

**Excavating Discursivity: *Post-Partum* Document in the  
Conceptualist, Feminist, and Psychoanalytic Fields**

by

Juli Carson

M.A., Art History (1991)

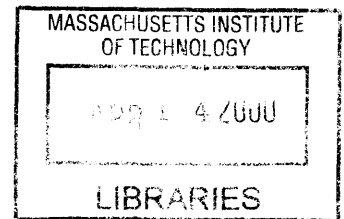
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Submitted to the Department of Architecture  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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**ABSTRACT**

*Post-Partum Document*, a multi-media artwork made by American artist Mary Kelly from 1973-1978, was informed by and contributed to contemporaneous debates in the fields of Conceptualism, feminism, and psychoanalysis throughout the seventies. This dissertation addresses the project's "debate-specificity." The conventional art historical categorization and analysis of an artwork, one based upon its medium specificity, was a mode of modernist criticism that Kelly's work specifically interrogated. What therefore distinguished *Post-Partum Document* from other artworks of its period was an interrogation of the "discursive site" - i.e. a specific site of debate grounded within a given discourse.

Within the practice of art, *Post-Partum Document* begs us to think of the discursive site as a displacement of the "material" site. It's "multi-media" status thus indicates the manner in which it simultaneously addressed questions of aesthetics, semiotics, film, psychoanalysis, and activism within the visual field. Previous studies have engaged *Post-Partum Document* primarily as an example of psychoanalytically informed feminist art. My dissertation traces its original debate within the broader history of Conceptualism, feminism, and psychoanalysis in Britain, followed by its American reception in the eighties, at which point *Post-Partum Document* became a model for feminist critical art practice.

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## FOREWORD

### ***A Note on Methodology***

Why write a dissertation on Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*? Simply, because it engaged in such a wide sphere of discourses it functions as a nodal point in the dreamscape we now call the "seventies." As such, the *Document* is a type of rebus through which specific seventies art practices can be read.

In taking up this project the following question nevertheless arises. How does one approach a treatise on the *Document*, an artwork based upon theoretical principles that interrogate the very logic of the monograph - the reigning paradigm of conventional art historical manuscripts? Most writings on Kelly's work have opted for a theoretical approach, wherein the *Document* is cited as an instance of "theoretical" feminist art that instigated polemics over female representation throughout the eighties. This has engendered voluminous material on Kelly's relation to psychoanalytic theory in contemporary art production, as well as the "an-iconic" imperative of a

particular strain of post-modern American feminist art. While the *Document's* position has indeed been central to such debates, *how* it evolved into such a discursive formation has yet to be convincingly traced.

My approach to *Post-Partum Document* grew out of an archival exhibition of the work, which I organized for the Generali Foundation in Vienna, entitled "Excavating Post-Partum Document: Mary Kelly's archive 1968-1998." Composed of eight glass display cases, each of which designated a specific "site" related to the *Document's* conception, production and exhibition throughout the seventies and eighties, my intent was to make the work, not the author, the "subject" of analysis. Put simply, departing from conventional histories that look for a sovereign figure behind a given body of work, I attempted to take up what Michel Foucault calls an archaeological strategy that would map the *Document's* formation amongst disparate discursive sites. My feeling was that by situating the copious archival material related to the *Document* in such a way, one could begin to discern how the project's "identity" evolved over the last 20 years. My organization of the

material further constituted an imaginary ninth "site" - that of analysis - manifested by an interview I conducted with the artist recording her response to my display. This was overlaid on top of each case.

The psychoanalytic paradigm that my exhibition evoked wasn't arbitrary; it purposefully reiterated the *Document's* mode of analysis. Kelly's project, initiated in 1973 and completed in 1978, was an on-going documentation/analysis of her child's acquisition of language and hence subjectivity. However, Kelly did not approach the child's subjectivity - and by extension that of the mother - ontologically. Rather, the manner in which subjectivity was *structured* within the mother/child dyad was traced vis-à-vis an archaeology of contemporaneous discourse. Thus, if *Post-Partum Document* was an analysis of a mother/child's reciprocal subjective development, my approach to the *Document* similarly analyzes *its* subjective formation vis-à-vis predominant philosophic and artistic debates of the seventies. In so doing, my intent was to resist the fetishization of the author-function as well as the ontological status of the artwork. Moreover, rather than

*borrowing* the psychoanalytic principles put forth in the *Document*, my exhibition (psycho)analyzed the *Document's* hybrid discursive formation.

This dissertation is a continuation of the archival project. It neither monumentalizes the project, nor is it a monograph of the author. The biographical "fact" of the *Document's* author can plainly be stated as the temporal site of the project's initiation and formation. That is, in 1968 Kelly, an American artist who had been studying in the Middle East, moved to London and enrolled in St. Martin's School of Art as a post-graduate fellow. She remained in London throughout the seventies where she produced the *Document* over the course of five years. Already in crisis then is the author/project's regional categorization. As Kelly became internationally known through this body of work - produced in the British context - Kelly herself was subsequently defined as a British artist (consistent with a type of Modernist confusion that the work is a "stand-in" for the author). However, such confusion is informative if we de-emphasize the author function. For indeed *Post-Partum Document* is a British

*subject*, formed as it was by discursive debates predominant in London throughout the seventies, which my dissertation takes up.

As I mentioned above, my methodological approach to these debates is influenced by Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, which puts forth an alternative mode of discursive investigation distinct from what he calls a "history of ideas." Foucault explains this in four points, all of which are central to my dissertation's approach to excavating the *Document's* "subject formation." First, Foucault's archaeology strives to define not the "thoughts, representations, images, themes, or preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourse; but those discourses themselves."<sup>1</sup> Within such archaeology, discourse is not treated as a revelatory document, but as a monument subject to investigation. Second, archaeology defines discourse in its specificity, rather than mapping a continuous transition that relates discourse to what precedes, follows or surrounds it. Third, archaeology knows nothing of the

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), p.138.

sovereign figure's oeuvre, as archaeology's pursuit is to "define types of rules for discursive practices that *run through* individual oeuvres." [My italics]<sup>2</sup> And lastly, archaeology is not a return to a lost moment of discourse in which the intent of the author is rediscovered. Rather, it is "nothing more than a rewriting," a "preserved exteriority" that returns to a given discourse in order to systematically describe its objectness within history.

Foucault's first point on archaeology is important to note concerning most academic texts written to date on Kelly. Theoretically based scholars on her work have generally used (but not historicized) the same Lacanian notions of representation to critically evaluate the *Document* - those filtered by Kelly and other British film theoreticians through the writings of Foucault, Louis Althusser, Bertolt Brecht, Christian Metz and Julia Kristeva. This tells us little about *how* these theories themselves were formulated, which is what my dissertation as a whole takes up. Likewise, Foucault's second and third points, which position the specificity of discourse against

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 139.

temporal models of categorization based upon individual oeuvres, are discounted by recent feminist re-historicizations of the *Document*. Such accounts tend to flatten the heterogeneous character of seventies art practices that the *Document* specifically debated. The argument goes: since Kelly made work "about women" contemporaneously with such [discursively antithetical] artists as Judy Chicago, both their projects must somehow be sympathetically related. I will, of course, take issue with such assertions at different points through out the dissertation. Concerning Foucault's last point, I am *not* attempting to hermeneutically return to the seventies to rediscover a lost author or artwork. Rather, by returning to the *Document's* discursive formation, my intent has been to address such formative discourses as sites themselves, precisely in order to understand their "objectness" within history.

What surfaced in my archival research was the persistence - in both the *Document* and related secondary material - of three discourses of investigation and subsequent engagement: conceptualism, feminism, and

psychoanalysis. These respective fields were further defined by the numerous debates surrounding theorizations of the indexical sign, Freud's notion of the unconscious, and the filmic concept of suture. In chapters two, three and four, I attempt to delineate these concepts for purposes of clarity and explore their limited intersection in the seventies. Conceptualists thought little of the unconscious, feminists little of systems analysis, and psychoanalytic theorists little of visual art practice and/or feminist activism outside of film's domain. Yet these concerns are entangled within the *Document*, marking it as an additional hybrid discursive site, which my analysis will show. Following Lacan's metaphor of the Borromean knot that ties the Imaginary, Real, and Symbolic registers together in order to construct the subject, should we cut any one ring of the *Document's* Borromean knot out of our analysis - i.e. Conceptualism, feminism or psychoanalysis - then Kelly's project, as a subject, falls apart. In this manner, my return to the *Document*, vis-à-vis these discourses, is a re-writing of the *Document's* own discursive formation. In so doing, it is also a return to

those discourses that have chiasmatically been mythologized in the process of mythologizing the *Document*.

Departing from the Foucauldean model, I am nevertheless interested in critical historical readings afforded by psychoanalytic methodologies. I thus take up psychoanalysis both as a *site* of research as well as a *means* to re-think such discourse. Which is to say, it is present in the form of (1) an historic, discourse of analysis; (2) a methodological tool of critical engagement against the historical model through which the *Document* and related discourses have come to be understood. Thus, my introductory chapter explicates the manner in which the *Document* visualized a hybrid psychoanalytic model, one mediated by other art projects and discourses. Subsequent chapters explicate the manner in which psychoanalytic notions of the "unconscious" and "suture" came to be theorized at the inter-sections with ideology in the fields of feminism and psychoanalytic film theory, a debate to which the *Document* actively contributed. However, at the same time I engage the *Document* in a continued (but different) reading of the unconscious and suture - in

tandem with Conceptualist theories of the index and Lacanian notions of the "real" - as a means of extending the Document's historical model against contemporary predominant psychoanalytic interpretations.

My dissertation ends with an analysis of the Document's exhibition history, which I posit as a fourth site of discursive formation. The Document's eighties reception in the United States is taken up, with special attention paid to its subsequent affiliation with "Male Gaze" theory. As a final note, I present an interview with a contemporary artist, Andrea Fraser, whose project engaged debates similar to those taken up by Document in the seventies rather than those associated with it in eighties. As such, I offer Fraser's work as a return to a model of critical practice related to the Document as I have laid it out in my dissertation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Post-Partum Document, An Introduction**

#### ***Discursive Fields***

It has been the recent practice of young scholars to re-visit a mode of seventies critical practice in order to re-read contemporary practices allegorically. Critic James Meyer has done so in a much circulated essay "What Ever Happened To Institutional Critique?" written for an exhibition of contemporary artists who returned to that practice.<sup>3</sup> Meyer claims elsewhere that the "functional site" characterizes a recent trend in site-specific art practice, which is:

*. . .a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and discursive filiations and the bodies that move between them. . .It is an informational site, a locus of overlap of text,*

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<sup>3</sup> James Meyers, "Whatever Happened to Institutional Critique?" (New York: American Fine Arts Gallery, 1993).

*photographs and video recordings, physical places and things...<sup>4</sup>*

Contemporary art historian Miwon Kwon cites Meyer's text to assert that practices dealing with site-specificity over the past thirty years have "transformed from a physical location - grounded, fixed, actual - to a discursive vector - ungrounded, fluid, virtual."<sup>5</sup> This move to the discursive is more pronounced today than before, Kwon asserts, as "the phenomenon is embraced by many artists and critics. . .to resist revised institutional and market forces that now commodify 'critical' art practices."

Kwon's account goes on to challenge claims that a move into the discursive field, away from the physical world of object making, successfully eludes a project's commodification. Her objection is well argued. Yet, at the fore of Kwon's essay - indeed what has been overlooked in most citations of it - is the designation of a "discursive

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<sup>4</sup> James Meyer, "The Functional Site," in *Platzwechsel*, exhibition catalogue (Zurich: Kunsthalle Zurich, 1995), p. 27. Quoted in Miwon Kwon's "One Place After Another: Notes on Specificity," *October 80* (Spring 1997), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Kwon, *ibid.*

site" or "practice" for critique in contemporary art, in counter-distinction to a seventies practice that relied on spatial metaphors. Both Kwon and Meyer's accounts are important. Yet indicative of allegorical readings, whereby one text (or art practice) is read through another, the allegorical meaning (or interpretation) necessarily supplants its antecedent. However, to observe that something gets supplanted in Kwon and Meyer's reading is not to argue for a hermeneutic model of historicizing art practice, nor is it to discredit their observations. Rather, it points to the utter invisibility today of those discursive sites and practices that in fact characterized a select number of artists in the late sixties and early seventies.

Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* recorded the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the mother-child relationship as it unfolded over a five year period (1973-1978) through traces, diagrams, text, and found objects. As such, it was founded upon the very notion of "debate-specificity" at a time when spatialized models of interrogating a site were still dominant. Richard Serra's

"Splashing" (1968), Mel Bochner's "Measurement" series (1969), and Hans Haacke's "Systems Analyses" (1965-1975), all exemplify a practice in which, as Kwon states, "the physical condition of the exhibition space remained the primary point of departure."<sup>6</sup> It was directly against this spatial model of a site distinct from discourse - or in Althusser's terms, ideology - that Kelly took up the task of writing "Notes on Reading the *Post-Partum Document*," in 1977.<sup>7</sup> The article sought to delineate the *Document's* audience in accordance with three ideal discursive sites: the Women's Liberation Movement, the Mother-Child Relationship, and Women's Practice in Art. Together, these three discursive sites marked the space of *Document's* debate. Where they overlapped was the site at which "each audience had to encounter something which was formerly quite unfamiliar."<sup>8</sup> In doing so, the *Document* launched an interrogation of each site through its interaction with the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Kelly, "Notes on Reading the *Post-Partum Document*," *Control Magazine*, Issue Ten (1977). Reprinted in Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996). I will return to the significance of this article, as part of Kelly's intervention into Conceptualist practice, in chapter two.

other, as the ideal audience - "avant-garde artists who were also mothers and feminists" - was just that, an ideal.

The article's format recalls Claire Johnston's article on the collaborative film *The Nightcleaners*,<sup>9</sup> a project with which Kelly was involved from 1970 - 1975. Both the film and Johnston's article relied heavily upon the Brechtian principle of "distanciation" (working against the spectator's identification impulse) in an effort to place the spectator/reader in a position of critical reflection. On the imperative of doing so, Johnston paraphrases Colin McCabe at length. As an editor of the British film journal *Screen*, McCabe - along with Stephen Heath - was central in theorizing Lacan and Brecht together - a theoretical hybrid that distinguished British film theory in the mid-seventies and informed both Kelly's writing and art practices:

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<sup>8</sup> From "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*: Mary Kelly in Conversation with Juli Carson," in *Mary Kelly: Post-Partum Document* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Claire Johnston, "Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 4, (Winter, 1975/76). This article, a transcript from a paper delivered at the 1975 Edinburgh Film Festival Brecht Event, addressed the "discursive field" into which *The Nightcleaners* project waged its intervention.

*All artistic production is a struggle within ideology. In his essay on classic realist text (Screen v 15 n 2, Summer, 1974), Colin McCabe described one of the fundamentally reactionary practices of the classic realist cinema as precisely the petrification of the spectator in a position of pseudo-dominance offered by meta-language. . . This meta-language, resolving as it does all contradictions, places the spectator outside the realm of struggle, ultimately outside the realm of meaningful action altogether. . . The effect of such [meta-language and the art forms that use them] is to convey the impression of an homogenous world - a false sense of continuity and coherence reinforced by identification.<sup>10</sup>*

According to McCabe and Johnston, a critical practice addressed the contradictions that underscore meta-language, which is indicative of Realist texts and representations. In *The Nightcleaners*, a documentary film about unionizing women office cleaners, the contradictions of meta-language

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

were to be found in the conflicting space of discourse: that of the actual nightcleaners, Women's Liberation, the filmmakers, the employer, the workers' spokeswoman, and the unionists. All were put into conflict, so that the contradictions central to the nightcleaners' existence, denied by traditional *cinema verité*, would surface. McCabe describes this opportune moment as the point at which elements escape "the control of the dominant discourse in the same way that a neurotic symptom or verbal slip attest to the lack of control of the unconscious subject."<sup>11</sup>

*Post-Partum Document* took up the task of doing with the static image what *The Nightcleaners* did with film: to make the representation of struggle, within discourse and ideology, the means through which the struggle itself is addressed. Ostensibly, the "struggle" or problematic of the *Document* was the issue of childcare as a form of domestic labor. Yet the interrogation of this struggle's *representation*, vis-à-vis discourses of the Women's Movement, subjectivity, and contemporary art practice, was the means through which the *Document* developed its "debate-

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<sup>11</sup> Colin McCabe, "The Politics of Separation," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 4

specificity," polemically waged against a Realist exposé of domestic labor based upon materialist or spatial models of "site." The "debate" surfaced at the point of contradiction among these discourses.

Thus even though it was the progeny of a mixed background, The *Document* did not adhere to the principles of Conceptualism, feminism, or psychoanalysis in any orthodox manner. In general, most Conceptualists were unconcerned with the *Document's* investigation of the subject, let alone its positioning of domestic labor or "femininity" as a viable site of "systems analysis." Those interested in psychoanalytically informed feminism, on the other hand, were generally unaware of the visual strategies of representation simultaneously being innovated by an aspect of Conceptualism (put to the service of what later became known as "institutional critique"). Furthermore, many of those active in the Women's Movement were not only put off by Conceptualism's predominantly male membership, they also found a psychoanalytic account of subjectivity, which questioned the privileging of personal experience, to

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(Winter, 1975/76).

be equally problematic. Kelly, however, was informed by each of these discourses. Her dialogic interrogation of them thus took up the *internal* problematic that distinguished these discourses' debate at that time.

In "Notes on Reading *Post-Partum Document*," this internal problematic - that is to say, the contradiction between the discourses' propositions - is addressed in a way consistent with the Brechtian model used by Johnston, McCabe, and the *Nightcleaners* Collective. For instance, Kelly sought to locate the work within the "theoretical and political practice of the women's movement, a practice which foregrounds the issues of subjectivity and ideological oppression."<sup>12</sup> And yet, as I will discuss at greater length in chapter three, the *Document* played out that which the Women's Movement prior to 1976 had yet to consider: the manner in which ideological oppression itself could not be considered outside psychoanalytic considerations of subjectivity. While Kelly's practice was informed by the "consciousness raising" that characterized feminism's founding moment - a moment that gave us the

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<sup>12</sup> Kelly, "Notes on Reading *Post-Partum Document*."

motto "the personal is political" - it simultaneously held this belief to the task of psychoanalytic analysis. This was something that both Marxist and feminist theory and practice (both of which informed Kelly's practice) had yet to incorporate in the early to middle seventies.

This emphasis upon a *psychoanalytic* consideration of the subject, so crucial to the *Document's* approach, was difficult for many feminists to digest in the early seventies and is still widely misunderstood today.<sup>13</sup>

Kelly's early introduction to Freud in 1970 (and later to Lacan around 1973) is evident in her discussion of the *Document's* "subject." To distinguish it from an emerging practice of "cultural feminism"<sup>14</sup> Kelly later articulated it this way:

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<sup>13</sup> In particular, the "rediscovery" of the *Document* within contemporary curatorial practice has placed the "subject" back in Kelly's practice in a non-critical, essentialist mode, conflating Kelly's practice with that of such American feminists as Judy Chicago. See Amelia Jones, *Sexual Politics* (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum, 1996); and Lydia Yee, *Division of Labor: Women and Work* (New York: Bronx Museum, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> "Cultural Feminism" was theorized contemporaneously to Kelly's "Notes on Reading The *Post-Partum Document*. It was characterized by a commitment to alternative "separatist" art practices. See Mary Kelly's "Art and Sexual Politics," originally presented at the "Art and Politics" conference, AIR, London, 1977, republished in Kelly's *Imaging Desire*; and Griselda Pollock, "Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition, 1978," *Feminist Review* no. 2 (1979).

*The Post-Partum Document describes the subjective moment of the mother-child relationship. An analysis of this relationship is crucial to an understanding of the way in which ideology functions in/by the material practices of childbirth and childcare. Feeding or dressing a child depends as much on the interchange of a system of signs as teaching him/her to speak or write. In a sense, even the unconscious discourses of these moments are "structured like a language." This underlines the fact that intersubjective relationships are fundamentally social. More precisely, every social practice offers a specific expression of a general social law and this law is the symbolic dimension which is given in language.<sup>15</sup>*

Childcare as a "system of signs," the unconscious moment of which gets "structured like a language," is a Lacanian formulation of the "subject" that Kelly purposely articulated in a polemic against Universalist notions of motherhood claimed by cultural feminism. This perspective,

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<sup>15</sup> Kelly, "Notes on Reading," p. 22.

though stated for the first time publicly in 1977, distinguished Kelly's position within the Women's Movement as early as 1970. It was then that Kelly participated in a *theoretical* consciousness raising collaborative called the "History Group" that sought "to make sexuality pass into the grand narrative of change."<sup>16</sup> Which is to say, while other feminist collectives focused on socialist, economic concerns alone as a means of "liberation," the History Group addressed the manner in which ideology and consciousness factored into such Marxist-feminist formulations. Similarly, the *Document* set out to re-enact and then analyze the domestic site of childcare, emphasizing the reciprocal development of mother-child inter-subjectivity, in order to deconstruct the feminist belief in a "natural" maternity held by American artists such as Judy Chicago.

This very "problematic" of women's art practice was central to the *Document's* third discursive site: art

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<sup>16</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*." The History Group was founded after the first Women's Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford. Its participants included Sally Alexander, Anna Davin, Liz Danziger, Rosalind Delmar, Margarita Jimenez, Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey, Branka Magas, Juliet Mitchell, and Margaret Walters.

production. Since Kelly had been enrolled in a post-graduate program at St. Martin's School of Art in London (1968-72), she had gained exposure to British "Conceptualists" such as Richard Long, Gilbert and George, and Charles Harrison (the editor of *Studio International*) at the school. Other artists not affiliated with the school that informed her practice, included Victor Burgin, Dan Graham, Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth, and Art & Language. With the exception of Graham's work none of these artists had yet integrated an interrogation of the subject-artist into their interrogation of various art procedures. While deeply informed by these artists' "procedural" tactics, indicative of Conceptualism,<sup>17</sup> Kelly simultaneously took up this absent subject - though her "subject" was the heterogeneous *feminine* subject.

Such a move challenged both the Conceptualists' privileging of "objective" analysis as well as the cultural feminists' privileging of an ontological "feminine experience." Posited as neither a "valorization of the

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<sup>17</sup> I will address these "procedural" tactics at length in chapter two.

female body or of feminine experience"<sup>18</sup> nor as "part of a purely denotative language,"<sup>19</sup> the *Document's* folded vests, child's markings, and word imprints were intended to psychoanalytically "represent" the mother as a subject divided along the hyphenation: *artist-as-mother*. This hyphenation of subject, reified by the project's procedural self-analysis, suspended the two positions in an interminable state of mutual interrogation. In other words, the entry of the "mother" subject-position opened a debate with the logical positivist side of Conceptualism (Kosuth's practice in particular) in as much as the "artist" subject-position entered into a debate with unmediated notions of maternity put forth by cultural feminism. This was done performatively, as these two positions dialogically interact throughout Kelly's process of self-documentation.

### ***The Artwork***

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<sup>18</sup> Kelly, "Notes on Reading," p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Carson "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

Often there is a gap between theory and practice in "conceptual" art production - which is to say, between what the artist *reads* and what he or she *makes*. What distinguishes the *Document* is the manner in which a theorization of the "artist-as-mother" is performatively worked through, a mode of critical practice that would influence eighties art production that Kwon classifies as discursive.<sup>20</sup>

Completed in 1978, the *Document* itself is composed of 135 units broken up into six sections. (figs. 1-2) Each section begins with indexical "residue" of the child's subjective development up to age five (his learning to speak, draw, write, etc.) labeled "Documentation." This documentation - found objects originating from the son (such as diaper liners, drawings, recordings, etc.) - are compiled together as "factual evidence," framed, and hung sequentially on the wall. At the conclusion of each section, slightly off set, are additional framed diagrams and algorithms from Lacan's writings that stand to

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<sup>20</sup> This eighties production incorporates the work of New York based artists Andrea Fraser, Renee Greene, and Simon Leung. The American

challenge both the "scientificity" of the empirical data, as well as the objectivity of the *artist-as-mother's* position in documenting both herself and her son's daily activities.

These two components - the empirical data and the psychoanalytic inquiry - are reiterated in a binder of text and footnotes presented elsewhere in the gallery.<sup>21</sup> These notes, divided under the headings "Documentation" and "Experimentum Mentis,"<sup>22</sup> respectively refer to the empirical data and psychoanalytic reflection of each section. The original disjunction between the "artwork" and the "footnotes" - later collapsed by the publication of the *Document* as a book in 1983 - was a physical continuation of

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reception of Kelly's work and the manner in which it dialogically influenced the work of Andrea Fraser are the subject chapter five.  
<sup>21</sup> The *Document* was shown in stages through out its making. Thus the first three sections were shown at the ICA in London in 1976. Though it was completed in 1978, after which the subsequent sections were shown at various sites, the *Document* was never shown as a whole until 1984 at the Yale Center for British Art (which still didn't include the "Introduction"). Prior to 1983, when the *Document* was published as a book, the notes were presented in the gallery. After that, the book sufficed as the notes accompanying the *Document's* (partial) exhibition. This, of course, changed the entire layout of the show and hence the impact of the notes. In 1998, the Generali Foundation re-exhibited the entire document (including the introduction), and compiled the notes in a binder as it was originally conceived.

<sup>22</sup> The term "experimentum mentis" comes from Anthony Wilden's translation of Lacan's *Language of the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968) p. 20.

"one discourse interrogating the other." Thus, the "scientificity" that empirical data mimicked (post-natal care, linguistics, child psychology, cognitive science, and linguistics) was challenged and revised by the second set of notes paraphrasing Freudian and Lacanian theory. In this way, the positivist "authenticity" that characterized pseudo-scientific accounts of childcare was undermined by the diagrammatic study of the unconscious, as were autobiographic accounts of motherhood informed by post-structuralist challenges to the author-function.

The introduction of psychoanalytic theory bifurcated the analyst's subject position between known and unknown experience, so that the analyst's (i.e. the *artist-as-mother's*) irrational impulses could enter the picture. Kelly aptly appropriates Lacan's term, *experimentum mentis*, to designate experiences that are unconscious, not empirical. In order to describe the paradoxical notion of such "unconscious experience," Lacan states:

*The unconscious is that chapter of my history which is marked by a blank or occupied by falsehood: It is the*

*censored chapter. But the Truth can be found again;  
it is most often already written down elsewhere: in  
monuments. . .archival documents. . .semantic  
evolution . . .traditions. . .and in traces."*

Thus Lacan's notion of *experimentum mentis* is taken up in the *Document* as that space where the subject's "truth" is psychoanalytically reflected upon vis-à-vis the child and mother's reciprocal history. Since their combined history is always already defined by convention (via documents, monuments, semantic evolution and traditions) the *Document's* subject challenges the interiorized Cartesian subject that conceptual artists either wanted to keep out (Kosuth, *Art & Language*) or fetishistically engage (Douglas Heubler, Robert Barry, On Kawara). Although the "look" of the *Document* shared a procedural aesthetic with these artists, its internal interrogation nevertheless implicated the blind spot of such Conceptualist work. I will return to consider at greater length the *Document's* relation to Conceptualism in the subsequent chapter.

The manner in which the *Document's* narrative unfolds through procedural documentation and running commentary also reflected Kelly's interest in "real time" film, specifically that of Straub and Huillet. The essentialist, pictorial representation (vs. interrogation) of motherhood that characterized most feminist art work in the early seventies, as well as the positivist approach to documentation simultaneously taken up by most Conceptualists, lead many to believe that the static image had lost its critical edge. Kelly has reflected on this dilemma:

*At the time, I had somehow felt divided about the issue of form and content - whether film as a medium was more progressive than the exhibition. Or did the still image have some potential for self-reflexivity? [Upon seeing Straub and Huillet's Othon in 1969] I realized "Why couldn't you do this in the context of the exhibition? Why couldn't there be a notion of*

*diegetic space. And why couldn't you pull the spectator into a static image that way?"<sup>23</sup>*

However, if the influence of film on the *Document's* organization was important in the way the narrative unfolded, this narrative wasn't "literal." To the contrary, the project's final form paralleled the way that semiotics was taken up in the context of film. Which is to say, the narrative structure's doubling back on itself - the way the documentation and diaristic narratives of the mother are reworked through psychoanalytic reflection - typified a mode of self-reflexivity in British film practice and theory meant to challenge the viewer's "narrative pleasure."<sup>24</sup> The *Document's* translation of "diegetic" space - the temporal and spatial movement of narrative in film - was thus a nod to a mode of criticality indicative of film practice that had yet to find its place in object-making.

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<sup>23</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

<sup>24</sup> At the time of *Post-Partum Document's* inception, Laura Mulvey was writing her now famous essay on Brechtian practice in film, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," *Screen* vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn, 1975). An earlier version was presented at the French Department in the University of Wisconsin in spring 1973.

The challenge to those traditional narrative structures predicated on the viewer's willful identification was further initiated by the *Document's* "heterogeneous" use of the sign. By heterogeneous, I mean those signs that refuse the opposition between image and text, in place of a fluid exchange between what Charles Peirce designated as "icons," "indexes," and "symbols."<sup>25</sup> A type of "iconophobia" was indicative of both Kelly and Mulvey's early practices, for fear that images of women (prevalent within both cultural feminism and mass media) would facilitate, if not further entrench, women's role as a fetish object within visual culture.<sup>26</sup> Much has been made of the fact that the *Document* rejected any pictorial, or iconic, representation of the mother in favor of indexical and symbolic traces that mark her desire, thus thwarting conventional identification with the narrative's

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Peirce, *Collected Papers: Volume I Principles of Philosophy and Volume II Elements of Logic*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1974).

<sup>26</sup> The emphasis on the *Document's* discursive exchange with Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema essay," in which the term 'woman-as-image' was invented, was a product of its eighties reception. See chapter five.

protagonist.<sup>27</sup> With limited exception what hasn't been addressed, however, is the manner in which the *heterogeneous* sign - not the mere *rejection* of the iconic sign - served to visually and conceptually problematize the security of the *artist-as-mother's* stable subject position as it put into crisis signification in general.

The *Document's* use of heterogeneity and real time, as well as its internal interrogation, will become clearer through an introductory survey of its six sections. The Lacanian theory that I use to describe the *Document* is a reiteration of its own interpretation of these principles. It is important to begin by stating these principles, without initial critique or historicization, in order to discern the project's internal logic. I will, however, return to historicize and interrogate the *Document's* use of these psychoanalytic theories in chapter four.

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<sup>27</sup> Writings on the *Document* in this context are voluminous, and for the most part have over-determined the project's reception in America. Andrea Fraser's "On the *Post-Partum Document*" in *Afterimage* (March 1986) is a notable exception. I will take this up directly my *Afterward*.

***Documentation I: Analyzed Faecal Stains & Feeding Charts.***

***(Experimentum Mentis I: Weaning from the Breast)***

In *Documentation I* (fig. 3) the record of the feeding and changing process from the month of February, 1974 (the infant's sixth month) is presented. Though Kelly recorded this process over three months (January - March), (fig. 4) February was selected as it represented the most dramatic change. The infant's daily diaper liners were saved and mounted as "prints," upon which Kelly printed an analysis of the infant's nutritional intake correlating to his stools. This was calculated in accordance with the following index from the *Document's* footnotes:<sup>28</sup>

*01 constipated*

*02 normal*

*03 not homogeneous*

*04 loose*

*05 diarrhoeal*

All six sections of the *Document* end with Kelly's re-working of Lacan's semiotic algorithm S/s (Lacan's placement of the Signifier over the signified - inverting Saussure's original algorithm of the sign). For instance in section one, in the place of the signifier, Kelly places the mother's question "What have I done wrong?" The algorithm is meant to signify the mother's doubt over her own maternal competence thus barring her from a unified maternal subjectivity based upon "innate" ability:

(WHAT HAVE I DONE WRONG?)

s

Each section also closes with an algorithm drawn from Lacan's R Schema - a diagram mapping a subject's psycho-sexual development in relation to three registers connected like a Borromean knot: the Imaginary (pre-linguistic), the Symbolic (linguistic), and the Real (the unrepresentable). The complete schema sequentially unfolds in each section of the *Document* vis-à-vis the child's intersubjective

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<sup>28</sup> Mary Kelly, notes to *Post-Partum Document*, published as *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 9.

development within the primordial (Oedipal) triangle of father-child-mother.<sup>29</sup>

In this section, the algorithm that Kelly draws from the R Schema,  $S(\emptyset)a(M)$ ,<sup>30</sup> signifies the child's position as a phallus for the mother. (fig. 5) The "Experimentum Mentis" subtitle, *Weaning from the breast* that concludes this section, describes the mother's general anxiety over resolving her own mis-recognition that she "had the phallus" and thus held a positive place in the Symbolic register. For the weaning process (the switch to solid foods rather than merely the end of breast-feeding) occurs around 6 to 18 months of age for the child - the same moment of Lacan's "mirror stage."<sup>31</sup> This stage is the

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<sup>29</sup> See my appendix for a complete reproduction of Anthony Wilden's explication of Lacan's Schema R. I include it in its entirety for two reasons: first it was reproduced as such in Kelly's original footnotes accompanying the *Document*; and second, as a reproduction it *pictures* the discursive site from which Kelly's theorization of this schema occurred.

<sup>30</sup> Again, see appendix for a precise breakdown and placement of this schema's symbols as it mutates throughout each section of the *Document*. In this section, for instance, "S" stands for the Subject, " $\emptyset$ " the phallus or imaginary object, "a" the figure of the imaginary other that the infant sees in the mirror between 6 and 18 months, and "M" the signifier of the primordial object, that is the mother or "real Other." In later sections, "P" or "the name of the Father" will enter the schema/algorithm

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," in *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: W.W. Norton, 1977).

moment of the child's own recognition of "self" (as in a mirror), placing him at the threshold between the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. Significantly, this separation of the child's identity away from the body of the mother (the child now takes the mother's body as his object of desire), instills a sense of lack in the mother, comparable to male castration anxiety.

But how does the mother's anxiety or insufficiency over this separation visually play itself out in the work? It is manifest through the feeding schedules kept by Kelly upon returning home from the hospital. In the early seventies, the practice was to put the infant's feeding on the mother's schedule. Accordingly, the mother was instructed to document the exact time and weight of the feedings, so as to analyze whether she was practicing proper post-natal care. Kelly did this in a rather obsessive, procedural manner (indicative of Conceptualist practices that documented everyday activities). The new food introduced to the child (i.e., apricot, beef, and yogurt...) was indexed in red - a clue on the stained liners as to whether the food had been properly digested.

The diaper stains and indexed food items thus served as a symptom of the mother's proficiency in feeding the child. At the same time, this digestive indexical sign iconically "resembled" both the mother's "real time" feeding procedure as well as the child's separation from the mother's body (weaning from the breast).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as is signified by the final question (WHAT HAVE I DONE WRONG?), the digestive sign indicates three things central to the *Document's* theoretical premise. First, that the woman's maternal subjectivity is based upon a lack of essential mastery over her "natural" role. Second, that maternal subjectivity is interactively determined by an exteriorization of "self," always already reciprocated by the *child's* identification of "self." And lastly, that the *Document's* internal interrogation is enacted by this moment of self-analysis because there is no *a priori* space for the *artist-as-mother's* subjectivity. Rather her subjectivity is constructed through the project's procedural contingencies,

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<sup>32</sup> Kelly's use of the digestive sign to both *indicate* something and *resemble* it (to be both an index and an icon) plays upon the sign's heterogeneity. In Peirce's writings this heterogeneity is characteristic of all signs. I will discuss Peirce's notion of the sign's heterogeneity further, as well as Kelly's interaction with Peirce's theories, in my discussion of Conceptualism.

always ending on an unresolved note signified by the algorithmic question.

***Documentation II: Analyzed utterances and related speech events (Experimentum Mentis II: Weaning from the holophrase)***

*Documentation II* (fig. 6) records the child's transition from "single word utterances to patterned speech (syntax)" in "daily 12-minute sessions, over a period of 5 months, January 26 to June, 29, 1975."<sup>33</sup> (fig. 7) The single word utterance - holophrases such as "ma-ma," "dere," "mo," etc. - were exhibited (in readymade block type and print) and analyzed in accordance with the following schema from Kelly's footnotes:<sup>34</sup>

*UTTERANCE:*

*The identifiable phonemic content of the child's utterance.*

*GLOSS:*

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, p. 45.

*The grammatical relation in which the mother thinks  
the utterance.*

*FUNCTION:*

*The relations of existence, non-existence and  
recurrence which ground the utterance in an  
intersubjective discourse.*

*AGE:*

*The temporal sequence of speech events which shifts  
the utterance from a paradigmatic axis to a  
syntagmatic one.*

Here, the R schema unfolds to offer the algorithm  
 $S(\emptyset)a'(I)$ . (fig. 8) This signifies the end of the mirror  
stage at 18 months, indicating the child's full Imaginary  
identification with a "self" and his subsequent entry into  
the Symbolic register of language (associated with the  
father). As this nascent step towards the Symbolic entails  
the concomitant loss of the mother's mastery over the  
child's speech (previously only she could interpret the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

meaning of the child's one-word phrases), the section ends with the question WHY DON'T I UNDERSTAND?

The title *Weaning from the holophrase* thus signifies the mother's anxiety over that one word utterance central to the child's passage into the Symbolic: what linguists call the "pivot." For it is the pivot - a nonsensical word the child uses when he begins to speak grammatically - that forces the mother and child to "wean" themselves from the hermetic language indicative of their Imaginary dyad. It is at this moment that the father enters the picture, so to speak, again instigating the mother's sense of "castration" related to her phantasmatic loss of the child-as-phallus.

If section one parodied the discourse of APTS's *Pediatrics* and Dr. Spock's *Child Care* through the obsessive documentation of feeding schedules followed by a Lacanian analysis of this discourse, section two extends this parodic critique to the field of linguistics. Kelly first mimics, through extensive documentation and empirical analysis, the "scientificity" of this discourse. In the section's "Experimentum Mentis" portion, she infuses the conventional linguistic discourse with psychoanalytic

theory, meant here to undermine the former's objectivity. To make this point clear, I will quote her commentary from section two at length. This should serve as a model for the way she mimics "scientificity" in each of the Document's subsequent sections:

*...it is the moment of the child's emerging syntax (i.e. patterned speech), of 'weaning' from the holophrase, which reiterates the lack of object (i.e. child as phallus) for the mother. Specifically, it is the enigmatic pivot, as for example /weh/ in Documentation II, R3-17, which provokes the maternal utterance 'Why don't I understand?' and once again demonstrates the contingency of the 'natural capacity' for maternity. In so far as the pivot is always combined with another utterance it anticipates the child's capacity for expressing him/herself grammatically and eventually being understood without the mediation of the maternal signified.<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> Kelly, *ibid.* p. 72.

Note the appropriation of the phonetic analysis (/weh/), documented throughout by a cryptic numbering system (R3-17, etc.). This is immediately followed by the Lacanian question that implicates the mother's subjectivity, interactively determined by the son's development. Kelly then goes on to make the psychoanalytic implications of this data explicit:

*Significantly, the moment of emerging syntax coincides with the termination of the mirror phase, around 18 months. By then the child's projected image of him/herself can be returned and internalized allowing him/her to situate an Imaginary and libidinal relation to the mother 'in the world'. This ultimately 'weans' the mother from the other who once was part of her in so far as she is no longer identified as the child's mirror, returning his/her image in her own look or returning his/her word with her own meaning. Thus the mother must reconstitute her narcissistic object*

*choice along the lines of an identification with the child as what she would like him to be.*<sup>36</sup>

This psychoanalytic interrogation of the empirical data serves to complicate the pictorial possibilities for the *Document*. Which is to say, the "castration" resulting from the weaning of the mother and child from the dyad's security, which circles around the "pivot," presents a visual problem. Whereas in *Documentation I* there was something you could see - the stained diaper liners - *Documentation II* was composed of material that was non-visual - the spoken word. How then to visualize this? Moreover, it wasn't only the word that created a pictorial problem, the very concept of castration itself denies specularization, as Freud asserts. How then does Kelly give castration a sense of "thing presentation?" Her solution was to use actual blocks of type, laid out in wooden rebates, which was meant to evoke musical notations, invoking Kristeva's notion of the *chora*. For the *chora* is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

that affective sound that anticipates signification.<sup>37</sup>

This, again, "resembled" something, without a direct reliance on the iconic (or pictorial) sign.

***Documentation III Analysed markings and diary-perspective  
schema (Experimentum Mentis III: Weaning from the dyad)***

*Documentation III* (fig. 9) presents diaries based upon conversations between the mother and child during the period that the child enters nursery school, between September 7 and November 26, 1975. (fig. 10) This is printed over daily "gifts" from the child - drawings he

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<sup>37</sup> Kelly's reflection from "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*." In "Revolution in Poetic Language," Kristeva theorizes the Freudian drive around Plato's notion of the *chora*: that "non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated." The following passage more fully illuminates Kelly's claim that the *chora* metaphorically visualizes the pivot's relation to castration: "The *chora* is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e. it is not a sign); nor is it a position that represents someone for another position (i.e. it is not yet a signifier either); it is, however, generated in order to attain to this signifying position. Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm." Collected in *The Kristeva Reader*, trans. Toril Moi, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 93-94.

made in school. The diary is presented in the following schema, as Kelly states in her footnotes:<sup>38</sup>

*R<sub>1</sub>*

*A condensed transcription of the child's conversation, playing it back immediately following a recording session.*

*R<sub>2</sub>*

*A transcription of the mother's inner speech in relation to R<sub>1</sub>, recalling it during a playback later the same day.*

*R<sub>3</sub>*

*A secondary revision of R<sub>2</sub>, on week later, locating the conversation (as object) within a specific time*

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<sup>38</sup> Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, p. 77.

*interval (as spatial metaphor) and rendering it 'in perspective' (as mnemonic system).*

This diary schema, Kelly explains, is framed within another schema - a modification of Leonardo Da Vinci's perspective system. Kelly instructs us to read the various points of this schema metaphorically in the following manner:<sup>39</sup> (fig. 10).

*ABCD*

*The object to be drawn or the 'real' in the sense of what is real for the subject.*

*V*

*The vanishing point or the vanishing reality which defines the subject In terms of a lost object.*

*DP*

*The distance point or the distancing function of the Symbolic father which inserts the lack of object into the dialectic of the Oedipus complex.*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 78

This schematic overlay is the *artist-as-mother's* analysis of the child's drawings according to the "specific placement of markings and his age at the time of making them." For, according to behaviorists, a child's scribbles advance in shape as he/she begins to acquire the signifying system of written language.

The R schema in this section advances to the algorithm,  $S(\emptyset)A(P)$ , with the mother's question being, WHY IS HE/SHE LIKE THAT? (fig. 11) The Imaginary dyad of the child and mother is now invaded by a third term, that of the father - signified by the (P) in the algorithm and the DP (distancing point) in the perspectival schema. The entry of the father refers not to a literal presence, but to the recognition of the father's "word", which Lacan uses to define the Symbolic register of language. Thus the title "Weaning from the dyad," refers not only to the child's passage into the realm of the father, but to the mother's retreat back to her negative place within the primordial triad (as the phallic plenitude provided her by the child is now relinquished). Since the child is a boy,

this is the moment that his identification with the father occurs.

Unlike *Documentation II*, which was characterized by the problematic of visualization and "thing-presentation" in relation to the spoken word, *Documentation III* takes up a critique of the visual field itself by using the child's ready-made drawings. Leonardo's perspectival schema, printed over the child's first lines and circles (the basis for writing), metaphorically points towards an inner perspective. The doubling of a visual schema (Leonardo's) over an internal schema (Kelly's modified version incorporating Oedipal development), is a nod to Lacan's gaze schema that "shifts the subject of representation to the point of light."<sup>40</sup> Kelly's approach is consistent with how Lacan's schema was interpreted by British film theorists as implicating the conventionally stable position

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<sup>40</sup> Lacan's schema was developed in his Seminar XI, published as *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (NY: W.W. Norton & Company), p. 106. 1977). The centrality of gaze theory characterized the British reception of Lacan's work in the early seventies. While Seminar XI wasn't translated until 1977, it was published in French in 1973. Kelly would have had access to this material prior to 1977 in the Lacan Reading Group - a collective designed to translate Lacanian texts. The comparison of the *Documents* superimposition of the Leonardo and Kelly's

of the (Cartesian) viewer by placing him simultaneously *within* and *outside* the picture. As such, an "internal perspective," i.e. his psychic *relationship* with the Other, vis-à-vis the "exterior" visual field, was believed to be underscored.

In the language of the *Document*, the "artist-as-mother" thus *returns* the look, a perspective conventionally understood in unilateral terms, as Dürer's *Method of Drawing a Portrait* illustrates. In *Documentation III*, then, the "artist-as-mother" performatively occupies both positions of Dürer's portrait - the artist *and* the model - as viewed through the screen of the child's pictorial/internal perspectival grid. The objectivization of the mother's position, however, is indexical - even *operational* - rather than pictorial. Which is to say, artists in the past, beginning with Michelangelo, up through Berthe Marisot and Mary Cassatt, have "represented" the unified mother-child dyad within the pictorial conventions of perspectival space. Kelly, however, places the illusionistic operation of this perspectival space

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schema with that of Lacan's is the artist's. See "Excavating Post-

under interrogation to metaphorically indicate the *separation* and instability characteristic of the mother-child dyad at this moment.

Representation in the *Document*, then, is actually a representation of *loss*. The first three sections documented through procedural, indexical tactics the stages and spaces of this loss (of the object and metaphorically of the child). The last three sections of the *Document* take up the completion of this loss - how it is secured through language and the mother's concomitant melancholia. The second half the *Document*, almost as an enactment of reaction formation over this loss, thus de-emphasizes quotidian procedural documentation (indicative of Conceptualist practices up through 1976 when section III was completed). In *Documentation IV-VI* we see instead the introduction of object production, combined with procedural strategies, as a means to visualized separation.

**Documentation IV Transitional objects, diary and diagram**  
**(Experimentum Mentis: On Femininity)**

Documentation IV (fig. 12) continues to use the mother's diary texts. Recorded between January and May 1976, they express the mother's separation anxiety over "working outside the home." This text is printed on fragments of the child's "transitional object" - his comforter - and juxtaposed to the child's "hand plaques" made by the mother. Lacan's Schema R is stamped on these hand imprints, unfolding "as a representation of the static states of the subject (S) within the fields of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real." Kelly provides an intentionally "scientific" Lacanian breakdown of these three registers:<sup>41</sup>

(I)

*the Imaginary; including (a) the figure of the Imaginary other of the Mirror stage, (a') the paternal imago, (∅) the Imaginary object, i.e., the phallus.*

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<sup>41</sup> Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, p. 97.

(S)

*the Symbolic; including (M) the signifier of the primordial object, (I) the Ideal of the ego, (P) the Name-of-the-Father in the locus of the Other (A).*

(R)

*the Real; framed and maintained by the relations of the Imaginary and Symbolic (the Real cannot be articulated but remains as a kind of residue of articulation, fore-closed to representation as such).*

The algorithmic derivative of the R Schema provided here is: S(IM)a. (fig. 14) This is where the three terms of the Oedipal triad begin to clearly define themselves: S, the subject (the child); IM, the Ideal of the ego and signifier of the primordial object (mother); and A, the Other (the paternal signifier). The mother's question WHAT DO YOU WANT? signifies her ambiguous place within the Oedipal triad. It is simultaneously one of loss to the *Name-of-the-Father* (i.e. the Symbolic register in the form of language acquisition, outside institutions such as school, etc.) as well as an escape to *maternal plentitude* (i.e. the

Imaginary register in the form of the child's constant demand for her physical presence/attention).

The mother and child's ambiguous placement between the Imaginary and Symbolic registers, with the father as a third term, is played out through the diary narratives. Here is the first one:

*His words are so clear now. . .so demanding. He's less convinced by my ploys. I keep on saying. . . 'you're not a baby, but a grown up boy'. All my songs, jokes, rhymes, threats. . . seem to center on the difference between 'babies' and 'boys', . . . an opposition introduced by R [Ray, the father] and subsequently taken up by me.*

As the narrative progresses, the R Schema printed on the accompanying plaster hand imprints is sequentially completed. The child in the end begins to distinguish his body from that of the mother. The mother, reciprocally, becomes more aware her own "femininity" being constructed

by the other (hence the Experimentum Mentis title "On Femininity"):

*This seems to be a new phase of sexual curiosity for K. . .showing us his willy etc. . .once he called it 'chicken 'n chips'. When we read the ABC book, after 'A is for apple' he points to me and says. . ."There's a breast 'n there's a breast". He notices what I wear too. . .he likes my 'shiny' shoes and 'feathery' coat. I enjoy his attention but it's made me more self-conscious about cuddling him so much. It's made me more aware of my self too. . .of being 'feminine.'*

Since the circulation of bodies, both real and phantasmatic - the child's, the mother's, and even the maternal grandmother's - is so central to this section, the significance of the plaster cast hands shouldn't be overlooked. For it offers a bit of the body for the viewer to recuperate in a visual project dominated by indexical strategies of representation. But the viewer's desire to recuperate this "real" of the body, mirrors the mother's

desire to recuperate the body of the child - that *body that was once part of me* in Freud's terms. As such, this picture of the child's hand is as much a transitional object for the viewer as is for the *artist-as-mother*, both of whom are melancholic for the presence of the maternal body.<sup>42</sup> However, the iconic nature of the hands shouldn't be over determined, as they are, of course, *imprints*. Thus they are actually an index. In this way, the heterogeneity of the sign is again underscored, as the hand imprints can be understood as no more "bodily" than the stains of *Documentation I*.

***Documentation V Classified specimens, proportional diagrams, statistical tables, research and index***  
***(Experimentum Mentis: On the order of things)***

*Documentation V* (fig 15) collects and classifies specimens (insects and plant life) the child brought to the mother between July 1976 and September 1977, when the child was

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<sup>42</sup> This melancholia was particularly acute for those viewers involved with a non-theoretical faction of the Women's Liberation Movement in

between two and four years of age. The collection of the specimens coincided with questions from the child about his sexuality, which were also recorded and presented. Each "event," as Kelly calls these presentations, was documented in three sections:<sup>43</sup>

*(1) L I-II: Mounted specimens and labels*

*(2) Figs I-IIa: Proportional diagrams and research*

*(3) Figs I-IIb: Statistical tables and index*

The specimens, mounted on entomological pinning blocks, and the accompanying labels, giving the taxonomic information, parodied the presentational form and documentary procedures used by entomologists at the British Museum of Natural History. The proportional diagrams mimicked the "Method of Co-ordinates" from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Theory of Transformations (the foundation of morphological, evolutionist science). (fig. 16) While such morphological theories no longer dominate modern science, they still

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Britain at this time. Most feminist artists were still involved in the depiction of maternal images.

<sup>43</sup> Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, p. 113.

exist at the level of socio-mythological notions of the female anatomy. By juxtaposing the diagram with the child's research (collection of specimens),

*. . .the Method of Co-ordinates is also used to suggest the operations of the unconscious; that place where the eccentricity and extravagance of anatomical transformation is not bounded by logic or by the specular image but by discourse of the Other.<sup>44</sup>*

The statistical tables and index that present photocopied medical diagrams of a full-term pregnancy offset the proportional diagrams. The mother's body is thus scanned in relation to the child's recorded questions, such as "Where is your willy?" Like the psychoanalytic interrogation of linguistic "scientificity" that characterized *Documentation II*, the discourses of museology and archaeology are similarly taken up here.

In this section, the Schema R algorithm unfolds to:  $\emptyset(SA)P$ , with the mother's question being WHAT AM I? (fig.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 114.

17) As the Father's presence - through the Law - becomes more dominant, the mother completes a double loss foreshadowed in *Documentation IV*. She loses both the child-as-phallus and the body-as-feminine. Thus the Experimentum Mentis title, *On the order of things*, points not just to Foucault's archaeology of human science,<sup>45</sup> but to the "order" of the subject's sexual identity (child, mother, and father) as he/she passes through the Oedipal complex. Thus the questions the child has about the world - *what is this* - is really a reiteration of the child's questions about himself: *will the badman come and cut my willy off?* or about the mother: *Mummy, do you have a hole in your tummy?* The child's questions are reciprocated by the mother's own question, *What am I?* This, in turn, is really an inquiry as to how the child's questions about the mother's body affects the mother's fantasies of having the phallus and maternal repletion. If she is no longer the phallic mother, who is she?

The question, of course, can't be answered. Indexing a process of *discovery*, these questions are thus asked over

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<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (NY: Vintage Books, 1973).

and over to no resolve. The visualization of the mother's body, here, is thus placed within the phantasmatic inquiry about "the world." So that if the body is referenced elsewhere in the *Document* through the feecal stain or the indexical imprint of the hand, in this section the body is implicated through *the question*. Kelly puts it this way:

. . . Kelly brought me these bugs and things. . . and I'd analyze them motivated by Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, and *On the Order of Things*. As an amateur I laboriously studied what entomologists did - where they came from around our house. So that section was the most difficult. It took the longest because there was absolutely no relationship between things - the insects he brought me and any idea how that was implicated in the questions he asked me, like: "Do you have a hole in your tummy?" And it just seemed preposterous that this had anything to do with insects, but of course it had everything to do with them. Because as Piaget<sup>46</sup> pointed out, children always

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<sup>46</sup> J. Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World*, (NY: Paladin, 1973).

*ask questions about sexuality before they order the world. . .It was like the whole of the [natural history] museum suddenly became a vast, perverse, exploration of the mother's body.<sup>47</sup>*

This metaphor of the museum for the mother's body is further continued in final section, *Documentation VI*.

***Documentation VI Pre-writing alphabet, exerque and diary  
(Experimentum Mentis: On the insistence of the letter)***

*Documentation VI* (fig 18) records the formative phase in which the child acquires reading and writing skills over an 18-month period between January 1977 to April 1978 (age 3.5-4.8). The child's "ABC" lessons were tape recorded, ending with his ability to write his own name. This period overlapped with the child's entry into nursery school - the institutionalization of the "private" mother-child reading sessions. This was recorded in the mother's diary. These three discursive sites were divided into registers and inscribed on slates mimicking the Rosetta Stone, which the

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<sup>47</sup> Kelly, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

artist fabricated. Thus, the child's pre-writing alphabet was placed in the top register where the hieroglyphics on the original would be. Portions from the storybooks the mother and child read at home ("Goodnight Little E"), along with her commentary were placed in the middle section where the demotic would be. And the mother's diary about the child starting school was placed in the lower section where the Greek would be.

The *Document* theorizes the child's hieroglyphic writing in accordance with Roman Jakobson's account that signification is made through two binary oppositions - or axes. Here the founding binarism is "x" and "o", which comes to be mediated by "e". From that, other letters, r, i, c, b, d, p, and q develop in the child's writing, until he masters their signifying difference and the directionality of reading the words he makes from them. The mother's commentary then identifies the letter as the material support of discourse. It is within this discourse (reading and writing) that the mother and child's intersubjectivity is examined; specifically, the imbrication of the child's text and the subject who reads it (represented

by the mother's diary) is emphasized, undermining the "objectivity" of the letter. The third register, the mother's diaristic accounts of the child's entry into institutions of learning, records the final stage of Oedipal separation. The mother takes her place as "mother-house wife" and the child becomes a subject identified with the Father as he learns to write his name: "Kelly Barry."

In this final section, the Schema R Algorithm unfolds to:  $S(\emptyset P)A$ . (fig. 20) At last all three registers (Imaginary, Real, and Symbolic) are fully incorporated in the algorithm, with the Subject (S) identifying through the phallus ( $\emptyset P$ ) with the Law-of-the-Father (A). The mother's question here becomes WHAT WILL I DO? And as such, the question addresses the dilemma of the *artist-as-mother* whose "project" (the child, the artwork) has been completed. If the previous sections of the *Document*, up to *Documentation V*, displaced the fetish of the child's body for the mother onto the ready-made art object (the liners, drawings, recordings, and imprints), in *Documentation VI*, the child's fetishization of the mother's body supplants this. For the child's text desires the mother, his

alphabet functioning as an anagram of her body. For instance, the child associates the letter "e" with the mother's breast. As he writes his own name, he gradually becomes the object of this own text, mastering his position within the symbolic as well as the mother figure as the rightful "object" of desire. The mother, in turn, returns to her negative position within the symbolic, the Oedipal triad procuring the space of the Imaginary, singular, mother-child dyad.

In this section, the textual aesthetic is important, The "look of de-skilling"<sup>48</sup> that characterizes the mother and child's hand written script points to labor involved in the *process of making*. This process - the fabrication of the slates - reflects back on the child's "work" of reading and writing. Kelly describes this process and the manner in which it refers to the child's activities:

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<sup>48</sup> This phrase, "the look of de-skilling," is Benjamin Buchloh's. He coined this phrase while speaking at the Whitney Museum Independent Studies Program. It was his argument that "de-skilled" formal tactics - the dominance of typewritten and handwritten text, for instance - characterized early Conceptualist art practices in contrast to the highly polished "finish fetish" of minimalism.

