Needling the System: The Textile Art of Colette Whiten, Barbara Todd, and Ann Newdigate.

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ABSTRACT

Needling the System: the Textile Art
of Colette Whiten, Barbara Todd and Ann Newdigate.

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This thesis examines contemporary Canadian textile art by three women: Ann Newdigate, Barbara Todd and Colette Whiten who, through their respective mediums of tapestry, quilting, and embroidery, challenge existing systems of meaning through a strategic critique of dominant cultural ideologies. Simultaneous to this discussion it seeks to examine how traditional and institutional structures have contributed to the devaluation of textiles, while at the same time considering the possibility textiles provide for an intervention into those systems.

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PREFACE

Not long after I began my graduate programme in Art History in the Fall of 1993, I became strongly interested in textile art, mainly its historical status, (or lack thereof), and the social history surrounding the medium; traditionally deemed "women's work."[1] Fueled by the writings of feminist art historians, such as Rozsika Parker's The Subversive Stitch, much of my research during the early part of my programme focused on the marginalization and feminization of textile-based media and the familiar debate over its categorization as either art or craft.[2] This was my trajectory when I began researching and planning this thesis over two years ago.

However, during the course of my project and as my ideas developed, I began to doubt the purposefulness of my work. This questioning was due, in part, to the concerns of my advisor Dr. Janice Helland, who was undergoing a change in her own thinking about the most appropriate way to write about marginalized art forms, such as textiles. One of the questions I was encouraged to consider was: "Why can't you just write about the art?" What she was suggesting was that if we continue to focus on the

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[1] I will not attempt to define the term "textile" as this very question has been at the height of recent debate for textile artists and scholars and was the focus of a recent symposium in Montréal. The symposium, "Textiles Sismographes: Symposium fibres et textiles 1995," was created and produced by the Conseil des arts textiles du Quebec. It was held at Université du Quebec a Montréal in October 1995.

[2] The negative view of textiles was reflected by the experience of some of the speakers at the above-mentioned conference. For example, the chair of the Fibres Department at Concordia University, Vita Plume, commented that as recently as 1990, as a jurist for the Canada Council she was witness to the following remark made by another jurist when a "craft medium" came up on the screen: "What is this doing here?"

marginalization and feminization of the medium we may simply continue to reinforce this negative view. Conversely, if we ignore this approach, perhaps textiles may be given the same consideration as other art forms such as painting and sculpture.

For some time I found myself in this ambiguous place; I felt both a desire to move ahead, to get beyond the idea that textiles are relegated to a secondary status, and at the same time, a need to acknowledge the historically constructed negative view of the textile arts. In the midst of my textile "angst", I attended two important symposia which influenced my approach to textiles. The first symposium, The Female Imaginary, was held in Kingston, Ontario in the Fall of 1994. The purpose of this conference was to bring together scholars and artists to share ideas about the possibilities for the dismantling of patriarchy[3] through a new order, based in visual art and defined by female experience. During the course of the conference I was struck by a comment made by one of the speakers, Dr. Jeanne Randolph, who said, "if the battle is invisible, we are all in trouble." Effectively she was arguing that in order for change to occur, the process or history of a struggle--be it personal or in a broader context--must be acknowledged. Exactly one year later in 1995, the landmark Textiles sismographes symposium was held in Montréal, Quebec. The conference gathered textile experts together to discuss contemporary textile art, with a particular focus on the question of a textile identity. While the negatively

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[3] The definition of "patriarchy" I am working with in this thesis is borrowed from feminist theorist Chris Weedon, who defines the term "patriarchal" as "power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men." Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987), p.2.

constructed view of textiles was brought to light in much of the discussion, it was not, for the most part, the *focus* of this discussion. What became apparent upon listening to the individual speakers was not only the complexity involved in defining a textile identity, but also the undesirability of naming of this media. In the words of symposium participant Manon Regimbald:

> In demanding equality and difference, textile arts cannot be defined alone. Rather they are free from the solid walls of totalitarian principles, their fluid properties glide by, envelop, weave one with the other, cross-breeding with painting, sculpture, or even technology.. faced with unity, they divorce themselves from all totalitarian identification without, however, disappearing.[4]

Throughout the course of my writing I have considered Randolph's words and their importance, as well as other ideas presented at the textile symposium. And while I no longer feel the need to centre on the traditional derogatory view of textiles, I do wish to bring to consider its history and make it visible in my work. For, as it will become clear, it is the same social and historical systems which have constructed textiles' secondary status in the art world, that are responsible for the secondary status of women in our world.

It is precisely for this reason that I have elected to investigate here the artwork of three women: Colette Whiten, Barbara Todd, and Ann Newdigate. While all three artists diverge in their choice of medium and individual practice, they are consolidated in their concern for issues of power and the construction of power in society and culture.

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[4] Manon Regimbald, Textiles Sismographes: Symposium fibres et textiles 1995, texts from the colloquim (Montreal: Conseil des arts textiles du Quebec, 1995), p.147.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, the challenge for feminists has been the examination of women's neglect in so-called "history." Feminist art historians were at first intent upon the reinsertion of previously neglected women into the art historical canon and looked for ways to salvage these histories. In her classic essay "Quilts: the Great American Art" first published in 1973, textile historian Patricia Mainardi attempted to bring to light the neglected history of quilts, and called for women to "rewrite art history in order to acknowledge the fact that art has been made by all races and classes of women."[1] Later feminists moved to a more critical position, examining the *reasons* for women's exclusion from art historical discourses. In the Introduction to their 1981 publication, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, British art historians Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker asked the question: "Why has this happened?" Why have women and what they do been negatively evaluated in comparison to men? In wishing to understand the separation of women's art from men's, as well as the categorization of work by women as homogeneously feminine, Parker and Pollock looked at the function of the feminine stereotype in the writing of the history of art. Through an examination of women's position in society and her relation to art and ideologies, the authors revealed that the presentation of women's work as inherently feminine is a determining factor in the maintenance of men's work and masculinity. Nowhere more than in the area of textiles has the functioning of the feminine stereotype worked to negate art made by women.

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[1] Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," in Norma Broude and Mary Garrard eds., Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) p. 331. Mainardi's essay was first published in 1973 under the same title in The Feminist Art Journal 2 no.1 (Winter 1973): 1, 18-23.

That such stereotypes exist today is evidenced by the comparative marginalization of this media from such validating institutions as fine-arts museums and galleries where a stratified system of values has carried over from earlier centuries. As Pollock and Parker explained, the beginning of the distinct separation of so-called craft related items, such as textiles, from other more privileged items such as painting can be traced back to the Renaissance and attributed in part to the break up of the medieval guild systems and the changes in art education which took place later during the seventeenth century. The new stratified system of values resulting from this institutional restructuring established an art hierarchy which was maintained by "attributing to the decorative arts a lesser degree of intellectual effort, or appeal and a greater concern with manual skill and dexterity."[2]

In her book The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine (1984), Rozsika Parker established an important correlation between the formation of a hierarchy of arts and a sexual division within that hierarchy leading to the association of textiles with femininity.[3] Tracing the history of embroidery from medieval times to present day, the author revealed how the once privileged artform came to be devalued and feminized.[4] Through a series of complex issues involving class, sex, and

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[2] Parker and Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology (New York: Pantheon, 1981), p.50.

[3] Anthea Callen brings this ideas into the nineteenth-century in The Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Craft's Movement (London:.1979) where she discusses the relationship between ideology and the art production of women active in this British movement.

[4] To dispel the myth that embroidery has always been an exclusively female craft, Parker looks at the example of Opus Anglicanum, a type of ecclesiastical

notions of what constitutes art and craft, Parker demonstrated that the association between women and textiles is culturally constructed, not biologically inherent. Parker determined that the diminished public role of women caused by the restructuring of societies during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, coincided with an ideology of femininity and domesticity which developed in the following centuries.[5] Beginning in the seventeenth century, one of the main methods of inscribing femininity in young girls was through embroidery and other needle-arts, including the making of samplers. A long and concentrated exercise, sampler-making required the stitching of verses on cloth--verses which often reflected the qualities desired in a good wife.[6] Records show that girls who balked at their lessons in sampling were often characterized as inappropriately masculine. In declaring their dislike of the instrument of femininity, such female children were labelled as 'hoyting girls' or tomboys.[7] By the eighteenth century, texts on women's behavior and embroidery patterns

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embroidery once practiced by *both* men and women in the Medieval period. She traces the social and historical process whereby the value of this art began to diminish and eventually take on domestic associations. Parker notes that it was only in Victorian times that historians began to "impose their ideal sexual division of labour on to mediaeval embroidery production." p.45. For full discussion see Rozsika Parker, The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine (New York: Routledge 1984), especially Chapter Three.

[5] Before the emergence of modern industry (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in Europe), the family household had been the unit of production. As capitalist production took hold women were increasingly confined to the home. The effects of capitalist production on the sexual division of labour is discussed in detail Chapter Two of Parker's book.

[6] The following verse taken from a nineteenth-century sampler conveys the codes of expected feminine behavior of that time.

> Seek to be good but aim not to be great
> A woman's noble station is retreat
> Her fairest virtues fly from public sight
> Domestic worth still shuns too strong a light

Ibid., p.165.

[7] Ibid., p. 83.

advocated needlework as a means of promoting the virtues of femininity--chastity, humility, obedience, self-sacrifice, and silence.

In Canada during the twentieth century, popular women's magazines reflect how the association between needle-arts and so-called feminine virtues continue to be circulated and reproduced. In one issue of the Toronto magazine, Everywoman's World (1919), an article advocating "Some Do's and Dont's" of trousseau selection employs terminology connected with female characteristics. For example, embroidered linen described as "lovely", "beautiful", "dainty", "tiny", "fragile", "simple", and "pure" again presents qualities traditionally associated with the "ideal" woman.[8]

Patricia Mainardi, in her aforementioned essay, remarks upon the *selective* feminization of textiles in contemporary times. In her discussion of the Whitney and Smithsonian museums' exhibition of quilts (held in 1972 and 1971 respectively) Mainardi criticized catalogue essayist Jonathan Holstein's gender-specific language. She noted that when describing certain quilts which "bear a superficial resemblance to the work of contemporary formalist artists such as Stella, Noland and Newman," Holstein "praises pieced quilts with the words strong, bold, vigorous," while dismissing other

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[8] "Linens Beloved by Maid and Matron: For the Bride--Some Do's and Don'ts of Trousseau Selection," Everywoman's World (June 1919): 17. Similarly, an advertisement appearing in the same magazine seven years later, claiming to help the twentieth-century woman with her sewing, asks the reader, "When is a woman not a woman?" and then takes the liberty of answering for her, "When her personal appearance means little or nothing to her." The ad goes on to dictate that "the woman who neglects her personal appearance, means little or nothing to *anybody*." Even as recently as the twentieth century, the woman who refuses to conform to a society's ideal of "woman", continues to be constructed as somehow deviant. Beyond being "inappropriately masculine" the twentieth-century woman who neglects her sewing duties becomes "nothing at all."

quilts which bear no resemblance to these artists as "pretty, elegant, beautiful, and decorative."[9] Mainardi's concern for language not only demonstrates its role in perpetuating ideologies of femininity, her concern also describes the position of language with a patriarchal system and its systemic functioning to uphold ideals of the male artist as individual genius.

That, "our recognition and appreciation of art is shaped by language, and cultural conditioning" is insisted upon by Kathy M'Closkey in her catalogue essay for the exhibition Fibre: Tradition/Transition, Historic Textiles from Essex and Kent Counties and Contemporary Canadian Quilts (Art Gallery of Windsor, 1988). The exhibition was prepared by M'Closkey in collaboration with Robin Morey as a means of foregrounding women's previously unrecorded creative contributions. Pointing out that "art history recognizes certain representations...while blocking or invalidating others," M'Closkey also highlighted the importance of questioning what is perpetuated as "perceived truth."[10]

In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition Redefined: The Quilt as Art (1989) --organized by the Whyte Museum (Banff, Alberta) as a means of drawing critical attention in Canada to the area of quilting in the textile arts-- Katherine Lipsett and Bridget Elliott address many of the concerns put forth by M'Closkey, Mainardi, Parker and Pollock in their earlier publications. For

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[9] Mainardi, pp.343-344. Mainardi also points out that "sentence structure can be sexist too." She refers to writers "constant use of the passive terms" when discussing quilts; for example "'Quilts were made,' 'Quilting was done,' never 'Women *made* quilts,'...". See page 346.

[10] Kathy M'Closkey and Robin Morey, Fibre: Tradition/Transition: Historic Textiles from Essex and Kent Counties and Contemporary Canadian Quilts (Windsor: Art Gallery of Windsor, 1988), p.3-4.

example, in a discussion of North American quilts Elliott wrote:

> Embodying the work ethic of colonial settlers, traditional quilting has been seen as frugal (in the recycling of material scraps), functional (in terms of providing bedding), and beautiful (in surface designs which decorated sparsely furnished bedrooms) - all qualities which were especially *desirable female traits* (my italics).[11]

This carry-over of stereotypes from the past is indicative that systems of power perpetuate certain ideologies as a means of maintaining their dominance. Patriarchal ideology constructs relations such as these as a means of producing what comes to accepted as "truth." Such ideologies are enforced and perpetuated in various ways but in western culture one of the most important systems whereby meaning is constructed is that of visual of codes of representation. "Representation," as Catherine King states, "can most narrowly refer to the creation of a convincing *illusion* of reality [my italics]," and in its widest sense "can mean 'stands for', 'states', 'announces', 'symbolizes', as well as 'suggests illusionistically', or 'gives a snapshot impression of'."[12] Roland Barthes as a means of demonstrating the constructedness between *what* is being represented, and its *assigned meaning* used the terms "signifier" to name the sound image, and "signified" to name the concept. Together the signifier and signified comprise the sign, and neither have meaning outside their arbitrary relation to each other. In societies signs are constituted by their difference from

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[11] Patsy and Myron Orlofsky, Quilts in America (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), pp.10-13 as paraphrased by Bridget Elliott in Katherine Lipsett and Bridget Elliott, Redefined: The Quilt as Art (Banff, Alberta: Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, 1989), p.18.

[12] Catherine King, "The Politics of Representation: A Democracy of the Gaze," in Frances Bonner, Lizbeth Goodman, Richard Allen, Linda Janes and Catherine King eds., Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender" (London: Polity Press, 1992), p.57.

other signs.[13] For example while the category of "woman" has come to be viewed as natural, "woman," is only constructed in relation to her counterpart "man." One may ask; What is signified by the word *woman*?.

According to the dictionary definition "woman" is; "an adult female person; [of a] distinctively feminine nature; a female servant or personal attendant; wife; mistress; girlfriend..."[14] However, nowhere under the dictionary's definition of "man" do the male equivalent of the terms "mistress" or 'girlfriend" appear. The terms "mistress" and "girlfriend" cannot exist without their male counterpart, so that one must ask; "Wife" or "mistress" *to whom*? Within patriarchy there is no real difference. It is only through binarisms that the One may complete the Other; the Other; woman is constructed as man's negative identity. [15]

Central to my discussion of the artists and their work is the role of language, as well as the social organization of language (that is media, magazines, advertising, television). As such, I rely on theories of language

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[13] The operation of signs in society are generally attributed to the writings of American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure posited that signs are the elements of the structure of language. Chris Weedon presents this functioning of difference through the signifier "whore," stressing that the signifier has no intrinsic meaning, but rather, its meaning lies in "its difference from other signifiers of womanhood such as 'virgin' and 'mother'". Weedon, p.23. For a detailed discussion of the linguistic theories of Saussure, see Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," The Art Bulletin LXXIII no.2 (June 1991): p.191. See also, Rosiland Coward and John Ellis, Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

[14] New Webster's Dictionary, 1991 edition, s.v. "woman."

[15] For a full discussion of the concept of the One and Other see Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); originally published as Ce Sexe qui n'en pas un (France: Editions de Minuit, 1977).

which are similarly premised on the assumption that meaning is constituted within language. Semiotics is of particular importance to my analysis of the works because it reveals that the meaning of signs--"woman" for example--are not intrinsic but rather, are constituted in language. As they specifically apply semiotics to art history, I also draw on the writings of Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson. In their article "Semiotics and Art History," Bal and Bryson explained how semiotic theory may be engaged in such challenging issues as "the polysemy of meaning; the problematics of authorship, context and reception;...the issue of sexual difference in relation to verbal and visual signs; and claims to truth of interpretation."[16]

Images are always constructed from a specific social and cultural viewpoint, as such they are always *selective*. Michel Foucault's concepts of the nature of power provide a model for understanding how power is exercised, and individuals "governed" in society.[17] Foucault looked at the relationship between language systems, and their social organization to determine that such systems always function within historically specific moments, organized through institutions, both material (for example schools, prisons, the media, hospitals, and the church), and discursive (forms, or ways of constituting knowledge). Foucault saw these institutions as reflecting and reinscribing the dominant values and interests of a society at any given time; for example, values and interests concerning women's sexuality and

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[16] Bal and Bryson, p.174.

[17] See for example Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), The History of Sexuality, Volume One, An Introduction (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1981), and The History of Sexuality, Volume Two, The Use of Pleasure (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986).

behaviour. As a means of addressing the social construction of gender as it is presented in the work of Whiten, Todd and Newdigate, I turned to theories of discourse based on the writings of Foucault.[18]

Visual representation marks a site where social power is carried out and meaning is constructed. But visual representation in the words of Chris Weedon, can also be "a place of struggle where dominant meanings are contested, alternative meanings affirmed," as I hope to reveal in this discussion.[19] My thesis, then, examines contemporary Canadian textile art by three women: Colette Whiten (1945) Barbara Todd (1952) and Ann Newdigate (1934), as a means of revealing how their mediums of embroidery, quilting, and tapestry, challenge existing systems of meaning through a strategic critique of dominant cultural ideologies. Simultaneously I seek to examine how traditional and institutional structures have contributed to the devaluation of textiles, while at the same time considering the possibility textiles provide for an intervention into those systems. As it will become clear, although stereotypes of femininity have resulted in a derogatory view of fibre-based arts, they may also be seen as sites of resistance or as systems which subvert the very codes of meaning with which they are associated.

