

THEIR FEET FELL CLEANLY ON EITHER SIDE,
AND SHE, BETWEEN THEM?

by

Margot Leigh Butler

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1986

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
Women's Studies

© Margot Leigh Butler 1992

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

April 1992

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without permission of the author.

APPROVAL

Name: Margot Leigh Butler
Degree: Master of Arts
Title of thesis: *Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*

Examining Committee:

Chair: Susan Wendell

Jacqueline Levitin
Senior Supervisor
Associate Professor of Women's Studies and Contemporary Arts
Simon Fraser University

Meredith Kimball
Associate Professor of Women's Studies and Psychology
Simon Fraser University

Allyson Clay
External Examiner
Assistant Professor
School for the Contemporary Arts
Simon Fraser University

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

"Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?"

Author: _____

(signature)

Margot Leigh Butler

(name)

May 6, 1992

(date)

ABSTRACT

My thesis project consists of two parts: an installation artwork and an accompanying essay. Visual representations and written essays work in very different 'languages'. In the essay I do not attempt to translate between the two; rather I discuss some aspects of the current multi-disciplinary feminist cultural discourse; my own art practise; key terms and concepts (such as visual representation, identity and narrative); and aspects of the evolution, production and exhibition of the artwork.

The tradition of installation art is self-conscious about relationships between and within artworks, materials, conventions, sites, contexts and audiences. Installation art encourages viewers to engage with the work on many levels - physically, conceptually and aesthetically - and to question, extrapolate and contemplate upon their experiences and insights. The installation's title "*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*" is indicative of the work's use of dialectics, by which I mean physical, conceptual and aesthetic strategies for moving between, through, within (and without) stalemating social and psychological positionings by unsettling what are assumed to be stable structures. Dialectic's effects, paradox, contradiction, irony, humour, incommensurability, unsettledness, ambiguity, disorientation, duplicity, splits, dichotomy and oxymoron are used in the installation to make strategic interpretations and interventions into dominant ideological fields.

I address in this artwork a specific manifestation of gender-based power relations through the construction of a visual representation of an event from my family history. Interpreting, recreating and representing this event creates the opportunity to work dialectically with one aspect of the complex inter-relationship between femininity and masculinity - the paradoxical positioning of women between protecting and aggressing men within a social practise which uses violence to enforce specific power relations. I am reconstituting this story which has been mythified through time and telling, linking myself across time and place with my great-grandmother, interpreting and extrapolating from her position to help me conceive of strategies for understanding and changing my own, and offering it to the gendered viewer. The denial of closure in the visual/textual narrative, crossing between real and representational space, and circular configuration of the installation elements unsettles what are assumed to be stable structures, inviting the viewer to conceive of their own dialectical strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank a number of people for their support: my family, Eliza and Harold Ronald Leigh Parry, Barbara and Frank Butler, Jody, Rob and Nathan Walker, David Butler, and my partner, David Glenn Trites; my very dear friends Lorna Brown and Susan Madsen; and my teachers Jacqueline Levitin, Meredith Kimball, the late Maggie Benston, Allyson Clay, Karlene Faith and Mary Kelly.

I was fortunate to receive financial support from the Canada Council, B.C. Cultural Services Branch, Simon Fraser University Graduate Fellowships and the National Council of Jewish Women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
ILLUSTRATIONS	3
DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE, INSTALLATION AND ELEMENTS OF THE ARTWORK	15
PRODUCTION NOTES	18
<i>“Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?”</i> IN THE CONTEXT OF MY ART PRACTISE	21
THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS	23
Feminist Methodology and Cultural Discourse	23
Visual Representations	24
Subjects in the representation and viewers of the installation ..	27
CONCLUSION	31
APPENDIX A	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1	<i>“Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?”</i> ...3
Illustration 2	<i>“She liked to walk alone”</i>5
Illustration 3	<i>“and she, between them?”</i>7
Illustration 4	<i>“if they are after you”</i>9
Illustration 5	Reproduction of handscripted text <i>“if they are after you”</i>11
Illustration 6	<i>“Hole, Flagstone, Door Step”</i>13
Appendix A	
Illustration 7	<i>“Witness”</i>32
Illustration 8	<i>“Witness”</i>34
Illustration 9	Detail of <i>“Witness”</i>36

INTRODUCTION

Ideologically-based power relations operate along intersecting and diverging lines of gender, race, class, sexuality, age and nationality¹ in hierarchically organized social and psychical fields. As an artist, I am particularly interested in how these relations are presented and represented in the visual field. Falling within the tradition of installation art², my artwork attempts to be conscious about relationships between and within artworks, materials, conventions, sites, contexts and the specific identities of viewers, and to inform these relationships by visual and conceptual references and signs. As installation art, my work encourages viewers to engage with it physically, conceptually and aesthetically, and to question, extrapolate and contemplate upon their experiences and insights.

In the visual field, visual and textual representations can be constructed which reveal assumptions about, and make space for, shifts in consciousness and change. In this artwork I address a specific manifestation of gender-based power relations through the construction of a visual representation of an event from my family history. Interpreting, recreating and representing this event I attempt to work dialectically with one aspect of the complex inter-relationship between femininity and masculinity - the paradoxical positioning of women between protecting and agressing men within a social practise which uses violence to enforce specific power relations. Reconstituting this event which has been mythified through time and telling, I link myself across time and place with my great-grandmother, interpreting and extrapolating from her position to conceive of strategies for understanding and changing my own position, and offering it to the gendered viewer.

The installation, which this essay accompanies and complements, is entitled "*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*". The disorienting quality of the title's question is indicative of the work's use of dialectical tension. The practise and

¹ These are some of the most discussed aspects of identity; this list is not, by any means, comprehensive.

