always rather askance at what I got up to sometimes but said I had proved a positive role model for her except for my being a bit too tipsy at family gatherings. She wondered if uncle ever got worried about me and I had to set her straight. One, he had given up a long ago trying to get me to behave and two, he had probably not even noticed I was not there because when I left he was watching a new golf video. That sparked off a confession from her on how pissed off she was with her job and her fiance. All in all when I got back to the coach in a police car it sort of dampened G.'s smugness at her being able to go to the party and my not. Her mouth was wide open when I joined her in the bus.

It turned out to be quite an evening after all and I had caught up on family gossip which was a hell of a lot better than the pretentious exhibition. Imagine just because you're YBA thinking that you could pass off an intellectually bereft exhibition on the workings of travelling the Northern line of the London Underground as art. All the glory of the high renaissance dismissed in the cartoon babblings of artists who think everyone is as amused as they are with one line ideas. Mind you Nancy Spero could do with a dose of humour and a little sensuality to boot!

Thursday

The Whitechapel Open once again rolls around. This year I wasn't in it but D.D. was as usual. Then again all of this year's guest Curator's other friends were as well so I should not be surprised at her success. G. couldn't work out any reasoning behind the selection until I pointed out this obvious little fact.

I must say that my colleagues are aging something terrible. Doesn't anybody use moisturiser these days. Even D.D., who I managed to almost avoid, said that F. looked so old. "That is the result of dedicated smoking and having a house in the south of France," I told her.

Besides I thought F. having a piece in the show just encouraged her to continue to make her appalling work. I was saying as much, more to myself than anyone, but it was overheard by her eighteen year old daughter who happened to be standing unnoticed at my elbow. She shot straight off to tell her mum and I made myself scarce. F. can pack a mean handbag.

Generally speaking the show was a lot better than what is normally shown there. I miss not having Nick Serota any more as curator. He put on some amazing exhibitions in his time. However, good things don't last for ever and hopefully that can be said for mediocrity as well. We were going to shoot over to Canary Wharf for the band and party scene but I had other obligations so we decided to miss all the pretentious art crowd and take it in next week.

Meanwhile my studio complex's Open Weekend looms and making ready for this event involves a lot of work. Moreover assistant has disappeared off the face of the earth.

I have misplaced the scrap of paper he wrote his yet again new address. Plus he hasn't phoned for four weeks. I really hope he is okay. Not only do I really need him but I miss his company as well. I hope nothing serious has happened to the sweetie. He's more than likely put himself inside again.

April 7, Sunday

I have the dubious pleasure of my nephew's company once again. Only this time he is here for three days which is more than enough before he travels up north to visit other relatives. We actually made it on time to the bus depot to catch the bus up North despite his insistence that it went at 1:30 pm not 1 pm. As usual I was right and it did go at 1 pm and we were there on time and he did catch it. However while waiting for him to have one last fag I ate his sandwiches and it was a good thing I did. They would have gone to waste. Because he ambled back with a huge cheese burger and fries to eat on the coach - he who said he had no money left.

Work in the studio goes at a pace. I am due a tax rebate and am having three small figure cast in bronze. Near and dear is a bit pissed off as he wants me to pay for this year's holiday. I will with the sale of the bronze statues. Some how I don't think he has much faith in me. An old friend from across the waters, who is now resident in London, and I have got hold of a dis-used church hall for three weeks this summer before it gets developed into flats. I feel an installation coming on!

April 13

Well Easter has come and gone. Had various friends over for an Easter lunch of roast lamb. Even had a religious experience of sorts this year if one could call it that. My friend the gay vicar flagged me down in the street last week and more or less volunteered me to fix the arm on a crucified Christ figure he has in the church. Well I said. "I'd look at it, if it was only a small fractured arm that needed mending." Ha! When I met him at the church I found out that the arm of the crucified figure was a little more than just fractured. There was a wacking great chunk out of it. Heaven only knows what they had been doing to the poor fellow. Any ways as Holy week was only a few days away I said okay but I needed to take it home as I had all the tools and equipment there needed for the operation. Foolish me.

