Re-presenting melancholy: Figurative art and feminism

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Re-presentations of women's melancholic subjectivity by women figurative artists from different historical moments, canonical images of melancholy and theoretical accounts of melancholy are brought together to address the question: 'What aspects of women's experience of melancholy have women figurative artists chosen to represent historically and contemporaneously, and further what is the importance of these artworks for understanding the nature of women's melancholic subjectivity today?'

The question is examined through an original juxtaposition of women's figurative art history, theories of melancholy and the author's own studio practice. Adopting and refining Griselda Pollock's method of the Virtual Feminist Museum, the thesis elaborates a new critical and creative space to gather, re-read and make artwork to address the theme of women's experiences of melancholy (Pollock, 2007). The author curates a 'virtual feminist museum' of women's figurative art dealing with melancholy, past and present. Using Pollock's model as a trigger, the research project sets up a space for interrogating what new meanings are revealed in relation to notions of melancholy by examining the overlaps, collisions and juxtapositions between the works the author has selected and the works the author has made. The artworks are theorised and interpreted by their relationship to the following discourses: the history of figurative art practice, melancholy and feminism; Freud's foundational text 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917); and the examination of the author's own representational multimedia studio practice. This studio practice contributes works that interrogate still and moving images, and creatively explores the interface between practice, theory and history.

The thesis makes an original contribution to feminist fine art discourse by proposing a previously unexposed history of women's figurative art about melancholy, and creating a Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy which informs our understanding of women's melancholic subjectivity and its representation in the contemporary situation.

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

Dated:

Introduction

> 'Given that the focus of the history of art's labours is always towards recovering what is lost, one of these primal desires must be labelled melancholic' (Holly, 2007: 8).

Aims

This thesis uses an interdisciplinary methodology to address the research question: 'What aspects of women's experience of melancholy have women figurative artists chosen to represent historically and contemporaneously, and, further, what is the importance of these artworks for understanding the nature of women's melancholic subjectivity today?'

Works of art by women figurative artists from different historical moments, canonical images of melancholy, and theoretical accounts of melancholy are explored here, informing and testing the development of my own studio practice. Art's histories and my own work as an artist are brought together explicitly through the adoption of a feminist approach developed by art historian Griselda Pollock (b. 1949) known as 'encounters in the virtual feminist museum' (vfm) (2007). The inquiries as a whole, therefore, attempt to create and elaborate a new critical and creative space in which to gather, re-read and make artwork to address the theme of women's melancholic subjectivity.

The thesis makes the argument that the history of women's figurative art and melancholy has been overlooked but can be recuperated and evaluated for the contribution it makes to answer the research question. The investigation examines the visual strategies used by women figurative artists for dealing with melancholy as read against the history of the use of the female figure within the canon of the art history of melancholy. Defending this thesis and addressing the research question is not without risk, as it is based on my conjecture, and the fragmentary evidence revealed through practice that there is such a history to discover.

My project has been motivated by the portrayal of feeling in Sandro Botticelli's *La Derelitta* (c.1495) (Figure 1), where the female figure is thought to signify the exclusion of the soul, from 'the place of beatitude' and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *Penitent (Mary) Magdalene* (1597) (Figure 2) where the sleeping figure rests, bringing together body and soul in the moments after her spiritual conversion (Piccoli (1930) cited in Argen, 1957: 21). I want to discover if it is possible to find a language in contemporary art practice that both acknowledges and recuperates this iconographic history but which also has the capacity to perhaps escape these conventions, to arrive at an idea of women's interiority reflective of twenty-first century experience.

Figure 1. *La Derelitta,* (c.1495)
Sandro Botticelli
Tempera on panel

Figure 2. *Penitent (Mary) Magdalene* (1596)
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio
Oil on canvas
122.5 x 98.5cm

I notice how the figurative language is used to both represent an aspect of a woman's emotional life and to transmit an ontological feeling, a feeling I describe as melancholy.[1] I use the term melancholy to refer to a mood that I notice in myself and in others, internal feelings or states of mind which may be passing or prolonged, although 'melancholy', I recognise, is also an external label imposed by society and culture on others, and linked to art historical and theoretical ideas about the condition.

