

Presented in this book is the documentation
of the work produced 1983-84 within
the Masters of Fine Art course at the Tasmanian
School of Art, University of Tasmania

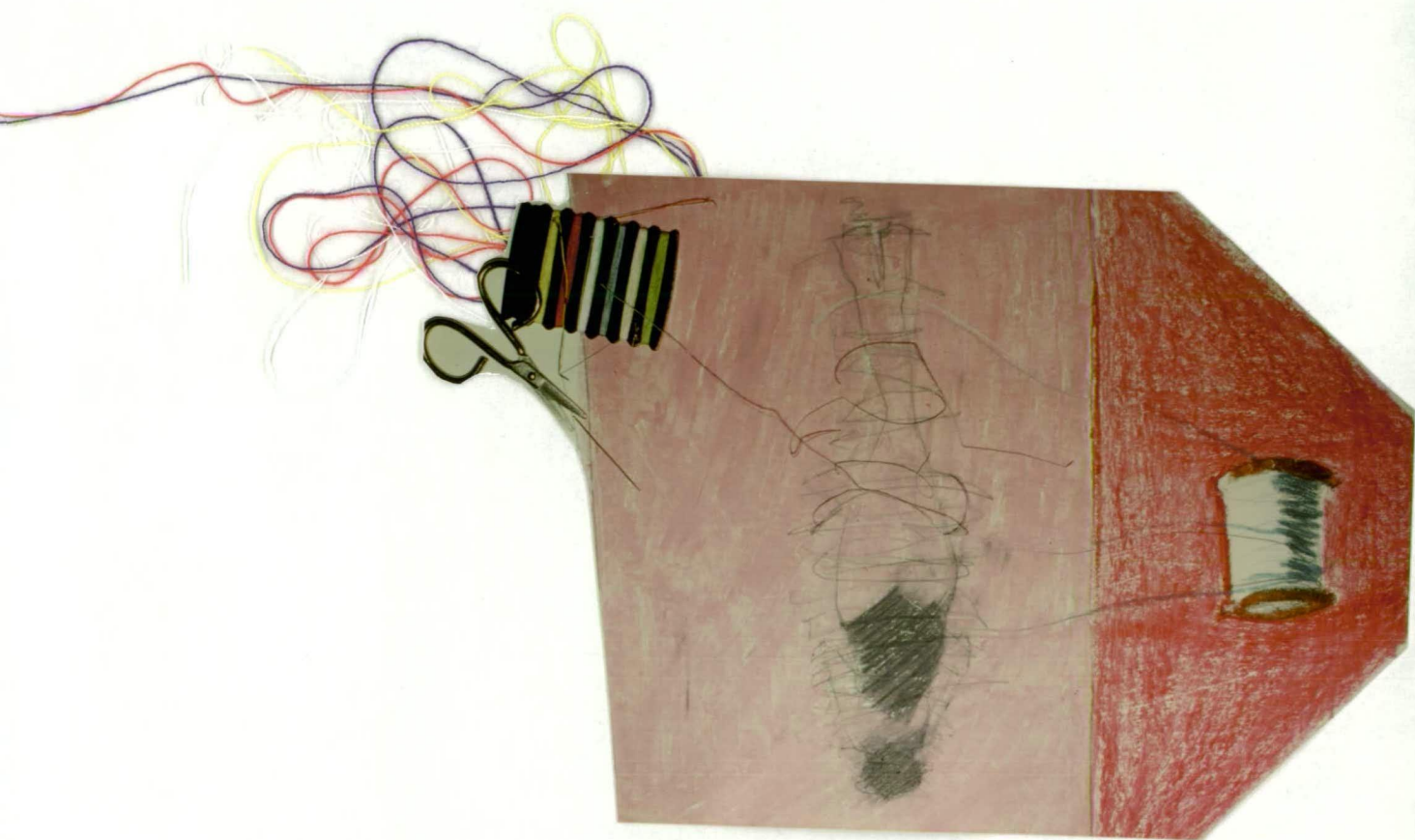
Ruth Gall-Bucher

Book Number

1

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illus.1

THE PROPOSAL

The work of '83-'84 will be a continuation of previous concerns. The environment in which the work is made will provide the intense questioning needed to locate myself within the discourses of 'art'. It is my intention to communicate my perception of reality.

The works are deliberations on the self and social behaviours. The contrast experienced between the flux and the moulds of our existence shall afford material for deliberation. The content of the works are a selection of dilemmas and preoccupations which reflect my situation - my psychological history, physiological and social circumstance. These are reflected in work currently in process.

My sense of displacement and incongruity with the immediate situation of the course evoked a sense of isolation and anguish which were worked through by the use of poem. It is to be a statement of the self in relation to the frameworks of an immediate social situation, exposing the alienation and separateness of each individual.

Feminist theories will be used as a reference point through which to develop my understanding of the induction of the female into society, and the gender constructions which surround 'woman'. The work 'Housebound' was to symbolize the housewife as a mad woman.

My personal experience of the change from child to woman will form the basis for a series of work utilizing the memories and recollections at my disposal. A transposition of past experience will be reformulated to express symbolic and abstracted processes of change; balancing the 'truth' with the forms by which it is codified. Two important issues are the perception of boundaries of the body and the separation of mind and body. The interior thoughts become externalized through writing and drawing. They are a means of creating an internal dialogue between the self and the world. The poem is an evocation of meaning and performs a means of defining parameters of concern. At times the poems and drawings will remain vestigial in the final presentation of work in the exhibition. The form of the work will be determined by the content and a desire for expediency.

Initial Work 1983-84

The works listed below are not represented in the final presentation. In order to account for the development of current work the initial work is provided. The proposal was a starting point which loosely projected the directions I developed. The cohesive and formative concerns of my work over the two year period were identity, femininity and reality. Initially the work incorporated themes of the alienation of self from society in the sociological sense and used the roles of women to speak of women's condition. Late in 1983 I turned towards an investigation of my own experiences of adolescence, Anorexia nervosa and autobiography. The questions moved from 'Who am I ?' and 'Who is woman ?' to 'How did I come into being?'

The work draws upon my lived experience of being a woman within a woman's body. It deals specifically with my experience as an anorectic adolescent and generally with the shared experience of being a woman.

Work outlined in progress in the proposal is no longer of central interest. Increasing knowledge of theoretical readings challenged the basis of many of the works. Yet they are still relevant to the final work in various ways; of methods of working, of mediums used and concerns.

The exhibited work has been a continuation of 'The Lacemaker', 1982 [illus. 2], in which I was represented as a wire structure intensely involved in the task of ordering, patterning and making sense and meaning of past memories. It spoke obliquely and silently of my past condition and re-constitution. 'The Lacemaker' was a figment in transit, enmeshed in threads; a voice who wrote and represented the transformation.

The Lacemaker figure remains present in the darkened room, in process in the unconscious, beside the coherent, specular and finished subject who appears in the lighted room of a more conscious state. I have represented myself as an identity that is split and who is in a constant state of transformation. The analogy of a workroom and a living-room can be made in reference to the light and dark room.



illus.2 THE LACEMAKER

SYMBIOSIS

The poem was written prior to the start of the academic year and sought to fathom my personal use of water imagery. In the poem the imagery of water as amniotic fluid is developed with a sense of peace and immersion. The poem refers to archaic memories and overlays images which are drawn on three levels; of the sea, of immersion and the sky. The difficulty of overlaying the two forms excentuated the differences in the reading of the two art forms; one became dominant over the other. In this case the text became an aesthetic device. In the book Seams within Silence the text and image parallel each other.

PROCESS PRESENTATION PROPOSAL

This work arose out of the pages and pages of words discarded in the process of writing my proposal. The vestigial pages became symbolic of the work involved in articulating the possibilities and directions of my work. The text pages were sewn together into three panels working a patchwork canvas.

HUSWIF/HUSSY

The woman was represented as a doll and housewife within a house. The etymology of the word housewife incorporates a notion of the hussy, an opprobrious woman. The housewife was contained within the house and as an extension of herself, the tools of her trade were her arms, with which she was fanatically clean and cleaned fanatically. The hussy remained outside of this arrangement, discarded and unclean.

The image was developed further using a photostat of the dictionary definition and the needle and thread sewing case (which is also a meaning of the word housewife), which symbolised her role. The image was composed and taken as a slide which was subsequently printed as a cibachrome. The woman as a subject was removed and reduced to being a number of objects.

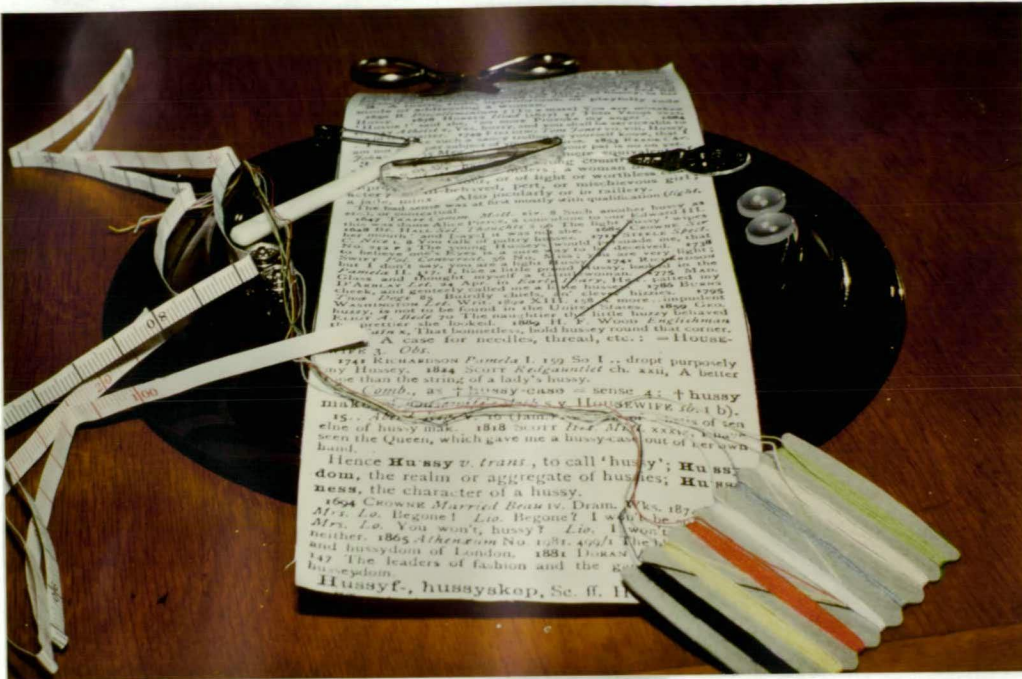
I began drawing to extend the imagery and through the sequence of drawings the mermaid emerged; a frozen, cocooned, armless, legless form. These drawings were accompanied by vengeful mark making. Slides of some of these images are used in the slide sequence in the exhibition.



