

Presented in this book is a documentation of  
the work produced during 1982-83 within the  
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## CONTENTS

### VOLUME I

- |     |  |         |
|-----|--|---------|
| (1) | M.F.A. Proposal  | page 1  |
| (2) | Magical Nature Rituals                                     |         |
|     | (a) Research   | page 2  |
|     | (b) Documentation  | page 8  |
|     | (c) List of slides   | page 11 |
| (3) | What does it mean to be a woman and<br>do performance art? | page 13 |
| (4) | Life-cycle Rituals   |         |
|     | (a) Research   | page 37 |
|     | (b) Documentation  | page 48 |
|     | (c) List of slides   | page 51 |
| (5) | The Clown and the Dancer                                   |         |
|     | (a) Research   | page 52 |
|     | (b) Documentation  | page 56 |
|     | (c) List of slides   | page 58 |
| (6) | Conclusion   | page 61 |

### VOLUME II

A complete visual record of the work documented in  
Volume I and presented in the exhibition.

## PROPOSAL

Over the two years of the M.F.A. course I propose to work on rituals and ritual costumes.

Within this framework I intend to combine my knowledge of photographic and printmaking processes and my knowledge of fabrics and the sewing and designing of garments to produce a number of works on chosen aspects of rituals.

In some cases the costume alone will be an adequate means of presenting the idea. Images printed onto the costume may be necessary, or the costume may require a wearer to perform certain actions within it resulting in a series of photo-etchings on the figure and the costume. Other ideas may require a three-dimensional space and sound resulting in a performance where body movements, costumes and documentation in the form of a series of photo-etchings play an important role.

At this stage I prefer not to outline specific works until I begin work on each project. As a general rule, I write rough notes on work, planning several months ahead. On reading back over these notes I can see the development of some, over a series of weeks and months, from a set of vague ideas into a clear statement. Others may be important to the resulting work, yet are only a step along the way and have little value, as finished works as was first intended.

Therefore, I propose to add to the section of my proposal on specific works when each idea is fully developed.

## MAGICAL NATURE RITUALS

## (a) RESEARCH

## THE MEANING OF RITUAL

Ritual is the symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture in a social situation to express and articulate meaning.

Characteristic features of ritual in this perspective are, (1) a stereotyped pattern of action independent of the actual situation and emotion, and (2) repetition and exaggeration to make up a kind of theatrical effect.

Consequently, there is an element of 'as if' in ritual of play-acting or pretending.

Ritual action is social. That is, it involves groups of people who share some sets of expectations in common.

It can involve members of groups, small and large, and does so by working with the whole of the person - his body, reason, unconscious needs and desires. It can appeal to symbols, actions, music, bodily movements, values, beliefs and ideas and produce some momentary kind of unity.

Because ritual can integrate bodily feelings and emotions with rational social purposes it can thus go some way to healing the splits between the body and the intellect.

Without rituals, life becomes utilitarian, technocratic and cold, devoid of human emotions. Rituals relate people to their bodies in ways which few other social actions do for they involve using the body to express feelings and even ideas in a disciplined way.

## RELIGIOUS AND MAGICAL RITUALS

"There is life on earth - one life which embraces every animal and plant on the planet. Time has

divided it up into several million parts, but each is an integral part of the whole... we are one flesh drawn from the same crucible."<sup>7</sup>

Two vastly different ideas exist concerning factors which control life. Religious rituals concentrate on the supernatural realm. Life, according to religion is controlled by one or more higher beings - Gods. On the other hand, magical nature rituals turn to the natural world for answers to questions beyond the capacities of man's experience. This attitude is far more in tune with my own beliefs.

I consider the four basic elements of life to be fire, water, vegetation and air and therefore concentrate the following research specifically on these four areas.

All rituals chosen for study are derived from a branch of Sympathetic Magic known as Homeopathic or Imitative Magic.

Wherever sympathetic magic occurs in its pure, unadulterated form, it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Underlying the whole system is a real and firm faith in the order and uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will always produce the same effects, that the performance of the proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired result. He supplicates no higher power than nature itself. In imitative magic in particular, the magician infers that he can produce any effect that he desires merely by imitating it.

## MAGICAL WORSHIP OF THE SUN - ELEMENT: FIRE

At Port Stephens in Adelaide, the medicine men call the sun by throwing fire sticks into the air. At an eclipse the Ojebays imagine that the sun has been extinguished. So they shoot fire sticks into the air, thus hoping to rekindle his expiring light. The Kamtchatkans bring out fire from their huts and pray to the great luminary to shine as before. Also during an eclipse men and women of the Chilcotin Indian tribe tuck up their robes, as they do when travelling and leaning on their staves as if they were heavy-laden they continue to walk in a circle until the eclipse is over. This is to support the failing steps of the sun as he treads his way around the sky.

## MAGICAL WORSHIP OF THE RAIN - ELEMENT: WATER

In a village near Dorpat in Russia, when rain was much wanted, three men would climb up fir trees. One of them drummed with a hammer on a kettle to imitate thunder; the second knocked two fire sticks together and made the sparks fly to imitate lightning; and the third dipped a bunch of twigs into water and then shook it to imitate rain. In New Britain the rain-maker imitates with his mouth the splashing of rain. The Omaka Indians of North America fill their mouths with water and then spit it into the air to create a fine mist or spray. In the Maree tribe of Northern Australia the rain-maker goes to a pool, drinks the water, spits it out in various directions and throws water all over himself. Twins in the Shuswap



Indian tribe produce rain by spilling a basket of water in the air.

Bathing is practised as a rain charm in some parts of Southern Russia.

A student of rain-making in the Braham tribe must be isolated from his fellow man from between one to twelve years and observe the following rules:

- (1) Touch water thrice a day.
- (2) Wear black garments and eat black food.
- (3) When raining - sit in the rain and do not shelter from it.
- (4) Never cross a running stream without stepping into it.

All these rules are intended to bring the Braham into union with water to make him, as it were, an ally of the water powers. The garments are meant to symbolise a sky darkened with rain clouds.

#### MAGICAL WORSHIP OF THE TREES - ELEMENT: VEGETATION

In Sweden on the Eve of St. John, the houses are thoroughly cleansed and garnished with green boughs and flowers. But the chief event of the day is setting up the Maypole.

This consists of a straight and tall spruce stripped of its branches. At times hoops placed crosswise are attached to it at intervals up its trunk. From top to bottom the Maypole is ornamented with leaves, flowers, strips of various cloth, quilt egg-shells etc., and on top is a vane or flag. The raising of a Maypole is an affair of much ceremony. The people flock to it from all corners and dance around it in a great ring.

Midsummer customs of the same sort were also observed in some parts of Germany. Round their Maypoles young folk danced by day and old folk danced by night. In some parts of Bohemia also a Maypole is erected on St. John's Eve. The boys fetch a tall fir from the wood and set it up where the girls deck it with nosegays, garlands and red ribbons. It is afterwards burned.

#### MAGICAL WORSHIP OF THE WIND - ELEMENT: AIR

The natives of the island of Bibli off New Guinea are reputed to summon the wind by blowing with their mouths.

