

Feminist / Art in Quebec
1975-1992

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ABSTRACT

Feminist / Art in Quebec: 1975-1992

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This thesis develops a reading of feminist art in Quebec that demonstrates the way that it emerged and evolved at the conjuncture of feminism, the visual arts and discourses of nation. It begins by arguing that feminist art is a discourse that is produced across artworks, the exhibitions and texts that present and position these works, and the larger discursive and non-discursive practices through which artworks, texts and exhibitions are formed and have their effectivity. The reading itself is structured around three 'moments', corresponding to the formation of feminist art in the mid-1970's, the exhibitions *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale*; its elaboration in 1982, *Art et féminisme* and *Réseau Art-Femmes*; and further shifts and problematizations in the early 1990's, *Instabili* and *Pour la suite du Monde*. Each chapter begins with individual artworks before examining the ways that they are taken up and articulated into exhibitions, institutional practices and forms of governmentality. Together the chapters evidence the ways that discourses of feminist art have shifted over time. Through this the thesis demonstrates both the social and discursive locatedness of feminist art and, within Quebec, the ways that the visual arts are productive of discourses on culture, identity and nation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Entering the gallery one encounters a photograph propped on two metal prongs. White silk is draped over the image, both obscuring and revealing the image underneath. The image itself is of a woman's lower torso and hips, her crotch covered and revealed by the clothes that she is wearing. The silk which covers this photograph, which replays the hand's gesture of covering and revealing in the image, is tied in an elaborate knot around one of the metal prongs on which the photograph is propped. There is a hint of danger here though as the other prong is still visible through the silk, and it is pointed and as sharp as a knife.

This silk-draped photograph is one of five that, along with texts printed directly on the walls, make up the work *La Voix parfaite* (1994) by Montreal artist Nicole Jolicoeur. It was exhibited a number of times in slightly different arrangements in Quebec City, Montreal, Marseille and Paris between 1993 and 1996. It is also part of a long series of works that began in 1980 with her discovery of the photographs and other visual documents produced under the direction of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) at the hospital La Salpêtrière in Paris between 1875 and 1900.¹

¹ Charcot was not the only doctor to have photographs taken of his patients. Other physicians at La Salpêtrière followed his practice. It is in fact photographs of Pierre Janet's patient 'Madeleine' that Jolicoeur uses in *La Voix parfaite*. Furthermore, at that time photography was being integrated into a wide

Dr. Charcot was a precursor to Freud. His studies included various neurological problems such as epilepsy, Tourette's syndrom ... and hysteria. To study hysteria, Charcot had photographs taken of his patients while they were in a hysterical crisis. He also had plaster casts made of their limbs, made drawings, and created visual charts of a complete hysterical attack. Furthermore, he looked for historical evidence of hysteria in the history of art, believing that the demoniacs represented in paintings were, in fact, suffering from hysteria. Interestingly however, the photographs taken under his direction are all of young women, even though he himself 'courageously' recognized hysteria in men.

It is this combination of medical science, photography, art and gender, and the particular ways that they were tied together at the end of the 19th century, that formed the starting point of Jolicoeur's work. It brought her to study a wider set of discursive and non-discursive practices that together produced realism as a mode of reading, scientific objectivity, the privileging of the visual in the production of knowledge and definitions of femininity. From this Jolicoeur has developed a series of works that includes images from art history and 19th century and contemporary medical science as well as drawing, texts and various materials. She has also developed ways of working with these materials, for example re-photographing and cropping images, combining texts, images and materials, and various means of hanging the works. Repeated across many works, these materials and modes of construction have become a set of codes or 'language' that

variety of medical and other scientific practices, as well as pseudo-scientific practices (Didi-Huberman 1987).

she has used to interrogate and ‘untie’ the intertextual and interdiscursive relations between medical science, photography, art and gender.

In this chapter I am using Jolicoeur’s work to introduce the subject of this thesis, feminist art in Quebec, and the theoretical perspectives through which it will be discussed. Her work spans much of the period covered in the thesis, 1975-1992. Furthermore, both she and others have defined her work as feminist. More importantly however is the fact that her work ‘works’ on and in discourses of art, gender and nation. What I want to do here is to look at how the work of Nicole Jolicoeur is produced and positioned within and across discourses of art, feminism, nation and the postmodern. I also want to use it as a way to open up the larger question of how feminist art in Quebec has been discursively produced and located.

This thesis began with the question of how to re-conceptualize the field of art history, as well as feminist theories of difference, so that the specificity of feminist art in relation to its location of production could be made evident. In other words, it takes up the question of difference as it has been articulated through feminist and post-colonial theories in order to apply it to feminist art itself. Feminist art, as a field of differences as opposed to a singular or unified project, thus becomes a located production, and process, rather than a transnational project. To analyze the specific and located nature of feminist art therefore entails an examination of the ways that general theories of feminism and art are taken up, or not, within a specific locale and the conditions of possibility for this process.

I am therefore proposing a reading of feminist art in Quebec that takes into

consideration its intertextual and interdiscursive production and social and discursive locatedness. The aim of this reading is threefold. First of all, it is to demonstrate, through specific examples, how all works are marked by their social and discursive location of production. Secondly, it aims to evidence the relationship between visual art and texts in the production of discourses on art. Finally, this thesis argues that the visual arts are productive of discourses on culture, identity and nation in Quebec and proposes a methodology through which this process can be analyzed.

To return to the work of Nicole Jolicoeur, *La Voix parfaite* employs a number of formal and enunciative strategies that have their origin in conceptual and post-conceptual art. Among these is her use of photography. Photography became a ‘fine art’ material in the late 1960s with the advent of conceptual art.² Conceptual artists used photography in a way that assumed and reinvested in photography as a form of documentation. In other words they used ‘deadpan’ photographic strategies and linked these to a discussion of photography as a recording device so as to produce a reading of photography as a record of the event or object in front of the camera. It is this attitude towards photography that linked conceptual art to nineteenth century medical and scientific uses of photography. It also marks the break between these earlier attitudes and postmodern photographic

² Photography made claims to be art almost since its invention in the 19th century. However, art photography was never accorded the same status as painting and sculpture until conceptual art’s sustained critique of these other media in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Conceptual artists used photography, not for its aesthetic value (at least not initially), but as a recording device within a larger set of practices that explored the material, social and political conditions of existence of art itself.

practices. For if conceptual art began with the assumption that photography is a recording device, the exploration of the conditions of possibility of photographic meaning led back out to the social context and to the postmodern exploration of how photography constructs meaning.³ Documentary objectivity thus came to be seen as a series of visual codes linked to a set of cultural assumptions.

Jolicoeur takes photographs of Charcot's photos in a manner that mimics the original, scientific use of the medium. This is a form of appropriation, another strategy in postmodern visual practices.⁴ Jolicoeur also mimics other aspects of his work. Charcot observed, Jolicoeur observes. Charcot drew, so does Jolicoeur. However, imitation is not always the sincerest form of flattery. It can also be used to undermine the authority of the original, and of originality. When a hysterical attack was 'incomplete', Charcot combined images from different points in time to construct a 'complete' narrative of the attack. In the same way, Jolicoeur also combines photographs and other materials. However, like the student who stands behind her teacher mimicking his gestures to make fun of them, Jolicoeur appropriates his images and imitates his methodology to make evident and change the meaning of these images and the larger discursive formation of which they form a part. In this Jolicoeur's work engages with and produces postmodern concerns and visual strategies.

Nicole Jolicoeur's work is also inscribed within contemporary art practices by her

³ This was influenced by the development of structuralist theory in the late 1960's and 1970's, especially the work of Roland Barthes. See *Image, Music, Text* (1977) and *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1981).

⁴ Perhaps the best known of these was Sherrie Levine's 'taking' of Walker Evan's photographs.

use of installation. Installation began with conceptual art and the critique of art conceived as a consumer object. Initially including the physical context as part of the work in order to make evident its function in the production of artistic meaning, especially the role of art institutions in the production of artistic value, installation soon began to use the physical context in a way that made evident the role of the social and discursive context in the production of meaning. In other words, installation became a way of making evident the social and discursive inscription or location of the work and/or the viewer.

With each exhibition *La Voix parfaite* has taken a different form, with the number of photographs ranging from three to five. In addition, white texts on the white gallery walls enlarge the work to include the space itself. They hover on the wall, white on white, appearing and disappearing as the viewer moves through the gallery space. Reading the work therefore becomes a form of performance, underlining the necessity of the bodily presence of the viewer for the meaning of the work. But the texts that this performance reveals are not descriptive. “Tour d’ivoire”, “porte du ciel”, “étoile du matin”, “maison d’or”, “arche d’alliance”, these texts repeat (should we say mimic?) metaphors of the Virgin Mary. They also repeat the poses of the women in the photographs, their own self-representations which imitated the religious images that they were familiar with. Therefore the function of these texts is not so much to include the physical environment as to represent the discursive environment, those religiously inspired images and ideas that informed both attitudes about women and the self-representation of the women in the photographs.

Jolicoeur’s use of photography, installation and especially the strategies of

imitation and appropriation demonstrate how the work mobilizes the discursive and non-discursive strategies of postmodern art. Jolicoeur effectively works within the discourses of postmodern art, activating them to her own ends. Her work therefore engages with and forms a part of the construction of postmodern art as a discourse. Furthermore, postmodern art forms one aspect of the work's discursive location.

I would like to introduce here the term 'location', the first of the theoretical anchorage points of this thesis. The concept of location was developed within British Cultural Studies, particularly in the work of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, and has been used to point to the social inscription of subjects and the discursive inscription of texts.⁵ As such, the term 'location' forms part of that theoretical and critical work that attempted to understand culture as a place of political address and mobilization.⁶

Texts are located discursively through their intertextual formation, which is to say through the materials and meanings that they articulate together in their own specific address. These materials and meanings have their own histories of use, and social and discursive locations which become part of the new text. At the same time this new articulation, this new text, is never exactly the same. Meaning is produced through context and use, as well as by the text itself. As Homi Bhabha has argued:

Despite the schemata of use and application that constitute a field of stabilization

⁵ Installation in art can, in this sense, be seen as a way of literally representing or making evident the theoretical concept of location.

⁶ In this Cultural Studies can be seen as coming out of a long series of shifts within Marxist theory that began with the privileging of the economic as the place of political action and intervention, relegating culture to a secondary and sometimes reflective role. It has led to the privileging of culture as the place where both 'the political' and subjects for political action are produced. See Michèle Barrett's book *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (1991) for an outline of this development.

for the statement, any change in the statement's conditions of use and reinvestment, any alteration in its field of experience or verification, or, indeed, any difference in the problems to be solved, can lead to the emergence of a new statement: the difference of the same (1988, 8).

The concept of location can therefore point to the social and discursive context for the production and reception of texts as part of the meaning of a work, showing that no text exists simply 'in itself'.

This notion of texts being located is linked to the idea that subjects are also inscribed in specific discursive locations. Bringing together the various forms of collective identities that have informed recent theoretical and political organization, whether on the basis of gender, race, class, or sexuality, the concept of location nevertheless undermines the separation between these categories. It does this by arguing that identities, like texts, are produced. Collective identities do not exist outside of those processes of articulation, outside of those social and discursive practices, that bring them into being. Here I am drawing on Stuart Hall's work on cultural identity where identity is defined as a positioning in discourse, a cut in the semiosis of language that is always temporary and that opens up again afterwards to the play of language (1990, 230). Identity, understood as the production and location of subjects through specific enunciative practices and in larger discursive formations, also shows that there is no identity or 'self' 'in itself'.

Applied to the work of Nicole Jolicoeur, the concept of location can make evident the ways that her work involves a process of articulation of diverse elements (materials, images, texts, visual strategies and the gallery itself) into new formations to create new

statements. Furthermore, these statements are located, not just physically in the gallery, but in the discourses of art. In this way the term ‘location’ catches the sense of the positioning in discourse (“what we say is always ‘in context’, *positioned* (Hall 1990, 222)”), and the way that any statement is productive of those discourses.

Applying the concept of location to Jolicoeur’s work can also point to the related notion that subjects are also inscribed in specific discursive locations. Jolicoeur has been using the photographs, drawings and other materials produced at the La Salpêtrière Hospital since 1980 when she first came across them while doing a Masters of Fine Arts at Rutgers University. In an interview in 1992 she spoke about the contradictory meanings that Charcot’s work had for her, and its relation to the question of personal and cultural identity (Jolicoeur 1992b). In the context of the United States, where her Quebec identity was invisible, she was seen as ‘French’. Therefore to use Charcot’s work was to associate herself with its ‘Frenchness’ and with the authority that he represented. The French language was also a point of identification, which, as the only person there who could read the texts, also gave her a small sense of power. At the same time, Charcot represented that from which, as a Québécoise, she wanted to distinguish herself – the authority and even authoritarianism of France and its version of ‘correct’ French. Working with Charcot’s materials was therefore a form of resistance as well as appropriation, resistance linked to forms of gendered and cultural identity.

I am not using this story of how Jolicoeur came to use Charcot’s materials to demonstrate the origins of her work. The interview that I drew on for this story took place more than ten years after Jolicoeur had left the United States and represents, not

‘the truth’ of the work, but a retrospective reading by the artist of the origin of the work. These kinds of retrospective readings are a way of ‘making sense’ of the work for oneself as a viewer of one’s own work. I use it rather to demonstrate the often ambivalent investments and identifications that any discursive operation entails, and that gives it its force. As Stuart Hall has said: “It is worth remembering that all discourse is ‘placed’, and the heart has its reasons (1990, 223).”

So far I have presented a reading of Nicole Jolicoeur’s work that is, in a sense, ‘internal’ to the work. I have looked briefly at the intertextual formation of the work and the way that this positions the work within the domain of postmodern art. This is the level of most art criticism which discusses the work itself along with the artist’s ‘intentions’. I would like now to set this level of reading art within a larger set of discursive and institutional practices, that of art criticism and exhibition practices. For if Jolicoeur’s engagement with postmodern art’s discursive and non-discursive strategies positions her work within the domain of postmodern art, it also makes the work available to be taken up and discussed in texts that define postmodernism in the visual arts.

In 1992 Guy Bellavance published an article on the role of photography in recent reconceptualizations of art (Bellavance 1992). In it he presented Jolicoeur’s work as exemplary of the shift from materiality to visuality, where values shifted from skill at production to concern with the exhibition and reception of the work, a shift that has also been used to define the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Other examples of

Jolicoeur's work being presented and positioned within 'postmodern art' include the article "L'Oeuvre-collection" by Christine Dubois (1989) and the catalogue essay in *La Traversée des Mirages: Photographie du Québec* by Gaëtan Gosselin (1992).⁷ Further examples could be cited. However, what I would like to underline here is the interrelation between the art works and texts such that 'postmodernism' in art is produced through both the visual and written texts.

I would like to propose two ways that this relation between art works and texts can be understood. The first refers back to Stuart Hall's use of semiotic theory, borrowing the insight that meaning is never finally given in the object or text. It is rather a temporary cut or break in semiosis that nevertheless opens up again afterwards to the play of the signifier (1990, 230). This opening up again means that an artwork is always open to other readings. Meaning in this case is produced retrospectively, after the work is completed, and is produced through texts that present and position the work. These include art catalogues, articles in newspapers and art journals, and books among other places.

Included among the 'other places' that meaning is produced are the exhibitions in which art works are literally positioned as objects for view. Here I am specifically

⁷ In the first Dubois uses the concept of the collection and its relation to forms of knowledge in the 18th and 19th centuries to discuss the work of a number of different artists. Nicole Jolicoeur's use of Charcot's and other's photographs is discussed in terms of these historical forms of knowledge and in terms of postmodern art through its "process of metaphorisation, the retreat from meaning as a founding principal, and the retreat to surface effects (Dubois 1989, 48)." In *La Traversée des Mirages : Photographie du Québec*, Jolicoeur's work is situated within the history of photography in Quebec. This history is presented as a narrative that runs from documentary in the 1960's to conceptual art in the 1970's to recent postmodern art. Jolicoeur's work is here situated within "an evolving academic discourse on the meaning of the post-modern photographic act (*La Traversée...* 1992, 9)."

drawing on Mieke Bal's argument that an exhibition is a type of 'exposition', a way of not only exhibiting objects but also "exposing an idea (1996, 16)." The exhibition as 'text' is constructed through the architecture and history of the museum or gallery itself, the relationships between the objects as well as between the objects and the viewer, and finally the texts that present and interpret the objects whether on the wall or in catalogues. In this understanding of an exhibition as 'text', art works are literally articulated within larger textual practices and discursive formations. Bal further argues that these produce not only meanings for the objects presented, but, through their forms of address, they also produce viewers for the objects. By this is meant that the 'exposition' of exhibitions produces readings of the objects and addresses viewers as coming from a specific social and cultural location from which the readings offered 'make sense' (Bal 1996).⁸

The second way to understand the relation between art works and texts is through 'intertextuality'. Intertextuality refers to the ways that texts influence each other, borrowing and re-articulating both meanings and the formal signifiers through which those meanings are produced. Texts construct readings of art works, positioning them within discourses on art. However, art works also take up and re-articulate ideas in written texts, that have been given acceptability through their written form. Therefore the relation between art works and texts cannot be considered to be unidirectional. For example, the concept of postmodernism in art, once defined, can be read off of art works

⁸ In *Double Exposures* Mieke Bal develops a discursive analysis of museum display that is nevertheless deeply informed by her background in literature and semiotics (73). In as much as her readings make evident the discursive strategies of museum (and I would add gallery) display, I find her work useful. When her readings close off the possibility of other readings, effectively denying the process of semiosis itself, I find her work less useful.

that come to stand for and represent postmodern art.⁹ At the same time, once the concept of postmodernism and the visual strategies through which it is defined and ‘recognized’ are named, they can be taken up again by others, taught in art schools in studio and art history classes, used to provide readings of other art works, and used by artists themselves in their work.

This understanding of the relationship between texts and art works is the second of the theoretical assumptions underpinning this thesis. I use it to argue that art discourses, including that of feminist art, cannot simply be read off the art works themselves. Discourses on art are produced through and across diverse exhibition and textual practices. A distinction must therefore be made between feminist art as a set of objects, which art criticism or art history purports to analyze ‘from the exterior’ so to speak, and feminist art as a discourse which includes both art criticism and art history, as well as curatorial practices, within its mode of production.

Taking up the idea that art works are discursively located and that they are productive of those same discourses, as well as the notion that discourses on art are produced through and across art works, texts and exhibition practices, it is possible to look at how any given art work or set of works can be located in a number of different,

⁹ I am in no way implying that postmodern art works come after the texts that define postmodern art. Readings are produced retrospectively, and can redefine works that were once positioned within modernist discourses. The retrospective reading of Robert Rauschenberg’s work as postmodern is a case in point (Owens 1980b).

and even opposing, discourses. Again, to use the example of Nicole Jolicoeur, her use of photography, installation, imitation and appropriation positions her work within postmodern art as a set of visual and discursive practices. At the same time her use of Charcot's photographs, drawings and other materials also links this work to another set of visual and discursive practices, that of feminist art, and more largely to feminism itself.

Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot had briefly been Sigmund Freud's teacher. Therefore to work with Charcot's materials means working with the pre-history of psychoanalytic theory.¹⁰ Beginning in Britain in the early 1970's, and especially since the publication of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* by Juliet Mitchell in 1974, many feminists have mined psychoanalytic theory for the ways that it could be used to analyze gender. The development of psychoanalytic feminism was linked to a feminist political agenda that had as its aim the critique of traditional definitions of gender, specifically the ways that these were used to naturalize women's subordinate position, as well as to a methodology of deconstruction. The aim of this work was to undermine any natural gender identity rather than to propose new (and politically correct) gendered identities.

Two of the most influential early works in the arts were by Mary Kelly and Laura Mulvey who were both working in Britain at the time. Kelly's work *Post-Partum Document* (1973-1978) examined the psycho-social processes through which she became

¹⁰ To read this in psychoanalytic terms, it could be seen as working with the pre-oedipal, at that moment when psychiatry was in its infancy, predicated on a direct visual relation between observer and observed, before Freud introduced language and the talking cure, in other words discourse.

‘the mother’ in the six years after the birth of her son.¹¹ Mulvey’s article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” employed the psychoanalytic concepts of scopophilia and voyeurism to analyze the production of both visual pleasure and a gendered (especially a male) relation to looking (Mulvey 1975). While the first is an artwork, and the second was written within the context of film theory, they both led to a large body of work in both art and art criticism that critically examined gender within a feminist-psychoanalytic paradigm. It also came to ‘represent’ feminist art and criticism within Anglophone countries, notably Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia.

Jolicoeur’s use of Charcot’s materials, as well as her critical look at how gender played out within the ‘theatre’ of his clinical research on hysteria¹², has meant that Jolicoeur’s work has had a privileged position in the narrative of feminist art in Canada, especially as it has been developed through group exhibitions and feminist publications. In fact, in 1985 the American JoAnna Isaak made a specific link between Jolicoeur’s work and that of Mary Kelly through their references to Charcot’s work (perhaps demonstrating that, within Canada, the definition of feminist art most often comes from the United States, even when its origin is elsewhere) (Isaac 1985). Jolicoeur’s work has also been included in Canadian feminist publications, for example *Locations: Feminism, Art, Racism, Region* which came out of the 1987 Feminism and Art Conference in

¹¹ The work was produced in six sections, each documenting another aspect of the separation of mother and child, the positioning of the child in language and culture, and the progressive construction of maternal femininity. *Post-Partum Document* was also published in the form of a book along with a number of essays about the work and its significance (Kelly 1983).

¹² Jolicoeur titled an article “Le Théâtre de la Salpêtrière” (1988), referring to both the medical theatre where Charcot’s lectures took place, and to the staging of hysteria by both patients and doctors.

Toronto (Jolicoeur 1989a), and in Monika Kin Gagnon's essay in *Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture* (Tregabov 1987).¹³

Jolicoeur's use of Charcot's images not only makes the work readable within the discourse of feminist art as such, it also makes the work available to be taken up in texts and exhibitions that address psychoanalytic and/or feminist issues in some way, particularly in relation to the body as a site of theoretical and political concern. Through her use of images of women hysterics, and the privileging of the body within the exhibitions and texts that present and position her work, her work is productive of definitions of feminist art as being 'about' the body in some way. For example, Gagnon discussed Jolicoeur's work within another publication, *Territories of Difference*, using it to link feminist and gay politics through a discussion of the medical construction of 'normal' gender identity and its 'others': femininity, the deviant, and illness (Gagnon 1993). Her work has also been presented in large group exhibitions, for example the exhibitions *Corps Étrangers* at the National Gallery (Ottawa) in 1996 and *Corpus* at the Mendel Art Gallery (Saskatoon) in 1993.

To demonstrate this process through which Jolicoeur's work functions as an example of feminist concerns with the body, and at the same time is productive of those same concerns, I will briefly look at the exhibition *Corpus*. This two-part exhibition, put

¹³ In neither of these two publications was Jolicoeur's work actually discussed. In *Locations* her work was one of five artists' works within a representation of feminist art that attempted to be inclusive in terms of race, region and age (her work 'representing' Quebec so to speak). In Gagnon's essay, by its physical placement, it was presumably meant to illustrate her argument that early feminist celebrations of the feminine body subsequently led to feminist analyses that saw "the female body itself as a social construct which cannot be taken at face value and whose symbolic meaning and representation in mainstream culture must be deconstructed to be seen (Tregabov 1987, 106)."

together by Bruce Grenville for the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, examined the different ways that the body was conceptualized in post-minimalist art of the 1970's and postmodern art in the 1990's. While the exhibitions include works by both men and women, the use of the body itself as the organizing theme of the exhibition underlines the way that feminist art and art criticism has become central to art discourses in general. Grenville credits “feminists, gays and lesbians, artists of color, cultural critics and others” with making evident the ways that both the subject and the social world are formed in language and representation (*Corpus* 1995, 13). Jolicoeur’s work in this exhibition, *Stigmata Diaboli* (1992), with its images of women’s backs showing the welts where doctors had inscribed words and numbers onto their skin (the appearance of welts was assumed to demonstrate that the person had a predisposition to hysteria), was situated within contemporary analyses of the body as text produced within discourses of science, art, religion and photography. Grenville writes “Jolicoeur invites us to consider the manner in which the modern body has been defined by the language of psychoanalysis (16).” Through this Jolicoeur’s work is neatly linked to psychoanalytic feminism, feminist art, and postmodern conceptions of the body.¹⁴

I would like to return here to the notions of articulation and location mentioned earlier. If articulation refers to the intertextual formation of any text or artwork, the ways that it borrows and re-works materials and meanings in its own specific address, location

¹⁴ Jolicoeur herself seems somewhat ambivalent about the connection between her work and psychoanalytic theory. In an essay for the same exhibition she wrote: “psychoanalysis is more interested in me than I am in it (*Corpus* 1995, 77).” This is not to say that the work should not be read within the paradigm of psychoanalytic feminism. Rather it shows how this particular reading is produced, and reminds us that others are possible. It also demonstrates that the artist’s intention and the readings available never exactly coincide.

refers to the ways that any specific statement is inscribed within, and is productive of, discourses. As I have tried to show, Jolicoeur's work is located within both postmodern and feminist art. However, not all postmodern art is feminist. Nor is all feminist art postmodern. Her work occupies the point of connection between the two discourses, the place where they are articulated into a new formation, postmodern feminist art. It also forms part of the larger process through which postmodern feminist art was produced, both through artworks themselves and through the ways that artworks have been presented and positioned by texts and exhibitions.

What I am trying to describe here is another level of articulation, one that operates on the level of discourses and not just individual texts or artworks. It operates through modes of interdiscursive rather than intertextual formation, through the borrowing of propositions, theories, problematics and practices from other discourses. These, however, are not simply added on to an already existing discourse. They are brought together in a way that creates a new field of discursive production, a new set of problematics that incite new statements.

This notion that discourses are produced, at least in part, interdiscursively, and that the propositions, theories, problematics and practices from other discourses are articulated into new discursive contexts, producing new discursive formations, is the third of the theoretical assumptions underpinning this thesis. It is my argument here that feminist art came into existence as a discourse, and that it continues to change, through these kinds of interdiscursive borrowing. While feminism has its origins in the 19th century, and there were certainly women artists who supported feminist ideas from the

beginning and took them up within their work, the discourse of feminist art only came into existence with what has been called 'second wave' feminism in the 1970's.¹⁵ Feminism could be articulated with art because of the ways that both feminism and art were conceived at the time, making it possible for feminist ideas on gender, equality, power and political practice to be joined with art as a set of discursive and non-discursive practices. Once formed it became a site of further elaboration and contestation, producing divisions within feminist art itself, and inciting further appropriations and elaborations through the production of artworks as well as texts and exhibitions that presented and positioned the works as 'feminist'. In short, once formed, feminist art became both a locus of power and an incitement to discourse. It also offered a collective identity as 'feminist artists' and a place for women to speak from.

It should be remembered here that both feminism and postmodern art have also been formed through this kind of interdiscursive articulation. I have already mentioned some examples. Feminist art drew on psychoanalytic feminism, itself formed through the appropriation and re-reading of psychoanalytic theory for feminist purposes, to elaborate an analysis of the construction of gender and the role of the visual in that process,

¹⁵ Deborah Cherry has argued convincingly that there were strong links between the women's movement and the visual arts in 19th century Britain in her book *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (2000). In an analysis that is obviously based on Michel Foucault's notion of a discursive formation, and that draws heavily on Post-Colonial theory, especially the work of Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, she demonstrates that there were significant numbers of professional women artists from the 1850's onwards, and that they both lent their support to demands for equal rights and were central to feminist claims that middle class women were self-reliant and self-defining individuals. Furthermore, she argues that women artists took up feminist definitions of female subjectivity and autonomy, as well as their demands for access to paid work, on the level of iconography, especially in what was called modern-life painting (33-47). The similarities and differences between that earlier moment and the emergence of feminist art in the early 1970's remains to be elucidated.

especially in relation to visual representation. Postmodern art appropriated photography into its list of material practices, and along with it appropriated the modes of reading and histories of use that photography entailed, especially documentary photography. This was linked to another appropriation, that of structuralist and poststructuralist theory. These were mobilized for an analysis of the conditions of possibility for photographic meaning and, more largely, the relation between images and the social and political context.

Therefore the fact that Jolicoeur's work is located in and productive of the discourses of postmodern and feminist art demonstrates that these are not separate discourses, but are themselves tightly imbricated. The encounter between them, and the place where they are articulated together, has been and is a site of discursive elaboration through diverse discursive and non-discursive practices. On the level of an individual work or group of works such as Nicole Jolicoeur's, it means that her work draws on and articulates diverse ideas, histories and visual practices. This in turn opens her work to various and contending readings. As shown above, some authors present her work as exemplary of postmodern art, especially through her use of the medium of photography. Others engage with her work primarily as a feminist art practice, this time focusing on the images themselves, foregrounding the fact that they are images of women, or on their origin in 19th century medical practices. However, what I want to underline here is the way that her work brings these meanings together in its own specific address. On a larger level, this process of articulation also operates on the level of discourses and their production. Feminist art, as a discourse, is produced through and across visual, exhibition and textual practices. Its formation and elaboration is the result of the

articulation of propositions, theories, problematics and practices from feminism into those of art. What is produced at that juncture, through the ways that they have been articulated, is a new discourse: feminist art. Therefore Jolicoeur's work, in the ways that it joins postmodern art and feminist theory and problematics, is also emblematic of the ways that feminist art as a set of practices and as a discourse has been produced.

However, feminist and postmodern art, or postmodern feminist art, are not the only discursive locations of Jolicoeur's work. I would like to touch on a third way that Jolicoeur's work is discursively located, that is in discourses of nation. To do this we have to look, not just at the work itself and the ways that it brings together materials and meanings in its own enunciative strategies, or even at feminist art and its interdiscursive formation, but also at the ways that artworks, texts and exhibitions are caught up in institutional practices that position and present the work both physically and discursively. Furthermore, institutions, including art galleries, museums and government funding agencies, are themselves caught up and articulated into larger discursive and non-discursive practices that both enable those institutions and the discourses that they produce, and close off other institutional and discursive possibilities.

To give an example of how feminist art is articulated into institutional practices and into discourses of nation, I will return briefly to the exhibition *Corpus*. Johanne Lamoureux has summarized the predominant definition of postmodern art in Canada as "a practice of photography or of installations to investigate the system of representation

and, more specifically, the construction of alterity (J. Lamoureux 1991, 52).” Jolicoeur’s work, which has often taken the form of photography-based installations using images of women taken from the history of medical science, is easily incorporated into this kind of definition of feminist and postmodern art. However, by including her work in an exhibition like *Corpus* that includes artists from across Canada, Grenville has also inscribed the work within a representation of ‘Canadian art’. In fact, in Canada where regional representation in exhibitions of Canadian art is almost mandatory, her work often functions as the ‘Quebec representative’ in these exhibitions.

Johanne Lamoureux has discussed this process through which artists from Quebec are taken up and positioned within the discourse of ‘Canadian art’ (J. Lamoureux 1991). Her argument is that the women artists from Quebec whose work is chosen to be included in exhibitions of Canadian art are chosen precisely because their work investigates “the process of representation (51).” Questions of representation, particularly as they produce gender, have been central to officially recognized feminist art and Canadian art. Therefore it is no surprise that artists such as Nicole Jolicoeur are chosen to represent Quebec within the narrative of Canadian art.

As a reward for its acceptance of the Other, once this difference, literally incarnated, is displaced to the realm of the sexual, Canada acquires a unified identity from coast to coast. In this homogeneous scenery, all artists, guys on the West, girls on the East, conceive art as a practice of photography or of installations to investigate the system of representation and, more specifically, the construction of alterity (52).

However, Lamoureux also argues that this is mapped onto another narrative where Quebec is gendered as feminine and Quebec art seen as poetic, whereas Canada is seen as

masculine and Canadian art as political. As she says, at a time when the possibility of Quebec's separation from the rest of Canada is represented as a divorce, the work of women artists in Quebec are multiply inscribed within definitions of art, gender and nation.

However, 'Canadian art' is not the only 'national culture' in which Jolicoeur's work is positioned. For example, *La Voix parfaite* was shown in France in 1994, as was *Intimité* in 1995. Her work was also included in *Espaces intérieurs* as part of *Le Printemps du Québec* (1999), *Quelles hystéries* (1994), *Le Bénéfice du doute* (1993) and *La Traversée des Mirages: Photographie du Québec* (1992), group exhibitions of art from Quebec that were presented in France. As Jolicoeur acknowledged in her reading of the origin of her work, France is a place of ambivalent investments and identifications, a place of origin for Quebec and as that from which one must distinguish oneself (Jolicoeur 1992b). It is therefore intimately tied to definitions of Quebec identity, even when those definitions are produced in opposition to the idea of 'France'.

To understand this process whereby visual art is imbricated into discourses of nation in Quebec, I will look briefly at the exhibition *La Traversée des Mirages: Photographie du Québec*. This exhibition, a joint project of Transfrontières de Champagne-Ardenne and Vu, centre d'animation et de diffusion de la photographie de Québec, presented the work of fourteen artists from Quebec in nine exhibition spaces in the region of Champagne-Ardenne, France. It was accompanied by a catalogue containing five essays as well as notes on each artist's work. Through the choice of works, the essays and the place of exhibition (France), this exhibition both defines

contemporary art in Quebec and presents the works, and the artists, as representative of Quebec.

The first essay by Gaëtan Gosselin begins by denying that the selected works do or can represent a coherent artistic community, a synecdochical representation of the nation, because the works are united, not by their similarity, but through a series of themes: “difference and reconciliation, fragmentation and the expanded field (9).” He therefore distances himself from those narratives of Quebec that precisely do construct Quebec as a nation based on historical and cultural coherence within its borders and difference from without.¹⁶ However he goes on to situate the works within a history of photography in Quebec, a history that is itself linked to larger social changes. The work of the 1960's is seen as coming out of the politically engaged documentary tradition of the National Film Board. This work is summarized as an “inventory of the geographical, economic, social and cultural heritage characteristic of the Quebecois identity” and a “«visual» affirmation of an ideology: Quebec nationalism (8).” The 1970's is seen as the moment when the documentary tradition was abandoned and artists entered the larger domain of visual arts. At this point “Western conceptual experimentation of the 1970's becomes the staple of Quebec photography and it draws directly from an evolving academic discourse on the meaning of the post-modern photographic act ... within a transnational context of validation (9).” Finally, according to Gosselin, current

¹⁶ Françoise Tétu de Labsade proposes a unified view of Quebec through the title of her book on the geography, history and culture of Quebec, *Le Québec: un pays, une culture* (1990). Annie Brisset, in her book *Sociocritique de la traduction: Théâtre et altérité au Québec (1968-1988)*, also defines Quebec as unified, in this case through its social discourse and resulting collective identity (1990).

photographic practices explore the specificity of the photographic act and combine materials and traditions in hybrid or 'contaminated' forms. Gosselin therefore situates the work in this exhibition in a narrative of the history of photography in Quebec, and presents it as its result.

There are two things to note about this narrative, that in fact are repeated in various forms in the other texts in the catalogue. The first is the definition of current photographic practices as 'hybrid' or 'contaminated'. For example, Denis Lessard discusses the "fragmentary nature of photography (21)" and argues that photography has joined "with key disciplines in order to foster hybridizations which coexist with «purer» images (20)". Louise Déry also argues that "there has been a deep infiltration into the visual arts (painting, drawing, sculpture and installation) by photographic images and processes; and they have obviously been contaminated (74)."

Johanne Lamoureux, in the essay already mentioned, argues that "the practice of visual arts in Quebec is more concerned with issues of languages than with the stakes of representation (1991, 52)." In *Seeing In Tongues / Le bout de la langue* she further developed this argument, saying that this concern with languages takes the form of interdisciplinarity and the hybridization of codes where what is explored is less representation as such, than the gaps in language and meaning that translation between different codes, materials and sensory apparatuses entail. As discussed earlier, one aspect of postmodern art is the ways that it examines the conditions of possibility of photographic meaning, a project that has involved an exploration of both visual codes and the cultural assumptions which give the codes meaning. According to Lamoureux, in

Quebec this involves an examination of the conditions of possibility (and sometimes impossibility) of meaning, visual or otherwise. Furthermore, she argues that this a central concern of postmodern art in Quebec (*Seeing in Tongues ...* 1995, 8-12).

Therefore, in the context of *La Traversée des Mirages*, Jolicoeur's work is read less as an example of feminist art (although this would not necessarily be denied) than as an example of postmodern photographic practices. Specifically, the curator discusses it in terms of discourse, the original discourse produced by nineteenth century medical practices, and the undoing of those discourses or the ways that the artist undermines the certainty that they produced through the incorporation of other materials and codes to produce a "discourse on doubt (84)." Within a context (Quebec) where hybridity and 'contamination' are read as a form of engagement with languages and the uncertainty of meaning, Jolicoeur's work is seen as exemplary of postmodern practices in Quebec.

The second thing to note in Gosselin's narrative is his argument that art in Quebec has been part of "a transnational context of validation (9)" since the 1970's. In other words, Quebec artists' engagement with postmodern concerns, in particular the specificity and meaning of the photographic act and the combining of materials and traditions in 'contaminated' forms, serves to locate the work within an international as well as postmodern context. This theme is also taken up in the catalogue by Françoise-Claire Prodhon, for whom international means primarily the United States and Europe (13). Lamoureux also notes the equation between hybridity and an international art context, arguing that "it serves to situate Québec art in an international, postmodern context, while it also constitutes a particular stance with respect to the 'mandate' of contemporary art

and the sort of meaning it is liable to produce today (*Seeing in Tongues ...* 1995, 5).”

This understanding that hybridity or the contamination of codes, materials and sensory apparatuses situates art in Quebec within an international context demonstrates the specific form that nationalism takes in the visual arts at the moment of the exhibition. By placing Quebec art within an international context, curators effectively counter the narrative of ‘Canadian art’ where Quebec is part of the ‘Canadian mosaic’. The exhibition itself, along with the many other exhibitions of Quebec art presented in France and other European countries, participates in this ‘internationalization’ of Quebec art. It also operates through exhibitions within Quebec where work by Quebec artists is presented alongside that by artists from other countries.¹⁷ In other words nationalism, at this point, takes the form of internationalism where Quebec is not a province among provinces, but a nation among nations. Furthermore, this form of nationalism functions on the level of exhibitions, rather than on the level of individual artworks.¹⁸

In arguing that discourses on nation function on the level of exhibitions, I do not want to imply that the works themselves, or the meanings that they produce, are nugatory to those discourses. As has been demonstrated by the examples of *Corpus* and *La Traversée des mirages*, by positioning the works in discourses of nation, exhibitions also privilege some readings over other possible readings for the individual works.

¹⁷ Denis Lessard, in his survey of major exhibitions of photography in Quebec, argues that the Musée d’art contemporain, CIAC (Centre international d’art contemporain) and the Mois de la photo in Montreal group Quebec artists with artists from other countries in order to create “a wider context for Québécois contemporary art (*La Traversée ...* 1992, 28).”

¹⁸ Nicole Jolicoeur herself once commented in conversation that curators in Quebec are much more interested in nationalism than artists.

Furthermore, the works are necessary to the production of those readings.

To understand why and how exhibitions engage in the production of discourses of nation, it is necessary to understand the ways that they are imbricated within larger discursive and non-discursive practices that produce definitions of Quebec as a nation. In particular, I will look briefly at the relation of museums, government policy on culture and the larger social discourse of which they are a part.

Museums came into existence as publically funded institutions around the beginning of the 19th century, at the same time as modern definitions of the nation state, and their history is intimately tied to modern conceptions of ‘the state’ and ‘the citizen’. Tony Bennett, in an analysis of the formation of museums,¹⁹ argues that their formation was part of a larger process whereby ‘culture’ entered the sphere of government concern and cultural institutions became part of the apparatus of governing. Culture, and the museums which were to dispense it, were therefore refashioned so as to produce good, self-regulating citizens (and at the same time to divide the ‘good citizen’ from the ‘riffraff’ that frequented public drinking houses and fairs). In other words, cultural institutions became vehicles for the exercise of the new form of power that came into being in the 19th century (Bennett 1995).

¹⁹ His analysis is based on Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ or the particular way that diverse aims, institutions, practices, and forms of knowledge are organized into a specific regime of power, producing, at the same time, the objects on which that power operates (Foucault 1979a). Foucault’s theory, which also informs this thesis, is discussed below.

Libraries, public lectures and art galleries thus present themselves as instruments capable of improving ‘man’s’ inner life just as well laid out spaces can improve the physical health of the population. If, in this way, culture is brought within the province of government, its conception is on a par with other regions of government. The reform of the self – of the inner life – is just as much dependent on the provision of appropriate technologies for this purpose as is the achievement of desired ends in any other area of social administration (18).

Once formed, this relationship between government and culture has continued to evolve and be adapted to different social and historical locales.²⁰ According to Allor and Gagnon, within Quebec since the Quiet Revolution, culture, nation and citizen has been articulated together such that ‘culture’ has become the unifying logic and justification for government action in a diverse range of fields (1994). It can be used this way precisely because it is defined anthropologically, as including all aspects of society, including “the arts, the economy, technology, history, science and the natural sciences (Tarpin 1998, 48).” However, this anthropological definition of ‘culture’, and its articulation with ‘nation’ and ‘citizen’ is not limited to the sphere of government action. It is part of, and in response to, a larger dispositif that incorporates within ‘the cultural’ a broad range of discursive and non-discursive practices produced in specialized publications and the news media, in education, in academic disciplines such as sociology and history, the arts and in the institutional practices through which these are produced. Together they produce and naturalize a set of terms, including language, culture, geography and history, as points of origin and definition of Quebec’s specificity and difference from the rest of Canada.

²⁰ Christine Tarpin, in her analysis of government policy and museums in Quebec, remarks that governments began to develop policies on cultural issues in the 1930's, notably in France. This process resumed and expanded after the Second World War. Canada’s creation of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957 is part of this international movement to incorporate culture and the arts within a logic of nation building and national identity (Tarpin 1998).

They also produce a collective identity, *le peuple québécois*, an ‘always-already existing’ representation offered as a place of identification and belonging.²¹ It is this discourse on culture, and cultural identity, that is the basis and justification for claims to nationhood and for government action across a broad range of activities in support of Quebec as a nation.

This production of the ‘Cultural’ involves the elaboration of new forms of knowledge about *le peuple québécois* and hence new articulations of social difference within the population. *L’identitaire québécois* is thus articulated across a dispositif which links temporal (language and ethnicity as the historical grounds of *le peuple*), spacial (the regions as the figuration of cultural difference within *l’identitaire*) and administrative (the structuring perspective of cultural development) logics in the formation of emergent state practices. At the same time, it involves the production of the field of *la citoyenneté culturelle*; a field of distinction of the citizen as both the social subject, the sovereign subject of a nation, and as the object of new forms of political power linking the distinctive traits of the citizen with those of cultural producer and consumer (Allor and Gagnon 1994, 26).

Museums within Quebec can thus be seen to be part of the apparatus of governing and as such have been the object of government policy and funding since the 1960's (Tarpin 1998). Furthermore, given the number of museums that have been built, here as elsewhere, they are obviously considered to be “important, even necessary, fixtures of a well-furnished state (Duncan 1991, 88).” As discussed above, government concern with culture within Quebec, and the kinds of policies and funding practices that they develop with regard to cultural institutions, make sense and derive their justification within the larger set of discursive and non-discursive practices that produce culture, nation and the

²¹ In fact I would argue that this representation of *nous, le peuple québécois* has its effectivity, not through discipline with the aim of “improving man’s inner life (18)” as proposed by Bennett in his study of museums in the 19th century, but through pleasure, the pleasure of belonging as much as the pleasurableness of the representations themselves.

citizen as objects of knowledge and places for identification.²²

It is also this larger dispositif of 'the cultural' as it is produced across different fields and discursive and non-discursive practices that makes the question of nation important within visual arts, that produces it as a question that must be addressed. This is as true for artist-run centres, for example Vu, as for large 'national' institutions such as the Musée d'art contemporain.²³ It also makes other questions that fall outside of 'the cultural' less visible or less urgent. Therefore, if in the context of the exhibition *La Traversée des mirages* Jolicoeur's work was not discussed in terms of feminism, it is not, as stated earlier, because it would not be recognized as such. Rather, within Quebec at that time the discourses of culture and nation meant that feminism was not considered to be the pressing problem or issue through which the exhibition needed to be produced and written about, or the optic through which the works needed to be positioned and read.

This process through which feminism in art is occluded in favour of nationalist discourse has not always been the case. Throughout the period under discussion, 1975 to

²² In that they take Quebec as their object of analysis, they in some sense produce their object of study. This is to say that they produce definitions of Quebec's specificity which are then available to be identified with. In that the definitions of Quebec are usually assumed to be concomitant with the borders of Quebec as a geographical area (other 'cultural' or 'national' identities not being discussed or, if they are, spoken about in terms of subgroups belonging to Quebec, i.e. cultural communities), cultural or national identity becomes equated with geographic territory. However, definitions of Quebec can never exactly 'fit' the geographic borders, there always being those outside of the proposed cultural identity by choice or by definition, as well as those within the definitions who disagree. The terms 'culture', 'nation' and 'citizen' are therefore places of discursive production as competing definitions are proposed and debated.

²³ There is a strong imperative for any government funded institution to develop programs that respond to the perceived interests of the funding agency so that they can justify further funding. This is as true of large 'national' institutions whose mandate is to represent the people of Quebec as it is for artist-run centres whose concern is primarily the interests of artists. Therefore, in a discursive context where culture, nation and collective identity are already produced as important issues, this imperative to produce exhibitions of 'Quebec art' is doubly determined.

1992, there have been a number of major exhibitions organized around the theme of feminism and art. Furthermore, feminism and nationalism have been productively articulated together across a diverse range of fields. However, at other times, such as the exhibition *La Traversée des Mirages*, they function as a disturbance or a block in relation to each other. The following chapters demonstrate the ways that they have enabled each other in the production of discursive and institutional practices, or inhibited each other, acting as a disturbance in the production of discourses of '*nous les québécois*'.

For those familiar with the work of Michel Foucault, it will be obvious that the theoretical and methodological framework for this thesis are drawn from his work. I am using Foucault's work because it provides a way to understand the relation between artworks, texts and exhibitions, as well as between art, feminism and nationalism. In particular I am drawing on a set of linked concepts that Foucault developed to analyze the formation of what he calls a 'dispositif' or 'apparatus'.

The first of these concepts is 'discourse'. Within the writings of Foucault, discourse is essentially language or the production of meaning through language, either spoken or written. The term 'discourse' serves to underline the productivity of language, the way that it produces rather than simply presents meanings. In his earlier work Foucault's focus on language implicitly or explicitly excluded the possibility of visual art also being a discursive practice or of being part of discursive practices. In his article "What is an Author?" Foucault commented:

I am aware that until now I have kept my subject within unjustifiable limits: I should also have spoken of the 'author-function' in painting, music, technical fields, and so forth. Admitting that my analysis is restricted to the domain of discourse, it seems that I have given the term 'author' an excessively narrow meaning. I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed (1979b, 24).

In later texts Foucault speaks about 'non-discursive practices' as well as 'discursive practices'. When he discussed 'non-discursive practices' Foucault had institutions primarily in mind, by which he meant those systems through which behaviour is regulated or constrained. "The term 'institution' is generally applied to every kind of more-or-less constrained, learned behaviour. Everything which functions in a society as a system of constraint and which isn't an utterance, in short, all the field of the non-discursive social, is an institution (1980b, 197-198)." However, this opening up of the concept of discourse and its function to include the non-discursive essentially opens the concept of discourse to include all practices that are caught up in the production of meaning and power. I would argue that visual art, in as much as it is about making objects, falls within the non-discursive. However, in that these objects are caught up in systems of interpretation they enter into the domain of the discursive. These interpretive practices are carried out by the artist, viewers, critics and curators, and through the exhibition, institutional (especially gallery and museum) and governmental practices that interpret, position and give value to an art work (that in fact designates some objects as art and not others).²⁴

²⁴ I am formulating this argument that visual art is both non-discursive and discursive in light of David Summers' critique of the assumption that there is an analogy between images and language. His argument is that art works are 'embodied' and that this is an important condition of their existence and

The concept of discourse takes on its depth and importance in relation to Foucault's notion of 'power/knowledge'. In fact, according to Foucault it is the particular relation between discourse, knowledge and power within a given social-historical moment, the forms through which they operate and through which they constitute each other, which constitutes the form of regulation or governmentality of a society. Foucault's argument is that discourse produces knowledge and therefore also power. There cannot be knowledge without power or power without knowledge because they produce each other – hence the written form 'power/knowledge'. To examine the discourses of a given society, and the particular forms through which they operate, is therefore to study the operations of power/knowledge in the production of that society.

This relation between discourse, knowledge and power and the means through which these are produced marks out another of Foucault's concepts, that of 'dispositif' or 'apparatus'. This term refers to all those discursive and non-discursive elements that together produce a given locus of power/knowledge. More specifically, *dispositif* refers to the form of their interrelation, how they work together. According to Foucault, they

meaning, which is not true for language.

I would like to argue that the category explicitly excluded by Saussure in order to reveal the system sustaining the values of words – namely the actual embodiment of the sign – is in fact something that, while it may lie outside the region of the central significance of language, is the primary region of significance of painting, sculpture, and architecture.... Not only must an image be made of *something* and place *somewhere*, but these irreducible conditions, if necessarily therefore constant, are at the same time articulated in different ways in different cultures; moreover they are not, and cannot be, nugatory, or merely arbitrary choices determined by the prevailing demand for some means or another of illustration. These different articulations have continuities, histories, and it is not possible to understand artistic traditions without explaining these continuities (Kemal and Gaskell 1991, 196, 206).

It should be noted here that Foucault did not consider it important to find an exact definition of where the discursive ends and the non-discursive begins (Foucault 1980b, 198).

are strategic, by which he means that they come together for a reason, in response to a specific problem. Once formed a *dispositif* continues to develop and elaborate in relation to the effects of their own operations. To quote Foucault, a *dispositif* is:

A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.... Thirdly, I understand by the term ‘apparatus’ a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic effect (1980b, 194-195).

For Foucault an ‘*episteme*’ is a specific kind of apparatus. Its function is to define what is true or false at any given moment, or what is ‘in the true’. By this is meant the system which defines and regulates the true and false or the acceptable and the unacceptable within a given domain, for example science or art. Like any *dispositif* it is strategic and forms part of relations of power (Foucault 1980b, 197).

Foucault has studied, as he would say, the ‘strategic connections’ between diverse elements in a given *dispositif*, the conditions of emergence for a given *dispositif* and the ways it shifts through time. For example, in his essay on governmentality, Foucault traces a series of changes in the way that the relation between the sovereign and that which is ruled over was conceived and the forms of power that they entailed within Europe from the Middle Ages to the 19th century (1979a). His argument is that in the 19th century new forms of governmentality appeared, encompassing diverse aims, institutions, practices, and forms of knowledge, which articulated new forms of power and produced as its object ‘the population’. ‘Government’ thus extends far beyond the state as such to

include diverse institutions and forms of knowledge, para-governmental and non-governmental, through which the population is analyzed, understood, managed, and produced as an object of knowledge and management.

However, Foucault was not just interested in how groups of people are produced, 'criminals', 'the insane' or 'the population', he was also interested in how discourse produces individuals or subjects for discourse. His argument is that power is not something applied from without, like a prohibition imposed from outside, but works from within, through desire, pleasure and incitement to discourse. In other words power begins on the micro level, acting on individuals, before being gathered up into larger dispositifs and systems of power/knowledge.

Because it's my hypothesis that the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces.... Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (1980b, 73-74, 98).

In summary, Foucault's concept of a dispositif provides a way of understanding the relation between different discursive and non-discursive practices and fields of knowledge such that their interrelation can become evident. In effect, texts (and here I would include artworks) and discourses are formed in part through the processes of intertextual and interdiscursive influence. Furthermore, interdiscursive borrowings are in response to a need, a problem, and their articulation into another discourse opens up new possibilities and incites new discursive production. These texts and discourses are in turn

imbricated within larger systems of discursive and non-discursive practices, the whole forming a regulated system or *dispositif*. Once formed, a *dispositif* continues to be elaborated through the systems of acceptability or the rules that define what is ‘in the true’ for that particular *dispositif*. It also produces subjects, individual and collective identities, that are imbricated into its own system of power/knowledge. The concept of *dispositif* therefore makes it possible to understand the relation between artworks, texts and exhibition practices, and the relation between the discourses of art, feminism and nationalism, in the formation of and elaboration of feminist art as a discourse within the specific context of Quebec.²⁵

My use of Foucault’s concept of a *dispositif*, along with his related concepts of discourse and power/knowledge, also marks the discursive location of this thesis. Foucault’s theory has informed British Cultural Studies, especially the work of Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha on the politics of culture and identity. As I said earlier, it is from them that I borrow the concept of location. This work comes out of the British Marxist tradition with its concern for questions of power, ideology and social change (Barrett 1991). In Quebec the concept of discourse is also central to the study of *discours social* (social discourse). The emphasis on language, spoken and written, that the concept of discourse presupposes (especially in Foucault’s earlier writing) fits well with the

²⁵ I have chosen ‘*dispositif*’ rather than ‘discourse’ as the central theoretical and methodological framework for this thesis because discourses on art are produced not only through texts about art, or even through the works themselves, but also through the institutional or non-discursive practices that present and position the works both physically and, through their physical positioning, discursively. An example of this is the way that art works are positioned in discourses of culture and nation (including language) within Quebec. I am to this extent disagreeing with those authors who limit their study to ‘the sayable’ (language), for example Micheline Cambron, Brisset and Popovic, even while I am at the same time heavily indebted to their work on both the theoretical and descriptive levels.

generally accepted understanding that language is central to Quebec's identity, culture and claims to nationhood. Studies of social discourse have entered sociology, itself a field that was particularly productive of the link between language and nationhood during the 1960's and 1970's (and was also influenced by Marxist intellectual traditions) (Dumont 1987; Rioux 1990). It has also been useful to studies of literature in Quebec (Cambron 1989, 1991, 1997; Brisset 1990; Popovic 1988, 1992a, 1992b). Recently the concepts of discourse and governmentality have been used to study the role of the Quebec government in producing definitions of Quebec as a nation (Allor and Gagnon 1994; Tarpin 1998). Therefore this thesis, which draws on readings of Foucault's work in both Cultural Studies and *discours social*, draws on, and is located in, these two intellectual traditions.

To return to *La Voix parfaite* by Nicole Jolicoeur, and to the knot of silk wound around the metal support, I have tried here to elucidate another knot within the work. This is the way that the work, that any work, is discursively located and how the location of a work is not singular, but plural. In effect, the work draws on and is located in multiple discourses, articulating them together in new statements. In this her work is also part of a larger process that has created a new field of knowledge and artistic and theoretical practice, feminist art. As Michel Foucault has said, the production of knowledge, and the discursive and non-discursive practices through which they are produced, also entails the production of power. The creation of feminist art as a

discourse through visual, written and curatorial works, as well as through the institutional practices that have made these possible, has created a new domain of knowledge and locus of power for women, a place to speak from.

Throughout this introduction I have outlined the theoretical concepts that underlie the premises, methodology and structure of the thesis. These concern the formation and elaboration of feminist art as a discourse and its imbrication in larger dispositifs that both enable and limit its formation. At each level I have also tried to demonstrate the discourses themselves, the strategic function of its formation and the ways that it organizes pleasures and identities for individuals to speak from.

The rest of this thesis will present a reading of feminist art in Quebec between 1975 and 1992, the period covering its formation and elaboration as a discourse. This reading is organized around three 'moments' in the history of feminist art in Quebec. The first is *Artfemme '75*, an exhibition organized as part of the International Women's Year celebrations, and *La Chambre nuptiale*, an 'environment' produced by Francine Larivée. The second moment, covered in the third chapter, is *Art et féminisme* and the exhibitions and events that coincided with it which were organized in 1982, especially *Réseau Art-Femmes*. Finally, the fourth chapter will look at the early 1990's, the exhibition *Pour la suite du monde* which marked the opening of the new Musée d'art contemporain, and the publication *Instabili*, produced for the 16th anniversary of Galerie Powerhouse. Structuring the thesis in this way, around exhibitions rather than individuals' works, shifts attention from the traditional focus on an artist's *oeuvre* and highlights instead the larger institutional and discursive formations of which the work is a part. This is in

keeping with the theoretical premise of the thesis itself where the concept of discourse cuts across the traditional boundaries between different fields of knowledge and unseats the author (or artist) as the origin of meaning.²⁶

Each chapter will present a synchronic reading that moves from individual works within the exhibitions, to the exhibitions themselves, to the larger discursive and institutional context that both enables and limits the production of artworks, exhibitions and readings for the works and exhibitions. Individual works within the exhibitions will be analyzed to understand their enunciative strategies, the ways that they articulate together materials and meanings in the construction of their specific address. This will be part of a larger discussion of the exhibitions and the ways that they frame the works through their relation with the other works in the exhibition, and through the texts that provide readings for the works and for the exhibition as a whole. This in turn will be placed within a larger discussion of the discursive and institutional context, including contemporary art, feminism and nationalism in Quebec. The structure of each chapter will therefore reiterate Foucault's own analysis of the ways that power/knowledge works, beginning on the micro level before being taken up within larger systems of discursive and non-discursive practices, the whole forming a *dispositif* or apparatus.

Together the three chapters form a diachronic reading of feminist art. The aim is not to present a traditional art historical reading of influences from one exhibition or art

²⁶ Foucault's essay "What is an author?" is instructive here. In it he defines 'the author' as a mode of classifying and ordering texts and as a function of discourse itself, and as such is different than a proper name which points to a person (1979b). He also criticized the unexamined concept of the author's 'work' and the unity that it creates within and among disparate texts. Both could easily be applied to 'the artist' and their 'work'.

work to the next. Neither is it to argue that these are more important exhibitions or events than others. The choice of these three exhibitions or 'moments' in feminist art is to evidence the formation and elaboration of feminist art as a discourse and, more generally, how all discourses change over time.

CHAPTER 2

ARTFEMME '75 AND LA CHAMBRE NUPTIALE (1976)

The mid-1970's saw the emergence of a new problematic and a new discursive formation within the visual arts: feminist art. It was, however, not new as such, but an articulation together of both feminism and the visual arts. As stated earlier, these were themselves complexly articulated formations, drawing on and reformulating propositions, theories, problematics and practices from diverse sources to their own discursive production. Therefore, to understand the formation of feminist art as a discourse it is necessary to look at, not only the various sources from which it drew, but more importantly at those moments of articulation through which it came into existence. Within Quebec, there are two such 'moments', which, while there were certainly other works and other events that preceded them, demonstrate the process of articulation or coming into being of feminist art. They have also come to represent feminist art within narratives of its history within Quebec. These are the exhibitions *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale*.

Artfemme '75

Artfemme '75 has the honour of being the first major exhibition in Quebec articulated within the discursive framework of 'second-wave' feminism. The project was

initiated by Powerhouse Gallery and involved the Musée d'art contemporain, the Saidye Bronfman Center and the Y.W.C.A. About 450 women applied to the exhibition, of which 150 were selected to show in the three participating galleries. It also included three conferences open to the public,¹ a dance performance, a poetry reading and a parade to launch the opening of the exhibition.²

To understand the meaning of this event (for as one reviewer commented, *Artfemme* '75 was an 'event' and not simply an exhibition) and its role in the formation of the discourse of feminist art, one must look at the ways that the exhibition was produced and positioned through the documents leading up to it, including the catalogue. One must also look at the works themselves and the ways that they took up and used the then current discourses on art and on feminism, as well as for the ways that the works articulated and were articulated into the enunciative practices of the exhibition. The response to *Artfemme* in the many reviews in the press further elaborated the meaning of the exhibition and more largely of art by women.

The exhibition

Artfemme was initially conceived as part of a much larger project that was to

¹ The first of the three conferences that formed part of *Artfemme* was a slide presentation and panel discussion titled "Women Artists Speak Out." The second was a 'rencontre - débat' that included three lectures, "La motivation créatrice chez la femme artiste" by Dr. Stephanie Dudek, "La femme artiste en tant qu'innovatrice" by Collette Carisse and "Le rôle de la femme dans les arts au Québec" by S. Lemerise and Rose-Marie Mayrand. Finally, there was an evening titled "A conversation with Women in Media" that included a slide presentation, the screening of "Meshes of the Afternoon" by Maya Deren and "Our Dear Sisters" by Kathleen Shannon as well as a panel discussion.

² It ran from April 3rd to 25th, 1975. The 'Salon des refusés' at Powerhouse Gallery ran until April 12th.

cover a year's operational funding for Powerhouse Gallery including exhibitions, poetry readings, workshops for printmaking, photography and woodworking classes, a documentation centre, and a 'cultural centre' with audio-visual equipment for performances, theatre, meetings, and so on. The cultural centre was conceived as a place for "consciousness-raising groups, informal discussion groups for women writers, artists, actors, etc. (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials)."³ The aim was to make Powerhouse a feminist community centre that would offer services to all women, not just artists. In other words, women's culture was understood in the large sense, including not only all the arts but also in the sense of a community with its own way of thinking and doing things. It was to be a place where women's culture was to be *generated* – hence *Powerhouse*.

The exhibition *Artfemme '75* was to be one part of this vast cultural project. If the workshops, classes and cultural centre were to be the place where women's culture was produced, *Artfemme* was the place where it was to be addressed to the world.

