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A profile of Gillian Wearing under the parameters of Anthropology and Hysteria.

by

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Introduction

Gillian Wearing is a young artist working from London. Born in Birmingham in 1963 she went on to study in Goldsmith's College in London and graduated in 1992. She has emerged as one of the leading lights of the Young British Art movement (YBA), and won the 1997 Turner Prize at the Tate gallery.

Her work exclusively utilises new media, Photography and Video. She mounts her prints on aluminium and shows her videos by projecting them onto the walls of the gallery or playing them on monitors. Her work is designed to be seen purely in a gallery setting. She videos and photographs the public and herself in a straight-forward, unstylized manner. This candid approach to her medium results in unalloyed documentation of her subjects' activities.

Her primary concern is with ordinary people, their thoughts and beliefs, and how they express these. She predominantly engages the general public, and occasionally known collaborators, as well as herself as subjects in her work. She inclines towards the repressed seeking to "give these people a voice" through her work (Wearing: The South Bank Show, 1998)

Her method of working is here defined into two categories: firstly, Wearing sets up unlimited situations within which she allows her participants to act according to their own impulses, she faithfully and unobtrusively records the results. Secondly, she conducts controlled performances, the actions of which are prepared, and truthfully

documented through video. For the purpose of this thesis these categories have been labelled as 'found images' and 'manipulated images' receptively.

Because of the non-directorial quality of the 'found images', the methods employed to achieve them and the impartiality of the recording one is led to draw a comparison between these and some of the methodologies and concerns of anthropology. These issues will be discussed in chapter one.

The second chapter deals with Wearing's 'manipulated images' within which an analogy is drawn between the actions of the performances in this section and the action of hysterics. Hysteria has been chosen on the basis that it is an expression of repression, and arising from this some clear resemblance between Wearing's chosen actions and case studies on hysterical seizures are pointed out.

This study is therefore, twofold: the 'found images' will be examined through the prism of anthropology; and the 'manipulated images' will be analysed under the heading of hysteria. It is with the former, 'found images', that this thesis will now begin.

Chapter One

'Found Images'

Wearing incorporates the public into her work, stimulating them to raise questions about their culture and societal make up. She finds participants at random, either on the street or through advertisements in the public press. The framework Wearing offers her participants is open-ended. Her participants must first agree to be photographed or videoed. Secondly, they are asked to act, that is to write their thoughts on a card to be included in their portrait, or tell a narrative about their experiences. These series of experiences then form the basis of a cultural sample of late twentieth-century western society. These works are a testament to people's questioning of themselves and the society in which they live.

In her 'found Images' Wearing went directly to the public with open-ended questions or requests. Her methodology was such that she patiently and unobtrusively observed her subjects and explored their behaviour under controlled circumstances.

Wearing's images are pure documentation of the event. She uses photography and video as her methods of recording as straight-forwardly as possible the action. She employs no special effects or techniques in this recording process so that the resulting images are true and plain documentation. In the gallery she places bright and clear images of her participants that are easily read, their challenge lies in the conceptual understanding of them.

Her work is, arguably, analogous to that of Duchamp in that she employs what might be described as 'found images' or ready-mades. Duchamp went out onto the streets and found objects, interfered with them minimally and placed them in the gallery, his infamous urinal of 1917 is an example in point. Wearing similarly goes to the street, sources people and gives them a platform on which to explore their culture. She images them during this process of questioning, using stills photography and video, and interferes minimally in the end product. Hence the author has christened this section of Wearing's work as 'found images'. Wearing, while discussing her celebrated series of photographs 'signs', talks about the immediacy of her media and their use in avoiding stylisation. Photography and video yields the truest record of events, though it must be kept in mind that these results relate only to the time of recording (see Sontang, 1979). Anthropologists also use the media as a method of recording cultural phenomena.

Anthropology

It has been argued by Paul Bonaventura and Luke Clancy that Wearing operates the methodologies normally associated with the discipline of anthropology. Bonaventura asserts that "her work approximates an anthropological enquiry, a social experiment focusing on private behaviour carried out at arms length" (Bonaventura, 1995, p. 36) It is, therefore, critical to examine the relevance of these assertions.

It is also necessary to elaborate on two integral concepts to this thesis, anthropology and culture. What exactly is anthropology, what is culture and can these comparisons to Wearing's work be justified?

Charlotte Seymour-Smith in 1986 defined anthropology as that which "seeks to raise questions about society and culture and to answer them in a way that promote understanding of the world's diverse peoples" (Seymour-Smith, 1986, p.53). Wearing has stated her aim as the discovery of "what makes us live, breath and tick" (Wearing: Bonaventura, 1995 p.36) Seymour-Smith's definition of anthropology as 'question raising' is, therefore, useful in emphasising Wearing's connection to the discipline of anthropology.

Anthropology is an age old tradition which can be traced back to Socrates and the Oracle at Delphi. It stems from an interest in mankind, both biologically and socially. Anthropology is classically understood to mean research into primitive people, their society, cultural make up, artefacts, and customs. But anthropology also incorporates the study of urbanised and industrialised peoples. Later in this chapter 'Mass

Observation' will be discussed, as an example of a group of anthropologists basing their study in urbanised settings. Based in England in the 1930s they set out to make an anthropological research of their own environment.

Modern anthropology is concerned with curiosity about humanity. Inevitably it has evolved into specialised areas. Wearing's work focuses on cultural anthropology. The main methodologies employed by anthropologists are fieldwork and the analysis of data gathered during this field work. Keesling has defined fieldwork as "intimate participation in a community and observation of modes of behaviour and the organisation of social life" (Keesling, 1981, p.5). Later in this chapter Wearing's methods of gathering her 'found images' will prove to be strikingly similar to this understanding of fieldwork. This process of recording data is called ethnography. Wearing's method of recording images is akin to that of an enthnographer.

Fieldwork as a method of anthropological research was first espoused by an American anthropologist working in the early twentieth-century, Franz Boas. He encouraged anthropologists to gather facts, record observable cultural processes and life histories. Wearing's work, like that of Boas, leaves much data with out analysis and classification. She makes no comment on her 'found images'. I will come back to Boas to validate her categorisation as a visual anthropologist. Wearing gathers information and yields results without comment, it is her participants who comment on their society.

To highlight this argument three works of Wearing's have been chosen: '60 minutes', 'signs that say what you want them to say and not signs that say what someone else wants you to say', and 'Confess all on video. Don't worry you'll be in disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian'. All these works use new media, photography and video. Conceptually all derive from an anthropological school of thought. Her images portray a visual picture of the culture. Wearing primarily works from London/England. She trawls the streets of London

looking for images of it's inhabitants and does so in a non-judgmental and impartial way. All of the resulting images, therefore, fall under the category of 'found images'.

Culture

What is culture? There are many definitions of culture, Hall and Gieden maintain that "every social activity has a symbolic dimension, and this dimension of symbolisation and meaning is what is meant by culture" (Hall & Gieden, 1992 p.233) This is the reference point by which culture is understood in this thesis. Wearing displays 'symbols' of culture in her photographs and videos, from the clothes her participants wear to the utterances they make. All congeal to make a picture of culture. Culture is the corpus of societal behaviour and is represented and read through a system of symbols.

Let us move on now to examine Wearing's work, analysing it with reference to the 'raising of questions' and the 'symbols of culture', as outlined above. Firstly, we shall examine the most recent of Wearing's work: '60 minutes'.

