SECTION 1 - THE IRONIC CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY

Part 1 - Mary Kelly

Plate 1

'Menace' INTERIM (1986) (p 14), The Fruit Market Gallery, Kettle's Yard, Edinburgh
the music is loud, too loud, to listen. sound, smells and smoke, pooling over me, through me, feeling gray, distant, feels good.

i want to dance, small at first, so long as a partner, we spark each other with the power of the sound and start to move in what i think is perfect unison, except that from a certain position i can see myself in the classroom mirror.

the image made, i stop moving dancing. but still, a story, doesn't go out of my head, won't fade, no, perhaps not, perhaps could, be heard in my face, the face, the face, i think, should, no need to, but when i sense, no, the more, the more insensible than that, the expression is wrong, too animated, too less, sound, sound, sound... at my age, keep the mouth closed and look normal, it can complicate, get the sound right, because of moving, space, room, and so much easily, supplies of more fluid.

then, no, the face, definitely the face, hardly perceivable but not quite the same, something to do with the feeling of space around the window. both hands, to get a dress and almost as opening me a pint, i see, see it. everyone i know went back to identical days ago, tall, everyone knew as thousands of miles away and everyone knew. to think of an expression.

i feel like a chambermaid among these, any other chambermaid, too.

i spot a post-graduate, grey enough at the temple, grey enough, i think him, i see him.

the story, that i proceed to dominate on about the defoliation of the economic movement, saying, you remember the first meeting at Oxford, didn't you? no, he says, history.

i am anxious, don't speak, just listen. how can he be so much? who do i look like that, thirty, forty, at the very least, but looking exactly as he remembers me. besides, he with someone who looks like less than twenty, I tell them. it comes, the hands no longer, don't.

Fiddler, moment, i remember, i first came, with the first, with the first, so long ago, with the Old Town, a grade of the table that made young faces the fourth, and you, i think. "Have you got it? have you got it?" yes, he replies and i see it, in my hand about, put it down, and immediately long into the beautiful music. then, i ask him what he would like as an offering of thanks, but he says he can't think of anything, because the theme is all to do with and she is already attending with her hand in his. at this point, of course, i want to learn them well and, and, and from their sight, there. but waited, i just answer myself and go to look for Ruth.
Fig. 2

EXTASE

Plate 3 'Extase'- INTERIM (1986) (p 136), The Fruit Market Gallery, Kettle's Yard, Edinburgh
Plate 4  Installation view of a section of Corpus from Mary Kelly's 
exhibition Interim (McNeil Gallery, Philadelphia)  
Summerbell, D. (1990), Mary Kelly. INTERIM, The New  
Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (p. 9)
In this section of my research paper I will be examining aspects of Emily Apter's article 'Fetishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's Interim', specifically her analysis of the section 'Corpus'. The feminist concerns Apter highlights are of particular significance to my own work 'Compulsive Beauty' and relate to Janine Antoni's installation 'Gnaw' and will therefore be included as points of reference in the analysis of 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty'.

Apter opens the article with a question posed by Mary Kelly 'How is a radical, critical and pleasurable positioning of the woman as spectator to be accomplished?' A question that she reminds us is echoed in Griselda Pollock's book Vision and Difference, in which Pollock looks for a reconfiguring of the gaze by disrupting the binary positions associated with female spectatorship: 'male subject, female object, masculine observer, feminine representation, active, sadistic look versus passive masochistic stare'. (Apter, 1991 p.97).

Apter cites Pollock's reading of Mary Cassatt's 'Women Bathing' of 1891 to point out a particular strategy of disrupting the male gaze.

The maid's simple washing stand allows a space in which women outside the bourgeoisie can be represented both intimately and as working women without forcing them into the sexualised category of the fallen woman. The body of woman can be pictured as classed but not subject to sexual commodification Pollock (1988, cited Apter 1991 p. 97).

Apter points out that Pollock's sympathetic reading of Cassat is based on the theory 'that the body of a woman that has been subject to sexual commodification is a body necessarily mediated by a male gaze' (Apter, 1991 p. 97). Apter states that this also implies that 'the fetishised, feminine Imago, [by] conforming to a commercialised ideal of what seduces the eye, is thus barred to the female spectator which implies that in this picture, there
are no female fetishists' (Apter, 1991 p. 97). Apter asserts that feminist theorists have been suspicious of the seductive power of the image, because historically, it has only attracted and maintained the visual pleasuring and scopophillic looking of the male viewer. A look that Apter asserts:

fetishises the female body through cutting, decortication and hyper focalisation (all in an effort to thwart castration anxiety by placing in view a displaceable prosthesis intended to stand in for the missing female phallus)\(^8\) [and] inevitably impersonalises its object, rendering subjectivity expendable (Apter, pp. 1991, 97-98)\(^9\).

Apter points out that psychoanalytic feminism has recently employed a strategy of disruption that seeks to alter the stereotyped gender bias in the perversions themselves. She goes on to point out that fetishism and its declaration of phallic potency, has in a way been altered from within, 'but the politics of gendered looking, scopic seduction, and commodity fetishism remain far from being resolved' (Apter, 1991, p. 98)\(^10\). These issues form the foundation of Apter's analysis of Mary Kelly's deconstruction of femininity within 'Interim'.

Mary Kelly, as artist and critic has challenged the male fetishistic gaze by attempting to place a 'female fetishism where none existed in classical psychoanalysis' (Apter, 1991, p. 98)\(^11\). Her installation 'Post Partum Document' (1976), posed questions about fetishism and its relation to art practice and feminist theory. By offering a female fetishism in the form of a compulsive gathering of intimate artefacts, Kelly documented her actions and interactions (as mother), with her son as his meaning was inscribed into language.

Kelly's later installation 'Interim' (1985-90) tackles fetishism once again, as well as woman as consumer, commodity fetishism and the problematics associated with the representation of feminine seduction.
The section entitled 'Corpus', is made up of a series of photographs of Kelly's clothing - a leather jacket, a pair of boots, a shirt and a night gown and a leather bag, each article is shown in three different positions. The photographs are titled Menacé, Appel, Supplication, Erotisme and Extase, and have red markings in the form of crosses, crosshatching, outline, arrows, applied to the articles of clothing within the photos (please refer to Plates 1 - 4).  

Apter describes Kelly's Corpus as 'riveting icons of femininity without face, female bodies without breath, [which] had the effect of bringing the allegorical representation of feminine seduction to crisis' (Apter, 1991, p. 100) and claims that 'by absenting the life like female subject from the subject of femininity, Kelly made all the more visible the reifying regime of scopic masculinity' (Apter, 1991, p. 100). Apter asserts the images do this by echoing the positions in which the 'feminine' has been identified and positioned historically in western painting, that is, 'through sartorial objectification, non-heroic or non-epic historical attitude, period costume, ornamental or domestic detailism' (Apter, 1991, p. 100). By 'refusing the female figure' and deploying the various crosses, arrows, outlines and ticks over the images of the clothes Kelly draws the spectator into a puzzle of who or what is being represented. In other words, questions are posed by the spectator in response to the images - is it femininity that is being analysed, and by what method of interpretation or analysis? Is it 'woman' being scrutinised, but why isn't she present? Is it the representations themselves that are being scrutinised and judged and if so, by what authority and method?

The spectator recognises the subjects of the objectification, but is forced to question what it is they represent. As Apter points out, the objects are fixed and positioned 'like entomological specimen[s] [but suggests that this] in no way forfeits [their] plaintive call to the eye' (Apter, 1991, p. 100). The
spectator recognises the fetishistic devices that have captured these objects; the lighting, positioning, highlighting of textures, as devices that have historically been used to pleasure the male viewer. That 'scopophillic look that fetishises the female body ... in an effort to thwart castration' (Apter, 1991, p. 97) is now exposed as a method of scrutiny, impersonalising its object, thereby creating specimens of femininity.

The clothing is fixed into folded, exposing and bound positions and are held by a viewing eye (the camera's and the spectators), as well as holding the spectator's attention through what Apter describes as a 'chilling, masochistic, beauty' (Apter, 1991, p. 100).

One could say that the power of these obviously manipulated constructions is that they force the viewer to analyse their own complicity in the fetishistic objectification of woman, and force the viewer to ask the question, for what purpose?

Apter notes Laura Muley's description of Corpus as 'unashamedly beautiful and satisfying to the spectator' - a comment Apter says raises theoretical issues relating to what she calls 'feminist anti fetishism'[and describes as] a kind of puritanism of the eye,' [which is placed in opposition to]...visual seduction'. Wanting to move the debate away from the 'rehearsed' idea that visual seduction is complicit with male fetishism, Apter positions the problem in relation to 'feminist politics and the aesthetics of femininity', (Apter, 1991, p. 101) and argues for:

a recuperation of the seductive image (often flush with the image of female seduction) that escapes the brutalities of a commodifying fetishism, that successfully recirculates feminine glamour and desirability for the female viewer, and that 'plays up' to the scopophillic hunger of the gaze without necessarily compromising female subjectivity (Apter, 1991, pp. 101-102).
Apter asserts that Corpus catalyses the problem by posing the question to the viewer 'can one seduce through an abstracted visual femininity while derealizing the female body in art?' (Apter, 1991, p. 102)\(^22\). A countering point of view is offered when Apter cites Mira Schor's review of the exhibition, in which she criticises what she calls the contradictions inherent in Interim. The contradiction Schor asserts, is that Interim is an exhibition about women in middle age, but Kelly 'refuses to present the viewer with a seductive self image ... yet at the same time sustains [an] elegance of manufacture in the objects themselves'.\(^23\) Apter responds, by asserting that these contradictions play a strategic role, in that Kelly wants to avoid another stereotypical construction of feminine 'self image'.

The seduction of image is left intact, but the seductiveness of feminine "self-image" (ironized through frozen poses and memorialised clothing) is subversively put into question. Placing "self" and "image" out of sync while keeping femininity and scopophilia in step seems to be one of the more interesting ways in which Kelly destabilises a social gaze conditioned by codifications of gender, race, class and age (Apter, 1991, p. 102)\(^24\).

One could say that by exposing the social positioning of the middle aged women, Kelly attempts to speak for a range of female experiences which thereby allows a variety of identifications with and for those experiences. The position women are allotted is threatened at middle age because they no longer conform to a patriarchal feminine beauty ideal. If Kelly had displayed the body of the middle aged woman in the exhibition the political issues attached to this threatened position would be lost.

The idea that these articles of clothing have been collected and represent a subject prompts a deeper level of readings and identifications. The objects that Mary Kelly offers for view could be read as projections of herself, her values, her unconscious desires. \(^25\) They allow and encourage the viewer to project their own signifiers into the contexts Kelly has proposed. By
exposing the mechanics of the cultural positioning, Kelly creates an opportunity for the viewer to identify themselves within the system.

