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INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to discuss the work of Susan Hiller which spans more than twenty years. One of my aims is to show how she, as an artist, working from the margins of a culture which has traditionally rendered women voiceless, has demonstrated that the "other" can have a voice that speaks, if not louder than, at least as loudly as words. Her work is of particular relevance at a time when feminist theory explores and develops notions concerning the problems and potential of female language and speech within patriarchy.

What initially interested me in and motivated me to study her work in greater depth was the fact that in a Post-Structuralist climate, her concerns are not merely deconstruction of patriarchal structures and their limitations, but also the positive potential and possibilities that she sees through the cracks and faulty joints of these structures. It is this outlook and approach to her art that gives the work such a refreshing quality. Thus, as I hope to show, she maintains a balance between an innovative critical awareness of the patriarchal culture within which she lives and an ability to see and highlight aspects of a reality which have hitherto been unrecognised or ignored.

One of the first stages in my research was to write to Hiller herself and to various galleries in Britain asking for information, since I had access only to limited sources in the N.C.A.D. and Trinity libraries in Dublin. The artist replied promptly, enclosing relevant material, as did many of the galleries, all of which have been duly acknowledged. I am particularly grateful to Susan Hiller, to whom I sent a questionnaire and a blank tape following her initial positive response, because she answered my questions in depth and at length, at a time when she was extremely busy.

In the interview she referred to the book <u>Heroines</u>, currently being written by Lisa Tuttle, and containing a long interview with Hiller, which includes a great deal of

information which I had been having difficulty in finding. On application, Tuttle generously sent me the relevant chapter of her forthcoming book, devoted to Hiller and the people and things which have been of influence and importance to her. It is from this source that I acquired much of the material in my first chapter.

Two other people who were particularly helpful and accommodating were René Gimpel, of the Gimpel Fils Gallery in London, and John Roberts, the art critic. René Gimpel forwarded information on two occasions, once enclosing a very precious copy of the catalogue Sisters of Menon and lending me some slides of Hiller's work. John Roberts was equally generous, sending me a chapter, "Against the Grain", of his current book Utopian Readings : Politics, Art and Modernity, which, like Heroines, is due for publication later this year and which is particularly relevant and encompassing in relation to Hiller's work.

I also received information, catalogues and the loan of books from various galleries : The Interim Art Gallery; The Tate Gallery; The Gardner Centre Gallery; The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, and the "Kettle's Yard" in Cambridge.

The material in this thesis has not been chronologically organized but structured in a way that enables me to concentrate on important aspects, consistent concerns and recurring themes in Hiller's work. However as, in her art, these elements are to some extent interdependent and often arise simultaneously, certain points will be reiterated where relevant and necessary.

Hiller's anthropological training and background are of great importance because, during the study and practice of this discipline, many concerns were raised which she has continued to deal with in her art work. During this time, many aspects of the academic anthropological practice began to raise doubts in her mind. It was this questioning and reassessment of her needs and aims, combined with some of the influences of two particular women anthropologists, that

led to her arrival at a certain outlook on life. From her changeover to an art practice, she carried with her many aspects of and interests nurtured by this training : her interests in notions of collectivity; the power and significance of collaborative, experiential projects, whereby the commonly held distinctions between the social and the individual, objectivity and subjectivity are dissolved; her belief in truth to materials and the power of latent meaning attached to cultural artefacts. Through an analysis of her work, certain underlying preoccupations become apparent, surfacing in her consistent treatment of the important themes of representation, identity, gender and language.

As her work has developed over a period of twenty years, a shift to a more personal and self-exploratory approach is discernable in that her search for and investigation of her own identity becomes a major motivating force. However, her interest and belief in the crucial value of a collaborative approach to both art and life has not diminished. As I hope to show, her combination of the more collaborative aspects of her earlier work, with the more personal, self-exploratory aspects of more recent years, in which her increasing use of automatic writing stands both as a metaphor for female speech and desire, and as a subversive language, provides us with an insight into a potentially broader and more encompassing future.

Chapter I

Susan Hiller, who was born in the United States in 1940, originally trained to be an anthropologist before taking up art as a career. As a young girl she had no idea that there were any women artists as such. She believed that art was a specialised domain for men, and that at best women could only practice as amateurs. Because of this misconception she felt that a serious art practice was not an option open to her.

Instead, she turned her interests towards anthropology. She was aware of the important contributions made by many great women anthropologists in this field and found this very encouraging. It was important to her to discover a practice in which so many women excelled, so this helped to give her the incentive to pursue the science in college. One woman anthropologist who influenced Hiller's decision, to a great extent, was Margaret Mead, one of the most outstanding anthropologists of her time.

Mead was born in Philadelphia in 1900. She wrote a great number of books and articles during her career, among them were: Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies, (1935) and Male and Female, (1949). One of the important contributions of Mead to anthropology was to make her field studies and research accessible to lay people. She believed it was very important that the public at large, and not just specialists in that field, should be able to understand her anthropological discoveries. At the age of thirteen, Hiller read a pamphlet by Mead called Anthropology as a Career for Women, Hiller said of this, "There was Mead's description of the function of anthropology to offer alternatives or correctives to the way our culture works, which appeared to me a kind of relevation".[1] Hiller was enchanted by this and believed, perhaps naïvely, that in studying anthropology, she could do very righteous things for society! She also admitted that the prospects of travel were rather alluring. This romantic notion of the possibilities of this science was further enhanced by the prevalent views on femininity. Although Hiller had no doubt

that she wanted to pursue a career, and had been encouraged in this wish (both her mother and grandmother had had careers), she was still somewhat influenced by the notion that if a woman did decide to work, she should try to do something "worthwhile", in that it should be something "good" or helpful to others.

One of the beliefs, among others, that Hiller held on to when she became an artist, was one held by Mead and a contemporary, Ruth Benedict, that culture was like a literary text which had to be deciphered. By this, they meant that everything within a culture has meaning or signifies something, whether that be a traditional ritual or a cultural artefact. It is through the analysis of these things that apparent and less evident meanings and their connotations can be deciphered or read. For example, the way in which an object is used or the context in which it exists can reflect particular ideologies and it is by systematically interpreting these objects or patterns that one can achieve greater insight into the culture under scrutiny.

Hiller went on to study anthropology at Smith College, then proceeded to Tulane University in New Orleans where she did graduate work, after which she did field work in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize, on grants from the National Science Foundations and the Middle America Research Institute. However, while studying, she began to realise that anthropological practice did not stand up to her rather high and unlikely expectations. Although she completed her studies and Ph.D thesis in 1963 at the age of twenty-two, she decided not to submit it. She had made the decision to leave anthropology because there were certain aspects of its academic practice that she could not come to terms with. Hiller has spoken of her three main reasons for leaving.[2]

Firstly, she and her colleagues had been trained to carry out their work as "value-free", apolitical observers. However, it seemed that this appraoch was not always adhered

to and a few had heard of instances where anthropology had fallen into corruption. One example of this was that during the Vietnam war, government agencies were using anthropological data and research to subvert village life in South East Asia. Hiller realised that even an objective science, such as anthropology, could be used in a way that benefited particular ideologies or political aims. And, although this practice, in reality, is inevitable, she found it difficult to accept.

The second reason for her leaving was the position of women, although she was unable to articulate it at the time. On the one hand, there were many great women anthropologists. Yet when it came to studying certain societies and gathering information, there was a great deal of inequality. As most of the societies under scrutiny were patriarchal, questions which had to be addressed to individuals in these societies were always addressed to men. It was difficult to intervene or halt the vicious circle where one patriarchal society questioned another, so that whatever data was gathered served to reinforce patriarchy. Hiller was aware that this was a complex problem and that change could take place only over a long time and, although a large number of women were involved in anthropology, they did not seem to be able to make any great impact or to bring about any great change in this area. Hiller decided that if she could not change this well-worn pattern, she certainly could not work within it.

Her third reason for leaving was that she could not come to terms with the idea that social or cultural anthropology was considred to be an essentially objective practice. She did not like the practice of entering another society and "participating", only to leave and use the information thus gained solely towards the promotion of a career. She believed that there could be no such thing as pure objectivity. An anthropologist, she felt, could not observe another culture objectively because he or she would automatically view it from his or her own perspective.

Also, through the very act of studying, the student could not avoid observation from becoming part of his or her own experience. Hiller feels strongly that one cannot remain objective to one's own experience, since it is obviously and essentially something subjective. She does not question the importance of objectivity or analysis. Her argument is that it is something which is basically inseparable from subjectivity and that, therefore, the two can co-exist.

One person who actually put this notion into practice was a woman called Maya Daren. Around the time that Hiller left anthropology she was becoming more familiar with the work of this woman. Daren was an anthropologist, writer, film-maker and choreographer. She was born in Kiev in 1917 and emigrated to America with her family in 1922. Her real name was "Eleanora", but she adopted the name "Maya" when she began her work as a film-maker in the early fourties, during which time she made experimental films such as Meshes of the Afternoon, (1943); At Land, (1944); Ritual in Transfigured Time, (1947) and Study in Choreography in Camera, (1945). However, it was through her writings as an anthropologist that she was most influential to Hiller, an important book being Divine Horsemen or Voodoo Gods. What made this book particularly important to Hiller was that the last chapter dealt with Daren's own experience of being possessed by a voodoo divinity while studying dance in Haiti. During this period, Daren became increasingly involved with the Haitian people, attending different ceremonies to take note of the various kinds of dance. It was at this time that she had the experience mentioned above. However, her account of this experience in the last chapter of Divine Horsemen or Voodoo Gods rendered the book unacceptable as anthropology, as it totally opposed the ethics of academic anthropology which insisted on purely objective observation. Daren, by allowing herself to become open to new experiences and changes while still gathering relevant data in a competent manner, stands as an example of how one can be both participant and observer. Hiller has said, "For me, it is a kind of touchstone for the way

I think we have to go, intellectually and artistically. That is, never to separate experience from reality".[3]

While studing anthropology at college, Hiller had also taken a Minor in art in addition to attending drawing and painting classes. Because of this, and since she carried many concerns raised while studying anthropology into her art, the change was less disruptive than it might otherwise have been. She began her art career as a painter yet did not feel fully satisfied working in this way. She had been involved in other projects which did not come under the heading of traditional art, so for some time she was apprehensive as to what she should, in fact, be producing. Soon she decided, however, not to limit herself to any one medium. "It took me a number of years to say 'I don't care what it's called, that's what I'm going to do'".[4]

In the early sixties Hiller travelled with David Coxhead (a novelist in collaboration with whom she later produced a book caled Dreams - Visions of the Night) in North Africa, India and the Far East before finally settling in Britain in 1967. By leaving anthropology to become an artist, she was entering a field that was marginalised by and, to some extent, isolated from society. Also, because she was an American, she was a "foreigner" in Britain, which meant that she was, in a sense, an outsider. This, it could be argued, was an advantage to her because in reality she seemed to be in a position similar to that which she had hoped to be in as an anthropologist; that is to be both observer and participant simultaneously. As an artist she could observe the situation within which she lived and as a foreigner she could observe the culture within which she lived.

Chapter I

Footnotes

[1] Susan Hiller in interview with Lisa Tuttle, Heroines (Forthcoming).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Susan Hiller, "I don't care what it's called". Artlink 2 (September - October, 1982) P.6.