An open exhibition such as *Artfemme '75* gives women an opportunity to make a collective statement about their imagery, culture and experience to the public. Such exposure can only increase public awareness of women's contribution to the plastic arts (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials).⁴

There was, therefore, on the part of the organizers of *Artfemme*, the assumption that women do have a specific, female, culture. Furthermore, it was assumed that this culture had been hidden or repressed by the larger male culture and needed to be given a place to

³ From the initial grant application for the cultural centre to the Secretary of State.

⁴ From the grant application for funding for *Artfemme '75* to the Secretary of State.

be seen. As Stansje Plantenga argued in the catalogue, “until now women artists have been submerged in a male-created culture; but they have started to emerge and become active, realizing they have their own culture, centuries of *female* experience (*Artfemme* ’75).” What female culture meant was not articulated in this or other texts leading up to the exhibition. Rather it was assumed that the exhibition itself would make this clear. Bringing women’s culture to light so that it could be recognized and defined was therefore one of the aims of the exhibition. Linked to this was another aim – that it be open to all women. About a thousand letters were sent to women artists inviting them to submit work to the exhibition. When two thirds were rejected Powerhouse organized a ‘Salon des refusés’ to include as many as possible. Therefore *Artfemme*, and Powerhouse Gallery, was conceived as open and inclusive, female art and culture, while undefined, was equated with all women.

The exhibition itself presented a wide range of work in terms of the visual codes, problematics and cultural references that they engaged. However there were, as a number of reviewers commented, a large number of figurative works. They were, moreover, often of women. It was as though the search for a female experience as expressed in women’s art (the stated aim of the exhibition) must necessarily be found in visual representations of women. In other words, the aim of the exhibition as it was elaborated through the choice of works condensed together the representation of women or ‘woman as image’, which since at least the 19th century has been the privileged object of art in

Western European art traditions,⁵ with the woman artist who made the work or ‘woman as artist’. This second element is linked to the equally long tradition of privileging the (autonomous, creative and normally male) individual that was central to Western European liberal humanist traditions. In this case the common understanding of art as self-expression was taken literally, with the ‘self’ being a woman defined biologically.

The most obvious example of this condensing of the artist and her representation was the stuffed doll by Andrea Hayes that graced the cover of the catalogue, both in the choice of the artist to make and submit the work and in the organizers to use it as a representation of the exhibition.⁶ It is also evident in the privileging of representations of women generally in the exhibition, from Bitsey Bateman’s and Harriet Stein’s documentary photography, to the presentation of women’s bodies by Kim Scott and in the piece by Louise Elie and Madeleine Forcier, to narrative and conceptual practices such as Isobel Dowler-Gow’s and Louise Turner’s work, and even in Françoise Sullivan’s humorous *Année de la femme* with markings made of blood.

To understand this relation between ‘woman as image’ and ‘woman as artist’ and the ways that these were produced through specific visual practices and articulated into

⁵ See the work of Griselda Pollock, especially her book *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (1988).

⁶ *Artfemme* is not the only exhibition catalogue of art by women which used an image on the cover that condensed ‘woman as artist’ with ‘woman as image’. The exhibition *Woman as Viewer* in Winnipeg (November 26 to December 14, 1975) had a detail of the crocheted sculpture *Boob Tree* by Phyllis Green on the cover. While the work itself may have been ironic, the use of a detail that depicted breasts but left out the tree trunk collapsed the irony into realism. The 1982 exhibition *Mirrorings*, organized by the Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery in Halifax, also used the image of a woman on the catalogue cover. In this case the image was of a woman looking at herself in a mirror, explicitly restating the title of the exhibition and the theme of the show.

the enunciative practice of the exhibition, as well as at the ways that the works borrow and re-work the then current visual practices in their own specific address, it is useful to look at a few of the works more closely.

Louise Turner's photographic piece, *Petrified Fog*, consisted of six images. Arranged in a grid, they could be read either across or down. In either direction, the changed position of the camera angle produced a narrative reading of the images. Read vertically, the images move from the horizon of the ocean, to a woman on a blanket facing away from the viewer, to a wave washing over the sand beach. The second vertical series shows the same images taken from a closer angle as though the camera had moved in and down in relation to the first series.

In this work the artist was taking up the then current conceptual photographic practices.⁷ As stated in the first chapter, photography had been newly accepted as an art medium through its appropriation into conceptual art's repertoire of visual strategies. There it was most often conceived of as a recording device where the process of the work's production was itself the work. Therefore the prevailing attitude towards photography was a formalism, not of the product, but of the process itself, where what was explored was the recording function of photography and the ways that it constructed meaning. Many conceptual works drew on the idea of film, grouping photographs in

⁷ There were a number of important exhibitions of conceptual art in Montreal in the early 1970's. The first was *45° 30' N - 73° 36' W*, organized in 1971 by the artists Bill Vazan and Gary Coward and the critic Arthur Bardo. It was shown at the Saidye Bronfman Centre and Sir George Williams University. Vazan and Coward were also founding members of Véhicule in 1972, a gallery known for its privileging of conceptual art. Members of Véhicule were overwhelmingly presented in the exhibitions *Périphéries* (1974) and *Québec 75*, both shown at the Musée d'art contemporain. The gallery Optica produced another important exhibition of conceptual art in 1975 titled *Camera Art*.

linear or grid fashion to explore the construction of narrative. In fact, the grid was used so often to structure conceptual works that it became the leitmotif of conceptual art.⁸

This work can therefore be seen to deploy conceptual art practices in the way that it uses photography, a grid structure and narrative sequence. Through these means another set of concerns structure the work and its meanings, concerns marked out by the image of a woman in the central photographs. Any photograph of a person stages the gazes of the camera, the viewer and the person viewed in its own structuring of meaning. Read horizontally, we, the camera/viewer, draw closer to the woman lying on a blanket. At the same time, read vertically, the woman appears and disappears from our view. The image of a woman, the privileged object of art and photography's gaze in Western European art, is here both offered and refused. Therefore conceptual art, as a set of formal concerns and strategies which had acceptability within art institutions, combined with the image of a woman, made to metonymically stand for the artist herself through the enunciative strategies of the exhibition, both made gender (of the artist and within the image) newly visible and, at the same time, allowed the work entrance into the museum.⁹

Extending the assumption that art by women must literally represent women was work that represented the lives of women. Here photography was often used alone or in

⁸ Les Levine's essay on camera art is an example of how the use of photography in conceptual art was understood (*Camera Art* 1974). His statement that "camera artists are attempting to use the phenomenology of 'perception architecture' (the way the mind works) as the context for their art (7)" summarized one aspect of this attitude and demonstrates the way that work like Turner's *Petrified Fog* would have been read.

⁹ It should be emphasized here that we are not yet talking about a feminist analysis of representations of gender. This would develop after 1980 with the introduction of psychoanalytic theory into feminist problematics. See the fourth chapter in this thesis.

conjunction with other media, but it was also found in many of the representational paintings, drawings and prints. Some were based on the family history of the woman who made them, often reworked or written over. In others the works documented women's lives or homes, using literal, conceptual or even allegorical forms of representation. In this work 'woman as image' is transposed onto 'women's lives' and the underlying assumption is that art is self-expression. Here the 'self' that is offered for view is seen as part of a larger social context, usually defined as family and friends.

Other works in the exhibition also demonstrate the way that this association of the work with the artist is produced, although through different means. Many of the works were fibre based, that is they used materials and processes that have historically been associated with both craft traditions and women.¹⁰ For example, both Yolande Dupuis-Leblanc's mural tapestry, *Paysage doré*, and Suzelle Levasseur's *Projet No. 1* use techniques of weaving and knotting. In Dupuis-Leblanc's case the materials are used to produce an abstract work where the formal concerns of surface, colour, texture and the qualities of the material itself become the subject of the work. These formal qualities allowed the work to be read within the formalist paradigm. At the same time the use of fibre, historically gendered female, created a privileged place for women to work as artists and allowed their work to be accepted and read as female art. The large abstract

¹⁰ This association of embroidery, weaving and similar processes with women, essentially gendering these craft traditions as female, is discussed in the book *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the feminine* (1984) by Rozsika Parker and the chapter "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts" in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981) by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock. Rose-Marie Arbour and Suzanne Lemerise also note the association of women and craft traditions, and the way that they were both devalued, in their article "Le rôle des Québécoises dans les arts plastiques depuis trente ans" (Arbour and Lemerise 1975).

fibre works by Dupuis-Leblanc and others therefore function as another point where the artist as woman and the work as female come together within the enunciative operations of the exhibition.

This gendering of work, and the creation of a 'female' art, is even more evident in the work of Levasseur where the tapestry takes the form of a dress. Here formal concerns, fibre traditions and image coalesce with the exhibition and its mandate. However, it is also true of the more traditionally sculptural work by Sorel Cohen where the reference to Claes Oldenberg's soft sculptures, and thus to American Pop Art, were re-read by some as female through their use of these same formal qualities and materials.

Finally, the last work that I would like to look at is Tanya Rosenberg's codpieces, three full-sized photographs of men with a real (non-photographic) codpiece attached to the appropriate place.¹¹ The codpieces had first been presented to the public the previous year when they were modeled by live models as a performance at Powerhouse Gallery. Each codpiece in some way metonymically represented the man. For example, one was constructed of an oil can and attached to the body using a heavy steel chain. In another the codpiece was a box/chess board complete with all the chess pieces. In still another the genitals were wrapped in the plastic packaging used to present and protect meat in any large grocery store.

According to Rosenberg, the work was about male sexuality and male sexual stereotypes in our culture (Rosenberg 1976a). By its presentation of men and male sexuality, the work effectively reversed the tradition of the female nude (by mostly male

¹¹ Tanya Rosenberg is now known by the name of Tanya Mars.

artists) in Western European painting and allowed the work to be read as feminist by both the artist and viewers. In other words, the work engaged gendered structures of looking as they were produced in both high art and popular culture (to paraphrase John Berger in his influential television series and book, *Ways of Seeing* (1972), men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at), but by placing herself as a *woman* artist looking at men, Rosenberg effectively reversed the gendered dichotomy of viewer/viewed. This reversal enacted the popular understanding of feminism that women wanted to take the place of men, or at least that men were to be the standard by which women's equality was to be measured.

This strategy of reversal can be seen in many other works in *Artfemme*, including Jenifer Dickson's *Male reliquary* (photo silkscreen) and Badanna Zack's *Wrapped Phalluses*, both of which represent male genitalia in some way. However, reversal is also evident in Gemma Forliano's *Can-Can* depicting nude old men dancing on stage and Louise Joyal's print of a motorcycle where what is depicted is not a man, but a machine coded as masculine.

What I am trying to trace out in this description of these works is twofold. On the one hand the works drew on a wide range of visual codes, problematics and cultural references. In this sense each work drew on and was located within existing visual practices and discourses, for example within documentary photography, painting, conceptual art or fiber art. This diversity was often noted by reviewers and made it impossible for them to locate the *exhibition*, and more largely women's art, within a stylistic or disciplinary boundary. On the other hand, the exhibition articulated the

artworks to its own textual production. As stated earlier, an exhibition as ‘text’, or the “exposition of an exhibition” to restate Mieke Bal’s phrase, is constructed through the meaning of the museum or gallery itself as produced through its architecture, mandate and history; the choice of works and the relationship that the exhibition constructs between them as well as between the objects and the viewer; and through the catalogue and other texts that present and position the works within the exhibition. The aim of *Artfemme* ’75 was to present women’s “imagery, culture and experience to the public (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials).” The privileging of representational practices in the choice of the works, along with the gendering of the work as female through the condensing of ‘woman as image’ with ‘woman as artist’, the inclusion of work from craft traditions that were already gendered as female, and the reversal of gendered dichotomies of looking produced a representation of women’s “imagery, culture and experience.” This exhibition of art by women therefore articulated the artworks into a ‘text’ about gender and art and produced ‘women’s art’ as a discursive object.

However, the ‘text’ of *Artfemme* was not simply about gender and art, or ‘women’s art’. *Artfemme* also mobilized institutional or non-discursive processes in its enunciative strategies that produced other meanings. In organizing the exhibition, Powerhouse involved two established art institutions, the Musée d’art contemporain and the Saidye Bronfman Centre. In doing this the gallery also appropriated the authority and reputation of those institutions. These institutions enjoyed government funding and acceptability from both the government and the public. While the stated reason for searching out other co-sponsors was that the exhibition was “to be large and to make a

united statement about women artists and their impact on society (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials),”¹² including them functioned to extend the meaning and authority of these institutions to the exhibition and to women’s art, something that Powerhouse Gallery, as a relatively marginalized and un-funded institution, could not do. In addition, four of the seven people invited to choose the work for the exhibition were men.¹³ Given that three of these men worked for important art institutions in Montreal, their presence loaned their reputations to the exhibition. The acceptability that they gave to *Artfemme* may also have had to do with their presence as *men*. In many of the comments by artists and reviewers alike there was a certain uneasiness with the fact that the exhibition only included women artists. This unease demonstrated that basing an exhibition on gender had not yet attained acceptability.

Exhibition catalogues are another site where the discursive and the non-discursive are mobilized through the enunciative strategies of an exhibition. The catalogue for *Artfemme '75* primarily documents the works in the exhibition. While not all the works were represented, the largest proportion of the publication was taken up with photographic reproductions. Initially it was also intended that information on the artists

¹² Grant application dated December 10th, 1974.

¹³ The jurors were Freda Bain (artist), René Blouin (Coordinator, Véhicule Art), Monique Charbonneau (artist), Georges M. Dyens (Director, visual arts program of the Saidye Bronfman Center, and professor, Université du Québec à Montréal), Alain Parent (Director of exhibitions, Musée d’art contemporain), Stansje Plantenga (Coordinator, Powerhouse Gallery), and Leopold Plotek (artist) (*Artfemme '75*).

and artists' statements about their work, their experience and their views on the role of women artists in society would be included. The emphasis, therefore, was not on texts about the exhibition (which were very brief), but on documenting the artists and their work. Linked to this was another aim, that of documenting *Artfemme '75* in order to provide "a useful and informative source of information about current Quebec women artists (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials)." Therefore the practice of producing catalogues to document the work effected the exhibition's aim of showing women's art and culture to the world in a way that would extend it beyond the space and duration of the exhibition itself.

The texts included in the catalogue further elaborate, and in some ways disturb, the meanings produced through the 'text' documenting the exhibition and the exhibition itself. The essay by Fernande Saint-Martin, then director of the Musée d'art contemporain, begins with a question "Is woman's art different from men's?" and proceeds with a reference to American feminists, whom she states "defined the ultimate question of female destiny." Her answer to her question seems to be in the affirmative, arguing that "women must now return to zero, must now reject male culture and begin to develop new structures and a new language, one which will express themselves and serve above all their own needs and nature." Here Saint-Martin's argument works to support the exhibition and the basis of its organization, work by women. However, she also argues that the problem for women, and for men, is first of all a problem of language – self-realization must be accomplished within the constraints of culture's already established values and conventions of language. Women must therefore work within a

context already defined by “Freud and Marcuse, Marx and Engels, Einstein and Planck, Derrida and Lacan.” In arguing this, Saint-Martin throws into question the assertion that women’s art is different from men’s and shifts the ground of discussion from American feminism to European political and intellectual traditions. While the critical and theoretical space that this assertion opens up was not elaborated here or elsewhere, it does point to a wider discursive context within which the references to American and European traditions made sense and unsettled each other.

It was, however, in the critical response to *Artfemme* in the local press that many of the stakes of the exhibition and the questions that it posed were elaborated.¹⁴ The extent of this response was unusual, and may have reflected the perceived unusualness of the exhibition itself. It may also have been a part of a general response to International Women’s Year and the privileging of ‘women’s issues’ that accompanied it. These reviews reflect an unease with the exhibition and an uncertainty of how to discuss it. As noted earlier, the diversity of work made it impossible for the reviewers to locate either the exhibition or women’s art within a stylistic or disciplinary boundary. This diversity and the unease that it occasioned, combined with the stated aim of the exhibition to present a collective statement about “women’s imagery, culture and experience,” incited

¹⁴ While it is not always possible to separate articles about Powerhouse Gallery from those about the exhibition, I have found ten articles in Montreal newspapers that discussed the exhibition itself. There were, of course, also articles in various newspapers and magazines about the gallery in the mid-1970's that mentioned *Artfemme* '75.

further questions regarding the meaning of the exhibition. These questions and the attempts to answer them form another of the structuring elements in the formation of feminist art in Quebec.

The first question that the exhibition posed arose from the fact that the exhibition was organized on the basis of the gender of the artists. Exhibitions of work by women were hardly new.¹⁵ However, many were obviously uncomfortable with the gender exclusivity of the exhibition. This in turn incited further discussion on whether there is a female aesthetic or female art. Looking for something that would be different, because made by women instead of men, and therefore perhaps also for what the works would share in common because they were made by women (in the same way that women were assumed to have their gender in common), the authors, and artists, argued for and against the notion that there is a female art. In discussing this question, the comments of Stanja Plantenga, the Powerhouse Gallery representative on the jury, regarding women's submerged culture and a female sensibility different from men's were quoted often.

Stansje Plantenga of Powerhouse ... says she finds there are differences in women's art. "Greater sensuality, more humanistic roots, closer to life sources," she says. "Women seem more in touch with their daily world – whatever it is – rather than being into an esoteric art so advanced that it dies ... I think women may be the new source of vitality." She also was happy to observe that a lot of "soft" work which might be dismissed as "feminine," after being around for a while,

¹⁵ Organizations such as the Women's Art Society of Montreal, founded in 1894, regularly held women-only exhibitions (*The Women's Art Society of Montreal...* 1994). In 1947 the Musée de la Province de Québec showed the work of seven women in *Femina*. In the 1950's and 1960's a number of exhibitions presented post-automatist work by women, including *La femme imagiste : Femmes peintres du Québec* at the Galerie de l'Étable of the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. For discussion of the association of women with post-automatism see "Reconnaissance des femmes dans l'art actuel : 1965" (Arbour 1987b) and "L'apport des femmes peintres au courant post-automatiste: une représentation critique (1955-1965)" (Couture 1993), both by Rose-Marie Arbour. Also, in the early years both *Véhicule* (1972-1973) and *Optica* (1972) presented exhibitions of work by women.

began to strike her as more and more strong (Virginia Nixon, "Women artists or women in the masks of men?," *Gazette* (Montreal), 12 April 1975, 50).

Others disagreed with this position.

Les vagues préjugés dont nous parlions dès le début de cet article seront — espérons-le — étouffés dans l'oeuf par cette exposition. Les sculptures de Luce Dupuis et de Hannah Franklin sont aussi dures que le crâne d'un Breton; et si celles de Janice Flood-Turner et de Sorel Cohen sont molles, elles ne le sont pas plus que les hamburgers géants d'Oldenburg (Gilles Toupin, "Le mou, le flou et le délicat...", *La Presse* (Montreal), 19 April 1975, D 19).

There was no agreement among the artists who participated in the exhibition either on the existence of a female specificity in art. Francine Beauvais argued that "il n'y a pas de différence entre les schèmes de référence de la créativité masculine et de la créativité féminine," while Françoise Sullivan proposed that "il est évident que les schèmes de références de la créativité féminine sont différents de ceux de l'homme. Sans vouloir faire des choses exagérément féminines, la femme créera des choses qui auront trait à la sensibilité féminine (Gilles Toupin, "Les amazones et le mâlisme artistique," *La Presse* (Montreal), 12 April 1975, D 18)." This difference of opinion even existed within the argument of a single author, for example the essay by Fernande Saint-Martin discussed above.

The point here is not to decide which of these two positions was right, whether there was or was not a female aesthetic in the work and in the exhibition as a whole, but rather to show that the desire (or not) to find such a feminine specificity led to certain kinds of readings. In this way artworks, already taken up and positioned through the exhibition itself through the artists' and jurors' selection of works, were subsequently taken up, along with the exhibition as a whole, into a further articulation of the meaning

of the exhibition through the reviews. These arguments for and against the existence of a female specificity in art essentially mapped out one of the problematics of the exhibition. Once articulated, it could also be taken up in other exhibitions and texts. This was not to happen again in a major exhibition until *Art et féminisme* in 1982, but Powerhouse Gallery, one of the organizers of *Artfemme '75*, continued to address this question through its exhibitions and publications.¹⁶

The second question that the exhibition posed was whether it represented a feminist consciousness. While this question incited less discussion, the answer was for the most part in the negative. To quote one reviewer:

Je n'ai pas perçu une volonté précise de la part des femmes d'identifier leur démarche créatrice à une lutte pour la reconnaissance de certaines inégalités sociales, ou au besoin de remédier à des problèmes issus du chauvinisme mâle si souvent dénoncé (Claude Gosselin, "Artfemme, ou des artistes femmes peu ... féministes," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 19 April 1975, 18).

It should be noted that the definition of feminism used here is that of a political struggle for equality. If this definition excluded even Rosenberg's codpieces from being described as feminist, the exhibition as a whole was seen as such in its appropriation of the space of public art institutions for the event, thereby inserting work by women into the institutions through which art is recognized. In this case, feminism was read on the level of the exhibition as a political strategy and statement, and not on the level of individual works (Gilles Toupin, "Le mou, le flou et le délicat...", *La Presse* (Montreal), 19 April 1975, D 19).

¹⁶ This question came up regularly and explicitly in the six years that the *Powerhouse Newsletter* was published (1977-1983).

The intertextual formation of *Artfemme '75*

Despite the claim of one reviewer that “the organizers of *Artfemme* stepped out on a limb (Virginia Nixon, “Women artists or women in the masks of men?,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), 12 April 1975, page 50),” and despite the apparent novelty of an exhibition only containing work by women, *Artfemme '75* in fact drew on the discursive and non-discursive practices of other exhibitions in its own formation. To give an example, just two years earlier there had been another large exhibition, *Les Moins de 35*, which was similar to *Artfemme* in its aims and in the way it was organized, justified and criticized. Initiated and organized by Normand Thériault with the students in the Groupe de recherches en administration de l’art at UQAM, and coordinated through the journal *Médiart* (also founded by the Groupe de recherches), this exhibition undertook to present the work of young Quebec artists through a series of exhibitions that was to span every region of Quebec.¹⁷ The aim of the exhibition was to “donner une image non restrictive d’un aspect de l’art québécois, l’art produit par les artistes de moins de 35 ans (*Les Moins de 35* [1973], 7).” It was therefore not juried and anyone wishing to participate could do so. Furthermore, this openness meant that the people of Quebec must have access to the work, because art was seen to manifest and affirm the collective identity of *les Québécois*.

Sans parler d’encadrement, il faut aussi viser à donner à tous les Québécois l’occasion de se manifester.... Il faut aller à l’étape de démocratisation suivante: faire en sorte qu’une oeuvre québécoise soit d’abord ressentie par tout le Québec parce qu’on ne craint pas chez les artistes d’affirmer ce qu’on est (*Les Moins de 35* [1973], 12).

¹⁷ In the original statement of intent, the exhibition was to include eleven galleries in seven different regions of Quebec, and show the work of 350 artists, each in their own region. In the end it included seven galleries in three regions and the work of 203 artists (*Les Moins de 35*, 7-8).

In other words, what was being constructed through the catalogue and structure of the exhibition was not only an opening for a new generation of artists and a survey or ‘panorama’ of what was happening in Quebec at that time, but it also constructed a representation of Quebec. Moreover, by dividing Quebec into regions, this representation was distinctly territorialized.¹⁸

It is here that the *Les Moins de 35* makes an interesting comparison to *Artfemme*. *Les Moins de 35* was in part a response to the perceived exclusion of young Quebec artists from the mainstream institutions. The organizational and curatorial practices that it employed were designed not only to be as inclusive or ‘democratic’ as possible, but to be a survey of work in Quebec that would at the same time represent ‘Quebec art’. What was produced, in fact, was a representation of ‘Quebec art’. In a similar way, *Artfemme*, like Powerhouse itself, was a response to the perceived exclusion of women from mainstream art institutions. Using similar organizational and curatorial practices, *Artfemme* produced a representation of ‘women’s art’. Furthermore, both catalogues documented their respective exhibitions by devoting a page to each artist and their work. This emphasis on the work and on the artists reflected accepted practices at the time where documentation and biographical representation were the primary functions of catalogues.¹⁹ This not only privileged the idea of the individual artist, but also

¹⁸ Given that the exhibition took place in only three cities, with the largest number of galleries and artists in Montreal, it can be seen that the representation of Quebec as a series of regions was only partly successful. In fact it demonstrated, as one reviewer commented, that Montreal was the art centre of Quebec.

¹⁹ Other examples include *Véhicule Art: In Transit* (1975), Véhicule gallery and the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal; “*Current Energies*”: *British Columbia ’75: 20 artists* / “*Les forces vives*”: *columbia britannique ’75: 20 artistes* [1975], Musée du Centre Saidye Bronfman; and *Bienale II du Québec: Une exposition d’art / Quebec Biennale II: An Art Exhibition* (1979), Musée du Centre Saidye Bronfman.

demonstrated a concern with history and the place of their constituent group within that history. It can therefore be seen that both the exhibition and catalogue of *Artfemme* articulated feminist concerns regarding the women's art and culture, especially with documenting this culture so that it could enter history, with accepted museum exhibition and cataloguing practices, especially the documentation of the work and the artist.²⁰ Together they formed a knot or conjunction between feminist and art discourses and formed one of the sites where discourses of feminist art were constructed.

What I am trying to make evident through this description of *Artfemme '75* is one moment in the formation of the discourse of feminist art. By 'moment' I am referring to the process of articulation or coming together in a new formation of various discursive and non-discursive practices. This is not an additive process, but the production of something new. As mentioned in the first chapter, while the separate elements may be familiar, the repetition of these elements in a new formation and context produces new meanings. It is, to quote Homi Bhabha, "the difference of the same (1988, 8)." By paying attention to the process of articulation at the level of the exhibition's *intertextual* formation, I have tried to make evident the way that meanings are produced across both discursive and non-discursive practices, and the specific way that *Artfemme '75*

²⁰ It could also be argued that in adopting a survey structure for the exhibition, the organizers of *Artfemme* also adopted its negative side. Like *Artfemme*, *Les Moins de 35* was criticized for the poor quality of much of the work, which reflected the current art styles rather than demonstrating, "non pas une école, mais un souffle particulier" which would show "que nous sommes participants à une identité collective (Claude Daigneault, "On n'a plus les jeunes qu'on avait," *Le Soleil* (Québec), 27 January 1973, 50)."

mobilized these different levels of discursive production in its enunciative strategies.

As stated earlier, the ‘exposition’ of *Artfemme* was in part produced through the works themselves through their own intertextual formation. The works mobilized a wide range of visual codes, problematics and cultural references, including accepted art styles and aesthetic concerns in the visual arts. Through this the works were located within the then current discourses on art. This discursive location made the works readable and gave them a certain acceptability with the visual arts.

However, the ‘exposition’ of an exhibition is not only produced through the works themselves. Exhibitions take up artworks and articulate them to their own textual production. Through the choice of works (the privileging of work with representations of women or their lives, work that used materials and processes that were already gendered as female, and work that employed strategies of reversal of gendered relations of looking) the exhibition produced a representation of ‘women’s art’. This was doubled by the incitement to read the work in relation to the stated problematic of the exhibition, which was to show women’s “imagery, culture and experience.” This incitement to read the work in relation to gender was produced by the texts that presented and positioned the exhibition, especially the grant applications, catalogue and statements to the press, and by the fact that 1975 was International Women’s Year, with the consequent discussion of ‘women’s issues’ generally in the media. This problematic was taken up again in the reviews of the exhibition, where debates as to whether or not there is a female specificity in art, and whether the gender of the artist was a legitimate category on which to base an exhibition, further elaborated the meaning of the term ‘women’s art’. In this way the

exhibition articulated questions of gender to the accepted discursive and non-discursive practices of visual art, producing a new discursive category, 'women's art'.

This first level of reading the 'exposition' of *Artfemme* includes the works, the stated aims of the exhibition, and the ways that these were further taken up and elaborated in readings of the exhibition. However, exhibitions entail non-discursive as well as discursive strategies in their formation. Through the appropriation of institutional and curatorial practices into their own specific address, in other words through the intertextual formation of exhibitions, the histories and meanings of these practices are incorporated into the new 'text' or exhibition.

As already mentioned, by involving established art institutions, *Artfemme* also appropriated the reputation and acceptability of those institutions to the project of 'women's art'. The same strategy is evident in the decision to invite men as well as women to jury the exhibition. What is evident in these decisions, and in the debates as to whether an exhibition of work by women was a good idea, was that the validity of women-only exhibitions was not yet established. Part of the aim of *Artfemme* was in fact to establish its own validity, to produce the acceptability of women-only events as 'in the true', to use Foucault's expression. In fact, as the discussion on this subject showed, *Artfemme* rather opened a debate on this issue.²¹ What this demonstrates is not only that

²¹ The fact that the acceptability of women-only organizations and events had to be established, not only for funding agencies and the general public but also for the members of Powerhouse, is evident in the texts produced by and about the gallery in the 1970's. It is also evident in the policies of the gallery. Up until 1977 three of the eleven exhibitions per year were open to men. The statements made when this was changed reflect both a clarification of the meaning of 'feminist' and mark out another moment in the institutional production of feminist art discourses. The minutes recording this change state:

Diane Quackenbush read the definition of a feminist in the Websters Collegiate Dictionary and

it took time to establish the validity of women-only events and organizations, and furthermore that this form of organization was feminist, but that the establishment of these ideas was produced in part through institutional practices.

There is another way that the appropriation of institutional practices located the exhibition. The structure of survey exhibitions, whether juried or not, produces a collective representation of their constituent group, for example a 'national' art.²² In the case of *Artfemme* and *Les Moins de 35*, the survey exhibition was articulated to a politics of democracy, understood as being as inclusive as possible, and to the aim of including those who had previously been excluded, women artists on one hand and young Quebec artists on the other. For Powerhouse Gallery this was linked to a feminist politics and the aim of presenting women's art and culture. For the participants in the *Groupe de recherches en administration de l'art* and the journal *Médiart* this was linked to a nationalist politics and the concern to represent the new generation of Quebec art and artists. This demonstrates that both the feminism and nationalism of the era were part of

then asked the group if it considered itself feminist according to the definition. The majority said yes with a show of hands. Then why, asked Diane, do we have a policy of showing men in the gallery? At the moment we allow 3 men a year, if they are accepted by the jury. In practice very few men are accepted. The Canada Council feels we do discriminate and apparently holds this against us in any considerations of grants. Should we care? After some discussion it was decided we should not give token shows to men and that we should firmly declare ourselves a feminist gallery. The following questions were voted on:

1. Shall men be allowed to have individual shows? Vote: No.
2. Shall men be allowed to have a group show? Vote: No.
3. Shall men be allowed to show with women (as in the case of Pat Walsh and Stephen Morrissey, a joint exhibition). Vote: Yes (Members meeting, 23 October 1977, Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials).

²² The Quebec biennials produced by the Saidye Bronfman Centre (1977 and 1979) produced a representation of 'Quebec art', just as the various Canadian biennials produced by the National Gallery of Canada did the same for 'Canadian art', for example the *Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art / Biennale Canadienne d'art contemporain* (1989).

a larger discursive formation, entailing the articulation of collective identities, or the representation of ‘us’, with democratic notions of inclusiveness and participation. This larger discursive formation makes any simple division between feminism and nationalism, or between Francophone and Anglophone, problematic.

Artfemme '75 can therefore be seen to have articulated discursive and non-discursive practices – the art works, the various texts that presented and positioned them, the exhibition and the institutional practices that structured the exhibition and marked it with their own histories and meanings – so as to produce and define ‘women’s art’ as a discursive category. This category existed not only on the level of meanings, but also on the level of practices and forms of organization. What I have tried to show in this description is that it is precisely through the *relation* between these different levels of production that ‘women’s art’, and the collective identity to which it referred, were produced. These were in turn structured within and by larger discursive formations, on the level of interdiscursive influence, for example definitions of nation and democracy. It thus demonstrates the process of articulation and the way that it produces knowledge/power.

La Chambre nuptiale

The other ‘moment’ within the formation of feminist art discourses was *La Chambre nuptiale*. Unlike *Artfemme '75*, it was a single work, conceived and organized by Francine Larivée.²³ While it was certainly not the first feminist work produced in the

²³ Conceived in 1974 and produced in 1975-1976, this work was exhibited four times. The sites were the Complex Desjardins and Carrefour Laval in 1976, the “Québec : art et société” pavilion at *Man and His*

province, *La Chambre nuptiale* came to stand for feminist art in Quebec in the 1970's. Therefore to understand the emergence of feminist art, and the intertextual and interdiscursive processes through which it was formed, it is necessary to understand the ways that this work drew on and articulated together both feminism and art.

La Chambre nuptiale was a large 'pavilion' composed of a long narrow corridor or labyrinth, "Le Corridor des Angoisses," which encircled and opened up into the central chambre. Over the entrance to the corridor was the head of a baby emerging from its mother. This was the first of seventy-three life-sized figures lining the corridor that depicted various scenes from infancy to adulthood. Dimly lit, viewers could hear electronic music and other sounds along the corridor, ending with the wedding march just before the opening to the central chambre.

The central chamber or "Chapelle ardente" represented the entrance to adulthood and married life. It contained three 'altars' dedicated to the man, the woman and the couple, and was structured around various references to popular culture, especially American movies, religious images and gender roles. In the centre of this space a large baldachin contained two figures mechanically making love and, below, the figure of a bride laid out on her deathbed. At the end of each visit a mechanical device lifted an altar and the baldachin moved to one side so that a film addressing the theme of the work could be screened.²⁴

World in 1977, and again as part of *Art et féminisme* in 1982.

²⁴ This summary has been informed in part by the description and images in *Déclics. Art et société. Le Québec des années 1960 et 1970 (Déclics... 140-145)*.

The intended reading for *La Chambre nuptiale* was outlined in a statement accompanying the exhibition. This text was quoted often in the various reviews of the exhibition, thus creating a privileged reading and an apparent consensus within the popular media regarding its meaning. In it Larivée stated:

La Chambre dénonce nos gestes faux, infantiles, malhabiles et résignés. Elle reflète bêtement le miroir du vide quotidien entre le “pipi room,” la cuisine, le métro, la “job,” les rôles d’hommes, de femmes, d’enfants, la violence du silence, le pouvoir, l’entendu du compromis des rapports de classe, la torpeur du sexe et la pauvreté des sentiments, l’absence d’amour et surtout le manque total d’autonomie.

Blanche et or, la Chambre Nuptiale, cirque cynique, cul-de-sac de l’amour mort-né, dans le satin coussiné, capitonnée, ennuyeusement bourgeois, écrin de pièges, de jeux institués, désuets, stupidement perpétués, cousus de fil d’or, critique le vécu de couple contemporain marié ou pas. Elle s’insurge et s’impose comme un réveil-matin à chaque endormi qui la visite et secoue les tympan engourdis par les battements de l’angoisse quotidienne....

La première énergie qui a déterminé une telle réalisation fut la volonté de dénoncer les coulisses des vices cachés de la vie du couple, la seconde fut de décoder les jeux de scène du théâtre des sous-réalités sociales soumises aux valeurs du plus fort et la troisième, d’articuler des collaborations qui permettent l’apprentissage de l’autonomie par les individus au sein de la collectivité (Larivée file, UQAM).²⁵

To understand the meaning of this work, or, to be more specific, how a given set of meanings were articulated to a particular visual practice, one must begin by looking at the various visual and institutional practices that the work drew on in the production of its own specific address. For if *La Chambre nuptiale* has come to ‘represent’ feminist art in Quebec, it was certainly not the first work of its kind. The group Mauve had presented a number of performances, installations and other works which were read as feminist,

²⁵ This text, dated 1977, was often quoted. However, other versions must have existed before then as earlier reviews of *La Chambre nuptiale* stated similar ideas. (Larivée file).

including several works as part of the exhibition *Montréal plus ou moins ?* in 1972.²⁶

There were also several previous 'environment-events', for example *Vive la rue Saint-Denis* at the École Jean-Jacques-Olier (March 1971), *Quebec Scenic Tour* at the Écuries d'Youville (July 1971), and the *Salon Apollo Variétés* at UQAM (August 1971) which were all produced by students at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM).

Moreover, an environment-labyrinth was produced by the Groupe Point Zéro for the exhibition *Montréal plus ou moins?* in 1972, which, interestingly, Larivée helped work on.

To understand the intertextual and interdiscursive formation of *La Chambre nuptiale*, the way that it articulated together feminism and art, I will begin by looking at the first of these 'environment-events', *Vive la rue Saint-Denis*, and more largely at contemporary art in Quebec in the 1960's and 1970's. *Vive la rue...* was made under the direction of Yves Robillard. Like *La Chambre nuptiale*, it was made to be shown outside the museum and gallery system, in this case a school gymnasium just off Saint-Denis street in Montreal. It consisted of three sections. The first presented slides and films documenting the store fronts and publicity along the street. The second consisted of a

²⁶ The members of Mauve were Catherine Boisvert, Ghislaine Boyer, Céline Isabelle, Claudette Isabel, Thérèse Isabelle, Lise Landry and Lucie Ménard. (*Montréal plus ou moins ?*, 2). Their work for *Montréal plus ou moins ?*, *La Femme en ville*, included an 'environment' in the window of Dupuis Frères and performances in shopping malls and on the steps of the Museum of Fine Arts. According to one review, the group started in September 1971 "autour d'un manifeste et d'un geste collectif de dénonciation de l'image de la femme dans notre société." The performances for *Montréal...* "puise dans les expériences vécues quotidiennement par les femmes, telles les jeux d'enfants, le miroir, les mannequins, les secrétaires, la prostituée, la mariée, la ménagère et les 'miss' ("Femme-objet," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 15 July 1972, 3)." Unfortunately I have found very few descriptions to their work, and even less discussion of it. The differences in how their and Larivée's work have entered into discourses on art (or not) perhaps demonstrates my argument that the meaning of a work is not only determined by the work itself, but also by the ways that it is presented and positioned in discourses on art through exhibitions and texts.

large labyrinth which viewers had to work their way through, discovering the architecture of the street in the process. In the third section, people were invited to view a film on life along the street. In the three sections sound and light were used to create a total environment.²⁷ Robillard describes the project in these terms:

Le labyrinthe est un nouveau type d'animation culturelle. C'est l'idée de mettre au profit du quotidien immédiate, et non pas de la publicité pour les pays étrangers, des jeux qui ont servi et que les gens aiment.... Dans notre labyrinthe, il faudra trouver la sortie: là se fera l'éducation. Car, par le jeu, tu peux faire passer toutes sortes de messages. Le projet de la rue Saint-Denis a toujours été un projet d'animation dans le sens qu'un groupe sensibilisé à l'environnement, à ses problèmes aide les autres à le devenir ("L'énigme de la rue Saint-Denis," Normand Thériault, *La Presse* (Montreal), 27 February 1971, D 14).

The key words within this description of *Vive la rue Saint-Denis* are 'play', 'cultural animation' and 'education'. For, while the labyrinth in *Vive la rue...* did not visually resemble the corridor-labyrinth in *La Chambre nuptiale*, it is obvious that the concept of a labyrinth was linked to a larger set of assumptions which invested it with meaning. These assumptions included ideas about the role of art and, therefore also, the role of the artist, and constituted what Robillard referred to in the same article as "a new way of thinking about art."

To understand the way that the terms 'play', 'cultural animation' and 'education' were articulated to the concept of a labyrinth, it is useful to briefly look at the work of the group Fusion des arts, of which Yves Robillard was a member. This group was initially

²⁷ Summarized from *Réseau, Bulletin d'information de l'Université du Québec* 2, no. 13 (3-16 March 1971), 1. According to the reviews of *Vive la rue...*, the idea was initially conceived by Charles Daudelin in 1968 when both he and Robillard were members of Fusion des Arts. It was then taken up and developed by Robillard and Nardo Castillo ("L'énigme de la rue Saint-Denis," Normand Thériault, *La Presse* (Montreal), 27 February 1971, D 14).

formed with the aim of creating a new kind of art and a new role for the artist in society.²⁸ In this, they deliberately took a position in opposition to the modernist view of art inherited from the American Clement Greenberg which made the purity and autonomy of each medium the aim of art, thus separating each medium from all others and from the larger social context. Instead, the members of Fusion des arts brought together people from different disciplines to produce work that integrated or ‘fused’ the different media and disciplines together and that was, at the same time, integrated into the larger social context.

Initially, architecture and urban design were their models for this ‘total’ art. However, after their first attempt to put their ideals into practice in the work *Synthèse des arts* for the Canadian pavilion at Expo 67, Fusion des arts reorganized and re-oriented itself towards an understanding of the artist as “un être qui avait une position morale à affirmer (*Québec Underground...* Tome 2 1973, 181).” From then on the group was concerned with the ‘efficiency’ of art, in other words how many people it could communicate its message to and the best means of doing this, as well as with the kind of message that they wanted to defend. This change marked their movement to the political left, supporting social democratic and nationalist positions in their work. This can be seen in their own description of the trajectory of their work.

Prenez notre cas : on a commencé par être des plasticiens, puis petit à petit, on s’est intéressé à la société, on s’est rendu compte que c’est une attitude morale, une façon d’être, et finalement petit à petit, on en arrive à un problème politique.

²⁸ Fusion des arts began in 1964 and lasted only five years. The founding members were Richard Lacroix (printmaker), Henry Saxe (painter), François Soucy (sculptor), François Rousseau (architect), and Yves Robillard (art historian) (Couture 1997, 387).

À la base, il faut travailler avec les gens (Lacroix, Robillard, and Montpetit 1969, 44).

It is here, in their concern with a message and with the efficiency with which it could be communicated, that a given set of visual and structural strategies could be articulated to the concepts of ‘play’, ‘cultural animation’ and ‘education.’ In effect, it was assumed that by physically involving the spectator, in making them interact with the work in a way that involved all their senses rather than looking at it from a distance, it would be possible to engage them with the ideas presented in the work and thus to ‘educate’ them. Therefore, the means that were used – the creation of an environment that included lights and sound as well as visuals, structuring the work in the form of a labyrinth so that viewing the work became a kind of game, and the use of a site outside the usual gallery and museum system – were invested with the meaning of democracy and social activism. Here, the role of art is to communicate a political or moral idea, and the role of the artist is that of social animator.

This understanding of the meaning and function of a labyrinth also structured the other ‘environment-events’ already mentioned. The notion of a labyrinth, and the functional and political role that was ascribed to it, were therefore available for Larivée to borrow and reformulate to her own ends for *La Chambre nuptiale*. They also informed Larivée’s own presentation of the work:

L’architecture et l’aménagement étaient conçus en fonction de la didactique et de son efficacité.... [L]e visiteur d’un pavillon a à agir, à faire sensiblement, sensoriellement, intellectuellement des choix. Il a son rythme de marche, ses temps d’arrêt. Le nombre de sensations physiques éprouvées par la vision d’éléments fixes ou mobiles de volumes ou d’espaces qu’il habite lui font vivre une expérience complète qui lui permet d’être à la fois acteur et spectateur

(Larivée file, UQAM).

This structural and conceptual link with *Vive la rue Saint-Denis* is not the only one that *La Chambre nuptiale* drew on. The political aspects of the work of Fusion des arts also underlay much of Quebec Pop art, especially what became known as ti-pop. Pop art in Quebec, as elsewhere, was associated with a return to representation in some form. However, it was also linked to an explicitly urban culture of leisure and consumption, a culture marked by new technologies and mass media. Pop art took the form of parody and play, often using strategies of imitation and appropriation. Serge Lemoyne's environments and events incorporating everyday objects and a playful attitude, the installation by Gilles Boisvert that included a doctored television and news images from magazines, and the prints by Pierre Ayot that included images, letters and objects from everyday life have all been associated with Pop art.²⁹

Ti-pop was initially associated with the use of joul within literary works and with a reflection on what an authentic Quebec culture would be by the writers of the journal *Parti Pris* (Couture 1997, 196). It represented a critical attitude towards Quebec's history and culture which could be seen in visual as well as literary works of the 1960's and 1970's. The unofficial emblem of this movement was a photograph of the ex-premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis, with a halo. This image embodied the strategies of appropriation and juxtaposition and the derisive attitude, especially towards traditional religious and political values, that marked ti-pop. Traditional Quebec culture, with its

²⁹ See Serge Allaire's essay in *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante*, Tome II (Couture 1997).

religious and political conservatism, was seen as kitsch, but only seen as such because it could no longer be taken seriously.

Ti-pop was therefore a form of parody or distancing that both acknowledged and disdained Quebec's traditional culture. It functioned as a way of representing a collective identity and history, and as a way distancing oneself from them at the same time, placing the writers or artists as well as their readers and viewers on the side of Quebec's modernity. Therefore ti-pop, rather than being a simple borrowing of American Pop art, was intimately tied to the project of modernity in Quebec represented by the Quiet Revolution. As Serge Allaire argues:

Il est pertinent, pour situer l'avènement du pop au Québec, de signaler que les premières œuvres de Serge Lemoyne intégrant des artefacts de la culture populaire traditionnelle coïncident avec la naissance de la revue *Parti pris* dont un des leitmotivs est « la création de l'homme québécois ». Ainsi une définition du pop au Québec doit-elle prendre en compte non seulement les effets de la culture de masse, les valeurs de l'automatisme, mais également les éléments du projet politique de la société québécoise et de la culture populaire traditionnelle. Le pop au Québec est aussi sur un mode ludique et parodique l'expression d'une réflexion de l'identité culturelle québécoise (Couture 1997, 217).

The inside of "La Chapelle ardente" is also structured by the attitudes and strategies found in ti-pop. The 'chapel' itself imitated the cruciform structure of Christian architecture while the walls were covered with images taken from religious and popular culture, especially American films, which defined and represented masculine and feminine roles. For example, the altar to the couple was divided into three sections, the upper of which depicted movie love scenes with halos added to the images of embracing couples. The middle section depicted a kissing couple in the clouds, while on either side there were images of a man and a woman behind bars and household consumer objects.

On the lowest level large pictures of a man and a woman on their knees faced the ‘altar’ proper: an image of the family. Surrounding the altar, and filling the space between the different altars, were putti.

It can be seen therefore that *La Chambre nuptiale* was not an isolated work. Like *Artfemme*, it drew on and articulated into its own specific address a set of practices, in this case visual and conceptual rather than curatorial, that already existed through other works. I have outlined two of these, the notions of participation and play that were harnessed to the idea of the artist as social animator, and the use of appropriation and juxtaposition harnessed to an aesthetic of parody to create a critical distance from the original. Others could be discussed, for example the concept of a pavilion, borrowed from Expo 67.³⁰ The point here is not to enumerate all the references in the work (an impossible task in any case). It is to show how, through its intertextual formation or the ways that it drew on and reformulated existing visual and conceptual practices, *La Chambre nuptiale* was located in, and drew on, a larger set of visual and discursive practices that developed through the 1960's and 1970's within the visual arts in Quebec. These included, among others, the political and visual practices of Fusion des arts and similar groups, Pop art, and its Quebec variant ti-pop.³¹ Furthermore, these visual and

³⁰ Larivée herself said that *La Chambre nuptiale* was modeled on the pavilions at Expo 67 (Larivée file, UQAM). This again ties this work to that of Fusion des arts, for whom Expo was a model for social animation, and demonstrates the process of intertextuality. In other words, the work's visual and conceptual precedents cannot be separated out, but rather form a network of interlinked references that could be drawn on and reformulated in the structuring of any new work.

³¹ A number of publications have noted this connection between *La Chambre nuptiale* and ti-pop and the more politicized art of the 1970's. See especially the catalogues *Art société 1975-1980* and *Déclics. Art et société. Le Québec des années 1960 et 1970*. Francine Larivée herself argues that there is no direct connection between ti-pop and *La Chambre nuptiale*, citing rather the work of Allan Kaprow, especially his

discursive practices were articulated to definitions of Quebec's identity and modernity, and were therefore located within the larger discursive context of nationalism within Quebec.

What was newly articulated to these visual and conceptual practices in *La Chambre nuptiale* was the politics of feminism and the specific political issues (or the issues that feminism had newly politicized) that feminism addressed. In this case, the work examined the ideal and the reality of marriage as an institution, gender roles and their effects within marriage, and the relation of both to economic and political power relations. As Larivée stated in another document accompanying the work:

La société actuelle contrôle les individus à travers les rapports de couple légalisés sur qui elle base son fonctionnement social, économique et politique.

L'institution du mariage agit comme endosseur à long terme de la rentabilité des individus au sein de la collectivité. Pattern rassurant répété à l'infini, on s'y réfère pour se confondre à la masse et s'adapter. L'intimité atteinte, on renonce facilement à l'intégrité de l'être pour s'abandonner à des comportements stéréotypes. On commence par s'engourdir puis on s'aliène (Larivée file, UQAM).

According to Larivée, *La Chambre nuptiale* had its origins in a film by Mireille Dansereau, *J'me marie, j'me marie pas*, in which she was one of the four women interviewed. This was part of a larger series, *En tant que femmes*, produced by the Challenge for Change / Société Nouvelle program of the National Film Board and which examined the daily lives of women (Clio Collective 1987, 366). The women interviewed in *J'me marie...* each represented a different style of family and each spoke of their needs, hopes and visions of life in a couple. The organizers had set up an open phone line and

ideas regarding the function of art.

published a questionnaire in newspapers in order to get the public's response to each film. According to Larivée, following *J'me marie...* they received more than 400 phone calls and thousands of letters encouraging them to continue. It was this response that prompted Larivée to examine the marriage relation in more depth (Ginette Auger, "Le scandale de la chambre nuptiale," *Le Lundi*, 1 October 1977, 31).

Many of the themes that were later taken up in *La Chambre nuptiale* can be found in the interviews in *J'me marie...* These include the bankruptcy of traditional marriage and the lack of any other models for living in a couple relationship, along with the oppressiveness of gender roles for both men and women which do not encourage or allow for the development and self-fulfilment of the individual, especially for women. More important though is the way the artwork interrogated private and affective life, questioning assumptions about gender roles within relationships, and thus making private life a topic for discussion and something that can be changed, that links it to the film. Through this, both works drew on, and were located in, the political project of feminism.

La Chambre nuptiale can also be seen to be located within feminism, as well as left nationalist art practices, in the way that it was organized. This work was conceived and organized by Francine Larivée, but it was also a collective project. In 1975 Larivée founded the Groupe de recherche et d'action sociale par l'art et les média de communication, GRASAM, to work collectively to produce the work.³² In the year and a

³² The members of GRASAM were Francine Larivée, Claude Gosselin and Jacqueline Rousseau. The aim was to "grouper en association les personnes intéressées à la recherche en sociologie et à l'action sociale par l'art et les médias de communication, et promouvoir leurs connaissances dans la pratique de cette science (*Déclics...* 1999, 141-142)."

half that it took to make the work about 75 other people were also involved.³³ In the 1970's working collectively was seen as a female, and a feminist, practice (the two terms not yet being clearly distinguished). The decade saw the founding of many endeavors by groups of women who referred to their project as a collective. Powerhouse Gallery was an example of this. Furthermore, like *La Chambre nuptiale*, Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* was also produced by a large number of people in a process that was described as collective. Working collaboratively in formally or informally organized groups was also undertaken by men in groups like Fusion des arts, Le Nouvel Âge and Le Zirmate. In this case working collectively was seen as linked to a left political position and, through that, to nationalism. The notion of collectivity therefore structured a number of different organizations and ways of working. It also linked *La Chambre nuptiale* to prevailing art practices and to feminist and nationalist discourses. It was, in this sense, a place where these different political and visual practices came together, forming each other.

It is hard to separate out the reading of *La Chambre nuptiale* from that of the critical reception of the work because almost all the articles that were published in newspapers quoted the press release written by Larivée. The artist therefore took tight control over the meanings that the work produced by providing the press with privileged readings. Where newspapers diverged from this was in their interest in the reception of the work by members of the 'general public', stopping people to interview them as they

³³ In total the *La Chambre nuptiale* took about 45,000 hours of work and cost \$132,000.

left the pavilion. This interest in what the general public thought of the work and the views on marriage that it presented doubled and enacted the stated aim of the work to reach as many people as possible, and to function as a form of ‘social animation’.

However, there was another way in which the critical reception of *La Chambre nuptiale* further positioned the work, this was rather through silence. Jocelyn Aubin, in her thesis, remarks on the visible lack of discussion of *La Chambre nuptiale* in the art press (Aubin 1994, 74). With the exception of a short review in *Vie des arts* by Yves Robillard (Robillard 1977-1978), no art magazine covered this work, in contrast to the large number of articles in the popular press. It was as if the success of the work as a form of social animation made it unacceptable within the domain of art. Certainly, the silence imposed on the work by art magazines demonstrates the way that the meaning of a work is in part produced through the ways that it is presented and positioned in texts, whether they are in the form of a catalogue or reviews in magazines and newspapers. It further demonstrates that this is also an act of policing, defining what is, and in this case what was not, acceptable within a certain domain. Given that the visual and conceptual precedents that *La Chambre nuptiale* drew on came from recent art practices within Quebec, this may at first seem odd. However, there were at the same time other kinds of work and discursive positions being produced in art in Quebec, work that was represented by the exhibition *Québec 75*, which were at that moment redefining the acceptable in art.³⁴

³⁴ I will discuss *Québec 75* below in relation to the larger discursive context in which feminist art came into existence as a discourse in Quebec. Suffice it to say at this point that this exclusion of *La Chambre nuptiale* from discussion by art magazines demonstrates that knowledge, or what is ‘in the true’, is

In summary then, it can be seen that the enunciative strategies of *La Chambre nuptiale* articulated together discursive and non-discursive practices drawn from both the visual arts and feminism. What was produced at that junction was a representation of ‘feminist art’.

To understand the specific way that feminist art was defined through this work, and the form it took, one must look at the definitions of art and feminism that it drew on in its intertextual production. For *La Chambre nuptiale*, this was first of all the concept of a labyrinth and the meanings that were ascribed to it – a ‘total’ environment that would actively engage the viewer physically and thus intellectually. It also included the parodic and critical appropriation of elements from popular culture. These in turn were located in and made sense in relation to a larger set of visual and conceptual practices that developed in Quebec through the 1960's and 1970's – the notions of democracy, participation and education that could be found in the work of the group Fusion des arts among others, as well as the representational practices and the playful and critical attitudes of Pop art and ti-pop. These representational and critical aspects of art made it possible for feminist concerns – the critique of gender roles combined with the political project of changing them – to be mapped onto the discursive and non-discursive practices

never separate from power. The re-mapping of the acceptable and the unacceptable in art in the mid-1970's was a larger process which affected more than just one work. However, this did not mean the ‘end’ of *La Chambre nuptiale*, or of its discursive work. *La Chambre nuptiale* was taken up again within the exhibition *Art et féminisme* in 1982, where it was firmly placed within the museum and within feminist art. It has also been located in the narrative of Quebec art through more recent exhibitions and publications, for example *Art société 1975-1980* (1981) and *Déclics. Art et société. Le Québec des années 1960 et 1970* (1999). These retrospective analyses of art in the 1960's and 1970's have been produced by art history and public museums in their production of ‘Quebec art’ as an object of study.

of the visual arts. Feminism was therefore ‘traced’ onto art practices such that feminist art took on the form as well as the conceptual and critical aspects of the then current art practices. These art practices in turn made the work readable, and validated it, in relation to the larger discursive and non-discursive practices of art.³⁵

It can be seen therefore that, through the various enunciative strategies that they drew on and re-formulated, the exhibitions *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale* produced representations of ‘women’s art’ and ‘feminist art’. Through the visual codes and discourses that the artworks drew on in their own specific address, through the institutional practices that the exhibitions mobilized, and through the critical reception that they were given, these exhibitions were located in and effectively marked out the discursive terrain of feminist art within Quebec. That terrain was, however, not homogeneous.

The Discursive and Interdiscursive Formation of Feminist Art

It would be tempting to line up *Artfemme* with Anglophone Quebec and *La Chambre nuptiale* with the Francophone side. However, this would not simply be a misrepresentation of the facts (rendering invisible the Francophones who took part in *Artfemme*, for example), but it is also a misunderstanding of the historical processes

³⁵ It should be noted that Robillard, a member of Fusion des arts, always argued for the importance of *La Chambre nuptiale* as an exemplary instance of art in Quebec, going so far as to publically remonstrate the jury of the *Première Biennale des Artistes du Québec* at the Saidye Bronfman Centre for not having included a portion of the work (“Du courage : est-ce trop demander à un jury...?”, *Le Jour* (Montreal), 18 March 1977, 36).

through which feminist art came into being in Quebec and, more largely, of the process of articulation itself. Instead, it is important to understand the larger discursive context in which these exhibitions were formulated and which made them 'make sense'.³⁶

To sketch out this larger discursive context within which feminist art came into being and of which it was a part, I will look at feminism, nationalism and the visual arts in Quebec in the 1970's, drawing out the complex relations between them, which included both points of opposition and of congruency. Through this I will trace a number of assumptions which traversed and informed these different domains.

Liberal feminism: the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada

One of the documents marking the early 1970's, and representing one aspect of the discourse of feminism, was the publication of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, also known as the Bird Report.³⁷ Set up in 1967 under the Pearson Liberal Government and depositing its report in September of 1970, the aim of the Bird

³⁶ This is not to say that the *idea* of Anglophone/Francophone, stated as a binary opposite, did not exist or was not relevant. Like other ideas, such as 'national/international', it was produced through both discursive and non-discursive practices, and enlisted for different aims to diverse effects. However, looking at the larger discursive context makes it obvious that no artwork, exhibition or institution can simply be lined up on one side or the other of its divide.

³⁷ Feminism in Quebec, as elsewhere, took on new life in the mid-1960's. With the increased availability of education and the number of women working, along with the rising expectations that these entailed, many women nevertheless found that equality was not the reality within which they worked. During the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, the contradictions between the rhetoric of liberalization and the new employment opportunities that were opening up on one hand, and the reality of women's exclusion from these new opportunities, spurred the organization of women's groups (Clio Collective 1987, 275). In 1965 the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ) was initiated during a conference celebrating the 25th anniversary of the enfranchisement of women in Quebec. In 1966 the Association Féminine pour l'Éducation et l'Action Sociale (AFEAS) also formed from the merging of two previous groups, the Union Catholique des Femmes Rurales and the Cercles d'Économie Domestique. Both organizations presented briefs to the Bird Commission. The FFQ, along with other groups, pressured the Quebec government to set up the Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF), which it did in 1973.

Commission was “to inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society ..., particularly with reference to federal statutes, regulations and policies that concern or affect the rights and activities of women (*Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* 1970, vii).” While most of the stated aims referred to responsibilities that fell under federal jurisdiction, the final objective, “and such other matters in relation to the status of women in Canada as may appear to the Commissioners to be relevant,” opened the door to a wide range of concerns to be addressed by the commission.

The report produced by the commission borrows its assumptions first of all from the language of rights. It explicitly refers to the United Nations’ 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Canada was a signatory, using this as a founding principle of the commission’s work and as a barometer against which to measure whether women “really do have these positive rights and freedoms in principle and in practice (*Report of the Royal Commission... 1970, xi*).”

Underlying and justifying the concepts of human rights within the commission’s report and in many of the articles about it was the concept of humanism. Their arguments for change were based on the notion that women, like men, are first of all human beings and must be seen as such (389). For example, stereotypes, as they are presented and taught in school textbooks, stunt “women’s creative and intellectual potential” and “fail to create a sense of community between men and women as fellow human beings (175).” From this they argue that changes that bring about sexual equality in all aspects of society

are seen as not only good for individual women, but also for men and for all of Canadian society (159).

Secondly, it was assumed that equality is a social value that must be attained for justice or “the just society” to exist.³⁸ Equality was understood in numerical terms (were there an equal number of women and men in government, the senate, sitting as judges, and so on) and in terms of equality of opportunity (did women have equal access to educational, economic, and political opportunities, without which equality of rights would not have much significance (xi)), and equality of responsibility (including for children (xii)). One assumption of the Bird Commission, though not one that was overtly stated, was that equality meant in comparison with men, that is that men’s status was to be the standard by which women’s status must be measured and the goal to which changes were to be directed (Marchak 1972). Another assumption, also implicit, was the privileging of the individual and individual rights, an assumption that has its origins in classical liberal theory where individual liberty and abstract equality are the measure of justice (Razack 1991).

It followed from these assumptions that any special status for women was to be rejected. Rather, with the exception of issues related to pregnancy and childbirth (xii), they argued for the “common status of women and men rather than a separate status for each sex (xi).” This seems to have been a widely accepted principle used to argue for legal and other changes both in the report itself and in the media coverage and support for

³⁸ “The just society” was quoted from a famous statement by the then Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau (Françoise Lavigne, “Equal representation at political conventions,” *Gazette* (Montreal), 14 January 1970, 6).

the commission. To achieve this end, and to change centuries of discrimination, the Commission further argued that special means must be used to change these long standing attitudes and practices. Special treatment was seen as a temporary measure. When the ends are achieved the means would be no longer necessary (xii, 390). For others, however, even the temporary measures giving preference to women, for example in appointments to the Senate, were to be rejected.³⁹ For them, equality was to be established strictly on the basis of equality of ability.

Il n'y a qu'une chose qui compte: c'est la compétence. A compétences égales, droits et responsabilités égaux. C'est une marque d'infériorité que de réclamer un traitement de faveur. On ne corrige pas une injustice en en créant d'autres (Thérèse Casgrain, quoted by Solange Chalvin and Renée Rowan, "Le rapport sur la situation de la femme serait-il démodé avant d'être né?," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 9 December 1970, 11).