The Scotland witches used to raise the wind by dipping a rag in water and beating it on a stone saying:

"I knok this rag upone this stone  
To raise the wind in the divellis name  
It sall not lye till I please againe."<sup>4</sup>

Finnish wizards and witches used to sell wind to storm-stayed mariners. The wind was enclosed in three knots, if he undid the first knot a moderate wind sprang up; if the second it blew half a gale; if the third a hurricane.

Shetland seamen still buy winds in the shape of knotted handkerchiefs or threads from old crones who claim to rule the storms.

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(b) DOCUMENTATION

PROPOSAL: To become aware of the basic rhythm which guides and controls all life, through the medium of magical nature rituals.

To communicate this awareness to an audience through the medium of a slide installation using images documenting the ritual actions as they are performed.

To create an installation for exhibition purposes using a combination of photographic documentation taken directly from the slide installation and a number of fabric banners using images from the slide installation as source material.

RITUALS: (1) Magical Worship of Fire  
(2) Magical Worship of Water  
(3) Magical Worship of Vegetation  
(4) Magical Worship of Air.

ACTIONS: Dance, or at least movement, plays an important part in magical nature rituals. Gestures are the corporeal manifestation of the inner state of the human being. Dance is employed in ritual in order to intensify the effect on the participants as well as transmit thoughts and ideas.

(1) Rotating a fire-stick  
(2) Thrusting a vessel full of water into the air.  
(3) Decorating a tree with flowers and dancing around it.  
(4) Untying a knotted scarf.

ENVIRONMENTS: (1) Clearing in natural bushland, at sunset.  
 (2) Beach and sea on a cloudy day  
 (3) Rain forest on a fine sunny day  
 (4) Rooftop on a clear fine day.

SOUNDS: (1) crackling fire  
 (2) running water  
 (3) crashing branches  
 (4) howling wind  
 (5) my own heartbeat  
 (6) my own breathing

Heartbeat and breathing are presented simultaneously with each of the sounds of the natural elements in order to combine my own rhythms with those of nature.

SILK SCREENS: Woven fabric symbolises the web of life. A sheen of shot silk symbolises time. Ritual action is very centrally tied in with the experience of time. It is an attempt to hold time, to re-create important events, and even to live in a timeless world. Rituals aim to alter and conquer time. They do this by what Mireia Elia de called 'concentrated time'.

SLIDES: The idea of rituals capturing time is further expressed by the use of time-lapse photography and the presentation of slides in sequential format.

SYMBOLS: While it is not necessary for every participant to be actively involved, at least some inner meaning of the ritual actions is necessary.

Symbols are used to convey information at specific times during the ritual performance.

The meaning of the symbols is printed onto scrolls which are given to the audience, thus encouraging some audience participation.

**COSTUMES:** Costumes are an important part of imitative or homeopathic nature rituals. They helped primitive man to feel himself further in tune with nature, by imitating certain aspects of it, not only by action but also in appearance.

**DESIGN OF RITUAL COSTUMES:**

The costumes are sleeveless and with a loose skirt to allow free movement, and are in fact based on traditional ballet costume design to suggest that the purpose of the costume is for active movement. The skirts are made of many separate segments of light fabric that move freely and rhythmically as the figure moves, and as natural elements such as wind and water act on the costume during the ritual.

## (c) LIST OF SLIDES

The slides catalogued here are situated in volume two of this thesis, marked with corresponding numbers.

## COSTUMES:

1. fire
2. water
3. vegetation
4. air

## SYMBOLS OF THE RITUAL ACTIONS DRAWN WITH PEN AND INK:

|        |         |              |       |
|--------|---------|--------------|-------|
| 5. )   | 9. )    | 13. )        | 17. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 6. )   | 10. )   | 14. )        | 18. ) |
| ) fire | ) water | ) vegetation | ) air |
| 7. )   | 11. )   | 15. )        | 19. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 8. )   | 12. )   | 16. )        | 20. ) |

## SYMBOLS OF THE RITUAL ACTIONS DRAWN WITH NATURAL OBJECTS:

|        |         |              |       |
|--------|---------|--------------|-------|
| 21.)   | 25. )   | 29. )        | 33. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 22.)   | 26. )   | 30. )        | 34. ) |
| ) fire | ) water | ) vegetation | ) air |
| 23.)   | 27. )   | 31. )        | 35. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 24.)   | 28. )   | 32. )        | 36. ) |

## SYMBOLS OF THE RITUAL ACTIONS DRAWN WITH THE BODY:

|        |         |              |       |
|--------|---------|--------------|-------|
| 37.)   | 41. )   | 45. )        | 49. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 38.)   | 42. )   | 46. )        | 50. ) |
| ) fire | ) water | ) vegetation | ) air |
| 39.)   | 43. )   | 47. )        | 51. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 40.)   | 44. )   | 48. )        | 52. ) |

## THE RITUALS PERFORMED:

|        |         |              |       |
|--------|---------|--------------|-------|
| 53. )  | 57. )   | 61. )        | 65. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 54. )  | 58. )   | 62. )        | 66. ) |
| ) fire | ) water | ) vegetation | ) air |
| 55. )  | 59. )   | 63. )        | 67. ) |
| )      | )       | )            | )     |
| 56. )  | 60. )   | 64. )        | 68. ) |

## SOUNDTRACK:

Tape (1) crackling fire; stream; crashing branches; and wind is to be accompanied by tape (2) heartbeat and tape (3) breathing.

## BANNERS:

|              |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 69. Banner 1 | 71. Banner 2 | 73. Banner 3 |
| (302 x 106)  | (302 x 106)  | (302 x 106)  |
| 70. detail   | 72. detail   | 74. detail   |

(All measurements given in centimeters, height by width)



THEORY PAPER, 1983

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WOMAN AND DO PERFORMANCE ART?

"Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."<sup>1</sup>

The recent work of a number of women artists has taken as its starting point, their own bodies. This paper is concerned with pursuing the implications that arise from this; to investigate its significance in the light of woman as object, and to investigate the ways of working used by women artists in order to challenge the set code of behaviour outlined by John Berger's statement. If women do in fact turn themselves into objects; especially objects of vision, this must have a number of implications for women who use their bodies - their selves - as their art. Do contemporary women performance artists fight against this issue by attempting in various ways to break this set code or is it so entrenched that they cannot work outside it? Do they in fact use their bodies as their art because they look on their own bodies as objects first and foremost? One course of action for women performance artists is to ignore the whole area as too muddled or dangerous for the production of clear statements; the other is to take this heritage and work with it - attack it, reverse it, expose it, and use it for their own purposes. Women artists who

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1. John Berger, Ways of Seeing

are in the second category and consequently whose work I wish to discuss are, Carolee Schneeman, Mary Beth Edelson, Hannah Wilke, Lynda Benglis, Eleanor Antin, Julie Brown, Ulrike Rosenbach and Gina Pane.

Naturally there are many many more women artists of considerable standing who could have been included in this paper; however, to discuss them all is not practical. Instead, after wide research I chose those women whose work I found particularly exciting; who best tackled the issues at hand; and those who face problems I face in my own work. Therefore, in this paper I hope to be able to critically analyse the success or failure of the strategies used by these women in an attempt to make my own standpoint clearer and to assess my own work more critically. There is much to be learnt from the successes and failures of others.

