

Mother Dearest

An examination of the representation of Motherhood in contemporary art from the perspective of the artist as mother

Kirsty O'Leary-Leeson

BA Fine Art 2011

Krzysztof Fijalkowski

Research Report: Extended Essay

ABSTRACT

As an artist and a mother I have often been made to feel that the two defining roles in my life should be kept professionally separate; that motherhood is not a relevant or intellectual subject within society in general, and so not suitable for consideration as a subject in contemporary art. In this essay I will explore how motherhood can be expressed within contemporary art in a meaningful and erudite way. I also hope to gain a better understanding of my own creative identity, and how motherhood forms part of the context of my own practice.

The essay comprises of four main sections; the Introduction examines how motherhood suffers from a history which both marginalized women, and defined them within set conventionalized roles. The proceeding two chapters investigates the work of the artists Marlene Dumas and Mary Kelly respectively, who have both used their experiences as mothers to create artworks that express their roles as creators and procreators. I shall be using psychoanalytical theory as a foundation on which to base informed analysis of the two artists, and in the Conclusion I shall compare and evaluate their differing methods and strategies in representing maternity.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	
TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS	Page 4
INTRODUCTION The Marginalisation of Motherhood	Page 6
CHAPTER ONE Marlene Dumas	Page 10
CHAPTER TWO Mary Kelly: Post Partum Document	Page 17
CONCLUSION The Matter of the Body	Page 24
Endnote	Page 29
APPENDICES	Page 30
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Page 31

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1. Marlene Dumas. (2003) *Immaculate*. Oil on canvas; 9 7/16 x 7 1/16 inches; collection of the artist. In: Butler, Cornelia ed. *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*. Co-published Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Distributed Art Publishers, Inc. p202.
- Fig. 2. Gustave Courbet. (1866) *The Origin of the world*. Oil on canvas; 46 x 55 cm; Musee d'Orsay. Available from <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search.html?> [Accessed 10 January 2011]
- Fig. 3. Marlene Dumas. (1988-90) *Pregnant Image*. Oil on canvas; 70 7/8 x 35 7/8 inches; collection Jack and Connie Tilton. In: Butler, Cornelia ed. *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*. Co-published Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Distributed Art Publishers, Inc. p208.
- Fig. 4. Marlene Dumas. (1994) *The Painter*. Oil on canvas; 78 3/4 x 29 3/8 inches; The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Available from www.artmarketmonitor.com/.../06/15dumas3.jpg [Accessed 8 November 2010]
- Fig. 5. Mary Kelly. (1976) *PPD: Documentation IV, Transitional Objects, Diary and Diagram*. Perspex units, white card, body/hand imprint in clay, plaster of paris, cotton fabric, string; 1 of 8 units, 28 x 35.5cm each; collection Zurich Museum. In: Iversen, Margaret. Crimp, Douglas. Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press. P45.
- Fig. 6. Mary Kelly. (1978) *PPD: Documentation VI, Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary*. Perspex units, white card, resin, slate; 15 units, 20 x 25.5 cm each; collection Arts Council of Great Britain. In: Iversen, Margaret. Crimp, Douglas. Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press. P50.
- Fig. 7. Mary Kelly. (1977) *PPD: Documentation V, Classified Specimens, Proportional Diagrams, Statistical Tables, Research and Index*. Perspex units, white card, wood, paper, ink, mixed media; 1 of the 33 units, 13 x 18 cm each. Collection Australian National Gallery, Canberra. In: Iversen, Margaret. Crimp, Douglas. Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press. P49.
- Fig. 8. Mary Kelly. (1973) *PPD: Introduction*. Perspex units, white card, wool vests, pencil, ink; 1 of 4 units, 20 x 25.5cm. Collection Peter Norton Family Foundation. In: Iversen, Margaret. Crimp, Douglas. Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press. P42.
- Fig. 9. Mary Kelly. (1978) *PPD*. Perspex unit, white card, resin, slate, 1 of 6 units, 20 x 25.5cm each. Collection, Arts Council of Great Britain. In: Iversen, Margaret. Crimp, Douglas. Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press. P53.

Fig. 10. Mary Kelly. (1975) *PPD: Documentation II, Analysed Utterances and Related Speech Events*. Perspex Units, white card, wood, paper, ink, rubber; 1 of 23 units, 20 x 25.5 cm each. Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario. In: Iversen, Margaret. Crimp, Douglas. Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press. P36.

Fig. 11. Kirsty O'Leary-Leeson. (2010) *Vessel*. Paper and pencil, 24 x 18 inches.

INTRODUCTION

The Marginalisation of Motherhood

I have approached the discussion in this essay on motherhood and its representations within contemporary art, from the position of an artist who is also a mother; in doing so I have had to confront the question 'what keeps those of us who are mothers ourselves from making the complexity, the challenge, and joy of our experience the full subject of our work?' (McDermot, 1995, 196). When I have produced work which relates to my children I have often felt the need to defend or apologise for my subject matter. Why has maternity proven to be such a problematic subject, considering everybody has a biological mother and approximately two billion women are mothers? The term "motherhood", when discussed within a theoretical context, is commonly placed among taboo subjects such as racism, religion and sexuality. Whilst women have introduced their bodies and biographies into their work there is still a lack of representations, and a serious and sustained discourse of maternity within contemporary art. As Robinson suggests, 'The morality and politics of motherhood are still under-articulated, whether verbally or visually' (1990, 7).

Within our western cultural psyche the mother has developed three complex roles identified as that of the socially constructed, institutional role; the unconscious mother articulated through psychoanalysis; and the fictional mother promoted through fictional visual and literary culture (Kaplan, 1992). In this essay I will explore how the contemporary artists Marlene Dumas and Mary Kelly, navigate through, conform to, or defy these constructs. I have chosen these two artists because they both work from the position of being mothers, and so draw on personal experience giving them a common ground from which to compare and analyse their practice. Their approaches differ however in that Dumas has created a proliferation of images revolving around maternity throughout her career, although her practice has always been somewhat ambiguous; whereas Kelly created a large scale installation within a highly theoretical explicated context, over an extended period.