'60 MINUTES', 1997

'60 minutes' is one of Wearing's recent works. She exhibited it in the Tate Gallery as part of her show for the Turner Prize in 1997 which she subsequently went on to win. (ill. 1) She went to a police station and asked uniformed policemen and women to pose for a portrait. They sit and stand in typical group-portrait fashion. But Wearing has a video rolling rather than a stills camera snapping spilt second portraits. She rolls the camera for an hour thus giving us, the viewer, a real insight into the people behind the disciplined pose. In doing so Wearing "raises questions" about our understanding of the people we live with. In this, a portrait of the police, the keepers of law and order shown as ordinary men and women, we are encouraged to examine our preconceptions and perhaps reformulate our views.

On the gallery wall we see a life-size portrait of a police station's workers. At first glance the portrait is deceptive one takes it as a stills photograph blown up to life-size a respectable portrait of a respected profession. Then someone moves in the portrait, ever so slightly, and we do a double-take. This is not just a split second snap shot but a prolonged gaze at these people. We see mundane movements like twitching and habitual nose rubbings. We see signifiers of their humanity; the police as human beings. This causes us to reflect upon our own humanity. In his book on social anthropology Jean-Claude Galey suggests that by "confronting other cultures, we are necessarily thrown back upon our particular form of humanity" (Galey, 1992 p.11) From this it is not to be inferred that the police are a different culture, but the police uniform does function as kind of barrier to our seeing the police as human beings. The police uniform operates symbolically as a protective layer between us and crime and fear. The police are not thought of as vulnerable people, like ourselves. The uniform is part of their image as protectors. Wearing, Thus, plays with our preconceptions by setting up this respectable portrait of the police, the 'protectors', and showing them as ordinary people. She uncovers instinctual mannerisms

Illustration 1. '60 minutes', Gillian Wearing, Video projection, 1997.

within the corpus of societal behaviour. The indicators, twicting and nose rubbing, for example, are ordinariness personified.

In an earlier work 'signs', which I will discuss at length later, Wearing approached a bobby-on-the-beat and asked him for his thoughts. The resulting portrait is of a uniformed policeman holding up a sign saying 'Help'. One cannot avoid reading that sign as a cry for help, on his own behalf, rather than as an appeal for help in fighting crime. (ill.2) Wearing seeks to raise questions about culture and society but there is no single response. Each viewer inevitably reads into the work what they will depending on the viewer's personal history and cultural experience. In this way, the ordinary viewer will have a different response to '60 minutes' than a viewer who is a member of the police force would have.

The act of viewing is not a passive one but an interactive one. (Wolff, 1981) Wolfgang Iser, speaking about literature says "The text itself simply offers 'schematized aspects' through which the subject matter of the work can be produced" (Iser, 1978, p.21). The text, or in Wearing's case the video, acts as a blueprint onto which the viewer brings themselves to complete the dialogue. All of wearing's work contains this openness into which the viewers bring their prejudices, experiences and life histories. In this repect she deviates from most practitioners of anthropology, there is no analytical comments on the work by the artist, no tidy categorisations or imposed meanings.

'60 minutes' penetrates the façade of the police. The communication of the work is non-verbal, the language is gestural. She goes to basics in '60 minutes', body movements erupt under restrictive limitations, the participants have been asked to pose for a portrait, and, presumably, to hold the pose. Therefore supressing any action for the duration of the pose. However, under this containment we observe instictual movements and irritated shuffles surfacing. As Gilda Williams has commented, Wearing's themes "boil down to a kind of democratic curiosity about the mechanics of ordinary experience and simple over-whelming emotion" (Williams, 1997). The climax of the portrait is when one policeman shouts and leaves the portrait. His endurance has reached its limit.

Illustration 2. 'Help', from the 'signs' series, Gillian Wearing, C-type prints on aluminium, 1997

Wearing herself remains anonymous, there is no trace of her. It is as if the image is taken through a two-way mirror, as if she has pressed the record button and then left the room. This anonymity is a recurrent trait of the 'found images'. In her search for an understanding of the mechanics of society her fingerprints are untraceable in the resulting images. She leaves these images with out apparent comment. In an interview for the South Bank Show, Wearing comments on this openness in her work and talks about the bridges the viewer must make in approaching and understanding her work. (The South Bank Show, 1998)

Similarly, anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1969 made written portraits of five families, in which the individual members told their own narratives. Lewis published his findings with virtually no analysis, no accompanying guide to interpreting their stories. (Bourguignan, 1991) This is conspicuously similar to another of Wearing's pieces (not discussed in this thesis) in which she went to participants and asked them to write a narrative, and named each piece after the respective narrator; 'Paul', 'Mary'... The connection between Wearing and Lewis is that both follow the Boas tradition; both raise questions but do not attempt to 'answer' them. They leave their viewers to formulate their own answers.

'60 minutes' is a non-verbal exploration of the workings of humanity. From challenging our perceptions of cultural symbols, we will now move on to consider a work which examines ordinary people's thoughts, or the signs they have chosen to represent them.

Illustration 3. 'I'm Desperate', from the 'signs' series, C-type prints on aluminium, 1992-1993.

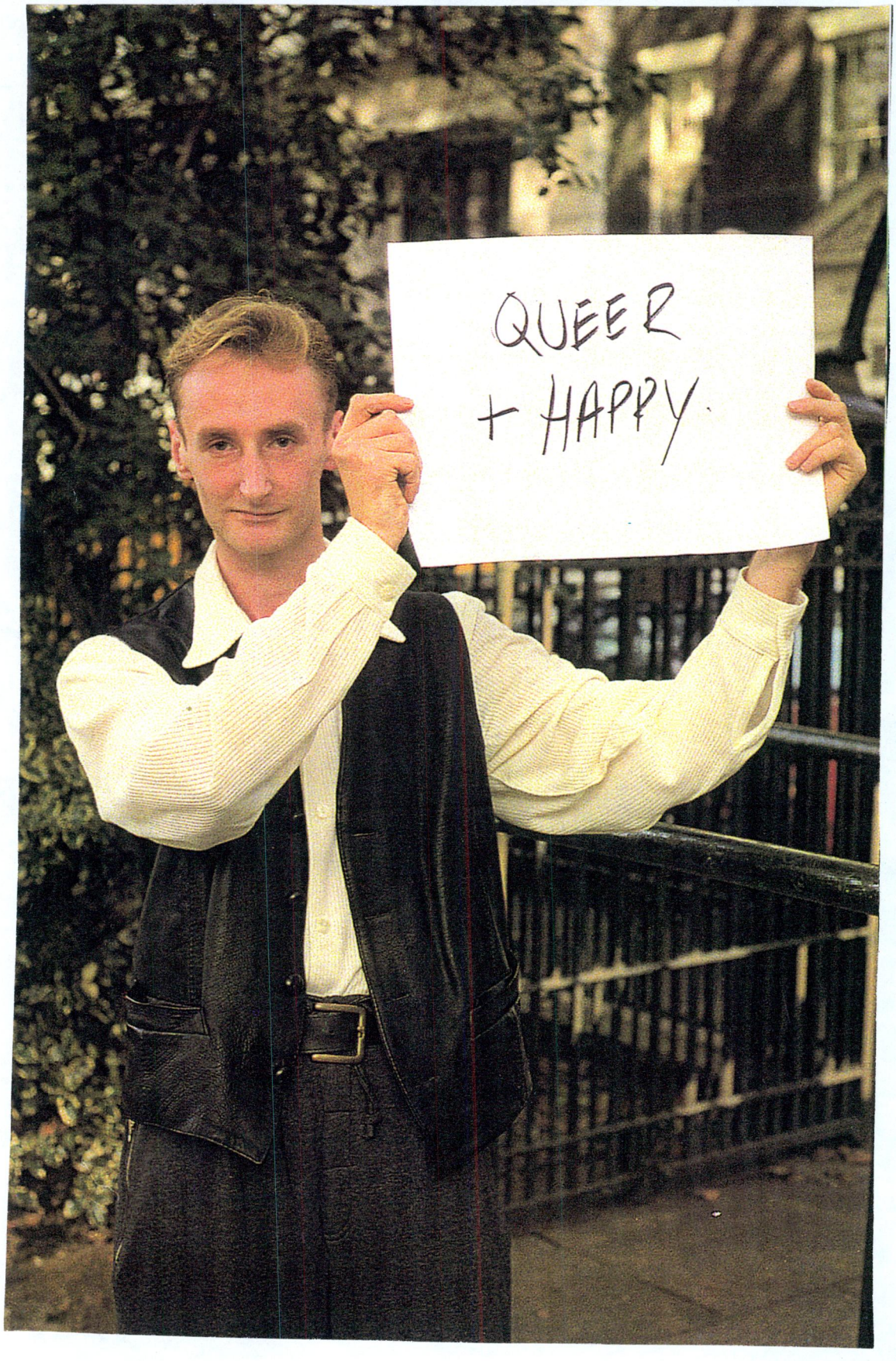
'Sign that say what you want them to say and not signs that say what someone else wants you to say', 1992-1993

