

4. DISSOCIATION: identity crisis

One of the most outstanding social revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century was achieved by ‘second wave’ feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. The history of Western art has been dominated by men, and this includes modern art and the radical art of the 1960s and early 1970s. It is only in the late 1970s that female artists (e.g. Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger) emerge as leading figures in a major movement—the postmodern appropriation movement that arose in the late 1970s and dominated art of the 1980s.

Sherman and Kruger focused on the issue of the social construction of female identity by mass media, but they did not tackle the social construction of artistic identity. The entry of women as a significant force in contemporary fine art is a considerable achievement, but the generation of female fine artists who emerged in the 1990s belong to ‘third wave’ feminism also known as post-feminism. The term ‘post-feminism’ alerts one to a certain complacency, a belief that the struggle is over, the victory has been won. Michel Foucault, however, stressed that the struggle is never over and that *resistance* is a constant companion of power. It would be a great shame if the complacency of ‘post-feminism’ led the women to cease their struggle before they reached a position in public life where they could have the power to alter social policy rather than simply adopting male roles.

At worst post-feminism might be described as women being happy to play games constructed by a masculine discourse rather than altering the rules of such games or constructing new games. And one of the most obvious indications of such acquiescence would be in a submission to the ideology of the ‘great man’, the exceptional individual, that is fundamental to masculine discourse. And in the context of capitalism, the notion that the individual must strive for his or her personal betterment is a highly effective means of steering people away from the collaborative action required to effect social change.

When Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger stepped into the role of the 'great artist' in the early 1980s they represented a victory for second wave feminism, but they did not dislocate the ideology of individualism. But this does not mean that they did not try to disturb that ideology. Both artists tackled the theme of the social construction of female identity by a male dominated mass media apparatus. Kruger created anti-advertising and Sherman deconstructed the construction of female identity in Hollywood film. But such deconstructions are in turn deconstructed by their assimilation into the 'great artist' tradition. What began as a statement regarding the forces of massification ends up being a paean to the triumph of the individual. Somewhere along the way the message regarding the need for resistance became diluted. There is no evil, chauvinistic cabal intercepting women's art practice, there is instead another force of massification akin to the stereotypical morality of the mass media that Kruger and Sherman attacked. The problem is that this alternative discursive formation, this alternative stereotype, is knit into the art system. We only need to watch just about any video or film about a particular artist to see the way in which the stereotype of the artist as a superior, super-sensitive individual separated from the herd is promulgated. The problem is that this stereotypical concept of the artist is useless in terms of its capacity for social transformation because only an extremely small percentage of the population can be elevated to such heights by the art system. Until we alter our definition of what it is to practice art this will remain the case.

More recently, in the early 2000s, there have emerged instances of women artists who prefer to collaborate and interact with communities rather than enter into the commercial gallery system which depends upon elitist values to market its products. Instances of this alternative to the more tradition-bound, museum-bound installation art approach will be investigated in the concluding chapter.

In this chapter I will examine women installation artists who continue in the modernist/postmodernist tradition of formulating a creative game for the artist to play. What is somewhat different in the examples I will cite,

however, lies in a certain questioning and problematising of the concept of identity. Women's art seems especially concerned with the issue of identity and it can be noted that women came to the fore in art at a point in cultural history when the patriarchal concept of the greatness of the male artist was being questioned and reconfigured by theorists such as Barthes (1977) and Foucault (1979). And shifting attention to feminist theory, one can note that, historically, feminism has foregrounded the issue of the social construction of gendered identity, advocating a pulling apart and reconstruction of that identity. But such deconstruction is noticeably at the level of psychology, which is to say the individual, rather than at the level of sociology, which imagines architectures for social reconstruction.

In *The Second Sex*, for example, Simone de Beauvoir took a distinctly sociological stance declaring: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine' (1993: 281). Commenting on de Beauvoir's statement the contemporary gender theorist Judith Butler notes:

If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. ... It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a woman, as if there were a *telos* that governs the process of acculturation and construction. Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. (Butler 1999: 43–44)

There are two directions evident in this passage: first, the de Beauvoirian thesis that 'woman' is a condition of becoming without a *telos* (end or goal); second, there is the notion that the longer 'stylisations of the body' survive and are reproduced the more likely they are to become accepted as 'natural' and 'essential'. In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler uses a combination of Foucauldian genealogy and a Hegelian concept of the

subject to elaborate the notion that gender is in and of itself without definition, it is a *process* rather than a solid, stable entity.

Although Butler's theory was not available when Sherman's created her Film Still series, that series fits into the 'gender trouble' framework as neatly as it did the 'death of the author' frame that was current in the late 1970s and 1980s, because Sherman's work depicts a constantly mutating identity seemingly without end. We can say much the same thing for individuality. Individuality is a social construction as much as it is a psychological entity. It is a process in which self is defined by the other, by the environment in which we exist. This is the most significant point made by Lacan in his metaphor of the mirror stage wherein our image of self is constructed via a mirror which, if we extend the metaphor, logically opens out onto other mirrors, other selves reflecting upon themselves; so that, taken together, we can speak of the self being constructed not upon a single mirror but within a hall of mirrors.

Nunnally Johnson's classic film *The Three Faces of Eve*, 1957, is of interest to this discussion because it projects a conservative model of female identity typical of America of the 1950s. In this story Eve White (Joanne Woodward) has multiple personality disorder, which is now referred to in psychiatry as dissociative identity disorder. She presents three personalities: the submissive wife (Eve White), a goodtime girl (Eve Black) and, under the influence of a strong male therapist (played by Lee J. Cobb), an emotionally balanced and rationally self-reflective individual (Jane). The narrative concerns the eventual survival of the Jane identity and the disappearance or 'death' of the other two suggesting that there is a civilised (and implicitly middle class) paradigm of selfhood that God, or the male therapist, will eventually choose. Fifty years after the film was made one can see the problem confronting this neat picture of the socially adequate as opposed to socially inadequate identity. The Jane personality is as trapped within a patriarchal order as Eve White is trapped as the submissive wife under her ignorant and domineering—and, implicitly, working class—husband (David Wayne).

The film represents technological society as being able to miraculously transform the weirdness of a dissociative identity into a model citizen. But there is another side to this coin which is that the film shows psychology expanding the definition of what it is to be human. Filmgoers in the 1950s were presented with the strange mode of being that is dissociative identity, yet the film teaches them to accept this weirdness because science can, allegedly, cope with it.¹ The Jane personality assimilates ‘correctly’ into a bourgeois social order rather than questioning its fundamental structures. In the context of America in 1957 such questioning would have been even weirder than having a dissociative personality.

Today we accept that we are socially constructed. We also accept the logic that if we are constructs then we can be deconstructed and reconstructed. At the core of the philosophical position outlined in Butler’s gender theory is the notion that human beings are capable of a high degree of mutability. We are susceptible to programming, but we are also susceptible to reprogramming. Modernity/postmodernity is a condition of accelerated evolution, which means that tradition is confronted not so much progress as the concept of *change*, and transformation. A massified social organism must be able to change quite rapidly and has proven itself surprisingly able to do this.

Watching a film such as *The Three Faces of Eve* one can gain some insight into the truly revolutionary achievements of the ‘second wave’ women’s movement that emerged in the 1960s. Viewed retrospectively, the Jane personality in *The Three Faces of Eve* is revealed as curtailed because it is conformist: it is self-reflective but it is not *socially* reflective. The ‘good’ Jane personality is not the kind that would step beyond its local environment and grasp the larger socio-political landscape in which there are figures such as Simone de Beauvoir *imagining* social roles for women beyond that of wife and mother. The Jane personality is psychologically integrated, she has composure and intelligence but no social imagination.

