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THE BODY AS TOPOS: THE DISCURSIVE MAPPING OF THE
FEMININE SUBJECT IN SELECTED WORKS OF CANADIAN
ART AND LITERATURE

by

MICHELLE CALVERT, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

March 25, 1991

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"The Body as Topos: The Discursive Mapping of the
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.....
Thesis Supervisor

.....
Director
Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

This thesis utilizes selected feminist and poststructural theories of gendered subjectivity to explore the work of four Canadian women artists and writers. It suggests that the body as topos represents a central organizing metaphor which highlights the position of women's bodies as always-already marked and positioned within dominant discursive and social practices. This analysis addresses Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Audrey Thomas' Mrs. Blood and Intertidal Life, Janice Gurney's appropriational art, and Geneviève Cadieux's multi-media installations. Both the literary and the artistic works foreground the connections between discourse, power and subjectivity -- particularly as they relate to women in patriarchal society. These works point to the complexities and inconsistencies in dominant discourses of femininity. Moreover, the artistic and literary products undermine the apparent naturalness of hegemonic constructions of gender, and offer certain resistances and alternatives to them.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Theorizing the Feminine Body

"Ah, but the mystery of man is of the mind," Paul said playfully, "whereas that of the woman is of the body. What is a mystery but a thing which is remaining hidden? It is more easy to uncover the body than it is the mind. For this reason, a bald man is not looked upon as an unnatural horror, but a bald woman is."

"And I suppose a moronic woman is more socially acceptable than an idiot man," I said, intending sarcasm.

"Just so," said Paul. "In my country they were often used as the lowest form of prostitute, whereas a man with no mind, for him there was no use." He smiled, feeling he'd proved his point.

-- Margaret Atwood, Lady Oracle (166-67).

Women's bodies have long been contested territories. In the dialogue between Joan Foster and Count Paul, Margaret Atwood foregrounds the struggle over the meaning of "Woman", together with its social and political implications. This project of explaining femininity has never been an innocent one. Most accounts describe and analyze women's sexual difference in light of established and naturalized masculine norms. Indeed, the very use of the term "difference" in relation to women's sexuality subtly preserves masculinity's status as the privileged standard against which all others are judged -- and usually found wanting.

This perspective has resulted in the construction of the kind of masculine/feminine binary oppositions -- mind/body, culture/nature, rationality/emotionalism -- which Atwood parodies in Lady Oracle. These oppositions inform the

dominant constructions of femininity from which women cannot diverge without being seen as in some way deviant. As Paul says in a reductio ad absurdum, a bald woman is an "unnatural horror", for she fails to meet the established standards of feminine beauty. Woman's physical presence, as her dominant and determining characteristic, implies that her irregularity goes beyond superficial appearances: the bald woman does not merely have an unusual appearance, she is, herself, unnatural. Atwood also suggests that such constructions of gender difference affect the social positions to which women have access; for Paul, if a woman has some intelligence she may take her traditional place as lover, wife, or mother, but if she is "moronic" she still has a use value as a prostitute -- a different kind of "body-for-men". The female body, then, does not exist as an uncoded phenomenological entity. It becomes the feminine body, always-already interpreted and positioned within language and social practice.

Yet, as Joan's ironic response to the Count indicates, the discourses which construct and position the feminine body are not singular, universal and eternal (Gabriel 4-5). While certain discourses of femininity retain hegemonic status in patriarchal society, alternative and contradictory discourses emerge to challenge them. Thus, it is as sites of competing discourses that women's bodies are contested territories.

The "question of women's bodies and women's sexuality" is therefore "a loaded one," with implications for both politics

and the arts (Suleiman 7). It is at this juncture of social and artistic practice that I will examine the work of two Canadian novelists, Margaret Atwood and Audrey Thomas, and two Canadian artists, Janice Gurney and Geneviève Cadieux. The visual and literary productions of each of these artists address the position of the feminine body in dominant society and its cultural practices. In approaching their work, I will draw on relevant aspects of poststructural and feminist theory, for they offer useful frameworks for analysing the relations between the forms of knowledge constructed within language and visual representation and the operations of power in that society. By examining the work of these artists and authors in terms of recent theories of discourse, power, knowledge, and subjectivity, I hope to highlight the complex processes which inscribe and locate the feminine body in their work. The Construction of Meaning: Language, Discourse, and Power

The term "poststructural" has been applied to a number of contemporary theoretical approaches from Jacques Lacan's revisions of Freudian psychoanalysis, to Jacques Derrida's deconstructive treatments of Western philosophy, to Michel Foucault's historical analyses of discourse and power relations. What these and many feminist theorists have in common is their approach to language.

Historically, language has been seen primarily as a reflective or expressive device. This view rests on the

"common-sense" assumption that "language is a transparent medium expressing already existing facts" about the world (Weedon 78). It relies on what Derrida calls "a metaphysics of presence": the belief that words are merely signs of the true substance which is exterior and anterior to language (Weedon 84-85).

However, according to poststructural theory and much feminist criticism, language constructs meaning. The physical body of a woman, for instance, has no generally understood meanings apart from the ones constituted and circulated in language. These linguistic constructions neither reflect the "true" nature of the female subject nor do they exist in a state of exteriority, imposing "false" meaning on the essence of the unwilling subject. Rather, they shape a woman's own sense of identity and place in the world -- that is, her very subjectivity.¹ By constructing the terms in which people understand the world around them, language becomes "the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested" (Weedon 21).

By language, I mean here not only the verbal and written forms most commonly addressed in theory, but also the visual images which circulate throughout society. Although visual representation -- particularly photographic images -- seems to reflect reality to an even greater degree than the more abstract system of verbal language, it, too, is always coded.

Images, like texts, generate and disperse meaning within discursive fields. As I will use it, then, the term "representation" refers to the visual production of meaning:

Representation stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual or pictorial terms, quite distinct from its social existence. Representation can also be understood as "articulating" in a visible or socially palpable form social processes which determine the representation but then are actually affected and altered by the forms, practices and effects of representation (Pollock 6).

In a society where visual representations of femininity abound in advertising, magazines, film, and television it is particularly important to understand how they construct, circulate and/or resist dominant constructions of femininity. This will be my project in addressing the multi-media art of Janice Gurney and Geneviève Cadieux.

The writings of Michel Foucault extend these theories of language to examine their connections with historically specific -- and therefore changeable -- social relations. The concept of discourse forms the foundation of Foucauldian theory (Foucault, HofS 68-69). In The Archeology of Knowledge, Foucault defines discourse as:

a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, [they produce] the conditions of operation of the enunciative function....[Discourse] is not an ideal, timeless form that also possesses a history...it is, from beginning to end historical (117).

Discourses, then, are assemblages of interrelated textual, visual and material practices which give meaning to their

objects. They form a complex and widely dispersed set of rules that "define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects" (AofK 48-9). In other words, discourses do not articulate the silent essences of things, nor do they fix irrevocably the terms in which objects are described and understood; instead, they produce and arrange objects of knowledge within larger discursive complexes and social practices.

This discursively constructed meaning is neither singular nor stable throughout time. Foucault writes that a discursive formation (that is, a complex of related discourses) may "give birth simultaneously or successively to mutually exclusive objects" (AofK 44). Because an object may take its place within a series of complimentary or conflicting discourses, its signification shifts according to the context within which it is considered. The discursive complex constituting femininity, for instance, includes discourses of fashion, motherhood, beauty, medicine and so on. Together, they produce the cultural meanings of "Woman". Individual women may therefore be understood in a variety of ways and have access to a different range of social activities according to the discourses which constitute them as "mothers", "lovers" or "workers". Hence, the discursively constituted meaning of femininity remains fundamentally unfixed, even at a single historical juncture.

Yet within any given society, the degree of power exercised by each of these multiple discourses is fundamentally unequal. Some of them, the dominant discourses, are more widely accepted. Indeed, social "recognition of their truth is the strategic position to which most discourses, and the interests they represent, aspire" (Weedon 131). Discourses are most powerful when they achieve invisibility -- when they are accepted unquestioningly as common sense. As such, they generally support and are supported by a culture's dominant social and institutional practices.

In fact, rather than assuming that power and knowledge are formed and operate independently of one another, Foucault asserts the opposite -- that "power and knowledge directly imply one another." Social and discursive relations are bound by this power-knowledge axis, for

there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose at the same time power relations. These "power-knowledge relations" are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but on the contrary, the subject who knows, the object to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge (DandP 27-28).

This discursive formation removes both the generation of

knowledge and the wielding of power from the exclusive sphere of autonomous agents or groups. The coordination of its multiple sites and processes is undertaken by actual individuals, but their forms of organization are neither fully intended nor completely regulated by any set or sub-set of individuals (Smith 40).

Furthermore, within a given historical period, the available forms of knowledge and the operations of specific power relations may facilitate the emergence of new forms of knowledge and their related power relations. In the nineteenth century, for instance, concern for the health and size of the productive social body produced a particular interest in the individual body. According to Foucault, at this "juncture of the 'body' and the 'population,' sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life" (HofS 147). Women, for example, became subjected to the increased medicalization of their bodies, in the interests of guaranteeing the health of future generations. The combination of existing power relations and established scientific/medical knowledge facilitated the production of new knowledge about the body and sexuality. And, in turn, this knowledge extended the reach of power to the very regulation and discipline of individual bodies.

Certain discursive and social relations may thereby achieve and reproduce their hegemonic status in a given society. Yet power is never the sole "property" of an

individual or group, nor is it exercised in a monolithic way. Discourses constitute a complex web of meanings among which certain ones are privileged, but from within which resistances continually emerge, with varying degrees of success (Henriques et al 113). Moreover, because objects -- and subjects -- are produced and made known in and through a variety of competing discourses, conflicts abound. Change, then, is an effect of the struggles that traverse these power-knowledge relations in their discursive and social contexts (Henriques et al 115).

The Construction of Subjectivity

This poststructural approach to language, discourse and power is of special interest to feminists, for it provides a means of challenging the dominant significations of femininity. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby note four particular convergences of feminism and Foucauldian theory:

Both identify the body as the site of power, that is, as the locus of domination through which docility is accomplished and subjectivity constituted. Both point to the local and intimate operations of power rather than focusing exclusively on the supreme power of the state. Both bring to the fore the crucial role of discourse in its capacity to produce and sustain hegemonic power and emphasize the challenges contained within marginalized and/or unrecognized discourses. And both criticize the ways in which Western humanism has privileged the experience of the Western masculine elite as it proclaims universals about truth, freedom and human nature (x).

Some feminists have criticized Foucault for not accounting sufficiently, in his own texts, for the discourses and disciplinary practices which mark and position women

differently from men (Bartky 63). Nevertheless, as I will show in the following chapters, feminists can productively adapt his theoretical approach in order to examine patriarchal power relations and their construction and circulation -- or resistance -- in textual/visual cultural productions.

For feminists concerned with women's traditional positioning as relatively powerless and docile subjects, it is particularly important to understand the processes by which this is accomplished. As Diamond and Quinby suggest, poststructural theorizations of the subject provide an important key to such an understanding. Poststructuralism rejects traditional "deep self" notions regarding the existence of true and unitary male or female selves (x-xi). My analysis of the feminine subject in the work of Atwood, Thomas, Gurney and Cadieux will therefore eschew the essentialist readings of femininity found in both liberal-humanist discourses and some French feminist theories.²

Instead, the poststructural feminist approach which I will adopt offers a fundamental challenge to the idea of natural gender traits. Such an approach suggests that human beings are born into the world but that gendered subjects are produced within its multiple discursive and social practices. Indeed, if discourses construct and circulate meanings according to which subjects' knowledge of themselves and the world is formed, then it would appear that these discursive formations constitute subjectivity itself (Henriques et al 3;

Weedon 32). This subjectivity is always-already gendered. Men and women do not have equal access to all discursive and social practices. Moreover, because "traditional discourses concerning sexuality are gender-differentiated, taking up subject or object positions is not equally available to men and women" (Hollway 236). The scenario presented in the epigraph from Lady Oracle exemplifies these theories of gendered subjectivity. The traditional discourses of femininity to which Paul refers, offer women specific subject positions as, for instance, the objects of the beauty discourse. The beauty discourse constitutes the ideal body of femininity as one that is physically appealing to men. Male and female subjects are not interchangeable within this discourse of beauty; whereas the woman is positioned as beautiful object, the man is located as the viewing subject.³ Hence, as Paul suggests, a bald man has a different discursive and social significance than his female counterpart. In this sense, then, gender is a discursive, social and ideological construction.

This is not to suggest that feminine subjectivity is a singular and uniform construction within a given society. In contemporary Western culture, women are exposed throughout their lives to a range of possible discourses in which they may take their places. In theory "almost every walk of life is open" to women. Nevertheless, all the options which they share with men "involve accepting, negotiating or rejecting

what is constantly being offered...as [their] primary role -- that of wife and mother" (Weedon 3). As a result, women are frequently situated in and constituted by a variety of contradictory discourses and their attendant social practices.

These social practices always involve "relations of power and powerlessness between different subject positions" (Weedon 95). Indeed, even a brief discussion of discourse and subjectivity suggests that neither discursive formations nor human subjects can be separated from the power-knowledge axes in which they are formed and which they, in turn, (re)produce. Yet "feminine" subject positions are generally situated as less powerful than "masculine" ones. A feminist examination of gendered subjectivity, then, needs to account for the persistence of such a phenomenon in contemporary society. If women are not to be seen simply as passive bearers of society's norms of femininity, then we must also try to understand why women occupy subject positions that do not seem to serve their best interests, even where other options exist.

This may be accomplished by looking at the production of desire, a process which is inseparable from the construction of subjectivity. As I suggested in my discussion of power, social regulation does not function primarily through coercive means. Rather, it defines the "parameters and content of choice" through the hegemonic circulation of specific discourses. Thus, literary and media productions for young

children often prepare girls to seek romantic resolutions within traditional heterosexual relations. Like some adult "women's fiction", these productions position female characters within discourses stressing helpfulness, caring and selflessness -- qualities for which they are rewarded with approval or love. Indeed, by learning what is expected of men and women in society, a girl learns how she must look, feel and behave in order to be an acceptable -- and accepted -- feminine subject. This knowledge also gives the feminine subject a certain degree of power within the confines of dominant culture; if, for instance, she manages to make herself attractive, she will have the power to win a man -- and this "desire for a man" is constructed as supremely important within hegemonic discourses of femininity (Hollway 238,241; Weedon 99). In this manner, the discursive positioning of girls and women simultaneously constitutes appropriately desiring gendered subjects (Henriques et al 219).⁴ These cultural productions do not overlay a "false" image on the young female subjects, nor do they repress an innate and pre-existent desire, as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous imply. Rather, desire is always constituted within a complex of discursive and social relations (Henriques et al 233).

Women's resistance to change and their reproduction of traditional practices of femininity implies the intransigence of these discursively channelled desires. Both the power

women possess as feminine subjects and the stability of their identities may seem to be threatened by alternative and contradictory discourses of femininity. Thus, a subject's conscious and unconscious investments in the discourses constituting her subjectivity are such that they are "not changed in any rational or voluntaristic sense" (Henriques et al 224). The replacement of one set of images or feminine stereotypes by another will not, by themselves, transform gendered subjectivity.

However, because subjectivities are constituted within multiple and often contradictory discourses they remain dynamic and non-unitary. Likewise, the desires constructed together with subjectivity remain to a greater or lesser degree (depending on an individual's specific positioning in discourse) contradictory. While marginal or alternative discourses may be suppressed by hegemonic patriarchal discourses, the conflicts they produce are never entirely eliminated (Hollway 252). It is from within this conflictual space that resistance to dominant modes of femininity may be produced:

As individuals we are not the mere objects of language but the sites of discursive struggle, a struggle which takes place in the consciousness [and unconscious] of the individual....The individual who has a memory and an already...constituted sense of identity may resist particular interpellations or produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between discourses (Weedon 106).

Indeed, a number of the artistic and literary works which I

will consider foreground memory as the site of multiple discursive traces -- inscriptions that may either reinforce complicity or provoke resistance to society's dominant constructions of femininity.

Resistance, then, is also discursively produced. Female subjects cannot step entirely outside of the complex relations in which their subjectivities are constructed. Even when women resist their placement within particular discourses of femininity, they do so from the position of alternative social definitions of femininity (Weedon 86-7). Nevertheless, discourses can and do emerge in opposition to prevailing social practices and, as such, they provide "a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (Foucault, HofS 101). Resistance, revision, and negotiation remain ongoing social and discursive processes in which "femininity" is continually re-formed, both at the sites of individual subjectivities and in the cultures where they are constituted.

The Body as Topos: Feminine Sites of Struggle

These discourses create a particular topography of the body. If, as Foucault suggests throughout The History of Sexuality, sexuality is a set of effects produced in bodies and behaviors within specific power-knowledge axes, then the topos of the feminine body may be seen as the site of these discursive inscriptions. In this sense, my use of the "place" metaphor, relates to Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby's description of the

body as the "locus" of discursive and power relations (x).

This metaphor gains resonance from both its rhetorical and geographical associations. Within classical rhetoric, topoi are "places" in the memory where certain arguments can be found and recalled for use in oratory or debate (Corbett 47). The topos metaphor thus situates the feminine body within a linguistic, rhetorical, and discursive space. And, as I have argued, that space is constructed rather than natural; the "logic" of patriarchal discourse inscribes women's bodies and subjectivities as loci of femininity. Likewise, within the discipline of geography, "place" implies the activity of mapping and making-known.⁵ Yet the codes of map-making are always already generated within culturally specific discourses. Places are not given significance as isolated "things-in-themselves". Instead, they are named and located within the context of particular geographic, political, and economic practices. The geographic coding of place may therefore be compared to the mapping of the feminine body insofar as both processes involve the discursive construction of their significance and positions within a larger cultural realm.

Moreover, in its geographic connection, the writing-over (topologizing) of the body suggests an exploration and colonization of its territory. As Foucault suggests, such a spatial metaphor foregrounds the possible relations between power and knowledge:

Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain,...displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory. And the politico-strategic term is an indication of how the military and the administration actually come to inscribe themselves both on a material soil and within forms of discourse (P/K 69).

While I would by no means assert an identity of experience between a colonized land and people and women within contemporary Western culture, both groups are made known according to discourses which situate them as in some way other to the white, male norms.⁶ Furthermore, subjects occupying these positions (as "native" or "woman") tend to exercise relatively little power within dominant social relations. It is from this perspective, then, that I will address the numerous references to the colonization of feminine subjects in the work of Atwood, Gurney and Thomas.

However, like any metaphor, that of the body as topos has certain limits. It aptly suggests how women's bodies and subjectivities are marked and situated within multiple discursive practices. However, as my earlier discussion of resistance indicates, women are not simply passive sites of dominant constructions of femininity. Instead, they are both sites and subjects of the discursive struggle for identity (Weedon 97). If women are not able to escape culture's topologizing inscriptions, neither are they irrevocably fixed

by them; the multiple discursive traces are continually modified and negotiated by individual women.

Conclusion

As contested territories, women's bodies and subjectivities are caught within a complex network of discursive and social relations. Yet while dominant discourses construct the "maps" according to which the feminine body is most often read, the works of Atwood, Thomas, Gurney and Cadieux de-naturalize and de-code such patriarchal "legends".⁷ In the following chapters, then, I will compare the ways in which these authors and artists deal with the body as a site of inscribed power relations. I will examine some specific discourses of femininity as they are presented -- and particularly as they are challenged -- within their work. And, in the context of these artistic and literary productions, I will address the questions of how power is organized and exercised in and through language and representation, how feminist literature and art explores the construction of the feminine subject, and, finally, how such cultural productions create points of resistance to society's norms. Neither the novels of Atwood and Thomas nor the multi-media art of Gurney and Cadieux simply reflect the "truth" of women's experience in patriarchal society. Nevertheless, as cultural products, they are constructed within that society's multiple discursive relations. My analysis of these works may therefore provide a politically useful reading of the contemporary discursive

and social practices in which feminine subjects are produced.

Endnotes

1. I will return to this concept of subjectivity in greater detail below.
2. According to French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, women's essence is seen as being repressed or devalued within patriarchal language and society. Yet the political implications of these feminist theories -- a reversal of the hierarchy of masculine and feminine traits and/or the creation of a language that is to some degree exclusive to women -- seem to me to be both unrealistic and undesirable (Suleiman 14-15; Weedon 32-33).
3. This description of the beauty discourse's constructions of masculine and feminine subjects is, of course, a simplification of its multiple operations. However, I will address these complexities in subsequent chapters.
4. It should be noted that subjectivity and desire are constituted not only in relation to gender, but also with respect to race, class, age, etc.. However, in this thesis I will focus on specifically gender-related issues.
5. In using the term topos, my intention is not to perpetuate any woman-nature connection, but rather to stress how discourses traverse and inscribe the feminine body.
6. For a discussion of the construction of the colonial Other in an African context, see Christopher Miller's Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French.
7. I am using "legends" in a dual sense as both the parts of maps which explain how to interpret their coded inscriptions and the "stories" that are told about women within patriarchal society.

CHAPTER TWO

The Scarlet Wom(b)an and her Sisters: The Strategic Mapping of the Female Body in The Handmaid's Tale

and I remember that
you said
in childhood you were
a tracer of maps
(not making but) moving
a pen or a forefinger
over the courses of the rivers,
the different colours
that mark the rise of mountains;
a memorizer
of names (to hold
these places
in their proper places)

so now you trace me
like a country's boundary
or a strange new wrinkle in
your own wellknown skin
and I am fixed, stuck
down on the outspread map
of this room, of your mind's continent
--Margaret Atwood, "The Circle Game" (39-40)

The Republic of Gilead, said Aunt Lydia, knows no bounds.
Gilead is within you.

--Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (33)

The positioning of the female body within dominant culture has been an aspect of much of Margaret Atwood's poetic and fictional work, but nowhere has this theme been explored more explicitly than in The Handmaid's Tale. In this novel, Atwood's focus has shifted from the individual male "tracer of maps" to the patriarchal society of Gilead. Yet, even in the earlier poem, the male subject is a tracer, not a maker, of the map which fixes the female speaker; he, too, is a

gendered subject within dominant social discourse. Although he participates in the topologizing of the female body, the signs and codes he employs do not originate with him. In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood deals more explicitly with the discourses that converge at the site of the female body and that provide the legend(s) according to which its location and function in the larger social territory may be understood.

The degree to which these topographical tracings are internalized by female subjects of the new regime is indicated by the extent to which alternate subjectivities are produced. Aunt Lydia's manipulation of biblical language -- "Gilead is within you" -- contains an ironic truth; if Gilead does not dwell within the women as some transcendent presence, it does manifest itself at the very level of their subjectivities. And it is at this level which Atwood portrays both complicity with and resistance to the hegemonic social discourses.

Gendered Subjectivity and the Female Body

In his essay "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Amin Malak discusses the relations between sexuality and power, as they relate to the female body in Gileadean society. He cites Foucault's statement in The History of Sexuality, Volume One, that "'To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition'" and situates Offred as "the victim of such a prohibition ordinance" (9). However, it is this very interpretation of sexuality that Foucault refutes and that the text of The

Handmaid's Tale challenges.¹ It is not so much an issue of the licit becoming illicit and the spoken being silenced, as it is a case of different relations being established between what is silenced and what is spoken, who is authorized to speak, and how such "elites" are distributed and positioned in society (Foucault, HofS 27). Rather than acting solely according to the prohibition ordinance of the power-law couple, the Gileadean regime institutes new (or re-newed) discourses of sexuality, in which prohibition features prominently but not, even in Offred's case, exclusively.

Nevertheless, discourses of power visibly inscribe and control female bodies in The Handmaid's Tale. Women are constituted as objects of knowledge, and are thereby situated -- physically, morally, and spiritually -- according to the sanctioned (and sanctified) statements of medical, political, and religious discourse. Such knowledge is thoroughly saturated with the power relations that construct it, operate within it, and are made possible through it.² And this power is written over women's bodies; they are made known, classified, organized and controlled by the discourses through which power-knowledge operates.

Atwood has stated that The Handmaid's Tale, as a work of speculative fiction, is based on a projection of elements that are or have been present in our society (in Vitale). Indeed, a number of the discourses of sexuality which circulate in contemporary culture persist, with all their contradictions,

in the supposedly transformed Gileadean society. What Wendy Hollway identifies as the "have/hold discourse,"³ with its focus on "traditional values", regains dominant status (231; Atwood, HT 17).⁴ It is deployed to reform society by outlawing the "unnatural" (because non-reproductive) practices of celibacy and homosexuality and by dissolving "immoral" second marriages and non-marital relationships. Yet the Gileadean version of this discourse is traced with a whole series of contradictions: not only are its stated values enforced unevenly along gender lines, but the very reforms it institutes promote the practice of extra-marital sexual relations through the assembly of a pool of fertile women to serve as Handmaids for childless officials.

This version of the have/hold discourse intersects with another discourse which circulates within contemporary Western society; the "male sexual drive discourse" emphasises that "men's sexuality is directly produced by a biological drive, the function of which is to ensure reproduction of the species" (Hollway 231-2). The have/hold and male sexual drive discourses are consistent with each other in their assumptions about sexuality being linked to reproduction and about sex being heterosexual, but "the two recommend different and contradictory standards of conduct for men" (Hollway 232). While many of the practices associated with this second discourse (extra-marital affairs, consorting with prostitutes) are banned by the moral/legal codes of Gileadean society, its

basic tenets are nevertheless employed to rationalize elements of the system. In a reiteration of the familiar double-standard, Aunt Lydia tell the Handmaids that men "can't help it...God made them that way but He did not make you that way....It's up to you to set the boundaries" (HT 55). Likewise, the Commander justifies the existence of "the club" by telling Offred that everyone (meaning privileged males) is human, and that "Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy" (HT 248-9). Not surprisingly, the supposed male domain of reason is invoked to explain this desire. And, as has happened so often in the past, scientific knowledge -- in this instance, the sociobiological studies of Wilfred Limpkin (HT 318) -- is invoked to justify sexist discourses and the social practices they constitute and sustain.⁵

In Gileadean society, the declining population gives rise to the dominant reproductive discourse. The woman/nature associations which have persisted throughout the history of Western thought regain hegemonic status and women's biology again becomes an important determinant of their destiny (HT 72-73). They undergo a process similar to that which Foucault describes as the "hysterization" of women in Victorian society.⁶ They are involved in a "thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex...in the name of the responsibility they [owe] to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding

of society" (Foucault, HofS 146-7). The female body is thus constituted as the subject of a set of medical practices which scrutinize it in order to determine whether it is a fit childbearing vessel.

The relations of power which fragment the female body and valorize certain parts of it -- designating the Handmaids as "two legged wombs" (HT 146) -- also influence what knowledge is deemed valuable and how it is deployed in medical practice. Possible fields of knowledge and practice are also repositioned in medical discourse due to the overlapping statements of religion and ethics. Most forms of reproductive technology (abortion, artificial insemination, ultrasound) are made illegal, while midwifery and the "shredding" of unsound babies are legitimized. The medical discourse, in turn, traverses the very operations of everyday life. It proscribes a diet to keep Handmaids healthy, announces the optimum time for the monthly Ceremonies, and imposes certain regulations on the activities of the Handmaids. Indeed, it touches on almost every aspect of the Handmaids' existence.

Nevertheless, women's bodies are not positioned solely in relation to Gilead's socio-medical reproductive discourse. If the have/hold and male sexual drive discourses offer multiple and sometimes contradictory subject positions to (privileged) men in Gilead, they also construct a number of corresponding positions for women. In relation to the have/hold discourse a woman may legitimately occupy the positions of either virgin

or wife, but to satisfy the male sexual drive discourse, a woman must be situated as mistress or whore (Hollway 232). However, unlike the men of Gilead, women are not permitted to occupy multiple subject positions.⁷ A discourse of presence operates alongside others which offer a selection of feminine subject positions, and implies that the position a woman's body occupies represents her essential being. Physical presence tells all to the knowing male gaze.

The belief that woman's essence is located in her physical presence is not an invention of Gileadean society. As John Berger has observed in his studies of the European art tradition, the appearance of a woman's body is seen as so intrinsic to her person that "men tend to think of" her true nature "as an almost physical emanation" (46). For Atwood, the three witches in Macbeth represent a literary example of this notion of presence:

Macbeth's motive is ambition, but what are the witch's motives? They have no motives. Like stones or trees they simply are: the good ones purely good, the bad ones purely bad....as always it remains difficult for us to separate what we see from what we have been taught to see ("The Curse of Eve" 221-2,228).

Consequently, any resistance to or deviance from the ascribed and inscribed subject positions is viewed not as legitimate political opposition, but as some fundamental deformation of a woman's nature. In Gilead, for instance, when nuns are persuaded to sacrifice their celibacy for the common good, they are not permitted -- despite what would earlier have been

deemed their purity -- to become Wives. There remains "an odour of witch about them" and they are considered too dangerous for "positions of such power" (HT 232). The final alternative available to uncooperative females is the ultimate expression of deviance essentialized: they are declared Unwomen.

"Woman", then, is whatever her body appears to be and, in Gilead, women's appearances are carefully regulated. Stereotypes are constructed at the intersection of dominant Gileadean discourses. Indeed, every position occupied by women in the higher echelons of Gileadean society -- Marthas, Handmaids, Wives, and (covertly) Jezebels -- implies a unitary self and a corresponding function. As Craig Owens points out:

The stereotype is truly an instrument of subjection; its function is to produce ideological subjects that can be smoothly inserted into existing institutions of government, economy and...sexual identity....The stereotype inscribes the body into the register of discourse; in it, the body is apprehended by language, taken into joint custody by politics and ideology ("The Medusa Effect" 7).

In Gilead, these stereotypes do not even have the dubious subtlety of our own dominant cultural discourses and the feminine bodies they construct. Gilead does its best to produce uniformity rather than similitude. Instead of bodies imitating and approximating magazine images of femininity, for instance, the images are prescribed government issue.

At any given historical juncture, fashion is situated within a web of discourses involving beauty, morality,

sexuality, and economics (Sawchuk 65). Under the Gileadean regime, each woman must don the costume appropriate to the social position she inhabits, for the regulation of feminine bodies is closely tied to their sartorial demarcation.

Not surprisingly, the Commander's Wives are dressed in blue, with its associations of purity and its connections with historic visual representations of the Virgin Mary. In fact, that very coding corresponds with the moral and religious discourses which inscribe and locate the Wives in society; they are to be chaste, modest, pure, and submissive as befits their status as "believers" and wives of the commanding elite. They are in many ways analogous to the "household nuns" of nineteenth century art and literature, whose twofold function was to bear children (although, if immaculate conception was out of the question, then a near approximation was to be preferred) and to keep the domestic realm "unblemished by sin" (Dijkstra 8; Vicinus ix). The costumes chosen to encase and designate the bodies of Wives, then, effectively signify their position in dominant society and adapt discourses which were present, if latent, in pre-Gileadean culture.

In the event that Wives are unable to provide their husbands and the nation with children, Handmaids are available to act as surrogate mothers. The Handmaid's body, however, becomes a palimpsest of contradictory inscriptions. The previous age has seen a steady decline in the Caucasian birthrate, due to a combination of reproductive choice and

toxic-waste induced sterility. Thus, as Offred is taught at the Rachel and Leah Centre, the economy of reproduction makes their function necessary and precious. As Aunt Lydia says, "A thing is valued...only if it is rare and hard to get" (HT 123). Ironically, it is exactly as a "thing" -- "a sacred vessel" -- that a Handmaid is prized (HT 146). Not only is the use of Handmaids accepted as a reproductive necessity, it is also legitimized by the state religion's recourse to a decontextualized Old Testament "precedent". Moreover, Offred's very attire, with its extensive covering of body and face, recalls a nun's habit and wimple, and signifies the attempt to regulate and control her sexuality. Offred and the other Handmaids "are for breeding purposes only" and are deliberately clothed and segregated to prevent their becoming the objects of male desire. As Offred states: "There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us" (HT 146).

However, while the costume's blood-like colour ostensibly signifies only the Handmaid's function and essence as chaste childbearer, it is nevertheless overlaid with other, conflicting meanings (Freibert 285). Despite attempts to remove from them any hints of promiscuous sexuality, the Handmaids are viewed, by Marthas and Wives alike, as literally "scarlet women." Offred is keenly aware of their moral distaste and disapproval. On one occasion Rita tells her: "'Ain't like you're common.'" Offred knows that the Martha is referring to her social position in the Commander's household,

but that in another, moral, sense, Rita does think that she is "common" (HT 58). Similarly, Offred imagines Serena Joy reporting her liaison with Nick in the scandalized but self-satisfied tones of one whose darkest suspicions have been confirmed:

Agreed to it right away, really she didn't care anything with two legs and a good you-know-what was fine with her. They aren't squeamish, they don't have the same feelings we do (HT 227).

Again, the costume reinforces not only the ambiguity of the Handmaids' position in relation to the dominant discourses of Gileadean society (as, simultaneously, wombs without desire and bodies saturated with desire), but also their stereotypical status as objects.

Yet these Gileadean Handmaids are not generally situated as objects of desire within the male sexual drive discourse. This position is filled by the "Jezebel's" who work at the elite men's "club" (a euphemism for the Gileadean brothel). The Commander justifies its existence to Offred, saying: "Women know...instinctively" that men require variety, otherwise why would they have bought "so many different clothes, in the old days?" (HT 249). His comment not only indicates the positioning of women in relation to this sexist discourse, but also the way in which the Jezebel's clothing registers their participation in it, as targets of the male gaze. They are made-up and dressed "in all kinds of bright festive gear," left over from the previous era (HT 246). Their bodies are mapped out for the Other, as their costumes -

- "cut high up the thighs, low over the breasts" and displaying "a great many buttocks" (HT 246-7) -- mark out sites (and sights) of particular interest.

Moreover, in the absence of a discourse legitimating permissiveness for women, they are situated only in relation to the codes which label them as the paradigmatic alternatives to wives and virgins -- mistresses and whores. Most of the women who work in the club are rebels and misfits of one sort or another, but because of their refusal to adopt legitimate feminine positions, they become unnatural and degenerate women. They are fit only to fill the position of the fallen woman -- indicated by their designation as Jezebels -- or to join the ranks of Unwomen in the Colonies.

Although it might seem that the Econowives, with their red, blue and green striped dresses are able to inhabit a number of subject positions simultaneously, they continue to be situated exclusively within the traditional have/hold discourse. Their place remains in the home, caring for their husbands and children, performing their household duties, and upholding all the religious and moral standards that a good (patriotic) wife should. Their bodies, too, are constituted, regulated and inscribed by dominant patriarchal discourses and the social practices they inform. In fact, the difference between Econowives and the other women lies more in the realm of economic well-being and social prestige than in the area of subjectivity.

The Regulation of the Feminine Body

The regulation of bodies described in The Handmaid's Tale is achieved partly through the operation of "panoptic" relations in Gilead. Foucault describes the Panopticon as the central core in a prison or other institution, from which the inmates can be observed, unnoticed, at any time. Because this arrangement makes "surveillance...permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action," it induces "a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assumes the automatic functioning of power" (DandP 201).

In Gilead, while an actual Panopticon is absent, a multitude of other methods and technologies are employed to create at least the appearance of continual observation. The very name of the regime's secret police -- the Eyes -- evokes this image of panoptic vision. The identity of these Eyes, and of believers who might report any behavioral irregularities, remains unknown. Hence, when Offred greets her shopping partner, she notes that Ofglen is "my spy, even as I am hers" (HT 29). She wonders whether Ofglen's piety is sincere, or whether it is a disguise she assumes along with the costume. However, because everything they do looks like "acting rather than a real act" neither appearances nor the people who present them can be trusted (HT 41). So it is even with Nick, the only person with whom Offred establishes intimate contact after the inception of Gilead. The anonymity of the panoptic structures of the Gileadean system thus allows

discontinuous means to be used quite successfully to produce continuous effects. The surveying gaze, with its implied laws and disciplinary powers, is inscribed on bodies to the extent that they become "isolated and self-policing subjects" (Bartky 80). The external regulatory function becomes internalized.

Yet the insertion of bodies into orthodox gendered subject positions does not rely exclusively on the omnipresence of the authoritarian gaze. In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood has constructed an elaborate system of social control which operates not only by physical coercion (or the threat of it) but also by creating subjects with "investments" in the system.⁸ As Professor Pieixoto observes in the Historical Notes: "the architects of Gilead knew" that "to institute an effective totalitarian system" they had to "offer some benefits and freedoms, at least to a privileged few," in exchange for those removed (HT 320).

These investments vary according to the individual's position, function and gender. For members of the male elite, like the Commander, there are obvious perks. Black market reading material, the exclusive "club," material comforts and prestige make up for certain restrictions and regulations imposed upon them. Wives, too, possess a degree of social prestige, material comfort, and control within their limited domestic circle. Similarly, the Aunts are allowed to read, write and exercise a large degree of control over other women, in exchange for their support of the system (HT 139).

In other cases, control operates both with the negative threat of sanctions and the positive hope of reward. For minor officials, the investments are situated in the future, and require a certain deferral of desire. Offred believes that the guards, rather than thinking of illegally kissing her and getting shot for it, must concentrate on "doing their duty," being promoted to the Angels and "being allowed possibly to marry"(HT 32). In the lower echelons of society, and particularly in the case of women, these investments become more negative, phrased as "freedom from" certain state imposed fates rather than freedom to do other things, either in the present or in the future (HT 34). The only investment for the Handmaids, apart from a fairly comfortable material existence, is the promise that if they succeed in producing viable infants they will never be declared Unwomen. Compliance with their positions within the dominant discourses of the Gileadean regime means, for the Marthas, little more than the deferral of an unpleasant end in the Colonies.

The functioning of Gileadean society, then, depends on the investments offered to its subjects, combined with the sanctions it threatens for non-complicity. But the problem for the engineers of the regime is to create, at the very level of subjectivity, individuals for whom these investments will be sufficiently desirable to ensure their cooperation. However, that attempt at harnessing desire, as I will argue in the final section, is Gilead's greatest weakness.

The Body and Colonialist Discourse

The writing-over (topologizing) of the female body, which I have begun to examine above, implies an imperialist exploration and colonization of its territory. In The Handmaid's Tale this process is both metaphoric and literal. The dominant discourses which are circulated through rigid controls on education and communication are meant to re-inscribe the female body, to re-constitute subjectivity, and to re-position women's bodies in society. As Foucault observes:

the body is...directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection...; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body (DandP 25).

The labour most desired from the female body in Gilead is, of course, the labour of childbirth.

Power relations aimed at creating docile reproductive bodies are deployed at the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre. Here, the Aunts aim not only to train the women to perform certain functions, but also to become the empty vessels needed to act as surrogate mothers for the future population of Gilead. As a part of their training the Handmaids' communications are severely restricted, their

bodies are strictly regimented, and their minds are set to learning a whole catechism of pseudo-religious statements regarding their functions as child-bearing vessels. "For lunch," Offred recalls, "it was the Beatitudes":

Blessed be this, blessed be that. They played it from a disc, the voice was a man's. Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the silent. I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left out things too, but there was no way of checking (HT 99-100).

The aim is to erase the tracings of now outlawed discourses and to replace them with new ones; in effect, to construct bodies ready to be slotted into new ideological spaces.

In this aim, the architects and builders of Gilead are at least partially successful. Offred's sense of her own body changes considerably after the institution of the Gileadean regime. So fully is she marked as a site of reproduction, that she no longer views her body as "an instrument...of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of [her] will" (HT 83).⁹ Instead, her flesh rearranges itself into a "cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than [she] is" (HT 84). Her body has been surveyed with a new project in mind. Hence it has been remapped according to a different scale and (in some respects) an unfamiliar legend. Yet without the perspective of alternate discourses, she is unable to see beyond her present circumstances to any possibilities of change or resistance. Indeed, Offred

compares herself and other Handmaids to earlier "ladies in reduced circumstances": "That is what we are now. The circumstances have been reduced; for those of us who still have circumstances" (HT 18). In this state, Offred views her skin as "a map, a diagram of futility, crisscrossed with tiny roads that lead nowhere" (HT 153): nowhere, that is, according to their bearer, but most definitely somewhere -- namely, to a purified and repopulated Gilead -- according to the dominant elites who have mapped them out.

In an ironic play on the commodification of images of women in our own society and its media, Atwood also presents the Handmaids' bodies as literally national/natural resources. It is a serious crime against the State for members of the heretical Quaker sect to smuggle "precious national resources over the border to Canada" through the secret "femaleroad" (HT 93).¹⁰ And, to prevent such a misappropriation of their property, Gileadean officials ensure that the Handmaid's bodies are inscribed not just with the tracings of dominant discourse, but also with the tattoos which guarantee that they "will never be able to fade...into another landscape. [They are] too important, too scarce, for that" (HT 75). Thus, the earlier objectification and distribution of images of women's bodies is taken to an extreme as Handmaids are physically circulated among needy Commanders, and branded as commodities-in-themselves.

The production of feminine bodies as, at once, externally

charted territories and resources waiting to be put to use, recalls the kind of colonialist discourse which Barbara Blakely sees in operation in Atwood's poetry (39). Atwood makes this connection clear in the Historical Notes. Professor Pieixoto observes that the co-option of the Aunts by the Gileadean male elite corresponds to the common imperial practice of controlling indigenous peoples through members of their own group (HT 320). And, as in a mercantilist economy, the natural resources of the colony are exploited for the needs of the "fatherland."

Furthermore, as so often happens with the "discovery" of unfamiliar territory, the bodily topos is given a name which both connotes its possession by and designates its relation to the namer. As Christopher Miller, writing of African colonialist discourse, suggests:

Names such as Ethiopia...are evidently the inventions of outsiders, of lighter complexion, who named the place in relation to themselves. By doing so, they attach a kind of significance to that which would normally have none (9).

A similar process operates in the naming of women in Gilead. On a generic level, the terms Wife, Martha and Handmaid locate women in relation to men and their households, designating what place their bodies hold within the domestic landscape that patriarchal discourses have charted. Likewise, according to the dominant religious discourse of Gilead, these names refer to selected Biblical models of sanctioned female behaviour -- in which case, it is hardly surprising that they

neglect to name anyone after Deborah or Mary, the sister of Martha.

Although Marthas and Wives are able to retain their previous names, together with their functional titles, Handmaids are additionally marked as property by their given names: Of-Fred, Of-Glen, Of-Warren. Offred tries to hold on to the memory of the name which formerly designated the territory of her body. She keeps her knowledge of it "buried" like "some treasure [she will] come back to dig up, one day" (HT 94), for it signifies a whole set of alternate discourses and social relations in which she was previously situated. To Offred, it symbolizes the very "identity" she struggles to retain. The continuity of personality implied by the Handmaid's former name, however, is replaced by an inscription indicating both the absence of personality and the presence of instrumentality; A Handmaid is valued only insofar as she is instrumental in the production of a child. In addition she is named only temporarily, in relation to the Commander she serves. Consequently, when Offred greets a different body calling herself Ofglen, she realises: "of course she is, the new one, and Ofglen, wherever she is no longer Ofglen....That is how you can get lost, in a sea of names" (HT 295). The Handmaids are to be undifferentiated (their bodies constituting the same topos) except, like British Guiana and French Guiana, in terms of who possesses them.

History and Memory/Continuity and Resistance

Yet as Offred's experience suggests, the over-writing (and over-riding) of women's previously constituted subjectivities remains incomplete. Unlike Oceania in George Orwell's dystopia Nineteen Eighty-Four, Gilead has not yet been purged of people whose ideas were formed before the "revolution" (Orwell 71). Resistance to dominant social practices therefore persists, with memory as its medium. The subject becomes the site of competing discourses (past and present) and the desires they generate. Thus fissures appear, making change, if not a certainty, then at least a possibility.

