

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

FRIDA'S MOUSTACHE:

MAKING FACES IN WOMEN'S SELF-PORTRAITURE

AN EXEGESIS

by

DEBORAH WOOD

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION,
LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

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DECLARATION

I certify that, except where acknowledged, this thesis is the original work of the candidate alone.

Deborah Wood

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ABSTRACT

This exegesis combines theory and art practice to interrogate the idea that self-portraiture by women artists can be positioned, and interpreted, as a practice that strategically intervenes in the politics of representation, gender and identity.

The focus of this study is the face. The represented female face is identified as a site that is both problematic and dynamic for women artists. The face involves two contradictory traditions of representation for women. It is generally used in portraiture and self-portraiture to indicate the presence of the individual, the 'subject'. However, the female face has more often been represented as a de-individualised site, the object. When a woman artist attempts to make a self-portrait she must, therefore, re-negotiate the relationship between object and subject in order to make room for her own representations of subjectivity.

In this study I closely analyse how other women artists have employed their faces in their self-portraits. I also provide insights into my own practice of self-portraiture through the use of a commentary, which follows my thoughts and decisions throughout the art making process. I link the art works to theoretical debates concerning feminist art history, faciality and subjectivity. By inter-weaving praxis and theory in this way the study provides a new perspective on these debates.

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INTRODUCTION

This investigation into selfportraiture and women began in my studio four years ago. It commenced, as many of my series do, without a specific intention in mind. I had tentatively begun work on an idea revolving around the image of a house containing the face of a woman. I was exploring ideas about women, the home, space and containment. At a certain point I began to make the faces loosely my own, for no real reason except that it was the most available referent. I made no real attempt to capture an accurate likeness. I did not, at first, refer to a mirror but relied on a kind of generalised perception of what I thought I looked like.

The results disturbed me. While I could see and record the parts that constituted my face the eyes, brows, mouth, nose and so on, I could not recognise myself in any of these images. I felt completely unable to see my face as a coherent or meaningful whole. Certainly I was not able to see my face clearly enough to represent it as a portrait of my 'self'. What I had encountered was a blind spot regarding my own face, an inability to make sense of this part of my physiology.

It is not surprising that a person can find it more difficult to grasp how their own face looks than others. However, what did surprise me was the degree of myopia and anxiety I felt about this. So I began, almost obsessively, to paint my face again and again, never, seemingly, getting any closer to 'capturing' a recognisable or convincing self-representation. I became both uneasier and more fascinated by what was required in the process of self-portraiture. Many questions began to surface for me. How do I see myself? What constitutes likeness? What is the purpose of a self-portrait? What is the face? How much of my reaction was due to broader issues of gender surrounding the representation of women and self-image? What, finally, could my represented face tell me about my self? From this point I began a journey of research into those areas of inquiry produced from the connections that occurred between the images and ideas that arose out of my art practice.

There is an absence of models for creative theses like this. This absence has raised for me many questions regarding the final presentation of the project. How can I present the visual component so that it is not subsumed as mere illustration to the theoretical component? Is it possible to demonstrate to the reader through the organisation of the text itself the manner in which the studio practice shapes and directs the theoretical research? Can the form of the thesis reflect and honour the exploratory (and not necessarily 'logical') nature of my creative process? To address these questions I have organised the thesis in the following way.

In order to provide the reader with a sense of how this project is an exploratory journey that moves from praxis to theory and back again, I incorporate a diaristic

commentary that I have kept throughout the project. This commentary records my artistic intentions, doubts, and desires. In it, I write of my decisions regarding both technical and conceptual concerns, the ideas I pursue and my reflections on the works themselves. I position the commentary in short sections between the chapters so that the reader must, as I did, keep returning to the studio to work through the ideas in the practice itself.

Each chapter deals with an area of theoretical concern that formed from the conceptual development of my self-portrait series and my interpretation of the self-portraits of other selected women artists. Initially, my intention was to just interpret and analyse self-portraiture by women artists. However, I found that before I could do that I needed to interrogate the claims made for and about 'women's art'.

In Chapter One, 'Tradition or Trap? The Historiography of Self-Portraiture by Women Artists', I critically examine the historiography of feminist art history and review the literature that concerns itself with art produced by women and, more specifically, with self-portraiture by women. The chapter traces the methodologies developed by feminist art historians and articulates my own position within this field. It also examines some of the implications and risks inherent in how we classify women's self-portraiture, especially when we invoke prescriptive terms like 'tradition'. Finally, I explore whether it is possible to identify connections between different women artists based on gender in ways that avoid collapsing their diversity and agency into a homogenized category.

In the course of painting my self-portraits I became aware that the face represented a problematic site for me as an artist and a woman. It was apparent that I would need to research what the face means in Western thought and how the female face has been represented in Western art. Chapter Two, 'Losing Face', grew out of these concerns. I propose in this chapter that the face is particularly significant for women artists because it is a site of contradiction where the artistic tradition of the Face as a sign of individuality and subjectivity collides with the tradition of depicting the female face as a de-individualised screen onto which masculine fantasies and desires are projected. I argue that women artists' employment of their own face in their art has often been a strategic interrogation of this contradiction.

Because I locate the face thus as a dynamic, if problematic, site for women's representations of subjectivity, I then examine the broader feminist debate surrounding notions of subjectivity, embodiment and identity for women. I argue that when women artists engage in the practise of self-portraiture they perforce examine similar concerns. Useful links can be drawn between theorists writing in this area and these artists. Therefore, in Chapter Three, "Room To Move", I map out connections between the work of feminist theoreticians-including Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray,

Bracha Ettinger, Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti, as well as both my own and other women's self-portraits.

Chapter Four, 'The Opening', is presented as a fictive exhibition through which I lead the viewer/reader. The intention is to evoke in the reader/viewer the physical presence of the art works and the agency of the artists. This chapter looks at the works of the selected women artist's self-portraits in detail. The artists are as follows: Artemisia Gentileschi (Italy, 1593- 1652/3); Megan Jenkinson (New Zealand, 1958-); Cindy Sherman (USA, 1954-); Sue Ford (Australia, 1943-); Frida Kahlo (Mexico, 1907-1954); Kathe Kollwitz (Germany, 1867-1945); Charley Toorop (Netherlands, 1891-1955); Jenny Saville (UK, 1958-) and Orlan (France, no date available). Here I closely scrutinise the art works themselves, describing and interpreting the way women have chosen to represent themselves in their art with a particular focus on how they have depicted or utilised their faces.

As making images is my primary means of research I consider it important that the overall shape of this exegesis reflect and emphasise this. The reproductions of the artwork are presented as an integral part of the fabric of the exegesis and not simply as a series of tangential illustrations to the written text. The 'conclusion' is presented as a visual essay comprising reproductions of the work from my exhibition 'Making Faces'. There is no accompanying or 'explaining' text with these images, and they are shown in the order they were produced so that they record and reflect the process of discovery and invention I have undertaken. It is from within the painting process that I find the theoretical paths along which I trace questions regarding women, faciality, and self-portraiture and the final selection of artworks constitutes a provisional conclusion, or summation of where I have been and where I am now.

The following commentary records my thoughts and art practice over the last three and a half years as I explore and question the significance of self-portraiture, women, the 'face' and the 'self'.

Weds.

I am trying to devise a form for my small self-portraits that best suits my purpose. I want to feel free to make lots of self-portraits so I need to work on something disposable, flexible and cheap. The cut pieces of clear sheet acrylic I have in the studio are ideal as they suit the speed I want to work at. They take the oilpaint well and can be 'worked' in various ways — scratching, gouging, erasing. I find I prefer to look at the mark of the paint from the back, through the clear acrylic, as it has some interesting and unpredictable effects. In this way I am painting myself back to front (painting myself back?). I like the way this almost re-enacts how we only ever have access to our image through reversal via the mirror.

My first paintings on the acrylic so far have retained elements of narrative. This involves a disembodied face (my own) in a simple house shape and minimal landscape. Gradually, though, all other components are being stripped away leaving only the face. I don't intend that each of these small studies, of themselves, work as 'self-portraits'. If I use them they will need to be grouped somehow in large numbers, as I want to express how my view of myself is multifarious. It changes daily, hourly even, from one quickly executed likeness to the next. The face is a mobile thing transformed by fleeting expressions. It has many facets and planes so the way light falls changes it's appearance dramatically. I suppose if I wanted to record just this, photography would be the best medium. What I am trying to record though is my relationship to my face. What is becoming clear to me is how little I am able to recognise what I look like. I am completely unable to judge if these faces look like me or not.

I will need, I suspect, to experiment with different ways of presentation to get this across. At this stage the possibilities are numerous: hanging in a large mobile; framed with a mirror behind

the image; a continuous strip of small self portraits in a line from wall to wall; a crowding of a hundred or so self portraits filling an entire wall.

Mon.

Our face is the most public part of our anatomy. We tend to it carefully, practise expressions from an early age, experiment with its colour, its texture and its frame — the hair. On one hand this manipulating or augmenting the way we look is, or can be, quite playful. However, because, in creating a 'look', we are focusing on the way other people see us, we can develop a rather dissociative relationship with our own face. Hence the shock when first perusing candid photos taken by a friend, or the discomfort when encountering our reflection in an unanticipated mirror or shop window. We like to compose and arrange our features before the shutter is clicked or before we approach the mirror, otherwise our real face in all its mobility and anarchy disturbs us because it does not fit the image we wish to project to the world.

Tues.

I find other people's responses to my self-portraits interesting. Each one selects different, or various aspects of, individual self-portraits that they 'recognise' as me. They are all an 'expert' on how I look. I was nervous of letting others see the self-portraits initially as I did not want to be influenced or sidetracked by their comments, after all what I am trying to capture is my relationship to my face. However their responses have been so various and even contradictory that I have come to reassess my previous assumption that others 'know' what I look like whereas I am blinkered by being trapped 'inside' my body and psyche. It occurs to me that no one else knows what I look like either. Others have the advantage of looking from the outside yet what they see is shaped by many subjective values — emotions, aesthetic ideals, familiarity and so on.

Mon.

Today I began a double self portrait. I ask myself why and find I am unable to articulate a precise answer. The words that 'attach' themselves to the image for me are: split/mirror/reflection/other. In a purely formal sense the two heads create a more dynamic structure for a painting — there is something quite static and inert with the single head and shoulders image. In terms of content the two faces open up possibilities. With two often quite different self portraits in the one frame I am able to illustrate the sense I have of being unable to 'see' myself clearly, of getting only glimpses of my external physical reality, and that these glimpses are often startlingly contradictory. The two heads suggest the possibility of many and I mean to extend this notion to large groupings of small self- portraits.

Weds.

There are times I go into my studio and am unable to recognise myself in any of the self-portraits I have done. In fact, the more self-portraits I do the more dispersed I feel, fragmented and somehow erased. What, exactly, is being erased? Could it be that the intense scrutiny required for me to be able to 'image' myself — that process whereby I become subject, object and audience — collapses the constructed idea(I) I had of myself?

Thurs.

A woman looks into a mirror and sees an image. She then attempts to copy that image and place it outside of herself as an artefact. Can she now look on that image and say 'this is 'myself''. How is this simulacra connected with her notion of her identity?

Sun.

Seeing myself backwards. The only access I have to seeing how I appear is through reflection (the mirror) and reproduction (photos). I can only 'see' these images through the perceptions I

form of what I look like. How are these perceptions formed? As a girl/woman I have been engaged in a running commentary throughout my life from others about how I 'look'. My looks are a commodity that seem to belong in some way to the public domain — as currency — as a real factor in how I will be measured, received, embraced and valued. However, how can I get to see myself? Perhaps self-portraiture will provide me with, not a 'true' and 'real' face, but means to explore what constitutes my self image. Maybe then I will be able to paint myself back to a place where I can comfortably inhabit my face, or, at the very least, to where I can understand clearly the factors that make this impossible.

Tues.

My self-portrait is about me, it is of me, it never is me. I am defaced at just that moment I approach recognition. The epidermal casing, that skin thin boundary, dissolves as I go into the mirror. Coherency of shape and feature collapse, shift and blur. I see lines and spaces — gaps and joinings — sheen and texture. I can look either at my own gaze or at the parts that jostle to occupy the territory of my face. My eye can not contain the whole of it.

Tues.

What is a face? What does it mean? What intervenes between me and my perusal of my own face? Making these self-portraits means that I have to look long and hard at myself in a way that I have not done since puberty. This has been a discomfoting process. Looking at my face now in my forties is different from when I was fourteen. Then I was concerned about how I 'measured' up to current fashionable standards and how I could present my looks as a 'look' which was sexually attractive. Now I am finding it difficult to actually see myself at all. Is this a reflection of how, as an aging woman, I have developed a sense of invisibility — of becoming defaced and disembodied? While I railed against the injunctions of

appearance that I encountered as a younger woman (in fact forming an identity by opposition), now I find myself in a visual desert with no reference points at all. Rather than being stranded there I need to make it an expedition that I take for myself. So let the journey begin with a series of paintings where my face is the centre. Just barely discernible behind my shoulders is a minimal horizon — a bit of light brushing the horizon line — and surrounding my head a notional sky, quite dark.

I am attempting to place myself in an empty landscape. Can I imagine a territory that has not been claimed in some way by discourse? The answer is surely no, yet the attempt to imagine and then traverse such an im/possibility will perhaps be useful in refiguring for myself a face I can tentatively belong to. Perhaps, in the desert where there are no mirrors I can leave behind me the idea of my face having any connection whatsoever with identity. I have done nearly twenty self-portraits so far and I am playing with how they can hang together. I still do not necessarily recognise the faces as myself but it seems to matter less.

Chapter One

Tradition or Trap: The Historiography of Self-Portraiture by Women Artists

'A female self-portraiture tradition is in the process of inventing itself'

(Borzello 1998: 193)

Frances Borzello (1998: 193) argues that self-portraiture by women artists in Western art can, in ways useful to the contemporary woman artist and feminist art historian, be perceived as a 'tradition'. This idea, as Borzello suggests, raises many questions. What constitutes tradition in art history? Is it possible or right to ascribe any kind of commonality in the work of different generations of women artists who were mostly unaware of the works that preceded them? Does this approach simply essentialize women artists? Is 'tradition' a concept that feminists would want to adopt given its role as an effective device to exclude women artists from the masculinist discourse of art history?

Formal art history writing constructs what can be described as a 'genealogy of influences' to link generations of artists. A tradition or 'story' of art is created out of this approach. Most of the characters in this story are men, and those women included are generally incorporated in marginalised roles such as models, companions and muses. Sometimes a female artist is included in the story as a notable 'exception' or as an interesting aside. This marginalisation of women artists reflected the societal norms governing a woman's role, which did not include being a serious artist. It did not, however, reflect women's participation as cultural producers. Many women were engaged in the making of art but their work was not included in the canon of Western art history. As Christine Battersby argues, the concept of genius was inextricably linked with maleness, so the inclusion of women into the canon (other than the odd 'exception') would have collapsed the very constructs of that canon with its emphasis on 'genius' and 'mastery' (Battersby 1989: 229).

In *Vision and Difference* (1988) Griselda Pollock incisively dissects the mechanisms of the masculine discourse of art history. She does this by breaking down the seeming truths embedded in that discourse, truths that are in fact male assumptions that have been naturalised by repetition. Traditional art history is rendered by Pollock not as a blameless reflection of a sexist society but as a discourse that has played an active role in the construction of sexual difference, both in the way women are seen in representation and how they have been silenced as art practitioners.

In terms of my art practice, the approach I have adopted whilst making my

series of self-portraits is to look at self-portraiture by other women artists as if it were a tradition of sorts. When I first began painting self-portraits I encountered conceptual problems in terms of the 'seeing' of myself and what this meant in terms of representation, likeness and embodiment. I felt that these problems inter-wove with wider issues of gender and I therefore looked to the work of other women artists to see if I could find some answers or illumination in their self-portraits. What ensued was an engagement in a visual dialogue between myself and a selection of women artists who engaged in the practice of self-portraiture. Underscoring this approach is a presumption of commonality with these other artists because they are women.

I acknowledge that there is some danger in this approach. It can too easily lead to a further ghettoisation of the work of women artists where their art is interpreted as only reflecting the 'feminine' or the female condition. However, I must emphasise that when I look to the self-portraits painted by women before me as part of my art practice, I am not proposing this as the only (or even the best) way to read these works. It is purely an approach I have found useful while developing my own self-portraits. I am aware that in terms of theorising this process I need to tread carefully so as not to cut these artists adrift in a completely ahistorical limbo. I agree with Gisela Breitling (1985:166/7) that it is an injustice to the creativity of women to consider it in an exclusively female context. So how do I reconcile my approach?

First, I would argue that works of art operate in more than one way on the viewer. The product of artistic process (the painting, movie, book) is both a product of its historical context and an object that exists now, in the present, that is experienced synchronically. These operations are not necessarily exclusive of each other. That is, it is possible to respond to a work on both these levels at once. As Broude and Garrard state in their introduction to *The Expanding Discourse* (1992), 'Art works do not have fixed meanings, but a multiplicity of meaning depending on audiences (receivers), and there is no fixed priority among the different meanings' (1992: 2).

Second, that which I desire to find, in say, Artemisia Gentileschi's self-portrait, '*Self-Portrait as La Pittura*', (1630) (Fig. 1 p. 73) has its own kind of validity grounded in my own subjectivity. My response to that painting becomes a cultural product of my personal historical context. This is what I call dialogue, a conversation I imagine having with the artist through her and my work. I see it as a process whereby I 'record' or reconstruct a dialogue that has been interrupted, that could have been, that was loudly over-ridden by the male voice.

In both my paintings and my writing about self-portraiture I view the works of several women artists on the basis of their gender. This is for the particular purpose of exploring how and if women have used self-portraiture to counter the image of 'woman' in representation. I stress that I am not proposing that in general the work of

these women artists should be interpreted as only speaking to the experience of women. Frida Kahlo's work, for example, deals with much more than just female embodiment and subjectivity. In fact, the preoccupation by art historians with the personal and autobiographical elements of her paintings has done Kahlo an injustice. Her work is as much (if not more) about national identity, mythology and politics as it is about her 'pain and suffering'.

Had I wished to pursue such a course of inquiry thirty or more years ago my research would have been stymied by lack of resources: in fact, I would probably not even have been aware that there were hundreds of female artists preceding me in Western art. This may seem an obvious observation, yet I feel compelled to make it, as the effect on contemporary women of having a 'history' in art is profound and yet already, I feel, being taken for granted. Of interest to me is the historiography of this newly collected history. That is, how can we interpret this 'new' history that has been re-constructed for us? What is being sought? Does this sort of endeavour become limited by its own desire, constructing only what it wants to find? Does this reclaimed 'history' tell us only the story of the reclaimers? What sort of vocabulary is needed to describe and interpret these works? Questions such as these meant that I have found it necessary undertake a critical review of the main texts on women's art published since the seventies in order to interrogate these points. I have done this in order to track the methodologies developed by feminist art historians and to construct my own position within this.

Feminist Art History: Finding the Words

There have been several books published in the last twenty years researching and reclaiming the work of women artists overlooked by or 'written out' of art history. They include: Anne Harris and Linda Nochlin's *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (1976); Karen Petersen and J.J. Wilson's *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal* (1978); Germaine Greer's *The Obstacle Race* (1979) and Whitney Chadwick's *Woman, Art and Society* (1996). I turn to these texts first in order to interrogate the proposition that the process of self-portraiture addresses significant issues of gender for women, as they provide critical insights into the formation of methodological and theoretical approaches to the subject of women artists and art history.

Harris and Nochlin, in their ground-breaking exhibition and accompanying book, *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (1976), set out to counter the idea that women had not participated significantly in cultural production in Western art. They look at historic and social factors that infringed on, or influenced, women's access to and success in the art market, and they attempt to analyse the works within this context.

The main aim of *Women Artists* is to make these paintings visible, once again, to contemporary artists and theorists and thus to generate new scholarship on the subject.

Both Harris and Nochlin make interesting and useful comments on self-portraiture by women. Harris, who deals with art before the French Revolution, describes how self-portraiture was a significant genre for women when they began to be able to emerge, albeit as 'exceptions', as artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She comments on how frequently the first women artists painted themselves, seeing this as 'evidence of their awareness of their exceptional character and of their contemporaries' interest in them as a new phenomenon' (1976: 34). Self-portraits by women were popular at this time, in part because it was a practice that could be undertaken within the domestic domain and did not compete in the masculine arena of religious or historical painting. As long as women artists were perceived as exceptions, their self-representations as painters were seen to confirm the notion of genius, that is, that genius was such a powerful force it could even, though rarely, inhabit the female sex. Harris deals at length with the self-portraits of Sofonisba Anguissola (1532-1625), using a quote from Anguissola's father to illustrate how they were valued at the time. He says of her self-portraits, 'In a single work I can exhibit two marvels, one the work and the other the artist herself' (1976: 107).

Nochlin provides my research with useful insights into the work of other artists who incorporated self-portraiture in their work, including Kathe Kollwitz, Frida Kahlo and Leanora Fini, amongst others. She describes Kollwitz's frank and uncompromising self-portraits as not simply representations of her face but as a 'forum for self-examination' (1976: 263). Nochlin notes that Fini's features recur in most of her painting. The question I will be addressing throughout this exegesis is why so many women artists chose to incorporate their own faces in their work.

In terms of methodology both Harris and Nochlin are cautious and unsure about how the art of women can or ought to be interpreted. They wish the work of these women artists to be accorded the same measure of 'quality' as their male contemporaries, thus assuring a place for them in the existing hierarchy of 'masters'. Yet while they begin to question the notion of genius as a male construct, they are not quite able to critique the paradigms of the male discourse of art history itself. They are wary, with good cause, of applying essentialist theories to women's art yet at the same time wish to investigate how being a woman plays an important role in the artist's sense of creative self. One senses an unresolved tension between their need to place women artists into traditional art history and their desire for the work of these women to speak of and, to some extent, for women. Nochlin suggests an approach that enables a possible reconciliation of these seemingly contradictory claims when she says, 'The artist's sense of the creative self as a woman could play an important role not merely

in choices of subject matter but in more subtle pictorial variations'(1976:59). It is the 'more subtle pictorial variations' that women artists have made in their representations of themselves, with particular emphasis on how they employed their face, which I explore in depth in Chapter Four.

Petersen and Wilson's book *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal* (1978) is, like Harris and Nochlin's, a comprehensive survey of past and present women arts practitioners. Women artists are brought together with the stated aim of providing exposure for the work of women who had been excluded from the discourse of art history. The authors tell us they want to 'rediscover the images women themselves create rather than to analyse those created of them by others' (1978: 2). Implicit in this statement is the idea that images made by women can be meaningful as statements about being a woman.

Because they are concerned with the 'reappraisal' of women's art, Petersen and Wilson directly tackle issues which affect the way we interpret art made by women. They point out the need to question the tropes of mainstream art history, 'the danger of having a fixed or unexamined art history perspective' (1978: 2). They also emphasise the need to de-construct the notion of 'genius' and hierarchies of different art forms where one is predisposed to 'look only at certain kinds of art and to see only certain superstars' (1978: 7). They consider it necessary to develop a new vocabulary with which to describe the work of women artists.

The authors attempt to explore particular themes that recur in the work of the artists they have collected. These include autobiography, mirrors and drowning. They manage to do this without making claims for an essentialist 'feminine sensibility'. What this book accomplishes is to begin to open up the discourse in art history, rather than simply inserting the overlooked works of women artists into the existing male-oriented paradigm of traditional art history. Peterson and Wilson understand that a space in the discourse needed to be created for the works to be appraised on their own terms and this meant that many of the assumptions embedded as truths in art historical discourse had to be queried.

The other major publication of the late seventies to deal with women artists was Germaine Greer's *Obstacle Race* (1979). Again, for the artist and student of women's art there is an inspiring number and variety of artworks created by women. The research is extensive and, given Greer's stated aim to place these women in some sort of social and cultural background, there is a wealth of previously unknown biographical detail about artists who had been forgotten by or excluded from the story of art.

There is, however, a serious lack of a coherent theoretical framework in Greer's approach. Whereas the texts discussed above can be seen to be attempting to ask

broader questions of the established discourses in the field, Greer's book is full of contradictions. It is understandable that, as an early work in the field of feminist art history, it would raise questions about how women's art can be described and positioned in the dominant discourse and one would not necessarily expect those questions to be answered. Yet Greer mostly ignores the implications of the questions raised. For example, she critiques the idea of 'genius' as being simply a case of over-rated individuals, but later describes Artemisia Gentileschi as the female equivalent of an Old Master and lauds her as a magnificent exception. She writes of the danger of reducing the discussion of women artists to the realm of anecdote and biography, yet mostly deals with the artists that way herself. At various points Greer seems to begin to understand that a paradigm shift is required before art by women can be properly appraised. She talks of a 'sensation of giddiness and fright as the well-known landmarks drop away' (1979: 153), but she is unable to translate this into her overall approach.

The inconsistencies and contradictions in this book highlight how feminist art theorists needed to develop a broader context from which to view and interpret women's art. That is, cultural production by women can not be discussed and appraised without understanding that the very discourse itself is gendered.

Whitney Chadwick states this clearly in the introduction to her book *Women, Art and Society* (1996). In her preface she outlines the development of feminist art theory and its inherent contradictions. She asserts that 'the desire to see the work of women exhibited, discussed, published, and preserved within the existing discourses of high art often contradicted with a recognition of the need to critique and deconstruct those same discourses in order to expose ideological assumptions based on systems of domination and difference' (1996: 11). She also raises useful questions about the term 'woman artist', seeing it as an inherently unstable category that can only be meaningful within the dominant male paradigms. Chadwick suggests that, rather than seeking an essential female imagery, the work of artists who are women can more usefully be interpreted from the feminist perspective as representations of gender; gender being defined as the socially created difference between men and women. This is an important distinction for me, both as an artist and a scholar. I wish to explore in this thesis how one's gendered identity informs the practice of self-representation. I do not, however, wish to propose that there is a discrete female identity that exists ahistorically (or in some way pre-exists the discourse of representation) and can be uncovered as the 'real' image of woman.

Throughout the book Chadwick refers to many examples of self-representation by female artists. She observes acutely that the use of self-images in the work of many women artists should be read as a dialogue between the constructed social 'self' and

the artist's experience of 'self' and also comments on how, in many instances, the images generated by this dialogue disrupt traditional conventions of representation.

Similarly, Norma Broude and Mary Garrard's introduction to *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (1992) provides a balanced and inclusive analysis of how feminist theory, art history and post-modernism have inter-woven to produce new and dynamic ways of seeing and interpreting art. They describe themselves as liberal feminist art historians with a pragmatic 'foot in both camps' philosophy (1992: 6). This philosophy should not be regarded as indecisive fence sitting on the part of Broude and Garrard. Rather, they adopt it as a deliberate corrective to masculinist models of mastery, positionality and objectivity. They thus challenge the methodology of formal art historical discourse that assumes an objective standpoint and 'the implication that discourses can only be discrete soliloquies that never combine into an interactive dialogue' (1992: 6).

Tradition or Trap?