The crucial point here is that deconstructive art ought to be *socially* reflective—to question the role of art in society rather than to simply play within a gamespace constructed by a previously dominant master

discourse. In other words the traditional concept of creativity as located in the exceptional individual deserves even more interrogation than it is receiving at present.

The word 'identity' stems from the Latin root *identitas* from *idem* (the same) and referring back to *entitas* (entity) which signifies wholeness. From a deconstructive point of view notions of wholeness and sameness are problematic if they posit identity as 'natural' instead of admitting its socio-cultural construction. Indeed, as identity is such a problematic notion we might be better served by looking instead to the *other* of identity that is *dissociation*: understood in this chapter as the dislocation of a totalising concept of identity.

Cindy Sherman pioneered the dissociative approach to identity in artistic representation and we can see her lead being taken up by female installation artists in the 1990s and early 2000s such as Candice Breitz, Georgina Starr, Sylvie Fleury, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Elke Krystufek and Renée Green. In the work of such artists the constructed and therefore contingent nature of identity becomes the source material for what can be best described as deconstructive identity games.

But there is one crucial criticism one can make of the works treated in this chapter which is that they consist of games constructed by the artist for herself to play. The viewer-reader is placed in the traditional role of one who admires the ingenuity of a creative game constructed and played by the artist. There is, however, one crucial shift away from the traditional concept of the artist individual in the works treated in this chapter which is that none of the works dealt with here project an image of the artist as an extraordinary individual. Instead they project a post-Shermanian concept of identity as woven into and out of the fabric of the culture that it inhabits. This is an almost paradoxical state of affairs because it suggests an *acceptance* of aspects of massification. This is different to the Marxist framework which sometimes lapses into an implicitly romantic dismissal of massification as entailing an alienated and reified human condition. There are certainly psychological problems inherent in massification but there are also advantages in terms of mass communication and mass access

to knowledge and information. We can note, for example, that virtually all the artists in this chapter make reference to cinema not only as an apparatus of the stereotype (Sherman) but also as a common cultural consciousness that becomes a point of reference not for mass conditioning but for mass de-conditioning.

MISRECOGNITION: RENÉE GREEN

I would like to begin by examining the work of Renée Green which includes theory as well as installation art practice. If we examine Green's theoretical writing first we can see how embedded it is in the concepts that outlined in chapter three. In her essay 'Site-Specificity Unbound: Considering Participatory Mobility' (1999) Green uses Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (1993) as a theoretical framework for her own work, in particular, *Partially Buried in Three Parts*.

Green's essay is also focused on the theme of site-specific art which is one of the threads from art of the 1960s and 1970s feeding the discourse of contemporary installation art. She uses Bersani and Dutoit to consider site-specific art in terms of a relationship between identity and location, comparing and contrasting it with the postmodern condition of dislocation that is being referred to in this chapter as dissociation.

She begins by noting that Bersani and Dutoit perceive a common factor in the work of Beckett, Rothko and Resnais which is their lack of authorial responsibility to society. She cites Bersani and Dutoit's description of this condition: 'My work is without authority. You will learn nothing from it; you will gain no moral profit from it; no superior pleasure which, you have been led to believe, artists have the obligation to provide you' (in Green 1999: 1; Bersani & Dutoit 1993: 3).

Green complies with Bersani and Dutoit's observation that there is some sense in this rejection of social responsibility if art is only to be understood as a social support structure compensating for, 'patching up' and 'explaining' the failings of social reality (Green 1999: 2). And if we examine Western art history we find that when art had a definitive social

role it was for the most part that of being in the service of power structures such as the church, monarchy or aristocracy. The revolution that is modern art witnessed a radical, romanticist turn towards an understanding of art as *personal* expression, but modern art also opened up the possibility for freedom of political expression.

Examining the social role of art gets to the nub of the difference between a narrative designed to program public opinion and one that is not; one that supports the status quo and one that questions it. And having considered Hollywood narrative cinema in this chapter it is significant to note that there is a cinematic connection to Green's essay because her attraction to Bersani and Dutoit stems, in part, from her admiration of the work of the filmmaker Alain Resnais. In her essay she admits that she is 'particularly fond' of Resnais' work. And we will see that there is an element of Resnais' approach evident in the installation that Green's essay is a preface to: *Partially Buried in Three Parts*.

Resnais began as a documentary filmmaker and in his early *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*), 1955, he mixed black and white documentary film of Nazi concentration camps with contemporary colour footage of the same sites. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith notes that Resnais 'suggests that the horror has become distant, difficult to recall vividly, and sometimes even covered over. ... The narration, written by Jean Cayrol, a survivor of the camps, suggests that the horror has not ended but simply moved elsewhere, taking on a different form.' (1997: 332). The key point is that *Nuit et brouillard* implies rather than explains, and it certainly does not patch up the failings of modern civilization. *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1959, written by Marguerite Duras and one of Resnais' most famous films, is even less explicit than *Nuit et brouillard*. In this later film Resnais intercuts a story about a love affair in contemporary Hiroshima with footage from wartime France in a temporally disjointed nonlinear narrative.

The intermixing of one time with another in order to create what might be called a poetic-political text seems very relevant to Green's approach in *Partially Buried in Three Parts* where she intercuts the present into the past. Part Three of the work, for example, was made for the Qwangju

Biennale in Korea, 1997. Part of the work consisted of photographs Green took while visiting Qwangju and Seoul intermixed with images of the Korean War, 1950–1953 that she had come into contact with some eighteen years previously, presumably in America, as her country played such a key role in what the US refers to as the ‘Korean conflict’. There is no narrative structure in the interconnection of Green’s images other than what the viewer brings to it. But the images of the war would have similar impact for both Americans and Koreans, as it was principally their war, or conflict. One can assume that the images of contemporary Seoul and Qwangju would for many South Koreans underscore the advantages of not having lost that war and not being taken over by North Korean communist forces. But the narrative is far from clear or closed with North Korea having been thrust into a dangerous darkness by the same war.

Returning to Green’s exegesis of Bersani and Dutoit’s *Arts of Impoverishment* she notes that Bersani and Dutoit see a ‘narcissistic concentration on themselves’ in the work of Beckett, Rothko and Resnais. The brief account of two major films by Resnais contradicts this assumption and so does Green’s work which makes one wonder why she extracts this concept from Bersani and Dutoit’s text. In terms of the discussion in this book the most obvious reason would be that art is fixated on individual expression and Resnais can be considered an *auteur* (although this is debated because of the key role played by the writers he employed). Moreover, the films he makes are not coherent wholes in the classical narrative sense; they exhibit, instead, narrative dissociation, a breaking into fragments. Kent Jones reports that ‘Anatole Dauman, one of the producers, of *Hiroshima mon amour* told Resnais, “I’ve seen all this before, in *Citizen Kane*, a film which breaks chronology and reverses the flow of time.” To which Resnais replied, “Yes, but in my film time is shattered.”’ (Jones 2006: 1). One recalls the shattering of space by an implied interpenetration with time in Analytical Cubism, and one also recalls the remarkable portraits of the Analytical Cubist period, because they did not display a classical integrated individual but instead a species of broken mirror.

‘Narcissism’ is classically portrayed via the metaphor of the mirror. But in context of modernity/postmodernity we can also think in terms of the Lacanian mirror stage where we see ourselves as others see us, as constructed by the social gaze. Then *misrecognition* becomes the most appropriate term, because it suggests a subject who is not entirely in control. It is, also, not simply the case that the subject looking into the Lacanian mirror is constructed by the social gaze because each one of those social gazes is also constructed by a Lacanian mirror. What we have therefore is a (typically postmodern) hall of mirrors, a labyrinth of mirrors which helps us understand Green when she points to Bersani and Dutoit’s observation that via the nonlinear text individuals might “‘find themselves” through a process of misrecognition’ (CEPA, 1999). In other words, fixed identity becomes an encumbrance in a dynamic late capitalist environment that requires continual adaptation to constantly changing circumstances.