Chapter II

Much of Hiller's work has a collaborative base and this can be seen as the result of the influence of her anthropological training and of the prevalent interest in the notion of the collective consciousness among artists during the late sixties and early seventies. A great deal of her earlier work involved group projects and group investigations, these being mainly: The Handpainting Series (1969); Draw Together (1972); Street Ceremonies (1973); The Dream Seminar (1973) and Dream Mapping (1974). These works were reminiscent of anthropological field studies, with the marked addition of space for the investigation of the individual and subjective experience, concerns which were not included in academic anthropological practice. The groups echoed social structures through collective endeavours, though they were not representative, as such, and were, in fact, formed on a random volunteer basis. Hiller did not see these works as being scientifically based but rather as experiential. Most of these pieces dealt with the questions raised in Hiller's mind as a student of anthropology in relation to the rigid distinctions made between the individual and the social, subjectivity and objectivity, participant and observer. What interested Hiller here was the notion that these seeming polarities can exist simultaneously and need not be separated.

Many of these collarboative works can be described as performances. However, Hiller has emphasised that she used the word "performance" only in order to describe the carrying out of something until it was finished.[1] She saw these performances as group endeavours involving mutual co-operation and participation. She did not divide groups into "doers" and "watchers", but rather arranged them in such a way that each person was both participant and observer. Through this organisation she sought to avoid clear divisions or any hierarchy of order. The only control or authority that she herself had was to give specific instructions which the volunteers agreed to follow and which were obviously necessary to give the performance a basic structure. However, the manner in which these instructions

were carried out and the eventual outcome were things which Hiller could not, and did not try to predetermine. In these groups she did not see herself as the artist and the others as the stage hands; her role paralleled that of the choreographer of a dance in which everyone was of equal importance.

These collaborative projects of the early seventies had a distinctly conceptual feel. Around this time, artists were beginning to reject object-making and the notion of art objects and were seeking alternatives in other indicators of concepts, such as text, diagrams and maps. Lucy Lippard said of the use of maps in the conceptual work of this time, that their "compactness offered a more effective embrace of vast space than did constructed earthworks".[2] Hiller herself used maps in pieces such as Street Ceremonies and Dream Mapping as a means of organising and documenting these group performances.

The idea for Street Ceremonies (see ill. 1), carried out in 1973, was conceived in response to the united action of a community of a threatened inner-city area in London. Hiller organised a performance in which over two-hundred-and-fifty people gathered within the city. She had mapped out a large circle on an urban grid which in reality had a perimeter of half-a-mile. On the night of the Autumn equinox, when both night and day are of equal length, the group stood within this vast boundary. This echoed the tradition of "walking the bounds" which involved villagers and communities literally walking around the boundaries of their villages in order to re-define their territories. By performing on the night of the Autumn equinox, the group metaphorically celebrated the unification of nature and urban life. This demonstration of solidarity by the community of the threatened neighbourhood could be seen to have symbolised and represented minority groups, particularly women. The feminist issue is one of Hiller's main concerns, one with which she is constantly preoccupied throughout her work.

In Dream Mapping she explores this sense of shared subjectivity on a deeper level, pushing it to its limits through experimentation with the notion of a collective consciousness. Hiller's wish was that, through collective participation, everyone's experiences, responses and activities would serve to create and intensify a sense of shared subjectivity. She embarked on this project with a small volunteer group. It was an open-ended experiment as opposed to a scientific study and its end was undetermined at the start. One of Hiller's interests was to see if there was an overall or collective structure underlying individual dreams.

A small field in Hampshire was chosen as the place where the experiment would be carried out. The field was rich in fairy rings formed by mushrooms. The idea was that seven participants were to choose rings to sleep within over a period of seven nights. This was prompted by the tradition of the conscious incubation of dreams. Each volunteer was given a map of the site. At the end of the three nights, the dreamers mapped out their personal dreams, which were finally superimposed on each other. The outcome was that there was a definite overlapping in the dreams and this was marked on a composite map by dark lines (see ill. 2). Hiller was not concerned with proving to people whether this result was a coincidence or not. What had, in fact, taken place was that some of the distinctions made between dreams and reality and the individual and the collective had been dissolved. Hiller has said that work such as this has "proposed a 'paraconceptual' notion of culture, that is, I aim to reveal the extent to which existing cultural models are inadequate because they exclude or deny some part of experienced reality".[3] Her exploration into this "paraconceptual" notion of culture extends into and develops through her use of automatic writing and will be discussed in relation to this in the last chapter.

Aside from these earlier works, most of Hiller's pieces do not revolve around group projects although they can still

be described as collaborative in nature. She had always avoided speaking directly in the first person singular in her work. One reason for this was that she wanted to avoid reinforcing the traditional notion of the artist as "special" or a "genius". Another reason of which she was initially unaware, was that it enabled her to work as an artist, in that it would bypass, to some extent, the obstruction of her negative positioning in a male world, where she, as a woman, lacked an authoritative first-person voice. Instead, through the device of collectivising the mind/ego in collaborating with others such as the dead heroes in Monument, Pueblo women in Fragments and the anonymous artists in Dedicated to Unknown Artists, she enabled herself to speak while enabling those otherwise voiceless people to speak also. This, of course, has a metaphoric power, because Hiller was also drawing a comparison between those she was collaborating with who had fallen into anonymity, and women who are oppressed and excluded, within a patriarchal system.

Another aspect which all these works had, and indeed which her work still has, in common is her use of cultural artefacts as starting points. She treats these as "keys to the unconscious side of our collective production".[4]

Although she sees this approach as influenced by her anthropological training, she also stresses the influence that Louise Nevelson has had on her work in this respect. She feels that Nevelson has been seriously overlooked in the history of art. She believes that many of the British sculptors, particularly those who use the reclaimed image, have not acknowledged her importance and influence. Hiller herself failed to acknowledge these and it has only been in recent years that she has become aware of Nevelson's influence on her own work. Nevelson's art, although abstract sculpture in the main, revolved around the appropriation of objects or cultural artefacts which she had found or collected. Hiller strongly believes that she had unconsciously internalized this fact and has been greatly

affected by Nevelson's approach. The work of both these artists involves the creation or recreation of new meaning from old meaning. The fact that Nevelson, a woman, was Hiller's forerunner in this way has encouraged Hiller's further development of these ideas.

The artefacts which Hiller uses are usually objects which she has bought because she likes them or found and kept because they fascinate and intrigue her. She does not go in search of objects with the intention of using them in the making of a piece, but rather allows them to prompt ideas for a work of art. She believes that if she is interested enough to collect particular objects, they will usually have something worthwhile to offer. Very often, as with the postcards in her piece Dedicated to Unknown Artists, she will have collected things over a period of years and it is when they gradually begin to reveal their importance that she uses them.

These objects, Hiller believes, contain latent or unconscious meaning. Although we attribute meaning to things, usually according to their functions, we overlook the fact that they may signify much more. Because we live within a patriarchal culture, everything is structured thus. We and everything around us are affected accordingly whether that is in the way we perceive things or whether it is in the way we place things in particular contexts. As already mentioned, Hiller chose to see culture as Mead and Benedict had, as a text which had to be deciphered. In this way she discovered that it was not simply language or words which were affected but also objects, images or cultural artefacts. However, the most everyday, mundane and seemingly trivial artefacts are so embedded in our culture that we no longer question them. It is in drawing forth their unconscious meaning which exposes the complexities, uncertainties, ambivalence and contradictions insidiously attached to such objects, that Hiller seeks to challenge the primacy of the word.

In Dedicated to Unknown Artists (see ill. 3) made in 1976, Hiller collaborated with the anonymous painters and photographers of a vast series, Rough Sea postcards. These depicted seascapes and shorelines all around the coast of Britain, which she had been collecting over a number of years. She found it odd and intriguing to see such supposedly trivial objects as these postcards being produced in such ordered abundance and in such a uniform way. She was also fascinated to see that these little pictures were not just mechanically produced, but were in fact extremely expressive (whatever the motivation) and many had been meticulously hand-tinted. By adhering to the notion of truth to materials, Hiller gradually discovered that the unconscious or latent significance and connotations were full of contradictions and paradoxes, which she saw as a direct reflection of the ambiguities and contradictions prevalent in patriarchal society. In this instance, Hiller was concerned with the contradictions which lay in the criteria by which a painting was considered to have the qualities of a work of art within the landscape tradition in Britain.

She firstly questioned the similarity in the composition of these postcards, in which vast waves engulfed the land in places which apparently, even in turbulent weather, have not experienced such overwhelming wrath. This raised questions as to whether landscape painting was a real response to nature. Had the unknown artists interpreted the landscape in this way because of the landscape itself, or had they been influenced by the way in which landscapes have traditionally been painted (many of which have been actually completed indoors)? Have our responses influenced art or has art influenced our responses?

In this work Hiller had assumed the role of curator, in that the whole piece was a mock exhibition of miniature paintings. She used a painstakingly methodical and methodological approach in the realisation of the work, one which is usually used in anthropological practice. Having

collected the "data", she then went on to classify and analyse over three hundred of these Rough Sea postcards.

The complete piece comprised a series of ten panels on which the postcards had been mounted, along with a map of the British coastline and explanatory text. Each panel echoed the shape of the individual postcards. Hiller's presentation was based on the notion that there was meaning, method and commitment to an idea in this vast series of artefacts.

Normally these postcards would be seen in our culture as cheap, arbitrary, unmemorable and, at best, quaint trivia. Generally people would pass them unnoticed in a shop window. Yet through a recontextualization of these objects by being placed in a gallery situation and in a structured system, people did stop to consider them. Hiller, in transforming these ordinary objects into art objects, exposed the snobbery and hypocricy which are frequently present in our value system. The suggestion is that the status of art is, as Griselda Pollock said, "something conferred by social action, not inherent in the thing itself".[5]

On another level, these postcards held varieties of ambivalent meaning and symbolism which could be seen as indicators of our own contradictory notions in relation to sexuality. Generally speaking, the sea is referred to as female (as are most aspects of nature), being something that alternates from the tempestuous to the calm. In these scenes the romantic and mythological portrayal of areas of the British coastline could be seen as being thrillingly erotic and overflowing with frothy passion! However, on closer scrutiny, it could be seen that it was the sea which roared and swelled, while the land was still, receiving and enduring the excited wrath. Because the land is always considered female, its passivity conferred masculinity upon the violent waters. Therefore, in these scenes the sea became the active, all-powerful male, thrusting himself mercilessly upon the helpless mother earth. Hiller

suggested that we "attribute characteristics to the sea or land depending on whether we value them negatively or positively".[6]

Although the piece worked on many levels, one problem arose as a result of the strict rigidity which Hiller adhered to in the presentation. One of the ideas she was trying to deal with here was the notion that objects are bearers of meaning (often hidden) as is language. However, because the explanatory text was so accomplished and well-defined, people viewing the work tended to depend on it as a means of understanding the piece. And, although this was one of its functions, its order closed off avenues of insight into the actual artefacts themselves. On this point, therefore, the piece defeated its own purpose and for Hiller this was a concrete example of the power and primacy of the word in our culture which she has gone on to challenge with increasing depth in later work.

