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SPINNING IN MY MOTHER'S GARDEN
a search for subjectivity

An exegesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Is female subjectivity possible within a patriarchal system? The following discussion investigates feminist thought through equality, difference and androgyny, mapping the achievements, setbacks, advantages and disadvantages of each through the theories of Luce Irigaray, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and others.

Discussing Irigaray's thoughts on disrupting the symbolic with mimesis and hysteria, how intersubjectivity might be possible through a syntax appropriate to women and the possibility of female genealogies through craft and the work of artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse.

Derrida's theory of *Différance* is used in relation to Irigaray's ideas of difference and morphology. And allows for Kristeva's thoughts on the essential meaning of language being in a constant state of flux and therefore fixed definitions of identity are pointless.

Virginia Woolf's use of androgyny and modernist style in her writing is considered in relation to Kristeva's ideas of revolutionary writing, and how destructive fixed gendered identities can be. The deconstruction of masculine and feminine identities is advocated by Kristeva to allow for individuality and subjectivity.

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Figure 1. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Shuffle)*, 2008, video, 19 minutes, looped

A4 sheets of coloured paper (blue, red, pink, yellow and green) have been cut into 4cm wide strips. Filmed from the performer's perspective against a white backdrop, starting with five separate coloured piles, we watch the hands of the actor shuffle the strips of paper together. Continuing for 19 minutes until the video loops and the shuffle is repeated. There is no audio with this work.

Postscript

I hope this document is a true reflection of the journey of discovery I have taken in an attempt to understand my place and experience of the world, and how I might be able to change both. I have intuitively followed the work, documented here, and now attempt to use a language that is foreign to my gender to interpret what the work has achieved.

I confess I started this journey confused and dejected. After many years of working within the corporate world, having to take on masculine characteristics to survive and succeed in an environment constructed by and for men, I discovered I had Endometriosis. A disease which is inflamed by hormones of the menstrual cycle the only cure to which is menopause. I could no longer keep up with my male colleagues, a situation made more difficult by the taboo around discussing anything related to the menstrual cycle. I looked around me to realise that although I was tolerated if I played by the rules, in truth I had no place within this system, as a women, and therefore my female experience was undervalued.

Another insidious aspect to having Endometriosis is a difficulty in having children. If as a woman I can't have a child, a foundation on which patriarchy bases the definition of women; if I can no longer be productive and/or reproductive then what does this mean for my identity as a woman and a contributing member of society? I need to redefine my identity, but how within a society that has already defined that identity, as woman, for me? How do I become the subject rather than the object?

I started to wonder if women had achieved equality. Is it possible to achieve equality within patriarchy? And if equality is not the answer or even possible then what is?

Within this document I have investigated feminist thought through equality, difference and androgyny. I have stuck to reading women authors, theorists and critics discussing women artist or feminist theory in hopes to recognise a voice or a shared experience.

In the chapter Mimesis, I discuss my own and other's experiences of equality and discover that it is not possible within a patriarchal system. What is needed is for women to claim their own subjectivity as woman, this cannot be achieved while claiming to be equal in order to justify access to the same rights and opportunities as men.

Morphology discusses feminist concepts of difference in order for women to claim subjectivity. Luce Irigaray suggests how we might change language to find a space within the patriarchal order through morphology and mother-daughter genealogies. Unfortunately idolising women universalises our identity disallowing subjectivity and marginalises women.

Finally Metonymy discusses Julia Kristeva's ideas of deconstructing the metaphysical oppositions of masculine and feminine in relation to criticism of Virginia Woolf's writing. Kristeva opens up the possibility of a woman's subjectivity by refusing to define women. Focusing on individual man or woman as taking responsibility for their part in the current dichotomy and allowing them space to redefine themselves.

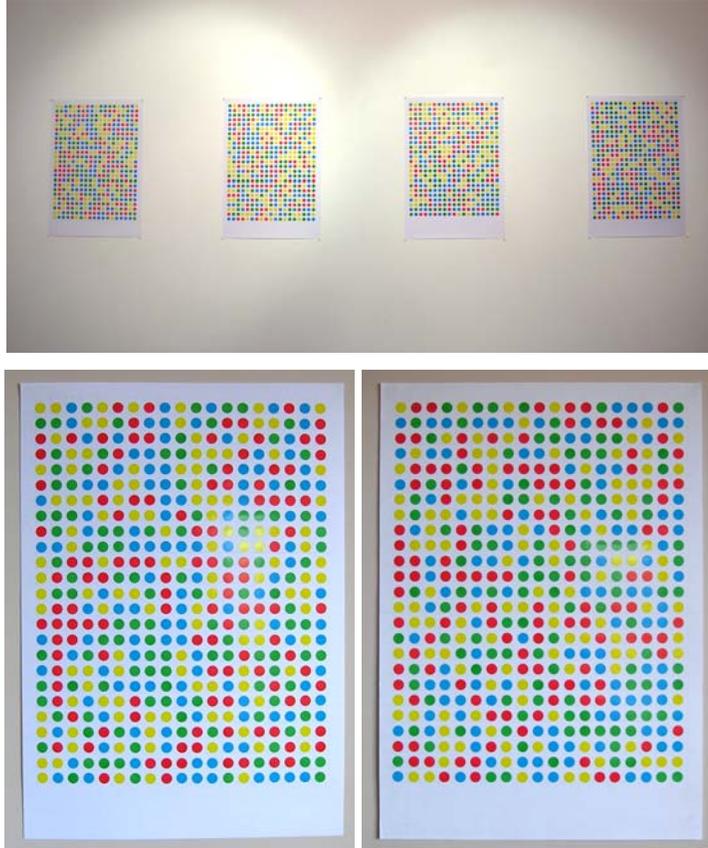


Figure 2. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Performance #5 - #8)*, 2008 – 2009, A2 paper, pencil, stickers, 420 x 594mm

An A2 piece of cartridge paper is ruled into a grid using pencil. Sheets of coloured stickers (red, blue, green and yellow) are cut, separated into individual stickers, and placed into a container. A sticker is drawn at random from the container and placed in the next available square of the grid. Starting with the top left square, moving left to right filling each row. The series continues.

Mimesis

“Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality.” (Moi, 1995. p.12)

Equality sounds like a great idea, equal opportunity, equal rights and an equal say on what happens in the world. So why is it that so many women today still don't have equality? If we ignore developing countries or countries that for religious reasons deny women the vote or access to education. If we only consider the western world where feminist movements have been spearheaded, and for all intensive purposes it is thought that women have achieved equality. But have we?

Women in the west are still paid less than their male colleagues, and are still the primary care givers of children and the elderly. This doesn't seem to have worked, but why? How do we achieve equality? Is it a simple matter of being paid the same wage?

I have experienced not being paid the same as my male colleagues in the corporate world. However this was not the main problem I faced as a woman on the corporate ladder. On a daily basis I was expected to take on male characteristics in order to be taken seriously within a team of men. I observed successful women mimicking men while ignoring or talking down to women as the men did.

This is also the experience of many women, Sue Kedgley in *Heading nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit* (1993) described her experience of working for the United Nations in New York. Initially Kedgley tried to gain, without success, access for herself and other women to the passages of power. However after attending courses instructing her to take on masculine characteristics and to play by male rules, she put on a suit and worked her way up the ladder until she found herself the only women in top meetings with the

Secretary General. She evaluated what she had achieved and the cost – the long working hours, sacrifice of a personal life, putting up with bad behaviour, being tolerated as part of the furniture or flirted with for amusement. Kedgley wondered what this had to do with being a woman. She gave it up and come home only to find women here in New Zealand reading the same books and attending the same courses.