² Installation art encourages active questioning of art conventions, such as the commodification of the art object, by producing a complex set of interrelationships between and within elements, physical sites and the bodies and movement of viewers. My use of installation art can be situated within the context of a feminist contemporary art practise. The appropriateness of installation art as a method for challenging conventions and assumptions, and for presenting new possibilities, agrees with the motivations of many feminist artists. The practises of Canadian installation artist Rita McKeough, who produces multi-media installations against violence against women, and American photographer Cindy Sherman, who performs a wide range of culturally constructed gendered subjects in her photographic self-representations, are part of the context in which my work is produced and received.

use of the term dialectics has a long and varied history³, and may be described simply as any systematic reasoning, exposition or argument that juxtaposes opposed or contradictory ideas and usually seeks to resolve their conflict.⁴ The work "*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*" is less motivated by a desire for resolution of conflict than by a desire to locate, stress and heighten the tension between, within and around ideas or structures thereby loosening their grasp. Dialectic's effects - paradox, contradiction, irony, humour, incommensurability, ambiguity, disorientation, duplicity and oxymoron - use various means to draw attention to and confound set ways of thinking. They may be used strategically to announce concealed motives - in the current piece the paradoxical positioning of women between protecting and aggressing men - thereby creating opportunities for shifts in consciousness, strategic interpretations and interventions into dominant ideological fields.

The work consists of a number of elements: Three large black and white photographs recreating the event from my family history printed on translucent mylar and hung from two wrought iron hinged rods and a two-headed spear; and a colour self-portrait, taken with the body facing a mirror while the head turns toward the viewer, bracketed by text, and hung from a wrought iron two-headed spear.

The following chapters describe the installation, the production of the black and white photographs, discuss the place of this work within the context of my art practise, and the work's theoretical underpinnings.

³ Dialectics has been theorized variously by the philosophers Socrates and Plato, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno, and most currently by Jurgen Habermas. For a discussion of their respective contributions to dialectical theory, see Scott Warren, The Emergence of Dialectical Theory, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

⁴ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., USA, 1986, p. 349.

Illustration 1 “*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*”
Installation photograph, Prince George Regional Art Gallery,
October 23 - November 20, 1991.



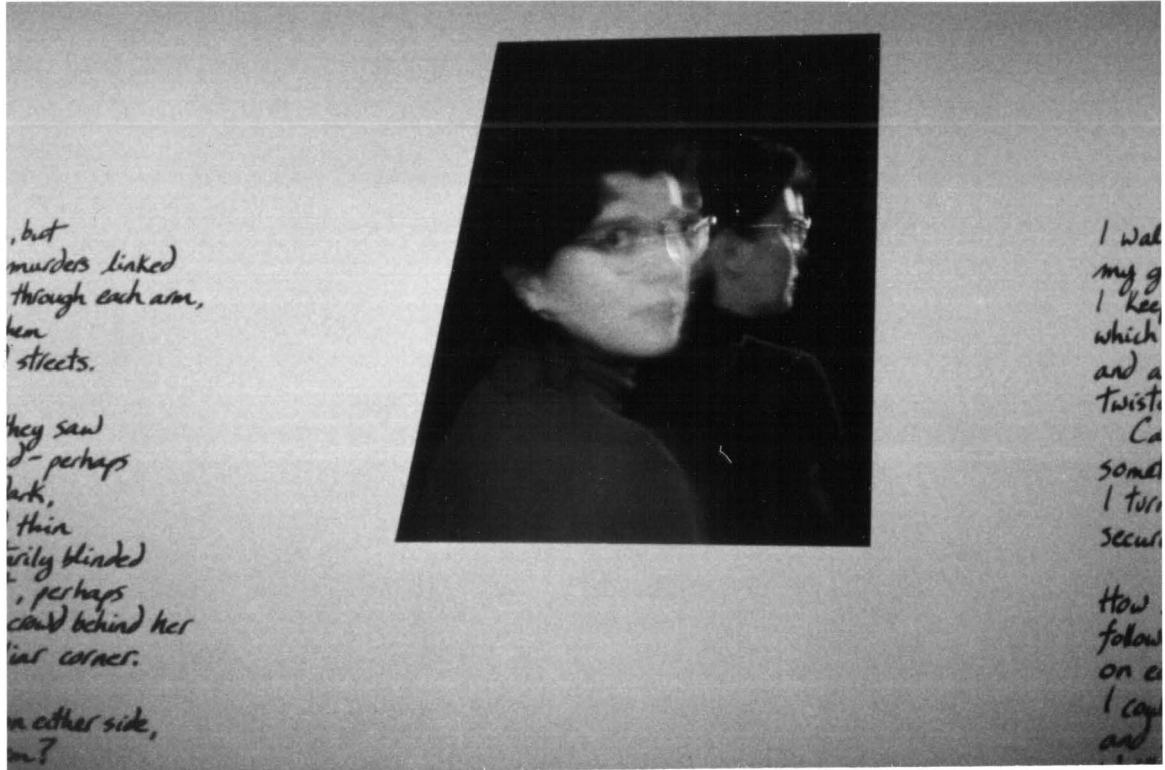
Illustration 2 “*She liked to walk alone*” (1991)
black and white photograph on mylar suspended from a wrought
iron two-headed spear, 63”x 96”.



Illustration 3 “*and she, between them?*” (1991)
black and white photograph on mylar hanging from a low
wrought iron hinged swing-arm, 40”x 54”.



Illustration 4 “*if they are after you*” (1991)
handscripted text and a colour photograph on mylar,
suspended from a wrought iron two-headed spear, 105”x 36”.



, but
murders linked
through each arm,
been
streets.

they saw
perhaps
dark,
thin
suddenly blinded
, perhaps
could behind her
near corner.

on either side,
on?

I walk
my g
I keep
which
and a
twists
Ca
some
I turn
secure

How
follow
on e
I can
and

Illustration 5 “*if they are after you*” (1991)
reproduction of the handwritten text, 105”x 36”.

She liked to walk alone, but
a string of unexplained murders linked
her husband and brother through each arm,
each evening between them
on the winding cobbled streets.

It seems unlikely that they saw
the open coal hole ahead - perhaps
it was past dusk, too dark,
the moon too pale and thin
and they were momentarily blinded
by a glaring gas-light, perhaps
she felt the press of a crowd behind her
or turned an unfamiliar corner.

Their feet fell cleanly on either side,
and she, between them?

I walk alone on recast cobblestones,
my great-grandmother in the eddy of my thoughts.
I keep time through her gesture of winding her ring,
which circles my finger with rosy gold
and a bevelled ruby held between split cultured pearls,
twisting a third of a revolution with every

Catching myself -

sometimes your feet fall on uneven ground -
I turn to search for the loose flagstone,
securing it in my mind.