Modernity can be read as a label for the historical moment when society became too massive for the individual gaze to encompass.² So the mirror had to be adjusted as is evident in the case of the Cubist implosion/explosion of Renaissance perspective. Cubism opens up of the simple mirror to show the universe of mirrors that lies beyond. But this does not make the modern world clearer, instead it reveals our confusion.

Green’s exegesis of Bersani and Dutoit reveals that the ‘narcissism’ evident in the work of Beckett, Rothko and Resnais becomes ‘self-explosive’, which is to say *dissociative*, the self is not reflected back as a whole, but as fragments. Green describes a process in which the work of art is ‘continually finding itself in other parts of itself—although what it finds is also different from itself’ (Green 1999: 3). But, obviously, a work of art is an inanimate object that cannot reflect upon itself. What Green is referring to, metaphorically, are the intimately interrelated processes of creating and reading the work of art. She quotes Bersani and Dutoit:

The work connects to the world outside by initiating within itself the uncertain tracing (the appearing and the disappearing) of

boundaries. It provides a formal model of how human beings ‘find themselves’ through a process of misrecognition. (in Green 1993: 3; Bersani & Dutoit 1993: 7)

The ‘uncertain tracing’ and the ‘appearing and disappearing’ of boundaries both suggest the labyrinth. But the notion that we ‘find ourselves’ in a labyrinth has to remain in scare quotes, because it is contradictory. It can only be taken as meaning that we cannot find ourselves, that there are no neat and tidy answers such as those provided by mass media, consumerism or Hollywood narratives. These are the social ‘patches’ that are brought online on a regular basis to mollify us on our bumpy ride through our postmodern existences.

Green elaborates on the ideas of Bersani and Dutoit when she notes: ‘I think of the activity which was referred to in conjunction with a “narcissistic concentration” as being linked to the process which is stimulated by the activity of memory’ (1993). Which is to say she appears to understand the labyrinth of the ‘uncertain tracing’ and the ‘appearing and disappearing’ of boundaries in terms of ‘the *activity* of memory’, which refers to the collective memory that is social history, a memory shared by both the artist-creator and the viewer-reader. Green notes that this ‘activity of memory’ should be ‘contrasted to a more passive process of remembrance’ (Green 1999: 3). This is certainly a reading that synchronises with Resnais’ play with memory and time. It also recalls the Humean model of consciousness introduced in chapter three. Hume’s philosophy foregrounds imagination rather than memory for the very reason that he considers imagination a more *active* faculty that constructs and deconstructs. But we can also note that imagination plays a role in the process of re-membling, or cognitively reconstructing the past and, of course, memory is the principal material for imaginative reprocessing. There is also some doubt that memories are stored as wholes; they may be stored, instead, in pieces as is the case in a computer relational database. This atomisation of memory is essentially a deconstructive process that makes imaginative reconstructions more powerful as is the case in film where reality is broken into tens of thousands of pieces creating a

condition in which any piece can be juxtaposed with any other piece. And it seems reasonable to note that cinema is able to provide especially remarkable demonstrations of the power of imagination and dream. It is also the case that photography and film have given human beings a prosthetic memory of considerable power. Films such as *Nuit et brouillard* and *Hiroshima mon amour* refer to the way in which documentary photography and film have changed forever the way in which we understand war. Gone is the romanticisation evident when the human hand was assigned the task of representing the glory of war. In its place we have images of the intense savagery wrought by supposedly ‘advanced’ ‘civilised’ societies. We now have a more complex picture of what it is to be human, one that contradicts the heroic depictions of classical art.

It is the concept of a creative engagement with the collective memory that is provided by documentary film and photography that inspires Green as it did Renais. But whereas political art is often about transmitting a ‘correct’ message, Resnais and Green take a more allegorical and poetic approach which deliberately avoids a definitive message. The basic idea is not that viewer should draw their own conclusion it is more that the text points to a necessity for questioning what we habitually take to be true or false. With regard to the role of the viewer-reader Green points to Bersani and Dutoit’s discussion of the:

political potential of ... “participatory mobility,” which is the process by which the viewer works to piece together the various parts of the work, rather than attempting to absorb and master it (Green 1999: 3).

Whereas the political art of Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin in the late 1970s and 1980s was concerned with transmitting a fairly explicit political message, Green is seeking an alternative. And this alternative seems best described by referring to the work of Renais. For example, discussing Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour* Kent Jones observes that when Resnais set off for Japan to shoot the film he ‘was convinced that his film was going to fall apart’, but Kent continues:

What they created [Renais and Duras], with the greatest delicacy and emotional and physical precision, was an anxious aesthetic object, as unsettled over its own identity and sense of direction as the world was unsettled over how to go about its business after the cataclysmic horror of World War II. With its narrative of an actress going to Hiroshima (to play a part in a film “about peace”) expecting to erase her tragic past, only to see her memories magnified by the greater collective memory of atomic destruction, Hiroshima never locates a fixed point toward which emotion, morality and ethics gravitate. (Jones 2006: 3)

One might propose *Hiroshima mon amour* as a paradigm for Bersani and Dutoit’s ‘participatory mobility’. But the term ‘participatory immobility’ might be more appropriate, because the basic ethico-aesthetic message is that we don’t know what we are doing, and might never know. All that we can expect is to be lost in the labyrinthine hall of mirrors of prosthetic memory—less a window onto the world and more a post-Cubist moral maze. The human mind has evolved to make sense of things; accordingly, when Green tells us that the viewer’s role is to ‘piece together the various parts of the work, rather than attempting to absorb and master it’ there is a distinct sense of frustration. We love narrative because it gives us the impression that we can make sense of things. And, of course, we can make sense of things, it is just that the sense we make is never the whole story. Narrative becomes dangerous when it suggests that it can explain the totality of experience, that’s when it becomes ideological in the Marxist sense of representing a false picture of the whole. It is possible that we will never be able to have a coherent image of ourselves again, either as individuals or as societies. And perhaps that is the ultimate message of modernity/postmodernity. It is certainly the message evident in the contemporary gender philosophy of Judith Butler.

When we look at *Partially Buried in Three Parts*—Green’s work of art that her essay prefaces—we find echoes of Resnais certainly, but there is also a narrative trajectory, an element of *making* sense, especially in the first part of the work. In a talk at Secession, Vienna, Green noted that *Partially Buried in Three Parts* began with a reflection upon Robert Smithson’s

Partially Buried Woodshed, 1970, Kent State University, Ohio. As Green was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1959 the work begins within the general geographical locus of her childhood. Like many earthworks *Partially Buried Woodshed* is no longer physically extant and is available solely through the prosthetic memory that is photo-documentation. Green points out that *Partially Buried Woodshed* is also sustained in the social consciousness of America because a few months after Smithsonian constructed the earthwork students at Kent State demonstrated against the bombing of Cambodia. The National Guard were called in to quell the demonstration resulting in the shooting of thirteen students four of whom died. No legal action was taken against the Guardsmen involved. Since then *Partially Buried Woodshed* has become indissolubly interlinked with that infamous event. And Green notes that shortly after the massacre the date of the event “May 4, 1970” was painted on the “Partially Buried Woodshed” (Green 1999: 4).

If we are speaking here in terms of memory and consciousness then one might point out that the Kent State coincidence is a perfect instance of Hume’s principle of the association of ideas according to the ‘principle of contiguity’. The difference is that the association took place not in the domain of an individual’s unconscious cognitive process but in the sphere of social consciousness and social imagination.