This is a series of portraits of people on the streets of London. Wearing did her 'field work' over eighteen months resulting in over four hundred portraits. She went out on to the streets asking passers by to write their thoughts on a piece of paper, hold it up, and allow their portrait to be taken with their thoughts. The resulting portraits are intriguing both for their banality and their insightfulness. With these individual portraits of her participants she is, in effect, creating a snapshot of late twentieth-century life. In looking to the individual in society we get a portraits of the society as a whole, or as Susan Bordo has pointed out, "images of the microcosm' - the physical body - may similarly reproduce central vulnerabilities in the 'macrocosm' - the social body". (Bordo, 1994 p.55) The resulting portraits are 40 x 30cm C-type prints mounted on aluminium. They look very much like ordinary portraits with the exception that all the subjects hold a white card on which they have written a slogan, their thought for the day, their beliefs, or their observations. These range from the banal to the poignant: 'Me and my brothers say bollocks', 'Come back Mary love you get back Mary', 'Today is a wonderful day because Krisna made it' and 'Black and white unite not fight'

The anthropologists, Mead and Bateson in 1942 set out making a photographic analysis of the Balinese character. Their aim was to determine, through photography, how the Balinese as individuals embodied their culture in their characteristic behaviour. (Bourgignan, 1991) In 'signs' we see just that, individual embodiments of British culture. We witness people looking at, commenting on, and querying their culture and society. In turn, we question our society, and come away from the work challenging our own prejudices and preconceptions about that society.

Illustration 4. 'Queer & Happy', from the 'signs' series,

C-type print on aluminium, 1992-1993



Wearing goes to the individual and images them, the work is thus collaboratively produced, although she, herself is effected in the resulting images. By this practise of expunging herself from the end product of the work Wearing achieves purified images of her participants, and through this concentration on the individual she advances towards the heart of that person, in the words of Cambell-Johnson Wearing's work "delves into fears and fantasies, the secrets and the aspirations of ordinary people" (Cambell-Johnson, 1997)

Her participants are sourced from every walk of life. We see a democratic cross section of people, homeless, gay, disabled, working class, middle class. Wearing makes visible the people one passes on the street everyday and rarely ponders over. She puts them on the gallery wall. Indeed, it is as if she puts us on the wall. Average people going about their daily lives are asked to participate, to become the subject of an investigation into life today.

Illustration 5. 'I like to be in the country' – 'The last holiday I had abroad was nice but I can't afford it', from the 'signs' series, C-type prints on aluminium, 1992-1993.

Gillian Wearing within contemporary art practice

To place Wearing in a contemporary Visual Art context, she, unlike her contemporaries such as Sam Taylor-Wood and Wolfgang Tilmans, goes to the man on the street, images them and places them on the gallery wall. Taylor-Wood and Tilmans, on the other hand photograph contemporary icons such as film stars, actors and models. Wearing places her Joe Bloggs alongside Taylor Wood's and Tilman's Kylie Mingue and Kate Moss, respectively. Wearing gives the man on the street the status accorded to contemporary icons. As she has said herself, "My photography is not about finding photogenic people ...the majority of people in the 'signs' photographs are average". (Wearing: Faure-Walker, 1995)

To draw out Wearing's practice more fully in the context of contemporary visual art, her work has a strong thematic connection to that of the French artist, Sophie Calle. Both artists deal with the every-day man going about his daily business and both attempt to convey a sense of the private through their work. Weintraub, speaking about Calle, has said "The men and women who participate in Calle's experiment provide the content of her work, they contribute an aspect of their lives that is normally off limits to stranger" (Weintraub, 1996, p.67) Something similar can be said of Wearing's 'found images'.

Both use ordinary people in their work although they diverge radically by the way in which they photograph these people, Wearing works collaboratively. Wearing has also performed in some of her work, as we will see in chapter two, Calle has never participated in the first person in her own work. To make a self-portrait Calle hired a private detective to follow her around for a week and note her movements, unusually introducing a third person into the process of making of self portrait. Calle seeks to eradicate herself in her search into ordinary humanity, (Weintraub, 1996, p.67) Wearing openly and fully involves her subjects. She documents men and women who knowingly participate and through them enquires into their culture. Wearing's accentuation of the average quality of her participants highlights the social documentation aspect to her work. Jon Savage has said as much while

commenting on her work; she "builds up a picture of contemporary London life faithful enough to be used in the future as social documentation" (Savage, 1994, p.63). She documents the society of London as Mead and Bateson documented the Balinese.

Mass Observation

Wearing's work has frequently been cited as taking up the mantle that Mass Observation left off. (Clancy 1997 & British Art Show 4 catalogue, 1995) Mass Observation were a group of anthropologist working in the 1930s who set out to "'create an anthropology of ourselves', a comprehensive survey of ordinary people's feelings and activities" (Jeffery, 1986, p3) The connection to Wearing is conspicious, she documents ordinary people ruminating over their lives. She witnesses and exhibits average people's feelings and thoughts. While talking to Faure-Walker she identified herself with the people; "I consider myself average", she maintained. In this way her work can be classed as an attempt at a survey of 'ourselves'.

The Mass Observers used photography, like Wearing, to record their 'observers' although they primarly worked with their 'observers' written or spoken narratives; daily diaries or recorded oral stories. (Note: Humphery Spender, a photographer employed by Mass Observation, had his work included in a recent Museum of Modern Art, Oxford exhibition of photography: 'Invisible Light'). Their topics of study included bathroom behavior, beards, armpits, eyebrows and anti-Semitism. The Observers were interested in the minute detail of people's lives, not only that but they were keenly interested in minority groupings, as illustrated by their inclusion of anti-Semitism as a topic for research. In retrospect, their work may be seen as a study of the English working-classes rather than an overall study of English life. Wearing's work can be linked to the Mass Observation movement because of their shared "passionate concern for the sights and sounds and smells of ordinary life going on" (Calder & Sheridan, 1984, p.1)

'Signs', Individual photographs examined

The 'signs' work, indeed all Wearing's 'found' work attests to Wearing's democratic and insatiable interest in ordinary people, a 'passionate concern' for a cross-section of life. A business man, his office security tag clearly visible, appears content and well-to-do, obviously in his working clothes, the epitome of respectability. One expects him to hold out him to hold out his hand with a "How do you do" type greeting. His slogan reads "I'm desperate". (ill. 3) Appearances deceive. Wearing's work reveals the "strange or disturbing realisties that lie beneath the apparently calm surface of everyday appearances" (The Turner Prize judges: Alberge, 1997)

A second man holds a sign "Queer and Happy". His face is strained, his mouth tense, stiff, decidedly uneasy. His visual appearance belies his optimistic slogan. (ill.4) As Bonaventura asserts "Wearing's best work has always creating a space in which people have been free to express their innermost desires" (Bonaventura, 1995, p.25) This man desires to be happy and live freely, comfortable with his sexuality, but the stress is apparent in his face. Witnessing his obvious distress versus his optimistic sign, begs us to bring ourselves into the reading. "We are asked to compare our lives with others" (Mac Millian, 1997)

Two people in another 'signs' photograph stand in a park, (ill.5) a man and a woman hold up seemingly banal slogans; 'I like to be in the country' and 'The last holiday aboard was nice but I can't afford it' - average sentiments one might expect on a summer's day. This photograph, however, is impossible to dismiss as simply average. It has an uncanny resemblance to some of the later photographs Diana Arbus took of people with Down's Syndrome (ill.6). The couple's stance, clothes and manner put one in mind of Arbus's portraits of people with Learning Disablities dressing up at halloween and getting ready for parties in their childlike manner. This ordinary couple thus reference ones of the most disempowered minorities in the world (UN Bill of rights, no. 48).