I have ruminated on the contemporary significance of this historical figurative language in my photographs *My Daughter Katherine 1 and 2* (2007) (Figures 3 & 4) and have then considered them alongside the historical paintings.

Figure 3. *My Daughter Katherine 1* (2007)
Christina Reading
Digital print on aluminium
100 x 100cm

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[1] Ontological is generally understood as an investigation into the question of the phenomenology of being or 'being there' (Dasein) as elaborated in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). For Heidegger the phenomenology of being there is the 'the theme of ontology' (Heidegger, 1927: 60).

Figure 4. *My Daughter Katherine 2*
(2007)
Christina Reading
Digital print on aluminium
100 x 100cm

The four images presented here seem to offer a starting point for an exploration of the use of the female figure and melancholy in fine art practice. They appear to provide incidents of a perhaps forgotten or unrepresented history of the female figure and melancholy that has fallen out of use, whose history I want to explore, recuperate and preserve in my own art practice. The basis for the project is therefore the emotional turmoil of melancholy for women and whether this is capable of being given form and expression through the female figure. By addressing the issue from my perspective as a woman artist I wish to uncover what women figurative artists have contributed to this history. To understand how the language of the female figure, its poses and gestures, have been used to signal melancholy is, I argue, to recall something that has been concealed so far within the dominant canon of the art history of melancholy.[2]

I have justified proceeding on the basis of such fragmentary evidence in the belief that, as the philosopher Michael Polanyi (1891–1976) argues: 'We can know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, 1967: 24–25). Polanyi argues that artists make discoveries through practice, and although their investigation may not be governed by clear

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[2] T. J. Clark makes a similar point in relation to his discussion of seventeenth-century paintings commenting that 'it is this seventeenth-century interest in the whole range of human motions that I find so compelling I see it as opening the way to a tradition of critical understanding that is still with us (just)' (Clark, 2006: 237).

objectives it is nevertheless guided by a personal conviction that there is something there to know.[3]

I acknowledge that both art history and psychoanalytic discourses of melancholy offer insights into the representation and explanation of women's melancholy, and it is important that these are reconciled within my practice. I use these discourses to open up a dialogue between the visual discourse offered through art history and my own studio work, and the written discourse about melancholy offered by Freud and psychoanalysis. I ask what this collision between the approaches to melancholy, the subject of artists across art history, changing conceptions of melancholy and Freud's attempts to flesh out a psychoanalytical interpretation of melancholy might reveal about our understanding of the representation of these aspects of women's experience today.

The interpretative process I have deployed in my studio practice for this research project has involved creating works that opened up to these inheritances and engaged in a dialogue with the visual and theoretical histories. In its development my practice has tried to learn from these recuperated traditions; however, as an artist I have also reserved the right to play with or make these traditions problematic, to avoid the development of a studio practice that is illustrative, dictated to and predetermined, rather than responsive and exploratory.

Ultimately, both the studio work and the thesis as textual parallel attempt to counter the current sense of marginalisation of figurative representations of women's melancholic subjectivity in fine art practice today. As a whole, this research project

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[3] Intuition, therefore, is an important part of art practice, including my own. It encourages the practitioner to proceed without necessarily often being able to explain in language what is sought through practice. Meaning, therefore, is only uncovered through the processes of making, and led by a powerful intuition that there is something to be discovered. Critically, Polanyi contends that creative acts are driven by 'informed guesses, hunches and imaginings' (Polanyi, 1967: 24–25). According to Polanyi these creative intuitions stem from a pre-logical phase of knowing which is fed by a complex mixture of conceptual, sensory and visual information. In this way, making creative discoveries involves embracing something that we feel or have an intuitive understanding of, but whose significance we may not always be able to articulate. Polanyi says: 'The discoverer is filled with a compelling sense of responsibility for the pursuit of a hidden truth, which demands his services for revealing it. His act of knowing exercises a personal judgement in relating evidence to an external reality, an aspect of which he is seeking to apprehend' (Ibid.). According to Polanyi, knowledge cannot be adequately articulated by verbal means because it is rooted in tacit understanding.

attempts to redress the balance, to open up the possibilities and to argue for the crucial significance of further work in this area, now and in the future.