Anne Truitt¹ in *Daybook: the Journal of an Artist* (1987) shares an experience of heading a post-graduate seminar while guest lecturer at the University of South Carolina. A student asked why she had moved from psychology to writing and then from writing to sculpture. Truitt openly shared her personal experience and reasons why, only afterward was she uncomfortable with her response and likened it to her female need to nurture. As if the students were “children wandering in a dark forest...to rush to them with whatever light I carry.” (pp.105 - 106) Only to realise that she should stand with the light and let them find her. “I could so easily have said ‘Because I found it didn’t serve my purposes.’” (p. 105) An example of responding initially in the feminine and then on reflection recognising the supposedly inappropriate response in a professional environment.

¹ Anne Truitt is thought to have had the first minimalist show in New York. Her sculptures are constructed of wooden tall square columns and then finished, by hand, in layers of paint sanded back between each application. Truitt’s sculptures use the language of minimalism within their construction and feminism in a hand painted finish.



Figure 3. Justine Walker, *Untitled (APPLAUSE)*, 2008, multimedia, 740 x 180 x 120mm

A black rectangular light box with the white text APPLAUSE written across the acrylic front. The word APPLAUSE illuminates for two minutes, then extinguishes for two minutes. This sequence repeats continuously.

Eva Hesse² and husband Tom Doyle's relationship was constantly stressed by the art world's admiration of Doyle's work while ignoring Hesse's. Lucy Lippard first met Hesse in 1963, her first impression being "that of a beautiful, fashionable, but spoiled little girl... I too considered her 'Tom's wife' rather than a serious artist." (Lippard, 1992, p. 23) Hesse was often challenged by people, asking why she couldn't just be Tom's wife. She was often frustrated and confused by expectations of her. "I cannot be so many things. I cannot be something for everyone.... Woman, beautiful, artist, wife, housekeeper, cook, saleslady all these things." (Lippard, 1992, p.24)

When addressing the problems of equality versus liberation Germaine Greer states:

Revolution ought to go much further than equal pay for equal work. It ought to revolutionise the conditions of work completely...It is not a sign of revolution when the oppressed adopt the manners of the oppressors and practice oppression on their own behalf. Nor is it a sign of revolution when women ape men or compete ... for a man's distinction in a man's world.... We know that such women do not champion their own sex once they are in positions of power, that when they are employers they do not employ their own sex...Such women are like the white man's black man, they are the obligatory woman, the exceptional

² Lucy Lippard's biography *Eva Hesse* covers Hesse's art career. Hesse trained as a painter but was increasingly influenced by her husband Tom Doyle, a successful sculptor. Initially using paper mache, string and rope to build up the surface of a painting.

Hesse's real break came when working in Germany for a year. Doyle had been commissioned to make work for the collector, Arnhard Scheidt, who decided it would be less expensive to have Doyle work in Germany for a year than to ship one of his works. Hesse started making machine like drawings. Using found materials within and around the studio, she shared with Tom, she made her first sculptures.

creature who is as good as a man and much more decorative.” (Kedgley, 1993, p. 13)³

The key here seems to be that we have tried to achieve equality within a patriarchal system, which by definition is biased in favour of men. Such a patriarchal system positions the male as the norm, everything outside of this norm is abnormal, is the other, aka women. So to achieve equality within this system women must judge themselves against the norm, men. In comparing ourselves as women against this norm we are continuing to allow ourselves to be defined and therefore valued within a system designed by men for men. Liberation is “about asserting difference, endowing that difference with dignity and prestige, and insisting on it as a condition of self-definition and self-determination.” (Greer, 1999, p. 2)

³ “How are we going to go about this? This society is the very society that killed female freedom: the society that was built on female slavery.... Some of us will succeed in moving into elitist jobs, kicking out sisters on the way up....We can, of course, aim to play the same game that men have played for centuries....But women will inevitably arrive at the next stage, and realize the futility of trying to be like men.... The aim of the female revolution will have to be a total one, eventually making it a revolution for the whole world.” Yoko Ono in *The Feminization of Society* (Chave, 2002, p.136)



Figure 4. Justine Walker, *Untitled*, 2008, multiple A4 inkjet photocopies, varying size

A4 sheets of coloured paper (blue, red, pink, yellow and green) have been cut into 4cm wide strips of paper. The strips of paper have been shuffled together. Each strip has been placed next to the other, within the shuffled order, on the scanning bed of a photocopier. The lid of the photocopier has been left open so that the light from an adjacent window is able to filter through the paper strips altering the colours within the resulting photocopy depending on the time of day. The next sequence of strips is placed on the scanning bed and the process repeats. The series continues.

Luce Irigaray considers language, the symbolic order, to be a direct reflection of culture and our society. The “feminine has become, in our languages, the non-masculine, that is to say an abstract nonexistent reality.” (Irigaray, 2007, p.12) As subjective expression is often derogatory to women when defining her as object to the male subject, women find it difficult to speak and be heard as women⁴. Irigaray recognises

the difficulties [women] face in order to enter the between-men cultural world lead almost all of them, including those who call themselves feminists, to renounce their female identity and relationships with other women, bringing them to an individual and collective impasse when it comes to communication.

(Irigaray, 2007, p. 13)⁵

It appears to have been a mistake to seek equality without changing the underlying system of patriarchy to liberate women from the expectations of society and therefore men.

Hilary Robinson in *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray* (2006) breaks down Irigaray’s concept of ‘mimesis’ into two parts. The first Robinson calls ‘productive mimesis’ such as when a musician recites a piece of music they bring their own interpretation to it, their own nuances and therefore an opportunity to improve the piece. The second being ‘non-productive’ or ‘maintenance mimesis’ which is a repetition and therefore a continuation of what has gone before. In the case of culture this means perpetuating the history of patriarchy. (pp.17-51)

⁴ “They are excluded and denied by the patriarchal linguistic order. They cannot be women and speak in a sensible, coherent manner.” (Irigaray, 2007, p.13)

⁵ Irigaray also points out the practical impossibilities of becoming equal, one sex, as detrimental to the continuation of the species.

According to Irigaray's concept of mimesis when women play the feminine role they are mimicking patriarchy's definition of femininity. This definition is set out to confirm the sameness of men, to be man's other. In order for patriarchy to establish the norm of the male, man must first recognise the sameness of men. And in addition recognise the otherness in women. For this to be accomplished women must "replicate a 'femininity' that is not of her making." (Robinson, 2006, p. 28)

Irigaray bases her theory on her practice of psychoanalysis and the stages of a child's development. During the Oedipal stage a child differentiates itself from the mother in order to determine a separate identity. When a young boy sees his mother lacks a penis he sees her as not the same, she becomes his other, he transfers his identification from the mother to the father, who is the same, yet retains his desire for the mother. The young girl on identifying with the mother sees herself as also lacking and therefore shifts her desire to the father in doing so she enters language, the symbolic. (McAfee, 2003, p.21-22)

What I find frightening here is that on the one hand women have to take on masculine characteristics to have authority and therefore to be heard. But on the other if women take on feminine characteristics they are again defined by the patriarchal system. How do we change this system so that women can take back their identity?

Irigaray suggests that 'productive mimesis' and hysteria have the potential to revolutionise or undermine patriarchy. Using productive mimesis to take what has already been defined by patriarchy and improving on it. (Robinson, 2006, pp.17-51)



Figure 5. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Drawing)*, 2008, video, 12 minutes, looped

Starting with a white piece of paper, a hand draws with an orange wax crayon continuously, filling the paper with orange. Filmed from the viewpoint of the performer. The audio with this work is of the rhythmic rubbing and scratching of the crayon on the paper and table beneath.