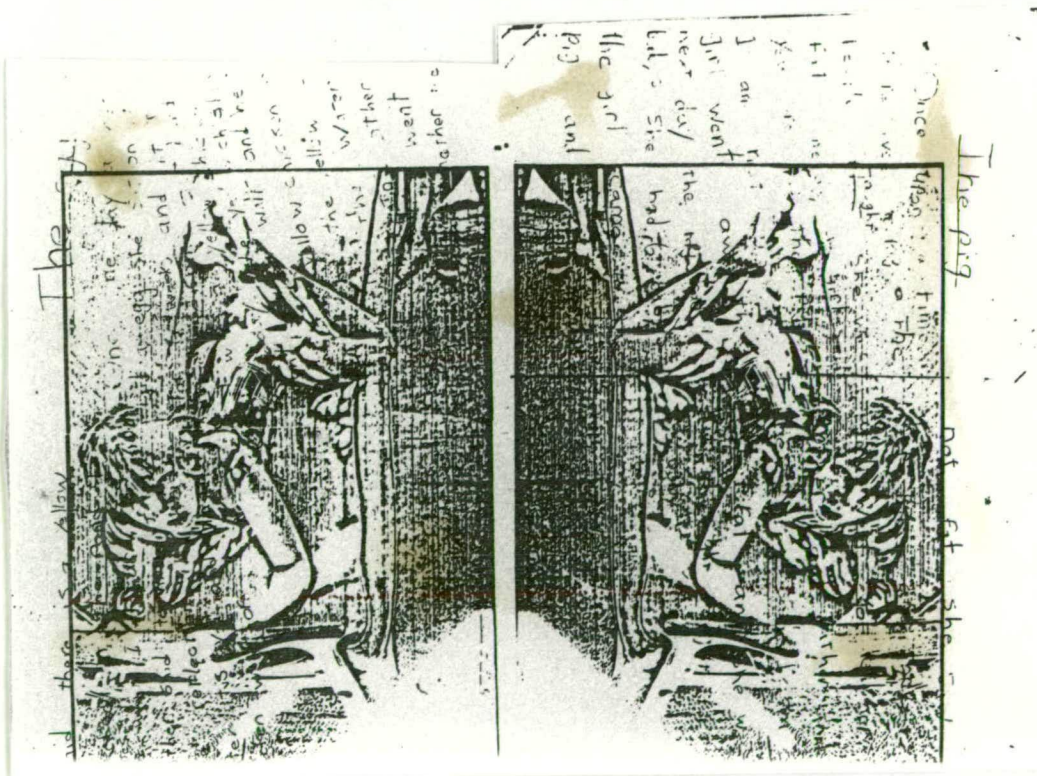
illus.3 SYMBIOSIS



illus.4 P.P.P.



illus.5 HUSWIF/HUSSY



illus.6 QUIESCENCE 5

VIDEO

During March '84 I used the video equipment to enable an immediate self-image to be replayed to myself. The two images taken from the video represent moments of contact (illus. 8 is a slide projection overlaid on the television image).

GENERATIONS

This work began as a drawing and a poem was written subsequently, entitled 'The Incubous'. Over the ensuing months interest in my paternal grandmother grew and I produced a collage image of her seated behind a window with a flower box. Some images were taken as slides and two were printed as cibachromes, one a clear and sharp image and the second, faint and distant. They were framed as letters to her, mirroring the faint image I had of her. The only contact we had was through photographs and her letters, written in a shaky, scrawling handwriting. I posed with head tilted as hers, and produced some double images. This method of working was used in producing the larger cibachromes. In this work I attempted to recreate her identity and questioned the likeness between herself and myself.

APPEARANCES

In August '83 I began to take a series of portraits of my younger sister by ten years. (She had often been a photographic subject for me in the past). Each month I took a series of images documenting her changing physical appearance. I was particularly interested in the changes because it was at the same age, ten years previously that I had come under stress. During the fourteen month period she completed School's Board, took her first part-time job, spent time at the holiday shack, began matriculation, applied for her first job, worked there for a few months and then took her current job. These could be shown as a sequence of 130 slides and I have also put together a book of selected images.

During August of '83 I spent time fossicking over some old black and white photographs that I had taken over the past ten years, (some of which were of my younger sister) which still fascinated and held my attention. I began to photostat and to construct a narrative.



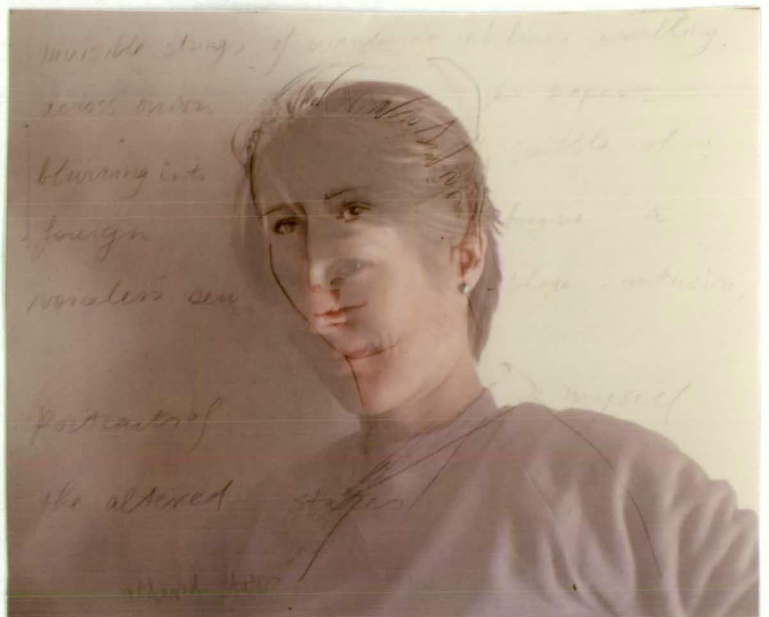
illus.7 VIDEO IMAGE



illus.8 VIDEO IMAGE



illus.9 GENERATIONS 1



illus.10 GENERATIONS 2

I used the fifth image of 'Quiescence' in the exhibition and two stories (see Appendix A) written in infant school which expressed interest in identity.

* * * * *

One of the primary concerns of the first two terms had been to establish a methodology based on principles drawn from scientific enquiry - observations, hypothesis, method and theory. As the time passed the controlled format of defining my motivations, my influences, my objectives and methods were discarded and the work developed out of the reading I was engaged in and through poetry and photographic imagery.

In that first six months my work mirrored my state of being, and was concerned with fear and alienation. Such a direction was not positive and attention was channelled to the deep seated anxieties which were vestigial. Despite the varied content of the works described so far centred on some of the personal dilemmas of my past and although they continued to surface in my work, they remained obscure to others. It became apparent that I needed to give form and meaning to my past experiences (as an anorectic adolescent).

* * * * *

Anorexia nervosa is a magnified state of the containment of women, the 'gilded cage', and there is a need to speak of the specificity of woman and of her lived experience. The adolescent of Western nations is born into a protected childhood within the nuclear family and into the institutions of schools which allows limited contact with adult life (as was my experience). This displacement has created the experience of adolescence. Adolescence is a passage of

life well documented in countless books. The passage of becoming a woman is difficult because greater restraints are placed upon her behaviours. She is generally ignorant of her own body. Feminine sexuality remains in debate, neither Freud nor Lacan successfully theorized how it comes into being. The cultural representations of women are impoverished and generally mirror male desire.

In the later stages of my anorectic behaviour, after the lowest weight threshold was passed, two aspects of the relationship between self and reality/society became apparent. In the first instance, life is given with a particular manifestation of weight and shape and is born into a particular historical situation. Secondly, social alienation, in this case Anorexia nervosa, separates the self from society, empties the personality and identity. We are constituted, we come into being, through the social interactions.

An understanding of Anorexia nervosa discussed in the following chapter is necessary to understand my concerns in Seams within Silence and the exhibition 'Transformations'.

The PASSAGE

A CONSIDERATION of FEMININITY and ANOREXIA NERVOSA.



"Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity."[1]

"Anorexia is a baffling disease, and its cure is elusive."[2]

The question of femininity continues to confound theory and analysis. This riddle is the blind spot of theory which misrepresents or makes absent woman. [3] Woman is represented as a lack in Lacanian analysis and the specificity of woman is not adequately developed. The nature of femininity has remained a riddle. Anorexia nervosa too has eluded analysis.

It is my intention to link the elusiveness of the anorectic to the elusiveness of the feminine condition. Anorexia nervosa can be considered as a dilemma of self-image, of identity, of sexuality and in the case of the young woman - of femininity.