I have divided the work of the artists I have chosen into the following categories which are not of course mutually exclusive:

1. Glorification of female power and the female body.
2. Parody.
3. Self objectification.
4. Exorcism of dominant male codes.

#### 1. GLORIFICATION OF FEMALE POWER AND THE FEMALE BODY

One type of women's body art is concerned with the glorification of an essential female power. This power is viewed as an inherent artistic essence which could find expression if allowed to be explored freely. Much of the art-work in

this category has as its aim, the encouragement of self esteem in a culture that diminishes satisfaction in being a woman, through valourization of female experiences and bodily processes. The strategy is that by glorifying the bodies of women in artwork an identificatory process is set up so that the receivers of the artwork (the women for whom the work is intended) will value their own femaleness. Operating on the assumption that our society isolates women and inspires competition, this kind of art seeks to encourage the mutual glorification and bonding of women. One of the main ways some of the artworks achieve this is through emotional appeal, ritual form and synthetic effects in performance, with the aim of enveloping spectators in female solidarity.

Carolee Schneeman and Mary Beth Edelson are two women artists currently using this system to challenge the manner in which women are surveyed. Their aim is for women to reject a male view of woman and replace it with a female view of woman, thus healing the split of male surveyor and female surveyed.

Carolee Schneeman, known in the early sixties as 'body beautiful' appeared nude in Happenings by Morris, Oldenburg and others. She first used her nude body in her performance 'Eye Body' in 1963. Discussing this change Carolee Schneeman states

"The nude was being used in early Happenings as an object (often an active object). I began using the nude as myself - the artist - and as a primal archaic force which could unify energies I discovered as visual

information. I felt compelled to  
'conceive' of my body in manifold aspects  
which had eluded the culture around me."<sup>2</sup>

'Eye Body' was an environment in a loft built of large panels, broken mirrors, glass, lights, moving umbrellas and motorized parts. Covered in paint, grease, chalk, ropes and plastic, Carolee Schneeman established her body as visual territory. In 'Eye Body' she explores the image values of flesh as material she chooses to work with. The body may remain erotic, sexual, desired, desiring, but is as well votive, marked, written over in a text of stroke and gesture discovered by her own creative female will.

In 1968 Carolee Schneeman explored further the question of female nudity in 'Naked Action Lecture' at the London Institute of Contemporary Art where she presented a lecture on her visual works and their relations to antecedents in painting, while dressed and undressed, dressing and undressing. In 'Naked Action Lecture' Carolee Schneeman's aim was to raise the questions: Can an artist be an art historian? Can an art historian be a naked woman? and Can she have public authority while naked and speaking?

In 'Interior Scroll' 1975, Carolee Schneeman reads out loud from a scroll which she extracts from her vagina, about a male film-maker who refuses to consider her an artist because she is a woman. However, being a woman is not the only grounds upon which Carolee Schneeman's art has been attacked. Even as an art student she was accused of

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2. Carolee Schneeman, More than Meat Joy

narcissism because she used her body as the central subject for her art. Carolee Schneeman states:

"For a painter no part of the body should have been considered taboo. As a student I painted self-portraits using my entire body as one which stood for all or any human shape from which I would learn. I was free to study, perceive my own genital shape and form as well as my ears and elbows. My art professor told other students this study was narcissistic."<sup>3</sup>

Narcissism is a term which crops up time and time again in the discussion of women performance artists - damning their work as nothing more than morbid self-love. In fact, the condemnation is even more far-reaching than this. It is not only a moral judgement on the artist's character but extends into all of a woman's activities. Simone de Beavoir states:

"The narcissist will be tempted by any and every road that can lead her to fame, but she will never commit herself to one wholeheartedly. Painting, sculpture, literature, all are disciplines that require a hard apprenticeship and demand solitary efforts; she may spend hours at the easel, but she loves herself too much to have a real love for painting and so ends as a failure."<sup>4</sup>

Therefore to describe an artist as narcissistic, not only accuses them of morbid self-love, an attribute no-one would be proud of, but also strongly suggests that every work they produce is doomed to fail.

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3. Carolee Schneeman, More than Meat Joy

4. Simone de Beavoir, The Second Sex

This moralizing reeks of a hypocrisy which has pervaded art conventions throughout history. In the Renaissance men painted naked women because they enjoyed looking at them, then put a mirror in their hand and called the painting 'Vanity'. Thus, they morally condemned the woman they had depicted for their own pleasure, as well as making her connive in treating herself chiefly as a sight. Little has changed in a contemporary art scene where men use women in their performances because they enjoy looking at them, and then condemn women as narcissists if they choose to use their own naked bodies in their own performances. There is an element of exhibitionism in all body art, perhaps a legitimate result of the choice between exploiting yourself or someone else. However, because women are seen as objects, it is wrongly taken for granted that any woman who presents her naked body in public is doing so because she thinks of her own body as an object of vision: a sight, in the same way as men see her; and terms such as narcissism are used only too often to back up this hypocritical attitude.

Women body artists are concerned with presenting their naked bodies to the public, not because they consider their naked bodies to be their greatest visual achievement, but because they want to liberate their bodies from meanings made exclusively by and for men, and to reappropriate them for women. Carolee Schneeman states:

"In some sense I made a gift of my body to other women, giving our bodies back to ourselves."<sup>5</sup>

This is a timely reminder that in rejecting men's view of us, we cannot afford to lose an authentic joy in the very real pleasures of the body, particularly if we can heal within ourselves the split between the surveyor and the surveyed, by seeing ourselves as ourselves and not as men see us.

Mary Beth Edelson uses ancient matriarchal imagery and myth as sources for her work. One of her major pieces 'Woman Rising' (1974) is a symbolic representation of the concept of growth and expansion of female power. Edelson uses pictographs, written words and photographs to make a record of the historically powerful Goddesses worshipped along with their archetypal female signs and symbols by both men and women throughout history. Juxtaposing past and present she places opposite these Goddesses a list of the first names of women artists and photographs of a woman (Edelson herself) rising from the earth and the ocean 'Woman Rising/Earth', unravels her bandages and removes herself from being the wounded and covered of the earth, as she makes room to negotiate the earth in her own terms. The female body in 'Woman Rising/Sexual Rites' is not a nude tantalizer but powerful and wild with self-generating energy. She takes a risk by not only exposing her body's naked form, but also by exposing its energy to potent forces in nature. 'Woman Rising' is Edelson's attempt to produce evidence of the manifestations and recognition of a powerful feminine force - every woman.

What is the value of this work and the strategies behind it?



Its aim is to glorify women; to encourage satisfaction in being a woman; to reappropriate 'femininity' for women. The image it presents of women is unproblematic. Surely in this day and age any true representation of 'femininity' would have many contradictions. Therefore, is this art doing anything more than reappropriating for women a new stereotype of femininity which is perhaps not a true representation?

## 2. PARODY

Lucy Lippard admits a personal lack of sympathy with women who have themselves photographed in black stockings, garter belts, boots, with bare breasts, bananas and coy come-hither glances. She says:

Parody it may be, but the artist rarely gets the last laugh. A woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she will with them, but it is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult."<sup>6</sup>

However, while I agree with Lucy Lippard that exploitation of the self in parody of the role women play in erotic imagery can collapse into ambiguity and confusion, it is also a potentially powerful social statement. In a sense, women are absent from erotic imagery of themselves.