Illustration 6. Untitled, Diana Arbus, Photograph, 1969-1971

These 'signs' photographs superficially bear out standard people, but what Wearing really succeeds in doing, is to get behind the person of the 'ordinary' person to reveals a disturbing disquiet with life and peoples inner thoughts on an often repressive world. The dicotomy between the facade and reality of people's lives is at the heart of Wearing's work, and her sucess at wresting-off this mask is the essence of her acclaim. She is concerned with the results accomplished when members of the public reveal their true selves, and what we intuit through the image of the ordinary man. Though these explorations Wearing composes a portrait of society. Wearing's participants corroborate to a picture of life in the immediate past, the 1990's, that is fretful and restless.

'Confess all on video. Don't worry you'll be in disguise Intriged? Call Gillian', 1994

In 1994 Wearing placed an advertisement in the personal columns of 'Time Out' magazine: 'Confess all on video. Don't worry you'll be in disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian' It became the title of video piece in which ten people confessed their sins. These 'confessions' are exhibited on television monitors placed on table-high plinths. The viewer is invited to sit opposite the box/monitor, put headphones on and enter the semi-private world of their stories. The stories are not told from individual monitors but altogether on the one monitor, one after another. The viewer can witness ten 'confessions' in the one sitting, endure a barrage of sins. Wearing says that: "the idea was to take the catholic confession box and use it in the context of a modern medium" (Wearing: Fogle, 1994 p.81) She sets up participants in a pseudo- confessional situation, and asks her viewers to become the listener/priests in this atheistic, modern confession. She went through no screening process, anyone interested in confessing was brought in, disguised and put in front of the camera. No time limit was imposed.

To achieve a more replete picture of contemporary society Wearing masked her participants and asked them to talk at length about their experiences/sins. As one might expect, by concealing their visual identity the confessors reveal fuller narratives, resulting in a more loading picture of the culture under scrutiny. To achieve a more substantial truth something must be hidden; the visual self. As Greenan has pointed out, she "urges us to relinquish privacy one minutes and guard it the next" (Greenan, 1994). Wearing's confidants protect their visual facade in order to free themselves to communicate their private thoughts and actions.

Wearing conceals her confiding public in concocted masques, the disguises are mockeries, they are marks that make no pretence at reality. The guises are maladroit and riotous, a blond 'fright' wigs (ill.7), a face distorted with sellotape (ill.8), a 'Ronald Regan' headpiece.

Visually, the fancy dress is hilarious but the content is not. There is a sense of foreboding in the viewer while taking the designated "listening" chair, donning headphones, and entering this realm of disclosure, beholding the secrets told by these masked oddities. We stare at these costumed performers and hear unclad narratives, disturbing confessions from an obscene phonecaller, a prankster and a victim, among others. In the words of the Turner Prize judges "She persuades her fellow citizens to reveals their most secret thoughts and desires" (The Turner Prize Judges: Glaister,1997)
The aural dimension is the part that both intriguies and disturbs. The performers include both exhibitionists and penitents. The former is epitomised by the man who talks about his obscene phonecalls to women and his strategies for doing so; his confessions are outrageous, shocking and frightening. He shows no remorse, indeed, admits to his activities are acceptable yet he displays an egotistical disregard for the affect he may have on any of his victims. He is completely self-absorbed in gratifying his fantasy; a sexual mercenary played on the fears of an unsuspecting female public. After his disclosure, he asked the artist could he keep his mask (a blond fright wig) to use for future phonecalls. Soon after his 'confession' he started calling the artist.

Illustration 7. Blond Fright Wig, from 'Confess All',

Gillian Wearing, Video tape, 1995

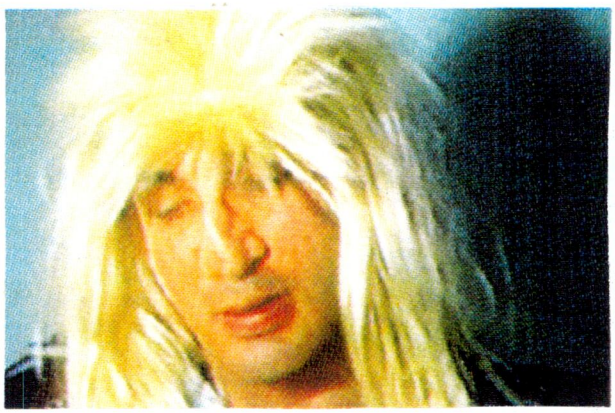


Illustration 8. Sellotaped Face, from 'Confess All',

Gillian Wearing, video tape, 1995

Conclusion to Chapter One

Woodward suggest that "Personal narratives, whilst richly idiosyncratic, unpredictable and diverse and diverse, are not arbitrary but deeply cultural" (Woodward, 1997, p.8) These individual narratives congeal to form part of our picture of our society. This begs the question, what does an obscene phonecaller's confession tell us about our culture? Confronted with the narratives in 'confess all', we are indeed to take a long, hard look at our society and question our cultural make-up. Wearing, as established above, gives us no neat categorisations or answers to these questions but does at least force us to ask them. As Mac Millan observes "Where do our most private thoughts and feelings relate to what we are seeing on screen?.We are asked to dig deep into our own morality" (Mac Millan, 1997). Wearing's work continually confronts us with questions and radically challenges our preconceptions and prejudices, This viewer is forced to question how and why this type of self-centred behaviour exists and is this vainglorious attitude the cause of violence, physical and psychological, perpetrated against vulnerable members of our society?

As mentioned, ten people agreed to tell their stories, nine of which were perpetrators of various misdemeanours, one was a victim who came to tell his story as a means of purging himself of the experience. For him the act of telling was a means of healing. Wearing says of him "it was cathartic, a way to get rid of the demons in his psyche" (Wearing: Fogle, 1994) His was a story of family life and suffering, he was a casualty of a bad family situation. He ended his confession with an appreciative "thank you"

In 'confess all' Wearing offers her contributions a 'soap box' on which they can safely, through their disguises, tell their tales. We receive unadulterated aural vignettes of humanity. In contradiction she achieves this by masking the true identities of her storytellers. Again, the dichotomy between the public and private self surfaces. Wearing plays one against the other as means of procuring the pith of our culture.

Chapter Two

'Manipulated images'

In examining Wearing's work one is struck by the differences, in both intent and result, within the body of her work. These differences can be broken into two clearly defined groupings; the 'found images' discussed in chapter one which observe people's appearance, thoughts and behaviours with minimal involvement from the artist. Within this group the artist seeks no control over her participants actions, the only directorial input being that she set up the situation and fashioned a conducive environment for her contributors. In the second grouping, however, the artist is more directly involved and takes full control over the processes and results. The author has chosen to label this group of work as 'manipulated images' specifically because of Wearing's more direct involvement. Nonetheless, the two groups are not unrelated. The 'found images' adumbrate the ideas which are further elaborated on in the 'manipulated images'.