"You'll have to forgive me. I'm a refugee from the past, and like other refugees I go over the customs and habits of being I've been forced to leave behind" (HT 239). So says Offred as she emerges from one of her many bouts of memory. Her flashbacks are, in fact, a prominent feature of the narrative structure of The Handmaid's Tale. As Maureen Turim points out, two concepts are implied in the temporal juncture of the flashback: memory and history (1). And these two concepts are vital to Atwood's investigation of the constitution and transformation of the female subject in society. Turim writes:

flashbacks...often merge the two levels of remembering the past, giving large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience. this process can be called the 'subjective memory,' which here has the double sense of the rendering of history as a subjective experience of a character in the fiction, and the formation of the Subject in history....The play of different voices within film narration, however, implies certain departures or

divisions within this formation of subjectivity (2).¹¹

If subjectivity is constituted through a series of discursive and social practices in which women are situated from the time of their entry into language (Kuhn Women's Pictures 46), then any attempt to reposition women in discourse must contend with the markings of the past. The correspondence or conflict between the two is made evident through memory, in the textual form of the flashback.

Nevertheless, as Offred also experiences, the "memory of events, and of history, is never completely transparent; it is constantly rewritten or overdetermined by present cultural practices" (Sawchuk 66). That, of course, is the aim of the architects of Gilead. In the "public" sphere, the governing elite makes a concerted effort to remove recent historical traces -- at least when it is in their interests to do so.¹² When visiting an old church, Offred notes that officials have not fiddled with it or the gravestones outside, for it is "only the more recent history" that poses a threat to the current order of things and thus "offends them" (HT 41). Where texts contain outlawed ideas which might appeal to Gileadean citizens and thereby produce discontentment with the current regime, they are excised from "history". Books and magazines from former times are censored or destroyed entirely, and the very Book that Gilead (mis)appropriates as its foundation and justification is locked away to prevent its "subversive" passages from coming to light. In a further

attempt to limit the possibility of female resistance, women - who have lost most under the new regime -- are forbidden to read at all. Yet, where history highlights the atrocities from which the current regime claims to save women, the documents recording them are carefully selected and deployed as propaganda celebrating Gilead's noble rule. The interplay of past and present in The Handmaid's Tale, then, with its particular emphasis on the construction of history, highlights the ideological lenses through which the past is observed, and implies that the way "we choose to construct history partly determines the history we are likely to get" (Davidson 115).

If "public" history is rewritten by the Gileadean elite, so, too, is the "private" history of the feminine body. Offred, for instance, recognizes that her own body exists as a palimpsest of feminine inscriptions. The discourses which previously mapped the territory of her body as an object of desire have been over-written by discourses marking the site of the body as, at once, a chaste vessel and an object for reproduction. She finds that her nakedness has become strange and "outdated" to her (HT 72). She can scarcely believe how she once attired and ornamented her body, to make it an attractive object of the male gaze. Although memories of the past produce fissures in the ostensibly smooth operations of Gileadean society, they also record the degree to which new dominant discourses have reinscribed the body; gendered subjects were "not 'made' once and for all when language" was

acquired, but are in "constant flux, being formed in and through every speech act" (Kuhn Women's Pictures 46-47).

The bodies of past and present, while mapped out somewhat differently, are equally constituted as bodies-for-the-other. In The Handmaid's Tale, Offred's flashbacks serve not only to highlight the conflicting "ways of seeing" women's bodies in the successive regimes, but also to reveal the subtle but telling correspondences. When Offred recalls the "liberty" of her earlier incarnation, she thinks of the seemingly endless possibilities and options available to women. She remembers how women sought continually to change their lives and their bodies. The latter transformation was seen, in fact, as a means to the former:

Working out was...something you did to keep your body in shape, for the man. If you worked out enough, maybe the man would too....Otherwise, one of you, most likely the man, would go wandering off on a trajectory of his own, taking his addictive body with him and leaving you with bad withdrawal, which you could counteract by exercise. If you didn't work i' out it was because one of you had the wrong attitude. Everything that went on in your life was thought to be due to some positive or negative power emanating from inside your head.

If you don't like it, change it, we said, to each other and to ourselves. And so we would change the man for another one. Change, we were sure, was for the better always. We were revisionists; what we revised was ourselves (HT 238-9).

These promises of endless variety and improvement are encapsulated in the fashion magazines that the Commander shows to Offred during one of their forbidden encounters. They offer the image of the "idealized body-as-product" (Smith 45):

the new-and-improved body that the correct application of exercise, clothing and cosmetics can produce. The body is constituted as a site of craft and artifice, the effects of which can rub off on the rest of a woman's life. It is this construction which Atwood parodies in Lady Oracle, where Joan Foster goes through a series of metamorphoses, convinced that eventually she will find the one pair of wings that will make her into the butterfly she wishes to be -- hoping always in the power of "magic transformations" (43).

Yet the transformations produced at the site of the body also mark it as an object of work and a commodity for circulation. In this sense, the body's position as commodity (particularly in relation to men) remains constant. The fashion magazines position women within discourses of femininity that establish particular relations between themselves as subjects and their bodies as objects. Just as the operation of the gaze tends to produce feminine subjects who survey their own bodies as men would, and to adopt poses constructed for that implied male viewer, so the discourse of beauty situates the body as an object to be modified and enhanced, according to established standards. This relationship between the subject, her body, and the idealized images of the dominant beauty discourse is tripartite: a distance is created between the feminine "subject and her body, which becomes the object of her work" by means of the textual image "through which she becomes conscious of its

defects" and the practices by which it may be perfected (Smith 50).

Although the former discourses of femininity undoubtedly produced such a "self"/body split within the female subject, Offred experiences that splitting and alienation more profoundly in Gilead, where the particular constructions of the female subject are still unfamiliar. The production of the body as object in the past went largely unnoticed due to its naturalization within dominant culture. In contrast, the over-writing of the body in Gileadean society not only highlights the body's status as commodity but also shatters the former illusion of the body as "single, solid," and "one with" the subject (HT 84). Thus, before her attendance at the Ceremony, Offred finds that she has to steel herself in a way she has only recently come to comprehend; if her body is to be an object, she must attempt to retain her identity (the identity constructed largely according to other discourses of femininity) by pretending "not to be present, not in the flesh" -- by "existing apart from the body" (HT 169).

Contrary to Barbara Hill Rigney's comment that these women "seem to have forgotten that they ever had roles other than those determined for them by some vaguely-defined hierarchy of government" (116), I would argue that the Gileadean regime's primary problem in creating docile subjects lies in its inability to eradicate the contradictory inscriptions which trace the memories of its subjects. As

Offred observes, the young guards, who have little recollection of earlier times and have not yet "learned about existence through time," are "the most fanatical" (HT 30). Their memories are not marked by the variety of conflicting discourses which might lead them to challenge, or at least to accept with less wholehearted zeal, the practices of the current regime. Offred, on the other hand, is haunted by memory. Hence, when Aunt Lydia assures the Handmaids that "for the ones who come after ..., it will be easier," for they "will accept their duties with willing hearts," Offred notes bitterly what the Aunt does not say: that "they will have no memory, of any other way" (HT 127).

In contrast to these future women, Offred recalls (both voluntarily and involuntarily) incidents from her past as a college student, an employee, a wife and a mother. The very smell of bread baking in the Commander's kitchen reminds Offred of "other kitchens, kitchens that were mine....This is a treacherous smell, and I know I must shut it out" (57). The memory highlights the contrast between herself as a mother in the past and herself as a producer of children in the present. And the "experience of having more or less power in different social practices" -- of having her own kitchen in which to bake bread for her daughter, as opposed to being sent out of the kitchen like a chastened child, to await the time when she will produce a child for others -- is connected to the contradictions that operate at the level of Offred's

subjectivity (Henriques et al 118).

The "treachery" of her memory, in this case, lies in the desire it triggers. The motivational dynamics that operated to constitute subjectivity in the past produce the current "haunting" desires for which there is no outlet in Gilead (Henriques et al 205; Gabriel 4). These traces of previous dominant discourses have not been erased, but have only been overlaid with others, and the desires they generated before Gilead's inception continue to surface. Offred's thoughts therefore contain a litany of memory-triggered wants, wishes and hungers. As she lies in her bed at night they become especially palpable:

I want Luke here so badly. I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me.

I want to steal something (HT 108).

Such desires threaten to produce at the site of her body those gestures of resistance -- often expressed as an act of theft -- which will incur punishment. The conflict produced fractures unities (the new subjectivities that the Gileadean regime has taken great pains to inscribe) and furrows "across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remoulding...their bodies and minds" (Foucault, HofS 96). In The Handmaid's Tale, then, women not only remember the past, but they also discover in it the seeds of their discontent and, possibly, the foundations of resistance.

As she waits for the Ceremony Offred thinks: "My self is

a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born" (76). This statement, while certainly true of the current circumstances in which her body must conform to the still unfamiliar gestures and poses demanded of a Handmaid, is also false in its implications that her previous body was something born. In his discussion of memory, Foucault suggests that individuals reshape past experience in order to meet their current creative needs (in Hutton 137). Indeed, Offred's contrast of her past and present bodies may overlook the discursive inscriptions of the previous regime, not only because they were naturalized by dominant culture, but also because the illusion of her other, natural, body supports the comforting fiction of the unreality of her present state. It makes possible the passive resistance of unbelief. But Offred's occasional denial of the reality of her situation also threatens to circumvent further resistance and thereby to "perpetuate the system" (Lacombe 18).

Offred's illicit dealings with the Commander represent, at best, highly ambiguous forms of resistance, for the very relations of power which position her in Gilead also operate in her interactions with him. Their encounters exhibit the fissures and contradictions which exist in the system itself (largely due to the desires generated by the Commander's own contradictory subject positioning), but they are still contained by the Commander's ability to offer or withhold

these alternatives. As Moira says to Offred at Jezebel's:

'Some of them do that, they get a kick out of it. It's like screwing on the alter or something: your gang are supposed to be such chaste vessels. They like to see you all painted up. Just another crummy power trip' (HT 255).

As long as the power to re-inscribe the female body remains in the hands of the male elite, the possibilities for resistance remain limited. Nevertheless, with such illicit dealings, "deviance" enters the realm of both the known and the possible.

Indeed, knowledge of misdemeanours is a powerful talisman to Handmaids in Gilead. In the absence of access to the written word, Handmaids depend on the coded language of the world around them, including other bodies, for such information (Lacombe 9). To the inmates at the Red Centre, Moira becomes one such body. Her continual opposition to the dominant order of things -- feigning illness, attempting to seduce a guard, escaping the Centre -- both hinders the non-violent inscription of docility and submission on her body, and leads to the violent markings of power on her body (HT 102). Consequently, her body becomes a symbol of non-compliance to the other Handmaids. As Offred recalls:

Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it (HT 143).

Moira, then, exists as a marker of possibility, an indication of what may be done to rebel against those who seek to control

and colonize the territory of women's bodies. Offred's fright at the "indifference" and "lack of volition" in her friend's voice, when they speak at Jezebel's, corresponds to her intense disappointment when Aunt Lydia refuses to state the crime of the victims of a Salvaging. "The crimes of others" represent "a secret language" among the Handmaids -- one that puts resistance into the field of knowledge and brings challenges to dominant power relations into the realm of possibility (HT 287).

Offred also uses her body, and the language she re-appropriates to tell of its experience, to undermine Gilead's hegemonic discourses. Increasingly throughout the course of the tale, Offred uses her body to resist the inscriptions traced over it. Her affair with Nick, despite its initial sanction by Serena Joy, continues unapproved. Through this facsimile of previous relationships between men and women, Offred finds herself more closely aligned with her previous identity, as indicated by Nick's use of her former name. In this situation, Offred uses her body to resist its topologizing within current society, and to re-inscribe it with the markings of her choice.

Yet even this process is fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. The counter-inscriptions are not so much new, as they are resurgences of past discursive tracings, retained in her memory. And in that sense, the re-mapping of her body cannot be seen as occurring solely according to Offred's

unmediated choice. Indeed, as she is ashamed to admit, her very relationship with Nick -- like those of other women with the "addictive bodies" of men in the past -- tends to make Offred complacent: she no longer wishes to escape Gilead, for she wants to be near Nick where she "can get at him" (HT 283). Offred retains the old investments in romantic relationships, despite her new situation. As the Handmaid herself recognizes, the contradictions which persist at the very level of her subjectivity mean that even her acts of resistance are not without a degree of ambivalence.

"I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it" (HT 279). Offred's story is indeed in fragments: literally, in its recording on numerous cassette tapes, and figuratively, in its spatial and temporal juxtapositions of people and events. And Offred's words are like her body, caught in the crossfire between conflicting discourses and the societies in which they have had dominant sway. Just as her body is made-over and fragmented according to the prevailing discourses, so her language is over-written and splintered by the strict regulation of women's relationship to the word in Gilead.

This body-language connection is made explicit in Atwood's description of the Handmaids' attempt to communicate with one another (significantly, about the resistance organization, Mayday). After their ritual viewing of the

bodies on the wall, Offred and Ofglen head for some open space where they can talk -- if, that is "you can call it talking, these clipped whispers, projected through the funnels of our white wings. Its more like a telegram, a verbal semaphore. Amputated speech" (HT 211). The same clothing that marks their bodies for use impedes free speech, with all its subversive potential. Furthermore, in an ironic play on critical treatises on writing and the phallus, Atwood describes Offred's reaction as she sits in the Commanders office, about to write:

The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another Centre motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is envy. Just holding it is envy....It's one more thing I would like to steal (HT 196).

Offred would like to steal back the word, just as she would like to steal back her own body (or, at least, the body of the past which she perceives as her own). The very act of telling the tale represents Offred's resistance to the discourses of power which aim to inscribe meekness and silence on her body. And, in this sense, despite her feelings of helplessness, Offred's words carry at least the potential for change.

Conclusion: Historical Notes

It is possible that Offred -- through the combined operations of her own memory and the fissures existing within the fabric of Gileadean society -- may resist the discursive remapping of her body. However, The Handmaid's Tale in no way suggests

that Offred's experience demonstrates how, by telling their stories, women may transcend their culturally-constructed subjectivities, establish their "true" identities and joyfully reclaim their bodies. In fact, the concluding Historical Notes imply quite the opposite. If the Gileadean regime is characterized by a number of discourses adopted and adapted from previous times, so too is the future of the appended Historical Notes. Professor Pieixoto's address provides ample evidence of the continued circulation of sexist discourses -- from his off-hand comments about "enjoying" the "charming Arctic Chair" who introduces him (HT 312), to his account of the "vulgar" pun on tail that is implied in the title of Offred's text (HT 313; Davidson 119,116). That the professor's is not an isolated lapse from dominant social norms is clearly implied by the complicit laughter which follows his "off colour" remarks. The re-writing of discourses of femininity has not been complete.

Thus, as a novel tracing the web of discourses which constitute female subjectivities and position women's bodies in history, The Handmaid's Tale points to the possibility of feminine resistance -- through language and the text of the body -- but it offers no Utopian promises of success. Indeed, in the concluding appendix, the very place of women's texts continues to be marginalized. Pieixoto laments the "feminine" (namely, subjective and personal) approach of Offred's account, wishing that she had a "different [male] turn of

mind" and the "instincts of a reporter and a spy" (HT 322). His concluding statement recalls the central thesis of Robert Graves' The White Goddess, in the way it inscribes women with the mysterious powers of the muse, while retaining for men the serious business of writing history:

We may call Eurydice forth from the world of the dead, but we cannot make her answer; and when we turn to look at her we glimpse her only for a moment, before she slips from our grasp and flees. As all historians know, the past is a great darkness, and filled with echoes. Voices may reach us from it; but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and, try as we may, we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day (HT 324; Gabriel 32-33).

And if the present is shaped by remembrances and interpretations of the past, as the novel suggests, Pieixoto is right for suspending moral judgement of Gilead -- but not for the reasons he states.

Endnotes

1. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault attempts to "construct an analytics of power" in relation to sexuality "that no longer takes law as a model and a code" (89). In fact, he declares that we must "try to rid ourselves of a juridical and negative representation of power, and cease to conceive of it in terms of law, prohibition, liberty, and sovereignty. Let us suppose that historical analysis has revealed the presence of a veritable 'technology' of sex, one that is much more complex and above all much more positive than the mere effect of a 'defence' could be" (90).
2. For an elaboration of this power-knowledge axis, see Chapter One, pages 7-9.
3. The have/hold discourse "has as its focus not sexuality directly, but the Christian ideals associated with monogamy, partnership and family life" (Hollway 231-233).
4. All subsequent references to The Handmaid's Tale will appear as HT, followed by the page number.
5. Wendy Hollway, in fact, notes that, as recently as 1979, Glen Wilson has used sociobiology "to attack feminist accounts of sex differences which are based on social theories of women's oppression" and "to represent women's position as biologically determined and therefore unchangeable" (231).
6. The hysterization of women, as Foucault describes it, may be seen as functioning through the discursive inscription and placement of women's bodies in a manner complimentary to Hollway's "have/hold" and "male sexual drive" discourses. In the History of Sexuality, Foucault writes that, in the "process of hysterization of women, 'sex' was defined in three ways: as that which belongs in common to men and women; as that which belongs par excellence, to men, and hence is lacking in women; but at the same time, as that which by itself constitutes woman's body, ordering it wholly in terms of the functions of reproduction and keeping it in constant agitation through the effects of that very function" (153).
7. The apparent exceptions to this exclusive subject-positioning are the Econowives, whom I will consider below.
8. By "investments" I mean the satisfactions or rewards which subjects associate with taking up specific subject positions (Hollway 238).

9. This is not to suggest that, in former times, Offred's body was not inscribed by then-dominant discourses, but just that, under the sway of other discourses, her body was configured differently, for different ends.

10. The descriptions of the femaleroad also recall the earlier underground railway for black slaves fleeing to Canada. Like the Handmaids in Gileadean society, they too (as productive if not necessarily reproductive bodies) were precious natural resources.

11. Turim's "subjective memory" corresponds with what Annette Kuhn calls discours. According to Kuhn, whereas histoire "is that mode of address characteristic of narrations of past events, in which the narrator is not foregrounded as a person," discours "inscribes both a speaker ('I') and a hearer ('You'), so that 'person' is present throughout" and subjectivity is foregrounded. (Kuhn, Women's Pictures 49). The Handmaid's Tale clearly falls into the narrative category of the discours.

12. In this sense they may again be compared to the officials in Nineteen Eighty-Four, where one of the Party slogans reads: "'Who controls the past...controls the future: who controls the present controls the past'" (Orwell 31).

CHAPTER THREE

Portrait of the Art(ist) as Media Compilation: The Inscribed Body in Janice Gurney's Multi-Media Art

I am an artist, now, she thought, a true artist. My body is my canvas. I am very old, and very beautiful, I am carved like an old shaman, I am an artifact of an old culture, my body is a pictograph from prehistory, it has been used and bent and violated and broken, but I have resisted. I am Somebody.

--Marian Engel, "The Tattooed Woman" (9)

The similarities between the treatment of the female body in Marian Engel's short story and in Janice Gurney's art works are striking. In "The Tattooed Woman," a middle-aged woman discovers that her husband has taken a mistress who in every way resembles her -- except that the other woman is half her age. This woman regards her body, with its hysterectomy and appendectomy scars, as a site of damage and brokenness; she has "nothing to offer" her husband (4). In an almost somnambulant state, the unnamed woman attempts to reinscribe her body with new meaning and power. She carves "arabesques", "cross-hatchings" and the "beautiful slashes" of "African women in the National Geographic magazine" into her own skin, in an ambiguous attempt to re-create herself (6). Engel presents the woman as both subject and object. In such works as Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults (1982) and Emphasis Mine (1985), Gurney also explores the divisions in the female subject of representation. In these and other

pieces, Gurney uses appropriated material to literally engage with dominant modes of representation, focusing on the site of the female body and highlighting the inscriptions of power that it bears. Like Engel, Gurney marks the tension between the body as it is mapped, "violated and broken" within dominant society, and as it is (potentially and problematically) reclaimed as a site of women's resistance.

Artistic Practice and Signifying Strategies

Gurney bases her visual art on appropriational strategies. She combines enlargements of reproduced photographs and film stills with paintings commissioned from other Ontario artists, found images, texts from a variety of sources, and overlays of plexiglas and white trace markings. While Gurney uses these formal differences to create visually heterogeneous works, her mixed-media pieces are clearly meant to be referential; Gurney values the formal variations, at least in part, for the multiplicity of their associations and "the differences in the way they are read" (Gurney, "The Surface of Behavior" 33). Their status as "art objects" (always a slippery category) depends more on the concepts generated by the interaction of the reconfigured, appropriated elements than on their lines and colour as auto-referential things-in-themselves.

Among the main components of Gurney's work are reproductions of photographs and film stills, both the media of dominant informational and commercial practices (Hutcheon, "Fringe Interferences" 304). As such, the images are marked

with the ideological assumptions they attain within society's dominant communication systems -- inscriptions with which the viewer of Gurney's work is familiar. In fact, Gurney's strategy of appropriation requires that the viewer shares in its community of discourse; if any manipulation or ironic use of dominant culture is to be effective, the viewer must be familiar with the context to which it refers (Hutcheon, "Splitting Images"). However,

A reproduction, as well as making its own references to the image of its original, becomes itself the reference point for other images. The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it [or, in Gurney's case, what is inscribed upon it] (Berger 29).

Thus, just as Margaret Atwood and Audrey Thomas make ironic use of intertextual references, so Janice Gurney disrupts appropriated images -- creating fragments and fissures, non-alignments of visual and verbal codes -- to defamiliarize and re-view their discursively inscribed representations.