Hysteria is when a woman deliberately takes the role of femininity to extreme perfection in order to redefine and therefore take ownership of femininity. An example is becoming as slim as possible through anorexia. However the danger is losing oneself to femininity; to being assimilated. However women who masquerade femininity, defined by patriarchy, have no choice but hysteria in an attempt to establish an identity. As Irigaray states:

Hysteria is silent and at the same time it mimes. And – how could it be otherwise – miming/reproducing a language that is not its own, masculine language, it caricatures and deforms that language; it ‘lies’, it ‘deceives’, as women have always been reputed to do. (Robinson, 2006, p.31)

Irigaray and Julia Kristeva both advocate for woman’s subjectivity. For a woman to be able to speak as the subject, not to be silenced as the object. They differ in how this might come into being; Irigaray suggests difference, two subjects, man and woman, existing within the same symbolic order. However Kristeva refuses to define woman at all. She calls for a deconstruction of masculine and feminine as metaphysical binaries.

Morphology

“Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled.” (Moi, 1995, p.12)

Difference sounds like a good alternative to equality. Allowing for two separate but equally respected male and female identities. According to Irigaray this is only possible if both man and woman are subjects and in turn do not reduce the other to the object; she calls this ‘intersubjectivity’ when two individuals can communicate as subjects. In order for this to happen each subject has to recognise their own limits and therefore realise they are unable to define or change what is beyond those limits. This would make it impossible to reduce another subject to the object. Irigaray suggests this is possible through creating a second syntax within the existing symbolic order which is appropriate for women. (Robinson, 2006)

Robinson refers to Derrida’s theory of *Différance*, meaning both to differ and to defer, in order to demonstrate identity is possible. According to Derrida difference cannot exist without *différance*. Difference meaning two opposing definitions (binaries); *différance* incorporating a structure of opposing binaries while deferring the definition of the binaries, this implies slippage between the two definitions. For example language produces man and woman as distinct categories that appear to be “fixed poles of a natural opposition. However, these are but two relative signifiers in a chain down which meaning is constantly deferred.” (Robinson, 2006, p.100) Thus between the difference of masculine and feminine, exists the space of *différance* that allows individual identity. (Robinson, 2006, p.99-101)

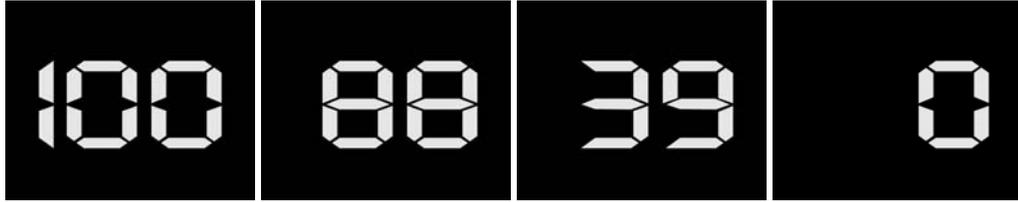


Figure 6. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Countdown)*, 2008, video, 1 minute 40 seconds, looped

Using a font similar to that of a digital clock, a sequence of numerical images from 0 to 100 has been created. These images have been animated to countdown from 100 to 0 and then repeat. This work has no audio.

Irigaray uses the term ‘morphology’ to denote what happens within the symbolic to accommodate difference. The subject understands what it means to be male or female not just through the body but also through the symbolic and its definition of the body. However this understanding moves in both directions, therefore morphology as a space between body and signification is an instance of *différance*. It is through this *différance* that woman will be able to determine their own syntax and therefore subjectivity. According to Irigaray in order to create a syntax appropriate for women while still within a phallogentric⁶ system we have to disrupt the symbolic on every level down to the characters it’s made up of and return again with language.⁷ (Robinson, 2006, pp.97-124)

Here Irigaray is making it possible for women, which have been relegated to the realm of the body within patriarchy, to have a voice. A slippage between body and mind

⁶ Phallogentric system is based on vision; a little boy on seeing that his mother does not have a penis recognises her as not the same, she becomes the other. In recognising his mothers lack the boy develops a fear of castration. Within this system women are seen to be lacking, to be a void.

Robinson cites the following artists as attempting to construct non-phallogentric ways of viewing women: Louise Bourgeois, Leonora Carrington, Genevieve Cadieux, Helen Chadwick, Mona Hatoum, Laura Godfrey-Isaacs and Jana Sterbak.

⁷ In relation to art morphology occurs between the artwork and the viewer; and between the artist and the object. Alison Rowley’s account of her first experience of the work of Jenny Saville demonstrates this: starting by standing at arms length (a painters distance) from the work she could see the brush strokes, the touch of the artist and could imagine the physical making, without seeing the boundaries of forms that are represented. Taking a step back some of the forms come into focus. Rowley starts to think of the body and how it has been represented through art history. Taking a further step back with the complete painting coming into view, thoughts on how women’s bodies are treated, what it is like to have such a body. What it means to be a woman represented in this way come to mind. (Robinson, 2006, pp.119-120) *Différance* is occurring through a shifting of meaning/understanding/translation/engagement through the making and image represented.

allows for an entry into the symbolic, this implies that women should be able to develop an appropriate syntax to be heard within the symbolic and therefore claim subjectivity.

Girls do not enter language in the same ways as boys....They enter language by producing a space, a path, a river, a dance and rhythm, a song... Girls describe a space around themselves rather than displacing a substitute object from one place to another or into various places. (Irigaray in Robinson, 2006, p.132) ⁸

Young girls dance and spin to cope with their mothers absence, creating a space for themselves to be expressive. “The subjectivity of the little girl is developed through her performativity, including that of bodily gestures that can develop signification and legibility in the Symbolic – an example of a developing legibility in an appropriate syntax.” (Robinson, 2006, p.130)

⁸ Freud observed his nephew coping with the absence of his mother by throwing a reel with string attached and using the string to retrieve the reel. For Freud the reel represents the mother, the little boy was able to objectify his mother. Little girls on being separated from their mother use dolls to take the mother's place, because the daughter identifies with the mother's lack of subjectivity she cannot objectify the mother and therefore only a female doll can be a stand in. (Robinson, 2006, pp.126-128)



Figure 7. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Landscape)*, 2008, video, 2 minutes 30 seconds, looped

The winking font is used to create an image of an imaginary landscape. The image is then animated to pan through the landscape from left to right repeatedly. There is no audio with this work.

Louise Bourgeois' *Cells* create a space for her subjective self. Each cell is body size as if she had spun or danced, arms outstretched as a young girl would, to determine the size. These works disrupt the readings by critics who cling to her description of her family experience as a young girl. Bourgeois' father had a mistress who was also her governess. Her father moved the mistress into the family home while her mother was still present. Most critics have commented on Bourgeois' work being about the father-daughter relationship, whereas Robinson would consider this to be an absence of the mother-daughter relationship. Not only is Bourgeois traumatised by the absence of the mother, as all young girls are according to psychoanalysis, her mother was completely displaced within the family by the mistress. Therefore Bourgeois had no one to identify with. (Robinson, 2006, pp.132-145)

For women to become subjects we need to identify with woman subjects that have gone before us. Irigaray calls this identification female-genealogy, in particular she stresses we must reclaim our mother-daughter genealogies. If a daughter can identify with a subjective mother then it becomes possible for the daughter to also be a subject. Mother-daughter genealogies have been interrupted by the patriarchal order moving from oral to written histories.⁹ (Robinson, 2006)

Irigaray suggests placing mother-daughter images in public places to reinforce mother-daughter genealogies. She comments on how these images are missing from our society and recounts an experience of viewing a statue of a mother holding a child. Initially she had thought it was Mary holding baby Jesus however on closer inspection she discovered it was St Anne holding her daughter Mary the virgin mother of Jesus. In Christianity this is a rare image of mother-daughter relations. (Robinson, 2006)

⁹ It is thought by Irigaray and many feminist writers that pre-history was matriarchal. Pre-history meaning pre-recorded and therefore pre-written consequently female-genealogies are thought to be oral.