Thematically the 'found images' and 'manipulated images' explore the same concerns. Wearing narrows the boundaries of her investigation, following the clues she uncovered in her 'found' work, she elaborates and expands these in the more controlled setting of her 'manipulated' work. We will see how some of the concerns voiced in the 'signs' series, for example, are amplified in works such as 'Homage to the woman with the bandaged face I saw yesterday down Walworth road'.

The role of the public in the 'manipulated' work differs from that in the 'found collection. Whereas in the 'found images' the public are willing participants, in the 'manipulated images' the public are caught watching the live event. The public passers-by witness the action of the performance and are watched by the camera; the documentation device, while doing so. The publics live reaction to the performance is an integral part of the finished product, the video projection on the gallery wall. Both

elements, the performance and the public's reaction, will be treated and discussed as interrelated parts of the end product.

Under the heading 'manipulated images' three works will again be examined: 'Dancing in Peckham', 1994, 'Homage to the woman with the bandaged face I saw yesterday down Walworth Road, 1995 and 'I'd like to teach the world to sing', 1995. The artist herself performs in both 'Dancing in Peckham' and 'Homage' but in the later work she tramps familiar ground by going to the public for her images. In 'I'd like to teach the world to sing' she collects together portraits of women who were asked to perform a specific task.

As established in chapter one, Wearing is interested in the private person behind the public persona. One could go further, as Gibbs has done, and claim that she is "interested in repressed feelings and desires" (Gibbs, 1997, pg.36). Wearing has said as much herself in a recent interview for The South Bank Show: "The root of it could be my own inarticulateness...there are voices that we don't listen to because we don't think they are important" (Wearing: The South Bank Show, 1998). Consequently, Wearing seeks to give a voice to those who are normally silent or silenced.

It is the theory of this thesis that in Wearing's 'manipulated images' she apes hysterical symptoms in her search for the language of repression. Language in this instance is taken to mean any symbol of communication, be that verbal, gestural or the inner 'train of thought'. In works that Wearing directly performs in, 'Dancing in Peckham' and 'Homage', the subject is mute but communicates through an inner voice, subtitled on to the final video projection, or through a gestural nonformal language[1]. The third work under examination, utilising female contributors, uses humming and the visual appearance of the performers to communicate. Wearing both apes hysterical behaviour herself and seeks out hysterical demeanour in her participants. These modes of communication will all, in turn, be related to theories on hysteria.

[1] The distinction is made between formal gestural languages such as the signed languages used by the Deaf communities throughout the world and nonformal gestural language.

Hysteria

What is meant by the word hysteria in the context of this thesis? Hysteria in its traditional form, that is the nineteenth-century understanding of the word, was aligned with the female reproductive organs and was viewed as a purely female malady. Indeed the word hysteria comes from the Greek word meaning uterus. Hysteria was thought of as a disease of the ovaries or womb. This has since been disproved, not least because of men found who suffered from hysteria; contemporary theories of hysteria include such ailments as Shellshock, Gulf War Syndrome, Multipersonality Disorder, and even Anorexia and Bulimia.

Mark Micale's 1994 definition of hysteria is apt for the purpose of this thesis. He states "Hysteria is not a disease; rather, it is an alternative physical, verbal, and gestural language, an iconic social communication" (Micale, 1994 p.184). Hysteria should not, therefore, be read in this context as the debilitating female malady of the nineteenth-century, but rather as an alternative means of expression of the human condition in the twentieth-century.

Wearing's apeing of hysterical symptoms should not thus be viewed as some morbid fascination with strange and the mentally ill, but as a further exploration of humanity. Wearing's stated aim, the discovery of what makes us live, breath and tick (Wearing: Bonaventura, 1995), is thus extended; by apeing hysteria she further explores the human condition from a different angle, gaining even further insight. Micale also commented that "rewriting hysteria becomes a way of achieving an understanding of, and perspective on, ourselves and our social world" (Micale, 1994, p.288). Wearing's use of hysteria will be referenced to traditional hysterical theories by Charcot and Freud, and modern hysterians, Micale and Showalter.

Jean-Martin Charcot who worked in La Salpetriere Hospital, Paris, in the late nineteenth-century is, arguably, the father of hysterical theory. He gathered around him a colony of hysterics whom he examined, photographed and exhibited to the public during his once weekly demonstrations of his theories on, and the products of, this disease[2]. He formulated the theory of 'Grande Hysterie' whereby his patients suffered from epileptic-type fits. These were dramatic seizures and physical contortions which served very well as 'exhibits' in his once weekly meeting. This theory will be connected with Wearing's 'Dancing in Peckham' where, it will be shown, this performance resonated with the seizures of 'Grande Hysterie'.

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[2] Please see footnote on following page.

Sigmud Freud followed on from the research carried out by Charcot and formulated the theory of 'Petite Hysterie'. This was where the patient showed less dramatic symptoms such as coughs, headaches, limps, and muteness. Muteness, we shall see, was employed by Wearing in her 'Homage to the woman with the bandaged face who I saw yesterday down Walworth Road'. Freud did not go as far as Charcot by giving public demonstrations of his patients although he did write case studies in which he elaborated on his treatises. One such case study, ' Irma' was utilised by Elizabeth Bronfen in a comparative essay between the work of Cindy Sherman and 'Irma': The knotted subject: Hysteria, Irma and Cindy Sherman. this essay is employed relative to the final work under examination; 'I'd like to teach the world to sing'.

Hysteria serves as an inclusive label for behaviours resulting from disturbing life events or repression. Wearing's choice of the hysterical action is not an isolated one. In the 1980s and 90s many feminist theorists attempted to reclaim the hysteric as a positive female role model (Showalter, 1997). Other feminists have indicated the meteoric rise in eating disorders as a symptom of hysteria and have pointed the finger of blame categorically at the cultural pressures on women. (Bordo, 1993)

To divert briefly from direct examination of Wearing's work it is useful at this point to draw an analogy between Wearing and two other contemporary practitioners with similar concerns; Kiki Smith and Janini Antoni, both of whom employ the dynamism between the surface appearance and the inner life. As Deitch has commented:

"Antoni's cube of gnawed chocolate reveals the neurotic and desperate behaviours sometimes hidden beneath the sleek facade of women's image perfected through cosmetics. Kiki Smith's flayed bodies, dripping with excretions, bear witness to the emotional wreckage that festers below the plastic surface" (Deitch, 1992 p. 45)

Most of his patients were working-class women who had suffered disturbing events prior to being referred to La Salpetriere (Showalter, 1997)

It is informative to draw comparisons with such contemporary art practices when discussing Wearing's work. She gives her concerns a less direct physical form, her subjects conceptualise their concerns therefore placing the work in the realm of the abstract as opposed to, for example, Smiths sculptures which visualise these concerns by laying their innards out on the gallery floor (ill. 9). Nevertheless Wearing too explores the themes highlighted by Deitch in Smith and Antoni's work, the neurotic behaviour and emotional state that lie beneath the surface of ordinary people. All three practitioners deal with the dichotomy between surface appearance and interior reality. These concerns are the mainstay of Wearing's work; revelation and exploration, as a means to understand, the psychological life of ordinary people.

Illustration 9. Tale, Kiki Smith, mixed media, 1992

'Homage to the woman with the bandaged face I saw yesterday down Walworth Road', 1995.

