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Disinterestedness & Political Art

Peggy Zeglin Brand

Can an ordinary viewer ever experience art - particularly politically charged, socially relevant art - in a neutral, detached, and objective way? The familiar philosophical notion of disinterestedness has its roots in eighteenth century theories of taste and was refined throughout the twentieth century. In contrast, many contemporary theorists have argued for what I call an 'interested approach' in order to expand beyond the traditional emphasis on neutrality and universality. Each group, in effect, has argued for the value of a work of art by excluding the other's approach. This essay will consider the legacy of the concept of disinterestedness for contemporary aesthetic theory in light of challenges posed by postmodern skepticism regarding the possibility of disinterestedness, and by the difficulties involved in appreciating political art with a disinterested attitude. My principal examples of political art will be drawn from feminist art.¹

Unlike traditional philosophers, I will advocate that an interested stance toward art is, at times, inevitable and appropriate. I will also argue not only that feminist art - and by extension political art of all kinds - can be experienced disinterestedly, but that it should be. As a position inconsistent with both traditionalists and feminist critics of tradition, my recommendation of both disinterestedness and interestedness affords what I take to be the fullest and fairest experience of a work of art.

In the early eighteenth century Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, proposed disinterestedness as both a moral and an aesthetic ideal in opposition to the notion of private interest (derived from Hobbes) in order to isolate the aspects of a mental state that precluded serving one's own ends. Disinterestedness was contrasted with the desire to possess or use an object. Francis Hutcheson concurred and recommended the exclusion of 'feeling to what farther advantage or detriment the use of such objects might tend.'² Edmund Burke placed disinterestedness at the

center of his theory of beauty, frequently citing the female body as a beautiful object which can be perceived as beautiful only if the sole interest of the perceiver is in perceiving for its own sake and not in the desire for possession. In speaking of the quality of beauty exemplified in 'gradual variation,' he states:

'Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried.'³

Archibald Alison maintained that it was not enough to lack self-seeking motives; rather, we must attain a state of mind in which 'the attention is so little occupied by any private or particular object of thought, as to leave us open to all the impressions, which the objects that are before us can produce.'⁴

David Hume contrasted private and public interest; public interest was communal and free of individual bonds. Hume adumbrated Kant's sense of disinterestedness in his recommendation that a true judge is one who is free from personal prejudice: 'considering myself as a man in general, [I must] forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances.'⁵

Kant expanded the notion of aesthetic disinterestedness, separating it from the practical and conceptual realms: to be disinterested was to be without interest in the object's existence. Making the notion of disinterestedness central transferred the focus of the aesthetic experience to the perceiver and away from the work of art. It was only a short step to the aesthetic attitude theorists' insistence that attitude was the primary determinant of one's aesthetic judgments. Jerome Stolnitz, a twentieth century aesthetic attitude theorist, extended the previous ideas of Alison:

'To perceive disinterestedly is to make oneself a pure, unflawed mirror, prepared to receive without distortion 'all the impressions, which the objects that are before us can produce.'⁶

On this view, no object could be excluded from the realm of the aesthetic; by properly adopting a particular mode of perception, any object could be perceived with an aesthetic attitude, i.e., disinterestedly. Thus, far from acknowledging what some would consider a thoroughly human and 'natural' reaction we have to images of the body- especially to the many depictions we find in the history of art of the female nude - these philosophers promulgated a self-conscious, deliberate and controlled transformation of interest into the more acceptable form of dispassionate dis-interest.

Consider what this means in practical terms for viewing art and the ways in which we have been taught to look at art. Let us review a typical explanation of an artwork by the noted psychologist of art, Rudolf Arnheim, in his landmark publication, *Art and Visual Perception*, Jean Auguste Ingres's painting of 1856 *La Source*. Arnheim concurs with the generally accepted view that visual perception 'is

not a passive recording of stimulus material but an active concern of the mind.¹⁷ Note the process by which he analyzes the ways in which an image can be perceived and subsequently interpreted. First, he refers to the painted nude girl standing upright in a frontal position and holding a water jug as follows:

'At first sight it shows such qualities as lifelikeness, sensuousness, simplicity. . . Ingres' nudes make the observer almost forget that he is looking at works of art.'¹⁸

Gazing as a male (which he unavoidably is), this initial reaction is not based so much on confusion making less ambiguous what he sees as an automatic response to the sexuality depicted, a reaction perhaps not unlike the one the painter may have felt who found himself painting the actual nude model before him. The implication is that it is difficult for a male viewer to maintain a disengagement of interest given the lifelikeness of the painted girl posed and displayed before him. Arnheim's initial reaction is unabashedly interested as he points out how the jug and the girl are both vessels with 'uterine connotations', that is to say, 'the vessel openly releases the stream whereas the lap is locked. In short, the picture plays on the theme of withheld but promised femininity.'¹⁹

He goes on, however, to provide a lengthy description of the formal properties of the scene: the unnatural posture of the girl as she tilts the jug she's holding, the tilt to the left of both head and jug, the analogous flows of water and hair, the vertical axis and the oblique central axes and their contrasting curves and contours. He concludes:

'The remarkable fact about a masterpiece like 'La Source' is that in looking at it we sense the effect of the formal devices whose meaning makes it such a complete representation of life and yet we may not be conscious of these devices at all.'¹⁰

How does he isolate and interpret these formal devices that so deceptively convince us that there is a lifelike girl before us? His answer, found another of his books, *Visual Thinking*, provides a useful lesson as to how the mind is able to abstract an object under observation from its context. He calls this process 'subtracting the context'.

'The observer may wish to peel off the context in order to obtain the object as it is and as it behaves by itself, as though it existed in complete isolation. This may seem to be the only possible way of performing an abstraction.'¹¹

By this route, he attains a disinterested approach, by stripping away as much interest as he can. In attempting to treat the depicted object 'as though it existed in complete isolation' from its context, he abstracts the compositional elements by blocking their associations and similarity to actual nude girls (and thereby subtracting the context). Arnheim sees this as a clear indication of the 'intelligence of visual perception' (this is the chapter title in which the visual exercise is embedded); such intelligence exemplifies the cognitive, i.e. rational activity - the 'active concern of the mind' - that plays so crucial a role in perception and interpretation.

Denying one's identification and involvement with the work on a personal level

is what many feminists see as a masculinist stance, that is, one that seeks mastery even over one's own bodily responses. Inhibiting one's natural and instinctive gendered reactions in a self-conscious, controlling way is seen as psychological censure. According to feminist thinking, disinterestedness is a prime example of a masculinist mode of thought in which it is assumed that the best (and only?) way to experience a work of art is as a neutral, unbiased, selfless observer. Feminists doubt one can ever really be neutral and they discourage its use as a tool in the evaluation of art.

What is notable for our purposes here is that a feminist stance toward art recommends the antithesis of the suggestions listed by the eighteenth century philosophers. In stark contrast, a feminist stance -- often considered subjective or emotional -- encourages interest in, identification with, and nurturing of awareness. Thus, it promotes interest with regard to how the image of woman is used or possessed; an inclusion of feeling for advantage or detriment; a nurturing of one's personal, individual interests; and the open admission that no viewer is a 'pure, unflawed mirror' ready to receive with openness all the impressions which the objects that are before us can produce. In effect, to adopt a feminist stance is to refuse to 'dis' one's interest and to acknowledge and even encourage an interested approach. For feminists, there can be no such thing as a disinterested approach to a work of art; the very attempt participates in an endeavor to posit a particular type of viewer as an ideal, neutral spectator. The only recommended way to properly and fully experience a work of art is with an avowedly gendered, identificatory, interested stance.

According to feminist art critic, Katy Deepwell,

'Feminism's critique of the disinterested observer exposed the partisan nature of all readings (when that 'neutral' figure was identified as white, male and middle-class), and began to explore how reading is inevitably informed by political positions.'¹²

On this view, disinterestedness is a masculinist stance toward art that involves what feminists have recently come to identify as the male gaze.

The most familiar and influential articulation of a theory of the gaze comes from the 1975 film criticism of Laura Mulvey. In an essay entitled, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey initiated an analysis of women characters in the films of Hitchcock and Sternberg based on psychoanalytic readings that identified women as objects of the male gaze.¹³ In uncovering and explicating a notion of the male gaze Mulvey sought to challenge the conventional notions of pleasure derived from mainstream film by highlighting the role of gender in the spectator's viewing of the female body on the screen. When a male viewer looks at the image of a woman, he typically looks with a possessing, desiring, objectifying look. His gaze succumbs to his scopophilic tendency to look at her as erotic object, to derive masculine pleasure from the power of his gaze over her body -- a body on view for his delectation. This gaze is similar to two other types of male gazing that actually takes place within

film-making: the gaze of the film-maker and camera men who manipulate the technology that defines the medium, and the gaze of the male actors who look at and interact with the woman being filmed. For Mulvey, cinema is uniquely positioned as the artistic medium that provides the paradigm of the male gaze:

'The place of the look defines cinema, the possibility of shifting it, varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, striptease, theatre, shows and so on. Going far beyond high-lighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself.'¹⁴

Thus, the person looked at is the woman. Her spectator is male: Hitchcock as film-maker, his camera men, the male 'heroes' within the films, and the male audience.¹⁵

In a later essay, Mulvey addresses the challenge from many readers that film-goers are presumed to be exclusively male. Rather than attempt to isolate and explain a particularly female look or gaze which might give rise to a particularly feminine sort of pleasure, she instead extended her earlier analysis to female viewers, claiming that women who watch the same films come to view them as men -- with a male gaze -- learned through habituation and training. The female spectator's masculine point of view is a 'trans-sex identification,' i.e., 'a habit that very easily becomes second nature.'¹⁶ In other words, women gaze at women in films as men do: by viewing them as erotic objects on view for the pleasure of heterosexual males (both inside and outside the filmic structure), as potential possessions of males, as subjects of male fantasies and desires.¹⁷

Clearly, Mulvey's thesis is not without problems. It has spawned an enormous amount of commentary and debate. It is undeniably the source, however, of two important consequences: (1) an ongoing investigation into the question of how women artists and film-makers can utilize a woman's body in visual representations without becoming complicit voyeurs, and (2) spin-off notions of the male gaze such as bell hooks' 'oppositional gaze.' What these varied analyses share is a deep and unyielding skepticism of anything like a neutral, distanced, disinterested mode of perception. The general consensus is that there is no disinterested gazer of visual images, only one whose gaze is saturated with interest. With this recognition, it comes as no surprise that most feminists advocate a pro-active, self-conscious, interested form of looking: one that blocks our learned tendency to view any subject according to conventional values of critical reception.

For instance, along the lines of Mulvey's concept of trans-sex identification, bell hooks proposes a similar notion: what might aptly be called trans-race identification. In the early days of television and film, black spectators became habituated to look at blacks on the screen the same way as whites, that is, to fail to notice the absence of blacks in television and Hollywood film, to accept without challenge stereotypically degrading and dehumanizing representations of blacks, and to laugh

condescendingly at black characters in early shows like 'Our Gang' and 'Amos and Andy.' Only within the last few years has a body of film theory and criticism begun to emerge that recommends a self-consciousness about the embeddedness of color within one's gaze, especially an awareness of the way in which race and racism determines the visual construction of gender. In an essay entitled, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,' hooks writes:

'Looking at films with an oppositional gaze, black women were able to critically assess the cinema's construction of white womanhood as object of phallogentric gaze and choose not to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator. Black female spectators, who refused to identify with white womanhood, who would not take on the phallogentric gaze of desire and possession, created a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look' was continually deconstructed.'¹⁸

On hooks' analysis, another layer is added to the construction of a feminist interested stance. Besides gender, one is also encouraged to gaze with interest in the racial dynamics of the representations of women. Many other layers of interest can be added as well: class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, and so on.¹⁹ This returns us to the topic of political art and my initial question, can one experience a work of art, particularly a feminist work of art, in a neutral, detached, objective, disinterested way?

Consider one example of particularly provocative feminist art: the performances of Orlan, a French artist who began her career as a painter and has systematically undergone a series of reconstructive surgeries by which she will totally transform her face. Entitled, 'The Reincarnation of St. Orlan' each 'performance' since 1990 is an actual surgical operation designed to alter a specific facial feature and bring it into conformity with some art historically-defined criteria of beauty. According to art critic Barbara Rose:

'Supplying surgeons with computer-generated images of the nose of a famous, unattributed School of Fontainebleau sculpture of Diana, the mouth of Boucher's Europa, the forehead of Leonardo's Mona Lisa, the chin of Botticelli's Venus and the eyes of Gerome's Psyche as guides to her transformation, Orlan also decorates the operating rooms with enlarged reproductions of the relevant details from these same works'²⁰

Orlan's goal is not to be beautiful, but rather 'to represent an ideal formulated by male desire' as she 'uses her body as a medium of transformation . . . to deconstruct mythological images of women.'²¹ Orlan's guides are paintings by past male artists; she creates the ultimate collaborative self-portrait: not with paint, but with a scalpel and the help of specialized surgeons.²² In true 1990's style, she calls her work 'techno-art.'²³ She claims her goal is to show that no woman can ever attain a male-defined ideal of beauty and therefore, all attempts are futile. Her art is meant to discourage women from wrong-intentioned surgery.

The still photographs that serve as documents of videotaped performances such as 'Omnipresence' (Orlan's seventh operation: November 21, 1993) form fascinating compositions of lights and darks, body parts and surgical instruments, that are at first glance somewhat indecipherable. They are like ambiguous images: difficult to read. Once deciphered, most viewers are incredulous as to their grisly realism.²⁴ Initially repelled by the blood and gore depicted in these photos, viewers tend to identify with Orlan to some degree or other, explainable in a variety of ways. Some may empathize with the pain she is apparently enduring (until learning she has undergone epidural anaesthesia) while some may assume a physically-charged male gaze that implies domination and possession. Women viewers in particular may identify with her as the object of the masculine gaze, sympathizing with her goal 'to represent an ideal formulated by male desire' since they care greatly about whether they conform to prevailing standards of beauty. Insofar as any of these viewers identify with the work, they take an interest in it. To the degree that their interest is self-conscious and self-directed, it becomes an interested stance. According to feminist theories advocating an interested stance, such viewers are correctly and fully experiencing the work. But according to the legacy of philosophical notions of disinterestedness, these viewers should block any empathy felt for the artist and attempt to experience the art disinterestedly. Is this possible and if so, how might this be accomplished?

I believe it is not only possible but also advisable. I would like to explore a position that lies somewhere between the two extremes: the traditional endorsement of masculinist disinterestedness on the one hand and its feminist antithesis on the other. What I suggest here is a bit of 'gender treason' -- a term borrowed from discussions of feminist pedagogy and defined as 'the simultaneous endorsement of both authority and freedom, order and flexibility, objectivity and subjectivity, and reason and feeling.'²⁵ I will argue that although the adoption of a stance of traditional disinterestedness is a masculinist approach to the experiencing of a work of art, it is still a possible and appropriate, useful mode of experiencing art, including feminist art when reconfigured along revisionist lines. What I call Interested Attention (IA) may persist only for the duration of one's initial encounter. It may last for the first few seconds, or it may come later. It may be interspersed with brief moments or long intervals of what I will call Disinterested Attention (DA). The 'toggle' between the two types of attention might be deliberate or not. In any case, one cannot 'see' with both types of attention at once. One either experiences the work with IA or DA. This is analogous to a person switching between seeing the duck and seeing the rabbit in the well-known duck-rabbit drawing.²⁶

Sometimes one intends to switch from reading it one way to the other and is successful. At other times, no matter how strongly one attempts to switch, one is not successful. Finally, there are times when one finds the switch occurring involuntarily, in spite of an attempt to focus on the duck or the rabbit exclusively.

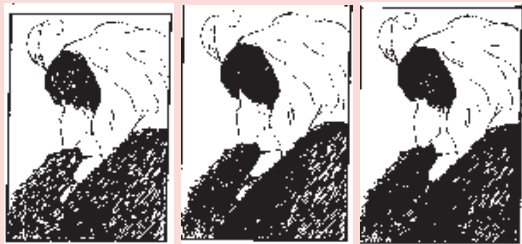


*Joseph Jastrow 1900 Duck-Rabbit Drawing
from Henry Gleitman Psychology (New York:
W. W. Norton and Co., 1981)*

Although he was not commenting on such a picture in particular, Hume's observations on one's initial encounter with a work of art are worth noting:

'There is a flutter or hurry of thought which attends the first perusal of any piece, and which confounds the genuine sentiment of beauty. The relation of the parts is not discerned; The true characters of style are little distinguished: The several perfections and defects seem wrapped up in a species of confusion, and present themselves indistinctly to the imagination.'²⁷

Clearly a duck-rabbit picture does not present us with as much 'confusion' as a more complicated work of art like a photograph of an incision of Orlan's face since there are only two choices: the duck and the rabbit. But the analogy is worth pursuing. Current theories of the psychology of perception utilize ambiguous images to demonstrate the same point: that there is what Hume called a 'flutter or hurry of thought' that confuses and confounds one's cognitive processing of the image in a work of art. Moreover, what one expects to see can often affect what one does see.



*From Left to Right : Fig 2A : Fig 2B : Fig 2C - , E. G. Boring, 1930
from Henry Gleitman Psychology (1981)*

Take another recognizable ambiguous figure: the well-known old woman/young woman illustration (Fig. 2A).²⁸ According to the perceptual construction hypothesis, a viewer's choice of seeing an image one way or another depends upon the perceptual organization she chooses, i.e., the context. This context may be within the stimulus pattern itself or it may be provided by the subject's expectations. If a viewer has been shown a less ambiguous image of the young woman (Fig. 2B) before viewing the ambiguous one, she is more likely to see the latter as the young woman rather than the old. Similarly, if she has been shown a less ambiguous image of the old

woman (Fig. 2C) before viewing the original ambiguous one, she is more likely to see the latter as the old woman rather than the young. Far from being passive receptors of external stimuli, our sensory systems 'actively transform their stimulus inputs.'²⁹ Visual patterns are constructions created by the perceived and the perception of patterns is heavily affected by experience and expectations.

It is said that we are typically unaware of our mental sets; we can be predisposed toward one particular perceptual organization without knowing that we are. But surely it is possible to also deliberately manipulate the awareness we have of our mental sets. One's initial confusion upon encountering a work of art is a preliminary configuring of our mental set to construct both a pattern and an interpretation from what is perceived. Some parts of this process are under our control. Seeing a still photograph out of its original context -- a videotape of the surgical process -- a viewer of a single image documenting Orlan's 'Omnipresence' scrambles to clarify the ambiguities of what is seen. She may be confused at first since freeze- framing the action is not usually the way performances are viewed. But as documents of a performance, they are often studied as individual still shots, and upon encountering such an image, she may attend disinterestedly to the image and ask, 'What am I seeing?' Recognizing what the forms and colors depict, the more pressing question becomes whether one can actually believe what one's seeing (thinking that perhaps it's only a computer-generated image). Once verified as a photographic document of real surgery, a viewer (as noted earlier) might empathize with the artist: either by imagining the pain and discomfort of the procedure or, in the case of female viewers, by sympathizing with the need to aspire toward some socially prescribed ideal of beauty. A quick reminder that the image is a work of art and not just a picture of someone's cosmetic surgery might cause another reversal, this time a disengagement with the rapport one has established -- a reversal of personal interest -- to an intellectual engagement with the content of the work of art. In keeping with the legacy of conceptual art of the 1960s, this engagement with the work of art as art would involve the recognition of Orlan's goal to deconstruct mythological images of women plus the contemplation of herself as the representation of an ideal 'formulated by male desire.' This final phase (although the possibility of toggling between IA and DA still remains) embodies the revisionist notion of DA sketched earlier: one that attempts to capture what it means to engage intellectually and disengage emotionally with the work of art. Similar though not wholly adoptive of eighteenth century conceptions of disinterestedness, it encourages attending with a dismissal of as many interests or prejudices as possible, with the full realization that -- try as one might -- we cannot be pure, unflawed mirrors that reflect the work.

The important point is that the experience and concomitant effect of the work of art rely upon input from both modes of attention, each with its own conceptual framework. After all, one can look at an image of a nude female body with DA by attending -- as best as possible -- to its color, texture and overall balance as well as

viewing it with a possessing or objectifying male gaze (IA). A viewer's contextual structuring is analogous to wearing different glasses or lenses that affect one's vision; switching and adding mental sets is like changing one's lenses or wearing multiple lenses. One can view representations with a gendered lens, a raced lens, or any other designated lens, but one cannot view and interpret an image with no lens at all. Thus, there is no pure disinterested stance; there is only something approximating it. Donning a lens of formal appreciation and intellectual analysis -- voluntarily or not -- strips away as many of the lenses as one is capable of discarding.³⁰

There is recent evidence that shows that similarity plays an important role in deciding between incompatible readings. In an experiment in which subjects were given incompatible 14 visual contextual clues before interpreting an ambiguous picture, properties were attributed to the picture based on whether it was being compared with one or the other even if the interpretations yielded were mutually exclusive. It was the context of comparison (or the comparison class) that determined the mental set for the processing of the picture based on similarity.

For instance, an ambiguous pronged figure could be interpreted as possessing three or four prongs, depending on whether the right-most protrusion is considered to be part of the base or a prong³¹ [Fig. 3A] When a subject viewed an unambiguous three- pronged version [Fig. 3B], it influenced the reading of the ambiguous figure as three- pronged. When s/he viewed an unambiguous four-pronged figure [Fig. 3C], it influenced the reading of the ambiguous figure as four-pronged. Similarity played a key role in influencing the predispositional mental set that affected the resultant interpretation.

Reconsider the ambiguous figures of the old woman/young woman and the duck/rabbit. As already noted, when provided with a disambiguated visual clue, viewers tended to interpret the ambiguous figure of the woman based on its similarity to the given clue. In the case of the duck/rabbit, a discussion of one animal or the other affected the interpretation of the ambiguous image, again based on similarity. The sensory contexts enabled viewers to choose between two incompatible interpretations. Incompatible interpretations were considered viable and there was clearly no problem vacillating between them as long as the two were not considered simultaneously. I would like to suggest that the same possibility holds with vacillating between the mutually incompatible approaches of DA and IA.

Extrapolating from the results of these experiments, I would suggest that the reason Arnheim and others viewing with a male gaze find themselves initially responding with interest in a physical, eroticized way to the nude body in 'La Source' and perhaps even to the bruised and bloody face of Orlan is that their initial response is similar to their unambiguous sexualized predispositions. In confronting the images of nude body and bloody face, they scramble to sort through the confusion of interpretations in much the same way as do viewers of more trivial ambiguous images. In these cases, like the more trivial cases of duck/rabbit and old woman/

young woman, the resulting interpretations are mutually exclusive yet viable provided they are not held at one and the same time. What is taking place is a deliberate dis-ing of the gazer's tendency to use, take advantage of, desire, or possess the girl that is pictured; it is an attempt to be open to receiving all the impressions that the work can provide. It is a shift toward the eighteenth century concept of disinterestedness, which is clearly a denial of Arnheim's initial and intrusive interests: an attraction to the work's sensuality singularly 'locked' within (the forbidden femininity). To say that images and works of art 'yield' impressions is to misconstrue the process and to philosophically rely on precedent and the weight of tradition; both Alison in the eighteenth century and Stolnitz in the twentieth were incorrect to emphasize the art object and its potential to yield impressions (as if the possibilities were simply there for the taking by passive percipients). However Arnheim, for example, self-consciously reconfigures his mental set to perform 'an abstraction/subtraction' on the nude body under his gaze in order to attain some form of DA, thus adding to his experiences of the painting. In striving to become an impure, flawed mirror, (remember there is no pure, unflawed mirror and hence, no pure DA), he is more open to all the impressions that the work might provide. From this exercise we learn how to attend disinterestedly to art.

But - in switching to a disinterested stance - can one be said to be fully experiencing the work of art? Certainly not. Large components of the significance and the meaning of art are blocked by the assumption of DA. But they may be retrieved through the imaginative exercise of IA. Can a viewer -- male or female -- who is conditioned to view the image of a woman with a male gaze reconfigure his/her mental set yet again to allow for an interpretation that is similar to a feminist interpretation, viz., that the girl on display is embarrassed by her nakedness, is outraged by being reduced to body parts on display for (clothed) male viewers, is feeling exploited and abused at the expense of male pleasure? Succeeding at this reading of the image may count as 'adding' a context instead of subtracting. In any case, it constitutes a deliberate building (not dis-ing) of interest in the nude body on display: a clear case of IA with a feminist lens. Changing lenses would enable one to



From Left to Right : Fig. 3A : Fig 3B : Fig 3C , from Henry Gleitman Psychology (1981)

be open to more impressions than ever before, although a viewer might admittedly prefer some to others. Finally, this extensive detour through IA, DA, and then IA(s) again, provides a model for the feminist who is committed to the goal of expanding viewers' reactions to art. The feminist viewer of Ingres' nude or Orlan's surgeries -- whose tendency is to adopt a more physically and bodily based interested stance (IA) like Arnheim's -- may also benefit from the lesson of undergoing an intellectualizing and abstracting process. Like the viewer with the male gaze, who undergoes a radical shift by learning to view with a feminist lens, the feminist who looks upon Ingres' nude formalistically is self-consciously and deliberately shedding her feminist lens to view the work as disinterestedly as possible. Viewing 'La Source' in terms of geometry and color adds to the variety of experiences she gains from the piece. Again, such shedding of lenses might arise involuntarily or it may become an habitual, learned practice.³²

One final question still needs to be answered. Granted, a feminist can jump between IA and DA when viewing women in Hitchcock films and Ingres' paintings, but can she do so when the image in question is intentionally feminist? Leaving aside the complications philosophers are prone to raise when dealing with artists' intentions, suffice it to say for the purpose of this investigation that Orlan has been up front about the feminist intent of her art and more than one feminist art critic has sanctioned 'The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan' as feminist. (In this case, the well-known art critic Barbara Rose.) I do not foresee the mental exercise required of a viewer (any viewer, but more particularly, a feminist viewer) to be any different in kind from the types of reconfigurations mentioned above on the part of a critic like Arnheim or the feminist viewer of Ingres' nude girl. The adoption of a Revised Disinterested mode of Attention might be more challenging with difficult political art, but only in the level of exertion required and not in the type. Switching from feminist IA to DA with regard to feminist art is still an exercise in subtracting the context. In the case of Orlan, it is a deliberate shift toward viewing bloody facial features as combinations of reds and purples, darks and lights, and a shift to reflection on the concept of women and of art exploited by the performance series. The former switch is in fact, at the heart of every feminist analysis of the formal properties of women's quilts, the composition of the vaginal iconography of Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' and Cindy Sherman's recent photographs of maimed mannequins and bloody body parts.³³

Works of art can yield multiple, even conflicting, sorts of experiences. But we must give them the chance to do so by encouraging ourselves to be open to all the impressions such a representation might yield. We may not be pure, unflawed mirrors, but we are mirrors whose cognitive mechanisms function, at least in part, on perceived similarities between our mental sets and what we disambiguate. One of the most laudatory aspects of art is its ability to make us look within: at our inner selves, our predispositions, our mental sets. We can attempt to be neutral and

objective, in the spirit of the traditional notion of disinterestedness, while recognizing that a revised notion of DA is not co-extensive with that notion.