*I was trying to get the look of the Rosetta Stone.  
Here fabrication pushes the work in another way  
towards self-parody, because it's an absolute fake. .  
.[the three texts were put] on a plate, just a simple  
foil that you use in the kitchen, with a separator.  
Then I mixed up slate filler and resin, casting it on  
the slates and dusted it up with the whitewash to make  
it look like the Rosetta Stone.*

*...The work it took to fabricate the slates - to give  
them that effect - mirrored the "work" of the child.  
As the marks on the slates were his work, they had  
nothing to do with the kind of maternal referent. So,  
I suppose, work was simply a metaphor for the  
obsessive labor to which both the mother and child  
were eventually driven in the process of separation.<sup>49</sup>*

This transition into another mode of production -  
object making in its most laborious form, the forgery -  
represents the project's end on several levels. First, the

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<sup>49</sup> Kelly, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

Conceptualist procedural strategies that characterized the first three sections made from 1973-1976 give way in the last three sections to strategies indicative of what would come to be known as "post-Conceptualist" critique: appropriation, the assisted ready-made, and the fabrication of "forgeries." I am thinking here of work by American artists Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Silvia Kolbowski, all of whom used variations of these strategies in the following decade to undermine and interrogate the art object's status as a commodity fetish.<sup>50</sup> However, it should be noted that Kelly's interrogation of the art object as fetish, more directly implicated the author's subject position than did the aforementioned artists (with the notable exception of Cindy Sherman). The art objects that constitute the *Document* were intended as "fetish objects" in the psychoanalytic sense: they are the site of the mother's

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<sup>50</sup> See Mary Anne Staniszewski, "Conceptual Art," *Flash Art* (Nov/Dec, 1988) for an example of the "post-conceptual" argument. This is one of few articles that historicize the *Document* within sixties and seventies Conceptualism, as opposed to placing it within "second-generation feminist post-conceptual critique." It is Kelly's second project *Interim* that can be categorized as such. I will address the *Document's* problematic periodization when I discuss its American reception in my final chapter.

displaced fetishization of the child.<sup>51</sup> Here, in the *Document's* last section the artist-as-mother's final denial - of the child as well as the object - are laid bare. And the *Document's* project thus comes to a close.

But where did *Post-Partum Document's* debate originate? The work became legendary in the eighties and nineties for the discourse around subjectivity and sexuality that it engendered in a critical mode of post-modernist art production informed by feminism (work by the above artists, for example). Yet, with few notable exceptions the discursive formation of the *Document* still remains widely unexplored. Griselda Pollock, of course, has addressed the *Document's* use of Brechtian strategies in her book *Vision and Difference*.<sup>52</sup> And more recently, an exhibition of Kelly's early collaborative work leading up to the *Document's* production was curated by Judith Mastai, accompanied by a catalogue offering an social-historical overview of that period.<sup>53</sup> But for the most part recent

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<sup>51</sup> Kelly, "Notes on Reading the *Post-Partum Document*," p.23.

<sup>52</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Screening the Seventies," in *Vision and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> Judith Mastai, *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970-1975*, (Vancouver: Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, 1997).

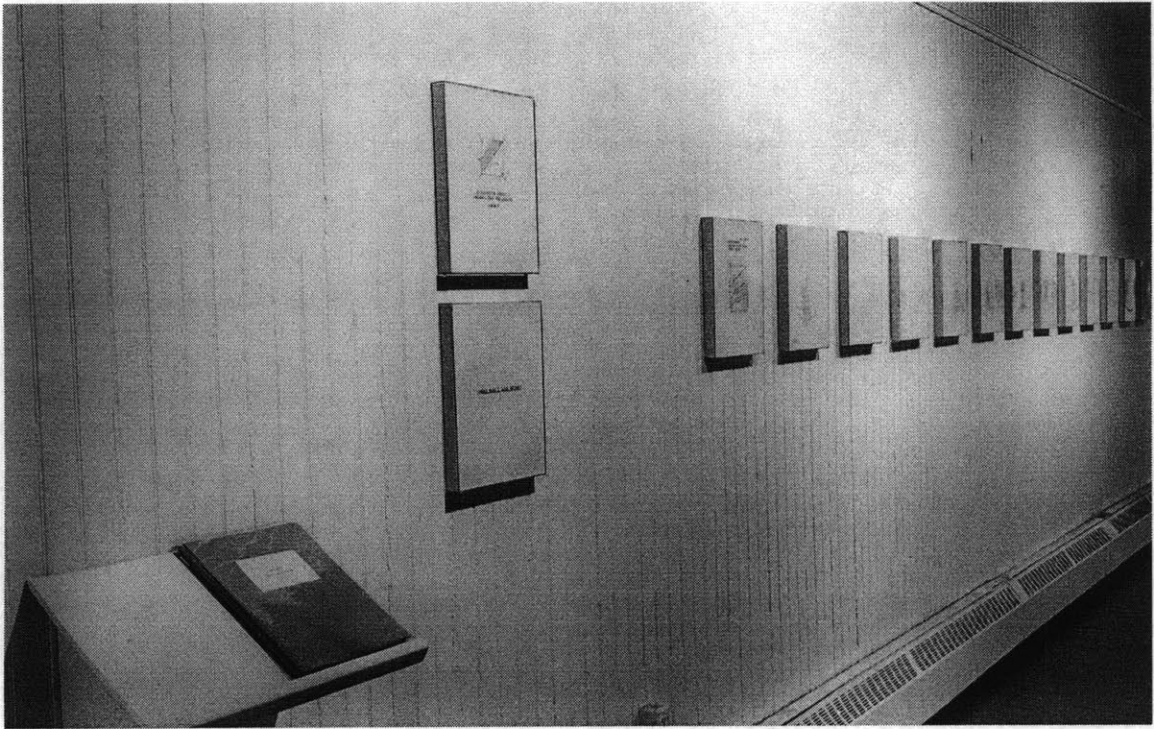
interest in both this period as well as the *Document* is consistent with a mythological re-reading of the 1970's. It is one in which diverse practices and debates are no longer traced and delineated; rather they are homogenized into a utopian account of feminism's founding moment. Amelia Jones' exhibition *Sexual Politics* and Lydia Yee's *Division of Labor: Women and Work* are indicative of this approach, both dissolving Kelly's work into Judy Chicago's. This is readily done today, even though Chicago was an artist with whom Kelly had absolutely no contact, until the late seventies when Kelly cited Chicago's work as part of a polemic over feminist art practice.

In this way, *Post-Partum Document* functions for many scholars and curators as a type of screen memory, supporting any number of retroactively projected fantasies that accord with the theoretical needs and interests of a given period. But as Laplanche and Pontalis explain, screen memories condense fantasy with historical contingency.<sup>54</sup> *Post-Partum Document* is no different. The problem arises then as to how one should approach the

*Document* without relegating it to a totalized meta-narrative of the seventies on the one hand, or elevating it to a de-historicized feminist icon on the other. My desire to look beyond the screen, at the *Document's* "primal scene" - a scene that constitutes its "identity" - mandates that I take the *Document* itself as the "subject" of analysis. However, this subject can only be approached indirectly, so that its picture comes into focus from an anamorphic angle. This angle, of course, is one of discursive formation. In the next three chapters I will trace the various discursive sites that lead to the *Document's* formation and subsequently the fields of its debate-specificity.

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<sup>54</sup> J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*,



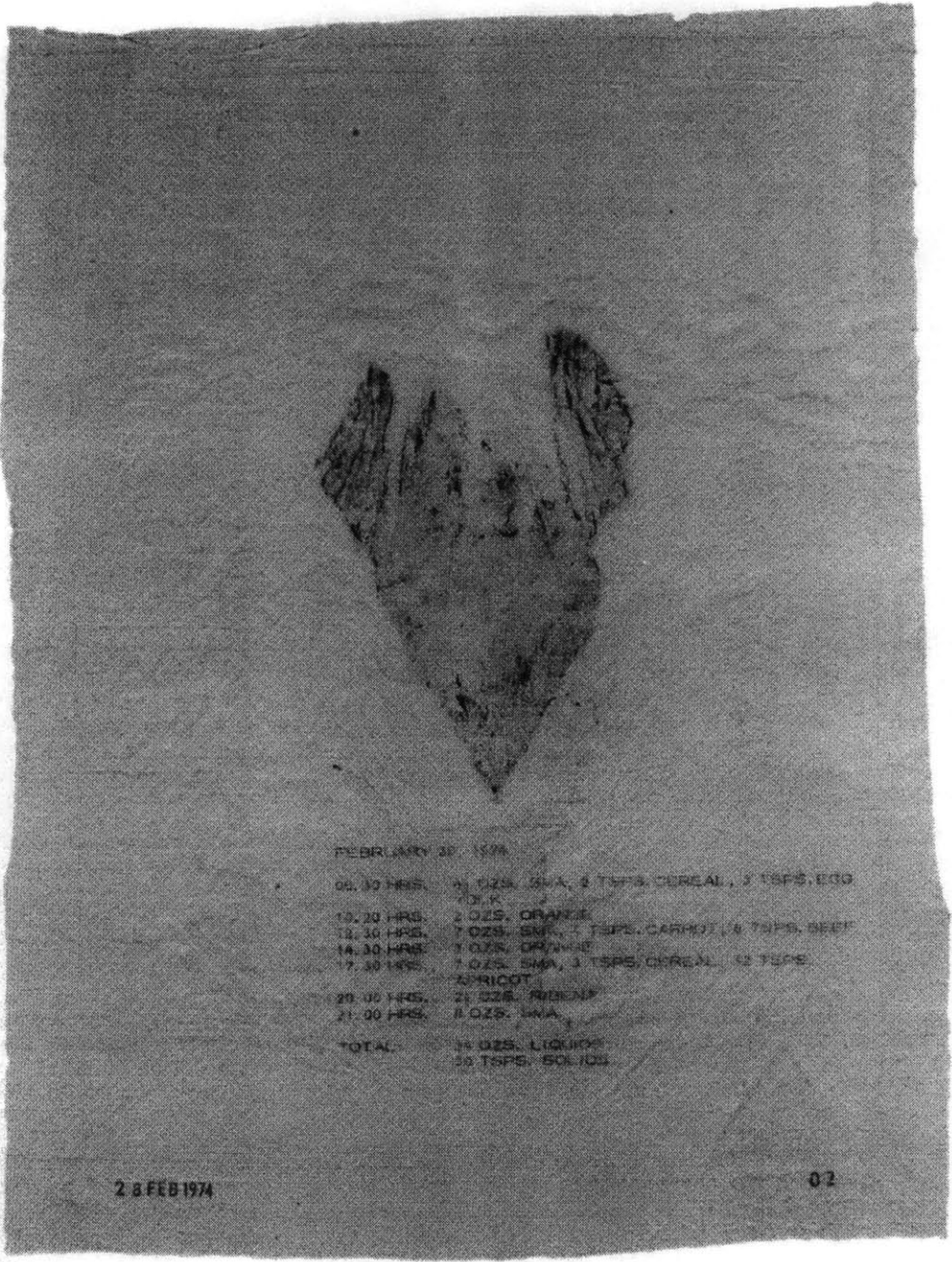
**Figure 1: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, 1973-1979.  
Installation, Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia,  
1981.**

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trans. Donald Nicholason-Smith, (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).



**Figure 2: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, 1973-1979.  
Installation, Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia,  
1981.**



**Figure 3: Mary Kelly, Post-Partum Document: Documentation I, Analysed faecal stains and feeding charts, (detail) 1974.**

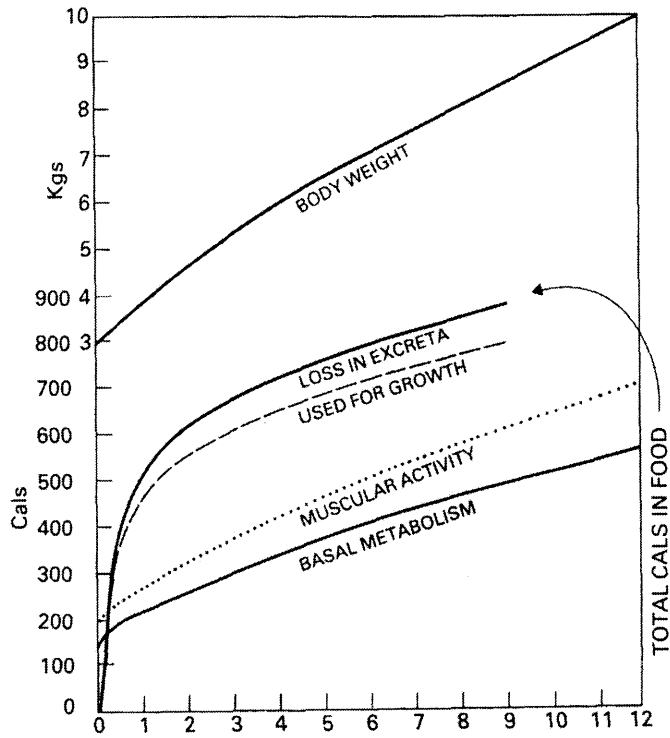


Figure 4: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation I, Feeding Chart.*

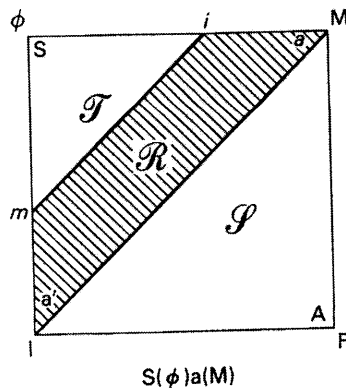


Figure 5: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation I, Schema R.*

UTTERANCE	/WEH KA/
GLOSS	SEE THE 'P CAR'
FUNCTION	RECURRENCE
AGE	17.27
	FEB 22 1975

T4 22.2.75

CONTEXT: M(mother) getting K(son) dressed and ready to go out.  
10.40 HRS.  
/weh ka/R13

SPEECH EVENT(S)

13.1 M. Now we'll get ready to go bye-bye.  
K. /ba-ba/ ka-ka/  
/weh ka/ weh ka/ weh ka/ (excitedly)

M. He's car? (puzzled as there's no car in sight.)  
There, little climber. (helping K up to window)

K. /ka/ ka/ weh ka/ e ka/ weh ka/ weh ka/

13.2 M. There's a truck.  
K. /oh/ ka/ ka-ka/ (truck goes away)  
/weh ka/ weh ka/ weh ka/ e gah/ (sadly)

M. Maybe your friend the rubbish man's coming.  
Can you see him?

MOST FREQUENT UTTERANCES: /weh ka/ weh-deh/ no-no/ be-be/  
MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCES: 1.60 17 months, 27 days

Figure 6: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation II, Analysed Utterances and Related Speech Events*, (detail) 1975.

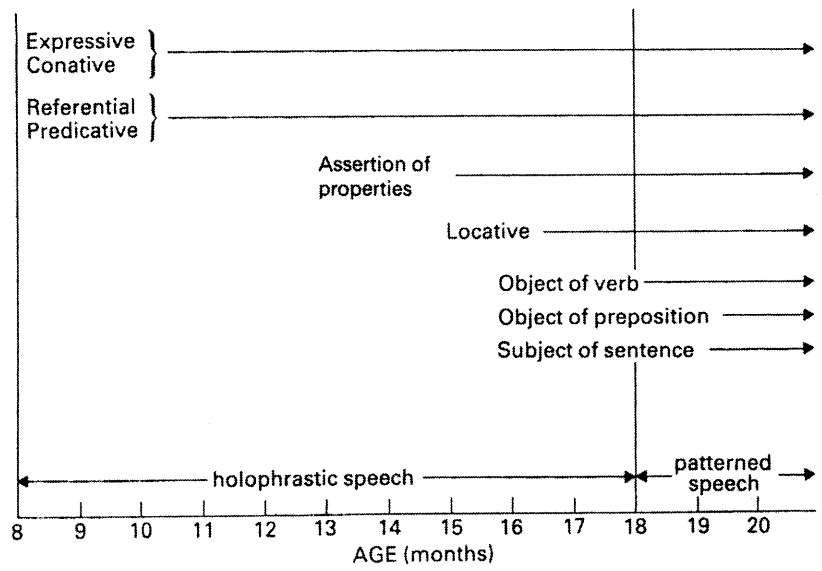


Figure 7: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation II, Analysed Utterances.*

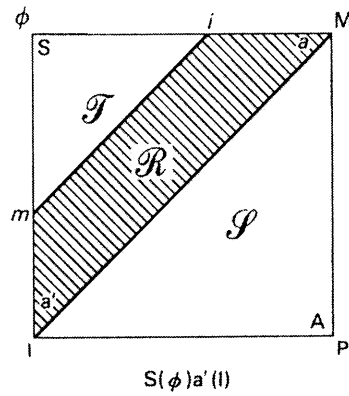


Figure 8: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation II, Schema R.*



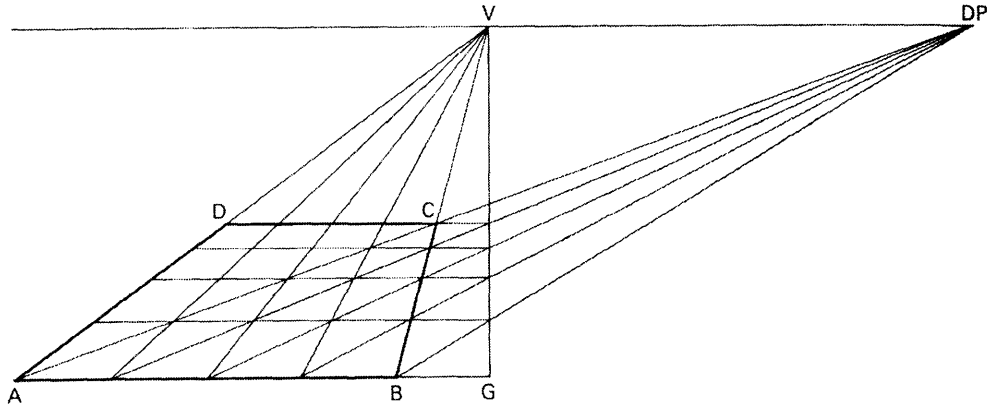


Figure 10: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation III, Perspective Schema.*

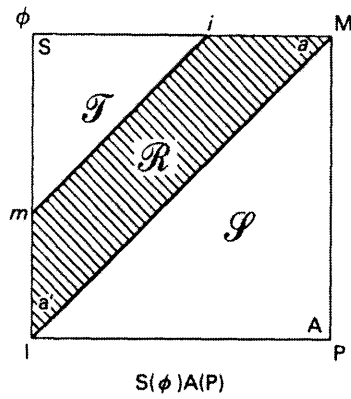


Figure 11: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation III, Schema R.*

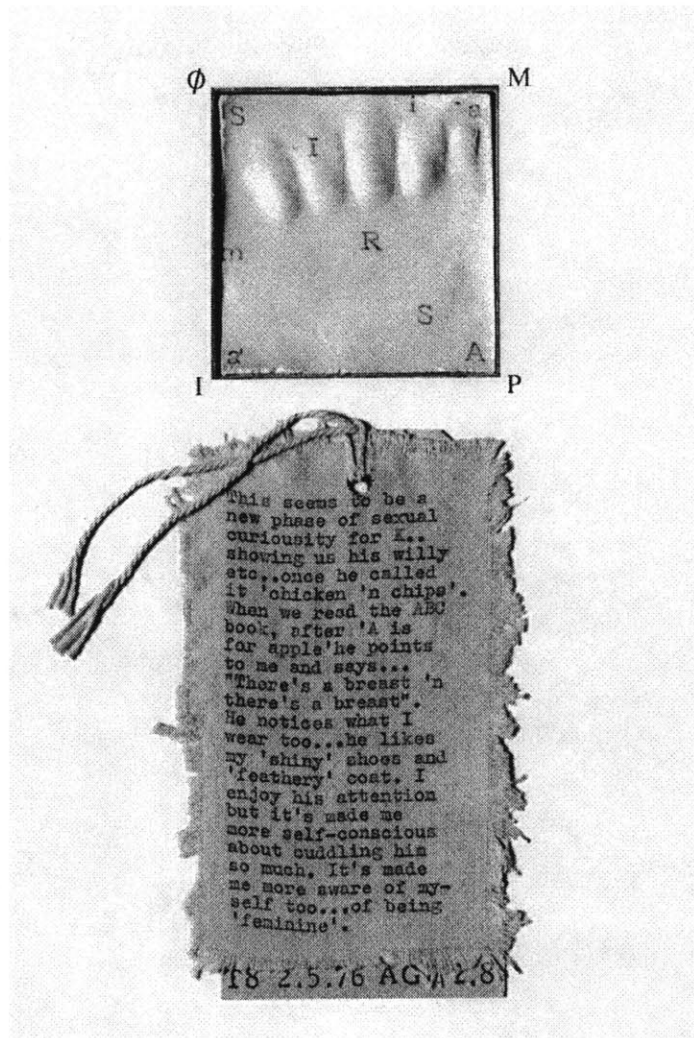


Figure 12: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation IV. Transitional Objects, Diary, and Diagram*, (detail) 1976.

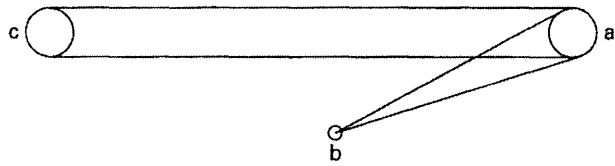


Figure 13: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation IV, Perspective Schema.*

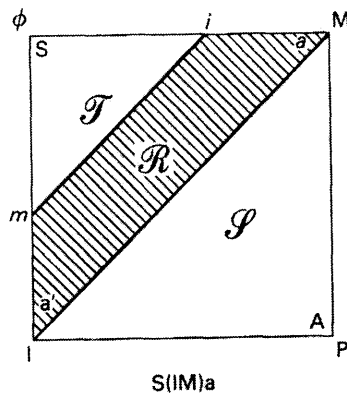


Figure 14: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation IV, Schema R.*

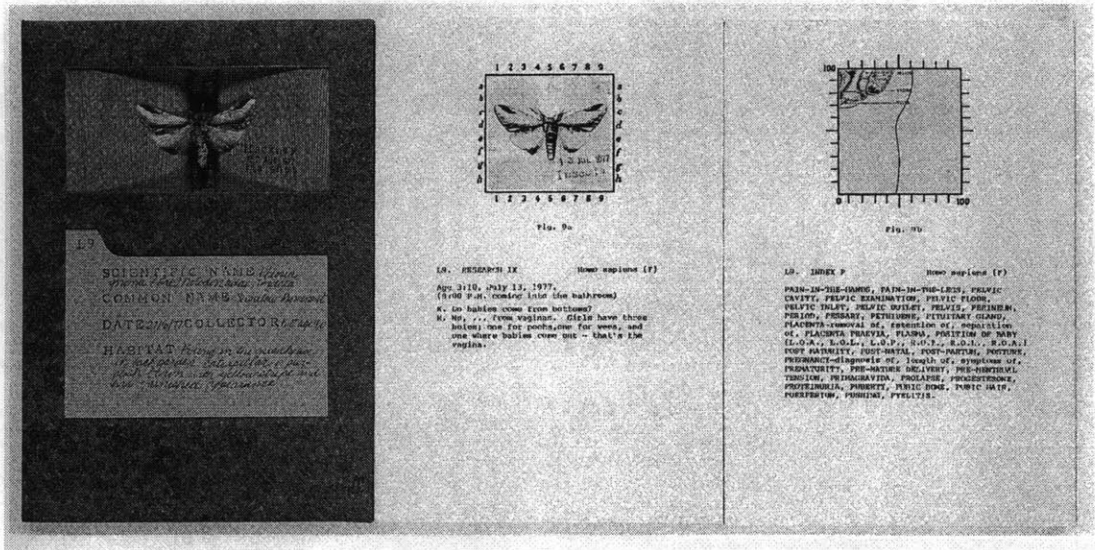


Figure 15: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation V, Classified Specimens, Proportional Diagrams, Statistical Tables, Research and Index*, (detail) 1977.

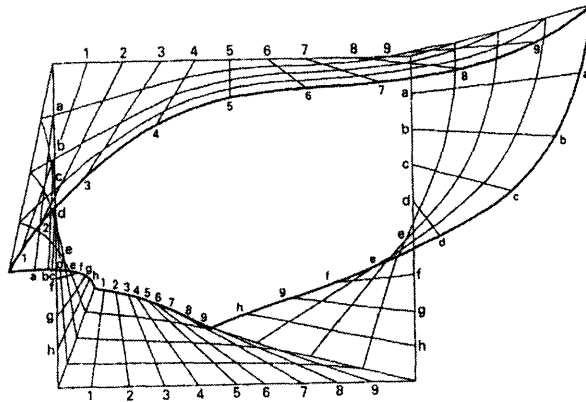


Figure 16: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation V, Proportional Diagram.*

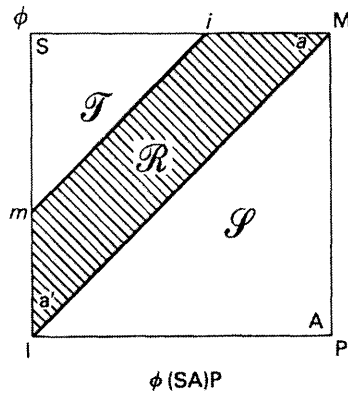


Figure 17: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation V, Schema R.*

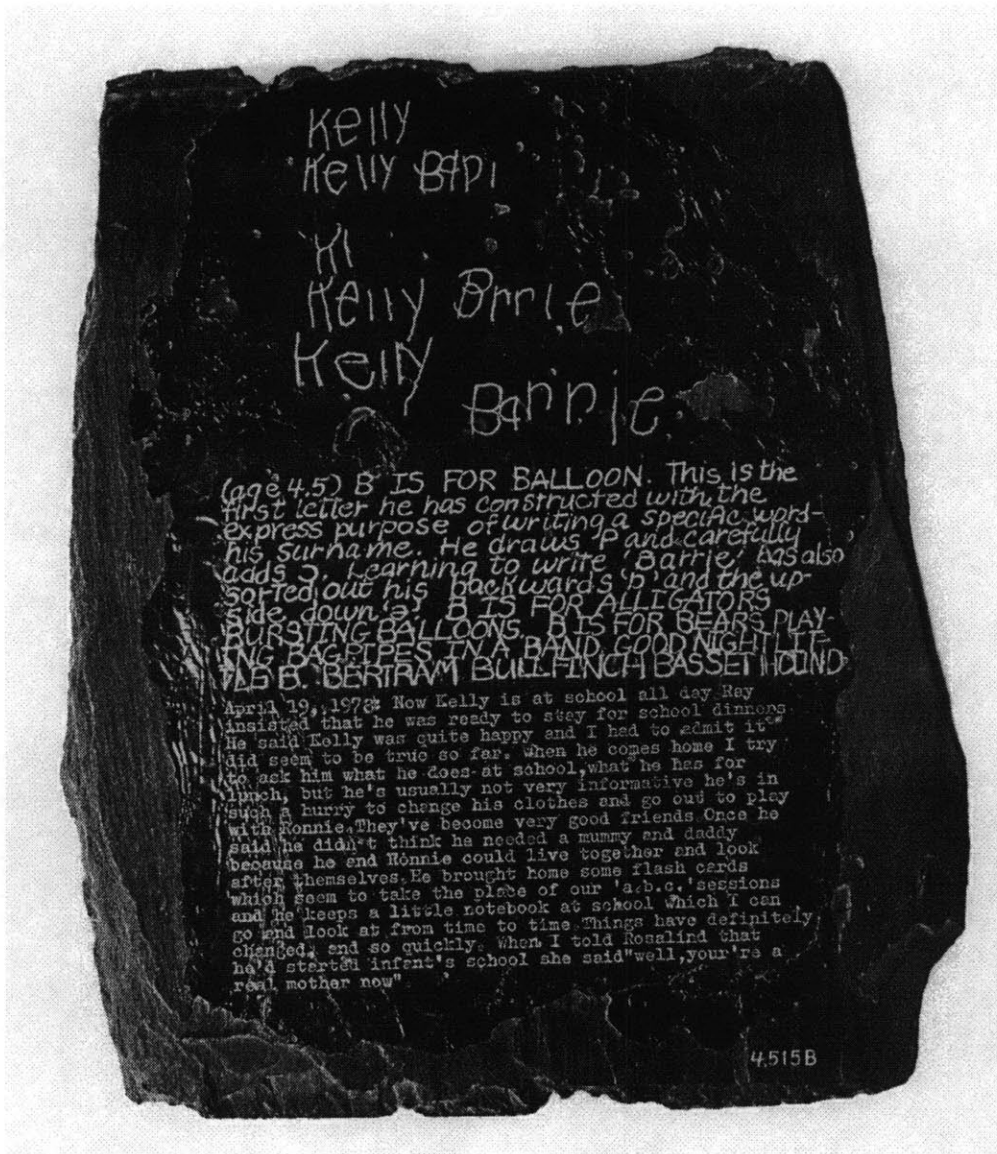


Figure 18: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document, Documentation VI, Pre-Writing Alphabet, Exerque and Diary, (detail) 1978.*

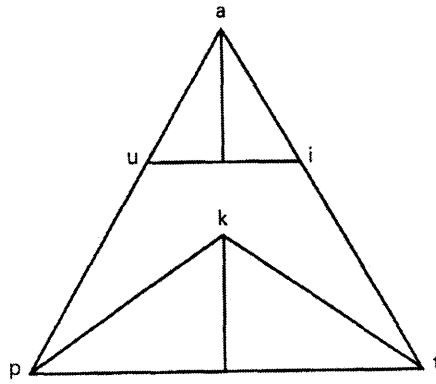


Figure 19: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation VI, Phonemic Diagram.*

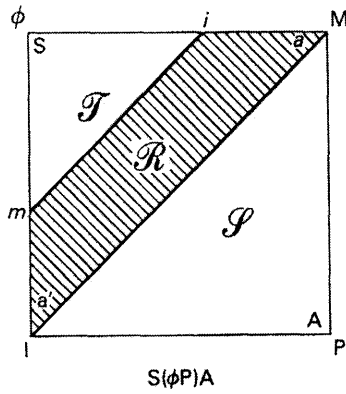


Figure 20: *Post-Partum Document, Documentation VI, Schema R.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Discourses of Conceptualism: The British Field and its Discontents, 1968-1976**

#### ***Background***

In the years surrounding Mary Kelly's initiation into Conceptual art at St. Martin's School of Art in 1968, a diverse group of international Conceptualists were either working in London or showing at the ICA. The list includes Richard Hamilton, Gilbert & George, Victor Burgin, Lawrence Weiner, Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, Art & Language, Bernar Venet, Ed Ruscha, and Douglas Huebler. Following these artists' lead while at St. Martin's, Kelly had yet to incorporate an interrogation of the speaking subject or to integrate the "synthetic" field of politics into her work.

Her 1970 performance piece, *An Earthwork Performed* (figs. 21-22) typified the "apolitical" systems work indicative of such Conceptualist art practice in the late sixties and early seventies. Although London, like Paris, had experienced the student and worker uprisings in 1968,

it was the fashion at this time for Conceptualists to separate their art and politics. Thus Kelly's *Earthwork* performance at the London New Arts Lab, only alluded to the concurrent miner's strike that later contributed to the fall of Prime Minister Edward Heath's Conservative Government. The piece itself was a one hour and ten minute film of a person shoveling coal - basically what Kelly herself calls little more than "a systematic series of actions."<sup>55</sup> Shortly thereafter, Kelly and a select few other artists, such as Conrad Atkinson, Margaret Harrison, and Kay Hunt, began to incorporate social issues into their respective Conceptualist projects.

Atkinson was a British artist whose work, like that of Hans Haacke's,<sup>56</sup> challenged the boundary between the so-called "neutrality" of the gallery space and the "politics" of mass culture. His 1972 exhibition at the ICA, entitled *Strike at Brannan's*, systematically documented a labor strike at the Brannan Thermometer factory at Cleator Moor

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<sup>55</sup> Douglas Crimp, "Douglas Crimp in Conversation with Mary Kelly," in *Mary Kelly*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1977), p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> I am thinking specifically of Haacke's *Shapolsky Piece*, made contemporaneously to Atkinson's *Strike at Brannans*. I will return to Haacke's work in chapter three.

in Cumberland through newspaper clippings, correspondence, taped interviews with workers, and other such material.

According to Atkinson's press release, the project

"describes and criticizes existing structures both of society and the art world itself." In this way, he

continued, "The subject of art is not art, the subject of art is not the processes of art or the presentation of the process. These are all technical or craft questions. The subject of a work of art lies in everything outside art."<sup>57</sup>

However, the mainstream reviews in the local press, such as *The Evening Standard*, predictably criticized what they perceived to be a lack of aesthetic concern in the work.<sup>58</sup>

*Women and Work* (fig. 23), an exhibition produced by Kelly

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<sup>57</sup> Conrad Atkinson, "Approaches to an Ideology of Art and Some Parallels with Science," unpublished artist's statement (March 1972).

<sup>58</sup> Richard Cork's review "Atkinson's hamfisted picture of unrest. . ." places "Strike at Brannan" within a movement "against the autocratic supremacy of painting and sculpture" that accompanies a "desire to involve art more directly with the political realities of everyday life." He goes on, however, to question just where the "art" is in Atkinson's project. Cork's opinion (held by many at the time) was that what makes a project "art" may no longer be its status as a painting or a sculpture but rather its ability to mark the artist's hand. He states: "Letters, written statements, photographs, and interviews continuously relayed through several television screens chart the progress of a year-old worker's strike . . . But how do Atkinson's methods measure up as the strategies of an artist?. . . I can see no sign of shaping intelligence at work in this diffuse and often indigestible exhibition: it lacks the *expressive coherence which an artist must display if he is to provide a convincing alternative to the*

in collaboration with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt from 1970-1975, similarly documented the shift in labor at a metal box factory in South London after the Equal Pay Act passed. I will return to discuss *Women and Work* at length in chapter three. For now it is important to note that these initial attempts to blur the boundaries between art and politics in Britain were concentrated on the topic of labor and industry.

In 1973 Kelly's individual work, however, extended this investigation outside the usual debate of "art vs. politics" to incorporate a consideration of the subject, which distinguished *Post-Partum Document* from other Conceptualist works. The moment "the subject" entered the picture marked a major shift in Kelly's early work away from conventional "systemic" approaches that characterized the aforementioned British practice. Of this moment she states:

*From 1968 to 1970 I was at St. Martin's School of Art in London because I was interested in the work there -*

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*battery of devices available to a campaigning reporter."* [my emphasis]

people like Gilbert & George, Richard Long, Charles Harrison and Art & Language. But from the moment that this imposition of social issues occurred, there was also something very inadequate about this systemic approach to art, something wrong with the formula 'art interrogating the conditions of the existence of the Object' and then going on to the second stage and interrogating the conditions of the interrogation itself, but refusing to include subjectivity or sexual difference in that interrogation.<sup>59</sup>

On this issue of subjectivity *Post-Partum Document* was most polemically engaged with the work of the collaborative group Art & Language. In particular, it was their series of installations entitled *Index* that the *Document* meant to debate.

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*Evening Standard*, (June 7, 1972).

<sup>59</sup> Crimp, *ibid.*, p. 11.

## ***The New Art***

In 1972, the Hayward Gallery in London mounted an exhibition entitled *The New Art*. Included was Art & Language's *Index* installation, along with different works by Keith Arnatt, Victor Burgin, Barry Flanagan, Gilbert & George, Richard Long, Michael Craig-Martin, and David Tremlett (among others). The theme of the show accorded with what Robert Morgan has called the structuralist method in Conceptual Art, a model "contingent on the absence of the signified (Object) in relation to the function of the signifier (idea)."<sup>60</sup> Most often the "signifier" that constituted the work was a document of some sort providing an analytic proposition, such as a map, a photograph, a descriptive statement, or an itemized list, which stood in for the lost Object. Of course, this approach relied heavily upon the gallery context to secure that artist's statement or intervention signified as an "artwork." And with limited exception (i.e., Atkinson, Hunt, and Harrison's work), this context clearly delineated the

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Morgan, *Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.17.

"aesthetic" space of the gallery from the "ideological" space of the street.

Art & Language, however, did want to take up a rhetorical space outside the gallery - that of art discourse and debate. Their *Index* installation (fig. 24) thus used the "index" as a formal device to catalogue "a complex network of relationships between ideas, beliefs, assertions, speculations and so forth" shared by members of the group.<sup>61</sup> *Index* in essence was an elaborate filing system, containing 350 texts that were either printed in the group's magazine *Art-Language*, published elsewhere, or circulated among the magazine's editors. It was accompanied by a cross-reference of these texts (mounted on the wall) according to three possible relations that Charles Harrison, a member of the group, described as: "a relation of compatibility; a relationship of incompatibility; and a relation of incomparability." In place of a conventional "art Object" was the display of an aggregate matrix: a map of the discourses within which art is defined. According to Harrison, central to this series

was the understanding that our "capacity to form concepts determines what can be made and produced," and as such, these concepts "are historically, culturally, and economically determined in art as in other spheres of activities."<sup>62</sup> However, Art & Language's reliance on a filing system as an appropriate vehicle to demonstrate this, based upon "internal coherence" that "does not (should not) 'exhibit' incompleteness in any dramatic way," indicates the extent to which Conceptual positivist beliefs still underlay the group's project.<sup>63</sup> For there could be no "outside" space of this project, no trace of the physical world, nor influence of an unconscious one.

Art & Language's "subject of inquiry" was not the *speaking* subject, of course. Rather, it was the very concept of an "art Object" caught in a net of inter-subjective dialogue that characterized the group, a discursive conversational mode of production meant to

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<sup>61</sup> Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> *The New Art*, exhibition catalogue (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1972).

surmount a conventionally unitary, authorial mode. Terry Atkinson, a member of the group, put it this way:

*What we try not to presuppose is personal subjectivity. We've tried to presuppose personal inter-subjectivity - that is conversation. . . There has been this heavy tendency (what ever you like to call it) that art is concerned with personal expression regardless of whether the terms are cognitive, understandable. We've always tried to presuppose inter-subjectivity and that meant in more practical terms not presupposing painting and sculpture (Object making), but presupposing some possibility of conversation with students at a more fundamental level than "assumed" conventionalism.<sup>64</sup>*

Having cast such an inter-subjective net over the absent art Object, Art & Language as speaking subjects themselves were exempt from the investigation. In this manner, the group's anti-authorial gesture seems little more than a

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

dialectical displacement of conventional gestures that fail to account for (in the *Document's* language) the determinant presence of unconscious drives within such inter-subjective relationships. The extent to which this blind spot characterized the entire project is evident in the unconsciously subjective term they used to index their conversations: "compatibility." Art & Language thus operated from a pop-psychology definition of intersubjectivity - one that was literal, empirical, and hermetic because it was over-determined by the aesthetic field. This hermetic impulse of Conceptual Art was best represented by Joseph Kosuth, a member of Art & Language and against whom the *Document's* polemic was most directly waged.

***Joseph Kosuth and the "Analytic Proposition"***

*I remember [in the late sixties and early seventies] being very confrontational with people like Art & Language, and very definitely engaging with people like Joseph Kosuth, and I thought, "If women don't do*

that - make this critical overview - then their work will not have the kind of presence that it needs to, historically."<sup>65</sup>

- Mary Kelly

Kosuth believed that the subject of analysis in art should be, tautologically, the function of art alone. Informed by the early writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in particular, Kosuth promoted "analytic" tautologies (or propositions) as they say nothing of the world, constituting nothing other than a picture of itself. In his famous essay of 1969, "Art After Philosophy," Kosuth argued that "a work of art is a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment of art." He argued that art should therefore be conceived in logical or mathematical terms, as these fields are composed in part through tautological reason. Likewise, the "'art idea' and art are the same and can be appreciated as art without going outside the context of art

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<sup>65</sup> Mary Kelly, "Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock in Conversation," *Vancouver Art Gallery* (June 1989), p. 13.

for verification."<sup>66</sup> Kosuth further distinguishes "analytic" propositions from the "synthetic" ones along the dichotomous terms of context and verification. Synthetic propositions, empiricist by nature according to Kosuth, are consistent with conventional codes of Realism. Analytic propositions, on the other hand, facilitate conceptual inquiries into art's nature. He asserts, "Realism's synthetic state does not bring one to a circular swing back into a dialogue with the larger framework of questions about the nature of art. . .but rather, one is flung out of art's 'orbit' into the 'infinite space' of the human condition."

The ability to know the "truth" of a situation "outside the human condition," was the project of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and it wasn't limited to the tautological proposition. To grasp the "truth" one looked to logical propositions that "pictured" reality. Significantly, this picture wasn't an ordinary *representation* of reality; rather it was a *logical* one

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<sup>66</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," was originally printed in *Studio International*, 1969. It is collected in Kosuth's *Art After*

completely divorced from empirical data. With this paradigm, "Reality" and the true logical proposition that "pictures" it, therefore, have a one-to-one correspondence untethered by empirical contradiction. Should it be contradicted, the proposition is either false, or the proposition has not been reasoned in the proper logical context. Such certainty, of course, is the bedrock of logical positivism. It stands outside the problematic of language - that is to say, of both translation and the speaking subject. Wittgenstein uses the example of a symphony score to illustrate how a logical proposition is laminated to its reality:

*4.0141: There is a general rule by means of which the musician can obtain the symphony from the score, and which makes it possible to derive the symphony from the groove on the gramophone record, and using the first rule, to derive the score again. That is what constitutes the inner similarity between these things which seem to be constructed in such entirely*

*different ways. And that rule is the law of projection which projects symphony into the language of musical notation. It is the rule for translating this language of gramophone records.*<sup>67</sup>

But it was another proposition, even more positivist and removed from the "human condition" that interested Kosuth - that subset called tautology. According to Wittgenstein's usage, tautologies are necessary truths, meaning that no matter what assignments we make to its constituent proposition, it will always come up "true." Here is Wittgenstein's "truth-table" for such tautology, in which the proposition's consistent truth is resolved in the right hand column as always "T":

<b>P</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>not P</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>P or not P</b>
T	//	T	/	T
F	//	T	/	T

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Press, 1991), p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, (NY: Routledge, 1995), p. 20

George Pitcher has described the terms of such tautologies as "true solely in virtue of the definitions of the basic logical constants, as given in their truth tables, and since we ourselves set up these truth tables in the first place, it is not surprising that we can know ahead of time that logical propositions must always be true."<sup>68</sup> This non-contradictory aspect of tautologies, then, is secured at the price of saying "nothing." Wittgenstein put their non-committal positionality this way:

*4. 461: (Like a point from which two arrows go out in opposite directions to one another).*

*(For example, I know nothing about weather when I know that it is either raining or not raining).*

Hence, tautologies are infinitely more safe from contradiction than are "pictures" of reality because tautologies admit *all* possible situations, based as they are on the hermetic terms of its own debate.

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<sup>68</sup> George Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964), p. 109.

This quality, of course, appealed to Kosuth, who wanted "art" as far away from empirical considerations as possible. For such empiricism, he argued, relegates art either to Realist strategies on the one hand, or decorative, formalist considerations of aesthetics, on the other.<sup>69</sup> His earliest work, the proposition series of 1969, thus set out to do what even Wittgenstein questioned was possible - to physically *demonstrate* the logical

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<sup>69</sup> Kosuth's suspicion of the empirical, synthetic realm of experience - under which Realist art falls - was matched by his disdain for its opposite, Greenbergian Modernism, which Kosuth called morphological, formal, and decorative. Kosuth's rhetoric is nevertheless highly consistent with that of Greenberg's. The main point of contention between Kosuth and Greenberg's arguments is *what* the tautological proposition serves. Kosuth's investigation questions what an art Object is, whereas Greenberg questions what art's pure *medium* is. Moreover, both promote the notion of the art expert in an analytic sphere of investigation, devoid of any "synthetic" contradiction. Compare Greenberg's statements about the avant-garde with those made by Kosuth about Conceptualist art: "Retiring from public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point. . . It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape - not its picture - is aesthetically valid; something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or part to anything not itself." Greenberg argues that if art fails to be avant-garde on these terms, then it is kitsch. And kitsch, he concludes, "is *synthetic art*." [my emphasis]. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review*, VI, no. 5, (fall, 1939), pp. 35-36.

(tautological) proposition of art's function or "idea."<sup>70</sup>

This is how Kosuth explains the "idea" of a work that constitutes his well-known tautology "art as idea as idea." He is speaking here of his most famous proposition piece, *One and Three Chairs* (fig. 25), which I will quote at length:

*I used photostats of dictionary definitions in a whole series of pieces. I used common, functional Objects - such as a chair - and to the left of the Object would be a full-scale photograph of it and to the right of the Object would be a photostat of a definition of the Object from the dictionary. Everything you saw when you looked at the Object had to be the same that you saw in the photograph, so each time the work was*

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<sup>70</sup> "Elementary Propositions" in Wittgenstein's terms are irreducible facts. They are so basic that they afford no further analysis. Because tautologies are beyond contradiction, they cancel further analysis and can thus be conceived as a type of elementary proposition. Though Wittgenstein, as a logician, was certain such elementary propositions existed, he was skeptical that one could prove them (or pictorially demonstrate them). In *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, N. Malcom recounts Wittgenstein's position: "I asked Wittgenstein whether, when he wrote the *Tractatus*, he had ever decided upon anything as an example of a 'simple Object.' His reply was that at the time his thought had been that he was a logician; and that it was not his business, as a logician, to try to decide whether this thing or that

*exhibited the new installation necessitated a new photograph. I like the fact that the work itself was something other than simply what you saw. By changing the location, the Object, the photograph, and still having it remain the same work was very interesting. It meant you could have an art work which was that idea of an art work, and its formal components weren't important. . . .The expression was in the idea, not the form - the forms were only a device in the service of the idea.*<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, the "idea" behind the form takes precedence over the "art Object," should that idea be communicable to the viewer. It is the idea that a tautological art proposition - the idea that a definition of a chair, a picture of that chair, and the actual referent (the chair itself) - can signify as an inquiry into the *function* of its own representation. This "idea" presumably stands outside

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was a simple thing or a complex thing, that being a purely *empirical* matter!" Quoted in Pitcher, p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "Art as Idea as Idea: An Interview with Jeanne Siegel," *Collected Writings*, p. 50.

aesthetics, synthetic contradiction, empirical fact, or irrational associations.

However, it is obvious that the transcendental conditions necessary to secure such tautologies don't exist. The following anecdote serves well to illustrate this. A disabled woman, attending a seminar on Conceptual art at UCLA, abruptly interrupted a discussion that others were having about Kosuth's failure to disentangle his project from institutionally defined aesthetics. She did so with the following speech act: *You're all talking about the aesthetics of the "chair." But that is not a chair, nor is it the definition of a chair. You sit in a chair. I live in one.* At heart, then, was the inability to agree upon the most basic "elementary proposition," upon which Kosuth's larger tautological investigation was based: what is a chair? In this case, a chair *is not* a chair, as they say. The invasion of the unconscious, the ideological, and the *synthetic* came crashing into the classroom, contaminating the purity of Kosuth's "art as idea as idea." Assert as he may that such objects are "art" if the artist says so, the *idea* upon which such declarations are made

can't be hermetically contained within a purely analytic sphere.

Kosuth's *One and Five Clocks* (fig. 26), devised along the same logic as *One and Three Chairs*, even better illustrates this. In this piece, a clock is accompanied by a picture of that clock, along with several definitions. If one takes a closer look at the clock and its accompanying picture, however, he/she will note the revenge of the index - i.e. the very presence of empirical data contradicting Kosuth's *pictorial* tautology. For he/she will see that the clock, plugged in and ticking, is perpetually out of synch with the clock's picture (the exception being 1 second out of every 24 hour period). Kosuth, however, wasn't alone in underestimating the heterogeneity of sign systems, or more precisely the manner in which other facets of the sign - iconicity, for instance - muddles its pure "objective" indexical signified. In fact, it was this very the belief in the indexical sign's hermetic scientificity, most often put to the service of such positivist pursuits as Kosuth's, characterized a mode of Conceptualism that Kelly's *Document*

debated. Thus, I will now turn to a fuller discussion of the index, as it was a theoretical motif implicitly and explicitly connecting divergent Conceptualist practices.

### ***Indexical Strategies Part I, A Review***

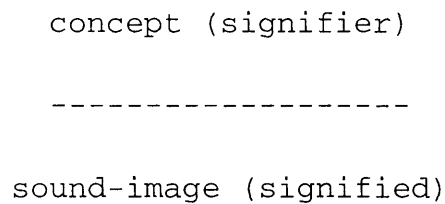
The semiotic definition of the "index" to which I refer is Charles Sanders Peirce's, an early twentieth century "generalist" who wrote on the distinction between iconic, symbolic and indexical signs.<sup>72</sup> Peirce's definition of the sign is similar to that of his contemporary, the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, with a few important distinctions.<sup>73</sup> As we know, according to Saussure a "sign" is made up of two parts: a "signifier" and a "signified." The signifier refers to a sign's form (i.e. a word, sound,

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<sup>72</sup> My use of Peirce's definition of the index here is not arbitrary. His writings were read and debated in the early seventies by Kelly and others, as means of interrogating Saussure's more positivist definition of the sign. Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in Cinema*, 1972, was a central text introducing Peirce's writings. The British journal *Screen* would continue this investigation throughout the mid to late seventies. As for Kelly's familiarity with these theories, her archival notes document that she was thinking through Peirce's notion of the sign as early as 1973.

<sup>73</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959). Collected in Mark C. Taylor, ed. *Deconstruction in Context*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

color, smell, etc.). The signified refers to the signifier's associated meaning or concept. When the two come together, laminated to one another like two sides of a sheet of paper, they make a sign. Thus we have Saussure's famous algorithm:



Saussure argued that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary because it is not *motivated* by any external factors outside of its conventional usage. Which is to say, it is unmotivated by any *transcendental* connection between the signifier: "C-A-T" (for instance) and its signified: a four legged feline animal. The signified, therefore, manifests itself via the signifier differently from culture to culture. That is, "G-A-T-O" in Spanish and "C-H-A-T" in French both refer to the same thing, but the physical presence of the animal that these

signifiers name has nothing to do with the form the sign takes.

The signifier then gains its meaning within a system of conventional difference. Saussure likens this to the game of chess:

*. . . a state of the set of chessman corresponds closely to a state of language. The respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic terms derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms.<sup>74</sup>*

The argument for the conventional basis of a sign's meaning is the bedrock of Saussurean semiotics - a linguistic theory that afforded a critical analysis of the transcendentalist nature of Kantian aesthetics, which dominated 19<sup>th</sup> century thought. However, a certain logocentricism is inherent to Saussure's thought, in that there is absolutely no room for a "motivated" sign. This precludes any consideration of how so-called "outside"

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<sup>74</sup> Taylor, p. 156.

factors might stand to foil meaning within a meta-linguistic signifying system. In this way, Saussurean semiotics is also characterized in part by tautological logic. It presents a schema that relies upon its own terms in order to define itself within a "closed system."

Saussure states:

*. . .in language there are only differences. . .  
.Whether we take the signified or the signifier, the  
language has neither ideas or sounds that existed  
before the linguistic system but only Conceptual and  
phonic differences that have issued from the system.<sup>75</sup>*

But to ask what is "outside" Saussure's signifying system - that is to say, to account for a "motivated" sign - is not to justify a return to transcendentalism per se. Peirce's consideration of the indexical sign demonstrates this.<sup>76</sup>

Whereas Saussure offers up a dyad, *signifier* and *signified*, to justify the sign, Peirce posits a triad:

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*. I will be citing from Volume II.

*Sign, Interpretant, and Object.* Simply put, a "Sign" for Peirce is "something that stands to somebody for something in some capacity." By addressing someone, it creates in his/her mind a more advanced Sign, which Peirce calls an "Interpretant" of the first Sign. What the Sign stands for, Peirce calls the "Object."<sup>77</sup> In this manner, many have understood Peirce's "Sign" as being somewhat like Saussure's "signifier," and his "Interpretant" as being somewhat like Saussure's "signified." However, Peirce's introduction of a third component - the "Object" that a Sign represents - complicates Saussure's model. Firstly, a Sign may have many Objects. Secondly, the Sign's relation to the "Object" determines, in part, that Sign's form. However, this "Object" is not connected to a discreet "real" outside language, for all representations have as their Objects other representations, making the "Object" more akin to a de-stabilized "idea" *within* a given cultural context. Peirce's introduction of the Object thus serves to consistently reorder meaning because it facilitates the Sign's ability to endlessly shift or slide within a given

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 135.

convention in a manner that the more positivist Saussurean model doesn't afford.

This is where Peirce's subset of the Sign - the triad of *Icon*, *Index*, and *Symbol* - comes into play. Put simply, an Icon is a sign that resembles something by similarity, and as such this sign offers up the most direct mode of communication. "The only way of *directly* communicating an idea is by means of an icon; [but] every indirect method of communicating an idea must [also] depend for its establishment upon the use of an icon," Peirce asserts.<sup>78</sup> A representational photograph is the most direct example of an Icon. However, indirect examples include diagrams though there is "no sensuous resemblance between it and its object," signifying as they do by means of *analogy*. An algebraic formula is also an Icon, though its meaning is indeed aided by conventional rules or Symbols. "A great distinguishing factor of the Icon," Peirce argues, "is that by the direct observation of it other truths concerning its Object can be discovered than those which suffice to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

determine its construction."<sup>79</sup> This capacity of "revealing unexpected truths" is exactly what makes such algebraic formulae both meaningful and Iconic. But what is essential to note here is that when Peirce offers examples of Icons, Indices, and Symbols, he does so vis-à-vis their mutual imbrication.

For instance, a photograph is an Iconic sign because it represents something (an Object), but it is also an Index because it is physically connected to its Object. Rays of light that have reflected off the Object being photographed, of course, physically mark the emulsion on a negative, and from this a "picture" is made. In its pure state, "the Index thus asserts nothing." It merely focuses our attention on an Object without describing it. The indexical nature of a photograph denotes that light hit an object and marked its presence. However, when imbued with iconic and symbolic qualities, as in a decipherable photographic image, the index indicates something to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

someone by focusing our attention and saying "there!"<sup>80</sup> For instance, should one flip through an old high school yearbook and stumble upon an "iconic" photograph that indexically marks a specific person's presence at a particular moment in time and space, one might iconically recognize this image and indexically exclaim, "Oh, there's my old high school friend, Bill!"

A connection between a Sign and its Object is at the heart of the Index's function, though this connection isn't physical in *all* classes of indices. Peirce makes this clear in stating that it is unimportant whether the connection between the Object and the Index is natural, artificial, or merely *mental*, as examples of indices range from barometers, weathercocks, clocks, or sundials, to personal demonstrative and relative pronouns. He states the Index's essential function as a *designating* device very clearly:

*A rap on the door is an index. Anything which focuses our attention is an index. Anything which startles us*

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<sup>80</sup> Peirce proposition (3.361) from *Collected Papers, Vol II*, cited in Douglas Greenlee's *Peirce's Concept of Sign*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 88.

*is an index, in so far as it marks the junction between two portions of experience. Thus a tremendous thunderbolt indicates that something has happened, though we may not know precisely what the event was. But it may be expected to connect itself with some other experience.*<sup>81</sup>

What is this "experience"? It is the interaction between two interlocutors mediated by an Index that gives meaning to that situation. This interaction, of course, relies upon symbolic signification. Peirce offers the example of a burning house.

*Suppose two men meet upon a country road and one of them says to the other "The Chimney of that house is on fire." The other looks about him and decries a house with green blinds and verandah having a smoking chimney. [Here the smoke is an index] He walks on a few miles and meets a second traveler. Like a Simple Simon he says, "The chimney of that house is on fire."*

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<sup>81</sup> Peirce, *ibid.* p.161.

*"What house?" asks the other. "Oh the house with green blinds and a verandah," replies the simpleton.*

*"Where is the house?" asks the stranger. He desires some index which shall connect his apprehension with the house meant. Words alone cannot do this.<sup>82</sup> [my emphasis]*

Thus the pure denotative signifier - the Index - needs convention to signify a meaning; a man has to know *what* a fire is to understand the indexical smoking chimney that marks it. However, at the same time, as Peirce's story makes evident, a third term - the Object connected to an Index - is needed to make sense of the series of words "that house is on fire," such that one knows it's true.

Consequently, the Index is connected to Symbols (meaningful situations or utterances) as much as it is to Icons (semblance). Peirce defines all words, sentences, books, and other conventional signs as Symbols. Basically, a Symbol is a sign that would lose its character that renders it a sign if there were no Interpretant. For this

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p 162.

he offers the example of a man and child walking. The man points his arm up into the air and says, "There's a balloon." The man's pointing arm is that indexical part of the Symbol without which it would mean nothing. The "purely" symbolic part of this sign is demonstrated when the child asks what a balloon is, to which the man responds: "It is something like a great big soap bubble."<sup>83</sup>

In their pure state Peirce's definition of the Icon, Index, and Symbol can therefore be defined in the following manner. An Icon is a sign that possesses meaning even without the existence of an object (a map of a territory no longer in existence, for instance). An Index is a sign that loses its meaning if there is no Object attached to it, though it still *exists* without an Interpretant. A Symbol is a sign that can only exist through its Interpretant. However, these signs are inextricably connected in their common day usage, the Index standing at the center of their intersection. "It would be difficult if not impossible," he argues, "to instance an absolutely

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p. 166.

pure Index, or any sign absolutely devoid of the indexical quality."<sup>84</sup>

To reiterate, the index, as a third term, doesn't stand outside language as a transcendental signifier just because it is "motivated" by its object. In its purely denotative state it is an empty vessel waiting for "meaning." Its meaning is achieved when it resembles something or is used conventionally - that is to say, when it enters into "language." What is interesting about the Peircian definition of the index in terms of Kosuth and other Conceptual practices is its reference to an "exterior" space outside of tautological, analytic propositions. However, because the index simultaneously relies upon so-called "closed" language systems to signify a given meaning, it stands to problematize any clear delineation between the very terms "exterior" and "interior." This is precisely the interest that the index held for Kelly's project, as the index is the quintessential heterogeneous sign.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p. 172.