In the proceeding two chapters I will explore the work of the artists individually. The third chapter/conclusion will compare their different approaches, and evaluate their success or failure to articulate the role of mother to an audience. It will also contain a more

personal account, and deliberation on how I have responded to their work, and whether motherhood infiltrates my studio practice, and implicates me in the dialectic surrounding maternity.

As a foundation for the analysis of the work of the artists Dumas and Kelly, I shall be referring in particular to the writings of the theorist Julia Kristeva. I consider her work to be particularly relevant because like the artists she too is working from the stance of a mother, and her essay *Stabat Mater* (1986) contains a highly subjective account of motherhood running alongside the more prosaic text. She also works from a psychoanalysts perspective, much of her work drawing on Lacanian theory, so that 'she conjures up a radically new understanding of maternal... within a discourse (psychoanalysis) that is steeped in paternal authority' (McAfee, 2004, 3). The themes that psychoanalysis deals with, subjectivity, its unconscious and its affections, are central to the arts. It also allows us to draw from the space of phallogentric logic a way to discuss aspects of the feminine within subjectivity (Pollock, 1995).

Within the visual arts Motherhood fights being accepted as a relevant and intellectual subject; the fact that the outcome of maternity is children is problematic as the subject of children has ever been fraught with the risk of sentimentalism, and the work being marginalized. Since the commodification of childhood in the nineteenth century it has been feminised, and as Romanticism waned so the subject was considered intellectually marginal and was left behind by artists and art historians (Higonnet, 1998, 39). With the advent of Modernism women were more than ever associated with domesticity and childhood became a subject for women. As Griselda Pollock (1980, 5) has noted, one of the reasons Mary Cassat's work has been so less visible than that of her impressionist peers is partly because of her oeuvre.

Modernism's patriarchal viewpoint became the norm and the female viewpoint was confirmed as that of the 'other' and subsidiary, and today the male perception is still accepted as the universal vision (Snyder-Ott, 1995, 70). Motherhood has been placed within the domestic sphere which also contains the subsidiary subjects of both women and children. When looking at art by mothers about motherhood does the politics of

difference mobilise against their work because it focuses on the otherness of the artist as woman and mother, to the exclusion of any serious discussion of their practice? Maternal subjectivity has historically been seen as the antithesis for creative production, the western mythology of the artist has been idealized and modelled on the Romantic movements powerful definition of the artist as a male outcast, sacrificing everything, creating only out of a profound passion (Apostolos-Cappadonna, 1995, 2), and although today motherhood is not necessarily seen as requiring all of a woman's attention, do we fear that we may compromise our status as serious artists if we bring attention to the fact that a huge amount of commitment, energy, and emotion is poured into something other than our art, proof of non-professionalism?

The feminist writer E. Kaplan (1992, 39) argues the fact that the position of 'mother' has been subordinated and fetishized, and that it is important for it not to be the all consuming entirety of the woman, that a woman should be constituted as 'mother' only when directly interacting with her child. I agree with the feminist viewpoint that maternity should not be an essentialized quality, yet I think it is impossible to simplify it down to the extent she may wish, for this denies it its existence as a life-changing often all-consuming experience, both physically and emotionally. Even when you are not with your child you are forever a parent. At this point I should mention that of course motherhood can on some levels be equated to parenthood, the effects also being profound on a father; however for the purpose of this essay I shall be concentrating on female artists, how they make work regarding maternity, and how being a mother can effect the work they make on the subject. As Kaplan points out, (1992, 197) 'fatherhood is chosen, motherhood is demanded'.

One cannot examine maternity without taking into account feminism, however when we consider feminism there is the sense of a devaluation of motherhood; Kristeva has been critical that feminism never managed to prolong a satisfactory discourse on motherhood, and that it has always taken an ambivalent standpoint on the subject (McAfee, 2004). Kristeva embraces the fact that a woman does not have to be the same as a man, and looks for a way to reconcile women's desire to have both children and careers, 'if maternity is to be guilt-free, this journey needs to be undertaken without masochism and without annihilating one's affective, intellectual, and professional

personality, either. In this way, maternity becomes a true creative act,' (Kristeva, 1995, quoted in McAfee, 2004, 101).

Of course within both society and the art world women have begun to close the gender gap, however after the birth of her daughter Dumas has been famously quoted 'I'm not one of the boys any more' (Dumas, 1998, 64); biologically becoming a mother forever separates you, the gender gap may be gradually closing but motherhood defiantly puts her foot in the door.

CHAPTER ONE

Marlene Dumas

Marlene Dumas has made the subject of motherhood from conception, through birth and babies to childhood, as a dominant theme in her oeuvre; approaching the subject not just from a biographical stance, but interrogating it to reveal the experiences of being a woman, a mother, and an artist.

It is the point of conception explored in *Immaculate* (Fig 1) that makes us aware that Dumas is depicting not just the experience of being a mother, but of a complex woman, a sexual being with desires. She is renowned for using erotic and sexual imagery, so how do we see this painting as referring to the maternal? Firstly there is the intent of its' title, but we can also compare it to another visually similar painting that it seems to reference, Courbet's *Origin of the World* (Fig 2). A painting that is usually discussed in terms of sexuality; its title refers to the primal, connecting the woman's body to instinct and nature; but it represents sexual desire only in relation to men. In Dumas' version the body is abstracted further than Courbet's, the cropping of the limbs focusing us not on the female body, but on a dark space, on the space within. Life originates in the womb. She reveals woman's desire located within the context of procreation and creation. Dumas declares that 'the aim is to 'reveal' not to display' (1998, 122); she subverts the possible voyeurism, that is present in Courbet's passively yielding body, by the cropping but also by size of her painting, it is small at only 9 7/16 x 7 1/16 inches, drawing us into a private space, rendering what in Courbet's is generic and public, in an intimate and specific way.

