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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
FINE ART ; SCULPTURE**

**REAPPROPRIATING GENDER
REPRESENTATION**

VICTOR BURGIN AND MARY KELLY

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION Page 5

CHAPTER 1

PART 1 : FEMINIST ART PRACTICE Page 6

PART 2 : PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE CONSTRUCTION
OF GENDER Page 9

CHAPTER 2 : OFFICE AT NIGHT Page 14

CHAPTER 3 : INTERIM Page 23

CHAPTER 4 : CONCLUSION Page 29

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ILLUSTRATIONS

- FIG A: Georgia O'Keeffe plate from The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago 1979
- FIG B: We Don't Need Another Hero: Barbara Kruger 1986
- FIG C: Office at Night: Edward Hopper 1940
- FIG D: Preparatory work for Office at Night 1985 - 1986
- FIG E: Office at Night: Victor Burgin 1986
- FIG F: Office at Night: Victor Burgin 1986
- FIG G: Office at Night: Victor Burgin 1986
- FIG H: "Extase" from "Corpus": Interim, Mary Kelly 1983 - 1990
- FIG I: "Pecunia": Interim, Mary Kelly 1983 - 1990
- FIG J: "Historia": Interim, Mary Kelly 1983 - 1990
- FIG K: "Potestas": Interim, Mary Kelly 1983 - 1990
- FIG L: "Documentation V; Fig 1a" from Post Partum Document, Mary Kelly 1973 - 1979
- FIG M: Zoo 1978: Victor Burgin 1978

INTRODUCTION

This thesis shall initially present feminist discourse and art practice as involving a multiplicity of aims and ideas. There will be a specific location of a strand of feminist artwork which tackles the notion of gender as being biologically determined, an attack which is animated by a belief that gender is constructed by cultural influences. "Femininity" can be understood in this context as a complicated entity which the patriarchal society demands in order to give masculinity meaning and strength. Psychoanalytic theory has provided a means for locating this construct and may ideally point to a means of deconstructing these categorisations. Freud's psycho-sexual theories involving the Oedipal and castration complexes shall be presented with reference to Lacan's relocation of those phenomena within the notion of the 'Symbolic'. Just as feminist psychoanalysis has utilised these concepts in the examination of gender construction the works of Victor Burgin and Mary Kelly are directly related to these theories as they utilise them to examine the constructs and reception of popular images. Through an examination of their work specifically focusing on one series by each artist, I will show how they successfully re-appropriate gender representation, subverting the traditional format within which "femininity" and "masculinity" are visualised. The thesis poses questions as to whether both artists remain equally gender critical being situated as they are within separate gender roles. Both their works are heavily reliant on theory, placing the spectator in a position where s/he must have some knowledge of the basis upon which the images were created in order to fully interact with the work. Bearing in mind that this kind of work is difficult to access, the thesis shall ask whether this format is necessary and appropriate in highlighting how representation perpetuates popular notions of gender.

Diversity is the appropriate word describing feminist art practice. There are no unifying aesthetic formal or hierarchy of concerns that can contain this category of work. Feminism is a politics not a methodology. Even within political discourse feminism embodies a complexity of different view points and aims. In visual art men and women's work alike may contain elements influenced by feminism. There are also male feminist artists who are specifically tackling the issues of "masculinity" and "femininity" as problematic patriarchal constructs. Psychoanalytic theory has provided a means for locating these constructs which is imperative in the work of Mary Kelly and Victor Burgin as they assess and re-appropriate the constructed gender roles within our culture.

It has been argued that in order for an artwork to be considered feminist it must be born from women's experience, though that in itself is not enough. Michèle Barrett in her essay **Feminism and the Definition of Cultural Politics**¹ comes to two conclusions on what constitutes a feminist work. Firstly that for art to be feminist women's experience of oppression must be taken to the level of engagement with cultural politics and secondly that this experience is the experience of women. Men may intellectualise and/or empathise with women but it is not their experience. This, she affirms does not exclude men or women from dealing with issues of gender and sexuality but rather suggests that both positions may inform feminism. This tendency to assert female experience as exclusive, totally disregards the proportion of males who experience patriarchal oppression on a similar level to that of the female especially when they are not conforming to their gender roles. Attitudes such as these can only serve to perpetuate the notion of women as separate and therefore secondary, and hinder the collaboration between male and female resistance to patriarchal authority. A similar essentialist notion is conveyed in Rita Felski's book: Beyond a Feminist Aesthetic as she talks of the 'Private' and 'Public' spheres of feminism. She states:

both politically and socially if women were to become



Georgia O'Keeffe

FIG A: Georgia O'Keeffe plate from The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago 1979

While feminist discourse originates from women's experiences of oppression and recognises their ultimate authority in speaking of its effects, feminism as a critique of values is also engaged in a more general and public process of revising or refuting male defined cultural and discursive frameworks.²

This public sphere that Felski takes into account is feminist political infiltration into society's frameworks such as education and employment and includes other anti-sexist discourses that have been set up specifically by men. Felski also discusses the 'partial' or 'counter public' sphere which embodies a feminist culture focusing specifically on experiences exclusive to women and on the positive differences of being biologically different to men. She views this process as being the decisive first step towards the public sphere. This separatist domain which has helped women to assert their identity as a group, has encouraged a multitude of feminist art work which attempts to reclaim a specifically female essence and celebrates the unification of all women through biology.

The work of **Judy Chicago**³ exemplifies the category of feminist art work, which attempts a reclamation of women's own desires and aspires towards a separatism. This kind of work often takes the form of celebration of the female body or attempts to rediscover womanhood through historical references. This may have been necessary for the Women's Movement in art for asserting a positive attitude to their sex, yet is a long way from the deconstruction of supposed "femininity" as it supports the idea of there being an essential "femaleness" which is inaccessible to the male. The oppressive nature of patriarchal society towards the female can only be challenged when the whole construction of this oppression is taken into consideration.

Another branch of feminist art work, which views our culture's accepted notions of gender as socially constructed, has emerged tackling set notions of "masculinity" and "femininity". The works of Barbara Kruger and Mary Kelly are identified with this tendency. Their work is based on a knowledge of how the



FIG B: We Don't Need Another Hero: Barbara Kruger 1986

categorisation of sexuality is perpetuated and they subvert this through attacking the major discourses which are part of its construction. The exploration and examination of the problematics of gendered sexuality hasn't been confined to female artists' work but has also been taken on by male contemporaries such as Victor Burgin and Ray Barrie. Specifically the works of Mary Kelly and Victor Burgin are based on an interest in psychoanalytic theory, which they employ to locate and critique western society's populist gender distinctions.

CHAPTER 1 PART 2 PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Contemporary psychoanalytic discourses of sexuality begin with Freud. Freud's account of the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology through the Oedipal and castration complexes has been used as a starting point in all theories on psycho-sexuality to follow. These complexes are a result of Western society's channelling of the individual psyche through the family. The child in each family has its primary and most intense relationship with its mother, therefore the mother becomes the child's first sexually desired object. Upon the child's realisation that he or she cannot have the mother, as she belongs to the father, a set of consequences occur which are specific to each sex. The little girl initially desires the mother but soon realises she cannot have her through physical "lack" since she does not possess the father's penis. Through her anger at her mother for creating her that way, as she recognises that the mother has the same physical lack, she shifts to a desire for the father, this desire being a desire to attain the penis. This penis envy begins the little girl's Oedipal stage. The little boy must end his desire for the mother under the threat of castration by the father. The father possesses the mother, while he is the sole retainer of the attributes of power. The visual signifier of this power is the penis. The boy is left with a feeling that his sexual impulses towards his mother are wrong because forbidden. He is forced to repress his feelings and so end his Oedipal phase and begin an identification with the father. The father of the Oedipal matrix is not just or even the biological father; he is the symbol of patriarchal authority and hence of all social authority within patriarchy. And so the Oedipus complex defines the roles of male and female. The symbolic castration of the male and the literal castration of the female mould the traits of "masculinity" and "femininity". As the boy must reject the female and suppress his feelings he learns to speak the language of domination to hide his fear. The female in accepting her position of never attaining phallic control through her physical lack, internalises the trait of passivity. Freud sees this result as how innate physical

differences should be valued yet continues to cite the constructs of "masculinity" and "femininity" as sociological. He concluded that female penis envy was replaced by the desire to have a child which would give the woman a source of phallic power. Lacan's re-reading of Freud attributes the Oedipus complex within the discourses of language placing the phenomenon within cultural experiences rather than biological, a point which feminist theory has availed of in dealing directly with a critique of patriarchal culture.