Like Atkinson's *Brannan* installation, or Art & Language's *Index* series, the *Document* utilized indexical strategies to supplant the discreet, so-called "neutral" domain of the art object. What lay "outside" aesthetic neutrality for Atkinson was socio-political. For Art & Language it was discursive. Kelly's project, while deeply engaged in both the socio-political and discursive spheres "outside" the gallery, also posited the notion of "exteriority" in order to problematize the very notion. Which is to say, most Conceptualists who implicitly or explicitly employed indexical strategies dialectically maintained the delineation between inside and outside spaces. This was true at either end of the spectrum, be it Kosuth who wanted to keep the empirical out, or Atkinson who wanted it to contaminate the "purity" of the aesthetic realm with his Maoist rhetoric.<sup>85</sup> Kelly's use of the index stood between these extremes, incorporating as it did an analysis of the artist's unconscious - that is to say, subjectivity - within Conceptualist practice. Which is to say, since her introduction of "subjectivity" was not based

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<sup>85</sup> His artist's statement begins with a statement by Mao-Tse-Tung, from

upon the Modernist transcendental, Cartesian model, but upon a psychoanalytic paradigm that problematized the boundaries of inside and outside, the index (sharing qualities with the latter model) was better taken up in the *Document* than it was in other Conceptualist projects. However, there was another group of Conceptualists, primarily American, taking up the notion of subjectivity via the index. Known as "Dematerialists" these artists stood at the opposite extreme of Kelly's investigation. As Kelly's *Document* was also locked into a debate with the Dematerialist notion of subjectivity, a brief discussion of this work is necessary.

### ***Indexical Strategies Part II, The Dematerialist Interior***

#### ***Subject and Post-Partum Document***

Kosuth asserted that after Duchamp all art was Conceptual because the unassisted readymade changed the nature of art from one of morphology (form) to function (what was said). After Duchamp, the questioning of art's

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which the project takes its spirit.

function was inextricably bound up with the artist's declaration that a given work was, indeed, "art."<sup>86</sup> For Kosuth, the artist's (indexical, i.e. designating) declaration - *It's art if I say it is* - was in service of analytic proposition. This emphasis on the artist as originator of the work/concept was also the foundation of Dematerialist projects, although the analytical proposition was not. Their interest was subjectivity - that of the artist followed by the viewer's - as an interiorized, psychic phenomenon. Such works as Douglas Huebler's *Duration Pieces* and Robert Barry's *Inert Gas* photographs were deeply concerned with privatized spaces, consistent with Jack Burnham's assertion in 1970 that the Dematerialist motto "'Live in your head'" means that the printed page is to Conceptualism what the picture plane is to illusionistic Realism: an unavoidable belaboring of the point."<sup>87</sup> Such practices purported to do away with conventional, pictorial illusionism. In 1973, however, Rosalind Krauss insisted that such Dematerialist practices

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<sup>86</sup> Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy."

still maintained the very illusionism they sought to undo by relying upon a participatory, privatized "self."<sup>88</sup> For like figures in a receding picture plane, an authorial ego was necessarily posited within the psychic plane, equally Cartesian in its illusionism, in order that a given work signify its meaning.

A prime example of the Dematerialist's reliance on a Cartesian ego is manifest in Huebler's *Duration Piece #31* (fig. 27), which presents an image of a young nude woman photographed at the "exact instant in time determined to be exactly 1/8 of a second before midnight." Huebler's accompanying text explains how the woman's image indexically marks the passage of time:

*Inasmuch as the aperture of the camera was set at "4" (1/4 of a second), the image on the film became "complete" 1/8/ of a second past midnight; put another way, after the first 1/8 of a second of 1974 had elapsed. As the subject of the photograph faced*

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<sup>87</sup> Jack Burham's essay "Alice's Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art" is a survey of Conceptualist art practices whose "ideal medium is telepathy," *Artforum*, (February, 1970).

*towards the south, the left side of her body was oriented toward the west; as time "moves" from east to west, the photograph represents the young woman during an instant when approximately half of her body existed within the old year, 1973, while the other half entered the new year, 1974; indeed, consistent with the spirit of the season she wears the costume of the New Year Baby.<sup>89</sup>*

In Huebler's hands, the mind of the viewer becomes the converse vanishing point opposite the woman's image, upon which a mastery of the "duration's" Conceptualization coalesces with the viewer's own point of vision. This seizing of the concept is facilitated by the photograph's capacity, as an indexical sign, to mark or denote the passage of time, as all photographs do by virtue of their "connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the sense or memory of the person for whom

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<sup>88</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility," *Artforum*, (November 1973).

<sup>89</sup> This piece and others are reproduced in Douglas Huebler's *Douglas Huebler "Variable", etc.*, (Vienna: EDF Services, 1993).

it serves on the other."<sup>90</sup> The "individual object," or the nude woman situated looking south, is thus mediated by the photographic index of time's passage, moving from east to west. This subsequently presents a perfect perspectival grid that converges upon the viewing subject who looks north (occupying the symbolically privileged cardinal point of the four directional axes).<sup>91</sup>

It was precisely at this time, 1973, that Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* indexically documented an infant's passage through time as well.<sup>92</sup> However, her analysis of the

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<sup>90</sup> Peirce, *ibid.* p. 170.

<sup>91</sup> In a like manner, Krauss criticizes Robert Barry's reliance on interiorized Cartesian space. She states of his *Inert Gas Series*: "The photographs of sites over which released amounts of invisible gas are presumably expanding demand. . . [a] residence within the minds of each of their separate viewers. For the work must be completed by the addition of a mental image of the (invisible) gas to the concrete image of the landscape. Since each of these mental images is private, 'each person can *really know that part which his in his own mind.*'" Krauss argues that this privatized image in the mind of the viewer mirrors the intentional, expressive point of origin in the mind of the artist. This expressive-intention model functions "in time for the same kind of things for which illusionism in painting serves as a spatial model." Moreover, both of these spaces are mythological as they deny that meaning is made through language and convention and not given *a priori*.

<sup>92</sup> One must, of course, say that Kelly iconically and symbolically documented the infant's development as well. For I, in agreement with Peirce, have been arguing that all signs are heterogeneous - i.e. at once icons, indices, and symbols. What I mean in biasing the indexical nature of the *Document* is that the iconic and symbolic signification pivots off the dominance of indexicality. It is the same, but inverted, process that Roland Barthes describes in *Rhetoric of the Image*. A photograph's first order of denotative iconic signification is read in tandem with its "natural" indexical signification, the later authenticating the message of the former. Hence, when one sees a

subject instead demonstrated "the reciprocity of the process of socialization in the first years of life."<sup>93</sup>

This directed the viewer towards the public or conventional dynamic of the subject's unconscious development. It is crucial to note that the "unconscious subject" in Kelly's work did not cast the vanishing point of the picture plane back onto the artist or viewer. Rather, it mirrored the presumed "exterior" language or symbolic net into which the subject is placed as an infant and from which he or she "interiorizes" this network based upon what is *said*. In this respect, the *Document's* interest in inter-subjectivity was closer to Art & Language's, the latter of whom also sought to disentangle the art object from an expressive model by mapping its discursive composition. However, as I previously mentioned, Art & Language's *subject* of analysis

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photograph, one thinks first that it is a resemblance, an icon. Its authenticity is provided by the fact that secondarily the viewer understands that light hit an object, reflected onto filmic emulsion, and a picture was made. The meaning is the combination of the two, in tandem with a second order of signification that is highly conventional or symbolic. The same is true with the *Document*, though what one sees *first* is the shit stain, which is secondarily encoded by what it represents. (This is aided by the "iconic" algorithms and diagrams, in addition to the "symbolic" text that Kelly provides.) From this Kelly seeks to undermine the second order signifying systems that usually results from such signifiers related to maternity - that is to say, maternity's "naturalness."

<sup>93</sup> Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, p. 1.

was limited to the art object and not the analyst's position. Against both the Dematerialists and Art & Language's approach to subjectivity, the *Document* indexically traced (via stains, scribbles, tape recordings, etc.) the mother and infant's inter-subjectivity, *reciprocally* imbricated within a psycho-sexual linguistic structure, in the place of a conventional portrait or artwork. The mother's role consequently doubled for that of the artist, allowing the "subject of inquiry" to incorporate both an analysis of the artist-as-mother's perception and unconscious reiteration of "patriarchal" structures within the discourse of childbirth and child care, as well as the "problematic" related to iconic representations of the woman's body within art practice. In so doing, Kelly made two important points of departure from Conceptualist methodology. First, the "voice" (or desire) of the artist (mother-analyst) was brought into the analysis itself. Second, the value of the indexical sign (understood as a denotative mark of this voice rather than a picture of its body) was aesthetically and theoretically investigated.

The extent to which the *Document* pro-actively waged an intervention against Conceptualism's denial of psychoanalytic considerations of the subject, and the manner in which Kelly did so by utilizing Conceptualism's formal and methodological strategies of seriality, quotidian documentation, and semiotic interrogations of the visual has been grossly underestimated in much recent scholarship on Conceptualism's period between 1965-1975.<sup>94</sup> I will now provide an overview of how the aforementioned Conceptualist strategies were visually and methodologically taken up and debated in select portions of the *Document*.

### ***Post-Partum Document's Conceptualist Debate***

#### ***The Aesthetics of Denotation***

The aesthetic consideration of the indexical sign was introduced to Kelly through the art of Bernar Venet, a French Conceptualist who was working in the early seventies

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<sup>94</sup> The most recent oversight of Kelly's work on this account occurred in *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-1975*, an exhibition on Conceptualism curated by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996).

on the signifying capacity of denotative diagrams. In his essay, "Lecture de Représentation graphique de la fonction  $y = - X^2/4$ ," Venet argued for a purely denotative use of graphic representation, one that would fix the "free-floating connotation" characteristic of "expressive" artworks formulated through aesthetic considerations of form, matter, and color.<sup>95</sup> His essay posits an "imaginary work" (a graphic representation of the mathematical function:  $y = - X^2/4$ ), from which a "real work" will take place (the same mathematical function captioned with the essay's title). The "real work" presents a one-to-one relation between the essay's title and the graphic (fig. 28). The addition of the title to the graphic halts the figure's multiple connotation outside its own tautology. That is to say, the incorporation of the title *within* the graphic, according to Venet, allows us to "read the figure" on its own terms, outside of secondary linguistic or visual messages.

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<sup>95</sup> Venet's essay was written with Thierry Kuntzel. Originally published in Arthur Hubschmid, ed., *Bernar Venet* (Paris-Zurich, 1975), it is also translated and re-published in *Bernar Venet*, (La Jolla: La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1976).

Venet's interest in a denotative sign that has yet to "enter" into language (and the concomitant retreat of a text into a purely denotative register) recalls Peirce's notion of a pure indexical sign that needs no interpretant (meaning) to exist. As such, in its *pure* state the index (paradoxically) is not a sign at all because it "says" nothing. Venet, however, overlooks Peirce's point that all indices therefore *fail* to signify without the aid of iconic and symbolic signification, inevitably making any and all "pure" indexical signs impossible to discern.<sup>96</sup> On this note, as we recall, Peirce was careful to demonstrate how even algebraic formulae (which we erroneously think of as only indexically "denotative") are simultaneously iconic, indexical *and* symbolic. However, Venet's aesthetic consideration of the indexical sign's relation to other signs (how a graph could be *read* or a text *figured*), was of

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<sup>96</sup> The impossibility of a "pure" index to signify is interesting to think of psychoanalytically. In its pure state the index recalls what Freud calls "memory traces," which can only exist in the unconscious register. As they pass into consciousness, these traces are detached (detached) from their objects and are bound by the censoring pre-conscious within language. As such the purity of memory traces, like indices, are compromised by their entry into conscious signification. I discuss how *Post-Partum Document* addressed the relation between a pure index and what Lacan calls the (unrepresentable) register of the Real in Chapter Four.

profound influence on Kelly's investigation of heterogeneous signs. Within this context we can better understand Kelly's statement explaining that the stained diaper liners, folded vests, child's markings, and word imprints in *Post-Partum Document* "have a minimum sign value in relation to the commodity status of representational art, but they have a maximum affective value in relation to the libidinal economy of the unconscious."<sup>97</sup> Characterized by a similar denotation presence, indicative of Venet's project, the *Document* set out to consider the very passage of the liners, etc. from a fleeting denotative, purely indexical state, into the connotative field of polysemic meaning. This passage was mediated by the artist's conscious manipulation (the addition of diagrams, etc) as well as the artist's and viewer's unconscious desire within the site of secondary reading.

The *Introduction* to the *Document* (fig. 29), a series of four infant vests upon which Lacan's Schema L is printed, can thus be seen as a parodic intervention into the dominance of the denotative signifier amongst diverse

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<sup>97</sup> Kelly, "Notes on Reading *Post-Partum Document*," p. 23.

Conceptualist practices.<sup>98</sup> Kelly has reflected upon her interest in such visual material, in particular the relation between her use of Lacan's schemas and Venet's appropriation of mathematic formulae:

*I was visually very involved with the diagrams, so the look of [Lacan's Schemas] were important to me. I realized this when I recently saw John Latham speak about his rather eccentric schemas and diagrams. It was all part of the desire for a denotated language at the time. What I liked about the psychoanalytic reference is how much it undercut that utopian hope of rationality, by attempting to diagram the utterly irrational processes of the unconscious. But what I*

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<sup>98</sup> Lacan's Schema L, first published in *Ecrits* (1966), diagrammatically "pictures" the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the Oedipus Complex. Specifically, the schema was meant to show how the subject's development is dependent on what is unfolding in the Other, i.e. the locus of the unconscious which is "articulated like a discourse." Against any notion of a discreet, privatized, interior ego, Lacan argues that the "discourse" of the Other is precisely what the subject's development is bound up with. He states: "Why would the subject be interested in this discourse, if he were not taking part in it? He is, indeed, a participator, in that he is stretched over the four corners of the schema: namely, S, his ineffable, stupid existence, o, his objects, o', his ego, that is that which is reflected of his form in his objects, and O, the locus from which the question of his existence may be presented to him." *Ecrits*, (NY: W.W. Norton, 1966), pp. 193-94.

really liked was what it represented to me visually, as a comment on these other diagrams and my own desire. . . I mean my own desire for a kind of mastery that mimes what the guys were doing. And at the same time it undercut their logic.<sup>99</sup>

Of course, Venet's use of the Pythagorean Theorem (to which Kelly was referring in this passage) could never be secured from polysemic denotation. Moreover, it is impossible to halt the influence of the irrational, the unconscious, or deeply unstable presence of connotation, which we saw in the Kosuth *Proposition Series*. For the Pythagorean Theorem, itself, is a paradoxically impossible thing to denote, because implicit in the theorem is the existence of an infinite number of points that you can't see between any two points that you can. However, such a deconstructive reading of Venet's appropriated theorem is still complicit with a Dematerialist reading of the graph, one that relies upon an internalized *sublime* experience of denotative material. If the *Document* sought to undercut the use of

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<sup>99</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

denotative material, it wasn't to invoke an irrational state associated with a mode of creative essentialism that places visuality outside of language. Rather, it was Kelly's desire to put Freud's definition of the unconscious into play, one that by definition is unknown, but which transforms its way into consciousness where upon it becomes material for analysis.

### ***Procedural Strategies***

The collection and ordering of this material for analysis is what constituted the *Document's* procedural component. On Kawara's "I Got Up" series of postcards (fig. 30) is a definitive example of the procedural strategy in Conceptual art. Literally, the series is comprised of postcards the artist made everyday he woke up in the month of November, 1969 and sent to friends. Like Huebler's *Duration Series*, they were conceived as a privatized way to mark one's existence through time. Lucy Lippard described Kawara's project in 1969 as that of an "isolated artist" marking "his place in the world" through daily documentation of his activities:

*Kawara is one of the most important, and one of the most elusive and isolated, artists working. . .In 1966, he began an immense and continuing series of "date paintings," small canvases with the stenciled date, executed almost daily and accompanied by a clipping from the day's newspaper, kept in notebooks. He also made. . .a continuing series of postcards. . .The fascination exerted by Kawara's obsessive and precise notations of his place in the world (time and location) imply a kind of self-reassurance that the artist does, in fact exist.<sup>100</sup>*

It was precisely against the aim of positioning the "isolated," yet self-reassured, artist that the *Document* took up Kawara's strategy of daily, procedural self-documentation. The artist-as-mother's obsessive notation of the infant's feeding schedule, which constitutes the data for *Documentation I*, was a procedural strategy that marked the *undoing* of the her discreet subjectivity. For

the artist-as-mother's procedural activity actually marked her own sense of alterity, not from the world in an expressive, heroic manner, but from *any* semblance of a contained "self." This Kelly evidences in her *Experimentum Mentis* section, where the question "What Have I Done Wrong?" points to the subject's utter reliance upon the Other (via the child, the hospital, and the very *convention* of maternity) for subjective self-identification and by extension, validation. In this way, the stained diaper liners - with their diagnostic indexes marking the child's fecal production and inevitable maternal imperfection - were symptomatic of the artist-as-mother's *desire* for mastery rather than a display thereof.

### ***The Conceptualist Debate: Control Magazine***

Of course, analytic mastery over their subject was what drove Kosuth (as well as other Conceptualists who published treatises on their work). Kosuth, in particular, had perfected a public discourse around his work founded

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<sup>100</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object*,

upon the rigorous philosophic principles of positivist logic drawn from Wittgenstein's' writings. This performative aspect of analysis was an integral part of the art proposition's project - and by extension, the foundation of art production itself. In a radiobroadcast interview from 1970, he explained:

*What my idea of art is comes out in both my propositions - that is to say, the specific work I show - and my activities in the production of any meaning in relation to art: such as articles I write, lectures at universities, my teaching at the School of Visual Arts, or conversations such as this one. (In fact, you could say this interview is the answer to your question.)<sup>101</sup>*

The extension of one's art production into the field of criticism and reception was a common component of Conceptualist practice. In fact, Benjamin Buchloh has

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(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 49.

argued that the fusing of the art object's production, reception and dissemination was *the* central characteristic of a mode of Conceptualism in the late sixties. Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (fig. 31), conceived for the pages of *Art in America*, took this fusion to the extreme. In Graham's project, the space of mass reception - the art magazine - was both the starting point and endpoint of his production.<sup>102</sup> Kosuth and Graham's respective projects, of course, stand at polar opposites of Conceptual practice. Graham's work incorporated synthetic concerns with a vengeance; *Homes for America* put the aesthetics of minimalism to the service of critiquing the synthetic field of urban planning. However, like Kosuth, the *means* through which he did this actively engaged what certain artists, such as the Abstract Expressionists, clearly delineated outside their work: the site of criticism.

Annette Michelson locates the origins of this practice - the artist/critic - within minimalism, as its

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<sup>101</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "An Interview with Jeanne Siegel," broadcast on WBAI-FM on April 7, 1970. It is also collected in Kosuth's *Collected Writings*, p. 53.

<sup>102</sup> See Benjamin Buchloh's "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," in *October* 55, (winter, 1990).

radical break from Abstract Expressionism mandated a new discourse to *describe* the art object. The artist himself took up the innovation of such discourse. Hence, we get paradigmatic texts such as Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture," or Donald Judd's "Specific Objects."<sup>103</sup> This was the tradition that both Kosuth and Graham followed as cultural critics in the late sixties, and it is same tradition in which the *Document* was conceived. Such that when Stephen Willats solicited the first writing Kelly did on the *Document* in 1977 for the British publication *Control Magazine*, it was a continuation of the project's original premise: one discourse interrogating another. In the context of *Control* the foremost discourse it was interrogating was one of Conceptualist writing and production, published as it was in a Conceptualist magazine that included writings by international artists such as Dan Graham, Herve Fischer, Allan Sondheim, and John Stezaker. As the article was originally part of a seminar entitled

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<sup>103</sup> Annette Michelson, *Robert Morris*, (Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969); Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," first published in three issues of *Artforum* (February 1966; October 1966; Summer 1967); Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," first published in *Arts Yearbook*, 8, (New York, 1965); reprinted in Judd, *Complete Writings 1959-1975*, (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1975).

"Psychoanalysis and Feminism" held at the ICA, London - contemporaneous with the *Document's* exhibition in the Conceptualist series there - Kelly's textual intervention of psychoanalytically informed feminism into Conceptualism was a continuation of the project's public debate.

Entitled "Notes on Reading the Post-Partum Document" (fig. 32), the article locates Kelly's project at the intersection of three discourses: "The discourse of the Woman's Movement," "The discourse of the mother-child relationship," and "The discourse of women's practice in art." The first section acknowledges the importance of consciousness raising, but argues "against the supposed self-sufficiency of 'lived experience' and *for* a theoretical elaboration of the social relations in which 'femininity' is formed."<sup>104</sup> In this manner, the early feminist tendency that reduced analysis (here *psychoanalysis*) to a patriarchal tool is rejected; however, so is Kosuth's denial of the synthetic proposition within such analysis. The second section elaborates upon the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the 'lived experience,'

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<sup>104</sup> Mary Kelly, "Notes on Reading Post-Partum Document."

articulating how the mother-child relationship is determined by its relationship to the phallus - the privileged signifier of language and the basis for all subjectivity in Lacanian terms. This debates the positivism of Kosuth and Art & Language's use of the speech act as the foundational, irrefutable basis of any art proposition. The last section speaks to both Dematerialist and feminist blind spots within art production: the "proliferation of forms of signification where the artist's own body [or subject position]. . . is given as a signifier, i.e. as an object." As a counter-point, Kelly argued that the *Document* "does not describe the unified, transcendental subject of autobiography, but rather, the de-centered socially constituted subject of a mutual discourse."<sup>105</sup> The mode in which Kelly argues her project *against* the ontological artist-creator through the same terms and venues dominant within Conceptualist rhetoric that maintains such a position, marks the deconstructive imperative Kelly held for the *Document* in its debate with Kosuth and others.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

However, it was the inclusion of the "Experimentum Mentis" footnotes with accompanying square "R Schemas" from the *Document's* first three sections that mounted the most pointed critique of Conceptualist positivism in the article. The square, as Buchloh argues, was the quintessential visual form corresponding to the linguistic form of tautology within minimalist and early Conceptualist vocabularies. He states:

*As the central form of visual self-reflexiveness, the square abolishes the traditional spatial parameters of verticality and horizontality, thereby canceling the metaphysics of space and its conventions of reading. It is in this way the square. . . incessantly points to itself: as spatial perimeter, as plane, as surface, and, functioning simultaneously, as support.<sup>106</sup>*

Venet had made similar claims about the hermetically sealed self-reflexivity of denotative diagrams, typically square in format. This desire to thwart the flow of connotative

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<sup>106</sup> Buchloh, "Conceptual Art," p.131.

signification echoed Kosuth's fear that synthetic elements within art inevitably lead to Realism, and as such his propositions sought to demonstrate a similar self-contained referentiality. Kelly's appropriated R Schemas, with the psychoanalytic reflections below, parody these claims within the privileged figure of tautology - the square. For Lacan's denotative diagrams mark the space of unconscious development, the very element that Conceptualism at that time couldn't or wouldn't account for.

This parodic use of the R Schema, continued within the site of written discourse (i.e. criticism), *figured* the intertextual debate that the *Document's* introductory vests waged with Venet's project. For just as the diagrammatic presence of the L Schema - unfolding on the infant vests' surfaces - debated the positivist presence of like signifiers in the aesthetically pure domain of the exhibition space, the R Schema in Kelly's article interrogated the presence of related diagrammatic material reiterated and contextualized within the positivist site of Conceptual criticism.

## ***Interrogating the Index***

If we were to thus characterize the aforementioned positivist or essentialist Conceptual strategies within the period of 1965-1975 as an engagement on some level with the index (or denotation), Kelly's engagement distinguished her project's "transgressivity."<sup>107</sup> For in her work, the index's ambiguity (or heterogeneity) was explicitly demonstrated. Though the pure index (as that "empty sign") theoretically stands somewhere outside iconic and symbolic sign systems, the employment of the index in the *Document* was not

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<sup>107</sup> In referencing a discursive concern with transgression here, I do not want to naturalize it as a definitive model or goal of contemporary art practice. Rather, it is to recognize that "transgression" was an influential concern among a group familiar to Kelly at the moment of the *Document's* production. Which is to say, the notion of a project's "transgressivity: was indicative of a type of Conceptualist practice with which Kelly was engaged in the early 70's. The "transgressivity of the sign," is also the central criterion Buchloh uses to distinguish various Conceptualist practices in his "Conceptual Art" essay. He privileges work that problematized the stability of sign systems within clearly demarcated boundaries of the visual or the linguistic. He offers Sol LeWitt's *Untitled (Red Square, White Letters)* (1962) as exemplary of a project that "created a continuous conflict in the viewer/reader," because it questioned whether "the inscription [was] to be given primacy over the visual qualities identified by the linguistic entity, or the perceptual experience of the visual, formal, and chromatic element [was] anterior to its mere denomination by language." It is also in relation to this discourse that I bring up the idea of a "transgressive" use of the sign, taking note that Buchloh's accounts of Conceptualism, here and elsewhere, extending into the early 1970's, consistently overlook Kelly's project.

entirely "an-iconic,"<sup>108</sup> as something can only signify if it is in part iconic. "Every assertion must contain an icon or set of icons, or else must contain signs whose meaning is only explicable by icons," Peirce instructs.<sup>109</sup> In this way, it can be said that all signification necessarily "resembles" something. And this Kelly made sure the *Document* did in two ways. By signifying the mother/artist/analyst's desire as a synthetic (ideological) concern, the tautological structure of Conceptualist language systems was pierced. Furthermore, by introducing a "transgressive," indexical representation of the mother's presence, conventional identificatory usage of the iconic image (of the mother's body, for instance) was displaced. The first transgression later influenced a second-generation feminist discourse on the "phallogocentric" nature of language, while the second transgression engendered so-called feminist "post-Conceptualist" practice critical of "picturing" women. Kelly's "transgressions" marked the very presence or *body* that Art & Language

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<sup>108</sup> "An-iconic" is Norman Bryson's term. See his essay "Interim and Identification," in *Mary Kelly's Interim* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992).

ignored, that Kosuth excluded, and that the dematerialists foreclosed as a privatized space of individual mastery. Kelly's statement that the "the fecal stain is an index, emblem, and symbol," was thus a formative, homologous theorization of the indexical sign. As such it points to the subject's heterogeneous desire within the site of domestic labor, presented here within Conceptualist terms of a "systems analysis" that willfully entangled the artist-as-mother's position within that same interrogation.

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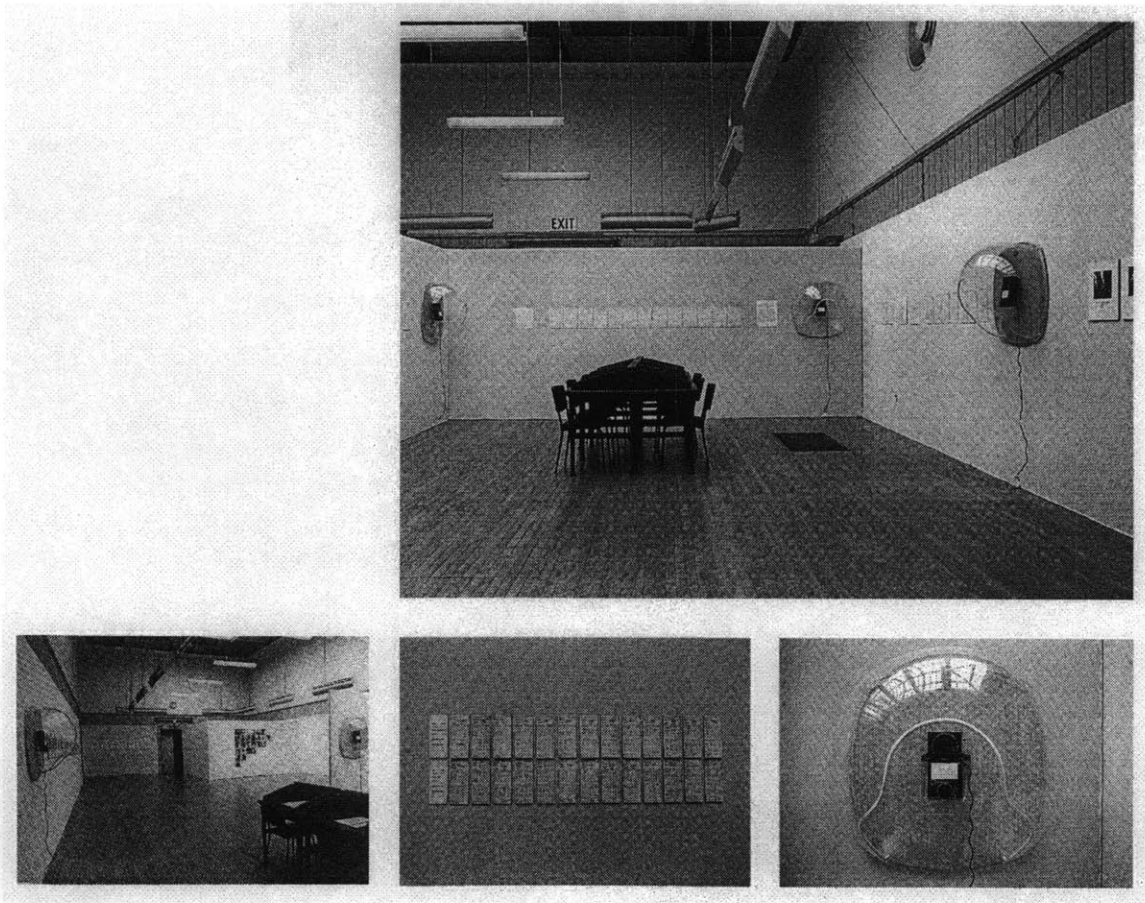
<sup>109</sup> Peirce, *Collected Papers*, p. 158.



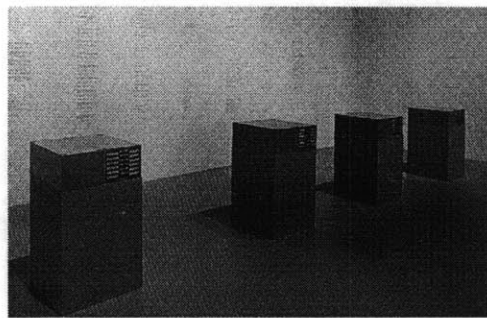
Figure: Mary Kelly, *An Earthwork Performed*, 1970.  
Performance, London New Arts Lab.

Event.  
Duration...one hour ten minutes.  
Equipment. shovel,microphone,two eight millemetre film projectors,  
tape recorder, video tape, amplifier, loudspeaker,coke.  
Four hundred weight of coke is heaped on floor.  
First film projector starts running off film of coke being shovelled.  
(after 5 minutes)  
Tape recorder,tape of coke being shovelled.  
(after five minutes)  
Microphone in shovel is switched on and shovelling started.  
(after five minutes)  
Video tape is started  
(after 5 minutes)  
Second film projector is switched on  
Tape recording amplification switched from recorder to loudspeaker.  
(same for duration of film,20 minutes)  
Film ends  
(5 minutes)  
Video ends  
(5 minutes)  
Tape ends  
(5 minutes)  
Microphone in shovel switched off  
Shovelling ends one hour ten minutes after start of event.  
end event.

**Figure 21: An Earthwork Performed, 1970. Typewritten  
Instructions.**



**Figure 22: Mary Kelly with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, *Women and Work*, 1973-1975. Installation, South London Art Gallery, South London.**



**Figure 23: Art & Language, *Index 01*, 1972. Installation, MOCA, 1996.**





Duration Piece #31  
Boston

On December 31, 1973 a young woman was photographed at the exact instant in time determined to be exactly 1/8th of a second before midnight. Inasmuch as the aperture of the camera was set at « 4 », (1/4th of a second) the image on the film became « complete » 1/8th of a second past midnight : put another way, after the first 1/8th of a second of 1974 had elapsed.

As the subject of the photograph faced towards the south the left side of her body was oriented toward the west ; as time « moves » from east to west, the photograph represents the young woman during an instant when approximately half of her body existed within the old year, 1973, while the other half had entered the new year, 1974 : indeed, consistent with the spirit of the season she wears the costume of the *New Year Baby*.

One photograph joins this statement as the form of this piece.

January, 1974

**Figure 26: Douglas Huebler, *Duration Piece #31*, 1973**

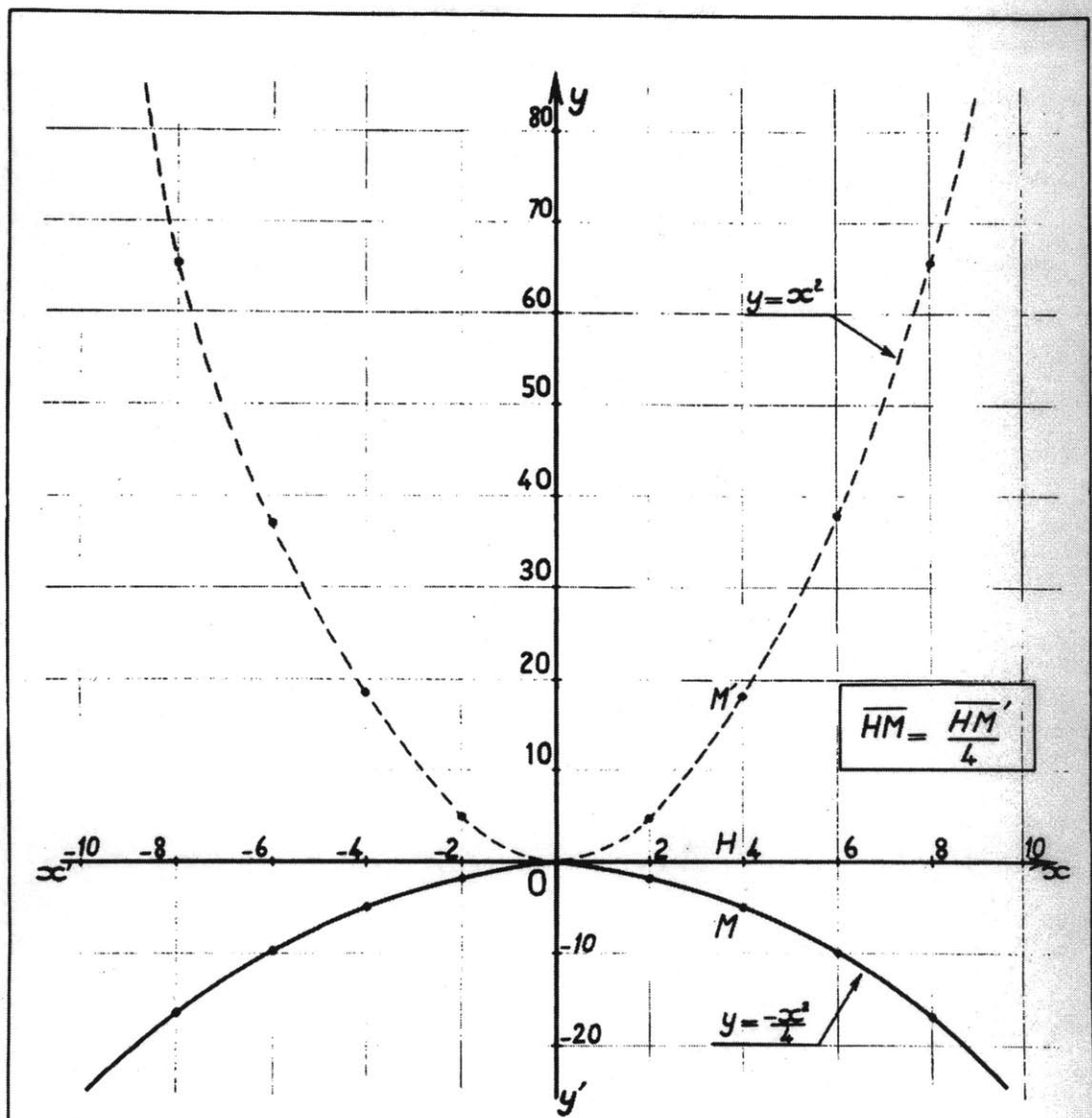


Fig: 241 \_ Représentation graphique de la fonction  $y = -\frac{x^2}{4}$ .  
 \_ On obtient une parabole ayant pour axe Oy.

Figure 27: Bernar Venet, Représentation graphique de la fonction  $y = x(2)/4$ , 1966.

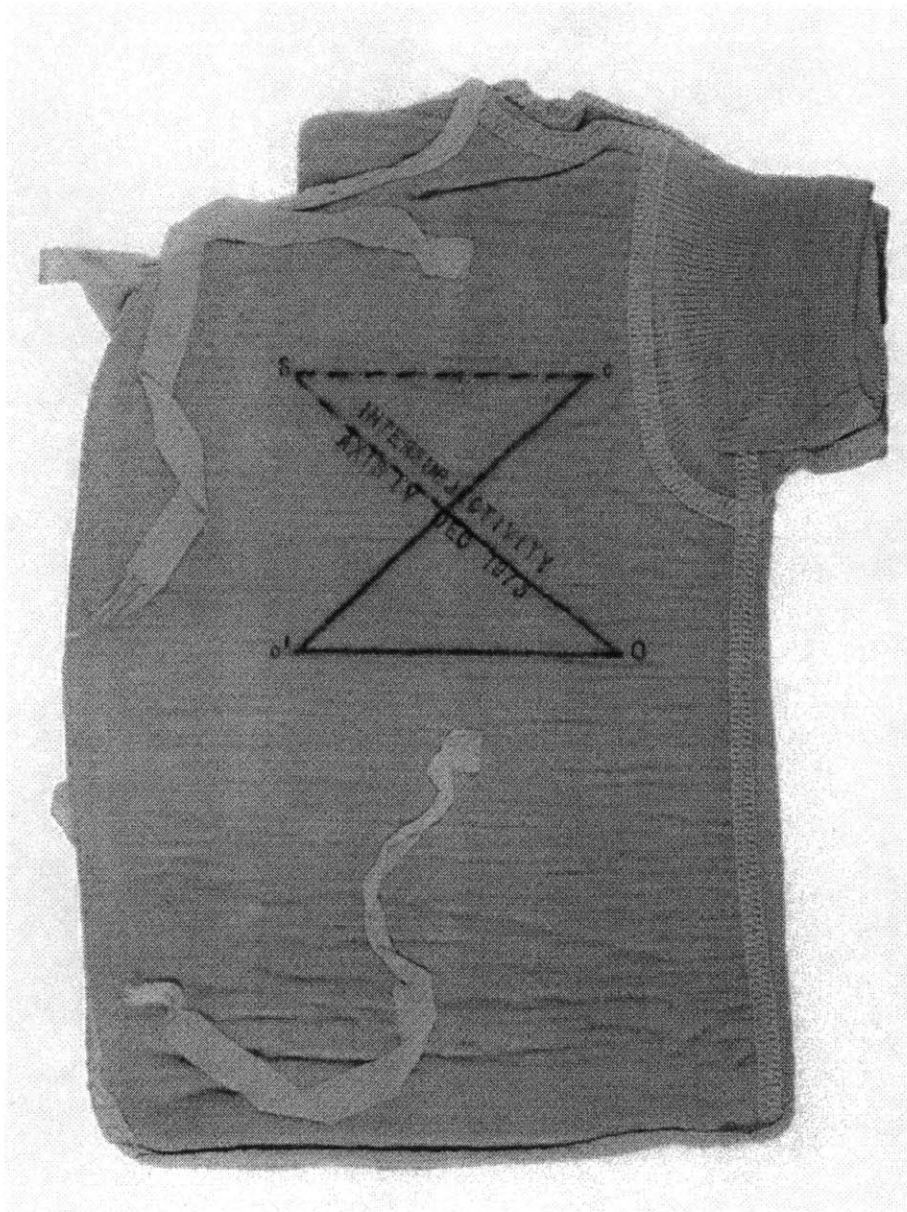


Figure 28: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Introduction*,  
(detail) 1973.

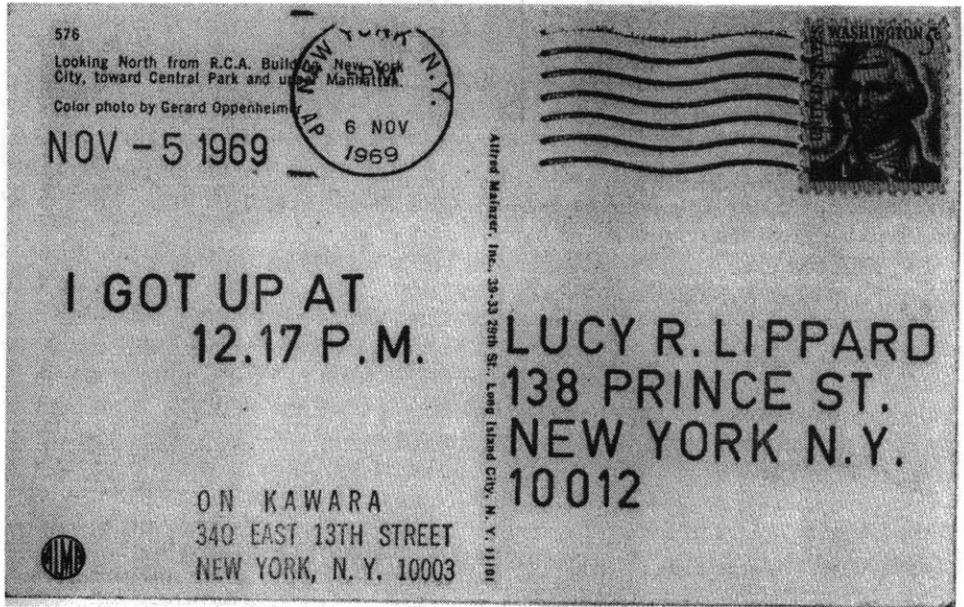


Figure 29: On Kawara, *I Got Up Series*, (detail) 1969.

# Homes for America

Early 20th-Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discrete Cell of '66

D. GRAHAM

Belleplain  
Brooklawn  
Colonia  
Colonia Manor  
Fair Haven  
Greenfields Village  
Green Village  
Plainsboro  
Pleasant Grove  
Pleasant Plains  
Sunset Hill Garden

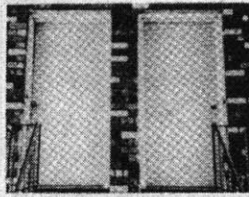
Garden City Park  
Garden City Park  
Greenlawn  
Island Park  
Lawlison  
Middleville  
New City Park  
Pine Lawn  
Plainview  
Plandome Manor  
Pleasantside  
Pleasantville

Large-scale tract housing developments constitute the new city. They are located everywhere. They are not particularly bound to existing communities; they fail to develop either regional characteristics or separate identity. These projects date from the end of World War II when in southern California speculators or 'operative' builders adapted mass production techniques to quickly build many houses for the defense workers over-concentrated there. This 'California Method' consisted simply of determining in advance the exact amount and lengths of pieces of lumber and multiplying them by the number of standardized houses to be built. A cutting yard was set up near the site of the project to saw rough lumber into those sizes. By mass buying, greater use of machines and factory produced parts, assembly line standardization, multiple units were easily fabricated.

Each house in a development is a lightly constructed shell although this fact is often concealed by fake (half-stone) brick walls. Shells can be added or subtracted easily. The standard unit is a box or a series of boxes, sometimes contemptuously called 'pullboxes'. When the box has a sharply oblique roof it is called a Cape Cod. When it is longer than wide it is a 'ranch'. A two-story house is usually called 'colonial'. If it consists of contiguous boxes with one slightly higher elevation it is a 'split level'. Such stylistic differentiation is advantageous to the basic structure (with the possible exception of the split level whose plan simplifies construction on discontinuous ground levels).

There is a recent trend toward 'two home homes' which are two boxes split by adjoining walls and having separate entrances. The left and right hand units are mirror reproductions of each other. Often sold as private units are strings of apartment-like, quasi-discrete cells formed by subdividing laterally an extended rectangular parallelogram into as many as ten or twelve separate dwellings.

Developers usually build large groups of individual homes sharing similar floor plans and whose overall grouping possesses a discrete flow plan. Regional shopping centers and industrial parks are sometimes integrated as well into the general scheme. Each development is sectioned into blocked-out areas containing a series of identical or sequentially related types of houses all of which have uniform or staggered set-backs and land plots.



'two home homes'

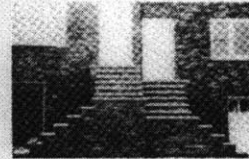
The logic relating each sectioned part to the entire plan follows a systematic plan. A development contains a limited, set number of house models. For instance, Cape Coral, a Florida project, advertises eight different models:

- A The Sousa
- B The Concerto
- C The Overture
- D The Ballet
- E The Prelude
- F The Serenade
- G The Nocturne
- H The Rhapsody



Moonstone Grey

As the color series usually varies independently of the model series, a block of eight houses utilizing four models and four colors might have forty-eight times forty-eight or 2,304 possible arrangements.



split level and ground level 'two home homes'

In addition, there is a choice of eight exterior colors:

- 1 White
- 2 Moonstone Grey
- 3 Nickle
- 4 Seafawn Green
- 5 Lawn Green
- 6 Bamboo
- 7 Coral Pink
- 8 Colonial Red

Each block of houses is a self-contained sequence — there is no development — selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example, if a section was to contain eight houses of which four model types were to be used, any of these permutational possibilities could be used.

AABBCCDD	ABCDABCD
AABBDDCC	ABDCABDC
AACCBDDC	ACBDACBD
AACCCDBB	ACDBACDB
AADDCCBB	ADBCADBC
AADDBCC	ADCBADCB

BBAACCDD	BADCRAIDC
BBAADDCC	BACDBACD
BBCCAADD	BCADBCAD
BBCCDDAA	BCDABCDA
BBDDAACC	BDACBDAC
BBDDCCAA	BDCABDCA
CCAAABDD	CABDCABD
CCAAADBB	CADBACDB
CCBBDDAA	CBADCBAD
CCBBAADD	CBDACBDA
CCDDAABB	CDABCDAB
CCDDBBAA	CDABCDBA
DDAABBCC	DACBDACB
DDAACCCB	DABCDABC
DDBBAAAC	DBACDBAC
DDBBCCAA	DBCADBCA
DDCCAAAB	DCABDCAB
DDCCBBA	DCBADCBA

The 8 color variables were equally distributed among the house interiors. The first buyers were more likely to have obtained their first choice in color. Family units had to make a choice based on the available colors which also took account of both husband and wife's likes and dislikes. Adult male and female color likes and dislikes were compared in a survey of the homeowners.

'Lake'

Male	Female
Skyway Blue	Skyway Blue
Colonial Red	Lawn Green
Patio White	Nickle
Yellow Chiffon	Colonial Red
Lawn Green	Yellow Chiffon
Nickle	Patio White
Fawn	Moonstone Grey
Moonstone Grey	Fawn



'Dislike'

Male	Female
Lawn Green	Patio White
Colonial Red	Fawn
Patio White	Colonial Red
Moonstone Grey	Moonstone Grey
Fawn	Yellow Chiffon
Yellow Chiffon	Lawn Green
Nickle	Skyway blue
Skyway Blue	Nickle

A given development might use, perhaps four of these possibilities as an arbitrary scheme for different sections; then select four from another scheme which utilizes the remaining four unused models and colors; then select four from another scheme which utilizes all eight models and eight colors; then four from another scheme which utilizes a single model and all eight colors (or four or two colors); and finally utilize that single scheme for one model and one color. This serial logic might follow consistently until, at the edges, it is abruptly terminated by pre-existent highways, bowling alleys, shopping plazas, car hops, discount houses, lumber yards or factories.

Figure 30: Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, (detail) 1976.

## NOTES ON READING THE POST-PARTUM DOCUMENT.

### The discourse of the Woman's Movement.

The Post-Partum Document is located within the theoretical and political practice of the Woman's Movement, a practice which foregrounds the issues of subjectivity and ideological oppression. More specifically, the Document is identified with the 'tendency' that bases the notion of ideological oppression on a psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity, i. e., the unconscious. (1.) Freud's discovery of the unconscious had crucial implications for theorising the process by which human subjects become constituted in ideology. If there is no ideology except in practice and by a subject, then ideological oppression is not merely 'false consciousness'. The ideological refers not only to systems of representation but also to a non-unitary complex of social practices which have political consequences. Moreover, these consequences are not given as the direct 'effect' of the means of signification employed in a practice. They depend on a political analysis of what is signified. (2)

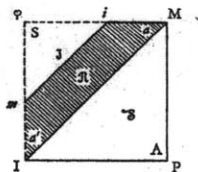
For the purposes of such an analysis, the Post-Partum Document is the product of a practice of signification and as such, it does not 'reflect', but 'reworks' the feminist ideology in which it was founded. This is primarily the ideology of consciousness-raising groups that still form a major part of the Women's Movement. The Document reiterates, at one level, the unique contribution that consciousness-raising made to political practice in general by emphasising the subjective moment of women's oppression. (3) But, at another level, it argues against the supposed self-sufficiency of 'lived experience' and for a theoretical elaboration of the social relations in which 'femininity' is formed. In this sense, the Post-Partum Document functions as part of an on-going debate over the relevance of psychoanalysis to the theory and practice of both Marxism and Feminism. Furthermore, the debate includes a critique of the patriarchal bias underlying some of the theoretical assumptions on which the Document is based. (4)

### The discourse of the mother-child relationship.

The Post-Partum Document describes the subjective moment of the mother-child relationship. An analysis of this relationship is crucial to an understanding of the way in which ideology functions in/by the material practices of childbirth and childcare. Feeding or dressing a child depends as much on the interchange of a system of signs as teaching him/her to speak or write. In a sense, even the unconscious discourse of these moments is 'structured like a language'. (5) This underlines the fact that intersubjective relationships are fundamentally social. More precisely, every social practice offers a specific expression of a general social law and this law is the symbolic dimension which is given in language. (6)

In patriarchy, the phallus becomes the privileged signifier of this symbolic dimension. Consequently, the female subject is constituted in a relation of 'lack' at the moment of her entry into language. (7) Moreover, it is possible to speak of her 'negative place' in the general process of significations or social practices that reproduce patriarchal relations within a given social formation. In childbirth, the mother's 'negative place' is mis-recognised in so far as the child is the phallus for her. (8) And this imaginary relation is lived through, i. e., at the level of ideology and in the social practice of childcare, as proof of the 'natural capacity' for maternity and the inevitability of the sexual division of labour. (9)

The Documentations of specific moments such as weaning from the breast, learning to speak and entering a nursery demonstrate the reciprocity of the 'process of socialisation', that is, not only the child but also the mother is constituted as subject within this intersubjective discourse.



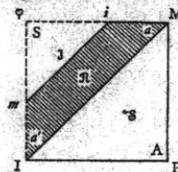
EXPERIMENTUM MENTIS I  
(WEANING FROM THE BREAST)  
 $S(\emptyset)a(M)$

### Documentation I: Analysed Faecal Stains and Feeding Charts, (Fig. 1) / Experimentum Mentis I: Weaning from the Breast.

Weaning from the breast is a significant discovery of absence not only for the child but also for the mother. In so far as it is a real separation, i. e. can be 'specularized', it does not provoke a 're-recognition' of castration, but it does rupture the symbiosis of the biologically determined mother-child unit.

Weaning from the breast does not imply, literally, the termination of breast feeding (as it can go on for over a year or never be initiated at all) but more specifically, the inevitable end of an exclusively liquid diet and the introduction of solid food. This transition has usually taken place by the infant's sixth month. It has a psychical parallel in that around the age of 8 to 8 months the child enters a phase of identification, that is a transformation takes place in him/her when assuming an image (as in the example of an image in the mirror). It is this identificatory movement of the child towards an ideal which mediates his/her anaclitic and primary relationship to the mother (or a part of her body) and consequently inscribes a sense of 'lack' in her because it threatens her own imaginary identification with the child as 'someone who was once part of her'.

In the early post-partum period what the mother wants the child to be is, primarily, 'healthy'. The normal faeces is not only an index of the infant's health but also within the patriarchy it is appropriated as proof of the female's natural capacity for maternity and child-care. But the impending absence of plentitude is expressed in her words, 'What have I done wrong?' The child is the mother's symptom in so far as she is judged through him/her. But the child's symptom, as for example in the lack of correlation between the nutritional data and the diarrhoeal stain in Documentation I, FS, undermines the ideological notion of 'natural capacity' and queries the expediency of the sexual division of labour through which the mother's secondary social status is confirmed. (10)



EXPERIMENTUM MENTIS II  
(WEANING FROM THE HOLOPHRASE)  
 $S(\emptyset)a'(I)$

### Documentation II: Analysed Utterances and Related Speech Events, (Fig. 2) / Experimentum Mentis II: Weaning from the Holophrase.

Because the acquisition of language is founded on a discovery of absence which is Imaginary, not real, it is not only the constitutive instance in the formation of the child's castration complex but it is also the pivotal moment in the mother's 're-recognition' of castration and of her own negative entry into language and culture. During the period of pre-patterned speech (i. e. prior to syntax) a unique process of signification develops within the specific relation of inter-subjectivity between mother and child. The child's single word utterance is thought by the mother as a holophrase, that is a conceptually complete sentence. Consequently it is the moment of the child's emerging syntax (i. e. patterned speech) of 'weaning' from the holophrase, which reiterates the 'lack' of object (i. e. child as phallus) for the mother. Specifically, it is the enigmatic pivot, as for example /weh/ in Documentation II, R 13-7, which provokes the maternal utterance "Why don't I understand?" and once again demonstrates the contingency of the natural capacity for maternity.

In so far as the pivot is always combined with another utterance it anticipates the child's capacity for expressing himself grammatically and eventually making himself understood without the mediation of the 'maternal signified'. Significantly, the moment of emerging syntax coincides with the termination of the mirror phase, i. e. around 18 months. By that time the child's projected image of him/herself can be returned and internalised allowing him/her to situate an Imaginary and libidinal relation to the mother 'in the world'. This ultimately 'weans' the mother from the other 'who was once part of her' in so far as she is no longer identified as the child's mirror, returning his/her image in her own look or returning his/her word with her own meaning. Thus the mother must reconstitute her narcissistic object choice along the lines of an identification with the child as 'what she would like to be'. (11)

Figure 31: Mary Kelly, "Notes on Reading the Post-Partum Document," *Control* no. Ten, 1977.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Discourses of Activism: the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1970-1979

#### *The Synthetic Proposition*

An important connection between the disparate sites of Conceptualism and activism in the early seventies was enacted by Hans Haacke's installation *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (figs. 33-35), which Kelly read about at the time.<sup>110</sup> This work, originally made for Haacke's solo exhibition of "systems pieces" at the Guggenheim Museum but subsequently censored by the Director, Thomas Messer,

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<sup>110</sup> The Guggenheim Museum's cancellation of Haacke's exhibition, based upon his inclusion of the *Shapolsky* piece, produced voluminous criticism in both the American and British art press. Prominent amongst these were: Grace Glueck, "The Guggenheim Cancels Haacke's Show," *The New York Times*, (April 7, 1971); John Perreault, "Art: Political Items," *The Village Voice*, New York, (April 15, 1971); Elizabeth Baker, "Editorial: Artists vs. Museums," *Art News*, New York, (May, 1971); Edward Fry, "Hans Haacke, the Guggenheim: The Issues," *Arts Magazine*, New York, (May, 1971); Jack Burnham, "Hans Haacke's Cancelled Show at the Guggenheim," *Artforum*, New York, (June, 1971); "Gurgles Around the Guggenheim, Statements and comments by Daniel Buren, Diane Waldman, Thomas M. Messer, and Hans Haacke," *Studio International*, London, (June 1971); and Barbara Reise, "Background to the Foreground: The Haacke Exhibition History," *Studio International*, London, (July-August, 1971).

directly took up the "synthetic" element that Kosuth and others who embraced tautological analyses denied. Consisting of photographs of 142 buildings and vacant lots located in Manhattan's Harlem and Lower East Side, along with typewritten sheets, charts, diagrams, and maps detailing their sale and purchase, the *Shapolsky Piece* "pictured" the capitalist dealings of a New York "slumlord" and his business associates.