Apter, (1991) poses the question, 'How do women as artists and spectators provide a critique of the historic gender bias of psychoanalytic theory without resorting to the essentialising frames of femininity and women's art?' (p. 102) Apter asserts that Kelly's revision of Lacanian theory within Interim, provides the spectator with that critical position. By using 'the algorithms, anamorphoses, and elliptical rhetorical conceits by which Lacan himself pictured the "cause of desire" or object small a' (Apter, 1991, p. 102), Kelly paradoxically presents the spectator with the cause of desire, as a tangible, material characteristic of the body, and thereby exposes the patriarchal positioning and scrutinization of women through psychoanalytic theory.

Apter asserts that Kelly positions these markings and signifiers (alluding to Lacan's complicated calculations ) over the images that she employs to represent femininity, to expose the scrutinising gaze of patriarchy, under the guise of psychoanalytic authority.

One could assert that even a spectator who isn't aware of Lacanian theory would still be able to see that the 'image' of woman is being systematically scrutinised, labelled and marked by a system of authority. A system of authority that utilises the binary orderings that represents woman as body and man as logic; the male authority imposed onto femininity.

Kelly uses the titles Menacé, Appel, Supplication, Erotisme and Extase as labels that identify an historical patriarchal position of authority. Apter asserts that these titles have their lexical origins in Greek, originally referring to 'gesticulations of female performers' (Apter, 1991, p. 104). Apter points out that Kelly uses these titles as figures of speech to ironically amplify the patriarchal labelling of the 'hysterical talking Corpus' (Apter,
1991, p. 104) thereby subverting the language, articulations/body gestures through the psychoanalytic positioning of the hysteric.

By representing 'object small a' on the clothing of a woman instead of the image of a woman's body, Apter suggests that Kelly presents the viewer with the commodified visual signs of desire. These signs are certainly under scrutiny by psychoanalysis and therefore patriarchy, but they seem to be reclaimed by woman as her objects of desire. This effect is produced by the positioning of a text next to each of the images, that links the female subject within the texts to the images themselves. Apter asserts that:

[Corpus] rigorously records and dissects the genuflecting of feminine subject positions to the invisible force fields of the male gaze, but the scenarios are injected with a politicising irony that undercuts implicit phallocentricism. And in the hushed exchange of confidences from woman to woman, desire is diversified; feminine speech acts are eroticised, encouraged to be polymorphously perverse, sprung loose from heterosexualist doxa. (Apter, p. 103).

Apter points out that 'orality and visuality' converge through Kelly's use of language as visual image both through her use of hand written script and the effect of the spectator reading and visualising the highlighted signifiers.

One could suggest that the words that have been written and spoken indicate the subject's desire and that the spectator re-experiences the female subject's desire through their own signifiers which are manifested when the stories are read. (Refer to plates 1-4)

Apter describes the clothing in Corpus as 'sartorial ghosts' and as metonyms for the ageing woman experiencing terror at the tell tale wrinkles, a loss of youth indicated in the creases and wear and tear on the articles of clothing that stand in for her. One could also say the clothing in 'Corpus' expresses women's loss of place in a society in which they are often acknowledged in terms of their degree of, lack of, or loss of sexual attraction. It is therefore
easy to understand Apter's claim that the 'wrinkles are a shorthand for the
death of youth and a prediction of the grand death to come', which is
designated by the letter X within the images (Apter, 1991, p. 107)\textsuperscript{32}.

Does this mean the death of the subject, the death of her desire or the death
of her desirability? The images of clothing that have the letter "X" marked
on them are tied up implying a masochistic position, which one could say
suggests either a redetermination of the masochistic position, \textsuperscript{33} or that
women are not bound to that position.

'By replacing the figuration of the female body with a scopic target which
attracts'\textsuperscript{34} (Apter, 1991, p. 107)\textsuperscript{35} Kelly directs the eye to particular points.
The image and artist thereby visually seduce the viewer to representations
of femininity without fetishisation of the female body taking place. The
female subject isn't dehumanised through fear of castration. One could say
that the seducer is in control and the spectator is complicit with the
captivation by the image.

\textsuperscript{2}Interim was shown at the New Museum of New York, 1990. It is made up of four major
sections: Corpus, Pecunia, Historia, Potestas. Within this section of the paper, only Corpus
will be referred to which consists of photographs of five articles of clothing laminated onto
perspex, each article is presented in three different poses and is accompanied by a framed
handwritten text. Please refer to Plates 1 - 4.
\textsuperscript{3}Pollock, G. 1988 \textit{Vision and Difference}, In chapter 3 - Modernity and the Spaces of
Femininity, Pollock examines the male gaze and the problems associated with the
positioning of the gaze as masculine in relation to female artists and subjects related to
femininity.
\textsuperscript{5}ibid p. 97
\textsuperscript{6}ibid p. 97
\textsuperscript{7}ibid p. 97
\textsuperscript{8}Freud's (1927) Fetishism, in Richard, A. (Ed.) (1977) \textit{Freud on Sexuality} (pp352-357).
London: Penguin Books
\textsuperscript{10}ibid p. 98
\textsuperscript{11}ibid p. 98

\textit{Continued next page:}

14 ibid p. 100
15 ibid p. 100
16 ibid p. 100
17 ibid p. 97
18 ibid p. 100
21 ibid p. 101-102
22 ibid p. 102
27 According to Lacanian theory ‘object small a’ is the object that always escapes the subject. It isn’t actually an object, but revolves around the relationship of an ‘edge’ or a cut; a rim. The experience of going from and coming together by the lips, the enclosure formed by the teeth, the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids. ‘Objets a’ partially represent the function which produces them, and are not parts of a total unified object. The ‘objet a’ then represents the object which is ungraspable in the mirror, the ‘remainder’, the lacking or lost object. The unified body image, which can be grasped in the mirror, is only the “clothing” or the “phantom” (semblance in French) of the lost object.’
30 ibid p. 104
31 In the folds of leather bags, the creases and pressure markings of age on the shoes, blouse and leather jacket
33 ibid p. 107
34 Gilbert, H. (Ed) (1993) ‘*The Sexual Imagination*’ documents masochism as ‘deriving sexual pleasure from one’s own humiliation or pain’ and cites a Freudian account of masochism that ‘has the self as its object and works through fantasy; a fantasy which can be seen as introducing death as the ultimate sexual event, a death that is always bound to occur but is always kept at a distance, anticipated. The essential feature of the scenario is suspense, waiting, deferred fulfillment of desire...Passivity is not the essential attribute of the masochist, but a strategy adopted...to lure the agent into fulfilling her or his place in the masochist’s scenario’ (p. 165).
35 the deployment of red ticks, red arrows and red grids.
Plate 5 'Lard Gnaw' and 'Chocolate Gnaw' Antoni, J. 'GNAW' published in Binocular 1994, McDonald, E. (pp. 22-23)
Plate 6

**Lipslick Display** - Sandra Gering Gallery, New York Antoni, J. 'GNAW' published in *Binocular* 1994, McDonald, E. (pp. 22-23)
In this section of the research paper Janine Antoni's installation 'Gnaw', the feminist concerns contextualised in 'Gnaw' will be analysed. Antoni's deconstruction of notions of femininity through the appropriation of the fetish and the abject will be examined.

Janine Antoni's installation 'Gnaw' (1992) featured the remains of two 600 pound cubes, one was made of chocolate, the other was made of lard, both were exhibited on marble pedestals. The cubes had been gnawed by the artist, chewed and spat up. The spat up chocolate and lard were then redesigned; the chocolate was 'vacuum moulded into heart shaped candy trays, while the lard was used as a base for 300 sticks of red lipstick ... ejected and recast [the chocolate and lard were transformed into] traditional symbols of femininity [and] displayed in a glittering mirrored showcase' to look like displays in the window of an exclusive boutique (see plates 5 - 6). This display was positioned at the entrance of the main exhibition space which displayed the cubes.

Antoni, like Kelly, presents us with aspects of the social construction of femininity without using the iconic representation of the female body. Instead, Antoni uses symbols that have traditionally been assigned to femininity, symbols that are used within the patriarchal visual economy to present 'woman' as a fetishised commodity.

One could say that the showcase of idealised femininity juxtaposed against the two cubes of lard and chocolate paradoxically offer feminine desire and femininity itself in the form of patriarchally assigned commodities. Antoni's use of chocolate and lard effectively display the dynamics of the construction of femininity in opposition to the construction of feminine desire.
As Gammen and Makinen (1994, p. 10) explain:

Women are being urged to consume more and more, as specific targets of capitalist consumerism, consumer fetishism has invested food with messages of desirability, pleasure, wealth and harmony. Yet as objects of consumer fetishism in their own right, bodies of women are expected to be impossibly thin.

The chocolate and lard monoliths set on marble plinths seem to symbolise the authority and rationality, the clean and controlled of patriarchal culture and indicate the place of prominence food plays in cultural rituals. But the significance of chocolate and lard doesn't relate to hunger and need, but to the desire for oral gratification, which as Freud points out, can be connected with sexual desire and re-experiencing the original object of desire.

By juxtaposing the enormous quantities of chocolate with lard (fat), Antoni alludes to the ways food and weight control are presented to women and notions of desire and restraint are aligned with the idealisation of feminine beauty. Gammen and Makinen (1994, p. 11) argue that thin female representation in western culture:

have informed ideologies about femininity and the language that structures desire. Food has become associated with pleasure, danger and the erotic by women who oscillate between engagement with and resistance to the thin ideal.

Rosalind Coward (1984) has pointed out how recipes and larger than life eroticised images of food are positioned alongside information on new diets in women's slimming magazines. Images of food are presented as both alluring and dangerous, pleasures that had better not be indulged. Coward suggests that 'this pleasure in looking at the supposedly forbidden is reminiscent of another form of guilty-but-indulgent looking, that of sexual pornography' (Coward 1984, p. 101). It has its differences though, as Coward points out, that 'if sexual pornography is a display of images which
confirms men's sense of themselves as having power over women, food pornography is a regime of pleasurable images which has the opposite effect on its viewers-women' (Coward, 1984, p. 103)\textsuperscript{7}. Coward goes on to point out that their pleasure in looking at seductive images of food 'is linked to servitude and therefore confirms the subordinate position of women ... [and that] because of pressures to diet, women have been made to feel guilty about enjoying food' (Coward, 1984, p. 103)\textsuperscript{8}.