Chapter One: Methods

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the key influences and theoretical ideas that have shaped the development of my thesis, namely, Pollock's notion of 'encounters in the virtual feminist museum' (vfm) (2007), the figurative art history of melancholy and feminism, theories of melancholy, Freud, and feminism and a discovery-led studio practice. I explain how I have developed my own working methodology from these theoretical bases to deliver a Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy and a final exhibition of studio work, which I have called *Melancholia and the Female Figure*.

Griselda Pollock

As Griselda Pollock's *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (2007) is a foundational work for the methodology of this thesis, it is necessary to first elaborate on its key aspects and their significance. Pollock's notion of 'encounters in the virtual feminist museum' (vfm) addresses questions of time, space and the archive, and was borne out of her desire to reframe art of the twentieth century with 'women in mind' (Pollock, 2007: i).

Pollock's method looks at the art historical context in which debates about the representation of the female form in modernism take place. This discourse focused on the formal innovations of male European artists such as Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) which were, argues Pollock, primarily concerned with 'undoing the bodily unity' found in classical representations of the female nude. To illustrate this point Pollock compares the classical nude sculpture in the Greek *Pudica* pose of shame with a modernist version of a torso with missing head and arms cast in bronze, to be found at the entrance to the Corcoran museum in Washington DC (Ibid. 105). Whilst the classical sculpture presents a 'masculine heterosexual visuality' the modernist strategy of disassembling the feminine body exemplified by the bronze sculpture results, argues Pollock, in 'the modernist disfiguration of this fundamental image in the Western artistic imaginary' that binds femininity to a 'silenced and sexually effaced or modernist, frankly, or brutally

exposed physicality' (Ibid.). The strategy, argues Pollock, denied the opportunity for women to explore the feminine body as a 'source of meaning' (Ibid.).

Consequently, Pollock contends that women are being asked to recognise themselves within modes of representation that are phallocentric, rather than in representations rooted in their own experience of the body. There is, then, for Pollock, an urgent necessity to explore what modernism meant for women artists in terms of their use of the 'sign of the female body' (Ibid. 109). She asks 'if and how this visual sign – the female body – could be refashioned through the radically transformed codes of modernism and inscription in the visual field to speak "the feminine" as a site of women's own sexuated subjectivity exploring its own hitherto unsignified dimensions' (Ibid. 110). Rather than focusing on the internal debates of modernism, Pollock asks how the contribution of women artists might modify the prevailing discourse relating to the representation of the female figure in modernism.

Background to Pollock's approach

Pollock's concept and associated methodology of the 'encounters in the vfm' draw upon three principal ideas:

Sigmund Freud's consulting room

First, Pollock's method draws inspiration from the way Sigmund Freud placed his collection of artworks and artefacts at the centre of his effort to disclose the operations and meaning of psychic life. As Pollock reminds us, Freud's consulting room at 19 Berggasse, Vienna, was full of sculptural antiquities and images from Egyptian, Classical and Chinese cultures. A series of photographs by Edmund Engelman taken in 1936, show Freud in close proximity to the collection of objects. Curator Jon Wood argues that Freud was not simply a collector, 'classifying and displaying his hoard' (Wood, 1989 cited in Pollock, 2007: 67). Instead, his collection formed a 'meaningful ensemble, a statement that depended on relations, connections, oppositions and conversations between the viewing subject and the group' (Ibid.).[4]

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[4] The Freud Museum is located at 20 Maresfield Gardens, Hampstead, London. The museum is described as 'the home of Sigmund Freud and his family when they escaped Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938. It remained the family home until Anna Freud died. The centrepiece of the museum is Freud's study, preserved just as it was during his lifetime. It contains Freud's remarkable collection