Notes

1. Some political art is also activist art especially when the art intends to convey an ideological message or motivation. For a defense of the work of Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Adrian Piper against charges by art critic Donald Kuspit, see my essay, 'Revising the Aesthetic-Nonaesthetic Distinction: The Aesthetic Value of Activist Art,' in *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, co-edited by Peggy Zeglin Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Penn State Press, 1995) pp. 245-272
2. From Francis Hutcheson 'An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue' reprinted in George Dickie and Richard J. Sclafani (eds.) *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977) p. 573
3. Edmund Burke *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* ed. J. T. Boulton (London, 1958) p. 115
4. Archibald Alison *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* 5th ed., (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., 1817) p. 71
5. David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste' in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (1977) p. 600.
6. Jerome Stolnitz, 'Of the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness"' originally published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Winter, 1961), 131-143, reprinted in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, (1977) p.618
7. Rudolf Arnheim *Visual Thinking* (University of California Press, 1969) p. 37
8. Rudolf Arnheim *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (University of California Press, 1964) p. 117.
9. Ibid
10. Ibid p. 120.
11. Arnheim *Visual Thinking* p. 38.
12. Katy Deepwell (ed) *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Manchester University Press, 1995) p. 8. Deepwell refers to Christine Battersby's critique of Kantian aesthetics in 'Situating the Aesthetic: A Feminist Defence,' in A. Benjamin and P. Osborne (eds.) *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics* (London, ICA, (Philosophical Forum), 1991) p. 31 -44.
13. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Indiana University Press, 1989) pp. 14-26; originally published in *Screen* (Autumn, 1975)
14. Ibid. p. 25
15. The heroes include the policeman in *Vertigo*, the dominant male possessing money and power in *Marnie*, and the photo-journalist whose sole enterprise is the viewing of others through a camera lens, in particular a woman in another apartment in *Rear Window*.
16. Laura Mulvey 'Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*,' *Visual and Other Pleasures* p. 33; reprinted from *Framework* (Summer, 1981).

17. Art historians such as Griselda Pollock have extended this analysis to painting. See her *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988) p. 20
18. bell hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,' *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics* pp. 149-150; originally published in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) pp. 115-31. hooks laments the slow increase in the number of black critics writing about art in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995).
19. For an account of the dynamics of whites assuming black face and vice versa, see Susan Gubar's *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1997)
20. Barbara Rose, 'Is it Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act' *Art in America* 81, 2 (February, 1993), pp. 82-87, 125. See also Kathy Davis 'My Body is My Art' *Cosmetic Surgery as Feminist Utopia?* *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 4, 1 (February, 1997) pp. 23-37
21. *Ibid* p. 84
22. She remains awake to orchestrate her performances. During one surgery, which was broadcast live to several galleries around the world, she answered faxes from viewers. One can purchase videos of her performances as well as ceremonial containers containing a 'relic' of her flesh. She is currently represented by the Sandra Gering Gallery in New York.
23. Orlan interviewed in 'The Doyenne of Divasection,' by Miryam Sas, *Mondo* 2000, 13 (January, 1995) pp. 106-111.
24. A particularly shocking image is one that shows the skin of her face being lifted away from her cheek structure below, pictured on the cover of Parveen Adams' collection of essays, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). This, and related images, form the content of Adams' essay, 'Operation Orlan' pp. 140-159.
25. Sara Munson Deats and Langretta Tallen Lenker (eds.), *Gender and Academe: Feminist Pedagogy and Politics* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994) p. xxiv.
26. The duck-rabbit figure was first used in 1900 by Joseph Jastrow. See Henry Gleitman, *Psychology* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1981) p. 231.
27. David Hume, 'Of The Standard of Taste: From Four Dissertations,' in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* 2nd ed., (1989) p. 248.
28. Formerly referred to as the 'Wife/Mistress' figure, it dates from 1930, the work of E. G. Boring. See Gleitman, *Psychology* p. 252. Gleitman labels Figures 2B and 2C 'unambiguous' but I have called them 'less ambiguous' since they are sometimes difficult to interpret as either an unambiguously young or old woman in spite of the visual clues: the prominent eyelash of the young woman (in profile on the left side of the face) in Fig. 2B and the more prominent ear-as-eye on the right side of the face of the old woman in Fig. 2C.
29. See, for instance, the theories of Julian Hochberg and Ulric Neisser in Gleitman *Psychology* p. 246
30. This is similar to E. H. Gombrich's claim 'the innocent eye is a myth' except for the fact that Gombrich never suggested gender or race as part of a viewer's mental makeup, opting instead for more general categories of 'fears, guesses, expectations which sort and model the incoming messages, testing and transforming and testing again.' See *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton University Press, 1960) p. 298.

31. D. Medin, R. Goldstone, and D. Gentner 'Respects For Similarity' *Psychological Review* 100, 2 (1993), 254-278. (I have changed the letters of the figures from the original article in order to have them conform with the previous convention from Gleitman's *Psychology* of Fig. A designating the ambiguous image.) It might be noteworthy to add that the authors of this essay were inspired by Nelson Goodman's claims about similarity; 'he called similarity 'invidious, insidious, a pretender, an imposter, a quack!'' (p. 254)

32. I hasten to add that some feminist critics and theorists would reject this suggestion. Andrea Dworkin and Susanne Kappeler, for example, claim that it is impossible for them to look at images of nude women in any way other than through a feminist lens. see Andrea Dworkin *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (Perigree Book, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979) and Susanne Kappeler *The Pornography of Representation* (University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Kappeler specifically denounces feminists who are 'busy rescuing a female artist,' for example, Judy Chicago and her immense project, *The Dinner Party*. Her complaint is that 'The overriding stumbling block here is art -- to be rescued at all costs, and to be filled up, moreover, by a quota of women.' (p. 39)

33. In fact, Laura Mulvey speaks of a similar process with regard to Cindy Sherman's photographs which she calls an 'oscillation effect . . . between reverence and revulsion.' See 'Cosmetics and Abjection: Cindy Sherman 1977-87,' in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Indiana University Press, 1996), 75-76. The essay was originally published as 'A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body. The Work of Cindy Sherman,' in *New Left Review* (July/August 1991).

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Historical Development of Women's Art in Taiwan

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This essay is a translation from the catalogue, *Mind and Spirit - Women's Art in Taiwan*, Taiwan Fine Art Museum, 18 April-9 August 1998 - a major exhibition of women artists in Taiwan in the 20th Century.

As Taiwanese cultural development in the 20th century was deeply influenced by political and social changes, the development of Taiwanese women's art may be divided generally into three phases. The first is that of the "classical tradition" during the period of Japanese rule (1895-1945), a time when women's awareness first sprouted under the colonial system. The second is the post-war period (1945-1980), characterized by "East-West dialectic," a time when Taiwanese culture modernized and feminism was propounded. The third period, the 1980s and 1990s, has been a time of increasing international pluralism, dynamic cultural autonomy and freedom; it has produced the full flowering of women's art. This essay attempts to do a preliminary investigation of the form and content of women's art through an analysis of the general cultural environment, the art education system, exhibition activities, and artists' creative media. Besides confirming that society and culture were strongly affected by changes in the political and economic climate, this study aims to interpret the images and content of works from each period in order to explore the historical and esthetic trends of women's art.

Classical tradition: the period of Japanese occupation (1895-1945)

1895, when Taiwan was ceded to Japan, marks an important starting point for 20th century Taiwanese politics, economics, society, culture, and art. On the one hand, it marks the time when the political and cultural umbilical cord to the Chinese

motherland was cut, and on the other hand, since Taiwan became a Japanese colonial base, the moment when Taiwan began to take on a new political system. Colonial cultural policy and planning had far-reaching effects on the development of Taiwanese art in the early 20th century.

Although the old examination system was quickly dismantled, the traditional ideas of Chinese Confucianism were deeply rooted in the population. In the fine arts, the literati styles of calligraphy and painting remained primary modes of expression. During the first decades of Japanese occupation, most women artists had grown up in educated families, through which they inherited Confucian tradition. The plum, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum - images that were so characteristic of literati painting - were their frequent subjects. The main thrust behind compositions, which demonstrated complete facility with poetry calligraphy, and painting, was to highlight how the artists had surpassed ordinary concerns and symbolize their inheritance of cultural orthodoxies. Although their expressive forms transcended their temporal limitations, these works lack the characteristics of a regional style. During this period, the most active women artists included Ts'ai Pi-yin (1874-1939), Chang-Li Te-ho (1893-1972), and Ts'ai Chih-ch'an (1900-1958). These three women were also talented writers of poetry and prose; the content and form of their art inherited the modes of classical tradition. In addition, works like Fan K'an-ch'ing's (1908-1952) *Tenderness* have also come down to the present. This work features rough, forceful brushwork and may be said to reflect to a very large extent the fierce "Min style" in painting.¹ Very few works with this subject matter have survived to the present, and it may have been painted to celebrate a wedding. Of course, insofar as the depiction of mutual love and respect between the husband and wife in the painting reveals a woman's yearning for such love, it is extremely significant for its time.

From the first Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition was held in 1927, these four artists were frequent participants. Chang-Li Te-ho was already 41 years old when she first participated in 1933, and after this she participated eight times, culminating with her being listed as a "regular exhibitor," which was an extremely high artistic honor during the Japanese occupation period.² Meanwhile, Ts'ai Pi-yin, with her poetry and calligraphy, and Fan K'an-ch'ing, with her ink paintings, were active among the local educated circles of Tainan and Hsinchu respectively. They followed the artistic practices common among literati at the end of the Ch'ing dynasty. Although the number of women artists at this time was very small, we can tell from the content and quantity of their surviving works and the records of their enthusiastic participation in cultural activities that they had gradually overcome patriarchal constraints to develop art showing their own self-awareness as women.

Previously, the term *kuei-hsiu* (which referred to educated girls from a good family but meant literally "beauties of the women's quarters") was often used to define the position of women artists in history, since they were unable to leave the familial

domain, go out and be seen in public: their activities were often limited to their own private quarters. Unlike them, however, Taiwan's women artists showed a high level of artistic accomplishment while engaging in cultural activities. The term *ts'ai-nu* ("talented women") became more appropriate.

The Japanese eliminated traditional private schools and the Ch'ing civil examination system and replaced them with modernized Western-style public elementary and secondary schools. Although Taiwan did not have any separate arts academies for women, the promotion of art education by the faculties of girls' high schools did in fact influence many students, and the authorities organised many exhibitions where their talents could be shown. Ch'en Chin (1905-1998), who attended Taipei Third Girls' Senior High School and received the encouragement of her teacher, Gohara Kotoh, went to Japan as early as 1925 to attend the Tokyo Fine Arts Academy for Women. Ts'ai P'in, Huang Ho-hua (1913-), Chou Hung-chou (1914-1981), and others also went to the same academy in Tokyo during the 1920s and 1930s, continued their professional study of art, and participated in officially organised exhibitions. In the 1930s and 1940s, the works of Lin Yu-chu (1918-), Ch'i Chin-lien (1912-), Huang Tsao-tsao (1915-), Huang Hsin-lou (1922-), and Ch'en Pinu (1924-1995), among others, were also frequently selected for the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition and the Taiwan Territorial Governor's Exhibition.³ Because these two annual exhibitions followed open, fair rules of competition, the *joryu gaka* (women artists) attracted attention, so they were very eager to participate. Through their record of participation in these public exhibitions, we can see the persistence and productivity of women artists and how important the exhibitions were to them.

One of the stylistic considerations for this period was "local color". Another one was the emphasis placed on "realism" in form and content. Since Gohara Kotoh was an active figure in art education and served on the judges' panels in exhibitions, the ratio of women artists who did casein paintings at this time increased. In contrast to their male colleagues, who sought to express loftiness of spirit through complex compositions, women artists tended to include more images from the domestic life around them, plant and flowers from nature, scenes of local culture, and rural landscapes. Generally, in terms of composition and technique, women's art from this period was relatively free and to the point.

During the period of Japanese occupation, Ch'en Chin was persistent in getting past the realism barrier. Besides continuing to publish her works and receiving commissions for many years, she maintained her judge's position in the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition, Taiwan Territorial Governor's Exhibition, and, after the retrocession, the Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition. Her active participation in art-related events was deeply appreciated. However, because she did not have a teaching position and never set up a teaching studio, her level of influence on the development of women's art was limited, despite the fact that she was always regarded as an outstanding model among women artists.

Judging from the size and overall content of their surviving works, this group of early 20th-century women were high-spirited, dedicated artists. After the war, however, they concealed their activities or interrupted their creative work for three general reasons: i) After the Republican government moved to Taiwan in 1949, ink painting replaced the category for casein painting in the Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition after a struggle over which technique could be considered orthodox. As a result, casein painters lost the opportunity to exhibit their works in fair and open exhibitions. ii) In the tense atmosphere after the February 28 Incident of 1947, intellectuals who had grown up during the period of Japanese occupation were quickly silenced. Most Taiwanese viewed political and public social activities as taboo. iii) With the resurgence of the traditional social norms of the "three obediences and four virtues" (the "three obediences" taught that a woman was to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son during widowhood; the "four virtues" were fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech, and efficiency in needlework), little respect was given to women's post-marital creative careers. In this patriarchal social system, women's roles as homemakers and child-rearers were considered primary, and the display of individual artistic talent became secondary.

East-West Dialogue on Esthetics: the Post-War Period (1945-1980)

After the Second World War, Taiwan was removed from Japanese colonial rule. The main cultural policy of the Republican government was to promote Chinese culture. In the area of art education, National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) established its Department of Art in 1949, and Huang Chün-pi served as its chairperson for the next twenty years. The teaching of traditional ink painting there between 1950 and 1970 thus formed the primary background to Taiwan's post-war artistic modernization.⁴ Among the mainland women artists who followed the government or their husbands to Taiwan at this time were Yuan Shu-chen (1911-) from Hsin-hua Art Academy in Shanghai, Sun To-tzu (1912-1975), who graduated from the Department of Art in Peiping's National Central University, and Wu Yung-hsiang (1913-1970), who graduated from the Peiping Art Academy.

This group of women artists from the mainland could teach courses in either Western art or ink painting at NTNU through their cultural and political connections. Meanwhile, the leading art educator at Fu-hsing-kang Political Warfare College, Shao Yu-hsüan (1919-) was a specialist in watercolors of the Shanghai School. Among these artists, the most progressive in her thinking was Sun To-tzu: although she used oil painting as her starting point, she greatly encouraged the exploration of how Eastern and Western esthetics and forms could be combined, and she was vigorously involved in the development of the May Painting society. Thus, during the 1950s and 1960s, she was a model female artist for the students at NTNU. Also, besides being an enthusiastic teacher, Sun Tuo-tzu opened her own painting studio to students. For many years, she quietly worked to improve art education and was

entirely dedicated to her work.⁵ Wu Yung-hsiang, meanwhile, set up a studio in her home, where she taught classes besides the ones she taught at NTNU. Her students included Lo Fang, Hung Msien, Tung Meng-mei, and others. She was thus instrumental in the teaching of ink painting to women artists.⁶

Although each of these transplanted women artists had their own creative styles, all of them had a point in common: they had good political backgrounds. When they came to Taiwan, they were in their thirties, a time when artists usually develop their most fecund creative capacity. When we discuss the quantity and style of their surviving work, however, we find that they usually followed existing artistic forms and rarely went beyond them. The content of their art also did not reveal much thinking about current trends or social changes - they were constrained by the ivory tower of artistic tradition. Besides occupying their teaching positions, they were also invited to the judges' panels for the Westenn and Chinese painting categories in the Provincial Exhibition. This strengthened the connections among the Provincial Exhibition, the colleges, politics and art.⁷

Ideas from contemporary modern Westenn art hit the local art scene at the end of the 1950s, and in response a number of societies centered on modern art were formed one after the other: the May Painting Society, the Oriental Painting Society, the Modern Print Society. These formed the main arenas for artistic activities outside the academic system, but most of their members were men. In the early 1960s, the establishment of the art departments in National Academy of Art and Chinese Culture College also brought new life to the art scene beyond the Department of Art at NTNU. Female artists of the first post-war generation who completed their academic training included, among many others, Chung Kuei-ying (1931-), Ho Ch'ing-yin (1934-), Li Fang-chih (1933-), Cheng Ch'iu'ng-chun, Chang Shu-mei (1938-), Ma Hao, Huang Jun-se (1937-), and Tung Yang-tzu (1942-). Their artistic development after graduation, whether in Taiwan or overseas, will be further discussed below.

From 1951 to 1970, a number of women artists who graduated from NTNU's Department of Art went abroad for further study, including Li Fang-chih, Cheng Ch'iu'ng-chuan, Ma Hao, Ch'en Ming-hsiang, Chou Yüeh-po, and Tung Yang-tzu. Before leaving Taiwan, they had shown their works in exhibitions organized by the May Painting Society and Today Painting Society. In concept and execution, their works could be classified as relatively progressive. The experience gained through these societies and the cultural impact of studying abroad deeply influenced their art. The East-West dialectic in the arts became a main discussion topic, and traditional ink painting faced the test of modernization. Meanwhile, as these artists internalized Westenn forms of expression, they searched for Eastern spiritual content. Li Fang-chih in the early period attempted to concentrate the Eastern spirit in non-imagistic painting, and Tung Yang-tzu continued to develop new forms for traditional calligraphic techniques.

Among the first post-war generation of female artists who began their careers directly after graduation and made Taiwan the center of their activities were Ho Ch'ing-yin, Chung Kuei-ying, Chang Shu-mei, Li Chüan-chüan (1942-), and Wang Mei-hsin (1944-). Most of them, however, adhered to their own teaching positions and worked quietly. The demands of teaching in normal colleges meant that these women artists and teachers had to develop a comprehensive range of artistic skills—painting, watercolor, graphic art, pottery, etc. Teaching from such a diverse perspective broadened their experience with different media, but their heavy teaching and administrative loads always limited their creative development. Meanwhile, outside the normal education system, another institution that cultivated female artists was the Department of Art at Political Warfare College. On the faculty besides Shao Yu-hsüan, there were the brothers Liang Ting-ming and Liang Chung-ming, who focused on social realism and propagandistic watercolors. Shao and the Liang brothers trained a number of female artists, including Li Chung-chung, who went on to concentrate on developing more contemporary watercolor styles. Their other students maintained the more traditional watercolor style. The children of the Liang clan—Liang Tan-feng, Liang Hisu-chung, Liang Tan-mei, Liang Tan-pei, Liang Tan-huei, and Liang Tan-huei (the names of the last two are homonyms)—also brought a vast array of talent to the Taiwanese women's art scene.

The second post-war generation of female artists grew up during the 1970s, when the ideas of feminism began to spread and female artists gradually gained more familial and social support. They could now realize their own ideal artistic career plans. At this time, artists like Tseng Shai-shu (1952-), Cho Yujuei (1950-), and Li Huei-fang (1948-) returned to Taiwan after completing their studies in Europe and the United States. The sureness of their career plans indicated the awakening of their subjective self-consciousness as women artists, and each artist's choice of themes retained a distinct individualistic character. The majority of works from this period returned to concrete images and realism, in response to the photo realistic style of the 1970s; human figures and objects showing distinctive local characteristics were chosen as subject-matter.

Under the various political taboos and economically-driven national policies of the post-war period, women's art did not have much space to develop freely, and it was subject to repression. During this time, women artists not only had to play the roles of virtuous wives and mothers but also had to be utterly devoted to their careers. As a result, they had to bear the multiple pressures from society, their families, and their own self-expectations, and their artistic development had to take place on the seam between their families and careers. The circumstances of their lives and their personal experiences were deeply inscribed in their art.

International pluralism and cultural autonomy: the 1980s and 1990s (1980-1998)

Through the 1980s, Taiwan entire political and economic environment became

more and more stable. The "economic miracle" helped build the determination and confidence required for political and cultural autonomy. Due to the number of students who returned from overseas study over the years, social perspectives in general were broadened, and Taiwan went from being an isolated island to being a hub of cultural exchange. Through the 1980s and afterward, the number of women artists greatly increased, along with their educational levels and stylistic variety. The few examples raised below with regard to exhibition spaces, public exhibitions, artists' organizations, and creative trends are intended to explain this process.

The Taipei Fine Arts Museum opened in 1983, and since then it has been organizing the ROC Contemporary Painting Exhibition, the Sculpture Exhibition, and other competitive exhibitions. The opening of the Taichung and Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museums followed. These new museums gave women artists additional settings for fair competition and showing their work professionally. Now, through fair and open judging, they can rely on their individual creative powers in order to gain recognition. When Ch'en Hsin-yuan (1951-), Lai Ch'un-ch'un (1953-), Hsiao Li-hung (1946-), Wu Mali (1957-), Li Mien-chou (1959-), and others won competitions in the new museums, their prizes had the effect of enhancing their dedication to art and building their confidence.

With regard to artists' organizations, the Taipei Women's Oil Painting Society was established under the leadership of Yuan Shu-chen in 1984, and since then it has held regular annual exhibitions. Such organizations were helpful for building collective strength, and most of their core membership consisted of artists of the first post-war generation who by this time were reaching their middle age. These artists' facility with coordinating political and economic resources and providing leadership to younger artists gave added impetus to their organizations' activities. Members of the Taipei Women's Oil Painting Society are admitted by recommendation from its Organizing Committee. Being female is required, but no limits are placed on the mode, style, or content of their art, and the main function of the organization is to establish friendship among members.⁸ Although the Society has come under criticism for the uneven level of talent among its members, its purpose and significance are acknowledged. The friendly nature of its exhibitions and discussions stimulate further artistic exploration and thought among members; these activities expand the range of concern in women's art. In addition, the meetings and the process of artistic creation itself have a therapeutic, spiritually uplifting effect that helps members get through difficulty. Creating art fulfills their ideal of the good life.

One phenomenon in women's art that cannot be ignored - even though it is seldom mentioned - is the appearance of studio art studies outside the main education system. As early as the 1950s, under the politically correct premise of "reviving Chinese culture" classes in watercolor painting were offered for officials' wives, with Chiang-Soong Mei-ling most prominent among them. Although the traditional teaching method of copying after drafts was used, students did learn more about

the wonders of traditional art and the vastness of Chinese culture, which is one of the purposes of art education. This kind of watercolor studio was first started by Huang Chün-pi. Later on, private studios were set up by Hu Nien-tsu, Wang Chün-I, Wu Yung-hsiang, Li I-hung, and so on, and they accommodated anywhere from several dozen to several hundred students. By holding regular meetings and organizing joint exhibitions for their teachers and students, these studios form an artistic current apart from the formal art education system. Their activities provided another place for social intercourse among Taiwanese women with artistic interests, thereby building a greater sense of sorority. Although these studios and activities are always considered out of the mainstream, they have had a definite, profound impact on the level of exchange and solidarity among women artists. Private studios in oil painting, pottery, calligraphy, and flower-arranging continue to develop rapidly today.

As multiple directions of thought developed through the culturally pluralistic 1980s, women artists' diversity could be seen through the different media they used, particularly in contemporary pottery and weaving. The trends in politics and art after the lifting of martial law did not change women artists' creative attitudes and orientations per se, but neither did it cause them to lose themselves in "art for art's sake". Instead, it allowed them to develop unique creative methods. Having abandoned standards of academic art and gone beyond the East-West dialectic in the arts, women artists used the things around them and their own experiences as starting points for presenting a kind of documentary record of the events and ideals from each period in their lives. Thus, art becomes not only an exploration of the external world but also an exposure of the artists' personal secrets, which provoke reflection on the phenomena and essential quality of our lives. The process of creation then becomes a kind of religious ritual in which the soul is purified, a kind of therapy that heals wounds.

Amateur artists received a boost from the hsiang-t'u movement of the 1970s, and the articles carried in Hsiung Shih Art Monthly, The Artist, and other magazines promoted concern and self-awareness of native culture. Amateur women artists such as Wu Yü-ko (1901-1991), Lin-Li Hsieh-liu (1899-1996), Chou-Ch'iu Ying-wei (1919-), and Su Yang-o (1911-1990) were given critical introductions, then acknowledged and well-favoured. Art was thus no longer limited to the forms of "pure art" but was felt to materialize in one's life, issue from the heart, and represent individual creativity, whether in weaving, embroidery, sculpture, or painting. Art went beyond the norms and rules of any school or system and became the realization of the belief in "the artistic life and living art". Recent aboriginal art has also been discovered by interested persons. This art combines traditional media and vocabulary with contemporary modes of expression, and is highly distinctive. It has further enriched the diversity and stylistic freedom of today's art.⁹

The development of a social discourse is one obvious phenomenon in recent women's art. As women's self-awareness increased and as they became more involved

in social institutions, women artists started to reinterpret social structures and events through their gender consciousness and economic conditions. Therefore, feminism has become one of the primary issues, while discourse on issues in politics, culture, war, violence, and environmental protection has broadened the thematic range for contemporary art. Meanwhile, the input from research conducted by Yen Ming-huei, Lu Jung-chih, Hou I-jen, Fu Chia-huei, Wu Mali and others has provided broader theoretical and historical perspectives to the development of art by Taiwanese women.

Exhibitions centered around women's themes have been held intermittently since the latter part of the 1980s. Whether arranged by media, period, or subject, they have uncovered and organized a vast amount of material. Finally, the long-forgotten history of women's art is gradually being unearthed and receiving serious attention. From the discussion above, it is clear that Taiwanese women artists in the 1980s and 1990s have made clear advances in terms of public exhibitions, artistic organizations, and private studio classes, and in the areas of pottery, weaving, metalwork, design, drawing, and aboriginal art. These advances have given women's art during this time its diverse, lively character. We have also fully described women artists' abundant creative capacity and their persistent enthusiasm for art. As a result of these developments, we know that the rare appearance of women's art in earlier history is definitely not due to any lack of talent but to discrepancies in the historical record and in art-critical perspectives. If it were impossible for women to establish an independent critical discourse and historical perspective, then we could still worry about the future of women's art.

Conclusion

Women artists were witnesses to Taiwan throughout the 20th century--from the beginning, when its art was still dominated by the tastes of the traditional literati; through the colonial period, when Eastern and Western-style paintings put great emphasis on local color; through the post-war period, when the colleges were reorganized and the contemporary art movement began; and in recent times, when Taiwanese art was diversified while society became internationalized and computerized. While women artists adhered to tolerant attitudes about culture and a humanistic spirit, they expressed a female social perspective and recorded the images of Taiwan's historic development. This initial examination of Taiwan's cultural atmosphere, art education system, painting societies, exhibitions, and the artists' media, forms, and subjects establishes that art is intimately connected with its general external environment. Cultural policy led by political authorities influenced the art education system and its direction on the one hand, and affected the form and operation of officially-organized exhibitions on the other. Thus the face of women's art changed with each period's changes in social values and the increase in women's self-awareness. It seems that the open, accommodating,

innovative, and self-expressive qualities of women's art has achieved excellent results. However, because it freely developed on the fringes of the authoritative center, it still tends to be considered as representative of a special minority. It is therefore difficult for women's art to attract more careful, positive evaluation. Although contemporary women's art is an extremely important part of the broader art world, establishing an independent theory and history for its and interpreting its vocabulary, signs, and forms will require greater collective participation from the entire artistic community.