'In a culture that constructs female fat as 'sin', but equates orgasm with eating great quantities of Belgian chocolate' (Gamman and Mäkinen, 1994, p. 11) Antoni's use of chocolate and lard, both very high in calories, carry 'messages of being both alluring and forbidden to women.'\textsuperscript{9}

Antoni's use of the combination of chocolate and lard and Minimalist art forms could be said to indicate the control of phallocentrism over the culturally formed psyche of women. It also suggests that if woman is to meet the criteria of idealised feminine beauty set by patriarchy, her desire must be restrained. By gnawing at the lard and chocolate cubes, Antoni locates

Most western women['s] experience of food as a site of struggle. They have easy access to food to accommodate the means of survival, as well as pleasure from eating. But they also know from cultural messages about what it means to be a woman, that they must exercise restraint around food.

(Gamman & Mäkinen, 1994, p. 148)\textsuperscript{10}

One could say that by 'gnawing', 'chewing' and 'spitting up' the cubes, Antoni (as woman and artist) enacts the 'struggle' in an attempt to satisfy her desire, gain some semblance of empowerment and affect a disruption of phallocentric control, thereby also representing femininity and feminine desire as a site of feminist struggle.

Antoni herself describes the action of biting as both an 'intimate and
destructive process\textsuperscript{11}. Robin Cembalest\textsuperscript{12} (1993) echoes this point, suggesting that while 'her "hidden performances" parody women's ambivalence toward their bodies - and tortures they obsessively suffer for beauty - they also consciously mimic methods of artmaking'. The difference is that Antoni uses her body as the tool.

Antoni cites minimalism as introducing fabrication into the art process and influencing her as an artist\textsuperscript{13} - 'My cubes are poured, chewed, spat out, melted down and recast by me\textsuperscript{14}. Antoni appropriates the 'male art' and politicises it by gnawing and chewing it, turning it into a commodity of her desire and subverting its original intention.

Simon Taylor (1992)\textsuperscript{15} asserts that Antoni's de-structuring process in:

Chocolate Gnaw and Lard Gnaw was an attack upon the intransigent geometry and rationality of the cube ... [he explains that] unlike the Minimalists, whose "primary structures" [were] meant by their literalness to invoke a transcendent universal experience, Antoni uses the artificiality of the cube to redirect attention to the human body and its inchoate biological imperatives.

Taylor suggests these rudimentary oral drives are made visible by the 'rows of teeth marks [that] could be seen on the surface of the chocolate cube, while chin, nose and mouth impressions were visible in a much softer lard\textsuperscript{16}, and are then emphasised by the title. A title that Antoni also uses to describe her artistic process of gnawing, which Taylor suggests conjures up the animalistic associations Georges Bataille has called 'the violent meanings of the mouth' (its devouring function). Taylor points out that the work can be read on many levels including infantile regression, oral fixation, fetishism, repetition compulsion and that the teeth marks in the chocolate evoke fears of the vagina dentate.

The 'gnawing' and the meanings associated with this descriptive word offer the feminine subject an empowering position by disrupting the patriarchal
laws that the cubes could be seen to represent.

But this sculptural installation and the invisible performance in which the gnawing, chewing, spitting up and remoulding took place also acts out the compulsive behaviours of the bulimic. By diverting their rage into compulsive eating and purging, the bulimic tries at once to desperately fill in their 'lack' and desires with vast quantities of food and purge in a desperate attempt to maintain the illusion of social perfection and mastery over the body.

Antoni's hidden performance parallels the secrecy in which the bulimic hides her shame and disavows her subjection from a society that labels Bulimia as neurosis, and the product of 'an exaggerated physical vanity'.

Antoni’s installation 'Gnaw' gives meaning to the combination of shame; through the hidden gnawing and disavowal; through the chewing and spitting up. The social labelling of the disorder as 'frivolous' and 'vain', is signified through the redesigning of the spat up chocolate and lard into lipsticks and heart shape 'lacking' candy moulds. These symbols are so sweet that they parody the assigned phallocentric positions given to women with 'love and kisses'.

One could also say that Antoni's hidden cyclic 'ritual' of chewing and spitting, chewing and spitting performs the function of dispelling lack in much the same way Freud's notion of the game fort/da/fort/da is played by the child to dispel the anguish of lack (absence of the mother) through the sustained cycles of making the toy disappear and reappear.

In a way Antoni plays the same game with the male gaze. Using the aesthetics of femininity to scopically ensnare the viewer, Antoni plays up to the masculine, fetishistic gaze with lipsticks and 'lacking' chocolate heart shaped candy holders, offering the fetishised objects 'to be seen'. The lure
cast, Antoni then takes the metaphor for the female body out of the equation altogether, leaving only traces of her body and mouth in the gnawing marks imposed on the chocolate and lard cubes, left as reminders of her active desire. Antoni disrupts the functioning of the male gaze by disrupting the binary positions of activity/passivity, looking/being seen, subject/object, that are used to construct the gaze. The mastering position of the gaze is disrupted and the viewer, now the equal of the subject position portrayed in the installation is also forced to question the subjection of the patriarchal signifiers.

The assumption that visual seduction implies complicity with the male fetishistic gaze suggests that women cannot be instrumental in creating and re-defining their own identity, that they can only consume ideas and positions allotted to them. By hyperbolising the objects that have been historically used to cast women as objects of the gaze, Antoni still plays up to the gaze, but with an over determined, hyper-femininity and states a new active position that re-creates a 'radical, critical and pleasurable position' for the female spectator. One could also say that through her gnawing, chewing and spitting up of the 'rational' and 'controlled' cubed, Antoni in effect performs a feminist abjection of patriarchal 'law' and 'order'.

Elizabeth Grosz (1989)\textsuperscript{20} explains Kristeva's (1982)\textsuperscript{21} theory of the abjection as 'the subject's reaction to the failure of the subject/object opposition to express adequately the subject's corporeality and its tenuous bodily boundaries' (Grosz, 1989, p. 70)\textsuperscript{22} Grosz goes on to explain that 'the abject is a condition of symbolic subjectivity; and is also its unpredictable, sporadic \textit{accompaniment}.' This relationship is played out by Antoni in her performance. The gnawing demonstrating the subject's desire for the object, the spitting up; gives meaning to the failure of the abject to be unified with the composition of the subject.
Antoni's performance brings to our attention the intolerance of the abject to the Symbolic and the control the Symbolic tries to effect over the abject through rituals 'that mark ... the boundary between the sacred and profane'. (Grosz, 1989, p. 77)\(^2\). The sacred; the authority of the Symbolic, one could say is represented by the cubes, the lipsticks and the heart shaped candy holders. The profane; the uncontrolled, represented by the abject chocolate and lard, and possibly the lard itself because it could be read as excess of waste product, and the implication of the uncontrolled body as waste.

Grosz asserts:

Abjection is what the symbolic must reject, cover over or contain. The abject is what beckons the subject ever closer to the edge. It insists on the subject's necessary relation to death, corporeality, animality and materiality - those relations which consciousness and reason find intolerable (Grosz, 1989, p. 73)\(^3\).

Antoni controls the abject, bringing it back into the realm of the Symbolic by reconstituting the spat up chocolate and lard back into clean, sanitised, socially acceptable signifiers of femininity. In this sense she redesigns 'femininity', rescuing it from the abyss of abjection, but it is redesigned, hyperbolised, over-determined into a hyper feminine that affords femininity with a strong, new power.

It is through this process that Antoni 'performs gender'. By examining and amplifying the female experience, she exposes the performance and the rituals as cultural constructions.

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Wishart.

7 ibid (p. 103)
8 ibid (p. 103)
10 ibid (p. 148)
12 ibid.
14 ibid
16 ibid.
17 'lack' refers to the Lacanian theory of 'lack of being', which the subject experiences through the recognition of an 'other'; to 'desire' the other and to be desiring of another's desire. It is also a term assigned to women because she lacks a penis.
18 Gammen, L. and Makinen, M. (1994) Female Fetishism. (pp. 123-144). London: Lawrence and Wishart. Gammen and Makinen argue that Bulimia could be claimed as a female fetishism instead of a neurosis, thereby challenging the definitions of perversity and binary gender constructions. They argue that the perverse strategy of bulimia, the 'doing' and 'undoing' (bingeing and purging) are comparable with descriptions of sexual fetishism.
23 ibid (p. 77)
24 ibid (p. 73)
SECTION 1 - THE IRONIC CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY (continued)

Part 3 - Kendal Murray

Plate 7  'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' V
Plate 8 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' VI
Plate 9  'Dangerous Beauty'
Throughout this section of the research paper I will be conducting a psychoanalytic reading of the artwork entitled 'Compulsive Beauty'. The exhibition will consist of a series of charcoal drawings which will be exhibited under the title 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' and a series of handbag sculptures which are individually titled. I will be contextualising the feminist concerns of 'Compulsive Beauty' with both Emily Apter's reading of Mary Kelly's 'Corpus' and my analysis of Janine Antoni's installation 'Gnaw'.

The drawings within the series 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' have a layering of meanings and possible readings, which revolve around a disruption of 'femininity' as it is constructed and inscribed within patriarchy.

The drawings are based on the theory that 'desire' is an 'activity' and its object polymorphous. Elizabeth Grosz (1989)¹ explains Lacan's theory of desire as:

a fundamental lack in being, an incompleteness or absence within the subject which the subject experiences as a disquieting loss and which prompts it into the activity of seeking an appropriate object to fill the lack and thus satisfy itself (p. xv - xvi).

Grosz goes on to explain that desire seeks an 'object' with which both to satisfy it, and to keep it as desiring, (by not completely satisfying desire). The object of human desire is the desire of the 'other' in that 'desire always desires another(s) desire, [and] seeks to be desired by another' (Grosz, 1989, p. xvi)². At first the subject's desire is unknown and so he (the child) looks for it in the Other (the mother). Her desire becomes his desire and his desire becomes the Other's desire. The subject also desires the mother.

Grosz (1989)³ asserts that 'for Lacan desire is always marked by the desire of the Other' (p. xvi). This other refers to desire as it is constructed through
entry into the Symbolic⁴, via the Oedipal complex which signifies the authority Lacan calls the 'Name-of-the-Father'.

The authority under the Name-of-the-Father, intervenes and thereafter mediates the narcissistic relationship the child has with the m(other); so the desire for the Other in the symbolic is thereafter manifested as a substitution of objects of desire (object small a), for the original object of desire - the mother. Lacan's notion of the object small a, the object of the oral, anal, genital drives, is organised through erotogenic zones. Grosz explains that according to Lacan:

Sexual zones are structured as a rim, a space between two surfaces that can be seen as boundaries between the body's inside and outside [i.e. the lips, the enclosure of the teeth, the vagina, the rim of the anus, the slit of the eyelids, the rim on the tip of the penis.] It is a boundary that must be traversed by the incorporated object, which is neither entirely within nor without the rim (p. 72)⁵.