The value of psychoanalysis, for feminism and any other political movement, lies in its ability to provide an account of subjectivity which links the external structures of the social world with the internal world of each individual. Using the work of Lacan as a starting point, feminist theory has been able to assert crucial arguments concerning the impact of ideology and social structure on sexuality. Lacan, whose theoretical basis was in philosophy, linguistics and cultural studies introduced the notions of the 'Symbolic'. The 'Symbolic' is a set of meanings that define culture and are embedded in all language systems. It represents the phallic order, as Lacan stated, the Law of the Father. The meaning one attains from the language systems according to Lacan is not from one's own experience but from pre-determined meaning. The child's entry into language systems begins the Oedipal stage as it is then that s/he recognises the male as having the phallic power. The penis envy and castration complexes are seen as symbolic as both have more to do with attaining power rather than pure concentration on the physical penis. Lacan cites this literal or symbolic loss as the moment of 'humanisation' of the child in the patriarchal world, creating a sexual division which forces each to take up a position of either "male" or "female". A sexual relationship therefore becomes the relationship between divided entities. His theories became problematic for feminism when he concluded that 'culture' can only be male and that the 'Symbolic' is always patriarchal by definition. This excludes women from becoming active negotiators of the 'Symbolic' and supposes that matriarchy is excluded from 'culture'. Hélène Cixious argues that Lacan is

tied, like Freud, to an account of gender based on vision due to the centrality this gives to the castration complex and the role of the phallus describing it as: 'a voyeur's theory'.⁴ The fantasy of the phallus as the phenomenon of desire and the attainable instance of power is according to Cixious perpetuated in the imaginary by its absorption as a visual image. This results in all sexuality becoming masculine articulated only in the presence or absence of the female vaginal organ. Julia Kristeva examines Lacan's work with attention to the 'Symbolic'. She accepts the phallic order of language systems as necessary in creating divisions between mother and child as it gives the child a sense of itself in relation to the power of society. Yet Kristeva denies that the phallic attributes of language are necessarily male, that they are equally available to women. She talks about the 'semiotic' as a possible way to avail of this, the semiotic being the aspects of language systems that are not simply concerned with representation.

The semiotic is a more immediate expression of the drives and is linked to the bodily contact with the mother before the paternal order of language comes to separate subject from mother the semiotic is always traversing language, always a bodily presence disruptive to the sublimated symbolic order.⁵

She mentions that the semiotic has its clearest expression in certain forms of art. Kristeva regards femininity as representative of potentials that lie within every individual, that people of either gender can be feminised in a 'revolutionary' fashion. Her assertion of the possibilities of re-coding language discourses has encouraged the work of Mary Kelly. Kelly subverts traditional language structures by introducing alternative modes of representation through them.

This displaces the viewer into a realisation of how these language discourses are normally constructed. She has therefore then placed these systems under her (female) control.

CHAPTER 1

FOOTNOTES

1. Published by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollack in Framing Feminism, London, Pandora 1987
2. Rita Felski - "Politics, Aesthetics and the Feminist Public Sphere", Felski Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, U.K. Hutchinson Rachius 1989, pg 167
3. Judy Chicago, The Dinner Party, New York, Anchor Books, 1979
4. Hélène Cixious quoted by Stephen Frosch in The Politics of Psychoanalysis, London Macmillan 1987, pg 196
5. Ibid ; Julia Kristeva, pg 205

Within Lacan's theory of the 'Symbolic', language defines and relates directly to patriarchal culture.¹ The deconstruction of the traditional modes of practice and reception of visual art can therefore set up a direct criticism of this culture. Victor Burgin in his essay "Tea with Madeline"², presents a direct critique of the art object as we know it. He describes the status of painting, for example, as being a form of market fetishism in a society which is essentially phallogentric. He therefore advocates investigation of the politics of representation in order to restructure the phallogentric dominance in visual language. He recognises that images in themselves are signifiers and can only become oppressive through social reception of them. Burgin's format lies between his art theory and his visual work. Neither his text or images are simplified ends of his overall theory but both are on-going processes which are closely linked:

The gallery has become the place where I can make a more complex text, a text which is ultimately bound up with my theoretical work, but which is freed from the imperative to teach.³

He no longer views visual artistic practice as just a form of communication but as a system which can open many discourses to questioning. He concludes that an attempt to decipher such work is 'dumb consumerism'⁴ His conceptually based works which span from the early seventies have constantly rejected the linguistic fallacy that there is a single language of art and a multitude of private languages within this. Since 1986 his formal approach has switched from photo-text images, to images containing photo references, juxtaposed with some aspiration to an unambiguous visual symbol. This format attests to an interest in undermining the concept of images as mystical signifiers of what cannot be articulated in speech. This form of questioning first became apparent in his work Office at Night, 1986 which was produced in conjunction with his book Between.



FIG C: Office at Night: Edward Hopper 1940

Office at Night deals with an Edward Hopper painting of the same name, from the 1940s. In re-appropriating this image Burgin questions the fabric of the discourse of visual art being part of the 'Symbolic' system which represents and perpetuates patriarchal order. Burgin proposes the original painting as a mise-en-scène of the conflict of 'Desire' and 'Law'. Freud cited 'Desire' as the unconscious impulses of sexuality and aggression which are repressed by 'Law' ; society's manipulation of these impulses.

It's impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction of powerful instincts.⁵

Office at Night presents the fictional couple which are pictured in the work, as an iconogram representing all such couples. The painting stabilises the potential erotic act that "working late at the office" supposes by providing a moral solution to the problem. The composition of the work ensures that the woman is the focal point of the spectator's gaze. Her body is twisted to show side and front profile as she is clad in a dress that clings like latex. Her gaze is ambiguous, she may be gazing downwards with modesty or at the male boss who is situated in the foreground of the image, seated behind a desk staring at a rigid piece of paper. His seemingly unvoyeuristic position leaves him as the innocent party if anything forbidden should happen. Burgin manipulates this image to dislocate the spectator/voyeur's position in a deconstructive complex and anti narrative presentation.

Office at Night Burgin 1986, is made up of seven panels with three sections to each panel. Each complete image is made up of a photo reference to the original Hopper painting, a panel of flat colour either red, blue or yellow and pictogram images. The coloured section in each panel is a reference to the ideology of the **Bauhaus**⁶ where it was believed that certain colours assign specific and absolute meaning which orientate the viewer, as contemporary office coding attempts to do. The photo references to the original image isolate the woman, denying the narrative