Green unearths this coincidence, which from a retrospective point of view takes on the fundamentally contingent form of a narrative. The point made by Green’s juxtaposition of the two events is that Smithsonian’s *Partially Buried Woodshed* can never be alluded to without evoking the Kent State massacre. And even if we try to exclude the massacre on the basis that there is no direct relationship of cause and effect between the two events we still have to refer to the massacre in order to exclude it. In a sense the Kent State massacre both unearths and, in terms of relative significance, erases *Partially Buried Woodshed*.

Although there is no *direct* causal relationship between the two events there is a substantive socio-historical connection because the 1960s and early 1970s, the years of Green’s early childhood, was a period of social

revolution in American society. And Green opens up the chain of associations by adding references to other radical features from that period such as the Black Panther Party which relates to her own identity as an African-American

Green's nonlinear historical reconstruction steps beyond the billiard ball theory of influence that informs classic art history. She shows not only an implicit connection between the aesthetic radicalism of *Partially Buried Woodshed* and the political radicalism of the anti-war demonstrators but, via the Black Panther reference, she connects historical events with her own consciousness, her own identity, which, in consequence, turns out not to be entirely her own.

Part One of *Partially Buried in Three Parts* includes photographs of the building of Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*. But in the process of copying these photographs, one supposes from a book, Green has included her black hand pressing the page down. She therefore maps herself not only onto the construction of a work by a famous American land artist—a member of a male-dominated discourse—but she also maps her African American identity into a period not only of artistic struggle and experiment but also social struggle and experiment.

The viewer who missed her talk or did not read her article may be puzzled by the mixture of images. That puzzlement is worthwhile because more research into the work will provide the viewer-reader with the satisfaction of having made some sense out of it. But the main point of the work remains in its contingency. The fact that there is no *direct* connection between Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* and the student protest remains a crucial feature of Green's *Partially Buried in Three Parts* because it destabilises the sense that we have constructed something definitive out of this narrative. The shooting of thirteen students by government troops is more significant than Smithson's earthwork to the extent that *Partially Buried Woodshed* has become an index pointing to the Kent State massacre more than an index for land art or earthworks. The social imaginary is the most significant hall of mirrors an artist can enter; especially when commercially dominated mass media is the principal apparatus feeding

that imaginary with simplified and sanitised versions of what is actually a complex and often contradictory reality. Which is to say, mass media in general and Hollywood, in particular, strive to make sense of a world that is fundamentally beyond any single sense. It is only comprehensible via a multiplicity of perspectives and when a single perspective is imposed on global complexity the result is nothing other than cultural colonisation.

Deconstructive art has evolved from transgression into play. Another way of putting this is to say that deconstructive art has always been concerned with a play of meaning rather than a fixed ideological position. Works such as *Nuit et brouillard* and *Hiroshima mon amour* offer deictic visual politics as opposed to a didactic politics: a mode of political art that simply shows, rather than passing judgement. One can also cite Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Petit Soldat*, which tackled the Algerian War of Independence without any overt ideological agenda. What is pointed to, instead, is the complexity and contradiction of the situation and the horrifying everydayness of processes of inflicting pain and death.

Reflecting upon French new wave cinema one can note that what is really rejected is not so much narrative as the explicit moral message, what Green refers to as a social 'patch' or 'explanation'. The existentialism of Resnais and Godard avoids specious simplifications of the human condition. Films such as *Nuit et brouillard* and *Hiroshima mon amour* set the stage for a post-Auschwitzian social narrative; one that acknowledges that massified society can't fully reflect up or explain itself. Even our sciences of psychology and sociology cannot explain the complexity of psyche and society. We can respond to this state of affairs in various ways. One is the absurdism of Beckett, which is perhaps the closest to the aesthetic position outlined by Bersani and Dutoit in *Art of Impoverishment*. Another position is the intersection of politics allusion with poetic ambiguity evident in *Nuit et brouillard* and *Hiroshima mon amour*. This is the avenue that Green takes.

THE SOCIAL-CINEMATIC IMAGINARY

Whereas Green uses nonlinear narrative cinema as her inspiration Candice Breitz, and Georgina Starr use Hollywood. But their perspective is, like Green, informed by a typically deconstructive dedication to nonlinear narrative and, accordingly, the results possess a family resemblance. Like Green, Starr and Breitz construct installations in which the viewer 'is expected to piece together the various parts of the work, rather than attempting to ... master it' (Green 1999: 3). And as in Green's work one can ask whether this mode of presentation is frustrating and/or rewarding. As noted in chapter two we can understand such nonlinear narratives in terms of a spectatorial game or puzzle because there is no means of participation. Instead we are firmly fixed in the traditional role of the viewer as 'reader'. Sometimes, however, the puzzle comes very close to becoming a participatory game and this is evident in the work of Breitz.

IDENTITY IN THE CUTTING ROOM: CANDICE BREITZ

Like artists prominent in the 1980s such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Dara Birnbaum Candice Breitz deliberately uses mass media imagery in order to avoid the elitism and esoterica associated with fine art. She enters instead into a dialogue with art of the everyday, but in a deconstructive fashion. The work I would like to focus on here is Breitz's *Becoming*, 2003, a video installation that is especially focused on dissociative identity.

To construct *Becoming* Breitz selected seven Hollywood feature films of the romantic genre in which the principal actor—Cameron Diaz, Julia Roberts, Jennifer Lopez, Meg Ryan, Neve Campbell, Reese Witherspoon and Drew Barrymore—plays a woman whose identity is entangled in her relationship with a man. Breitz's basic method of processing these seven films is similar to her earlier works *Soliloquy*, 2000, and *Diorama*, 2002, in that she extracts a clip wherein the actor delivers a monologue to camera. In each instance the actor is expressing intimate feelings that intensify the effects of empathy and identification on the part of the viewer. Yet, of course, in each instance we are witnessing complete fabrication, a fact

foregrounded by Breitz's addition of the processes of extraction and looping.

In the *Becoming* installation a row of seven colour monitors display the actors delivering their monologues. But this row of monitors is doubled by the addition of seven black and white monitors that show the various scenes re-enacted by Breitz. Breitz is shown miming the facial expressions and gestures of the various actors in the various scenes but, in each case, she retains the original soundtrack. As in Sherman's Film Still series Breitz steps into the shoes of an actor thereby partially erasing herself. Yet, in contrast to Sherman's Film Still series, Breitz does not dress up and make up to resemble the particular actress she is mimicking. Instead we see a row of images that are identifiable as the same person—Breitz—only the voice and the gestures are different. Through this tactic Breitz situates herself as a *viewer-reader* who is deliberately resisting narrative immersion in order to appropriate the Hollywood gamespace, altering the rules so as to make the game her own.

One can compare the operation Breitz performs on Hollywood films with Barthes' demonstration of a distinctly radical approach to reading Balzac's short story 'Sarrasine' offered by Barthes as an instance of the 'writerly' text: a text that challenges the interpretive-creative capacity of the reader. Graham Allen describes Sarrasine as a 'disturbing twenty-page story existing somewhere between Gothic intrigue, comic tale of ignorance and psychological study of the illusions of love' (Allen 2003: 84). Barthes takes the challenge of this writerly text seriously, and his approach is not unlike Breitz's surgical deployment of the scalpel to Hollywood film. Barthes' analysis of Balzac's story lasts over two-hundred pages and entails breaking Sarrasine into units of meaning that Barthes refers to as 'lexemes' and classifies according to a number of 'codes'. His analysis of 'Sarrasine' takes creative involvement in the writerly text to the level of obsession especially when one can question whether such analysis can be creative.