Grosz explains that the object small a is a part of the subject that the subject thinks they can separate from themselves, that it is foreign and external to them, but it is actually part of the 'activity of desire' in which the erotogenic rim seeks object small a to fill the lack, the small a 'is not a thing or an object but a movement, an activity, the taking in or introjection of the object, its absorption into the subject' (Grosz, 1989, p. 73)⁶. The activity and absorption of the object gives the subject satisfaction and ultimately the object is expelled.

According to Grosz (1989) the abject is understood through Lacan's notion of the object small a, and explains that 'abjection occurs when the object does not fill the rim; a gap [therefore] emerges, a hole into which the subject, through lack of an anchor in the object is propelled' (p. 73)⁷.
Julia Kristeva, according to Grosz (1989) asserts that the abject can't easily be classified, and is necessarily ambiguous;

undecidably inside and outside ..., dead and alive ..., autonomous and engulfing .... It disturbs identity, system and order, respecting no definite positions, rules boundaries or limits. It is the body's acknowledgment that its boundaries and limits are the effect of desire not nature. It demonstrates the precariousness of the subject's group of its own identity. The subject may slide back into the chaos from which it is formed (p. 74)8.

It is from this understanding of the necessarily ambiguous character of abjection, that one could say the series 'Strong Attraction, Subtle Repulsions', represent a notion of abjection (refer to plates 7 and 8). They can be described as both light and dark, inside and outside at the same time. The markings are energetic, anxious, and fading, their ambiguity lies in the way the viewer can only guess whether it is the energy of the white space that is trying to conceal and cover the marks or whether it is the marks themselves that are breaking into the silence and order of the white space. One could say that the drawings testify to 'the abject [as] a condition of symbolic subjectivity ... its unpredictable, sporadic accompaniment' (Grosz, 1989, p. 72)9.

It could be said that the soft lines, tones and smudges of energy are of a time and space that is also ambiguous and unpredictable, consequently it seems impossible to position the energies as existing in the present, they seem to have been taken by surprise in a state of flux, from another time.

In most of the drawings the energy of the black markings alludes to a central axis which could be thought of as a rim. A rim that the object seeks to traverse. But the energy has spilled from the central axis and the object small a is lost in the seductive black shadows. Ambiguity again - one is encouraged to question whether the object was absorbed, misrecognised or
abject, but an answer won’t be forthcoming, thereby disrupting the labelling process.

Even at times of its greatest cohesion, the subject teeters on the brink of a yawning hole which threatens to draw it into it. This abyss marks the place of the genesis and obliteration of the subject, for it is the space inhabited by the death drive (Grosz, 1989, p. 73).10

The controlled and clean body of the Symbolic is produced by the ‘enmeshing of sexual drives and bodily functions in signification’, (Grosz 1989, p 71) and as Grosz points out subjectivity and sexual difference are regulated by the incest taboo and the Oedipus complex within a patriarchal society. The Oedipal complex (according to Freud, Lacan and Kristeva) introduces 'the child to the concept of sexual difference [and] ... the reduction of sexual difference to the opposition between phallic and castrated'11.

The effect of this opposition is to create a binary (Grosz 1989, p. 76)12 labelling system that assigns masculinity and femininity specific meanings. Therefore, according to this system, masculinity is constructed as active and having the penis, femininity is allocated a passive and 'lacking' position.

One could say that abjection is the state of opposition where both binary positions come into play, threatening the subject with chaos and a loss of control over identity. It signifies the threat of the Symbolic collapsing into the Real.13

A feminist appropriation of the theory of abjection can therefore be used to not only affect a disruption of Symbolic logic and authority but disrupt the concept of the feminine self as constructed within patriarchy.

Returning to 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' (Murray), the intense presence of energy represented in the movement of lines, the formation and dissolution of shapes, and the displacement of space could be seen to
indicate not only a desire to seek satisfaction but a desire to disrupt by abjection. This suggests the necessarily close relationship abjection has to desire.

The anxiety represented in both the eruption of the marks and the character of the marks themselves signify the emotion attached to the action of abjection. The smudges on the 'clean' surface indicating the continual threat of the abject breaking through.

The abject attests to the impossibility of clear borders, lines of demarcation or the divisions between the proper and the improper, the clean and the unclean, order and disorder as required by the symbolic. Symbolic relations separate the subject from the abyss that haunts and terrifies it (Grosz, 1989 p. 73)\textsuperscript{14}.

The disruption of the patriarchal Symbolic, bought about by a disruption of binary orderings, offers a re-articulation of feminine energy as active which therefore offers a possible re-reading of marks, spaces, dynamic movement and stasis. Femininity as 'active' and disruptive, as abject, is represented in the smudges, a range of energised markings and even the irregular edges of the paper. With femininity now aligned with activity, the masses of black energetic lines, fraught with anxiety, change 'lack' into seduction, the viewer seduced by the alluring dark spaces. The 'clean' light spaces therefore become the location of the Other, which in this case is the paternal Symbolic.

Through the patriarchal construction of the 'unified' and 'clean' body and its intolerance and subsequent excision of the rest, woman is cast as abject because she shows signs of sexual difference in that she bleeds. Her bleeding is seen as blemishing the 'clean' and is therefore disavowed, as are the female sexual organs through the phallocentric 'male' perversion of fetishism. This brings me to another layer of possible readings - the markings could also be read as fetishised pubic hair. Fetishism as defined by
Freud\(^{15}\) has been constructed by phallocentrism as a 'defence' against the horror of seeing the 'castrated' female genitals, just as the 'clean and controlled' body has been constructed as a defence against the horror of the abject.

Michelle Montreley in her article 'Inquiry into Femininity' (1976)\(^{16}\) links the fear of femininity to the non-repressed and unpresentable object, one could say linking patriarchal fear of the feminine body with the fear of the non-repressed, the abject and 'jouissance', which both originate in the Real. Montreley points out that 'femininity, ... that is, femininity as experienced as real and immediate, is the blind spot of the Symbolic process' (p. 263).

Women's genitals are feared because of femininity's link to the Real, the unpressed, uncontrolled presence of death in life. But as Montreley points out, woman is also constructed as 'castrated' which aligns her to the Symbolic. The castration is seen as a masquerade hiding the unpressed.

Montreley (1976) explains that 'this is why man has always called the feminine defences and masquerade evil\(^{17}\) ... [and] woman ... is accused of incarnating [evil] (p. 264) and goes on to point out that

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\text{it is the evil that scandalises whenever woman "plays out" her sex in order to evade the word and the law [of the Symbolic order], ... each time she subverts a law or a word that relies on the predominantly masculine structure of the look. Freud says Evil is experienced as such when anxiety grips the child in front of the unveiled body of his mother. "Did his desire then refer only to this hole of flesh?"}
\]

(Montreley, 1976, p. 264)\(^{18}\)

Fetishism is a constructed disavowal of the 'castrated' mother and sexual difference. It is also then a disavowal of the threat of both castration itself and the unpressed of the Real disguised as lack. Montreley says that Freud claims that the disavowal of castration the pervert constructs, is in a sense, a disavowal that every man shares.
On the one hand he enjoys without saying so, without coming too close - for then he would have to take upon himself a terrible anxiety, or even hate --; he enjoys by proxy the thing he glimpses through his mother. On the other hand, he does not appear to understand that her relation to the thing is sublimated. It is evil which has to be repressed.

(Montreley, 1976, p. 264)\(^{19}\)

 Returning to the analysis of the drawings as a fetishisation of pubic hair and the questions raised by that objectification. One could ask what might a feminist appropriation of fetishism mean, and given that fetishisation usually entails an objectification of the 'feminine' subject, how could a feminist appropriation of the fetishistic treatment of the body be utilised to 'defend' or create an empowering position for women?

When the series of drawings 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' is aligned to a reading of fetishised pubic hair, the male gaze is baited, lured to objectification, but the fetishistic treatment of the 'subject' is used to play up, hyperbolise the lack, thereby disrupting the gaze. This is not a passive acceptance of objectification, this is an exaggerated objectification that actively redefines 'lack', seducing and disrupting the gaze using the guise of objectification. Seducing the viewer through an abstract visual femininity. 'What better site for disruption of the social order than the seeming scene of the origin of women's oppression?' (Gaines, p. 9)\(^{20}\).

The sculptural section of my exhibition 'Compulsive Beauty' consists of a series of handbags that have been fetishistically embellished with pins, safety pins, needles, fine wires and greased and varnished papers (refer to plates 9 - 11).

This feminist appropriation of a 'male' perversion is an attempt to show both the mechanics of the masculinist fetishising gaze, exposing it as a 'construction' and an attempt to disrupt it thereby re-creating positions of subjectivity for the female spectator.
The handbag itself was chosen because it signified woman's presence in her self motivated absence, in the same way the clothes in 'Corpus' and the lipsticks, candy holders and teeth marks indicate women's presence in 'Gnaw'. The handbag could also be used as a sign to represent women's genitals, the rim of the bag can be seen to suggest the rim of the vagina.

Jane Gaines (1990)\textsuperscript{21} points out that 'there is often no distinction made between a woman and her attire ... she is what she wears' (p. 1). The handbag is therefore seen as a completion of identity, adorning woman’s body and defining her as feminine. A pub(l)ic sign for the disavowed genitals. A socially accepted signifier of femininity — what better site for disruption than the objects that are used to keep women in their place.

With this in mind, and the Symbolic construction of woman as 'lack', woman’s fetishisation of her own body constitutes a disavowal of lack by the process of creating herself as object of desire (her own object of desire). This means that for a fleeting moment, woman is both subject of desire and object of desire to an other, which in effect re-creates a jouissance of the female body. It is for that moment before the Symbolic is re-established, woman has created an another autoerotic\textsuperscript{22} situation for herself.

Visually this process is recreated in each of the bags, which seen in the context of a collection, references the subjects activity of self projection onto the object. One could therefore say that woman effectively takes control of herself as commodity, and as confirmed by the action of pinning/the process of fetishisation, becomes the producer of her own identity thereby disrupting another binary positioning and the idea that women only adorn themselves for male pleasure.

The desire of another is alluded to through the use of fetishistic embellishment. The feminine aesthetics are used to scopically ensnare the spectator, playing up to the masculinist gaze, but offering an
overdetermined 'to be looked at' kind of beauty, that amplifies the effect of the 'feminine aesthetics' and challenges the gaze with a hyper-feminine position.

The visual impact of the fetishistic deployment of the pins and needles over the surfaces of silk, beads, metal mesh, velvet and muslin create objects that certainly delight the eye and seduce the viewer, but at the same time reveal the mechanics of the objectifying gaze by disrupting its functioning. This effect takes place through a disruption of binary positions - no longer can the 'feminine' subject be seen to be passively waiting to be seen. The mastering position is disrupted and the spectator is now the equal of the subject position portrayed.