In *Immaculate* we are confronted by desire, the desire for sex, for procreation, and the causality of these interchangeable desires. This concept has often been problematic for our western culture because of the Christian 'Cult of the Virgin Mary', the church's created mythology of Mary as the idealized devoted mother, who was denied her biological body by the immaculate conception, discussed by Kristeva in *Stabat Mater* (1986). In western thought there has been a dualism of nature and culture, body versus mind; historically the feminine body has been connected to nature with no connection to the intellectual functions, denigrated as weak, immoral and unclean (Oliver, 1998). The Cult of The Virgin Mary removed the body from maternity so that we could place it within



Fig. 1. '*Immaculate*', Dumas, 2003. Oil on canvas; 9 7/16 x 7 1/16 inches; in Butler (2003, 202)



Fig. 2. '*The Origin of the world*,' Courbet, 1866. Oil on canvas; 18 1/8 x 21 5/8 inches, available from: <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search.html>

culture. Dumas though, juxtaposes culture and nature questioning these seemingly incompatible constructs.

The image and its title also rejoins the 'polarized paradigms' of the "virgin" and the "whore" mothers' (Kaplan, 1992, 45) (that also have a long representational history particularly as an art-historical subject), these binary constructions of the 'good' and 'bad' mother have helped to repress the lived reality of the sexual woman who can also be a mother.

For Freud the woman's desire for a child is the transformation of penis envy, he and Lacan also maintain that women cannot be desiring subjects because they are castrated and have nothing to fear (Kristeva, 1986, 178); in Dumas' image however we are confronted with the woman's sexual organs as the locus for procreation and sexual desire. If the penis is symbolic of dominion then Dumas rejects this in the paintings' uncompromising detail and profound physicality, she exalts the female body and drives.

Pregnant Image (Fig 3) was begun in 1988, the year Dumas became pregnant, though it was not completed until after the birth of her daughter. This fact is recorded along the bottom of the painting; the three dates reminiscent of the three trimesters, and a testament to the time spent within the experience of pregnancy and the mothers 'slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself' (Kristeva, 1986, 206)

It is not a portrait of a specific person, it is a composite made from photos of different women. Pregnancy represents a liminal state where boundaries of the body are fluid, inside and outside, self and other dissolve. In the painting the woman's head and feet begin to merge with the background, there is a sense of the loss of the self, of the individual identity, as Kristeva suggests, 'to imagine a mother as the subject of gestation... is simultaneously to admit the risk of a loss of identity and to disavow it. It is to acknowledge that we are shaken by biology' (quoted in Betterton, 1996, 167). Kristeva points out however, that the fundamental challenge to identity is accompanied by a 'fantasy of totality – narcissistic completeness' (1986, 206), yet in the painting the face and extremities are darker, instead the luminous distended belly presides over our

view and so we see the negotiation between individual and other. It undoes the dualism of culture and nature 'where before she could parade as an individual , affirming her cultures individualistic ethos, now she is undeniably at least two' (McAfee, 2004, 85).



Fig. 3. '*Pregnant Image*', Dumas, 1988-90. Oil on canvas; 70 7/8 x 35 7/16 inches, in Butler (2003, 208)

Rosemary Betterton discusses in her essay 'Maternal Figures' (1996) how one of the principal functions of the female nude in western art has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body, with representations of the female body traditionally separated into reproductive and private, and sexually available and erotic. So when Dumas paints her pregnant nude we see the potential threat of the maternal body. In *Pregnant Image* the figure kneels precariously balanced (perhaps metaphorically as well as physically), her hands are consciously held behind her back, her stomach purposefully on show, genitals also defined. It is as if she defies us to ignore her fecundity and her sexuality. Religion made the mother sacred, science reduces her to nature, this image balances between providing us with the physical and psychic nature of a lived experience of maternity.

Betterton also comments on how Kristeva suggests that

'The 'artist' and the 'mother' represent two points of entry into the same experience, but while the artist may represent the maternal state, the mother may not 'represent' herself', Betterton concludes then that,

'This represents a dilemma when the artist is a woman and a mother, however it is through the maternal nude that an artist can simultaneously affirm their identity and represent maternal subjectivity' (1996,172).

Dumas also writes of the fraught connection between artistic creation, and biological creation (see appendix 1), so it is important to note that the title is not *Pregnant Woman* but *Image*, she reflects on the analogy between biological and artistic creation, is there a suspension between subject and object, between the artist as maker of images and maker of flesh?

Another possible allegory for the artist as a creator, is *The Painter* (Fig 4). A larger than life portrait of a little girl that looms over the viewer. The child's stomach is accentuated in a reversal of *Pregnant Image*, paint seems to be smeared across the stomach accentuating it and the belly button, the linea nigrea line that pregnant women often develop, runs down the abdomen. The head and body seem differentiated in their execution, the face pale, dark eyes seemingly peering out from behind a mask, creating the sense of a merging. Is this the child-as-artist depicting a primal creativity, or could it be the artist-as-child?



Fig. 4 . 'The Painter', Dumas, 1994. Oil on canvas; 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Available from www.artmarketmonitor.com/.../06/15dumas3.jpg

Kristeva sees in childbirth the woman entering into contact with her mother, 'they are the same continuity, differentiating itself' (1980, 239). Nancy Chodorow theorises that 'girls...in relation to their mother (and similarly, the mother in relation to her daughters)...experience themselves as overly attached, unindividuated and without boundaries' (1978, 137), however ultimately the girl will flee identification with the mother. Dumas depicts a sullen and defiant little figure resisting a projected identity from her mother/artist, but it could equally be Dumas herself commenting on the artist's creativity affected by the child, something she articulated in her poem *Fear of Babies* (see appendix 2).