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[18] Here I draw on Chris Weedon's writings on the subject where she mobilizes Foucault's theories to develop her view on the structural functioning of patriarchal power. Her book provides an extended but accessable discussion of Foucault's ideas.

[19] Weedon, p.12.

Chapter 1

> *All media and the official news service only exist to maintain the illusion of actuality...all these things arrive too late...they have exhausted their meaning long in advance and only survive on an artificial effervescence of signs....*[1]
>
> Jean Baudrillard
> Simulations

Colette Whiten's installation exhibition New Needleworks (1992) questioned the role that mass media plays in our lives.[2] In this Chapter, I intend to focus on the issues of the exhibition as represented in the five individual embroidered pieces and the corresponding graphite patterns. I will consider individual works as a means of illustrating how the artist questions representational systems through her inquiry into the social/cultural impact of the media.[3] More specifically I will seek to reveal how the artist breaks down stereotypical representations of femininity and addresses the media's ascription of social meanings to biological sexual difference.

Whiten has stated that her interest in media images stemmed from a desire to "understand things" in the world. The desire was largely provoked by the artist's confrontation with disturbing, often violent information conveyed to the public in the media.[4] Because of this, Whiten made cutting images out

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[1] Jean Baudrillard, Simulations (New York: Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983), p.71.
[2] The exhibition, Colette Whiten: New Needleworks 17 January - 1 March 1992 was held at The Power Plant Art Gallery in Toronto.
[3] I will define and use the term "media" here as any means of communication aimed at a mass audience including magazines, radio, televison and especially within the context of my discussion, newspapers.
[4] Colette Whiten, interview by author, tape recording, Toronto, Ontario, 13 May

of the newspaper part of her daily routine. The subject matter, according to the artist, "was too critical, too important to gloss over,"[5] and soon this subject matter became the focus of her artwork.

Whiten translated her first image into embroidery in 1986. The image, entitled The Search (1986), reflects her interest in and concern for serious news items.[6] During my interview with the artist she explained the motivation behind this work.

> The very first piece that I did, was called The Search. [It] was when two small children were murdered in Orangeville [Ont.] and there was a police hunt for the bodies of the children. I was just horrified by this incident. Can you imagine? What would you do? How could you go on with your life? How could you make any kind of meaning after something like that? It was too much information and I couldn't bear it.[7]

The pieces which followed The Search evolved from the artist's increasing feelings of helplessness in the face of seemingly uncontrollable circumstances. From the mid-80s to late-80s, as a means of coming to terms with these situations, Whiten focused on embroidering newspaper images of men, mainly political leaders, whom she saw as icons of power and fame (plates 1-2). The artist explains:

> I was thinking about situations where you feel helpless, when, for instance there are political decisions to be made. When these things happen to you because [Prime Minister Jean] Chretian decides not to abandon the GST...what do we have to say? Or when [Premier Mike] Harris does something absurd to

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1996. Referred to hereafter as, Whiten, interview by author.

[5] Ibid.

[6] The Search was not included in the New Needleworks exhibition but was part of an earlier exhibition at the Oakville Galleries, Toronto, July 28 - September 4, 1988.

[7] Whiten, interview by author.

> us.... So I felt that by dealing with images of these politicians I was...not exactly sticking needles into them but I felt like I had some kind of control. It's silly, but nevertheless it was a process of organizing, controlling them if you like.[8]

It was through this gathering of images that Whiten began to notice an absence of women in the photos: "I thought, Wait a second! What's going on here? Why don't I have any?"[9] The artist deliberately began to search out pictures of women because she "wanted to know under what circumstances women [were] newsworthy."[10] The culmination of her search led to the making of the images for the New Needleworks exhibition.

New Needleworks was organized as five free-standing structures draped in embroidered fabric and individually highlighted by low hanging, ceiling-suspended light fixtures (plate 3). The carefully arranged, pressed linen cascaded down the podium-shaped structures covering all but the bottom third of their steel forms. The uppermost part of the structures containing the tiny embroidered area of the linen resembled a lectern, but was slightly slanted *towards* the Gallery audience, presented as "texts" for them to read (plate 4). The embroidered images themselves were quite small and ranged in size from the smallest work measuring 6.4 cm x 7 cm, to the largest measuring 8.3 cm x10.5 cm. The "original" newspaper photographs were first mapped onto individual paper grids with graphite to create an embroidery pattern. The five grid patterns were used by Whiten to

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid. In her interview with the show's curator Richard Rhodes, Whiten acknowledged that, "there are fewer women in decision-making roles, fewer women who have power who are considered newsworthy." Colette Whiten, "Interview with Colette Whiten," interview by Richard Rhodes, Colette Whiten: New Needleworks (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1992), p.37.

[10] Whiten, interview by author.

translate, in stitches, the tonal differences of the black and white photographed images onto the cloth. Visible in each tiny square of the graphs are different symbols corresponding to the different stitches used by the artist in her embroidering of the cloth (plate 5). Pinned to sheet metal by magnets and hung on a wall adjacent to the free-standing structures, the paper patterns provide viewers with an indication of the artist's working process. Whiten titled the works according to the headlines of their individually corresponding newspaper photographs . The titles are, Cooling of Relations (1991), Overcoming Indifference (1990-91), Faces of Despair (1991), Foreigners held in Baghdad U.S says (1991), and Palestinians Remembered (1991) (plates 6-10). Each of these reproductions represents a group of non-western women who, from the titles and critical situations indicate they inhabit areas of the world in conflict.[11]

Unlike the male political leaders in Whiten's earlier works, the women in this series at first appear powerless and filled with despair. Whiten suggested to the exhibition's curator Richard Rhodes that:

> The images of women who are newsworthy have to do with women in crisis, women who have some catastrophe to deal with like war, or murder, or some other kind of atrocity. Women are depicted either crying or in agony, or in desperation. The image of women carrying arms is very rare. They are usually the victims.[12]

Whiten's interest in the media's role in the selection and portrayal of images, namely their cultural construction of women as passive or as victims, is

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[11] The non-western identity of the women is evident from the titles which provide a clue to the geographic location of the events (i.e Palestinians Remembered, Foreigners in Baghdad, etc.)

[12] Whiten, interview by Rhodes, p.37.

revealed by her comments, and is reflected in her choice of images which portray desperate women. While Richard Rhodes has interpreted the images in the New Needleworks series as powerful representations of women, I do not view them as such. Although one image, Palestinians Remembered (plate 10), shows women bearing arms this image does not suggest power to me. Given the context of despair suggested by the other images of women crying, mourning, and waiting, the Palestinian women in this image appear in critical situations from which they can not escape.[13] My opinion is supported by Mirjam Westen who in her article on New Needleworks writes: "like Barbara Kruger, who provides the stereotyped representation of femininity, with a cynical comment that goes right to the bone, we could consider Whiten's image reproductions as a *silenced* comment on the sex- and culture-specific stereotypes of the political media representations." Westen also upholds that Whiten's choice of images "suggest that forever mourning, crying, or protesting women, will never hold any form of power, unlike the male political leaders."[14]

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[13] In his catalogue essay Rhodes suggested that Palestinians Remembered is a "vision of equivalent empowerment" to the way men have pursued political power throughout history. He wrote that, "In these images they [the women] *get to* mourn their dead, cry against fate, wait to vote, protest in the street, and finally bear arms against their oppressors." (my bolded italics). The problem with Rhodes' analysis is, in my opinion, revealed in the language he uses to describe the women's actions. For example Rhodes employs the verbs "to mourn", "to cry", and "to wait" which to me suggest that the women's actions are somehow beyond their control. Must not one "wait" or "mourn" for someone else? As well the action of crying usually implies that something has been done to someone *by* someone else to evoke distress, rage or pain. Moreover, that Rhodes' prefaced his description of the women's acts with "*get to*" conveys the idea that these acts are merely tolerated or *allowed* by someone else.

[14] Mirjam Westen, "Colette Whiten's Needlework: About Time, Intimacy, and Disclosure," in Colette Whiten (Herblay, France: Les Cahiers Des Regards, 1993), p 12.

As suggested in the introduction to this thesis, images which portray women in this manner are dangerous because they serve to reinforce cultural myths which negate women's worth in society. The production and reproduction of such knowledge by the media is particularly crucial because it is here that images are mass produced and then consumed by audiences to the extent that their underlying ideology seems natural. In my conversation with the artist, she acknowledged the media's role in reinforcing ideologies of femininity, its importance in the formation of women's identities and her interest in counteracting what she has termed its "authoritative truth."[15] To this extent, Whiten is in accord with other women artists who have directed their projects toward breaking down systems of representation which have been informed and perpetuated by a patriarchal understanding of women's lives.

Whiten is using a technique that feminists have used to critique and interrogate the media and its supporting structures: appropriation. Lucy Lippard defines appropriation as a postmodernist means of "reemploying and rearranging borrowed or stolen ready-made images from art and media sources;"[16] the strategy has provided feminists with one means of instigating questions about notions of authorship, ownership, authenticity of

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[15] During my interview with the artist we were discussing her grandchildren and my niece while comparing their mutual interest in "barbie dolls and princesses". We both agreed that much of their interest in traditionally feminine toys was mainly a result of their exposure to television, and recent movies such as The Lion King and Pochahontas where the male is commonly portrayed in the position of power; he is the "hero". Whiten insisted: "This is largely where a lot of this stuff is coming from."

[16] Lucy Lippard, Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), p. 25. Lippard discusses appropriation as a useful critical strategy, while at the same time acknowledging its problems when it "reaches into other cultures."

the "original" and, perhaps of most importance to feminists, traditional patriarchal representations of women. As a means of understanding more completely the concept of appropriation, especially as it pertains to Whiten's work, I will expand on Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's discussion in their article "Semiotics and Art History."

Bal and Bryson use the concept of "intertextuality" a term first introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin, as one means of accounting for how images are interpreted.[17] They refer to intertextuality as the "ready-made quality" of signs, linguistic or visual, "that a writer or image maker finds available in the earlier texts that a culture has produced." Bal and Bryson argue that, "[b]y reusing forms .... an artist takes along the text out of which the borrowed element is broken away, while also constructing a new text with the debris." They suggest that in doing so, "the historical narrative is infected by subjective discourse."[18]

Griselda Pollock, in a discussion of the appropriation of images by feminist artists such as Mary Kelly, Yve Lomax and Marie Yates suggests that their work exposes "diverse images of women which relay us off to major sites for the production and circulation of 'truths' about 'woman' - advertising, film noir, melodrama, fashion photography, television and so forth." Pollock argues that making visible the "codes and rhetorics" of such media-related images in turn "reveals their unexpected menace."[19] Thus, in introducing a

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[17] Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Soviet philosopher of language.
[18] Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," The Art Bulletin LXXIII no.2 (June 1991): 207..
[19] Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.174-175.

new form to the original, the artists create a new "text" which in its unsettling of the viewer, provokes the viewer into questioning the truth of the image.[20] Another artist well known for her appropriation strategies is the American, Barbara Kruger who uses newspaper text juxtaposed with fragmented photographs of women in order to question the language of the mass media. In her discussion of the artist's work Whitney Chadwick comments on the unsettling effect caused by disparities between forms. She notes that since the written texts in Kruger's work "always subvert the meaning of the visual image," viewers are "confronted with the message that something is wrong."[21]

Similarly, Whiten's borrowed newspaper images, re-represented in needlework, confront the viewer with the notion that "something is wrong." Viewers are unsettled when they fail to recognize the new form created out of the item of the newspaper photo--which signifies the predominantly male-controlled public institution of the media, rendered in embroidery--a medium which has been historically constructed as a private activity practiced by women. To apply the semiotic language of Bal and Bryson, Whiten has created a new "text" while taking along the text of each earlier form. When faced with the disparity of forms, Whiten's viewers may begin to question the truth of what they see. While the media presents the illusion of reality and immediacy, what we see is not *really* what we see but rather something

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[20].For a more detailed discussion on appropriation see Whitney Chadwick, "A Postmodern Postscript," in Women, Art, and Society (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), and Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds., Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985 (London: HarperCollins, 1987), p.53. For further examples of artists using appropriation techniques see Difference: On Representation and Sexuality (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985) which includes an often-quoted catalogue essay by Kate Linker.

[21] Chadwick, p.356.

processed in time through an intermediary, in this instance, photography. In his book Simulations Jean Baudrillard explains: "All media and the official news service only exist to maintain the illusion of actuality...all these things arrive too late...they have exhausted their meaning long in advance and only survive on an artificial effervescence of signs...."[22] In this way Whiten undermines the artificiality of what is often presented as truth, in this case by the media, thus raising our awareness of the role such structures play in shaping our belief systems.

Whiten's interest in bringing together the private and the public is reflective of the her need to "try to understand the world" and the structures which support it, through personal exploration. In my conversation with the artist I suggested a parallel existing between her work and that of Barbara Todd, as it seemed that both make a link between her personal life and the greater world at large as a means of understanding and involving themselves in world issues. My opinion was supported by Whiten in her response:

> I feel very much that way. Absolutely. And it is ...[about] trying to understand things, trying to make them real because they seem too abstract. You get this information about Bosnia and to this day you still don't know who the bad guys are. You try to figure it out but its not in our backyard. Nevertheless, these people are experiencing horror on a day to day basis. We share the planet but it's not real to us really. We are protected, entertained really, by the information.[23]

In today's society of modern technology the speed at which images are transmitted and received is extraordinary. Thus, to stop to consider these

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[22] Baudrillard, p.71.

[23] Whiten, interview by author. Mirjam Westen also noted of Whiten that: "By copying these images in embroidery as exactly as possible, Whiten wished interalia to make a bridge between her 'own' world and the 'outside' world." Westen, p.11.

images for more than just a fleeting moment is a rare action. Television, LED displays and newspapers with their brief and fleeting headlines, are not items intended for contemplation. Ironically it is precisely due to the over-exposure of images and news items that one easily becomes blind towards, or at the very least dulled by what is being communicated. Writing about the medium of photography in their essay "Other People's Pictures" Rhonda Lieberman and Vik Muniz state that the more one is exposed to an image, the less impact it will have on the viewer. To illustrate this idea they provide the example of Japanese art collectors:

> In Japan, collectors keep their drawings in drawers. When they are ready to look at them they take them out: ritual. By keeping the things hidden, they preserve their ability to *see* them - rather than having them out so that they become like high-grade visual musak...total access to the image erodes your ability to encounter it.[24]

One of the ways in which Whiten endeavors to make the "abstract" more "real" is through her attempts to slow down or suspend the passing of time.[25] Like the Japanese art collector, Whiten wishes to heighten or "preserve" the viewer's ability to "see" what the media presents to them. Accordingly, one way in which she attempts to do this is through the

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[24] Rhonda Lieberman and Vik Muniz, "Other People's Pictures: Second Class Phenomenological Holding Pattern," Flash Art 24 no.160 (Oct 1991): .96.

[25] In her interview with Rhodes, Whiten discussed the notion of "abstract" as it pertained to the media images. She explained, "We are not confronted with their reality when we walk out the door in the morning. It is abstract: it is somewhere out there. ...It is not as if you could step into that situation shown by the newspaper and truly appreciate what is going on. It is a smattering of information that is passed along to us. And it is alienating. We see an image but beyond the image, how does it feel?" Whiten, interview by Rhodes, p.36. Whiten's concept of the "abstract" brings to mind the writings of Jean Baudrillard who postulated: "Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. ...It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality..." Baudrillard, p.2.

suggestion of the viewing process as ritual.

The dictionary definition of ritual is, "a strictly ordered traditional method of conducting and performing an act of worship or any other solemn ceremony; any method of doing something in which the details are always faithfully repeated."[26] The concept of ritual is called forth by Whiten both formally, in her planning and execution of the installation, as well as implicated by the process of embroidering itself. Reflecting on her planning for the creation of the supports Whiten explained:

> I wanted them to suggest various things, one of them being figures and another being some kind of *ritualistic* [my italics] altar. I wanted there to be a sense of reverence so that when you approach it is serious and contemplative.[27]

There is a ceremonial atmosphere in the gallery space evoked by the dim lighting as well as by the individually lit structures which do bear resemblance to altars; places which normally serve as a centre of worship.[28] The structures also call to mind the traditional uniform of the nun and, in the manner in which they are arranged, order, thereby evoking a religious quality. Within a ritualistic or religious context "pray" is used as a word to introduce a request or plea.[29] In her act of placing the images on the altar-like supports, Whiten requests that the viewer stop to consider or

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[26] New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1991 edition, s.v. "ritual."
[27] Whiten, interview by author.
[28] An altar is defined by Webster's dictionary as "an usually raised structure or place ... which serves as a centre of worship or ritual." Whiten's structures are also reminiscent of speaker podiums, or lecterns, a place where one would generally find speaker's notes. It is therefor possible that the artist's positioning of the embroidery on top of the structures is intended as another means of "giving voice" to women.
[29] Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2d ed., s.v. "pray."

meditate upon the images. Thus, the artist transforms the fleeting quality of the newspaper image into an object of contemplation.