From the point of view of romantic aesthetics an analysis such as Barthes offers in *S/Z* cannot be creative because creativity arises out of the unconscious whereas analysis is fundamentally a conscious thought

process. Also analysis tends to be linear whereas the flux of desire that allegedly motivates creativity is rhizomatic (Deleuze 1987). We have an issue here because if we cannot call Barthes' analysis of 'Sarrasine' creative then neither can we call Breitz's *Becoming* creative due to the fact that it possesses several analytical features, the extraction of specific information from a corpus; its arrangement into a series and a critical intervention. In a sense one can describe it as an exercise in film studies transformed into an art game. But we can remember Tiravanija at this point and his declaration of everyday life as a work of art. If eating pad tai can be a work of art then perhaps film studies can be creative too.

In order to allow a work such as *Becoming* to be defined as 'creative' we have to allow an element of analysis into the creative process. It was argued in chapter four that unless creative process takes place in a hypnagogic trance then conscious analytical judgement will inevitably play an important role. An artist always has to pass their own informed judgement as to the quality of what they have produced. Every artist is therefore an interpreter of their own work. Moreover, if an artist uses appropriated, readymade works of art for their source material, as is the case for Breitz, then interpretation plays a role at the beginning as well as at the end of the creative process. She employs judgement to select her raw materials, which are creative products to begin with, and then interprets her own treatment of that material. What we are examining here is the interface between interpretation and creativity. And this is critical to an examination of the writerly text or what one also might refer to (with less stress on literature) as the *creatorly* text: which is to say a text that requires creative engagement on the part of the reader.

But although *Becoming* can be described as a text that demands both a creative and a critical response from the viewer-reader the cinematic texts Breitz uses as her source material are not. In Barthesian terms they are 'readerly' which is to say they would be defined by Barthes as demanding only passive immersion with little requirement to be critical on the part of the reader. In order to shift Barthes' literary concept of the 'readerly' into the field of art theory we might call such texts *spectatorial* because they do

not require intellectual engagement. But that does not mean that they *preclude* such engagement. What *Becoming* shows—and what Cindy Sherman showed in her Film Still series—is that active readership can be applied to *any* text whether it is readerly or writerly, spectatorial or creatively and critically engaging. The entire field of media studies is based on the fact that readerly texts can be approached in a critical and intellectual manner.

What distinguishes *Becoming* from an exercise in film studies is its release from academic protocol and the fact that it is practical rather than theoretical. Barthes' response to 'Sarrasine' does not step outside of the genre of literary criticism. In contrast, Breitz response to the films she chooses is articulated in a different category, that of the work of art—more specifically the video installation. We begin to see that the difference between whether something is called creative or not creative depends largely upon convention. Take the pages Barthes *S/Z* out of their binding and exhibit them on the walls of an art gallery and it becomes an instance of installation art. *S/Z* is as creative as Breitz's *Becoming*, but we do not call it creative because we reserve that word for artefacts that obey culturally constructed rules of presentation. Ultimately whether something is creative or not is a question of institutional framing.

The suggestion that creative practice cannot be intellectual would probably be challenged by many artists. It is certainly possible, however, to have art that is not intellectual; but this is not the case for deconstructive art. Adopting a romantic aesthetic stance once again, we could argue that *S/Z* is not a creative text because it uses a pre-existing work of art—it is not original—but that argument was shot to pieces by the postmodern appropriation movement of the late 1970s and 1980s in which Sherman was a leading figure. Indeed that argument has been undermined since the arrival of the Duchampian Readymade in the early twentieth century.

And reference to the Readymade is pertinent to a consideration of *Becoming*. Earlier I suggested that Breitz takes the Hollywood narratives apart and reconstructs them as an alternative game that becomes her own. It would be more accurate, however, to note that she takes the Hollywood

narrative and transposes a *readymade* game onto it. Breitz's *Becoming* was, in part, inspired by the eponymous MTV series. In MTV's *Becoming* 'ordinary fans' are transformed into their favourite artists (e.g. Shakira, Enrique Iglesias, Nelly Furtado, B2K, *NSYNC). An advertisement for MTV's *Becoming* notes that 'our "stars" will get every bit of the glitz and glam afforded the celebs themselves, and to top it off, they'll even recreate a classic video by their favorite artists' (MTV 2006). Breitz avoids the 'glitz and glam' by dressing simply against a neutral background shot in black and white. She deglamourises the representation of herself thereby underscoring the fact that her version is not an uncritical, unquestioning mapping of self onto the hyperreality of celebrity. There is also an element of surreality in seeing the same person 'talking' in so many different voices, which intensifies our sense that all the 'people' in *Becoming* are simulacral. The normal mode of reception for these films is one of emotional engagement (identification) in the characters portrayed on the screen. Breitz closes off that avenue of reception and forces the viewer to engage in a more intellectual, reflective engagement.

Experiencing *Becoming* we begin to understand what is entailed by the 'writerly' text: it requires intellectual rather than emotional engagement. In 1846 the aestheticist poet Charles Baudelaire explained: 'Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subject nor in exact truth, but in a *way of feeling*' (in Honour, 1979: 14) [emphasis added]. The shift from a romanticist emphasis upon emotional involvement to intellectual involvement is one of the key features that distinguishes deconstructive art from its romantic-aestheticist predecessor.

But there is another facet to Breitz's *Becoming*, which pertains to its relationship to the game that is karaoke. *Becoming* is essentially video-karaoke and one can note that she created another installation entitled *Karaoke* in 2000. In the current configuration of *Becoming* the game is played only by Breitz, it is not hard to imagine adding another layer wherein the viewer could face a 'karaoke camera' and join in. What is most interesting here is considering why a fine artist would *not* consider this. One reason is that the fine art frame of reference conventionally demands a

focus on the individual artist creator. That is a legacy of patriarchy that demands as much interrogation as does the portrayal of female stereotypes in Hollywood cinema. We may also feel that adding a participatory dimension would make *Becoming* less 'serious' but Breitz makes the point that she uses mass media to create accessibility.

One of the reasons why *Becoming* could easily morph into a game is due to the technology Breitz is using: it is a relatively short step from video art to *interactive* video art. The next instance of contemporary installation I will examine steps even closer to attaining such a goal via its use of computational video.

HUMAN RACE MACHINE

If we switch our attention, for a moment, from fine art to the field of digital interactive art, however, it is not difficult to find creative identity games that can be more interactive. Nancy Burson's *Human Race Machine* is an outstanding instance of a simple and elegant creative game that encourages social reflection. The basic idea behind Burson's machine is to allow people to see how they would look if they were a different race (black, white, Asian, Hispanic, Indian). The viewer looks into a video mirror and coordinates their face with an edge-detection map on the screen. When the video image of the viewer's face is aligned, digitised and loaded into the system, the viewer makes an on-screen selection to see their face morphed into another race. This is a simple but elegant game that initiates a significant degree of fascination in the viewer who is able to explore his or her identity beyond their current self-image.

Human Race Machine also possesses a political-narrative dimension communicating the message that race is more a matter of social construction than genetics. But what is most interesting about *Human Race Machine* is that it allows the viewer an embodied confrontation with their socially constructed concept of self that serves to enhance or expand social reflection and social imagination. The question one can pose here is whether non-interactive art can effect a similar degree of social reflection if

it is in the form of a 'writerly' nonlinear narrative that confronts the viewer with an interpretive challenge.

Fundamentally Burson's machine is a mirror, a video mirror or computational mirror. And this fact is emphasised by Burson's acquisition of software that enables the viewer to see themselves as they will look when older. This software was developed by the FBI and America's National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to help locate kidnap victims. Another program enables couples to preview offspring or explore the boundary between male and femaleness.