Preempting the work's exhibition, however, Messer thereafter polemicized Haacke's project in the same terms that would characterize the media hype surrounding Conrad Atkinson's *Strike at Brannan* installation one year later at the ICA in London. Messer's complaint was simple: the work demonstrated no (transcendent) "aesthetic" value. In a letter to the artist, Messer thus defended the cancellation as a matter of museum policy by asserting that:

*We [the Guggenheim] have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing aesthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive. [my emphasis] On those grounds, the*

*trustees have established policies that exclude active engagement toward social and political ends.<sup>111</sup>*

For Haacke, however, the project's value resided in its "real time" nature - indicated by the project's title, subject matter, and performativity - because it displaced the artwork's meaning from the site of discreet aesthetics onto the sites of exhibition and reception. Such a move facilitated the work's "completion" via the material circumstances of its public circulation within the discursive space of the museum - understood here as indistinguishable from the more "general" civic sphere. After the project's censorship, Haacke would substantiate this by claiming:

*Works operating in real time must not be geographically defined nor can one say when the work is completed. Conceivably the situation into which a new element was injected has passed when the process*

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<sup>111</sup> Letter by Thomas Messer to the artist, dated March 19, 1971).

*unleashed at that moment has gained its greatest potential.*<sup>112</sup>

The *Shapolsky* piece, therefore, not only took up the synthetic proposition loathed by most Conceptualists; it also revealed the ideological interests of those who determine what becomes art by shifting attention away from the artwork onto the "material" framework of the museum (the secondary performative "picture" presented via the work's censorship). In this manner, the "figure" of Shapolsky (a slumlord) could allegorically be read through that of Messer (a museum Director) via the capacity of both to move commodities (real estate and artwork respectively) through economies commonly perceived as distinct but fundamentally characterized by related exclusionary practices.<sup>113</sup>

Haacke's concern with the way that aesthetics are mediated by ideology characterized a mode of art production

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<sup>112</sup> Haacke's comment of 1972 is quoted in Rosalyn Deutsche's "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987).

<sup>113</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche gives a detailed reading of *Shapolsky* as such an allegory in "Property Values."

that succeeded what Hal Foster has called the "crux" of minimalism.<sup>114</sup> Previously, the Minimalists had been critical of ontological claims made by the Greenbergians about art's essence and classification, focusing instead on the phenomenological conditions of the artwork's reception. However, Minimalism's phenomenological investigations are often mistakenly conflated with the cerebral, diagrammatic strategies of a subsequent Conceptualism, when in fact Minimalism stood at the axis between modernist strategies inherited from Greenbergian theory and post-modern ones informed by Haacke's brand of Conceptualism.<sup>115</sup>

It is true that phenomenology undermined the Cartesian belief in the immediate or intuitive knowledge by an isolated individual's intellectual mastery of an idea. And in a parallel move, Minimalism's phenomenological approach did undermine Greenberg's existentialist assertion that an

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<sup>114</sup> Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," collected in *The Return of the Real*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>115</sup> Before Foster, Rosalind Krauss had argued in 1973 that (Post) Minimalist practice must *not* be confused with (Conceptual) Dematerialist strategies just because they shared some visual components - i.e., the "objectless-ness" of Richard Serra's "Splashing" installation on the one hand and Joseph Kosuth's "Propositions" on the other. Whereas the Dematerialists posited both the author and the notion of "art" *a priori*, the Minimalists undercut such idealism by making "meaning itself a function of surface - of the external, the public, or

artwork's essence indexed the author's expressive hand. However, distinct from subsequent post-modernist practices, Foster argues that Minimalism still located meaning within a subject constituted by the very utterance "I perceive."<sup>116</sup> Still, it is important to note that the context for such perception had entered the picture with Minimalism. Moreover, it laid the ground work for a practice such as Haacke's - known later as "institutional critique" - that investigated the manner in which both the artwork and the space of its reception were implicated by ideology, not just perception.

This question of ideology intersected with a "Brechtian" practice that was being rediscovered in British film criticism in the seventies.<sup>117</sup> But with limited exceptions, at this time it had yet to cross over into art practice as means of further interrogating the discreet aesthetic position of both the object and viewer that Greenberg posited and the Minimalists began to undermine.

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*a space that is in no way a signifier of the a priori, or of the privacy of intention.*" See: "Sense and Sensibility."

<sup>116</sup> Hal Foster, *ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>117</sup> I will return to a discussion of Brechtian theory within the context of British film criticism in chapter four.

Haacke was an important exception. And as such, his Brechtian approach to art practice was an influential precedent for Kelly's work, particularly his incorporation of "distanciation" and "dis-identification" strategies within the visual arts. But there are significant distinctions to be made between Haacke and Kelly's practices. Whereas Haacke's ideological concern was strictly Marxist based, Kelly's was equally influenced by her activities in the nascent moment of Feminism in Britain.

### ***The Question of Ideology***

Mapping ideological formations was of central concern to Mary Kelly and others in 1970 when the National Women's Liberation Movement was just beginning in Britain. It was of such importance that a collective known as the "History Group" was formed in part by Juliet Mitchell to discuss the impact that writing by Marx, Freud, and Althusser had on women's personal lives and work.

The need for such collectives was characteristic of the Britain Women's Movement where Feminism was slow in the making and highly decentralized. The United States had passed an Equal Pay Act a decade earlier in 1963, the same year that Betty Friedan wrote the *Feminine Mystique*, galvanizing women to form the National Organization of Women (N.O.W.) in 1966. Britain's Equal Pay Act, on the other hand, wasn't passed until 1970,<sup>118</sup> the year that The National Conference of Women's Liberation Groups met for the first time in Oxford with four basic demands: (1) equal pay, (2) equal education and opportunity, (3) twenty four hour nurseries, (4) free contraception and abortion on demand. Unlike the American Movement, which was led by a central organization (N.O.W.), the British counterpart had no such central authority. Instead, the Movement was composed of a network of affiliate groups located in London, collectively known as the Workshop.

The Workshop's Office wasn't permanently located in any one physical site. Rather, the individual groups met in different women's homes on a rotating basis. Beginning

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<sup>118</sup> The Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970, but didn't become law until

in Autumn of 1970, a collective newsletter was produced (entitled Newsletter of the Women's Liberation Coordinating Committee), the function of which was to disseminate topics for discussion among the various groups. The Workshop also drew up a collective manifesto to present at the first national women's conference in Oxford of the same year. The idea that the Movement should address topics concerning women's liberation in de-centralized groups was stressed:

*The women's liberation workshop questions women's role and redefines the possibilities. It seeks to bring women to a full awareness of the meaning of their inferior status and to devise methods to change it...We want eventually to be, and to help other women to be, in charge of their own lives...We come together as groups and individuals to further our part in the struggle for social change and the transformation of society.<sup>119</sup>*

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1975.

<sup>119</sup> Women's Liberation Workshop Manifesto, cited in *Red Rag, A Magazine for Women's Liberation*, no. 8, (February, 1975), p. 19.

Sally Alexander and Sue O'Sullivan further reiterate this position in their article entitled "Sisterhood under Stress." They state:

*The desire to be 'in charge of our own lives, our own movement,' has lead us to reject both male and liberal-bourgeois ways of doing things: hierarchies, power structures, bureaucratic methods and procedures, notions of leadership, anything that smacks of authoritarianism or male practice has been thrown out of the window.<sup>120</sup>*

The History Group was but one collective within this non-hierarchical movement, dedicated to understanding the "subjective moment of women's oppression."<sup>121</sup>

At this early moment (1970-72) the debate over ideology's relation to the art object - a later concern of *Post-Partum Document* - was overshadowed by a different concern held by the History Group: how ideology mediated

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<sup>120</sup> Sally Alexander and Sue O'Sullivan, "Sisterhood under Stress," *Spare Rib*, no. 8 (February, 1975).

<sup>121</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

women's representation. Typically groups were affiliated with a region, such as the "Chalk Farm Group" or the "Nottingham Group," while others collected around a particular topic, such as the "family," "unionization," "psychology," or "women's working conditions." The Feminist magazine *Shrew* functioned as a discursive meeting place for these diverse concerns to be documented, each issue being produced by a different group with a particular theme reflecting their aims. Kelly has recalled that the History Group's *raison d'être* was indicative of a larger debate between Feminists and Marxists over sexuality and ideology, which distinguished their collective from the others:

*We called it the History Group because we wanted to make sexuality pass into the grand narrative of social change. But I also think it was because many of us were informed by Marxism and socially involved with Marxist men who would not allow us to find, within the lines of German Ideology, a space to talk about sexuality - which is why the "personal is political"*

came to have such meaning. This is what is misunderstood now when people talk about the polemical relation of one Feminist group to another. That I think happened much later. The initial argument was really with men who were engaged in the anti-war movement, the student movement, and the civil rights movement.<sup>122</sup>

Thus, the History Group deliberated how to bridge the gap between Noam Chomsky's writings on Cambodia or Ernest Mandel's on neo-capitalism, for instance, and the subjectivity of women's oppression.<sup>123</sup> In 1970, they collaboratively produced an issue *Shrew*, which can be seen as a purposeful staging of this debate. It included essays by Mary Kelly, Juliet Mitchell, and Laura Mulvey investigating the function of ideology in determining social relations and representations.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Having studied in the Middle East in the late sixties, and consequently influenced by Marxism and Pan-Arabism, voluminous texts related to International socialism constitute a significant portion of Kelly's personal archive. Noam Chomsky's *Two Essays On Cambodia* (1970); Ernest Mandel's *Workers under Neo-Capitalism* (1968); Pamphlets by the *General Union of Palestinian Students*; and the Kuwait Government

Kelly's essay entitled, "National Liberation Movements and Women's Liberation," sought to form an analogy between women's oppression with that of "peoples oppressed as nations." Althusserian in tone, Kelly argues that all oppression is maintained through "dominant ideologies" - what Althusser called Ideological State Apparatuses - promoted by institutions such as church, school, family and mass media.<sup>124</sup> Regarding women and oppressed peoples of colonized or neo-colonized nations, Kelly argued that two parallel ideologies are dominant - national chauvinism and male chauvinism - both stemming from "a social system dominated by white, male capitalists." Kelly's analogy circles around labor (exploitation) and subjugation (representation). As women are laborers in the home, non-white peoples of colonized countries are the "servants" of their colonizers. And just as women are represented as intellectually inferior, natives are "characterized as

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Press's *American T.V.* and *The Arab-Israeli Dispute* (1967) are but a few examples.

<sup>124</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971). Brewster, an editor of the British film journal *Screen*, was instrumental in translating and disseminating French theoretical texts in the early seventies. I will return to the question of Althusser in chapter four.

religious, complacent and culturally backward." Yet women of the so-called "first world" had also to confront their own complicity with international racism. Thus Kelly concludes that:

*...We noticed that the victims of racism and sexism are pictured at their impoverished best in the so-called fine arts, as the "earth mother," "love goddess," or "noble savage," and at their graffiti worst as "wogs," "nig-nogs" and "bitches." We then conclude that while our first awareness of oppression as women meant confronting sexism; as members of an oppressing nation, it was also necessary to confront our own racism in order to link our struggle with national liberation movements such as those in Vietnam and Palestine.<sup>125</sup>*

If we view Kelly's article through the Althusserian-Marxist terms of its period, then the "superstructure" (the law/state and ideology) could be seen as representing

"white male capitalists." The "infrastructure" (productive forces and relations of production) could be seen as representing "women and oppressed peoples." In this logic, sexism and racism would be seen as the superstructure's dominant ideologies just as feminist and liberationist ideologies belong to the infrastructure. However, Althusser also argued that the two structures are chiasmatically bound up together, making the superstructure only "relatively autonomous" from its infrastructure or base, engaging as they do in a "reciprocal action."

What circulates between the superstructure and infrastructure - binding them to each other - are the Ideological State Apparatuses, which mustn't be confused with the (Repressive) State Apparatuses (such as the government, police, or courts). The ISA's are heterogeneous and private (consisting of churches, parties, unions, and the like), though they are used to sustain the public repressive apparatuses. In this way, ideology is also only relatively autonomous - taken up equally by the infrastructure or the superstructure. Thus, a

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<sup>125</sup> Mary Kelly, "Women's Liberation and National Liberation," *Shrew*,

liberationist theory in one site can contradict itself as repressive in another.

The final point of Kelly's essay - that Western feminism was only liberationist if its complicity with a so-called Western male capitalist superstructure was confronted - reflects the History Group's assertion that the Women's Movement's was only *relatively* autonomous from both patriarchy as well as Marxism. This assertion distinguished the History Group from virtually all the other collectives from 1970-1976 and is the seed for the theoretical hybrid that came to characterize a mode of British feminism with which Kelly is associated.

***From Socialist-Feminism to Psychoanalytic Feminism: Juliet Mitchell's Writings 1966-1974***

If ideology was a site of struggle in its own right for the History Group, no one was more actively engaged with the struggle between Marxism and Feminism than the Group's founder, Juliet Mitchell, whose theorizations of

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(December, 1970), p. 5.

the family in the mid to late sixties were of great importance to Kelly's work. As a British, socialist feminist, Mitchell returned to Marx, Engles, and later Freud in a continuing effort to pinpoint the ideological apparatus of women's oppression. In her important essay of 1966, "Women: The Longest Revolution,"<sup>126</sup> she describes the ideological formation of women within four groups: Production, Reproduction, Socialization, and Sexuality. Written before feminism's moment, Mitchell categorized women's oppression within Marxist terms. However, her thesis was that a women's condition couldn't be deduced from the economy or merely equated symbolically with society. Such a deduction would over-determine women's existence. Rather, Mitchell seeks out the *specificity* of such existence as they stem from the four different ideological groups.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Juliet Mitchell, "Women: The Longest Revolution," *New Left Review*, (1966), collected in *Feminism in Our Times*, (New York: Vantage Books, 1994).

<sup>127</sup> Defining the specificity of women's experience was key to Kelly's article in *Shrew* four years later. For it was only after defining such a position that it could be posited analogously to other forms of oppression. As I mentioned, this was integral to the feminist-Marxist debate in the early seventies. Mitchell would elaborate the terms of this debate in her book *Women's Estate*: Put simply, socialist theory had yet to make a category for Woman. Engels claimed that women's

Hence, when Mitchell looks at women's production, she notes that her role is stationary as there was little to no economic or social growth for women between 1911 and the 1960's. The roots for this status is materialist: women's work is, more often than not, menial, secretarial, or service related due to the fact that 75% of 18 year old girls were uneducated at the time. A woman's secondary status within production is mirrored by her position within reproduction, which was generally compulsory. The contraceptive pill, approved by the Committee on the safety of medicines in Britain and the Federal Drug administration in the U.S. in 1961, had the potential to divorce (more systematically) sex from the reproductive imperative. However, without radically re-configuring family ideology,

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condition was derived from the economy, while Marx equated it symbolically with society. Mitchell argued her existence was both *specific* and heterogeneously dynamic, changing over time. She states: "In a complex totality each independent sector has its own autonomous reality though each is ultimately, but only ultimately, determined by the economic factor. This complex totality means that no contradiction in society is ever simple. As each sector can move at a different pace, the synthesis of the different time-scales in the total structure means [sic] that sometimes contradictions cancel each other out, and sometimes they reinforce one another. Because the unity of woman's condition at any time is in this way the product of several structures, moving at different paces, it is always 'over-determined.'" *Woman's Estate*, (New York: Random House, 1966).

such an advance, Mitchell argues, wasn't automatically liberationist.

Regarding women's socialization, Mitchell demonstrates how materialist reality is mediated by dominant ideologies. The family, for instance, appears to be separate from society, playing little part in economic production at large. If this is so, the question then becomes: what is the psychosocial function for the infant and couple? Mitchell answers that in the first three to four years of a child's life, his/her socialization is "exploited ideologically to perpetuate the family as a total unit when its other functions have been visibly declining."<sup>128</sup> Moreover, there is an attempt to limit a woman's entire existence to raising the child, which is ultimately unhealthy since "the mother discharges her own frustrations and anxieties in a fixation on the child."<sup>129</sup> This moment, Mitchell urges, needs to be analyzed, not to redeem classical maternal roles, but to reconsider them. This in turn will have a larger societal effect because, she argues

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<sup>128</sup> "The Longest Revolution," p. 206.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

through Althusser, the family is *not* a discreet, autonomous agent:

*The belief that the family provides an impregnable enclave of intimacy and security in an atomized and chaotic cosmos assumes the absurd - that the family can be isolated from the community, and that its internal relationships will not reproduce in their own terms the external relationships which dominate the society. The family as refuge in a bourgeois society inevitably becomes a reflection of it.*<sup>130</sup>

As this was prior to her reading of Freud, the ideological role played by the family/society in psychoanalytic terms is still missing, though this is precisely what she does in her book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, which I will return to momentarily.

The refusal to account for the unconscious presents the biggest problem for Mitchell when she addresses the fourth element determining a woman's existence: sexuality.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p. 207

As a site of the greatest internal contradictions, a woman's sexuality is therefore the weakest link in the chain - for both patriarchy and feminism. As Mitchell was writing at the moment divorce, contraception, and abortion were radicalizing sexual activity, a woman's sexuality ostensibly offered the highest potential for liberation. However, she warned (here in Situationist terms) that such liberationist gains could equally be taken up by neo-capitalist ideology and practice because it would be selling leisure time in the form of premarital non-procreative sexuality.<sup>131</sup> Therein lies the contradiction of sexuality in women's experience, leading Mitchell to remind us that "while one structure may be the weak link in a

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<sup>131</sup> "The colonization of everyday life" was a catchphrase in France during the early 60's, popularized by theorist Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists. In his *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord explains the spectacle's part in such colonization. As the spectacle is "not a collection of images, but a social relation among people mediated by images," it permeates every instance of one's life, professionally and socially. Thus even in leisure time, one's lived experience is bound up in the spectacularization of capitalism. What seems private or even liberationist is never outside the society of the spectacle, as "inactivity" still conforms to a mode of capitalist production. Advertisements for such commodities as the hand-held movie camera were a favorite target of the Situationists as it fused the spectacle of commodities with the spectacle of private leisure time. Similarly, Mitchell warns that anti-liberationist forces could easily recuperate "liberationist" advances such as birth control on demand. See: Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

unity like that of woman's condition, there can never be a solution through it alone..."<sup>132</sup>

"The Longest Revolution" concludes that the contemporary family is a triptych of sexual, reproductive, and social functions (the woman's world) embraced by production (the man's world). Within this, women's exclusion from production can be seen as the root naturalizing her social function. In the end, women should thus (1) fight not for equal pay, but for equal work, and (2) enter jobs that aren't extensions (or economic supplements) to a family unit led by the man's "career" job. And yet, something was missing in Mitchell's essay, written as it was prior to her engagement with psychoanalysis. As she put it later after writing *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*:

*After ["The Longest Revolution"] I hit a total impasse. I found I just didn't have the concepts, the terminology, to think about women. As we've found in*

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<sup>132</sup> Mitchell, "The Longest Revolution," p. 208

*the 'women and sexuality' group, we just don't know what sexuality is at all, at the moment.*<sup>133</sup>

The initial consideration of what a woman's sexuality was, and the need for feminism to "return to Freud" in tandem with Marx in order to understand it, was the topic of her essay for the History Group's issue of *Shrew*.

Entitled, "Why Freud?" Mitchell's essay rebuts the wholesale rejection of Freud by Women's Liberation, specifically within texts by Betty Friedan, Naomi Weinstein, and Kate Millett among others. Asserting that such writers have misread psychoanalysis, Mitchell posits Freud as a liberationist practitioner: he was highly critical of the institution of marriage and believed that women fell ill as a means to escape its hegemonic constraints. Moreover, Freud was disturbed by the valued distinction between "feminine" and "masculine," arguing that not only are such terms unclear, but that their conventional usage denies the inherent bi-sexuality of human drives. Mitchell insists that a Freudian approach

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<sup>133</sup> Carol Morrell, "Interview with Juliet Mitchell," *Sparerib*, no. 22,

puts the women's experience - femininity itself - into question. Such a question stems from an analysis of the nuclear family, that formative domestic site at "the borderline between biology and society."

"Why Freud," was in many ways the abstract for Mitchell's ground-breaking book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, which is similarly bracketed by a critique of American feminists' rejection of Freud. It is, however, also a critique of the radical psychology developed by Wilhelm Reich and R.D. Laing, both of whom were popular in the sixties for their repudiation of Freud. The primary contention Mitchell has with Reich, Laing, and the American feminists is their overall denial of the unconscious. Mitchell argues that such a denial serves to over-determine social realism at the expense of the subject's desire and phantasies - the latter of which is the cause for the subject's "knowable" existence/identification. Moreover, the rejection of the unconscious in favor of empiricism places the unconscious within a false dichotomy: conscious = known and unconscious = unknown.

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(April, 1974).

Mitchell stresses that Freud's notion of the unconscious is not a "deep, mysterious place, whose presence, in mystical fashion, accounts for all the unknown." To the contrary, the thoughts contained by the unconscious are "knowable and normal," though the laws of repression transform them. These laws are different for each individual based upon his or her neurotic response to societal conventions (i.e., "normal" heterosexuality, femininity, and masculinity, that is to say, "patriarchy"). The purpose of psychoanalysis is to decipher the laws of the primary process (the transformative mechanism of the unconscious) which are recognizable and readable. The importance of the unconscious for Mitchell's feminist practice, then, was the manner in which it exposed sexuality - femininity specifically - as that which is "lived in the mind."

Many feminists addressed a woman's sexuality at the time, but these investigations were polemically positioned *against* the principles of psychoanalysis. As I previously mentioned, prominent American feminists, such as Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*), Kate Millett (*Sexual*

*Politics*), and Shulamith Firestone (*The Dialectic of Sex*) took strong stances in the sixties against Freud's presumed sexism. Subsequently, Freudian tropes, such as "anatomy is destiny" and "penis envy" were widely circulated and attacked in a populist context. Mitchell argues that a debased form of psychoanalysis thus prevailed, one that merely recapitulated the very hegemonic structure of patriarchal ideologies the feminists sought to undo.

Driven by this feminist opposition to Freud, Mitchell returned to his texts and found just the opposite: "that his theory was incredibly useful for understanding femininity." What compelled Mitchell most about Freud was his assertion that an individual's acquisition of human culture was less voluntary and more internally duplicitous. This was diametrically opposed to what the American feminists claimed. Mitchell explains this "internal duplicity" via the bi-sexuality of the drive:

*Each little baby can't repeat the whole meaning of human history, it has to be acquired very, very rapidly. That infant has to find its place within the*

human order. And while that place is a feminine or masculine one, it's never absolutely so. That's the psychological concept of bisexuality, which I do think is true. Bisexuality, not in the popular sense of object-choice, loving either a man or a woman, but in the sense that one has the possibility of the other sex within one's self, always. One's social orientation is always to the repression of the psychological characteristics of the sex that one, anatomically, is not.<sup>134</sup>

The popular American notion of bisexuality, based upon the subject's conscious object choice and the concomitant counter-cultural polymorphous perversity that it advocated, was of little interest to Mitchell on its own. Indeed, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* interrogated the revolutionary potential of such non-conformity, or "libertarian practices," popularized by Reich and Laing's texts in Britain and the feminists in America. As separatist practices, Mitchell argues, they offered little analysis of

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

the existing ideological structures unconsciously taken up by the subject. A *psychoanalytically* informed feminist practice, on the other hand, would look for the material base for these attitudes - the patriarchal social organization - in order to change them.

The material base for these attitudes, however, is not exclusively located within a knowable, empirically defined "masculinist" structure. It is internalized and reiterated by *all* subjects under patriarchy. A psychoanalytically informed feminist practice, therefore, would engage in a textual analysis of the site in which these attitudes are unconsciously reiterated. Mitchell's own interrogation of the feminist response to Freud's passage on penis envy demonstrates such a practice. She begins by citing Freud's statement that offended feminists the most:

*So far there has been no question of the Oedipus complex, nor has it up to this point played any part. But now the girl's libido slips into a new position along the line - there is no other way of putting it - of the equation 'penis-child.' She gives up her wish*

*for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: and with that purpose in view she takes her father as a love-object. Her mother becomes the object of her jealousy. The girl has turned into a little woman.*<sup>135</sup>

Mitchell then goes on to explain the operation of the unconscious in this passage.

The unconscious, of course, revolves around the fact that *the little girl wants a penis*. Since this desire is incompatible with convention, she represses it into the unconscious. On occasion the desire will re-surface, transformed in the guise of a symptom, ultimately sublimated into the desire for a child, which is perfectly compatible with convention. The woman's wish - bifurcated into unconscious (penis) and conscious (baby) - thus establishes her subjectivity as a divided one. The obstacle for most feminists in this passage, however, is the original "wish" for a penis. And yet, this reified wish can only be posited at the expense of the unconscious.

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<sup>135</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, (New York: Vintage,

That is to say, the subject's "conscious decisions and perceptions" replace the "mechanism of unconscious life." In doing so, the psychoanalytic principle of "penis envy" is transformed into the conscious wish for a penis. This move re-enacts (rather than analyzes) the subject's repression of phantasy and desire in favor of the subject's knowable experience, thus re-placing the unconscious into the mysterious realm of the "unknowable." Such a move, according Mitchell, only naturalizes conventional femininity because it leaves the original repression mechanism that defines normative sexuality un-interrogated.

By privileging a social realist model of knowledge, the subject is re-sutured by Millett and others into an indivisible, discrete unit, one that follows the existentialist model of a separatist psychic agency. To demonstrate this, Mitchell cites Millett's response to the same passage on penis envy by Freud:

*What forces in her experience, her society and socialization have led [a woman] to see herself as an*

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1974), p. 7.

*inferior being? The answer would seem to lie in the conditions of patriarchal society and the inferior position of women within this society. But Freud did not choose to pursue such a line of reasoning, preferring instead an etiology of childhood experience based upon the biological fact of anatomical differences...it is supremely unfortunate that Freud should prefer to bypass the more likely social hypothesis to concentrate upon the distortions of infantile subjectivity...*<sup>136</sup>

Not only is such consideration of the unconscious anathema to Millett's understanding of a woman's "real" experience, she later asserts that Freud's invention of the unconscious was meant to deny a woman's life experience outright.

If Millett thus saw Freud as a quintessential misogynist, incapable of acknowledging the real life experience of women (*rape* not *castration* constituting such "experience"), Mitchell in turn points out the inability of Millett's social realism to account for the primacy of the

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 352-353.

subject's *unconscious* "experience." For Millett, desire exists in the conscious world alone, arguing that a girl envies not the penis but what the penis can give her in a world dominated by "the male's superior status." What is completely denied, Mitchell argues in turn, is the *psychic origin* of such structures as "male superiority." From Mitchell's perspective, Millett's child is born "directly into the reality principle," bypassing the moment of infantile sexuality, Oedipal development, and subsequent gender identification. For feminists like Millett, Freud's starting point - the subject's "reality" - is the end point. If Freud thus saw the development of the subject's sexuality as originating with the repression of unacceptable impulses within the Oedipus complex, American feminists saw the *reality* of incest (a repressed *phantasy* for Freud) as formative of the subject's sexuality. Put simply, Millett wanted to recognize the reality principle as formative of a woman's sexuality, whereas Mitchell wanted to put such a reality principle itself under

analysis as a means to find the material, ideological basis of the structures that form such a sexuality.<sup>137</sup>

***The "Synthetic" Proposition Revisited: Marxism and Psychoanalysis***

Mitchell's introduction of the Freudian unconscious into Marxist considerations of women's oppression was a monumental move with far-reaching implications. First, it had an organizational effect upon the Women's Movement that was felt most strongly in the latter half of the seventies. In the Movement's initial stages, approximately 1970-1973, a populist-socialist spirit predominated amongst the various factions or groups as they sought to actualize

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<sup>137</sup> The influence of Lacan, or rather the Lacanian conduit through which Mitchell approaches Freud, is evident here. Lacan's "Mirror Stage" essay, published in *New Left Review*, ends with a critique of existential psychoanalysis (from which Mitchell and others take their lead). Lacan states: "Unfortunately [existentialism] grasps negativity only within limits of a self-sufficiency of consciousness, which, as one of its premises, links to the *méconnaissances* that constitute the ego, the illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself. This flight of fancy, for all that it draws, to an unusual extent, on borrowings from psychoanalytic experience, culminates in the pretension of providing an existential psychoanalysis." I will return to the centrality of this essay to the British strain of Lacanian psychoanalytic film criticism in the next chapter. Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in

their four basic demands. After these demands were (partially) met in the middle seventies, and more were subsequently articulated, various feminist groups took on theoretically distinct positions. It was in this context that the History Group, previously focused upon ideological structures of class division, evolved into the Lacan Reading Group. The Group was influenced and inspired by Mitchell's book and continued its project through the reading and translation of unpublished Lacanian texts, introducing these principles to the public in the 1976 "Patriarchy Conference" held at Institute of Contemporary Art in London.<sup>138</sup> Following the conference, Kelly and others from the Lacan Group began to problematize the conventional

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psychoanalytic experience," collected in *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977) p. 6.

<sup>138</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, before the English publication of *Ecrits* in 1977, access to Lacan's writings was very limited. Three primary texts in English were available to Kelly and her colleagues at this time: "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," originally translated by *Yale French Studies* (1966); "The Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis," translated by Anthony Wilden and published as *Language of the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); and "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," translated by *The New Left Review*, (1968). Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, which contained the now famous "gaze" seminar, was published in French in 1973 and translated into English in 1978. Typical papers translated and/or discussed by the group (collected in Kelly's archive) included Michele Montrelay's "Inquiry into Femininity," Jacques Lacan's "Signification of the Phallus," Julia Kristeva's "Signifying Practice and Modes of Production," Susan

socialist notion of "patriarchy" within feminist discourse, eventually dropping term altogether.

Parveen Adam's journal *m/f* was founded two years following the Partriarchy Conference, as a socialist-psychoanalytic feminist hybrid geared towards taking up what the Marxist proposition left out: the unconscious as it contributed to socio-historic structures of women's oppression. For just as Kosuth and other Conceptualists following his lead had left out any influence of the irrational, indexical, *unconscious* impulse in their analytic propositions, the conventional Marxist-feminist position similarly over-determined the effect that economic structures (equally hermetic in their purist theoretical application) had on women's experience. Thus, in some ways the Marxist-feminist "synthetic" consideration of what Kosuth denied - social realism - was the flip side of the Conceptualist coin. The first issue of *m/f* took this dilemma up as its foundational concern.

In the journal's opening statement the editors, Parveen Adams, Elizabeth Cowie and Rosalind Coward, stated

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Lipshitz's "Freud's Fetishism and a Step Beyond," and Rosalind Coward's

their claim against "essential" femininity<sup>139</sup> as it was founded upon two predominant ideas: (1) the notion of a trans-historical oppression of women at all times (i.e. an essentialized history); or (2) the notion of an "original" repressed or suppressed femininity (i.e. and essentialized subject position). The incorporation of a semiotic-psychoanalytic feminism was seen as the means to interrogate these essentialist positions. Specifically it would challenge the economic foundationalism of Marxist-feminism, the admitted blind spot of Mitchell's earlier "Longest Revolution" essay. Such foundationalism presented a number of problems. First, the Marxist-feminist belief in a consistently deprived social group would be challenged. Following Mitchell's critique, the editors argued that such an emphasis on class over-valued the liberationist effect of consciousness raising (i.e., women identifying themselves as a deprived class) without any consideration of women's unconscious development, the latter of which was *formative* of such oppression. Second, the primary role

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"Sexuality and Psychoanalysis."

given to working class women in leading the feminist vanguard was held as suspect because it essentialized working women's ability (or interest) in best effecting change. Moreover, it wrongly localized hegemonic structures within the lower classes. Lastly, the belief that women's oppression was solely the work of capitalism, in the form of ideologies surrounding the nuclear family, erroneously advocated that the nuclear family's collapse would secure the fall of capitalism. The non-nuclear family units prevalent in Sweden's capitalist social democracy were offered as an example of this view's shortcomings.<sup>140</sup>

The collective editorial instead argued for an analysis of the woman as *category*, for it was *this* that determined women's subordinate position. Psychoanalysis was seen as means to analyze such categorization, as it accounted for the process through which an individual becomes a sexed subject to begin with. From this theoretical perspective sexual *division*, based upon class would eventually give way to sexual *difference* based upon

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<sup>139</sup> Essentialist feminism was a general theory that came to define "cultural feminism," a practice formulated around the same time as *m/f's* inception.

the individual's discursive development within conventions of gender.

However, while this brand of feminism utilized Marxist and psychoanalytic theory, it did so through the simultaneous interrogation of both discourses' principles. The editors warned that psychoanalysis shouldn't be privileged itself, but taken up as another discursive site from which women as a category are constructed and ideologically maintained. They explain the possibilities and limitations of psychoanalysis this way:

*Some feminists have taken up psychoanalysis as providing an account of the process of the construction of the sexed subject in society. This is seen as important because it is with the construction of sexual difference and its inscription in the social that feminism is concerned. But psychoanalysis has had little to say on the relationship of this construction to particular historical moments, nor the effect that considering the historical moment might*

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<sup>140</sup> Parveen Adams, et al, *m/f*, no. 1 (1978), p. 4.

*have on psychoanalytic theory itself. Thus psychoanalytic theory [alone] is not a sufficient theory for understanding the construction of women as a category.*<sup>141</sup>

Indeed, the psychoanalytic-Marxist hybrid would consist of two mutually interrogative components. What stood "outside" the Marxist concern - the woman's construction as a sexed subject - would be taken up by psychoanalysis. What stood "outside" psychoanalytic investigation - its discursive complicity in the perpetuation of women as an (oppressed) category - could be addressed through a Marxist approach. The first issue of *m/f* thus dealt with the production of sexual division (or difference) by examining how psychoanalysis constructs the feminine (Michele Montrelay's "Inquiry into Femininity"), how Marxism conceptualizes the sexual division of labor (Rosalind Coward's "Sexual Liberation and the Family"), and how discursive media such as film reiterate the category of woman.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

This inter-discursive approach mirrors the "debate-specificity" advocated by Kelly in *Post-Partum Document*. In the *Document's* completed form one can see "sexual division" evolve into "sexual difference" as Kelly's interest in psychoanalysis became more involved between the years 1973-1976. I will return to the *Document's* evolution from a sociological approach to women's oppression to a psychoanalytic one momentarily. First it is necessary to review Kelly's collaborative project *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labor in Industry*, begun in 1973, as its Marxist concern parallels that of Mitchell's "Longest Revolution" essay. Though *Women and Work* was initiated the same year as the *Document* - their similar methodologies and aesthetics reflect this - *Women and Work* theoretically and conceptually belongs to the History Group's period dominated by Mitchell's early writings. Thus, by looking at *Women and Work* first, we better grasp the critical advancements made by *Post-Partum Document*. In a manner of speaking, it was the blind spot of this collaborative exhibition that initiated the *Document's* specific site of investigation.

### ***The Women and Work Project (1973-1975)***

Produced in collaboration with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, *Women and Work* as a project grew out of the Women's Workshop of the Artist's Union. Formed in 1972 with the aim of seeking affiliation with the Trade Union Commission, the Artist's Union - like all Unions - had a constitution and a board of elected officials on which Kelly was Chair. The Women's Workshop, initiated by Artist's Union members Tina Kean and Elona Bennett, was a feminist collective arguing for gender parity in union membership and equal consideration of women's issues. Like the History Group's relation to the (male) editors of the *New Left Review*, the Women's Workshop had a somewhat strained relationship to the Union at large. Kelly recalled the general reaction at the time in *Sparerib*: "The women in the union were always supportive (not all of them were members of the Workshop) but the men were sometimes suspicious and heated debates ensued."<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, a

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<sup>142</sup> "Women Artists Take Action," *Sparerib* no. 13 (July, 1973), p. 39.

majority vote was obtained "to end discrimination in the arts" by the Artist's Union.

With this demand met, the Women's Workshop proceeded to a two tier agenda of art activism and production. It began pressuring local councils into providing studio space for women and children, and public museums into exhibiting women and men equally. One example was the demand made of the Tate Gallery to mount the show "Old Mistresses," an exhibition of female old masters traveling from Baltimore.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, the Workshop was a site of diverse (often-contradictory) artistic collaborations. It simultaneously produced a British interpretation of Judy Chicago's *Womanhouse* project, initiated by Su Madden, Alexis Hunter, Sonia Knox, and Linda Price, and the *Women and Work* project by Kelly et. al. However, it is important to note that the possibility of shaping the debate around women's issues within the Artist's Union and the possibility for women to collaborate on individual projects took precedence over conceptual or theoretical approaches

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

to art production at this early moment.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, the methodological rigor with which the *Women and Work* collective approached its subject distinguished it from other projects produced by the Workshop.

The project began when Kay Hunt, a member of the Workshop, met and interviewed women at a metal box factory in South London and proposed that Kelly and Harrison join her in gaining entry into the factory to document the shifts in labor initiated by the Equal Pay Act. As in the *Nightcleaners* film (briefly discussed in chapter one) the collaborators employed Brechtian strategies of dis-identification in representing the workers, opting to "picture" the women's labor through indexical means. In a mode that recalled the visual strategy of Haacke's *Shapolsky* piece, the "subject" of *Women and Work* was presented through a series of photocopied pay slips, graphs, tapes, and work schedules, producing a "portrait" composed of administrative evidence tracing the reorganization of labor (fig. 36). It was Kelly's assertion that the project should be laid out in such a manner that

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<sup>144</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

the *look* of the documentation would come to the fore as would the viewer's ability to read the documents intertextually.

Accompanying the exhibition of documents, a brief summary of the findings was written up by Kelly and Hunt. In it they concluded that women were still paid less, employed at lower positions, and offered less desirable hours than the men. In particular, they argued that the discrepancy in hours made the Factories Act on the employment of women and young persons so ineffective as to prompt its repeal. However, the real "contradiction" that surfaced (in Brechtian terms) concerned the expanded site of women's labor to the domestic sphere, an unforeseen displaced "discovery" within the group's original investigation. Of the interviews Kelly and Hunt conducted with the women, they consequently made the following conclusion:

*The Metal Box Co. women who were interviewed, particularly part-time workers, clearly indicated that their first commitment was to their domestic*

*responsibilities. None of them described their work in the factory without prompting, whereas the men included this information in detail and considerably abbreviated the list of activities at home. All of the men who were interviewed worked full-time and most of them worked overtime. But the introduction of shift work, by eliminating part-time hours for women and overtime for men, undermined the heterosexual imperative on which this division of labor was founded. A section supervisor on the double day shift complained that he was not responsible for taking his children to school if he worked from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.*

...<sup>145</sup>

Thus while Kelly, Harrison and Hunt's analysis was initially confined to the parameters of factory labor, the interviews with both the men and women produced a contingent picture of the heterosexual imperative within

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<sup>145</sup> Mary Kelly and Kay Hunt, "Women & Work: A Document on the Division of Labor in Industry. Part III: A Brief Summary of Findings from the Exhibition," collected in Judith Mastai's *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970-1975*, (Vancouver: Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, 1997), p. 89.

labor. Which is to say, the men's work-day ended when they clocked out from the factory, while the women's work continued until they completed various domestic chores, most commonly revolving around child care. The site of analysis, therefore, unexpectedly shifted to home. It was in the midst of this unexpected displacement that Kelly began to formulate the subject of *Post-Partum Document*.

***Post-Partum Document: From Sociologic to Psychoanalytic  
Considerations of the Subject***

*I was pregnant at the time [of Women and Work] and wanted to find out exactly what this domestic labor thing was all about. Was this the last imperative for heterosexuality? What was it that only women did in the home? So I looked at something like changing the nappies in a rather sociological way at first. But I soon discovered I needed a different structure to address more complex notions of the social than*

*perhaps was initially indicated by this project.*<sup>146</sup> -

Mary Kelly

The *Document's* use of charts and graphs to mark the mother's post-natal labor is consistent with the representational strategy used to document the exchange between management and labor in *Woman and Work*. However, important distinctions need to be made between the two projects, though there are significant overlaps. Indeed, the absent object in *Women and Work* - the worker's site-specific interactions - is "pictured" through secondary documentation rather than the pictorial mode indicative of the conventional photo-essay format. In addition, the index operates as means to indicate a given "symptom" in *Women and Work* as it does in the *Document*. In the former project, the pay slips indicated a continuous gap between labor and equal pay in the work place, which was what the artists consciously set out to document. Inadvertently, however, the recorded testimony denoted that which remained

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<sup>146</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

outside the artists' scope of investigation: the ever-present domestic sphere.

It was precisely this collapse of the public and private that the *Document* took up. Moreover, while *Women and Work* theorized the women's experience in the home (which is to say, the family unit itself) within the economy of capitalist industrial labor (much the way Mitchell's "Longest Revolution" did), the *Document* theorized how the subjective category of "woman" was produced and sustained within the nuclear family and how that was *chiasmatically* related to "outside" conventions of labor and femininity. Thus, a psychoanalytic approach - a return to Freud - was enacted in the *Document* much as Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* did, in order to tease out the relation between sexual difference and class formations.

Although the *Document* increasingly took up a psychoanalytic approach to address issues of desire and maternal femininity as it developed, in the beginning (1973) the work took the same sociological approach as the *Women and Work* project. A little known "sketch" for *Post-*

*Partum Document*, entitled *Ante-Partum*, exemplifies this. Shown in 1974 at Portsmouth Polytechnic, the installation consisted of two projected 8 mm film loops: a close-up of Kelly's stomach at 9 months juxtaposed to another close-up of women's hands working the machines at the Metal Box Factory from *Women and Work*. There was thus an effort to mark the connection between production and reproduction, represented by the continual movement of hands loading the machines with metal next to the slow up and down movement of the breathing stomach.

*Primapara* (fig. 37), a series of photographs of the mother giving the infant a manicure-pedicure shown in 1974 at the Artist's Meeting Place exhibition and organized by the Women's Workshop group of the Artist's Union, was another attempt at figuring the mother's labor around larger issues of production. Made contemporaneously with Kelly's *Nightcleaners* documentary on female janitors' attempt to unionize, the labor of childcare again parallels the sociological topic of unionization. The connection between *Primapara* and the *Nightcleaners* is made even clearer by the visual strategy Kelly used in an early study

for *Primapara* (laid out in a grid of 8 connecting photographs), which mirrors the cover she designed for an issue of *Shrew* magazine dedicated to the film.<sup>147</sup> (fig. 38) Again, we see a serial grid of film stills, in this instance of a woman cleaning a toilet. The repetition of labor, the duration of which is "captured" via its serial presentation (she had originally wanted the film to consist solely of 8 hours of such scrubbing), points to Kelly's interest in "real-time" film strategies, which extended to the *Document*. The name itself, *Post-Partum*, with Kelly's addition of the hyphen positioned between "post" and "partum," implies an indefinite extension of the moment following birth, the labor of which the project documented for five years.

The feeding charts for *Documentation I*, in particular, made between January and March of 1974, constitute a site of intersection between *Post-Partum Document* and the other activist, collaborative projects. At the time, Kelly theorized the fecal stain as an index, symbol, and icon of

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<sup>147</sup> *Shrew* vol. 3, no. 9 (December 1971).

women's work in raising the child. In a brochure for this section's first exhibition, Kelly summarized it this way:

*The fecal stain is a mark of the woman's secondary social status and of the ideological and economic function of the sexual division of labor.*<sup>148</sup>

In the beginning, then, the stain was a literal economic signifier for the secondary social status of women in the home, a somewhat trans-historic, economically foundationalist claim that Kelly later disavowed.<sup>149</sup> Thus, shortly after Kelly began the *Document* (c. 1974-1975) the manner in which the mother *internalized* her secondary status began to surface.

Like Mitchell, Kelly turned to psychoanalysis to understand the subjective moment of women's oppression. The stain (and later the utterance or scribble in *Documentation II and III*) came to be theorized as a symptom of the mother's desire. For such a theorization, Maud

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<sup>148</sup> Dated handwritten notes from Kelly's archive document this.

Mannoni, a French psychoanalyst, influenced Kelly. In her book *The Child, His "Illness" and the Others*, Mannoni extends Lacan's principle that "one's desire is always the desire of the Other," to an analysis of children's neuroses. In her case studies, she discovered that the mother's relation to the child's analysis was ambiguous because when the child spoke, the mother's desire was in turn spoken. She concluded that a "direct" analysis of the mother is a futile task:

*In prevailing on a mother to undergo analysis herself, instead of hearing her while treating the child, they [analysts] do not reflect on the point that it is futile to analyze a mother on the basis of her own accounts, when her own accounts are the child to such an extent that her perpetual presence is expressed through the child's symptom.<sup>150</sup>*

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<sup>149</sup> I am referring to disavowals made at the 1976 ICA exhibition of *Post-Partum Document's* first three sections, and the accompanying Patriarchy Conference on feminism and psychoanalysis.

<sup>150</sup> Maud Mannoni, *The Child, His "Illness" and the Others* (London: Tavistock, 1970), p. 55.

In the *Document* we see this symptom represented, for example, in the fecal stain and feeding charts that index the success or failure of the mother's "natural" ability to care for the child. For in this context the stain is a symptom that ultimately points to the mother's desire in the form of the Lacanian algorithm, concluding *Documentation I*, "What Have I Done Wrong?" The inclusion of the mother-as-artist's subject position within the *Document's* analysis (the algorithmic question always implicates both positions of the hyphenated proper noun) critically distinguished it not *only* from such earlier projects as *Women and Work* and *Ante-Partum* but from Haacke's *Shapolsky* installation, to which I will now return in concluding this chapter.

***Administrative Tasks: Hans Haacke's Shapolsky Project and Post-Partum Document***

Benjamin Buchloh's article "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," begins with a survey of conceptual works

that address the schism between Language and vision and concludes with those redistributing the (fetishistic) author/artist function through a "performance of daily bureaucratic tasks." As an example, he quotes Sol Lewitt's text "Serial Project, 1966" from *Aspen Magazine*:

*The aim of the artist would be to give viewers information...He would follow his predetermined premise to its conclusion avoiding subjectivity. Chance, taste, or unconsciously remembered forms would play no part in the outcome. The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise.*<sup>151</sup>

Although this administrative brand of Conceptualism "purged artistic production of the aspiration towards an affirmative collaboration with forces of industrial production and consumption" (as in Minimalism and Pop Art),

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<sup>151</sup> Sol Lewitt cited by Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," p. 140.

it took the strategy of institutional critique, embodied in the work of Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke, to critique the ideological apparatus of social institutions that existed *through* administration. Gone, then, was any trace of the artist's "memory" as the work. This, of course, had been the "mark" of the transcendental progenitor "behind" Greenbergian abstract expressionism.

In Haacke's work authorial memory is displaced by a "counter-memory" (in Foucauldean terms). Consequently what surfaces is that which institutions purposely "forget" in order to fetishize the artwork: its economic materialist history, or what Fredric Jameson calls its *conditions of possibility*.<sup>152</sup> This is most evident in Haacke's *Manet-PROJEKT '74* (figs. 39-40), in which ten panels trace the provenance of Manet's *Bunch of Asparagus* of 1880 from the hands of liberal Jewish collectors to Nazi bank accounts and finally to the Ludwig Museum in Cologne on permanent loan. This "counter-memory," facilitated by administrative techniques of research, collection, cataloguing, and display, characterized the *Shapolsky* project as well.

Like *Manet-PROJEKT*, the *Shapolsky* installation displaced documentation from archival files to exhibition walls in the service of investigating the political economies of representation. This "administrative" mode of art production, as I have noted, was extended by Kelly to investigate the economy of sexual difference within both the sites of domestic labor and visual representation. Just as *Shapolsky* represented the administrative mode and effect of capitalist real estate ventures as a dislocated "picture" of class relations, the *Document* went about picturing the mother's subjectivity via the daily routine of bringing the child into the economy of language as it was predetermined by sexual difference. Departing from Haacke, however, the *Document* purposefully problematized the "objectivity" of its own investigation by interrogating the analyst-artist's position. In this way, the *Document's* handling of memory is slightly different from Haacke's.

Rather than denying the presence of *authorial* memory (a mere reversal of its transcendental notion), the artist's own "conditions of being" are put on the table in

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<sup>152</sup> Fredric Jameson "Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of

the *Document*. The question, then, of who is speaking - the mother, the artist, the child - is continually made evident, and consequently the very *notion* of memory is interrogated as a subjective counter-memory arises. But this subjective counter-memory is one that puts the art object's status as a commodity fetish, as well as the privileged position of the artist as progenitor, into relief. This is what Kelly meant when she described the role that the unconscious played in the *Document*, which I will cite again in full:

*In Post-Partum Document, the art objects are used as fetish objects, explicitly to displace the potential fetishization of the child and implicitly to expose the typically fetishistic function of representation. The stained liners, folded vests, child's markings, and word imprints have a minimum sign value in relation to the commodity status of representational art, but they have a maximum affective value in*

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Postmodernism," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, p. 42.

*relation to the libidinal economy of the  
unconscious...*<sup>153</sup>

The indices constituting the *Document* indicate the construction of the mother's position vis-à-vis the child's development of language skills. Perhaps this is where one could see Haacke's systems analyses as stopping because the mother's subjective position, in turn, is interrogated by a secondary analytic revision, dis-privileging any notion of the *Document* as an "authentic" autobiography of her experience. Thus, while the traces and charts "construct the discourse of the mother's lived experience," they are opposed by the artist's addition of diagrams, algorithms, and footnotes. However, since the "artist" and "mother," of course, constitute the same individual, the terms within the position "artist-as-mother" are put into perpetual mutual interrogation. It was crucial to Kelly - in light of the discursive debate with which she was engaged - that the Cartesian position of mastery conventionally held at either side of representation (the creator/artist and the

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<sup>153</sup> Kelly, "Notes on Reading *Post-Partum Document*," p. 23.

subject/mother) was split via the subject's divided constitution (conscious/unconscious, private/public) being acted out through the interrogation of its own constitution.

### ***Epilogue***

The *Document's* interrogation of the woman/artist's subject position had its immediate fallout, however, by directly implicating the viewer's desire for a Realist representation of motherhood, a demand made by Marxist-feminists who saw domesticity as a *knowable* site of women's oppression. Upon the *Document's* first showing at the ICA, Kelly was thus accused of "mystifying theory" after Laura Mulvey wrote a review of the ICA exhibition for *Spare Rib* magazine.

It is noteworthy that Mulvey was called upon by *Spare Rib* to review the exhibition, as she was not the magazine's first choice. Initially, Roszika Parker, an editor at *Spare Rib*, conducted an interview with Kelly concerning the *Document's* psychoanalytic approach. Kelly and Parker made

several failed attempts at unraveling the "complexity of the piece." Parker's goal was to "provide women with the information with which they can approach the exhibition..." in order to reach "a wider audience." In the end, the editors rejected the interview format altogether, opting for a review. Parker relayed to Kelly the magazine's sentiment that "...90% of the readership [wouldn't understand] 'cathected memory traces' i.e. the psychoanalytic terms." Moreover, the editors worried that "Lacanian terms like 'lack' [would be interpreted] in a literal manner..."<sup>154</sup> *Spare Rib's* decision to assign the review to Mulvey indicates the extent to which the terms of psychoanalytic-feminism was still confined to film theory in 1976.<sup>155</sup>

Mulvey, having just written her now famous manifesto on cinematic representations of women and its radical alternatives,<sup>156</sup> addressed straight away the *Document's*

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<sup>154</sup> From Parker's correspondence to the artist collected in Kelly's personal archive. This was exhibited, along with related correspondence, at the Generali Foundation's retrospective exhibition in 1998.

<sup>155</sup> I will return to discuss the development of British psychoanalytic film theory and its relation to feminism in the next chapter.

<sup>156</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, (Autumn, 1975).

"provocation to conventional concepts of 'art' ". Her focus was upon Kelly's rejection of iconic imagery in favor of a performative approach to the mother's discursive formation. This, Mulvey argues, is the reason for the barrage of bad tabloid press decrying the "dirty nappies." She thus begins with the *Document's* reception:

*It is quite clear from the attention Mary Kelly's exhibition has received in the establishment press that it was a direct provocation to conventional concepts of 'art.'* It is the form of the exhibition, its emphasis on work rather than art-object-for-critical-evaluation, that causes so much outrage. A painting of a mother changing her baby's nappy would be easily overlooked as kitsch, but not so with dirty nappy liners annotated and placed within a discourse that needs work to be unraveled, and refuses to place the figure of the mother on view.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Post-Partum Document," *Sparerib*, no. 40, (1976). Collected in *Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document*, (London: Routledge, 1983).

Mulvey then proceeds to unravel the manner in which the *Document's* three sections - the stained liners, recorded utterances, and analyzed drawings - represent the mother's unconscious narcissism, melancholia, and consequential fetishization of the child, shaped as they are by patriarchal structures. A nod is given to Mitchell's book, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, and an admission is made about Kelly's reliance upon "theory biased - though not invalidated - by patriarchal assumptions." Although the review's perspective was still psychoanalytic, Mulvey nevertheless attempted to bridge the gap between those readers of Lacan and the populist audience constituting the Women's Movement.

The attempt at bridging these two spheres, however, failed, as a letter composed by *Spare Rib* readers, Margot Waddell and Michelene Wandor, testified. Addressing the gap they perceived between Kelly's "intentions" as a feminist and her "actual achievements" as an artist, Waddell and Wandor unwittingly re-enact the debate Mitchell had with Millett over the formative unconscious aspect of women's experience. Supported by the (anti-psychoanalytic)

notion that pleasurable collective consciousness is central to women's "liberation," they assert that:

*At a superficial level it is possible to walk round the walls and either be turned on by the 'pictures' or not. But any deeper understanding, presumably meant to help provide a basis for women to theorize their own experience and struggle on the basis of that, cannot be got from the 'pictures' alone. Either the viewer must bring psychoanalytic/linguistic knowledge with her, or make use of the folder of notes that Mary Kelly provides.*

The authors continue to express displeasure that their demand for this knowledge was denied. "...Far from extending *understanding* [my italics] and closing the gap between theory and art," they conclude, Kelly's "brief notes...serve to mystify theory even further." Good art, in Waddell and Wandor's terms, is the transformative *representation* of theory into visually apprehensible terms, art that leaves the desirous subject positions of artist

and viewer uninvestigated in favor of the work's immediate, knowable social function.

What the authors overlooked was that the social *function* of the *Document* was to challenge the very terms of artistic representation that relied upon the jubilant mastery of a viewer over her own image. This is signified by the desire of women (Waddell et. al.) to look at representations of themselves, a *cogito* that the *Document* sought to interrogate. A subsequent letter in defense of the *Document*, written by Parveen Adams, Rosalind Delmar, and Sue Lipshitz and published in *Spare Rib*, took up the imperative for such an interrogation at length.<sup>158</sup> The *Spare Rib* debate represents the end of an earlier populist period of the Women's Movement, one focusing on rights, and the beginning of a schism separating feminists over their position on psychoanalysis. Moreover, it is important to note that psychoanalytic feminism had yet to enter discourses on feminist art production in specific or the Women's Movement in general prior to 1976. From 1970-1975 psychoanalytic theory was still limited, primarily, to the

academic fields of film theory, literary criticism, and new historicist practice.

We must now turn, then, to a discussion of *Screen Magazine*, the discursive site where such psychoanalytic feminism developed in a hybrid form with other theories. The impact of this theory was far reaching, sparking a new "feminist" approach to art production and eventually influencing even those most outside such a practice - i.e., Conceptualist artists such as Victor Burgin, Dan Graham, and even Joseph Kosuth.

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<sup>158</sup> Parveen Adams, et. al., "Using psychoanalytic theory," *Sparerib*, no. 49, (1976).

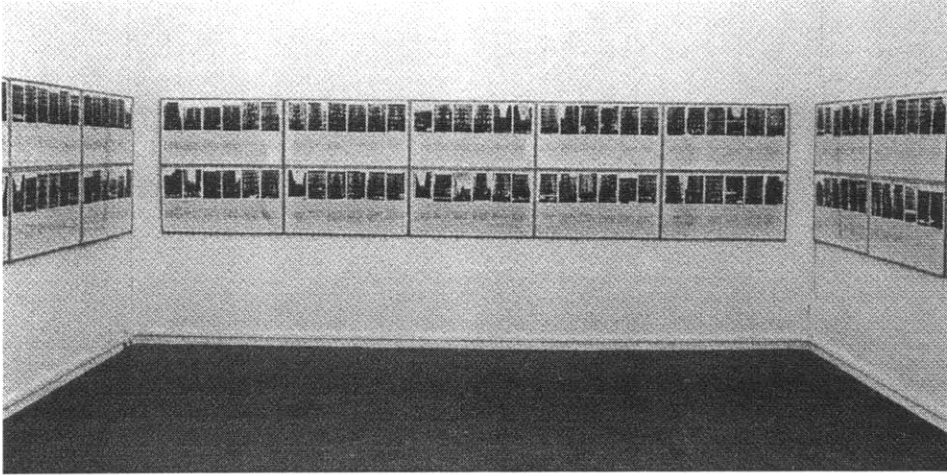


Figure 32: Hans Haacke, Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System as of May 1, 1971, Installation, 1972.