It can be seen in this discussion not only that special measures to put an end to discrimination against women was an issue for debate within what could be called the liberal political position,⁴⁰ but also that it parallels the debates around *Artfemme '75* regarding the necessity and consequences of women-only exhibition. Even Françoise Sullivan, who herself supported the notion of a feminine specificity in art, initially opposed the idea of an exhibition of work by women.⁴¹ This may explain why, as many

³⁹ This question of special measures, even on a temporary basis, to equalize the status of women was hotly contested by many, and prompted one commissioner, John Humphrey, to write a minority report, which was widely commented on in the press.

⁴⁰ See Razack (1991) on the distinction between classical liberal thought, which focused on individual rights, and more recent attempts to take account of discrimination against groups.

⁴¹ Gilles Toupin quotes Sullivan as saying: "En premier lieu, dit-elle, l'idée d'une exposition de femmes ne me plaisait pas. Dans le contexte actuel, ça a pris une tournure militante. La femme a tellement été maltraitée ici sur ce point de vue. ("Les amazones et le mâlisme artistique," *La Presse* (Montreal), 12 April 1975, D 18)."

reviewers noted, few of Quebec's well-known women artists submitted work to the exhibition. More importantly for an understanding of the formation of feminist art, is the way that the question of gender difference was being formulated both within and outside the domain of the visual arts through these kinds of debates.

The Bird Report emphasized the commonality of men and women and based its arguments on the concept of individual rights and responsibilities. The status of women in the arts was therefore discussed in terms of equal opportunities to produce and present work, as well as to work as performers and administrators in the arts. Furthermore, equal opportunity was to be measured numerically by the number of women in each area of professional activity. While women's traditional responsibilities for child care were seen to work against the possibility for women to achieve "prominence as creative artists (152)," the solution proposed is for women to "give up other duties and devote themselves more fully to art (152)." This individual solution to the problems of production and recognition for women working in the arts reflects the individualism that underlies the assumptions of the Bird Commission and its report. It probably also reflects popular attitudes about the arts and artists, that art is produced by (usually great) individuals who create in isolation. Without a discussion of artistic production itself, the idea of sexual difference on the level of production could not be addressed and the possibility of a specifically feminist, or for that matter 'feminine', art practice was occluded.

This lack of consideration of the possibility of difference, on the levels of both production and interpretation, is odd given that the study *Women in the Arts in Canada* by

Sandra Gwyn, which was prepared for the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada and published under its auspices, bases its arguments on the idea that men and women are different and produce different kinds of work. To use their quote by Joyce Wieland:

There are two kinds of art ... man art and woman art. They are two different kinds of people, so the art comes out differently (Gwyn 1971, 25).

This statement parallels that by Françoise Sullivan quoted above where she says “il est évident que les schèmes de références de la créativité féminine sont différents de ceux de l’homme (Gilles Toupin, “Les amazones et le mâlisme artistique,” *La Presse* (Montreal), 12 April 1975, D 18).” Apparently *Women in the Arts in Canada* was the only report to take this position (Marchak 1972).⁴² Not only the report itself, but also the eleven additional commissioned studies and most of the articles reporting on and reacting to the report supported its assumption that women and men are essentially the same and that equality of opportunity must be extended to women both for the self-fulfilment of women themselves and for the good of the larger society. Arguments on the basis of gender difference, within the Bird Report and within liberal humanist political philosophy and the domain of government action that it represented, was definitely a minority position.

⁴² In her analysis of the Report, sociologist Patricia Marchak remarked that:

Gwyn’s review of essays on *Women in the Arts in Canada* is the only one of the commissioned studies openly to embrace the concept of equivalence.... This, quite unlike the factual comparisons of salaries in the three other occupational studies, is a literary review, and one which seeks out and asserts the special value of specifically feminine contributions. Here the argument for equality rests not on the assumption that the sexes are indistinguishable, but on the assertion that their respective contributions deserve equal recognition. Gwyn, in a restrained manner, points out that at present women’s opportunities to develop their special talents in the arts, and the rewards for their work, are not equal to those of men (Marchak 1972, 76).

From this reading of the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* and the many articles about it, it can be seen that feminism as defined by the government and by much of the popular press was linked to and argued for on the basis of a linked set of ideas about human beings, human rights, equality of persons and equality of opportunity. These assumptions about human rights and equality were mobilized in articles in both English Canada and in Quebec. Within Quebec, however, there was another set of arguments in support of the proposals of the Bird Commission and of equality for women in general. These linked the position of women in relation to that of men to the situation of Francophones in comparison to other groups or to that of Quebec in relation to Canada. It was, like similar arguments that equated prejudice towards women with that towards Blacks in the United States, a strategy that mobilizes one set of established assumptions to support another.

Ce changement [d'attitude envers le terme féministe] s'est opéré, semble-t-il, parce que les femmes du Québec ont compris rapidement que leurs problèmes étaient les mêmes que ceux des Canadiens français, nous dit Mme Carisse. Elles se situent encore plus bas que les travailleurs canadiens-français dans les structures économiques. Les femmes qui travaillent au Québec le font 4 fois sur 5 parce qu'elles y sont obligées pour renflouer le budget familial. Si le Canadien français à compétence égale gagne moins que plusieurs immigrants italiens, nous dit la sociologue, la femme à compétence égale gagne la moitié de ce que l'homme reçoit, sauf dans certaines professions organisées sur le plan syndical, comme l'enseignement (Colette Carisse, quoted by Solange Chalvin, "Une sociologue québécoise fait le point sur le nouveau féminisme," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 12 September 1970, 17).

Dans ce mariage entre Canadiens anglais et Canadiens français, il semble que le Canada français ait trop longtemps accepté de jouer le rôle de la femme soumise. Il est grand temps que cet état des peuples comme l'égalité des sexes soit reconnue une fois pour toutes ("Les relations Québec-Canada : un mariage de raison pour Thérèse Casgrain," *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 27 January 1970, 11).

Through this a similarity or link was established between the demands of women and the demands of Quebec, each being used in support of the other, producing at the same time a link between feminism and nationalism in liberal arguments within Quebec. This link between feminism, nationalism and liberal notions of equality was further taken up and elaborated by Quebec. In 1973 the Liberal government of Robert Bourassa set up the Conseil du Statut de la Femme (CSF), the same year as the federal government set up the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

The importance of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was that it made the status of women, and the conditions that affected their position in society, an issue for public discussion and debate (Clio Collective 1987, 341). Furthermore, it did this within a liberal paradigm of equal rights. In doing so it deployed arguments that had a large amount of acceptability to the general public. It can be seen therefore that the first definitions of feminism in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and the ones that had the widest acceptability, were modeled on liberal human rights discourse. This discourse about equality and rights on one hand, and discrimination against women on the other, was part of the discursive context within which *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale* were produced and understood. However it also set limits on how art by women could be understood. By occluding difference and relegating art production to the level of individual expression and personal responsibility, the possibility of a female specificity in art or of collective action by women to end discrimination against them, was also occluded.

However, these two exhibitions were more directly linked to the Bird

Commission. As a result of the commission a number of ongoing programs were set up, including the Status of Women office in the Privy Council Office in Ottawa. One of its mandates was to set up an International Women's Year Secretariat to begin preparations for International Women's Year in 1975. The aim of this, according to Martha Hynna who was the Coordinator of the Status of Women Office, was to address the problem of attitudes about women that had been discussed in the Bird Report (Hynna 1974, 15). International Women's Year was therefore to be a means through which the government would tackle discriminatory attitudes, much discussed in the Bird Report but outside of direct legislative control. Among other things, money was made available for community projects which was used to help fund both *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale*. Both were therefore formulated within a discursive context that made equality and women's rights the subject of discussion and debate, and, at the same time, they were supported by and incorporated within a logic of governance that produced equality, women's issues and social attitudes as within the domain of government action.

Revolutionary feminism: the Front de libération des femmes and the Centre des femmes

There was, at the same time that the Royal Commission on the status of Women was writing and finally publishing its report, the development of another form of feminism within Quebec, revolutionary feminism.⁴³ Its development illustrates again

⁴³ In the fall 1969 a number of Anglophone women who were aware of the new women's liberation movement in the United States approached Francophone women to discuss the idea of forming a women's liberation movement in Montreal. It was during one of these meetings that the idea of protesting against the anti-demonstration law of the Drapeau-Saulnier administration in Montreal was first raised. The demonstration, organized in forty-eight hours under the name of "Front commun des Québécoises" and taking place on November 29th, brought together about 200 women, mostly those active in unions but also

how feminism itself is produced and located within and against other discursive and non-discursive practices. For if the feminism of the Bird Report was based on the liberal notion of human rights, with the claim to equal rights being premised on the notion that women, like men, are human beings, revolutionary feminism came out of that part of the independence movement that was influenced by socialist and Marxist theories. It was embodied by the Front de libération des femmes du Québec (FLF) (1969-1971) and the Centre des femmes (1972-1975), as well as the publication *Manifeste des femmes québécoises* (1971).⁴⁴

The close relation between revolutionary feminism and the left-nationalist⁴⁵ movements in Quebec is evident both in their forms of organization and the kinds of analyses that they produced. The links between them, however, were often personal as well as political. Most of the members of the FLF came from groups such as the

students and housewives. Demonstrating at night by chaining themselves together, 165 of them were arrested. According to the narratives of the FLF, this event sparked the formation of the Front de libération des femmes du Québec and the beginning of revolutionary feminism. While the FLF only lasted to the end of 1971, at the beginning of 1972 a new group, the Centre des femmes, was founded by two ex-members of the FLF plus two women who had been active in the Comité ouvrier de Saint-Henri (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 23). It carried on the work of the FLF and much of its political rhetoric. It too ceased to exist in 1975.

⁴⁴ The *Manifeste des femmes québécoises* was written by two women who had close connections with the FLF, although they were not members of the group. It was written soon after the October 1970 manifesto of the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), to which it was in part a reaction, and initially circulated in photocopied form before being published by Éditions L'Étincelle.

⁴⁵ I am using the words 'left-nationalism' and 'left-nationalist' to refer to a range of political positions throughout the 1960's and 1970's that saw Quebec as a distinct nation, that used socialist and/or Marxist theories to analyze political relations both within Quebec and between Quebec and the rest of Canada, and that argued for the political independence of the former. According to Linteau et al., socialist ideas were dominant during the 1960's. However, by the 1970's Marxism dominated political discussion, with 1972 to 1976 being the period of greatest Marxist rhetoric. They state that in the later 1970's Marxist organizations became increasingly dogmatic, dividing into smaller groups that attacked each other, and were increasingly rejected by trade unionists and others. In the 1980's, with the decline of Marxism, socialism gained new support (Linteau and others 1991, 502-504).

Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale, the Front de libération populaire, the Parti socialiste du Québec, the Comité ouvrier du St-Henri and the Théâtre Radical du Québec as well as unions, particularly the C.S.N., and the student movement (Brodeur and others 1982, 29). For this reason they had experience as members of these groups, or personal connections with members. This relation was signaled by the organization of the FLF and the Centre des femmes into 'cells', a form of organization that was used by groups as diverse as the FLQ and Fusion des arts, and in their choice of the word 'front', a word that was used by many of the left-nationalist groups that were forming at the time such as the Front d'action politique and the Front de libération du Québec, as well as liberation movements in other countries. This use of the word 'front' served to distinguish the FLF from feminists in other countries, especially the United States, which adopted the word 'movement', just as their use the term 'revolutionary feminism' distinguished their organizations from the egalitarian feminism from earlier in the century and from "reformist, cultural and opportunistic feminism" which they opposed (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 32; 1983, 95).

The members of the FLF and the Centre des femmes wanted their organizations to be autonomous yet at the same time part of and contributing to the nationalist revolutionary movement. The FLF especially saw itself as part of a wider nationalist movement that was fighting for the creation of an independent, socialist Quebec. This relationship between nationalism and revolutionary feminism can be seen in the way that they analyzed the oppression of women. In fact, even the use of the word 'oppression' rather than 'discrimination' marks the origin of their analysis in left politics.

Their definition of revolutionary feminism, published in the first issue of

Québécoise deboutte!, was:

Tout individu (homme ou femme) qui lutte pour la fin de la discrimination exercée envers les femmes au niveau politique, social, économique et culturel, lutte impliquant un changement global de la société québécoise (O'Leary and Toupin 1983, 18).

The use of terms like “political, social, economic and cultural” to describe the levels of operation of women’s oppression was repeated throughout the texts by the FLF and the Centre des femmes. Similar categories of analysis were used in the *Manifeste des femmes québécoises*. These categories take up terms that were circulating in analyses of the situation of Quebec and can be found, for example, in the first FLQ manifest in 1963:

Colonisés, nous le sommes politiquement, socialement, économiquement (Daniel Latouche and Diane Poliquin-Bourassa eds., *Le Manuel de la Parole, Manifestes québécois, Tome 3: 1960-1976*, Montreal, Les Éditions du Boréal Express, 1979).

and in the journal *Parti Pris* (published 1963-1968):

L'équipe se propose de dénoncer l'aliénation dont souffrent les Canadiens français afin de réaliser progressivement les conditions objectives de son dépassement. Cette aliénation existe à tous les niveaux. Politiques : « nous n'avons qu'un gouvernement provincial, dépourvu des pouvoirs et des sources de revenus essentiels ». Économique : « la presque totalité de nos richesses naturelles et de notre industrie est dans les mains d'étrangers ». Culturel : « la dégénérescence de notre langue et l'abâtardissement de notre peuple » témoignent du mal d'être collectif (Gauvin 1975, 11).

To understand this relation between revolutionary feminism and left-nationalist arguments regarding the oppression of Quebec within Canada, it is useful to look at texts by the FLF, the Centre des femmes and the authors of the *Manifeste des femmes québécoises*. According to the *Manifeste...*, where women’s oppression was analyzed in terms of economic, social and political, cultural and sexual exploitation, the basis of

women's oppression is first of all economic. Here they use Marx's concepts of exchange value and use value, as well as Engels' work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, to argue that women are exploited both in the work place and as un-paid workers in the home, work that is nevertheless necessary to the capitalist system, and that these two levels of exploitation are imbricated into one another (*Manifeste...* 1971, 29; O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 107-108).

L'on voit que système patriarcal (famille patriarcale) et système capitaliste (division du travail, exploitation) vont de pair et s'imbriquent l'un dans l'autre. Le résultat pour la femme, c'est la DÉPENDANCE ECONOMIQUE, le servage, source de toutes les dépendance sociales et culturelles (*Manifeste...* 1971, 31-32).

This privileging of Marxist theory in the analysis of the position of women reflected not only the personal and theoretical links between revolutionary feminism and the left in Quebec, as well as the lack of other analytic frameworks, but also, according to O'Leary and Toupin, the desire to be accepted as part of the left-nationalist movement (34-36).

The second category of analysis in the *Manifeste...*, social and political exploitation, referred to the exploitation of women within the family. They argued that the family as an institution is organized so that women serve men, and through them capitalism. Furthermore, it is structured like a mini state, with men as the head of state. Since marriage is based on obedience and lack of other possibilities, it is the opposite of liberty. One example that they gave was the way that women's reproductive abilities are controlled, with the denial of access to abortion being the most blatant example. The family also teaches each new generation to be oppressors or to accept oppression, to become masculine or feminine, and thus reproduces the system itself. They therefore

argued that when women have control of their own bodies, they will have control of their lives and will no longer be subject to men or to the state (*Manifeste...* 1971, 32-36).

The equivalence that is drawn here between the state and the family, and between political autonomy and control of one's own body, again draws on Engels' work and demonstrates the relation between revolutionary feminist and left-nationalist analyses such that, initially, revolutionary feminism was literally traced onto, and took the form of, left-nationalist discourse:

C'est pour ça aussi qu'y a des ménagères qui sont pas payées, parce qu'on ne les considère pas comme des travailleuses. Le produit de leur travail est pas vendable. Ça rapporte pas d'argent, les mères de famille. Mais en fait ça rapporte en criss pace que ça évite de payer pour l'entretien des maisons, la garde des enfants.... Pi lui pendant c'temps-là, y'est le chef de famille, ça lui donne de l'autorité sur femme et enfants, ça défoule pi ça fait s'imaginer qu'on est maître chez soi et de soi (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 106).⁴⁶

Another concept that was current in the discourses of the FLF and the Centre des femmes, and that was one of the categories of analysis in the *Manifeste des femmes québécoises*, was that of culture. This term had two quite different meanings. One was synonymous with ideology, understood as a false understanding of social relations.

Les femmes ne sont pas seulement victimes d'une oppression réelle mais aussi des mythes et de l'idéologie qu'a engendrés cette oppression, lesquels contribuent à la renforcer.... Ce renforcement de l'oppression par l'idéologie est un des grands obstacles à la lutte de libération des femmes. Avec les média d'information actuels qui sont les véhicules parfaits de cette idéologie, la situation est souvent tragique d'autant plus que les femmes, pour la plupart ménagères à plein temps, sont les consommatrices idéales de ces média (*Manifeste...* 1971, 37-38).

⁴⁶ Written by the Cellule journal for the *Bulletin de liaison FLFQ*, no. 1, July 1971. "Maîtres chez nous" was the Liberal campaign slogan for the 1962 election, and its use by the Cellule journal was thus a reference to the political system to which they were opposed. As discussed above, the use of joul signaled an allegiance to the political positions developed by the journal *Parti-Pris*. As O'Leary and Toupin state, "À l'époque, indépendance de gauche obligeait... (1982, 129)."

In this sense cultural oppression meant all the ways that women are educated into their role as second class citizens (or, according to Simone de Beauvoir, their role as the second sex) and are convinced to accept their oppression. This includes the education system, the double standard of morality, feminine forms of dress and make up, and religious, scientific and philosophical systems of thought that justified women's oppression and kept them from fulfilling themselves. It was this definition of culture that informed events such as the demonstration by members of the cell "X Action-choc," renamed "Lépatatcol" for the occasion, against the Salon de la femme in 1971.⁴⁷

In opposition to the bourgeois culture of the Salon de la femme, they assumed that women have, or could develop, a 'true' or female culture. According to this second definition, culture comes from lived experience and is based in it. As women are oppressed, their culture is a culture of the oppressed. However, this culture would become visible when women start to become conscious of their oppression and begin to express it (*Manifeste...* 1971, 37). What a 'true' women's culture might be was open to question, if not a lot of soul searching. More importantly, this second definition of culture opened up possibilities for new forms of political activism where art, theatre, literature, and so on could be produced and read as revolutionary activities and as actively participating in the creation of a new culture, a women's revolutionary culture.

En créant une nouvelle culture des femmes, une culture où les femmes seront solidaires dans la lutte de libération. Car c'est dans la lutte que se créera la

⁴⁷ Other actions by this cell were the rushing and occupying the jury bench during the trial of Lise Balcer for which seven of them spent time in jail (at the time women were not allowed to sit on juries), the distribution of stickers with "Québécoises deboutte!," and at least some of its members participated in the occupation of taverns which at that time excluded women.

femme nouvelle et sa culture, une culture révolutionnaire d'où seront exclues toutes les dépendances (*Manifeste...* 1971, 39).

It is perhaps for this reason that popular or street theatre was a privileged form of activity and there were a number of members of the FLF who were also members of the Théâtre des cuisines.

Culture, as shown above, was considered by the writers of *Parti Pris* to be one of the ways in which Quebec was 'alienated'. Culture, along with language, was seen as the basis of Quebec's difference from the rest of Canada and was therefore also the justification for independence. This argument assumed not only that Quebec's culture was distinct, but also under threat and therefore in need of protection.⁴⁸ The imposition of cultural values from other countries, especially from the United States but also English Canada and France, could only be seen as a form of colonialism or imperialism.

Le dévoilement progressif de la réalité coloniale fut donc pour la Canadienne et le Québécois que nous sommes l'aboutissement des autres ruptures et critiques, sans que nous les ayons abandonnées en route. Il nous apparaît aussi que l'autonomie nationale est la condition de réaliser, au Canada et au Québec, des sociétés autogestionnaires dans lesquelles les femmes pourront œuvrer en toute égalité et en toute créativité (Rioux and Crean 1980, 14).

This cultural definition of Quebec, and the notion that it had to be protected, whether by independence or by some other means, was not only present within left-nationalist arguments, but circulated across a wide range of domains and was integrated within the rationality of governance under the Liberal as well as Parti Québécois governments since

⁴⁸ See Richard Handler's book *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (1988) for a discussion of the notion that Quebec's culture is under threat.

the 1960's.⁴⁹

To these three categories of analysis, which were more or less modeled on the categories used in left-nationalist arguments, the *Manifeste des femmes québécoises* added a fourth, sexual exploitation. This referred to all the ways that women are exploited physically in marriage, since women were seen to have to sell themselves on the marriage market, and through jobs such as models and actresses where they have to 'please' men. It also referred to the ways that women are made to suffer unwanted attention and even violence, or denied knowledge of their own bodies or access to contraception or abortions.

It can be seen from these that revolutionary feminism drew on the arguments of left-nationalist political groups. It was, in effect, traced directly onto the discursive and non-discursive forms of left-nationalism and is evident in the way that certain words traverse both feminist and left-nationalist discourses, especially 'colonialism', 'oppression', 'alienation' and their opposites, 'autonomy' and 'liberation'. Diane Lamoureux, in her analysis of feminism in Quebec, discusses this relation between feminism and left-nationalism (1986, 99-109).

Si le féminisme a emprunté au nationalisme contemporain l'idée de la nécessité d'une solution d'ordre politique – et non seulement culturelle – à l'oppression, il ne pouvait lui emprunter autrement que métaphoriquement la solution politique, à savoir la libération du territoire. Dans ce sens, le corps a rempli dans une large mesure la fonction de territoire (D. Lamoureux 1986, 106).

This relation accounts for the way that women's oppression was understood and, as the

⁴⁹ See Martin Allor and Michelle Gagnon's book *L'État de Culture, Généologie discursive des politiques culturelles québécoises* (1994) for an analysis of the ways that culture was imbricated in the logic of governance within Quebec.

examples above show, for the language that was used. It also accounts for the ways that political organization and change was envisaged.

À ce moment-là, les débats au Centre des femmes étaient calqués sur ceux de ces groupes: faut-il « s'implanter » dans les lieux de travail pour rejoindre les travailleurs, ou, pour le Centre des femmes, dans les quartiers populaires pour rejoindre les ménagères? Faut-il d'abord faire de la propagande sur les idées socialistes (pour le Centre, les idées féministes)? À quel moment devrait-on créer un Parti révolutionnaire des travailleurs ou, pour le Centre des femmes, une Organisation révolutionnaire féministe (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 34-35)?

This use of Marxist theory to analyze the situation of women and to argue for women's liberation, as well as the borrowing of the aims and organizational structures of socialist and Marxist political organizations, carried with it certain advantages. Socialist ideas had gained a certain acceptability in Quebec since the early 1960's and in the early 1970's Marxist ideas gained currency, especially in unions, community organizations and left-nationalist groups (Linteau and others 1991, 502-504). Borrowing these socialist and Marxist ideas, especially as they linked nationalism, left-wing politics and the privileging of the working class, not only provided analytical tools but also legitimized feminist arguments (especially to male and female members of left organizations who often looked on feminism with mistrust if not outright hostility). It was, in effect, another example of the borrowing of the acceptability and authority of one set of discourses in support of another. At the same time the use of Marxist concepts to understand women's oppression undermined the need for independent women's organizations since, according to classical Marxist theory, women's oppression was a secondary effect of class relations and would disappear on its own. Nationalists seeking to make Quebec an independent socialist state also saw feminism as divisive rather than supportive of the nationalist cause. Therefore

Marxism and nationalism both legitimized and de-legitimized feminist organizing and this contradiction marked many of the texts produced by the FLF and the early years of the Centre des femmes.⁵⁰

While revolutionary feminism was defined in opposition to ‘reformist feminism’, in other words in opposition to the liberal feminism that the FFQ and the Bird Commission represented, the socialist and Marxist ideas that they drew on nevertheless brought with it assumptions that were also current within liberal feminist thought. One was the assumption that the only natural difference between men and women was that which had to do with pregnancy and childbirth (O’Leary and Toupin 1982, 179). All other differences were seen as the result of social causes and would necessarily disappear when Quebec became an independent socialist state. This was partly because the FLF saw themselves as part of a larger movement of national liberation which included men. But it was also because the Marxist political philosophy on which they drew only took account of differences arising from socialization in the family or from experience within the economic structure. This was paralleled by the famous statement by Simone de Beauvoir, “on ne naît pas femme, on le devient,” which was often quoted. It was for this reason that the idea of separate women’s groups was problematic and much time was

⁵⁰ It should be noted that the relation of Marxism to nationalism was itself often troubled because a strict adherence to Marxist principles meant that class conflict, and working class solidarity across national boundaries, was privileged over nationalism. According to Linteau et al., the rejection of nationalism and the independence movement as ‘bourgeois’ by Quebec Marxists in the mid-1970’s created a split between the two, and contributed to the eventual discrediting and marginalization of Marxism (504). This parallels the evolution of revolutionary feminism where the rejection of feminism and independent women’s organizations as ‘bourgeois’ by Marxists during the same period also led to a split between Marxism and feminism and eventually helped to establish and validate the independence of feminist organizations and theories (O’Leary and Toupin 1982, 35-39).

spent justifying the necessity of independent women's organizations, to themselves as much as to those who opposed them.⁵¹

Revolutionary feminism was also defined in opposition to another form of feminism, radical feminism from the United States. Radical feminism arrived in Quebec both via the media and books, and via the women who moved north in protest against American policies, especially in Vietnam.⁵² However, its American provenance and association with Anglophones in Quebec, as well as the fact that initially the published material was only available in English, made it problematic. It must be remembered that, before 1971 when the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* and the special issue of *Partisans* titled "Libération des femmes: année zéro" became available, the only books that Francophone women had were Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Marxist texts such as Friedrich Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.⁵³ Even after other texts became available, the influence of left-nationalism made it imperative for Francophone feminists to develop an analysis of Quebec women's specific oppression because, while texts from the United

⁵¹ According to O'Leary and Toupin, the discussion during the FLF's 1971 self-evaluation finally focused on the need of independent women's organizations (1982, 129).

⁵² Gail Bourgeois, herself born in the United States and an early member of Powerhouse Gallery, has said in conversation that several of the early members of the gallery were originally Americans.

⁵³ According to O'Leary and Toupin, in addition to the classic Marxist texts, other books read by the members of the FLF and the Centre des femmes were *La Femme Mystifiée* (Betty Friedan), *Sexual Politics* (Kate Millet), *The Longest Revolution* (Juliet Mitchell), *The Female Eunuch* (Germain Greer), pamphlets published by the Boston group Bread and Roses, the journal *Off Our Backs*, *The Myth of the Vaginal Organism* (Ann Koedt), *Rapport Kinsey* and *Les mésententes sexuelles* (Masters and Johnson), and *La révolution sexuelle, L'analyse caractérielle*, and *La psychologie du masse du fascisme* (Wilhelm Reich) (40-41). Other books became available in French from Europe after 1973.

States, France and elsewhere were useful, they also represented another form of colonialism.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in that radical feminism made gender division and oppression the primary problem, it contradicted the Marxist analyses and left-nationalist politics that informed and justified revolutionary feminism in Quebec.⁵⁵

It can be seen that within Quebec in the early 1970's there were a range of feminist theories and arguments regarding the position of women. I have tried to show how each drew on existing political theories and it is these that gave initial definitions of feminism their form and language. However, liberal, revolutionary and radical feminisms cannot be understood as separate political positions because they were also formulated through their relation to each other. As noted earlier, revolutionary feminism defined itself in opposition to liberal or 'reformist' feminism, as well as to American radical feminism. The connection between them, the way that they inform one another, was in part through this opposition. In this sense the interdiscursive relation between different feminist positions takes the form of reversal, as in a mirror image, where opposition incites

⁵⁴ It should be remembered that, while the FLF grew out of discussions initiated by Anglophones, by the end of 1970 the Anglophones had been excluded. This was in part because the Anglophones had direct access to American feminist writing, most of which was not yet translated. This privileged access to new feminist knowledge gave them the power to define feminism and the forms of discursive and non-discursive action that would come from it. It was felt by many Francophones that these definitions of feminism ignored the specificity of women's situation in Quebec and, furthermore, because it was American and Anglophone, it was felt to be another form of colonialism. Similar processes were happening in other left-nationalist groups where it signified both a desire for control and self-affirmation as Québécois (O'Leary and Toupin 1983, 19-20).

⁵⁵ See Laurin-Frenette's article, "La libération des femmes" (1977), originally published in 1974, for a demonstration of how Marxism was used to articulate the new domain of feminist theory, and for a critique of radical feminism from a Marxist-feminist position.

discursive elaboration and where what is elaborated is opposite to what is being rejected. Different feminist theories were in this sense formed by what they opposed. It should be noted also that this kind of opposition is one form of the 'urgent need' or 'problem' described by Foucault in his argument regarding how and why dispositifs are formed (Foucault 1980b, 194-195; 1972, 216-220).

Linked to this urgent need, and further connecting the different forms of feminism, was the problem of feminism's status as a distinct domain of political thought and action. The questions (and divisions) that informed feminism in the mid-1970's were not simply regarding the way that women's position was understood, and therefore what kind of action would be called for, but also the independence of feminism as a domain of political theory and practice. As described earlier in relation to liberal and revolutionary feminism, each borrowed their founding assumptions from existing political theories, applying them to the question of women's position in society. However, by occluding difference, liberal feminism could only be understood as a temporary movement which would end when discrimination towards women ended. By taking Marxism and left-nationalism as its model, revolutionary feminism also undermined the need for independent women's organizations. Liberal and left-nationalist discourses therefore both enabled the establishment of feminism by providing analytic tools, and undermined the validity of feminism as an independent domain of political theory and organization.

However, in the mid-1970's feminism was being validated through both discursive and non-discursive forms of action. Discursively, this entailed the establishment of a set of problematics or questions that marked out the terrain of feminism as a discourse. Non-

discursively it entailed the establishment of independent women's organizations that defined themselves as feminist as well as the organization of events and special projects by and for women. Thus the establishment of Powerhouse Gallery, as well as the organization of *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale*, were part of a larger process that took place through the different and competing feminist positions and organizations whereby feminism became established as a domain of discursive and non-discursive elaboration.⁵⁶

However, there was another connection between different feminist positions within Quebec, this was that each was formulated in part in relation to the then current nationalist discourses. It was the "the question of Quebec" (to cite the title of Marcel Rioux's well-known book) that had to be answered, that provided a language and forms of analysis for the new discursive domain of feminism, and, as the example of radical feminism from the United States demonstrates, marked out the acceptable and unacceptable within feminist discourses in the early 1970's.

As stated earlier, *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale* marked out the

⁵⁶ The Clio Collective, in their history of women in Quebec, argue that in 1975 there was a shift in feminist politics in Quebec away from working within nationalist and Marxist paradigms and male dominated organizations, instead working within women-only groups and developing more radical feminist analyses (Clio Collective 1987, 367). O'Leary and Toupin also note that in the early 1970's women wanted to introduce an analysis of women's oppression into Marxism, whereas later they simply borrowed from Marxism what they needed for their own analysis (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 36). Certainly, the number of organizations that began around 1975 demonstrate that independent women's organizations defining themselves as feminist were becoming acceptable. A partial list of arts organizations includes:
1973: La Femme et le Film (later Vidéo Femmes); Powerhouse Gallery; Théâtre des cuisines.
1974: Studio D (NFB).
1975: Librairie des femmes; Éditions de La pleine lune; Groupe d'Intervention Vidéo (GIV); Centre de documentation féministe.
1976: Les Têtes de pioche; Éditions du Remue-Ménage.

See Demers and McMurray (1987b) for a list of feminist organizations, texts and events from 1964 to 1985.

discursive terrain of feminist art within Quebec. In their production they in part drew on and were part of a larger discursive formation, feminism, articulating it to the discursive and non-discursive practices of art. The larger discursive formation of feminism was not made up of three distinct areas of political thought, but was rather an open terrain in which questions of nation and difference made certain political theories available to be used in its formation and elaboration as a discourse and as a set of political practices. At the same time they regulated the sayable within the domain of feminism in Quebec. Therefore the terrain of feminism, like that of the feminist art, was not homogeneous but was traversed by the workings of knowledge/power.

In describing feminism as an 'open terrain' I am trying to show, not only that there was no clear line between different political positions, that they were formed as much through their relation to each other and through extra-discursive questions as through the political philosophies that they actively embraced, but that the 'urgent questions' that incited the elaboration of knowledge also elaborated sites of power within the larger domain of feminism. Any given statement must work within a discursive terrain and position itself relative to the sites of power/knowledge within it. Conceived in this way, a given text, artwork or exhibition cannot simply be lined up with one of the political philosophies outlined above, but rather takes up and elaborates a position within a larger field that includes many, often contradictory and conflictual, elements.

What I am trying to describe here is a way to reconceive feminism or feminist art, not as clearly bounded domains, but as open to interdiscursive influence where what is important is not the 'edge', those places where the divide between acceptable and

unacceptable is produced, but the centres of power/knowledge. It is these centres that organize the larger terrain as fields in which power is produced and operates through the production and organization of knowledge. This is not to deny the important ways in which the 'edges' are sites where power/knowledge is produced through the negotiation of the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable'. However, not only are these borders always uncertain, requiring that they be constantly refixed, but, through interdiscursive influence, a new statement or discursive formation may be produced as much in relation to what is outside as through what is inside its discursive domain. This geo-political metaphor is also a reminder that discursive domains, like geo-political ones, organize and represent collective identities.⁵⁷

In articulating feminism to the discursive and non-discursive practices of art, whether an artwork, exhibition or written text, a work drew on the definitions and problematics that marked out the domain of feminism in Quebec. In other words, it had to locate itself *within* the discourse of feminism, a terrain marked by different and contestatory sites of knowledge/power. This larger discursive context not only marked any given work, but also privileged certain readings for it. However, as I have tried to show, any given artwork, exhibition or written text is not simply positioned within and by

⁵⁷ I am borrowing this understanding of geo-political domains from Benedict Anderson's description of the ways that maps provide a visual representation of 'the nation'. Specifically, he notes that European colonizers brought with them a new way of mapping, and therefore imagining, political territories. The Europeans' Mercatorian map emphasized state boundaries, imaginary lines that did not correspond to anything on the ground, and that 'represented' a given political territory. It replaced older ways of imagining geo-political territories where it was the centres of power, the places where governments resided and from which power was exercised, that were considered to be important. In these older geo-political representations, borders were inexact and often either unmarked or marked in several different places (Anderson 1991, 170-178).

feminism. By using and re-working the problematics and practices of feminism in the construction of its own specific address, works also actively construct feminism as a domain of political theory and organization. Through this they also participate in the construction of sites of knowledge/power within the larger discursive domain of feminism.

Discourses of visual art

What feminist problematics were being articulated to was of course the discursive and non-discursive practices of art. In describing *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale* I have already named a number of their intertextual borrowings from within the domain of the visual arts. These include the various media, visual codes, problematics and cultural references that the individual works drew on. It also includes the institutional practices that presented and positioned these works both physically and discursively. It was through this intertextual formation that the exhibition and art works were located in, and drew on, a larger set of visual and discursive practices that developed in art through the 1960's and 1970's in Quebec.

Like feminism, this larger set of visual and discursive practices was also traversed and organized by left-nationalist discourses. In discussing *La Chambre nuptiale* I have already named a few of these. The use of a labyrinth form to create a 'total environment' was articulated to the meanings of democracy and cultural animation with the aim of communicating a political or moral idea. The representational strategies of Pop art, and especially the derisive aspects of ti-pop, were articulated to discourses regarding

Quebec's modernity and, in the case of ti-pop, a critical attitude towards the political, economic and cultural establishment. The ideas of inclusiveness and democracy also underlay the organization of exhibitions like *Artfemme '75* and *Les Moins de 35* as each constructed a representation of their constituent group, whether women artists or Quebec artists.

What these point to is the ways that certain visual and curatorial strategies were articulated to notions of democracy and social activism. Further examples could be given.⁵⁸ Through this process they were located within larger discourses that defined culture and the arts as both representative of a collective identity, *nous les québécois*, and, within left-nationalist discourses in the 1970's, a given class within the larger collectivity. In other words, the ideas of left-nationalism, or "the question of Quebec," traversed the visual arts, marking both the visual and institutional practices of artworks, exhibitions, and the critical response to both, as well as privileging some practices over others. Through this, the visual and discursive practices of the visual arts were articulated to definitions of Quebec's identity and modernity, and were therefore located within the larger discursive context of nationalism within Quebec.

To understand this relation between the visual arts and the production of a collective identity or *nous les québécois*, I will look at one aspect of this process, the ways that the terms 'national' and 'international' circulated through the discursive and

⁵⁸ For example, in the 1960's the medium of printmaking was articulated to the ideal of democracy, where the relatively less expensive cost of production was understood as offering a more 'democratic' access to art. As Marxist theory gained acceptability in the late 1960's and early 1970's in left-nationalist circles, Marxist language and analyses were brought to the arts and many artists began to search for ways to speak to, and for, the working class, forming collectives and/or working with unions or community groups. For a discussion and documentation of this work, see *Art/société 1975-1980* (1981).

non-discursive practices of the visual arts.

Marie-Sylvie Hébert (Couture 1993, 131-169), in her analysis of the critical reception of formalist painting in the late 1960's, demonstrates that the work of the Plasticiens (especially the 'second' group of Plasticiens: Guido Molinari, Claude Tousignant and Jacques Hurtubise among others) was initially understood within a narrative of Quebec art and Quebec modernity that began with the Automatists and the Refus global. However, when this work was taken up in large 'international' exhibitions in the United States, especially *The Responsive Eye* (1965), and then subsequently consecrated as 'Canadian painting' in exhibitions celebrating Canada's centennial in 1967, the ground was laid for other work to be articulated to definitions of Quebec's modernity and cultural identity. This work, as discussed in relation to the intertextual formation of *La Chambre nuptiale*, was representational and multimedia work such as Pop art, ti-pop, environments, events and other 'underground' art practices. Furthermore, she argues that this shift in the 'nationality' of formalist painting in Quebec initiated a debate around the terms 'national' and 'international' in discussions regarding the originality and cultural belongingness of formalist art, and, more largely, the question of culture and the national identity in Quebec (Couture 1993, 166).

The articulation of Pop art, ti-pop, and other related work to a narrative of Quebec's identity is evident in, for example, the essay "A Quebec Art Scenic Tour" by Marcel Saint-Pierre (1973). Republished in the second volume of "*Quebec Underground*," *10 ans d'art marginal au Québec, 1962-1972* for the exhibition of the same name, this essay locates the work in the exhibition within what he terms the

beginning of an artistic tradition. He saw the basis of this tradition as a heightened awareness of the relation between art and society, and of the specific situation of Quebec, on the part of Quebec artists and argued that in the early 1960's this led to a desire to integrate art into society and to new forms of cultural animation. From the mid-1960's, and especially since the student occupation of the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal in 1968, this work evolved towards what he calls 'socio-political' animation.

Mais, de tels gestes, de tels "reflets" ne manifestent-ils pas également, derrière un tel discours, l'affirmation d'une idéologie nationaliste essentiellement fondée, dans son idéalisme et son romantisme, sur les questions d'identité nationale, de dépossession, de sous-développement, de colonialisme, d'aliénation, etc... (Saint-Pierre 1973, 466).

As this quote demonstrates, especially his use of words such as 'colonialism' and 'alienation', the work that was presented in the exhibition, and more generally work that used forms of cultural or socio-political animation, was read within left-nationalist discourses on nation.

However, if the exhibition and publication *Quebec Underground* articulated the representational and political strategies of 'underground' art to left-nationalist discourses, this left the term 'international' open to be articulated to other practices. This is what happened with conceptual art and the exhibition *Québec 75*. Conceptual art was associated with the gallery Véhicule, and was presented in a series of exhibitions that included many of the gallery's members.⁵⁹ *Québec 75*, curated by Normand Thériault and presented at the Musée d'art contemporain, consecrated conceptual art as the new

⁵⁹ As noted, these included *45° 30' N - 73° 36' W* (1971), *Périphéries* (1974), *Québec 75* and *Camera Art* (1975).

(Quebec) art. In constructing the ‘text’ of this exhibition through the choice of works and the catalogue, he deliberately rejected nationalism and cultural or socio-political animation. ‘Quebec art’ was now to be seen in an ‘international’ frame. In his curatorial statement Thériault asserts:

Québécois art suddenly stopped centering around the problem of its cultural identity and became more concerned with affirming its own existence. Montreal, as a result ceased to be known as simply a very large city, but became a metropolis of international stature. Now, more than ever, the Québécois artist must assert himself on a more far-reaching scene, unless he wants to play the role of “animator” in a given place in time (*Québec 75 : Arts*, 7).

In other words, the exhibition signaled a rejection of much of the art that had gone on for the last fifteen years, and especially of the discourses on cultural identity and belongingness that interpreted and justified this work. It was also a rejection of the histories of art in Quebec which saw it as referring back to itself in a linear development and was rather witness to influences from outside as well as inside Quebec (Thériault 1975, 4).

More importantly, what was happening through the exhibition *Québec 75* and more largely in the visual arts in Quebec in the mid-1970's, was a re-formulation of the terrain of the visual arts. The dichotomy ‘national/international’ organized and provided an interpretive grid for the discursive and non-discursive practices in the visual arts since at least the early 1960's. In other words, it organized people, institutions and artistic practices as a set of oppositions. Thus, for example, Véhicule was seen as an ‘Anglophone’ gallery that presented conceptual art, despite the fact that there were Francophones who were members and that other kinds of work were also shown. At the

same time, the gallery Média was seen as ‘Francophone’ and as privileging political and collective work.⁶⁰ What *Québec 75* represented, and actively contributed to, was the re-mapping of the acceptable and the unacceptable in art, where the term ‘international’, which was aligned with conceptual art and associated with Anglophone artists, became the privileged term.⁶¹ This shift is also evident in the founding of *Parachute* magazine in the same year. The first editorial began with the question “que connaissons-nous de l’art contemporain à l’extérieur du Québec, du Canada ou à l’étranger?”⁶² This is not to say that the question of nation was no longer important, but rather, as discussed in the first

⁶⁰ It is important to underline the fact that the organization of people, institutions and artistic practices into a set of oppositions often occludes the reality of the situation. For example, both Chantal Pontbriand and René Blouin were active in *Véhicule*, encouraged by Normand Thériault to become members when they were students in the Groupe de recherches en administration de l’art at UQAM (Nemiroff 1985, 137). Serge Lemoyne, although categorized on the side of ‘national’ and ‘Francophone’, showed at both *Véhicule* (1972) and *Média* (1977). Moreover, in the summer of 1964 he went to Europe to try to set up an exchange network between Québécois and European artists and to “jeter les ‘premières bases d’un journal international d’art plastique’ (Gaston Saint-Pierre quoted by Marcel Saint-Pierre, in *Couture* 1997, 23).” These oppositions also incite discursive and non-discursive activity. Like *Véhicule*, *Powerhouse* was seen as an ‘Anglophone’ gallery despite the many Francophone members through the years, and this assumption provoked many attempts to become more ‘Francophone’ through the choice of exhibitions, the language of meetings and published documents, the hiring of staff, and even in the change of name to *La Centrale* in 1990.

⁶¹ It was noted at the time that half the artists in *Québec 75* were Anglophone. When Thériault was asked “y a-t-il eu un souci d’équilibrer les deux cultures existantes au Québec, à travers les artistes choisis?” he replied no (Thériault 1975, 5).

⁶² The editorial continued with the following declaration which demonstrates both the influence of left-nationalism and the rejection of that position in the founding of *Parachute*.

Situer l’information artistique dans un cadre de référence qui ne s’articule pas qu’en fonction de sa propre historicité, tout en tenant compte du contexte politique, social et économique où elle est forcément impliquée. Arriver à un échange interdisciplinaire et international qui soit un décloisonnement culturel et une antithèse au régionalisme. De plus en plus, le débat du “rattrapage culturel” et de la “dépendance de l’étranger” s’estompe. Il faut maintenant apprendre à fonctionner à l’intérieur de schèmes culturels en état de reformulation, explorant à la fois la voie du retour aux sources et celle des nouvelles réalités idéologiques, scientifiques et technologiques (Pontbriand 1975, 3).

chapter, nationalism now took the form of internationalism.⁶³

If the mid-1970's saw the remapping of the acceptable and the unacceptable in art through a new privileging of the term 'international', along with the ideas associated with it, this did not mean that the attitudes and practices of the 1960's and early 1970's disappeared. As Nemiroff has argued, while the exhibition and publication *Quebec Underground* was witness to work that was in the process of disappearing, the attitudes that produced them were formative of a new kind of organization, parallel galleries or, as they were later called, artist-run centres (Nemiroff 1985, 132). In Montreal there were four, which were part of what became a network of parallel galleries across Canada. These were Média (1969-1979), Véhicule (1972-1983), Optica (founded 1972), and Powerhouse (founded 1973).⁶⁴ Each had their own mandate and privileged specific visual

⁶³ It is this remapping of the discursive terrain of the visual arts at exactly the moment when *La Chambre nuptiale* was being produced and shown that I think accounts for the lack of critical acceptance of this work within art journals. *La Chambre nuptiale* drew on the visual and discursive practices of Pop art, ti-pop and the work of Fusion des arts. This work provided a visual and critical language which Larivée drew on in developing the enunciative strategies of her own work. In other words, it made the development of feminist art possible. At the same time, by articulating feminism to a set of visual and discursive practices that were in the process of being remapped on the side of the 'unacceptable', or at least as no longer representative of the avant-garde or of Quebec's modernity, these visual and discursive practices have made it difficult to claim a tradition or history of feminist art in Quebec. Rose-Marie Arbour's distinction between 'l'art féministe' and 'l'art à discours féministe' is an attempt to negotiate this problematic history. See her essay in *Art et féminisme* (1982).

⁶⁴ Two other galleries existed in the 1970's, Motivation V, which opened in 1979 to support "work that is politically engagé and attempts to maintain links with working class and university communities outside the artistic sphere (Nemiroff 1985, 43)," and La Relève, which opened in 1974 with the aim to "unplug' the market for art in Montréal, Québec, Canada, the U.S. and Europe, in favour of our artists; to fight for their recognition and survival and to assure that they carry on their work to its fullest (*Québec 75 : Arts* 1975, 72)." I have not found the dates when these two galleries ceased to exist or much information about their activities. There were also two video production and distribution centres, Vidéographe (founded 1971) and GIV (founded 1975), and a printmaking studio, Graff (founded 1966). Graff also opened a

practices and discourses on art. However, their founding partook of a larger set of attitudes and opportunities that opened up at the beginning of the 1970's. These were the ideas and ideals of participatory democracy and collective action.

According to Diana Nemiroff in her discussion of the origins of artist-run centres (1985, 40-76), the discursive context, or in her words the social and cultural context, for the founding of parallel galleries was a critical attitude towards established institutions and the interests that they represented. This critical attitude led to and was fed by the civil rights movement, the youth movement, opposition to the Vietnam war and the counter-culture. She argues that while much of this had its origins in the United States, the movement of ideas and people across the border led to the establishment of “communes, co-operatives, free schools, ‘underground’ newspapers and a variety of grass-roots community organizations (60)” within Canada as well. Paul Starr, whom Nemiroff quotes, describes the aims and ethics of these kinds of organizations:

[Here] social relations were to be direct and personal, open and spontaneous, in contrast to the rigid, remote and artificial relations of bureaucratic organization. The organizational community, moreover was to be participatory and egalitarian. It would make decisions collectively and would eliminate or at least reduce hierarchy by keeping to a minimum distinctions of status and power between leaders and members, or professionals and non-professionals (Nemiroff 1985, 60).⁶⁵

This origin of parallel galleries in the structures and ethics of collectives and cooperatives is evident in the genesis of Powerhouse Gallery. Powerhouse grew out of

gallery in the mid-1970's.

⁶⁵ Quoted from Paul Starr, “The Phantom Community,” in *Co-ops, Communes and Collectives*, ed. John Case and Rosemary C.R. Taylor (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 245.

another organization, The Flaming Apron, which was a non-profit women's cooperative craft store.⁶⁶ As a cooperative its first aim was to offer a place for women to show and sell their work. However, this was to be accomplished through an organizational structure that embodied the ethics of equality, where all decisions would be made by consensus and all responsibilities would be shared. Furthermore, the members of The Flaming Apron defined this structure as feminist (Bruhy 1973). It can be seen therefore that the ideals of democracy, equality and participatory collaboration that informed the founding of cooperatives were here articulated to another set of political concerns, that of feminism. These same ideals informed the organization and rhetoric of the first parallel galleries and many of them, Powerhouse included, continued to use the word 'collective' and/or 'co-operative' to describe their organizations throughout the 1970's.

However, the ideals of participatory democracy were not only formative of the structures and rhetoric of the new parallel galleries, it also informed new forms of governance. According to Nemiroff, democratization and decentralization were part of federal government policy under the liberal government of 1968 and two of the programs established under the impetus of these ideas had a direct effect on the establishment of parallel galleries, Opportunities for Youth in 1971 (OFY) and the Local Initiatives

⁶⁶ The Flaming Apron lasted only a year, from November 1972 to October 1973 (Bruhy 1973). Powerhouse Gallery started in 1973 when two women put a notice on the bulletin board at The Flaming Apron saying that they were interested in more involvement with other women artists. From this, a group of eight women got together to discuss their work and eventually to look for a space to exhibit together. When all inquiries at existing galleries received no response at all, not even negatively, the artists rented their own space in an apartment on Green Avenue in Westmount and Powerhouse began.

programs in 1972 (LIP) (Nemiroff, 100-103).⁶⁷

The programs established an extraordinarily direct link between individual community groups and the federal government, reflecting the philosophy of participatory democracy which prevailed under Pelletier. The principle was simple: short term infusions of cash were injected into communities in response to a wide variety of community-oriented projects developed at the grassroots level. The goals, however, were complex. They were not merely traditional make-work schemes, tied to industry and public works; rather, they were an effort to respond to new demands for meaningful roles in society on the part of the baby-boom generation whose outlook had been radically transformed by the idealistic rhetoric and spirit of contestation of the sixties. Of course, they were also politically astute, seeking to make allies among the young for the federal Liberals, led by Trudeau, whose vision of a “Just Society” was much touted. Economically, they reflected the continuation of Keynesian Policies of stimulation, as they owed to him their vision of leisure-oriented cultural solutions to long-range problems of technological unemployment (Nemiroff 1985, 103).

The availability of OFY and LIP grants encouraged the newly formed artists groups to define themselves as community organizations and to apply for money (as noted earlier, Powerhouse initially saw itself as a feminist community centre, offering services to all women, not just artists). Once received, the money was used to hire artists and to develop programming and facilities.⁶⁸ When these OFY and LIP funded projects proved to be successful, they in turn put pressure on the Canada Council to fund artists’ organizations, which they did in 1972-73 (Nemiroff 1985, 104-105). This was made

⁶⁷ It should be noted that the idea of participatory democracy was not limited to the federal government. In Quebec, the notion of cultural democracy and the rights of all citizens to have and to participate in culture also informed the rhetoric and policies of the Quebec government, especially the 1978 white paper, *La politique québécoise du développement culturel* (titled *A Cultural Development Policy for Québec* in English), also known as the Laurin Report. For example, it states:

Anyone who rereads the White Paper from beginning to end will readily see there is a single thread running through the whole, from ways of life to cultural industries, from patrimony to creativity: the determination to give the people of Québec control of their culture and access to both cultural property and creative activity (Quebec, Le Ministre d’État au Développement culturel 1978, 421).

⁶⁸ For example, both Véhicule (in 1973-1974) and Powerhouse Gallery (in 1974) received LIP grants.

possible by the increase in funding to the Canada Council by the federal government in 1965, in part as a response to the creation of the Ministère des Affaires culturelles in Quebec in 1961 and its emphasis on cultural nationalism as part of all Quebec's policies (which was itself a response to the development of Canadian cultural nationalism after the Second World War and the establishment of the Massey Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (1949-1951) and then the Canada Council (1957)).

It can therefore be seen that the ideas and ideals of participatory democracy and collective action that were formative of parallel galleries traversed a wide range of discursive and non-discursive practices and formed a logic of governance that traversed both governmental and non-governmental institutions. Together they opened up a space for a new kind of artistic practice, both institutionally and visually. In other words, parallel galleries provided an institutional support for work that, at least initially, was not easily commercialized, especially conceptual art, performance art, installation, video and other non-traditional media, and for the discourses that supported and interpreted these kinds of work.⁶⁹ Parallel galleries therefore provided the physical and discursive space for the experimental and politicized art of the 1970's, including feminist art, and through the politics of their own formation encouraged and incited this kind of work. In this way, multimedia and 'underground' art was incorporated into the art system, and into the new

⁶⁹ Parallel galleries were not the only institutional support for this kind of art. The increase in the number of fine arts programs in universities and colleges provided jobs for many of these artists and trained younger artists in the aesthetics and politics of this kind of art. Grants from the Canada Council and the Ministère des Affaires culturelles also provided financial and discursive support for these new art forms.

forms of governance.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have roughly divided the analysis into intertextual and interdiscursive levels of reading. However, as should be obvious, there is no clear line between the intertextual and the interdiscursive levels of any discursive formation. Any given moment of articulation involves both since the visual, textual and institutional practices that any given 'text' draws on are always already located within discourse. The emphasis on the intertextual in relation to the formation of the individual artworks and exhibitions, and the emphasis on the interdiscursive on the level of the discursive context in which the discourse of feminist art was formed and of which it was a part, is necessitated by the need to make evident the different levels of this formation. Through this I have tried to map out the way that feminist art came into being as a discourse in the mid-1970's in Quebec, and the specific form that it took at that time.

The formation of feminist art entailed the articulation of feminism to the visual and institutional practices of art. By the appropriation of these visual and institutional practices, feminist art was firmly placed within the domain of the visual arts. However, through its discursive and interdiscursive formation, it was located within a larger set of problematics that included feminism, Quebec nationalism and participatory democracy, problematics that were not limited to a single domain but rather traversed different domains to diverse effects. These problematics map out the larger discursive terrain within which feminist art was located, which made it possible, and which marked it with

its own set of questions.

It therefore becomes obvious that feminist art is always socially and discursively located. Feminism, as an international movement and as set of problematics, can only be understood in relation to this locatedness, to the ways that it is taken up in any given domain or in any geo-political locale and articulated to other propositions, theories, problematics and practices. It is this locatedness that makes it possible, that makes it 'make sense', and that gives it its specific form through the kinds of 'urgent questions' (in Foucault's sense of the driving force behind the formation of dispositifs) posed within that specific social and discursive context. Therefore, rather than taking feminist art as a given set of assumptions or political/aesthetics questions, as a ground on which other arguments can be made, it is necessary to begin with an understanding of feminist art as a field of differences and to look for the specific ways that it has been taken up, or not, within a given locale.

The formation of feminist art in Quebec in the mid-1970's put in place a set of problematics – assumptions or questions that could be further elaborated and/or contested through other artworks, exhibitions and texts, inciting new questions and further discursive elaboration. Once formed, feminist art became a locus of knowledge/power and an incitement to discourse. It also produced a new collective identity, a location within discourse for identification, that of feminist artist.

CHAPTER 3

ART ET FÉMINISME AND RÉSEAU ART-FEMMES (1982)

The discursive terrain that exhibitions like *Artfemme '75* and *La Chambre nuptiale* opened up, and the discursive identities that they produced, made it possible to organize other exhibitions and events within the domain of feminist art, and thus to further elaborate the meaning of that term. In 1982 there were two, *Art et féminisme* at the Musée d'art contemporain in Montreal, along with the accompanying *Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise* at the Cinéma Parallele, and *Réseau Art-femmes*, a series of exhibitions and events that took place in Montreal, Quebec City, Chicoutimi and Sherbrooke.¹ Together they further elaborated the problematics that marked out the discursive domain of feminist art. Not a simple progression or linear development from the work of the mid-1970's, these exhibitions/events rather demonstrate shifts in the visual and institutional practices of the visual arts and their articulation to new definitions of feminism, providing new readings for art by women.

¹ Galerie Powerhouse also organized two events to coincide with the exhibitions at the Musée d'art contemporain. The first, *Célébration I*, was a series of videos, films, slide shows, performances and poetry in honour of *The Dinner Party* (March 2 - 20, 1982). The second, *Célébration II*, was an exhibition curated by Françoise Sullivan (March 23 - April 10, 1982) (*Powerhouse Newsletter*, March-April 1982). The works were by Freda Guttman-Bain, Anne Billy, Faye Fayerman, Harriett Friefield, Rose-Marie Goulet, Brigitte Radecki, Nell Tenhaaf and Bandanna Zack.

Art et féminisme

The exhibition *Art et féminisme* was organized by Rose-Marie Arbour at the request of the Musée d'art contemporain in Montreal to coincide with the exhibition of the *Dinner Party* by the American artist Judy Chicago. This invitation set in motion a series of exhibitions and events, and incited various writings to accompany or to comment on them and the questions that they raised.

Art et féminisme presented 85 works by forty-one artists. The works included traditional media such as painting and sculpture, along with performance, photography, fibre works and feminist political cartoons. Among these was Francine Larivée's *La Chambre nuptiale*. There was also a colloquium, "Le sujet de la femme dans l'art," which presented two panels, "La Femme dans l'image" and "La Spécificité du féminin dans l'art," in addition to a talk by Judy Chicago.²

The press release stated that the works in the exhibition had representations of the human figure in common. Looking at the work, this was certainly true. Whether through representational practices in photography, drawing or painting; metonymically through

² *Art et féminisme* ran from March 11th to May 2nd. The colloquium was held on April 17 at the Musée d'art contemporain. Louise Letocha, Nicole Brossard, Aline Dallier, Avis Lang Rosenberg and Luce Irigaray spoke at "La Femme dans l'image," while Rose-Marie Arbour, Diane Gay, Francine Larivée, Hélène Roy, Nell Tenhaaf participated in "La Spécificité du féminin dans l'art." Judy Chicago spoke at the museum on March 13th (*Art et féminisme* file).

The artists in *Art et féminisme* were Louise Abbott, Élise Bernatchez, Louise Bilodeau, Marik Boudreau, Andrée Brochu, Marie Chouinard, Sorel Cohen, Carmen Coulombe, Michèle Cournoyer, Judith Crawley, Lorraine Dagenais, Marie Décary, Mira Falardeau, Louise Gauthier-Mitchell, Suzanne Girard, Sheila Greenberg, Louise de Grosbois, Anne de Guise, Clara Gutsche, Freda Guttman-Bain, Michèle Héon, Raymonde Lamothe, Lise Landry, Lise-Hélène Larin, Francine Larivée, Madeleine Leduc, Doreen Lindsay, Ginette Loranger, Camille Maheux, Jovette Marchessault, Marshalore, Nicole Morisset, Lise Nantel, Ann Pearson, Pol Pelletier, France Renaud, Hélène Roy, Joyan Saunders, Sylvie Tourangeau, Josette Trépanier and Marion Wagschal.

the clothes associated with the body or the activities performed by women; or through the presence of the artist herself in performance, the figure was in some way present in almost all the works. To understand this privileging of the body and its representations, one must look at the stated aims of the project and the way that these directed the choice of the works. One must then look at the works themselves, for their own enunciative strategies, and the ways that these were taken up within the larger 'text' of the exhibition, together producing definitions of feminist art.

Rose-Marie Arbour states that the aim of *Art et féminisme* was not to look at women's art in general, but to examine the relation between art and feminism without privileging one of those terms over the other (Arbour 1982a, 12). In proposing this, she wanted to signal a rejection of the view that linking the two meant that art was being subjugated to aims and interests from outside of the domain of art. At the same time she suggested that the relation between the two terms was not self-evident, but rather problematic and uncertain.

Arbour outlined the criteria of selection for the exhibition as the following:

a) recherche de processus de production et de création, de symboles visuels, de modes de communication basés ou issus de l'expérience des femmes, témoignant de leur imaginaire, de leurs aspirations nouvelles face à la réalité dans ses dimensions spirituelles et politiques; b) adoption du point de vue des femmes sur les femmes et élaboration de liens entre les femmes à travers le temps et l'espace, malgré les différences d'âge et de classe; c) représentation et analyse des conditions passées et actuelles de la condition des femmes, présentation des changements ou alternatives pour de nouveaux rapports (sur le plan individuel et sur le plan collectif) (*Art et féminisme* 1982, 9).

The body and the various ways that this was 'figured', whether presented or represented, were therefore understood as a means of presenting women's experience, point of view,

or condition within society, either of the woman who made the work, or of the larger category of ‘women’ of which the artist was a part.

The presenting of women’s experience, point of view, or condition within society through the ‘figuring’ of women is most obvious in the large number of photographic works included in the exhibition. Most of these draw on documentary traditions within photography, for example Louise de Grosbois’ photographs of demonstrations for women’s right to abortion, Clara Gutsche’s images of store window displays, and the work of the group Plessisgraphe.³

As noted in the first chapter, Gosselin has discussed the history of documentary photography in Quebec as having its roots in the traditions of the National Film Board and as being bound up with the social and political ideals of the Quiet Revolution and the independence movement of the 1960's and 1970's. He argues that “as strong supporters of the counter-cultural ideals, emancipation movements and the goal of worldwide decolonization, these photographers scoured the land taking inventory of the geographical, economic, social and cultural heritage characteristic of the Quebecois identity (*La Traversée des Mirages...* 1992, 8).” This link between documentary photography, political commitment and the exploration of, or search for, a collective identity was easily articulated to feminist concerns, opening a space for a feminist documentary practice. This trajectory can be seen in the statement by the group Plessisgraphe:

Le Plessisgraphe... est né avec la réalisation de projets communautaires, de

³ The members of Plessisgraphe were Marik Boudreau, Suzanne Girard and Camille Maheux.

travaux audiovisuels sur la jeunesse, sur les problèmes relatifs au logement ou à l'immigration. Après sa première année de travail, le Plessisgraphe regroupait uniquement des collaboratrices et s'orientait avec une démarche féministe.... La nécessité de produire des nouvelles images de femmes s'allient à notre besoin personnel d'expression (*Art et féminisme* 1982, 130).