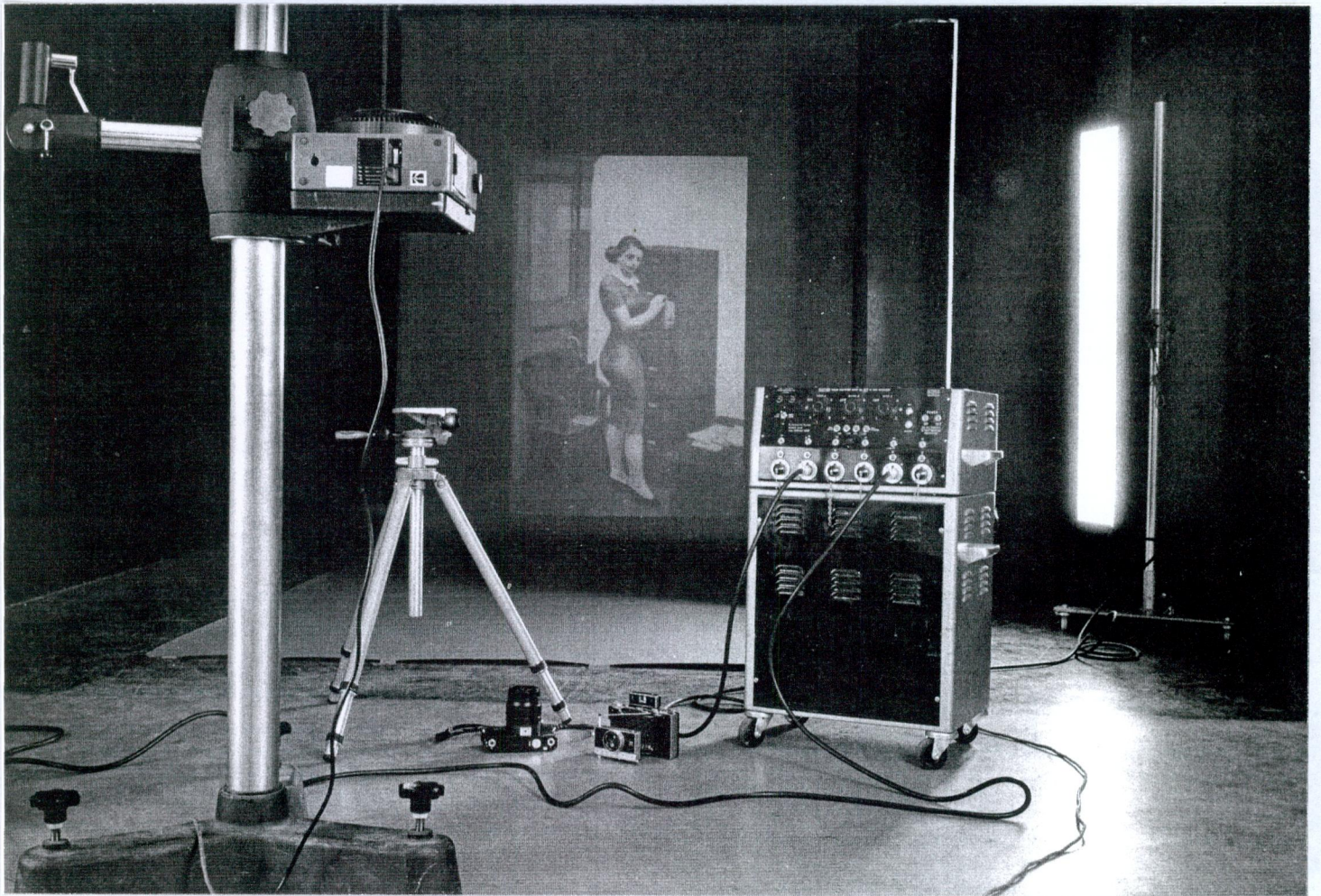


FIG D: Preparatory work for Office at Night 1985 - 1986

Hopper created and places her in a variety of positions relevant to the original such as standing at the filing cabinet and seated at the desk. Burgin attempts to neutralise his model by de-emphasising her female bodily form yet includes an amazingly high pair of shoes which allude to the role of the fetish object in popular images of the female body. Fetishism involves displacing the sight of woman's imaginary castration onto a variety of reassuring body parts or accessory objects, one of which is traditionally the high heeled shoe. Freud's account of this phenomenon attributes it with a double function. The fetish object is a token of triumph for the male over the threat of castration as the woman represents this possibility and serves as a protection against it. This object endows women with the characteristics which make them tolerable as sex objects. Fetishism, according to Freud, is a minority perversion in which the fetishist's sexual satisfaction with a woman could only be complete in the presence of the substitutive objects and may be sufficient in itself without a woman. Lacanian and feminist understanding of the concept has extended it to a: **'generalised structure that governs the constitution of the woman's image as object of desire'** ⁷ Laura Mulvey writes of the **fetishisation of the entire female body making the totality represent the part which is lacking.** ⁸ This body/object signifies to the male, the phallus, the desired object of power. Lacan writes of the position of woman in the phallic system:

Paradoxical as this formulation might seem
I would say that it is in order to be the
phallus, that is the signifier of the desire
of the other, that the woman will reject an
essential part of her femininity it is
for what she is not that she expects to be
desired as well as loved. ⁹

Burgin includes the classic fetish object in Office at Night possibly to allude to the myriad ways in which the female form is manipulated to deny the fear of castration that woman represents to the male. The male fantasy which creates the woman as phallus or fetishised woman is a closed loop dialogue, with itself as it is only based on male narcissistic fear and reduces women to objects within this phenomenon.



FIG E: Office at Night: Victor Burgin 1986

The fallacy of an image holding a meaning which is absolute prompted the use of the pictogram/isotype in the final section of each panel. In Francette Pacteau's article on "**Woman as Hieroglyphic**" ¹⁰ the metaphorical and symbolic connotation of hieroglyphics is exposed by tracing the patriarchal wish for a secret and magical code of expressing ideas through images. She concluded that in relation to the mystical hieroglyphic the female image has become a fantasized place imbued with mystery. Burgin problematises this mystical image by the introduction of the isotype, the supposed universal pictorial language which fails to be as such. The concept of the isotype was developed by Neurath, a contemporary of Freud's whose aim was to devise an unambiguous pictorial language. Parts of this language have been appropriated by the graphic arts, utilising this kind of symbolism in public places, such as the signs for men's and women's toilets. Burgin utilises suitably ambiguous pictograms and refers them to the strict divisions of gendered sexuality through stark black and white images. One of the panels displays the letter M with the inverted W which calls into direct questioning the man/woman dichotomy. In a search for a person isotype Burgin illustrates the pictogram 'I' normally used for tourist information. Lacan suggested that **the 'I' stage in a person's life begins when the child differentiates between itself and others, as it recognises itself in the mirror.** ¹¹ This marks the first step towards the emergence of sexual difference.

As Burgin repeats the image of the female model in different configurations we are reminded of **Barthe's** ¹² concept of the tableau; the theatrical stilling of a visual moment summing up what would be too complicated to state linguistically. Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" mentions that the visual presence of a woman in dominant narrative cinema works against the storyline as it freezes the flow of the action to erotic contemplation. Repetition is at the heart of this erotic tableau:

There is no development, no maturation, no meaning, nothing but a series of segmentations. ¹³ Barthes.