Thus the artworks in Freud's collection were crucial to his efforts to uncover what constitutes human subjectivity, bringing to the fore questions of metaphor and memory as they persist across human history. Freud acknowledged that often 'the poet (or artist) precedes the psychological for insights into the human mind', helping to 'uncover what we do not yet know about ourselves and identifying patterns of memory, persistence and return' (Pollock, 2007: 12). Thus, viewing artworks was placed at the core of Freud's method because they have the potential to 'predate' or 'consolidate' the insights offered by psychoanalysis (Ibid. 79). This is because artworks can show the psychic material pushed away and repressed by consciousness and, consequently, they have the potential to be 'mnemic carriers of these lost meanings, a translation into a rebus-like language, in dreams, for instance, that can otherwise be deciphered, and as screen, a displacement, a deception that nonetheless makes meaning possible despite censorship and repression' (Ibid. 56). Hence Freud's collection is not simply the means through which the story of subjectivity is conveyed, it is itself 'a performative enactment of its own lapsus and the imprint of the unconscious' (Ibid. 58). Above all, Pollock reminds us that for Freud the work of art is a 'repetition of an always-lost memory' and that 'creative transformations of core impulses and anxieties' provide an 'index' of these desires within and amid different cultures' (Ibid. 78).

Freud's collection provides Pollock with the crucial insight that to understand exactly what is at stake in artworks means to recognise that they operate as conveyers of hidden meanings, which function according to the laws of the unconscious and its representation. This has given Pollock a method for placing the examination of artworks made by women artists at the centre of her inquiry, enabling her to generate a debate about the contribution of women artists to the discourse on representation, modernism and the female nude. Hence Pollock's method is not just a study of women artists, rather it is about the questions such a perspective opens up regarding the nature of the feminine revealed through artworks made by women artists. Pollock's vfm is ground-breaking because it complicates and extends ideas

of over 2,000 antiquities Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Oriental. The most famous piece of furniture in all the collection is Freud's psychoanalytic couch'(Freud Museum, 2011).

about the feminine beyond the confines of patriarchy by including the perspectives offered by women artists (Pollock, 2007: 230).

Aby Warburg's 'Picture Atlas' (1920)

Pollock's vfm also draws upon the ideas of Freud's contemporary, the art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929). Warburg's concept of the *Picture Atlas* (1920) consists of 70 large hessian sheets on which he juxtaposed photographs of images from different historical periods and media, ranging from art history to daily newspapers, making connections between images across time and cultures from pagan times to modernity.

Challenging prevailing notions of art history, Warburg argues that art should not be confined to an examination of changing styles; instead imagery should be read as a repository for persistent and intense human experience. Warburg rejects a linear or developmental notion of art history and instead looks for the links between all of the photographs of artworks he had pinned on his wall, moving fluidly forwards and backwards to foreground the connections between them, and mapping the complex interrelationship between artworks in the form of diagrams.

According to Warburg, intense human feeling is conveyed through figurative and gestural symbolic language that 'creates both meaning and affects' (Pollock, 2007: 20). Warburg's approach reads figurative imagery as forms or 'formulae' for deep feelings or 'pathos' (Ibid. 11). Figuration is thus established as the means to arrive at a detailed understanding of the emotional life and human feeling. Moreover, the images he gathered were not just seen as a vehicle to represent a feeling, but juxtaposing images allowed him to trace the 'persistence and survival' of recurrent themes that 'shared in the conflicts of human consciousness' (Ibid. 18). Hence the repetition of figurative imagery in Warburg's *Picture Atlas* (1920) has significance because such imagery represents a recurring cultural memory of those emotions most significant to the human subject.[5]

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[5] Pollock notes that, for Warburg, such imagery provides an 'iconology of the interval', a space for thought and reflection on the polarisation of life between a 'distanced contemplation and a will to understanding and mastery of self' and 'a susceptibility to powerful emotion that could even dispose of one's reason in the intensity of the effect' (2007: 19).

Pivotal to Warburg's approach is the attempt to trace the iconography of the image back to its source, placing it in the cultural context from which it sprang, so that the psychological attitudes, beliefs and mental states of the originating period can be understood.[6] From this view, the prehistory of an image is significant for its subsequent meaning.