Irigaray adds along with the mother-daughter genealogies we also need to recapture the female divine. In order for women to achieve their full potential they need access to the divine. This will open up the possibility for women to transcend their objectivity. If there is a possibility of becoming a goddess rather than just the mother of a god then anything is possible. (Robinson, 2006, pp.147-170)

Bourgeois¹⁰ has revisited themes and interests in her latter work using fabric and stuffed objects, particularly female forms, that were previously made in bronze or marble. Stitching and sewing is less valued and considered women's work. This becomes a comment on the status of women in the art world both as object and subject. Robinson observes:

They are unmistakably gendered and classed and allude to a particular position in the hierarchy of creative endeavour. The connotations here are not of art, but of the domestic sphere of furnishings, of dressmaking, patchwork, make-do-and-mend, of an activity passed from mother to daughter. (Robinson, 2006, p.144)

¹⁰ Bourgeois latest works are geometric patterns made with stitched fabric.

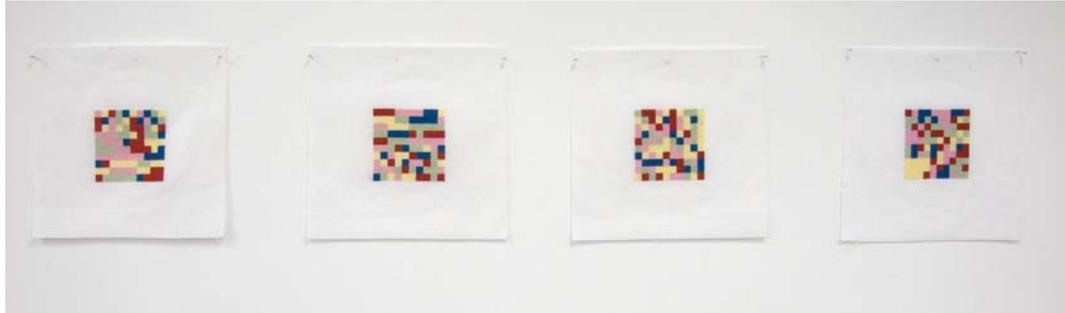


Figure 8. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Cross Stitch)*, 2009, multimedia, 18 at 255 x 255mm

A4 sheets of coloured paper (blue, red, pink, yellow and green) have been cut into 4cm wide strips of paper. The strips have been shuffled together. As a strip is removed from the resulting pile, it's corresponding colour is cross stitched into the next square of the grid. Each square is made up of 5 x 5 cross stitches; each grid is made up of 10 x 10 squares. The series continues.

Harmony Hammond¹¹ in her essay *Feminist Abstract Art* (1977) addresses readings of abstraction that have denied the possibility of it being used by feminist artists simply because abstraction has been claimed as a male domain, both in its creation and interpretation. Hammond goes on to discuss indigenous and women's craft as being based on abstract, often geometric patterns, coming out of a repeated stitch. This repeated stitch can be compared to the repetitive mark making within drawing and painting. The repeated stitch or mark is diaristic in nature; a recording of daily activity and emotion, "they are a record of recent feeling, a ritual giving in to the repetitive gesture, a language to reveal self". (p.68) According to Hammond "words are marks and marks are words; their repetition becomes not only an interior monologue but also a dialogue with other women."¹² (p.68) This opens up the possibility of female genealogies and woman-to-woman intersubjectivity.

Lucy Lippard comments on Eva Hesse's work in relation to craft:

Women are always derogatorily associated with crafts, and have been conditioned towards such chores as tying, sewing, knotting, wrapping, binding, knitting, and so on. Hesse's art...incorporates these notions of ritual as antidote to isolation and despair. There is that ritual which allows scope to fantasy, compulsive use of the body accompanied by a freeing of the mind. (Lippard, 1992, p.209)¹³

¹¹ Hammond is one of the few artists Lucy Lippard considers successful in combining abstraction and female experience.

¹² "...the meaning of swing and knotting is 'connecting' – connecting the parts of one's life, and connecting to other women – creating a sense of community and wholeness." (Hammond, 1977, p.67)

¹³ The art world accepted male artists using craft materials and techniques within their work, such as Frank Stella, Kenneth Noland and Claes Oldenburg. A lot of feminists saw formalism as representing patriarchy – "male authority, male ideas and male rule, as well as a kind of neutralised, dehumanised art." (Stoops, 1996, p.29)

In hindsight Lippard states she curated the show *Eccentric Abstraction*, which included Hesse and Bourgeois, “looking for ‘feminist art’. I was looking for sensuous, even sensual, abstraction, an off-center, three-dimensional imagery that shared minimalism’s bluntness and presence but didn’t cut off all content.” (Stoops, 1996, p.27)¹⁴

Hesse didn’t think of her work as male or female. She was interested in personal experience, in perfection and imperfection, in contradiction and absurdity. She was fascinated with repetition and how it exaggerated an idea. “Repetition can be a guard against vulnerability; a bullet-proof vest of closely knit activity can be woven against fate. Ritual and repetition¹⁵ are also ways of containing anger, and of fragmenting fearsome wholes” (Lippard, 1992, p. 209)

¹⁴ Lippard commented “I was not trying to ‘create a movement’, but rather to indicate that there were emotive or ‘eccentric’ or erotic alternatives to a solemn and deadest Minimalism which still retained the clarity of that notion.... Eccentric Abstraction thrives on contrast, but contrast handled uniquely, so that opposites become complementary instead of contradictory” (Lippard, 1992, p. 83)

¹⁵ “Repetition, and repetition of moveable units in particular, leads to fragmentation, the disintegration of one order in favour of the new one.” (Lippard, 1992, p. 209)

In *Difference and Repetition* (1994), Gilles Deleuze states that repetition is not to be confused with generality. Within each repetition there is singularity or individuality therefore difference. “To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent.” (p.1) He links repetition with habit and contemplation opening a space of ‘inbetweenness’ where difference exists. Connecting repetition to human experience and embracing the infinite peculiarities of the human hand the post-minimal artists have linked difference with repetition.



Figure 9. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Headstand)*, 2009, video, 4 minutes, looped

The opening frames are of a white wall with a striped orange mat in front of it. Long blond hair falls from the top of the screen until the upside-down head of a naked woman rests on the mat. The shot is of the woman's head and shoulders. The woman holds the headstand for as long as she can and then ascends from the frame as she entered. The same woman returns to repeat the performance. The video has no audio.

bell hooks writes of making space for oneself, time to contemplate, when women sew, embroider or mend. (hooks, 1995) Virginia Woolf shared the same sentiment in *A Room of One's Own* (2009), women need time and space, as men do, to be creative. Although Woolf thought it important that women should write, she advised their writing not be gendered as if they, the author, have no gender.

