

**The Pavilion Women's Photography Center 1983–1993**

**Deciphering an 'incomplete' [feminist] project**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first historical study of The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, which was founded in Leeds in 1983. It is a contribution to the institutional and curatorial history of feminist cultural practices in Britain. It addresses the work of artists Brenda Agard, Yve Lomax, Ingrid Pollard, Jo Spence, Maud Sulter and Marie Yates, making sense of them in the context of their exhibition at The Pavilion during the 1980s. In order to understand the significance of The Pavilion, I have deployed the Grounded Theory Method [GTM] in the analysis of an oral archive created in 2014, which includes statements of ten participants involved in The Pavilion from 1983–1993. From these statements I derived from the GTM method of coding a concept—'Feminising Photography'. This concept captures the priorities, investments, and effects of The Pavilion project. It also enables me to situate The Pavilion in relation to the larger question of the way in which photography became a site of critical inquiry during the 1980s for feminist artists concerned with complex questions of sexual difference and the entanglements of gender, class and race.

In enlarging upon the concept, 'Feminising Photography', as it can be read in the context of The Pavilion's aims, I also contribute to the historical study of: key shifts in arts policy in Britain; the significance of artist-led spaces; the politics/aesthetics relation; the practices and politics of representation; the emergence of feminist debates and practices; and the history of feminist exhibitions and events. Furthermore, by focusing on The Pavilion, I also make Leeds visible as one of the spaces in which these key issues converged in the early 1980s.

The thesis is also significant for its reflections on issues of encountering the past and the archive. It identifies a methodology through which to locate, within the 'mute' archive, traces of The Pavilion's aesthetic and political significance in terms of its ambition, practices and place in a larger picture of cultural politics in the 1980s. Finally I argue that The Pavilion should be understood as an 'incomplete' project. In doing so, I aim, through the thesis, to make visible what can be learnt by 'looking back' at feminist strategies in the 1980s for thinking the challenges facing feminist cultural practices in the present.

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## INTRODUCTION



Figure 0.1, Exterior shot of The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, date unknown. Courtesy Feminist Archive North/Pavilion

### The Research Context

The Pavilion Women's Photography Center [known as and henceforth referred to as The Pavilion] opened its doors in May 1983, in a renovated refreshment pavilion on Woodhouse Moor (Figure 0.1), a public park located between the University of Leeds campus and the inner-city suburb of Hyde Park in North-West Leeds. The history and analysis of this cultural organization is the topic of my thesis. From 1983–1993, The Pavilion taught working women to make photographs when the technology and resources for making images was mostly unavailable to them. It also exhibited work by leading figures in the critical debates about the image and 'the politics of representation' in an era dominated by media imagery of women. It sought to examine both the photographic image and technology in relation to areas of women's lives ignored in the media image world. Finally it engaged with issues of race and class as they intersected with gender. The Pavilion's initial project was short-lived, but the name survived through various forms from its original function as exhibition center and darkroom to its role as contemporary arts commissioning agency. In this latter form it survives and is known simply as Pavilion. I was the director of Pavilion from April 2012 until October 2017.



The current-day Pavilion, still based in Leeds and commissioning contemporary work in photography and moving image is, in name only, the inheritor of the specifically feminist photography project *The Pavilion*. The relation to the historic project had become so distanced by the time I became director of Pavilion the team knew almost nothing of the founding years and purposes of The Pavilion. As a result, in 2013, Pavilion commissioned a contemporary artist working in film and with an interest in British socialist histories to create an artwork that would explore the archive of The Pavilion. This project would excavate the traces from an archived past into a contemporary film work. The ambivalent if not overtly critical response to this film prompted a different kind of research that I decided to undertake.

Through my initial research, I came to recognize one shared issue between past and present: struggle for financial survival following changes to funding distribution by the Arts Council. Thus my early research into the historic organization, The Pavilion, was driven initially by this institutional question: is it possible to sustain a small, politically motivated, grassroots arts organization in the climate of a capitalist, competitive, under-funded, neoliberal art world?

Frustrated by a perceived hostility from arts funders to the critically engaged, politicized arts activity taking place in the English regions, I decided to research the fuller history of Pavilion, wishing to understand more about the founding years of *The Pavilion*, when it was initiated and sustained as a feminist project, specifically presenting itself as a Women's Photography Center. What could this specific artistic, political intervention tell me about the conditions of artist-led, grassroots, political culture in Britain in the 1980s and now? What could I discover about the nature of feminist struggle and strategies of resistance both past and present?

At another level, I wanted to think about how my study of this particular institution and its formation might qualify current narratives of the stages of feminism over the last forty years. These have been represented by sociologists such as Clare Hemmings as contesting, agonistic and successive generations in which politicized activism and engagement with the community

are seen to be opposed to theoretical feminist engagement and/in cultural practices.<sup>1</sup> My thesis aims to make an intervention in this narrative, and, through the case-study of The Pavilion, to qualify these oppositions, and in addition, the prevailing view that feminism of the 1980s was indifferent to issues of racialized difference within the women's struggle.

In addressing The Pavilion, I aim to contribute to the historical study of several issues. These include: key shifts in arts policy in Britain during the 1980s; the significance of artist-led spaces; the relationship between politics and aesthetics; the practices and politics of representation; the emergence of feminist debates and practices; and the history of feminist exhibitions and events. Furthermore, I aim to make the city and artistic communities of Leeds visible as a space in which these issues converged in the early 1980s. There are, therefore, three major questions, which touch on location, period and art form/practice: Why Leeds? Why the early 1980s? Why feminism and photography?

In the thesis, I have not had space to expand on the wider social context of Leeds during the 1980s but it is important to state here that the theoretical and creative commitment exhibited by The Pavilion was motivated, informed and enlivened by the presence of the Women's Liberation Movement in a city that has a much longer history of socialist and feminist politics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter?* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Tom Steele's work on the Leeds Art Club addresses what he terms a 'provincial avant-garde', to describe the unique intersection of guild socialism, feminist suffrage, the early labor movement and radical aesthetic and cultural practices in Leeds in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Steele's close archaeological excavations of this particular period of Leeds' history have been useful to me, in its emphasis on challenging the notion that 'new ideas and avant-garde practices distill at the center and then percolate to the "provinces"'—see Tom Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club 1893–1923* (Mitcham: The Orage Press, 2009), p. 9.

Leeds' rich socialist history is also addressed in the work of Richard Hoggart. Hoggart drew on his upbringing during the interwar years in the industrial working-class areas of Potternewton and Hunslet in Leeds, to produce *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), an autobiographical analysis of the culture of the Northern England working classes. Important observations in Hoggart's work include the prevalence of a female workforce at the center of Leeds' clothing industry, which was later integral to the development of the Leeds women's movement in the 1970s, and, in particular, his focus on the development of the Workers Educational Association [WEA]—see Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

In 1963, social historian E. P. Thompson wrote *The Making of the English Working Class* while he was working in the Extra-Mural Department at the University of Leeds (Tom Steele (above) was a student of Thompson's and went on to be Tutor Organizer for the WEA in Leeds and Lecturer in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Leeds) Thompson was deeply committed to adult working class education, and worked with the WEA across the West Riding area throughout his life—see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963).

Both Hoggart's and Thompson's work, grounded in their lived experiences and the experiences of their students, were instrumental in the development of cultural studies as an object of academic study. The strong WEA presence in Leeds continued into the 1970s and 1980s, and played an important role in the formation of The Pavilion. In 1981, through the WEA, the three founders of The Pavilion—Shirley Moreno, Dinah Clark and Caroline Taylor—developed the Leeds Women's Arts Program, which delivered two educational courses for women in Leeds, focusing on art and representation. One outcome of this was an exhibition titled *Anonymous: Notes Towards a Show on Self-Image* at the St Paul's Gallery in Leeds. This engagement with the politics of the WEA helped shape the founders' vision for The Pavilion that sought to extend feminist art practices to women in the immediate community.

During the 1980s, many women's groups in Leeds were constituted with the aim of consciousness-raising and political action against a backdrop of the UK miners' strike, deindustrialization, Margaret Thatcher's dismantling of the welfare state, police racism and the women-killing campaign of Peter Sutcliffe, the 'Yorkshire Ripper'.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the political activism within the city, the cultural necessity for feminism was being elaborated in art practice and art history in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds, impacting directly on the fine art and art history students who became the collective of women who initiated The Pavilion. In her chapter 'The light writing on the wall: the Leeds Pavilion Project', published in 1986, one of The Pavilion's founders Shirley Moreno described the relationship of the project to the city of Leeds:

Leeds is historically an area of women's activities; the female labor force has been of major significance to local industry and has therefore played a crucial role in the development of the city. This has assisted the growth of a strong local women's movement. The Peter Sutcliffe murders and the resultant militant action against sexist imagery has encouraged debate and concern about the effect pictures have on women's lives. There is a large women's arts movement, with nowhere to exhibit and also almost nothing significant to see, as the facilities for the visual arts in Leeds are appalling. All these factors made Leeds the perfect place for the [Pavilion Women's Photography] Center.<sup>4</sup>

When I address the significance of 'Leeds', I thus refer to a particular place with a specific history that provided hospitality for a public-facing artist-led women's art center in the 1980s. I am also referring to a critical, theoretical space that was created by specific lecturers within the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds after 1977. It will be important to register the impact, on the genesis of The Pavilion project, of Griselda Pollock's feminist studies in the field of historical and contemporary art—she began to teach in Leeds University in 1977—as well as her elaboration of a feminist challenge to gender- and racially exclusive art history. I will also address the significance of photo-historian John Tagg's analytical work on

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<sup>3</sup> Between 1975 and 1980, Peter Sutcliffe murdered thirteen women in Leeds and Bradford. He was arrested in 1981. In 1980, a group of women carried out direct action at cinemas in Leeds in protest against the sexual violence depicted in the film *Dressed to Kill* (1980). In her essay 'Now is the time to stand up and fight', written in 1980, Jean Stead addresses the link between these two sets of events in Leeds, asking, 'when violence against women is the standard entertainment of local cinemas, is it truly sensible to deny that it has not become part of the established cultural pattern of our day?' – see Jean Stead, 'Now is the time to stand up and fight', in *Women of the Revolution: Forty years of Feminism*, ed. by Kira Cohcrane (London: Guardian Books, 2010), pp. 79–81 (p. 80).

<sup>4</sup> Shirley Moreno, 'The light writing on the wall: the Leeds Pavilion Project', in *Photographic Practices: Towards a Different Image*, ed. by Stevie Bezencenet & Philip Corrigan (London: Comedia, 1986), pp. 113–124 (p. 115).

the history and theory of photography. Both of these figures introduced at undergraduate and graduate level, and into studio teaching a rich range of theoretical resources from Marxism and Feminism, disrupting the anti-theoretical position of fine art teaching at the time as well as the absence of theory in normative art history, which had a significant effect upon the theoretical preoccupations of The Pavilion's founders. Griselda Pollock brought a number of artists to the Department in the years around The Pavilion's formation. These included Jo Spence (1934–1992), Lubaina Himid (b. 1954) and Marie Yates (b. 1940) who are now seen as central to artistic work on questions of gender and the image, and whose impact upon The Pavilion program is addressed in this thesis. The relationship of art practice to theory can be tracked in the political practices of these artists in parallel to the ambitions of The Pavilion founders.



Figure 0.2, Dinah Clark.



Figure 0.3, Caroline Taylor.

Both images dates unknown. Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion

It was this specific space of criticality at Leeds, emerging as it did in the late 1970s that resourced three women students—Dinah Clark (Figure 0.2) and Caroline Taylor (Figure 0.3)—two graduates from a BA Fine Art, and Shirley Moreno, a graduate from the MA in the Social History of Art, to set up The Pavilion as a public art center, which would be simultaneously engaged with theoretical debate, art practice, and social/political change. My thesis contributes to a study of this particular educational and creative space at Leeds, showing how debates about feminism, representation and photography were introduced to and informed a generation of politicized artists in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This configuration is not self-evident. Much of the discourse on feminist histories has focused on the way in which different generations of feminists superseded—or else regressed from—the previous moment. In her analysis of feminist journal articles in the field of social sciences, a strong area of feminist theorization, Clare Hemmings has identified three feminist narratives: ‘progress’, ‘loss’ or ‘return’.<sup>5</sup> In this reading, the 1970s are presented as a period of feminist activism while the 1980s are seen as a decade of theoreticism and ‘identity politics’, both of which are often seen to have been ‘overcome’ in the 1990s. For some the shift into more theoretically rich feminist discussions represents a loss of activism, for others it signals progress from naïve activism to deeper analysis of structures. The 1990s narrative of return involves an attempt to reconcile what had been presented as opposing modes of feminism.

In part, this reading has been conditioned by the introduction of ‘feminist theory’ into academia as a distinct intellectual discourse. The tendency has thus been for feminist histories to be misread as fitting into either ‘theoretical’ or ‘activist’ feminism, a division that then drives the narratives Hemmings identifies. I am interested in working against these narratives of feminism by showing one instance in which such oppositions were not enacted, but rather negotiated through a specific framework at the intersection of art education, feminism and exhibition practice, and mediated by cultural practices on photography. In the course of my own research I have been able to position *The Pavilion* as being a significant case study precisely because it defies such over-simplified generational narratives, because it was a project that was committed, during the 1980s, to both an intense engagement with certain theoretical resources—informed by its relationship to the educational space at the University of Leeds—and to activating social change among the women from the immediate communities around its Woodhouse Moor site, who both used *The Pavilion*’s open darkroom and visited its exhibitions. These exhibitions revealed yet a further challenge to existing categories, notably those used by the Arts Council of Great Britain. For the women involved in *The Pavilion*, photography was not simply a fine art form but was both a process to which women needed access to represent

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<sup>5</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter?* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011)

themselves and a key site of feminist interrogation of ideology, representation, subjectivity and sexual difference.

The discovery of The Pavilion as defying the caricature of the 1980s feminist moment as being ‘over-theoretical’ has only been possible through painstaking reconstruction of The Pavilion’s early activity, centered as it did on a program of exhibitions that were designed to connect with the experiences of women in its immediate community as well as deep engagement with the politics of representation through the photographic image. I have, therefore, undertaken extensive art historical research to reconstruct exhibitions so that I could, furthermore, analyze the actual artworks exhibited at The Pavilion. To read these shows and their individual works I have also had to reconstruct for myself the discursive and political contexts of each work’s making. This involved retrieving a sense of what theoretical texts as well as artworks were being read, debated, struggled with and worked through by a set of feminist artists during the early 1980s and with what effect. The reconstruction work in the following chapters also creates a picture of *how* feminist discourse was put together in the late 1970s and early 1980s, often by drawing materials from other fields of theoretical work such as film or literature studies. My research revealed to me the framework of events, essays, conference papers and articles through which feminist artistic ideas and strategies were being developed, disseminated, debated and contested. In turn, this has allowed me to understand the significance of the theoretical resources of the 1980s, used and created by feminists. I am arguing that understanding what these resources were and how they intersected is vital for reassessing this art historical moment in light of the relationship between politics and aesthetics that shaped the project.

In this sense my work aligns with the art historical research of Siona Wilson in her recently published study *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance* (2015). Wilson’s book has been acclaimed for its ‘comprehensive analysis’ of a set of feminist art practices in 1970s Britain in light of the debates about politics of representation, as well as the charged relationship between sex and labor politics in the making

of feminist art.<sup>6</sup> Just as my work aims to complicate the theoretician/activist polarity, Wilson's focus on the entangled concerns of gender and class also complicate the narrative that has claimed that feminism during the 1970s was exclusively focusing on gender, a tendency then challenged during the 1980s through the emergence of the battle of competing 'identity politics'. Adding to Wilson's rendering more complex this standard narrative, my own focus on *The Pavilion*—and particularly the convergence of feminism and the photographic image—shows that there were examples of openly feminist projects in the early 1980s that were able productively to navigate the complex intersections of gender and race, gender and class, and race and class.

### **National and Regional Arts Policy**

Early on in my research I undertook a 'mapping exercise' in order to identify the networks of spaces for 'alternative' arts activity that existed across the UK in the 1980s. How did the spread of independent, artist-led, community-engaged initiatives compare across a thirty-year period? This initial work showed that, while the number of major art galleries within the regions has increased significantly since *The Pavilion* began, there was—during the 1980s—a more identifiable network of politically motivated, grassroots art galleries and agencies than exist today.<sup>7</sup> One context for my research is the changing policies and priorities of the national and regional arts funders, notably the Arts Council of Great Britain [ACGB] and the Regional Arts Associations [RAAs] during the 1980s. My work contributes to a survey of the historical role public funding in Britain has played in enabling what Tom Steele termed in his study of an earlier moment of Leeds' cultural history, a 'provincial avant-garde', through the contributions

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<sup>6</sup> Siona Wilson, *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015)

<sup>7</sup> The turn of the millennium saw a wave of flagship art galleries developed with the aim of regenerating post-industrial cities in the English regions. This included the opening of the Milton Keynes Gallery (1999), New Art Gallery Walsall (2000) and the Baltic Center for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (2002) Prior to this, the major galleries of contemporary art were largely concentrated in London, although there were a number of important artist-led spaces across the country, which have since been closed down or scaled up. These included the Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham (1943–1987) and Untitled Gallery, Sheffield (1975–1996) At the same time, certain regional local authority art galleries were integral to supporting and promoting radical art practices – including black and feminist art movements – which were not being recognized by the major London-based institutions. For example, from 1981–1993, curator Jill Morgan delivered what is now recognized as a landmark program of black feminist exhibitions at Rochdale Art Gallery.

of smaller and alternative models of organization.<sup>8</sup> My focus on the arts policy of the 1980s was in part motivated by the current context of an increasingly dominant ‘sender-receiver’ model of arts organizations. Major national art galleries such as Tate or the Hayward Gallery are financially rewarded for touring exhibitions to the English regions, whereas galleries in those same regions are having curatorial resources stripped due to pernicious cuts to local authority funding and, in turn, arts budgets.<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter Two, I discuss the initial investment that the Yorkshire Arts Association [YAA] initially made in The Pavilion, in relation to its work to advocate for the strength of the photographic practices among Yorkshire arts initiatives. At this time, the ACGB distributed 90% of its funding direct to artists and organizations, with only 10% of its funding awarded to the autonomous RAAs. In 1984, a major report was published titled *The Glory of the Garden*, which promised a strategy for greater devolution of resources to the regions.<sup>10</sup> The underlying principle was that further devolution to the RAAs would remove the obligation of arts organizations to fulfill a ‘national remit’ and instead more community-based, locally focused activity could be encouraged and supported. I thus read The Pavilion as one example of the independent culture fostered through the shifting arts policies of the 1980s.

Another important context for the enabling of artist-led activity during this decade included the agreement formed in 1981, by the Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians [ACTT] in collaboration with the British Film Institute, Channel 4, the RAAs and the Independent Video and Film Association to support independent film production. This ‘Workshop Declaration’ provided funding for production-centered film activity aimed at developing audiences, research, education and community work. In Leeds, it funded many of the outputs of the women’s film collectives Vera Media and Leeds Animation Workshop, both of whom had strong relationships with The Pavilion group. The labor movement was another important source of funding for politically motivated artistic activity at this time. While this was

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<sup>8</sup> Steele, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Here I am referring to initiatives such as Tate’s ‘Artist Rooms’ or Hayward touring programs such as the British Art Show. The British Art Show as an example was, in the early days, co-curated by the directors or curators of regional art galleries but is now curated on behalf of those galleries by nominated, (usually London-based) ‘star curators’.

<sup>10</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Glory of the Garden: the Development of the Arts in England: a Strategy for a Decade* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1984).



more notably the case prior to the formation of ACGB in 1946, as for example the Workers Film and Photo League that was associated with the Communist Party, the influence of trade union councils and socialist political movements was still felt in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>11</sup>

Shifting priorities of arts funders, increasing devolution of certain financial resources, as well as a more diverse range of community, political and educational organizations opened up possibilities for independent arts activity in the 1980s that in some sense surprised me, given that this was also the decade that witnessed Thatcher's deindustrialization across large swathes of the north of England, the defeat of the trade unions and the beginning of the dismantling of the Welfare State. The Pavilion's turbulent first decade is symptomatic of the 1980s as a decade in which, what is now recognized as a determinedly market-led, neoliberal rationality was set in motion, and yet its effects were still not yet fully felt.<sup>12</sup> While certain funding priorities at this time *allowed* for the emergence of a number of grassroots projects, ACGB and its RAAs often embodied values that were in opposition to what The Pavilion—and other radical artistic initiatives—was seeking to do. In 1984, the year following The Pavilion's opening, its funding was temporarily retracted due to particular value judgments about the organization's 'quality' as a photographic gallery. In Chapter Two I analyze a set of minutes from the ACGB archive through which I identify the illegibility of The Pavilion's aesthetic and political priorities to the official administrators of the visual arts at the time.<sup>13</sup> I discuss this archival 'evidence' as being symptomatic of the particular 'problem' that the archive poses for minority histories. Thus, my work seeks to produce a 'counter-inscription' that contests the dominant story contained within official archival documentation, in this case a story of The Pavilion's 'failure'. I discuss this further in the methodology section below.

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<sup>11</sup> One example of this is support is found in the work of The Hackney Flashers, which I address in Chapter Four. This collective made their photographic documentary project *Women and Work* (1975) through an invitation by the Hackney Trades Council who supported the group to mount an exhibition at the Hackney Town Hall.

<sup>12</sup> Feminist political theorist, Wendy Brown, argues that neoliberalism is not simply a set of economic policies or an ideology, but rather a rationality that 'assaults the principles, practices, cultures, subjects and institutions of democracy understood as rule by the people' and that equates to 'all conduct being economic conduct' – see Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), pp. 9–10.

<sup>13</sup> In 2011, this found its parallel when Pavilion programed two screenings of work by Hito Steyerl a contemporary visual artist and filmmaker who is known for her powerful critiques of capitalism. Steyerl's work has been included in numerous art biennials worldwide and in 2017 she topped Art Review's contemporary art 'power list'. An Arts Council England [ACE] assessor attended the screenings at Pavilion and in her report, commented that Steyerl's work was 'too long' and 'esoteric'. That same year, Pavilion was removed from ACE's portfolio of regular funding. The staff team felt strongly that this was an indirect censorship of critically engaged, experimental work, itself linked to an increasing condescension by the funders towards arts audiences in the regions.

In this thesis, I shall argue that because of its scale, its politics and its location outside of London, The Pavilion is an example of an organization whose cultural and historical significance has not so far been registered. Thus, while this thesis opens out a range of research questions relating to art history, feminism, the analysis of arts organizations and the photographic image—as I will go on to outline—it also contributes to making visible the value and political import of place-specific, small-scale, artist-led initiatives at a moment when those types of organizations feel, again, to be under particular threat.

### **Chapter Structure**

The first chapter of my thesis performs a close reading of *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, [TEAP] a film made by Luke Fowler & Mark Fell [Fowler & Fell] in 2014. It was commissioned by the current-day Pavilion as a way of marking the significance of its founding moment, thirty years after its formation as a feminist photography project. Reading back from the current moment, however, the contemporary artists who made the film were only able to reconstruct The Pavilion in terms of a struggle between academia and activism that sought to take art to the streets. Thus they could not recognize that the moment in which The Pavilion was established was a moment in which the modernist focus on medium and form as the exclusive concerns art-making and art history was being challenged by feminist and social-art-historical interventions, which addressed ideology, social relations and subjectivity as being necessary topics for the making of art. They did not investigate the theoretical and political terms in which The Pavilion's founders conceived their project, which drew on the foundational work of Althusser, Foucault, Freud, Lacan and others. Nor did they grasp the art historical resources offered at the University of Leeds by T.J. Clark on the social history of art or Griselda Pollock on psychoanalysis as a feminist theoretical resource.<sup>14</sup>

In this chapter, I use the film as a provocation, and as a device for setting up the methodology I have used to produce my own art-historical reading of the archive formed by the

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustav Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) and Griselda Pollock, 'What's Wrong with "Images of Women"?', *Screen Education*, 24 (1977), 25–34.

interviews that were undertaken as part of making the film. In my reading of the extended and mis-used oral archives created for the contemporary art film I show how the history of The Pavilion as a feminist artistic-political project appeared as opaque and incomprehensible to the two contemporary artists who had been invited to make the film. At the beginning of my research, this history was opaque to me also. In the course of this research, and the reading of the material generated for the film using a specific analytical method, however, I have *discovered* what The Pavilion was for those involved in it. Thus, I am interested in methods that enable knowledge of a past moment to be re-constructed not ‘as it was’ but as its participants can narrate their self-understanding of the project, and in doing so generate an additional archive that can be itself analyzed to develop new theoretical insights and concepts.

Having positioned the illegibility of 1980s feminism to the current moment, while also discovering a critical understanding of the participants’ purposes, I proceed, in the three main chapters, to trace the theoretical genealogy that was part of the political-artistic project of The Pavilion. Precisely by understanding what made that moment specific in terms of its theoretical and activist self-understanding, I intend to show how such a re-envisioning of earlier practices, enables conversations with and creates new contexts for current practices, a premise I come back to in my concluding chapter.

The film, *TEAP*, thus serves to open out the question of what it means to approach history and its archives from the present. It also specifically opens out the problems of working with an archive that contains insufficient material fully to ‘speak’ the history contained within it. In her own work to trace the barely visible women photographers who participated in the US government’s Farm Security Administration during the 1930s, artist and art historian Andrea Fisher—who was also a student at Leeds and connected to The Pavilion group—describes the archive as ‘seducing us to narrativize’, thus giving the false impression that the past has been overcome.<sup>15</sup> She argues that the archive shelves, conceals and seals, separating past from present. But Fisher also writes that ‘it is not a question of then *and* now, but of the then *in* the

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<sup>15</sup> Andrea Fisher, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the US Government 1935 to 1944* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 100. Fisher’s work is added evidence of the substantial outputs that were produced through the intersection of critical feminist and photography-focused teaching in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds during the early 1980s.

now'.<sup>16</sup> In this thesis, I address Fisher's latter statement by working with what I name the 'Living Archive', the memories of a group of artists, workers and participants who constituted The Pavilion in its founding moment. Specifically, I address the testimonies of ten women, initially recorded for *TEAP* in 2014, which look back to their experiences at The Pavilion in the 1980s. While I argue that the artist-made film presents these memories as part of The Pavilion's story of conflict and struggle, I address them in my own work as a route to reanimate the archive. In his article 'Constituting an archive', Stuart Hall argues that it is the 'heterogeneity', 'the multiplicity of discourses', 'personal story', 'anecdote and biography' which make the archive live.<sup>17</sup> While this heterogeneity is necessary, he also notes – interpreting Foucault's thesis on discourse and archive – that it is the historian's job to 'drive through the particular line of interpretation which animates one's work'.<sup>18</sup> My own project, therefore, adds to the efforts undertaken to generate the oral archive as part of the production of *TEAP*, by investigating the way in which the individual testimonies can reveal a 'line of interpretation' – or what Hall also names 'an internal regularity of principle' – that can be the subject of further research in and for the present-day.<sup>19</sup>

In Chapter Two I trace a parallel between the early organizational assessments of The Pavilion made by the major funding bodies and the effect of the contemporary art film, *TEAP*, as each producing a negative dialectics of The Pavilion. Taken together, these historic and contemporary 'misreadings' of The Pavilion produce a political impulse for my own counter-narrative that aims to position the organization as both a significant art-historical initiative in its own right, and as a lens through which to discern a particular moment in the history of British art.

The first two chapters thus address the limitations of The Pavilion's formal archive for producing knowledge about this particular feminist cultural project. They also raise the potential of memory as being productive of the 'Living Archive'. Having read the 'internal regularity' of this 'Living Archive' by means of a coding exercise, I distil from the main individual statements

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<sup>16</sup> Fisher, p. 100.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Constituting an archive', *Third Text*, 15, (2008), 89–92 (p. 92).

<sup>18</sup> Hall, 'Constituting an archive', p.92.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, 'Constituting an archive', p.92.

a concept through which to grasp across the dispersed set of memories produced for the film. I then seek to build on this interpretative work in the three subsequent chapters, structured around exhibitions that were shown at The Pavilion from 1983–1986. In line with my attempts to think the past *in* the present, I open each chapter with a reading of a contemporary exhibition that I have visited over the course of my research, exhibitions in which I have been able to encounter works once shown at The Pavilion or related to its historical moment. By reading the way in which these works are (mis)-interpreted in the hyper-marketized, spectacularized contemporary art world in the present-day, I go onto identify what an understanding of these same artworks in the context of their exhibition at The Pavilion during the 1980s can offer to the narratives of feminist cultural practices in the present. My three primary chapters proceed as follows:

Chapter Three focuses on The Pavilion exhibition *The Image in Trouble* (1984). It begins with a reading of a contemporary exhibition of work by Marie Yates – who showed in *The Image in Trouble* – which took place at the Richard Saltoun Gallery in London in 2016. This recent exhibition was notable for making visible the artist’s relationship to the dematerialization of contemporary art, in particular by seeking to locate the ‘origins’ of the artist’s work in her mentorship by John Latham. While I argue that the 2016 exhibition enabled the viewer to acknowledge the category of ‘conceptual *photography*’ in addition to the broader term ‘conceptual art’, my interpretation of Yates’ work reads the more radical questioning of the category ‘woman’ through the language of conceptual art, an exploration that is rendered marginal within this specific commercial gallery exhibition. In this third chapter, I thus seek to construct the history of Marie Yates’ turn to sexual difference as the primary preoccupation of her image-centered artwork. Creating the frame for her work, and that of the two other exhibited artists Yve Lomax and Susan Trangmar, necessitated an investigation into the question of ideology, the Althusserian proposition of the relative autonomy of representational practices and their implication for feminist thought and art practice.

In this chapter I thus trace the way in which questions of ideology and representation at the intersection with French psychoanalytical theory mediated by film theory, led to an analysis of subjectivity as constituted in and through the image. I also discuss the way in which a focus on ideology as one way to overcome crude economic determinism led on to feminist cultural

theory's engagement with the question of subjectivity as reformulated by the structuralist psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. Feminist theory developed a way to understand how sexed identifications are produced through the acquisition of language – that is the social, external fixing of internal fantasies and desires. This chapter also makes visible the role of screen theory in thinking through the creative possibilities of 'unfixing' the image, notably through strategies of montage and 'depropriation'. In this chapter I thus locate the way in which Yve Lomax, Susan Trangmar and Marie Yates, as artists informed by feminism, were bringing the theoretical work of the New Left to bear upon an understanding of sexed subjectivity, with the aim, in the words of Mary Kelly, to 'make sexuality pass into the historical discourse of feminist politics; in other words, to be "named" in the grand narrative of social change'.<sup>20</sup>

Where the focus on the work of Lomax, Trangmar and Yates makes visible the feminist attention to image politics, Chapter Four addresses another pole of feminist debate – social politics – by attending to the work of Jo Spence. I begin the chapter with a reading of an exhibition, *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Photography and the Critique of Modernism* (2015), at the Museo Reina Sofía Madrid, which tracked the relationship of documentary photography to social movements. The 'blind spot' of this exhibition was, I argue, its failure to fully attend to the way in which the foundations of social documentary were being questioned by feminism, which raised the problems of representing woman within both the social relations of production and the social relations of reproduction. In this chapter, I trace the development of Jo Spence's unique photographic language as it was presented at The Pavilion from 1983–1986. I discuss her collective work as part of The Hackney Flashers, through to her solo exhibition *Beyond The Family Album*, the concerns of which were extended through her collaborations with The Polysnappers. The final focus of this chapter is Spence's exhibition *The Picture of Health?*.

Through a close reading of these bodies of work, I discuss Spence's preoccupation with the relationship of the camera and the photograph to the processes of capitalism, specifically as this relationship can be understood through the lived experiences of women, and herself as *a woman*. Attending to the convergence of class and gender, Spence's work addresses questions

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<sup>20</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. xviii.

of subjectivity in relation to the sites of the workplace, the family and healthcare. Her work moves from using the camera to make visible hitherto invisible experiences of women within the relations of production towards staging her own embodied experience of the world to show how capitalism inscribes itself onto the classed and gendered body. Building on Chapter Three, this chapter extends my study of the complex relationship between subject and image, analyzing the way in which Jo Spence stages the body as sign of the structures by which women, under the conditions of advanced capitalism, are subordinated, sexualized and objectified *through the image*. It also shows the way in which Spence – in making visible unseen, unspeakable experiences that pertain to class and gender – reaches out to working class women, opening up new kinds of spaces and rethinking the relationship between art and audience.

In Chapter Five, my historic focus is the exhibition *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers*, which was exhibited at The Pavilion in 1986. The chapter opens with a reading of *The Place is Here* (2017) at Nottingham Contemporary. This exhibition addressed the configuration of artists who formed the Black Arts Movement in Britain during the 1980s. Within this show I identify the under-represented story of the regional contributions that made space for black women artists in Britain during the decade of the 1980s. Notably, I locate – and thicken – the traces of The Pavilion within this story while also showing the relationship of the Black Arts Movement to feminism. I dedicate my chapter to creating the frame that sheds light on the significance of black women artists within the history of British art, while equally attending to the way in which black *feminist* creativity necessitated its own intervention into photography.

Chapter Five thus attends to questions of differentiated experience: the specificities of silencing, marginalization and subordination on the basis of both racialization and gendering. Through my study of exhibiting artists Brenda Agard, Ingrid Pollard and Maud Sulter who were brought together by The Pavilion's Darkroom and Outreach Coordinator Sutapa Biswas in the *Testimony* exhibition, I address the way in which the photographic image became central to making visible the violence of representation in relation to black women's experiences, as well as being the site of creative political work that was decolonizing the photographic image to change the visual record. This chapter shows the specificity of work being done by artists to

address the experiences of women who were subject to oppressions on the basis of race and gender as well as both intersecting with class. I end this chapter by making visible the way in which the presence of black women artists at The Pavilion makes legible – most clearly – the relationship between the critical and creative ambition of The Pavilion’s exhibitions program and its educational outreach work, which aimed to invite women from the local community into The Pavilion’s darkroom in order to resource them to define their own representation against the experiences of racism, class exploitation and sexist oppression. I show that this important ‘bridging work’ between the deep questions being asked of the relay between social experiences and the image, led to the increased visibility and self-representation among local women who were neither artists nor academics, but for whom accessing the means of photographic production became an important tool in their self-determination.

This thesis begins with a self-reflexive reading of a contemporary art film that catalyzed my process of research. Mirroring this, my final chapter concludes and looks forward through a similarly reflexive approach. Written in coincidence with a symposium and exhibition I co-organized in 2017—‘A Feminist Space at Leeds: Looking back to Think Forward’—this chapter reflects on the central arguments I am making with regards the convergence of which proposes that The Pavilion is to be understood not as a failed undertaking but rather as an ‘incomplete project’.<sup>21</sup> In doing so, it traces the way in which one specific initiative from The Pavilion’s recent program has been informed by what I have been discovering in the process of this research while also reflecting on the differences and commonalities between *The Pavilion* then and *Pavilion* now.

### **Existing Work**

The written material published on The Pavilion is very scant. My research offers the first historical study of the organization since it relocated from the park pavilion in 1994, at which

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<sup>21</sup> In using the word ‘incomplete’, I am invoking a roundtable discussion from 2004 in which Hal Foster proposes to ‘look back over the last few decades to instances where critical alternatives were proposed’. He argues that ‘indicating some “incomplete projects” might help us look ahead as well’ – see Hal Foster, ‘The Predicament of Contemporary Art’, in *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, ed. by Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pp. 671–679 (p. 673).



point it stopped operating as an explicitly feminist project.<sup>22</sup> In 1986, photographers and cultural theorists Stevie Bezencenet and Philip Corrigan included a chapter written by Shirley Moreno in their 1986 book *Photographic Practices: Towards a Different Image*. The chapter was written by Moreno as an advocacy document, shortly after the YAA first withdrew its funding to the organization. It is thus particularly useful in setting out one vision for The Pavilion in its moment of emergence. I draw on this essay in Chapter Two as part of my discussion about the legibility of The Pavilion's founding aims in relation to the accepted terms of the visual arts field. The second piece of published writing forms part of sociologist Elizabeth Chaplin's 1994 book *Sociology and Visual Representation*. Chaplin's chapter, 'Visual and verbal critique: feminism and postmodernism' uses The Pavilion as an example of what the author names a 'pluralist, localized, minority group-based yet generally Marxist-informed approach to cultural representation'.<sup>23</sup> Notably, this chapter draws on The Pavilion as part of a discussion on the changing relationship between theory/practice, art/sociology and image/text. I make further reference to Chaplin's reading of The Pavilion in Chapter Five, when discussing the relationship between black feminist and postmodernist debates.

These two published contributions were both written and published at the time of The Pavilion's existence as a women's photography center. They were also written 'from within', by people who were directly linked to the organization's formation and operation—Shirley Moreno co-founded The Pavilion and Elizabeth Chaplin was appointed onto the Management Committee in 1988.<sup>24</sup> Thus they can be read as being part of the primary archive. *Creative Economies in Post-Industrial Cities* (2013) edited by Myrna Margulies Breitbart references The Pavilion as part of a broader study on the relationship of art to the deindustrialization of cities in the north of England. Likewise, Gabriel N. Gee's book *Art in the North of England, 1979-2008* (2017) addresses the role of art in Britain's de-industrialized north, in relation to political and economic changes. The Pavilion is staged briefly in both these books as an example of the way

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<sup>22</sup> In 1994, The Pavilion relocated to 2 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. It has had several bases since then and currently operates from an office at the University of Leeds (although it continues to be constituted as an independent charity)

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Management Committee Report – one Member's Personal Reflections on the Last Year', in unpublished Annual Report 1988/89, p. 1. Leeds, University of Leeds Special Collections, Feminist Archive North, FAN/PAV.

in which grassroots art projects offered up dissenting voices to the procedures of deindustrialization, neoliberalism and regeneration in the 1980s. Thus while both of these projects note the significance of The Pavilion as part of the story of resistance within the north of England, they offer only brief descriptions of the organization as part of broader analyses. My work provides the first in-depth historical study of The Pavilion's significance as a political-aesthetic project in the context of the histories and narratives of feminist cultural practices.<sup>25</sup>

### **Methodology**

I began my thesis in order to make visible the conditions and innovations of The Pavilion Women's Photography Center as revealing the important, but under-recognized convergence between feminism and the theories and politics of the image. An important context for this work was the question of the archive in relation to those historically-significant cultural practices—of which The Pavilion is one example—that have virtually disappeared from view.

As I stated earlier, one reading of the documentary material contained within The Pavilion archive, coupled with the testimony of the Arts Council assessments I located, represents The Pavilion as a project defined by failure and lack. My methodological challenge has thus been to locate, within the archive, traces of The Pavilion's aesthetic and political significance in terms of its ambition, practices and place in a larger picture of cultural politics in the 1980s. I have read for traces of this other story in the archive by 'filling in the gaps' of the sparse documentation of The Pavilion's exhibitions program. How could I thicken and enliven the archive sufficiently to produce new knowledge of the exhibitions and artists who exhibited at The Pavilion, and as a way of challenging the simplistic stories of 'feminist generations' that abound in the present-day? As part of this process, I worked with the 'Living Archive': a set of oral testimonies of women involved in different ways in the history of The Pavilion, created in 2014 by the makers of the film *TEAP* while I was working at *Pavilion*. These added political and personal memory to the mute historical documents contained within The Pavilion

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<sup>25</sup> In the course of my research, academic Gavin Butt has spoken to me about my work, which has informed Butt's developing project on the relationship between the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds and artistic experimentalism in the 1970s/80s.

collection. In my second chapter, I show how these testimonies operate as ‘resistant material’ that re-inscribe into the archive a sense of the political and personal energy that created and sustained The Pavilion project.

One methodological element was thus to make visible what is at stake when encountering any archive as an object of potential knowledge. What can be known? What is unknowable? What knowledge can be produced of that which is currently unknowable? My first chapter—the reading of a commissioned art film produced by two contemporary artists as their response to The Pavilion archive—offers a way to justify methodological elements of my research as well as, itself, being a part of my research methodology. In Chapter One, I seek to show how the reading of an archive that is itself rendered incomplete by cultural erasure requires a methodology that is sensitive to its incomplete, unprocessed state.<sup>26</sup>

In her 1985 article, ‘The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives’, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak references historian Dominick LaCapra, who cautions against a fetishization of the archive as literal substitute for the past.<sup>27</sup> Spivak, however, is not content with defetishizing the archive or with making visible that which is ‘repressed’. She approaches the archive from the perspective of postcolonial critique. Addressing the British records of the transference of the rule of India from the East India Company to the British Crown, Spivak discusses the archive in relation to one particular woman: the ‘Rani of Sirmur’, wife of the Raja of Sirmur who was deposed by the British government. Within her reading of this figure, who appears briefly within the historical records, Spivak argues that ‘between the production of archives and indigenous patriarchy, there is no “real Rani” to be found’.<sup>28</sup> She argues that, within the colonial records, the Rani ‘emerges only when she is needed in the space of imperial production’, after which she disappears from view.<sup>29</sup> Spivak states that, ‘the point of this essay is to inspect soberly the absence of a text that can “answer one back” after the planned epistemic

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<sup>26</sup> Important resources in relation to the problematic of the archive from a feminist and postcolonial perspective include: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading Archives’, *History and Theory*, 24 (1985), 247–272; and Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, ‘Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite literature: the representation of Elizabeth Siddall’, in *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, ed. by Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 91–114. This latter chapter examines the way in which the archives used in Pre-Raphaelite scholarship ‘were deeply implicated in nineteenth-century ideologies of class and gender [...]’ (p. 92).

<sup>27</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, NY, 1985), p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Spivak, ‘The Rani of Sirmur’, p. 271.

<sup>29</sup> Spivak, ‘The Rani of Sirmur’, p. 270.

violence of the imperialist project'.<sup>30</sup> Her work is thus useful to me, as a resource that poses the challenge of working on a reconstruction of minority histories in the face of archival violence.

The archive of The Pavilion is caught up with its own kind of challenges that are distinct but related to Spivak's project. Specifically, as I will go on to show, it is inscribed by the terms of the funding bodies who judged The Pavilion against criteria that did not relate to their aims or ambitions. Through analysis of a set of records that cast The Pavilion as a failed project, I aim to show—as Spivak does—that historical reality is fabricated within the archive. After carefully reading this 'fabrication', Spivak nonetheless reveals her own desire that drives her historical project. She writes, 'I want to touch the Rani's picture, some remote substance of her, if it can be unearthed'.<sup>31</sup> Like Spivak, I recognize that there are thin traces within the archive which—driven by my feminist desire—I will unearth, and expand upon, aiming to voice the silencing, while also locating other sites of women speaking through the archive.

In The Pavilion archive, I was able to access a collection of incomplete reports documenting aspects of The Pavilion's early program. By carefully reading these documents, I located the titles and dates of exhibitions through which I constructed a timeline, albeit incomplete (See Appendix 1). Within the archive itself, these exhibitions are scantily visible. Aside from cursory references in minutes of meetings, there are posters that give the titles and, in some cases, visualize elements of the artistic material included in the exhibitions. Besides this, however, there is no documentation explaining how and why the exhibitions were chosen. Images are sparse and there are no artist biographies or descriptions of work. The reports within the archival boxes largely focus on the politics of fundraising. They document struggles to raise money, the labor of application writing, and aspects of the day-to-day tasks involved in running the center on little money. There are also letters written to the funders from supporters of The Pavilion—other women's groups—which show defiance in the face of the YAA funding cuts in 1984. In Chapter One, I am reading *TEAP* as being one effect of this negative dialectics, in recirculating the story of failure inscribed within the archive.

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<sup>30</sup> Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur', p. 251.

<sup>31</sup> Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur', p. 271.

The participants who were interviewed for the film responded negatively to *TEAP*, indicating that the significance of The Pavilion is known to those involved but had not been captured by the film itself. It was clear that The Pavilion's incomplete archive did not tell the whole story. I wanted to know: What was the urgency that drove the founders to set up this project in the face of struggle? What were the art practices that they insisted were seen? What were the exhibitions? How were they organized? Who saw them? What effect did they have? What impact did they have on the terms of art? What impact did they have in relation to the shifts in art practice and related debates? In light of these questions, I asked another question: how could I activate the archive, to enable it to 'speak' to and in the present?

An important methodological dimension of my work has been to listen again to the oral testimonies produced by the women interviewed for *TEAP* and to transcribe their words as texts. To work on this new 'archive' I selected the Grounded Theory Method [GTM], explained more fully in my second chapter. As a method of qualitative research into lived experience and decision-making, GTM provided a way of reading the diverse accounts by the women who formed The Pavilion that disclosed shared ambition across a set of disparate memories and experiences. By means of the rigorous coding method in GTM that grounds theory in the analysis of the words of the subjects of experience, memory and history, rather than imposing a hypothesis or theoretical frame upon those words, I worked with this material to arrive at what has become my key concept. This concept was then tested further against documentary and historical research.

In testing this concept, another methodological element thus sought to fill in the gaps of the archive by re-constructing the exhibitions of The Pavilion's early program using more classical art-historical methodologies that nonetheless reflected Grounded Theory's emphasis on reading symptomatically, rather than through the lens of a particular contemporary debate. This has produced three case studies of exhibitions that took place from 1983–1986. I have carried out detailed research into these exhibitions and have performed close readings of the artworks

they showed, when I succeeded in accessing them ‘in the flesh’.<sup>32</sup> I also sought to construct a wider frame for these art practices in order to understand the conditions in which they were made, by locating reviews and references in critical writing, while also establishing the intersection of artists with related events, publications and other exhibitions. By this means, this thesis contributes to the historicization of the artists included in these exhibitions. Through an analysis of the exhibitions, it also illuminates the debates around which the meeting of feminist politics, theory and art practice pivoted during the 1980s. Finally, by reconstructing such theoretical and political debates I have also identified the events, magazines, publications and groupings out of which the women’s art movement was produced and for which The Pavilion was a bridge that enabled particular connections between artists doing different kinds of work.

### **Reconstructing the Archive**

In addition to the reconstruction of ‘disappeared’ but significant exhibitions, my methodology has involved archeologically identifying and investigating the political events, networks and publications that were the platforms for the emerging political/aesthetic debates that can be seen, in some sense, as having produced The Pavilion and having been put into concrete practice there. These platforms have not yet been fully archived or historicized. I have followed various threads to build up a picture of the organizing of the feminist artistic movement as it intersected with black politics, the women’s liberation movement and the emerging spaces of debate for cultural theory. Thus I have identified the journals of *Screen*, *Screen Education*, *Ten 8*, *Camerawork*, *Politics/Photography*, *Feminist Art News*, *Block* and *m/f* as key sources, all linked by a shared inquiry into questions of representation in the moment of post-structuralism. Another source was the syllabus for a lecture course titled ‘Theories and Institutions’, delivered at the University of Leeds from 1977–84 by Griselda Pollock, covering the period of

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<sup>32</sup> This included visits to three exhibitions: *Not Yet. On the Reinvention of Photography and the Critique of Modernism*, Museo Reina Sofía (11 Feb–13 July 2015); *Some Dimensions of My Lunch: Conceptual Art in Britain – Part 2: Marie Yates Works*, Richard Saltoun (24 June–22 July 2016); *The Place is Here*, Nottingham Contemporary (4 Feb–1 May 2017) From 23 November–17 December 2017 I mounted an exhibition in the Project Space at the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds. This brought together work by Maud Sulter, Jo Spence and Marie Yates, loaned by Richard Saltoun Gallery, Tate and the Estate of Maud Sulter. Seeing works from my three case study exhibitions *together*, revealed the visual coherence between a set of distinct feminist art practices that took photography as their site of intervention.

undergraduate study of Dinah Clark, Caroline Taylor and Sutapa Biswas. This reading and lecture list provided useful insight into the theoretical texts that were being brought together to form the resources for The Pavilion founders. I have also tracked down documentation and essays from key events, including the 1976 Patriarchy Conference and the 1979 Socialist Feminist Conference in London, out of which the essay 'Representation vs Communication' was produced, itself vital for my understanding of the theoretical innovations of feminism and the work of artist Marie Yates in particular. Audio recordings and testimony from the first National Black Arts convention enabled me to understand in more detail the politics of the Black Women's Art Movement in relation to both an emerging feminist and black political consciousness.

The scope of this archival reconstruction is inevitably limited within my own project and there is potential for further detailed research to build a more comprehensive national picture of the platforms that made space for feminist and black political-aesthetic debate. Nonetheless, my research into these events, exhibitions and published writing as it has pivoted around The Pavilion exhibitions shows the convergences of what are, on the face of it, quite distinct cultural initiatives. Looked at through the lens of The Pavilion, however, they paint an expansive picture of a period of art history that was inflected by the dual questioning of what, retrospectively, can be given the short-hand terms 'feminism' and 'photography'.

In the course of my research this reconstructive work has been difficult, both at the level of accessing the materials, and in understanding those materials for myself. Journals and magazines that were integral to the circulation of feminist debates have disappeared quietly from library shelves. Archival evidence of exhibitions and events that constituted the feminist art movement during the late 1970s and early 1980s is dispersed, if it exists at all. The renewed feminist impulse began, in the 1970s, to evolve its own theoretical framings and creative practices, which did not emerge within the formal spaces of academia, but rather in the collective spaces of reading and thinking that took place in community spaces, side rooms of conferences or women's homes, a formation that is very difficult to appreciate in the current-day with the proliferation of 'gender studies' courses across academia. While certain major events produced publications or other documentation, feminist work has required me to be

particularly attentive to the scant traces within archives, as well as to rely on the memories of those who were there.

On the other hand, the difficulty of this research has gone beyond the practical challenge of locating materials. As someone who was born in 1984, who thus came of age in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I have had no direct access to the way in which feminist political strategies or a feminist language of analysis was formed. It is telling that I began university in 2003—the very same year that the postgraduate Masters Program in Feminism and the Visual Arts (known as MAFEM) founded by Griselda Pollock at the University of Leeds—was axed.<sup>33</sup> In the course of my research, which has included participating in an MA module (‘Feminism and Culture: Theoretical Perspectives’), and attending certain conferences that have themselves signaled a recent resurgence of interest in questions of feminist theory and art, I have gradually acquired knowledge of the complex theories and practices that defined the moment of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as a new appreciation for the genealogies of theory.<sup>34</sup> This has included, for example, being introduced to the feminist theoretical engagements with the vocabularies of psychoanalysis, as inhabited by particular feminist artists and thinkers during this period, which has required slow and painful working through for myself to try and grasp what Mary Kelly means when she says that psychoanalysis was taken up as an *active political resource*:

We didn’t pursue this out of any academic interest. We just got the things that we could at the time, translated them, and in a sense, the urgency here was to change our lives and what we saw as the iniquitous conditions of all women’s lives at that time blatantly enforced in the workplace.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the language of psychoanalysis, as articulated by Kelly, a return to the Brechtian political-aesthetic strategies of the 1920s/30s, as taken up in the 1970s, has, likewise, helped me to understand the historically situated, politically motivated creative practices that emerged in the

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<sup>33</sup> Griselda Pollock gives an account of the opening and closure of this program in Griselda Pollock, ‘Opened, Closed and Opening: Reflections on Feminist Pedagogy in a UK University’, *N.Paradoxa*, 26 (2010), 20–28.

<sup>34</sup> For example, *House, work, artwork: feminism and Art History’s new domesticities*, University of Birmingham (3–4 July 2015); *Fast Forward: Women in Photography*, Tate Modern (6–7 November 2015); *Feminist readings 2: theory, practice and politics of reading today*, University of Leeds (15–16 April 2016); *Making Women’s Art Matter: New Approaches to the Careers and Legacies of Women Artists*, Paul Mellon Center (9–10 February 2017).

<sup>35</sup> Mary Kelly, ‘Three Non-Strategic Observations for a Few Artists Whose Work In Some Way Is Informed by Feminism’, <<http://exquisiteacts.org/symposium/strategies-for-contemporary-feminism.html>> [accessed 6 March 2018].



1980s.<sup>36</sup> My research into one particular feminist art center has thus opened out onto larger art-historical questions that have to do with the politics-aesthetics-theory relation. By investigating the cultural resources and language that informed feminist artists in this earlier moment, I have discovered why the moment of feminist politics/art/theory was also, within the domain of feminist art, the moment of photography. I began my research with the simple understanding that increased democracy of photographic technology equated to its becoming a means of political expression for women artists. Its accessibility *was* one important dimension. Through reconstructing the wider archive of the theoretical and cultural resources that were, historically taken up by a set of artists, however, I have come to understand, much more specifically, why and how the photographic image became a site of political and creative intervention for feminist artists working in the 1980s.

### **Politics of Aesthetics/Aesthetics of Politics**

One of the major issues raised by my study of *The Pavilion* is the relationship of art to politics. My research contributes to an understanding of the politics/aesthetics relation, first through its focus on debates about photography that, during the 1970s and 80s, were addressing photography's relationship to the operation of ideology, a discourse interacting strongly with debates in contemporary film theory. Revisiting this historical theoretical moment was essential for re-envisioning the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the 1980s. Tracing this theoretical genealogy has been absolutely necessary to understanding both the art practices of the time and what enabled three graduates from the Department of Fine Art to imagine the project that became *The Pavilion*. This study examines the way in which women artists became agents of new kinds of image making. It also analyses new creative work that made visible woman *as* image while seeking to re-image women in a wider range of lived experiences, identities and conditions. These two sets of debates converge, in my research, through a group of art practices that address what was articulated during the 1980s as 'the politics of

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<sup>36</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Screening the seventies: sexuality and representation in feminist practice – a Brechtian perspective', in *Vision and Difference*, pp. 155–199 (pp. 157–160).

representation'.<sup>37</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, both 'feminism' and 'photography' were categories that became subject to intense debate and criticism. Critical thinking from this moment, as I aim to show, revealed the unstable nature of these two categories, as being comprised of a set of practices and heterogeneous articulations rather than being fixed knowable disciplines.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increased availability of technology and training facilities that enabled wider access to the means of photographic production, both within and outside of, the art school context. While training facilities and courses existed across the country, however, and while the process of production and printing was becoming easier and cheaper, particularly since the introduction of resin-coated paper to the printing of silver gelatin photography in the 1970s, analogue photography still depended on access to equipment, facilities, financial resource, and know-how. Dinah Clark, one of The Pavilion founders, makes this clear in the following account:

I still had a key to the darkroom in the University of Leeds. I wasn't meant to use it because I wasn't a student anymore. But I got up at about 3 o'clock in the morning. And I was staying overnight in a squat on Clarendon Road and it was really cold because there was no heating in the house. And I set the alarm and I got up and I went off to the university and it was really dark. Let myself into the darkrooms and I just started developing the film to get a print of *The Pavilion* for some publication we wanted to put it in. And so there I was, busy with the chemicals, and developing my film and then doing some printing, thinking 'I'll be away by about six in the morning if I'm lucky'. But actually of course everything ran over time and suddenly behind me, the new head of the photography facility in the University of Leeds walks in behind me and we're both just looking at the print and how its coming through in the chemical bath [...] And that was how it was in Leeds, there really weren't any facilities if you weren't an art student and you were no longer involved in the colleges.<sup>38</sup>

My work, particularly the final part of Chapter Five, which addresses one particular outreach initiative at The Pavilion, makes visible the significance of The Pavilion's darkroom for providing access to the means of production at this stage in the technological history of photography. At the same time, my research also addresses this moment of photography as

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<sup>37</sup> In 1980, a special issue of the journal *Screen Education* was published. Titled 'the Politics of "representation"', this is one instance that marks the usage and circulation of this term in the early 1980s. *Screen Education*, 36 (1980) included an editorial on the politics of representation by James Donald, John Tagg's 'Power and Photography: Part One' and Sarah McCarthy's 'Photo-Practice 2'. The latter essay includes some of the images McCarthy made for Sue Clayton's *The Song of a Shirt* (1979), itself one of the most important examples of feminist independent film.

<sup>38</sup> Dinah Clark, unpublished transcript of testimony produced for *To the editor of Amateur Photography*, September 2014, FAN/PAV, p. 2.

being defined by the domination of mass media images as a productive and ideological dimension within consumer capitalism. In relation to this increased domination of the photographic in society, new theoretical debates began to emerge that addressed the photograph as a central part of communications and culture.

In the book *Thinking Photography*, published in 1982, Victor Burgin brought together a series of essays that proposed a new kind of photographic criticism in response to the increased presence of photography in ‘social institutions’—that is, within advertising as much as in journalism and art. This provides a key source for my research into this historical moment. The criticism with which this book and my thesis engages, addresses the increased circulation of photography as an art practice that intersected, however, with the domain of the mass media. At the time of its emergence, this theoretical work sought to challenge the dominant mode of the writing on photography in art history that centered its evaluation on technical skill, aesthetics or the artist’s personality or biography. In radical contrast, as a concept, ‘thinking photography’ addresses photography as a practice of signification. It locates photography within the production and dissemination of meaning, where meaning production is furthermore defined as structural within the social formation as a whole. Within my thesis I am addressing this ‘thinking’ photography in contrast to that classification of photography that would be used to describe photographic objects within a modernist art collection, as if they are objects created by a unique individual isolated from social relations.

At the end of his introduction to *Thinking Photography*, Burgin writes that despite its omissions of any essays by women in the collection, ‘this theoretical project [...] owes itself to the initial and continuing insistence of the women’s movement on the politics of representation’.<sup>39</sup> Thus, while this shift in photography discourse to *thinking* photography provides one context for the debates with which I am working, I shall also map the work that was creating new frameworks in order to theorize, not only the social divisions between women and men within society, but the way in which the ideological sphere of images and discourses

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<sup>39</sup> Victor Burgin, ‘Introduction’, in *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), pp. 1–14 (p. 14).

produce and reproduce hierarchies of meaning and the system of sexual difference. My work draws out the convergence of these two sets of debates.

One defining aspect of feminist thought and work during the 1970s and 1980s was the constellation of debates it brought together that pertained as much to the political, economic, social and artistic dimensions of social experience as the psycho-symbolic production of subjectivity, of classed, raced and sexed subject positions. A journal that was particularly committed to this latter configuration was *m/f*, published between 1978 and 1986, which published challenging theoretical work on the social and psychical organization of sexual difference within the domains of film theory and literary criticism.<sup>40</sup> Artist Mary Kelly (b.1941) has argued that the introduction of psychoanalysis to feminist debates served to expose what she has described as ‘the absences in the established knowledge pertaining to gender at that time, which were just that gender was either biologically determined or sociologically constrained; there was nothing in between’.<sup>41</sup> The intersection of psychoanalysis and semiotics, as addressed through film and communications theory, helped thinkers and artists to understand the complex relations between capitalism and patriarchy as interlocking but irreducible systems of oppression.<sup>42</sup> For the *m/f* writers, or indeed artists such as Mary Kelly, the notion of artistic production as a signifying social practice was important because it showed that art could be a political resource for the women’s movement across levels of both the social and the psycho-symbolic. If it is acknowledged that subjectivity is the effect of systems of representation, of which art is one, then visual art could be central to challenging the sexed identities and positions of men and women in society and in fantasy. Thus, during the 1980s, art practice itself became a site for an analysis of sexual difference situated within the complex social processes of the colonial and the capitalist relations of production and ideological production.

In Britain, while there was one impetus to assert women’s experiences of both gender and class, a second tendency emerged that emphasized a more critically theorized feminist

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<sup>40</sup> *m/f* was edited by Parveen Adams, Beverley Brown, Rosalind Coward, Elizabeth Cowie and Cora Kaplan

<sup>41</sup> Mary Kelly, ‘Three Non-Strategic Observations’, <<http://exquisiteacts.org/symposium/strategies-for-contemporary-feminism.html>> [accessed 6 March 2018]

<sup>42</sup> Heidi Hartmann, ‘The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union’, *Capital and Class*, 3 (1979), 1-33. In this essay Hartmann argues that while both a Marxist and feminist analysis are necessary for understanding capitalist societies, a feminist perspective has been consistently subordinated.

project, which engaged in a wider circle of debates across film, literary theory and political philosophy including Marxism. Replacing the focus on social identities, this body of theory focused on subjectivity being formed through *systems* of representation and social practice. These arguments drew on Michel Foucault's then recent work on 'discursive formations' and on re-readings of psychoanalysis notably in relation to cinema.<sup>43</sup>

Such a position was put forward in a paper presented at the Socialist Feminist Conference, London in 1979. Written by artists Mary Kelly and Marie Yates, literary theorists Cora Kaplan and Jacqueline Rose and film theorists Elizabeth Cowie and Claire Johnston, this paper was titled 'Representation vs Communication'. It sought to add the analysis of the effects of representational practices to the activist political work of the women's movement that had focused on the political and economic demands for equal representation for women in terms of exhibition space, grants, employment opportunities and screen time.<sup>44</sup> The argument these artists and thinkers put forward was a complex one. It recognized amongst current feminist projects in the arts and media 'the search for new images of women', 'the impetus to create a women's aesthetic', 'the celebration of the female body', as well as effort to give value to 'the traditional crafts of women's work' as being part of the work of the women's movement.<sup>45</sup> In this text however, the authors argue that it is not possible for old forms to convey new content, or for new, specifically female forms to emerge.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the authors propose (invoking Mary Kelly's specific psychoanalytic, semiotic, feminist-informed art work), 'a feminist avant-garde practice which places an emphasis on the intersubjective relationships (Kelly), attempting to articulate "the feminine" not as an essential experience but as a representation constructed in

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<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Cowie, Claire Johnston, Cora Kaplan, Mary Kelly, Jacqueline Rose and Marie Yates, 'Representation vs Communication', in *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975-80*, ed. by Feminist Anthology Collective (London: The Women's Press, 1981), pp. 238–245 (p. 239).

<sup>44</sup> Cowie et al., p. 239.

<sup>45</sup> Cowie et al., p. 240.

It is important to register that this theoretical project was distinct from an artistic and critical tendency during the 1970s that sought to discover the means to represent women's specific experiences in art – formally, figuratively or through the use of materials. For example, from 1971-1976 Judy Chicago structured the Feminist Art Program she ran at the California Institute of the Arts around consciousness-raising sessions, which centered on the discovery of a common oppression based on gender. There was also a determined political effort to increase the quota of women who were exhibited in public museums as, for example, in 1970, when a group of women picketed the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York over the Whitney's virtual exclusion of women in its exhibitions of contemporary art. For accounts of these events see Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1975) and Faith Wilding, *By Our Own Hands: The Women Artists' Movement, Southern California, 1970–1976* (Santa Monica, CA: Double X, 1977)

<sup>46</sup> Cowie et al., p. 240.

discourse'.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Cowie et al., argue that representational practices have their own effectivity, producing meaning through codes, processes and structures. The authors argue that there is a 'politics of a work of art', which, from a feminist perspective 'can only be constructed in the context of its reading and insertion into the theoretical and political practice of the women's movement'.<sup>48</sup> This echoes what was, at that time, being advanced in the new film theory—that a film should not be read as a closed, finished object, but as a text that implies and solicits the spectator in the production of meaning and in ideologically framing the subject.<sup>49</sup>

In 1984, The Pavilion made space for these emerging debates in hosting the exhibition *The Image in Trouble*, which staged the work of Marie Yates (b. 1940), Yve Lomax (b. 1952) and Susan Trangmar (b. 1953) who were all, in one way or another, unfixing assumptions about the image. The Pavilion thus becomes historically significant as a site for the development of this particular, theoretical, feminist position. While there was an element in the founding ideas for The Pavilion and its outreach activity that related to, for example, Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's project *Womanhouse* and the later Woman's Building in San Francisco, as providing a space for women to come together and make art, *The Image in Trouble* shows that The Pavilion also made space for art practices that focused on the politics of representation. This emphasis was closely related to, for example, the exhibition *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984-5), which was shown in London, New York and Chicago, and explored the concept of gender as a construction rooted in language. By underscoring this particularly complex dimension of The Pavilion's work, which shows that The Pavilion was deeply engaged with the cutting-edge of debates informing contemporary art in its extended forms of practice, I show why the project was so difficult for the arts funders to grasp in relation to their expectations of what a public gallery might do.

In relation to the larger question of politics and aesthetics, my research also makes visible the relationship of feminist practices to the debates on the British intellectual left. The work of Heidi Hartmann, Juliet Mitchell and Sheila Rowbotham provide historical resources

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<sup>47</sup> Cowie et al., p. 245.

<sup>48</sup> Cowie et al., p. 245.

<sup>49</sup> Cowie et al., p. 240.

through which to understand developments in feminist debates, in relation to the feminist critique of Marxism and extended analysis of capitalism and gender emerging during the 1970s.<sup>50</sup> The publication of foundational socialist feminist theories, which recognized that Marxist theory did not account for certain social experiences were themselves informed by new translations of, for example, Marx's *Grundrisse* (1973) and the circulation of Walter Benjamin's expanded Marxist writings in the 1970s. Thus, while feminist thinking was deeply connected to the history of Marxist thought, it also critiqued Marxism for its blindness to gender relations as sites of exploitation within capitalism.

These debates have been famously articulated in Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's film *Riddles of the Sphinx*, which is one particularly pertinent example of the intersection of avant-garde practice in art, cinema and theory. In the film, a character 'Louise' poses this issue:

Should women demand special working conditions for mothers? Can a child-care campaign attack anything fundamental to women's oppression? Should women's struggle be concentrated on economic issues? Is domestic labor productive? Is the division of labor the root of the problem? Is exploitation outside the home better than oppression within it? Should women organize themselves separately from men? Could there be a social revolution in which women do not play the leading role? How does women's struggle relate to class struggle? Is patriarchy the main enemy for women? Does the oppression of women work on the unconscious as well as on the conscious? What would a politics of the unconscious be like? How necessary is being-a-mother to women, in reality or in imagination? Is the family an obstacle to the liberation of women? Is the family needed to maintain sexual difference? What other forms of child-care might there be? Question after question arose, revolving in her mind without reaching any clear conclusion. They led both out into society and back into her own memory. Future and past seemed to be locked together. She felt a gathering of strength but no certainty of success.<sup>51</sup>

In addressing the theoretical debates of feminism that intersected with the New Left my research is part of the study of the relationship between feminist and socialist theory and cultural practice in Britain. My work tracks the parallels in thought and practice that were taking as subject the position of women in the family and the areas of social reproduction, as these were constituted through the photographic image.

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<sup>50</sup> Key contributions include: Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', *Capital and Class*, 3 (1979), 1-33; Juliet Mitchell, 'Women: The Longest Revolution', *New Left Review*, 1 (1966), 11-37; Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971); Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (London: Pelican Books, 1973)

<sup>51</sup> *Riddles of the Sphinx*, dir. by Laura Mulvey & Peter Wollen (British Film Institute, 1977).

In his essay ‘Photography, Phantasy, Function’, Burgin argues against the notion that photography could be political simply by showing the ‘real’ conditions of working life, or conversely through new defamiliarized viewpoints, as rehearsed in the debates of Aleksandr Rodchenko and Boris Kushner in the 1920s.<sup>52</sup> Burgin’s reference to the debates between Rodchenko and Kushner—which centered on the potential of a revolutionary worker photography—reflects a revival of interest that emerged in the 1970s, in the potential of a much earlier leftist documentary project as a challenge to the history of modernist photography, the canonization of which was—by this time—beginning to be seen in the major galleries of art.<sup>53</sup> This revival found its clearest feminist articulation in the work of Jo Spence and Terry Dennett, which attended to representations of labor in order to question photography’s ‘truth claims’. The work of these two artists, who named themselves ‘Photography Workshop’, brought together an interest in the apparatuses and production of photography for understanding history, and the position and representations of women within a class society. Their co-authored essay ‘Remodeling Photo History’, published in *Screen* in 1982, seeks to add to the discourse on psychoanalysis and representation, by bringing together questions of sexuality and the family with a consideration of ‘the apparatuses and institutions involved in the regulation and repression of people’s labor, and of their sexual and reproductive lives’.<sup>54</sup> In its self-conscious referencing of an earlier ‘worker photography’, the practice of ‘Photography Workshop’ sought to challenge what Dennett and Spence described as the ‘heroicization of work in Soviet ‘20s photography’.<sup>55</sup> My analysis of Jo Spence’s practice in Chapter Four shows how she developed these concerns, addressing the relationship between class and gender.