The multiple sources of the works' constituent parts also challenge the notion of the solitary (male) genius who envisions and produces the unique objet d'art (Pollock 11). While this technique differs from those employed by Engel, Atwood and Thomas in the degree of its displacement of authorship, it nevertheless corresponds to the writers' undercutting of notions of the authority and sufficiency of the text. Many of the components of Gurney's works retain either the artists' signatures or references to their

producer, thereby decentering their creative locus (Gurney, "The Surface of Behavior" 33). Moreover, in her photo essay, "The Taking of Photographs is Strictly Prohibited" (1988), Gurney plays with the notion of "taking", as both photographing and appropriating. She undermines the notion of creator by reproducing photographs and signatures of Degas, Delacroix and other artists, with her own name signed below the configuration. Gurney's appropriational practice thereby resists the historic juxtaposition of tradition and the individual talent. As Foucault describes it, tradition

is intended to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar); it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same....; tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals (AofK 21).

By reproducing the already-existent (eschewing the "new"), and by including references to the various sources (including the now problematic signatures of the constituent artists), Gurney displaces the notion of the single creator of the art piece.

Representation and Subjectivity

Instead, in its use of diverse elements and multiple formal codes (linguistic, painterly, photographic), Gurney's work may properly be viewed as a type of discourse (Grenville). Within any given piece, Gurney arranges a group of signs which do not simply designate things outside of the work, but which

"systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, AofK 49). Yet, as previously noted, this production of the subject/object never takes place apart from dominant discourses in society. The subjects of Gurney's artistic practice are inscribed with traces that index the relations of power by which they have been surveyed and topologized.

This process is evident in Gurney's triptych Reverie (1985; fig.1). Each panel consists of a photostat of a film still covered with coloured plexiglas. The left panel pictures a woman kneeling with a child standing between her knees, and is overlaid in red. The middle panel depicts an actress playing Joan of Arc at the stake, and has a clear covering. The right panel shows a partially clad woman sitting with her feet resting on a window sill with her legs apart, and is seen through a blue sheet of plexiglas. In each image, the woman has her eyes closed, apparently preoccupied with her own pleasure or pain.

"If the subject is constituted primarily through language in the symbolic order, his or her identity is reinforced through the image, an image, however, that always carries a subtext with its look" (Monk, "Subjects in Pictures" 211); the image's ways of seeing/presenting are informed by the subtext of dominant discourse. Moreover, throughout Western artistic (and, to a large degree, social) practice, women have been defined in terms of physical presence; their appearance is

taken to constitute their essence. The images in Reverie represent the stereotypes constructed according to such notions of "presence".¹ The first film still falls in line with a long history of visual representations of motherhood, most notably of the Madonna and Child. Its female subject is therefore judged according to whether she appears to possess the proper maternal qualities of moral purity, sweet-tempered patience, and nurturing love (Dijkstra 8). The image of Joan of Arc takes the almost spiritualized self-giving qualities of the mother to the self-sacrificial extreme of women-as-martyr. However, the third image of the woman sitting by a window inscribes its subject with somewhat different qualities. It implies the type of sensual pleasure which is suspect in the "good" woman. The illicit connotations of the image are highlighted by the fact that only in this frame is the woman alone; her pleasure is ironically presented as private and in secret. Hence, to the viewer who is (consciously or unconsciously) aware of the dominant discourses of femininity, the women's surface appearances indicate what kinds of women they are, and they become static objects before the reifying gaze.

As subjects traced with a series of competing discourses, women are not only constructed as the seats of spiritual purity, but also as harbourers of guilt:

Rousseau argues that the source of the disorder of women lies in their boundless sexual passion. Women, he claims, foreshadowing Freud, are unable to subdue and sublimate their sexual desires in the

same manner, or to the same extent, as men. Men are the active and aggressive sex and are "controlled by nature"; passive and defensive women have only the control of modesty. There must therefore be a double standard of sexual conduct....However, even an education specifically designed to foster modesty is not sufficient guarantee against the disorderliness of women (Pateman 25).

Indeed, not only does the third image construct its subject as morally suspect, but the other two images also resist their most immediately visible inscriptions of pure, self-sacrificial womanhood. The representations of motherhood and immanent death are both eroticized, hinting at the perverse nature of Woman. The presence of Joan of Arc, as the central element in the triptych, resonates with such contradictions. In history and in popular representation she has been constituted on the one hand as a saint -- the epitome of all that is pure and spiritual in Woman -- and on the other hand as a sorceress -- the essence of Woman's wantonness and deviance from nature (Benét). Contradictory cultural inscriptions are thus overlaid on the surfaces of the female subjects, a process which Gurney continually confronts in her own artistic practice.

If women's bodies become "[signs] within the patriarchal order," on which a myriad of discourses converge, Gurney's appropriation of dominant media images tend to undermine any naturalness which may have been constructed in their original visual and narrative contexts (Kaplan qtd. in Kuhn, Women's Pictures 77). Not only does her configuration of the images

in Reverie highlight the conflicting inscriptions which trace female bodies, but the plexiglas overlays also foreground the ideological filters through which we see. In the case of the central panel, the clear "filter" may appear to provide a neutral vision of the work, but its reflective surface throws back the viewer's own image, implying a connection between who is looking (also a subject in/of dominant society) and what is seen (Gurney, "Janice Gurney"). The viewer, with his/her ideological suppositions, becomes an overlay on the work. The plexiglas sheets on the other two images, however, seem to be reversed, according to the dominant symbolism of colour. If blue stands for purity and has traditionally been associated with motherhood -- particularly in connection with the Virgin Mary -- then it should "naturally" cohere to the first image. Likewise, if red is the colour of blood and of impurity (as in the "scarlet woman"), it should, more "logically", be placed over the third image. The constructions of naturalness and logic, as they relate to the discursively constituted feminine subjects, are thereby undermined and defamiliarized by the filters Gurney places over the women's images in Reverie.²

Furthermore, the introspection of the female subjects is revealed to be a pose, manufactured for the male gaze. The women in Reverie "are not confronting the realities of their situations -- motherhood, pain..., and sensual pleasure -- but are presenting themselves as involved with themselves" (Corbeil). They are literally and figuratively actresses,

self-consciously performing for the ever-present audience, even as they disguise their own dissimulation.³ For female subjects in dominant Western culture, such dissimulation is almost inevitable. The conventional practice of representation posits a male viewer. As John Berger has argued:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed, female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight (47).

But if this self-consciousness is generated by dominant representational practice, it is equally true that as "women watch themselves they are at every moment incurring guilt, proving themselves to be the 'narcissists' they are often accused of being" (Modleski 53). Women are at once positioned by discourses of femininity to see themselves as reflections (often, in the media, of an ideal which they are to emulate) and criticized for their vain preoccupation with their own mirror images (Perger 51; Bartky 73). Indeed, this situation aids the smooth functioning of patriarchal society. If women can be condemned for the narcissism which has been inscribed by dominant discourse, they can be excluded from those activities which require engagement with the outside world -- the male domain of power.

Again, the central position of the image of Joan of Arc is telling. While the other two panels picture women in a

private space, the centre one shows a women in a public (and highly political) sphere. But in order for her to accomplish her mission, Joan of Arc has had to disguise herself as a man; she has had to transform herself from the passive reflection that is Woman into the active presence which is Man. The masquerade thus takes different and more threatening proportions: she not only dissimulates before the male gaze like the other women, but she also positions and inscribes her body according to discourses of masculinity. As Annette Kuhn observes, clothing can "dissemble" and "embody performance. As a means to...a commutable persona, clothing as performance threatens to undercut the ideological fixity of the human subject" (Power of the Image 53). Joan of Arc enters what patriarchal society preserves as the male domain of public power -- and is charged with the unnatural crimes of cutting her hair and wearing men's clothing (Benét). It is not surprising, then, that in the final instance -- the execution pictured in Reverie -- the woman has been judged, stripped of her armour, and returned to her position of powerlessness.

In Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults (fig.2), Gurney also explores the topologizing of the female body in dominant representation and the discourses which inform it. The work contains a painted enlargement of a tintype photograph of her grandmother as a child and, below it, a photostatic enlargement of a posed studio photograph of Indian famine victims. The latter image retains its descriptive

caption: W.W. Hooper. Victims of Madras famine posed in studio style, 1877. To the right is a full-length nude painting of Gurney, done by the Toronto artist (and her husband), Andy Patton. The images are covered with plexiglas on which Gurney has inscribed white trace markings. Everything but the child's hands and face is painted over and the strokes covering her body are copied and dispersed over the famine victims (Gurney, "The Surface of Behavior" 31). The painted nude is likewise marked out and sub-divided by the intersecting lines that trace it.

As in Reverie, Gurney's arrangement of the various elements in Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults addresses issues of the gaze and the construction of the subject in representation. Gurney deliberately structures her work from a variety of appropriated elements in which she tries to locate herself as a particular female subject (Gurney, "Janice Gurney"). The fact that Gurney commissioned a man to paint the nude of herself is no accident. By submitting herself to the male gaze and inserting it in her work, Gurney deliberately becomes subject to the process of representation (Patton 23). Her control over the images, as artist, is confronted by her lack of power as the nude subject/object. As artists, women inhabit the dialectic of master (artist) and mastered (model). However, the "ultimate mastery that" such a "dialectic implies...is denied by social reality" and women artists remain situated in "both positions

at once"(Monk, "Subjects in Pictures" 210-11). The contrasting positions of power and powerlessness that Gurney occupies in relation to the work, then, imply the contradictory subject positions with which women are inscribed in dominant society.

Yet within the context of Gurney's work, the painted nude differs from images of women in dominant culture. The portrait is removed from any context, such as the bedroom or boudoir of many nude paintings, which might naturalize the image. Within the boundaries of the painting itself, the body stands isolated on a dark ground, confronting more than soliciting the gaze. The painted white traces also defamiliarize the female nude. They stand between the image and the audience, disrupting any complacent (and complicit) viewing of the body.

The presence of the white traces on the surface of the nude painting, like the coloured plexiglas in Reverie, foregrounds the mapping of the feminine body. Gurney's work does not represent a juxtaposition of the new against a history of the same, in terms of its being a series of unique objects produced by the inspired artistic consciousness; it does, however, inscribe the already-existent images with new markings and textures. Like Atwood, Gurney makes use of the palimpsest: the "writing material or manuscript on which the original writing [or, in this case, image] has been effaced to make room for a second writing" (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

This technique may be seen as indicating (and implicating) the inscriptions of discourse on the body, for in Gurney's works this "over-writing" occurs literally on and over bodies.

The white traces overlaid on the nude portrait suggest a comparison with the "tattooed women" of circus sideshows or the "branded women" in The Handmaid's Tale.⁴ In these cases, the lines which topologize the body's surface also mark the figure as radically other. Historically, women have been seen and represented as dominated by the physical and as unable to act with the rational order demanded in the public sphere (Pateman 30). Difference has been constructed in patriarchal society as hierarchical, with the masculine "norm" privileged. And this difference is written over the feminine body. Gurney's image, like a "primitive" curiosity, is situated as a freak and an alien to civilized culture. The nude image, then, makes visible in representation a construction of femininity which has been circulated in Western society for generations.

Yet Gurney's use of the palimpsest is deliberately ambiguous. The white markings that are overlaid on the nude portrait, as on the other images, acts as supplements. As such, the traces both add to and supplant the underlying representations (Owens, "Detachment" 43); they simultaneously inscribe and displace meaning. This practice compliments Gurney's own preoccupation with the trace as both a defacement and a reparation of the image.

Hence, if the white marks map the female topos as foreign and alien, they also provide a type of defence against a traditional viewing of the nude. In fact, Gurney titles this portion of the work Character Armour (Patton 23). She states that in Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults, the inscriptions on her own image "represent markings used by an African tribe to paint their bodies. For them body painting is a means to protect themselves and identify each other in the context of their society" (qtd. in Grenville). In this sense, the markings may be compared to the self-carving of the protagonist of Engel's "The Tattooed Woman"; they represent an illusively empowering talisman, written on the body in defiance of the hegemonic constructions of femininity. Gurney's appropriation of the "protective" tribal markings, then, implies the threat of the gaze which aims to fix the female subject in a "stable and stabilizing identity" (Owens, "The Medusa Effect" 75). The naturalized transparency of the gaze is also undermined by the physical overlay of the (counter)topologizing white traces; for if the painted markings seem alien to the Canadian viewer, our representations of women would seem equally foreign and unnatural to the African tribespeople.

Women and Colonialist Discourse

The proximity of the female nude to the photograph of the Indian famine victims reinforces the connection between Woman and the colonial Other. As a colonized subject, Woman is

constructed, interpreted and spoken for by the superior consciousness of the civilizing agent. The process may be compared to Orientalism, in which power-knowledge discourses constitute their subjects and prepare them for subjection (Said 3). Within this discourse, the term Orient is "conceived as a description of the world," but it soon "generates concepts and categorizes thought until it becomes a massive screen between subject and object. From that moment on, perception is determined by Orientalism rather than Orientalism's being determined by perception" (Miller 15). Female subjects are similarly located within patriarchal discourses of femininity. Women become Woman; they are constituted as manifestations of mythologized types and they are inscribed with difference (male/female, colonizer/colonized), even as they are marked as undifferentiated.

Furthermore, as territory to be charted and controlled, women's bodies may be compared to most colonial lands. If the white traces on the images in Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults mark the subjects as different, they also highlight their resistance to being made known; women and other mastered subjects are inscribed as essentially mysteriousness. They have long been feared for their unfathomable deviance from "normal humanity," and because their conduct cannot be predicted by the rules that govern civilized society, they are seen as a menace to order (Janeway

5; Pateman 25).

Although women share the inscriptions, to a greater or lesser degree, with all indigenous colonized groups, they have been particularly associated with the last great territorial mystery: the dark continent of Africa. That mystery must be either covered up -- over-written with "myths and speculations" -- or highlighted as the "terra incognita" which harbours an unknown threat to its explorers (Miller 6). In the case of the image of Gurney's grandmother, the female body is all but obliterated, covered in a crust of white paint. It at once traces and hides the contours of her body -- a body which is also obscured by the underlying Victorian garb. The child bears the marks of propriety and modesty and, as by the "myths and speculations" of dominant culture, she is thereby managed and made manageable. As such, the image may well represent one half of the contradictory discourse which marks feminine subjects as either "good women" or "fearsome vixens". The nude painting, however, reveals what is always suspected of lying below the surface: the dark centre of Woman. The traces which topologize Gurney's image leave blank the dark space (representing pubic hair) which signifies Woman's sexual difference. And, in terms of the formal arrangement of the figure, that blank darkness lies at the centre of the canvas. In "Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous discusses this "phantasm of woman as a 'dark continent'" waiting to be penetrated and pacified. She writes that as soon as women

"begin to speak" -- to have their subjectivities constituted in and by dominant discourse -- "they can be taught that their territory is black," and that "Dark is dangerous" (310). Difference at the level of the body may thus be inscribed as inferiority and lack at the level of the subject. However, the very connections made within Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults -- between women, colonial subjects and the topologizing gaze of authority -- also make visible the inscriptions of power that trace the subjects. If this defamiliarization by no means guarantees a positive re-visioning of the female (or colonial) subject, it does imply a challenge to the dominant ways of seeing.

Indeed, at the same time that Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults draws attention to the mythologizing and colonizing of women in patriarchal society, the configuration of its own elements resists such a process. The two representations of women, for instance, gain particularity in their matrilineal connections with one another. As female subjects, they are subject to the mapping of their bodies by dominant society and the representational practice which operates within it. Nevertheless, the connections provided in the work establish for them a specific, if not explicit, history and context. Through them, Gurney insists that, despite the regulating inscriptions of power on the body which position women "in the 'dark' -- that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their [own] attribute --

there is...no general woman, no one typical woman" (Cixous 309). "Me" and "my grandmother" resist becoming Woman.

The association of the starving Indians and the female nude under the artists' gaze is complicated by the fact that the inscriptions on the Hooper photograph are the same ones that cover the child's body. This connection may suggest that both the Indians and the child are subject to the regulating gazes of authority (whether in the form of colonial government or the family) in which dominant discourses are circulated and deployed to produce and control subjects (Grenville). However, Gurney's grandmother, as an English settler in Manitoba (Genereux 52), may also be implicated in the discourses of power by which indigenous peoples in North America have been marked and controlled. Gurney, too, as artist and as her "grandmother's faults" -- one of which she declares to be manipulative control (in Doyle 7-8) -- may be complicit with the power relations that have constituted the Other as subject of and subject to the regulating gaze. Like all of Gurney's work, no simple or final reading is possible. And, in this manner, she deliberately circumvents any "mastery" by the viewing eye.

In fact, the very structure of Gurney's work resists the type of singular reading that might promote the construction or perpetuation of stereotypes; the arrangement of elements, with all their fissures and indeterminacies, "reveals the fallacy of the notion of adequate representation, simply by

throwing the presence of a centred or determined subject [whether "woman" or "native"] in to question" (Grenville). Thus, while the nature of Gurney's work invites indeterminacy, Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults does more to challenge than to uphold the unifying and reifying operations of representation.

Fragmentation, Dissolution and Damage

As Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults suggests, Gurney is preoccupied with notions of damage, decay and disfigurement. The damage appears in a variety of forms: punctured paintings, effaced surfaces, painted inscriptions, and cut images. In a discussion of this technique Gurney writes:

I think when I was specifically dealing with the 'damage-to' --whether it be surfaces or bodies or psyches -- I was trying to sort out a way that it was possible to be damaged, marked by the outside world, yet still use those things to make something else, to repair (in Doyle 9).

In early pieces such as Interpenetration of Myself and Vida (1982) and Cloud Study (1983), the artist's additions (especially of white traces) represented a type of "making-up" for absence or damage in the appropriated images. Yet even there the gesture of repair occupies an ambiguous position; it is "simultaneously...a displacement and a defacement,...a figuration as well as a disfiguration" (Febredt 16).

Emphasis Mine (fig.3) deals with this theme of damage -- physical and psychic -- particularly as it relates to the female subject. This 1985 work also marks a shift in Gurney's

art away from the "reparative gesture." As Gurney states:

In "Emphasis Mine"...I use images of damaged paintings and text from a woman who's talking about a certain kind of damage that's being done to her, as a woman, as someone who's growing older, and also as someone who's not at home in the world in some sense....I think that piece moves away from reparations. I'd been more involved with reparations when I was taking someone's work and adding to it by making a repair in a certain sense, making a bandage, a healing process....[But] the healing process didn't seem possible for her, because she wasn't aware...of her ability to make that happen (in Doyle 9).

Emphasis Mine is a six-part work, combining visual and verbal codes. The central image consists of a black-and-white photostatted film still from Georges Franju's Judex and pictures a nun stabbing another woman in the back. Gurney has cut the image vertically in half and placed it between coloured photographic details of a damaged landscape painting, itself part of another work called The Damage is Done (1986). Beneath the outer pictures and over the surface of the central image run fragments of text appropriated from Anne Truitt's Daybook, The Journal of an Artist (Gurney qtd.in Rhodes).

Because the notion of presence operates so pervasively in both the discursive constitution and visual representation of women, the body becomes the prime site of inscriptions of femininity. Femininity is mapped on to the topos of the female body. And, in Emphasis Mine, the textual captions and overlays reveal this inscribed body to be a field of physical damage and a source of psychic pain:

'MY LIPS BLISTER HIDEOUSLY, DISFIGURING ME FOR AT LEAST TWO WEEKS. Some part of me wants me to fail,

to reveal my anxiety, actually to wave it like a flag.'

'Life just seems to me irremediably about coping with the physical. YESTERDAY MY HEART POUNDED ALL DAY AND MY LEFT EYE IS JUMPING AND JERKING.'

'The struggle is to hold myself submissive to a process of diminishment. THE OTHER DAY I CAUGHT MY MIRROR IMAGE IN A CASUAL SIDE GLANCE AND SAW TO MY SURPRISE A PERSON OLDER THAN I FEEL.'

'MY SCARIFYING FEVER BLISTER EMBARRASSES ME, BROADCASTING THE FACT THAT I HAVE NOT TAKEN CARE OF MYSELF, MAKING A BID FOR PITY. Really, the waywardness of my weaknesses tires me.'⁵

The upper case announcements of physical damage and disfigurement are contrasted in Gurney's work with the lower case accounts of the woman's emotional response.

That juxtaposition, together with the text's dispersion over images of physical damage, suggest (although by no means conclusively) the position of the feminine subject in Emphasis Mine. The woman's blister seems to signal her failure as a woman, for whom making the best of one's appearance and keeping up appearances are important signs of achievement. But her desire for such failure represents, at best, an ambiguous resistance to hegemonic models of femininity; like the passive resistance of nineteenth century feminine illness, it may situate her in a position of greater weakness, as one who cannot even "manage" herself (Dijkstra 27). Moreover, the shame produced by her blisters reflects her contradictory desire to succeed within the discourse of beauty, the prime index of women's worth.

Within the discourse of beauty, an ideal feminine body is

constructed, of which actual bodies are supposed to become replicas, by means of a variety of beauty practices and products. Yet the formulations of beauty, like other power-knowledge discourses, do not "act directly and immediately on people". Rather, as Foucault writes, they act "'upon their actions.'" The discursive regulation of the subject involves:

'a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it introduces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects' (qtd. in Henriques et al 117).

Hence, becoming "feminine involves learning sets of attitudes and actions conceived and completed upon and through the body" (Lesko 123). As subjects within this discourse, women become technologists whose area of expertise is their own bodies; they become endlessly "'practised and subjected bodies,'" because they can never overcome the flaws which have been constituted by dominant ideals (Bartky 71). Consequently, even as the textual subject desires failure (possibly as a negative form of resistance) and a release from "coping with the physical," she remains acutely conscious of her physical disfigurement and her resulting shame. Her refusal to comply does not, then, represent an absolute rejection of the discursive mapping of her body. Rather, like the protagonist of "The Tattooed Woman," her rebellion (partially) amounts to a bid for attention and pity -- perhaps, as in the story, from the very man who is dissatisfied by her inability to conform

to the dominant constructions of feminine beauty (Engel 9).