Like Broude and Garrard I embrace the concept that writing about art can be an interactive and ongoing dialogue rather than the masterly construction of a new truth claim. This approach allows me to deliberately sidestep the limitations of the totalizing narratives that have been the norm in art history. This is a trap I believe Frances Borzello falls into when she tries to define women's self-portraiture as a 'tradition'. Broude and Garrard and Chadwick all make the point that any study of women artists must examine how art history is written and question the assumptions that underlie its hierarchies. They urge the reader to look at art historical and critical evaluations of art produced by women closely and critically and to understand that language itself has become the site of the struggle over content and meaning in art.

With this observation in mind I want to return to Borzello's statement that self-portraiture by women artists can be constituted as a tradition. I asked at the beginning of the chapter whether tradition is a concept that feminist art historians would want to adopt given that it has been a foundational assumption of traditional art history writing and, in effect, a means by which women have been excluded. I believe it is problematic to declare a tradition of self-portraiture for women artists. To name it thus runs the danger of imposing a constraining interpretation onto a diverse range of works that merely subsumes them into yet another story. I share with Pollock the belief that rather than simply adding women artists to the existing canon, what is needed are 'wholly new ways of conceptualising what it is we study and how we do it' (Pollock 1988: 5).

For this reason I remain ambivalent about Borzello's terminology. I must add

that Borzello herself sees the term 'tradition' as problematic and spends some time trying to define it. She seems more comfortable with the term 'genre', telling us that 'female self-portraiture deserves to be treated as a genre in its own right' (Borzello 1998: 35). Yet both tradition and genre are weighted terms that, unless used carefully, could serve to anchor these self-portraits by women into an overly formalist structure that excludes more than it includes. These self-portraits came from a wide and disparate range of sources and in most cases (at least until the more recent deliberately feminist use of the genre) dealt with gender and subjectivity only incidentally. Let us not collapse this diversity into a convenient and unexamined theory of tradition. If we wish to 'invent' a tradition we must acknowledge that this is only one of many meanings we can gather from these works and that this is a provisional view formed more from our contemporary preoccupations than from any intended meaning in the works themselves.

Earlier I stated that, whilst painting, I approach the self-portraits painted by women artists before me as if I were engaging in a kind of tradition. I use the phrase 'as if' for a reason. It indicates that I acknowledge that what I am doing is an act of the imagination, a fantasy, that allows me to explore interconnections that would otherwise be inaccessible through a more formal approach. I borrow heavily from Rosi Braidotti in this as I have found her discussion on the subject both illuminating and inspiring. Braidotti describes the philosophy of 'as if' (1994: 5) as a 'performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge' (1994: 6). This practice of 'as if' is particularly pertinent to my project concerning the self-portraiture of women artists when it is seen as 'a technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now' (1994: 6). It also offers me a way to avoid the limitations I believe Borzello encounters when she attaches terms such as 'tradition' or 'genre' to that diverse body of work that constitutes self-portraiture by women artists.

It is interesting that I do not find it problematic in my art practice to use and refer to the self-portraits of earlier women artists as a body of work that operates in some way as a 'de facto' tradition. I believe this is because art functions in a way that allows (or even requires) it to be ambiguous, ambivalent, paradoxical and even, at times, contradictory, what Deleuze calls the 'analogical language par excellence' (Boundas 1994: 248). The practice of 'as if' has always been part of the process of art. This means that it is more possible in visual arts practice to use and re-use these works in such a way that their many-layered operations are not collapsed into one interpretive position.

It is more difficult to express this kind of multiplicity in theoretical writing

given that we inherit an academic style of argument and positionality that has a tendency to emphasise the claiming of new ground which is then to be 'defended'. This can have the effect of turning an exploratory approach into a territorial stance that resists and discourages dialogue. I wish to avoid this. It is therefore illuminating to read writers such as Braidotti, Rosemary Betterton (whom I will discuss in greater detail below) and Broude and Garrard to see how it is possible to create real paradigm shifts in the way we form our interpretations of cultural production. Broude and Garrard (1994) describe this exactly when they talk of the 'polyvalence' of art:

'What turns out to be 'timeless' then, in the work of art is not it's allegedly single and universal meaning, but rather its apparently endless capacity to mean different things at different times or at the same time to different people and its participation in an ongoing, open-ended, cultural discourse'.

(Broude and Garrard 1994:21)

Self-Portraiture by Women

Most of the books written concerning the art of women artists have noted that self-portraiture has been a genre that has been practiced by women extensively and in many diverse ways. There have, however, been very few texts written which deal exclusively with this subject. Marsha Meskimmon's *The Art of Reflection* (1996), which I discuss in detail below, is one of only a few to do so. I have already discussed Borzello's *Seeing Ourselves* (1998) in relation to her claims for a 'tradition' or 'genre' of women's self-portraiture. In *Mirror Images* (1998), Whitney Chadwick edits together several papers concerning women, surrealism and self-representation. The following book by Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance* (1996), though not about self-portraiture *per se* explores ideas of embodied subjectivity through an analysis and dialogue with the self-portraits of many women artists

Betterton examines how the practice of self-portraiture has been utilised by women artists to articulate how the body itself is experienced discursively and psychically and thus to describe an embodied subjectivity. This study of women, art practice and the body is particularly relevant to my study of self-portraiture by women artists. This is not only because she 'gathers and re-uses' (1996: 1) self-portraits by several women artists, providing fresh and original insights on how they can be read, but also because her approach to the subject itself is illuminating.

In her introduction Betterton signals clearly to the reader that her aim is not to 'master' a new authoritative interpretation of the cultural production of women artists

that would supplant others, nor does she wish to reduce the diversity and richness of women's art practice to a single theory. Rather, she talks of the patterns she sees in the work of women artists and presents her response to the art as being part of a dialogue between producers, readers and writers. She thus disavows the implicit hierarchy between the 'authoritative' art theorist and the somehow 'naive' arts practitioner often assumed in art history. As an artist who is attempting to write about my own production of art and that of other women artists, Betterton's approach provides me with a framework of methodology that I can incorporate in my own writing.

In this sense *An Intimate Distance* is an important piece of scholarship not only for what it says but how it says it. Betterton opens up possibilities for how art can be interpreted, and at the core of this is her belief that critical theory should be a dialogue with, not an appropriation of, the work of art producers. Central to her thesis is the idea that 'cultural production is itself a form of knowledge that can offer access to and understandings of the body which are unavailable through purely cognitive means' (1996: 9). I share this belief and utilise it in my interpretation of how women artists have understood and employed the face in their self-portraits.

Another subtle, yet significant, shift in emphasis in Betterton's approach is the way in which she interprets the self-portrait work of artists like Modersohn-Becker, Kollwitz and others as pro-active and strategic interactions between the artist and the culture she inhabits. For example rather than seeing Modersohn-Becker's *'Self-Portrait with Amber Necklace'* (1906) as being a traditional and limiting encoding of the female body with nature, she describes it as a 'strategy with which to address the absence of a visual language of the body for women in the 1900s' (1996: 24). This is a reading of this work that refuses to interpret it as an unquestioning mirroring of the masculine identification of the female as a metaphor for nature or as some kind of pre-feminist naivete on Modersohn-Becker's part. Rather, Betterton is saying women artists have always had to re-imagine the female body when attempting to express an embodied subjectivity. They have had to re-negotiate notions of likeness and difference, proximity and distance, appearance and embodiment and the private and public 'self', thus encountering, confronting and disrupting injunctions of gender. Betterton's emphasis on the agency of the artist in this way is an approach I adopt when discussing the artists' work in Chapter Four.

A concept of Betterton's I consider important is the notion of the 'in between'. Betterton argues that 'the answer to the question of artistic subjectivity lies in the creation of a place 'in between' (1996: 193). Betterton positions this in-between space as a site of positive re-orientation for women, a point of view that offers an escape from the limitations of the object/subject dualism. This has been a useful insight for my research, both in my understanding of own self-portraiture series and of the self-

portraits of other women artists. I interrogate this further in the chapter 'Room to Move'.

As the first comprehensive study of self-portraiture by women to be published, Meskimmon's *The Art of Reflection* (1996) is probably the single most important text for my research into women, self-portraiture and the face. Meskimmon does not deal with the face in particular but shares my view that self-representation by women artists can be seen as a crucial site to examine the interplay between object and subject, and also one where we can explore the relationship between 'woman' and 'women'. Meskimmon defines 'woman' as the term used to refer to 'an abstract notion or symbol [...] or passive material through which masculine ideals find metaphoric form', and 'women' as 'those actual individuals defined through their combined experiences of biology and social life' (Meskimmon 1996: 14). She asserts that self-portraiture is a practice that can be re-examined as one where women, by portraying their embodied or situated knowledge of themselves, have come to question, re-define and subvert the role of 'woman' in patriarchal culture.

Meskimmon deals first with the notion of genius and how this trope has been problematic for women artists because it has operated as an exclusively masculine construct. Occupational self-portraits, often depicting the artist with authority over both the tools of his trade and his nude female model, long served to promote the mystique of the male artist/genius. Women artists took on this form with enthusiasm and a certain degree of audacity and thus made themselves visible as women and artists.

In her chapter 'The Autobiographical Model', Meskimmon makes cogent points regarding whether women's self-portraiture can be read as autobiographical in the traditional sense. She argues that women artists have had to subvert the conventional modes of autobiography because those traditional forms did not speak to them or for them. She cites the employment of serial self-portraiture, multiple likenesses and parody as means by which women artists have revealed the 'ways in which their 'selves' were the products of shifting social constructs and definitions of 'woman'' (1996: 73). Of particular usefulness are her observations on how the reading of Frida Kahlo's work has been limited by being viewed only in terms of traditional autobiography.

In order to facilitate her description of the strategies undertaken by women artists to question gender Meskimmon places them provisionally in three broad groups: masculinities, femininities and androgynies. It is the last category, androgynies, which interests me the most as it accords with the concept of the 'in-between' that I develop in Chapter Three, 'Room to Move'. Meskimmon sees androgyny as offering 'a mediating space from which to challenge and subvert the binary logic of masculinity

and femininity' (1996: 118) and as being a site where women artists have explored the possibility of alternate gender identities. She cites the work of Kollwitz, Romaine Brooks and Diana Thorneycroft (amongst others) as examples of this strategy.

One of Meskimmon's greatest strengths is her detailed knowledge of women artists in Germany between 1918 and 1938. She is thus able to introduce many previously unknown or inaccessible artists to the reader, providing a wealth of new information. This is particularly useful to me, as one of the artists I focus on in my study is Charley Toorop, about whom little has been written in English. Meskimmon includes many of Toorop's works and discusses the artistic milieu she inhabited.

The core of Meskimmon's thesis is her belief that self-portraiture is a practice positioned at the very point of intersection where 'woman' and 'women' meet; the interface between the biological and the social. She shares with Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz and other feminist writers the belief that women must articulate a sense of 'embodied subjectivity' which reports on the feminine in order to be more than the 'other' in a masculine discourse. Interestingly, Meskimmon does not see this as something that is yet to happen. She positions self-portraits of women artists as texts that can be read in this way. She says, 'Women have been coming into representation for a very long time, but we have not had the means by which to understand them' (1996: 202). *The Art of Reflection* is a beginning in creating those means. It is not meant to be the last word on the subject. Meskimmon invites further exploration of this field and I take up that invitation in this thesis.

Conclusion

Until the 1970s women artists were not able to access information or reproductions of the many female artists whose work had not been included in the standard 'story' of art that represented itself as the history of Western art. The effect of this lack of genealogy was to isolate women arts practitioners, making it impossible for them to generate a continuum of influence, reference and tribute that was informed by gender. Women artists were part of the contemporary art movements of their times but were written out of the history that recorded those movements. This meant that in each era individual women who chose to be artists had to reinvent themselves in that role and assert their right to be taken seriously as an artist.

Self-portraiture has been an effective tool in this sense as it has provided women artists with the means to articulate their presence as artists (all self-portraits are *ipso facto* a 'portrait of the artist'). It is also a genre through which they could explore and renegotiate the representation of their subjectivity (in opposition to the traditional appropriation of 'woman' as sign). The representation of subjectivity for women is a

complex one that must perforce include their experience of absence from the dominant discourse. Self-portraiture has been developed by many women artists as a way of describing the shape of that absence. In fact it could be claimed that the very marginality women artists have experienced has enabled them to expand the practice of self-portraiture well beyond its traditional purpose of recording likeness.

I would suggest that this is the reason so many women have engaged in self-portraiture and in this way only can it be said to constitute a kind of 'tradition' (though perhaps 'counter tradition' would be a more accurate term). The practices of self-portraiture by women artists can be linked on the basis of gender if we interpret them as a strategic negotiation between the positions of subject and object, self and other. The continuum is the fact that the circumstances for women artists, their marginalisation within the contemporary art movements they identified with and their relegation to invisibility in the histories written afterwards, remained constant until very recently (and some would argue continue today, albeit more subtly).

The existence of this body of work does not only provide evidence of how women have seen and experienced themselves in relation to representation; it also gives us insights into how they have made, in various ways, space for themselves. Space that allowed them to renegotiate how woman could be perceived and, beyond that, how the experience of self can be represented. Women may have been relegated to the sidelines but I see, in their self-portraits stretching back into the 16th century, a crowd of irreverent, bold and audacious women making faces at us from behind those lines. In this way they have used their own faces to make sure that their individual presence could not be entirely subsumed by the image of anonymous, man-made 'woman'.

It is this strategic use of the face that I emphasise in this thesis. The face is such a given in most self-portraiture that how it is employed as a sign is generally overlooked. In the studies on women and self-portraiture cited above, none pay particular attention to the face as a significant representational site for women artists. In the next chapter I examine how the face has been used in representation and argue that it is both a problematic and dynamic site for women's negotiation with subjectivity.

Weds.

I use the mirror a lot now. I initially chose not to use the mirror while painting my self-portraits because I hoped to somehow capture an internalised version of my face — what I thought I looked like. I now want to explore the process of looking at myself and record that looking.

*From mirror after mirror
No vanity's displayed:
I'm looking for the face I had
Before the world was made.*

W. B . Yeats

How do I use the mirror? In one sense the mirror is simply a tool; a reflective surface I can use to 'prepare' my face for the world. I check my face before I leave the house. What am I checking for? This is such an ingrained habit I find it hard to de-construct the process. I could say I am simply making sure there are no embarrassing marks, no stray hairs or whether my hair's a mess, but I think it is more complex than that.

Alone in my house, or with my familiars, I have no face. I have no sense of this thing called 'face'. I am a collection of emotions, thoughts and actions enacted through my physical embodiment. When I leave this private space to engage in the world outside my doors I put my face 'on'. Face, as an idea, only comes into meaning when I move from being 'in/self' to self-consciousness. In a sense, when I check my face in the mirror before I go out, I am reminding myself of its existence. I am also trying to capture the intimate stranger — to construct and hold an image of myself I can present to others.

Tues.

Recently I have made photocopies, transparencies and photos of my self-portraits. Some of the transparencies have found their way into the paintings. So I have, at times, a painting with a

photocopied transparency of another painting incorporated into it. I am intrigued by the effect of this 'removal' from the original. It's as if I hope to be able to 'capture' my image through a process of removes. I persist, despite myself, to look 'for the face I had before the world was made'. If I remove myself far enough away from the discomfoting act of looking at myself in the mirror — by painting and then photographing and then photocopying and so on — will I at some point encounter the image of my likeness with the clarity of a stranger? Is that what I want? What would I find — embodiment or erasure?

Frid.

I have incorporated transparencies of reproductions of Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as La Pittura* into some of my paintings. The working title is '*Artemisia Makes Room*'. This painting and how Gentileschi makes a space for her self intrigues me. There is just a hint of a corner in this painting and I re-imagine it as a space that Gentileschi marks out for herself and all women artists seeking a location for their self-representations.

How many mirrors did Gentileschi need while executing this self-portrait? How many 'removes' was she from herself in that final reflection, the one she recorded? Eventually an image formed on the mirror's surface that she could use to counter Vanity, Beauty and Muse. Perhaps that is what I seek when I reproduce through photography, photocopying and painting images of my face. I attain a point of cool regard of my features — they are no longer disturbing and have no power over me. It is as if, when looking in the mirror, I am *too much there*. So am I portraying myself or betraying myself when I make a self-portrait? Revealing or concealing? I need to somehow subtract my 'self' from my likeness to create an object I can then invest with meaning in order to make the subject myself. The process becomes elusive, ambiguous and contradictory.

Mon.

Increasingly the horizon line seems to be asserting its presence — pushing through the head and shoulders of the self-portraits. This makes the space I inhabit ambiguous and the likeness tentative. I ask myself why the horizon seems such a necessary component. I think it is because it is both a definite border (between land and sky) and no place in particular. It is an idea not a location (making it an ideal location). This seems a good place to situate my self-portraits. The images of myself seem to be either in the process of being erased or of coming into being.

Mon.

With all these faces of mine propped around the studio against and beside one another I find that all sorts of juxtapositions and overlaps occur that become useful accidents. For example one face on the clear acrylic that rested over the top of a landscape created new possibilities for me. I've made some deliberate overlaps with my face, eyes closed, laid across a simple land/sky landscape. I think it captures the sense I feel of my face being, not a solid thing, but a border between inside and outside. I have also overlapped two faces to give a 'double exposure' effect of movement. I love these sorts of 'accidents'. They can provide sideways leaps, linkages and lines of flight that are not always possible with conscious intention. The trick, of course, is selecting the accidents and developing them further.

I have begun experimenting with some images that incorporate photos of my face that I have then photocopied as transparencies. Playing with the graininess, light and dark of the transparencies provides me with a process I can use to explore concepts of distance and intimacy. I place these mediated faces on the horizon, though they are there rather tentatively. The working title is 'Coming and Going (I don't know if I'm). I like the idea that forms of these self-portraits being perhaps trapped between layers (between subject and object?), I like their indiscernability. They can be either a becoming or a losing, or both. The more one looks the

less one sees, evaporating/forming.

Weds.

Today I am at a point where the attempt to represent my likeness has lost meaning. I feel increasingly that I cannot use my face to 'say' anything about myself. Quite aside from the fact that I do not recognise these faces I am creating (in any 'real' sense), I don't know what they can mean. Do I need to add narrative elements? Do I need to break down the surface? I want to erase/excise this thing, this shape, this face. It has never been mine. Somewhere along the way it was given to me and I no longer want it. It has a kind of tyrannical existence, a false authority, somebody-else's meaning, I want to shrug it off.

Frid.

I seem to have stepped back from the rather earnest, and perhaps naïve, attempts at 'capturing' my 'real' likeness/self in my self-portraits. At the moment the only images I can feel comfortable doing are those which describe the process of self-portraiture itself. The painting I am working on at the moment has my face and two hands emerging from the ground. My face is positioned ambiguously within a landscape that is simply a horizon line, land and sky. The face stares at the viewer directly and the hands hold a paintbrush and a mirror. The image infers nothing about identity but describes the tools of identity-making. Am I making an empty gesture?

Weds.

I find that it is only while I am engaged in making a self-portrait that I feel the connection that the face being depicted is mine. While I am making a self-portrait I constantly refer to the mirror to check lines, shapes and proportion etc. I am not looking at the whole thing, nor am I engaging in eye contact with myself. I study fragments of my face and can spend all day working on one tiny segment (the line formed beneath my left eye perhaps, the way it describes the curve of the eyeball). Gradually, as the image of my face forms, I develop eye contact, not with my reflection, but with

my painting. What is it about looking into the eyes that affects us so? It is a dangerous and precipitous act; arresting and irresistible, something that is hard or impossible to sustain. Is this what makes the self-portrait so powerful and disturbing? The face in a self-portrait where the artist looks directly out of the canvas (though in fact at herself) is frozen forever in a seemingly intimate relationship with all the many strangers who will view it.

Tues.

A day of questions. If I make myself the subject of my paintings do I thereby attain subjectivity? Am I able, through representation, to articulate an expression of myself that is meaningful? What is subjectivity; a large comfy armchair that I can sink into smugly, sure of who I am or a tight rope stretched over a dangerous void that I negotiate precariously? Is it something I want only because I have been denied it? Do we need a new word entirely? Can I have lots of subjectivities? Can I change my mind? Does subjectivity have to be gendered? Are my self-portraits redundant the moment they are finished? Why is the face not just the front of the head?

Chapter Two

Losing 'Face', Using Faces: Invention and Resistance in Women's Self-Portraiture

'The face, with its rather blank, wrinkleless expression and slack mouth, has a similarity to some of those with Möbius syndrome. Modigliani used blank pupils for artistic effect in several portraits, and I know of no evidence that he saw someone with Möbius.' (Cole 1998: 92)

The 'blank' female face is such a given in Western art that we mostly fail to notice it and rarely question its function. In his description of Modigliani's painting of a woman (above), Jonathon Cole unwittingly yet tellingly highlights not only the way in which the face of woman was most often depicted by male artists as a de-personalised space, but also how this practice continues to be overlooked as phallogentric in its purpose. I find it highly significant that Cole asks not why the artist chose to paint his female model this way, but instead wonders if perhaps she suffered from some sort of disability (Möbius Syndrome is a condition in which people are born without any ability to move their faces and so cannot make facial expressions).

In Western art the represented face of woman has frequently been collapsed into 'body' and de-individualized. This reflects and reiterates the dualism embedded in Western philosophy in which the mind/body opposition is representationally aligned with the opposition of male and female, so that man equals mind, woman equals body. The portrayal of the female face as devoid of any individuality is crucial if that face is to work as a screen onto which male desire can be projected, unopposed by a thinking/known subject. As Elizabeth Grosz (1994: 4) observes, 'Given the coupling of mind with maleness and the body with femaleness and given philosophy's own self-understanding as a conceptual enterprise, it follows that women and femininity are problematized as knowing philosophical subjects'.

In the overview of how the face has been perceived in Western thought that follows, I will highlight how, despite the general alignment of the face with the concept of individuality, the representation of women's faces is more often used to signal anonymity, objectification and otherness. The face, for women, signifies two colliding traditions of representation. On the one hand there is the general idea that the human face is the principal part of the human anatomy that can be 'read' (and thus portrayed) to determine the presence of a particular individual. Conversely, however, for women the face has been constituted in representation as a de-individualised site.

Griselda Pollock (1988: 123) suggests that this process involves the ‘representations of faces as dissociated, uninhabited spaces which function as a screen across which masculine fantasies of knowledge, power and possession can be enjoyed’. The tension that results from this collision has made and continues to make the practice of self-portraiture one of the most dynamic areas of art practice for women artists.

The Significance of the Face in Western Thought

Western thought has long been fascinated with the face as a site both of mobility and elusiveness and as a site of recognition and interpretation. There have been many attempts to record and explain face recognition practices. They all fall broadly under the notion of physiognomy (from Ancient Greek *phusis*, nature and *gnomon*, interpretation) which sought to create a scientific basis for the interpretation of different physical traits and proportions.

In a fascinating article on ‘The Face and the Soul’, Patrizia Magli (1989) takes the reader into what can seem for the present day observer to be the quite bizarre claims of physiognomy. Physiognomy sought to determine and categorise sign correlations between physical features and personality traits. Physiognomic analysis had its beginnings in the 5th century BC and reached its peak (and greatest excesses) in the late 19th century. It has since been discredited as non-scientific in its assumptions and methodology, yet many of these underlying assumptions continue to operate as representational and anecdotal tropes. This is particularly so in literature from the Middle Ages onwards, where facial description of characters often doubles as intimation of character. I find physiognomy fascinating mainly because it demonstrates how important the face has been in Western thought and how it has aligned the face as the predominant physical manifestation of personality. At its most excessive, this pseudo-science created an encyclopaedic schematisation of the human body with a particular focus on the face. This taxonomy reached a point of almost hysterical categorisation:

‘Each individual trait is subdivided into sections reflecting a stable typology of vices and virtues. The nose, for example, can be divided into root, spine and tip, and by the way in which its features combine (long/short, convex/straight, lean/fleshy) it is possible to identify up to eighty-one types, corresponding to an equal number of moral inclinations. This same method leads to the identification of fifty-eight types of forehead, forty-three types of eyes, fifty chins and eighteen mouths’

In her account of the face's historical meanings, Magli distinguishes between the rigid schematisation described above and the kind of physiognomic perception used unconsciously in everyday life by humans to interpret those around them. She sees the latter as an important form of 'local knowledge' that is based on subtleties of expression, memories and associations. These 'readings' are impossible to formalise but are nevertheless a useful part of communication: 'The face of those near us presents itself as the space upon which it is possible to perceive infinitesimal traces which, in turn, sometimes allow us to glean a deeper reality' (Magli 1989: 89). These 'infinitesimal traces' have been of great interest to psychologists in the field of behavioural science. This area of research emphasises another way in which the human face is an important site — its role as communicator. Behavioural science sees the primary function of the human face as being its ability to communicate feelings to others.

In his book *About Face* (1999) Jonathan Cole considers the face and society primarily from this biologically determinist point of view. His stated aim is to 'advance a natural history of the face, postulating for it a role in the development of consciousness.' (1999: 6). In the context of my own inquiry, this makes Cole's study more interesting for what it leaves out than what it includes. Cole ignores sexual difference in the experience, perception and portrayal of the face. This is despite the fact that in his conclusions he makes claims concerning the link between a person's perception of selfhood and their 'facial embodiment'. Cole never considers that the way in which the faces of women have been represented (looking as though they are sufferers of facial paralysis, for example) could impact on their sense of facial embodiment. In order to understand what the human face is, Cole studies and interviews people who suffer, from a variety of causes, 'loss of face' (these include blindness, Möbius syndrome, autism and Bell's palsy). I would argue that in general women in Western society have suffered a cultural and metaphysical 'loss of face' through conventions of representation, but Cole remains silent on how the politics of gender may have influenced such developments.

About Face does, nevertheless, serve to illustrate how significant the face is and has been perceived to be in Western culture. Cole provides an overview of the current research and understanding of what the face is, how the human face evolved, its role in the development of emotion and how it works. The human face has an extremely complex system of musculature. There are forty-four separate muscles. Only four of these are required for chewing, while the other forty are devoted to facial expression. It would seem that no other species has such a vast capacity for making faces. Experiments with primates indicate a particular sensitivity to faces and their messages. That is, in the brain's visual cortex there are specialised cells that have very

specific functions for recognising facial identity or interpreting facial expression. Studies of human subjects (using patients with certain brain injuries that immobilise the face as comparisons) suggest that human brains are specially adapted to perceive faces. We are hard-wired, then, to focus on that part of the anatomy we call the face, both to discern one person from another and to interpret the often subtle muscular movements that signal emotion and intention. The face is the locus of a continuous dialogue that we are unconsciously reading all the time when encountering other humans.

Considering that the face has been the object of such intense, involuntary, scrutiny it is not surprising that it has come to be overlaid with so many meanings. In particular, it has been positioned as the home of the 'self', the individual. A mythology of physiognomic signification has been constructed around the features of the face that supports and perpetuates the idea of individuality. So the face comes to be the image that represents the idea of a singular, coherent and unique identity. However, that the image of the female face as constructed in art has largely demanded the opposite, a completely de-personalised zone, is ignored in most writings about the 'human' face. The effect of that anonymity on women's perception of themselves and their face is similarly overlooked.