This process has not been used to reposition masculinity as culture and femininity as nature, on the contrary, the construction is elaborated with the excessive use of gold and silver pins; fetishisation is appropriated and recirculated as feminine glamour and desirability, its alluring and often illusory charm highlighting a 'feminine' re-construction of the body. The patriarchal construction of femininity is thereby displaced, then replaced with a counter construction.

It is through the understanding of the bags as excessive/excess that they can also be read as abject. The pins and needles are applied at the 'break[ing point] (between the subject and the corporeal) and [the] merger (of self and other) in an impossible effort to contain a resistant, dangerous merger/rupture within the symbolic psychic identity' (Grosz, 1989, p. 76)\textsuperscript{23} at a time when pleasure and pain are undifferentiated.

The handbag's symbolic function is to hold the 'excess' of woman's identity. Metaphorically they could be seen to represent the construction of woman 'as' accessory/excessory to patriarchy in that her sexual identity is constructed via phallocentricism.
The process of putting things into the handbag and taking things out signifies both the 'activity of desiring' and the process of abjection, which can be read as an empowering action for woman. In deciding what to abject and what to sustain, she is, in effect also choosing what she wants to keep and make part of her identity, or not. This is an action which also defines her subjectivity.

It is through these methods of examining and hyperbolising the 'feminine' object (the handbag), and the materials (the pins and needles) that signify both a defence and an infliction of pain, a tool of construction and a method of repair, that a re-construction of femininity is performed, which disrupts a system of authority (the male gaze) and 'creates a radical, critical positioning of the woman as spectator'\footnote{24}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{1} Grosz, Elizabeth, (1989) \textit{Sexual Subversions}, (pp. xv-xvi). Australia: Allen and Unwin.
\item \footnote{2} ibid (p. xvi).
\item \footnote{3} ibid (p. xvi).
\item \footnote{4} The Symbolic is a term that refers to a social state. It is capitalised to make it into a proper noun.
\item \footnote{6} ibid (p. 73).
\item \footnote{7} ibid (p. 73).
\item \footnote{8} ibid (p. 74).
\item \footnote{9} ibid (p. 72).
\item \footnote{10} ibid (p. 73).
\item \footnote{11} ibid (p. 71).
\item \footnote{12} ibid (p. 76).
\item \footnote{13} See Montreley, M. (1976) Inquiry into Femininity, in Adams, P. and Cowie, E. (Eds), \textit{The Woman in Question} (p. 264). Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for further elaboration of the Symbolic collapsing into the Real.
\item \footnote{17} Montreley's use of the term masquerade refers to the terminology Joan Riviere uses in her terminology in 'Womanliness as Masquerade' which Montreley points out Lacan readily took up. In Burgin, V., Donal, J. and Kaplan, C. (Eds) (1986) \textit{Formations of Fantasy} (pp. 35-44) London, Methuen.
\item \footnote{18} ibid (p. 264).
\item \footnote{19} ibid (p. 264).
\item \footnote{20} Gaines, J. (1990) Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body in Gaines, J. and Herzog, G.
\end{itemize}

\textit{Continued next page:}

21 ibid (p. 1).

22 Refer to Irigaray, L. (1985) *This Sex Which is Not One*, Ithaca, M.Y.: Cornell University Press, for more information on the autoerotic.


24 This is a question posed by Mary Kelly that Emily Apter referred to in the opening of her essay, *Fetishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's Interim* (1991) and is referred to in the first part of the research paper.
SECTION 2 - THE DISCOURSE OF THE ANALYST AND ITS RELATION TO FEMINIST ART

Part 1 - Interim

In this section of the research paper I will be examining Parveen Adams article 'The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's Interim and the Discourse of the Analyst' and by applying the same structural analysis as a working hypothesis, test my assertion that both Antoni's 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' could be similarly positioned.

In the article 'The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's Interim and the Discourse of the Analyst', Adams constructs an argument that the 'fundamental situation of Interim' that the series, the spectator, the artwork and the fantasy of whatever goes under the name of Mary Kelly - finds its analogue in the analytic situation' (Adams, 1991, p. 81). Adams uses Lacan's notion of discourses as a working hypothesis, explaining that 'discourses describe the structures of different bonds' (Adams, 1991, p. 82) and that they determine the subject's relations to other subjects and objects within a particular situation. The position and effect upon the subject changes radically when placed into the discursive 'apparatus' in four different situations. These structures/situations are - the master's discourse, the university discourse, the hysteric's discourse and the analyst's discourse; each discourse having radically different consequences for being and speaking.

Adam suggests that Mary Kelly's Interim was the 'setting for the discourse of the analyst, a discourse that structures the conditions under which questions and answers circulate' (Adams, 1991, p. 83), so that by going to Interim, Adams suggests the spectator is positioned as subject in the same sort of structure that they would be if they went to analysis.
In order to prove this proposition, Adams outlines Lacan's theory in more detail, explaining that each discourse is made up of a number of components that describe the essential qualities of the discourse. These components are outlined as:

- the space of the agent = the point from which speech is articulated;
- the other = the point/person to which the speech is addressed;
- the space of production = when the agent acts upon/relates/speaks to the other;
- the place of the truth = the truth is in the unknowable unconscious. 'For a discourse to function in its own particular way, there is always something at the place of truth that remains masked' (Adams, 1991, p. 83)\(^6\).

These four components define what Adams describes as the 'discursive machine in which the product is always separated from the truth' (Adams, 1991, p. 83)\(^7\) and offers the following diagram to illustrate the point.

Adams goes on to explain how in different ways, the person who speaks can be fitted into this 'machine'. She explains that the person who speaks cannot be thought of as a unity, but are made up of three terms which are S, S1 and a. Speech produces the subject as barred (through entry into language.
and therefore the Symbolic). Adams explains that the Lacanian subject is a signifier \( (S_1) \) which is a signifier of a subject for another signifier \( (S_2) \). The Lacanian subject \( S_1 \) is a signifier without signifiers. It has the role of master signifier, and it is this role that the agent speaks for.

Adams goes on to explain that \( S_2 \) is the signifier which 'engages the signifying chain', it represents the signifying other, the place from where one speaks and the place of knowledge that \( S_1 \) activates. The relation_interaction of \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \) (\( S_2 \)) equals the subject, which means that subjectivity (who you are) only exists in relation to an other or others.

The full (undivided) subject only exists for approximately the first six months of life (in Lacan's theory of the Real). At that time we have no sense that there is anything other than ourselves, that is, everything is perceived as an extension of ourselves.

Adams proceeds to explain that 'in Lacanian theory language deprives the body of jouissance\(^8\), which finds refuge only in the limited zones of the body that Freud called erotogenic zones. The entry into language produces the barred subject by depriving the body of jouissance (Adams, 1991, p. 84)\(^9\). This produces a sense of incompleteness, what Lacan has titled manque-à-être, the lack of being.