PORTRAIT NUMBER ONE

Burson's transformational video mirror recalls a pioneering instance of an interactive art game by Luc Courchesne entitled *Portrait Number One*, first shown in 1990. *Portrait Number One* is an interactive narrative consisting of a computer monitor on which a woman's face is displayed. At first sight it looks like a typical static photographic portrait. However, when one approaches one notices that there is a mouse, and using the mouse one can obtain a list of conversational statements that one can direct towards the apparently lifeless face. As soon as one chooses a statement the portrait springs into life and responds. To continue the conversation the viewer selects from another list of responses. The result was so engrossing that this viewer spent half an hour in 'conversation' with the portrait (in 1994). This is a deeply immersive work that involves creative and critical engagement on the part of the viewer. In retrospect, one can't avoid asking the question how one could spend so long speaking to a machine. To construct the work Courchesne used the actor Paule Ducharme and wrote an imagined conversation with the gallery viewer beginning with simple statements such as 'Hello!'; 'Do you have a minute?'; 'What is your name?'; 'What are you doing here?'; etc. Courchesne used Apple's HyperCard as software. He explains that the statements addressed to the portrait are:

grouped on 'cards' by sets of 2 to 4; each question is a 'button' linking to another 'card' that defines and plays a video sequence

related to the question; this video 'card' is in turn linked to another 'card' showing a new set of questions. After ending a particular development, I could step back a few cards and imagine alternative questions (attitudes) with their own development. For instance, in formulating the second or third question on a 'card', I imagined the visitor in a different mood or another visitor altogether. (Courchesne 2002)

Courchesne's interactive portrait underwent various modifications to 'fine-tune the interaction between the character and visitors' (Courchesne 2002). And the final version of the installation is available in six languages. What is remarkable is that such a powerfully immersive and interactive work could have been created with relatively simple software (Hypercard came free with the Apple Macintosh when Courchesne developed *Portrait Number One*) at a time when computers were considerably less powerful than they are today.

ARTIFICIAL IDENTITY, SYNTHETIC CREATIVITY

More recent excursions into synthetic identity and interactive narrative may be more elaborate but not necessarily more aesthetically sophisticated than the elegant simplicity of Courchesne's *Portrait Number One*. One notable recent instance is the interactive narrative installation *5 'til 12*, 2006, created by the media art duo Knifeandfork (Sue Huang and Brian House) and exhibited at the University of California, Irvine's Beall Center for Art+Technology.

The visitor is invited to watch four characters, on four monitors incorporated into pedestals spatially distributed in the gallery. The four characters recount the tragic, fictional, circumstances of a murder on the exhibition's opening night. The experience is unique for each visitor, as each story is generated by computer algorithms that select narrative particles somewhat similar to the 'lexemes' that Barthes used to break Balzac's 'Sarrasine' into components. But the computer does not simply pull out random variations of lexemes, the selection is guided by the rules of the game-theoretical strategy referred to as the 'Prisoner's Dilemma'.

Like Breitz's *Becoming, 5 'til 12* is based on cinematic narrative, specifically Akira Kurasawa's film *Rashoman*, 1950. Broadly speaking *Rashoman* is in the genre of the courtroom drama but the tale is not set in a courtroom but in the poetically dramatic setting of Kyoto's crumbling Rashomon gate, where people involved in a recent crime—the rape of a woman and the murder of a man possibly by a bandit—seek shelter from a rain storm. In each of the four versions the characters and particular details are consistent. Yet there are also significant differences. The bandit pleads guilty to the murder but denies the charge of rape, claiming consent. The woman's story confirms that the bandit attacked her, but suggests that she may have murdered the dead man. The dead man's account, told via a medium, tells a tale of rape and suicide. The last witness is the only one not directly involved but he tells the least convincing story due to the fact that it seems to interweave elements of the stories that have already been told. Brian House notes that *Rashomon* is: 'about the subjectivity of the narratives and how objective truth is elusive ... really all of their stories are valid in a certain way. We were fascinated by that' (Knifeandfork 2006). House also notes that another aspect of *Rashomon* that appealed to him and Sue Huang was that Kurasawa 'uses the viewer as a character. The viewer plays the part of a magistrate who receives the testimony of the characters in the story' (Knifeandfork 2006).

One of the slightly disappointing aspects of *5 'til 12* is that there is less interactivity than is the case in works such as Burson's *The Human Race Machine* or Curchesne's *Portrait Number One*. But upon consideration one can note that *5 'til 12* is fabricated within a very interesting and potentially productive space between interactivity, artificial creativity and traditional authorship. Which is to say *5 'til 12* is certainly not fully interactive, but it is also certainly not a game devised by artists for artists. It is semi-interactive, and it is also semi-authorial, which indicates that this work is entering into a new creative territory.

I will deal with the level of interactivity first, before examining more closely the question of artificial creativity. Each visitor to the exhibition is given a small unique identifying microchip (RFID). He or she has to enter

their personal chip into each of the monitor pedestals before the narrative will begin. This ensures that the system recognizes each individual viewer and keeps track of the story being told that particular viewer as he or she wanders through the installation from one character to another. Keeping track of the identity of each individual viewer means that the computer grid can weave a bespoke narrative game for that viewer effectively inserting that viewer into the conversation in a manner akin to the first person point of view evident in *Rashomon*. But whereas *Rashomon* tells the same story to everyone who watches us 5 'til 12 tells as many stories as there are viewers. This requires quite a bit of computational power, a lot of video snippets being fed by a powerful server to individual computers that act as each of the four characters. The server inserts the viewer as the target of what needs to be an internally consistent narrative.

Each of the character's scripts are made up of twenty-five to forty sentences (in Barthesian terms 'lexemes') each of which has three to six variants. As noted, the game that is played with these sentences obeys the rules of the 'Prisoner's Dilemma' wherein individuals choose to cooperate or maximize their own personal advantage. The computational characters can 'choose' to be complimentary, neutral, or vindictive toward each other. A character who appears confident and blameless while illustrating everyone else's faults will win that particular 'round' of the narrative. However, in the following round, the rules of the game entail that he or she can expect revenge and must eventually make amends. Although I am explaining this in human terms in fact in 5 'til 12 we should remember that interpersonal logic is actually in the form of a computer program based on mathematical game theory. Also, we need to remember that the computer program is aiming the narrative at one person, in effect this intricate game is directed at persuading that individual that they understand what happened. The fact that the program works even plausibly well is a testimony to the fact that highly productive relationships can be established between system and creativity. Sue Huang comments:

What we tried to do is create characters that are really complex in the way that real humans are complex. They have been given the ability to sympathise with their fellow characters and they have been given the ability to be critical people. We were interested in this idea of truth and the human ability to recognize the truth, or tell the truth. So this piece is really expressing a subjective truth, the idea that truth is a relative thing. Narrative is the way that humans create meaning for the world around them. The viewer themselves will create their own truth. They may feel that their version is completely correct, it doesn't really matter because everybody's version is correct, in the sense that they experienced it.
(Knifeandfork 2006)

One of the most groundbreaking features of *5 'til 12* concerns the fact that it is not an artist's game that the artist plays and the viewer admires. Instead it is a game that a computer plays and the viewer admires. *5 'til 12* contributes to the the Barthesian debate concerning the 'death of the author' (1977) by foregrounding the productive relationship between system and creativity that is antithetical to romantic aesthetics and putatively central to deconstructive aesthetics. And with regard to this particular aspect of *5 'til 12* Huang and House report that another influence on this work was the Oulipo literary movement led by Raymond Queneau (1903-1976). Queneau is best known for his *Exercises in Style*, 1947, and his structuralist, permutational poem 'One Hundred Thousand Billion Sonnets'. The latter consists of ten sonnets limited to the classic structure of fourteen lines. The one hundred thousand billion stems from the fact that the sonnets can be arranged in ten columns with fourteen rows and the reader is then able to select any line from any of the ten sonnets moving down the fourteen rows. According to Queneau, the permutations can reach one hundred thousand billion sonnets. 'One Hundred Thousand Billion Sonnets' is a pioneering instance of interactive poetry and a fine example of the overlapping of structure and creative process that is one of the key features of post-romantic aesthetics from Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism onwards.³

Although *5 'til 12* is passively interactive, in the sense that it is the computer system and not the viewer who controls the interaction, it is,

nevertheless, a highly engaging work that opens up a great deal of creative engagement on the part of the viewer due to the issues that it raises. Possibly the most contentious issue concerns the apparent success of what is essentially an artificial creativity machine. *5 'til 12* points out that creativity is not necessarily a mysterious unknowable process, it can instead be a complex system, such as the systems in nature for example.