264 E 4 St.  
Block 386 Lot 18  
24 x 96' 6 story walk-up old law tenement

Owned by 507 E 11 St. Corp., 608 E 11 St., NYC  
Contracts signed by Anthony Schimizzi, President ('58)  
Principal Harry J. Shapolsky (according to Real Estate  
Directory of Manhattan)

Acquired 1-8-1965 through foreclosure from  
Chivall Realty Corp. et al defendants  
No mortgage (1971)

Assessed land value \$8000.- total \$27,000.- (1971)

**Figure 33: Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky Piece*, (detail).**

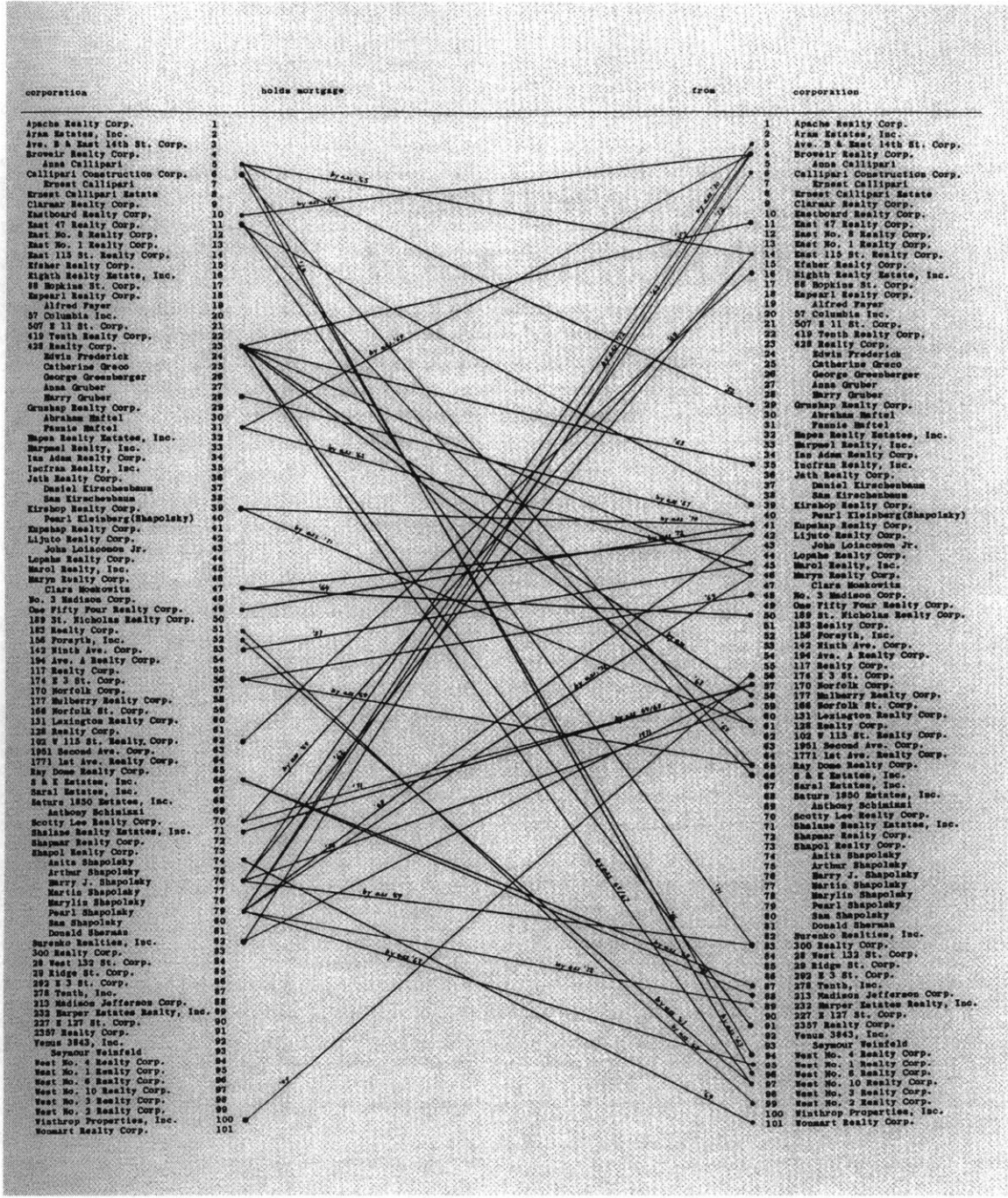


Figure 34: Hans Haacke, Shapolsky Piece, (detail).



<p>5:30 AM: START BREAKFAST FOR FAMILY          7:15 AM: LEAVE FOR WORK          8:00 AM: START WORK          5:00 PM: FINISH WORK          5:45 PM: ARRIVE HOME          6:00 PM: START DINNER          7:00 PM: WASH UP, SEE          DAUGHTER TO BED          8:00 PM: IRONING          9:30 PM: SIT DOWN          10:30 PM: MAKE DRINK          11:30 PM: GO TO BED, IT'S          A LONG DAY</p> <p>JEAN ALEXANDER, AGE 40          1 SON AGE 18 1 DAUGHTER AGE 11</p> <p>DOUBLE SEAMER OPERATOR          FULL TIME 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM</p>	<p>6:00 AM: GET UP, GET BABY          DRESSED, FED          7:00 AM: TAKE BABY TO          MINDER          7:15 AM: GO TO WORK          8:00 AM: START WORK          12:30 PM: DINNER BREAK          GO SHOPPING          1:30 PM: START WORK          5:00 PM: FINISH WORK          5:30 PM: GET BABY FROM          MINDER          6:00 PM: PREPARE BABY'S          MEAL          7:30 PM: PUT HIM TO BED          8:00 PM: PREPARE MEAL FOR          HUSBAND AND SELF          9:00 PM: BABY'S WASHING          CLEAN UP          12:00 PM: GO TO BED</p> <p>JOANNA MARTIN, AGE 21          1 SON AGE 1</p> <p>SHRINK WRAP OPERATOR          FULL TIME 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM</p>
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Figure 35: Mary Kelly with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt, *Women and Work*, (detail) 1975.

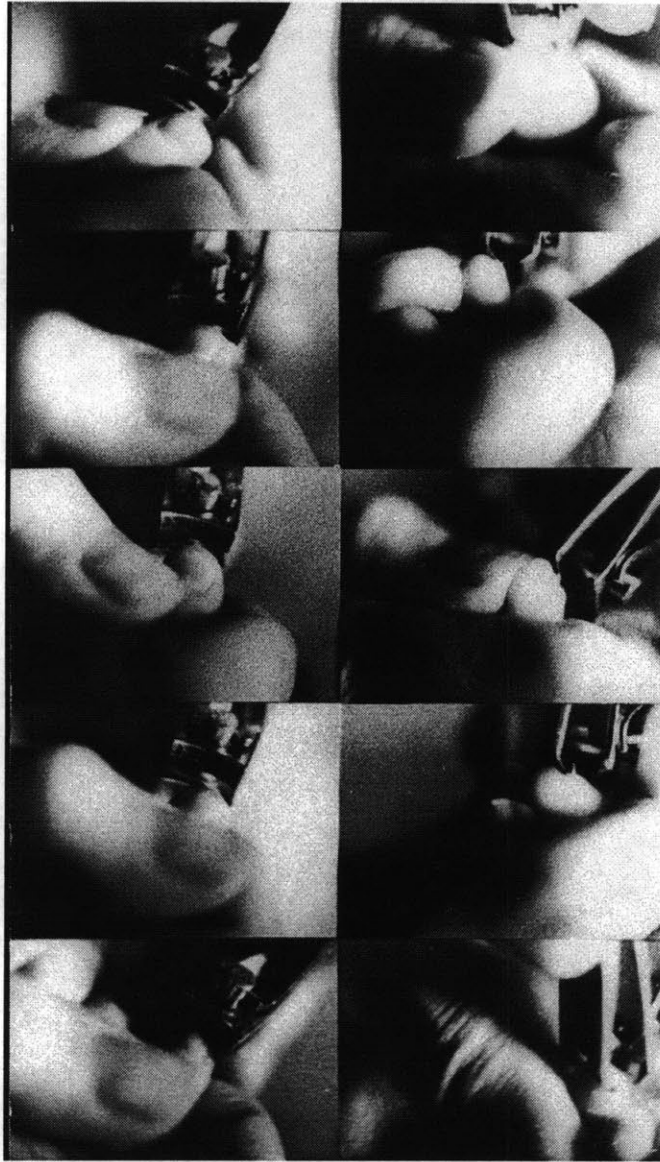


Figure 36: Mary Kelly, *Primapara*, 1971.

SHREW vol.3 no.9 DECEMBER 1971  
**NIGHT CLEANERS**

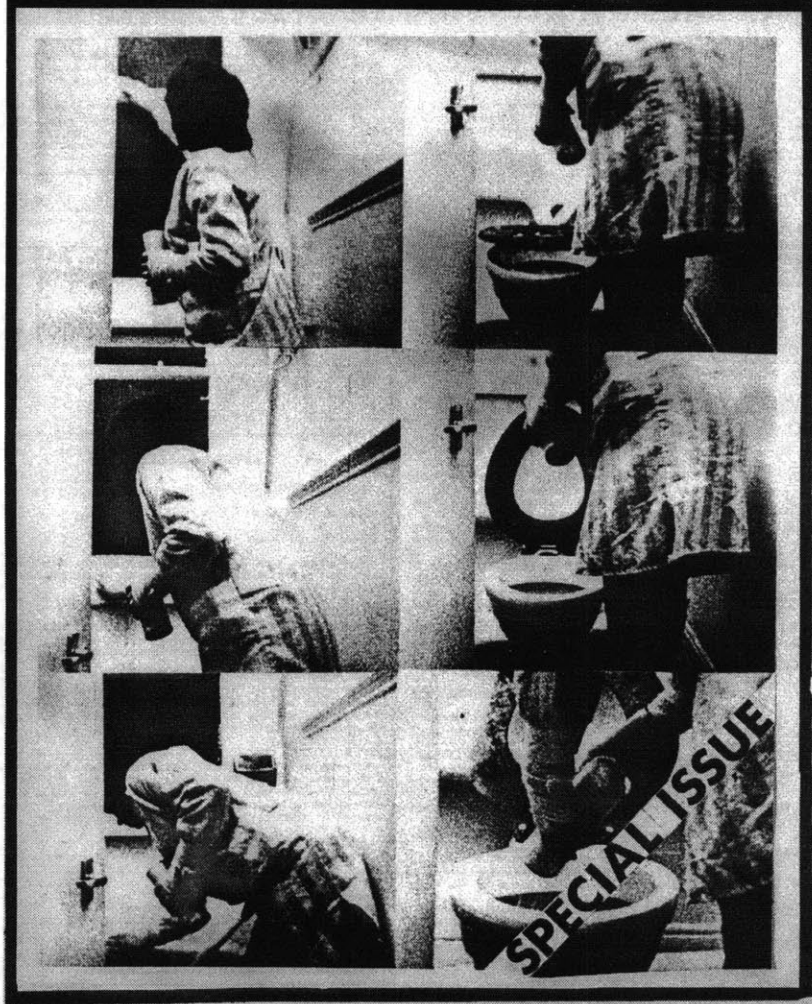
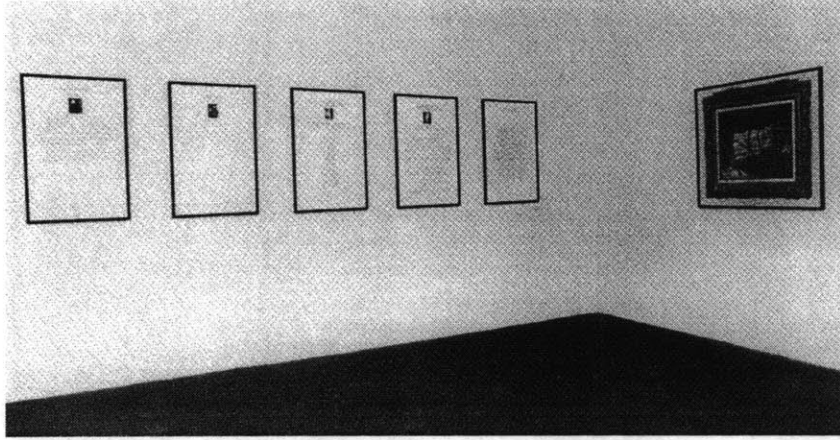


Figure 37: Mary Kelly, cover art, stills from the *Nightcleaners*, 1971.



**Figure 38: Hans Haacke, *Manet-PROJEKT*, 1974. Installation.**

Das Spargel-Stilleben  
erworben durch die Initiative des  
Vorsitzenden des Wallraf-Richartz-Kuratoriums



Hermann J. Abs

Geboren 1901 in Bonn. - Entammt wohlhabender katholischer Familie. Vater Dr. Josef Abs, Rechtsanwalt und Justizrat, Mitinhaber der Hubertus Braunkohlen AG. Brüngen, Erft. Mutter Katharina Lückerrath.

Abitur 1919 Realgymnasium Bonn. - Ein Sem. Jurastudium Universität Bonn. - Banklehre im Kölner Bankhaus Delbrück von der Heydt & Co. Erwirbt internationale Bankerfahrung in Amsterdam, London, Paris, USA.

Heiratet 1928 Inez Schnitzler. Ihr Vater mit Georg von Schnitzler vom Vorstand des IG. Farbenkonzerns verwandt. Tante verheiratet mit Baron Alfred Neveu du Mont. Schwester verheiratet mit Georg Graf von der Goltz. - Geburt der Kinder Thomas und Marion Abs.

Mitglied der Zentrumspartei. - 1929 Prokura im Bankhaus Delbrück, Schickler & Co., Berlin. 1935-37 einer der 5 Teilhaber der Bank.

1937 im Vorstand und Aufsichtsrat der Deutschen Bank, Berlin. Leiter der Auslandsabteilung. - 1939 von Reichswirtschaftsminister Funk in den Beirat der Deutschen Reichsbank berufen. - Mitglied in Ausschüssen der Reichsbank, Reichsgruppe Industrie, Reichsgruppe Banken, Reichswirtschaftskammer und einem Arbeitskreis im Reichswirtschaftsministerium. - 1944 in über 50 Aufsichts- und Verwaltungsräten großer Unternehmen. Mitgliedschaft in Gesellschaften zur Wahrnehmung deutscher Wirtschaftsinteressen im Ausland.

1946 für 6 Wochen in britischer Haft. - Von der Alliierten Entnazifizierungsbehörde als entlastet (5) eingestuft.

1948 bei der Gründung der Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau. Mäßiglich an der Wirtschaftsplanung der Bundesregierung beteiligt. Wirtschaftsberater Konrad Adenauers. - Leiter der deutschen Delegation bei der Londoner Schuldenkonferenz 1951-53. Berater bei den Wiedergutmachungsverhandlungen mit Israel in Den Haag. 1954 Mitglied der CDU.

1952 im Aufsichtsrat der Süddeutschen Bank AG. - 1957-67 Vorstandssprecher der Deutschen Bank AG. Seit 1967 Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats.

Ehrenvorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats:

Deutsche Überseeische Bank, Hamburg - Püttler Maschinenfabrik AG, Langen (Hessen)

Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats:

Dahlbusch Verwaltungs-AG, Gelsenkirchen - Daimler Benz AG, Stuttgart-Untertürkheim - Deutsche Bank AG, Frankfurt - Deutsche Lufthansa AG, Köln - Philipp Holzmann AG, Frankfurt - Phoenix Gummiwerke AG, Hamburg-Harburg - RWE Elektrizitätswerk AG, Essen - Vereinigte Glanzstoff AG, Wuppertal-Eilberfeld - Zellstoff-Fabrik Waldhof AG, Mannheim

Ehrenvorsitzender:

Salamander AG, Kornwestheim - Gebr. Stumm GmbH, Brambauer (Westf.) - Süddeutsche Zucker-AG, Mannheim

Stellvertr. Vors. des Aufsichtsrats:

Badische Anilin- und Sodafabrik AG, Ludwigshafen - Siemens AG, Berlin-München

Mitglied des Aufsichtsrats:

Metallgesellschaft AG, Frankfurt

Präsident des Verwaltungsrats:

Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau - Deutsche Bundesbahn

Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz mit Stern, Päpstl. Stern zum Komturkreuz, Großkreuz Isabella die Katholische von Spanien, Cruzeiro do Sul von Brasilien. - Ritter des Ordens vom Heiligen Grab. - Dr. h.c. der Univ. Göttingen, Sofia, Tokio und der Wirtschaftshochschule Mannheim.

Lebt in Kronberg (Taunus) und auf dem Bentgerhof bei Remagen.

Photo aus Current Biography Yearbook 1970 New York

Figure 39: Hans Haacke, *Manet-PROJEKT*, (detail).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Discourses on the Subject in Film: Screen's Development of a Psychoanalytic Model of Criticism (1969-1978)

*I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.*<sup>159</sup>

- Jacques Lacan

#### **Introduction**

Post-Partum *Document*, to put it simply, was the real-time narrative of a mother and child's reciprocal subjective "suture" into discourses of domesticity. Thus the following question comes to the fore: "who is

speaking?" Or rather, who is spoken through the series of traces and imprints that constitute the *Document*? Whose voice is it in the diarist's accounts, or the child's first attempts at writing his name? Ultimately, what is to be gained from such confusion? For Kelly, informed in part by Althusser's writings, interpreted through psychoanalytic texts, the point is precisely this: the ideological formation of the subject within the economy of language can only be demonstrated through such a strategy of narrative slippage.

Althusser argued in "Ideology and the State" that there is no purely denotative place for the subject outside ideology, as ideology itself interpellates us all as subjects.<sup>160</sup> In the language of the *Document*, such

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<sup>159</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," *The Language and Self*, p. 63.

<sup>160</sup> The famous example Althusser gives as a model of interpellation is the "hailing" that a person recognizes as directed at him or her. He states: "...ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by the very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey you there!' When the person hailed turns around, he becomes a subject because he recognizes "that it was really him who was hailed." The person to whom the hail was directed receives it through ideological collusion: in the case of the police hailing, which Althusser cites, the person recognizes that he is the *subject* of a pursuit - he is a 'suspect'

interpellation occurs for the mother upon returning from the hospital, instructions on post-natal care or the doctor's written schedules for proper breast feeding in hand.<sup>161</sup> The child's interpellation, in turn, occurs continually through the mother's responses to his acquisition of language: "You're not a baby, but a grown up boy." Althusser's assertion that "you and I are always already subjects, and as such constantly practice rituals of ideological recognition which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and irreplaceable subjects,"<sup>162</sup> is demonstrated in the *Document* by a 'real time' narrative that charts the reciprocal mother-child dynamic of interpellation.

However, the *Document* also demonstrated the tenuous nature of such "concrete" and "distinguishable" subjectivities, mediated as they are by the irrational

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within what he calls the "state apparatus." However, the construction of the subject through ideology is not unilateral, but chiasmatic. There is no subject formation outside the ideological category of the subject. Which is to say, ideology has "no outside (for itself)," but simultaneously, it "is nothing but outside (for science and reality)." He thus concludes that "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects," but it is the (multifarious) category of subject that constitutes ideology. *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 173-174.  
<sup>161</sup> Dr. Spock's books on child care, well circulated in the seventies, are a perfect discursive example of the Althusserian "hey you."

impulses of the unconscious. Indeed a firmly sutured "I" and "you," wherein the referent "I" (safe from an incoherent aphasic state) corresponds to the one who utters it, begins to unravel as the *Document* unfolds. The *Document* thus 'thinks through' what threatens to exceed grounded ideological structures of subjectivity - which nonetheless serve to reaffirm them - vis-à-vis a number of psychoanalytic discourses, many of which were first translated and published (or commonly cited) in the British film journal *Screen*.

Of great import to the production of feminist film discourse used to explain the *Document* through out the eighties was *Screen's* "Dossier on Suture," published in 1978, itself the final product of the journal's assimilation of psychoanalytic discourse through out the early to mid seventies. Published the same year as the *Document's* completion, this dossier on suture (like the *Document* itself) was characterized by a particular need for psychoanalysis to help interrogate "sexuality in the field

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<sup>162</sup> Althusser, p. 172.

of vision" - to use Jacqueline Rose's phrase.<sup>163</sup> Thus, Rose's translation of Jacques Alain Miller's essay "La Suture (éléments de la logique du signifiant)"<sup>164</sup> underwent a subsequent conceptual translation as well, one that was useful for specific considerations of ideology; the "classic realist" text; point-of-view; suture; theories of the look; psychoanalysis; subjectivity and gender.<sup>165</sup> To begin a consideration of *Screen's* use of psychoanalysis as a critical tool for investigating the "Screen-spectator" relationship in film (keeping in mind the *Document's* parallel engagement in this debate), I thus begin at the "end" of the story - that is, with *Screen's* translation and re-publication of Miller's seminal essay on suture.

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<sup>163</sup> This is the title of her essay for the New Museum's *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* exhibition catalogue, and later for her anthology of essays. I will return to the *Difference* show and Rose's text in the next chapter.

<sup>164</sup> Originally published in French in *Cahiers pour L'analyse* (no. 1, 1966).

## ***Translating the Concept of "Suture"***

*Just as manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original - not so much from its life as from its afterlife.<sup>166</sup>*

- Walter Benjamin

Miller's suture essay was originally delivered on February 24, 1965 to Lacan's Seminar XIII on "The Object of Psychoanalysis." This seminar, conducted one year following the renowned Seminar XI,<sup>167</sup> continued Lacan's investigation of the gaze in relation to what he called the *objet a* - the object cause of a subject's desire. Without giving an explication of this seminar - which isn't possible in the scope of this chapter - it is nonetheless

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<sup>165</sup> These are the subject headings used by the editors of *Screen* to define the journal's focused application of psychoanalysis. See: *The Sexed Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>166</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), p. 71.

<sup>167</sup> Later transcribed and edited by Jacques Alain Miller as *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, published in 1973.

important to note that Lacan was addressing the register of the Real (that *non-representable* topography tied as in a Borromean knot to the Symbolic and Imaginary registers through which the subject is constructed and from which the *objet a* falls). Due to the impossibility of "representing" the Real, as well as to Lacan's interest in presenting psychoanalysis as a science, algorithms and logic by Gottlob Frege were relied upon to illustrate his investigation of the scopic drive.<sup>168</sup> It was in this context that Miller mathematically theorized the concept of suture in relation to an *non-representable* "lack" - one that constitutes the subject in as much as the subject constitutes lack.

According to Miller, the logic of the signifier is suture, which "names the relation of the subject to the

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<sup>168</sup> This is an instance of a psychoanalytic *miming* of rationalism that characterized Miller's interpretations of Lacanian theory. Miller was a philosophy major at the Ecole normale supérieure. His interpretations broke with earlier surrealist (Kojevian) tendencies in Lacan's texts, favoring instead the structuralist underpinnings (Jakobson, Benveniste, and Saussure). While this reduction of Lacan's principles had the benefit of more widely disseminating the work, it simultaneously closed down many of its complexities. As Elisabeth Roudinesco has put it, "Lacan's gradually evolved concepts, detached from their history and striped of the ambivalence that had been their strength, were now classified, labeled tidied up, sanitized, and above all cleansed of their polysemic complexity. In a way they were all

chain of its discourse." <sup>169</sup> The subject itself may be that which is lacking, but its lack exists in the form of a "stand-in." This he explains through Frege's argument about the zero, one, and its successor made in *The Foundations of Arithmetic*. Frege's premise is that every number is defined by its predecessor, such that the infinite set of numbers is reduced "to the number one and increase by one, [such that] every one of the infinitely numeral formulae can be proved from a few general propositions."<sup>170</sup>

Miller states that what is logically specific to Frege's system, "is that each concept [for instance the notion of "nothing"] is only defined and exists solely through the relation which it maintains as subsumer with that which it subsumes."<sup>171</sup> At the same time, Miller continues, the object [in this case the actual instance of nothing] exists only by falling under the concept [the

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ready to be put into a school textbook." Jacques Lacan, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 305.

<sup>169</sup> Jacques Alain Miller, "Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier)," trans. Jacqueline Rose, *Screen* vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter 1977/78), p. 27.

<sup>170</sup> Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), p. 8e.

<sup>171</sup> Miller, p. 27.

marker "zero"]. In this way, the object "takes its meaning from its difference to the thing integrated, by its spatio-temporal localization, to the real."<sup>172</sup> From the zero (nothing) to the "zero" (number), a lack is rendered visible, the non-conceptual is conceptualized, but only by producing an object "not-identical-with-itself." As such, Miller, concludes, "the zero, understood as a number which assigns to the subsuming concept the lack of an object, is as such a thing - the first non-real thing in thought."<sup>173</sup>

What we have here is the impossibility of redoubling an object, which is where Miller begins to work across Frege's text. This he demonstrates by putting to use Lacan's notion of the sliding signifier, derived in the essay "The Agency of the Letter,"<sup>174</sup> whereby every signifier becomes subsumed within a chain of discourse as a new signified for another signifier. In this manner, the number zero constructs a concept: 0 counts as 1. This is because the number zero subsumes nothing but a blank, meaning that

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>174</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," was first delivered on May 9, 1957 at the Sorbonne for philosophy students. It was subsequently collected in *Ecrits*,

it subsumes as its sole object the number zero. In this way the number that assigns zero - gives it reason, appoints it to its post - is 1, making 0 its new signified. As with all language, any given signifier within the chain of whole numbers thus never has the last word. Which is to say, that the signifier "0" through its suture into the chain of whole numbers, retroactively makes it itself that which it is not. In other words, "0" which itself isn't a whole number, but an integer, through the flow of signification conceptually gets subsumed within the set of whole numbers by proxy. "The emergence of lack as 0, and of 0 as 1 determines the appearance of the successor," Miller explains. "Let there be  $n$ : the lack is fixed as 0 which is fixed as 1:  $n + 1$ ; which is added in order to give  $n'$  - which absorbs the 1."<sup>175</sup>

Miller then proceeds to argue this directly in the terms of Lacan's "Agency" essay: along the axes of metonymy and metaphor. If the flow of signification is therefore facilitated by the metonymic displacement of lack along a

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published in French in 1966 and later in English by W.W. Norton in 1977, the same year Miller's article was translated by Screen.

<sup>175</sup> Miller, p. 31.

horizontal axis, each number, beginning with 1, is a primary symbol of the "emergence of lack in the field of truth, and the sign + indicates the crossing, the transgression through which the 0 lack comes to be represented as 1."<sup>176</sup> Through this difference of  $n$  to  $n'$  the name of a number is produced. Thus, the metonymic series of "whole numbers" begins with zero's metaphor: the integer "0". But this metaphor is only the "standing-in-place" that sutures the absence of absolute nothing. This standing-in-place continues to move down the chain of numbers, producing an impossible object of representation: the integer (in case of "0") which is not-identical-to-itself (when read retroactively as a whole number). Miller likens this paradox to the subject:

*The impossible object, which the discourse of logic summons as the not-identical with itself and then rejects as the pure negative, which it summons and rejects in order to constitute itself as that which it is, which it summons and rejects wanting to know*

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

*nothing of it, We name this object, in so far as it functions as the excess which operates in the series of numbers, the subject.*<sup>177</sup>

Thus the subject's exclusion from the discourse with which it is paradoxically bound up is what Miller ultimately calls suture. It is precisely in this way that Miller's notion of suture differs from the normative definition. For rather than a "suturing" that *mends* a wound Miller's concept of it *initiates* one.

Since his Seminar X on anxiety, Lacan had been focusing on how the register of the Real (the field of the non-representable) works toward the production (or suturing) of the subject and how the *objet a* (conceived as an algebraic function) is its "tell." This Lacan took up further in his Seminar XI where he discussed the place of the Real as stretching from trauma to phantasy, both of which serve to suture the subject, driven as it is by lack:

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

*Phantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary, something determinant in the function of repetition. This indeed, explains both the ambiguity of the function of awakening and of the function of the real in this awakening. The real may be represented by accident, the noise, the small element of reality, which is evidence that we are not dreaming. But on the other hand, this reality is not so small, for what wakes us is the other reality hidden behind the lack of that which takes the place of representation; the Treib [drive].<sup>178</sup>*

This "accident," or "tuche" as Lacan called it, is thus a missed encounter with the Real, existing somewhere between waking and sleeping. However, determined as it is by the subject's drive - which unlike the instinct necessarily misses its aim - the missed encounter structures the subject's conscious "reality" in absentia. This missing element (in Freudian terms, the "vorstellung" or "idea") is

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<sup>178</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 60.

situated within the Real and thus perpetuates a lack in the Symbolic (or field of representation). In a fundamental way this lack exists at the level of a lost object, one that never really existed but which is retroactively constructed by means of the subject having conceived it as "lost." Through phantasy, this "lost object" takes the form of an *objet a*, that unobtainable object cause of desire, the thing that both constructs the subject as sutured "lack" while simultaneously driving the subject's desire to get it back so he can be "whole."

This is what Miller was trying to demonstrate through a Lacanian reconsideration of Frege's mathematical logic. The signifier (or subject) is that logically impossible object, the not-identical-with-itself, that summons pure negation only to reject it in order to constitute itself. Thus he concludes that when Lacan posits the sign as that which represents something for someone - the signifier that represents the subject for another signifier - he is stressing that "in so far as the signifying chain is concerned, it is on the level of its *effects* and not its cause that *consciousness* is to be situated." [my emphasis]

In this way, the "insertion of the subject into the signifying chain is representation, necessarily correlative to an exclusion which is a vanishing."<sup>179</sup>

Thus, if the phantasmatically lost object is central to Miller's notion of suture, the signifier can then be read indexically as that which indicates something absent, but by rendering this absence as retroactively present the signifier is directly motivated by the so-called lost object. What is paradoxical about this index, as a type of imprint of the *non-representable* Real upon the Symbolic, is that it isn't a representation of the Real. Rather it is a sign that the Real can never present itself. Which is to say, the signifier (derived in part from the Real) can never present itself as a self-identical-object. We can picture this through the index of erasure; if I run my finger vertically across a horizontally drawn chalk line, I must first remove my finger to see it as present via the erasure it effects on the line. However, in Lacanian terms, the "finger" as lost object, is only *phantasmatically* produced through the slippage of

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<sup>179</sup> Miller, p. 33.

signifiers that are never identical to themselves: "0" standing for nothing, 1 standing for 0, and so forth, the movement of which constitutes, that is, *drives* a subject. In my example, the desire to get the lost object back, to actually "see" it, would paradoxically require the reinsertion of my finger in the place of erasure thus destroying its representation. And, as Lacan pointed out in Seminar XI, it is representation as phantasy or screen that conceals something primary - the perceived lost object in the space of an unrepresentable Real - that sustains the subject. Hence to obtain that object is the subject's death.

In the same issue of *Screen*, the editors translated Jean-Pierre Oudart's article "Cinema and Suture,"<sup>180</sup> in which the notion of suture is applied to a study of the visual field. If Miller interprets suture through the signifiers 0 and 1, Oudart does so analogously through the strategy of shot and reverse-shot ubiquitously employed in film. Every filmic field, Oudart asserts, is answered by an absent one, which is the place of a character that the viewer puts

there through his imagination. Very simply, the shot stands in for the absent one - my point-of-vision in the place of the absent character - followed by a reverse shot that presents the seeing character. Oudart summarizes the suturing dynamic this way:

*As a result, the field of absence becomes the field of the Imaginary of the filmic space, formed by the two fields, the absent one and the present one; the signifier is echoed in that field and retroactively anchors itself in the filmic field.<sup>181</sup>*

An exchange, therefore, takes place between the two fields at which point a signified appears. The signified is the character's location within the Imaginary space of the filmic field, and by identificatory extension my position is located at that same point.

Like Miller, Oudart sees suture as a type of placeholder for a subject grounded upon absence. In doing

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<sup>180</sup> Oudart's essay was originally published in *Cahiers du Cinema*, no. 211 and 212 (April/May, 1969).

so, suture retroactively defines the contradictory fields of absence and Imaginary presence, decentering the subject along such vectors. Seen through the metaphor of watching a film, such decentering occurs between the first two shots. In shot one the spectator posits the signifying object (the absent field literalized by a shot of an empty landscape, for instance) as the signifier of the absent person, placing him outside as well. As the spectator enters into the film in shot two and locates his position by the reverse shot (literalized as a shot of a person *looking* at the empty landscape), he subsequently loses himself (is subsumed in Miller's terms) into the discursive field of the film.

The terms Oudart uses to describe this operation are Lacanian; suture is the representation of that which designates the relationship of the subject to the chain of its discourses. This representation slides under the signifying aggregate though it is burdened by a lack. This lack is that of someone - an absent one - that abolishes itself "so that someone representing the next link in the

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<sup>181</sup> Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," *Screen* vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter

chain (and anticipating the next filmic segment) can come forth."<sup>182</sup> For Miller, however, suture was a device to describe the subject's relation to a Real that drives him, a Real outside representation that paradoxically demands a representative stand-in to assure its absence. For Oudart, however, suture is conceived in filmic terms that describe the subject's Imaginary *identification* with Lacan's "screen" or Miller's "stand-in." Thus while suture is a paradoxical entity in Miller's text, in Oudart's it ultimately places the subject *into* position. That is to say, Oudart is concerned with suture's *effect*, which for Lacan is the register of consciousness or a *representable* "reality," whereas Miller was concerned with suture's *cause*, which for Lacan is the register of the unconscious and by extension an *unrepresentable* "Real."

Stephen Heath's article "Notes on Suture" (within the same dossier) explicates suture within such filmic terms. This he does by reiterating Oudart's steps of identificatory suture within the convention of shot/reverse shot. Step one: the subject experiences a pure jubilation

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1977/78), p. 37.

in the image as a spectacle. This primal moment is one untroubled by screen and frame. Step two: the screen's presence breaks the spectator's imaginary plenitude by giving the image limits. In doing so, a "beyond" is posited but one I can't see. This cutting off operates on the level of lack, ever present, as the film proceeds shot to shot. Suture happens when this absence is filled by someone (in Miller's terms, this would be the "0" counting as "1"). In other words, a character in the film comes to take the place of this absent one posed by the spectator. In accordance with Oudart, Heath asserts that shot one would be the open field, shot two would be the person from whose perspective this is seen.

Heath warns, however, that Oudart's reading of cinematic suture in Imaginary terms that allude to Lacan's notion of a pre-linguistic mirror stage<sup>183</sup> is problematic as

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>183</sup> In "The mirror stage as formative of the 'I' as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," Lacan describes the process whereby the infant comes to recognize himself in the mirror between the ages of 6 - 18 months. It is this moment that instigates the transformation of the subject as he assumes an image - his own imago - in a jubilant moment. As he can yet walk or stand, the ability to hold his upright position through his gaze provides a moment of perceived mastery. But as this imago is incorporated from an *exteriorization* of himself, narcissistic identification is always already encoded with alienation. Moreover, the

the spectator is already in the process of *reading* the film. That is, the spectator - though taken by an image - is already subsumed within language, having long evolved from the primordial state of pure eidetic identification. He thus argues against Oudart that:

*Cinema is not the mirror-phase...the moment of the image Oudart stresses is not 'before' but 'after' the symbolic, is much more the dispersion of the subject-ego than the anticipation of its mastery...What is in question is a complex and multiple play of symbolic and imaginary, the production of the spectator as subject in film in that play: it is not the spectator's imaginary...which sutures discourse;*

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agency of the ego (unlike Freud's notion) is forever situated in a fictional direction: this agency "will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather [it] will always rejoin the coming-into-being of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as 'I' his discordance with his own reality." (*Ecrits*, p. 2) Conventionally, the mirror stage has been interpreted as the definitive moment of the Imaginary register because the subject's ego develops dialectically with his own imago. However as this incorporated imago is already given as an exterior discovery, it also provides the first instance of any conceptualization of the positions "you" and "I". I would argue, then, that the Mirror Stage simultaneously demonstrates the threshold between the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. Lacan, of course, was very careful not to disconnect these two, hence his use later of the Borromean knot to represent their interconnection.

*rather, the suturing function includes the spectator as part of an imaginary production.*<sup>184</sup>

Heath's emphasis on the spectator's role in an imaginary production, of course, echoes Althusser's argument regarding the subject's ideological interpellation (reliant as it is upon a primary miscognition).

After iterating Althusser's concept of interpellation (see footnote 160), Heath reads across Althusser's text asserting that while a theory of suture needs to account for the subject's ideological construction (which Oudart omits), in doing so the unconscious can't be reduced merely to the ideological. This recalls Mitchell's critique of feminists and psychoanalysts that over-determined the reality principle, which I discussed in the previous chapter. For the subject, Heath asserts, is a divided one - between Imaginary and Symbolic registers (self/Other, conscious/unconscious) - making the subject's history one in which the ideological may constantly be in play, but this play is one of continual process, heterogeneity, and

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<sup>184</sup> Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture," *Screen* vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter

intersection of contradictory ideological positions. For Heath, a theory of suture must ultimately not begin with the subject (his imaginary position vis-à-vis the filmic field), but with an account of the construction of meaning *derived* from the subject's identification with the fictional nature of the (filmic) sign.

To recapitulate, Miller explained suture's effect as an absence being subsumed by a presence, which retroactively defines it ("nothing" as a concept filled by the signifier "0," which by proxy the signifier "1" subsumes as the first digit in the series of whole numbers). Like Oudart, Heath extends this, translating suture's effect as the moment in which a character in a film comes to take the place of the absent one posed by the spectator, which then serves to drive the narrative. However, Heath extends his analysis of suture's effect to a consideration of ideology a la Althusser. The conceptual translation of Miller's (indexically privileged) theory of suture as a metaphor to understand the subject's imaginary identificatory relation to the filmic sign was the

realization of an anglophone hybrid of psychoanalytic theory, one mediated by readings of select Brechtian, Freudian, Lacanian, and Althusserian texts. However, *Screen* went through a number of editorial phases to get there. I turn now to a consideration of *Screen's* editorial development that laid the groundwork for this psychoanalytic trajectory.

***Screen: From Ideology to Semiotics***

*Screen*, the British journal of The Society for Education in Film and Television, published its first issue in 1969 as a continuation of the journal *Screen Education*, the latter of which was founded in 1959. From the beginning *Screen* had a pedagogical function: to be used as "a reference work with occasional supplementary lists of books-in-print, 16mm films available, useful addresses for film users, announcements about courses, exhibitions, conferences and other activities."<sup>185</sup> At the same time, the journal sought to innovate critical writing on film, albeit

from a directorial perspective. This was the journal's founding editorial position. Over the period spanning 1969 - 1980, however, *Screen* underwent some theoretical evolutions. This we can break down into three critical stages: the emphasis on ideology and politics (1969-1973); the introduction to semiotics (1973-1974); and the development of a hybrid psychoanalytic model (1974-1978).<sup>186</sup>

*Screen* no. 1 was established as a forum "in which controversial areas relevant to the study of film and television can be examined and argued." Basically, the articles published over the first few years critiqued the Hollywood industry, with emphasis placed on accessible public debate and pedagogy. For instance, Jim Hillier's essay on Arthur Penn's films - *The Left-Handed Gun*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *The Miracle Worker*, - addressed the

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<sup>185</sup> Founding editorial statement, *Screen* vol. 10, no. 1, (January/February, 1969), p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> *Screen* has published three readers that loosely align with this chronology and emphasis: *Cinema/Ideology/Politics* (1977), *Cinema and Semiotics* (1981), and *The Sexual Subject* (1992). While I borrow their time frame for the first two stages of critical development, I narrow the third to the period spanning 1974-1978 when the British psychoanalytic model was being developed. *The Sexual Subject*, being a reader, naturally accounts for the advanced institutionalization and application of this hybrid in the eighties by including articles that extend Lacanian theory to a consideration of homosexuality, masculinity, and the post-colonial subject. That, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

"American myth of violence."<sup>187</sup> In a subsequent issue, Margaret Tarratt's review of *Rosemary's Baby* explicates how "the structure and values of American society fall under Roman Polanski's scrutiny." No mention as yet is made of feminism or women-as-sign. Rather, the question of "moral vision" is emphasized in comparisons to other films containing women protagonists such as Federico Fellini's *Giulietta of the Spirits* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*.<sup>188</sup> By the fourth issue, sociology and Cinema are taken up by Paul Filmer who discusses John Frankenheimer's films - *All Fall Down*, *Bird Man of Alcatraz*, and *The Manchurian Candidate* - in relation to the macabre. Here Freud's notion of infantile sexuality is evoked sociologically in an analysis of our "inadequate socialization" via our "inadequate internalization of the normatively accepted social values."<sup>189</sup> Other issues of this period were dedicated to the psychological and social effects of "censorship and violence" (vol. 11, no. 3, 1970) or the

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<sup>187</sup> Jim Hillier, "Arthur Penn," *Screen*, vol. 10, no. 1, (January/February, 1969).

<sup>188</sup> Margaret Tarratt, "Rosemary's Baby," *Screen*, vol. 10, no. 2 (March/April, 1969).

<sup>189</sup> Paul Filmer, "Three Frankenheimer Films: A Sociological Approach," *Screen*, vol. 10, no. 4/5 (July/October, 1969), p. 161.

possibility of teaching disadvantaged children to write by teaching "visual literacy" (vol. 11, no. 6, 1970). By 1971, the issues became culturally and historically more topical. Special issues were dedicated to the work of German filmmaker Douglas Sirk (vol. 12 no. 2, 1971); the Soviet Avant-garde (vol. 12, no. 4 1971/2); and British Cinema (vol. 13, no. 2, 72).

In 1973 *Screen* began to shift its focus, engaging directly with the work of Christian Metz, which the editors had encountered through their educational project. The goal was to make 'film studies' a self-sufficient academic discipline separate from film production, and semiotics appeared to be the best methodological tool to analyze how meaning was structured in the production of film.<sup>190</sup> This interest in semiology - looking at the signifying field of film - relied heavily on Metz's interpretations of the structuralist and post-structuralist writings coming from France following the theoretical epistemic shift initiated

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<sup>190</sup> Additional semiotic influences originated from the British Magazines *Afterimage* and *Cinema*, Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meanings in Cinema*, and recent translations of Althusser's *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, and Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* and *Elements of Semiology*. For a thorough consideration of the articles published by *Screen* during this period

by the student uprisings of 1968. Thus it was through a consideration of Metz's theory of "cinesemiotics" that the readers of *Screen* were first introduced to various concepts of the sign. Specifically, the journal considered semiotic theories - put forth by Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Jan Mukarovsky, Roland Barthes, and Louis Hjelmslev - and translated them to an analysis of the cinematic sign via Metz's work.

*Screen's* new focus on semiotics marked an abrupt editorial challenge to the journal's previous sociological approach. Their special double issue, entitled *Cinema Semiotics and the Work of Christian Metz*,<sup>191</sup> translated Metz's "Current Problems in Film Theory," and "Methodological Propositions for the Analysis of Film" in the form of a manifesto, followed by challenges and interpretations by Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, Stephen

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see: Mick Eaton and Steve Neale, eds., *Cinema and Semiotics*, (London: The Society for Education in Film, 1981).

<sup>191</sup> *Screen*, vol. 14, no 1/2, (Spring/Summer, 1973). This issue also presented a glossary of Metz's semiological terms compiled by Stephen Heath and an annotated bibliography of international theoreticians and linguists including Louis Althusser, Emile Benveniste, Ernst Cassirer, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Louis Hjelmslev, Roman Jakobson, Julia Kristeva, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Phillippe Sollers compiled by Paul Willemen. The presentational mode (who was selected and how they were

Heath, and Michel Cegarra. The editors' aim was to analyze what remained outside previous considerations of film both within the pages of *Screen* and (more polemically) Andre Bazin's journal *Cahiers du Cinema*. That is, a theory of semiotics put towards an investigation of the "theoretical framework for any examination/description of film texts."<sup>192</sup> Bazin's position on cinema was one of ontological realism; the long take and deep focus and editing within the frame being de rigueur. Metz et. al. thus took up the structuralist use of montage, fragmentation, and construction indicative of Eisenstein's work - what Bazin thought to be "anti-cinema" - as a means to focus on cinema as a sign rather than a filmic, narrative re-presentation of reality.

This was contemporaneous with *Screen's* interest in the structuralist and avant-garde films of Godard, Vertov, Eisenstein, Straub/Huillet, Oshima, and Mulvey/Wollen. Accordingly, the articles written in subsequent issues (1973-1974) interrogated ontological notions of authorship

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synopsized) is interesting, given that this was the formative stage of *Screen's* semiotically informed film theory.

<sup>192</sup> "Editorial," *ibid.*, p. 3.

and intention; the gap between the "empirical, identifiable, interviewable author and the statements and structures of meaning produced by auteurist analyses of that author's films" was emphasized.<sup>193</sup> Departing from a singular ideological reading of films defined by the author's intent, the author-as-sign itself was now interrogated. Viewed as neither a coherent entity nor a conscious personality, the author no longer was seen as the originator of a vision translated (on a one-to-one basis) to the filmic image. Instead, the distinction between the directorial space of intent and the structure of meaning, continually produced via the film's spectator, was emphasized. This position was anticipated a year earlier by Paul Willemen's reconsideration of Sirk's films. In "Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System" *Screen's* previous analysis of Sirk's 'world view' was supplanted by Willemen's study of Sirk's filmic contradictions, which he termed the "subversion from within."<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *Semiotics and Cinema*, p. xiii.

<sup>194</sup> Paul Willemen, "Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System," *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Winter, 1972/73).

For *Screen*, perhaps the single most important aspect of Metz's writings was his rejection of an "impressionist" form of film criticism, indicative of Bazin's practice. Put simply this impressionist mode of analysis posits "form" (cinematic technique) as distinct from "content" (the social referent). Metz argues that from such an analysis "what comes into the category of 'the cinematic' is form and form alone, while 'content' is simply something recruited by the film in the way that it might be a play or a novel."<sup>195</sup> Bazin thus ignores the manner in which a film produces (ideological) meaning vis-à-vis its presumed ability to offer an unmediated re-presentation of reality. Stephen Heath's first article for *Screen* - a reprint of a piece originally written in 1970 as an introduction to the semiology of film with a specific emphasis on Metz's work - cites Pasolini's account of cinema's inherent realism to demonstrate Bazin's impressionist position. In this passage, a tree - ironically the referent for Saussure's explication of the sign - is forever, tautologically, self referential within film:

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<sup>195</sup> Metz, "Methodological Propositions," p. 91.

*...cinema...expresses reality not through symbols but via reality itself; if I want to express that tree I express it through itself. The cinema is a language which expresses reality with reality. So the question is: what is the difference between the cinema and reality? Practically none. ...when I make a film I am always in reality, among the trees and among people...there is no symbolic or convention filter between me and reality, as there is literature.*<sup>196</sup>

Semiotics, of course, refused such stable and fixed meanings. For according to Metz, since what we see on the screen is really a double - a presence standing in for what is absent - every film is therefore a fiction film. Heath applies this semiotic to an account of what *ideological* meanings are therefore produced by film. Combining Saussure's notion of the sign with the Althusserian-Marxist assertion that reality is a social production, cinema's

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<sup>196</sup> *Pasolini on Pasolini* ed. Oswald Stack, (London: 1969), quoted in Stephen Heath's "Film/Cinetext/Text," *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Winter, 1972/73).

"realism" was thus to be understood *not* as mirror of reality but "in relation to the representation of 'reality' a particular society proposes and assumes." Paraphrasing Althusser, Heath explains such 'reality' as:

*...that 'complex formation of montages of notions - representations - images on the one hand, and of montages of modes of behavior and conduct-attitudes-gestures on the other. The whole functions as practical norms which govern the attitude and the concrete stance of men with regard to the real objects and real problems of their social and individual existence, and of their history.'*<sup>197</sup>

Reading cinema as a text, however, was still problematic because of the difference between film's image-sign and literature's word-sign. For even Metz understood the film's image-sign as a complete utterance, rather than a *moneme* as is the case with the word-sign. That is, as Heath puts it, even the simple close-up of a pistol

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

produces the utterance 'here is a gun.' It was thus possible to see cinema as a mere recording device, one that captured ontological utterances, against the literary craft, which combines singular units within syntax to *construct* an utterance. However, with theoretical support from Umberto Eco, who stresses the "process of conventionalisation and codification underlying the 'natural' fact of the image," and Roland Barthes' theorization of the connotative nature of the image-sign, Heath concludes that a semiotic read of film posits the image-sign as a "minimum unit" in the production of meaning. The production of meaning in film, therefore, began at the level of the diachronic combination of these minimum units within both montage and narrative strategies, just as the word-sign functions within syntax.<sup>198</sup>

Hence, what *Screen* sought to engender, through a presentation of semiotic's basic tenets, mediated by Heath and other's translations and challenges, was a model for the "rigorous analysis of a filmic corpus," as Metz put it. It was a model that contrived to read film as a text, while

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

recognizing the medium's iconic specificity. From this groundwork, the journal's subsequent interest in Brechtian anti-realist strategies was further developed in tandem with a psychoanalytic approach. Again, Heath's translation was central.

Perhaps Heath's article "Lessons from Brecht" made the biggest conceptual leap between discursive fields hitherto seen in the pages of *Screen*. It would nevertheless prove formative in the journal's future use of fetishism, voyeurism, castration complex, and Lacan's mirror stage as metaphors for the filmic production of meaning.

### ***Separation/Distanciation/Fetish: A Psychoanalytic Hybrid***

Within the Brechtian method the concept of "separation," as that classic Aristotelian mode of theatre, comes to the fore. Separation was a model that Brecht obviously opposed, associating its illusionistic character with reactionary petty-bourgeois morality. As Peter Brooker explains it, Brecht's declaration of drama's own artifice - the use of a spare stage, white lighting, half

curtain, emblematic props, acting style, etc. - contributed to a dialectic wielded against the organically fused work of art. In such "Epic" theatre, the narrative function was made explicit, refusing linear development in favor of episodic jumps and starts. By doing so, the contradictions within one's reality might be exposed alongside the ideological workings that construct such reality.<sup>199</sup> In classic theatre, the viewer isn't made aware of the drama's artifice, separated as he is from any consciousness of what is being produced. Rather, the viewer is lulled into an identification with - in Brechtian terms - a bourgeois presentation of society as natural and real, not ideological and contradictory. Against identificatory separation, Brecht tried to bring the viewer into the production paradoxically by placing him in a position of dis-identification. In this way the viewer was encouraged to refuse the drama as a linear re-presentation of "reality." Instead, it was believed, he would enter the

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<sup>199</sup> Peter Brooker, "Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre," collected in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 189.

production through active reflection of its disjunctive components.

Heath's explication of separation in "Lessons from Brecht," however, begins with the assertion that the classic 'Aristotelian' mode of theatrical representation - the same model used in classic cinema - is structured around the fetish.<sup>200</sup> Relying on the Freudian definition of the fetish, Heath analogizes that a film's spectator is produced in a position of separation from which his imaginary coherence is guaranteed. However, the condition of such coherence is the subject's ignorance of "the structure of his production, of his setting in position."<sup>201</sup> This "position" in psychoanalytic terms is the subject's

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<sup>200</sup> In his essay "Fetishism" of 1927, Freud describes the fetish as "a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego." This denial is based upon the boy's narcissistic fears that if the mother's penis can be castrated than so can his. Fetishism is thus the compromise made between not wanting to know the woman lacks a phallus, all the while knowing such is true. Freud explains, "In the world of psychic reality the woman still has a penis in spite of it all, but this penis is no longer the same as it once was. Something else has taken its place." This something is the fetish - both a "triumph over the threat of castration," and a "safeguard against it." Since Freud's founding example of the fetish was the case of a young man aroused by a 'shine on the nose,' (*glanz auf der Nase*), shiny surfaces have held a privileged - perhaps over-determined - status in contemporary critical applications of the fetish, which I will come to momentarily. See: Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, vol. 5 (NY: Basic Books, 1959), p. 199.

(masculine) suture into the privileged site of phallic plenitude, defined, as it were, in relation to the threat of castration. The fetish allows the subject to deny this threat, while still securing the subject's position or identity. Thus, the fetish is more than an object; it is a structure of identification. This Heath argues is precisely the same structure of identification operative within classic cinema:

*If we look closely at Freud's exemplary case, we can see that it is truly most extraordinary, providing as it does in the play on glance/Glanz a little résumé of the fetishistic effect. The fetish is indeed a brilliance, something lit up, heightened, depicted, as under an arc light, a point of (theatrical) representation; hence the glance: the subject is installed (as at the theatre or at the movies) for the representation...[I]dentity in separation, the very geometry of representation.<sup>202</sup>*

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<sup>201</sup> Stephen Heath, "Lessons from Brecht," *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1974), p. 106.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

The photograph, the image-unit of film, seems to sustain this fetishistic structure. It similarly places the subject in a relation of specularity - the glance - affording him a separate space of disavowal from which his pleasure stems. This separation can be summed up thusly: I know this exists, but I am outside this existence.<sup>203</sup>

Heath's conclusion was twofold: first, that one of the key battles in cinema is fighting fetishism, and second that this fetishistic, fixed position of "separation-representation-speculation" was what Brecht's distanciation

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<sup>203</sup> The "anterior-present" nature of the photograph that secures the viewer's comfortable distance would be theorized quite to the contrary six years later by Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, which posited an "anterior-future." Written as a treatise on photography's "essence," Barthes' explores the manner in which the viewer's safe separation in front of many photographs is elided. This is due to the fact that photographs are all indices of something "that-has-been." On occasion, this provides, for Barthes', an encounter with a *unrepresentable* Real (in Lacan's terms). He offers a photograph from 1965 of a young Lewis Payne who had tried to assassinate Secretary of State W.H. Seward. He is photographed in his cell waiting to be hanged. But something strikes out from the photograph, a *punctum*, as he calls it. It is the sudden realization that *he is going to die*. Barthes' writes "I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose, the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence." Written in 1980, *Camera Lucida* was informed by Lacan's writings on the Real - beginning with Seminar XI - rather than by the anglophone hybrid, which I am in the process of explicating. I mention the Barthes here as a point of contemporaneous divergence on viewing the photograph within a

sought to undermine. It was thus to breaking down the dynamic of separation that distanciation repositioned the spectator in a critical perspective. The difference between Brecht and Screen's explication of distanciation was Heath's psychoanalytic introduction of the woman-as-sign and her concomitant ideological formation as constituting both the means and the ends of a spectator's fetishistic separation from the filmic image.

The woman's ideological formation was the concern of Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" essay published in 1975. However, at the time, her essay would also have been read inter-textually with Metz's "Imaginary Signifier," published in the previous issue as an introduction to reading film from a Lacanian perspective. Metz sees film as a technique of the Imaginary, involving as it does photography, fictional narrative and a lure of the ego. If Heath analogized the fetish to the cinema, Metz does the same with Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. His essay thus begins with an extraordinary passage establishing the topology of cinema's viewing space in

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psychoanalytic paradigm. See: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans.

Lacanian terms that would subsequently be cited and reiterated in voluminous texts on film criticism over the following decades. He states that film is a technique of the imaginary,

*...in the Lacanian sense, in which the imaginary, opposed to the symbolic but constantly imbricated with it, designates the basic lure of the ego, the definitive imprint of a before the Oedipus complex (which also continues after it), the durable mark of the mirror which alienates man in his own reflection and makes him the double of his double, the subterranean persistence of the exclusive relation to the mother, desire as pure effect of lack and endless pursuit, the initial core of the unconscious (primal repression). All this is undoubtedly reactivated by the actions of that other mirror, the cinema Screen, in this respect a veritable psychical substitute, a prosthesis for our primally dislocated limbs.* <sup>204</sup>

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Richard Howard, (NY: Hill and Wang, 1981).

<sup>204</sup> Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 2, (Summer, 1975), p. 15.

Metz, then, sees a one-to-one correspondence between the spectator's relation to the cinema *Screen* and the infant's relation to the mirror: both are formative of a subjectivity based upon identification with an image more perfect (and exterior) to ourselves. But in as much as the screen recalls the mirror by affording identification, Metz points out its difference from Lacan's mirror, in front of which the infant pulls himself up to jubilantly exclaim "ah!" at his own image. In film, it is not our image, but a projection of ourselves into the point of view identified with the camera and then onto a character's image. In Lacan's terms this is the quintessential moment within the Imaginary register where 'my representations belong to me.' But this embodied, spatial vision, I would argue, is one that relates to the "eye" and not the "gaze."

Metz lifts heavily from Lacan's Seminar XI, in which Lacan's theory of the gaze is developed. Metz understands Lacan's assertion that drives, distinct from instincts, can't be satisfied, functioning as they do upon lack. For instance, on the level of the oral drive, Lacan explains

that "it is the nothing, in so far as that from which the subject was weaned is no longer anything for him. In anorexia nervosa, what the child eats is nothing."<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, Metz understands that the screen-as-image would be that very thing that piques our *scopic* drive. What his text doesn't distinguish between is precisely what Lacan's Seminar did, and this is the "split between the eye and the gaze." For Lacan was careful to distinguish the gaze as that which surrounds us from birth, making us given-to-be-seen, but which doesn't actually show itself. The split between the eye and the gaze, therefore, has the effect of a failed encounter, which means the gaze is an *objet a* connected to the Real.<sup>206</sup> I will go into this in greater depth.

When I see myself seeing myself - which first happens to the subject in Lacan's mirror stage - it is an act

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<sup>205</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 104. This is my example, not Metz's.