The place of lack is replaced by what Lacan designates as object small \( a \), which, as has been established, represents the leftover of jouissance. Now in place of the pre-linguistic full subject we have the subject comprising of \( S \) (within language - the Symbolic) and object small \( a \) (cause of desire). Adams explains that object small \( a \) does not have a signifier (no word or image can be made to stand in for object small \( a \)) which means 'there is a hole in the signifying network .... [and that] ... this object without a signifier has a key role in analysis' (Adams, 1991, p. 84)\(^{10}\), and in Interim.
Adams provides an analysis of the discourse of the analyst and its connection to Interim. The discourse of the analyst is illustrated in the following illustration

```
[ • analyst ]
[ • agent ]  [ • analysand ]
[ • other ]

a

\[ \text{S}_2 \]

//

\[ \text{S}_1 \]

[ • truth/unconscious
  • signifier which engages a signifying chain
  • the signifying other
  • the place of knowledge that \( \text{S}_1 \) activates
]

[ • production
  • the master signifier that the agent speaks for
  • Lacan's subject without signifieds
]

Discourse of the Analyst
Adams explains that in this discourse (as in all the others) there are three levels operating and proposes how Interim fits into this discourse:

- truth
- agent
- other
- production

- $S_2$
- a
- $S$
- $S_1$

- signifier which engages a signifying chain
- analyst
- analysand
- production = the action of analysis brings the subjects (and as Adams proposes spectators) originary signifier to light.

Mary Kelly’s unconscious
artist
spectator

Adams tests her proposition with the phrase 'I am that I am', applying it to the discourse that happens in analysis, explaining that the analysand goes to analysis thinking that the analyst is the 'master' (master of language/meaning), and can therefore answer the questions posed by the analysand. The analysand 'hears' the analyst saying 'I am what I am' which isn't what is being said, but that doesn't stop the analysand hearing it and longingly thinking 'if only I could say that'

'The patient may come to hear something different at the end of analysis'
(Adams, 1991, p. 85)\textsuperscript{12} and as Adams suggests, if the analysand is 'lucky, hear the analysts version of "I am that I am" as "I am only what I am" ... realis[ing] that the analyst does not have what he wanted and at last he can make his lack his own' (Adams, 1991, p. 85)\textsuperscript{13} (which means that the analysand can recognise and accept that he lacks; thereby accepting his place in the Symbolic order).

In the discourse of the analyst the object small $a$ is put forward at the same time as meaning ie, the object small $a = $ the analyst. The barred subject occupies the place of the other = the analysand. Adams highlights the significance of the relation between agent to other because it means that the relation of the subject to the object can be 'worked on directly and modified, because there, between agent and other, is where the action is' (Adams, 1991, p. 87)\textsuperscript{14}.

Within the analytic session the textuality and the silence of the analyst work together to make the analyst appear to the analysand as object small $a$. The 'textuality of the analyst' refers to 'the fact that the analyst interprets and that interpretation works on the analysand as the subject of the signifier' (Adams, 1991, p. 87)\textsuperscript{15}. The analyst's interpretation brings forward the repressed signifiers of the analysand's psychological history (from their unconscious). What was repressed now becomes signified, the action of interpretation and the action of bringing the repressed forward adds weight to the signifiers symbolic meaning and supplies the analysand with an 'identity'.

Through the ambiguity of the analyst's signifiers, the analysand becomes aware of the presence of the object of desire in the 'silent' spaces between signifiers. The analyst's silence pushes the analysand to make connections between the signifiers.

The textuality and silence of the analyst are not the only elements of
importance within the analytic relationship. Adams cites the 'phenomenon that brings the object [of desire] into play [as] transference love' (Adams, 1991, p. 87)\textsuperscript{16}.

Adams explains that in analysis, the analysand 'over-estimates' the analyst thereby making the analyst the love object which gives the analysand narcissistic satisfaction and replaces the analysand's ego ideal. In other words, the analysand over-identifies with the analyst, this over-identification takes the place of the analysand's original ego ideal which means 'it is from the place of the analyst that the analysand wants to see himself as satisfactory and loved' (Adams, 1991, p. 88)\textsuperscript{17}. But this has to change if the analysand is to be able to make his lack his own, which has been established as imperative for the analysand to establish their identity. The analyst as object small a, must be detached from the analysand's ego ideal. In other words the analysand must fall out of love with the analyst. Something has to occur to make this happen. Adams cites that 'something' to be what Lacan calls, separation.

If the analysand can understand that the analyst is lacking, that is, doesn't have all the answers and is also desiring of the answers, the analysand can then identify his own lack with the lack of the other and is not locked into desiring the other's desire.

For the analysand to understand that the analyst also lacks, and doesn't have the answer, Adams says that the 'analyst must embody the function of lack' which is demonstrated to the analysand through the analyst's silence.

If the analysand realises the analyst is lacking the object (i.e. doesn't have the answers), the analysand can start to give meaning to the signifiers that had previously been repressed and to understand their significance to his identity - instead of looking to the analyst to give him an identity.
Adams argues that within Interim there is an element of the textuality and silence within which the spectator engages, which is similar to the way in which the analysand engages with these elements in analysis. The textuality of the analyst, as Adams has argued is equal to engagement with the activity of interpretation; the textuality of the artist is also equal to the engagement with the activity of interpretation. Both acts of interpretation (the artist acts through the artwork) work on the textuality interpretation of the analysand/spectator.

To clarify her point Adams cites Freud's theory of secondary revision in which the action of telling a story or dream involves the texture of interpretation (even if it doesn't make any sense). It is in this context that Adams points out that 'there is no interpretation that doesn't represent a text' (Adams, 1991, p. 90)\textsuperscript{18}.

Adams goes on to make the connection that pictures are texts, imbued with interpretation and truth, 'which is stated by the artist supposed to know' (Adams, 1991, p. 90)\textsuperscript{19}. Adams makes the comparison here of the spectator going to the exhibition to find out about themselves with the analysand going to psychoanalysis to find the answers to their questions. In this respect Adams points out that the spectator expects the artist to perform a function - that is to know and to tell the 'truth', give the answers in the picture.

Adams points out that pictures are texts that hold within them interpretations that act upon the spectator. The spectator relates as subject to the signifiers the artist has used, reinterprets them, and thereby represents the text. The artist becomes the ego ideal of the spectator, at this point the spectator's interpretation of herself is reflected in the picture by the 'artist who knows', as something that she wants to visualise about herself.

In the Corpus section of Interim, the spectator identifies with a history, set out in stories based on conversations. The stories present the spectator with
Section 2 - Part 1 - 'Interim'

a selection of signifiers - selection indicating interpretation. But as Adams points out the 'selection is not a collusion or a simple sharing. For an interpretation always involves discomfort, the recognition that something else is at stake, something other than what we though we said' (Adams, 1991, p. 92)\textsuperscript{20}. This indicates the symbolic importance of signifiers previously repressed within the unconscious that equals the 'truth' of the picture to the spectator.

The spectator recognises her subjection to the signifiers that are displayed, a worry over fat legs, wrinkles etc. and interprets them as something more than a reference to getting older, but to an absence. The signifiers hollow our spaces and intensify absences' (Adams, 1999, p. 92)\textsuperscript{21}. The spectator realises that the artist has not signified everything; Adams, 1991, it is in this sense Interim points to the 'absence behind identity'.

Adams points out that a person goes to analysis to understand the conditions under which the significant aspects of an identity which they want to make their own has become the object of desire. To do this the place of the object has to be produced as empty.

It is along this line of thought that Adams links the space of production of Interim with psychoanalysis. Adams speculates that Interim could offer a feminine order of signifiers - (an alternative to phallocentrism), but surmises that what Interim might do is whet our appetite to feel 'satisfactory and loved' (Adams, 1991, p. 92)\textsuperscript{22}. But then even this doesn't happen because as Adams restates, 'at the limit of the analyst's speech is silence, while at the limit of the artist's images is emptiness' (Adams, 1991, p. 93)\textsuperscript{23} both of which indicate their lack and desire.

Adams proposes that 'Interim gives us the place of the object small a at the limit of the image ... at the limit of the symbolic' (Adams, 1991, p. 93)\textsuperscript{24} and suggests that the limit is thought about through the 'notion of an
apparition ... which is both sublime and horrible [and] silent, being outside signification'. Adams suggests Lacan's description of the "toi" suggests an apparition and goes on to explain that the "toi" is a reference to the Other of jouissance ... a pre symbolic Other ... the lack in the Other of language, the object that must figure in Interim (p. 93)25.

Adams suggests the section of Interim called Corpus which means 'Body' produced the awesome, silent effect of the Other of jouissance by presenting us with bodiless apparitions. If the images do 'yield a body', Adams suggests that it is the real body, the awesome silent jouissance of the body ... outside any signifying network ... [and] apparition at the limit of the symbolic' (Adams, 1991, p. 95)26.

2 Interim was shown at the New Museum of New York, 1990. It is made up of four major sections: Corpus, Pecunia, Historia, Potestas. Within this section of the paper, only Corpus will be referred to which consists of photographs of five articles of clothing laminated onto perspex, each article is presented in three different poses and is accompanied by a framed handwritten text. Please refer to Plates 1 - 4.
4 ibid p. 82
5 ibid p. 83
6 ibid p. 83
7 ibid p. 83
8 In Adams essay the Other of jouissance is described as a primal other, a pre-symbolic other, a reference to object small a which represents the lack in the Other of language. The Other of jouissance is described as 'awesome, silent and threatening' (p. 94).
10 ibid p. 84
11 I have added extra explanatory information from the first part of Adams' essay in brackets.
13 ibid p. 85
14 ibid p. 87
15 ibid p. 87
16 ibid p. 87
17 ibid p. 88
18 ibid p. 90
19 ibid p. 90

Continued next page:
20 ibid p. 92
21 ibid p. 92
22 ibid p. 92
23 ibid p. 93
24 ibid p. 93
25 ibid p. 93
26 ibid p. 95
SECTION 2 - THE DISCOURSE OF THE ANALYST AND ITS RELATION TO FEMINIST ART (continued)

Part 2 - 'Gnaw' - 'Compulsive Beauty'

In this section of the research paper the hypothesis that both 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' might also 'find their analogue in the analytic situation' as Parveen Adams\(^1\) has argued for Mary Kelly's Interim, is tested.

For this hypothesis to work there has to be something that represents the textuality and silence in which analysand engages within the analytic process, in the exhibitions. The textuality of the analyst is equal to engagement with the activity of interpretation, which as Adams points out, the artist is. Both acts of interpretation (the artist through the artwork) work on the interpretations of the analysand/spectator.

At this point, as Adams points out, the spectator expects the artist to perform a function; that is to 'know' and to 'tell the truth', and to give 'the answer' through the artwork. The artist at this point equals the ego ideal of the spectator, which means that the spectator's interpretation of herself (her desires and what she is hoping to validate about herself) is reflected through the artwork, by the 'artist who knows'.

One would suspect that this narcissistic transference would only happen if the artwork in the exhibition holds some significance to the spectator and that they go to the exhibition hoping to be told something about themselves as in psychoanalysis.

Adams points out that 'images are texts' (which is understood to include three dimensional art) that hold the artist's interpretation (truth) within them and 'act upon' the spectator. The spectator relates as subject to the signifiers the artist has used, re-interprets and thereby represents the text.
Adams says that the spectator in 'Corpus' identifies with a history set out in stories based on conversations, which present the spectator with a selected and therefore interpreted set of signifiers.

In 'Gnaw', one could suggest the spectator identifies with an arrangement of objects that have been culturally identified as symbols of femininity - empty heart shaped candy holders made from chocolate and three hundred red lipsticks ornamentally arranged in a pseudo boutique style display case made of glass and mirror. The display of 'feminine charm' is juxtaposed with the two gnawed 600 pound cubes of chocolate and lard.

One could also suggest that the spectator might identify with the display of handbags in 'Compulsive Beauty' that have been fetishistically adorned with a selection of pins, needles, wires and grease smeared paper as signifiers of femininity. These objects could be seen to represent a woman's collection of handbags that have therefore been imbued with a projected meaning by the collector/artist. In this respect they are similar to Mary Kelly's photographs of her own clothing, which are also referred to in the accompanying texts, but quite different to Antoni's impersonal 'feminine' commodities.