The Made-Up Face: the portrayal of the female face in Western art

The face is generally perceived as the home of the mind. It contains those organs most necessary for engagement in discourse: the eyes (the gaze), the mouth and ears (language). It is the part of the body that is most commonly used to assert the presence of the individual. This is especially so in the genres of portraiture and self-portraiture, where the main purpose is to provide an authentic and convincing effect of presence and authoritative subjectivity. Yet this general perception of the significance of the face is mostly contradicted by the way women's faces have been portrayed in Western art.

The feminist art historian Griselda Pollock has looked closely at this portrayal of the female face in her book, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (1988). Pollock provides the reader with an astute analysis of what has been done to women's faces in art to render them as signs that function to perpetuate masculinist fantasies. The fifth chapter of *Vision and Difference* is a photo essay comprising two pages; one page shows six faces of modern-day fashion models, the other page shows eight reproductions of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's drawings of his life-drawing models. There is no text accompanying these images. Pollock thus allows the viewer to make a visually immediate comparison between Rossetti's treatment of the female face and the way women's faces are presented in twentieth-century

advertisements. Readers are compelled to think about this juxtaposition of facial images and their meanings before engaging with Pollock's theoretical considerations about the use of women's faces in art.

All of these faces are made utterly available to the viewer. Only three of the women are looking out towards the viewer. All the others have their eyes downcast (except for one who looks up in a simulation of erotic rapture). The downcast eyes of most of the models have the effect of allowing the viewer's gaze to regard the face before them without being 'checked' by a shared look. The face is thus made body/object. The women's faces are mostly depicted in partial or full profile. This too is a means of presenting the face so that it can be regarded as an object of beauty, virtue or fetish unimpeded by any sense of the presence of a knowing subject.

This use of the profile is analysed more specifically by Patricia Simons in her 'Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture' (1992: 38-52). In this essay, Simons investigates the way in which the profile, with its averted eye and a face available to scrutiny, was employed to enable the representation of women as 'an ordered, chaste and decorous piece of property' (1992: 40). She points out how the profile form was particularly amenable to the construction of the face as a 'display object', as the subject is rendered static by the formal structure and absence of a returned gaze. The way the profile represses a sense of volume also subtly denies fleshly presence. Individuality is muted in the profile, not simply because only half the features are depicted, but because a fuller characterisation requires an inclusion of facial asymmetry, mobility and expression. The most significant aspect of the profile is that its form makes straightforward eye contact between viewer and viewed impossible: in essence, a form of scopophilia, where the gaze is possessive, relentless, and, most importantly, one-way rather than mutual.

In the represented face in art, how the gaze of the face depicted interacts with the viewer has major significance. It is in the reflected gaze of the face that the viewer can participate in the effect of presence, intimacy and insight (windows to the soul and so on). However, when it is the face of a generalised 'woman' that is being constructed entirely from the masculine point of view, the eye imagery is quite different. The function of such images of 'woman' is to deploy the female form as an abstraction and is not an attempt to capture or engage with her identity. To achieve this her ocular engagement with the viewer has needed to be modified so as not to disturb the operation of a phallocentric position. Pollock sees this as a strategy that allows these faces to 'take on an iconic fascination of being seen, while unseeing' (1988: 150). These masculinist strategies resolutely refigure the woman as object and prevent her being seen as (and in effect becoming) the subject.

Most often, in Western art the direction of the woman's gaze is coyly averted.

Where the eyes do seem to look directly out at the viewer, her presence is countered by the employment of a blank or remote gaze. As in pornography, these strategies allow the viewer unimpeded access to the woman's face without the disturbing intimation of presence that is implied when our gaze interlocks with someone else's. In essence, this positions all viewers as 'male' or 'masculine', regardless of their biological gender (Grossman 1988: 158). From this masculinist perspective, to observe the portrayed woman 'looking back' is to risk having to acknowledge her presence as a subject and thus have the viewer's centrality (and masculinity) challenged.

A common feature of many self-portraits is the direct gaze of the portrait's subject toward the viewer. The fact that this is the result of the artist looking at himself or herself in a mirror in order to record one's features becomes redundant. The effect of this look is to privilege the viewer with a sense of intimacy and insight. The self-portrait, then, mimics the 'held' gaze. This held gaze is something we experience with others only in moments of intense intimacy, of desire, recognition or hostility. To 'lock eyes' with another is always a precipitate act charged with import. Here we are not just 'looking-at' the other person, we engage in an inter-subjective exchange that acknowledges the other's presence.

The purpose of the blankness or aversion of the female gaze in representation was to create a screen for the projection of male desire, so it follows that the inhabited, often intense, look returned by the woman artist in her self-portrait will resist, subvert and disturb the primacy of the masculine position. The intense and somehow demanding eyes in Charley Toorop's self-portraits are a particularly clear example of this. The viewer cannot look on her face and make it face/object; her look refuses this and declares her uncompromising presence. This feature of self-portraiture makes it a genre that is eminently suitable as a means for women artists to communicate not just their own presence but the possibility of women's subjectivity being representable.

This apparent eye contact that interlocks with the viewer disturbs the solipsism of the male gaze and thus begins to dismantle one of the foundational tropes of masculinism. Pollock deals with this in depth in her chapter 'Woman as Sign' (1988), using the faces of women drawn by Rossetti as an example of how art practice does not simply reflect the values of its times, but actively shapes the construction of those values via its own practices. In addition to describing Rossetti's portrayals of female faces, Pollock analyses both what they mean and who they were for in order to show the processes by which such images were fetishized into a 'face-object'. There is a wonderful description of the faces in Rossetti's paintings written by his sister, the poet Christina Rossetti:

*One face looks out from all his canvases,
One self same figure sits or walks or leans:*

*We found her hidden just behind the screens,
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
 A queen in opal or ruby dress,
 A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
 A saint, an angel - every canvas means,
 The same one meaning, neither more nor less,
 He feeds upon her face by day and night
 And she with true kind eyes looks back at him.
 Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
 Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.*

(re-printed in Pollock 1988: 126-127)

This poem reveals how another woman interpreted what it was that Rossetti did representationally to the faces of the women he painted. Tellingly, Christina talks of there being only ‘one face’ that looks out from all his canvases and how they all have ‘the same one meaning’. This meaning lies in the way the model reflects as a mirror/screen the artist’s fantasies. The woman being painted is represented as a ‘nameless girl’ who is depicted ‘not as she is, but as she fills his dreams’ (1988: 126-127).

Rossetti altered the faces of his models in this way so that they functioned, in Pollock’s terms, as an uninhabited space that could be colonised by the male psyche without resistance. In his portrayals of female faces ‘the abstracted symmetry and severely restricted potential for [interpretive] reading and expression produces an iconic and hieratic face’ (Pollock 1988: 134). Pollock’s analysis shows how he imposed extreme symmetry, foreshortened the forehead and enlarged the area between eye and chin. Lest we think that this is just a quaint 19th century practice, one need only refer to the way in which the faces and bodies of models are these days being digitally manipulated to fit contemporary precepts of beauty or sexuality. We need to ask again, what do these distortions mean and who are they for?

Pollock’s discussion of how patriarchy is structured through men’s control over the power of ‘seeing’ women and how the representation of women by men has served as a regulatory practice that is party to the construction of sexual difference is particularly useful to my thesis. I argue that for women both the act of ‘seeing’ herself and the representation of that ‘seeing’ is made problematic and complex due to those masculinist regulatory practices. This has led to the creation of a diverse and challenging body of work in the genre of self-portraiture by women, a body of work that not only counters the male representation of ‘woman’ but radically questions

many of the givens of representation and identity.

Faciality: Dismantling the Face

Some of the most interesting and challenging considerations of what the face has come to mean in Western society have been provided by the theory of faciality put forward by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in an essay entitled 'Year Zero: Faciality' (1988). However, their perspective crucially overlooks the factor of sexual difference in the way the face may have been experienced by women, and it is to this issue that I would now like to turn.

Deleuze and Guattari see the face as a place from which to begin dismantling the restrictive categories of a Western culture dominated by binary oppositions. They de-construct many of the 'truth' assumptions about the face, describing it as an abstract machine rather than an organic given. This machine they call the 'faciality machine' (1988: 181) because it is the social construction of Face. Deleuze and Guattari call for a rejection of the territoriality of the face with its claims of discrete subjectivity and identity.

They begin by de-constructing the idea of the face: 'The face is a surface: facial traits, lines, wrinkles; long face, square face, triangular face; the face is a map, even when it is applied to and wraps volume, even when it surrounds and borders cavities that are now no more than holes. The head, even the human head, is not necessarily a face' (1988: 170). They write that the production of the notion of face required a kind of decapitative split of the head from body. 'The face is produced only when the head ceases to be part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body, when it ceases to have a multidimensional, polyvocal corporeal code - when the body has been decoded and has to be overcoded by something we shall call the face' (1988: 170). They believe the face needs to be dismantled, as it has become a 'monstrous hood' (1988:190) that represents only 'white man himself' (1988: 176). The historical and ontological development of the concept of the face is seen as having three stages: the 'primitive head' (pre-face), the 'Christ-face' (FACE) and the 'probehead' (when the Face is left behind).

On first reading it would seem that Deleuze and Guattari's de-construction of the face could be of great use to feminists. This is especially so in the way they clearly link faciality with 'white man' and see the idea of face as being crucial part of the construction of the dominant discourses of identity and power in Western thought. However, they take no account of sexual difference in the experience of the face in Western representation. What Deleuze and Guattari are describing here is the general western trope of the face and their underlying assumption is that this applies evenly to

both genders. So for them, what mankind needs to do is to overthrow the tyranny of the faciality machine. They assume that all need to dismantle the face and return it to the body, as only this freed faciality will open up 'a rhizomatic realm of possibility' (1988: 190). (The rhizome is a lateral, spreading underground root that Deleuze and Guattari use figuratively to represent a mode of thinking that opposes the more linear connotations of the Western figuration of the 'tree of knowledge').

The 'probehead' figuration is posited as the means of escaping the restrictive codification of the present Face. This term is meant to evoke a sense of movement, flight and discovery but, for me, and I would think many other women, it mainly serves to turn the 'ovoid phallus-face' (Welchman, 1994: 2) into the missile-phallus-weapon-head. This becomes especially obvious in Deleuze and Guattari's description of probeheads as 'guidance devices... that dismantle the strata in their wake, break through the walls of significance, pour out of the holes of subjectivity' (1988: 190).

In this sense I believe Deleuze and Guattari remain blinded by an inherent and unexamined phallocentricity that severely compromises how much their theory really challenges the dominant totalities of western thought and how much it can be of use to feminism. Women have not shared, at least, not entirely, in the general signification of the face as a 'loci of resonance' for subjectivity (1988: 169). The face of woman has not been able to fully participate in this fantasy of individuality. Rather, woman's face has been used as a blank screen for the projection of the face of the Other, whether as Face/Object or Face/Ideal. The blankness required for her face to function thus meant that she has rarely felt herself an occupant of her own face; she becomes an uncanny stranger to her self.

In this regard Deleuze and Guattari share with many other post-modernists a blind spot about sexual difference. Many feminist writers have addressed this at length (Grosz [1994], Braidotti [1994], Irigaray [1977] and others). Craig Owens provides a particularly cogent critique of this failure of post-modernism to address the issue of gender difference in the experience of culture in his 'The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Post-Modernism' (1992). He makes the point that, even though there is an apparent intersection of intention in the feminist critique of patriarchy and the post-modernist critique of representation, post-modernism on one level remains simply another masculine invention that excludes women. This is because it refuses to acknowledge sexual difference as a foundational construct of culture. Women will continue to be left out of the de-constructive theories of post-modernism as long as those theories 'aspire to the status of a general theory of contemporary culture' (1992: 490). That this aspiration re-iterates the 'mastering' positions that post-modernism claims to break down is overlooked by its practitioners. There can be no general theory of culture whilst half of societies participants have experienced that culture differently

on the basis of their gender. General theoretical stances inevitably present themselves as 'neutral' (or as Grosz aptly spells the word, 'neut(e)ral') (1994:162). This is a loaded term for women that they are rightly suspicious of. It is one that could once again subsume them as props for masculine fantasies. As Rosi Braidotti asserts, 'Only a man could idealise sexual neutrality' (1994: 120).

The face of woman has been overcoded but in a quite different way to the face of universal Man. It was overcoded with the excess of masculinity; that which needed to be discarded to form a discrete masculine identity. Because women have yet to be in the position where their faces can represent individuality (however bogus that idea of individuality is revealed to be) discarding the face may not be the compelling imperative for women as it would seem it is for Deleuze and Guattari. Because of the way the face of woman has been utilised in Western representation and hence the different way the face has been experienced by them, women come to this problematic site with quite different priorities. It is my belief that the feminist project which seeks to find a way that female subjectivity can be represented has points of intersection with, but an ultimate divergence from, Deleuze's 'probehead' project.

Deleuze and Guattari assume that their call for the dismantling of the face and its rebirth as the 'probehead' is what must happen for all humanity. As I remark above, the fact that the specificity of what women need to do in their 'line of flight' may be quite different is not even considered. Irigaray states it exquisitely when she asks, 'And don't we run the risk once more of taking back from women the as yet unterritorialised spaces where her desire may come into being?' (1977: 140). If, as I suggest, self-portraits made by women demonstrate that their own face has and continues to be an important site for experiment, resistance and renegotiation, a place where 'desire may come into being', then it is debatable whether we would want or need to abandon it just yet. I certainly doubt whether it will ever be useful to me to adopt a 'probehead' as a substitute for a face.

So, where does this leave women? Are we one step behind, trailing the 'probehead's' trajectory because we haven't yet found a face to reject? Or are we who are, in one sense, already/always faceless a step ahead? Deleuze calls for all to 'know your faces; it is the only way you will be able to dismantle them and draw your lines of flight' (1988: 188). I ask, what can a woman know about her face? Has her face ever been a means by which she could declare a discrete identity? Perhaps she has always known that the face is something that has been stuck, mask-like, on her head and belongs more to others than to her.

I would suggest that women are, in fact, already well along the path and have been dismantling their 'faciality' for a long time. That is, the face was always an unstable vehicle for women to represent the self because historically it has not

functioned for them as a signifier of individuality. In the self-portraits made by many women artists over the centuries we can already discern 'lines of flights' which escape the faciality machine. Examples could include Artemisia Gentileschi's resistance of the Italian Renaissance tradition of facial symmetry; Frida Kahlo's impassive face that she makes a multi-gendered, multi-cultured, inhabited abstraction, or Cindy Sherman's many disguises. These and many other diverse self-portraits by women reveal an awareness of the face as an imposed mask (a construct) and, concomitant with this, an awareness that this is not all the face can be. Because women's presence can not be automatically assumed to be signified by the representation of their face, they have brought to self-portraiture different meanings and intentions. This has resulted in the genre expanding beyond the tropes of traditional representation and, ultimately, beyond a simplistic assertion of individual identity.

Conclusion: Self-Portraiture as Strategy

'Woman' has been traditionally constituted as the object and not the subject in art, yet the practice of self-portraiture nevertheless requires the woman artist to be both object and subject, and thus to re-negotiate the relationship between these two positions. If the face of 'woman' has been used as a site for the production of masculinist meanings in Western art, as Pollock demonstrates in her acute de-construction of Rossetti's face/objects, then it follows that it can also be a crucial site for the re-negotiation of such meanings by women. My thesis proposes that many women artists have done just that through their engagement with the genre of self-portraiture.

As I have already suggested, when women artists employ their own perception of their own, particular, face they assert a level of identity and individuation which resists the traditional representation of women as symbolic, fetishized and, essentially, absent. The practice of self-portraiture can be usefully interpreted as an on-going experiment by women artists to renegotiate how and if their presence can be represented. Self-portraiture, where the artist's face is a crucial component of the image, is a process that many women artists have engaged in order to reclaim the face as a site that can be useful for their own identity-making. It is a project that has required them on one hand to sever the alignment of face and body that has been fundamental in the representation of 'woman' in Western art and on the other to attempt to recuperate both the body and the face as a site that can represent an embodied subjectivity. In this sense, women's self-portraiture involves at times what I consider to be a strategically necessary 'decapitation'. This image, with its connotations of violence and rupture, is something of a contradiction, since it is strategically the mechanism by which women artists can first examine the idea of Face

and then begin to re-integrate and re-establish identity, presence and individuality within the framework of embodied subjectivity. I will show in subsequent chapters how these mechanisms are at work and at play in the self-portraits of selected women artists from a variety of cultural periods and settings.

I see, in self-portraits painted by women, evidence that there has been a long held desire by many women artists to use their own face in their artwork as a tool in the process of unravelling and ravelling the politics of female representation and identity. In *Laugh of the Medusa*, Helene Cixous speaks of how women are ‘omitted, brushed aside at the scene of inheritances’ (1980: 248). She believes this can be a plus, not a lack. When a women artist attempts a self-portrait she finds herself positioned at the intersection of two incompatible representational traditions regarding the face. Her face cannot function as a sign for individuality because it is female and it also cannot be the sign for ‘woman’ because it is too individual. This position of contradiction has meant that women have had to experiment with the form of self-portraiture and invent new ways of representing the female face from a volatile mix of experience, resistance and desire.

Not only have these experiments produced new possibilities of how women can be represented, they have also produced new ways of imagining and depicting the way our sense of ‘self’ is experienced. In the next chapter, ‘Room to Move’, I will examine the way self-portraiture can be said to parallel and intertwine with the more general debate surrounding female subjectivity.

Frid.

It is gradually becoming clear to me that this series of self-portraits is a project whose value lies in the process of making rather than in the end results in terms of individual works. The body of work that results from this process then will constitute the telling of the story of a journey. A journey that meanders, covers and recovers old ground; goes round in circles, heads off into the unknown and abandons all thought of only one final destination. I see it as a kind of loitering with intent. There is not going to be one final self-portrait where I yell 'Eureka! My god, I've finally done it. I have captured my essential self in painting'. There will always be another approach to take, another point of view, other ways of seeing myself (quite aside from the fact that I will continue to physically change). In fact this journey does not even have one starting point. Rather, it is made up of many different approaches that often criss-cross, coming at the same location from many different directions. Sometimes I think I will 'sneak up on myself' this way and 'capture' a view of my face that has not been compromised by culture and discourse. As if my face has a kind of virtuous existence somewhere and that it could tell me something essential about myself, if only I could 'catch it'. I think of a title for a painting of this, 'The Artist Attempts To Capture Likeness'- I see a shy, mythical creature called Likeness stepping delicately into a clearing with the Artist nearby poised to spring the trap.

Tues.

The problem with a journey such as this one is that with no one destination, or in fact, no one particular point of departure, I find I occasionally get disorientated and become lost as if in the middle of nowhere. I wish then for a logical and orderly itinerary by which I can mark off my 'progress'. Aside from anything else, the need to make an exhibition out of all of this makes me want to impose some limits to my wanderings. Yet if I do limit myself to only one or two paths I exclude too many possibilities. I suspect that I need to trust that the project is the point and that the products

produced along the way will have their own internal logic. Too conscious designing of a series of work tends to inhibit the use of the language of visual art. Most of the elements that appear in these paintings have not been theoretically conceived and then incorporated into the images. They have shouldered their own way in well ahead of any intellectual understanding of why they should be included. They make only *a priori* sense. Sometimes image making seems a clumsy and laborious way to attempt to express meaning. I can *think* things through much more quickly. I can articulate any number of grand theories about self-portraiture and women yet each of those ideas seem narrow in comparison to the process I undertake when painting an image. I think of ideas as lines of thought whereas painting, for me, requires a broad sweeping of all before me, in me and behind me. A large clumsy embrace with experience. The logical ordering of ideas calls for exclusions and the leaving out of awkward bits that don't fit. When I make a picture I want it to contain and include all of it, the contradictions and the ambiguity.

Mon.

There is something relentlessly grim, pompous or smug about most self-portraits. The artist is usually staring very seriously into the mirror and hence at the viewer. I am starting to feel slightly oppressed by this and have therefore embarked on a group of paintings called 'Making Faces'. The title refers both to the irreverent nature of the act of making a face and to the idea that all represented faces are constructed or made up. The images I have chosen to work from are photos I had taken of me literally making faces — screwing up my face, leering etc. I project these images onto the acrylic to trace and then 'play' with them.

It strikes me that these are the sort of images of ourselves that we generally loathe when they slip out of the photo envelope of a just retrieved film. They are not flattering, they show how uncontrollable our features are, they are not the hopeful image of ourselves we take with us to social functions. I have made these

faces quite large, blown up to about four or five times the size of my actual face and cropped from mid forehead to the chin. This scale creates interesting and contradictory effects. On one hand the use of close-up mimics intimacy and on the other the oversized features collapse coherency.

Weds.

My studio is becoming a crowd of faces. It is at times difficult to be in amongst that crowd. Most of them are strangers to me today. When I am not actually engaged in the painting of the faces I can't quite see the point of them. It seems somehow naive to wish to recuperate my face in such a way that it is meaningful to me. No one face is mine, or totals my sense of me (my desire to be) yet I feel compelled to pursue the idea that in the painting of my face I may find some fragile connection between appearance, identity and embodiment. Perhaps it is simply by becoming the agent of my own representation that I claim my face for my own? It is also, somehow, about making myself visible — putting myself in the picture — claiming a space.

Weds.

What kind of subject-hood do I achieve when I make myself the 'subject' of a self-portrait? On one level I am staking a claim in the territory of representation. I am being the agent in how I am represented both as an individual and a woman. But what sort of territory do I find myself in? Visual representation is a discourse that has in many ways defined and limited how women can be seen, so it is not enough to simply add my face to it, to make myself visible. I need to make trouble here. I need elbow room. I need to say something about the tyranny of likeness, the complexity of seeing oneself and to describe the act of looking at my face.

Sun.

Doing this series of self-portraits provides me with a unique opportunity to look at my face in a way that is not possible

otherwise. I have spent a lot of time in my life looking at my face in the mirror (with varying degrees of anxiety, hope, despair and pleasure). The purpose of that looking was to find or create a face for others or to build up a picture of what it is that I thought others saw. The way I look at my face while making a self-portrait is different. I am looking for the face I see. This requires detachment/intimacy, distance/proximity, removal/belonging. I gradually abandon what I think other people see, lessen the grip of self-consciousness and begin to be able to describe a face or faces that I can feel in some way connected to.

Tues.

I have spent some time recently working on a triptych appropriating two of Gentileschi's images, *Self-portrait as La Pittura* and *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. This work speaks to the process of making a self-portrait. In the left panel I depict myself as Gentileschi depicting herself as 'La Pittura'. By doing this I am claiming a connection with Gentileschi — inventing a tradition and finding common ground. With the Judith image I am appropriating the image to my own ends. In this painting I have myself sawing off a head that also bears my likeness. Here I am trying to articulate the idea of removal and detachment. This refers to the feeling I have that in some ways self-portraiture, for women, requires a kind of 'decapitation'. In art the face of woman has been collapsed into 'body' so in order to be able to make my face a place I can declare individuality I need to separate it from 'body'. I wonder what it is that I believe 'individuality' to be. It perhaps only has meaning in terms of a reaction against anonymity.

Chapter Three

Room to Move

To move into that space of creative practice where to 'become' is the point — not to become something but to 'become intransitively.

(Trinh T. Minh Ha 1989 : 19)

When I first began my study of self-portraiture by women artists I assumed at some level that I would be tracking and recording the determined path of 'woman' from the position of object to that of a victoriously reclaimed position as subject. The study began with the central hypothesis that women artists have for a long time used the genre of self-portraiture strategically as a means to come into representation as subjects. However, I came to understand that a simple assumption of the traditional position of subject is problematic for women artists because it has always been a shape formed by and for the masculine template. Nor could the woman/artist easily escape the viewer's perception of the female form as being body/object/other. What I have found in both my own art practice and in the work of many and diverse women artists self-portraits has been something far more subtle and subversive than my initial line of inquiry would ever have suggested.

Rather than a crude adoption of, or participation in, the existing trope of the unitary self, what I have found again and again in the self-portraits by women I have studied is evidence that the very polarity of the object/subject dualism itself has been interrogated. These artists needed to invent and develop new and dynamic forms of self-representation because neither position of 'object' nor 'subject' adequately matched their experience of themselves as women, artists and individuals. These new figurations have both questioned and enlarged our understandings of what constitutes the 'self'.

Throughout my study and practice one of the questions that has shaped my research has been this: how can a woman artist 'see' and represent herself as an embodied subject within a discourse that has traditionally represented woman as the object or symbolic 'other'? I would suggest that many women artists have, through the practice of self-portraiture, been engaging in a project that both counters and resists the traditional representation of 'woman' in art. By deploying their own faces in their artworks they have not only made themselves visible and consequently challenged the essential anonymity of the fetishized female form in Western art, they have perforce disrupted traditional understanding of how the self or subject is constituted. At the core of this project is the desire to escape not only the fixed position of object/other in

Western discourse but also the fixity of conventional ideas of the self that construct the subject as a discrete entity.

The more self-portraits I have made, the more questions have arisen for me about what it is that an artist is trying to ‘say’ or ‘capture’ through the depiction of her own face. Rather than looking for and attempting to capture or reclaim one’s ‘real’ face it has become apparent that subjectivity is a more complex issue than that, particularly for women. It certainly wasn’t simply a matter of rejecting and abandoning the role of object and uncritically adopting the masculine notion of subject. It is not just a leaping off the pedestal, running through that no-man’s land in between and diving headfirst into the heavy gilt frame that embraces the Western fantasy of a discrete and coherent self.

The movement between subject and object is a complex and fraught journey. What form that subjectivity takes or what the concept of subjectivity means for women is one of the central concerns of feminists today. I believe that for decades women artists have, through the practice of self-portraiture, been engaged in a project that parallels and illuminates the theoretical debate surrounding subjectivity and identity for women. This has led me to examine the writings of feminist theoreticians who concern themselves with female subjectivity.

My art practice and the accompanying study of the self-portraits by other women artists have guided my approach to these writers. I have found myself drawn to those writers who talk of subjectivity as a process, as provisional, as a negotiation between social constructs and embodied experience. This connects with the insights I have formed in the process of painting my own series of self-portraits. That is, that my subjectivity, my sense of being, can best be expressed through works that expose and depict the processes, the negotiations and the gestures of agency and desire rather than those that lay teleological claim to a mimetic connection between captured likeness and the self. I thus interweave the practice of self-portraiture by women artists with the broader feminist discourse concerning subjectivity, embodiment and identity for women by exploring connections between the self-portraits of artists such as Gentileschi, Kollwitz, Toorop, Ford, Sherman and Orlan with the work of writers such as Cixious, Kristeva, Irigaray, Grosz, Braidotti and Ettinger.

The ideas concerning female subjectivity that I have encountered in various writers and thinkers have then flowed back into the studio and informed the directions I have taken with my self-representations and helped me form interpretations of the self-portraits of other women artists. Both practice and theory, then, have inter-woven to enable me to shape a conceptual framework with which to approach and interpret self-portraiture by women artists.

Who I have read and what I have found to be significant for my project has

been determined by the insights into, and interrogations of, self-portraiture I have formed as I tracked my own journey through that practice. When I have encountered concepts, descriptions and figurations in the writings of others that have resonated with what was happening in my paintings I have borrowed that idea and taken it back with me to my studio to test and explore through my painting process.