As previously mentioned, another means whereby the artist slows down the passing of time is through the art of embroidery. Embroidery, or the process of embroidery, lends itself well to the notion of ritual, for it involves a "method of doing something in which the details are always faithfully repeated." The act of embroidery, is a time-consuming process, and it requires a great amount of concentration, scrutiny and attention to detail. Commenting on the process the artist stated:

> There is something reassuring about the length of time it takes to make one of these images and in the *repetitiveness* [my italics] of the labour. It is not that you understand things more but you hold on to it - perhaps not the subject but some aspect. It is being involved in a process where you are able to give it the consideration it might deserve.[30]

What new meanings surface through Whiten's slow, fixed "transmission" to the viewer of these normally rapidly transferred media images? Whiten, by the very *process* of her work, is attempting to slow down or fix these often hastily viewed images for the viewer's scrutiny. In this way they may be carefully considered both in terms of *what* is being represented, as well as in terms of their meaning within the broader context of world issues.

In Victorian times ideologies regarding the behavior of women were exemplified by the painstakingly slow ritual of *embroidery*, undertaken by so many middle-class women. In her book The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine, Rozsika Parker argues that , "[d]omestic

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[30] Whiten, interview by Rhodes, p.36.

arts were equated with virtue because they ensured that women remain at home and refrain from book learning."[31] In contemporary society ideologies regarding the behavior of women are circulated at top speed through the language of the *media*, where similarly the message conveyed is, "stay at home". For example the media's sensationalisation of crimes, particularly those involving women, serve to create - unnecessarily - an atmosphere of fear. Hence their underlying message; stay off the street.[32] One does not have to look further than the newspapers, television and magazines in contemporary times to see that attitudes governing the way women dress, speak, act, the spaces in which they are free to move, act, as well as their sexuality, work, education and reproduction are reflected and are perpetuated on a day to day basis.

Yet one may, as did Parker, look beneath the surface of certain narratives to reveal that particular ideologies are put forth at certain historical moments in order to satisfy the dominant structure. In tracing the shifting notions of femininity and roles ascribed to women through embroidery from medieval times until the present, Parker demonstrated how embroidery changed from

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[31] Rozsika Parker, The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine (New York: Routledge 1984), p.75.

[32] During my interview with the artist we discussed the idea of fear mongering by the media. Both of us commented on its "effectiveness" in keeping women off the street. This is not however, to dismiss women's real vulnerability to crime. Rather, what I am suggesting is that these messages may be used against women in the vested interest of patriarchy. For example, in some rape trials women are seen as "asking for it" simply because they go out at night alone. As Chris Weedon states: "To go out alone has been interpreted as yet another sign of sexual availability, a provocation to male sexuality. This itself is *socially constructed* [my italics] as an everpresent, powerful thrust of sexual drives, which society, and women in particular, must hold in check by not offering 'unreasonable" provocation." Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.36-37.

a profession practiced by *both* men and women in the middle ages, to one used to instill notions of femininity in young women and to eventually embody a feminine stereotype.[33] Parker emphasizes the history of embroidery and its contradictions in terms of its relevance for women today. She explains "that definitions of sexual difference, and the definitions of art and artist so weighted against women, are not fixed," noting, "They have shifted over the centuries, and they can be transformed in the future."[34] Thus, Whiten's choice of embroidery techniques with its shifting signification, serves as an appropriate medium with which to question the media's similarly shifting representation of women.

As previously stated, certain texts--visual or written-- may be put forth at certain historical moments as a means of upholding dominant ideologies. However, as feminist scholars have demonstrated, certain ideologies, such as patriarchy, may just as easily convert these images into other types of images which, in turn, might support different interests--for example, pornography and sexist advertisements. Linda Nead describes pornography as existing in "the realm of the profane and mass culture where sensual desires are stimulated and gratified."[35] Here the myth of women's natural suitedness as house-wife or mother is easily converted for the pleasure of the male viewer into her role as another commonly presented woman type, that of "mistress" or "whore". Whiten exposes the framework of these mechanisms of power through the presentation and display of her graphite

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[33] For an elaborate discussion on the gendered history of women and embroidery see Parker's groundbreaking book, The Subversive Stitch.
[34] Parker, p.215.
[35] Linda Nead, The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 85. For a particularly succinct discussion on women, representation and pornography see Nead, pp. 83-103.

grids.

A grid represents a regular pattern and a means of reproduction as it has the ability to be placed on top of any subject. In Western society with the development of linear perspective, the grid was often employed by certain artists who believed that the ideal nude ought to be constructed by the compilation of individual body parts. As John Berger states in Ways of Seeing, "the exercise presumed a remarkable indifference to who any one person really was."[36] Whiten's grids which helped her to reproduce her subjects, expose the pattern for each individual stitch, and, as such, the structure of her process. In revealing her process, Whiten metaphorically exposes the structure of the media which, in Berger's words presumes a "remarkable indifference" in their manufacturing of the news Richard Rhodes corresponding views posit Whiten's grids and their characteristics as "a metaphor for the hieratic nature of mass media information, for its artificiality, for its deep structure as an iconographic system buttressed by habit, repetition and sheer power."[37]

Baudrillard has written on the definition of real as, "that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction."[38] Stated more simply, Baudrillard is saying that the real may never be represented as no equivalent of the real exists. (Re)presentation is exactly that, hence always a distortion of the truth. Whiten tries to bring the anonymous faces of the

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[36] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p.62.
[37] Rhodes, p.7. It is also possible that Whiten intended the grid structures, in evoking "masculine" mathematics, to be played off their "feminine" use for embroidery.
[38] Baudrillard, p.146.

women she encounters each day in the media closer to the exhibition viewer: this becomes apparent when one considers the layout of the exhibition. When distanced from the this installation one is struck by the similarity between the fabric draped lecterns and the fabric draped figures of the women in the images. This was a formal decision on Whiten's part who revealed that she, "wanted them [the "sculptural" forms] to have the sense of being figurative, to refer in a way to the figures [in the needlework]."[39] Because the sculptural forms may be read as women wearing the burqa -- the traditional concealing cloth worn by Muslim women -- they appear almost real.[40] That the forms bear a similarity to the women is also evoked by the linen because it mediates a visceral proximity to the real women through its suggestion of their materiality. Whiten's interest in conveying a human aspect in her installation is reflected in her interview with Rhodes: "I didn't want my works to be seen as pictures, I wanted them to have a tangible physical weight. I wanted them to seem material, not just more images."[41] As their presence is conveyed into the gallery space and therefore the present, by the time the viewer sees the embroidered images

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[39] Whiten, interview by author.

[40] According to Patricia Jeffery, the "old style *burqa* is perhaps the most effective way of concealing a woman. It consists of a circular piece of material...which drops right down to the ground around the women, giving a rather ghostly impression." The newer style burqa consists of a separate coat and veil but in Jeffery's opinion, "[t]he effect of these garments is all the same, though, for the woman is anonymous, a non-person...silent. ...nameless and faceless." (p.4) Perhaps then, the artist intentionally used the burqa to comment about women's silent position in other cultures such as the Muslim culture. There has been much controversy as of late surrounding the burqa and its cultural significance. Today many Muslim women do not consider the wearing of the burqa as oppressive, but rather as a means of moving freely in public spaces without observation. For a detailed discussion of burqa as well as *purdah*, a range of behaviour connected with the cultural concealing of women in Muslim culture, see Jeffery, Frogs in a Well: Indian Women in Purdah (London: Zed Press, 1979).

[41] Whiten, interview by Rhodes, p. 36.

the women represented therein are no longer distant anonymous faces. Moreover, as Whiten uses fabric as an element which interacts with the viewer and the viewer's construction of meaning, she transforms the fabric into an *active* agent in the communication of information. Thus, the artist counters embroidery's associations with stereotypically passive feminine characteristics, and, by extension, questions the media's similarly constructed view of women as passive victims. Whiten suggests this in the design of the installation itself which positions the viewer as facing the ordered row of steel structures their unity and solidarity.

As we have seen with the example of needlework, patriarchy perpetuates ideologies of femininity as natural, because it is crucial to maintaining the power structure. Whiten's needleworks however, defy women's stereotypical representation. In encouraging viewers' participation in the production of meaning through the formal considerations of her installation, and in offering viewers a multiplicity of viewpoints from which to consider alternate "realities' other than the one presented by single authoritative voice of the media, the artist unveils dominant cultural production. That all of the women represented in this installation are women from other cultures not only serves to acknowledge the experience of non-western women, but it also provokes the viewer to think about his or her own privileged and protected position.

Chapter 2

> *With this work I feel at once grounded in contemporary artmaking practice AND a tradition of quiltmaking with its particular language, history and materials. My job has been to pursue the integration of these two distinct worlds, using the bedcover as the central metaphor.* [1]
>
> Barbara Todd

It is appropriate, if not ironic, that I began my writing about the art of Barbara Todd in August 1995, during the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Todd's exhibition of seven quilts, Security Blankets (1993-1994) incorporated images of bombs, missiles and planes as an interrogation of the arms industry and military power.[2] In this chapter as a means of investigating the themes presented by the exhibition, namely security, surveillance, and war/violence/death I will focus on the first quilt in Todd's series, Security Blanket:14 Suits, 5 Aircraft, 1 Bomb, 25 Missiles (1986-1988) (plate 11), while at the same time, making reference to the remaining six quilts.[3]

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[1] Barbara Todd, interview by author, Montréal, Quebec, 3 August 1995.

[2] The exhibition, BarbaraTodd: Security Blankets 5 December, 1992 -17 January, 1993 was held at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery and travelled extensively across Canada. The quilts were hung two and three to a wall at well-spaced intervals in the main part of the Gallery. In a smaller room adjacent to the main gallery space, hung various drawings by the artist. Most of the drawings consisting of bombs, suits and other imagery found in the quilts, were made by Todd upon her completion of the quilts. As they do not represent the artist's working process, and were included in the exhibition by the artist simply because "she liked them," I have chosen not to discuss the drawings in this thesis.

[3] The titles of the other quilts are as follows: Security Blanket: 57 Missiles (1989), Security Blanket: B-2 Stealth Bomber (1989-90), Wild Goose Chase: B-2 Stealth Bomber (1991), Funeral Blanket (1992), Coffin Quilt (1991-92), and Overkill (1992).

As a means of discussing the Security Blanket series, I extend the artist's use of the quilt as a metaphor for a layering of meanings which includes a surface and its opposite along with an "in-between." That is, as the structure of a quilt is composed of three layers; the top, the bottom, and the batting which links these two parts together, so too does Todd interpret the world she represents.

Todd stated, during an interview with me, that she "is making quilts because she is **in between** things;" she has described her work as "an interface **between** the domestic or personal and what she termed the larger events of the world."[4] For example, when she spoke about a new work, Ground Zero,[5] she confirmed her concerns for the same issues: her interaction as an artist with world events.[6] According to Todd, Ground Zero is "a point above ground where an atomic bomb explodes - **place between** the ground and the atmosphere ...also, on a scale [it is] the **place between** positive and negative, like a quiet...[zone]"[7] Todd's thinking reveals her convictions about the importance of intermediate spaces as sites of negotiation. Like the structure of a quilt itself, the "in between" is a rarely considered locus which is neither one thing or the other. It is rarely visible or nameable but it exists to join two pieces together.

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[4] Deena Waisberg, "Cold Comfort: Contemporary Canadian Quilts," Ontario Crafts 18 no.4 (Winter 1993): 18.

[5] I viewed this work in progress at the artist's home in August, 1995.

[6] When I interviewed her Todd remarked that she began working on her quilt Ground Zero when she was "in between" the end of a tour and the beginning of a new project.

[7] Todd, interview by author.

Security Blanket: 14 Suits, 5 Aircraft, 1 Bomb, 25 Missiles is composed of a grid of twenty square panels (2.7 x 2.7 m) set within a narrow border surrounding the outer parameter of the quilt. While the grid pattern used by Todd is a property of the traditional quilt, her choice of fabric and subject matter is not. Todd has appliquéed bodiless business suits using the fabric of an actual business suit in each of the twenty blocks of the pattern. These are interspersed with images of fighter planes and a nuclear bomb, a "fatman", the same type dropped on Hiroshima. The narrow margins of the outer border hold images of missiles appropriated from the military hardware year book, Jane's Weapons Systems (plate 12).[8] The idea for Security Blanket: 14 Suits, 5 Aircraft, 1 Bomb, 25 Missiles grew out of an earlier work--the first and only quilt Todd had made prior to this one. Created out of outfits she wore in her twenties, the artist's Cover/Undercover (1982), is a self portrait addressing issues of identity and gender within a patriarchal system. According to Todd, her interest in clothing as both sign and masquerade initiated a desire to experiment with men's business suits.[9] It was through working with this fabric that she began thinking about military aircraft.[10] A friend then suggested she look at Jane's Weapons. The artist

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8 Air-to Surface Missiles, in Janes Weapon Systems, 18th Edition, 1987-88 Yearbook. London: Janes Publishing Co., P. 761.

9 Joan Borsa in her review of Todd's 1986 exhibition Drawings and Dresses suggested that Todd used clothes as "both sign and costume, capable of disguising or making a spectacle." Joan Borsa, "Barbara Todd, A.K.A. Gallery, Saskatoon," Vanguard (September 1986): 39. The dictionary meaning of masquerade is disguise or assuming a false appearance and Todd, particularly when she incorporates the empty business suit, accepts this kind of meaning in her work.

10 Todd, in her discussion with me, maintains that she made this connection but that she is not sure how it came about. She said, "I wanted to make a quilt with men's suits, and years before I had made a quilt for myself using my own clothes. It was a self-portrait. That was the only other quilt I had made. So I made that and I made a lot of work around that...I don't know exactly how it happened, but that started everything." Todd, interview by author.

states that at that time:

> I was thinking about ...the arms embargo in Bosnia. I thought why are they doing this? I felt it was because there are people who make arms, investors, make arms very well and people have invested millions in this and the only way they can recoup the money is to make arms....Yes, it is always about money.[11]

The juxtaposition of the business suit, a traditional symbol of patriarchal commerce, with aircraft and other military weapons, represents the role economics and business have played and continue to play in the production of military weapons. According to Bruce Grenville in his catalogue essay for the exhibition, "[p]roponents of deterrence advocate the development of increasingly sophisticated military hardware," assuming that ever greater build-ups of military power will ensure peace. This rationale legitimizes the basis for a highly developed and lucrative arms industry.

In her understanding of war and industry, Todd underscores the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. A clear delineation of this link requires some insight into the impact of capitalism on patriarchal relations. Prior to the late eighteenth century Industrial Revolution society met its needs through the family production of goods and services, both men and women maintaining this production. Sally Alexander, writing about capitalism and the development of the sexual division of labour in the nineteenth century, notes that in pre-industrial times, "[a] woman's work in the home was different from her husband's, but no less vital."[12] With the Industrial Revolution came changes in the production of goods and services

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Sally Alexander, Becoming a Woman and Other essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History (London: Virago Press, 1994), p.21.

accompanied by new ideologies pertaining to "work." As industry grew and the production of goods increased, the site of labour moved from the home to more centrally based factories. Under this new system of production it was men who began to work increasingly outside the home while women for the most part worked within it. What set these two types of work apart was that those who were part of the new labour force received wages for their work, while those who remained home, namely women, did not. The Industrial Revolution, through the assignment of paid wages for men and no wages for women, created a new distinction between the role of the sexes.

Moreover this gendered division of labour resulted in a system of pay organized around the assumption that all workers were men and that their incomes supported women.[13] While women did initially work outside the home for wages, the unpaid work of maintaining the home came to be seen as their primary job and was maintained for the most part by an ideology that they are naturally, that is biologically predisposed to work of this kind.[14] This ideology of women's suitedness to domestic labour is one which exists today and is upheld in the interest of patriarchy and big business.[15]

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[13] For one brief history of how industrialization changed the sexual division of labour see Irene Padavic and Barbara Reskin, "A History of Gendered Work," in Women and Men at Work (London: Pine Forge Press, 1995), pp. 16-30.

[14] Alexander suggests that, "[w]omen's vulnerability as wage-workers stemmed from their child-bearing capacity upon which 'natural' foundation the sexual division of labour within the family was based." Alexander, p.21.

[15] For a general discussion of the gendered division of labour see Joan Rothschild, "Technology, Housework and Women's Liberation," in Machina Ex Dea: Feminist Perspectives on Technology, ed. Joan Rothschild (NewYork: Pergamon Press,1983), pp. 79-93; Lisa Adkins, Gendered Work: Sexuality, Family and the Labour Market (Open University Press: Buckingham, 1995); June Nash, and Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, eds. Women, Men and the International Division of Labour (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Barbara Drygulski Wright, ed. Women, Work, and Technology (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1987).

In maintaining control over women's access to paid labour and in promoting the idea that the family and sexual/private relations are separate from the public, patriarchy maintains women's dependence on men as well as ensuring their place and production in the home. Sally Alexander writes that:

> [B]y confining production for use to the private world of the home and female labour, and production for exchange increasingly to the workshop outside the home and male labour, capitalism ensured the economic dependence of women upon their husbands or fathers for a substantial part of their lives.[16]

As a means of maintaining this dependence, women are encouraged to believe that they must seek security, promised through the institution of marriage, and, by extension, the promise of protection supported by a home and a husband.[17] Women are socially encouraged to believe that they are in need of protection thus they accept a false security that is actually forced dependency as a means of control.[18] This ideology becomes evident, for example, in the sexual division of labour, access to education and control of sexuality.[19] It is also presented and perpetuated through traditional representations of the family in film, advertising, newspapers and television.

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[16] Alexander, p. 22.

[17] Lisa Adkins drawing on a history of feminist analyses of the labour market suggests that one of the ways in which women's dependency upon men is maintained is by limiting their access to paid labour. She writes that "by limiting women's access to paid work, men maintain a situation where women have little choice but to marry. In so doing, men secure access to women's unpaid domestic production in the household." Adkins, p.24.