This linking between photography, political engagement and the exploration of identity was also evident in non-documentary work such as Anne de Guise's '*Le grand écart*' ou '*La petite histoire d'un enrôlement*' which consisted of eighteen photographs examining the social formation of gender identities, and the work of Sheila Greenberg, whose *Portraits-Sisters* engaged with the tradition of interpretive portraiture. It is also evident in many of the videos presented in the context of *Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise*.

Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise was organized by Christine Ross under the auspices, and within the assumptions, of the larger exhibition.⁴ Of the twenty-eight tapes, fifteen were presented within the category 'documentary'. In her introductory remarks Ross defined documentary as a form of proof, witness or information on a given subject (*Semaine de la vidéo...* 1982, 11). The tapes that she chose for this section (or at least those that I have been able to see) demonstrate a concern for allowing women to speak about their reality from their own point of view, and with showing or communicating that reality in some way.

⁴ According to Arbour, *Semaine de la vidéo...* developed into a separate event when it became obvious that a large number of women were working in that medium (Arbour 1982a, 14). The screenings took place at the Cinéma Parallèle from April 19th to 25th. The artists were Lise Bonenfant, Hélène Bourgault, Helen Doyle, Nicole Catellier, Corrine Corry, Lorraine Dufour, Robert Morin, François Dugré, Louise Giguère, Nicole Giguère, Denise Hammond, Marshalore, Diane Poitras, Anne Ramsden, France Renaud, Hélène Roy, Linda Roy, Joyan Saunders, Colette Tougas, TVC Laval, Vidéographe, Vidéo Amazone, Réseau Vidé-elle de Femmes and Femmes en Focus.

This concern with presenting women's reality from women's point of view is evident in *Chaperons rouges* by Helen Doyle and H  l  ne Bourgeault.⁵ The subject of the tape is rape, but it begins with the telling of a fairy tale, *Little Red Riding Hood*. This story appears in various forms throughout the tape – as a woman reads the story to two very young girls, within a discussion of rape with two older girls, in conversation between women about the effect of these kinds of stories on women's lives. These parts are inter-cut with dramatic sections depicting rape and sexual harassment. The aim was to present the subject from the point of view of the women who have been its victims. However, the tape also included footage from a wu-do class. The artists therefore not only presented a discussion about rape, but also tried to intervene in how it was understood and how women reacted to it. 'Documentary' in this case entails the inclusion of a variety of genres all directed towards presenting a specific point of view and enabling social change.

While this work was the most 'fictional' of the tapes shown under the category 'documentary', that is to say that it was a form of docu-drama, all the works within this section evidenced a concern for representing women's experience. In the catalogue accompanying the screenings, Ross argued that video was a privileged medium for women in the mid 1970's, not only because it was a new medium and easy to use, making

⁵ While I would argue that the movement of *people* between institutions and events is part of the non-discursive formation of discourses, this aspect of discourses is often lost to history. It is therefore interesting to note that H  l  ne Bourgeault, in an interview about her tapes *Partir pour la famille* and *Chaperons rouges*, said that it was her involvement with the Front de Lib  ration des Femmes and her contacts with the Centre de consultation sur l'avortement and the Th   tre des cuisines that brought her to produce a video about abortion. Furthermore, she considered that rape and abortion touch most directly women's alienation (Bourgeault, Gendron, and Poitras 1980, 16-17).

it relatively accessible for women, but also because video was a means of *recording* reality. It was this assumed privileged relation to reality, such that video's capacity to record sound and images was understood as giving access to the reality that it represented, that meant women saw it as an ideal vehicle for the communication of women's experience, for proposing solutions to end oppression, and for elaborating a new vision of reality from women's point of view. In effect, the 'realism' of the video image was assumed to address the spectator more directly such that the content of the work was more easily communicated to the viewer. The documentary works presented in *Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise* can therefore be seen to be located within a larger set of assumptions that, like documentary photography, had their origins in the left-nationalist aesthetics and politics of the late 1960's and early 1970's.⁶

⁶ There is another way that these works were linked to the aesthetics and politics of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Most of the tapes which were not acquired directly from the artists were distributed by the Groupe d'Intervention Vidéo (GIV), Vidéo Femmes and Vidéographe. As discussed in the previous chapter, the formation of parallel galleries and other artists' organizations came out of the politics and aesthetics of left-nationalism and the notions of participatory democracy and collective action. These ideas also underlay the emergence of feminist organizations in the mid-1970's. As already noted, GIV was founded in Montreal in 1975. Vidéo Femmes also came into being in the mid-1970's, initially through a connection with the wider feminist movement as the local organizers for a cross-Canada series of women's films in 1973 titled Women and Film - La Femme et le Film, and then as part of a larger community video access organization called Le Centre Ciné-Vidéo-bec which was established in Quebec City in 1974. They changed their name to Vidéo Femmes in 1980. The early works that they produced and distributed addressed women's issues and were produced with their use by women's groups in mind. This history and the politics that it entailed can be seen in a description of Vidéo Femmes by Nicole Giguère and Michèle Pérusse:

D'abord implanté dans le quartier St-Jean-Baptiste où on a produit quelques vidéogrammes sur différents thèmes reliés aux conditions de vie de ses résidents, notre centre s'est bien vite orienté vers la production exclusive de vidéos sur la condition féminine. On voulait ainsi participer à notre façon à ce vaste et profond mouvement de remise en question provoqué par les femmes dans tous les secteurs de la société (undated photocopy, Vidéo Femmes file, Artexte).

The fact that all eight of the fifteen tapes from the documentary section of *Semaine de la vidéo...* that are still available are at Vidéo Femmes demonstrates a strong link between specific visual and production practices defined as documentary, their articulation to definitions of feminism, and the politics and history of this specific institution. Ciné-Vidéo-bec dissolved in 1979 in order to join the Marxist-Leninist

The links between photography, video and the politicized documentary tradition in Quebec in the 1960's and 1970's were paralleled by the inclusion in the exhibition of illustrations and political cartoons from Éditions du Remue-ménage and feminist magazines such as *La Vie en rose*. These kinds of works had their origin in the aesthetics and politics of the counter culture and the irreverent attitudes of ti-pop that were found in magazines such as *Mainmise* and *Le Quartier latin*, as well as in the early years of the art magazine *La Revue Intervention*.⁷ The presence of *La Chambre nuptiale* further exemplified the aesthetic and political origins of certain feminist art practices in ti-pop and the politicized and 'underground' art of the previous decade in Quebec.

However, if many of the works in *Art et féminisme* and *Semaine de la vidéo...* demonstrated the way that certain feminist art practices had drawn on the politics, problematics and visual practices of the late 1960's and early 1970's, these were not the only sources that these works drew on. The aim of the exhibition, to show work that presented women's experience, point of view or condition within society, and the privileging of works that 'figured' the female body in some way, opened the exhibition to a wide range of visual practices in terms of the media, visual codes, problematics and the cultural references that they engaged.

Hélène Roy's *Je me laisse prendre les bras, je me laisse dire les mots à entendre*

organization En Lutte! (Groupe d'Intervention Vidéo 1979).

⁷ See Tome 2 of "*Quebec Underground*," *10 ans d'art marginal au Québec, 1962-1972* (1973, 333-442) and Michel Roy's essay in *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante* (Couture 1997, 378-386) for a discussion of the relation between illustrations and political cartoons and the politics of the Quiet Revolution and the independence movement. *La Revue Intervention* often featured cartoons and articles on them in the first years of its existence from 1978 to the early 1980's. The magazine *Spirale* also published reviews of books of cartoons during the same period (beginning 1979).

(1981) uses the traditional art media and processes of drawing and collage. Structured in two sets of four panels, the work can be seen to refer to both altarpieces from the Northern Renaissance and to the narrative structures of film and, by extension, conceptual art. The ‘narrative’ here is autobiographic and subjective, exploring her own, and more largely women’s, experience, vision and *imaginaire*.⁸

Ma création, comme celle de la plupart des femmes en art, s’inscrit surtout dans la recherche de l’identité, dans cette quête de la différence et de la manière d’arriver à la connaissance à travers l’instinct, à travers l’observation de soi et à travers la manière de prendre le temps.... Cette saisie du temps à travers la collecte d’images et la reconstruction d’un espace imaginaire, a pour principale source une cause existentielle qui est la quête d’une identité et la transgression momentanée du destin (H. Roy 1983, 13).

In discussing the series of works that she began in 1981, Roy says that they began with the daily collection of images and notations in a diary-like process of accumulation (H. Roy 1983, 11). She then reworked these through the repetition and accumulation of marks in drawing and collage. Together they produced a dense surface from which the images, texts and structure of the work emerge. In other words, there is a parallel accumulation of materials and images or ‘content’ with the accumulation of marks in the process of drawing, the second used as a means to ‘carry’ or present the first.

Traditional art media, processes and visual codes are also used to carry a female, and thus feminist, content in other works. For example, Louise Gauthier-Mitchell’s drawings, *Vierge enceinte* (1981), represents women’s experience of the body, desire and

⁸ There is no exact translation of the French word *imaginaire* as it is used in the terms *imaginaire au féminin* or *l’imaginaire des femmes*. The closest equivalent in English would be a ‘collective world view’ or way of seeing and experiencing the world that encompasses both an intellectual and an emotional relation to it.

exploitation, and Marion Wagschal's self-portrait exploring the possibility of self-representation from a woman's point of view (*Art et féminisme* 1982, 98, 142). In these works the medium and mode of production are the ground or means through which women's experience, point of view, or condition within society are presented. Feminism in art is therefore produced as a given content – women's experience represented from a woman's point of view. The 'politics' of the work was the representation of what had not been represented before, whether of political issues or personal experience.

It should be noted here that women's experience, point of view or condition within society was also presented through non-traditional media and modes of working. The inclusion of performances that drew on the traditions of dance (Marie Chouinard and Ann Pearson) and theatre (Pol Pelletier), as well as performance art (Sylvie Tourangeau), audiovisual installation (Mashalore), and of course video, both documentary and fictional, demonstrates the articulation of new media and modes of working to both the domain of visual art and to discourses of feminism.⁹

The aim of the exhibition, and the privileging of representations of the female body that it entailed, is also evident in the choice of two photographic works by Sorel Cohen, *Le rite matinal* (1977) and *The Shape of Gesture* (1978). Cohen used herself as a model in both. The first presents nine images of the artist making a bed. Hung in grid

⁹ I consider the inclusion of performance as important to the meaning and enunciative strategies of this exhibition and the definitions of contemporary art and women's/feminist production that it produced. However, since I have not seen the performances, nor video documentation of them, it is impossible for me to discuss these works in detail (necessary to the project of this thesis). Neither can I exclude performance from the discussion of feminist art because, as the essay by Johanne Lamoureux in *Art et féminisme* demonstrates, the historical conjunction of performance art (and a large number of women working in performance) with postmodernism and feminist art incited debates about their definition and relation. I will therefore take up the discussion of feminism, postmodernism and performance art later in the chapter.

fashion, these images take up the conceptual art practice of using both photography as a recording device and a grid structure to explore the construction of narrative. In addition, they make reference to the notion of ritual, and the centrality of the body to ritual, that was explored in much feminist performance art (Roth 1983, 22-27). What was articulated to these art concerns, and to the visual practices through which these concerns were produced, was the daily activities of women – in this case making beds. Cohen described the work in this way:

Le Rite Matinal 1977, deals with the attempt to remove an autobiographical and ritualistic activity from its normal context, and place it within an art context in order to reconsider its meaning. Part of this transformation is effected by the decision to subject this activity to an aesthetic attitude and isolate it as images. But more important is the transposition of gestural activity in three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional surface, where it takes on a unique existence related to the brushwork of painting (artist's statement [n.d.], Cohen file, Artexpte).

The other work, *The Shape of Gesture*, also articulates women's daily activity of housecleaning to art practices, specifically painting. The four images, hung in a row, show the artist on the other side of a window that she is cleaning. According to the artist, the window refers to the picture plane of a canvas and the cleaning cloths, each a different colour – green, yellow, red and blue, refer to painting and to the painterly gesture (artist's statement [n.d.], Cohen file, Artexpte). In using photography to 'enact' or mimic painting, the work 'deconstructs' it, making evident the elements of which painting, the *sine qua non* of high art, is constituted and thus undermining the preciousness attached to it. That the artist does this through an activity traditionally associated with women articulates the analytical and critical aspects of conceptual art, particularly in relation to painting, with

questions of gender.

While the use of conceptual and deconstructive art strategies within the exhibition were not common, it is evident that conceptual art practices were still current in 1982 and were therefore available to be articulated to feminism in the production of the discourse of feminist art. They can also be seen in a number of the videotapes presented in the 'fiction' category of *Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise*.¹⁰ However, what made these works acceptable within the context of *Art et féminisme* was the artist's use of herself as a model and the way that this made the work readable in terms of the autobiographical.¹¹ Here, the autobiographic in work by women was no longer understood as 'women's art', but rather as 'feminist art'. In other words, these works were feminist *because* they are autobiographical, examining women's daily lives and relationships from a critical/feminist point of view (as Cohen said in relation to another

¹⁰ As only three of the thirteen tapes presented in the 'fiction' category of *Semaine de la vidéo...* are still available, it is harder to assess the kinds of work that this entailed. However, both *New Freedom* by Anne Ramsden and Marshalore's *You Must Remember This* borrow and critically use genres from popular culture, television soap operas in the first case and popular music in the second. Lorraine Dufour's and Robert Morin's *Le Royaume est commencé* employs the codes of cinema-verité to carry a narrative about marriage and the contradiction between the ideal and the reality. While these three tapes cannot account for all the ways that video was being used by artists or articulated to feminist discourses in art, they do point to the way that different visual and narrative modes and (in this case feminist) political discourses were articulated to video practices. However, like documentary, the fictional works in *Semaine de la vidéo...* were seen to have their effectivity through the ways that they engaged the spectator in the ideas presented in the work, which was assumed to lead to changes in attitude and thus behavior (*Semaine de la vidéo...* 1982, 7). Fiction was thus understood as another means through which artists presented women's experience, point of view or condition in society and to intervene in the larger social context.

¹¹ The privileging of the representation and/or presentation of the female body in the exhibition is evident not only in the choice of works, but also in the exclusion of works. Cohen's *After Bacon/Muybridge* series (1980) consisted of photographs of men wrestling. The artist had discussed these works as presenting a woman artist's view of male sexuality, and therefore as a feminist work (Cohen 1980). While it may not be possible to know now if this work was available to be included, the fact that it was not meant that representations of men from a woman's/feminist point of view were also excluded, and further demonstrates the enunciative work of the *exhibition*.

work, “from a woman’s point of view, a woman with a raised consciousness (1980)”.

Finally, this focusing on female experience in the work is also evident in works that ‘present’ or ‘enact’, rather than ‘represent’, women’s activities. Lise Landry’s four works in the exhibition were part of a series that was made using weaving, sewing and crayons on paper.¹² Visually abstract, their construction entailed the use of the repetitive gestures of mark-making, based on the movement of women’s hands in sewing and weaving, and the real sewing and weaving of the paper. They thus combined activities that come from drawing practices in art and from women’s domestic activities (transplanted into the gendered working class world of textile and clothing manufacturing). She has said of this work:

Mais je pense tout de même que ma production analyse bien des aspects de la réalité des femmes : l’histoire et les conditions du geste des femmes et de mon propre geste, non sur un plan littéraire, mais sur celui de ses racines culturelles et de ses règles de fonctionnement (L. Landry 1981, 5).

Through this double reference to both art practices and women’s traditional activities, enacting the gestures of weaving and sewing, both literally and in drawing, the works mark out a space within art for a specifically female and working class practice. Through this Landry also creates a space in the domain of art for herself as a woman of working class origins. It is this reference to women’s experience and history that allowed this work to be presented in the context of *Art et féminisme* and made it available to be taken up and read within feminist art discourses.¹³

¹² The works were *Lettre d’une couturière*, *Hommage à la secrétaire*, *Panier à retailles* and *Pièce de trousseau*, all dated 1981.

¹³ In a later article Arbour linked Landry’s work with Pattern Art and the American artist Miriam Shapiro, and thus to definitions of feminist art that were produced in the United States (Arbour 1984b, 52).

Like Cohen's photographic pieces, Landry's work works on both visual language drawn from art and from women's traditional role within the home (and in Landry's case, within the workplace). This articulation of the visual and conceptual practices of art to historically female practices of domestic activities produced a new discursive space for women to work as women and as artists. Rather than an additive process where the media and visual codes carry feminist content, what was being produced was a set of formal strategies and concerns as female and, when used as Cohen said "with a raised consciousness," as feminist.

What I am reiterating here in this description of Cohen's and Landry's work is the process of articulation in the formation of discourses of feminist art. Articulation functions on the intertextual level in the formation of these works, and through this on the interdiscursive level between discourses on art and traditional female occupations (seen through the optic of feminism). Through this process a new problematic and a new discursive formation within the domain of feminist art was being marked out. This was a notion of feminist practice in art on the level of visual language or visual codes, and not simply on the level of the 'content' of a work. Here, the visual strategies of drawing, collage and conceptual art do not simply carry feminist content. Rather, these formal/visual strategies are part of what is under examination in these works, and therefore are part of the meaning of the work. It should be noted that this deconstructive and analytical definition of feminism on the level of visual codes was not found in many of the works. It was, as such, a minority strategy within the exhibition. However, their inclusion within the exhibition opened another space within the discourse of feminist art.

The exhibition

Looking at these diverse practices, it becomes obvious that the privileging of figuration through the presentation or representation of the female body not only linked these works together, but more importantly produced a reading of the work and a definition of feminism that focused on ‘woman as subject’, both as the subject of the work, and the artist as female subject. At the same time, these two notions were not separate but rather imbricated tightly together such that one was assumed to lead to the other. Feminist art, as it was defined through the enunciative strategies of the exhibition, was art that focused on the subject of women as represented through the female body. In other words, there was a collapsing together of the artist and her representation, with the figuration of the female body being the (assumed unproblematic) link between the two.

This definition of feminist art that the exhibition produced was not the only meaning formulated through the enunciative strategies of the exhibition. Rather than an open call for submissions, the works were selected on the basis of an invitation from the curator and after discussion with each artist. In most cases, a number of pieces by the same artist were included, metonymically standing for a body of work. This encouraged a reading of the artist’s intentions across different artworks. Feminist art was thus produced as an object of inquiry on the part of the artist through the elaboration of a body of work.

Art et féminisme was also a survey of feminist art in Quebec across media and across time. As already noted, the exhibition included theatre, performance, dance,

video, and illustrations and political cartoons from feminist publications, along with more traditional art media such as painting, drawing, and sculpture. Significantly, it included Francine Larivée's *La Chambre nuptiale* from the mid-1970's, the period when feminist art came into existence as a discourse within Quebec. The domain of feminist art was thus enlarged and diversified, being produced across the body of an artist's work, across different disciplines within, and sometimes outside, of the visual arts, and through time. At the same time it was more focused, being defined as work that presented women's experience, point of view, or condition within society through the figuration of the female body. The exhibition therefore examined and marked out feminist art as a domain of knowledge/power with its own history within Quebec. By being shown at the same time as the *Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, another large feminist work from the mid-1970's but from the United States, it set the exhibition *Art et féminisme* in relation to, and in contradistinction to, American definitions of feminist art.

The catalogue

The reference to American feminist art, at least to that which the *Dinner Party* represented, was one of the recurring themes and reference points within the catalogue. However, it was not the only one. The inclusion of eight essays written from diverse aims and theoretical and political assumptions marked out the domain of feminist art as an uneven field traversed by a range of definitions of both feminism and art.

The introductory essay by Rose-Marie Arbour begins with a short discussion of American feminist art. The aim of this discussion is not to demonstrate a direct

connection between feminist art in Quebec and the United States, but rather to argue that there is no corresponding movement in art paralleling that south of the border or even that in Quebec in other areas. She argues that without a feminist art movement one cannot talk about feminist art as such. However, this does not mean that feminism was irrelevant to the production or reading of these works. Rather, she uses the term '*art à discours féministe*' to indicate that the artists nevertheless engaged with feminism in their work, without their necessarily doing so as part of an organized movement. The aim of the exhibition was therefore to look at the ways that women engaged with discourses of feminism in their art practices.

Arbour's essay places the work within a discussion of the social and historical conditions that have affected women's position in society and women's production as artists. For example, she argues that the recurring use of certain symbolic and formal devices such as circular forms or interior spaces are the result of women's shared history in the West where the creation of private life coincided with the enclosure of women in the home (7). Similarly, the use of certain materials, processes and gestures, for example weaving and sewing, have their origin in traditional women's work in the home and, by extension, in the workplace (10). She argues that this shared history of constraint and servitude, both within and outside the home, is consciously taken up by certain artists in their work in order to examine and critique this historical and contemporary reality. In other words, women artists examine their condition "as artists and as women," to use Arbour's own phrase, through their work.

The privileging of the figuration of the female body within these works, which

linked the works together and formed one of the points of enunciation of the exhibition, was therefore read within an analysis of the social and historical position of women. In this reading, the body was understood as the place where the social is addressed and experienced. In other words, Arbour argues that it is through their socially and historically located bodies that women are alienated and exploited. The artists' choice of figuration and representational practices in general was thus read as a political decision grounded in a female location in society and in the feminist insight that 'the personal is political.'

C'est en définitive autour et en fonction du corps que les affinités se sont manifestement posées, corps aliéné et exploité par une culture et des intérêts qui ne vont assurément pas dans le sens de l'intérêt des femmes, corps qui s'identifie en nommant ses oppressions et ses éclatements, ses blessures et ses cicatrices aussi (5).

This social analysis of women's art and of women's position in society came from, and was an elaboration of, the socio-historical approach to art that was prevalent in the late 1960's and early 1970's in left-nationalist circles within the visual arts.¹⁴ As with the earlier work, it entailed a rejection of formalism as a mode of producing and reading art, as well as a concern with "efficiency and communication." Where it elaborated on the earlier work was the central position that it gave the (in this case female) body within the analysis of art and as the defining characteristic of *art à discours féministe*.

L'expression « art à discours féministe » indique qu'il s'agit de préoccupations communes à ces artistes face à leur condition de femmes dans leur production artistique plutôt qu'un consensus sur le plan formel et stylistique. Cette

¹⁴ See Arbour and Lemerise's article "Le rôle des Québécoises dans les arts plastiques depuis trente ans" (Arbour and Lemerise 1975) for a social analysis of women's role in the visual arts. *L'artiste et le pouvoir 1968-1969* presents a social analysis of the visual arts in Quebec (Couture and Lemerise 1975).

exposition veut être non pas le lieu où l'on établira les critères d'un art typiquement féministe (sur le plan formel) mais où l'on s'interrogera au sujet de nouveaux critères concernant l'efficacité de la communication de l'art...

L'art à discours féministe est un lieu de remise en question du rôle, de la fonction et de la nature de l'art, parce qu'il assume les contradictions et les luttes de la vie sociale à l'intérieur du champ artistique.... C'est là, je pense, qu'un art à discours féministe se redéfinit comme art de la communication par le rapport qu'il établit entre le personnel et le politique, entre l'art et la vie, entre l'artiste et le public (4).

This social analysis of women's art was followed by an essay by Suzanne Lamy who, while arguing that a feminist approach to art necessarily entails a socio-historical reading in order to understand the conditions of its production and reception (22), nevertheless brings other assumptions to the definition of feminist art and to the exhibition as a whole. These become evident in her discussion of knowledge, the body and women's art. Here a series of terms are evoked that link this text to French feminist thought and the re-writing of psychoanalytic theory by women such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. They include the notion of a feminine *imaginaire*, a way of seeing and representing the world as well as one's desires in relation to the world, and the Law and the Symbolic, which in psychoanalytic terms is understood as constructing a masculine relation to meaning. Therefore, one of the aims of the exhibition was to provide a place where women artists could make visible their relation to the world.

Ce qu'elles ont à montrer? Mais TOUT. C'est leur affectivité, leur imaginaire, leur façon d'être au monde, à l'art et au langage qui sont mises au jeu, en jeu (23).

'The feminine' in art is understood as a place of energy and movement.

Les réalisations se juxtaposent, s'opposent, font boule et spirale. Des énergies y circulent. C'est ce féminin dans sa mutation, dans sa pluralité qui se découvre et qui vous questionne. L'exposition ne va pas de soi. (Votre lecture non plus).

Elle rend compte de ce qui bouge dans le monde des femmes (24).

Finally, knowledge is seen as having a direct relation to the gendered body. It is absorbed and represented bodily.

Mais pour elles, ce savoir [masculin] n'est rien s'il n'est accompagné d'un autre savoir, du savoir où nous renvoie l'origine du mot : « s'apercevoir », c'est aussi « goûter », « connaître par le goût », par le coeur et par le corps. Longtemps coupées de la théorie, plus ou moins en porte à faux avec elle, du moins les féministes, les femmes « savent » de bonne source, de leurs élans comme de leurs insomnies, que toute véritable connaissance vient de ce que leur corps cherche, désire ou vomit. Désir bien sûr lié au manque, mais aussi à ce qui vous jette hors de vous, vers la quête, le voyage (25).

Lamy's essay presents an understanding of art and creativity as necessarily gendered, that it comes from and exists in relation to gendered bodies such that (some) women will have a different relation to creation. Furthermore, it is “un féminin manifeste dans la *matérialité* de l'oeuvre : dans la technique, le geste, la symbolique, la fiction... (18).” In other words, ‘the feminine’ in art is to be understood on the level of visual language as well as the content of the work.

To make this relation between form and content clear, to ‘embody’ her own argument so to speak, Lamy chose to write in the form of a conversation, a more intimate and open-ended form than an academic argument. The ‘conversation’ is between ‘Ariane’ and ‘lui’, ‘him’.¹⁵ Here the usual gendered positions of individual (male) speaker and nameless (female) other are reversed, as ‘Ariane’ responds to his questions and criticisms, and in so doing locates the exhibition in a discussion about the relation

¹⁵ Ariadne, Ariane in French, was the daughter of Minos, the king of Crete who had a labyrinth built. Ariadne gave Theseus a thread so that he could escape the labyrinth after he had killed the Minotaur (*Chambers' Etymological English Dictionary*, 1964 ed. S.v. “Ariadne”).

between knowledge, art and the body. Through this she invites ‘him’ (and the viewer) to view and thus participate in the exhibition, without closing down the meaning of the work through description. More importantly, she reflects on the processes of writing itself and her own use of a dialogue form. In this sense Lamy’s critique of objectivity is made manifest through the taking up of a specific gendered voice. Feminist theory is not simply an object of discussion, but also structures the text itself.

In drawing on French feminist theory, Lamy is in effect bringing theories and problematics from outside the field of art to the reading of artworks. This articulation of French feminist theory to the visual arts opened up a new site of discursive elaboration within feminist art, producing ‘the feminine’ in art as a site of discursive elaboration for art works and critical texts. The essay by Diane Guay, which discusses art works in the exhibition, also draws on French feminist theory, quoting, among others, H el ene Cixous, Madeleine Gagnon and Catherine Cl ement.¹⁶

While Lamy’s and Guay’s use of French feminist theory privileges the female body as the source and subject of knowledge, Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin works from within the discipline of art history to critically examine this same privileging of the female body in feminist art and art criticism. She begins by pointing out that feminist art is associated with the return of content in art, in this case ‘feminine’ content, and argues that according to the modernist paradigm this implies the incorporation of something

¹⁶ French feminist theory was not the only extra-discursive borrowing evident in the catalogue. Suzanne Foisy, who wrote about the graphic and photographic works in the exhibition, brought the concepts of ‘moment’ or ‘dialectical moment’, and the literary term ‘protopopoeia’, to the analysis of the political function of feminist art.

‘foreign’ into art. It is therefore understood as a rejection of modernism as defined by the American Clement Greenberg.¹⁷ This rejection was most often interpreted as the sign that feminist art was integral to the project of postmodernism. The argument was that postmodernism heralded the return of everything that modernism had excluded, that is everything that contaminated the ‘purity’ of art, including content. However, Dubreuil-Blondin makes a distinction between work that simply ignores the modernist paradigm, and work that critically examines that paradigm in order to question and go beyond the limits set by modernism in art. In other words, she makes a distinction between *postmodern* art, art that assumes and critically moves beyond modernism (and thus, as some have argued, stays within the modernist tradition), and anti-modern art or art that is simply outside of modernist traditions.

The aim of Dubreuil-Blondin’s discussion was to disagree with the privileging of ‘the feminine’ in much feminist art, whether understood as a transcendent reality that needed only to be represented, or as a transcendent subject that only needed to be expressed (159). In other words, she was arguing against much of what was understood as feminist art and art criticism at the time, especially the work of Judy Chicago and Lucy Lippard. This does not mean that Dubreuil-Blondin was opposed to feminist art as such. Rather, she was proposing another way to understand ‘the feminine’ in art, and with that another definition of feminist art.

¹⁷ The essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (originally published in 1939) is the usual reference for Clement Greenberg’s concept of ‘advanced art’ and the teleological conception of art’s evolution towards ‘purity’ that he instated and that became the definition of American modernism after the Second World War (Chapter in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

The work that she considers to be exemplary of a new way of understanding ‘the feminine’ in art is Land Art by women such as Suzanne Harris, Nancy Holt, Alice Aycock, Michelle Stuart and Mary Miss. Her argument is that this work, by its location within and its use of the landscape, makes the landscape part of the meaning of the work. Furthermore, in that the viewer must move around within the work/landscape to grasp it, she or he is necessarily made aware of her or his own physical presence in the experience and reading of the work. Dubreuil-Blondin argues that Land Art therefore makes evident two aspects of the meaning of art that modernism had supremely ignored – the context and the viewer. However, neither are here considered to be transcendent or transhistorical. Rather both are already caught up in systems of meaning.

Il [le spectateur] ne se découvre d’ailleurs pas lui-même comme sujet unifié, mais comme sujet divisé et incertain, traversé lui aussi par des significations qu’il n’arrive pas à réunir en un moi transcendant. Il n’y trouve pas non plus l’expression d’un autre sujet déterminant, une landartiste dans le cas qui nous intéresse. Le spectateur refait pour lui une expérience qui à été vécue avant lui et différemment par la créatrice (165).

It is useful to compare this argument to that of René Payant, to which she refers (Payant 1987, 319-322). For while she takes up much of his discussion on the meaning of sculpture-architecture, or in this case Land Art, what she makes evident (and what he ignored) was the gender of the viewer (including the artist) as part of the experience and meaning of the work.¹⁸ In presenting this work as exemplary of a way to understand ‘the

¹⁸ Payant’s article, “Une cérémonie comme un gant retournée,” was originally published in *Traverses : la cérémonie*, no. 21-22, Paris, CCI et Minuit, 1981. ‘The spectator’ in this article is always written in the masculine, as it is in Dubreuil-Blondin’s article, only in this case the *gendered* specificity of the physical experiencing of the work is not discussed.

Elle [sculpture-architecture] s’ouvre au contraire à un contact plus physique où tout le corps du spectateur s’engage, souvent au ralenti, avec hésitation, à tâtons et tentant de se familiariser avec

feminine', not as an essence to be expressed, but as a set of embodied experiences traversed by social meanings that do not produce or reflect a unified subject, Dubreuil-Blondin effectively argues that feminist art can intervene in postmodern art.

Dubreuil-Blondin's critical analysis of feminist art from within the paradigm of art history can also be found in Johanne Lamoureux's discussion of the relation between performance art, postmodernism and work by women. Both authors worked from assumptions regarding the critical and epistemological function of art that was rooted in the discourses of modern and, by extension, postmodern art. As such they are in contradistinction to the paradigm that Rose-Marie Arbour used to discuss *art à discours féministe*, a paradigm that comes out of the social history of art. They are also distinct from the use of French feminist theory by Suzanne Lamy, work that both came out of and opposed psychoanalytic theory, especially the work of Jacques Lacan. The sources that these authors drew on, and the assumptions underlining their arguments, entail different sites of knowledge/power within the larger domain of feminist art. Together they demonstrate that the domain of feminist art within Quebec was traversed by competing problematics and theoretical assumptions, some from within and others from outside the domain of art history and criticism.¹⁹ They also produced sites of identification within

ces formes mais aussi avec son corps qu'il n'a pas l'habitude de sentir ainsi, si présent et désorienté. Rapport tactile où l'étrange devient familier (proche) mais reste étranger (propre), donc corps à corps avec la construction où le « spectateur » fait corps avec la sculpture qui le « définit » en lui indiquant tout ce qui lui est extérieur et qui l'affecte (Payant 1987, 321).

¹⁹ I do not want to imply that these were the only three theoretical/political positions within the discourses of feminism or feminist art within Quebec, or the only ones within the catalogue essays. Collectively they do demonstrate that the domain of feminist art as a discourse was articulated in relation to problematics and theories from within the field of art history and art criticism (themselves complex formations traversed by divisions and oppositions) and from outside the domain of art.

these discourses – as feminist artist.

At the same time that these texts mark out different positions or sites of knowledge/power within the larger domain of feminist art, positions that demonstrate points of division and opposition within it, they also shared a number of assumptions about feminist art, as well as about who, and what, fell into that category. Feminist art was assumed to be ‘about’ women in some way – women’s experience, point of view, or condition within society presented from the position of the artist as a woman. In almost every case, when not speaking about the artists in the exhibition, the examples given were of American feminist art, or at least that part of it represented by Judy Chicago and Lucy Lippard. In other words, these texts produced American feminist art as the model through which feminist art was defined and against which art in Quebec was measured.

This defining of feminist art through American examples is most obvious in the essay by Thérèse Saint-Gelais where she undertakes to examine the specificity of *art féminin* and *art féministe*. According to Saint-Gelais, art in the feminine is not strictly political in that it does not make political demands or attempt to produce social change. Rather, it elaborates a vocabulary that symbolizes women’s social and biological experience. Art in the feminine is therefore an exploration of ‘the feminine’ in and through visual language as much as through the ‘content’ of the work or what it represents.

On the other hand, she defines feminist art as political art, as art that makes

political demands or attempts to produce social change. Here, the work of the American artist Judy Chicago is considered as exemplary.

L'art féministe est un art politique et, comme toute forme d'art politique, son contenu doit être clair. Ce qu'il exprime, c'est d'abord et surtout du féminisme.... "Menstruation Bathroom" [de Judy Chicago] témoigne de l'histoire féministe, elle est une des oeuvres par lesquelles passent les convictions de l'artiste. L'art est ici moyen et le féminisme une fin.... L'art féministe de Judy Chicago est un art qui se fait pour le changement, son existence tient à l'effet qu'il désire provoquer (151, 152).

Thus, for Saint-Gelais the distinction between feminist art and art in the feminine is in the political aim of the work. However, she does not see these two kinds of work as in opposition to each other. She argues rather that they both begin with women's lived social and biological experience as the source of the visual language and/or content of the work. Furthermore, according to her, to claim 'the feminine' as a place to speak from is itself a feminist act.

Qu'un féminin certain se manifeste et qu'il s'approprié un espace et une forme relève, croyons-nous, d'une conscience féministe. Le monde présent est sans contredit basé et construit sur des valeurs masculines; de se montrer *autre* est audacieux et engage à une position qui remet en question ces valeurs (152).

Through this she extends the definition of feminist art and indirectly claims the work in the exhibition – work about women's experience, point of view, or condition within society presented from the position of the artist as a woman – as feminist.

The assumptions that feminist art, whether overtly political or 'in the feminine', represents women's experience, point of view or condition within society – that it is 'autobiographical' to use Saint-Gelais' word – and that American feminist art is exemplary of feminist art, can be seen to traverse all the essays in the catalogue.

Moreover, it was confirmed by the presence of the *Dinner Party* alongside the exhibition *Art et féminisme*, and by the critical attention that it received.²⁰ What feminist art was put in contradistinction to was not just art by men, but often formalist art as defined by the American critic Clement Greenberg and as represented by abstract art. This distinction is explicit in Rose-Marie Arbour's essay where she argues that art in the feminine is necessarily representational because women refuse to separate art from the contradictions and struggles of daily life (4). It is also underlies Lamoureux's assessment of whether feminist art's refusal of formalism, as represented by the work of Judy Chicago and Lucy Lippard, necessarily puts them within a postmodern framework (64). Even Dubreuil-Blondin sets up a distinction between feminist art, "dont Judy Chicago serait en quelque sorte le paradigme (160)," and Land Art by women, all of which were situated in the United States. In other words American art, whether feminist or formalist, was understood as defining contemporary art.

Conclusion to *Art et féminisme*

The *textual* operations of *Art et féminisme*, or the exhibition as *text*, including *Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise*, can be seen to work across both the works and the catalogues. While *Art et féminisme*, like *Artfemme '75*, was a survey exhibition, the choice of object or the problematic that it 'surveyed' was different. No longer women's art in general, by posing the question of the relation between art and feminis the

²⁰ In fact, *Art et féminisme* was to some degree overshadowed by the *Dinner Party*. Chicago's work received by far the most press coverage (I have found 22 articles on Chicago's work in comparison to 16 for *Art et féminisme*), in some cases opening a discussion of the larger exhibition. These articles, which most often repeated the information contained in the museum's press release, presented the *Dinner Party* as feminist art – as a work of art and a work of social intervention.

exhibition narrowed and clarified the object of enquiry. With this change, the democratic and inclusive aspect of the earlier exhibition was jettisoned. *Art and féminisme* was constructed around certain *choices*. The definition of feminist art, or the construction of feminist art as a discursive object, was produced in part through these choices.

As discussed earlier, the works that were chosen all entailed the figuration of the female body in some way, whether through presentation or representation. It was this aspect of the work that was foregrounded through the exposition of the exhibition. In the catalogue *Arbour* further placed the works, especially their use of figuration, within a discussion of the female body as the site of oppression and as the locus of struggle for liberation for women. In other words, presentational and representational practices by women, when of the female body, were read as political practices. Furthermore, this was placed in a larger discursive terrain that not only lined up women's art, figuration and feminist politics, but also set this in opposition to abstraction and formalism as defined by Greenbergian modernism from the United States. In effect, the second was used to define the first as its opposite and as an oppositional practice.

This linking of representational practices with feminist art, especially when tied to the notions of communication and efficiency, had its origins in Quebec in the underground and political art of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Moreover, it tended to privilege certain kinds of discursive and non-discursive practices. For example, due to the assumption that the photographic image gave more direct access to the reality that it depicted, documentary video and photography were privileged sites for this work. Furthermore, they were often linked with specific institutions, as in the documentary

video produced through Video Femmes and GIV, and with production processes that were deemed more ‘democratic’.²¹ Arbour’s argument regarding the political implications of women’s representation of the female body, which is based in traditions of the social analysis of art, demonstrates that this work incited certain kinds of readings.

What I am describing here through the linking of assumptions about representation, specific media, forms of visual and production practices, institutions, and readings for the work is a kind of ‘knot’ or point of knowledge/power within the larger discursive field of feminist art. Furthermore, it is precisely in the *relation* between these different levels of production, in the way that they are tied together, that this definition is produced. However, this locus of knowledge/power is produced not only through the relation between these different levels of production, but also in relation to the wider discursive field, through opposition as well as alignment. In other words, they are positioned in relation to other sites of knowledge/power, in relation to the larger discursive field. Discursive production entails the positioning in discourse. Thus the ‘taking up’ of artworks into the discursive and non-discursive practices of an exhibition is at the same time a positioning within larger discursive fields, relative to other sites of knowledge/power.

Politically motivated work was not the only kind of work included in *Art et féminisme*, nor the only site of knowledge/power produced through its operations. The privileging of figuration of the female body was read as ‘about’ the woman artist, and by extension as ‘about’ women. Representational practices were thus seen as an exploration

²¹

See note 6.

of women's identity and *imaginaire*. This can be seen in Thérèse Saint-Gelais' assertion that both 'feminist art' and 'art in the feminine' begin from the experience of the artist herself. Suzanne Lamy's essay, which spoke about knowledge, the body and women's art, also assumed that these were centred on the woman as both the subject and object of knowledge. In Lamy's case, as with Guay's essay, this was linked to the re-reading of psychoanalytic theory by people like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, theories and problematics drawn from outside the domain of the visual arts. The presence of French feminism was doubled by that of Irigaray herself as one of the speakers for the colloquium organized as part of *Art et féminisme*.

Together these essays map out the concept of 'art in the feminine'. Furthermore, the conceptual space that their essays opened up both made it possible to include less overtly political works in the exhibition and brought these works into the discursive operations of the exhibition catalogue. This discussion of 'art in the feminine', where it was 'the feminine' as identity and as *imaginaire* that was foregrounded, marks out another 'knot' or conjunction within the discursive and non-discursive operations of the exhibition where the figuration of the female body through the practices of visual art was linked to readings that located the artworks within larger discursive formations.

Looking at the works and essays, there was no clear line drawn between 'feminist art' and 'art in the feminine', to use Saint-Gelais' terminology. They rather defined a range of theoretical positions and visual practices. Arbour's reading of figuration by women artists in terms of the body as the site of oppression and locus of struggle for liberation, and Lamy's claim that a feminist approach to art entails a socio-historical

reading in order to understand the conditions of its production and reception, demonstrate that these two positions were not defined in opposition to each other. However, as mentioned earlier, there was an opposition that ran through many of the catalogue essays; this was the opposition between feminist art and Greenbergian modernism. As the essays by Dubreuil-Blondin and Lamoureux demonstrate, the question that this raised was the relation between feminist art and postmodernism in art. This question functioned as a disturbance in the exhibition's construction of feminist art as a discursive object and opened further questions and sites for discursive elaboration. At stake was both the definitions of postmodern and feminist art and the relationship between the two.

It can be seen from this description of *Art et féminisme* that while the exhibition was organized around the question or problematic of the relation between art and feminism, what it constructed through its discursive and non-discursive operations was a definition of 'feminist art'. This was, moreover, not a singular object. The different terms used in the essays, *art à discours féministe*, *art au féminin* or *art féministe*, and the theories and assumptions used to define these terms and to discuss the artworks, demonstrate that the domain of feminist art had become more complex since the mid-1970's. *Art and féminisme* in effect mapped out the terrain of feminist art through its discursive and non-discursive practices. However, to reintroduce my geo-political analogy again, it was an open terrain marked by different sites of discursive production and the workings of power/knowledge. Looking at the different means through which this was produced, it is also obvious that the discourse of feminist art was being elaborated in part through the texts that presented and positioned the works as 'feminist'.

This is not to say that the artworks were simply the raw material for the authors, without their own discursive function. Rather it is to say that works that would have previously been discussed as ‘women’s art’ were now taken up into a discussion of ‘feminist art’, and their own specific address integrated into this larger discursive terrain. This change is in part due to the availability of new theories and problematics through which the works could be read, and which in turn incited further discursive elaboration on both the level of artworks and readings for those works.

Parallel to this, the category of feminist art was broadened on the level of the *exhibition*. By including performance art, dance, theatre and video, as well as the more traditional media such as drawing, painting and sculpture, the exhibition defined feminist art across disciplinary boundaries within and outside of the domain of the visual arts. What was foregrounded through this, or what the exhibition produced as the connection between them, was their feminism. This was doubled by the assumption that women constituted a social group. While this assumption was implicit in the organization of the exhibition itself (and was in effect produced by the exhibition), Arbour makes it clear in one of her articles. She writes that “malgré des disparités économiques, elles partagent la même situation par rapport à l’État, à la famille, à l’homme (Arbour 1982b, 7).” Feminism in art is thus produced as a category across disciplines within the arts, and across social divisions within the larger social context.

Réseau Art-Femmes

Just as *Art et féminisme* was organized to coincide with the *Dinner Party*, the

exhibitions at the Musée d'art contemporain incited other projects and further elaboration of the domain of feminist art. One of these was *Réseau Art-Femmes*. In the flyer for this event, the aims of the project were defined this way:

La proposition Réseau Art-Femme tient compte du milieu québécois dans son ensemble et des effectifs propres aux régions. Projection intéressante d'une topologie de l'art québécois dans les lieux mêmes de son insertion et entreprise de décryptage, de dévoilement d'une production langagière, corporelle et idéologique. Où sont les valeurs femmes dans l'art au Québec, où en est la fonction réseau comme alternative de diffusion sur les surfaces régionales du Québec (Lafortune, personal archives) ?

This double interrogation, regarding women's art and Quebec, structured the discursive and non-discursive organization of *Réseau Art-Femmes*.

Réseau Art-Femmes was in fact four separate events in as many cities, each with its own mandate and organizational structure.²² The initiator of the project was Diane-Jocelyne Côté who invited women in other cities to participate by organizing something in their own community. *Traces*, the title of the event in Quebec City, included 'performative installation' at the Musée du Québec organized by Côté, and a photography exhibition at the gallery Vu organized by Lucie Lefebvre.²³ While the first was initially

²² While my discussion of *Art et féminisme* and the different sections of *Réseau Art-Femmes* tries to make evident the specificity of each exhibition, it should be noted that the works themselves were perhaps not so clearly divided as to intent. Hélène Roy showed work in both *Art et féminisme* and *Espaces-Femmes*. Manon Thibault and Blanche Célany participated in *Traces* and in *Tridimension-Elles*, while Carmen Coulombe showed work in *Traces* and *Art et féminisme*. Lise Bégin presented photographic work in both the exhibitions at the Musée du Québec and at Vu. While these works formed connections between the different exhibitions, this also demonstrates the way that each exhibition approached the work from its own specific assumptions, integrating the work into its own enunciative strategies and privileging some readings over others.

²³ The dates were March 10-28, 1982. The artists participating at the Musée du Québec were Claude Arteau, Lise Bégin, Louky Bersianik, Bernard Bonnier, Marie Bonnier, Danièle Bourque, Lise Castonguay, Blanche Célany, Francine Chaîné, Jacques Cloutier, Lucienne Cornet, Lorraine Côté, Carmen Coulombe, Christine Daoust, Odette Fournier, Marie Gauvin, Lucie Grégoire, Nicole Jolicoeur, Marie Langlois, Geneviève Letarte, Valérie Letarte, Aline Martineau, Paule Martineau, Pierrette Mondou, Marie Nash,

conceived of as a form of documentation of the work by women in Quebec City, Côté said that the large amount of work in theatre, dance and video soon led her to the idea of performativity (D-J. Côté 1982b, 16). The ‘exhibition’ at the Musée du Québec was thus structured around the notion of process rather than product.

L’important est donc de créer des interrelations entre des artistes, de faire cohabiter un grand nombre de niveaux de production et de conscientisation pour voir où en est le rapport des femmes-artistes à leur production à Québec. Tout ça finalement tient d’une vision à caractère écologique : celle qui renverse les perspectives et envisage globalement le contexte, qui tient compte de beaucoup d’éléments (plusieurs petits milieux) dans un système de relations qui permet des rapprochements apparemment incongrus (*Réseau Art-Femme : Traces* [1983], 3-4).

Linked to this notion of process was that of residue, or what was left after the work was done or the event had taken place. The exhibition ‘opening’ was in fact a closing, as the ‘traces’ of the works were left on display for the public.

The event in Chicoutimi was organized under the title of *Espaces-Femmes* by Lise Gauthier and Clémence Bergeron.²⁴ Their aim was to be as inclusive as possible with regards to media and artists, to be a kind of ‘survey’ of art by women in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. It therefore included not only an exhibition, but also evenings of

Geneviève Pépin, Danièle Ricard, Gisèle Ricard, Francine Saillant, Jacinthe Sévigny, Manon Thibault. The artists showing at Vu were Lise Bégin, Adrienne Bouchard, Ginette Bouchard, Marie-Andrée Cossette, Christiane Jobin, Marie-Josée Lafortune, Lucie Lefebvre and Brigitte Ostiguy.

²⁴ The dates were March 19-28, 1982. The participants were Lorraine Audette, Isabelle Baribeau, Marthe Beaudoin, France Bédard, Clémence Bergeron, Anne Bilodeau, Françoise Bilodeau, Diane Blais, Hélène Bonin, Sylvie Bouchard, Moïsette Boucher, Diane Blackburn-Côté, Sylvie Chenard, Monique Cloutier, Denise Côté, Rhéna Côté, Madeleine Doré, Aline Fortin-Pagé, Lise Gagnon, Danielle Gauthier, Lise Gauthier, Marie-Suzanne Gay, Sylvie Genest, Colette Houde, Michelle Huot, Bernadette Labondance, Lise Laforge-Bilodeau, Lise Langlois, Diane Laurier, Suzanne Lavoie, Micheline Lévesque, Nicole Mercier-Benoit, Hélène O’Bomsawin, Aline Pagé, Joanne Plourde, Nancy Ross, Hélène Roy, Carmen Simard, Jocelyne Simard, Lucie Simard, Rachèle Simard, Diane Tremblay, Odette Tremblay, Ruth Tremblay and the collective Dance Lab Pildowi.

video, dance, theatre, music, performance and readings. The object ‘surveyed’ however was not simply art by women, but ‘women’s art’ understood as coming from and speaking about women’s experience as women and as artists. The term that was used to refer to this was ‘interior temperature’.

Inviter des femmes à produire, selon leur mode d’expression habituel, des pièces qui permettraient de ‘visualiser, d’exprimer leur température intérieure quant à la vie qu’elles vivent comme femmes’, c’était ouvrir l’art à la vie et à l’auto-référence, c’était orienter le vocabulaire technique vers l’anecdote, le récit (Gaétane Picard in *Réseau Art-Femmes : Espaces-Femmes* [1983], 12).

This notion of ‘interior temperature’ was linked to the theme of the exhibition, “la perception que les femmes ont de leur espace (3).” In her introductory essay, Lise Gauthier further proposed that “prendre de la place commençait sans doute par ‘occuper son espace’ (6).” Since the ‘interior temperature’ which many of the essays spoke about signified both a person’s experience of their condition as a woman and the coming to consciousness of that condition, ‘the perception that women have of their space’ referred to women’s awareness of their social place. The *Espaces* – spaces – of the title therefore linked together the ideas of speaking about one’s condition as a woman within the public sphere or ‘taking one’s place’, and occupying a public space in the form of a temporary gallery. Through this, feminism in art signified both the artworks and the forms of organization through which the works could enter the public sphere.

Séquences, the project for *Réseau Art-Femmes* in Sherbrooke, was a series of film screenings, conferences, and an installation by Montreal artist Barbara Steinman.²⁵

²⁵ The screenings took place from March 8th to 11th. The exhibition ran from February 21st to March 21st. The films shown for *Séquences* were:

While, according to Johanne Brouillet, the decision to show films was in part based on the lateness of their involvement in the *Réseau...*, it marked another site for the definition of feminist art, geographically and conceptually. She said that in looking for films by women it became apparent that most of them addressed social issues.²⁶ Panel discussions were therefore organized to talk about the films, film-making and the issues that they addressed. In that both the films and the discussions were understood as forms of social intervention, especially in the case of *C'est surtout pas de l'amour* (the French version of *Not a Love Story*), this part of *Séquences* worked within a similar political and conceptual terrain to the documentary work in *Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise*.

The installation by Barbara Steinman, while 'filmic' in its use of moving slide images projected on white sheets, drew rather on the problematics and practices of visual art in its formation. This work was conceptually linked to the exhibition at the Musée d'art contemporain through the catalogue essay which argued that the work came from the personal experience of the artist, and through this was connected to the collective

C'est surtout pas de l'amour. Bonnie Sherr Klein. 68 min. 40 sec. Studio D of the National Film Board of Canada.

Premiers Jours. Clorinda Warny. Completed posthumously by Suzanne Gervais and Lina Gagnon. 8 min. 48 sec. 16 mm. National Film Board. 1980.

Une Histoire de femmes. Sophie Bissonnette, Martin Ducknorth, and Joyce Rock. 16 mm. 73 min. 1980.

Manger avec sa tête. Monique Crouillère. 16 mm. 60 min. 1980.

Une bien belle ville. Sylvie Groulx, Francine Allaire, Michel Lamothe, and Jeanine Gagné. 16 mm. 20 min. 1975.

Anastasia oh ma chérie. Paule Baillargeon. 16 mm. 35 min. 1977.

²⁶ The exceptions to this interventionist work were *Premiers Jours*, an animation, and *Anastasia oh ma chérie*, a fictional film.

experience of women (Graham Cantieni in *Réseau Art-Femmes : Séquences* [1983], 23).²⁷ This reading of the installation within the optic of *Art et féminisme* was reinforced by the presence of Arbour who was invited to speak about women's art and the exhibition at the Musée.

Finally, *Tridimension-Elles* was the last of the four *Réseau Art-Femmes* events to be undertaken.²⁸ This exhibition, which was organized by Ghyslaine Lafrenière and Thérèse Saint-Gelais and presented at the Université du Québec à Montréal, both was a response to *Art et féminisme*, and had to distinguish itself from the other exhibition. For this reason the organizers chose to focus on sculpture by women, a medium that was marginalized in the museum exhibition, and women artists' attitudes towards sculpture as a medium which was historically associated with men (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Tridimension-Elles* [1983], 1).

In fact, *Tridimension-Elles* distinguished itself not only from *Art et féminisme*, but also from the other sections of the *Réseau*.... First of all, the exhibition focused on a single medium with the aim of looking at women artists' attitudes towards that medium, not at women's experience as women and as artists. Secondly, the catalogue essays were written by art historians and critics, four out of nine of whom were men, and who applied

²⁷ Rose-Marie Arbour mentions that originally Steinman's work was to have been included in *Art et féminisme* but it became too large to fit into that exhibition (Arbour 1982b, 7).

²⁸ The dates were March 23rd to April 4th, 1982. According to Ghyslaine Lafrenière, a talk by Rose-Marie Arbour, Francine Larivée and Thérèse Saint-Gelais at the university regarding the work of Quebec women artists in the fall of 1981 had already made her aware of how little known the work of women artists was. This influenced her decision to accept Diane-Jocelyne Côté's invitation to participate in *Réseau Art-Femmes* by organizing an exhibition (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Tridimension-Elles* [1983], 1).

The artists in *Tridimension-Elles* were Blanche Célanuy, Tatiana Demidoff-Séguin, Louise Gagné Lucie Laporte, Isabelle Leduc and Manon Thibault.

the assumptions and writing styles of their domain to the reading of the work. These assumptions marked out an opposition within, or perhaps against, the domain of feminist art.

The opposition between *Tridimension-Elles* and *Art et féminisme* is most obvious in the essay by René Payant where he contrasts the two exhibitions in order to argue for a practice in art and art writing that recognizes the specificity of the field of art as a set of problematics and practices. In this he is implicitly critiquing social histories of art that look at the context to understand the conditions of possibility for any art practice and as the optic through which works should be read. In other words, he is directly critiquing the aims and assumptions underlying the organization of *Art et féminisme*.

Payant also sets the two exhibitions in opposition on the level of the artworks. The contrast that he sets up is between work that is ‘autobiographical’, that is work about the artist’s life, and work that is ‘intimate’, which he defines as work that involves the writing of the self in the text. ‘The intimate’ assumes the productivity of language (or in this case visual art) where ‘the self’ is constituted in the text. He thus proposes that feminism in art could or should mean the coming to language of women through the work on language. This argument clearly critiques the assumption that feminist art is in some way autobiographical, as well as the privileging of representational practices, especially in video, film and performance, that this assumption entailed. In *Tridimension-Elles*, feminism as a social movement or as a problematic within the work is either not

discussed or is put on the side of the ‘unacceptable’.²⁹

I would like to look at the exhibition *Traces* in more depth. While the diversity of the events making up *Réseau Art-Femmes* precludes one of them ‘representing’ the whole, this event does make evident the way that discourses of feminist art were being produced across a wider set of problematics and practices, across a wider discursive terrain, than that produced by *Art et féminisme*.

As stated earlier, *Traces* was organized around the notions of performativity or process, and of the traces or residue left by that process. The artists were therefore invited to work within the space during the eighteen days of the exhibition. During that time there were performances by dancers, musicians, writers and performance artists, often in collaboration with each other, as well as the more usual visual art forms such as installation, photography and drawing. For these latter, it was often the process of making the work that was on display. There were also those for whom the ‘process’ was the movement of the viewer through the work.

²⁹ I should add a brief reminder at this point. The *Art et féminisme* that I am discussing here, and that Payant opposes, is the representation of the exhibition constructed in his text. As mentioned earlier, while Rose-Marie Arbour placed the work within a discussion of the social and historical conditions that have affected women’s position in society and their production as artists, the enunciative strategies of the exhibition *Art et féminisme* were much more polyvocal than his text allows. The division that he sets up between social readings of art and readings internal to the domain of art itself does not so much lie between the two exhibitions as much as it is a division that runs through *Art et féminisme* itself. The essays by Dubreuil-Blondin and Lamoureux, as well as the works by Cohen and Landry, while minority positions within the enunciative strategies of the exhibition, show that a definition of feminist art internal to the problematics and practices of art already existed within *Art et féminisme*. Payant’s monolithic, or monologic, depiction of the other exhibition demonstrates the habit of constructing a representation of what one opposes as the mirror opposite of what one supports.

To illustrate the way that ‘process’ was taken up by artists in their work, I will look at the work of one of the artists invited by Diane-Jocelyne Côté – that of Nicole Jolicoeur. Her work, *Installation-collection*, consisted of the objects that were on display, but also the process of collection itself as it evolved through the duration of the exhibition. This included visiting the flea market every day, buying things that caught her attention and that evoked associations. She likewise brought things that she had at home. These ‘found’ objects included surgical instruments, small framed images of horses or women hysterics, things that evoked childhood such as an old rag doll, children’s games, and a ribbon box, official ‘identifications’ in the form of her baptismal certificate and passport, exhibition invitations, post cards, and photographs of herself at work at the university. Among the things that she included was a bookwork that she was in the process of making. This work was itself a collage of found and drawn images and texts that explored the attitudes and cultural meanings of the horse. This material was brought to the museum and installed in a temporary alcove within the larger exhibition space. This alcove effectively became a museum within the museum, with the objects displayed in small groupings at various heights or on the floor. To these were added labels, attached with string, such as used in old-fashioned archives or archeological museums. The post cards, collected while traveling in the United States, were hung so that the hand-typed quotes on the back by Paulo Freire were visible. These quotes evoke the voice of Friere at the same time that they double as Jolicoeur’s own interrogations.³⁰

³⁰ Paulo Freire (b. 1921) was famous for his work as an educator among the poor and illiterate in third world countries. One of his best known works was *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Two examples of the quotes used are: “Au cas où dans cette lettre il y aurait quelque chose qui ne corresponde pas à la réalité du

In a recent interview Jolicoeur said that at the time she was interested in the idea of categories and the possibility of changing them, of creating different categories. In this work the categories were linked to her own identity – as an artist, a university teacher, a woman and as a Francophone (Jolicoeur 2001). The objects or images chosen for inclusion thus stood for or ‘represented’ aspects of her identity, aspects which were not as such ‘visible’. However, what was on display was not only the different objects and the various relations between them, as well as the meanings that they evoked, but also the act of collecting itself. Moreover, ‘performance’, or the work as act rather than object, seems to have been central to all the works in the exhibition. This is most obvious in the inclusion of dance, music, readings and performance art. It was also evident in the way that the aims and structuring of the exhibition encouraged collaboration between different domains in multi-disciplinary works, for example *Frange-démesure* by an artist, a dancer and a writer,³¹ and inter-disciplinary works such as *La Geste mauve* where objects and sound were used to ‘spacialize’ the text.³² However, as is obvious from the work of

pays et avec quoi, en conséquence, vous n’êtes pas d’accord, avertissez-moi,” and “Comme je l’ai toujours souligné, je n’ai d’autre intention, en vous écrivant, que de poser des question et nullement d’offrir des solutions, même lorsque je suggère tel ou tel type d’action.”

³¹ “Frange-démesure” was produced by Pierrette Mondou (artist), Christine Daoust (dancer), and Louky Bersianik (writer). The description in the catalogue notes states:

Médium : Collage, installation, danse, voix, écriture. Une danseuse au corps mouillé prend contact avec des banderoles de papier couvertes de mots... Un thème, les restes. Une écrivaine ensuite reconstitue un texte-témoin à partir des fragments (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Traces* [1983], 12).

³² The artists were Danièle Bourque, Geneviève Letarte and Francine Saillant. The text describing the work states:

L’espace de la *Geste Mauve* consistait en une installation quasi symétrique de deux lits doubles aux teintes rose et mauve disposés face à face sur lesquels chacune des deux participants était placée.... Le projet de *La Geste Mauve* était double : constituer une mémoire poé-politique de l’histoire des femmes, et rendre spatial (plutôt que livresque) le texte poétique. De là, le

Jolicoeur, even normally static forms were reconceptualized as process where the presence of the artist and/or the act of making were important aspects of the work.

If the stated aims of the exhibition incited women to work performatively, and in some cases collaboratively across different disciplinary boundaries, the inclusion of works from different disciplines, as well as multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work, produced a definition of art as experimental, cross or multi-disciplinary, and as process rather than as an object. This definition of art was further elaborated by Diane-Jocelyne Côté in the catalogue. In this text, which was evidently written after the exhibition itself and in some way responds to both the work and to the criticisms that were made of it, Côté defines the ideas underlying the organization and structure of *Traces* as performativity, the process of installation, and the traces left behind. These are, however, not separate, but interconnected aspects of the same process. Furthermore, in constructing meaning, these works engage with time and space as well as the materials and methods through which they were produced. In effect, time and space are seen as part of the materials with which the artists worked, and thus as part of the work itself and the way that the works were to be understood.