Instead, it is the sign woman which is present, emptied of its original content and refilled with masculine anxieties and desires. Therefore, if women work within the same code - turn themselves into sex objects - the meaning of

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6. Lucy Lippard, From the Center.

woman as sign may eventually evolve from one of masculine anxieties and desires to woman as she is. If women begin to take an active role in their own self exploitation, surely this exploitation will gradually stop as women have more and more say in the way their bodies are presented in erotic imagery. 'Woman' rather than just the sign for woman may become present in erotic imagery for the first time. This is a high risk art for women to deal with, especially when they are using their own bodies. But I think it is important that women take the risk rather than avoiding the challenge for fear of exploiting themselves in the same way that men have exploited them.

Hannah Wilke is one artist working within this controversial area of parody or playgirl. In her 'Starification Object Series' 1975, Wilke sits semi-nude and flirts with the audience while they chew gum for her. She then forms the gum into tiny loops resembling vaginas and proceeds to decorate her body with them. In the ceremonial aspects of the piece and in her treatment of her body as a decorative surface, the work relates to African cicatrization decoration. The dual nature of the African custom - it enhances beauty, is a sexual come-on and relates to the status of the woman - is reflected in the seductiveness of Hannah Wilke's performing persona and the playing with women's roles as evidenced by the poses recorded on the playing cards.

In a similar vein to Hannah Wilke, Lynda Benglis in the announcement for her show in May 1974 at the Paul Cooper Gallery had herself photographed in a Betty Grable-like posture with bared buttocks and jeans draped around her

ankles. She transformed herself into a pin-up - the ultimate sex object for male masturbatory fantasies. To follow were photographic ads of herself in a Greek boy's skirt, leaning butch on a car, and finally - the 'coup de grace' - her notorious ad. in the November 1974 issue of *Artform* of herself as a greased nude in sunglasses sporting a huge dildo. In this photograph we have an image of self-objectification on three levels. First of all Benglis has translated herself into a photograph; secondly, she holds the phallus which is the supreme symbol of self-objectification, and thirdly, she is nude and perspiring - evidence of the aftermath of self-stimulation. Masturbation by women seems to be the absolute requirement for economic success in visual or verbal pornography because a woman masturbating objectifies and makes purer and more salient the interest in self-objectification, and the risk of identification (for the male) as a despicable masturbator is thus reduced. A group of editors condemned the advertisement as "an object of extreme vulgarity... brutalizing ourselves and our readers", thereby playing into her hands by proving, according to the critic, Lucy Lippard, "there are still some things a woman may not do".<sup>7</sup> Lynda Benglis herself intended the series as a mockery of role playing and the dildo as a media statement to end all statements - the ultimate mockery of the pin-up and the macho. It is a display of the ways in which women are used; therefore, she can use herself as a political sex object in the art-world. Hannah Wilke and Lynda Benglis have received a great deal of

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7. Lucy Lippard, From the Center.

criticism, mainly on the grounds that they are both very attractive women. It is often argued that this makes their statements ambiguous because they are rather too close to the stereotypes they aim to expose. However, would this strategy work if they were not attractive? Wouldn't it just seem like sour grapes if done by unattractive women? Such women would look amusing, pathetic, sad, but certainly not convincing. Hannah Wilke and Lynda Benglis are convincing in their roles precisely because they do so closely approach the conventional stereotypes. Furthermore, a greater power lies in the work of artists such as Hannah Wilke and Lynda Benglis because they could so easily fit into the conventional stereotypes and survive very well. Instead, they have avoided the temptation and chosen a harder path by exposing and sending up what men most admire about them.

### 3. SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

Objectification has become a much abused term. There is a sense in which the process of sight and perception necessarily entails objectification in order to conceptualize and signify the object of the gaze. In John Berger's statement objectification has quite a specific meaning: through the process of representation women are reduced to the status of objects. Images of women have become commodities from which women are alienated. Their status as commodity denies their human individuality. It seems that many people reject the connotations objectification has for women in the specific masculine context, and to the necessary objectification used to expose these meanings. This is

because they have not bothered to consider the theory behind objectification or distinguish one process from the other. Adrian Piper, Eleanor Antin and Julie Brown have all chosen to confront and deal with this problematic area in women's art practice.

It is difficult for women to assert their identity directly through their appearance. However, since women are not expected to be disgusting, vulgarity can be a means of enhancing dignity if its expression merely signifies a message which is not obscene. It is this strategy that Adrian Piper uses in a series called 'Catalysis', which she executed in the seventies. 'Catalysis' included 'Catalysis I' in which she saturated a set of clothes in a mixture of vinegar, eggs, milk and cod liver oil for a week, then wore them on the train during rush hour. 'Catalysis IV', in which she dressed very conservatively but stuffed a bath towel into her mouth until her cheeks bulged out to about twice their normal size and rode in a bus and in the Empire State Building elevator. 'Catalysis VI', in which she attached helium-filled Mickey Mouse balloons <sup>to</sup> from her ears, nose, teeth and strands of her hair, then walked through Central Park and the lobby of the Plaza Hotel. In 'Catalysis V'. Adrian Piper recorded loud belches, then concealed the tape on her person and played it full volume while doing research in the library.

Discussing the 'Catalysis' series, Adrian Piper states,

"At times I was violating my body. I was making it public. I was exposing it. I was turning me into an object; but an

object that was rebelliously more repellent than attractive."<sup>8</sup>

Considering the fact that Adrian Piper was a model - an epitome of professional role-playing of the transformation of a woman into whatever someone else thinks she, and everyone, should look like, with the resulting loss of identity - it seems only natural that she should produce art-work that vulgarized her appearance rather than idealizing it. However, is this work really a means of enhancing dignity as I first suggested, or is it just a bitter reaction against her former career? This would depend on the message she is trying to convey. Being a model - the ideal woman - resulted in the loss of her identity. But does being disgusting - the opposite of the ideal - necessarily result in giving back her identity? 'Catalysis' does challenge our expectations of what the object (woman) may be; but does it really challenge the specific process of objectification referred to by John Berger? After all Adrian Piper is still turning herself into an object. Does the fact that the object she becomes is more repellent than attractive really make that much difference?

Eleanor Antin is also working in opposition to glamorous fantasy images that as a woman she has internalized. Her work 'Carving: A Traditional Sculpture' is a take-off or play on traditional art. The photos are 'sculpture' and the process is 'carving' - a parody of Renaissance relief sculpture. Another action by Eleanor Antin is a face

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8. Lucy Lippard, From the Center.

cleansing and make-up session. This is 'Representational Painting' because the painted face represents her to the world. By working directly on her body, not just to emphasize the transforming process, but to make the material 'art', Eleanor Antin is concerned with two issues: woman as object in life and art, and the conflation of roles of the artist, the model and the work.