How long have they been
following, approaching, protecting, overtaking
on either side?

I couldn't see him at all before
and now I see him everywhere.

Written in a sooty London underpass
"It's not paranoia if they are after you".

Illustration 6 “*Hole, Flagstone, Door Step*” (1991)
black and white photograph on mylar hanging from a low
wrought iron hinged swing-arm, 51” x 36”.



DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE, INSTALLATION AND ELEMENTS OF THE ARTWORK

In this section I will walk the reader through the installation, describing the gallery, the installation and the elements of the artwork.

Entering the main floor of the Prince George Regional Art Gallery, where the original installation was displayed from October 23 to November 20, 1991, and walking up one flight of stairs, the upper gallery is through a door on the right. (This is the same for both the original installation site and for the proxy installation, reconstructed for the thesis defense, at Simon Fraser University's downtown Perel Gallery.) The room, about 1100 square feet and roughly square, has four central, life scale pillars which support two beams that run the full length of the gallery. There are two small windows with blinds on opposite walls, facing each other. The gallery is painted white, with grey carpet, and central fluorescent and perimeter track lighting. The most interesting architectural feature of this room is the ceiling, which slopes from 9' on the left side of the gallery to 7'2" on the right, creating a strong sense of compression and intimacy.⁵

The exhibition space is divided laterally, with each side devoted to the work of one of the two artists in the show. The left side of the gallery is brightly spotlit, housing Susan Madsen's large paintings of women in mock-historical styles. The right side, where my photo-based work is installed, is darkened, lit only with low wattage amber and pink spotlights to evoke a contemplative mood.⁶

Near the centre of the four pillars, the bottom part of the photograph "*She liked to walk alone*", printed on a flexible and translucent plastic (mylar), trails onto the gallery floor, merging representational and real space. Its image, a trail of cobblestones, like the train of a wedding gown, invites the viewer into the largest photograph - an "establishing shot" - which shows three life scale figures from behind (a woman between two men) dressed in nineteenth century style clothing and walking along a cobbled street.⁷ The

⁵ Upon entering the gallery for the first time, six months before the exhibition, I walked directly to one of the rightmost corners and stretched up my hand - the height was exactly my maximum reach. Thus I had an immediate bodily relationship with this space.

⁶ Both our works, while different in media, have common aspects: life-scale self-conscious self-representation, and representations of figures in specific constructed historical and contemporary contexts; and the employment of irony, and other techniques, to question what are assumed to be stable structures.

⁷ I have borrowed from film the term "establishing shot" to describe this photograph, since it establishes as in overview the historical, spatial and figural aspects. In addition, "establishing shot" connotes the idea that

mylar print hangs between two pillars from a double-headed wrought iron spear which is suspended from one of the beams. (All four photographic elements of the installation are suspended by fabricated wrought iron arms mimicing Victorian outdoor sign rods, fences and gates.)

Rolled onto a wrought iron swing arm which is hinged upon the left pillar is another black and white mylar-printed photograph of the same three figures, called "*and she, between them?*". (As with the other two black and white images, there is a thin strip of black mylar where the photograph meets its support, which acts as a reminder that the photos have been cropped.) In this image, the bodies of the three figures are shown from just below the waist, with the photograph attached to the pillar at waist height. While the ground is clear and in focus, the three figures caught in motion as they continue the action of the first photograph are blurred, her body suspended above a dark rectangular hole. The bottom part of this photo, including the representation of the hole, rests directly on the gallery floor, and is angled so that the viewer will walk from the outside toward the inside of this circular installation.

Ahead and to the left of the second photograph, hanging from the compressed wall, is the large piece, called "*if they are after you*". Two handwritten texts (reproduced on page 7) bracket a slightly blurred, colour head and shoulders, paper-printed photograph of a contemporary woman, myself, life-scale and hung at eye-level, looking simultaneously in two directions through the trick use of a mirror. I/She looks behind her toward the viewer who is looking at her, and ahead of her toward an undisclosed future. I/She also looks past the viewer toward the metaphoric past embodied in the nineteenth century threesome.

After viewing the mirrored portrait and reading the text, viewers move toward the next, and only remaining element, "*Hole, Flagstone, Door Step*". Paralleling in place, size and materials its companion piece, "*and she, between them?*", this photograph is rolled onto a swing arm which, unlike "*and she, between them?*" is hinged low upon the right pillar. In this image, taken from behind, we see the ground and the lower part of the three figures' legs, the woman's left foot poised on the rim of the hole. This time, the photograph has been lifted so that the representation of the hole becomes a suggestion of a door or a less disturbing imaginative space. The title of this image, "*Hole, Flagstone, Door*

there is more to follow, a narrative telling across time. The process of the construction of all these photographs are discussed in the Production Notes chapter.

Step", focuses attention not on the subjects in the representations, but on the ground.⁸ The bottom part of the photograph "*Hole, Flagstone, Doorstep*" is angled into the circle so that, when standing right in front of it, the viewer is also facing the door of the gallery.

⁸ Three of the elements' titles "*She liked to walk alone*", "*and she, between them?*" and "*if they are after you*" are lines from the text portion of "*if they are after you*". The title of the remaining element, "*Hole, Flagstone, Door Step*", calls attention to the ground and to the way the photograph has been raised suggesting movement through a transitional space. There were no title cards on the gallery wall, but the works were titled in the accompanying brochure.

PRODUCTION NOTES⁹

My memory of a story about an event from my family history was triggered by reading a newspaper account of a "team rape".

*I read that while walking down a Langley street last summer, a woman was grabbed by two men from between two men, taken away, raped, stabbed and left to die. She lived, and the men, who had brutally raped many women, have just been caught, but have not yet been sentenced. I learned all this from the front page of the newspaper.*¹⁰

I pictured a woman positioned vulnerably between protecting and/or aggressing men.

(While walking) I try to be aware of who is in front of me and behind me.

*And who is beside me.*¹¹

Articulated in many ways within visual art, film, and feminist theory and practise, representation and narrative are often discussed as affected/effected constructions (eg. the ideological construction of femininity in Hollywood film, advertisements, artworks, etc). Although lived experience and representation operate in different fields, through the viewer they are intricately connected.