The exhibition *More than Minimal*¹⁶ (1996) curated by Susan Stoops included sculpture based women artists from the 1970's "...their art articulates a 'both/and' discourse - that is 'both' a feminist rejection of the exclusive ethos of minimalism 'and' an affirmation of human relatedness of an abstract aesthetic." (p.7) Stoops¹⁷ comments there has been a history of denying abstraction multiple subjective discourses. And argues the artists in this exhibition have embraced abstraction to represent female subjectivity. They ignored feminist rejection of abstraction as an exclusive male domain and explored the possibility that abstract language, in particular minimalism, had not been taken far enough. Minimalisms premise to remove the hand of the artist from the work, allowing for the viewers experience of the work and space around it, removed the subjectivity of the artist. However the gender, race and identity of the viewer are also ignored in favour of the phenomenological experience of the work. These artists used productive mimesis to

¹⁶ *More than Minimal* included artists Lynda Benglis, Jackie Ferrara, Nancy Graves, Eva Hesse, Ana Mendieta, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, Michelle Stuart, Dorothea Rockburne, Hannah Wilke and Jackie Winsor.

¹⁷ These women artists "while retaining minimalisms emphasis on relatively elemental forms, schematic compositions and formal repetition and restraint turned to human experiences and natural occurrences, and gravitated toward unpretentious, oftentimes raw materials and visibly direct, hands-on methods." (Stoops, 1996, p.6)

reinterpret minimalism; they included their female experience opening up the subjectivity of the artist and viewer, allowing for intersubjectivity.¹⁸

In *Women's Time* Julia Kristeva comments on three feminist attitudes. The first, prior to 1968, sought equal access to linear time, to the history of accomplishment. In order to achieve this women minimised difference to justify their equal access to opportunities enjoyed by men. Kristeva reflects very favourably on what these women achieved in granting women access to the vote, education and career opportunities. Unfortunately minimizing difference meant accepting the status quo without question. (McAfee, 2003, pp.93-96)

The second examined difference, women's uniqueness from men. However women marginalised themselves by rejecting the system and attempting to exist outside it. By idolising the feminine they practice a backwards sexism and generalise the definition of women to a universal, undermining a woman's subjectivity and therefore identity. (McAfee, 2003, pp.96-100)

The third, which Kristeva hopes for the new millennium, will examine and re-evaluate the socio-symbolic definitions of masculine and feminine. Allowing for individual woman as subject.

¹⁸ Poly Apfelbaum, Mona Hatoum, Rachel Lachowicz, Jac Leirner, Claudia Matzko, Rachel Whiteread, and Andrea Zittel were included in the exhibition *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (1994), curated by Lynn Zelevansky, because of their use of repetition, the grid or geometric structure. These women engage with minimalist tactics while adapting them for their own purposes; accommodating contradiction "emphasizing the body and the ineluctability of both suffering and decay and sensuality and desire" (p.33), plus a fascination with the ephemeral nature of experience, memory and time.

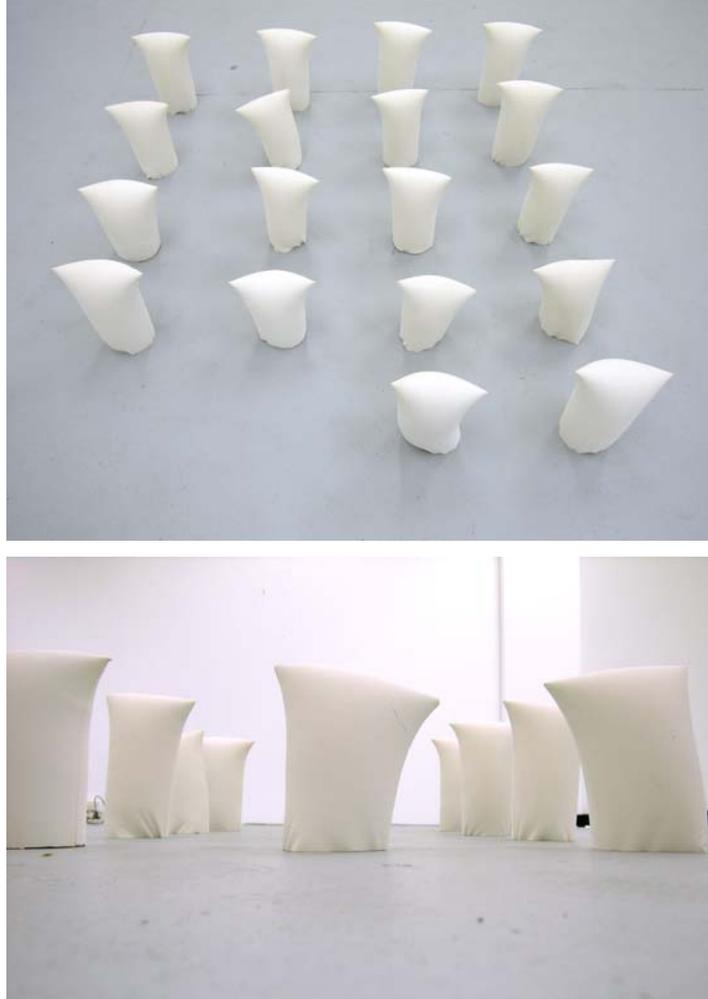


Figure 10. Justine Walker, *Untitled*, 2009, plaster, size variable

Two pieces of satin fabric, 20 x 29cm, shiny sides facing, are sown together along three sides leaving one 20cm end open. The resulting mould is hung from a rig to hold it open. Plaster is poured into the mould and allowed to set. The resulting plaster cast is then removed from the fabric and turned upside down to sit on the flat end formed by the opening of the mould. The process is then repeated. The series continues.

Metonymy¹⁹

“Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.” (Moi, 1995. p. 12)

If difference also puts a woman’s subjectivity in jeopardy, by idolising women universally rather than allowing for woman as individual; how are we to create a second syntax within the symbolic appropriate for women? Julia Kristeva would suggest that we deconstruct masculinity and femininity within identity.

Helen Molesworth in her essay *Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out: the Rejection of Lee Lozano*²⁰ (2002) describes Lozano as a successful painter and conceptual artist in New York in the 1960’s and 70’s. Eventually Lozano decided to reject the art world by gradually refusing invitations to openings and events. Around this time she decided not to have any contact with women for a month, a work she continued until the end of her life, known to insist on being served by a man when confronted by a female clerk at checkout counters. Molesworth puts this down to Lozano’s rejection of patriarchy and capitalism both of which are intimately connected. “Not to speak to women is to render daily life a constant struggle, and I would proffer that in that space of difficulty Lee Lozano was more attuned to the problematics, limitations and systematised nature of gender and

¹⁹ Metaphor transforms an object’s meaning without changing its context. Metonymy transforms an objects meaning by indicating a different but related context.

²⁰ Molesworth discusses three bodies of work; one consisting of drawings and paintings of male and female genitals morphed together which progressed to include deformed tools. The second, the Wave paintings, use a self-created mathematical formula which determined the number of waves for each painting. Each painting was then executed in one sitting, some taking eight hours, others three days. The third body of work is her written word pieces, for example *Dialogue Piece* where Lozano invited artists and critiques to have a conversation in her studio, which she would then document in her ongoing journals.

patriarchy.” (p.71) By refusing to speak to woman as an artwork Lozano was highlighting the difficulties of dividing society into two separate genders, while simultaneously refusing the “demand of capitalism for the constant production of private property.” (p.71) Hence linking these two systems as mutually beneficial.