This has resulted in an approach to these thinkers that can best be characterised as a sort of selective thieving, 'a practice of "theft", or extensive borrowing of notions and concepts' (Braidotti 1994: 30). In this I have been influenced and reassured by Braidotti's defence of theft as an enabling practice that allows one an escape from a too rigid logocentricity. Like Braidotti I have sought 'a creative, non-reactive project emancipated from the oppressive force of the traditional academic approach' (Braidotti 1994: 30).

I describe this process as a kind of 'loitering with intent' as I believe this is a particularly apt term for the sort of approach I undertake to my subject. As an artist, making images is my primary form of meaning-making and this is not a necessarily logical process, or at least, it follows its own internal logic. I believe this kind of approach can be utilised to uncover, connect and shape subtly different understandings of the depiction of subjectivity in women's self-portraiture. Art is the starting point from which I find the paths into theory, a nomadic process that does not necessarily follow straight lines. Any map that attempted to plot my movements in this project would more likely reveal a series of overlapping and intersecting tracks that move from and constantly return to the art practice. The artist and theorist Bracha Lichtenburg Ettinger's observations about this process are insightful: 'Painting produces theory and kernels that can transform it; theory does not alter painting in process; it can draw stalks out of it and translate them into its own language' (Ettinger 1996: 92). The 'theoretical stalks' that have grown out of my paintings have led me to different writers for different purposes.

There are three key areas of feminist thought regarding female subjectivity that I have found compelling. Firstly, I have found myself drawn to writings that position the imagination and creativity as a crucial site from which women can fashion new representations of identity. These writings support my belief that, because it functions analogically, visual art is a particularly enabling practice for women to imagine, invent, depict and report on the feminine. Secondly, I have been interested in what various writers have had to say about the concept of 'being in-between', the feeling I have experienced while painting my series of self-portraits. The sense of being neither subject nor object, of needing to make room between these seemingly fixed poles, was something I wanted to explore further. Finally, as I came to understand, through my art work, that what I was trying to express was a sense of myself as an on-going process

rather than a triumphal arrival, I sought out those writers who articulated ideas of the self in terms of process, becoming and movement.

Before I move onto these three areas it is necessary to clarify what I mean by the term 'woman' when I talk of women artists, their self-representations and women's subjectivity. This is important to my approach as I consider it problematic to collapse the work of women artists as being only representative of gender. How and when one uses the term 'woman' should be carefully considered so as to avoid reducing the diversity of women artist's work to bland and essentialist claims that reinforce their marginalisation.

Judith Butler has been particularly useful in formulating my position here. Her *Gender Trouble* (1990) makes the reader question the term 'woman' and what sorts of claims are being made by it. She argues that the subject of women should never be presumed, as this fails to question deeply the politics of representation itself. Butler's point is that gender and identity are social constructs. She would rather we critically examined the way the notion of gender is formed and 'naturalised' in patriarchy by ritualistic repetition than make new essentialist claims in the name of 'woman'. The creation of a universal subject called 'woman' to counter their traditional positioning as object would only serve to create yet another space of containment. It is therefore necessary to develop strategies that disrupt injunctions to be a given gender. For if gender is a central foundation of identity, then disrupting those tropes by expressing displacement and parody opens up the possibility of developing a discourse that would allow for a 'proliferation' of configurations of sex, gender and identities.

Butler's ideas on this matter have helped me to determine that my aim is not to view the self-portraits of this study as evidence of the 'real' representation of women. Rather, I have come to see them as expressions of 'displacement' that have been strategically employed by diverse women artists, in diverse ways, to negotiate the ideas of gender, representation and identity. For example, artists as diverse historically as Cindy Sherman, Artemisia Gentileschi and Sue Ford (whom I analyse in detail in Chapter Four) all experiment with self re-presentation in their work, depicting the gap that lies between the representation of 'woman' and their experience of themselves as women and artists.

I believe that all the artists included in this study, albeit to varying degrees, share Butler's understanding that gender is a social construct that women learn via social sanctions and injunctions to perform 'woman'. This critical awareness arises from their art practice. The moment a woman decides to produce a self-portrait she unwittingly (that is, whether she intends it or not) disturbs the assumptions that underlie self-portraiture. These assumptions include the following: the artist is male; the 'individual' is male; the self is a coherent and reportable fact (and male) and that

the female in art can represent only other/object/body. A woman artist cannot make a self-portrait, then, without causing 'gender trouble'. As Meskimmon argues, "'Woman' has been the object of art for centuries, while women have remained marginalised as producers. To act in both roles, simultaneously, is to stage a crucial intervention" (1996: 14). A particular problematic is that 'painting herself' requires the artist to make her visual representations of self right in the heart of the specular economy; that object/subject, inside/outside dialectic formed by the primacy of looking in Western culture. It can't help but produce a crisis for the woman attempting to paint her own image. It also creates a crisis of recognition for the viewer who does not expect to 'read' the face of woman as other than 'Other'.

Self-portraiture is a genre that developed primarily as a vehicle to declare and depict the individual genius and skill of predominantly male artists. As Meskimmon (1996) points out it was only after the Renaissance when artists gained increased social status and when the idea of the artist/genius began to emerge that self-portraiture gained cultural value. The genre of self-portraiture, then, has been formed by, and for the purpose of maintaining, the concept of the artist as male, individual and genius. There is a deeply internalised and unquestioned expectation that the artist is male and the female is form in art that is confounded by a woman's self-portrait. All self-portraits by their very nature are a 'portrait of the artist' so when a woman paints one she challenges the exclusively masculine construct.

So from the outset there is a disturbing misalliance between the desire of women to represent themselves and the underlying paradigms of self-portraiture. The resultant displacement and mis-recognition the female artist experiences has impelled many women to engage extensively in the practice of self-portraiture so as to further question the implicit beliefs that underpin self-representation. Unless she questions these underlying assumptions she consigns herself to simply reiterating the use of the female face and form as a signifier for the 'Other'. In my self-portraiture series I have moved from the initial desire to 'reclaim' (somehow) a face I felt I could belong to (in some way) towards the understanding that my art practice provides me with a means rather than an end. As I continued to be unable to recognise the faces I painted as being in any way the 'subject', it became apparent to me that I had to look more closely at the practice of self-portraiture itself.

What sort of claim is an artist making when he or she utilises this genre? I found that even if I placed a likeness of my face slap-bang in the middle of a painting and titled that painting 'self-portrait', it did not necessarily produce an image that had for me a recognisable connection with my sense of selfhood. I had to unravel things further and start from scratch. I had to imagine new ways of employing my face to see whether it was possible to use it to depict how I experienced subjectivity.

This kind of questioning leads not only to the de-construction of the tropes of self-portraiture but also to a recuperation of the form based on experience and invention. The self-representations of women artists show us that, through their art practice, they have been able to find ways to articulate their displacement from, and interrogation of, those injunctions to be 'woman'. This interrogating leads to and allows for the 'proliferation' of configurations that Butler calls for that enable us to begin to imagine women as subjects in a culture that positions them as object.

In some ways the woman artist must begin her self-portrait by imagining herself as the subject and, when she encounters the limitations of the existing trope, must from her creative imagination sketch depictions of herself that can include both her embodied experience and her experience as Other in a phallogentric culture.

Imag(e)ining a Female Self

In my self-portraiture series I have found it necessary to first imagine an empty landscape where I could situate representations of my face. It has to be empty and unpopulated so that I can start to build a picture of myself 'from scratch'. Through my art practice I test whether it is possible to create a figural space in which I can come to 'see' myself. That this may be an impossible project does not actually matter for, while the imagination cannot entirely escape the dominant discourse, it can not be completely contained by it either. Furthermore, what the imagination and my art practice provide is a vehicle and a means of exploration. This gives me mobility and method. It provides me with ways of moving off in directions that are not predicated purely on the object/subject dualism I inherit from a phallogentric culture.

Because the imagination is positioned as a crucial element in my self-portraiture process the theorists I have been drawn to are those who, to some degree or another, also privilege the imagination and creative practice (writing, poetry, art) as an important area of feminist endeavour for women. The theorists discussed below all position creative practice as particularly well placed to provide women with not only 'points of exit from phallogentric schemes of thought' (Braidotti 1994: 38), but the means to create and employ new forms and figurations that envisage subjectivity differently.

French feminist Helene Cixous is very much concerned with this when she speaks of the need to 'write the feminine' (Cixous 1980: 245). *L'écriture feminine* is posited by Cixous as a form of writing that seeks to offer a series of representations in which the female body is central and can be 'positively marked'. This works against the classic representations of women and even counters those writings that focus solely on exposing the use of women as sign in the male discourse. This form of writing

recognises that women have always existed outside of the dominant discourse and calls for new forms that articulate an embodied subjectivity which subverts and challenges the assumptions, dualism and hierarchies that underlie that discourse.

I am interested in the whether a concept of '*la peinture feminine*' might be positioned as an equivalent to '*l'écriture feminine*'. There are, clearly, intersecting trajectories in a project that calls for women to write themselves and one where women set out to visually depict themselves as the subjects of their own paintings or photographs. If, in the quote that follows, one includes the word 'painting' alongside the word 'writing' and 'face' with the word 'body' it becomes quite illuminating when applied to self-portraiture: 'By writing/painting herself, woman will return to the body/face which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display' (1980: 250). In Western art women's 'face' as a locus of individuality was confiscated and refigured as body. To 'return' to the face is a crucial yet complex first step in the depiction of a female-inclusive subjectivity. Paradoxically this return requires simultaneously a separation of the female face from the body/object and its recuperation as a site of subjective embodiment. This calls for women artists to imag(e)ine and depict anew the relationship between body/face and object/subject.

For Cixous the only way for women to come into representation, to cease to be strangers to themselves, is through newly imagined self-representations in one form or another. The concept of *l'écriture feminine* is not just to describe female experience but to see it as a means by which new ways of seeing, embodiment and subjectivity can be imagined. She positions the imagination as the point of departure, the means of escape and that space of engagement where new shapes can be formed. 'Woman's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms incredible' (1980: 245). I see the many self-portraits I have looked at in this study as a stream of inexhaustible phantasms formed from the imagination of women artists.

The creative imagination is also an important concept for Luce Irigaray, the French feminist theorist, whose ideas on subjectivity, sexual difference and the inter-subjective economy of women has both informed my own work and helped me to interpret the work of other women artists. Irigaray sees the utilisation of the imagination as the single most important way of articulating the feminine as a positively marked condition. For Irigaray the imagination is the central means by which women can escape/circumvent their absence from symbolic language. Irigaray's emphasis on creative expression (a 'new poetics') as the means by which women can become speaking subjects gives imagination a key role to play in her almost visionary call for women to participate in the 'production of a new age of thought, art, poetry and language: the creation of a new poetics' (cited in Whitford 1991: 10).

Irigaray's '*parler femme*' echoes Cixous's *l'écriture féminine* and she argues that speaking (as) woman is a useful strategy that women writers, artists and thinkers can deliberately utilise in order to recuperate the feminine as a location of situated being. This recuperation is necessary because, Irigaray argues, in the masculine discourse women are 'exiled from themselves... imported into another economy, where they are completely unable to find themselves' (cited in Whitford 1991: 135). A different economy to the one we have may only be imagined, but once imagined can be the basis of inventing a new way of depicting, writing and speaking woman. These new depictions or figurations have the effect of forming for both their makers and their audience a different perspective, which displaces and disturbs previously unquestioned positionings.

Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic is useful here in understanding why the imagination and creative language/art can be such a powerful vehicle for women seeking to form new representations of both the self and women. Her premise is that the semiotic is that state we occupy before language. This semiotic is the negativity of the symbolic that asserts order and signification through language and meaning. As the socially produced subject comes into language, semiotic or pre-linguistic understandings are subsumed or repressed by the symbolic. The significance of the semiotic, however, is that it is not and cannot be entirely suppressed. Kristeva believes that the semiotic continues to erupt within the symbolic, especially through the agency of what she calls the 'poetic text' or 'poetic language' (cited in Boulous-Walker 1998: 106). She sees the poetic text as a site that privileges and highlights the semiotic, which accords with my positioning of painting and other art forms as instances of 'poetic text'.

Kristeva's interpretation of the semiotic and its links with creative practice supports my belief that visual art privileges the kind of meaning-making that happens outside of logic. Women artists attempting to portray their experience of themselves through the practice of self-portraiture have to move outside of the 'logic' of the idea of the unitary self, for in fact they experience themselves as already/always outside of that particular logic anyway. Through the employment of the imagination and their art practice they exploit the opportunities that arise for Kristeva's semiotic breaches to occur. Such breaches lead to what the artist/theorist Bracha Lichtenburg Ettinger would describe as pathways along which women can, via art, come into language in such a way that they do not have to 'collapse onto the royal way of the phallus' (Ettinger 1996: 98).

Ettinger's perspective as an artist makes her situate art as one of the most effective means of articulating a non-phallic perspective. She declares, 'I will here articulate a feminine aspect in/for/from art' (1996: 92). She believes that art is the

medium most likely to generate new pathways into language for women that allows for the cultural reporting of the feminine that is 'beyond-the-phallus' (1996: 105). She also thinks that it is possible, through the making of art and reflecting on it, 'to formulate theoretical paths that are not a tear or a cut' (1996: 98). I understand her to be saying by this that the visual art process, because it favours ambiguity, analogy and the imagination, is one that is particularly suited to engendering depictions of the feminine that, while releasing it from the male/other binarism nevertheless does not essentialize nor negate it. Ettinger positions creating, producing and viewing art as a site from which women, as 'partial becoming-subject' and 'woman-m/Other-to-be' (1996: 98), can report a non-phallic subjective perspective.

Elizabeth Grosz is another contemporary feminist writer who positions creative practice as crucial for women recuperating their sense of subjectivity. She calls for 'new modes of art and new forms of representational practice outside of the patriarchal frameworks' (Grosz 1994: 188). I believe that if we look closely at women's self-portraiture over the last several decades it becomes evident that many women artists have, for a long time, been exploring 'new forms of representational practice' that question many givens of the self, the feminine and the body. Grosz's metaphor of the Möbius strip, 'that point of twisting or self-transformation in which the inside flips over to become the outside, or the outside turns over on itself to become the inside' (1994: 160), is an apt one to describe the way in which the self-representations of a number of women artists, for example Frida Kahlo, breached the borders and surfaces of the intact body so that experience, desire and subjectivity could flow through it.

Similarly, when Rosi Braidotti talks of embodiment being 'a point of the overlapping between the physical, symbolic and the sociological' (Braidotti 1994: 13) she too could be describing Kahlo's self-portraits where the artist layers the personal, the political, the symbolic and the particular into one image. Braidotti emphasises the imagination as a process that works to both destabilise rationality and offer opportunities of escape from the confines of logic. She openly declares her belief in 'the potency and relevance of the imagination, of myth-making, as a way of stepping out of [...] political and intellectual stasis' (Braidotti 1994: 4). Her approach is one where the imaginary is wielded strategically to form creative figurations that can articulate new ways of describing how subjectivity is experienced and articulated. She imagines and constructs the figure of the nomad as a useful political fiction that can be adopted by women and all other 'others' who desire an escape from the fixed certainties of Western thought.

Braidotti describes a nomadic aesthetics practised by what she calls the 'nomad as polyglot' (1994: 8). I am interested in this term polyglot and how it relates to art practitioners. Braidotti uses it initially to describe her particular multi-cultural

upbringing with its attendant knowledge of more than one language. She privileges the multi-lingual person as being someone who is more able to critically examine society than the person who stays safely ensconced within one language and one culture is. Because they move between (at least) two languages the polyglot becomes aware of the 'treacherous nature of all languages' (1994: 8). In this sense Braidotti depicts displacement as a positive factor for the 'nomad as polyglot' gains critical insight by not being entirely within one culture.

Braidotti goes on to argue that one can be a polyglot within the same language, using writers like Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce as examples. I believe that the visual artist similarly moves between languages. Visual art is a language that operates in ways quite different to the spoken or written word. Art is constituted from the unspeakable, the ambiguous and the phenomenological and the artist employs a kind of synaesthetic grammar involving colour, line, texture, shape and meaning. Visual arts practitioners may therefore also understand that there are other ways of seeing and communicating and can occupy that space of dynamic displacement that Braidotti describes for her 'nomad as polyglot'.

The key element here of Braidotti's thesis is that this 'being in between' is an empowering position. For, as she says, 'being in between languages constitutes a vantage point in deconstructing identity' (1994: 13). I will develop this conceptualisation of the in-between as an enabling site further, as I think women artists are similarly positioned in the in-between (between object and subject) when they attempt to produce self-portraits.

Working (in) the In-Between

I have formed an understanding while making my self-portraits that it is more productive to linger and play in the no-man's land between object and subject than it is to attempt to adopt the position of 'the subject' in my paintings. Most of my faces are depicted on or near a horizon line for the horizon is a metaphor for the in-between: being neither land nor sky it is a place that can be represented but never arrived at. This in-between space is where my ideas of my 'self' can be constructed and also dismantled as the need arises. I can build this representation of 'self' out of scraps stolen or borrowed from the bracketing object/subject duality. Even though it inherits the polarities of object and subject at its borders I do not experience this neither-nor space as one of containment. An imagined space can be as large or as tiny as I want or need it to be.

If the in-between is the site where I centrally locate my experiments of self-representation, it is the fixed configurations of object and subject that are pushed out

onto the margins. I can thus make room for the myriad depictions of movements, gestures and faces I deem necessary for me to begin to describe my sense of subjectivity; room to move. Nor is this space one that is defined only by what it is not. From this liminal position I can also employ and toy with the concepts of object and subject. This shift allows me to escape the purely reactive position of defining myself only through a critique of the representation of 'woman' in Western culture.

I see this experimentation in the in-between occurring in other women artists engaged in the practice of self-portraiture, as I discuss in detail in the next chapter. Women who wished to articulate their perception of themselves necessarily had to renegotiate this boundary between the two positions. This is because a self-portrait by a woman places the represented woman in the position of both and/or not-quite-either object and subject. Therefore a woman's self-portrait becomes a representation of self that must perforce explore and describe the liminal spaces between the object/subject dualism. Many feminist theorists have addressed this idea of the in-between or liminal space that forms when the fixed binarism of object and subject is interrogated.

When Cixous calls for women to 'return to the body' she understands that this is a complex procedure. One that involves employing a creative process that leads to, 'a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms'. (Cixous 1980: 254). This phrase aptly describes the many self-portraits I have collected together for this study. Artists as diverse as Gentileschi in the sixteenth century, Kahlo in the early twentieth century and Orlan in the late twentieth century, have all in their own way and in different mediums 'returned' to their bodies (and faces). To do this they have had to negotiate a different space and form for themselves in the in-between. For, as Cixous states, the creative process 'is precisely working (in) the in-between' (1980: 254). The in-between is thus positioned as a dynamic and destabilising site that women can occupy strategically in order to both unravel and re-knit configurations of identity.

Kristeva's concept of the 'abject' is also useful here in that it echoes that of Cixous' 'in-between'. She states the abject is that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions and rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (cited in Gaudelius 1993: 50). I believe many women artists occupy or traverse the abject when they attempt to make self-portraits. As Barbara Creed explains, 'that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject' (Creed 1993:11). However, an essential element of Kristeva's concept of the abject is that it disturbs. It is not the more benign space of exploration implied by Cixous's 'in-between'. It brings with it the connotation of the despicable, the thrown aside and the monstrous. We see this 'monstrousness' explored quite deliberately by some of the

artists examined in the next chapter, particularly Sherman, Orlan and Saville. For the abject to become a positively marked position from which to challenge the symbolic order a paradigmatic shift is required in the way we view the object/subject dualism.

Mary Douglas's work on dirt, *Purity and Danger* (1980) relates to this and clarifies the way in which the 'abjectness' of the abject is something that is created by its positioning in the established order of things rather than by any innate quality of horror in itself. Dirt for Douglas is that which is not in its proper place and therefore upsets or muddles the clean outlines of order. Dirt disturbs, not through any intention towards disruption but because it is out of place. As Grosz says on this topic, 'dirt signals a site of possible danger to social and individual systems, a site of vulnerability insofar as the status of dirt as marginal and unincorporable always locates sites of potential threat to the system and to the order it both makes possible and problematizes' (Grosz 1994: 192).

There are clear correlations between Kristeva's concept of the abject, Douglas's thesis on dirt and my understanding of the way that women artist's experiments in self-representation must disturb order and must enter into the abject and redefine not only that position but that of subject and object. Their self-portraits disturb because they are 'out of place'. The abject is that 'in-between' position women artists are negotiating when they attempt to either cross, erase or redefine the border between object and subject in the practice of self-portraiture. As Grosz points out, the abject cannot be reduced to a subject/object opposition. 'The abject necessarily partakes of both polarised terms but cannot be clearly identified with either' (Grosz 1994: 192). In my use of the idea of the abject here, my intention is not to simply introduce a third, fixed, position between object and subject: rather I envisage the abject as a space of engagement that actively challenges and subverts the object/subject dualism itself. It provides an-other point of perspective that ultimately shifts the paradigm entirely.

Ettinger explores this shift when she talks of a 'matrixial' (or from the womb) perspective that 'rotates' the paradigm in such a way that women can escape their phallogocentric positioning (Ettinger 1996: 99). She posits the matrix as that which 'intertwines the woman as between subject and object and between centre and nothingness on the axes of heterogeneous severality, while the phallus posits her as either a subject in the masculine format or an object patterned upon masculine desire' (1996: 105). This resonates clearly with the way I have understood the practice of self-portraiture to work for women artists. Women artist's desire for and practice of self-representation leads to a major shift in their positioning in the object/subject nexus. They come to be reporting on the self from a different place altogether, one that frees them ultimately from being either object or subject (or allows them to recombine those elements in new, more productive ways).

Rosi Braidotti talks of this in-between-ness as ‘a practice of the intervals, of the interfaces, and of the interstices’ (1994: 6). In fact, she believes that it is only here in the ‘in-between zones’ (1994: 93) that her epistemic nomadism can work to provide women with the means, perspective and space to construct new understandings of the self and the feminine. This appreciation of the significance of in-between places makes her declare a ‘special affection for the places of transit’: airport lounges, stations and other public places. While I do not share Braidotti’s love of airport lounges I appreciate her co-option of them as a metaphor for ‘in-between zones where all ties are suspended and time stretched to a sort of continuous present. Oases of non-belonging. Spaces of detachment. No-(wo)man’s lands.’ (1994: 19) She goes on to specifically mention artists who have used these public spaces as the siting for their work, for example Barbara Krueger’s billboards and Jenny Holzer’s electronic panels.

It is interesting that Braidotti here blurs the line between being in the in-between and the practice of the in-between. I find this particularly significant in the context of this study, which seeks links between the practice of self-portraiture by women with the theoretical debates regarding subjectivity by feminist theorists. As an artist I have found that it is the practice that provides me with the means to invent, discover, experiment and communicate the ambiguity and the unspeakable that constitutes the in-between. Art is not the only way to do this but it is particularly well suited to the task. That is why I believe that a close look at how women artists have constructed their self-representations can provide us with a way of ‘seeing’ expressions of the feminine that are more than the not-male. Braidotti’s conceptualisation of the in-between makes it a place/practice of active engagement; ongoing making, unmaking, alignment and realignment. In regard to this way of seeing the in-between there is a phrase of Irigaray’s that has caught my attention over many months, hovering in the back of my mind while I have painted my self-portraits.

Irigaray believes that the only adequate response a woman can make at present in reference to female subjectivity is this: ‘...she can only reply: not... yet’ (cited in Whitford 1991: 58). The fact that Irigaray wrote ‘not...yet’ in this way has intrigued me. What these two small words (with the all-important gap) say to me is: here is both a space of engagement and point of escape; a fracture, a crack, a tiny crumble in the edifice. Here is a tiny but Tardis-like piece of time and space embedded in the structure of discourse. After all, how long is the pause represented by ‘...’? It can be as long as you want or need it to be. By making space between the not and the yet Irigaray pushes apart the boundaries of the either/or dualities we inherit in Western thinking, rather than simply calling for a female counter-subjectivity that matches and mimics the masculine.

This sentence would have a completely different emphasis if Irigaray had

chosen to write 'not yet' without the ellipsis. This is an eloquent pause that 'makes room'; allows time and space to look around and consider. It is a syntax that mirrors my desire to make room to move. In those three little dots can be heard the grunt of female effort to be more than 'other'. It is the almost soundless exhalation that escapes when something is... just out of reach.

This gives women the elbow-room needed to interrogate, invent and debate how they wish to represent themselves and their sense of being. It provides the time and space for women to 'constantly work on a dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity' (cited Whitford 1991: 30) as Irigaray exhorts us to do. As she says, 'Patriarchal civilisation [...] has put us in the position of objects; we must learn to become subjects capable of speech' (1991: 30). Note that this is not a call to adopt unquestioned the trope of the self, but rather to envisage ourselves as being able to articulate feminine experience.

It also enables us to glimpse the possibility that there will be and should be no closure to this process. Perhaps an advantage of arriving so late to the fantasy game of 'the self' means that women can bypass the rigid limitations imposed by the belief in the unitary and universal subject. To experience oneself as already and always 'not...yet' is not necessarily a bad thing. What it describes is an idea of identity as a gesture, a movement, a forward-leaning trajectory; always precipitate, always becoming, always provisional.

This 'not...yet' phrase of Irigaray's has resonated for me so deeply because it describes so well the process I have experienced in the production of my self-portrait series. When I first encountered it I was working on a series of paintings called, *Coming or Going (I don't know If I'm)* (Fig. 23 p. 106). These self-portraits consist of images of my face hovering indeterminately about the horizon line in a simple, gestural landscape of land and sky. With these images I wished to position representations of my face in a deliberately in-between or liminal space. The horizon line was perfect as it is not actually a place as such; one can never arrive there, it is always 'not...yet'. Through this device I began to explore the notion that it was possible to see subjectivity as being representable as a process rather than a state. The coming and the going are simultaneous. I am endeavouring to come into self-representation because I must in order to counter absence and, paradoxically, I seek to evacuate that representational trope altogether.

An important point to make here is that this 'in-between' positioning I talk of is not a matter of women adopting *a* position between object and subject. Rather it is a matter of them moving into a space of engagement in the in-between where they can adopt as many positions as they need. In fact once there they may find themselves moving too fast or too often for the term 'position' to apply.

The work of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) has been useful to my research in terms of developing this idea of subjectivity being a matter of movement and process. Their emphasis on 'becoming' rather than on 'being' in the formation of subjectivity has obviously important resonances with how I have come to see myself through this self-portraiture process I have been engaged in. Their work re-positions subject and object as 'a series of flows, energies, movements, strata, segments, organs, intensities - fragments capable of being linked together or severed in potentially infinite ways' (Grosz 1994: 167) and I believe this accurately describes the negotiation between object and subject that occurs in many women's self-portraits.