Moving from Hiller's earlier collaborative projects to her collaboratively based works, such as Dedicated to Unknown Artists, Fragments and Monument (the latter two will be discussed in the next chapter), it is possible to discern a steady development of concerns and ideas on different levels which have given rise to multi-levels of meaning and interpretation. This evolution took place through somewhat discursive means which, in turn, led to work which had, and indeed, work which has, greater direction.

Chapter II

Footnotes

[1] Susan Hiller, About Time, P.18.

[2] Lucy Lippard, Overlay, P.121.

[3] Susan Hiller, About Time, P.18.

[4] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, The Muse My Sister, P.26.

[5] Griselda Pollock, Framing Feminism, P.115.

[6] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, Framing Feminism, P.283.

Chapter III

Throughout her career, Hiller has increasingly dealt with a complexity of important themes in a variety of different ways. I want to discuss some of the different routes of her exploration into and analysis of representation, in relation to some of her other themes such as history, identity and gender. Initially she carried out her investigation in a more general way in her Handpainting Series, a group project which, similarly to her other early group projects, evolved into more socially specific collaborative work such as Fragments and Monument, in which she explored how representation in Patriarchal terms can and does lead to misrepresentation. In these, along with the emergence and development of her more self-exploratory works such as her Photomat Portraits, she tackled the problem of misrepresentation through bringing into view alternatives which call for a reconsideration of our limiting cultural boundaries.

Hiller's Handpainting Series was one of her earliest collaborative group projects. Produced in 1969 while Hiller was still a painter, the project involved people, who had been openly invited to take part, making painted handprints on a ground. The whole project continued over a six-month period. Each person taking part was limited to using only one hand, making either a positive or negative print with red or black paint on a white ground. Everyone was encouraged to experiment with making prints or sets of prints in relation to others produced within the group. Hiller has said that she did not attempt to document the actual process of the making of these pieces, since it was about, among other things, shared experience, which essentially cannot be documented. She has subsequently destroyed the prints though she has photographs of the final pieces, purely for reference.

The idea for this piece was sparked off by the early cave paintings (which in itself reveals some of Hiller's anthropological interests in other cultures and societies). She has pointed out that the earliest human representations

on the walls of these caves were, in fact, handprints.[1] What interested her about these was the fact that one could not distinguish whether the makers of these imprints were male or female. She enjoyed the idea that someone could make this mark which is, on the one hand, anonymous and, on the other hand, completely individual, since no two handprints are alike. A handprint is a form of personal identification, yet at the same time it is androgynous; therefore, when seen on its own, the identity of its owner is no longer tied up with the notion of gender.

Although this piece was essentially an experiental one, through it ideas were conceived to which Hiller was later to return and develop further in relation to the way in which she has approached self-presentation. She has since used the simple yet strong symbol of the handprint in works such as her self-portraits, which have a stronger and more thorough direction.

Hiller has collaborated, in her work, with people who have been forgotten or oppressed by society and who have, as a result, fallen into complete anonymity. Because they have been rendered voiceless on a social level within inadequate patriarchal structures, they have no means of self-representation. Thus, they are prey to misrepresentation which only fuels the continuation and reinforcement of oppression and exclusion. In Fragments and Monument, Hiller collaborated with two particular groups of people who have been victims of this oppression, these being Pueblo women and forty-one dead heroes and heroines. Through an investigation into some of the reasons for and results of misrepresentation in relation to these two groups, she sought positive, potential alternatives.

Before talking about Fragments (1978), it is worth giving a brief account of an exhibition that was running concurrently in the Hayward Gallery in London. It is of relevance because its organization led to the form of misrepresentation Hiller was dealing with in Fragments. The

exhibition displayed North American Indian art entitled Sacred Circles, in celebration of the American Bi-centenary. Hiller reviewed this show, making some very strong criticisms.[2] She questioned the fact that the organizers could display artefacts which referred to the long, hard and still existing struggles of the oppressed native people, while calling the show a celebration. (Although the struggles of these people were referred to in the exhibition catalogue, it did not indicate that they were a continuing problem). She pointed out that this was contradictory and hypocritical, suggesting that, in this context, the exhibition amounted to a documentation of the success of the Anglo-Americans in killing and gaining control over the native American Indians.

Many of the artefacts on exhibition had traditional, religous and spiritual significance, an example being the Plains Shields. These shields, which were used by the Indians before and during battle, carried designs which had been inspired by the owners' own dreams. These motifs served to give the owners a sense of heightened awareness. In contemplating these shields they would regain their sense of spirituality and a belief in their invulnerability and this enabled them to dispel some of the fears they might have had. These shields were considered highly sacred and were always kept covered until times of battle. However, in the Sacred Circles exhibition, they were shown without their painted covers. Hiller argued that, by exhibiting the shields in this way, without their covers, they had been placed in an incorrect and inappropriate context and that this only served to show what little concern or respect was really felt towards the makers of these objects or towards the culture from which they came. In this way, Hiller pointed out, the show merely undermined their significance.

In Fragments (see ills. 4 and 5), Hiller also used cultural artefacts from another society. These were shards of pottery made by Pueblo women, which, while in America, she had found in and collected from an Indian dump. Pueblo women carry on a long tradition through the making of these

pots. They get their inspiration from the broken shards of pots made by their mothers and grandmothers and from their own dreams.

Fragments comprised hundreds of these shards along with gouache representations, charts, diagrams and photographs. Handwritten text outlined the structures in which the Pueblo women made the pots, which were those of both the inherited traditions of art and personal inspiration. All these combined formed a large wall and floor installation. This work questioned the means by which western society gains knowledge of another culture's history and traditions, which Hiller believes often results in misrepresentation. That is, by looking at something and defining it from our own perspective we can often give the "wrong" slant on that data and information. She highlighted the fact that, if we impose our own meaning and order upon the fragmentary remains of another culture, we succeed only in falsifying their true significance and thus render them silent. This, of course, is a concern raised in Hiller's mind as an anthropologist and, as a result, she feels a responsibility towards the use of such artefacts in her work. Although she drew a comparison between western society's tendency to falsify the significance of aspects of another culture and the way in which women are constantly oppressed and misrepresented in patriarchal society, she was aware that she could quite easily have done the same. However, she was careful not to impose meaning from her own experience or that of women in western society on to the fragments of the Pueblo women's history. No matter how universal the secondary position of women may be, the experience of women from Hiller's culture must differ in many respects from the experience of women in other societies. These fragments, therefore, had their own meaning and story to reveal. The fact that the fragments in this piece were, indeed, fragments was of great importance. Metaphorically it underlined the fact that women's history is fragmented (a great deal more so than men's). The Pueblo women make their pots through the inspiration they gain from the

fragments of pottery made by their forerunners and from their dreams. In this piece Hiller linked the notion of creativity with fragmentation. However, she did not view this negatively but rather in a celebratory way; the creativity of these Pueblo women is perpetuated through the positive use of their fragmentary history. Hiller has suggested that a "fragmented view of the world is all we've got".[3] Her point is that we should not try to create new wholes from the fragments because nothing is complete, entire or fixed. The gaps between the fragments need not be seen as a lack but rather as a positive place from which to discover and create new alternatives which have been denied and ignored in patriarchy.

These ideas, were also explored in <u>Monument</u> (1980-81), (see ill.6) in relation to the sadly forgotten dead heroes and heroines of Victorian Britain. <u>Monument</u> was an audio-visual installation inspired by a monument in Saint Botolph's churchyard in the East End of London. The original monument was donated in 1900 by G.F. Watts, a Victorian artist who championed minority causes. On it were a host of plaques commemorating both men and women of the working classes of Victorian Britain who died in the course of some heroic act. The installation comprised photographs of a number of these plaques which were arranged in a stepped-diamond formation. In front of this, facing the opposite direction towards a blank wall, was a park bench where individuals were invited to sit, one at a time, to listen through headphones to a sound-track accompanying the piece. Among the plaques, in a similar form to the others, was a photograph of some modern graffiti encountered by Hiller which read, "Strive to be your own hero". The piece has been exhibited in three versions in different countries, sometimes reduced in size due to a lack of gallery space; in the original piece, however, each plaque represented one year of Hiller's life.

Through this piece our attention was brought to the dead and to death itself, in particular to the forty-one people

commemorated on these plaques. These heroes and heroines lived on in the inscriptions which briefly described the circumstances of their sudden deaths. Yet these brave acts, though noble and worthy, were only the tiniest fraction of their entire lives. The whole span of the existence of these people had been reduced to the moments of their deaths. The irony is that these working-class women and men had led lives of hardship, self-sacrafice and struggle in a predominantly bourgeois industrial society, for which they received no acknowledgement or reward. In Victorian society, heroic acts of bravery and self-sacrifice were considered to be the worthiest acts, no matter what the status of the person who performed them. In effect, these commemorative plaques did not represent the people whose names were inscribed on them but rather the moral standards of that time. This was emphasised by the formal layout of the inscriptions. It was not the names of the people who died which were placed centrally on these plaques but the descriptions of the acts of bravery. In the traditional format of portraiture, the subject is usually placed centrally. The arrangement on the plaques, therefore, suggested that the names had simply been added to the acts so that it was mainly these that had achieved public acknowledgement.

On tape Hiller spoke of representation, memory and death and invited the audience individually to contemplate these inscriptions. The plaques had become part of the viewers memory while seated facing away from the Monument (the relationship between death and memory will be discussed in Elan). Hiller challenged and questioned the notion that these short inscriptions should be enough to compensate these Victorian heroines and heroes for the loss of their lives. Was it right that they should be remembered in this inadequate form for longer than they had lived their lives? These questions were strengthened and echoed by the technical presentation of the piece, where the photographs were flat like the images on a television screen which were viewed while recorded sound ran concurrently. This audio-

visual presentation was reminiscent of the media which we listen to and watch so readily and frequently. Yet what we forget is that the information we receive has been altered, condensed and interpreted from a particular slant which may not be appropriate. It has also been captured within a false time span.

The piece of modern graffiti saying, "Strive to be your own hero", could be read in two ways. On the one hand it could have been read as a confirmation of Victorian ideologies, yet, on the other hand, it suggested that one has to work towards achieving the means of self-presentation and self-determination. These means the heroes and heroines lacked and, as a result, they were reduced to the stereotypes of martyrs. In this piece, Hiller was not dismissing history or continuity but rather, as in Fragments, was suggesting that nothing can be rigidly represented because, in doing so, aspects are inevitably excluded leading to the false creation of new wholes, which are, in reality, myths.

Through the reclamation of artefacts in Monument and Fragments, Hiller not only exposed patriarchy and the contradictions that lead to misrepresentation, she also gave old meaning a new lease of life. In acknowledging that which has been forgotten and discarded, she enabled their absence to become a strong presence.

It was around this time that Hiller's own presence began to emerge in her work. (She used her own voice on the Monument soundtrack). Whereas before all of her collaborative work had involved the collectivising of the mind/ego whereby her ego became anonymous, now, through her own developing understanding of representation, this had gradually changed. She had become increasingly aware that giving up one's individual authorship and being a woman raised some contradictions. "Being a woman artist and giving up one's property claims to one's discoveries is not quite the same thing as it is for a man, since one is never acknowledged to have had a right in the first place".[4]

Ten Months (1977-79) (see ill.7) was an important piece in that it was the first time that Hiller had spoken directly in her own work, of her own personal feelings and experience. The piece documented her experience of pregnancy and the ambiguity, conflict and change that arose during that time. However, the piece was not simply one of subjective expression; it was balanced by a critical overview. This consciousness was crucial to the success of the piece. Hiller was concerned not to conform with the conventional, romantic portrayal of pregnancy in art where the woman was seen as the personification of pregnancy, as opposed to being seen as someone who was experiencing pregnancy.