Pollock notes that Warburg is:

> 'propitious for a feminist project, a project that can also only articulate its themes by means of a dialectical self-situating practice of reading images that connect conscious expressions (to artists working in a time/place with historically specific materials and conditions) and unconscious conditions (shared persistent, formative, non linear and even a-temporal, linked with the other space and time of the unconscious)' (Warburg, 2007: 20).

In other words, for Pollock, Warburg's approach is helpful to feminism because it provides ways of reading art history that challenge approaches rooted in 'phallocentric, nationalist and heroic narratives' (Ibid. 13). Instead, Warburg provides a template for Pollock to consider the themes that emerge as persistent for women artists across historical time, and to consider the metaphor and cultural memories that are viewed as significant. Warburg's approach is significant for my inquiry, which also places figuration at the centre of the discourse on the representation of human emotion and feeling.

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's matrixial theory (1992)

Of particular importance to Pollock's aim to create a feminist space of encounter are the innovations of matrixial theory proposed by the psychoanalytical theorist and painter Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger (b.1948). Ettinger defines the term Matrix as:

> 'a feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with asymmetrical, plural, and fragmented subjects composed of the known as well as the not, rejected and not assimilated unknown, and to unconscious processes of change and transgression in borderlines, limits, and thresholds of I and not I emerging in co-existence' (Ettinger, 1992: 176).

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[6] Pollock reminds us that for Warburg the recurring image stands as a 'memorial signifier of an affective trace of a once powerful emotion and pagan imagining' (2007: 44–45).

Ettinger uses the term 'metramorphosis' to refer to the processes associated with encountering the subjectivity of another within the space of the Matrix.

Ettinger summons up notions of the Matrix with two word-images. The first 'is of the foetus in the mother's womb with some kind of awareness of I and unknown not I neither rejected nor assimilated and that of the mother carrying the baby in her womb with a similar awareness of I and not I' (Ibid.). Thus, the meaning of the Matrix is the womb or uterus, a concept related to 'a feminine Real and to imaginary structures' (Ibid. 197): a territory that might otherwise pass by 'unthinkable, unnoticed and unrecognized' (Ibid. 198). The second, the combination of 'Metra and Morpheus (after the Greek god of sleep and dreams), refer us – apart from the motif of the womb (Metra) – also to the dimension of the dream' (Huhn, 1993b: 8). Hence in the Matrix the 'birth giving principle' of the womb is paired with 'the creative potential principle of dreams' (Ibid).

Ettinger offers a discourse relating to prenatal and very early postnatal experiences that are recorded in the psyche and are therefore capable of being traced in the symbolic. From this perspective subjectivity is viewed not as the result of an individual personal history but as formed through a web of interdependencies, past and present, whose structure emphasises the creative interconnections and flows between subjects. Such a paradigm is needed, suggests Ettinger, because there is 'a missing feminine symbolic' which neither psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) nor Jacques Lacan's (1901–1981), conceptualisations of human subjectivity adequately address (Ibid. 180). Ettinger reminds us that 'both Freud and Lacan realised in later life that they did not really "know much" about the feminine. Previously seen only through the prism of the Phallus, the feminine slowly became a question mark for both of these analysts, while at the same time Western culture accepted and adhered to their earlier theories' (Ibid. 180).

Hence the feminine is viewed by both Freud and Lacan as unfamiliar and yet something to be fully disclosed. Crucially, Ettinger argues this is because women have not contributed sufficiently to the existing symbolic or their contribution has

been ignored (Ibid.). She asserts: 'we must break down the tautological equivalence between phallus and symbol and its related equivalences in order to inscribe symbols of/from the feminine positively' (Ibid. 195).

Ettinger's radical theorisation of subjectivity is significant for Pollock because it allows for the possibility of thinking about the shared spaces and encounters between subjects, rather than restricting the investigation to exploring the differences between subjects and endlessly recreating or deconstructing patriarchy. Pollock's method draws upon Ettinger's theorisation that the late intra-uterine stage, which defines the Matrix, delivers 'missing fragments and lost pluses' that are specifically feminine (Ibid. 196). What interests Pollock about Ettinger's discourse is the suggestion that encounters in the matrixial space may be used to reveal the feminine perspective.