Another concept of theirs I consider useful is that of 'assemblage', which Grosz describes as 'provisional linkages of elements, fragments and flows' (Grosz 1994: 167). This is a process I see much evidence of in the self-portraits I have drawn together for this project. We see it in Kahlo's layering of the private/political/symbolic; in Sherman's disguises; in Jenkinson's pastiches; in Kollwitz's weaving of a universal face from a male/maternal conjoining. My work attempts to portray this also by showing explicitly that I, having made some room, go on to 'making faces' as an on going experiment. For, as Grosz states, this becoming involves 'endless experimentation, metamorphosis, or transmutation, alignment and realignment' (1994: 167).

The self-portraits of the artists in this study show how the process of self-representation for women has always involved 'endless experimentation', 'assemblage' and 'realignment'. Every time they have picked up a paintbrush, camera or pen in order to represent themselves they have had to assemble an image from many different layers, fragments and previously unthought of linkages. This was and is necessary for women artists because each time they must conjure themselves out of absence. This absence is paradoxically constituted of a plethora, a surfeit, of images of 'woman' produced by the phallogentric need to locate woman as other. The process required for women to assemble a self-representation from this location involves extricating, appropriating, rejecting, questioning and playing with the material they inherit. This process creates powerful images of brief and provisional coherency that reveal an awareness by their makers of the fragile claim of any self-portrait to be able to signify a fixed identity.

This always becoming-woman resides in the intransitive and it is in the writings of Rosi Braidotti (1994) that I have found the most sustained ontological understanding of this. Her 'nomad' is always moving, discovering, experiencing and practicing. She is reportable only in retrospect by where she has been and is only

briefly visible in the present. Self-portraits can serve the purpose of making these provisional and temporary becomings visible, not as claims for the stable self but as evidence of ongoing identity-making. (Sue Ford's *My Faces* [fig. 4 p. 79] is a particularly good example of this.)

Braidotti takes or 'thieves' from the work of Deleuze and Guattari what is useful and fashions an epistemological site that constructively weaves sexual difference into Deleuzian 'de-territorialisation'. She evokes the figuration of the 'nomad' to create the means by which women can form new ways of describing the experience of subjectivity (1994: 28). This nomadic metaphor allows women room to move in a discourse that has positioned them as static objects. What Braidotti offers is an escape from the purely reactive position feminists inherit in the philosophical debates regarding the self, identity and subjectivity. Her approach allows feminists and artists to 'think through and move across established categories and levels of experience' (1994: 4) in order to form, not counter positions, but new directions that step outside the restricting binarisms of Western thought.

Movement is the core concept operating throughout Braidotti's idea of nomadic subjectivity. This has influenced the direction my paintings have taken. The final works (for now) concern themselves with the face being partially blurred/erased by movement. Note that I talk of only partial erasure, for it is still important to me that I do not return to anonymity; to lose face again. Perhaps I feel that women have been anonymous in representation for too long for me to want to embrace Deleuze's 'becoming imperceptible' (1988: 279). Not...yet, at least.

Braidotti argues that 'women need to re-possess the multi-layered structure of their subjectivity as the site of [...] meanings and representations that must be worked through' (Braidotti 1994: 39). Similarly Cixous states, 'If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man [as signifier]... it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it round, seize it; to make it hers' (Cixous 1980: 257). Cixous's use of the phrase 'it is time' here indicates that she believes this 'turning around' is yet to happen. It is my belief self-portraiture by women artists can be viewed as evidence of an already embarked upon practice of on-going experimentation by women artists to negotiate a space that gives them 'room to move'. Self-portraiture has been utilised by many women artists over the centuries for this very purpose.

There can be no more concrete example of a woman artist doing just what Cixous exhorts than Artemisia Gentileschi's *'Self-Portrait as La Pittura'* (fig. 1 p. 73). In this painting Gentileschi seizes and dislocates the 'within' by ironically naming herself as the muse of painting (*la Pittura*) and simultaneously depicting herself as the artist. She then proceeds to 'explode' the assumptions that underlie the use of the female in representation. She disobeys the codes set out for how *la Pittura* must be

represented. She turns herself around (or away). She re-inhabits her form with a vengeance ('makes it hers').

In my studio practice while making my self-portrait series I invented a small fiction regarding *'Self-Portrait as La Pittura'* (fig. 1 p. 73). I had noticed that there is an odd sort of space/corner behind the figure of the artist. It is a space that is difficult to determine, as it doesn't seem to quite fit the spatial requirements of the artist's figure. It is a shallow indent that makes the space the artist inhabits ambiguous. I chose, as a deliberate device, to interpret this space as part of a retrospectively constructed dialogue between Gentileschi and myself. I saw this 'room' she created as something I was being invited to share for a while. I wanted to go into that space and understand it.

I made some paintings that I called *'Artemisia Makes Room'* (fig. 22 p. 105) which attempted to examine and explore the nature of that space. They show how, for me, the ambiguity of that space meant it could be one that contracted or expanded according to my desire. It was a point of purchase for me as an artist attempting to make meaningful self-portraits. What I felt this little space could be for me, and perhaps other women artists, was the beginning of a space that could become a wide plain of possibility stretching towards an always-far horizon.

The understanding I formed from engaging in a dialogue with this painting in this way was that Gentileschi imagines and paints for herself a space of engagement that gives her room to move. She is depicting herself as an artist engaged in the activity of painting; she needs room. The indeterminacy of that room means that it is not an area of containment but rather a creative space, 'that space of creative practice where to 'become' is the point' (Trinh T. Min-ha, cited Braidotti 1994: 16).

This insight helped me to see that what I wanted to create in my self-portraiture series was not a definitive self-portrait, but many images that depicted my subjectivity as an ongoing process. Making room to move became an important working concept for me. However, before I could do that I had to dismantle the weighty structures that support the trope of self-portraiture. In this regard women are hemmed in by two monuments that cast long shadows. On one side there is the heavy bust of the (male) subject and on the other there is the faceless torso of the (female) object. In order to be able to move from the passive object into the intransitive post-subject I had to make works that concerned themselves with what Cixous calls 'inspecting the process' (Cixous 1980: 254).

With all the artists in this study I see a strong element of this 'inspecting the process'. When women have come to paint a self-portrait they have had to de-construct the assumptions that underlie the process of self-portraiture in order to prise apart the mirrored reflections of object/subject. This had to happen because unless women artists

make themselves some 'room to move' they are consigned either to simply attempting to occupy a shape they do not fit (the authoritative subject) or resigning themselves to the role of passive other (the body/object).

So it has been necessary to question what constitutes self-portraiture itself and the claims that are being made by its practice. Examples of this kind of 'inspection of the process' are many: Kahlo's self-images that layer identities in an inter-subjective construction; Kollwitz's use of her particular face to speak to universal social concerns; Ford's series of photos of herself from babyhood to the present that show the precarious reality of the captured face, Gentileschi's wry reworking of the female muse/portrait of the artist trope; Sherman's refusal to reveal her 'real' face.

In my self-portraiture series the work that deals with this overtly is the large triptych *'Working in the In-Between'* (fig. 17 p. 103). In it I present three images of myself in quite different ways. In the right panel I have separated myself into a bust and a torso. They are heavy, inert, and blind. They represent the weight of the inherited object/subject split. On the left I represent myself as a woman/artist holding a self-portrait painting up in front of my face. The face in the 'painting' is the only one that the viewer gets eye contact with. I am attempting here to depict how women artists have needed to represent their face as separated from the body if they wished to convey subjectivity to viewers more used to seeing the female face as body/object. However the fact that this constructed 'real' face masks an underlying 'real' face that is connected to the body demonstrates ambiguity and paradox. The central panel depicts me beginning to turn away. My elbows are on my hips, making elbow-room. My eyes are closed and my face is turning from the viewer towards the empty landscape and horizon. It is a small act of refusal. For me this movement suggests both resistance and possibility. It is saying I have inspected the process of self-portraiture and am now moving into an understanding of myself as process.

Kristeva's writings concerning the subject in process have helped me locate this desire of mine to represent myself as process into a broader theoretical context. For Kristeva, 'the subject in process is literally a social mis-fit unable to recognise itself in the various social institutions that demand its allegiance' (Boulous Walker 1998: 112). When women experience this displacement within the social construct of 'woman', they become a subject who is unable to 'recognise' herself. This creates a crisis that precipitates a radical questioning and subversion of the dominant discourse.

I see a direct correlation here to the process of self-portraiture by women artists. The woman artist finds herself in a position where there are no easily accessible or ready-made depictions of women as active subject, let alone as artist. Furthermore, just painting self-portraits in the traditional manner does not, in itself, counter expectations that the represented female can only be object. Unable then to recognise

herself in her self-representations as the subject she has to question and change the form itself.

This resonates for me on several levels. It connects with the lack of recognition I experienced with my self-representations when I first began the self-portraits. Furthermore, I did not recognise the face in the mirror as my 'self'. I found that while the act of making self-portraits gave me insights into how I see myself, the finished paintings seemed to retain only traces of these insights. This led me to question what it was that I expected from a self-portrait. How could any one image or even several 'capture' a communicable image of how I experienced my self?

What I feel myself to be is a fluid, moving, shape-shifting entity whose identity is constantly being formed. What a self-portrait seems to declare with its fixed face and gaze is that subjectivity is a state one attains. Therefore my crisis in my painting was not because I was unable to capture a good, recognisable likeness of myself that confidently declared itself as a coherent subject. Rather it was because I found that I did not fully participate in this idea of the self.

That I did not participate in this idea was due to the fact that as a woman I have been excluded from this phallogentric fantasy in the first place. Any attempt by me, as a woman, to depict myself as subject is complicated by underlying assumptions (often internalised by me) that all representations of a woman represent 'woman', object/body/nature/other. Whitney Chadwick describes this dilemma clearly when she says, 'It is the nature of the self-portrait to produce the subject as object, but, as Luce Irigaray has noted, the process of objectification that enables the woman to describe herself as if from outside the body also implicates her in a masculine dynamic that projects the woman as other' (Chadwick 1998: 8).

In Kristeva's terms this crisis of mis-recognition means that I find myself in the site of radical intention where I need to question and refigure the form and function of the self-portrait so that it can be a genre that is relevant to me. I see this pattern repeated to varying degrees in all of the artists included in this study. None of them have unthinkingly adopted, unaltered, the tropes of self-portraiture. All have made significant changes and challenges to the assumptions that underlie its practice. The subject in crisis does not possess intention as such; rather she occupies the site of intention. This idea has important implications for my study of women artists and self-portraiture. It enables me to sketch lines of connection between women artists who are separated by historical context, artistic styles and geography, who in fact have only gender and the fact that they made self-portraits in common.

Gender is an unavoidable issue when women make self-representations, whether they are Artemisia Gentileschi or Orlan. It is in fact that crucial irritant in the process that has made self-portraiture by women artists such a dynamic area of

creative endeavour. Women artists can not avoid a crisis of mis-recognition when they attempt to portray themselves as the subjects of their paintings. This crisis has impelled them to interrogate the genre and to create new ways of representing themselves that disturb the viewer's assumptions regarding both the representation of women and the nature of subjectivity.

Boulous Walker, in her excellent analysis of Kristeva's 'subject in process', makes an illuminating point about how this 'crisis' can lead to positive outcomes and agency for women: 'Kristeva's crisis is one that permits a range of new signifying practices, a range of new subjective processes [...] (this crisis) re-orientates the subject in process toward ever changing relations or configurations with the symbolic order'. (Boulous Walker 1998: 108). It seems to me that this statement aptly describes the process and outcomes of women's self-portraiture.

In the process of finding a way to 'designate that process of self representation which defines 'I' as a woman or, in other words, en-genders the subject as female' (De Lauretis 1984: 159) many women artists have hijacked the genre of self-portraiture and run with it. Their exclusion as the 'subject' in Western art has been the impetus for a vital de-construction and re-invention of the genre. This has created work that challenges our understanding of how subjectivity is formed and depicted. Such work has been making what Butler calls 'gender trouble' through the practice of self-portraiture for a long time. We are only now being able to interpret it as such. Collected together contingently as a body of work that shares intent and desire, if not style and historicity, women's self-portraiture can be seen to parallel and illuminate the theoretical debate surrounding subjectivity and identity for women.

Tues.

I have found a photo of myself at the age of sixteen. A lover who was a photographer took this photo. I don't quite know what to make of it. It is an image that has me looking coyly away from the camera. It is almost Madonna-like in its softness and blankness. It is a face that belongs entirely to the viewer. It would be easy for me now to see this photo as an example of my having been made victim of the 'male gaze' It would be inaccurate to do so however. I barely recognise the face (as me) yet remember the circumstances that created it. I remember being a knowing participant in its creation. However it is good example of how this sort of idealisation subtracts individuality from the face and replaces it with a generalised anonymity.

Here I am in the cliched female position of model or muse. My face is subsumed into the service of form, it is recorded as body. I am looking away to the left yet not looking at anything. I look away to allow the viewers eye to peruse my body/face. A perusal unimpeded by eye contact. Eye contact would contradict the function of the image and would make me less available to the viewer as form/body/other/woman.

One of the most startling aspects of this photo is, of course, how young I look and how attractive. This so contradicts my memory of myself at that age. I believed myself plain, as do most girls that age, and I ache a bit for that girl who didn't know how she looked and how to look at herself.

I would like, in some way, to use this in my self-portraiture series. It can perhaps be one of my starting points. A device whereby I can measure the distance between an image of my face created by my own hand and one that has been made by another. I envisage a painting where I am handing back this face. Not as an angry gesture towards its creator but one that tries to convey the sense that I simply don't need this gift any more. Thanks for the opportunity to perform that face, thanks for the loan, thanks for the record. I'll keep the copy for old times sake but that face is not one I want now. Now I am moving away from Face, abandoning mirrors

that reflect others gaze. Then I was anxiously asking, 'how do I look'? Now I am asking, 'how can I see myself'? Beyond that, I ask, 'how can I represent that seeing'?

Weds.

I have changed the Artemisia Gentileschi triptych. The decapitation panel has been replaced by another image of myself impersonating Gentileschi (my 'Self-portrait as the Self-portrait of'). I now feel ambivalent about the image of decapitation as a metaphor for the process of self-portraiture for women. It is too emphatic for the kind of degree of separation I mean here. I need to explore this further.

Now two 'Artemisias' face in from the left and right panels, forming an arching embrace that takes in the central figure — a 'straight' self-portrait of me. The three panels share a landscape — horizon and sky. There are partial walls behind the Artemisia figures, which are a reference to the liminal space/ corner that Gentileschi created in her original painting. This is a significant space for me and I choose to interpret this space as her attempt to prise apart the limitations of representational space for women. In the original painting it is an odd sort of corner that doesn't quite fit the perspective of the painting. In my re-invention of her painting I have expanded that space to include my representation of a limitless horizon and myself. I am claiming for myself, through Artemisia's agency, much more than a shallow indent in the representational plane. Within Artemisia's arms I am embraced. She makes room for me for a while. She describes the shape of absence — how this narrow corner does not contain her.

Frid.

I have begun work on the large triptych. I have had Matt take photos of me, made transparencies of them and projected them up onto the acrylic. This works quite well as I can position the figures and play with the scale a bit. I have a clear idea of what I want here and am rather pleased with the initial look of it.

Mon.

In the midst of working on my large three-panel painting I am struck by how easily you can mis-direct yourself in the art process. I find that I have encountered problems here because I decided the 'ideas' I wanted to convey and then set about illustrating them. This doesn't work. Such an approach does not allow the images to speak — not in their own language — it narrows the focus, denying ambiguities. The ideas dominate and limit how the viewer and myself can experience the image. This is a key factor for me in my art process. In fact, if I pre-empt the meaning of the image in this way there is no 'process' as such. The process of making an image involves a complex and subtle dance — an interaction between medium, experience, intention and allowance. This way the painting can come to tell me something more than I thought I was saying.

I started off by designing in my mind a linked triptych of three panels. I wanted to address and de-construct the process of self-portraiture itself. I planned that the right panel would be of headless monuments of my body — face/identity lost. The left panel was to be of myself standing naked 'returning' the face created of me by the photographer. The central panel was to be of me standing holding a framed self-portrait in front of my (real) face. As soon as I had sketched it out I realised that it was not going to work. While these are important ideas that I am exploring — ideas that have formed from the paintings — here I have made them far too emphatic and prescriptive. I have tried to control too much what the end result will be.

To some extent this failure has come about because I have invested this work with the burden of being a summation of all the work I have done on this series. This was due in part to the scale of the work — the fact that it will be a major component of the show — and also because of the cost of the materials. This has meant that I've become too cautious of risk — the risk of allowing the work to become what it has to be. Allowing it to be unresolved if necessary. There is a tension between intention and process that needs to be respected. Art is not a precise explication. With my images I create

evidence of where I have been. Where I am going is just the next step in the process. Ideas and theoretical meanings grow from this and play a part in forming the images but they should not constitute the whole. I want my paintings to tell me something that I did not know when I began them. I want them to invite dialogue — to converse with the viewer — not to dictate meaning.

I have said that my paintings are evidence. It occurs to me now that the making of them is in itself a research process that creates its own evidential basis. This process is also a means of testing theoretical positions against experiential knowledge (subjectivity). In this sense the ideas I had for this work have not survived the test of praxis. So, with this work I start again by throwing away the recipe and trusting that I have the right ingredients to create a work that will reflect where I am, now, and that this is enough.

Weds.

The triptych is quite different now, still forming through a process of painting and erasure. The material I am using luckily allows me to scrape away any element that becomes excess to my desire. So, I have painted many, many paintings in this one work. Most have been excised in the process of moving towards something like the image I want. I won't know what that is until it is before me. As it stands now the left panel has a figure (myself), arms on hips (making elbow room) with my face turning from the viewer — a refusal to engage. There is a sense of movement, imminent or just begun, that I will perhaps develop further. My body is open and fully exposed to the eye of the viewer yet I don't get the feeling that it is therefore available. This is actually an impossible thing for me to gauge of course. Because these figures are in fact representations of myself I find I have a curious blindness about them. I cannot be sure that they are 'right'.

There are quite comic moments when I am drawing a breast or a leg or stomach when I find myself 'trimming' or reshaping my form. I don't think this is just vanity, it is more a kind of

unconscious reshaping of my body to fit the image of 'woman' by lengthening the leg or tucking in the waistline. A kind of externalised cosmetic surgery. This is obviously a reflection of many of the anxieties that accompany a woman as she views her own body and compares it with beauty standards.

The central panel is now the painting of my body as statue — torso only. There were three statues now there is just the one on the right. To the left and further away is a bust of my face and head sitting on a plain, rectangular plinth. The decapitatory nature of self-portraiture is referred to here. The idea I am exploring is that, for women, the body is a monument, a heavy and unmoving tradition and within that tradition the face of woman has been depicted as 'body'. On the other hand there has been a tradition that privileges the face, or 'bust', as the site of individuality. A feminine subjectivity has been excluded from both these traditions so there needs both separation and recuperation.

The lefthand figure in the triptych seems to be about to turn away from the viewer. There is something about my gesture and expression here that both retreats from and refuses the gaze of others. This intrigues me. As a profile this face should be made more available to the 'cannibal' eye not less. The fact that it is not so here indicates that a profile can be more than just a coy invitation to perusal. Rather it can be a depiction of the subject choosing to turn away. This is a subtle difference and how it can be communicated is something I wish to explore further.

Tues.

I have made several studies on large sheets of clear acetate where all the faces are turning away. I am experimenting with overlapping to give the effect of movement but another possibility is to overlay them on top of reproductions of the photos I have of myself that were taken when I was sixteen. These earlier images of my face are good examples of how the profile can be used to produce the face as body/object. Would I be able to capture that slight but crucial difference between an image made of me and one

made by me? One problem I anticipate though is that because the underlying images are of me at sixteen and the overlays of me at forty four it may be interpreted as being only about aging. Anyhow I shall play with the idea and see what develops.

My son Matthew has taken another series of photos of my face for me. This time I have had him do images that show me turning my face from the camera (eye). Some of the images blur with the turning gesture leaving map like shapes where the light strikes my facial planes.

Thurs.

I continue to play with the order of the panels in the large triptych. The figure holding the painted self-portrait is now the central figure. The monuments are to the right and the turning figure is on the left. This grouping introduces a degree of symmetry to the overall composition of work, which helps the eye move more freely across the figures. It also creates new and dynamic relationships between them. I must be wary though, perhaps its a bit like moving the furniture around in a room — you initially feel it works much better and then find yourself dissatisfied a day later. I had initially wanted to work against a symmetrical composition, as I wanted the space the figures occupied to be ambiguous — recognisable as a shared landscape but one in which the different figures occupied a slightly different perspective. This didn't work for various reasons. One reason was that it didn't really look deliberate, just a bit clumsy. The other was that with the monuments in the middle panel the viewer was left with an empty space slap-bang in the centre of the whole work. This space seemed to call for something to be in it to engage or at least direct the gaze and there was really nothing I felt should be there, at least nothing integral to what I was trying to say. The lack of symmetry made the eye move jerkily from figure to figure and this sabotaged the kind of links I wanted there to be between them. For these are all the same figure (myself) each enacting the various gestures and considerations necessary for me, as a woman, to explore if/how I can represent

myself as some kind of subject.

Now that the figures are in place I am able to work on the in-between spaces. This is often the best part of making an image for me. Here I 'fiddle' with colour, marks and tones. It is the part of the painting that no one notices especially but which makes a huge difference overall. This is particularly so in a large painting. Here is where the factors of rhythm, colour, hue and texture come into their own. I am working with scratching back and then applying washes of colour — mainly in dark earthy tones and blacks with a bit of cadmium splashed in. It is a very haphazard and unrepeatable technique. I can only get it a point where it 'works' and then leave it. The impression of rightness seems to be achieved when subtle things like tension and tone align and there are no dead or flaccid patches left to drain energy from the overall composition. I have pushed the horizon line back more deeply into the picture plane by reducing the contrast between the sky and land. I considered doing this by making the whole thing lighter and sketchier but rejected that in favour of darkening the sky and far horizon. This creates a more inchoate mood to the whole image. The linear skeleton of the picture is getting absorbed and the shapes and figures are starting to emerge out of the plain/plane in a way that is beginning to be quite powerful.

The Opening: An Exhibition

You are invited to the opening of an exhibition. The venue is these pages, these words and our imagination and desires. I invite you to accompany me as we move through this space and encounter the self-portraits of the women artists I have selected. Let me tell you why I have selected particular images, why I have placed certain images next to one another, the connections I discern and the differences I celebrate.

It is the physical experience of the encounter with the artwork I would like to evince here first. The way we move, hesitate and move again. Lean in close and smell the surface, sense the brush, fluidity and direction of the paint, the tones and light of the photo, the grain and texture of the etching. Sense too the trace of the artist's gestures, decisions and pauses. Let us allow the artist back into the picture in this way and acknowledge the agency of the hand that produced the work.

When we stand in front of an artwork we create an intersection of time and space into which can flow a range of responses, paths and understandings. There is the physical sensation created by the scale, form, texture, and colour of the object before us. There is our desire to construct/find meaning or a narrative, to 'make sense'. There is the personal narrative we bring with us into which the artwork is woven. There is also our 'knowledge' of the work's provenance, its historical context, the biography of the artist and our understanding of the artist's intention.

Across the room perhaps our eye is caught by another image and we are drawn to it. By what? Recognition, desire, pleasure, attraction, maybe shock or horror. Our viewing and walking and moving between these images is impelled by sensation and by our desire for sense to be made. Every viewer will create a different pattern of connections between the artworks and thus a different narrative of links and meanings will emerge. In this case you are not entirely free to wander at will. You must, initially, view this exhibition through my eyes. However, your own experience, desire and meaning-making will more and more direct subsequent traversals through the exhibition space. It is highly likely that quite different interpretations and links will be made.

This approach is not simply a literary conceit. For a long time it has bothered me how I was going to talk about the artwork of these artists. I come to these works from the vantagepoint of an artist first and then as a theorist so it follows that I would wish to instigate an approach to these works which puts the work first. By constructing an approach to the art whereby writer and reader participate in the illusion of being at an exhibition, I emphasise the way in which all artworks function both as an artefact

produced through its maker's agency and socio-historical context and as a contemporary text and object that resonates in the viewer's present.

As I noted in Chapter One, it is important to recognise that a work of art continues to function as a contemporary text for every viewer who encounters it. This is an important understanding for feminist art historians and artists who are involved in the project not just of reclaiming the art made by previous generations of women artists, but also of revising the way in which art history is constructed. Mieke Bal discusses this in her paper, 'Reading Art?' (Bal 1996: 26-41). She emphasises how important it is that we understand how meaning is formed from our encounters with art. If we understand that the process of making meaning from art is a fluid, inter-discursive and on-going process rather than the more rigidly fixed historical interpretations of the traditional art historical approach, then we can begin to layer other meanings (the meanings of the 'others') into the story. This gives women not only the means to analyse the way in which images of women have been used by the dominant discourse to 'impose its view-of us, on us' (Bal 1996: 32), but also the means to instigate new ways of 'reading' art.

My hope also is that, by imagining an exhibition and thereby emphasising the works themselves, I can in some way counter the kind of writing about art where the work becomes entirely colonised by the written text, something Bal calls the 'linguistic invasion of visuality' (1996: 26). Bal advocates a kind of 'reading' of images that, while utilising the tools of linguistics, does not reduce the image to linguistic discourse only. She seeks a way of writing about art and reading an image that takes the image 'on its own terms, raking its elements — signs like words? — at face value, the painting at its word — see what it has to say' (Bal 1996: 26).

In a recent article Jeanette Winterson makes a similar point when she explains her decision to ask writers to write the forwards to new editions of Virginia Woolf's novels. Winterson writes that she wanted to find a way of presentation that would allow the reader to 'come to the work in its own right, on its own terms' (2000: 10). To do this she taps into the way writers read other writers. The way she describes this process is as applicable to visual artists as it is to writers. 'Writers read differently to other people. For a writer all literature is contemporary. If the language endures the thought endures. Writers eavesdrop on each other across time. This is a two way process, because what has been written is continually changed by what is being written' (Winterson 2000: 10). As a painter I too 'eavesdrop across time'. When I look at the work of these artists I want to look closely at how they chose to represent themselves, raking elements such as Gentileschi's decision to use such an extreme angle of profile, Toorop's expressive brow, and Kahlo's emphasis of her facial hair: details that make me ask what effect the artist was seeking and why. How I understand

that 'why' is, of course, shaped by my own desire for meaning and the contemporary lens through which I must view the work. Bal describes the way we 'stamp' each artwork with our own meanings as 'framing' (1996: 33). Each viewer 'reframes' the work, assigning meaning inevitably through her own frame of reference. Bal argues that 'framing is a constant semiotic activity without which no cultural life can function' (1996: 33). According to Bal, these frames are forged by a socio-historical context which both limits the possible meanings that can be construed and prevents the construction of meanings too idiosyncratic to be of use in the broader discourse.

I believe another necessary corrective in this regard is the viewer's sense of the role of the artist as producer of the work. The emphasis on the artwork as physically present as if at an exhibition allows me to re-focus on the artist as the producer of the art. This is not a desire to re-invest in the mystique of the artist/author/genius. Rather, it is to assert the presence of the person who produced the work as significant and to facilitate a relationship with the work that involves a dialogue with both the artwork and artist. This is a particularly important point to consider in the context of women artists and how we write about them. There has been a tendency to represent women artists, and women self-portraitists in particular, almost entirely in terms of the biographical details of their lives or else for what they 'stand for' in the context of feminism. This has the unwonted effect of diminishing recognition that these artworks were produced by an artist making fine and crucial decisions about how they wanted the works to be read.