Throughout her pregnancy Hiller documented the experience. She had taken full-figure black and white photographs which showed the gradual growth of her abdomen from day to day. She also kept journals in which she recorded the events, changes and feelings of that time, without the intention of using them in a particular piece of art. It was only some time after the birth of her son, Gabriel, that the ideas for a piece began to fit together. This came about when she discovered that the actual length of an average pregnancy, which is just over nine months on the standard solar calendar, actually spans ten lunar months. She also learned that this alternative calendar followed the rhythm of the famele body as our ordinary calendar does not. With this in mind and the fact that she had been thinking of the moon analogy while photographing her pregnancy she felt that this could form the basic structure of a piece of work. Because she wanted to deal with the experience of pregnancy itself, she decided not to use the full-figure photographs but only a section of them, the pregnant abdomen. In doing this she obliterated her own physical identity from the work, which helped to avoid the predictable and inadequate representation of herself as a "pregnant woman" whereby people would completely identify her with pregnancy. In avoiding this she was able to deal with such a subjective experience both as an observer and as a participant.

The photographs of her pregnancy, which she used in Ten Months were black and white which immediately removed the usual "pink" sentimental portrayal of pregnancy. They were arranged in a sequence of groups of twenty-eight days and each of these groups represented one lunar month. These were then ordered in a stepped fashion so that the last day in each month linked up with the first day of the next. These images were then juxtaposed with text taken from her personal journals. The entire piece had a minimal quality, which balanced well with the highly charged text. Hiller has adhered to Minimalism in much of her work because she finds that she can use it to create a nonhierachical structure, to order and permutate forms and cultural artefacts in a way that will give each of them equal treatment and attention.

Hiller placed the text underneath the first five sequences of photographs because during that term of her pregnancy she had been extremely conscious of the physical change and growth taking place in her body. During this period she felt that her physical experience was stronger and more heightened than her mental experience. However, the opposite was the case in the five remaining lunar months, during which she suffered increased levels of anxiety and felt a need to research and question what was taking place.

What was particularly interesting about this piece was the fact that Hiller spoke from the standpoint of both the artist and the mother, two roles which have traditionally been considered incompatible. In this way she asserted herself as the subject as well as the object of her own experience. Through the analysis of her own consciousness throughout this period she successfully combined the subjective feelings and objective facts relating to her pregnancy. This was strengthened by the cool detatchment of presentation of the piece in which the growing pregnant mound resembled the moon rising and swelling. This calm was contradicted by the intense analysis and anxiety

expressed at certain points in the text:

> "It is her voice, her body. It is painful being inside and outside simultaneously.... she is the content of a mania she can observe. The object of the exercise, she must remain its subject, chaotic and tormented".[5]

Ten Months revealed that, alongside the rational and the controlled, there will always be ambiguity and inconsistency. However, Hiller does not view this negatively but feels that it is important that these contradictions arising from personal experience be expressed. She believes that it is through the acknowledgement of the co-existence of the rational and irrational simultaneously that we can break down some of the rigid limitations that patriarchy imposes.

Although Hiller has pointed out that there are inconsistencies within us which cannot necessarily be explained or defined, and that, because our world is fragmented, it can never be reconstructed into new wholes or represented in any unitary way, these need not be limiting. As already said, it is when we attempt to make new wholes from the fragments that misrepresentation takes place. However, this does not mean that every form of representation will inevitably lead to misrepresentation. Hiller explored this very thoroughly in her photo-booth self-portraits which evolved gradually over more than ten years of investigation of the possibilities of photo-booth portraits involving friends and strangers.

During the seventies she became very interested in the photo-booth, mainly because of the contradictions concerning the function of the machine. On the one hand, it could be seen as a very convenient and instant way to photograph oneself and because there was no photographer to impose his

or her own ideas upon one which would render one an object to the entire process, one could remain the subject and thus use the booth as a way to express and assert one's own individuality. Yet, on the other hand, the machine could be seen as merely a more mechanical, stark and less glamorous form of the traditional self-portrait which, without the existence of another person (in this case the photographer), raised questions as to what extent ones self-image or self-characterisation depends on another person's attention, acknowledgement or presence.

Hiller made a piece called Icognito using abandoned and discarded booth photographs of strangers, in many of which the subjects were hiding their faces or otherwise blocking their bodies with items of clothing. She, in the knowledge that there was no intervening photographer, interpreted these photographs as symbols of people's insecurity as to their own identities. They could also be seen, however, as symbols of defiance. By throwing away their photographs these people demonstrated their ability to choose whether or not they wanted to accept the images the booths produced. (See ill. 8).

Hiller developed this second notion in photo-booth photographs of friends. In rejecting the conventional function of the machine by allowing only certain parts of themselves to be photographed or by using objects to obstruct the images in an effort to avoid being captured in the unitary and fixed form of the photograph, these people symbolically succeeded in mocking, defying and subverting the traditional notions of portraiture and representation.

Through the revelations of self-exploratory works such as Ten Months and seeing the possibilities a subversive use of the photo-booth creates, Hiller has said:

> "I'd like to make a distinction between lacking an authoritative first-person voice, which isn't a real problem and the undermining of authentic self-presentation through being forced to exist in a world structured by the language of the other, which is".[6]

Tentatively she began to introduce parts of her own body into photomat portraits. However, she had to find a way to assert herself as subject without reducing herself to the object of the viewers gaze which would have been merely to conform to the traditional representation of women. Initially, she used sections of her body such as her arms and shoulders as in one of her Photomat Portrait pieces (1982) (see ill.9), which comprised photographs enlarged from hand-coloured photo-booth snaps. By enlarging them she enabled the viewer to feel a greater sense of physical identification with the fragmented body before him or her. She coloured and blocked out areas of her body such as her hand (which she sees as an important symbol of identification as an artist) and her face. Through this conscious act of obliteration and erasure she transformed those areas into an absent presence. She also used her own handprint in some of these works, a strong symbol explored in her early Handpainting series, which underlined the presence created through physical fragmentation as being her own. In works like this, she also turned her back to the camera, which on one level indicated her refusal to be rigidly represented and objectified, while still making her presence felt. On another level, she explored the notion of dissolving the distinction made between waking life (the automatic-booth photographs) and dream life (fragmented, disconnected images). She drew an analogy between this fragmented use of the machine and the irrational disconnected imagery we experience in dreams, where suddenly we see ourselves from the back.[7] Initially she refrained from using her head and shoulders in the traditional portraiture format; later, through the inclusion of head and

shoulders coupled with her eyes kept noticably and tightly shut, she subverted and defiantly rejected the viewer's gaze.

In these works, Hiller not only wanted to assert herself as subject and signifier of her own experience but also wished to reveal her inner self. This again raised possible problems, for how can one present or define oneself, particularly on camera, without producing oneself as, or reducing oneself to a fixed representation which delimits one's identity? One way in which Hiller tackled this problem was through her choice of titles, such as Midnight, Baker Street (1982) (see ill. 10) and Sometimes I think I'm a verb instead of a pronoun (1982) (see ill. 11). The former derived its name from the place where the subject, Hiller, was at the particular time these photographs were taken. This title through its reference to time (midnight), obviously described something temporary, and therefore was not static and rigidifying. The word "midnight" also has connotations of uncertainty, darkness and change. However, Hiller was far from promoting any essentialist theory which equates woman with nature but as the artist said, "I want to show how one can claim a position of speaking from the side of darkness, the side of the unknown, while not reducing oneself to darkness and the unknowable ...".[8] In using this title, Hiller refused to catagorise or delimit her own possibilities through a fixed definition. The latter title, Sometimes I think I'm a verb instead of a pronoun, indicated something active, moving and "doing" as opposed to something passive, inanimate and "done to". The device of these titles was strengthened by her use of automatic script which she has been investigating and developing since the early seventies and which will be discussed in the final chapter.

In Midnight, Baker Street, Hiller superimposed her script over the image of her face. On one level, this created a sense of action and movement within the photograph, since the script was lively in style and the

Chapter III

Footnotes

[1] Susan Hiller in interview with Margaret Downey, Audio-tape
See Appendix p.55

[2] Susan Hiller, "Sacred Circles : 2000 years of North American Indian Art"
Studio International
(January-February, 1977), pp.56-58.

[3] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, Framing Feminism, p. 283.

[4] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, The Muse My Sister, p. 23.

[5] Susan Hiller, "Ten Months",
3 Block (1980), pp. 28 and 29.

[6] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, The Muse My Sister, p. 31.

[7] Ibid, p. 25.

[8] Ibid, p. 26.

handpainted colours of blue and orange were vibrant in contrast to the usual black and white prints from photo-booths. Also, the script hid her face which prevented viewers from seeing her as she was from "outside". On another level the script worked as a pun in the sense that Hiller was writing her own "story" and using her own text to express herself. The word "automatic" in this context also created a clever contradiction. Automatic photo-booths are thus named because they are instant, mechanical and objective producers of images. Yet "automatic" when applied to writing, suggests something subjective and spontaneous. In this way questions were raised as to the truth of the saying, "the camera never lies".

One of the points that has arisen repeatedly in the work discussed in this chapter and to some extent in the previous chapter, is the need to broaden the perimeters of our culture in order to discover means by which women can express themselves and their repressed or ignored desires, which stem from their own personal experience. Hiller has explored and continues to explore this need, uncovering alternatives already touched on in relation to her Photomat Portraits, through her use of automatic writing.

Chapter IV

Language came under the scrutiny of many artists during the seventies at a time when new avenues were being explored and new theories being formed through the analysis of the semiotic relationship between language and reality. It became clear that there are strong links between social discourse and dominant ideologies which are, of course, patriarchal.

This is something which Hiller has been investigating from very early on in her career as an artist. As said earlier, Hiller came to see that patriarchy affected not only language and the word but also cultural artefacts embedded in our society. The latter are defined, as is language, in patriarchal terms. She came to understand that in this way women have been rendered voiceless, since they cannot effectively use signs or language which rely so heavily on the rational or logical and whose structures ignore or exclude aspects of women's experience. It is when contradictions arise from their own experience within the accepted structure of patriarchal social discourse that women are denied an identity and thus become an absence.

Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist and early Structuralist, born in Geneva in 1857, saw the linguistic sign as being differential in nature, in the sense that a sign is what it is by virtue of what it is not (a simplistic example being that a chair is a chair partly because it is not a stool). In this way, he saw that the value and meaning of a sign depended upon the relationship it had with other signs. Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher and early Post-Structuralist has extended this notion. He advocates that each sign has a "trace" of other signs (this "trace" being something which cannot be pinpointed, as such, but which is rather, as Derrida suggests, something which is inherent in "signhood") and can only exist because of this. It is not a complete entity in itself. Therefore, for something to be present, there must always be the possibility of its not being present. A presence cannot exist independently but only by containing a "trace" of absence.