Kristeva questions whether the problems Freud places on babies, and their problems separating from mothers is mirrored in the mother? (1986, 178). Perhaps we are seeing in this image of the duality of mother and daughter, the melancholy of the mother losing the child as it becomes 'object', as well as the sense of loss they must both experience. It also exemplifies the continuing construction of identity, the mother is changed by the experience as much as the child, and both experience the constant shifting of identities. Dumas is renowned for ambiguity in her work, yet in doing this she gives us scope to see both mother and child, artist and subject.

CHAPTER TWO

Mary Kelly: Post Partum Document

Post Partum Document was an installation that was progressively created over six years, from 1973 to 1979; consisting of 135 small units divided into an Introduction and six parts. It addresses the mother child motif, using the conceptualist process of documentation to introduce an examination of subject, and an interrogation of her own preoccupations. It is a process of analysis, and a visualization of Mary Kelly's relationship as a working/artist mother with her young son (Kelly, 1983, xv).

It consists of objects; baby memorabilia, such as nappies, clay imprints of her child's hand, specimens of plants he collected, and his name written by himself. To this Kelly has added a narrative commentary in the form of subjective diary-like notes; and objective quasi-scientific texts, including diagrams derived from Lacanian psychoanalytical theory (Figs 5-7).

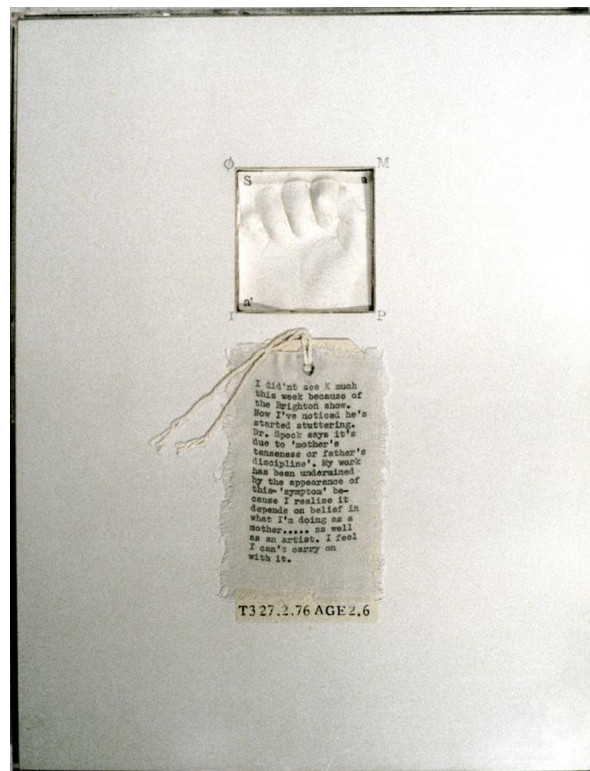


Fig. 5. 'PPD Documentation IV, Transitional Objects, Diary and Diagram'; Kelly, 1976. Perspex units, white card, body/hand imprint in clay, plaster of paris, cotton fabric, string; 1 of 8 units, 28 x 35.5cm each. In Iversen (1997, 45)

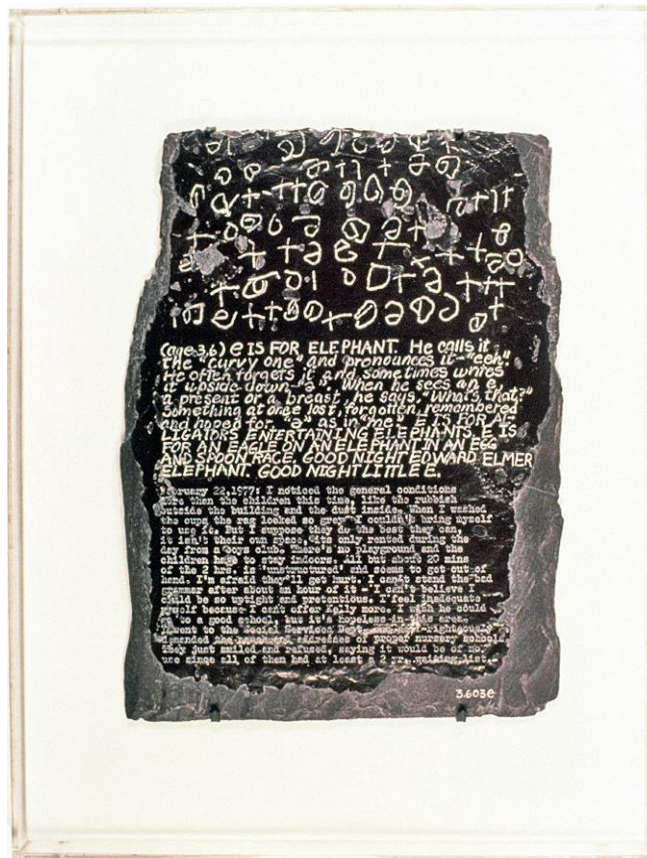


Fig. 6. 'PPD: Documentation VI, Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary', Kelly, 1978. Perspex units, white card, resin, slate; 15 units, 20 x 25.5 cm each. In Iversen (1997, 50)



Fig. 7. 'PPD: Documentation V, Classified Specimens, Proportional Diagrams, Statistical Tables, Research and Index', Kelly, 1977. Perspex units, white card, wood, paper, ink, mixed media; 1 of the 33 units, 13 x 18 cm each. In Iversen (1997, 49)

It traces the child's development from weaning to his induction into the written language; effectively following the processes by which the child separates from the mother.

However this is not just a biographical account of the first five years of her son's life; Kelly explains how it operates on two levels, 'my lived experience as a mother and my analysis as feminist of that experience' (quoted in Iversen, 1981, 207).

Initially the viewer *is* caught up with the mothers' narrative, one cannot help but find empathy with the maternal experience and the mechanics of rearing a child. We recognise the emotional and intellectual process taking place, as the child emerges from the mother as independent and separate. In the repetition of the image in different states, we acknowledge the lived experience, that childrearing is laborious, that it is work.