When I encounter an artwork in its original form, whether it be a painting, photograph, print or video, I am made much more aware of the presence/existence of a person who produced the work than when viewing reproductions. I am confronted by how the artist designed the work to be seen and am reminded that behind each effect produced in the image lies a series of decisions made by the artist, consciously or otherwise. Thus, my reading of the image cannot be entirely one way; a monologue I impose onto a passive object. Neither, however, am I tied completely to an interpretation that is defined purely by what I perceive as the artist's intention. I believe that the process of forming an understanding of an artwork is a complex one that should balance the viewer's desire for contemporary meaning with respect for what can be discerned of the artist's desire. The evidence of this desire is woven into the text of the work itself in the form of omissions, inclusions and technical decisions.

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss the effect reproductions have on how we relate to an image. I am struck by how differently I experience a work of art when in front of the original as opposed to looking at a reproduction. With a reproduction it is somehow just too easy to appropriate the images made by others in such a way that they become only illustrations to one's own theories and interpretations. Reproductions

reduced, de-textured
(reduced, de-textured, with colours altered) have the artist's hand excised and agency diminished. This gives us a no-holds barred access to the artwork as 'picture' only. We have a different kind of proximity to the image. It is usually in a book or catalogue and we hold it towards us. It can be drawn unresisting into our orbit, and a subtle power shift occurs that can, unless monitored, lead to a too complete erasure of the artist and a kind of unproductive slippage into solipsism. Even though you, the reader, will only see the works referred to here in reproduction, I ask you to exercise your imagination and collaborate with me in this fantasy of an exhibition. Within this construct I ask you to 'reframe' each work as present and before you. My intention is that this opening serve as your point of entry into a space where you add your meanings to 'the innumerable acts of reading that constitute 'art' in the on-going history of its functioning' (Bal 1996:29).

The Exhibition

All the works are together in one large room. This is to facilitate our being able to make connections from artist to artist and image to image. The first image I want you to be aware of is Artemisia Gentileschi's *'Self-portrait as La Pittura'* (1630). It is centrally positioned on the far wall opposite us as we enter the exhibition space. To get to it we must traverse the length of the gallery space, passing all of the other works as we go. I position it thus to emphasise how this self-portrait can be viewed as a seminal work in the context of this study. I see it as an early, powerful, example of how many women artists have, from their position of marginality, been impelled to create new depictions, or questionings, of how subjectivity is represented.

De-facing



Fig.no.1. *Self-Portrait as La Pittura* 1630
Artemisia Gentlechi

Let us look closely at this work. Artemisia leans forward, her gaze intent. Her right arm is raised, brush in hand, with the tip of the brush just touching the left

perimeter of the painting plane. Her left arm sweeps down and around, the hand firmly holding the palette with a sure grasp. The palette also extends to the edge of the frame and echoes the line of the brush. This creates an embrace, a space of engagement into which the artist leans. Dangling into this space is a gold chain from which hangs a medallion of a mask. This medallion formally identifies the painting as a representation of the allegorical muse of painting, '*La Pittura*'. The line of the chain draws the eye to what is the central focus of the painting: the face. The angle of the head, in profile and its crown tilted towards us, means that the most identifiable features, eyes, nose and mouth, occupy only a fraction of the space created by the head, hair and face. Nevertheless, we recognise the individuality of these features. This is not generic 'woman'; this is a particular woman, Artemisia Gentileschi. The dynamic of the painting rests in the painter's relationship with her canvas and her reflected image. Her gaze is intently directed at the painting's subject (herself) and her arms embrace the unseen painting (that is, in fact, this painting). The subject matter of the painting is the active engagement of a woman painter in the production of her work and beyond that her conscious decision to identify herself as the spirit of painting itself.

Mary Garrard (1980 : 97-107) describes the historical development of the idea of the muse of painting, '*La Pittura*' in detail. She shows how Gentileschi selected some, but not all, of the attributes for how '*La Pittura*' should be represented in art. They include; the golden chain with the pendant mask which represents imitation, unruly hair denoting the frenzied artistic temperament, and the use of the technique of *drappo cangiante* (where the artist demonstrates virtuoso skill in the depiction of cloth by using different colours in the highlights and shadows of drapery). The above are present in Gentileschi's portrayal, but it is telling those attributes she chose to alter or leave out. It was stipulated that the portrayal of female beauty, symmetry and proportion (to the extent of specifying arched eyebrows and a long dress to cover the feet) was necessary to convert the female image to the status of metaphor for the intellectual beauty of painting. Gentileschi, however, presents only the top half of her body and she positions the angle of the viewer in such a way that it is her powerful arms, shoulders and head that occupy most of the space within the frame. Her torso is partly obscured by her left arm and the rest is absorbed into the shadows of the background of the painting. Gentileschi's decision to present herself in an active pose circumvents the traditional conversion of the female image into the passive bearer of an ideal. This active pose and her tilted head not only create an impression of dynamic engagement and concentration, they also deny the viewer an opportunity to assess the symmetry of her face or, for that matter, whether her eyebrows are sufficiently 'arched'.

Of further significance here is the way Gentileschi has used the form of the profile to her advantage. I discussed in Chapter Two Patricia Simon's thesis regarding the use of the profile form in painting as a device to represent women as de-individualised commodities. By subtly tilting the angle of the face and by having her face turned to the limit of profile (a fraction further and we would be looking at the back/top of her head) Gentileschi offers a very different type of 'profile'. This is a depiction of a woman's face that is about to escape the male gaze entirely and which has certainly escaped its role as passive object.

Gentileschi forces us to encounter her as a woman who is a painter engaged in her work. This disrupts utterly the assumption underlying the use of the female figure as the muse of painting, that is, women were not artists so thus could only stand for Art as an abstract essence. Gentileschi's wry reworking of the trope of '*La Pittura*' is a powerful example of how, in order to become visible, women in art have had to re-configure the traditions of representation of women in western art and in fact disrupt the conceptual underpinning of those traditions. She occupies and then disturbs the symbolic discourse, creating an opening through which she can enter into representation on her own terms.

In my own work I have come to perceive the space that Gentileschi has created here as a space of opportunity, a space from which new relationships can be negotiated between the positions of object and subject. I see connections between what Gentileschi does here and what many other women artists who have engaged in self-portraiture have done. On either side of Gentileschi's painting I have placed two works that are very different in style and created over three hundred years later. However, there are important connections to be discerned between these images. On the left, we see the finely executed and presented photo-assemblage of New Zealand artist, Megan Jenkinson's '*Pulchritudo - Beauty*' (1996) and on the right, one of Cindy Sherman's famous '*Film Still*' photographs, *Film Still* #56 (1975) (Fig.no.3 p.77).

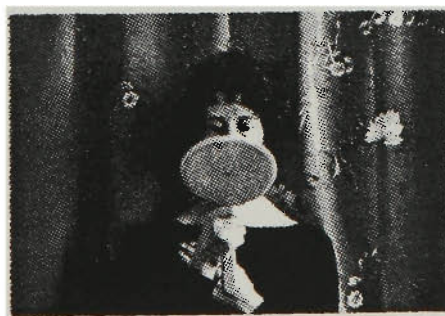


Fig.no.2 *Pulchritudo-Beauty* 1996
Megan Jenkinson

With Jenkinson's image we have to crowd in close. Like all Jenkinson's images, it is meticulously constructed from more than one photo. The work is quite small and detailed, beautifully mounted and constructed with precise, almost excessive care. It comprises a photograph not much larger than an ordinary snapshot, a finely

wrought coat of arms' (reflecting Jenkinson's interest in heraldry) and text in both Latin and English. The text reads: 'Pulchritudo - Beauty' and then, 'Pulchritudo Considers the Potential for her Improvement'. Below the image, in Latin and English, is the more cryptic 'tears in the nature of things, hearts touched by human transience'.

The first aspect one notices in this work is the rich, sumptuous nature of the image as a whole. Note the way the sheen and shadow of the rich red drop of embroidered curtain behind the figure echoes the technique of *drappo cangiante* and how the deep shadow of the black dress and hair contrasts with the alabaster creamy-white of the flesh and the mirror back. These elements combine to create a rich jewel-like quality that attracts and seduces the eye. Having been drawn in this way, however, we then experience frustration in the satisfaction we can get from the image. Where is the face of beauty here? We expect to see a beautiful female face as emblem of all beauty and get only the back of the hand mirror. 'Beauty' has evaded our gaze and is too busy looking at herself to care!

Could this image be read as a depiction of vanity, then, a sin rather than a virtue? Beauty and vanity have always been closely allied in the masculine imagination both in art and in general. Indeed the sin of vanity has traditionally been portrayed as a woman viewing herself in a mirror. As Meskimmon remarks, 'the sin of vanity was most commonly represented by the image of a woman staring intently at herself in a mirror. This iconography was frequently built into the representations of women both as an enticement to the spectator to join in this pleasurable viewing and as a warning about the sins of the flesh' (1996: 2). Thus depictions of vanity have traditionally provided morally plausible excuses for voyeurism.

Jenkinson prevents this voyeurism by making her face and body unavailable to the viewer. As in Gentileschi's image, she presents herself as neither the 'subject' nor the 'object'; rather it is her engagement in an activity that is depicted. Looking at herself is represented as a purposeful activity. This is endorsed by the accompanying text, 'pulchritudo considers the potential for her improvement'. Jenkinson creates 'tears in the nature of things' by reworking the tropes that underlie both the representations of beauty and vanity. As with Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as La Pittura*, emblems and signs are put together in such a way that their traditional readings are subverted.

A similar subversion occurs in the next image we move to. I have selected *Film Still 56# (1975)* from Cindy Sherman's *Film Still* series for inclusion in this exhibition as it too deals with reflection and the cheating of the gaze. In this black and white 8"x10" image we see Sherman, or someone we 'know' to be Sherman in blond wig and make-up, looking at herself in the mirror. The image is cropped in close so the viewer sees only the back of the head and the reflected face. The combination of

onto the mirror, creates a fractured image of the face that interrupts any frank perusal and reading of it by the viewer. At the point where the shadow overlaps on the reflected face there is a silhouette, within which the front part of the face is sharply discernible. Our eye leaps into this in-between space of clarity, hoping to find a 'way in'. Again, we will feel frustrated here. We get access to neither the artist's 'real' face/self nor the blank female face/screen. Not only is the artist herself heavily disguised and the face difficult to discern but the subject's gaze, like Jenkinson's, looks back only at herself.



Fig. 3 *Film Still #56* 1975
Cindy Sherman

At this point I would like to discuss the effect of this lack of eye contact on us as viewers in the three images we have looked at so far. The averted gaze of the woman depicted in art has long been a device that makes the female face available as body/object to the (erotic) gaze. No disturbing hint of presence, intelligence or individuality is conveyed when there is no eye contact or shared look. Gentileschi, Jenkinson and Sherman all 'look away' and yet, in a way that seems paradoxical within this trope, prevent the process of fetishization occurring. How do they achieve this?

The most obvious evasive action they take to escape the inhabiting, controlling gaze is to make visual access to their faces difficult: Gentileschi's face is turned at such an angle that its symmetry can not be measured; Jenkinson uses the hand mirror to block perusal of her face, and Sherman's face is fractured by light reflections. But something else these artists do is yet more subtle. It lies in the nature of the look itself. In each of these images the looking away is not a demure and self-conscious dropping of the eyes. It is instead a look of active engagement elsewhere. This works to position the viewer as if 'absent', robbing that role of its power. This contrasts with images where the woman is rendered object because the (male) viewer is always already the subject. This is the case even where the woman depicted appears to be unaware of the viewer, such as the many images of 'women at her toilet', where the viewer has a 'peeping tom' vantage-point. The viewer, of course can never in fact be absent; their presence is a required element for the functioning of any work of art. However, the role of the viewer can be manipulated in subtle ways as we can see here. In these three

images the artist has positioned her viewer as 'onlooker' and not the (undeclared) subject. We are made onlookers here because our presence is not reflected in any way in the expression of the women portrayed and because they are absorbed in the activity of looking. They are all looking at themselves pro-actively.

An important question to ask here is: to what degree and in what way are images such as these 'self-portraits'? I believe that it is the residual element of self-representation that is a key element in these works. That is, these artists use themselves for these representations of abstract Woman so that it becomes apparent to the viewer that they are knowingly exploring and interrogating the gap between their sense of embodied subjectivity as women and artists and the iconic demands of female representation in art. If a straightforward critique of how women have been represented in art was their only aim then it could just as easily have been achieved by the use of a model or fictional female figure. So the element of 'self-portraiture' significantly alters how we can read these images.

For example, how would Sherman's works differ if she used a model instead of herself? She would no doubt still be able to address the issue of the representation of women in a general way. But the fact that she puts herself in the picture takes the images beyond obviousness into the profound. They become complex and ambiguous. Sherman's constant material presence, yet her absence of 'self', creates a bewildering contradiction. We expect self-revelation and get performance; if we expect only performance we encounter the artist's stubborn, if provisional, presence. Sherman's presence confounds attempts at simple interpretation. Why does she photograph herself in scenes such as those depicted in the *Film Still* series? She is, on one level, acting out the position of the female character who has no power—who has been placed in position by The Director to passively await the action (often a man wielding a weapon). Yet because we know that it is the artist, Sherman, who has placed herself there, the trope is disturbed. The implicit assumptions of power and the gaze in the discourse are subverted (or inverted). Sherman has stilled, then stolen these images from the movies. She has then stepped into the frame herself becoming simultaneously the director/actor/artist/object/subject.

Sherman's work is often described as being about absence. Katy Kline believes that Sherman is 'entirely absent from her work' (1998: 79) and Meskimmon says her works are 'not about Sherman the woman or the artist, they are about the multiple guises assumed by women in our visual culture' (1996: 90-91). I think this is an overly simplistic reading of Sherman's images. It presupposes that women, artists and the cultural representations of 'woman' are discrete and quite separate categories; that there is a 'real' and revelatory self-image that Sherman denies us and that these staged self-portraits are to be read only as a critique of the way 'woman' is represented in our

culture. Sherman works from a more ambiguous and even contradictory position than such an interpretation implies. This ambiguity is what provides the work with its power to disturb. Sherman's images are not about emptiness and absence (or, at least, only a certain kind of absence); they speak to us, rather, of fleeting and provisional presence. These are the women we are and are not. We have been them all fleetingly as we engage with the world, especially with the world of media. In such a way our image of ourselves is formed; accretions of remembered 'stills' that hover around the mind's eye. It is Sherman's presence (both as the artist and the subject) not her absence in her work that makes us question simple demarcations between the real woman and the constructed ideal or fetishized object.

The 'real' Cindy Sherman is present in her challenging self-portraits as both the material subject/object and as the agent in her own making. In other words, as the artist. She abandons the conceit of providing a representation of the real, authentic face of her real self. It is as if she is saying the 'real' self and, by implication depictions of subjectivity, would be simply yet another construct. Her 'real self' resides only in her agency and in the fact that she makes and performs in these images that are created from her meaning-making/unmaking. It is her presence that disturbs as it counters and resists those meanings we would otherwise unthinkingly ascribe to these types of representations of women.

The 'Real' Face

Are not all self-portraits a form of 'making faces'? The faces that Sherman is making are no more made up than those that seek to construct for the viewer the effect that they are getting access to the 'real' face (and therefore the real 'self') of the artist. Let us now look closely at how this 'realness' is constructed by moving toward the work of artists such as Charley Toorop, Kathe Kollwitz and Frida Kahlo.



Fig.no.4 *My Faces* 1975
Sue Ford

On the way though, we encounter a group of small photos by Australian photographer/artist Sue Ford. They are positioned between Jenkinson's work and that of Kathe Kollwitz. I have placed Ford here because her series '*My Faces*' raises interesting points regarding what constitutes a 'real' face in representation. This

provides me with a bridge between artists like Sherman and Jenkinson, who deliberately deny us the sense of having access to their 'real' face and artists like Toorop, Kollwitz and Kahlo, who appear to give us self-portraits that do provide such access. I would like to interrogate the assumptions that underlie our responses here.

Ford has always positioned the face as a crucial site in which to stage her explorations around notions of gender, inter-subjectivity, identity and time. In the series *My Faces*, (1975) (Fig.no.4 p.79) Ford assembles a group of photos that are portraits of her from babyhood to the present. They are mainly photographs taken by others-family, friends and professionals and then rephotographed by Ford and reprinted in a standard black and white format. They include baby photos, glamorous studio shots, anxious teenage snapshots and, later, more self-aware images taken by her. All are presented in the same format: black and white, small scale (the size of family album photos) and hung simply and singly. Most of the photos record her looking directly and often earnestly back at the viewer. The effect of this is to communicate a sense of her core presence beneath the changes, wrought by age and fashion, we see recorded on her face. The scale and shared look provides an intimate relationship between the viewer and the photos. Ford has always downplayed the element of technical virtuosity that is often emphasised in the world of photography. The effect of this on the viewer is to make the medium 'disappear'. By presenting these images thus, Ford evokes the idea of the family album, the ordinary collection of images we all have of our self.

The two photos I have selected to include here are the same as those chosen by Helen Ennis to illustrate her article on women photographers of the 1970s (Ennis, 1986: 2). These two images present the most contrasting representations of the artist's face even though Ford seems to be close in age in the two photos. One photo shows Ford with eyebrows plucked, make-up applied, hair styled and set in an obvious studio shot. The other depicts Ford staring out directly and plainly at the camera; no make-up, hair unstyled, 'natural'. If we analyse the way these two faces look out at us we see striking differences. The studio shot presents the head slightly turned towards and up to us. This somehow 'beguiling' angle is a very common pose in photographic portraiture of women and is considered flattering. It is a look that seems attractive because it is actually one that 'flatters' the (male) viewer. The expression (willing to please) and look (careful hairstyle and make-up) signal the subject's complicity in the creation of an idealised vision of 'woman'. This contrasts dramatically with the direct frontal challenge of the later photo. The hair is now unstructured the make-up gone and the subject seems to make no attempt to please the viewer. There is very little similarity here. The first one looks like any number of studio shots of a woman of the sixties and the second could almost be a police 'mug shot' it is so lacking in artifice.

Ennis describes it as 'the new 1970s woman who makes no pretence, but is as she is' (1986: 2)

Ennis's juxtaposition and interpretation of these two images illustrates the more contemporary feminist reading of *'My Faces'* (Fig.no.4 p.79). Namely, that of all her faces presented by Ford, only the last one is her 'real' face. The sub-text of this kind of reading is that Ford has liberated her self from regulatory appearance codes imposed on her by a masculine world. The last, 'real' face depicts the emergence of the new female subject.

I see this last self-portrait of Ford's face, however, as one whose effect of 'authenticity' is as carefully wrought as those we perceive to be more obviously artificial. This is not to say I now deem this series as in any way counterfeit or dated. In fact hindsight has broadened for me the significance of this work. When I see the final face as just one of the many faces Ford has constructed for herself over her lifetime the whole series begins to speak to me more of how women, especially women artists, have always understood their face as territory that is both socially and representationally significant.

As a contemporary feminist in 1975 viewing this series, I too would have seen the 'story' of this exhibition as being about the victorious assertion of Ford's 'real' face as a corrective against the female face/object produced by and for the male gaze. The intervening twenty-five years with its developments in feminist thought have modified my thinking. I view that final face now as being a political act that required the production of a face that seemed real. This is perhaps only a very fine shift in emphasis yet it enables me to make a broader reading of this group of images, a reading that positions *'My Faces'* (Fig.no.4 p.79) as a work that has continuing resonance today. By collecting together photos of the many versions and ages of her own face and presenting them as an art installation, Ford declares her understanding of the face as a territory of political significance for women. Her agency as the artist/producer places her in control, thus reclaiming the face/site. The final 'real' face functions as evidence of that agency. The next three artists we move on to also felt the need to produce a 'real' face as a vehicle for their political and social intentions.

With the self-portraits of Kollwitz, Toorop and Kahlo we experience an effect that we are gaining access to the real person behind the image. As a result of this, the works of these artists are often read as predominantly autobiographical. This kind of reading has the effect of both diminishing the agency of these artists and overlooking their broader concerns. I believe a more useful and accurate way to view such work is outlined by Betterton in *An Intimate Distance* (1996). Instead of viewing self-portraiture as a genre that gives the viewer unmediated access to the person portrayed Betterton argues they should be viewed as deliberate constructions: 'The self-portrait,

like the act of writing a journal or a letter, constructs the self as other, making available to others a particular representation of the subject which the author has selected. The autobiographical is not an unmediated expression of inner being, but the production of a fictive self which functions as a form of self 're-presentation' (1996: 26). Kahlo, Toorop and Kollwitz all chose, to differing degrees to give their self-portraits a sense of verisimilitude, the appearance of the real. This has led to an overemphasis on the personal and psycho-social biographical interpretations of their work to the detriment of understanding their broader concerns.



Fig.no.5 *Self-Portrait with Monkey* 1938
Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo's work has been the most affected by this biographical approach. In her self-portraits Frida Kahlo appears to offer her audience an open invitation into her private world, a world that involved pain and suffering (from injuries sustained in an accident), a complex relationship (with Diego Rivera, the noted Mexican muralist) and a passionate involvement with Mexican politics and Mexican identity. Her images are filled with biographical, mythical and political references, all of which are boldly signposted and presented to us in the uncomplicated style of the retablo (votive or miracle paintings). In these paintings Kahlo offers her body with gaping wounds, punctured with nails, torn open to reveal the broken column/spine within, tears and blood. All this would seem to suggest that we are being offered unmediated and direct insights into the heart, soul and life of the artist, that all is being revealed to us.

However, when we look to that central element of self-portraiture, the face, what do we find? We encounter a face that withdraws or, at least, qualifies the invitation of the body. Kahlo gives us only one face in all her self-portraits. It is a face she chooses to present as iconic, expressionless and dispassionate. It is also essentially ageless. Why did Kahlo chose to represent her face in this way? Analysing the way in which she employed her face in her self-portraits provides us with a key to reading these works as more than just autobiography. I share Meskimmon's approach to Kahlo, in particular her argument that while these representations are personal they are also 'signifiers within a wider social field'(1996: 83). Meskimmon argues that it is 'necessary to understand them as artworks, as forms of social communication, in order

to challenge readings which subsume women artists into the anecdotal' (1996: 84).

Let us now look at how Kahlo has depicted her face in the self-portrait included in my exhibition, *Self-Portrait with Monkey*, (1938) (Fig.no.5 p.82). Here Kahlo's representation of her face is mimetic to the extent that it records a likeness that is recognisably Frida Kahlo. In this sense she uses her face as a signature. She does this in a way that is simplified yet accurate; in effect, she invents a stylised version of likeness. She emphasises particular features, most notably her heavy eyebrows, the moustached upper lip, the eyes and the general shape of the face. Beyond this effect of likeness, however, Kahlo, as the artist, makes several interesting pictorial decisions about how she represents her face to the viewer.

Her face is that of the dispassionate observer, placed by Kahlo high above the body by the depiction of an overlong neck. It is not so much the face of a woman observing herself in a mirror as that of an artist observing the viewer observing her representation of herself. This lengthening of the neck serves a twofold purpose: to separate the face from the body and to allude to that most universal of depictions of the female face, that of the iconic representations of the Virgin Mary. The use of a Madonna-like face here is significant. Kahlo is using that most universal representation (in Western art) of the female face to signal her intention that the paintings of herself were intended to be seen as more than reflections of the private sphere.

If, as Deleuze and Guattari declare, the Face is Christ and 'White Man himself' (1988: 176) what face can a Mexican woman artist employ as a site to expand the possibilities of interpretation of her own self-portrait? Kahlo appropriates the Madonna's face for this purpose and through this device is able to combine several elements into a fluid statement about identity. The version of Madonna she chooses is based on that of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the dark-complexioned re-figuration of the Virgin who is regarded as the patroness of Catholic Mexico (Warner, 1976: 303). Kahlo begins with that most universal face of Woman, the Madonna, overlays that with the Mexican version of the same and then lightly applies her own features to Our Lady. A feature of the Madonna 'look' is that it is usually a rather bland expression that allows for multiple readings shaped by the viewer's need. It can seem to express a wide range of feelings — grief, wisdom, patience, gentleness, sadness, pain and peace. The face Kahlo makes for us is similarly indeterminate. Where some may see vulnerability others see strength, even arrogance,

Kahlo further broadens (and complicates) how her face can be read by the emphatic inclusion of her facial hair in the form of heavy eyebrows and, more significantly, her moustache. I read this as a deliberate assertion of androgyny. Meskimmon talks at length about how many women artists used androgynous self-imagery as a strategy to counter the traditional definitions of passive femininity. She

defines androgynous imagery as 'visual representations which either work to combine gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity or images which blur the distinctions between the two' (Meskimmon, 1996: 127). I think Kahlo's visual representation works mainly within the latter mode for, without in any way rejecting or denying the feminine, she seeks to include the masculine in her representations so that her self-portraits could also be interpreted as being pan-gendered. A moustache on a female face also disturbs. Like Mary Douglas's 'dirt' it is in the wrong place — it does not respect the regulatory border between male and female, 'it offends against order' (Douglas 1980: 2). Kahlo's emphatic depiction of her moustache disrupts simple readings of her portrayed face. It is a signal that the expected pattern has been disordered and, as Douglas says, this disordering creates unlimited potential for new patterning (1980: 94). It would seem that Kahlo's moustache is still an unacceptable image. In a recent article describing a new movie about Frida Kahlo, journalist Anna Moore notes that the film studio, though keen to emphasise the numerous physical similarities between Kahlo and the actress, Salma Hayek, who plays Kahlo, drew the line at including a moustache. 'However, there is one Kahlo trait Hayek will not replicate: 'The studio doesn't want me to wear the moustache, though I wanted to,' she {Hayek} says' (Moore 2001: 17). Kahlo's depiction of her ample facial hair is also a proud assertion of ethnicity that counters the standard, 'fair', Western image of female beauty.



Fig.no.6 Portrait of Neferinico 1942
Frida Kahlo

The way in which Kahlo's self-representations can move effortlessly between the particular and the general, female and male, is clearly demonstrated in the small sketch we look at next. This sketch is from her journal, which she began in 1942. It is a bearded self-portrait that she names '*Portrait of Neferinico, Founder of Lokura*'. It is part of an elaborate fantasy that Kahlo constructs in her journal about a mythical empire of Lokura (Madness). Kahlo gives her own face to the fictional male character Neferinico. Here she is the 'founder', the conjurer, of a kind of mode of identity-making that is multi-layered and multi-gendered. It is as if, for Kahlo, her self and the world are not separate places. She presents her whole world through the agency of her

represented corporeality. She both collapses the public sphere into her private experience of it and conflates her private experience into a representation of the world around her — her wounds are also the wounds of Mexico's troubled history. She dissolves the boundary between inside/outside, private/public and male/female so that her self-portraits are at one and the same time personal, social, political and psychological. These are presented as stratifications or layers but each layer is not accorded a hierarchical value. Her paintings are not more about pain and suffering than they are about Mexico or gender or identity. These elements are all embraced as part of a provisional whole, not a static, unitary wholeness but experiments in becoming. As she says herself in her diary, 'everything is all and one/ Anguish and pain — pleasure and death/ are no more/ than a process/ for existence' (Kahlo, 1995: 78-79).