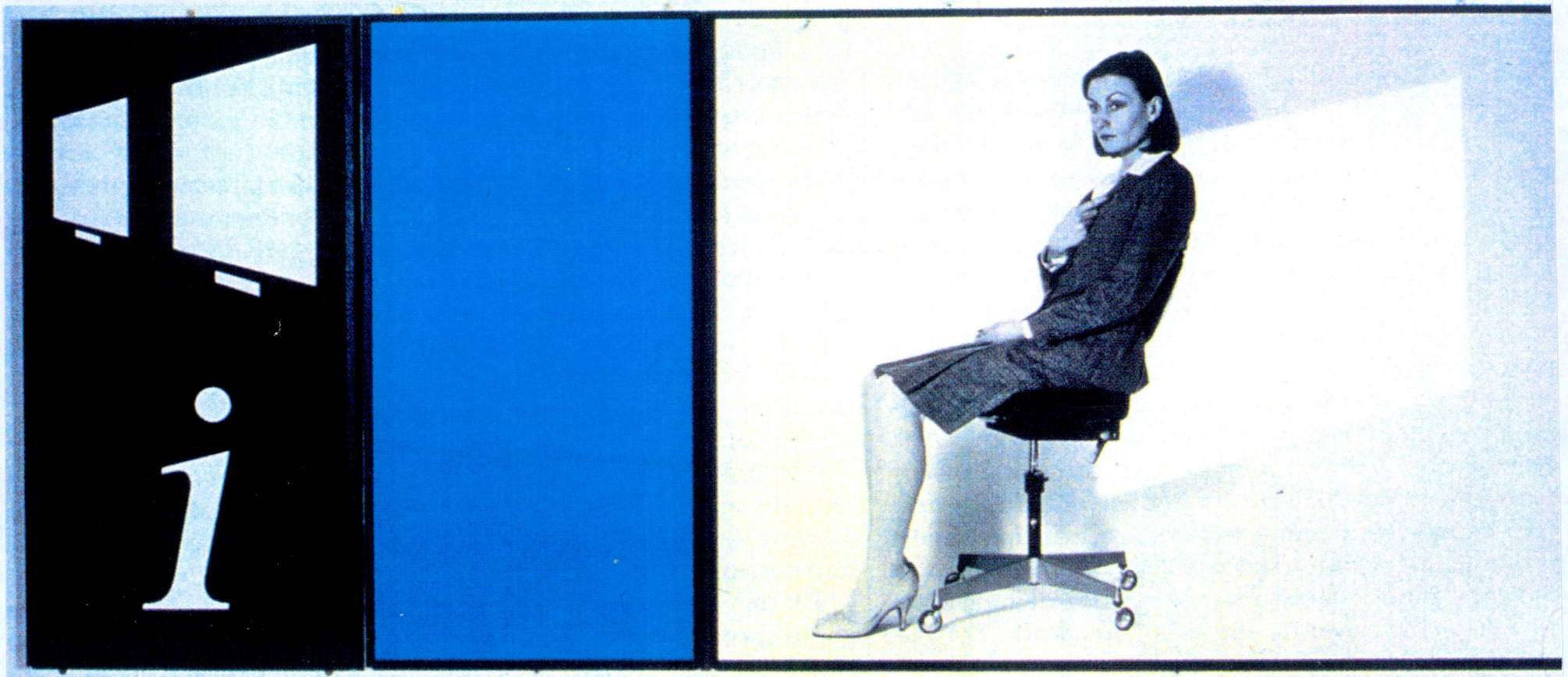


FIG F: Office at Night: Victor Burgin 1986

Male desire goes from image to image to find the lost mother in what Burgin refers to as the monotony of desire.

Dislocating the privileged view of the voyeur is central to Burgin's work. He writes of the phallocentric dominance in representation and how it must be restructured:

the possibility for this lies precisely in the fact of a shared pre-Oedipal sexuality of men and women, the recognition of sexuality as a construct subject to social and historical change, the recognition of the body as not simply given as essence in nature but as constantly reproduced and revived in discourse.¹⁴

This highlights Burgin's close association with the theories of Freud preferring his tests to those of Lacan and Kristeva who focus their work on language systems. Like Freud he sees that there can be no change in society without a major shift in thinking within patriarchy. Despite his links with psychoanalysis he has stated that he never presents it as sufficient to a comprehensive understanding of gender divisions in society. He deconstructs the position of the voyeur, which Freud aligns with **sadism**¹⁵ by drawing our attention to it. The role of the voyeur is closely linked to the fetish as the voyeur seeks to possess the object which denies any sign of lack. Burgin has stated that due to Mulvey's essay on **"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"**¹⁶ in which she concluded that visual pleasure catered to masculine fetishism and scopophilia he attempted to frustrate this pleasure in his early work. After consideration he decided that in denying visual pleasure the social world will just seek gratification elsewhere. He now re-enacts the voyeur scenario exposing it in the interests of making some of the mechanisms visible. Woman is presented as spectacle in this instance to expose what is at stake in this presentation. The supposed controlling male gaze is also explored as masculine sexuality is represented as problematic in the context of the visual images used to perpetuate it.

Burgin refers to Lacan, who when discussing the phallocentric gaze concluded that no one ever has the 'phallus'. The model in

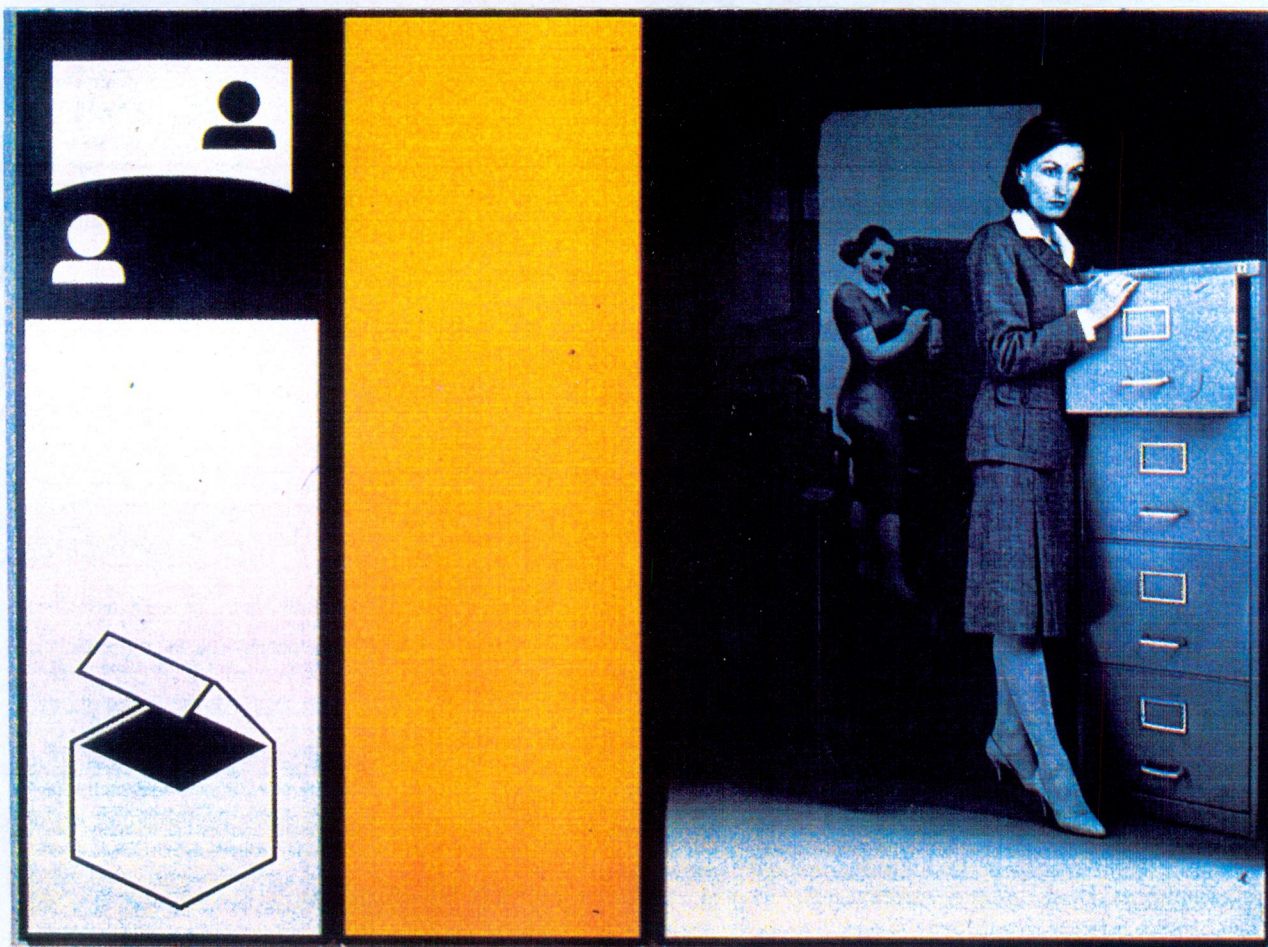


FIG G: Office at Night: Victor Burgin 1986

Office at Night acts out a variety of different roles which are suspended in isolation drawing attention to the construction of the images and therefore indirectly to all images of women.