Freud rephrased the question of femininity and masculinity from 'What is it?' to 'How did it come into being?'. [4] Sexuality is now understood as a psycho-sexual process, one in which consciousness and unconsciousness are formed in response to a recognition of sexual difference during the Oedipal stage. The sight of a women's genitalia is said to horrify the young boy because he sees an absence of a penis. Her genitals are a blind spot and become symbolized as a lack. This operates as a threat, manifested as a castration anxiety for the boy child. The boy's phallic phase is characterized by the opposition of phallic/castrated (see Essay A). The female sex is represented as a lack; as a negative of masculine attributes. As such, the cultural representation of woman is more characteristic of the phallic phase of the boy than of adult sexuality. As Jane Gallop wrote, 'the blind spot is the price of man's inability to escape his Oedipal destiny. Theory cannot see woman, but can only represent, re-present, make present again endlessly all through his life 'mother', the masculine's own original complementary other.'[5]

To represent woman from a man's point of view, in relation to his desire, is inadequate as a self representation of woman to herself. She needs to speak and represent herself (see Essay A).



illus.12 1960



illus.13 1964

Freud outlined the passage of the boy and girl as a narrative of stages, both passing through an oral and anal stage to the Oedipal drama. Like the boy child, the girl child's first love object is the mother. Both cannot have the mother to themselves. Yet the women must turn away from the love for the mother towards the father. For the girl child, the shift towards loving the father is a means of acquiring the phallus or phallic power. She indirectly possesses it, and must accept her passivity in relation to it; the hallmark of the feminine condition. During adolescence the Oedipal drama is resolved by a normal heterosexual orientation and acceptance of the respective positions of each sex. After the latent period, reemerging sexuality during puberty may result either in the girl turning away from women, debasing and despising them, or she may refuse to abandon the pleasure of the clitoris, which will delay her passage from her masculine development, or she will assume the feminine role in normal heterosexual relationships. It is the phallus, its power and symbolic value which are said to effect the changes in the behaviour of children.[6]

A Definition.

Anorexia nervosa was described and identified as a psychogenic malnutrition in clinical papers early this century and, since, considerable effort has been directed at understanding the bodily disfunctions - in an effort to find physiological causes of the starvation. More recent investigations of the condition are less restrictive and reductive and favour a comprehensive approach.

Anorexia nervosa has to do with the meaning attributed to body weight and shape. It is defined as a diverse syndrome of individual conditions exhibiting a variety of behavioural tendencies and incorporating a phobia of increasing weight and proportion.[7] This variety indicates the multiplicity of the determinants and degrees of severity exhibited by the condition, ranging from an eating disorder born of restrictive dieting (bulimia), expressing desire to conform to a cultural ideal of form (which predisposes the subject to bingeing and vomiting), to extreme cases of self-starvation (Anorexia nervosa). In both cases the young woman may revert to a pre-pubertal state in the course of the weight loss and menstruation cessates.

As Boskind-Lodahl wrote, the bulimic or anorectic woman does not reject the feminine stereotype: "Rather, these women have already learned a passive and accommodating approach to life from their parents and their culture"[11]

Anorexia nervosa is due to a failure to express her sexuality precisely because the family and other people with whom she is in contact repress or censure her desires. The mass media portrays woman as either a-sexual or as a passive sex-object. Female fantasies are structured and represented by male fantasies of rape, violence and penetration.[12] The young women may be so contained in her 'feminine' position and accommodating in her approach to life that she is unable to cross the boundaries of the stereotype. If she does, she is in danger of being unacceptable - the hussy.

A disjunction occurs between one's experience of one's own desires and the societal expectations of how this will be experienced. As Luce Irigaray writes:

Whatever may be the inequalities between women they all suffer, even unconsciously, the same oppression, the same exploitation of their body, the same denial of their desire. It is a specific social and cultural structure which deprives women of their desires and of the possibility of their expressing it, because language and the systems of representations cannot 'translate' that desire.[13]

She goes on to say:

A woman in a state of madness does not have, for some reason, the means for elaborating a delirium. Instead of language being the medium of expression of the delirium, the latter remains within the body itself. The dominant element in feminine schizophrenia is corporeal pain, the feeling of deformation or transformation of organs, etc. Thus, in this case also, women do not manage to articulate their madness: they suffer it directly in their body, without being able to transpose it in some different mode.[14]

Women she says, are shut up in their bodies, in their silence, in a mutism, in a form of autism.



illus.14 1965

Nine out of ten of the treated cases are young women and the mean age of the onset is seventeen to eighteen years of age (though the treatment may not commence until mid-twenties.) The condition is more prevalent today, particularly since 1960. A recent study of schoolgirls taken in London revealed that one in every 100 females aged 16-18 years inclusively was an anorectic and that one severe case would be encountered amongst every 250 school girls. The condition is also observed in other cultures, for example, arab countries. This increasing prevalence in western nations would seem to go against expectations. [8]

Anorexia Nervosa.

The traditional psychoanalytic position interprets the condition as a rejection of femininity and historically typifies the case as an identification with a kind, passive father and a hostility toward an aggressive castrating mother, resulting in a gender role conflict which leads to either bulimic or anorexic behaviours. The former is regarded as an over-identification with femininity and a desire for pregnancy whereas in the latter case, a rejection of femininity occurs with an operating fear of oral impregnation.[9] In this interpretation the symbolic referents are phallic and do not include any notion of the woman's autonomous sexuality.

Reductive symbolic readings are less favoured in recent analyses which prefer a multi-dimensional approach. It is generally recognized that all parents of anorectics do not fall into the traditional categorization and the experiential determinants are much broader.

Marlene Boskind-Lodahl has argued that low self-esteem, the acceptance of a restrictive femininity and rejection as a sexual being by men are characteristic of the condition. She has also argued that the ideological positioning of women as passive and dependent upon men is an inadequate one.

It is generally recognized that anorectics "find it difficult to accept their sexuality".[10] But how does a feminine sexual identity come into being?



illus.15 1973

The anorectic enters into a deadlock between her imaginary body, her knowledge of its functioning and its desires and the expectations of others. She manifests a gross distortion of her body in a secretive and concealing silence, censuring her sexuality as is deemed appropriate by others. The circumstances that originated the changed eating behaviours are transposed into a transformation of the body.

Anorexia is a psychologically adaptive stance of operating within the terms of a body language, which removes the subject from the extenuating circumstances, deflecting the discords into a privately borne weight which she gains control of by determining her food intake. She is alienated by others' lack of understanding. Her identity is condensed into her obsession which stretches her physiological limits - the body transforms.

The reflected body image does not mirror her desired self image. She does not see her reflected body without rejecting it as inadequate. The self image massively collapses into nothingness.

Her experience is inadequate for her to act as she desires. She is the negative of that which she desires to be. She is fat, she is thin. Abstinence suspends her in a state of denial in which nothing is real, not even herself. The physiological body which we understand as determinant, fixed and very real, is experienced as a Phantasm, a phantasm which can be shed by the anorectic but can never reach absolute definition.

The mythic and/or idealized representation of women has included large obese figures and slender pubescent forms. Particular parts of the body have acquired a fetishistic focus in most cultures: the footbinding techniques applied to Chinese womens' feet, crippled and inhibited their movement and they became 'true' ladies of leisure; the use of the corset to shape the female body as an hourglass,

deformed and caged ; and the giraffe women of Africa, ring and stretch their necks with gold to exorbitant heights, separating their heads from their body. Beauty goes beyond any 'natural' beauty of form and is a facet of desire. To be beautiful is to be desired. Women in particular are prone to disfigurement in the pursuit of beauty.

The adolescent is particularly sensitive to the changes occurring within the body and the response to it. For young women this seems to happen to her. Michele Montrelay wrote:

For the woman enjoys her body as she would the body of another. Every occurrence of a sexual kind (puberty, erotic experiences, maternity, etc.) happens to her as if it came from another (woman); every occurrence is the fascinating actualization of the femininity of all women, but also and above all, of that of the mother.[16]

Montrelay inscribes the anorectic as one who desires 'to reduce and dissolve her own flesh, to take her own body as a cipher.' She represents the anorectic as miming a lack, because of the censure of her body. The anorectic can be said to become a silent, fragile phantasm. Montrelay writes that:

The analyst often finds a 'fear of femininity' in connection with feminine anxiety, especially in the adolescent...that this fear is not a result of phantasies of violation and breaking in (effraction) alone. At bottom it is a fear of the feminine body as a non-repressed and unrepresentable object. In other words, femininity, according to Jones, experienced as real and immediate, is the blind spot of the symbolic process analysed by Freud.[16]

The female body is actualized for the young woman as herself. It is irrepressable. It can not operate as it does in the case of the young man.

The stripping away of flesh, of possessions, taking account of all motions, all exits and entrances into and from the body with each and every gesture watched, every spoken word heard, speaks a desire to

transform the identity that one is. The cost of the stance is life itself. The body is bartered, martyred, repulsed and reviled for life.

* * * * *

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CURRENT WORK

The studio and written work is concerned with identity, the female body, feminine desire, adolescence and the condition of Anorexia nervosa. The work situates my identity as shifting and the self-image as transforming.

The most important concern of my work has been with my experience of the condition of Anorexia nervosa. The text "The Mirror Stage" written by Lacan, divulges the subject as profoundly split between the unconscious and conscious representations - of coherence and fragmentations - and it is within this framework that I have set out the exhibited work. The self is represented within the mirrors of the photograph and language. Occasionally I am present as another, for instance in the 'Quiescence' series.

Lacan's stress on the body-image as integral and essential to identity linked an otherwise obscure process of anorexia to a process of identification within the mirrors of others' desire. The necessity of incorporating a coherent and whole projection of self is primary for an acceptance of self. The disillusion was no longer conceived of as being between my body and my mind but between myself and others. My fading and seemingly diffuse body mirrored others' responses to it. I mimed the absence I felt I was. The anorectic moves within a force field of a desire that censures her. Her experience of her body remains an isolating experience.

The projected use of my autobiography has been realised to a greater extent than envisioned. Over the summer break (1983-84) the silent and voiceless experience of my adolescence was spoken through poems. The poems I wrote became the basis for the book of poems, Seams within Silence. The poems worked over fragmented memories to re-formulate the meaning of the experience. There was a psychological need to place the experience outside myself and to engage in a dialogue with others. Over the two year period, the private experience became a shared experience, one that was no longer a perversity of mine, but one in which society played a constitutive role. My condition was not unique. The poems cease at the point which I began to reconstitute my identity and transform myself through experience rather than solely through bodily transformations.