Il faut que du temps soit dépensé ; du temps avant et du temps pendant. Le temps s'inclut comme valeur à saisir, à voir dans la disposition des choses montrées (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Traces* [1983], 8).

Certains espaces, dès le départ sont *délimités en tant que lieu...* Certains lieux sont *mobiles...* D'autres espaces sont pris comme *trajet...* Enfin certaines artistes effectueront des déplacements qui prendront le temps d'un *parcours* et ne laisseront comme indications d'espace que des pointillés, des marques de ruban gommé (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Traces* [1983], 9).

qualificatif qui lui fut donné : celui de texte-événement (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Traces* [1983], 20).

Through this Côté presents the concern with the time and space of the production of art as common to all the works, in effect forming a link between the works. Time and space, understood as materials which the artist used in the production of their work, underpinned the concept of process and were presented as central to the production and reading of contemporary art. This emphasis on process entailed a concern for the ‘traces’ of the event or what was left after the work was done.³³ It was for this reason that there was a closing rather than an opening. It was also the reason that the exhibition was documented in photography, video and sound recording for radio broadcast. The intention was to extend the work beyond the exhibition itself and, in the case of the video, so that the work could ‘tour’ throughout Quebec.

If Côté was defining contemporary art practices as multi-disciplinary, experimental, and performative, she was also, by only inviting women, defining women’s art. It is to be remembered that *Réseau Art-Femmes* was in part a response to exhibitions at the Musée d’art contemporain in Montreal. In her introductory essay Côté positioned *Traces* in opposition to art that makes political demands. Instead, she proposed work that is ‘*pulsif*’.

Avancer; il y a sûrement à Québec des femmes-artistes chez qui la pulsion de produire est plus forte que le plaisir de se plaindre. Des femmes qui poussent des avancées de présence. Qui parlent en langage pulsif. Autre chose qu’une position critique. Une parole qui se pose d’elle-même comme pivot de ses propos – une « affirmante » – qui parle d’ailleurs et se regarde elle-même sans référence autre (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Traces* [1983], 3).

³³ *Traces* was not the only exhibition that put the objects left after a performance on display. An exhibition curated by Sylvie Tourangeau and Denis Lessard in 1989, *Performances + Artifacts*, included the presentation of performance art and the exhibition of the materials used in performance as a documentation or, in their word, as an ‘archeology’ of performance practices.

What is being produced here is not simply an opposition to a specific definition of feminist art, or an opposition within the domain of feminist art in Quebec. The reference to a language that is ‘pulsive’ makes a link between language, or in this case visual art, and the female body as the source of new forms of creative production. This linking between visual art and the female body parallels what was happening within the domain of literature. The notion of writing from the body can be found, for example, in *D’elles* by Suzanne Lamy where she discusses women’s relation to language and writing.

...on peut commencer à parler. À désigner quelques effets, quelques composantes pulsionnelles, quelques rapports de l’imaginaire féminin au réel, à l’écriture (Lamy 1979, 54).

Another example is Madeleine Gagnon’s essay “Mon corps dans l’écriture” where Gagnon proposes that women’s writing could contribute to science and knowledge by putting desire back into the centre of discourse.

Si les femmes – et même les plus « savantes » – utilisent de plus en plus ce que l’on nomme, à défaut de mieux, *fiction*, c’est que jusqu’ici ce mode d’écriture (et de parole) est le seul qui puisse redonner au discours ce qu’il y a en nous tous de pulsions, fantasmes et désirs (M. Gagnon 1977, 83).

Karen Gould, writing about the development of Quebec feminist writing, argues that beginning in 1977 a link was made between the body, language and the *imaginaire* in women’s writing (42-43). She writes:

This discursive transformation involves not only an important shift from thematics to textuality, but also a striking change of focus from victimization to self-affirmation, from the forces acting upon women’s bodies to the power women possess to reposition their bodies as active agents in the political, social, and artistic spheres. Hence the female body previously defined and contained by existing cultural norms has become a body actively engaged in the transformation of those same norms and of culture itself (Gould 1990, 44).

Here Gould's argument regarding the body as the site of new politicized creativity in Quebec feminist writing echoes Côté's call for work that speaks in a "*langage pulsif*." Furthermore, both Côté and the writers that Gould discusses favour "self-affirmation" (Gould) or a position "*affirmante*" (Côté). In other words, Côté was making a connection between women's art practices and notions of feminism and feminist cultural practices that had their roots in Quebec feminist writing. This connection was doubled by the presence of Louky Bersianik, a well known Quebec feminist writer, as one of the participants in *Traces*.

While this connection between the work in *Traces* and Quebec feminist writing was hinted at rather than developed, and did not receive the same attention as the relation between the experimental, multi-disciplinarity and process in art, it nevertheless signals the way that the politics and aesthetics of feminist writing were being articulated to the domain of visual art. What was produced through that juncture were new forms of institutional practices on the level of the exhibitions, for example the inclusion of work by writers and their collaboration with artists in other fields, and the privileging of certain readings for the works, especially when the works presented or represented the body in some way.

While the exhibition at the Musée du Québec was organized around the notions of performativity, process and the trace, the exhibition at the Galerie Vu was organized with the stated aim of getting the work of women photographers known, "à percer le mur de la

diffusion sélective (D-J. Côté 1982b, 17).” To this end Lucie Lefebvre invited seven other women to show at the gallery.³⁴ The choice of work, or in this case the choice of artists, mark out another aim for the exhibition – non-traditional or experimental work in photography.

Among the artists at Vu was Marie-Josée Lafortune. Her work consisted of a large panel of photographic paper along with two smaller framed prints. According to the artist the images were taken in a discotheque, with the flash off to the side of the camera, thus producing fragmentary images of bodies and lights. These initial images were re-worked in the printing process by placing a glass plate over the photo paper and drawing on it with black ink before printing, casting white painterly brush strokes into the printed image, in places obliterating it completely. In some instances she drew on the negative with a black lithography crayon, accentuating certain graphic lines in the image. These reworked images were then integrated into the larger work, sometimes forming sequences. In other words, the work articulated different practices together, literally inserting drawing and painting into the photographic process and image. What was produced through this articulation was, to use Denis Lessard’s term, a ‘hybrid’ form (*La Traversée des Mirages* 1992, 21).

It is this hybridity or the reworking of photographic practices through the incorporation of different media or materials, either directly or indirectly, the use of sequences or non-traditional formats, or simply non-traditional photographic processes

³⁴ The artists were Ginette Bouchard, Brigitte Ostiguy, Adrienne Bouchard, Marie-Andrée Cossette, Marie-Josée Lafortune, Christiane Jobin, Lise Bégin and Lucie Lefebvre.

such as xerography, that marks all the works in the exhibition at Galerie Vu. Together, they produced a definition of non-traditional or experimental practices in photography. This definition of experimental photography, produced through the discursive and non-discursive practices of the exhibition, was, effectively, the ‘exposition’ of the exhibition. It was also, one might add, that of Vu, a new gallery that had not yet become an artist-run centre and that was just formulating its own mandate within the larger community of Quebec City. In that *Traces* was one of the gallery’s first exhibitions, it was also part of the means through which the gallery’s mandate was defined.

It can therefore be seen that the two exhibitions that made up *Traces*, at the Musée du Québec and at the gallery Vu, were organized separately with their own mandates and organizational structures. The first was structured around the notions of performativity and the trace where art was defined as experimental, multi-disciplinary and as process, articulating these to the politics and aesthetics of Quebec feminist writing, especially as it linked the body and language. The second exhibition presented various hybrid and non-traditional formats and practices in photography, thereby aligning women’s photography with experimental practices. The common point between these two exhibitions was the link that was produced between women’s art and experimental and multidisciplinary practices.

If *Traces*, like the exhibitions in the other cities, answered the question “où sont les valeurs femmes dans l’art au Québec,” the second question posed by *Réseau Art-*

Femmes, “où en est la fonction réseau comme alternative de diffusion sur les surfaces régionales du Québec (flyer in Lafortune, personal archives)?” functioned more on the level of the *Réseau...* as a whole. The notion of a network between centres for the exhibition of works and for communication between artists entails a definition of Quebec as made up of different regions. This definition was thus applied to feminist art, in effect territorializing the discourse of feminist art and mapping it onto the geo-political surface of Quebec. Through this, feminist art was linked to a geo-political identity, *les québécoises*, producing that identity through the questions that it posed and the structuring of the *Réseau...* itself. In other words, *Réseau Art-Femmes* articulated the collective identity of nation to that of gender.

This notion of a network between different centres within Quebec, that in a sense mapped out the geo-political space of Quebec, was produced widely across diverse texts and forms of organization, both within and outside of the visual arts. Within the visual arts the notion that Quebec is made up of different regions was articulated to the narrative of art in Quebec, shifting the division around which it was constructed. For example, Richard Martel, in an article in the journal *Possibles* (1981), proposed that the earlier division between national and international art in Quebec, that was lined up with politically engaged art and abstract art respectively, was now being replaced by a new alignment and forms of political engagement. These new forms of political engagement were evident in the development of centres of artistic production outside of Montreal. Thus the division that defined art in Quebec was no longer international/national, but

rather Montreal/region or centre/periphery.³⁵

Il y a actuellement des production artistiques en région qui « n'auraient pas du tout honte » d'être vues à Montréal, quoique leurs auteurs ne soient pas tellement intéressés à déménager pour « peut-être perdre leur identité ». Ces groupes sont très actifs dans leur milieu et leurs pratiques souvent autogestionnaires laissent présager une *NOUVELLE FAÇON D'ENVISAGER LES CONCEPT D'ART QUÉBÉCOIS* (author's emphasis) (Martel 1981, 113).³⁶

This new 'regionalization' of the visual arts in Quebec, or the emergence of new centres of contemporary art production, was in part made possible by the creation of new art institutions, especially parallel galleries. *La Chambre Blanche* (1978), *Vu* (1981), and *Le Lieu* (1982), as well as *La Revue Intervention* (1978) and the older *Atelier de*

³⁵ It is interesting to note that the term 'international' does not disappear with the emergence of the couplet Montreal/region. Rather it is incorporated to both terms. Thus one of the ways that art in the regions was seen to subvert Montreal as THE centre for art in Quebec was in the way that organizations in the regions made links directly with artists and art centres in other countries, especially France, essentially leap-frogging over the metropolis. Montreal was no longer an intermediary between art in the regions and art in an international context. While *Réseau Art-Femmes* did not take up this particular aspect of the new definition of art in Quebec since it only included Quebec artists, it was discussed in relation to other exhibitions, for example the Symposium international de Sculpture Environnementale de Chicoutimi in 1980 (Martel 1981, 113-114; G. Durand 1983, 12).

³⁶ This article, like a similar one by Andrée Fortin (1982), still uses much of the language and assumptions of the earlier left-nationalist politics in art, and demonstrates how the shift from international/national to Montreal/region was produced through the notion of the political in art.

S'il ne s'agit clairement pas pour l'art québécois d'être à la remorque des avants-gardes des internationales patentées, surtout s'il se veut québécois et éventuellement alternatif, il n'en reste pas moins que s'affirmer culturellement en dehors des métropoles, c'est en soi subversif !... Ceci dit, il ne faudrait pas croire que l'activité artistique régionale soit l'Alternative en art. On peut faire en régions un art tout aussi traditionnel, classique et/ou élitiste qu'à Montréal. Mais la taille du milieu artistique, culturel et « progressiste » force des alliances et des regroupements et favorise ainsi une réflexion sur la place de l'artiste dans la société, sur le caractère « bourgeois » et formaliste de l'art versus l'artisanat et ce qu'on qualifie « d'art populaire »; se pose en effet de façon beaucoup plus criante dans les régions la question de l'audience: à qui parle-t-on et qu'a-t-on à lui dire (Fortin 1982, 211, 220) ?

The magazine *Intervention* maps this shift through the articles that it published from its inception in 1978 through to the early 1980's. Compare, for example, "Essai sur l'art contemporain québécois" by Richard Martel and "Identité nationale et lutte des classes dans l'art québécois" by Alain Richard, both in the Fall 1978 issue, with "Octobre 1979 : l'art au Québec" by Martel (no. 6, 1980) and "Les Réseaux d'art : Alternative au centralisme" by Guy Durand (no. 19, 1983).

réalisations graphiques de québec (1972, now called Engramme) were founded in Quebec City in the 1970's and early 1980's. Furthermore, as the articles in *Intervention* demonstrate, Quebec City was the leading centre for this new definition of art in Quebec, and in creating the opposition between Montreal and the rest of Quebec. Parallel galleries were also being established in other centres. For example, the Regroupement des Artistes des Cantons de l'Est (RACE) was founded in Sherbrooke 1973, the Galerie d'art de Matane began in the mid 1970's, and Langage-Plus was established in Alma in 1979.³⁷

The regionalization of art within Quebec, and the development of other centres of artistic production and collective identification outside of Montreal, was part of a larger process through which Quebec as a whole was 'regionalized'. In 1966 the Quebec government officially divided the province into ten regions (which was increased to eighteen in 1989), for the purposes of gathering statistics and for organizing development and administration (Harvey 1994, 14). In 1977 the newly elected Party Québécois extended this to the domain of culture by setting up Conseils Régionaux de la Culture or regional cultural councils. These councils, which came into existence in response to the same ideals of democratization and participation that underlay both the formation of parallel galleries and government funding for these projects, were to make culture accessible to everyone across Quebec and not simply in the two largest centres, Montreal and Quebec City (Linteau and others 1991, 590). The Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec, founded in 1986, was also structured on the basis of

³⁷ A listing and descriptions, sometimes including the date of their founding, of all the artist-run organizations in Quebec that are members of the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec, can be found in their *Répertoire*. The most recent edition, number five, was published in 2002.

regional representation.

This progressive regionalization of Quebec is also evident in most areas of academic studies. Fernand Harvey argues that the concept of regions, which was initially a geographic concept, was adopted by economists in the beginning of the 1950's, and into the disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, psychology, literary analysis and linguistics after 1970 (Harvey 1994 11, 18). As he argues, to adopt the concept of region is to spatialize the object of study (11). Quebec thus became territorialized, that is it was defined spatially across the whole geo-political area represented by the map (as opposed to the older definition of French Canada based on language and religion), and this territory was seen as made up of differences that mark one area from another.

This notion that Quebec is made up of different regions was thus produced across a wide range of governmental and non-governmental activities, and across both discursive and non-discursive practices. Furthermore, as the quote above by Martel demonstrates, the regionalization of Quebec also entailed the formation of different sites of identification. These different activities, practices and sites of identification were not separate, but were tightly imbricated together, effectively producing one another.³⁸

While the notion of Quebec being made up of different regions does imply a

³⁸ For example, Andrée Fortin notes that the development of different centres of cultural production was aided by the creation of CEGEPs and the Université du Québec throughout Quebec, which provided both jobs for those working in the arts and an artistic community (especially of students, artists, and other professors) which formed a public for their work (Fortin 1982, 219). Fernand Harvey describes a similar process whereby the development of sociological studies of the regions of Quebec began after the implantation of a network of educational institutions (Harvey 1994,16). Thus these regional centres became not only places to work, but also sites of identification from which to view the world.

certain equality between them, in reality of course the differences between them include differences of economic and political power. Therefore the couplet Montreal/region in fact represents an opposition, the second defining itself against the first, and the articles about the new forms of alternative artistic practice in the regions places this work in opposition to art in the metropolis. To quote Martel again, “L’art québécois n’est pas l’art montréalais (1980, 30).” However, if many of these articles (especially in *Intervention*) define Quebec City as the centre outside the centre of Montreal, this process of opposition could be and was applied to the relation between Quebec City and other regions, as Lise Gauthier, the organizer of *Espaces-Femmes* in Chicoutimi, makes clear.

La discrétion avec laquelle on opposait l’art montréalais à l’art québécois, cachait-elle le désir pour Québec de se distinguer de Montréal? Il me semblait que l’objectif le plus clair resterait cette décentralisation depuis Montréal, Chicoutimi servant plutôt d’alibi à la régionalisation, voire même à ‘l’urbanité’. Cette stratégie politique, fit naître en moi, une certaine méfiance (*Réseau Art-Femmes : Espaces-Femmes* [1983], 5).

This relation between the different regional centres was noted by Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin when she commented that “un événement inter-régional ne peut pas s’élaborer sans que s’établisse un certain rapport de forces (Dubreuil-Blondin 1983, 15).” The power relations that she describes go beyond distrust of the stakes of regionalization that the organizational structure of *Réseau Art-Femmes* produced. Dubreuil-Blondin says that the differences were in part due to the means available. Thus, for example, the exhibition in Montreal comfortably inserted itself into the museum, while Chicoutimi occupied a space outside the normal gallery system. Similarly, *Tridimension-Elles* was undertaken by a team of art historians and critics, while the texts for *Séquences* were for the most part

entrusted to students. These differences were also evident on the level of the discourses produced. As she says, the essays from Montreal explored postmodernity, while Chicoutimi was concerned with reality and the communication of a message (15). What this makes clear is that the differences between the centres were both discursive, on the level of the theories and concepts that were available to define and elaborate the problematic of feminist art, and non-discursive, the availability of the institutional means (including funding and personnel) through which art could be presented and positioned as feminist. Therefore the geo-political definition of feminist art in Quebec that *Réseau Art-Femmes* produced was marked by differences in the power to define discourses on art, in this case feminist art. Furthermore, centres of artistic production are literally sites of production of knowledge/power within the geo-political territory of Quebec.

Conclusion to *Réseau Art-Femmes*

The textual operations of the *Réseau Art-Femmes*, like that of *Art et féminisme*, were produced across the works, the catalogue, and the structuring of the separate exhibitions and the event as a whole. Together they produced a range of definitions of feminist art. If most of the films shown as part of *Séquences* worked within the same assumptions as the politicized documentary work shown during *Semaine de la vidéo féministe québécoise*, work that had its origins in the feminist movement of the mid-1970's, other works shared the concern with presenting or representing women's experience as women and as artists. This was sometimes articulated to an understanding of the body and language that came from Quebec feminist writing, literally incarnated by

the presence of Louky Bersianik as part of *Traces*. Often it was articulated to definitions of the experimental and multidisciplinary in art through the use of non-traditional materials and processes or the incorporation of other domains such as music, literature or dance. However, in the case of *Tridimension-Elles* it was not women or the body that was the object of the exhibition, but women's relation to the tradition of sculpture. The reading of this work in the catalogue produced an opposition within the domain of feminist art between work 'about' women and work 'about' the traditions of art.

In addition to producing a range of definitions of feminist art within and between the different exhibitions, the *Réseau...* effectively linked feminist art to feminist practices in other disciplines. Like the exhibition at the Musée d'art contemporain, it not only included visual art as traditionally understood, but also photography and performance art, both of which were newly accepted as part of the visual arts, as well as literature, dance, music, video and film, sometimes through the articulation of these different practices together in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work.

At the same time, *Réseau Art-Femmes* expanded the definition of feminist art across the geo-political surface of Quebec by occupying several centres at the same time. In this remapping of Quebec art, Montreal became just one centre of artistic production among others. What is evident here is that feminist art was being productively articulated to new definitions of Quebec art. This definition of art in Quebec replaced the older opposition between the terms 'national' and 'international', or between politically motivated forms of representation versus abstract art, with the opposition now being between Montreal and the regions, or perhaps more pointedly between Montreal and

Quebec City. With this there was a new configuration of *nous les québécois*, one that was defined in terms of the geo-political space of the map, and regionalized as different centres of cultural production and identification within the larger whole. *Réseau Art-Femmes* in effect articulated feminist art and Quebec art together, along with their attendant collective identities, producing feminist artists as *nous les québécoises* across both disciplinary boundaries and territorial space.

What I am trying to make evident through this description of *Réseau Art-Femmes* is another ‘knot’ or conjunction in the formation of discourses of feminist art in Quebec. Like *Art et féminisme*, the *Réseau...* linked together diverse discursive and non-discursive practices in its enunciative address – visual and exhibition practices, readings, institutions and forms of organization, discourses of art and nation, and the collective identities that they entailed. What was produced at that conjunction, through the relation between these different levels of discursive and non-discursive production, was ‘Quebec feminist art’ as discursive object. However, this was not a homogeneous object, but was traversed by different and competing discourses on art, as well as different institutional and discursive means through which to produce those discourses.

On one level these differences entailed the production of sites of knowledge/power within the larger domain of feminist art in Quebec. These differences existed on the level of the artworks, which articulated materials, processes, codes and problematics into their own specific address. The differences also existed on the level of the exhibitions, which took up and positioned the works through their own discursive and non-discursive practices, locating the works within larger discursive fields and relative to

other sites of knowledge/power both within and outside of the domain of feminist art. As Payant's essay for *Traces* makes clear, the different sites of discursive production were often produced in opposition to one another. Therefore feminist art, as a discursive terrain, was uneven, marked by competing sites of knowledge/power. As stated earlier, at stake was the definition of feminism and postmodernism in art, and the relation between the two. As will be clear later on, this question was played out in the larger domains of feminism and art, and was part of the discursive context within which feminist art was formed, and which marked it with its own questions and problematics.

On another level the differences within 'Quebec feminist art' as discursive object entailed the different locales where it was produced. 'Locale' or site of discursive production refers not only to different cities or regions, but to all the discursive and non-discursive means through which discourses are produced in different geo-political centres. In this sense the different sites of discursive production within the domain of feminist art were made literal by being produced in different centres throughout Quebec. These different centres were not only places where knowledge was produced, in this case definitions of feminist art, but were also sites of discursive power. This power is in part institutional, entailing the existence of galleries, personnel and funding for the production of exhibitions, along with their respective mandates, histories and reputations. It is also discursive, since any institution tends to have access to, and to privilege, certain discourses. These institutional and discursive instances are incorporated into the meanings and effects of any exhibition. As the quote by Lise Gauthier indicates, and the differences between the exhibition in Chicoutimi relative to Montreal make clear, some

centres had more institutional power than others to define feminist art and to make their definition enter into and structure the larger discursive terrain.

This second understanding of differences within the discursive field of feminist art is not concomitant with the first. Discourses cannot simply be lined up with cities, institutions, or even exhibitions. *Art et féminisme* and the exhibitions that made up *Réseau Art-Femmes* were complexly articulated events that entailed different and sometimes competing theoretical positions within their enunciative strategies. Discursive terrains and geo-political ones rather function as analogies of each other. More importantly, what this geo-political definition of feminist art makes clear is that the non-discursive, including exhibitions, institutions and their attendant mandates, histories and reputations, are formative of discourses on art, in this case feminist art, and they are always physically located somewhere. Therefore geo-political centres are also centres of production of power/knowledge and their attendant collective identities. They are thus sites of opposition to other centres.³⁹ In other words, on both the discursive and institutional levels, 'Quebec feminist art' was marked by different and competing sites of power/knowledge.

Feminism and feminist art have been understood as concerned with questions of difference.⁴⁰ What *Réseau Art-Femmes* makes evident are the ways that the discourse of

³⁹ Here it is useful to remember Fernand Harvey's insight that while the notion of regions entails concrete economic and institutional structures, regions only attain a certain cohesion when they are linked to a symbolic universe with its accompanying representations and collective identities (1994, 21).

⁴⁰ The understanding of feminism and feminist art has been particularly influenced by French feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous (Cixous and Clément 1986) and Luce Irigaray (1977; 1985), and British art historians such as Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (Parker and Pollock 1981; Pollock 1988; 1996; 1999).

feminist art is itself marked by differences. These differences arise because any enunciation, any artwork or exhibition, any institutional practice, is always located somewhere, both physically and discursively, and is produced in relation to other geo-political locales and sites of discursive production. To engage with the discursive and non-discursive means through which feminist art is produced is to position oneself in that discourse. What the *Réseau...* makes evident are the ways that feminist theories are taken up, or not, within a specific locale and the conditions of possibility for this process.

The Discursive and Interdiscursive Elaboration of Feminist Art

As is obvious from the descriptions of *Art et féminisme* and *Réseau Art-Femmes*, these exhibitions drew on the discourses of both feminism and art in their enunciative strategies. These discourses were, however, themselves complexly structured, articulating theories and problematics from other discourses to their own discursive production and traversing different academic disciplines and fields of activity. It is these larger discourses that posed questions for any given exhibition, that effectively produced them as discursive events, and that incited further discursive elaboration around and in opposition to those events.

The elaboration of feminism in Quebec

Andrée Yanacopoulo, in an article that discusses the evolution of the feminist movement since the 1970's, begins by defining the two founding propositions of that movement (Yanacopoulo 1985). The first was the specificity of women's oppression such that it could not be understood as a subcategory of any other kind of oppression,

whether based on class, race, ethnicity or nation. The second proposition she defines as ‘the personal is political’.

Underlying the first proposition, and in effect making it possible for feminism to become an independent domain of political and theoretical activity, was the separation of feminism from the left-nationalist theories and organizations out of which revolutionary feminism had emerged. As noted in the second chapter, feminism became a distinct domain in the mid-1970's, in part due to the discursive and non-discursive activity incited by the International Women's Year in 1975 and by the establishment of independent women's organizations, of which Powerhouse Gallery was one. However, as is obvious by the formation of the Regroupement des femmes québécois in 1978 to pressure the péquiste government to fulfill its promises regarding women's rights, and as the reaction to the 1980 ‘Yvette’ phenomenon on the part of the Parti québécois and the press indicates, the relationship between nationalism and feminism continued to be both productive and problematic.⁴¹

Diane Lamoureux, in an essay outlining the relation between feminism and nationalism in the 1970's, argues that while feminism and nationalism converge on certain points, they have never been articulated together (D. Lamoureux 1983). On the side of nationalism, it is in its modernizing form represented by left-nationalism, or the

⁴¹ The Regroupement des femmes québécoises was founded by Andrée Yanacopoulo and other disaffected members of the Parti québécois when it became obvious the party was male dominated, despite the fact that half the members were women (Clio Collective 1987, 367-368). The ‘Yvette’ phenomenon refers to the gaff made by Lise Payette before the 1980 referendum. Payette referred to Madeleine Ryan, the wife of Claude Ryan, as an ‘Yvette’, a stereotypically feminine girl in a primary school text book. This gaff was interpreted by the press in different ways, and used by the Liberal Party in the no campaign. See Renée Dandurand and Évelyne Tardy's analysis of the ‘Yvette’ phenomenon in Y. Cohen (1981, 21-54).

radical nationalist movement as she calls it, in the 1960's and the project of a national state proposed by the Parti québécois in the pre-referendum period that nationalism comes closest to feminism. On the feminist side, it is in the demands for equality, the right to paid work and access to abortion that feminist demands are most easily aligned with nationalism (54-55). However, she argues that the Parti québécois has continued to incorporate aspects of the older French-Canadian nationalism, where the family was seen as a microcosm of the nation, and the survival of the one depended on the survival of the other. She argues that it is this ideology that underpins the inability to see women apart from their role in the family and that underlies, for example, the government's pro-natalist policies. She further argues that feminism, when it is founded on a politics of difference rather than equality, cannot be articulated to nationalism. She concludes that with the rejection of the sovereignty-association proposal of the Parti québécois in 1980, and the resulting break up of the social-political field, feminism was finally free to develop independently of nationalism and the question of nation that had structured political life in Quebec since the beginning of the Quiet Revolution (58).⁴²

This separation of feminism from the left-nationalist discourses from which it had emerged does not mean that the question of nation, or nationalism, was jettisoned by

⁴² It should be noted that in the second half of the 1970's there was a separation of the independence movement from Marxist and socialist discourses and politics that had marked it since the founding of *Parti Pris* in 1963 (Linteau and others 1991, 504; D. Lamoureux 1983, 49). This was not only due to the progressive rejection of nationalism on the part of various Marxist groups, but also to the focusing of nationalist politics and aspirations on the Parti Québécois as they rose to power, winning the provincial election in 1976. Yolande Cohen, in an article that looks at women's relationship with politics from the beginning of the 20th century, argues that with the election of the Parti québécois sovereignty became a government responsibility, thus removing it from everyday life and excluding not only women but also most men from participating in its actualization (Y. Cohen 2000, 47).

feminists. It continued to circulate as a leitmotif in various texts. However, feminism no longer had to justify itself within the terms of nationalism, nor in terms of the Marxist or socialist politics which had been formative of the Front de libération des femmes. Rather, the language of left-nationalism was occasionally borrowed to support feminist arguments, lending legitimacy to them at the same time that they produced a 'Quebec' version of feminism.⁴³

This establishment of feminism as an independent domain of theoretical and political elaboration opened the question of the specificity of women's oppression, and concomitantly the specificity of a woman's perspective or analysis of that oppression. Here, a range of analyses were developed on a broad spectrum of issues. However, they can roughly be understood as working from sociological and/or socialist points of view on one hand, and from a 'cultural' position that drew on work on language, literature and French feminist theory on the other.

In sociological analyses such as the essay by Nicole Laurin-Frenette that Arbour cites in her essay (Y. Cohen 1981),⁴⁴ there was an attempt to understand the specificity of women's oppression in terms of the work that women do in the home and therefore the

⁴³ For example, Andrée Yanacopoulo, in the article discussed earlier, proposes that identity includes the sense of belonging to a nation.

C'est cet aspect de notre personnalité qui, nourri des normes socio-culturelles, nous insère en retour dans le milieu où nous vivons; grâce à quoi nous partageons un minimum d'intérêts, de besoins communs et pouvons échanger, communiquer. La composante sociale s'exprime à son maximum sous la forme du sentiment national – d'où cette absence d'identité si fortement ressentie par les individus appartenant à un peuple colonisé (Yanacopoulo 1985, 3).

⁴⁴ This book, *Femmes et politique*, is an example of the kind of work that was being done at the time from a sociological/socialist position. It includes essays on women, politics and power; sociological and historical studies; and texts on epistemological questions within the social sciences from a feminist perspective.

place that they occupy within economic and social structures relative to men (156).

Laurin-Frenette's analysis, which is rooted in Marxist theory, particularly in Engels' "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" (Engels 1994), demonstrates the way that feminists used and reworked that theory. For example, she describes women's position in the home in these terms:

Les caractères distinctifs de la production domestique sont, en premier, l'organisation de cette production sur la base de places sexuées, de manière à entraîner des relations d'exploitation et de domination des agents de sexe féminin, par les agents de sexe masculin ; en second, la double propriété féminine d'agent de production et de capital productif (Y. Cohen 1981, 155-156).

At the same time Laurin-Frenette argues that the social place that women occupy within the domestic sphere produces character structures to fit that role – femininity. Therefore changing the social system that oppresses women would require changing the forms of femininity that this system produces and without which the system could not continue to reproduce itself (180-181). For her it was this double analysis of the position of women, as economic structure and as lived identity, that constitutes the specificity of women's oppression.⁴⁵

This understanding of women's oppression, and the assumption that it was based on women's role within the family, had its origin in revolutionary feminism of the 1970's and can be found, for example, in the texts produced by the Front de libération des femmes and the Centre des femmes (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 107-112, 178-181, 208-

⁴⁵ An earlier version of her argument can be found in her essay "La Libération des femmes", originally published in 1974 (Laurin-Frenette 1977, 191-198).

212).⁴⁶ What the essay by Laurin-Frenette witnesses to is the continuing circulation and elaboration of a set of arguments that had first been proposed by the FLF regarding the specific oppression of women, as well as their use of Marxist theories to define and analyze that oppression. However, this understanding of the specificity of women's oppression could also be found in radical feminist texts, for example the magazine, *Les Têtes de Pioche*.⁴⁷

La plus-value du travail des femmes fructifie quelque part entre les mains de tous les pouvoirs économiques et politiques mondiaux, auxquels les femmes n'ont aucune part; la plus-value du travail des femmes bénéficie à chaque mâle (Brossard 1976, 2).

Here the relationship between Marxism and radical feminism becomes apparent, as radical feminism incorporated aspects of the language and politics of Marxism into its analysis of gender relations at the same time that it claimed that sex rather than class was the primary contradiction.

Other analyses of the specificity of women's oppression took the 'cultural' to be the object of analysis and political intervention. The most prominent domain in which this work was developed was literature. In her book, *Writing in the Feminine: Feminism and Experimental Writing in Quebec* (1990), Karen Gould traces out the history of Quebec feminist writing and the political and literary concerns that underlay that project

⁴⁶ The first of these originally came from the *Bulletin de Liaison* of the FLF in 1971, the second from the *Dossier sur la situation des femmes au Québec* prepared by the Centre des femmes for the regional meeting of the Parti québécois on the South Shore in 1972, while the third is a text by the Théâtre des Cuisines, the Comité de lutte pour l'avortement et la contraception libres et gratuits, the Centre de santé des femmes du quartier Plateau Mont-Royal and the Éditions remue-ménage given on March 8th, 1976.

⁴⁷ *Les Têtes de Pioche* was founded by Nicole Brossard, Michèle Jean, Agathe Martin, Eliette Rioux, Martine Ross and France Théoret. It was published from 1976 to 1979.

through an analysis of the work of Louky Bersianik, Nicole Brossard, Madeleine Gagnon and France Théoret. According to Gould, this project was rooted in the experimental forms of literary modernity as developed through the journal *La Barre du jour*.⁴⁸ Furthermore, literary modernity was itself linked to the modernization of Quebec and the rejection of the traditional values and attitudes that prevailed before the Quiet Revolution, especially under the premier Maurice Duplessis. It also entailed a rejection of the forms of realist writing and overtly political themes that *Parti Pris* had championed (18). She argues that the development of this work was influenced by new theories from France, especially the work of Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous. Thus, for the writers associated with *La Barre du jour*, the terms *textualité* and *écriture* became the privileged terms and attitudes underlying writing (Gould 1990, 17-22). In this way the linking of modernism in writing with the modernization of Quebec meant that work on language was itself seen as a political act.

However, with the rise of feminism in the mid-1970's, writers like Brossard began to question the gender neutrality of experimental writing and the male bias that this produced. They began, as Gould says, “to reconsider the relationships between political theory (traditionally male) and cultural production (also predominantly male); between language and gender (historically male constructions); between the realms of the symbolic (inaccessible to women, said Lacan), the imaginary, and the concrete realm of women’s daily lives; and between a sexuality that had long been repressed in a largely

⁴⁸ *La Barre du jour* was founded by Nicole Brossard, Marcel Saint-Pierre, Jan Stafford and Roger Soublière. France Théoret also worked for the journal for awhile. It was published from 1965 to 1977 (Gould 1990, 17, 18).

church-dominated culture and the authoritative power of the (male) word (26-27).” In other words, these writers also began to question the way that knowledge and culture are gendered so as to exclude women.

Feminist writers in Quebec therefore began to articulate feminist questions regarding the historical absence of women from culture and the specificity of women’s writing to the concern with the materiality of writing that marked experimental writing practices. The aim of this work was to replace the gender-neutral subject of formalist writing with the female speaking and desiring subject. This inscription of the female speaking subject entailed not only the inscription of sexed bodies, but especially sexed identities and histories into the text. Writing thus became a place where the female speaking subject, and the feminine in language and culture, was to be produced. As such, it was a site of feminist political practice as it attempted “to move women’s writing out of the realm of colonized writing and into a space of multiplicity and affirmative *becoming* (Gould 1990, xvii).”

While literature was the privileged site for this feminist political practice, this understanding of ‘writing in the feminine’ as the writing of the feminine into language and culture was not limited to literature. It also underlay, for example, the aims and organization of the conference *L’Émergence d’une culture au féminin* that was held at the Université de Montréal in 1982, along with the resulting book published under the same title (Zavalloni 1987). ‘Culture’, as defined through the conference and publication, included not only literature, but all areas of academic research and, indeed, all of society and the ways that it is organized and represents itself. The assumption that it had to date

been gendered in such a way as to exclude women made 'culture' an area for feminist political intervention.

There are a number of questions or themes running through the different essays in *L'Émergence d'une culture au féminin* that together mapped out the problematics defining 'culture in the feminine'. One recurring question was that of identity, social roles and social change. While some were more concerned with individual identities or the ways that identities are formed within the social realm, others were more concerned with collective identities. This second was linked to the question of how to reconceptualize academic disciplines, and more largely knowledge, from women's point of view. However, many were not simply interested in changing the basis of knowledge, but in changing the symbolic order itself. This was the argument of Louky Bersianik who said that "une vraie culture au féminin serait une culture où les femmes, tout en créant l'utopie du futur, s'appartiendraient totalement, non seulement physiquement, mais symboliquement (122)." Here 'finding' women's history or culture shifts into 'making' women's culture. The project of a culture in the feminine is thus linked not only to female experience, but also female being, and the project of bringing it into language. Work on language was thus seen as work on culture and as part of the larger project of creating a culture in the feminine.

The project of producing a culture in the feminine, as proposed by the conference and resulting book, traversed all the social and human sciences and the humanities and there was no clear division between the 'cultural' viewpoint and those working from sociological and/or socialist standpoints. While they worked from different disciplinary

perspectives, they shared a concern for the specificity of women's oppression and attempted to develop an analysis of that oppression from women's perspective.

Therefore, despite obvious theoretical and disciplinary differences, feminism in Quebec was produced and understood as a single movement. To quote Brossard again, but this time from the book *Femmes et politique*:

Du poétique au politique, un seul et même engagement; cultiver la vie.
S'identifier. Regarder le miroir jusqu'à ce qu'il renvoie une image intégrale;
jusqu'à ce qu'il devienne fenêtre, ouverture sur l'espace du réel et de l'imaginaire.
Aussi longtemps que la réalité (Y. Cohen 1981, 19).

While the first of feminism's founding propositions regarding the specificity of women's oppression opened up diverse responses from different political and disciplinary positions, the second of Yanacopoulo's propositions, 'the personal is political', points to the ways that American radical feminism was appropriated by feminists in Quebec in the elaboration of feminist theory. It was this encounter with American feminism in the later 1970's that in fact helped feminists move from a nationalist and materialist analysis of women's issues to a radical feminist and woman-centred position regarding women's experience in patriarchal cultures. The assertion that 'the personal is political' circulated widely in feminist texts in the late 1970's. Nicole Brossard defined the meaning of the phrase in an article titled "La vie privée est politique" for the second issue of the radical feminist magazine *Les Têtes de Pioche* (Brossard 1976) and many of the articles in the three years of the magazine's existence attempted to elaborate on its significance.

Brossard, along with Luce Guilbeault and Margaret Wescott, also produced the film *Some American Feminists* with the explicit aim of introducing American feminists and feminist

thought to Quebec women (Guilbeault, Brossard, and Wescott, 1977). The assertion that ‘the personal is political’ also underlies Nicole Laurin-Frenette’s analysis of the work that women do in the home and the resulting place that they occupy in economic and social structures relative to men. This articulating of American feminism to feminist discourses in Quebec also took place in the visual arts. As discussed earlier in relation to the catalogue for *Art et féminisme*, American feminist art, and especially as represented by the work of Lucy Lippard and Judy Chicago, was understood as defining of feminist art. More generally, a number of articles on feminist art appeared that discussed work from the United States, for example “L’Apport des femmes artistes à la sculpture environnementale depuis 1970” by Rose-Marie Arbour (1981) and “Artistes féminines américaines” by Claire St-Jean (1980).

However, feminism in Quebec was not simply opening up to American feminism, there was more largely a redefinition of feminism on an international plan. Feminists in Quebec were also reading and incorporating theoretical developments from France, especially the work of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. It should be remembered that Cixous gave seminars in Montreal in 1972-1973 (Gould 1990, 35) and Irigaray was invited to speak in the context of *Art et féminisme* in 1982. It is therefore significant that *L’Émergence d’une culture au féminin* included essays by French, Belgian and Italian as well as American writers. Not only was the project of a culture in the feminine to cross disciplinary boundaries, but feminism itself was defined as an international movement, crossing political borders at the same time that it united women across class and nation.

It can therefore be seen that feminism in Quebec in the early 1980's evidenced

both the continuing circulation of ideas that had their origin in the 1970's and the articulation of new theories and problematics to its discursive production. More importantly, discourses on feminism posed questions for the domain of feminist art and incited visual and institutional practices, as well as readings for those practices.

It is in relation to these larger questions regarding the specificity of women's oppression and the argument that 'the personal is political' that the body was foregrounded as an object of political concern within feminism. In Nicole Laurin-Frenette's work it was the female body as it is socially placed through the sexual division of labour in the home that was the object of study. Nicole Brossard, in "La vie privée est politique," defines private life as the life of the body as it is lived on a daily basis.⁴⁹ It was from this socially placed and biologically distinct body that women were called to write, and that was to be written into culture. It was the body as subjectively experienced, as identity as well as objective fact, that was to speak its desire in language and culture, and through this to change both. Thus the positions represented by Laurin-Frenette and

⁴⁹ The introduction, which is quite long, makes evident the way that she understood the body as central to feminist politics.

La vie privée, c'est la vie du corps qui mange, qui dort, qui coïte, qui défèque, qui sue, qui touche, qui souffle, qui jouit. C'est l'histoire cachée du corps retranché derrière les murs de la maison familiale, de santé, ou de réforme. La vie privée, c'est quand on se dispute, qu'on en vient aux coups; qu'on s'est fait violer, qu'on bat ses enfants, qu'on fait l'amour, qu'on étouffe de bonheur, qu'on devient alcoolique, qu'on souffre d'insomnie; qu'on se marie, qu'on accouche, qu'on prépare le dîner, qu'on prend son bain, qu'on assiste à la mort de son père ou de sa mère. C'est l'histoire cachée des femmes. C'est l'histoire que les hommes taisent. Ce que l'on nomme "vie privée", c'est essentiellement la relation que nous entretenons avec nos corps et ceux des autres. Si pour moi, cette relation est politique, c'est qu'en dehors de la maison cette relation se continue, mais cette fois-ci, médiatisée par des valeurs sociales qui semblent retirer au corps le droit de se manifester. De comment on conçoit le rapport à son corps dans l'intimité, découlent toute une série de comportements et d'attitudes sociales desquels, on prétend exclure la subjectivité en niant le corps quand il travaille, quand il projette, quand il se soulève devant les pouvoirs qui l'utilisent à leurs fins (Brossard 1976, 1).

by the project of *L'Émergence d'une culture au féminin* were not in opposition to each other. They rather formed a dense series of interconnected assumptions as well as differences. Indeed, it is possible to see that the female body was central to otherwise different and sometime competing feminist positions as they were taken up and articulated into the domain of visual art.

It was in relation to this larger discussion of the female body as object of oppression, as the site of political struggles for liberation, and as the ground for the creation of a culture in the feminine that the choice of works and the essay by Rose-Marie Arbour, and the privileging of performance and process in the exhibition *Traces* at the Musée du Québec, can be understood. It also underlay the invitation to Suzanne Lamy, a literary critic involved with Quebec feminist writing, to participate in the catalogue for *Art et féminisme*, as well as the discussion of 'art in the feminine' by Thérèse Saint-Gelais. Furthermore, the existence of Quebec feminist writing and the problematic that it raised regarding women and culture incited questions with regard to art by women. As one critique asked, "est-ce qu'il y a chez nous en arts visuels une effervescence semblable à celle qu'a connue la littérature chez les femmes (René Viau, "« Art et féminisme » au MAC," *Le Devoir*, 6 March 1982, 24) ?"

The elaboration of postmodernism in art

The other site of discursive elaboration that was formative of discourses of feminist art was around the term 'postmodernism', especially as it was being taken up within the visual arts. Like the formation of feminist art itself, the elaboration of

postmodernism was incited by developments outside of the field of the visual arts. It was the work of people like Jean-François Lyotard, Paul Virilio, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze on postmodernity and postmodernism, work that was being produced within the domain of philosophy, especially in France, that incited discursive elaboration within other fields of endeavor, including the visual arts.⁵⁰ In other words, theories and problematics from philosophy were being articulated to the visual and critical practices of art.

However, the elaboration of postmodern art, or postmodernism in art, was not simply a result of borrowings from the domain of philosophy. Visual and critical practices within the visual arts have their own histories of theories, problematics and practices. In articulating the question of postmodernism to art, a new set of problematics were set in place, inciting further elaboration. In other words, postmodernism made possible new readings for visual practices. This includes, as noted in the first chapter, the re-reading of works that had been understood within one paradigm so as to relocate them within the new paradigm or set of theoretical assumptions. At the same time, the choice of works that were discussed, and the enunciative strategies of those works, were integrated into definitions of the postmodern in art, working to produce definitions of what the term would or could mean within the field of art. In other words, the meaning of the word postmodernism was produced through the way that artworks, exhibitions and readings were linked together, through the specific relation that was produced between

⁵⁰ René Payant refers to the work of these authors in different essays in his book *Vedute*. Others could be cited.

these different levels of discursive production. Furthermore, as already discussed, once a term has gained currency, it continues to incite discursive elaboration through the further production of artworks, exhibitions, and critical and art historical texts.

Within Quebec the term postmodernism, as well as attempts to define its meaning in relation to both the philosophy from which it was drawn and the artworks and exhibitions that were produced at the time, can be seen in many texts in the early 1980's, especially in the work of René Payant. One of the structuring elements in the processes through which this term was elaborated was, of course, the term modernism. Within Quebec, as has already been discussed in relation to *Art et féminisme*, American art, whether feminist or formalist, was understood as defining contemporary art. The definition of modernism in art was thus most often drawn from the work of the American critic Clement Greenberg and his teleological definition of historical development in art, where art was seen to progressively divest itself of all inessential elements in order to concentrate on its own specificity. Within a certain reading of Greenberg's work, American Abstract Expressionism could be seen as the culmination, and end point, of Western art traditions. More generally, it was seen as privileging high formalist art as produced by American artists in the 1940's and 1950's.⁵¹

Given this American and teleological view of modernism, one way to define postmodernism was of course to see it as encompassing all that modernism had rejected — representation, the personal and the autobiographical, and a connection to the social context in which it was produced. Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin drew on this assumption in

⁵¹ See René Payant's summary of this process in his introduction to *Vedute* (1987, 22).

her article on the work of Lucy Lippard, effectively defining women's art as a subcategory of postmodern art at the same time, when she said "hors des strictes considérations formelles, on peut dire que le retour du sujet autobiographique de même que l'ouverture du champ de l'art aux considérations politiques font aussi partie des nouvelles dimensions explorées par l'art des femmes et par l'art post-moderne en générale (Dubreuil-Blondin 1981, 15)." This definition of postmodern art and the equivalence between it and art by women seem to have been circulating at the time. However, it was most often raised in order to criticize it. Dubreuil-Blondin does so herself in her essay for *Art et féminisme*, and it underlies Lamoureux's questioning of the association between women and performance in the same publication.

The critique of the notion that postmodernism encompasses all that modernism had rejected was part of a larger argument where the definition of postmodernism in art was built on that of modernism and was seen in fact as modernism's heritor. According to this definition, postmodernism continued, and elaborated on, the critical and epistemological aspects of modernism. These in turn were understood to be founded on art's autonomy and self-referentiality, two concepts borrowed from modernism. In other words, it was based on the assumption that art is first of all about art.

The strongest advocate for postmodernism as the heritor (this was his word) of modernism was the critic and art historian René Payant. Indeed, while others were also active in elaborating this term, he has been recognized as a central figure in the formation of postmodernism in Quebec (*Seeing In Tongues...* 1995). In the introduction to the collection of his essays, *Vedute* (1987), Payant explains his allegiance to the critical

tradition represented by Clement Greenberg by arguing that art is self-reflexive and self-representational as well as self-referential and autonomous (19-28). What he sets this tradition against, and what I would argue is one of the structuring elements for the definition of postmodernism that Payant represents, is traditional art history and social histories of art. By traditional art history he was referring to iconography or the practice of reading images for their content or what the work represents. When discussing social histories of art, he referred especially to those traditions that were influenced by Marxism where the work is understood to be the result of given social and historical conditions. In contradistinction to these, he argued that art is autonomous, even while dependent on certain social conditions, and it is this autonomy that founds its critical and epistemological role. Thus the function of art is to “questionner ses conditions d’existence, de réfléchir à ses conditions de possibilités, de critiquer les transformations historiques de ces conditions (Payant 1987, 337).”⁵²

If postmodernism was being defined in relation to modernism within critical texts, it was also defined in relation to, and through, certain visual practices. After all, if there was a postmodern art, there had to be artworks that ‘fit the bill’ so to speak. These, now postmodern, practices were found in the new media and forms of visual production that came out of conceptual art practices of the 1970’s, especially photography, video, installation and performance art. In a move that was similar to the assumption that postmodernism entailed everything that modernism had rejected, it was sometimes

⁵² Originally published in *Parachute*, no. 39, 1985 and reprinted in *Vedute* (1987). All other references to Payant’s writings regarding postmodernism are taken from this book unless otherwise indicated.

assumed to be enough to work in ‘non-traditional’ media, that is media other than painting and sculpture (which were privileged by modernism), to be doing postmodern work. However, in most cases, it was the *way* that these media were being used, the enunciative strategies of the works themselves, that was discussed as exemplary of postmodernism.

Within Quebec, the enunciative strategies or visual practices that were most often articulated to the concept of postmodernism, in other words that were used to define what postmodernism would and could mean within the visual arts, were variously described by the terms quotation, hybridity, impurity, interpictoriality, interstyle, interdisciplinarity and, in one of Payant’s essays, *l’imagination combinatoire* (480). Quotation and hybridization (to choose two words to represent the range of terms used to describe postmodern works) indicates a mode of constructing works that makes the mode of construction evident, and that makes it part of the meaning of the work or what it is ‘about’. If, as Payant points out, all art quotes from other art (51), that is to say that all art is formed in part through intertextual influence, what made these practices postmodern was the way that their use of quotation and hybridization was made visible, or the ways that the works were seen to point to their formation as their mode of producing meaning.

In his essay “Entre-lieux” Payant introduces the notion of portmanteau words, *le mot-valise*, in order to describe how certain artworks evidence their own enunciative strategies. Portmanteau words combine already existing words, ready-mades as Payant calls them, in such a way that the original words and their meanings are still evident while creating new significations through their encounter.

L'amalgame que présente le mot-valise implique une *contagion* des territoires spécifiques aux lexèmes isolés, découpés, imbriqués, et, au plan sémantique, ne peut être compris que du point de vue de la *synthèse disjonctive*. S'il marque par conséquent une résistance du double, du duel, à s'abolir dans un ensemble parfaitement unifié, le mot-valise n'est donc pas catastrophique, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'élimine pas des entités données et n'échoue pas à signifier, mais éveille nécessairement à un espace conceptuel nouveau, oblige à confronter la spécificité de l'*hybride* (324).⁵³

He is thus arguing that it is through this process of articulating diverse images or things together, sometime integrating things into art that had previously remained outside, sometimes making visible aspects of the domain of art that had been invisible, that the critical and epistemological function of quotation and hybridization as enunciative strategies worked. If Payant discussed this in terms of 'infection' and, elsewhere, 'impurity', it could, of course, only be in relation to the supposed 'purity' of modern art.

It is through the notion that certain practices point to their formation as their mode of producing meaning that photography and video were seen as typically postmodern. Guy Bellavance, in an article on the emergence of the 'photographic' in contemporary American art, defines the 'photographic' as the manner in which these works use, and foreground, the photographic apparatus through their construction. In other words, certain works articulate together the economic, political and institutional as well as technical and representational aspects of photography to evidence the process by which photography signifies (Bellavance 1982-1983). Thus photography, which modernism had long excluded from the Fine Arts because it was representational, and therefore not considered to be self-referential and autonomous, was now a privileged exemplar of

⁵³ Originally published in *Parachute*, no. 31, 1983.

postmodernism in art precisely because of the way that it put on display its own mode of signifying. Similarly video, which like photography had been linked to both the tradition of documentary and to conceptual art through the understanding of video as a recording device, was newly inscribed within postmodern art discourses through readings that focused on video as a signifying process.⁵⁴

The newly acceptable status of photography and video was linked to the ‘return’ or, more truthfully, the newly acceptable status of representational practices in art. Representation was newly acceptable, and postmodern, because it was not about the object depicted, but about its own operations as system. Thus, for example, Payant says of certain photographic practices, in a statement that could be applied to the work of Nicole Jolicoeur, “aujourd’hui, plusieurs praticiens de la photo tentent, comme les poètes le font avec la langue, d’arracher la photo à la collectivité en travaillant d’une manière critique sur l’histoire de la photo et sur l’idéologie de la représentation qu’elle transporte et confirme (571).” Furthermore, once this concept of representation as postmodern practice in art came into existence, it could be and was applied to ‘traditional’ art practices such as painting, providing new ways of constructing paintings as well as new readings for these practices.⁵⁵

However, it was in relation to installation, and by extension performance, that

⁵⁴ See Payant’s 1986 essay on video and television, “La force des formes” (579-591).

⁵⁵ See Payant’s discussion of the work of Raymond Lavoie and Michel Saulnier (125-131), originally published in *Parachute*, no. 36, 1984, or of Sylvie Guimont (397-399), originally published in the catalogue *Sylvie Guimont*, 1985. It also gave rise to exhibitions such as *L’Impureté*, on the theme of impurity and postmodernism, in which most of the works were representational and combined painting with other media (1985).

René Payant most often defined postmodernity in art. In fact, he stated in a number of his essays that installation was the postmodern name for art, “que le terme signale cette volonté de distanciation, ce vouloir-être-autre que le modernisme artistique (338).”⁵⁶

What made installation an exemplary form of postmodern art in his view was the way that it made the spectator, that is the spectator as function or role within the work, central to the meaning of the work. Moreover, he argued that this staging of the spectator through the work was common to other art practices, especially performance and video, and was an aspect of the larger question of the role of the art institution itself as condition of possibility for art.

S’il fait sens de qualifier ces oeuvres de *postmodernes* c’est parce qu’elles sortent effectivement de la perspective formaliste qui caractérise l’attitude moderniste. Elles en sortent parce que leur problématique n’est plus l’oeuvre en elle-même mais l’*analyse institutionnelle* qu’elle permet d’opérer. Il serait erroné de croire que les oeuvres postmodernes marquent le retour de la subjectivité comme le revendiquent critiques et théoriciens de l’art en mal d’humanisme. De même qu’ils ne présentent pas l’oeuvre comme moment idéal de stabilité ou de transcendance d’une expérience qui engagerait profondément et authentiquement un sujet, l’auteur, l’artiste. Tout est pensé chez eux du point de vue de la réception (314).⁵⁷

In other words, what suddenly becomes visible in these works, that had always been there but denied by high formalist modernism, was the mechanisms of the institution and the locating of the viewer through the work. Installation was seen to do this precisely by articulating the context, whether understood as the physical place of presentation or the

⁵⁶ Originally published in *Parachute*, no. 39, 1985.

⁵⁷ This essay, “Le choc du présent,” was originally presented at a conference on performance and subsequently published by Éditions Parachute under the title *Performance. Text(e)s & Documents* in 1981, and then in *Vedute* in 1987. The works discussed were installations – “Vancouver” by Irene Whittome, “Passage in a red field” by Betty Goodwin, and “Made to Measure” by Max Dean.

larger social and institutional context, into the work itself.

It can be seen from this brief description of postmodernism as it was being produced through visual practices and critical texts in Quebec is that the terms quotation, hybridity, impurity, interpicturality, interstyle, interdisciplinarity and *l'imagination combinatoire* referred to a range of practices that were at times seen to be within the work and at times were seen in the relation between the work and the context in which it was presented. Furthermore, while I have privileged the work of René Payant in this discussion, these terms circulated widely in critical texts in the 1980's.⁵⁸ What they demonstrate is the way that artworks, rather than being seen as concentrating on their own specificity as they had been within modernist discourses, were now being read as the point where diverse levels of discursive production were articulated together – spectator, work, institution, the social. What was on view was not only the work, but the conditions of possibility for the work as work of *art*. In this way the social context re-entered the domain of art, not as the 'other' of art, what was outside of art which art represented, but as the very condition of possibility of art.

By discussing postmodernity in relation to photography, video, installation and performance art, Payant and others were producing a definition of postmodernism that traversed different disciplines within the visual arts. In other words, visual practices, or the enunciative strategies of artworks, were taken up and articulated to the larger discourses of postmodernism, especially as they were produced in relation to modernism,

⁵⁸ See for example Bellavance 1982-1983; Bradley and Johnstone 1994; Dubreuil-Blondin 1981; R. Durand 1980; Gervais 1985; Pontbriand 1979, 1982b; *L'Impureté* 1985; *Où est le fragment* 1987; and *Seeing In Tongues / Le bout de la langue* 1995.

and worked to produce the meaning of the term. In this way the concept of postmodernism provided new readings for these visual practices, linking them to the larger philosophical discussions on postmodernity, and incited further discursive elaboration both on the level of visual production and on the level of readings for that production. Feminist art, as one of the discourses circulating through visual and critical practices at the time, sometimes intersected with, and sometimes contradicted, definitions of postmodern art.

When postmodernism was defined as modernism's 'other', as including all that modernism had excluded, feminist art's opposition to the high formalism of Greenbergian modernism, such as discussed in Arbour's essay in *Art et féminisme*, could and was included within the postmodern. In this way, work that addressed the personal and autobiographic in art, as much feminist work was understood to do, was seen as postmodern. Similarly, when postmodernism was defined as specific kinds of visual practices – as body art, performance, land art, assemblage, process art, conceptual art, abstraction and new realism, to use Dubreuil-Blondin's expanded list (1981, 14) – then feminist art practices were also necessarily included in the category of postmodernism. In this way the privileging of performance, experimental and multidisciplinary work, and 'hybrid' forms in the exhibitions *Traces*, as well as many of the works in *Art et féminisme*, were part of larger discursive processes through which discourses of feminism and postmodernism in art came together and in fact helped produce one another.

However, in many texts the relation between feminism and postmodernism in art was much more ambivalent and problematic. What was being produced was a distinction

between the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable' in art, including feminist art. In other words, definitions of postmodernism in art were being used to create a distinction between different kinds of feminist practices with their attendant modes of reading.

I would like to return to the concept of postmodernism as it was being produced through visual practices and critical texts in Quebec to look more closely at the notion of the spectator within the work and at the related notion of the 'subject'. René Payant defined the 'subject' as understood within postmodernism as coming, in fact, from modernism.

Le postmodernisme hérite du modernisme un *sujet sublimé*: dénégarion dans la notion de l'autonomie picturale du moi psychologique. Du formalisme exacerbé (surtout américain) des années soixante, il reçoit aussi l'apparente absence de fonction sociale de l'art ou, comme fonction sociale, l'absence critique de fonction sociale. Se croisent ici une conscience de l'histoire: son irréversibilité, et une conscience du sujet: sa sublimation historique. Par conséquent, l'art actuel n'est pas néo-romantique, car le retour du sujet ne peut être aujourd'hui le retour du sujet romantique puisque les conditions sociales de son existence ne sont plus. Le retour du sujet dans les productions actuelles est la marque de son impossibilité même, le signe d'un doute sur ce sujet, la désignation des conditions sociales, historiques, qui occasionnent ce doute (628).⁵⁹

This argument against the return of the 'romantic subject', what he elsewhere referred to as the humanistic or transcendent subject (314), was explicitly opposed to the notion that postmodern art heralded the return of the personal and the autobiographical in art.

Running through Payant's texts is in fact an attempt to distinguish the postmodern subject, or the subject as position in the work, from the romantic or humanist subject, which art would then express or represent. The 'acceptable' subject was a position and problematic within the work, not the autobiographical self of the artist as expressed

⁵⁹ Originally presented at *Colloque 80* on teaching art, 1980.

through the work (559). It was a question of codes and positions, not of individual experience (319). Therefore postmodernism could not mean the return of humanism or the authentic subject (314).

In this way the ‘subject’, like representation, was newly acceptable again in art, not as the author or artist of the work, but as a position within the work or more largely within discourse, and as condition of possibility for the work as work of art. However, this distinction could be, and was, used in arguments against certain forms of feminist practice, especially that which privileged the confessional as a mode of production. In other words, it was enlisted to a process that distinguished between different feminist practices in art, with the appropriation of some practices to postmodernism and the rejection of others. It was this process that underlay the binary opposites that structured Payant’s essay for *Tridimension-Elles* – between the autobiographic and the intimate, between the subjectivity of the author and the subject in writing, and between the discourse of persuasion and the pleasure of the text. It can also be seen in the distinction that Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin sets up between feminist art and land art by women in *Art et féminisme*, again with the aim of privileging the second over the first, and locating land art within the domain of the postmodern (160).

Finally, there is also discernable within some essays on postmodern art a process of erasure or the absence of discourses of feminist art from definitions of postmodernity. This is most obvious in Guy Bellavance’s essay on the emergence of the ‘photographic’ in contemporary American art (1982-1983, 9). The artists that he discusses are Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger and Louise Lawler, all, with the

exception of Prince, central names within the feminist art discourses in the United States.⁶⁰ However, it is also discernable by the absence of any sustained discussion of feminist art in relation to postmodernism.

It can be seen from this summary of the elaboration of postmodernism in art in Quebec that there was not a single definition. Rather, there were a range of definitions, and of practices that were articulated to the term. John Frow (1991) argues that the terms postmodern, postmodernity and postmodernism function as a 'machine' for producing discourse, where the opposition to the terms modern, modernity and modernism incites the organization of diverse concepts and cultural facts into a hierarchical relation where one is privileged over the other. This is a useful reminder of how the elaboration of the concept of postmodernity was incited by what was outside the term, as well as inciting further discursive elaboration and organizing concepts and practices through its discursive operations. However, I would argue that in Quebec the discursive field in which postmodernism in the visual arts was being produced was more complex than a simple opposition to modernism. At times postmodernism was in opposition to it and at times was its heritor. This was made possible by the presence of other oppositions that marked and organized postmodern art in Quebec.