[18] For further discussion on the manner in which women are socially encouraged to be dependent see Simone de Beauvoir on "Marriage" in Second Sex (New York: Knopf, 1952) Translated and edited by H. M. Parshley.

[19] Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 14.

Carol Duncan in her groundbreaking article, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," looks at a particular historical period--late eighteenth century France--to understand the extent to which representations of family and motherhood have contributed to the process of gender socialization.[20] Duncan explains that in order to answer both the economic and psychological needs of the emerging bourgeois state, new ideals of conjugal love and parental responsibility began to be promoted. As the emerging public world of business took hold, people began to look increasingly upon their private life, that is the home and family, as a private haven away from their work. The unifying element of the new family unit Duncan states, was the "wife-mother," who's role was to fill the physical and emotional needs of her husband, and, contrary to what was then traditional practice, nurse her own children and raise them at home.[21] Duncan goes on to say that while the "joys of motherhood" were popularized in many ways including eighteenth century writing, nowhere was the message that "motherhood is happiness" more blatantly conveyed than in the image of the happy nursing mother. Of one drawing by Prud'hon (1809-1865), appropriately titled The Happy Mother (ca. 1810) (plate 13) she comments: "The child asleep, the mother watching him, each seems to experience a perfect contentment and tranquility."[22] Duncan states that while Prud'hon's drawing and others like it serve to suggest that women were content and happy with their roles, this was not

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[20] Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," in Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp.200-219.

[21] Duncan argues that "throughout most of the eighteenth century the tasks of nursing and caring for babies were regarded by both men and women as debilitating, obnoxious and coarsening....Tending to its infant needs and earliest education was the work of servants." p.207.

[22] Ibid., p.217.

the case. Rather, she argues, that such images must be viewed as a reflection of eighteenth century French ideological thought. Norma Broude has stated of the carry over of eighteenth century societal ideals that: "So successful was their campaign--and the similar ones, for similar purposes... that have followed it in modern society down to the present day--that we have come indeed to accept ...[women's] social role as the natural order of things."[23]

That such ideals concerning women's suited role as wife and mother are a thing of the past, is strongly contradicted by the language--visual and literary--of a recent advertisement; which blatantly confirms the purveyance of the "happy mother" ideal in contemporary society. In their full-page advertisement in a recent (1996) issue of the Montreal Gazette, British Airways announced their new business class "cradle" seat (plate 14). However, nowhere in the advertisement is the seat itself depicted, rather, what stands in for the seat is an image of a woman cradling a baby in her arms. Superimposed and obliterating the face of the infant is a photograph of the head and shoulders of a grey-haired business man. The photograph is positioned so that the man's head rests, or more properly, is cradled, in the crook of the woman's arm next to her breast. The man is smiling, his eyes are closed as the woman gazes down at him. The wording of the text, "Lullaby not included" and "doesn't simply recline but tilts as a whole raising your knees and relieving your body of stress and pressure," not only reinforces what is already suggested by the image--woman as caregiver--it also impresses upon the viewer the idea that the typical business person is

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[23] Norma Broude, introduction to Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany, p.9.

male. Yet, as patriarchal as images of the "happy family" might be, they are, as Chris Weedon remarks, at the same time "immensely seductive," and they serve to signify "warmth, happiness and emotional and material security."[24]

How does this relate to the quilts of Todd? The quilt's imagery, its title Security Blanket as well as its associations with domesticity, confront viewers with notions of security such as military security, a myth of public security offered by patriarchy as National Defense, and a myth of domestic security. In placing militaristic devices within the frame of the quilt, Todd also plays off notions of aircraft and handi-craft thereby provoking a consideration of where each is made: the aircraft is constructed in the public sphere for public or government use, while handicraft is made within the private sphere for domestic use. By sewing items which are linked to the public world of business and patriarchy into the quilt with its private/domestic significations, Todd symbolically threads together the so-called separate spheres thus revealing their connectedness, and hence the artificiality of their separate construction.[25] Having already established the

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[24] Ibid., p.16. I have encountered this image type in many places including, for example, the swim schedule at my local YMCA. The icon indicating *adult* swim time shows two figures with obvious physical distinctions. The first figure, symbolizing a woman, poses with her weight resting on one leg with the other leg turned up behind her and her hands clasped behind her back. The second figure, a man, is depicted by a larger, broader looking figure standing firmly with feet apart and hands on his hips. The same two figures are implemented for the *family* swim time except that now they are placed distinctly apart with the figure of the woman clasping the hands of two small children. The female child stands on one leg like her mother while leaning against her. The male child is depicted as reaching across the space which separates the mother from the father, thus reinforcing the stereotype of the mother as primary caregiver and the father as "protector" of the family.

[25] Todd said, "What keeps me going is the connection between my life, my children, the newspaper, the fights with our partners - it is all together - not a

business suit as a sign of patriarchy and power, it is interesting to think about the significance of the absence, or invisibility of the suit's owners: Todd's business suits are bodiless.

Understanding how power is produced and reproduced is of great importance for feminists. Michel Foucault's theories on the production of power have provided a framework offering historical explanations for the manner in which power is exercised over individuals through particular institutions and social practices, including penal systems and the control of sexuality.[26] According to Weedon, Foucault's theory of discourse and power indicates that "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms."[27] For example, in Discipline and Punish, Foucault elaborates upon the invisibility of power in society. He explains that familiar institutional practices, education for example, reflect and reinscribe differences in individuals in such a way that they are perceived to be natural, when in fact they are subjected to the power of a discourse. Power becomes a form of surveillance because its operation is mostly invisible. Weedon states, "these institutions discipline the body, mind and emotions, constituting them according to the needs of hierarchical forms of power such as gender and class."[28]

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convenient separation as one imagines between life and work." Todd, interview by artist.

[26] See, for example, Lois McNay, Foucault and Feminism (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992). McNay insists that "perhaps to a greater extent than any other poststructuralist thinker, feminists have drawn on Foucault's work." (p. 2)

[27] Weedon, p. 121.

[28] Ibid.

The theme of surveillance is strong in Todd's work, not only as it is evoked by the empty suits in Security Blanket: 14 Suits, 5 Aircraft, 1 Bomb, 25 Missiles, but also as it is suggested by the imagery and symbolism in both Security Blanket: B-2 Stealth Bomber (1989-1990) (plate 15), and Wild Goose Chase: B-2 Stealth Bomber (1991) (plate 16). The stealth bomber, or the B2/7 MJ as it is properly named, was a spyplane designed by the Americans to elude radar detection, thus permitting invisible surveillance. In Wild Goose Chase: B-2 Stealth Bomber, "raining" formation of the plane's triangular shapes resembles the "Darts of Death" motif found in "The Widow's Quilt," which is one variation of a category of traditional nineteenth-century American quilts called "Mourning Quilts" (plate17). Characterized by their sombre colours--usually blacks, grays and browns--the quilts were made during and after the Civil War as a means of commemorating the death of a loved one. The connection between war and death, acknowledged by Todd in her historical connection to the "Widow's Quilt," is further heightened when the military's alternate name for artillery--"Widow Maker"-- is considered. In Security Blanket: B-2 Stealth Bomber the bomber's triangle forms, joining up at the tips and facing into a circle, create a negative central space forming the shape of a star. This formation mimics the symbols painted on the runway at a U.S Air Force Base in celebration of the plane's unveiling in 1989. Todd's inspiration for the star/bomber pattern came from an aerial photograph of the runway she had seen in the May/June 1989 issue of Technology Review, but the grid-based pattern, three rows of three, follows an historical quilting design from the eighteenth century known as the "Honey Comb" (plate 18).[29] Interestingly, this

[29] Nancy Tousley, "Night Watch: Barbara Todd's Quilts Protect Against the Chill of the Post-Cold War Dawn," Canadian Art (Winter 1992): 43-45. In her article

pattern also echoes the shape of Panopticon prisons, based on the eighteenth-century prison design by Jeremy Bentham (1791) (plates 19, 20, 21). [30]

Bentham's Panopticon, consisting of a round building surrounding a central tower, was based on the concept that all prisoners would be subject to perfect visibility and hence control. Within the tower there were zig zag openings (similar to the circumference of the individual shapes on the quilt) rather than doors between individual rooms. The structure of the prison was designed so that visibility was axial, allowing the supervisor to observe without himself being observed. In such a way power could be exercised and order guaranteed by anonymous surveillance. As part of his analysis on power, Foucault envisioned the functioning of the Panopticon as a model for the functioning of power in society. The Panopticon, "would be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it."[31] In other words, Foucault saw the architecture of society

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"Quilts the Great American Art," Patricia Mainardi states that the octagonal shapes and three on three pattern which "consisted in cutting the points off a square to form an octagon," is known as the "Honeycomb" or "Grandmother's Flower Garden." Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: the Great American Art," in Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p.336.

[30] According to The United States Bureau of Prisons, though Bentham's original design was never actually constructed, "[a] few Panopticon prisons, with modifications of Bentham's original plan, were erected on the Continent [Europe] in the early nineteenth-century." Handbook of Correctional Institutional Design and Construction (1949), p.19. Two prisons based on Bentham's design include the first Western Penitentiary, Pa., 1826 (plate 20) and the Millbank Prison, London (1812) (plate 21). See also Leslie Fairweather, "The Evolution of the Prison," in Prison Architecture: An International Survey of Representative Closed Institutions and Analysis of Current Trends in prison Design, prepared by Giuseppe di Gennaro (London: The Architectural Press Ltd., 1975).

[31] Michel Foucault quoted in Donald Preziosi, Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 66.

constructed as a transparent space where power is created and exercised independent of society but ultimately supervised by society itself.

The structure of a grid may be seen as a scientific classification system for what is contained within its frame.[32] In Todd's quilt, the grid organization of the Panoptic-shaped bombers suggest ideas about the functioning of power in contemporary society, particularly as it pertains to the way our social space is organized.[33] For instance individuals in society are constantly subjected to anonymous surveillance by modern technologies such as video cameras, banking institutions, cellular phones, and most recently the internet. These various devices control and fix our position with an invisible eye.[34] As Todd's quilts call forth the constructed dichotomy of the public/male and private/female spheres, they provoke thinking about the public surveillance of women in contemporary society.

In her essay Femininity and the Spaces of Modernity Griselda Pollock comments that "social spaces are policed by men's watching women...observing but never interacting, consuming the sights through a

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[32] Bridget Elliot, Redefined: The Quilt as Art (Banff: The Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, 1989), p.26.

[33] The empty suits and the symbols of war also convey ideas about the invisibilty of leaders in the battlefield today. Todays war strategies are negotiated by authorities from their positions behind a desk. Future wars may be "fought" using modern technologies activated simply by the push of a button. In this way orders may be carried out and authority exercised while the "powers that be" remain safely distanced from viewing the consequences of their actions.

[34] I am also thinking that we are literally 'fixed" in a position elicited by, for example, the bank machine. Its structure is such that we are forced to stand in full view of the surveillance cameras. Similarly we must always be in proximity to some "larger" technological power in order to operate a cell phone, explore the internet, etc.

controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze..." [35] Luce Irigary states that: "[i]nvestment in the look is not as privileged in women as it in men. More than other senses, the eye objectifies and masters...." In other words, it guarantees control of "the seen" through fear of being seen, functioning as a kind of self-surveillance. In his early writings about "ways of seeing," John Berger recognized that women had to constantly watch themselves: "from earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually....She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance...."[36] Thus surveillance becomes a factor in everyday life, especially for women, as well as being a major component of the military and Security Blanket: B-2 Stealth Bomber, while focusing on a military issue, also highlights the concept of surveillance in more general ways.

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[35] Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Feminity," in Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 67. In her essay Pollock examines the ways in which impressionist artists Berthe Morisot (1841-1896) and Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) adapted different working processes and techniques as a means of negotiating their place within the "sexualized structures" of modernity. In this statement Pollock is referring to the "flaneur," the masculine embodiment of modernity who, "symbolizes the privilege or freedom to move about the public arena of the city...." In her essay Pollock argues that "modernity is still with us...women...while out in public...are denied the right to move around our cities safely." p.89.

[36] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 46. Berger and Irigaray's writings have informed those of anthropologist David Howes. He states: "[s]exual dominance is... intimately related to visual dominance." In his studies Howe has concluded that in order "for women to come into their own (i.e for gender equality to become a fact), there would have to be an overthrow of the Western hierarchy of the senses, which privileges sight." see David Howes, "Sensorial Anthropology," in The Varieties of Sensory Experience: a sourcebook in the anthropology of the senses, ed. David Howes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p.189.

Combined with the artist's sombre choice of colour, black on grey, the pattern in Security Blanket: B-2 Stealth Bomber creates an optical illusion with the shape of the planes sometimes receding or giving over to the shape of stars. Because Todd revealed a few of the virtually invisible bombers by highlighting them in a lighter fabric, their hidden design becomes visible. The forms do not remain fixed or defined but rather they seem shadowy and nebulous, thereby suggesting the camouflaged power that exists in societies particularly in societies which have a commitment to a retention of military power. By making the shapes resemble stealth bombers, Todd also highlights the power which accompanies the ability to survey or watch without being seen or visible. Stealth means escaping observation; the bomber sees but is not seen.

We live in a society which privileges sight over all other senses. Attitudes regarding aesthetic appreciation have carried over from the Renaissance and have resulted in a hierarchical ordering of the senses.[37] .Leonardo da Vinci wrote: "The eye is the chief organ whereby our understanding can have the most complete and magnificent view of the infinite works of nature."[38] Other senses, namely the proximity senses such as touch and smell were neglected and even tabooed in some cultures because they were seen to be linked with the body (savagery, illness, paganism, women).[39] In her article on the senses, Polly Ullrich writes, "the sense we choose as having primary importance dictates the kind of art that will have the most prestige in our

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[37] For a discussion of the senses including sight see Howes.

[38] Leonardo da Vinci as quoted by Polly Ullrich in "More than just a Touch: the Tactile Element in Fiber Art," FibreArts Magazine 19 no.2 (Sept/Oct 1992): 33.

[39] For an elaboration on the history of the proximity senses and women, see Diane Ackerman, A Natural History of the Senses (New York: Random House, 1990). For information on the tactile aspect of fibre see Ullrich.

culture."[40] French theorist Luce Irigaray has expressed similar concerns: "in our culture the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality."[41] Fibre a medium which is so tactile, is a part of everyday experience to which Barbara Todd wishes to contribute: "I really want people to be able to experience my work. The tactile quality, the absorbent quality of the wool, the kind of somberness of it and yet the warmth of it. That is really important to me."[42]

In Funeral Blanket (1992) (plate 22) and Coffin Quilt (1991-1992) (plate 23), Todd employs the tactile language of quilting to shift her emphasis towards a discussion of the human body in relation to war.[43] Coffin Quilt consists of dozens of coffins arranged in a patterned fashion suggesting the orderliness of military barracks, of gravestones or of soldiers' coffins prepared to be shipped home from, for example, Vietnam during the 1970s.[44] Grenville, when discussing the theme of death evident in Todd's

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[40] Ullrich, p.33.

[41] Luce Irigaray (1978), Interview in M.-F. Hans and G.Lapouge, eds. Les Femmes, la pornographie et l'erotisme, (Paris), p.50, as quoted in Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), p.50. Ullrich remarks on the bipolar properties of touch, in other words, the notion that in touching something we are touched in return. She comments that touching "...involves direct contact with the body. ...[w]hen we move our hand over an object, it brings the physical properties to life " Ullrich, p.34.

[42] Todd, interview by artist.

[43] Ibid..

[44] Some viewers have interpreted the shape of the forms as bombs and their "falling" vertical arrangement as a bombing attack. Todd's ambiguous "sometimes you see it, sometimes you don't," design was most certainly a deliberate means of highlighting the "stealth" aspect of military devices. The quilt's abstract design and colour create the illusion of movement, and, as such, are characterenistic of the Mid-1960s "Op art" (optical art) style

work, writes that: "Within the post-modern world we have lost our understanding of death, seeing only its finality and closure. The continuity of life and death has been displaced by a binarism which pits the living against the dead and the powerful against the powerless."[45] Despite this apparent emphasis upon death, spirals, which most frequently symbolize life, are quilted over the coffins in Coffin Quilt. Similarly, while the border of Funeral Blanket contains all of the death icons found in Security Blanket:14 Suits, 5 Aircraft, 1 Bomb, 25 Missiles, the central part of the quilt contains a new motif of scrolls and spirals, thereby connecting life and death. As Marni Jackson has observed in her catalogue essay, "the spiral occurs everywhere in life...ferns shells, embryos, fingerwhorls."[46] Indeed the organic shape of the spiral is even reminiscent of cell forms and as such they might speak of the cycle of life itself. The representation of death, then, does not seem so one-dimensional. Also, the quilt's association with warmth, domesticity and caring, implicates the protective characteristic of covering and protection; while the viewer sees images related to death, he or she, is, at the same time aware of the comfort of the quilt. Todd has stated that people have a tendency to separate their "personal lives from the larger events in the world."[47] Her unlikely coupling of technology and fibre conflates the categories of life and death, public and private, and, by extension, the constructs of nature and culture.

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[45] Bruce Grenville, "Death and Deterrence," in Barbara Todd: Security Blankets (Lethbridge, Alberta: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1993), p.26.
[46] Marni Jackson, "Uncoverings" in Barbara Todd: Security Blankets (Lethbridge, Alberta: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1993), p. 8.
[47] Waisberg, p. 18.