Since working so very intimately with this story from my family history, I can no longer remember the details of hearing it, such as the circumstances under which it was told and who told it, although it must have been my grandfather whose premature birth was precipitated by these events. The nature of this story has changed with my using - I have integrated it into my repertoire of memories, complicating it with its re-enactment within the context of my own life and work.

⁹ Throughout this section italics and indentations have been used to signal the use of a personal voice.

¹⁰ The Province, May 27, 1991, and The Vancouver Sun, February 1, 1992.

¹¹ *While producing the work for this show Susan Madsen, the artist Lorna Brown and I spent many hours discussing not only the artwork, but our growing awareness - due in part to spending many late nights at downtown studios - of the many ways in which our fear of violence against women, against ourselves, affected us. Near misses on the street, at bus stops and in parkades raised our consciousness' about how much we had accommodated ourselves to this circumstance, and how we used the fear to protect ourselves: awareness of how we negotiated public spaces in terms of what we wore, where we went at different times of the day, who was walking in front of and behind us and how we'd get away from him if necessary. We also realized (again) how complicated are our relationships with our male partners.*

After choosing a site which conveyed a sense of narrative and the appropriate historical period, plus a stand-in coal hole¹² my partner, brother and I prepared the site for the photoshoot¹³ and then proceeded with the work. The camera was set up on a tripod and a 30 foot shutter release cable was attached. We discussed taking turns holding the shutter release bulb, squeezing it according to feeling and timing rather than the usual controlled visual composition. We then assumed the positions (myself between them), and walked through the incident several times. I tried not to look down, catching myself at the moment when my foot lost the ground.

Trying to hold my gaze away from the hole before me, I saw them as they came down the alley, she a little ahead of him, he cursing at her, accusing her of fucking his best friend, slut, he knew all about it and he'd fix her, no wife of mine.... He caught up with her and crossed his leg in front of her, tripping her and pushing her down on the cobblestones. We yelled at him to leave her alone. A man who had been watching the photoshoot put up his dukes threatening to punch him out. During this time, the woman had gotten up from the ground, going away then coming back, wavering between the two. After more yelling and threats, the husband said he'd stop hitting her. She got about ten yards ahead of him down the alley before he headed after her.

The coincidence of these events - fear of violence, lived experiences of violence, and the construction of this representation - helped me to re-integrate connections between the personal and political, feminist activism and art practise. Moreover, it solidified my

¹² The three black and white photographs were taken in Blood Alley Square in Vancouver's touristic, historic Gastown. This area includes a mix of architectural styles and periods, leaning heavily on simulated Victorian-style elements such as ironwork, cobble-stones, lamp standards, etc. Thus Gastown relives part of Canada's British colonial history. The cobblestones in Blood Alley Square are laid in an X pattern, with a radiating brickwork pattern between the legs of the X, and a grate covered hole at the centrepoint. This X has one bent leg, which I am using to suggest a narrative which doesn't follow a predictable pattern. We walked toward that bent leg in the re-enactment, toward an uncertain future.

¹³ This included cleaning the area of Player's butts, candy wrappers, and bottle glass, weeding out some of the grass which obscured the cobblestone pattern, smashing charcoal briquettes around the 'coal hole', removing the grate, talking with passers by and men who live in the Square's residence and putting on our 19th century, working class style costumes (I also wore a tummy stuffer to simulate my great-grandmother's advanced pregnancy).

commitment to conceiving of strategies for dialectically moving between, through, within (and without) straightjacketing ideological, physical and psychical structures (even if these strategies are the temporary techniques of distraction).

Pinioned between protecting and aggressing men, women devise strategies for consciousness-raising and action so that the daily fear, fed by real circumstances and constructed representations, can also help prepare us against violence against women and children.¹⁴

¹⁴ 1 in 4 women sexually abused, 1 in 10 women battered by partners. (Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women, The War Against Women, House of Commons, Canada, 1991.) Why not cite how many men will be sexual abusers, rapists and batterers, since all men benefit by the power relations witnessed in the rape of some women and children? Men are rightfully offended by the statement that all men are potential rapists, but are women not offended by the continual evidence that we are all potential victims?

"Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?"

IN THE CONTEXT OF MY ART PRACTISE

Although not having developed a 'signature' style or material, in my ten year art practise I have consistently been concerned with interpreting power relations, and visual representations of power relations, especially as they pertain to gender, language and place. These works have attempted to unsettle ideological positions through the use of dialectical movement. Most recently, my work has included performed self-representation within a constructed situation.¹⁵

Because "Witness" (1988)¹⁶, my last large piece of work, shares many of the techniques and concepts with my thesis artwork, I'll describe it in some detail. At the time I produced "Witness" I was very interested in the way different people are represented in the mainstream media, specifically in the way options for change are closed down through the pernicious use of gender, racial, and national stereotypes. I chose

¹⁵ I will briefly describe some of my work to date in order to show different manifestations of these themes. There are, of course, many other aspects of these artworks which will remain unacknowledged here. The works can be organized around two intersecting concepts: gendered power relations, and formal ideological structures.

The first piece I exhibited, called "What Happens to Soft Things", is a series of pairs of clay bricks with plaster squishing out from between them. It was for a show called With These Hands, a benefit for Battered Women's Support Services (1983). Describing the vandalism of library books by stamping an "s" before the word "he" where found in left margins, "Erratum" (1984) challenges stable linguistic and ideological gender positionings. This work was shown at a subsequent BWSS fundraiser along with "s" stamps for sale. "Either/Or" (1984) is a sculptural 4' ramp with a small moveable figure (which the viewer can move from one position to another) seated in an interrogation chair ad, by movement, prostrated in front of it, between two possible, and impossible, options. This work was inspired by the escalation at that time of American interventions in Central America, and tries to create a visual metaphor for the dilemmatic positions and options offered by these types of power relations. "Nuclear Armour" (1985) is two torso-shaped, life-scale body shields made out of thin layers of plaster-impregnated gauze bandage and string. They are an ironic response to a real fear, indicating the tension between vulnerability and inadequate protection. In 1986-87 I did several bookworks, experimenting with incising the centres out of books and placing images inside them. The ones which are most interesting in the context of my recent work used images which sat on both sides of a single page in a magazine, photocopying them onto clear acetate and then overlaying them inside the incised books. Thus I was able to place together ironic, conflicting, and contradictory images which had been placed in a linear, yet innocuous, relationship within these popular culture magazines. In one bookwork, a photo of a communist street with a huge billboard of Lenin is overlaid with a patriotic image of a black Texan woman who has a lone star incised into her gold front tooth. "1894-1984" (1986) is a series of carved concrete blocks, set into a cruciform shape; in the centre of the cruciform is a sheet of glass with gold text which describes the cracking of the foundations of the oldest church in Vancouver when a neighbouring corporate office tower was erected. The sculpture was installed in that office tower, and overlooked that church; reflective windows caught both in a surprising overlay. Thus, the seemingly stable structures - architecture, church and corporation - are mutually unsettled.