At that same time (Summer 1983-84) I painted a series of images which were based upon memories, previous work and were drawn to effect a sense of process: of movement through a shedding and growth; a dreaming; a looking outwards; a certain closure and opening to new and old experience; and a certain vertigo and anxiety. The painted images (the fan, the dreaming, the shedding of forms, overlaid imagery and inverted figures) became the basis of some of the imagery within the exhibition, Transformations.

I have used the photograph of my actual body to mirror myself. However this 'real' image is an illusion. The photograph mirrors the oscillation between, 'Is that me?' and 'There I am!'.

What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else : the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the Sovereign Contingency, matter and somehow stupid, the This (This photograph and not Photography) in short, what Lacan calls the Tuche, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.

Barthes: Camera Lucida.

They capture a moment and movements; both freezing an image and blurring a sequence of motions. The images are metamorphoses of my body-images - fluid entities.

APPENDIX A

The egg

Once one day a hen laid an egg she sat on it for 6 weeks and at a chicken came out and it was a yellow chicken. One day the yellow chicken went for a walk and he saw a yellow chicken in a pond. He the yellow chicken in the water it did what the other chicken did it went back to its mother and

Said there is a yellow chicken in the pond. IT ^{does} ~~do~~ what I do and his mother said to him it is the reflection in the water it is you and the chicken went off.

The pig

Once upon a time there lived a pig. The people ^{thought} ~~there~~ she was fat. One day a girl said you are fat the pig said I am not and the girl went away. The next day the pig had baby's. She had 6 baby's. The girl came to the pig and she was

not fat. She saw her baby's and the girl went to tell her mother and father and the pig said I am not fat and she was ~~right~~ ^{right} ~~taught~~ ^{taught}.
baby
babies

APPENDIX B

ADOLESCENCE

The word adolescence was first recorded in the fourteenth century as a time of life in which signs of approaching reproductive maturity were visible. Since the industrial revolution adolescence has been used increasingly and become a distinct period of transition. The change of laws concerning child labour with the establishment of minimum ages for work and the reduction of work hours redefined childhood.

Childhood became recognized as different from adulthood and children were no longer considered as little men or women. With the rise of the capitalist ideology during the Victorian era, a conservative morality and a repression of childhood sexuality was favoured. Children were protected from witnessing childbirth, death, sexual intercourse, amorous displays and debaucheries and instead were placed in innocence and experienced 'childhood'. Compulsory education was introduced and further inscribed childhood as a distinctly different period of life.

Adolescence became a necessary interim period of time between childhood and adult life in which the child assumed adult behaviours and sexuality. The rites of passage to maturity have become an extended period of ten years. Increasing knowledge of the physiological processes and development of the body during puberty further defined it as a distinct period of growth. The definition of adolescence now includes an account of psychological development in the period of transition between childhood and maturity.

PUBERTY and MENSTRUATION

Puberty is marked by the development of secondary sexual characteristics associated with a re-emergent awareness of sexuality. For the girl, the visible aspects are breast development and growth of pubic hair. The changes in the body are stimulated and controlled by the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland which begin to secrete several interacting hormones. (The average age of onset is ten years three months. What initially stimulates these changes is unknown.)

The observable marker of a young woman's physical maturity is the onset of menstruation. Puberty was recognized in tribal societies as a major maturational process and menstruation was observed with ritual and myth within the community. Young women entered into womanhood with ritual and a new set of behaviours, taboos and constraints to be followed henceforth.

The first menstrual flow was considered the most potent and damaging. If the young woman even looked at a man it would harm him or his property. Both Jews and Muslims have elaborate rituals following the menarche for purification of the body. The young women from the South Sea Islands were often shut away and only allowed to eat certain selected foods. These periods of abstinence were frequently followed by feasting. The young women were often obliged to leave their family home or remain isolated for a considerable period of time. In cultures with strict rituals, transgressions would be followed by punishment directed at the girl and the family. Generally menstruation was approached with foreboding and marked by fasting, abstinence and isolation. In our own society it is a silent event which is coped with privately.

FASTING

Fasting has been associated with menstruation to cleanse and purify the body. However, it is men who have a recorded history of the practices of fasting and asceticism (a form of discipline with an explicit desire to control and stifle the bodily desires).

Fasting has a history of political, public and personal protest. Historically within Celtic tribes, a person or group would fast against injustice. In the New Testament fasting is used as an act of penance. Recently fasting by political prisoners as a form of martyrdom has been used to arouse popular support. Most voluntary fasting is associated with self-denial and related religious practices. Though extreme forms of asceticism are characteristic of philosophies and religions based upon dualistic notions of the separation of mind and body, it is also practiced in monistic societies. Fasting often accompanies grief and mourning. The Christian church incorporates times of fasting, frugal eating and abstinence from certain foods times which are followed by feasting - Easter and Christmas.

Asceticism is considered a virtuous training towards an ideal goal. The process requires mental and physical self-control. Pious mystical thought is facilitated by monastic isolation, solitary life, silence and prayer with a corresponding physical rigour.

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illus.16

INVESTIGATIONS of the FEMININE SUBJECT
in AUTOBIOGRAPHY and WRITING

"Reflections always contain danger;
at one extreme of narcissism
at the other of self knowledge."
Patricia Meyer Spacks.



illus.17

This paper takes a literary and psychoanalytic perspective to investigations of the permeation of the subject in women's autobiography and writing. The autobiographical text elucidates women's subjectivity and their existence and experience of the subject as constituted by the language of a society. It speaks of the metamorphoses over the lifetime of the subject and of BECOMING in the text. The first section examines the relationship of women and writing, autobiography and its form, content and style. The second section examines theories of the psychoanalytic subject and the possibilities for a feminine mode of expression.



illus.18

Women and Writing

What is the relation between women and writing? Do women write differently from men? Why is the sex and gender of the writer of importance?

The western, white male is often assumed to be the normative state. To be other is to be confronted by the question 'Who am I?'. Writers are assumed to be of the male gender unless specified otherwise. They write in a tradition of their own construction; yet writing is not an activity defined by sex or gender. It is a cultural activity used by all the members of a society for different reasons.

The Anglo-American feminists have tended to use a sociological account of femininity and have inquired into language without the use of a psychoanalytic account of the subject. Dale Spender's analysis of language as man-made typifies this position. Her thesis uncovers the cultural flaws and attitudes which are embedded in everyday use and which exclude women; and she argues for an awareness of the negative assumptions attributed to the feminine that could be corrected.

In the final chapter of MAN-MADE LANGUAGE, Dale Spender outlines her analysis of the relation and situation of women and writing, concentrating upon the seeming incompatibility and thus the difficulty of being both a woman and a writer. Women writers are a contradiction in terms.[1] Spender uses the public/private dichotomy to further illustrate this point; that women occupy the private realm and men the public, structuring the position of the two sexes in relation to writing as an occupation.[2] Women have been encouraged to write for a private audience in the form of diaries, letters, articles and sometimes novels.[3] Women have encountered a split between private and public writing, that men have not.[4] When women have gone to the public on matters not of their province they have often been ridiculed.[5] Spender develops the notions of the opposition of difference to conceptualize the ideological containment of women within the man-made world in the past. She postulates the creation of a woman-made language in opposition to the man-made language.

Rosika Parker and Griselda Pollock begin with the premise that women have worked creatively and they examine art and craft by women from the Renaissance to recent feminist work in relation to the ideological construction of art and the artist. They argue the difference as being a constructed, ideological relationship and state that the feminine stereotype of the nineteenth century England, in particular, is the negative of masculinity and as such:

"Women and all their activities are characterized as the antithesis of cultural creativity, making the notion of a woman artist a contradiction in terms." [6]

If a woman paints well, she is said to paint like a man. They assert that to discover the history of art by women is to expose the underlying assumptions, values and prejudices of art history. [7] They avoid presenting and evaluating the history of art by women within the traditional evaluations of art, and assert that women have participated in the development of the language and codes of art. Women's art has maintained a strategic and contradictory position to the history of art, operating as a structuring category for the ideology of art. The history of women's art remains outside of the dominant discourse.

While Spender theorizes the dichotomy and is unable to recover the writers of the past; Parker and Pollock reclaim the history of women's art, challenging the dominant ideology. Though their text examines the visual arts, their arguments are also valid for the evaluation of women writers.

One of the first well known papers on the topic of women and writing, *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*, is often used as an opening passage to address recent debates. As Patricia Meyer-Spacks says, Virginia Woolf's paper strays from its focus with the intention of establishing the difficulty of the relationship between women and writing and that she includes an account of the social and economic restraints that have conditioned women's writing. [8]

The definition of woman cannot be confined to considerations of sex and gender, but must also include the social, economic and political forces that shape her lived experience. Michelle Barrett points out the difficulty of locating biological differences in the analysis of the condition of woman:

"Although it is important for feminist analysis to locate the question of biological difference in an account of male-female relations, the slide into biological reductionism is an extremely dangerous one. It is regressive in that one of the early triumphs of feminist cross-cultural work - the establishment of a distinction between sex as a biological category and gender as a social one - is itself threatened by an emphasis on the causal role of procreative biology in the construction of male domination." [9]

The use of gender as a social construction that is overlaid on the female body suggests that a real, essential and natural woman can be liberated with the appropriate social changes. The relationship between sex and gender is more complex and interrelated than this would suggest. Moira Gatens argues that to distinguish sex and gender as a body/consciousness dichotomy is theoretically untenable and historically unresolved. [10] Michelle Barrett in her chapter 'Femininity, Masculinity and Sexual Practice', observes the many contributing factors which inform our sense of sexed identity whilst investigating the problems of a marxist-feminist analysis. Feminism has, in respect of the contemporary women's movement, established that the personal is political. This is predicated upon the knowledge that sexual relationships are socially constructed and can be changed. [11] As she points out, the distinction between sex and gender is widely used in feminist literature. She questions the degree of separation between the biological and sociological determinants, because it suggests that the liberating potential of physical sexuality can be achieved by the removal of social repression. [12]. To argue that the biological determinants as the basis of social relations is to be faced without the possibility of changing them and to define woman as a sexed and gendered being is to obscure the historical constructions of woman. Different cultures in the past have ascribed other values to the female sex than is assumed 'natural' in our own. To be a woman is to speak from the female body, from a social and sexual relation to the man, and from a relationship to the dominant structures. Women speak from a different position.