Echoing Freud and Warburg's earlier discussion about the power of imagery to provide a record of our psychic histories, Ettinger adds to this discourse the suggestion that artwork made by women artists is the place to search for these matrixial or feminine experiences. This is because for Pollock, as for Freud and Warburg, artworks by women artists have the capacity to reflect both the culture of their period but also, as Pollock notes, to register the 'différance' that women bring to the symbolic (Pollock, 1996: 109).[7] Hence, from this perspective, art practice can play a crucial part in bringing these unacknowledged or undisclosed aspects of the feminine into the culture and the symbolic.

The act of bringing together artworks by women artists does not mean that the feminine is 'simply visible' in culture (Ibid). As Pollock notes: 'it will not be grasped on the register of the visible and scopic though the field of aesthetic practices may be one route to its entry into culture and hence recognition' (Ibid.). In other words, the feminine aspects of experience presented in artworks may not be wholly evident or complete but instead offer allusive and fragmentary evidence of the feminine.

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[7] Pollock defines the term 'différance' as 'the making and unmaking of relational, provisional, necessary but unstable meanings around something deeply central to human self consciousness and desire, hence around subjectivity but also central to social, economic and cultural organisation. Feminist work critically engages with the processes of gendering, engendering and differentiating, in relation to an axis of meaning, power and sociality: sex-gender' (Pollock, 2007: 14).

Through the act of thinking about the works made by women artists Pollock uses Ettinger's concept of the Matrix to create the opportunity to speak about women's experience, to disclose the meanings contained in the artworks they produce, echoing the way Freud and Warburg used their collections of artworks to inspire their work.

Encounters in the virtual feminist museum

Pollock uses the theoretical ideas borrowed from Freud, Warburg and Ettinger in order to develop her concept of 'encounters in the virtual feminist museum'. She refers to the vfm as a 'poetic laboratory' concerned with the western tradition in art history of the female nude and how women artists have engaged with this tradition since the Holocaust (Pollock, 2007: i).

The encounters in Pollock's vfm are **'**virtual' in the sense that they 'could never be actual'; the vfm is a space constructed in the imagination that acknowledges the efforts made by women artists across art history whose work might be resurrected to contribute to a theme (Ibid. 9). Such a space is, for Pollock, about 'potentialities and (possibilities)' which may change the way we view ourselves' (Ibid. 15).

Pollock's vfm brings together work by women artists that, because of the existing 'social and economic power relations that govern museums' would not at the present moment be brought together in any other way (Ibid. 9). Consequently, the method does not attempt to bring together art in actuality but, after Warburg, through a written discussion of photographic reproductions brought together in an imaginary space. Thus, for Pollock, bringing together artworks by women artists and writing about them is a way to acknowledge a lost or missing history of the feminine and is central to her method.

According to Pollock 'feminist', in this instance, does not simply suggest a collecting point for works by women artists, rather it is a method of interrogating and intervening in the conditions of the production of sexual difference, as it is mediated through representation and art making. It is concerned with 'tracking relations amongst artworks outside museum categories of nation, style, period, movement,

master, oeuvre so that artworks can speak of something more than either abstract principles of form or style or the individualism of the creative author' (Ibid. 10). The encounters in Pollock's vfm are about understanding 'what artworks say and do' outside existing categories and 'what shapes the saying at a social or personal level' (Ibid.).