It is clear from the way that the distinction between the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable' was being produced, especially in relation to 'the subject', that it was the presence of social histories of art and critical approaches to producing and reading works

⁶⁰ In the early 1980's, when I was working on a Masters of Fine Arts degree at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, these were precisely the names that circulated as exemplary feminist practices.

that focused on art as socially produced and located that was set in opposition to postmodernism and that incited elaboration of what the term would include – as well, of course, of what it would exclude. These approaches came out of the left-nationalist politics and aesthetics of the 1960's and 1970's and underlay certain feminist practices in art and art criticism. It was this other opposition that problematized modernism and postmodernism as simple oppositions in relation to each other and that provided, along with visual practices, some of the *specificity* of what the term meant in Quebec.

The specificity of postmodernism in Quebec has been discussed by others. Johanne Lamoureux has argued that postmodernism in Quebec has a different emphasis and privileges different aspects of the larger problematic of postmodernity in art than English Canada (*Seeing In Tongues...* 1995). This emphasis can be seen in the privileging of interdisciplinarity and hybridity in visual and critical practices in Quebec, which she links to the postmodern concern with ending “the ‘purity of the medium’(8)” that often takes the form of “moving back and forth between codes (9).” Furthermore, she links this to a hyper-sensitivity to the politics of language in Quebec, not as an embracing of the linguistic identity produced through official narratives of Quebec, but as the problematizing of precisely what she calls “the doxic discourse of linguistic hegemony (language as the great narrative of the homogenization of identity in Québec)” as well as “the parameters of the visual postmodern as defined in Canada (10).”

Karen Gould, writing in the domain of literature in Quebec, has also cautioned against assuming that the terms modernism and postmodernism have exactly the same meaning or valence as they do in the Anglo-American context. She argues that the force

of the term modernity and its connection to the notion of modernization and the push for cultural autonomy, especially during the Quiet Revolution, has meant that postmodernism refers not so much to an opposition to literary modernism as to an elaboration of that project while more freely appropriating literary forms and codes from the past (22-24). She further cautions, in a remark that could easily be applied to the domain of the visual arts, that the term postmodernism “is once again a term generated from an external metacritical discourse that tends to gloss over cultural differences and historical contexts in favor of unifying philosophical and artistic currents – a troublesome contradiction, to be sure, when considering the postmodern penchant for valorizing brokenness, marginality, and plurality, as well as its presumed resistance to master codes and metanarratives (Gould 1990, 23-24).”

These two analyses support my own contention that discourses of postmodernism in art, like those of feminist art, are always produced and located within specific social and discursive contexts and are marked by those contexts. Furthermore, it is the specificity of postmodernism within Quebec that made its relation to feminism both productive and problematic such that feminist art, whether included or excluded from the category of postmodernism, was instrumental in the definition of this term.

Conclusion

It can be seen from these readings of *Art et féminisme* and *Réseau Art-Femmes* that they were complexly articulated events. This complexity was due to the larger discursive context within which these events were produced and from which they drew in

their own discursive elaboration. Each exhibition produced definitions of feminist art through the ways that they tied together different levels of discursive production – the enunciative strategies of the art works, the readings for the works and for the larger exhibitions that were produced through the catalogues, the structuring of the exhibitions themselves, and the histories of the institutions through which the exhibitions and their works were physically and discursively located. In other words, each exhibition was a moment of articulation, or a point of discursive elaboration in the production of discourses of feminist art in Quebec.

This understanding of ‘articulation’ reminds us of the intertextual formation of any given artwork or exhibition and more largely of the interdiscursive formation of feminist art. It is through their intertextual formation that any artwork or exhibition is located within and works on discourse. To return to my geo-political metaphor, the domain of feminist art was organized around different sites of knowledge/power. The most obvious were those represented by sociological and/or socialist analyses and those by ‘cultural’ analyses. If the first witnessed to the continuing existence and elaboration of visual and critical practices coming out of left-nationalist aesthetics and politics of the previous two decades, the second demonstrated the appropriation of new modes of reading works drawn from radical feminism and feminist writing as they were formulated in Quebec. Both, however, made evident the way that the discourse of feminist art was part of a larger discursive terrain and was formulated as much by what lay outside as by what fell inside its borders.

What is striking about the formulation of feminism in Quebec in the early 1980's

was the way that it was understood, and was in fact produced, as crossing disciplinary boundaries, uniting women across theoretical and political differences and even geopolitical locales. In other words, it was assumed that women formed a group *as women*, and that this entailed a specific relation to society and culture. If this relation was sometimes understood as being founded on gendered social practices, women's (assumed universal) responsibility for housework being the primary example, or whether it was seen to reside in the gendered nature of language, knowledge and culture, what was important was women's commonality. In this the body acted as the sign and guarantee of the commonality that it was supposed to represent.⁶¹ For any given statement or any given artwork to be 'feminist', it had to take up a position within this larger discursive terrain of feminism. This does not mean that there were no differences within the domain of feminist art, or that they were not recognized. The various terms that were used – 'feminist art', 'art in the feminine', '*art à discours féministe*' – and the texts that elaborated these terms demonstrate that differences were both recognized and that they structured the discourse of feminist art. However, the commonality of women and of the feminist project, including feminist art, was privileged over difference.

If feminism, including feminist art, was produced and understood as a unified movement and discourse across the various differences that structured it, this does not mean that there were no sites of opposition. It must be remembered that discourses are

⁶¹ As I have noted, and as the criticism of Lise Gauthier regarding the organization of *Réseau Art-Femmes* makes evident, the unity of women was more ideal than reality. What is important is that the idea that women formed a group structured both the discursive and non-discursive organization of feminism, including feminist art. This 'moment' of collective cohesion did not last long. The article by Andrée Yanacopoulo, "Des féminismes" (1985), that I discussed earlier in fact argues that women do *not* have the same experience and so feminism must now be thought in the plural – as feminisms.

produced as much by what they oppose as what they embrace. The opposition that runs through the various texts, structuring the discourses of feminist art, was against modernism. If I have stated a number of times that this left open the question of the relation between feminist art and postmodernism, this is because discourses of postmodernism in art were being produced at the same time, and their own relation to modernism was neither one of strict opposition nor pure alignment. Thus the relation between feminist art and postmodernism in art depended on the definition of each.

As is demonstrated by the various texts, especially the work of René Payant, the discursive elaboration of postmodernism worked to divide the unacceptable from the acceptable. I would therefore argue that the *status* of feminist art was affected by its relation to postmodernism because, as a privileged site of knowledge/power within the domain of visual art, postmodernism marked and organized that domain. I would also argue that one of the effects of this process was to determine what could and could not be seen as feminist. To demonstrate my point, I would like to return to two texts. The first is the essay by René Payant in *Réseau Art-Femmes : Traces* (1983), the second is Guy Bellavance's article on the emergence of the 'photographic' in art (1982-1983).

Payant's discussion of *Art et féminisme* puts it wholly on the side of political art, reducing the polyvalence of the exhibition and ignoring the diverse readings that were produced in the catalogue. His negative assessment of the exhibition on the basis of its political intentions put the whole exhibition on the side of the unacceptable. This rendered invisible the photographic work, which he elsewhere excluded from his criticism of the exhibition (but never discussed) (1982b), as well as the work of Sorel

Cohen and Lise Landry. As I argued above, the work of these two artists articulated together both gendered and visual practices, thus opening a space for feminist practice on the level of visual language as well as content, practices which coincided with the definition of postmodernism that he was elsewhere developing and championing.

In his essay on the photographic in art, Bellavance proposes that the photographic in art is symptomatic of the emergence of the postmodern. He therefore places the work of Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Louise Lawler within the postmodern, and the acceptable. However, he made no mention that these artists and their works were taken as exemplary *feminist* artists in the United States. One could conjecture that this absence was because, as I proposed in relation to Nicole Jolicoeur's work in *La Traversée des Mirages*, it was not considered to be important. However, if one looks at the larger discursive terrain in which these works were being placed within Quebec, especially by being published in *Parachute*, a privileged site for the production of postmodernism in art in Quebec, it can be argued that these works could not be *seen* as feminist within Quebec.

I would argue that what made these two texts possible was the larger discursive field of art and the various sites of knowledge/power that marked and organized it. When the definition of postmodern art entailed everything that modernism excluded, and feminist art was being produced broadly as crossing all disciplinary and geographic boundaries, there was a large margin of overlap. However, the essay by Payant in fact refers to a narrower definition of feminist art, that which came out of the aesthetic and visual practices of the later 1960's and early 1970's, of which *La Chambre nuptiale* was

the representative. This definition of feminist art was supported and elaborated through the work of Rose-Marie Arbour, whose critical project worked from and on social theories of art – in other words, from theories that were being rejected in the elaboration of the postmodern in art by people like René Payant. It was in this context that the work of Judy Chicago and Lucy Lippard was privileged as exemplary of feminism in art, at the expense of other kinds of feminist work from the United States. Furthermore, this was part of a larger process whereby American radical feminism was appropriated to the elaboration of feminist discourses in Quebec. In effect, the work of Chicago and Lippard made sense within the definitions of feminist art that were being produced in Quebec, by those who supported and by those who opposed it.

With the privileging of definitions of feminist art in Quebec that came from the politicized art practices of the 1960's and 1970's and social histories of art, practices that were being rejected through the elaboration of postmodernism, feminist art discourses could only be put on the side of the unacceptable in relation to postmodernism. The effect of this was to render invisible other kinds of visual and critical practices as *feminist* practices. What could not be seen or acknowledged were differences within the domain of feminist art. Therefore, what was produced was not an opposition within feminist discourses on art, but rather an exclusion. In other words, practices that could not be appropriated to the definition of feminist art that came out of the politicized art practices of the previous two decades could only be seen as not feminist. This had important implications for what could be *seen* as feminist practices in art, and for the *status* of the discourse of feminist art as a whole. It also had ramifications for the further elaboration

of feminist art, as will be seen in *Pour la suite du monde* and *Instabili*.

CHAPTER 4

POUR LA SUITE DU MONDE (1992) AND INSTABILI (1990)

The early 1990's saw two important events. One was the opening of the new Musée d'art contemporain in the centre of Montreal with its inaugural exhibitions, *Pour la suite du Monde* and *La collection : tableau inaugural*. The other was the sixteenth anniversary of Galerie Powerhouse which was celebrated by, among other things, the publication of *Instabili*. If the first had important implications for contemporary art in Quebec, the second marked a site of production within discourses of feminist art in Quebec. However, the specific, and at times troubled, relation between art, feminism, and nationalism at this conjuncture means that they cannot be understood as discrete events. Within this thesis, they also mark the first events of which I can speak directly. It was my own encounter with these events after my arrival in Quebec in 1988 that in part informs the larger project of this thesis – to understand feminist art as a located project and process.

Pour la suite du Monde

Pour la suite du Monde was the principle event celebrating the opening of the new, long-awaited, museum in downtown Montreal.¹ According to Réal Lussier, who

¹ In addition to *Pour la suite du Monde* and *La collection : tableau inaugural*, the latter of which presented a selection of the permanent collection, there were special events throughout the exhibition

along with Gilles Godmer curated *Pour la suite du Monde*, the aim of the exhibition was to examine the nature of artists' social commitment in their work.

Inspired by the work of numerous artists, by events, by social reality, and presented at a special moment in the history of the Musée, this exhibition proposes to highlight the essential role played by artists in society and, more precisely, aspects of their commitment toward the world (236).

Therefore there was, without naming it as such, an understanding of art as having some sort of political role and function within the larger social context, or at least expressing some explicit ethical position. There was also an understanding of 'the world' as the place within which artists worked and to which their work was addressed. As such it included all of humanity. However, 'the world' was also, more narrowly, the international 'art world' and the works were drawn, as Lussier says, from "the various cultural networks in the Western World (237)." This double intent, the social commitment of artists to and from 'the world', directed the organization and readings of the exhibition as a whole.

Pour la suite du monde included the work of twenty-nine artists or artists groups.²

While Quebec artists had a privileged place in the exhibition, eight coming from this province (six of whom were women), most lived elsewhere – in various European

period. These included a piece by Théâtre Ubu titled *Luna-Park*, a concert by the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne and the Société de musique contemporain du Québec, a concert by Super-mémé titled *Les Muses au musée*, conferences and concerts in the context of the 7^e *Printemps de musique électroacoustique*, and numerous artist's talks either at the museum or at different universities in the city. The exhibitions were held from May 26th to October 11th, 1992.

² The artists were Dennis Adams, Ida Applebroog, Dominique Blain, Christian Boltanski, Gilbert Boyer, Geneviève Cadieux, Melvin Charney, Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe, Gilbert and George, Leon Golub, Gran Fury, Hans Haacke, Mona Hatoum, Alfredo Jaar, Mark Lewis, Liz Magor, Cildo Meireles, Muntadas, Marcel Odenbach, Nam June Paik, Giuseppe Penone, Adrian Piper, Chéri Samba, Alan Sonfist, Barbara Steinman, Bill Viola, Jeff Wall, Irene F. Whittome and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

countries, the United States, Brazil, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and English Canada. The names include people like Hans Haacke, Mona Hatoum, Alfredo Jaar and Adrian Piper, all of whom are internationally recognized artists known for their critical and politically oriented work. The choice of artists from Quebec, for it was the artists who were chosen and not the works, each artist being invited to produce a work for the exhibition,³ was directed in part by the political and ethical aspects of their work.

To understand the relation between the artists' works and the larger exhibition, or the ways that the enunciative strategies of the works were articulated to that of the exhibition, it is necessary to briefly look more largely at the artists' work and at their place within discourses on art within Quebec.

Dominique Blain presented *L'Éclaireur*, an installation made up of rifles, binoculars, photography lenses and other ocular devices piercing the wall that led into the main gallery space. Arranged in a circle, they were directed at the visitors as they approached the main gallery space. This double reference to hunting, or perhaps the military, and to looking linked the two, the violence of the gaze being imbricated with the violence of fire arms. To this was added a further reference. In the *Cahier : propos et projets* published before the opening of the exhibition, Blain included an excerpt from the 1929 book *Then I Saw the Congo* by Grace Flandrau. In it a colonial official explains to the author that it took thirty years of fighting for France to win Senegal. When asked what France got from the country, the answer was peanuts. Through this excerpt the

³ It was not always possible for an artist to create work for the exhibition. In these cases, the artists and curators arrived at a consensus regarding which of their recent works would be included (*Pour la suite du monde* 1992, 236).

history of colonialism, as exploration and as appropriation, as well as the links between the two, added another layer to the meaning of the work.

That Blain should be invited to participate in *Pour la suite du Monde* is no surprise. Over the previous ten years her work explored themes of colonialism, militarism, First and Third World relations, gender, race, and various permutations of these. More importantly, her work was central to the reformulation of ‘the political’ in relation to art in the 1980's. Indeed, it is possible to see, in the various catalogues and articles that discussed her work, the ways in which this question of art and ‘the political’ functioned to divide the acceptable from the unacceptable in Quebec.

This distinction can first be seen in an exhibition *Écrans politiques* (1985) where the curator, France Gascon, makes a distinction between art that has an ethical and political dimension, and *art engagé* or art that serves a political cause. The ‘acceptable’ is that which is concerned as much with its own formal qualities, and more largely with the development of the artist’s work as a whole, as it is with the issue presented. This distinction is also made by René Payant in his discussion of Blain’s work (*Vedute* 1987).⁴ Here the terms used, and the distinction made, is between “*le politique*” and “*la politique* (529),” or between work that engages with ‘the political’ and work that takes part in ‘politics’. For Payant ‘the acceptable’ is work that works on its own formal materials, in this case, and quoting Baudrillard’s *Pour une critique de l’économie politique du signe*, the system of signs which the work mobilizes in its own enunciative strategies. He further links this with the postmodern.

⁴ Originally published in *Parachute*, no. 40, 1985.

Il ne s'agit pas de demander à l'art une « théorie politique », mais plutôt qu'il interroge, en *tant qu'art*, le politique; qu'il élabore un nouveau concept (un concept postmoderne?) du politique. Autrement dit : produire une interrogation artistique du politique (529).

This distinction between “le politique” and “la politique,” with the first being on the side of the acceptable, was taken up in a number of texts in relation to the work of Dominique Blain. Pascale Beaudet uses these same terms in her discussion of Blain’s work in *Vie des Arts* (Beaudet 1988, 44). Gilles Daigneault also makes the same distinction in the exhibition *Art actuel : Présences québécoises* that was shown in France (*Art actuel...* 1992, 25). In every case, what Blain’s work is set in opposition to, and what falls therefore on the side of the unacceptable, is the politicized work of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s in Quebec. This work, it should be recalled, was linked to left-nationalism and the privileging of ‘national’ over ‘international’ art. It is therefore significant that *Écrans politiques* included artists from Britain and the United States as well as Canada and Quebec,⁵ and that Daigneault comments that Blain’s work is openly political “à l’instar de quelques jeunes créateurs de par le monde (25).” Through this process ‘the political’ was not only being redefined in relation to art, but it was also placed on the side of ‘international’ art, and the acceptable. It is this newly defined, and possibly postmodern, notion of the political in art as embodied in the work of Dominique Blain that was articulated to the exhibition *Pour la suite du Monde*.

Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe’s work for the exhibition, *Lagrime viva*, takes up many of these same issues. This work included a screen and a large wooden wheel

⁵ Victor Burgin was from Britain and Laurie Anderson, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Mike Glier and Robert Longo were from the United States.

that had been part of the installation *The Wilds and the Deep*, and its integration into *Pour la suite du Monde* metonymically brought the larger work into the museum exhibition.⁶ *The Wilds and the Deep* was produced in the Battery Maritime Building, an old ferry terminal in New York. Excavating the history of the site and the relation between mercantile interests, ethnography, colonialism and museum collections, the work imbricated together these different histories and meanings so that the viewer would discover or uncover them, as in an archeological site, as they explored the building. The screen, with its images of, among other things, a dinosaur skeleton, a whip, an Indian headdress, a crab and a wineglass spilling out a blood red map of the Americas, was both a panorama and key for the larger installation. The wheel, with an anamorphically distorted image of a prairie pioneer woman bent double under a heavy load of hay, brings in the role of women within histories of colonization. Together the panorama and anamorphic drawing referred to forms of representation, predating the invention of photography, that were inscribed within regimes of truth. Shells and plant materials arranged on the floor, in effect small collections, completed the work.

Over the previous decade Fleming and Lapointe had become known for their large installations produced within old buildings, incorporating their histories of use into the installations themselves. In the first three, all produced in abandoned buildings in Montreal, it was the history of abandonment that the works made visible, the building standing in for the people and communities left behind by economic change or

⁶ The title of the screen was “Allégorie de la colonization.” It had been acquired by the Musée d’art contemporain for their collection.

marginalized by scientific and medical discourses, especially of women.⁷ Through these first three installations the artists developed a mode of working and a visual vocabulary that entailed long periods of research on the sites in which they worked, on the histories of museums and collections, and on various discourses through which knowledge and power are organized and people displaced. Furthermore, their mode of working with each other and, in production, with others entailed a form of collaboration which the artists themselves saw as informed by their sexual identities as lesbian women and by their relationship together.

Ainsi le processus, le développement, et la forme de notre travail commun sont liés intimement à l'évolution de notre rapport affectif. La spécificité du site de notre travail, les thèmes sociaux que nous abordons, notre relation discursive avec la matière, notre perspective historique et notre indépendance relative des institutions de la culture sont tous nés d'une affirmation, contre tous vent et tous marée, de notre identité lesbienne. Assumer une identité marginalisée, quelque soit, et rechercher une communauté des semblables sont des actes politiques qui créent une vie intègre où auparavant il n'y avait que le néant répressif des tabous. Car quand nous les femmes cherchons à nous épanouir, il ne s'agit pas uniquement de faire des rêves des réalités, mais encore d'inventer de toute pièce une syntaxe et des vocables afin même de pouvoir rêver (*Pour la suite du Monde* file, Médiathèque, Musée d'art contemporain, Conference paper, 5 June 1992).

The artists therefore located the themes that they explored within questions of gender, homosexuality, and power. These questions also located the work within discourses of feminist art.

This locating of Fleming and Lapointe's work within feminist discourses on art

⁷ The first, *Project Building / Caserne #14* (1983) occupied an old fire hall and explored the military organization and social isolation of work such as done by firemen. The second, *Musée des Sciences* (1984), took over an old Beaux-arts postal station, imbricating the discourses of scientific objectivity and visual representation in order to evidence the ways that they produced women as the object of their respective gazes. The final installation in Montreal, *La Donna Delinquenta* (1987), was produced in an old vaudeville theatre in the economically depressed area of St-Henri. It took up the themes of spectacle, abandonment, and the criminalization and marginalization of those considered to be 'non-productive'.

was produced across a number of texts. For example, Christine Ross linked their work to the definition of feminist practice proposed by Quebec writer Nicole Brossard.

Dans ce sens, l'intervention, selon la désignation de Nicole Brossard, constitue une pratique féministe spiralée puisqu'elle élabore un questionnement des institutions dans le but d'atteindre une société dans laquelle les comportements de hiérarchie, de domination et de catégorisation seraient absents et parce qu'elle vise un élargissement du territoire critique en tenant d'impliquer de plus en plus d'individus dans l'activité de questionnement (Ross 1984a, 39).

Rose-Marie Arbour discusses their mode of working collaboratively and their way of opening their work to non-art audiences in terms of "amour, communication, entraide." According to Arbour this work undermines the dichotomy between art and politics, and is thus in opposition to modernist definitions of art practice (Arbour 1986, 291-292).

Lesley Johnstone also places the work within feminist discourses in art in an article for *Le Journal du Musée d'art contemporain*.

Abandon et marginalisation, espace public et espace privé, musée comme lieu de représentation sociale et historique, rôle symbolique de l'architecture et expérience de la ville de même que féminisme, sexualité et différences entre les sexes sont parmi les questions posées par les installations « in situ » des artistes montréalaises Lyne Lapointe et Martha Fleming (Johnstone 1991, 7).

Through these and other essays, the work of Fleming and Lapointe was positioned as feminist, or as Johnstone writes in another essay, "feminist in position (1988, 22)." They were thus known for work that was understood as engaging with the political in some way, from their position as women and as lesbians. At the same time they were also artists who had shown in the United States. Not only had *The Wilds and the Deep* been made there, but they had also been invited to produce an installation for The New

Museum in New York, *Eat me / Drink me / Love me*.⁸ By inviting them to participate in *Pour la suite du Monde*, the curators effectively articulated these histories to the enunciative strategies of the larger exhibition.

The work of Geneviève Cadieux in *Pour la suite du Monde* was installed on top of the museum. The title of this work, *La Voie lactée* (the Milky Way), evokes another, *La Voix lactée* (the milky voice), and refers back to the image itself, that of a woman's mouth, barely open as if on the verge of speaking. It consists of a single photograph presented in a large, back-lit light box such as used in advertising. Produced in a medium that is necessarily silent, the work mobilizes concerns with visibility and its displacement, speaking and silence, and the uncertain relation between them. The fact that the work is placed on the top of an important arts institution in Quebec that was reopening within the centre of the city extended the questions posed by the work to the institution, possibly gendering the museum itself as female at the same time.

Over the previous fifteen years Cadieux had developed a visual vocabulary and mode of working that entailed large-scale works, often installation. Many of these works both used and referred to photographic, and by extension film, practices at the same time that they inhibited the gaze. In an early series, *Séquence* (1979-1980), the repeated image of a woman or of eyes was produced on darkened steel plates using photographic emulsion. Partly covered with printing ink, and sometimes combined with neon lighting, these images verged on the edge of visibility. In later works this play with visibility and

⁸ This installation explored the 19th century sciences of botany and zoology, the sublimation of women's pleasure, the (not literally possible) love affair between the Victorian poets Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson, and the possibility of pleasure for women within rigid institutional structures.

its negation was produced through other means or shifted onto other senses. In *La Blessure d'une cicatrice ou Les Anges* (1987) she juxtaposed an image of the Little Prince (from Saint-Exupéry's story) and a photograph of a nude woman (taken by E.J. Bellocq around 1900), where the faces of both had been obliterated. In *Trou de mémoire, la beauté inattendue* (1988) the photograph is of a scar, taken so closely that the part of the body and the gender of the person become invisible. This refusal of the gaze is even more evident in the diptych *À fleur de peau* (1987) where one frame contains a dark, mirrored surface and the other a text written in braille. Here the shift is not only from sight to touch, but touch itself is both offered and refused as the surface in which the braille is written is lead, a very poisonous substance. It is also integral to another work, *Amour aveugle* (1992), where the same image of a woman's mouth that was used in *La Voie Lactée* is placed opposite a pair of eyes, also visibly female and partly clouded.

Through these works a visual vocabulary and readings were developed that focused on photography and the conditions of visibility, or sometimes its displacement or even negation. At the same time, they marked out another set of concerns around gender. In many works the images were evidently of women, or, in *L'Inconstance du désir* (1988), their substitute – high heeled shoes. Here the gender of the person photographed, whether entailing questions of seeing or speaking, as well as the gender of the artist, come into play. In many works this is even more evident as she used her sister, whom she closely resembles, as well as other members of her family as models.

The large format and sumptuous presentation of these works, combined with the themes of visibility and its displacement or negation, has meant that these works have

often been taken up into museum exhibitions and by critical texts, especially as they present and produce narratives of art in Quebec. This can be seen, for example, in *Aurora Boréalis*, the first large exhibition organized by the Centre international d'art contemporain (CIAC) in 1985. While the structuring of the exhibition placed Cadieux's work as well as the work of other artists from Quebec within a narrative of Canadian art, the second CIAC exhibition, *Lumières : Perception-projection* (1986), in which Cadieux also participated, placed her work alongside artists from the United States, Europe and Canada. In other words, the structure of *Lumières...* placed her work within an international art context.

This 'internationalization' of Cadieux's work was also produced through exhibitions outside of Quebec. Cadieux participated in the International Kunstmarkt in Germany (1986), in Northern Noises as part of the 19th Biennial in Sao Paulo (1987), both the 7th and 8th Biennials of Sydney (1988 and 1990), and the Venice Biennial (1990), as well as smaller exhibitions in Europe and the United States. Her work therefore both represented Canada in major international exhibitions and produced a representation of 'international art' as a set of visual and conceptual practices.

There was, however, another way that Cadieux was being located through these exhibitions. As well as being placed within discourses on photography and visibility, and in narratives of art in Quebec as it was being produced on an international plane, it was also being placed within discourses of what could loosely be termed 'the ethical'. This can be found, for example, in René Blouin's essay for *Aurora Boréalis* where he says that "current art is demonstrating unprecedented relentlessness in its critical analysis of

culture's structures and operating mechanisms, and in making visible their underpinnings (*Aurora Boréalis* 1985, 166).” It can also be found in Chantal Pontbriand's essay for *The Historical Ruse: Art in Montreal* when she says that “art that counts is art that thinks, art capable of making a coherent reflection on the cultural world and on art as an institution within this world (*The Historical Ruse* 1988, 8).” Perhaps most telling is Pontbriand's essay “Peintres de la vie moderne” where she links the work of Cadieux with that of Jenny Holzer, an American, and Lothar Baumgarten, a German, through a notion of the ethical in art.

Comment la question de l'éthique est-elle abordée par les artistes d'aujourd'hui? Rapport au temps, rapport à son temps, l'éthique est un positionnement, une attitude qui se définit par un travail. Autrefois on aurait dit une vision du monde, mais le vingtième siècle nous aura montré l'écueil totalitariste de cette conception des choses. À la vision s'est substituée la notion de procès, le travail en train-de-se-faire où oeuvrent diverses instance, moi de l'artiste, moi du spectateur, rouages de l'institution, du social... L'oeuvre d'art contemporaine active ce champ de références et produit du sens (Pontbriand 1990, 14).

The ethical is thus defined as working with and on the conditions of possibility of meaning – including the spectator, the work, the institution, the physical and discursive context and the specific way that they are articulated together in the production of meaning. It is thus part of the postmodern project in art. ‘The ethical’, however, is distinguished from ‘the political’. Pontbriand explicitly states that none of these artists have declared themselves feminist, ecologist or anything else. “L'allégeance politique n'est pas leur affaire (14).” When one remembers that these three artists all participated in the Venice Biennial, Cadieux and Holzer in 1990, Baumgarten in 1984, it can be seen that a conjunction or knot was being produced between definitions of postmodern art

practices, ‘the ethical’, and the ‘internationalization’ of Quebec art. Furthermore, the work of Geneviève Cadieux was both exemplary of and central to this process.

This description of these artists’ work makes evident both the enunciative strategies of the individual artworks and the histories of readings of the larger body of work of which they are a part. Their work in effect represented, and helped to produce, what could be understood as an ethical and/or political practice in art. They did this both on the level of the visual and conceptual practices used within the works, and on the level of the readings produced for those practices. Moreover, these visual and conceptual practices, along with their attendant readings, were also produced as ‘international’ practices. By inviting these as well as the other artists from Quebec to participate in *Pour la suite du Monde*, these histories and readings were articulated to the enunciative strategies of the larger exhibition.

The catalogue

An important site of discursive elaboration within the exhibition was the catalogue, or one should say the catalogues as there were in fact two publications. The first of these, *Pour la suite du Monde : Cahier : propos et projects*, was a place for the artists to intervene by including visual and textual material related to their work. It was thus a place where the artists could either elaborate on their work through essays, or to extend it by using the publication as a site for interventions along the lines of an artist’s bookwork.

The other catalogue, titled simply *Pour la suite du Monde*, was the site where the

museum, in the persons of the director and curators, and more generally critics, art historians, scientists and philosophers presented their work. The function of this second publication was to present and elaborate on the project of the exhibition as a whole. This included the stated aims of the exhibition, the definition of ‘international art’ on which it was based and which it produced, and the museum as a large state-funded institution.

The aims of the exhibition were outlined by the museum’s director, Marcel Brisebois, and the curators, Réal Lussier and Gilles Godmer. It was, as stated above, to “highlight the essential role played by artists in society and, more precisely, aspects of their commitment toward the world (236).” This, however, entailed a number of assumptions about ‘the world’ and about the role of artists.

‘The world’ in these first essays is described as a dark and violent place. To quote Brisebois:

We are living at a time of extreme crisis and everything depends on our remaining lucid: a century of extraordinary barbarism, suffering and darkness is drawing to a close.... Our century, our burning, bleeding history, pushes the experience of pain beyond the flesh, into our soul and our consciousness. And ultimately, it is the essence of the human, as a being capable of susceptibility to freedom and truth, that is apparently being destroyed by the process (228-229).

The role of art and culture is thus to offer a place of hope, value and redemption, to transcend everyday life to offer a vision of the future. “As a creator – with the goal of being more sensitive, more receptive to the true meaning of events, of better understanding the problems – the artist can avert the future that threatens (231)” In other words, the artist is to be both critic and visionary.

This deeply romantic, not to mention unsubstantiated, view of the world and of

the role of artists is repeated in various forms in the essays by the curators, as well as by many of the authors who came from outside the visual arts. These included people working in the hard and social sciences, philosophers and, 1992 being the five hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's accidental discovery of the Americas, a Native poet. If this array of authors did nothing to clarify the stakes of the exhibition or of the individual artworks, it did nevertheless represent the theme of the exhibition by associating the artists' work with critical and philosophical work in other fields. This strategy can also be seen in the choice of title, *Pour la suite du Monde*, which could be translated as *For the continuation of the World*, which was borrowed from the 1962 film by the Pierre Perrault (Perrault, Brault, and Carrière 1962). This title linked the project of the exhibition with that of the film. However, the connection was poetic rather than real. According to one of the curators, it was the filmmaker as "a source of inspiration and a symbol of an artist fully committed to his time (239)" that they wished to associate with the exhibition.⁹

Beyond these claims regarding the artist as critic and visionary, certain essays did critically engage with the exhibition or, more largely, the institution. Through their invitation to art critics and historians, as well as the essays on the roles of the museum (Manon Blanchette) and the critic (Patricia Phillips), it is evident that the curators invited

⁹ The film documented, and in effect recreated since it was undertaken for the cameras, the hunt for beluga whales that had existed on Ile aux Coudres in the Saint Lawrence River up until the 1920's. It also documented a way of life that, even by the time that the film was made at the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, no longer really existed. The film did however produce a history of the people of Quebec, a representation of a kind of historical collective identity. I would argue that it was also this imagined and real past and collective identity, as well as the very real success of the film, that the title, *Pour la suite du Monde*, brought to the exhibition.

an examination of the art world as institution, and not simply the Musée, within the project of *Pour la suite du Monde*. However, two essays do reflect on this specific institution and on the exhibition which it was presenting.

The essay by Johanne Lamoureux is in fact the only essay that examines the stakes of the *exhibition* in any critical way. She does this by unwrapping the notion of ‘the world’ used in the title and evoked in many of the essays, the term ‘site specific’ as it is embodied in various art practices, and that of criticism. The starting point for her argument is an essay by Edward Said, “The World, the Text and the Critic” (1983). Specifically, she draws on his definition of the term ‘worldliness’ or the ways that any text, including modernist ones, is always located somewhere, and that this locatedness marks the text itself. She says:

The world is to be understood, then, within this view, as a particular set of circumstances which, while they do not determine the text in any mechanistic way, nonetheless define the enunciative position of the author, the audience for whom the text is intended, the levels of language employed and the ordering of the declarations made, just as much as the scheme of referents denoted by the text. This emphasis on the existence-in-the-world of texts does not imply a rejection of the internal textual approach, but rather opens it up from the inside to the threads of worldliness that run through it. And these threads have their source in a group of specific facts that are never related to the “world” in its broadest geographic sense, as a planetary space, but always to the world as situation (254-255).

Lamoureux uses this notion of ‘worldliness’ to open up a discussion of site-specific artworks. Her argument is that site-specificity, which was initially understood as referring to the way that works were conceived for a given physical space such that the space itself was part of the work, has expanded to include larger notions of ‘site’ such as the institution, the broader locale, or various socio-political contexts on which the work

draws and to which it refers. Furthermore, while initially understood as being proper to installation, site-specificity in the larger sense structures work in traditional media. The concept has thus become much more complex, and can entail different levels or notions of site at the same time (256-258).

While not speaking of individual works, Lamoureux's argument engages with the exhibition precisely because most of the works took the form of installation and entailed some level or levels of site-specificity in their enunciative formation. Lamoureux argues that 'the world' that the exhibition title evokes is thus not 'the whole world', but a specific place or site within it, whether understood as physical locale or socio-political location. Through this, a work's 'worldliness', assumed and taken on as an enunciative strategy of the work, is also the place or space of its critical or ethical dimension.

Said's notion of 'worldliness' that Lamoureux summarizes above recalls René Payant's definition of installation as exemplary of postmodernism in art. According to his analysis, installation, along with performance and video, stages the spectator as a function or role within the work. Furthermore, the position of the spectator in the work is part of a larger question of the institution itself as condition of possibility for the work as work of art (Payant 1987, 338).¹⁰ In other words, the spectator and the context of viewing were assumed and articulated to the work through its enunciative strategies such that 'the world' is internal to the work rather than that to which the work refers.

If Lamoureux does not discuss site-specificity or the works in the exhibition as postmodern art practices, it is perhaps because postmodernism was by then the accepted

¹⁰ Originally published in 1985.

paradigm in art. What her essay does do is to discuss how the meaning of site-specificity has been elaborated or, as she says, the ways that “the boundaries of the site are not extended, but the parameters in terms of which a work might participate in it, appropriate it and misappropriate it, are multiplied and built up (258).” More importantly in terms of the theme of the exhibition, she is defining not only the conditions of possibility for a postmodern art practice, but also the conditions of acceptability for a politicized art practice – a postmodern political art practice. It is a definition, moreover, that places it within the discourse of postmodernity as it has been produced within Quebec.

The other essay that engages with the stakes of exhibition, without having taken this museum or its opening exhibition as its subject, is that by the American critic and theoretician Douglas Crimp. Known for his analyses of issues related to AIDS and cultural activism, his presence along with Gran Fury, an activist artist group from the United States whose work addresses these same issues, presumably represent a certain kind of critical stance and practice in contemporary art within the larger project of the exhibition. Crimp’s subject, however, is museums. Using the example of the controversy caused by Robert Mapplethorpe’s sexually explicit images of homosexual and sado-masochistic practices, he questions the way that the museum not only presents work dealing with social issues, but also the way that it represents the audience and social context through its mode of address.¹¹ The audience, he argues, has to be recognized as socially differentiated, and thus living social reality and ‘social problems’ differently.

¹¹ See the anthology edited by Douglas Crimp, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), for more information on AIDS, representation and cultural activism.

Moreover, social reality cannot be understood as existing outside the museum waiting to be 'addressed'. The museum is part of the social world and in fact produces 'the social' through its institutional and discursive practices. He further argues that it is only when the museum recognizes that it is part of the social, and begins to work with and on this differentiated social context, that postmodernism as *museum* practice will become effective (266).

If, as I argue, this essay engages with the stakes of the exhibition, it is because it acts as a critique of the view of the artist, and by extension of the museum, presented by the director and curators of the museum. Rather than the artist as critic and visionary, and rather than the museum highlighting the role of the artist and their commitment to the world, 'the world' is seen as part of the museum and vice versa. To take up Lamoureux's, and by extension Said's, argument, the 'worldliness' of the museum is precisely the way that it is marked by the context within which it exists. In other words, the social context is never only 'out there', it is part of the discursive and institutional practices of the museum itself, and these locate the museum in specific discursive as well as social locations.

As I said, these essays by Lamoureux and Crimp are the only two that critically engage with the project of *Pour la suite du Monde*. As such they are minority positions within the larger project. However, their importance is in the fact that they open up the critical work of *Pour la suite du Monde* by examining of the role played by the museum and its opening exhibition.

The exhibition

The enunciative strategies of the exhibition were produced through the ways that it mobilized certain institutional practices, articulating the artworks to itself in the process. First among these was the way that it both physically and discursively positioned work by Quebec artists with work by those from other countries. As stated, *Pour la suite du Monde* included work by artists from a wide range of countries in Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere. It thus produced a representation of ‘the world’. However, as the curators said, it was not the whole world. The artists were drawn from “the cultural networks of the Western World (237).” This is to say that the artists had shown work in ‘the West’ – New York, London, Berlin, Venice, Sydney, Sao Paulo, as well as Montreal, Ottawa and other Canadian cities appearing throughout the artists’ biographies – and had often participated in large international exhibitions and biennials. Through this the artists from Quebec were represented as part of the international art world as produced and centred in ‘the West’.

This juxtaposing work of Quebec artists with that by artists from elsewhere was also produced through the catalogue. Réal Lussier wrote, for example, that “a number of artists (Dennis Adams, Dominique Blain, Alfredo Jaar, Mark Lewis, Muntadas, Jeff Wall) look at social representation by questioning the mechanisms involved in sign systems that yield value and power,” that “some (Ida Applebroog, Adrian Piper, Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe) have applied themselves to a critical analysis of systems of representation in order to underscore relations of power,” and “the artists (Geneviève Cadieux, Mona Hatoum, Marcel Odenbach, Bill Viola) explore, in a world of their own,

the echoes of a collective experience (*Pour la suite du Monde* 1992, 238).” This distribution of names, like the physical organization of the works in the exhibition, links the work by Quebec artists with that of others, creating a conceptual equivalency between them and positioning the Quebec artists as ‘international’.

In addition to this physical and discursive positioning of Quebec artists with those from elsewhere, there is another way that the exhibition positioned the work ‘in the world’. Many of the works were shown outside the museum itself. Not only was Cadieux’s work placed on top of the museum, Alfredo Jaar’s work was presented within three Vietnamese Restaurants, Gran Fury produced posters for the street, Mark Lewis’s ‘monuments’ occupied various sites throughout downtown Montreal, and Dennis Adams’ work was near the museum entrance. Others, while in the museum, occupied the corridors – Krzysztof Wodiczko, Christian Boltanski, Gilbert Boyer – or garden – Alan Sonfist. The physical location of these works enacted and doubled the placing of the works within the international art world, only this time ‘the world’ was the city centre to which the museum itself had just moved.

The museum, governmentality, and discourses of nation

The ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ in art, ‘international art’, and definitions of ‘the world’ as they were produced and articulated together through the enunciative strategies of the exhibition and catalogue, were set within another set of discursive and institutional practices – that of the museum and the forms of governmentality of which it was a part. It was through this larger discursive and institutional context that the exhibition made

sense and derived its justification.

In effect, the exhibition *Pour la suite du Monde* not only presented ‘international art’, it also presented, and represented, the Musée. After his bleak review of the problems in ‘the world’, Brisebois asks rhetorically: “What is the point, then, of opening yet another museum? What can be the significance, today, of such an institution (229)?” The answer to this question is found in the role of the museum, and especially this museum, within the world. After naming the usual museological functions of collecting, preserving and exhibiting objects, he says that the museum must also be concerned with what is happening today, with contemporary issues and culture. It must be “interventionist” and “creative” rather than simply conserving the past. If the museum is the place where the artist’s work, and their role in society, can be made available to the public, the museum can also be seen as having the same critical and visionary role as the artist.

It cannot be overemphasized: this institution is part of the discourse on history and society, a contemporary focus of the age-old discussion about human goals, one of the centres for posing our own question about the meaning of life. It is a place in which to reflect on the conduct of the moral and creative individual. Perhaps, in the end, the Musée’s main preoccupation can only be ethics, or the study of the different value systems that underpin the various forms of collectivity manifested in art and creation (232).

The museum’s move from the edge of the city at La Cité du Havre, from the man-made peninsula that juts out into the Saint Lawrence into the very centre of downtown Montreal, placed the institution, like the artworks, ‘in the world’ so to speak. It in effect literalized the role of the museum as a central institution in a collective reflection on history and society, human goals and ethics. Thus the aim of the exhibition, “to highlight

the essential role played by artists in society and, more precisely, aspects of their commitment toward the world (236),” was extended to the museum itself, and the exhibition functioned ‘to highlight the essential role played by the *museum* in society’. In this way the exhibition can be seen to have to put the museum itself on display.¹²

The role of the museum, taken up and embodied by the exhibition, had in fact been the object of debate six years earlier.¹³ In a series of public hearing held in 1986 on the new building for the Musée, a number of presentations proposed a vision of the museum’s role, subsequently incorporated into the committee’s final report, that included both the collection, preservation and exhibition of contemporary art, and a more creative and interventionist role in relation to contemporary art where the Musée would function as a kind of laboratory. It was also proposed that the Musée should play an international role, organizing international exhibitions in Montreal and ensuring the exhibition of work from Quebec and Canada abroad. In effect, it was argued that the Musée should not only

¹² This exhibition can be seen to be exemplary of Daniel Vander Gucht’s argument in *L’Art contemporain au miroir du musée* that there has been a shift between artworks and the museum, with the museum now occupying the place of the artwork. He says that in contemporary museum practices curators now ‘create’ exhibitions using artists’ work to produce ‘installations’ of contemporary art, at the same time that artists create ‘museums’ (Irene Whittome’s *Le Musée des Traces* (1989), her work for this exhibition, *Émanation = Le Musée noir* (1991-1992), or Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe’s installations, are good examples of artists’ museums). His argument is particularly pertinent to *Pour la suite du Monde* as it was developed in relation to contemporary installation practices by artists and the tendency of museums to invite artists to produce works for the museum (Vander Gucht 1998, 102-107).

¹³ The Musée d’art contemporain, which had originally been founded and run directly by the Ministère des Affaires culturelles, became a government corporation with a board in 1984. However, the project of building a new Musée had already begun the previous year, without the input of the Musée or its new board of directors. Finding itself straddled with a building project which it did not consider met the needs of the Musée and over which it had no control, the president of the board wrote to the Ministère in January of 1986 asking it to reexamine the building project. The minister decreed a moratorium on the construction on February 4th of 1986 and set up a committee to reevaluate the project (Government of Quebec, *Rapport Final* 1986, 61, 64-65).

be a national institution, whether the nation was understood as Quebec or Canada, but an international institution, positioning itself (to paraphrase Réal Lussier) ‘within the cultural networks of the Western World’. Chantal Pontbriand, editor of *Parachute* magazine and one of the interlocutors at the hearings (and one that seems to have had a great impact on the committee), put it this way:

C’est seulement en ayant un programme d’expositions internationales soutenu et de qualité que le Musée va pouvoir, éventuellement, placer des expositions de Canadiens en Europe et aux États-Unis, des expositions de même envergure, de même taille. Tout cela, c’est dans la muséologie internationale. Il y a un système d’échanges et le Canada a beaucoup à faire pour gagner sa place à l’intérieur de ce système, à l’intérieur de ce réseau. Mais en montrant que le Canada veut se positionner sur la scène internationale, en faisant des expositions internationales de qualité régulièrement, nous allons finalement attirer l’attention internationalement et pouvoir obtenir la réciprocité d’ici quelques années. Parce que l’art qui se produit au Canada, incontestablement, est mûr pour obtenir cette reconnaissance (Government of Quebec, *Transcription des Audiences...* 1986, 71).¹⁴

It can thus be seen that the two roles of the Musée were represented by the two opening exhibitions. That of collecting, preserving and exhibiting contemporary art was represented by *La collection : tableau inaugural*, and that of a laboratory for contemporary art and as international art institution was represented by *Pour la suite du Monde*. By taking up residence in downtown Montreal, the role of the museum as international art institution was doubled by its position within the centre of the city, and more largely within the cultural centre of Quebec.

¹⁴ Chantal Pontbriand published her presentation to the committee in *Parachute*, no. 45 (1986-1987).

The museum and the roles that it was called to fulfill were further located within another set of discursive and non-discursive practices – that of government policy with regards to culture, of which the new museum was one manifestation, and more largely the terms ‘national’ and ‘international’ as they traversed both governmental and non-governmental practices.

The Musée d’art contemporain has been imbricated with questions of culture and nation since its inception. The Ministère des Affaires culturelles was founded in 1961 at the beginning of the Quiet Revolution and almost from the beginning artists lobbied the Ministère for a museum dedicated to contemporary art. This came to fruition on July 4th, 1964, with the foundation of the Musée. The official opening took place on the 12th of July 1965 at the Château Dufresne with the exhibition *Artistes de Montréal*, as well as an international sculpture symposium in the Château’s gardens (*Les Vingt ans du Musée à travers sa collection* 1985, 8, 11-12).¹⁵

What made a museum of contemporary possible at a moment when even museums of modern art were rare was the way that culture and identity were linked under the Lesage government in the early 1960's. As already discussed in the first chapter, within Quebec, culture, nation and citizen have been articulated together such that ‘culture’ has become the unifying logic and justification for government action in a diverse range of fields (Allor and Gagnon 1994). Effectively, with the push for

¹⁵ There had been a previous ‘opening’, an ‘international’ exhibition of work by Georges Rouault in temporary quarters at Place Ville-Marie in March of 1965. It was artists’ opposition to this exhibition opening the new Musée that led to *Artistes de Montréal*. The Musée moved to La Cité du Havre in 1968, occupying the building that had served as an art gallery for Expo 67.

modernization at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, ‘the cultural’, and Quebec’s cultural identity, became the terms through which democracy and modernization were understood and defended (Tarpin 1998, 45-46). The government of Quebec thus became the guarantor of Quebec’s cultural identity, and Quebec’s cultural identity justified the state as representative of, as well as guarantor of, the nation. At the same time, as Johanne Lamoureux points out, the effect of the *Refus global* and the *Automatiste* movement was to link modernity in the visual arts with both abstraction and with the rejection of the parochial mentality and conservative nationalism of the past (*Seeing in Tongues...* [1995], 3-4).¹⁶ It is thus no surprise that abstraction in art became linked with the modernization of Quebec at the beginning of the Quiet Revolution and that it would ‘make sense’ to establish a museum of contemporary art.¹⁷

Christine Tarpin, in her analysis of the emergence of Musée de la civilisation in Quebec City, demonstrates the way that the link between cultural identity, nation, modernity and the state made possible the elaboration of ‘the museological’ as a dispositif in Quebec. She argues that by placing a wide range of objects, sites and activities under the notion of *la patrimoine*, heritage, the government in effect justified the founding and funding of various types of museums to protect and promote Quebec’s heritage for the people of Quebec. Museums were thus a means for the people of Quebec to have access

¹⁶ As Lamoureux notes, this may also be the reason that abstract art has been much more acceptable within Quebec than elsewhere in Canada.

¹⁷ As Marie Carani makes evident, it was only at the beginning of the Quiet Revolution that the *Refus global* acquired its mythic status as founding moment of Quebec’s modernity, being little known outside of small intellectual circles before that. She says that it was discussed in *Cité libre* (1960), *Liberté* (1960-1963), *Situations* (1959) and *Parti Pris* (1963) (Carani 1997, 131).

to, and to become conscious of, their collective heritage and identity, and for the government to represent itself as the protector of Quebec's culture and heritage, and of the nation itself. At a time when culture was defined anthropologically to include all aspects of society, culture, or Quebec's cultural specificity, was also a means to argue for Quebec's cultural, and even political, sovereignty (Tarpin 1998, 67-100).

The development of 'the museological' took concrete form after 1978 when, following the publication of *La politique québécoise du développement culturel* (Government of Quebec 1978), the péquist government announced a program of cultural development and *rattrapage*, including in the domain of museums. Beginning in the 1980's a wide range of museums were founded and funded by successive governments in Quebec, including museums, exhibition and interpretation centres, and historical sites. Among these was a new building for the Musée d'art contemporain.

Museums were seen not only as means to protect and promote Quebec's history and culture, and thus to make Quebec's cultural identity visible and available to the citizens of Quebec, it was also a means for the government to present itself as a modern nation state, as having all the "important, even necessary, fixtures of a well-furnished state," to quote Carol Duncan again (1991, 88). In this way, the dispositif of the museological, and the creation of a network of museums throughout Quebec, made sense and was justified through a larger set of terms whereby Quebec was produced, not as a province among provinces, but as a nation among nations. Museums were therefore a representation and guarantee of Quebec's nationhood and modernity.

It is within this understanding of Quebec as a modern nation state that the term

‘international’ comes into play, not as the opposite of ‘the national’, but as its exemplar. In effect, by having museums that meet international standards, both in terms of the of the buildings themselves and of the exhibitions and other programs that they produced, Quebec could demonstrate that it was a modern nation state. As Tarpin says:

En voulant positionner le dispositif muséal québécois à la pointe des nouvelles tendances en muséologie, le gouvernement confirme sa volonté de faire du Québec une nation moderne, il se positionne comme garant du développement de la province et de la modernité. L’argument de l’accès du Québec au rang de « pays moderne » est souvent invoqué dans les positions gouvernementales, ainsi que celui de son rayonnement international (155).

It is in this context that international arts events, whereby artists from Quebec participate in biennials and other large ‘international’ exhibitions, whether within Quebec or abroad, is understood as demonstrating Quebec’s presence in the world, as a nation among nations.

However, the ‘internationalization’ of art from Quebec, and the production of Quebec as a nation among nations rather than a province among provinces, as well as the centrality of ‘national’ institutions in the production and representation of ‘the nation’, existed across a wide range of cultural practices. As already discussed in the third chapter, around 1980 there was a re-mapping of the discursive and institutional terrain within Quebec such that the older dichotomy of ‘national / international’ was replaced by ‘Montreal / region’. In this shift, the term ‘international’ took up the whole field, with the new regional arts institutions, especially artist-run centres in Quebec City, making

contacts and organizing exchanges with centres in Europe.

The ‘internationalization’ of art was subsequently taken up and produced through a series of exhibitions organized by the Centre international d’art contemporain or CIAC. In fact, the CIAC exhibitions were formative of *Pour la suite du Monde* through intertextual influence on both the discursive and institutional levels of formation. The first, *Aurora Boréalis* (1985), located artists from Quebec within a representation of ‘Canadian’ art (about a third of the artists were from Quebec), in an exhibition that focused on the practice of installation in contemporary Canadian art. The essays by Lesley Johnstone and René Blouin further examined the notion of installation both in contemporary art practices and historically. However, beginning with *Lumières : Perception-projection* in 1986, every subsequent CIAC was an ‘international’ exhibition, presenting artists from Quebec alongside those from Europe and the United States as well as Canada. Furthermore, while installation was not the official theme of these exhibitions, it was privileged as a practice through the work that was presented.¹⁸ The CIAC exhibitions were also held up as a model for the Musée and the role that it should play during the public hearings on the new building for the Musée in 1986, both by Chantal Pontbriand in her presentation to the committee, and in the committee’s final report (Government of Quebec, *Transcription des Audiences...* 1986, 71-72; Government of Quebec, *Rapport Final* 1986, 89, 94).

¹⁸ The CIAC exhibitions include *Aurora Boréalis* in 1985, *Lumières : Perception-projection / Light: Perception-projection* in 1986, *Stations, stations, stations* in 1987, *Les Cent jours d’art contemporain* in 1989, *Savoir-Vivre, Savoir-Faire, Savoir-Être* and *Visions 90, Visions 91*, and *Diagonales Montréal* and *Dialogues* in 1992. It should be noted that most of the Quebec artists in *Pour la suite du Monde* had also participated in various CIAC exhibitions, Blain in 1989, 1990 and 1992; Boyer in 1991; Cadieux in 1985 and 1986; Charney in 1985; Steinman in 1986, 1989 and 1992; and Whittome in 1985, 1989 and 1992.

This concern with the place of Quebec artists within international art circles should not be interpreted as a rejection of the question of nation within the visual arts. It served, rather, to produce a representation of Quebec as part of the international art world. In other words, as stated already, Quebec was produced as a nation among nations. That this should also be intimately tied up with questions of identity was made evident through the exhibition *Un Archipel de désirs : les artistes du Québec et la scène internationale*, organized by the Musée du Québec in Quebec City in 1991. This exhibition undertook to present work by Quebec artists that had been shown internationally, to represent Quebec to itself so to speak, the works and their international itinerary being seen as a representation of Quebec and its place in the world.¹⁹ As such it was tied to the question of Quebec and its national identity, and, as the curator Louise Déry said, functioned as a form of self-affirmation (*Un Archipel...* 1991). According to Déry, the works and their presence in the exhibition “reconstituent, par le fait de leur diffusion internationale, une géographie possible de notre identité (19).” Identity is in this case collective, *nous les québécois*, and geographic rather than linguistic or ethnic.²⁰ For the government too, the international itinerary of Quebec culture was evidence of Quebec’s cultural identity. In the 1992 cultural policy the minister wrote: “La reconnaissance mondiale de la valeur unique du patrimoine québécois contribue également à l’émergence d’une conscience

¹⁹ Dominique Blain, Geneviève Cadieux, Melvin Charney, Barbara Steinman, and Irene Whittome all participated in this exhibition.

²⁰ Déry in fact explicitly excluded the possibility of defining artists, and Quebec, along ethnic lines (12). Forming a counter discourse to this equation between ‘the international’ and Quebec’s identity, Daniel Béland, in his review of the roundtable that was organized to coincide with *Un Archipel de désirs*, caustically remarked: “L’art au Québec ou le stade international comme formateur de la fonction du ‘je’. La question est de savoir dans quel miroir on veut se regarder (Béland 1992, 39).”

claire de l'identité culturelle québécoise (Government of Quebec, Ministère des Affaires culturelles 1992, 6).”

It can thus be seen that the exhibition *Pour la suite du Monde* was located within, drew upon, and produced a series of intersecting discourses and their attendant institutional practices that included visual and exhibition practices, readings for those practices, museums as national institutions, government policy, and discourses of nation. In this, the terms ‘national’ and ‘international’ were not in opposition to each other. Rather, nationalism and ‘the national’ takes the form of internationalism. Furthermore, it did so on the level of exhibitions and ‘the museological’ rather than on the level of individual artworks.²¹ In addition, the government was expected, and undertook, to represent the nation by funding institutions and events that would represent Quebec on an international plane, producing itself as the representative of the nation in the process.

***Pour la suite du Monde* and discourses of feminist art**

So where, one must ask, do discourses of feminist art intersect with the project and politics of *Pour la suite du Monde*? One answer is not at all since the exhibition does not take feminist art as its subject. However, a more careful examination of the exhibition and catalogues demonstrate that discourses of feminist art are present, but

²¹ In this sense I am both agreeing and disagreeing with Marie Carani’s argument in “Le no(m)n de Borduas comme mémoire” that art in Quebec since 1948 has engaged in a form of ‘artistic refusal’. She says that since the beginning of modernity in Quebec, with the possible exception of Pop art, artists have refused to fulfill the demands of politicians and others for work that represents the collectivity, to make ‘Quebec art’ or ‘national art’ (Carani 1997). While I agree that this is true on the level of individual artworks, it does not take into consideration the ways that artworks are taken up into discourses of art and nation through exhibition and institutional practices, and the way that these produce representations of the nation for identification. Carani’s own argument in fact produces a representation of ‘Quebec art’.

problematically. This relation between feminist art and the exhibition makes evident the problematic presence of discourses of feminist art within those of art and nation within Quebec.

Given the stated theme of the exhibition, artists' commitment to the world, a theme that involves at least an ethical if not an openly political position within the work, one would assume that feminist art would be included. And it is. However, its inclusion within the catalogue is in the past tense. In a brief discussion of the way that questions of identity entered contemporary art practices, Réal Lussier cites feminist art in the 1970's as the origin of this problematic.

A major element in forming a new attitude of increased social awareness by artists was the feminist discourse. During the seventies, we saw feminist artists and art critics demonstrate that all art had a political dimension and that, for women as well as for many other groups, the political question was a subject that touched all aspects of social and cultural reality. Feminist art underscored the relationship between the personal and the political by formulating the reexamination of the role of women and their identity. Furthermore, women artists brought about the artist's affirmation as a social being and value as a subject. As a result, the role of artists in many different areas was redefined, particularly as regards their involvement in social issues. Art then took on a meaning deeply rooted in political and social changes (237).

Feminist art is thus seen as having had a decisive influence on the formation of the political in art. Lussier further argues that questions of identity and subjectivity were also taken up by Black artists and, subsequently, by others, critiquing cultural values and criteria of judgement in the process. Feminist discourses are therefore seen as having introduced questions of identity and subjectivity into contemporary discourses on art, and feminist art is presented as an exemplary instance of politicized art practices.

On another level, discourses of feminist art are absent in the catalogue. Lussier

places feminist art in the 1970's, the moment of its formation. What might constitute a contemporary feminist practice in art is not addressed. Indeed, because the individual works are not discussed within the main catalogue, the specific enunciative strategies of these works and the ways that they intervene within larger discourses remains absent within the discussion. This is true even of the essay by Lamoureux where she analyses the practice of installation and the place of 'the political' within it.²²

This absence of feminist art within the catalogue is countered by its presence in the exhibition, or at least the inclusion of artists whose work has been definitive of feminist discourses on art. As discussed earlier, Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe locate their work within feminist discourses on art. Many of Barbara Steinman's works have also been presented as feminist, as is evident in her inclusion in the *Séquences* as part of *Réseau Art-Femmes* and in discussions of her work by Rose-Marie Arbour (1985a, 1989). The work of Dominique Blain, while not explicitly placed within feminist art discourses, is nevertheless seen to address issues of gender along with colonialism, militarism, race, and First and Third World relations. Other women artists in the exhibition, Ida Applebroog, Mona Hatoum, Liz Magor and Adrian Piper, have also all been discussed in terms of feminist art.

This break between feminist art, seen as an idealized political moment in the past, and contemporary discourses on art marks a disturbance between the two within the

²² Even Lamoureux's brief mentioning of Fleming and Lapointe's work, where she says that "it was not until the trilogy of Montréal installations by Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe... that critics here began to see the first examples of the epistemological potential of installation – in this case the metaphorical transformation of a site based on sexual and political factors (258)," does not explicate their work in the exhibition, *Lagrima viva*. Rather, it must be imputed by the reader.

exhibition, and within the larger discursive context of Quebec. To understand the reasons for this disturbance, and the way that it structured discourses of feminist art, it is necessary to understand how each was defined. However, before taking up this question further, I would like to first look at another event in the early 1990's that did define itself as feminist, the publication *Instabili* that was produced on the occasion of Galerie Powerhouse's sixteenth anniversary.

Instabili : La question du sujet / The question of subject

At the time that the Musée d'art contemporain was preparing to celebrate the opening of its new building, there was another celebration taking place, the 16th anniversary of Galerie Powerhouse, also known as La Centrale.²³ Begun in 1973 and incorporated in 1974, the members chose 1989-1990 as the year to mark the gallery's anniversary. While all of the programming for the year was considered to be part of the celebration, they organized two special exhibitions, *Portrait d'une galerie / Galerie de portraits*, a video installation documenting the response of all those who had been involved in the gallery to the opening line "Galerie Powerhouse is....,"²⁴ and *Métro d'art*,

²³ The members of the gallery decided to use the name Galerie Powerhouse at a meeting on 14 September 1987, putting equal emphasis on the two words. The name La Centrale électrique was officially adopted at a special general meeting held on 27 February 1990. This was shortened to La Centrale at the following annual general meeting in June 1990 (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials).

²⁴ Of course, not all of the people could be contacted or chose to participate. Of the approximately 500 who had been involved in the gallery, 145 participated in the making of the 'portraits'. In addition to the two artists/organizers of the event, Corrine Corry and Lisa Krupka, many other people, working individually or as part of artist-run centres, also contributed by videotaping the responses.

eleven works by twelve artists in the city's subway stops.²⁵ The gallery also undertook a publication project, *Instabili : La question du sujet / The question of subject*. It was this last project, which included both essays and artworks, that most clearly mapped out discourses of feminist art in the early 1990's.