The recent feminism has made theoretical inroads to our understanding of the operations of cultural re-production. One of the aims of feminism was to "develop a history of and a theory of form and meanings articulated by women." [13] *WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (1976), is an example of the examination of the history and theory of form of autobiography which reclaim a silent history and redefines the parameters of evaluation to include women writers. [14]

Autobiography speaks the life and times of the narrator as the subject within the text and is usually spoken in the first person, it is a medium in which to examine the use of and form of the 'I'. The self is projected with words, speaking itself, structuring life experience into an aesthetic or literary form.

A Definition of Autobiography

Autobiography was traditionally defined as a form of biography. Biographical work is compiled from notes, diaries, letters and memoirs by significant individuals and developed into a causal narrative of the decisive events and experiences in a life time.

Although autobiography had been identified and named by Robert Southey in 1809, in critical analysis autobiography was rarely distinguished from biography. Edgar Johnson sums up the view still characteristic in the nineteen thirties in his definition of biography which included "not only formal biography, but all kinds of autobiography - letters, journals, reminiscences - for all biography is ultimately founded in a kind of autobiography." [15]

Since the Second World War, autobiography has been identified as a significant genre. The subject of an autobiographical text is also the author. It is assumed that the author is publicly verifiable and independent of the text itself. The text purports to be the truth whether in private experience or public occasion. Unlike the majority of novels or biographies the text is written in the first person. The mode is generally introspective and intimate, includes inner and emotional experiences, and the author consciously reshapes his life into a coherent form. [16]

A Brief History of Autobiography

Autobiographical writing is not represented in classical literature nor in other cultures in the form it is known today.[17] St. Augustine's *CONFESSIONS* is the earliest example and begins the tradition of autobiography. It is a philosophical document of his time, tracing the vicissitudes of his spiritual progress until his conversion to Christianity.[18] He reveals his life as a series of confessions on the journey of his soul. Other Christians have used this mode as a narrative movement towards God.

The earliest account in English is the *BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE* written in the early fifteenth century which is a narrative of the spiritual struggles and adventurous life of a devout woman who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It reveals her personality and provides an interesting account of the life of a pilgrim. It was dictated to and written by another, and was not published until 1936, for an Early English Text Society.[19]

Most autobiography has been written since the Renaissance, increasing in the succeeding centuries to become one of the most popular twentieth century literary forms. The eighteenth century witnessed the writing of some of the classics of world literature. The emphasis upon individualism in the Romantic era of the nineteenth century encouraged the growth of this form. During the twentieth century, people from all parts of society publish autobiography and life experiences of all kinds.[20]

The first histories of autobiography by Misch and Burr, were written early this century and the content was evaluated in terms of character judgement of the author. Though early histories list women writers, very few have been seriously evaluated within the literary genre. Two major bibliographies were published in 1955 and 1961 and compiled by William Matthew and Louis Kaplan respectively, yet neither works represent women writers at length, and only passing mention is made of *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ALICE. B. TOKLAS* by Gertrude Stein. In Wayne Schumaker's *ENGLISH AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (1954), only three women rate a mention: Harriet Martineau, Margaret Oliphant and Annie Besant.[21]

Serious criticism and evaluation of the form has occurred since the Second World War when it was identified as a significant genre. Autobiography by women has not been included within recent evaluations. The history of women writers was silenced, as is the case for women artists, from the dominant ideological forms. By the early nineteen seventies the imbalance was identified and the situation redressed and recovered by feminists.

Women's life studies have been excluded from recent bibliographies and from literary evaluation and the problem has been doubly compounded. Significant discrepancies between the critical canon of form, content and style can be identified between examples of autobiography written by men and women. Therefore the need for a separate history has been historically created.

Content

A major difference is that, as Jelinek says, women rarely mirror the establishment of the time; their writing focuses upon their immediate world, including domestic details. Men's autobiographies concentrate on the public goal rather than on the private experience whilst women write to clarify and affirm their identity rather than to idealize or aggrandize themselves.[22]

James Cox has argued that autobiographical output increased parallel to important historical events in America, for example, the gold rush, the revolution and the civil war. Women's output relates to literary and educational opportunities that occurred in the late nineteenth century in America. The impact of historical events is less clearly observed in women's life studies.[23]

Jelinek observed that Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her autobiography EIGHTY YEARS OR MORE declined to project her political and ideological position to her audience. In her preface she stated :

"The story of my private life as the wife of an earnest reformer as an enthusiastic housekeeper proud of my skill in every department of domestic economy and as the mother of seven children, may amuse and benefit the reader. The incidents of my public career as a leader in the most momentous reform yet launched upon the world -

the emancipation of women - will be found in the HISTORY OF THE SUFFRAGE."[24]

As Jelinek argues, neither men or women writers of the past, write of their private life beyond an acceptable level. Their shared disinclination to write of the inner emotional experience is because it exposes vulnerability and uncertainty. However more contemporary examples include such material within the narration. Han Suyin embeds her life within the history of China, selecting and speaking of her early childhood memories and family relationships as shaped by external events and situations.[25] Simone de Beauvoir in her memoirs relates in great detail and depth of her feelings for Jacques, her friendship with Zaza and her relationship with her mother.[26]

Patricia Meyer-Spacks suggests that women portray themselves as self-less by stressing their ability to give to others and not think of themselves. She says that, "In writing, these women of public accomplishments, implicitly stress uncertainties of the personal, denying rather than glorifying ambition, evading rather than enlarging their private selves" and further more that "They use autobiography, paradoxically partly as a mode of denial. Their strategies of narrative reflect both a female dilemma and a female solution to it."[27]

Women's autobiography reveals this attitude and it shapes their writing. Who am I? How did I come in to being? How do I move beyond the boundaries in which I find myself? underly and are thematic of autobiography.

For example, Anais Nin investigates the notion of the feminine and uses language as her access to the phantasy, the imaginary and real of others. Her diaries collude the imaginary and the real. Early in her life by writing in a diary she articulated an interior monologue. As a child she was so shy that she rarely spoke to any one outside her family. Her writing is born of the psychic trauma of displacement that occurred when her parents separated, and she, her mother and two brothers settled in New York. Writing was a means to cohere and resolve the fragmentation as she learnt a second language and adjusted to her

new life. The JOURNAL became her life's work and in her novels she moved towards a feminine mode of expression which she spoke of as the nocturne and the oceanic. She sought a language that spoke of sensations, emotions, desires, distance and proximity.[28]

The expression of the feminine is the theme that unites her first journal. She was brought into turmoil by a meeting with June, Henry Miller's second wife. His account of his wife as a subject of his writing fascinated her and she realized that women confounded themselves in his mind; "...his desire never became a desire to know them intimately; they were faceless without identity except as sexual objects." [29]

Upon meeting June, Anais was overcome by her presence, but by the end of the evening she had lost her admiration for her. She felt that her projection was false, weak and postured as she dramatized her life in response to Anais.[30] Yet later Anais identifies with her, recognizing their common delight in assuming costumes, masks and disguises and admires June for her passion for living on edge and her selflessness.

"Her talk is like my secret writing. At times incoherent, at times abstract, at times blind. Let incoherence be then. Our meeting each other has been emotionally too disturbing. Both of us had one inviolate self we never gave. It was our dreaming self." [31]

Anais Nin searched to express this dreaming self in her writing.
Form

The written organization of autobiographical material by men or women has differed historically. Women's writing is more likely to be informal, less clearly organized and less synthetic. Men tend to unify their writing by a chronological, linear narrative, concentrating on one period of their life, one theme, or one characteristic of personality. The direction of men's life is appropriately cast in this manner.[32]

Irregularity rather than orderliness informs the self portraits by women. The narrative is often neither chronological nor progressive but disconnected, fragmentary or organized into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters. The

multi-dimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seem to have established this pattern of diffusion and diversity. Dale Spender argues that this was a result of the different cultural and literary experience of women which sanctioned these lesser forms as acceptable by men for women. Parker and Pollock argue that women writers have been excluded as feminine by the masculine value attributed to artistic creation. It is apparent that women's writing has reflected their lived experience and has been excluded the definitions of 'art' into other 'lesser' forms of autobiography because the content, form used and the way in which they write about their life is at variance to that written by men. The following is a consideration of the other forms of autobiography.

Letters; the Dialogue.

Letters form a correspondence between two people, though they may also address a larger audience in a newspaper or magazine. Letters are not defined by a strict criterion of content and the interspersal of the serious and the trivial are inextricably bound in such a form. Kay Goodman stated that the zeal for letter writing by women in the nineteenth century in Germany and England coincided with the expanding bourgeois society. Feminists delving into the past have taken renewed interest in letter writing and Caroline Schlegel's letters are considered "masterpieces of mixed aesthetic form: wardrobe descriptions alternate with philosophical discourse, gossip with literary quotation, allusion and criticism." [33]

Journals; the Monologue

Day by day accounts of activities, emotions and turmoils are recorded in the journal and diary. In this form the content is not as selective as autobiography, but reveals the plethora of information that composes a day. It can be developed as a self reflective form which develops a coherent voice. Diaries are often kept by young women who value the secret interior monologue as a private space into which to speak, developing an air of inviolate identity. Many diaries use the form of a series of letters or a dialogue to an unknown or imaginary person, for example THE DIARY OF ANNA FRANK.