The quilt's associations with warmth, security and comfort, and the connections established earlier between capitalism and patriarchy evoke considerations of the military industry If, as she hopes, Todd's quilts "encourage people to think harder about what's happening in the world,"[48] then certainly the notion of "women's work" must be considered in light of the commodification of women during wartime. During both World Wars when men were drawn out of the labour force and into the military, industries turned to women to maintain production. The war years gave women access to jobs which had previously been closed to them. Ironically, employers tried to attract women to these skilled blue-collar jobs by comparing them to women's homemaking activities. As part of their recruitment, women were assured that "if you can run a sewing machine you can operate a rivet gun." Predictably, when the war ended and in anticipation of returning male workers, employers laid off women from these traditional male occupations.[49] Exploited as a reserve labour force, women in the interest of men were then made obsolete.

While women's labour has formed part of the production of war, women also suffer as particular types of victims of war. For example, Betty Reardon in Women and Peace: Feminist Visions of Global Security observed that increase in the militarization of any given area leads to more abuse directed toward women. Reardon writes that, "[m]ilitarization of an area, particularly the stationing of troops, leads to an intensification of such abuse, with the consequent rise of prostitution, rape, and sexually transmitted diseases."[50]

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[48] Ibid.

[49] For related discussion see Irene Padavic and Barbara Reskin, Women and Men at Work (Pine Forge Press, California: 1994), pp.49-51.

[50] Betty A. Reardon, Women and Peace: Feminist Visions of Global Security

This was certainly the case with the Asian "comfort women" of World War II who were forced into captivity in order to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers. The recent demonstrations in Japan led by a Dutch woman captured in Indonesia during the war have put this issue into contemporary light, as have the Japanese government's recent efforts to "compensate" the women who were forced into prostitution.[51] Thus, as with Todd's quilts, comfort becomes double-edged, offering a site for nurturing that does not really exist: the soldier seeks sexual favours from a women forced into prostitution, and she euphemistically becomes a "comfort" woman. Underneath the warmth and comfort of the quilt lurks the danger of war and its attendant violence.

Todd has written that her series Security Blankets, "rely heavily on an ironic reading.... By integrating what is normally construed as opposite...they undercut the ingrained dualisms of Cartesian thought. The images and their associations are mostly literal, and their irony lies in their juxtaposition."[52]

(Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p.55. Reaerdon based her finding were based on a comparison of mappings of militarization and brothels in the Philippines and other Asian countries.

[51] "Former Sex Slaves Refuse Payments," Montreal Gazette, August 1996. According to the author of the article, Andrew Pollack, only seven women in the Philippines are accepting the payments. Women in South Korea and Taiwan are refusing payments on the grounds that the money comes from a private fund, rather than a government fund. Thus, the women believe that to accept the money would allow "Japan to evade responsibility for running the brothels." The author also states that it was only in 1992, "when confronted with overwhelming evidence," that the government began acknowledging "the role of military authorities in coercing young women to have sex with as many as 20 or more soldiers a day." Over 200,000 women were forcibly confined.

[52] Todd, Programme Proposal 1993. It is also ironic that Todd juxtaposes symbols of contemporary and technological society with the quilt, an item which was and still is, associated with traditional non-technological societies such as the Amish. For a comprehensive illustrated history of traditional quits see Mary Conroy, 300 Years of Canada's Quilts (Toronto: Griffin House, 1976).

If one considers the quilt as a metaphor then what is on the surface is militarism, violence and technology, what is evoked by the medium is its opposite, the feminine and domestic. However, these categories which are suggested by Todd's juxtaposition of symbols of war with the quilt's associations with warmth and comfort, can be taken further than the initial reading of these supposedly fixed dualities to reveal the layers between. In undermining those categories which are usually considered "natural" through an integration of things which have traditionally and historically been considered mutually exclusive, she may change the way we have traditionally viewed histories of women and their work by revealing underlying ideologies and feminine stereotypes.

Chapter 3

T'ain't what you do (It's the way that cha do it)

Ella Fitzgerald

I work in tapestry primarily for its materiality and its capacity to shift within traditions, to shuttle between theoretical positions, to hover around borders, to challenge hierarchies and to connect with many different resonating imperatives. The medium, belonging everywhere and nowhere, is everything and nothing. It is what you think, and it conjures what you don't know and can't remember - it has no certainty.[1]

Ann Newdigate
1995

Ann Newdigate's series, Look At It This Way was designed specifically as a centrepiece for the 1988 exhibition of the same name at the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.[2] It consisted of a "mural" of seven tapestry panels each measuring approximately 180 x 90 cm. In the series Newdigate drew on her interest in language and theories of language to "challenge the criteria for measuring art" and to investigate issues surrounding women and their role as producers.[3] In this chapter I will

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[1] Ann Newdigate, "Kinda art, sorta tapestry: tapestry as shorthand access to the definitions, languages, institutions, attitudes, hierarchies, ideologies constructions, classifications, histories prejudices and other bad habits of the West," in New Feminist Art Criticism, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp.174.

[2] The exhibition also consisted of other work including drawings, and represented an eight year survey (1981-1988) of the artist's artistic practice. All of the tapestries in the Look at it this Way series are dated 1988 with the exception of The nomad lit a candle and waited/Look at it this way, which is dated 1987.

[3] Newdigate, 1995, pp.173-181. Upon completing a year of specialized study in

discuss Newdigate's Look At It This Way series as a means of revealing how the artist, through an exploration of personal issues as well as broader cultural politics, employs the art of Gobelin tapestry to examine social and cultural meanings often ascribed to women and tapestry, and to question and challenge hierarchies.

As previously stated, central to Newdigate's thinking is her concern for language. In her 1988 work, Newdigate conveys her interest in, and understanding for postructuralist theories which posit that meaning is produced within language, rather than being reflected by it.[4] Recognizing that meaning is not fixed but will change according to varying contexts, the artist insists on the "positive location of the undefinable as a place from which to negotiate alternate meanings and subject positions."[5] The artist's

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the Tapestry Department at the Edinburgh College of Art, Newdigate began an M.F.A at the University of Saskatchawan, where, working under Lynne Bell she developed the theoretical knowledge which enabled her to understand and address some of the issues which had come to light through her practice as a tapestry artist. Her thesis Love, Labour and Tapestry: Unraveling a Victorian Legacy, was accompanied by the Virtue Series (1986) and deals with many of the issues Newdigate had been thinking about during her studies with Bell including; art hierarchies, gender divisions as well as ideals of femininity. See Cheryl Meszaros, "A Weave of Words: The Art of Ann Newdigate," Newest Review (June/July 1991).

[4] Newdigate's interest in language, specifically in relation to textiles, involves her in the height of recent contemporary concerns about the specificity of textile art within contemporary art practice. Many contemporary textile artists and writers interested in these debates view semiotic theory as a useful tool to argue for the notion of a "shifting identity" for textiles. For a detailed discussion on this subject see the publication of texts from the recent colloquium Textiles Sismographes: Texts from the 1995 Fibre and Textile Symposium 1995 (Montreal, Quebec: Conseil des arts textiles du Quebec, 1995), p.24, in particular see Janice Jefferies, "A Textile Identity" (p.20-27)

[5] Ann Newdigate, letter to author, 25 August 1995. In regard to language, the artist noted: "Janet Wolff's The Social Production of Art and Deborah Cameron's Feminism and Linguistic Theory played an important part in helping me to analyse the limiting devices of constructed definitions and binary opposites." Newdigate, 1995, p.16.

insistence on a "capacity to shift" is reflected in her modification of the seventeenth century French technique of Gobelin tapestry. Gobelin tapestry techniques traditionally involve the translation of an ink cartoon onto the threads of the warp, and a meticulous weaving through of the design with the fingers. Newdigate adopts the weaving technique while disregarding the preliminary cartoon design. Thus, new ideas can enter the work changing or altering it as it progresses. The works in the Look At It This Way series were deliberately intended by the artist to instigate the gallery audience's awareness of the manufacture of meaning as well as to reflect her commitment to shifting identities.

Although the individual works constituted a broader narrative, the artist did not intend the series to be read in any particular sequence--any work could be viewed in any order and be read in isolation from the others. I will view the works according to the order in which they make sense thematically to me. Each tapestry has a two-part title as follows: The nomad lit a candle and waited/Look at it this way (1987); The first to arrive were some unwelcome memories/What did you expect? (1988); And from the southern hemisphere came a wrong sign/It ain't what you say it's the way that you say it (1988); Finally a lesson from tapestry/It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it (1988); Then there was Mrs. Rorschach's dream/You are what you see (1988); Followed by a projective taste/You see what you are (1988); and But the happy unhappy medium would not go away/Think about it Other wise (1988) (see Plates 24-30).

Newdigate's double titles are a device for playing on the viewer's preconceptions of the medium of tapestry. The artist explains that from a distance her tapestries are often mistaken for and compared to paintings but that upon drawing near viewers' "evaluations change and viewing shifts from content to the means of production." [6] Thus, the first title phrase is intended by the artist to embody the initial reaction of the viewer while the other "speaks to the viewer's second--and sometimes dismissive--response" upon discovering that the medium is tapestry. For example, in the panel The Nomad lit a candle and waited/Look at it this way (plate 24), the first part of title reflects the self-referential content of the work, possibly the artist's feelings about her identity as a white middle-class immigrant to Canada from South Africa; and the last part of the text "Look at it this way" implores the gallery viewer expecting to encounter a work in paint to consider the medium of tapestry but in a new way.[7]

The dual nature of the titles is reflective of the cryptic nature of Newdigate's work. In my correspondence with Newdigate she stated: "I never know before I do the work how much I am willing to be explicit. I also find that I pack the work with levels of meaning and references. Many of which will not be taken up."[8] Through her titles and their relation to the tapestries' contents which themselves often include text, Newdigate provokes the thought processes of her viewers on multiple levels, often

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[6] Ann Newdigate, untitled essay in Alice Zrebiec, Tapestry: The Narrative Voice (Aubusson, France, 1990), p.16.

[7] In 1966 Newdigate immigrated to Canada from South Africa when, according to the artist, living within the apartheid regime became "intolerable." There is a strong focus on issues of identity and Post Colonial attitudes in other work by the artist. My focus however, within the limitations of this thesis, is on issues of identity as they pertain to textiles and women.

[8] Ann Newdigate, letter to author.

leaving them to draw their own conclusions.[9]

Thus, in the panel The first to arrive were some unwelcome memories/What did you expect? (plate 25) the personal references in the first part of the title are left to interpretation by the individual viewer, while the second part, "What did you expect?" directly confronts his or her expectations of the medium. In an interview with the exhibition curator the artist explained:

> Invariably the message changes then according to the preconceptions of the viewer. The medium itself is a signifier of meaning that often has nothing to do with the imagery or content, but which is a result of unconsciously learned attitudes about hierarchical categorizing of art.[10]

In causing people to assess their personal reactions to the works, especially their assumptions about what kinds of art forms they expect to find within a fine arts setting, Newdigate creates an awareness of the systems of value operating within the galleries and other art institutions. As already indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, such systems have privileged and continue to privilege some art forms, such as painting, over others such as tapestry.

The hierarchy of art which exists today has been linked to the distinct separation of so-called craft related items (such as textiles), from painting, sculpture and architecture. The beginning of the separation between the

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[9] Her coded and enigmatic style links the artist with traditional tapestry practices of the Renaissance where, according to Dr. Alice Zrebiec, "the narrative program of tapestry became the domain of particularly erudite court savants and the levels of meaning or additional associations imparted by any image became increasingly difficult for the unschooled and unitiated to comprehend." Alice Zrebriec, "Narrative in Tapestry - Telling a Story, or a picture is worth a thousand - or more - words," in Tapestry: The Narrative Voice (Aubusson, France, 1990), p.2.

[10] Newdigate, as quoted in Lynne Bell in Ann Newdigate Mills: Look At It This Way (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1988), p.8.

artist and weaver, according to Francis Thompson, is marked by a series of tapestries, the Acts of the Apostles (c 1520), woven in Brussels and based on the cartoons of Raphael.[11] Prior to this series the weaver worked very closely with the designer in the planning of the work, now, instead of collaborating with the designer, the weaver was increasingly disciplined to follow whatever design the painter laid out. The change in art education from craft-based training in workshops to new theory-based academies not only contributed to the decline in the status of certain craftspersons, such as the weaver, but also served to establish and maintain a new stratified system of values in which women were ignored.[12] Feminist scholars have shown that women *were* previously active in such guild systems. Christine Battersby notes: "Hostility towards women in the arts only increased when the status of the artist began to be distinguished from that of the craftsman, and the arts in general represented as activities suitable only for the most perfect (male) specimens of humanity." [13]

While the beginning of tapestry's demise and accepted notions of art and artist may be historically traced to the Renaissance, the institution of these notions began with the selective tradition of Modernism initially developed in Europe in the late nineteenth century, and canonized in North America during the twentieth century.[14] Modernism's characteristics are generally

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[11] Francis P. Thompson, Tapestry: Mirror of History (New York: Crown Publishing, Inc., 1980), p.90-91.

[12] See Pollock and Parker, pp.27-29 for a brief discussion of the growth of academies in Europe.

[13] Christine Battersby, Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1989), pp.25-26.

[14] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds., Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985 (London: HarperCollins, 1987), p.103. Pollock and Parker explain that although, "Modernism was initially a European phenomenon...it became transatlantic in the period between the two World Wars.

viewed by feminists to include: a preoccupation with the medium as a means of distinguishing artforms, identification with a particular kind of art--especially abstract painting and sculpture--thought to progress towards purity, and a concern for stylistic innovation and individual (male) genius. In their writing on feminism and Modernism Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock state that although it may be grasped in several dimensions, "[m]odernism constituted in the late 1960s the dominant paradigm of art, art criticism, and art history...[and] is still the instituted official culture in terms of galleries, museums and art education."[15] Marcia Tucker has commented on Modernist attempts to secure categories and hierarchies of artmaking:

> By fixing certain artistic practices and products in time, according them universal characteristics, and perpetuating them as *the* cultural paradigm, these selected forms of artmaking are kept in a separate and isolated sphere, away from the great majority of people for whom, not surprisingly, they seem to have little or no relevance. Art that raises disturbing questions about society--about race, gender relations, economic issues, moral or religious beliefs--is dismissed as propaganda because *it threatens existing power relations* [my italics]. Abstract or nonobjective work ("pure" painting), being free of representational subject matter altogether, seems much safer, much further away from the exigencies of everyday life, but still runs the risk of being incomprehensible to everyone but the experts.[16]

By the 1950s it was exclusively identified with 'American-Type Painting' (Abstract Expressionism)."

[15] Ibid., pp.101-2.

[16] Marcia Tucker, A Labor of Love: An exhibition organized by Marcia Tucker January 20-April 14, 1996 (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), p.71.

In other words, by drawing boundaries around aesthetic practices, the dominant system keeps them separate while simultaneously supporting its own structures. Pollock and Parker are careful to note that Modernism must be acknowledged as more than just a theory or style. Rather, they stress that it "must be understood as an institution, composed of and realized in a series of practices--painting, sculpting, writing art criticism...and so forth."[17] Thus, Modernism's main ideals are circulated by and through these practices. Clement Greenberg, whose formalist theories are generally viewed as providing the premise for Modernist ideals of painting and sculpture, is believed to have institutionalized the same culture here in Canada during the1960s.[18]

In her two tapestries And from the southern hemisphere came a wrong sign/It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it (plate 26) and Finally a lesson from tapestry/It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it (plate 27), Newdigate departs from the traditional representational style of the other panels in the series; she deliberately adopts non-objective strategies as a means of directly challenging Modernism's traditional standards of measuring the value of art. According to the artist, this work is "strongly and deliberately derivative" of the work of her undergraduate painting teacher Otto Rogers from whom she received her formalist training. Newdigate studied at the University of Saskatchewan at a time when artistic practice was very much steeped in Modernist tradition.[19] The artist

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[17] Ibid., p.103.
[18] Terry fenton and Karen Wilkin, Modern Painting in Canada (Edmonton, Alberta: Hurtig Publishers, 1978), p.83.
[19] Bell, p.17. Bell notes that the early 1970s was a period when "the history of art all but ignored women."

has noted that she "completed [in 1975] her BFA in painting and printmaking during the ascendancy of abstract expressionism."[20] Indeed a comparison of Newdigate's And from the southern hemisphere... with that of Roger's work, particularly his painting Vision over Trees (1975) (plate 30), reveals their similarities.

As in Roger's painting, the central part of Newdigate's tapestry is framed within an outer border which is accented by a darker line; inside this frame are lines and dabs of colour many of which appear stained. In Roger's work intersecting lines form an X and in Newdigate's a large X dominates the surface of the tapestry. The symbol appears again in Newdigate's Finally a lesson from tapestry..., where the artist has applied two X's in acrylic paint on the tapestry, over the ghost-like figure of a woman.[21] The artist has also woven the words "two wrongs" in the bottom area below the two X's.