<sup>206</sup> The *objet a* revolves around the split subject (that subject not-identical-to-itself). Lacan puts it this way: "The interest that the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it - namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name, in our algebra, is the *objet a*." *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 83.

related to the "eye."<sup>207</sup> And this "eye" that goes on to produce the "I" which is me - the *there I am* - belongs to a spatial conception of vision.<sup>208</sup> In order to assert my subjectivity - to reaffirm my subjective ground - I resist merely being a spot or a stain in a picture under a gaze that, in showing itself, lights me from all sides, thus annihilating me. For my subjectivity is annihilated when I cannot establish a geometral alignment with the world of representation, from which a Cartesian position of scopic mastery is grounded. Moreover, if the "gaze" were to be seen by the subject it wouldn't illuminate him but instead destroy him, because the gaze is the object cause of the subject's scopic drive (i.e. his desire to see and in turn be seen along these geometral trajectories). Should the

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<sup>207</sup> For Metz, the subject's eye is split not from the gaze, but in two. It is both a projection, a transcendental eye, "cast out like a search light" and a point of introjection where the world is taken in by the eye and imprinted onto the retina.

<sup>208</sup> To emphasize how Cartesian this mode of understanding vision in spatial terms is, Lacan refers to Diderot's *Letters on the Blind*, which demonstrates that the geometral space of vision can be reconstructed as well as *imagined* by a blind man. Diderot asserts in his treatise that a person wanting to theorize vision should meditate on the subject in the dark, or even "put out his eyes in order to be better acquainted in vision." Descartes' *La dioptrique* as well illustrates a blind folded man finding his way by mapping space - not sight - with the help of two sticks. Lacan, p. 86. For an extended consideration of this theorization of vision see: Jonathon Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*,

subject then "see" the gaze, he would paradoxically realize that in fact there *is* "nothing" out there beyond representation to see, like the referent for the signifier "0." Thus in order to posit the gaze, I must align myself spatially *with* it such that it disappears. What appears in its place is the perspectival "me" that looks in the mirror, seeing myself seeing myself. If there is misrecognition involved in the scopic drive, for Lacan (in Seminar XI) it is based on the denial that the gaze as an uncanny object is split from the seeing eye. Such misrecognition, of course, is necessary for the subject to resist being subsumed by the gaze like Roger Caillios's insects, which become nothing but a senseless spot in the world of images, "mottled against a mottled background."<sup>209</sup>

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*On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

<sup>209</sup> My concern here is to demonstrate that two theorizations of Lacan were occurring contemporaneously, one in England the other in France in the sixties and seventies - Metz of course being the transporter. However, rather than demonstrating how Metz or others "misread" Lacan, my intention is to show at what point they departed from Lacan (knowingly or unknowingly) and for what reason. Nevertheless, the polemic over British film theoreticians "getting Lacan wrong" has recently flourished. For such an account see: Joan Copjec's "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan," in *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994); Rosalind Krauss, *Cindy Sherman*, (NY: Rizzoli, 1993); and Hal Foster's, *The Return of the Real*.

Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" essay couldn't have been farther from a consideration of the gaze within the Real, though she did borrow Metz's metaphor of the mirror-as-screen, something that distinguishes her account from Heath's, and on another front, something for which the essay has recently come under fire.<sup>210</sup> However, it is important to note the essay's specific discursive formation, for it is even a bigger mistake to confuse Mulvey's essay as a critical read of Lacan's gaze theory than any mistake she may have made by erroneously alluding to such theory. Mulvey's interest was the ideological formation of specular politics, one that began with her account of the Women's Liberation action against the Miss World contest in 1970.<sup>211</sup> Thus, while her essay may indeed constitute the etiological site for contemporary "Male Gaze" theory - a radical re-conceptualization of Lacan's theory of the gaze - originally Mulvey's reference to the gaze was, in fact, Freudian. The confusion of her use of

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<sup>210</sup> See Krauss's *Cindy Sherman*.

<sup>211</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Why Miss World," *Shrew*, London, (December, 1970). Mulvey's article describes the action in Brechtian terms as one against passivity: "The spectacle is vulnerable. However intricately planned it is, a handful of people can disrupt it and cause chaos in a

"gaze" with Lacan's perhaps stems from the word's proximity in the article to other Lacanian concepts such as the Imaginary and Symbolic registers. For Mulvey, the word "gaze" is interchangeable with "look." This confusion was most definitely reiterated by other film theorists' appointing Mulvey as the spokesperson for "Lacanian" Male Gaze theory."<sup>212</sup>

Dissatisfied with *Screen's* failure to account for the "importance of the representation of the female form in a symbolic order," Mulvey looks at what the woman-as-sign might ideologically constitute within classic narrative cinema. She begins with the assertion that woman is constructed in life as in film: as a spectacle for and a symptom of male desire, making her the passive object of a male gaze. The construction of women as passive spectacle and man as active bearer of the look circles, for Mulvey,

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seemingly impenetrable organization. The spectacle isn't prepared for anything other than passive spectators." P. 18.

<sup>212</sup> For an American legacy of "Male Gaze," also extended to the 'straight' and 'white' gaze, see: Theresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," in *How Do I Look*, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991);

around primal castration anxiety. Thus Freud's theory of castration is recounted: castration anxiety arises from the child being made aware of genital difference which at once socializes him into paternal law.<sup>213</sup> Mulvey equates this paternal law, vis-à-vis Lacan, with the Symbolic register of speech, for which the master signifier is the emblem of difference: the phallic signifier. Consequently, man becomes the maker of meaning and woman the bearer of it. As transcendental as the phallus is the woman's signification as lack. She states:

*Woman stands in patriarchal culture as the signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and [fetishistic] obsessions through linguistic command, by imposing*

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and Bell Hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, (NY: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>213</sup> Freud explains that this "recognition" of genital difference is deferred from an earlier visual event in which the possibility of absence is verified by a castrated mother, which later serves as threat to the child's own castration. The child is thus urged to side with the paternal law that makes such a threat. Freud developed the castration complex in "On the Sexual Theories of Children," (1908); "The Infantile Genital Organization," (1923); and "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," (1924).

*them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not make of meaning.*<sup>214</sup>

For Mulvey, film thus works to constantly re-create woman as a symptom of man's castration anxiety in silencing her, but it works even harder to situate her as an eroticized fetish.

Within this configuration, Mulvey constructs the following theoretical conclusion: cinematic pleasure is therefore scopophilic and voyeuristic (Freud), taking place as it does in a dark, safe, distant, unified space (Brecht) indicative of phallic mastery (Lacan). Like Metz, this hybrid of theory pivots off Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, extended to the cinematic Screen. The cinema, Mulvey argues, satisfies our primordial wish for pleasurable looking at the human form. Like the child who (mis)recognizes himself in the mirror, the audience thus identifies with images on the screen. Moreover, the cinema has such a strong hold on our scopic drive that it lets us forget our ego, "a moment reminiscent of that pre-

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<sup>214</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," p. 7.

subjective moment of image recognition." But concurrently, "the cinema has distinguished itself in the production of ego ideals as expressed in particular in the star system, the stars centering both screen presence and screen story as they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)."

This little coda to the mirror stage, of course, recalls Guy Debord's critique of the spectacle as it relates to the commodification of leisure time beyond any authentic 'lived experience.' In such terms, if Debord was thinking of the spectacularization of our lives, Mulvey was thinking of the spectacularization of women.<sup>215</sup>

With Mulvey's text we circle back around, then, to Miller's definition of suture as it came to be developed and redefined via the filmic image, but it is one of disparate discursive parts. For Heath and Oudart, the

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<sup>215</sup> Mulvey's film collaborator, Peter Wollen, was involved with the Situationist International, thus she would have been familiar with this material. Debord argued in 1967, "The social image of the consumption of time is for its part exclusively dominated by leisure time and vacations - moments portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, at a *distance*, and as desirable by definition. This particular commodity is explicitly presented as a moment of authentic life whose cyclical return we are supposed to look forward to. Yet even in such special moments, ostensibly moments of *life*, the only thing being generated,

classic cinematic organization of suture is defined by the subject's willingness to become absent to itself by permitting a fictional character to "stand in" for it, or by allowing the director's point of view to fix what we see. Mulvey's suture, however, is further informed by (and thus takes into account): (1) Althusser's notion of interpellation applied to the chiasmatic production of meaning both within and outside the moment of viewing a film; (2) Metz's denial of an a priori "reality" separate from the circulation of signs within a film; (3) Brecht's disavowal of the spectator's passive identification (separation) vs. active contemplation of what ideological formations narrative cinema structures; and (4) a Freudian-Lacanian account of gender difference (filtered through Heath and Metz), with the assertion that sexuality is constructed in life as it is in film. This hybrid of theory came to characterize *Screen's* subsequent articles on the topic of film, which were dominated through the mid-eighties by a psychoanalytic approach that would ultimately

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the only thing to be seen and reproduced, is the spectacle." Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 112.

subsume the more purist Brechtian model of the mid-seventies.<sup>216</sup>

### **Post-Partum Document's Psychoanalytic Model**

*The role of photography in the early development of the Document was quite strategic. Initially I thought of combining found objects, like the liners, or the cleaning swabs, with the photographs. Later, between 1973 and 1976, I formalized the structure so that each section was introduced by a broader notion of what constitutes the social as discourse - a*

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<sup>216</sup> Screen's shift to a Lacanian-Freudian model had its own fall-out, however. In a letter of dissent, written by Screen editors Edward Buscombe, Christopher Gledhill, Alan Lovell, and Christopher Williams, the journal's acceptance of psychoanalysis as a science was seen as lacking "critical distance." (We should recall here that Juliet Mitchell defined it as such in *Psycho-Analysis and Feminism*). In support they recall Althusser's definition of science as (1) defining its own object; (2) having internal coherence and consistency; and (3) developing its own methods of test and proof. The editors argued that Lacan's discourse was too cryptic for film theoreticians to apply or test, this especially being the case in Heath's accounts. The complaint appeared to be one of academic standards, though the similar incorporation of Brecht, Levi-Strauss, and semiotics by these editors was left unchecked. The most compelling criticism, however, was the radically different interpretations of castration, fetishism and voyeurism by Metz, Heath, and Mulvey. At the same time, the editors' positivist *belief* in science should be noted. Soon after the authors of the letter resigned, further securing Screen's psychoanalytic trajectory. See: Ed Buscomb et. al., "Statement: Psychoanalysis and Film," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter, 1975/6).

*procedure or empirical kind of development. This was followed by a kind of revision, as it were, that referred to the psychoanalytic reading of the work.*<sup>217</sup>

- Mary Kelly.

Much has been made of the fact that *Post-Partum Document* contains no photographs - no iconic image - of the mother and/or child.<sup>218</sup> But how, then, does the *Document* relate to film or photography? Why was film the site of aesthetic investigation for Kelly, one that "entailed a more far-reaching transformation in methodology"?<sup>219</sup> Certainly, Kelly's own distrust of the photograph's effect, of the fetishistic implications of women's iconic representation, was a concern she shared with Mulvey. The two authors' projects, in fact, have been so closely associated over the past twenty-five years as to be seen as a form of interdisciplinary collaboration. But while Kelly and others, such as film scholar Peter Wollen, have

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<sup>217</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*."

<sup>218</sup> This is especially true in the context of its American reception, which I will address in the following chapter.

<sup>219</sup> "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*," *ibid.*

remarked on the diegetic<sup>220</sup> quality of the work, obviously the *Document* is not a film. Why then do people persist in speaking about it in cinematic terms? Quite simply, because the project's discursive site was conceived in such terms. However, in as much as the *Document* utilized the semiotic-psychoanalytic terms developed by film criticism, it also exceeded Heath, Mulvey and Metz's interpretations of Freud and Lacan. As such the *Document* doesn't merely derive itself from these terms, rather it debates them. I'll thus first discuss how the *Document* takes up the concepts I've reviewed, and then I'll conclude with the *Document's* augmentation of them.

In 1972, many feminist art projects were engaged with what Mitchell has called the "reality principle" of women's experience.<sup>221</sup> This was consistent with Bazin's claim of film's "ontological realism" - that is, "the what you see is what you get" approach to the image. Judy Chicago's *Womanhouse* would be the quintessential instance of this strategy within art production. *Womanhouse* was designed as

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<sup>220</sup> The term for the spatial unfolding of narrative in film.

<sup>221</sup> See my discussion of Mitchell's *Psycho-Analysis and Feminism* in chapter three.

the final art project collaboratively produced by Miriam Schapiro and Chicago, along with their students from the Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts. It was aimed to "help women restructure their personalities to be more consistent with their desires to be artists and to help them build their art-making out of their experience as women."<sup>222</sup> Thus, Faith Wilding's *Womb Room* (fig. 41) made reference to the womb shaped structures built by "our female ancestors." Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* (fig. 42) made public the privatized "secret" of women's menstruation. Schapiro and Sherry Brody's *Dollhouse* (fig. 43) sought to "regress and reconnect with childhood fantasies of love and terror." And Beth Bachenheimer's *Shoe Closet* (fig. 44), an altered collection of shoes, dealt with "women's most popular obsession:" having the right shoe for the right occasion."<sup>223</sup>

Chicago and her collaborator's insistence on the reality of their experience, as well as the assertion that such reality could be represented accordingly, echoes Pasolini's statements that cinema "expresses reality not

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<sup>222</sup> Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Womanhouse," published in the exhibition catalogue for *Womanhouse*, (Valencia: California Institute of the Arts, Feminist Art Program, 1972).

through symbols but via reality itself. . .if I want to express that tree I express it through itself." In *Screen's* terms, Chicago and Pasolini leave aside an analysis of the unconscious ideological production of meaning when we collude with such "realities." Kelly's work, on the other hand, aligns itself with the Lacanian belief that conscious "reality" is always marginal to the unconscious construction of our subjectivity, a belief reiterated in the diverse readings of Lacan by the aforementioned writers published in *Screen*. Against many feminists' desire that the *Document* be an autobiographic work, we should recall in specific Metz's assertion that every film is really a fiction film. Furthermore, in accordance with Heath's Althusserian reading of Brecht's stance against conventional realism, for Kelly it was thus the very *representation* of reality that needed to be represented. Kelly's "experience as a woman," mediated as it is by representations that hail her, interpellate her, are consequently resisted by the *Document's* protagonist (the artist-as-mother) via the reflective interrogation of

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

their construction in the *Experimentum Mentis* sections. This was diametrically opposed to the approach taken by Chicago who accepted the designation "woman" and proceeded to represent it as an ontology.<sup>224</sup>

Positioned polemically against Chicago's practice, Kelly's "On Femininity" essay reiterates the imperative for a Lacanian approach in order to understand the discourse of the mother-child relationship. Discussing the manner in which *Documentation IV* constructs the representation of femininity as "essentially maternal," Kelly thus states (in terms that permeated Screen's discourse):

*This is not to say there is an essential femininity and that it is maternal, but rather that this feminine identity is a position the subject occupies in language, as signifier for another signifier (the*

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<sup>224</sup> Amidst recent seventies feminist revivalism some curators have recontextualized Kelly with Chicago's work in the service of recuperating that period's essentialism under contemporary "deconstructive" terms. The essentialist recuperation of Kelly's work only mimics the uncritical reception *PPD* received in the seventies, even by Lucy Lippard herself who admitted upon first viewing the piece that she "liked the melancholic delicacy, the visual parallels to the ephemerality of motherhood, [and] the organic traces and talismans of the mother's individual discoveries....". Lippard explains, however, that her attraction to the work was precisely on the prosaic

*Other as mother for the child). The subject is constituted emphatically in a relation to "lack" - lack in the signifying chain, lack in the Other, and lack in the subject itself which emerges as desire.*<sup>225</sup>

This "subject as signifier for another signifier," of course, is from Lacan's "Agency of the Letter," a central text for Kelly's production. But it is also the foundation of Miller's more abstract reading of suture as that thing "not-identical-to-itself," so well suited to considerations of the index as a mark of that "left over object" - i.e., that "object cause of desire" produced by the subject's said suture. This is where Kelly's work exceeds the filmic interpretation of Lacan, a medium that by its very nature is burdened with negotiating the always-present affect of the iconic sign.

And what could be more appropriate than the index to mark the melancholic moment that a woman sutures into the subject "mother?" In *Documentation IV* Lacan's Schema R is

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biological/autobiographical level that Kelly sought to subvert. See: Lucy Lippard, "Forward," in *Kelly's Post-Partum Document*, p. ix.

<sup>225</sup> Mary Kelly, "On Femininity," *Control Magazine*, Issue Eleven (1979).

introduced into the field of the exhibited artifact,  
transported from its previous site, the footnotes.  
Overlaid onto the indexical plaster imprints of the child's  
hand, this schema itself is an index of Kelly's explicit  
interest in Lacan's concept of the Real - something that  
was only implicitly operative in the interpretive writings  
on the subject's "lack" by Heath and Metz.<sup>226</sup> Kelly's use of  
Lacan's schema was a means of addressing what can't be  
"pictured": the subject's *internalized* specular  
perspective, one that stands for the unconscious side of  
the divided subject. This displaces the subject's  
conscious perspective - the "eye" - articulated by Leonardo  
da Vinci (fig. 45) and cited by Kelly in her notes for  
*Documentation IV*.<sup>227</sup> Like others from *Screen*, Kelly  
initially emphasizes the Imaginary formation of the subject  
around such an internalized perspective:

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<sup>226</sup> For an explication of this schema development within the *Document* as a whole see chapter one. For an explication of it in specific, see the appendix.

<sup>227</sup> On Leonardo's perspective, "As regards all visible objects, three things must be considered. These are the position of the eye which sees (b), that of the object seen (a), and the position of light which illuminates the object (c)." Kelly citing Richter, I.A., *Selections*

*[Leonardo's perspective] is displaced by Lacan's Schema R, which places specularity within the context of a psychoanalytic discourse of the Imaginary and which refers to the specific moment of the mother-child relationship.<sup>228</sup>*

However, her footnote explaining Schema R's designation of the Imaginary brings us closer to the Real via its messenger, the *objet a*:

*The surface R is to be taken as the flattening out of the figure obtained by joining "i" to "I" and "m" to "M," that is, by the twisting which characterizes the Mobius strip. The presentation of the schema in two dimensions is thus related to the cut which enables the strip to be laid out flat. It will be realized that the line IM cannot refer to the relationship of the subject to the object of desire: the subject is*

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*from Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1952), in Post-Partum Document, p. 194.*

<sup>228</sup> Kelly, "On Femininity."

*only the cutting of the strip, and what falls out of it is called "the object a."*<sup>229</sup>

We can think of this left over object that falls at the moment of the subject's formation in relation to Freud's fort/da game. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes his observation of a child playing what he calls a game of "fort/da." This "game" consists of the repetitive action of an eighteen month old child flinging a spool into the corner (as he exclaims "fort"), followed by its retrieval ("da"). The game, however, is not about the spool. Instead, the child's pleasure derives from the ritual itself, which according to Freud stands for the child's mastery over the mother's presence/absence. Lacan's interpretation of the same game is slightly different.

Lacan argues that the child's repetitive throwing and retrieval of the spool upon the mother's absence is not a substitution for her. In fact, mere repetition - a Symbolic means of staying off the Real (the site of

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid. Kelly's footnote 6.

primordial trauma) - is the point of this game. Fort/da is thus the subject's answer to what the mother's absence has created: the subject's initial splitting. This primordial "trauma" is repeated symbolically, the spool constituting a small part of the subject that detaches itself from the child, while still remaining his - albeit displaced into the field of the Other.<sup>230</sup> The spool then is one of the first performative demonstrations of the subject's relation to the *objet a*, a phantasmatic object which will forever reinvent itself in many forms as his/her cause of desire. As I have said above, the subject's desire to get this elusive object back, to be "whole" again, only assures that it never can be retrieved, as it is the desire for the object as *missing* that sustains the subject.<sup>231</sup>

*Documentation IV* takes up this moment of splitting indicated by fort/da, but Kelly brings the mother's perspective into the picture such that the mother-child's *intersubjectivity* is addressed. The mother's text that is inscribed on the child's comforter fragments are written as

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<sup>230</sup> We should recall Miller's definition of suture here, whereby 0 counts for 1.

<sup>231</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 62.

"confessional" narratives, reflecting the mother's separation anxiety over working outside the home and leaving the child. In the face of such separation anxiety, the hand plaques constitute the mother's transitional object, mirroring the same function the comforter holds for the child. In this sense, the plaques and the comforter have a certain partial object quality to them - a stand-in for something lost. But the real *objet a* in this picture is the child himself, who in Freudian terms constitutes the mother's substitute phallus, which she must relinquish to become the proper (non phallic) mother - that is, to become another subject or signifier. The indexical hand imprints are interesting in this context, as they point to - are directly *motivated* by - the object forever lost, that is to say, the object cause of the *mother's* desire, the child-phallus. For this object cause of desire - the phantasmatic "loss" of the child-phallus - is precisely what moves the woman from the phallic mother-child dyad to the castrated Oedipal triad, as one signifier gets subsumed by another in a moment of the subject's suturing. Here, the *child* is the signifier that comes to represent a

subject for another signifier, the moment of melancholic loss indicative of this process forever being marked by the hand print that "stands in" for the object not-identical-to-itself.

This indexical strategy of representing the subject's suture into that which is not-identical-to-itself departs from the conventional iconic (i.e. point-of-view) strategy utilized in classic cinema, which Metz et. al. discussed. For in the *Document* we are inundated with evidence that points to the potential cost of non-suture - that is, to the subject's potential annihilation. If the mother refuses to take her position, if she holds onto her melancholia for the *objet a* - the phantasmatic phallus - the product is unthinkable, ranging from incest to psychosis. The temptation to hold on is clearly stated in *Documentation VI* in the mother's diary:

*I'm really enjoying my present relationship with K., going out to lunch, to the park, shopping together...He's fulfilling my fantasy image of a son as little companion-lover.*

However, by the section's end such a fantasy has to be relinquished when the boy develops an awareness of the mother's sexuality and by extension his own (which I will quote a second time for reference):

*This seems to be a new phase of sexual curiosity for K...showing us his willy etc...he points to me and says "There's a breast 'n there's a breast." He notices what I wear too...he likes my 'shiny' shoes and 'feathery' coat. I enjoy his attention but it's made me more self-conscious about cuddling him so much. It's made me more aware of myself too...of being 'feminine.'*

The mother's phantasy is thus truncated by the imperative that the mother-child relationship normalize itself, moving swiftly as it does into the Symbolic by relinquishing the object vis-à-vis the incest taboo. The "phallic mother" by "insistence of the letter" - that is, by the sliding of one

signifier into another driven by a series of perceived losses - is thus sutured into "castrated mother."<sup>232</sup>

But the index is interesting to think of in a semiotic manner as well. If many at *Screen* were influenced by Metz's semiotic reading of film, Kelly was equally taken by Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic interrogation of semiology. In the 1973 *Times Literary Supplement* (London), Kristeva published a short piece entitled "The System and the Speaking Subject," in which she discusses her notion of "semanalysis." This is the term Kristeva coined to describe a type of discursive semiotics that addressed the speaking subject's enunciation within a heterogeneous signifying system. This was posited against conventional structuralist semiology<sup>233</sup> that maintained a transcendental sign system by opposing any notion of a fluid (or shifting) signifying system. In this conventional semiology the

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<sup>232</sup> At the same time, in order for the child to evolve from being an extension of the mother's body into an "autonomous" subject he must reciprocate this relinquishing of his position of attachment to the phallic mother. Should this not happen, according to Lacan, the mother becomes the "body too much." The child's object cause of desire (the absent mother, the aim of the child's partial drives) would then vanish and so would the child as subject. The *Document's* presentation of this threat is a clear indication that it was taking up issues of trauma in which the subject faces potential annihilation (encounters with the Real) that others at *Screen* were not.

speaking subject maintained a Cartesian mastery over his utterances as a privatized act.<sup>234</sup> The crux of Kristeva's semiotic research, on the other hand, was the "deployment [of semiology] as a critique of its own suppositions." Semanalysis thus identifies the "systematic constraint within each signifying practice" by simultaneously appropriating that practice and exceeding it so that what falls outside its scope is exposed. For Kristeva argues that what falls outside the system is precisely what characterizes it.<sup>235</sup>

It is useful to think of Kelly's debate with various discursive sites or fields in Kristeva's terms. In chapter one we saw how Kelly's debate with the Conceptualists demonstrated a type of semanalysis. Through the deconstructive use of Conceptual strategies the *Document* performatively argued that the Cartesian subject unconsciously assumed by Kosuth was actually the defining

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<sup>233</sup> Such as that by Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, and others discussed in *Screen's* special issue of Christian Metz.

<sup>234</sup> This is the model employed by the more conservative factions within both Conceptualism (Kosuth) and a faction of the Women's Liberation Movement (cultural feminism), which I discuss in chapters two and three respectively.

<sup>235</sup> Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject," *Times Literary Supplement* (October 12, 1973), p. 1249-52.

characteristic of such projects. In chapter two, we saw how Kelly herself learned the same lesson about her own work while making the collaborative art project *Women and Work*. The domestic site of labor and hence sexuality, left outside the project's original scope of investigation, returned and persisted in the interviews conducted with the female workers at the Metal Box Factory as a central concern.

In *Post-Partum Document*, what Kelly was determined not to leave out of the picture was the mother's subjectivity, though what "appears" to be the subject is the child's entry into language. On this account, the centrality of the index as an indicator of the subject's position, according to Roman Jakobson's definition of the "shifter," should be noted. Just as semanalysis accounts for a divided speaking subject (divided along the axes of the conscious/unconscious, which the signifying process exposes), the indexical shifter (that ambiguous sign that performatively designates both "you" and "I"), complicates conventional semiology's reliance upon the grammatical

Cartesian speaking subject.<sup>236</sup> The shifter can be seen as a subset of the index because, as I discuss at length in chapter one, it is a sign whose meaning is motivated by its referent - that is, the person "using" it. Put simply, if two people are speaking, the "I" can only refer to the one who utters it and the "you" to the recipient of this same utterance. The referential meaning of "I" therefore "shifts" based upon who uses it. As such, its meaning is infinitely reversible in any conversation.<sup>237</sup>

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed how the speaking subject is intentionally confused in the *Document*, a point to which I will now return. The predominance of the shifter - conceptually deployed in its ambiguous *aphasic* state - allowed Kelly to apply "semanalysis" to the subject position that she occupied in this project: the artist-as-mother. In normative art production, the artist

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<sup>236</sup> Metz and Mulvey argued that classic cinema maintained this Cartesian position, which both authors analogize to the mirror stage. Mulvey, however, took up the task of de-stabilizing this position in her collaborative film *Riddles of the Sphinx*, made with Peter Wollen. Their use of the 360 degree camera pan, broke the fundamental rule of conventional film: never turn the camera back upon the space from which it shoots as this is the space of the viewer's "eye." Kelly's deconstruction of this Cartesian position was more linguistic, as we shall see.

masters his object; witness Kosuth and his tautologies, Chicago and her female experience. The *Document*, however, from its inception embraced the revenge that objects under study inevitably enact: the exposure of the Cartesian analyst's tenuous position. This can be explained through the work of Maud Mannoni, another psychoanalytic influence on Kelly overlooked by the editors of *Screen*.

As I discussed in chapter three, Mannoni extended Lacan's principle that "one's desire is always the desire of the Other," to the analysis of children's neuroses, concluding that the mother's subject position was ambiguous in relation to the child. In fact, when the child spoke, it was the mother who was in turn *spoken*. Thus, an analysis of the child was always already an analysis of the mother. Taking Mannoni's perspective, the *Document's* stained liners, analyzed utterances and drawings, diaristic accounts of the child's growing sexual awareness, and collected evidence of the child's writing his own name, would collectively constitute a displaced site of the mother's self-analysis. Thus, the *Document's* voice is one

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<sup>237</sup> See: Roman Jakobson, "Shifters, verbal categories, and the Russian

displaced into the field of the Other, which from a Lacanian perspective, is true of any subject's voice. However, within art production at this time, particularly within the fields of feminism and conceptualism, this was an anomaly. Such that, should one want to play with the idea of suture, or discuss critical strategies such as semanalysis, within the visual arts, film criticism was the closest site for this investigation.

Over the course of the seventies, Kelly's unique hybrid of conceptualist, feminist, and (film inspired) psychoanalytic strategies were discussed in the form of publications, exhibitions, and conferences associated with the *Document*. After its American reception in the early eighties, critics and artists alike used the *Document* as a didactic tool to unpack Lacanian theory, which was just entering American art discourse at that time.<sup>238</sup> But something is lost by merely historicizing the *Document* as a

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verb," in *Russian Language Project*, Harvard University Press, 1957.

<sup>238</sup> For a didactic reading of Kelly's work, see: John Paoletti, "Mary Kelly," in *The Critical Eye/I*, (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1984); Andrea Fraser, "On the Post-Partum *Document*," *Afterimage*, (March, 1986); Laura Mulvey, "Mary Kelly and Laura Mulvey in Conversation," *Afterimage*, (March, 1986); Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," *Parachute*, no. 32, (1983); Paul Smith, "Mother as Site

didactic tool. The many discourses that influenced it, and which in turn it interrogated, are left out of such analysis. And as Kristeva says, what is left out of any analysis is in fact its defining characteristic. In this chapter, as in the preceding ones on feminism and conceptualism, I have discussed the discursive fields in which the *Document* was conceived and from which it developed its specific debate with such discourse. In my final chapter I will discuss its American reception as constituting a fourth field in which the *Document* itself gets sutured into discourse. This will be followed by an Afterward that considers the *Document's* effect on the practice of Andrea Fraser, who learned of the work in this context and took it as a model for a critical, debate specific, art production.

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of her Proceedings," *Parachute*, no. 26 (1982); and Elizabeth Cowie, "Introduction to Post-Partum *Document*," *m/f*, no. 5/6, (1981).

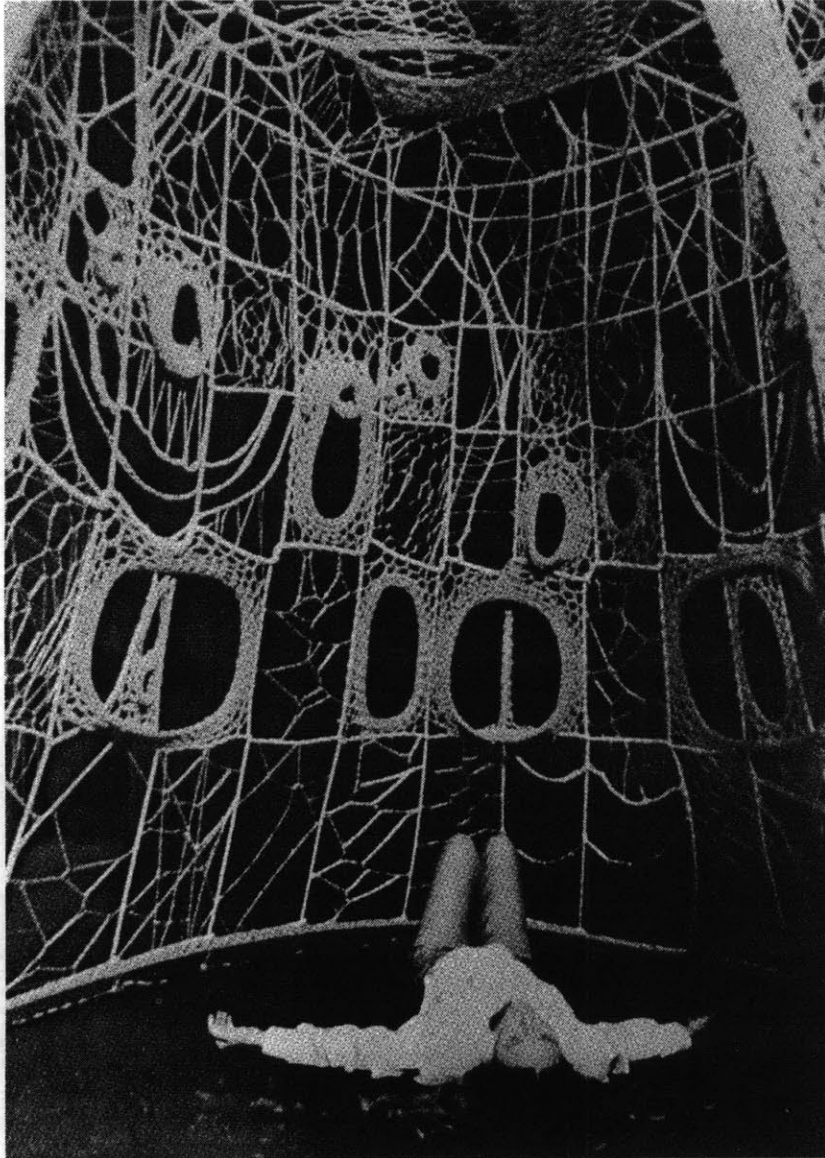
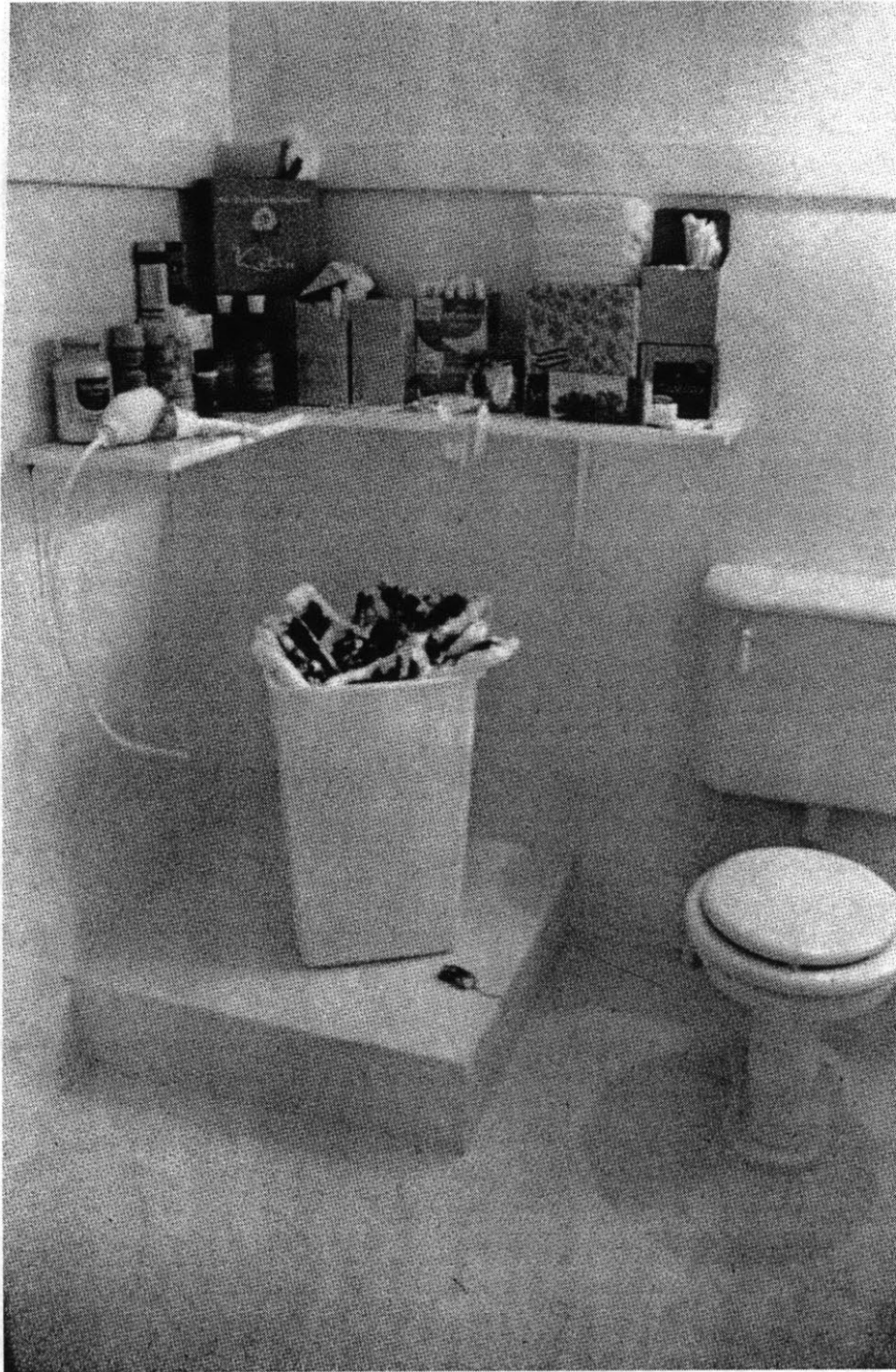


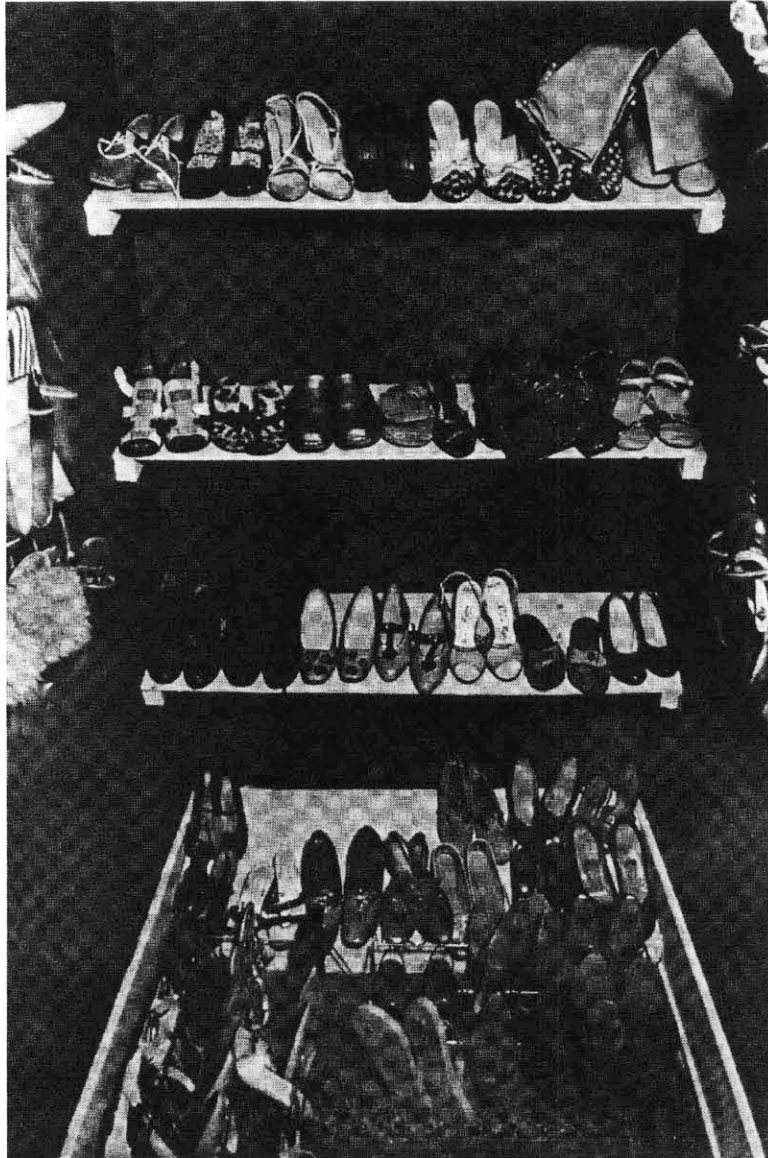
Figure 40: Faith Wilding, *Womb Room*, 1972. Installation, *Womanhouse*.



**Figure 41: Judy Chicago, *Menstruation Bathroom*, 1972.  
Installation, *Womanhouse*.**



Figure 42: Miriam Schapiro and Sherry Brody, *Dollhouse*, 1972. Installation, *Womanhouse*.



**Figure 43: Beth Bachenheimer, *Shoe Closet*, 1972.  
Installation, *Womanhouse*.**

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because they are the first shadows to form a covering to the bodies concerned. And to this I shall devote the second book.

From these primary shadows there issue certain dark rays, which are diffused through the air and vary in intensity according to the density of the primary shadows from which they are derived; and consequently I shall call these shadows derived shadows, because they have their origin in other shadows. And of this I will make the third book.

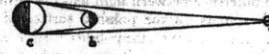
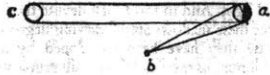
Moreover these derived shadows in striking upon anything create as many different effects as there are different places where they strike; and of this I will make the fourth book.

And since where the derived shadow strikes, it is always surrounded by the striking of the luminous rays, it leaps back with these in a reflex stream towards its source and mingles with and becomes changed into it altering thereby somewhat of its nature; and to this I shall devote the fifth book.

In addition to this I will make a sixth book to contain an investigation of the many different varieties of the rebound of the reflected rays, which modify the primary shadow by as many different colours as there are different points from whence these luminous reflected rays proceed.

Furthermore I will make the seventh book treat of the various distances that may exist between the point where each reflected ray strikes and the point whence it proceeds, and of the various different shades of colour which it acquires in striking against opaque bodies.<sup>52</sup>

As regards all visible objects, three things must be considered. These are the position of the eye which sees, that of



the object seen, and the position of the light which illuminates the object: *b* is the eye, *a* is the object seen, *c* is the light. *a* is the eye, *b* the illuminating body, *c* is the illuminated object.<sup>53</sup>

*Of the nature of shadow*

Shadow partakes of the nature of universal matter. All such matter is more powerful in its beginning and grows weaker towards the end; I say at the beginning, whatever their form or condition, whether visible or invisible. It is not from small beginnings that it grows to a great size in time, as a great oak from the small acorn. But on the contrary like the oak which is most powerful at its beginning at its stem where it springs from the earth and is largest. Darkness, then, is the strongest degree of shadow and light is its least. Therefore, O Painter, make your shadows darker close to the object that casts it, and make the end of it fading into light, seeming to have no end.<sup>54</sup>

Shadow is the diminution alike of light and of darkness, and stands between light and darkness.

A shadow may be infinitely dark, and also of infinite degrees of absence of darkness.

The beginnings and ends of shadow lie between the light and the darkness and may be infinitely diminished and infinitely increased.<sup>55</sup>



Shadow is the diminution of light by the intervention of an opaque body, shadow is the counterpart of the luminous rays which are cut off by an opaque body.<sup>56</sup>

Figure 44: Selections from the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, from Mary Kelly's archives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Post-Partum Document's American Reception*

*The frame labors indeed. Place of labor, structurally bordered origin of surplus value, i.e., overflowed on these two borders by what it overflows, it gives indeed. Like wood. It creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates even as it cooperates in the production of the product, overflows it and is deduc(t)ed from it. It never lets itself be simply exposed.<sup>239</sup>*

- Jacques Derrida

### **Introduction**

*Post-Partum Document's* exhibition history itself - its frame - is an index of the project's complex discursive entanglement, one that continually redefined the work vis-à-vis its reception throughout the late seventies up through the eighties. In the beginning (1973-1978),

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<sup>239</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 75.

various sections of the *Document* were shown separately at different venues upon their individual completion, often contextualized and interpreted in a contradictory manner. This final chapter will trace the *Document's* exhibition history, specifically its American homecoming and reception.

Tracing the manner in which group exhibitions discursively re-define art projects is necessarily a part of historicizing a work itself, as the production and circulation of concomitant exhibition catalogues in the field of contemporary art history continue to generate the art work's meaning long after the exhibition has been dismantled and shipped home. For it is in such catalogues that a given exhibition continues to be mounted over and against the "actual" object mounted in the gallery space. Moreover, the exhibition catalogue is often times the only primary text historians can access on a given contemporary artist or artwork. Knowing this, how do we use these documents? They have escaped, for the most part, the rigorous institutional critique that museums have undergone, in that the catalogue, as a site of such a

critique, has not received the same attention that many artists - Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler, and Andrea Fraser being but a few examples - have directed towards the museum's collection, means of display, or exhibition space.

Indeed, recent exhibitions<sup>240</sup> have sought to correct the egregious historicisms made by such anthologies as the *Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970's*, one which posits a purified seventies art practice against those of the eighties. Eighties practices appear in *The Power of Feminist Art* without historical precedent, presented in a chapter by Mira Schor entitled "Backlash and Appropriation" in a section of the book entitled "Beyond the Seventies: The Impact of Feminist Art." In this chapter the *Document* is first mentioned as an artwork for which the viewer "needs an advanced degree in psychoanalysis" to comprehend.<sup>241</sup> Because Kelly's work denied the iconic representation of women, and was informed

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<sup>240</sup> I am again referring to Lydia Yee's *Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art*, at the Bronx Museum and Amelia Jones' *Sexual Politics*, at the Armand Hammer Museum.

<sup>241</sup> *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970's, History and Impact*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, (NY: Harry Abrams, 1994).

by Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, it is perceived by Schor to be at odds with the female-centered iconography that characterized feminist artwork in the seventies. It *must*, therefore, be a product of the eighties when inquiries into images of women flourished. On the other hand, contemporary exhibitions like *Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art*, mounted by the Bronx Museum of Art in 1995, recognize that indeed Judy Chicago's *Womanhouse* was produced contemporaneously with *Post-Partum Document's* inception. And in doing so, the curator correctly sought to examine that contingent moment whereby a Judy Chicago and a Mary Kelly coincide in an unexpected year, consequently threatening to rupture Schor's teleological construction of the seventies that recent polemics on essentialism's period maintain. Unfortunately, the objective of re-positioning Kelly's work in *Division of Labor* was in the service of radically re-historicizing Chicago's practice within deconstructive terms that even a cursory look at archival material from that period fail to support.

For instance, in *Division of Labor* when one is physically confronted with Kelly's *Introduction* to the *Document* hanging next to a re-creation of Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* from *Womanhouse* and turns to the catalogue for an explanation, no account for either work's discursive formation is provided. Indeed we *do* find Chicago and Kelly together in Yee's text - not in the seventies but in the eighties - where the *Document* is compared to Chicago's 1985 collaborative piece on motherhood entitled *The Birth Project*. It is here, in the year 1985, the year that Kelly's book version of the *Document* was widely disseminated in America, and the year in which Chicago's *The Birth Project* was completed, that the revised Chicago of the nineties and the historicized Kelly of the seventies meet. This is, to be sure, an interesting moment, but not one that relates accurately to the time line produced by the exhibition, nor one that illuminates the questions one has upon seeing *Womanhouse* and the *Document* side by side. Rather, the curator emphasizes the methodological approach shared by Chicago

and Kelly in their documentation of birth and motherhood.

Yee states:

*Mary Kelly's meticulous documentation and analysis of her child's actions and articulations, as well as her own responses and activities, began with the personal experience of childrearing and moved towards a broader analysis of subject formation. Judy Chicago's "Birth Project," by comparison, drew on a wide range of experiences of childbirth from interviews with women, which the artist interpreted and translated into an extensive series of birth imagery and metaphors for creation....Comprising eighty units, each consisting of an artwork and its related documentation, the "Birth Project" was designed to be widely exhibited, and shares both a common subject matter and a rigorous documentary format with Kelly's "Post-Partum Document."*<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Lydia Yee, *Division of Labor*, p. 22.

In the above passage, Yee bypasses two pieces by Chicago made contemporaneously with the *Document*, (*Womanhouse* and later *The Dinner Party*) in favor of *The Birth Project* (fig. 46), ostensibly because the "subject matter and rigorous documentary format" made for an accessible formal reading of both Kelly's and Chicago's work. The same error is thus made in Yee's textual comparison as was left hanging in the exhibition space. Namely, the flattening out of two bodies of work along the prosaic lines of subject matter falsely posits Chicago's work as more semiotically informed than it was and Kelly's work as more centered around biological and autobiographical histories of narrative than *it* was. In the catalogue we thus move away from the awkward hanging of *Womanhouse* and the *Document* side by side without explanation and on to the awkward marriage of the *Birth Project* and the *Document* as pieces about mothering. Consequently, what is produced here is more than a catalogue at crossed purposes with its exhibition. The catalogue, as a new and different site, mounts a second discursive exhibition that posits erroneous historical

context for the work, morphologically determined by its subject matter.

Nevertheless, such curatorial moves that recognize the contemporaneous production of Kelly and Chicago's work (if not their discursive inquiries) is interesting. As literary critic Joel Fineman noted, it is in these contingent moments, structured like the anecdote, that the rupturing of meta-history can take place. Fineman warned, however, that the narrative spun around historical contingency inevitably refills the tear or hole made by the anecdote.<sup>243</sup> In our case, the exhibition catalogue is the culprit of such an act as it forecloses the potential offered by the *Document* to challenge the centrality given Chicago's work by historians and curators alike in their examination of the seventies. The historical displacement of Kelly's work out of the seventies, into the eighties, is such teleology at work. Thus, rather than accepting catalogues of the contemporary exhibition ontologically as a secondary textual source illuminating the exhibition

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<sup>243</sup> See: Joel Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction," collected in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

space, we need to employ a Foucauldean project which analyzes the discourse of the catalogue *itself* as a monument. For it is the holes created by contingency, often times closed by the exhibition catalogue, that will afford us an encounter with the complexity of the seventies art practice. Moreover, it will illuminate the manner in which a work is discursively made by its reception both within its period of origin as well as its historical placement.

### ***Dissemination and (Re)Formation***

Perhaps *Post-Partum Document's* problematic American reception was foreshadowed by its initial European exhibition history, which in many ways has been repeated by recent curatorial attempts at contextualizing the work. The *Document's* European contextualization - or rather, *discursive (re)formation* - can be broken down into three simultaneous fields of reception from 1978-1979: Socialist Activism, Conceptualism, and Feminism. I will discuss each field through three exhibitions that can be thought of in

terms of Fineman's notion of the anecdote. My purpose in doing so is *not* to posit a presumed loss of *Post-Partum Document's* internal "coherence," but rather to demonstrate the various discursive points through which spectators have historically entered the work's different fields of signification. For, in Foucauldean terms, the manner in which a specific period *conceives* of a given art work can provide an archaeology of both the artifact and its site of reception.

### **Activism**

*Art for Society: Contemporary British Art with a Social or Political Purpose*, 1978, Whitechapel Art Gallery London

Selected by a committee including Richard Cork (editor of *Studio International*) and Caroline Tisdall (art critic for *The Guardian*), this exhibition was organized as an open call for submissions. After a decade of civil activism initiated by the (international) 1968 student uprisings, the show's thesis advocated the incorporation of the

synthetic realm denied by Kosuth and others. This, of course, transgressed the barrier between art and politics that was previously promoted by *Studio International* - most notably Kosuth's project. The curators thus displayed "a wide range of art which seeks, by its subject and manner, to locate itself directly within the social fabric of our society." Moreover, this "embracing of society" took a self-reflexive turn, as the exhibition's site - the Whitechapel Gallery - was problematized in Nicholas Serota's preface. How could one embrace society from such rarified real estate? "The audience for any exhibition is small in comparison with the audience for even the least popular television or radio programme," Serota argues. Ostensibly the goal here was dismantling the division between "high" and "low," as the exhibition advocated the social imperative for "fine art" to cross over into "mass culture" with the following declaration: "This exhibition will succeed if this part of our audience [the ones living or working in the neighboring City or Tower Hamlets] leaves

the gallery with a sense that contemporary art might play a larger role in shaping their daily lives."<sup>244</sup>

In the spirit of an activist political "society," the curators dispensed with the conventional "authorial" catalogue format whereby individual sections reproduce the artist's work and biography. Instead, an index of exhibited work was supplied in the catalogue's closing pages. Furthermore, the catalogue essays themselves collectively debated general issues related to politics and art, rather than explicating the exhibited work. Richard Cork, who had written one of the first "positive" reviews of the *Document's* ICA show for the *Evening Standard*, contributed an essay on the public reception of politically controversial art. Although his 1976 review of the *Document* questioned whether Kelly's theory had been effectively incorporated into the work on *visual* level, at the time of *Art for Society* Cork was perhaps more interested in the controversy surrounding the work, i.e., the "dirty nappies are art" accusation made in the tabloid

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<sup>244</sup> Nicholas Serota, "Preface," in *Art for Society: Contemporary British Art with a Social or Political Purpose*, (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1978), p. 5.

press (fig. 47).<sup>245</sup> After its initial showing and subsequent controversy it was possible for Cork to encode Kelly's work as politically imbricated in the debate over aesthetics and mass culture.

The *Document's* re-contextualization within the framework of public controversy, rather than the feminist problematic of representation, fit perfectly with *Art for Society's* thematic. Citing the rancorous debate that the Tate's purchase of Carl Andre's brick sculpture produced in 1976, the same year as Kelly's ICA exhibition, further bolstered this "context". The connection between Kelly and Andre's reception was an obvious one since tabloid accusations, such as "After the bricks at the Tate, nappies

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<sup>245</sup> Cork's review states: "It is all very well *telling* us that the nappy-liners's record of a three-month transition between breast feeding and solid foods signifies the breaking away of the child's ego and consequent depletion of the mother's ego. But the boxes themselves do not carry the full meaning of the shift in relationship explained in Kelly's text, and I suspect that her well-grounded knowledge of psychoanalytic ideas may have prevented her from raising the need to *incorporate* fully these ideas in the work." This challenge of the *Document's* visual component was more engaged than similar complaints waged against Kelly's contemporaries, most notably against Conrad Atkinson, which I discuss in chapter two. See: Richard Cork, "Big Brother - and Mary Kelly's baby," *Evening Standard*, (Oct. 14, 1976). The phrase "dirty nappies are art," is the headline for a tabloid article blasting the public exhibition of *Post-Partum Document*. *Daily Express*, (October 15, 1976).

are art," dominated press coverage at the time.<sup>246</sup> Thus was the vehicle through which Kelly's work was recuperated by the Left as an argument for the social function of art. Cork's catalogue essay, with which the *Document* would have been inter-textually read - aptly titled, "Art for Society's Sake" - was a polemic against the modernist paradigm "art for art's sake." As such, it addressed the manner in which rhetoric both for and against the Tate's acquisition of Andre's piece maintained the stereotype of art's as a frivolous pursuit:

*When Carl Andre's infamous brick sculpture provoked such a prolonged and widespread furor at the Tate Gallery, the best rejoinder Sir Norman Reid could*

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<sup>246</sup> "I may not know much about Art, but I certainly know a dirty nappy when I see one hanging up," reads one tabloid headline. *Daily Express*, (Oct. 15, 1976). The article ends with an account of public monies associated with the institutions that mounted both Kelly and Andre's exhibitions: "Admission is free. Of course as a taxpayer, you will already have contributed some of the £36 million a year which the Arts Council received this year. And more than £80,000 of this was given to the ICA in grant by the council. About £5,000 went to the New Gallery to fund exhibitions. Another famous London Gallery, the Tate, was under fire last February when it exhibited a pile of 120 bricks at an estimated cost of £4,000 in public money." The artist's accountability - by association - for the institution's overall receipt of public monies foreshadowed the American scandal over NEA grants precipitated by the Mapplethorpe controversy in the late eighties that continues today.

*muster as a directorial justification of his purchase was the comment that 'for at least a hundred years every new form of art has been ridiculed and labeled a folly.' The Daily Mirror, which reported Sir Norman's words, cocked a cynical snook at both them and Andre by giving its front page story the banner headline 'WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH.'*<sup>247</sup>

Modernism's hermetic claim for art - that it has to be at odds with the public, that all good art is reviled at first - was incidentally reinforced by rhetoric surrounding both the Andre and Kelly controversies. It was precisely *against* this segregation of the public sector and contemporary art production, that *Art for Society* sought to undermine in reviving the similar mandate of the historical avant-garde. The *Document's* reference to the domestic "synthetic" site, combined with the resulting public controversy, finally made the work suitable for display to

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<sup>247</sup> Richard Cork, "Art for Society's Sake," in *Art for Society*, p. 48.

the Left, as the critique of its theoretical difficulty could be put aside.<sup>248</sup>

### ***Conceptualism***

*Un Certain Art Anglais...Sélection d'artistes britanniques 1970-1979, 1979* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

A collaborative effort by l'ARC and the British Council, *Un Certain Art Anglais* was a revisionist exhibition of British Conceptual art. Typical of Kelly's early reception, the *Document* was regionally classified as British, due to the fact that she was living and working in Britain when it was produced. Interestingly, the exhibition included those with whom Kelly's work had previously debated from the *New Art* show at the Hayward in 1972: Art and Language, Conrad Atkinson, Victor Burgin,

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<sup>248</sup> By "historical avant-garde" I am referring to a trajectory that included the practices of the Soviet avant-garde, one that challenged the boundary between "art" and "life" and one that Alfred Barr, the first Director of the Museum of Modern Art and advocate of high Modernism, denied. Seventies Fluxus practices, through which *Art for*

Gilbert and George, Richard Long, and Stephen Willats, among others.