Julie Brown in her recent installation 'Disclosures (Surrogate 1) A Photographic Construct' has chosen to confront representation of female sexuality. Such photographs do run the risk of being co-opted into the discourse of erotic photography, with the author unintentionally constituting a focus for male desire. In the face of this difficulty has arisen the dogma that all such images are suspect and the only solution is to place an embargo on their production. In choosing to ignore this prohibition Julie Brown has attracted the expected adverse reaction. To decry the nudity as though it formed the total content of the show is to totally disregard the issue of context, the way in which the structure influences our reading of the text.

In her installation 'Disclosures (Surrogate 1) A Photographic Construct', Julie Brown takes as her starting point a key element in our visual culture, one that has always been used to control and subjugate women - the female produced as a passive and receptive object of male desire. She transcends the difficulties of adding to the sexist discourse by constructing an elaborate and sophisticated context which positions the viewer and dislocates the

voyeuristic impulse. The continual disjunctions - the number and range of pictures, the variety of postures, the strategy of the pairs - place the audience in a position of double-edged interrogation: the questions we ask about the how and why of the work's construction are replaced by questions the work asks about our attitudes and expectations.

In the first five pairs of the suspended thirty pair sequence, Julie Brown poses before a plain wall while the camera around her neck reveals (via the self-timer) the studio. Props have been borrowed from the conventions of soft core pornography: pantyhose, nylon knickers and mirrors. She uses these to caricature the reproduction and consumption of glamour photography. The traditional male photographer circling the passive female model has been reduced to static impotence (the camera on a tripod) while the model has taken possession of another camera and the active role of using it. There is also a sardonic reference to the images of women used in advertising photographic equipment in which scantily clad models hold cameras and lenses with no indication of actually using them. Julie Brown, on the contrary, is using them with a vengeance. In much advertising the lens is a phallic symbol; hence, the female model may hold and caress the camera, but may not use it. Julie Brown, by becoming photographer has become possessor of the phallus, instead of the passive imagined recipient.

#### 4. EXORCISM OF DOMINANT MALE CODES

In 'Don't Believe I'm an Amazon' 1975 Ulrike Rosenbach



attempts to destroy the age-old stereotype of woman as sex object by shooting arrows into the face of the 'Madonna of the Rose Garden' superimposed over her own image.

Discussing this work Ulrike Rosenbach says:

I was working on the idea of female roles and images and the two I picked were the madonna and the amazon, so the passive and active extremes were represented. Because I feel that I have been educated in the madonna role - the role of making oneself beautiful and following the type of the virgin - I am shooting into myself as I shoot into the face of the madonna because I want to change that passive part of me into something stronger and more active. I want to become more individual and not just remain a projection of a fictional image."<sup>9</sup>

Gina Pane is another artist who like Ulrike Rosenbach, mutilates her own image in public performance. Starting with the first body actions, pain became inseparable from Gina Pane's discursive practice. Her exercise of pain follows a sequence. It is organized like a treatment which progresses from the suffering upon opening the body with a razor blade, to swallowing rotten meat, cooking the body over candle fire, vomiting milk mixed with blood. She is questioning symbols of eternal myths. If one accepts the fact that today the body is socialized, each wound inflicted on it is also a wound inflicted on society. Gina Pane defines the incision on her face in 'Le Lait

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9. Lip 1980.

Chaud' 1972 as:

"a transgression of the taboo of the sore through which the body is opened, and of the canons of feminine beauty".<sup>10</sup>

Complications arise, however, when the assumptions underlying this type of art are examined. By elevating pain to the status of an oppositional art force, it would seem to indicate that she feels in wounding herself she is wounding society. However, because her wounds exist in an art context, they may be ritualized and easily absorbed into an artworld notion of beautiful pain, distanced suffering and a whole legacy of exquisite female martyrdom. Could this solidarity in suffering that Gina Pane aims to promote, serve instead to impose the same suffering on herself which has been imposed on women for centuries? In this sense, is it bondage rather than bonding?

However, Gina Pane, in discussing the actual events of 'Le Lait Chaud' states:

"Suddenly I turned to face my public and approached the razor blade to my face. The tension was explosive and broke when I cut my face on either cheek. They yelled 'No, no, not the face, no!' The face is taboo, it's the core of human aesthetics."<sup>11</sup>

So perhaps Gina Pane's work may appear on the surface to be adding to the tradition of female martyrdom and yet actually be breaking with these codes. If John Berger is right, and woman must continually watch herself in order to turn herself

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10. J. Barry, Textural Strategies.

11. Flash Art, no. 92.

into an object of vision: a sight, which is favourable to men's eyes, the work of these two artists, Ulrike Rosenbach and Gina Pane, may present the greatest challenge yet to this code of behaviour. As Lucy Lippard says:

"We all know our faces affect our fortunes."<sup>12</sup>

To destroy the face is to destroy what every woman has been taught to secure and protect in order to secure her own future. Is not the work of these two artists then, a successful attempt to rid themselves of one of the most dominant male codes overriding the way in which women see themselves. It seems a pity however that women artists such as Gina Pane, have to go to such extreme lengths in order to make a strong and effective statement. There is a great deal of self-esteem to be had from being a woman with an attractive face. Gina Pane forsakes all this in order to retain for herself, out of men's reach, her own body.

#### CONCLUSION

I mentioned briefly at the beginning of this paper that I chose to study a number of women who use their bodies as their art, basing my choice on the grounds that in their work they were facing issues I have found confronting me in my work. This is an attempt to answer the question, What does it mean for 'me' to be a woman and do performance art? Over a number of years my work has increasingly centered on using my body as a means of expression. My ideas have developed quite naturally in this direction. However, while I have been free to work with my body in any way I

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12. Lucy Lippard, From the Center.

wish and have not been accused of narcissism or presenting myself as a sex object, I have often worried that his in fact might be the case. Therefore, I felt it was crucial to the development of my work to argue out this problem for myself at this point in time, to decide whether or not my work was suffering because of the medium I had chosen to express my ideas. Their work has helped me to conclude that Lucy Lippard's statement, "There are still some things a woman may not do", is simply not the case. While it cannot be disputed that as a woman using my body as my art I am working within an ambiguous and problematic area, I no longer feel intimidated. By facing and understanding the problems and ambiguities, and being more informed on the subject as a whole, I now feel free to explore this area of work fully and to concentrate on the ideas I wish to express rather than worrying about whether I should or shouldn't be using my body.

By continuing to research this subject I will be able to work towards a critical analysis of my own work; to assess whether the strategies I am using are enabling my work to transcend the difficulties, or merely allowing my work to be co-opted into the tradition of woman as sex object.