Kahlo renders for us a face that can, without surrendering her particularity, convey to us aspects of the broader issues of politics, gender and national identity. Another artist who concerns herself very much with this is Kathe Kollwitz whose work hangs alongside Kahlo's. With Kollwitz's self-portraits we experience the sense that we are getting a powerfully 'authentic' rendition of Kollwitz's face and an insight into her psychological state. We see grim, realistically rendered and graphic depictions of the artist's face, often with one hand partially raised as if to support or shield the weight of despair expressed there. It is as if Kollwitz has made her face work as a sign for despair. This echoes her political concerns for the poor and disadvantaged whom she championed in much of her work. She is nearly always looking out at us with sombre mien, her visage stripped of vanity, overt femininity and animation. Meskimmon argues that many women artists employed such sober self-portraiture techniques because 'such a sobering rendering denies our expectations of 'woman' displayed as the carrier of 'beauty' or sexual difference' (1996: 28).



Fig.no.7 *Self-Portrait, Laughing*
1888-1889 Kathe Kollwitz



Fig.no.8 *Self-Portrait, 1910*
Kathe Kollwitz

In my exhibition I have chosen to juxtapose against this expected image the one known smiling self-portrait Kollwitz made of herself '*Self-Portrait, Laughing*' c.1888-1889 (Billeter, 1985: 348). Next to this etching is hung a more typically sober self-portrait, '*Self-Portrait, 1910*' (Fig.no.8 p.85). The purpose of this juxtaposition to

make us think freshly about why Kollwitz chose to present her face in the way she did in and analyse how she achieved it.

'*Self-portrait Laughing*' (Fig.no.7 p.85) shows Kollwitz's technical virtuosity in drawing and her ability to capture both likeness and expression in a sketch. Compared to the darkly brooding face in '*Self-Portrait 1910*' (Fig.no.8 p.85) beside it though this self-representation lacks impact and power. Kollwitz use of the graphic device of stark and contrasting light and shade heightens the sense of expressive drama and gravitas in '*Self-Portrait 1910*' (Fig.no.8 p.85) making it far more evocative of mood. It is lit dramatically as if from a source of light that comes from behind and to the left. This throws into stark relief the musculature of the Kollwitz's face giving it a sinewy appearance that is quite androgynous in appearance. Most of the face is in shadow so we must look into it closely to read the expression there. The expression is minimal and the face's blankness, its lack of overt emotion allows us to project onto it a general feeling of pain and sadness. By contrast the face in *Self-Portrait Laughing* (Fig.no.7 p.85) is expressive and has a far more even distribution of light across its planes with no dark and brooding lines and spaces. It is unambiguously and conventionally female.

'*Self-portrait Laughing*' (Fig.no.7 p.85) seems to be caught mid movement as if glancing across at the onlooker. Kollwitz gives the impression of 'capturing' a moment of light heartedness in her life. Intensely still and face to face with the viewer, the pose of the '*Self-Portrait 1910*' (Fig.no.8 p.85) creates a quite different sense of time and emotional tension. Time here is not momentarily caught; rather it is held and stretched, evoking a sense of timelessness that removes it from the particular and gives it an iconic breadth.

The placement of these two images together highlights the kind of decisions Kollwitz made as an artist (and woman) to construct a face that could be read within a larger framework than mimesis or autobiography. The style of '*Self-portrait Laughing*' (Fig.no.7 p.85) could not escape the conventions of the genre or the expectations of the represented female face. Kollwitz had to develop a face that could serve her subject matter and counter such expectations. For Kollwitz the subject matter of her self-portraiture is not her 'self' as such but rather the general human experience of poverty, war and suffering, and her connection to this. She therefore makes her face work as a screen that reflects the world.

An important observation to make here is that Kollwitz could have made images about grief and suffering and injustice without using the elements of the self-portrait at all. In fact did so in many of her works concerning the plight of the impoverished working classes in the period before and between the wars (though to my eye there are very few faces of Kollwitz's figures that don't bear a residual likeness

to the artist). That she found it necessary to re-configure the way she presented her own face in order to make it reflect more generalised suffering is, to my mind, significant. It speaks to me of Kollwitz's desire to portray a sense of connectivity and inter-subjectivity between herself and her subject matter. To broaden the reach of this inter-subjectivity she generalises her features and expressions so that her face becomes Everywoman and Everyman. She introduces a degree of androgyny by deliberately stripping her face of any softness or prettiness and this serves to counter viewer expectations that the depicted female can only function as the sign for beauty.

However, Kollwitz achieves this without undermining the viewer's strong sense that they are privileged by a sense of the artist's 'authenticity', thus balancing two seemingly incompatible elements. Kollwitz deliberately constructs and uses this sense she evokes in the viewer that they are looking into the artist's 'real' face/self. The intense sense of connectivity this provides encourages the viewer to empathise with her larger political concerns.



Fig.no.9 Self-Portrait 1922
Charley Toorop



Fig.no.10 Self-Portrait 1925
Charley Toorop

Next to her work I have hung three paintings of the Dutch artist Charley Toorop (1891-1955) who also works within the constructs of realism to make challenging self-portraits within a political context. Of all the artists assembled here the self-portraits of Charley Toorop stand out as the most convincingly 'real' in the sense of 'capturing' the artist's urgent presence. As we walk up to this group of images, her fierce and demanding gaze ensnares us. To analyse how she achieves this effect I have placed together two early works, painted three years apart, that show us how and when Toorop began to invest self-portraiture with the artistic and political significance she was to explore throughout her life.

The paintings are both self-portraits, the first painted in 1922 and the second in 1925. Taken together they suggest how Toorop came question some of the fundamental assumptions of portraiture, self-portraiture and the representation of women. The *Self-Portrait 1922*, (Fig.no.9 p.87) though already showing the strong graphic line that is her stylistic signature, is a self-image that could just as easily be construed as a generic 'Portrait of a Woman'. There is something (or someone) lacking here. The eyes don't actively look out at the viewer but seem almost to passively accept the gaze of others. The brow is partially obscured by a fringe. The face is presented to us atop an

overlong neck and is sharply delineated from that neck by a sharp jaw-line. The face is also rendered as quite symmetrical and this symmetry stylises, smooths over and somehow erases the sense that a particular person is being depicted. The overall pattern of this self-portrait falls as if by default into the shape and expectation we have of the generalised female portrait.

Now let us look at the other self-portrait painted only a few years later in 1925 (Fig.no.10 p.87). The figure has moved from centre placement and seems almost to hunch down into the bottom corner of the picture plane. The neck has contracted and there is no attempt to adopt a feminine pose. Nor is it masculine however; rather, a degree of androgyny is introduced, just enough to create room for Toorop to emerge from the trope of 'woman'. Positioning the figure to the left of the canvas and having the left side of the face so deeply shadowed works against any symmetry and creates an edgy feel. The contrast between dark and light on the planes of the face is heightened and deepens the facial lines, especially in the brow. The ridge above the left eyebrow catches light and a dark wedge of shadow arrows down to the bridge of her nose. An almost-frown gives the face a look of glowering intensity. It is in this 1925 self-portrait (Fig.no.10 p.87) that we first experience the intense, determined, almost belligerent, look one associates with the self-portraits of Charley Toorop.

What we witness here is the emergence of the style of self-representation that Toorop continued with throughout her life. With all her self-portraits the viewer first encounters the eyes, eyes that lock onto the viewer and allow no easy slide of the gaze across the face's surface. This is fiercely occupied territory. Meskimmon accurately describes these self-portraits as 'determined' (Meskimmon, 1996: 47). This sense of determined presence is a deliberate strategy of Toorop's, an effect she sets out to achieve. She does so by choosing to present her face in a particular way that I will now analyse in detail.



Fig.no.11 *Three Generations* 1941-50
Charley Toorop

I have mentioned the eyes, which seem to lock the viewer into an unwavering ocular engagement. Let us look at how Toorop creates this feeling. Toorop makes her

eyes larger than life, but it is not just that which makes them so arresting. Their effect is due more to the way they are framed within the expressive contours of the brows and forehead. In all of Toorop's self-portraits her brow is a site of concentrated energy. By the use of contrasting light and shadow to emphasise the furrows and frown lines, Toorop conveys a sense of her face looking intensely out of the frame. This in turn produces a sharply felt sense of the presence of the artist. She produces a look that squarely meets our own and demands recognition. To analyse this look in greater detail I include here her work *Three Generations* (1941-50) (Fig.no.11 p.89), which is a group portrait of herself, her son and her father — three generations of artists.

'*Three Generations*' (Fig.no.11 p.89) is an odd, uneasy composition that is severely unbalanced by the huge, looming bust of Charley's father, Jan Toorop, a well-known Symbolist painter. The bust and pedestal create a weight of darkness above Charley's right shoulder, a darkness that nevertheless provides a sharp relief for her own outline. The father's gaze is blind, as one would expect from a bust—his seeing is over, his face has become monument. There is no sense of shared looking here. The daughter/mother, Charley Toorop, both supports and is placed below the father/son. She is the agent here, the worker (in her plain worker's overall). She takes the active position, her arm raised, presenting herself in the act of painting. In this way Toorop makes absolutely clear her agency as the author of the image. The highly dramatic lines created by the creases in the smock and the conspicuously placed palette gives her a dominant claim to the space of the painting's composition and counteracts the initial sense of her being 'below' the father and son. Toorop's face is the central motif in the painting. Again we see the signature brow, buckling with determined effort. The mouth is firm and the chin and neck push forward into the foreground. Her urgent eyes block our perusal of her. She effectively captures our looking and sends it back so that we become the looked at. Her gaze is almost medusa-like in the sense that it captures the viewer (Toorop kept a bust of Medusa in her studio and made two interesting paintings of this mythological figure). We become the looked upon and are forcefully reminded of Toorop's role as the artist. How does she achieve this effect? To understand this it is useful to compare her depiction of her son's face and that of her own.

The portrait of her son (who is also a painter) is positioned within the embrace of Toorop's raised painting arm. While his facial expression is strong it is not as sharply etched and loaded with intent as his mother's. His gaze is one the viewer feels it is possible to share. It is someone being looked at and looking back. There are subtle yet important differences in the handling of light and contrast. Toorop's face pushes forward into a direct light source. This creates dramatic contrasts that pick up and delineate the fine lines around her eyes, lines that describe for us the action of looking.

The son's face is portrayed with a much more even distribution of tonal shading, so that even though he too is staring out in a concentrated manner, his gaze lacks the intensity of his mother's.

For Toorop the act of making a self-portrait was a considered and loaded act that was a deliberate intervention in the tropes of the representation of woman. That she was acutely aware of issues of gender is clearly demonstrated in her painting, '*Vrouwenfiguren*' (Female Figures), 1932. What the viewer expects of an image titled 'Female Figures' is a generic and essentialized depiction of Woman. What we get is something much more disturbing and transgressive. The rear figure is only a partial face presented in half-profile who looks away frowning. The figure on the left, breast exposed in the long-established manner of the fetishizing gaze, has a bruised and unhappy look and appears uncomfortable with her positioning as an erotic object. The dominant face in the painting belongs to the figure on the right. She pushes her face forward and, with her wryly pursed mouth, corrugated brow, raised eyebrows and tired eyes makes the viewer question the whole premise of the depiction of 'female figures'. This is a face that says, 'go on, try to turn this face and body into an anonymous other. I dare you'.

Toorop allied herself with the art movement of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Realism). The aim of this group was not to return to a purely naturalistic or academic style, but to re-invigorate realistic representation as an art practice that addressed social and political struggle. *Neue Sachlichkeit* was a movement of critique. It is within this context that Charley Toorop created her self-portrait series. Such a context makes credible claims that Toorop's lifetime practice of self-portraiture can be interpreted as a political act — a deliberate and considered interrogation about what the 'real' face of woman could be and how it could be achieved.

One of the many definitions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in contemporary sources was the term 'New Matter-of-Factness' (Fer 1993: 283). This term seems most apt for Toorop's self-portraits. Her impulse as an artist is to strip the images she makes of herself of any of the symbolic functions that the image of 'woman' calls up almost by default. She determinably presents a plain, bare-faced image of herself whose direct and challenging look leaves very little room for the viewer to see her except as an artist who is a woman.

Kollwitz, Toorop and Kahlo were all very politically active artists. All believed that art should function in society as a means for change. Given this, an important question for us to ask is why they all chose self-portraiture as their main form of expression. Surely the genre of self-portraiture with its emphasis on the personal and the individual is not the most likely site from which to launch political critiques of society? Or is it? I would argue that for women artists the making of a self-portrait was

already a political act in itself as it confronted and challenged many patriarchal assumptions regarding women. For women artists, self-portraiture has long been a dynamic site of interrogation, not one of smug self-assertion.

More importantly, I believe these artists use of self-portraiture illustrates their desire to depict themselves as not separate from their social concerns. They portray a kind of subjectivity that is constructed or woven from many threads, threads that connect the individual to society. The point of using a self-portrait as the basis for political comment is that it re-connects the general and the particular. Our sense that we are gaining access to the 'real' Kollwitz, Toorop or Kahlo is an effect these artists utilise so that their audience can then identify with their larger concerns; war and poverty, national identity and so on. This realism needs to be understood as a strategic effect deployed by these artists so that the meaning of their work is not contracted back into a purely psycho/personal reading.

Fleshing (out) the Face



Fig.no.12 *Untitled #314E* 1994
Cindy Sherman

Perhaps the most 'real' representations of the face in this exhibition are to be found in the group of works just to the left of the door as you come in. In this group I have three examples of work from the contemporary British artist Jenny Saville. Next to these I have placed another, later Sherman and beside her a photo that records the performance art of Orlan. These works represent the face predominantly as flesh. To depict the face in this way deeply challenges the trope of the Face. Face is not flesh; it is the disembodied sign for self, identity and the subject.

Sherman's image (Fig.no.12 p.91), while not actually a self-portrait, is a representation of the face that I have included here as a significant exploration of what constitutes the Face and of how any depiction of the fleshy materiality of the face disturbs our understanding of faciality. We are confronted here with a violent rendition of a face constructed from what appears to be slabs of torn, gleaming flesh. The scale is much larger than the *Film Stills* (44" x 30") and instead of cool, restrained black and white tones we get in- your-face reds, pinks and crimson. This image has the appearance of abattoir black humour where an clumsily approximate face has been

mockingly constructed from scraps of flesh. The result is horrific and disturbing. It is also, in an 'awful' way, very beautiful. This collision of beauty and horror creates a response of both disgust and attraction. Such an abject response makes us question what it is exactly that disturbs us so. What code is being broken? What truth is being subverted? What this image disturbs is our sense of our selves as stable and discrete identities. The body being revealed as flesh is (just) tolerable. But we strongly resist the face being portrayed thus because the whole idea of the Face works as the sign for the unified self. Cut into this facade and you puncture the very foundations of how we visualise and construct identity.



Fig.no.13 *Omnipresence*, 21 November 1993 Orlan

The contemporary artist whose work most directly challenges these foundations is perhaps Orlan, the French performance artist who has used the operating theatre as a space to stage performances of transformation and empowerment via the means of plastic surgery since the 1960s. Aside from Orlan's work serving as a commentary on the gender issues surrounding cosmetic surgery and ideals of female beauty, her performances emphasise the unavoidable fact of the materiality of the face.

I have included in my exhibition a still from one of Orlan's operation/surgical performances, *Omnipresence*, 21 November 1993 (Fig.no.13 p.92). This is a quite large-scale image (110x 165cm) that shows Orlan's profile close-up, staring upwards as the surgeon's scalpel carves away the flesh beneath her chin. Marked on her face are texta lines that indicate where the next incisions will be. Here we witness the actual dismantling and reconstruction of the artist's face. We see, and flinch with horror at what we see. Much of the disturbing power of this image of Orlan's lies in the fact that it is the face that is being cut open. As Michelle Hirschborn points out, the face is that part of the body privileged as the signifier for identity so cutting into and altering this site challenges the western construction of subjectivity (1996: 128).

Orlan is not just dismantling the face she is demonstrating that it is something that can be constantly reworked, remodelled and re-invented. Helen McDonald sees Orlan's mode of self-depiction as portraying 'the subject and object, body and text, self and other, of a hybrid identity in formation' (2001: 195). Orlan's art practice takes to a logical extreme the everyday practices of facial grooming and make-up that most women engage in. Women have long known the face is a constructed sign, and its representation for them has not been the stable signifier of the self as it has been for

men. Orlan operates within this slippage or overlap and, rather than leaving the face behind entirely, recuperates it as a flesh/site that can embody her becomings and, furthermore, demonstrate her agency in its shaping.

Alongside Orlan's image we encounter the huge figurative images of Jenny Saville, a contemporary British artist who bases her figures on herself. She too attempts to recuperate the face so that it can be incorporated back into depictions of embodied subjectivity and no longer have to carry the weighty presumption of the 'White Man himself' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988:176). There are three works of Saville's here: *Self-Portrait*, (1994-5) (Fig.no.14 p.93); *Branded*, (1992) (Fig.no.15 p.94) and *Interfacing*, (1992) (Fig.no.16 p.94).



Fig.no.14 *Self-Portrait* 1994-5
Jenny Saville

The first, '*Self-Portrait*' (1994-5) (Fig.no.14 p.93), shows Saville photographed from below as she lies on a large piece of glass. This makes for odd distortions of her body at the points where her flesh is flattened against the clear surface of the glass. What interests me is how this affects our perception of her face. It too is spread and squashed against the clear barrier between the figure and the viewer. It is not 'recognisable' as anyone in particular, in fact, it is barely recognisable as face. The arms and legs are tucked out of sight and the pressure of flesh against glass closes eyes, mouth and nose. What the person does is denied. This is just flesh. It could be argued that this is a critique of the objectification of the female body, and on one level it works thus. But I see it as more of an assertion of the fact, the matter, of body. The face has not been reduced to body it has been recuperated as body. The way the flesh presses gives an overwhelming sense of touch, weight and substance. How the flesh encounters, resists, takes on the shape of the surface it touches is captured here, repudiating the fixed boundaries we expect when viewing the nude in art. You can clearly see the influence of Irigaray's ideas here; that embodied subjectivity is formed more from the sense of touch, touched by others, touching others, touching self, as it is by looking. The idea of the face is constructed as a sign that functions predominantly within the parameters of the gaze. It's function as face/sign dissolves in the intimacy of the touch. Irigaray describes this in 'The Fecundity of the Caress': 'without a face?

The face swallowed up by the nocturnal experience of touching, touching self and other, retouching' (1984: 191)



Fig.no.15 *Branded* 1992
Jenny Saville

In the next work, the painting '*Branded*' (1992) (Fig.no.15 p.94), Saville evokes an uncomfortable intimacy between spectator and image by making her represented figure seem far too close. As in most of her paintings her figure here is placed at the forward most limit of the foreground, and appears nearly to spill out of the two-dimensional frame. The outline, the defining outside line of the body is not contained within the frame of the painting, these bodies cease to be 'figure', they are flesh escaping figuration. The severely foreshortened bodies with their broad hips and heavy breasts hang towards us off a small, distant head. The face loses its traditional role as the central signifier for identity.

How Saville positions herself is telling. As Alison Rowley observes, 'The effect is as if the canvas is a large mirror which has been placed on the floor to catch the woman's reflection and then tilted upwards slightly from the back' (1996: 88). But where does this position us, as the viewer, here? We are literally put, in an impossible position, for there is no space for us to inhabit. We are caught ambiguously between Saville's look and her reflection. We look to the face portrayed to 'read' her look but do not find any point of entry here. This look, like Gentileschi's, Jenkinson's and Sherman's, is one that does not engage with the viewer: it is the artist looking at her reflected body.

Standing in front of a work such as *Branded* (1992) (Fig.no.15 p.94) is quite overwhelming. Regardless of the distance you place between yourself and the canvas, you feel both too close and too low. Saville's use of scale endorses this feeling. Her images are very large, for example, *Branded* (1992) is 7' x 6'. An effect of this scale is to provide us with vast expanses of beautifully rendered painted flesh. This makes the flesh itself become the most predominant element of the painting. The face is pushed far into the background/distance — relegated to fleshy protuberance.

Even when Saville paints only the face, as she does in *Interfacing* (1992) (Fig.no.16 p.94), this remains the case. Here she creates a face that does not function

portrait of the artist's self. This is a portrait of the face as flesh. Again, she uses the impression of extreme closeness in order to position us into an awkward and discomfiting intimacy with her. This close, our eye cannot organise the elements of the face into a 'readable' physiognomy. Those elements we rely on to do this, the eyes, mouth and nose, are, by the angle and proximity of our viewing, made to occupy less than a third of the picture plane. The rest of the face becomes an expanse of flesh, with folds, moles, texture and colour that dominate the image. Interfacing is also large (nearly four foot square) which makes the spaces of flesh between the features of the face much more prominent. There is no shared look here either; Saville's face, side on, looks to the left and is viewed by us from below.



Fig. 16 *Interfacing* 1992
Jenny Saville

These images by Orlan, Sherman and Saville all share elements of horror and the grotesque. The horror/disgust we feel comes primarily from our sense of wrongness here. Our conceptualisation of the face is built on a visualisation of it as a discrete and contained site that is somehow not-body. Even when it is the female face being represented as body/object it is depicted as something that is contained and ordered by the gaze to stay safely within its outline. Viewed as flesh however the face begins to escape the gaze and is de-constructed and then re-figured as an inhabitable locus of subjective embodiment.

Conclusion

We have now viewed all the works I have assembled for this show. Let us, for a moment, move to the middle of the showing space and peruse the exhibition as a whole. When we look around at the images, which range from the sixteenth century to the present and encompass many art movement styles, the most striking aspect is the sheer diversity of the works. I am reminded also that there are many other works that have, for reasons of time and space, not been included: Claude Cahun's photographic fantasies; Clara Peeter's quiet, surreptitious insertion of her reflected face into her still-lives; Suzanne Valadon's confidently direct and assured self-images, Modersohn-Becker, Leonora Fini, Alice Neel ... the list could go on.

The point I wish to make here is that, while I have constructed a provisional

kind of narrative that aims to map connections between these diverse works, ultimately the works themselves escape, as they should, containment within one over-arching theory. I am not attempting in this study to construct a definitive account of self-portraiture by women artists. In fact, as I have discussed already, I reject such an approach as one that forecloses too much on the on-going dialogue that works of art are capable of engendering. Rather than trying to make claims regarding a putative 'tradition' of women's self-portraiture I would prefer to offer a model that allows for the articulation of difference as well as connections between these diverse artists.

As for the connections, I believe that there are sustainable generalisations that can be made regarding self-portraiture by women artists which enable us as viewers, writers and artists to begin to form useful insights into these works and the broader debate concerning female representation and subjectivity. Regardless of style and historical context, all these artists could be said to have in common the desire to extricate the female face from its traditional role as purveyor of the sign of idealised and anonymous 'woman'. This desire arises from the resistance of the face/sign or 'faciality machine' to the woman artist's attempt to occupy that site to express her sense of individual presence. For the woman artist setting out to make a self-portrait, two things needed to be done simultaneously; the de-construction of the trope of the female face in art and the re-figuring of the Face into a sign that could encompass a feminine experience of subjectivity. This need to de-construct the traditional deployment of the female face has meant that many women artists have understood the face as already/always a site of invention. It follows also that this attempt to re-figure the face for their own use has led many women artists to analyse how the trope of the face 'worked' as a sign for individuality in art. The seemingly straightforward desire to make a self-portrait, in fact, has always placed women artists in what Kristeva calls a 'site of intention' (Boulous Walker, 1998: 108) where truth assumptions must be interrogated and disturbed.

All these artists self-portraits (and 'not-self-portraits') work in different ways to test and expand our understanding of what constitutes both 'woman' in art and the 'subject' in self-portraiture. Self-portraiture by women artists can in this sense be approached and understood as a loosely woven project that concerns itself with 'making faces' so that the face can be of use to women in the representation of female identities. As this exhibition demonstrates, self-portraiture by women involves a wide and diverse range of approaches all of which can be seen as part of a dynamic exploration of form wherein women artists have expanded the possibilities of how subjectivity can be not only represented but challenged.

Thurs.

I've had some more acrylic cut and have started on a group (maybe three) of small paintings that use some of the latest photos I have had taken of my face. I am working around the idea of defacement. The photos are all of me moving so the facial features are blurred and indiscernible. I want them almost sliding out of the picture plane. It is extremely hard to get the blurred effect in any kind of subtle way. I was tempted to try photo screen-printing onto the acrylic but feel still that this is something I want to explore in paint at this stage. My hope is that I can make more subtle and unexpected interventions with the mark making of paint. The images are already quite abstract — map like shapes of light rather than recognisable faces — and painting them makes them even less recognisable. This fits in with the impulse towards defacement that I want to experiment with now. The mobility described in these images will perhaps disturb some of the expectations of Face/bust. Movement is one way of depicting/suggesting agency, occupation and presence.

Mon.

The series of smaller paintings depicting movement (and thus, hopefully, agency) is proving to be far more difficult than I expected. The group has expanded from three to five (and counting). I have tried an arrangement that has a central face front on and looking at the viewer. From either side the faces start to peel away into profile until at either side they are barely discernible blurs of movement. This sounds fine but doesn't function the way I want it to. The central face checks all sense of movement and the viewers eye seems to have to return to that fixed point. I have started to think that I will reverse this order and see what happens if I have the faces turning into the centre. This would mean that the middle faces are depicted as being almost fully erased by movement. I have also considered the possibility of making a short animation loop that shows this series of movements. I will pursue this further if I feel that I really can't convey what I want with these still images.

Weds.

A concentrated burst of work on the large triptych — I need to be done with it now. What I was saying there about the process of self-portraiture is no longer of great interest to me. I am onto the next thing (movement/erasure) but need to wrap this group of paintings up. This is something I always find hard to do — somehow investing too much into each piece, forgetting that it is only a fragment of the process.

A detour, a rumination — perhaps an ode of sorts — to my tired, porridgey belly. Its free-form excess, its uncontainability within the aesthetics of the 'female form', its inexorable slide away from its outline, its utter declaration as flesh. All this has made it incredibly difficult for me to render a depiction of my middle torso that captures it as it is. My brush seems instead to always attempt to re-shape and modify my comfy old belly into something that looks more how the generic female 'nude' should be. I have no models for the way my belly looks now. My brush falters and doesn't know where the lines begin or end here. The contours are contradictory and seem to go all over the place. Softly collapsed, it resists representation. It is no longer the concave, flat erotic space awaiting impregnation nor is it the ripe round shape that proclaims possession. There has been no need for this flaccid part of female anatomy to be venerated in art. It's a kind of unoccupied no-man's land and, because I haven't 'seen' it before in representation, it is as if I don't know *how* to see it.

Thurs.