As in 'Corpus' the displayed artwork in both 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' are recognised as a 'selection' of elements and therefore indicate an interpretation of an experience or situation. The 'biased' interpretation indicates that certain elements have been left unrepresented. The spectator's recognition of the 'unsaid' or 'unrepresented' indicates the symbolic importance of signifiers previously repressed within their unconscious, that now equal, as Adams puts it, the 'truth' of the artwork to the spectator.

It could be said that the spectator in both 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' could recognise her subjection to the signifiers, as Adams claims happens in
"Corpus". In the case of 'Gnaw' the juxtaposition of gnawed chocolate and lard minimalist cubes with the display case full of ornamentally arranged candy holders and red lipsticks could be said to indicate the spectator's subjection to signifiers of - a fat body, food as pleasure, pleasure as sin, fat as sin, desire as commodity, body as commodity, femininity as commodity etc.

The same thing could be claimed for 'Compulsive Beauty', in which the signifiers that could indicate the spectator's subjection might be seen to be the needles and pins piercing and controlling the body of the bags, the hand bags themselves, and the titles applied to each of the bags. The titles indicating some of the patriarchal roles in which woman is cast - 'Femme Fatale, the construction of femininity - 'Smile Sweet', 'Smile Pretty' and accusations against her sex - 'Is Beauty Your Weapon?' etc.

If the hypothesis is correct and both 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' can also be seen to create the discourse of the analyst in the situations of the exhibitions, then the spectator has to interpret the signifiers of their subjection as something more than a reference to Bulimia as a neurotic reaction by women and to the cultural construction of femininity respectively. They also have to recognise an absence. The spectator has to realise, according to Adams, the artist has not signified everything and recognise the absence behind identity that is implied in the artwork. One should restate Adams' point here - that you go to analysis to understand the conditions under which the significant aspects of an identity, which you want to make your own, have become the object of desire, and to do this the place of the object has to be produced as empty. In the case of drawing an analogy between analyst and artist, analysis and exhibition - the object of desire = the answer, therefore the 'answer' won't be given by the artist if the hypothesis is correct.

At this point, Adam's asserts, the narcissistic lock between the spectator and
Section 2 - Part 2 - 'Gnaw' - 'Compulsive Beauty'

the 'artist who knows' breaks, because the artist hasn't supplied the spectator with a reflection of a 'satisfactory' and 'loved' image of themselves, or an alternate to phallocentrism, which shows that they are also lacking and desiring of an answer. Adams asserts that 'at the limit of the analyst's speech is silence while at the limit of the artist's [artefacts] there is emptiness' both of which indicate their lack and desiring, (Adams, 1991, p. 93)².

Adam's proposes that Interim's 'Corpus' gives us the place of the object of desire at the limit of the image, the limit of the Symbolic. She suggests this is thought about through the notion of an apparition which is both horrible and sublime and links this idea to the Other of jouissance which she proposes the spectator represents in their anxiety when viewing the awesome silent bodiless apparitions in 'Corpus'.

One could say that 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' also give the place of the object of desire at the limit of the Symbolic. At the limit of the image but in the space and time of the abject. Adam's notion of an apparition creates a significant link between jouissance and abjection. An apparition suggests a presence of life in death, abjection suggests a presence of death in life.

Proper subjectivity and society require the expulsion of the improper, the unclean and the disorderly ... [but] what is excluded can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the borders of our existence, threatening the apparently settled unity of the subject with disruption and possible dissolution. It is impossible to exclude these psychically and socially threatening elements with any finality Kristeva (1982 cited Grosz, 1989, p. 71)³.

I would assert that the 'emptiness' that is needed within the artwork to represent the artist as lacking and desiring is located in 'Gnaw' in the hidden space and time the compulsive gnawing of the cubes took place, that is, when the spectator wasn't present. The teeth, chin and lip marks left in the chocolate and fat are presented to the spectator as abject, as 'a condition
Section 2 - Part 2 - 'Gnaw' - 'Compulsive Beauty'

of symbolic subjectivity' (Grosz, 1989. p. 72)4.

One could also say that the desire and lack (of an answer) is also presented to the viewer in the juxtaposition of Antoni’s chocolate cube, (representing desire) and the cube of fat (representing disgust) and the questions posed by the effect of that juxtaposition, point to the insatiability of desire and the subjects implication in waste, and as waste.

The artist's lack and desire to know are again shown in the 'empty' heart shaped candy holders implying lack and the red lipsticks that have been made up from the chewed and spat up fat, which is even more disturbing when you think of the lipstick being re-applied to the lips as excess. One could suggest that with this last visualisation, artist's question and desire to know is asked over and over again as the spectator pieces the story behind the exhibition together.

Abjection implies the existence of an 'other' in the form of death ... it is an effect of the ego's self deluding conception of its own capacities and identity ... the abject is thus a pre-signifying psycho-visceral response and an occasional accompaniment of oedipalised consciousness Kristeva (1982 cited Grosz, 1989. p. 77)5.

It is this recognition of little deaths within life alluded to in the series of charcoal drawing series 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' that could be said to indicate the artist's lack and desire to know in 'Compulsive Beauty' and draws comparison with the Other of jouissance, the object that Adams suggests figures in Kelly's bodiless 'Corpus'.

It could be suggested that the drawings within the series 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' indicate the insistence of an 'other' presence, a disruptive presence threatening the order and unity of the Symbolic. The threat coming from the space of the Real, a time before Oedipalised binary positions held the power to construct difference and impose order, a space and time when the relationship between the Other of jouissance and

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abjection was ambiguous, undefined - at the limit of the Symbolic. They both accompany the Symbolic and imply the existence of an 'other'. Both threaten the Symbolic order with chaos and are elusive in their purpose and disruptive in their presence. Their flashes through the Oedipalised orderings of the Symbolic causing chaos, with both binary positions being thrown together. This very action causing a disruption to the Symbolic gendered binary ordering.

It could be said that, the series 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' provoke an anxiety related to the threat of abjection, whose unsettling deathly presence is indicated in the very materiality of existence. The disruptive power of abjection, is indicated in the energy of the markings breaking through a centralised barrier. The energy, at once threatening and seductive, calls to the spectator to align with it, while the smothering white space seems to fight to regain control. The threat shadows the surface, its presence indicated in the smouldering smudges and faint lines that indicate a break, and another rim of activity.

The desire of the artist is left empty through the implied unknowability of the object of desire. Lack is shown through the very action of desire and markings of abjection.

Like 'Corpus', 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' indicate an 'underside' of the clean and neat structuring of the Symbolic, a presence that threatens to disrupt by exposing the absence of identity.

By using the same structure Adams' has used to test her hypothesis; that Mary Kelly's exhibition Interim finds its analogue in the analytic situation, one could assert that both 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' seem to work within this same structural discourse of the analyst, a space where questions are asked and passed from place to person.
This brings up a series of unresolved questions, that indicate the need for further research in this area. It has already been established that this hypothesis would not work for all exhibitions. Indeed it would seem that an exhibition would only be analogous to the process of analysis if it suggests a situation in which the spectator is forced to ask questions of herself.

According to Adams, the 'interpretation has to engage you before you set up a subject supposed to know and before there can be anything called transference love. But then you do go to be told about yourself' (Adams, 1991, p. 91)6.

Following this point, one could assert that when women go to a feminist exhibition they go to be told something about themselves and the situations that have created and give meaning to what they perceive to be their identity. Can it be hypothesised then that any women going to a feminist exhibition can be placed in the discourse of the analyst? Or does the woman have to be a feminist herself who has internalised the languages of feminism before the exhibition/interpretation can offer the same type of production space as psychoanalysis? And if this does happen, can the process of separation then occur if the feminist art is essentialist and offers the spectator a feminine ego ideal? One could also ask, does the spectator have to be a woman for the interpretation to mean anything and be able to take a position within the discourse of the analyst?

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2 ibid p. 93
4 ibid (p. 72)
5 ibid (p. 77)
CONCLUSION

The strategy of appropriating the fetish politicises both the point of production and reception of the art practice of Mary Kelly, Janine Antoni and my own visual research. The process of appropriation enacts a critique of accepted notions of sexuality and an idealised femininity which thereby disrupts the notion of a singular universal experience 'of woman' and 'as woman' by promoting a multiplicity of subject positions for women as both artist and spectator.

The strategy of refusing the iconic representation of the women's body has been used by all three artists to ironically situate woman as either a singular sign or a specific category of signifiers, thereby exposing the binary positions reified in the traditional sexual politics of looking. The use of irony amplifying the point that everything hasn't been said, that things have been left out, thereby promoting a circulation of questions and answers.

Mary Kelly uses an ironic positioning and binding of the articles of clothing to expose the fetishising gaze so that the spectator will be motivated to ask questions about the exhibited 'specimens' in Corpus, and in doing so ask questions about their own subjection and complicity in a system that authorises gender bias.

In patriarchy women are assigned the contradictory positions of both consumer fetishist and as commodity fetish themselves. Antoni appropriates the logic of the fetish to expose the contradictions in being both the subject that fetishises and the fetish object. Through the use of irony, played out in the display of lipsticks and empty candy holders, redesigned from the chewed and spat up chocolate and lard, the juxtaposition of chocolate with lard and the hidden 'performance', Antoni interrogates accepted notions of femininity. This displayed selection of signifiers creates
Conclusion

a production space for the spectator to realise their own subjection to
patriarchal signifiers of an idealised beauty and the artificiality of desire
itself. Antoni metaphorically recirculates femininity, amplifying the
cultural specificity of female experience into a hyper-feminine subjectivity
that suggests a new, strong and active position for femininity.

I have attempted to appropriate the fetish as both Kelly and Antoni have, to
scopically ensnare the viewer. The fetishistic embellishment of the
handbags 'plays up' to the masculinist gaze with an over-determined 'to be
looked at' kind of beauty. This process exposes and disrupts mechanics of
the objectifying gaze by amplifying the construction of femininity and
hyperbolising the objects that have been used to encode femininity as 'lack'.

All three artists disrupt the fetishistic gaze by subverting the binary
positions of activity/passivity, looking/being seen, subject/object that allow
the mastering gaze to recreate its objects of desire. The feminine subject no
longer waits to be seen, but attempts to seduce the eye with a new power, an
'overdetermined' lack. Feminine identity is created as both subject of desire
and object of another's desire through the hyperbolisation of 'feminine
aesthetics' and affords the female spectator with an empowered and
pleasurable position.

The assumption that visual seduction only implies complicity with the
fetishising gaze suggests that women cannot be instrumental in creating
and redefining their own identity, that they can only consume ideas and
take positions allotted to them and that the gauge of acceptability and
therefore subjectivity rests on a male response. 'Corpus', 'Gnaw' and
'Compulsive Beauty' all promote women's agency and right to self
definition. Implicit in the artist's interpretations is the multiplicity and
difference of female subjectivities, including subjects that have been
'defined as deviant and have been rendered invisible by a dominant
aesthetic that posits the white, healthy, middle class and youthful ... [subject]
as the ideal of femininity (Nead, 1992, p.64)\(^1\). Kelly's interpretation of
women's experiences in middle age, Antoni's interpretation of the
bulimic's experience and my own visual research into fetishism and
abjection constitutes a 'defiant assertion of the autonomy of those other
kinds of bodies and subjectivities' (Nead, 1992, p.64)\(^2\), bodies that aren't
acknowledged by the dominant discourses of patriarchy and are excluded
from representation as either subject or object. One could say that this is an
analogy for the control the Symbolic tries to effect over the abject.

'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' both utilise the theory of abjection to
effect a disruption of phallocentric binary labelling and its notion of an
idealised femininity. Antoni 'performs' an abjection of patriarchal law and
order through the gnawing, chewing and spitting up of the chocolate and
lard cubes. By making the cubes the object of her desire, then enacting an