Indeed, the mirror, often regarded as a sign of woman's narcissistic vanity (Berger 51), presents an unpleasant and unexpected image to the woman. The text suggests that the woman's aging image is related to the process of diminishment to which she is subject; if beauty is seen as the prime attraction in a woman, and if youth is constituted in dominant society as a vital feature of beauty, then aging seems to be inevitably a process of diminishment -- at least in a woman. The relation between mirror image and subject involves a separation between the woman who does not feel old and the woman whose reflection looks old (Smith 48-49). According to dominant beauty practices, the physical surface which exhibits age must become the object of remedies and rituals meant to remove such traces (and thereby to dis-figure the face). Thus, the positioning of the female subject within the dominant beauty discourse, as she experiences aging and physical disfigurement, produce in her a contradictory subjectivity and a sense of alienation from the body which does not appear as it should.

While the text and the images all signify damage, the relation between the various elements is not immediately obvious. In contrast to Screen (1986; fig.4), the textual narration does not seem to shift reference in Emphasis Mine; it does not appear to be narrated by one of the pictured subjects. Nevertheless, the central divided image may be seen

as an analogous visual representation of the contradictions inscribed at the level of female subjectivity.⁶ On the one hand, a nun is pictured and, on the other, a woman of uncertain (and therefore suspect⁷) character appears. The two women are separated physically by the cut in the photostat, and symbolically by the violence between them. Gurney thereby highlights the division which must be maintained. While the unknown (and threatening) nature of the stabbed woman may be latent in the "virtuous" nun, the former traits must be controlled through discourses of femininity which produce effects of modesty, submission and purity in the feminine subject (Pateman 28). The nun stabs the other woman. Yet the binary split between good woman and (perhaps) bad woman is not overcome through the violent suppression of one half of the couple: there is no synthesis or sublimation in evidence. In fact, in the appropriated film still, the moment of violence is captured and frozen, as an ongoing and unresolved struggle. The image, then, may reflect the conflicting desires of the female subject, to conform to or to reject any hegemonic ideals -- and absolutes -- of femininity.⁸

Finally, the images of damaged women are related to the image of the damaged landscape painting. The textual subject, as both an aging woman and an artist, unites these two streams of damage. According to Gurney:

The photograph seems to give proof of the existence of the object or person that appears there....Painting gives proof not of what appears in the work, but of the existence of the concrete

individual who painted it....A painting can be damaged, yet still endure, like a damaged body. It is linked to the body in a way that photography cannot be, because it is handmade rather than produced technically ("The Surface of Behavior" 35).

The landscape images in Emphasis Mine represent fragments of the original work, mechanical "reflections" of part of the painted surface. In this respect they are analogous to the mirror image that indicates the textual subject's alienation from her own body. Moreover, like the photostat of the two women, the photographs of the damaged painting freeze the image of disrepair and decay. The reparative gesture seems impossible where images of damage and alienation (to/from the body, the painting, the other person) are frozen and mechanically fixed.⁹

Gurney employs a number of similar techniques in her treatment of damage and dissolution in the triptych Screen (1986; fig.4). The central panel of this work contains a film still of a child/woman of uncertain age, taken from Erich von Stroheim's Foolish Wives. The figure is seen from behind a scrim filter which breaks up her image. Two cibachrome photographs, produced from slide images of foliage viewed through a window screen flank the central image. Text from Marguerite Duras' novel The Lover, is split in half and partially repeated over the surfaces of the cibachrome images. The red print reads:

At that time she'd / time she'd just turned
thirty-eight. And the / And the child was
ten. And now, when / now, when she remembers

she's sixteen. / she's sixteen.

Below these images, Gurney has placed three narrow panels which bear photostatic reproductions of the grain and texture of fabric (Gurney qtd. in Grenville).

The title, Screen, may be read in a number of ways. It clearly refers to the literal use of screens and filters in the construction of the images. These filters distance the image and place a type of visual barrier between the viewer and the image-proper that s/he wishes to see -- that is, the "natural" unfiltered object. The prominence of the cross-hatched markings on the outer panels indicates the close proximity of the camera to the window, and implies a sense of entrapment -- of enclosure within the interior space.¹⁰ The girl/woman's mournful look suggests a parallel desire for release -- if not from the indeterminate space she inhabits behind the screen, then from the gaze which freezes and fixes her as its object. Indeed, appropriated from the movie screen, her image is caught in a "freeze-frame" on the screen of Gurney's work.

The filters which interrupt and fragment vision thus represent a certain damage to the pictured subject. The images in all three of the large panels are fragmented and seem to be at the point of dissolution. The picture of the child/woman in particular appears to be defaced as her body is marked with the "flaws" of an unnatural texture. These flaws are picked up by the imperfect variations in the weave of the

fabric details below.

Yet if these faults inscribe the surface of the images, they also imply the distortions of the filters through which we view them. In fact, the flawed image of the child/woman may indicate the faults and shortcomings -- physical, mental and moral -- which are "seen" in women through the "screens" constructed in and by dominant patriarchal discourses (Miller 15). There is no clear passage from the production to the reception of the images; both the creating and the viewing of pictures, particularly those of women, takes place within a culture which inscribes them with particular meanings. Gurney does not represent some ideal object-in-itself, untouched by the mediations and manipulations of culture, but rather the object (and subject) constituted and positioned within dominant society.

Like a number of Gurney's multi-media pieces, Screen also makes use of textual overlays. In dominant media representation:

the addition of a linguistic message to an iconic one (in advertising or in press photos) could act as...an anchorage...By anchorage, [Barthes] means that the text could name and fix the many possible signifieds of the image and thereby guide identification and interpretation (Hutcheon, "Fringe Interferences" 305).

Such has often been the case with dominant media representations of women. Their meaning as signs within patriarchal discourse have been fixed through the combination of visual and verbal (or, in film, narrative) codes.

In this work, the text contains a third-person shifter -- one that, as Bruce Grenville observes, "changes its referent easily," allowing the words from Duras' novel to be seen as referring to von Stroheim's film still. The text focuses attention on the central image; not only can the viewer interpret it as a reference to the female image, but his/her eyes must also pass continually over the central middle panel, simply to read the words. Yet the text plays with time and age, halting it by repetition and destabilizing it by multiple references. In this manner -- unlike advertising copy or film narrative -- the work heightens the ambiguity of the female figure. Is she the woman of thirty-eight, the sixteen-year-old of her memory, or the ten-year-old child? Or is her abstracted and decontextualized image that of Woman -- the enigmatic figure who is inscribed by dominant discourse as timeless and unitary?" By "damaging" and fragmenting the text, Gurney heightens the viewer's "awareness of the surface" and suggests that "language, which is often intended to clarify...is also the site and source of the manipulation of a subject" (Grenville). The ambiguous interplay of verbal and visual codes that make up Screen, like those which constitute the subject in dominant society, thus form "an ideological arena" in which the inscriptions of hegemonic discourse are highlighted and fractured (Nichols 64).

Conclusion

Here, buy my glasses and you'll see the Truth-Me-Myself tell you everything you should know. Put

them on and take a...look...at your body and the body of the other. You see? No? Wait, you'll have everything explained to you....Hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away (Cixous 319).

Janice Gurney's treatment of the female subject focuses on the surface of representation and its relation to the topologizing of women's bodies in society. She indicates the complexities and contradictions of representation, not as transparent index, but as a practice which is always-already constituted in dominant society and which, in turn, produces discursively inscribed subjects. As Gurney writes in "The Surface of Behavior":

I feel that constructing work the way I do helps keep me aware that nothing in our world is stable. Contexts and interpretations of artworks are continually shifting over time....I question the possibility or value of taking a...stance as a "keeper" of a true representation, even of myself (35).

Contrary to most visual representations of women, Gurney's multi-part works resist the notion of presence and undermine the concept of the subject as unitary and non-contradictory. While her art represents a deconstructive more than a reconstructive process, by highlighting and fissuring dominant codes of representation, her work may nevertheless circumvent the discursive systems in which woman-as-sign gains its significations.

2 of/de 2

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

Figure 1

Endnotes

1. This essentialist notion of "presence" is elaborated in Chapter 2, pages 27-28.

2. The red, white and blue overlay may also make an oblique reference to the French flag, as the one defended by Joan of Arc. A number of Gurney's film stills are taken from French films. Alternately (or in addition) the colour overlay may allude to the American flag. If so, it may refer to the dominant discourses, circulated by the entertainment industry, which operate and produce subjects within American culture.

3. In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood describes a similar situation, where Offred, aware of her position as an object of the Commander's gaze, adopts a pose of artlessness: "While I read, the Commander sits and watches me doing it, without speaking but also without taking his eyes off me. This watching is a curiously sexual act, and I feel undressed while he does it. I wish he would turn his back, stroll around the room, read something himself. Then perhaps I could relax more, take my time. As it is, this illicit reading of mine seems a kind of performance" (HT 194). Indeed, as the epigraph to Bodily Harm indicates, Margaret Atwood has read John Berger's Ways of Seeing.

4. The white traces on the nude portrait may be compared to the tattoo on Offred's ankle. The discourses which mark the Handmaid's body for use are upheld by a law which dictates her literal branding with "a Braille" that the Commander can read -- a tattoo which signifies ownership and control (HT 266).

5. These four passages appear under/over the images, from left to right. The capitalization is Gurney's.

6. This image is particularly elusive, so any reading of it is provisional, taking into account the other elements of Emphasis Mine and similar themes in other pieces of Gurney's work.

7. My reading of the stabbed woman as "suspect" is based on her uncertain nature (in other words, an identity not delineated by appearance) and her black costume. The combination of darkness and the unknown is generally read, within dominant society, as threatening and potentially evil.

8. These ideals and absolutes are further confounded, in Gurney's work, by the very fact that it is the nun who is committing the violent act. As in the case of Joan of Arc, it raises the possibility of disguise (the women are, after all, actresses) and deception.

9. Moreover, the painting and the female body are both commodities, the damage to which reduces their "market value" (whether on the art market or on the "meat market").
10. The image of the window as a frame of the exterior world and a barrier between public and private spaces is prominent in the work of another Toronto artist, Christiana Pflug. In her work, the vision of this outside space represents both an enticing promise of freedom and a frightening threat to security (Davis 9).
11. In relation to this construction of unitary and timeless woman, Annette Kuhn writes: "If it is the case that one of the effects of ideology is to make what is cultural and therefore historically variable appear natural and therefore immutable (Barthes, 1973), then a film may be seen to embody a series of ideological operations through which woman is constructed as eternal, mythical and unchanging, an essence or a set of fixed images and meanings, 'a sign within the patriarchal order' (Kaplan 1977)" (Women's Pictures 77).

It is the function of the hero-as-mentor to reveal the "truth" of women's bodies and desires. Harlequin guidelines, for instance, stress that the romance "should fulfil readers' fantasies of ideal love and meet a high moral standard"(Gibson) -- or more particularly, that each sex should adhere to the moral standards applicable to it. Woman's sexuality must be awakened by and described in terms of man's innate sexuality (as set forth in the hegemonic "male sexual drive" discourse) (Nyquist). According to the traditional discourses of femininity within which these women take their places, an independently "passionate woman" cannot be a "good woman" (Henriques et al 220). And, as Alice points out, Harlequin heroines are "good girls with hidden fire" -- hidden, that is, from themselves until it is identified and disclosed by the hero (IL 13).

Indeed, it is no accident that Alice repeatedly refers to the romance heroines as "Harlequin girls"(IL 16). Within the language of the romance, women are constructed as bodies-for-the-other and, as such, they must exhibit the prescribed qualities of beauty and youth. Hence, whereas Alice's age and plump figure disqualify her for the role of ingenue, Anne-Marie's "Grecian goddess"-like beauty fits her to be Peter's new heroine (IL 26). Her "slim, boyish figure" not only attracts the male gaze, it also hints at the presence of an appealingly child-like and malleable nature (for it is generally girls, not women, who have "boyish" figures) (IL 76).

branches of feminist scholarship have attempted to reclaim and valorize the latter terms -- celebrating such things as the disorder and multiplicity contained within women and their bodies -- others have criticized this essentialist position for remaining within discursively inscribed models of difference (Suleiman 14-15).

Like Sexton's poem, Audrey Thomas' writing implies that the multiple discourses of femininity are themselves saturated with historically constructed terms of gender difference. Yet Mrs. Blood and Intertidal Life, as cultural products, do not operate in some neutral or "free" zone outside of dominant discourse. Rather, they operate in the tension, as experienced by their characters, between acceptance of and resistance to dominant constructions of femininity. As Alice asks in Intertidal Life, "'Well, are we ladies or are we only playing ladies?'" (211; emphasis added).¹

Like many of Thomas' novels, Mrs. Blood and Intertidal Life present women at times of intense personal crisis. In the former work, "Mrs. Blood/Mrs. Thing"² suffers a prolonged miscarriage while living with her family in Africa; in the latter, Alice experiences the "death" of her fourteen-year marriage when her husband leaves her. These physical and relational dysfunctions create fissures in the apparently seamless discursive operations which inscribe and position the women; as the smooth functioning of their lives is disrupted, their "identities" as mothers and wives are destabilized.

Thus, while the two novels differ stylistically in many respects, they share a number of thematic concerns, including the construction of gendered subjectivity, the discursive tracing and regulation of bodies, and the resistances offered by women.

After the Romance: Beginning the Story at the End

Of the numerous discourses positioning women, the romance genre is one of the most enduring -- and popular. Harlequin romances, which Alice and her daughter Flora discuss in the frame narrative of *Intertidal Life*³, are characteristic of the most widely-circulated (and profitable) forms of the genre. They rely on formula plots, dependably attractive characters and predictably exotic settings. Nevertheless, they are able to draw the female reader into the story, involving her in the pleasures of the happily-ever-after story. As Flora accuses her mother: "'Oh yes,....You read them too. You can shake your head all you like'" (IL 12).

The romances, at once constituting and constituted by dominant discourses of femininity, rely on the production of desire. Widely "accepted practices of femininity take it for granted that there is status and power attached to being attractive to men" (Hollway 233). Consequently, the heroines -- and the readers who identify with them -- willingly take up "the object position within the male sexual drive discourse" in order to be appealing to men (233). And since the standard trajectory of romantic plots guarantees the desired "marriage

closure", the reader develops an emotional investment in the successful resolution of what are often antagonistic relationships between the heroine and hero.

Yet by desiring that happy ending, the reader is also drawn into accepting the attendant masculine and feminine stereotypes, the production and reinforcement of acceptable female desire, and the ultimate subversion of the heroine's autonomy. Alice notes that "these Harlequin girls" frequently have "careers at the beginning of the book but never at the end. And weak ankles." They are always "twisting their ankles as they [run] through the woods, trying to escape their destiny" (IL 16). Their fate as females is constructed as natural and inexorable; they are destined to find fulfilment within the traditional romantic discourse.

However, in Intertidal Life, Alice identifies her husband's desertion of her with his own desire for "Romance" (IL 88). Rather than taking his position within the "have/hold" discourse of marriage, he seeks to reinhabit his position as the subject of the "male sexual drive" discourse. Peter no longer wants to live after the happy ending; he wants to be reinstated as the hero, to be mysterious, to be the adored mentor of his female students, including Alice's best friends. Nevertheless, Peter cannot operate exclusively within one or the other subject position. He too is doubly inscribed within society. As Alice observes, "'he is torn'" between being husband and hero (IL 206).

It is the function of the hero-as-mentor to reveal the "truth" of women's bodies and desires. Harlequin guidelines, for instance, stress that the romance "should fulfil readers' fantasies of ideal love and meet a high moral standard"(Gibson) -- or more particularly, that each sex should adhere to the moral standards applicable to it. Woman's sexuality must be awakened by and described in terms of man's innate sexuality (as set forth in the hegemonic "male sexual drive" discourse) (Nyquist). According to the traditional discourses of femininity within which these women take their places, an independently "passionate woman" cannot be a "good woman" (Henriques et al 220). And, as Alice points out, Harlequin heroines are "good girls with hidden fire" -- hidden, that is, from themselves until it is identified and disclosed by the hero (IL 13).

Indeed, it is no accident that Alice repeatedly refers to the romance heroines as "Harlequin girls"(IL 16). Within the language of the romance, women are constructed as bodies-for-the-other and, as such, they must exhibit the prescribed qualities of beauty and youth. Hence, whereas Alice's age and plump figure disqualify her for the role of ingenue, Anne-Marie's "Grecian goddess"-like beauty fits her to be Peter's new heroine (IL 26). Her "slim, boyish figure" not only attracts the male gaze, it also hints at the presence of an appealingly child-like and malleable nature (for it is generally girls, not women, who have "boyish" figures) (IL 76).

While these dominant constructions of masculine and feminine sexuality are treated ironically in Alice's self-conscious commentary, her experience throughout the course of Intertidal Life reveals that they are not so easily discarded. Alice and her friends experience sexual desire without it being discovered for them by a man, and they express it in relationships where the traditional sanctions of marriage are not in place, without being represented as impure. Nonetheless, double-standards within emotional and sexual relationships persist. According to Alice, Peter is seen as "a romantic hero" even by his children (IL 181). But while Peter has left Alice for Anne-Marie and still retained his children's acceptance, Alice senses her daughters' disapproval of her own affair with Raven. As a woman and particularly as a mother, Alice occupies positions within a number of conflicting discourses of femininity which mediate against her easy entry into any, more recent, "permissive" discourse (Hollway 234-235).

If Thomas confronts the romantic discourse's mapping of feminine subjectivity, she also reveals the more direct physical inscriptions of male anger and violence that popular romance fiction explains away. The hegemonic discourses of masculinity -- constituting the "real man" as strong, assertive, aggressive, and successful in his pursuits -- consistently appear in the popular romance. Moreover, the

constructions of male sexuality as innate and undeniable often merge with less acceptable discourses of male aggression. As Tania Modleski observes:

Often, punishment [in the romance] miraculously turns into reward: "For an instant she thought he was going to hit her and then, fearfully, realized he was going to do something very different"....The novels perpetuate ideological confusion about male sexuality and male violence, while insisting that there is no problem (they are "very different"). The rapist mentality -- the intention to dominate, "humiliate and degrade," which, as Susan Brownmiller shows, is often disguised as sexual desire -- is turned into its opposite -- sexual desire disguised as the intention to dominate and hurt (42-43).

Male sexuality is therefore described as invading and conquering, only to reveal new (virgin) territory of desire in the heroine (Nyquist).

In Intertidal Life, however, the myth is exploded. When Alice reads Flora "The Princess and the Pea", a fairy tale romance, she reflects that even princesses have to be covered in bruises to prove that they are sensitive enough to marry the prince. Alice even wonders whether "the prince tested her once a year, just to make sure she hadn't toughened up as she got older." In the same context, she reflects on the irony of Peter punching her in the eye to stop her angry denunciations of Anne-Marie, only to confess: "'When I hit you I knew I loved you" (IL 89). In Thomas' novel the narrative strategies employed in the Harlequin are absent. Rather than structuring the hero's contempt or violence as a means by which the heroine is enabled to look towards the fulfilment of her own

desire (Nyquist), Intertidal Life indicates its violation of the woman.

Thomas' novel not only subverts the myths of the popular romance, but it also explores what is unspeakable within the context of the Harlequin -- namely, separation and divorce. In the process, Intertidal Life challenges the popular romances' suppression of feminine resistance. Since resistance is structured within the Harlequin merely as a prelude to the finale union of heroine and hero, it is trivialized and explained away according to other widespread stereotypes: that women's resistance to men's amorous advances results either from their childlike nature or to their "ice goddess"-like coldness (frequently resulting from their "unnatural" absorption in careers) (Nyquist). Instead of reinforcing these constructions of femininity, Thomas denaturalizes them in the context of a marriage break up, and has the "heroine" comment directly on them. Alice complains to her friends that, although Peter initially encouraged her writing, when she became really committed to her work, he said, "'You're cold, you're calling the shots, you're neglecting me'" (IL 174). Alice's experience and reflections thereby challenge the "truth" of romance's constructions of aberrant femininity, as well as the justification they provide for discounting feminine resistance.

Yet Thomas indicates the complexity of resisting the dominant discourses which constitute feminine subjectivity.

While Alice insists on the importance of her work and seeks to create alternative stories for women, her own ways of seeing and behaving often remain within the patterns set forth by her culture. As Carolyn Heilbrun points out, the marriage closure of the romance plot is one of many that women have been taught to desire. For women within patriarchal society, "there always seems to loom the possibility of something being over, settled, sweeping clear the way for contentment. This is the delusion of a passive life" (130).

But the delusion is a seductive one -- and one that women are told to expect, if only they fall smoothly into the niches created for them within dominant culture. Alice's own (half tongue-in-cheek) fantasy of the ideal life represents what is perhaps the "new romantic myth" of femininity: the myth of having it all.

'I want to be with a man, not just any man but the miracle man, and be writing my novel. I want to be free to work six or eight hours a day and then play with my kids and then have supper miraculously appear and the children instantly fall asleep and the nannie look up from her knitting and say, 'Don't worry dears, stay out as long as you like,' and then my man and I go off down the road in the moonlight to make love in the woods' (IL 179).

However, like a number of Canadian women writers -- Margaret Laurence in The Diviners, Marian Engel in Lunatic Villas, and Margaret Atwood in Lady Oracle -- Thomas demonstrates the difficulties and the guilt which accompany women's attempts to satisfy the often-conflicting demands of both old and new discourses of femininity.

Among them is the discourse of the "good wife" -- the position to which, according to the romantic discourse, all normal women should aspire. Like other discourses of femininity, that of the "good wife" is constituted, circulated and transmitted in and through multiple points, including educational institutions, families and the media. The woman's magazine, not unlike the romance novel, is a prime source of its transmission and re-inscription. It too takes its lucrative place within the commodity-exchange system. The woman's magazine not only generates income from its purchasers, but also from its advertisers. It displays those products which the female consumer requires (according to its discursive constructions of desire) to transform her body into a useful "commodity": the efficient homemaker, the model hostess, the attractive and sociable wife (Smith 49; Brooks 139).