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<sup>52</sup> Victor Burgin, ‘Photography, Phantasy, Function’, in *Thinking Photography*, pp. 177–216 (pp. 177–180).

<sup>53</sup> While by this time, photography had become instituted at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) as part of the canon of modern art, Christine Y. Hahn argues that the first exhibition of photography at MoMA was a challenge to the institution of a ‘fine art’ aesthetic at the museum during the 1950s and 1960s. She shows that in curating the exhibition, *Photography 1839–1937*, which was mounted at MoMA in 1937, Beaumont Newhall (then Curator of Photography) failed to distinguish fine art from other types of photographic images, selecting to display rare prints alongside scientific photographs, magazine images, newspaper photographs and advertisements. This eclectic exhibition emphasized the technological developments in photography, as well as the relationship of photography to economic and social demand. See Christine Y. Hahn, ‘Exhibition as Archive: Beaumont Newhall, *Photography 1839–1937*’, *Visual Resources*, 18 (2002), 145–152.

<sup>54</sup> Terry Dennett and Jo Spence, ‘Remodeling Photo-History: An Afterword on a Recent Exhibition’, *Screen*, 23 (1982), 85–97 (p. 86).

<sup>55</sup> Dennett and Spence, p. 87.



Jo Spence describes her photographic work as ‘taking into account not just the symbolic sexual lack, but also the exploitation of women’s labor power under capitalism’.<sup>56</sup> Her work sets out to bridge the binaries of man/woman and labor/capital through visual analysis that addresses representations of women historically and in the present-day, thus showing how class was being re-thought through feminist politics. Spence’s work represents a convergence of photography and feminism as it was inflected by questions of class. It attends to the way in which class is ‘invisibilized’ within images of women, either by ‘naturalizing’ women’s roles as ‘mother’ or ‘wife’ or by depicting women as being dependent on men for financial security. In either case, within dominant representations of the ‘long 1970s’, women were not pictured as being part of the relations of production, but were instead presented as ‘de-classed’, as subject and object of consumption. In my focus on Spence’s exhibition and body of work *The Picture of Health?*, which ends the fourth chapter, I explore the ways in which her work challenged the idealized images of women through a critical reworking of dominant representations of the body. Spence stages her own body in states of ageing and illness, in order to signify the exploitation of labor power, which, in the language of advertising and news photography of the 1970s, was ordinarily obscured in representations of women even, she argues, when women were photographed in places of work. Through her artwork, Spence argues that women need to be conscious of the value of their labor in relation to domestic work and capitalist employment in order to struggle for their rights as classed subjects, while at the same time being conscious of the gendered discrimination of the workplace. I thus read the space The Pavilion gave to Jo Spence as being particularly significant because Spence’s work addressed the way in which both class identity and sexuality is constructed through a system of representation while finding accessible forms that would—in Spence’s words—do ‘useful critical work’ in addressing the possibilities for images to effect social change.<sup>57</sup>

### **Diversity Issues/Black Arts Movement**

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<sup>56</sup> Jo Spence, ‘What Do People Do All Day? Class and Gender in Images of Women (1978–9)’, in *Representation & Photography: A Screen Education Reader*, ed. by Manuel Alvarado, Edward Buscombe and Richard Collins (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 128–147 (129) (first publ. in *Screen Education*, 29 (1978–9), 29–45).

<sup>57</sup> Dennett and Spence, p. 86.

Adding to the research into the relationship between politics and aesthetics, I also aim to define The Pavilion's potential place in the under-documented history of exhibitions by black women artists. Furthermore, I show how The Pavilion helped to make the central question of black feminine subjectivity visible in and to the history of feminist interventions into photography. The critique of representation, as it was taken up by feminists seeking to understand the gendered and classed positions of women in society, was specific to the role of mass media images as agents of advanced capitalism that emerged in the 1970s. This was also an important context for artists such as Maud Sulter (1960–2008), who made visible the racist discourse constructed through mass media representations, an ideology that was itself related to the European colonial project of capitalist accumulation. The work of the black women artists I am addressing—Sulter, as well as Ingrid Pollard (1953) and Brenda Agard (1961–2012)—also speaks to a longer history of photography as agent of colonialism. Thus, I aim to make visible another creative feminist movement—one that was seeking to decolonize images and produce a black spectatorship. During the 1980s, black women artists progressed the feminist movement by coming together to define the specificity of black women's experience, in the face of a double indifference: that of the feminist movement to questions of race and of the naturalization of 'male mastery' while also affirming their solidarity with black men in anti-racist struggles. Through a study of the exhibition *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers*, presented at The Pavilion in 1986, I show how the photographic image became both a site of inquiry and a tool for the creation of new work that both articulated and resisted the violent ways in which black women are seen and represented.

In her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks addresses the complex relationship between images, spectatorship and lived experience, arguing that 'unless we transform images of blackness, of black people, our ways of looking and our ways of being seen, we cannot make radical interventions that will fundamentally alter our situation'.<sup>58</sup> The problem of how to see outside existing representations, and to create new decolonized images,

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<sup>58</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), p. 7. In avoiding the linguistic convention of capitalizing the first letters of her first name and surname, bell hooks deploys a feminist strategy, calling attention to the patriarchal values inhabited by language. Instead, she seeks to place emphasis on 'the substance of her writing rather than who she is' – see bell hooks, 'Biography', <<https://www.berea.edu/appalachian-center/appalachian-center-home/faculty-and-staff/bell-hooks/>> [accessed 13 April 2018].

has its own set of specific conditions in relation to the subjectivity of black women. In her book *Viewfinders: Black Women Photographers*, photographic historian and photographer Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe outlines her careful research to locate the traces of black women photographers working during the 19th century in the United States of America. Moutoussamy-Ashe highlights a group of remarkable black women who found work in the early photographic studios of North America. She also locates rare examples of black women who were able to decide to *be* photographed. The history of enslavement, however, meant that it was impossible for many black people to determine their representation in any sense, either as subjects of photographs or as those accessing the means of production. On the other hand, the invention of photography was fundamental to the production of the racist imaginary and the structures of the racialized world. Black people have been subject to a regime of exclusionary violence that has been enforced through the history of enslavement and colonial domination of which the photograph has been one agent. Thus the struggle against racism and racialization has also necessitated a struggle for different kinds of representations that is itself, as bell hooks argues, to do with ‘the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures that would contain it’.<sup>59</sup> By focusing on the way in which black women artists used photography in politically and aesthetically challenging ways, I am aiming to contribute to the wider story of black women’s art in Britain. Furthermore, in addressing the specificities of photography as a feminist site of race, class and gender critique, I address both the entanglements and fragmentation of the differentiated feminist practices that emerged through attention to the relationship of politics and aesthetics in the 1980s. The Pavilion addressed these entanglements in its outreach practice and its exhibitions.

### **Feminist Exhibitions and Events**

In addition to engaging with the specific take-up of photography in relation to gender, race, and class, as it was enabled through the critical space of The Pavilion, this thesis contributes to the under-told history of feminist exhibitions and events. Part of my contribution is the mapping of

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<sup>59</sup> hooks, p. 116.

the exhibitions informed by feminism, as they made visible practices of representation. My thesis constructs the archive of The Pavilion exhibitions, adding to the record of feminist-informed exhibitions in Britain during the 1980s. It also tracks and assesses the importance of a wider set of exhibitions and cultural events, which both made possible, and gave space to, the critical art practices I am addressing in my main chapters. These include the exhibitions organized by and showing artist Mary Kelly, which as Kelly herself has described—in her discussion of the photography-based exhibition *Beyond the Purloined Image*—brought developments in photographic practice to bear upon the question of gender, and situated this convergence within a wider network of social and aesthetic debates.<sup>60</sup> While many of these exhibitions took place in smaller exhibition venues, I also make visible the significance of the major contemporary art galleries in London in their creation of a certain space for feminist practices in the 1980s that were otherwise subject to marginalization and that showed the potential of a different kind of exhibition-making. In particular I re-examine the exhibitions *Issue: Social Strategies* (1980) curated by Lucy Lippard and *The Thin Black Line* (1985), curated by Lubaina Himid, both mounted at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. I also address *Three Perspectives on Photography* (1979), co-curated by Paul Hill, Angela Kelly and John Tagg at the Hayward Gallery. My work shows how a set of major exhibitions can be read together as enabling the convergence of feminist thinking and practice with an analysis of representation and a construction of a critical photographic practice.

### **Key Findings**

Having laid out my key research topics alongside the wider issues with which this research engages, I have sought to show the implications of my research for curatorial studies and for art history. Through this research, I have made a case for the historical importance of one specific artistic institution, while also situating this particular institution within a wider culture of political arts practice. Detailed reconstructive art-historical work has revealed The Pavilion as being a site in which feminist innovations in art education, theory, art practice and activism

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<sup>60</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 107.

converged. Through my study, I have interrogated the nexus of funding relations that impacted upon the possibilities of contemporary art during the 1980s, and which have a clear legacy in the present-day. I have situated the art practices that were shown in three exhibitions at The Pavilion within a history of feminist exhibitions that have yet to be historicized sufficiently, producing knowledge of a moment of theoretical and creative complexity, which is neither self-evident within The Pavilion archive nor the existing literature. In doing so, I have shown how feminist artists negotiated a theoretical and cultural landscape through the production of specific exhibitions that were not just about increasing the representation of women artists on gallery walls, but that were dedicated to questioning the sexual politics around which art and exhibition-making has hinged, and yet been perpetually denied. Furthermore, in analyzing a set of complex representational practices, I have shown that feminist artists during the 1980s were experimenting with new aesthetic forms as a means of interrogating the politics of race, class and gender. Importantly, this analysis situates feminist practices within the wider debates on the relationship between politics and aesthetics as these debates sought to understand art's potential in relation to theoretical questions about the nature of social relations.

My work also has implications for contemporary methodologies of curatorial and art-historical research. Taking as its starting point, the challenge of feminist exhibitions and institutions that have been 'disappeared', I have identified a methodology of archival research that works with the traces of the existing archive, while also navigating the absences and erasures through both the configuration of the dispersed archive, and an analysis of the 'Living Archive'. My use of the Grounded Theory Method as a tool for art history has been integral to this latter analysis, in its emphasis on deriving a pattern from a set of memories that are, on the face of it, different from one another but that in actual fact can be read for a shared priority that will not be made visible through a close reading of memories as distinct, individual accounts.

The complexity of feminist art practices—as they engage with the domain of representation and sexual difference—presents a particular theoretical complexity that is also a historiographical complexity, in the sense that this work has been frequently marginalized, disappeared or misread. My research into the particular creative political practices and strategies of The Pavilion, as an institution that is itself symptomatic of an under-theorized moment of art

history, has entailed an investigation of the emerging discourse on sexual politics, an engagement with political-aesthetic debates and an engagement with the problematic of the archive. In configuring these seemingly divergent areas of research, my methodology thus responds to the challenge of undertaking 'feminist curatorial studies' and 'feminist art history' of the 1970s and 1980s from the perspective of the present-day. This is a moment in which the creative, political, theoretical work of a feminist field continues to be erased, disappeared and forgotten, yet, when re-examined, can be read for its resistance to the phallogentric, capitalist structures perpetuated by the contemporary art-world system.

## CHAPTER 1 – TO THE EDITOR OF AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER

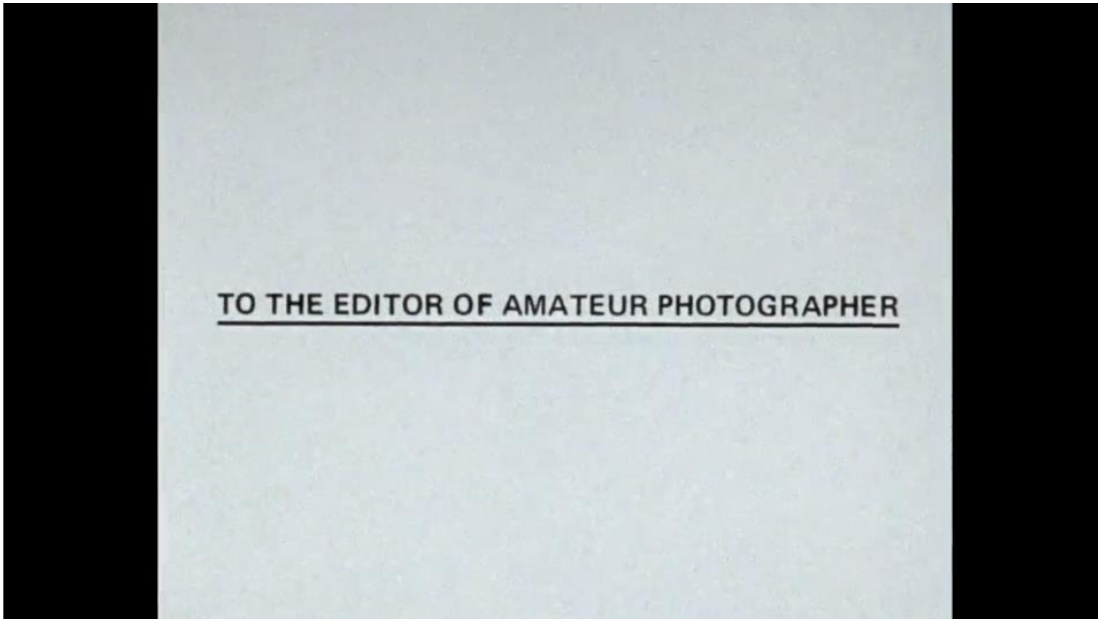


Figure 1.1, Mark Fell and Luke Fowler, *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, 2014. Still image from HD Digital Video. Courtesy of Pavilion.

### **Introduction**

On 22 November 2014 a new film, *To the editor of Amateur Photographer* [TEAP], was launched at the Hyde Park Picture House in Leeds. It had been commissioned by Pavilion to mark the occasion of the organization's thirtieth anniversary. The intention of the film commission was to reflect on, and make visible, the organization's foundation as a women's photography center. The seventy-minute film was made by visual artist and filmmaker Luke Fowler, in collaboration with sound artist and music producer Mark Fell. It was seen by the organization as an experiment. What would result if two contemporary artists, both men who had encountered something of feminism's history through art school during the 1990s, were to confront the archive of a feminist project? The fact that Luke Fowler and Mark Fell were men, of a different generation from the women involved in The Pavilion's founding, and active in the professional market-driven contemporary art field made for a contested process from the outset, foregrounding the challenge of making sense of and representing a history from the distance of the present.

*TEAP* was developed in response to the desire of the existing Pavilion team—of which I was part—both to understand the urgency of The Pavilion’s founding moment and to relate that moment to questions that are being asked now by contemporary artists, particularly with regards to the way in which history can be seen and known in a highly image-saturated context. The film was produced as part of Pavilion’s contemporary art commissioning program that aims to make possible a set of critically engaged artworks (often film and video) for public presentation.<sup>61</sup> Through contributions by artists including Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc, Harold Offeh, Hito Steyerl and Yael Bartana, questions about the politics of representation—who can speak about what, and for whom—have been a driving force of this recent program. It was in the context of these explorations that *TEAP* was commissioned and realized.

In the wake of postmodernism, a contested term often deployed to describe the erosion, assimilation or annihilation of political aspiration in art, a number of contemporary artists have turned to archives and past histories in order to address the truth-claims, or politics, of contemporary art. Such a view can also be read as a response to feminist art historian Angela Dimitrakaki’s argument that the contemporary exhibition form is ‘inherently predisposed to undermine and tame—or else “manage”—radical forms of art under capital’s global rule’.<sup>62</sup> Dimitrakaki argues that art is instrumentalized for global capital and contributes to a flattening of difference where ‘art from various cultures is habitually anthologized, often under grand curatorial concepts’.<sup>63</sup> In its desire to find alternatives to this instrumentalization of so-called radical art, an examination of The Pavilion’s initiating moment, as symptomatic of a time when a politically engaged feminist intervention in a dominant art world was felt to be urgent and possible, became a lens for the current organization to reflect on art’s capacity for radical transformation in the future. It was through my involvement in the film, as director of Pavilion, that I encountered a set of archival material that had been the subject of very little research and attention. This highlighted the need for a sustained exploration through which to develop a

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<sup>61</sup> While I didn’t lead on the production of this particular project, I was, until November 2017, a part of the staff team. Partway through the production process of *TEAP*, I selected to reduce my involvement in the organization in order to undertake doctoral research on the organization’s history, itself prompted by the commission. In this way, I wrote this chapter from the position of being both within, and outside of, the commissioning process.

<sup>62</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘Art, Globalisation and the Exhibition Form’, *Third Text*, 26 (2013), 305–309 (pp. 312–13).

<sup>63</sup> Dimitrakaki, ‘Art, Globalisation and the Exhibition Form’, p. 306.



means for assessing the achievements and ongoing potential of The Pavilion's founding moment and to use this reading as a lens to think through the broader significance of feminist cultural histories. My own position as researcher with a strong investment in Pavilion's future does not simply demand self-reflexivity for ethical reasons. Rather, reflexivity is at the core of the research—an inquiry that looks back to the past in order to think the future.

The first part of this thesis (Chapters One and Two) addresses the complexity of reading the archive. In this first chapter, I show how the film reads the archive of The Pavilion as a failed project. Furthermore at the end of my analysis, I will argue that in presenting The Pavilion as failed, the film itself *failed* to read the archive for its art-historical and political significance. I am not focusing on this failure as a means of casting judgment. Rather, I am performing a close reading of the film in order to show that the archive is not self-evident: when looking at the archive, one does not simply arrive at a discovery of knowledge. The difficulty of the archive—as it is revealed through this reading—thus becomes the justification of my own research methodology, which is discussed in Chapter Two.

### **Artistic Context**

Since 2001, artist Luke Fowler has made films that deal with 'radical subjects', figures or collectives that were politically active during the 1960s/70s. He has often addressed the problems of working with archives and personal recollections. In a recent review of Fowler's work, film critic and curator George Clark argues that, 'Fowler attempts to reconcile his sympathy with his subjects and their ambitions with the historical knowledge of their outcomes and failings'.<sup>64</sup> Running throughout Fowler's films is a political project: a desire to uncover aspects of history—the subjects themselves, but also perspectives on those subjects—that have been undesired or overlooked or that exist at the margins of collective knowledge. Drawing on the work of experimental film-makers such as the Dziga Vertov Group and Jean Rouch and working with subjects including Cornelius Cardew, R. D. Laing and E. P. Thompson, Fowler

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<sup>64</sup> George Clark, 'The Way Out is Via the Door', *Mousse Magazine*, 18 (2009) <<http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=83>> [accessed 15 January 2015].

juxtaposes archival material, sound and image, attempting to expose the cracks, fissures, subjectivities and affects that constitute social and political histories.

My reading of *TEAP* considers the implication of the artistic method used by Fowler and his collaborator Mark Fell.<sup>65</sup> The chapter considers the way in which the artistic method is applied to the subject of a *feminist* archive and how the effects of this method differ from its application to the other, less marginalized, or at least, more legible, political subjects with which Fowler deals. Thus my reading does not have to do with the relationship between form and content in the artist's practice *per se* but the relationship of form and content in this film to the specificities of its subject. In reading *TEAP* as an intervention into the archive of The Pavilion, I want to consider what knowledge is produced through the film. I also aim to identify a set of key questions and problems that the film raises in its attempt to give form to the history of a feminist project. Within the wider aim of producing my own intervention into The Pavilion archive, I read the film as a 'false start', and use it as a device through which to begin thinking about the methodology I will utilize in my own project. Thus, the following reading of the contemporary art film, commissioned by a contemporary art organization to which I have been intimately linked, is used here as a reflexive device through which to construct my own research proposal and its methodology.

### **Film Part 1: Photographs**

*TEAP* opens with a 2'46' sequence of photographs that have been filmed (Figure 1.2), each image filling the screen for less than a second. Further instances of these photographic sequences appear throughout the film as one of three recurring treatments of archival material. The film presents a total of twelve-hundred 35mm photographic negatives from The Pavilion archive that, in preparation for the film, were scanned, printed on 10x8" paper, re-photographed on a 16mm rostrum camera at the Leeds Animation Workshop, and presented in the film, in the order that they were found in the archive, roll by roll. The photographs were not edited for the film and thus include several images that are out of focus, repeats, the wrong orientation,

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<sup>65</sup> While Fowler invited Mark Fell to work with him on the film—in particular its soundtrack—the methodology and topic was determined by Fowler.

damaged or the end of rolls. Documenting events, meetings, social situations and educational workshops, they are an eclectic and somewhat perplexing stream of images. Appearing and disappearing rapidly throughout the film, the presentation of these photographs renders a close reading impossible.



Figure 1.2, Mark Fell and Luke Fowler, *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, 2014. Still image from HD Digital Video. Courtesy of Pavilion.

The sequences of filmed photographs are accompanied by field recordings of birdsong, traffic, sirens, footsteps and other ambient sounds that were made by Luke Fowler in October 2014 on Woodhouse Moor, the site on which The Pavilion was originally located.<sup>66</sup> The artist's interest in the relationship between the material concerns of structural film, and documentary cinema is evident through the conjuncture of the clinical structured sequence of images with the more subjective, impressionistic nature of field recordings. The everyday sounds, alongside the structural presentation of the photographs add texture to the film. Yet in what way does that texture perform an interpretation of the archive? In its focus on Fowler & Fell's phenomenological experience of the archive as encountered in a particular place at a particular time, the film makes visible the reflexive dimension of the project, while remaining a somewhat introspective meditation on the archive qua archive.

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<sup>66</sup> The park pavilion now operates as Akmal's Tandoori Bistro.

## Film Part 2: Documents

This focus on the texture of the archive is carried through in the treatment of a second set of materials: board meeting minutes, letters of support and funding applications that document The Pavilion's founding moment. Close-ups of these documents and images reveal their texture and 'thingness' in the moment of the film's making, marked by rusty traces of paper clips, scuffs, marks, creases, stains and watermarks as the documents are handled by the artist and an assistant. David Toop has asked, in response to Fowler's practice, 'what is an archive if not a collection of letters to ourselves?'<sup>67</sup> This again evokes Fowler & Fell's focus on the phenomenological encounter with archival materials rather than on the politics of that material. Jacques Derrida describes the politics of the archive as having to do with 'the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution and its interpretation'.<sup>68</sup> The scuffs and marks that signify the passing of time evoke what Jacques Derrida names 'the commencement' or origins of the archive, but these filmed documents do not address what, for Derrida, is the second aspect of the archive—'the commandment'—which describes the archive's relation to political power.<sup>69</sup>

The soundtrack accompanying the documents was produced by Mark Fell, who makes experimental electronic music, output as records and live events. His work broadly fits into the context of 'noise', and has its roots in the Acid House and techno music of the 1980s. Fell's compositions are formed from algorithms that create generative beat patterns, layered with drum machine and vocal samples. Through his work, he sets out to create rhythms that have 'the right level of drive' while employing unconventional time signatures—13 or 15 beats to the bar, rather than a standard 4/4 or 16/8 structure—which, according to philosopher Inigo Wilkins, produces a 'radically inhuman and non-aesthetic music that mobilizes unpredictable complexity'.<sup>70</sup> Wilkins' reading of Mark Fell's work, as 'radically inhuman' correlates with the effects the soundtrack produced within its viewing public. Following the film's premier in

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<sup>67</sup> David Toop, 'Depositions', <<https://lux.org.uk/work/depositions>> [accessed 31 May 2018].

<sup>68</sup> Derrida, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> For an in-depth discussion on the politics of the archival impulse see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> Inigo Wilkins, 'Enemy of Music', <<https://irreversiblenoise.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 15 February 2015].

Leeds, audience members commented that the sound produced an ‘aggressive’ treatment of the archive material, through which an imposed structure is dominant.

Conversely Mark Fell has argued that the soundtrack relates to the anti-fascist experiments of synthesized popular music in the 1980s that stood in contrast to guitar-based rock music. While this locates the film in relation to the political-artistic climate within which *The Pavilion* was emerging, I argue that it is impossible to read this politics within the film, where the jerky, electronic, abstract beats impose a sense of chaos and confusion. The effect on the archival materials, of the electronic soundtrack, is evocative of what Rosie Braidotti has described as ‘the alternation of fascination for the posthuman condition and the concern for its inhuman and even inhumane aspects’.<sup>71</sup> The collision of repetitive, synthesized patterns with the camera’s random scanning of archival material—material that locates a specific subject—sets up a back-and-forth between the abstract and concrete, producing an ambivalent position in relation to the possibilities of meaning-making and truth-claims. On the one hand, the score works nihilistically to recast the archival documents it depicts as a chaotic, uncontextualized and unknowable mass of material. At the same time its use of micro-rhythms and generative patterns, as well as Fowler’s ‘presencing strategies’, maintains a relationship to the concrete subject, and thus, arguably, to ‘real possibility’.<sup>72</sup> While the film is symbolic of the archive’s potentiality, it is bound up with the self-conscious position of the artist—made more emphatic by the frequent cuts to depictions of the artists sorting and sifting in the archive—rather than in what it might offer in making legible this previously overlooked archive to the artwork’s viewer. In this way, the work is more reflective of the focus on self-expression that *The Pavilion* artists were themselves resisting, rather than the ruptures that those artists produced.

### **Film Part 3: The Participants**

The third treatment of material deployed by the artists through *TEAP* is their editing of a series of testimonies by twelve women, who were each invited to contribute to the film as people who

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<sup>71</sup> Rosie Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Boston: Polity Press, 2013), p. 187.

<sup>72</sup> Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 242.

were involved in The Pavilion during its founding years in the 1980s. Sue Ball, Deborah Best, Sutapa Biswas, Dinah Clark, Caroline Taylor and Angela Kingston were all involved in the work of administering, programming, curating, fundraising and organizing. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Rosy Martin and Maggie Murray were exhibiting artists. Griselda Pollock influenced The Pavilion's beginnings in her capacity as lecturer and was a founding trustee. Quinn made a body of work as participant in The Pavilion's darkroom provision. Al Garthwaite was a filmmaker and activist in Leeds who collaborated with The Pavilion through her work with the feminist film collective Vera Media. Finally, Jennifer Ransom was a former photographer for Kodak, who did not have a direct connection with The Pavilion, but was selected for her intersection with the industry of the snapshot photograph, which has perpetuated many of photography's 'naturalizations', not least in its idealizations of the family album. According to Luke Fowler, the aim of the filmed interviews was to register the concerns and experiences of individuals involved in The Pavilion without 'foisting our agenda'.<sup>73</sup>

To ground their accounts, each participant was invited to select, or was given a limited choice of, an individual photograph from The Pavilion's archive.<sup>74</sup> This 'zooming in' on selected images goes some way to counter the relentless and perplexing flow of uncontextualized information elsewhere in the film. It is also a reminder that history is filtered and known through the testimony of memory. The four questions asked of the twelve participants were: 1) *Describe what is happening in the photograph* 2) *Within the period that this photograph was taken, can you tell us as much as possible about what was taking place outside of this specific frame?* 3) *Could you share a reflection on the events, which followed the making of this photograph?* And finally, 4) *What are the problem areas you feel must be examined, when facing the task of making a film about Pavilion's past?* In the questioning of what is both within and outside the frame, these questions point to the object and practice of art as being legible only in relation to the wider social and political conditions. The final question,

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<sup>73</sup> Luke Fowler, unpublished email to Mark Fell and Will Rose, September 2014.

<sup>74</sup> It is important to pay attention to the process of this. It is certainly true that some participants had a significant amount of agency in selecting an image. Sue Ball spent a morning in Pavilion's office looking through all 1200 images reproduced for the film in order to select the image she would talk about. For others, time constraints meant that this level of choice was not practical, in which case the producer self-selected a smaller number of images for them to choose from.

however, focuses back on the film's making and the artists themselves. Asking about 'the problem areas' was a response to concern from some of The Pavilion participants about the way in which the film would be determined by the artists' position as men. While this question was thus an attempt by the artists to deploy reflexivity as an ethic of feminist practice, the effect is a somewhat narcissistic presentation, in which the presence and authorship of the artists dominates the subject of the archive.

The twelve personal recollections are accompanied by filmed footage of the spaces in which the interviews were conducted, usually interiors of the women's houses or workplaces. While the artists attempted to give over authorship to the participants by inviting them to select the setting in which they were filmed by camerawoman Margaret Salmon, some participants perceived the process as being heavily didactic, through the set structure of questioning and the opacity of process. Others protested against the editorial strategy employed through which Fowler & Fell authored the selection of certain excerpts of the testimonies for inclusion in, or exclusion from, the film. I will address one specific example of this later in the chapter.

### **The Question of Voice**

In bringing together multiple voices, *TEAP* has a particular relevance to feminist strategies that seek to undo the centralizing authorial position and to find solidarity in diversity. Within *TEAP*, there is no singular voice or coherent narrative but instead it presents excerpts from the twelve personal recollections. In editing the film, Fowler & Fell chose to disrupt the flow of the film by inserting a series of sharp cuts between these selected excerpts. Many of the excerpts end suddenly and there is a sense of entering and ending a conversation partway through, with the effect of them feeling incomplete. In certain places, the accounts of experiences have been juxtaposed so as to present a contradiction between two recollections. These contradictions were intended to emphasize that there can be no one fixed narrative from an archive. In one interview, for example, former worker Angela Kingston recollects the aspirations of The Pavilion and the difficulty she remembers in attracting women from outside of an arts or academic environment. Within the film, this account ends with the following sentences:

And we really, really believed that lots of working class women would come along to The Pavilion. We just thought they would arrive and they didn't.<sup>75</sup>

In another interview, Quinn recalls her experiences *as* a working-class woman using The Pavilion's facilities, saying:

I've got no form of qualification in art at all and I do loads of art. And that was sort of like, 'yeah, this is a really good resource, the door is open to me', and I was welcomed.<sup>76</sup>

I transcribed the full-unedited recordings of the testimonies as part of this research and re-read them in their entirety. In Kingston's complete interview, she goes on to say, 'and you know, fortunately there were people who came along and occupied the space and did all sorts of really interesting things'.<sup>77</sup> This is a significant addendum. In 1986, artist Sutapa Biswas was one of those people Kingston refers to. Employed as Darkroom and Outreach Coordinator, Sutapa Biswas organized exhibition and educational activity that re-focused The Pavilion on enabling access for women who were based in The Pavilion's immediate community. Other workers throughout the decade subsequently developed this outreach work. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, the minutes from the moment in which Biswas was employed reveal the way in which The Pavilion's feminist aims necessitated a constant process of reflexivity, on the entangled, yet differentiated experiences of women. Furthermore, it is significant that Biswas developed this work following four years studying in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds. Fowler & Fell, however, present a contradiction between those involved in the project's academic beginnings—as represented in the film by Angela Kingston—and the experiences of local working-class women, which are represented within the film by Quinn. In this sense, the film fails to grasp that it was precisely their engagement with feminist theoretical debates within the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds that enabled The Pavilion's founders to provide an effective creative resource that was accessed by a diverse constituency of women from the local community. This relationship between feminist theory, politics and cultural

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<sup>75</sup> Angela Kingston, unpublished transcript of testimony produced for *To the editor of Amateur Photography*, September 2014, FAN/PAV, p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Quinn, unpublished transcript of testimony produced for *To the editor of Amateur Photography*, FAN/PAV, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Kingston, p. 1.



practices will thus be an important focus of my own historiographical work.

In his theses ‘On the Philosophy of History’, Walter Benjamin argues that ‘to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it was”’.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, in their focus on the contradictions and confusion that arise from memory, Fowler & Fell avoid constructing a singular, neat, linear history of The Pavilion. Yet it is necessary to understand what historical knowledge *can* be gained from assessing a set of different lived experiences. In her extended interview for *TEAP*—in an extract that was excluded from the film—Griselda Pollock argues that, ‘it actually often needs different kinds of encounters and different kinds of perspectives’, in order to discern ‘a critical sense of what we should be focusing on and what are the legacies of [the past]?’<sup>79</sup> What could it mean for the testimonies to be approached, not as a set of contradictory memories that undermine one another but as revealing a rich and diverse set of experiences, which each add something to the knowledge of what The Pavilion was seeking to do? What could it have meant had Fowler & Fell been able to demonstrate the feminist practice, introduced by Bettina Aptheka during the 1980s, of ‘pivoting the center’, and thus recognized the rich pluralities of experience rather than reducing them to a set of hazy, confused and contradictory recollections?<sup>80</sup> Could a sense of regularity be discerned across these experiences? These questions will be taken as the focus of Chapter Two.

### **The Question of Authorship**

The question of the deployment of voice within *TEAP* leads on to further questions about the notion of authorship in relation to feminist theory and practice. Fowler & Fell invited each participant as an *individual* to select a *single* image as the subject of their interviews, which should be considered in relation to the resources of the women’s movement, that itself provided a model for The Pavilion’s non-hierarchical organizational structure and the ‘restructuring of

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<sup>78</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 253–264 (p. 257).

<sup>79</sup> Griselda Pollock, unpublished transcript of testimony produced for *To the editor of Amateur Photography*, September 2014, FAN/PAV, p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> Bettina Aptheka, *Tapestries of Life: Women’s Work, Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 12.

the creative act in *collective* terms'.<sup>81</sup> It should also be considered in relation to debates that positioned the need to claim a place for women artists within history and institutions, against those who saw feminist practice as being about effecting structural transformation i.e. by rejecting the focus on single named artists altogether. The traditional format of photography exhibitions that celebrated named photographers had been notably challenged in 1979 through an exhibition at The Hayward Gallery titled *Three Perspectives on Photography*, curated by Paul Hill, Angela Kelly and John Tagg. This exhibition related a more explicitly political photography to an alternative mode of exhibition making. It was seen by Tagg as a means of intervention into The Hayward Gallery that 'ruptured expectations'.<sup>82</sup> Reflecting on the exhibition in an interview in 2003, John Tagg argued that the exhibition was 'not a way of packaging photography and making it acceptable to the museum', but rather that it sought to present the 'maximum heterogeneity of the field of social engagement and photography'.<sup>83</sup> I will say more about Tagg's art-historical revision of historical photography that makes visible the power relations inscribed within the documentary mode as I go on to analyze the art practices that formed The Pavilion's exhibitions program. Writing a review of *Three Perspectives on Photography* in *Screen Education* in 1979, Griselda Pollock analyzes the way in which John Tagg's contribution to the Socialist section of the exhibition unsettled the 'catalogue format' of exhibitions and countered the idea of artist-photographer as creative individual, divorced from its social and political context.<sup>84</sup> Her review reveals a feminist perspective, which argues that it was destructive to see the artwork or artists as existing in isolation and sought ways to counter the discourse of 'art masters' that dominated the field of art. Indeed, Helena Reckitt has pointed out that there is a difficulty in retrieving feminist work because there was such a concerted effort not to make stars.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, however, artists and intellectuals engaged with feminist discourse *also* argued that there was a need for women's art to be named and read in its specificity in order to avoid reductive interpretations. As Griselda

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<sup>81</sup> Siona Wilson, *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. xxi.

<sup>82</sup> John Tagg, 'Oral History of British Photography'. London, British Library, Oral History, C459/173.

<sup>83</sup> Tagg, 'Oral History of British Photography'.

<sup>84</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Three Perspectives on Photography—a Review', *Screen Education*, 31 (1979), 49–54.

<sup>85</sup> Peggy Phelan and Helena Reckitt, *Art and Feminism (Themes & Movements)* (London: Phaidon, 2001), p. 11.

Pollock observed in 1986, there was a tendency at that time for artists making critical work about representation and gender to be dismissed as ‘that lot, the feminists’, feminists being a ‘blanket term through which women’s art was marginalized’.<sup>86</sup>



Figure 1.3, Mark Fell and Luke Fowler, *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, 2014. Still image from HD Digital Video. Courtesy of Pavilion.

This debate on authorship can be read in relation to *TEAP* in which the voices within the film are frequently disembodied from the speaking subjects (Figure 1.3) After watching the film, several of the participants articulated their dissatisfaction with this particular mode of presentation. In a panel discussion about the work on 10 January 2015, Luke Fowler argued that his aim was to challenge conventional tropes of documentary filmmaking, in which the talking head becomes the knowing commentator, embodied voice of authority. By ‘disembodying’ the voice of the participants, Fowler returned to a strategy he has often used in his work in order to undermine the authority of his subjects. While this may be a transgressive approach to some of Fowler’s other subjects who have been held up as idols of the left, I argue that it is not a strategy appropriate to a feminist collective whose participants within the film were highly attuned to the problems of having their voices cut, pasted and manipulated. Thus I argue that to disembody these subjects had contradictory political effects.

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<sup>86</sup> Griselda Pollock, ‘Art, Art School and Culture’, in *The Block Reader in Visual Culture*, ed. by George Robertson (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 50–67 (p. 61) (first publ. in *Block*, 11 (1986), 8–18).

Luke Fowler claims a determined belief in the potential of the margins—as seen in his indiscriminate presentation of archival photographs and documents—that relates to Martha Rosler’s argument that, ‘it is only on the margins that one can still call attention to what the universal system leaves out’.<sup>87</sup> It should be acknowledged, however, that the artist’s own work circulates within the dominant, value-driven, hegemonic space of the contemporary art world while the artwork historically exhibited at The Pavilion has, in most cases, been denied widespread attention or canonical status, a contradiction that was strongly felt by the women involved in the film’s making.

Having looked at *TEAP*, and the declared intentions and chosen strategies of Fowler & Fell, I have indicated that there is a critical discussion to be developed from the potential for feminist contestation of those strategies and their effects relating to the question of authorship. In her 1996 chapter, ‘Agency and the Avant-Garde’, Griselda Pollock revisits the major texts that formed the debate about authorship and presented challenges to the structure of an author-focused art history. Systematically analyzing the theoretical work of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin, Pollock elaborates the specificity of their arguments in order to denounce the idealization of the artist as creative author. She writes:

Feminist cultural historians have not been afraid to operate in, as well as on, the dominant art histories—partly to reinscribe the participation of women as producers and consumers of culture, and partly to identify the effects of sexual difference within the very structures of art practice, its texts, images and discourses.<sup>88</sup>

In order to expand upon her proposed feminist art-historical intervention, Pollock re-examines Benjamin’s notion of the author as social producer, arguing that a critical feminist practice is one that recognizes artists as existing within a set of social relations. She shows how Benjamin’s work has implications for contemporary feminism:

One of the continuing conflicts within the women artists’ community is between those who aspire to occupy the subject/author place of ‘the artist’, i.e. who want permission to be that sort of person, expressing themselves as women; and those who define their

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<sup>87</sup> Martha Rosler, statement made to Brook Productions, 1984, quoted in Pollock, ‘Art, Art School and Culture’, p. 64.

<sup>88</sup> Griselda Pollock, ‘Agency and the Avant-Garde: Studies in Authorship and History by Way of Van Gogh’, in *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviews*, ed. by Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 315–342 (p. 319).

feminist project as a strategic practice requiring precisely Benjamin's notion of 'author as producer', a tactical understanding of the relations of cultural production and the discursive and institutional conditions of contesting its preferred meanings.<sup>89</sup>

Pollock, however, complicates the notion of authorship further, by turning to psychoanalysis as that which addresses the formation of 'sexed, speaking subjects' as part of her work to show that practitioners are not simply the products, in a Marxist sense, of an economic base. How then, can this focus on the individual and the social be brought together? Pollock concludes by citing Raymond Williams and his conception of culture. Through rethinking Williams' displacement of fetishized objects by a study of cultural practices Pollock offers some thoughts towards resolving the debate on authorship brought about through the intervention from feminist art history. She proposes that the author should be recognized both as a knowing, intending agent and one that operates within a set of historically and socially determined relations.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, she argues that the author is not the source but the effect of the conditions of existence:

Art is not objects caused by someone or something. Culture is practice, that is, it is one of the social activities of which object/texts are both the effect and the actual forms. Cultural practices operate in a tension between collective modes and individual projects<sup>91</sup>

I am referencing this debate on authorship—the tension between the individual and collective modes—to show that the question of authorship within *TEAP* is a complex terrain. I am seeking to show that, while the individual memories within the film have value for revealing the agency of different women who came together through this particular feminist artistic intervention, the sequence of testimonies within the film is insufficient to produce knowledge about The Pavilion as a collective cultural practice. In Chapter Two, I take up a particular method of analysis, derived from the social sciences—The Grounded Theory Method—that both works with the memories of experience of self-conscious individuals, but that also discloses a pattern or *regularity* across those memories that will produce knowledge about the historical conditions of The Pavilion. Thus, in studying the history of The Pavilion, part of my feminist methodology

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<sup>89</sup> Pollock, 'Agency and the Avant-Garde', p. 334.

<sup>90</sup> Pollock, 'Agency and the Avant-Garde', p. 339.

<sup>91</sup> Pollock, 'Agency and the Avant-Garde', p. 339.

has been to consider the collective and collaborative intentions for which art history has difficulty in accounting.<sup>92</sup>

### **The Question of Photography**

Capturing the everyday experience of women involved in *The Pavilion*, I argue that the photographs presented in *TEAP* demand more sustained attention than the film gives them. It is necessary to understand how the use and valuing of photography shifted as it intersected with feminist discourse and practice, and how photography was mobilized to make visible the hitherto unseen experiences of women.

Feminist and photography historian, Jessica Evans, argues that it is necessary to ‘pay close attention to what women photographed and how they photographed, in order to observe the previously unnoticed and taken for granted limits of a genre—in terms of what it does and does not show, and what it can and cannot say’.<sup>93</sup> The rapidly rolling cycle of images documenting the early years of *The Pavilion*’s activity can be read in relation to Evans’ assertion that, ‘there is no justification, from a feminist point of view, for continuing to study only the “significant”, the “better”, the more aesthetically satisfying or sophisticated objects’.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, in ‘On the Invention of Photographic Meaning’, artist and writer Allan Sekula argues that photography should not be considered simply as ‘precious objects’ or ‘productions of extraordinary craftsmanship’.<sup>95</sup> While Fowler & Fell saw themselves as giving value to the filmed archival images—by refusing to edit or select what they felt to be ‘precious’ or ‘significant’—the strategy of simply showing them on screen, without any commentary, fails to communicate *what* can be learnt through a reading of these images. I would argue that the photographs offer a rich resource for the feminist researcher. Slowing down the film and looking at the images more carefully (as can be done when viewing moving image work on a laptop), one observes, for example, a sequence of images depicting two women washing up in the building’s darkroom. These reveal the unseen drudgery and organizational labor (much of it

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<sup>92</sup> Wilson, p. xxi.

<sup>93</sup> Jessica Evans, ‘Feminism and photography: languages of exposure’, in *Feminism and Visual Culture*, ed. by Fiona Carson and Claire Pajackowska (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 105–120 (p. 107).

<sup>94</sup> Evans, p. 107.

<sup>95</sup> Allan Sekula, ‘On the Invention of Photographic Meaning’, in *Thinking Photography*, pp. 84–109 (p. 93).

unpaid) that was necessary for The Pavilion's continued survival. Other photographs are the products of workshops led by The Pavilion that sought to enable local women to represent their everyday experiences. It will be necessary for me to re-examine the photography that was made through these workshops, as part of an analysis of The Pavilion's work to provide access to the means of production for women from several communities in and around Leeds, through educational workshops and a darkroom (Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.4, Mark Fell and Luke Fowler, *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, 2014. Still image from HD Digital Video. Courtesy of Pavilion.

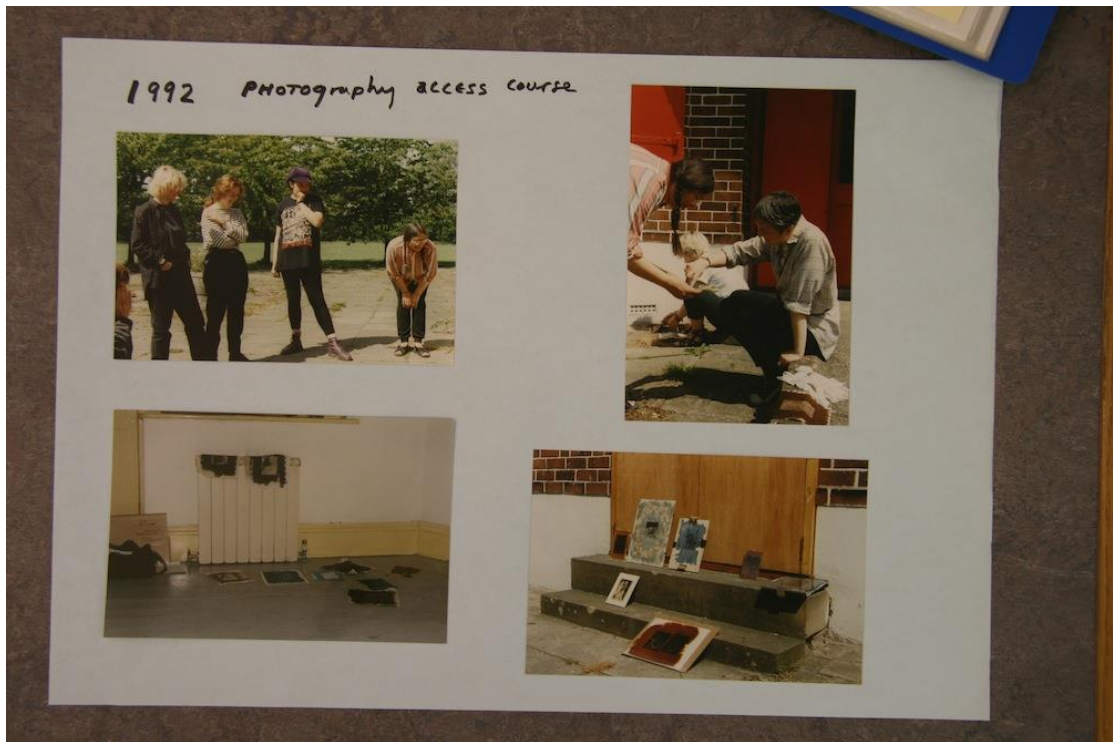


Figure 1.5, Photographic documentation of photography access course at The Pavilion, 1992. Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion.

Within both the film and the archive, however, the notable absence is those photographs that were exhibited as artworks in The Pavilion's cycle of exhibitions. These artworks were not produced as the result of educational workshops (Figure 1.5)—although their working process may have included workshops—but in order to challenge the dominant form of visual art being put on to gallery walls elsewhere. I know from the posters that a number of professional artists exhibited at The Pavilion during the 1980s. Work by artists Brenda Agard, Ingrid Pollard, Jo Spence, Maud Sulter, Susan Trangmar and Marie Yates—whose work will be examined later in this thesis—contributed to the innovations of a photographic art practice in Britain that dealt with the hitherto unrepresented experiences and desires of women. These critical artistic practices were not part of the 'found' photographs presented in *TEAP*. In focusing only on the visual material found within the archive, The Pavilion's intervention in photographic practice in Britain in the 1980s was almost completely invisible within the film. In a panel discussion accompanying a screening of *TEAP* at the Hyde Park Picture House, in January 2015, Mark Fell commented that the photographs used in the film seemed to be simply what had been 'left behind' in the archive. This is an important observation. While the oral histories of artists Rosy Martin, Maggie Murray and Sirkka-Liisa Kontinnen go some way to counter this absence of



artwork from The Pavilion archive, the film nonetheless creates a limited view of the history of The Pavilion exhibitions. If the work of the feminist art historian is to seek out what is not visible, rather than simply accepting absence as natural, then this must start with acknowledging the archive, in its tendency to exclude and select, as a patriarchal frame. Some of the work originally exhibited at The Pavilion is now represented in public and private collections, signifying the shift in institutional collecting practices that is one feminist transformation available for analysis.<sup>96</sup> A process of further research has thus been necessary in order to make visible that which is not documented within the archive kept at Feminist Archive North. This has included further work on the memories and lived experiences that Fowler & Fell began to address, but also close readings of the artworks that evidence the critical interventions in contemporary art and photography that formed The Pavilion's program.

### **The Documentary Mode**

The photographs within *TEAP* also raise questions about the relationship between debates on the documentary mode to feminist art practices. There are two histories relating to the documentary form, which require attention. The first is the development of documentary photography and film in relation to the history of modernism. Jorge Ribalta argues that the social commentary of photographers such as Lewis Hine (1874–1940) or Jacob Riis (1849–1914) can be understood in relation to the emergence and institutionalization of modernism.<sup>97</sup> In 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', published in 1975, Allan Sekula discusses the transition of the photograph from report to metaphor as it acquired status as a 'high art'. Sekula's particular critique focuses on the relationship between politics and expression in the work of Alfred Stieglitz and Lewis Hine, noting that in both artists' work only the 'valorized figure of the artist remains'.<sup>98</sup> In his essay, Sekula quotes a 1963 essay by Milton Brown on the photographer Paul Strand (1890–1976), drawing attention to this privileging of photographer as

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<sup>96</sup> Dinah Clark, Mark Fell, Luke Fowler, Gill Park, Griselda Pollock, Irene Revell and Will Rose, unpublished panel discussion, Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds, 10 January 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Jorge Ribalta, 'Introduction: Outline for a map of the debates around documentary in the "long 1970s"', in *Not Yet: On the reinvention of documentary and the critique of modernism*, ed. by Jorge Ribalta (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015), pp. 16–45 (p. 21).

<sup>98</sup> Sekula, p. 108.

creative genius, even at the service of liberalism or humanitarianism. Sekula writes that it is, ‘the result of [Strand’s] acuteness of perception which finds in the person a core of human virtue and his unerring sense of photographic values that transmits that quality to us’.<sup>99</sup> Thus the notion of artistic perception and photographic value are at stake in a photographic modernism, over and above its political impulse.

The ‘high art’ privileging of photography, even at the service of a ‘photographic humanism’ is contrasted in the second history of documentary—that history of which aims for the ‘critical denaturalization of the ideological and persuasive role of documentary’.<sup>100</sup> In response to the privileging of the singular author’s vision, a set of artists and film-makers ranging from Jean-Luc Godard (b. 1930) to Jean Rouch (1917–2004) to Chris Marker (1921–2012) have sought to make visible the failings of documentary as both evidential status and ‘voice of God’ perspective, in what Bill Nichols refers to as the ‘reflexive mode’ of documentary.<sup>101</sup> One particular art-historical revision criticized a reformist documentary photography that embodies an ‘exploitativeness’ in the name of ‘protectiveness’, and which is problematic for concealing the conditions of its production.<sup>102</sup> As John Tagg argues in *The Burden of Representation*, ‘photography does not transmit a pre-existent reality which is already meaningful in itself’.<sup>103</sup> Instead, Tagg proposes that the documentary photograph exerts its power, ‘not as the evocation of a pristine truth but as a politically mobilized rhetoric of Truth, a strategy of signification, a cultural intervention aimed at resealing social unity and structures of belief at a time of far-reaching crisis and conflict’.<sup>104</sup> Thus it is necessary to consider the consequences of accepting photographs as meaningful, truthful, or real.<sup>105</sup> Martha Rosler, whose own artwork sought to deconstruct the myths of a seemingly liberal photographic practice, argues that, ‘documentary photography has been much more comfortable in the company of

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<sup>99</sup> Paul Strand, *Paul Strand: A Retrospective Monograph, The Years 1915-1968* (New York: Aperture, 1971), p. 370.

<sup>100</sup> Ribalta, p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001).

<sup>102</sup> Martha Rosler, ‘In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)’, in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001*, ed. by Martha Rosler (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004), pp. 151–206 (p. 187).

<sup>103</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 119

<sup>104</sup> Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, p. 13.

<sup>105</sup> Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, p. 119.

moralism than wedded to a rhetoric or program of revolutionary politics'.<sup>106</sup> Her work charts the way in which documentary photography, far from unsettling the social order has made arguments for reform that are both 'polite and negotiable'.<sup>107</sup> Taking up these arguments in her essay, 'A Crisis in the Intimate', originally published as part of her 1987 book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the US Government 1935–44*, artist and writer Andrea Fisher assesses the way in which modes of documentary photography commissioned by the United States government shifted between 1935 and 1944, at the time of the American Depression and analyzes the contrasting instrumentalizations of Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) and Post Wolcott (1910–1990).<sup>108</sup> Lange, Andrea Fisher observes, was presented as the socially compassionate mother, her photography used to produce a voice of humanitarian sympathy for the people displaced or made unemployed by the Dust Bowl. Conversely, in Post Wolcott, Andrea Fisher finds the deployment of the positive, vivacious young girl when it was necessary for the state government to give the impression of the nation moving on to better times, tracing the rhetoric of documentary as it is used to naturalize idealizations of femininity, both in its instrumentalization of women photographers and its representation of women subjects.

Following Fisher's introduction of femininity within the debates on the rhetoric of documentary, it is now useful to turn to the concept of realism. In her discussion of the relationship between feminism and photography, Jessica Evans draws on Laura Mulvey's cinematic critique. She argues that there were two types of realism deployed as feminist interventions during the 1970s and 1980s, 'first, there was a period marked by the effort to change the content of cinematic and photographic representation, in order to develop realistic images of women, to record women talking about their real-life experiences'.<sup>109</sup> Evans uses the example of The Hackney Flashers whose photographic montages sought to depict the invisible labor of domestic work and childcare. These agit-prop works utilized a montaging of text and image in order to make visible that for which there were no previous representational forms.

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<sup>106</sup> Rosler, 'In, Around and Afterthoughts', p. 177.

<sup>107</sup> Rosler, 'In, Around and Afterthoughts', p. 177.

<sup>108</sup> See Fisher, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the US Government 1935-44*.

<sup>109</sup> Evans, 'Feminism and Photography', p. 108.

The second type of realism is that photography which sought to disrupt the illusion of being able to show things as they are, and that instead worked to reveal the construction of the document, drawing on the Brechtian techniques of non-unity and distancing, alongside techniques of montage and pastiche.<sup>110</sup>

In its resistance to illusion and in drawing attention to the film's construction, *TEAP* can be read in Brechtian terms. Employing something similar to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, there are sharp cuts between screens that interrupt the film's flow, a series of incomplete testimonies, sequences of uncontextualized images and a play between archival and newly created footage. The work also serves to 'lay bare the device', with scenes that depict the camera, or at other times, show the artists in the act of making the film. Furthermore, the presentation of photographs without chronological or geographical consistencies undermines any sense of a coherent whole. In its filmic strategies *TEAP* implicitly relates to the exhibitions at The Pavilion, some of which recovered Brechtian strategies in order to make visible the classed, gendered relations inscribed within the documentary mode. The relationship between the critical filmic strategies deployed within *TEAP* and the feminist representational strategies made visible through The Pavilion's program, however, is not made explicit within the film.

As I will go on to show, the arguments of Sekula, Rosler and Fisher are pertinent to the feminist photographic practice exhibited at The Pavilion, in its critical analysis of the photographic image as an index of 'A Truth'. During the 1980s, feminist artists deployed strategies of montage and performance to reveal the constructed nature of the image, that has naturalized 'truths' both of male power and privilege and at the same time, woman as passive object to be looked at and consumed. A return to the Brechtian 'documentary realism' of the 1930s marked an effort to see beyond the surface and to present a more 'real' depiction of a social reality than that which can be pictured by simply showing what is visibly there. This work challenged naturalized forms of representation through techniques such as serialization, construction, montage and the juxtaposition of image and text, in order to call into being an

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<sup>110</sup> Evans, 'Feminism and Photography', p. 109.

actively engaged and critical audience.<sup>111</sup> Writing in 1993, feminist philosopher and sociologist Luce Irigaray argued that the politicization of art has never been fully thought through and properly apportioned to sexual difference, but at best has been related to class struggle.<sup>112</sup> While much important work has been done since then to advance the relationship of sex and labor politics through art, not least through the recent writing of Siona Wilson, there is a need for more sustained attention to the specific relationship of the documentary turn to questions of sexual difference. Siona Wilson's analysis of Mary Kelly's *Nightcleaners*, for example, with attention to the affective responses 'in certain feminist viewers', works to complicate a more standard Brechtian reading of this film, and is a pertinent example of how feminism demands a different way of reading the political animation of art.<sup>113</sup>

It is also important, therefore, to consider the way in which artists engaged with the women's movement *led* the way in *destabilizing* photography. Marxist writer John Roberts argues that photography is always caught up between the notion of the photograph as art and the notion of the photograph as de-aestheticized object that takes its place in a world of reified things, in which its relationship to truth and the real is unstable and suspect.<sup>114</sup> This destabilizing of the photograph as both pictures and as windows on to the world is arguably most manifest in the work that was being produced by artists whose work was inflected by a feminist consciousness. British socialist feminism has always maintained a relationship to the socio-economic reality, in its calling attention to that which lies beyond appearances, and to the identity of femininity, which has eluded visibility within a patriarchal culture. In this way, artists like Jo Spence, used the photograph in order to reveal traces of what 'woman' is beyond the dominant conventions of images. At the same time, it is in the necessary feminist acknowledgement of the constructed nature of images, that the connection to 'the real' is unsettled. The effect of feminism in producing new understandings of photography's mechanisms—an effect that is impossible to read in *TEAP*, because of its limited archival strategy—will be important to read across the memories, practices, institutions and archives that

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<sup>111</sup> Steve Edwards, 'Two critiques of representation (against lamination)', <<http://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-38/steve-edwards-two-critiques-of-representation-against-lamination/>> [accessed 15 February 2015].

<sup>112</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press), p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> Wilson, p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> John Roberts, *Photography and its Violations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 26.

I have as my resource.

### **A Case Study: Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen**

In his writing on photography and its truth-event, John Roberts argues that, ‘the photographer seeks control over an objective and anonymous process, but the process continually and necessarily betrays his or her attempts at control’.<sup>115</sup> I wish to examine one particular section of *TEAP* in light of this comment. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen is a photographer and filmmaker who co-founded Amber Film, a film and photography collective, established in 1968 in the North-East of England, which continues to produce and distribute alternative and independent films and photographic work based around ‘long term engagements with working class and marginalized communities’.<sup>116</sup> Konttinen’s work sits within the context of a documentary mode in which image-makers seek to counter the ‘point and shoot’ single-image work of the photographer coming in from the outside. Instead she seeks to deploy feminist photographic strategies that give dignity to its subject.<sup>117</sup> Within *TEAP*, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen discusses *Step by Step* (1980–89), a durational photographic project produced over the course of seven years during the 1980s, which documents the lives of women and girls attending a dance school in the North East town of North Shields. The project, realized first as a touring exhibition, and then as a book, focuses on the mother-daughter relationships within the dance school. It was exhibited at The Pavilion in April 1985 (precise dates unknown).

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<sup>115</sup> Roberts, p. 27.

<sup>116</sup> Amber Film, ‘Amber History’, <[http://www.amber-online.com/history\\_chapters/1968-1974](http://www.amber-online.com/history_chapters/1968-1974)> [accessed 15 February 2015]

<sup>117</sup> Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 9.



Figure 1.6, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *Step by Step (Lorraine with mum)*, 1980–89. © Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen.

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's filmed account focuses on two images. The first of these is titled *Lorraine with mum* (Figure 1.6). It depicts a girl, of around the age of 10 or 11 years, with her mother, both dressed in leotards and standing either side of a fireplace in what is presumably their living room. The room has a gas fire, above which are a number of ornaments. Hanging on a wall between them, a print of a famous painting from the Tretyakov Gallery depicts an exotic-looking woman, signifying the role of fantasy in the subjects' lives. To the left of the mother is a low table housing a set of family photographs. The room appears to depict a typical working-class living room, but the photograph avoids the usual clichés of oppressed subjects. Penny Florence notes that, 'the expressions on the two women's faces, especially Lorraine's show the individuality, their relationship and their resistance'.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, it is this aspect of the image that is most compelling. Lorraine's hands are pointed inwards, just touching each other, a little self-consciously, and she is leaning awkwardly on the fireplace. Her discomfort, however, is overshadowed by her gaze, which is focused directly at the camera, a

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<sup>118</sup> Penny Florence, 'Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen: Step by Step', *Creative Camera*, 242 (1985), 28.

defiant smile on her face, as if daring the spectator to challenge her. Her mother is similarly expressive, looking shyly away from the camera, and towards her daughter but, with her hand on hip, she is equally resistant.



Figure 1.7, Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, *Step by Step (Terminus Club)*, 1980–89. © Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen.

The second photograph discussed by Konttinen within *TEAP* is an image of three young girls balanced on the arm of a leather settee (Figure 1.7). Next to them sits one of their mothers, looking away from the girls and the camera, towards something in the distance, out of frame. Like the previous image, it presents a ‘low-plane vision’ of the everyday world, refusing to ‘purify it or render it spectacular’.<sup>119</sup> Titled *Terminus Club*, the photograph is taken in the wings of a dance show, and it is the stage on which the performance is happening towards which the mother is looking. The three little girls are dressed in bikinis and have their arms held out like wings, smiles accompanying their movements as they emulate the older girls on stage, waiting their own turn to perform a dance routine, which (their bikinis suggest) is set on a beach. The

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<sup>119</sup> Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p. 95.



room itself is furnished inexpensively, a rusty sofa leg and everyday curtains suggesting a space designed to be functional. Once again, the image does not portray the woman or girls as victims, nor does it elicit compassion, but instead conveys a sense of happiness, freedom and spiritedness, conveyed through the warmth and joyfulness of the young girls dancing unselfconsciously, under the protection of their mother, who sits arms crossed, a sentry by their side.

As I have said, I had access to the extended testimonies recorded for *TEAP*, which are now housed in The Pavilion archive. A section of Konttinen's account that is excluded from the film, addresses her process of production, which she describes as being, 'a collaborative process, negotiated portraiture, whatever you want to say, but always with the final say, the final veto at the very least given to the subject in terms of how the work is used and whether and which images can be used'.<sup>120</sup> Writing in 1994, Martha Rosler asserts that, 'formerly, people used to question the propriety of making works about working-class people, especially since the majority of such works were malicious efforts that involved negative stereotyping'.<sup>121</sup> She goes on to argue, 'but solidarity is not an empty concept, especially when collaborative'.<sup>122</sup> This principle lies at the heart of Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's work.<sup>123</sup> During her testimony the artist describes a process of photography that is founded on meaningful, long-standing relationships with the women and girls in the dance school. Through this durational engagement, a space of agency for the subjects was opened up. Most pertinent to the work is the artist's own account of the way in which her aims for the project shifted over time. She acknowledges that she began with an assumption about the oppression faced by women and girls in the community through the ideals of femininity imposed on them by the dance school. What emerged, however, was the view that 'there was something so valuable coming out of this concoction of training [at the dance school] that I felt the women were far better off with it than they would have been without'.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, unpublished transcript of testimony produced for *To the editor of Amateur Photography*, September 2014, FAN/PAV, p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Martha Rosler, 'Place, Position, Power, Politics', in *Decoys and Disruptions*, pp. 349–378 (p. 374).

<sup>122</sup> Rosler, 'Place, Position, Power, Politics', p. 374.

<sup>123</sup> Rosler, 'Place, Position, Power, Politics', p. 374.

<sup>124</sup> Konttinen, p. 2.



Figure 1.8, (L-R) Mitra Tabrizian, Griselda Pollock, Joanne O'Brien, panel discussion at The Pavilion, 1985. Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion.

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen goes on to describe a panel discussion that took place on the occasion of her exhibition at The Pavilion in 1985, an event that is also the subject of Griselda Pollock's interview for the contemporary art film. The panel discussion involved Griselda Pollock, photographer Joanne O'Brien and artist Mitra Tabrizian (Figure 1.8). According to Konttinen the panel raised a question about the ethical problems of depicting images of young girls in such costumes and poses. In the filmed interview she recalls:

They were chairing a panel discussion around my exhibition and one of the things that kinds of startled me was a comment from one of them that I should have never photographed girls in tutus—well it just wasn't on.<sup>125</sup>

Decontextualized within *TEAP*, Konttinen's memory is presented as an example of censorship. The film is unable to engage with the difficult and negotiated debate between the production of art and the emergence of a feminist art-historical discourse that critiqued the politics of representation. This kind of critique did not amount to censorship. Rather, it represented an interrogation of what takes place when existing ideological conditions and social relations frame

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<sup>125</sup> Konttinen, p. 3.

the circulation of images.

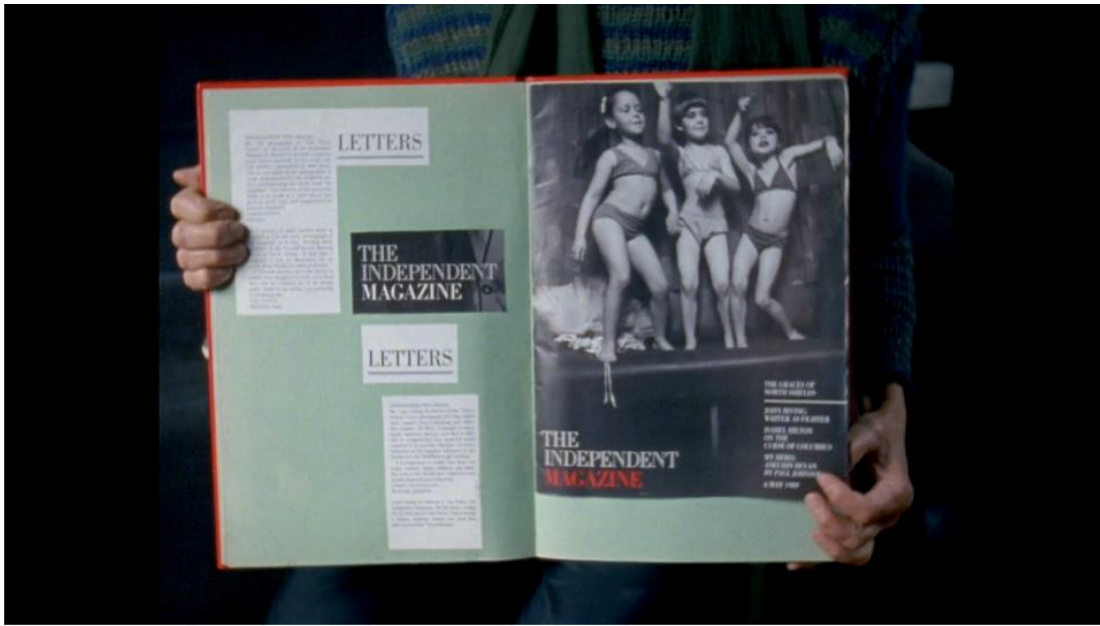


Figure 1.9, Mark Fell and Luke Fowler, *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, 2014. Still image from HD Digital Video. Courtesy of Pavilion.

The necessity of the critique brought to bear on work by feminist theorists and art historians is further extended later in Konttinen's interview when she discusses the presentation of *Terminus Club* in *The Independent Magazine*. Despite Konttinen's careful insistence that there should be no manipulation of her photographs, she recalls how *The Independent's* Picture Editor had chosen to crop *Terminus Club* (Figure 1.9) for the front cover of the magazine. This crop entailed the removal of the mother so that the three girls were all that remained in shot, producing a much more sensationalist image than Konttinen intended. Readers of the magazine expressed fury about both the editor's willingness to present three young girls in bikinis and the ethics of the artist's photography. In her interview for *TEAP*, Konttinen points out the editor's failure to read her images as she intended and to grasp the importance of the mother in the image. For Konttinen the photograph was about the warm and supportive relationship between the community of women and their daughters. Without the mother, the girls were presented, she states—quoting what one reader of *The Independent* wrote—'as if they were Thai prostitutes'.<sup>126</sup> Thus, the artist argues that the cropped image falls into clichés of impoverished subjects, with the little girls now being read as victims of exploitation: of both their upbringing,

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<sup>126</sup> Konttinen, p. 4.

and of the photographer. The separation of the image from the artist's intention is further reinforced through the representation of *Terminus Club* within *TEAP*. Within the film, Fowler & Fell depict Konttinen holding a scrapbook, with one page showing *Terminus Club* as it was cropped in *The Independent*. Her own description of this image and its crop, however, was left out of the film itself. In an email sent by Konttinen to Pavilion producer Will Rose in response to the film, Konttinen noted that she felt that the artists were perpetuating the same problem, by showing the image that cropped the mother, decontextualizing it from the argument she was making.<sup>127</sup> Despite having heard Konttinen's experience, Fowler & Fell chose to re-circulate *The Independent* image out of context from her explanation. To return to John Roberts' statement at the beginning of this section, this dual contention—of the editorial decisions made by *The Independent's* Picture Editor, and the editorial decisions made by Fowler & Fell—enables a reflection on the ruptures between artistic intention and the critical analysis of imagery as it is formed through the experience and circulation of work within the world.<sup>128</sup>

By addressing Konttinen's contribution to the film, and her artistic practice as a case study, it has been possible to track the way in which debates about the ethics of a documentary photography played out through the 1970s and 1980s. On the one hand, a commitment to negotiated agency, collaboration and a photographing from 'within', was part of a feminist challenge to the power dynamics of the photographer and subject. At the same time, as Siona Wilson has argued, the power imbalance involved in picturing the socially and economically

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<sup>127</sup> Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, unpublished email to Will Rose, 1 February 2015.