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## LIST OF SLIDES

The slides catalogued here are situated in volume two of this thesis, marked with corresponding numbers.

|      | ARTIST            | TITLE   |
|------|-------------------|---|
| 75.  | Robert Morris     | 'Site', 1965  |
| 76.  | Carolee Schneeman | 'Eye Body', 1963                                    |
| 77.  | "                 | "   |
| 78.  | "                 | 'Naked Action Lecture', 1968                        |
| 79.  | "                 | "   |
| 80.  | "                 | 'Interior Scroll', 1975                             |
| 81.  | "                 | "   |
| 82.  | Mary Beth Edelson | 'Woman Rising/Earth', 1974                          |
| 83.  | "                 | 'Woman Rising/Sexual Rites', 1974                   |
| 84.  | Hannah Wilke      | 'Starification Object Series', 1975                 |
| 85.  | "                 | "   |
| 86.  | "                 | 'Super-t-art', 1974                                 |
| 87.  | Lynda Benglis     | (ad for Artforum, November 1974)                    |
| 88.  | Adrian Piper      | untitled  |
| 89.  | "                 | 'I Embody Everything you Most Hate and Fear'        |
| 90.  | Eleanor Antin     | 'Carving: A Traditional Sculpture'                  |
| 91.  | "                 | 'Representational Painting'                         |
| 92.  | Julie Brown       | Disclosures (Surrogate 1) A Photographic Construct' |
| 93.  | "                 | "   |
| 94.  | "                 | "   |
| 95.  | Ulrike Rosenbach  | 'Don't Believe I'm An Amazon', 1975                 |
| 96.  | "                 | "   |
| 97.  | "                 | "   |
| 98.  | Gina Pane         | 'Action Melancolique', 1974                         |
| 99.  | "                 | 'Action Sentimentale', 1973                         |
| 100. | "                 | 'Laure', 1976                                       |
| 101. | "                 | 'Le Lait Chaud', 1972                               |

## LIFE-CYCLE RITUALS

## (a) RESEARCH

The function of life-cycle rituals:

Life-cycle rituals are key points at which culture and social structure interrelate with the biological growth and decay of human bodies. There are always two sets of problems with which life-cycle rituals have to deal; those concerned with the life of the group and those concerned with the feelings aroused in people by biological processes.

Christenings: Birth rites have the purpose of separating the new-born child from the world of the dead into the world of the living. Ceremonies for the new-born child involve a sequence of rites of separation, transition and incorporation. Rites such as bathing or washing the head are rights of purification and separation from the mother. However, they may also signify incorporation if performed with consecrated rather than ordinary water. When a child is named he is both individualized and incorporated into the society at large.

Weddings: Marriage constitutes a transition from one social category to another because it involves a change of family and home. Because of the number of people affected by the social union of two of their members it is natural that the period of transition should take on considerable importance. This is the period commonly called the betrothal. Rites of separation include: changing clothes; cutting, breaking or throwing away something; bathing and anointing oneself; closing hands; covering oneself with a veil; changing one's name; changing one's work either temporarily or permanently; and passing over something. Rites of incorporation for the

families include: a communal meal; the collective participation in an essentially religious ceremony. Rites of incorporation for the wedding couple include: exchanging gifts; eating together; dancing together; entering a new house.

Funerals: On first considering funeral ceremonies, one expects rites of separation to be their most prominent component, in contrast to rites of transition or rites of incorporation; however this is not the case. Funeral rites which incorporate the deceased into a new world are assigned the greatest importance. Funeral rites are further complicated when within a single people there are several contradictory or different conceptions of the after-world which may become so intermingled with one another that their confusion is reflected in the rites.

Mourning, seen simply, is an aggregate of taboos and negative practices marking an isolation from society of those whom death in its physical reality has placed in a sacred impure state. However, mourning involves more than just rites of separation. It is a transitional period for the survivors and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society. The transitional period of the living often coincides with that of the dead, that is, the incorporation of the deceased into another world. During mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and how soon living individuals leave that group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead person.

In all human societies there is a large amount of ritual surrounding the life cycle. Much of this ritual can put people in contact with the basic life process and give them confidence to trust the body. However, it is also the case that cultural beliefs and values can so overlay this that rituals come to put people out of contact with this natural process. Much of Western society's development in the area of ritual has done this by concentrating on the supernatural realm, to the detriment or even exclusion of the natural. The influence of Manichean dualism has been strong in Christian thinking. Manichean dualism sees the material world and the body as evil, even created by the devil; the spiritual alone is good and Godly. Thus many people have found themselves in tension with Christian rituals. People look to Christian rituals and find action which often contradicts their own basic feelings. Instead of rituals being therapeutic and healing emotionally and bodily, they become sources of further confusion. This is most evident in our funeral ceremonies.

All available evidence points to the absence of clear cultural direction with respect to death in Western society. It has been found that death and bereavement, rather than being culturally routinized and transmitted are, to a great extent, left to the individual. In no known primitive society is one left to his own devices in facing his own death. We flee from the reality of our own death with such purpose and persistence and we employ defences so patently magical and

regressive that these would be ludicrously obvious in any other area of human conflict. Researchers of death claim that not only do we deny the reality of our own deaths, but also that our culture supports the denial.

Funeral customs and the related funeral industries also mask the reality of death. Persons who accept the reality of death and therefore a cessation of the physical self should have no concern for physical comfort and protection after death. Our use of caskets, however, is a manifestation of the attitude that death does not really put an end to physical experience. Caskets are often made of solid copper to give long-lasting protection, equipped with inner-spring mattresses. By assigning professional functionaries the responsibility of traditional familial roles, contemporary society avoids direct and disconcerting contact with death. The funeral party does not ordinarily view the casket itself. It is hidden by flowers. Currently it is general practice not to lower the casket into the ground until all those connected with the deceased have left the cemetery. This practice functioned to remind onlookers that the person being buried would be covered with earth, never to return to life. The expression of grief or sympathy for a death is limited to time and place. Within a week one is expected to be back on the job. Giving way to grief is stigmatized as morbid, unhealthy and demoralizing. Mourning is treated as if it were weakness, self indulgence, a reprehensible bad habit, instead of a psychological necessity. From being a socially recognised inevitability, death has become an embarrassing private trauma in which almost any outside solace, except

from intimates, has become an intrusion.

Symbolism of the elements of life:

All things that flow and grow were regarded in early religions as a symbol of life. Life is, in itself, closely bound up with death. Death is also a source of life, not only spiritual life, but the resurrection of matter as well.

Nearly all symbols of life are also symbols of death.

Fire: Represents the vital craving for nourishment.

Fires, floods and winds are the symbols of emotion which is essentially a movement of energy. Fire is also an agent transmutation. All things derive from and return to fire. It is the destruction of what is base to make way for what is superior.

Water: Symbolises the fertilizing powers. The ocean is a symbol of dynamic forces and of transitional states. It is regarded traditionally as the source of generation of all life; whereas it was also believed that to return to the sea was to return to the mother or to die. In dreams, birth is usually expressed through watery imagery. Water is the most clearly transitional between fire and air, the ethereal elements, and earth, the solid element. By analogy water stands as a mediator between life and death, with a two-way positive and negative flow between creation and destruction.

Earth: Is related to death and is symbolic of receptivity. A mound of earth symbolises the intermediate stages of matter. Mud signifies the union of the purely receptive

principle, earth, with the power of transition and transformation, water. Mud is regarded as the medium for the emergence of matter of all kinds. It is related by analogy with biological processes and nascent states.

Air: Winged creatures are symbols of air and spiritualization. These are a supernatural aid to thoughts and flights of fancy.

The moon, immortality and the life-cycle:

The immortality promised by the moon is not an unending life in a golden city, where there is no night and where everything continues forever and ever changeless, completely revealed, bathed in an unending light. It is not a continuation in a state of perfection, but is an ever-renewed life like the moon's own in which diminishing and dying are as essential as becoming. In this world, at all events, the process of life consists in a rhythmic increase followed by decrease, and not in a linear progression.