Memoirs

The memoir includes narrative incidents, vignettes of personal relationships, character sketches, accounts of travel, essays, dialogues and letters received. They are generally written in retrospect and re-imagine incidents that are generally more public than private. The intention is generally not to carry out an examination of self, but, through the outward projection a disclosure. *AN UNFINISHED WOMAN* (1969) by Lillian Hellman [34] is imaginatively constructed by various methods. The initial chapters speak her life through a metaphoric use of incidents and moments that remain in her memory as formative of her identity. The middle section is written through extracts from her diary of her travels across Europe and is concluded with character studies in which she reveals of herself as much as of others. In *PENTIMENTO* (1973) [35] she develops the portraits of others but in so doing she speaks more of herself; for example, the chapter 'Julia'. She remains unapologetic for the disjunctions of these autobiographical writings.

Women have used other undefined forms that elude the definitions of autobiography. Their use of the 'I' has been less certain and more disjunctive in the past.

Style

The manner in which text is written has also differed when used by women, but this is more characteristic of particular texts than of all writing by women. It is a difference that has been consciously pursued in the twentieth century.

Virginia Woolf wrote that the novel *PILGRIMAGE* by Dorothy Richardson used a sentence that 'we might call the psychological sentence of the female gender.' [36] She attributed the qualities of elasticity, of fragility and of envelopment to her use of the sentence contrasting it to the stream-of-consciousness method as used by James Joyce.

In her own writing, Woolf uses this elasticity of the stream of consciousness to parallel a thinking unfettered by a rationalism. In her most poetic work *THE WAVES*, the six personalities weave and interweave, loosely retaining a voice,

merging their thoughts, apprehensions and perceptions into waves of a story. There are no chapters, only spaces acknowledging a new scene or the passage of time. The sun rises as the writing begins, sinking as the waves reach the shore, ceasing the flow of words. The six voices construct the text. There is no author setting up a drama, instead a polysemic text. The following is a passage selected at random which typifies her writing :

"...I am titillated inordinately by some splendour; the ruffled crimson against the green lining; the march of pillars; the orange light behind the black pricked ears of olive trees. Arrows of sensation strike from my spine, but without order.

Yet something is added to my interpretation. Something lies deeply buried. For one moment I thought to grasp it. But bury it, bury it; let it breed, hidden in the depths of my mind someday to fructify. After a long lifetime, loosely in a moment of revelation, I may lay hands on it, but now the idea breaks in my hand. Ideas break a thousand times for once that they globe themselves entire. They break; they fall over me..."[37]

The disjunctive form, the varied content and the more diffuse style is more appropriate to women's lived experience and more typical of life. The singular, ordered, self-important history of the author is a self delusion that women have not generally used. Their use of autobiography reveals existent possibilities for the genre which ^{are} much broader than the definition allows. The differences found within women's writing raise fundamental questions of the nature of the difference between writing by men and women.

Does the psyche of a woman differ in its operations and functions? How can this speak? In the following investigations of the feminine subject the possibilities for a feminine language are examined, which will affect future use of the autobiographical form and provide a basis for the re-examination of the texts of the past. The following arguments are speculative and are in current debate.

The Subject and Writing

Roland Barthes has linked closely the style of the author with a subjectivity that speaks as a desire from the body. French theorists have linked more closely the relationship of the subject and writing. Jacques Lacan has reinterpreted Freudian theory incorporating it within linguistic science.

The French Structuralists use the study of language as a key to the understanding of culture and society. The ideal of the autonomous individual expressing a unity of self and meaning was apprehended as a projection and figment of a wish-fulfilling imagery. Language becomes the entity in which the parts make meaning in relationship to each other rather than to any natural connection to 'reality'. French feminists have challenged the notion of the autonomous individual claiming it to be the self delusion of the patriarchal man; one of which woman has no part. Under this delusion women are placed as inferior within language and are excluded from it. To change the way a woman speaks and is spoken of would shift the meaning and representation of woman.[38]

Words and sentences reveal misinterpretations and misrecognitions as well as ideological and semiotic operations. Writing and speech activate the body of language as Blanchot says in *THE ESSENTIAL SOLITUDE*:

"Writing exists in a space of solitude, where concentration is found. This isolation is not an alienation, nor a quest for singularity, but a desire for immersion, a dissolution through language systems and codes."[39]

Blanchot eloquently evokes the mystery of writing, generating a space of solitude into which the book is fulfilled. The meaning is lodged in the intimacy between the reader and writer. There is no NEED for it. The concept of an *écriture* is derived from Roland Barthes who made a distinction between the classic 'readerly' text that reproduces the existing order of discourse, and the 'writerly' text that subverts and moves beyond the conventional forms of received ideology. He erects a framework through which the corpus of language is intermingled with the subject's body

and biography as style. Language is a corpus of prescriptions and habits common to all writers of a period which seems to speak 'naturally' without effort, "It is, as it were, an abstract circle of truths, outside of which alone the solid residue of an individual logos begins to settle." [40] His use of verb and noun erects a phallogentric representation of the individual, "... enfolds the whole of literary creation as much as the earth, the sky and the line where they meet."

Language becomes a frontier which can be overstepped to enter into possibility. [41] He elaborates the author's 'personal and secret mythology', that subnature of expression where the coition of words and things takes place. The language of the male body delivers writing as an expression of desire. Such language invites a coition. With an eloquent use of language he raises the myth laden depths of hidden, secret flesh, "... into a rhythm of words, a flow, a discharge of vertical and lonely dimension of thought." [42] He excludes his destination for the ecstasy of the writer's 'thing'.

"Style is never anything but a metaphor, that is, equivalence of the author's literary intention and carnal structure (it must be remembered that structure is the residual deposit of duration.)" [43]

He describes style and structure in terms of the morphology of the body and as an orgasmic state.

Apart from this metaphoric description of language and writing in terms of the male body, more serious constructions of the male/masculine have been theorized by Lacan. He reinterprets Freud and postulates the phallus as the privileged signifier. Its presence or absence is said to structure the entry of the subject into language. Male or female, the phallus is the prime signifier. Women are excluded as a signifier because they are unrepresented or unrepresentable in this society and culture. They are censored and repressed and thus absent. For the women themselves this is of undoubted significance.

Lacan, like Freud, insists upon the importance of the phallus (its absence or presence) in the laying down of the law and to account for sexual difference as being either feminine or masculine, since biological determinants do not decide this. [44]

Sitting
Confinement

The women, with shaven heads and ill-fitting clothes, were confined in a triple doored, damp, dark cell and fed on bread and water. This punishment was prescribed for the most minor of offences, such as disobedience neglect of work and abusive language.



1) CHILDREN OF MARY

Installation

2) SILENT SENTINELS

Installation

3) SOLITARY /
/ CONFINEMENT

Installation

4) DISJUNCTION

5) MAPPING A LANDSCAPE

6) GOOD GIRL JANE

7) *PRESERVED SHADOWS*

DOUBLE CROSSED SERIES

8) *POINT OF FOCUS*

9) *POINT OF ENTRY*

10) *POINT OF CONTENTION*

11) *POINT OF INDECISION*

Freud recognized the clitoris as an equivalent of the penis, yet discounted it as inferior and inadequate for the purpose of penetration. Lacan uses the phallus as the privileged signifier because "it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation" and it is the most symbolic in the literal sense."[45] He rejects the cultural phallus as the feminists have defined it and points out that in Freudian doctrine the phallus is not a phantasy or imaginary effect, "it is even less the organ, penis or clitoris , that it symbolizes."[46] However the ambiguity of the term is lost as he reappropriates as in the possession of the male. He writes of woman giving what she does not have, and fails to acknowledge the presence of her own pleasure system. The penis and the clitoris are not opposites but contraries. The clitoris has been replaced with an absence.[47]

The girl-child has a much more elaborate and precarious course to become a woman than a boy child. Freud has claimed that there is no biological distinction of desire between the sexes. Lacan outlines desire as structured upon a loss; to be without is to want. Initially both desire the mother and it is only after the entry into the Oedipal conflict that the paths of the two sexes diverge.[48] The girl child remains unaware of her vagina and imagines the clitoris as an inferior and small form of the penis. She transfers her desire from the mother to the father but according to Freud she has little incentive to internalize the superego, and thus retains a continued childish craving for love and a penis envy which will mark the impotency of her situation.

As this explanation is inadequate and deprecating of the feminine condition it has been reacted to strongly. Melanie Klein and Karen Horney sought to theorize the existence of a specific feminine libido which Ernest Jones termed a concentric drive. He described the desire for the phallus to be primary.[49] Psychoanalytic theories propose that the gaining of knowledge of sexual difference is crucial to the sense of identity. The possibility of a femininity which is formed in relation to the morphology of the body need not be considered to be biologically innate. The libido Freud theorizes is not biologically determined but is consciously and unconsciously resolved by the lived experience of the subject.

Two French theorists analysed the feminine desires and imaginary of the woman. Luce Irigaray and Michelle Montrelay challenge the Freudian and Lacanian interpretations of femininity and speak for a feminine language adequate to speak feminine desires. Irigaray argued for a specifically different language for the female form and Montrelay sought to work the theories of concentricity and phallocentricity as concurrent yet incompatible drives that constitute the feminine situation in a specifically different manner.

Luce Irigaray raises the question of a feminine language adequate to speak the body, sex and the imagination of the woman. She brings into question the history of philosophy and psychoanalysis as discourses that define the feminine as the negative of masculine values. The masculine language is epitomized by Aristotelian logic. When questioned upon the possible form the feminine language may take she replied:

"It is obviously very difficult. First of all I would say it has nothing to do with the syntax which we have used for centuries, namely that constructed according to the following organization: subject, predicate, or subject, verb, object. For female sexuality is not unified, it cannot be subsumed under the concept of subject. Which brings into question all the syntactical norms...[50]

She suggests that to formulate a feminine language, the morphology rather than the anatomy of the female sex should be re-examined. She attempts to find the imaginary of the feminine in the two lips which she declares are always joined in embrace. This split subject is a strategy to baffle the dominant discourse and the coherent subject and challenges the coherent subject with a split subject.