The aims of *Instabili* as defined by the editors, Marie Fraser and Lesley Johnstone, can be found in the grant applications for the project. They wrote:

Cette publication prendra la forme d'un recueil d'essais théoriques sur le féminisme et ses rapports multiples aux arts visuels. Elle s'inscrit dans les mêmes objectifs que la galerie s'est donnée lors de sa fondation : diffuser et promouvoir l'art des femmes. Mais ce projet vise à en explorer des aspects théoriques, analytiques, historiques et critiques plutôt qu'essentiellement pratiques.... Par ces diverses approches, il s'agit d'offrir plusieurs points de vue et d'aborder le côté multidisciplinaire du féminisme et ses influences capitales aux niveaux des arts et de la pensée contemporaine (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials, Description de la publication).

In other words, the project of *Instabili* was understood as continuing the objectives of the original founders of the gallery at the same time that it constituted a break by privileging the theoretical and analytical over political and practical demands.

The ways that this general statement of intent was understood, and the form that the publication was to take, were further elaborated by the editors (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials, Pertinence et enjeux de cette publication). The aim was first of all historical, to provide the much-needed material necessary for the further theoretical development of feminist art. Secondly, the publication was to bring together what was seen as the two intellectual traditions within feminist art, Anglo-American theoretical

²⁵ The artists were Michèle Assal, Cécile Baird, Claire Beaulieu, Loly Darcel, Marie Fraser, Christina Horeau, Raymonde Jodoin, Khadejha, Renée Lavaillante, Josée Pellerin, and Kitty Scott and Laurel Woodcock.

traditions and the philosophical and psychoanalytic theories originating in France, here mapped onto the notion of two languages and two cultures within Quebec and more largely within Canada. Thirdly the aim was to highlight the way that artists-run centres had historically privileged experimental and marginalized practices and issues, thus opening a space for, among other things, women's art and discourses of difference. Finally, the publication was to take up the question of 'the subject' as it had been developed within feminist theory and across diverse representational and political practices. It was a question, moreover, that the editors saw as symptomatic of the postmodern era.

The theme of the publication, the question of subject, is evoked by the cover itself. The image of what is evidently a window, in fact a shoe repair shop window, displays the dark forms of upturned shoes. On either side are two pairs of high heels. These shoeless heels evoke the gender of the intended wearer, both through the way that they recall a pair of breasts, and through the way that they remind us of the structure of fetishism where the substitute object, often shoes, both acknowledges and denies the loss of the phallic object. Behind the shoes a small sign, unreadable to most people in North America because written in German, and a curtain, deny access to the linguistic and visual space of display, in effect undermining the gaze. Emblazoned over the curtain is the title, "*instabili.*"

It is significant that the cover should represent the female subject, not directly, but

through a fetishistic substitute. It is also significant that the image should both entice and deny the gaze, the display of both the window and of photography itself being undermined by the unreadability of the sign and the impenetrability of the curtain. It will be recalled that the catalogue for *Artfemme '75*, like others of that era, depicted an image of a woman on the cover. That this image by Angela Grauerholz, with its various references to gender and the gaze, should be used to represent the publication demonstrates both a link with, and a break from, the earlier too-easy equation between the artist and her representation. That the subject should be unstable – *instabili* – further undermines the certainty of any link between woman and her representation.²⁶

The theme, the question of subject, was also taken up and elaborated by Marie Fraser in her introduction to *Instabili*.²⁷ The definition of ‘the subject’ that she draws on comes primarily from psychoanalytic theory. It is a subject formed through “loss and lack,” not a fixed entity but “a constantly unresolvable distinction, an enigma of sorts; a significant but not easily located ELSEWHERE (*Instabili* 1990, 12-13).” This definition of ‘the subject’ is linked to assumptions about women’s relation to language and representation where women are understood to occupy the margins of society and a position of absence in language and representation. Fraser argues that the feminist

²⁶ According to Marie Fraser, it was Grauerholz who proposed this image for the cover. However, as she was the graphic designer rather than one of the artists invited to participate in the publication, she did not want to be acknowledged as the photographer of this image (Fraser 2001). If I include it as one of the visual works in the publication, it is both because Grauerholz is also an artist in her own right, and because of the way that the image forms part of the publication’s exposition.

²⁷ According to Fraser, the original title was simply *La Question du sujet / The Question of Subject*. *Instabili* was added when it became apparent that all of the authors were arguing for the instability or uncertainty of the subject (Fraser 2001).

response to this is to work on discourse itself, to make visible both the structured absences in discourse and their relation to power, to point out “what IS NOT THERE in terms of what IS THERE and by defining oneself through difference (12).” Therefore the instability that is evoked through the title refers not only to ‘the subject’ as defined within psychoanalytic theory, but also to discourse where the feminist project is to undermine neutral and ‘universal’ truth through work on language and representation. She concludes by saying that “it is of vital importance to signify (in writing, speaking, imagining) the theoretical aperture which feminist reflection has provoked within the realms of discourse, the visual arts and contemporary thought... (13),” thus enunciating the project of *Instabili*, and more largely of feminist art as understood and advocated by the publication.

The cover design and introduction can thus be seen to signal the publication’s object of analysis, the (female) subject, as well as the theoretical assumptions underpinning the project of the publication and more largely of feminism itself. The theoretical sources for this understanding of the subject, as well as the questions or problematics to which they were a response, become clear in the following essays.

The publication itself was divided into four sections. The first two, consisting of four essays and four artworks respectively, formed the body of the publication. The first essay by Christine Ross, “Feminism and the Instability of its Subject,” outlines both a definition of the subject and reads several artworks through this theoretical framework.

Drawing on the work of Jane Flax and Teresa de Lauretis,²⁸ she argues that the feminist subject, or the subject as understood and produced by feminist work on theory and cultural production, is open and in movement, outside of the discourses that produce difference as the always already existing biological or social subject. As such the place or possibility of the feminist subject is that which discourse has left out, the spaces of the unsaid.

This elsewhere, produced by women and by feminists, is described by de Lauretis as a fold, a blindspot, an interstice and as a space which has not been represented or articulated in the dominant discourses.... its site is that which representation leaves out. As such, the elsewhere is the subject engendered by feminism, a social and discursive space which takes into account the level of subjectivity and the representation of the of the self, which fissures the space of the official discourses that constitute the subject in its sexual, socio-economic, racial, ethnic or any other differences (132).

Ross proposes that it is for this reason that feminists constantly deconstruct all discourses on gender, including their own, in order to avoid the pitfall of trying to describe (and to claim to know) the Real. Therefore feminists intervene in and change the discursive construction of gender precisely by always being elsewhere, by refusing to postulate a feminist standpoint to counter the masculine one.

Ross brings this understanding of the subject to her reading of a number of artworks. Here she introduces Julia Kristeva's notion of the *(im)propre*, where the limit or edge that assures difference is made fluid or uncertain, opening a space or interstice (132). She uses it to read certain visual practices in photography and video, especially the use of reflections, blurring and the dissolving of images, in terms of the opening of a

²⁸ Specifically, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory" by Flax and *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* by de Lauretis, both from 1987.

space for and of (female) subjectivity. Among the works that she discusses is that of Geneviève Cadieux.

Cadieux's work *Trou de mémoire, la beauté inattendue* (1988), with its large image of a scar set at an angle to a dark, mirrored surface, is, as already stated, usually read in terms of visibility and its negation. Ross's argument does not contradict this reading, but rather elaborates on it. The mirror, being clouded and thus undermining visibility, elicits an excess of interpretation in the effort to see. The image of the scar, the mark or trace of a personal history on the surface of the body, also elicits an effort to 'see' the body by searching one's own memory in order to identify the image/mark. Ross describes this excess of interpretation, resulting from the effort to see the work, as making evident the processes of viewing, the subjectivity of the viewer, and the social site of both. It is, as she says, the "site of interpretive difficulty which it mirrors and intensifies, indicating the putting-into-process (*l'en procès*), of the subject, the fluid temporality of our own mental images, perception and positioning (133)." She further links this with the space or aperture opened within discourses for the subject produced by feminism, an aperture by which "the spectator *invests* in a mnemonic position which contradicts the socio-cultural visibility erected by the dominant discourses (133)." It is here, in the place that the work opens up for the viewer and the putting into play of subjectivity, that Ross argues that Cadieux's and others' work intervenes in the social construction of gender and can be read within feminist discourses on art.

Ross's essay therefore entails a double project. It outlines a question within feminism, the problematic place or space of the feminist subject in relation to language

and culture, and a theoretical model through which this question is posed and understood. Secondly, it reads given artworks, and specific visual strategies, within and through those same questions and theoretical models. In other words, it elaborates the meanings of artworks in terms of the question of the subject, locating the works within the discourse of feminist art at the same time that it presents the works as engaging with those same discourses.

Mary Kelly, in an essay that had originally been published in 1984, “Desiring Images / Imaging Desire,” does not discuss specific artworks.²⁹ She rather poses a series of questions regarding representations of women. The first question, how to change images of women, reflects the terms in which feminists initially understood the problem of representation. Her following questions, “how can she represent herself as a subject of desire (25)” and “how is a radical, critical, AND pleasurable positioning of the woman as spectator to be done (26)?” demonstrate the way that this essay, as well as her art practice and her other essays, reformulated the problem of representations of women. It did so by problematizing the viewer’s, including the artist’s, relation to images, making that relation the site of theoretical investigation and feminist intervention.

The theoretical model that Kelly appropriated for her investigation is psychoanalytic theory, specifically the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, as it was seen to offer an explanation of the psychic processes which representations activate and through which they have their effectivity. More largely, psychoanalytic theory was seen as an account of the process of *becoming* masculine or feminine, thus undermining

²⁹ Originally published in the American journal *Wedge*, no. 6 (winter 1984).

of any notion of an essential femininity, and focusing instead on sexual difference as division and as positioning. The account of this process is contained in the description of the Oedipus Complex or, as Kelly says, symbolic castration (26). In one reading of this theory the resolution of the Oedipus complex happens when the child recognizes sexual difference and takes up a position on one side or the other of the divide. On another level it is the recognition of loss – that the child cannot ‘have’ the mother / that it cannot ‘be’ the sole object of desire of the mother – that sets in place the (differential) relation to the representation of desire. For men this is understood as ‘having’ the ‘phallus’ or object of desire. For women it is ‘being’ the ‘phallus’. Castration in this sense is not loss as such (there is nothing to lose), but is rather the ability to represent loss and therefore also desire.³⁰

While this account may be understood as yet again defining fixed positions for men and women, there is another reading of the Oedipus complex that sees the passage as always uncertain, and masculinity and femininity as never finally fixed. It is this understanding of psychoanalytic theory that Kelly draws on, and that marked out a site for feminist interventions into representation. Thus, for example, Kelly proposes that the structure of fetishism, the simultaneous recognition and denial of loss which is traditionally seen as a male perversion through its association with the pornographic, also underlies the mother’s memorabilia of the child, which function as emblems of desire that simultaneously represent and deny the loss of the child as it grows up, and with it the

³⁰ For a fuller account of psychoanalytic theory, see the introductions to *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (Mitchell and Rose 1982).

ability to represent loss. At the same time the loss of the child represents the loss of the woman's privileged relation to the mother's body, to having the mother through her own child. Kelly proposes that the representation of loss, and the interrogation of the structure of fetishism, could both create a critical distance from what she describes as "*cultural overdetermined scopophilia (27)*" and create a critical as well as pleasurable position for the female viewer. It would also be a means for women to represent themselves as the subject of the gaze rather than its object.³¹

Thus Kelly's essay, while not discussing specific artworks, nevertheless maps out a set of questions regarding the representation of women. What informs these questions, and more largely feminism, was psychoanalytic theory. In other words theory is used, as it is in Ross's essay, to pose questions or to formulate a problematic within feminist art and to offer a way to analyze representations in light of these questions. By articulating this theory to feminist questions regarding the representation of women, Kelly in effect produced it as a area for visual and theoretical elaboration.

While the specific theories on which Ross and Kelly drew on were different, together their work demonstrates the way that theories were being articulated to discourses of feminist art. What was produced in this process was a new set of questions or problematics within feminist art, further inciting the elaboration of visual and theoretical interventions in response to these problematics. There was therefore a close

³¹ Kelly's own work can be seen as a critical interrogation of representation and female subjectivity through her examination of her positioning as 'the mother' through the loss of the child as it acquires language (*Post-Partum Document*, 1973-1979) and the loss of the privileged image of the female body in middle age (*Corpus*, 1984-1985, the first section of the larger work *Interim*).

relation between visual practices and the writing that presented and positioned those practices. Feminist art as a discourse was in effect being produced through and across this relation.

The two final essays draw on the kinds of questions and theoretical interventions that the first essays map out. However, their aim is to investigate women's strategies of self-representation. Thérèse St-Gelais examines the ways that women artists have used representations of themselves in their work, especially in recent feminist art practices. She argues that feminists have been interested in the question of the female subject since the beginning in the 1970's with the aim of giving women a voice. However, the conception of the subject has evolved since then. It is, she says, now "a fragmented subject, whose centre has been displaced and is in a state of flux; it was, in fact, a subject in constant definition (141)."

It is through this expanded definition of the subject, one that is in constant definition, that St-Gelais reads the self-representations of four artists. In the work of Raymonde April and Sorel Cohen it is the blurred or vague images of the artists themselves that interests her. These are read in terms of the movement or uncertainty of the subject, where the limits of readability are understood to signify the limits of definability of the subject.³² In the work of Eleanor Antin and Cindy Sherman, it is rather the constructedness of the representations that she highlights, their fictional character, which is read in terms of the fictiveness of any self-representation and the uncertainty and

³² The works that she discusses are *De l'autre côté des baisers* by April (1985-1986) and the painted self-portrait that appears in Cohen's photographic work *An Extended and Continuous Metaphor* (1986).

permeability of identity itself.³³ In each case the artist's work is seen to work at and on the limits of self-representation.

Liz Magor also examines women's self-representations, in this case their use of fashion. Her essay describes her encounter with photographs of the wives of famous men, and her speculations on the way that these women may have negotiated their position through dress. Magor's essay therefore makes visible something that is normally ignored or trivialized, fashion, and the psychic and social investments that it may involve for women. However, the photographs that accompany her essay, far from illustrating her topic, undermines the too easy equivalence between the textual and the visual. By re-photographing fragments of already existing photographs, further distancing them by blurring the picture, she produced images that hover on the edge of unreadability. This is in contradistinction to the clarity of the caption that accompanies each photograph – “Nora Joyce Jersey blouse gathered at the shoulder...,” “Coretta King Black wool dress with squared neckline...”

By juxtaposing the blurred fragments of photographs with concise captions, inserting both within the body of her text, Magor in effect proposes a disjunction between the visual and the textual, and between the woman and her body. It is what one might call, to use Ross's term, a blind spot within the work, where the viewer's desire to see is refused, undermined. It is this same blind spot, produced through the *relation* between the visual and the textual within this essay/artwork, that opens a space for critical

³³ St-Gelais discusses Antin's fictional character, the ballerina Eleanora Antinova (begun 1973). She also discusses images from two extended photographic works produced in the early 1980's by Sherman, both untitled.

reflection on the part of the viewer on the subjectivity of the women themselves. It is therefore also the place of the role of the viewer, produced through the enunciative strategies of the work, as active participant in the construction of meaning.

These last two essays demonstrate the way that the question of the subject had become a site of discursive elaboration within feminist art, both on the level of visual practices and of readings for those practices. Furthermore, as the essay by Magor demonstrates, these two levels of discursive production are not necessarily separable. Magor's work entails both photographic images and written texts in the form of captions for the images and an essay. However, it is in their relation, the gap between the visual and the textual, and the space that this opens up for the viewer, that the meaning of her work is produced.

Many of the visual strategies discussed or used in the essays can also be found in the second section. This section mirrored the first by presenting the work of four artists – Céline Baril, Lani Maestro, Céline Surprenant and Nancy Spero – each artist producing a work specifically for the publication. The first, an untitled piece by Céline Baril, includes a short story of a woman in Quebec in 1935 who dies shortly after giving birth to a son. Through the references to the woman's fears, as well as the attitudes of the doctor and priest to the consequences of the event, the story evokes the history of women, the church's hold on Quebec society before the Quiet Revolution, and the lack of control that women had over their lives and their own bodies. However, the images that accompany this story do not illustrate it, but rather circulate around the story, both literally and figuratively – an old photograph of a young woman playing the piano, reprinted several

times in accordion fashion across the top of the pages; three pictures of a baby boy; and a broken cross in the centre of which is an image of a belly button. Visible in the old photograph is a triangular form, possibly the hem of a dress of another woman listening to the first as she plays, hinting at the possibility of a relation between women.

The second work, *The Enemy is Within* by Lani Maestro, produced with Stephen Horne, also appropriates found images. In this case it is of an old post card. The picture, a group of young girls from Madagascar working on their needlework while a Franciscan nun looks benevolently on, evokes the history of colonialism where the inculcation of European definitions of gender-appropriate dress and behaviour was a central part of religious teaching. This image is printed twice on opposite pages, surrounded by an intricate lace floral pattern, recalling the lace that the girls were producing and, more generally, the feminine sphere of textiles. Circling the two postcard images, and disturbing the too easy association between the beauty of the textiles and the history evoked, are the lines “the enemy is within” and “the damage is everywhere.” These texts point to the subjective aspect of colonialism’s heritage, the ways that it marked and continues to mark identity and subjectivity.

These works articulate a series of visual strategies and modes of working to the problematic of the representation of woman. These visual strategies can be found, moreover, in the other works in this section, as well as the frontpiece by Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe. They include the juxtaposition of diverse images, texts or other materials, sometimes of the same element repeated in a number of times, such that meaning is not simply produced through the individual parts, but through their relation to

each other. Furthermore, these images or other materials are often ‘appropriated’, taken from other sources, so that the original meanings and context is articulated to the new work at the same time that a critical distance from them is produced. What is effected through this relation between the different elements within the work, or between the work and its context, in this case the publication and more largely the gallery, is a gap or shift between the meanings of the individual parts and the whole. Through this they open up the meanings of the representations within the work, undermining any simple correspondence between the image and the meanings that it produces, or between the image and its referent. It is therefore significant that one of the things represented in the works, and which is caught up in this unsettling play of meaning, is the image of woman.

This gap, effected through the works’ enunciative strategies, can be linked to Ross’s argument that the feminist subject can be found or is produced in the spaces of the unsaid. It is the same gap or space produced in the work of Liz Magor, the critical space of and for the viewer as active participant in the construction of meaning. It also recalls the question posed by Mary Kelly, “how is a radical, critical, AND pleasurable positioning of the woman as spectator to be done (26)?” What these different essays explore, and what the visual/textual practices of the artists entail, is the position of the subject, not as topic of discussion or as object of the gaze, but as a position within the work with which the viewer is invited to critically engage.

On another level, the choice of writers and artists to participate in the publication,

as well as the particular topics and approaches that they addressed, also produced a representation of the gallery. As stated in the grant application, *Instabili* was to bring together two intellectual traditions within feminist art, Anglo-American theoretical traditions and philosophical and psychoanalytic theories originating in France. This double theoretical/geo-political reference, Anglo-American and French, was mirrored by the invitation of two Anglophones and two Francophones to participate in the theoretical and visual sections of the publication. Through this a representation of the gallery, and more largely of Montreal, as at the crossroads of these two traditions was produced.

This aspect of *Instabili*, as a representation of the gallery, was further effected through the chronology of the gallery's programming during its sixteen year history, as well as all of the names of those who had participated in some way throughout that period. The fact that the artists and writers who were invited to contribute to the publication had previously participated in some aspect of the gallery's programming added a historical dimension to their visual/theoretical intervention (Fraser 2001).³⁴

However, the publication also marked a critical distance from the history of the gallery. This distance can be measured by the difference between the essay by Joanna Nash and that by Nell Tenhaaf. The first, a reprint of an essay published in 1979, is essentially a narrative of the first six years of the gallery's existence.³⁵ The second, which

³⁴ For example, Nancy Spero showed the work *Site* in 1985, giving two conferences to coincide with this exhibition. She showed again in 1987 as part of a group exhibition. Mary Kelly presented her work *Corpus* in 1988, also giving a public lecture for the occasion. Céline Surprenant showed *La pudeur* in 1989. The two essays in the historical section are by Joanna Nash, a founding and longtime member of the gallery, and Nell Tenhaaf, who worked as a coordinator of the gallery from 1979 to 1983.

³⁵ *Fireweed*, no. 3-4 (summer 1979).

in fact comes before the first, is not so much about the history of Powerhouse (although it includes that) as it is an interrogation of the notion of women's history and knowledge and the implications of these for the epistemological claims of feminism. Through this Tenhaaf poses the questions of how to write the history of the gallery, what aspects of the gallery would constitute the truth of its history, and what approach to the material would evidence the meaning of its political and cultural project. In other words, the distance between Tenhaaf's essay and Nash's is not simply one of years. It is one of a critical reflection on history itself, including the gallery's history, that was informed by feminist theoretical interventions within the domains of epistemology and historiography. It thus effected the same critical distance between the gallery and its representations as was produced between woman and her representations in the first two sections, a distance made possible by the introduction of new theoretical models through which each could be understood.

Instabili : La question du sujet / The question of subject demonstrates that feminist art was contemporaneous with *Pour la suite du Monde*, and not confined to the 1970's as the exhibition's catalogue implied. The definition of feminist art that it produced through its enunciative strategies was one that critically focused on the 'subject' as an area of theoretical and visual investigation, a subject that was assumed to be produced in language and representation, not given as biological fact.

This question or problematic of the subject was opened up by the articulation of

new theoretical models to feminist critiques of representations of women – the work of Jane Flax, Teresa de Lauretis and Jacques Lacan being typical of the kinds of theoretical work that was being appropriated to the visual arts, without being limited to them. What was produced in this process was a new set of questions or problematics within feminist art, further inciting the elaboration of visual and theoretical interventions in response to these problematics. It was through the articulation together of these two forms of discursive production, the visual and the textual, that the exposition of *Instabili* was produced. More largely it also produced and presented feminist art as a visual/theoretical intervention into the representation of women as subject.

This process of articulating new theoretical models to discourses of feminist art resulted in a close relation between visual practices and the texts that presented and positioned those practices. As discussed in the first chapter, this relation between artworks and texts can be understood through the insight, taken from semiotic theory, that meaning is never finally given in the object or text. Any reading is rather a temporary cut or break in semiosis that opens up again afterwards to the play of the signifier (Hall 1990, 230). This means that the meaning of any artwork or text is always open to further elaboration. The relation between artworks and texts can be understood further through the concept of intertextuality where visual and textual works are seen to borrow and re-articulate both meanings and formal signifiers from other works, articulating them into their own enunciative strategies. These two ways of understanding the relation between artworks and texts, including exhibitions as ‘texts’, demonstrates how discourses on art are produced through the relation between these different levels of discursive production,

between the ways that texts present and position artworks, and the ways that artworks take up and elaborate ideas and problematics that have been given acceptability through texts.

However, as the work by Liz Magor makes clear, there is also a third relation between artworks and texts, or between the visual and the textual. Here meaning is produced through the relation between the visual and the textual within a single work, in this case through the gap or non-equivalence between them. In her work the images do not illustrate the text, but rather uses formal devices to undermine the conventionally close relation between text and image, and between image and referent. As I argued, this is also the space of critical reflection on the subjectivity of the women 'represented', and of the viewer as active participant in the construction of meaning through her or his relation to the work. This same relation between image and text, or between different parts of a work, can also be seen in other works in the publication.

It will be recalled that the position of the viewer within the work, as part of the work's enunciative strategies, was one of the defining traits of postmodernism as outlined by René Payant. It was distinguished, moreover, from the humanist subject or the autobiographical self which the work expresses or represents. That the position of the female viewer as subject of desire and as active participant in the construction of meaning should be an issue of concern within these essays and artworks points to the ways that the problematic of the viewer had been elaborated in discourses on art since the early 1980's. If the position of the viewer had initially been understood as a positioning within a given

physical site, usually the gallery or institution,³⁶ it had expanded by the early 1990's to encompass a social-political and psychic positioning, including and especially a gendered positioning.

This concern for the position of the viewer within the enunciative strategies of the work is not the only thing that links these works to the definitions of postmodernism as initially formulated by Payant and others in the early 1980's. Payant described the enunciative strategies of postmodern art through the terms quotation, hybridization, impurity, interpicturelity, interstyle, interdisciplinarity and *l'imagination combinatoire*. To this he added 'portmanteau word', *le mot-valise*, in order to clarify the way that these enunciative strategies signified, arguing that the critical and epistemological function of these strategies was produced through the combining of often already existing images and materials in such a way that their original meaning and contexts were still evident while creating new meaning through their encounter.

If quotation and hybridization can also be found in the artworks in *Instabili*, it because these works operated within the paradigm of postmodernism that had been established in the early 1980's. However, as Lamoureux argued in her essay on site-specificity for *Pour la suite du Monde*, the ways that these visual strategies were understood to produce meaning, and the levels of reference which they articulated to the work, had continued to be elaborated or 'built up', to use her term (258). This elaboration was made possible and produced by the articulation of new problematics and

³⁶ See, for example, Payant's description of Max Dean's work, *Made to measure*, in the essay "Le choc du présent" (Vedute 1987, 311-313).

theoretical models to feminist discourses on art.

While the works in *Instabili* are not described as postmodern (although Fraser does posit the context of the publication as postmodern (*Instabili* 1990, 13)), these works can be seen to mobilize the strategies of postmodernism as it was produced in Quebec. Through this they were located within postmodern as well as feminist discourses on art, at the place where they were articulated together – postmodern feminist art. It will be remembered that the works in *Pour la suite du Monde* also engaged with, and were located in, the discourses of postmodernism. There is thus no clear division between the discourses that informed the two events.

This overlap between the two events, *Instabili* and *Pour la suite du Monde*, was made explicit on the level of the artists who were invited. Liz Magor, Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe participated in both the exhibition and the publication.³⁷ However, this does not mean that the two events can be seen simply as coming from the same discursive formation. Rather, as the problematic presence of feminist art within *Pour la suite du Monde* demonstrated, the relation between the discourses of feminist art and contemporary art within Quebec was one of a disturbance.

To understand the formation of feminist art as a visual/theoretical intervention, as well as the kinds of questions or problematics that were posed, that in effect incited the discursive elaboration of feminist art, it is necessary to look at the larger discursive context within which it was formulated. This includes both the visual arts and feminist

³⁷ It should be noted that Barbara Steinman and Adrian Piper, both of whom participated in *Pour la suite du Monde*, had also been considered as participants in *Instabili* (Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials, Description détaillée de la publication).

theory. I will therefore examine the discursive context before returning to the question of the problematic relation between feminist art and contemporary discourses on art within Quebec, especially as it was caught up in and produced definitions of nation.

The Discursive and Interdiscursive Elaboration of Feminist Art

As is evident from *Instabili* and *Pour la suite du Monde*, feminist art and discourses of contemporary art in Quebec were neither entirely separate nor coterminous with one another. On the level of visual practices, problematics and theoretical models, there was much that they shared. If I describe their relation as one of disturbance, it is rather on the level of the sayable, or what each rendered invisible or unsayable in the process of constructing its own discursive object, that their relation can be seen to be problematic. To understand this problematic relation between discourses of feminist art and that of contemporary art in Quebec, one must look at the larger discursive context in which each was produced and had its effectivity.

Feminism in the 1990's

By the late 1980's and early 1990's feminism and the feminist movement had achieved a certain level of institutionalization in Quebec, and with it a level of acceptability. This institutionalization was represented by organizations such as the Fédération des femmes du Québec and the Conseil du statut de la femme, the first being an umbrella group involved in lobbying the government among other things, and the second a para-governmental agency. However, if these two organizations were two of the oldest, and enjoyed wide recognition, there were many more that had more specific

mandates covering a wide range of issues and domains of activity.³⁸

This institutionalization of the feminist movement, and the acceptability that went with it, was in part a result of its integration into the new forms of governmentality that had developed in Quebec since the 1960's. Diane Lamoureux, in her study of the relation between feminism and nationalism, makes clear the different levels on which this integration was effected (D. Lamoureux 2001). It involved, in part, the government's recognition and financial support of women's groups. The government called on women's groups to 'represent' women in public consultations and to furnish statistics and information which it used in the development of policy. It also funded women's groups that provided services to women, for example women's shelters and employment counseling services, thus both ensuring the dispensation of services to one sector of the population and, as Lamoureux caustically remarked, doing it at a reduced cost.

This integration of the women's movement, at least certain parts of it, with forms of government action was paralleled by, and made possible through, the convergence of feminism and nationalism on another level. The grounds of this convergence was the definition of the modern nation state that underlay Quebec politics since the Quiet Revolution. On one hand it entailed the modernization – or de-traditionalization as Lamoureux calls it – of Quebec society and the defining of the citizen in terms of the modern abstract individual. If for nationalists this represented the modern form of

³⁸ While it certainly does not include all the existing groups, the 1992 *L'Annuaire des femmes de Montréal / Montreal Women's Directory* lists 153 organizations in Montreal, organized into twelve topics: Self-defense, Centres and groups, Culture, Federal government, Quebec government, Native women, Disabled women, Groups against sexism and pornography, Religious groups, Lesbians, Women's shelters, Prostitutes, and Victims of sexual assault (Montreal: Les Éditions Communiqu'Elles, 1992).

citizenship and the basis for civic nationalism, for feminists it meant that women were defined as individuals rather than on the basis of their role as mothers. The most obvious result of extending this conception of citizenship to women was the changes in the laws regarding women's status in marriage.³⁹ On the other hand, nationalism and feminism also converged around the formation of the welfare state. For nationalists this represented a means to rally various sectors of society to their cause, while for feminists it was a means for women to be recognized by the state as individuals and as citizens through their role as consumers of social services. Lamoureux argues that it was principally through the construction of the welfare state that feminism has become integrated into forms of governmentality, the government funding women's organizations who distribute services to its constituents, and calling on women's organizations to represent women and to provide expertise to the government in the formation of its social policies.⁴⁰

³⁹ There were four separate laws through which this was effected. The first was passed in 1964, abolishing the legal incapacity of married women. In 1969 women no longer lost their rights over property that they owned before marriage, only property acquired during the marriage being considered joint property. In 1980 the Parti Québécois passed sweeping changes to the civil code, including making women equal partners in marriage. Finally, in 1989 a bill made it mandatory that all property that had been acquired during a marriage be separated equally on its dissolution (D. Lamoureux 2001, 139-141).

⁴⁰ While Lamoureux sees the 'modernization' of women's position in society as having been effected through both their inclusion as citizens, defined as the modern abstract individual, and their being constituted as consumers of social services, she sees the second as in part undermining the first.

En restant prisonnières de la catégorisation sociale, en étant reconnues comme « femmes », elles échappent encore et toujours à la logique de l'individuation qui est au fondement de la citoyenneté moderne.... Ainsi, non seulement les femmes se voient ramenée à leur « spécificité » par rapport à une norme qui reste masculine, mais la prise en charge de cette spécificité implique qu'elles doivent s'y cantonner, situant plus leur action dans le registre de la *police* que dans celui de la *polis* (175).

'Modernity' for women, at least within the modern nation state, can thus be seen to be both contradictory and only partially achieved.

That part of the feminist movement that Lamoureux describes, and that was integrated into the forms of governmentality that developed since 1960, was also the most publicly visible aspect of the movement, the official 'face' of feminism so to speak. In other words, it is the part of the feminist movement that tends to be reported on in the media and therefore most widely known. What this aspect of the feminist movement leaves out, the aspect that was tied up with Quebec's modernity, is the question of postmodernity and the critique of the modern abstract individual that it entailed.

There were, of course, other places in which feminism had achieved a certain level of institutionalization and acceptability, universities for example. By 1990 women's studies programs were established in a number of universities in Quebec. Moreover, the journal *Recherches féministes* was founded by the Groupe de recherche multidisciplinaire féministe (GREMF) at the Université Laval in 1988. It is here, in universities and academic journals, that one might expect to find the question of postmodernism taken up. However, this does not seem to have been the case. The editors of the first issue of *Recherches féministes* said that the aim of the publication was to be a useful tool for the women's movement: "Comme la recherche féministe qui la nourrit, cette nouvelle revue veut contribuer à la transformation des rapports sociaux, tâche complexe dont le succès exige la prise en compte des rapports entre théorie et pratique, la plus grande diversification possible des horizons culturels et le dépassement des limites étroites des disciplines constituées (*Recherches féministes* 1, no. 1 (1988): 1)." This relation between theory and practice was reiterated a number of different times throughout the introductions to the early issues. Thus, for example, in the introduction to the first non-

thematic issue Huguette Dagenais states:

Les textes réunis ici présentent d'autres points communs intéressants qui se situent cette fois sur le plan politique. Ainsi, malgré la diversité des disciplines et des champs d'intérêt, ils illustrent la compatibilité entre recherches scientifiques et engagement politique (*Recherches féministes* 2, no. 2 (1989): 6).

Looking through the early issues of *Recherches féministes*, it becomes evident that none of them took on the question of subjectivity within a postmodern or poststructuralist paradigm.⁴¹ Indeed, there seems to have been a certain distrust of postmodernism. In the introduction to an issue containing a bibliography on the relation between feminism and postmodernism, Huguette Dagenais comments that "l'intérêt récent pour la notion de postmodernisme, y compris parmi les féministes, nous est apparu suffisamment problématique, compte tenu du peu de cas qui est fait des remises en question théoriques et épistémologiques opérées par les chercheuses féministe – un autre enjeu de taille –, pour vouloir y regarder d'un peu plus près (*Recherches féministes* 6, no. 2 (1993): 5)." Moreover, she sees the phenomenon as principally Anglo-Saxon, especially American. Of the 159 entries in the bibliography, only one is in French.⁴²

This break between feminism and postmodernism within Quebec around 1990, at least within the Francophone universities, is curious given that many feminists working within Anglo-American feminist traditions cite French as well as British and American

⁴¹ The themes of the initial issues were education, Third World development, the built environment, women and the state, *la francophonie*, and women and work. One in four were non-thematic.

⁴² Chantal Maillé has also commented in conversation that feminist studies within the Francophone universities has privileged work within the social sciences, and that cultural studies is still relatively unfamiliar (Montreal, 17 January 2002). The only article in the bibliography in French is by Elspeth Probyn who was then teaching at the Université de Montréal: "Corps féminin, soi féministe. Le Dédoublement de l'énonciation sociologique," *Sociologie et Sociétés* 24, no. 1 (spring 1992): 33-45.

sources for their work. Not only did names such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze circulate widely, but also what was known as French feminism within the United States and Canada – Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. The Belgian Françoise Collin, who seems to have been well known in academic feminist circles in Quebec, especially in her role as editor of the feminist journal *Les Cahiers du Grif*, and who participated in the 1982 conference *L'Émergence d'une culture au féminin*, described feminism as being postmodern as well as modern in her preface to Diane Lamoureux's 1986 book *Fragments et collages....* By this she meant that feminism is part of modernity when it makes demands for equality and rights. However, it is part of the postmodern rupture with modernity when it undermines the opposition between masculinity and femininity, denouncing the notions of a feminine or masculine nature, or even a human nature, and instead installing difference and heterogeneity everywhere, where the body is seen as a polymorphous surface “qui fait peau partout (10).” In other words, while texts on postmodernity, especially within feminism, were not legion in French, they were available.⁴³

On the other hand, it is perhaps not a surprise that postmodernism, as well as the related theories of poststructuralism and cultural studies, would not be ‘available’ or taken up within women’s studies in the Francophone universities – that there was a certain blind spot or inadmissability with regard to these theories. It is possible that the convergence of feminism and nationalism that Diane Lamoureux describes, and the imbrication of aspects of the feminist movement with forms of governmentality, meant

⁴³ See also Collin’s essay “La même et les différences” (1983-1984).

that feminism was associated with political organizing and collective action – theory being used, to quote again from the first issue of *Recherches féministes*, to “contribuer à la transformation des rapports sociaux (1988, 1)” rather than to critically examine feminism or its categories of analysis – gender. The official ‘face’ of feminism would thus be seen to privilege certain definitions of feminism and its aims to the detriment of others.

Related to this first possibility is another – that the discursive field was taken up by other problematics and theoretical paradigms such that postmodernism, poststructuralism and cultural studies would not be seen as appropriate or useful, or even to be ‘visible’. One possible answer to what this might be was proposed by Chantal Maillé when she noted that Christine Delphy and Colette Guillaumin, whose work is based on a materialist analysis of women’s position rather than on the literary or psychoanalytic models privileged by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, have been privileged in feminist studies in Quebec (Maillé 2002).⁴⁴ This would mean that the socialist and Marxist models of feminism that had been formative of the revolutionary feminism of the FLF in the 1970’s, and that had informed the work of Nicole Laurin-Frenette among others, continued to be a site of discursive elaboration within feminism in Quebec, particularly in the social sciences. Furthermore, this would also mean that there was a break or gap between feminist studies based in the social sciences and Quebec feminist writing, which certainly had been influenced by French

⁴⁴ To this is added the fact that Christine Delphy opposed the work of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, seeing ‘French feminism’ as an invention of Anglo-American feminists to meet their own needs and not reflecting the realities of the feminist movement in France (Delphy 1996; Moses 1996).

feminism, especially Cixous and Irigaray. If this is true, then the project of the 1982 conference *L'Émergence d'une culture au féminin*, which conceived the object of feminist political concern as including all areas of academic research and knowledge, and had invited writers as well as those working in the social sciences, had failed and feminism was now being elaborated on the basis of different problematics and theoretical models, and within different disciplines and institutional sites, without there being any necessary relation or dialogue between them.⁴⁵

This does not mean that postmodernism, or the related paradigms of poststructuralism or cultural studies, has not had an impact within Quebec. Diane Lamoureux's study of feminism and nationalism is a discursive analysis of these two movements as much as an analysis of their respective political projects, and it demonstrates the ways that the discourses of sovereignty, citizenship and nation have historically been gendered, as well as how both nationalism and feminism have produced new forms of individual and collective identity (2001). Furthermore, Chantal Maillé's essay "Matériaux pour penser un Québec féministe postmoderne" specifically proposes the usefulness of postmodern theories of the subject for feminism, especially in Quebec

⁴⁵ If I outline the discursive terrain of feminism as a set of possibilities here, it is because there has not been an analysis of feminism in Quebec in the 1980's and 1990's – Diane Lamoureux's work on feminism and nationalism being the possible exception (2001). While outside the aims of this thesis, this analysis deserves to be done. Taking feminism as a discursive formation, such a study would need to look at the conditions of possibility for feminism in Quebec during that period. Questions would include: what are the problematics that structure the elaboration of feminism as a discourse? what are the institutional sites through which feminism is produced and which help make it possible? what is its relation to other domains of research and theoretical elaboration, both within and outside of Quebec? and what are the places of disincentive or interdiction and how do they structure feminist discourses in Quebec? Such a study would not only demonstrate where feminism has made theoretical and political inroads, but also where it is absent or 'unspeakable'.

where both feminism and nationalism have been based on definitions of collective identity and action that have made it difficult to incorporate questions of difference (Maillé 1999). It is also being taken up more recently in the pages of *Recherches féministes*.⁴⁶ At the same time there has emerged in the last few years a body of work within what could be called ‘Quebec studies’ that considers questions of nation and cultural identity in Quebec within a postmodern paradigm.⁴⁷ Indeed, these two enterprises cannot be seen as distinct, both because they begin with the same problematic regarding identity, and because they take Quebec as their object of study, feminist or otherwise.⁴⁸

However, this engagement with postmodern theories of identity within Quebec developed after the publication of *Instabili*, which leaves open the question of the relation between feminist art as it was produced through the enunciative strategies of the publication on one hand, and feminist theory and the feminist movement as it was being produced in Quebec on the other. I would argue that this relation was one of a gap or disjunction, feminist art not being produced through the articulation of feminism to the

⁴⁶ See, for example, volume 13, no. 2 (2000) which was organized around the theme of communications, especially the defense of the cultural studies model presented in the preface and first two articles. It should be noted that Chantal Maillé was on the editorial board at that time.

⁴⁷ Examples include *Les frontières de l'identité : modernité et postmodernisme au Québec* (Elbaz, Fortin, and Laforet 1996), “Authenticités québécoises. Le Québec et la fragmentation contemporaine de l'identité” (Maclure 1998), *Hybridité culturelle* (Simon 1999), and *Produire la culture, produire l'identité* (Fortin 2000).

⁴⁸ It would be useful to analyze this convergence of feminist discourses and discourses of nation in the 1990's, not only because it would demonstrate the ways that these two discourses continue to be imbricated with each other in Quebec and the grounds for this convergence (which I would argue is around the question of identity), but also perhaps the places where they trouble one another.

visual arts, as it was at the point of its formation in the 1970's, but rather through their disarticulation. Furthermore, this disarticulation served a need. It was incited by both the way that feminism was defined and produced through its discursive and non-discursive practices, and by the way that feminist art was produced in relation to feminism, or more specifically *against* feminism, in the construction of its own discursive object.

This opposition to feminism – defined as a form of political engagement – can be found, for example, in Marie Fraser's introduction to *Instabili*:

The impact of feminism is not solely defined in terms of political or social action. Feminism has gone beyond the scope of demands, turning instead to the strategies of the dominant discourses; to what instigates and forms politics (12).

It is also present in Christine Bédard's essay on *Portrait d'une galerie / Galerie de portraits* and *Métro-d'art*:

This process [of concentrating on strategies for immobilizing... the subject of/in the work, the subject of/in writing] is of interest only in the *aftermath* of feminist protests of a sociological tenor, from which many became involved in researching, expressing and defending a specifically female identity (152).

It even underlies the need to question history, including Powerhouse's history, in the essay by Nell Tenhaff. In other words, *Instabili* was produced in part by the need to distance feminist art from feminism, that is feminism defined as political engagement, where analyses were grounded in the social sciences and, to cite the author in *Recherches féministes* again, were to contribute to “la transformation des rapports sociaux.” This was also, one must add, to distance itself from the particular way that feminism and art had been articulated together in the mid-1970's, that had in effect produced feminist art as a

discursive domain.⁴⁹

If the relation between feminism and feminist art within Quebec was that of a break or disarticulation, this poses again the question of *Instabili* – what made it possible? For this, one must look rather at what was happening within the visual arts.

Discourses of visual art

Looking through art journals and catalogues leading up to 1990 it is possible to discern, not a shift in the problematics and practices of the visual arts, but rather an elaboration of those that had emerged in the early 1980's. It will be remembered that the early 1980's was the point where the postmodern in art was defined, both as a set of visual practices and as readings for those practices. By 1990 postmodernism was the accepted paradigm in art. In other words, it was understood to be the context within which artists worked, whether seen as an attitude in art, or more broadly as the cultural context or era within which people lived.⁵⁰ More importantly, the terms through which it had been defined continued to be discussed and elaborated.

Photography was one important area where this work was produced. Indeed,

⁴⁹ This disarticulation of feminism and feminist art within Quebec may also explain why the term 'feminist' was easier for Anglophone members of La Centrale to appropriate for themselves than it was for Francophone members. It may also explain why the gallery has sometimes referred to itself as a 'feminist gallery', for example in 1977 (see minutes, Members meeting, 23 October 1977, Powerhouse Gallery / La Centrale Materials), and at other times a 'women's gallery', such as during the period when *Instabili* was being produced. Fraser commented that neither Cécile Baril nor Céline Surprennant, the two Francophone artists invited to produce works for *Instabili*, referred to themselves as feminist (Fraser 2001).

⁵⁰ For example, Geoffrey James, in his introduction to *Thirteen Essays on Photography* (James and others 1990), argues that the changes in the way that photographs have been created and read in the last ten years are founded on a postmodern sensibility (xii). Chantal Pontbriand, in her presentation to the commission on the new Musée d'art contemporain, refers to Montreal as both post-industrial and postmodern (Pontbriand 1986-1987, 43).

given the number of artist-run centres devoted to the medium, it is perhaps not a surprise that it should be an area of discursive elaboration.⁵¹ More importantly, however, was the way that it was being defined. As discussed in the first chapter, Gaëtan Gosselin, in his introduction to *La Traversée des mirages : Photographie du Québec* (1992), outlines a history of photography in Quebec that begins with the politically engaged documentary work of the 1960's and moves into a concern with “the meaning of the post-modern photographic act (9)” in the 1970's. The final segment of his history presents current practices as exploring the specificity of the photographic act, combining materials and traditions in hybrid or ‘contaminated’ forms and undermining what he refers to as “mimetism” and “false transparency (11).” This definition of contemporary photographic practices, and more generally how photography signifies, can also be found in other essays. For example, in *Thirteen Essays on Photography* Denis Lessard enumerates different forms of intervention into photographic processes, including photomontage, découpage, and working directly on the image through tearing, scratching, drawing or painting (James and others 1990, 79-93). These various forms of manipulation are read as going beyond the boundaries of the medium and, more largely, as being a more

⁵¹ In Montreal Dazibao (founded in 1980) and Vox Populi (1985) are devoted to photography, and it was the initial mandate of Optica (1972). Beginning in 1989 Vox Populi has also organized the bi-annual event Le Mois de la photo. Vu in Quebec City (1981), Daïmôn in Hull (1986); Espace f: in Matane (1987); and at the beginning Séquences in Chicoutimi (1983) all have photography as their mandate, in whole or in part. In the late 1980's there was also a number of conferences on the subject of photography – *La Photographie et l'art contemporain* (1987), *Marques et contrastes* (Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, 1987), *La Photographie en tant que document vulgaire / Towards the Photograph as a Vulgar Document* (Optica and the Musée des Beaux-arts de Montréal, 1988), and the *Colloque sur les enjeux actuels de la photographie*, organized in the context of *Mirabile Visu* (Bibliothèque Gabrielle-Roy in Quebec City, 1989). Together these institutions, conferences and exhibitions point to photography as a site of discursive and non-discursive activity within the visual arts.

adequate description of our relationship to the world and to culture.

The question of photography's relation to meaning was also taken up by others.

Chantal Pontbriand, in an editorial on the future of contemporary Canadian photography, writes about the uncertainty of photographic meaning:

Le dénominateur commun de toutes ces pratiques [photographique] est leur habilité à dégager ce qu'on pourrait qualifier « d'inquiétante étrangeté ».... Ces photographes dont nous avons parlé s'appliquent à déconstruire les images familières qui nous entourent et à leur conférer par leur distanciation face au réel l'inquiétante étrangeté dont il est ici question (Pontbriand 1986, 5).

In another essay Pierre Boogaerts portrays photography as a form of blindness, where what is seen is what we already know:

Voir son propre aveuglement. Avec la photographie, c'est tellement facile que l'on se demande comment il est possible de croire avec tant d'assurance à une réalité à ce point truquée, à ce point fabriquée. *Pré-fabriquée* (Boogaerts 1990, 18).

What is marked out through these and other essays is photography as a site of discursive elaboration within the visual arts, not as a practice that gives onto the real, but understood as work that problematizes the relation between the image and signification. Moreover, Boogaerts argues that this 'blindness' marks other visual practices as well – painting, sculpture and architecture (18).

Installation was another area that continued to receive critical attention during the same period. In place of the notion of hybridity or the transgression of the boundaries of the medium through which photography was discussed, installation was defined through the concept of site. Indeed, installation was assumed to necessarily transgress traditional disciplinary boundaries, as Anne Bénichou points out in her analysis of the term as it was

used in *Parachute* magazine (Bénichou 1989, 45-46). However, if the notion of site substituted for that of medium within definitions of installation, the meaning of the term, and therefore the relation between the work and its context, was an object of discussion.

Johanne Lamoureux's expanded definition of installation in her essay for *Pour la suite du Monde* was exemplary of this work. It was, moreover, part of a larger analysis of installation and more largely of *in situ* practices on the part of the author.⁵² Lamoureux traces the origins of installation back to minimalist practices where the space of the object, as well as the trajectory of the viewer through the work, were literalized (if, as she says, not entirely 'real' (74)).⁵³ However, if installation initially referred to, and marked, a specific site, she describes more recent practices as loosening this relation to site in two ways. One was the 'pictorializing' of installation such that it became a kind of 'tableau' which the spectator is invited to wander through and interpret. Here the site becomes a necessary stage for the work, making interpretation possible through its spatialization, the *mise-en-scène* of the work, at the same time that it was the relation between the different elements of the work rather than their relation to a specific site that was important (33-44).⁵⁴ The other was the expansion of the notion of site to include various levels or

⁵² In her introduction to her book, *L'art insituable : de l'in situ et autres sites* (2001), Lamoureux distinguishes between site specificity (written in English), which refers to a specific site and its history, and *in situ*, which evokes the notion of 'place' in a general and often poetic sense (11-12). This book collects a number of her essays on the subject. Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations are taken from this book.

⁵³ From "Le musée en pièces détachées," originally published in 1988.

⁵⁴ This essay, "Lieux et non-lieux du pittoresque," was initially published in 1985. In it she links recent installation to painting (here she uses the notion the pictorialism as developed in the 18th century), both because painting is understood as a kind of tableau or mode of organization, and because it is a practice that quotes other painting (35).

notions of the term. This entailed, as she said in another essay, a redefinition of the relation between the 'site' and signification:

À travers cette graduelle extension de la définition du site, de sa dilatation d'une place repérable et déterminante jusqu'à l'orbite planétaire, des changements importants ont pris place concernant le statut sémiotique de la spécificité du site. Celui-ci cesse d'être un contexte, indexé par l'oeuvre, pour ne devenir qu'un contenu, un référent plus ou moins local, que l'oeuvre est invitée à commenter (87).⁵⁵

This concern for defining installation in relation to site and with the meanings that this could produce was taken up in a number of articles. For example, Chantal Boulanger, in an argument that is similar to Lamoureux's, says that installation, which initially began by investing a specific, physical site, now offers autonomous "places of imagination" for the viewer to reassemble and invest with meaning (Boulanger 1986, 53).⁵⁶ Jacques Doyon also argues that installation, or rather site specificity, is no longer tied to a specific site, but instead "s'énonce en fonction de son propre contexte d'énonciation esthétique, en se désignant comme un parcours pour le regardeur (*Photo-sculpture* 1991, 13)."

What these remarks make clear is that installation, through the ways that it articulates together materials, practices and specific sites (including un-specific sites as Lamoureux makes clear), is also concerned with questions of meaning or *how* the work signifies. Thus this work was seen as being concerned, not with reference, but with the process and possibility of signification. It is here, in the concern for signification and for

⁵⁵ From "L'architecture rechargée par l'art," originally published in 1995.

⁵⁶ The artists whose work she discusses are Jocelyne Allouche, Mario Bouchard and Louise Viger.

the work of art as enunciative act, that installation joins photography. To work on the materials and processes through which a work is produced, to combine them in hybrid forms, is to work on the meanings that it is likely to produce. It is to work on the process of signification from the inside so to speak. Furthermore, interdisciplinary practices and the concern with art as enunciation was defined as the hallmark of postmodern artistic practices.⁵⁷

L'art n'est plus alors exploré seulement comme une langue avec une emphase sur la structure et sur la pureté du médium, mais plutôt comme un langage en acte, hybride, complexe, et relevant à la fois de situations concrètes d'énonciation et de multiples formations discursives. Langage qui se construit à partir d'énoncés préalables et contradictoires, issus de sa tradition ou extérieurs à elle, dans une trame intertextuelle ou inter picturale qui en constitue le fondement (*Photo-sculpture* 1991, 12).

This concern for the process of signification, and for art as enunciative act, has been attributed by a number of people to the influence of semiotic theory and poststructuralism from France within the university and artistic milieu within Quebec (Bellavance 1987; Pontbriand 1987-1988; *Seeing in Tongues...* [1995]). As discussed in the third chapter, Lamoureux has further argued that it constitutes a particular stance or emphasis within the larger discourses on postmodernity that is specific to Quebec (*Seeing in Tongues...* [1995], 8-9; Lamoureux 2001, 186-187). As such it is not simply a question of opposing Greenburgian formalism and its insistence on the purity of the medium with processes of hybridity and interdisciplinarity. It is also a response to a specific socio-

⁵⁷ It will be noticed that the other two media through which René Payant defined postmodern art in the early 1980's, performance and video, are not discussed here. This is not to say that videos and performances were not produced. The existence of video production and distribution centres such as Vidéographe, Prim, GIV and Vidéo-Femmes witness to the continuing practice of video (often presented, literally and discursively, as part of installation). Artist-run centres also continued to program performance art. However, there seems to have not been the same discursive elaboration around these two practices.

political and discursive location. Lamoureux argues that within Quebec questions of language and the problematic possibility of signifying 'make sense' and have a profound resonance precisely because language has been the privileged term within definitions of Quebec's specificity and identity, as well as the object of political struggles since the Quiet Revolution. As such it is a position that is as opposed to "the doxic discourse of linguistic hegemony" within Quebec, where language is held up as the unifying representation of collective identity, as it is to the privileging of visual representation in terms of reference that was specific to postmodernism within English Canada (*Seeing in Tongues...* [1995], 10). In other words, the specificity of discourses on art within Quebec is not only the result of the kinds of texts that are available, it is also a question of the *identaire* and of positioning oneself within and against a given discursive context.

Within the larger domain of the visual arts the question of the subject was one site of discursive elaboration. However, the ways that it was understood, and thus the role that it had within the definition of contemporary art practices, differed widely. The subject, as position within the work rather than as an individual, whether artist or viewer, was one of the defining characteristics of installation, and by extension postmodern art, in the early 1980's. However, while this subject was embodied, it was strangely ungendered (in this sense the essay by Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin for *Art et féminisme* was exceptional). This embodied but ungendered subject continued to circulate in various forms through installation and *in-situ* practices and the critical discourses that presented and positioned

them. When installation was conceived of a kind of ‘tableau’ or as a ‘place of imagination’ which the spectator is invited to wander through and to construct meaning from the various elements, the gender of the spectator and the meanings that they are likely to construe were not assumed to have any gendered (or any other) specificity. When the site was used as the content of the work, which the work points to and comments on, the various subject positions that this entailed were not necessarily foregrounded either. It is only, as Lamoureux points out (88-89), when artists are invited to represent a given social and discursive location, in other words that they are assumed to represent a given gender, race-ethnicity, sexuality, or some other position, that the subject can be seen to be gendered and more largely socially located. While she does not discuss this in relation to feminist discourses, it is clear there is space here to include the notion of a gendered subject, especially where she speaks of the curator in the feminine, as “la conservatrice.”

On the other hand, in those instances where the subject was explicitly understood to be gendered, the question of subject was most often posed in terms of identity – of the artist and more largely of women. This understanding of gendered identity can be traced through a number of articles and events in and around 1990. For example, the exhibition *Création / femmes* (1989) was discussed by its organizers in terms of the social position of women, which, they argued, could not help but have an effect on the experience and identity of the artist and the kind of work that she produced (13).⁵⁸ The essay by Lise

⁵⁸ The three curators, who wrote the accompanying essay in the form of a dialogue, were Rose-Marie Arbour, Marie Carani and Nicole Paquin. In it Arbour takes up arguments that she developed in the catalogue for *Art et féminisme*.

Gagnon, “Québec 70-80 : À travers la photographie, les femmes et l’identité” (1990), was also concerned with gendered identity, of the viewer who interprets and gives value to a work as much as of the artist and of women as a whole. In this case feminism is defined as explicitly questioning the notion of feminine identity and, in the case of feminist artists, of proposing a different view of women, one informed by the photographer’s recognition of the other as someone like herself. The series of exhibitions and events organized by Line Blouin under the title *Voies / Voix* for the gallery L’Œuvre de l’autre in 1992 at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi also explicitly undertook to examine the question of identity within a feminist optic.⁵⁹ While identity here was considered to be ‘in movement’, it nevertheless pointed to the artist as ‘having’ a gendered identity and as being the producer of meanings. What these essays attest to is the privileging of identity, in this case one that was gendered as female, in definitions of feminist art and feminist discourses. As such it also attests to the continuing circulation of a series of problematics that had their origin in the sociological/socialist and ‘cultural’ feminist analyses of the early 1980’s, work that privileged identity as an object of political analysis and as a site of intervention, and that had been formative of *Art et féminisme* and *Réseau art-femmes* in 1982.

Within this array of ‘subjects’, some gendered and some not, there was some work that took up the question of the subject within a specifically postmodern and psychoanalytic feminist point of view. In the pages of *Parachute* one of the first places

⁵⁹ The event was discussed by Lisanne Nadeau in her article “Voies / Voix ; une question d’identité” (1992).

where it appeared was through an article and an interview of Mary Kelly by Paul Smith in 1982 on the topic of her work *Post-Partum Document* (Kelly 1982; Smith 1982).⁶⁰ The theme of art and fashion in *Parachute* 40 (1985) also opened a discussion on the question of the subject in art. It is significant that two of the essays are written by women, Kate Linker and Silvia Kolbowski, both Americans, and that they both take up the question of subjectivity within a specifically feminist perspective.⁶¹ The essays in *Féministe toi-même, féministe quand même !* (1986) take up arguments that were developed by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock in their book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981), as well as authors such as Laura Mulvey, Kate Linker, Catherine Clément and Michèle Montrelay in an analysis of the role of the feminine stereotype in the structuring of the visual arts.⁶² In *Thirteen Essays on Photography* both Carol Corey Phillips and Monika Gagnon draw on feminist theory regarding the gendered subject, referring to Julia

⁶⁰ This interview was held following the exhibition of *Post-Partum Document* at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax where Kelly had been invited to teach during the winter of 1981. This was also the moment of my own introduction to feminist art (I was working on a MFA at NSCAD at the time) and one point of entry for a British 'Lacanian' feminism into Canada, particularly through students who went on to work in different parts of Canada. It also explains the slight 'British accent' to my own theoretical project.

⁶¹ The others are an essay by Guy Bellavance on the forms of fashion as collective and subjective activity, a semiotic reading of the comic book character Tintin's clothes by Jacques Samson, and an analogy between art and fashion that drew on the work of Baudrillard and Melanie Klein by Robert Graham.

⁶² *Féministe toi-même, féministe quand même !* was a double exhibition, performance evening and colloquium organized by Nicole Jolicoeur, Isabelle Bernier, Chantale Desgagnés and Francine Chaîné for La Chambre Blanche in 1984. The catalogue, which was published two years later, represents a cross section of different sources of feminist art theory at the time. The influence of French feminist theory can be seen in the essays by Nicole Jolicoeur and Bérénice Reynaud – Jolicoeur is concerned with the structuring power of language while Reynaud develops a social, economic and psychoanalytic (Michèle Montrelay's reading of Jacques Lacan) explanation of why women have been excluded from art and culture generally. Bernier's text, which draws heavily on a reading of *Old Mistresses* as well as American feminist sources, represents a more sociological analysis of the feminine stereotype and its role in maintaining the hierarchy of the arts.

Kristeva, Teresa de Lauretis, Jacqueline Rose, and Mary Kelly among others (James and others 1990). It was also taken up within various reviews such as H  l  ne Taillefer's article on Mary Scott's work (Taillefer 1987), Catherine B  dard's discussion of an exhibition by Janice Gurney and Colette Whiten at Galerie Powerhouse (B  dard 1988-1989) and Francine Paul's readings of Monique R  gimbald-Zeiber's and C  line Surprenant's work (Paul 1988-1989; 1989). It is within this discursive site, where the subject was problematized through the articulation of psychoanalytic theories to feminist questions regarding identity, language and representation, in effect undermining any simple relation between the image and signification or between the image and the referent, that *Instabili* was located and in which it intervened. It was, moreover, a postmodern feminist work, articulating this problematized subject to the discursive and non-discursive practices of postmodernism. Furthermore, the publication attempted to situate this problematic within Quebec through the mapping of the British, American and French sources of this work onto the representation of Montreal as a bilingual and bi-cultural city.

While these essays trace out the way that feminist theories of the gendered subject within a postmodern framework entered Quebec, they also demonstrate the problematic presence of this work in Quebec.⁶³ Many of the theoretical texts were published in English and, if they originally came from France (such as the work of Jacques Lacan,

⁶³ This is in contradistinction to publications produced in English Canada where the question of the subject within a psychoanalytic framework seems to have been seen as a feminist question, in fact the defining problematic of feminist art, and as the area in which feminists/women intervened in the discourses of art. To invite women to contribute an essay to a publication was, in effect, to ask them to discuss the question of the subject.

Hélène Cixous or Julia Kristeva), the re-reading of this work in relation to visual representations had its origins in Britain, lending it a different accent and effectivity.⁶⁴ However, the problematic availability of this work was not simply a question of language, it was rather the existence of competing theories and problematics that in some sense problematized the presence of discourses of feminist art within a psychoanalytic and postmodern framework in Quebec.

On one hand, within the larger domain of the visual arts, interdisciplinarity, or the hybridization of disciplines, materials, processes and codes, privileged work on the means through which meaning is produced, not to give onto reference, but in order to problematize both signification and reference. This problematization of signification through work within and between different disciplines and codes was particularly intractable not only to definitions of postmodernism that privilege reference, but especially to notions of politicized art practices that assumed reference as the basis of political effectivity. Linked to this was the continuing rejection of that earlier moment in the history of art in Quebec when, around 1970, representational and politicized art practices were not only acceptable, but also linked to discourses of left-nationalism.

⁶⁴ It is to be remembered that the re-reading of psychoanalytic theory for feminist purposes (as opposed to a critique or rejection of it as was initially the case within the United States) began in Britain in the early 1970's with the publication of Juliet Mitchell's book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974). This rereading of psychoanalytic theory was made possible, and acceptable, by the previous appropriation of this work to a Marxist analysis of ideology by Louis Althusser. Althusser's work was important to, and formative of, the New Left in Britain in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the same moment when the feminist movement was forming, in part out of the New Left. It was through this British Marxist tradition that the work of Michel Foucault became available within that country, especially in the formation of Cultural Studies. According to Anthony Easthope, in the United States the development of poststructuralism began with the work of Jacques Derrida, which led to the work of Lacan, by-passing the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser (xiii). See Easthope's book *British Post-Structuralism* (1988), as well as Michèle Barrett's *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (1991).

