

n.paradoxa

online, issue 8 and 9
Nov 1998 and Feb 99

Editor: Katy Deepwell

Published in English as an online edition
by KT press, www.ktpress.co.uk,
as issues 8 and 9, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*
<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaisssue8and9.pdf>
Nov 1998 and Feb 1999, republished in this form: January 2010
ISSN: 1462-0426

All articles are copyright to the author
All reproduction & distribution rights reserved to n.paradoxa and KT press.
No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or
by any electronic, mechanical or other means, including photocopying and recording,
information storage or retrieval, without permission in writing from the editor of
n.paradoxa.

Views expressed in the online journal are those of the contributors
and not necessarily those of the editor or publishers.

Editor: ktpress@ktpress.co.uk
International Editorial Board: Hilary Robinson, Renee Baert,
Janis Jefferies, Joanna Frueh, Hagiwara Hiroko, Olabisi Silva.
www.ktpress.co.uk

List of Contents

Peggy Zeglin Brand Disinterestedness & Political Art	4
Ying Ying Lai The Historical Development of Women's Art in Taiwan	19
Annie Paul Meeting History with Art: "The Myriad of Myself" on <i>Lips, Sticks and Marks: Seven women artists from the Caribbean</i> shown at the Art Foundry in Barbados	29
Monica Mayer De La Vida y el Arte Como Feminista (Spanish) A Personal History of Feminist Art Activism in Mexico (English)	36 47
Anja Franke <i>Motiv #11</i> English / Danish version	59
Diary of an Ageing Art Slut (issue 8)	68
Angelika Beckmann Silke Wagner : Facetten einer Ausstellung in der Galerie Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe (20 Feb-23 March 1999)	81
Jenny Jones Reproductive work and the creation of the digital image	84
Diary of an Ageing Art Slut (issue 9)	99

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

1. Matthews, N ‘Going Public’, *make* magazine issue 78. 1997 p5.
2. Rabinowitz P ‘Soft Fictions and Intimate Documents: Can Feminism Be Posthuman?’ Halberstam, J and Livingston, I (ed) *Posthuman Bodies* (Indiana: Indiana University Press,1995) p99
3. Kristeva, J ‘The Maternal Body’ in K. Oliver (ed) *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press,1975) p.304
4. Braidotti, R *Patterns of Dissonance* (London: Polity Press, 1991) p118
5. Dimitrakaki, A and Tsiantis, M (1997) ‘Bodies in Conflict? Mother, Fetus and Problems of Representation in Contemporary Biology’(Reading University. Unpublished conference paper,1997). p.108
6. Kristeva J (1975) ‘The Maternal Body’ in K. Oliver. p301
7. *ibid* p.302
8. *ibid*
9. *ibid*
10. Irigaray, L (1991) ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’.in M. Whitford (ed) *The Irigaray Reader* (London and Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1991) p224
11. Haraway, D (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women, The Reinvention of Nature*. (London: Free *n.paradoxa* online issue no.8 and 9 Nov 1998 and Feb 99

ISSN: 1462-0426

Association Books, 1991) p.150

12. *ibid.* p.181

13. Squier, S.M (1995) 'Reproducing the Posthuman Body: Ectogenetic Fetus, Surrogate Mother, Pregnant Man' Halberstam, J and Livingston, I (ed) *Posthuman Bodies* (Indiana: Indiana University Press,1995) p.113

14. Rabinowitz P (1995) 'Soft Fictions and Intimate Documents: Can Feminism Be Posthuman?' p.97
15. *ibid*

16. Squier, S.M (1995) 'Reproducing the Posthuman Body: Ectogenetic Fetus, Surrogate Mother, Pregnant Man'. p.113

17. Dimitrakaki, A and Tsiantis, M (1997) *Bodies in Conflict? Mother, Fetus and Problems of Representation in Contemporary Biology.* p.120

18. Betterton R(1996) *An Intimate Distance - Women, Artists and The Body.* p.107

19. *ibid.*

20. Braidotti R(1991) *Patterns of Dissonance* (London: Polity Press,1991) p.31

21. *ibid.* p.10

22. Young I M (1990) *Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation. Throwing like a Girl and other essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) p.169

23. Grosz, E (1995) *Space, Time and Perversion.* p.31

24. *ibid.* p.235

25. Haraway, D (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women, The Reinvention of Nature* p.153

26. Grosz, E (1995) *Space, Time and Perversion.* p.48

27. Irigaray, L (1991) *The Bodily Encounter with the Mother.* p.39

27. *ibid.*

28. *ibid.*

29. Dimitrakaki, A and Tsiantis, M (1997) 'Bodies in Conflict? Mother, Fetus and Problems of Representation in Contemporary Biology'. p.2

30. *ibid.*

31. Lichtenberg Ettinger, Bracha *The becoming threshold of matrixial borderlines.* (Leeds University) p.41

32. Plant, Sadie (1997) *Zeros and Ones* p.36

33. O'Brien, M (1981) *The Dialectics of Reproduction.* p.31

34. *ibid.*

35. Squier, S.M (1995) *Reproducing the Posthuman Body: Ectogenetic Fetus, Surrogate Mother, Pregnant Man.* p.116

36. Rabinowitz ,P (1995) 'Soft Fictions and Intimate Documents: Can Feminism Be Posthuman?' p108

37. O'Brien, M(1981) *The Dialectics of Reproduction.* p.41

38. *ibid.*

39. Plant, Sadie (1997) *Zeros and Ones.* p.36

40. Holt. M. 'Variations on a Theme' *Creative Technology Magazine*, November 1997. p.8

41. Kristeva, J (1976) 'Stabat Mater'. *The Kristeva Reader* p.183
42. Young, IM (1990) *Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation*.p.168
43. *ibid.* p..164
44. Lichtenberg Ettinger, Bracha 'The becoming threshold of matrixial borderlines' George Robertson (ed) *Travellers Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (Routledge, 1994) p.51
45. Young , I M (1990) *Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation*. p.167
46. Haraway, D *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan TM_Meets_Oncomouse* (London: Routledge, 1997)
47. Kristeva, J (1976) 'Stabat Mater' p.185
48. Braidotti, R (1991) *Patterns of Dissonance*. p.118

A version of this paper was presented at ISEA, Liverpool in September 1998 and 'Work and the Image' conference, Leeds University, April 1998.

Copyright © : Jenny Jones, February, 1999
n.paradoxa : Issue No. 9, 1999