¹⁶ See Appendix A for reproductions of "Witness".

to use a newspaper photograph of a moment of crisis - three young Irish men depicted in different emotional and physical responses to violence. Rephotographing this image, I stood in front of a projected slide of this photograph, moving between and within the three young men's varying emotional and physical states, interpreting and unsettling by my various positions the photograph's stereotypical visual representation of masculine power relations. "Witness" introduced into my work issues of self-representation within constructed situations. Of the photographs of this 'performance', two were printed as black and white life-scale photos, and one, a small colour photo, on clear acetate. The smaller colour photo is an interpretive image, linking the two black and white images and making a space within and between them for viewer interaction and interpretation. The photographs were installed first on either side of an urban bus shelter, and later as an outside door of an art gallery, neither of which are conventional - or expected - exhibition sites.

There are some strong connections between "Witness" and "*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*" in terms of their evolution, production and exhibition. Choosing specific historically and geographically located images of (near) crisis from newspapers, in the case of "Witness", and in "*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*" from my family history, I have constructed life-scale black and white, and colour interpretive photographic representations in which I play a gendered performative part, interpreting and recreating these situations as a way of understanding and connecting them with my own. The photographs tap into what is constructed as unresolved narratives, showing movement within what are conventionally represented and received as fixed images or events, questioning the univocal readings they imply, and encouraging in the viewer a sense of engagement through dialectical movement. Viewers of these site specific works move through, around and between the installation elements, inhabiting multiple physical, emotional, conceptual positions, and replaying a sequence at their own speed.¹⁷

¹⁷ This is interestingly contrasted with film and video where the viewer is moved along by the pace of the work; still work lets the viewer decide on their own speed of engagement. I have heard that this averages about five seconds per work.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The art installation "*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*" presents visual and textual representations of subjects in specific, yet ambiguous, circumstances, using dialectical tension to unsettle what are assumed to be stable structures, and inviting the viewers of the installation to do the same.

Beginning with a discussion of feminist methodology and multi-disciplinary feminist cultural discourse in general terms, this section explores the key words, subject positions and theoretical concepts in the artwork under the subheadings "Visual Representation" and "Subjects in and Viewers of the Installation".

Feminist Methodology and Cultural Discourse

'Feminist' for me implies assuming a perspective in which women's experiences, ideas and needs (different and differing as they may be) are valid in their own right, and androcentricity - man-as-the-norm - stops being the only recognized frame of reference for human beings. And by 'methodology' I mean both the overall conception of the research project - the doing of feminist research - as well as the choice of appropriate techniques for this process including forms of presenting the research results.¹⁸

Within universities, Women's Studies faculty and students often integrate feminist awarenesses against the grain of more traditional disciplines, generating hybrid, multi-disciplinary discourses. Feminist scholarship sits on a wide base of interdisciplinary theories such as psychoanalysis, marxism, structuralism, and post-structuralism, and is itself, again, interdisciplinary. Working in such an expanded field makes it necessary to establish criteria for selecting productive theoretical and practical directions. Within the visual field, feminist cultural discourse includes feminist socialist art history, feminist film theory, and feminist post-colonial theory, to name but a few.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein, Theories of Women's Studies, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 89.

¹⁹ Germinal works in these fields have been produced by critic-theoreticians such as Linda Nochlin, Lisa Tickner, Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker in art history; Laura Mulvey, Teresa de Lauretis and Kaja Silverman in film; and Trinh T. Minh-ha, bell hooks and Nelly Richard in post-colonial theory. Feminist visual arts have also been greatly influenced by feminist literary criticism.

Current feminist practitioners and scholars are becoming increasingly wary of unselfconscious cross-applications of specific analytic tools and categories. This is part of a larger challenge to the assumption that mainly white, heterosexual, middle-class, western-based analyses adequately address specific issues important to women of colour, lesbians, women with disabilities and women not identified in these analyses. It seems clear that every specific difference - in identity and 'discipline' - is of consequence and can be crucial to understanding our current complex positions. At the same time, paradoxically, multidisciplinary practitioners relish the role of wry, overt kleptomaniacs, eager to pilfer concepts from dominant and critical discourses, and to apply them discriminately.

Visual Representations

a) Constructed Representations

Contemporary photography is practiced within a range of traditions including photo-documentary, 'fine art' photography, and commercial advertising imagery. Current discourse surrounding these practises includes an increasingly sophisticated critical reassessment of the apparent 'truth' of the documentary image, a reconsideration of 'fine art' traditions which exist within the context of modernism, and feminist inquiries implicating these traditions in the positioning of gendered and race-specific identities in the photographic representation of the body.²⁰

The visual representations in "*Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she, between them?*", as in all other photographs, are profoundly constructed. Decisions involved in constructing the representations are not motivated by a desire to recreate the 'truth' of the event, but rather to isolate and articulate specific manifestations of gender-based power relations. The sense of time and place, to mood and atmosphere, the tension that the viewer understands, whether consciously or unconsciously, is dependent on the choice of site selection, lighting, masking, costuming and staging, the expressions, gestures and

²⁰ Some influential thinkers in this discourse include Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, John Tagg, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Simon Watney.

movements of the subjects, and on the artist's selection and technical construction of the final images.²¹

During the reconstruction, the camera was moved to show multiple points-of-view of the same event. In *"She liked to walk alone"*, the viewer is positioned behind a seemingly historical image. (History is seen from behind no matter which way you look at it.) In the next image, *"and she, between them?"*, taken facing the subjects, the blurred figures are ephemeral in contrast to the sharp definition and detail of the ground. This image resists fixed meaning, leaving an opening for the viewer to resolve the open-ended narrative. In the colour image and text panel *"if they are after you"*, the flash-lit subject looks back at the camera as if looking at someone behind her. Paradoxically, through the use of the duplicitous mirror, she is looking not only behind her, but also ahead to an undeclared future. In the final photograph, *"Hole, Flagstone, Door Step"*, taken from behind, the viewer is in line with the gallery door, and thus poised between replaying the sequence of events by recircling the installation and quitting both the space and the unresolved narrative.