I could not get hold of the car by any means in the next few days as near and dear was in a golf tournament out of town. So I thought I'll just carry the thing home as it is only a few streets away. Ha! Ha!

Feeling like a complete religious looney I started to carrying this four foot crucifixion down the Mile End Road. Then I decided that if I carried it so that the arms of the cross went in my rain coat arms while my arms held with the main cross my coat could partially buttoned up and I could walk home relatively unnoticed. Ha! and more Ha!

With the face of the figure pressing up against my cheek and the top of the cross protruding slightly further I managed to meet at least four neighbors before even

reaching my place. My next door but one, a psychiatrist for the local health authority and her two small children, stopped dead in their tracks when they saw me coming. Her little four year old said "You're a funny lady" and didn't stop staring at me while I struggled to open my front door and get inside.

But the tale doesn't end there. No way. When I returned it to the church I did so in a car. But as I got to the door at the side entrance a gust of wind almost wrenched the statue out of my hands so I clutched it hard only to have the other arm snap. This time I had the tool box in the car with a small bag of plaster.

I ended up mending the blighter in the church kitchen and staining the new plaster with tea and wax to match the other mend and the rest of the body. In the end one could not tell the mends from the rest of the Victorian plaster work or so I thought. The church warden stopped me in the supermarket on Saturday and said that she was amused at having a piebald crucifixion. Piebald indeed! Michelangelo didn't have to put with comments and attitudes like that from the public.

Wednesday 22 April

G. and I have been on some rather sad rounds of openings for sad little shows. I can't even bear to comment. One is not distinguishable from another. I keep feeling I am seeing the same stuff recycled.

Em has managed to become un-engaged again. Apparently her current ex-fiance went to a stag night party and did something not worth repeating on stage with two so-called strippers. The only reason Em found out about it was because her ex found a letter from a male friend of hers thanking her for helping him through a rough patch in his marriage. Immediately suspecting unfaithfulness a giant argument ensued with the truth and confessions flowing out. Poor Em, all she did was suggest that T. her friend go to therapy. Now she can't look anyone in the face at work because all the blokes there also happened to go to the stag night. The strange thing is that fiance's excuse for not answering yes to her question. "Did you have sex with a stripper?" is because it was the wrong question.?????

Now we get into President Clinton mindset here - having a blow job is not real sex; only penetrative sex is real sex. So having a blow job on stage in front of 40 other men while another woman sits on your face is not real sex and nothing to get upset about!!!! Whereas in fiance's tiny mind his "thinking" that there is a possibility of Em having an affair is worth getting upset about! Near and Dear in the midst of Em crying her eyes out at the kitchen table said loud and clear "Its more than likely not the first time he's done something like that. Guys don't do things like that for the first time at his age." Which is just what she wanted to hear.

The only good news is that G. has had an old flame call her out of the blue. So she feels all wonderful and wants to go shopping for a new flirty skirt.

Meanwhile I wait in desperation for my tax rebate to appear. I hope it comes

before my studios Open Studios Weekend. I have no money to buy booze and snacky thingswho said life is not exciting.

April 30

G. has decided that going around galleries is quicker on her own. So she will in the future art slut without me; or so she said last time I saw her at the Chisenhale when I dropped in for a look at the new exhibition. I managed to miss the opening because of a charity board of directors meeting which I had to attend the same night which went on meeting for five hours. A lifetime! Mind you it was about the accounts not quite adding up. Any ways because of it, I went the next day to check out the show and saw G. She also informed me, very secretive like, that she was applying for a new job in art institution in another city.

I thought nothing of it because it happens quite regularly. However much to my surprise she was short listed and 'phoned me up at lunchtime the next day to go with her around the two remaining parts of the Whitechapel Open. Suddenly my support and opinion are valued again. This was to be done in one lunch hour in London traffic. So from Canary Wharf to the Tannery and back again we managed to do it in just over the allotted time. Of course it involved near misses with a large doubledecker bus and parking illegally outside the Tannery. But what was exhibited wasn't worth spending much time looking at. It was, as Caro's wife Shiela said so succinctly at my last Open Studio, filled with "Sight Bites"; badly made, poorly curated, and intellectually bereft.