APPROPRIATED AUTOBIOGRAPHY: GEORGINA STARR

5 'til 12 is not the only story machine, the film industry is another instance of an apparatus producing endless permutations on the human condition. It is also the case that immersion in film on a regular basis can be significantly dissociative. The world of films can begin to encroach upon one's reality. One begins to reference events in 'the real world' in terms of the films one has watched rather than in terms of actual experience. In the case of narrative film, which covers most film, the linearity of the narrative makes it appear, paradoxically, more 'real'—than the loose ends of everyday experience. Ultimately, with a sufficiently large dose of cinematic narrative, the viewer can become detached from reality. Artists who play with cinematic narrative such as Sherman, Breitz, Green, and Knifeandfork point to the way in which individuals can assume some degree of control over the narrative apparatus. Another artist in this vein is Georgina Starr.

Like Sherman, Breitz, and Green's work Starr's *The Bunny Lakes* articulates the dissociated sense of identity of a media saturated consciousness. In the midst of *The Bunny Lakes* we find a post-Shermanian 'autobiography' constructed out of fragments of appropriated media artefacts, especially cinema. *The Bunny Lakes* deploys the full theatricality we associate with that mode of installation art that can be described as a film that was never made but is, instead, exhibited with its props, and in this case its actors too, in an art gallery. In her artist's statement for the exhibition Starr explained:

I am interested in the fact that childhood can only exist in a fictional way because we only have it as a memory, it will never be how it really was again. This is something that I've touched upon in many works, but especially the Bunny Lake series. (Pinksummer 2003)

The basis for *The Bunny Lakes* is Otto Preminger's 1965 thriller *Bunny Lake is Missing* (a remake is planned for 2007 starring Reese Witherspoon). Starr also interweaves another film into her narrative installation, Peter Bogdanovich's *Targets*, 1968. The Preminger film is set in London where an American single mother arrives with her four-year-old daughter. We never see her child, even when she is supposedly dropped off at a nursery school, and when she goes missing the police and the viewers are left in some doubt as to whether she ever existed. Starr recalls:

My whole memory of the film was from seeing it when I was a child. This memory uncovered a much more personal story of what was going on around that time in real life. My relationship and memory of my sister became a kind of parallel to what was happening in the movie. The idea of missing children, abduction and revenge were all subjects that were close to me as well as subjects that are dealt with in the fictional film. Both *Bunny Lake is Missing* and *Targets* deal with a person who is angry about something that happened in the past and feels a need to wreak havoc by taking revenge. I saw parallels with my sister who was 'saved' from being abandoned and Bunny who was also 'saved' at the end of the film. (Pinksummer 2003)

Starr's adopted sister was unfortunately prone to self-destructive acts and, accordingly, painful personal memories are enfolded into the multi-layered narrative that is *The Bunny Lakes are Missing*. Certainly, Starr's insertion of an autobiographical layer into her appropriation of mass media, and her use of a playful narrative distances her work from the ideological deconstructions of appropriated mass media imagery evident in the work of Hans Haacke, Victor Burgin and Barbara Kruger in the late 1970s and 1980s. Like Breitz, Starr uses mass media imagery as raw material to weave a nonlinear narrative that pulls back from transmitting any definitive ideological message regarding the repressive construction of social identity

by mass media. Nevertheless, like Breitz and Sherman, Starr's work is not uncritical.

For example, Starr uses a group of young teenage girls who she calls the Bunny Lakes and, sponsored by Pinksummer, she organised a fashion show complete with catwalk and elegant models dressed in costumes designed by Starr. In the course of this show the Bunny Lake teenagers wielding toy guns, shoot down the grown-up models amid a flurry of red sequined 'blood' terminating as a well-dressed heap of bodies at the end of the catwalk.

As Petra Schröck suggests that *The Bunny Lakes are Missing* reflects the existential confusion of a generation fed by television from toddlerhood into the maelstrom of teenagehood (Schröck 2000). Starr's *The Bunny Lakes are Missing* appears to symbolise a generation that has 'gone missing' due to the interpenetration of their reality with the fictional constructions of film, television and marketing. And her use of fashion models suggests that her principal focus is the paradigm shift in contemporary female identity.

For the sake of the 'lost generation' Starr's fashion models have to perish. They represent the unattainable perfection used by mass media to seduce their audience into compliance. Instead of buying the product the young teenagers in *The Bunny Lakes* kill it, or at least its vehicle: because capitalism, like evolution, seems unstoppable. But Schröck is correct to note that there is more a sense of confusion in *The Bunny Lakes* than one of confident Marxist social analysis.

For Barbara Kruger, Victor Burgin and Hans Haacke working in the late 1970s and 1980s the message was clear: mass media and consumerism are bad. Whereas these artists had the advantage of ideological clarity, indeed *certainty*, Starr's work represents mass media and consumerism as a complex fabric deeply interwoven into personal, everyday, life. In *The Bunny Lakes* popular cultural and media associations are subjected to significantly more elaborate processes of translation and intertextual mixing than was evident in the ideological deconstruction of artists such as Haacke and Kruger. Like Sherman's Film Still series, the narrative

thicket that is *The Bunny Lakes are Missing* shows quite clearly that the *formative* power of the socio-cultural forces that traverse the postmodern psyche. Mass media is treated as a collective imagination. On the one hand there is an element of criticism in *The Bunny Lakes are Missing*. On the other hand there is also a demonstration of how productive the shared texts of mass media can be if one takes a creative deconstructive/reconstructive approach to their material.

I SHOP THEREFORE I AM NOT: SYLVIE FLEURY

There is no doubt that mass media is the servant of the power of the capitalist system. But as John Berger (1972) pointed out this is akin to the way in which painting and sculpture was in the service of power under church and courtly patronage. The difference is that under democracy there is the possibility of criticism within the sphere of the creative arts. And because we cannot expect commercial visual culture to be especially critical it becomes apparent that the arts have something of social duty to exercise their right of freedom of speech. But the concept of duty seems old fashioned and so we have the turn to absurdism so evident in art at the turn of the millennium.

It is also the case that following the multiple failures of communism we have to accept that capitalism is the only social system that appears to work on a mass scale. While that does not necessarily lead one to celebrate capitalism—its failings are too evident for that—it does lead to the admission that capitalism is productive not only in terms of commodities but also in terms of knowledge and culture.

The fall of communism in 1989 seems to be reflected in the generation of artists who emerged in the 1990s who mostly exhibit a general shift away from the Marxist concept of social repression. Marx depicted capitalism in terms of the oppression of the mass of people by a wealthy elite. That seems less convincing today when we understand social systems in terms of complexity theory and self-organising systems. Today we are more likely to think that nobody is in control. For Niklas Luhman social systems are autopoietic (self-generating) much like ecological systems in nature.