<sup>128</sup> In January 2018, artist Sonia Boyce performed an intervention at the Manchester Art Gallery, in which she asked the gallery staff to temporarily remove John Williams Waterhouse's painting *Hylas and the Nymphs* from the gallery walls. The painting depicts seven young women, unclothed, who are luring Hylas to his death. According to Boyce, the intention of this gesture (itself part of a series of workshops that she conducted leading up to the creation of a new work) was to involve an audience in a discussion about 'whether there are other narratives than the female subject as a deadly siren (the femme fatale) or as submissive object to be looked at' – see Sonia Boyce, 'Our Removal of Waterhouse's naked nymphs painting was art in action', *The Guardian*, 6 Feb 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/06/takedown-waterhouse-naked-nymphs-art-action-manchester-art-gallery-sonia-boyce>> [accessed 18 March 2018]. This event attracted substantial media attention. Most newspaper reports decried Boyce's performative intervention as 'censorship' or 'feminist moralizing'—see, for example, Jonathan Jones, 'Why have mildly erotic nymphs been removed by a Manchester gallery? Is Picasso next?', *The Guardian*, 31 Jan 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/jan/31/hylas-and-the-nymphs-jw--waterhouse-why-have-mildly-erotic-nymphs-been-removed-from-a-manchester-gallery-is-picasso-next>> [accessed 18 March 2018]. Journalists failed to report on the artist's intention to question both the way in which artwork is selected for exhibition and the values that are embedded within public art collections. The media coverage also ignored Boyce's artistic commitment to critiquing representation, as evidenced throughout her career. This event finds its parallel in the experiences of Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. The work of each artist raises the complex relationship of sexual politics to questions of representation, while also showing that feminist work is often read reductively, in relation to debates on censorship.

disenfranchized can reinforce the very power dynamic the photographer is trying to disrupt.<sup>129</sup> I argue that it is necessary to understand how it was precisely within this intersection of artistic work and feminist criticism (itself a negotiation), that the productive destabilization of the photographic image took place. This is an example of a critique raised by *TEAP* that requires further examination.

### ***TEAP's Challenge***

In an interview for *Mousse Magazine*, Karen Goldberg asks Luke Fowler, ‘does this subject matter summon a completely different mode of observation?’ than his previous films, which center on individual figures from the history of the political Left.<sup>130</sup> Fowler answers that he and Fell wanted to re-engage with ‘the ideas of those [feminist] creators and the social movement as well as reflect on our roles as authors, within a largely female domain’.<sup>131</sup> It is this latter point that is most explicitly addressed within the film, which depicts the two artists as they engage phenomenologically with the archival material. I would like to argue that this feminist subject does indeed necessitate a different ‘mode of observation’. Furthermore, the failure of the artists to locate an appropriate feminist strategy has critical effects. In all of his work Luke Fowler claims to counter the temptation of nostalgia, romanticizing or mythologizing typical of so many social and political documentaries. Instead, in both the form and content of his films, Fowler aims to complicate the narrative of those figures usually depicted as socialist heroes. Indeed, this same insistence is evident in many of the edited testimonies included in *TEAP* as well as in the severe cuts between scenes and the chaotic presentation of archival material, which is an attempt by the artists to give value to material that would usually be overlooked within the archive.

In his previous films that deal with radical figures such as E. P. Thompson, writer of *The Making of the English Working Class*, Fowler’s films work against a tendency of the Left to hold up figures as isolated heroes and he uses previously overlooked material as one way of

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<sup>129</sup> Duncan Forbes and Siona Wilson, ‘Documentary Struggles and Political Movements in Britain’, in *Not Yet: On the reinvention of documentary and the critique of modernism*, pp. 67–74 (p. 70).

<sup>130</sup> Mark Fell, Luke Fowler & Keren Goldberg, ‘Luke Fowler “To the editor of Amateur Photographer” at The Modern Institute, Glasgow’, < <http://moussemagazine.it/fowler-modern-institute-2015/>> [accessed 13 May 2018].

<sup>131</sup> Fell et al.

doing so. This critique of the singular author figure can be read as a feminist strategy. In the case of *The Pavilion*, however, whose place within culture has never been fully acknowledged, the application of a deliberately anti-romantic and fragmented portrayal of the initiative serves not to bring new understanding but reinforces the belief that feminism's potential to transform failed before it really began.<sup>132</sup> Writing in 2004 on 'the predicament of contemporary art', Hal Foster asks, in reference to the relationship between poststructuralism and feminism, 'why critique a subjecthood, [feminist] groups argued, that was denied one in the first place?'<sup>133</sup> In restating the complex terrain of authorship, and the displaced woman as artist, Griselda Pollock puts it pithily, 'does it make sense to push her off the stage when she never really had a part in the play?'<sup>134</sup> The archive of *The Pavilion* has not been thought through, published on, idolized or heroicized through historical work. Thus the way in which the artists used the material did not provide a *counter*-narrative. Instead, the film functions as the *only* contemporary narrative of the subject matter so far, a crucial difference when assessing its impact on the film's audience and participants.

While *TEAP* engages with a feminist project, I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter that it did not decipher or make visible sufficiently the aims and achievements of *The Pavilion*'s history. In their work Fowler & Fell refuse the temptation of a single historicizing narrative and put to one side any a-priori assumptions of *The Pavilion*'s history by giving an equivalence to all of the material they found within *The Pavilion*'s archive. Nonetheless, their work does not offer an interpretation of *The Pavilion*'s significance. I thus want to bring, to the archive, a method of working that draws on the resources that feminist theory and art history offer. In doing so, I wish to use *The Pavilion* as a lens, through which to assess a critical moment in which feminism and photography/art and politics converged.

Productively, *TEAP* generated a great deal of oral history material that is now a part of *The Pavilion* archive. While this is used within the film to affirm the narrative of failure and loss that is inscribed within the 'formal archive'—as for example, Angela Kingston's edited

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<sup>132</sup> Moreno, p. 120.

<sup>133</sup> Hal Foster, 'Roundtable: The Predicament of Contemporary Art', p. 678.

<sup>134</sup> Pollock, 'Agency and the Avant-Garde', p. 319.

account of *The Pavilion*'s failure to attract working-class women or Sirkka-Liisa's account of the way in which her documentary project was accused of failing in its ethical responsibility to the women she photographed—I will re-examine this oral material for its archival *potential*. As the next stage of this research, therefore, it is necessary to identify the methodology to which I will turn in order to locate and analyze the conditions of *The Pavilion*'s emergence that are concealed by the displacements, ruptures and loss that constitute the formal archive.<sup>135</sup> This is neither to deny the fragmentation that occurs in the archive, nor will I construct a false 'whole'. Rather, my research will seek to work through the limitations of the archive and to find a way to fill in the gaps so that *The Pavilion* is not simply reduced to an identity defined by failure or lack as, arguably, it is within *TEAP*. Despite the creativity of Fowler & Fell's artistic project, I argue that the film did not succeed in making this necessary archival intervention. Writing in 1982, Sylvia Harvey argues that a crucial question for cultural theory in the 1980s was, 'to what extent might these dominated cultures, and those who produce the means of expression for them, transform the social totality?'<sup>136</sup> My work will seek to answer this question from the perspective of the current moment. It will examine the apparatuses that have erased knowledge of feminist projects and will excavate those achievements and transformations, innovations and interventions that have yet to be fully analyzed or taken up.

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<sup>135</sup> Nora Alter, 'Memories in the Digital Age', in *Stuff It: the video essay in the digital age*, ed. by Ursula Biemann (Zurich: Institute for Theory of Art and Design, 2003), pp. 12–23 (p. 20).

<sup>136</sup> Sylvia Harvey, 'Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties', *Screen*, 23 (1982), 45–49, (p. 47).

## CHAPTER 2 – THE QUESTION OF THE ARCHIVE

A people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history. That is why—and this is the only reason why—the entire art of the past has now become a political issue.<sup>137</sup>

### **Yorkshire Arts Association and the Dominant Photographic Culture**

Having read a contemporary art film for its success and failings as a method of archival intervention, I begin this chapter by addressing another archive, that of the Arts Council of Great Britain [ACGB]. I start here because this was and is a body that exercises a considerable power to determine what a publicly funded arts organization will become. It has had a significant role in The Pavilion's history, both in its emergence, and its subsequent specific struggles for survival. Analysis of its documentary traces becomes, in this chapter, a route to understanding a particular historical misreading of The Pavilion that has its parallels in my reading of *TEAP*.

Between 1956 and 1971, twelve Regional Arts Associations [RAAs] were established across England to whom ACGB delegated responsibility for providing advice, and limited amounts of funding, in support of regional arts activity. Up until 1989—when a more federal system of arts funding was established—most decisions for organizational funding were made at the London-based ACGB level, through communication with the RAAs.<sup>138</sup> This meant that it was in each RAA's interest to find ways to articulate the artistic strengths of the region they represented. Specifically, the Yorkshire Arts Association [YAA] advocated for power and resource on the basis of its growing strength as a regional center for photography. As one report from 1977 states:

At present Yorkshire Arts Association has incorporated photography within its overall policy towards the visual arts but support has been fragmentary and it is essential that the Association forms a positive policy towards photography in its region.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), p. 33.

<sup>138</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Glory of the Garden*.

<sup>139</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, unpublished paper on photography policy, 1977. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, The Archive of Art and Design, The Arts Council of Great Britain, Regional Arts Associations and Photography, ACGB/33/1.



Thus, an understanding of the photographic articulations of the YAA is key for understanding how and why a women's photography center in Leeds gained initial support in 1983.

A growing reconsideration of photography as a fine art form took place in Britain on a national scale from at least as far back as 1970, marked by a number of important events within the national arts field. In 1970, a cohort of students enrolled on a degree course in Photographic Arts, the first of its kind, at the Polytechnic of Central London [PCL]; in 1971 The Photographer's Gallery opened in London's Covent Garden and, in 1972, Impressions Gallery in York was established, initially exhibiting 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Photography and soon after, contemporary photographic work. In 1972, the first Keeper of Photography appointments were also made, one at the National Portrait Gallery and the other at the Victoria and Albert Museum [VAM]. Following the appointment of Colin Ford as Keeper of Photography at the National Portrait Gallery, a landmark case took place in 1975 when Ford successfully petitioned the Arts Council's Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest to prevent the Sotheby's sale of a set of 19<sup>th</sup> Century photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) to an American collector. Instead the works were 'saved for the nation', the first time photography had been designated, in export law, an object of cultural importance.<sup>140</sup> In 1973, the first and only Photography Officer, Barry Lane, was appointed by ACGB and thus, during the 1970s, ACGB and the RAAs began funding a growing number of photographic projects. The opportunities this offered were seized upon by the YAA, in large part due to the presence of Impressions Gallery in York as well as the Sutcliffe Gallery in Whitby and a group of photographers including Martin Parr (b. 1952), who were active in Hebden Bridge. As such the YAA was the first association to develop a dedicated, region-wide policy for photography. In 1977, YAA Visual Arts Officer Simon Roodhouse wrote to Barry Lane stating that:

There is for the first time, a separate item in our budget for photography, and although the amount available is very small, it indicates the serious attitude the Visual Arts Panel has taken towards photographic activities in the region.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> John Wall, 'Towards a National Photographic Archive', *Art Libraries Journal*, 8 (1983), 6–20.

<sup>141</sup> Simon Roodhouse, unpublished letter to Barry Lane, ACGB/33/1.

The activities funded by the YAA largely centered on what might be summarized as a ‘concerned documentary photography’, much of which focused on the region’s industrial identity. In a 1978 article, ‘Photography: Directions for a Region’, Val Williams, then director of Impressions Gallery, describes the photographic tradition of the area as being marked, from the Victorian photographers onwards, by a fascination with photographing the regional landscape, both rural and industrial:

Yorkshire has always had much to offer the photographer. From the earliest days of photography, many of its major practitioners have made themselves in the region, or have made studies of it. Frank Sutcliffe, native of Whitby, devoted much of his life to making a chronicle of life in this remote fishing village and its surrounding area. Other photographers of this period, including Atkinson, Fenton, Watson, Bedford and Frith, followed in this tradition of regional documentation, while the thirties and forties brought photographers of the caliber of Bill Brandt to Yorkshire, mill towns like Halifax attracting the vision of those intrigued by the startling contrast between the beauty of the landscape and the deprivation of the industrial settlements. The present decade has its own photographers of Yorkshire, including Ken Baird, Daniel Meadows, Martin Parr and Peter Mitchell, who have all studied some aspect of the region.<sup>142</sup>

This record testifies to a recovery of a certain kind of socialist documentary photography rooted in the individual expression, creative or concerned vision associated with the masculine artist genius. While records in the archive evidence funding awarded to a small number of women photographic artists—notably the landscape photographer Fay Godwin whose depiction of the Calder Valley in the series *Remains of Elmet* was exhibited at the Calder Valley Festival in 1975—his work sustained a pictorialist tradition of photography through its focus on capturing the ‘essence’ of the West Yorkshire landscape.<sup>143</sup> Needless to say, prior to The Pavilion’s formation, the YAA had supported little work *by* women photographers but, more importantly, it had not hitherto supported any photographic work that specifically addressed feminist debates.

### **Funding Support for The Pavilion**

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<sup>142</sup> Val Williams, ‘Photography: Directions for a Region’, ACGB/33/1.

<sup>143</sup> Barry Lane, unpublished letter to Miss G. Clare, 25 March 1976, ACGB/33/1.

In addition to its artistic focus on a modernist documentary tradition, the YAA had a vested interest in supporting the development of photographic activity across the region, for place-making purposes and to leverage greater autonomy and investment from ACGB. According to written records setting out the aims of its photographic policy, it ‘sought to foster a broadly based photographic culture by actively developing facilities in all parts of the region, concentrated in key public centers which could combine a number of artistic, practical and educational functions and promote public involvement and understanding in ways appropriate to their strengths and locations’.<sup>144</sup> Minutes of a meeting in 1978 state that £355 was awarded by the Photographic Advisory Committee [PAC] to a Leeds-based group of professional photographers calling themselves the North Light Photographic Trust who had made some effort towards establishing a photography gallery in Leeds through the temporary use of a derelict terraced house in the Burley Park ‘Greenhows’ area of Leeds. The report states that, ‘the Committee agreed that this was a worthwhile venture, and long overdue in Leeds’.<sup>145</sup> When this group floundered, The Pavilion collective was, according to one report in the YAA archive, regarded as ‘replacing’ the group in its efforts to open a dedicated facility for photography in Leeds.<sup>146</sup>

In 1980, John Tagg, photography historian and lecturer in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds, was invited onto the PAC for YAA. As I said in the previous chapter, Tagg had co-curated the 1979 exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* at the Hayward Gallery, which was an intervention into the standard stylistic and monographic reading of photographs. This exhibition proposed that there had been three recent developments in photography: individual expression, socialist practices and feminist work. In her 1986 chapter, ‘the light writing on the wall: the Leeds Pavilion Project’, published in 1986, Shirley Moreno, identifies this exhibition as one of a small number of feminist art exhibitions that had ‘attracted

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<sup>144</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, unpublished review of photographic policy and development in the region, 1981, ACGB/33/1.

<sup>145</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, unpublished minutes of the Photography Advisory Committee, 28 February 1978, ACGB/33/1.

<sup>146</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, unpublished review of the Photography Advisory Committee, 1974, ACGB/33/1.

a lot of interest and a lot of criticism' and it was, without doubt, an important reference when she and others on the committee were identifying The Pavilion's constituting aims.<sup>147</sup>

In conjunction with Griselda Pollock, both of whom initially sat on the Management Committee for The Pavilion, John Tagg had taught students Dinah Clark, Caroline Taylor and Shirley Moreno during their studies at BA and MA level at the University of Leeds. Thus by no means 'mainstream', Tagg was nonetheless designated an 'expert' on photography by the YAA because of his work in institutions with status, notably The Hayward Gallery and the University of Leeds. Because of this, he was able to use his influence to help The Pavilion collective argue for ACGB and YAA funding to support the establishment of a women's photography center, on the grounds that it would be distinct from Impressions Gallery's focus on pictorialist photography, and would also be distinct from Sheffield's Untitled Gallery, through which had emerged a strong interest in documentary photography.<sup>148</sup> Tagg also argued to the YAA that a gallery in Leeds would triangulate photography in Yorkshire, adding to those facilities in York and Sheffield. On the basis of this advocacy, and the persistence of the three women founders, the YAA awarded The Pavilion £250 as a 'starter' grant, prior to its opening in May 1983. This was followed by a one-off grant of £4500 from ACGB to equip the building and a commitment from the YAA of £4000 per annum to run the building.<sup>149</sup> Alongside some support from Leeds City Council [LCC] and a variety of other sources, this funding made it possible for a group of women volunteers and their supporters to get a small arts center off the ground.

### **A Collision of Aims**

While it is evident from the early Arts Council reports that The Pavilion fulfilled some of the YAA's priorities in the early 1980s, notably in relation to its place-making agendas, further reports reveal that the YAA very quickly established a collision of aims between their vision for a photography gallery in Leeds and the vision of The Pavilion workers. In an internal memo

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<sup>147</sup> Moreno, p. 115.

<sup>148</sup> John Tagg, 'Oral History of British Photography'.

<sup>149</sup> Moreno, p. 116.

In the present day £4000 would equate to circa £16000.

contained within the archive of the YAA, there is a report from a visit, which was made by Simon Roodhouse to The Pavilion in 1984.<sup>150</sup> The account reads as follows:

A rather dispiriting visit. YAA had withdrawn program support because of a number of issues—shortage of funds, ineffective management, lack of local authority support and growing exclusiveness of events (women only). Both the gallery and darkroom are now functioning and run by voluntary effort, but both seem to lack direction and energy. We encouraged the staff to respond vigorously to YAA's withdrawal of support, particularly in view of the significance of Leeds in the Arts Council strategy.<sup>151</sup>

What am I to take from this report? As I read this in the present, with some understanding of the transformations feminism has effected, I am inclined to view this assessment with some suspicion. Reading it against what I know about the initial aims of The Pavilion, I propose, in fact, that this report evinces three misreadings of The Pavilion: first, that The Pavilion's activity was 'exclusive'; secondly, that its exhibitions were 'disappointing' or 'dispiriting'; and thirdly that it lacked 'direction and energy'.



Figure 2.1, *Collective Works* at The Pavilion, 1–28 May 1983. Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion.

<sup>150</sup> Roodhouse was Visual Arts Officer for Yorkshire Arts Association from 1978–1985.

<sup>151</sup> Barry Lane, unpublished internal memo, 'YAA regional visits', 11–13 April 1984, ACGB/33/1.

Further reports corroborate the perceptions of the YAA. The minutes of the YAA PAC held on 6 May 1983, five days after The Pavilion's opening, states:

The Pavilion project had opened its doors and was now functioning, although the darkrooms were not yet in operation due to the lack of cash. Simon Roodhouse said that he felt the opening exhibition was rather disappointing.<sup>152</sup>

There is no justification, in these records, for why Simon Roodhouse found the opening exhibition, *Collective Works* (Figure 2.1)—which took the form of an 'open show featuring work by local women—'disappointing'. In 'the light writing on the wall', however, Shirley Moreno states that the YAA went on to cut The Pavilion's funding in 1984 because of two verbal criticisms, which may well have related to Roodhouse's 'disappointment', 'firstly, that the aesthetic quality of the work is not high enough and, secondly, that the company is separatist (women only) and the YAA is designed to fund art for the general public'.<sup>153</sup> Writing in response to these criticisms, Moreno argues that:

Aesthetic quality is a standard distilled from contemporary mainstream art. Any critical practice must contradict its aesthetic as well as its meaning, in order to evolve new aesthetics/meanings, so, of course, feminist art does not conform to prevailing aesthetic standards. Secondly, a feminist project must be run by women, yet The Pavilion is open to the general public 90% of the time across its range of activities.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, Moreno articulates the way in which The Pavilion workers focused on giving voice to a politics, and a strategy of image-making, which collided with the mainstream standards of art as they were upheld by the administrators of art in Britain during the 1980s.

Subsequent minutes of meetings report on The Pavilion's application to the YAA for £15000 for the 1984/85 year. The minutes of the PAC dated Friday 2 March 1984 includes the following statement:

It was very likely that because of the cuts, the Pavilion Project would be a casualty. Simon Roodhouse had written to the Pavilion warning them that no further grant aid

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<sup>152</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, unpublished minutes of the Photography Advisory Committee Meeting at York Arts Center, 6 May 1983, ACGB/33/1.

<sup>153</sup> Moreno, p. 122.

<sup>154</sup> Moreno, p. 122.

could be guaranteed. He also reported that the ‘Women Only’ events at the Pavilion were increasing ...<sup>155</sup>

The YAA’s objection to The Pavilion’s ‘women’s only’ events is also evidenced in the minutes of the PAC on Friday 6 January 1984 in which a list of reasons are stated for the committee’s dissatisfaction with The Pavilion’s application for further funding. One line of the report states, ‘the events being organized by the Pavilion are for women only and the Committee finds this to be unacceptable’.<sup>156</sup> While the perceived separatism of The Pavilion’s activity was evidently one major focus of the YAA objections—as addressed by Moreno above—it was not the only one. In a letter written on behalf of The Pavilion in August 1984, Griselda Pollock, as trustee of The Pavilion, questions the YAA’s withdrawal of financial support:

From reports given to the committee after that meeting on 9 March [1984] and from comments made by John Tagg when he was a member of the management committee we have some ideas about worries about the prestige of the exhibitions. But we are puzzled. We apply for money to help put on a professional exhibition by nationally and internationally reputed artists but we are refused funds because apparently our shows are not professional.<sup>157</sup>

Indeed, there was an active move by the YAA to prevent The Pavilion from continuing to operate on feminist terms, not least in its on-going pressure on the organization to professionalize by showing ‘named artists’ and developing a formal hierarchical management structure, which countered The Pavilion’s vision to be collectively run. As Moreno writes, ‘we try and keep the decision-making power in the hands of the workers, who are all women’.<sup>158</sup> In her essay ‘Feminism and Modernism’, Griselda Pollock argues that feminism demands more than the introduction of a new style or period of art. The result of feminism’s radical proposition is, she states, that ‘feminist interventions encounter more than the polite disdain of the

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<sup>155</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, unpublished minutes of the Photography Advisory Committee at the Untitled Gallery, Sheffield, 2 March 1981, ACGB/33/1.

<sup>156</sup> Arts Council of Great Britain, unpublished minutes of the Photography Advisory Committee Meet at Impressions Gallery, 6 January 1984, ACGB/33/1.

<sup>157</sup> Griselda Pollock, unpublished letter to Simon Roodhouse, August 1984, FAN/PAV.

<sup>158</sup> Moreno, p. 120.

establishment. They are resisted with hostility, repression, censorship and ridicule'.<sup>159</sup> This returns us to the judgments from the report in 1984 (Figure 2.1) that I cited above. I wish to read these judgments critically. First, I propose that 'ineffective management' is the way in which YAA interpreted The Pavilion's political commitment to a collective, non-hierarchical, anti-elitist structure of working, which was a defining mode of organization by the women's movement. Secondly, I interpret 'exclusiveness of events' as YAA's coding of the attention being paid by The Pavilion to the marginalization of women within the visual arts field and within wider society. Thirdly, I read 'lack of direction and energy' as the way in which YAA interpreted the deliberate refusal of The Pavilion to celebrate individual named authors or to assert one named director or curator as having authority over and above the other workers. The consequence of this third commitment was, according to Shirley Moreno, that the organization lacked 'that clear profile of intention that dictatorship gives you'.<sup>160</sup> Thus in this simple record, it is possible to find traces of the moment in which a key stakeholder fundamentally misrecognized the significance of The Pavilion at its moment of foundation.

### **A Feminist Opposition**

In 'The light writing on the wall', Shirley Moreno positions The Pavilion as existing in opposition to the 'contemporary mainstream'.<sup>161</sup> From the moment of its foundation The Pavilion was set up to challenge the artistic priorities, exhibition selections and value systems of the dominant art institutions. At the same time, its early constituents were dissatisfied with attempts to confine it to the position of an alternative space, seeking as it did to perform strategies of *intervention* within the public visual arts culture. This desire to intervene is articulated by Moreno towards the end of 'the light writing on the wall', in which she writes:

The Pavilion could well be seen as an eccentric organization, operating as an alternative to mainstream culture, rather than an intervention in it; we would not choose to be in that position. It is necessary to be both interventionist and alternative at different

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<sup>159</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Feminism and Modernism', in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–1985*, ed. by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, 1987), pp. 79–124, (p. 80).

<sup>160</sup> Moreno, p. 120.

<sup>161</sup> Moreno, p. 122.



moments as they arise. However, we feel that we are being forced into the latter role as other options close down.<sup>162</sup>

The intention of The Pavilion organizers was to exhibit critical practices that challenged an uncritical allegiance to photography as expressive or socially-realist. The feminist practices and theories that The Pavilion supported—which drew on historically situated strategies of montage, for example, or psychoanalytically informed theories of sexual difference—were perceived (even by critics committed to the artistic ‘avant-garde’) as being over-theoretical and thus marginal.<sup>163</sup> In her essay ‘Screening the seventies’, Griselda Pollock stages an exchange between Peter Wollen and Tim Clark in which Wollen makes a case for the defense of a ‘radical or political modernism’ in response to Clark’s call for a return to realism.<sup>164</sup> Pollock reads, in this exchange, the importance of understanding the historical and political conditions through which feminist practices emerged. She argues for a theorization of the sexual politics around which modernism is structured, but which are displaced by ‘the celebration of creative masculine individualism’.<sup>165</sup> She writes:

Indeed specific historical knowledge is a vital defense against postmodernist suspension of history. Even in radical critical circles this takes the form of an over-emphasis for instance on the psychoanalytic theory used by certain artists at the expense of an understanding of the political reasons for its strategic use in the struggle against sexual oppression.<sup>166</sup>

Thus, the marginalization of feminist practices as being ‘over-theoretical’ confines those practices to a position of ‘alternative’, when what they offer is a historically situated, theoretically informed critique of modernism (*and* post-modernism).

### **Perceiving The Pavilion as Failed**

The writing and reading of institutional histories is fraught with challenges for all researchers, but when its illegibility and resulting marginalization is a key factor in an institution’s history

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<sup>162</sup> Moreno, p. 121.

<sup>163</sup> In her chapter, ‘Screening the seventies’ (p. 156), Griselda Pollock quotes Hal Foster as example of this—Hal Foster, *Recordings, Art, Spectacle, Culture Politics*, Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1985).

<sup>164</sup> Pollock, ‘Screening the seventies’, pp. 157–160.

<sup>165</sup> Pollock, ‘Screening the seventies’, p. 159.

<sup>166</sup> Pollock, ‘Screening the seventies’, p. 158.

and its ongoing representation in contemporary culture, the challenge of interpreting that history becomes even more profound.

From the perspective of the ACGB and YAA, the accounts of the arts officers and advisors, cited earlier in the chapter, show an organization that had failed, virtually before it began. Rather than celebrating The Pavilion for its progressive unraveling of aesthetic and institutional norms, the minutes of meetings located in the ACGB archive focus on loss, failure and lack: the ‘*withdrawal* of funding’; ‘*ineffective* management’; ‘*lack* of local authority support’; ‘*lack* of direction and energy’. The activity of The Pavilion did not match the hegemonic standards modeled by the Impressions Gallery or even the more grassroots Untitled Gallery in Sheffield, which, while each dealing with different photographic traditions, could still be read within the history of photographic modernism. The attempt of The Pavilion to think power and representation through both the work they put on the wall and the structures through which they operated, all driven by a political engagement with the women’s movement, was interpreted as lacking the professional capacity to manage itself and to assert an artistic vision.

The implications of this foundational misinterpretation of The Pavilion by the institutions upon which it depended for support, was made manifest through the almost immediate retraction of YAA funding in 1984. While The Pavilion was later able to find other opportunities to position itself in relation to the YAA’s priorities, and found more amenability from future officers, it was never able to intervene to the effect that its feminism was understood and actively supported by the major funding bodies.<sup>167</sup> In 1994, the decision was made for the organization to finally retract its feminist focus. My premise is that the failure of hegemonic institutions, such as the Arts Council, to acknowledge the unique contribution of feminist ideas to art practice at the time of their emergence has resulted in a collective amnesia when it comes to understanding the relevance of feminist cultural practices today.

The illegibility of The Pavilion’s feminist innovations to the arts funders and those unaffected by feminist concerns can thus be located at either end of The Pavilion’s thirty-year history: the first, in 1984, in the early reports by The Pavilion’s funders and the second, in 2014,

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<sup>167</sup> A report from May 1986 states that by the end of 1985/6, the YAA had awarded The Pavilion £4400. See Yorkshire Arts Association, unpublished minutes, 13 May 1986, ACGB/33/1.

through *TEAP*, the commissioned film re-examined in the previous chapter. The resistance and frustration among the original constituents to Fowler & Fell's work which—while raising much-needed awareness of The Pavilion in the present-day, did little to advance the YAA's reading of the organization in 1984—was one factor that motivated me to re-visit the archive of The Pavilion, and especially the oral archive created by *TEAP*.

### The Pavilion Archive



Figure 2.2, Mark Fell and Luke Fowler, *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, 2014. Still image from HD Digital Video. Courtesy of Pavilion.

The Pavilion archive exists within the Feminist Archive North (FAN) as a collection of five boxes of uncatalogued papers and a portfolio case of exhibition posters. FAN deserves some attention. Founded in 1988 as a sister project to the Feminist Archive South, FAN contains material—much of it donated from the personal collections of individual women—that relates to the history of the Women's Liberation Movement. It was initially housed at the University of Bradford, through the connections of founder member Jalna Hanmer before being moved to Leeds Metropolitan University (now Leeds Beckett University). It is currently part of Special Collections at the University of Leeds although it is marginalized within the library holdings, administered on a voluntary basis by a small group of feminist archivists (Figure 2.2), rather than by the paid library staff employed by the university. The visibility of FAN is thus partial,

its management and promotion dependent as it is on the good will and hard work of under-resourced women volunteers.

Unlike large public galleries on which a wealth of biographical material exists that can be observed, described and interrogated, the archive of The Pavilion has been neither formally catalogued nor substantially interpreted. Furthermore, there is no theorization adequate to the reading of this grassroots feminist project. Having witnessed—through the film—the affective investments of The Pavilion’s early constituents in its founding vision, and also understanding the mechanics of erasure that were at work upon The Pavilion even at the time of its emergence—as made visible through my re-examination of the funding reports—I argue that there is, within The Pavilion’s history, a project to be recovered, worked through and learnt from for the future. It is necessary, however, to locate a method that is suited to constructing knowledge of this virtually invisible, unobservable moment of recent feminist art history.

### **Methods of Reading the Archive**

In seeking to make an intervention into the archive of The Pavilion, it is useful to draw on the work of Professor of Feminist Theory, Clare Hemmings, whose work focuses on one particular method of reading the construction of feminist histories. In her 2011 book *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Hemmings traces what she calls ‘stories about Western feminist theory’, and the way in which these stories ‘intersect with wider institutionalizations of gendered meanings’.<sup>168</sup> Analyzing articles from feminist social science and cultural theory journals, Hemmings addresses the way in which feminist past, present and future is narrated, and how these stories might be told differently. She does this as a means of arguing for feminist theory’s continuing political potential.

I am interested in Hemmings’ notion of ‘transformative feminist story-telling’ in relation to my own art-historical work, which seeks to address both *what* can be learned about The Pavilion as one instance of a feminist artistic intervention, but also *how* that knowledge can

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<sup>168</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter?* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 1.

be produced in the face of an art-historical ‘memory lapse’.<sup>169</sup> Hemmings structures her analysis around three types of ‘feminist stories about feminist theory’. She names these stories Progress, Loss and Return, arguing that these particular story-typologies ‘oversimplify this complex [feminist] history and position feminist subjects as needing to inhabit a theoretical and political cutting edge in the present’.<sup>170</sup> Thus, she reads within these specific types of narratives, a particular imperative to distinguish ‘the new’ that undermines what is so radical about feminist theory. I draw on Hemmings’ work in wishing to pay careful attention to the relationship between a feminist methodology and a feminist historiography. Hemmings argues, with regards ‘stories about theory’, that the methodological challenge is not one of ‘correcting’ accounts, but rather of prioritizing the unknown, as a means of producing a new grammar of story-telling. Like Hemmings I have sought to show—in my reading of the film *TEAP*—that a feminist archive does not simply require a ‘corrective’ account. As I discussed in Chapter One, Fowler’s approach to telling stories of heroic socialist figures did not have the same effect when applied to an untold feminist project. Rather than seeking the ‘correct’ story from the documentary material that exists in The Pavilion archive, I am seeking a method that enables me to work with and in the gaps of a feminist archive, and thus to overcome the assumption that the archive is ‘self-evident’. Hemmings proposes that it is through new methods of story-telling—in her work she focuses on what she calls new citation tactics and attention to affect—that new aspects of feminist history will be revealed. She also calls for a ‘reflexive Western feminist accountability that shuttles back and forth between past and present in order to imagine a past that is not already known’.<sup>171</sup> In seeking to uncover new aspects of The Pavilion’s past and to tell its story differently, I will undertake this reflexive work by analyzing the words of The Pavilion’s early constituents, as they were recorded in 2014 but grounded in their experiences of the 1980s.

## The Living Archive

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<sup>169</sup> In using the term ‘memory lapse’, I am drawing on Helena Reckitt, who describes the way in which the early 1990s was a moment of ‘feminist/anti-feminist recovery’, in which the feminist art practices of former eras was emulated but disavowed – see Helena Reckitt, ‘Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics’, in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, exhibitions cultures and curatorial transgressions*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 131–156 (pp. 135–138).

<sup>170</sup> Hemmings, p. 3.

<sup>171</sup> Hemmings, p. 3

In a paper for *The Living Archive Conference*, held at Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) in 1997, Stuart Hall proposed the concept of the ‘Living Archive’. Hall discusses this concept in relation to the constitution of minority archives, specifically the experiences of archiving the work of the Black British Art Movement. Hall’s text, titled ‘Constituting an archive’, can be read in relation to the history of feminist arts activity. In his essay, Hall introduces the archive as occurring:

when a relatively random collection of works, whose movement appears simply to be propelled from one creative production to the next, is at the point of becoming something more ordered and considered: an object of reflection and debate.<sup>172</sup>

For Hall, however, an archive is not a fixing of the past, but a process of ongoing, open-ended constitution—it is in this sense it can be conceived as a ‘Living Archive’.

In his 1969 treatise *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault developed his distinctive thesis about the archive in relation to its status as a collection of statements:

Between the *langue* (*langue*) and the system of constructing possible sentences, and the *corpus* that passively collects the words that are spoken, the *archive* defines a particular level: that of a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated. It does not have the weight of tradition; and it does not constitute the library of all libraries, outside time and place; nor is it the welcoming oblivion that opens up to all new speech the operational field of its freedom; between tradition and oblivion, it reveals the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification.<sup>173</sup>

Re-visiting this thesis, Hall explains Foucault’s notion of the archive as being that which is somewhere between being ‘a single collection from a single source’ and an inert corpus of work. It is thus neither representative of a single unified perspective nor an all-encompassing, amorphous body of material. Hall argues that, in responding to the archive, ‘the trick is not to try to describe [the archive] as if it were the oeuvre of a mythical collective subject, but in terms of what sense or *regularity* we can discover in its very *dispersion*’.<sup>174</sup> Hall places emphasis on the potential of multiple perspectives arguing that—rather than either seeing only what seems to be the same, or alternatively perceiving the archive as a body of work that happens to have come together without any order or rationale—‘the critical effort is to discern the regularity in

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<sup>172</sup> Hall, ‘Constituting an archive’, p. 89.

<sup>173</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1969; repr. New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 146.

<sup>174</sup> Hall, ‘Constituting an archive’, p. 90.

its heterogeneity'.<sup>175</sup> Another dimension of the Living Archive is its agency in the present. As Rasheed Araeen argues in his paper from the same conference:

The idea of a living archive suggests that it is not just a body of documentary material stored somewhere, comprising information about some past event or period which is not available elsewhere, to be used only by those who are now interested in looking at the past and narrating it, but which also acts or proposes to act with living reality.<sup>176</sup>

Thus Hall and Araeen also show that the archive is not a static body of material but one that has potential for political transformation in the present. The archive is not a single entity, confined to a past, but is determined by how it is interpreted, circulated and disseminated in the present.<sup>177</sup>

Towards the end of his essay, Hall states that the 'multiplicity of discourses, not only of practice but of criticism, history and theory, of personal story, anecdote and biography, are the "texts" which make the archive live'.<sup>178</sup> The way in which the commissioned film generated a set of affective responses to the representation of materials from the stored archive within The Pavilion collection in the Feminist Archive North is an example of Hall's notion of the 'Living Archive', because they introduce memories and counter-narratives charged with a sense of both past and present. The recordings of the interviews produced through the commissioned film are now available within the archive to be read alongside the previously archived material.<sup>179</sup> In developing my research, I have selected to take these personal stories and memories and to explore how these can be read for the 'regularity' they contain as well as for a shared investment that is invisible to the usual use of the archive as a storage of information.

### **Reading The Lived Experiences Absent from the Archive**

While Hemmings and Hall are both useful resources through which to consider methods for reading The Pavilion as a project that is an 'incomplete' rather than a failed project, it has been necessary to find a method that is specifically useful for analyzing the accounts of the people

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<sup>175</sup> Hall, 'Constituting an archive', p. 91.

<sup>176</sup> Rasheed Araeen, 'Re-thinking History and Some Other Things', *Third Text*, 15 (2001), 93–100 (p. 93).

<sup>177</sup> Hall, 'Constituting an archive', p. 91.

<sup>178</sup> Hall, 'Constituting an archive', p. 92.

<sup>179</sup> Hall, 'Constituting an archive', p. 92.

who participated in the film as sources of memory. One methodology available to me, in engaging in an analysis of a group of people, or community, is ethnography. An ethnographic approach privileges a process of lengthy observation, either as an outsider looking into or at a subject or by producing knowledge through participating in a community, as a ‘participant-observer’. Ethnographic methodologies, as with all methodologies, must be thought through in relation to the effects of sexual difference. In her article of 1988, ‘Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?’ Judith Stacey introduces into the debates on ethnographic research, questions around the potential for a feminist ethnography. Feminist ethnography seeks to overcome the power relations that exist between researcher and subject and to find ways for subjects and researchers to work collaboratively on the quest for knowledge. As Stacey argues:

While there cannot be a full feminist ethnography, there can be (indeed there are) ethnographies that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives. There also can and should be feminist research that is rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of its ethnographic vision and its capacity to represent self and other’.<sup>180</sup>

Feminist ethnography is a useful tool that reminds me that my own perspective on *The Pavilion* is inevitably shaped by my own subjective experiences. I am not, and cannot be, a neutral observer of this history.

While ethnography provides a helpful frame through which to think through the challenges of working with living subjects, I am not observing a set of behaviors at work within a community. While I am working *with* a community of constituting participants, I am attempting to find ways to interpret their recollections, which have been newly collected under the rubric of a commissioned film responding to *The Pavilion* archive, rather than to theorize the behaviors and social interactions of a group of participants today. An ethnographic study may have been appropriate were *The Pavilion* still to exist as a collectively run women’s photography project. As it is, however, the qualitative material I am dealing with centers on descriptions of experiences and investments around a particular moment and site some thirty years ago: in short, their memories.

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<sup>180</sup> Judith Stacey, ‘Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?’, *Women’s Studies Int Forum*, 11 (1988), 21–27, (p. 26).



### The Grounded Theory Method

The Grounded Theory Method [GTM] is a qualitative method ordinarily used within the field of social science that is increasingly being used in the study of art institutions and practices and particularly in producing new knowledge about the investments and lived experiences individuals have in relation to those institutions.<sup>181</sup> It is distinct from an ethnographic approach in that it rejects the straightforward relationship between knowledge and observation. Grounded Theory, as it was originally called, was first developed by ‘Chicago School’ social scientists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. It has been significantly advanced since by Kathy Charmaz and Antony Bryant, as a *method* that places emphasis on the validity of qualitative research and counters the ‘canon of verification’, which, by the 1960s had come to dominate sociological research. Bryant argues that GTM is important because it seeks to remove the hierarchy between ‘proletarian testing’ under the guidance of ‘theoretical capitalists’, thus enabling the conclusions to be *grounded* in the data.<sup>182</sup> GTM invokes a third tool of coding as a means of interpretation that enables the production of knowledge that cannot be arrived at, simply by describing the behaviors or narratives of the subjects being observed. Instead it allows researchers to separate, sort and synthesize data, allowing for the comparison of one experience to others.<sup>183</sup> Secondly, and importantly for a feminist study, it is a method that actively seeks to put aside a hypothesis or preconceived theory, allowing the theory to be informed by the data and thus, according to sociologist Kathy Charmaz, enabling ‘a path between collecting and analyzing data’.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> The Grounded Theory Method is distinct from Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory describes the outcomes of a research process, whereas GTM emphasizes a method of working, which according to Bryant places emphasis on research founded on directly gathered data—see Antony Bryant, ‘The Grounded Theory Method’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 116–136 (pp. 118–119).

I am part of a group of researchers in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds that is experimenting with using GTM as an art-historical method.

<sup>182</sup> Bryant, pp. 118–119.

<sup>183</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London: Sage, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>184</sup> Charmaz, p. 1.

The emphasis of GTM is on creating a body of material through conversations and interviews that are then coded according to the terms of experience that subjects describe in relation to particular lived practices. The coding process places emphasis on activating descriptions of experience by using gerunds—verbs that behave like nouns—rather than adjectives or nouns. With its emphasis on grounded research, GTM can be considered a form of praxis that focuses on the human capacity to act in the world. Verifying it as a form of praxis, Antony Bryant argues that Grounded Theory is a constructivist method that produces theory, arguing that researchers play an active role in shaping the development of codes, categories and concepts.<sup>185</sup> The process of coding enables the researcher to develop from the descriptions of reported experiences a set of concepts that lead on to a theoretical hypothesis of what people are thinking, feeling and doing or what they *remember* about what they were thinking, feeling and doing when engaged in activities or practices. I have selected to use GTM as a means of locating the priorities relating to The Pavilion's founding moment as they are contained within the 'Living Archive'.

GTM acknowledges that the interviewer's own knowledge culture is always at play in the interview situations, but it places emphasis on putting this aside, being open to a continual process of revision, often through a number of interviews with each subject, or by widening the field of participants. By allowing codes and categories to change as more data is generated through the process, GTM enables participants to become active producers of the work. This contrasts with the ethnographic method which, according to Judith Stacey, 'appears to (and often does) place the researcher and her informants in a collaborative, reciprocal quest for understanding, but the research product is ultimately that of the researcher, however modified or influenced by informants'.<sup>186</sup> The coding and categorizing involved in GTM is what has determined my translation of this social science method to the domain of art-historical research. Returning to my desire to understand The Pavilion as—invoking Griselda Pollock and Raymond Williams—a *cultural practice*, which is both individually and collectively produced, GTM offers a route to discern a regularity across a set of differently remembered experiences,

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<sup>185</sup> Bryant, p. 123.

<sup>186</sup> Stacey, p. 23.

focusing on the *processes* and *actions* that constitute the social context of the practice being investigated.<sup>187</sup> This rationale will become clearer as I discuss my own application of GTM.

### Coding the Testimonies

A set of twelve testimonies were recorded in the course of making *TEAP*, which were then donated to The Pavilion Archive at FAN. I transcribed ten of these recordings as qualitative data for the GTM analysis (See Appendix 2).<sup>188</sup> GTM follows a three-stage process of coding which Kathy Charmaz describes as being ‘the process of defining what the data is about’ by moving from the overwhelming amount of data gathered at the beginning of the process to a single final concept.<sup>189</sup> According to Bryant:

Open Coding is the first stage of coding and usually involves close scrutiny of data. If the data is in the form of written documentation or verbatim or near-verbatim interview transcripts, then this may be done line-by-line or even word-by-word.<sup>190</sup>

In my application of GTM, I thus began with a process of initial ‘Open Coding’, in which I took each transcript in turn, abstracting a simple code from each line of the text. For example, an extract of Angela Kingston’s account reveals the participant’s recollections of having letters opened and being followed by the police during her time working as part of The Pavilion collective. An example of one sentence from this extract, and the Open Code produced from it is shown in Figure 2.3:

Data	Open Code
But I had letters opened, it was like, letters would be delivered to me and they’d been opened and no attempt, you know they hadn’t sort of steamed them open, they were letting us know that we were under observation.	Being under surveillance

Figure 2.3, Example of GTM Open Coding—Angela Kingston transcript.

An example using data from a different transcript is shown in Figure 2.4—in this account founder of The Pavilion, Dinah Clark, describes a lack of provision for artists in Leeds:

<sup>187</sup> Bryant, p. 138.

<sup>188</sup> I selected not to use the testimonies of Al Garthwaite or Jennifer Ransome as these participants were not directly involved in The Pavilion.

<sup>189</sup> Charmaz, p. 43.

<sup>190</sup> Bryant, p. 130.

Data	Open Code
Leeds itself, you weren't a student anymore, there weren't any facilities.	Lacking Facilities

Figure 2.4, Example of GTM open coding—Dinah Clark transcript.

A third example from the interview with Sirkka Liisa-Konttinen (Figure 2.5) recounts her photographic work with women and girls from a dance school in a North East community:

Data	Open Code
I followed them into the world outside when they left the dancing school and some of them became mothers themselves by the end of this period.	Committing to subjects

Figure 2.5, Example of GTM Open Coding—Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen transcript.

Many hundreds of Open Codes were generated in this way. As I produced more codes I began to group them together into loose themes or categories and noticed that as I did so, similar codes were being produced across the transcripts in addition to a greater diversity of codes as I processed more of the testimonies. For example, there were ten Open Codes generated that had links to 'lacking facilities'. These included: 'lacking access to professional technology' and 'men controlling means of production'.

The second stage of coding within GTM is referred to as 'Axial Coding' and is the process of collating, then naming, these related Open Codes. During this stage, the researcher aims to find links between different categories, enabling codes to be grouped into less specific and more abstracted codes. I produced sixty of these codes in total. Figure 2.6 shows how 'lacking facilities,' one of the Open Codes shown above, was grouped alongside other related Open Codes which each had to do with the importance of having the space and means of producing work. This produced the Axial Code 'accessing means of production'.

Open Codes	Axial Code
Lacking means of production Men controlling means of production Lacking spaces Lacking facilities Forcing access Losing access to facilities after university Needing darkroom	Accessing means of production

Figure 2.6, Example of GTM Axial Coding.

Figure 2.7 shows how the Open Code, ‘under surveillance’ was grouped together with several other Open Codes, to produce the Axial Code, ‘outside world feeling threatened’.

Open Codes	Axial Code
Recalls being feared Treated with suspicion Perceived by others as ‘Angry Wimmin’ Recalls being followed Authorities feared Pavilion Being perceived as a threat Under surveillance Work dealt with contentious issues Causing controversy Surprised that an arts organization was feared Sense of being suspect Controversial exhibition Thinks exhibition was stolen Political controversy Was criminalized Photographs deemed threatening Perceiving controversy as good thing Provoking	Outside world feeling threatened

Figure 2.7, Example of GTM Axial Coding.

A further process of condensing and collating of themes then took place to produce third-stage ‘Selective Codes’, which came to sixteen in total. Bryant notes that: ‘these codes can be seen to encompass the earlier codes but work at a higher level of abstraction’.<sup>191</sup> For example, the Axial Code, ‘accessing means of production’ was grouped alongside four other

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<sup>191</sup> Bryant, p. 130.

Axial Codes to reach the Selective Code ‘Accessing’ as shown in Figure 2.8.

Axial Codes	Selective Code
Making art accessible Alternative forms of education DIY production Accessing means of production Pavilion as training ground	Accessing

Figure 2.8, Example of GTM Selective Coding.

As codes generated through GTM become condensed and collated, it is also common for them to become shorter phrases/single words. The first application of Grounded Theory is addressed in Glaser and Strauss’ book *Awareness of Dying*, which looked at the experiences of dying among different patients, families and medical staff. In their process of working with those who were dying and their relatives, the two sociologists identified the single concept ‘Awareness’ as that which was most significant in the way in which people experienced death. Thus, Grounded Theory is most effective when it works to produce a single condensed concept. The sixteen Selective Codes that I identified were: Potential of Memory; Anxiety about Memory; Agency; Accessing; Critiquing; Personal Identity; Public Space; Losing/Failing; Changing/Shifting; Destabilizing Representation; The Body; Women’s Movement; Threatening; Impacting; Political/Social Context; Higher Education. Once I had produced the Selective Codes, I was particularly interested to observe that, while loss and failure emerged as key themes in both the commissioned contemporary art film and within the reports of the YAA, the Selective Code ‘Losing/Failing’ (Figure 2.9) was relatively under-populated. It comprised just three Axial Codes—‘Sense of Failure/Uncertainty’, ‘Sense of Loss’ and ‘Sense of Difficulty’, which in turn contained just twenty-eight Open Codes derived from the individual transcripts that described an aspect of failure or loss in relation to The Pavilion project (Figure 2.9).

<b>Sense of Failure/Uncertainty</b>	<b>Sense of Something Being Lost</b>	<b>Sense of Difficulty</b>
Working-class women didn't come Organizational doubts Aims contrasted with reality Doubts value of own contribution Partiality of feminism's success Precarity of feminism Cautious about own engagement in activity Question of what survives from that time	Sense of being able to effect change 'brutally quashed' Sadness at exhibition ending Hope for return to political vibrancy Sadness at space no longer being present Sense of loss through technology Sense of human contact having been lost Little still left of that moment Sense of progress having been lost Loss of support for documentary Perceiving documentary as marginalized by the arts Furious, devastated	Labor of producing photographs Focus and determination Three years work Boredom of everyday work Labor of running a gallery Resourcesfulness Dedication to taking the image Technical labor involved in photography Big restoration process Effort

Figure 2.9, Example of GTM coding. – Losing/Failing.

In contrast, there were two Selective Codes that emerged as being by far the most populated. The first was the selective code ‘Destabilizing Representation’, which was a condensation of seven axial codes: ‘Relationship of Images to Politics’; ‘Moment of Photography’; ‘New Forms/Methods of Photography’; ‘New Representations of Women’; ‘Making Visible the Invisible’; ‘Resistant Strategies’; ‘Taking Control over Representation’. These codes were linked by a shared concern with the production of new ways of using photography, of taking photographs and of representing the feminine subject. Across these seven axial codes there were 175 open codes that related to challenging the standard forms of representation and dominant uses of photography. (Figure 2.10)







<b>Relationship of images to politics</b>	<b>Moment of photography</b>	<b>New forms/ methods of photography</b>	<b>New representations of women</b>	<b>Making visible the invisible</b>	<b>Resistant strategies</b>	<b>Taking control over representation</b>
Facilitating campaigns through darkroom	Shift from working in more general arts to photography	Non-standard images	Resisting male gaze	Representing people not usually represented	Going against what was permitted	Control over images
Thinking the social world through the image	Moment of photography theory	New types of practice	Exploring women's imagery	Making visible what was previously unseen	Taking a risk	Controlling editing
Relationship between representation and politics	National interest in photography	Shifting how photographs were taken	Non-objectifying representations	Recording daily lives	Resisting through photography	Women defining own images
Revealing what is outside the frame	Had a legacy	Critiquing traditional documentary	Addressing new questions	Representing absence	Challenging male authority	Photographic integrity
Critiquing propaganda images	Significance of being a photography gallery	Beginnings of a feminist photography	Challenging assumptions	Focusing on invisibilities	Challenging main institutions	Seeing control

Figure 2.10, Example of GTM coding—Destabilizing Representation.

<b>Women working in community</b>	<b>Sense of joy/spiritedness</b>	<b>Enabling difference</b>	<b>Collective authorship</b>	<b>Women's activism</b>	<b>Collective organization</b>	<b>Support from others</b>
Recalling relationships of women involved	Upbeat and fun	Difference and debate	Uncertain whose idea it was	Responding to issues facing women	Collective effort	Active support
Vivid memory of other women	Humor	Changing view-points	Perceiving others as driving force	Desire to change conditions	Socialist structure	Supporters helped it get off the ground
Warmth, closeness	Brilliant	Tackling discrimination	Diverse authorship	Platforming women's issues	Collaborating/negotiating	Using standing in world to benefit group
Women empowering each other	Fun in contrast to dark times	Recognizing different forms of oppression	Collective authorship	Connections with women's campaigns	Desire for solidarity	Backing The Pavilion
Inspired by others	Liberating experience	Involvement of black women and young women	Critiquing male authorship	Celebrating feminist achievements	Sharing of power	Enabling The Pavilion

Figure 2.11, Example of GTM coding—The Women's Movement.

The second most populated Selective Code was ‘The Women’s Movement’, which incorporated seven Axial Codes: ‘Women Working in Community’; ‘Sense of Joy/Spiritedness’; ‘Enabling Difference’; ‘Collective Authorship’; ‘Women’s Activism’; ‘Collective Organization’; ‘Support from Others’. These contained 156 Open Codes that related to the ideas, motivations, priorities, aspirations and methods of organization that underpinned the women’s movement (Figure 2.12).

To follow GTM to its usual conclusion, it is necessary to end up with one final concept to be focused on, investigated and developed as a ‘Grounded Theory’. As it is the case that ‘Destabilizing Representation’ and ‘The Women’s Movement’ were the two selective codes that were the most populated, then it follows that I should bring these two categories together into a single final concept.

What then, should we call this ‘Final Concept’? In focusing on these two priorities—one on the women’s movement and one on destabilizing photography I wanted to find a short phrase that would encapsulate the relationship between the two. The Pavilion described itself as a women’s photography center or, at other times, a feminist photography project. My conclusion, from this coding exercise, is that these descriptions do not fully catch the significance of these two sets of codes, which have to do with feminist politics, on the one hand, and new work in the area of photography on the other. What could evoke the relationship between these two dimensions of The Pavilion project? Informed by the GTM emphasis on activating the descriptor I experimented with adding ‘ing’ to the word ‘feminist’.<sup>192</sup> I then added this to the word ‘photography’, so that ‘feminist’ was no longer a static describing word—as in ‘feminist photography project’ but a ‘doing’ word that activates ‘photography’. Thus, I created the term ‘Feministing Photography’ as the Final Concept that has emerged as a result of coding the ten testimonies using the Grounded Theory Method.

I argue that the concept ‘Feministing Photography’ is descriptive of the shared priority to challenge forms of representation and to use photography as a tool in new ways, driven to do so by the concerns, theories and activities produced through the political consciousness of the

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<sup>192</sup> This emphasis on feminism as a doing word finds parallels in the call made by bell hooks for the renewal of feminism as a *movement*—see bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, (New York: South End Press, 2000)

women's movement. From this GTM analysis, I argue that it is legitimate to understand the foundational moment of The Pavilion as being defined by Feministing Photography: this is not to say that it was simply a space to show photography by women or of women (although both aspects may be involved) More specifically, the convergence of photography with the women's movement produced new forms and tools for thinking the world. Thus the field of photography—and its standard forms and instrumentalizations—was mobilized through that convergence. We can thus begin to understand this convergence as an act of intervention in the institutions and structures on which the field of art depends in its drawing attention to the place of sexual difference within what Griselda Pollock identifies as the 'seemingly ungendered' domain of art.<sup>193</sup>

### Conclusion

In the first two chapters of this thesis I have sought to open up the question of the archive. I have shown how and why it is necessary to look beyond the limits of the documentary material contained within the formal archive, by focusing on the way in which feminist art practices were constituted against the grain of official culture. I have then demonstrated a way of reading the memories of an oral archive, which I am naming the 'Living Archive'. This reading is productive of an entirely different reading of The Pavilion than would have been reached, had I been confined to either the institutional reports from the ACGB archive or even the more unpredictable contemporary art film that nevertheless conforms to certain standard readings of feminist histories. In Chapter One, I highlighted the way in which Angela Kingston's testimony had been cropped within the film so that it ended on the quotation:

And we really, really believed that lots of working class women would come along to The Pavilion. We just thought they would arrive and they didn't.<sup>194</sup>

I showed how this cut was disingenuous, indicating that The Pavilion *failed* in its aim to attract working class women when, in fact, Kingston had gone on to say—in her unedited account—

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<sup>193</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desires and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 26.

<sup>194</sup> Kingston, p. 1.

that, ‘fortunately there were people who came along and occupied the space and did all sorts of really interesting things’.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, this is evidenced by the account of Quinn, an artist who had not been trained at university and thus found at The Pavilion an alternative space of education:

I ended up getting involved in The Pavilion through another activist really that I knew. I’d lived at Greenham Common, done lots of anti-nuclear stuff and ended up coming to Leeds where quite a few other Greenham women were. People know people and I ended up coming across a woman called Jan Wells and she had been a working class woman, I think she was born and bred in Leeds, and she had been doing some work up at The Pavilion and had said you might be interested in this, because I’ve always had a wee bit of a passion around photographs.<sup>196</sup>

It is not possible to read a pattern across the set of distinct accounts as they are presented within *TEAP*. The accounts of Kingston and Quinn are presented, within the film, as contradictory experiences. Another example of this can be found in Griselda Pollock’s account of the exhibition *Step by Step* at The Pavilion. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen who—as I discussed in Chapter One—was also interviewed for *TEAP*, produced this exhibition. Within *TEAP*, Pollock’s recollections of Konttinen’s documentary photography project ends with the line:

So this is also about going to what might be thought of as the heartland of a sort of traditional documentary. You go from somewhere and look at somebody else.<sup>197</sup>

This edit has the effect of presenting Konttinen’s work as being inscribed within the problematic power relations of social documentary. In fact, in her full interview, in a section left out of the film, Pollock goes on to describe the way in which Konttinen’s work *challenges* the politics of a traditional documentary:

But Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen lived in Byker, she lived in a house that was ultimately destroyed and worked with the people whom she photographed, tracing aspects of what is not part of the canon of what working class photography’s about because it’s the heroic worker, or in a sense the desolated worker, you know the ‘Road to Wigan Pier’ view of that or even Richard Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy*, that certain sense. So what would happen if you lived among people whose daily lives are not part of the daily record? What is it like to live that sort of space, to have families, to play, to have social lives or as in the case of this exhibition *Step by Step* where you have mothers and daughters photographed around the process of the ballet class. So we now know about Billy Elliot and the ballet class, its sort of got a different kind of thing but obviously

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<sup>195</sup> Kingston, p. 1.

<sup>196</sup> Quinn, p. 1.

<sup>197</sup> Pollock, unpublished transcript of testimony for *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, p. 3.

here we have these young girls who are going to have fantasies about these great dramas that come through ballet but in an area where so much possibility was being closed down systematically by the forces of social and cultural production. So there's a very interesting intersection between what is feminist photography i.e. what you pay attention to but also one that's deeply inflected by socialist awareness and a kind of ethics of not coming in from outside but photographing within the world.<sup>198</sup>

In her full account, Pollock thus shows the way in which feminist concerns transformed the format of a traditional documentary through, for example, Kontinen's durational method and her commitment to photographing from 'within'. These two examples which involve Angela Kingston and Griselda Pollock—who each speak from their relation to the critical space of the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds—and Quinn and Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen—artists committed to a grassroots, activist approach to photography—reveal the struggle of the film's authors to resolve these two poles of activity. As a method of qualitative research into lived experience, GTM has provided to me a way of reading 'between the lines' of the diverse accounts by the women who formed *The Pavilion* that disclosed shared ambition across a set of disparate memories and experiences. By means of the rigorous coding method involved in GTM—that grounds theory in the analysis of the words of the subjects of experience, memory and history—I worked with this material to arrive at what has become my key concept. This key concept is significant primarily because it resolves the film's contradictions between the political activism of the women's movement and the deep experimental work being done on theory and photography.

By drawing on the GTM method of locating one final concept, while also observing GTM's focus on the language of processes and actions, I have been able to bring together what are, on the face of it, differing accounts of experience. My final concept encapsulates *The Pavilion's* significance. It shows that—rather than being defined by a struggle between art and theory, activism and experimentalism—*The Pavilion* brought these different poles of activity into relation with each other. This relationship is what I am now calling 'Feministing Photography'. The subsequent three chapters of this thesis discuss and expand upon the formation and effect of 'Feministing Photography' testing it further against documentary and

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<sup>198</sup> Pollock, unpublished transcript of testimony for *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, p. 3.

historical research in relation to the theoretical and political debates in the fields of art, to individual art practices and to particular exhibitions that were prominent within The Pavilion's founding program.



## CHAPTER 3 – THE IMAGE IN TROUBLE

**Introduction**

Having shown, in my first chapter, the necessity of re-visiting the founding moment of The Pavilion Women’s Photography Center, through a close reading of the limits and possibilities of a film, commissioned by the current-day Pavilion in response to its archive, I then examined, in my second chapter, the problem of reading the official archive as evidence of The Pavilion and put forward a methodological approach that would enable a reading of the ‘Living Archive’: the memories contained by several of the early Pavilion constituents. Through these two chapters in tandem, I contested the conclusion conveyed by the film that The Pavilion was a ‘failed’ project by discovering, through a deep reading of the oral histories produced for the film—made possible through The Grounded Theory Method—the concept animating The Pavilion project: ‘Feministing Photography’. Reconstructing and close reading of three exhibitions at The Pavilion in an extended historical analysis will theoretically deepen and convey the practical complexity of this concept.



Figure 3.1, Exhibition opening of *The Image in Trouble* at The Pavilion, 1 Aug–1 Sept 1984. Courtesy of Marie Yates.

The first of these exhibitions is *The Image in Trouble*, presented at The Pavilion from 1 August–1 September 1984, which exhibited Yve Lomax (b. 1952), Susan Trangmar (b. 1953) and Marie Yates (b. 1940). The opening of this exhibition (Figure 3.1) was a particularly contentious event in The Pavilion’s initial program and in response to the archival work set out

in Chapter Two. A letter dated 2 August 1984, written by Griselda Pollock—at that stage a member of The Pavilion’s Management Committee—to YAA Visual Arts Officer Simon Roodhouse states the following:

I am writing once again to report on a meeting held at the Pavilion on Wednesday 1 August. As you know this was the opening of the exhibition THE IMAGE IN TROUBLE featuring the work of Marie Yates, Yve Lomax and Susan Trangmar. The artists were present as they had been invited to give a short talk about their work. They did not give a talk in protest against the situation in which they found themselves because of a serious misunderstanding that has arisen between The Pavilion and Yorkshire Arts.<sup>199</sup>

The letter goes on to outline that, in advance of the show, the directors of The Pavilion had been encouraged to go ahead with the planning of the exhibition following a meeting with Simon Roodhouse on 27 June 1984: from that meeting they had believed that costs for the exhibition, in particular the fees for the exhibiting artists, would be supported by YAA. Yates, Lomax and Trangmar were subsequently invited to show at The Pavilion and promised that they would be paid the standard Arts Council fee for artists. Shortly before the opening of the exhibition, however, an application to the YAA made for £500 towards the artist fees and exhibition costs was rejected on the grounds of ‘serious concerns’ raised by the YAA when it withdrew grant aid for The Pavilion earlier that same year (as discussed in the previous chapter).

According to the letter, YAA also criticized the exhibition for the fact that two of the artists had already shown in the region. This referred to a ten-day exhibition titled *Marie Yates and Yve Lomax* that was mounted at the Untitled Gallery in Sheffield in 1983, which had featured one of the three pieces of work shown in *The Image of Trouble* by Marie Yates and an entirely different body of work by Lomax. In protesting against this decision, Pollock writes:

It is not unusual for artists to exhibit repeatedly as each successive exhibition offers new work, or places works in a new context, offering it to new audiences [...] We are therefore deeply worried that this kind of argument is being used against women artists. Can you imagine it being used against Caro or Moore?<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Griselda Pollock, unpublished letter to Simon Roodhouse, August 1984. Leeds, University of Leeds Special Collections, Feminist Archive North, FAN/PAV.

<sup>200</sup> Pollock, unpublished letter to Simon Roodhouse.

In this chapter, I present the first analysis of this contested exhibition. I am also seeking to trace through it the larger question it posed then and still poses to us now: how can *The Image in Trouble* help us to understand the correlation between artistic practices working with photography and the emergence of a specifically feminist theory of sexual difference and the image? Answering this question involved my encounter with the ways in which feminist artists and theories were then deeply engaged with both Althusserian theory of ideology, and psychoanalytical theories of the unconscious, subjectivity and sexual difference, which were forming the basis of film theory, and were being absorbed into art practices critiquing, but also reformulating the photographic image. I thus aim to situate the show in relation to the major feminist artistic-theoretical intervention that was being made by one specific group of artists during the early 1980s. This intervention was legible to The Pavilion founders as being one dimension of the *feministing* project, both to challenge sexism at the level of representation and to enlarge contemporary languages of art practice. This feminist-artistic intervention becomes historically significant as the major artistic inquiry that was taking place at the moment of The Pavilion's emergence and yet was not legible to The Pavilion's funders.

My study of The Pavilion aims to make the case that we can learn from The Pavilion's ambition and its difficulties. In order to examine the theoretical and political possibilities of reading the past for the present, I begin each of the proceeding chapters with a reading of a contemporary exhibition. In doing so I am drawing on Mieke Bal who—in her work on the dialogue between past and present—has argued for what she calls a 'preposterous history'. In proposing this concept, Bal in turn draws on the writings of Walter Benjamin who conceptualized *Jetztzeit*—'a past charged by the time of the now'—by which he floated the idea that the past becomes intelligible later when it produced a present that can belatedly recognize the significance of the past.<sup>201</sup> Bal is reflective of a tendency in art history, which can also be registered in contemporary exhibitions that are belatedly recognizing the work of the 1980s.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 254.

<sup>202</sup> Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Indeed, in a spate of recent museum and dealer gallery exhibitions we are witnessing the phenomenon of a rediscovery of certain feminist artists of the 1980s. Marie Yates is one of these artists. This contemporary interest adds a particular urgency to my own research into the conditions in which these feminist practices were first made and the contexts in which they were first shown. My purpose in staging the contemporary case studies in relation to The Pavilion's past is to open up the knowledge gaps and political suppressions in the representation of these artists when they are restaged in the context of the contemporary art-world. What has been missed? What has been misinterpreted? What still needs to be understood about these works? What can a reconsideration of these works in the context of The Pavilion reveal that both challenges the effacement of the feministing moment while making the aesthetic politics of that moment critically available for us now?

Thus on 23 June 2016 I visited the opening of a solo exhibition of feminist conceptual artist Marie Yates that focused on her work during the 1970s. The exhibition took place at Richard Saltoun, a private art gallery in the West End of London that presents itself as being at the 'forefront' of reintroducing and promoting the work of several feminist artists who emerged in the 1970s.<sup>203</sup> My attendance at the opening of this exhibition stemmed as result of my discovery in The Pavilion archive of Yates' name on the exhibition poster for *The Image in Trouble* (Figure 3.2).

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<sup>203</sup> These include Helena Almeida, Eleanor Antin, Renate Bertlmann, Trisha Brown, Helen Chadwick, Rose English, Alexis Hunter, Vivienne Koorland, Friedl Kubelka, Annegret Soltau, Jo Spence and Marie Yates.