G. said dead casually, as she dropped me off at the studio, that the girl whose car she borrowed more than likely will not have missed it if she got back quick and didn't say anything. I couldn't have said anything in reply if I had wanted to because she had pushed me out and sped off in a cloud of dust and squeals. Still no tax rebate !!!!

May 4th

Another Open Studios has come and gone. My legs are killing me. Over 1,500 people came through. 500 alone on the opening night. Got some very good discussion and comments on the work. Shiela Girling dropped in again this year to say hello and we got talking about YBA art once more. "Sight Bites" she very appropriately called it last time and it still is appropriate. I am just getting very bored with it all.

Why does irony rule in England ? You can dress ironical, paint ironical, make music ironically and nobody ever gets bored with it but me.

May 7th

Well life never ceases to surprise me ! G has been trying for a new job higher up the career ladder in arts admin and actually got it. So she moves on. I think out of London but she wouldn't tell me exactly where she is moving to so I suspect something is amiss. She also has managed to meet another unsuspecting man at a sponsor's

night party. From what I hear she has certainly met her match this time....

Em has moved in with us as the ex-fiance has become rather violent. Seems just like student days again. We have split all the household chores. She does all the ironing and once a week clean I do all the cooking and everyday tidy up and nearest and dearest is being nagged into gardening and cooking every third night plus finishing off the kitchen which is still left over from last year.

Em is so anal that we now have everything ironed even our briefs and knickers are pressed. I must say it is lovely to look in my bureau and see neat and pressed piles of clothing instead of the usual mess.

May, Friday, the 22nd

Well dear assistant has surfaced again. But not until I found his address and telephoned him. It was sitting under a pile of mail beside the telephone - so much for my organization. I thought I had been through that pile several times when I was looking for it. He has had appendicitis and taken refuge in saving his granny's garden. He is reclaiming it from rack and ruin. His vegetables have been all planted and he has set a monstrous compost bin going as well. He has also laid formal garden beds for the roses. He looks well but just as skinny and as twitchy as ever. We decided he should start back with me one day a week helping on the large work as I can't handle them on my own. Today we met at the Royal Academy to see the show on Russian Icons which was wonderful. I could have stayed for hours but he was more interested in eating.

While I was waiting for him to turn up I spied Anthony Gormley posing about in the central court yard at the Academy. He was installing more images of himself. All his work is moulded from his own body and he just keeps repeating the original idea over and over again but in slightly different formats. This time some of the turd like figures are hanging from ropes against the side of the buildings while a dozen or so of the other others are scattered around the court yard. That should bore the pigeons to death! He was looking most pleased with himself, as he usually does, but just a little more so than ever. He has an air of one born to rule; more than likely all that public school education he's had. After all his brother is one of the Queen's Physicians, I believe.

We had a good chat about all his problem's installing the Angel of the North. He didn't ask about any of my shows or work. Wouldn't been able to tell him of any if he had. I did say I was very busy and was waiting for my assistant to arrive. I must say I was glad when he moved his studio away from being next door to mine. All that hammering out of the bronze shapes got on one's nerves after a while. Thankfully assistant wasn't too late and I could excuse myself before he went on too long about all his wonderful successes. Of course assistant had to make a comment and raise an eyebrow when he spied who I was chatting to when we were on our own.

"I thought you weren't that keen on him?"

"I'm not", I replied," But it's good to let him know I'm about and that I have an assistant. One never knows when I may need him."

And with that assistant gave me a look that said it all. Next week G. and I are going art-slutting again. I'm back in her good grace.

next day

I am getting very discouraged with my marriage. near and dear seems to be totally interested only in golf and the pub but mostly golf. I keep telling him that my figure is not that dissimilar to a golf ball in order to entice him. I even have a dimpled surface especially around my buttocks but to no avail.

He seems to have gone completely off sex. Em says he seems to have gone completely off everything except food, golf and golf videos.

Curiously Em and I had a rather long and interesting conversation about poison and if it could be traced. When we were students we often used to plan murders. It passed the time.