It is not surprising that it is as Mrs. Thing -- Isobel's public persona -- that she reflects on the discourses which position her in this social context. Just as Alice makes her ironic but not entirely disengaged observations about the Harlequin in Intertidal Life, so Isobel confronts the ladies' magazines' "well-lighted mythology" in Mrs. Blood (Thomas 66).⁴ From her hospital bed, Isobel examines the magazines' depiction of "Life as it should be lived. Flowers on the dinner table, angostura bitters in the Irish stew ('Sweet tricks with Bitters'), clever things to make your friends for

Christmas" (MB 67). However, displaced from her normal surroundings, Isobel sees the conventional discourses of femininity as artificial and out-of-place; they are defamiliarized and rendered somewhat absurd, both to her and to the reader.

Isobel becomes particularly conscious of her already-mediated body when confronted with an African woman's recreation of herself according to "some image culled from the American ladies' magazines and the ads in the Graphic" (MB 41). She feels uneasy witnessing how Mrs. Maté, the wife of an African official, positions herself within the white Euro-American discourses of femininity that are still privileged in a supposedly post-colonial age. And, as Isobel observes Mrs. Maté with her foreign eyes, she finds the African woman's breaches of Western decorum "'incredibly vulgar'" (MB 41). Even with her frilly nightgowns, wig and cologne, Mrs. Maté cannot be satisfactorily inscribed as a Western woman -- or, within those terms, as a "good wife."

Nor can Isobel, although for somewhat different reasons. While flipping through the magazines' pages she realises that she cannot "live up to this woman or that dress or this complicated recipe" (MB 67). Yet neither can she ignore them. Isobel has a number of investments in her position as Jason's wife -- his love, her acceptance by the other wives, and her own sense of competence as a homemaker -- which generate her desire to take her place within its discursive parameters.

However, Isobel is unable to fully inhabit this subject-position and she is plagued by feelings of guilt over her "decadent" (because neglectful of home, husband and children) confinement to bed (MB 29). She finds the other women's visits uncomfortable and humiliating, for she imagines the ladies as

Vultures who look in the mirror and see only fresh Englishy faces with no-fuss hairdos and the merest touch of lipstick. I hate them and I want to be like them. I want to be brave and competent and healthy. And I want to be a hardy annual, not something wilting on a too thin and bloody stalk (MB 29).

Isobel does not fit in with the other Europeans -- the bringers of civilization, order and progress -- and so she lives, afraid of "Being judged," and alienated from the "Ladies' groups" (MB 154). She feels unable to meet the requirements of the "good wife" and thus identifies her "self" as a failure.

If Isobel sees her alienation as resulting from her failure to have a strong body which is willing and able to perform the proper duties of the "good wife," Alice feels inept because she does too many things, and does not devote herself sufficiently to Peter. She recalls that, before their separation, Peter sometimes went off by himself while she stayed at home, cooking, reading to the children, writing her novel and slowly getting a degree (IL 165). But after Peter leaves, she goes through a litany of guilt and regret, chastening herself for not being tender, gentle or loving

enough (IL 80). In Alice's eyes, the failure of her marriage indicates primarily her own failure as a "good wife."

Indeed, according to dominant culture, it is the wife's job to keep the husband happy; if he is not satisfied (by all the means recommended in the ladies' magazines), then it is only "natural" for him to seek his pleasures elsewhere. Only gradually does Alice realise that she has viewed Peter as the ideal husband ("superior, so much more 'civilized' than I was") and mentor ("judging...that I didn't live up to the ideal housewife or ideal mother or ideal lover"), and that she has consequently judged herself wanting by failing to measure up to his real or imagined expectations (IL 209). She has been thoroughly inscribed by the discourse of the "good wife" and is quite capable of judging herself according to its dictates; she is the self-regulating subject of her discursively mapped position.

In a similar fashion, Alice takes her place within the dominant discourse of motherhood while self-consciously commenting on her position within it. She takes great pleasure in her children; she enjoys reading to them, playing with them, and caring for them. And, like most "good mothers," Alice worries about her daughters, particularly after the separation. Nevertheless, she realises that she is marked as "mother" -- identified according to her function and her relationship to her offspring -- just as she is marked as "wife." She reflects:

Who can see the "other" in mother? Calling the school for so many years -- "Hello, this is Hannah's mummy." "This is Anne's mummy" -- to make identification easier for the teacher. All wrapped up in her family (IL 136).

In fact, she sometimes feels "wrapped up" in another sense, as a "mummy" embalmed by the needs and demands of her family (IL 136).

Alice, like Isobel in Blown Figures, also resents the discourses of femininity which de-sexualize the "good mother." According to traditional, and particularly nineteenth-century discourses of motherhood, the good woman was not meant to desire or seek sexual pleasure from her marriage, but rather to find her fulfilment in bearing and rearing children (Henriques et al 221). As mother, the good woman is supposed to switch her attention from her husband to her children (IL 161). Such traditional discourses of motherhood have not disappeared; Peter continues to see women as occupying the position of either lover or mother -- or at least as occupying them successively. Alice, however, wants to occupy positions within the romantic and the familial discourses simultaneously, and Peter's reaction to her as "mother" upsets her. She says to her friends that the moment she became a mother, Peter was no longer able to love her romantically. In his eyes, the movement from "couple" to "family" meant that they had to "get on with it. Life, don't you know. First act's over, now we're into the heavy stuff" (IL 154). Thus Alice expresses her resentment of the discourses of femininity

which inscribe and regulate her body in a unitary fashion while her own subjectivity and desires have been constituted within multiple discourses. Her body is mapped out as "mother", but these discursive tracings fail to erase the other inscriptions of femininity that mark and locate Alice in society.

The Medicalization of the Feminine Body

In Mrs. Blood, Isobel's position as a mother in the process of miscarrying her child makes her the object of somewhat different discursive practices.⁵ She becomes the object of a set of discourses which developed in the eighteenth century with the "hysterization" of women's bodies. These medico-social discourses involved

a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed -- qualified and disqualified -- as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it; whereby, finally, it was placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element), and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education): the Mother, with her negative image of "nervous woman," constituted the most visible form of this hysterization (Foucault, HofS 104; emphasis added).

The social relations which create and are created by such discourses extend their operations in diverse forms through multiple channels. The medicalized feminine body, for instance, requires perpetual observation and regulation in

order to avert the ever-present dangers of illness or disease. In fact, it is not only during her miscarriage that Isobel becomes a subject of medical discourse. The knowledge that Dr. Biswas uses to observe, diagnose and regulate Isobel's body is paralleled, at another level, by her own mother-in-law. Conscious of all the things that could go wrong with the baby if Isobel fails to control her behaviour in a manner appropriate to her "condition," Jason's mother vigilantly watches over her and repeatedly intervenes in her activities with the warning: "'I don't know if you should do that.'" And Isobel, "like a good girl" -- and like a good mother -- regulates her activities accordingly (MB 69).

The more explicit medicalization of Isobel's body during her miscarriage retains traces of the late nineteenth century "rest cure" for nervous women. According to the constructions of this feminine disease, women naturally tend to be overly emotional and thereby to jeopardize their physical endurance. They are consequently instructed to dominate their emotions and to avoid any loss of self-control (Bassuk 143). In a similar fashion, the medical treatment of Isobel's body involves confinement to bed and repeated instructions to remain calm, to be brave, to resist fear. When Dr. Biswas enquires whether Isobel is experiencing any physical pain she must struggle to master her stronger emotional pain:

I weep quickly behind the plastic screens before Esther and Alexandria can come to pull them back. And the pain of my self-pity is a terrible thing about which Dr. Biswas, intellectual, mystical,

Indian, male, will never understand. He is right. We must stick to the patterns. Big girls don't cry. Madame must not cry in the presence of the natives. I put on my lipstick like an old-fashioned district commissioner dressing carefully for dinner in the jungle (MB 91).

More than physical discomfort, then, Isobel feels "a dull ooze of fear" that "spreads through [her] arms and legs until it finally stops somewhere behind [her] tongue" (MB 90). In effect, her fear and the doctor's disapproval of excess "emotionalism" stops her tongue and keeps her silent. Her disordered body is disciplined and controlled, according to the intervention of medical observation and advice. As Isobel notes, even the plastic curtains around her bed serve to contain her pain and the bloody signs of her body's disorder; only after she is "swabbed and scrubbed and clean-toothed" are they opened for the "masquerade of order" to begin (MB 15).

Moreover, frustrated and irritated by her poor health, Isobel observes that she is like "some neurotic semi-invalid in the best ladies' magazine story tradition" and that all she needs "is the bedjacket and a couple of bottles of medicine on the end table" to complete the picture (MB 137). Here she expresses the long-standing elision of physical and mental illness in women, for Isobel compares herself not simply to an ill woman but to "some neurotic."

Indeed, in the medicalization of femininity, there is a marked tendency for the line between physical and mental illness to be blurred. "Represented as possessing" bodies that are "over-present, unavoidable, in constant sympathy with

the emotional and mental faculties," women are situated "just outside the boundaries of the...mind/body dualism" (Doane 153). And, as women inhabit that ambiguous territory between nature/disorder/body and culture/order/mind, their malady is frequently written over both physical and mental "spaces". Hysteria remains the example par excellence of this process. According to the traditional medical practices within which hysteria is essentialized, the "illness" is "assimilated to a body as a site of the feminine, outside discourse" (Rose 129). The hysterical body of femininity becomes both the source and the manifestation of illness. Thus, in the eyes of both Dr. Biswas and Jason, Isobel's physical illness places her simultaneously on the border of mental breakdown. Nevertheless, this boundary must rest unspoken in the hope that it will remain uncrossed.

Isobel, too, fears that the barrier between physical and mental breakdown will be shattered if she expresses her feelings, if she loosens her control. She regulates her own body according to the rules established within medical discourse, which still position women as potential hysterics. Isobel tells herself that she must not cry, for if she starts, she "will be carried to a place far worse than this" -- presumably a mental asylum (MB 36). Similarly, as Mrs. Blood, she associates her pregnancy-induced "solitary confinement" with the confinement of madwomen in an asylum where she worked as a teenager (MB 198). Pregnancy, illness, and mental

breakdown blur together in her own mind and she fears that Jason, who has so frequently shaken his head at her "vague fears and various minor aches," will "shake his head for this ultimate disgrace" and desert her (MB 36). There are clear incentives, then, for controlling her emotion; if Isobel becomes an "hysteric", as she fears, she will be unfit to be either the "good wife" or the "good mother" that she (sometimes) wishes to be.

Thomas implies, however, that part of Isobel's instability results from her transgressive relation to dominant discourses of feminine sexuality. Many of her recollections deal with past sexual encounters, particularly those involving her former lover, Richard. In them, Isobel's remembered experience and expression of sexual desire do not conform to the standard practices of her youth; she does not behave solely as the object of the male sexual drive discourse, or as the "good" (modest) woman of the corresponding romantic discourse. As Mrs. Blood recalls, even Richard commented that she was "'very shy about everything but sex'" (MB 73). In this sense, Isobel's sexuality is constituted within socio-medical discourse as "unladylike", "unnatural" and potentially pathological. Indeed, for the medicalized body of Western society, "sexuality" -- and particularly any aberration of it -- "runs the risk at one and the same time of being in itself an illness and of inducing illnesses without number" (Foucault P/K 191).

Mrs. Blood makes a similar connection between sexuality and madness. She recalls the medicalization of women's sexuality within the mental asylum, notably the chastisement of a pathological/promiscuous woman dubbed "Jezebel." ⁶ Following the birth of her illegitimate child, the director of the institution shouted at the woman: "'You're not insane, you're just promiscuous!'" The narrator, on the other hand, objected that Jezebel "wouldn't have anything to do with the baby, you know, so she must have been crazy, musn't she?" (MB 158). Madness is seen in the context not only of sexual but also of maternal "perversity." And here, as the reader learns on the last page of the novel, Isobel has also transgressed. Her attempts to inhabit the position of "good mother" are continually undermined by the repressed memory of an earlier abortion: "'Get rid of it,' he said" (MB 220). Thus, in light of Freud and Breuer's well-known claim that "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (in Doane 163), Mrs. Blood's narrativization of memory or, rather, of selected memories is perhaps telling. Her various recollections may be seen as screens for the more painful -- and "incriminating" -- memory of her abortion (Bernheimer 11; Kahane 21; Flax 95).

Although, in The Handmaid's Tale, Offred's memory aids resistance by allowing her to inhabit alternate (albeit perilous) subject positions, in Mrs. Blood Isobel seems unable to negotiate the contradictions in her subjectivity. Within the context of her physically and emotionally painful

miscarriage, the guilt which attended her earlier transgressions -- her multiple violations of the dominant discourses of femininity -- resurfaces in her memory. In fact, Isobel convinces herself that "the gods" are punishing her for such feminine deviance (MB 103).

Yet, while Isobel is situated within medical discourses of femininity -- both as she experiences them in the African hospital and as she remembers them from the American asylum -- she does not become the subject of any specifically psychoanalytic discourse within the text. In this sense, Mrs. Blood differs significantly from other fictional treatments of the medicalized body. Mary Ann Doane, for instance, notes that in the "woman's films" of the nineteen-forties, the female body becomes

a manuscript to be read for the symptoms which betray her story, her identity. Hence the need, in these films, for the figure of the doctor as reader or interpreter, as the site of a knowledge which dominates and controls female subjectivity. A scenario of reading is provided within the films themselves, a hermeneutics of pathology which requires that the body approximate a two-leveled text [from which the doctor can read the interior's "truth"] (157).

In Mrs. Blood, however, Isobel is the only narrator/interpreter of her own experience; neither a doctor nor a psychiatrist determines for the reader the truth of Isobel's physical/mental disturbance.

This is not to say, of course, that hers is an unmediated interpretation arriving at the truth of her identity. Thomas does not write of some essential self, connected with the

female body, as some critics have suggested (in Godard 21,23). Although Isobel's reminiscences often dwell on sensual physical detail and sexual experience, those memories also relate to her past as a subject in society. Isobel's sense of "identity" is constructed within a complex of often conflicting social and medical discourses -- a network of contradictory inscriptions which she is unable to reconcile or unify. And, whereas normative social practices construct the model of the mature, unitary individual (Henriques et al 225), Thomas' narrative strategy highlights the division within what is supposed to be Isobel's unified personality. As the very first line of the novel announces: "Some days my name is Mrs. Blood; Some days it's Mrs. Thing....things here aren't always what they seem to be and one must behave accordingly. Or try to" (MB 11). The text, then, remains deliberately unresolved; it neither presents the multiplicity of the subject as an essence of woman's nature (whether for good or ill), nor offers a "cure" for the painful situation in which Isobel finds herself.

Who Draws the Maps?: Navigating Colonialist Discourses

It may be argued that the alignment of women with nature (blood, the moon, Africa) in Mrs. Blood and Intertidal Life, remains problematic within the context of traditional patriarchal discourse. Nevertheless, it seems less that Thomas is seeking to write of a natural, unmediated female body, than that she is presenting her characters as

negotiating the tensions between traditional and alternative constructions of femininity. And, particularly in the latter novel, Thomas situates women not only as subjects constituted and operating within dominant social discourses, but also as cultural producers.

In both novels, women's blood -- the blood associated with their natural reproductive functions -- assumes a prominent position. And in Intertidal Life women's blood becomes a sign for an almost mystical connection between women. Alice describes her daughters and friends as "Eve's sisters....connected like some vast archipelago....Connected by femaleness and by blood and by the moon" (IL 92). However, the rest of the novel repeatedly undermines this vision of natural womanhood. Thomas foregrounds the discourses of femininity, such as the romance, which these "Eve's" inhabit in relation to their "Adam's." Moreover, she reveals the tensions which erupt between the women, and shatters any utopian notions of ideal female unity.

In Mrs. Blood, Isobel associates the female body with the country surrounding her and its overripe vegetation. As Mrs. Blood she makes these connections in almost surreal terms, suffusing the landscape with a menacing female sexuality:

The woman is the Venus flytrap, tinted a mordant pink, mouth open wide to catch the unsuspecting guest.

But who is to blame? She did not ask him to be enamoured of her scent. And this land too is female and open and deadly. There is always the warm sticky smell of charcoal on the air, like dried blood, and the flowers wait with swollen lips

for you to stumble against them in the dark (MB 107).

But if Isobel identifies herself with Africa, it is in terms of its alien and threatening qualities -- the sexuality which, in her state of extreme physical and mental strain, has come to be associated with her treacherous body and its "punishment." And, as she repeatedly acknowledges, Isobel continues to see the African land and culture with alien Western eyes. When she is disturbed by the noisiness of the hospital and thinks of "Stanley Park Zoo," Isobel feels "ashamed and frightened" for thinking "such a cruel nonliberal thought" (MB 38); she recognizes how her own "cultured" view of the Africans aligns them with a lower order, with "nature." Thus, while Isobel associates her body with nature, she does so chiefly as it manifests itself as alien in its illness. Her body is both threatening and threatened, like the land around her.

Like Atwood and Gurney, Thomas uses the metaphor of the body as topos to examine its position as always-already mapped and coded within dominant culture. The discursive maps according to which the feminine body is inscribed and read are, like literal ones, instruments of power and knowledge (Foucault P/K 74). Thomas highlights this connection between women in patriarchy and colonized subjects. Both groups are positioned in relation to those who, because of their colour or gender, represent what is "true" and "normal" -- those who are, for the most part, the makers or sustainers of the

hegemonic discursive maps (Janeway 5).

In Mrs. Blood, Isobel muses on the problem of colonization and the position of women within this imperial project. She perceives certain parallels between Africans and women in (neo)colonial/patriarchal society. Yet, as the only white woman in the hospital, Isobel is extremely conscious of her own position as Other. She acknowledges that one "must have an attribute which is generally recognized as superior" - as the neo-colonials have in their skin-colour and cultural backgrounds -- for "difference" to be advantageous (MB 78). Moreover, she sees the double colonization of African women as being exemplified by Mrs. Mate's determined entry into the privileged position of the Westernized African, and its specific discourses of femininity. Mrs. Mate's body is thereby written-over with a number of conflicting codes, which manifest themselves in her inconsistency in maintaining any of them -- her lapses into "vulgarity."

Isobel also notes, with some irony, what she considers to be the inconsistency of Jason's "liberal" views. While attending a birthday party Isobel observes that all the supplies have been brought by her hostess from "home." She thinks "I know, I am not a practical person but why did Jason not consider these things?" and she concludes that it is because he thought this to be "'The woman's role.'" Nevertheless, Isobel speculates that Jason will see this "English" display, like other signs of colonialism, as "all

wrong -- a transference of the old environment rather than assimilation of the new" (MB 140). But although Jason can see the problems of traditional colonialist discourses in this unfamiliar land, he remains blind to the patriarchal discourses which operate so smoothly in his own culture.

Thomas implies that this process of discursive mapping operates at the very level of language. According to one of Isobel's recollected newspaper clippings:

LANGUAGE COLONIZED THEM.

Mr. Fagg asserted that Africans were influenced by the language of the country which colonized them. For example, the French-speaking African was rhetorical while the English-speaking African was pragmatic in expressing views on a problem (MB 120).

While the reductiveness of the journalistic argument is humorous, within the context of Thomas' examinations of subjectivity it accurately suggests the connection between language, knowledge, power and the subject. Lorna Irvine argues that Thomas' narratives "emphasise gender and articulate, from the perspective of female characters, their sense of physical dispossession" thereby encouraging "overt representations of their own [feminine] spaces" (25). However, it must be recognized that such representations still operate in relation to the dominant discursive formulations which are constructed and circulated in language -- even if that relationship is oppositional. Likewise, in repossessing women's physical spaces, men are not laying claim to an unmediated natural body, but one which is always-already

mapped as a site within the gender system (Gabriel 11).

In Intertidal Life Thomas explicitly connects the discursive mapping of the body with its production as possession. Alice tells Flora that she and her girlfriends used to tape their boyfriends' initials on their backs while suntanning, so that when they removed the tape they were "branded" (IL 10-11). They were literally and visibly marked as bodies-for-the-other, as subjects/objects within a romantic discourse. On reflection, Alice does not see her position as Peter's wife as being very much different. She protests:

Women have let men define them, taken their names even, with marriage, just like a conquered or newly settled region, British Columbia, British Guiana...etcetera. I really understand all those African nations taking new names with their independence, names that relate to their racial history (IL 171).

It is perhaps not such a great leap, in terms of the use and implications of naming, from the designations "Flora's mother, Hannah's mother, Anne's mother, Peter's ex-wife" to those of Martha, Wife, and Handmaid (Of-Whomever) (IL 14). Function and relation remain key to understanding the "identity" of a woman; and in each case, Alice's functional/relational title clearly indicates the subject- position which she occupies.

However, while Alice muses on the adventures of the explorers she reads about in A Spanish Voyage to Vancouver, she considers the possibilities of being a woman and an adventurer. She wonders whether women would have behaved any differently from men, had they been sailing the ships and

"discovering" the lands all those years ago. In her conclusion ("Probably not. It probably 'ouldn't have made any difference whatsoever. And yet" [IL 15]), Alice resists the temptation to idealize women while holding on to the possibility that the new voyages of discovery can be otherwise-written. As she later declares: "what's happening to men and women today is just as exciting and terrifying" as the historic discoveries, but "we all need new maps, new instruments to try and fix our new positions" (IL 171). Similarly, Alice recognises that the quest narratives which are fixed in language, in culture, and in the literary canon, posit a solitary male hero. Nowhere does one find a quester who is accompanied by three children, a cat and a dog (IL 141) -- except in Alice's own writing, where she attempts, often painfully, to re-topologize the site of the feminine body.