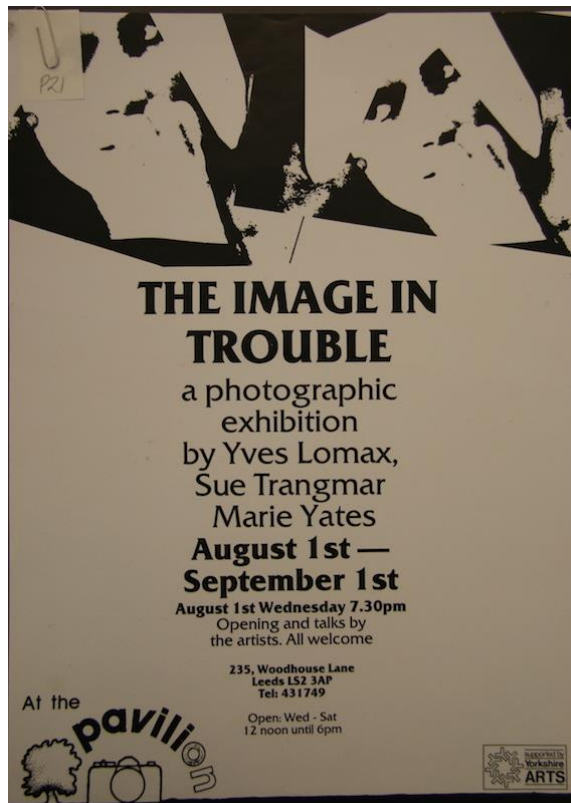


Figure 3.2, Poster for *The Image in Trouble*. Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion.

There are, however, no artworks within The Pavilion's archive. *Marie Yates Works 1971–1979* at Richard Saltoun was thus a timely opportunity to view work that was originally exhibited at The Pavilion. It was also significant as the first solo exhibition Marie Yates had had in Britain since the 1980s.<sup>204</sup> What am I to make of this? The fact that this recovery is being led by an art dealer is ironic. While such shows are testimony, however belated, to the impact of feminist interventions in art over the past forty years, the repositioning of certain feminist artworks within the art market also risks making illegible the political urgency of those artistic *practices* within the market's promotion of artist names and the fashionable recasting of once politico-aesthetic initiatives under new rubrics. This current repositioning of 'feminist artists' by the market-driven contemporary art world provides a rationale for looking—with close care and

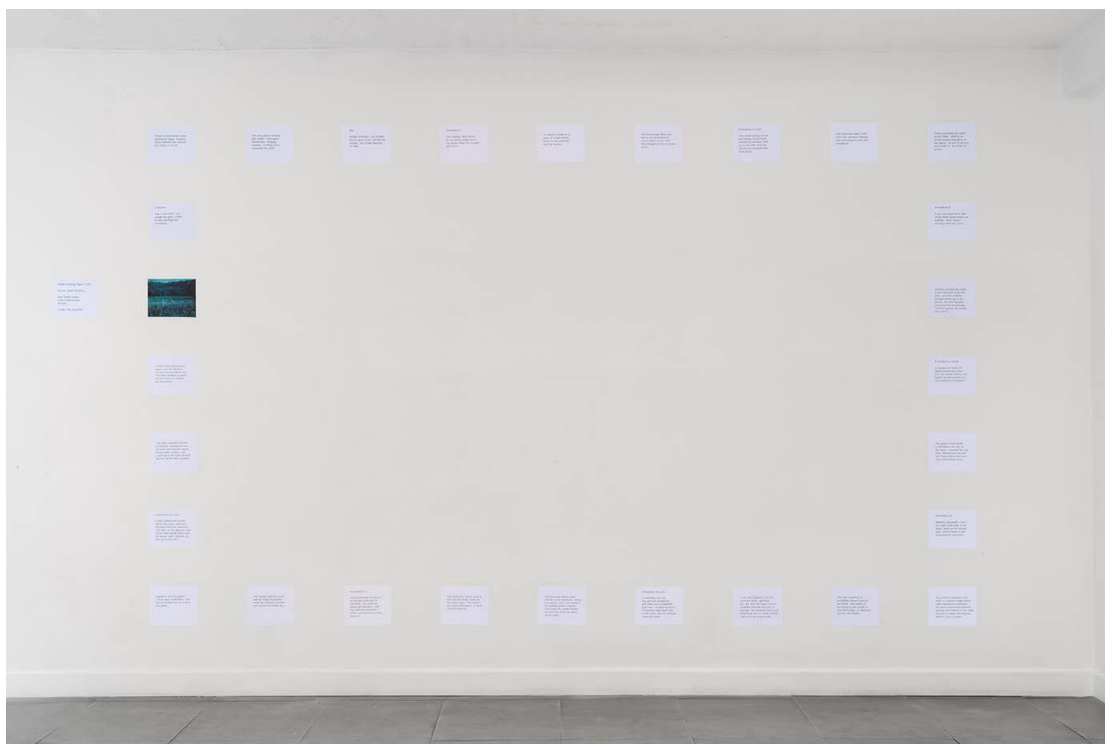
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<sup>204</sup> Within this chapter I discuss the works of Yve Lomax, Susan Trangmar and Marie Yates. I focus primarily, however, on the work of Yates. When I spoke with Yates she told me that she had been the instigator of the exhibition and subsequently invited Trangmar and Lomax to show with her. She was also more than an exhibiting artist at The Pavilion. Minutes of the management meetings within the archive show that Yates went on—in 1985—to sit on The Pavilion's Management Committee. She also encountered at least one of The Pavilion workers—Sutapa Biswas—when she was a guest lecturer in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds during the early 1980s. Thus in light of the several different encounters that Yates had with The Pavilion, I position her as central to this chapter, which focuses on one particular dimension of 'Feminist Photography'.

attention—at the theoretical materials and practical processes from which they produced a series of art practices ‘informed by feminism’.<sup>205</sup>

Confronting this troubling curatorial direction, I start by exploring the paradox that it enabled me in 2016 to encounter for myself, and thus study ‘in the flesh’ the specific works by Marie Yates that I needed to see in order to begin an analysis of the historical exhibition at The Pavilion. I shall then undertake an archaeology of *The Image in Trouble* exhibition at The Pavilion by means of the sparse archival materials available to me. This involves a much more complex theoretical journey to recover for myself the intellectual and artistic conditions of emergence of Marie Yates’ practice. The case study, undertaken at these intersections, then in turn enables me to place The Pavilion in the nexus of feminist theory, politics and practice that reveal The Pavilion’s historical significance as a regional but nationally connected site of feminist practice.

### **Marie Yates Works 1971–1979, June 2016: My Encounter**



Marie Yates, *Signals (Dorset Field Working Paper 23)*, 1975–78. 28 texts and 1 color photograph. (Exhibition view – *Marie Yates Works*, Richard Saltoun, 2016) Courtesy of Richard Saltoun.

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<sup>205</sup> I am using this latter phrase, derived from Mary Kelly, to minimize the limitation on the artwork when the adjective ‘feminist’ precedes ‘art’, as if ‘feminist’ was a shared style of art. At other times I *do* use the term ‘feminist art’, ‘feminist theory’ or ‘feminist politics’ to describe art practices, theoretical developments or political activities that take the structuring of sex/gender as its central concern.

I enter the Richard Saltoun gallery on Great Titchfield Street in West London and I am struck immediately by two features of the installation that makes clear the spatial dimensions of Marie Yates' work: text and grids. There are numerous photographic images mounted on boards, grouped together in neat rows and grid formations, accompanied by white boards containing lines of small, typed text. On one wall I see that there is a whole square of these text panels (twenty-eight in all) and only one photograph (Figure 3.3). The effect is austere and a little intimidating. As I walk around the space, trying to orientate myself, I discern that there are three different sequences of photo-texts. Two of them are clearly addressing the theme of landscape. I begin to look more closely at the first of these, titled *Signals (Dorset Field Working Paper 23)*. The texts are short semi-poetic accounts, which evoke the artist's experience while standing in a landscape. One reads:

The long grass blowing like water, with many buttercups. Singing, sighing, rustling trees surround the field.

Another reads, 'procedure 1: the sloping field forms an irregular shape and I am facing down the longest part of it'. The photographs depict shots of non-descript images of the landscape: grass, shadowy trees, blue sky in twilight, the linear form of a dry-stone wall. I relate them to documents I have seen of Land Art performances, such as those by Richard Long, or the structural landscape films of Robert Smithson or William Raban. This work reveals art as experience rather than object: the dematerialization of the artwork. The pairing of landscape with an interest in language reminds me that neither is a given—both are cultural constructs. This piece is not an academic thesis, however. Despite the seeming severity of the monochrome images and the proliferation of words, there is a playfulness and poetics in the work.

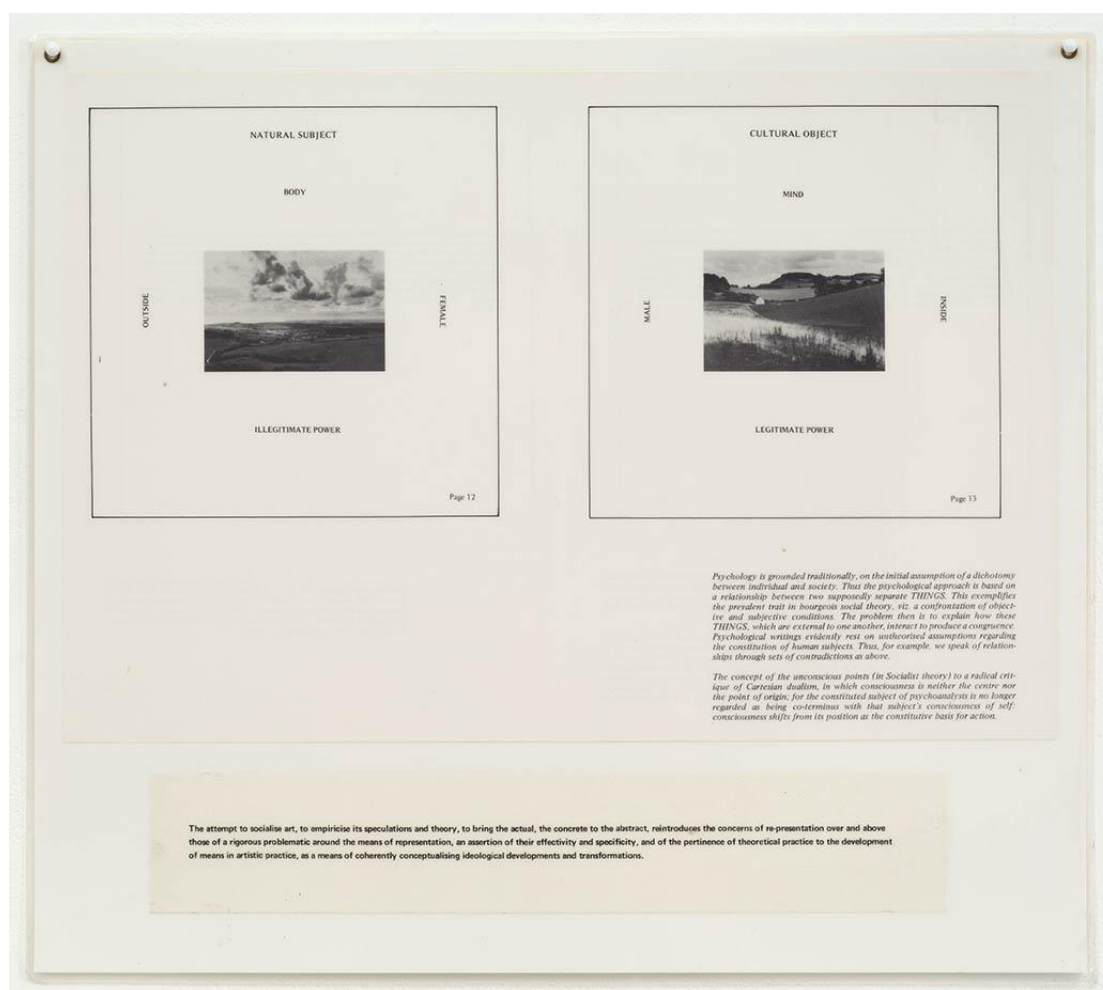


Figure 3.4, Marie Yates, *Signals (A Critical Re-Evaluation of a Proposed Publication)*, 1975-78. 1 text and image panel. Courtesy of Richard Saltoun.

Another sequence of photo-texts—titled *A Critical Re-Evaluation of a Proposed Publication* (Figure 3.4)—stage photographs of non-spectacular landscapes surrounded by single words. On one panel an image is surrounded by four words, one for each side of the photograph: ‘External/Body/Female/Underdeveloped’; next to it, in the same format, the words read ‘Internal/Male/Mind/Developed’. These word-associations relate to Rosalind Delmar’s assertion that there is a tendency to essentialize men as reflecting and women as acting out. Delmar challenges this association by asking, ‘but in their acting what *ideas* were women drawing on, using, transforming, creating?’<sup>206</sup> Beneath Yates’ two photo-text arrangements is the following text:

<sup>206</sup> Rosalind Delmar, ‘What is Feminism’, in *What is Feminism?* ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 8–34 (p. 24).



Psychology is grounded traditionally, on the initial assumption of a dichotomy between individual and society. Thus the psychological approach is based on a relationship between two supposedly separate THINGS. This exemplifies the prevalent trait in bourgeois social theory, viz. a confrontation of objective and subjective conditions. The problem then is to explain how THINGS which are external to one another, interact to produce a congruence. Psychological writings evidently rest on untheorized assumptions regarding the constitution of human subjects. Thus, for example, we speak of relationship through sets of contradictions as above.

The concept of the unconscious points (in Socialist theory) to a radical critique of Cartesian dualism, in which consciousness is neither the center nor the point of origin: for the constituted subject of psychoanalysis is no longer regarded as being co-terminus with that subject's consciousness of self: consciousness shifts from its position as the constitutive basis for action.

From this complex paragraph and the related image, I draw three points that necessitate further attention. First, that there exists division that situates 'female' on the side of the body/the external/the underdeveloped in opposition to the mind/the internal/the developed; yet these associations that constitute the human subject are not self-evident. Secondly, that these assumptions of the subject—which have to do with difference on the grounds of sex—have been untheorized. Thirdly, that there is a relationship between psychoanalysis—and notably theories of the unconscious—and socialism. I shall bracket these three points and come back to them as my investigations proceed.

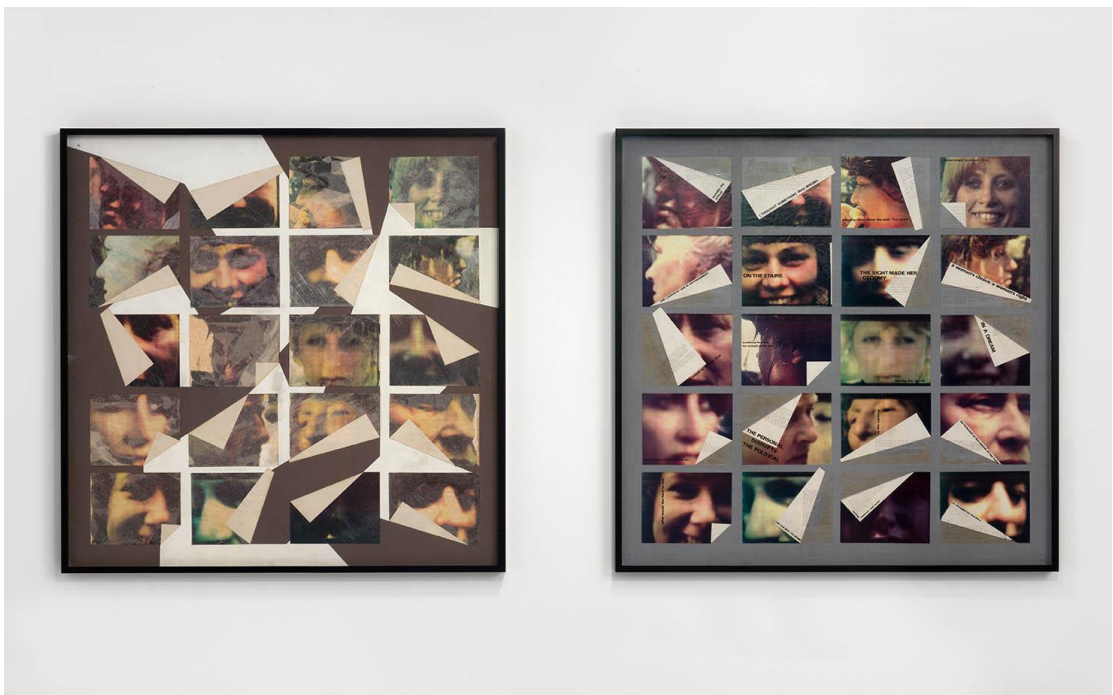


Figure 3.5, Marie Yates, *Image/woman/text*, 1979, color photographs and texts mounted on two panels, 48"x48".  
Courtesy of Richard Saltoun.

The third work on exhibition is titled *Image/woman/text* (Figure 3.4) Here the question of ‘woman’ becomes more explicit. The work is composed of two grids of photographs that depict discernible faces of women. Some faces are shown in their entirety but others only partially so. One corner on each of the photographs is turned over, emphasizing the materiality of the image, a materiality that was hard to read in the digital reproductions I had seen of this work prior to visiting the show. The effect of the folded corners is to obscure parts of each face: the most arresting are those images in which these folds serve to cover the woman’s mouth or eyes, hence obscuring the means of expression and potentially effacing subjectivity. Even before reading the textual element of this work, I am struck by the violence of the imagery that thus formally conveys a silencing or blocking out of women. On the left-hand grid, I see that the faces are further obscured through a wash of white paint, which blurs the image. The faces of the photographs are cropped and close-up. They are anonymous. Some of the images might be photographs of women taken from magazines at the time; others, in their relaxed expressions could have been personal snapshots. Laid over the photographs are slogans printed in bold type. The relationship between the slogans and the faces are not immediately clear, but as I read through them, they appear to shift between different sites that represent women’s experiences. ‘The sight made her gloomy’, could be lifted from a novel, where ‘I thought something was wrong’, from its first person perspective suggests a confessional diary entry. Some of the slogans are despairing or anxious—‘he shrugged his shoulders’—where others are determined, political—‘a woman’s choice/a woman’s right’.

Over the top of each folded corner is further typed text that reads as a broken up essay, dense reflections on the nature of images, of the feminine and on women’s art. These texts relate implicitly to the headline slogans. For example, the words that accompany the slogan ‘He shrugged his shoulders’ opens, ‘it is an exercise of power and subjectivization’. As I read through each text in turn it becomes clear that they are all to do with the image and reality of ‘woman’. One section states:

Within these representations we seek woman-ness or man-ness; we locate what we identify as a clue, and decide on the basis of it that we have discovered a ‘real’ sexual difference located as a property within the discrete person captured in the ‘reality’ of the photograph. This ‘location of difference’ then becomes the full presence required by

the question of the image, and narrative takes hold and is constructed which places the subject of the image within a framework of events and details, and their precise ordering. Further, because so much personal reference is required in this production of meaning through involvement within the image, we entail ourselves within the recognition.

This work articulates a then current feminist investigation into the question of sexual *difference*, which is, however, specifically posed in relation to the visual image. Notably, Yates is questioning both the *reality* of sexual difference and the *reality* of the photograph. In this collaging of photographs and slogans, recognizable in their tropes, Yates complexly destabilizes the category of ‘woman’ as a given, in order to insist on the ways in which visual representation constantly produces the feminine at the level of the image. The image is shown to be the site of the production of sexual difference. At the same time, Yates is also denaturalizing the status of the photograph by emphasizing its recurring tropes and effects. She thus shows how both ‘woman’ and image are mutually reinforced and thus, how it is necessary to address the image if she, as artist, is to address the politics of sexual difference. Yates’ work becomes a mode of investigation, a process of questioning rather than an illustration of an argument.

While this exhibition is part of the important re-discovery of feminist art in Britain, there is another important point to make about this exhibition. Framed as part of Richard Saltoun’s wider investigation into the history of conceptual art, the exhibition also included work by John Latham, who was part of the Artist Placement Group with Marie Yates and who is acknowledged in the gallery’s interpretative text as ‘her mentor for a time’.<sup>207</sup> While I read in this exhibition a journey in which the categories of art are being transformed through Yates’ attention to sexual difference, the exhibition’s curatorial framing emphasizes Marie Yates as an artist relevant for now because of that relation to the circle around John Latham, one of the ‘fathers’ of conceptual art. This raises two problems. One is that Yates’ work is legitimized by her connection to an artist who is both better-known and a man. The second problem is that, in focusing on her link to Latham’s work, attention to Yates’ increasingly explicit feminist aesthetic politics as a distinctly disruptive force is displaced by an emphasis on the general

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<sup>207</sup> Richard Saltoun, ‘Some Dimensions of My Lunch: Conceptual Art in Britain’, <https://www.richardsaltoun.com/exhibitions/49/overview/> [accessed 31 May 2018].

procedures of conceptual art and validated by that connection alone as an investigation into the relationship between art and society.

Marie Yates was at the exhibition opening and I was able to speak with her about the work on show. I thus discovered that *Image/woman/text*, as described above, was one of the works exhibited at The Pavilion as part of *The Image in Trouble*. I wanted then to think about the different meaning and impact of the work as it had been presented within the particular context of The Pavilion in 1984. How might I ‘read’ the work and The Pavilion now in light of my concept: ‘Feministing Photography’? What different understanding is produced of Yates’ work when I read it, not as an artwork that fits within accepted art-historical categories, but rather as a less recognizable *practice* that was addressing the functioning of the image and its sexual politics? The following analysis traces the shift Yates made from a focus on conceptual, dematerialized practice with its montages of landscape images and text to disrupting the image itself as a means to address ‘woman as image’. How did this shift happen? What is the wider theoretical context for Yates’ more explicitly feminist work? In the following section I retrace Yates’ steps in order to read the still under-acknowledged radicalism of her creative act of ‘feministing photography’.

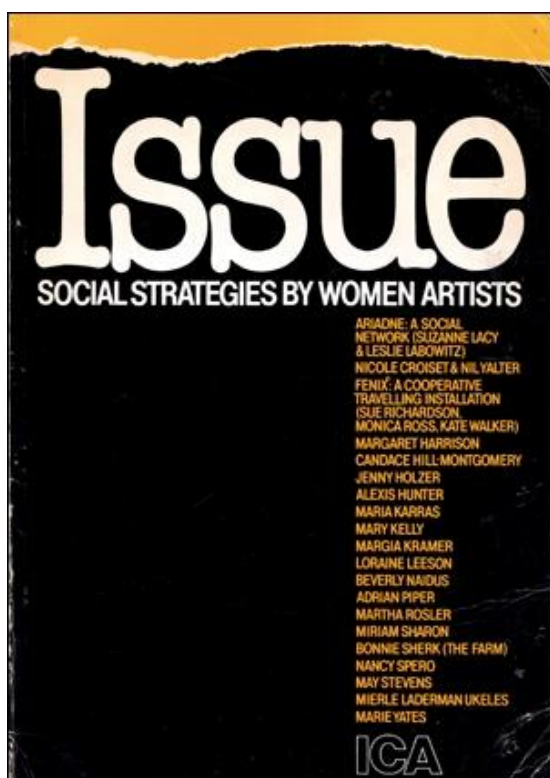


Figure 3.6, Cover of exhibition catalogue for *Issue: Social Strategies By Women Artists* published by the ICA, 1980. Courtesy of Specific Object/ David Platzker.

*Issue: Social Strategies by women artists*

*Image/woman/text* was produced in 1979 for the exhibition *Issue: Social Strategies by women artists* [*Issue*], organized by New York curator and critic Lucy Lippard (Figure 3.6). Lippard's writing on conceptual art was an important influence for Marie Yates in the development of *The Field Workings* and other early works.<sup>208</sup> Lippard's engagement with conceptual art was marked by her belief that 'the most "exciting" art might still be buried in social energies not yet recognized as art'.<sup>209</sup> In addition to her long engagement with conceptual art practice, however, Lippard saw *Issue*—which was mounted at the ICA in 1980—as being important for making visible her continuing commitment to feminist art criticism, demonstrated in her key collection *From the Center: Essays on Women's Art* published in 1976 and her specific engagement with feminist artists who engaged critically and socially through conceptual-based practices.<sup>210</sup> This exhibition also adds to the evidence of the early 1980s as being a defining moment in the theoretical recognition of art informed by feminism.

In 1978, as a critic actively writing about women artists, Lippard had been invited to write the catalogue introduction to the second *Hayward Annual* in London that was—following the criticism of the first *Hayward Annual*, which included just one woman, Kim Lim—to be curated by Rita Donagh, Tess Jaray, Kim Lim, Lilian Lijn and Gillian Wise Ciobotaru. The exhibition included work by twenty-three artists: sixteen women and seven men. More significantly three of these were artists who were known to be associated with the feminist art movement and debates—Susan Hiller, Alexis Hunter and Mary Kelly.

In her catalogue essay for *Issue*, Lippard states that, overall, The Hayward exhibition did not make any grand political or theoretical claims for the feminist movement, but simply

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<sup>208</sup> Lippard's writings on conceptual art are documented in Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

<sup>209</sup> Lippard, *Six Years*, p. xxii.

<sup>210</sup> The same year that *Issue* was mounted, Lippard also wrote an essay titled 'Sweeping Exchanges' in which she argues that feminist art is not a stylistic innovation but an art that 'transforms culture' and 'changes the character of art'. She argues that feminist art is anti-modernist because 'it offered a socially-concerned alternative to the increasingly mechanical evolution of "art about art"'—see Lucy Lippard, 'Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s', *Art Journal*, Fall/ Winter (1980), 362. Both these events followed Lippard's curated show *Ca. 7500*, which came to London in 1974: this show aimed to expose the activity of many women in conceptual art.

sought to address The Hayward Gallery's obvious exclusion of women in its first annual.<sup>211</sup> In her article on the exhibition, published in *Feminist Review* in 1979, Griselda Pollock reviews the complexity of an exhibition that 'could have been a threat but never was' by showing how the second *Hayward Annual* was indeed read as simply correcting bias or dismissed as 'alternative' rather than in terms of the potential to disrupt the constructed categories of art—a disruption that could have happened if the work of Hiller, Hunter and Kelly had been contextualized in relation to the feminist debates with which they engaged, rather than simply as women artists.<sup>212</sup>

The *Hayward Annual* 1978 did increase the quota of women ordinarily exhibited on its gallery walls. In curating *Issue*, however, Lippard wanted to make visible the *issues* facing women in the social and political sphere. Lippard framed the exhibition as being part of the work of the women's movement by showing the feminist commitment to art's role in social change. In her catalogue introduction to the show, she describes what she perceives as the development of feminist art over the previous decade:

In ten years, the needs, contexts and development have changed. In the early days of the feminist art movement we were looking for shared *images*—or rather they popped out at us and demanded to be dealt with. For some of us this preoccupation then led to a search for shared esthetic and political *approaches*, for a theoretical framework in which to set these ubiquitous images. Now we are in a stage where we tend to take that earlier data on image and approach for granted: the real challenges seem to lie in analyzing structures and effects. Thus the time seemed right to begin to break down the various kinds of feminist political art (all truly feminist art being political one way or another)<sup>213</sup>

What strikes me, when reading this catalogue essay—and Lippard's writing more broadly—is the polemics of the moment. Lippard did not produce her writing as a theoretical reflection to be confined to the space of art but as part of an active engagement with real-world struggle.

Lippard's text is theoretical but it also offers a clear sense of the politics that she sought to address through this particular exhibition by reaching further than the usual gallery-going

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<sup>211</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, 'Issue and Tabu', in *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, ed. by Lucy R. Lippard (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1980), pp. 3–12 (p. 5).

<sup>212</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition 1978', *Feminist Review*, 2 (1979), 33–55, (p. 52).

<sup>213</sup> Lippard, 'Issue and Tabu', p. 5.

public. Lippard outlines her position, as it focused on art that was oriented towards social struggle:

*Issue* scrutinizes that branch which is 'moving out' into the world, placing so-called women's issues in a broader perspective and/or utilizing mass production techniques to convey its messages about global traumas such as racism, imperialism, nuclear war, starvation and inflation to a broader audience.<sup>214</sup>

Within the exhibition, Lippard thus framed the feminist art practices selected as being in opposition to the dominant modernism and its stress on autonomy, individualism and formalist protocols. Instead, in her bringing together what she describes as 'social-change' art, Lippard stressed artistic production as that which takes place in dialogue with, or as outreach to, an audience. The effects in which Lippard was interested at that moment had to do with the way in which art practice was addressing the structurally discriminatory economic conditions women face or issues such as abortion, contraception and health care, as exemplified by Loraine Leeson & Peter Dunn's campaign poster-work *East London Health Project*.<sup>215</sup> There was also, within the exhibition, a strong curatorial focus on the structures, spaces and collective strategies through which feminist practices were being produced. Lippard describes the exhibition as being 'about seeing clearly and teaching people how to see the world that surrounds them'.<sup>216</sup> It reflects Lippard's shift from the concerns of conceptualism—which were trying to open up the privileged space of the museum—towards art that was engaged in a social activism that went beyond the space of the museum.<sup>217</sup> For Lippard, Yates' work *Image/woman/text* supports this curatorial premise, which she describes as addressing 'social preconceptions about images of women' and working to 'expose the codes of gender identification in this society'.<sup>218</sup> *Issue*, however, was a particularly interesting exhibition because it combined—in its selection of artists—Lippard's sense of conceptual feminist practice and a more activist kind of art making. Her selection of several conceptually oriented artists such as Marie Yates, Alexis Hunter and

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<sup>214</sup> Lippard, 'Issue and Tabu', p. 5.

<sup>215</sup> It is important to note that there was, during the 1970s, a socially-engaged art that was also a part of conceptual practice, for example Hans Haacke's *Manhattan Real Estate Holdings* (1971). Although Lippard does not situate them as such, some of the artworks selected for *Issue* (including Marie Yates' work) can be read in relation to this history of socially engaged conceptual art.

<sup>216</sup> Lippard, 'Issue and Tabu', p. 8.

<sup>217</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', *Tate Papers*, 12 (2009)

<<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers>> [accessed 21 May 2018].

<sup>218</sup> Lippard, 'Issue and Tabu', p. 8.

Mary Kelly, meant that the artists themselves disowned her positivist vision of art as activism. Instead, they were preoccupied with a political analytical work that focused on a critique of representation as being itself bound up with the feminist struggle in art, theory and action.

Thus, when I look closely at Yates' *Image/woman/text*, I encounter the disruption of Lippard's framing of feminist art and social struggle from within the work itself. Within the essay that forms part of Yates' artwork is the following paragraph:

The theme 'Issues' is problematic for this work: My practice denies that a 'meaning' or a 'content' can be already present in the work. Instead the production of meanings and contents is approached as a process of the social and discursive fields, which are the content of the work.

As Yates states, her photographs do not depict something recognizable, a social issue, but instead she takes the production of meaning itself as her subject. It is not that Yates is uninterested in social issues but more that she takes 'the image' as part of the problem of the social world. Alexis Hunter (1948–2014), who also showed in *Issue*, shared Yates' interest in the constructed nature of imagery.



Figure 3.7, Alexis Hunter, *The Marxist Wife (still does the housework)*, 1978/ 2005. © Estate of Alexis Hunter.



For example, in her work *The Marxist Wife (still does the housework)* (1978), Hunter uses sequences of staged photographs through which to address the absence of class within Marx's writing. In the image series (Figure 3.7), a woman's hand repeatedly cleans a poster on which is written 'Man, Thinker, Revolutionary'. Those images that depict the word 'Man', however, show the poster getting dirtier not cleaner as the woman's hand moves her cloth across the image. According to Hunter, the work presents the fact that 'women workers are invisible: they are absent from the analysis of the labor market on the one hand, and their domestic work and its exploitation is taken as given on the other'.<sup>219</sup> Thus, like Yates' artwork, Hunter's practice opens out onto the complex terrain of representation.

The title of Lippard's show, *Issue: Social Strategies* indicates her artistic and curatorial interests. Yates' title signals her own priorities. *Image/woman/text* is a corruption of *Image-Music-Text*, the seminal collection of essays written by Roland Barthes, which were collated and translated into English by Stephen Heath in 1977, two years before Yates made her work. The writing by Barthes collected in *Image-Music-Text* offer readings of the visual image that draw on structuralism and semiotics, in particular on Saussure's intervention in linguistics, which challenges the notion of an *a priori* meaning or content in language and instead understands meaning as being produced through a system of signs. Barthes' work was significant for literary and film theory because of its application of Saussure to the visual and literary fields. Barthes approached photography, film and narrative as signifying practices, identifying their specific systems of signifiers and signifieds. Indeed, in his 1961 essay 'The Photographic Message', Barthes writes, 'whatever the origin and destination of the message, the photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy'.<sup>220</sup>

In acknowledging this implied theoretical context, it is relevant that Yates was engaging with key theoretical trends in structuralist Marxism, psychoanalytical, literary and film theory,

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<sup>219</sup> Alexis Hunter, 'Artist Statement', *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists* ed. by, Lucy R. Lippard (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1980), pp. 30-31 (p. 30).

<sup>220</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 15.

much of which was disseminated through the British film journal, *Screen*.<sup>221</sup> In her bold insertion of the term ‘woman’ rather than ‘music’ between the words ‘Image’ and ‘Text’, Yates shows how the category of ‘woman’ offers an intervention into the accepted theories of language and meaning addressed by the theorists of structuralism and post-structuralism, returning us to her earlier-cited notion of the ‘untheorized assumptions’ relating to the human subject. Within Yates’ work I can begin to identify, at one and the same time, an engagement with structuralism and linguistic theory, in thinking through the construction of meaning contained within image and text, but also the specific question of ‘woman’ as requiring a specifically feminist intervention into this theoretical work on image and text: on representation.

### **Representation vs Communication**

I wish to expand on this notion of representation. The same year in which she made *Image/woman/text*, Marie Yates co-authored a paper for a seminar held as part of the Socialist Feminist Conference in London in 1979. This paper was titled ‘Representation vs Communication’. Yates wrote the paper in collaboration with artist Mary Kelly, literary theorists Cora Kaplan and Jacqueline Rose and film theorists Claire Johnston and Elizabeth Cowie. How did Yates come to be associated with this particular group of women and what does this particular piece of writing add to an understanding of her work?

Marie Yates began her art practice as an abstract painter living and working in St Ives during the 1960s. During this time she became dissatisfied with the gender inequalities she experienced within the art world, specifically her own struggle, as a woman, to gain gallery representation. In 1968 she went to study fine art at Hornsey College of Art (now Middlesex University), in order, in her own words, to explore this problem.<sup>222</sup> In September 1969 she saw the seminal exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* at the ICA, which was formative for her practice, questioning accepted categories of the artist and the artwork and disrupting established

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<sup>221</sup> In his paper ‘The Trajectory of Screen 1971–79’, Anthony Easthope outlines the significance of the theoretical journal *Screen* for the development of aesthetic discourse—see Anthony Easthope, ‘The Trajectory of Screen 1971–79’, in *The Politics of Theory: proceedings on the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1982* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), pp. 121–133.

<sup>222</sup> Marie Yates, ‘Works 1962–2015’, <<http://www.users.otenet.gr/~myates/artworksandprojectsmarieyates.html>> [accessed 15 June 2016].

notions of art's autonomy. Between 1971 and 1974 Yates produced the conceptualist project *The Field Workings*, one of the works within the 2016 show at the Richard Saltoun gallery. This 'in process' series of photographic documentations of journeys made to remote parts of the UK was shown in 1973 at the Midland Group Gallery (Nottingham) and The Arnolfini (Bristol). Two years later Yates developed a new landscape work *Artists Over Land*, which foregrounded the role of the spectator within the art work and which was selected to be shown at The Arnolfini alongside Richard Long, Hamish Fulton and Phillippa Ecobichon. The profile of these exhibitions during the 1970s led to various ad-hoc teaching opportunities at regional art schools and universities (including at Leeds Polytechnic) where Yates recalls the struggle of being the only, or virtually only, woman within the department.<sup>223</sup> After studying at Hornsey, Yates went to University College London where she enrolled on a Social Anthropology course as part of her continuing interest in Field Work. It was while at UCL, in 1974, that Yates heard a lecture by artist Mary Kelly on the conditions of women's lives in Ancient Greece.<sup>224</sup> This encounter with a woman who was daring to speak out against the historically determined oppression and subordination of women that Yates had encountered in her own experience as an artist, was transformative for her practice. Another important experience was viewing Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's film *Riddles of the Sphinx* at the London Filmmakers Co-op.<sup>225</sup> Hearing the lecture by the filmmakers and watching this film introduced Yates to the way in which feminist issues could be explicit not only *in* art/film but also *as* art/film.

In an interview with art historian Juli Carson in 1999, Mary Kelly reflects on the significance of the 'Representation vs Communication' paper. Kelly describes it as attempting 'to bring the question of representation into the general arena of feminist theory'.<sup>226</sup> What do the authors mean by representation? In their text, Yates, Kelly et al., distinguish what Stuart Hall

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<sup>223</sup> Marie Yates, unpublished interview with the author, 12 May 2016.

<sup>224</sup> This was a lecture in a program set up by a group of feminists held to coincide with Lucy Lippard's final 'numbers' exhibition *C. 7,500* in which, having repeatedly been told that women did not make conceptual art, Lippard sought to set the record straight. This work was shown in London in 1974 at the Warehouse Gallery, Earlham Street, London—see Cornelia Butler, 'Women—Concept—Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows', in *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Number Shows, 1969-74*, ed. by Cornelia Butler (Cologne: Walter Koenig, 2011), pp. 16–69.

<sup>225</sup> Yates, unpublished interview with the author, 12 May 2016.

<sup>226</sup> Juli Carson & Mary Kelly, 'Excavating *Post-Partum Document: A Conversation between Mary Kelly and Juli Carson*', in *Rereading Post-Partum Document*, ed. by Sabine Beitwieser (Vienna: Generalis Foundation, 1999), pp. 181–234 (p. 198).

describes as the ‘work’ of *representation*, which is dependent upon the dual systems of concepts and language, from the notion of *communication* as a neutral technology that simply transmits a message from whomever controls that technology and that thus assumes ‘a single unproblematic originating source’.<sup>227</sup> They write, ‘we are emphasizing this because we don’t take meanings as a pre-given entity, simply as a content which exists outside the forms of its production, but we feel the need to think about specific forms through and against which our politics can be defined or spoken’.<sup>228</sup> Instead, the authors show that these forms should be recognized as having a *material* basis, not only in terms of being analyzed as a commodity, in the traditional Marxian sense, but also as ‘material signifying practices’ that are historically specific and contingent. In recognizing representation as constructions of meaning through systems that are social rather than natural, it follows that the notion of the subject is made more complex. For the authors, art cannot simply be read as the expression of an author communicated to the reader. Rather, this analysis leads to understanding both author and reader of the image as constructed through representation.

What do these questions have to do with the authors’ engagement with the women’s movement? The authors argue that the consequence of complicating the issue of access and control is the conclusion that it is not possible simply to appropriate the forms of mass communication and to change the content of what is communicated through those forms for the benefit of women, without analyzing the production of meaning that takes place in those forms themselves.<sup>229</sup> They write:

We see these questions as central to that of ideology, which we define as the way or process through which our identities as women, our positions as a sexed subject, are constituted through specific systems of representation and social practice. On the other hand, there is no question of our seeing ourselves as standing outside these structures, rather that subjectivity itself is an effect of these structures through which our identities are constantly being reworked and replaced.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Cowie et al., p. 238.

<sup>228</sup> Cowie et al., p. 238–9.

<sup>229</sup> Cowie et al., p. 238.

<sup>230</sup> Cowie et al., p. 239.

This paper can thus be positioned as part of the revised understanding of ideology that was being developed amongst the New Left circles, in response to the particular struggles of modern capitalism in post-War Britain and Western Europe.

### **Feminist Debates and the Question of Ideology**

In presenting the theoretical work with which Yates was engaging, I aim to show the way in which feminist theory was being produced and mobilized by certain artists in the context of feminist art making. I wish to stress—at this point—that while the proceeding theoretical analysis is detailed, the purpose of this work is to stress the *struggle* of undertaking this feminist research from the perspective of the present-day. The theoretical resources that were informing Marie Yates had a particular currency and circulation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which they do not have today. Thus, it is necessary for me to slowly work through them in order to understand the intellectual and political framework in which The Pavilion artists were producing work, and within which The Pavilion, as a political-aesthetic project was created. Part of this work necessitates an engagement with the way in which feminism challenged and expanded the intellectual framework of the New Left out of which so many of the artists in Britain emerged.

In her essay, ‘Women: The Longest Revolution’, originally published in *New Left Review* in 1966, socialist-feminist literary scholar Juliet Mitchell argues that classical Marxist theories lack a specific analysis of women in the social formation. For instance, she points out that Marx abstracts the position of women, staging it as an index of ‘more general social advance’ while also ignoring women within his analysis of the problem of the family. Her criticism of Engels is that while he acknowledges the oppression of the female sex by the male, as the first ‘class oppression’, he nonetheless reduces the problem of woman’s exploitation to her capacity to work. Mitchell notes that Engels therefore gave woman’s physiological weakness as a primary cause of her oppression.<sup>231</sup> In her criticism of Marxist analysis, Mitchell argues that the liberation of women can only be transformed if there is transformation in the

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<sup>231</sup> Mitchell, ‘Women: The Longest Revolution’, p. 14.

structures of production, reproduction, sex and socialization.<sup>232</sup> In a conversation with Anna Murray, Mary Kelly recalls reading Mitchell's text, noting that it had been considered by the community of French-educated, New Left intellectuals as being 'something of a deviation from the main struggle'.<sup>233</sup> Kelly notes, however, that it was precisely this agenda that she sought to advance when she joined the Women's History Group, itself an activity of the Women's Liberation Workshop, which was formed in 1969. In the following section, I discuss the specific inflection of socialist theory undertaken by women founding and involved with the women's movement in Britain.

One of the defining contributions of the New Left was a questioning of one Marxist notion of ideology as being the 'false consciousness' of class relations that will lose its power once the subordinated class revolts.<sup>234</sup> In 1971 New Left Books published Ben Brewster's translation of Louis Althusser's influential article, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1970) as part of a collection of eight essays that had a significant influence on Marxist thought. Althusser's work was particularly significant for a specific section of the women's movement that was actively engaged in a critique of Marxism and cultural/aesthetic politics. Indeed, in her interview for *TEAP*, as analyzed in the previous chapters, the impact of Althusser is registered by Angela Kingston, who was part of the original working group at The Pavilion, and who had studied at Leeds on the MA in the Social History of Art taught by Griselda Pollock and John Tagg. In this interview she states, 'we had read our Althusser and we were activists in the sphere of representation!'<sup>235</sup> What does Kingston mean by being activists in the sphere of representation?

In 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' Althusser argues that the illusions of ideology will not be dispelled after the revolution because ideology is 'inseparable from the

<sup>232</sup> Mitchell, 'Women: The Longest Revolution', p. 17.

<sup>233</sup> Mary Kelly and Anna Murray, 'On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/50401>> [accessed 15 July 2015], p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> While 'false consciousness' is a term associated with Marxist discourse, it was never actually used by Marx. Engels used the phrase once in a letter to Franz Mehring (1893) in which he writes, 'ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness'—see Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Franz Mehring', in *Marx and Engels Correspondence*, ed. by Fritz J. Raddatz (New York City: International Publishers, 1968). This letter was cited by Georg Lukács in his 1920 essay 'Class Consciousness'—see Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1967)—and revived by Herbert Marcuse in 1964—see Herbert Marcuse *One Dimensional Man* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1964)).

<sup>235</sup> Kingston, p. 1.

practical social activities and relations of everyday life and is therefore a necessary condition of any society'.<sup>236</sup> Althusser argues that ideology is more than the concealment of the exploitative nature of class relations, to be overcome through the transformation of the structures of economic production alone. Instead he argues that ideology has real effects as it operates through what he calls 'Ideological State Apparatuses', which include the press and media, education, the church and the family. These are not repressive apparatuses so much as those which shape consciousness and identity through representation and a process Althusser names interpellation, hailing us to recognize who and what we are through the representations ideological practices project to us. Kelly thus explains that the significance of Althusser's work was his recognition that, 'the economy wasn't always determinant in the last instance'.<sup>237</sup> Instead, Althusser identifies the real ideological effects of representation:

I shall therefore say that, where only a single subject (such and such individual) is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into his material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which we derive the ideas of that subject ...* Ideas have disappeared as such (insofar as they are endowed with an ideal or spiritual existence), to the precise extent that it has emerged that their existence is inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals defined in the last instance by an ideological apparatus. It therefore appears that the subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system (set out in the order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, describing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief.<sup>238</sup>

Thus, Althusser showed how ideological struggle went beyond the struggle over economic relations and extended, for instance, to the realm of education, the media and art.

In researching the way in which this new understanding of ideology supported the work of the women's movement, I wish to discuss another important paper, 'Psychoanalysis and Patriarchal Structures', by Ros Coward, Elizabeth Cowie and Sue Lipshitz, which was initially presented at the 1976 Patriarchy Conference in London, a major feminist event in terms of theoretical development. In their paper, the authors argue that it was through attention to the familial relations that a demand for a new theorization was brought forth in order to understand

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<sup>236</sup> Victor Burgin, 'Introduction', p. 5.

<sup>237</sup> Kelly and Murray, p. 2.

<sup>238</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (London New Left Books, 1971) (transl. by Ben Brewster), pp 158-59.

what they term ‘the real relations between patriarchy and capitalism’.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, they argue that classic Marxist theory is insufficient because it makes women analogous to the working class.<sup>240</sup> Instead what is distinct about women’s subordination is that they are excluded from both the transforming relations of production and access to political power and are subject to the structuring of sexuality for the purpose of reproduction.<sup>241</sup> They explain how this links to ideology:

[Althusser’s] insistence on understanding society constituted by three necessary practices, economic, political and ideological, has at least made it possible to think of the determinacy of the ideological instance as relatively autonomous from the mode of production. This theoretical advance from the crude economism of early Marxism was felt to be valuable for the women’s movement which had simultaneously, and in a way as yet unelaborated, found that the position of women could not be described or explained solely in terms of the mode of production.<sup>242</sup>

One of Althusser’s most significant and influential concepts was that of interpellation, which puts forward the notion that ideology functions to produce what Althusser describes as ‘the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’.<sup>243</sup> For Althusser, individual persons do not exist as conscious, self-determining subjects, but they misrecognize themselves as such through their social interactions. Interpellation describes precisely this imagined identification. As Marie Yates writes as part of her text accompanying *Image/woman/text*, ‘within the image, we entail ourselves within the recognition’.<sup>244</sup>

In his book *The Art of Interruption*, John Roberts argues that, from the early 1970s to late 1980s, ‘the re-theorization of photography allowed artists to reconnect their aesthetic concerns to the wider ideological forces of society’.<sup>245</sup> Indeed, in an account of her political-aesthetic concerns during this period, Mary Kelly states that, ‘I recall making a connection between images of women and ideology as a system of representation’.<sup>246</sup> Through his

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<sup>239</sup> Ros Coward, Elizabeth Cowie, Sue Lipshitz, ‘Psychoanalysis and Patriarchal Structures’, *Papers on Patriarchy: conference London 1976*, ed. by Anon. (London: PDC and Women’s Publishing Collective, 1978) pp. 6–20, (p. 16).

<sup>240</sup> Coward et al., p. 8.

<sup>241</sup> Coward et al., p. 9.

<sup>242</sup> Coward et al., p. 6.

<sup>243</sup> Althusser, p. 162.

<sup>244</sup> Marie Yates, ‘A Note on Image/woman/text 1979’, in *Marie Yates Works 1971–1979*, ed. by, Richard Saltoun (London: Richard Saltoun, 2016), pp. 86–87 (p. 86).

<sup>245</sup> John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1998), p. 144.

<sup>246</sup> Kelly and Murray, p. 2.



theorization of ideology, Althusser argues that subjectivity is not obscured by existing representations but is constituted *through* representation. This consequently had a bearing on the theorization of photography. If ideology takes place through representation, it follows that photography can no longer be understood as being simply a ‘window onto a world’, which can be ‘seen through’ in order to reach a ‘true picture’. Instead, as Victor Burgin argues in the introduction to *Thinking Photography* (1982), photography is a discursive structure, which produces and disseminates meaning through ‘a complex articulation of the moments of institution, text, distribution and consumption of photography’.<sup>247</sup> Within the field of visual culture, the revision of the Marxist concept of a superstructural culture meant that the relationship of photography to ‘the real’ was being radically re-thought, notably through John Tagg’s work which drew particularly on Althusserian theory as well as the theoretical work of Michel Foucault, to think the social production of photography’s ‘truths’. It is important to address Tagg’s work because it was he who introduced issues of ideology and photography to the students at Leeds who went on to establish The Pavilion.

In his book *The Burden of Representation* John Tagg addresses Althusser’s understanding of ideology. He argues that while Althusser sought to displace notions of consciousness which had reduced ideology to a ‘(mis)representation of the social in thought’, nevertheless, in confining Ideological State Apparatuses to a unified function, he was actually upholding the model of causality that he was supposedly critical of in the base-superstructure model.<sup>248</sup> While recognizing the appeal of Althusser to those engaged in struggles outside the dominant organization of politics-notably the struggle against racism and the subordination of women-Tagg argues that Althusser’s notion of State Apparatuses ties political struggle to a classical understanding of a social totality. Although Tagg critiques both Althusser *and* Foucault for their lack of attention to historical particularity, in both the Althusserian concept of ‘ideological self-subjection’ and the Foucauldian conception of the ‘panoptic regime’, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge the significance of Foucault’s work for the debates on

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<sup>247</sup> Burgin, ‘Introduction’, p. 2.

<sup>248</sup> Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, pp. 24–25.

the meaning and effects of photography on which Tagg was part. In his introduction to *The Burden of Representation*, Tagg argues that:

The conditions of capitalist production are, for example, complex, flexible and compatible with a wide range of familial, managerial, educational, administrative and cultural forms, and even these may not be allowed to stand in the way of the colonization of new markets. The political, economic and cultural fields are not, therefore, unities constituting definite sectors or instances, governed by their place in an architectonic totality.<sup>249</sup>

Drawing on Foucault's theory on discourse, Tagg argues that power operates 'in and not just on' the social body, not through institutions or 'state apparatuses' but as, what he calls, micro-physics of power. Foucault metaphorized his conception of power as a capillary, arguing that power 'reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourse, learning processes and everyday lives'.<sup>250</sup> Likewise Joan Copjec argues in her essay 'The Orthopsychic Subject' that the subject is not constructed by one monolithic discourse but by a multitude of different discourses and that knowledge and power are produced in the relations between these different discourses.<sup>251</sup>

Artist Mary Kelly was informed by a different aspect of Foucault's work: the link between power and the social organization of sexuality. Reflecting on her early work *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), Kelly argues that maternal femininity is the 'ideal moment', in which 'the woman, in relation to her child, is constituted as the actively desiring subject, without transgressing the socially accepted definition of her as mother'.<sup>252</sup> She extends the relationship between the psychic and the social further in her later work *Interim* (1984–89). Describing the second section of this work, *Pecunia* (Latin for 'money'), Kelly draws on Foucault's concepts of the 'distribution of alliance' and the 'distribution of sexuality' as found in *The History of Sexuality* to argue that female sexuality is repressed and controlled both materially, but also through the psychic economy, linked to a body that both produces and

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<sup>249</sup> Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, p. 25.

<sup>250</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Prison Talk: An Interview with Michel Foucault', *Radical Philosophy*, 16, (1977), 10–15 (p. 10).

<sup>251</sup> Joan Copjec, 'The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan', in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by E Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 287–308 (p. 289).

<sup>252</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 172.

consumes.<sup>253</sup> Kelly's emphasis on the psychic and the social returns us to *Image/woman/text* in its focus on the act of identification through the image. I want to explore the psychosocial construction of 'woman', as it relates to the question of representation by turning, next, to another important exhibition—*Beyond the Purloined Image*—curated by Kelly and which sheds light on a second of Yates' artworks shown as part of *The Image in Trouble*.



Figure 3.8, Marie Yates, *The Missing Woman* (1982) (Exhibition view—*Beyond the Purloined Image*, Riverside Studios, 1983). Courtesy of Marie Yates.

### ***Beyond the Purloined Image***

Marie Yates was one of eight artists selected to show as part of *Beyond the Purloined Image*. Curated by Mary Kelly and mounted at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, West London (Figure 3.8), the exhibition took place from 3–29 August 1983. The selected artists included six women: Yates, Yve Lomax and Susan Trangmar alongside Karen Knorr, Judith Krowle and Mitra Tabrizian and two men: Olivier Richon and Ray Barrie. Mary Kelly has stated that, in bringing together both men and women, she intended to go beyond 'the biological canon of feminist commitment' in order to extend the question of gender to what she describes as the broader questions relating to the social and aesthetic debates taking place in London that should

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<sup>253</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 154.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978) (transl. by Robert Hurley).

not only be considered a ‘women’s issue’.<sup>254</sup> The artists within Kelly’s exhibition shared an interest in montage, fragmentation and the scripto-visual strategies so clearly in evidence within *Image/woman/text*. In using these aesthetic strategies, the artists each sought to make visible the unstable nature of photography and of the visual codes that constitute the contemporary world.<sup>255</sup>

In titling the exhibition *Beyond the Purloined Image*, Kelly made explicit reference to a recent artistic trend of appropriation, which, in re-deploying images found in mass media, questions the fetishization of notions of artistic genius and originality. More implicitly, the title is also both a reference and a resistance to the exhibition *The Stolen Image and its Uses*, which also took place in 1983. This show was curated by Abigail Solomon-Godeau and exhibited at Lightwork, New York. *The Stolen Image and its Uses* included the work of American artists Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince, dubbed the ‘Pictures’ generation because of their re-staging and re-appropriation of advertisements, popular films and modernist photography as a strategy through which to contest the ownership and authority of the artist.<sup>256</sup> Kelly argues that while the British artists in her exhibition demonstrated—in their work—the same proximity to the contemporary world as their American counterparts, their strategy went *beyond* appropriation to what Kelly refers to as *depropriative* practice in subjecting standard photographic notions of narrative, the frame and perspective to a process of careful critique.<sup>257</sup> In this account, Kelly acknowledges the importance of Bertolt Brecht for the eight artists within the exhibition, in transforming finished works into unfinished works in order that the spectator

<sup>254</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 107.

<sup>255</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 110.

<sup>256</sup> Burgin, ‘Introduction’, p. 107.

<sup>257</sup> While—in *Beyond the Purloined Image*—Mary Kelly was knowingly referencing *The Stolen Image and its Uses*, her exhibition title was also an implicit reference to Jacques Lacan’s ‘Seminar on the Purloined Letter’, which uses Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *The Purloined Letter* (1844) as a means through which to address the relationship of the Imaginary to the Symbolic order. Lacan’s seminar was published in French as the introduction to his collected writings *Écrits* (1966) and translated into English in 1972—see Jacques Lacan & Jeffrey Mehlman, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’, *Yale French Studies*, 48 (1972), 39–72.

The terms of Lacan’s argument were subsequently critiqued by Jacques Derrida in his 1975 lecture ‘The Purveyor of Truth’, which was published in French in *Poétique* and in English, in reduced form, that same year—see Jacques Derrida, Willis Domingo, James Hulber, Moshe Ron & M.-R.L., ‘The Purveyor of Truth’, *Yale French studies*, 52 (1975), 31–113.

The three contributions by Poe, Lacan and Derrida gained further prominence through Barbara Johnson’s analysis—see Barbara Johnson, ‘The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida’, *Yale French studies*, 55-56 (1977), 457–505. In her article, Johnson points out that Poe’s *Purloined Letter* becomes an ‘allegory of the signifier’, which produces certain effects that do not rely on the content of the letter. Thus it becomes illustrative of the way in which the Symbolic order (the world of linguistic communication) constitutes the subject (Johnson, p. 464.). This relates to Kelly’s statement that the exhibition is ‘concerned with the image but not consumed by the spectacle’ (Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 113).

finds a new kind of pleasure in the 'critical position'.<sup>258</sup> In addition, Maria Walsh has argued that the important distinction between what Kelly was arguing for and the appropriative work of the 'Pictures' generation is that Kelly was concerned with bringing a new spectator into being, believing that the analysis of the image would lead to a freedom for the viewer.<sup>259</sup>



Figure 3.9, Marie Yates, *The Missing Woman* (detail), 1982, 21 color photographs mounted on board. Courtesy of Marie Yates.

<sup>258</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 113.

<sup>259</sup> Maria Walsh, *Art and Psychoanalysis* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p. 53.

*The Missing Woman*

Figure 3.10, Exhibition view—*The Image in Trouble* at The Pavilion, 1 Aug–1 Sept 1983 (Marie Yates, *The Missing Woman*, Right-hand side) Courtesy of Marie Yates.

The work Marie Yates included within *Beyond the Purloined Image*—and that was also shown in *The Image in Trouble* (Figure 3.10)—was from the series *The Missing Woman* (1982). It consists of twenty-one image-text configurations mounted on board. The photographs and sections of text draw on the signs of woman deployed across different everyday sites of representation: diary entries, narrative film, magazines, novels, conversations and personal photographs. For example, one panel (Figure 3.9) depicts a photograph of a bedroom, light streaming in through the window. The accompanying text—an ‘extract from A’s diary 8<sup>th</sup> May 1981’ reads:

Sometimes I like to lie in bed all day and my daughter runs in and out with food and messages and I lie and daydream endlessly of all the wishes I’d had as a child and teenager in Brazil, and the new dreams that came with my twenties ... only one or two of the early ones are fulfilled and therefore I can lie on my back looking at the sunlight crossing the ceiling of our cottage, hearing the birds calling back and to, and the tractor slowly moving across the hill opposite, and my daughter Mira rustling about in the yard, and dream them all again changing a detail here and there but in the main luxuriating in them.

Each of the photo-texts addresses the fantasies of an unknown woman. According to Yates, the aim of these photo-texts is to tease the viewer with a narrative process, the coherence of which is ultimately disrupted. In addressing fantasy and the image the work can be partly theorized through Apparatus Theory, which—emerging in the discipline of Film Studies—analyzed the way in which cinema functioned to produce desire, reading the spectator as being part of the ‘apparatus of cinema’.<sup>260</sup>

In ‘The Orthopsychic Subject’, Joan Copjec argues that the concept of the cinema apparatus—as economic, technical and ideological institution—was a radical break with the common understanding that cinema reflects an *a priori* reality. Instead she theorizes cinema as part of the *construction* of reality arguing that, ‘cinematic representation was considered to be not a clear or distorted reflection of a prior and external reality, but one among many social discourses that helped to construct reality and the spectatorial subject’.<sup>261</sup> Another key proponent of Apparatus Theory was French film theorist Christian Metz. In his essay, ‘The Imaginary Signifier’—a term drawn from Althusser—Metz argues that the cinema is a technique of the imaginary, both in the simplistic sense of being a work of fiction and also in the psychoanalytical sense in which the cinema screen becomes the space on which the spectator projects the fantasies of the primal imaginary – for Metz, ‘a veritable psychical substitute, a prosthesis for our primally dislocated limbs’.<sup>262</sup> At the same time, Metz argues that cinema is constantly caught up in the Symbolic, in which society’s unconscious productions, of which film is an example, is marked by ‘the semiotic imprint of the Law’.<sup>263</sup>

For Metz and other proponents of Apparatus theory, the understanding of the psychic structures of the cinema was part of understanding how cinema functioned ideologically—how cinema maintained its lure. He writes that, ‘the point is to ask why many people go to the cinema when they are not obliged to, how they manage to ‘assimilate’ the rules of this game

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<sup>260</sup> In 1975, Jean-Louis Baudry’s influential article ‘Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus was translated into English—see Jean-Louis Baudry ‘Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus’, *Film Quarterly*, 28 (1975), 39–45.

<sup>261</sup> Copjec, p. 57.

<sup>262</sup> Christian Metz, ‘The Imaginary Signifier’, *Screen*, 16 (1975), 14–76, (p. 15).

<sup>263</sup> Metz, p. 15.

which is a fairly new one historically, how they themselves become cogs of the institution'.<sup>264</sup>

Film Theory proved a vital resource for the theoretical developments of the artistic and cultural practices associated with the women's movement. In analyzing cinema as being a machine that is both social (cinema as industry) and psychic (the spectator's psychology), rather than enacting its power purely through financial mechanisms, Metz showed that ideology was not only determined by economic relationships, but through cinematic codes that were imbricated by the Imaginary and the Symbolic, in which, as Jacqueline Rose has argued, the spectator ultimately identifies with the positions of desire and sexuality that the film puts into play.<sup>265</sup>

### **Feminism and Psychoanalysis**

The complexity of the subject-matter being addressed in this reading of work by Marie Yates is that there are two distinct but related questions that were being explored with intensity during the 1970s and 1980s: first, an understanding of the way in which images were operating ideologically. Secondly, the production of sexual difference, which was of particular concern to those in the women's movement who wanted to become conscious of, and thus challenge, the negative place of women within a patriarchal society. 'Feminising Photography', as a concept that I am reading in Yates' work, thus addresses these dual concerns.

As I have already pointed out, feminist artists and thinkers during the 1970s and 1980s came together through their various engagements with social movements, New Left political and social theory (that became Cultural Studies) and the Women's Liberation Movement, to question the adequacy of Marxism in understanding the central relevance of sexual difference to social progress. The earliest manifestation of the investigation of psychoanalysis in relation to the women's movement in Britain came through the Women's History Group, which involved Sally Alexander, Rosalind Delmar, Mary Kelly, Juliet Mitchell and Laura Mulvey. In an account of the group's work in editing a 1970 edition of the Women's Liberation Workshop's literary journal *Shrew*, Kelly recalls, 'I remember thinking we had found both the

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<sup>264</sup> Metz, p. 76.

<sup>265</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, (London: Verso, 2005) p. 217 (first publ. London: Verso, 1986).



object—the unconscious, and the discourse—psychoanalysis, that would finally make sexuality pass into the grand narrative of social change'.<sup>266</sup>

In the introduction to the papers of the previously referenced Patriarchy Conference in 1976, Susan Himmelweit, Margaret McKenzie and Alison Tomlin argue that the women's movement lacks, 'theoretical grounding and hence any establishment of the movement's relationship to the left' and secondly, 'that the women's movement should relate macro-political theory and strategy to an awareness of the personal as political'.<sup>267</sup> In so doing, the authors believed that the political left would be forced to confront the problems being raised by the women's movement. In this paper, the authors draw on both the Freudian notion of the unconscious as well as Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and Symbolic, in order to account for why and how individuals become subject to the structure that determines their access to the sites of production/reproduction on the basis of sexual difference. They argue that it is through the alienating process of 'the mirror stage'—in which the 'imago', the fantasy of the unified subject, produced at the moment of the subject's recognition of 'I' as separate from 'you'—that ideology has its force. This enables the organization of relations necessary for the on-going production and reproduction of a capitalist society. Coward et al., go on, in their own paper for the Patriarchy Conference, to discuss Lacan's theory of the Symbolic and language, arguing that Lacan's positioning of the phallus as *signifier*, shows that the basis of subject construction is found in culture and not biology.<sup>268</sup>

According to Lacan, the acquisition of language is the crucial stage for the construction of subjectivity, which happens only once the subject recognizes that there is a division between themselves and objects outside of themselves, the first of these objects being the mother. For Lacan, the Mirror Stage describes the division between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. In 'Feminine Sexuality—Jacques Lacan and the *école freudienne*', Jacqueline Rose argues that the stress in the linguistic/symbolic for Lacan, is on that which 'stands in' for that which has been

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<sup>266</sup> Kelly and Murray, p. 2.

<sup>267</sup> Susan Himmelweit, Margaret McKenzie and Alison Tomlin, 'Why Theory', in *Papers on Patriarchy*, pp. 1–5 (p. 5).

<sup>268</sup> Coward et al., p. 14.

lost.<sup>269</sup> The inter-relation of the subject and the social found in Lacan's notion of language and the orders of the Imaginary and the Symbolic is given significant attention in Fredric Jameson's essay on Lacan, which is subtitled 'Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject', in which he finds in Lacan the means to reconcile Marxist and Psychoanalytical critique:

It should not, indeed, be forgotten that it is precisely to a Lacanian inspiration that we owe the first new and as yet insufficiently developed conception of the nature of ideology since Marx and Nietzsche: I refer to Althusser's seminal definition of ideology as 'the "representation"' of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to their Real conditions of existence'.<sup>270</sup>

Jameson argues that it is through the acquisition of the Symbolic that 'the child begins to develop relationships to others, jealousies, games, and much richer forms of substitution and of the exercise of language'.<sup>271</sup> He states that what is so significant about Lacan is his identification of Freud's notion of the Oedipal complex as a linguistic phenomenon which is marked by the transformation of the Imaginary relationship to the parent (the 'imago') into what he describes as 'the new and menacing abstraction of the paternal role as the possessor of the other and the place of the Law'.<sup>272</sup> With Lacan, Jacqueline Rose argues that 'language speaks the loss which lay behind that first moment of symbolization' and yet that 'subjects in language persist in their belief that somewhere there is a point of certainty of knowledge and of truth'.<sup>273</sup> For Lacan, the Other/l'Autre (designated by a Capital A) is the site of language, the site that Rose says, appears to hold the 'truth' of the subject. Interestingly, Yates reflects her own interest in Lacan by borrowing his use of capital letters—which serves to emphasize language as being an order that is outside of the subject itself. Within *The Missing Woman*, Yates credits each of the narrative fragments to five 'personae', which are signified, not by names, but by letters.

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<sup>269</sup> Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p. 54.

<sup>270</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject', *Yale French Studies*, 55/56 (1977), 338–395 (p. 394).

<sup>271</sup> Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan', p. 361.

<sup>272</sup> Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan', p. 359.

<sup>273</sup> Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p. 55.

According to Lacan, language is a site of fantasy: that which is lost is only ever experienced by the subject as loss, and hence desire, through the acquisition of the Symbolic. Jameson describes this paradox as ‘the transformation language brings to what without it could not yet have been called desire’.<sup>274</sup> While Rose acknowledges that Fredric Jameson was important for understanding how symbolic substitutes are formed in place of the child’s object world and in showing how the internal pre-verbal fantasies become fixed in the external world through language, she argues that the main limitation of Jameson’s work is that it overlooks the particular relevance of psychoanalysis to sexual difference.

What, then, *does* Lacan’s theorization of the psychic processes in relation to the acquisition of language have to do with sexuality? First, sexual identity, as all aspects of subject identity, is structured in language and thus there can be no masculinity or femininity outside of language. Secondly, psychoanalysis has produced a complex theorization which accounts for the phallus as ‘privileged signifier’ and thus for the division of sexuality in language through which the feminine is produced as the negative term.<sup>275</sup> For Lacan, as for Freud, the place of the father is the place of the law. He argues that, ‘what we meet as an accident in the child’s development is linked to the fact that the child does not find himself or herself alone in front of the mother, and that the phallus forbids the child the satisfaction of his or her own desire, which is the desire to be the exclusive desire of the mother’.<sup>276</sup> Unlike Freud, however, Lacan argues that the phallus does not have any value in itself. Instead he argues that it is only through the assumption into the Symbolic that the phallus can be recognized as missing, and hence the emphasis must be on the phallus as *signifier*: ‘it can be said that this signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation’, and yet ‘it can play its role only when veiled’.<sup>277</sup> Crucially, subject identity is constructed with reference to the phallus, and subjects take up their positions on either side of this divide. For Lacan, the woman takes up her identity in language in relation to the negative position, the position of lack.

How, then, were these complex ideas being worked through within the site of Marie

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<sup>274</sup> Jameson, ‘Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan’, p. 361.

<sup>275</sup> Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p. 80.

<sup>276</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Les formations de l’inconscient’, *Bulletin de Psychologie*, 2, (1957-58), p. 13.

<sup>277</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Signification of the Phallus,’ in *Ecrits: A Selection*, ed. by, Jacques Lacan (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 311–322 (p. 321).