However this recognition of the work involved in motherhood must be reciprocated in the work demanded of the viewer; for these are not art-objects to be considered in themselves. Kelly created 'an exhibition as space to give documentation the force of argument.' (Mulvey, 1976, 201). The language surrounding the pieces is complex, and the ideas multifarious. To fully apprehend the rigorous analysis one needed to read the lengthy 'Footnotes and Bibliography' booklet that Kelly provided. We are prompted to become critically engaged with the installation, and are made aware that Kelly is bringing to bear the voices of not only the mother but that of political debate; feminist and psychoanalysis examination; and academic discussion (Kelly, 1983, xviii).

The breadth and depth of PPD is such that many essays could be written on each section alone, so for this chapter I shall focus on its use of psychoanalysis. Kelly uses Lacanian psychoanalysis within PPD as a principal structuring element. An example of the use of Lacanian symbols can be seen in *Introduction* (Fig 8), which consists of a series of four baby under-shirts carefully folded; upon these one line from a Lacanian diagram that concerns inter-subjectivity, is successively drawn until the diagram is completed.



Fig. 8. 'PPD: Introduction', Kelly 1973. Perspex units, white card, wool vests, pencil, ink; 1 of 4 units, 20 x 25.5cm, in Iversen (1997, 42)

Kelly's use of Lacanian psychoanalysis could be considered controversial for an artist working from a feminist standpoint. Why endorse patriarchal authority? Yet she is using psychoanalytical theory to tell the story of the mother's psychic life, whereas classically, psychoanalysis is concerned with the child's point of view. Rather than support these theories she is interrupting them. Creating a conflict between patriarchal sources, and her feminist analysis (Lippard, 1983, xii).

Each section of PPD ends with a modified version of Lacan's diagram of the subject, 'S over little s', divided by the bar of repression, meaning that the subject is the subject of a (phallic) signifier of lack.' (Iversen, 1997, 48) (Fig 9).

The questions she substitutes destroys the conception that motherhood is 'natural' and 'essential', instead she anxiously questions herself.

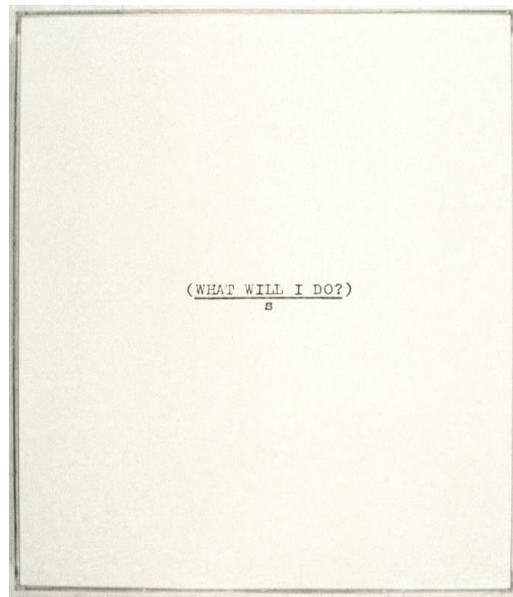


Fig. 9. 'PPD', Kelly, 1978. Perspex unit, white card, resin, slate, 1 of 6 units, 20 x 25.5cm each, in Iversen (1997, 53)

Kelly's work originates from the consideration of Freud's Oedipus complex (Kelly, 1983, xix); the woman's recognition of lack is postponed by having a child, then in possessing the child she, in a sense, possesses the phallus. Therefore the impending loss of that child as it becomes an individual under the law of the father, represents the anxiety of castration, and a return to a negative place in the symbolic order. The mother can either accept this status or rebel against it. PPD proceeds from this point as a rebellion, by the fetishisation of the child (Mulvey, 1976, 202). Kelly engages Lacan's '*emblems of desire*' (Kelly, 1983, xvi) as the mother fetishizes the child, obsessively saving his drawings, hand-print's, comforter remnants etc, both memorialising the loss and defending against it. But in the presentation of these objects within the installation Kelly does not passively accept this theory, and we witness a very conscious decision by the mother/artist to replace the child as fetish, with the art objects (Mulvey, 1976, 202); so positing a female fetishism where none existed within classical psychoanalysis, and then challenging psychoanalysis reading of maternal cathexis (Apter, 1991). The self-abnegating activity of mothering becomes the self-affirming activity of culture (McAfee, 2004, 101). So like I observed with Dumas' *Pregnant Image* she too disproves Kristeva's posit that women cannot represent themselves.

Kelly's use of the symbolic, abstract, scientific discourse displays a pleasure in the acquisition of patriarchal knowledge, that she can understand it and control it, then use it

for her own means, to witness 'women's alienated position in relation to the Symbolic order' (Iversen, 1981, 207); or more specifically in the case of *Introduction*, mentioned earlier, as an explanatory theory to the mothers fetishistic attachment to the vests, and an implication that the attachment can be sublimated into the pleasure of knowledge and the creation of artwork (Iversen, 1997, 41).

The Lacanian theory is further displaced by the iconography of the museum display. The formal features of the installation situates the work into the critical spaces of art and knowledge. The academic environment traditionally deals with intellectual practices, and helps negate domestic work, yet here text based theory is juxtaposed with materiality and women's work, highlighting the interconnectedness of art and life. We can also see 'the primacy of the material and historical over the natural' (Isaak, 1982, 204), so distancing the mother from the ideology of the 'natural'. This form of display allows for 'an archaeology of everyday life' (Kelly, 1983, xvi). The mother can be seen as an anthropologist, then the artist/intellectual/curator comments from a more distanced view, and we then enter, booklet in hand, providing another register of signification (Iversen, 1981, 206).

However the fundamental element of the written word and its relation to language, goes beyond providing a knowledge base from which to interpret the work. The Lacanian theory that PPD is structured upon is based upon a linguistic paradigm (Isaak, 1982, 204), Kelly has stipulated that

'not only the visible art work but the process itself, is about the relation of writing to the mother's body...it is at the moment of our entry into language that we take up a feminine or a masculine position in the symbolic structure of our society.'
(Lippard, 1983, x).