*Un Certain Art Anglais*, like the *New Art* showcased interdisciplinary "new forms of expression" in photography, video, installation art, and performance, against the "already well known" disciplines of "classic" painting and sculpture. However, Richard Cork who (again) was one of exhibition's organizers (along with Michael Compton, Suzanne Pagé and Sandy Naire) wrote a catalogue essay "Collaboration without Compromise," questioning Conceptualism's "mythic" status. In the early seventies, Cork relays, the common assertion was that Conceptualism, unanchored by the material world, could "sail freely through spirit," utilizing any possible strategy - other than Modernist painting and sculpture - to do so. It was in the support of the myth that Conceptualism was more a part of the world, more a part of the social fabric than other practices, that Richard Long's walks through nature and Art & Language's documented conversations were typically presented. Cork argues that the public's

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*Society* should be read, can be traced to this aspect of the Soviet

mystification as to how these inaccessible practices embraced their milieu exposes this myth for what it is. He thus concludes that even though widely read anthologies like *Concepts of Modern Art* declared Conceptualist strategies - showcased by the Hayward's *New Art* exhibition - to be the "art of a new era," in reality such practices were complicit with Modernist hermeneutics. Conceptualism may have thus incorporated material of the quotidian world (text, photography, installation, and performance), but it spoke nothing of it or to it.<sup>249</sup>

In the seven years following the *New Art* show, however, many of the artists exhibited there began embracing the very synthetic element - in the form of a political imperative - that British Conceptualism previously ignored. Hence, Victor Burgin's earlier obfuscatory semiotic texts published in *Studio International* gave way to his Situationist style *detournements* of public advertisements, which he called

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avant-garde.

<sup>249</sup> It should be noted that this characterization of Conceptualism from the early seventies overlooks the work of Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers, and Dan Graham all of whom took up precisely what Cork notes as missing in the *New Art* group. See: Benjamin Buchloh's *Conceptual Art 1962-1969*.

"scripto-visual discourse" (fig. 48).<sup>250</sup> Even Gilbert and George's performatively pop decadence - evident in their earlier drunk series - now explicitly embraced "social consciousness," their brightly colored Warholian grid pieces commenting on "wankers" and "communism" (fig. 49). In support of this rehabilitated Conceptualism, the curators of *Un Certain Art Anglais* included work by Kelly, Willats, and Atkinson. It should be recalled, however, that all three (in different ways) had already initiated this investigation of the synthetic proposition within British Conceptualism in the early seventies as an intervention.<sup>251</sup>

Unlike *Art for Society*, the catalogue provided individual sections for each artist, Kelly's explication being provided by Mark Nash, an editor at *Screen*. Well-informed by the hybrid of Lacanian discourse that constituted one of the *Document's* discursive sites, Nash psychoanalytically addresses the mother's separation anxiety as it is indexed by the collection of empirical

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<sup>250</sup> *Victor Burgin: US77/ZOO 78*, exhibition catalogue, Picker Art Gallery, (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University), 1980.

<sup>251</sup> See chapter one.

"evidence." Furthermore, the deconstruction of ideological assertions regarding a mother's "natural capacity" to raise a child is addressed, a summation of the *Document's* purpose that most feminists were still struggling to understand and most Marxists still ignored. However, the interrogation of this synthetic proposition upon the analytic Conceptualist paradigm - seemingly the *Document's* leading contribution in the context of this revisionist exhibition - isn't taken up by Nash. The gap between the site of Cork's introduction, which laid the groundwork for a revisionist look at Conceptualism's blind spots, and the site of Nash's text, which clearly explicates the *Document's* psychoanalytic agenda, marks two sites of Kelly's original debate. And yet, neither Cork nor Nash can account for the other's discourse. Indeed, Conceptualism and Psychoanalysis - synthesized by *Document* - found themselves in dialogue for the first time, vis-à-vis Cork and Nash's different sites of reception, though as yet they are not synthesized within the site of the viewer.

## **Feminism**

*The Hayward Annual*, 1978, Hayward Gallery, London.

Lucy Lippard's forward for this exhibition catalogue locates the show's origin in 1975 when "a feminist protest against a Hayward sculpture show including thirty six men and four women raised general consciousness."<sup>252</sup> It was eight years prior to the *Annual* that the American art historian Linda Nochlin wrote her famous essay, "Why have there been No Great Women Artists?", launching such "consciousness" in the art world. Shortly after enumerating the reasons for this lack of female presence in art production - women's limited access to education and intellectual circles - Nochlin, together with Ann Sutherland Harris, set out to "even the playing field" by curating a traveling show, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*. When the show was mounted by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1975, Liliane Lijn, Tess Jaray, Kim Lim and Gillian Wise Ciobotaru organized a complement show of British

artists working after 1950, with the understanding that *Women Artists* would travel to London. When this fell through, the group was asked by the Hayward Gallery to organize a similar exhibition for the 1978 annual, supplementing the previous annual that Caroline Tisdall and Richard Cork called an "art-political event."<sup>253</sup>

The curators' intent, stated overtly in political and feminist terms, was "to bring to the attention of the public the quality of the work of women artists in Britain in the context of a mixed show." The only connection between the selected artists was their association with feminism, national regionalism and non-representation, the latter of which was aimed against the "charmed circle" of "old boys".<sup>254</sup> The bias towards work made by women accorded with their desire to exhibit women who *make* art rather than exhibiting conventional art with women *in* it. The *Annual's* spirit mirrored that of related group interventions by American feminists such as the Guerilla Girls and the Women's Caucus for Art, both of whom became well known for

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<sup>252</sup> Lucy Lippard, "Anatomy of an Annual," *Hayward Annual*, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p. 1.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

their pro-active attempts to force gender parity in museums and other cultural institutions in the seventies and eighties.<sup>255</sup> The *Annual* received mixed reaction due to the number of women in it, which attested to the necessity of waging the feminist problematic over representation. Although the exhibition wasn't an "all-woman" show, it nevertheless was characterized as such because of the curator's clearly stated bias.

Corresponding to the lack of institutionalization of female authorship, the exhibition catalogue provided each artist an individual section showcasing her work and biography. From the perspective of the show's pro-active gender bias, Sarah Kent unsurprisingly sees the *Document* as asserting female creativity, teaching self-empowerment, and reversing hegemonic structures that pite phallus against womb. Her catalogue entry on Kelly states:

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>255</sup> The Guerilla Girls formed in 1984, as an anonymous action group. Their first protest was against MoMA's 1984 International Survey of Painting and Sculpture, which was less than 10% female. The Women's Caucus for art formed much earlier, in 1972, as an outgrowth of the College Art Association. A history of the WCA is provided in the *Power of Feminist Art*. p. 94-100.

[Kelly] points out that a patriarchal society, such as our own, defines women in terms of negative attributes rather than positive ones. Instead of viewing them as potent, creative beings who are the source of human life, they are classed as castrated men without money, influence or power, since in the patriarchy, status accrues to the phallus rather than the womb.<sup>256</sup>

Kent thus qualifies the *Document* as a lesson in internalized oppression - much like contemporaneous American feminist readings of psychoanalysis that spoke of an essential femininity "before" the law-of-the-Father, or "outside" castration anxiety, rather than of a femininity constituted *vis-à-vis* such pathos.<sup>257</sup> The all-woman show became a staple in the seventies and eighties, in which Kelly's work was often included without any consideration of its intellectual or methodological project. Rather, it was the subject matter - the "story" of motherhood - that

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<sup>256</sup> Sarah Kent, *Hayward Annual*, (London: Hayward Gallery, 1978), p. 64

<sup>257</sup> I address the difference between American and British readings of psychoanalysis in chapter three.

initially attracted curators.<sup>258</sup> Whereas the fecal stain, for Kelly, was an indexical mark related to the mother's intersubjectivity, for many curators in the seventies, it would tenaciously persist in being a Realist sociological mark of domestic labor.

### ***Kelly's "Homecoming" - The New York School***

By the time of the *Document's* American homecoming in the early eighties, the art world had begun to synthesize the aforementioned discursive sites, even though the *Document's* first three venues in the New York region in many ways replicated the divided audiences of its European compartmentalization. The difference was that American interest in the *Document* was part of an overall

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<sup>258</sup> Examples of all-women European shows from this period that are methodologically closer to Kelly's project include: *Sense and Sensibility in Feminist Art Practice*, curated by Griselda Pollock (Nottingham: Midland Group, 1982); and *Issues: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, curated by Lucy Lippard (London: ICA, 1980). *Feministische Kunst International*, on the other hand, is the precedent for such recent curatorial ventures as Amelia Jones's *Sexual Politics*. Both *Feministische* and *Sexual Politics* sought to define the separate themes and histories uniting disparate feminist practices. Wherein Kelly was paired with artists such as Jenny Holzer, Marie Yates, Adrian Piper, and Martha Rosler in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Issues*, in *Feministische* and *Sexual Politics* Kelly and Chicago once again show up together with little to no verifiable context.

introduction to British film theory and French post-structuralism.

For instance, in 1983 the book form of the *Document* was published, as was Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics*. Written as "a methodological guide to a group of semiotic writings frequently taught in advanced undergraduate North America and Britain," *The Subject of Semiotics* distinguished itself from previous books on post-structuralism by the weight it gave (British) psychoanalysis. However, rather than explicating the British school - that is, how the British "Lacan" was created - Silverman *performs* its methodological principles as a means of explaining them. In the preface, therefore, we hear Laura Mulvey's voice in Silverman's tautologically methodological explanation of her approach to authors such as Mulvey:

*The Subject of Semiotics must be distinguished from its predecessors [by] its emphasis upon sexual difference as an organizing principle not only of the symbolic order and its "contents" (signification,*

*discourse, and subjectivity), but of the semiotic account of those things. Not only does psychoanalytic semiotics establish that authoritative vision and speech have been male prerogatives, whereas women have more frequently figured as the object of that vision and speech, but it provides a vivid dramatization of this role division at the level of its articulation. The theoreticians most fully associated with this branch of semiotics - Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan - function as exemplary representatives of the paternal values they locate at the center of the existing symbolic order. [my emphasis]<sup>259</sup>*

The book thus introduced the theories of Saussure, Peirce, Barthes, Derrida, and Benveniste, followed by an explication of basic psychoanalytic principles by Lacan and Freud. But it was one already *translated* through the British model it purported to explicate.

While the book was a prolific introduction to semiotic theory, it was Silverman's chapter on Suture, in which the

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<sup>259</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, (Oxford: Oxford University

Screen model is presented, that distinguished *The Subject of Semiotics* from other readings of the same material.

Silverman begins by citing Jacques Alain Miller's essay on suture from which the filmic concept is derived, but does not provide a reading of Miller's text outside of a quick summation consistent with its British translation:

*Miller's account of suture locates the emphasis in orthodox Lacanian places; the key terms in his definition of it are "lack" and "absence."...A given signifier (a pronoun, a personal name) grants the subject access to the symbolic order, but alienates it not only from its own needs but from its drives. That signifier stands in for the absent subject...whose lack it can never stop signifying.<sup>260</sup>*

Consistent with Heath's explication of this material in the Screen dossier, Silverman "sutures" Miller's essay into its metaphoric filmic application. Which is to say, she goes on to present "a synthesis of the contributions" made by

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Press, 1983), p. viii.

Jean Oudart, Daniel Dayan, Stephen Heath, Laura Mulvey, and Jacqueline Rose, which was basically a compact iteration of *Screen's* 1975 dossier on Suture. As a feminist activist teaching Women's Studies in the academy, Silverman's objective was the *introduction* of the British model, which invented the notion of a "Male Gaze," *not* the interrogation this model's discursive making. As *The Subject of Semiotics* was one of the first treatises on semiotic, psychoanalytic feminism, it was central in the introduction of the British model to an American Feminist audience. Moreover, that this was the discursive screen through which most American art critics and artists interested in Lacan first encountered the *Document* has an importance that can not be overstated.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>261</sup> Jane Gallop was also central in the introduction of psychoanalysis to an American audience, however, her books from this period are not British based per se. Gallop instead offers a model of Lacanian analysis in the field of Comparative Literature. Her handling of "suture," for instance, incorporates an interrogation of Heath's author-position. See: *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). Mary Anne Doane, on the other hand, was instrumental in furthering the British model to an American audience. See: Mary Ann Doanne, "Misrecognition and Identity," *Cine-Tracts*, vol. iii no. 3 (1980) for more discussion of the "screen as mirror" model. As a film theoretician, however, Doane's practice should be distinguished from Silverman's because Doane was the *subject* of Silverman's historicization.

However, when the *Document* was shown in its entirety for the very first time in 1984 at the Yale Center for British Art, it was in the context of British conceptualism, which included the usual suspects: Victor Burgin, Gilbert & George, Richard Long, Bruce McLean, and David Tremlett all of whom had some connection to St. Martin's School of Art in London. And yet, the exhibition's title significantly marks the effort to consciously fuse the discourses of Conceptualism and Psychoanalysis, although a rigorous understanding of how the subject "I" would be destabilized within such a fusion was in no way considered by the curator. Entitled *The Critical Eye/I*, it was thus to "the intensity of [the artists'] personal responses to the world which surrounds them" that gave rise to the hyphenated subject position of exhibition title.<sup>262</sup> However, Victor Burgin had by this period moved on from his Situationist *detournements* to psychoanalytic explorations of his male authorial subject position behind the camera - an allusion to Mulvey's Male Gaze theory. Burgin was thus paired by John Paoletti, the

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<sup>262</sup> *The Critical Eye/I* Press Release, (Yale Center for British Art).

exhibition's curator, with Kelly as being "involved with historical and psychological conventions which govern the way we perceive the world and its socio-political order, particularly that which concerns women." The others are presented through the non-psychoanalytic metaphor of "looking " in the most general sense. Long and Tremett are seen as "looking searchingly at the landscape and at the reductive symbolic forms which recall primitive responses and alliances with the forces of nature," while Gilbert & George and McLean "look in a particularly unblinking way at British society and customs in a manner that turns tradition against itself." <sup>263</sup>

As the *Critical Eye/I* was concerned (uncritically) with the artist's "personal responses to the world," Paoletti had a sociological understanding of Kelly's work, such that in the afterword he describes the work as a "diaristic self portrait" in which "the world [is] viewed in the first person singular." In even greater contradiction to the *Document's* challenge of the speaking subject via its indexical strategy, Paoletti asserts that

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

"Kelly's ghostly presence removes the physical shell of the artist but allows us to enter in an intensely personal manner directly into her mind and heart."<sup>264</sup> Thus, while the psychoanalytic, semiotic sounding title of the show indicates an interest in the theories disseminated by Silverman and others at this time, it nevertheless also marks the gap between the curator's personal interest and intellectual competency in these discourse. This was something that characterized many group exhibitions throughout the eighties that took up (or commodified) critical theory.<sup>265</sup> The exhibition's curator may have not have thoroughly grasped Kelly's work within the pastiche of theoretical terms put forth first by *Screen*, followed by Silverman and others. However, the exhibition's presentation of work related to sixties and seventies Conceptualist strategies was a context that paralleled the 1976 ICA show in London, and as Kelly herself has said one

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<sup>264</sup> John Paoletti, *The Critical Eye/I* exhibition catalogue, (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1984), p. 41.

<sup>265</sup> This concern was heightened by the increase in curator/collectors, such as the infamous eighties team Collins and Milazzo whose collection was financially bolstered by the theory-laden exhibitions they organized around the artwork. The rise in currency of work (figuratively and literally) by Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach, and Peter

"really got a good sense of what [her] project was taking on in such a context."<sup>266</sup>

A year prior to this, a section of the Document was included in Jo-Anna Isaak's group exhibition *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* at Protetch McNeil, a private Manhattan gallery. Paralleling the "feminist" reception established in Europe by Lucy Lippard, Griselda Pollock, and others, *Revolutionary Power* went farther than any previous exhibition in crossing over theories developed by the British school into the visual arts. Citing French post-structuralist theory by Lacan, Saussure, Eco, and Barthes, the exhibition was conceived around Kristeva's notion of the disruptive process and function of laughter.<sup>267</sup>

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Halley, all of whom the team promoted and theorized in accordance with Baudrillard's writings, is but one example.

<sup>266</sup> Carson, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*." The *Critical Eye/I* was also the site through which a second generation of feminists, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, and Silvia Kolbowski would have been introduced to the *Document*.

<sup>267</sup> In "Word, Dialogue and Novel," Kristeva discusses the ambiguity of the word "carnavalesque." It can either be solely parodic, as it is generally thought of in contemporary society, and in such a case it merely strengthens the law. But parody alone denies carnival's dramatic (murderous, cynical and revolutionary) *dialectical* potential that the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin emphasized. The power of the carnivalesque lies in its parodic *ambiguity*, according to Kristeva. She states: "The laughter of the carnival is not simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say it is *serious*. This is the only way that it can avoid becoming either the scene of law or the scene of its parody, in order to become the scene of it *other*. Modern writing offers several striking examples of this

For the first time in its feminist exhibition history, the *Document* - along with work by Jenny Holzer, Illona Granet, Nancy Spero, Barbara Kruger, and Mike Glier - was described through Lacanian terms such as "jouissance," "Law-of-the-Father," "signifying chain," "the symbolic," and "the Other." Issak began, in fact, with a statement against previous sociological readings of the subject: "With the acquisition of language comes only the ability to sign the pact others have written for us." <sup>268</sup>

The exhibition was thus decidedly anti-Realist in a manner recalling Screen's Brechtian-Althusserian position, which the polemics of the curator's statement clearly expressed:

*The analysis of how meaning is produced and organized undermines the structures of domination in this form*

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omnified scene that is both *law* and *others* - where *laughter* is silenced because it is not parody but *murder* and *revolution*. (Antonin Artaud)." Kristeva's text was written in 1966 and translated into English in 1980 in *Desire and Language* (just three years before Isaak's show). Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov were among the first writers to interpret Bakhtin's writings to an Anglophone audience. "Word, Dialogue and Novel" is also collected in *The Kristeva Reader*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 50.

<sup>268</sup> Jo-Anna Isaak, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, exhibition flyer, (NY: Protetch McNeil Gallery, 1983).

*of society (call it the paternal, the phallic, the symbolic), and shatters its belief in a transparent text, an 'innocent' uncoded experience of a 'real' world, in the notion that language or any other form of symbolic production simply expresses 'things as they are.' The aim is both to dismantle the presumption of the 'innocence' of the signifying system and to explore the only signifying strategy which allows the speaking subject to shift the limits of its enclosure - through play, jouissance, laughter.<sup>269</sup>*

As *Revolutionary Power* advocated a critical reading in the form of "play" rather than consumption, the art was therefore seen as *not* postulating "a new set of meanings" - that is, a separatist, feminine thematic. Rather, through visual puns and unsettling laughter the work was seen as wrecking ("phallo-centric") language from the position of the Other within the Symbolic, i.e., *within* its own terms.

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

The show's theme, to be sure, purported to be a deconstructive one, an agenda with which Kelly's work was by now becoming increasingly associated. As in the *Critical Eye/I*, the *Document* was positioned as an historical precedent in *Revolutionary Laughter*, though it was grouped with contemporary work by others artists made within a few years of the exhibition such that it was first received by many as an *eighties* art production. It is important to note, for instance, that Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (fig. 50), a series of public posters stating societal "truisms" in the language of the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, were made between 1979 and 1982. Barbara Kruger began making her signature work - in Isaak's words - "work that addresses the pictorial sign as site of the cultural construction of gender...woman as image, man as bearer of the look," around 1980 (fig. 51).<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> The phrases "woman as image" and "man as bearer of the look," of course, are from Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" essay. It should also be noted that the confusion of Kelly's 70's project with Kruger's 80's work - known as "second generation" feminist critique - at this time was further aided by contemporaneous exhibitions of Kruger's work, specifically *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*, hosted by the ICA, London. For this exhibition, Craig Owens theorizes Kruger's work around a British read of Lacan's gaze theory and Jakobson's semiotics. A year later, as I will come to shortly, he does the same thing with

However, unlike the aforementioned curators, Issak took pains to situate Kelly's work as the basis of the exhibition "historically as well as theoretically." First of all, Issak deliberately foregrounded the *Document's* origin as 1973 in her explication. But of greater importance, Isaak understood the *Document's* interrogative fusion of discourses on sexuality (psychoanalysis) and historical materialism (Marxism).<sup>271</sup> Its "revolutionary" potential was located in its "speaking" - psychoanalytically - the subversively unspeakable. That is to say, its speaking the "feminine." However, Isaak warned that the *Document's* presentation of the "feminine" is not

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Kelly's work. Henceforth, the two bodies of work have been discursively entangled with and periodized by such theories.

<sup>271</sup> As Issak was teaching in the Department of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara, a consideration of Conceptualist discourse was not presented. It was common place at this moment that most critics and scholars familiar with post-structuralist discourse were working in the fields of literature or philosophy. The notable exceptions in the arts, of course, were Norman Bryson and Rosalind Krauss, followed by Hal Foster, Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp, and Benjamin Buchloh all of whom were associated with the art journal *October*. The journal was the primary American art historical site for French post-structuralism, as well as related theory developed by the Frankfurt school. *October's* first issue was published in 1976 as "a forum for the presentation and theoretical elaboration of cultural work that continued the unfinished project of the 1960's." A genealogical account of *October's* theoretical development, of course, is beyond the focus of this chapter. Sandy Cohen, however, has written such an account - albeit a polemic one - for *Critical Inquiry*. For a general account of the art historical incorporation of structuralism and post-

natural or essential. Rather, it should be understood as a "complicated edifice." Accordingly, Issak sees the *Document's* power in its potential *subversion* of femininity's terms, rather than a polemical attack against them or an embracing thereof:

*The work is extremely restrained, there is no attack, no invective, its entire subversive impact comes from its revelation that what is natural, therefore is inevitable, or evitable, therefore natural, is in fact arbitrary and therefore possible to change.*<sup>272</sup>

Since *Revolutionary Power* was the first time that many people saw any of the *Document* in New York, Isaak's discursive encoding - via references to Mulvey's Lacan and Kristeva's Bakhtin - is significant.

If Issak introduced this discursivity to curatorial practice, filmmaker Jane Weinstock's review of Isaak's show, written for *Art in America*, initiated a public debate

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structuralism, see: Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. LXIII, no. 2 (June, 1991).

<sup>272</sup> Isaak, "Revolutionary Power."

over sexual difference, whereby such theories were positioned as the "blind spot of contemporary art criticism." Weinstock takes pains to polemically configure the problematic of feminist exhibitions celebrating Otherness (Body or Goddess art), implicitly referencing the work of Judy Chicago, Hannah Wilke, and others promoted by Mira Schor in the aforementioned article "*Beyond the Seventies: The Impact of Feminist Art.*" The danger of embracing this type of Feminist Art, Weinstock argues, is that one becomes "victim of the capital letter," and as such "remains the unchanging Truth extolled by the phalocrats." Nancy Spero (fig. 52), one of the exhibited artists, is seen as falling precisely into this trap, which Weinstock contentiously argues in terms that the art world was just taking up in 1983 around the deconstruction/essentialism debate:

*Of the women in the show, only Nancy Spero runs the risk of Feminist Art. Hand-made scrolls of mythical women, first crawling and then racing to victory, project an Other-worldliness which reinscribes the*

traditional male/female opposition. (It is just an opposition which Helene Cixous, whom Spero quotes in one of the works, is attempting to destroy.) Jo-Anna Isaak, the curator of the show, describes Spero's work as a 'celebration of difference,' but for me Spero's utopian scrolls have more to do with a myth of Otherness.<sup>273</sup>

Against Spero, Weinstock strategically reads the other artists *literally* through the show's thematic. For instance, Holzer is then seen to be playing with the grid, the square, the quintessential masculinist form - though this is described tongue in cheek by Weinstock, as if to point out the subversion of refusing the lure of a literal *Feminist* iconography. By sarcastically reading the work literally (Holzer's snide use of the "masculinist" square, Kelly's association of art with shit) she instead argues for what Kelly herself has called a "feminist *problematic*." That is to say, by making a case for a sarcastic, literalist reading, Weinstock claims to laugh

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<sup>273</sup> Jane Weinstock, "A Lass, Laugh and a Lad," *Art in America*, (Summer,

performatively at the conventional. Through such a strategy, she argues, "literal translations" exceed "literal-mindedness," and as such become a linguistic device to "break up the System of literal definitions." Moreover, if literal definitions are broken up, then it follows that "woman" as fixed sign would concomitantly be "deconstructed." The feminist problematic, then, didn't posit a defined iconography or subject matter; rather it advocated a critical approach to gender normativity and related linguistic codes.<sup>274</sup>

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1983), p. 7.

<sup>274</sup> Weinstock and Isaak were thus the first to publically articulate the deconstructionist, anti-essentialist position in the context of the New York art scene. However, "deconstructionist" is a term more readily used in the late eighties when writings by Jacques Derrida were widely read. In 1984, the term for the anti-essentialist position was "constructionist," emphasizing psychoanalytically that sexual difference was "constructed" not innate. Kelly and others were equally adamant about not essentializing feminism as well. Thus instead of "Feminist Art" there would be a "feminist problematic." The argument for a "feminist problematic" vs. "Feminist art" is from Mary Kelly's "Art and Sexual Politics," a paper she originally presented at the Art and Politics conference at AIR, London, in 1977 as a polemic against "cultural feminism." It is also collected in Kelly's *Imaging Desire*. Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman's "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Making," in *Screen* (Summer 1980) make a similar argument, pitting Kelly against Wilke. In the eighties and nineties, the essentialist debate (in the arts) crossed over into "Queer Studies," of which Judith Butler was the primary founder and advocate. Though she embraced performativity, Butler was suspicious of the psychoanalytic model. See: *Gender Trouble*. (NY: Routledge, 1990). While Butler is known as the founder of "Queer studies" in the general field of critical theory, the precedent set by Douglas Crimp within art discourse should not be overlooked. See: "Boys in My Bedroom," *Art in*

A year later the New Museum mounted *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, an exhibition that was even more polemical than *Revolutionary Power*.<sup>275</sup> Guest curated by Kate Linker (who selected the artwork) and Jane Weinstock (who organized the accompanying film series) its thematic was work engaged with the "complex terrain triangulated by the terms of sexuality, meaning, and language." Central, again, were Lacan's writings on "the construction of the subject in language," but what was *actually* being disseminated for the first time by a major art institution - as a coalesced discourse - were the British School's theories on sexual difference, translated to the field of contemporary art. The list of essay contributors alone emphasizes this bias. Three of the five were from the British School: Lisa Tickner, Peter Wollen, and Jacqueline Rose. The other two Americans, Jane Weinstock and Craig Owens, were informed by the British School and translated

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*America*, (February 1990); and "Mourning and Militancy," *October* 51 (1989).

<sup>275</sup> *Difference* presented an international group of artists, though it was predominated by the British and Americans. It included: Judith Barry, Dara Birnhbaum, Victor Burgin, Hans Haacke, Mary Kelly, Silvia Kolbowski, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Yve Lomax, Stuart Marshall, Martha Rosler, Jeff Wall, and Marie Yates.

its theories in a fairly orthodox manner to film and visual art, respectively.

Rose's contribution to the catalogue is important to note. As a dominant force in the Lacan Reading Group in London, to which Kelly also belonged, she was instrumental in the introduction of his writings to British and American feminists the same way Mitchell had previously made an argument for Freud. The Group had thus been a type of "think tank" for Rose and others to develop their own reading of Lacan, which came to fruition in the form of a number of influential writing projects. In 1982, two years prior to the *Difference* exhibition, Rose and Juliet Mitchell co-edited *Feminine Sexuality*, an anthology of articles by Lacan and his school (the *école Freudienne*) that the two had collected in the mid seventies, some of which had been discussed in their Reading Group.<sup>276</sup> In 1975

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<sup>276</sup> Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école Freudienne*, trans. Jacqueline Rose (NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982). The book's double introduction by Mitchell (on Freud) and Rose (on Lacan) was important in conceptually translating these late Lacanian texts to an anglophone audience. Recently, this "translation" has been disputed by descendents of the *école Freudienne*, led by Jacques Alain Miller, Lacan's son-in-law and heir to the estate. Dissatisfied with British interpretations of Lacan, Miller has since made it his task to disseminate "corrective" English translations. See: *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love*

Rose wrote one of three seminal texts published or presented in Britain on Lacan's notion of the Imaginary, appropriately entitled "The Imaginary" and originally delivered to the British Film Institute.<sup>277</sup> But it was for the *Difference* exhibition that Rose wrote "Sexuality in the Field of Vision," an essay whose title alone came to define a type of American art discourse centered on a psychoanalytic definition of sexual difference.<sup>278</sup>

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and Knowledge 1972-1973 (*Encore The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*), ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, (NY: W.W. Norton, 1998).

<sup>277</sup> Rose's essay on the Imaginary was written, as she says, "in response to a demand - for some clarification of the concept of the Imaginary which was being fairly loosely imported into certain areas of literary, and specifically film, criticism at a time when works by Jacques Lacan...were relatively unavailable in English." It was later published in 1981 in *The Talking Cure: Essays in Psychoanalysis and Language* ed. Colin MacCabe. The other two texts that dealt with the Imaginary were Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1975) and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen*, vol. 16, no.3 (Autumn, 1975).

<sup>278</sup> "Sexuality in the Field of Vision," would later entitle her book of collected writings on Lacan, literature, and film. Interestingly, the book's cover reproduces Barbara Kruger's photo-text piece *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face*, which subsequently became the poster-child for a feminist theorization of the Male Gaze throughout the eighties. See: *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, (NY: Verso, 1986). One of the first and most influential adaptations of this strain of Lacanian theory in an American context is Craig Owens' two well known essays "The Discourse of Others," collected in *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), and "Posing," collected in the *Difference* catalogue. Cindy Sherman's work at this time was also theorized as the quintessential vehicle for "redirecting" the "male gaze." Three of the most important texts that take this line of argument are: Judith Williamson's "Images of 'Woman'," *Screen* no. 24 (Nov. 83); Laura Mulvey's "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman," *The New Left Review*, no. 188 (July/August 1991); and Abigail Solomon-Godeau's critique of Sherman's recuperation under the "male gaze": "Suitable for Framing: The Critical Recasting of Cindy

***The Politics of Sexual Difference (The American Lacan)***

The British reception of Lacan, as I discussed in the previous chapter, was distinguished by the primacy given to theories surrounding the Imaginary. The notion of a psycho-visual gestalt, characteristic of Lacan's early theorization of the subject in his "Mirror Stage" essay, was more useful to intellectuals pondering representations of women in the seventies and early eighties than were later Lacanian theories concerning traumatic returns of the Real that have recently resonated in a post-AIDS episteme. As *Difference* was planned by a proponent of the British School, all of the catalogue essays incorporated the Imaginary interpretation of Lacan's gaze theory that Mulvey had implicitly promoted and Rose more explicitly so. It will suffice, however, to address Rose's essay as the transporter of this theory and Owens' as its recipient.

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Sherman," *Parkett*, no. 29 (1991); This reading of Sherman's work is critically undone by Rosalind Krauss, in her monograph *Cindy Sherman*.  
<sup>278</sup> Both essays are collected in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, (NY: Dia Art Foundation, 1987).

In "Sexuality in the Field of Vision," Rose attributes to artistic practice the dual task of "disrupting visual form and questioning sexual certainties and stereotypes of our culture." This connection - the relation between sexuality and the image - is substantiated by a return to Freud's essay on Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>279</sup> For in this essay Rose (like Mulvey) sees that "there can be no work on the image, no challenge to its powers of illusion and address, which does not simultaneously challenge the fact of sexual difference."<sup>280</sup> For Freud, Rose argues, voyeurism, fetishism, and castration are all related to sight. In such terms, the little boy refuses to believe the anatomical difference that he sees, while the little girl sees what she doesn't have and immediately knows she wants it. However, Rose continues, sexuality relies less on what is consciously seen than it does on the subjectivity of the viewer who sees it - that is to say, what it comes to signify to the subject *later* in a moment of deferred action. Thus seeing, like subjectivity, is always caught

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<sup>279</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood," (1910), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

in a state of fracture, its meaning always somewhere *other*, embodying the dialectics of recognition/misrecognition, pleasure/pain, identification/disgust. The manipulation of images can then be either complicit, reinforcing sexual identity, or disruptive, exposing "the fixed nature of sexual identity as a fantasy." Rose argues that "the archaic moments of disturbed visual representation, these troubled scenes that expressed and unsettled our groping knowledge in the past, [should] now be used as theoretical prototypes to unsettle our certainties once again."<sup>281</sup>

This Freudian psychoanalytic paradigm is used by Rose to argue a postmodern practice vs. a conventional modernist one, the former of which resists positing a certainty in the sign.<sup>282</sup> Rather, the post-modern sign is one whose meaning is constantly shifting. Roland Barthes' reading of Balzac's *Sarrasine* is thus seen as a quintessential example of a post-modern practice, as Barthes argues that the character's undecipherable sexuality is the actual source

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<sup>280</sup> Rose, "Sexuality in the Field of Vision," p. 31.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>282</sup> Presumably, Rose is speaking of a Greenbergian Modernism, not that of Duchamp or the branch of surrealism to which Bataille et. al. belonged that advocated the *informe*.

of the text's pleasure/pain. Modernism, on the other hand, emphasized the purity of the visual signifier - a gestalt akin to the "I" of Lacan's mirror stage. But this "I" is a lie - a primordial misrecognition that the unified, pure signifier covers up. Again, the image - like the subject - is split, troubled, decentered, along the division between conscious and unconscious states.<sup>283</sup> Rose thus psychoanalytically annotates four fundamental errors within a modernist practice that denies this split: (1) The belief in the visual signifier's ontology as opposed to unconscious mystique is a total denial of language's connection to subjectivity (that the unconscious in fact is structured like a language). (2) The belief that language can "rupture" the iconicity of the visual sign denies the structure of the unconscious (in which images are language)

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<sup>283</sup> I reiterate the particularity of this split for the British as being one caught between conscious and unconscious states. This interpretation of sight fuses Freud's theories on scopophilia with those put forth by Lacan's "Mirror Stage." However, Lacan revises this position in *Seminar XI*. In the latter case, the split is between the gaze and the eye - the gaze being an object hidden (the object cause of desire *beyond* the image of the other) and the eye that which sees (recognizes or misrecognizes) the same image. This revised paradigm incorporates a discussion of the Real - the unrepresentable "object" - which upon being "seen" annihilates the subject. The former paradigm, Rose's, deals with the threshold between the Imaginary and Symbolic registers, that is between the subject's pre and post linguistic states at the moment of the mirror stage. See chapter four.

(3) The belief that cultural artifacts can indict the stereotype denies sexual difference, and (4). The belief that reading is supplemental (i.e., that it is what the subject adds to a text, not what *constitutes* the subject) denies the sexual determinacy of the signifier within visual space.

The connection between visual production and the psychoanalytic means of theorizing sexuality in the field of the visual was a major development. Importantly, Rose's essay dealt with *visual practice*, rather than sociological or ideological imperatives for a feminist production. From this position, Rose advocated what she calls a deconstructive approach, not a moral corrective. Post-modern artists utilizing a deconstructive strategy, the argument went, would draw upon the same critical and artistic tendencies they also sought to displace. In this way, "reference" in its *problematized* form would re-enter the frame. Such arguments on deconstruction were by now familiar among the initiated via essays by Owens ("The Allegorical Impulse") and Crimps ("On the Museum's Ruins"), both of which had been published in the journal *October*.

It was Rose's contribution to psychoanalytically interpret these arguments.<sup>284</sup>

Contemporaneous with Crimp and Owens' work on post-modernism, Hal Foster canonized the post-modern vs. modern debate within the field of art criticism (to which Rose's text refers in an American context). In his anthology of critical essays entitled *The Anti-Aesthetic* (in which Crimp's essay is reproduced) and the anthology of his own essays entitled *Recodings*,<sup>285</sup> the polemic of an "oppositional post-modernism" was posited against what was known at the time as the "trans-avant garde." In his essay "Between Modernism and the Media," Foster characterized the trans-avant garde, represented most notably by the European artists Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia, and Anselm Kiefer, as being "the very achievement of a triumphant bourgeoisie...bathe[d] in (nostalgic glory)." An oppositional post-modern strategy, on the other hand,

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<sup>284</sup> Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," Parts 1 and 2, *October* 12 & 13, (Spring and Summer 1980); and Douglas Crimp's "On the Museum's Ruins," *October* 13 (Summer 1980).

<sup>285</sup> In the early to mid eighties Hal Foster's two books became hotly debated manifestos, of a sort, advocating the work of Mary Kelly, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Victor Burgin, among others.

recognized that historical references could be disruptive.

He states:

*...the use of different artistic techniques may open up our own mode of cultural production, revealing it to be an overlay of many modes; and the quotation of marginal expressions in the present (e.g. third world art) or dismissed figures in the past (e.g. woman artists) can challenge the official canon and value system of modern Western art.*<sup>286</sup>

It was precisely within the terms of this debate that Rose's transference of terms from British film theory into contemporary art production should be understood. Rose's argument for entering "reference" - in its problematized form - into the "frame" (an obvious dual reference to the filmic and static images), parallels Foster's argument for disruptive historical citation. Thus one discursive trajectory produced by the *Difference* show advocated the

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<sup>286</sup> Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1985), p. 41.

incorporation of the politics of sexual difference into the politics of an oppositional post-modernism.

As a complement to Rose's text read through Foster's criticism, Owens' article would establish another discursive trajectory that would henceforth come to define Kelly, and others such as Kolbowski, Kruger, Levine, and even ex-Conceptualists Haacke and Burgin, to an American audience. Heavily laden with references to Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the English translation of which had just been released in 1978, "Posing" theorized the above artists around the concept of mimicry. Based on what was then a conventional reading of Lacan's use of mimicry, the following passage by Kruger is cited as the essay's leitmotif: "We loiter outside of trade and speech and are obliged to steal language. We are very good mimics. We replicate certain words and pictures and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction."<sup>287</sup>

At the time of the essay's writing, mimicry as an oppositional strategy was advocated across numerous

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<sup>287</sup> Craig Owens, "Posing," *Difference*, p. 7.

disciplines. For instance, Homi Bhabha argued in the field of British "post-colonial" literary studies (a spin off of British film theory), that in the "comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects, mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge."<sup>288</sup> Recalling Kristeva's theorization of the carnival's revolutionary power, which rests on its ambivalence, Bhabha makes similar oppositionist claims for mimicry, through which Kruger's assertions can be read:

*The discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. . . Mimicry is thus the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or*

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<sup>288</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Of mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October*, no. 28, (Spring, 1984), also collected in *October: The First Decade*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), p. 318.

*recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary power.*<sup>289</sup>

In both Owen's and Bhabha's texts, the "pose" (the screen-image, which in Lacanian terms sustains the subject's phantasy with regards to the "Other") is fused with mimicry (which in Lacanian terms annihilates the subject). The effect that the latter strategy would have on the "posing" subject is never clearly reconciled by either author, as they don't view mimicry in such strict Lacanian terms.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Roger Caillois' essay "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," upon which Lacan based his notion of mimicry in a discussion of the gaze, wasn't translated in English until 1984 (*October* no. 31). Thus, Owens' may not have had an opportunity to read what Lacan/Caillois' use of mimicry makes clear - that mimicry is *not* akin to the image with which one aligns one self to achieve a singular notion of subjectivity. Rather, it is a mechanism by which a subject (or insect in Caillois' text) approaches psychotic spatial dissolution. Caillois, in fact, refers to schizophrenia for a description of what is at stake in mimicry: "...[this is] the invariable response of schizophrenics to the question: where are you? *I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself.* To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them...He tries to look at *himself from* any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put.* He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar.*" The effect on the subject then is one of radical alterity, a loss of his Cartesian footing within the scopic drive.

Such "cut and run" uses of psychoanalysis, however, were not unusual in a partisan environment in the process of developing a critical feminist, oppositional practice based upon newly translated material. Moreover, it wasn't just the theory that was elastic. So was the art. For instance, a piece by Haacke tracing the provenance of Seurat's *Les Poseuses* was easily subsumed into the politics of sexual difference in order to address the artwork as corporate "property." Owens explains this discursive re-formation: "Haacke's work has been included in the present exhibition presumably because its 'object' belongs to a long tradition of images of the female nude - images destined for a male viewer, who supposedly accedes through

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For Lacan, this radical alterity was also the subject's experience should he see that which isn't given to sight - the gaze as an uncanny *object*. For to be seen at once from all sides, is not (psychoanalytically) to be *seen* at all, as the scopic drive - seeing - manifests itself in the desire to see (or be seen by) something (an object) *beyond* representation. This of course is a phantasy (desire) that sustains the subject. However, should this object show itself - i.e., should the *object* of our scopic drive, the *gaze* show itself, we would see that it (as *objet a* - object cause of desire) in fact doesn't exist at all. That is, we would see that there *is* nothing beyond representation to see, only our desire to see it. The consequence of the gaze showing itself disables the scopic drive, it is thus not to be seen and therefore not to *see*. As the scopic drive (like all drives) is necessarily unconscious, it would constitute an annihilating return of the Real comparable to the psychosis described by Caillois. See "The Line and the Light," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*.

the image to a position of imaginary control, possession."<sup>291</sup>  
Legacy, of course, is related to patrimony (or the legacy of the father). As such, anything could be defined within the politics of sexual difference, but of course, that is (psychoanalytically speaking) precisely the point.

Owens goes on to define all the artists in *Difference* as somehow addressing sexuality as a "pose," that is, as a form of (mimetic) imposture. Again, we see Lacan's gaze theory conflated with Freud's scopophilia, which was characteristic of the British/American psychoanalytic hybrid. On this account, Burgin is heavily cited. Here is but one passage in which Burgin's reading of Freud through Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" essay is readily apparent:

*If we turn to psychoanalysis we find that Freud's discussion of voyeurism links it with sadism - the drive to master is a component of scopophilia (sexually based pleasure in looking); this look is a*

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<sup>291</sup> "Posing," p. 7.

*mastering sexually gratifying look, and the main  
object of this look in our society is the woman.*<sup>292</sup>

Equally characteristic of British discourse on the "look" was the reference to Foucault's writings on the Panopticon.<sup>293</sup> The panopticon in Burgin's reading (cited at length by Owens) "shows how power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representation." The peep show (the model here would be Show World on 42<sup>nd</sup> street) is

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<sup>292</sup> Burgin cited in "Posing," p. 8.

<sup>293</sup> Foucault's reference to the Bentham's panopticon became popular at this time within discourses of "Others." Bentham's panopticon was a 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural model for a disciplinary society: a ring of cells stacked on top of each other surrounds a central tower. Each cell has two windows: one facing the tower and the other facing the outside. This facilitated the cell's constant illumination and thus visibility to the central tower. The mechanism made sight constant and recognition immediate, as Foucault states: "Full lighting and the eye of the supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap." *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 201. The "figure" in the tower had a certain appeal to Mulvey et. al. as he (in the darkness) sees but is not seen - the reference to the theatre can be made here with a surface reading of the Foucault. "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad; in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen." Foucault, it should be noted, was making a homology between the panopticon and the manner in which power is decentralized and disseminated among a democratic populous in a dystopic way, whereby an unlocatable self-policing mechanism would be operative. Joan Copjec's "The Orthopsychic Subject" speaks of the Foucauldization of Lacan, although her treatment of Foucault is less engaged than her handling of Lacan.

thus seen as an inverted Panopticon: "in the [peep show], the voyeurs occupy the peripheral booths, the spectacle, the central stage; whereas in the [Panopticon], the (over) seer occupies the central tower, the prisoners the peripheral cells." Burgin/Owens conclude that the oppressive surveillance of women in society may therefore not be the most "visible, socially sanctioned form of the more covert surveillance of society-in-general by agencies of the state."<sup>294</sup> This is precisely what Owens' text took up, the difficulty in locating the eye of the oppressor in relation to the (mimetic) pose of the Other. For sometimes, the Other consciously *refuses* to pose but is still "seen."

Owens theorized Kelly's *Document* as one such "refusal" to pose. As iconophobia (and hence psychoanalytically, its opposite iconophilia) was the pathology of the day, images of woman, physically present or absent, were ultimately always "present." Interestingly, Owens didn't see, blinded by his iconophilia as it were, where the "pose" was located

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<sup>294</sup> Burgin's text, which Owens is citing here, is an interview with the artist by Tony Godfrey, entitled "Sex, Text, Politics," *Block*, no. 7 (1982), p. 15.

in the *Document*. The parody, of a number of discourses ranging from Conceptualism to Psychoanalysis, was the strategic locus of the *Document's* "pose," or in Lacanian terms, the image-screen it put up. While for Owens the deployment of charts, graphs, diagrams, drawings, imprints, plaster casts, and found objects may be indexes of an "absent" mother, his desire to locate this mother at the other end of the pointing index (finger) lands him squarely within another site: the book form of *Post-Partum Document*, in which a picture of Kelly and her child was reproduced as a frontispiece (fig. 53).<sup>295</sup>

After addressing the mother and child's pose in Kelly's photograph, "identical to that of hundreds of thousands of cult images of mother and child," Owens focuses upon the exchange of looks both within and emitting from the photograph's frame.

*What is most fascinating about the image...is the child's gaze, which seems to puncture the otherwise*

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<sup>295</sup> Ironically, this secondary photograph of Kelly and her son in the midst of a recording session was the *only* reproduction of the "work"

*impenetrable surface of the image in order to fix us, its viewers in place. What is this immobilizing gaze if not the figuration...of the gaze of the otherwise invisible photographer who framed and stilled this scene? For there are not just two, but three subjects represented here; the identity of the third party is acknowledged outside the frame, in a caption that gives credit for considerably more than the image, since the name of the photographer is also the name of the father: Ray Barrie.<sup>296</sup>*

Owens' reading of the photograph (as well as Lacan's theory of the gaze in which the eye and gaze are not split) may now seem literal. But this, as I have said, typified the way Lacan's gaze theory initially was received within contemporary art. However, what is more interesting to note is the manner in which Owens, like many critics at this moment, was *caught* by Kelly's photograph. This, of course, was what Lacan spoke about when he theorized in *The*

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provided in Owens' essay. The image's revenge should thus be duly noted here.

<sup>296</sup> "Posing," p. 10.

*Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that the picture was a "trap for the gaze." For the gaze - that uncanny, unrepresentable object - disappears in each point at which the viewer tries to locate it. What instead surfaces are a number of trajectories, geometral points, a series of exchanged looks, the image-screen at which they are directed serving to *hide* the gaze lest it surface, exposing that in fact there is nothing beyond representation to expose (or desire).<sup>297</sup> Should we extend *this* theorization of the gaze to an analysis of Owens' position, what he sees *behind* the image is the object-lack produced by the "law-of-the-father," which - as a mastering subject - is precisely what he *should* see.<sup>298</sup> For without

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<sup>297</sup> See "What is a Picture," and "Anamorphosis," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>298</sup> To give a feel of how this concept of "the law of the Father" was used, I quote Owens at length, as for many years it was his model that younger critics followed: "The Lacanian concept of the Name-of-the-Father refers to the legal attribution of paternity, the law whereby the son is made to refer to the father, to represent his presence (as in the photograph in question). Since such attribution can never be verified, but must be taken on faith, the Name-of-the-Father is both a juridical and a theological concept: 'The attribution of paternity to the father,' Lacan wrote, 'can only be the effect of a pure signifier, of a recognition, not of a real father, but of what religion has taught us to refer to as the Name-of-the-Father.' Although Christianity suspended the Mosaic prohibition of representation, the interdiction of images of the Father remained in force: nevertheless, he returns as pure, disembodied gaze (fantasies of an all-seeing being) which subjects both mother and son - and, as relayed by the latter, the viewer as well - to His scrutiny." This passage is the quintessential

it, the photograph holds no meaning, and within this context neither would the feminist critic "Owens" himself as the photograph's decipherer.

Kelly's intended signification of the same photograph, however, was something different, as the original use of the photograph attests. In 1976 a poster mock-up (fig. 54) for a lecture related to the *Document's* ICA exhibition places the same photograph in the middle of Lacan's Schema R, which is to say, it places it in the space designated by Lacan as the *unrepresentable*. This intersubjective "moment" of mother and child - of great *affect* for masters of the Madonna and Child as a Christian genre - would always be psychoanalytically unrepresentable if one simply "pictured" the dyad. It would, as Owens shows, always be subsumed within the "Law-of-the-father" by both those claiming to deconstruct it as well as those (like Chicago) trying to redeem it. The poster, in its original form, was thus an explanatory footnote for the lack of iconic imagery in the show. I mention the artist's "intent" here not to posit the "real" meaning of the image as a pure index of

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example of the American fusion of Foucault and Lacan vis-à-vis Mulvey.

Kelly's "self"; rather it demonstrates the extent to which images were readily screened through Mulvey et. al.'s rhetoric at this moment. That is to say, it demonstrates the manner in which they were posited within the "woman-as-image" vs. "man-as-bearer-of-the-look" model.<sup>299</sup>

The lasting historical importance of Owens' reading was that it afforded the *Document* a model of reception, and therefore an audience, within the space of contemporary art production in the process of assimilating psychoanalysis as a critical tool. The down side was that this type of psychoanalytic reading of the *Document* - structured around theories of the Male Gaze - shut down the project's dialogic, even parodic, relation to the various discursive fields I have discussed throughout this dissertation. What the *Document* went on to be, after the *Difference* exhibition, was a manifest example of the British School. Initially, this was *not* without Kelly's compliance. The year prior to *Difference*, Kelly had participated in a

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"Posing," p. 10.

<sup>299</sup> I would be remiss not to mention the other British (non-psychoanalytic) model for this paradigm of "woman-as-image": John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972). For an instance of Berger's approach combined with that of Mulvey's, see:

British conference at the ICA entitled *Desire*, for which a catalogue was produced that had a limited but specific circulation.<sup>300</sup> Participants included Victor Burgin, who by now had made a complete conversion from Conceptualism to psychoanalytic critical practice, Rosalind Coward, co-founder of the journal *m/f*, Julia Kristeva, and Laura Mulvey all of whom participated under the following proclamation:

*Ever since Freud designated the human being as the neurotic animal, the primary repression of sexual desire has made us what we are. Yet desire is not only a sexual term. These papers explore the fabric of desire and pursue it through psychoanalysis and representation in language and image.*<sup>301</sup>

The collected papers included a conversation between Coward and Kristeva, both of whom urged the importance of theorizing artistic production - the image - around Lacan's

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Judith Williamson *Decoding Advertising: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).

<sup>300</sup> *Desire*, ICA Document, (London: ICA, 1984).

notion of the mirror stage and Kristeva's notion of the imaginary which proceeds from it.<sup>302</sup> Mulvey's contribution discussed how feminist "work" on images of women drew attention to "the potential offered by psychoanalysis as a decoding tool" for understanding the seductiveness of such images.<sup>303</sup>

But it was here, in the *Desire* catalogue, that Kelly first describes her own project within Mulvey's terms. Feminist art production, according to Kelly, needs to negotiate the following contradiction: "The woman artist 'sees' her experience as a woman particularly in terms of the 'feminine position'...but she must also account for the 'feeling' she experiences as the artist occupying the so-called 'masculine position' as subject of the look."<sup>304</sup> Regarding the conference flyer's reference to the *Document* - "Feminist artists have refused the image of the maternal body creating significance out of its absence" - Kelly responds that her denial of such representation is an

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>302</sup> "Julia Kristeva in Conversation with Rosalind Coward," *Desire*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>303</sup> Laura Mulvey, "The Image and Desire," *Desire*.

<sup>304</sup> Mary Kelly, "Woman-Desire-Image," *Desire*, p. 30.

*historical* one aimed at undermining the conventional reading of the portrait as a "slice of life." Thus, the concept of the "look" provides an additional discursive field to which the *Document* now responds, one that had yet to be established to such an extent during the project's production. In reference to this field, Kelly more fully states:

*Using the body of the woman, her image, or person is not impossible but problematic for feminism. In my work I have tried to cut across the predominant representation of woman as object of the look in order to question the notion of femininity as a pre-given entity and foreground instead its social construction as a representation of sexual difference within specific discourses. [my emphasis] Above all I am trying to picture the woman as subject of her own desire. This is not a new form of iconoclasm but an aspiration I share not only with feminists, but with certain 'post-modernists' who are making a critique of*

*the kind of creative essentialism that predominates in much current art and criticism.*<sup>305</sup>

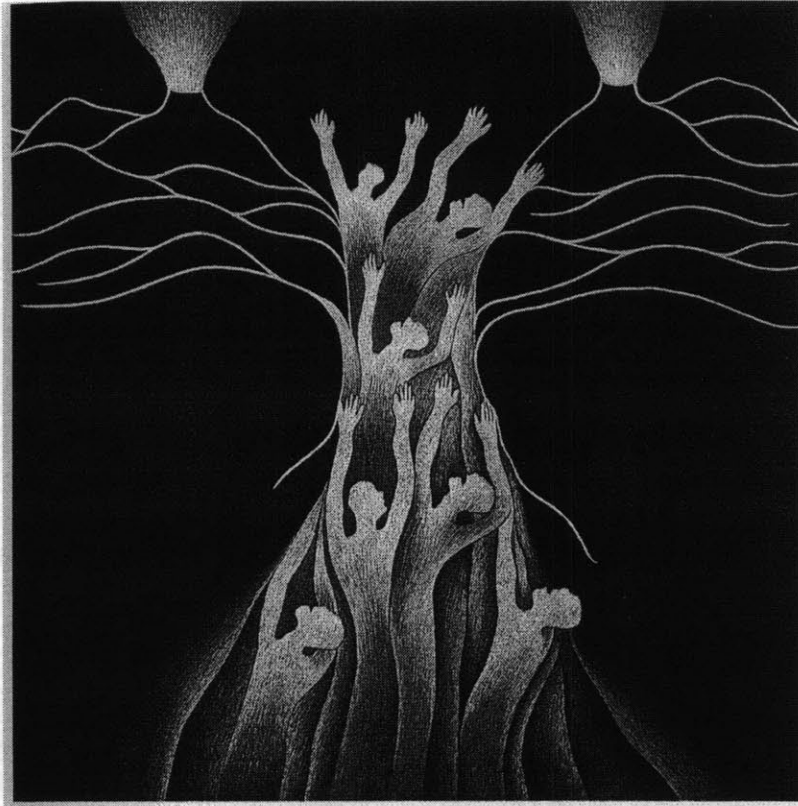
In 1984 with the British School's success, the terms of the *Document's* debate thus radically shifted away from its initial engagement with Conceptualism, activism, and psychoanalysis. And as the above citation shows, Kelly herself was instrumental in pushing the *Document* along its new discursive trajectory. The economy of the look (Mulvey/Owens) is now in dialogue with strategies of the post-modern (Rose/Foster), within which the *Document* as sign stood for a model of critical practice/engagement for critics and artists in search of an oppositional, psychoanalytically informed post-modernism.

However, not everyone felt the "politics of sexual difference," as articulated by those associated with the *Difference* exhibition, was a satisfactory model for political action. As in all deconstructive practices, a residual component is always left unchallenged. The moment of the *Document's* transformation into a critical model for

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

artistic production was also the nascent moment of the AIDS crisis. Thus, many felt the failure of psychoanalytically informed feminists to account for an economy of homosexual desire was one such residue, an argument I will now take up in my Afterword. The *Document's* impact on a younger generation as a model of critical practice, specifically on the work of the American artist Andrea Fraser will also be considered.



**Figure 45: Judy Chicago, "Thou Art the Mother Womb,"  
(detail), *The Birth Project*, 1984.**

Y.C.A.  
DURRANT'S

DURRANT HOUSE  
HERBAL HILL  
LONDON E.C.1  
01-278 1733

DAILY EXPRESS

118, FLEET STREET,  
LONDON, E.C.4

ISSUE  
DATED 15 OCT 1976

I may not know much about Art  
but I certainly know a dirty nappy  
when I see one hanging up...



A wash-day look about this gallery line-up, as any woman can see

EXPRESS PICTURE BY DAVID CAIRNS

By Patrick Clancy

**WELL DONE** Mary Kelly's little boy! But I'm sure my little Rodney could do just as well, given a more artistic diet.

And who could blame this visitor for finding herself back home with the weekly wash... rather than on a cultural outing to an art gallery.

This rash of nappies is artist Mary Kelly's idea. And please don't laugh... it's a very important educational experience.

The nappies — or nappy-liners to be precise — are part of an exhibition of Miss Kelly's works at the Institute of Contemporary Art's New Gallery.

She has spent three years preparing it and the 25, gloriously smudged, used nappies are partly the work of her three-year-old son.

Chemically treated — for hygienic purposes — they are mounted and framed in neat rows at the gallery in London's Mall.

But nappies in an ART



Mary Kelly... it's art

And the  
artist  
says: 'They  
are art  
because  
I say so...'

quantity?  
Miss Kelly insists: "They are art because I say so."  
"The important thing about art is that it only exists because it cannot be defined, because it fills that extra need for that which cannot be defined."  
And talking of definition, there is printed beneath every nappy a list of what the baby had to eat and drink each day before that particular garment became redundant.  
e.g. Feb. 9, 1974. 09.00hrs. 7ozs. SMA, 2 tsps. cereal, 11.00 hrs. 2 ozs. orange, 12.00 hrs. Sacs. SMA, 2 tsps. carrot, 1 tsp. egg yolk, 16.00 hrs. 1 oz. water, 18.30 hrs. 7 ozs. SMA, 2 tsps. cereal, 6 tsps. apple, 21.30 hrs. 3 ozs. SMA.

### Nursery

Miss Kelly — it is her professional name — is married to an artist and is herself an art lecturer specialising in art history and visual research.

The nappies are only a small part of the exhibition. American-born Miss Kelly emphasises: "They are meant to be educational and represent the earliest stages of feeding a child and the changing of its nappies."