This is the line of thought Hiller adheres to when investigating cultural artefacts, which she reads as signs in a text (culture). In doing so, she is not only interested in reading and drawing from them meaning which exposes patriarchy but also in revealing their capacity to speak of women's absence and female desire. For Hiller her automatic writing is a metaphor or symbol for this absent presence, "this 'writing' is a way for me to speak my desire for utterance without being affected by the language of the other, and the language of the law...".[1]

Automatism may be said to find a tenuous predecessor in biblical times when Daniel interpreted unintelligible signs written on the wall by a mysterious hand at King Belshazzar's feast. (In relation to this story, Hiller made a piece which will be discussed further on). The practice of speaking in tongues, which has religious origins, is a form of automatism, as is the practice of some mediums who, in allowing themselves to become mediators between spirits "from the other side" and perhaps, their living relatives, have written messages over which, they believe, they have no control, since they are merely acting as tools for the dead spirits. W.B. Yeats was sufficiently interested in the occult and other such fringe practices to encourage George Hyde-Lees, his wife, to practice automatic writing. However, André Breton, a surrealist poet and founder member of the Surrealist Movement has, in his essay, "The Automatic Message", dismissed this use of automatism in no uncertain terms:

> "There is not much to be said of these productions, generally tainted by the unsound hypothesis that there pre-exists the hope of obtaining a communication with the "Beyond"... these products have in common only their borrowed grandiloquence and an astonishing response to naïvete".[2]

Hiller, though she might not put it quite like that, would be in agreement with Breton's assertion that the use of automatism in such a way is particularly futile and that the reputation it has acquired, as a result, is one that has been damaging. There is the common belief that automatism is something which is divinely inspired and for which one has to have a particularly special gift, so that it is generally viewed as something strange, esoteric and, perhaps, potentially dangerous. Hiller maintains that nothing is further from the truth. Automatism is essentially related to subjectivity and it is through the misinformed placing of the onus on some unknown third party that it has become such a fringe practice. Hiller believes that anyone can practice automatism or automatic writing simply by writing absent-mindedly or, indeed, "mindlessly", while watching television, for example.

Breton and the surrealists practicised automatism as a means to create a direct link between the conscious and the unconscious. They believed that, through an involvement with the automatic or spontaneous gestural mark or utterance, they could bypass conscious thought and thus reach into or tap their innermost selves. In doing so they sought to break down cultural distinctions between, on the one hand, inner states and dream life and, on the other hand, conscious reality and waking life, distinctions which they believed, as does Hiller, to be false and limiting. Much of the early automatic script they produced was collective and anonymous. Because they advocated that automatism could be produced by absolutely anybody, they felt that through its common production, notions of individual authorship could be destroyed. (The problem arising from this in relation to women, was dealt with in the last chapter). In this way, they sought to bridge the gap between Marxism and psychoanalysis, thereby merging the individual and the social. They also sought to reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary or latent meaning in the commonplace, which revelation they referred to as "le merveilleux".

Hiller respects many of the surrealists' intentions but feels they have been subsequently misunderstood and misinterpreted. She believes that much of the work, particularly painting, produced by the surrealists has ultimately failed, since its attractive formal qualities have become an accepted style. This serves only to cloud their initial aims, one being, Hiller says, the "socially-motivated investigation of mark making".[3] Her interest in the gestural mark has extended into American Abstract Expressionism. She points out that certain marks or signs crop up again and again in the work of many abstract painters but that these marks are not seen as scripts in themselves or as signifiers without signifieds. She says:

> "I think there is a particular appeal that the calligraphic has that comes about because the kind of ongoingness of the marks relates to body feelings, something like breathing or walking... it has a sort of flow to it which in a sense represents the flow of life".[4]

She suggests that once examined, one can see that this flow has a very structured quality.

Hiller has continued to explore in her work the admirable intentions and concerns of the surrealists. There were, however, contradictions in what they were trying to do. Although they believed that, through automatism and other such practices, they could move towards a time and place where the shackles and burdens of Western civilisation could be broken down and destroyed, they were in reality reinforcing, with vigour, one particular aspect of this civilisation which has been a prevalent and continuing problem within the patriarchal structure. This, of course, is the subordinate placing of women in our society. The surrealists looked upon "woman" as muse and source of inspiration for their own creativity and, though they

believed themselves to be endowing her with a particularly "noble" status, they were reinforcing the notion of woman as passive tool to be exploited for male ends. This view of her status embodied a contradiction and deprived women of their autonomy. The surrealists were in constant search of women who would best complement the surrealists' own sense of identity, and reinforced the notion of the desirable in their limiting and binary stereotyping of women: virgin, child and "femme-enfant"; erotic object, spirited sex-kitten and "femme-fatale". These roles, obviously, did not include the space for women's self-exploration or potential change and growth but simply aided in the completion of the cycle of male creativity.

What Hiller has done in her own work is to change this positioning, without merely using a process of conversion which relies on some form of female centrality. Where, in the surrealist tradition, the woman or muse was the subject-matter and object of desire, in Hiller's work she has become the signifier and expresses her own desire.

Hiller's scripts are, in fact, paradoxical; they emphasise language both as a vehicle for communication and as an unknowable, ambivalent domain. Through the scripts she enables us to look at language from a new perspective; they give us a glimpse beyond what we know, beyond the seeming coherence and order which structures our society and our culture, which would otherwise be limiting and exclusive. The scripts give us a chance to understand that this seeming rationality is something which is there to avoid accepting the presence of that which cannot be literally or rationally understood or comprehended. Hiller is not asking us to decipher her "nonsensical" marks or to try to grasp them (though she believes that they are the making of a new language which is rooted in her personal history and experience), because they cannot be grasped and they do not signify anything in a literal sense. She is aware that to try to assimilate the new (her script) with the old ("rational" discourse) will only serve to "destroy

its ability to intervene and change the system we live under".[5] It is in this way that her scripts become an effective and powerful symbol of female speech, deriving their subversive character from their marginality and unintelligibility.

Hiller's first involvement with automatism occurred in May 1972, while she was staying in a village called Loupien, near Sête in France, where she had been carrying out a group investigation into the origins of images and ideas in a project called Draw Together. One evening she picked up a pencil and began to make random and arbitrary marks on paper. She said that initially the script comprised unintelligible marks that a child might make.[6] Soon, however, coherent words began to appear and she began to produce pages of text in a way that seemed to be beyond her control or which she seemed to be distanced from. She felt that she could have written on interminably. The resulting script was shown in 1973 after which it got lost for some time, but having been found in 1979, it was exhibited as a wall-piece in a crucifix format, and also produced in book form with a commentary by Hiller. The piece, or script, was called Sisters of Menon, (see ill. 12) since this was the name "they" inscribed.

> "Who is this one/I am this one/Menon is....
> This one/you are this one....I am your sister.... We three are your sister...".[7]

"Menon" can be read as an anagram for "nomen" (name), also for "no men" which was written when David Coxhead tried to be a transmitter. The "sisters" spoke collectively and as an individual, which Hiller saw as an important and crucial variation of Oedipus's question, "Who am I?". Whereas Oedipus was referring to himself as "I", the "sisters" referred to themselves both as "I" and "We". In this way the notion of the self as a single, unified and unitary entity was eroded and the self and the social overlapped. This is something Hiller went on to explore in more concrete terms

in projects such as Dream Mapping, discussed in the second chapter. This first experience of automatic writing led her to understand and view identity in a different way, "my 'self' is a locus for thoughts, feelings, sensations, but not an impermeable corporeal boundary.... (This does not mean I do not accept responsibility for the transmission and presentation of this material)".[8]

Sisters of Menon also brought to her mind the fact that the use of automatism and other such fringe practices is seen in a different light depending on the gender of the user. When used by women it is aligned with madness, mediumship and the uncontrollable; however, when used by men it tends to be aligned with art (as in Surrealism) and science (as in parapsychology).

In a piece called Elan (1982-83) (see ill. 13) Hiller counterposed these two opposing approaches to or locations for automatism. This piece consisted of a large wall-piece, where photographs bearing white automatic script on a black background were mounted in such a way that there remained a large blank space at the centre, which extended out in a cruciform style and divided the photographs into four groups. Nearby, loudspeakers relayed a soundtrack which alternated between Hiller's "nonsensical" singing or chanting and extracts from the well-known Raudive tapes.

Konstantin Raudive, a Latvian psychologist, had claimed in the sixties that he had captured human voices from the past by leaving a blank tape running in a recorder in a silent and empty room. When played back at an amplified pitch, strange scratchy voices could be distinguished, among them, Raudive claimed, those of the dead and famous such as Churchill and Mayakovsy. On these tapes Raudive later included a woman's voice, repeating and clarifying what the "dead" had said. Thus they were presented to the public with a seemingly rational translation.

In Elan, extracts from the Raudive tapes alternated with Hiller's pre-verbal-type singing which had a calming flow. Its unintelligible and primitive quality sounded as though she was chanting in some remaindered language or one which we, as yet, have no access to. Yet it had a resonance which evoked a response, though not on an intellectual level. In this way, its communicative capacity did not require a literal translation or explanation. Its undemanding presence, which made no attempt at self-justification or rationalisation, contrasted strongly with the Raudive recordings which, in that setting, seemed far-fetched and verging on the ridiculous. Guy Brett has said, "for all its outlandishness the experiment reproduces an idea of the dead as culture-bound as our idea of the living!".[9]

Though Hiller made no comment or judgement, the implication of Elan was that not everything needs to be or can be rationalized. We communicate on many levels, intellectually, emotionally, consciously, unconsciously and, therefore, to subject everything to analysis, to try to make coherent that which is incoherent, only cuts us off from aspects of ourselves which, in the long run, limit our communicative capacities.

Through this piece, Hiller has also alluded to and questioned the efficacy of technology - in Elan's case a tape recorder - which is now generally accepted "as the new magic"[10] and which is commonly believed to be a means of objective verification. This also links in with the pun on the idea of "automatic".

Elan went as far as to challenge our notions of life and death and the distinctions we make between the two states. Hiller was suggesting that these boundaries are, in fact, arbitrary. Listening to the Raudive tape, one wondered where these voices did come from. Were they a pure coincidence? Could we actually say that these recordings were fanciful rubbish? Didn't the fact that these voices

were distinguishable and interpreted suggest that this kind of translation takes place in other instances and that there seems to be a need for us to keep the dead alive? Even in situations less dramatic than the Raudive recordings, we keep dead loved ones alive in our memories as illustrated by Hiller's Monument. Our inability to "let people go", again brings to mind the notion of identity. We need others to reaffirm our identity; they are, in fact, part of our personality. After all, without others where do we stand? Who are we? Elan's investigative questioning succeeded in momentarily breaking down the temporal order. It could be seen that we speak to the past and the future and we enable it to speak through us. However, our need to rationalise and catagorise events and states has driven us to repress the incoherent and the inexplicable. As a result we try to distance ourselves from what we do not understand or cannot intellectually grasp and thus place the onus elsewhere. Hiller's suggestion was that abnormal phenomena are manifestations of the collective unconscious; there are no real divisions.