The first piece of work to be examined within the parameters of hysteria is the above, hereinafter 'homage' (ill. 10). Made in 1995, it is a seven minute video projection set on the Walworth Road, a direct documentation of the artists excursion. There is little evidence of editing made to the finished product, one minor exception being the white subtitles superimposed on to the bottom of the screen, a transcript of which is included in the appendix. The performer is physically mute but, these subtitles tell the story of the performers' thinking as she prepared and went through her homage, they serve as her internal voice. From the subtitles the gallery audience read the artists thoughts about the woman and her feelings during the performance.

Wearing dons a white bandage and walks down the Walworth Road holding the camera outwards. The camera documents her path ahead, what is captured in the projection is segments of the street ahead and images of the unsuspecting passers-by. Everyone from street vendors to shoppers are recorded reacting to the this woman with the bandaged face. their reactions are intriguing, they vary from outright disregard of the performer to jeering and pointing. For the most part people are recorded in a supposedly nonchalant attempt to act normal, not to notice the spectacle. Nevertheless, we glimpse people's instinctual reactions as they reveal their curiosity, then immediately recover to normality and the pretence of non-reaction. What Wearing captures is the transformation from the private to the public response. She carries a visual signifier of otherness, abnormality (the bandage)and goes to a public place to discover the average persons response.

Where did this initially sighted woman come from? We are led to believe that there was an actual woman whom the artist saw walking down the street, however, this could be disputed. One could read

Illustration 10. 'Homage to the woman with the bandaged face I saw yesterday down Walworth Road', Gillian Wearing, Video projection, 1995

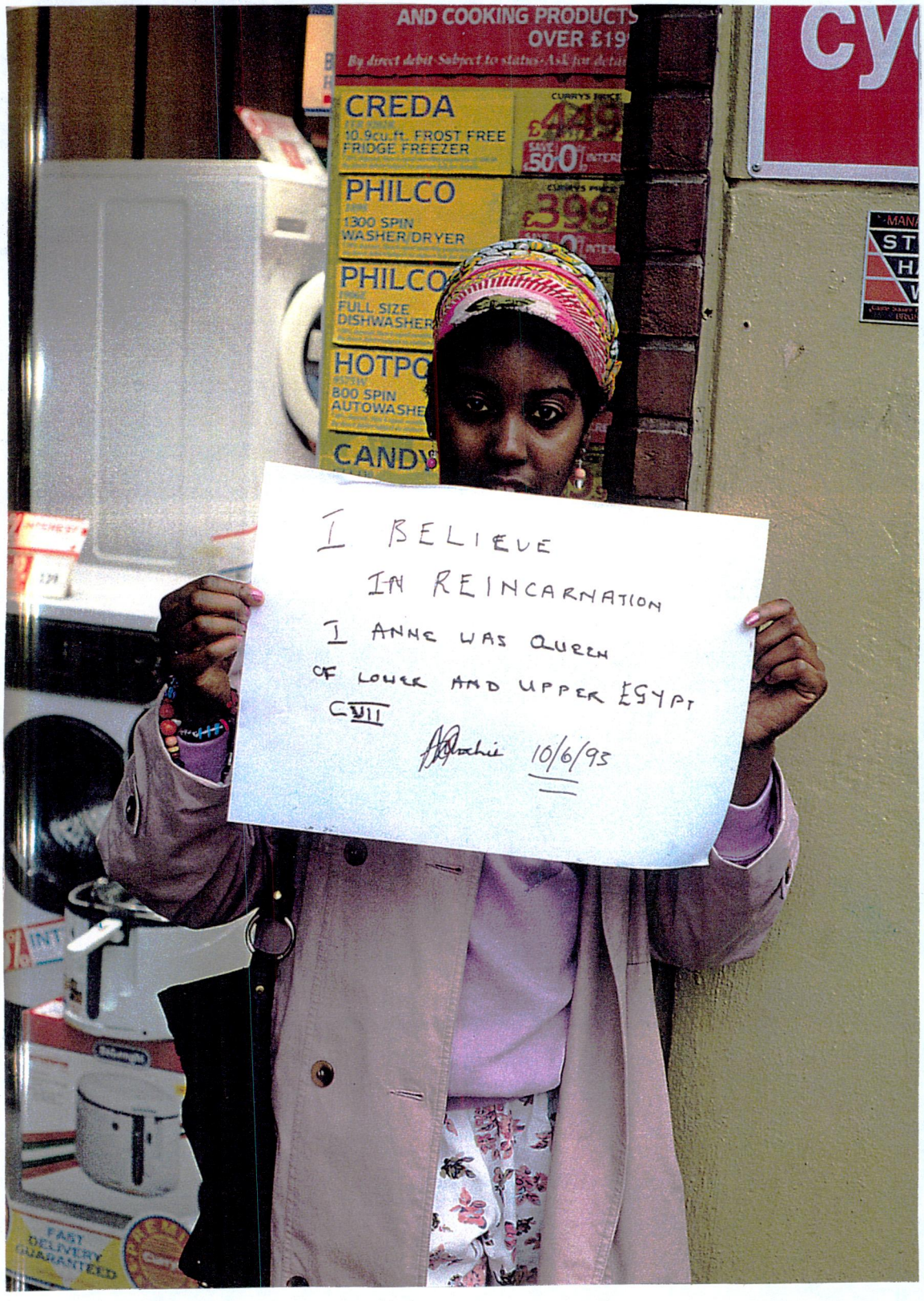
this woman as a reverie of Wearing's. It is therefore possible that Wearing is paying homage to a figment of her imagination but makes this figment real through the act of homage/imitation. Rodney has commented on the piece to this effect; "Wearing explores this terrain in the guise of a fantasised other - an enigmatic woman she glimpsed on the street" (Rodney, 1997 p. 54). Wearing homage can thus be read as a tribute to an imagined person. Interestingly, Bronfen notes "the hysterics proclaivity to daydreaming and fantasising" (Bronfen: Pollock, 1996 p.52) strengthening Wearing's connection to the actions of the hysteric.

Cursorily, to look back to the 'found images', there is one 'signs' photograph that resonates with 'homage' and imagined people. A black, ordinary looking, woman holds a placard saying 'I believe in reincarnation I Anne was queen of lower Egypt CVII' (ill. 11). This woman henceforth becomes transformed in our imagination into a past queen of an ancient and glorious kingdom. Wearing, in 'Homage', actualises the fantasy by embodying her reverie and going out, as the woman, into public view.

Two versions of this video were shown in the Irish Museum of Modern Art in the summer of 1997. Outside the main room of the projection a television monitor showed a rougher 'sketch' of the piece. The artist walking along the street, passers-by ignoring or jeering. There is one significant distinction between the two versions, this is why it is included here. During the 'sketch' Wearing walks past a second-hand furniture shop, furniture is displayed outside the shop, along the path. Wearing pauses in front of a dressing table, complete with mirror and looks at herself / the bandaged woman. While the performer puruses her appearance we get to see what all the attention is about. It is the first time we see the woman with the bandaged face, the only explicit sighting we receive of the crux of the performance.

We have read 'Homage' thus far as a tribute to a fantasised person and also pointed to Wearing's use of her bandage/mask as a visual signifier of difference from her fellow shoppers. There is another element to this performance linking it to the actions of a hysteric; the woman is mute. She can neither communicate verbally nor through facial expression (because of her mask). Nearing the end of her

Illustration 11. 'I believe in reincarnation I Anne was queen of lower Egypt CVII', from the 'signs' series, C-type on aluminium, 1992-1993



journey her ability to communicate is tested. The woman comes across some Quik Fitters, through the subtitles she tells us "I kept thinking please come over...I felt immobilised and did not want to leave the pavement". The woman yearns for contact but is unable to verbalise this or move off her designated path. One of the mechanics then makes an attempt to communicate with her, again, through the subtitles; her inner voice she tells us "they eventually sent over their leader, he was very tentative...unfortunately all he said was, 'what you got under there', and backed off really quickly". A tale of failed communication and fear of the unknown. Why did she feel 'immobilised'? Why did the 'leader' of the alien race called the Quik Fitters 'back off rather quickly'? are some of the questions raised by the episode. Wearing assumes the disguise of an outsider, donning the bandage/mask and refusing to speak, as an objective means to study the society.