Notes

1. Lin Po-t'ing 'Chung-yuan hui-hua yu T'an-wan te kuan-hsi' (Chinese painting's relationship to Taiwan) *Ming-Ch'ing shih-tai T'ai-wan shu-hua tso-p'in (Taiwanese calligraphy and painting from the Ming and Ch'ing periods)* (Taipei: Council for Culture Affairs, 1984) pp. 428-431
2. Lai Ming-chu "'Ts'ai-ch'ing yü jen-chih te lo-ch'a--lun Chang-Li Te-ho te ts'ai-tekuan yü hui-hua ch'uang-tso-kuan' (The gap between expression and recognition-a discussion of Chang-Li Te-ho's views on talent, virtue and painting') *I-shu-chia (The Artist)* 245 (1995. 10) pp.330-340
3. Ibid
4. Hsiao Ch'iongjuei *Wu-yüe h yü tung-fang--Chung-kuo mei-shu hsien-tai-hua yun- tung tsai chan-hou T'ai-wan chih ch'i chan-lan-kuan (1945-1970) (The May Painting Society and Oriental Painting Society-the Chinese contemporary art movement in post-war Taiwan and their exhibition halls, 1945-1970)* (Taipei: Tung-ta, 1991) p. 62.
5. Hsich Li-fa 'Mei-you chi-ch'u te ho-nien-k'a--nien Sun To-tzu hsien-sheng' (An unsent New Year's card--In memory of Teacher Sun To-tzu') *Tang-tai i-shu-chia fang-wen-lu (Interviews with Contemporary Artists)* 1 (Taipei: Hsiung-shih, 1980) pp. 135-148.
6. Shen I-cheng 'Wu Yung-hsiang yü Ch'en Chün-fu k'ang-li hsiao-chuan' (Biography of Wu Yung-hsiang and her husband Ch'en Chun-fu') *I-shu-chia nien-p'u (Artists' Chronologies)* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1985) pp. 45-46
7. Hsiao Ch'iongjuei *Wu-yüe h yü tung-fang* p.144
8. Ho Ch'ing-yin 'Wei T'ai-pei Hsi-hua Nu-hua-chia hua-hui' 10 chou-nien-ch'ing chi 1994 nien-tu hui-yuan lien-chan shuo chi-chü-hua' (A few words on the tenth anniversary of the Taipei Women's Oil Painting Society an the 1994 Member's Exhibition) *1994 nien T'ai-pei Hsi-hua Nu:hua-chia lien-chan chuan-chi (The 1994 Member's Exhibition of the Taipei Women's Oil Painting Society)* (Taichung: Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Museum, 1994) p. 4
9. See Chien Fu-yü's series 'Rock and Roll Ancestral Spirits' in *I-shu-chia (The Artist)* nos. 272, 274, and 275 (1998. 1, 3, 4)

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Meeting History With Art: "The Myriad of Myself"

Annie Paul

This was the catalogue essay from Lips, Sticks and Marks, curated by Annalee Davis, Alida Martinez & Irénée Shaw, shown at The Art Foundry, The Heritage Park, Foursquare, St Phillip, Barbados. August 23- October 25 1998 and Carribean Contemporary Arts, Museum of Port of Spain, Fort San Andres, South Quay, Port of Spain, Trinidad November 24th-December 5th 1998.

"Where you going" they said, "This road not yours to walk. Go home to yuh big yard. That's where yuh belong"

"Tell History for me," I said, "I not playing his game."

They pulled off my disguise then, laughing so hard they could hardly stand up. But they only scratched my throat with the ratchet blade. Blood dulled the knife's silver-edged glint.

'History say yuh can take yuh chances, but yuh can't hide," one said. "Your skin glitters bright in the dark. We can sight yuh anyweh huh go."

"I'll zip out of it," I said. "There's an opening between my legs." They only laughed more.

Well I did. Unzipped, I rose up flapping high and cool as a kite. But I had no form. Unnamed, nameless, invisible, I floated over the landscape of burnt cane, over the all-inclusives and their swimming pools, over the markets and the stalls of jerk chicken. I looked down on everything. I was hungry but I couldn't eat. I was tired but I couldn't sleep. I was vulgar abstract. No context at all. It was like being trapped in a dreaded dream. "History," I thought, "you win this first round." "History's Posse" from My Mother's Last Dance by Honor Ford-Smith

For someone from the peripheral quote unquote old world - India to be precise - where modernity is often in pitched battle with tradition, one of the great advantages

of the Caribbean would appear to be its lack of suffocating "tradition". A profoundly modern enterprise such as visual art could thus be free to take root and flourish in new and unexpected ways or so I thought (Irénée puts it particularly well: 'People deprived of their history can make up their own and what better job can there be for an artist?'). But in the absence of agonistic tradition there appears the vexed issue of identity and race. Who is entitled to make history in this 'unique contemporary space'? To re-present it? To be the subject of it? Benitez-Rojo is right in saying that in the Caribbean skin colour 'is a colour neither of the self nor of the Other, but rather a kind of no man's land where the permanent battle for the Caribbean Self's fragmented identity is fought.' As this show makes its debut in Barbados where only recently there was tension about who was eligible to be national hero, I have no doubt that similar questions will be raised again.

Lips, Sticks and Marks is a representation of Caribbean realities by 'seven women working individually but thinking collectively' to quote Susie Dayal's tidy phrase. The distinction made by Chris Cozier is important here. These women are not claiming to represent Caribbeanness but to re-present facets of it emerging from their own highly personal examinations of their inner and outer realities. Moreover this is a show whose scant regard for boundaries, borders, rules and other people's traditions or innovations craft and the craft of art. Some of these women immerse themselves in "female culture" and produce in and out of it, others like Roberta Stoddart and Irénée Shaw seem to occupy their gender without being preoccupied by it. Annalee Davis's *Work* energetically explores the consequences of forms of Womanhood-- mother, wife, individual - while Susie Dayal interrogates and challenges notions of fashion, beauty and "art". On a more exclusively spiritual level Osaira Muyae talks of "feeling clean" while Alida Martinez speaks of 'searching in knowing clean water, Eternal transparency'. Joscelyn Gardner's complex installation evokes Nina Simone's powerful song about identity, *Four Women*, with its plaintive line 'Whose little girl am I?'

Joscelyn's *In the Chamber of My Birth* is an artful re-production of the rape of the Caribbean Basin. It is hard not to think of Benitez-Rojo's 'repeating island'... 'the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps'... 'because Europe in its mercantilist laboratory conceived the project of inseminating the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa.' Roberta's *Black Pearls* is part of the same history 'crisscrossing waters of rage blackened seeds shackled in suffocating tomb' as Joscelyn puts it adrift in the sea amputated black penis, torn vaginal lips - the strange fruit of slavery. *The Middle Passage* as still life, a portrait of the beginning of modernity which is synonymous with the birth of the Caribbean archipelago.

Roberta Stoddart's work is remorselessly and unrepentantly descriptive but what is she describing? Is this landscape or mindscape? Or treacherous land-mined scape? What we do know is that this is Roberta's reality/realism. A realism that is embodied



Right: Joscelyn Gardner *In the Chamber of My Birth* (a repeating voyage to my Self) (1998) Multi-media installation, dimensions variable.

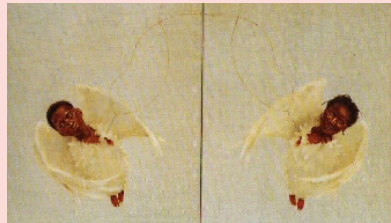
Photo: Ronnie Carrington

in anthropomorphic anthropological detail in which vulnerability and metamorphosis are personified and look you in the eye. Her work subjectifies emotion. The recurring black subject in her paintings has exposed her to criticism for she is racially speaking by and large, white. The intensely human faces in her mindscapes are the kind of face you would encounter in the streets of Kingston. Roberta is a true painter in the old style! her heroes are Caravaggio, Velazquez, and the more contemporary Lucian Freud.

Her lyrically epigrammatic "It must be a duppy or a gunman" foregrounds the church and its graveyard first encountered in "God's Bride" a few years ago. The decrepit grillwork fencing the graveyard also fences the painting. Stray animals, dogs, goats, rats and bats encroach. The gravestones are dominos--a link to the popular-- with pendant teardrops of blood oozing from the black holes which suggest bullet wounds. No one paints blood as exquisitely as Roberta and the bejewelled church and gravestones seem to emit an unholy glow. In the very centre of the graveyard and painting is a coffin with a small male body in it. "This is it this is it this is it I've been hit" he seems to be saying, immediately creating a hyperlink to David Rudder's Madman's Rant and its visual version exhibited by Chris Cozier in early '98 in Port-of Spain. As in other parts of the Caribbean gun violence has become a central figure stalking the Jamaican landscape. Blacks dominate this nightscape and the inside of the coffin/cradle encasing the dead man is a rich warm uterine red suggesting pulsating life and rebirth rather than death. An allegorical story about the nation states of the Caribbean?

Taken all together; Joscelyn's and Roberta's work in this show represents a visual anthem, linking the past which haunts the Caribbean into its violent present. Wholeness and completion is to be attained by a repeating voyage to myself. In a way this is the thread that unites the work of these seven women. One senses the care and deliberate self-love with which they examine their interior spaces and turn these inside out for us, inviting us to participate in their explorations.

Osaira's *Chance and Change* is a deep meditation on the power of water to cleanse and purify. On one level her work seems to be very personal, dealing with self knowledge and conscious amendment of the self after ritual cleansing. But her body



Roberta Stoddart *Learning How to Glide* (1998) Ten Panels, each panel 10" H x 12" W. Photo: Donette Zacca.

is also a metaphor for the body politic and there is more than a suggestion that her 'letter to myself' so reminiscent of Joscelyn's repeated 'voyage to myself' is a message to wider society to purify and remake itself to heal to opt for health over sickness.

Alida's cocoon-like image and the repeated wax-images of her face are intriguing as is the title of her piece *Beyond the Image*. Is there a flirtation here with the notion of "Imago", the "final and perfect form of an insect after it has been through its metamorphoses"? The perfect insect that emerges from chrysalis goes through a stage of being cocooned. What is being hatched in the securely bound cocoon of Alida's body? Warmed by human heat and secured by nourishing fluid this seems to be another rift on the theme of rebirth and new life in a new world. As Alida says this work is all about identity and invites viewers to enter "in our own inner body that screams for understanding".



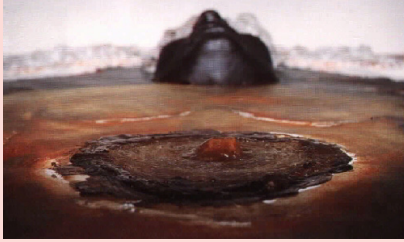
Left: Osaira Muyale *Chance & Change* (1998) Multi-media installation, dimensions variable. Photo: Jose M. Fernandez



Right: Irénée Shaw *Queen of Grande Riviere* (1998) oil on board 3'H x 6'W. Photo: Abigail Hadeed

Irénée Shaw's "visual dramas" resonate with vigour and excitement. Her depiction of the 104-year old subject of the Queen of Grand Riviere as a commanding figure in the colours of life rather than death, threatening to "disrupt her supporting architecture" as she asserts her presence is a good example of an artist choosing to invest an ordinary subject with great significance in the same way that some years ago she painted the great Eric Williams as she saw him - a diminutive brown figure. It is exciting to encounter intuitive vibrations and echoes between work by Caribbean artists writers and singers across generations national boundaries and aesthetic practices. In his celebrated *History of the Voice* Kamau Brathwaite says 'I shall end with the violet and red extremes of the spectrum' and goes on to describe 'the beauty and power of Miss Queenie's language: she is after all, priestess, prophet and symbolist'. Miss Queenie. a kumina queen is imaged in remarkably similar terms to Irénée's Grand Riviere, though one is a verbal portrait and the other visual.

Irénée's creations refuse to tamely occupy a wall space and Adam and Eve thrust themselves into our midst life-size figures challenging us to recognise them, members of 'the community of the painted'. Adam astride an island hillscape, his



Alida Martinez *Beyond The Image* (1998) Mixed Media Installation Photo: Jose M.Fernandez

own (forbidden?) fruit flanked by snake and scythe against an undergrowth of banana leaves is a welcome re-vision of the species' dominant creation myth. The unexpected tilts and angles signal Irénée's presence and you can almost see her peering back out of her Work at you caught in the act of manipulation, arms stretching out towards the viewer, pushing you, pulling you--now she's in your face, now she isn't.

Annalee Davis' extraordinary installation is a raw and visceral depiction of the wounds of modernity from the point of view of the female of the species. It is clear that what we are invited to partake of is a woman's attempt to come to terms with the "splikity-splakity-split" with her mate; the realisation that her "spiralling separateness" toward her "singular self" and their son's resulting "split sense of self" is a "screaming sacrilege". Modernity has meant a kind of liberation for many women, but it is a bittersweet freeing far it entails seemingly sacrilegious disruptions and distortions with blame for- this "unholy" state of affairs often laid at the feet of women. The exhibition of the couple's wedding clothes, their son's baby clothes and the suspended 'houses', thrusts before our eyes these symbols of domestic harmony while at the same time inviting us to sit down and listen to the circumstances of their disintegration and violation. For the many of us who have been confronted with the consequences of modernity this could be a catharsis, an invitation to "suture the shame and select the survival game" to paraphrase Annalee. Once again Annalee's smoking alliterative text recalls Brathwaite and his lamentations during HIS "time of salt", "that time of alarm" when he lost his wife, Zea Mexican. She displays the same "nakedness of soul that is at once startling and illuminating." The difference is that as Gordon Rohlehr so perceptively noted Brathwaite was writing from "within the silent howl and scream of the straitened man".

The difference is that as Gordon Rohlehr so perceptively noted Brathwaite was writing from "within the silent howl and scream of the straitened man". Annalee however is not silent, although she too is articulating the howl and scream of the wounded. Whereas Irénée's constructions seem on the very verge of speech, Annalee's installations wilfully breach the realm of the visual to convey the "Antillean drama of anguish" which Rohlehr talked about in reference to Brathwaite's Work.

It is only appropriate that the youngest artist in this show should introduce the theme of playful sexuality. Susie Dayal's tantalizingly titled "She Web" posits woman as aggressive temptress. Her use of wire as she says is cultural meaning that being firm Trinidad she is naturally drawn to the methodology of carnival costume, and she doesn't give a damn about a prevalent obsession with avoiding being mistaken for "kitsch". My personal view on this is that one woman's "kitsch" is another woman's



Annalee Davis *An Alliteration, A Soliloquy and a Sonnet* (1998) Multi-Media Installation, Dimensions Variable, Photo: Walter Bailey

la- di-da ‘quiche’ in other words these are questions of taste, not art. Susie makes “body masks” in which the wearer can pose and play different roles and discover heretofore hidden personas. This is another way of making acquaintance with oneself in the sense that Osaira Muyale talks of. Isn't this the essence of playing Mas?

‘In an ocean of veiling, wailing words’ as Joscelyn's text goes. The move to accompany the show with texts by the artists is one I genuinely welcome. This is what art can be in the Caribbean. What is remarkable about

this show is the reaching out of these artists to one another and to a Caribbean audience. It is not at all surprising to me that it's a group of women artists that has decided to overcome the “separatist situation” seemingly imposed on us by our colonial histories to give us a visual feast of the kind one would expect to find from a region with a culture of carnival. In literature one talks of the West Indian novel rather than the Barbadian novel, or the Grenadian novel or the St. Lucian novel, but in art one is confronted with Jamaican art for instance or Trinidadian art. At what point does an island become too small a dot to have an art of its own? It is profoundly odd that while something like the Faber Carribean Series is trying to break down the linguistic barriers that separate our literatures, art can still be corralled by language and nation.

What makes this work Caribbean is not that it conforms to any stereotypes about how art from this region should or should not look. These women are not willing to play History's game and they refuse to be trapped in a dream. I keep quoting Braithwaite in relation to their work because he is the supreme practitioner of history as art (history as art is ART not art history) and has largely been responsible for ‘the relocation of the archipelago in history; the redefinition of New World identities through the recognition and clarification of the seminal images and rhythms through which Carribean peoples may now revision themselves, beyond the limitations of received stereotypes.’ Just like Braithwaites work, *Lips, Sticks and Marks* offers ‘corridors through which stereotypes are revisited and experiences anew, modes of descent into self and into the formative historical experiences of a *n.paradoxa* online issue no.8 and 9 Nov 1998 and Feb 99



Susan Dayal *She-Web* (1998) Photo: Susan Dayal

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civilisation' (Rohlehr). And what's best, it scorns the uptight severity and reticence of high modern abstraction.

This is work fashioned in and by the Carribean, work that offers 'viable options for viewing ourselves'. This work is not meant for viewing, or hanging on the wall; these are not semi-religious objects for visual contemplation but carefully orchestrated "experiences". Some playful, some contemplative, some more urgent and some cathartic. But they are all, thank goddess as Annalee would say, expressions of the "myriad of myself".

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De La Vida y el Arte Como Feminista

Mónica Mayer

De como un buen día me dí cuenta que yo sin el feminismo, no puedo vivir.

Mi ingreso a las filas del feminismo coincide con el inicio de mi vida profesional como artista visual. Como provengo de una familia bastante alivianada y crecí entre puros hermanos varones, aunque durante mi adolescencia había escuchado sobre el importante movimiento de liberación de la mujer que empezaba a tomar fuerza en todo el mundo, hasta ese momento no me había percatado del sexismo, por lo que la sentía una lucha valiosa pero irrelevante a nivel personal.

Un día, a principios de los años setenta durante un seminario en la licenciatura en artes visuales en la Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas (alias “San Carlos”), una compañera presentó un trabajo sobre las mujeres artistas y cual no sería mi sorpresa cuando al final de su exposición la mayoría de los chavos afirmaron que por cuestiones biológicas las mujeres no eramos tan buenas artistas como ellos ya que nuestra creatividad sólo se encausaba a la maternidad. Aparte del asombro que me causó que aceptaran un concepto tan poco científico, a pesar de ser disque artistas, intelectuales y progresistas, esa discusión me hizo entender que como artista no solo tendría que enfrentar criterios misóginos, sino que a mí me correspondía tomar cartas en el asunto para tratar de cambiar esta situación. Comprendí que de nada serviría hacer el mejor trabajo artístico del mundo si por el hecho de ser producido por una mujer sería mal recibido. Por primera vez me entristeció el enorme potencial artístico que había desperdiciado la humanidad por estos prejuicios estúpidos. En otra ocasión, habiendo cerrado San Carlos como parte de un importante movimiento

estudiantil que llevó a un cambio curricular completo (eran los setentas, la generación de Los Grupos estaba naciendo, todos eramos de izquierda, cargábamose el 68 a cuestas y no existían ni el internet ni el SIDA), me tocó encontrarme un letrero en el baño de mujeres que decía “Compañeras, haced el amor, apoyad a los compañeros en su lucha”. De un brochazo habían borrado nuestra participación en el movimiento, por no mencionar la lucha que las jóvenes emprendíamos en esos momentos para apropiarnos de nuestra sexualidad y pretendían que nuestra vida se limitara a mantenerle las camas calientes y los pinceles limpios a los compañeritos.

Pase automático al feminismo o de como traté y traté infructuosamente de formar un grupo de artistas feministas

En 1975 se realizó en México la conferencia internacional del Año Internacional de la Mujer por lo que el Museo de Arte Moderno organizó la exposición “La Mujer como Creadora y Tema del Arte”. Curiosamente, la mayor parte de los participantes eran hombres. A poco más de veinte años, a muchos nos parece increíble que en ese momento no hayan encontrado suficientes mujeres artistas para organizar una espléndida muestra o que ni siquiera se les hubiera ocurrido que era incongruente plantear una exposición paralela a un evento feminista en la que la mujer seguía siendo solo musa, por no decir objeto. Por lo menos en este aspecto las cosas más o menos parecen haber cambiado. El empuje que traen las nuevas generaciones de mujeres artistas que hoy en día integran más de la mitad de los productores visuales y los cambios profundos que ha aportado la teoría feminista al estudio de la historia del arte a nivel internacional han tendido un efecto fundamental tanto en la visibilidad de las artistas como en la concepción misma del arte. Hoy la lucha ya no es que se haga una exposición de mujeres artistas, sino por el contrario, que sólo se organicen cuando exista una justificación académica o curatorial específica que lo requiera.

A la par de la exposición, el MAM dedicó un número de su revista Artes Visuales¹ al tema de las mujeres artistas. En sus últimas páginas venía una entrevista con Judy Chicago, la pionera del arte feminista en Estados Unidos gracias a la cual me enteré que había una escuela de arte feminista en Los Angeles. Me puse en contacto con ellas, fui a un taller de dos semanas y decidí que era exacto lo que necesitaba para mis estudios de posgrado. A partir de ese momento Víctor Lerma (mi compañero de toda la vida) y yo empezamos a ahorrar para irnos a California.

Me incorporé al movimiento feminista en México durante el par de años que nos tomó reunir fondos para irnos a Los Angeles porque me parecía que era importante empezar a averiguar más a fondo sobre todo este rollo antes de llegar al Woman’s Building. Empecé a participar en el grupo Movimiento Feminista Mexicano con Mireya Toto, Sylvia Pandolfi, Lourdes Arizpe y otras compañeras porque realizaban un periodiquito llamado CIHUAT: VOZ DE LA COALICIÓN DE MUJERES y yo necesitaba integrar mis preocupaciones políticas a las artísticas. Los temas candentes eran la violación y el aborto...el lesbianismo se discutía con miedito.

En ese momento, la Coalición solo estaba integrada por el Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres y por el Movimiento Feminista Mexicano y poco a poco fueron integrándose La Revuelta, el Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer y el Colectivo de Mujeres. Nos cambiamos de las calles de Yucatán al local de Río Ebro donde las sesiones eran maratónicas, las discusiones recias, las posturas radicales, las recriminaciones dolorosas y el humo de cigarrillo impenetrable. Aún recuerdo una maravillosa manifestación frente a la Cámara de Senadores en diciembre de 1977 para exigir la liberalización del aborto en la que participamos todas las huestes feministas que no pasábamos de 30 mujeres. Como mi mamá estaba preocupada de que fuera a una manifestación decidió acompañarme y a partir de ese momento se integró al Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres. En la acera de enfrente nos esperaban mi papá (que fue a cuidar a mi mamá) y Víctor que estaba documentando la manifestación.

Uno de los eventos más importantes para mí durante este período fue el Primer Simposio Mexicano Centroamericano de Investigación sobre la Mujer por la exposición paralela² que se efectuó en el Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil cuya curaduría estuvo a cargo de Alaíde Foppa, Sylvia Pandolfi y Raquel Tibol y en la que colaboré como chalana. En esta magna exposición participaron poco más de ochenta pintoras, escultoras, grabadoras, tejedoras, fotógrafas y ceramistas. Después de años de clases de historia del arte en las que difícilmente se mencionaba una que otra artista (invariablemente muertas y con vidas trágicas), para muchas de las que éramos artistas jóvenes fue una verdadera sorpresa encontrarnos con tantas colegas.

Posteriormente me uní al grupo de cine de Rosa Marta Fernández porque como no cuajaba uno de artistas, éste por lo menos se acercaba más a mi campo. Sin duda fue la época de mayor aprendizaje porque me tocó participar en la investigación para su película en torno a la violación “Rompiendo el Silencio”. Nunca olvidare a un doctor que entrevistamos en una delegación afirmando que la violación siempre es provocada por la mujer, aunque acababa de atender a una anciana a quien habían violado y de pasadita asesinando a su marido. Esta sin duda fue mi época de feminista furiosa: ese primer momento en el que uno toma conciencia de los estragos del sexismo, desmenuza todos los mitos que se ha tragado y que es tan fuerte que hasta nos hace perder el sentido del humor e irnos con la finta de que el enemigo es el hombre y no el sistema en el que todos participamos. Afortunadamente el período aunque intenso, fue breve. En el grupo de Rosa Marta participaban, entre otras, Laura Rosetti, Ana Victoria Jiménez, Lilian Liberman y Beatriz Mira.

Durante esa época, a pesar de los infructuosos intentos por formar un grupo de mujeres artistas, por lo menos organizamos varias exposiciones. La primera en la que nos identificamos como artistas feministas fue Collage Íntimo”. Se llevó a cabo en 1977 en la Casa del Lago y en ella participamos Rosalba Huerta, Lucila Santiago y yo. Mi obra en ese momento se refería a la sexualidad (sin duda el tema que más me interesaba) y por todos lados aparecían falos y vaginas, escandalizando, aunque hoy parezca chistoso, a más de una persona. Al año siguiente organizamos la “Muestra

Colectiva Feminista” en la Galería Contraste en la que todas las feministas que quisieran participaron aunque su obra no tuviera una postura política y también “Lo Normal” que se presentó en la Casa de la Juventud en la Col. Guadalupe Tepeyac y reunió obra con un fuerte contenido feminista en torno el rol social asignado a nuestro género, aunque las artistas no se asumían como feministas. En fin, la lucha por definir lo que podría ser un “arte feminista” se hacía por todos lados.

Algo que fue particularmente difícil durante esa época es que ni siquiera las feministas dedicadas a la crítica de arte como Alaíde Foppa estaban de acuerdo con nosotras en que hubiera la posibilidad de producir un arte feminista. Y a la fecha, aunque los principales debates teóricos del arte en Estados Unidos y Europa invariablemente reconocen las constantes aportaciones de la teoría feminista al arte, pocos críticos mexicanos le han entrado al debate.

El “Woman’s Building” en Los Angeles y los puentes con México

En 1978 por fin ingresé al Feminist Studio Workshop en el Woman’s Building en Los Angeles. El proceso educativo en esta institución singular era muy especial porque estaba basado en el formato de pequeño grupo tan utilizado por todo el movimiento feminista y se buscaba desarrollar la creatividad y crear conciencia a través de dinámicas de grupo e investigaciones sobre las artistas en el pasado. Acostumbrada a una educación tradicional, para mí fue una sorpresa encontrarme en clases en las que lo que más se valoraba era mi experiencia personal.

Además del curso de dos años al que me inscribí, trabajé de achichinle de Suzanne Lacy y Leslie Labowitz en su grupo Ariadne: A Social Art Network en proyectos que integraban el trabajo político con el artístico. Uno de ellos fue “Making it Safe” y su objetivo fue reducir el índice de violaciones en la comunidad de Ocean Park organizando exposiciones, mesas redondas, performances, sesiones de denuncias públicas, clases de defensa personal y cualquier otra cosa que creara conciencia entre el público. Si algo confirmé en ese momento es que si uno pretende hacer un arte revolucionario en términos políticos, primero tiene que serlo en términos artísticos. También trabajamos en obras hechas específicamente para las manifestaciones feministas (a las que llegaban 5,000 personas), para los medios de comunicación masiva. Eran obras de difícil definición que, en la mejor tradición del arte conceptual, rompían las fronteras de lo previamente aceptado como “arte”.