Molesworth comments that Virginia Woolf’s essay *Three Guineas* (1938) also makes the same observation. When asked to give funds towards three causes: a women’s college; a women’s professional society; and to preserve culture from war, Woolf argues that none are deserving as all women’s causes are connected with war. In order to solve the problem of war we must also solve the problem of women’s inequality. To do this Woolf argues, “one has to identify the interconnected and mutually beneficial systems of patriarchy and capitalism and then to reject their self-imposed terms of engagement.” (Molesworth, 2002, p.71) Lee Lozano not talking to women as an artwork did just that.²¹

²¹ Robinson refers to painting being privileged and therefore capitalised within the art world. What Irigaray calls the intersubjective mediator cannot be capitalised because it then becomes an object and the intersubjective relationship is interrupted.



Figure 11. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Bud)*, 2009, video, 20 minutes, looped

Filmed in my mother's garden. The camera is focused on a Camellia bud swaying in the breeze. This work has no audio.



Figure 12. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Bud #2)*, 2009, video, 20 minutes, looped

Filmed in my mother's garden. The camera is focused on a Rhododendron bud. The light filtering through the surrounding trees moves slowly across the Rhododendrons leaves, which shiver in an occasional breeze. The audio track to this work is of the surrounding noises of the garden and the gardens adjacent; birds, dogs, lawn mowers and insects. The audio is not always included with the installation of this work.

Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1995) discusses feminist reception of Woolf's work. In *A Room of One's Own* (2009) Woolf is adamant that women should write, however she recommends they write with a non-gendered voice. Feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter have rejected Woolf for not drawing on or writing about her own female experience. Making the personal political was an important aspect distinguishing feminist art in the 1960's and 70's. Showalter claims Woolf abandons her femaleness for androgyny which she defines as a "full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements". (Moi, 1995, p.2) Showalter is critical of *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando*²² for Woolf's use of "repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy and multiple viewpoint" (Moi, 1995, p.2) which shifts and changes the subject's position, leaving the critic confused with no one single viewpoint. Showalter is looking for a female aesthetic within Woolf's writing, one that is clearly defined and based within female experience. However, as Moi points out, this only illustrates Showalter's feminism is based on a fight against sexism where there are clear oppositions. What Showalter seems to misunderstand is that clearly defined oppositions and a singular viewpoint (man) is the basis for a patriarchal system. (Moi, 1995, pp.4-8)

Moi argues that Woolf practiced a deconstructive form of writing, exposing how language cannot be pinned down to an essential meaning. She too refers to Derrida's theory of language being an endless deferral of meaning, "any search for an essential, absolutely stable meaning must therefore be considered metaphysical." (Moi, 1995, p.9)

²² Woolf was writing *Orlando* at the same time as *A Room of One's Own*. *Orlando* is a novel written in biographical form covering four hundred years. First describing Orlando's life as a gentleman rising through the ranks of English aristocracy only then to become a woman. Orlando is then challenged by society in order to retain her rank, riches and independence.

To the Lighthouse is another of Woolf's novels, written prior to *Orlando*.

For Kristeva language and subjectivity are intimately connected; language shapes the subject and the subject forms language. She defines the 'semiotic' as the emotional or unconscious expression of language; how bodily energy is used to inflect and give meaning behind language. The 'symbolic' is the rational, logical structure of language. In what she calls 'signifying process' the bodily experience finds a way, via the semiotic, into language, the symbolic.²³ (McAfee, 2003, pp.13-27)

²³ The 'Chora' is a term Kristeva borrows from Plato to mean both receptacle and nurse. Plato used the term to explain the beginning of the universe. However Kristeva uses it to explain the stage before a child comes into language. The child is in the chora associated with the mother as protector; the child is within a boundless space where she only has coos, facial expressions and bodily gestures to express herself; the child is within the semiotic. On entering language the child enters the symbolic and therefore can now express herself logically to be understood. However the chora and therefore the semiotic is not lost. (McAfee, 2003, pp.18-23)



Figure 13. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Drawing Performance #1 - 15)*, 2009, A4 paper, colour pencil, variable size

12 coloured pencils are removed from their packet and placed into a container. A pencil is selected at random from the container. Using a ruler a straight line is drawn, a ruler width distance from the left edge of a landscape A4 white piece of paper. The line starts 2cm from the top of the paper and finishes 2cm from the bottom. The pencil is returned to the container. The ruler is moved 3mm to the right (by eye). Another pencil is selected at random and other line drawn. The process repeats until a line is drawn a ruler width distance from the right edge of the paper. The series continues.

Kristeva has been criticised for being essentialist by feminist writers²⁴. They liken her semiotic and symbolic as stand-ins for the feminine and masculine. Women historically have been identified with emotion, the unconscious, the irrational and the bodily and men with the rational, conscious mind. Modern philosophy is based on Cartesian dualism of mind over matter therefore anything of the body, biological processes or emotion, cannot add to human knowledge. However Kristeva argues that the semiotic is always present in the symbolic and therefore they are inseparable; “a speaking being is embodied and desiring, that is, *alive*, her attempts at purely logical discourse will always be disrupted.” (McAfee, 2003, p.80) Kristeva’s critics by taking an anti-essentialist reading for her work have only opened up the possibility of essentialism while attempting to prove its opposition. Kristeva is trying to do the exact opposite, to deconstruct such binaries and oppositions, by claiming them to be metaphysical. (McAfee, 2003, pp.75-90)

Kristeva in her essay *Revolution in Poetic Language* argued that modernist poetry²⁵ is a revolutionary form of writing. Modernist poetry with its “abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks and apparent rhythm of the body and the unconscious” (Moi, 1995, p.11) reveals the semiotic erupting into the symbolic. For Kristeva the symbolic order is the structure sustaining all human social and cultural institutions, therefore any activity that disrupts the symbolic is revolutionary. Because modernist poetry is a practice of writing she sees this as a possibility of transforming the symbolic from within. Woolf with her refusal to write in a rational or logical way within her essays can also be seen to be disrupting the symbolic.

²⁴ Nancy Fraser, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Toril Moi took issue with Kristeva’s concepts of the ‘Chora’, maternity and the semiotic.

²⁵ Kristeva uses the examples of poets Lautréamont and Mallarmé, along with novelist James Joyce.

Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* demonstrates her concept of androgyny through illustrating how destructive fixed metaphysical definitions of gender can be. The characters Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey are the epitome of male and female identities, Lily Briscoe, an artist, breaks down these oppositions as far as possible while still living within the patriarchal system of the day. Instead of Woolf abandoning her femaleness, as Showalter would suggest, she has recognised feminism needs to deconstruct the metaphysical binaries of masculine and feminine in order for women to become subjective. (Moi, 1995, p.13)

Roni Horn's practice is based on drawing. She considers any problem solving activity to be drawing. In her studio on a daily basis she produces drawings by following a process of breaking drawings down, cutting them up, and reconstructing them. There are cuts, guide marks and measurements left by the process that has been followed; however as the viewer trying to decipher the process you end up losing your footing.