The script on the walls was, like the chanting, unintelligble except for one coherent word - Elan - which means "ongoing energetic principle" and which was used as the title of the piece. The indecipherable script had quite an ordered structure, which suggested that there was meaning, though it could not be literally interpreted. The photographs were, in fact, negatives, so that the writing appeared as light and positive, suggesting illumination and enlightenment. This idea was echoed in the blank space created by the formation of the photographs, which could also be seen as a "positive gap". This recalled Derrida's notion that wherever there is a presence there is also an absence which thus becomes a presence in itself. This space in Elan did not evoke a response but rather worked as a screen on to which the viewer could project his or her own image. It became a dream screen, as the surrealists had defined it. This was also the case in Hiller's photomat portraits, where her image became a dream screen on to which

the script was projected, whereby she became a focus for possibilities.

Elan, in its refusal to define itself and to answer the questions it had raised, could, ironically, be seen as an answer in that it opened up possibilities and potential which are normally hidden and marginalised.

Hiller took points raised in Elan and explored them further in a video installation entitled Belshazzar's Feast/The Writing on Your Wall (1983-84) (see ill. 14). Although the extracts from the Raudive recordings seemed far-fetched and rather futile attempts at analysis, they could also be seen as an unusual example of an attempt to make sense of the incoherent, on a creative level, in an effort to make sense of our culture. The same could be said of people whose stories of strange supernatural experiences have occasionally been reported in newspapers. Hiller had, over a period of time, collected various newspaper clippings which related the experiences of people who claimed they saw ghostly images appear on their television screens at night, when transmission was over. Although Hiller did not believe that these images were literally ghosts, she did believe that those who saw them were sincere. Instead of dismissing them as ridiculous, she viewed these odd "visions" as the result of people's unconscious and creative rebellion against the rigid structures of our "rational" culture. She feels that incoherence is an area of experience which is universal, yet because our culture has refused to recognise it, it has become marginalised or repressed. Therefore, when such insights or manifestations rise to the surface of our consciousness we deny responsibility, placing it on some unknown third party, which, in the above case, took the form of ghosts.

These newspaper clippings were the basis of the installation of Belshazzar's Feast which comprised a video of a bonfire, filmed on super-eight film on Guy Fawkes' night, with a soundtrack of Hiller's pre-verbal singing and

relating these ghost stories along with the voice of her son who, having seen reproductions of Rembrandt's depiction of the feast, tried to recall it from memory. Around the video screen was a series of Hiller's photo-booth self-portraits.

The biblical story of Belshazzar's Feast is one of retribution. It recalls a banquet held by King Belshazzar during which he and his friends praised gods made from gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. As they revelled, a human hand appeared writing some mysterious words on the wall - MENE MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. The king was terrified and sent for his soothsayers, promising riches and power to the one who could interpret the strange signs. None of them was able to decipher the marks and eventually the prophet Daniel was called in. He, by then an old man, was able to interpret the script, telling the king that he had been weighed by God and found wanting and, as punishment for his life of corruption and decadence, he would lose his kingdom to the Medes and Persians. That night the king was killed and the kingdom was seized; the prophecy had come true.[11]

Although the emphasis in the legend of King Belshazzar's Feast is on retribution, Hiller was not suggesting that all those who ignored or denied their own experiences of incoherence would be struck down, but rather that these insights could not be fully quelled or repressed.

> "Like the language of the flames ('tongues of fire'), and the automatic scripts ('writing on the wall'), these incoherent insights... stand as signs of... that which is always and already destroying the kingdom of law".[12]

The bonfire in Hiller's piece brought to mind the traditional hearth in front of which people used to sit and tell stories, allowing their dreams to be shaped by the flickering flames. Nowadays the hearth has been replaced by

the television which, as in the case of the ghost-watchers previously mentioned, serves as a vehicle of reverie. A friend of mine who saw the piece in the Living Art exhibition in Dublin in 1985, had been indignant that Hiller should tell the viewers, before entering the installation, what she hoped they would see and experience. In this frame of mind, he watched the video and listened to the sound-track, determined not to succumb to Hiller's suggestions. He was both astonished and horrified to see ghoulish faces dance and swim among the flames!

In this piece, Hiller tried to create a situation where a group of people would allow themselves to be carried off into their own dreams and fantasies. She wanted to enable the viewers to retrieve those aspects of themselves which are universal, and can thus be experienced collectively, and "to insert the notions of ourselves as the active makers rather than the passive recipients of our culture".[13] Belshazzar's Feast, although simple in formal terms, contained layers of meaning and many levels of possible interpretation. In bringing the absent and the marginalised to the foreground in a way that reaffirmed their definite presence, she accommodated our different levels of consciousness in a way that can be seen as liberating.

Indeed, Hiller's automatic script has become the predominant element in her work in recent years. Latterly she has been working on and developing her "wallpaper" pieces (see ills. 15, 16 and 17) including them in installations or allowing them to work independently in picture format. The process involved in these works is of great importance. The scripts are originally drawn by Hiller and then transferred to slides. Her next step is to project these slides on to a backdrop or background, which is always wallpaper depicting cultural stereotypes, ranging from Pierrots sitting wistfully on crescent moons to "he-men"-type heroes. With black or white household paint, she then paints around the automatic forms (script), which are the positive images on the slides. By this method she is not painting positive forms as such, but is rather

painting in their backgrounds. It is as the brush-strokes cover most of the wallpaper's surface that the automatic script appears as "visible negatives".

The wallpaper she chooses is designed for children's bedrooms, though she generally uses wallpaper whose images appeal to little boys, a choice which may well be rooted in her concern for her son Gabriel's growing up in this culture. Something so seemingly harmless and amusing has, because of its context, a great deal of power. The bedroom is the place where children live out their dreams and fantasies, where they allow their imaginations free rein. It is, in fact, their own personal world. This world of theirs is, to a large extent, a place where they are educated and socialised. As a result, their supposedly untrammelled imaginations are at the mercy of our mass culture. Through consumer goods, such as wallpaper, displaying society's sterotypes and "ideals", this culture controls and delimits the minds and the choices of children. What Hiller does by superimposing her "absent" scripts on to the commercial and repetitive images of happy bombers and relentlessly willing heroes is, symbolically, to etch into culture (wallpaper) underlying desires which have always been present though repressed and rendered invisible. Through these lively and "positive" negative spaces, we can see the mindlessly mundane imagery underneath for what it is. As Lucy Lippard has said, "Hiller's interest in popular culture is redemptive rather than populist".[14] In working her script over children's wallpaper, she metaphorically opens our eyes to a potentially different future where social discourse would no longer be delimiting and exclusive.

Hiller is almost entirely convinced that her script is the making of a new language. She believes that she has accumulated a vocabulary or alphabet which has evolved over the years. One of her reasons for insisting on this belief is that from time to time the script is subject to rupture and change, therefore dispelling the suspicion that is the result of habit, while also enabling it, as language, to

remain new, unfixed and future-oriented. I asked her if she believed her script would ever be understood, to which she replied that she did.[15] At first this seems contradictory in that if it is ever understood, it will lose its metaphoric power and its ability to intervene and change established codes and structures. However, what Hiller is, in fact, suggesting is, that if we do allow ourselves to be open to change (which would be constant and moving) and to different levels of our own consciousness, "meaning" as such will also change. Old structures will be replaced while, at the same time, the new ones will never become fixed. Communication, as already discussed, is not dependent on literal translation but can work on an irrational and incoherent level. Hiller believes that this form of communication already exists, but surfaces in a warped form because it has been blocked by the primacy of the word in our society. If ever the day arrives when we can communicate in this way, the metaphoric will become the new and constantly shifting reality. If this seems utopian, Hiller's art, at the very least, outlines the possibility of a gradual change in this direction.

Chapter IV

Footnotes

[1] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, The Muse My Sister, P.19.

[2] André Breton, What is Surrealism?; Selected Writings, P.104.

[3] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, The Muse My Sister, P.23.

[4] Susan Hiller in interview with Catherine Lacey, Belshazzar's Feast, P.12.

[5] Susan Hiller in interview with Rozsika Parker, The Muse My Sister, P.22.

[6] Susan Hiller, Sisters of Menon, P.1.

[7] Ibid, PP.3-6 and 11.

[8] Susan Hiller, Sisters of Menon, cited by Guy Brett, The Muse My Sister, P.14.

[9] Guy Brett, The Muse My Sister, P.14.

[10] Lucy Lippard, Out of Bounds, P.7.

[11] Old Testament, Daniel, Ch.5, V.24-28.

[12] Susan Hiller, Belshazzar's Feast, P.5.

[13] Susan Hiller in interview with Catherine Lacey, Belshazzar's Feast, P.15.

[14] Lucy Lippard, Out of Bounds, P.8.

[15] Susan Hiller in interview with Margaret Downey, Audio-tape,
See Appendix. P. 60

Conclusion

Conclusion

Hiller's work is all about uncertainty. In her art nothing is absolute or clear cut; what she proposes, of necessity, indicates constant change and flexibility. Not only is she marginalised by producing work with a feminist slant in the traditionally male domain of Fine Art, she also works with fringe material and subject-matter, which has predominantly been denied space in our culture and pushed to the margins as, for example, automatic writing which, in Hiller's work, stands as a very powerful metaphor for female speech and desire, and as a subversive language. Perhaps, most interestingly of all, Hiller risks the possibility of misinterpretation, where people, including other feminists, assume that she is identifying women with nature or aligning them with some form of mystical essence.

Hiller is not searching for or aspiring to a female centrality, but is drawing a comparison between aspects of our culture which have been continually overlooked, ignored or dismissed: the irrational and incoherent aspects of our experience and collectivity, and women who have been oppressed and denied a voice within patriarchy. In alluding to and drawing our attention to these comparisons through persistent investigation in her work, she consistently shatters established structures and (positively) fragments the conventional beliefs of our "rational" culture. In this way she provides us with an insight into a potential future where we can positively use our unfixed and fragmentary identities as a locus for possibilities.

One could draw a comparison between Hiller's investigation of language and communication in relation to the many themes in her work, and her technical approach to her art. Her varied use of materials and equipment does not rely solely on any one medium or department. Her work cannot be catagorized as purely sculpture, painting, drawing or photography, though she uses elements of all these (she

is also currently writing a book and is thinking about making a film). This could be seen to parallel her refusal to demarcate the "incoherent language" she is trying to reveal. However the ensuing result is not one of vague chaos but rather one of boundlessness and scope.

Appendix

Appendix

This interview is the result of a questionnaire which I sent to Susan Hiller, along with a blank tape. The artist kindly answered my questions on the 24th December, 1987. The interview has been edited only in so far as certain asides and two questions (which asked for specific information on two pieces of work which are not included in my thesis) have been omitted since they are not of direct relevance. The audio-tape containing Hiller's answers is available on request.

1) I have read that at the beginning of your career as an artist you painted. Could you tell me a bit about the work you produced then and why you stopped painting?

About my early painted works; these were in two series really. One, a very delicate, beautiful set of sewn canvases with a delicate modulation along one kind of set of colours. For example: a pink painting made of rectangular sections in various very pale shades of pink, all connected together by sewing. And I think in reference to that I was probably the first artist around who exhibited sewn canvases and I said at the time that I (this was in 1965-66 I think) was interested in sewing mainly because it was a very simple way of putting things together, and something that I had access to. I didn't have access to carpentry and so forth.