Assistant has resigned!!! When he phoned to tell me, I couldn't make out whether it was being my assistant or life he was talking about ?????

Wednesday 29th

Went to a 25th Anniversary of Acme Housing Association that started the invasion of the East End of London and made it the place to be for art. "Cool Britannia" started here 25 years ago. The celebration was in a Victorian fire station on the Blackwall tunnel approach which has been turned into studios with residencies for able-bodied and disabled artists.

The opening was a traumatic event both for near and dear and myself. There was our past, older than one would like to admit to, with all their grown children looking unrecognisable. What the hell have they been doing to themselves? Doesn't anybody use moisturiser!!! Are they still drinking and smoking at the same rate they used to? G. turned up. Near & dear confessed he can't understand a word she says these days now that she speaks in admin. art language. It's her new job I tell him. She is leaving the Chisenhale and going up the art admin ladder.

He replied "Was there a possibility that she was possessed? She changes into artspeak at the drop of a hat then changes back into normal language with no noticeable difference!"

Well I didn't know what to say that.

"She doesn't notice it and as far as I know that's the way all art admin. people and theorists speak these days. One just nods, say umm and a few select but pertinent phrases in reply."

"Sort of like speaking Martian!" he replied and went off for more champagne.

The performance piece at the event was one and a half hours - about one and a quarter hours too long. Even G. got twitchy after the first twenty minutes. N and D

sensibly had excused himself and scuttled out before it began, having first seen Station House Opera some fifteen years ago and decided that there was no hope for them then. How right he was! You have been warned!

June 5

G. and I did one last final bit of art-slutting last week before she vacates to the provinces to her new job. First we hit the a show from General Idea at Camden, then Saatchi's for a book launch, then the Delfina Gallery, right across town near London Bridge. I hope the provinces are ready for her driving skills. It will be the only thing about her that I will miss.

The last show was truly forgettable, by a Philippino artist who had settled in L.A. It had so many points to make that the show was like an intellectual assault course. You didn't and couldn't know which one to follow. Talk about being under-curated!! However, the wine and olives were divine.

The really big thing that got my goat this week was one commentator pontificating in a national newspaper about the new appointment at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Now the new girl on the block is Judith Nesbitt - G.'s ex boss. G. has nothing but praise for her. This lady in her brief but powerful term at the Chisenhale managed not only to turn it around financially but, of last year's girlie Turner Prize nominees, all but one had shown at the Chis. over the past two years.

The newspaper columnist chose instead to positively shower praise on the curator of the Showroom Gallery, a small and truly insignificant gallery beside Bonner Road Studios. He asks why their female curator hasn't yet received such an accolade? In my opinion, the shows there have been memorable only in their severe boredom and obscurity; including one with a fermenting soya bean installation. As with so many shows now, it had tracts of accompanying artspeak which tried to justify the stench and sheer boredom of the whole exercise. Bins of the stinking stuff. One could say it's establishments like the Showroom that give modern art a bad name and have a truly discouraging effect on any practising artist of real merit. The fact that Gillian Wearing had her first show there was a pure fluke.

Why was this man so bothered by Ms.Nesbitt's appointment? For what ever reasons he wrote the article it certainly didn't come across as ballsy, witty, or even shooting from the hip style. It came across as petty and plain bitchy. One suggested reason, I was told, was that he never forgave her for misdirecting him in a foriegn city to the studio of a famous artist in Germany, who was about to exhibit at the Tate Liverpool, and scooping an interview with him. Now all this is pure conjecture and repeated to me by persons who found it still very funny several years after the event. They bet me that he has probably never forgot the incident and still couldn't possible accept that it could be all his own incompetence. Who knows? Why doesn't the man stick to commenting on shows. He can be rather good at it. As to giving the world and it's dog his opinion, on what to the average artist, seems a very intelligent

appointment it does him no credit.

When someone is so ferocious about a new appointment I begin to wonder why and always ask "What axe does he have to grind?"

Diary of an Ageing Art Slut was published anonymously 1997-2004

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n.paradoxa : Issue No.7, 1998