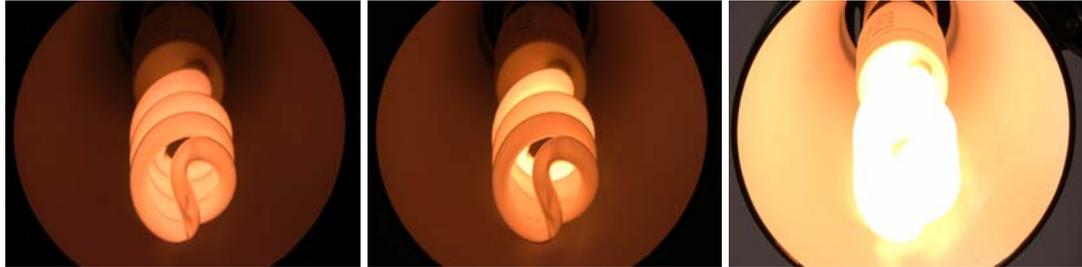


Figure 14. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Bulb)*, 2009, video, 2 minutes, looped

Opening with the image of a lit spiral florescent light bulb glowing orange. Gradually, almost undetectable, the spiral begins to darken from one end to the other until the bulb bursts into light, before the video loops to the beginning. There is no audio with this work. The light bulb has been filmed from the point of being turned on and slowly warms up. During the editing process the footage has been reversed.

Briony Fer in her essay *Complete with Missing Parts* (2009) discusses Roni Horn's work in the Tate Modern exhibition *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*. Fer describes Horn as an artist who has worked through the legacy of minimalism. "...the memory of a certain kind of encounter with minimal art is built into her work as part of it's own psychology" (p.25) Fer suggests that Horn's work has two things running through it; one a monologue, an "inner-thought train" and "at the same time a bodily sense of the situation....It is as if experience is pitched against phenomenology." (p.27) The text, from Emily Dickinson's²⁶ poems, in the work may be thought of as experience and the way it is installed as phenomenological.²⁷

Horn is interested in the instability of identity. Androgyny²⁸, in particular, how it does not allow for a single and exclusive identity. She acknowledges her own identity relates to not being a man or a woman. "Androgyny is identity based on the inclusion of

²⁶ Dickinson rarely leaving her house has been portrayed as weird or strange, however bell hooks sees this commitment to solitude and contemplation threatening to patriarchy. She sees this as claiming a space for contemplation and creativity. (Hooks, 1996)

²⁷ For example *Things That Happen Again: for Two Rooms* (1986) which consists of two identical solid copper objects placed in separate adjoining rooms. On discovering the second object the viewer's experience or memory of the first is changed to that of the original but only because of the second. The *Distant Double* series also has this effect with the addition of not quite being sure if the two drawings hung in different rooms are identical. The experience becomes one of testing the viewer's memory of details between the two.

Thinking of this doubling on installation in relation to the binary of masculine and feminine; is the original, the first come across or seen, the norm, the standard to be compared against in order to determine equality?

²⁸ For Horn the work *Asphere* (1988) is an object of androgyny, it includes difference as a source of identity.

the other.” (Herkenhoff, 2003, p.31) According to Horn language compounds identity, “I like the word ‘net’ in relationship to identity.” (Herkenhoff, 2003, p.31)

On evaluating feminist attitudes of equality and difference in her essay *Women’s Time*, Kristeva proposes an alternative which will deconstruct the socio-symbolic definitions of masculine and feminine. Allowing for individual woman as subject. She proposes three steps to achieving this: first to stop romanticising women and allow for individual woman; second²⁹ reconcile a woman’s desire to have children and contribute to the symbolic (culture); and third recognise that the symbolic is based on identity and difference “where one sex is seen as the rival of another.” (McAfee, 2003, p.101) As individuals we need to take responsibility for this conflict, in order to understand it as metaphysical, our own contribution to it and its perpetuation. “I am at once the attacker and the victim, the same and the other, identical and foreign.” (McAfee, 2003, p.101)

²⁹ Kristeva is also criticised for validating the bodily experience of maternity in her essays *Women’s Time* and *Stabat Mater*. However she offers maternity and motherhood as subverting the opposition of body and mind. Today’s women want to be mothers however by having a baby, being a bodily experience, a woman turns her back on her place in the symbolic, her contribution to culture. Drawing on Kristeva’s experience as a mother, she seeks to redefine motherhood, to create a guilt-free space so women can be mothers without being masochistic. She argues that procreation is the ultimate contribution to society and therefore culture, without procreation society will die out and culture with it. Asserting that motherhood intersects nature and culture; the bodily experience of giving birth and the mother looks after her child not out of duty or law but out of love “a love that is not just for an other but for what was once in her and for the species, for the singular other and for the universal.” (McAfee, 2003, p.86)

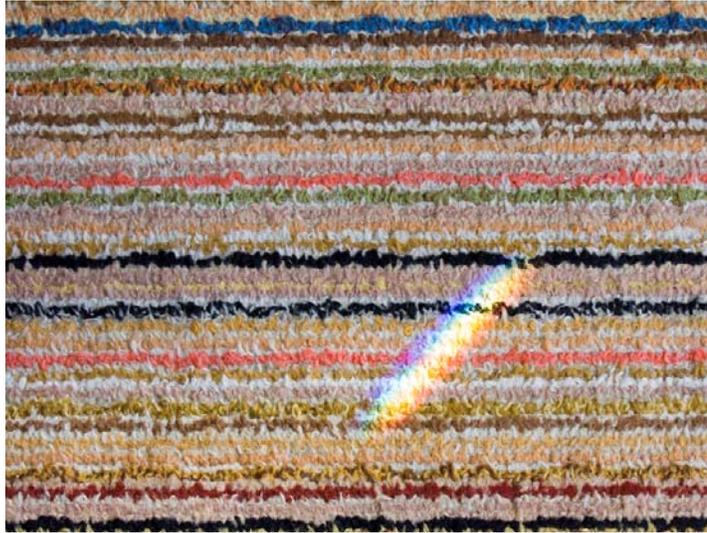


Figure 15. Justine Walker, *Untitled (Rainbow)*, 2009, digital image

Photograph of old horizontally striped multicoloured carpet. A gash of prismatic light cuts at an angle interrupting the striped pattern.

Preamble

This essay has discussed feminism from three perspectives equality, difference and androgyny in an effort to determine if and how it would be possible for women to become subjective.

Although women who followed the banner of equality have gained access to the vote, education and career opportunities, previously only enjoyed by men, they have not challenged the status-quo. Germaine Greer points out that for women to be liberated we must change the underlying patriarchal structure of society. Irigaray sees language, the symbolic order, as being a direct reflection of society. She suggests using mimesis and hysteria to undermine and therefore change the symbolic. However the danger is women will ultimately mimic patriarchies definition of femininity, again becoming the object.

Women that have advocated for difference have marginalised themselves while idolising women as universal and therefore closing any opportunity for woman as individual; as subject. Irigaray suggests subjectivity is possible through morphology and Derrida's theory of *différance*. The slippage of meaning in language offers the opportunity for women to develop a syntax, within the symbolic, to allow for intersubjectivity. Craft and the repetitive stitch has been handed down between generations of women, an example of mother-daughter genealogies Irigaray recommends we redevelop in order to recognise our mothers as subjects, therefore making subjectivity possible for ourselves. Irigaray also follows this line of reasoning to advocate for the female divine. Through the process of repetition, opening up a creative space, Eva Hesse and other women artists included in Susan Stoops exhibition *More than Minimal* demonstrate the possibility of intersubjectivity by allowing for the artist's and viewer's experience of the world.

Julia Kristeva suggests a third option deconstructing the binary of masculine and feminine as metaphysical. She too believes that language is a reflection of society, but that its meaning is constantly in flux therefore having fixed identities of masculine and feminine is pointless. Toeil Moi argues Virginia Woolf is undermining the symbolic in her writing using multiple viewpoints, repetition, whimsy and the idea of androgyny to recognise how destructive fixed genders can be. Kristeva advocates for the individual as subject and therefore the place to start questioning the oppositions of masculine and feminine.