En 1980 obtuve mi maestría en sociología del arte con una tesis titulada “Feminist Art: An Effective Political Tool” y como proyecto final organicé una obra de arte conceptual que se llamó “Traducciones: un diálogo internacional de mujeres artistas”. La idea del proyecto era venir a México con varias de mis compañeras del Woman’s Building para impartir una serie de conferencias y talleres sobre arte feminista en el Museo Carrillo Gil, en la casa de Nancy Cárdenas en Cuernavaca y en Oaxaca. Aquí el proyecto lo coordinó un grupo integrado por Ana Victoria Jiménez, Yolanda Andrade, Magali Lara, Yan Castro, Lilia Lucido (mi mamá) y otras

compañeras. A la vez reunimos información para regresar a E.U. a impartir conferencias sobre las artistas mexicanas en diversas sedes. La documentación de este proyecto la presenté en la exposición “Künstlerinnen Aus Mexico” en Berlín que fue una importante muestra organizada por Magali Lara y Ema Cecilia García que arrancó en el Instituto Goethe y recorrió varios países europeos.

Una de las obras mexicanas que documentamos que más me impactó en ese momento fue la manifestación para un día de la madre que habían diseñado varias artistas y feministas mexicanas en protesta por las mujeres que mueren en abortos clandestinos. En ella, todas las feministas llegaron vestidas de negro al Monumento a la Madre y depositaron una corona que además de flores estaba adornada con los instrumentos, pastillas, hierbas, etc. utilizadas con este propósito.

También recuerdo la participación de varios grupos feministas en una obra de Suzanne Lacy en San Francisco. Esta pieza se realizó en forma paralela a la exposición “The Dinner Party” de Judy Chicago, misma que probablemente ha sido la exposición de arte feminista más sonada del siglo. Para esta muestra Lacy creó “The International Dinner Party” en la cual convocó a mujeres de todo el mundo a organizar una cena en honor a una o varias mujeres importantes en su comunidad. En México se efectuó una para festejar a Adelina Zendejas, Amalia Castillo Ledón y Concha Michel. En el museo Lacy tenía un enorme mapa del mundo con pequeñas banderitas en cada ciudad de la que recibía un telegrama avisando de una cena homenaje.

De regreso al terruño: por fin los grupos de arte feminista

A finales de 1981, después de una gira de cinco meses impartiendo conferencias sobre arte político contemporáneo mexicano, arte feminista y las artistas mexicanas por varios países de Europa, Víctor y yo regresamos a México. Mi mamá había muerto hacía unos meses y Adán, nuestro primer hijo, era apenas un recién nacido. Un día me presenté ante José de Santiago, director de posgrado en San Carlos y le propuse un curso sobre arte feminista, mismo que, para mi asombro, inmediatamente aceptó. Se integró el grupo y nos abocamos a investigar la situación de las artistas en México, a estudiar diversos aspectos teóricos del arte feminista y a desarrollar nuestro trabajo creativo a través de las técnicas que aprendí en E.U. Después de un año decidimos que era importante formar un grupo de arte feminista, y en 1984 nació “Tlacuilas y Retrateras”. Para nuestro primer proyecto decidimos trabajar sobre el tema de la fiesta de quince años por considerar que sigue siendo un ritual social muy arraigado en nuestra comunidad. El grupo estaba integrado por Ana Victoria Jiménez, Karen Cordero, Patricia Torres, Elizabeth Valenzuela, Lorena Loaiza, Ruth Albores, Nicola, Consuelo Almeda y Marcela Ramírez.

El resultado de nuestro trabajo de investigación fue un evento llamado “La Fiesta de Quince Años” que se presentó en agosto de 1984 en San Carlos. A la entrada de la Academia la Victoria de Samotracia, vestida de quinceañera y rodeada de hielo seco,

recibía al público. Esa tarde cayó un aguacero torrencial y como estaban arreglando el techo del patio de San Carlos, empezamos el evento en medio de un caos que jamás logramos sacudirnos porque después llegaron más de 2,000 personas (siendo que esperábamos máximo unas 300) y ni siquiera podíamos atravesar los pasillos para manejar las pocas luces que nos permitían utilizar por miedo a que los cables mojados hicieran corto circuito. La fiesta, bajo la conducción de María Eugenia Pulido y Armando de León y basándose en un guión escrito por el grupo, dio inicio con su tradicional baile.

En nuestra fiesta las damas de honor fueron artistas que diseñaron sus vestidos: la que no traía un cinturón de castidad, vestía la crinolina por fuera o traía huellas de manos sobre su ropa. Como parte del proyecto convocamos a diversos miembros de la comunidad a ser nuestros padrinos. Raquel Tibol, por ejemplo, fue madrina de libro; Sanborn's nos donó un enorme pastel en forma de zapatilla; Eric Zeolla compuso el vals "Sopa Inglesa" especialmente la ocasión y José Luis Cuevas fue el padre de la quinceañera, aunque por desgracia llegó tarde y las multitudes impidieron que nos diéramos cuenta de su presencia. Además de la fiesta en la que hubo varios performances, hubo una muestra con obra realizada ex-profeso por cerca de 30 mujeres artistas y Nahum B. Zenil a quien invitamos a exponer para que no se dijera que éramos sexistas. Entre las participantes estuvieron Fanny Rabel, Yolanda Andrade, Magali Lara y Leticia Ocharán. Quizá lo más importante de la exposición es que junto con la revaloración de la temática de los quince años, también se abrió de par en par la puerta a todo tipo de propuestas artísticas basadas en el kitch, hoy tan de moda. Además hubo lecturas de poesía en las que participaron Patricia Vega y Magali Tercero y la presentación de la obra "Cocinar Hombres" de Carmen Boullosa.

Entre los performances que se presentaron esa noche estuvo "Nacida entre Mujeres" del grupo de arte feminista Bio-Arte, integrado por Nunik Sauret, Roselle Faure, Rose Van Lengen, Guadalupe García y Laita. Su propuesta grupal era realizar obras que tuvieran que ver con los cambios biológicos de la mujer y para esa noche se confeccionaron unos hermosos vestidos de quinceañera hechos de plástico. También participaron Robin Luccini, Eloy Tarcicio y María Guerra en un controvertido performance en el que ellas se vistieron con bisteces. Por su parte Patricia Torres y Elizabeth Valenzuela realizaron "Espejito-Espejito" una pieza muy íntima que se perdió en el tumulto, el caos y los bastonazos de Raquel Tibol que, cual madre regañona de quinceañera, les gritaba que se apuraran. En el grupo Polvo de Gallina Negra (del cual les platicaré en detalle más adelante) optamos por una participación mixta con Rubén Valencia y Víctor Lerma que se llamó "Las Ilusiones y las Perversiones". Mientras Víctor y yo nos besábamos apasionadamente con un enorme corazón de fondo, Maris portaba un vestido con el sexo de fuera que Rubén le desprendió dejando correr un hilo de sangre. Después Rubén agarró un frasquito de semen para rociar a todo el público. En el evento de clausura de La Fiesta de Quince Años realizamos el performance "TRES RECETAS DEL GRUPO POLVO DE GALLINA

NEGRA” en el que hacíamos un análisis del evento de “Tlacuilas y Retrateras” y proponíamos varias dinámicas de grupo para aprender a aceptar la crítica sin achicoparse.

La crítica, por cierto, nos destrozó Hoy que releo sus textos comprendo que aunque hubo muchas fallas técnicas en la realización de un proyecto muy ambicioso sin recursos económicos, ni apoyo institucional, los críticos y los periodistas ni siquiera contaban con el vocabulario elemental para hablar de ese tipo de obra. Se nos tacha de malas actrices, por ejemplo, sin darse cuenta de que estábamos haciendo un performance, y por ende debía evaluarse desde otros parámetros. Más aún, si ni siquiera conocían la palabra performance, por lo que difícilmente podíamos esperar que agarraran la onda. Entre el agotamiento por el evento, el sustito por las críticas y el hecho de que mi curso en San Carlos terminó, el grupo se desintegró al poco tiempo.

Más o menos por esas mismas fechas, el Museo de Bellas Artes de Toluca me pidió que organizara una exposición de mujeres artistas. En 1984, Mujeres Artistas/Artistas Mujeres reunió a casi un centenar de participantes, incluyendo pintoras, grabadoras, escultoras y performanceras y, aunque su concepto no era muy diferente al de la exposición del Carrillo Gil, personalmente me sirvió para conocerlas a todas, en especial un grupo amplio de artistas identificadas con la causa de la mujer, entre ellas Elena Villaseñor, Herlinda Sánchez Laurel, Susana Campos, Carla Rippey, Noemí Ramírez, Fanny Rabel, Leticia Ocharán. Durante el período que estuvo montada la exposición llegó a México Nilda Peraza para curar una exposición de mujeres artistas patrocinada por Avon. “NUEVOS CAMINOS: PINTORAS MEXICANAS” se presentó en Washington y Nueva York, concluyendo su gira en el Foro de Arte Contemporáneo en el D.F.

La época de oro del arte feminista en México fue a principios de los ochenta, tanto así que hasta la revista FEM³ dedicó un número a la mujer en el arte. Para mí fue un momento muy importante porque algo que siempre me ha preocupado es la falta de comunicación entre el feminismo político o académico y el arte feminista. Estoy convencida de que una de las grandes debilidades del arte feminista mexicano ha sido no encontrar en su público natural entre las feministas. O nosotras no hemos sabido como responder a sus necesidades o ellas no han entendido que nuestros planteamientos no solo son políticos sino primordialmente artísticos.

Hacia finales de 1983 empezamos a reunirnos varias artistas nuevamente con miras a integrar un grupo. Ya habíamos participado en una serie de colaboraciones, como fue la instalación colectiva para el Foro de la Mujer en el Festival de Oposición en diciembre de 1982 en la que Magali Lara, Rowena Morales, Maris Bustamante, Adriana Slemenson y yo realizamos una serie de camas para hablar de los roles sexuales tradicionales. A principios de 1983 Magali, Silvia Orozco, Carmen Boullosa y yo realizamos una serie de videos para la exposición de Rowena Morales “Cartas a esa monja” en el Museo Carrillo Gil. Al plantearles la idea de que fuera un grupo

feminista, la mayoría huyeron. Algunas argumentaron que era una propuesta demasiado radical y otras temían perder al novio. En el grupo quedamos Maris Bustamante, Herminia Dosal y yo. Herminia abandonó el grupo al poco tiempo por no compartir nuestras ideas estéticas y desde entonces Maris y yo quedamos como únicas integrantes de “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.

Los objetivos de “Polvo de Gallina Negra” eran: 1) Analizar la imagen de la mujer en el arte y en los medios de comunicación 2) Estudiar y promover la participación de la mujer en el arte y 3) Crear imágenes a partir de la experiencia de ser mujer en un sistema patriarcal, basadas en una perspectiva feminista y con miras a ir transformando el mundo visual para así alterar la realidad. La decisión del nombre fue fácil porque considerábamos que: en este mundo es difícil ser artista, más peliagudo ser mujer artista y tremendo tratar de ser artista feminista, por lo que decidimos ponerle al grupo “Polvo de Gallina Negra”, un remedio en contra del mal de ojo, y así desde el nombre estaríamos protegidas.

Nuestro primer evento fue el performance “EL RESPETO AL DERECHO AL CUERPO AJENO ES LA PAZ” que realizamos durante la marcha en contra de la violación el 7 de octubre de 1983 en el Hemiciclo a Juárez en donde preparamos una pócima para causarle el mal de ojo a los violadores. Posteriormente repartimos sobrecitos de nuestro menjurje especial. La receta fue publicada en varias revistas y agendas feministas, e incluso ha salido en la televisión.

En 1984 participamos con el performance “LAS MUJERES ARTISTAS O SE SOLICITA ESPOSA” en la Biblioteca de México y en “LA FIESTA DE QUINCE AÑOS”.

Pero nuestro gran evento ese año fue una gira de 30 conferencias por diversas instituciones educativas en el Estado de México impartiendo una conferencia performanceada que también se llamó “LAS MUJERES ARTISTAS O SE SOLICITA ESPOSA” y en las que después de hacer un breve análisis del uso sexista de la imagen de la mujer en los medios y en el arte, les mencionábamos algunas de las principales artistas a través de la historia del arte, para llegar a México y centrarnos en las artistas jóvenes. Sin embargo, nuestro énfasis no era promover a las colegas, sino hablar de temas feministas tomando como punto de partida las imágenes. Así, las fotos de las luchadoras de Lourdes Grobet nos daban pié para hablar de las mujeres golpeadas, los dibujos de diarios de infancia de Magali Lara de la educación de las niñas, el trabajo de Maris para hablar del erotismo, el mío para referirnos a la violación o el de Ana Victoria Jiménez para hablar del trabajo doméstico. Cabe mencionar que en ese momento yo estaba en el sexto mes de mi segundo embarazo y Maris en el tercero de su primero y así llegábamos a las distintas escuelas con unos delantales de utilería que acentuaban aún más nuestras panzas. En más de una institución logramos que se prendieran los chavos y entraran en acaloradas discusiones.

El proyecto más ambicioso de “Polvo de Gallina Negra” se llevó a cabo durante 1987 y llamó ¡MADRES! Aunque hoy podría clasificarse como una obra conceptual o

de proceso, a nosotros nos gustó el término Proyecto Visual para definir este tipo de trabajo cuyas características principales son su integración a una propuesta política, su empeño en borrar los límites entre lo que se considera o no arte y por último, el hecho de que se efectuó a lo largo de varios meses. Nos planteamos ¡MADRES!, como una forma de integrar el arte y la vida ya que en ese momento la maternidad era el eje central de nuestra experiencia. De ahí que nos presentáramos como el único grupo que creía en el parto por el arte y afirmábamos que nos habíamos embarazado para llevar a cabo una investigación de campo antes de realizar el proyecto. Naturalmente para esta hazaña contamos con la ayuda de nuestros esposos quienes, como artistas, entendieron perfectamente bien nuestras intenciones. Como buenas feministas, tuvimos hijas y , para probar nuestra exactitud científica, Yuruen y Andrea nacieron con solo 3 meses de diferencia en 1985, el año del terremoto.

¡MADRES! tuvo varios sub-proyectos. En primer lugar una serie de envíos de arte correo a la comunidad artística y a la prensa abordando diversos aspectos de la maternidad, desde la relación con nuestras propias madres, hasta un imaginario suceso en el futuro en el que nuestras descendientes lograban destruir el arquetipo de la madre. Por otro lado organizamos el “CONCURSO CARTA A MI MADRE” en el cual convocamos a todo el público a escribir una carta con todo lo que hubieran querido decirle a su madre pero no se habían atrevido. Llegaron casi 70 respuestas y hubo una ceremonia de premiación en la que le regalamos una obra de arte al ganador y rifamos otra entre todos los participantes. Otro evento fue una velada en la que Carmen Boullosa y Perla Schwartz, entre otras, leyeron sus poemas sobre la maternidad.

Como parte de “MADRES”, Maris por su cuenta o entre las dos, realizamos una serie de performances en el Museo Carrillo Gil, la Esmeralda, etc.. Curiosamente el último que se llevo a cabo en la UAM y en el cual Maris me serruchaba una panza de unicornel, fue el día antes de que naciera su hija Neus. A partir de ese momento definimos como un grupo totalmente endógamo y decidimos que la única manera de integrarse a éste era por descendencia directa. Sólo nuestras hijas o nietas tendrán derecho a ser miembros de “Polvo de Gallina Negra”.

Además de los performances ante públicos en vivo, realizamos un par de ellos específicamente para los medios de comunicación. Uno de ellos se llevó a cabo en el programa “Nuestro Mundo” de Guillermo Ochoa. Vestidas con nuestras enormes panzas con mandil y cargando una muñeca de ventrilocuo que llevaba un parche sobre el ojo como el famoso personaje de Catalina Creel, la mala madre en la telenovela “Cuna de Lobos”, le llevamos su propia panza al famoso conductor y lo nombramos “Madre por un Día”. Ochoa se prestó padrísimo para jugar en este performance y se tragó sus pastillitas para causarle náuseas mañaneras y aceptó que le pusieramos su corona como reina del hogar. El público inmediatamente respondió: los hombres profundamente ofendidos y muchas mujeres fascinadas. A los nueve meses alguien del público llamó a Ochoa para preguntarle si había sido niña o niño. El proyecto

“¡MADRES!” concluyó con mi exposición “NOVELA ROSA O ME AGARRÓ EL ARQUETIPO” en el Museo Carrillo Gil.

Posteriormente participamos esporádicamente en diversas conferencias y uno que otro performance. Después de 10 años, dimos por concluido el ciclo de “Polvo de Gallina Negra” en 1993.

El Arte Feminista en los Noventas

No sé si fue el desgaste de tantos años de trabajar en grupo, pero hacia finales de los ochenta ya estaba yo lista para trabajar sola. A diferencia de los grupos de arte feminista de Estados Unidos y Europa que lograron una importante mancuerna entre las teóricas (historiadoras, críticas, etc.) y las artistas, en México aún no cuaja. Por eso, cuando en 1988 se me presentó la oportunidad de colaborar en El Universal en forma regular acepté de volada para escribir sobre los temas que más me apasionan: las mujeres artistas y el arte no-objetual. Para mí lo más importante de escribir es que poco a poco he ido reuniendo una colección de artículos sobre las artistas mexicanas y me ha permitido analizar los cambios en nuestra situación durante los últimos 20 años.

Lo primero que habría que subrayar es que hoy en día hay una gran cantidad de excelentes artistas jóvenes, entre las que destacan Mónica Castillo, Sofía Taboas, Yolanda Paulsen, Laura Anderson, Patricia Soriano, Isabel Leñero, Rosario García Crespo o Elvira Santamaría, cuya producción, aunque ellas no se asuman como tal ha sido influenciada directa o indirectamente por el arte feminista. También hay otro tanto de excelentes artistas cuyas preocupaciones nada tienen que ver con el tema de la mujer, como Estrella Carmona, Doris Steinbichler o Lorena Orozco. A partir de su generación, por lo menos 50% de los estudiantes en las escuelas de arte son mujeres. En el terreno de las becas del Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes y de premios nacionales como el Encuentro Nacional de Arte Joven, las chavas van a la par de sus compañeros. Sin embargo, tanto en exposiciones colectivas como individuales, la presencia de la mujer sigue siendo menor y por cada 10 críticas que se escriben de ellos, solo se nos dedican a nosotras.

A pesar de los avances que hemos visto y de que cuando hablo con las artistas más jóvenes me dicen que todo ha cambiado y que ya no perciben sexismo en nuestro medio profesional (aunque las que empiezan a tener hijos parece que están cambiando de opinión) a mí me siguen desesperando las carencias. En verdad son pocos los libros sobre mujeres artistas y menos aún los que tengan una perspectiva feminista. Aún en los centros de estudios de género el tema del arte casi no se trata, aunque sé que hay dos o tres estudios y tesis en proceso. No existe una sola guardería para atender a los hijos de los artistas, lo que sigue imponiendo una carga muy fuerte a las mujeres, pero tampoco hay una organización de mujeres artistas que luche por mejorar nuestras condiciones profesionales.

Por otra parte, a 20 años de las exposiciones de mujeres artistas en las que el objetivo era comprobar su existencia y que yo creí que ya eran parte de la historia, hace poco me enteré que la UNAM esta organizando una exposición de 100 artistas con el criterio

exclusivo de que las participantes sean mujeres, sin tomar en cuenta tendencias políticas o artísticas y ni siquiera la calidad de la obra. Hoy, en día esto es tan absurdo como querer organizar una exposición de “mexicanos” y meter ahí desde Francisco Toledo hasta estudiantes de arte y pintores domingueros. Quizá, como decía la canción, caminamos “un pasito pa delante y veinticuatro para atrás”.

A últimas fechas en el D.F. han surgido un par de grupos de mujeres artistas, aunque sus objetivos son muy distintos a lo que fueron los nuestros. LINEA ABIERTA es un grupo en el que participan Cecilia Sánchez Duarte, Erika Bulle y Tania de León, entre otras y han organizado exposiciones con el objetivo de promoverse profesionalmente aunque no pretendan buscar coincidencias temáticas ni utilizar su producción artística con fines políticos. Por cierto, Cecilia ha organizado varias exposiciones de mujeres artistas mexicanas y chicanas. También está el grupo COYOLXAUHQUI ARTICULADA en el que participan Lilia Valencia, Ema Sosa y Yan María Castro entre otras y cual no sería mi sorpresa cuando me enteré, en 1996, que se presentaban como el primer grupo de arte feminista en México, aunque si son el primer grupo de artistas lésbico feminista que conozco.

No quiero dejar de mencionar, aunque sea al final, que para mi la lucha feminista más canija ha sido la que libro contra mi propia educación todos los días. A pesar de haber leído miles de páginas sobre feminismo, de haber participado en marchas, trabajado en grupos, organizado exposiciones y escrito cientos de artículos, no puedo dejar de reconocer que mi corazoncito se formó dentro del más recalcitrante machismo. Cambiar esos patrones de comportamiento para que mis hijos puedan crecer de otra manera, o para que mis propias expectativas como mujer y como artista sean diferentes ha sido bastante grueso. Estando el enemigo adentro de una misma es difícil de vencer por lo que las contradicciones siempre están a la orden del día. Por lo mismo, cuando pienso en lo ambicioso de un proyecto feminista (o cientos de diversos proyectos feministas) que pretenden cambiar ni más ni menos que la esencia misma de la sociedad me digo...tenemos chamba pa rato.

Notes

1. *ARTES VISUALES*. México. Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1976, Num. 9
2. Catálogo: Exposición *PINTORAS/ESCULTORAS/GRABADORAS/FOTOGRAFAS/TEJEDORAS/CERAMISTAS* Museo de Arte Alvar y Carmen T. De Carrillo Gil. Noviembre de 1977. Texto de presentación por Alaíde Foppa.
3. La Mujer En El Arte *FEM* Vol IX No.33 abril-mayo 1984.

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On Life and Art as a Feminist

Mónica Mayer

On how one day, I suddenly realized that I can not live without feminism.

I joined the ranks of feminism almost at the same time my professional life as an artist began. Even though I was brought up among male siblings in an enlightened family where I was treated as an equal, and during my adolescence I had heard about the important emergence of the women's liberation movement which was spreading like fire all over the world, up until then I had not noticed sexism around me and I felt that it was a worthy cause, though irrelevant at a personal level.

Then one day, in the early seventies, during a seminar at art school at the National School of Art (alias "San Carlos") where I was studying, a fellow student gave a lecture on women artists and to my surprise, at the end of her presentation most of the (male) students agreed that it was because of our biology, we could never be as good artists as them: motherhood took up all of our creativity. Apart from the astonishment I felt that they accepted this highly unscientific concept, particularly as they were artists and intellectuals and therefore generally considered to be progressive, that discussion made me understand that as an artist not only would I have to face such misogynist crap, but that it was up to me to try to do something about it. I understood that even if I produced the best artistic work in the world, the fact that I was a woman would affect the way in which it was received negatively. For the first time I was saddened by the enormous artistic potential humanity had wasted as a result of these stupid prejudices.

On another occasion, I had another big surprise. It was the 1970s. The generation of "The Groups", with its political art and its interest in emerging genres such as performance and installation was in full blast. Everyone was a leftist and we still felt the scars of the 1968 student massacre in Tlaltelolco in Mexico City. Neither

the internet nor the AIDS epidemic were around yet. We had closed San Carlos down as part of a large student movement struggling to improve educational standards. As I walked into the women's bathroom, I read an enormous sign that read 'Women, make love, support the guys in their fight.' With one phrase they had managed to erase our participation in the movement, not mention our efforts as young liberated women to control our sexuality. The guys seemed to believe our life should be limited to keeping their beds warm and their paintbrushes clean.

Jumping straight into feminism, or how I tried in vain to form a feminist art group.

In 1975, the Women's International Year took place in Mexico City and the Museum of Modern Art organized the exhibition *LA MUJER COMO CREADORA Y TEMA DEL ARTE (Woman as Creator and Topic of Art)*. Ironically, most of the participants were men. Twenty years later, it seems unbelievable that they were unable to find enough women artists to organize a splendid exhibit or that they could not see how contradictory it was to organize a show where women were fundamentally the object of art, at best a muse, as part of a major international feminist event. At least in this aspect, things have more or less changed. At present, the younger generations of women artists are integrated and form over half of the visual artists' population and feminist theory has contributed in making profound changes to the study of art history at an international level and had a fundamental effect both on the visibility of women artists as well as the conception of art itself. Today, it is not necessary for us to fight for an exhibition that shows the work of women artists. On the contrary, there are so many of them that we only want them to exist when there is a specific academic or curatorial reason to have them.

Parallel to this 1975 exhibition, the MAM dedicated an issue of its magazine *Artes Visuales* to the topic of the women artists where an interview with Judy Chicago, the pioneer of the feminist art in United States, was published. In it I found out that there was a feminist art school in Los Angeles. I contacted them and joined a two week workshop where I decided that this was exactly what I needed for my postgraduate studies. Víctor Lerma (my lifelong lover and partner) and I started saving money so we could go to California.

During the two years we were saving money, I joined the feminist movement in Mexico. I felt it was important to begin to understand all this universe before arriving at the Woman's Building. I began participating in the group 'Movimiento Feminista Mexicano' (MFM) with Mireya Toto, Sylvia Pandolfi, Lourdes Arizpe and other women because they produced a publication called *CIHUAT: VOZ DE LA COALICIÓN DE MUJERES* and I felt with them I could integrate my political concerns and the artistic ones. The burning topics were rape and abortion. Lesbianism seemed to scare everyone, so it was hardly mentioned. In those days, the Coalition was integrated by the Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres and the MFM. Shortly after, we were joined by

groups such as La Revuelta, Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer and Colectivo de Mujeres. We moved from Yucatán Street to an apartment at Río Ebro Street where marathon sessions, violent discussions, radical attitudes, painful recriminations were the norm, all of which were as dense as the cigarette smoke that characterized them. A wonderful memory I have from those days is the demonstration we held in front of the Senators Building in December of 1977 demanding the liberalization of the abortion. The whole movement, all thirty of us, was present. Since my mother was concerned about my safety (the police could get kind of rough at the time), she decided to accompany me. She was so excited about the movement that she later joined one of the groups, Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres. On the sidewalk across the street, my father (who went to take care of my mother) and Victor (who was documenting the protest), cheered along.

One of the most important events for me during this period was the Primer Simposio Mexicano Centroamericano de Investigación sobre la Mujer (First Symposium of Mexican Central American Studies on Women). A parallel women artists exhibition was presented at the Museum de Arte Carrillo Gil.² Alaíde Foppa, Sylvia Pandolfi and Raquel Tibol curated this exhibition and I helped as an assistant. More than eighty painters, sculptresses, weavers, photographers and ceramists participated in this important exhibition. After years of history of art classes where hardly any women artists were mentioned (and they were invariably dead or had suffered tragic lives), for many of us, as young artists, it was a real surprise to meet so many colleagues.