For Michel Foucault power is disseminated and distributed across the entire fabric of society to the level of individuals, there is no ‘them and us’, in Foucauldian terms we are all implicated in the web of power and this becomes a crucial feature of Foucault’s concept of resistance as local action rather than as the meglomaniac social engineering schemes taken on by communism with such unfortunate consequences.

Artists such as Sherman, Breitz and Starr are not simply portraying mass media as an authoritarian ‘reality studio’ programming women’s minds, instead they are revealing a postmodern concept of identity which is looser, more relaxed, more able to play with the machine that once upon a time washed their brains. Indeed we can suggest that this machine has become envisaged as akin to the story engine in Huang and House’s *5 ‘til 12*, a machine without an author in which the viewer is inextricably interwoven into the story. In short the social construction of identity becomes understood not in terms of repression but in terms of *a game*.

With regard to the ludic approach of contemporary women artists treated in this chapter one can cite Gordon Matthews who describes postmodern identity as constructed from ‘the information and identities available from the global cultural supermarket’ (Matthews 2000: 4). Matthews sees this mode of identity superseding that of either personal or national identity: ‘Market identity ... is based on belonging to no particular place, but rather to the market in both its material and cultural forms—in market-based identity, one’s home is all the world.’ (Mathews 2000: 9). Mathews also cites Madan Sarup’s meditations on postmodern identity where via fashion and lifestyle accessory consumer goods ‘one can put together elements of the complete ‘Identikit’ of a DIY [do-it-yourself] self.’ (in Mathews 2000: 12). This is less Marxist alienation than it is a fashion game in which one’s individualised combination of clothes and accessories becomes a *creative* act. One is not a fashion victim so much as a player of a fashion game mixing the main outfit with an individualised ensemble of accessories. This becomes one instance of how a socially constructed system has the capacity for productive individual permutations. In short, consumption is

not necessarily a passive robotic activity used by a social elite to dull the minds of its subjects.

The Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury's portrays female identity in the wake of the achievements of the women's movement when the social script has been rewritten, and women can go shopping *and* be successful artists—or even go shopping in order to be successful artists. From an art historical point of view, as well as relating her work to Sherman, we can also position Fleury in the broader discourse of popism,⁴ with key figures such as Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons whose work both parodies and celebrates the interrelationship between identity mass media and consumerism. Like Warhol and Koons, Fleury adopts a postmodern persona. For Warhol it was the blank screen onto which the viewer could project anything. For Koons it is a hyperrealisation of the 'winner' as an embodiment of the consumerist American Dream—which, for him, became a reality. In the case of Fleury we have the creative products of the fashion industry transmuted into a fine art game which not only encompasses the parody of consumerist obsession but also the elitism of fine art which considers itself somehow more 'spiritual' than fashion. But such pretensions should be measured against the background of the auction room and the capacity of the art system to create mind-boggling overvaluations of even the most 'deconstructive' art objects.

The ludic-parodic image of feminine consumerism that Fleury projects is not akin to the hardcore feminist critique of the social construction of female identity evident in art of the 1970s and 1980s—I am thinking again of Kruger. Fleury's sculptural installations include packaging and carrier bags as well as the objects she purchased. In addition her installations are characterised by the projection of a stereotypically female obsession with shopping onto the discourse of what has been until quite recently a male-dominated art world. As Pierre-Andre Lienhard notes:

At her first exhibition in 1990 she presented monochromes and 'Mondrians' in synthetic fur, 'Fontanas' in ripped-up jeans, 'Rymans' splattered with nailpolish: a number of emblematic icons

of artistic modernism that she ‘bastardizes’ by linking them to products stemming from the world of fashion. (Lienhard, 1998)

‘Bastardize’ is most definitely the wrong word to use in the context of a discussion of Fleury, due to its etymological derivation from the Portuguese word *bastardo* which is masculine. Fleury continues a feminist methodology that can be traced back to the postmodern appropriationism of Sherrie Levine and Julie Rrap. Like Levine and Rapp, Fleury maps feminine concerns onto the male dominated discourse of modern art history.

This strategy proved especially potent in an exhibition at the Stadtmuseum Esslingen where she scattered high heeled shoes (with a Mondrian design) over the surface of a copper Carl Andre ‘rug’ sculpture. Fleury comments:

Unfortunately it was a short-lived piece, because Mr. Andre didn’t like it. He had it removed after two days. If you have a catalog with that image in it you should keep it, because afterwards all the catalogs had my page removed! (in Halley, 2002)

One recalls here Sigmar Polke’s *Carl Andre in Delft*, 1968, in which Polke deconstructs the studied seriousness of Andre’s gridded floorpieces by associating them with decorative applied arts. But Fleury’s statement is all the more powerful because it is gender-politically loaded and Andre’s defensive reaction to Fleury’s intervention in the Stadtmuseum Esslingen foregrounds the fact that what we thought was progressive art in the 1960s was actually a male dominated discourse. The fact that I can devote a chapter in this book almost entirely to women artists is thanks to the force of second wave feminism. The theoretical rhetoric that accompanied American minimalist sculpture argued artists such as Judd and Andre were simply making objects that were like any other object in the urban environment. But Fleury’s Esslingen intervention indicates that Andre, at least, actually understands his work in traditional terms as precious ‘metaphysical’ objects that must be protected from contamination. Anna

Chave's virulent critique of American minimalist sculpture (1992) seemed a little harsh when one first read it in 1992, but now it is beginning to make much more sense; not simply because of 'Mr. Andre' but because the entire edifice of artistic genius, precious objects etc. is—like war and the sociopathic aspect of corporate capitalism (Achbar 2003)—a quintessentially patriarchal construct.

Andre's rather pathetic response to Fleury's shoe installation also contradicts patriotic American theorists such as Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss who argued tenaciously that American Minimal art evolved beyond European geometric abstraction. Their case rests on the contention that Minimal Art recombines geometric abstraction with a post-Cartesian deconstruction of the artist-genius (Krauss 1978) and a Duchampian deconstruction of the boundary between art and everyday life (Foster 1986). Andre's response to Fleury's playful action deconstructs both Krauss and Foster's case. It also reinforces the argument in this book that the deconstructive art project is in great danger of succumbing to traditional aesthetic values.

Finally, it is significant that the Stadtmuseum Esslingen actually complied with Andre's wishes in spite of the fact that Andre no longer owns the piece. That is a perfect demonstration of the way in which what began as a radical gesture, a mode of sculpture that the young, radical Andre, wanted people to walk on, rather than around, has congealed into a traditional precious object complete with the myth of artistic genius that goes with it. Moreover, he forces the museum to remember that their primary purpose is to preserve such values. How much better it would be if art galleries could forget this institutionalised script and treat works of art like any other commodity. And, of course that is precisely the point that Fleury was making via her shoe action. The older, apotheosed 'Mr Andre' now understands his work as High Art which ought not be contaminated by everyday references such as high heels. In contrast Fleury is totally open to the objects of the capitalist everyday and the notion that works of art are essentially commodities. This is both honest and effective from a

creative point of view because if we demythologise art then we can play with it rather than genuflect to it.

1 More recent instances of the dissociative identity genre have been less optimistic (e.g. *Primal Fear*, 1996; *Fight Club*, 1999).

2 Anthropologists and evolutionary biologists inform us that the human social imagination can only cope with groups of up to one hundred and fifty people.

3 In his youth, Queneau had a brief involvement with the Surrealist movement but as a mathematician he was not impressed with what he understood as the irrationalism of Surrealism. Commenting on his work he noted that 'The appearance may be surrealistic, but the method is not' (BBC 2001).

4 To use the late Australian art critic Paul Taylor's term.