Newdigate's deliberate appropriation of her teacher's approach may extend beyond formal similarities, as writer George Moppett's impressions of Roger's work suggest. Moppett describes Roger's painting as being "primarily concerned with the merging of contradictions - a passing beyond distinctions." [22] Moppett also comments that Rogers works with "states which contradict or cancel each other."[23] Moreover Moppett observes that the X in Vision Over Trees represents "the power of *affirmation* and *denial*

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[20] Newdigate, 1995, p.175.
[21] According to the artist, the crosses were applied "in the studio of two well-known men painters, David Alexander and Grant McConnell". Newdigate, letter to author.
[22] George Moppett and Norman Zepp, Otto Rogers: A Survey 1973-1982 (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1982), p.7.
[23] Ibid. p.21.

where opposites cancel each other out" (my italics).[24] Notably, Newdigate has struggled with her own affirmations and denials in her attempt to negotiate a place for her work, which, according to the artist, had no currency in either the "High Art World" or in the "Low Art World (craft)."[25] She has noted: "[A]s I moved my practice from one sphere to the other, I revised and censored my language for each, because what was rewarded in one sphere was precisely what was rejected in the other." [26]

It may be precisely these oppositional codes which Newdigate addresses in these two works. For example in the multi-media work And finally a lesson from tapestry..., which incorporates techniques of both painting and weaving, the crosses may signify the artist's "crossing" or "ruling" out of the work's classification as either fine art or craft. Moreover Newdigate's primary emphasis on abstraction and her concern for the two-dimensionality of the picture surface--traditional formalist principles of painting--as well as her application of these principles to a traditionally narrative art form, namely tapestry, may be understood as the artist's critique of the very institution upon which Roger's and other formalist work is structured.[27] By bringing these different media and traditions together in one work and subsequently declaring " two wrongs don't make a right", Newdigate refuses to comply with Modernism's oppositional definition and measurement of art forms. As curator Lynne Bell suggests, "[t]he application of paint to part of this tapestry creates a multi-media work which

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[24] Ibid. p.11.
[25] Newdigate, 1995, p.176.
[26] Ibid.
[27] The artist has acknowledged that "the words were also employed in "defining the picture plane" a concept that is intergral to the formalist approach and one that Otto always emphasised." Newdigate, letter to author.

would be unsatisfactory to purists in both the fine art camp and the craft camp."[28]

In her essay Text and Textiles: Weaving Across the Borderlines, British textile artist and critic Janis Jefferies expresses concerns about the fixing, or hierarchical classification of art forms, specifically textiles. Jefferies sees identity, within modernist discourse, as "fixed at the point of origin, material and technique becomes identical to itself." Yet she believes this position may be shifted through "conflicting discourses of interpretation." Drawing on Rosalind Krauss' writings to provide a useful paradigm to aid in the shifting of rigid modernist boundaries of definition which discriminate against textiles, Jefferies suggests that one "could engage with the metaphorical meaning of textiles through new critically coded meanings liberated within the free play of the signifier."[29] Rather than a fixed single identity then, a multiplicity of readings of the term "textiles" is permitted. As identity is constantly slipping and therefore cannot be located within one practice or another, the modernist concept of origin is questioned. Jefferies notes: "This 'boundaried boundarinessless' also permits a way of thinking which transforms visual practice into the languages of the hybrid form;" forms which in an artistic sense cannot be said to belong to one practice or another.

Newdigate's conflation of the material and techniques of tapestry and painting in the panel Finally a lesson form tapestry, suggests conflicting

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[28] Bell, p.16.

[29] Janice Jefferies, "A Textile Identity," in Textiles Sismographes: Texts from the 1995 Fibre and Textile Symposium 1995 (Montréal, Quebec: Conseil des arts textiles du Quebec, 1995), p.24.

discourses of interpretation in which the meaning of textiles can not be located. Rather, meaning is transformed into the languages of the "hybrid." In Jefferies words:

> The hybrid belongs to both, by not belonging to either. It is an "indeterminate" which marks out the site of disagreement, a movement which defers the question of identity and of naming which resists a final signified or closure of meaning. This site of disagreement and of conflict disturbs what we may understand to be the traditions of any predetermined practice or object as it probes what we might believe to be its status and value.[30]

Thus, the work becomes a site of "conflict" which destabilizes existing ideologies, allowing the possibility for a questioning of origins and authenticity as well as an extension of boundaries of the traditional linear order of classification of art.[31] . In acknowledging identity as a state of constant flux, Newdigate not only demonstrates her belief in "uncertainty and ambivalence" as positive conditions working towards rejection of rules set rigidly in place by those in power, but also continues to endorse the location of the undefinable as a place from which to defy art history's hierarchical polarization of certain art forms such as tapestry and painting.[32]

In Finally a lesson from tapestry... the final part of the title, ...It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it, reinforces the validity of the tapestry medium by suggesting a shift from the modernist focus on the medium

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[30] Ibid., p.25.

[31] Again, Modernists held that art should be a progression towards purity. For a detailed discussion of modernism see, "Feminism and Modernism" in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds., Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985 (London: HarperCollins, 1987), pp.79-122.

[32] Newdigate, 1995, p.181.

itself, to a consideration of the required skill and knowledge of a technique.[33] To quote Rosalind Krauss "[with hybrid forms] practice is not defined in relation to a given medium but in the logical operation on a set of terms, for which any medium might be used." [34]

As discussed in the Introduction, the division of art forms into hierarchic categories which separate artists from artisans can be ascribed to factors of class and economics. Moreover, I have also attempted to show how this division of art and craft practices coincided with the development of an ideology of femininity. Newdigate critiques this "practice of Masters and their status"[35] in the panel And from the southern hemisphere... by having her design executed by workers at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne, Australia. The artist explains: "I removed my 'hand' by having it done in the VTW in Melbourne. I played with concepts of power by negotiating funds for this very expensive from of art. I invited the viewer to re-assess their preconceptions through it."[36] In simulating the divisive practice, established in the Renaissance, of the "Master" artist delegating the labour of his artistic practice to the craftsperson, and in exchanging her role, from that of weaver to designer, Newdigate questions ideologies pertaining to both class and gender. As Lynne Bell has noted, "she... subverts the traditional distinctions drawn between the artist's mental skills

[33] What is being suggested by Newdigate is echoed I think, in the words of Marcia Tucker; "Boundaries are created because some people need them to be there, somewhat like temporary drawer dividers. Some of us prefer to keep our socks separate from our underwear, but it's not one of life's necessities; you can still get dressed in the morning." Tucker, p.74.

[34] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in Hal Foster, ed., the Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.31-42 as quoted by Jefferies, p.40.

[35] Newdigate, letter to author.

[36] Newdigate, letter to author.

and the craftworker's manual skills," hence questioning "the mind/body polarization upon which these distinctions are based."[37] Moreover in placing herself in the position of designer Newdigate reverses the traditional order of the workshop (according to the artist "the VTW *even now* [my italics] concentrates on well-known male painters"), questioning these assigned gender roles.[38]

The first part of the title of this piece, And from the southern hemisphere came a wrong sign..., as well as the woven text, "wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong," placed at the bottom of the work, is perhaps intended by Newdigate as a means of pointing out the "unethical" methods and materials she employed in her creation of this work. In the second half of the title, ...It ain't what you say it's the way that you say it, the artist may again be arguing against the modernist emphasis on the value of the medium, rather than the process whereby art is created. Newdigate includes the words "Emmas' dilemma" not only as a means of defining the picture plane as stated earlier, but also, according to the artist, as a means of referencing the once influential Emma Lake artist's colony. The Emma Lake workshops were highly valued because of their close ties to Clement Greenberg, and Modernist ideals would have certainly rejected tapestry as a legitimate art form.[39] As Bell notes in her catalogue essay, "the Workshops are now devalued in some quarters *because* of these continuing ties (my italics)," and she points out "Ironically, the very modernism which has

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[37] Bell, 16.

[38] Newdigate, letter to author. Newdigate stated that "sometimes the weavers are men" which implies that most of the time they are women.

[39] The artist stated in her letter to me that during the time she was working on this piece she was "thinking about the difficulties for the once influential Canadian Emma Lake artists colony." Newdigate, letter to author.

worked to exclude pictorial tapestry from recognition is now itself affected by shifting and historically specific notions of value and significance."[40] The faint human figure which appears in the background of the work is appropriated from an earlier work and is of the ghost of the woman in Patience, Prudence and Constance, a work from the Virtue Series (1986) in which the artist challenged gender stereotypes. During the medieval and renaissance periods tapestries representing the virtues and vices in combat (often depicted as female nudes) were used didactically to convey moral examples.[41] The woman's appearance here conveys how closely the history of women and textiles is linked as embroidery was also used as a means of conveying moral examples to women.

Then there was Mrs. Rorschach's dream/You are what you see (plate 28), based on the Rorschach inkblot test, reveals how in addressing viewers and inviting their participation, Newdigate not only acknowledges their role in the construction of meaning but also attempts to provoke a consideration of the cultural values associated with the respective mediums.[42] The phrase "you are what you see" refers to the psychological belief that you reveal yourself in the interpretation of a Rorschach inkblot. Newdigate sees this process as not unlike viewing the medium of tapestry today, in that the viewers reactions are tested and assessed by the ideological knowledge they bring to the work. Newdigate has positioned an image of a ballerina (possibly Mrs. Rorschach herself) below an inkblot which could be

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[40] Bell, p.16.

[41] For a more detailed discussion of this series see Cheryl Meszaros, "A Weave of Words." Newest Review (June/July 1991): 15.

[42] In her letter to me the artist mentioned that she was "interested in the unconscious in relation to textiles and how it produces multiple meanings or sets of beliefs."

construed as resembling the female reproductive system.

Theories of representation developed by feminists out of their need to understand women's secondary position in society, have determined, as previously stated, that this position is upheld in part by the perpetuation of an ideology of women's natural predisposition to fit certain roles, mainly those of mother and wife.[43] This message is conveyed to us in a variety of ways including television, radio, magazines, religion and children's books so that women's suitedness to those roles is thought to be natural. In their essay on representation and women Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker wrote: "Representations are addressed to someone and are organised to win that someone's complicity with their preferred readings so that the image is experienced as a reflection of the natural order of things."[44]

It is well recognized how images (representations) contribute to the shaping of our identities, and while it is obvious that women do have access to alternative roles other than those of wife or mother, such possibilities are structured on and must always be negotiated around others which are set up as the norm.[45] Parker and Pollock for example have observed that women "are profoundly shaped by these images" through which they come "to imagine" what they are or "might be."[46] The ballerina is an image which is often presented as the quintessential symbol of femininity and is a visual representation of women to which young girls are frequently

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[43] Weedon, p. 2.
[44] Parker and Pollock, p.126.
[45] Weedon, p. 4.
[46] Parker and Pollock, pp.125-126.

subjected.[47] Newdigate's placement of the ballerina with the reproductive-like inkblot suggest a biological link between woman and her constructed feminine role. Another conflation of woman and nature might be suggested through the figures of the animals which lie at the feet of the ballerina, locating her within the construct of the realm of nature. Beyond being merely decorative, the figure has been reduced to her very "nature", that is, her procreative function. Mrs. Rorschach's dream then, may be intended as an ironic comment pointing to the discrepancy between the roles expected and encouraged in women and their actual potential in the world. The artist's reference to the lesser-known "Mrs." Rorschach, wife to Dr. Rorschach, reveals an instance where woman's personal identity is subsumed by her marital status, as well as pointing, as Lynne Bell suggests, to the neglect of both women and tapestry by history. For, as Bell notes, "although Mrs. Rorschach herself was a practising psychologist, her presence has been hidden from history, overshadowed by her more famous husband, just as tapestry has been overshadowed by the more prestigious fine arts."[48] All of these images, when considered in light of the text "you are what you see" are remindful of the power visual representations have to construct our identities.

Another Rorschach-like shape resembling two faces is presented in the panel, Followed by a projective taste/You see what you are (plate 29). "Followed by a projective taste" suggests we project meaning, such as our

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[47] I am thinking here of story books, barbie dolls, fairy tales, commercials etc. Just recently I was watching a commercial (directed towards a young female audience) on Television which aimed this question to its viewers; "What do you dream of becoming?" One of the first images which appeared on the screen was that of a ballerina.

[48] Bell, p.8.

learned expectations about different media such as painting and drawing. "You see what you are" reminds viewers that their response to the medium is preconditioned and revealing of ingrained ideologies. The text also points to how one is shaped by knowledge /language as well as the process by which meanings are produced. The relationship between a particular viewer and an image will change within the constantly shifting context of their social and cultural environment.[49] When considered within the framework of modernist thinking, the phrases "you are what you see" and "you see what you are" interact to provide another layer of meaning in these works. Modernists insisted that narratives and illusion in art should be eliminated; instead art in which *what you see governs what is there* ideally should be created. Frank Stella's famous quote, "my painting is based on the fact that what can be seen is there...what you see is what you see" is based on this conviction.[50] Newdigate's questions the purely aesthetic modernist notion that meaning ends with the art itself. The phrases "You are what you see" and "you see what you are" imply a relationship or dialogue between the viewer and the work of art and the manner in which a work of art can construct the viewer and, conversely, the way in which the viewer constructs a work of art.

Another tapestry in the series <u>But the happy unhappy medium would not go away/Think about it Otherwise</u> (plate 30), portrays the figure of a woman

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[49] See Bal and Bryson, especially p.206. Bryson and Bal explain, "It is crucial to keep in mind that narrative is not a one sided structure. Address, the ways in which a viewer is invited to participate in the representation, is perhaps the most relevant aspect of a semiotics of subjectivity." Newdigate, in setting up this dialogue with the viewer, or overtly "addressing" them perhaps seeks to raise their awareness of preconditioned ideas.

[50] Frank Stella as quoted in London Institute of Contemporary Art, <u>Frank Stella : Works and New Graphics</u> (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1985) N.P.

within a turrett-like form or, as author Miranda Jones has suggested, a family tree.[51] The tight framing of the woman's body suggests a socially imprisoned middle-class Victorian woman; a popular image in late nineteenth-century literature and painting. Newdigate has positioned a symbol of romance--a heart (which appears to be broken) above the head of the woman. The symbol suggests conflicting ideologies, namely the ideology of Romantic Love. In the book Romance Revisited in which the cultural representation of romance is discussed, Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey note that "feminist analyses of romance have taken issue with the ways in which the classic romance narrative has constituted gender, power and sexual desire."[52] Pearce and Stacey view romance as a narrative which "crosses the common-sense boundaries of 'fact and fiction', 'representations and lived experience', 'fantasy and reality'."[53] The nineteenth century narrative of Romantic Love at once promoted women's sexuality while simultaneously denying it. The woman represented in Newdigate's tapestry brings to mind the portrayal of such tragic nineteenth-century figures as the Lady of Shallot who appropriately enough spent her days in "captivity," weaving at her loom. The artist's weaving of the word "symbols" onto the surface of an image resembling a signpost, reminds us that while the sign or category of "woman" has come to be viewed as natural, such categories are in fact constructed. By including these symbols, Newdigate at once acknowledges the history of women while

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[51] Miranda Jones, "Weaving Through Art History," Border Crossings (Summer 1989): 49. Newdgate has expressed her interest in "ancestor worship". See for example Ann Newc gate, "Tapestry, Drawing and a Sense of Place," in Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Ann Newdigate Mills: Tapestry, Drawing and a Sense of Place (Regina: University of Regina, 1982), N.P.

[52] Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey., eds. Romance Revisited (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), p.15.

[53] Ibid.

denying the negative stereotypes of femininity, and its association with tapestry, which exist today and which originated in Victorian times.

The figures of the tortoise and hare can also be read as functioning as signs of tapestry and painting respectively. Newdigate has stated: "I like tortoises and I rather like slow, meditative, ritualistic, considered, compulsive, improbable things in general."[54] Tapestry, she has remarked, "is a ritual that invites contemplation and suggests order."[55] Recalling Newdigate's statement, "I am compelled by the tension between the freedom of painting and the limitations of the loom," it appears that the figure of the tortoise might be intended by the artist to signify the technique of tapestry. One may also reason that positioned on the other side of the post is "painting," symbolized by the rabbit which signifies the relative spontaneity, freedom, and speed of many painting techniques. The fable of the "Tortoise and the Hare" tells of the hare, accustomed always to coming first, challenging a tortoise to a race. Positive that it would win, the hare was put to shame by the tortoise whose deliberate, contemplative method won the race. The moral of the fable is later echoed in the work "following" this one - "it ain't what you do it's the way that you do it." Finally, in the last part of the title the artist implores viewers to "Think about it Other wise" perhaps making reference to both woman's and tapestry's marginalized and "Othered" location. The title also affirms that regardless of status, the medium, and women, will not go away.

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[54] Newdigate, letter to author.
[55] Newdigate, 1982, N.P.

Newdigate's Look At It This Way series is an inquiry into the factors surrounding the public reception and perception of artworks which considers women and their role as producers. Recognizing that historical and cultural specificity, as well as individual preconceptions all play a role in determining value, and will shift within different contexts, Newdigate seeks to raise awareness of the politics of aesthetic judgements. The questions provoked by the artist in her artwork challenge the intrinsic value (economic and/or aesthetic) of a work, such as one executed in tapestry, by pointing to its constructed relationship to other media, such as painting. Similarly, the artist by argues against a naturally determined femininity by highlighting woman's socially and culturally constructed relation to man.

Like many feminist artists intent on revealing the manner in which meaning is produced, Newdigate makes language a site of political struggle.[56] The artist has stated that when she feels a definition surfacing she remembers to ask herself the following questions: "Who constructed the definition?", "Who needs the oppositional distinctions and is going to benefit from them",

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[56] In addition to a concern for the politics of language, Newdigate has dealt with political situations. For example in The Narrative Voice (1989-1991) exhibition one tapestry Sentences: XHOSA (1988-89) the artist relied upon statements from the newspaper, "the most common way of distributing information", according to the artist, and wove them directly into the tapestry The text Newdigate chose to extract from the newspaper was one journalist's account of the killing of a seventeen year old Grahamstown youth who was shot for singing in his own language at a funeral. Newdigate stated that she used newspaper language as a means of trying to engage through a "public narrative" in "social change" Another exhibition in which Newdigate's interest in language is evident was her 1995 exhibition Ciphers from the Muniments Room. Here the artist used Pittman's shorthand -- "the secret language that colonized the young brains of secretaries" -- as a means of looking at "systems and institutions which determine value" as well as to examine "whose version of history will enter official archives." As quoted by Ann Newdigate in Ciphers from the Muniments Room April 13 to May 11, 1995. Exhibition press release by the Hart House Gallery. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995)

and "Why should I comply with those codes and conventions?"[57] And while refusing to make any definitive statements, Newdigate does challenge her viewers to think differently about the way meanings and notions of value have been constructed, by offering them a position from which to construct meaning.