Later on I joined a film collective run by Rosa Marta Fernández because I could not bring together one for artists and this at least was closer to my own field. This was a very intense learning period for me because I participated in the research for *ROMPIENDO EL SILENCIO (Breaking the Silence)* a film on rape. I will never forget a doctor that we interviewed at a police station who affirmed that women always provoke rape, even though he had just assisted a senior citizen who had been raped and her husband murdered by some thugs. Undoubtedly, this was my period as a furious feminist: that first moment when one becomes aware of the havocs caused by sexism, and all the myths that one has swallowed start to crumble and one's anger is so intense that you lose your sense of humor and sometimes end up believing that the enemy are men and not the system in which we all participate. Fortunately, for me, this period, although intense, was brief. Several film makers participated in Rosa Marta's group, among them: Laura Rosetti, Ana Victoria Jiménez, Lilian Liberman and Beatríz Mira.

During that time, despite my unsuccessful attempts to form a women artists collective, we were at least able to organize several exhibitions. The first one in which we identified ourselves as feminist artists was *COLLAGE ÍNTIMO (Intimate Collage)*. It took place in 1977 at the Casa del Lago and Rosalba Huerta, Lucila Santiago and I participated in it. My work in that moment referred to the sexuality (the topic that I

certainly was most interested in) and it was full of phalluses and vaginas. Although today these works may even seem funny, at the time they managed to scandalize a lot of people. The following year we organized the *EXPOSICIÓN COLECTIVA DE ARTE FEMINISTA (Collective Feminist Show)* at the Galería Contraste: Anyone who considered herself a feminist was invited to participate, even if the work itself was not feminist. *LO NORMAL (On Normality)*, another exhibition, was presented at a Youth Center in a working class neighborhood and it included work with a strong feminist content, even though not all the artists identified themselves as feminist. It seems as though we were trying to define what "feminist art" might mean.

Something that was particularly difficult during that time was that, although artists were trying to open up the debate on feminist art, art critics like Alaíde Foppa, who was an outstanding feminist militant and political activist, thought gender had nothing to do with art. And to this date, although the main theoretical debates of the art in United States and Europe invariably recognize the constant contributions from the feminist theory to the art, few Mexican critics even seem to be aware of it.

The "Woman's Building" in Los Angeles and the bridges with Mexico

In 1978, I finally joined the Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles. The educational process in this singular institution was very special because it was based on the small group format, used by the whole feminist movement, and it looked for ways in which to develop creativity and to raise consciousness through group dynamics. We also studied the lives of women artists in the past. Accustomed to a traditional education, it was a surprise for me to be in classes where my personal experience was what was valued.

Besides the two year-old course I was taking, I also worked with Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz in their group Ariadne: Social Art Network and their projects which integrated art and politics. One of them was *Making it Safe* whose goal was to reduce the level of violence against women in Ocean Park, a local community, through art. We organized exhibitions, round tables, performances, public speak outs, personal defense workshops and any other thing that raised the public's consciousness. Something I learned at the time was that if one seeks to make a revolutionary art in political terms, it first has to be revolutionary in artistic terms. We made specific pieces feminist demonstrations (to which, much to my surprise, over 5,000 women would attend) and for the mass media. They were works which are hard to define, and in the best tradition in the conceptual art, went beyond all the limits of what had previously been accepted as "art."

In 1980 I obtained my "mistress of feminist art" degree at the Woman's Building and my master's degree in sociology of the art from Goddard College with a thesis titled ;Feminist Art: An Effective Political Tool; and for my final project I organized a conceptual work of art called *Translations: an international dialogue of women artists*. The idea of the project was to come to Mexico with several of my fellow-students from the Woman's

Building to give a series of conferences and workshops about feminist art. They took place at the Carrillo Gil Museum, at the house of Nancy Cárdenas (the outstanding feminist and lesbian theater director) in Cuernavaca and in Oaxaca. The project in Mexico was coordinated by a group which included Ana Victoria Jiménez, Yolanda Andrade, Magali Lara, Yan Castro, Lilia Lucido (my mom) and other women. Once here, we also gathered information to take back to the U.S. where we gave a series of lectures on Mexican women artists. The documentation of this project was presented in the exhibition *Künstlerinnen Aus Mexico* in Berlin, an major show organized by Magali Lara and Ema Cecilia García. This exhibition started at the Goethe Institute and it travelled to several European countries.

One of the Mexican works we documented that impressed me the most was a mother's day demonstration designed by several artists and Mexican feminists in order to protest against all the women who die from clandestine abortions. In this event, all the feminists marched to the Monument of the Mother dressed in black and they deposited a flower arrangement adorned with the medical instruments, herbs and pills used for abortions.

I also remember the participation of a group of Mexican artists in a piece of Suzanne Lacy in San Francisco. This work was presented at Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, which is probably one of the best known feminist art exhibitions in this century. Lacy created a parallel piece called *THE INTERNATIONAL DINNER PARTY* in which women from all over the world came together to organize dinner parties to honor one or several important women in their community. In Mexico they celebrated Adelina Zendejas (a journalist), Amalia Castillo Ledón (writer and politician) and Concha Michel (a political activist)s. At the museum in San Francisco, Lacy had an enormous map of the world with small flags in each city from which she had received a telegram informing her about a dinner party.

Returning home and finally getting those feminist art groups going.

Towards the end of 1981, after a five month tour giving lectures on Mexican contemporary political art, feminist art and Mexican artists in several European countries, Victor and I returned to Mexico. My mother had died some months before and Adam, our first child, was on the way. One day I barged into the office of José de Santiago, postgraduate director at San Carlos, and I told him I was interested in giving a course on feminist art. Much to my surprise, he immediately accepted. My students and I started investigating the situation of women artists in Mexico, studying diverse theoretical aspects of the feminist art and developing creative work through the techniques that I learned in the U.S.. After a year we decided that it was important to form a feminist art collective, and in 1984 Tlacuilas and Retrateras was formed.

Our first project was around the "quinceañera" (fifteen year old girl) and the party and celebrations girls this age enjoy (or not). This party is a highly ingrained rite of passage in our society. The group included Ana Victoria Jiménez, Karen Cordero, Patricia Torres, Elizabeth Valenzuela, Lorena Loaiza, Ruth Albores, Nicola,

Consuelo Almeida and Marcela Ramírez. The result of our research led to an event called La Fiesta de Quince Años which took place in August of 1984 at San Carlos. At the entrance of the Art School, the replica of the sculpture of the Victory of Samothrace dressed as a typical “quinceañera”, all frilled up and pink, in a misty atmosphere, received the public. That afternoon there was a torrential rain storm and since the roof of San Carlos' patio was being fixed, we had to begin the event amid a chaos that we are never able to overcome: More than 2,000 people arrived and we only expected around 300. As a result, we could not even cross the corridors to manage the few lights that we were allowed to use for the authorities feared we could be electrocuted by the wet cables. The ceremony was conducted by María Eugenia Pulido and Armando de León and was based on a script written by the group, which began with the traditional waltz.

The maids of honor were artists who had designed their own dresses: one brought a chastity belt and dressed in a crinoline with hands printed all over. As part of the project we asked diverse members of the community to be our godparents, just as there are for the real fifteen year old parties. Art critic Raquel Tíbol, for example, was book godmother; Sanborn's (the restaurant) donated us an enormous cake in the shape of Cinderella's slipper; musician Eric Zeolla composed the ‘Sopa Inglesa’ waltz specially for the occasion and artist José Luis Cuevas was the father of the birthday girl, although unfortunately he arrived late and the multitudes prevented us from noticing his presence.

Besides the party, there were several performances, an exhibition including the work of nearly 30 women artists and Nahum B. Zenil, whom we invited as the token man so that we weren't accused of being sexist. Fanny Rabel, Yolanda Andrade, Magali Lara and Leticia Ocharán (the late artist who wrote extensively on women artists in Mexico) were among the participants. Apart from turning the spotlights onto this popular and highly significant puberty ritual, this exhibition was important because it opened up the door to all sorts of artistic proposals based on kitsch aesthetics, which are so trendy at present. We also had poetry readings by Patricia Vega and Magali Tercero and the presentation of Carmen Boulosa's play *PARA COCINAR HOMBRES (COOKING MEN)*. Among the performances that were presented that night was *Nacida entre Mujeres* of the feminist art collective Bio-art, which included Nunik Sauret, Roselle Faure, Rose Van Lengen, Guadalupe García and Laita. Their group proposal was to carry out works that had to do with the woman's biological cycles and that evening they modeled some beautiful plastic quinceañera dresses. Robin Luccini, Eloy Tarcicio and María Guerra also participated in a controversial performance where they dressed up in meat. On the other hand, Patricia Torres and Elizabeth Valenzuela performed a piece called "Mirror-mirror", which was very intimate and got lost in the tumult and chaos. It abruptly came to an end when Raquel Tíbol's (like a nasty quinceañera mother) started banging the floor the floor with her umbrella, ordering them to hurry up.

Polvo de Gallina Negra, a feminist art group to which I will refer to in detail later, made a performance for the event with Rubén Valencia and Víctor Lerma called *LAS ILUSIONES Y LAS PERVERSIONES (Illusions and Perversions)*. While Victor and I kissed passionately in front of an enormous crocheted heart shaped cushion, Maris Bustamente wore a dress with a female sex on the outside which Rubén tore, leaving a trail of blood. Then he grabbed a syringe of “semen” and started squirting the public. At the closing event of ‘La Fiesta de Quince Años’ we also performed *TRES RECETAS DEL GRUPO POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA* in which we analyzed the event of ‘Tlacuilas and Retrateras’ and acted out several group dynamics showing us how to accept criticism, without chickening out.

Criticism, by the way, was vicious. Today I reread their texts and I understand that although I am aware there were many technical flaws in this very ambitious independent project with hardly any sponsorship or institutional support, and that the critics and the journalists didn’t have a clue of the type of work we were doing. They dismissed us because we were not good actresses, and didn’t even know the terms performance or live art, which required other parameters, existed. We could hardly expect them to understand. Exhaustion after the event, the critics’ attitudes and the fact that my course in San Carlos had come to an end, made the group disintegrate not long after.

More or less at the same dates, the Museum of Fine Arts of Toluca asked me to organize an exhibition of women artists. In 1984, *Mujeres Artistas/Artistas Mujeres* brought together almost a hundred participants, including painters, sculptresses and performance artists and photographers, and, although their concept was not very different to that of the exhibition of the Carrillo Gil, I personally learned a lot by meeting them all, particularly the women artists who identified with feminism, among them Elena Villaseñor, Herlinda Sánchez Laurel, Susana Campos, Carla Rippey, Noemí Ramírez, Fanny Rabel, Leticia Ocharán. During this time Nilda Peraza, a Puerto Rican curator living in New York came to Mexico to put together an exhibition of women artists sponsored by Avon. *NEW ROADS: MEXICAN PAINTERS* was presented in Washington and New York, and concluded its tour at the Foro de Arte Contemporáneo in México City.

The moment of glory of feminist art in Mexico was in the beginning of the eighties, so much so, that the feminist art magazine *FEM³* dedicated an issue to women artists. For me, it was a very important moment because something I’ve always been worried about is the lack of communication between political or academic feminism and the feminist art. I am convinced that one of the big weaknesses of the Mexican feminist art has been that we have not been able to find our natural public among feminists. Either we have not been able to respond to their needs, or they have not understood that we are not only interested in politics. Art is our main concern.

Towards the end of 1983, we began to meet with several artists with the purpose

of starting a group. We had already participated in a series of collaborations, like the collective installation at the Festival de Oposición (Opposition Festival) in December 1982, where Magali Lara, Moral Rowena, Maris Bustamante, Adriana Slemenson and I made bed installations in order to deal with women's traditional sexual roles. At the beginning of 1983, Magali, Silvia Orozco, Carmen Boulosa and I produced a series of videos for Rowena Morales' exhibition "Cartas a esa monja" at the Museo Carrillo Gil. When the idea of starting a feminist art group came up, most of them chickened out. Some argued that it was a too radical and others worried they would lose their boyfriends. In the end the group was formed by Maris Bustamante, Herminia Dosal and I. When Herminia realized she did not share our aesthetic ideas, Maris and I were left as the only members of Polvo de Gallina Negra (PGN).

The objectives of PGN were: 1) to analyze the woman's image in art and in the media 2) to study and to promote the participation of women in art and 3) to create images based on our experience as woman in a patriarchal system, with a feminist perspective and with the goal of transforming the visual world in order to alter reality. This made it easy for us to select the name of the group: we believed that if in this world it is difficult to be an artist, all the more so to be woman artist and it is almost impossible to be a feminist artist, so we selected the name "Polvo de Gallina Negra" (Black Hen Powder) which is a remedy against the evil eye. Our name itself was a protection. Our first event was the performance *EL RESPETO AL DERECHO AL CUERPO AJENO ES LA PAZ* and it took place during the demonstration against violence against women on October 7, 1983, at the Juárez Monument. Our performance was to prepare a potion which would cause rapists the evil eye. We read a texts in which ingredients were things such as: 10 hairs of a strong feminist, a sprinkle of supportive legislators, etc. Later on we distributed envelopes of our special potion/medicine. The recipe (which is actually very humorous, though critical of a system which clearly promotes rape) was published in several magazines and feminist calendars, and it has even appeared once or twice on television.

In 1984, we participated with the performance *MUJERES ARTISTAS O SE SOLICITA ESPOSA* (Women artists or, we are looking for a wife) at the Biblioteca Mexico and in *LA FIESTA DE QUINCE AÑOS* which I have already mentioned. However, our great event that year was a tour of 30 lectures at different educational institutions in the State of Mexico with a performance/lecture called *MUJERES ARTISTAS O SE SOLICITA ESPOSA*. After talking briefly about sexist images in art, we mentioned some of the most important women artists through history, including those in Mexico focusing on younger artists. However, our goal was not to promote our colleagues, but to speak of feminist issues based on their images. This way, Lourdes Grobet's photographs of women wrestlers allowed us to speak about battered women, Magali Lara's childhood journals started us off on the education of little girls, the work of Maris was used for us to speak about eroticism, my own work to refer to rape and that of Ana Victoria Jiménez to deal with domestic work. I should

mention that at the time I was six months pregnant, and Maris was in her third month and we stressed our condition by wearing aprons made our tummies bulge even more. In many of the schools we visited we started heated debates.

PGN's most ambitious project, *MADRES! (MOTHERS!)*, took place in 1987. Although today it could be classified as process art, we coined the term Visual Project to define this type of work we were doing, which aimed at integrating politics, eliminating traditional definitions of art and creating pieces which were carried out over several months. We thought of *MADRES!* as a way of integrating life and art, particularly at a time when motherhood was the most important part of our experience. Thus, we presented ourselves as the only group that had gotten pregnant as part of an art project. Naturally, we had had the help of our husbands. As artists themselves, they understood our intentions perfectly. Obviously, as feminists, we gave birth to daughters and, to prove our scientific accuracy, Yuruen and Andrea were born with only 3 months difference in 1985, the year of the earthquake.

MADRES! had several sub-projects. In the first place it was an art mail project where we sent several pieces to the artistic community and the press on different aspects of motherhood which ranged from our own relationships to our moms, to an imaginary event in the future in which our descendants are able to destroy the archetype of the MOTHER. We also organized *LETTER TO MY MOTHER*, a competition, where we summoned the general public to write a letter with everything they every wanted to tell their mothers but had not dared. We received 70 answers and there was an award ceremony in which we gave a work of art to the winner and we raffled another work amongst all the participants. Another event was a poetry reading where Carmen Boulosa and Perla Schwartz, amongst others read their poems on motherhood.

As part of *MADRES!*, Maris and I carried out a series of performances at the Museo Carrillo Gil, the Esmeralda art school, etc.. Surprisingly, the last one, at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana where Maris sawed a plastic tummy off me, took place the day before her daughter was born. As of that moment, we became a totally endogamous group and the only way any one can join us is if they are our direct female descendants. Only our daughters or granddaughters will be entitled to become members of POLVO DE GALLINA NEGRA!

Besides the live audiences performances, we made a couple of them specifically for the media. One of them took place at the news program 'Nuestro Mundo' with anchorman Guillermo Ochoa, which at the time had a very high rating. Dressed with our enormous paunches with aprons (which made us look very pregnant) and a ventriloquist's doll that had an eyepatch like Catalina Creel's, the infamous mother in a very famous soap opera running in those days, we dressed him up as a pregnant woman and named him 'Mother for one Day'. Ochoa really joined in the fun and performed beautifully with us. He swallowed the pills we gave him to make him feel morning sickness and proudly wore his crown as queen of the home. The public

immediately responded: the men were deeply offended but it fascinated many women. Nine months later, a member of the public called Ochoa to ask if he had had a girl or boy.

The project *MADRES! / MOTHERS!* concluded with my exhibition *NOVELA ROSA O ME AGARRO EL ARQUETIPO* at the Carrillo Gil Museum. Later on we participated sporadically in diverse conferences and a few performances. In 1993, after 10 years, we decided to bring the cycle to a close.

The Feminist Art in the Nineties

I don't know if it was exhaustion after so many years working collectively, but towards the end of the eighties I was ready to work alone. Unlike feminist art groups in the U.S. and Europe who were able to link the work of people in the theoretical and the practical fields of art (historians, critics, and artists etc.), in Mexico this did not happen. Thus, in 1988 when I had the opportunity to collaborate in *El Universal*, one of the major newspapers in the country, I decided to write about the issues I love: women artists and cutting-edge art.

For me, the most important thing about writing is that little by little, I have gathered a collection of articles on Mexican artists which has allowed me to analyze the changes in our situation over the past 20 years. The first thing I would have to underline is that, at present, there are a great number of excellent young artists (in their late twenties and early thirties) such as Mónica Castillo, Sofía Taboas, Yolanda Paulsen, Laura Anderson, Patricia Soriano, Isabel Leñero, Rosario García Crespo and Elvira Santamaría. Their work, even if they do not necessarily accept it, has been thoroughly influenced, directly or indirectly by feminist art. There are also other excellent artists whose concerns have nothing to do with women's issues such as Estrella Carmona, Doris Steinbichler or Lorena Orozco. Amongst their generation, at least 50% of students at the art schools are women. As far as the grants awarded by our National Fund for Culture and Arts (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes) and awards given at the National Competition of Young Art (Encuentro Nacional de Arte Joven) are concerned, women students do as well or better than young male artists. However, in collective exhibitions as well as solo shows, the presence of women artists continues being weaker and for each 10 critical texts written of them, only one alone is dedicated to a woman.

In spite of the advances that we have seen and the fact that when I speak to younger artists they tell me that everything has changed and that they no longer perceive sexism in our profession as a relevant issue (although those that have started having children are quickly changing their minds), I still worry about everything we are lacking. There are hardly any books on women artists, and even fewer with a feminist perspective. At the different women's studies centers at various universities, art is not an issue studied. There are, however, a couple of women doing their postgraduate studies in this field. There isn't one single day care center for artist's children, which means a heavier load on women, but neither do we have an

women artists' organization working to improve our professional conditions. On the other hand, 20 years after the exhibitions of women artists I mentioned earlier, whose main objective was to make our presence felt and which I thought were part of history, I recently found out that the UNAM, our most important national university, was organizing an exhibition of 100 artists whose exclusive curatorial criteria was the artist's gender, disregarding political or artistic tendencies, ages, media and even the quality of the work. Today, organizing an exhibition of "women" artists is as ridiculous as organizing an exhibition of "Mexican" artists that would bring together the work of outstanding artists such as Francisco Toledo, students and amateur paintings. Maybe, like the Mexican song says, we tend to take "one step forward, and then twenty-four backwards."

Recently, in Mexico city a couple of women artist groups have appeared, although their objectives are very different to what ours were. LINEA ABIERTA is a group where Cecilia Sánchez Duarte, Erika Bulle and Tania de León, among others, participate. They have organized exhibitions with the purpose of promoting themselves professionally. They don't necessarily share aesthetic or political ideas. Cecilia has also organized several exhibitions inviting Mexican and Chicana artists. Another group is COYOLXAUHQUI ARTICULADA. Lilia Valencia, Ema Sosa and Yan Castro, among others, participate in it. I must say I nearly fell on my caboose when, in 1996, I found out they presented themselves as the first feminist art group in Mexico. I must admit, however, that they are the first lesbian feminist art group I know of in Mexico.

I would like to mention, even if it is at the end, that for me the hardest feminist struggle has been the one I fight against my own upbringing every day. Although I have read thousands of pages on feminism, participated in tons of demonstrations, worked in groups, organized exhibitions and written hundreds of articles, I must admit that my heart was formed within the fierce machismo that surrounds us. Changing these behaviour patterns so that my kids grow up with a different experience, or so that my own expectations as a woman and an artist are different, has been quite difficult. Having the enemy within oneself makes it hard to overcome all the contradictions. This is why, when I think on how ambitious the feminist project is (or the hundreds of feminist projects are), when I realize we are trying to change the essence of society itself... I realize we still have a long long way to go.

Notes

1. *ARTES VISUALES*. Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. 1976, Num. 9 Catalog: EXHIBITION
2. *PINTORAS/ESCULTORAS/GRABADORAS/FOTOGRAFAS/TEJEDORAS/CERAMISTAS* Museo of Arte Alvar and Carmen T. de Carrillo Gil. November of 1977. Presentation text by Alaíde Foppa.
3. 'LA MUJER EN EL ARTE' *FEM*. VOL IX NO.33 April-May 1984.

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Motiv # 11, 1998

Anja Franke

In *24 Motiver:et Manuskript (24 Motifs : A Manuscript)*, of which only 'Motiv #11' is reproduced in *n.paradoxa*, Anja Franke writes a dialogue with her alter ego. Franke splits herself into a feminine (Anja Franke - AF) and a masculine (Kaj Aage Draffenharden - KAaD) part. In each motif, the feminine and the masculine parts interact dialectical, and in this way, they reveal more and more people, each with different identities (P#3, P#4, P#5 etc.). The dialogues contained in *24 Motiver: et Manuskript* are all small stories from daily life. The stories are written out in three different texts. The first text is about the environment, exploring whether it is set inside or outside, the setup lighting, the time and where the bodies are placed. The second text is the actual spoken dialogue between the different people in the stories. And the last text explains the thoughts of the subjects and what kind of position and movement the subjects are doing with their bodies as they speak. *24 Motiver; et Manuskript* is in the process of being produced as 24 short videoplays.

Anja Franke (b.1962) is a visual artist living in Copenhagen,Denmark.

KAaD:

How did it go?

[He is sitting comfortable in a big sofa with his legs crossed and stretched on top of a coffee table in front of the sofa.]

AF:

I am not sure yet ...

[She is standing on the floor close to a stereo system.]

KAaD:

But you must have sensed something?

[A tall earthenware jar with pencils is standing on the coffee table.]

AF:

Sensed ... It is not a thing that you sense, it's pure practice and routine.

[Her finger slides smoothly and slowly over the edge of the black stereo.]

KAaD:

Yes, but anyway ...

[He is starting to touch the earthenware jar with one of his feet on the coffee table.]

AF:

Anyway?

[Her finger is about to reach the end of the edge of the stereo.]

KAaD:

Did you see something?

[His foot pushes carefully the earthenware jar - holding the pencils - across the coffee table.]

AF:

Yes, I saw him of course ...

[The stereo is bought during the sales in Fona. Probably it is a SONY. Before she purchased it, she had spent a lot of time on choosing a brand because the price of the stereos were almost the same. It is all in one, CD recorder; tape recorder and radio.]

KAaD:

Once he had problem with his pancreas, you know, the metabolism process.

[With his foot he is carefully pushing the earthenware jar across the surface of the coffee table.]

AF:

Anyway, you must know him very well ?

[Her finger slides over the edge of the stereo and she passes her finger over her eyes. She is standing watching the accumulation of the fine and grey dust on her fingertip]

KAaD:

But don't you think, that being together with him is pleasant?
[He is still pushing the earthenware jar in the same direction across the surface of the coffee table.]

AF:

He is not exactly my taste.
[She is blowing her finger tip and all the dust is moving around in the air]

KAaD:

TASTE!!! What do you mean?
[Suddenly he stops moving his foot and the earthenware jar stands still]

AF:

I just notice that he constantly changes his position in relation to what he claims.
[She turns around her finger when she blows it and finally she wipes her finger in the blouse.]

{franke}KAaD:

Position to what?
[He starts moving the jar again and continues to push the earthenware jar with its pencils in the same direction - across the coffee table.]

AF:

That he contradicts himself constantly, like a lizard can change its colour ...
[She bends down in front of the stereo and looks into the transparent door of the tape recorder]

{franke}KAaD:

... but I think it is his method.
[He is now sitting with his leg totally outstretched - across the surface off the coffee table - in a strange position. He can almost not reach the earthenware jar]



AF:

But not a considered method.

[She presses a small button next to the tape recorder and the door to the inner room begins automatically to open at a very relaxed and slow speed.]

{franke}KAaD:

But we all have the right to be human beings.

[He is now trying to get his foot on the other side of the earthenware jar]

AF:

Human and method? [!]

KAaD:

Yes, human, you know how to control and not control...feelings! [!]

{franke}AF:

Have you known him for a long time?

[For a moment, she watches the now totally inner room of the tape recorder]

KAaD:

A long time...well I bumped into him a while ago.

[He has finally got his foot on in an awkward position across the coffee table.]

AF:

Humm...How?

[With her finger she carefully wipes off the inner side of the door of the tape recorder.]

KAaD:

It was a coincidence ... I was looking at a frenchcoffeemaker, you know, one in glass, such a thing I have desired for long time.

[He is slowly pushing the earthen ware jar with pencils back again - across the surface of the coffee table, trying to raise his body - while the movement with his foot keeps going, he happens to push the earthen ware jar violently. All the pencils are dispersed on the coffee table and roll across its surface and down on the floor - in all directions]

AF:

But I think that he changes constantly...

[She raises her finger to her eyes to see if any dust has accumulated.]

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Motiv # 11, 1998

Anja Franke

From the Danish version of *24 Motiver: et Manuskript (24 Motifs : A Manuscript)*.

KAaD:

Hvordan gik det?

[Han sidder dybt nede i en stor sofa med benene over kors hen over bordet, som står foran sofaen.]

AF:

Det jeg ikke helt klar over endnu ...

[Hun står på gulvet tæt ved et stereoanlæg.]

KAaD:

Men du må da have fornemmet et eller andet?

[På sofabordet står der en høj lerskål med blyanter i.]

AF:

Fornemmet! ... Det er ikke noget, man fornemmer, det er ren øvelse og rutine.

[Hendes finger glider let og angstomt hen over en kant på det sorte stereoanlæg.]

KAaD:

Ja, men alligevel ...

[Hen begynder at berøre lerskålen med sin ene fod på sofabordet.]

AF:

Alligevel?

[Hende finger er lige ved at nå afslutningen af kanten på stereoanlægget.]

KAaD:

Så du noget?

[Hens fod skubber forsigtigt lerskålen - med blyanterne i - hen over sofabordet.]