abjection, Antoni gives meaning to the failure of patriarchy's idealisation of
femininity to give a satisfying meaning to the female subject.

Antoni's control over the abject, bringing it back into the realm of the
Symbolic by its reconstruction into socially acceptable symbols of femininity,
enacts a political intervention and reformation of femininity into a new
active hyperfeminine. Through this process, Antoni metaphorically
performs the construction and reconstruction of gender. By examining and
amplifying the female cultural experience, Antoni exposes the performance
and rituals as cultural constructions and repositions femininity in a
position of self determination.

'Laura Mulvey ... describes the female body as a spatial
metaphor for the structural division between surface
allure and concealed decay. The cosmetically finished
surface of the body must conceal the abject matter of the
interior of the female body; and in psychoanalytic
terms, this cosmetic surface "conceals the wound or
void left in the male psyche when it perceives sexual
difference”. For Mulvey, then, the typography of the cosmetic surface and concealed interior is an echo of the typography of the fetish’ (Mulvey, 1991 cited Nead, 1992, p. 66)\(^3\).

One could say that Mulvey describes the idealised femininity promoted by patriarchy as a disavowal of the materiality and sexual difference of the female body. This notion is played out in the excessive pinning/fetishisation of the handbags in ‘Compulsive Beauty’. The handbags as metaphors for the female body, conceal and control the abject, therefore one could say that by opening the bag, woman exposes the wound and the sexual difference the fetish has been employed to conceal. The process of putting things into the handbags and taking things out signifies both the activity of desiring and the process of abjection, which in effect means that woman is able to choose what she wants to sustain as her identity and what she wants to abject, an action which defines her subjectivity and disrupts the binary labelling of ‘passive’. Abjection, enclosed and controlled by woman is bought back into the realm of the Symbolic but in a hyperbolised, overdetermined way. The handbags and the pins and needles that both decorate and construct meaning, are used in a similar way to the lipsticks and heart shaped candy holders in ‘Gnaw’, that is, to hyperbolise the process of construction and the objects associated with femininity. The hyperbolisation disrupts the system of authority, the sexual politics of looking and the perversion itself.

If the bags are metaphors for the disavowal of abjection, the drawings in the series ‘Strong Attractions, Subtle ‘Repulsions’ are used to display the threat openly. The abject is recognised as a condition of Symbolic subjectivity, an unpredictable, disruptive companion, whose intense presence, represented in the energy and movement of lines, formation and dissolution of shapes and the displacement of space, aligns femininity with activity and changes the ‘disavowal of lack’ into a ‘seduction by lack’.
'Corpus', 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' function as critiques of existing values, exposing the construction and performance of gender which therefore suggests the possibility of the construction of alternative and new meanings for femininity. To say that 'Interim', 'Gnaw' and 'Compulsive Beauty' work in the same way as the discourse of the analyst, provides feminism with another strategy to critique the subjection of women within existing oppressive structures. This analogy therefore empowers women as spectators and artists to question the nature of their subjection. Due to the unique way the signifiers work on each spectator, the notion of a multiplicity of subject positions is reinforced.

So although psychoanalysis has been identified as a phallocentric authority, its process utilised in this method, acts as a disruption of the status quo, a disruption of the systems that try to stereotype and label, the disruption that thereby enables a 'radical, critical and pleasurable positioning for woman as [both] spectator'⁴ and artist.

⁠² ibid (p. 64)
⁠³The article by Laura Mulvey, referenced by Nead, is titled 'A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body; The Work of Cindy Sherman', New Left Review, 188 (July/August) 1991, 146
⁠⁴A quote by Mary Kelly cited in Emily Apter's article 'Pitishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's Interim' (1991) which was analysed in Section 1, Part 1 of this research paper.
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Slides of the drawing series 'Strong Attractions, Subtle Repulsions' I - X.

Slides of Handbag Sculptures:

1 "Compulsive Beauty"
2 "Is Beauty Your Weapon?"
3 "Accessory/Excessory"
4 "Dangerous Beauty"
5 "Smile Sweet"
6 "Smile Pretty"
7 "Flirt"
8 "Femme Fatale"
9 "Sweetheart"
10 "Veiled Beauty"
11 "Who's that hanging on your arm?"
The Use of Abstract and Figurative Images to Evoke Emotive Qualities Characteristic of Women's Sexuality

K.M. MURRAY

1995

University of Western Sydney, Nepean
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20.6.95
PREFACE

This research paper examines the implications of a feminist appropriation of the fetish and the use of the theory of abjection, as a disruption of phallocentric binary labelling and its notion of idealised femininity.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section includes an analysis of Emily Apter's articles 'Fetishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's Interim' and an analysis of Janine Antoni's installation 'Gnaw' which form a contextualisation of the issues on which my own visual research is based. These issues revolve around the creation of multiple subject positions for women as both artist and spectator, the recuperation of the seductive image without creating the same power relations apparent in the male gaze and the deployment of an abstract visual femininity to scopically seduce the viewer.

In Section two, part one, Parveen Adams' article 'The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's Interim and the Discourse of the Analyst' is examined. In this article Adams uses Lacan's theory of discourse to hypothesise that the space of production in Interim is an analogue to the space of production in psychoanalysis. Part two consists of an examination of the application of the same structural analysis to Antoni's 'Gnaw' and my own 'Compulsive Beauty', and explores the possibility of a new contextual analysis of feminist art.
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research for Master of Arts (Honours) Visual Arts is to explore aspects of women's sexuality and representations of femininity.

At the beginning of the course of study, the visual research revolved around the creation of images that might be seen as metaphors for women's psychic sexual experience; images that evolved from a theory of jouissance\(^1\), the Real\(^2\) and the repressed images of the unconscious.

Through the early research it became apparent that only glimpses of the unconscious are possible, and that the experiences of jouissance and abjection\(^3\) are part of the mediated psychic and corporeal experience of the subject. These experiences are designed and reinforced by culture (the Symbolic)\(^4\). The post-Oedipal condition of subjectivity is mediated through language and sexual difference (according to Freud, Lacan and Kristeva). The problem investigated from that point, was the representation of feminine desire and the 'construction' of femininity within a western patriarchy. It is this specific problem that feminists are attempting to deal with by deconstructing notions of femininity.

I have used Griselda Pollock's definition of feminist art to define my understanding of feminist art practice. Pollock defines feminist art:

> according to the way [it] acts upon, makes demands of, and produces positions for its viewers. It is feminist because of the way it works as a text within a specific social space in relation to dominant codes and conventions of art and to dominant ideologies of femininity. It is feminist when it subverts the normal ways in which we view art and are usually seduced into a complicity with the meanings of the dominant and oppressive culture.

Pollock (1987, cited Nead, 1992)\(^5\)

The aim of the research is to indicate the diversity of psychic and corporeal
experiences and energies associated with Lacan’s notion of desire. These experiences are part of the subject’s continual corporeal and psychic energies, which are mediated by patriarchal culture.

The subversive potential of Kristeva’s theory of abjection and the fetish are interrogated throughout this research paper. Both have a necessary and close relationship to desire. There can be no theory of abjection without a theory of desire. This is also true of perversion, which also can only be understood in relation to desire. So the notion of desire creates the underpinning of my attempts to disrupt the binary positioning of femininity - femininity, as it is designated a place and character by phallocentrism.

The notions of abjection and the fetish are investigated and re-circulated in an attempt to represent an ‘active’ feminine desire and subvert the notions of a phallocentrically idealised and naturalised femininity. This investigation initiates a questioning for women as artists and spectators - can woman appropriate the fetish and through this appropriation interrogate accepted notions of sexuality? And given woman is cast as abject because of her sexual difference and her so-called excess, can the theory of abjection be used to disrupt phallocentric binary labelling and its notions of an idealised femininity?

In both sections of the research paper these issues will be investigated and their relevance to both contemporary art practice and psychoanalytic theory will be explored.

Section 1 of the research paper is divided into three parts; it includes an investigation of a section of Mary Kelly’s installation Interim - ‘Corpus’, Janine Antoni’s installation 'Gnaw' and my own visual research under the title 'Compulsive Beauty'.
Introduction

I have used my interpretation of Emily Apter's article 'Fetishism and Visual Seduction in Mary Kelly's Interim' to contextualise the analysis of both Janine Antoni's work and my own. It becomes a foundation for further analysis of feminist issues that are investigated in each artist's work. These issues include exposing the mechanics of women's subjection to the male gaze, its fetishistic objectification of women, and the binary positioning of woman as passive objects of the gaze. An objective that all three artists share is to create an equal position for women as subject of desire. Through her analysis of Kelly's exhibition, Apter poses questions that are of critical importance in the feminist debates surrounding the recirculation of glamour and so called 'feminine aesthetics'. These issues are 'played out' in 'Gnaw', 'Compulsive Beauty' and 'Corpus'. The questions posed through the work include; can an artwork be beautiful and satisfying to both the artist and spectator without creating the same power relations apparent in the male gaze and can an abstract visual femininity seduce the viewer?

I explore the link of fetishism in each artists' work, investigating its use as a method of disruption. Within the analysis of my own work, I explore the possibility of fetishisation being appropriated by women as both a disruption of binary labelling and a method of seduction through hyperbolisation, of the objects and characteristics femininity has been assigned.

In Section 1, I will analyse how each artist identifies a specifically feminine experience and exposes that experience as a cultural construction. All three artists use a series of objects to signify woman's experience and presence, in her consenting absence. This practice works particularly well when the artist is trying to convey the mechanics of a particular cultural construction. The viewer readily identifies with the object; a lipstick, a handbag, a leather jacket and projects their own signifiers onto them, creating a situation for
the viewer to question their subjection to phallocentric signifiers and their own identity. Whereas, realistic representations of women automatically signify the binary divisions of class, age, race, gender and can actually stop the viewer identifying with a situation because of a perceived difference. In saying this, it would be a mistake for anyone to see my research as essentialising women’s experience, on the contrary, my aim is to make the 'construction' of femininity evident and politicise both the appropriation of a 'male' perversion and the positioning of woman as abject.

My interpretation of Parveen Adam's article 'The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's Interim and the Discourse of the Analyst'\(^7\), in which she asserts that the production space of Kelly's 'Interim' is similar to the production space of psychoanalysis occurs in Section Two, Part One. I then use the structure outlined by Adams in her article as a working hypothesis in Part 2, to test whether Antoni's installation 'Gnaw' and my own exhibition 'Compulsive Beauty' will work in the same way.

The first section forms an analysis of the three artist's work and their similarities in terms of objectives, subjects tackled, methodologies, and their relationships to psychoanalytic theory. Mary Kelly and Janine Antoni's work form a context from which my own work is positioned. Section 2 utilises a specific Lacanian theory to explore the possibility of a new contextual analysis of feminist art, in that it parallels the process of psychoanalysis and offers an opportunity for the female spectator to identify their own subjection to patriarchal signification. The interconnection of these two sections provide a critique of systems of patriarchal authority that exhibit gender bias and the visual authority that reinforces it.

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According to Grosz 'jouissance' refers to 'pleasure understood in orgasmic terms, and a more

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generally corporeal non-genital pleasure'.
The term 'joissance' is used throughout this research paper to refer to an awesome, threatening and chaotic corporeal and psychic experience.
2 Throughout this research paper, the term 'the Real' is used to refer to the state of being that is experienced by the baby in the first six months of life. The body and psyche of the baby is uncoordinated, the baby having no control over its impulses. It is in a state of chaos, experiencing **everything** as fragmented and conflictual bits of its existence.
According to Kristeva and Grosz, abject is the waste - the body waste which is rejected by the social, but nevertheless necessary to the social (Symbolic), for it to maintain its pure and untainted position.
The term 'Symbolic', is used throughout this paper to refer to 'the social and signifying order governing culture, to the post-oedipal position the subject must occupy in order to be a subject'.