And then there was a collective piece called <u>The Handpainting Series</u>. That went on for a couple of months, six months, actually, in 1969. This involved inviting groups of people to collaboratively produce pictures, using only their handprints. The limitations being right hand or left hand, positive or negative prints, red or black paint only, on a white ground. I was thinking then of the origins of art in cave paintings, the earliest human representations being the handprint found all over the world and nobody knows whether the prints are of men or women because the hand is androgynous. And the idea that

intrigued me was this problem of making a mark. What mark one could produce that could be called, authentically one's own. And the handprint is on one level a complete identification since no two are alike. But the hand functions not just as a representation or as an identity but also as a symbol. So there are a number of levels in that and what I did was to choreograph or suggest patterns and behaviours at the end of which time people might be able to produce a print in relationship to other prints produced by other people, and a whole series of works were made. And subsequently I destroyed them. I have left from this period the photographs of the actual works and in fact two tiny little paintings which were kind of trials that I made myself with my own hands. I didn't document the making of the works, because I felt that would have falsified the situation and I didn't keep the works because it wasn't about that. These two series and a third series, I did exhibit in 1972 at what was then the experimental space in London called 'Garage Art'. That third series were (sic) very delicate minimalist works which I've subsequently recycled into a series of little sculptural objects called The Painting Blocks in which I've turned surface into mass and taken the works passed the normal point of completion, which is a thing I often do in my work.

2) You have said that American Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism have influenced you. In what way?

Yes. In so far as Abstract Expressionism intrigued and mystified me, because I could not, for the life of me, grasp how there could be form without a content and I wanted to know what the content of the marks was. Minimalism influenced me as a way of putting together objects which were very slightly different, one from the other, in a regular nonhierarchical order. And what I took from that was the ability to permutate cultural artefacts, as well as formal instances and I suppose the influence has been total and pervasive. Although I can't think that too many other artists would have taken what are seen as two opposed

tendencies in art history and brought them together, but I think I certainly have. In a sense, everything that has ever been seen and done influences you, so how these two major schools of art could not have influenced me, really, might have been another kind of question.

3) What are your views on the Surrealist tradition, particularly in relationship to women?

Well, I've talked about what seems important to me in the Surrealist tradition in the interview with Rozsika Parker in the Orchard Gallery publication and I think, also in the Tate Gallery publication on Belshazzar's feast. To go on to answer your question about Surrealism as regards women, in the Surrealist tradition the woman was the muse, the inspiration and also the subject-matter. Now, obviously I've reversed that. The title of my publication The Muse My Sister comes from the poem by Akhmatova, which you might want to look up to understand my paraphrase of her sentence, at least, as I know it in translation because I don't read Russian. The Muse My Sister, I thought was a very handy and resonant relocation of the muse as regards a woman artist.

4) Have you been influenced by any artist in particular?

Well, there's a new book coming out called Heroines, in which I participate and in the course of being interviewed for that book I talked about two kinds of artists that influenced me, mainly, I think, women writers; Gertrude Stein, Anais Nin, Djuna Barnes and Virginia Woolf influenced me deeply, in so far as they were able to articulate things that I wasn't able to put into words. But as far as visual artists goes (sic), the problem was that women artists were seen as followers of, or secondary to or not as significant as and so forth and so on. And this was, of course, deeply disturbing and undermining to the women of my generation who were struggling to produce first order practices. So in the rather long interview that I did for Heroines I've

managed to, I think, finally articulate a kind of respect and gratitude to several women artists; Louise Nevelson, Georgia O'Keeffe, Maya Daren, Maya Daren being a film maker, dancer, choreographer and ultimately anthropologist who wrote the greatest book on Patient Voodoo called The Voodoo Gods or Divine Horsemen, which is again something you might want to look up. Naturally, this influenced me because I had been an anthropologist at one point, and I had become an anthropologist because there were a great many women anthropologists and I felt I would follow in their footsteps, I suppose.

Georgia O'Keeffe was the most famous woman artist that I knew of and her sensual, sexual use of form and colour was something I admired tremendously when I was young, and I guess, something I've internalised, but, perhaps, not fully brought forward in my own work.

Louise Nevelson - a very, very important sculptor, who I feel has been disgracefully overlooked in recent years, because she was one of the first artists to articulate her position around appropriation. And what I mean by that is, she took already made, already manufactured units, bits of furniture and so forth and constructed out of them enormous new complexes of meaning. And I think she's been an enormous influence, not just on myself, but also on the British sculptors who know her work very well, although they would never acknowledge it, since they always give a male line up to justify their own positions. But certainly, she did have, in the sixties, major exhibitions in Europe which were seen by everyone and it is very, very extraordinary that she is not ever given the kind of credibility that, I feel, she deserves.

5) Whose work do you admire?

Well, those women and the work of many artists of the past, men and women. As far as contemporaries go it's very difficult for me to genuinely admire work that I feel

represents a kind of mistaken consciousness. And since my own work has existed over a number of years, kind of unrecognised in some ways, but certainly, I suppose objectively speaking, prior in time to a lot of other tendencies that have come about, I can't really say, other than in terms of vanity, I could name the names of artists whose work has been influenced by mine. And work which is very different from mine I would, of course, see as wrong, wrong-headed at least, in one way or another. I've said on a lot of occasions that it is really hard for artists, mature artists, to really use the word "admire" in regards to their contemporaries since we are all, in a sense, competing for cultural terrain and ground. But there are a number of artists whose work I feel a very strong respect for and I guess that would include, among others, Judy Chicago, May Stevens, Louise Bourgeois, Alice Aycock and so on. None of whom, I suppose, do work which is at all like mine, but I do admire them.

6) Could you tell me how Sisters of Menon came about?

If you look in my book entitled Sisters of Menon, the first two pages of that book and the last two pages consist of explanatory text which will give you the history of the piece.

7) Under what circumstances do you produce automatic writing?

Any circumstances at all. There's nothing in the least bit mysterious or trance-like about it. It simply has to do with the separation of consciousness, which one should learn the habit of, you can do very easily. If you want to try automatic writing for yourself, you can try it out by sitting comfortably in front of a T.V. set for example, writing with your left hand, or holding a pencil in your left hand if you are right handed or vice versa, and see what your hand can do while your mind is concentrating on something else. But I think you should look at the text in the Sisters of Menon book for details of that.

8) How do you prevent consciousness from invading your automatic writing? For example, how do you prevent certain signs from becoming habit, comfortable, or repetitive through familarity alone?

Well, I'm not sure if I do, to be perfectly honest. I think I have a vocabulary or at least an alphabet which permutates and repeats itself, this is why I've argued that it is a language. It may well be habit. From time to time there are abrupt changes of handwriting and/or signs and "letters". At one time in Sisters of Menon and various other pieces such as Mary Essene, Get William and so forth, I was producing quasi-coherent English scripts-cum-blank drawings that changes (sic) at a certain point into the kind of script that, I suppose, is what you're referring to, and I'm sure it will change again (sic).

9) In Out of Bounds by Lucy Lippard, you are quoted in 1983 as having said that you were "...practically at the point of claiming that my newer automatic works are a new language or are making one". You are also quoted in an interview with Rozsika Parker in The Muse My Sister as having said that you would "... like to see a full phonemic study someday". Do you believe that these signs can and will be deciphered, interpreted or understood?

I would say yes, the signs will someday be deciphered, interpreted or understood. At the moment we have a very crude notion of what art "means". Time, the passing of time enables work to be read differently. I'm sure my work will read differently in the future.

10) Do you see your automatic writing as equally metaphoric as it is a subversive language?

Yes.

11) I have listened to the soundtrack of Elan and found it wonderfully mesmerising (particularly your singing/keening).

a) How do you feel about using sound in your work, particularly your own voice?
b) Do you feel it has particular strength and meaning because you are a woman?

I am glad you like the piece. Sound - sound is very important in history of art. It has a particular strength and meaning because I am a woman, because I am interested in breaking coherence in order that new meanings can surface. But there are examples in modern art which, in fact, come from male voices, which have been very important to me. I'm thinking here of Antonin Artaud's poetry and tapes and Schwitters Sonata for Primeval Sound which, although produced in a very conscious way, does totally break down the normal phonemic and morphemic patterns of language as we know it, producing a sense of hilarious well-being, which is, I think, to some extent, what I've taken a lot further. You see the kind of exotic or far away or long ago quality in so-called nonsense sounds, takes us back to periods in our own unknown pasts, our infantile pasts if you like, where the sounds in the world have not yet become attached to specific meanings, where meaning is floating free, in a way. Julia Kristeva has written about this as the kind of "Pre-Oedipal phase" of the infant before it enters into language as a sex object. I think that is what my use of sounds and, also, signs in writing evokes in the individual viewer. This is precisely what interests me. It's why I often use shapes such as the drifting shapes in the Belshazzar's Feast piece which allowed the viewer to configure for herself or himself, a new set of images and meanings.

12) How do you feel about using personal imagery in your art, for example, idiosyncratic elements or autobiographical imagery, and the use of this kind of imagery in general?

I find them very interesting. I'm very committed to certain ideas about the use of personal imagery, I cannot

imagine how an artist could not be using personal imagery. And the kind of problem with your question is that, even the kind of ready-made, standardised units used, in let's say, heavy, metal, macho Minimalism that you could see in the Saatchi collection, is personal in so far as the artist has personally selected it, feels personally attracted to it, personally feels it carries a weight of meaning and so forth. I think that art is a person talking.

13) How concerned are you with the aesthetics of your work?

Well, I've said lots of times that I'm not interested in aesthetics, the aesthetics in various pieces of mine develop out of the process of making the work. I try to make the work as clear as possible and whatever aesthetic issues are presented, follow from that attempt to speak clearly, as it were.

14) In Out of Bounds Lucy Lippard says that you are uninterested in bringing issue-orientated politics directly into your art.

a) In works such as Home Truths would you agree that your work has become more overtly political?
b) What direction do you see your work going in relation to this?

Lucy and I have a longstanding argument which has been going on for about fifteen years. Yes, in the sense that she's articulating, I'm not interested in bringing issue-oriented politics directly into my art. To me, that would be journalistic; any issue that can be defined ahead of time is journalism. That doesn't mean that my work doesn't address issues.

Yes. In Home Truths my work is very political; it's not becoming more political, the sewn canvases of the sixties were political as well. I'm teasing you a bit because my work goes back and forth over various kinds of

approaches to so-called issues. If you ever come to London, you could get a chance, perhaps, to see a piece of mine called Saving and Spending, which is in the basement of the Gimpel Gallery, which has never been, for some reason, really written about or shown, although, I think it's a rather interesting piece of work based on children's colouring books and the relationship between the nuclear family and consumer economics. That piece is a very strong approach, I suppose, to some kind of issue definition. But the way I came to the issue was through the kind of art-related issues, if you like, that I saw in the images and in the process of children inscribing themselves into ideology through the use of certain comic books.

15) Why have you returned to painting?

No, I haven't returned to painting; I use paint. I've always used paint from time to time in various projects: the Fragments piece. I've used paint in relationship to all sorts of things. I'm not a painter, I'm an artist who uses painting or paint as a possible material etc. I think that that's the stage that art has got to. Any kind of discussion of painting as a primary issue in art history, at the moment, is very regressive and provincial, in my opinion.

16) In your more recent work your imagery seems to be becoming more simplified and direct. Would you agree with this observation? If so, why do you think this is the case?