As the child emerges into a patriarchal world, discovering language, its sexuality and identity, so too do we witness the mother's equivalent emergence.

In Documentation II (Fig 10) the matrix – the block from which letters are pressed, is exhibited, the reversed type face of the matrix alluding to Lacan's mirror phase (Iversen, 1981, 208), However it also recreates the printed text as matter, implicitly reinforcing the

idea of labour both physically and intellectually within motherhood, (it is interesting to note that matrix is Latin for womb).

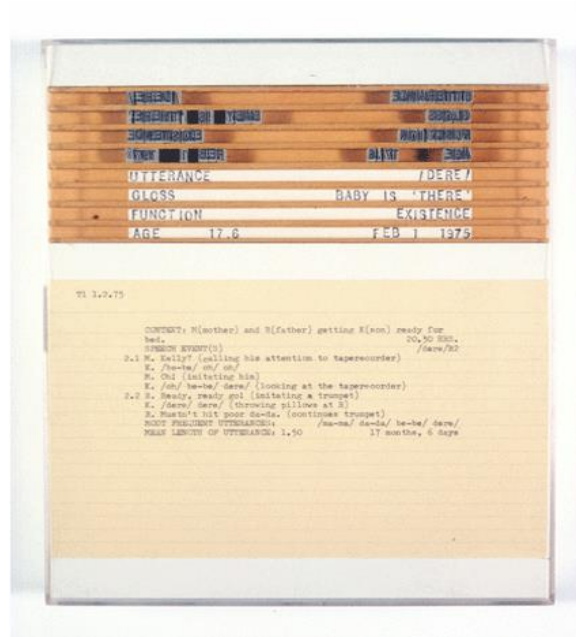


Fig. 10. 'PPD: Documentation II, Analysed Utterances and Related Speech Events', Kelly, 1975. Perspex Units, white card, wood, paper, ink, rubber; 1 of 23 units, 20 x 25.5 cm each, in Iversen (1997, 36)

PPD now exists primarily as a book, the various sections of the original artwork residing in different collections, and so it's life continues in the literary environs of a library. Encompassing the categories of art, autobiography, psychoanalysis, child development, and feminism, yet eluding being defined by any of them, it reads both as a critique on motherhood and as a self interpretation.

CONCLUSION

The Matter of the body

Although both artists differ vastly in their representations of motherhood, they both attempt to re-generate denigrated aspects of the female experience of motherhood. In this chapter I will consider how the two artists rejection, or use of the figurative image of the mother and child affects the reading of their work .

Kelly avoids the literal figuration of mother and child 'as a historical strategy...to avoid any means of representation which risked recuperation of a 'slice of life' (Kelly, 1983, xvii). She does not want any references to an iconic vision of motherhood which could identify her work or the spectator with an ideal mother. In art the body is intrinsically a problem for representation, for the image of the woman has been culturally over-determined. Kelly refuses to image the woman, deliberately using fetish objects instead, countering the fetishistic nature of representation in visualizing the woman's body. 'To be fetishized is once again to be in the space of the vulnerable, the visible, the psychically feminine' (Crimp, 1997, 24). Instead she visualises the mother without picturing her.¹

How then do we view Dumas' use of the figure? Is she allowing the woman to be the object of the look? By using the image of the woman she has, in one instance, fallen into the area Kelly wished to avoid by invoking a sense of the iconic. When discussing '*Pregnant Image*' D. Boogerd (1999, 60) refers to it as 'a sacred and weighty shrine', unwittingly? He confirms the ideology of the divine, and non-biological. We kneel and worship before shrines; the figure in the painting kneels, subservient to the child within. In psychoanalysis the emphasis has primarily been put on the child's development, and the effect of maternity on the mother is overlooked. In culture the interests of the child is superior to that of the mother; we look critically at the effects mothers have on their children and the blame for any aberrations in a child's character is usually laid at their feet. Yet there is a poignancy to the kneeling figure, a testament to the non-abstracted, lived reality of the mother, part martyr, part hero.

We must remember when comparing the work of the two artists, that at the time of PPD, feminist theory had effectively excommunicated the female nude, and the subject has

remained much less seen in contemporary painting (Boorgerd, 1999, 51). So Dumas use of it becomes radical and transgressive. As I have mentioned earlier, the female nude, particularly when pregnant, is threatening to the paternal symbolic order, and Dumas' use of it could be seen as disrupting this order.

Kristeva links the maternal body to the concept of the abject; we first experience abjection at the point of separation from the mother; it is the process of excluding the maternal body so that the child might expel itself from the pre-oedipal mother-child dyad, and enter the symbolic realm or the law of the father. The main threat to the subject is its dependence upon the maternal body (McAfee, 2004, 47-50). So when attention is drawn back to what the mother represents as having been lost, and which must remain lost to maintain ones subjectivity in the symbolic order, by displaying a body (*Pregnant Image*) of becoming, changing and alteration, the totality and integrity of the subject, and the conception of order is disrupted (Liu, 2004, 29). We see the maternal regulation or law which prefigures the paternal law.

We could consider the body as situation, rather than object; the materiality of the body is significant to meaning, and can 'encompass a range of embodied powers, pleasures and desires through which subjects are materialised in their full sentience' (Meskimmon, 2003,105). *Pregnant Image*, and *Immaculate*, are images that could invite the masculine gaze, but do the visual strategies of respectively a larger than life, and a small, extreme close-up, change them? Creating a direct confrontation with matter, meaning and desire. So while we acknowledge the scopophilic hunger of the gaze, it is subverted by confronting the traditional male representations of private and reproductive; versus the public and the erotic, so not compromising female subjectivity and connecting aesthetics with sexed specificity, and difference.