Yates' artwork? The two central themes within Yates' work, evoked clearly within her title, *The Missing Woman*, is the construction of subject identity and its relation to the question of loss. Yates addresses these themes through a focus on language. Stuart Hall describes the systems of concepts and language as 'shared "maps of meaning"—which we learn and unconsciously internalize as we become members of our culture [...] where words and things function as signs, into the very heart of social life itself'.<sup>278</sup> Likewise, Yates acknowledges the viewer as participating in the construction of meaning and draws attention to this by providing a series of recognizable visual clues—particular representational devices—within the photographic assemblages of *The Missing Woman*, which communicate to the viewer an invitation to construct the narrative of the woman who lies behind the enigmatic texts and images. While incorporating 'icons, symbols and indexical signs', drawn from the multiple 'maps of meaning' from within visual culture, Yates evades a narrative through which a conventional resolution can be reached.<sup>279</sup> In describing her work's address to the spectator, Yates explains her dual intention to both lure and elude the viewer:

The Missing Woman is a detective novel, a database, a diary, a soap opera, a documentary and none of these. A multimedia fascination with romance, this piece employs and relates to narrative, but it does so in order that it may fragment that sense of coherence, that fiction of the whole story.<sup>280</sup>

Writing about Yates' work in *Block* magazine, Griselda Pollock reads *The Missing Woman* through the resources of semiotics, psychoanalysis and Marxism and in doing so, adds to the understanding of the work. Writing from the position of viewer, Pollock locates within the work, 'the effect of making the viewer conscious of how much she desires to find in a work a secure locus of meaning either in a woman about whom a story is being told or in one telling the story'.<sup>281</sup> She goes on to argue that, through the work, the viewer is forced 'to recognize the fact of representational strategies, a fact which is overlooked in our normal consumption of their

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<sup>278</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The Work of Representation', in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. by Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 13–75 (p. 29).

<sup>279</sup> Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 110.

<sup>280</sup> Marie Yates, 'The Missing Woman 1982', <<http://www.users.otenet.gr/~myates/themissingwomanproject.html>> [accessed 15 June 2016].

<sup>281</sup> Pollock, 'Art, Art School, Culture', p. 62.

constructs as truth revealed'.<sup>282</sup> Thus the work is radical because it makes us recognize the image as discursive practice.

Through close theoretical interrogation, it is thus possible to read in Yates' work 'the missing woman' as being the subject whose identity is unfixed in calling attention to the 'representational strategies' that reproduce woman's negative position within society and within the psychic formation. Within Yates' work, the usual function of the Symbolic which functions within images to install the viewer back into the phallogentric order is denied resolution. In an act that Yates refers to as an 'anti-narrative' the chain of identification usually present between the viewer and image in narrative film, and that normally functions to produce sexed subjectivity, is broken. Thus, the artwork resists the construction of sexual difference, as it is determined within patriarchal culture. The spectator of the work who is a man is unable to find pleasure through the image because the image of woman does not conform to the woman-as-spectacle. On the other hand, while the spectator of the work who is a woman is also prevented from identifying as woman-to-be-looked-at, the woman viewer is conversely enabled to find a new kind of pleasure. As Jo Anna Isaak says about *The Missing Woman* in a review in the journal *Afterimage*, 'this project stresses the absence of woman as a subject in her own right in a phallogentric culture which defines woman in terms of lack; in the fragmentary photo-texts, our desire for a fetish-image, fixed identity or narrative closure is checked, in this refusal of the image of woman'.<sup>283</sup> The refusal of the image of woman is thus a refusal of the woman as lack and thus presents the potential of woman-yet-to-come.

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<sup>282</sup> Pollock, 'Art, Art School, Culture', p. 62.

<sup>283</sup> Jo Anna Isaak, 'Women: The Ruin of Representation', *Afterimage*, 9, (1985), 6–8.

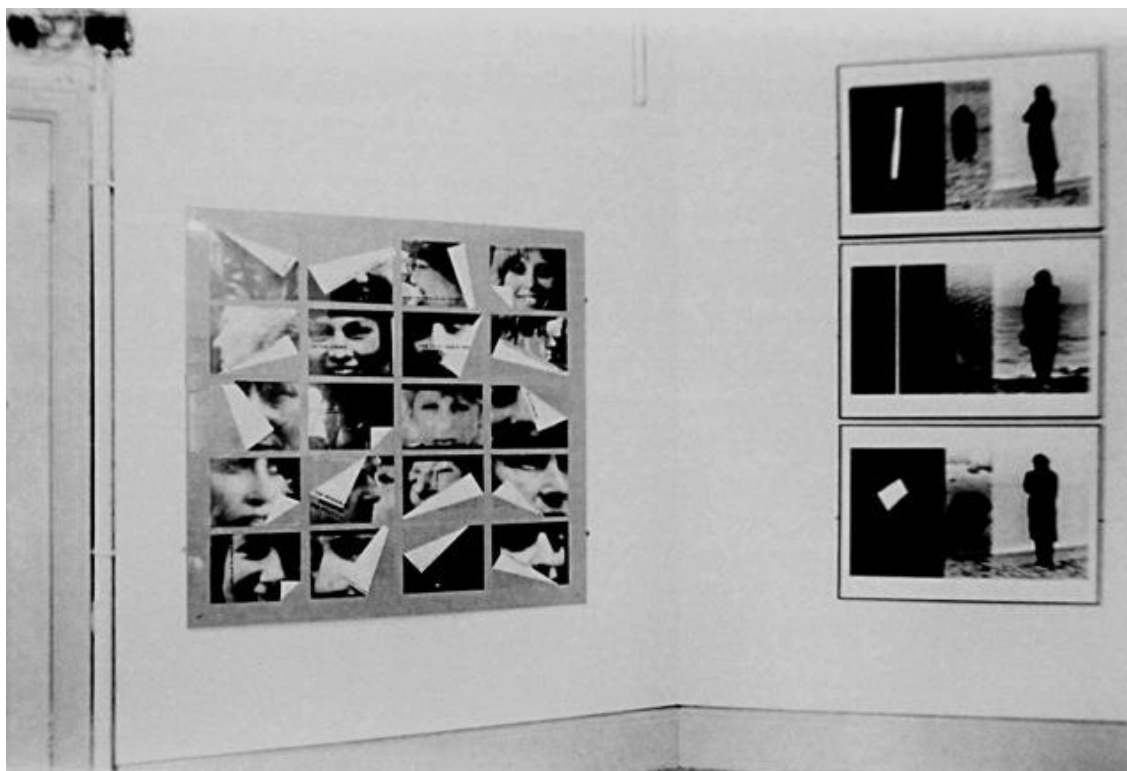


Figure 3.11, Exhibition view, *The Image in Trouble* at The Pavilion, 1 Aug–1 Sept 1983 ((L-R), Marie Yates, *Image/woman/text* and Yve Lomax, *Open Rings and Partial Lines* ) Courtesy of Marie Yates.

### Yve Lomax

Having discussed *Image/woman/text* and *The Missing Woman*—two major works that were presented at The Pavilion as part of *The Image in Trouble*—I now want to look closely at the work of Yve Lomax and Susan Trangmar with whom Yates exhibited (Figure 3.11). Both had also shown with Yates as part of *Beyond the Purloined Image*. On 20 September, 1981, a ‘Women’s Workshop’ was held at the Camerawork Gallery and Darkroom at 121 Roman Road in Bethnal Green (previously the Half-Moon Photography Workshop and now the site of Four Corners film and photography center) that assembled a small group of women artists working with the camera to question the function of montage within photography. Yve Lomax and Susan Trangmar were two of the women involved in that event. Writing in an article for *Camerawork* magazine, Lomax and artist Lorain Leeson describe the motivation for this event:

Working within male-dominated traditions, women photographers and artists have been isolated, marginalized, ignored by mainstream publishers, galleries, distribution networks and funding bodies; denied adequate access, on a personal as well as an institutional level to technical help, information and educational facilities; even abused—in the attempt to take up a stance on the wrong side of the camera [...] Women working with photographic media have expressed a need not only for the supportive discussion and sharing of problems that informal women-only groups can provide, but also for a more rigorous examination of the issues that affect the construction of images

within feminist practice—the extent to which they are informed by or have power to undermine those perpetuated by the dominant culture.<sup>284</sup>

Considering this 1981 workshop in relation to Yates' co-authored paper for the 1979 patriarchy conference, the concurrent development of *Image/woman/text* and Mary Kelly's curated exhibition *Beyond the Purloined Image*, it is clear that this was a moment of intensity for a feminist practice exploring the relationship of the image to the highly complex conditions of women's subordination. How, specifically, was Yve Lomax investigating this relationship in her own work?

Yve Lomax began her artistic practice in painting, but came to photography through the theories made available to her within the Complementary Studies department at St Martin's School of Art (now Central Saint Martins).<sup>285</sup> Associated with this course was the informally named 'Saint Martins' Group', a loose collective of staff and students who were concerned with the relationship between ideology and the systems of visual representation.<sup>286</sup> It is interesting to note that while Lomax's feminist consciousness came partially through the informal groupings that she encountered *within*, if at the edge of, the art school, it was precisely *outside* of the art school that Yates found her own way to feminism, noting the space of art education as the space in which she experienced alienation and persecution.<sup>287</sup> Lomax's experience of Saint Martin's finds its parallel at Leeds, where The Pavilion founders encountered Griselda Pollock's radical feminist intervention in the visual arts, as well as John Tagg's work on the critical analysis of photography. Indeed, before he came to Leeds, Tagg was part of the 'Saint Martins' Group' and was also on the editorial board for the influential journal *Screen Education*, providing a bridge between the students at Leeds who went on to start The Pavilion, and the theoretical developments on the image, power and representation.

In 1979, following her completion of an MA in Environmental Media, Lomax's MA project *Recto/Verso* was selected by Angela Kelly to be part of the 'Feminism and Photography' strand of the exhibition *Three Perspectives on Photography* at The Hayward Gallery in London,

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<sup>284</sup> Yve Lomax, 'Montage', *Camerawork*, 24 (1982), 8–9 (p. 9).

<sup>285</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 213.

<sup>286</sup> John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), p. 163.

<sup>287</sup> Yates, unpublished interview with the author, 12 May 2016.

which was co-curated by Kelly, John Tagg and photographer and lecturer Paul Hill. In the catalogue essay to the exhibition, Angela Kelly opens with the oft-quoted statement by Simone de Beauvoir, ‘representation of the world like the world itself is the work of men, they describe it from their point of view which they confuse with absolute truth’.<sup>288</sup> In this essay, Kelly goes on to argue that photography was used by the women’s movement in order to make visible a new kind of truth: those details which are normally excluded about women’s lives, for example, issues of education, work, healthcare and childcare. She writes that this work aimed ‘to articulate women’s personal experiences thus revealing the political relevance of this’.<sup>289</sup> The notion ‘the personal is political’, as invoked by Kelly, deserves some further attention, given its ubiquity as a feminist slogan since it was first introduced as part of the polemic of the women’s movement in the early 1970s. In a text titled ‘Self-Image: Personal is Political’, published in *Camerawork* a few months prior to the opening of *Three Perspectives*, Kelly argues that there is a need to question the standard of the photographic self-portrait. She writes:

The position of the ‘self-expressive individual artist’ is an ironic one. The illusion is that the artist is expressing her/himself. The reality is that any attempt at critically examining a concept of self in a wider social context is treated as taboo, as self-indulgence. We may look into the mirror only to check our appearance, not to see through it.<sup>290</sup>

On the one hand, therefore, this statement critiques the idea that the artwork creatively communicates the subjective insight of the artist. At the same time, Kelly also addresses the feminist struggle to produce self-determined images that counter the distorting images of femininity within the mass media. In her chapter for Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley’s 1986 book *What is Feminism?* Rosalind Delmar addresses the issue of self-determination, writing that, ‘feminists play and have played with a range of choices in the process of self-presentation, registering a relation both to the body and to the social meaning of womanhood’.<sup>291</sup> Charting the history of the struggle of women, unified in their confinement to the private, domestic space and

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<sup>288</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 161.

<sup>289</sup> Angela Kelly, ‘Feminism and Photography’, in *Three Perspectives on Photography*, ed. by Arts Council of Great Britain (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979) pp. 42–43 (p. 42).

<sup>290</sup> Angela Kelly, ‘Self-Image: Personal is Political’, in *The Photography Reader*, ed. by Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 410–416 (p. 411). (first publ. in *Camerawork*, 12, (1979))

<sup>291</sup> Delmar, p. 8.



in their demand to participate in public political life, Delmar writes, 'it has been part of the project of feminism in general to transform women from an object of knowledge into a subject capable of appropriating knowledge, to effect a passage from the state of subjection to subjecthood'.<sup>292</sup> Thus, for Delmar, 'the personal as political' addresses the shared experiences of women but it also raises the fundamental questions of the women's movement which have to do with, at one and the same time: the question of woman as a *social group*; the question of the female body as it can be known outside of the bounds of reproduction; woman unified as a sexed subject; and woman as a fragmented and unknowable subject.<sup>293</sup>

In her catalogue essay for *Three Perspectives on Photography*, Angela Kelly goes on to explain that the content of the image is not the only aspect of photography that has been informed by feminism. She states that she is interested in 'the important problem of how issues are presented through the use of photography'.<sup>294</sup> Kelly argues that the work selected for the exhibition raises various issues both *through* and *about* photography. In the final section of her essay, Kelly sets out the two positions that she sought to make visible within her curated section of the exhibition: documentary and analytical approaches to photography. Within the exhibition, the documentary approach was exemplified through the serial photographic documentations of Christine Leah Hobbeheydar. Her *A Refuge for battered and emotionally tormented women and children* (1978), is, according to Kelly, an example of a work through which the photographer takes a definite position in relation to their chosen subject. This is contrasted with the analytical approach described by Kelly through which, 'photographic images are presented as constructs and the viewer is forced to read the system of signs and to become aware of being actively involved in the process of the creation of meaning'.<sup>295</sup>

In her entry for the exhibition catalogue, Yve Lomax expands upon this analytical approach. She interrogates the hierarchy of representations in which, she argues, 'the woman becomes the opposite of (his) power defining him as the-one-who-is-supposed-to-know'.<sup>296</sup> As

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<sup>292</sup> Delmar, p. 25.

<sup>293</sup> Delmar, pp. 26–28.

<sup>294</sup> Angela Kelly, 'Feminism and Photography', p. 42.

<sup>295</sup> Angela Kelly, 'Feminism and Photography', p. 43.

<sup>296</sup> Yve Lomax, 'Some Stories which I have heard: some questions which I have asked', in *Three Perspectives on Photography*, pp. 52–55 (p. 53).

such, Lomax argues that it is not enough to reverse the dominant term within the relationship between signifier and signified. Rather, the aim should be to overthrow the ‘violent hierarchy’ of ‘the terms of binary oppositions’.<sup>297</sup> Lomax ends her text in the exhibition catalogue stating that, ‘in short I will say that what is at stake, is the fixing of an “image”, and the status of the truth of such an image’.<sup>298</sup> Thus, what was visible within Kelly’s section of *Three Perspectives* was a spectrum of practices in which, on the one hand, the economic, social and political forms of oppression were being challenged through documentary photography, and on the other a type of practice in which the artist was unsettling the idea of a secure truth within the image.

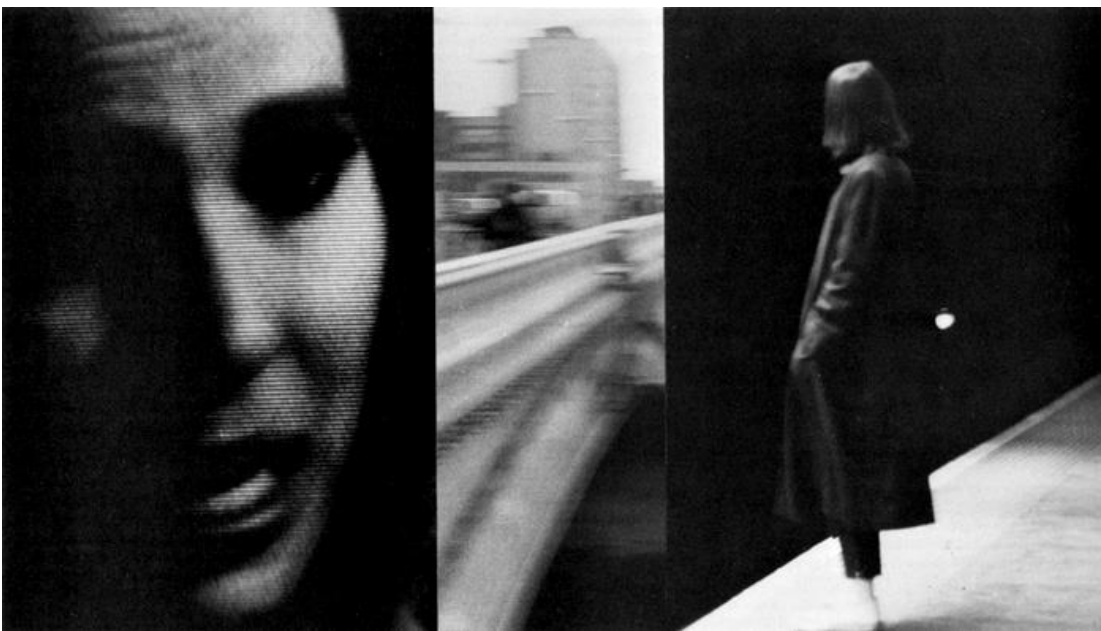


Figure 3.12, Yve Lomax, *Open Rings and Partial Lines* (detail), 1984-85, 15 black & white/color photographs. Courtesy of The Renaissance Society.

The work Yve Lomax included within both *Beyond the Purloined Image* and subsequently *The Image in Trouble* is titled *Open Rings and Partial Lines* (Figure 3.12), which continues her work to unsettle the photographic image.<sup>299</sup> Within her series of photo-montages, Lomax borrows from the aesthetics of popular film and television to both allude to and disrupt what Laura Mulvey terms the ‘normal pleasurable expectations’, in which the image of woman comes to symbolize the threat of castration outlined in Freud’s conception of the Oedipal

<sup>297</sup> Lomax, ‘Some Stories which I have heard’, p. 53.

<sup>298</sup> Lomax, ‘Some Stories which I have heard’, p. 54.

<sup>299</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 112.

Complex.<sup>300</sup> The photographic montage (Figure 3.12) is part of this series. It is a juxtaposition of three images. The left-hand image depicts the close up of a woman's face, the eyes, cheek, nose and mouth partially obscured by shadow, the mouth open passively, in the manner of a ventriloquist's dummy. Referencing the facial close-ups typified by Greta Garbo in Hollywood melodrama—to which Lomax's work alludes—Mulvey argues that one mode of eroticism within cinema deploys the fragmented body in order to destroy the illusion of depth demanded by narrative, giving 'the quality of the cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen', thereby allowing the leading man to carry the story, driven by his desire for the passive woman, who stands as image for the man's gaze.<sup>301</sup>

The right-hand image in the montage can be likened to a film still from film noir. Unlike the full-frontal close-up of the left-hand image, this image depicts the whole figure of a woman, dressed in an overcoat, standing at a train station looking away from the camera. With the headlight of a train visible against the blackness of the void beside the platform, the image connotes the stereotypical *femme fatale*, who is positioned in mainstream film as a seducer of men into dangerous situations, signifying the threat represented by castration. Despite this signification of danger, marked by her break away from the conventional family structure, the *femme fatale* is still the subject of male desire. Mulvey argues that within narrative cinema, devices are used to ensure that the woman is subject to the 'controlling and curious gaze' playing to the 'voyeuristic phantasy' of the cinema audience.<sup>302</sup> With her head turned away from the camera, the woman in Lomax's image signifies the woman as object of scopophilia, the sexual drive in which the act of 'looking at' becomes a source of pleasure.<sup>303</sup>

Where the left and right-hand images in Lomax's montage conform to dominant cinematic tropes, the third, middle image is a narrow, blurry black and white image of a figure and a bridge and it is the presence of this third image within Lomax's series of montages that is key to the work. This middle image is much more ambiguous in its visual codes, breaking the assumed narrative and functioning to destabilize the work of the other two more recognizable

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<sup>300</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6–18 (p. 8).

<sup>301</sup> Mulvey, p. 12.

<sup>302</sup> Mulvey, p. 8.

<sup>303</sup> Mulvey, p. 8.

representations. Writing about Lomax's work in an extended version of the catalogue introduction for *Beyond the Purloined Image*, Mary Kelly describes this image as working to push a 'third term' on to the stage in the guise of 'lack', that is, a space between the two images which queries the photograph's assumed finitude, rather than questioning the subject's identity.<sup>304</sup> In so doing Lomax goes *beyond* re-appropriating images—by refusing the function of the photograph within the 'usual' mode of pleasure, she renders the image 'in trouble'.

### **Susan Trangmar**

The exhibition title *The Image in Trouble*, is further elucidated by *Tattoo* (1982), the photographic work exhibited at The Pavilion by Susan Trangmar. *Tattoo* (Figure 3.13) comprises a series of fifteen black and white photographs that depicts the face of an unknown woman (modeled by Yve Lomax). Each image of the face is inscribed with montaged text, displacing the logic of the portrait photograph that confirms, rather than obscures, the identity of the sitter. In his now widely-read essay, 'Photography and Aesthetics', published within *Screen* in 1978, film theorist and filmmaker Peter Wollen argues that, 're-inscription, discontinuity and heterogeneity, caught though they may be in the imaginary, make possible by displacement, unsuspected changes in the symbolic'.<sup>305</sup> He argues, however, that the shift in photographic practice away from its assumed neutrality as mediator of meaning entails a process of 'reproduction', which involves more than a process of deconstruction but rather a disorientation and reorientation of the spectator in which new signifieds are superimposed disturbingly on the memories/anticipations of old presuppositions.<sup>306</sup> By attending to caption, point-of-view, frame, narrative sequence, as well as ideas of photography as being either 'fact' or 'vision', Wollen argues that a new kind of knowledge is possible.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 112.

<sup>305</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Photography and Aesthetics', *Screen*, 19 (4), 1978, 9–28 (p. 28).

<sup>306</sup> Wollen, 'Photography and Aesthetics', p. 28

<sup>307</sup> Wollen, 'Photography and Aesthetics', p. 28



Figure 3.13, Susan Trangmar, *Tattoo*, 1982. © Susan Trangmar.

Trangmar uses sporadic slogans, recycled from the media, in a process that Kelly describes as a ‘poetic recycling of the visual debris that exudes from a technologically engorged social body’.<sup>308</sup> She deploys phrases such as, ‘how much do you want to see?’ that address the viewer in their search and desire to find meaning in the image. Underneath the faces, in place of a caption, are sequences of short phrases that relate the word ‘tattoo’ to the notion of the feminine subject, for example, ‘she is a battle cry’ ... ‘she is a decoration’ ... ‘she is a mark of identification’. Through her use of tattoo as metaphor, Trangmar, like Yates, calls into question the mirror-like transparency of both the photographic image and of the feminine. Within her artist statement written for the exhibition *Beyond the Purloined Image*, Trangmar writes:

Everywhere we seek the image’s reality; we turn the camera movement into a prayer and seek the passion between black and white. If we take technology as an extended or detachable part of a human whole, if we take the lines of communication and knowledge as instruments or media along which the human whole may be projected or represented, then will we not always be returned to lack?<sup>309</sup>

<sup>308</sup> Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 112.

<sup>309</sup> Susan Trangmar, artist statement for *Beyond the Purloined Image*, quoted in Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, p. 112.

*Papers on Patriarchy* presents another essay that adds further to my understanding of the system of language, subjectivity and the photographic image that is brought together in Trangmar's work. In her paper, 'Language and Gender', Cora Kaplan argues that it is through language that we become both human and social beings. In a close reading of the theorization of Lacan's use of language, she analyzes how the segregation, separation and restriction of women's speech takes place.<sup>310</sup> Kaplan looks at poetry, rather than visual art, in order to examine the women's right to speak and write. She argues that, 'to be a woman and a poet presents many women poets with such a profound split between their social, sexual identity (their 'human' identity) and their artistic practice that the split becomes the inconsistent subject, sometimes overt, often hidden or displaced, of much women's poetry'.<sup>311</sup> Drawing on Lacan, Kaplan explains that the mastery of language gives the child 'the necessary abstractions' to articulate their relationship to the world (notably through pronouns: 'I', 'you', 'it', 'he', 'she', 'they'). This enables the child to articulate their experiences for others and thus to participate within social relations. What then does this have to do with sexual difference? Kaplan argues that, while both men and women obtain language, the fact that women accept the missing phallus as a permanent loss in themselves, determines their restriction to certain kinds of speech. The female entry into the Symbolic is one of lack: women form their identifications on the basis of their difference from men, the possessors of the Symbolic function.<sup>312</sup> Where the sexual division of labor is reproduced in men through their control of public speech, which is linked to power, Kaplan (while anxious not to state an essentialist position) argues that the speech of women, even in the twentieth century, is still characterized by its private nature.<sup>313</sup> She observes that, 'this prejudice seems persistent and irrational, unless we acknowledge that the control of high language is a crucial part of dominant groups, and understand that the refusal of access to public language is one of the major forms of the oppression of women within a social class as well as in trans-class situations'.<sup>314</sup> In 'Language and Gender', Kaplan focuses on poetry, as being a privileged 'metalanguage' within patriarchal culture and notes, as

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<sup>310</sup> Cora Kaplan, 'Language and Gender', in *Papers on Patriarchy*, pp. 21–37 (p. 22).

<sup>311</sup> Kaplan, p. 22.

<sup>312</sup> Coward et al., p. 15.

<sup>313</sup> Kaplan, p. 26.

<sup>314</sup> Kaplan, p. 21.

characteristics of this culture, its claims to universalism and the position of poet as ‘transcendent speaker’.<sup>315</sup> It is not to say that women do not write poems but that the Symbolic language used in poetry has a politics, as do all forms of culture.

As discussed earlier, it is through culture that sexual difference is produced, hence the taboo against women’s speech, which has, Kaplan points out, often been the subject of women’s poetry itself. As Kaplan argues, ‘the very condition of [women’s] accession to their own subjectivity [...] is their unwitting acceptance of the law which limits their speech’.<sup>316</sup> The linguistic tropes deployed in poetry, notably those of metaphor and metonymy are, Kaplan observes, the modes through which sexual difference is produced. She argues, ‘how men and women come to speak at all, how they see each other through it, the social taboos on speech for children and women, all these relations bear upon the way in which individual poets are seen to “create” new symbolic identifications and relations’.<sup>317</sup> Kaplan’s argument can be applied to the question of the photographic image, revealing that language, as with the image, ‘cannot be conquered or taken over simply by itself’.<sup>318</sup> By understanding the way in which language and representation function to produce sexual difference, interventions become possible.

### **A Space of Revolt: *The Only Woman***

Through a close reading of artwork by three artists presented at The Pavilion under the title *The Image in Trouble*, I have mapped the feminist recognition that in order to challenge the patriarchal order—in which identifications are formed on the basis of lack—representations need to be analyzed in order to be transformed. In her description of Marie Yates’ *The Missing Woman*, Lisa Tickner argues that the images and texts within Yates’ work would be ordinarily designated as documentary but ‘which we might well subsume under Stephen Heath’s “mass production of fictions”’ in teasing the viewer with the promise of narrative resolution of ‘the

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<sup>315</sup> Kaplan, p. 21.

<sup>316</sup> Kaplan, p. 29.

<sup>317</sup> Kaplan, p. 24.

<sup>318</sup> Kaplan, p. 36.

missing woman' that is finally refused.<sup>319</sup> Likewise, Yve Lomax deploys recognizable forms of representation that are then disrupted by inserting a gap, a 'third term' between her narrative images. Lisa Tickner argues that Lomax foregrounds the surface, breaking the hold of narrative and illusion and unsettling the normal procedure of identification, in which femininity is equated to lack and in which women are not only represented for the pleasure of men but also find narcissistic pleasure within those same images that are addressed to men—'with finding our own satisfaction in the spotlight of that controlling gaze'.<sup>320</sup> It is in the gap between her assemblages of images in which Lomax argues that heterogeneity can be made manifest and negotiated, arguing, 'montage is ... the way in which we take up practices (literature, science ... sex) as assemblages, indeed as montages, and not as monolithic wholes'.<sup>321</sup>

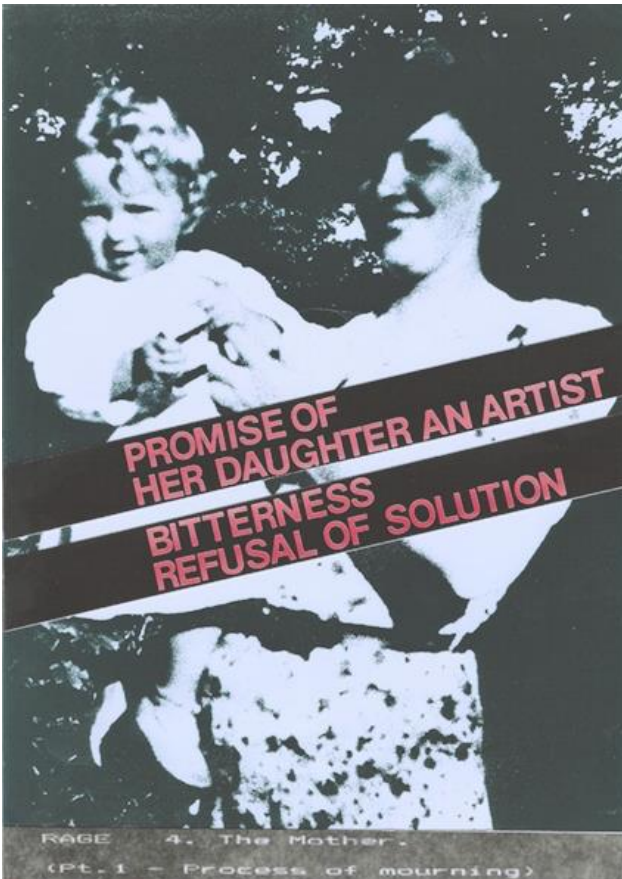


Figure 3.14, Marie Yates, *The Only Woman* (*Rage—section 2*) Four sections of framed color prints, 30" x 20". Courtesy of Marie Yates.

<sup>319</sup> Lisa Tickner, 'Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists', in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, ed. by The New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985), pp. 19–30 (p. 27).

<sup>320</sup> Tickner, p. 29.

<sup>321</sup> Lomax, 'Montage', p. 9.



Tickner likens the ‘unfixing’ of femininity to the ‘woman as not yet’ positioned by Luce Irigaray as ‘the concern with sexuality in process’.<sup>322</sup> In her book *Vision and Difference*, Griselda Pollock addresses another work by Marie Yates: *The Only Woman* (Figure 3.14). While not presented as part of *The Image in Trouble*, this work shows the way in which Yates went on to build on her ‘unfixing work’ by representing, Pollock argues, ‘a new daring, to re-engage with figuring woman’.<sup>323</sup> While this work draws on similar scripto-visual strategies to *Image/woman/text* and *The Missing Woman*, *The Only Woman* has a more legible narrative—that of a daughter mourning her mother, which can be read as a counterpart to the scenario of maternal loss addressed in Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*. Following the pattern of mourning outlined in Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia 1917’, *The Only Woman* is structured across three sections, titled ‘Rage’, ‘Pain’ and ‘Gaze’. It deploys images selected from the artist’s family album, juxtaposed with extracts of text that relate to events in the artist’s personal family history. Yates describes these images as presenting, in a valorized form, the scenarios of loss and desire.<sup>324</sup> In her close reading of the work, Pollock identifies the way in which Yates draws on the events in her own family life to refer to the shared psychic processes of the family and sexual and social positioning.<sup>325</sup> Thus, the mother and the daughter within the work are not simply indicative of Yates’s own personal experience but rather they become positions with whom the viewer can identify, and through which the viewer can bring their individual yet shared experiences of motherhood and daughterhood to bear on the enigmatic story. According to Pollock, ‘the occasion of mourning becomes a space through which the relations within which we are captured and formed become speakable’.<sup>326</sup> The work is a feminist intervention because it does not retreat back to the space of artist as giver of meaning, nor does it position the spectator as voyeur, but instead the artist draws on her own experience to produce anchors that enable the activation of the spectator to become part of the social process of meaning production.

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<sup>322</sup> Tickner, p. 29.

<sup>323</sup> Pollock, ‘Screening the seventies’, p. 181.

<sup>324</sup> Yates, ‘Works 1962-2015’.

<sup>325</sup> Pollock, ‘Screening the seventies’, p. 182.

<sup>326</sup> Pollock, ‘Screening the seventies’, p. 187.

## Conclusion

Through an analysis of the complex theoretical-artistic strategies deployed in three artists' works, it has become clear why *The Image in Trouble* was particularly troubling to The Pavilion's funders. Indeed, in September 1984, following the close of *The Image in Trouble*—and due to the YAA's funding cuts—The Pavilion was forced to temporarily suspend its exhibitions program.<sup>327</sup> The lack of funding for this specific exhibition also meant that the public impact of *The Image in Trouble*—through the artist talk that never was—was limited. While one impact of this exhibition, therefore, was the hostility of the funders, it is also important to acknowledge more optimistically, that work by Lomax, Trangmar and Yates has since been acquired by the Arts Council Collection.<sup>328</sup>

I have sought, in this chapter, to counter the tendency of institutionalization and academization that has obscured the intense political urgency of feminist theoretical work—to borrow Peter Wollen's term—'as/in/against art'.<sup>329</sup> The feminist attention to language and representation as being productive of sexed subjectivity transformed the categories of both art and photography, shifting art further away from the modernist concerns of names, themes and medium, towards inquiry and critique, adding *conceptual* photography to the broader category of conceptual art. Indeed, in an analysis of the feminist exhibition *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, Griselda Pollock references a review of the exhibition written by Roberta Smith in the *Voice* in which she argues that, 'the show's single most important message is that in feminism, conceptualism may have found its greatest and most urgent subject'.<sup>330</sup>

In 'Photographic Practice and Art Theory', Victor Burgin argues that the distinction between the categories of art and photography is irrelevant. It is not the case that one is a means of mechanical reproduction and the other an autonomous art object, but neither is it the case that either the artist or photographer can reveal unique essences in things or objects that are otherwise concealed from the viewer. Burgin writes that 'it is not a matter of "genius" on the

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<sup>327</sup> The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, unpublished minutes of The Pavilion Annual General Meeting 1985, FAN/PAV.

Changes in YAA officers the following year, along with funding opportunities linked to *The Glory of the Garden* report meant that, in 1985, The Pavilion was able to leverage new sources of ACGB funding.

<sup>328</sup> Pollock, 'Feminism and Modernism', p. 100.

<sup>329</sup> Wollen, 'Photography and Aesthetics', p. 27.

<sup>330</sup> Roberta Smith, *Voice*, 22 January 1985.

one hand and the “lucky snapping” of a “moment of truth” on the other’.<sup>331</sup> Rather he argues that, ‘to appreciate such operations we must first lose any illusion about the neutrality of objects before the camera’.<sup>332</sup> The work of Lomax, Trangmar and Yates challenged the foundational assumptions and categories of art and artist. The concurrent interrogation of the neutrality of photography and of the feminine subject was driven by the urgent demands of the women’s movement to understand the conditions of women’s subordination, both in its social processes and institutional and discursive structures.<sup>333</sup> It was thus through the work of small clusters of artists and intellectuals that the fallacy of the photograph as window-on-to-the world became part of a feminist politics. Furthermore, in seeking to demonstrate the *politics* of representation—that which the photograph works to conceal—new forms of photographs were found.

The political imperative of the women’s movement demanded that art maintained its connection with the external world. As Marie Yates argues in an essay written in reflection on *The Field Works*—her early minimalist photographic reveries on journeys to remote sites, on which the recent exhibition at Richard Saltoun focused—‘in the writings that I made in situ, the “I” was often present, but this presence was written out in those later revisions to remove too much of that which was personal—the subject’.<sup>334</sup> She explains that this was because she was interested in questioning the hierarchical relationship between subject and object. She goes on to say, however, acknowledging her later focus on the very question of the feminine subject that, ‘the image or presence of a woman in those photographic records would have changed the whole event—the image would have transformed the event or non-event into a problem’.<sup>335</sup> It is important to go back to one of my observations earlier in the chapter, which is that the insertion of ‘woman’ into the title of the Roland Barthes publication to produce Yate’s title *Image/woman/text* shows the way in which feminist practice indicated the possibility of exceeding the constraining system.

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<sup>331</sup> Victor Burgin, ‘Photographic Practice and Art Theory’, in *Thinking Photography*, pp. 39–83 (p. 41).

<sup>332</sup> Victor Burgin, ‘Photographic Practice and Art Theory’, p. 41.

<sup>333</sup> Griselda Pollock, ‘What’s the Difference? Feminism, Representation and Sexuality’, *Aspects*, 32, (1988), 2–5.

<sup>334</sup> Yates, ‘Works 1962–2015’.

<sup>335</sup> Yates, ‘Works 1962–2015’.

In this chapter I have undertaken an archaeological exercise as a means of deciphering the field within which The Pavilion exhibition *The Image in Trouble* took place. By entering into the complexity of the field, and specifically the dual theories of ideology and subjectivity which came together through an investigation into the image, it is now much easier to see why the major public funders did not register The Pavilion as producing the work required of an arts institution. As I have sought to show, the relationship of representation to the oppression of women could not have been understood without the intense focus of this community of artists whose investigations were made possible by the resources of Marxism, film theory and psychoanalysis. By playing with the fixities and codes of representation, artists used photography in order to produce work in which the usual identifications were no longer possible. In undertaking this work, I have thus arrived at a set of practices brought together at The Pavilion that challenged the categories of the image, and of the field of art history and theory and, in doing so, produced work that has had a major aesthetic and political effect. Having tracked a configuration of ideas and practices that circulate around the notion of ‘the politics of representation’, I will now proceed to examine a different aspect of ‘Feminising Photography’ through attention to the work of Jo Spence.

## CHAPTER 4—CAPITALISM’S BODIES IN THE WORK OF JO SPENCE

Usually the woman’s ‘symbolic lack’ (of the phallus) and her exclusion from the patriarchal order have been stressed; but I would like to ask if the concept of ‘woman as sign’ can also illuminate her place in the ‘symbolic order’ of capitalism? In other words I want to broaden the question of decoding images of woman to take into account not just the symbolic sexual lack, but also the exploitation of women’s labor power under capitalism.<sup>336</sup>

***Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism***

Having explored the way in which three artists were ‘Feminising Photography’ by ‘troubling’ the codes and signs of the photographic image in relation to the question of sexual difference, I now want to look at another artist whose work can be read in relation to a different dimension of ‘Feminising Photography’, which concerned the inflection of class with gender and gender with class. My focus in this chapter is on the work of English artist Jo Spence (1934–1992).

From 1983–1985, The Pavilion presented four exhibitions of work by Jo Spence. In June 1983 (precise dates unknown) she exhibited as part of The Hackney Flashers collective in a show titled *Who’s holding the Baby?* This was followed, from 5–29 October 1983 by an exhibition of Spence’s photomontage series, *Beyond the Family Album*. From 7–31 March 1984, the group touring show *Family, Phantasy, Photography* was exhibited, the result of Spence’s collaboration with *The Polysnappers* collective. Finally, from 4–28 September 1985, The Pavilion hosted *The Picture of Health?*, a collaboration between Spence and five other practitioners.<sup>337</sup> While Jo Spence was the most frequently exhibited artist at The Pavilion she was also in attendance at meetings of The Pavilion’s advisory board prior to its opening in 1983. Thus she was a contributing factor in constituting The Pavilion’s founding vision. In the minutes of an advisory board meeting from 1981 Spence is noted as being in attendance. In the records of this meeting it is noted that, ‘the use of the word “art” was discussed, and the

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<sup>336</sup> Spence, ‘What did you do in the War, Mummy?’, *Photography/Politics*, 1 (1979), 30–37 (p. 30).

<sup>337</sup> This show included a talk by Roberta McGrath in place of Jo Spence who at the time of the exhibition was seriously ill with breast cancer (the subject of the work). McGrath was an MA student on the Social History of Art at Leeds from 1982–83 and worked on photography in relation to medical images and issues of health and the body. Her presence at The Pavilion is another marker of the productive relationship between the Department of Fine Art, The Pavilion and feminist work on the image.

problems and limitations of that term were stressed'.<sup>338</sup> This links specifically to Jo Spence who was ambivalent about the category of 'art', refusing to use the title 'artist' unless it was tactically useful to her.<sup>339</sup>

In the last chapter, I showed that to present Marie Yates as an artist within the commercial contemporary art context did not make legible the political-aesthetic intervention produced in the correlation between artistic practices and the emergence of a feminist theory of sexual difference and the image that formed the project at The Pavilion. Jo Spence's own photographic intervention—as it sought to intervene in the traditional spaces of art, while also reaching out to those who do not normally see themselves represented within visual culture—adds to the understanding of the cultural politics of 'Feministing Photography'.

I shall preface the subsequent analysis of Jo Spence's work at The Pavilion in the 1980s with a reading of the inclusion of her work at a recent exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofía, in 2015. Unlike the case study in the previous chapter, this exhibition was not simply significant for inserting Spence into a history of photography through exhibition in a mainstream institution of contemporary art. The focus of the show at the Reina Sofía was specifically to emphasize the political orientation of Spence's work, by positioning her in relation to a history of the worker photography movement. Nonetheless, while this exhibition was important for revealing one aspect of Spence's formation as a photographic practitioner engaged with questions of class and representation, it could not, as a result of its framing address the specifically feminist dimension of Spence's photographic project. Thus an analysis of her work within the frame of The Pavilion's aims contributes an expanded knowledge of what constituted 'Feministing Photography' in the work of Jo Spence.

The exhibition to which I am referring was titled *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary And the Critique of Modernism* and was curated by Jorge Ribalta at the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid where it was shown from 11 February–13 July 2015. *Not Yet: On the*

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<sup>338</sup> The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, unpublished minutes of the advisory board, 1981, FAN/PAV. In relation to Spence's presence on The Pavilion advisory committee, it is significant that on 5 February 1980 Spence gave a visiting lecture at the University of Leeds as part of Griselda Pollock's lecture course 'Theories and Institutions'. This course was taken by The Pavilion's founders—see Griselda Pollock, unpublished syllabus for 'Theories and Institutions', lecture course, 1980. Personal collection of Griselda Pollock.

<sup>339</sup> Jo Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, (London: Camden Press, 1986), p. 209.

*Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* developed Ribalta's interest in the worker photography movement by charting a self-conscious reclamation, during the 1970s, of this earlier documentary impulse.<sup>340</sup> Specifically, Ribalta states that the exhibition, 'opens with the memory of the experience of the proletarian documentary that reappeared with the second wave of worker photography in West Germany beginning in 1973'.<sup>341</sup> Through the exhibition, Ribalta charted the way in which this reappearance was an artistic response to political crises, which related to what he terms a kind of pact between labor forces and capital, leading to the emergence of the welfare state, as well as to the financial crisis of 1972–73 which marked the beginning of the neoliberal era.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> The exhibition was the counterpart to a show curated by Ribalta, itself titled *A Hard, Merciless Light: The Worker Photography Movement, 1926-39*. Presented at the Museo Reina Sofía, from 6 April– 22 August 2011, this earlier exhibition explored the way in which photography was deployed by multiple worker movements across the globe in the interwar period.

<sup>341</sup> Jorge Ribalta, 'Foreword', in *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism*, pp. 6–11 (p. 7).

<sup>342</sup> Ribalta, 'Foreword', p. 7.

*Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* was so named in reference to two essays each written by an artist who was using and thinking about photography and the politics of representation in the 1970s/80s. 'Not Yet' derives from an essay by Martha Rosler, first published in 1981, titled 'In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)' in which Rosler argues that, between a liberal documentary that inspires pity for the oppressed, and a documentary of the 'present', there is 'not yet' a real documentary, (p. 195). The second part of the title, *On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* references 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)' by Allan Sekula. It was first published in 1978 in *The Massachusetts Review*, and in 1979 in the British publication *Photography/Politics*, co-edited by Jo Spence. The essay explores Sekula's proposition for a new kind of social critical documentary photography that deals with what he terms 'the social ordering of people's lives', (p. 172). Sekula exposes the co-option of documentary photography by institutions of the state and of corporate capitalism (that of the courtroom and the media, for example). He also addresses the dangers of equating the photograph with what he calls 'essential realism', which is synonymous with the notion of an evidential power—see Allan Sekula, 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)', in *Photography/Politics*, 1 (1979), 171–185 (p. 172).

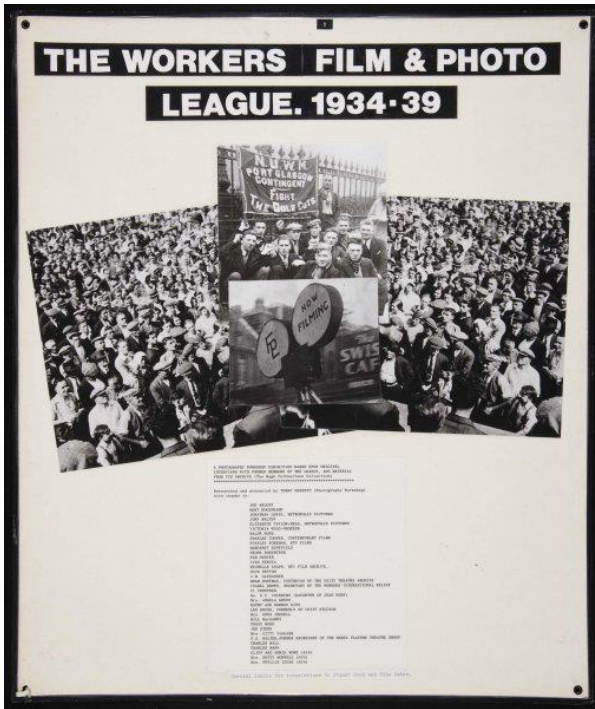


Figure 4.1, Jo Spence & Terry Dennett (Photography Workshop), *The Workers Film & Photo League*, 1974 (circa), Museo Reina Sofia.

*Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* included work by two British collectives to which Spence belonged during the 1970s: the Photography Workshop and The Hackney Flashers. Each of these collectives used photography for educational purposes as well as to agitate for social change. Spence and her long-term collaborator Terry Dennett founded the Photography Workshop in 1974, initially to produce community photography projects for children. Subsequently the Photography Workshop began running the Half-Moon Photography Gallery in London through which it produced touring exhibitions of photography for political and educational purposes. Ribalta presented one of these projects within his exhibition. Titled *The Workers Film and Photo League* (1974), the project consists of twenty-eight photomontage panels made from the Photography Workshop's research into the British Workers Film and Photo League, 1934–1939 (Figure 4.1). The panels feature photographs by, and interviews with, former members of the league. The British Workers Film and Photo League sought to give a true picture of the industrial conditions of working life by putting the means of production (here, the camera apparatus) into the hands of



the workers themselves.<sup>343</sup> Through their work, made in or around 1974, Spence and Dennett thus sought to trace the latent potential of the league's early worker photography as the starting point for an investigation into the politicization of photography in their own moment.

More explicitly feminist in tone, Ribalta also selected one of two projects made by Spence as part of The Hackney Flashers collective. Titled *Who's Holding the Baby?*, this 1978 work addresses the urgent need for childcare by impoverished mothers in the Hackney area of East London. I will discuss this project further in due course as I discuss the exhibitions that were shown at The Pavilion. It is important, however, to register that by contextualizing the work within the theme of social movements (and the worker photography movement in particular), a feminist interpretation of *Who's Holding the Baby?* was inhibited. Both *Who's Holding the Baby?* and *The Workers Film and Photo League* paved the way for the interests that Spence took up later in her practice. Notably, through these early works, Spence began to question the straightforward relationship between documentary and 'the real'. The work by The Hackney Flashers also shows how Spence began to engage with the question of reproductive labor as a challenge to the historical representations of the Left that had positioned industrial production as *the* site of politics. Nonetheless, both of these bodies of work were distinct from the work Spence produced through the rest of her life, and which saw her turn the camera away from representations of other people towards self-representations, in order to explore photography's relationship to the structural gender formations within a classed society. I am interested in the way in which this later focus on her own body, its subordination and resistance to both capitalism and the camera, makes visible a way of understanding the human condition under capitalism that is distinct from the contributions of the worker photographer made visible within Ribalta's exhibition.

In this chapter I shall show the way in which—through a distinct creative process—Jo Spence sought to come to terms with her position as a working-class woman making photography. In her work Spence became interested in the contradiction of the photographic

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<sup>343</sup> John Roberts locates the British manifestation of the league as a 'missed opportunity', which subsumed a commitment to 'art of the everyday' into positivist, sentimental, melancholic images of class identity—see Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, pp. 69–70.

image in relation to the classed, gendered body ‘as battleground’.<sup>344</sup> Spence’s work shows the way in which class and gender is written onto the body but it also makes visible the way in which the image, as part of ideology, serves to *de-class* women. Furthermore, it also addresses the experience of shame, which Spence linked to the dual denial of woman’s class position and her sexuality. Thus, taking the convergence between feminism, capitalism, the body and the photographic image, as that which has ‘not yet’ been fully reappraised in Spence’s practice, I shall take up where *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* exhibition left off by archaeologically investigating the materials and processes through which the work of Spence and her collaborators can be situated. In doing so, I will make visible another dimension of ‘Feministing Photography’, focusing on Spence’s complex analysis and staging of ‘capitalism’s bodies’ in and through the photographic image. In addition, this discussion of Spence’s practice, in the specific context of The Pavilion, offers up a frame through which to understand the way in which both the projects of Jo Spence and of The Pavilion were challenging divisions between art/artist/audience. It also makes clear that The Pavilion embraced the complexity of issues of class and gender as primary areas of feminist investigation and as significant for representational practices.

### **The Laboring Body and The Hackney Flashers**

In 2012, after learning that their project *Who’s Holding the Baby?* had been acquired by the Museo Reina Sofía, members of The Hackney Flashers came together following a thirty-two year interval to produce an official record of their history. According to the website created as a result of this re-grouping, The Hackney Flashers was a collective of nine women: An Dekker,

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<sup>344</sup> Annette Kuhn, ‘Introduction’, *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression*, ed. by Jo Spence (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 19–23 (p. 19).

This research was also informed by a conference that I co-organized at the University of Leeds from 21–23 April 2017, titled *Speak, Body: art, the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of life*. Through this initiative, Rose-Anne Gush, Tom Hastings, Sophie Jones and I came together to explore our shared interests in those artists from Europe and North America who were staging the body in art in order to speak about the ‘crisis of capitalism’ in the 1960s–1980s. This included, for example, Valie Export (b. 1940), Yvonne Rainer (b. 1934) and Martha Rosler (b. 1943), the latter of whom participated as a keynote speaker at the conference. During her lecture, Rosler presented a remarkable slideshow featuring hundreds of advertisements, most from the 1970s, which evidenced the way in which mass media images became a producing force of sexual difference under late capitalism. Understanding the shift in visual language that took place in the ‘long 1970s’ has helped me to understand why the ‘image of woman’ became a dominant concern for those artists who sought to understand the sexual objectification and economic subordination of women in history, and under the particular conditions of ‘advanced capitalism’.

Sally Greenhill, Liz Heron, Gerda Jager, Michael Ann Mullen, Maggie Murray, Christine Roche, Jo Spence and Julia Vellacott. To complicate the matter, Spence states—in a text for the catalogue of *Three Perspectives on Photography*—that the Photography Workshop founded The Hackney Flashers, although The Hackney Flashers website (made long after Spence’s death), notes that ‘Terry Dennett of Photography Workshop did not join but was an observer at some of the meetings’.<sup>345</sup> There is a specific contention around Dennett’s role in the collective because it was he who authorized the acquisition of The Hackney Flashers work by the Museo Reina Sofía. It is not my intention to provide a definitive account of who was where when, but simply to note the fact that The Hackney Flashers was typical of a collective that emerged informally without a specific intention of becoming a fixed, named group. For my purposes—that of locating the frame that can help me to understand the specific issues at stake in the work that formed The Pavilion’s initiating program—I have relied on the testimony of Hackney Flashers members found in a small number of written accounts, both retrospective and those that were published at the time of the group’s activity, including by Spence herself.

The Hackney Flashers was initiated as the result of a meeting to discuss a photographic exhibition of women working in Hackney on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Hackney Trades Council.<sup>346</sup> The exhibition that followed launched on 25 September 1975 at Hackney Town Hall. Titled *Women and Work* it was framed as a counterpart to the exhibition *75 Years of Brotherhood: 1900–1975* (20 September–2 October 1975). Comprising 240 documentary photographs alongside written testimony, the aim of *Women and Work* was to document the largely invisible female labor force in Hackney who were engaged in work across the diverse settings of manufacturing, offices and various professions as well as those women engaged in domestic work within the home. While The Hackney Flashers only showed their subsequent work *Who’s Holding the Baby?* at The Pavilion, it is useful to address *Women and Work* as part of my discussion because it sheds light on a theme that was a focus for The

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<sup>345</sup> The Hackney Flashers, ‘Work of a Women’s Collective’, <<https://hackneyflashers.com/history/>> [accessed 7 October 2016]

<sup>346</sup> Spence and photographer Neil Martinson, the main link to the Hackney Trades Council initiated this meeting – see The Hackney Flashers, ‘Work of a Women’s Collective’.

Pavilion's initial program. Indeed, minutes of one of the early meetings of The Pavilion committee note that:

Our theme for 1983/4 will be 'Women In and Out Of Work'. Work from a variety of photographic traditions which bear on this theme will be shown, and will provide the broad context within which the center can look at conditions in Leeds.<sup>347</sup>

What does the theme of work have to do with feminist struggle?

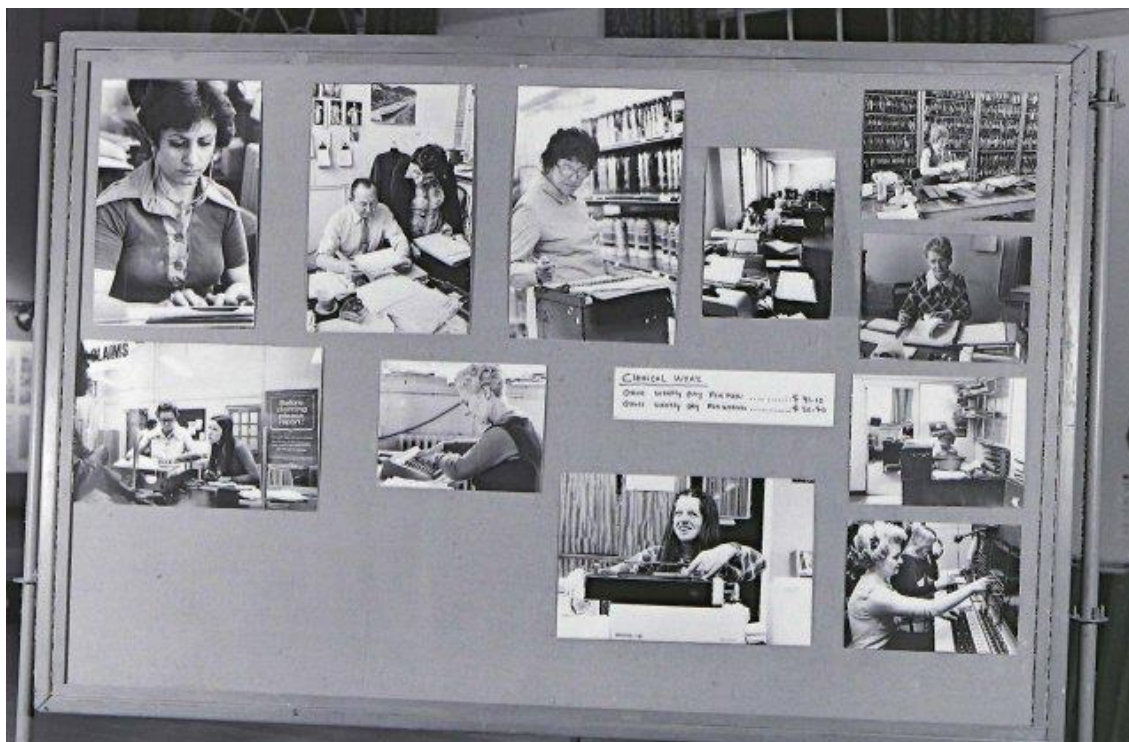


Figure 4.2, Exhibition view, The Hackney Flashers, *Women and Work* at Hackney Town Hall, 1975. © The Hackney Flashers.

According to Liz Heron, the intention of The Hackney Flashers' *Women and Work* was 'to make visible the invisible, thereby validating women's experience and demonstrating their unrecognized contribution to the economy'.<sup>348</sup> *Women and Work* (Figure 4.2), addressed the lived experiences of women that were not normally present within dominant representations, notably those women who were productive wage-laborers within the industrial setting of the factory. While The Hackney Flashers saw photography as a vital means of putting certain invisible women in public view, the collective also came to recognize the limitations of

<sup>347</sup> The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, unpublished minutes of a meeting (dates unknown), FAN/PAV.

<sup>348</sup> Liz Heron, 'Hackney Flashers Collective: Who's still holding the camera?', *Photography/Politics*, 1 (1979), 124–132 (p. 126).

documentary photography in satisfying the aims of their project. They were interested in the way in which images distort reality, by invariably picturing women as wives or mothers, cleaning or caring, rather than engaged in economic activity. They also wanted to convey the way in which reality is rooted in appearances, the fact that images themselves contribute to the construction of femininity and its apparent universalism. Thus, later manifestations of *Women and Work* juxtaposed documentary photographs with text and statistics. For example, a photograph of a woman in a garment factory is presented alongside an advertisement for women's fashion, showing that women are active producers within the capitalist system, but that they are reduced to the position of passive consumers through the process of advertising. Through this, The Hackney Flashers aimed to make visible both the conditions of women in the workplace and also the contradictions between images of women and their reality.

In Chapter One of *Woman's Estate*, first published in 1971, historian Juliet Mitchell argues that the Women's Liberation Movement came about in the late 1960s precisely because of the shift towards a consumer capitalism which saw a significant expansion in the provision of education, as workers shifted further away from the role of primary production to become agents of the market. She points out that as women moved from being the reserve labor force of the Second World War to being able to participate in the advancement of education for all in the 1960s, so they became conscious of the gap between the supposed freedom that capitalism brought about and their own lack of social and economic privilege. As Mitchell states, 'an Appalachian mother of fifteen children experiences her situation as "natural" and hence inescapable: a college-educated girl spending her time studying "home economics" for an academic degree is at least in a position to ask "why?"'<sup>349</sup>

Mitchell goes on to address this contradiction between a new era of opportunity and the means through which women found themselves to be oppressed. In the book's conclusion, she argues that the place of women in relation to production is replete with contradictions, occupying as they do a place within the most economically advanced and backward sectors of

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<sup>349</sup> Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, p. 22. I acknowledge that, in the present-day, this quotation evidences a somewhat stereotypical understanding of women living in rural communities. In quoting Mitchell here I am raising the significance of the advances in access to Higher Education that had been afforded certain women within society that in turn gave rise to the Women's Liberation Movement in the UK and USA.

society.<sup>350</sup> According to Mitchell, women in the era of advanced capitalism became the main agents of consumption. The position of woman as consumer is signified within dominant representations, notably through the language of advertising. As Mitchell argues, ‘appealed to as consumers, women are also the chief agents of that appeal: used aesthetically and sexually they sell themselves to themselves’.<sup>351</sup> The key structure for this positioning is the family, which provides the ‘ethic of consumption’: the need for women to spend money in order to fulfill their duties as wife and mother.<sup>352</sup>

*Women and Work* addresses the fact that in the 1970s, the majority of women who were not relegated from the workforce altogether were engaged in low-paid, unskilled labor. This labor was denied through the seemingly a-social domain of the family but it also reproduced the structure of the family by forcing women to be reliant on the waged labor of their husband or father.<sup>353</sup> Mitchell argues that independent economic interest for women is not possible because, ‘on the one the hand, the economy uses them as cheap labor and, on the other, they have a social, economic and ideological role to play in the family’.<sup>354</sup> A lack of economic independence cuts across class, be it the bourgeois woman who can afford to dedicate her life to the home or the working mother who, in addition to her domestic work, is employed as a low-paid nightcleaner. Spending most of their time in the private space of the home, or in a non-unionized, under-valued, low-paid sector of the economy, women have been excluded from the means to achieve class-consciousness.

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<sup>350</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 173.

<sup>351</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p.42.

<sup>352</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 42.

<sup>353</sup> According to Heidi Hartmann, the relegation of women was, in part, upheld by the introduction of the ‘family wage’, which served both patriarchy and capitalism. Brought into force at the end of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the ‘family wage’ was paid only to workingmen. It was seen as being high enough to maintain the entire family, thus keeping women and children out of the workforce and ensuring that women were free to support the home and to reproduce labor-power in an unpaid capacity. Ostensibly protecting women and children from the exploitation of manual work, the result was to segregate workers on the basis of sex. Hartmann argues that, while a united fight for equal pay would have addressed the problem of cheap competition that underpinned capitalism, the family wage ensured a compliant workforce by producing divisions between the sexes where, as Hartmann puts it, one part (men) were bought off at the expense of another part (women). This did not eliminate low-paid jobs, but ensured that highly-paid jobs were the preserve of men, enforcing the reliance of women on the structure of marriage and thus maintaining the hierarchy of the sexes in the interest of patriarchy—see Heidi Hartmann, ‘The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union’, *Capital and Class*, 3, (1979), 1–33.

<sup>354</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 180.



Figure 4.3, Exhibition view, Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt & Mary Kelly, *Women and Work: a document on the division of labor in industry*, South London Gallery, 1975. Courtesy of Postmaster Gallery.

In her book *Art Labor, Sex Politics*, Siona Wilson stages The Hackney Flashers' *Women and Work* in relation to a project of the same name, made by Margaret Harrison (b. 1940), Kay Fido Hunt (1933–2001) and Mary Kelly (b. 1940). The second *Women and Work* was also shown in London in 1975, although not in a civic building but rather in the South London Gallery (Figure 4.3). The work addressed the Equal Pay Act in relation to its specific implementation at a metal box factory in Bermondsey, South London. The Bermondsey-focused *Women and Work*, which was subtitled *a document on the division of labor in industry*, combined documentary footage of women in factories with other visual material such as employment statistics, punch cards and pay records which offered sociological evidence of the gendered divide between the job status of men and women. The political significance of this was that, in 1975—when *Women and Work* was made—all companies in Britain were required to have made adjustments in line with the 1970s Equal Pay Act. In their research, the artists discovered that the Bermondsey factory—like many others—had got around the requirement to increase women's pay by reclassifying the work of men and women who were doing similar work, naming the labor undertaken by men as skilled or managerial and women's work as low-skilled. This maintained the division of pay in the face of changing legislation. In her analysis of the two *Women and Work* projects, Wilson argues that, 'the recognizable art world

sophistication of Harrison, Hunt, and Kelly's *Women and Work*, with its reliance on a post conceptual aesthetic, is all the more marked in light of the Hackney Flashers' self-conscious crudity'.<sup>355</sup> This distinction undermines the shared aesthetic strategies that were being developed through feminist practices. Instead, these two bodies of work, which share a title, can be read for the feminist questioning of a documentary realism in relation to the question of women's work.

In an interview with Douglas Crimp, in which she recounts the production of *Women and Work*, Mary Kelly recalls that, 'we interviewed the men and they told us everything that happened on the job, but the women wouldn't even talk about what they did at work. They just said, "we went to work, came back," and then they talked about what they did in the home'.<sup>356</sup> This observation describes the investment that the women workers had in the space of the home, which was not a space of leisure (as it was for the male factory workers) but the space in which their reproductive labor was enacted through childcare and domestic work. The encounter with working-class women at the Bermondsey factory added to Kelly's own artistic explorations of the psychic investments of the maternal, which she went on to explore through the lens of her own subjective experience of being a working and sole breadwinning mother, articulated through her scripto-visual work *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79). It also relates to the earlier film *Nightcleaners* (1975), a major work of feminist avant-garde cinema made by The Berwick Street collective of which Kelly was a part. In her reading of *Nightcleaners* as part of her essay 'The Pathos of the Political', Griselda Pollock describes an instance within the film where two women night cleaners describe their poverty because of the family wage and their motivation for taking on night work despite the toll on their health. Pollock addresses the particular pathos of one of the cleaners, Jeanne Mormont who, having described in detail the physical damage the night cleaning and daytime childcare has done to her health and body, is asked why she works such long hours. Her answer is that she trusts no one else with her children. In a footnote to this

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<sup>355</sup> Wilson, p.157.

<sup>356</sup> Douglas Crimp, 'Interview: Douglas Crimp in Conversation with Mary Kelly', in *Mary Kelly*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha, Douglas Crimp and Margaret Iverson (London: Phaidon, 1997), pp. 6-32 (p. 15).



statement, Pollock discusses the way in which this film addresses what she describes as the contradiction between the economies of desire and necessity:

In what is woman's desire invested and how does the social division of labor by gender work upon that desire to appropriate it for capitalist profit? It is here that the resistance of desire also makes itself felt in the fact that its drive will lead to her death, not because she should find no meaning in motherhood, but because of the social conditions in which she must live that motherhood.<sup>357</sup>

Similarly, in a reflection on her practice, Jo Spence articulates her own experience of being the focus of such maternal desire, as the working to finance her daughter's training took its toll on her own mother who went to work in a factory in order to pay for Spence to attend a private secretarial college:

Just as she did not seem to want to hear about my body, now inextricably bound up with my blossoming sexuality, so she stopped telling me about hers, inevitably threatened by her slowly escalating illnesses and depression, the toll of her stressful, double-shift, double-crossed life.<sup>358</sup>

By engaging with the relations between gendered oppression and class exploitation, as they were expressed through the lived experiences of working women in South London, Harrison, Hunt and Kelly, like *The Hackney Flashers*, sought to develop an aesthetic-critical practice that would expose the contradictions and complexity of classed, gendered experience within the industrial workplace.

Within the installation of *Women and Work*, the material relating to the division of labor and pay was assembled alongside portraits of the women as well as the daily schedules of the workers, which made visible a second issue relating to domestic work. The diaries of men and women revealed the different investments of energy and meaning around the domestic sphere. The diaries of the men who worked in the factory revealed that their work was confined to the factory. On the other hand, the portraits and diaries of women registered both the division of labor within the home and the subjectivity of the women workers who invested both physically

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<sup>357</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'The pathos of the political: documentary, subjectivity and a forgotten moment of feminist avant-garde poetics in four films from the 1970s', in *Work and the Image II: Work in Modern Times—Visual Mediations and Social Processes*, ed. by Valerie Mainz and Griselda Pollock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 193–224 (p. 271).

<sup>358</sup> Jo Spence, 'Shame-work: Thoughts on Family Snaps and Fractured Identities', in *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography*, ed. by Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago, 1991), pp. 226–236 (p. 234).

and psychically in the labor of childcare and social reproduction in ways that were not registered by the men working in the factory. Thus, this installation—despite being a critical work of conceptual art—reached out to working women who would not usually visit contemporary art galleries, psychoanalytically interpreting and discovering the complex psychic entanglement of women’s subjectivities in forms of labor not acknowledged as work but only as women’s unpaid and natural roles. Both instances of *Women and Work* thus add to the evidence of new feminist strategies of art-making that took a critical approach to the documentary image as a means of addressing the complex question of women’s labor, as being both unpaid and assumed natural and its psychic dimension: desire, pleasure, anxiety.<sup>359</sup>

### **Photomontage: A Feminist Strategy**

In a blog post published on her personal website in April 2014, Liz Heron writes about The Hackney Flashers’ own specific influences within the resources of art:

Repeatedly we have found ourselves described as a feminist art collective. Perhaps this perception derives from our participation in the Hayward Gallery 1979 show, *Three Perspectives on Photography*, an invitation we accepted only after lengthy discussion. Our intention was not to make art, but agitprop. The artist we consciously turned to for inspiration was the German communist John Heartfield, who used photomontage to attack Nazi ideology in the 1930s. Some of us knew the work of Hannah Höch from the Hayward Gallery’s 1978 exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, and it wasn’t just cultural theorists who were reading Walter Benjamin’s *Illuminations*, which first came out in Britain in 1973.<sup>360</sup>

Heron’s reference to Heartfield, Höch and Benjamin casts an important light on the way in which The Hackney Flashers approached the photographic image, in beginning to recognize the currency of the photomontage.