Burgin sees the role of the artist and critic as transferable, also preferring the term art theory to the one of art criticism as he assures that this locates art within a more general cultural theory. Dissolving the divisions between art theory and practice is an attempt to negate the possible structural or market fetishisation of the visual arts. Structurally fetishism is a matter of idealisation, mystification and adoration of an object. Greenbergian modernism was an apotheosis of this:

The art object was to signify nothing, that is to say, it must not serve in the place of something which is absent as the signifier of that absence but rather must serve, like the fetish to deny that absence.¹⁷

The modernist art object denies that there is anything lacking in the field of vision. In the same way the expressionist painting movement, which is based on the notion of artist (male) as genius, focusing on the visual traces of the 'one who does not lack'. For Burgin moving against this structural fetishism of the visual arts is to move 'beyond its fragments', beyond the sacred division of theory from practice and also of masculine from the feminine. Through this he has created a theory art which is difficult for the art cognoscenti, never mind the general public, making a multiple of demands on the spectator/reader. It is only through the promptings of the written word that we can acquire the capacity to read/see the complexities of these images. Even then we can only locate the interests and possible discourses surrounding the work but cannot assign the work with any definite meaning. This agrees with Burgin's belief that images can only be signifiers and only acquire meaning through discourse.

Should the role of visual art be as a complex transferer of meanings and absolutes or as a vehicle for introducing many different discourses into the social conscious? Burgin's aspirations for his work in this context are quite obvious. In

Office at Night he introduces the space Between male and female to re-appropriate the image from the perpetuation of gender myths upon which our supposed subjectivity is based.

1. Lacan and the 'Symbolic' - Stephen Frosch, The Politics of Psychoanalysis, London Macmillan 1987, pg 134 - 137
2. Victor Burgin, "Tea with Madeline"; Burgin, The End of Art Theory, London Macmillan 1986, pg 96 - 111
3. Victor Burgin Between", Oxford Basil Blackwell 1986, pg 181
4. Victor Burgin in; Geoffrey Batchen; "For an Impossible Realism; An Interview with Victor Burgin, Afterimage February 1989, pg 7
5. op cit, Freud quoted by Stephen Frosch in The Politics of Psychoanalysis pg 38
6. Bauhaus theory - further reading, Design and Form : the basic course at the Bauhaus, revised edition translated from German by Fred Bradley, London Thames and Hudson 1975
7. John Fletcher : "Versions of the Masquerade", Screen Volume 29, Number 3, Summer 1988, pg 51
8. Laura Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" ; Mulvey, Visual and other Pleasures, London Macmillan 1989
9. op cit, Lacan quoted by John Fletcher in "Versions of the Masquerade", Screen Volume 29, Number 3, Summer 1988, pg 52
10. Mentioned by Christopher Barrett "The Riddle of the Sphinx", Afterimage, Summer 1987, pg 16
11. op cit, Lacan and the 'Mirror Phase' in Stephen Frosch, The Politics of Psychoanalysis, London Macmillan 1987, pg 132-134
12. Roland Barthes, "Diderot Brecht Eisenstein", in Image, Music, Text, Barthes translated by Stephen Meath, N.Y. Mill and Wang 1977, pg 69-78

13. Ibid pg 74
14. op cit, Victor Burgin in Geoffrey Batchen; "For an Impossible Realism; An Interview with Victor Burgin", Afterimage, February 1989, pg 6
15. op cit, Freud on the voyeur "Stephen Frosch", The Politics of Psychoanalysis, London Macmillan 1987, pg 31
16. Published in Visual and other Pleasures, Laura Mulvey, London Macmillan 1989
17. op cit, Victor Burgin The End of Art Theory, Burgin, London Macmillan 1986, pg 106

'Feminist Discourse' is the label used to describe the vast texto-visual works of Mary Kelly. Her work centres on examining the manifestations of gender constructs, deconstructing and in turn re-appropriating them. Formally her work is anti aesthetic in the traditional sense, it denies market value and forces the viewer into a position where they must make a definite effort to interact with it. She manages to visualise the female without using direct images of women. This helps to break down the male/voyeur : female/object dichotomy, changing the way women view themselves and displacing the male viewer into a realisation of the voyeuristic masquerade. This masquerade as expressed by Joan Rivière in her 1929 essay on "**Womanliness as a Masquerade**"¹, is a phenomenon by which women who wish for or who recognise their masculinity play the masquerade of womanliness to avert anxiety and retribution from the male (father figure). This masquerade mimics an authentic - genuine - womanliness yet authentic womanliness is such a mimicry as Rivière states:

The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the "masquerade". My suggestion is not however that there is any such difference whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.²

The voyeuristic masquerade is the male perpetuation and enjoyment of the visual manifestations of the feminine masquerade. Kelly's most recent work Interim 1983-1990 looks specifically at the difference between the social construction of woman as object and how she experiences herself in relation to this . Its main theme is woman approaching middle age. During this stage in a woman's life she begins to lose her importance within patriarchal society as her body's aesthetic value begins to decline therefore she becomes more aware of her 'womanliness' as a construction.

Interim began in 1983 with recordings of conversations between women who have had active experiences of the early second feminist movement of 1968. Kelly isolated the themes which figure dominantly in the collected conversations and through this

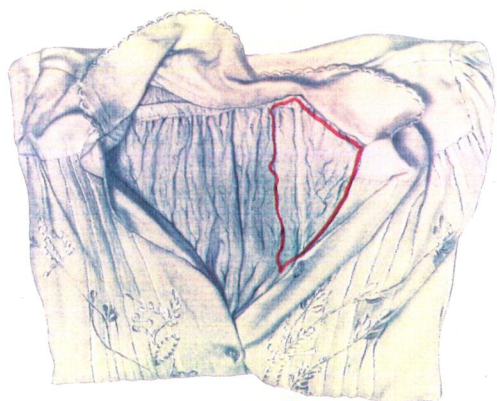


Fig.2

EXTASE

The first week of September and already, leaves are falling. An ominous sign, mother would say. She is not well, has been in pain the last two days. Carl convinced her to take the tablets. She's aspirin tablets, declares, "That killed your father." I argue, "It was more than that, please, take them, it might help you, it would help us too if you could go to sleep." I'm tired, came home for a rest, wanted someone to look after me. Instead she is the child. Felt cheated, angry, then repentant. Tell the doctor, say its urgent, his advice to me is pointless, but not till four o'clock. I try to make her comfortable. She says she is afraid, afraid of being alone, afraid of imposing on her friends, afraid of being rejected, of appearing, disappearing. "Mother, don't," I ask that she get through till early. I am afraid, afraid her fear will be contagious. Then, in spite of everything, she insists on getting dressed the way she always has as long as I can remember, to the bath. Her autumn hair unmodulated with spray, brown eyeliner-pencil, lipstick - coral pink, the crisp white summer dress and the stilettos. I protest, "You can hardly walk, you can't wear stilettos." She is stubborn, independent even in dependence. More than mere appearance, I can see that she is to do with heroes dressed for battle, willing to go on. And after all, she is still very beautiful. I love her, but I want to leave. At the clinic, she is palming and examining, diagnosis - a pinched nerve, perhaps, don't know, don't worry, take this. At home again, she tells me she's the worst part, insecure, not knowing. "No truth anyway," I believe, only theories, treatments, changing all the time. To concoct either. I can see she isn't listening, staring past me toward the lake - serene and still, reflecting every minute detail of the shoreline, inverted like a memory and more enticing than the thing itself. She looks at it, "To be an older woman is," she quips, beyond words, can't describe it. I don't mean not feeling well, you can adjust to that, its something else I think, like not being taken seriously by doctors or selectors, not even by my analyst. "Don't mope," I say, talking to myself. "Who?" she asks. "Never mind." I put my arms around her. The picture on the lake is saturated with magma - a familiar ending for so many evenings just like this one. Yet the stillness is disconcerting.