The very structure of Intertidal Life suggests the new course which Alice is trying to chart in relation to her society. The notebook in which she pours out her anger, her insights, and the details of daily life, makes up a large portion of the text. It resembles, on the one hand, a traditional genre of women's writing: the journal containing personal details and accounts of domestic life (perhaps like the wives left at home by the intrepid explorers of the past). Indeed, as Susan Gubar writes:

Like Kafka's victim in "The Penal Colony," women have had to experience cultural scripts in their lives by suffering them in their bodies....For the artist, this sense that she is herself the text

means that there is little distance between her life and her art. The attraction of women writers to personal forms of expression like letters, autobiographies, confessional poetry, diaries, and journals points up the effect of a life experienced as an art or an art experienced as a kind of life (251-2).

On the other hand, Alice's "commonplace book" may be compared to the logbook in which the ship's captain recorded both the everyday workings of the ship and the new adventures of discovery. Alice offers her resistance from within (and in response to) the cultural space she inhabits, as she charts and navigates the treacherous waters of new relationships and her own partial repositioning as a female subject in dominant society.

Thus, if Thomas foregrounds the comparison of women with colonized lands and their subjects in both Mrs. Blood and Intertidal Life, in the latter novel she also associates them with explorers and adventurers. While women might be aligned with nature, according to many patriarchal discourses, they are also, in Intertidal Life, cultural producers. Thomas mediates the patriarchal nature/culture split according to which "woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life," while man asserts "his creativity externally, 'artificially,' through the medium of technology and symbols"(Ortner 75). As a writer, Alice takes her place in a position traditionally associated with the male subject (IL 21-2, 173). She re-situates herself within dominant discourse and insists that this new position be acknowledged. When she

notices that the divorce papers read "'Peter Hoyle, teacher' and underneath, 'Alice Hoyle, housewife'" she re-writes her occupation as "'Writer'" and demands that the document be changed (IL 156-7). As both mother and novelist, Alice's creativity spans the traditional gender divide between natural and cultural production -- between creating perishable humans and "eternal, transcendant" art (Ortner 75).

Conclusion: Writing and/as Resistance

In both Mrs. Blood and Intertidal Life, Thomas uses a variety of techniques -- defamiliarization, irony, revision of male texts and, occasionally, didactic expository -- to foreground and challenge a number of discourses which inscribe and position women in dominant society. Mrs. Blood may be seen, in this light, as a successful exploration of Isobel's failure to negotiate or revise the multiple discourses which inscribe and position her, a situation paralleling her "failure" to give birth to a living child. Her experience, as well as Alice's, also indicates the "resistance to change which is involved in the production, fixing and channeling of power-desire relations" (Henriques et al 223). Given women's investments in the subject positions they occupy, change is often experienced as painful loss, as Alice's notebook clearly attests.

However, particularly in Intertidal Life, Thomas writes of women who are "neither totally powerful nor powerless, but fragmentary and positioned and repositioned from one moment to

the next" (Henriques et al 225). While Alice sees herself as a powerless victim following Peter's departure (while chastising herself with the words, "'Alice, there are no victims'"), she gradually comes to realize that this is not entirely so (IL 80). She recognises herself as "'Alice Hoyle: 1000 Interlocking Pieces" (IL 158) -- pieces which are diversely and sometimes conflictually inscribed, more or less powerful according to how they are situated within the web of discourse. Like Joan Foster in Lady Oracle, Alice comes to recognize that she will "never be a tidy person" (Atwood 345).

Endnotes

1. All subsequent references to Intertidal Life will appear as IL, followed by the page number.
2. The central female character, alternately identified as Mrs. Blood and Mrs. Thing, is not "named" in Mrs. Blood. However, the novel represents the middle book in a loose trilogy including Real Mothers and Blown Figures, in each of which the protagonist is called Isobel. I will therefore take the liberty of referring to Mrs. Blood/Mrs. Thing as Isobel, for the sake of economy.
3. In "A Fine Romance, My Dear, This Is," Audrey Thomas notes that she began reading Harlequin novels during the writing of Intertidal Life (5).
4. All subsequent references to Mrs. Blood will be appear as MB, followed by the page number.
5. It should be noted that in Intertidal Life there are also references to the medicalization of Alice's body. The episodes related in the frame narrative indicate that Alice will be having an operation at the end of the summer. Alice recalls what is possibly a miscarriage, reminiscent of Isobel's (as described in Blown Figures). Finally, there is an ironic inversion in Alice's experience of psychiatric care: when Alice tells the doctor that all of Peter's new lovers have been her friends, he responds, "'Well,...I'd say he had a neurosis -- except that he isn't suffering'" (247; emphasis added). However, these episodes are not elaborated in the text and I shall concentrate on Isobel's experience in Mrs. Blood.
6. It is hardly surprising that this woman shares the name "Jezebel" with The Handmaid's Tale's socially and sexually deviant women.

CHAPTER FIVE

B(e)aring the Marks of Culture: The Feminine Body in Geneviève Cadieux's Multi-Media Art

"Joan" often made me think of those great theatrical machinae of the Renaissance which combined all the resources of the greatest geniuses of trompe d'oeil and of perspective manipulated a thousand times and never twice in the same way. Dear love, I actually feel that your inimitable genius for the facade has even brought about (at my expense) a certain distanciation (is it real or illusory?). I feel like nothing so much as a distorted effigy which, never having been seen obliquely (i.e. from the proper angle) remains forever a distorted image.

--Hubert Aquin, Blackout (Trou de mémoire) (103)

In Trou de Mémoire, Hubert Aquin plays with problems of perspective, experimenting with narratives which not only reveal divergent points-of-view, but which construct completely contradictory stories around the absent character, Joan. Like a hall of mirrors, the stories refract and multiply in an infinite regression. Ambiguity dominates the novel, for the narrators' memories cannot be connected nor can the pieces be assembled into a "satisfying whole." It is probably no accident, then, that one of Geneviève Cadieux's recent works bears the title Trou de mémoire, la beauté inattendue (1988). Like Aquin, Cadieux plays with the issues of proportion and perspective, particularly as they relate to the representation of the female subject. Thus, while the artist denies that her work contains any particular feminist message (Pontbriand, "Peintres" 14), her manipulation of

dominant representation necessarily involves her in explorations of the place of women's bodies in contemporary art and society.

Artistic Practice and Signifying Strategies

Cadieux's work generally takes the form of installations in which she combines cinematic, photographic, and sculptural elements. In installation art, the exhibition site, with its particular spatial and architectural features, is taken into account in the artist's construction of the work.¹ As well, the viewer "is physically or metaphorically integrated into the work" and his or her spatial and temporal relations to it are "quite directly controlled" (Johnstone 49). Cadieux takes full advantage of this feature, carefully determining the size and arrangement of the parts of her works in order to manipulate and defamiliarize the viewer's perspectives on familiar images and scenes. As in Janice Gurney's work, these images often have the appearance of being appropriated directly from the realm of dominant culture. But, unlike Gurney's, many of them are actually "staged" by the artist -- using her actress sister as model -- to simulate film, television or advertising visuals. In this manner, Cadieux foregrounds the processes by which actual female subjects adopt the gestures and poses made available to them through dominant representational practices. As well, she destabilizes such processes by emphasizing the images' status as re-enactments of already-acted "roles".

Cadieux's work resists what Annette Kuhn describes as illusionism. Illusionist representation conceals the processes and strategies of signification, using "codes of transparency" to disguise it as the neutral reflection of a monolithic and pre-existent reality. Moreover, the viewer-image relations inherent in such "realist" representation (identification and closure, for instance), position the viewer as unitary, non-contradictory, and passive in relation to the image's signification process (Women's Pictures 157). Photography constitutes the medium of much illusionist representation, for it most closely resembles a true and unmediated picture of the world. As the dominant medium in her oeuvre, however, Cadieux constructs the photographic image so that it resists such a comfortable reading. Together with much recent criticism, her work suggests that:

photography is not a unified and stable ontological object: it is not a thing-in-itself. Rather, the processes and products of photography are historically constituted within incomplete and unstable conjunctures of power and knowledge. There is no inherent origin for the utility or truth of the medium: it finds its import and signification elsewhere, within overlapping systems of material and historical events (Seaton 41).

Like Aquin's textual strategies, Cadieux's visual treatment of the processes of popular image-production -- cropping, enlarging, fragmenting and juxtaposing images -- brings about "a certain distancing." Her work estranges the viewer from its images. And, unlike illusionist cinema or photography, Cadieux's installations require the spectator to take an

active and critical look at representation -- not in a vacuum, but in relation to the multiple and overlapping social discourses which inform it.

Adorning the Surface: Fashion and the Feminine Body

Among the discourses of femininity which Cadieux addresses, fashion figures prominently. The discourse of fashion saturates contemporary Western society, from its visual and textual representations in magazines, on television, and in advertising to its material practice on the disciplined bodies of women. The clothing, cosmetics, and hairstyles that women wear are coded along gender, as well as class and ethnic lines. They effectively situate their wearers within a society where coded bodies are continuously circulated and read by the knowing gaze of others (Smith 42). In this sense, "femininity is an artifice, an achievement, 'a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh'" (Butler qtd. in Bartky 64).

In both L'Inconstance du désir (1988, fig.5) and The Shoe at Right Seems Much Too Large (1986, fig.6), Cadieux indicates this relation of women to fashion by placing fragmented or blurred female figures in close proximity to high-heeled shoes. L'Inconstance du désir is made up of two inter-related photographic and sculptural elements. The base of the structure is made of poured concrete replicating a rough city sidewalk. On it stand two delicate, pearl-white porcelain

shoes. Rising vertically from the back of the sidewalk is a large black photograph. In its lower right-hand corner there appears a ghostly image of feet, blurred by a photographic double-exposure. The feet are covered by a plate of glass whose edges have been ground to create a frame. The sidewalk and the backdrop are arranged so that the reflections of the shoes in the glass coincide with the image of the feet (Pontbriand, Geneviève Cadieux 74).² Indeed, the partial image of the body implies a gendered subject primarily by its relation to such fashionable apparatus.

Cultural practices such as the encasing of female feet in high-heeled shoes are not instituted as a result of natural and pre-existent desires or beauty norms -- witness, for instance, the dramatic changes in fashion throughout the centuries. Rather, any consideration of fashion involves an examination of "relations of power and their articulation at the level of the body, a body intimately connected to society, but which is neither prior to it, not totally determined by it" (Sawchuk 62). Despite their fragility, the shoes in L'Inconstance du désir are clearly associated with the material practices of society; they are commodities which, according to prevailing fashion discourses, must be purchased and worn in order to transform a woman into the ideal body of femininity. The shoes' reflective palimpsest on the feet highlights the cultural inscriptions and overlays on the female body. The feet, while pictured as disembodied and

almost ethereal, do not escape the operations of the discourse of fashion; they are identified, marked and positioned as belonging to a gendered subject on whose body a host of related discourses converge. L'Inconstance du désir makes the explicit connection between desire and the positioning of women within the discourse and discipline of mainstream fashion. Foucault observes that these discursive formations help to produce and channel women's desire through complex power-knowledge relations (P/K 59; Henriques et al 223). And, as the work of Atwood, Gurney and Thomas suggests, there are certain incentives associated with discourses of femininity which make it desirable for women to inhabit them. By knowing how to make-up and make-over her body, the feminine subject acquires a certain competence in the discipline of fashion and beauty. This knowledge, in turn, gives the subject a certain limited power within society: namely, the ability to attract men. And, within dominant discourses of femininity, this achievement is constituted as supremely desirable (Hollway 241-42). It may be, then, that the position of the feet in relation to the shoes suggests the woman's desire to put them on -- to take her place within the discourse of fashion.

In this respect, Cadieux's porcelain shoes invite comparisons with Cinderella's glass slippers. Chantal Pontrbiand notes this visual allusion but goes on to state that "[s]hoes invoke the uniqueness of those they belong to

and...take on the characteristics of the wearer's physical identity, becoming, with use, like a second skin" (Geneviève Cadieux 74). However, this reading seems to neglect the artist's deliberate use of porcelain, not leather, shoes. The shoes in L'Inconstance du désir do not stretch to fit the wearer. Rather, the wearer must to be made-over to fit the shoes and the ideal feminine body they represent.³ The practices associated with the discourse of fashion form:

part of the process by which the ideal body of femininity...is constructed; in doing this, they produce a "practiced and subjected" body, that is, a body on which an inferior status has been inscribed....The "art" of make-up [like fashion] is the art of disguise, but this presupposes that a woman's face, unpainted, is defective (Bartky 71).

In order to become the object of the prince's love and desire, Cinderella must be transformed from "scullery maid" to "princess" by means of the disciplines of fashion and beauty. In fact, the discourses of fashion and romance meet where the female body becomes a specular object, designed for the male gaze. It is by means of this physical transformation, that women's deepest desires for their "prince" may be satisfied -- or so the romance story goes.⁴ Yet as Cadieux's title states, such feminine desire is inconstant and unstable. In L'Inconstance du désir, the hovering feet also imply the subject's uncertainty about donning the "glass slippers" and taking her place within the associated discourses of femininity. What is the cost of making the shoes fit? If the dominant fashion discourse constitutes the feminine body as a

specular object -- as a body-for-the-other whose primary function is to become an object of masculine desire -- it contradicts other social discourses within which women take their places. The porcelain shoes contrast with the concrete sidewalk, but this juxtaposition is a familiar one; it recalls the many working women who walk the city streets each day in their impractically high-heeled shoes.

In contemporary Western culture, most women work within the public sphere. As such, they are ostensibly constituted as productive rather than re-productive or passive bodies. Operating within traditionally male preserves (at least when they occupy professional or managerial positions), working women are situated within multiple and contradictory discourses. While occupying such "masculine" positions, women retain the inscriptions -- physically, in their appearance, and psychically, in their desires -- of long-established discourses of femininity. In this sense, Cadieux's work recalls another cultural metaphor for women's contradictory desires, amidst pressures to occupy unitary subject positions: the dance of the "Red Shoes" (Gabriel 25-26). In Atwood's words, the moral of this fairy tale/movie is that the real red shoes are "the feet punished for dancing. You [can] dance or you [can] have the love of the good man", but you cannot have both (Lady Oracle 336).⁵ L'Inconstance du désir, then, implies a similar state of conflicting desires that the character, Joan Foster, describes in Lady Oracle:

What a shame...how destructive to me [are] the attitudes of society, forcing me into a mold of femininity that I [can] never fit....Very true, very right, very pious. But it's not so simple. I [want] those things, that fluffy skirt, that glittering tiara. I [like] them (Atwood 102).

The signification of the contrasting visual and sculptural elements in Cadieux's work remains elusive, resisting didacticism. Nonetheless, the piece clearly implies the conflicts and ambivalences that operate at the very level of women's desire -- conflicts constructed by the contradictory discourses within which women take their places.

The Shoe at Right Seems Much Too Large (fig.6) also raises questions about the places women occupy within dominant discourses of femininity. Describing the origins of the piece, Cadieux has said:

Pour établir la relation entre le corps et l'esprit, je voulais une image neutre, et j'ai trouvé cette radiographie colorée d'un squelette. Plus tard, j'ai constaté que le squelette était celui d'une femme parce qu'il se tenait debout sur le bout des pieds. Ce n'était plus une image neutre et j'ai décidé de continuer dans la même sens avec l'autre photo (qtd. in "Geneviève Cadieux: 'Ca ne change rien'").

Indeed, finding neutral and uncoded images of the female body is an impossibility within dominant culture and its representational practices (Doane 218). The Shoe at Right... is composed of three large, back-lit images which dominate a darkened room. Against one wall stand two light boxes displaying full-length representations: on the left, a tomogram⁶ pictures a female figure balanced on her toes and, on the right, a shadowy silhouette shows a woman in a similar

pose, feet poised above a pair of high-heeled shoes. Against the opposite wall, facing these images, stands a much-enlarged and heavily-framed monochrome photograph of a pair of male eyes. This image is also lit from behind, but its gaze is broken up and made somewhat uncertain by a wave of shadow that continually passes across it (Pontbriand, Geneviève Cadieux 70; Gale 60).

Cadieux's choice and configuration of subjects within the installation immediately raises questions about women's positions as specular objects. The shadowy, silhouetted female figure recalls the common cinematic and television image of a woman seen through a drawn blind -- the object of the "Peeping Tom's" gaze. Likewise, the ponderous image of the framed and shadowed eyes implies such a covert voyeuristic activity. However, Cadieux's work exposes and foregrounds this voyeurism, thereby removing any vestiges of naturalism or invisibility from the operations of the male gaze. Moreover, each viewer who enters the darkened room also becomes its uncomfortable object, unable to avoid the persistent look without leaving the installation site. The framed male eyes, then, serve as an index to the pervasiveness of the male gaze in dominant modes of representation, and in society at large. Although the sentiments of the male spectator are ambiguous -- the passing shadow perhaps indicating uncertainty or confusion (Evans-Clark; Tenhaaf 45) -- his gaze is nevertheless the only sign of activity among the represented images. The other

figures are static, captured in a pose by the voyeuristic eyes as well as the photographic gaze. As John Berger has pointed out, power and activity are generally implied in visual representations of men, whereas powerlessness and passivity are associated with images of women (46-47). But in The Shoe at Right..., this process is de-naturalized and invites analysis.

By taking their places within the fashion discourse, the female figures not only court the male gaze, they also become self-conscious and self-regulating subjects. From the "standpoint of discourse" the gaze is "impersonal and ubiquitous. It is not only an internal reflection, but a shared practice of reflection on others in the light of a common discursive standpoint" (Smith 42). Women's status as objects of the gaze is not simply imposed from without, by the male viewer, but operates through multiple social, textual and visual relations -- a process similar to Foucault's regulating panoptic vision. These discursive and material relations promote a particular subject-object split within the female subject. The body becomes the object of specific disciplinary practices designed to create on its surface the desirable signs of femininity: the "idealized body-as-product" (Smith 45). Thus in The Shoe at Right..., the high-heeled shoes and their widespread associations with "sexy" pin-up girls stand in for the multiple discourses of femininity within which women take their places. The silhouetted female figure in

Cadieux's piece seems to adopt a pose independently of the viewing eyes on which she has her back turned. However, as in Gurney's triptych Reverie, the male gaze is internalized -- the woman regards and positions herself as a specular object (Berger 47). Within the discursive operations of dominant society the woman is constituted (if "imperfectly") as an appropriately desiring and self-regulating feminine subject.

Plumbing the Depths: Women and the Medical Gaze

If Cadieux is concerned with the surface inscriptions on the female body -- the topologizing marks of patriarchal discourse and the male gaze -- she is also interested in their relation to the "depths" of the female subject. The Shoe at Right... is "a work about knowledge"; the tomogram, as a "standard document in the scientific field," represents a specialized "instrument of knowledge" about the body (Pontbriand, Geneviève Cadieux 70). And, as Foucault repeatedly insists, power produces knowledge: "It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible" (P/K 59). Moreover, it is through the multiple relations and operations of power that this knowledge is used to regulate and discipline bodies in society.

In her use of the tomogram image, then, Cadieux introduces another manifestation of the regulating gaze: the look of the clinical eye. The disembodied but ever-present eyes represent the medical gaze which seeks to see beyond the surface configuration of the flesh and its adornments, to the

depths of the body that harbours the "truth" about Woman. The power of the gaze, with its attendant technologies, seeks a special knowledge according to which the woman's body might be diagnosed and cured. Ironically, the most striking feature that the scientific apparatus reveals is the same one which appears in the shadowed silhouette: the marks of the high-heeled shoes on the female body.⁷ Hence, the confusion suggested by the flickering of shadow across the eyes may also result from the unexpected blurring of surface and depth, the refusal of the images to reveal the truth of Woman, the withholding of some privileged knowledge and its associated power.

Cadieux again situates the feminine subject within dominant medical discourse -- this time concerning mental health -- in Voices of Reason/Voices of Madness (1983, fig.7). Within a darkened installation space, Cadieux places two projectors aimed at opposite walls. Each of the much-enlarged projections picture the same woman's face. However, while one face stares impassively back at the viewer, the other bears an anguished expression. The former image is in colour, although it is heavily shadowed and seems to fade into the surrounding darkness. The latter image appears in black-and-white, but its clarity is continually distorted as the projection moves in and out of focus, punctuated by the piercing sound of a sharp blow (Gale 58; Pontbriand, Genevieve Cadieux 69).

As the work's title indicates, the female subject is

literally split into two images: the calm and the "hysterical" woman. The contradictory markings which trace the feminine subject in such works as L'Inconstance du désir, here take an extreme and disturbing visual form. Yet the audio "blows" imply a further narrative -- one of violence against women. The source and the form of these blows are uncertain, although the artist states that the piece deals with psychic rather than physical damage (in Sabbath). In any case, the anguished expression and the dissolution of the black-and-white projection is clearly related to the unspecified violence associated with the noise. These insistent blows may well represent the real "voices of madness" in the piece, but the control they exercise and the marks they produce on the female body position her as the madwoman to the viewing eye.

The representation of the female subject in Voices of Reason... also recalls the medicalization of femininity in popular "women's films" of the nineteen-forties. In them, hysteria is signalled by a conversion reaction: signs of mental distress or break-down register themselves as physical symptoms (Doane 171). The marks of madness -- here, the woman's pained facial expression -- literally inscribe the female body . Moreover, within traditional medical discourse,

Hysteria...is characterized by a specific style of expressing feelings and organizing thoughts. Hysterics are flamboyant, expressive,...and prone to inappropriate outbursts of emotion. Cognitively, they process events in a global and impressionistic manner, paying little attention to detail. In contrast, an obsessional style, more characteristic of men, is somewhat rigid and

intellectualized. Unlike the hysteric, the obsessional person focuses on the smallest details and is often involved in moral imperatives or "I shoulds" (Bassuk 144).

Women's emotions are suspect, for within traditional medical discourse, their expression always threatens to become uncontrolled (and potentially "contagious") hysterical speech. Such illness is also essentialized: whereas a man may have obsessional characteristics, a woman is an hysteric. Thus the surface inscriptions of anguished emotion reveal the "truth" about the woman herself. Not surprisingly, then, it is the image of the emotionally troubled woman which is literally "going to pieces" in Voices of Reason/Voices of Madness.