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<sup>359</sup> The combination of experimental formal strategies with the political imperative to address equal pay can be read in relation to Peter Wollen’s essay ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’, which addresses the way in which attention to a modernist formal avant-garde has repressed an avant-garde that is both politically *and* formally radical. In his essay, Wollen addresses the work of European filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Straub-Huillet who are often falsely contrasted to US structural filmmakers such as Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal while also addressing the work of earlier Russian Soviet filmmakers Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein in order to resolve what he sees as a false division between ‘contentism’ and ‘formalism’. Wollen’s main argument is that, ‘it is all too easily asserted that one avant-garde is political and one is not’—see Peter Wollen, ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’, *Studio International*, 190 (1975), 171–175. Attention to the two collectives who each produced a *Women and Work* shows the way in which feminist practices have been part of a history of this ‘repressed’ avant-garde that has contested the political Left’s naturalizing of the ‘truth’ about working class lives while formally innovating materials and processes to unfix representational strategies as part of their anti-capitalist critique.

<sup>360</sup> Liz Heron, ‘Here’s to the Collective’, <<https://lizheron.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/heres-to-the-collective/>> [accessed 15 January 2017].



Figure 4.4, John Heartfield, *Millions Stand Behind Him—the meaning of Hitler’s Salute*, 1932. © The Estate of John Heartfield.

The photomontages of John Heartfield (1891–1968), deployed as part of the anti-fascist campaigns in Germany during the early 1930s, drew on a sophisticated knowledge of the sign relationships inherent within images, in order to critically re-appropriate image and text. In his essay, ‘Heartfield’s Millions Montage’, published in Terry Dennett and Jo Spence’s edited journal *Photography/Politics: One*, historian Eckhard Siepmann focuses on one of Heartfield’s most famous images (Figure 4.4), in which a close-up photograph of a man with banknotes extending from an outstretched hand is set alongside a reproduction of Hitler addressing a crowd. The composition of the image is produced in such a way so as to position Hitler’s raised right hand to look like the dictator is reaching for the money offered by another man, who is coded in the image as a corporate financier.<sup>361</sup> Without the words being changed, but simply by being placed across the bottom of the montage, Hitler’s well-known claim that ‘millions stand behind me’, is thus transformed from being a slogan about democratic support (at the same moment as National Socialism was being peddled as the working people’s party) to one that describes the corporate wealth backing fascism.

<sup>361</sup> Eckhard Siepmann, ‘Heartfield’s Millions Montage: (attempt at) a Structural Analysis’, *Photography/Politics*, 1 (1979), 38–50 (p. 43).



Figure 4.5, Jo Spence & Terry Dennett (the Photography Workshop) *The Highest Product of Capitalism* (After John Heartfield), 1979 © The Jo Spence Memorial Archive.



Figure 4.6, John Heartfield, *Spitzenprodukte Des Kapitalismus*. © Estate of John Heartfield

In 1979, Jo Spence and Terry Dennett (as the Photography Workshop) re-staged Heartfield's photo-montage *The highest (or finest) products of capitalism* (Figure 4.5) in which a photograph of a shabbily-dressed, immiserated man is depicted facing the camera (Figure 4.6), with a hand-written sign around his neck that reads 'Nehme jede arbeit' (German for 'Take any

job’). Behind the man stands a woman dressed in a bridal gown, her eyes gazing downwards, her stature as static as a shop mannequin. Spence argues that, within this image, Heartfield exposes the way in which both the working-class male laborer and the woman-as-bride serve the interests of capitalism: the man by providing his labor-power; the woman by entering the family and reproducing the labor-force. Within the Photography Workshop’s own photographic re-enactment, Spence redirects the gender critique present within Heartfield’s original image. In dressing herself to look like the working-class man, and positioning herself in front of a bridal mannequin, Spence at once points to the reproductive labor of the woman-as-wife while also—as Siona Wilson argues—questioning the assumed masculinity of the classed worker.<sup>362</sup> Thus, within this work, Spence not only explores the currency of montage as a strategy of political critique but also recognizes what her own body can bring to politicizing the image. In the work, she addresses the ethics of photographing those who lack control over the image while by putting herself within the picture, Spence also investigated the psychic and social formation of identities. As she writes:

The problems of the dominant practices of documentary photography still remain: though such practices may be useful for showing what appears to be happening in the world, they are still incapable of showing how institutional structures work. *Nor can they indicate how we feel or negotiate within them* [my emphasis].<sup>363</sup>

I will address both of these aspects of Spence’s practice as I develop my discussion in relation to Spence’s later work.

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<sup>362</sup> Wilson, p. 146.

<sup>363</sup> Jo Spence, ‘Questioning Documentary Practice? The sign as a site of struggle’, in *Cultural Sniping*, ed. by Jo Stanley (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 97–110 (p. 105). (First presented as a paper at the National Conference of Photography, organized by the Arts Council of Great Britain in Salford, 3 April 1987).





Figure 4.7, Hannah Höch, *Modenschau*, 1925–35. Berlinische Galerie—Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur, Berlin.

In addressing the political-aesthetic formation of *The Hackney Flashers* and *Jo Spence*, it is also necessary to register the impact of Berlin Dadaist Hannah Höch (1889–1978) who radically transformed photomontage in ways that integrated a critique of fascism with a gendered dimension. Höch’s work focused on criticizing the National Socialist creation of the German ‘New Woman’, who was incited to stay at home and raise children as part of her duty to the German state.<sup>364</sup> Working as the only woman among the Berlin Dada group, Höch’s work is also significant for its challenge to the sexism she encountered on a personal level within her own artistic community, as well as within the ideology of the state. This dual experience of oppression is revealed in her satirical short-story *The Painter* (1920) in which an artist feels his ‘boundless flight’ of genius is thwarted when his wife asks him to wash the dishes.<sup>365</sup> Like Heartfield, Höch utilized the strategy of photomontage, as exemplified by her work *Modenschau* (1925–35). In this constructed image (Figure 4.7), Höch presents cut-outs from women’s magazines and advertisements for fashion and beauty products alongside images of ethnographic objects to create ambiguously gendered figures that address the rise of the beauty

<sup>364</sup> Jo Spence, ‘The Sign as a Site of Class Struggle’, in *Photography/Politics*, 2 (1986), 176–186 (p. 181).

<sup>365</sup> Hannah Höch, ‘The Painter’ (1920) quoted in Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 216–218.

industry and gender stereotypes in Nazi Germany. In her own account of photomontage, Höch writes that, ‘the peculiar characteristics of photography and its approaches have opened up a new and immensely fantastic field for a creative human being: a new magical territory, for the discovery of which freedom is the first prerequisite’.<sup>366</sup> In Höch’s work, montage serves both to denaturalize the photographic image, while also enabling new creative visions of the world. Her work thus relates to the desire of feminist practitioners in the 1970s/80s to both critique the dominant visual culture but also to imagine new aesthetic and social possibilities.<sup>367</sup>

The final resource cited by Heron in the extract above is Walter Benjamin, who himself referenced the Dadaists (of which Heartfield and Höch were part) in relation to his work on the dialectical image in the 1930s. Benjamin’s work was first published in the UK in 1970, as *Illuminations*.<sup>368</sup> His emergence in the British cultural scene during the 1970s coincided with the decade in which the Dadaists were being rediscovered in Britain, evidenced, for example, by the *Dadaism and Surrealism Reviewed* exhibition at The Hayward Gallery in 1978, which is cited by Liz Heron above. Thus Benjamin provided, in the 1970s, another theoretical frame through which feminists were becoming conscious of the political potential of the photographic image. Of particular relevance to my discussion of photomontage is Benjamin’s argument that to bring together opposites has the effect of giving the photograph a ‘magical value’.<sup>369</sup> In his thesis ‘A Short History of Photography’, published in German in 1934, and in English, in the British journal *Screen*, in 1972, Benjamin writes about the relationship between past and present within the photographic image:

However skillful the photographer, however carefully he poses his model, the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and

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<sup>366</sup> Hannah Höch, ‘Nekolik poznámek o fotomontáži’ (‘A Few Words on Photomontage’), *Stredisko*, 4 (1934) quoted in Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, p. 219.

<sup>367</sup> While the Arts Council of Great Britain exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* at The Hayward Gallery in 1978—see Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978)—was important for introducing Höch’s work to British audiences, including The Hackney Flashers, the influence of feminist scholarship on an understanding of Höch’s work was marked in 1996 by the exhibition *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Organized by Maria Makela and Peter Boswell, this exhibition was particularly significant for presenting the importance of Hannah Höch as an artist in her own right as well as part of the Dadaist group. Notably, it focused on the preceding 15 years of feminist research that had paid serious attention to Höch’s representation of women in the Weimar era – see Peter W. Boswell, Carolyn Lanchner and Maria Martha Makela, *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996).

<sup>368</sup> This took its title itself from the first critical text on Benjamin’s work written in English by Hannah Arendt, which was published in *The New Yorker Magazine* in 1968.

<sup>369</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘A Short History of Photography’, *Screen*, 13 (1972) 5–26 (p. 7).

now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character in the picture; to find that imperceptible point at which, in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts itself that, looking back, we may rediscover it. It is indeed a different nature that speaks to the camera from the one which addresses the eye; different above all in the sense that instead of a space worked through by a human consciousness there appears one which is affected unconsciously.<sup>370</sup>

Benjamin introduces in this essay the notion of the ‘optical unconscious’, the idea that something can be revealed through photography that cannot be revealed through other art forms, such as text or painting:

It is possible, for example, however roughly, to describe the way somebody walks, but it is impossible to say anything about that fraction of a second when a person starts to walk. Photography with its various aids (lenses, enlargements) can reveal this moment. Photography makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious, just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious.<sup>371</sup>

In his subsequent essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, Benjamin relates the ‘optical unconscious’ to the possibilities that the *moving* image introduced, notably its ‘plunging and soaring, its interruptions and isolating, its stretching and condensing of the process, its close-ups and its distance shots’.<sup>372</sup> In offering a means of both *reproducing* reality, and showing that reality in an altogether different way than the eye allows, Benjamin attends to the unique manipulative possibilities that the camera offers. He argues that, ‘on the one hand film increases our understanding of the inevitabilities that govern our lives while ensuring, on the other hand, that we have a vast, undreamt-of amount of room for manoeuvre!’<sup>373</sup> Thus for Benjamin, the work of the Dadaists was filmic, not because it literally used the moving image, but because of the way in which its reassembling of found footage provided a ‘shock effect’ that disturbed the viewer by rearranging aspects of the image-world to reveal something that could not otherwise be seen. ‘In the hands of the Dadaists’, Benjamin writes, ‘the work of art, from being a sight that seduced the eye or a sound that persuaded the ear, became a bullet’.<sup>374</sup> How then did these art historical and theoretical references inform The

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<sup>370</sup> Benjamin, ‘A Short History of Photography’, p. 7.

<sup>371</sup> Benjamin, ‘A Short History of Photography’, p. 7.

<sup>372</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 30. (first publ. in German in *The Literarische Welt*, 1931).

<sup>373</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p. 29.

<sup>374</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p. 32.



Hackney Flashers? I will explore this by focusing on their subsequent work, *Who's Holding the Baby?*

### *Who's Holding the Baby?*



Figure 4.8, The Hackney Flashers, *Who's Holding the Baby?*, 1978 © The Hackney Flashers.

According to Liz Heron's account in *Photography/Politics: One*, one of the responses to the initial *Women and Work* exhibition from those who saw it was the need for more visibility of the issue of childcare provision within the borough of Hackney, which, with a thousand children on the top-priority waiting list, was seen as severely inadequate. The Hackney Flashers determined that its subsequent project should focus on the lack of free childcare in the local area. This subject continued to problematize the function of the photograph because, as the group argued, it was much more difficult to photograph the lack of something (in this case childcare) than something that is there but simply not made visible by

the dominant structures, as was addressed in *Women and Work*. The Hackney Flashers also wanted to go beyond the immediate issue of childcare provision in the area. They recognized that in order to address this particular problem in its fullness, it was also necessary to analyze the role of the family and motherhood as ideological constructs. This in turn, would help to reveal why childcare provision had become such an important social issue. Thus, through their second project, *Who's holding the baby?* (Figure 4.8)—made in 1978 and exhibited at The Pavilion in June 1983—The Hackney Flashers attempted to expose the structures of oppression that are both capitalist and patriarchal. Liz Heron explains this as follows:

Women's struggles around equal pay, childcare, abortion, contraception and other issues are of crucial importance in undermining the ideologies of femininity and domesticity. By challenging their subordinate roles not only in the family but also in the hierarchy of labor, women are also attacking the class structures of capitalist society.<sup>375</sup>

As Heron argues, the family is not simply one site of women's oppression but the central site to understanding the *nature* of women's oppression. In *Woman's Estate*, Juliet Mitchell argues that, while the family is a stronghold of capitalism, it has also been a constant unit throughout each economic stage in history.<sup>376</sup> Mitchell is concerned with the specific effects of the family in thwarting the revolutionary impulse of those oppressed by the family structure: women. In her chapter 'Psychoanalysis and the Family', Mitchell seeks to show that the meaning society gives to the family and the entry of men and women into society is distinct but inseparable: the family has been a constant source of women's oppression because 'the germ of the family is the source of the psychic creation of individuals'.<sup>377</sup>

In 1972, The International Wages for Housework campaign began in Padua, Italy. Initiated by a feminist collective (Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, Brigitte Galtier and Selma James), 'Wages for Housework' sought to call attention to housework and childrearing as being integral to capitalist industrial production, asking what might happen if domestic labor was compensated by a wage. In her 1975 essay 'Wages Against Housework', Silvia Federici argues against those who criticized the campaign for accepting the fate of women as those who

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<sup>375</sup> Heron, 'Hackney Flashers Collective: Who's still holding the camera?', p. 128.

<sup>376</sup> Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, pp. 158–161.

<sup>377</sup> Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, p. 171.

maintain the home. She argues that the campaign was not, primarily, a call for money but rather a political proposition that was significant for ‘demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in capitalist society’.<sup>378</sup> For Federici, while waged-labor in itself does not offer any sort of emancipation from capitalism, what it does provide is recognition of ‘work as work’. She argues:

It is important to recognize that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class [...] the wage at least recognizes that you are a worker, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work.<sup>379</sup>

In addition to the analysis by *Wages for Housework* that identified housework as a ‘subtle and mystified violence’, Sheila Rowbotham argues that housework is not only excluded from the prevailing notion of economic value but that it is also invisible in the sense of men not seeing it being done.<sup>380</sup> By challenging the invisibility of childcare The Hackney Flashers sought to show that the role of women as housewives and childrearsers was not a natural role. Instead, it was socially and psychically determined so that almost all women of any class did the majority of the housework and that, when care and domestic work did translate into waged labor, this work was also undervalued and thus underpaid. Secondly, The Hackney Flashers were interested in finding a way of making visible the role played by the media, and, in particular, advertising, in producing what Mitchell terms ‘woman’s objective conditions within the family’.<sup>381</sup> Where ‘the family wage’ was the tool through which nineteenth and early twentieth-century women were kept within the home, women in the 1970s were restricted in their social and economic opportunity through a lack of access to affordable and available childcare, at the moment when the Equal Pay Act should have been helping women to access the workplace.

In *Who’s Holding the Baby?*, The Hackney Flashers show the way in which contemporary media imagery complies with the perception of women as passive members of

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<sup>378</sup> Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press/Power of Women Collective, 1975), p. 1.

<sup>379</sup> Federici, p. 2.

<sup>380</sup> Rowbotham, p. 70.

<sup>381</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 162.

society, whose natural place is as wife and mother, despite the increasing number of women who were going out to work. One particularly powerful montage of image and text depicts a woman wearing a body suit, bent over next to a sofa, staring suggestively at the camera, her eyes heavily made up. Its juxtaposed slogan reads, 'you've tucked the kids into bed ... slipped into something simple ... taken your Valium ... and you're waiting for him to come home ... mustn't be late for the evening shift at the bread factory'. In this work, *The Hackney Flashers* deploy the imagery and language of a classic advertisement but then subvert this imagery by drawing attention to the need for women to sustain the family by going out to work, as well as by pointing to the hidden reliance on stress-relieving medication that was common among many women. In this way, the artwork reveals the contradictions that advertisements rely upon in depicting women simultaneously as homemaker and consumer.

The contradictions of the photograph are given focus in Spence's, 'What do people do all day?', written while she was employed as a secretary for the British Film Institute. In this essay, Spence draws upon the figure of the secretary (and hence her personal experience), which she reads as an example of the changing representation of women in relation to work. She asks, rhetorically, 'what is emphasized [in the stereotype of the secretary], the secretary's labor power or her sexuality?'<sup>382</sup> Spence notes that during the 1970s, as more women were entering the workforce, the media began to picture women in the previously 'male' world of paid work and active leisure. At the same time, she observes that those women are rarely portrayed as actually working. Instead, as in images of the secretary, glamour and sexuality are emphasized, colluding in the myth of feminine passivity. Indeed, Spence shows that, within photographs, particularly those photographs that are used in advertising, the association between women and work becomes about selling products and processes to women that will make them more beautiful or glamorous at work or that will revive them so that they will become more sexually attractive and available to men.<sup>383</sup> The entry of women into the workforce is exploited for the sale of commodities that sustain the heterosexual family structure. Spence writes, 'work now becomes a place in which to pass the time of day, or to preen, look sexy and beautiful, to

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<sup>382</sup> Jo Spence, 'What Do People Do All Day?', p. 138.

<sup>383</sup> Jo Spence, 'What Do People Do All Day?', p. 139.

improve the visual landscape for male workers'.<sup>384</sup> Spence, and the wider Hackney Flashers group sought to make photographic interventions by re-appropriating the imagery used within the media to raise consciousness of the value women's labor plays, both in the sense of sustaining and reproducing workers in the context of domestic work, and in contributing surplus value to the capitalist economy. An analysis of how these images function semiotically and ideologically, coupled with the construction of new assemblages were the dual parts of this consciousness-raising process. I shall explore this further in my analysis of the second Jo Spence exhibition at The Pavilion, *Beyond the Family Album*.

### **Analysis and Intervention: *Beyond the Family Album***

In 1979, Jo Spence and Terry Dennett produced the first of two photography annuals titled *Photography/Politics*. The journal came about as a result of differences between Spence and Dennett, on the one hand, and, on the other, the remaining half of what was then known as 'The Half-Moon Gallery and Photography Workshop'. This was co-founded by Spence and Dennett with documentary photographers Mike Goldwater and Paul Trevor.<sup>385</sup> According to Spence and Dennett, the other part of the Half-Moon group looked upon the re-examination of earlier traditions of left-wing photography as being 'time-wasting', 'obscure' or 'too theoretical'. It is the history of left-wing photography that thus forms the main focus of enquiry in *Photography/Politics: One*. What is interesting about this focus—particularly reflecting on the curatorial focus of the contemporary exhibition that introduced this discussion—is that, while the journal attends to the history of the worker photography movement in relation to various national Communist parties and to the Depression-era photographs commissioned by the Farm Security Administration, the journal presents an expansive definition of politics by also focusing on the inscription of photography within the family. The volume presents the family—somewhat radically—as a site of class conflict. Indeed, in their introduction to the journal, Spence and Dennett state the following:

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<sup>384</sup> Jo Spence, 'What Do People Do All Day?', p. 139.

<sup>385</sup> Wilson, p. 152.

Outside professional photography, it is within the family that photography is mainly practiced, usually to produce images of itself; within advertising photography, it is the image of the consuming (bourgeois) family, which is a recurrent theme, a recurrent ideal. Not formally part of the state, the family, and its representations, nevertheless have very pertinent political effects, for their very existence is presented as a denial of class, and therefore as a denial of the primacy of class politics.<sup>386</sup>

In her reflection on Jo Spence's practice, Jessica Evans argues that, while The Hackney Flashers experimented with various non-naturalistic visual strategies to address the complexity of social relations, they nonetheless maintained a residual belief in the evidential efficacy of the black and white documentary image.<sup>387</sup> In the work Spence made after her collaborations with The Hackney Flashers, she stopped photographing in a standard documentary mode altogether. In 1979, the same year as the publication of *Photography/Politics: One*, Spence made her first major solo body of work, *Beyond the Family Album*, in which she turns the camera on herself.

In her autobiographical writings, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Spence explains that the process of photographing women in factories with The Hackney Flashers was, for her, an uncomfortable experience. She notes, 'I think this was because the women workers were very much like my mother and I felt accountable to them'.<sup>388</sup> Spence writes that she was on the verge of giving up on photography altogether when she began reading autobiographies that had been published by the independent bookshop, *Centerprise*, in Hackney, which inspired her to return to photography through the lens of her own family photographs.

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<sup>386</sup> Terry Dennett and Jo Spence, Editorial [Untitled], *Photography/Politics*, 1 (1979), 1.

<sup>387</sup> Jessica Evans, 'An Affront to Taste,' in *The Camerawork Essays*, ed. by Jessica Evans (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997), pp. 237–261 (p. 281).

<sup>388</sup> Jo Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 208.

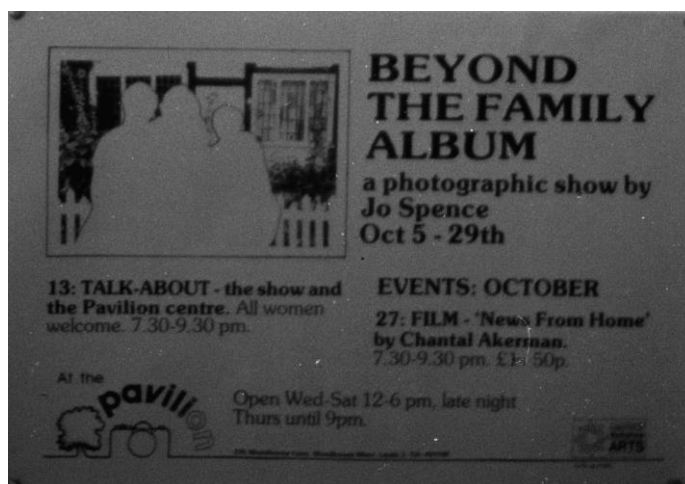


Figure 4.9, Poster for Jo Spence *Beyond the Family Album* at The Pavilion (5–29 October 1983) Courtesy of Feminist Archive North.

*Beyond the Family Album* (1979) was exhibited at The Pavilion from 5–29 October 1983 (Figure 4.9). It is a sequence of fourteen photomontages in which Spence assembled photographs of herself from her family album that document her life from her birth in 1939. Beneath each of the photographs is a caption, which states Spence's age and a description of the event that the photograph depicts. It also names the photographer who took the image. Above each sequence of photographs is a textual commentary that discusses the relationship of the photographs to Spence's own interrelated class/gender identity.



Figure 4.10, Jo Spence, *Beyond the Family Album* (Panel 2), 14 panels of color transparencies, text and black and white negatives. © Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

For example, the second panel of the series (Figure 4.10) addresses Spence's pre-school years.

The commentary describes Spence's parents and their own economic and social position:

As a record of her life, as a mother, these photographs give no indication of the amount of sheer hard work involved in childcare. Of my father's life as a worker I had no record at all.

Thus, in *Beyond the Family Album*, Spence addresses the ideological function of the family photograph and the way in which it renders invisible the social and economic reality of its subjects.





Figure 4.11, Jo Spence, *Beyond the Family Album* (Panel 3), 14 panels of color transparencies, text and black and white negatives. © Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

She illustrates this humorously with a photograph included in panel three (Figure 4.11), this one of her adolescent years, which depicts Spence in her family garden. She captions this photograph:

Seventeen years, looking glamorous in the back garden. I never worked on the garden but it makes a good backdrop.

The image and text configurations reveal the family album as produced through recourse to certain visual codes, such as an attractive backdrop, smiling faces or affectionate poses. These codes present family life as being a state of happiness and contentment, removed from the struggles of daily life. In her textual commentary, Spence counters this idealization of the family by making visible the way in which each seemingly neutral photographic image is underpinned by the struggle for freedom, sexual liberation, friendship, economic success, completeness and love.

In addressing the seemingly apolitical images of her personal family album, Spence builds on her work with *The Hackney Flashers*, by recognizing that the political struggle faced

by women is neither self-evident nor easily represented. In her book *Becoming a Woman*, historian Sally Alexander writes:

Against Marxism's claims that the determining social relationship is between wage labor and capital, exploiter and exploited, proletarian and capitalism, feminism insists on the recognition that subjective identity is also constructed as masculine or feminine, placing the individual as husband or wife, mother or father, son or daughter, and so on. And these subjectivities speak through political language and forms of political action, where they may be severed from class or class interests, indeed may be at odds with them.<sup>389</sup>

*Beyond the Family Album* can be read in relation to Alexander's notion that attention to sexed subjectivities produces different forms of political action—in her case within the terrain of the image—than those produced through attention to class interests alone. Spence states that:

Feminism made me aware of my socialization as a woman [...] As a result I began to think about how I had been represented by others.<sup>390</sup>

The Women's Liberation Movement sought to show that, unlike the observable relationship between wage-laborer and capitalist, the situation of women was hidden from consciousness.<sup>391</sup> Sally Alexander likewise argues that the reality of women will not be encountered through empirical observation.<sup>392</sup> In addition, according to Juliet Mitchell, the situation of women was assumed to be natural or else a 'personal' problem. The structure through which the women's movement began to organize politically was thus different to the structure of other political groups. Those engaged with the movement came to recognize that, within the political structures of the working classes, notably the trade unions, women's oppression could not be adequately overcome. This is because, according to Mitchell, women in Britain in the 1970s were largely tied to the identification of maintained person within the family, which cut across a social/economic class position. Instead it was necessary for women to come together and to find new ways to address their struggle. As Mitchell argues, 'because [women] are dominated by men, when they join a political organization they imitate men's styles and cannot discuss the

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<sup>389</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Feminist History* (London: Virago Press, 1994), p. 106.

<sup>390</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 82.

<sup>391</sup> Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, p. 62.

<sup>392</sup> Alexander, p. 106.

personal, but only analyze the so-called “objective” situation which normally means, quite simply, somebody else’s problems somewhere else’.<sup>393</sup>

Women liberationists devised strategies for meeting that worked towards a process of collective decision-making as a means of challenging the patriarchal structures of power relations. Moreno articulates this in relation to The Pavilion’s founding aims, explaining that, ‘we are agreed on the necessity of operating as we do, with a talked-through series of aims and projects and with a consensus of opinion and an acceptance of difference’.<sup>394</sup> Secondly, women identified consciousness-raising as the means through which they could come to understand their private experiences as part of a shared social and political struggle. The history of consciousness-raising was an interpretation of a practice that originated in revolutionary China, when those suffering the most abject poverty began a process of ‘speaking bitterness’, articulating their poverty as a way of denaturalizing the hardships of their lives. Mitchell explains that in this practice, ‘one person’s realization brings to mind other injustices for the whole group’.<sup>395</sup> Anticipating the put-down of this type of political action as ‘gossip’ or ‘moaning’, Mitchell states that ‘consciousness-raising is speaking the unspoken: the opposite, in fact, of having a natter’.<sup>396</sup> The aim of consciousness-raising was to break the inhibitions of women, enabling them to reimagine the structures in which they were caught.

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<sup>393</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 60.

<sup>394</sup> Moreno, p. 21.

<sup>395</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 62.

<sup>396</sup> Mitchell, *Woman’s Estate*, p. 62.



Figure 4.12, Jo Spence, *Beyond the Family Album* (Panel 3), 14 panels of color transparencies, text and black and white negatives. © Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

Within *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Spence acknowledges that her experience of being in women's consciousness-raising groups had an influence on her 'encouraging others to use the camera for its unfixing, rather than its fixing abilities'.<sup>397</sup> Through her own photographic practice, Spence engaged in a process of consciousness-raising that was performatively enacted to the camera, in turn aiming to raise points of identification in the viewer. Within the series of image-and-text panels that constitute *Beyond the Family Album*, the latter constellations divert from Spence's pattern of analyzing found photographs from her family album. Instead, Spence presents a sequence of constructed self-images in which she plays with different poses in front of the camera, altering her facial expression and the position of her body. These images explore the way in which a subject can produce different signs that the viewer would recognize as signifying, for example, coquettish, funny, sexy, young, old, serious, silly.<sup>398</sup> In the eleventh panel of the series (Figure 4.12), Spence asks, 'how can we begin to change the portrait, to change ideas of what should and should not go into our family album?' By presenting numerous

<sup>397</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 208.

<sup>398</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 95.

photographs of herself in the same setting—all photographed from the same angle, but performing distinct signals (by changing the angle of her face or chest, adding a wig or lowering her eyes)—Spence reveals the constructed nature of photography. Her more explicitly performative work shows up the earlier images in the sequences to be works of fiction in their own right. In the latter images, Spence also makes visible the unequal relationship between the person being photographed and the photographer by addressing the way in which the meaning of images change depending on the context in which they are used.<sup>399</sup> The eleventh panel quotes from Allan Sekula's 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary', asking, 'how do we invent our lives out of a limited range of possibilities, and how are our lives invented for us by those in power?'<sup>400</sup> Through the organization of image and text, Spence shows that it is not, in fact, the subject who determines his/her own family album, but rather that the family album is constructed through a complex nexus of ideologically-driven investments.<sup>401</sup>



Figure 4.13, Jo Spence installing *Beyond the Family Album* at The Hayward Gallery, 1979. Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

<sup>399</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 95.

<sup>400</sup> Sekula, 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary', p. 172.

<sup>401</sup> Jo Spence, 'Beyond the Family Album, Private Images, Public Conventions,' in *Three Perspectives on Photography*, pp. 60–63 (p. 60).

*Beyond the Family Album* was first shown in *Three Perspectives on Photography* as part of Angela Kelly's curated selection, 'Feminism and Photography' (Figure 4.13). I cited this exhibition in the last chapter, but it is useful to look at it again as I build the discussion of Spence's work. In her contribution to the exhibition catalogue, Angela Kelly writes about her selection of work as follows:

All the work I have chosen deals essentially with women's lives and can be seen as representing a spectrum between two poles of a Feminist photographic practice. I have called these the 'documentary' and the 'analytical' poles. Within these bounds the photographers employ a number of styles, approaches and contents, which raise various issues through and about the medium of photography.<sup>402</sup>

Within this description it appears that Kelly only partially recognizes what is going on in the work she has chosen for the exhibition. Her focus on the multiplicity of 'styles, approaches and contents' does not quite catch what was so radical about the work she selected. Within the exhibition catalogue, an essay by Spence, titled 'Beyond the Family Album, Private Images, Public Conventions', follows entries on the work of Yve Lomax and Sarah McCarthy, each written by the artists themselves. In the final paragraph of her artist statement, Yve Lomax writes that her work is neither a question of style nor content stating, 'in short I will say that what is at stake, is the fixing of an "image" and the status of the truth of such an image'.<sup>403</sup>

About her own work addressing the representation of working women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century 'rag trade', Sarah McCarthy similarly argues that:

What is more important, than for example, work on the level of the narrative, is an investigation of how the surface appearance of the photograph masks the real relations that underlie both its own process of production, (through newspapers or magazines), and the production of the ideological meaning, the real relations which it represents.<sup>404</sup>

In her own account of *Beyond the Family Album*, published in an interview for *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Spence writes that:

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<sup>402</sup> Angela Kelly, 'Feminism and Photography', p. 43.

<sup>403</sup> Lomax, 'Some stories which I have heard: some questions which I have asked', p. 55.

<sup>404</sup> Sarah McCarthy, 'The Milliner and The Student', in *Three Perspectives on Photography*, pp. 56–59 (p. 56).

I could *investigate* them to try and see what they told me. In the process of looking I came to the conclusion that they told me very little—which is what *Beyond the Family Album* is all about.<sup>405</sup>

What these statements have in common, therefore, is not an articulation of a feminist style. Rather, they show that what is brought about through feminism is an approach that takes the photograph as a tool of investigation about the nature of representation, thereby unfixing the very work of the image itself. As Tagg argues in his oral account of the exhibition, the practitioners within the show were not working *as* photographers, but were using photography as a space to work *in* or *on*.<sup>406</sup>

When Spence writes, in the quotation cited above, that her family album told her very little, she does not mean that she did not find anything out through working on her family photographs. Rather, in the process of analyzing the images of her own family, she came to see how the real relations that underpinned her classed/gendered position were obscured *through* her family album. Spence writes about these photographs as follows:

They were either decisive moments in my life or else, through their genres and styles, part of an aesthetic history of photography. The more I worked on them, the more I concluded that if that was my history, it was a complete mythology. Theory entered here and showed the way forward. Without realizing it I had become involved in questions like ‘Can you photograph the real?’; ‘Is there a real?’; ‘What are you doing with a camera?’<sup>407</sup>

Throughout her writing on *Beyond the Family Album* Spence discusses her working-class upbringing, her relationship to her parents (her mother in particular) and her own class mobility. She notes that this mobility took place ‘mostly through the men I knew who were, without exception, middle class’.<sup>408</sup> In her accounts of her family experience, included alongside the photographs used in *Beyond the Family Album*, Spence writes particularly about her own feelings of shame and discomfort in relation to her class position. *Beyond the Family Album*, and indeed other work that followed, was informed by Spence’s specific classed and gendered experience of growing up as the daughter of working-class parents. In an account of

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<sup>405</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 208.

<sup>406</sup> Tagg, ‘Oral History of British Photography’.

<sup>407</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 208.

<sup>408</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 208.

her upbringing published in a book that she coedited with Patricia Holland on the meaning of domestic photography, Spence writes:

It all seemed fairly normal that I should grow up feeling ashamed of my parents, my home, my brother, our accents, our manners, our class. Where others speak only of a symbolic lack, I perceived any number of lacks which plagued me until I was finally able to leave home and hide everything.<sup>409</sup>

Thus Spence's work was significant for acknowledging the importance of her own lived experience of class, through which she came to question the value of positivist representations of women at work. In her essay, 'The Sign as a Site of Class Struggle' (1986), Spence explains that, rather than simply exposing the fact of being ideologically constructed through the 'fetishistic and voyeuristic' structures of photography and cinema, there needs to be a theory of ideology which can encompass 'the unconscious construction of our subjectivity plus identificatory (patterning and categorizing) processes, and not ignore the contradictions of the ways in which we actually *live out* "*the imaginary relationship of (our) conditions of existence*".<sup>410</sup> This was quite different from the earlier projects of the Photography Workshop, which focused on researching the overlooked outputs of the Worker Photography Movement. In its focus on a social body of workers, this history had limited currency in relation to those structures that were not based on social organization, notably the family. The imaginary relationship to what Spence terms the 'symbolic order' of capitalism recognizes the distinction between the class identities produced by capitalism and the real-world experience of individual subjects. The nature of this experience cannot easily be shown because of the way in which representation is part of the ideological work of power to efface its own structures.<sup>411</sup>

Spence's article, 'What did you do in the war, Mummy?', published in 1979 to coincide with her work on the family album, explores the complex relationship between gender and class through an analysis of the images used in the news magazine *Picture Post*. Published during

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<sup>409</sup> Jo Spence, 'Shame-work', p. 229.

<sup>410</sup> Jo Spence, 'The Sign as a Site of Class Struggle', p. 177. In this quotation, Jo Spence is citing Louis Althusser who writes 'ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'—see Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 153. Thus, a close reading of Jo Spence's work adds to the analysis in the previous chapter which aims to show the significance of Althusser's ideas for artists during the 1980s, in understanding that meaning is produced through systems of representation circulated by ideological apparatuses, ideology being an imaginary relation. In Spence's analysis of the family album, for example, she shows that our identifications and phantasies are produced through the image, but unconsciously so.

<sup>411</sup> Spence, 'The Sign as a Site of Class Struggle', p. 177.



World War II, the women in these images were depicted as industrial workers at a time when women's contributions were vital to the productivity of agriculture and factories. Spence notes, however, that once the war was over, so the depictions of women as industrial workers disappeared. Instead, women were addressed, once again, in their ideologically 'natural' position as consumers within the home. This shift is evidenced by post-war advertisements for cleaning products and cosmetics, which encouraged women to return to the 'glamour' or 'stress-free' space of the home. Spence also points to the erasure of class difference in visual representations. By exposing the gap between the real-world experience of women under capitalism and the signs and codes of representations that produce subject identifications, Spence saw the potential for producing in the subject both an 'I' and a 'we'. For Spence, this distinction acknowledges the fact of women as participating in, rather than outside of, the system of capitalism (and thus as classed subjects), but does not subsume the question of gender into the question of class struggle.

In her essay for the *Three Perspectives on Photography* catalogue, Spence discusses the ideological nature of representations of women, which relate to the naturalized and idealized roles that women occupy within society:

If we take the universal category of 'motherhood', mediated through idealized images of mother and child, and re-label it 'childcare' we can then begin to understand how a whole new range of possibilities for representation come to mind.<sup>412</sup>

Thus for Spence, the problem of the divisions of labor (as addressed by The Hackney Flashers)—including the question of who does what work, and how that work is valued and recompensed—needs to be addressed, in the first instance, by acknowledging the effect images have in constructing the role and spaces women occupy, and are excluded from, within society. She argues that:

The images and roles of 'women' as beautiful and sexually available (effectively de-classed), then as universal mothers and family-makers—with the mythology of 'love' and marriage as the carrot to be chased—dominates our socialization as women. This 'visual construction' of us through photography usually emphasizes our 'femininity', our 'womanliness', and is often a total deflection from the more positive possibilities of

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<sup>412</sup> Spence, 'Beyond the Family Album, Private Images, Public Conventions', p. 61.

understanding the class contradictions (as well as sexual oppression) for many of us. Against all this, the images, which we make and keep of ourselves are invariably about 'leisure', how we look and 'family life' and are seen as amateur.<sup>413</sup>

Thus, as I indicated earlier, while Spence is concerned with the experience of sexual oppression, she also argues for the importance of making class difference visible. By positioning women as being part of the system of social relations, it is no longer possible to maintain the universalizing stereotype of women as mothers and wives. For Spence, it was particularly important to expose class difference for women because of the specific nature of women's exploitation as workers. Those women positioned as part of the ruling classes were not exploited in the same way as working-class women engaged in waged labor. Unlike their male counterparts, however, so-called 'bourgeois women' have been subject to a different kind of exploitation on the basis of labor, centered on the division of labor within the family.

In her work on the family album, Spence shows how it functions as a device through which women are structured to participate in the construction of their own femininity. In doing so, she reveals the central role of images within the psychic and social function of the family that Juliet Mitchell theorized. In the current context, given art's commonplace engagement with the everyday, it is easy to miss the radicalism of Spence's work on the family photograph, as both an artistic and a political intervention. In her essay 'An Affront to Taste? The Disturbances of Jo Spence', Jessica Evans cites an extract from a conversation she had with sociologist Don Slater in relation to the journal *Camerawork* that signals how distinct Spence's work was in relation to other political photography circulating at that time:

The [predominant] notions of photographic empowerment still involved distancing ourselves from domestic photography. Although *Camerawork* never descended to assuming (as some then did) that the only proper political photograph is of a good demo or bad fascist, it laid a heavy stress on ordinary people learning to 'document' their lives and conditions and using photographs for agitprop. We said that the personal was political, but that never quite included the family snap.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Spence, 'Beyond the Family Album, Private Images, Public Conventions', p. 60.

<sup>414</sup> Evans, 'An Affront to Taste', p. 251.

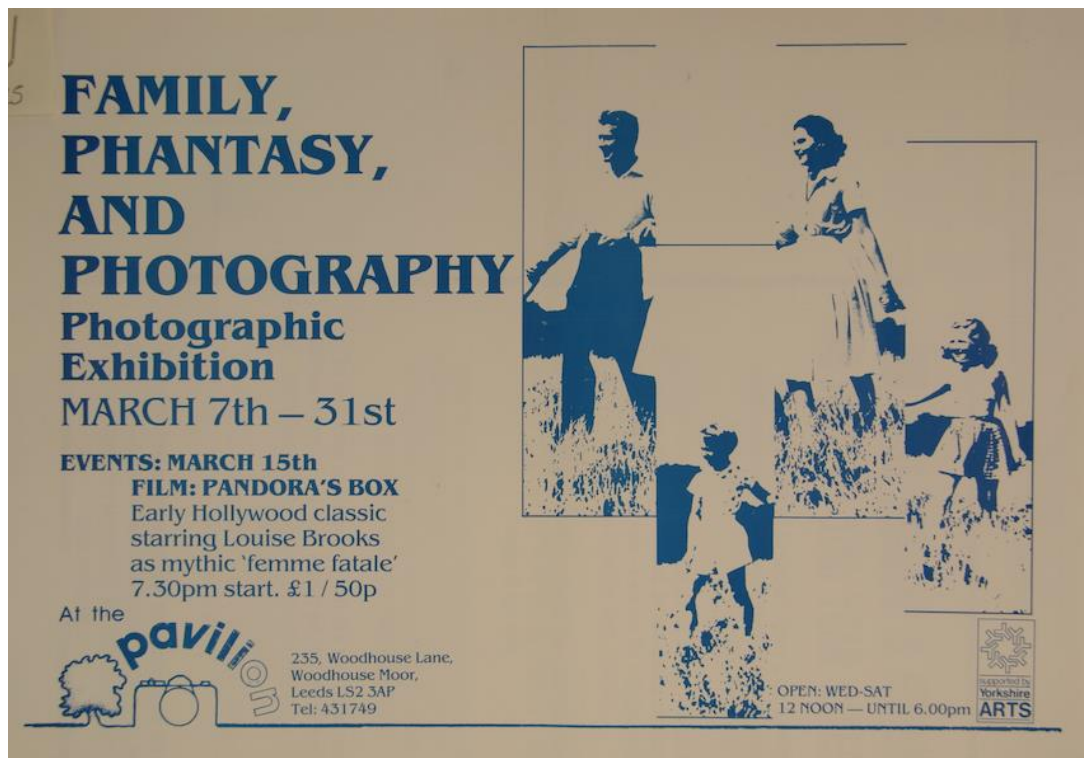
*Family, Fantasy, Photography*

Figure 4.14, Poster for *Family, Phantasy, and Photography*, March 7–31 1984. Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion.

Spence continued to pursue her interest in the family and its representations in her studies at PCL from 1980–82, an institution that had, during the 1970s, transformed from an apprenticeship space to the central educational institution for a critical engagement with photography. It was here that Spence joined forces with three fellow students—Mary Ann Kennedy, Jane Munro and Charlotte Pembrey—who termed themselves ‘The Polysnappers’ and collectively produced their degree show, under the title *Family, Fantasy, Photography* (1981). This show went on to tour and was exhibited at The Pavilion from 7–31 March 1984 (Figure 4.14).<sup>415</sup> Through this work, Spence continued to question the apparent neutrality of the family unit within Western society, as ‘a haven’ from the structures of capitalism, rather than as central to capitalism’s continuation.<sup>416</sup> In her brief account of this work, Spence articulates two of the key aims of The Polysnappers. First, she writes, ‘we wanted to look at the family as a socially and ideologically produced unit within systems of representation, rather than as a biased or

<sup>415</sup> The poster for The Pavilion exhibition uses the psychoanalytical word ‘phantasy’ in place of ‘fantasy’.

<sup>416</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 136.

distorted reflection of the real'.<sup>417</sup> Secondly, 'we tried to indicate that we could look at the family as an ideological sign system and as a possible site of struggle that could unfix the status quo and promote social change'.<sup>418</sup> The resulting photographs were a series of photomontages using text and images to make visible an analysis of images, functioning in much the same way as the panels in *Beyond the Family Album*. In this work, however, many of the photographs were produced using dolls as props. In so doing they depict but also play with, typical representations of the nuclear family, revealing the contingent nature of these representations. The use of the doll is also reflective of the passive role ascribed to women when it suits the dominant ideology. As Juliet Mitchell notes in *Woman's Estate*, 'at one moment women were "manning" the munitions factories, the next extolled as the housebound doll and mother'.<sup>419</sup> By photographing a doll, instead of a human subject, the artists were also able to address representations of women without risking exploiting an actual person through the power relations set up by the camera. For example, one panel presents a sequence of images in which the same doll is depicted in a variety of clothes and engaged in different tasks. The final sequence has the doll dressed in clothes that signify masculinity and holding a hard-hat while standing at an ironing board. By setting up more and less recognizable images, this work serves to make visible the limited representations that exist of women as well as opening up the potential for new representational possibilities. I explore this potential further in the final section of this chapter, which takes Spence's work, *The Picture of Health?* as its focus.

### ***The Picture of Health?***

In 1986, seven years after the publication of *Photography/Politics: One*, Spence collaborated with Patricia Holland and Simon Watney to edit a second edition of the journal, *Photography/Politics: Two*, still under the distribution of the Photography Workshop. This edition sought to expand on the politics of photography with particular attention to its *sexual* politics. In their introduction to the publication, the editors argue that, in all its forms,

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<sup>417</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 136.

<sup>418</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 136.

<sup>419</sup> Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, p. 46.

photography works to position subjects as sexed individuals within a network of unequal power relations; this positioning is then validated by the ideology of photographic ‘truthfulness’.<sup>420</sup>

This argument was not new, but what is significant is the shift in emphasis from *Photography/Politics: One*, which focuses on class struggle, albeit in an expanded sense, to *Photography/Politics: Two*, which emphasizes sexual politics as the main principle around which photography, but also capitalism is organized. The editors articulate their focus as an exploration of ‘the way ideology becomes fleshed, capitalism constructs its subjects, and our subjectivities and economic positions continue to be polarized by the tyranny of gendering’.<sup>421</sup>

In their introduction, the editors write that, ‘photography deals with the representation of the body, with the external signs of sex as inscribed in human form’.<sup>422</sup> They argue that photography supports the regulation, reinforcement and policing of human sexuality and desire.<sup>423</sup> While Spence acknowledged the importance of the ways in which gender and sexuality are inscribed ideologically, and the way in which sexual identifications are produced through ideology, she was also interested in the bodily experience of women under capitalism—in the lived but largely hidden and unspeakable experiences within the systems of work, family, welfare, etc. For example, in her essay ‘Body Talk’, for *Photography/Politics: Two*, she writes, ‘if the body is deteriorating in the organic, cellular sense, then it is nonsense to talk only about social constructs or the imaginary’.<sup>424</sup> As the flip side to her own subjective experience, she is also interested in how her work can have a mobilizing effect on her audience, offering what she terms ‘really useful social knowledge’.<sup>425</sup>

In her essay on ‘family snaps’, Jo Spence writes about the shift she made away from the exploration of her family history, towards an investigation of wider state structures and systems of power:

Eventually, by working with people from my own fractured class background, I was able to move beyond deconstructing my family into making visible the power

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<sup>420</sup> Patricia Holland, Jo Spence & Simon Watney, ‘Introduction: The Politics and Sexual Politics of Photography’, *Photography/Politics*, 2 (1986) 1–7 (p. 1).

<sup>421</sup> Holland et al, p. 5.

<sup>422</sup> Holland et al, p. 5.

<sup>423</sup> Holland et al, p. 5.

<sup>424</sup> Ros Coward and Jo Spence, ‘Body Talk’, in *Photography/Politics*, 2, (1986), 24–39 (p. 24).

<sup>425</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 151.

relationships within the discourses of state education and medicine and understand how they too had shaped my life. From there on it felt safer to begin to engage with the deeply buried structures of my feelings of shame as the daughter of parents who earned their living through the sale of their manual labor. In this way I began to try to reconstruct and then nurture my residual subjectivity as a working-class child. Out of this finally came an understanding and valuing of my own group and family history.<sup>426</sup>

This quotation is revealing because it shows the understanding that Spence gained through access to theorists including Foucault and Althusser, who analyze the mechanisms through which institutions maintain their power, and secondly through the question of subjectivity, in this instance the feeling of shame. It is not that Spence moves away from the personal through her turn to state institutions, but rather that she is interested in the complex relationship between the social construction of subjects and her own specific embodied experience of the world. In her subsequent work *The Picture of Health?* (1982–86)—exhibited at The Pavilion from 4–28 September 1985—Spence developed her exploration of a politics that takes place through a convergent analysis of her own subjective, embodied experience and the work of power and control in a particular discourse.

*The Picture of Health?* was the outcome of two events in Spence's life. First, it was made after Spence had graduated from her photography degree at PCL, where she was taught by critical photographers and theorists such as Victor Burgin whose own photographic work was a challenge to both social documentary and fine art photography, and whose writing addressed the role of photography in producing the 'ideological subject'.<sup>427</sup> Thus, Spence came out of PCL equipped with a more theoretical understanding of the role of power, ideology and institutions in relation to photography.

The second event was Spence's diagnosis with breast cancer. Spence's account of an early encounter with an oncology doctor poignantly describes the impact of this diagnosis, both affectively and intellectually. It is worth reproducing this account here in full:

One morning, whilst reading, I was confronted by the awesome reality of a young white-coated doctor, with student retinue, standing by my bedside. As he referred to his notes, without introduction, he bent over me and began to ink a cross onto the area of flesh above my left breast. As he did so a whole chaotic series of images flashed

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<sup>426</sup> Spence, 'Shame-work', p. 228.

<sup>427</sup> Burgin, 'Looking at Photographs', in *Thinking Photography*, pp.142–153 (p. 153).

through my head. Rather like drowning. I heard this doctor, whom I had never met before, this potential daylight mugger, tell me that my left breast would have to be removed. Equally I heard myself answer, 'No'. Incredulously; rebelliously; suddenly; angrily; attackingly; pathetically; alone; in total ignorance. I, who had spent three years (and more) immersed in a study of ideology and visual representation, now suddenly needed another type of knowledge; what has come to be called 'really useful social knowledge'. Not only the knowledge of how to rebel against this invader, but also of what to do beyond merely reacting negatively. I realized with horror that my body was not made of photographic paper, nor was it an image, or an idea, or a psychic structure ... it was made of blood, bones and tissue. Some of them now appeared to be cancerous. And I didn't even know where my liver was located.<sup>428</sup>

Thus, armed with a commitment to both a theoretical knowledge that equipped her to read the way in which the medical institutions control and fragment the body, and to exploring her embodied subjectivity, Spence set out to make a photographic investigation into what she termed 'the politics of cancer'.

The final remarkable work—*The Picture of Health?*—is a series of eight photographs, made during Spence's treatment in hospital for breast cancer between 1982 and 1986. This work emerged from an extensive process of research and collaboration. The poster for the work states that the exhibition was by Jessica Evans, Rosy Martin, Maggie Murray, Jo Spence and Yana Stajno, although posthumously, there has been a tendency to credit the work to Spence and Dennett. Spence's account of the work in her autobiography, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, explains the nature of the collaboration with three of the credited women and with Terry Dennett. She writes:

In 1985 I enlarged an image/text critique of orthodox medicine which had been exhibited at the Camerawork gallery into a touring show called *The Picture of Health?*. The documentary work by myself, Terry and Maggie and the photo-therapy work by Rosy and myself was contextualized by Jessica Evans' work on orthodox medicine, in which she foregrounded the myth of the doctor as hero through images from medical text books, film stills and staged photographs.<sup>429</sup>

The collaborative, multi-disciplinary nature of this project was important for Spence and the politics of her working method. Where Murray was a photographer and Evans an academic in the sociology of photography and visual culture, Martin was practicing in a more therapeutic domain, and Stajno was a practitioner of alternative medicine. This is indicative of the diverse

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<sup>428</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself In the Picture*, p. 150.

<sup>429</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself In the Picture*, p. 156.

resources Spence took up as she worked to take control over both her image and her illness. Through this collaborative method she came to understand the world around her, both through her own subjective encounter of it, as well as through the theoretical work available to her. Thus, the photographs present Spence's own lived embodied experience of being subject to, and resisting, the powers and processes of the medical institution. It relates her experience of powerlessness as a patient to the other ways in which women's bodies are controlled and fragmented within institutions and representations. Through this work, Spence experimented with different photographic strategies in order to give visual form to the struggle for health that was repressed within visual culture.



Figure 4.15, Jo Spence, *The Picture of Health?*, 1982–86 (Exhibition view—*A Feminist Space at Leeds*, University of Leeds, 2017). Courtesy of Julian Lister.

The photographs created by Spence and her collaborators (Figure 4.15) document Spence's journey through having a lumpectomy to engaging in practices of alternative medicine and therapy. In one photograph, made in collaboration with Dennett before she went into hospital to have the lump in her breast removed, she deals with the sense of being alienated from her own body. The photograph is a low-plane black-and-white portrait of Spence, her body angled slightly away from the camera and naked to the waist, her facial expression neutral, alluding to



the conventions of the objectifying ethnographic photograph. A bandage covers the underside of her left breast, marking the point at which the surgeon's cut would be made, and across the top of the breast is written the words 'Property of Jo Spence'.



Figure 4.16, Jo Spence and Terry Dennett, *The Picture of Health?* (detail), 1982–86. © Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

Another image (Figure 4.16), this one in color, captures Spence in the process of having a mammogram, revealing the way in which the camera, in its focus only on the breast, fragments the body, relating to the role the camera plays in advertising or pornography. Together these photographs can be read as signaling the way in which women's bodies are colonized by different systems of power.

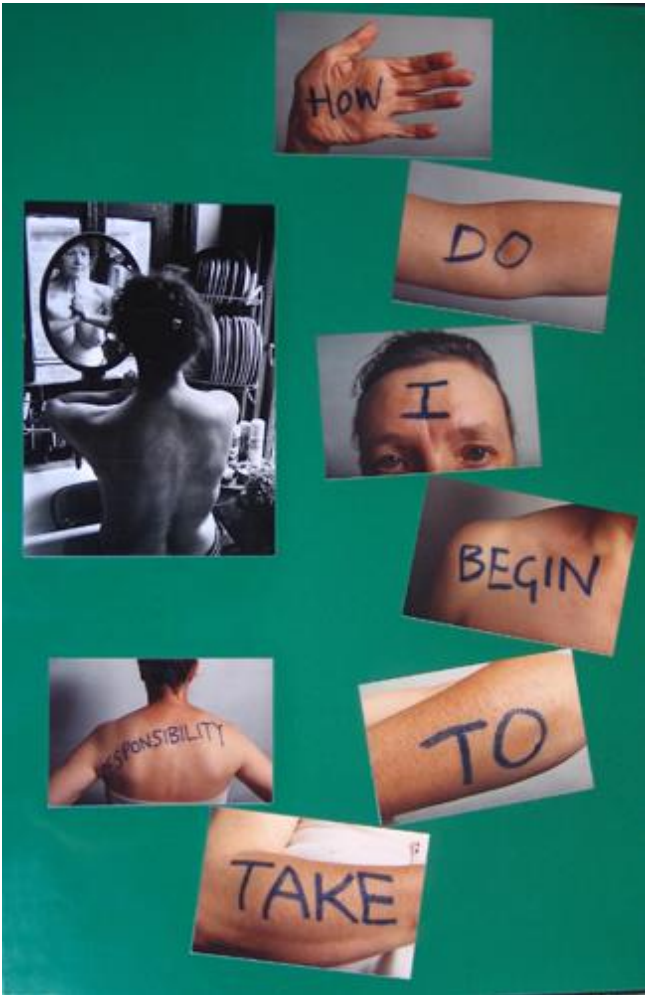


Figure 4.17, Jo Spence and Rosy Martin, *The Picture of Health?* (detail), 1982–86. © Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

A third panel from the series juxtaposes a documentary image of Spence in the course of her treatment through traditional Chinese Medicine, with images made during her ‘photo-therapy’ work with Rosy Martin (Figure 4.17). Spence and Martin produced a series of close-up photographs of their bodies on which the words ‘how do I begin to take responsibility’ are written. Spence says of this conjunction, that she was trying to bridge between work done on health struggles, typically through documentary photography and work done on the body as image. She writes that, ‘an understanding of how these spheres relate seems to me essential to being healthy and well-balanced’.<sup>430</sup> Another image depicts the top half of Spence’s body, naked with the exception of a helmet (Figure 4.15, R-H image). Revealing the scar on her breast following her operation, the image relates the treatment of cancer to that of nuclear warfare. In her account of the series, published in her autobiographical publication *Putting Myself in the*

<sup>430</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 168.

*Picture*, Spence cites Alex Jack from *Cancer Control Journal*, who points out that the three medically-sanctioned treatments of 1) surgery ('search and destroy'), 2) radiation ('bombardment') and 3) chemotherapy ('chemical warfare') were also the three major weapons of war on Vietnam.<sup>431</sup> This shows Spence's interest in exploring medicine as a regime of power, alongside alternative practices of healthcare, and the body as it is subject to the camera. The image also draws attention to the false hierarchy between mind and body, which is produced through the structures of the medical institution. In Spence's image, the head is protected, where the body is marked with scarring, revealing its vulnerability to damage. But the image also reverses the shame of the breast cancer patient, who is encouraged to hide her scars and to deny surgery with a prosthetic breast. Spence confronts the hierarchy, addressing the association between shame and the sexually differentiated body, refusing the fragmentation and hierarchization of mind and body. Jessica Evans argues that Spence uses the camera as way of resisting the objectification of her body, reclaiming the position of social agent. Evans also points out that Spence puts the subject back into the body of the patient. She argues that, 'taking pictures is to enter into immediate performed relationships with a particular setting, to stage an interaction with an environment which alters during the process'.<sup>432</sup> As such, Evans argues that Spence became an 'embodied social witness'.<sup>433</sup> Read in this light, Spence's radical gesture is the way in which she performatively presents her body through the photograph, as it is subject to both affects and to social processes.

Viewing only the final images of this series limits what can be understood about Spence's work. As I sought to emphasize in my discussion of *Beyond the Family Album*, Spence's work was a process of investigation. Spence's inquiry into her family history, as it was constructed through the photograph, led to her becoming conscious of the relationship between the fixed representations that circulate of women and their lived experience of the processes of production and reproduction. Through her analysis of the family album, Spence engaged in a process of experimentation in front of the camera with the aim of creating new images that

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<sup>431</sup> Alex Jack, *Cancer Control Journal*, 5 (1979), quoted in Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 161.

<sup>432</sup> Evans, 'An Affront to Taste', p. 241.

<sup>433</sup> Evans, 'An Affront to Taste', p. 242.

would unfix the genres and styles that define the family album. In *The Picture of Health?*, Spence continued to use the camera as her tool of analysis and investigation. Beginning with a subjective moment—the trauma of her cancer diagnosis—Spence initiated a process of photographic inquiry. It was only through the process of making photographs that Spence was able, once again, to see what the image had to do with her own lived experience. *The Picture of Health?* was formed through more than three hundred photographs, taken over the course of Spence's treatment in hospital and through her subsequent engagement with alternative medicine. She has described the camera evocatively as a 'third eye' that is both analytical and critical yet also attached to the emotional and frightening experiences.<sup>434</sup> In a description of her work, Spence sheds light onto what the camera enabled her to do in analyzing and then subverting the ideology of orthodox medicine:

Later, when I looked more carefully at the three hundred or so pictures I had made, I saw images of the consultant's ward rounds on the morning I was to hear my diagnosis, followed by a picture (taken by my setting the self-timer and putting my camera on the top of my locker) of my naked breast marked up for amputation. I then remembered that the entire consultation had taken less than five minutes.<sup>435</sup>

For Spence, therefore, the camera was a tool to visualize the traumatic encounter with the medical institution. In addition, it enabled her to *see* a route through which to subvert the institution by constructing images that made visible her own engagement with alternative therapy.

Spence did not work on neat, singular, resolved projects but constantly reconfigured and re-presented her work, treating her work as an on-going process of questioning and creation.<sup>436</sup> In 2001, artist Paula Farrance visited the Jo Spence Memorial Archive, then housed within the flat shared by Spence and Dennett (but now dispersed across institutions including Birkbeck, the Ryerson Image Center and Richard Saltoun Gallery). Farrance evocatively describes her visit to the archive:

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<sup>434</sup> Jo Spence, 'Identity and Cultural Production: Or deciding to become the subject of our own histories rather than the object of somebody else's', in *Cultural Sniping*, pp. 129–142 (p. 130).

<sup>435</sup> Spence 'Identity and Cultural Production', p. 131.

<sup>436</sup> *The Picture of Health?* was exhibited at The Pavilion in 1985, although the series is dated from 1982–1986, meaning that The Pavilion must have presented an unfinished version of the work.

In this moderate flat, every possible wall space was banked from ceiling to floor with shelves stacked and crammed full of books she had read and written. There was a selection of video and audiotapes of interviews. Transcripts and articles she had read, written and published. Box files overflowing with slides, contact sheets and photographs, many of which go unseen, took up the larger wall space.<sup>437</sup>

Within *Putting Myself in the Picture*, images of contact sheets show the numerous variations that Spence produced before she reached the final eight photographs that constitute *The Picture of Health?* One, for example, depicts eight different versions of a photograph in which Spence is looking into a mirror, her naked breasts visible, her hands clasped above her chest. Taut with determination, her facial expression registers the difficulty of facing a terminal disease; the reflection gazes back at her, signifying isolation, while her hands tightly pressed together give a sense of resistance or rebellion. The other working images on the contact sheets show different variations of pose, proximity and facial expression. Five of the images, for example, are taken so as to leave the other side of Spence's reflection out of the picture, which speaks less of the internal loneliness of the cancer patient. In others, the expression, when compared with the final image, appears to be too calm, too happy, or too forced. Spence's commentary about the series sheds light on this process of giving form to her work:

Providing images in order to have a dialogue with myself. The question is 'Will I be a heroine or a victim?' The answer I gave myself was that I had no desire to be either; I merely wanted to be 'seen' as a person in the daily struggle to restore equilibrium and health to myself.<sup>438</sup>

By using photographs in this investigatory, process-driven way Spence came to understand her own struggles for control within the cancer process and to perform and communicate this struggle to others. As Roberta McGrath argues, in reviewing Spence's autobiography *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Spence's work is significant because it offers so many points of identification, 'our problematic relationship with our mothers, lovers, sexuality, ageing bodies

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<sup>437</sup> Paula Farrance, 'Transgenerational dialogues with Jo Spence about class and gender in the mother-daughter sphere: drawing as the site of transformation from feminist generation to genealogy' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2011), p. 15.

<sup>438</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 162.

and ultimately death itself: with all that is repressed in our culture, that which is unspeakable and invisible'.<sup>439</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1990, Spence wrote an article for the US photography journal *Views*. In this she describes her process as engaging emotions, description and analysis:

I have written from inside my own history as a woman and as a cancer patient, while commenting upon that history as a photographer who employed critical practices from within psychoanalytic and discourse theory.<sup>440</sup>

This quotation reflects the unique configuration of resources on which Spence drew, in producing her photographic work. She was interested in her social, historical and subjective construction as a woman. By placing her diseased, scarred body in front of the camera, however, she also confronts the viewer with her subjective, embodied position that both undermines and resists the positions into which she is socialized. This work shows that, far from being a fixed inevitability, the position of women can be addressed and altered. Spence's work is driven by an interest in the structures that are difficult to visualize: the production of power relations through state institutions, for example, and the unconscious processes of psychoanalysis. It is on the level of the image that all this meets. Spence both investigates and challenges the photographic image as being central to her positioning within the relations of power. This is evident through the work with which I began—that of *The Hackney Flashers*—in which the group confronted the relationship of women and work under consumer capitalism, at the level of representation. It is also evident in the work with which I ended—*The Picture of Health?*—which uses the camera to investigate the politics of healthcare. Likewise Spence's process-driven work is enacted through *Beyond the Family Album*, which agitates the seemingly neutral family album. In the course of making these works, Spence came up against the relationship between her lived experience as a woman and as a photographer, encountering questions of power and of visibility that were specific to her classed and gendered experience.

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<sup>439</sup> Roberta McGrath, 'Putting Myself in the Picture', *Ten* 8, 25 (1987), 71.

<sup>440</sup> Spence, 'Identity and Cultural Production', p. 129.

Her challenge to the question of documentary realism is directly related to her experience of being a woman. At the same time, it is through the camera that she finds the tools with which to resist her psycho-social positioning as woman.

‘Feminising Photography’ can be read through the journey of the photographic practices outlined in this chapter. Spence co-founded The Hackney Flashes as a result of coming to see the limits of the worker photography movement in reflecting women’s experiences. The specific experience of taking photographs of women in factories had a determining effect on Spence. By acknowledging her specific feelings of shame and embarrassment prompted by the memories of her mother working in a factory, Spence turned the camera away from other people towards herself. This subjective moment led to an analysis of what would appear to be the most subjective of all photographs: Spence’s family album. Finally, a photographic documentation of Spence’s own body within the regime of orthodox medicine produced in Spence a knowledge of the way in which the medical institution fragmented the body through the use of photographic technology. By seeing these images she was able to understand her own loss of control. Spence thus went on to create new more positive representations that documented her journey to take back that control through the process of alternative medicine and self-responsibility.

At the end of her ‘political, personal and photographic autobiography’ *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Spence transcribes a series of questions that came up in conversation with audiences during her touring retrospective exhibition *The Review of Work*. The first of these questions relates back to where I began this chapter, asking, ‘do you see yourself as an artist?’ Her answer is as follows:

When I was a mature student at the Polytechnic of Central London on an arts degree course, we had lots of lectures about the history of art as a result of which I decided I was a photographer and not an artist. If sometimes it helps me to get a small grant by calling myself an artist, then of course I will. I finally called myself an educational photographer, whatever people think that means, as a way out of the problem. Then there is the other word ‘feminist’ that gets tacked on, i.e. feminism as a style of photography, and one could spend the next hundred years trying to explain that it isn’t a style but to do with a body of ideas. Although I am a feminist and a socialist I am not a feminist or socialist photographer because I don’t think you can talk about photography in those terms.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 162.

This indicates the misreadings that Spence encountered during her own lifetime. She was not an artist producing work that was stylistically similar to other work by those practitioners who identified as ‘feminist’. Instead she was a feminist and socialist who used photography as a space through which to become conscious of the way in which class exploitation and sexual oppression is produced through representations and to find a way to intervene in and challenge those representations. It was through an engagement with questions of power, subjectivity and representation that Jo Spence was ‘feministing’ photography, thereby showing how photography could become a site for feminist inquiry. The result was the production of new images that were critical, subversive, transgressive and radical. Her images presented bodies that were not usually seen within art galleries, within advertising or within family albums. They upset the status quo and they reached out to those who are not usually addressed through images.

Through a close reading of the exhibitions that were staged at The Pavilion from 1983–1985, I have shown that Spence’s practice went far beyond the accepted subjects of art, addressing the lived experiences of working women, which were not represented within the daily record. Beyond the themes of her work, however, Spence also sought to upturn the relationship between the creator and spectator, showing, in her own words ‘that the camera can be reappropriated’.<sup>442</sup> She performed this reappropriation while also staging her positionality as a working-class woman. In doing so she reached out to other working-class women. This, in turn, determined the way in which Spence produced and presented her work. Much of Spence’s photo-textual work was produced as cheap panels, mounted on board and laminated for durability and portability, a fact that is easy to miss in the commercial gallery prints that have enlarged her work (See Figure 4.5). Spence sums this up in relation to her mode of presentation:

The whole idea of blowing something up and putting a frame round it is anathema to me, and the idea of transporting frames from one space to another is nonsense in political terms. A photographer colleague said you should be able to put an exhibition in the post if you really want to circulate it.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 209.

<sup>443</sup> Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 205.



Spence showed her work in major galleries of art—notably through participation in the Hayward Gallery's *Three Perspectives on Photography* exhibition. In this participation her work reveals the effect of a feminist practice that pushed forward a new, more socially and politically engaged definition of photography within the spaces that defined the terms of art. At the same time, Spence also challenged ideas about where art should be seen by circulating her work outside the formal gallery. Part of her project was committed to opening up and contributing to the kinds of spaces that privileged accessibility and democracy, a commitment that was rarely evident in the major public galleries.<sup>444</sup> These included community spaces, libraries, town halls and spaces of education in London but also across the country—in cities like Leeds, Nottingham and Newcastle—most of which have since been shut down, formalized, scaled-up or turned into income generators for local authorities. The Pavilion was one of these spaces.