AF:

Ja, jeg så ham selvfølgelig ...

[Stereoanlægget er købt på udsalg i Fona. Det er vist nok et Sony. Inden hun anskaffede sig dette, havde hun brugt megen tid på at vælge et marke, idet priserne på aile stereoanlæggene var ca. ens. Det hele er samlet i ét: cd-støv på sin fingerspids.]

KAaD:

Men synes du ikke, at han er meget behagelig ... du ved, at have samvaer med?

[Han skubber stadigvæk lerskålen i samme retning - hen over sofabordets flade.]

AF:

Han er nu ikke lige min smag.

[Hun puster til sin fingerspids, og sit støvet forvilder sig i alle retninger ud i luften.]

KAaD:

SMAG!!!... Hvad mener du med det?

[Han stopper brat ain bevægelse med foden, og lerskålen med blyanterne står stille.]

{franke}AF:

Jeg bemærker blot, at han konstant ændrede position i forhold til, hvad han påstod.

[Hun vender og drejer sin finger, mens hun puster, og til sidst aftørrer hun den i sin bluse.]

KAaD:

Position til hvad?

[Han påbegynder igen sin bevægelse og fortsætter med at skubbe lerkrukken med blyanterne i den samme retning - hen over sofabordet.]

AF:

At han modsiger sig selv konstant ... som et firben kan skifte farve ...

[Hun bøjer sig ned foran stereoanlægget og bigger ind gennem den gennemsigtige låge på kasettebåndoptageren.]

{franke}KAaD:

... men jeg tror, at det er hans metode.

[Han sidder nu med et helt udsrakt ben - hen over sofabordets flade - i en forvreden krops- stilling. Han kan næsten ikke nå leeskålen længere.]afspiller, radio.]stofskifteprocessen.

[Med foden fører hen forsigtigt lerskålen med blyanterne hen over sofabordets flade.]tasettebåndoptager og

KAaD:

Han har vistnok engang haft problemer med sin bugspytkirtel, du ved, det dér med

AF:

Du må alligevel kende ham ganske godt?

[Hendes finger glider ud over stereoanlæggets kant, og hun fører fingeren op mod sine ejne. Hun står og iagttager ophobningen af det fine, grålige

AF:

Men ikke en særlig velovervejet metode.

[Hun trykker på en lille knap ved siden af kasettebåndoptageren, og lågen til det indre rum begynder automatisk at åbne sig med en meget afslappetog langsom hastighed.]

KAaD:

Vi har vel alle lov at være mennesker.

[Han forsøger nu at få foden over på den anden side af lerskålen.]

{franke}AF:

Menneskeligt og metode?

[!]

KAaD:

Ja, menneskeligt - du ved, kontrol og ikke kontrol ... følelser!

[!]

AF:

Har du kendt ham længe?

[Hun betragter et øjeblik det indre af den nu helt åbne kassettebåndoptager.]

{franke}KAaD:

Længe og længe ...Jeg stødte ind i ham for et stykke tid siden.

[Han har endelig fået foden over på den anden side af lerskålen og ligger i en noget forvreden kropstilling hen over sofabordet.]

AF:

Hmm... Hvordan?

[Hun tager sin finger og tørrer forsigtigt indersiden af kassettebåndoptagen af.]

KAaD:

Det var meget tilfældigt.....Jeg stod og betragtede en fransk



stempelkaffekande, du ved, sådan en i glas, som jeg har ønsket mig lænde
[Han skubber langsomt lerskålen med blyanterne tilbage igen - hen over
sofabordets flade. Idet han forsøger at rejse sin krop - samtidig med at
bevægelsen med foden fastholdes - kommer han til at skubbe voldsomt til
lerskålen, som vælter. Alle blyanterne spredes ud på sofabordet og ruller
hen over dets flade og ned på gulvet - ud i alle retninger.]

AF:

Men jeg synes nu, at han skifter konstant ...

[Hun løfter sin finger op mod sine øjne for at se, om der skulle være
ansamlet noget støv.]

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

Friday night, end of term July (I think!)

Ou ee,baby! Don't let your dog bite me! God Bless rock & roll. It's Friday and its cocktail time again !!! The end of a stressful and far too long week. So shake rattle and roll. Two Gin and Tonics have made their way down the throat and it's not seven o'clock yet....

Why is it that there are periods of one's life when anything that could get screwed up does so and with a vengeance? Everything, every organisation that I am involved with in any remote way goes haywire this past year. Also it's that time of year when it's final show time. All my students are going slightly mad and are extremely stressed out but not as much as me. I have to mark their stuff!

I'm really fed up today. More fed up than usual with all the art management who get awards and lots of praise for promoting the arts, for giving artists a chance etc, etc when all they were doing, beside being paid a good wage, was their job! Yet here I am. An artist, the person who by one's own sacrifice and slog justifies all the art administrators, curators and whatever who make their living off our backs! There is no justification for their work except the likes of me and thousand of other artists the world over who daily struggle and wrestle with insurmountable odds to produce our work. We have no guaranteed income unless we teach or take other work. Odd isn't it. Myself and thousands like me who struggle in a huge industry so that a few can glory. And of those few, fewer still are artists. Such is my cross to bear!!!!

Nearest and dearest has just rolled his eyes heavenward once again as I deliver another diatribe against all arts administrators. What does he care he doesn't have to work with them!!!

next day

Well was I silly last night or not? Em, who is just about to leave us after six weeks

here, came home stressed out from her job and we got a bit heavy with the gin & tonics. Considering I really haven't had a drink (before last night!) since New Year's because I have been trying to lose weight, I did okay. But I am a cheap drunk!

Em's ex has continued to harass her so she finally got a restraining order out on him, his sister and all his family. I thought that this was a bit extreme until she pointed out that his sister had verbally threatened her as well as writing nasty letters promising among other delights to gauge her eyes out. As for his father, he just has done time for grievous bodily harm or GBH as it's known in the trade.

Then Near & Dear said, 'You can sure can pick them. The one before may have had a PHD but he was as nutty as a fruit cake.'

Em did not take kindly to this remark and let out some venomous rebuttal. But N & D just grins at her, knowing he had hit a very sore point. Em has about as lousy taste in men as G. The only difference being that she actually gets to live with one and almost get to the altar before disaster strikes. Where as G. has never even managed that. Talking of G., she was supposed to have a farewell party but it got cancelled; along with her departure to the north and the new job. She is now unemployed as well as dateless!

So we decided to go out on our own next week. Em turned down the offer as she had booked people and vans to move her belongings out of storage and into her new flat that day. Coincidence or what??? Personally I believe that Em has never forgiven G. over an incident years ago involving one of them winning a date with a media personality that led on to much better things. But I refuse to get involved and as she was paying for the night out I am not asking any questions about it.

June 27

I have another nephew visiting me !!! So far he has managed to give me the wrong arrival date so that I turned up at Heathrow and no nephew. I was so pissed off I telephoned my brother collect to tell him that his son might have evaporated in mid-Atlantic. He told me not to worry as they were just about to leave for the airport to put him on the 'plane and that the information he had faxed me was wrong. A typo which he had only just noticed that morning and was wondering, just as the 'phone rang, as if I might have been confused over the matter.

Confusion has nothing to do with it! How about rage and the desire to strangle brother and nephew and need to bite the head off an unsuspecting tourist who juggled my tray thus spilling most of my coffee out of my cup. No, I am not annoyed not in the least! So back I went the next day. He did arrive eventually. I just have to admit that, as G. said: 'They are country bumpkins.' But very nice ones. I think this one is rather sweet so far. But then he sleeps a lot from jet lag.

The really tragic news is that assistant has decided he is of no use to anyone but his granny's garden and I have not seen him since last time we met at the Royal Academy. I feel so helpless that I can't help him in anyway and I still need an assistant!!

Near & Dear and I have a wedding anniversary in two days.TWENTY YEARS!!

Friday

Wedding anniversary is now divorce. No meal out. No Flowers. No card. Just me and nephew who went out and got a bottle of wine. Mind you, he was at the wedding as well in a very fetching blue romper suit! No, what I have to thank is football. We are in the midst of World Cup Football and the testosterone is so thick in the air that you could have a sex change just walking into a pub. Wham! Just like that! Suddenly a beer belly and trousers drooping, revealing a bum crack and your head is filled with tacky information about which female neighbour has the best legs and names of players before you could put your second foot forward into the establishment.

I tell you it is lethal. I am so glad England has not made it to the finals. Otherwise you might as well kiss civilization goodbye on this island because when there's a game on with England playing you can even get a table at the Ivy restaurant. London becomes that empty. No traffic is about. No human being moves for fear of missing something. When a goal is made you can hear the roar shaking the buildings as you quietly try to garden out of earshot of a television. But no hope! Every set in the land is on loud. Very loud. I can not believe that every male in Britain is as deaf as Near and Dear and has to have the volume up that loud! My man is what I would term rather unemotional. Cool in his temperament. Sanguine. Great disapproval is expressed with a slightly raised eyebrow. A light scratch of the nose is high emotion. But with World Cup even he was jumping out of his chair and yelling YES!!! YES!!! .Which is more than I get in bed! The day after England lost I witness several arguments in public over what would have been better tactics or if so and so was not booked and so forth and so on. You could have been forgiven for thinking perhaps that we had all been told our television licence fee had doubled overnight or air had been rationed. You know something serious.

Now can you with any stretch of the imagination think of an equivalent activity that is dominated entirely by women? That is solely for women. Which only has women in any position of importance in any media in serious discussion on the matter while occupying all public and mental space on prime time television. Then there's the spin off shows and not to mention the merchandise? Well I can't! Furthermore I can't see it ever happening. Some man would be sure to yell sex discrimination or complain that too much time was being wasted on a minority interest.(Despite the fact that half the world is female.)

Sunday night

I am having one of my more infrequent little blue patches that used to come around in my now forgotten periods. However I have taken Bach's Flower Rescue Remedy and am feeling a bit better. We now can look forward to France being in the finals against Brazil. A bit ironic considering the French aren't at all that keen on the game. No, give them the Tour de France any day. Apparently most chic French people think

it a little bit to common. Well, we'll just have to see. Some how I think the French national ego will get the better of them....

July 3

Still no night out with G. AND she has managed to land a job as an Arts Officer for a Suburban Borough of something or other. What an art slut! She has been swanning around all over the place so smug at landing a job after the northern one fell through. (I have yet to know the full story on that!)

Meanwhile I worked out that I am living beneath the official poverty line. Rummaging through the clothes rack at the Buddhist shop (Note: that the Buddhists seem to attract more wealthier and middle class people than any other religion these days for their charity shops) I have got some very lovely second hand designer clothes for myself and the nearest and dearest. His Paul Smith suit came from there. It's a moot point that he is too fat to wear it now but it used to look very nice on him. Which reminds me I must let out his other trousers before our holidays and get the travel insurance !!!

Friday 10

I have not gone to a garden party this evening because once again another social event has fallen foul of the bloody weather. It has done nothing but rain this year! My studio is so damp that I have started using electrical heaters because my paraffin heater is too wet. It produces wet heat. Nothing is drying because it is always too cold and damp. When I'm rich and famous I will have gas central heating!

I am trying to complete a series of prints but it's defeating me because of the dampness. Apparently everyone in all the studio complex is having problems. Non drying oil paint is giving my neighbour above me problems and the sculptor next door is cursing his wood because it has absorbed so much moisture he can't chisel it. Please God one day can I have a central heated studio with dry gas radiator heat.

The snails are so prolific and big in the garden that I have taken to hitting them with a cricket bat. Will people think me a hard cruel woman? After one has witnessed sunflowers, basil and every flower munched to just small stumps then you too would weep. Snail poison is not really part of the answer because it becomes part of the food chain and hurts the birds. We have tried beer and a bucket of salt and throwing them into the neighbour's gardens but the sheer volume of the little buggers defeats you. So now I just smash them and feel wonderful. Pretty good therapy!

Monday

I was art-slutting at the Royal College of Art graduation exercise on Friday - a strange but true story! My dear friend called Bett, who became an art historian only to give it up for art administration (yes, I am surrounded by them!) has been made a Fellow (surely a Fellow-ette!) of the Royal College. When she phoned me up several

months ago to let me know she was in town freelancing as an art administrator trouble-shooter (getting rid of unwanted artists perhaps? I said I'll shoot any of them free but if I could get paid for it all the better! Bett didn't think that sentiment funny but then her sense of humour was always a bit thin, unlike her bottom) Well, I thought great! We used to have wild fun in our student days. Anyway, last week she 'phoned me to ask if I would go as her guest to the RCA Convocation ceremony. Sure why not ? Get to see how the great and the famous live.

We started off at 10:15 with sherry in the Senior Common room . Plllleeeaaassee !!! Sherry at 10 A.M.!!! Only my English great aunties did that. But, so did we and very merry for it all we were. Zandra Rhodes was there to get a Honours Doctor with her shocking pink hair, at almost sixty looking like a geriatric punk and the gallery owner. A., looking as wonderful as ever on HRT was also given an Honorary Doctor. She just happened to deal in the work of the ex-head of printmaking (Funny how there are all these connections linking honours and favours!); not to mention Lord M, Princess S's ex. He, like the rest of the royals, is not much taller than an enlarged dwarf! Bett and I started to giggle when we saw him walk into the senior common room and we just couldn't stop. Sherry that early in the day is lethal. I commented that "Do you think the royal family are related to the Munchkins?". And that really did it. We were off into fits of choking giggles; barking with laughter behind the potted plants - trying not to wet ourselves.

The ceremony in the Albert Hall was amazing. Talk about pomp and circumstance complete with trumpet fanfare. Peter Blake was made a Honorary Doctor as was the film maker Ken Loach. Peter look very jolly and rotund and turned to wave to everyone after he was handed his scroll and everybody cheered .

Bett looked a bit daft with her funny little hat and tassel. It's the closest I'll ever get to receiving an award from the Royal College. I used to have real slugging matches with the ex-head of printmaking who retired about ten years ago. He was so pissed most of the time he could never remember that we came to blows and would start all over again the next time I met him at an opening. After a splendid lunch where we met a wonderful couple who were great designers in the fifties. We decided that we couldn't just go home so we went out shopping and then home after a discreet time to watch Wimbledon tennis on TV over a few glasses of Pimms!

The English art scene is still fairly chauvinistic and dominated by men and the old boys club network operate very well in the teaching appointments. Despite the higher profile of young women artists its still very much the "blokes" who get the jobs. Even though the majority of students are women, the majority of lecturers are men and they're the ones that get tenure.

Just look at what happened at Brighton recently with another ex-head of Painting and Printmaking! He was so uncomfortable with women that he couldn't look them in the eye when talking to them. The external moderator this year took S. aside and asked her if there was anything amiss? Had she done anything wrong because the head just wouldn't look at her during the moderation. S. told her not to worry because

any woman made him feel so uncomfortable that he felt as if his balls were about to drop off. I understand, it's one of the benefits of a Jesuit education.

August. Somewhere very far north in Western Canada.

If I see another TREE I'll scream. The so-called shortcut my dear brother suggested added not only an extra hour and a half on to our already tedious journey but the only vehicles we saw were logging trucks and pick up trucks full of loggers. When we did manage to reach civilization in the shape of a gas station and general store the air was filled with smoke from burning trees. A huge forest fire thousands of miles north was blowing smoke everywhere and not on just one province but all the prairie provinces. They were all screened in smoke for days from thousands of fires. We could even smell it in the cabin interior of the aeroplane when we took a short detour to the 'ol home town. They have the nerve to be smug about how polluted London is.

This holiday is soooooo needed!! It's not until you begin to chill out that you realize how fried you can get. I could tell my priorities changed when the all consuming task for the day was remembering to bring the cheezzys for the beach and getting a higher score on Super Mario than my six year old niece. There's a lot to be said for mindless activity. It's just that some art administrators mistake it for civilisation/culture.

August 23

The plane ride back was a lot better than the one going out. For one thing I could actually identify what was presented to me on my plate for dinner. Going out near and dear, along with the pair to my right, got into a very animated conversation on what exactly we were eating. The substance presented as meat had us all foxed. I maintained it was definitely not of a former living being because I could identify the knitting stitch in its texture. Knit one, pearl one first row; pearl one, knit one, second row always produces the seed stitch whether in sweaters or non-organic substances served up in your aeroplane lunch. Who says encouraging women into science has not had its benefits!

On the home run I attempted to sleep on what is known as the red eye run; this I learned from the air hostess who also informed me that it was her first overseas flight. Near and dear got rather animated at the sight of the northern lights as we flew over Hudson Bay towards London. One poke in the ribs to wake me was tolerable but the dozen or so that he thought necessary caused me to hiss through my clenched teeth at him with threats of tipping his beer on his lap.

"I've seen Northern Lights before. I want to sleep. Wake me up when they serve the knitted food substances."

I woke as we were landing at Gatwick. N. and D. said he couldn't wake me so he ate my serving not wanting to see it go to waste, despite the fact he somehow managed

to do it before many times. So we ended the holiday in the traditional manner of having an argument and I knew we were home again.

All in all it was a tolerable holiday no major trauma this year with any of the relatives except the pet rabbit know as the "Holy Bunny" (because of its cross shaped stigmata on the head) when he decided to take a bite out of me. Next time I will not try to seek him out in the backyard to return him to his cage because the children are panicking at the predatory hawk that is continuously circling the back yard looking for a snack. I will instead give the hawk crackers. The rabbit is possessed not blessed! Hasn't got a blessed bone in his body; at least a few less after I gave him a swift kick for the massive bruise that still adorns my arm two weeks later.

Em had house- and cat-sat for us again and as usual the cats were traumatised. G has settled into her new job out in the outer regions of suburbia and loves all the power her position holds as the one and only Arts Officer in suburbia. Lots of invites for Private views starting next week. Bett has left copious messages on the ansaphone about how bored she is and did I know any eligible men and could I make sure I invite them to my 50th next month.

AGGGHHHHH! MY 50TH! I have to start planning it. I have NO MONEY!!!!

September 6

Have designed my invite /declaration for 50th birthday party. Will send them out this week after I print them up. Making lists of who to invite will prove to be major problem. Will not invite the dreaded FiFi as she didn't invite me to hers. Have ordered all the wine (cheap fizz) and will order the cake this week. I hope to get lots of presents. Took N. and D. out to an Italian for his 48th. Apparently there is a glut of birthdays in March and Sept/Oct because they fall nine months after summer holidays and Christmas.

Bett has new contract at the Whitechapel and phoned to see if I am going to opening next week. Will go and meet her there. I deliberately gave the M.A. opening at Goldsmith a wide miss. I find it too discouraging and pretentious.

Have discovered wild yam cream as a hope for curbing hot flushes! A list of things they do not tell you about the menopause in all those books on the menopause.

1. Your figure turns into the same as your aunties - square, big busted and overweight. In fact you automatically go up at least one size as soon as the change starts. Your weight moves around your body redepositing itself between your shoulders and your hips. So you now have a bigger cup size and your hips merge into your waist. You get to have thinner thighs because all the weight goes up to your hips and waist.

Which brings me to point 2.

2. You can not get rid of your weight. Except with a very, very big effort. You may need more gin and tonic's to cope with life but they stay with you for ever; especially around your waist.

3.You haven't the energy to get rid of the extra fat. Forget it. I could happily sleep my life away.

4.I do not believe Japanese women do not have hot flushes. Anybody who does not have them is lying !! Except when your homeopathic remedy finally kicks in...all the wild yam cream herbal remedies make you constipated.

5. Men ,especially husbands and partners of the same age, go off sex. Just when you don't have to worry about pregnancy and pre- menstrual tension any more,they go off it. The biggest kept secret of all time is that men over a certain age can't get interested any more. Why do you think Viagra is in such high demand ? Why do you think they all get second trophy wives much younger than themselves, except in an attempt to stimulate that flaccid muscle into action.

6.You get very fed up with your husbands /partners stupid habits and boring jokes. Most men still have the humour of a seventeen year old at the best of times. At this stage in the proceedings I'd rather not have the body which has the non-functional and flaccid muscle as well as a sense of humour that has stopped at seventeen. I can't seem to find the benefit of having it around and life without a sophisticated sense of humour is not worth knowing.

Thursday September 12

Went to the opening called *Speed*. Met Bett. She still had a pink feather duster in her hand from her attempt to give a "Professional Look" to the exhibits. In other words they were looking like they had just come out of storage and with only minutes to go before the punters arrived she started dusting.

Can not say I blame her! One of my last criticisms of "The Open" there was that it looked as if it had been hung by students with the labels all crooked and pictures wonky!

D. turned up with the ex-wife of his best friend??? She gushed on about how much she wanted her ex's picture collection especially my pieces. I told her to buy her own and come to my next sale.

Bett was in full steam swanning all over the place. At one time she was talking to the director of the Serpentine who began her vocation as a humble curator of the open studios in Wapping in the early 1980s. Believe it or not. She eye-balled me and I her before Bett said questionly,

'Do you know each other?'

We both burst out at the same time .

'I didn't recognize you.'

Considering she has more income than me and more access to more expensive beauty products and the services of the make up counters at Harvey Nicks, she has not aged that well. H.was there. He is always good for gossip because he works on so many top art and exhibition catalogues. But things are quiet at the moment. Told me to wait till after the new Bankside Tate's "Topping Out" ceremony. G. promised me her ticket but I'll believe it when I see it. Next week is more openings. Tuesday is the night for all of Cork Street.

Friday 19 September

End of another week! Started back to teaching my classes including the 17 year old's. Thank God I'm not 17 any more and never will be again. It could almost be classified as a disease. The openings on Tuesday night I did with G. She comes up to town quite frequently in order to survive the 'Burbs. The hot gossip with her is that she has met another man. This one seems reasonable and actually human. However I live to be contradicted.

We walked into the Barry Flanagan show and within the first 5 minutes I got cold-shouldered by the director of the Camden Arts Centre and chatted up by M. He was wondering how come he hasn't seen me much at the Delfina Gallery and smiled charmingly at me. I really wasn't up to it so I said to save me a seat for the next one just before G. got me into a corner to hiss at me. She wanted an in-depth discussion on the new work. Immediately!

'For God sake it's just a women's fanny. Not more of *The Sun* erotic school of art!', I hissed back at her.

'There's not much you can say about them. Who would want a six foot fanny in their garden except some perve?'

'Yea, I see what you mean. I just wasn't too sure what they were supposed to be actually!'

I gave her a strange look. Then we both sighed deeply at the obvious clumsiness of the new work. Unfortunately for us the artist was just behind G.. He turned around and sneered. G. was about to open her mouth again but I grabbed her arm and led her quickly out the door. I thought it best as she was going back there for dinner afterwards. After a few cursory glances at some pretty appalling shows we swanned down and around the corner to Timothy Taylor's new gallery. Taylor being Helen Taylor's husband, Helen Taylor, being the Duchess of Winsor's daughter. Tres chichi opening of Latin American painters. I hate to say it once again but I am so fed up of looking at young immature work.

G. and I after a very serious discussion about the work, out of earshot of anybody we recognised, decided to rubber neck and see who the celebs were. We caught sight of Helen and mummy upstairs in the office chatting over drinks with various people. I can definitely say they are not true born blondes. Even from that distance, I could see roots!

We decided to window shop along Bond Street before G. went to her dinner and I trotted back to the East End. What we could do with a few thousand ££S !!! Sigh. I asked her, in a quiet moment brought on by lust in front of the Donna Karen window, just what she was going to buy me for my 50th. I felt her stiffen, swallow hard and gulp. Not a good sign I would say. Must double check my party list. Can't remember who I invited?

Tuesday

It's the day before my birthday. Nearest and Dearest is out of town inspecting and supervising a project. He has promised to be home for tomorrow. G. and Em and

Bett have booked a table at Pont de le Tour on the Thames next to the Design Museum. Em knows it well as she use to work at the D.M. Near & Dear at first wasn't going to come as he is in one of his "I'm too broke after the holiday" moods. Em turned and sneered at this bit of whimpering when he uttered it. Her sneers are like laser beams! He even gave me my present two weeks ago in a cardboard box unceremoniously plunked on the table. It was a Poole china coffee set in a gorgeous shade of steel blue which I wanted but why he couldn't have given it two weeks later and wrapped is beyond me. The air was a bit frosty between us for a while after he revealed it was the birthday present. Yet this is the man whose employers think is one of the most well mannered and charming people they have and constantly send him out to deal with clients. Have I missed something here.

Both Bett and G. went to the new Tate's "Topping Out" ceremony. G.had a wonderful time and was very glad she didn't give me her ticket. Bett meanwhile, had a tap on her shoulder, turned around and was confronted with a ghost from her past in the form of her ex-fiancee who she ditched some 10 years ago. I remember it well. I felt really sorry for the guy. He was lovely. He has since married badly. It is a complete and utter disaster and he made sure Bett knew for over an hour while all the art world of Brit Art swirled around her. She was pinned to a wall by a barrage of woe and pain; not one but two breakdowns and wifey is the woman from hell. He would leave except for the children. At this point, Bett apparently yelled out.

'What Children ? You said you never wanted children !'

And a silence suddenly replaced the din of chit-chat that surrounded them up 'til then. Necks craned.

G. said that she thought it was spectacular.

'Everybody looked at them.Even Nick raised his eyebrow.'

I enquired why she didn't rescue Bett and her reply was:

'What ! And ruin the fun!'

Anyway Bett survived by feigning faintness at not having a chance to get to the nibbles and bolted. Apparently at that point she caught sight of G. grinning like a Cheshire cat and tried to make a bee line for her. Bett's hands were itching to strangle somebody but G. had slipped away through the crowd. I got both sides of the story and either way I was glad I didn't go after all.

I have got two birthday cards and one present in the post so far. I am having a pedicure at 8:30 a.m. tomorrow. I am not having my hair done as I'm trying to grow it out. I may regret this choice. The day after my birthday I am going all philosophical about being 50. What a relief to have it over and done with. Now it's only the party to get through without any major disasters.

Near and dear managed (just) to get home in time for the birthday meal. At that point in time I was well away as I had already managed to down a bottle of champers with colleagues in the art department. G turned up on time. Partially, I think, it is because she will use any excuse to get into town away from the delights of her new

suburban environment and into the arms of her new man. We had a lovely meal at a Cantina on the river. Em didn't manage to make it because of a very late shipment of art that had to go to Sweden. Near and Dear managed to get really pissed in his usual very quiet way. So quiet that G and I hadn't noticed he had fallen asleep and slid under the table. It was only when the bill arrived that we stopped talking and noticed he wasn't there. G perceived a familiar sound of snoring and looked under the table. We managed to wake him by sticking our heads under the table repeatedly (pretending that we had dropped something) and hissing at him. We were eventually successful and he slipped back into his seat without anybody noticing I think. The table next to us filled with trendy young media types who were giggling uncontrollably. It could be they were on illegal substances but on the other hand..... I paid for my meal and his on my card and bolted gracefully out of the restaurant as quickly as I could. If anybody had asked me if I would I care to push him in the Thames before I went home I would have. G thought we should have left him under the table sleeping.