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[57] Newdigate, 1995, p.181.

CONCLUSION

or

THERE IS A HISTORY OF WOMEN USING TEXTILES AS A MEANS OF GIVING VOICE TO THEIR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONCERNS

During the early twentieth century in England, women made banners and carried them in support of the women's suffrage campaigns. Many of these appliquéed and embroidered banners, such as the one belonging to the National Federation of Women Workers (1914) or the one representing the National Union of Women Civil Servants (1908), bore messages which served to identify the various Suffrage organizations and to celebrate the achievements of women in history. There was nothing naive in the Suffrage use of embroidery as Rozsika Parker points out: "Far from desiring to disentangle embroidery and femininity, they wanted embroidery to evoke femininity - but femininity represented as a source of strength, not as evidence of women's weakness."[1] In Chile women have also used textiles to protest and resist their condition. Arpilleras, resembling small tapestries, are pieces of burlap to which groups of women, "arpilleristas," collectively applique and embroider aspects of their daily lives arising out of the conditions imposed by the Chilean government. Many of the women were the wives of men who disappeared or who were political prisoners, but because of their coded nature arpilleras escaped the eyes of the government allowing for their exportation and sale in other countries. The politically charged arpilleras provided Chilean women with a safe public forum for the

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[1] Parker, p.197.

voicing of collective opposition as well as a means of economic survival.[2] The history of quilting, according to Patricia Mainardi, is also fused with social and political content:

> In designing their quilts, women not only made beautiful and functional objects, but expressed their convictions on a wide variety of subjects in a language for the most part comprehensible only to other women. In a sense, this was a "secret language" among women, for, as the story goes, there was more than one man of Tory political persuasion who slept unknowingly under his wife's *Whig Rose* quilt. Women named quilts for their religious beliefs...or their politics... at a time when women were not allowed to vote. The *Radical Rose* design, which women made during the Civil War, had a black centre for each rose and was an expression of sympathy for the slaves.[3]

In 1971, Joyce Wieland used a quilt to relay the potential threat of environmental damage to Canada by the United States. Her Water Quilt consisted of an assemblage of sixty-four small pillows, each covered with a semi-transparent piece of muslin and embroidered with an image of arctic flora. Underneath the embroidered "flaps" were excerpts from James Laxer's Energy Poker Game. Thus, while the face of Wieland's Water Quilt appears quite regular, beneath each flap of muslin lies text warning of the danger posed to Canada's natural resources by U.S exploitation.

If feminist politics are directed towards the modification of the conditions of women's lives, then the strategic use of textiles by women for protesting and resisting their situations must be viewed as one tradition whereby change may be made. Intent on exposing power relations which structure

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[2] For further discussion on arpilleras and arpilleristas see Eliana Moya-Raggio, "Arpilleras: Chilean Culture of Resistance," Feminist Studies 2 (Summer 1984): 277-283.

[3] Mainardi, p.338.

women's lives, the textile practices of Colette Whiten, Barbara Todd and Ann Newdigate must be recognized as a continuation of this political tradition.

While their mediums--embroidery, quilting, and tapestry-- content and strategies differ, all three artists insist that patriarchal structures be recognized, thus, they focus on the same concerns. By calling attention to representations of women and unveiling how such representations have prescribed women's behaviour in the interest of men, and in pointing out and challenging the values and assumptions of the dominant culture, such as fixed categories of art and artist, they expose socially determined constructs. Language--including feminine stereotypes--has traditionally worked to negate women and their production, yet Whiten, Todd and Newdigate have turned the domestic implications of their medium against such systems to reveal the social and political factors leading to the marginalization of textiles' and women. In exposing the constructed gap between representation and meaning they allow the possibility for change.

Marcia Tucker writes: "Art that raises disturbing questions about society--about race, gender relations, economic issues, moral or religious beliefs--is dismissed as propaganda because *it threatens existing power relations* [my italics] "[4] Regardless of the restrictions set in place by dominant systems which control and manipulate the conditions under which women are allowed a voice, women will continue to negotiate spaces to make meanings. Moreover, it is hoped that as other textile work by women has served as historical record of their experience in patriarchal cultures, so too

[4] Tucker, p.71.

will the art of Whiten, Todd, and Newdigate contribute to a future understanding of this discourse.

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Plate I
Colette Whiten, René Levesque, 1983

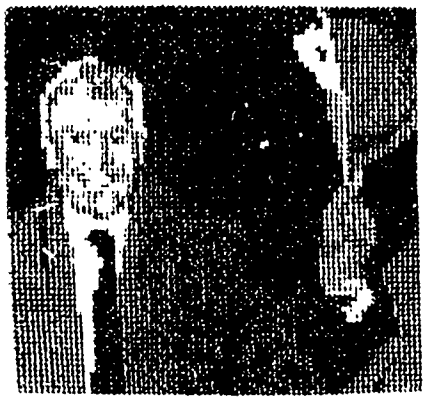


Plate 2
Colette Whiten, John Turner 1988

Plate 3
Colette Whiten, Installation View, North Gallery, The Power Plant

January, 1992

Plate 4
Colette Whiten, Palestinians Remembered (detail), 1991

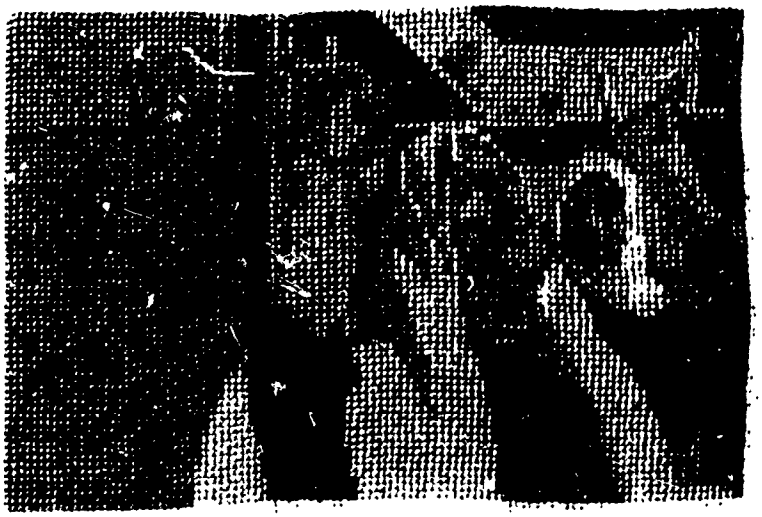


Plate 6
Colette Whiten, Cooling of Relations, 1991

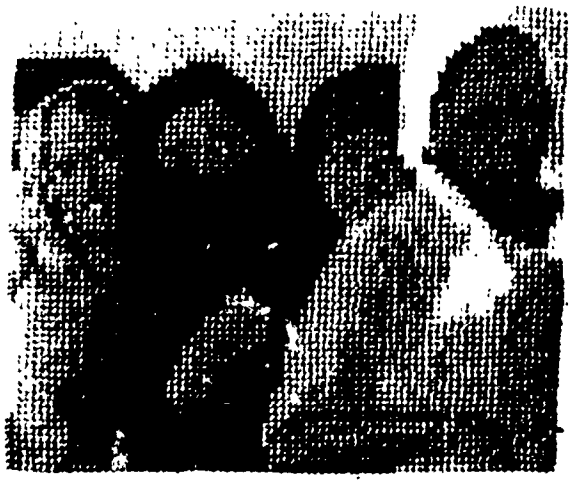


Plate 7
Colette Whiten, Overcoming Indifference, 1990-91.

Plate 8
Colette Whiten, Faces of Despair, 1991

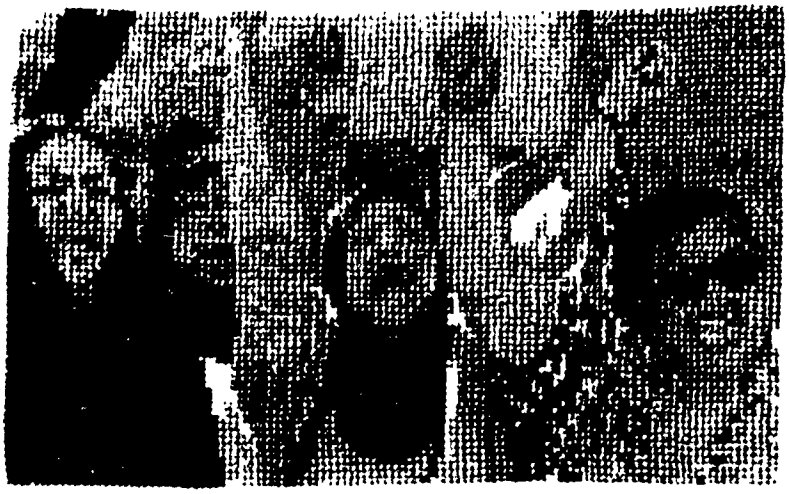


Plate 9
Colette Whiten, Foreigners Held in Baghdad, 1991

Plate 10
Colette Whiten, Palestinians Remembered, 1991

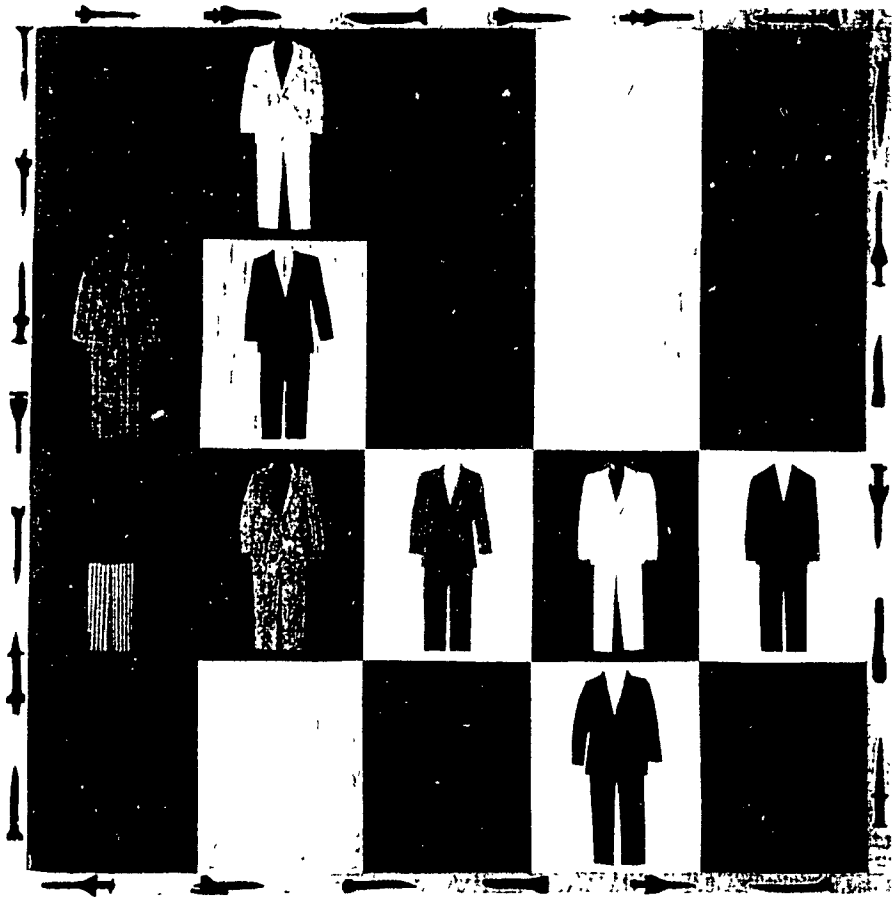


Plate 11
Barbara Todd, Security Blanket 14 Suits, 5 Aircraft, 1 Bomb, 25 Missiles, 1986 1988

AIR-TO SURFACE MISSILES

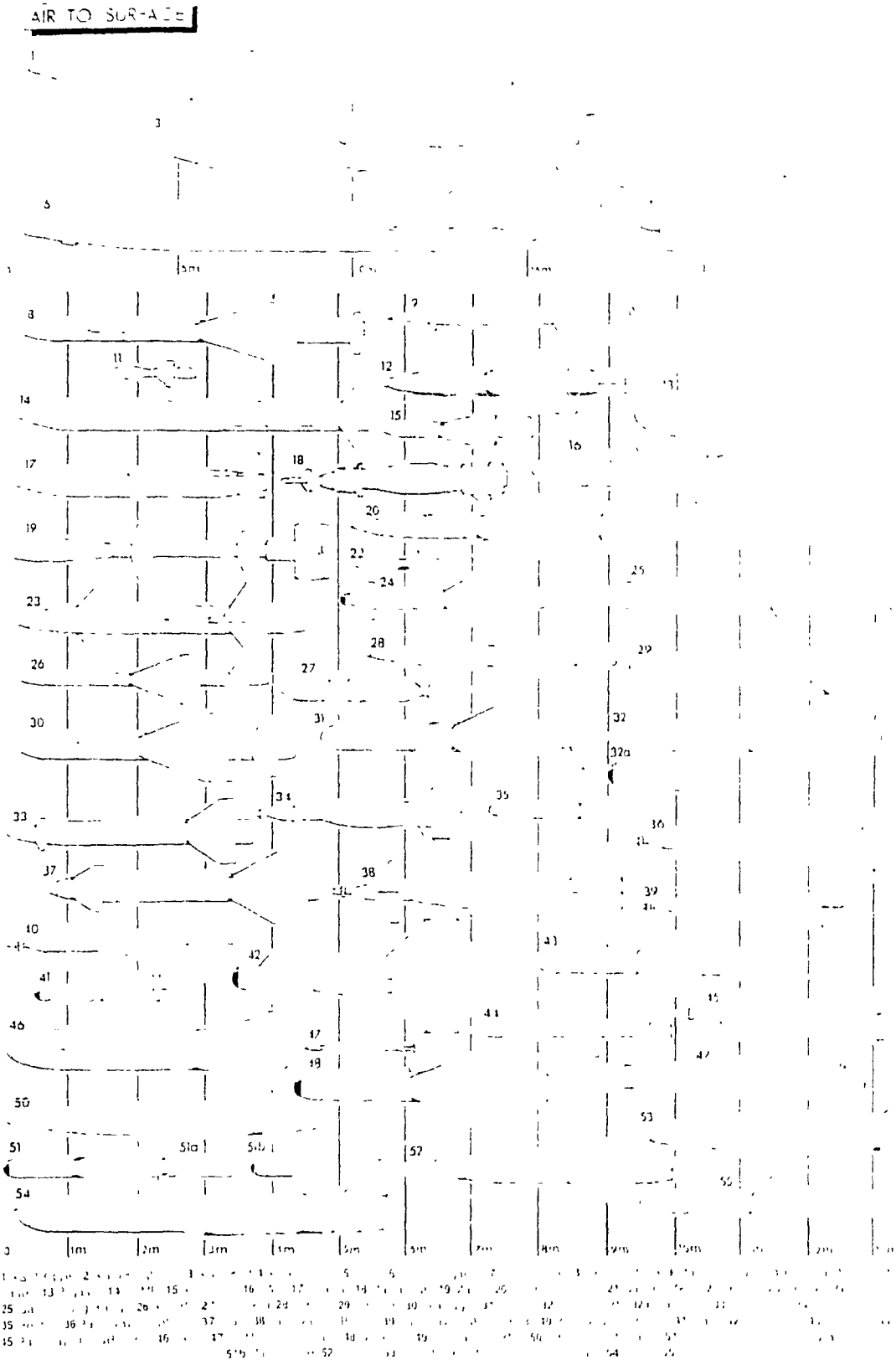


Plate 12
Air-to Surface Missiles, in Janes Weapon Systems, 18th Edition, 1987-88

Plate 13
Pierre Joseph Prud'hon, The Happy Mother, ca 1810

Plate 14
British Airways advertisement Montreal Gazette 1996

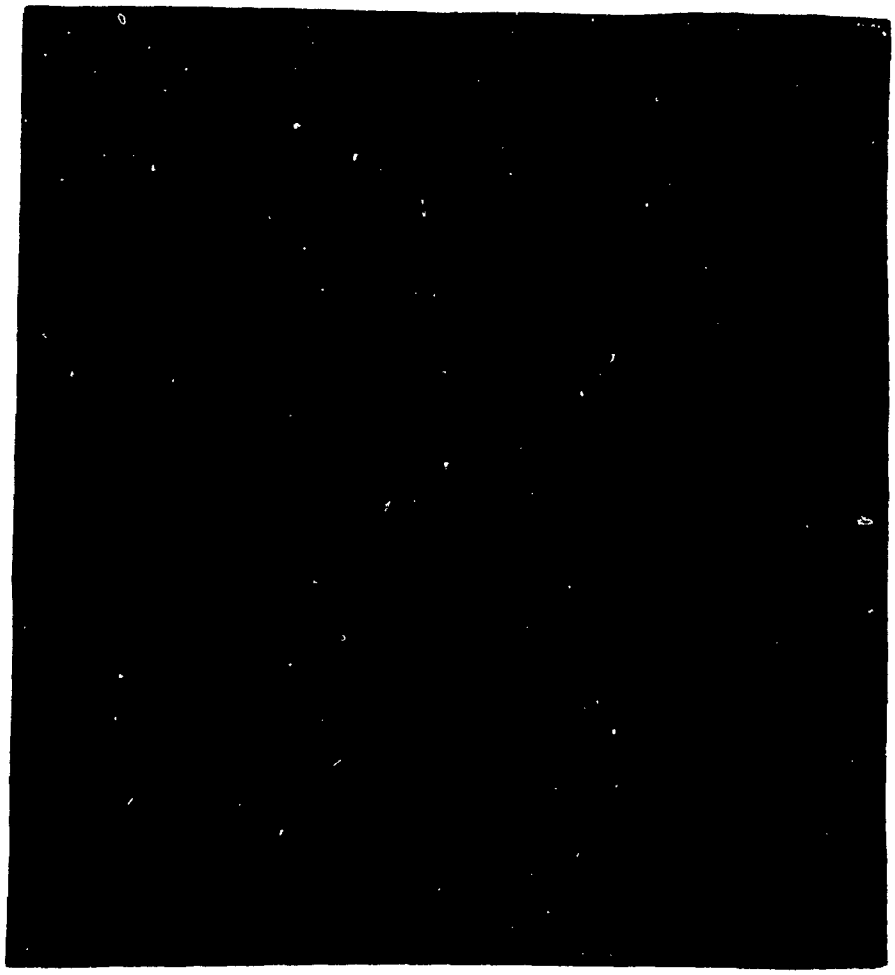


Plate 15
Barbara Todd, Security Blanket B-2 Stealth Bomber, 1989-90

Plate 16
Barbara Todd, Wild Goose Chase: B-2 Stealth Bomber, 1991.