FIG H: "Extase" from "Corpus": Interim, Mary Kelly
1983 - 1990

organised the project into four sections. Part one is labelled "Corpus" (the body) and is made up of five separately titled groups with three pairs of images in each group. The group headings are "Menacé", "Appell", "Supplication", "Erotisme" and "Extase", which are taken from the 19th century neuropathologist J. M. Charcot's classification of the hallucinatory phases of hysteria. Each of the paired images are made up of one narrative panel on reflective plexiglass and one silk screened image of an item of clothing onto plexiglass. The texts are handwritten first person accounts which explore how older women experience the body, shaped socially and psychically by the discourses of popular medicine, fashion and romantic fiction. The images of clothing are arranged in increasing states of disarray and both text and image are highlighted red in parts. Highlighting key words indicate the presence of particular investments by Kelly and in the images they cite the so-called 'danger' zones in relation to the text. The second section, "Pecunia" (money; Pecunia non olet; money does not smell) consists of multi coloured galvanised steel panels, fastened to the wall and opening like books to readings of silkscreened texts. This section is again divided into four groups with five panels to each. Each section is mapped out according to the schema of: "Mater"; "Filia"; "Sorrow"; "Conjei" (mother, daughter, sister, wife). The text is a mixture of first person narratives, classified ads and greeting card quips forming as juxtaposition between fact and fiction and dreams which Kelly states are the: 'forms within which we structure our desires.' "Historia" (History), the third section takes the form of a pseudo documentary. It is made up of silkscreened steel pages which are laid out flat in the manner of precious manuscripts. These four books collectively make up the word viva. Each contains a narrative in the words of women who were either twenty seven, twenty, fourteen or three years old in 1968 and who are reviewing their relationship to the feminist movement. These are followed in each panel by shorter texts, one of which describes moments of collaboration and communication resulting in women being able to "see" each other for the first time, and the other which satirizes the exchanges between a group of women who can't "see"

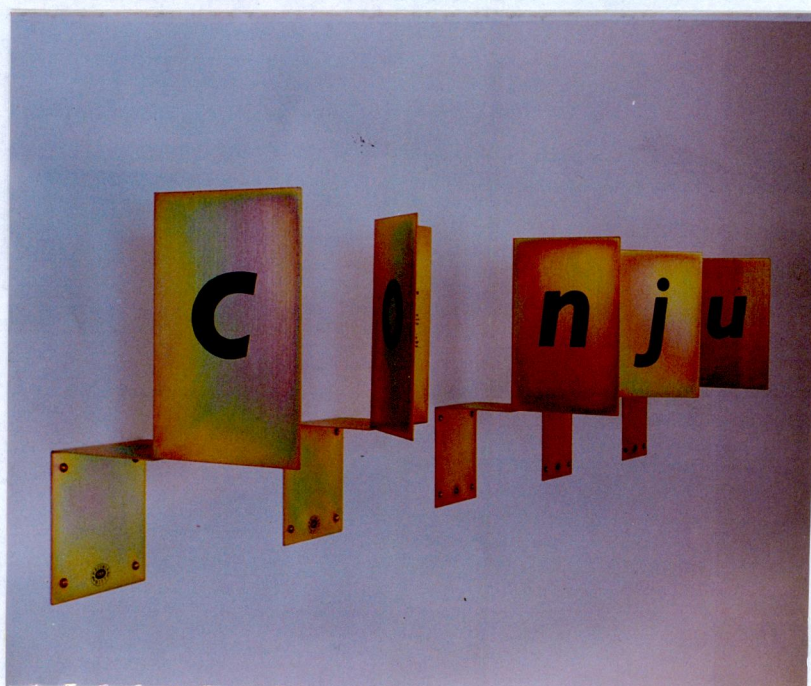


FIG I: "Pecunia": Interim, Mary Kelly 1983 - 1990

each other as they define only by age. The final section of the work is entitled "Potestas" (Power). This is the least visually complicated section which contains a large steel relief bar graph visualizing different statistical information relating to women's position in society such as the 1985 United Nations report:

**[Women] by virtue of an accident of birth,
perform two thirds of the [world's] work,
receive one tenth of its income and own less
than one hundredth of its property.³**

This is an attempt by Kelly to illustrate how cultures create hierarchies in order to validate the deployment of power and how women experience this. The work is multiple and heterogeneous mixing visual and semantic styles, focusing on woman's command of language as against language's command of woman, a point which Kristeva advocates.

**I had often thought of dedicating Interim to
Dora's mother the woman who never made
Freud's⁴ acquaintance. He assumed she had
housewife's psychosis: too old for analysis?
too old to be noticed? In a sense she
underlines the dilemma for the older woman
in representing her sexuality, her desire
when she is no longer desirable.⁵**

Mary Kelly

The classic case of Dora, one of Freud's 'hysteric' patients and his synopsis of her mother whom he never met, illustrates how the older woman is deemed to lack significance in patriarchal culture. Interim disperses this repressed presence back into discourse. The 'hysteric' as a concept exposes the psychoanalytic institutions misogyny according to Kelly. Interim exposes hysteria, the failed masquerade, as a theoretical symptom within contemporary culture, as the conditions that define woman's subjectivity and shape her so called "femininity" are exposed. Kelly has stated her alignment with Lacan's of the 'Symbolic', believing that gender conditioning begins at the moment of our entry into language systems. Rather than suppose that the 'Symbolic' is purely male as Lacan does, Kelly is in agreement with Kristeva's position that the phallic attributes of language are equally available to women. Kelly deconstructs language systems; visual and linguistic; fact and fiction; and re-appropriates them under her (female) control. Her use of the



FIG J: "Historia": Interim, Mary Kelly 1983 - 1990

Latinate terms to label the different sections of Interim serves to distance the viewer from the immediate associations s/he has with the meaning of those terms. In "Corpus" the handwritten text becomes a voice speaking in even tone, no matter what the context is. When the content is traumatic the graphic apparatus goes on producing its even copybook script, signifying Kelly's interest in illustrating how the event is removed from the recording of it. When the script can no longer articulate the personal discourse, breaks appear in the narrative; '**...want to dance...see myself...images grate...clothes...hair**'; ⁶ as though there is a conscious effort to silence her thoughts. This necessity to silence or possible inability to communicate certain concepts through language, reintroduces the notion of woman being outside this domain. This is contradictory when Kelly's ability to manipulate the language systems she utilises is taken into consideration.

One of the major consequences of her ability to manipulate language systems is to succeed in visualising the female without any direct images of her. The female body has become a spectacle in our culture, especially through advertising. Increasingly popular images of the female body are perpetuating the aesthetic of the fetish, objectifying and turning the body into a physical manifestation which is more to do with male desire than woman. Kelly responds to this by renouncing the direct image of the female Burgin discussed in his essay "**Tea with Madeline**" ⁷ how a female language should attempt to find non-visual equivalents on imagery, when referring to women. Male language is limited to the experience of the female through vision. This suggests that since images of the female are coded within the male/voyeur; female/object mode that alternative methods of visualizing the woman can break the conventional reception of her image. Indeed there are some, for instance Laura Mulvey, who would conclude that utilising the female image in any form is so problematic, so heavily coded that it should be avoided altogether. This conclusion has been proved extremist in consideration of the work of Cindy Sherman who successfully overloads the female image until its cultural codes are broken down.