At last I feel as if I can finally see the large triptych nearing completion. I am now concentrating on the final touches. I am working the surface of the landscape to give it a more complex texture. It needs to operate as both a narrative background and a painted space that holds the figures in its embrace. I have settled on the final order of the triptych now (honestly). The torso and bust are on the right, the figure holding the painted portrait is on the left and the figure with arms on hips beginning to turn away is the central

panel. This works well spatially and also makes 'sense' to me. I realise that my understanding of self-portraiture has changed as I have been painting this triptych. The central position now has to be the representation of myself that is starting to turn from the gaze — has made room (hence the hands on hips) and wishes to find new ways of representing (my) self.

This triptych outlines the process I have undergone to reach this understanding. The right panel represents the weight of the past — the female form as passive object/body and the face/bust as fixed and authoritative subject. The left panel shows me holding up a self-portrait, but there is an un-revealed 'real' face behind the portrayed face which makes the meaning ambiguous. The central figure of myself self-consciously turning away, pinpoints my decision to cease to attempt to portray myself as a stable unit. Rather I now want to portray myself as a moving entity whose 'face' begins to move out of the parameters of the framed still face. Effaced, not by anonymity or objectification but by a different kind of presence. Presence that is indicated by action and agency.

Mon.

On some large pieces of clear mylar sheet, I have made three self-portraits that show me making faces — mugging it up to the camera — grinning and grimacing. I wanted to record this kind of movement in my face as it escapes the inevitable gravity of most self-portraits. It shows me self-aware and disrespectful of the usual intentions of a self-portrait, which is to convince the audience of one's 'authentic' self. It also subverts the conventions on beauty and vanity in the portrayal of the female face. Foolish and fun they are intended to show how mobile and alterable the face can be.

I am still not sure how to use the images I have of my face blurred by movement. It doesn't seem to work if I paint them onto the mylar. I may just hang them as enlarged photos as it is obviously a medium more suited to communicating movement than paint. However I still feel the need to intervene with them in some way so will continue to experiment with their use.

Weds.

I have decided to abandon the earlier triptych I did that attempted to portray my sense of Gentileschi 'making room' for me. The idea was good I think but it doesn't work as it is. I don't feel I can go back to that point to redeem it. The selection process I am now beginning to undertake regarding what will go into the exhibition or not has raised some interesting questions for me. In some ways everything I have done over this project should be included if I wish to show the process fully. It shouldn't matter that many of the works don't 'work'. But it does matter. Many ideas have to be attempted and often aborted to get to the work that finally counts. The selection of the final images for inclusion is a part of the process. I want the exhibition to tell a story I create by selecting and discarding from the many images I have made. That story will be contingent on whatever understanding of this subject I have at the time.

Sat.

I bought some hand mirrors today as I decided I would like to include them as a framing device in the show. At this stage I am thinking of a line of about 8-10 that will have small self-portraits in them showing how diverse our seeing of our own face is. Actually, this may be the vehicle for my blurred movement photos. I like the idea of looking into the mirror and only seeing movement. The face escapes!

I was sorting through the many photos I have had my son take of me over the last three years and I began to notice that some groups of them could be arranged to create a kind of narrative. After playing with them for a while I've put together nine of them that show me at first staring directly out at the camera/viewer and then gradually closing my eyes and turning away. The very last image is one of me looking back with a cheeky look on my face. In some ways I feel this tells the story of this process of self-portraiture I have been engaged in. I first attempted to occupy the real face and convince the viewer of my presence. I then disengaged my eye

contact and turned away — not into an accommodating profile that made me more available but one than declared my agency and resistance. The last cheeky backward glance reflects my desire to make faces as an ongoing process and thus escape from the heavy shadows of both the 'bust' and the 'torso'. I've found some small chipboard frames with stands which will make a good framing device as they will mimic the sort of photos you have on a mantelpiece or shelf.

Weds.

I have come to that point where the final shape of the show is taking definite form in my head. This is an interesting part of the process because it is now that I start to stand back from the making and let the work speak back to me. I find that many of the images I have made over the years have been pushed aside. It is interesting to read this commentary and remember what it was that I was trying to depict in those works. It is inevitable that what you think you want to say changes through a long process of experimentation. Some avenues of thought become dead ends and others go in directions you don't anticipate.

I am wary though of declaring that where I am now is a final arrival. I am already thinking of new ways of moving through this self-portraiture process. It is not even necessarily a matter of moving forward. I feel a desire to go back now to my initial attempts at recording my idea of my likeness without a mirror. Perhaps I can now understand what that process could mean. Even though the last works in the show are about movement I feel a nagging resistance to my earlier desire that movement would ultimately de-face me in a way that would be enabling. I find I am not finished with this thing called 'face'. There's more to it than meets the eye.

Conclusion



THE ARTWORK: an Introduction

The following pages depict reproductions of the works included in the exhibition 'Making Faces', the major creative component of this study. As I state previously in the exegesis, I wish the works to 'speak for themselves' and have therefore resisted the impulse to 'explain' the artworks in a way that suggests they are subordinate to the theoretical discussion.

It is important for the reader of this thesis to know something of the dynamic that informs and shapes it. As a 'reader' only, who does not have access to the actual exhibition, there is the danger of forming an expectation that the main role of the artwork is to 'illustrate' or reflect exactly the written discussion. As an artist, I argue that this expectation would distort and misrepresent the process that occurred throughout this project, effectively turning it inside out so that the threads that connect its parts unravel and knot.

As I discuss in depth in Chapter Three, 'Room to Move', making images is my primary means of exploring ideas and meaning, this is not, nor should it be, a linear, logical process, rather it is an analogical process that dips and weaves about, around and through the issues being interrogated. I have described this approach as 'loitering with intent' (p.45) and argue that this is a methodology that rightly positions my art practice as the instigator for the various directions the theoretical discussion takes. It would be a mistake, therefore, to read the theoretical chapters and to then look to the artworks for direct explication. The relationship between praxis and theory is neither that tidy nor that symmetrical. Imposing such symmetry would limit the potential of creative theses such as this to provide new ways of looking at and speaking to an issue such as self-portraiture by women artists.

Ideally I would prefer all readers of this exegesis to have experienced the artwork in the form of the exhibition before they engaged with the written discussion. This is, of course, not practicable so the following is a guide to what I see as the major threads that inform the images. I do this with some caution as I do not wish to over determine what each image 'means'. As my commentary demonstrates, over the time I worked on each piece in the studio, my own understanding of what was being said was always in a state of flux, a negotiation between intention, process and form. Often what I intended to say was subverted, expanded, added to or altered by the process itself. This makes me as the artist in some ways, no more an 'expert' on what the works can mean than any other informed viewer. So I ask the reader to see this summary as just one way of approaching the work and to understand that it is, and must be, provisional.

These works are not standard self-portraits in that their purpose is not to

capture or reveal a mimetic or psychological ‘truth’ about myself to the viewer, rather they are a series of images of myself that I use to interrogate the very practice of self-portraiture. The first two paintings, *Artemisia Makes Room* (Fig. 18, p. 103) and *Artemisia Paints Herself Out of a Corner* (Fig. 22, p. 105) indicate this.

These two works refer to Artemisia Gentileschi’s painting *Self-Portrait as La Pittura*, which I discuss extensively in the exegesis (pp. 58-59 and pp.73-75). While making these images I imagined for myself a visual dialogue with Gentileschi’s work which re-figured the corner-space in her painting as one that later women artists could strategically occupy in order to re-negotiate the representational space allowed women in Western art. The corner-space is lightly inscribed on a broad horizon in these two works, the implication being that once the female position is questioned, as Gentileschi does in her *Self-Portrait as La Pittura*, the possibilities become infinite.

The group of three works entitled *Coming or Going, I Don’t Know If I’m*, (Fig. 23) expand on this. I place representations of my face along a horizon line - claiming limitless space for my depictions of self. The horizon is a visual metaphor for that dynamic in-between-ness I discern in women’s self-portraiture - the sense of being both/neither/either object and subject. All the faces are shut to the viewer and many turn away. This ‘turning away’ theme, which I explore in many of the other paintings (see Figs. 19, 20, 25 and 31), is an idea that arises directly from Gentileschi’s painting, as I am intrigued and inspired by the way she uses the extreme profile to evade the male gaze. I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter Four.

This idea of ‘turning away’ as an escape from the male gaze is probably most clearly articulated in the two works *Somebody Else’s Face* (Fig.29) and *Turning Away* (Fig. 25). These photographic images of my face are framed within hand-mirrors. This links with my discussion (pp. 75-77) regarding Gentileschi, Jenkinson and Sherman’s use of their reflected image and how they avoid the male gaze by engaging their look elsewhere. In *Somebody Else’s Face*, a group of three mirrors, I use the photos of myself taken by a male photographer when I was sixteen. These images are strong examples of the way the female face is made available to the male viewer by the use of a coyly lowered gaze and the angle of face. The next group of three mirrors, *Turning Away*, counters this by depicting my aged face blurred and made indiscernible by movement. Jenkinson (Fig.2 p.75) makes her face unavailable by using the hand mirror to block the viewers gaze; I reveal the image in the mirror yet my blurred visage refuses unmediated scrutiny or appropriation.

This idea of mobility is taken further in the paintings and photographs titled *Making Faces*. Here I present a series of representations of my face that are animated by exaggerated expressions. This too is a strategy I employ to evade the male gaze. Here I depict my face as an embodied entity - animated, alive and at times made quite

‘unbeautiful’ by grinning, leering, laughing and generally mugging it up for the camera. This is the antithesis of the passive body/object face produced out of the masculine imagination in traditional Western art.

Broadly speaking, the themes I follow in my self-portraiture series are these: the need for the female imagination to ‘make room’ for new woman-generated self-representations; the concept of ‘turning away’, which is a knowing refusal to engage with the male gaze; the promise of ‘making faces’ which indicates the possibility of diverse and subversive invention and renewal. Many other, more implicit, threads also inform the artwork, issues concerning aging, beauty, vanity and autobiography. I leave these to work on the viewer unmediated by my analysis of them. As I say above, the artist’s interpretation of their work’s meaning is no more privileged than others who come to it later as viewers. The work will speak for itself and become part of other peoples meaning making, hopefully spurring further discussion and art production around the subject of women and self-representation.



Fig. 17. *Working in the In-Between* (triptych panel, right) 1999-2001.

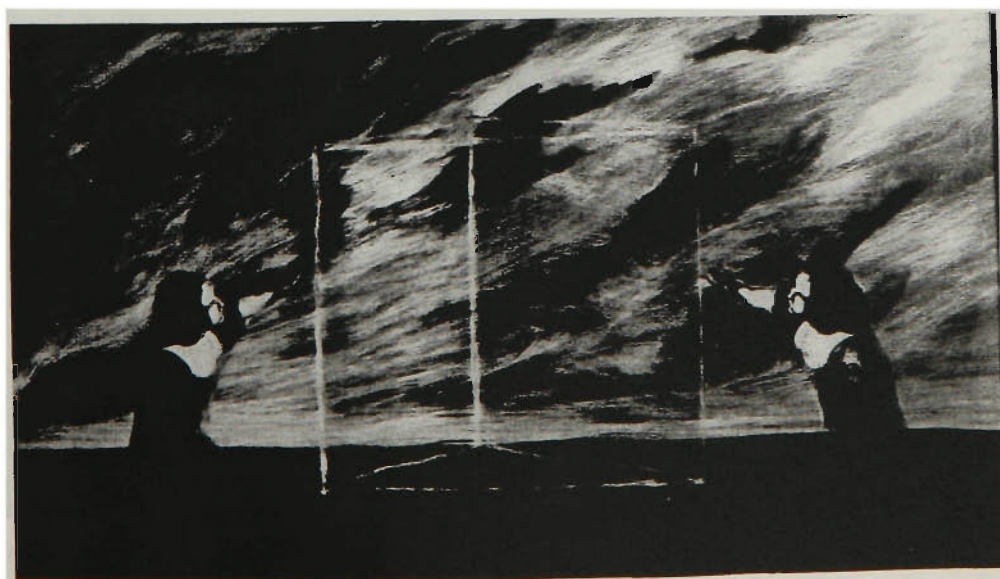


Fig. 18. *Artemesia Makes Room*, 1998



Fig. 19. *Working in the In-Between* (triptych panel,centre) 1999-2001.



Fig. 20. *Being in the In-Between*, I, II, and III, 1999.



Fig. 21. *Working in the In-Between* (triptych panel, left) 1999-2001.

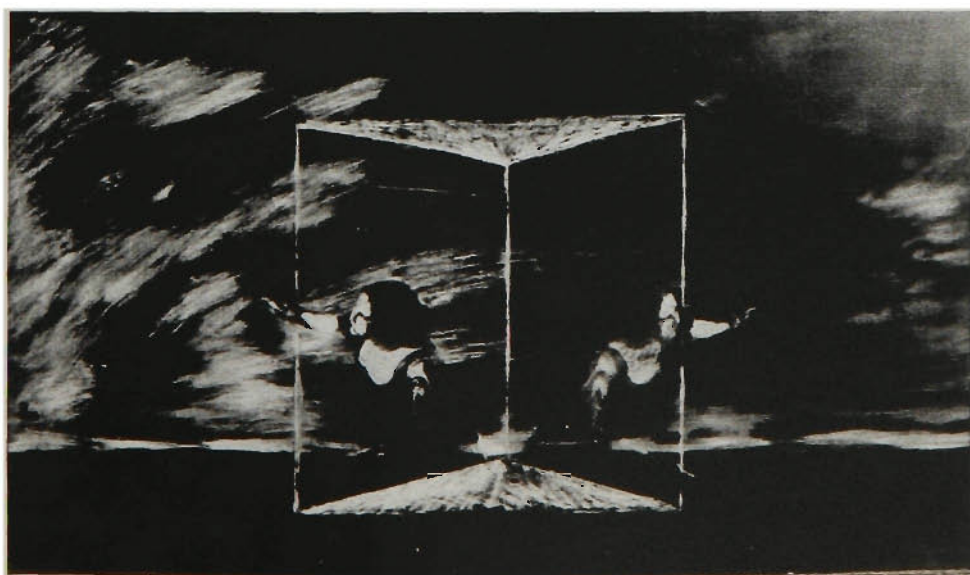


Fig. 22. *Artemesia Makes Room*, 1998.



Fig. 23. *Coming or Going, (I don't know if I'm)* I, II and III, 1999.

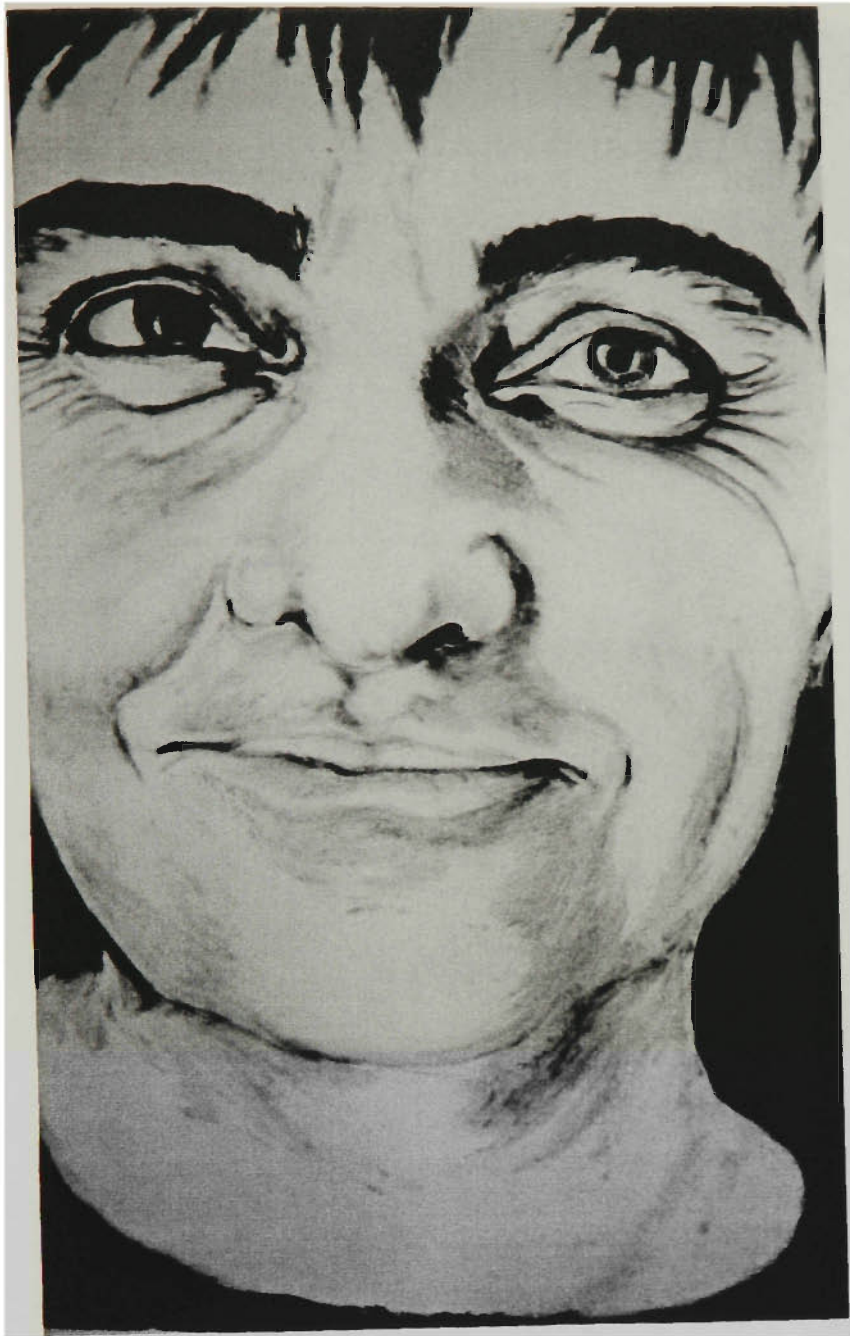


Fig. 24. *Making Faces*, II, 2000-1.

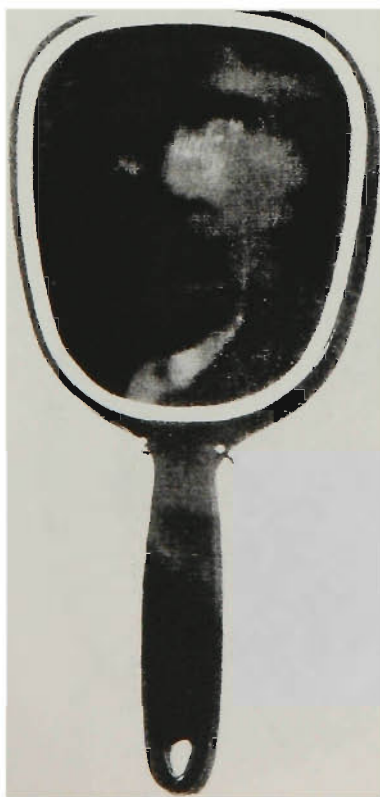


Fig. 25. *Turning Away*, I, II and III, 2001.

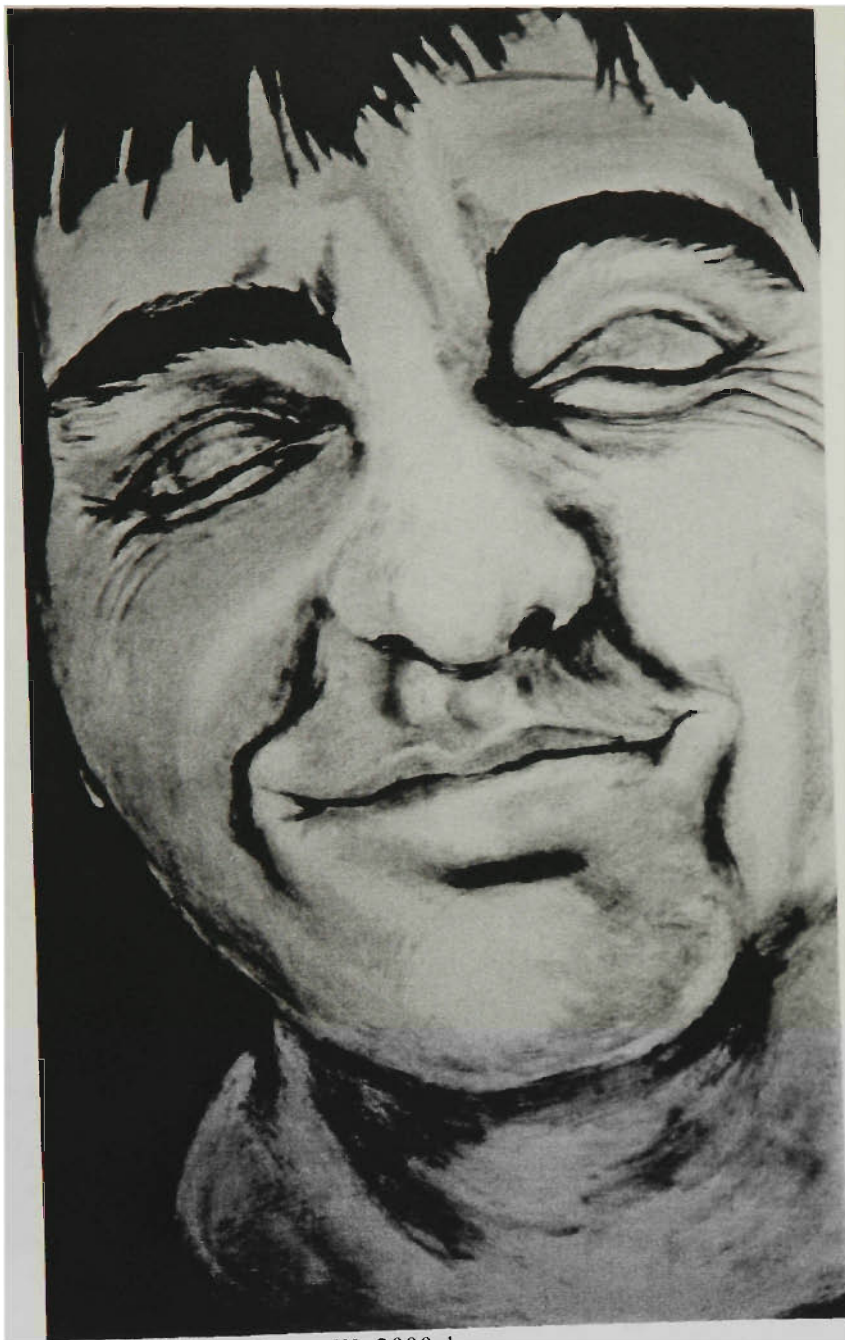


Fig. 26. *Making Faces, III*, 2000-1.



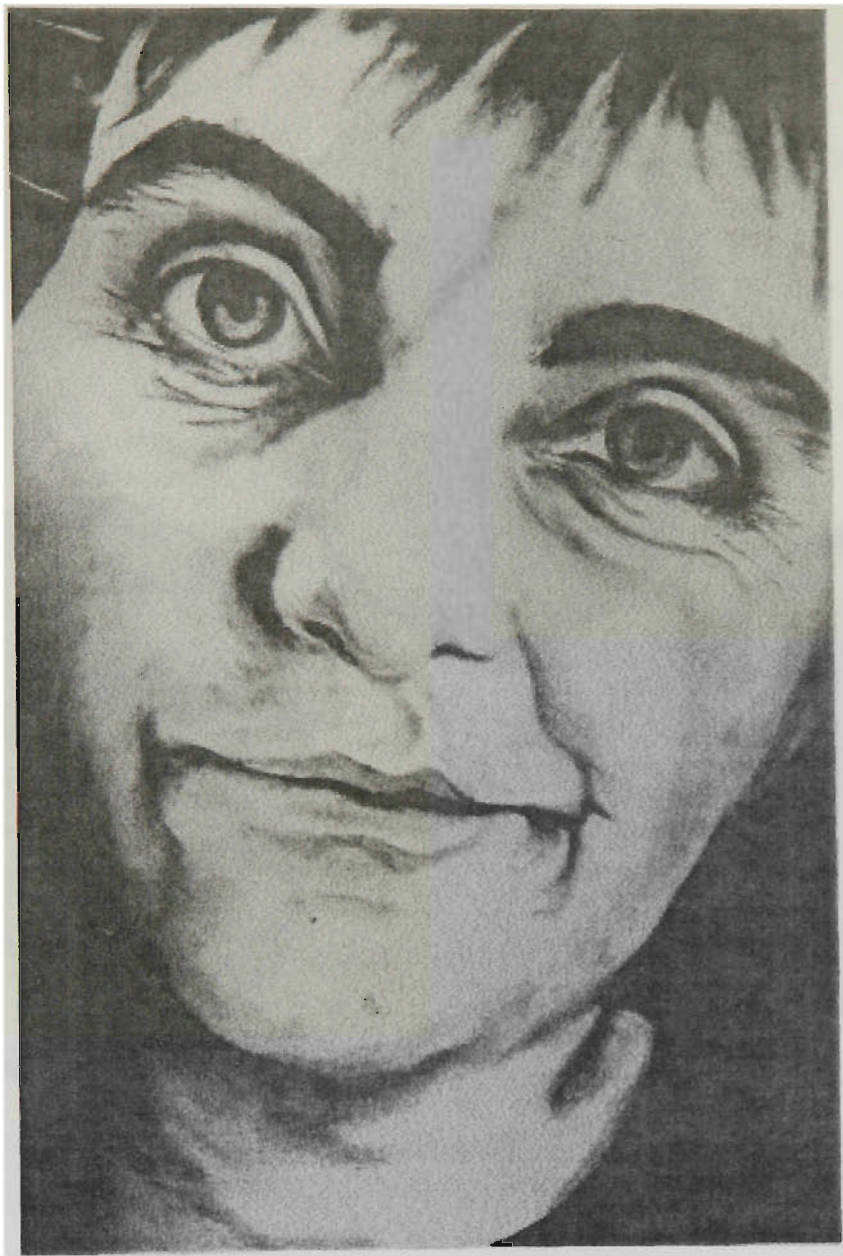


Fig. 28. *Making Faces, I*, 2000-1.

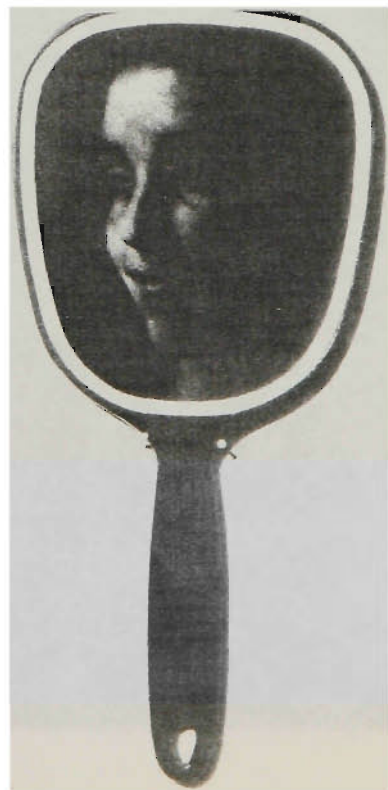


Fig. 29. *Somebody Else's Face, I, II and III*, 2001.



Fig. 30. *Making Faces (framed)*, IV, V and VI, 2001.



Fig. 31. *Turning Away with Backward Glance*, 2001.

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