However Near & Dear didn't fare much better at the party on the following Sunday. Having managed not only do nothing what so ever towards its preparation because he had been out of town during the previous week. He insisted on cooking a tradition Sunday lunch then walking out on it while it cooked to go to the pub for two hours. Needless to say the whole mess landed in the rubbish bin and we had a blazing row which only ended as the doorbell rang and the first guest arrived. He stomped up stairs to have his Sunday afternoon nap and slept through the first 3 hours of the party. The really great thing was that nobody asked where he was.

I fear that being fifty is going to very dangerous for my marriage. At this point in time I really don't give a toot about whether it survives or not. I do not care if my parents think of me as a failure for walking out on my husband. I don't care if my husband can not survive without me. Can I survive with him is the point of the matter ? I have become totally intolerant of his behaviour, my three part time jobs and a thousand other things in my life. I think I need to have a new and more exciting life.

October 15

I can not believe what I do for my friends, especially G. Since this new man has come into her life, and he is v.v. important, we have done more shopping for the "Right Clothes" than I can ever remember. No man has ever affected her like this. We live at Fenwicks ! We have bought, then taken back, three suits. We have bought, but not taken back, four pairs of trousers and one drop dead sexy top. We have taken back one pair of gorgeous maroon trousers that split on her, just as she was about to go out on a date. I lied to the sales clerk saying that as a fashion lecturer I think that the fabric was faulty. I did not tell the sales clerk that my dearest and nearest friend in her excitement at going out with "THAT MAN" she had put the trousers on backwards and split them when she sat down to talk on the 'phone. The "brilliant trousers that zip

up the front and fit perfectly" in reality zipped up the back. G only worked that one out when I pointed out that the label is always on the back. What, I ask myself, is that man doing to her head? So we bought another suit only this time it had a very short shirt and we'll probably take it back next Saturday and exchange it for something else. In order to make me go with her she keeps taking me to Maison Bertaux for cake and coffee before the next forage in Fenwicks. I have come out with a big 'orrible spot on my face.

Work in the studio is now a production line. I have started on some new sculpture that is a multiple. It is v.v. fiddley and involves lots of stapling and tiny little sheep. I may abandon it. But I need to find some industrial wheels - like two dozen.

October 18

G. has told me she is in LURV! Very definitely absolutely in LURV! Have I heard this before? But she seems v.determined about it. I fear the worst. Have not met him yet. Near and dear is still in disgrace about his behaviour on my b.day. He claims he doesn't feel very well. I claim he won't get any better if he keeps this behaviour up. G says to ignore him as she finds his talking about golf more offensive. Bett just rolls her eyes backwards into her head when ever I try to talk about near and dear. Most disconcerting! But then she has had so many serious relationships that I had lost count. After husband no.3 I suggested she ran an Evening Adult Education class on marriage and what not to do. She stopped talking to me for several years after that.

Thursday

We have taken the suit with the skirt back! Afterwards I took G. to the nearest cappuccino bar and told her outright that I was not going shopping with her again. At least not until I got to meet this man who is turning my friend into a blathering idiot. G. looked at me in total panic and said it was v.v.important to her to get it right.

'Right for what?'

I asked.

'This man is driving you insane.'

She just sat there with this look of perplexity welded on her face. I might as well of spoken to her in a Martian sub-dialect. I fear we are going to have one hell of a broken heart, or worse, a marriage situation. I am dreading the future!

Saturday

Bett has just phoned with her news. She has been asked to be a jury member on next year's Turner Prize panel. I replied that I wouldn't be compromising her by being nominated now that I am 50! She didn't think that was funny.

This year's list is bad enough. What with Sam Taylor Wood being married to a prominent gallery owner, Chris being ethnic, Cathy De Monchaux appealing to every unrepressed fetish freak and the whole thing gets more boring every year!! I am now forced to listen to Bett drop names and look for her photo in December Vogue in the

pages at the beginning with hundreds of miniature pictures of people at arty parties supposedly caught unawares in their designer frocks and their capped grins glittering in the flashlight. I have yet to see a bad photo of anybody. Everyone always seems to have their photogenic side to the cameras. Come the night, I shall plunk my cat Fat Mabel down in front of the television so she can whether her relative's owner, Cathy De Monchaux loses! (Her cat is related to mine).

With both Bett and G. going to the same affair there is a slight air of guarded rivalry over what the other is wearing. Bett will be not too much of a problem as she will just throw money at it but with G. if this present man situation is not cleared up by January, I may land up being on intimate terms with the sales staff at Fenwicks. That is if she isn't barred from the shop by then.

Saturday

With G. being so far out of town in suburbia I have curtailed my Art-slutting a bit. As I keep bumping into M., the fellow I got a bit drunk with at the Delfina, I need a built in excuse like G. He always shoves a drink into my empty hand before I can object and raise one eyebrow. However that was only a minor hitch as Bett now keeps ringing me to see if I can accompany her to various openings. She invited me to a special evening at the Whitechapel where the style guru Stephen Bailey was giving a talk. It was like listening to a record being played too fast. Odd that, as the Exhibition is called "Speed". At last the Whitechapel has a decent exhibition and the labels don't fall off. I suspect that Bett has gone around super gluing them to the wall. The munchies were brilliant!

The studio work is eating up so much money. I am haemorrhaging money. Which is in rather short supply of late as I have lost my one day-a-week teaching at art schools. What a story of bullying and out right male chauvinism that was! I am so fed up with it. When will it stop. Why do so many men think that if a woman has power, like an university education and teaches on the same staff as them, that she is crazed with the desire to dominate them, gain control and make them impotent. Talk about transference! I am fed up of the explanation that candidates picked were the best that applied when you see a man, usually younger than you without half the teaching experience, research or exhibition record land the position. I graduated from art school in 1971 and now in 1998 I see that most art departments do still not have more than 5 or 10% women on staff and those that are there usually don't have tenure. Yet the art departments in the UK are more than half women in their student body. The revolution is a very long one indeed!

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Silke Wagner

Facetten einer Ausstellung in der Galerie Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe
20 Februar - 23 März 1999

Angelika Beckmann

DER KÜNSTLER KANN DAS WERK AUSFÜHREN

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1998 (unveröffentlicht)

Galerie Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe, Informationsmaterial, Karlsruhe, ohne Jahr
(1998)

Ausstellungskatalog, Lawrence Weiner, Kunstverein St. Gallen, St. Gallen 1995

Ausstellungskatalog, Von den Dingen. Gegenstände in der zeitgenössischen

Kunst, Museum zu Allerheiligen, Kunstverein Schaffhausen, Schaffhausen 1996

Danke: Sarah Palmer, Baden-Baden

2. DAS WERK KANN HERGESTELLT WERDEN

Der Schauplatz ist eine ehemalige Eisenwarenhandlung in der Südweststadt von Karlsruhe. Die Schaukästen von J. Lechner & Sohn, der das Geschäft lange betrieb, sind aber seit langem leer. Wo einmal die Lettern mit Name und Warenangebot des Geschäfts prangten, akzentuieren heute Farbstreifen - quasi als horizontale Ralleystreifen - die Gebälkzone. Ob der Urheber, Volker Möllenhoff, in der Farbwahl auch der Republik von Kiribati eine dezent-stilisierte Referenz erweisen wollte, ist nicht überliefert. Dieser Farbsockel trägt den filigranen Balkon,

an dessen geschmiedeter Einfassung noch zwei Wappenvögel die Initialen JLSO in die Höhe strecken. Mittig darunter klapft in fast dramatischer Weise der Eingang der dreiflügeligen Ladenfront, die der schnelle Flaneur voreilig für leer und unbelebt erachten mag.

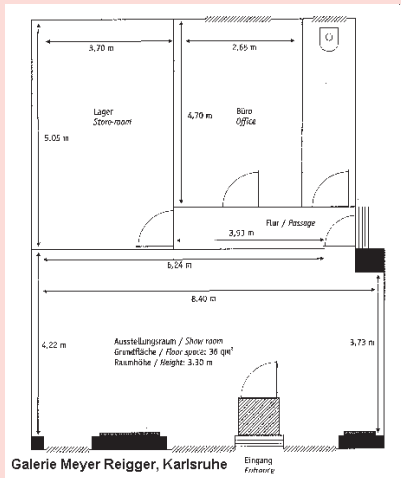
Beim Eintreten gibt sich das Innere als white cube zu erkennen, wobei die Eingangssituation mit dem tief eingeschnittenen Windfang die komplexe Durchdringung von Innen- und Außenraum, ja der diaphanen Wandstruktur zum klingen bringt. Hier können sich Silke Wagners 28 Facetten transparenter Kunststoff-Folie auf weißer Wand auf subtile Weise entfalten. Diese räumlichen Veränderungen durch psychophysische Effekte lassen sich wahrnehmen aber nicht betrachten und stehen kontrapunktisch zur Architektur, die so eine Nivellierung ihrer Autorität erfährt.



3. DAS WERK MUSS NICHT AUSGEFÜHRT WERDEN

{Galerie plan} Ein Satz ist ein Bild der Wirklichkeit. Der Satz ist ein Modell der Wirklichkeit, so wie wir sie uns denken. Tatsächlich geht es beim Schreiben um ein Transcodieren des Denkens, um ein Übersetzen aus den zweidimensionalen

Flächencodes der Bilder in die eindimensionalen Zeilencodes, aus den kompakten und verschwommenen Bildercodes in die distinkten und klaren Schriftcodes, aus



Vorstellungen in Begriffe, aus Szenen in Prozesse, aus Kontexten in Texte. Zuviel unzusammenhängende Aufzählung, zuviel Nennung beobachtbarer Details. So rückt der Beobachter in den Vordergrund, wie als sei er stolz, was er alles sieht. Der Gegenstand muß aber hervortreten, so als spreche er selbst. So, als würde er "handelnd" in mein Auge treten. Bin ich zu voreilig im jetzigen Stadium? Will ich zu schnell ein fertiges Bild haben? Vielleicht muß ich nochmals bei "Null" anfangen. (Ludwig Wittgenstein/Vilém Flusser/Ulrich Meister)

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Reproduction and the creation of the Digital Image

Jenny Jones

Dear Doctor,

I am nine weeks pregnant, The problem I have is that I keep getting nauseous at the thought of the two websites I created during the first six weeks of my pregnancy. I have actually been sick after talking or thinking about them. Will this affect my career as an artist using digital media?

Yours anxiously,

Ms J. Jones.

identified with the paternal

I am interpellated by both artistic production and cyberspace. Why do I seek out a connection with technology? Trained as a fine artist and graduating ten years ago in 1987, what potential was there in expanding my practice to encompass works made by digital means? This is undoubtedly a sacrifice of considerable money and labour. Money spent on hardware, software and ongoing “upgrades”; labour spent in “mastering” computer skills and increasing my knowledge of new programmes. Presumably, I sense there is power to be had in computers and the internet and have maybe fallen for the hype. In doing so, to what degree am I automatically identified with the paternal, in so far as the domain of technology is stereotyped and associated with a masculine gender. Might the stereotypical maternal identification enforced

by my pregnancy be interpreted as a conflict of interests? How might this affect my “status” as a (digital) artist? Finally, is such status possible in digital domains and how do the mechanisms by which this might be attained differ from those which have been already in operation in contemporary Art Histories?

Being optimistic, the internet promises community in a space where we are directly connected to, and perhaps more dependent on our tools than ever before. As digital citizens we can reach a constantly shifting mass of others who are only an interactive e-mail away, giving a thrilling, simultaneous perception of closeness, as well as globality. Immersed in a widespread group delusion, we seem to participate in a “public sphere”. As artists, are we liberated to affect a new and infinitely varied audience, no longer subject to the constraints of specialised transatlantic, transpacific Artworlds? Nicole Matthews says: ‘the Internet should be considered as a whole series of different venues, with different dress codes and different charges for admission.’¹ The optimistic lure I referred to neglects to take into account the computer industry’s domination by large corporations, the worldwide inequalities of access to these spheres of interest and the inequalities of distribution, for example: the access to representation of one’s site in Internet search engines, which drastically affects viewing numbers.

In this article, I will be exploring the overlap between myself, as experienced in three subjective states: subject of pregnant embodiment, digital artist and cybercitizen. To explain the terms by which I am thinking through these states, necessitates a plundering of Western attitudes to maternity in terms of: representations in popular culture, phenomenological accounts, the posthuman, philosophy, psychoanalysis, social histories, assisted reproductive techniques (A.R.T.) and digital technology. The implications of self-representation must also be considered. Do I want to engage in ‘the feminist-humanist project of truth-telling?’ The purity of these positions is challenged by discourses of the posthuman whereupon the posthuman body ‘tells stories through those already told..... posthumans always lie’.² As Grosz suggests, feminist politics needs to acknowledge its contingent aspect - its performativity responding to its own cultural space and historical period.

thinking the mother

The physical nausea I felt in relation to something that had hitherto been very important to me (my first output in html), made me feel my pregnancy was causing me to change my behaviour against my will, except that then, my will itself began to change, until I wasn’t sure what I wanted... a somewhat hysterical position maybe. Kristeva says that the enceinte woman ‘loses communal meaning, which suddenly appears to her as worthless, absurd, or at best, comic - a surface agitation severed from its impossible foundations.’³ Friends found my negative association with these two websites as strange and humorous as I did, but mothers were in complete

sympathy. One explained how when pregnant, she came to detest mulligatawny soup and the Beatles song 'Can't buy me Love', whilst another that she came to hate the colour blue on walls and has never wished to reread the MA thesis on 'colour' that she was working on at the time.

I wanted to mark the significance of my altered states of consciousness with gravity and respect, to write my pregnancy with an as-it happens diaristic account - exposing the unexpurgated chaos of my body - rather than resort to the retrospective haze of censoring memory. I knew I could not speak for all women yet an anxiety persisted that I might be objectifying myself and my baby by writing about my experience, exploiting my state. Does this anxiety measure the degree of my immersion in the traditional orthodoxy of silent maternal sacrifice? I am still unsure as to what degree I might patently claim to know myself as a maternal subject and as someone visibly pregnant, in order to claim a position on the basis of identity politics. To do so would be to disavow the importance of the unconscious in determining who I am, my split subjectivity. Sometimes I do forget that I am pregnant and there is also the possibility that 'something might have gone wrong' and I might no longer be pregnant. To the issue of speaking from an "I" Braidotti adds; 'it is not clear how any one can contain men and women to speak only in their own voice or as their sex.'⁴ This is especially pertinent when thinking about subjectivity as experienced in cyberspace, where one's body is in most cases invisible.

"The pudding club"

The invisibility of the bodies of cybercitizens complicates a project of political community on the basis of bodily specificity. But is the non-virtual maternal subject able to speak for herself, let alone bond with others in a political sense? Grosz remarks that the effects of self-proclamation can only result in recuperation, and I thought that the propensity to give birth was something that bound most women, but some women may not be able to have children, some may never wish to and some may see it as something by which you are 'copping out' and joining the ranks of 'the enemy'. Despite the fact that Dimitrakaki and Tsiantis say 'childbearing and childlessness are intimately connected with a sense of identity and self-worth for women,'⁵ why did I feel defensive, almost sheepish at telling my friends that I was pregnant? What is the status of the maternal in society? Where am I privileged and where am I disempowered? How do representations of pregnancy and motherhood shape my views on my status as a pregnant subject?

I read parenting magazines and watched Ricki Lake whose TV chat show consistently figures "moms"... In national newspapers, I read several stories on maternity which were shocking enough to glean representational space. Maternity seems such a ubiquitous part of life that it is no longer news or else is seen only as relevant to those who are mothers or "expecting". Other representations included feminist theories, fine art imagery, my own artwork; also, the words of families, friends

and other mothers. According to Kristeva, women are not the subjects of maternity, the maternal body is a place of splitting. “Cells combine, redouble, proliferate; size grows, tissue is distended, moods change their rhythm - speed up, slow down: within one body an autonomous other grafts itself. And within that space, both double and stranger, there is no one to signify this. The impossible syllogism of motherhood - ‘It is happening therefore I am not there’ or ‘I cannot think it, yet it is happening’”.⁶

If we confer identity on these processes then we are ‘positing an animism that reflects the inherent psychosis of the speaking Being’.⁷ Yet at the same time, we cannot take solace in the fantasy of the “Phallic Mother”, presuming that the mother is “mastering” the process, for if we do, ‘it is prior to the social-symbolic-linguistic contract of the group, (and) we acknowledge the risk of losing identity at the same time as we ward it off’.⁸ Isn’t this the case only if we accept that the Lacanian model of psychoanalysis is correct in positing identity formation at the stage it does?

Kristeva advocates ‘trying to explore the constitution and functioning of this contract (the socio-symbolic order) starting less from the knowledge accumulated about it (anthropology, psychoanalysis, linguistics) than from the very personal affect experienced when facing it as subject and as a woman.’⁹ Yet within her terms, I am unclear whether the mother is able to reinscribe herself as subject of the birth process given that ‘she is a symbolising-speaking-subject like all others’? Irigaray says ‘We who have always been bound by reproduction have everything still to invent towards the production of our desires, pleasures and “work”.’¹⁰ Who feels “bound”? I’m being smug, but I haven’t done so far.... For me it feels the other way round, I have led a fully expressive and productive life, managing to circulate my name on “the artmarket”, and now am in the fortunate position of being able to look forward to and enjoy my pregnancy. Contraception presumably has endowed me with this privilege. It is easy to take this for granted but Haraway reminds me that if I omit experiences of the restricted reproductive freedom of “other” mothers, then I will produce an “unmarked” account which will reinforce privilege. What conditions have led to a mother’s role being perceived as “binding” and perhaps preventing creative productions about her state? Solely the confusion of her role with that of the domestic? Or is it, the degree to which she has been excluded from the polis? Is the mother able to speak of her experience and if she does, will she be heard, and if so, where?

When I searched the internet for instances of the participation of “real mothers” in these domains, I found my experience to be similar to that of Iris Marion Young who discovered (in her case through a library card) that it contained endless entries giving objective accounts of the best ways to have children, ie: the powerful discourses of the medical and the scientific.

suspicious cyborgs

In contrast to the absence of the subjectivity of “real mothers”, the figure of the cyborg seems omnipresent. Although a contested location, the cyborg seems to

embody the social and material implications of technology. Haraway says: 'The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness...' ¹¹ Here Haraway lists previously thought "ways out", or subversive ideas that second wave feminism has had recourse to. The maternal appears to have become, in the minds of many feminists, associated in various ways with a number of these, despite being also disdained as a conservative position for maintaining the patriarchal status quo.

Haraway states further that: 'Cyborgs have more to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing.' ¹² By becoming pregnant it seems as if by her terms, I am now no longer eligible for cyborg status, to be oppositional. I now feel marginalised by her writing. She doesn't go into details about how you might perform this state differently ie: live communally, avoid the nuclear family, don't get married, be a single mother on Social State Benefits (DHSS) etc... Although she does mention "real live women" she calls cyborgs, she doesn't say whether they have children.... Her wanting to be a cyborg, not a goddess signals a death knell for any vestiges of the second wave feminist political tack of celebrating fecundity. Today's privileged feminist way seems to be to operate within male dominated preserves, acquiring theoretical power; to take an evasive, guerrilla tactic which avoids an overtly oppositional stance.

mothers in the Posthuman.

In cyberspace, we become dematerialized bodies of raw data : posthuman subjects. 'As the separation of sexuality from reproduction aspires to technical completion in the postmodern era, we can ask what figures now anchor our understanding of that other term in the copula now nearly under erasure: reproduction, now at the boundaries of the posthuman.' ¹³ Does this mean that I am an anachronism? Or does this mean that I am, through my unfashionableness to mainstream feminism and my natural, as-yet-unassisted- by- reproductive-technologies approach to motherhood, (give or take the odd nuchal scan) that I am actually coming round to a place which, by its spectacular erasure, is slowly acquiring some minority privilege?!

'Posthuman bodies.....emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context.'¹⁴ This is a confusion of boundaries like maternal experience....the sender and the message cannot be distinguished from the receiver. So by the terms of this discourse, might maternal subjects not be seen as posthuman? For example, Young gives a phenomenological account of her pregnancy and talks about how the boundaries of her body were constantly changing and that this marks the point where she meets the world. I too am experiencing this but would add that, for me, expecting my belly to grow at a steady rate, day by day, so that I can measure where I am at has not happened. Instead I am

subject to bloating and water retention, so the size of my belly goes up and down throughout the day, confounding a smooth passage.

Paula Rabinowitz asks: 'are women posthuman or prehuman? does the term human have any meaning for women? in claiming space for the post-human are we erasing yet again women's lives and stories? these circulate apart from human knowledge.'¹⁵ But why exactly are feminists taking such an interest in reproduction again now that it has moved into the powerful zones of the science labs? 'Three images foundational to our contemporary preoccupation with reproduction as the object of expert knowledge and power: the extrauterine fetus, the surrogate mother and the pregnant man.... these three images marginalize, overshadow or repress the pregnant female body, in all its messy, boundary-defying subjectivity.'¹⁶

the mother, in law

'It is significant...that it was felt necessary to define the meaning of "mother" for the first time in British law as a consequence of the new reproductive technologies...the necessity to define motherhood at all in law suggests, paradoxically, that biological motherhood is in effect being deconstructed.'¹⁷ In seeking to write about the confluence of my subjectivities as pregnant subject, cybercitizen and digital artist, I found it hard not to get sucked in to discussing the technology of assisted reproductive techniques, as if avoiding a whirlpool of contention where technology is perhaps most powerfully and emotively suggested. I wanted to discuss technology in terms of the aesthetic uses I was making of it as a digital artist and cybercitizen, not as a mother. Betterton describes this paradox of technology and the maternal as framed as nature v technology and that this is problematic because 'it places women in the contradictory position of wanting to assert control over reproduction while being against technological intervention'.¹⁸ But she seems to be using non-A.R.T. mothers as the site of co-optation, and radicalising mothers who make use of assisted reproductive techniques, exploiting A.R.T. mothers as objects for the purposes of a feminist cause. 'The dilemma that such technologies pose for feminism is between the reassertion of a natural relationship to fertility, using 'nature' as a territory on which to stake our claim' (Stanworth, quoted in Stabile 1992: 1989) and 'engaging with the more radical possibilities of rethinking the relationships between biology and motherhood which assisted conception may offer. This might involve precisely uncoupling the links between the "creator" and the "bearer", the social mother and birth mother which have been the central cultural metaphors through which birth and creativity have been understood.'¹⁹

Thinking the mother.

How does she enter "our" thought processes? Who is this "we" that thinks her and what or who has shaped these thought processes? Braidotti describes thinking as 'the means of grasping the fluid mass of the affects which animate the body as a libidinal space. All semiology is impregnated with corporeal fluids.'²⁰ This anti-

Cartesian pronouncement derives from the displacement of Western philosophy's knowing subject or "cogito" by the Freudian emphasis placed on the primacy of the unconscious: Phenomenology and feminist theories of corporeality and embodiment have augmented this situation resulting in a "crisis" in philosophy whereby "Woman" has become a privileged site, leading prominent theorists such as Deleuze and Derrida to invest in the concept of 'becoming-Woman.' Braidotti describes it so: 'It is as if the modern subject, the split subject, discovers the feminine layer of his own thought just as he loses the mastery he used to assume as his own....will this new Woman be Man's future?'²¹

the body itself

Thus it seems as if the body can be regarded as a highly particularised vantage point. However, as Young states: 'The dominant model of health assumes that the normal, healthy body is unchanging. Health is associated with stability, equilibrium, a steady state. Change is also a central aspect of the bodily existence of healthy children and healthy old people, as well as some of the so-called disabled. Yet medical conceptualization implicitly uses this unchanging adult male body as the standard of all health.'²² But Braidotti warns that this body-awareness is being utilised in a somewhat guarded manner, whereby feminists perhaps still wish to warily keep a foot in both feminist and male-stream camps, and not identify themselves by their actual female body. 'few concepts seem so readily embraced while at the same time undergoing a process of sanitization or neutralization-that is a strange de-corporealization- by those feminist and cultural theorists who insist on the discursivization (if I may so name it) of bodies as a mode of protecting themselves from their materiality.'²³

Elizabeth Grosz alludes to this in the specific case of a cyborg body when she says: 'with a sense of history as something as contingent and constructed as a cyborg, we can situate political problems in relations between or among bodies instead of positing politics in the body "itself".'²⁴ Cyborg positionalities seem to me however, to come close to masculinist ideas of non-corporeality, transcendence, spirit rather than body: 'Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum...Cyborgs are ether, quintessence'²⁵

The political usefulness of bodily specificity is seen by feminist thinkers such as Braidotti and Grosz to have not proved itself entirely. They maintain a scepticism about whether it can be valorised as a place to speak from or used as a place from which to flee. Indeed, she goes on to say that 'In particular biology usually ties women closely to the functions of reproduction and nurturance.... Insofar as biology is assumed to constitute an unalterable bedrock of identity, the attribution of biological characteristics amounts to a permanent form of social containment for women.'²⁶ But "we" don't have to accept this; confinement, as in an illness. It's at

moments like this, when they merely state the problem, paralysed, not knowing which route to take, that eminent feminist scholars allow their words to elide maternity with the patriarchal/masculinist views of what it is and can mean. Words can restrict/discourage considerations of how a maternal subject might be seen who is attempting to speak; whether in the academy, artworld, politics or cyberspace.

invisible inc.

In 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', a critique of patriarchy and psychoanalysis, Irigaray says of the belly's inner workings: 'Psychoanalysts take a very dim view of this first moment- and besides, it is invisible'(27)... 'a primal womb, our first nourishing earth, first waters, first envelopes, where the child was whole, the mother whole through the mediation of her blood. They were bound together, albeit in an asymmetrical relationship, before any cutting, any cutting up of their bodies into fragments.'²⁸ She describes what Haraway might dismiss as an origin story of symbiotic union. Such "myths" have comforted feminists who perhaps see in them, some separatist haven, untarnished by male presence.

Biologist David Haig recently interrupted such reverie in 1993 with his "discovery", framed within Neo-Darwinian evolutionism: 'some of the physiological procedures during the development of the fetus, and the placenta in particular, seem to operate not only to the benefit of the fetus but potentially to the detriment of the organism of the mother.'²⁹ Specifically, through the invasion of fetal cells into the mother's endometrium, 'maternal arteries in that vicinity are modified so that the fetus gains access to its mother's arterial blood'³⁰ Dimitrakaki, and Tsiantis, suggest that a conflict at the level of physiology challenges the idea of a harmonious relationship in nature. But harmony doesn't necessarily equate with fusion, or oneness as demonstrated in the writings of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger. She describes a feminine dimension in subjectivity which: 'alternates with that of being one, either separate or fused.'³¹

In *The Dialectics Of Reproduction*, Mary O'Brien speaks of how the maternal has been made vulnerable to recuperation, through the thinking of male-identified intellectuals. Sadie Plant too recognises how women as an infrastructure, have not had their labour recognised for the contribution it makes to the maintenance and continuation of the human species, to which she adds a cybernetic spin: 'Women have been his go-betweens, those who took his messages, decrypted his codes, counted his numbers, bore his children, and passed on his genetic code.'³² O'Brien postulates how male-stream thought regards women as trapped in the biological function of birth whereas other functions shared by men such as eating, sexuality and dying have historically become the subjects of large bodies of philosophical thought. Her thesis is that 'reproductive process is not only the material base of the historical forms of the social relations of reproduction, but that it is also a dialectical process, which changes historically.'³³ She relates a history of male attempts to

appropriate birth, for example Hegel's assertion that the child 'breaks free from impotent biology to arrive in the world clothed in dependence and the potential, if he is male, to partake of the universality of man.'³⁴ This concurs with the concept of "epigenesis" in the nineteenth century, where we see, 'a picture of the Romantic fetus (as) the perfect bourgeois subject - it makes itself, and so is neither simply the inheritor of paternal power nor the commodity - like product of its mother's labor.'³⁵ This again is perpetuated in contemporary Western, militarist-capitalist-industrialist societies with the concept of 'fetal personhood'³⁶ which deletes the mother.