By closely reading the political-aesthetic issues that arise in Spence's work, it is evident that Spence did not show at The Pavilion as a secondary space. Rather the aims of The Pavilion closely aligned with her desire to intervene in the categories of photography—both those formal, stylistic categories associated with modernism and the more accepted political categories of documentary photography. Where the previous chapter revealed the alignment between the theoretical and artistic projects, which brought together questions of the image and sexual difference, Jo Spence's work can be read as 'Feministing Photography' in a different sense. Her work, while informed by feminist theory, can be read as a type of feminist photographic activism that sought to address social politics by staging her embodied experience of the world as it is classed and gendered under capitalism. An engagement with Spence's work arguably had a major impact on The Pavilion's approach. Reports from a meeting of The Pavilion committee in June 1985 include the following statement:

Planning after Oct 1985: It was agreed that exhibitions should not be a priority, as there are limits as to the usefulness of using even contextualized shows, to increase an audiences' understanding and enjoyment of photography. Also feminist photography in terms of its production is under severe pressure in the present financial climate, and

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<sup>444</sup> During *Three Perspectives on Photography*, working-class women were actively encouraged to visit the gallery. Crèche facilities were provided during one of the public events for the first time in the Hayward Gallery's history.

more energy is needed to produce the new work we wish to exhibit. A new strategy will be developed over the winter months working with a specific target group. This is still under discussion.<sup>445</sup>

Read through the lens of the Arts Council reports analyzed in Chapter Two, this quotation could evidence the YAA's judgment that the organization 'lacked direction and energy'. Read in relation to the exhibitions, however, and Jo Spence's work in particular, I argue that it reflects a productive desire to mobilize the work beyond the gallery walls.

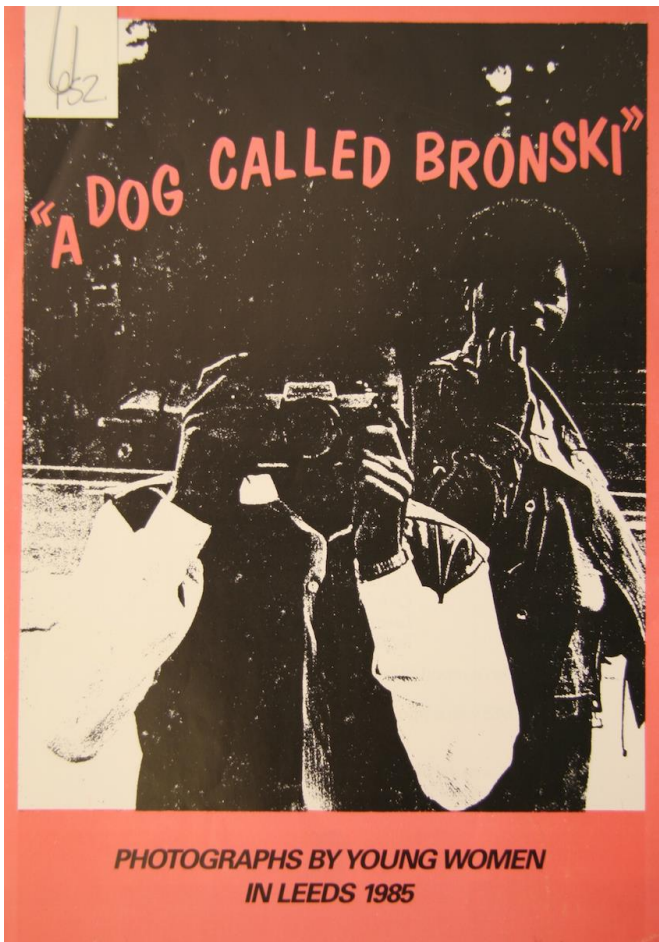


Figure 4.18, Poster for *A Dog Called Bronski*, 3–26 October 1985. Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion

Indeed, from 3–26 October 1985, following the close of Spence's exhibition *The Picture of Health?*, The Pavilion put on an exhibition titled *A Dog Called Bronski?* (Figure 4.18), which showed photographs made by young girls in Leeds. This was the beginning of a program that opened up opportunities for women and girls in Leeds to access the means of production through The Pavilion's darkroom. In the following chapter I explore the way in which this more

<sup>445</sup> The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, unpublished minutes of the Management Committee meeting, 11 June 1985, FAN/PAV.

activist dimension of ‘Feministing Photography’—coupled with a third dimension of practice that was exploring the entanglements of race and gender— inspired an outreach program at The Pavilion that transformed the relations between the work on show and the people for whom that work was made.

## CHAPTER 5 – TESTIMONY: THREE BLACK WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS

Photography has been used against us for decades by anthropologists, in pornography, in fashion, in police files and in art books to negate us, degrade us and erode our memory. Now is the time to use, photography can bring about change.<sup>446</sup>

*The Place is Here*

In February 2017, I went to visit a third exhibition as part of the process of my research. The exhibition was *The Place is Here*, presented at Nottingham Contemporary from 4 February–30 April 2017 and curated in collaboration with the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. It was part of a wider recovery of the Black Arts Movement in Britain in the 1980s.<sup>447</sup> *The Place is Here* included the work of several women artists who have, since the early 1980s, explored their identities, positions and specific conditions of oppression, as black people and as women. Artists included Brenda Agard (1961–2012), Martina Attille (b. 1959), Sutapa Biswas (b. 1962), Sonia Boyce (b. 1962), Joy Gregory (b. 1959), Mona Hatoum (b. 1952), Claudette Johnson (b. 1959), Pratibha Parmar (b. 1955), Ingrid Pollard (b. 1953), Marlene Smith (b.1964) and Maud Sulter (1960–2008) who showed together, in various configurations, throughout the 1980s. Seeing *The Place is Here* was important for my research because there was a strong presence of photography, notably work by artists Joy Gregory, Ingrid Pollard, Marlene Smith and Maud Sulter. These works were presented in their historical specificity through the presence of accompanying archival material, including journals, news reports and letters.

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<sup>446</sup> Lubaina Himid, 'Introduction', in *Testimony: Three Black Women Photographers*, ed. by The Pavilion Women's Photography Center (Leeds: The Pavilion, 1986), p. 1. London, Goldsmiths, Women's Art Library, Women of Color Index.

<sup>447</sup> This exhibition was intentionally organized to coincide with two other exhibitions that highlighted the contributions of one particular artist—Lubaina Himid—to the history of contemporary art in Britain. These exhibitions were *Lubaina Himid: Navigation Charts* at Spike Island (20 January–26 March 2017) and *Lubaina Himid: Invisible Strategies* at Modern Art Oxford (21 January–30 April 2017). The significance of Lubaina Himid's work was further highlighted when, on 5 December 2017, it was announced that she had won the Turner Prize. This celebration of Himid in 2017 can be read as the result of her long struggle to visibilize black women artists. Following her many major outputs as artist and curator over more than thirty years, the art world has finally been forced to recognize an artist who has been 'overlooked and undervalued for most of her career'—see Mark Brown, 'Lubaina Himid becomes oldest woman to win Turner Prize', *The Guardian*, 5 Dec 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/dec/05/lubaina-himid-becomes-oldest-artist-to-win-turner-prize>> [accessed 13 May 2018].

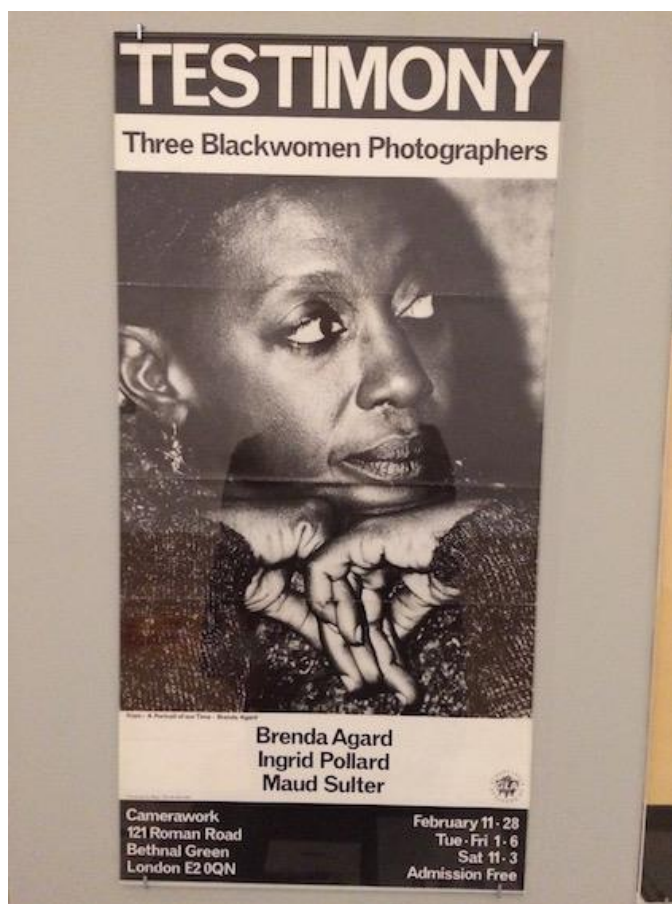


Figure 5.1, Poster for the Camerawork version of *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers* (Exhibition view—Archival display at *The Place is Here* at Nottingham Contemporary) Image taken by the author.

Within these archival displays there was one particular poster on show, advertising an exhibition titled *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers* at Camerawork, London (Figure 5.1) that featured work by artists Brenda Agard, Ingrid Pollard and Maud Sulter. The Camerawork show took place in 1987 but the poster matched one from The Pavilion archive, which makes known the fact that the exhibition was *first* exhibited at The Pavilion, from 10 June–2 August 1986. The fact that it was the London exhibition that was evidenced in Nottingham is significant because it reveals the under-visibility of regional organizations as supporters, and indeed *initiators*, in the history of radical arts activity. Thus while *The Place is Here* has been received as *the* retrospective of the Black Arts Movement, there is more to be said about the development of black women's art in relation to the regional context and specifically in relation to The Pavilion project.

In this final chapter I analyze *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers* [*Testimony*] as my third case study from The Pavilion's historic exhibitions program. By investigating a set of archival and theoretical resources, I re-construct the frame of *Testimony*.

Through this, I show the way in which the terms of feminism were being produced and transformed through artistic investigations into black feminist subjectivity. While photography has been subject to critical discourse in relation to the debates of the Black British Art Movement and notions of black consciousness, the take-up of photography by black women artists has not been addressed sufficiently in relation to feminist discourse. Through a close reading of work by Brenda Agard, Ingrid Pollard and Maud Sulter who showed in *Testimony*, I shall I enlarge further upon the concept of ‘Feministing Photography’, reading the significance of the *Testimony* exhibition as catalyzing, within The Pavilion’s program, a specific focus on the entanglements of race and gender, which both also intersect with class.

***Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers***

Testimony: its meaning is to give evidence in support of a fact or statement, often in a court of law. It is also used to describe an open declaration or profession by an individual, a means of bearing witness to something or someone. Thus testimony can be both a statement taken as evidential truth and an expression of a person’s individual experience or subjectivity. The photograph can support the production of testimony in both these senses. It can be deployed in court, as legal evidence or truth-telling device but it can also be used in the creation of a personal story as in the family photograph or the holiday snap: it says *I was there*. I am interested in the fact that the photograph was used by black women artists in the 1980s as a means of complicating these two classical notions of photography as 1) a truth-telling device or 2) a profession or expression of a personal experience. Within the work I am addressing in this chapter, these two aspects of photography coalesce. I begin my reading of *Testimony* with a focus on Ingrid Pollard’s work, through which the question of the photograph as object of testimony is raised and made complex, addressing assumptions about evidence, truth, naturalness, freedom and expression in relation to notions of presence, belonging and Otherness.

When I spoke with Ingrid Pollard about her participation in The Pavilion’s program she had a clear memory of being at, and photographing, the opening of an exhibition of Maud Sulter’s work—*Sphinx*—at The Pavilion in 1987, addressed later in this chapter. Until

prompted, however, she had forgotten about her own presentation at The Pavilion as part of *Testimony*. During our conversation she said that the work exhibited was most likely an earlier version of her 1988 series *Pastoral Interlude*, which now belongs to the Victoria and Albert Museum photography collection and was prominent within *The Place is Here*. In subsequent email correspondence with Ingrid Pollard, she stated that her memories of the exhibition are too hazy to be of use to me.<sup>448</sup> There are no images from *Testimony* in The Pavilion archive, simply the single poster I referenced earlier. In the course of my research, however, I found a review of the Camerawork installment of *Testimony*, which was written by Maxine Walker in 1987. In this review, there is an image credited to Ingrid Pollard, which is titled *In an Urban Garden*. This photograph depicts a single tree within a circle of high-rise tower blocks, which relates to a theme to which the artist has returned throughout her career: the relationship between representations of the city and the countryside. Despite this published evidence, the image does not exist anywhere on Pollard's website, which presents an archive of the artist's work since she began art making in the 1980s. Here, I have a challenge. I have one small reproduction of a photograph that does not exist in any collection and that is not documented in either The Pavilion or the artist's archive. I have an exhibition that is only vaguely remembered, by the one exhibiting artist who is still alive.<sup>449</sup> How then to proceed in the face of this fragmentary piece of history? Is it possible for me to say anything at all about this work? I have chosen to grasp onto Pollard's half-memory of showing an earlier version of *Pastoral Interlude* and to follow the argument that this work (for which she is now most well-known) was developed *through* the images exhibited at The Pavilion. *In an Urban Garden* is not part of the final five images that form what now exists as the *Pastoral Interlude* but its thematic relation, coupled with Pollard's account, suggests it may well have formed part of the research and development that culminated in *Pastoral Interlude*. Therefore, in the following section I proceed, somewhat speculatively, to read Ingrid Pollard's contribution to *Testimony* by performing a close reading of the work *Pastoral Interlude*, which I saw in *The Place is Here*, and which I can reasonably take as the

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<sup>448</sup> Ingrid Pollard, unpublished email to the author, 8 July 2017.

<sup>449</sup> Brenda Agard died in 2012 and Maud Sulter in 2008.

final realization of what was shown in The Pavilion exhibition, the precise content of which remains unknown.

### ***Pastoral Interlude and the (non)-documentary***

Ingrid Pollard's *Pastoral Interlude* (1988) is an arresting series of five photographic images set in unspecified parts of the English countryside. The photographs were originally shot on color film, then printed as black and white silver prints and, finally, hand-tinted to create a more vivid coloration. Ingrid Pollard told me that the photographer Roberta McGrath undertook this tinting. McGrath studied on the MA Social History of Art at Leeds in 1982–83 and also took part in The Pavilion's public program.<sup>450</sup> The tinting achieves a heightened romanticized aesthetic, typical of the pastoral landscape in painting and photography. In a talk I attended by Pollard at Nottingham Contemporary, the artist expressed her feelings of frustration that the specific aesthetic effect and techniques that she has used in her work have often been overlooked in readings of her work, in favor of a focus on its political themes.<sup>451</sup> It is important to stress, therefore, that the specific ways in which Pollard works on and with photography should be read as being part of the work's political effect.

Within each of the five landscape photographs, there is a man or a woman, captured in a pose of work or leisure. Underneath each of the photographs is a typed caption, semi-poetic reflections on the perceived polarities of the urban and rural landscapes as well as notions of Englishness, ownership and identity. Through her text and image configurations, Pollard's work reflects on the fact that the dominant image of idealized Britain is an image in which black people are rendered absent or outsiders. Pollard disrupts the idealization of the English landscape by bringing to the surface the violence of the Atlantic Slave Trade, which led to the accumulation of capital for England's bourgeois landowners. Thus, Pollard's depictions of black subjects within the landscape prompt the viewer to acknowledge the way in which the imagining of the rural idyll excludes black experience. In a 1988 review of *Pastoral Interlude*

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<sup>450</sup> When I spoke with her at Nottingham Contemporary (8 March 2017), Ingrid Pollard suggested that the work shown at *Testimony* may have included pre-tinted version of the *Pastoral Interlude* photographs.

<sup>451</sup> Ingrid Pollard, unpublished talk at Nottingham Contemporary, 8 March 2017.



for *Aperture Magazine*, Ceylan Tawadros writes that, ‘by confronting this idealized Britain with the reality of the Black experience, these images challenged the social and political framework within which such concepts as ‘naturalness’ and ‘Otherness’ are constructed’.<sup>452</sup> Indeed, Pollard shows the concept of the natural to be a construction, but a construction that is continually subject to denial.



Figure 5.2, Ingrid Pollard, *Pastoral Interlude* (detail), 1988 Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Ingrid Pollard’s interest in myth-making is underscored through the tension between the documentary and non-documentary at work within the series. While there are many layers of meaning within the images, as well as the vivid ‘hyper-real’ color quality that I described above, these qualities exist in tension with a certain banality that one would associate with a documentary social-realist practice. Thus, unlike traditional depictions of the landscape, the artist’s compositions both reference and resist the picturesque. The first image in the series

<sup>452</sup> Ceylan Tawadros, ‘Ingrid Pollard: Pastoral Interludes’, *Aperture Magazine*, 113, (1988) 41–46, (p. 41). (It is my assumption that ‘Ceylan Tawadros is the author who is elsewhere cited as Gilane Tawadros and was a prominent supporter of black women artists, through her art criticism and curatorship).

(Figure 5.2) is a low-plane, close-up photograph, cropped so that a barbed-wire fence, dividing field from road, appears prominently in the foreground. A woman, dressed in walking clothes, is seated, looking away from the camera, on a seat of dry bracken. Her back rests against the fence, the rolling hills in the background. The text beneath it reads:

‘Pastoral interlude’ ... its as if the Black experience is only lived within an urban environment. I thought I liked the Lake District, where I wandered lonely as a Black face in a sea of white. A visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of dread ...

While the inclusion of the fence, as an aspect of scenery that would usually be cropped out, has a documentary quality, it also exceeds the documentary. The fence in the photograph is a signifier of the land as a space of industry and production, rendering as a falsehood the notion that the countryside is a natural, unchanging space, outside of the relations of production. Within this particular image, however, it has another level of signification, in evoking the exclusion or restriction of black feminine subjectivity. Added to the artist’s disruption of the pastoral scene and the ambivalence towards the documentary as strategy, is the fact that Ingrid Pollard’s subjects are not actors—they are people known to her already. In her public introduction to the work when I went to visit *The Place is Here*, the artist revealed that the woman pictured in the photographs is a person with whom she actually enjoyed walking in the countryside, the man photographed holding a net in the river was, in reality, employed to work in the British waterways.<sup>453</sup> In this sense, the works are both documentary evidence of the black presence within the countryside and, more specifically that of Pollard, and her friends.

In 1984, *Ten 8* magazine published an article by cultural theorist and historian Stuart Hall, in which he discusses the contradictory role of the liberal photojournalistic magazine *Picture Post*, in both challenging and reinforcing stereotypes of black people.<sup>454</sup> *Picture Post* was important for casting light on aspects of English life that were invisible within other media. In relation to the migration of people from England’s former colonies, most media communications, at least before the borders were closed, constructed a certain style of imagery

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<sup>453</sup> Ingrid Pollard, unpublished talk at Nottingham Contemporary, 8 March 2017.

<sup>454</sup> Interestingly, Hall’s work inspired Jo Spence to make her own analysis of the representation of working women in *Picture Post*, as referenced in the preceding chapter.

focusing, Hall points out, on optimism and ‘innocence’. *Picture Post*, however, sought to reform this view by creating humanist images that addressed the social ‘problem’ of migration—the ‘problem’ of housing large numbers of migrants, for example, and the ‘problem’ of mixed marriage. Hall argues that the social realist images of *Picture Post*, which sought to present the ‘true picture’ of the day, *did* show up difficult social problems, which appealed to a humanist concern. In its appeal to realism, however, *Picture Post* rendered its subjects natural, rather than as part of a set of social forces that could be transformed.<sup>455</sup> These images, he argues, ‘could get no further in revealing to us the forces at work creating these situations because it had no understanding of social contradiction, no language for stripping away the surface “naturalism” in which the problem appeared to present itself, no way of revealing the contradictory and oppositional forces creating it, or the conflicts out of which radical change or transformation might be generated’.<sup>456</sup>

Ingrid Pollard’s work, on the other hand, reveals the problem of ‘the natural’ by experimenting with the new significations produced through the juxtaposition of her documentary images with text. Together, these images address the forces of violence and oppression on which Englishness, and the so-called natural English landscape, have been built—forces that are not visible within the traditional conventions of landscape photography. Thus *Pastoral Interlude* also makes the viewer conscious of the way in which stereotypes constitute how we understand the English ideal. In adding to the visual evidence of black people within the rural environment, however, Pollard’s images also change the visual record.

In his *Ten 8* article, Hall makes a second point about the *Picture Post* images that relate to the affirmation of the documentary mode that I read in *Pastoral Interlude*. He uses, as an example, social documentary photographs of the Color Bar being enacted in post-war Britain. He argues that while many of these images are now seen as ‘over-typical’ and ‘over-typified’—for example, the image of a sign reading ‘Rooms to let. No colored men’—at the same time these kinds of *Picture Post* images were still, historically, meaningful. Those images could not make visible the conditions that produced the racism of the Color Bar. Nonetheless, Hall argues

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<sup>455</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Reconstruction Work’, *Ten 8*, 16 (1984), pp. 2–9 (p. 7).

<sup>456</sup> Hall, ‘Reconstruction Work’, p. 7.

that, ‘in that conjecture, documenting it, putting one’s finger on it, showing it going on, bringing it to the surface of the collective consciousness (including that of other Blacks who may have expected things to be different) *mattered*’, contributing to the politics of resistance that followed this period.<sup>457</sup> I am reading Hall’s text in relation to Pollard’s work in order to argue that there is a particular necessity for the photograph to attest to a presence that has been consistently written out of British history. I am also arguing that *Pastoral Interlude* exceeds the photograph’s indexical possibilities through the use of vivid tonality and textual annotation, which emphasize the construction of the photographic image.



Figure 5.3, Ingrid Pollard, *Pastoral Interlude* (detail), 1988. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

... a lot of what MADE ENGLAND GREAT is founded on the blood of slavery, the sweat of working people – an industrial REVOLUTION without the Atlantic Triangle

*Pastoral Interlude* evidences black people as active producers of, and visitors to, the British countryside. The work also addresses the black presence as it is historically embedded within the English landscape. The artist confronts the English complicity in the slave trade explicitly through the third image in the series (Figure 5.3), which shows a man stood knee deep in a river, holding a fishing net into the water. In this image, partly through its timeless

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<sup>457</sup> Hall, ‘Reconstruction Work’, p. 9.

coloration, the contemporary British landscape is metonymically transformed into the land of the slave plantations. The text beneath the image reads, ‘a lot of what MADE ENGLAND GREAT is founded on the blood of slavery, the sweat of working people ... an Industrial REVOLUTION without the Atlantic Triangle’. Through this image-text configuration, Pollard reminds the viewer that the rolling hills and vales of the English countryside were established through the profits of industrialists, many of who had major stakes in the slave economy. Capitalists bought land through the profits from goods produced through the enslavement of people and they made profits through the farming, mining and maintenance of this land by wage laborers. Thus, the history of capitalism and imperialism meet in the artwork, which falsifies the assumed division between the urban-industrial-productive and the rural-pastoral-transcendent and relates experiences of racism to those of class oppression.



... Searching for sea-shells; waves lap my wellington boots, carrying lost souls of brothers & sisters released over the ship side...

Figure 5.4, Ingrid Pollard, *Pastoral Interlude* (detail), 1988. Courtesy of the Victorian and Albert Museum.

The fourth image-text configuration (Figure 5.4) continues to contend the Romantic notion of freedom and transcendence. In this image, a woman is pictured side-on, gazing out across the hills. The caption beneath reads, ‘searching for sea shells; waves lap my wellington boots, carrying lost brothers and sisters released over the ship side’. For Pollard, the sea—an eternal source of inspiration for artists and poets—cannot be separated from the weight of



history. A site of leisure and contemplation, it is also the site of enslavement, of forced uprooting and displacement. The reference to ‘brothers and sisters released over the ship side’ implicitly speaks of the 1781 *Zong* massacre, in which a Liverpool-based company authorized the drowning of the enslaved people its ship was carrying, in order to profit from the insurance it had taken out on people as cargo. The legal disputes that resulted from this mass murder stimulated the abolitionist movement in Britain, notably through the work of Olaudah Equiano, a freedman, living in London, who was a prominent campaigner for the anti-slave trade movement.<sup>458</sup>



Figure 5.5, Ingrid Pollard, Pastoral Interlude (detail), 1988. Courtesy of the Victorian and Albert Museum.

The trauma of history is brought back into the present-day through the use of the personal pronoun in the final panel, in which a man is pictured in the river, in the act of raising his net.

The photograph is captioned as follows:

... death is the bottom line. The owners of these fields; these trees and sheep want me off their GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND. No Trespass, they want me DEAD. A slow death through eyes that slide away from me.

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<sup>458</sup> Anita Rupprecht, “‘A Very Uncommon Case’: Representations of the *Zong* and the British Campaign to Abolish the Slave Trade”, *The Journal of Legal History*, 28 (2007), 329–246.

Through this image-text configuration Pollard connects the denial of history in which black people were enslaved and murdered, and the continual denial of the embodied experiences, presence and subjectivity of black people in the present-day.

Having shown the class/race relation in these works through Pollard's focus on the connection between the Atlantic Slave Trade and the industrialization of Britain, how do the images relate to questions of gender as well as race and class? How can we read Ingrid Pollard's work in relation to a black feminist consciousness? *Pastoral Interlude* disrupts the binary opposition between the documentary and the constructed, fictional image as well as the binary of belonging and unbelonging. Her work also complicates the notion of, on the one hand, a unified black identity, and an identity that recognizes difference. In addressing the history of the Atlantic Slave Trade and of colonialist violence, Pollard's work presents solidarity with a diaspora experience. Pollard herself migrated with her parents to London from Guyana as a child. In his text 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', Hall addresses the category of black Caribbean identity, which is pertinent to Pollard's experience. He writes that the formation of this unified identity was produced through the enforced uprooting of people from across Africa into the economy of slavery, which cut people off from their past.<sup>459</sup> This unified identity, he argues, need not be about essentializing Africa as an unchanging, singular location or origin but rather about recognizing that there is a shared experience in the traumatic erasure of origins of people from all across Africa that unifies people from different places, language, custom etc. without erasing those differences.

Nonetheless, while Pollard's work speaks to this historic diasporic experience, it also speaks from the place of 'I', as in 'feeling *I* don't belong' or '*I* wandered lonely as a Black face in a sea of white' [my emphasis]. Kobena Mercer has written that, 'the innocent notion of Blackness as a unitary and undifferentiated identity has been radically questioned in the work of Black women and Black gay men'.<sup>460</sup> He argues that the 'doubleness' of the 'disadvantages' that are faced by black people on the grounds of sexuality and gender, 'interrupts common-

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<sup>459</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Cultural, Differences*, ed. by Jonathon Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–237 (p. 227).

<sup>460</sup> Kobena Mercer, 'Dark & Lovely: Notes on Black Gay Image-Making', *Ten* 8, 2 (1991), 79–85 (p. 79).

sense essentialism in favor of a relational and dialogic view of the constructed character of any social identity'.<sup>461</sup> Cultural historian, Hazel V. Carby, also addressed Mercer's notion of the 'doubleness' of disadvantage. During her doctoral study at Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies, Carby wrote an essay titled 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood' (1982), in which she argues that the task of black women is not simply to challenge their visibility within feminist discourse, but to transform the central categories of that discourse. She argues that:

When white feminists emphasize patriarchy alone, we want to redefine the term and make it a more complex concept. Racism ensures that black men do not have the same relations to patriarchal/capitalist hierarchies as white men.<sup>462</sup>

In her now-famous paper, 'Age, Race, Class and Sex' (1980), Audre Lorde shows the necessity for the women's movement to recognize the inherent privilege that comes from being white. Arguing that unity is not the same as homogeneity, Lorde writes that, 'ignoring the differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the most important threat to the mobilization of women's power'.<sup>463</sup> Within her work, Lorde writes evocatively about the violence that confronts black women, a violence that can be strongly felt within Pollard's images. She writes, 'you fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the streets, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying'.<sup>464</sup> A caption in the fourth panel of *Pastoral Interlude* speaks of 'the waves which lap my wellington boots'. Read alongside the image of a black woman in 1980s walking clothes, alone within the countryside, the viewer feels her embodied subjectivity, her fears and dreams. And yet, the caption states that those waves carry the lost souls of the narrator's brothers and sisters. Thus this individual woman's experience of fear, of outsidership, of otherness, of isolation, is rooted in a historic, shared struggle in which one grouping of people have been dominated by another grouping of people through the structuring

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<sup>461</sup> Mercer, p. 80.

<sup>462</sup> Hazel V. Carby, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Seventies Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 111.

<sup>463</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1984) p. 117.

<sup>464</sup> Lorde, p. 119.



of race. As Ceylan Tawadros argues—in reference to *Pastoral Interlude*—it is from the English landscape that the black woman, ‘doubly Other as both Black and female, is excluded’.<sup>465</sup>

While *Pastoral Interlude* repositions black bodies within the landscape in order to change the visual record, the artist also addresses the fragility of the self, which—as I look across the works in the *Testimony* exhibition—is a defining concern of black women’s art. The caption, ‘feeling I don’t belong’, or the photograph of a woman balancing on a wall beside a graveyard, evoke this fragility, the struggle to put together the self in the face of the fragmentation that arises from the historically situated experience of loss, isolation and invisibility. In this sense, Ingrid Pollard’s work addresses Jean Fisher’s statement that ‘the right to be considered a historical subject is yet to be realized universally’.<sup>466</sup> Gilane Tawadros argues that, in the 1980s, contemporary black artists were questioning the tenets of Western historiography, notably what she describes as ‘the privileged concepts of tradition, evolution, source and origin’.<sup>467</sup> She argues that what distinguishes black women artists in the 1980s is ‘the assertion of history and historiography unambiguously within the frame of cultural reference’.<sup>468</sup> This assertion of history is present within *Pastoral Interlude*, in which Pollard borrows ironically from earlier tropes of 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape painting, travel photography as well as colonial imagery, to question the idealization of the landscape by confronting it with the historic reality of the black experience.<sup>469</sup>

### **Brenda Agard: (In)Visibility**

The historic reality of the black experience is also addressed within Brenda Agard’s work. According to Maxine Walker’s aforementioned review of *Testimony*, Agard exhibited two works in the exhibition: one titled *Visibility* and the other *A Portrait of our Time* (dates of works unknown). In the small booklet that accompanied *Testimony*, Agard describes her work as follows:

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<sup>465</sup> Ceylan Tawadros, ‘Ingrid Pollard: Pastoral Interludes’, p. 41.

<sup>466</sup> Jean Fisher, ‘Dialogues’, in *Shades of Black*, ed. by David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp.167–196 (p. 169).

<sup>467</sup> Gilane Tawadros, ‘Beyond the Boundary. The work of three Black women artists in Britain’, *Third Text*, 3 (1989) 121-150 (p. 131).

<sup>468</sup> Gilane Tawadros, ‘Beyond the Boundary’, p. 133.

<sup>469</sup> Ceylan Tawadros, ‘Ingrid Pollard: Pastoral Interludes’, *Aperture Magazine*, 3 (1989), 113.

My work is largely about the recording and documentation of events, which our people have been involved in. Why the need to record? It is important that we have records of how it was and how it is. It is important that we have a record that does not distort the truths.<sup>470</sup>

As I write this chapter, the question of visibility resonates on two levels. The driving theme of *Testimony* is the question of creating new images of black women that counter stereotypes, convey complexity of experience and address difference. As I have argued in relation to Ingrid Pollard's work, however, this question of visibility also reflects back on the current moment in which I undertake this research. Brenda Agard died in 2012. Despite her active contribution to the Black Arts Movement in the 1980s, she died in near-obscure. In his book *Black Artists in British Art: A History from 1950 to the Present* Eddie Chambers acknowledges Agard's 'stellar contributions' to the Black Arts Movement but observes that later, it was as if these were insignificant or unimportant.<sup>471</sup> He argues that for each step black artists have taken towards visibility, this has been invariably accompanied by an entrenchment of challenges or new difficulties.<sup>472</sup> Unlike Ingrid Pollard, Brenda Agard is no longer alive to talk about her work. Her estate is protected by her family, rather than by a public institution or commercial gallery that would ensure her practice continued to circulate in the world. Aside from one or two brief catalogue entries, Agard did not publish on her work in her lifetime and her work does not belong to public collections. I have seen one image of her work—from the series *Portrait of Our Time*. It is printed on the poster for *Testimony* (Figure 5.1) and was included as a 6"x4" print within *The Place is Here*.<sup>473</sup> The virtual disappearance of Brenda Agard thus speaks to the challenging archival task with which I am faced. This involves piecing together a period in the history of art in which—as Gilane Tawadros has noted—British cultural institutions were finally beginning to reflect the complexity of British society, only for that moment to be

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<sup>470</sup> Brenda Agard, 'Testimony', *Testimony: Three Black Women Photographers*, pp. 2–3 (p. 1).

<sup>471</sup> Eddie Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art: A History from 1950 to the Present* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014) p. 5.

<sup>472</sup> Chambers, p. 5.

<sup>473</sup> The curators of *The Place is Here* were not able to negotiate loans of work by Brenda Agard from her estate. *Portrait of our Time* – the 6x4" print pictured on the poster for *Testimony* was, however, included in *The Place is Here* as part of Marlene Smith's work *Art History*, which comprises four photographs made by other artists.

replaced—in the following decade—by the YBAs, the Blairite packaging of ‘Cool Britannia’ and the dismissal of what was perceived to be the outmoded notion of ‘identity politics’.<sup>474</sup>

How do I write about Brenda Agard’s work when I can only find one image from the two bodies of work included in *The Pavilion* exhibition? I do not wish to offer up a reading of her artwork based purely on conjecture. However, there *is* a single image, which is sufficient to raise questions and to make some speculations. The photograph is a black and white portrait of an unnamed black woman. It is a close-up, low-plane image, which shows only her face and the top of her body. The woman’s hands are folded under her chin and she is looking to the left of her, to something happening beyond the frame, the right side of her face turned slightly towards the camera. She is dressed in a knitted jumper, an earring in her ear. This is, by all appearances, an ordinary woman in the 1980s, captured in thought, listening and watching another.

Describing this piece, in her review of *Testimony*, Maxine Walker writes that the series, *Portrait of Our Time* (of which this single image is part), is:

A multifaceted portrait showing Black women engaged in conversation, thought, song and with their children. From whatever walk of life there is something in this for all Black women.<sup>475</sup>

The remarkability of this single image appears to be its unremarkability. What do I mean by this? It is significant for the fact that this is a black woman depicted not as a figure of exoticism, nor of the ethnographic gaze, nor as a passive victim, nor a criminal, nor as an object of sexual fantasy. Instead, the woman is pictured as an individual subject—thinking and listening, an active agent in her time. It is important to consider the specific significance of this not-so-simple artistic gesture in relation to black feminist politics. Writing in 1982, Hazel V. Carby argues that the stereotypical images of black women need to be considered in their difference to the stereotyping of white women, not least because those stereotypes have, at times, been perpetuated by ‘progressive’ feminists who have reproduced media ‘horror’ stories about, for example, arranged marriages, as well as generalized notions of ‘Third-World’ pre-capitalist

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<sup>474</sup> Gilane Tawadros, ‘A Case of Mistaken Identity’, in *Shades of Black*, pp. 123–132 (pp 124–125).

<sup>475</sup> Maxine Walker, ‘Review: Testimony’, *Creative Camera*, 4 (1987), 34.

customs of genital mutilation and foot-binding.<sup>476</sup> There are sexist practices that exist in black societies as everywhere in the world, but Carby's point is that white feminists need to recognize their own contribution to myth-making as well as the fact that colonialism tried to disrupt or destroy kinship systems that often allowed more power and autonomy to women than those of the colonizing nations.<sup>477</sup> In the catalogue for the exhibition *The Thin Black Line* (1985) Brenda Agard writes that the strategy of documenting in her work responded to an understanding that 'Western Society's stereotyped images are how they believe we are—not how we believe we are'.<sup>478</sup> The impact of her work is, she writes, 'that our children will have the true account for us—not just the lies perpetrated by western media'.<sup>479</sup> This relates to the point I raised earlier in relation to *Pastoral Interlude*—that the struggle to be subject, rather than object of discourse, has been the focus of a particularly intense struggle for black women that is located in the traumatic uprooting and shattering of subjecthood through the histories of enslavement and colonization that is not part of white women's history.

While the politics of Agard's work can be theorized through Carby's writing—which shows the way in which Euro-American feminism has often ignored the distinct struggles and concerns of black women's struggle—it is also necessary to understand this work in the context of the emerging Black Arts Movement. Kobena Mercer argues that there is an art-historical amnesia, which cannot relate black British or African American formations into that broader story of twentieth century art.<sup>480</sup> This amnesia is made more complex when it comes to the work of women artists who were subject to exclusion *within* the Black Arts Movement that was partly to do with a failure to recognize the politics of women's work. Lubaina Himid recently reflected on the difference *she* perceived between her experience, and the art she produced, and that of her peers who were men. She writes:

I've never made work that was strong in that political way, like Eddie Chambers or Keith Piper would make it about, which is the killing of black men on the streets every

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<sup>476</sup> Carby, p.114.

<sup>477</sup> Carby, p.121.

<sup>478</sup> Brenda Agard, Artist statement, *The Thin Black Line*, ed. by, Institute of Contemporary Arts (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>479</sup> Agard, Artist statement, p. 1.

<sup>480</sup> Kohena Mercer, 'Iconography after Identity', in *Shades of Black*, pp. 49–58.

day. I never made that kind of work because that wasn't my everyday experience. I make work much more about the missing gaps in the culture.<sup>481</sup>

Can I go further in understanding *Portrait of our Time*, and the politics of black women's work as it related to the everyday? In the next section, I address the formation of what is loosely referred to as the Black Women's Arts Movement. In doing so, I arrive at a fuller understanding of why the portrait of one individual woman in 1980s Britain can be read as a defining work of feminist politics.

### **The Formation of the Black Women's Art Movement**

The First National Black Art Convention, which took place in Wolverhampton on 28 October 1982, has been credited as the moment in which a loose grouping of black women artists formed a network with shared interests. The convention was organized by artists based in Wolverhampton, both men and women, who together formed an affiliation under the title the Blk Arts Group, showing together in various configurations from 1979 and throughout the 1980s. In 2011, to coincide with the exhibition *Thin Black Line(s)* at Tate Britain, a conversation took place between artist Lubaina Himid—who had curated the exhibition—artist Claudette Johnson and Tate curator Paul Goodwin. During this conversation, now online, the two artists discuss their memories of the 1982 convention. Johnson states that she remembers, 'strong questions coming up about whether my work could be identified as a black artist, as a black person and that started to split the conference'.<sup>482</sup> This memory relates specifically to the first paper of the day given by Rasheed Araeen, which was titled 'Art and Black Consciousness'. In this paper, Araeen argues that black art embodies the struggle for self-realization and assertion as equal human beings within a world in which the notion of blackness has been imposed upon people under colonialism as part of a structure of domination. Araeen's interest is in how art can express the condition of blackness in order to subvert its use as a

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<sup>481</sup> Rebecca Fulleylove, 'Artist Lubaina Himid on making visible the "invisible histories" of black artists', <<http://www.itsnicethat.com/features/lubaina-himid-modern-art-oxford-spike-island-nottingham-contemporary-300117>> [accessed 20 April 2017].

<sup>482</sup> Claudette Johnson, 'Late at Tate: Lubaina Himid, Claudette Johnson and Paul Goodwin on *Think Black Line(s)*' (Audio Recording), <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/late-tate-lubaina-himid-claudette-johnson-and-paul-goodwin-on-thin-black-lines>> [accessed 23 May 2018].

category of domination. He argues that ‘to be black is to be political’.<sup>483</sup> For Araeen, as expressed in the discussion following his paper, black art is distinct from art made by black people, just as art made by women should be read as distinct from art driven by a feminist politics.<sup>484</sup> The question that arose through the presentation by Claudette Johnson, against the backdrop of this paper, is whether her work expressed a black consciousness. She recalls the following event:

Someone in the audience (I think it was actually Merve Ross) stood up and said ‘well I think this discussion should continue and it seems to be mostly the women who want to hear about this discussion’ [...] And after further discussion we decided that there would be a vote on whether people wanted to continue discussing this in a separate space as a workshop or continue a whole conference discussion in that lecture theatre. And because I voted that we should have that discussion that had begun in the theatre I was, I suppose, seen to take the discussion out and effectively divide the conference because then the conference continued in that space, with whoever remained in that room and those of us who came out (black women, mostly black women), in fact entirely black and Asian women ... went into different spaces. And looking back I realize that there were lots of drawbacks to that—it wasn’t documented, the discussions that we had, we didn’t have microphones, it hadn’t been planned, a lot was lost that took place in the convention because that was recorded ...<sup>485</sup>

In Johnson’s partial recollection of this event, it is clear that there was something going on in her artwork that was felt by many of the women present at the conference to be of great importance, raising questions about what was felt to be a valid strategy in art-making in relation to black politics. Writing in 2005 about the decisive event, recounted above, and the subsequent erasure of her contribution, Lubaina Himid states with characteristic force that:

It was Claudette Johnson who decided to take the women at the Black Art Conference into another space, in order for us to engage with the issues most important to us. Unless I say it here, it will not be said. Stuart Hall never mentioned her. Rasheed Araeen did not talk about her. Keith Piper did not speak her name. Her presence in the BLK Art Group was pivotal. In visual terms, she said things about black women’s bodies, experiences, and aspirations that changed lives.<sup>486</sup>

Why is the intervention of Claudette Johnson at this specific event in Wolverhampton significant to the *Testimony* exhibition at The Pavilion? Her work is not photographic, she

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<sup>483</sup> Rasheed Araeen, ‘Art and Black Consciousness’, 1982 (Audio Recording).  
<<http://www.blkartgroup.info/82conference.html>> [accessed 23 May 2018].

<sup>484</sup> Araeen ‘Art and Black Consciousness’.

<sup>485</sup> Johnson, ‘Late at Tate’.

<sup>486</sup> Lubaina Himid, ‘Inside the Invisible: For/Getting Strategy’, in *Shades of Black*, pp. 41–47 (p. 43).

makes paintings and drawings. It does, however, have a resonance with the work of Brenda Agard, as well as Ingrid Pollard, in the sense that all three artists sought to address the constructed image of the black woman by depicting the embodied reality of individual black women's experiences. Both artists also locate the black woman's gaze as a site of resistance. In her book, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), bell hooks addresses what it means to 'both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back and at one another naming what we see'.<sup>487</sup> Ingrid Pollard and Brenda Agard interrogate the way in which white supremacy is upheld through images that degrade, dehumanize and erase. Their images are in direct opposition to the over-determined representations of black people past and present. Claudette Johnson's work has a similar agency. Her monumental drawings of black women seek to depict their personalities and present them free from objectification. Frederica Brooks beautifully describes Claudette Johnson's images of dancing, masturbating, tumbling, menstruating bodies as, 'shaking out feelings and inhibitions, so suppressed I never thought existed in me'.<sup>488</sup> In her essay, she quotes Johnson's fear that her work descends into 'the acceptable image of black people, a popular image ... dreads ... shining skins', demonstrating the constant struggle to create in the face of violent and deep-rooted stereotypes. For Johnson, the depiction of the black woman's body is deeply political. It is a problematic that is rooted in the history of enslavement and the subsequent way in which women's sexuality has 'been the focus of grotesque myths and imaginings'.<sup>489</sup>

While Johnson used pencil and paint to counter these grotesque myths, the artists I am primarily focusing on were referencing the material appearing within image-based media that drew on a much longer history of colonial photographic representations. Photography has been a particular force in the construction of the racist imaginary, since its use in the emergence of anthropology in the nineteenth century to impose racial difference between the colonizer and the colonial subject, producing a notion of racial inferiority. Steve Edwards argues that this difference was produced in two ways: first by reducing racial difference to that of the body and

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<sup>487</sup> bell hooks, p. 116.

<sup>488</sup> Frederica Brooks, 'Ancestral Links: The Art of Claudette Johnson', in *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity* (Hebden Bridge: Urban Fox Press, 1990), pp. 183–190 (p. 186).

<sup>489</sup> Claudette Johnson, 'Issues surrounding the representation of the Naked Body of a Woman', *Feminist Art News*, 3 (1991), 12–24 (p. 12).

secondly through images that confirmed colonial fantasies of an ethnographic Other as being exotic and outside of time.<sup>490</sup> Historically, the camera has largely been under the control of the white, western photographer, which—as Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy have pointed out—means that the photographic canon has remained overwhelmingly Eurocentric.<sup>491</sup> In an article for *Ten 8* in 1984, Pratibha Parmar evidences the way in which this need to differentiate black women as Other is translated into contemporary media images. Using the example of the way in which young Asian women are depicted she shows how the stereotypical image reinforces Asian women as being, contradictorily, quiet, submissive, dominated subjects to be pitied, and as exotic creatures, ‘full of Eastern promise’.<sup>492</sup> Thus, she argues that Asian women are Othered, through representation, on two levels: as signifying culturally ‘backwards’ practices of, for example, arranged marriages that render them victims to be pitied, or as sexual objects of a voyeuristic gaze. The long history and impact of dehumanizing, racist images, which have been made to appear as scientific, compounds the problem of the image for women of color. Thus, Brenda Agard’s *Portrait of our Time*, in its depiction of a black woman in all her ordinary everydayness has a particular political potential in beginning to challenge what Hazel V. Carby terms as the ‘commonsense logic’ of racism experienced by black women through regimes of representation.<sup>493</sup>

In her powerful work, *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens*, Alice Walker writes of the violent abuses of black women’s bodies, felt by subsequent generations of women, and what this has meant for the creativity of black women. She asks:

Did you have a genius of a great-great-grandmother who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseer’s lash? Or was she required to bake biscuits for a lazy backwater tramp, when she cried out in her soul to paint watercolors of sunsets, or the rain falling on the green and peaceful pasturelands?<sup>494</sup>

Walker’s words make all the more striking the images of Claudette Johnson, Ingrid Pollard and Brenda Agard in making felt, within the sphere of representation, the freedom and creativity of

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<sup>490</sup> Steve Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 25.

<sup>491</sup> Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy, *Different* (London: Phaidon, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>492</sup> Pratibha Parmar, ‘Hateful Contraries: Media Images of Asian Women’, in *Ten 8*, 16 (1984), 71–78 (p. 75).

<sup>493</sup> Carby, p. 113.

<sup>494</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 233.



black women. bell hooks articulates the fundamental struggle to ‘break with hegemonic ways of seeing, thinking and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory’, and that then dares others ‘to break their colonizing gaze’.<sup>495</sup> Her writing addresses the struggle towards decolonizing the image, in light of Stuart Hall’s observation of the way in which the regime of representation produces ‘inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm’.<sup>496</sup> Thus the process of creating images raised consciousness of the way in which dominant modes of representation are both normalized and internalized, hence so difficult to oppose. The woman’s gaze defines Agard’s *Portrait of Our Time*. It is not simply a portrait of an unknown woman, but it can be read in relation to what bell hooks describes as the politics of ‘looking relations’.<sup>497</sup> It acknowledges the gaze as having power in ‘fixing’ subject positionalities but in claiming the right to gaze, it asserts black spectatorship as a site of resistance.

### Maud Sulter



Figure 5.6, Maud Sulter *State of Emergency*, 1986 (Exhibition view—*A Feminist Space at Leeds*, University of Leeds 2017). Courtesy of Estate of Maud Sulter/Julian Lister.

<sup>495</sup> bell hooks, p. 2.

<sup>496</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 52.

<sup>497</sup> bell hooks, p. 118

‘Looking relations’ also concerned Maud Sulter, the third artist who exhibited her work in *Testimony*. The pamphlet produced for *Testimony* states that her contributions to the exhibition comprised: a mixed-media collage series titled *Poetry and Motion* (1985), a work titled *Cuba Libre* (1985) which addressed the twenty-fifth year of the Cuban Revolution and *State of Emergency* (1986), which is described in the exhibition text as identifying child abuse, police/institutional racism, sexism, violence and the exploitation of images of women.<sup>498</sup> I will begin with this latter work. *State of Emergency* (Figure 5.6) takes the form of three photomontages. The central montage has a torn fragment from a missing person’s poster in London put out by the Metropolitan Police. The poster depicts a young black boy with a description of his last known whereabouts and the sentence, ‘he is of half-caste appearance’. It is this last sentence that the artist addresses in her work. Across the poster—in bold type—are a series of words adopted into the English lexicon to demean black people. Racist insults are pasted across the page: ‘Macaroon’; ‘Nigger’; ‘Coon’; ‘Darkie’; ‘Jungle Bunny’; ‘Nekker’; ‘Gollywog’. Along the bottom, four words utter a resistance to this racist terminology. They say, ‘we name ourself Black’

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<sup>498</sup> Maud Sulter, ‘Testimony’, in *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers*, pp. 10–11 (p. 10).



Figure 5.7, Maud Sulter *Poetry In Motion*, 1985. Courtesy of the Estate of Maud Sulter

Sulter's work is concerned with what bell hooks articulates as 'the way racial domination of blacks by whites over-determined representation'.<sup>499</sup> Her own interest is in this over-determination of representation through language. Her second series, *Poetry in Motion* (Figure 5.7) develops the work of *State of Emergency* by investigating language as both productive of racism and resistant to it. *Poetry in Motion* consists of three montage works titled *Nightmare*, *In the Ever Presence of an Enemy* and *As a Black Woman*. The works collage layered news articles and reportage images that uncompromisingly address white privilege and racism in Britain and across the world. Torn directly from unnamed newspapers, the edges have been burned, charging the works with a sense of violence and anger. In 1985, the year that this work was made, there was widespread social unrest, culminating in violent clashes between the police and black citizens, fuelled by unemployment, welfare cuts and the exemption of the police from the Race Relations Act: under the so-called 'sus' law, the police had the power to stop anyone who was merely suspected of committing a crime. In autumn 1985 uprisings in

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<sup>499</sup> bell hooks, p. 117.

Tottenham, Brixton and other parts of the country reflected the outrage felt after two black women, in separate incidents, were killed and injured by police officers. Sulter's selection of newspaper articles does not, however, only address violence on the street.

The photomontage *As a Black woman* presents an appropriated news article depicting a young black woman alongside the headline 'Promising Writer Dies'. A sub-heading follows the headline stating, 'she was a shy, beautiful and considerate girl'. Beneath this image is a fragment of newspaper showing the headline 'hair problems' and below that an image of the torso of a naked woman. Another article, torn from a newspaper, is laid across an image of a graveyard. This article reports on the trial of an Asian woman who killed her husband as the result of domestic violence. In the left-hand corner is a hand-drawn image of a black woman, dressed in masculine clothing, hand raised above her head in a gesture of defiance. The drawing is accompanied by the headline 'Black Feminist Newsletter' and the slogan 'Fight Back'. This configuration of image and text, ripped from the daily news machine, singed with fire and defiantly placed on the gallery walls seethes with anger and intent. It confronts the audience with a statement of resistance on behalf of black women in Britain in 1985, a resistance towards the white spectatorship that constructs and idealizes black women as passive and voiceless.

In this work, Maud Sulter happened upon photography as a tool to support her socio-political intervention. Unlike Ingrid Pollard who came to photography through a degree in filmmaking, Sulter was initially a poet, who only later in the 1980s went on to develop photography as her primary artistic medium.<sup>500</sup> To begin with, photography was a way for her to express, more directly, the political intent and contemporaneity of her poetry. Indeed, in an interview with Mark Haworth-Booth, Senior Curator of Photography at the VAM, the artist explains that she was interested in the everyday, immediate, accessible nature of photography. She writes that, 'the challenge is then to get beyond that superficial glance, to convert that glance into a more concentrated gaze'.<sup>501</sup> For Sulter, montage was a strategy of developing that concentrated gaze, of understanding the politics of spectatorship.

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<sup>500</sup> In 1988–9, Maud Sulter studied an MA in Photographic Studies at Derbyshire college of Higher Education (now University of Derby).

<sup>501</sup> Mark Haworth-Booth, 'Maud Sulter: An Interview', in *Maud Sulter: Passion*, ed. by Deborah Cherry (London: Altitude Editions, 2015), pp. 110–117 (p. 112).

Montage is addressed by Stuart Hall in his chapter, 'Assembling the 1980s', written for the 2001 *Shades of Black* conference. Hall argues that the move away from the documentary photograph 'better approximates the complexity of real relations it seeks to explore and contest'.<sup>502</sup> While I have already discussed this complex positioning of documentary in relation to the work of black artists, via my analysis of Ingrid Pollard's work, it is also useful to explore Hall's analyses of the Black Arts Movement in relation to the shift in the wider political impulse that took place during the decade. This shift sheds light on the particular development in art practice in relation to the socio-political environment of the 1980s, which Maud Sulter directly addressed in her own work. For Stuart Hall, drawing on Raymond Williams, the 1980s represented a transition in the 'structure of feeling'.<sup>503</sup> The concept of 'structure of feeling' proved particularly useful for postcolonial writers to describe those experiences that are not yet fully able to be articulated, understood first as private, idiosyncratic and isolating but which are later revealed as having dominant and shared characteristics.<sup>504</sup> The political transformation in which Hall was interested—in terms of black experience—was in part due to what he has identified as the shift from the anticolonial to the postcolonial, which fundamentally affected the formation of black artists who were not born as colonial subjects. These artists did not experience Western power in terms of the direct rule of territories, but were conscious of the structural racism that caused black people in Britain to experience being the object of racial hatred, welfare cuts, police brutality, and other forms of exclusion and oppression on a daily basis. Importantly, this was a structure of racism that was blatant but more difficult to make visible. Furthermore, as Pratibha Parmar argues in her article 'Hateful Contraries: Media Images of Asian Women', these racist acts have a direct link to the images and reports within the media.

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<sup>502</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Assembling the 1980s: the deluge and after', in *Shades of Black*, pp. 1–20 (p. 17).

<sup>503</sup> This term is used by Williams to describe the analysis of the patterns in which the organization of production, family, politics and institutions are lived and experienced. He articulates this as the 'felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living'—see Raymond Williams, 'The Analysis of Culture', in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 715.

This concept reflects Williams' own working-class experience and his commitment to understanding culture, not only in relation to the structures of ideology, institutions and language that defined the approach of the New Left, but also in terms of the lived experience of individuals and communities. In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams argues that a worldview, prevailing ideology or class outlook 'exist and are lived definitively in singular and developing forms'—see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 128.

<sup>504</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.

Parmar argues that, within the media, there is an insidious kind of racism that it is taken for granted and thus appears to be natural. She writes:

It is this common sense racism which informs not only the reporting of major events, but also the daily, more run-of-the-mill reporting, which when articulated through the popular media provides fertile ground both for the legitimization of repressive state measures directed at the Black communities and fodder for the growth of racist ideologues.<sup>505</sup>

Thus, there is a clear politics at work in Maud Sulter's reappropriation of media reports. Taken alone, each of these reports may appear to be an 'innocent', apolitical telling of an individual story but together there are particular tropes of representation and interpretation that can be read as underpinning the widespread racism directed towards black communities in Britain.

Hall argues that artists emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s were also engaged with a growing awareness of the specificity and relative autonomy of social divisions.<sup>506</sup> Specifically, class was no longer acknowledged as *the* objective unified political struggle but rather the categories of race, gender, class and sexuality were recognized as being historically specific and differentiated. Significantly, Hall argues that:

Overarching all this was a 'crisis' of Marxism (especially its economist variant during the 1970s) as the general theoretical horizon within which all serious political struggles (including antiracism) were to be organized, and the lack of any alternative comprehensive framework of analysis or action.<sup>507</sup>

Like Ingrid Pollard and Brenda Agard, Maud Sulter's work can be read in relation to 'the double inscription' of difference in relation to black women. Her work addresses the way in which black women negotiated their specific oppression by men who were themselves oppressed on the grounds of race. At the same time black women desired to be part of the struggle against racial oppression, which also had a relationship to class and economics. As Hall points out, the shift from a conception of a unified, undifferentiated political subject to a recognition of difference and complexity in the political struggle impacted upon the artwork being produced at that time, notably the photographic.

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<sup>505</sup> Parmar, p. 74.

<sup>506</sup> Hall, 'Assembling the 1980s', p. 14.

<sup>507</sup> Hall, 'Assembling the 1980s', p. 14.

*Poetry in Motion* represents this attempt to negotiate the doubling of oppression that was experienced by black women. Maud Sulter's own experience was, in fact, even more complex, because she was born in Glasgow as the daughter of a Ghanaian father and a white Scottish mother. This formation points to the complexity and heterogeneity of black identity in the West, which, as Paul Gilroy points out in his writing on *The Black Atlantic*, encompasses the post-slave experience of those from the Caribbean and America, as well as those who identify an African heritage.<sup>508</sup> Diaspora space, he argues, 'is marked by its dynamics of differentiation'.<sup>509</sup> Writing in the publication *Difference*, Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy argue that artists in the 1980s opened up a 'third space' from which to speak;

Refusing, simultaneously, either to disappear into the global bazaar of the international art market or to be holed up forever in some 'local' ethnic ghetto, this movement is 'located' in, without being rendered motionless by, places of origin, skin color, so-called racial group, ethnic tradition or national belongingness and is part of a new, emergent kind of vernacular cosmopolitanism.<sup>510</sup>

Indeed, inheriting the experiences and culture of Scottish and Ghanaian heritage, Sulter drew on both of these identities while never feeling 'at home' in either a black or white community. While her Scottish upbringing, notably the Glaswegian dialect, informed much of her poetry, the artist nonetheless bore the fact that her position in the world was determined by the color of her skin. Thus her work addresses what it is to experience the world, and be read by the world, as a black woman. In the introduction to their book *Thinking Through the Skin*, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey propose that skin acquires meaning through the way it is read. Thus, it is through our skin that we become exposed to others and it is through skin that we assume to know another.<sup>511</sup> In her own contribution to this book, Shirley Tate draws on Frantz Fanon's discussion in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, specifically his discussion of colonialism's construction of the 'racial epidermal schema'.<sup>512</sup> She argues that this continues through the 'discursive construction of difference', arguing that black women and men are 'imprisoned by

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<sup>508</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Verso: London, 1993), p. 199.

<sup>509</sup> Gilroy, p. 197.

<sup>510</sup> Hall and Sealy, p. 34.

<sup>511</sup> Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, 'Introduction: Dermographies', in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–18 (pp. 1–4).

<sup>512</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

discourses of skin, which construct them as a Black other'.<sup>513</sup> Sulter may have a shared African and British heritage but her life is lived with the risk of violence that is specific to her being read as black. Tate's writing links to the artist's investigations into the language of racial 'othering', as it relates to skin color. Sulter's work, however, also addresses a shared experience and consciousness that is not to do with an essential identity but has to do with what Tate describes as a shared struggle to become a subject in the face of daily experiences of violence and silencing. In Sulter's early series *State of Emergency*, as it assembles the many racist words used to define skin color, this social construction of race is made visible. Through her own experience of being read, and thus positioned in terms of her skin color, however, the artist also experienced a shared black identity through which she found solidarity with other black subjects in their differentiated struggles, and which thus gave her a route to challenge her positionality.

Sulter's work can be read in relation to the concept of 'structures of feeling' that I raised earlier to describe an experience of a world that is both structural—as in Sulter's focus on language—and affective. This affect is produced through Sulter's use of poetry as a tool for conveying the subjectivity of experience, which is vitally important for the struggles of black women in their difference and heterogeneity. In each collage within *Poetry in Motion*, there is an autobiographical poem, written in response to both an individual and collective experience. In her chapter 'The Poetry of Theory', Dionne Sparks addresses this relationship between poetry and politics. Focusing on the poetry of Audre Lorde, she argues that poetry is a tool *to re-feel* the structures of our world; it is a tool through which the divisions between emotion and language are healed, and thirdly it allows the poet, through the presence of the individual voice, to express all parts of her subjectivity, and to acknowledge difference in experience.<sup>514</sup> Sparks argues, 'we are women but we are different by virtue of our Blackness, our whiteness, our sexuality, our individuality'.<sup>515</sup> She then goes on to cite Audre Lorde who writes, 'I cannot be simply a Black person and not be a woman too, nor can I be a woman without being a lesbian ... What happens when you narrow your definition to what is convenient, or what is fashionable

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<sup>513</sup> Shirley Tate, 'This is my star of David', in *Thinking Through the Skin*, pp. 209–222 (p. 209).

<sup>514</sup> Dionne Sparks, 'The Poetry of Theory', in *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity*, pp. 130–141.

<sup>515</sup> Sparks, p. 133.



or what is expected, is dishonesty by silence'.<sup>516</sup> Thus, in this quotation, Lorde validates the difference between individuals that must be acknowledged to avoid silencing through an abstract notion of the collective struggle, even while there *are* shared struggles on the grounds of race, gender and sexuality.

Alongside African-American writers such as Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, the writing of Angela Davis provided nourishment for black women organizing in Britain during the early 1980s. Drawing on research into the experiences of black women under enslavement, Davis shows that white feminist assumptions about familial relations and domestic life, as two primary examples, shift when the historical experiences of black women are properly taken into account. Domestic life, far from being the site of women's oppression, provided enslaved people with 'the only space where they could properly experience themselves as human beings'.<sup>517</sup> The division between 'feminine' and 'masculine' forms of labor were also removed, with children and women forced to undertake manual labor on plantations in exactly the same way as men. Added to this is the fact that countless white women perceived black women as their property, either as slaves or domestic servants, and saw no contradiction between the struggle of black women and the fight of white women for rights in the workplace.

Davis' analysis shows that enslaved men and women often practiced an egalitarianism that was not witnessed within white familial settings, for example, through the distribution of domestic labor. White plantation owners oppressed enslaved women on the grounds of their sex as well as race, however, notably through the act of sexual violence as a mechanism of control. The nature of this oppression was distinct from the subordination that white women experienced within the plantation family. This difference is addressed in *Poetry in Motion*. In her poem *As a Black Woman*, which is typed, torn and pasted onto the montage of image and text, Sulter writes, 'as a black woman the bearing of my child is a political act'. It goes on:

I have been mounted in rape, bred from like cattle, mined for my fecundity. I have been denied abortion, denied contraception, denied my freedom to choose.

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<sup>516</sup> Sparks, p. 139.

<sup>517</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1982), p. 16.

These lines from the poem address the violence of reproductive control that has been historically enforced on black women in situations of colonization and enslavement and more subtly, but in equally systematic ways, in the contemporary West. While sexual violence and the denial of rights is necessarily a shared focus of feminists everywhere, this violence is linked to racism in specific ways. Davis describes the way in which enslaved women in the United States were marked out as ‘breeders’, forced to have children, which were then sold as property to reproduce the workforce. She notes that rape was a weapon of domination, repression and economic production. She also points to the way in which families were forcibly disrupted through the indiscriminate sale and separation of husbands, wives and children. This violent shattering of family bonds that Davis denotes directly relates to the struggle for subjectivity that is addressed in the work of each of the three artists I am looking at here.

*As a Black Woman* ends with the line, ‘as a black woman the personal is political holds no empty rhetoric’. While closely analyzing the regimes of violence and control enacted upon black women, Angela Davis also discusses the ways in which enslaved men and women resisted their dehumanization, notably through marriage taboos and naming practices.<sup>518</sup> Maintaining family ties by naming a child after their father, for example, or committing to another person in marriage, were ways of maintaining origins and communities that ensured enslaved people did not accept their designation as ‘sub-human’. In speaking from the ‘I’—‘I have been mounted in rape’—the poem asserts, with political force and solidarity, what it is to be a human subject in the face of this historic violence. It also acknowledges what it means to feel that history, for that history to have an effect in the present-day through the struggle to put together a sense of self against a long history dedicated to erasing that subjectivity. At the same time, it also joins with the wider feminist acknowledgment of the subjective, emotional, domestic, maternal experiences as being valid political subjects in their own right. Finally, the poem becomes a tool through which the artist is able to undermine the objective fixity of the seemingly ‘realist’ image within the media. Sulter’s use of poetry becomes both an aesthetic and political tool, conveying what Hall identifies as the notion of ‘dreamwork’—displacement, substitution,

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<sup>518</sup> Davis, p. 15.

condensation.<sup>519</sup> The dream-like poems, a contrast to the appropriated media texts and images with Sulter's montages, undermine the 'realism' of the news reports and evoke the complexity and incommensurability of the historically-grounded, subjectively-felt struggle.

In an interview with Mark Haworth-Booth, the artist writes about the relationship of images to language:

Where we see Europe portrayed, where we see Africa portrayed, where we see women made into icons to represent political ideologies, we must understand that those are the languages, those are the codes and conventions that have been at play, and as artists we have to question if it's possible to rework those imagings.<sup>520</sup>

Having initially used found images as a way of making her poetry speak more explicitly in relation to the socio-political context in the 1980s, Maud Sulter subsequently went on to create her own photographic images. Her later work addresses the myths and images of empire and how women have been implicated in that iconography.



Figure 5.8, Invitation card for *Sphinx*, 1987. Courtesy of Estate of Maud Sulter.

<sup>519</sup> Hall, 'Assembling the 1980s', p. 19.

<sup>520</sup> Haworth-Booth, p. 115.

*Sphinx*

The body of work Sulter made after *Poetry in Motion* was titled *Sphinx* and was specifically commissioned by The Pavilion where it was shown from 16 September–28 November, 1987 (Figure 5.8). The work is a series of black and white photographs taken on St James' Island off the coast of Gambia, which has since been renamed Kunta Kinteh Island in tribute to Kunta Kinte, an enslaved Gambian man.<sup>521</sup> Where her earlier work primarily addresses contemporary Britain, *Sphinx* addresses the experience of migration, which, Sonia Boyce observes, was an ongoing conversation among black artists in Britain in the 1980s.<sup>522</sup> Sonia Boyce argues that enslavement has had a particular impact upon the African-American psyche because it took place alongside white America for generations whereas, in general, those who were colonized by Britain did not live alongside British people.<sup>523</sup> *Sphinx* links to themes of displacement, outsidership and erasure, which are linked to the migratory subject. Part of the British empire, Kunta Kinteh island was one of the shipping posts on the Atlantic Triangle trade route, used to imprison African people before they were forcibly taken across the Middle Passage where they were sold to plantation owners in the Caribbean and the Americas.

*Sphinx* consists of nine photographs depicting the island's coastline and the ruined colonial buildings that meet the sea; its fort and prison partially obscured by the trees growing over the built environment. Thus the work bears witness to the brutal history of enslavement while signifying the denial and erasure of this history through nature's reclaiming of the island's architecture. As a second element of the work, Sulter also produced a black and white video, depicting a continuous shot of the Sphinx of Giza. The image is accompanied by a song, titled *The Ballad of the Wing*, written and sung by the artist. The song accompanying this great monument to African creativity has been described by Lubaina Himid as being both 'an homage to Black Creativity and a critique of theft and denial'.<sup>524</sup> The photographic images are, themselves, creative endeavours to speak the loss of the African people who lost their lives on the island. Devoid of human subjects, the nine photographs were installed in the exhibition

<sup>521</sup> Kinte's story gained notoriety through the 1977 US television series, *Roots*.

<sup>522</sup> Sonia Boyce and Manthia Diawara, 'The Art of Identity: A Conversation', in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 306–313 (p. 313).

<sup>523</sup> Boyce and Diawara, p. 313.

<sup>524</sup> Lubaina Himid, 'The Ballad of the Wing', *AND Journal of Art*, 21 (1990), 13–14.

alongside a single line of text engraved on a piece of copper that read, ‘only the wailing of the women remained’. These words speak of both the personal and the collective: it evokes Sulter’s own emotional experience of returning to the place of her heritage (her father was from Ghana) and it speaks on behalf of, and in solidarity with, women past and present, calling for remembrance of the history of diaspora and disappearing.

The potential of creatively working through history in this way, is addressed in an essay written by Lubaina Himid titled ‘Fragments’, which was published in the Leeds-based *Feminist Art News* in Autumn 1988, shortly after the exhibition of *Sphinx* at The Pavilion.<sup>525</sup> This edition of *Feminist Art News* was guest edited by Himid in collaboration with Maud Sulter. Addressing the relationship between black and feminist politics, their editorial introduction describes this issue as a ‘passionate letter’, whose contributors ‘represent a network of brave Blackwomen who want to communicate within a context of equality’.<sup>526</sup> In ‘Fragments’, Lubaina Himid addresses the practice of what she terms ‘gathering and reusing’ as a strategy of black creativity and politics. She opens this article with a reference to the way in which the Western world has consistently appropriated, and simultaneously denied, the influences of Africa upon its cultural forms. Gathering and reusing, she states, is thus linked to the exploitation of black cultures. She also argues, however, that it is a positive strategy for black artists, in repairing a link to the past that has been broken through what she describes as ‘enforced removal, slavery, re-location’.<sup>527</sup> At the end of her essay, Himid writes that, ‘gathering and re-using is an essential part of black creativity, it does not mimic and is inextricably linked to economic circumstance’.<sup>528</sup> She exemplifies this with reference to images from magazines. She asks, ‘if you use the images from magazines, which are designed to capitalize on capitalism, and therefore oppress Black people, and re-use those images as artwork, can it have a function on a gallery wall?’<sup>529</sup> Thus, gathering and reusing is put forward as a way of locating and reworking the violence of the past, to propose a different future.