Moreover, interdisciplinarity, as a practice and as a set of readings for those practices, was in turn located in, and helped produce, definitions of postmodernism. These, now postmodern, art practices both defined the specificity of art in Quebec relative to English Canada, and were seen to place art in Quebec within an international art context. This interconnected set of determinants – the privileging of interdisciplinarity with its attendant forms of reading, linked to both definitions of postmodernism and to the internationalization of art in Quebec – may be, as Lamoureux notes, the reason for the continuing refusal to engage with social or political issues through art practices within Quebec (*Seeing in Tongues...* [1995], 16).

At the same time there was an ongoing tradition of feminist discourses in art within Quebec, a tradition that did in fact privilege reference. Most of this work assumed that feminist art was concerned with identity, of the artist or more generally of women, and in fact produced it as such. Linked to this was the privileging of those traditions of American feminist art represented by Judy Chicago and Lucy Lippard, as opposed to those that came out of Britain, as definitive of feminist art and art criticism.⁶⁵ This definition of feminist art, and the privileging of identity (whether naturally given or

⁶⁵ An example of this is the article “La part féminine du désir” by Marie Carani (1993). In it she critiques the work of Freud and Lacan as sexist and argues that there is a female sexuality and desire that is expressed through art by women. In a text that elsewhere refers to the work of Lucy Lippard and Miriam Shapiro regarding the specificity of art by women, Carani defines feminist art as both contesting the prejudices against women and as ‘expressing’ a feminine sexuality.

Après 1970, dénonçant la place réservée aux femmes au plan de la représentation et de la créativité, le féminisme va s’efforcer de sortir définitivement la sexualité féminine du tabou où l’avaient enfermé les préjugés sociétaux contre la force érotique de la femme. Depuis, les jeunes femmes artistes (comme d’ailleurs toutes les femmes en général) ont repris possession de leur corps, de tout leur être psychologique et social. Les femmes parlent désormais d’elles, de leur « nature » féminine, des pulsions et des contraintes qui animent leur sensibilité (Carani 1993, 18).

socially produced) was particularly intractable to the problematization of the relation between the image and signification, or between the image and referent, that feminist work within a postmodern frame, including that in *Instabili*, produced. It is perhaps for this reason that this work appeared as ‘new’ within the discursive context of Quebec and that it would make sense to reprint an article by Mary Kelly which had originally been published in 1984.⁶⁶

It was within thus this larger discursive domain of the visual arts, traversed by different and competing discourses on art and the subject, that both incited discursive elaboration and imposed sites of interdiction, that discourses of feminist art were produced. It also set the conditions for the troubled relation between feminist art and the larger discourses of contemporary art within Quebec.

Conclusion

Looking at the larger discursive context in which *Pour la suite du Monde* and *Instabili* were formed, and through which they had their effectivity, one can see that it was marked by different sites of discursive elaboration – of power/knowledge. Within the visual arts, postmodernism had become the dominant paradigm, effectively appropriating diverse conceptual and visual practices to itself. It had also become more complex as the visual practices and the readings for those practices continued to be

⁶⁶ In her interview regarding *Instabili* Marie Fraser said that it was an interesting period to be involved with the Galerie Powerhouse as it was the moment when discourse became important within feminist art and theorists started developing interesting work on visual art. She also commented that *Instabili* was given in several courses as reference as it was the only text available in French on the subject (Fraser 2001).

elaborated. At the same time the specific way that postmodernism was defined, as interdisciplinary practices where the hybridization of disciplines, processes and codes were read as problematizing signification, was imbricated within another set of problematics – that of discourses of nation. On one hand this entailed the interpretation of these visual practices and their readings as a particular stance within the larger terrain of postmodernism that was specific to Quebec, where the problematization of signification was seen to be linked to the politicized status of language in Quebec and its role in formations of the *identitaire*. On the other hand, postmodernism, defined as interdisciplinarity, was also seen to situate art in Quebec within an international art framework. This ‘internationalizing’ of art from Quebec was doubled by specific institutional and governmental practices – the government of Quebec representing itself as defending and promoting culture by constructing and funding museums and other cultural institutions, and art institutions organizing ‘international’ exhibitions both within Quebec and abroad.

The problematization of both signification and reference within definitions of postmodernity within Quebec, and the concomitant rejection of work that privileged reference, follows, and I would argue is structured by, the definition of the acceptable and the unacceptable that was produced through the formation of discourses of postmodernism in the early 1980's. The acceptable was work that worked in and on its own mode of signifying, at times including (in contradistinction to modernism) the museum and larger social context. In this process the politicized art practices of the late 1960's and early 1970's, which had been formative of discourses of feminist art in

Quebec, were put on the side of the unacceptable. This division is evident, for example, in the distinction that was made between “le politique” and “la politique” in relation to the work of Dominique Blain, with work that engages with ‘the political’ being on the side of the acceptable and work that engages with politics being relegated to the unacceptable. It also evident in Johanne Lamoureux’s use of the term ‘worldliness’ in her discussion of site-specificity where the acceptable was that where ‘the world’ was internal to the work, rather than that to which the work referred ‘from the outside’ so to speak. It even informs the project of *Instabili* where ‘the sociological’ or work based on political demands was rejected in favour of working on “the strategies of the dominant discourses, to what instigates and forms politics (12)” to quote Fraser again in her introduction to the publication. In other words, the opposition between work that was informed by sociological assumptions, that engages in politics, and work that foregrounded its own formation as part of its signifying process, continued to structure the acceptable and unacceptable across the discourses of the visual arts, including these two events. This opposition in effect formed a fault line through the history of contemporary art in Quebec from the late 1970's on, structuring the larger domain around itself. It is thus no surprise that the catalogue for *Pour la suite du Monde* should present feminist art as an exemplary instance of politicized art practices – and as specific to the 1970's.⁶⁷

Feminism was another site or sites of discursive elaboration that informed both

⁶⁷ That this understanding of feminist art as exemplary politicized art practice proper to the 1970's is still extant was made evident to me recently when, teaching a masters level class at the Université du Québec à Montréal, all of the students defined feminist art as *revendicateur* or as *art engagé* – as making political demands.

Pour la suite du Monde and *Instabili*, and more generally discourses of feminist art.

Within Quebec organized feminism had been incorporated into forms of governmentality and definitions of the modern nation state. As such it privileged demands for equality and rights based on the notion of the modern abstract individual. Linked to this was an ongoing tradition of materialist analyses of women's position that came out of the Marxist and socialist traditions that had their origins in the FLF and the left-nationalism of the 1970's. At the same time there was also a continuing concern for the cultural and for a 'culture in the feminine' that had been formative of Quebec feminist writing. Both of these traditions, those informed by sociological/socialist analyses of women's position and those that took language and culture as their object of inquiry and as a site of political intervention, were concerned with the question of identity, whether socially formed or naturally given. Together these intellectual traditions encouraged definitions of feminist art as either making political demands, as *art engagé*, or as concerned with identity, of the artist or of women in general.

Feminist art in Quebec was produced within and across this complex and shifting terrain. Not a singular discourse, it was marked by the different problematics, sites of discursive elaboration and interdiction, through which it was formed. Any given statement, any given artwork, exhibition or text, had to take up a position within this larger terrain, articulating propositions, theories, problematics and practices to itself in its own specific address. Through this artworks were productive of, and located within, discourses. It also made them readable within those discourses.

As can be seen from the various definitions of feminist art from around 1990,

questions of identity and subjectivity were dominant problematics within discourses of feminist art, in fact for some the defining problematic. However, while some work privileged reference, where the referent was the artist or more largely women, others undid this relation between the artwork and referent, problematizing both the notions of the subject and of representation on which it was based. If the first witnessed to the continuing elaboration of problematics that were extant in the early 1980's, the second evidences shifts in discourses of feminist art through the articulation of new theories to the question of the subject, producing new problematics within discourses of feminist art. Moreover, work that articulated the question of the subject, as defined by psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories, to postmodern visual practices and modes of reading was produced *against* the dominant feminist discourses within Quebec.

As stated, feminist art was produced within and across the complex and shifting terrains of postmodernism and feminist discourses. However, the unevenness of the larger discursive terrain through which work was produced privileged some readings over others. I would argue that it was the particular way that postmodernism was defined within Quebec, and the resulting division between work on the modes of signification and work that privileged reference, between the acceptable and the unacceptable, that made it particularly difficult to see feminist art within a postmodern frame and to read it as a feminist intervention within discourses on art. This was combined with the view that the term 'feminist art' referred to politicized art practices that privilege reference, usually of a woman or women. It was for this reason that work in *Pour la suite du Monde* could not be discussed as contemporary feminist practices, and that feminist art was seen as proper

to the 1970's. It was also the reason that Nicole Jolicoeur's piece in *La Traversée des Mirages, Stigmata Diaboli*, was read as exemplary of postmodern photographic practices, rather than of postmodern feminist practices. Thus, while in the early 1990's discourses of feminist art were obviously present, they were usually discussed under other categories of analysis. It was, in this sense, an absent presence, marking the larger discourses on art at the same time that it was difficult to name as such.

To bring discourses of feminist art into view, to be able to see their presence and effectivity within Quebec, it is necessary to remember that feminist art is always already hybrid, always already mixed with other discourses, and open to other possible readings. It is this that provides the specificity and locatedness of any given statement, any artwork, text or exhibition, and that makes feminist art a necessarily located production and process. Therefore, rather than speak of feminist art as a closed domain, I would argue that we need to speak of the spaces and traces of discourses of feminist art within a given production, or within a given discursive location, the ways that it intervenes and shifts the discursive terrain within which it is produced. In this way discourses of feminist art become very much visible within Quebec. Furthermore, it is a reminder that they are always open to new readings and further discursive elaboration.

CHAPTER 5

FEMINIST ART IN QUEBEC: CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis I proposed to reconceptualize feminist art in two ways. First, I wanted to define feminist art, not as a set of objects, but as a discourse that is produced across artworks, texts, exhibitions and larger institutional and discursive practices. Secondly, I wanted to show how this discourse, how any discourse, is produced in and through a given socio-historical locale, in and through a specific discursive location. Feminist art, as I argued, is not a transnational project, but rather a located production and process.

This thesis is therefore a reading of the formation and elaboration of feminist art within a specific locale, Quebec, a reading that, as some would say, privileges Montreal. It does not look at every artwork or exhibition, but is rather a mapping of the field at three distinct moments. Each chapter describes two specific events and the institutional and discursive context through which they were formed, that marked both their possibilities and limits. The relation between the chapters demonstrates the shifts between these different historical moments. They do not constitute a linear progression. Rather they evidence both a process of complexification, and the abrupt articulation of new problematics and practices to discourses of feminist art along with the rejection of others. In other words, different sites of discursive elaboration can suddenly develop within a

larger domain, displacing others as the centre of knowledge/power.

The terms through which this history is written – articulation, conjunction, formation, shift and disarticulation – make it evident that a linear history of feminist art is not possible. They rather point to the necessity for another way to conceptualize art history, one that can take into consideration both the complexity of any discursive moment and the uneven sites of power/knowledge that mark any given discourse. It is this that my geo-political metaphor of a discursive terrain is meant to represent and make clear. If feminist art is a domain, a specific field of discursive and non-discursive activity, this metaphor reminds us that any given discourse, any given domain, is always set within a larger discursive terrain. It is this larger terrain that makes any given statement possible and that marks it with its own set of imperatives. It is in this sense that artworks, statements, are always located somewhere, and it is this location that gives it in part its force and effect. Feminist art can therefore never be understood as a single unified project, but rather requires that one take into account the very real conditions of possibility for its production and reception within any given locale.

This thesis is also a discursive reading of feminist art. In defining feminist art as a discourse, and not simply as a set of objects or problematics, it has widened the object of analysis to include the non-discursive or institutional – exhibition, museum and governmental practices – as well as the larger social discourses within and through which these different levels of production have their effectivity. In doing this I am bringing into view aspects of the visual arts that normally remain invisible to art history and criticism, or that are analyzed under separate categories, in studies of the history of the museum for

example. I am further arguing that feminist art is produced across these different instances or levels of discursive production, through their relation to each other, as much as within any given statement or level of production. I have described the relation between these different levels as a process whereby one statement or discursive level is ‘taken up’ and ‘positioned in’ another, being literally articulated to the enunciative strategies of another instance and level of discursive production. For example, artworks are taken up and positioned within exhibitions and by the catalogues that accompany them, both being further positioned in the discursive and non-discursive practices of galleries or museums, and so on. This notion that one statement or discursive level is ‘positioned in’ another reiterates my geo-political metaphor of a discursive terrain, where any given object or statement, any given discursive domain, is set within a larger discursive terrain.

In formulating the problematic of the thesis in this way – how to understand feminist art as a discourse that is produced across artworks, exhibitions and larger institutional and discursive practices – I am drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, specifically his notion of a ‘dispositif’ or apparatus. The notion of a dispositif brings together all forms of discursive and non-discursive production – not just texts, but also objects, problematics, practices, and institutions. More importantly, a dispositif is the *relation* between these different elements, the way that they are organized into systems of power/knowledge. This relation can be elucidated through another of Foucault’s observations, that power begins on a micro level before being gathered up into larger dispositifs and systems of power/knowledge. Thus individual statements and practices

are taken up and organized within larger discursive and institutional practices, the whole forming a *dispositif*. This notion of a *dispositif* has both provided a way of understanding the relation between different instances of discursive production, and suggested a way to structure my reading of feminist art so that this relation can be made clear.

The other term through which this reading of feminist art is understood is that of location, borrowed from the work of Stuart Hall. The concept of location reminds us that any statement – any artwork, text or exhibition – is socially and discursively inscribed somewhere and this ‘somewhere’ forms part of its meaning and address. So, while any given statement articulates together diverse meanings, codes and practices in its enunciative strategies, it is also articulated to a specific context, to a specific social and discursive location. In this sense any statement is positioned within discourse at the same time that it is productive of discourse.

However, Hall’s concept of location not only refers to the location of statements, but also to that of subjects – that *we* are located within discourse at the same time that we work on discourse. In other words, discourse produces places for identification and positions to speak from. To quote Hall again, “it is worth remembering that all discourse is ‘placed’, and the heart has its reasons (1990, 223).” The concept of location therefore reminds us of those investments and identifications that any discursive operation entails, that are both an incitement to discourse and that mark any given statement.

These two terms, *dispositif* and location, are used in order to reconceptualize feminist art as a located production and process. By making this social and discursive locatedness clear, this thesis counters the tendency to assume that feminist art is a unified

discourse and transnational project. As such, it brings the feminist concern with difference to the study of feminist art itself.

This thesis can itself be seen to be socially and discursively located. One of the discourses that this work draws on, and is positioned in, is that of cultural studies. Cultural studies as it originated within Britain grew out of the Marxist intellectual traditions that were concerned with questions of ideology and its relation to the subject. As Michèle Barrett makes clear in her book *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault*, not only did Marx himself employ the term in a number of different ways, but the meaning and importance of this concept shifted considerably throughout the 20th century (Barrett 1991). What these debates around the concept of ideology mapped out was an area of political concern and theoretical elaboration – the relation between ideas, identity, agency and social structure.

Once produced as an area of political concern and theoretical elaboration, the concept of ideology and its related terms could be brought to other identities and social structures not recognized within classical Marxist theory. Indeed, as Barrett points out, it was precisely in the displacing of class as the privileged category of analysis that Marxism moved into post-Marxism. She says that there were two points where this shift was effected. One was through the articulation of poststructuralist theories on the subject to Marxism, redefining the subject as produced through language and representation. The other was through the emergence of new collective identities as sites of political

organization and theoretical elaboration. Culture, as the place where identities are produced and contested, thus came to be seen as the site of political mobilization and address. However, this view of culture also worked to displace the concept of ideology itself, its place now being taken by that of discourse – the production of knowledge/power through discursive and institutional practices.

It is easy to see why this work would be of interest to those involved in cultural production, literature and the visual arts for example, and for those who take collective identities as their object of theoretical elaboration and site of political organization, whether based on gender, race, class, sexuality or any other category. In effect, this understanding of culture and identity as the place where the political is produced and to which it is addressed, underlies a range of academic disciplines and objects of analysis – the visual arts, literature, cultural studies, post-colonial theory, queer and feminist studies to name just a few. In other words, these different disciplines and their various objects of study are places of discursive elaboration, sites of knowledge/power, within a larger discursive terrain. What crosses this terrain, marking it with a series of questions and the theoretical paradigms through which those questions are posed and understood, is the problematic of culture and identity. This is also the discursive site of this thesis, taking up the questions of culture and identity as produced in cultural studies in order to apply it to a specific object of analysis, feminist art in Quebec. In doing so it demonstrates the relation between visual practices and the larger discursive and institutional practices through which the cultural is produced. It is also a reminder that the insight regarding the locatedness of any statement or discursive formation must be applied to cultural studies

and feminist art history itself – that we work within as well as on discourse – and demonstrates through its structure one possible way to make the locatedness of these theoretical interventions clear.

This thesis also draws upon the theory of *discours social* as it has developed within the domain of *sociocritique* and in recent developments in Quebec studies. Indeed, these two domains overlap in their interest in the concept of social discourse as a theoretical paradigm and as an object of study. The theory of social discourse proposes that meanings circulate through language and other forms of representation, through processes of intertextual and interdiscursive influence, to define the ‘sayable’ within a given society at a specific moment. In principle it includes all forms of representation, the visual for example. In practice, however, the privileging of linguistic forms has tended to exclude visual production.¹

Sociocritique has its origins in literary studies within Quebec, especially those that

¹ Marc Angenot, in his oft-quoted definition of social discourse, defines it as:

Tout ce qui s'imprime, tout ce qui se parle publiquement ou se représente aujourd'hui dans le média électroniques. Tout ce qui narre et argumente, si l'on pose que *narrer* et *argumenter* sont les deux grands modes de mise en discours.

Out plutôt, appelons « discours social » non pas ce tout empirique, cacophonique à la fois et redondant, mais les systèmes génériques, les répertoires topiques, les règles d'enchaînement d'énoncées qui, dans une société donnée, organisent le *dicible* – le narrable et l'opposable – et assurent la division du travail discursif (Angenot 1989, 13-14).

This definition, which is obviously indebted to Michel Foucault, especially his earlier work, privileges the linguistic. Micheline Cambron, on the other hand, defined social discourse as everything that passes through representation, and so included the visual. However, in her study of the way that Quebec identity was produced through narrative processes, *Une société, un récit : Discours culturel au Québec (1967-1976)*, she chose a more limited object of study, ‘cultural discourse’ or those representations that pass through language (1989). Most of the work on social discourse, by concentrating on a limited number of texts, often literary, also privileges the linguistic. See, for example, the work of Brisset (1994), Cambron (1989, 1991, 1997) and Popovic (1988, 1992a, 1992b).

come out of Marxist intellectual traditions, and therefore explicitly concentrates on literary texts. It takes up and reformulates the question, posed within Marxist aesthetics and the sociology of literature, of the relation between the social and the literary.² It does so by rejecting the division between form and content, and between readings internal to the text and those that focus on context, in order to see the social as internal to the text itself, in the formal structures of a text as much as in its ‘content’. According to André Belleau it has entailed diverse theoretical paradigms and modes of reading, including semiology, literary psychoanalysis and socio-historical approaches (1983). In other words, *sociocritique* uses diverse methods and models to evidence the intertextual formation and social locatedness of any text. Again, in principle this includes the non-discursive or institutional practices through which texts are produced and positioned. In practice, however, it has privileged written texts over other forms of discursive production.

If I claim that this thesis draws on and is located within work on *discours social* as it has developed within *sociocritique* and certain areas of Quebec Studies, it is in part because they are concerned with the way that texts are productive of and located in larger social discourses. Moreover, they have focused on, and have in fact produced, Quebec as an object of study. It is thus no surprise that they should have been particularly productive in the study of literature, a domain where the focus on language fits easily with discourses of nation where language and culture are understood to be definitive of

² For a definition of *sociocritique*, see “La démarche sociocritique au Québec” (Belleau 1983), “Présentation” (Biron and Popovic 1991), “Sociocritique et poésie : perspectives théoriques” (Biron 1991), and “Pour une socio-poétique de l’imaginaire social” (Robin 1993).

Quebec's specificity and difference from the rest of Canada. However, as this thesis makes clear, the visual arts are also productive of and located within discourses of nation within Quebec. It does this by including institutional practices – exhibition, museum and governmental practices – within the purview of the discursive. These practices are both productive of meaning and, through the ways that they take up artworks into their own discursive and non-discursive practices, position them as *québécois*. Secondly, and more importantly, visual practices, as *material* practices with their own histories of use, where the physical embodiment and location of the work form part of its meaning and address, make it clear that the non-discursive can never be separated from the discursive. Therefore, by evidencing the way that the visual arts are located in and productive of discourses of culture, identity and nation within Quebec, this thesis broadens the theoretical scope and object of analysis of the study of *discours social* as it is produced in the domains of *sociocritique* and Quebec Studies.³

Most importantly however, this thesis, as a reading of feminist art in Quebec, is an intervention into discourses of feminist art. It reconceptualizes feminist art so that its intertextual and interdiscursive formation and social and discursive locatedness can be

³ By drawing on and being located in both cultural studies and *sociocritique*, this thesis also demonstrates that these domains are not separate. Both draw on Marxist critical traditions, especially the Frankfurt school, as well as the work of Michel Foucault. Both are concerned with understanding texts as socially produced and located, and in fact read the social as a text. However, there are also places of divergence between these two domains. In Quebec there is more of a focus on sociological sources, for example Pierre Bourdieu, and semiological theories, and it tends to privilege written texts over other representational and institutional practices. Furthermore, in Quebec, as well as France, the moment of rupture with traditional Marxist aesthetics is May 1968. Cultural studies, on the other hand, cannot be separated from postcolonial theory and the new collective identities that came into being in post-war Britain. It is this historical experience of postcolonial Britain that undermined traditional Marxist analyses of society and culture in that country.

made evident. As already discussed, this entailed both defining feminist art as a discourse, thus bringing forms of discursive and non-discursive production into view that normally remain invisible, and focusing on a specific locale, in this case Quebec.

There are two consequences to this way of thinking about feminist art. The first has to do with the way that art history is conceived. By putting forward my geo-political metaphor of a discursive terrain, I am proposing a spatial metaphor in place of the more usual linear narrative of art history. This linear narrative, as Rose-Marie Arbour points out following Arthur Danto, comes from modernism's characterization of art as a process of formal evolution and rupture internal to a given discipline (Arbour 1999, 46-47).⁴ She argues that since the mid-1970's art has been based on the individual development of the artist, and is determined more by questions related to identity than to medium. It must be noted that the 1970's is also the point at which feminist art came into existence as a discourse, and thus must be recognized as central to this refiguring of art history. I would add to this, following my notion of a discursive terrain, that what organizes the domain of art and incites discursive elaboration is the underlying problematics with their attendant theoretical models that cross a diverse range of discursive domains, and that pose themselves as urgent questions that must be answered. As is clear from the publication *Instabili*, one of these problematics is precisely that of identity and the subject.

Feminist art can thus not be conceived of as a discrete domain with clearly defined borders. It is a site, or rather a constellation of sites, of discursive production. Any given statement – any given artwork, text or exhibition – must take up a position

⁴ Arbour refers to Arthur Danto's book *Après la fin de l'art* (Paris: Seuil, 1996, 24).

relative to these different sites of knowledge/power, and relative to the larger discursive terrain within which it is located. Statements entail a process of positioning within discourse at the same time that one works on discourse. An understanding of feminist art thus entails an understanding of this process of positioning, the ways that statements, practices and subjects *become* feminist, the ways that they are organized and positioned as feminist. It must therefore also take account of this process of becoming, of the ways through which problematics incite discursive elaboration and mark any statement, not only with its location of production, but also with those investments and identifications that gives it its force.

This argument that feminist art must be understood as a discourse that is marked by different sites of discursive elaboration supports my contention that feminist art is a field of differences rather than a singular and transnational project. Understanding feminist art in this way brings into view the different problematics, practices, discursive locations and social locales within and through which it is produced. It also undermines the tendency of feminist art, of any discourse, to become a master narrative (can we yet say a mistress narrative?). Here I would like to reiterate Karen Gould's cautionary remark regarding postmodernism. Gould pointed to the contradiction between the definition of postmodernism as a critique of "master codes and metanarratives" and the way that it is used as a metacritical discourse that, as she says, "tends to gloss over cultural differences and historical contexts in favor of unifying philosophical and artistic currents (1990, 23)." What she is arguing for is a recognition of plurality and difference *within* discourses of postmodernism. In the same way, I am arguing that the insights of

feminist art regarding difference and power be brought to feminist art criticism and history itself – for a postmodern feminism *within* feminist art criticism and history, in the ways that it defines itself and its relation to its object of inquiry.

Postscript

In 1999 Nicole Jolicoeur presented the work *Les langues* within the context of the exhibition *Mémoire et antimémoire*.⁵ This work was based on the film *Trance and dance in Bali* by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson that had been produced during their research on Bali, Indonesia, during the late 1930's. Jolicoeur's work took the form of a video projection on the wall of the gallery accompanied by a still from the video. It begins with a short excerpt from the voice-over of the film – “at the gate of the temple, attacked by the enemy of the king, who fails to conquer her.” This was followed by fragments of images – the scene of the unsuccessful ‘attack’ on the sorceress Rangda taken from the film by Mead and Bateson, Jolicoeur leafing through a book, a large mask of the sorceress – sometimes in succession, sometimes montaged together. In the final segment we see the Balinese mask on display, as in a museum, facing to one side with the tongue sticking out. Jolicoeur walks into the frame, positions herself in front of the mask, and sticks out her own tongue.

My pleasure on seeing this work was immense. It came in part from the play of language evoked through the title, *Les langues*, in relation to the work, referring to the

⁵ Curated by Françoise Le Gris for the Galerie de l'UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal), it included works by Ghislaine Charest, Chantal duPont, Nicole Jolicoeur and Marie-Christiane Mathieu. It ran from January 15th to February 20th, 1999.

two tongues and/or to two languages, and by extension to two cultures, the West and Bali, and ways of representing the world, art and anthropology. What was displayed through this play of language and representation was the way that the West positions others in its systems of knowledge/power – the way it produces them as ‘other’. It also came from the way that the artist positioned herself within the work, and thus within the representational and discursive practices that the work articulated together, parodying and thus undoing, not the mask itself, but the systems of knowledge through which the mask had become an object of display. However, my pleasure in this work also came from my recognition of the concerns and visual strategies that have marked her work over the last twenty years – her careful examination of the ways that systems of language and representation construct knowledge and therefore also power, and her playful appropriation and ‘mimicking’ of images and practices in order to undermine the authority of the original and the discourses of which they form a part.

Seeing her work reminded me that while any artwork, any statement, ties together diverse materials, practices, problematics, and discourses through its enunciative strategies, and is itself tied into larger institutional and discursive practices, these different elements and levels of discursive production have their own histories and trajectories. Thus the visual strategies that Jolicoeur has worked on and through, that have become a kind of ‘language’ for the artist, as well as the problematics that her work has engaged, are here articulated to a new medium, video, and a new body of material with its attendant discursive history, Western anthropology as represented by one of its emblematic figures, Margaret Mead. The image of a knot that I used in the first chapter

to describe the way that any given statement ties together diverse elements and levels of discursive production can therefore also remind us that the threads making up the knot move out again in different directions, being taken up and articulated to new statements within other discursive locations. Through this, discourses continue to shift through time.

Jolicoeur's work also reminds me that we position ourselves within discourse by working on it. If I have chosen Quebec as the object of this thesis, it is because I am also located here, not just physically, but also discursively. My participation in the institutions and processes through which feminist art is produced has marked the ways that I understand feminist art, and my own place within this process. This thesis is therefore not only a reading of feminist art, it is an intervention into the very discourses that it seeks to present.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

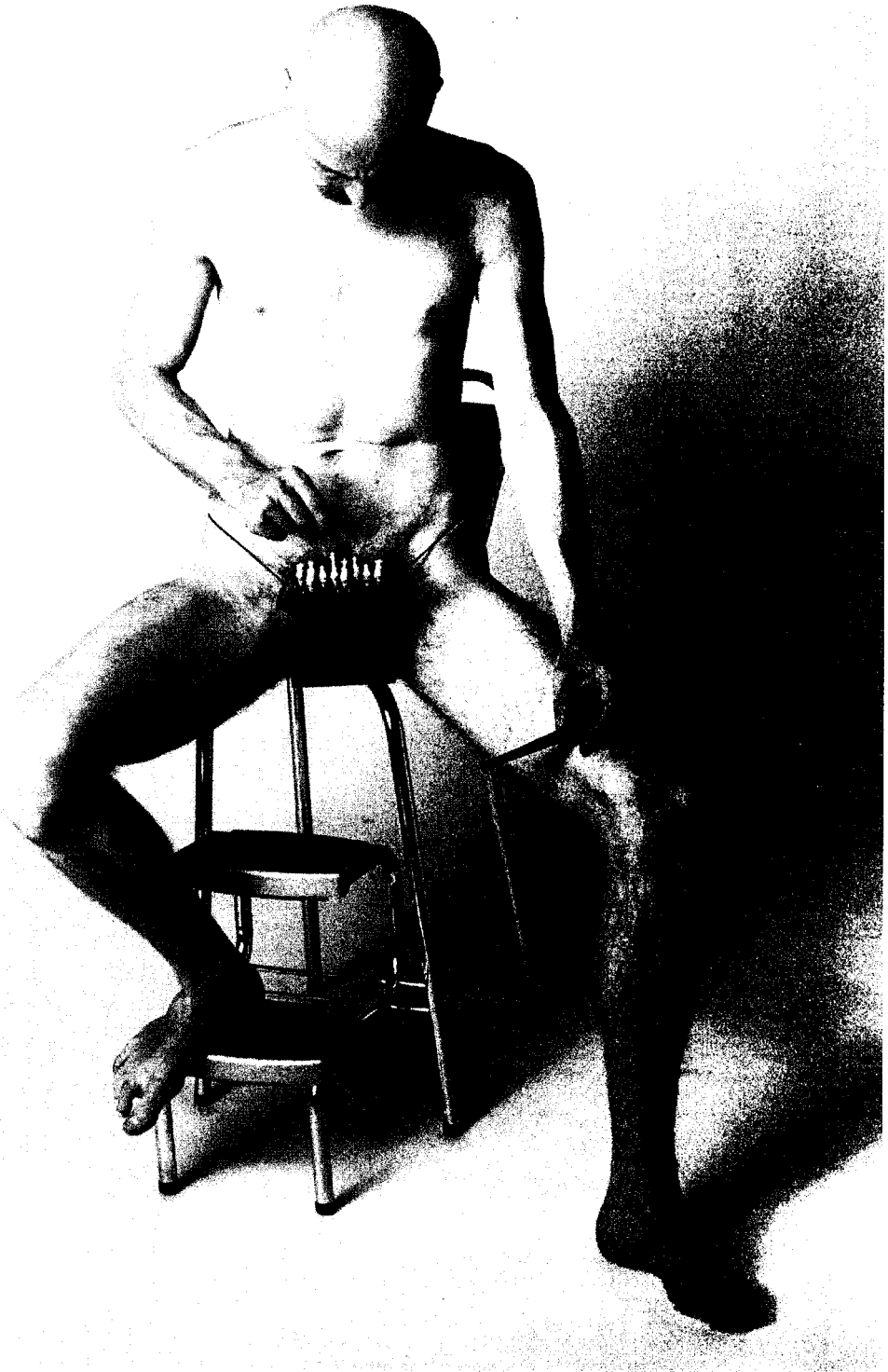


Figure 5

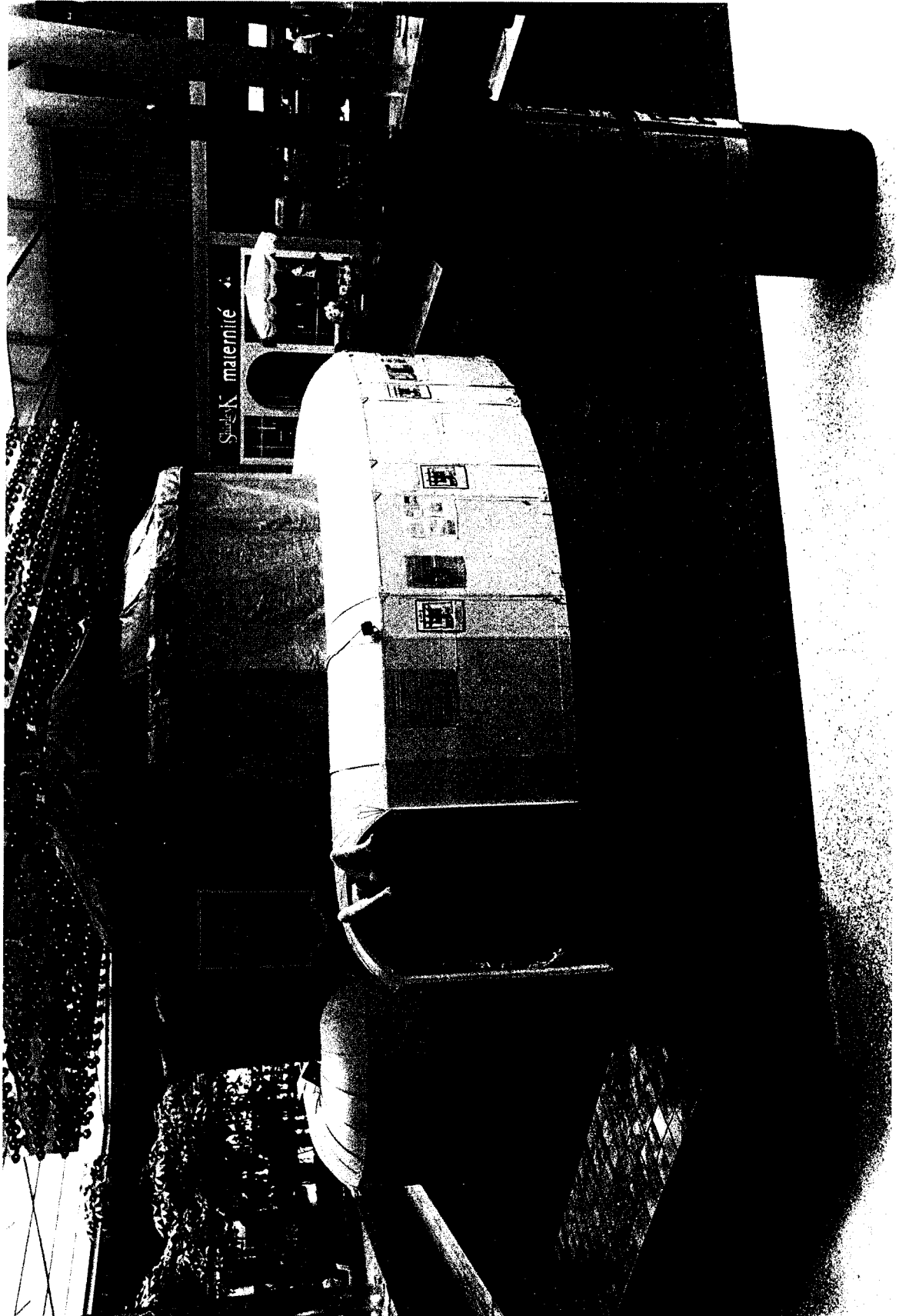


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

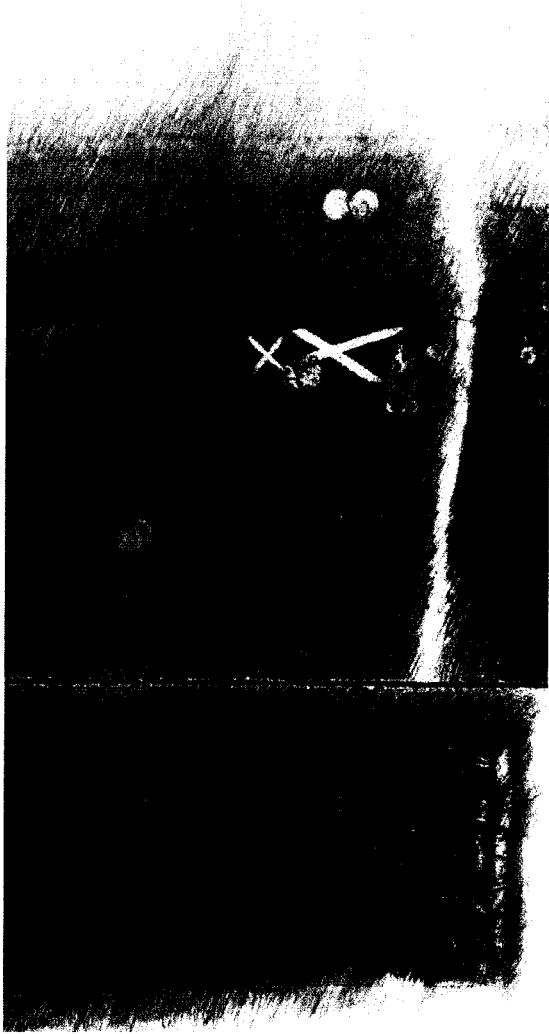


Figure 10

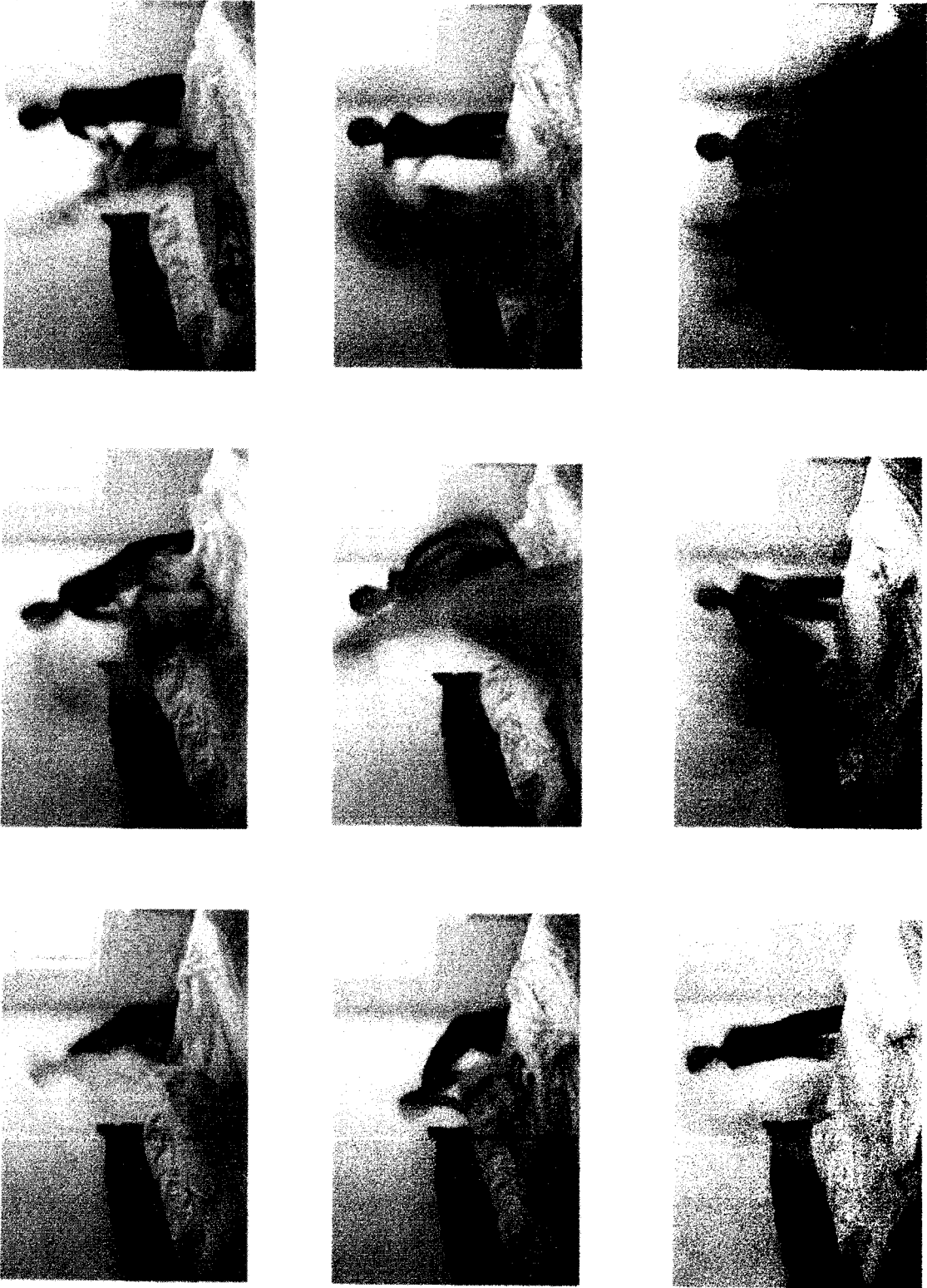


Figure 11



Figure 12

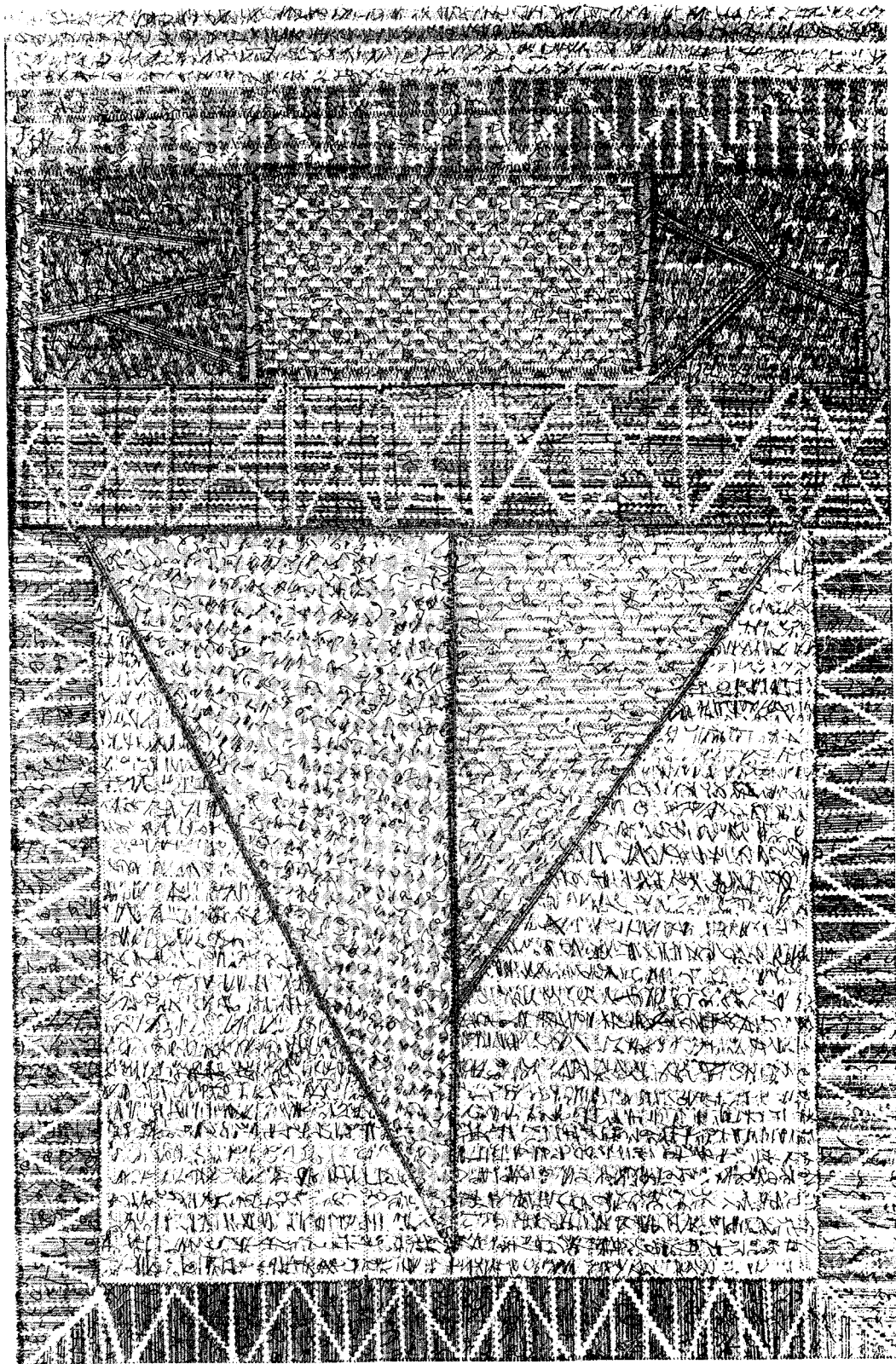


Figure 13

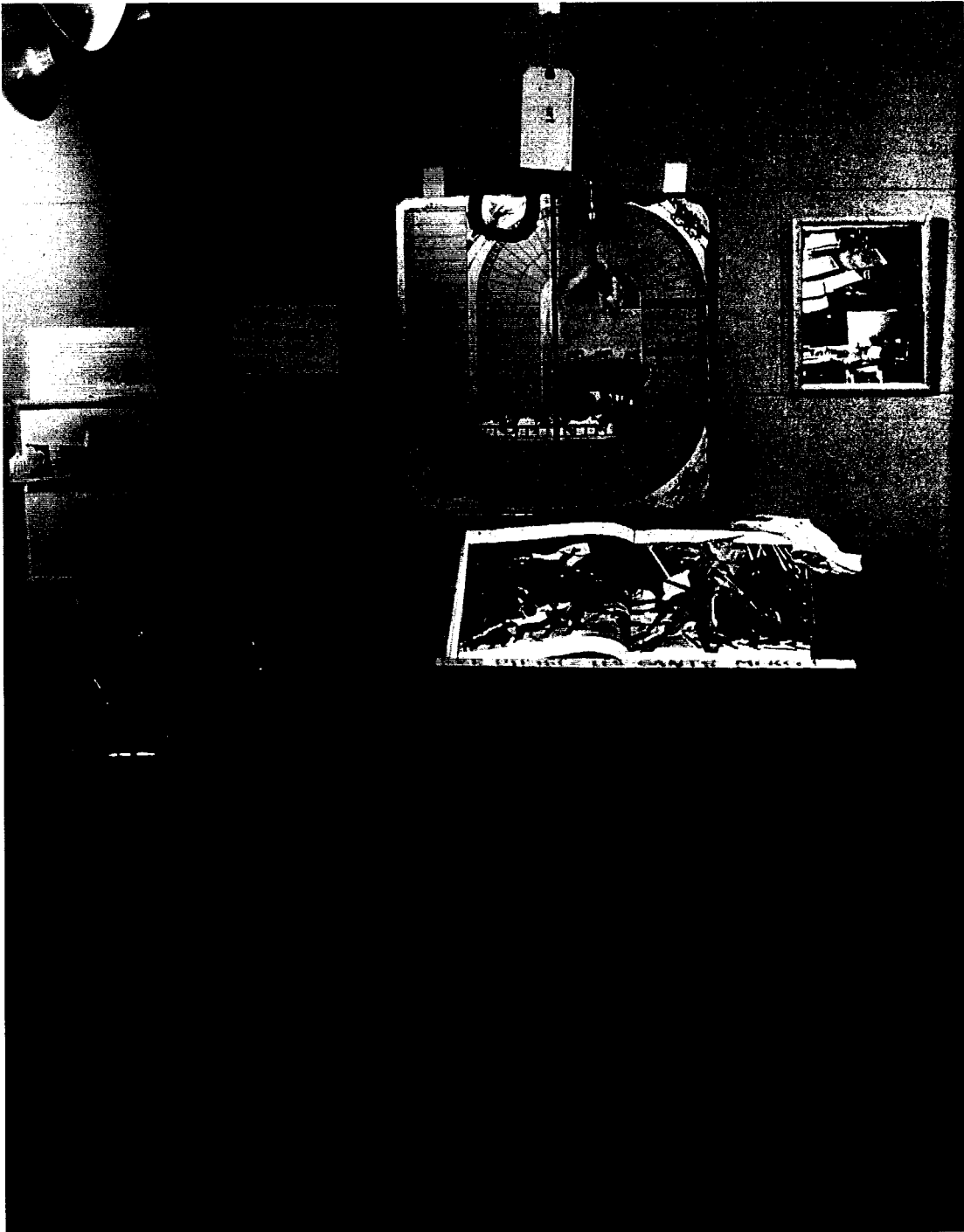


Figure 14



Figure 15

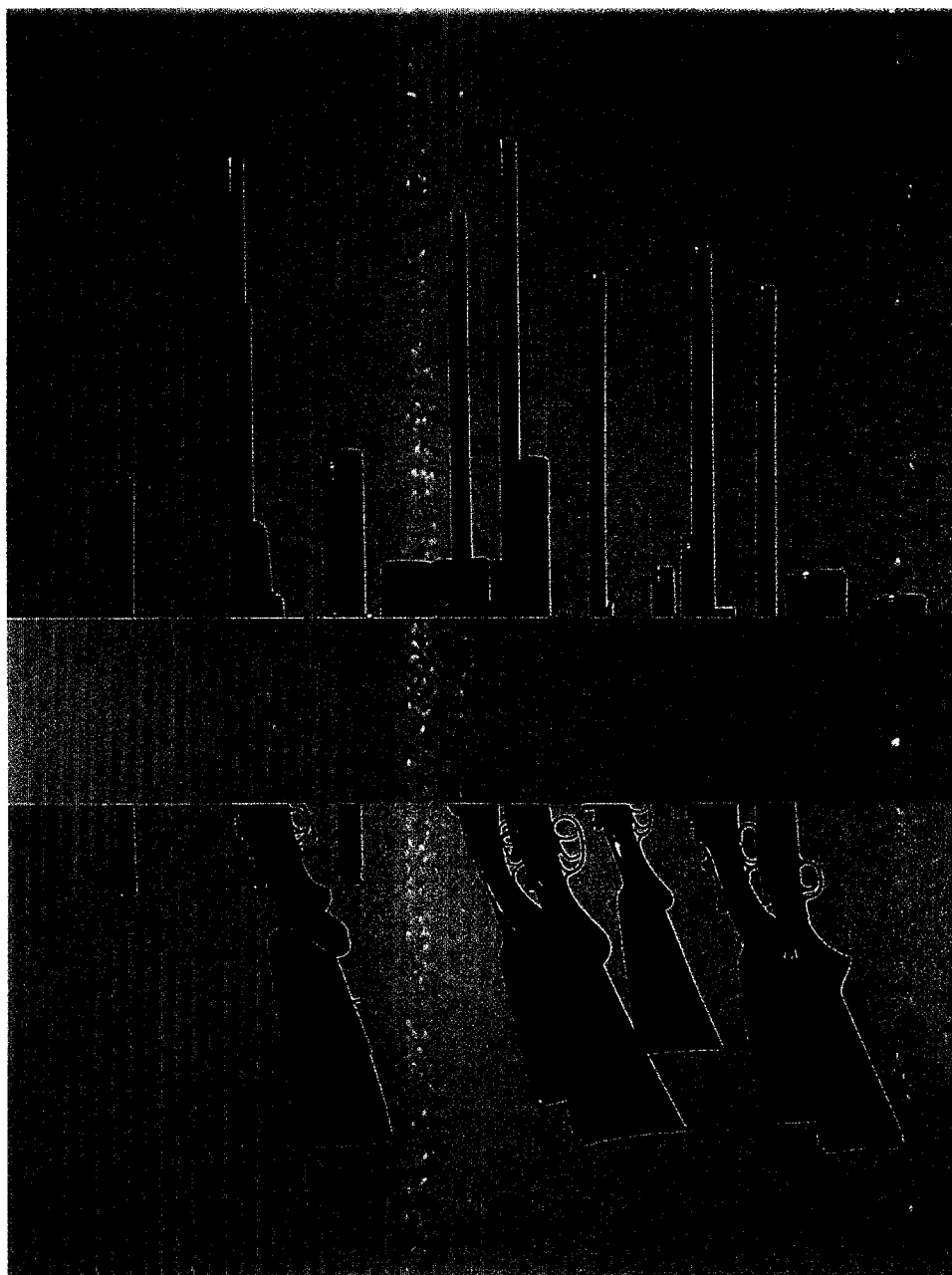


Figure 16



Figure 17

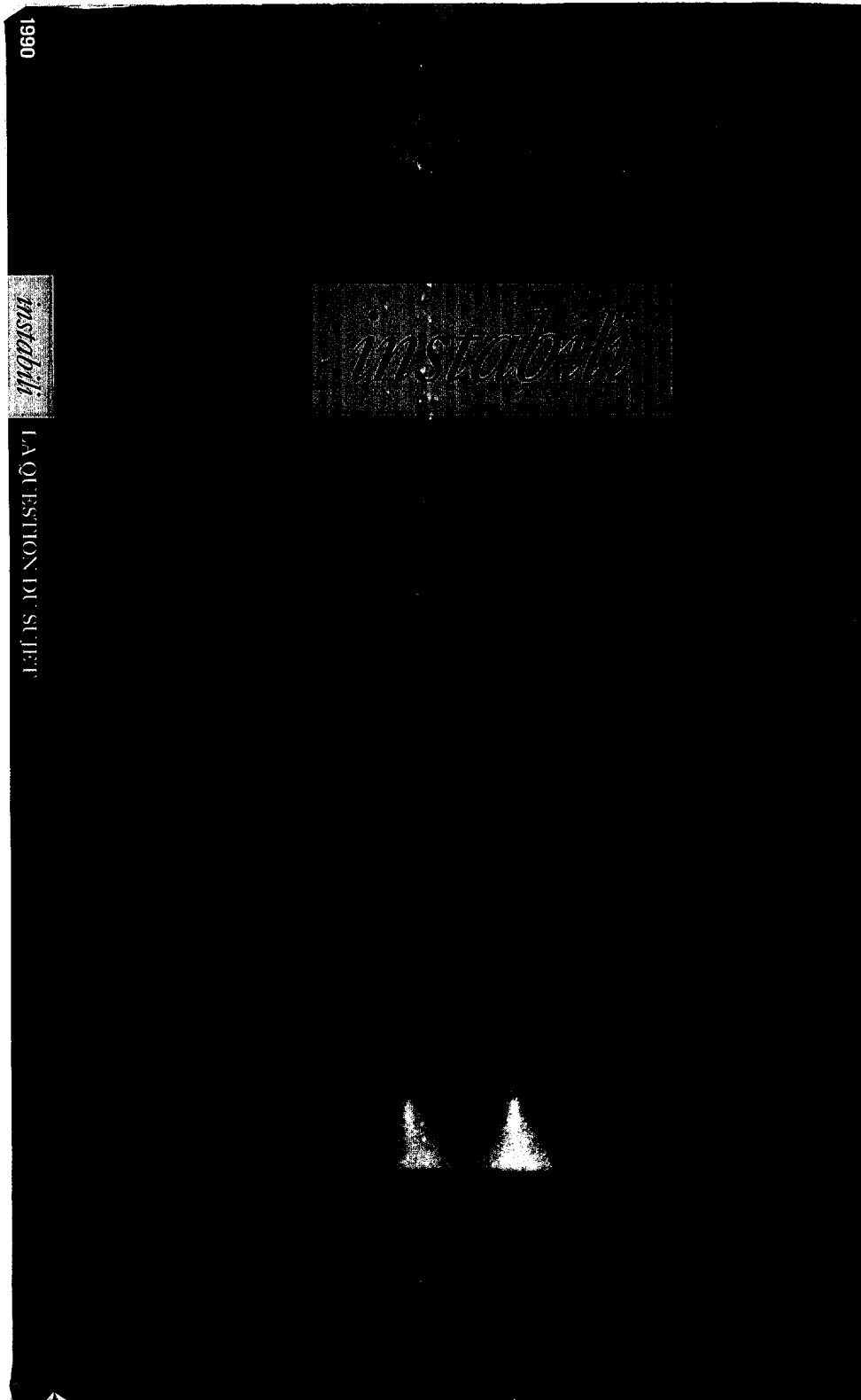


Figure 18



Il y a beau gros bébé et un seul quelques heures plus tard, comme un bon soldat, son devoir de femme accompli. Monsieur le docteur passa: « Quel dommage, une si bonne femme. Monsieur le curé lui fit chanter une messe, gratuitement.

Qu'il y, 1935. Marie-Denise est très univale. Encore enceinte. Déjà, pour sa deux dernière ce a été difficile. Pour celle-ci elle a peur et y a des sautes de coeur. Monsieur le curé a demandé le docteur lui ait dit: « une grande femme, le père sera reconnaissant. Marie-Denise accoucha finalement

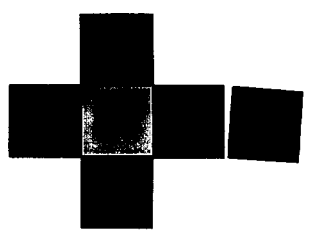
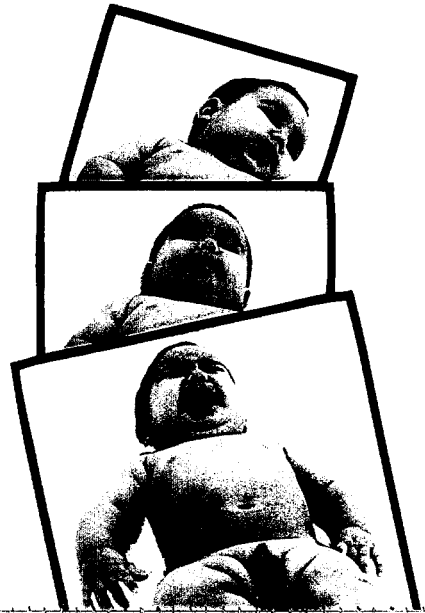


Figure 19

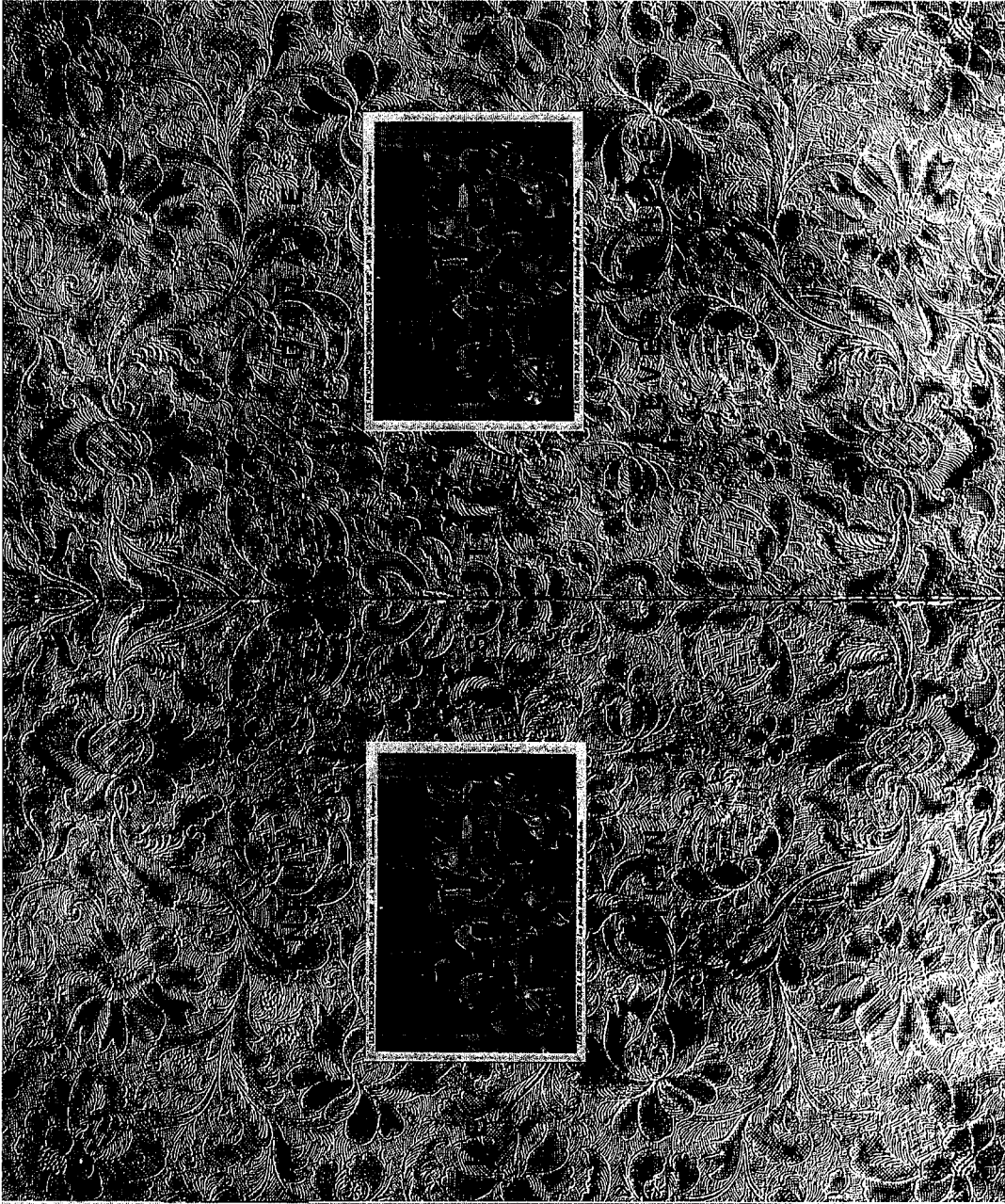


Figure 20



Figure 21

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