One acknowledge symptom of 'Petite' hysteria , as established by Freud, is muteness. There are a plethora of examples of this, fictional and real, in society today. In Jane Campion's award winning film The Piano the heroine Ada has willed herself to muteness. We hear her narrative or inner voice as a voice-over throughout the film, referring to her muteness she says "My father said I can do anything once I put my mind to it" (Campion, 1993) Also in 1993 the Empress of Japan 'lost' her voice for three months after criticism was levelled against her in the Japanese press (Showalter, 1997 p.32). Muteness, thus, often manifests itself as a protest against debilitating circumstances or as an anetedote to feelings of suppression. In Wearing's case she feigns muteness as a symbol of difference, a ploy to examine people through their reaction to the abnormal. 'Homage' attests to Wearing's exploration of her society. She imitates 'an alternative physical language' in an attempt to understand or 'Achieve a perspective on ourselves and our society'.

Performance and New Media

Moving briefly away from direct examination of Wearing's work, it is nessesary to analyis her media and it's consequent influence in her work.

Wearing uses photography and video (new media) as her tools. She and her participants perform, and these performances are documented through these media. So, the basis of her work is performance. Repeatedly it has been stated that Wearing assumes or imitates hysterical symptoms, how did one arrive at this hypothesis? Performance is action and action lends itself quite comfortably to imitating some condition. Some performance artists use it as a cathartic action, such as Marina Abramovic in her Venice Biennial installation/performance 'Cleaning the house' (1997) and Janine Antoni in 'Gnaw' (1992), exhibited in I.M.M.A. in 1995. Wearing on the other hand, uses performance as a means to both display twentieth-century life and also to scrutinise and explore it. He medium of performance has an immediacy unsurpassable by others. In the words of Fiach Mac Congail [2] "the bottom line for me is that the most lucid and eloquent and integral way of reflecting what's happening at the moment comes through live art and fine art" (Mac Congail, 1997, p.25)

Wearing uses video and photography to document these performances. She has spoken of the mediums immediacy, "I find things are done better when photography is done quickly; this avoids being stylised"(Wearing: Faure-Walker, 1995, p.45). The nature of the medium means that there is the least interference in the action, therefore, the action or performance is freed and placed at the centre of the work. As Decter has commented "photography assumes transcription, renders the world legible and automatically" (Decter, 1997 p.76)

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[2] He was the 1997 Irish Commissioner to the Venice Biennial and sent Jaki Irvine and Alaister MacLennan, two performance based artists, to represent Ireland.

Illustration 12.'Dancing in Peckham', Video projection, 1994

Dancing in Peckham, 1995

Using this medium, in 1994 Wearing went into a shopping mall in Peckham, London, set up a video camera in the middle of the mall, and danced in front of it, the resulting work is simply entitled 'Dancing in Peckham'(ill.12). In the subsequent video tape of the performance we see a woman framed by the arching architecture of the shopping mall, her clothes, general appearance look similar to any average persons attire. However, the artist is dancing in the middle of the this public space although there is no music playing. Wearing memorised two pieces of popular music; 'I will survive' by Gloria Gaynor and 'Smells like teen spirit' by Nirvana. No one besides the performer has access to this music, it is purely in the realm of her imagination. Neither the viewer of the live performance nor the viewer of the video tape have the information/sound that compels Wearing to dance. What we witness is a woman jumping up and down, in contortions, to the impulses in her head, with just the hustle and bustle of the shopping mall as accompaniment.

Charcot's theory of 'Grande' hysteria; the physical seizures resulting from a hysterical fit is surely appropriate here. One may wonder how dancing to no music, in this instance, can be compared to a hysterical seizure? Wearing performs routine dance moves, swings her hands, sways her hips, moves her legs and plays some air guitar, all recognisable movements from the dance floors of any night-club. So how can a comparison to 'Grande' hysteria be justified?

In a rare account of a male hysteric at Salpetriere, the patient, Gui, suffered an attack which was described by an intern as "an acrobatic performance as beautiful as it was varied" (Showalter, 1997 p.69). Showalter, in her book on modern hysteria, describes Gui's attack and comments that he "might be in a gym as in a hospital" (Showalter, 1997 p.70) In this sense Wearing might as well be in the Salpetriere as in a shopping mall, contorting as a hysteric rather than a dancer in a night-club. Research

in Salpetriere showed that convulsive fits could take any form and indeed were often akin to some aesthetic practises. An observation, Showalter maintains, that went over the heads of the fervent doctors of the Salpetriere (ibid.).

Bonaventura while discussing 'Dancing in Peckham' and two other works of Wearing's not under examination in this thesis, 'Slight reprise' and 'My favourite track' comments on the withdrawal from everyday life inherent in all the works; "all three works show individuals locked up in an isolationism brought on by the alienating aspects of urban existence" (Bonaventura, 1995 p. 36) Wearing gets inside her own head an dreams up a scenario, such as the playing of pop songs,as an impetus to dance. She instantaniously becomes isolated, alien, abnormal, other. In 'Dancing in Peckham' as with 'Homage' Wearing probes for what makes us "tick", searching to understand ourselves, our identity, history, and make up, through,as Micale has stated, a substitute mode of behaviour.

Most of his patients were working-class women who had suffered disturbing events prior to being referred to La Salpetriere.

Illustration 13. 'I'd like to teach the world to sing',

Gillian Wearing, Video projection, 1994

'I'd like to teach the world to sing', 1995

The third, and final, piece of work under analysis is 'I'd like to teach the world to sing', a video projection again made in 1995 (ill. 13). This work differs formally to the two other pieces discussed in this chapter; the projection is split into nine different screens. Each screen shows a separate woman, standing in a park, wearing a floral patterned dress, whistling into an empty Coca-Cola bottle.

This piece is the antithesis of 'Homage' and 'Dancing in Peckham'. In both of the other works the artist took on some easily recognisable form of "otherness". In 'Homage' the mask/bandage served as a visible label of otherness. In 'Dancing in Peckham' Wearing embodied otherness. 'I'd like to teach the world to sing' employs opposite tactics in its exploration of ordinary people's lives. These women are clich_s of femininity, dressed almost identically in flowery summer clothes as non-threatening gentile womenfolk. As Mac Millan observed about them "individual personalities have given in to a desire to look and act normal, to be one of the crowd" (Mac Millan, 1997). Wearing no longer acclaims the signifiers of otherness but uses the converse, normality, in her effort to understand us.

Bronfen, in the essay mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Hysteria, Irma and Cindy Sherman, propounds the theory that Cindy Sherman, in her early 'Untitled Film Stills' series (ill. 14), employs the image of femininity as a deceit. In other words the image of femininity serves as another mask, or public persona, disguising the inner, true person. Wearing utilises this embodiment of the public persona in 'I'd like to teach the world to sing'. Bronfen, on Sherman's photographs, argues that "She discloses the performance of femininity as a fake in the gesture of the hysteric's dissimulation - women pretending to be someone else, but never quite getting fully into the role" (Bronfen: Pollock, 1996 p.51). Like Sherman; Wearing explores the mask of arch or overt femininity in 'I'd like to teach the world to sing'. Similarly Wearing's women don't quite fully get into the role either; they are all whistling into a Coca-Cola bottle, signifying that something is awry.