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<sup>525</sup> This was the first edition of *Feminist Art News* that Sally Dawson published as editor. At that time, Sally Dawson was also a member of The Pavilion’s Management Committee and is thus a further example of the way in which The Pavilion was attuned to the importance of black women’s creativity.

<sup>526</sup> Lubaina Himid and Maud Sulter, Editorial (Untitled) *Feminist Art News*, 2, (1988), 2.

<sup>527</sup> Lubaina Himid, ‘Fragments’, *Feminist Art News*, 2 (1988), 8–9 (p. 8).

<sup>528</sup> Himid, ‘Fragments’, p. 8.

<sup>529</sup> Himid, ‘Fragments’, p. 8.

### **Black Women's Art and Postmodernism**

In the year following the publication of 'Fragments', Gilane Tawadros used Himid's essay as the basis from which to assess the work of black women artists within the theoretical frame of postmodernism. I will come on to Tawadros' contribution shortly, but I also want to read it alongside another chapter, itself titled 'Visual and verbal critique: feminism and postmodernism'. Written by sociologist Elizabeth Chaplin, who was also on The Pavilion's Management Committee during the late 1980s, Chaplin's analysis uses The Pavilion as a lens through which to address the relationship between feminism and postmodernism. In this chapter, Chaplin examines the potency of the visual image, arguing that it is through critical uses of the image that political and artistic formations can make an intervention into postmodern culture. She draws on the work of Linda J. Nicholson to argue that feminism and postmodernism can be seen to be a natural ally because both seek to question the universalizing tendency of scholarship and to reveal the white, masculinist views that underpin grand narratives.<sup>530</sup> Her argument thus proposes what Hal Foster termed a resistant postmodernism, which is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, rather than an instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo- historical forms; with a critique of origins, not a return to them.<sup>531</sup>

Hal Foster's edited anthology, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, first published in 1983, was a defining work of the 1980s, which brought together a number of critical perspectives on postmodernism by figures including Jean Baudrillard, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson and Rosalind Krauss, and which was enormously influential on the field of cultural theory in the decade that followed.<sup>532</sup> What is particularly significant for Elizabeth Chaplin's reading of postmodernism through The Pavilion project is Hal Foster's exploration of the 'anti-aesthetic'. By this he does not mean that critical postmodernism is 'anti-art' but rather he is interested in the rejection of the aesthetic as an experience separated from history. Crucially he argues that, 'more locally, "anti-aesthetic" also signals a practice, cross-disciplinary in nature that is sensitive to cultural forms engaged in a politic (e.g. feminist art) or

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<sup>530</sup> Chaplin, p. 146.

<sup>531</sup> Hal Foster, *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), p. xii.

<sup>532</sup> This was published in the US in 1983 as *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture*. When it was published in Britain by Pluto Press in 1985, it was simply titled *Postmodern Culture*.

rooted in a vernacular—that is, to forms that deny the idea of a privileged aesthetic realm'.<sup>533</sup> Chaplin reflects this perspective in writing about *The Pavilion*, arguing that the organization is rooted in 'a collectively based and accessible practice —whose theory reflects these criteria and is more directly grounded in empirical experience'.<sup>534</sup> Chaplin uses, as one example, Maud Sulter's *Zabat: Poetics of a Family Tree* (1989). This photographic series depicts the artist's black women friends re-presented as Greek muses. It serves, Chaplin argues, as an example of the postmodern because it problematizes the divisions between reality and the symbolic, 'draining the aura of visual art'.<sup>535</sup> Does postmodernism work as a framework in relation to the critique of black women artists?

Unlike Chaplin, whose essay addresses postmodernism in relation to the anti-aesthetic, Gilane Tawadros focuses on the position of history in art, notably by drawing on the concept of 'gathering and reusing' to which I referred earlier. Her argument is that the *diasporan* Black Atlantic experience can be read in the terms of postmodernism because it disputes a monolithic experience. For example, the imaging of the coastline, she argues, is 'an ambivalent site which marks the frontier of slavery, colonialism, and migration but which also denotes the positivity of the *diasporan* experience'.<sup>536</sup> While certain assessments of postmodernism equate the collapse of Western Grand Narratives with the collapse of history, Gilane Tawadros shows that black women artists addressed the illegitimacy of a universalizing Eurocentric discourse by centering diaspora experience and discontinuous histories. She argues against those theories that find within the postmodern condition, nothing more than, in Fredric Jameson's terms, 'the cannibalization of all styles of the past'.<sup>537</sup> Reading the work of black women artists who drew on history in their work, Tawadros identifies a danger in the postmodernist denial of a 'real' history, following, instead, Jürgen Habermas's counter perspective that views postmodernism as a 'critical reappropriation of modernism'.<sup>538</sup> Thus, the concept of diaspora recognizes the presence of diverse cultural experiences, and intersecting histories, rather than a pluralism

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<sup>533</sup> Foster, *The Anti-aesthetic*, p. xv.

<sup>534</sup> Chaplin, p. 121.

<sup>535</sup> Chaplin p. 149.

<sup>536</sup> Gilane Tawadros, 'Beyond the Boundary', p. 123.

<sup>537</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, (Duke University Press: Durham, 1997), p. 17 (first publ. in *New Left Review*, 1/146 (1984), 59–92).

<sup>538</sup> Tawadros, 'Beyond the Boundary', p. 150.

which negates history: a distinction she describes as being the difference between the negation of coherent identities (postmodernism) and the assertion of positive and political implications of difference (the formation of black identity).<sup>539</sup>

Gilane Tawadros also argues that ‘the diaspora as an historical experience will have implications for the way in which black identity is constructed and represented in artistic practice’.<sup>540</sup> She notes the importance of time in the work of black artists, which attends to past and future. This is in contrast to the modern avant-garde appropriation of African cultures, as exemplified by Pablo Picasso’s ahistorical and timeless assimilation of African objects that Lubaina Himid references in ‘Fragments’.<sup>541</sup> But it also resists the nostalgia, which Paul Gilroy argues is a defining dimension of ‘new racism’ which links to notions of patriotism, nationalism and xenophobia and relies on a fictional notion of a non-existent, mythical, pre-modern past.<sup>542</sup> Thus, Tawadros’ text is important because it situates black women’s art within the dominant theoretical discourse of the time, while also showing how that work adds to and challenges the terms of that discourse. While Tawadros reads the work of three black women artists in relation to the terms of the dominant debates relating to visual culture, it is also important, however, to recognize that the creative act of those artists exceeds her academic analysis. In ‘Fragments’, Himid poetically evokes the activity of quilt-making, as a metaphor for the act of putting together the complexity of black experience. In relation to this, she notes that the quilt—which is made of gathered cloth—‘can be made as a testimony to time spent as well as lives lived’.<sup>543</sup> Tawadros herself acknowledges the limits of her own theoretical framing, stating that the art of black women must not be read as an aesthetic strategy isolated from the domain of lived experiences.<sup>544</sup> Himid’s work states this much more forcefully. For Himid, the quilt becomes an expression of the struggle to give visual form to the unquantifiable trauma that is the shattering of black subjectivity. There is something particular about the artwork Tawadros addresses in making felt (to go back to Williams’ concept of ‘the structure of feeling’) what it is to live in

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<sup>539</sup> Tawadros, ‘Beyond the Boundary’, p. 138.

<sup>540</sup> Tawadros, ‘Beyond the Boundary’, p. 135.

<sup>541</sup> Tawadros, ‘Beyond the Boundary’, p. 122.

<sup>542</sup> Tawadros, ‘Beyond the Boundary’, p. 136.

<sup>543</sup> Himid, ‘Fragments’, p. 8.

<sup>544</sup> Tawadros, ‘Beyond the Boundary’, p. 138.



relation to the trauma of black experience and that thus shows up the inadequacy of reading this work through the terms of postmodernism.

Returning to *Sphinx* in light of this discussion, what did it mean for Sulter to photograph this historic slave site? Why did Sulter's practice take her from addressing her present-day encounter with racism on the streets and in the daily images and news reports that surrounded her in Britain, to a historic site of trauma and diaspora off the West African coast? In the course of my research, in seeking to more fully understand this journey, I watched the 1993 feature film *Sankofa* for its resonances with Sulter's work. In this film an African-American model, participating in a fashion shoot on the site of a former shipping post on the slave route in Ghana, is overcome by the spirits of the people captured at that site, and forced to revisit the past. The woman finds herself working on a plantation where she experiences the violence inflicted upon her ancestors, as well as the strength of those enslaved people in the face of their suffering. The film ends where it begins, returning the model to the present-day. On her return to the slave post, however, the film's subject turns away from the white photographer, with whom she laughed and joked at the start of the film, and takes her place alongside a chorus of African people, singing songs of grief for the lives lost in history. Sulter's work prefigures this famous film. Located in a similar site, the work also addresses what it means to confront the historic trauma of enslavement and its legacy in the present. Unlike the model, this fictional subject, or indeed Ingrid Pollard, whose family line derives from those enslaved in the Caribbean, Sulter does not have direct family ties to slavery. Her father originates from Ghana, not the Caribbean or the United States. Nonetheless, her experience of being interpellated as black on a daily basis—and a recognition of the violence this entails—is her impetus to explore her Ghanaian heritage, and thus a black Atlantic experience which is deeply intertwined with the loss and fragmentation of communities and identity. Moreover, her position as child of Scottish and Ghanaian parentage through which she is multiply positioned becomes a creative, political impetus to enter into another's experience. This struggle to have solidarity with, and give form to, the wounds of history is an essential aspect of black women's creativity.

### **Black Women Artists at The Pavilion**

Having attempted to ‘thicken the line’ of the work shown by the three artists who exhibited in the *Testimony* exhibition, I will proceed beyond the work of the individual artists, to explore how *Testimony* fit into the wider project of The Pavilion. How did it relate to The Pavilion’s work within its specific community? What struggles does it cast light on? How did it shape what The Pavilion was to become?

*Testimony* was co-organized in 1986 by artist and curator Sutapa Biswas. Biswas played an important role in the history of The Pavilion and in the loosely defined Black Women’s Art Movement. Her presence also sheds further light on the significant relationship of The Pavilion to the critical art history and theory taken up in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds, where she was a student from 1981–1985. In an interview with the artist in August 2017 Biswas described to me in detail her formation as a child of an Indian academic, growing up in London after her family migrated from West Bengal in 1965, which included a sense instilled in her of having the right to full participation in British society. Biswas then went on describe the feeling of alienation she experienced during her lectures at Leeds on the history of art. She recalled her experience of feeling ‘very ignorant’, ‘very out of place’ and like a ‘fish out of water’.<sup>545</sup> She also expressed her enthusiasm about the critical questions being asked of history in her classes:

I think that the [lecturers] I was naturally drawn to were the ones who were asking very difficult questions of gender, questions of class. They didn’t ask questions of race, that’s what I thought was absolutely critically missing.<sup>546</sup>

While in the Department of Fine Art at Leeds, Biswas engaged in dialogue with her lecturer Griselda Pollock, who, the artist describes, ‘really gave me permission’ to challenge the course. Biswas’ presence at Leeds thus coincided with the presence of specific lecturers within the department who were creating a political culture in which the artist felt able to assert her own critical voice. This encouragement to research the critical questions of race in art history thus prompted Biswas to go out and find other black artists who were practicing at that time. She

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<sup>545</sup> Sutapa Biswas, unpublished interview with the author, 15 August 2017.

<sup>546</sup> Sutapa Biswas, unpublished interview with the author, 15 August 2017.

began researching the Black Arts Movement for her final year dissertation while, at the same time, beginning to show with, and thus constitute, that movement. In response to this—in 1985—Griselda Pollock invited Lubaina Himid and Sonia Boyce to the Department of Fine Art to give a guest lecture.



Figure 5.9, Sutapa Biswas, *Kali* (1985) (Exhibition view—*A Feminist Space at Leeds*, University of Leeds, 2017). Courtesy of Sutapa Biswas/Julian Lister.

During Himid and Boyce's joint visit to Leeds, they saw the work Biswas was making for her final degree show and encouraged her to submit this work for *The Thin Black Line* exhibition at The ICA (1985–6). This included the mixed media piece titled *Housewives with Steak-Knives* (1985). *Housewives with Steak-Knives* is a symbol of creative feminist resistance in which the Hindu warrior goddess Kali is transformed into a multi-armed woman brandishing a steak-knife. In the piece, Kali wears around her neck the heads of men, described by Jean Wainwright as political 'villains'.<sup>547</sup> The second work shown at The ICA and as part of Biswas' degree show was a film titled *Kali* (Figure 5.9) made in the fine art studios at Leeds. This time, Biswas is dressed as Kali, who signifies destruction of evil and ignorance and the liberation of the ego. Dressed in costume and using puppets, the performance stages a series of rituals,

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<sup>547</sup> Jean Wainwright, 'Sutapa Biswas', <[http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/sutapa\\_biswas/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/sutapa_biswas/essay(1).html)> [accessed 23 May 2018].

through which Kali ultimately defeats Ravana, performed in the work by Isabelle Tracy. In Hindu mythology, Ravana is king of the demons and symbol of malice. The work is a feminist statement about the strength of women but it also functions to radically decenter Western discourse. Partway through the filmed performance, 'Kali' brings Biswas' lecturer, Griselda Pollock, into the room. Pollock is hooded with a pillowcase, seated in the middle of the small room, and forced to witness the performance through two eyeholes, which limit and fragment her vision. Writing about this experience in an essay for a later catalogue on Biswas' work, Pollock states:

I was made to function as an icon of imperialism around which Biswas's enactments of resistance would be performed. Centered, yet made vulnerable by being deprived of the position of protected observer, I could not distance myself from the mythological representation of a historically conditioned struggle, which was concretized in Sutapa Biswas's experience as an Asian student in a British university art department.<sup>548</sup>

Pollock argues that while the resources offered to Biswas at Leeds were, in part, what enabled this critical intervention, the artist also forced the department to pay attention to its own lack of post-colonial critique. She writes:

Sutapa Biswas' presence in the course, however, was itself a factor in the evolution of the Leeds project. It was she who defined the absences in these seemingly radical discourses deriving from Marxism and feminism. It was she who named the imperialism that still structured analyses speaking in undifferentiated terms of class and gender, never knowing the issues of race and colonialism. It was her critique that forced us all to acknowledge the Eurocentric limits of the discourses within which we, the staff, practiced.<sup>549</sup>

Thus, as well as signaling the absences on the course, Biswas also brought to her lecturers the resources drawn from her Indian heritage. *Kali* is significant because it makes Indian culture the central space for a feminist enactment, one that gives Biswas power and agency. In this work, therefore, the displaced subject is not a subject of loss, but rather becomes empowered by drawing on the strength of her cultural identity. How does it do this? In the filmed introduction at the beginning of the work, Biswas recounts a meeting with Marie Yates,

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<sup>548</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Tracing Figures of Presence: Naming Ciphers of Absence Feminism, Imperialism and Postmodernity: The Work of Sutapa Biswas', in *Sutapa Biswas* (London: Iniva, 2004), pp. 22–41 (p. 26).

<sup>549</sup> Pollock, 'Tracing Figures of Presence', p. 24.

who was a guest lecturer on the course. In directly addressing Marie Yates, who exhibited in *The Image in Trouble*, this recollection offers an interesting way to weave together the different threads of The Pavilion's formation that I am addressing in this thesis. In her filmed account, Biswas states that Marie Yates saw some figurative drawings that Biswas had made. After seeing these works Yates reportedly stated that Biswas should not make these kinds of drawings because they reproduced stereotypical images of women. Biswas however, states that she did not think that the images were either weak or passive; instead this event prompted her to research images of 'fearsome' women from her own history, of which Kali is one.<sup>550</sup> Biswas' work asks the question 'how and why have these images been lost'? It also questions the nature of spectatorship, asking 'who performs?' and 'who spectates?' By centering the figure of Kali as source of feminist strength and power, the work also reverses the structure of a white spectatorship, allowing the world to be seen and known through the lens of non-European cultural practices.

Following her graduation from the University of Leeds, Sutapa Biswas was employed at The Pavilion where she brought together the *Testimony* exhibition. In her interview for the film *TEAP*, addressed in Chapter One, Biswas argues that the emergence of The Pavilion was an inevitability of the political activity in the Department of Fine Art, driven by a belief that things are possible.<sup>551</sup> In 2011, Lubaina Himid produced a hand-drawn tube map, on which she depicted the spaces, artists, publications, exhibitions and conferences that intersected and enabled a network of black women artists. It is significant that, while Leeds is named as a place on that map, The Pavilion is not.<sup>552</sup> Sutapa Biswas formed a bridge between Leeds and the more London-centered network of black women artists that Himid represented. Her presence adds to the untold story of The Pavilion in the history of black women's art. At the same time Biswas was also an important bridge between the theoretically inflected art-making at the University of Leeds and the outreach-focused dimension of The Pavilion project.

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<sup>550</sup> *Kali*, dir. Sutapa Biswas (Independently produced, 1984-5).

<sup>551</sup> Sutapa Biswas, unpublished transcript of testimony produced for *To the editor of Amateur Photography*, September 2014, FAN/PAV.

<sup>552</sup> Lubaina Himid, *Thin Black Line(s)* (Preston: Making Histories Visible, UCLAN, 2011), Appendix.

### Accessing the Means of Production

As the final part of this chapter, I underscore the significance of The Pavilion in relation to its impact upon women who were not artists and who lived close to The Pavilion building. The year 1986 marked this shift, when Sutapa Biswas was employed and the organization went through a process of critical reflection, in order to think through the problem of art's dissemination. It is useful to track some of the discussions that took place at this time in order to expand on the tripartite relationship between The Pavilion and 1) the critical analysis of art and art history taking place at the fine art department at the University of Leeds 2) the emerging black women's art movement in the 1980s and 3) the desire to make a locally specific resource that would enable a wider constituency of women in Leeds to determine their own representation.

The appointment of Sutapa Biswas at The Pavilion was as Darkroom/Outreach Coordinator. This position linked to The Pavilion's developing remit to work much more broadly with the surrounding community. It is evident, from the records of The Pavilion meetings that Biswas made a significant impact upon the presence of Black and Asian Women within the Pavilion's education and exhibitions program. This impact can be read in the minutes of The Pavilion's Management Committee meeting, dated 13 October 1986, in which notes are made about a 'self-critical assessment' written about The Pavilion. One of these notes states:

Sutapa read the report by Emma and suggested that the educational and exhibitions programming as well as the advertising of jobs should expressly address the issues of Black and Asian women's involvement in the project.<sup>553</sup>

A report on the exhibitions program for 1986 notes that:

A changing feeling in The Pavilion dictates that a stronger working link between the exhibitions and education sub-group is needed in order that exhibition space should become an important site for the education program. It follows that Black and Asian women's work must be incorporated into the exhibitions program as well as in the education work being carried out. We are conscious that our recognition of work by Black and Asian women should not be merely token, but an integral part of the exhibition's structure.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, unpublished minutes of the Management Committee, 13 October 1986, FAN/PAV.

<sup>554</sup> The Pavilion Women's Photography Center, unpublished report on The Pavilion exhibitions, 1986 (Precise date unknown), p.10, FAN/PAV.

These statements are extremely interesting because they acknowledge the way in which The Pavilion addressed the relationship between the images shown and the constituencies to which it reached out. Indeed, the exhibitions report from 1986 shows that *Testimony* trialed this new way of working, which brought the exhibition and education programs together:

[*Testimony*] was a powerful collection of pieces that tackled a range of issues through photography. Supporting workshops brought The Pavilion into closer working contact with Black workers at the Roseville Center in Leeds. The well-attended screening at the University of four films directed by Black women again demonstrated the need for such an event to be held in conjunction with an issue-based exhibition. This original show was the first of its kind to be held at The Pavilion. The Pavilion has long been aware of its under-representation of Black and Asian women. It is hoped that the working relationship developed from the joint-organization of *Testimony* will form the foundations from which to involve Black and Asian women in the project and to represent their work in future exhibitions and events.<sup>555</sup>

Another record is worth raising in relation to this statement. Within the report dated 13 October 1986, an issue is raised relating to an open submission exhibition that went on show at The Pavilion (specific dates and title unknown). The report states that there were two bodies of work within the show that had received complaints. It minutes that, ‘the title “native boy” on a photo of an Indonesian boy and some pictures of women dancing accompanied by titles [“Algerian dancing”] have been seen as racist’.<sup>556</sup> The report goes on to note that the women who took the photographs did not understand the complaint. The minutes record a discussion about the merits of an open show versus the need to address the racism of images while at the same time ensuring that The Pavilion stayed open to a wide audience. Significantly, the report ends with a statement, which reads, ‘Sutapa proposed that she should do a talk about representations of Black and Asian people’.<sup>557</sup> I am interested in this exchange because it appears that it was in the back and forth between the critical questioning of the image and the desire to engage broad audiences that bridges were built between the work that came out of the academic community and those people who did not necessarily have access to such critical thinking, but whom were

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<sup>555</sup> The Pavilion Women’s Photography Center, unpublished report on The Pavilion exhibitions, 1986, pp. 10–11, FAN/PAV.

<sup>556</sup> The Pavilion Women’s Photography Center, unpublished minutes of the Management Meeting, 13 October 1986, FAN/PAV.

<sup>557</sup> The Pavilion Women’s Photography Center, unpublished minutes of the Management Meeting, 13 October 1986, FAN/PAV.

recognized as important participants in The Pavilion's program. It acknowledges the fact that images were productive of racism and, thus, that racist attitudes within the field of art and wider society could not be transformed without attention to the image.

While The Pavilion was thus meaningfully wrestling with the challenge of addressing the deep-seated racism within British society, as this racism was reflected even at the level of an open submission exhibition, there was also awareness among black artists that an increase in visibility for black artists was not necessarily shifting the structures of art institutions per se. In her essay, 'Mapping: A Decade of Black Women Artists 1980-1990', Lubaina Himid discusses the challenge of getting funding as a black woman artist and its relationship to the wider political environment in Britain. She writes:

We had a situation where the only place that you could get cash to make an innovative or radical piece of art, or to stage a supposedly political exhibition was either, the local authority, or the regional arts body, whose money was given to them by the government. The government, you remember, was trying to keep black people from loudly complaining in the streets about the essentials that were being denied us and so there was money for black people making art. It was a very small amount of money, much less than it cost.<sup>558</sup>

Himid goes on to state that, 'we were used to bring government money into the arts and then were forced to watch, open-mouthed, while it was handed out to publishers, galleries, and projects that ignored the brilliant and focused on the mediocre'.<sup>559</sup> These two quotations characterize the way in which the arts in Britain has paid lip-service to enabling black creativity, while failing to address the structural racism within institutions, funders and local authorities. In 1986, the journal *Race and Class* published a UK commentary that was a short analysis of the background to a report titled 'In the Eye of the Needle', which was an inquiry into racism within Greater London Arts (the equivalent of the YAA).<sup>560</sup> In this article, the commentary references a report produced a decade earlier by the ACGB that outlined as a problem the 'cultural isolation' of 'ethnic minorities' and the need to encourage 'ethnic minority arts'.

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<sup>558</sup> Lubaina Himid, 'Mapping: A Decade of Black Women Artists 1980-1990, in *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity* (Hebden Bridge: Urban Fox Press, 1990), pp. 63-72 (p. 65).

<sup>559</sup> Himid, 'Inside the In/Visible: For/Getting Strategy', p. 42.

<sup>560</sup> Greater London Arts, *In the Eye of the Needle: Report of the Independent Inquiry into Greater London Arts* (London: Greater London Arts, 1986).



Summing up this perceived problem and its link to the identified racism within the GLA, the article argues that:

[The Arts Council Report] conceptualized the art forms and expressions developed by the black community not in terms of the challenge that these posed to white cultural values but in terms of their accommodation to such values. And, for that very reason, it resurrected precisely those art forms which, in being traditionalist and closed-in, were emptied of the dynamics of the black community's struggles against racism in Britain and elsewhere.<sup>561</sup>

In 2005, Lubaina Himid wrote, with a sense of weariness, that, 'having exhibitions in establishment venues is still rare, underfunded, and kept very quietly from press scrutiny'.<sup>562</sup> In 1985, Himid curated an exhibition titled *The Thin Black Line* (1985) at the ICA, which can be read in relation to the statement above. In a letter written to ICA curator Declan McGonagle in 1984/5 (precise date unknown), Himid outlines her ambitions for the exhibition, which she proposed would take place in the ICA's downstairs and upper galleries, in addition to the concourse gallery and stairwell. She writes, 'I would like to use the space, the whole space, to make visible the black woman in Britain today, the black woman as seen by black woman that is'.<sup>563</sup> There is a scan of this letter within the catalogue for *Thin Black Line(s)*—an exhibition curated by Himid at Tate Britain (2011/12), which re-presented work shown in *The Thin Black Line* (1985). The reprint includes the curator's annotations. This shows that McGonagle had underlined the paragraph in which Himid proposed using the concourse gallery and up the stairs. Corresponding to this, Himid was not allocated the Upper Gallery or Lower Gallery as she had requested. During the exhibition period of *The Thin Black Line*, contemporary artist James Coleman and modernist architect Adolf Loos were shown in those two spaces. While two white artist men were allocated the larger spaces, Lubaina Himid was given only the concourse and stairs. She has since described the space she was given as a '20 meter corridor'.<sup>564</sup> While the staircase space was used as a regular part of the ICA's exhibitions program at that time—for example, it was used for Flick Allen's *Café Royale* (1984) and Peter Kennard's *Target London* (1985)—the allocation of exhibition space represented, for Himid, a belittling in terms of what

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<sup>561</sup> Liz Fekete, 'UK Commentary: Racism in the Arts in Britain', *Race and Class*, 28 (1986), 73–79 (p. 74).

<sup>562</sup> Himid, 'Inside the In/Visible: Forgetting Strategy', p. 42.

<sup>563</sup> Declan McGonagle, letter to Lubaina Himid, published in Himid, *Thin Black Line(s)*, p. 26.

<sup>564</sup> Himid, *Thin Black Line(s)*, p. 11.

she was seeking to do in making visible the vital presence of black women's art in Britain. McGonagle's gesture is reflective of a 'political unconscious', which produced, and continues to produce, daily experiences of marginalization and erasure for black people.<sup>565</sup> On the one hand, this exhibition produced an event that enabled the gathering together of black women artists in a major space of contemporary art, who asserted themselves as a visible presence within the contemporary art field. On the other, it showed the necessity for those artists—as black people and as women—to do this work for themselves, subject as they were to the perpetual risk of being side-lined and undervalued by the predominantly white institutions of the art world.

In her assessment of *The Thin Black Line*, Himid adds to the number of articles she has written over the years that evoke the pain of black artists in recognizing the way in which they found themselves constantly subject to marginalization even while they were finding themselves invited into the major spaces of art. She writes about the conditions that led up to *The Thin Black Line*, notably an invitation by the director Bill McAlister to submit ideas for a Black Arts festival. Himid recalls that, 'I went to a meeting and discovered that there had been pressure (funding pressure) from the Greater London Council for much more evidence of a black cultural contribution to the program at the ICA'.<sup>566</sup> While the festival did not materialize, this detail adds further context to the event of *The Thin Black Line*. The 1980s reflected a shift in opportunity for black artists in Britain that reflected the efforts and struggles of a Black Arts Movement as part of the broader struggle for black power, voice and visibility. The new directions in funding policy, which put pressure on institutions like the ICA to diversify their arts programming cannot be overlooked because it is through these opportunities that artists were given limited means to organize and talk to one another. These opportunities, however, also made Himid and others conscious of the complexity of struggle that continued to ensure the sidelining of black culture even while, on the face of it, it was being supported and promoted like never before.

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<sup>565</sup> In using the term 'political unconscious', I am invoking Fredric Jameson's theoretical contribution through which Jameson shows that creative work cannot be divorced from its political context—see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

<sup>566</sup> Himid, *Thin Black Line(s)*, p. 11.

How then, did this changing policy affect The Pavilion? An annual report from The Pavilion dated 1988/89 notes that The Pavilion had appointed a Touring Exhibition Organizer who was funded, alongside similar positions across a number of other arts organizations, by ‘The Black Visual Arts Franchise Scheme’. In the report the appointed touring officer, Violet Hendrickson writes an account, which shows that, despite the opportunity this scheme had offered her, she is attuned to the problems still facing black women artists. She writes that, ‘Black women’s art is often defiant, consciousness raising, humorous and uplifting [...] It is often ghettoized and marginalized and has yet to find a permanent space in white mainstream galleries’ exhibitions programs’.<sup>567</sup> Black women’s art was not marginalized at The Pavilion but was central to its feminist project. From 1986 until 1993 (after which The Pavilion closed its original premises) The Pavilion had numerous exhibitions of black women’s work. Beginning with *Testimony*, this program included the exhibitions *Sphinx* by Maud Sulter (1987); *Our Space in Britain* (9 Nov–10 Dec 1988)—work by migrant, immigrant and black women photographers; *Transatlantic Traditions* (8 June–6 July 1989)—work by Frieda Medin, Coreen Simpson, Nina Kuo and Lorna Simpson and *Keepin’ It Together* (2 November 1992–25 Feb 1993)—selected by Chila Kumari Burman and Violet Hendrickson. Some of these were by nationally-recognized contemporary artists but other exhibitions were by local women invited to use The Pavilion’s darkroom.

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<sup>567</sup> The Pavilion Women’s Photography Center, unpublished annual report, 1988/9, FAN/PAV.



Figure 5.10, Poster for *5 Women* at The Pavilion (15 November–15 December 1988). Courtesy of Feminist Archive North/Pavilion.

From 15 November–15 December 1988, The Pavilion hosted an exhibition titled *5 Women* (Figure 5.10), which was the result of a workshop series designed to enable local women to make photographic work. One of these five women was Bradford-based photographer Nudrat Afza. Afza arrived in Bradford at the age of ten as a Pakistani immigrant and later trained as a social worker as a mature student. At a meeting at the National Science and Media Museum on 10 July 2017, I interviewed Afza about her own formation as a photographer. Unlike Sutapa Biswas, this did not take place through a university or art school education, but rather through a more grassroots experience. She describes this as follows:

My photography just started by chance, I didn't even have a camera. Because I used to say, I'd like to take pictures. And somebody said 'here's a camera' [...] We lived a very sheltered life and we came from a very big family so we did a lot of housework, and cooking, and we missed our education. And that's it really. All I do remember is that when I came to Britain I was very bright, looking at magazines, *Time* magazine and newspapers and looking at images and those images are still in my head. And I came

across it when I was taking pictures and it's an American soldier in Vietnam sticking his tongue out ...<sup>568</sup>

Later in the interview, Afza adds to this reflection on the impact social documentary had on her interest in photography and her consciousness of the migrant experience. She says:

I remember having a card on my desk and that card which I know now because I'm doing photography and I've looked at books was this iconic picture by Dorothea Lange about the migrant mother, the woman and two children, and not understanding it but having that card for years on my table. And looking up now and looking at the issues around it and the history and also a very up-to-date image of the same people which I saw recently somewhere. And that tragedy is, which comes back to the issues about black artists and black art, the mother died, the mother and the daughter, they were still poor.<sup>569</sup>

Thus when Nudrat Afza started making photographs herself, these famous social documentary images informed her own critique of the signifiers of inequality in Manningham, Bradford, where Afza still lives and works. Indeed, her first photographs were taken on her own street. One such photograph depicts a British Asian girl, standing on the artist's doorstep, holding a white doll. It powerfully documents the dominant representations of whiteness that were experienced by an immigrant child living in 1960s/70s Britain. Having started to take photographs, Nudrat Afza found out about The Pavilion as a space that could further her photographic self-education. She became engaged in a process of workshops, which led to participation in the *5 Women* exhibition. While, in talking to me, she was unable to recall the work she exhibited as part of the show, she could remember the workshops in the darkroom and the fact that she had access to resources for the first time in her life. She recalls:

I think there were five or ten sessions where we had to take photographs and go in the darkroom and develop them, print them and had a small exhibition. Yeah and its really interesting because it makes me very angry, because there would have been lots of people, and there still are, lots of people like me. In my, in the girls school I went to, there was a darkroom that I never went in. We didn't have access to. Nobody told us to go in there and do anything.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> Nudrat Afza, unpublished interview with the author, 10 July 2017.

<sup>569</sup> Afza, unpublished interview with the author, 10 July 2017.

<sup>570</sup> Afza, unpublished interview with the author, 10 July 2017.

I applied the Grounded Theory Method of analysis to Nudrat Afza's interview and I found that, as the quotation above exemplifies, the most populated selective code from the interview was 'Accessing', with a total of seventy-four lines of the transcription relating to the issue of accessing art, training and the means of production.<sup>571</sup> There was a strong sense through the interview that the artist recognized the way in which the state apparatuses of art and education had failed her over the course of her artistic career, and that she had lacked the resources needed to fulfill her potential. Conversely, she recognized that The Pavilion provided, for a temporary period, a space through which she was able to access the necessary support structures to develop her work. Notably, this included access to skilled facilitators, dark room facilities, camera and lighting equipment, supportive peers and exhibition opportunities. In her interview, Afza distinguished herself a number of times from what she saw as the intellectualism and experimentalism of fine art. For example, in speaking about her attraction to social documentary she says:

I think that's because it was easy and accessible, because people wanted jargon and intellectual understanding about things. I mean I was off the road, the rough and ready, so it was very frowned upon because it wasn't fine art.

While, in this statement, she distances herself from the category of 'fine art', it is clear that photography was, nonetheless, a vital tool through which she was able to make visible the experiences of her life as a British Asian immigrant. Indeed, when I spoke with Afza she described photography as her 'lifeline'. While the workshops at The Pavilion clearly provided an important opportunity for Nudrat Afza as she was beginning to develop her practice as a photographer, there was an additional outcome from the project that I had not anticipated. According to Afza, in 1988, the year of the *5 Women* project, The Pavilion was asked to nominate a photographer for an exhibition at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford (now the National Science and Media Museum), the site in which we met for the interview. The artist recalls:

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<sup>571</sup> At the end of the coding process there were a total of thirty-eight lines of interview that related to the selective code 'Destabilizing Representation' and thirty-two lines of interview that related to the selective code 'Women's Movement'. This supports the strength of 'Feminising Photography' as a final concept that reflected the *shared priorities* of The Pavilion's constituents.

Ah! That's it! The Pavilion were asked to nominate somebody (see you made me remember!) nominate a photographer for an open exhibition here.

As a result of this nomination, the museum chose to acquire *Girl with a doll* (1986), the photograph referenced above. In reflecting on this past moment through the interview, Afza thus came to realize that The Pavilion made a significant impact upon her visibility as a photographer. Afza's experience shows the necessity of a feminist space, not only for making visible work that was not being shown elsewhere, but also for enabling and resourcing women who did not have access to training in the formal spaces of Higher Education. Afza did not come to The Pavilion through direct involvement with the women's movement or through official training in fine art, but rather through recognizing the possibility of the camera to confront the struggle to be seen and represented in daily life.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have put The Pavilion back into the history of the exhibitions, organizations and curatorial initiatives that enabled the visibility of black women's art practice during the 1980s. Through this, I have presented the significance of photography in articulating a black feminist subjectivity at this particular moment in the history of contemporary art. In the course of this research, my own assumptions have been deeply challenged. When I first began my research, I assumed that *Testimony* was a single interruption into a broadly white-feminist program that was attempting to deal with the myriad concerns of sexual difference, gender, race and class. What I discovered, however, was that this exhibition and the subsequent program of black artists, was absolutely central to The Pavilion's development as a feminist initiative.

This chapter, more so than the previous, has also revealed the struggle to write feminist history. One important dimension of my research in both my third and fourth chapters was the opportunity to see various pieces of work by the artists through the presence of their work within exhibitions, within publications and books. Though this, too, was a struggle that necessitated reaching far outside of The Pavilion archive, it is in this final chapter that I have felt most strongly of all, the risk of important feminist work being written out of history. In this

chapter in particular I found the evidence of work—the articles, reviews, the artwork itself—difficult to locate.<sup>572</sup> The virtual invisibility of Brenda Agard, in particular, clarified for me a particular imperative for doing this work. While the exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary gave me opportunity to see two important bodies of work by Maud Sulter and Ingrid Pollard, on which I have relied heavily in this chapter, I was not able to track down the original work Ingrid Pollard showed within the *Testimony* exhibition. The artist herself barely remembered having made it. The work of Brenda Agard has been rendered virtually invisible outside of a single 6”x4” photograph. The publications that resourced the Black Women’s Art Movement were also enormously difficult to track down. For example, I spent significant time on a fruitless search for one particular copy of the magazine, *Outwrite*, which addressed feminism and imperialism in the 1980s. Most of the magazines and catalogues I have referenced were found, not in university libraries, but on the Diaspora-website, a key resource created by Eddie Chambers, that reveals many of the threads of the Black Women’s Art Movement.

It has also been important for me to understand in more depth the significant relationship between the University of Leeds, The Pavilion and the wider field of art. The story of black women’s art at The Pavilion begins at the Department of Fine Art at Leeds, where the creativity of Sutapa Biswas made visible the imperialism of European Art History. On her initiative, two black artists were invited to Leeds, who then selected her work for inclusion in *The Thin Black Line* at the ICA. It was through this exhibition, and the networks around it, that Biswas met Brenda Agard, Ingrid Pollard and Maud Sulter whose photographic work was also included in *The Thin Black Line*. It was also through her participation in this exhibition that Sutapa Biswas saw the possibility and necessity of creating spaces for black women artists to show together. Having recognized an opportunity for her to develop her black feminist critique through the organization of exhibitions, Biswas then took employment at The Pavilion, where she brought together the *Testimony* exhibition, which gave prominence to the specific

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<sup>572</sup> From 23 November–17 December 2017 I opened an exhibition in the Project Space within the School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies, which brought together work addressed in these chapters so I could see it for myself, and disseminate it to audiences. I borrowed two bodies of work by Marie Yates that were exhibited in *The Image in Trouble*. These were loaned by Tate and Richard Saltoun Gallery. Richard Saltoun Gallery also loaned work from Spence’s series *The Picture of Health?* While the Estate of Maud Sulter lent me archival documentation alongside Sulter’s video, *Sphinx*, I was unable, to secure loans of any of the work exhibited within *Testimony*, further reinforcing the struggle involved in sustaining the visibility of black women’s work.



photographic interventions that were inspired by a black feminist critique. This gave a platform for the artists who were developing what should now be considered some of the most important work of British art in the 1980s. It also productively challenged the terms of feminism at the moment of The Pavilion's emergence. It made visible black women's experiences, and the struggle to produce a black subjectivity in the face of a long history of traumatic fragmentation. As I have sought to show, the specific artwork exhibited in *Testimony* raised questions that had to do with history, subjectivity and black spectatorship. Finally the exhibitions program, which was committed to showing black women artists at The Pavilion also constituted a network of women who were enabled to access The Pavilion's darkroom, to make their own images and to find solidarity in their struggle. This was exemplified by the account of Nudrat Afza. What is clear, therefore, is that at The Pavilion in Leeds, there was a unique configuration of art, critical analysis, and political energy, out of which came a public art space that was both rooted in the daily experiences of local women while being critically attentive to the politics of the image, both in relation to the entanglements of gender and race. This can thus be read as a third dimension of 'Feministing Photography'.

## CONCLUSION – LOOKING BACK TO THINK FORWARD

Her history is, then, no longer the disclosure of a lost and distant past; it is a relation, a writing and thus, a production of our present.<sup>573</sup>

**Conversations and Differences**

In the introduction to this thesis I asked: What could one specific artistic, political intervention in the 1980s tell me about the conditions of artist-led, grassroots, political culture in Britain? What could I discover about the nature of feminist struggle and strategies of resistance both past and present? The current-day *Pavilion* is a very different organization from the one that was founded in 1983. In the 1990s it retracted its explicit feminist focus and it moved out of the original park pavilion. Over the years its priorities have adapted to shifts in the financial and political landscape. Its modalities of practice are necessarily different to what they once were. The art market now dominates the possibilities for artists to make and show work and most of the artists Pavilion works with are circulating in a highly marketized international circuit of biennials and blockbuster exhibitions. Photography has been absorbed into the mainstream categories of art in Britain and art, since the 1990s, has taken a multiplicity of forms that had yet to be imagined in the 1980s. The means of production and of distribution have shifted enormously, not least through the development of digital technology. Indeed, Pavilion's main program now focuses on the commissioning of artist video and audio work, which has emerged as arguably *the* primary medium of artwork of a critical, political nature. The gap between then and now must be acknowledged. The world has changed and art has changed with it. Yet while there are differences there are also continuities and the current artistic moment is marked by a desire by contemporary curators to produce conversations with feminist art of the 1970s and 1980s, as exemplified by the exhibition case studies posed at the beginning of each of my main chapters.

An exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel in 2018 showed the possibilities of conversations across feminist artists differently situated temporally and theoretically in terms of political moment, art practice and feminist theory. The show brought together the work of

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<sup>573</sup> Fisher, p. 3.

American feminist artist based in New York—Martha Rosler (b. 1943)—and Berlin Japanese-German artist Hito Steyerl (b. 1966). Martha Rosler is a contemporary artist who began making work in the 1960s, using photomontage and early video technology to critique the conventions of representations in relation to questions of power and subjectivity. Her work tends to be exhibited in shows about the 1970s although she has continuously made new work. Hito Steyerl is a contemporary artist whose work dates back to the 1990s and who has become very visible over the last decade.<sup>574</sup> Like Rosler, Steyerl's work addresses mass media as the way in which the distribution of power is normalized in society. Both artists are interested in technologies of surveillance and militarization and the show itself was named *War Games*, addressing, as the exhibition text states, the 'various fields of conflict as mechanism of societal power relations' and 'reflecting the connections between our perception of social reality and the audiovisual media by which it is communicated'.<sup>575</sup> The opportunity to see work made by Martha Rosler that spanned the entirety of her oeuvre from 1966 to 2018, was illuminating, making it possible to track a common impulse to investigate the operation of power through representations, whether that be news magazines or, as in her most recent work, drone technology. As Stephanie Schwarz astutely points out in her *Art Monthly Review*, 'there is no sense here that the older artist sets the stage for the younger artist'.<sup>576</sup> We may not now be in the moment of the Vietnam War or the Pinochet regime (the subjects of two of Rosler's older pieces) but this does not mean her older works read as outdated or transcended. Rather they show us the patterns of oppressions and invisibilities across time even while the modes of violence have shifted. One of Steyerl's most compelling works is titled *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* In it she tracks back from the Istanbul Biennial 2013, the event at which this staged lecture-performance was originally set, to the biennial's corporate sponsor. This company, she reveals, made the munitions used to fire at her friend Andrea Wolf, who died in battle fighting for the PKK in 1998. The work shows that understanding history is necessary for understanding—and defeating—the dominant

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<sup>574</sup> See, for example, her solo show *Duty Free Art* at the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (11 November 2015–21 March 2016), her participation in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (9 May–22 November 2015) and her contribution to the 13<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial (14 September–20 October 2013).

<sup>575</sup> Exhibition guide accompanying *Martha Rosler and Hito Steyerl: War Games*, produced by Kunstmuseum Basel, 2018.

<sup>576</sup> Stephanie Schwarz, 'Martha Rosler and Hito Steyerl: War Games', *Art Monthly*, 418, (2018), 33 (p. 33).

political forces in the present. Read together, the two artists show the way in which power operates, the way it is normalized, and its connection to real lived violence under neoliberalism. They show us a persistent desire to use the creative possibilities of shifting audio-visual technologies to critique the way in which those technologies are deployed by state and corporate powers. They show us that while the mechanisms of power may have changed, issues of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and violence against women persist remarkably unchanged.

While this is an example of an exhibition that is showing the potential of intergenerational conversation between feminist artists across the decades, recent feminist debate has also addressed the way in which feminist practices have been incorporated into the hegemonic art world. In her 2013 essay, 'A Good Time to be a Woman? Women Artists, Feminism and Tate Modern', Lara Perry addresses this point by looking at the effect of feminist art on the collections and exhibitions of Tate Modern. She argues that while one of Tate Modern's central goals when it opened was to create spaces that would make visible the transformations in the discourse of art that had taken place since the 1970s and 1980s—one of these transformations being the emergence of a feminist practice in art and art history—Tate has not incorporated the lessons of feminism into its methods of display and interpretation. An important example, she notes, is the way in which Ana Mendieta's landmark photograph *Untitled (Rape Scene)* (1973) disavows the political concerns inherent within the work by interpreting Mendieta's representations of rape stylistically. As the accompanying interpretive text panel reads, 'Mendieta's performances and photographs involving blood can be seen as a fusion of various influences, including the work of Frida Kahlo and the Vienna Aktionists'.<sup>577</sup> The mutual transformations of politics and aesthetics that must be credited to feminism—as I have shown in my close analysis of three sets of exhibited works at The Pavilion—have yet to be fully acknowledged in the institutions that are now, belatedly, collecting and exhibiting that work. My analysis, as it has produced and enlarged upon the concept of 'Feminizing Photography' adds to this demand to recognize the politics of feminist works, which does not

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<sup>577</sup> Lara Perry, 'A Good Time To be a Woman', in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, exhibitions cultures and curatorial transgressions*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 31–47 (p. 40).

reduce artwork to an aesthetic style nor make feminist a signifier of politics or politics as extraneous to art, but rather shows that ‘feministing’ was a complex operation as much about the media, the technology and the concept of operation as a political message.

In a recent essay entitled ‘Insights from Italy: Pleasure, Plurality and Shaping the Present’, Jo Anna Isaak, who herself made important contributions to the feminist discourse of the 1980s, notes that ‘there has been a radical rejection of the theoretical 1980s. Work done at that time by avowedly feminist artists—work drawing upon theoretical writings—is now often rejected as didactic, illustrative, intellectually elitist or arcane’.<sup>578</sup> In returning to The Pavilion, however, I did not find an organization that was ‘intellectually elitist or arcane’. While theory has continued to develop new concepts, the legacy of my research into The Pavilion is a continued desire to disavow the division between politics and aesthetics that persists in the contemporary art-world. In my introduction I cited an event in which a screening of films by Hito Steyerl, programmed by the current-day Pavilion, were derided as ‘esoteric’ by Arts Council England. Steyerl’s work is intellectually, theoretically, aesthetically sophisticated. As a result it is also politically vital, finding forms to visualize the complexities and effects of global capitalism in relation to the image. Yet presented by Pavilion before Steyerl entered fully into the international art-world circuit, her work was illegible to the arts funders because of the demands it appeared to make on viewers to understand what is happening in the world. How can art escape from the confines of an art-world that continually reduces it to commodity or spectacle? How can Pavilion continue to pursue the relationship between politics and aesthetics in relation to its current constituencies? It was this question that informed a recent project which I wish to address in the final section, where I hope to make clear the combination of continuity in feminist projects and differences because of altering political urgencies. This does not represent succession and supersession. It becomes a point of historical conversation, both of whose elements offer critical insights into feminist negotiation of its social concerns by means of aesthetic practice in increasingly narrowed and historically uninformed contexts of funding

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<sup>578</sup> Jo Anna Isaak, ‘Insights from Italy: Pleasure, Plurality and Shaping the Present’, in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, exhibitions cultures and curatorial transgressions*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 31–47 (p. 40).

and exhibition.

### **Interwoven Histories**

In 2014, at the start of my doctoral work, I became involved in a project with a group of women migrant domestic workers, mostly from The Philippines. This group, who named themselves Justice for Domestic Workers Leeds (sister to the larger, London-based, self-organized campaigning group, Justice for Domestic Workers), were part of a concrete political struggle against the legal constraints recently placed upon the domestic worker visa, which tied migrant workers to their employers, exposing thousands of women in Britain to potential exploitation. My engagement with the group came through a network of feminist curators and academics who are interested in the feminist debates on the politics of representation in the present day and the way in which visual art can be a political tool through which to address the conditions of women's labor in the current moment, taking particular account of the experiences of women from the so-called Global South. The opportunity to help support this group came through connections with Louise Shelley, a curator and initiator of the ground-breaking 'Communal Knowledge' programme in London, through which artists and designers are invited to work with community groups, organizations, schools and neighbourhoods. Justice for Domestic Workers had been part of this program and had later invited Shelley to be on their Board of Trustees. When one particular domestic worker moved to Leeds, a small network of artists, academics and domestic workers began to meet regularly to socialize and to discuss ways of supporting the activism of Leeds-based migrant domestic workers. This network included Dr Amy Charlesworth (Open University) whose academic and curatorial work addresses issues of women, labor, domesticity, caring, and protest. Artist Rehana Zaman was also an important contributor to the group's work. Zaman's artist films are often generated through conversation and collaboration with others and her film *Some Women, Other Women and all the Bittermen* (2014) includes early footage documenting the meetings of Justice for Domestic Workers Leeds as they began to organize around restrictions in their employment rights within UK immigration law.



Figure 6.1, Leeds Animation Workshop, *They call us maids: the domestic workers' story*, 2015. Still image from HD Digital Video. Courtesy of Pavilion.

My own contribution to the work of Justice for Domestic Workers Leeds was to raise a small amount of funding in order to commission the feminist film collective Leeds Animation Workshop to produce a short animation film (Figure 6.1), made in collaboration with domestic workers in Leeds, that would tell the story of the journey taken by thousands of women from The Philippines to the Arab Gulf States, and then to Britain to work in private homes. The final short film, scripted by Terry Wragg from the accounts of domestic workers, used animations, hand-painted by artist Jo Dunn, to narrate the experiences of women who had been neglected, sexually abused, enslaved and subjected to violence at the hands of their employers. The film became a tool to support the campaigns of the wider Justice for Domestic Workers group, who wanted to counter the isolation and invisibility they faced working alone in private homes, while also making the political demand that their work *is* work. Engaging in my own research on the history of The Pavilion alongside this particular project, I was able to understand how this example of artistic activism mapped on to important socialist feminist questions about the nature of women's oppression. I reflected on Jo Spence and The Hackney Flashers' demand to make visible the contributions women make to the relations of production and reproduction. I also reflected on the way in which the Black Women's Movement has revealed that, within the

Anglo-American world, the labor of working-class women of color has been integral to the ongoing reproduction of Western capitalism. I began to see how the feminist questions raised in the 1980s—if recognized for the way in which they meaningfully addressed the entanglements of gender, class and race—are not confined to the past but absolutely pertinent to the ongoing feminist global struggle in the era of so-called multiculturalism.

At the same time my research into *The Pavilion* also made me think more deeply about the nature of the image. I was interested in what the position of this specific group of women workers from the Global South had to do with the images of economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees within the British media, and particularly since 2011 and the start of the Syrian Civil War. How could the present-day *Pavilion*, as a contemporary cultural practice, reflect on the nature of our relations under global capitalism through its public visual arts program? I applied for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund [HLF] to undertake a project that would ‘make visible the contributions of the migrant workforce to the textiles industry in Leeds’. I named this project *Interwoven Histories*. The pitch to the HLF was only half the story. I was really interested in understanding how the image has, historically, (in)visibilized migrant workers, separating Britain’s economic dependence on migrant labor from the representation of migrant subjects. How has the distribution of certain kinds of representations had productive effects in relation to, for example, the recent vote to leave Europe by people in Britain, or—as described above—in terms of the lack of care for the human rights of migrant women domestic workers? Thus, it seemed necessary that the activist dimension of the project—the campaign film—was coupled with a strand of activity that would locate the politics of representation in relation to *Pavilion*’s local context.

This project was also informed by my research into the problematic of the archive. There was not an archive of migrant work just waiting to be discovered. The gap between archival representation and the historical socio-economic reality of Leeds was perfectly illustrated when I spoke to curators from the Leeds Industrial Museum based at the former Armley Mills. The museum’s own collection of historical material—derived from its history as a textiles mill—contains documentary evidence of a white working-class labor force, but no material relating to migrant labor. This began to be challenged in 2014, however when—as part



of an artistic response to the mill's history by artist David Bridges—the museum's Assistant Curator of Community History, Hannah Kemp, interviewed Lis Tempest, the daughter of Ernest Tempest who was the last owner of Armley Mills. The museum's curators were surprised to find that Lis Tempest recalled childhood memories of workers in the mill who had come from India, Pakistan and the Caribbean Islands. When *Interwoven Histories* formally launched, an additional piece of evidence came to light. Irena Gorbun, widow of former millworker Wally Gorbun, donated a photograph to the museum. This depicted her husband alongside Ernest Tempest, the mill-owner, and a black man whom she knew simply as 'Derek'. On seeing the photograph, Lis Tempest offered the following recollections:

Derek was in Wally's 'Cardings Gang'. The carding sections were on two floors (two sets on each floor)—the floor where the 'Top Office' was situated and the floor above. Most, if not all of Wally's team were Jamaicans. I do not know when they arrived in the UK, possibly mid to late 1950s. I also recall at least two, possibly three Jamaicans played in a steel band.<sup>579</sup>

Here, therefore, I found myself confronting the opacity of another archive, this time the archive of a large public institution—the Leeds Museums & Galleries of which the Leeds Industrial Museum is part. A desire to investigate the representation of migrant workers in Leeds, however, led me to identify traces of a history that was not self-evident within the public, institutional memory of industry in the city. From here, we—Pavilion's current team—sought to thicken the archive further. We investigated the collections of West Yorkshire Archives, Yorkshire Film Archive, Leeds Jewish Cultural Archive, the British Newspaper Archive and the Yorkshire Collection in Special Collections at the University of Leeds. We spoke with first-generation migrants about their experiences of arriving in Leeds from Jamaica, St Kitts & Nevis, India and Pakistan. We researched the radical publications *Leeds Other Paper* and *Chapelton News*, which sought to be an alternative news source to the racist reporting of *The Yorkshire Post & Leeds Mercury* during the 1970s and 1980s. By constructing an archive, and listening to first-hand experiences, we began to build up a picture of a post-war Leeds that was

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<sup>579</sup> Lis Tempest, 'Derek from the Cardings team at Armley Mills', <<http://www.interwovenhistories.co.uk/post/166079231261/derek-from-the-cardings-team-at-armley-mills>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

dependent on its migrant workforce but that was also entangled with a deep-rooted racism. For example, one retired woman with whom I spoke at the Leeds West Indian Center recounted that, having arrived in Leeds from the Caribbean—and having made a job application by telephone—she was invited to interview. On arriving at the office, however, her prospective employer, surprised by the color of her skin, subsequently informed her that a job was no longer available. I also found a newspaper article within the British Newspaper Archive, published on 10 December 1955 in *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, which ran the headline ‘Many colored workers are over-sensitive’.<sup>580</sup> The headline was symptomatic of this particular newspaper’s transformation of migrant labor into a ‘social problem’. As these two examples show, the project uncovered historic racism at the level of testimonies of lived experience, but also at the level of representation.

*Interwoven Histories* was thus another discovery of the politics and problematic of minority archives. It was not the first effort to tell migrant stories in Leeds. Melody Walker, for example, had already produced a number of much more thorough oral histories as part of her research project *A Journey Through Our History: The Story of the Jamaican People in Leeds* which had culminated in a book.<sup>581</sup> *Interwoven Histories* was also limited in scope, restricted by time, funding constraints, staff capacity and expertise. One of the driving questions, for me, however—having undertaken this historical study of The Pavilion, and having traced the convergence of feminist historiography and the politics of representation—was ‘what could a visual arts organization offer to the particular topic and method engaged by *Interwoven Histories*?’ Why should we, as a contemporary arts organization, be undertaking this project? Was there a connection between my work to construct an archive of a group of feminist artists using photography, and this second piece of archival work that was attempting to reconstruct the history of migrant work in Leeds?

It was at the exhibition stage—in which the material was curated—that I began to see the contributions a visual arts organization could make to this topic. As we had been

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<sup>580</sup> Derek Boothroyd, ‘Many colored workers are over-sensitive’, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, December 10 1955, p. 5.

<sup>581</sup> Melody Walker, *A Journey Through Our History: The Story of the Jamaican People in Leeds & the Work of the Jamaica Society* (Leeds: The Jamaica Society, 2003).

undertaking the historical research—aware that we were not simply going to ‘discover’ a documentary archive offering evidence of migrant workers *at work*—we could see that the complex picture of migration was being produced in the *convergence* of different historical resources: documentary photography, archival film footage, works of art, creative writing, workers’ magazines, lived experiences, music, mainstream news reports and alternative community publications. When, as a team, in our planning for the installation, we began to assemble the material on the walls of Pavilion’s office, this historiographical method of convergence became a visual curatorial strategy. Putting together different types of representations side by side allowed the contradictions of the ‘migrant story in Leeds’ to emerge as a creative, political gesture that could ‘speak’ without the need for lengthy interpretative wall texts. I began to think again about ‘montage’ as a particular artistic gesture.

In Chapter Four, I have described the way in which ‘photo-montage’ was deployed in Weimar Germany in the 1920s/30s, in order to make visible a critique of the rising fascist ideology. Feminist artists then remobilized this strategy in the 1970s in order to show that the idealization of women as wives/mothers related to their socio-economic position in society. I added to my understanding of this strategy when I read Lubaina Himid’s article ‘Fragments’, published in *Feminist Art News* (1988), in which she names a strategy of black creativity ‘Gathering and Re-using’. She expands on this concept stating, ‘gathering and re-using is like poetry, a gathering of words, sounds, rhythms and a re-using of them in a unique order to highlight, pinpoint and precisely express’.<sup>582</sup>

*Interwoven Histories* was not an artwork. It was, however, an attempt to make a creative gesture that revealed the patterns, the regularity, of migrant representations within the history of Leeds’ industry. The result was a configuration of panels—for which Pavilion producer Will Rose must be credited—that brought together the divergent material gathered through the research project in an installation at the Leeds Industrial Museum. For example, the aforementioned article from *The Yorkshire Post & Leeds Mercury* that writes about the ‘problem’ of migrant integration was positioned in conjunction with a reproduction of a

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<sup>582</sup> Himid, ‘Fragments’, p. 8.

*Chapelton News* article titled ‘Racist Attacks’ that named the institutional racism of the Leeds police force. Between these news reports was a documentary image, taken by Leeds fine art student Timothy Neat at Leeds Kirkgate Market. Depicting a smartly-dressed black woman looking directly into the camera, this photograph brought to my mind Brenda Agard’s counter-image, *Portrait of Our Time*, addressed in Chapter Five. Added to this configuration were pieces of poetry, reproductions of artworks, and documentation of the Leeds carnival, which together evidenced the creative, aesthetic contributions brought to the city by its migrant populations. While few of the images within the exhibition documented a migrant worker at work, the exhibition overcame this ‘problem’ of invisibility. It found a way to present positive images of migration, while also denaturalizing the discourse that presents the figure of the migrant as either victim or problem. In staging this recent project, I am seeking to show that a theoretical understanding of the archive’s opacity, and of the way in which the invisibility of migrant representations serves the interests of the political status quo, produced an aesthetic strategy that reveals the ongoing productive potential of the politics-aesthetics relation.

This contemporary curatorial experiment shows how an energetic re-engagement with the specific cultural practice of The Pavilion offered a model for a creative resistance to the dominant structures of capitalism in the present day. Propelled by my research into The Pavilion, it was motivated by the lived experiences of one specific group of women—Justice for Domestic Workers Leeds—who wanted to challenge their collective invisibility. It was informed by my investigations into the politics and problematic of the archive, which enabled me to overcome the opacity of the archive. It was resourced by understanding representation as a language that is productive of meaning, which necessitates political analysis. Finally, it remobilized specific visual strategies, informed by the archive of feminist photographic practice that began to articulate a complex set of social relations.

### **Feministing Photography**

By way of conclusion, I wish to restate the significance of my main concept—‘Feministing Photography’—for writing feminist art and curatorial histories. I identified ‘Feministing Photography’ as the final concept that was reached through the coding of the

filmed oral memories that were produced for the contemporary art film analyzed in Chapter One. This concept registers a shared political ambition from across the distinct memories of ten women who each participated in The Pavilion's activity during the 1980s, but had a different relation to it. It names a particular political-artistic impulse: the political struggle of the women's movement taking place within the regime of representation.

The coding exercise through which I analyzed these filmed oral memories was drawn from the Grounded Theory Method [GTM]. A particularly important element of GTM is its emphasis on naming concepts by using the gerund: a verb-form that is used like/treated as a noun. It was this emphasis that led me to activate the static descriptive term 'Feminist Photography' by transforming it into 'Feminizing Photography'. This is no minor grammatical detail. Rather it places emphasis on the *work* of finding out what a feminist practice might be as a political intervention, rather than a description of a content, or style of artwork.

In tracking the dismissal of The Pavilion's early exhibitions by the public funders—as outlined in Chapter Two—I had a particular political impetus to reconstruct the archive of The Pavilion exhibitions. Seeking to read against this narrative of failure, I then examined the exhibitions in detail, which also entailed reconstructing the theoretical genealogy that produced these works of art and the wider project of The Pavilion. Through this examination I produced new knowledge of the pertinence of the concept 'Feminizing Photography'. I did not identify a shared formal quality or content. Instead, this analysis revealed a set of distinct exhibitions that were connected in their use of the camera as a means of doing feminist work. By this I mean that each of the exhibitions addressed representation as being political in the sense of being a site that produces meaning and positions, but also in the sense of being a site of political intervention, in which those meanings and positions can be altered.

These exhibitions did not demonstrate this activity of *feminizing* knowingly. It was rather that I came slowly to understand what this project was in practice through closely reading the specificities of the art practices in each of the three exhibitions. In this sense, I took up the task of *feminizing* photography, making my research a work of political discovery.

'Feminizing Photography' thus describes a shared political artistic ambition: to effect social change through the work of art. It also describes a particular artistic focus on a critical analysis

of, and activism within, the realm of representation. There is another, third dimension of 'Feministing Photography' that has been made visible within my investigation of these exhibitions. The three particular exhibitionary case studies: *The Image in Trouble*; Jo Spence's multi-exhibition project and *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers* have shown that *feministing* takes, as its subject, the psychic and social patterning of gender, while also necessarily attending to the way in which class and race are determining factors of social relations. The study of these three exhibitions, and the artistic practices that contributed to them, show how these entanglements were addressed at The Pavilion through attention to the high-level debates of feminist theory, through artistic practices and through a focus on reaching out to women in The Pavilion's local community, all of which maintained a commitment to social and political change.

The concept of 'Feministing Photography' underpins the significance of The Pavilion Women's Photography Center as a radical cultural practice that must be read as part of the wider history of a politicized artistic culture in Britain that has yet to be fully assessed. It has revealed photography as a primary instrument of critical art practice at a particular historical and political moment. It has also expanded on an understanding of the relation of feminist theory and politics to the history of contemporary art practice. Finally—as I sought to show through the contemporary application of 'Feministing Photography'—it has become a route to show the necessary relationship between theoretical work, art practice and political struggle in the past in relation to the challenges facing cultural practices in the present.

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## APPENDIX 1 – EXHIBITIONS AT THE PAVILION (1983–1993)

**1983**

- 1–28 May *Collective Works*
- June (precise dates unknown) *Who's Holding the Baby?*
- 7–3 July *Snap back: an exhibition of women's photography*
- 3–27 August *Gaining Momentum: Eight Women Photographers Photograph Women*
- 3 Sept–1 Oct *Spare Rib – 100 Issues*
- 5–29 October *Beyond the Family Album*
- 22–26 November *Using Photography*
- 30 Nov–23 Dec *No Access: Disability is a Question of Class*

**1984**

- January (precise dates unknown) *A Peace of the Action: Greenham Common*
- February (precise dates unknown) *Visible Women*
- 7–31 March *Family, Phantasy, Photography*
- 1 Aug–1 Sept *The Image in Trouble*
- 5–29 Sept *Visions of the future: an exhibition of photographic science fiction*

**1985**

- April (precise dates unknown) *Step by Step*
- 1–35 May *10 Years On, 1975 to 1985*
- July (precise dates unknown) *Unemployment in the West End of Newcastle*
- 1–31 August *10 Million Women for 10 Days*
- 4–28 September *The Picture of Health*
- 3–26 October *A Dog Called Bronski? Photographs by young women in Leeds*

**1986**

- January (precise dates unknown) *Working Women (commissioned by TUC)*
- February (precise dates unknown) *Obvious Women*
- May (precise dates unknown) *Don't say Cheese, say Lesbian*
- 7 June *Girls are powerful*
- 10 June–26 August *Testimony: Three Blackwomen Photographers*
- 5–30 August *No Frames! No Boundaries! A celebration of women's action for a nuclear-free future*

**1987**

- 3 April–9 May *Dog 2: Photographs by Women in Leeds*
- 16 Sept–28 November 1987 *Sphinx*

**1988**

- (precise dates unknown) *Tiocfaidh ar la (Our day will come)*
- May (precise dates unknown) *Unnatural History: photographs by Kate Mellor*
- 9 Nov–10 Dec, *Our space in Britain*

**1989**

- (precise dates unknown) *Byker*
- 3 April–5 May *Getting Around: A photographic exhibition by Broad Images*
- 8 June–6 July *Transatlantic Traditions*
- 29 Aug–29 Sept *Poseuses – Lesbian Identities*
- 15 Nov–15 Dec, *5 Women*

**1990**

- 24 Sept–31 Oct *Breaths*

**1991**

- 1 March–10 April *Against the Odds*
- 26 April–5 June *Split Ends*
- 14 June–31 July *New Work*
- 9 Sept–26 Oct *Womaness, a photographic exhibition*
- 11 Nov–30 Jan 1992 *Stolen Glances: Lesbians take photographs*

**1992**

- (precise dates unknown) *Looking for Sheba*
- 6 April–15 May *Real Lemon: Broadening Out*
- 10 July–20 Aug *Asking for it*
- 7 Sept–15 Aug *Espiritu de el Salvador: Heroines, Martyrs & Patriots*
- 2 Nov–25 Feb 1992 *Keepin' it together: selected by Chila Kumari Burman & Vi Hendrickson*

**1993**

- 7 June–29 July *Voices of Fury*
- 9 Aug–30 Sept *The Dresses: An Archaeology of Childhood*
- 8 Oct–16 Dec *Back of Beyond: An exhibition and installation of laser prints and videos*<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Exhibition dates and titles are taken from the posters and meeting minutes within The Pavilion archive as well as further information from early participants. It remains incomplete, representing the knowledge I have been able to access to date.

## APPENDIX 2 – RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Twelve women participated in the film *To the editor of Amateur Photographer*, which is analysed in Chapter One. Each participant was filmed talking about her experiences of The Pavilion and extracts of the footage was included in the film.<sup>584</sup> The interviews were audio recorded separately. I transcribed ten of these unedited recordings, which I then analyzed through the Grounded Theory Method (See Chapter Two). Below are the names of the women involved in this process, as well as their relationship to The Pavilion.

Sue Ball—Worker at The Pavilion

Sutapa Biswas—Darkroom/Outreach Coordinator

Dinah Clark—Co-founder of The Pavilion

Angela Kingston—Worker at The Pavilion

Sirkka-Liisa Kontinnen—Exhibiting Artist *Step by Step* (1985) and *Byker* (1989)

Rosy Martin—Exhibiting Artist *Don't Say Cheese, Say Lesbian* (1986)

Maggie Murray (The Hackney Flashers)—Exhibiting Artist *Who's Holding the Baby?* (1983)

Griselda Pollock—Founder member of the Management Committee/Lecturer in the Department of Fine Art (University of Leeds)

Quinn—Darkroom Participant and Exhibiting Artist *Tiocfaidh ar lar* (1988)

Caroline Taylor—Co-founder of The Pavilion

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<sup>584</sup> Each interview was conducted in September 2014, either by one of the commissioned artists – Mark Fell or Luke Fowler – or by Pavilion producer Will Rose. They were filmed by Margaret Salmon and audio recorded by the interviewer. The audio recordings have since been donated to the Pavilion collection at the Feminist Archive North.