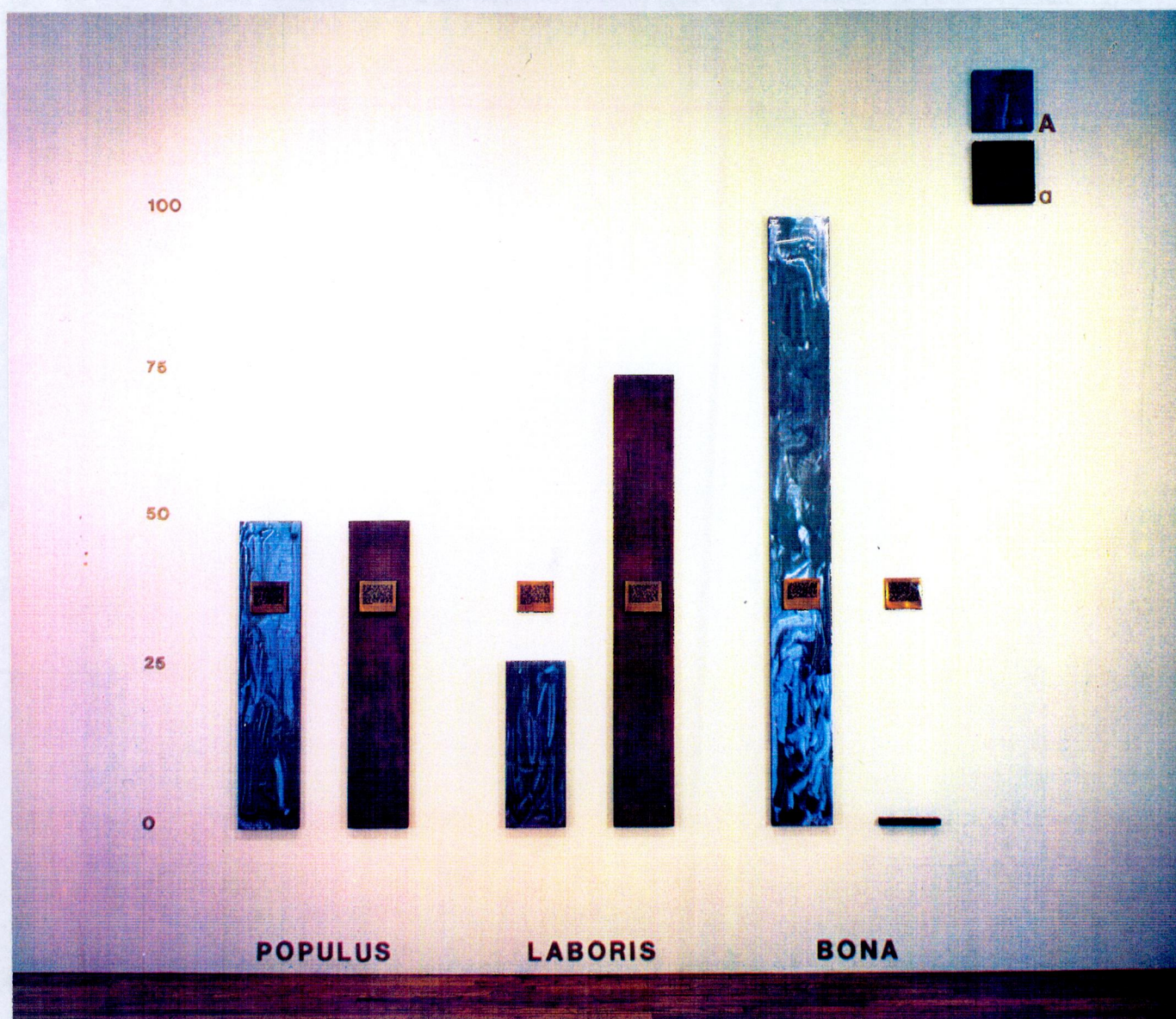


FIG K: "Potestas": Interim, Mary Kelly 1983 - 1990

Sherman examines the phenomenon of the feminine masquerade placing woman in visual quotation marks, imaging her as a social construction, as a mask within patriarchal representation. Kelly avoids this terrain by making the usually ignored middle aged woman, visible through a multitude of discourses.

Interim deals only with positions that exist for the female subject yet the work does not totally alienate the male viewer. The male viewing position is certainly dislocated as he is denied the role of the voyeur. This according to **Norman Bryson**⁸ leads men to question their own position as a cultural construction. He states that men know that masculinity is only a fabrication but will deny it. Interim by interaction challenges this denial. Kelly has mentioned that she agrees with the concept of men as feminists and talks of the importance of these male feminists decoding their masculine identity supposedly in conjunction with female feminists deconstruction of "femininity". The subject matter of Kelly's work never deals directly with the male condition but indirectly critiques it through a close examination of "femininity" as the two are indisputably linked. Yet it would be interesting from a spectators perspective to see how she would deal with a critique of masculinity. It would seem that this kind of interactive examination is needed to expand on the notion that "masculinity" and "femininity" are not gender specific.

1. Joan Rivière: "Womanliness as a Masquerade", reprinted in Formations of Fantasy, edited by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, London/New York, Methuen 1986, pg 33-44
2. Ibid, pg 42
3. Mary Kelly: "Potestas", Interim, 1983 - 1990
4. Freud, Case Studies 1, Pelican Freud Library, Volume 8, London Penguin 1977, pg 49
5. Mary Kelly, "Invisible Bodies - On Interim", New Formations No 2, 1987, pg 12
6. Mary Kelly, "Corpus" - Interim, 1983 - 1990
7. Victor Burgin "Tea with Madeline" published in The End of Art Theory, London Macmillan, 1986, pg 96 - 111
8. Norman Bryson, "Interim and Identification", Interim Catalogue; New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York 1990

What are the aims of the visual investigators of gender discourse? Feminist artistic practices have positioned themselves within a multitude of positions from reclamation to redefinition to deconstruction. Lisa Tickner has examined the works of both male and female artists working through gender issues and has located an attempt:

to disarticulate the dominant and
naturalised discourses on sexuality, class
subjectivity and representation itself.¹

I hold a preference for Mary Kelly's aspiration to 're-appropriate the patriarchal image systems, contesting the ownership of these images by placing them in visual quotation marks so to displace their social meaning forcing them back into discourse to be redefined. This may seem an idealistic scenario yet one that can be made possible through constant and decisive placing of visual language under strict interrogation; at least I would like to so believe.

In 1985 an exhibition called Difference : On Representation and Sexuality was held in the New Museum of Contemporary Art of New York and toured to the Institute of Contemporary Arts London later that year. The exhibition included works by Mary Kelly and Victor Burgin, produced prior to Interim and Office at Night and included "Corpus", the first section of Interim. The exhibition attempted to focus on:

the ways in which representation purporting
to be neutral is informed by differences in
gender ... intellectual as well as visual
exploration of how gender distorts "reality"
as seen through the work of thirty one
artists both male and female

- Marcia Tucker²

The question "can men make work on masculinity from a feminist position?" was now posed. The work of Victor Burgin referenced to the work of Mary Kelly provides us with a basis upon which to answer this question. Can they both sustain a level of gender criticism which goes beyond the level of their own subjective position?

Fionna Barber ³ in examining Craig Owen's article : "The Discourse of Others : Feminism and Postmodernism", highlights how despite Owen's scepticism of Western culture's gender distinctions he does not claim his position as feminist. Is this because the term feminism is solely politically identified with the attempts by women to determine and represent their own conditions of existence within a patriarchal and capitalist formation? Or is it a reluctance on the male speaker's part to name his position for fear of replicating the relations of domination and subordination within patriarchy, once again women are being spoken for? What are the alternatives? - 'anti-sexist'? 'gender critical'? Since the word feminism is derived from female, I am not convinced that the male speaker in naming his position as feminist could reduce its context to a level of a male controlled discourse, simply by being part of it. It is imperative in my opinion that men who are gender critical do name their position as feminist to allow themselves the scope to reacquire what they have been forced to repudiate by culture, their own femininity. This will surely contribute to the dissolution of the constructs which define woman and man. Mary Kelly in an interview with Hal Foster ⁴ talks about the importance of the existence of male feminists as there is a definite need for gender criticism to occupy the realms of "masculinity" as well as "femininity", an area of investigation which of course Victor Burgin inhabits. Whether Burgin would name his position as feminist is questionable.