She has a particular interest in the languages of schizophrenia and senility and has also recorded the way in which anxiety or psychosis is expressed differently in the two sexes. She recorded and compared the conversations of ten male and ten female schizophrenics which indicated that men have an ability for syntactic modification and for metalanguage. The women did not speak their madness in language but expressed it through the

body itself, unable to transfer it to some different mode. Irigaray postulates that "women are totally censored in their relationship to their mothers and other women. Instead women (sic) take up a language with desires and phantasms that do not belong to her".[51] Thus she is exiled from herself and her sexuality. It would be necessary for women to be recognized as bodies with sexual attributes, desiring and uttering, and for men to rediscover the materiality of their bodies to effect a change.[52]

Montrelay investigates the becoming of the girl to a woman to unravel femininity. Her paper "Investigations into Femininity" examines phallogentric and concentric theories as two incompatible but operative drives of the feminine condition. [53] Montrelay uses a definition of the phallus as that which is desired for "the ideals and values which the penile organ represents".[54] Desire is a pure artifice because it cannot be attained and it is precisely this non attainment which represents its potency. If it is realized as a finite object then it becomes insignificant. Repression is essential to the maintenance of desire. Montrelay differentiates between repression and censure; censure passively blocks a representation forming whereas repression actively symbolizes a significant form. Social and physical censure remain operative for women, whereas for men the reverse is the case.[55] Montrelay designates the more distinctively female drives as incompatible with the development of a castration anxiety and hence of repression:

"If this insatiable organ-hole is at the centre of precocious sexuality, if it modifies every psychic movement according to closed, circular schema, it compromises the woman's relation to castration and to the law: to absorb, to take, to take in, is to reduce the world to the most archaic instinctual 'laws', a movement opposite to that implied by castration: where the jouissance of the body is lost 'for' a discourse that is other."[56]

For the woman repression fails also to differentiate between her own body and that of her first object of love. It is not until puberty that her desired maternal body materializes, and thus her 'first stake of representation' can no longer be "repressed". As Rachel Bowlby stated:

"Instead of a structuring gap - 'what is lacking was a lack' - the female libido is granted an excess and therefore, through inadequate repression, runs a much stronger risk of that 'unbearable plenitude'.[57]

Desire is always structured on a loss. In the first instance this is the mother. At puberty the girl becomes the mother.

"The repressed is lost - but it is not of a castration. At bottom, it is a fear of the feminine body as a non-repressed and unrepresentable object. Femininity according to Jones i.e. femininity experienced as real and immediate, is the blind spot of the symbolic processes analysed by Freud. Two incompatible, heterogeneous territories co-exist inside the feminine unconscious: that of representation and that which remains the dark continent."[58]

Hence the dark continent of the female unconscious that cannot be represented.

Montrélay examines the two types of orgasm in explanation of the two signifying structures operative of feminine sexuality. The first is gynocentric which reactualizes the *jouissance* the woman has of herself. The second type is dependent on an articulation via the phallus, both literally and by its representation. There is a difference in the intensity of pleasure in each case. In the first case, the pleasure is finite and she is unable to maintain "the economy of the unconscious", and in the second "the *jouissance* is sharper and more profound to the extent that the object which is its instrument, the penis, is virtually nothing", producing a sublimated economy. The orgasm becomes a metaphor in a "continuity to the ascent of pleasure, losing itself."[59]

She concludes with the notion that the female *jouissance* of orgasm is like a writing. "To the point where it must appear that this *jouissance* and the literary text [which is also written like the orgasm produced from within the discourse], are the effect of the same murder of the signifier.[60]

Both Irigaray and Montrelay use a split feminine subject to subvert the coherent subject. For Irigaray the subject is split in a morphological manner by the two lips, for Montrelay the split is of psychical structures manifested in concentricity and phallocentrism. Both recover the "imaginary" female body as the basis of a feminine *écriture*.

Julia Kristeva investigates the operations of desire in language, distinguishing the poetic language from a logical or scientific language. She appropriates the poetic as derived from feminine operations and the scientific language as akin to male processes. The poetic language she says, stems from the archaisms of the semiotic body, typical of the subject before the mirror stage. The symbolic language breaks with this and moves the subject into the signifying process at the cost of repressing the instinctual drive. "On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely a sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element"[61] Kristeva outlines poetic language to include the first structurations and identifications with the mother. Language cannot be solely interpreted as a preoccupation with the sign. [62] Appropriating the poetic, unsettled and shifting signification as originating between the mother and child, she claims poetic language with an existent history as feminine.

As has been shown, the sex and gender of the writer effect the text in its form, content and style. This is shaped by the historical situation and does not originate from any biological drive. Women write from a different position within the social structures of our institutions, from a different body which has specific desires that are variant to the male desire as elaborated by society as sexual difference.

The writer permeates through the text both directly and indirectly. Within the autobiographical text the use is intentional and directly spoken as the 'I', which is an ideological function. The genre has been defined within the terms set by men and includes the sovereign, transcendental subject as espoused within humanistic philosophy. The 'I' is developed as a character with a personality and should be re evaluated to include other disjunctive forms.

Investigations into the feminine language and writing reveal existing possibilities within the historical and cultural structures.

The psychoanalytic analysis of the subject, the shifting subject of poetic language and dream, and the split subject can be used to extend the notion of the subject in writing.

Language cannot be changed individually at will, but is changed collectively as a corpus of prescriptions. A lexical selection of language designed to exclude obvious phallic metaphors, substituting new words of female/feminine resonance, redressing a female presence by verbs, nouns and pronouns in institutional language, the educational system and the media move some way to redressing the imbalance. The link between the archaic feminine sensibility can reappropriate much of the poetic, polysemic text as a use that is from the first structurations of language, and the source of meaning that shifts. The motion towards a writing able to speak a feminine desire, the female body and the lived experience of a woman seems appropriate at this point in time. The linking of poesis and the feminine is evident in recent women's writing; and the fecund site for possibilities.

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illus.19



illus.20

THE SUBJECT



The Subject.

Recent art theory has seen the displacement of the humanistic subject and its sovereign integrity for a subordinate subject who is constituted by ideology and cannot be considered either to be the originator of meanings or 'free' to create. The creative role of the artist/author/subject has been marginalized. However, the concept of the subject cannot be removed entirely. It must be redefined to incorporate the social and ideological forces that are now seen as constituting the subject and importantly to include an active subject capable of intervening in the ideological codes.

Words such as personality, individual and self tend to privilege the singular unit at the expense of the social group. They become problematic when theorizing the relationship of the self and society. The term 'subject' is used to denote the individual human being and infers a subjugation of the individual to society, government or a larger social formation[1].

The adjective 'subjective' implies "an expression of one's own consciousness".[2] As one's own consciousness is socially, ideologically and linguistically constituted it cannot be said to originate meanings. Western art since the beginning of the nineteenth century has often been theorized as a subjective expression of the artist/author/subject. Recent theory has led to the reframing of the visual art practices as a mode of cultural and ideological intervention within the dominant discourse. To lose the subject within an abstract ideology is to be left without the possibility of intervention in the codes and meanings. The subject should be conceived neither as passive nor as a simple reflection of his/her times but should include an active consciousness and role within society.

The Humanist Subject

Humanism situates man at the centre of his own history and in control of most of his actions, exercising a choice.[3] Philosophical humanism begins with the concept of a discrete,

transcendental entity whose essence may be distorted or alienated in particular social conditions. [4] The existential subject is considered as of primary importance. The subject is affected by ideological and social processes, is transformed by personal and interpersonal experience, but retains an unquestioned essence.[5] Humanistic psychoanalytic practice reveals the patient as someone who has lost control and is out of touch with his/her real self.[6] Sociology likewise incorporates the discrete subject. The current sociological distinction between sex and gender (that a person is born with a biological sex and is given a gender by society, the environment, the parents, the educational systems and the media) replicates the theoretical impasses of the dichotomies: body/consciousness, nature/nurture and self/reality. If the starting point of the humanistic enquiry into the relationship between the individual and reality is the individual, then there is a danger of conceptualizing the individual as a separate being in direct relationship to reality as received through the senses. The positivist notions of the self do this at the expense of evaluating the social formation of the individual. The author/artist/subject within such a framework is considered to be the originator of meanings which are intentioned, determined, unified and fixed, revealing his/her self and perception of reality. Such a relationship is more complex than this would suggest and recent theory has sought to unravel it.

Towards a Redefined Subject.

Althusser views the humanistic subject as unquestioned and untheorized because the subject cannot be considered pure, totally rational or a-historical. In his view the subject is constituted by ideological practices which override any distinction between personal and social reality. He would argue that the subject has no original ideas, that the work does not originate from within. The work is constituted within ideological codes, and the text as Barthes suggests, can be considered as either conventional or radical. In supporting the demise of the author in his essay "The Death of the Author",

Barthes elaborates the theory of a multiplicity of texts which are far removed from a coherent, linear, singular meaning.[7] The text can be considered as polysemic - a multiple of writings composed from other texts.

Recent interest has been focussed upon the reader/author relationship. The reader is in a privileged position of reading a finished product, unlike the author who remains knowledgeable of the selecting process and of the discarded material of writing. Thus the author has been retermed a compositor or producer. As Janet Wolff wrote, "To put it simply, texts (and other cultural products) contain and express meanings beyond the intended and conscious meanings of their authors." (This occurs because the meanings are encoded within aesthetic codes and ideology and remade by the viewer/reader).[8]

Art is collectively produced, either directly as a collaborative effort of many individuals or indirectly by the people who inform the practice of making. The conditions in which a work is produced are dependent upon the structures and institutions of artistic practice and thus the individual act is manifestly a 'social' and ideological process.[9] The ideas, beliefs and attitudes that constitute a work can be seen as an ideological expression in relation to the social and economic circumstances which situate the artist/author/subject. Though the sociological nature of the work can be accounted for, the art practice cannot be reduced to a direct ideological practice. Janet Wolff argues that the aesthetic codes mediate another system of meanings and beliefs that include form, style, content and technique and are not simple reflections of ideology.[10]

The concept of personal inspiration and the role of the artist/author/subject is thus marginalized. However as Foucault has argued the subject should not be abandoned but redefined. The creative mode should be seen as an intervention in discourse and be analysed as a complex variable of the function of discourse.[11] In his view the author/artist/subject as a determinate and fixed source of meaning should be abandoned for the way in which a text/work is constructed and produced both technically and ideologically within the aesthetic codes.