The principle of life is clearly recognised by the orientals. To the Chinese it is symbolised by the Tai-gi-tu, the fish bladder emblem, in which the light is as a seed in the dark and the dark grows again and replaces the light. This is the basic principle embodied in their sacred Book of Changes, the I Ching. To the Hindus too, the cyclical alternation of life and death is a fundamental religious teaching. In the myths of the moon, both primitive and ancient, the same rhythm of creation and destruction which together form the life process are accepted as the basis for immortality.



Alchemy and the life-cycle:

The first principle of alchemy - 'as above, so below'.

We ourselves are composed of atoms, which in their configurations and motions imitate the workings of stars and planets, which are composed of and imitate the motions of atoms and so on. The belief that everything is basically the same as something bigger and something smaller leads directly to the belief that in the last analysis the universe must be composed entirely of 'One Thing'. Reduce anything in the universe down to its essence and you would find that essence is everywhere the same.

In nature metals, and everything else, are in a constant state of transformation, continually changing in an orderly progression from lead to copper, from copper to iron, from iron to tin, from tin to mercury, from mercury to silver and from silver to gold. Lead is the base metal found in the bowels of the earth, while gold is perfection, the highest form a metal can reach; it is conceived in heaven and born through the action of the sun. Since the seed lead is essentially the same etheric spirit as the seed of gold and since nature herself is constantly using these seeds to grow one metal from another - eventually to grow gold from lead - ultimately the alchemical work is nothing more than the acceleration of a natural process.

The alchemists make no distinction between 'organic' and 'inorganic' matter. To them everything in nature is alive. Metals, like humans, experience birth, death and even marriage. They breathe and are subject to illness and so on. No metal can be made to change unless it is first

killed and later made to be reborn; unless the old form is completely destroyed in fire and the new form brought to life from the ashes of the old. For when a metal is killed, when its form is destroyed, nothing is left but its seed - the essence of the metal. Once that seed is isolated, then the underlying essence of all metals can be found; new life can be given to this seed, and a new metal can grow from the dead body of the old.

The material process of alchemy is an allegory for the perfection of man's soul. Man's spirit in its normal state is like lead, the basest of metals. With the techniques of alchemy the greater spirit of man can be released from the cycle of birth, death and ignorance, just as the seed of metals can be released from lead. Once the spirit/seed is free it can be developed and strengthened through successive levels of knowledge until it reaches the heights of perfect awareness.

The life-cycle of man in relation to alchemical observation of nature's yearly cycle:

The alchemist above all things, belongs to the earth and is in contact with nature. Attentive and detailed observation of the successive stages of growth and decay in nature's annual cycle led the alchemists and the astrologers to their discovery of the laws of nature.

#### B I R T H

Winter Air Sign: The etheric forces of nature are fully active underground. By irradiation they impart new life to roots, induce internal breathing and generally awaken that which is sleeping.

Winter Water Sign: Seeds which are given the breath of life are now nourished by water, promoting internal breathing in them. The tissue dried out in winter will gradually swell. Germination occurs under the ground in secret. Roots and seeds await only the initial impulse of the next sign to spring into life.

Spring Fire Sign: Days lengthen, the temperature rises and the element fire reveals its expansive and beneficent nature, giving the initial impetus to plant life. The fire causes the stem to grow, the buds to swell and burst, flowers and leaves to appear.

Spring Earth Sign: The ground releases the breath of life held in during winter, thus releasing the material elements needed in young plants for full growth.

#### G R O W T H

Spring Air Sign: Plants grow to their maximum height. The plants are most alive and most intensely green; for this is the time of greatest assimilation of chlorophyll.

Summer Water Sign: Fruit swells and sap continues to rise.

Summer Fire Sign: Fruit which has swelled under the preceding sign but is still acid and unpalatable is now ripened by the external fire (solar radiation) to bring it to perfection.

#### I L L N E S S

Summer Earth Sign: Vegetation gradually dies out. The ground is now sterile after having its vitality drained.

Autumn Air Sign: The leaves wither and fall off. They have stopped breathing and so die.

Autumn Water Sign: Water acts in a destructive capacity. All attention is focused on the phenomenon of corruption. Water manifests an incredible passive force reducing everything to chaos, the state of undifferentiated matter. The spirit may then be liberated and separated from the inert and combustible matter, just as the body separates from the soul after death.

#### D E A T H

Autumn Fire Sign: The life forces are separated from the vegetable matter by a secret and regressive fire.

Winter Earth Sign: The life of nature is entirely concentrated in the ground. The earth now broken down into separate elements by the corruption and combustion of the two previous signs, slowly assimilates the life forces that have been given to it.

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## (b) DOCUMENTATION

PROPOSAL: It is my view, as stated earlier in my research and backed up by my own personal experience, that the life-cycle rituals currently in practice in our society do not fulfil the needs created in people which are brought on by the biological processes of birth; growth; the establishment of close relationships with others; procreation; old age; illness and death. Our rituals today concentrate on the supernatural and the commercial aspects of life to the detriment of the natural.

It is therefore my intention to create an installation of work which, by the nature and presentation of its images, challenges our present day rituals and restores these rituals into their original context. That is, into the natural world where man/woman is in touch with nature and his/her own biological processes.

## Works in the Installation

## Black and white photographs:

The large black and white photographs are images documenting the performer (myself) undergoing ritual actions pertaining to three critical points in the life-cycle; birth, marriage and death. The images are transitional in nature, in two main ways; firstly they are breaking away from the traditional ritual form and breaking into new ways of expressing emotions evolving around the life-cycle process. Secondly, the performer undergoes a number of transitional stages as I ritually re-enact my own birth and act out my

marriage and death. It is my aim in these works that by acting out rituals which fulfil my own needs at these critical points in my life, the viewer will transfer him/herself into the position of the performer and consider his/her own biological processes in a way which is perhaps more in tune with the natural order of things and therefore more meaningful to him or her.

#### Hand Sequences:

The hand sequences are developed from dreams, in the form of symbolic premonitions, which I have experienced at times of imminent crisis and/or change in my life; usually taking the form of the establishment of new relationships or the breakdown or loss of old relationships. They are, in many ways, a more subconscious and private restatement of the ideas expressed in the large black and white photographs.

Documentation of the successive stages of growth and decay: These are included in the work, not only as symbols of life and death, but also to show by way of simple analogy, that the life-cycle of man is the same as that of all living things, including plants and insects, and is therefore governed by the same laws of nature.

#### Handkerchiefs:

The text on the handkerchiefs is taken from The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette: A Guide to Contemporary Living, L. Baldridge, Doubleday, New York, 1972. The text is an excellent example of the kind of life-cycle rituals we have in our society today - rituals bound up in trivia; out of

contact with our basic bodily processes and needs; their meaning virtually lost. The text is presented as a contrast to the photographs, to thus heighten the contradiction.

The text is printed onto handkerchiefs for two reasons. Firstly, these are articles of frequent use at life-cycle rituals. Secondly, like our rituals today, they bring to mind something that was once very useful; yet the tiny lace object which remains today is about as decorative and useless as our modern day rituals.