Both Burgin's and Kelly's approach to the examination of gender representation is effected by their own position within Western culture's sexual categorisations. The most significant result this has on their work is their treatment of the visualisation of the female subject. Kelly avoids the use of direct images in her work Interim, and in previous work ; Post Partum Document 1973 - 1979 and Women and Work 1974 - 1975

Using the body of the woman, her image, or person, is not impossible but problematic for feminism. In my work I have tried to cut across the predominant representation of woman as the object of the work in order to



Fig. 1a

L1. RESEARCH I Homo sapiens (F)

Age 2;11, July 29, 1976
(7:30 A.M., getting into our bed)

K. Mummy, where's your willy?

M. I haven't got one. I'm a girl and you're
a boy. You're like Daddy. You two have
got one and I don't.

K. Show me.
M. Oh Kel...

FIG L: "Documentation V; Fig 1a" from Post Partum Document,
Mary Kelly 1973 - 1979

question the notion of femininity as a pre-given entity and foreground instead its social construction as a representation of sexual difference within specific discourses. Above all I am trying to picture the woman as subject of her own desire.
- Mary Kelly⁵

Kelly subverts the division of the visual field into sexually fixed positions, by presenting an alternative image of the woman, one that takes into account woman's own experience of herself rather than the male visual experience of her. This placement of the female outside the role of the voyeur/object dichotomy aligns her with Laura Mulvey's essay on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' which Burgin cites as a source from which he questioned the role of the voyeur. Yet Kelly has recognised that exploration and deconstruction of male voyeurism can be achieved through direct manipulation of the woman as fetish type images, with reference to **Burgin's work**⁶. She chooses not to do so herself as she recognises the importance of the female artist creating an alternative vantage point for women to view themselves from. This is a view that Burgin shares as he concluded that through this alternative imaging a restructuring of the perception of sexual difference can be achieved.

The position Burgin takes up is one of re-enactment. He has written of the recognition by the photographer of the apt moment to photograph as being a product of the popular preconscious, which is patriarchal. Therefore the aesthetic by which s/he constructs images inevitably perpetuates a phallogentric form of looking. Burgin's work deals primarily with male sexuality through an exploration of the structures in representation which perpetuate the voyeuristic/object fantasy. This must include placing the popular fetishistic image of the female within a critical framework so as to verify the problematics of this voyeurism. The problematising of this phenomenon that both Interim and Office at Night present, along with the displacement of the female/body image, makes both the works non essentialist and relevant to both the male and female spectator.



The plan is circular: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower pierced with many windows. The building consists of cells; each has two windows: one in the outer wall of the cell allows daylight to pass into it; another in the inner wall looks onto the tower, or rather is looked upon by the tower, for the windows of the tower are dark, and the occupants of the cells cannot know who watches, or if anyone watches.

FIG M: Zoo 1978: Victor Burgin 1978

Choice of medium and presentation is imperative to both their work. Both aspire to a supposed non stylistic mode of representation, such as Interim's multitude of elements, diversifying from scripted text, silkscreened image, three dimensional bar graphs and steel book forms. Yet even the non stylistic becomes a fashionable form of representation. Black and white photographic images with text formerly utilised by Burgin have now become a common stylistic feature of contemporary fine art practices. Something which is supposedly new and innovative does not remain so for long. The choice of photography relates to the photograph being a form of image that is widely circulated and therefore not revered to the same extent as a painting or sculptural object would be. Therefore the photograph attempts to disavow structural fetishisation of the visual art object, which the Modernist or Expressionist work exemplifies by their form and recognition. One might also suppose that the photographic image, being the kind of image the public are constantly dealing with, assures that the meaning or location of the work is more accessible. This as I have discovered for myself with my own work is untrue as it is precisely this familiarity with the language of photography which works against this. The average person living within patriarchal culture comes in contact with a wide variety of photographic images through the media each day. Most of these images need no more than a glance to locate them. When a spectator arrives at a photograph produced within fine art discourses they tend to apply the same mode of viewing as they would to the media produced photograph. Therefore the fine art photographic tends to float within this ironic situation of being recognised but not really considered. The revered painting or sculpture is more likely to be contemplated. Burgin attempts to counteract this by the format within which he presents his images. The photo text-works previous to Office at Night relate to newspaper or magazine photography which is often accompanied by lengthy texts. The spectator being accustomed to this device reads the text in the hope of discovering the riddle of the visual image. Burgin's texts rarely divulge the specific meaning of the image, as the newspaper photograph's accompanying script does. In utilising

this format he successfully entices the viewer to interact with the work. Office at Night presents images which prompt examination, by the juxtaposition of photograph with pictogram, black and white with flat areas of bright colour. As the viewer attempts to place these images within a narrative structure, which most media images allude to, the work is contemplated and recognised as being contrary to normal photographic representations. Burgin therefore utilises specific means of enticing the viewer to contemplate the work through an awareness of how popular photographic images are received.

Both Office at Night and Interim are difficult works. One must have some knowledge of the theoretical input into these works to locate them. Victor Burgin has stated that his writing fulfils his need to be precise about his experience. I think Kelly approaches her work in a similar fashion. Gallery work is a means by which they can introduce a variety of theoretical questions without creating a closed dialogue which supplies statements and answers. Through their subversion and re-appropriation of gender representation they open the possibility for the viewer to consider their own relationship to this, not necessarily leading to any conclusions but a reflective process which invites the introduction of questions back into discourse. Exhibiting within this system, supposes a specific kind of spectator, one who will be aware of contemporary art's branch of work which is heavily located within sociological theories. Burgin talks of how he targets a small audience so the work will remain more homogenous and therefore have a substantive area of linguistic overlap. Office at Night offers no concessions to the spectator forcing him/her into a working relationship with it. Its form mimics a visual language that should say it all (isotype and Bauhaus references) but of course fails. In textual isolation Office at Night stands dumb creating an irony which I believe is central to the work. this work's difficulty is partly what the work is about. Interim is an excruciatingly complex and demanding experience. This work separates itself from popular notions of feminist art which try to ghettoise all women's art. Its multi-textual theoretical framework denies formal association

with other women artists' works, and successfully gives voice to the "feminine" within the ideological discourses Kelly cites it.

Freud asserts that gender identities are not as contained as society tries to make them. The adult is crippled into repressing his/her infantile bisexuality by a process of socialisation. This suggests, as does Kristeva, that "femininity" and "masculinity" are representative of potentials that lie within every individual. With this in mind, does Burgin's and Kelly's work, informed as it is by theoretical accounts of gender difference, equally succeed to deconstruct our notions of these differences as Burgin is a male artist situated within a privileged position? The most apt question of this juncture is whether privilege is so wonderful? Constant pressure to retain phallic power under the threat of castration manifests itself in a male masquerade which is most apparent in the celebration of the heroic. It would seem that "masculinity" is not the successful position it intended itself to be.

The level of criticism that each of the works attains depends on the interaction between the spectator and the work. Is this type of theory art the only route for successful and poignant work which re-appropriates gender representation? Questions on the construction of sexual difference involves a complex area which includes psychological and sociological theories. In order to enter into these questions there must be a direct engagement with the discourses that define it. Therefore this theory art which directly immerses itself in these discourses is one decisive starting point for the deconstruction of accepted notions of gender representation bearing in mind that notions of gender are themselves constructed in and through representation.

CHAPTER 4

FOOTNOTES

1. Lisa Tickner in "Difference on Representation and Sexuality"; catalogue New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, pg 23
2. Ibid, Marcia Tucker, pg 4
3. Fionna Barber "Feminist Writings and Art Practice", Circa June/July 1988 No 40, pg 34
4. Hal Foster, "That Obscure Subject of Desire", from Interim, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1990
5. Mary Kelly, "Woman - Desire - Image", Postmodernism edit Lisa Appignanesi, ICA documents, London ; Free Association Books 1989, pg 1 of article
5. Ibid, pg 2 of article

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