Contrary to usual photographic practises, wherein the conventions of visual composition dictate the significant moment, in all these photographs the camera is unattended when the shutter is released. By taking turns holding this shutter release bulb, the subjects themselves chose to trip the shutter at charged moments of their performance. There is, therefore, no photographer of these photos, and the traditional, gender-based and controlling relationship between the artist and model has been circumvented.

A sense of tension is evoked by the use of the wrought iron double-headed spear on which *"if they are after you"* - and *"She liked to walk alone"* - are hung. These armatures suggest both the aggression usually associated with weapons, and the sensation of the woman pushing, elbowing out on both sides, pushing away the constricting, bracketing men (and pillars), and opening a space for herself. Thus these armatures reiterate the dialectical tension and movement which is suggested throughout the work. The hinged swing arms which support *"and she, between them?"* and *"Hole, Flagstone, Door Step"* are mounted in parallel positions in relation to both of the larger elements. When standing in front of *"She liked to walk alone"* the configuration of these three elements resembles a human figure with the lower part of the arms gesturing out to either side. However, the hinges, or

²¹ The production of the final photographs involves another set of spectatorial relations: careful selection of the 'best' photographs from amongst many exposures necessitates a visual and conceptual distance informed by the considerations involved in the overall production of the work.

'elbows' on the swing arms emphasize the potential for these 'arms' to move from an outstretched position to folded protectively across the 'body', again evoking a tension of oppositions.

b) Narrativity

Due to the placement of the photographs and the interactions between the work and the architecture, the viewer proceeds through a visual narrative sequence. When standing between *"if they are after you"* and *"She liked to walk alone"* the viewer is presented with a textual narrative organized into two bracketing columns which describe and link two historical and contemporary lived experiences. The structural decisions involved in the construction of the text parallel and extend those decisions involved in the the production of images through the choice of language, metaphors and references to the passage of time. The texts specify the subjects, physical circumstances, site and atmosphere introduced in the images, naming the opening as a coal hole, stating the familial relations between the subjects, and identifying the colour photograph as the artist and writer of both texts. The text is handwritten, directly indexing it to the hand of the artist and subject in the work. The style suggests an internal, somewhat detached, reflective voice. Evoking the same site and bodily movement - walking on cobbled streets - in different historical periods, the text situates the viewer simultaneously in two connected places and times, and establishes the link between the two subjects. The subjects in the images are named in the text as great-grandmother and great-granddaughter who are in coincident situations, both of which remain, visually and textually, unresolved.

The figures in these photographs are printed life-scale and hung to encourage bodily identification by the viewer. This identification is enhanced by the images being rendered visible from either side and by the draping of the photographs onto the gallery floor to cross both real and representational space.

During the artists' talk and opening of the exhibition at the Prince George Regional Art Gallery there was discussion amongst the viewers about possible outcomes of these narratives (and some pressure applied on me to disclose the 'real ending'): Is the woman in the historical photograph being led to safety or danger by the two bracketing men, or could she even be leading them?

c) Metaphor: "*sometimes your feet fall on uneven ground*"²²

Present in the two parallel black and white photographs, "*and she, between them?*" and "*Hole, Flagstone, Door Step*", and mirrored in the cropping of the colour self-portrait in "*if they are after you*", is a rectangular opening representing a coal hole, which draws the viewer's attention to the ground. In this work, the ground is a vehicle for the narratives, and a metaphor for security, knowledge, trust, and the 'common ground' of ideology. These assurances are complicated by the introduction of the coal hole. By suggesting how selective ground is, this unsuspected hole, like subsidence caused by mining, stands as a metaphor for the ground giving way. The sensation of the ground giving way is not uncommon for anyone who has discovered that what they thought to be happening was quite different from what was really happening, a shift of consciousness commonly experienced by advocates for social change. Although disorienting and enraging when initially encountered, consciousness shifts can be used strategically by activists to challenge hostile ideological structures and to create new, better possibilities. Holes are most dangerous when the walker is unprepared for them. An aware walker can have some say in when and whether to choose danger, or, variously, pedestrian bypass or imaginative escape. In "*Hole, Flagstone, Door Step*", the photograph has been lifted so that the hole can be read as a doorway or a more voluntary imaginative space.

Subjects in the representation and viewers of the installation

When we urge, or ourselves attempt, a feminist practice, whether aesthetic, scholarly, or overtly political, it becomes urgent to interrogate the notion of woman to which such practices would conform. Was not the notion itself secreted by the circulatory system of power? I use the word 'secreted' for its value as a double entendre: its capacity to produce and conceal at the same time.²³

a) Identity

When raising issues of identity, it is appropriate to ask the question "Who am I?" Any particular cluster of identities is formed out of difference - different options,

²² This phrase is from the text portion of "*if they are after you*".

²³ Mary Lydon, "Foucault and Feminism: A Romance of Many Dimensions" in Diamond and Lee Quimby, eds., Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Northeastern University Press, 1988, p. 139.

influences, times, circumstances, politics, etc. Difference describes a relationship - different from whom, within and between what, and how? Identity is contingent. Specificity is the way difference is manifest. The question "Who am I?" is usefully expanded to include specifics such as "When, where and how am I?" As the subject and producer of my own work, What is my specific cluster of differences, under what conditions did they arise, and where can I take them in terms of political action? Moving from the realm of the single subject into a wider political framework, identity politics can allow for strategic questioning which cannot be satisfied with merely inverting hierarchies²⁴ or with alternative possibilities which are safely ensconced within dominant paradigms.