In this piece Wearing orchestrates the images of these women so that they appear similar to each other and emulate the ideal of womanhood. It is not clear whether Wearing stopped random women on the street, or directorially and specifically choose woman to participate, dressing them in the floral patterns and placing them in a park. Irrespective of her selection process, the women oblidge as a representative grouping of average members of the public. There is no auxiliary participation in this work by the public; they are not captured on film observing the live performance, as happened in 'Homage' and 'Dancing in Peckham'. These performances are made in private and only become public after the act, when exhibited on the gallery wall.

each woman makes whistling noises into the Coca-Cola bottle. This work is part of a series of work where Wearing asked individual to publicly act out a private action[3]. The women in this piece fantasise the Coca-Cola bottle as a musical implement. The wondrous is created from the banal, the bottle is alchemized into a higher object by the players belief in it. By way of a comparison, and again with reference to Charcot's theory of 'Grande Hysterie', on one occasion while 'exhibiting' his hysterics, Charcot gave one women, under hypnosis, a hat and told her it was a baby. The woman started rocking and kissing the hat, treating it as if it was a real baby (Showalter, 1997). Wearing's performers were asked to believe the bottle to be a musical instrument or microphone and treated it accordingly, further emphasising the familiar thread of fantasy that runs through all of Wearing's 'manipulated images'.

[3] Some other work in this series included people singing along to the music on their walkman and air guitarists strumming the air to their favourite guitar solo in the privacy of their bedroom.

Illustration 14. Untitiled Film stills #6, Cindy Sherman 1978.

Conclusion to Chapter two

Wearing's 'manipulated images' attest to her interest in fantasy and in becoming "other". She assumes the role of the outsider to view and understand life. Firstly, we have watched her manipulating outward symbols of eccentricity; the mask/bandage, dancing to no music, and muteness. Secondly, the element of fantasy and fantasising runs through all of these 'manipulated images'; conjuring up a bandaged woman, dreaming accompanying music to her dancing, and imagining the transformation of Coca-Cola bottle.

In all of these works Wearing manipulates the everyday; a stroll down the street, dancing, a Coca-Cola bottle, in order to invert our accepted views on such things and challenge our sometimes inert preconceptions. She jolts the susceptible viewer into rethinking their surroundings - their culture. Wearing engages our everyday cultural signifiers and employs them through the voice of the hysteric; the voice we could easily overlook. Sydenham views the hysteric as an imitator of their culture, he says "hysteria is a disease of imitation, it imitates other disease, indeed imitates culture...the symptoms leading to the condition of hysteria 'imitate' the culture in which it has been produced" (Sydenam: Pollock, 1996 p.44). This has been quoted at length to propound the theory that Wearing re-enacts the symptoms of the hysteric, imitating the culture around her in a venture to understand it.

Conclusion

Average people are the content of Gillian Wearing's work. In all of the work under examination Wearing is investigating life of the time; Late twentieth-century. Her portraits of individuals, viewed as a body of work oblige as a portrait of that society.

Throughout all her work Wearing's interest in the private person underneath the public façade is apparent. All of her work succeeds in peeling off this public masks and reveals vignettes of the private, inner person; 'what makes us live breath and tick'.

The use of new media, photography and video, aids Wearing's research into ordinary people's lives. It allows her to record straightforwardly the action of her subjects. She uses her media plainly; taking immediate shots and adding little or no editing to the final work.

Viewers of Wearing's work are asked to involve themselves in an interactive process. The reading of her work is subjective, depending on the viewers personal history and cultural background for its meaning.

Wearing employs two methods to achieve these portraits and therefore there are two, related, section to her practice. The author labelled them 'found images' and 'manipulated images'. Some of the themes raised in the 'found images' are further explored in the 'manipulated images'; themes such as the expression of repression, fantasy and the deceptive role of the public mask.

Her 'found images' are related to the discipline of anthropology. Wearing's methodologies for gathering her 'found images' are shown to be related to the field work carried out by anthropologists. Wearing herself is anonymous in this body of work, she recorded people unobtrusively and impartially. This investigation into the private self is gradually built up in the works examined. Firstly, Wearing records the habitual movements made while standing for a formal portrait, '60 minutes'. Secondly, immortalising peoples thoughts or slogans with their portraits, 'signs'. Thirdly, taping narratives told freely from under the cover of a disguise, 'Confess all'.

Wearing takes a more directorial role in her 'manipulated images' and focuses on the expression of the inner self. She uses performance, documenting it through video, to explore this. This thesis related these works to the actions of hysterics, citing case studies of hysterics and theories on hysteria as back up to this analogy. In the first two performances analysed under this parameter Wearing performs, using deviating devices to become separate, 'other', to her fellow citizens. She gauges their reactions in an effort to further understand them. In the final piece considered in this section Wearing utilises the public persona, the image unthreatening women, presenting it as false, another mask. All three of the 'manipulated images' engage elements of fantasy, further relating them to the actions of the hysteric.

Gillian Wearing's work searches for the private person. She uses a variety of methods to achieve this. Her work provokes its viewer to challenge their preconceptions and their prejudices. Attaining the truth of the private self is the her works essence.

Homage To The Woman With the Bandaged Face Who I Saw Yesterday Down Walworth Road
(Text from the video projection)

This is about a woman I saw a couple of weeks ago, who was with some very raucous friends at the time. I was sort of in a similar mood myself but didn't really show it. From behind this woman had an average appearance, black pencil skirt, court shoes and bobbed black hair. My own hair is black and maybe we bonded from that point onwards. Her profile was the first thing that struck me. It was rather shapeless and white, not a pale skin colour but sheer brilliant white. My first instinct was just to forget I saw her and treat her sighting as if it were an apparition but then I felt seduced by the extraordinary combination of her clothes and whiteness. I was just getting into a friends car at the time and as we pulled away and overtook her I was able to work this mystery out. Her face was bound up in bandages, they had been placed only around her face and neck therefore making the bandages look aesthetic rather than practical. Don't ask me why but I felt so elated in seeing her close up, maybe it was because I could relate to her other physical attributes as they were so similar to my own and also that these bandages were both comic and tragic at the same time - I suppose you could call it sick humour.

I wanted to pay tribute to her there and then but I knew deep down that it would be futile and so I devised a plan to pay homage to the woman with the bandaged face who I saw yesterday down Walworth Road.

That Sacred Saturday
My homage took place a few weeks after the sighting. I decided to wear a similar mask to the woman I had seen and parade down to my local shops on Saturday. I was incredibly nervous when the moment arrived for me to step out into the street. I was tormented about adverse reactions to my appearance and indeed people did stand and stare and even stopped their cars in order to get a closer look at the woman with the bandaged face who I saw yesterday down Walworth Road.

On Meeting the Quick Fit Fitters
After a while I began to feel a little dejected because no one had the nerve to confront me and by the time I came to the end of the first stretch of the Walworth Road that was exactly the kind of reaction I wanted to receive. Then when I heard a chorus of heckles to the left of me coming from the garage I immediately swung around to greet it. At first I could not focus on the exact location of the noise and so I used my zoom lens - lo and behold lurking there in the shadows of the garage were five Quick Fit Fitters standing in a half moon shape. They seemed to be keeping their distance so as not to be directly associated with me and I wondered if they were excited by my presence as I was when seeing that woman. I kept thinking please come over so I can announce my homage, but I think they must have been waiting for me to make the first move. For some reason I felt immobilised and I did not want to leave the pavement as this was the path I had paved. Anyway they eventually sent over their leader, he was very tentative and I don't know what he was expecting because I wasn't going to be chatty as I was here on the homage and wanted the opportunity to announce that. Unfortunately all he said was, "What you got under there," and then backed off really quickly leaving me no space in which to let him know about my homage to the woman with the bandaged face who I saw yesterday down Walworth Road.

Gillian Wearing

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