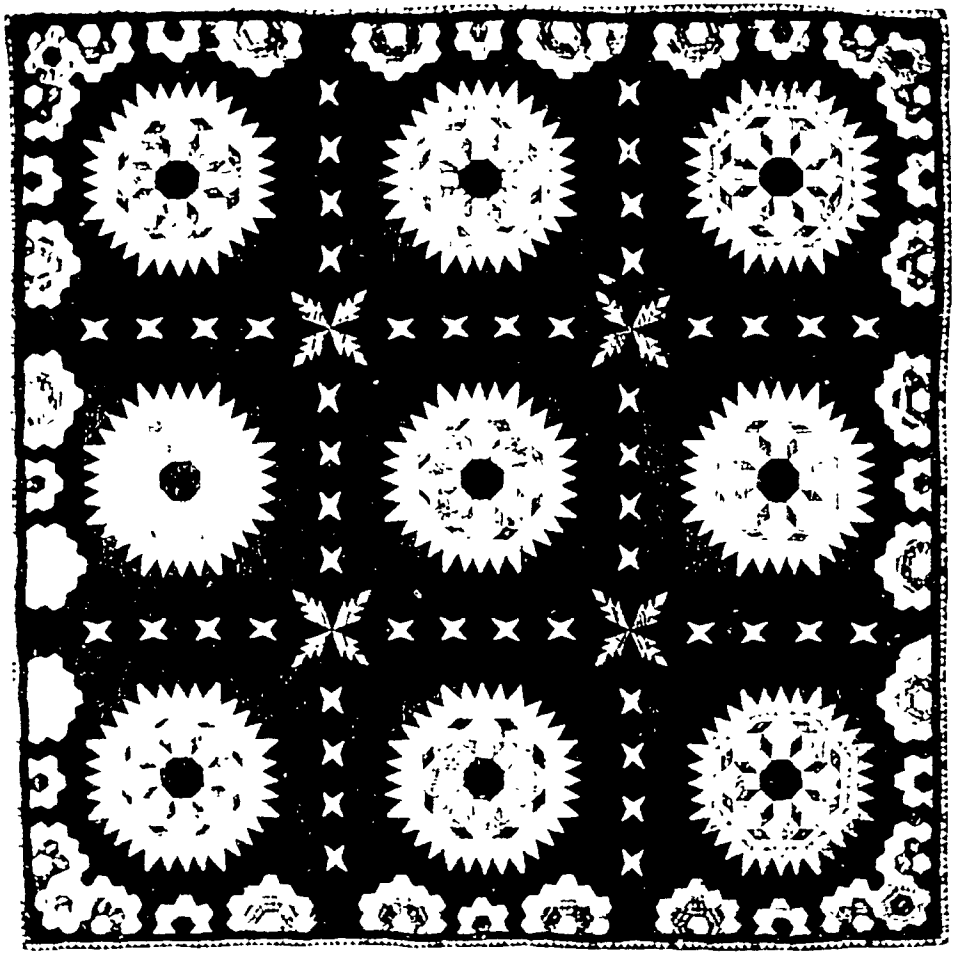
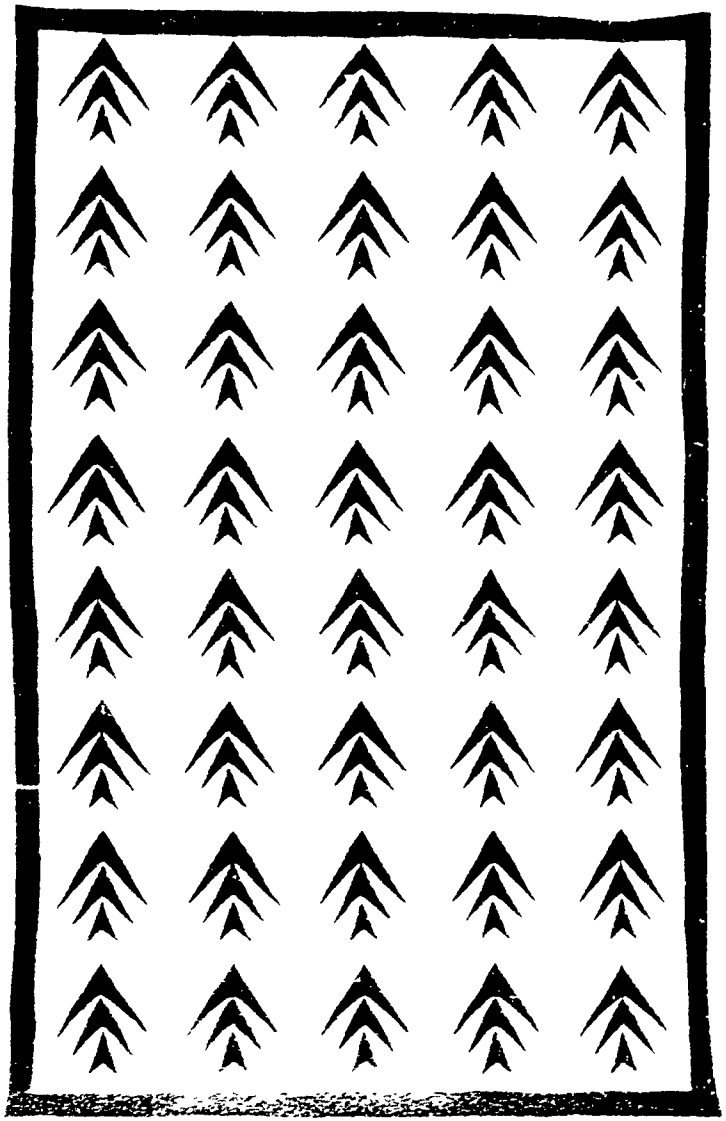


Plate 18
Zubie Cole Spaulding Sunburst and Grandmother's Flower Garden

1849



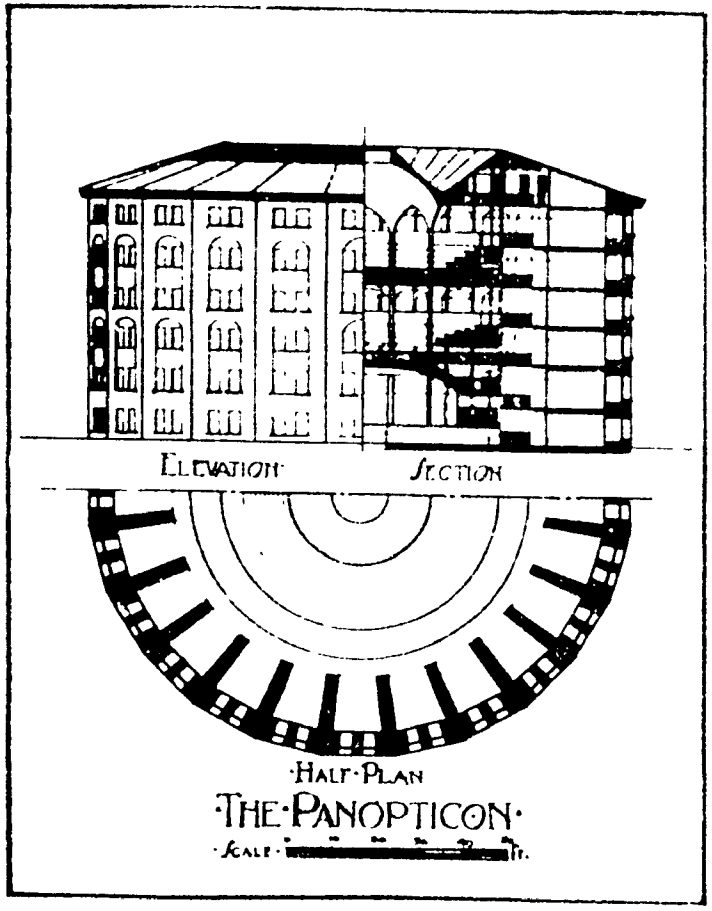


Plate19
Jeremy Bentham's ground plan of the Panopticon prison.

1791

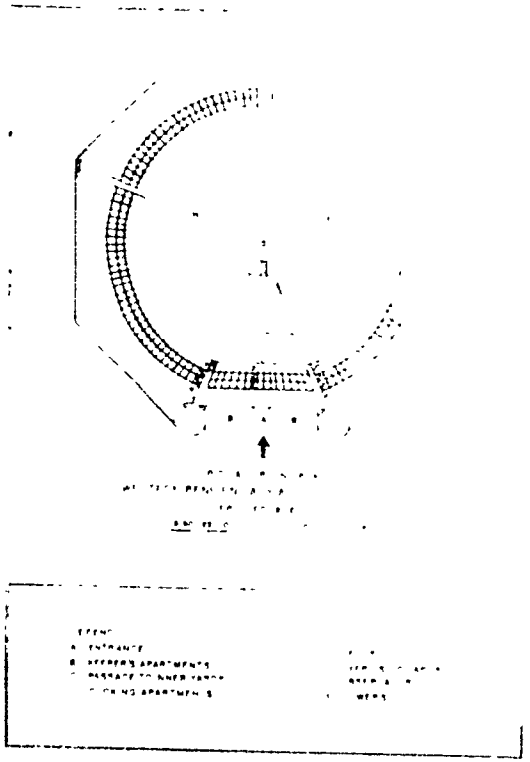


Plate 20
Ground plan of the first Western Penitentiary,

Pittsburgh, Pa 1826

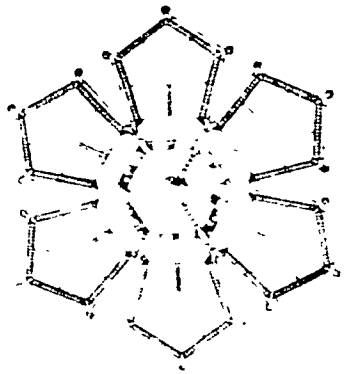


Plate 21
Millbank Prison, London, 1812

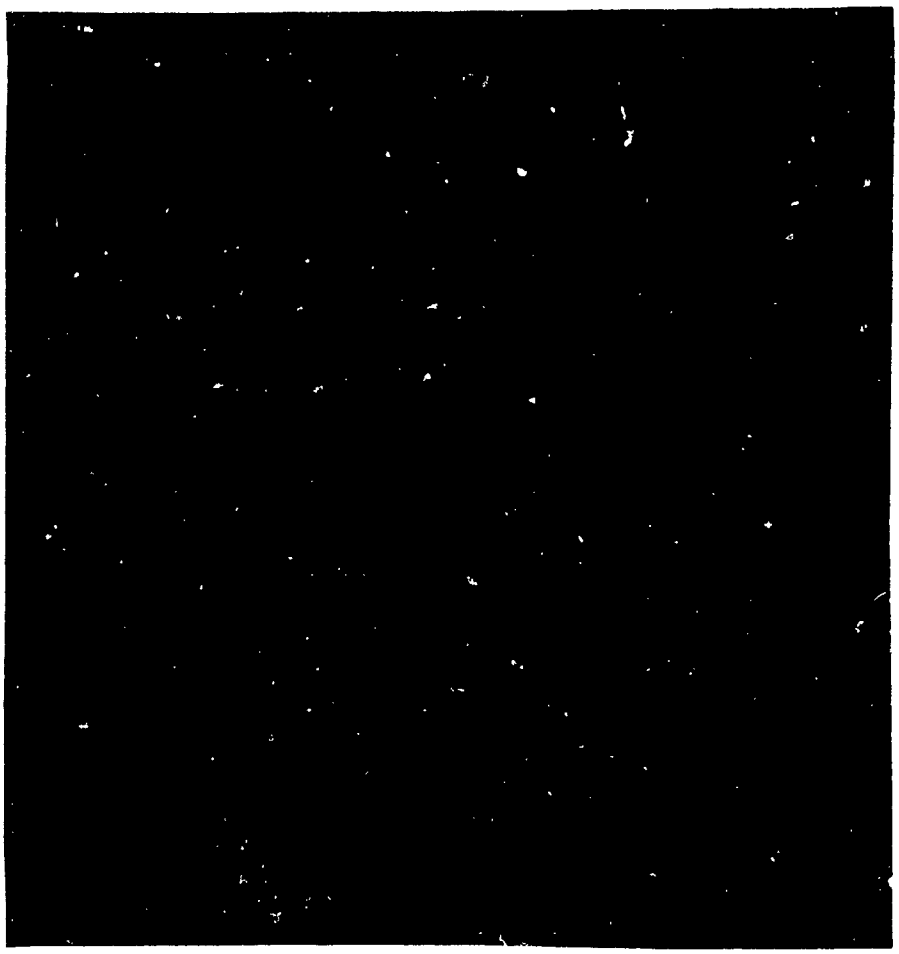


Plate 22
Barbara Todd, Funeral Blanket 1992

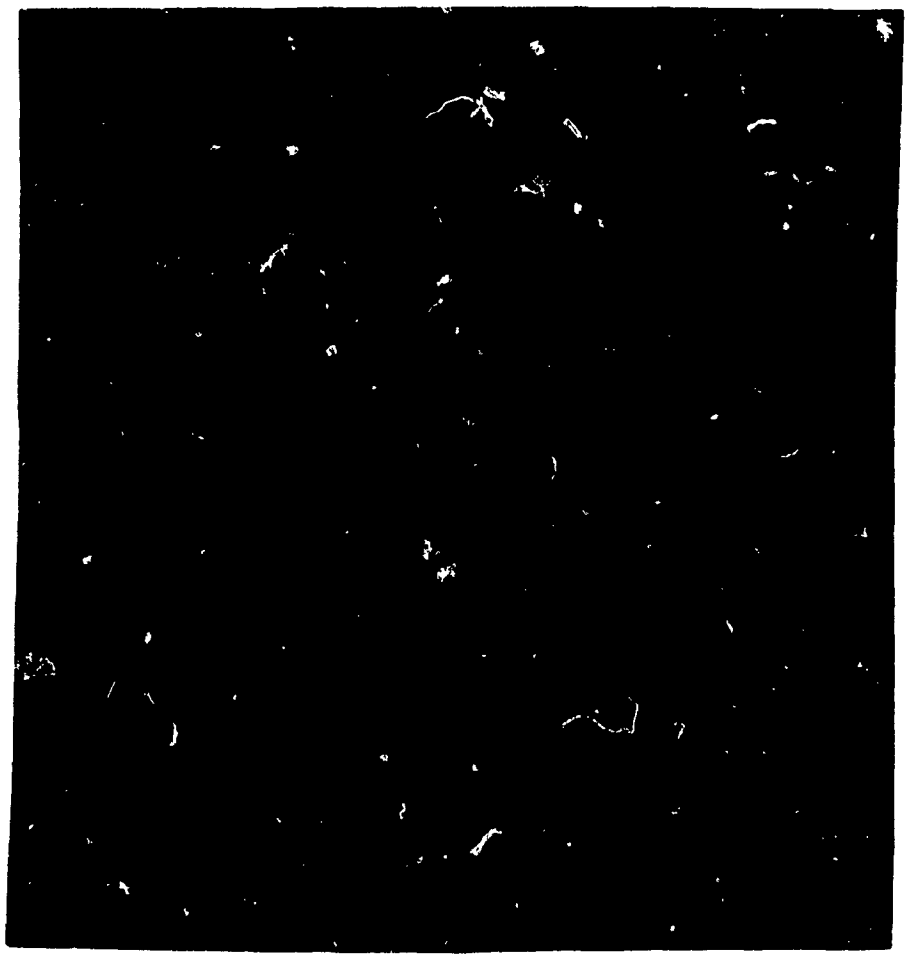


Plate 23
Barbara Todd, Coffin Quilt, 1991 92.

Plate 24
Ann Newdigate, The nomad lit a candle and waited/Look at it this Way, 1987

Plate 25
Ann Newdigate, The first to arrive were some unwelcome memories/What did you expect?, 1988

Plate 26
Ann Newdigate, And from the southern hemisphere came a wrong sign it ain't what it's the way that you say it, 1988

Plate 27
Ann Newdigate, Finally a lesson from tapestry/It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it, 1988.

Plate 28
Ann Newdigate. Then there was Mrs. Rorschach's dream/You are what you see, 1988

Plate 29
Ann Newdigate, Followed by a projective taste/You see what you are, 1988.

Plate 30
Ann Newdigate, But the happy unhappy medium would not go away/I think about it (Or) otherwise, 1988.

Plate 31
Otto Rogers, Vision Over Trees, 1975