## (c) LIST OF SLIDES

The slides catalogued here are situated in volume two of this thesis, marked with the corresponding numbers.

|      | Title                              |               | Size      |
|------|------------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 102. | Birth and earth                    |               | 101 x 106 |
| 103. | Birth and water                    |               | 86 x 86   |
| 104. | Birth and air                      |               | 98 x 124  |
| 105. | Birth and fire                     |               | 123 x 136 |
| 106. | The wedding procession             | (8 images)    | 126 x 80  |
| 107. | Death and earth                    |               | 136 x 133 |
| 108. | Death and water                    |               | 123 x 147 |
| 109. | Death and air                      |               | 92 x 94   |
| 110. | Death and fire                     |               | 134 x 149 |
| 111. | Dreaming of birth                  | (9 images)    | 10 x 8    |
| 112. | Dreaming of water                  | (3 images)    | 8 x 10    |
| 113. | untitled                           | (6 images)    | 8 x 8     |
| 114. | untitled                           | (6 images)    | 8 x 8     |
| 115. | Dreaming of marriage               | (4 images)    | 8 x 10    |
| 116. | Making the wedding dress           | (20 images)   | 8 x 10    |
| 117. | Dreaming of suffocation            | (3 images)    | 8 x 10    |
| 118. | Dreaming of loss                   | (4 images)    | 10 x 8    |
| 119. | Dreaming of death and purification | (9 images)    | 10 x 8    |
| 120. | untitled                           | (6 images)    | 8 x 8     |
| 121. | Dreaming of blood and fire         | (2 images)    | 10 x 8    |
| 122. | Text: christenings                 | (6 sections)  | 26 x 26   |
| 123. | Text: weddings                     | (15 sections) | 26 x 26   |
| 124. | Text: funerals                     | (12 sections) | 26 x 26   |

(All measurements given in centimetres, height by width)

THE CLOWN AND THE DANCER

## (a) RESEARCH

## The Lover:

The sixth enigma of the tarot pack. It is related to the legend of Hercules which tells how he was given the choice of two women, the one personifying 'virtue' - or decisive activity, vocation sense of purpose and struggle, and the other 'vice' - passiveness, surrender to base impulses and external pressures. The lover faced, like Hercules, with these two opposite modes of conduct hesitates. He has parti-coloured clothes divided vertically: one half is red (for activity) and the other green (neutral for indecision). On the positive side this mystery card implies the making of the right choice and represents moral beauty or integrity; on the negative side it alludes to uncertainty and temptation.

## Madonnas and harlots, or female sexuality explained:

The dichotomy appears in Hebrew mythology, with Eve, the mother of mankind, and Lilith the witch who seduces Adam. It continues in Christian iconography with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. The myth has been fundamental to social organization for centuries. All societies recognise that sex can be either procreational or recreational and make their arrangements accordingly. Crudely, the madonna restricted her sexual activity to the needs of procreation and, if she could possibly accomplish it, procreated without intercourse - as in the case of the Virgin Mary - or with the minimum of fuss, like the virtuous Matron in 'The Leopard' who bore her husband eight children, without once letting him see her navel. The harlot enjoyed

recreational sex with as little interruption from pregnancy as possible.

The mythology divides women according to a moral absolute which polarises a group of qualities. Their relaxed positions reflect the waxing and waning of women's status in society. They are usually most prominent and most clearly contrasted when women are under the most savage discrimination and the double standard is at its worst.

This double standard is still an undercurrent in our thinking about women and sexuality today. If women are to determine their own lives and change their place in the world, they must first know and accept themselves, including their sexual selves. But the interpretations of women's sexuality - the moral and censorious, the prurient and commercial - make it difficult for women to talk about sexuality, or even to find the right words without sounding too technical, crude or romantic.

Sexuality, a learnt code of behaviour:

Children's sexual attitudes and knowledge are being patterned from an early age and are moulded by the media, their friends, parents and other adults, and by what they learn in school. However progressive or conservative the teaching, the 'facts of life' are not being written on a blank page - patriarchy has already made its indelible mark. Most girls, by the time they are teenagers, have learnt the ropes of female objectification. One popular women's magazine warns its readers:

"Give your eyes a rest and go around  
for a day or two without make-up.  
Try it when your fella's not around  
or he'll get the shock of his life."

How ironical that within the same magazine's pages  
anxieties should be created and problems answered. And  
such problem pages often provide the most important and  
influential source of information for those girls who  
receive no sex education from school or parents.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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4. Vries, A. Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, North Holland Press, Amsterdam, 1974.

## (b) DOCUMENTATION

Proposal: Women are falsely represented as belonging to one or other of two polarised codes of sexuality. They are either madonnas or harlots, wives or mistresses, nice girls or naughty girls.

I propose to produce two images of myself - one as a clown and one as a dancer - to express how I feel when I rightly or wrongly believe someone has placed me in one or other of these two categories.

The dancer portrays the harlot polarity. She is a show-girl, a pin-up girl, a strip-tease artist, the ultimate projection of male sexual fantasies.

The clown portrays the madonna polarity. She is sexually naive, clumsy, a fool, a little girl. In mythology the clown is the inversion of the king - the inversion that is to say, of the possessor of power. She has no power over her own sexuality as it is suppressed and hidden.

Circus characters are also chosen in order to play on the idea of the 'spectacle'. A spectacle is a piece of stage display or pageantry. It also means a person or thing offered up to the public gaze, as an object either of curiosity or contempt, marvel or admiration. John Berger in 'Ways of Seeing' states that woman is, in some

cases, not just a sight but a spectacle, to be judged as nice or naughty; as potential wife or potential mistress, according to the clothes she wears, the way she speaks, the type of work she does, and her attitudes to sex.

By convincingly portraying myself as one character, then the other, I hope to present the viewer with a paradox which will challenge this tendency to stereotype woman into one or other category. By presenting the images in such a way that the viewer can effectively view only one of the two images at a time, he/she will make certain assumptions about the woman performer according to her expression, stance and dress. To then see the same performer portrayed in the opposite role will hopefully make the viewer realise that these assumptions are as false as the devices used by the artist to create each character.



## (c) LIST OF SLIDES

The slides catalogued here are situated in volume two of this thesis, marked with corresponding numbers.

- |      |           |           |      |            |           |
|------|-----------|-----------|------|------------|-----------|
| 125. | The Clown | 183 x 155 | 127. | The Dancer | 183 x 155 |
| 126. | detail    |           | 128. | detail     |           |

(All measurements given in centimetres height by width)

CONCLUSION

During my time as an M.F.A. student I have taken the opportunity to experiment with new techniques, new content and new modes of representation. The flexibility of the course has allowed me to extend my basic knowledge of printmaking, photography and dressmaking and combine them in a variety of ways. I have felt very aware throughout the course that the facilities and advice available to me were more abundant than they are ever likely to be again, and while the pressure of assessment and the consequent tendency to produce 'safe' work has always weighed on my mind, this attitude has fortunately not been encouraged by my assessors. Consequently, I have felt free to experiment a great deal; not only with new techniques but with more challenging content as well. I feel this has been a strength in the work I have produced over the last two years. While I am aware of weak areas in my work I feel these have all been a part of the learning process and therefore look back on the work I have produced not as the best work I will ever produce, but definitely as a solid grounding for better work to come.