This artwork attempts to unsettle identity²⁵ through the use of a number of strategies, namely, self-representation, cross-generational identity, and the construction of a composite body in the installation photographs.

By choosing to represent myself as the subject of this work, I have circumvented the traditional relationship in photography and fine art wherein there is a deliberate distance between the artist and model. Representing myself not only as myself, but also as my great-grandmother, Eliza²⁶, I am crossing generations within my family, reorienting myself within a historical continuum, and creating an unsettled, composite familial identity. For the construction of the historical representations my brother and partner took up the parts of Eliza's brother and husband, establishing corresponding familial relations across time, and restating the subject of the narrative's shifting identity as both sister and wife.²⁷

In the installation, the arrangement of heavily cropped, mock-historical and contemporary photographic images which are of a consistent life scale and figural orientation, invites viewers to connect the fragments of figural representation through their own bodies and movement, so that viewers may create their own version of this composite

²⁴ Linda Briskin, "Identity Politics and the Hierarchy of Oppression", Feminist Review #35, Summer, 1990.

²⁵ Pratibha Parmar, Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha in Feminist Review #36, Autumn, 1990.

²⁶ This name has been passed through generations of women in my family, and was, coincidentally, also the name of my great-grandmother's daughter-in-law, my grandmother.

²⁷ Being in a state of advanced pregnancy at the time of this event, Eliza was on the cusp of another aspect of women's identity - motherhood.

identity through their own body. This is particularly the case for women viewers, my audience of choice, since they are offered a full complement of female fragments, while the male viewers' identification with the represented men is frustrated by a deliberate lack of visual information.

b) The use of the mirror in "*if they are after you*".

I've seen you where you never were,
And where you ne'er will be,
And yet within that self-same place
You can be seen by me.²⁸

Some psychoanalytic theorists (most notably Jacques Lacan) have suggested that the mirror is the conceptual site for the first psychological separation of self and other, and the entry point into the symbolic, ideological field.²⁹ The mirror is a primary site for the inscription and daily reinscription of ideological constructs like 'femininity' and 'beauty'. I, who have been bred in ideology, look out and back at me; the mirror gains its power from the one who carries ideology to it, and receives ideology from it. As such it is a particularly pernicious site for social control because it operates psychically, socially and corporeally in an ironic self-surveillance.³⁰ In the primary relationship with the mirror, the subject is split into self and exteriorized other; in the installation, the position of other is taken by the audience, in the relationship between the subjects in the artwork and the spectators of the artwork.

Although having used reflective and transparent surfaces in earlier works, I first used mirrors in my work in the floor photograph "*I came to the puddle, I could not cross it, identity failed me.*" (1990). This piece addressed self-conscious photographic self-representation through the splitting and joining functions of mirrors, exploring the way mirrors split the subject off from herself, thereby creating a two-dimensional, ideology-

²⁸ Jenijoy La Belle, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass*, Cornell University Press, 1988, p 41.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, Norton, New York, 1966.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Pantheon Books, Random House, 1977.

drenched visual representation of the subject - ourselves, since we step into her "shoes" - as 'other' in front of our very eyes.

In the current piece "*if they are after you*", the subject is standing facing a mirror, but is turning away from her reflection to look behind her. The inherent disorientation and duplicity of mirrors is taken advantage of in order to show a moment of simultaneous present (the subject looking to see who might be right behind her), past (looking at the historical image "*She liked to walk alone*"), and future (looking ahead toward what is undisclosed).

c) Viewers of the installation

Installation art encourages viewers to engage with the work on many levels - physically, conceptually and aesthetically - and to question, extrapolate and contemplate upon their experiences and insights. Viewers' interpretations of artwork are signalled not only by the sets of and uses of cultural codes and signs within the work, but also by their identity, memory, cultural history, and chosen readings of the work.³¹

There are a variety of different spectatorial positions and relations in the production and exhibition of this work. As constructed in "*if they are after you*" the gaze into the looking glass has been refused, turned instead onto the viewer of the photograph.

In the use of the unattended camera, the usual assumption of an artist's guiding point-of-view is challenged (even if not evident to the unsuspecting viewer), while the use of multiple camera positions, heights and angles questions the assumption of a single authorial 'truth'.

As previously described, the photographic elements are arranged in the gallery in an open circle, with specific 'privileged' spectatorial positions for each element and for the installation as a whole. These viewing positions are linked narratively, encouraging the viewer to walk through and connect the images.³²

³¹ A Native woman, for example, who came to the artists' talk said that the woman's figure in "*and she, between them?*" evoked her culture's sense of a spirit rising, or a ghost coming out of a burial ground.

³² At the exhibition's opening, it was interesting to see how viewers negotiated the tension between two particular elements in the installation. Some viewers paused in front of the image in "*if they are after you*", and then turned around to look at "*She liked to walk alone*" thereby mimicing the woman's bodily gesture in "*if they are after you*". Some of those viewers then walked over to one edge of "*She liked to walk alone*", and peered around the other side as if expecting to see the woman's face. This seemed to cause a little embarrassment as they realized this was a single representation printed on a translucent surface with light pushing through. It may be that this moment in the installation in particular conceptually and physically disorients viewers by positioning them in relation to the constructed paradoxes, splits, splices and contradictions.

CONCLUSION

"Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she between them?" is the work of a conceptually-based feminist artist who participates in an interdisciplinary cultural discourse. The work therefore comes out of a specific set of methods and theories which are integrated within the subject's/my body, identity, experiences and understandings. My understanding of the paradoxical positioning of women between protecting and aggressing men featured in *"Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she between them?"* came out of a heightened awareness of my daily fear of violence against women, against myself, and from my outrage at how women's lives are thus controlled and limited. My response as an artist, who sees art as a social practise contributing to the production of meaning and therefore potentially of social change, was to use materials and conventions such as constructed narrative, media, scale and site to formally express tensions and to provide movement dialectically out of these straightjacketing social relations.

The production and exhibition of the artwork, and subsequent description and theorization in the essay, has contributed significantly to my overall understanding of these issues.