My imagery is becoming more simplified, well, I don't know. Perhaps it's becoming clarified and, perhaps, the pieces are shorter, less discursive, with fewer units which might be a kind of positive simplification.

Well, I think as one gets older one becomes clearer.

17) What direction do you see your work going in the future?

This, I really could not answer. If I knew that, ahead of time, I would never have been the kind of artist I have been. I have always tried to act as though I were confident in the fact that I had nothing to lose, so that this negative position could be a positive value in the making of work and make it possible for me to feel absolutely free to produce works which might, when they first appear, look very different from other works that I'd done or seem to be about different things, but perhaps as we could agree, restrospectively, begin, really, to look very, very consistent indeed, since, of course, everyone always has a very limited range of what they are capable of saying. And in a sense everyone is saying the same thing over and over again. But I am, very consciously, not making decisions about the direction of future works, or the look of future works or whether they might be film, installations or videos or books. At the moment, I've been working for over a year on a book, a straight book on The Myth of Primitivism. I'm also thinking about a film. I've gone on with the wallpaper pieces and I've developed a new series of photo-pieces called Sunshine Alphabets and Moonlight Alphabets. No, I can't say for sure what I'll be doing in the future and I wouldn't want to say.

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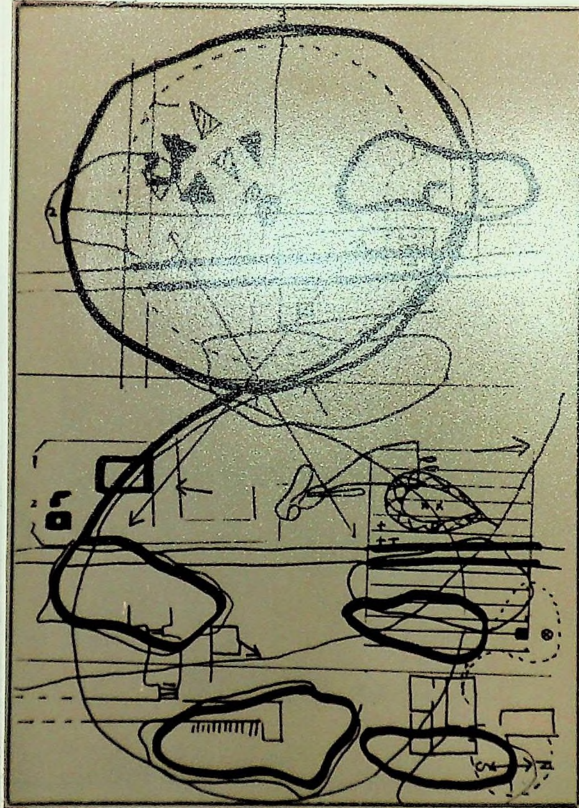
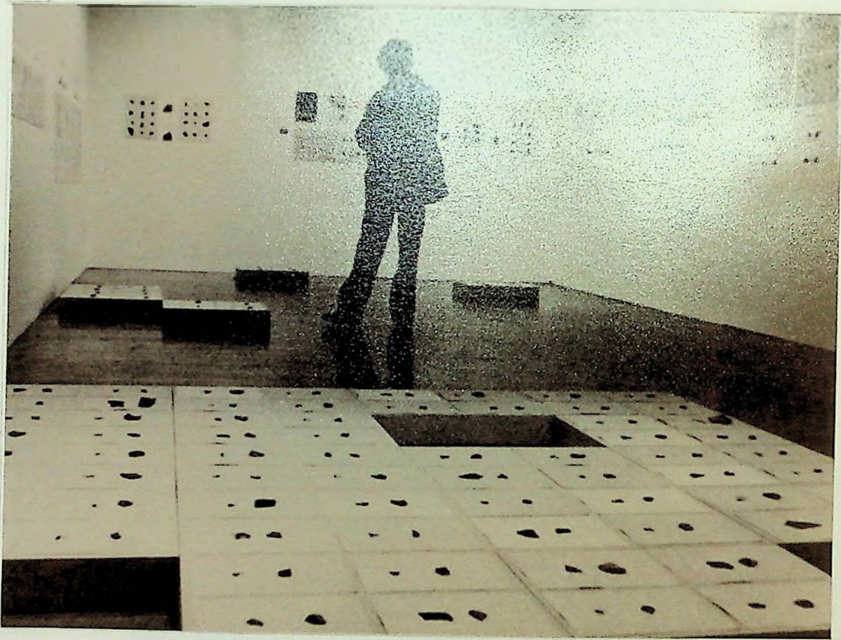
Illustrations

(ill. 1) Map from STREET CEREMONIES (1973)



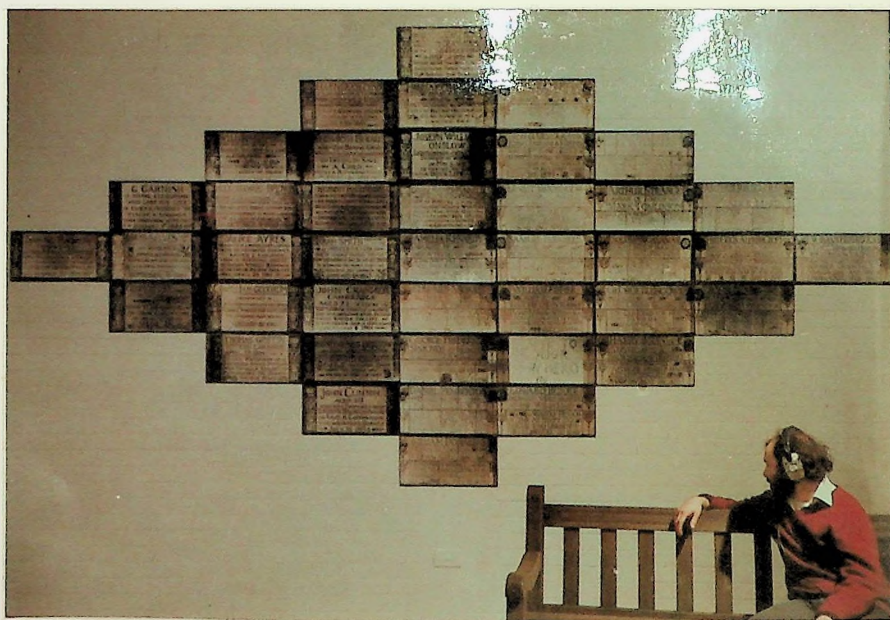
(ill. 2) Composite Map from <u>DREAM MAPPING</u> (1974)

(ill. 3) Panel from <u>DEDICATED TO UNKNOWN ARTISTS</u> (1976)



(ill. 4) <u>FRAGMENTS</u> (1978)

(ill. 5) Detail from <u>FRAGMENTS</u> (1978)



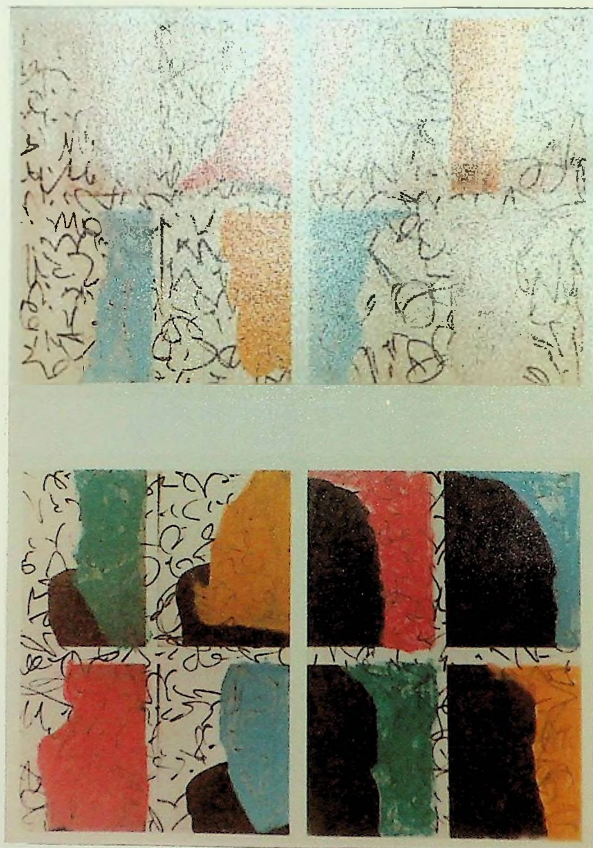
(ill. 6) <u>MONUMENT</u> (1980-81)

(ill. 7) Detail from TEN MONTHS (1977-79)

(ill. 8) PORTRAIT OF A MAN (1972)

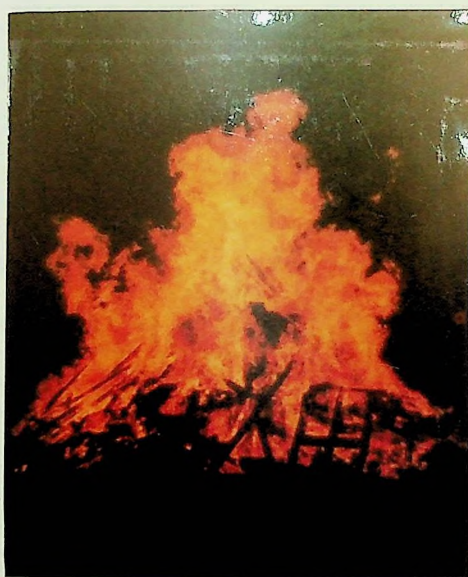
(ill. 9) PHOTOMAT PORTRAIT (1982)

(ill. 10) MIDNIGHT, BAKER STREET (1982)



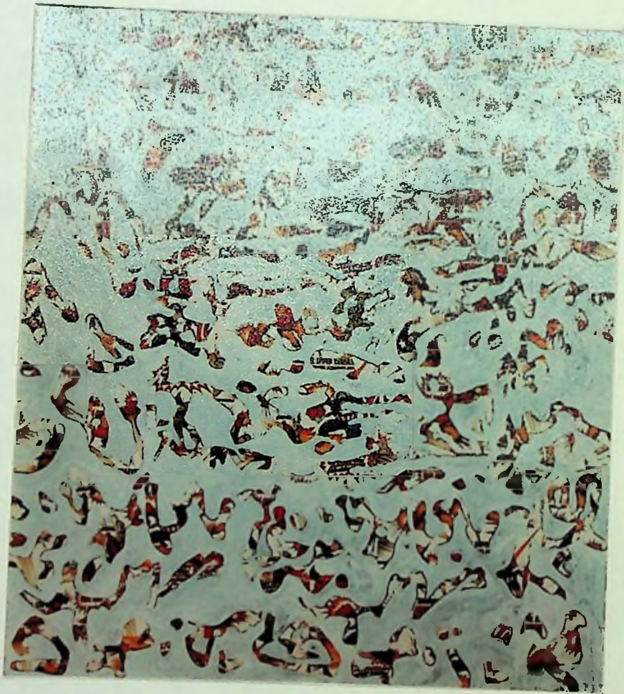
(ill. 11) SOMETIMES I THINK I'M A VERB INSTEAD OF A PRONOUN (1982)

(ill. 12) Detail from SISTERS OF MENON (1972)



(ill. 14) Still From the Video in KING BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST (1983-84)

(ill. 16) MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE (1986)



(ill. 17) <u>SECRET WARS</u> (1986)