The installation's viewer is not alone in regarding the image of the distraught woman; her impassive "other self" also confronts the disturbing image. This second woman's image may represent the (silent) voice of reason, which the medicalization of the female body aims to restore.⁸ Despite the shadows beneath her eyes -- possibly the marks of strain -- she remains calm and expressionless. However, I disagree with Laurence Sabbath's belief that, through the juxtaposition of the two images, the work conveys "a reminder to women who lose their way and role in life" to "step back and look calmly at themselves, at others and where they stand". His comment reinforces the traditional socio-medical notions of "calmness" being the route to curing women's ills. Moreover, as L'Inconstance du désir suggests, it is impossible to step entirely outside of one's "way and role" as constituted within

the complex operations of discourse; the hovering feet in L'Inconstance... may suggest ambivalence, but they still retain the traces of dominant inscriptions of femininity. Likewise, the simple choice that Sabbath's comment implies does not exist within Voices of Reason.... The female subject is divided by the gulf of darkness between her contradictory images and the work presents no sign of her visual/psychic reconstitution. Even the viewer is unable to bring the two images together within her/his line of sight. Nor is there any sign of closure; the cycle of noise and dissolution endlessly repeats itself. If anything, the female figure who has "stepped outside of herself" seems helpless to intervene. The work thereby situates the viewer in an uncomfortable position as both the witness of a painful, private struggle and as the representative of the normalizing diagnostic gaze indicated by the title.

Through the play of vision in Voices of Reason... -- the medical glance⁹ implied by the title, the voyeuristic gaze associated with the female figure, the self-regarding look of the female subject -- Cadieux foregrounds and undercuts its complex interactions. In popular cinematic treatments of madness, a woman's mental break-down often coincides with the undesirable physical manifestation of her symptoms. No longer courting the male gaze -- in itself an unnatural sign -- the woman becomes instead the object of the medical gaze. Such is the case with Cadieux's black-and-white projection; not only

does it resist the erotic gaze, but it disappears repeatedly from any such vision. It prompts instead a diagnostic "reading." Conversely, the restoration of a "woman's status as specular object of desire" indicates her restoration to health and normality (Doane 155-6). In Voices of Reason... the visually appealing colour and the clearer features of the second women suggest such a "restoration." Yet this image, too, resists the traditional operations of the male gaze: "No longer quite a simple voyeur...the spectator emerges... as the witness of a dialogue between two different aspects of the same character -- a dialogue on the sidelines of which he [or she] is obliged to remain" (Landry 29). The arrangement of the installation (so that the viewer must either remain on the periphery or interpose her/himself into the work's internal line of the gaze) thus short-circuits the traditional image-spectator relations.

Within the work's proliferation of perspectives, then, none seems to capture the truth of the represented woman. The site of madness/fiction is never completely distinguished from that of reason/reality (St-Gelais 44). Yolande Racine suggests that Cadieux uses "black and white for the portrayal of reality, and colour for the portrayal of fiction" (6). Anguish, not calm, represents the woman's "real" state in society. Pierre Landry, on the other hand, writes that the coloured image is "somehow closer to reality" (29). The woman represented in the black and white image, then, has lost

touch with such reality; she will not listen to the voice of reason. The confusion is not accidental. Like Aquin's novel, Cadieux's installation raises questions of representation and surface appearances -- questions of where the truth (and the "sanity"!) lies in visual and social constructions of femininity. But Cadieux leaves the viewer -- literally and metaphorically -- "in the dark."

As in The Shoe at Right..., Cadieux makes use of a darkened room for her installation. Danielle Roy has said of this technique:

Shadow...clearly enhances the brightness of light. But apart from the contrast of chiaroscuro, complete darkness allows the luminous object to abstract itself from actual space. The luminous object is separate from the visibly absent background, thus creating a topological change. Darkness having erased many landmarks, our gaze is drawn to the occasional luminous zones (29).

This darkness, combined with the audio and visual elements of Voices of Reason..., enhances the cinematic effects of the work. However, as previously noted, Cadieux's representational strategies resist illusionism. She does not disengage the viewer from the surrounding space, only to recreate the appearance of real space on the "screens". Instead, while employing the technology and effects of cinema, the artist undermines its traditional re-creation of the real, and its attendant constructions of femininity. She removes the female images from their normal -- and normalizing -- contexts, and foregrounds the discourses which mark and position them within dominant culture. By "creating a

topological change" in the installation site, Cadieux also highlights the social and medical topologizing of the female body.

The Body as Topos: Skin as Cultural and Memory Map

I...stretch out wretchedly in a perspective premeditated by you, like an anamorphosis which no amorous gaze can restore to its shortened form, i.e. to the past recaptured! A secret work of art, I am elongated out of all proportion on a two-dimensional sheet which, by an optical illusion, wraps itself around me like an undeciphered shroud: a nature morte ("still life" as you say) (Aquin 103)

In some of her most recent pieces, Cadieux has carried her practice of enlarging and fragmenting images of the body to an even greater extreme. In Trou de Mémoire, la beauté inattendue (fig.8), the skin is photographed at such a close range that its location on the body, and even the gender of that body, are obscured. The piece consists of an enlarged colour photograph of a scar running diagonally across the picture plane of the light box. The skin on the right of the image is smooth and unmarred, but the majority of the surface is taken up with the damaged, puckered mark. Hairs grow around the wound. The scar is elongated in the mottled reflective surface of another panel which Cadieux angles toward the photograph (Pontbriand, Geneviève Cadieux 74-75; Gale 62).

Trou de mémoire, la beauté inattendue: the title explicitly connects the body and the scar with questions of history and memory. As Cadieux has stated, the scar reveals

the skin's ability "to convey information, and a past history, 'so that skin becomes like a photographic emulsion which retains an image,'" a visible memory trace (Godfrey). Yet its narrative is halted, for the mouth of the wound (whether physical or psychic) is stitched up and silent; if it conveys information, the scar also withholds knowledge.

Cadieux associates this "memory gap" -- this silence -- with an "unexpected beauty." Does the scar's strange mark of healing, then, represent a welcome "forgetting" of the wound or illness which it has replaced? Does the unusual perspective deliberately resist the "past's recapture"? Or is the unexpected beauty of a more equivocal, metaphoric nature? This latter option seems warranted by the allusiveness of the title. As Peggy Gale points out: "The 'trou de mémoire' is literally a 'hole' in the memory, a loss or denial of fact, and recalls the memory holes of George Orwell's novel 1984, those slots where all conflicting or implicating information slipped away without a trace" (62; Orwell 33). Similarly, in The Handmaid's Tale memory is potentially subversive because it retains the inscriptions of alternate social discourses; and, for that very reason, it is painful and dangerous. The beauty of forgetfulness in Trou de mémoire... may therefore lie in the welcome psychic repression of painful contradiction -- contradiction that leads to physical risk in The Handmaid's Tale and mental anguish in Mrs. Blood.

However, Cadieux's reference to memory gaps is somewhat

ironic "for her stitched-up slit enforces memory by remaining forever visible on the surface of the skin" (Gale 62). Here, as in The Shoe at Right... and Voices of Reason..., Cadieux plays with the notions of presence and absence, surface and depth. The scar becomes a bodily hieroglyph of indeterminate status. In this sense, it corresponds to language's own instability:

Derrida [uses a mark], that indicates an erasure that retains a trace, an X crossing out the representation of truth to indicate the double energy of a deconstructive mode that allows one never to fix on what is present nor on what is absent, but inscribes the conflict between the opposition present/absent in the realm of representation (Turim 13).

What is present on the surface -- the scar -- suggests what is absent from it. But the nature of that "memory" is hidden in the depths of the body or the psyche. Like the character of Joan in Aquin's Trou de mémoire, that which is absent continually makes its presence felt, whether as linguistic sign or bodily mark. In both cases, the memory's content remains elusive.

The image presented in Trou de Mémoire... is disturbing and almost surreal in its distortion of familiar proportions and rejection of visually orienting "landmarks." The defamiliarization is intentional, for Cadieux wishes to explore how, in such enlarged close-ups, the body loses its traditional meanings (qtd. in Godfrey). The body may retain its cultural inscriptions, but from the angle of its representation in Trou de Mémoire... they are all but

unreadable. The bodily topos is ambiguously re-mapped.

The image of the scar reappears, in conjunction with more obviously coded bodies, in La fêlure, au chœur des corps (1990, fig.9). Cadieux designed this large-scale installation for exhibition at the Canadian pavilion of the Venice Biennale, where it was mounted on the exterior of the building, curving around a central courtyard. The photographic images, covering the windows which stand six metres high and thirteen-and-a-half metres wide, overwhelm the viewer with both their layout and size. Appropriately enough, the installation draws on popular "big-screen" images of the "The Kiss" for its two central panels. In their gross enlargement, however, the kissing lips take on an ambivalent appearance. This ambiguity is enhanced by the disturbing bracket formed by the scar. These representations of pleasure and pain are further juxtaposed and superimposed in the reflective palimpsest created by the circular display (Pontbriand, Geneviève Cadieux 78).

In this piece, Cadieux clearly confronts dominant cultural stereotypes and their attendant gender inscriptions. The kiss immediately recalls the widespread cinematic representations of the romance plot. As Audrey Thomas suggests in Intertidal Life, such stories are central to the production and circulation of ideals of femininity. The romantic discourse positions women's bodies as specular bodies-for-the-other -- an operation which is foregrounded in

cinematic representation.¹⁰ The female viewer/reader's identification with the romance heroine also involves her (as a desiring and desired feminine subject/object) in the plot's trajectory towards the happy ending. Cadieux presents this moment of romantic resolution in La fêlure, au coeur des corps. The happy ending associated with the kiss is emphasised by its presentation as a close-up, for in "the cinema, the close-up is frequently used as an end point, to denote emphasis and to focus the spectator's attention. At its most rudimentary level, it represents a closure of possibilities" (Tarantino 161).

But in Cadieux's work, the close-up undermines its traditional cinematic function. The image resists both closure and expected meaning; the sign shifts. It is not so much that, as Chantal Pontbriand suggests, the representation is "calculated to produce a shock in that it is unsettling and uncoded" (Geneviève Cadieux 79). Rather, the artist creates a shock precisely because the image is coded within dominant discourse and representation; Cadieux's manipulation and juxtaposition of the images, however, challenges and subverts those codes of the kiss. The scar suggests pain, illness, injury or damage. The kiss signifies love, happiness, fulfilment of desire. And within the romantic discourse any conjunction of the two, such as the threat of male violence, is "explained-away" or eliminated before its conclusion (Nyquist). In contrast, Cadieux's work foregrounds that

meeting and renders the meaning of the kiss uncertain and vaguely threatening.

The conjunction of the mouths with the seam of the surrounding scar also implies that they may be part of the wound, or that they may be wounded. Does the work, then, signify the psychic damage done to gendered subjects within dominant discourses? Or does it simply aim to "scar" the widespread representations which mark and position the body within society? La fêlure... leaves the precise implications of the juxtaposed images indeterminate. Nevertheless, it succeeds in undermining the popular cinematic representation of the kiss, and its attendant re-creation of gendered stereotypes.

Conclusion

In Geneviève Cadieux's work, the body-as-map of cultural inscriptions is re-viewed from unfamiliar perspectives. Her art foregrounds women's position within society as she addresses fashion, beauty, and romantic discourses, as well as the multiple operations of the gaze. In works like L'Inconstance du désir, The Shoe at Right.. and Voices of Reason..., however, the established ways of seeing are denaturalized and exposed to critical examination. In pieces like Trou de mémoire... and La fêlure..., the culturally-mapped body is distorted and the expected landmarks disappear. The viewer is on unfamiliar and ambiguous terrain. Indeed, to a much greater degree than the work of Atwood, Gurney or

Thomas, Cadieux's multi-media art requires multiple and indeterminate readings. She raises many questions about the female body in society, but she refuses to resolve them for the viewer.

Figure 5

figure 6

figure 7

figure 8

Figure 9

Endnotes

1. It should be noted that Cadieux's works, like many installation pieces, do not always remain in the sites for which they were intended. The change of location, however, often alters the impact of the work and the viewer's relation to it.

2. The appearance of this reflective overlay, of course, would depend on the angle from which it is viewed -- again bringing to the fore questions of perspective in representation.

3. Anne Sexton makes both the potential destructiveness of this making-over and the connectedness of the fashion and romantic discourses pointedly clear in her poetic re-writing of the Cinderella story:

He went to their house and the two sisters
were delighted because they had lovely feet.
The eldest went into a room to try the slipper on
but her big toe got in the way so she simply
sliced it off and put on the slipper.
The prince rode away with her until the white dove
told him to look at the blood pouring forth.
That is the way with amputations.
They don't just heal up like a wish.
The other sister cut off her heel
but the blood told as blood will.
The prince was getting tired.
He began to feel like a shoe salesman.
But he gave it one last try.
This time Cinderella fit the shoe
like a love-letter into its envelope (257-258).

4. For an elaboration of the production of women's desire to be the object of a man's desire, see my section on the romantic discourse in Intertidal Life, pages 97-100.

5. Atwood alludes to this popular story again in The Handmaid's Tale when Offred sees an executed figure and thinks: "Everything they taught me at the Red Centre, everything I've resisted, comes flooding in. I don't want pain. I don't want to be a dancer, my feet in the air, my head a faceless oblong of white cloth" (298). In Intertidal Life, Alice also compares her writer's brain to the endlessly and fatally dancing red shoes: "Sometimes she wanted to SHUT IT OFF. For her mind was also the broom of the sorcerer's apprentice, the red shoes which kept on dancing dancing dancing, the longest-playing phonograph record in the universe" (226).

6. A tomogram is a coloured, heat-responsive x-ray.

Gurney, Janice. Emphasis Mine. 1985. Coll. of Drs. Ron and Alice Charach. Slide courtesy of Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto.

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CONCLUSION

Once I'd thought of Arthur as single-minded, single-hearted, single-bodied; I, by contrast, was a sorry assemblage of lies and alibis, each complete in itself but rendering the others worthless. But I soon discovered that there were as many of Arthur as there were of me. The difference was that I was simultaneous, whereas Arthur was a sequence.

--Margaret Atwood, Lady Oracle (213)

Like many of Margaret Atwood's heroines, Joan Foster has a particular talent for making simultaneously insightful and inaccurate observations. As Joan's comment aptly suggests, women are situated within numerous and often conflicting discourses at the same time as they are encouraged, as mature individuals, to be unitary and non-contradictory subjects. Yet, while her statement rightly suggests that men and women are situated differently by dominant discourse, it is unlikely that Arthur is positioned, at any given moment, as singularly as Joan suspects. Male and female subjects have unequal access to gendered subject positions, but both women and men take their places within complex and dynamic networks of discursive and material practices.

As I have discussed in relation to the literary and artistic works of Margaret Atwood, Janice Gurney, Audrey Thomas and Geneviève Cadieux, this construction of gendered subjectivity is a fundamentally ideological process. Dominant discourses of femininity -- as generated and circulated in both verbal and visual media -- aim to create subjects who are

willing to take their "natural" places in society. And the practices by which this is accomplished are always-already saturated with power relations. Indeed, the feminine body represents a particular site of inscribed power relations -- whether as a Handmaid in Gilead, an actress playing a role, a mother in British Columbia, or a patient under medical observation. However, as Atwood, Gurney, Thomas and Cadieux imply, these inscriptions are neither singular nor permanently fixed; the feminine subject is a site of multiple discursive tracings, a palimpsest of cultural codes.

By examining the work of these writers and artists from the vantage point of feminist poststructural theory, I have highlighted the discursive operations of power in relation to feminine subjects. This reading of subjectivity, as grounded in historically-specific cultural practices, resists traditional notions of timeless, unitary and unchanging male and female "selves". Theories which stress the presence of an essential nature -- whether expressed or repressed in dominant society -- tend to rely on some form of pre-given gendered identity, and thereby limit the possible scope of change. A poststructural approach which emphasizes the constructed nature of subjectivity, however, eschews any deterministic analysis of subjects in society and foregrounds the possibilities of resistance. As Foucault has stated:

The problem is not so much that of defining a political "position" (which is to choose from a pre-existing set of possibilities) but to imagine and to bring into being new schemas of

politicisation. If "politicisation" means falling back on ready-made choices and institutions, then the effort of analysis involved in uncovering the relations of force and mechanisms of power is not worthwhile. To the vast new techniques of power...one must [instead] oppose a politicisation which will take new forms (P/K 190).

Discursive and social practices are inextricably bound, so that challenges to dominant discourses -- in, for instance, the form of cultural productions -- are fundamentally "political"; they both make possible and are made possible by altered social and material relations. In fact, any effective resistance to hegemonic patriarchal models of femininity must come from within discourse, as there is no space outside of culture where true untainted femininity has been preserved for women to recover (Moi 198).

In this sense, then, the literary and artistic works of Atwood, Gurney, Thomas and Cadieux, and my readings of them, may be seen as one step in the construction of a new schema of feminist politicisation. While change may be difficult or painful for women whose subjectivities and desires have been produced in relation to traditional discourses of femininity, it is nevertheless possible. Women, like Alice in Intertidal Life, may revise or oppose traditional gender "roles" by exploiting the multiple and contradictory operations of discourse and by inhabiting and negotiating alternate subject positions. They are not the powerless victims of a monolithic patriarchal system, but individual subjects who are continually and actively involved in the discursive and social

operations of power.

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Appendix A: Artist/Author Biographies

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa on 18 November 1939. She studied English at Victoria College, University of Toronto, and completed her bachelor's degree in 1961. At this time she received the E.J. Pratt Medal for her first book of poetry Double Persephone and was awarded a Woodrow Wilson scholarship for graduate studies. She graduated from Harvard with her master's degree in 1962. During the next decade, Atwood moved between several academic and non-academic jobs and she began (but did not complete) post-graduate studies at Harvard. Meanwhile, she continued her own writing, publishing The Circle Game, Animals in that Country, The Edible Woman, Procedures for the Underground, The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Power Politics, Surfacing and Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Since then, Atwood has continued to publish -- and receive prizes for -- numerous novels and volumes of poetry and short stories including Lady Oracle, Dancing Girls, Two-Headed Poems, Bodily Harm, Bluebeard's Egg, The Handmaid's Tale and Cat's Eye. She has served as writer-in-residence at several universities and has received honorary degrees from Trent University, Queen's University, Concordia University and the University of Toronto. In addition, Atwood has shown an active concern for the state of the arts in Canada and for human rights world-

wide, participating in such organizations as the Writers Union of Canada and Amnesty International. She presently lives in Toronto with the novelist Graeme Gibson and their daughter Jess (Carrington 1-4).

Janice Gurney

Born in Winnipeg in 1949, Janice Gurney graduated with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the University of Manitoba in 1973. Since then, she has held a number of teaching positions, including sessional lectureships at Simon Fraser University (1984) and the Ontario College of Art (1989). As well, Gurney has been an artist-in-residence at Embassy Cultural House in London, Ontario (1988) and a Visiting Artist at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (1980), the Emily Carr College of Art and Design (1984), Simon Fraser University (1984), the Ontario College of Art (1986, 1989, 1990), York University (1987, 1990) and the University of Western Ontario (1988). During this time, she has participated in group exhibitions throughout the country and has curated exhibitions for YYZ and Wynick/Tuck galleries in Toronto. Gurney's solo shows include Reparations at YYZ Gallery in 1984; The Damage is Done at Simon Fraser University in 1984; For the Audience at Mount Saint Vincent University in 1986; Ashes and Diamonds at Wynick/Tuck Gallery in 1988; Surface of Behaviour at Gairloch Gallery in 1988; and The Last Tasmanians at Wynick/Tuck Gallery in 1990. Gurney's work has been collected in private and public collections including the National

Gallery of Canada, the Canada Council Art Bank, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery (Wynick/Tuck Gallery).

Audrey Thomas

Audrey (Callahan) Thomas was born in Binghamton, New York, on 17 November, 1935. In 1953, Thomas entered Smith College on a full tuition scholarship. She majored in English, spent her junior year studying at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, and graduated in 1957. Thomas later completed her M.A. in English at the University of British Columbia. From 1964 to 1966, she lived in Ghana with her husband. During this time, Thomas published her first short story, "Ten Green Bottles", in The Atlantic Monthly. It was from this story that Thomas developed her first novel Mrs. Blood. Thomas returned to British Columbia in 1969, and settled on Galliano Island to write full-time and raise her three daughters. She has continued to live on the island, except while serving as writer-in-residence at various academic institutions including the University of British Columbia, Concordia University, the University of Victoria, and Simon Fraser University. Thomas has participated in a number of Canadian literary organizations, among them the Arts Advisory Board of the Canada Council, the Writers' Union of Canada, and P.E.N.. In 1979, she became a Canadian citizen. Since 1967, Thomas has published numerous novels and short story collections, including Latakia, Mrs. Blood, Songs My Mother Taught Me, Blown Figures, Intertidal Life, Two in the Bush and Other

Stories, Real Mothers, Goodbye Harold, Good Luck, Ladies and Escorts, and The Wild Blue Yonder. In addition, CBC has produced several of her radio plays. Thomas has received numerous awards and distinctions during her career, including the Canada-Scotland Writer's Literary Fellowship and the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize (Godard 1-4).

Geneviève Cadieux

Born in Montreal in 1955, Genevieve Cadieux graduated with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the University of Ottawa. Cadieux has participated in a number of national and international exhibitions: Theatre of the Imagination at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1984; Aurora Borealis at the Centre international d'art contemporain in 1985; Fokus: Canadian Art at the Cologne International Art Fair in 1986; the XIX Sao Paulo Biennale in 1987; Enchantment and Disturbance at the Power Plant in 1988; the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada in 1989; and the XLIV Venice Biennale in 1990. Since 1981, Cadieux's work has also been featured in solo exhibitions in Montreal, Kingston, Toronto, New York and Geneva. Her art has been collected by a number of public galleries, including the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Canada Council Art Bank, the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Fundacion Caja de Pensiones (Madrid) (René Blouin Gallery; Pontbriand, Geneviève Cadieux 104-105).

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