Does Dumas rather than objectifying the body, articulate its difference? This is the crux of Kristeva's contention that feminism needs to bring the body and the acceptance of sexual difference back into discourse (McAfee, 2004, 91). As Kristeva states (1980, 238) 'A mother is the subject of gestation, in other words the master of a process that science, despite its effective devices, acknowledges it cannot know and perhaps never will be able to take away from her', so nature has to be considered when examining maternal

identity as it is a 'thoroughfare, a threshold where nature confronts culture', (Kristeva, 1980, 238) and images such as *Immaculate* and *Pregnant Image* emphasises the complexity of this discussion of nature and culture, to be of body and mind, free to have children and to create culture.

Kristeva though would see in Kelly's use of language another way to undo the psyche and soma dichotomy, seeing language as the site of interaction for thought and sexuality 'it is where body and culture meet, and insofar as the body is mediated through language it's also a cultural construction' (McAfee, 2004, 80). However her reliance on text, the catalogue and indexes requiring careful reading in order to grasp the full extent of the piece, means that the images are 'meta-discursive, assuming a certain knowledge based on readings of and debates around specific articles' (Kelly, 1983, xviii). This can prove problematic if it seems too cerebral and obscure; her reasoning for this is sound, that it helps counter the assumption that childcare for women is natural and instinctive. The risk though, is that with the loss of visual seduction in PPD you alienate the audience, and it becomes too abstracted from its context.

The fact that the piece was created over three decades ago, and Kelly's analysis was relevant to a particular moment in history, means that it is more vulnerable to revision, and less available for interpretation and identification for subsequent viewers. However, PPD's principal format now as a book means that it has found an existence that more suits the constraints that time has placed on the piece, for it contains essays written at the time and since, which enables us to locate it within a discourse begun decades ago and which, considering the topic of this essay, still requires further consideration.

As a final conclusion I will now briefly consider how I, as a mother and artist, have related to the work of the two artists. The work of Kelly is dense and often obscure, she distances the emotions through the form the artwork takes, removing the passion from her analysis. Kristeva (2005) considers the 'maternal function' as 'more precisely, a passion', and I must agree, that motherhood is full of powerful emotions. In this I relate more directly to Dumas representations, which directly confronts and makes palpable these 'passions'. Yet I do understand that Kelly is still examining this passion, this often irrational event; the whole process of the document goes beyond rationality. PPD

breathes melancholy, 'a problem is continually posed but no resolution reached...a replay of moments of separation and loss, perhaps because desire has no end, resists normalisation'(Kelly, 1983, xvii).

In some respects my work is more closely related to Kelly's expression of the social and psychic constructions of maternal femininity. In my art practice I examine my existence within a physical and a psychic world, and explore how both realms create the individual self. Motherhood has imposed on me physically, emotionally and psychologically, and I have come to more fully understand how being a mother forms a context for my own work; that the process of bearing and raising children fundamentally effects the mothers psychology, and the creation of identity.

The objects that I choose to image in my work are drawn from a life that includes children (Fig 11); the washing basket references the daily routine and never-ending cyclical process of maternal commitment. Society's perception of female labour has been diminished, but the reality of it still exists (Graves, 1996, 35).

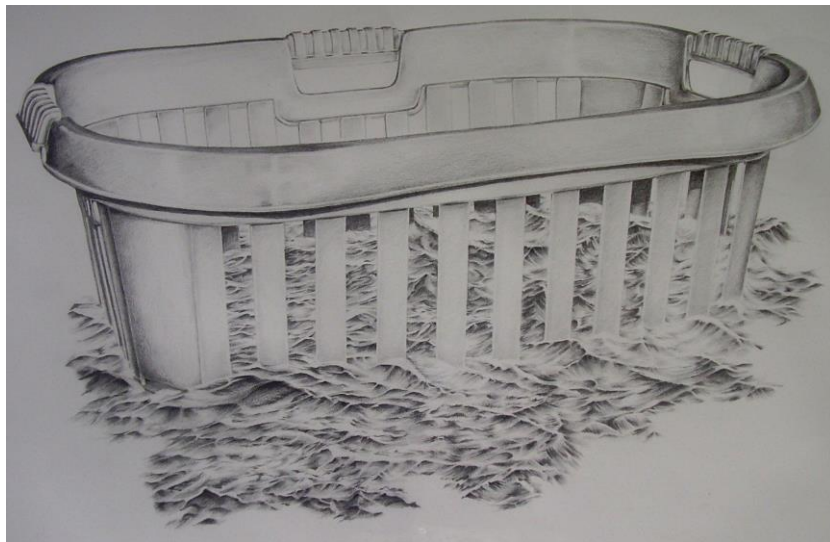


Fig. 11. 'Vessel', O'Leary-Leeson, 2010, pencil on paper.

Anais Nin 'identifies creative women as those most trapped in the dialectical tension identified by Otto Rank as that dialectic between creative guilt and the guilt for not

creating' (1995, 156). Dumas and Kelly have both found expression through their art for their experiences of being a mother. The anxiety that exists between the two creative roles is evident in both artists work, but by expressing their maternal commitment through their commitment to their art, we witness the female desire for the creative processes, of both procreation and creation. In doing so they display the real female innovation that Kristeva suggests 'will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them are better understood' (Oliver, 1998).

Word Count: 5501

i

It is interesting to note that despite Kelly's insistent rejection of all reproduction of the image of mother and child, a photograph of her son sitting in her lap is the first image in PPD in it's book form. Although there is discussion of this in several texts considering it representational of the child as phallus, could it actually be seen as, beyond any

intellectual reasoning, the irrepressible instinct of the mother, the maternal desire to show her beautiful boy.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1
Birth

29

29

To create an artwork
(to make and image of)
and to give birth
(to another human being)
have essentially nothing to do
with one another.
Yet this is no reason to stop loving
metaphors or avoiding the unrelated.
But the poetry that results from mixing
different kinds of language,
disappears into sloppy thinking,
when we imagine that these differences can ever be solved
harmoniously; or even worse, when
we forget that these realities we are
mixing are of a beautiful and often
cruel indifference towards each other.