Although I no longer feel isolated or dejected as when I started this journey, I will confess to still being a little confused. Not about the possibility of equality but as to what a non-gendered language would be like. What would a culture look like that has completely deconstructed the binary of masculine and feminine? Would masculine and feminine traits still be identifiable? If the answer is yes, perhaps as individuals, man or woman, we would be free to determine what masculine or feminine characteristics to incorporate into our identities. Two equal and opposite characteristics could be part of one identity; identity could change over time, swinging between masculine and feminine, without an eyebrow being raised.



Figure 16. Justine Walker, *Untitled (LAUGH)*, 2009, multimedia, 740 x 180 x 120mm

A black rectangular light box with the white text LAUGH written across the acrylic front. The word LAUGH illuminates for two minutes, then extinguishes for two minutes. This sequence repeats continuously.

Through her writing career Kristeva has changed her stance on the position of women from arguing for difference to refusing to define women at all. She has been harshly criticised for this; however I think she is only trying to demonstrate her point. Being that identity, culture and language cannot be pinned down to a particular definition; meaning is constantly shifting. Therefore to define masculine and feminine as fixed identities has no meaning. For both man and woman to be subjective and therefore determine their individual identity, they need to be able to deconstruct masculinity and femininity to then build an identity from a combination of parts without judgment from other subjects, which would only return them to the status of object.

Are we going to have a non-gendered language in my lifetime? I don't think so; it takes generations to change attitudes and languages. However given the development of politically correct language, substituting 'chairperson' for 'chairman' for example, does give me hope. Now all we need is for this to change from 'politically correct' to language.

My own journey hovers between Irigaray's discussion of mother-daughter genealogies; her use of metaphor and metonymy within her writing; And Kristeva's discussion on deconstructing the opposition of masculine and feminine, along with Woolf's exploration of androgyny within her writing practice. I continue to question identity and fixed meaning particularly in relation to my own performance as a woman within society and culture.

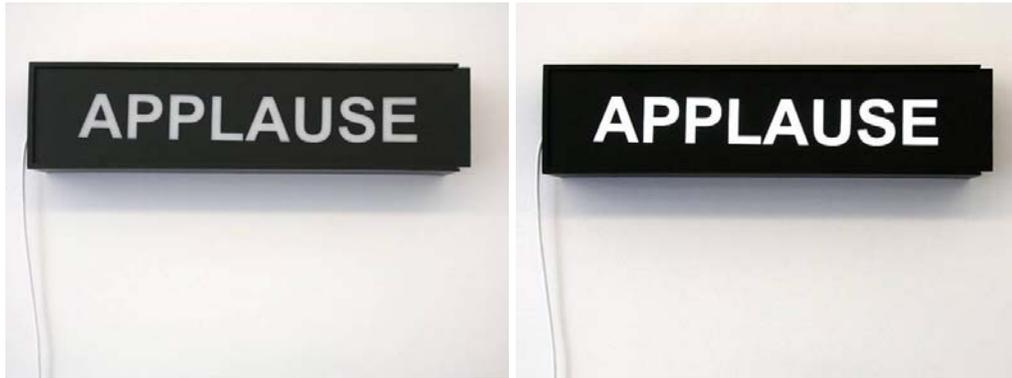


Figure 17. Justine Walker, *Untitled (APPLAUSE #2)*, 2009, multimedia, 740 x 180 x 120mm each

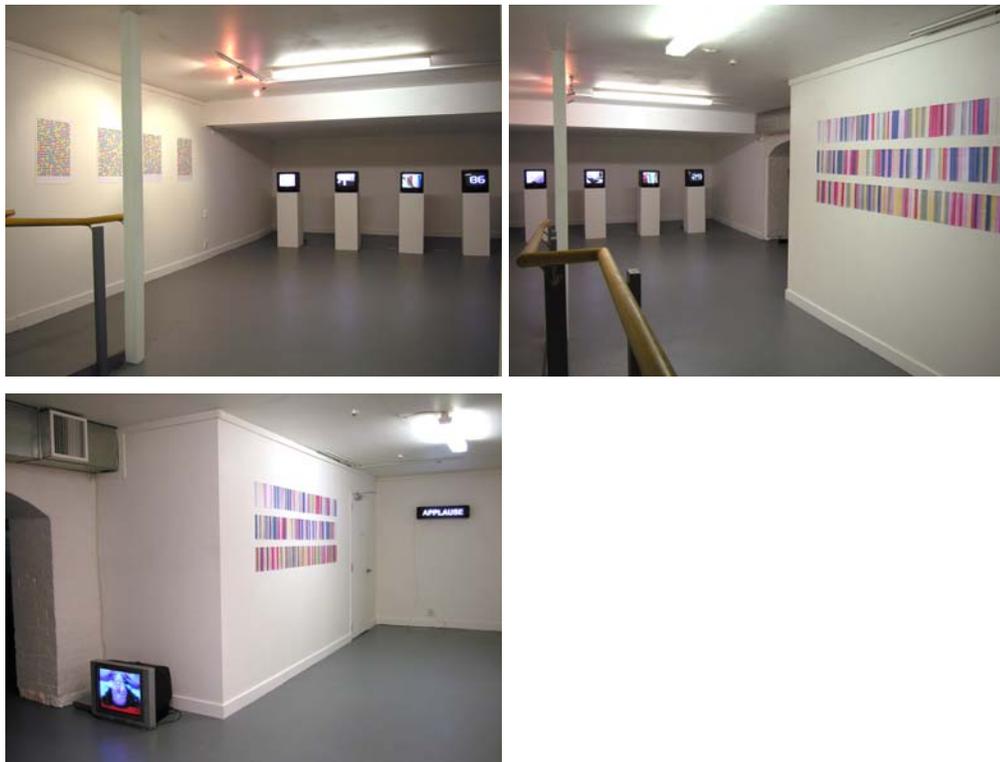
Two identical black rectangular light boxes with white text APPLAUSE written across the acrylic fronts. The word APPLAUSE illuminates for two minutes on the first box while the APPLAUSE is extinguished on the second box. Then the first box extinguishes for two minutes, while APPLAUSE illuminates the second box for two minutes. This sequence repeats continuously.

Appendix A – Installations

Installation at Vent Gallery, Massey University, April 2009



Installation at Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, July 2009



Install at Enjoy Gallery, Wellington, September 2009



Install at Massey University, December 2009



Appendix B – Words of Experience

“I met a happy man
a structuralist filmmaker [...]
he said we are fond of you
you are charming
but don't ask us
to look at your films
we cannot
there are certain films
we cannot look at
the personal clutter
the persistence of feelings
the hand-touch sensibility
the diaristic indulgence [...]

he said you can do as I do
take one clear process
follow its strictest
implications intellectually
establish a system of
permutations establish
their visual set....

I said my film is concerned
with Diet and Digestion [...]

he protested
you are unable to appreciate
the system the grid
the numerical rational
procedures-
the Pythagorean cues-

I saw my failings were worthy
of dismissal I'd be buried
alive my works lost...

he said we can be friends
equally tho we are not artists
equally I said we cannot
be friends equally and we
cannot be artists equally.”

Interior Scroll, Carolee Schneeman

Appendix C – DVD

The attached DVD includes samples of the following works:

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Shuffle)*, 2008

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Drawing)*, 2008

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Countdown)*, 2008

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Landscape)*, 2008

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Headstand)*, 2009

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Bud)*, 2009

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Bud #2)*, 2009

Justine Walker, *Untitled (Bulb)*, 2009

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