Althusser's Anti-humanist Subject.

Althusser's position inscribes 'man' as a bourgeois myth and indicates that a Marxist-Leninist approach cannot begin with any such notion but will arrive at a 'real man' at the end of such an analysis. The bourgeois ideology names and places its subjects who, whilst under the illusion of freedom, are in fact inscribed and determined even before they are born.[12]

Ideology in general is an a-historical, universal, abstract form which constitutes all individual human beings as subjects. Althusser differentiates particular ideologies, distinguishing abstract and systematized forms from commonsense forms. Althusser argues that the subject has already been displaced from the privileged position it occupied in classical epistemology: from the centre of the world by the natural sciences; from the social world by Marxism; and from psychological uniqueness by psychoanalysis. As Terry Lovell states, Althusser's view is one in which:

"The individual human being is not ... the constituting subject which creates the world, society and the self. S/he does not even constitute the knowledge of those worlds. Rather s/he is the helpless product of psycho-social processes beyond his/her control.[13]

Althusser's position using a Marxist-Leninist approach works from the concept of society towards a 'real man' and begins to redefine the position of the subject. As he observed, the subject has been displaced by other disciplines (science and psychology). Though he uses an ideologically constituted subject he does not theorize how this occurs. The Althusserian subject has been critiqued as an 'empty' subject who simply fulfills ideological functions. Althusser draws upon Lacan's theory of the subject and language to account for the process of the constitution of the subject.

Feminists have also turned to Lacanian psychoanalysis because it provides an account of how a neutral subject becomes sexed and gendered and why this is essential to the self-identity of the subject. This self identity is initially constituted within the family, which mediates ideology through language. Lacan theorizes the subject as constituted through language.[14]

The Lacanian Subject.

Psychoanalytic and linguistic theory addresses the question of the constitution of the subject by unravelling a sequenced narrative of psychological development. Early this century Freud confronted popular conceptions of sexuality by theorizing that sexuality could not be equated with a simple genital or biological drive (desire), but is instead formed by society.[15] Desire and the means to express it move beyond physiological needs and invoke a range of actions.

Lacan rereads Freud and unravels the person as formed through his/her sexuality and through the interplay of the imagined body and the 'imaginary' of the other. Consciousness is not physiologically given but is mediated by the people we are in contact with. The subject becomes an object with a history formed within history; an imaginary subject. The Lacanian subject can be considered the obverse of the humanist subject. Lacan's writing style is intentionally difficult and resists clarity to challenge an easy comprehension and incorporation into our ideological (humanistic) framework. The text "The Mirror Stage" from Lacan's Ecrits can be interpreted as forming consciousness and the unconscious, by the exchange between spatial awareness and the received image. The paranoia generated by this exchange represses the sense of fragmentation by the assumption of the social reality given and projected henceforth through language as an 'I'. (It is as if the self-explorations - spatial awareness - by the young child are relinquished for the security of the received and socially mediated experience). As Juliet Mitchell writes:

"Lacan's human subject is not a 'divided' self (Laing) that in a different society could be made whole, but a self which is only actually and necessarily created within a split - a being that can only conceptualize itself when it is mirrored back to its self from the position of another's desire." [16]

This division is not between the biologically perceived awareness by the child of its own genitals and body and the social, ideological sense of being. Rather, Lacan posits the subject as created in a radical split between the unconscious and the conscious; sexuality is an expression of desire, an artifice structured upon a loss.

In terms of the body image, the baby from the age of six months is able to distinguish his/her own image as him/herself. The mirror stage is either exercised by recognition within the mirror or given to the child by the other, generally the mother. It is the threshold into the specular world. The body image and self-recognition are essential to such an entry. With acts of mimicry the subject then learns to speak.

The Subject and Reality

Lacan reworks the mind/body split integrating the two aspects. The relationship between reality and the 'separate organism' is merged in the spatial investigations. As Lacan wrote: "I am led therefore, to regard the function of the mirror stage as a particular case of the function of the imago, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality - or as they say between the Innenwelt and the Umwelt.

In man, however, this relation to nature is altered by a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism, a primordial Discord betrayed by the signs of uneasiness."[17]

The subject experiences the fantasy of a fragmented body image in contrast to the coherent body he sees of others. This fragmented body is retained in dreams and is vestigial as the shifting 'I' which can be all manner of objects or subjects, as experienced in dreams and remains perpetual evidence of the 'primordial' splitting.*

Lacan grounds the Mirror Stage upon the findings of various disciplines including comparative psychology and he

*Madness can be understood as a paranoid alienation that can be dated from this early memory and a breakdown of the social and ideological imaginary world. For example, the condition of Anorexia nervosa can be read as an alienation in which the body image as a medium is evacuated and marring all social relationships. The relationship to reality is altered by an uneasiness that creates another 'reality' of imaginary proportions.

concludes that there is a genetic basis for the 'Mirror Stage'.** His theory demonstrates that each subject is initially situated within the universal predicament - each subject is structured with a consciousness and unconsciousness with an 'I' of a fictional and ego^{fistic} direction and a fragmented and shifted 'I' as represented in dreams, respectively. The social representation of self, the 'I', circumscribes the child's entry into the discourse of language and the activity of signification. Henceforth the child is said to identify through the desire of the other with his/her sex and gender in the Oedipal drama as experienced within the historical and ideological situation by the system of language. Lacan's theory opposes the concept of the ego as centred on a perceptionconsciousness system or as organized by a reality principle.[20] Reality becomes imaginary and composed of a social consciousness through language.[21]

Lacan narrows the ideological and humanistic separation of nature and culture. At the same time he more profoundly splits the subject, creating a fissure between consciousness and unconsciousness which challenges the sovereign, humanistic 'I' now marred by a shifting, incoherent 'I' of the unconsciousness. He places the subject in a discourse of desire that is mirrored by another.

The unconscious contains all that has been repressed. The lack of continuity in conscious psychic life is evidence of the unconscious, revealed in the slips of the tongue, jokes and psychotic and neurotic behaviour. However the operations of the unconscious differ from consciousness; it is governed by its own laws; "its images do not follow each other as in the sequential

** It has been known for some time that the child can recognize his own image in the mirror at an early age and further more that the child is elated by this image. In comparison, the chimpanzee, although exhibiting a greater instrumental intelligence at the same stage of development, does not recognize its own image. However, identification with other members of the same species is important for many other animals.[18] The necessary condition for the maturation of the female pigeon's gonads is to see another pigeon or an image of itself in the mirror at a particular stage of development. The migratory locust can move from a solitary form to a gregarious behaviour by exposure to another locust or an object exhibiting similar behaviours[19].

logic of consciousness but by condensing onto each other or by being displaced onto something else." [22]

Lacan in redefining the subject separates the subject from biological determinants or reality principles. He places the subject within the imagination of language. As Janet Wolff points out, Lacan attributes determining power to language and sign systems. [23] The world exists through these given representations. An imaginary world is problematic and it is the same dilemma Althusser faced when using Lacan's theory of the subject. Lacan's position places the subject within mirrors of misrecognition and presupposes a false consciousness which undermines Althusser's notion of the determining power of ideology in the constitution of the subject.

Language and the Subject

Kristeva addresses in the paper 'The Semiotic Activity' and in her book Desire and Language the relation of the subject, language and reality. The semiotic enterprise as Kristeva suggests, works language as a relationship between the name and the sound of the word and the object, locating an intermediary, the signifié. The signifié (a Saussurian term) resolves the matter/spirit dichotomy which has problematized Western thinking. [24] Semiology posits a relationship between reality and the subject's imaginary world as shifting in the operation and production of meaning in the systems of language.

Language is not a fixed system of signs and meanings and there is a danger of formalising the semiotic enquiry which would reduce rather than explicate the complexity of the act of signification. [25] Julia Kristeva suggests means of resisting the ossification of language are present in the theoretical discourses and names two factors which she considers will exert influence upon the semiotic enquiry into language: dialectical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis. Marx theorized capitalism as a system of exchange, represented by a sign, money, which is in turn representative of the work invested in the product. [25] The Freudian concept of the unconscious is characterized as another thought system which is analysed from

the verbal account which slips through into conscious language. He made the analogy of dream processes as a dream work that transforms and "specifies that the semantic and syntagmatic permutation in dream narrative denotes less a fixed sense than a transformation of a signifying work in which the subject is included." [26] (my italics)

Freud's notion of dreamwork employs a transformation of the sign which re-introduces an active subject into the debate, a subject in danger of dissolution in a meta-language. The acquisition of language is dependent on an exchange, for instance between the object and the sound, to make a meaning and this requires an active subject which is necessary to account for the activity of signification, as Moira Gatens argues. [27] The constitution of the subject by language cannot be considered a simple, passive process of receiving given signs, but one in which the subject must make and work to effect meaning.

Though language may structure the subject, language itself is a construct arising from collective human activity. It is conceivable that the artist/author/subject transforms the given meanings of culture rather than intervening with a replica of the ideological practice or radically departing from the convention, as Althusser suggests. The activities of production or creation are more appropriately cast as transformations of meanings occurring in the psyche of the subject, a subject who is not a unique formation, rather one who is ideologically and linguistically structured through the lived experience of the subject. The unconscious is a site of transformations as much as a repository of repressions.

It is in the light of this that the re-defined subject, though appropriately de-centered should not be made analogous to a simple reflection of ideology or language which reduces and incapacitates the subject. It is necessary to conceive of the subject as active, to make and receive meaning - enabling the artist/author/subject to effect transformations within the language and cultural systems.

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