(Dumas, 1998, 49)

Appendix 2 *Fear of Babies*

How do we dream
our dreams of peace
a race of small creatures
populating the areas of hatred
or the spheres of boredom
So
share my bed
you sterilized lovers
and feel free
to do nothing
that would
cause the artist
to give up
her aesthetic playthings
for the disorderly toys
of children

(Dumas, 1998, 30)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane. (1995) *On the Creative Necessity of Sacrifice*. In: Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane & Ebersole, Lucinda eds. *women, Creativity, and the Arts*. New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, pp1-11.

Apter, Emily. (1991) Fetishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's Interim, *Rendering the Real*, Vol.58, October, 97-108. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778800> (Accessed 5th December 2010).

Betterton, Rosemary. (1996) *Maternal Figures: the maternal nude in the work of Kathe Kollwitz and Paula Modersohn Becker*. In: Pollock, Griselda Ed. *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts*. London and New York, pp159-175.

Boogerd, D. (1999) *Hang ups and Hangovers in the work of Marlene Dumas*. In: *Marlene Dumas*. London, Phaidon Press, pp30-85.

Chodorow, Nancy. (1978) *The Reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Crimp, Douglas. (1997) *In Conversation with Mary Kelly*. In: Iversen, Margaret; Crimp, Douglas; Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press, pp8-31.

Dumas, Marlene. (1998) *Sweet Nothings, Notes and Text*. Amsterdam, A co-production of Marlene Dumas and Galerie Paul Andriesse.

Dumas, Marlene. (1999) Artists Writings. In: *Marlene Dumas*. London, Phaidon Press, pp104-144.

Mark, Lisa Gabrielle. (2008) *The Binding Factor*. In: Butler, Cornelia ed. *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*. Co-published Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Distributed Art Publishers, Inc. p200-247.

Graves, Jane. (1996) *The Washing Machine: 'Mother's not herself today'*. In: Kirkham, Pat ed. *The Gendered Object*. Manchester, New York, Manchester University Press, pp30-42.

Higonnet, Anne. (1998) *Pictures of Innocence*. London, Thames and Hudson.

Isaak, Jo-Anna. (1982) Our Mother Tongue: The Post Partum Document, Vanguard, April. In: Kelly, Mary. (1983) *Post Partum Document*. London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp202-205.

Iversen, Margaret. (1981) The bride stripped bare by her own desire: reading Mary Kelly's Post Partum Document, *Discourse*, no 4. In: Kelly, Mary. (1983) *Post Partum Document*. London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp206-209.

Iversen, Margaret. (1997) *Visualizing the Unconscious: Mary Kelly's Installations*. In: Iversen, Margaret & Crimp, Douglas & Bhabha, Homi K. *Mary Kelly*. London, Phaidon Press, pp32-85.

- Kaplan, E. Ann. (1992) *Motherhood and Representation*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Kelly, Mary. (1983) *Post Partum Document*. London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Kristeva, Julia. (1980) *Motherhood According to Bellini*. In: Roudiez, L. ed. *Desire In Language*. New York, Columbia University Press, pp237-270.
- Kristeva, Julia. (1986) *Stabat Mater*. Translated from the French by Leon S. Roudiez. In: Moi, Tori. ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd, pp160-186.
- Kristeva, Julia. (1986) *Women's Time*. In: Moi, Tori ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd, pp187-213.
- Kristeva, Julia. (1995) *New Maladies of the Soul*. Translated from the French by Ross Guberman. New York, Columbia University Press as quoted in McAfee, Noelle. (2004) *Julia Kristeva*. London, New York, Routledge.
- Kristeva, J. (2005) *Motherhood Today*. Available from: <http://www.kristeva.fr/motherhood.html> [Accessed 18 August 2010]
- Kristeva, Julia. *The Maternal Body*. M/f. 5/6 pp158-9. In: Betterton, Rosemary. (1996) *Maternal Figures: the maternal nude in the work of Kathe Kollowitz and Paula Modersohn Becker*. In: Pollock, Griselda Ed. *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts*. London and New York, pp159-175.
- Lippard, Lucy. (1983) Preface. In *Post Partum Document*. London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, ppix-xiv.
- Liu, Jui-Ch'i. (2004) Francesca Woodman's Self Images: Transforming Bodies in the Space of Femininity. *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol 25. No.1, Spring/ Summer, 26-31. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3566495> (Accessed 2 December 2010).
- McAfee, Noelle. (2004) *Julia Kristeva*. London, New York, Routledge.
- McDermott, Alice. (1995) *Books and Babies*. In: Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane & Ebersole, Lucinda eds. *Women, Creativity, and the Arts*. New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, pp196-198.
- Meskimmon, Marsha. (2003) *Women Making Art*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Mulvey, Laura. (1976) Post Partum Document Review. In *Spare Rib*, 40. In: Kelly, Mary. (1983) *Post Partum Document*. London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp201-202.

Nin, Anais. (1995) *Women Reconstructing the world*. In: Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane & Ebersole, Lucinda eds. *Women, Creativity, and the Arts*. New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, pp151-157.

32

Oliver, Kelly. (1998) *Kristeva and Feminism*. Available from:
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/Kristeva.html> [Accessed 1 September 2010]

Pollock, Griselda. (1980) *Mary Cassatt*. London, Phaidon Press.

Pollock, Griselda. (1995) Preface. In: Ettinger, Bracha Lichtenberg. *The Matrixial Gaze*. Feminist Arts and Histories Network, Department of Fine Art, The University of Leeds.

Robinson, Hilary. (1990) *Mothers*. In: Kingston, A ed. *Mothers : Exhibition catalogue*. Ikon Gallery, pp7-10.

Snyder-Ott, Joelynn (1995) *The Female Experience and Artistic Creativity*. In: Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane & Ebersole, Lucinda eds. *Women, Creativity, and the Arts*. New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, pp70-74.

33