I will continue to work through the same set of concerns in the next part of *"Their feet fell cleanly on either side, and she between them?"* which will consist of mixed media sculptural forms which reference structures involving tension and movement. These forms will include: glass doors (which both protect and reveal), Dutch doors (which leave one half of the body protected and the other exposed), stiles (which allow the body to move over a wall which is designed to contain, letting the body cross but not removing the barrier) and drawbridges which are half-open (neutralizing their use as a means of selection). Viewers of the work will again, as in the current work, be invited to move between and within these elements which will be set up to emphasize tension, dialectical movement and change.

APPENDIX A

Illustration 7 "Witness" (1988)

Two black and white photo-murals back to back, connected by a 6" square 'color xerox on acetate' window. The images are photographs of slides of an A.P. newspaper photograph of "Ulster youths, hit by stones, scream(ing) at their Irish attackers in Dundalk" projected onto myself.



Illustration 8 "Witness" (1988)

Two black andwhite photo-murals back to back, connected by
a 6" square 'color xerox on acetate' window.



Illustration 9 "Witness" (1988)
Detail of the 6" square 'color xerox on acetate' inserted
window.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, E. and T. Hess Art and Sexual Politics, Collier Macmillan, London, 1973.
- Barthes, Roland Image - Music - Text, trans. Stephen Heath, Fontana, London, 1977.
- Bottomore, Tom A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Bowles, Gloria and Renate Duelli Klein Theories of Women's Studies, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Briskin, Linda "Identity Politics and the Hierarchy of Oppression", Feminist Review #35, Summer, 1990.
- Bullock, Alan et al Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, Fontana Press, 1990.
- Canadian Advisory Council of the Status of Women,
Battered But Not Beaten...: Preventing Wife Abuse in Canada, C.A.C.S.W., 1987.
- Cheerham, Mark A., and Linda Hutcheon Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Recent Canadian Art, Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Cocks, Joan The Oppositional Imagination, Routledge, 1989.
- Conly, Christine Politically Speaking: Rita McKeough, Mary Scott, Marcella Bienvenue, (exhibition catalogue), Women in Focus Arts & Media Centre, Vancouver, B.C., 1988.
- Crosby, Marcia et al Struggle: Local and Global: Special Double Issue featuring B.C. Women Writers and Artists, Capilano Review, Series 2, No. 6/7, Fall, 1991.
- de Lauretis, Teresa Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction, Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Diamond, I and Lee Quinby eds. Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Northeastern University Press, 1988.
- DuBois, Ellen Carol et al Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe, University of Illinois Press, 1985.
- Foucault, Michel Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan, Pantheon Books, Random House, 1977.
- Fraser, Nancy Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Griffin, Susan Rape: The Politics of Consciousness, Harper and Row Publishers, 1986.

- Harding, Sandra, ed. Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues, Indiana University Press, 1987.
- hooks, bell Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics, Between the Lines Press, Toronto, 1990.
- Hughes, Patrick and George Brecht Vicious Circles and Infinity: A Panoply of Paradoxes, Johnathan Cape, London, 1976.
- Kelly, Mary Interim, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1990.
- Kimball, Meredith "Using the Tension Between Opposites: Gender Similarities and Differences" unpublished paper, 1990.
- Knight, Stephen Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution, Academy Chicago Pub., 1986.
- Kruger, Barbara and Phil Mariani, eds. Remaking History, Dia Art Foundation #4, Bay Press, Seattle, 1989.
- La Belle, Jenijoy Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass, Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Lacan, Jacques Ecrits: A Selection, Norton, N.Y., 1966.
- Laplanche, J. and J-B. Pontalis The Language of Psychoanalysis, Norton, 1973.
- Lemaire, Anike Jacques Lacan, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
- Lippard, Lucy Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change, Dutton Inc., 1984.
- Lorde, Audre Sister Outsider, Crossing Press Feminist Series, California, 1984.
- Lydon, Mary "Foucault and Feminism: A Romance of Many Dimensions", in Diamond, I and Lee Quinby eds. Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Northeastern University Press, 1988.
- Marks, Elaine and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. New French Feminisms, Schocken Books, New York, 1981.
- Malette, Louise and Marie Chalouh The Montreal Massacre, trans. Marlene Wildeman gynergy books, P.E.I., 1991.
- Mulvey, Laura Visual and Other Pleasures, Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Nochlin, Linda "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in Baker, E. and T. Hess Art and Sexual Politics, Collier Macmillan, London, 1973.

- Parmar, Pratibha Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha in Feminist Review #36, Autumn, 1990.
- Pollock, Griselda and Roszika Parker Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981.
- Pollock, Griselda Vision and Difference, Routledge, 1988.
- Province, Pacific Press Ltd, Vancouver, B.C., May 27, 1991.
- Rabinow, Paul, ed. The Foucault Reader, Pantheon Books, N.Y., 1984.
- Richard, Nelly Margins and Institutions: Art in Chile Since 1973, Art & Text 21, 1986.
- Sherman, Cindy with an essay by Arthur C. Danto Untitled Film Stills, Rizzoli, New York, 1990.
- Sherman, Cindy and John Baldessari "Collaboration" in Parkett #29 Parkett Publishers, New York, 1991.
- Silverman, Kaja The Subject of Semiotics, Oxford, 1983.
- Solomon-Godeau, Abigail "The Legs of the Countess", October 39, 1986.
- Sontag, Susan On Photography, Delta Book, Dell Publishing Co., New York, 1973.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty "Who Claims Alterity?" in Remaking History, eds. Kruger, Barbara and Phil Mariani, Dia Art Fdn. #4, Bay Press, Seattle, 1989.
- Squiers, Carol, ed. The Critical Image, Bay Press, Seattle, 1990.
- Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women The War Against Women, House of Commons, Canada, 1991.
- Tagg, John The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories, Macmillan Education, London, 1988.
- Tickner, Lisa "Feminism, Art History, and Sexual Difference", Genders #3, 1988.
- Trinh, Minh-ha T. Woman Native Other, Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Vancouver Sun, Pacific Press Ltd., Vancouver, B.C., February 1, 1992.
- Warren, Scott The Emergence of Dialectical Theory, University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Watney, Simon "Photography and AIDS", in Squiers, Carol, ed. The Critical Image, Bay Press, Seattle, 1990.

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., 1986.

Williams, Raymond Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,
Fontana Press, London, 1976.