O'Brien describes how male and female temporal consciousness differs due to their respective differences in terms of alienation from their seed. She says women have a sense of genetic continuity whereas men have had to create ideological institutions of continuity such as the economy, politics and philosophy where the child is appropriated in a second birth, a coming of age when he is admitted into the polis. This occurs in the Freudian psychoanalytical thesis of the passage through the Oedipus Complex which she criticises for positing 'a primordial opposition in sexuality - passive woman versus active man... while (Freud) neglects the real generic oppositions in reproductive process. His separation of sexuality from reproduction is a persuasive myth in the male mind, because the process of reproduction actually does separate male sexuality from reproduction in the alienation of the male seed.'³⁷ This is how Freud disavows the significance of the uncertainty of paternity. Lacan continues this pattern in his proposition of the child's admission into the Symbolic. O'Brien also shows how Marx too similarly posits a system of social relations which is inherently masculinist: 'Marx needs a continuity which is both material and historical, and his single productive individual is integrated in productive activity with a universal class of heirs and successors for whom the presence of ancestors is made manifest in tools.'³⁸

matter-flow

Sadie Plant documents the transience of today's technology's accelerated modes of production. In *Zeros and Ones* she sounds like a feminist but she speaks in a jargon which is the language of systems in vogue, thus appearing to be identified with the "masculine". Her oppositionality is integrated, running throughout the structure of the book. She seems to write with a peculiar and cunning device which evokes science fiction. She writes of the present in the past tense as if we are living now in a bygone age. This conjures up the speed at which things are moving today, but also more deviously, it signals her as an all-knowing narrator who already knows better and has gone beyond, has survived; whereas the implication is that those who she talks about may not. Technology, meant to serve the bosses, is out of control. 'This is the diagonal route which feels a way through the binaries of one and the other, master and slave. Those who pick up on it are neither in charge of their materials nor are their materials enslaved to them....this route is determined in such

a way as to follow a flow of matter, a 'machine phylum' a line which is 'materiality', natural or artificial, and both simultaneously; it is matter in movement, in flux, in variation, matter as a conveyor of singularities and traits of expression. This has obvious consequences: namely, this matter-flow can only be followed.'³⁹

For me, her writing describes the debt technology owes to the feminine and the historical influence of "The Matrix" on its development. But the maternal metaphor more often than not appears in its crudest form in writings on cyberspace: 'give an object some basic shape and property rules, then subject it to evolutionary forces in the form of mathematical formulae that are hell-bent on messing with it. The objects have a natural resistance to being distorted but (and here comes the organic bit) sometimes they will accept a change and, if it meets its survival rules, will predominate over the previous generation. Apply something called "recursive programming" and you get the same function fed back into its forefather (so to speak) creating the illusion of thousands upon thousands of digital generations changing as subtly as any 'real life' versions might over hundreds of thousands of years.'⁴⁰

In this dry form of creation, there are no chemicals involved as with Earth's first life forms and no interaction with the environment eg: the taking in of oxygen. This seems nothing more than a 3D equivalent of equations on a blackboard. But the achievements we might hear perhaps, of real mothers with real babies scattered through cyberspace, are not perceived to be of any interest. So in the artistic domain, how am I to resist internalising society's perception of my inevitable decline in intellectual/artistic status due to becoming a pregnant subject? How am I to keep my name in circulation as an artist? And how is the antiquated artist to keep her name in circulation in cyberspace?

Kristeva speaks of 'the self-sacrifice involved in becoming anonymous in order to pass on the social norm.'⁴¹ During the first trimester, I had no drive to attend exhibition private views I felt occupied with my own R&D (Research and Development) phase, something I might get a grant for if it was an art project! But I felt subject to different bodies other than funding bodies. Young says: 'if this is her first child she experiences the birth as a transition to a new self that she may both desire and fear.'⁴² Was this event to render me ineffective in my former workplace or might it overwhelm my previous subject matter or concerns, despite its incommensurability with current trends of artistic thought?

con-fused images

Young states that in Western philosophy, thinkers assume 'being brought to awareness of (the) body for its own sake, entails estrangement and objectification that must cut the subject off from the enactment of her projects.'⁴³ I could envisage however, that it might however create a con-fusion where the worlds of inner subjectivity and outer language and sign production have to be brought into some kind of co-existence in order to signify the specificity of the experience. Whilst De

Beauvoir thought that pregnant women occupy themselves in idle day dreaming, Lichtenberg Ettinger describes such processes in terms of transmissibility and co-subjectivity and goes on to insert these into the powerful discourse of psychoanalysis. ‘The effects of anticipation in the maternal response during the prenatal period are crucial for later developments. ...The maternal I is first investing in an idealised I of the child which gradually is transformed in to a future I to which the I of the child can become.’⁴⁴

While you’re pregnant, no productivity is assumed. Seen from the outside, you appear to be doing nothing... waiting... expecting. ‘For the pregnant subject, on the other hand, pregnancy has a temporality of movement , growth and change. The pregnant subject is not simply a splitting in which two halves lie open and still, but a dialectic. The pregnant woman experiences herself as a source and participant in a creative process. Though she does not plan and direct it, neither does it merely wash over her; rather she is this process, this change. Time stretches out, moments and days take on a depth because she experiences more changes in herself, her body.’⁴⁵

becoming-mother

Young talks of valuing the pregnancy as worthwhile and continuous to its end. Until recently many feminists didn’t write about this stage, so that in a survey of books, I felt I had to discard many on motherhood at this stage as they just didn’t apply to my predicament. What if I somehow come out of this without the “end product?” I am in a limbo which has its base in imagination, not visible reality. Might this fear, the sort I suspect might give rise to superstition, erode the surety of a place from which to speak, a political engagement. You have nine months of flux and then priorities change once more.

becoming-digital artist

This perceived lack of productivity seemed reminiscent to me of a hiatus which is occurring for me in the changeover from traditional artistic media to computers. The term “artist” is troubled in the digital realm. Other titles are in evidence; “cultural producer”, “digital artist”, “creative technology worker”, “web designer”, “animator”, “computer artist”. Why not still just artists? What is being sidestepped here? Could it be that artists are seen as passe, selling commodities in a market, whereas in cyberspace, no monies are exchanged; that somehow, it’s purer? Also due to the costs of technology, many artists choose to join a creative consultancy where creative output is collaboratively made and credited with the name of the firm. But I am interested, (as I feel this applies to me) in those making a crossover from contemporary arts practice to utilise the medium of computers, quite patently capitalising on the kudos lingeringly associated with new technologies whilst retaining their (in my case relatively scant!) reputation.

What I am about to suggest might sound somewhat cautious, even conservative



digito: image from Jenny Jones *Escapology*. Interactive director movie, exhibited in *Touching Matters* Swiss Cottage Library, London, 1988

to some who believe like.....that 'pleasure in machine skill...(should) cease to be a sin but an aspect of embodiment'.⁴⁶ But I would call my stance "vigilant". My focus on the unrecognised labour involved in the "R&D" of being pregnant sensitised me to a laterally similar situation of becoming-digital-artist. In this case, you must acquire or grow the skills to be a digital artist; you only "count" when you can use the skills. You have to "master" the programmes. I am not making an argument for incompetence, rather I am musing on the disappearance or invisibility of the congealed value within the artist who is making this changeover of language.

What happens to the analogue skills this artist has attained prior to this period? Do good ideas necessarily lie in the display of technical skills? No, not if contemporary art has anything to say on the subject. The use of the "low-tech", seen in styles such as Arte Povera, Art Brut, and Britpop Conceptualism is well documented. My idea of art is one which is concerned with ideas and play, allowing space for pleasure which emerges through mistakes, error and surprise. Clearly some degree of application to the new medium is initially necessary, as with learning a few words of a foreign language. But beyond this, I am arguing that in the current climate of digital art, the tools, the technology itself holds such sway, that approaches which seek to subvert and "play" with the medium, are simply not seen. A gap exists whereby if you don't observe the codes, copy what is 'already out there', you run the risk of being completely misunderstood as the communal vocabulary of the digital art language is still seemingly so new that one could say that it refuses to recognise what doesn't conform to "industry standards". There is a definite bias towards inexplicable, mysterious "special effects" (hide your code). This situation will maybe develop and change so that the medium will become conscious of itself, in a period of Brechtian deconstruction, but at the moment, something else seems at stake....

I believe that the Western philosophical cogito has currently made a leap into cyberspace in the form of a "digito". This describes your knowingness, as displayed through your tool use or computer skills. This display - in order to show one's "Identity card", that one is a member of the club, one is able to use this technology - might occlude the creative content of the end product. Something which also disturbs me is that the cogito's "I am" as digito becomes "I am able" or "I can". The latter has intimations of wilfulness and lack of responsibility, whereas the former marginalises those who have no access to these specialised skills or language, supposedly in an enterprise zone, the supposed meritocracy that is the internet; where anyone might look at anyone's site. It's terminology might even be seen as elevating able-bodied-

ness into a new eugenics. Somewhere along the way, an artist, in learning this language, must conform, acclimatise to the options available: what the computer is capable of, how it thinks. This then becomes “grafted” (in a cyborg fashion?) onto the artist as a set of conditioning routes through creativity in the medium.

Kristeva describes mothers as ‘women who harbour the desire to reproduce (to have stability).’⁴⁷ I see my desire as the exact opposite; deciding to have a baby means throwing one’s lot in with chance...who knows what will happen? My life might be changed forever...This to me is far more “unstable” than someone who decides to stay childless, perhaps because they can control things better that way without having to accommodate the vagaries of someone else’s whims. Incidentally, it is this stability that the posthuman seems to decry. This presumed linkage of motherhood with stability is seen from an objective point of view - perhaps alluding to genetic continuity - rather than from a subjective point of view. Perhaps my pregnancy does give me a privileged view on this in terms of a greater sensitivity to transience. Certainly I have experienced this very strongly in terms of the shifting parameters of my research, the constantly changing questions pertaining to the overlapping subjective states of pregnant subject, digital artist and cybercitizen. I feel that my reproductive period of “R&D” has given me an unexpected leverage of perspective which has both brought forth for me, useful ideas on spheres deemed “outside” the reproductive, but also ideas and reproductive images which Rosi Braidotti might see as ‘a site on which positions can be contested....to express power, but also resistance.’⁴⁸

Notes

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

Sometime in November

Why oh why is everybody's love life suddenly gone v.v.complicated ? Either the women of my acquaintance are without a "special" person in their lives or the one(s) they have are proving to be très très difficult!!! Let's first deal with G. How does one deal with G ? The Turner prize managed to stumble along this year without any support from me in the way of accessories or clothes. Bet, as I predicted, bought a stunning number for the event. It looked very Prada. I unfortunately said that she might need (I hate to say it) a girdle. Not in so many words though! I tried to talk about the line being a bit broken. You know the LINE from the arm pits to the knee.

'Broken line my foot. You mean that I am rather lumpy and that the panty line is visible', she said rather icily.

I sort of stammered at her directness but was saved by G who lurking once again in the changing rooms of Fenwicks, popped her head around the corner, bright and breezy like. We were supposed to meet her later at Maison Bertaux to compare purchases, since I have refused to go shopping with her for the foreseeable future. She took one look at the wobbly jelly like figure of Bet and said dryly: 'Marks & Spencers have the most wonderful all in one undergarment. You can have a perfect unbroken line to wear with bias cut dresses this year. It beats working out in the gym' and swanned out. Bet just raised an eyebrow. I could tell she was thinking v.hard. We later bought two outfits, one in white and one in black before we hit the cakes and coffee at Maison Beatuaux. Unfortunately, despite all the heavy shopping that went on beforehand, I could not give a proper critical analysis of the Turner prize-giving as I was not in the country. I was in France. But even more unfortunate,

I was with a party of seventeen year olds in Euro Disney, holed up in a wild West village at the Cheyenne Hotel.

Somehow the art department at the Secondary Modern, where I teach half a day, tagged along with the tourism students who were attending a conference at Euro Disney or as I have heard it referred more succinctly as, the "Cultural Cheynobol" of France. The thinking behind this trip being that it was cheaper and we could bus into Paris with our students very easily. Yes, it was but it was also very strange. Paris as usual was just wonderful. No short breaks at sidewalk cafes unfortunately looking dead cool and drinking coffee and smoking. How could anyone with a busload of seventeen year olds look cool. The little farts stick like glue. Paris, because it isn't London, frightens them.

We 'did' the newly opened Museum de Costume (or whatever its called) attached to the Louvre. très wonderful. The students actually asked intelligent questions and our guide at the end of the talk actually said. "Tell me what are they wearing on the streets of London these days ?" Sacre bleu. What a reversal from previous decades ! Mind you there happens to be quite a few English men heading up Paris fashion Houses these days not to mention Stella McCartney..... However its nice to think that one can be dead cool just coming from a place that is thought of as dead cool. I also managed to get all the students, art and tourism into the Musée D'Orsay to look at the Post Impressionists. What I had not reckoned on was the other tourists who tagged on to our little group as I went around giving my spiel. Just after Cezanne I looked around to make sure I had everyone still with me and encountered a small mob of faces most of whom I had no recognition of at all. What's more one of them began to dispute my comment on the fact that Picasso could not have happened without Cezanne. Panic stricken that I had lost the original crowd, I hoofed it to the gift shop and sure enough there they were in high consumer mode, obviously still under the influence of Euro Disney. But the best part of all was stopping at the hypermarket in Calais and shopping just before we hit the ferry home.

The Day After The Absolute Vodka Party, December ???

Every year its the same. Everybody gets lobotomies on free Vodka. I, on the other hand, had just enough to drink. The only problem was when I went to go home I must have taken the wrong turning or the roads were changed because after I staggered past the Albert Hall the road didn't look at all familiar and I could have sworn that the scaffolded building wasn't like that when I passed it going to the party. The same was the case, when I stopped to ask the way, everybody I spoke to didn't live in the area so I just had to stumble on to a late night fruit and veg shop. Which was strange in itself, as who buys vegetables late at night? The shopkeeper looked at me rather pathetically when I asked where the Tube was, said nothing and just pointed to it. It was very conveniently next door. It was the Gloucester Road station which is the next one along from South Ken. I really do not know how I got there.

When I arrived home and slumped in front of the T.V. Near and dear, fast asleep on the couch woke up and asked if I had remembered to pick up his fish and chips then went back to sleep. What was v.interesting of course is who turns up to the Absolute party. Because if you design four post cards, with no identification visible and donate the money raised by the sale at only £40 each, then you get invited to the free party with all the free Vodka coolers you can drink. What is soooooo interesting is picking out the styles of various friends and acquaintances and seeing who has sold and who has not. I sold all of mine. I bumped, literally into S. who, trying to be dead casual, said her work was going on to New York with a select group of others. I asked her if that meant hers had not sold yet and she went puce. Then, before she could give a pithy answer, she was ungraciously pushed out of the way by another old fiend and acquaintance I hadn't seen since the last drunken opening last year. I briefly saw that S. had fallen into the arms of an old flame from her art school days so I figured all's well that ends well. When I told Dee Dee the little episode today she said that as S. was known as the college bike when they were at Central so things probably ended very well for her.

Money being as scarce as usual prompted me into holding another studio sale close to Christmas. Thankfully I sold two middle-sized pieces to a woman that works in the city on the stock exchange converting Deutchmarks into the new Euro money. When I delivered the work to her house on the Isles of Dogs I had to take the Docklands light rail and got to see the Millenium Dome up close from this side of the river. There I was with my nose pressed to the window having a dome experience. It really looks fantastic. I can hardly wait till the opening night. My friend K. only lives three streets away from it so we decided that if I bring an extra refrigerator and fill it up as my contribution to the two day bender I can co- host the party. Unfortunately near and dearest thinks it all a bit naff. He would prefer to spend it with my parents celebrating their sixtieth wedding anniversary in western Canada. I some how think he has forgotten how cold it can be in winter on the prairies. I for one am not flying anywhere. Who knows when and where the millenium bug will strike. I want to be on the ground near the Greenwich meridian drinking champagne. If near and dear won't come I'll ask the old ex fiance who still fancies me.

Christmas Season - December something

This is the season that I have to actually choose which social or art engagement to attend. So far this year the pickings are good if I can haul G. out of suburbia and away from men. Latest news on that issue is he has dumped her. I knew things were coming to a head and it was messy. We had decided to go out together to a movie. A nice girlie pal thing to do. When I met her at Piccalilly tube station she was all agitated.

‘What's up’ I delicately asked.

‘He's in Milan.’

I just smile vaguely.

'But I don't believe him.'

I just smile more vaguely.

'I phoned his home and his sister said he was around this weekend.'

'What do you want to do about it', I ask.

She just shrugged her shoulders and we went off to the cinema. Once there I suggested she telephone him on his mobile from the foyer. Which she did in a flash. I tactfully sat in a corner and drank my dry martini but I could tell by her face it was not going well. When she returned she said that he was in Milan and he was annoyed at her phoning his home to check up on him.

'I told him that I forgot he was away this weekend but he was still annoyed.'

'So how is Milan?'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'Well, well,' I said, 'The marvels of modern telecommunications. With a mobile you can be contacted anywhere in the world.'

Then she looked at me with very narrow eyes.

'If I telephone out of the country do I have to dial the area code even if its a mobile?'

I looked at her with raised eyebrows. The girl takes a little time to work out things that really are quite obvious. She looked back at me with very, very narrow scrunched up eyes.

'The bastard isn't in Milan at all. He's somewhere in England with somebody else.'

'Don't get too mad you'll ruin your make up.'

At that point the movie was announced as starting like now so we went in. Later, in a little Irish pub around the corner, silently and very determine, we drank one pint after another as neither one of us was brave enough to be the first to speak. So we kept our silence and drank. After my third Guinness I was beginning to loosen up a bit and said to her:

'What now?'

She just shrugged her shoulders. After our fourth we left.

The following week

That was last week. I phoned her up to see if she was coming up to town to attend an opening at a new little gallery in Fitzrovia. She hummed and hawed before saying that she might be going with an architect that she had become some what friendly with this last week. She had been working with him on a project for some months and finally agreed to go out with him. What, I ask you, does one say ? Bett on the other hand never ever discusses her love life. It is strictly off limits. I just get little tantalising glimpses. Em.. well there we have another story. Just the other night as N. & D. and myself were saying how wonderful Em has made the transition from engaged to dis-engaged, the telephone rang and all the world seemed to go upside

down. Our poor dear Em telephoned to say she was just about to hospitalised herself for depression and almost attempting suicide. She had come to her wits end and had telephoned her G.P. in great despair saying she was suicidal. The doctor said she should admit herself then she would not be sectioned and that would have had terrible consequences on her future employment and travel. So the long and the short of it all is that Em is in the psychiatric ward of the Royal London just across the road from us and will be there until she is thought to be well enough. Things are a bit topsy-turvy at the moment as I can not tell anyone that Em is in St Clement and I am so upset.

One interesting thing did happen that was a little light of "niceness". A fellow vicar friend of my mate, the gay vicar, had seen my work some where and wanted to come to the studio. So I had him around for tea and showed him my tapestries on thewell you know my usual stuff about women and love etc. He's a nice sort of chap in a Friar Tuck sort of way but really bright and we had a good old chin wag about all sorts of issues. Well the long and short of it all was that my tapestries are going to be hanging in this Grade II listed church for Advent. They really look great. As I said it was the one nice thing to happen amidst all the Em tragedy.

Christmas Eve.

Em has been let out under supervision. That is, she is with us for Christmas for 24 hrs exactly then we take her back to the hospital. She can not drink because of medication nor be left alone. Dearest is really upset and has out done himself with making sure everything from the turkey to the tree is perfect for her Christmas with us. She is like a little crumpled doll. I went over to see my friend the gay vicar for some moral support and a shoulder to cry on as it's too risky having a few tears in the our house. What with near and dear being so down as well. He was most kind and told me that as he is the chaplain to St. Clement. He would keep an eye on Em and talk to her when he's on duty there. Because of all of the recent events to do with Em I didn't have my usual cocktail party. In fact we didn't really feel like having a drink at all with Em being there and not drinking.

Xmas day

One of my ex-students and his wife came over so we had to put on the works. It turned out alright. It was actually good that they came as it would have been just Em, N.& D. and me plus Em's new boyfriend. So with champagne and apple juice, when the Queen came on television, we even toasted her which just goes to show how merry and stuck into Christmas we got.

New Years Day

I have decided to not use dates any more in my Diary but adopt a means of telling time based more on the Ecclesiastical method. For example breaking the seasons

into Candlemas which ends the Christmas season in January followed by Lent Easter, Pentecost so many week after Easter then Advent etc. I always getting dates wrong and times and I don't seem to operate on the same wave length. Especially when it comes to money going in or out of my bank account. Dates seem irrelevant. I have a good concept of time just not a specific one. Anyways according to the professor who lives down the road it's all based on seasons so that is probably why I find it more compatible. No, I have not gone bonkers or had a religious experience! It's just that I have been reading about Julian of Norwich an English Saint who after her husband died got pissed off with everything and decided to become aI can't remember what its called but it wasn't uncommon for women to do it in her times. This is something I thought I could do quite easily. She built a little abode onto the side of the cathedral and had a window in the wall of the nave; from there she would give out advice and hear confessions for a ham or loafs of bread or what ever she needed to support herself; a sort of a therapist-in-residence. Apparently it was not unusual and she was one of the best. When she didn't want to hear any more woe and tales of depression she would just shut her window and get on with what she wanted to do. I think I could be quite happy doing that for while in exchange for barter payment. A lot better than being a woman artist scabbling around to make ends meet and having to put up with all the shit and shinanigans of art school politics and the art world in general. I really feel I need a break from it all. Near and dear thought that somehow the local C.of E. vicar wouldn't look kindly on me attaching an abode no matter how small onto the side of his building.

Well this is the last New Years day in the last millenium and I just spent the last New Years Eve with N.& D. in our local pub celebrating the evening with various neighbours and locals. We didn't feel like doing much this year somehow and it was just around the corner. I was taken back at how well known he is there. Most strange.

Third week in January still in Candlemas

Went to S. from Brighton's private view. She has done all these digital image prints for years and this was a mini retrospective. VERY impressive. She is almost 55 and can wear fake leather trouser and a shiny top very well. She said the top was her son's who used to dress up as a Gothic punk. Well it looked good on her. Saw all my ex-students. I miss them and they me. Have not been doing any privates views the last four months and I have tons of invites for the next five weeks but just can't get the enthusiasm up to go. Also, this whole thing with dates is getting worse. I have now lost my watch. So even if I really really want to go to an opening, I think it's on the Tuesday and then find out it's on the Monday night. I only made it to S.'s because she 'phoned me in the afternoon to remind me.

February near the beginning of Lent which is very early this year.

Missed the Chisenhale opening last week, as well as the Freud Museum opening,

and the Arkwright Center also, and the Lisson and the teacher's evening at the Hayward Gallery the week before, and the special private view at the Crafts Council all of which I really wanted to see. I did make it to the Whitechapel because Bet telephoned me when I got home from work. It was Terry Winter and Henri Michaux. Terry, I could miss. Except his drawings were good but he's got no sense of colour in his paintings. Henri is the real treat. So I fed the cats and dashed off. I was well rewarded. Henri Michaux is worth a second and third return trip. But the big treat was a special artist's night at the Royal Academy to view Monet.

What does one say when you have seen heaven! The first room was filled with his paintings of London in her pea soup fogs. They were special and I could quite easily have lived with anyone of them. The rest of the work, until you got to the very last room, was sort of ho hum. Let's just say the man had to pay the mortgage as we all do. The paintings were in the most hideous gold baroque frames. My mind began to wander and I noticed that so many people there looked like the parents of acquaintances and friends. Rather uncanny I thought until it suddenly dawned on me after the tenth one smiled and mouthed hello at me that perhaps they weren't the parents at all. I spied T. who has always looked haggardly and suggested to him that something strange was going on here.

'Yes, I thought the same until I realised it was my friends and that they have just aged,' he replied.

I was staggered. These wrinkled and totally un-moisturized beings were my contemporaries!! What had they been doing to themselves.

'Oh you know the usual' he said. 'Substance abuse, alcohol late nights .All that misspent youth of the 1960s, some people just never stopped it.'

Well, I suppose so but I had a hell of a good time in the sixties and since then. But I do not have skin that looks like a smoked kipper. I use a good moisturizer and I never smoked. On that sanctimonious note I wandered into the last room and was stopped in my tracks for here was truly one of the great masters of the 20th century. Here hung the three huge paintings executed between 1910 - 1919; predating Abstract Expressionism by decades. What one is deprived of by the photos is their texture and these babies had it. You fell into the paintings and became lost in time, space and jouissance. Colour did not just embrace you but filled your very being. One experienced a sense of ecstasy and never wanted to leave. Everyone was suspended; language was inadequate because here was the ineffable. Now that is what I call ART.

I have also managed to go to one of the Open lectures at The Royal College of Art. Now that was a shocker! Never ever be surprised by people, especially the ex's of your friends. I had registered the name but couldn't match it with the others in the list of distinguished speakers.

'Can't be him. He's not that good!!!'

Well he isn't, but it was him. Dressed as a woman because he is now a tranny or transvestite. When I walked into the lecture theatre I am confronted with B., the old

ex of S. who I last saw at the Absolute Vodka party, dressed as a "she" and pretty badly at that. He looked like a ten cent whore and stood like he had spent the night on his back with a dozen clients or had just done thirty miles on horseback. Now I knew he liked to dress in her underwear because she used to tell everybody. What I didn't know was after years of therapy he had come out and was using it as an art form. He looked awful. Yet you could tell he was dead chuffed with himself. I could have forgiven him for the bad makeup he was trying to carry off if, it wasn't for all the appalling videos he made one suffer through as well as all the verbiage to justify the fact that he just liked to dress up in women's clothing. At one stage after describing harassment by a cab driver when he was dressed as woman coming home at night (In the dark believe me anybody can look good), I said loud enough to be a heckle. 'Welcome to the real world of women!' There was a stunned silence before the proceedings carried on as usual. After one and a half hours of dire footage and more pretentious artspeak on "identity" than I could manage for years to come I slipped out. I wanted to spend some quality time with Near and Dearest. He may seem boring but he sure is lovely to me!

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