There are two other sections in the exhibition with an additional 38 exhibits dealing with the child's progression through the nursery and speech-learning stages.

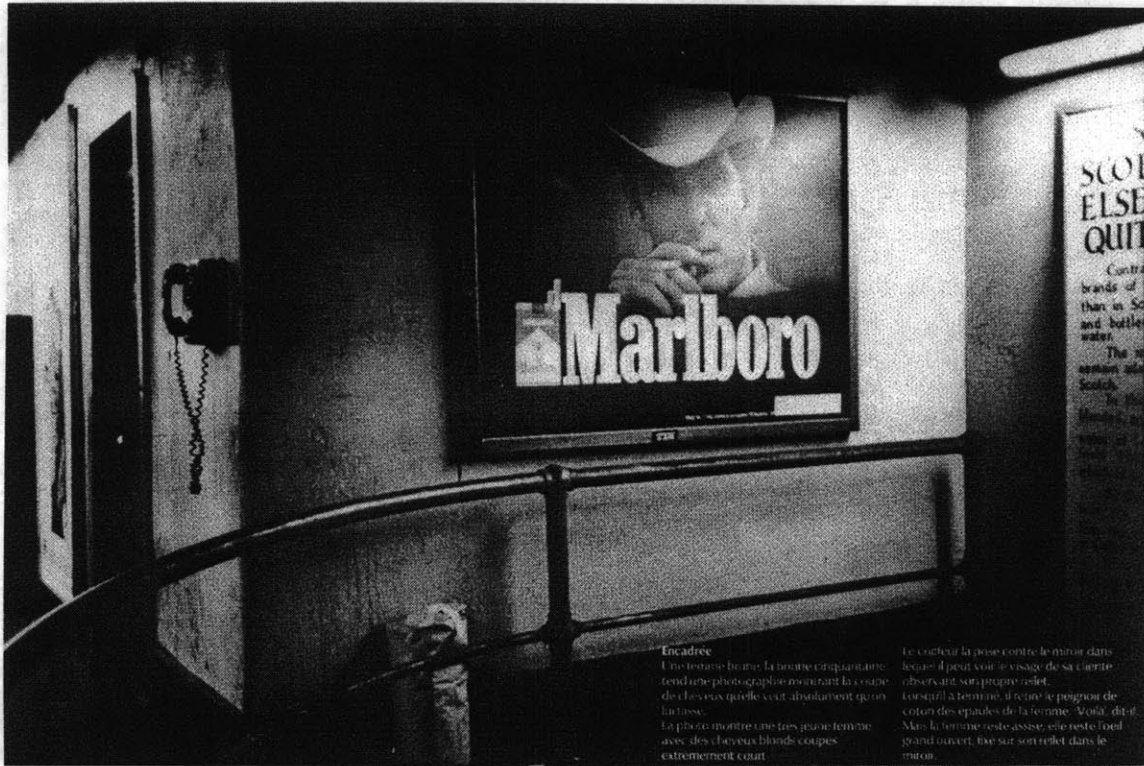
Overall, the exhibition is meant to be a proud display of "the femininity of woman and motherhood."

Admission is free. Of course, as a taxpayer, you will already have contributed some of the £36 million a year which the Arts Council received this year.

And more than a £20,000 of this was given to the I.C.A. in a grant by the council. About £5,000 went to the New Gallery to fund exhibitions.

Another famous London gallery, The Tate, was under fire last February when it exhibited a pile of 120 bricks at an estimated cost of £1,000 in public money.

Figure 46: "I may not know much about Art...", Daily Express, (October 15, 1976).



**Encadrée**

Une femme jeune, la jeune cinquantaine, tend une photographie montrant la coupe de cheveux qu'elle veut absolument qu'on lui fasse. La photo montre une très jeune femme avec des cheveux blancs coupés extrêmement court.

Le coupleur la pose contre le miroir dans lequel il peut voir le visage de sa cliente observant son propre reflet. Lorsqu'il a terminé, il retire le poignoir de coton des épaules de la femme. Voilà, dit-il. Mais la femme reste assise, elle reste focal grand ouvert, fixe sur son reflet dans le miroir.

**Figure 47: Victor Burgin, *Encadrée*, 1977.**

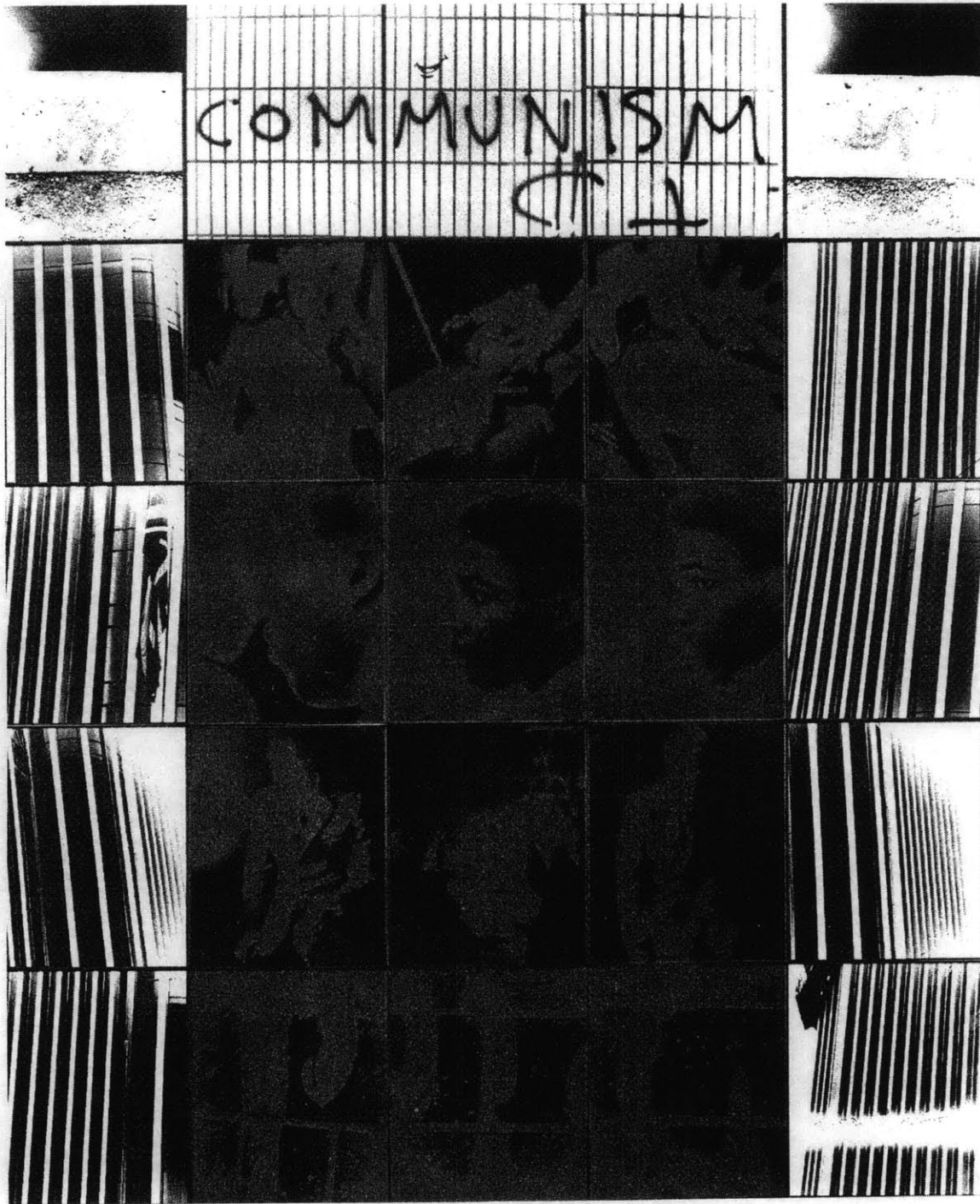


Figure 48: Gilbert and George, *Communism*, 1977.

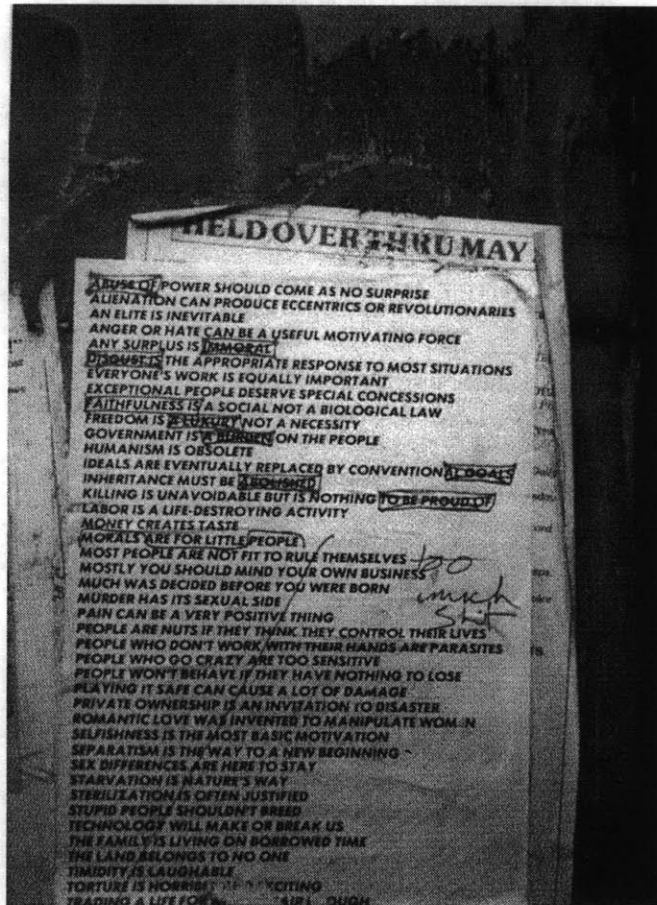


Figure 49: Jenny Holzer, *Selections from Truisms*, 1982. Street Installation, New York City.



Figure 50: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face)*, 1981.

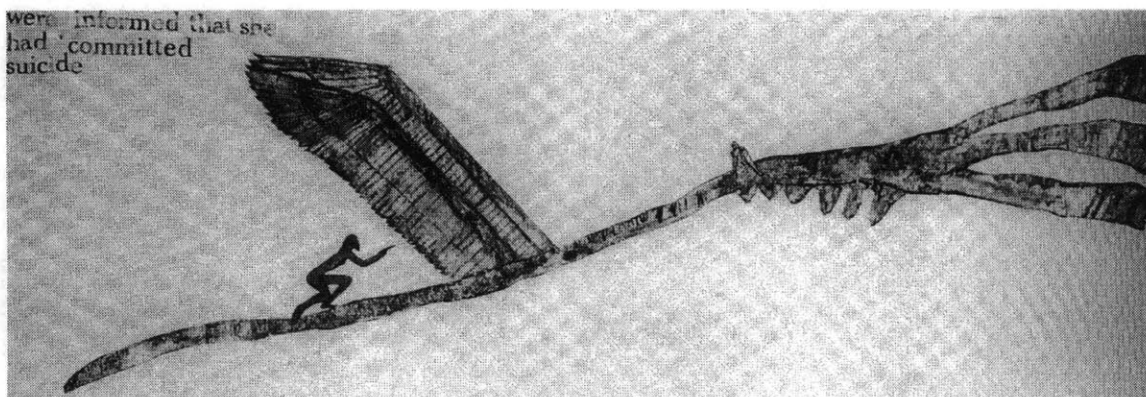


Figure 51: Nancy Spero, *Torture of Women*, (detail) 1968.



fig. 3. Mary Kelly, Recording Session from *Post-Partum Document*, 1973-1979; *Documentation II*, 1975. Mixed media, 18 units: 10 x 8" (edited version).  
Courtesy of the artist

**Figure 52: Reproduction of Kelly Recording Session from  
*Difference: On Sexuality and Representation*, New Museum  
exhibition catalogue, 1985.**

# Mary Kelly

LECTURE AND DISCUSSION  
ON THE POST-PARTUM DOCUMENT  
MONDAY, MAY 30, 2:00 P.M.  
ART HISTORY DEPT. ROOM 54

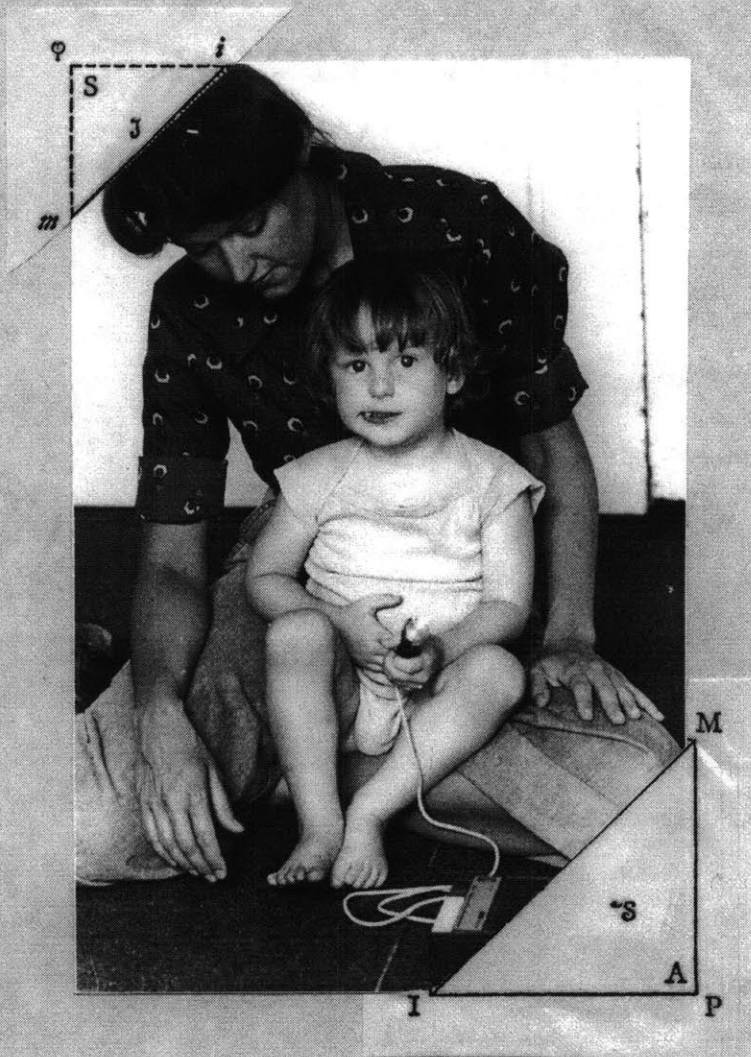


Figure 53: Mary Kelly, poster mock-up, ICA exhibition, London, 1976.

## **AFTERWORD**

### **A Case Study for Contemporary Critical Practice: A**

#### **Conversation with Andrea Fraser**

##### ***Introduction***

The imperative to question edifices of sexual difference, as manifest within the visual field, was definitively anti-separatist. Both *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* and *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* exhibited work by men on the subject. Ironically, this discourse nevertheless became separated from other critical art discourses. Thus, in some ways, there was a return of a repressed separatism resulting from their dialectical polemics. Douglas Crimp publicly voiced this "failure" in a conference organized by the Dia Art Foundation in 1987, entitled "Strategies of Public Address: Which Media, Which Publics?" Performatively staged as an angry response to another Dia presentation by Thomas Crow, entitled "These Collectors, They Talk About Baudrillard Now," Crimp's address rebutted Crow's characterization of

the collective 'Other' (i.e., postmodernist feminists, critics, and artists) as a "balkanization" of the public - a regressive, feudal threat to the cause of the Modernist Left.<sup>306</sup> Interestingly, Crimp saw the *Difference* exhibition as an extension of this problematic division between two camps - the (heterosexual) feminist psychoanalytic Left and the (heterosexual) masculinist Marxist Left - at the cost of an unspoken (homosexual) Other. That is to say, the debate between the "politics of class and those of sexual difference," in which the gay "Other" is expelled, was nothing but business as usual for Crimp.

Citing Bill Olander, who curated another show New Museum show entitled *Homo Video*, Crimp reiterates the belief that *Difference* was a "stunning failure" by its refusal to take up an analysis of *homosexual* difference:

*In his notes for the "Homo Video" show recently at the New Museum, Bill Olander makes reference to the absence [of homosexuality from the discussion of sexual difference]...as "a stunning failure." Now it*

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<sup>306</sup> Both essays are collected in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed.

*must be said that any attempt to dismantle patriarchy, any insistence on sexual difference, implicitly benefits gay people. But the relevant word here is "implicitly." How does the presumption of desire as heterosexual differ from the assumption of subjectivity as male? I think that...the word "homosexual" never appeared in the texts for "Difference" cannot be easily dismissed.*<sup>307</sup>

Olander's *Homo Video* had been organized in response to this line of criticism, which the *Difference* show had invoked while it was mounted. An exhibition of videos by gay and lesbian artists, made before and after the AIDS crisis, *Homo Video* was one of the first attempts by a major art institution to address the gay "community" within terms defined by the politics of sexual difference. However, as Crimp points out via his critique of Crow, when *Homo Video* was mounted a general attitude among the Left still persisted in the sentiment that "This does not concern me."

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Hal Foster, (NY: Dia Art Foundation, 1987).

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

Crimp militantly asserted that there was no real division between such discursive practices, only the homophobic denial of their common sites of resistance. The ironic doubling of the title "Unfinished Business," which referred both to a video project on AIDS activism shown in *Homo Video* as well as the concurrent Hans Haacke exhibition in the front gallery, attested to this. It was unlikely, Crimp argues, that the audience of either show would have noticed this irony as these groups were ideologically segregated, one interested in sexual politics the other in corporate. However, the problem was ultimately curatorial, as meaning is discursively manufactured in such spaces as the exhibition site. It can resist the blithe perpetuation of hermetic ideologies or it can comply with them. Crimp muses over the situation in which one could have waged such a resistance:

*I wonder what might have been achieved, for example, if the two curators, Brian Wallis and Bill Olander, had strategized together about the possibility of confronting Hans Haacke's "Unfinished Business" with*

"Homo Video"'s unfinished business. How might Benjamin Buchloh's lecture on Hans Haacke at Cooper Union have been different if he had been asked to talk about "Homo Video" as well? I know this might sound like an absurd proposal. But its absurdity should tell us something of the degree of our differences.<sup>308</sup>

Crimp's frustration was with the real difference at hand - the difference of concern. It was the same story of discursive confrontation (or the refusal thereof) with which Kelly had become intimately familiar in the production and reception of the *Document*, reiterated for Crimp in 1987 at the nascent moment of another critical practice known as Queer Theory. It should be recalled that the reception of Kelly's work had still not incorporated the debate it provoked between Conceptualism and theories of sexual difference in a mode of critical art practice. Though Craig Owens' had incorporated Haacke into the politics of sexual difference in *Differences*, no one had as

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

yet incorporated Kelly into Conceptualism.<sup>309</sup> Thus understanding the manner in which seemingly opposite sites of discourse (Conceptualism, psychoanalysis) could interrogate each other vis-à-vis the use of related terms of resistance was still limited. Since Queer Theory was in part a derivative of many of the principles put forth by visual strategies surrounding the politics of sexual difference, retrospectively the denial of any dialogue between *Homo Video* and *Unfinished Business* is all too predictable.

There was, however, one site of resistance to the segregation of Conceptualist practice from the politics of sexual difference in the practice of Andrea Fraser, a young performance artist who attended both the *Difference* and *Unfinished Business* exhibitions. In 1986 Fraser was invited to participate in the New Museum's *Damaged Goods* exhibition, organized around the art object as commodity fetish. Posing weekly as a gallery docent, Fraser

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<sup>309</sup> When Kelly's work was incorporated into the Conceptualist debate by those interested in the politics of sexual difference, it was categorized as a second generation, "post-conceptualist," feminist intervention. See: Mary Anne Staniszewski's "Conceptual Art," *Flash Art*, (November/December, 1988).

conducted a tour of the museum - the entire museum - careful to include its marginal spaces such as the bookstore and security system. The performance script was composed of a series of textual 'ready-mades,' appropriated from a discursively diverse range of sources all related to the production of culture.<sup>310</sup> The *Damaged Goods* performance directly took up what Crimp had asked to be considered on the Dia Art Foundation panel: what is the museum's interest? Whose concerns are at stake? The answer inevitably was one of contradiction. As Craig Owens noted in his contribution to the same Dia conference, "Fraser called attention to one of the subtle inversions of cultural protectionism: while the museum claims to protect works of art in the name of the public, it actually protects them *from* the public."<sup>311</sup>

Fraser's performance was informed by a branch of institutional critique initiated by Michael Asher who, unlike Daniel Buren or Hans Haacke, investigated the

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<sup>310</sup> Thus promotional brochures for the security system and the *Docent Guidelines* from the Freer Gallery of Art were as readily cited as Raymond Williams's *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. The script and footnotes for the "Damaged Goods Gallery Talk" were published in *Art Paper*, vol. 7, no. 7, (March 1988).

institutional *framework* more than the work of art's function. But Fraser was equally informed by Kelly's work, the *Document* in particular, as it mapped out a mode of critical practice geared at representing the unrepresentable, i.e., economies of desire based upon the "Other's" (the public's) demand to know. But to know what? To know what the exhibition is about, for instance, or what to think about it. Fraser's "Epilogue" to her "Damaged Goods" script describes the docent's position as the object to which this demand is made:

*Jane Castleton is neither a character nor an individual, but rather an object, a site determined by a function. As a docent she is the museum's representative, and her function is quite simply, to tell the visitors what the museum wants - that is, to tell them what they can give to satisfy the museum.*<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Craig Owens, "The Yen for Art," collected in *Discussions in Contemporary Art*, p.19.

<sup>312</sup> Fraser, "Damaged Goods Gallery Talk," p. 15.

Thus the psychoanalytic notion of transference - the supposition that another knows what one wants - was an important organizational strategy bridging Conceptualist practice with politics of sexual difference, as the character Jane Castleton performatively embodied the artist-as-object. This hyphenated artist (Fraser) as object (Castleton) allowed Fraser to allegorically explore the split (one of participatory alienation) that defines the public's relation to culture.<sup>313</sup> Fraser argued that in playing "Jane Castleton" she could articulate what the museum wanted, against which Castleton/Fraser's desire is introduced. The point at which Castleton's or Fraser's desire "exceeds what the museum promises, or takes it too

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<sup>313</sup> Fraser's psychoanalytic, allegorical approach to a critique of cultural discourse was both historically important and problematic. Its importance lies in its bridging the gap between 'concerns' to which Crimp referred. Its problematic involves the substitution of the individual subject for an embodied public sphere. John Rajchman has explained why this leap from the individual unconscious to the collective unconscious won't work, canceling out as it does the formative component of subjectivity itself: *individual* trauma. He states, "The Freudian or libidinal body would individuate us in our living in another, non-physiological manner: it would submit each of us to a particular destiny that confronts us as an enigmatic compulsion we don't know about. For our Freudian 'embodiment' is a fundamentally traumatic one, and the unconscious is the way this trauma works itself out in the particularities of the living of each one of us. That is why a 'collective unconscious' is a contradiction in terms." For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will focus on the historical precedent of her work and not the problematics of transference. See:

literally, or takes herself as its object," Fraser sees as the moment of public transference onto the museum performatively re-enacted. This discursive split - between artist and object, patron and museum, embodied by the classed and gendered composite of Castleton/Fraser and ruled by the dynamics of transference - was thus a psychoanalytic "wedge" that Fraser hoped to "introduce into the chain of identifications, visitor/docent/bourgeois patron."<sup>314</sup>

As a means of conclusion, I will now turn to an interview with Fraser conducted by myself as a case study for practices that continue to debate the discursive sites of Conceptualism and the politics of sexual difference. However, as such sites are unstable - both on the part of the artist's desire as well as the public's *concern* - the intersection of such practices have a temporal nature. The following interview demonstrates both how the intersection between these discursive sites initially motivated Fraser's practice and the manner in which her practice developed

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John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics*, (NY: Routledge, 1991)

<sup>314</sup> Joshua Dector, "Andrea Fraser," *Flash Art*, (November/December, 1990).

beyond this particular dialogue as debates around the work of Pierre Bourdieu came to dominate her concerns.

***A Conversation with Andrea Fraser: New York City, 4-26-98***

JC: Your interaction with Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* in the early eighties when it came to New York is pretty involved. I want to trace this connection. When did you first see it? Was it before you reviewed it as a book?

AF: Well, I saw parts of it at the *Difference* show at the New Museum. But my central encounter with *PPD* was in the book. When was the *Difference* show?

JC: In 1985. And the book was published in 1983. So they're sort of bound up together.

AF: As far as I can remember my first contact with the *Document* was through Paul Smith's review of it in *Parachute*, which I read in 1984. That same year I was also at the Whitney ISP Program with someone who knew Mary - Amy

Rankin - who had a history of being involved with Lacanian groups in the Seventies in the Bay Area. I remember going up to Ron Clark and saying: "You know who we should invite to speak at the Whitney? We should invite Mary Kelly," feeling I had made some basic discovery. I remember Amy sitting there and Ron saying "Oh yes, Mary's an old friend of mine." But I'm not sure that she'd spoken at the program yet, and I don't think she came that year. So that was the beginning.

JC: And then you reviewed the book.

AF: Amy had actually been asked to write a review for *Afterimage* - at Mary's suggestion - but Amy couldn't do it so she suggested that I write it. I had just written a piece about Louise Lawler for *Art in America*. I have only written four pieces of art criticism: those two and two catalogue pieces for Allan McCollum.

JC: Tell me about your encounter with the *Document* at the *Difference* show.

AF: I have to say I don't have a clear memory of the *Document* in the *Difference* show. The show was a very important event to me, but I don't remember any of the specific works in it. At that time it was probably more important to me as a discursive event than an artistic one. The most exciting thing was that it represented one of the first theoretically informed exhibitions I had ever been to. I think I related to that more than the actual art objects. . . . Hmmm, does Craig Owens write about Mary in his Postmodernism and Feminism essay? I was just trying to look that up...

JC: Craig mentions her briefly, just in passing. But, of course, the big essay on her work was "Posing" which Craig wrote for the *Difference* catalogue. Even so, his "Posing" essay was very different from your review. You came to the *Document*, reviewing it as a book, so the book and the show get bound up. I think that's true not just for you, but for everyone, including myself. Also, Craig's engagement with the *Document* privileged film theory, while you seemed

to engage with it through semiotics and linguistics. This may have had to do with the fact that you were reviewing it as a book and he was writing about an object in a show. But your theoretical approach may also have to do with your prior interest in psychoanalysis and semiotics upon encountering *PPD*, while many critics at the time were just learning about these theories - psychoanalytically informed *film* theory in particular- from the *Document* itself.

AF: I started reading Lacan in 1983, initially just as one theory among others. I remember Craig, who was my teacher, calling himself an "intellectual floosy" because he'd go from one theoretical framework to another. So there was psychoanalysis, Derrida, early Baudrillard, some Frankfurt School, you know the list. That's what I was looking at. Progressively, I focused my interests more on psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and institutional critique, on the other. My encounter with *PPD* was part of that process. The single most important thing about *PPD* to me was its intellectual ambitiousness. This was completely unprecedented and still hasn't been matched.

JC: By women?

AF: By anyone, but more importantly, by an *artwork*. It demonstrated that artistic practice could be more than just an illustration of theory - although that charge really hadn't come up yet. That was probably one of the single most important things to me about *PPD* as a model. It showed that artists, through their work, could really engage in theoretical debates and contribute to them. I even remember Craig once suggesting to me - and when I was really young, maybe just eighteen - that I could follow that model for my own work. There were very few other artists who even aspired to intellectual relevance. Martha Rosler was one I had contact with.

JC: But I can see the difference.

AF: When I read my review of *PPD* again, I was struck by the way I quoted Mary paraphrasing Lacan's "The Signification of the Phallus." It was about attempting to construct a

relationship that was not one of a critic to an artist but one of as two artists engaging theory. Of course, in a certain way that mimics the relationship that *she has* constructed to theory. You can see how I was taking that up. I wanted to relate to her on the level of the theoretical authority she was assuming. Mary represented artists who wrote, who were engaged intellectually, who aspired to enter into theoretical debates in order to participate and not just appropriate. Writing that review of *PPD* as a young artist was a performance of that model in a way.

JC: I notice that your review was published exactly 10 years after *PPD's* ICA show in London. And after *that* exhibition there was this failure - a monumental refusal to review it. Well, first of all, this was also the time of the controversy - the "dirty nappies" and all. But it even eluded Mary's friends and fellow feminists. In particular Rozsika Parker, who was asked to interview Mary for the British Women's Liberation magazine, *Sparerib*, literally couldn't understand what Mary was saying. I mean, no one

spoke like that. Only a hand full of feminists had read Lacan in 1976. So this interview, which underwent multiple revisions only to be rejected by the magazine, is the first time that an artist tried to enter this project into language. Its interesting that 10 years later the work found its interlocutor - in the form of an artist, not a critic. A monumental shift in just 10 years.

AF: 10 years is a long time if you're an artist [Laughs].

JC: But its not a long time for an entire discourse to change, such that someone could rise to meet the challenge of engaging with the *Document*. And I think that's a distinct moment in history, where you've played a part in the work's continual discursive reformation.

AF: I haven't read much that's been written about the *Document* really in the last 10 years.

JC: Well, there's this new revisionist model of presenting it. A prime example would be the *Division of Labor*

exhibition at the Bronx Museum that basically claimed Judy Chicago and Mary Kelly were doing the same thing. I mean that's very reduced, but the gist of their argument was that Mary Kelly was more essentialist at the time than she let on, and Judy Chicago was more deconstructionist than critics and historians have claimed. But then there's other people like Maurice Berger, whose *Minimal Politics* exhibition, returned to the *Document* by placing it within an analysis of the avant-garde. So all those first responses in the early seventies are still playing themselves out.

AF: The seventies and eighties are really unique moments in the status of artists as intellectual producers, perhaps because the appropriation of these theoretical discourses had not yet been institutionalized within the art field. I think the intellectual production of artists has undergone a process de-legitimization since the mid-eighties. It's something that I find deeply problematic. And now that's even starting to effect the reception of Mary's work. But you know, Judy Chicago is a complicated figure who was

unfairly dismissed for a long time. Regardless of what you think of vaginal art, her work went way beyond that in the formation of activism and organizing as a central component of an artistic practice.

JC: But you don't have to reject that practice when you reject the homogenization of Chicago and Kelly's work. It's just that they always get thrown together onto the compost heap of "feminism." [Laughter].

AF: Absolutely. But returning to that moment in the eighties, people like Craig Owens and Brian Wallis represented a generation of critics and curators who respected artists and who looked at artists like Mary Kelly and recognized intellectual leadership in the re-theorizing of art practice. Art historians today just won't do that, or they can't. I think my relationship to Mary and her practice was supported by that moment.

JC: So the *Damaged Goods* show was how many years after you wrote that review?

AF: I wrote that review right before I wrote my *Damaged Goods* gallery talk: spring 1986. *Damaged Goods* was my first and most explicitly psychoanalytic performance, where I actually "transfer"... [Laughs]. The other thing I noticed when I was re-reading the *Document* recently was the cover. *Look at this! There are three different discourses layered here.* That's another impact that the *Document* had on my work that I hadn't thought about for a while, but I'm sure must have been quite direct at the time: *Damaged Goods* was my first attempt to negotiate a broader range of discourses, layering and structuring different kinds of positions within them.

JC: There's a parallel between your work at that moment - *Damaged Goods* - and Mary Kelly's when she initiated the *Document*. Mary has said that she knew from the beginning that her work had to have a certain intellectual rigor, like that of Kosuth's. I mean, we could argue over just how intellectually rigorous Kosuth was. . .[laughs] but the point is that she was concerned with how she was going to

engage. Going to psychoanalysis, then, was a way for her to interrogate the interrogation of conceptualism on its own intellectual terms - to point out the blindspots regarding the subject, as she's argued. In 1986, when you were writing *Damaged Goods*, what was really left out of institutional critique was precisely again, an interrogation of the subject within the institutional framework. At that time, the notion of the "fetish" was limited to a critique of objecthood, how it's narrativized and commodified by the museum. So you go from Duchamp to Broodthaers to Haacke. But *who* was consuming these objects, what was the desire of that agent, how does that subject transfer onto the institution, those questions were left out of it. You addressed institutional critique's blindspot regarding subjectivity. So *Damaged Goods* was pivoting off the work of someone who had a similar relationship to conceptualism as you did to institutional critique. However, even though they're temporally linear, I still want to resist the claim that institutional critique was a type of "post-conceptualism." I merely want to point out a parallel between both your critical practices, not to

narrativize your work within an overly dialectic history of theoretical art practice.

AF: I found it very interesting that Lucy Lippard wrote a Foreword to *PPD* because she was so closely identified to conceptual art as a critic, curator, and historian and later became more involved with feminism. To some extent the split that's now being constructed between conceptual art, as it was defined in *Studio International*, and institutional critique is not historically accurate. I'm thinking of the kind of institutional critique that developed out of the Art Worker's Coalition, which Benjamin Buchloh completely ignores. Lippard was a central figure in that group, along with Hans Haacke. Problematics relating to that dimension of institutional critique, like the critique of the commodity which Lippard was very involved with, are present in her Foreword. That's a very important aspect that I was trying to take up: the critique of the cultural commodity was not alien to the *Document* or to the discourse of the book. But that is somewhat different from how institutional critique was being formulated as a canon

by Buchloh at that time. But what you're saying is exactly right: I was trying to translate that problematic through psychoanalysis.

JC: What's also interesting about both Mary's and your use of psychoanalysis as a mode of methodological intervention, was that it was done at the moment those methodologies predominated, meaning: it wasn't a retroactive critique of a movement, it was a mode of production *within* that movement. For instance, in *Damaged Goods*, where commodity-based institutional critique was showcased, no one was using psychoanalysis that way but you, in the show or in the catalogue essays. For instance, Hal Foster's essay for the show is about "cultural cargo." He makes an argument about the art object's relation to contradictory trends that produce a type of hybrid commodity fetishism related to both Freud and Marx's definition of the term. How this relates to intersubjectivity, however, isn't there yet. That was the moment of your intervention, and Foster's theorizations were in some way anticipating such moves. So it's not like you were making your critique retroactively

as a mode of reflection on "What was wrong with the *Damaged Goods* show?"

AF: It seemed natural. From the beginning my orientation was to read psychoanalysis as a theorization of practices rather than a theorization of subjectivity or unconscious desire, etc. I don't know why that was, maybe because my mother is a psychotherapist [laughs]. And, of course, I was also reading psychoanalysis to do self-analysis. What I found most interesting and most compelling was the theory of transference.

JC: Yes, that component is central in your work.

AF: The *only* thing that penetrated my consciousness the first time I read the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* in 1983 was that it was anti-developmental. I "got" that much. [Laughs] That's why I read it again. The second time I read it the notion of "the subject supposed to know" rang a bell in my brain. By the third time I read it I recognized that the notion of transference

was necessary for any understanding of the relations organized by institutions. Lacan does, of course, relate the notion of transference to the problem of the institutionalization of psychoanalytic practice and discourse. Some people have picked up on that, but not many, especially considering how central it is to the question of training analysts, the struggle with the IPA, the establishment and dissolution of Lacan's *Ecole Freudienne*, and so on.

The other central issue that I brought to and took from Lacan related to an anti-developmental obsession that I had and was trying to formulate as a critique of practice. At the time, psychoanalysis was being used primarily to theorize the "gaze" and "specularity" as they relate to the image, the object, and the fetish. I was interested rather in how the artistic subject was constructed institutionally, especially within the structure of an *oeuvre* and not just individual works, by for example, such conventions as the monograph and monographic exhibition. Such a critique of artistic practice is, of course, also related to a specific reading of institutional critique:

not the reading that directs critique toward the institution defined as "exterior" to art, the art work or the artist, which "appropriates" and "institutionalized" supposedly once non-institutional "avant-garde" subversions. You read that kind of thing over and over again and it's just incredibly stupid! Institutional critique was always also critique of practice – the work of Daniel Buren and Michael Asher make no sense otherwise – but people continue to read Buren's "The Function of the Museum" while in effect ignoring his "The Function of the Studio." That's one reason why I have come to see Pierre Bourdieu as absolutely essential to any thinking of institutional critique. Substituting "field" for "institution" makes such stupidities impossible. Institutions such as museums must then be considered simply as one kind of agent – among others, like artists – within the "institution," or field, of art. Anyway, in the eighties I was taking that critique of practice from institutional critique and trying to formulate it psychoanalytically. And that relates to my critique of the monograph.

JC: At one point in your review of *PPD* you make the book accountable to the conventions of the monograph. What's interesting about that is how it performs a dialogue between two artists in terms of Mary's application of psychoanalysis on the one hand, and, on the other, your insistence that another discursive space needs to be investigated: that of the monograph. The contradictions that might surface when *PPD* is presented in the form of the monograph are thus underscored. Ironically, that's very Brechtian – pointing out contradictions within various discursive sites when they come together. That, of course, was a strategy that deeply informed *PPD*. So it's interesting that that type of debate finds its "site" in a work that informed many about such a debate.

AF: It wasn't a negative criticism.

JC: No, it was more of a dialogue.

AF: I was making an interpretation of *PPD*, the condition of which was my reading of *PPD*. So it's a dialogue, but it's also a process, a form of working through. What did I say? Here it is:

*Perhaps the only monograph here is the one that I am engaged in writing. In her essay "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism," Kelly notes that "criticism's function is to initiate that work which art history eventually accomplishes in the form of the biographical narrative, that is, as Griselda Pollock describes it, "the production of an artistic subject for works of art."<sup>315</sup>*

In a way one can see this in the context of the mode of institutional critique that looks at the ways in which artists and works are inscribed within institutional discourses and spaces. What I go on to say is:

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<sup>315</sup> Andrea Fraser, "On the Post-Partum Document," *Afterimage*, (March, 1986), p. 7

*But the signification of a work and the subject that it produces is not only a condition of representation, or of art-historical representation, but is also contingent upon the structure of the practice in which the work is situated. Similarly, the ideological function of traditional monographs is not simply an order over-laid, but one that is allowed by an artist's assumption of a mode of production that presents its organization as immanent.*<sup>316</sup>

So actually I was pulling back from seeing the book as merely a monograph – an inscription produced in reception – trying to understand it instead in terms of an inscription produced in practice. I then go onto say that *PPD* constitutes a radically different mode of production and construction of the subject of practice.

JC: In terms of – it's a problematic word but I'll use it anyway – *generational* dialogue, the recent discourse on what constitutes a "public sphere" is interesting to think

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

of here. In particular I'm thinking of theories of "radical democracy" taken up in Rosalyn Deutsche's recent book, *Evictions*, whereby an harmonious notion of the public, and by extension the politics of domesticity within that, are interrogated. This relates directly to what *PPD* was addressing in the mid-seventies. Because, of course, *PPD* was interrogating a so-called "private" domestic space that was always over-determined by a "public" construction of it. Still, the question of what would happen when the "transgressive mother" was publicly displayed in such an indexical, narrative manner, was missed. So the outcry over the "dirty nappies" being "art" came as a surprise.

AF: Oh yes, the "dirty nappies." It's one of my favorite parts - it's so great! How could anyone not like that?

JC: It entered into a debate over what constituted art at the time, and it came at the heels of the controversy over the Tate's acquisition of Carl Andre's Bricks. So the Tabloid headlines read: "After the Bricks at the Tate, Dirty Nappies Are Art." It's not so much that this

blindspot over the public reaction was a failure of the work, rather it just wasn't part of the *Document's* investigation. You know, this notion of the abject or obscene that dominates today's post-Mapplethorpe art market. But, of course, your work was very concerned with the exhibition space, reception, and the public sphere. I'm thinking of *Museum Highlights*, the premise of which was sort of sketched out in *Damaged Goods*.

AF: Actually, my thinking about the public sphere began with a piece I did with Louise Lawler in 1988 called *The Public Life of Art*, a videotape that never got shown. There began to be more of a ferment around the discourse of public art at that time, with the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko, the writing on gentrification by various critics, and so on. But even though *PPD's* site of production was "domestic" and it didn't directly deal with the public sphere as an artwork, it certainly *did* deal with the public sphere in terms of the child's leaving home, his entry to society through schooling, etc. And of course it's also dealing with the public sphere to the extent that it

explicitly incorporates the feminist debates and activism which were the central contexts of its production. That's another thing I was struck by when I first encountered *PPD*.

Another aspect of *PPD*'s importance as a model of critical, theoretical, practice by an artist is as an artistic practice engaged in a *process* of analysis, investigation, critique and self-critique. Contrast that to the defenses of artistic positions parading as theory and criticism which you read everywhere. Mary refers to her appropriation of scientific discourse as "pseudo-," but the position that she's constructing for herself does have a relationship to the practice of scientific investigation, which is really very rare to find, not in terms of "objectivity" or empiricism, etc., but in terms of stating an hypothesis, developing a theory, testing it, and engaging in a constant revision of its basic assumption. Stated bluntly, it's the difference between working towards *something*, on the one hand, and, on the other, just pursuing and defending a position in a market. Describing the *Document* within the context of feminist debates, as Mary does in her "Preface" is part of that project. At the

same time, it's important to see that it is not "cultural activism." It's not about dissolving artistic practice into the "political sphere" or "activism"—despite her very active engagement. And it's not about dissolving artistic practice into an academic or scientific scheme either.

It's about negotiating a space between these spheres that retains specific, "relatively autonomous," conditions of legitimacy, *proposing* revised criteria for art *in dialogue with* rather than just *appropriated from* other fields.

JC: Which discursively makes it a public artwork.

AF: Yes, because it is effectively operative within a collective context. But it's very important to distinguish the *Document* from other forms of activism both then and now, as well as from Kosuth's position, which involved an (aspiration to) appropriation, not only of academic and scientific discourse, but of academic and scientific legitimacy. The artistic field continues to suffer from the can of worms he opened with that play for prestige.

JC: I want to return to *PPD's* relation to *Museum Highlights*, which I find interesting. Your project is a larger performative statement on the public function of art, incorporating similar psychoanalytic issues that *PPD* took up. You say in your footnotes to the script:

*Providing the services of a guide in the gallery's information desk, a volunteer docent is not just someone who gives tours for a small percentage of the museum's visitors, she is the museum's representative. Unlike the members of the museum non-professional maintenance, security, and gift shop staff that visitors come in contact with, the docent is a figure of identification for a primarily white middle-class audience.*<sup>317</sup>

So you brought issues of identification - or *transference* - to bare upon discourses of public space and institutional critique, performatively presented. . .

AF: . . .yes, I was trying to do it all [Laughs].

JC: . . .and then you deconstruct the position of the docent - the central female figure in the midst of all this.

AF: Do you know my epilogue to *Damaged Goods*, which is my Lacanian cartoon on the desire of the museum? That's where I address transference most directly. I wrote:

*The Damaged Goods gallery talk was founded upon the refusal to talk about, or, rather an attempt to stage the impossibility of satisfying the demand implicitly addressed to docents by those who attend gallery talks. The demand to know, to know what the exhibition is about, to know what the works in the exhibition are about, to know what position one should take up in a gallery, to know what position one should take up in relation to what could be called the desire of the museum. Or to push it even further, the desire*

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<sup>317</sup> Andrea Fraser, "Museum Highlights," *October*, no. 57, (Summer, 1991),

*of the class which supports the museum through gifts and bequests and to whom the museum truly belongs. Jane Castleton is neither a character nor an individual, but rather an object, a site determined by its function. As a docent she is the museum's representative and her function is quite simply to tell visitors what the museum wants. That is, to tell them what they can give to satisfy the museum.<sup>318</sup>*

And then it really turns into a Lacanian cartoon:

*The desire of the subject who attends a gallery talk is thus the desire of the museum. Now, you can't take me too seriously here. . . .*

[Laughter]. And then I say:

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p. 107.

<sup>318</sup> Andrea Fraser, "Damaged Goods Talk Starts Here," *Art Paper*, vol. 7, no. 7, (March, 1998), p. 15.

*Of course the museum doesn't exist, that is to say,  
not as a desiring subject.* <sup>319</sup>

*The Public Life of Art* was the real "study" for *Museum Highlights*. It was where I began to think about the history of philanthropy and social policy. *Damaged Goods* is much more a "discourse of the analysand." My focus shifted from feminist issues relating to the museum in *Damaged Goods*, to primarily class issues in *Museum Highlights*. *The Public Life of Art* was somewhere in between. There's one scene in it where the docent speaks as a women "getting out of the house" part of which re-appears in *Museum Highlights* but in a form that become instead about the museum's seduction, and the good.

To change the subject slightly, another thing I was thinking about the *Document* as I was re-reading it was whether we could think about it as a "site-specific" piece.

JC: Absolutely. One of the great things about putting this archival exhibition together for the Generali Foundation's

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

re-exhibition of the complete *PPD*, is finding all these tiny notes on scraps of paper everywhere. And on one of these pieces of paper from the early seventies she made notes on the first sections of the *Document* - for a grant, I think- theorizing it's "debate specificity." This is a term that more people are using today. Miwon Kwon recently used it to describe a type of art practice in her article on site-specificity for *October*. But on this piece of paper from over twenty years ago, Mary had sketched out *PPD*'s site-specific debate in the form of three interlocking circles: one for "mothers," one for "avant-garde artists," and one for "the woman's movement." The artist represented the discursive site of conceptualism, the mother was the psychoanalytic site of the subject, and the woman's movement, of course, was the site of socialist feminism. And the debate-specificity of those three circles occurred at their intersection - configured almost like the Lacanian Borromean knot such that if you cut any one link the whole thing falls apart. So in a way, this was a prototype for a model of site-specificity that pivoted on discursive debate.

AF: I would draw a different chart: "activist," "mother," "psychoanalyst," "artist."

JC: I don't think that's so far out, because her role as an artist was one that used psychoanalysis to interrogate conceptualism. But you're describing her position as producer. She was describing *PPD's* ideal audience: "mothers who were artists and members of the women's liberation movement."

AF: I didn't mean "psychoanalyst-artist." The "artist" is where "activist," "mother" and "psychoanalyst" intersect.

JC: That actually sounds like an accurate model of your practice.

AF: No, I would apply that to Mary, because here you have the discourse of the mother, activist, and artist. But you've got to put psychoanalysis in there! You know, it's ridiculous that she didn't [Laughter].

JC: I think it's implicitly there with the "subject" of the mother.

AF: But it's not the same! I would say there's a radical and violent splitting that she subjects herself to at this point. . .

JC: What isn't the same?

AF: "Mother" and "psychoanalyst." You can't conflate those. Mary is subjecting herself to a self-analysis that's brutal in certain ways. That's where I would locate the *Document's* site-specificity. You're talking about debate specificity, but the way I think about site-specificity – this again goes back to *Damaged Goods* – is as a reflexive practice which takes as its object the position of the subject within a site understood as a set of social, discursive and intersubjective relations. This of course includes the reader/viewer as well. It's about starting where you are standing, which one could say is a

notion of site-specificity rooted more in feminist than sculptural practice. It's in this sense that I see *PPD* as site-specific.

JC: Then the split in *PPD*'s "working through" its site-specificity is delineated this way: the analyst (artist)/analysand (mother).

AF: It's also what makes it so different from the other ways in which psychoanalysis gets used – particularly in academia.

JC: Yes, the pedantic application of it.

AF: There are all kinds of Derridean self-reflexivity games which are, for the most part, extremely shallow and, by and large, bullshit. Bourdieu's notion, and practice, of reflexivity is much more convincing. At least to me. But the relationship between "reflexivity," "self-analysis" and "site-specificity" has never been thoroughly examined.

JC: When Laura Mulvey, Stephen Heath, and Colin McCabe first introduced psychoanalysis to film criticism in the early seventies, the original fear of a group of Brechtian editors at *Screen* magazine – they actually wrote a letter of dissent – was that it would become another meta-discourse. Looking at some of the trendiest applications of psychoanalysis today within the academy, their fear wasn't entirely unfounded, even if it was slightly misdirected at the time. Psychoanalysis too often is used in the service of pedagogical mastery – it's almost become a new Greenbergian standard – rather than as a model of critical practice or historicist self-interrogation. And I think this is what distinguished *PPD's* relation to psychoanalysis.

AF: The *Document's* engagement with psychoanalysis can be distinguished from most academic work in that it's extremely practical and is oriented towards the formation of practice, both artistic and political. But it can be distinguished from the usual practical engagement with psychoanalysis – that is, psychoanalytic practice – in that

it's a self-analysis. I don't know of very many published self-analyses by analysts. One is Montrelay's "The Story of Louise," but very few people know that that's a piece of self-analysis. I wonder if Mary knew about that. . . .

Anyway, I don't know how clear the parameters of those different types of practice were to me in 1986. I do remember reading a lecture by Jane Gallop that was published in *Art in America* around that time, which was hilarious.

JC: Oh yes, I remember that piece. . .

AF: It was like a comedy act. She's talking about the use of psychoanalysis by laymen, and about being a good lay [Laughter]. It was pretty wacky. Craig heard her give this talk and he described it to me, how she wore a low-cut evening gown with earrings that were sitting on her shoulders. It was a performance!

Anyway, hmmm... [Flipping through notes]. "Mother as site of her proceedings. . ."

JC: ...the title of Paul Smith's article on the *Document* in *Parachute* from 1982. He had a different approach to *PPD* than Jane Gallop. Your review was like Paul's in that he also places the *Document* at the intersection of a number of discursive investigations and practices. This brings us back to the recurring motif of our conversation: the critique of practice. If you look at the *Document* in terms of its discursive sites of debate and the analysis of practice that it enacted, then you begin to understand it within the parameters of an institutional critique that you've been re-defining here. But this isn't a popular way to look at the *Document*. Most critics and art historians want to see it primarily as a feminist critique on the Lacanian "male gaze" - itself a misnomer.

AF: That also has to do with the way that institutional critique and site specificity has been formulated by the art world within masculinist art historical trajectories. The forms of institutional critique and site-specificity that were developing simultaneously within feminist practice were completely left out.

JC: They still are.

AF: Except in a problematic way. The "discovery" of Mierle Ukeles's work is the current example. I begin to think about the split between those trajectories around Louise Lawler's work in the 80s. Silvia Kolbowski, of course, was also working on that. For me, Louise and Mary, and then of course Yvonne Rainer, were very important. I became aware of Adrian Piper's work a bit later – I think it was 1989 – and it was a revelation to me in many ways. The most important point of intersection here, between feminist practice, site-specificity and institutional critique, is performance, but it gets screwed up in the way that it's historicized because of stupid disciplinary categories. The performativity developed within feminist practice is the key to thinking about site-specificity in any sort of meaningful way. As far as I'm concerned.

JC: Mary's work was definitely performative, but "performative" is not "performance." And *PPD* was always

mistaken as performance which is problematic when you think what performance was in 1976. Very few people could see the *Document* as a conceptualist artwork, nor could they see it as a form of analysis.

AF: But there was performance going on at the time that was critical.

JC: Of course: Stuart Brisley, Dan Graham, Yvonne Rainer, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper. But they were *explicitly* performance artists, which was a more readily accepted site for women. So it's a little troublesome. . . .

AF: . . .yes, putting her "back in her place."

JC: The *Document* is definitely "performative," but it's not "performance."

AF: I think there are some important differences between "performative" and "performance," but I would also argue that the distinction is necessitated largely by the

reductive ways performance has been defined as a discreet artistic action.

JC: That's true, but I was thinking of the distinction in linguistic terms. Perhaps it's too esoteric a distinction. However, what Yvonne and Adrian were doing, specifically within the genre of performance, made critical contributions that were enormously important but totally different from Mary's practice. So I'm nervous about lumping her in with them. Though it's better than lumping her in with Chicago. Not to bash Chicago, but it's an incredibly reductive move that we see more and more today. I'm thinking of shows like *The Division of Labor* or even Amelia Jones's *Sexual Politics* that re-exhibited the *Dinner Party* along side the *Document*.

AF: I'm not lumping anyone, just listing the artists who were important to me in their different ways.

When I was 12 or 13 I had a girlfriend whose mother worked with Judy Chicago and had tickets to the special opening of the *Dinner Party* at the Museum of Modern Art in

San Francisco. So we cut class and took public transportation to the opening. I remember sitting around with my mother and her friends later, going through the catalogue of the *Dinner Party*, which of course my mother bought. So by the time I was 18, I was ready to move on to other models. [Laughter].

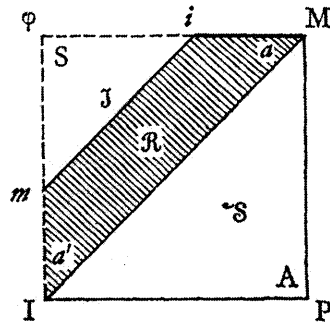


SCHÉMA R :

KEY

- S the subject
- I the Imaginary (at upper left)
- R the Real (shaded area)
- S the Symbolic (at lower right)
- a* the figure of the Imaginary other of the *stade du miroir*
- a'* the identification of the (child's) ego through the identification with the ideal of the ego (the paternal *imago*)
- $\phi$  the phallus (Imaginary object)
- I the ideal of the ego
- P the position of the Name-of-the-Father in the locus of the Other
- M the signifier of the primordial object (*das Ding*—cf. Freud on negation)—the mother, who is the *real Other*.
- i* } the two Imaginary end-points of all later narcissistic relationships,
- m* } the ego (*m*) and the specular image (*i*).
- iM* the axis of desires (object choice)
- mI* the axis of identifications (narcissism)
- SA the *metaphorical* relationship between the subject and the Other or between the phallus ( $\phi$ ) and the Name-of-the-Father (P)—cf. Schema L.

The broken line delimits the Imaginary.

**Figure 54: Anthony Wilden's R Schema Key**

In *The Language of the Self*, Anthony Wilden describes the dynamics of Lacan's R Schema as the following:

"Beginning from the position of the (child) subject - identified as in classical analytical theory with the phallus - one notes the two lines of interest which link him to the ideal of the ego (I) and the signifier (M) of the real Other, the mother. The first represents the nonsexual relationship of identification with the ideal (being the other), described in Section I; the second, the libidinal relationship of desire for the mother as an object (having the other). At the same time the primordial triangle of father-child-mother represented as  $I-S(\emptyset)-M$  is given at a secondary level ( $m-S-i$ ) representing all the later identifications, narcissistic relationships, and Imaginary captures in which the subject may be involved. The solid line joining  $i$  and  $M$  represents the real relationship between the child and the primordial object (the mother or a part of her body) at a time when the child cannot distinguish himself from "reality." This is of course in keeping both with Freud's remarks, previously referred to, in the article on the Verneinung as well as with Lacan's view of the Real as outside symbolization, since for the mother to symbolize "reality" she must become a signifier in the Symbolic for the subject, introjection and expulsion being neither Real nor Imaginary. On the other hand, the relationship between ego ( $m$ ) and the ideal of the ego (I) is shown as a broken line; it is always Imaginary. Thus the distance between  $m$  and I and that between  $i$  and  $M$  represent the distinction the subject has achieved between the primordial relationships of being and having (I and M) and later ones; this delimits the Real for the subject. In psychosis this delimitation becomes warped or twisted. The Real and the Imaginary are represented more closely related to each other than is each to the Symbolic, Lacan's intention presumably being to

assert the primacy of the Symbolic over both, since they derive their structure from it (the signifier precedes and determines the signified).

"The objectal movement of the subject's desire toward the mother is complemented by the mother's desire. Her desire (the desire of the Other) that he be the phallus (the signifier of the desire of the Other) so that she may have it is met by the child's desire to conform to her desire (to be what his mother wants him to be) - in the Lacanian view the neurotic or psychotic subject has to learn that this is what he wants to be and precisely what he cannot be. The identificatory movement towards the ideal is a pure alienation along the lines of the *stade du miroir*, but again the subject meets a contrary law: his desire to be the father (in the father's place) complements the rivalry which his relationship to the mother also sets up. Naturally the respective lines of interest represent any number of intermediate positions, whether from the static or the historical point of view.

"The Name-of-the-Father in this formulation means rather precisely what it says. P represents the Word of the father as employed by the mother - in other words, it represents the authority of the father upon which she calls in her dealings with the child. Thus is the Symbolic father the figure of the Law to which the real or Imaginary father may or may not conform. The anaclitic and primary relationship of the child to the mother is mediated by the "object a" (apparently complemented in the relationship to the imago of the father by its image in a'). Originally the child is involved in an identification with another springing from his identification with objects at a stage where he does not distinguish between object love and

identification love; it is at this point, in Lacan's view, that the progressive splitting of demand from need and the resulting birth of desire occur. It is at this point - structurally speaking - that the mother introduces into the child's view of "reality" the fact of the lack of object upon which desire depends. This lack of object is an absence; the Imaginary other (a) is now only a substitute for it, since a lack cannot be "specularized" (cf. t.n. 183). Weaning, for instance, sometimes described in psychoanalysis as a primordial form of castration - inaccurately it seems, since the "castration" of the "castration complex" is not and cannot be real - is an especially significant discovery of absence for the child. With the constitution of the lack of object, need gives rise to demand and desire." (Wilden, pp. 295-296)

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