In this context, 'feminist' means for Pollock offering readings that reflect the personal and the subjective and how these readings relate to the perspectives of other artworks produced by women figurative artist's working in this territory. What is revealed through the 'encounters' advocated by Pollock (2007), therefore, is not some kind of essentialist position in which the experience of women is defined exhaustively and pigeon-holed; rather, her approach questions what, individually, these readings might say about women's personal responses to gender structures in relation to her theme.[8]

For Pollock, 'feminist' also means 'a mode of reading against the grain of art history's classificatory systems in order to explore what philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva [b.1941] called "women's time" in relation to the image and the archive' (Ibid. 1). Taking up the issue of time and feminism in her pivotal essay 'Women's time' (1981), Kristeva argued that female subjectivity is linked to a notion of time that is both 'cyclical time' (repetition) and 'monumental time' (eternity) rather than linear or chronological time (Kristeva, 1981: 193).[9] This type of time is, suggests Kristeva associated with the biological rhythms of motherhood and reproduction as experienced through the feminine body rather than chronology. Hence, for Kristeva, 'generation means less a chronology than a signifying space'

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[8] Essentialism is defined by feminist theorist Sarah Gamble as 'the belief in natural or innate differences between men and women. Essentialism rejects the view that gender differences are socially constructed concepts that have become attached to men and women and insists that the differences are fixed and natural' (Gamble, 2001: 224).
[9] Kristeva elaborates: 'on the one hand there are cycles, gestation and the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and union with what is experienced as extra subjective time, cosmic time occasion vertiginous and unnameable jouissance. On the other hand and perhaps as a consequence there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very words temporality hardly fits: all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space, this temporality reminds one of Kronos in Hesiod's mythology, the incestuous son whose massive presence covered all of Gea in order to separate her from Ouranos, the father' (Kristeva, 1981: 191).

(Moi, 1986: 187).[10] What is significant about Kristeva's notion of women's time is that it allows Pollock to create a method where artworks by women artists are brought together in a signifying space not because of their association with a particular historical moment or genre but because of their shared concern with an aspect of women's experience. For Pollock, 'such a critical interruption/displacement, involves allowing traces of the différancing dialectics of death and sexuality "in, of and from the feminine" to find a form of signification' (2007: 39). This phrase describes a 'sphere of potentially sub symbolic subjectivizing meaning not yet available to either masculine or feminine subjects in a phallocentric symbolic, but not utterly foreclosed precisely due to the psychic proximity of the formation of sexuality, sexual difference and aesthetic' (Ibid. 232).

Pollock's method is important to feminism because it shows that the suppression of women's voices 'underscores the potency of what feminism poses to still so adamantly phallocentric cultures' (Pollock, 2007: 13). For, as Pollock reminds us, 'in 1973 American art historian Linda Nochlin asked how can women know themselves in a country – art – where they have no language, if there are no representations, or spaces of representation in which we can read for what I called in 1996 "inscriptions in, of and from the feminine"' (Ibid.).

It follows, then, that examining the specific contribution of individual women artists continues to be important for furthering feminist understanding and agency. I agree with art historians Norma Broude and Mary Garrard that it remains crucial to examine 'the agency of specific women in history, uncovering the subversive power they actually yield as measured by visible cultural efforts to suppress or neutralize (marginalize, ignore) them' (Broude & Garrard, 2005: 3). Yet the challenge in opening up this space is, as writer on museum aesthetics Hilde Hein has argued, that there 'is no single explanation of women and that an individual woman's subjectivity

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[10] According to Kristeva the history of the women's movement consists of two generations of feminist: the first wave of political feminists demanding equal rights with men, in other words their right to a place in linear time, in politics and history; and a second generation emerging after 1968 interested in 'the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realizations, these women seek to give language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left by culture in the past' (Kristeva, 1981: 194). In other words, they emphasised women's difference from men and demanded women's right to remain outside linear time. For Kristeva the limitations of both of these forms of feminism pointed the way to her wish for an approach that strives for both an 'insertion into history' and the 'radical refusal of the subjective limitations imposed by this history's time' (Ibid.).

is multiple, positional variable and contingent', meaning that the perspective offered by each of the individual women artists matters (Hein, 1990: 282). What is crucial is the way that these individual women challenged, or accepted, the existing order and whether their contributions were acknowledged or dealt with by patriarchy and the dominant perspective in art history formed by male artists, critics and art historians.

Pollock's method also makes use of aspects of museum practice for feminist purposes. The vfm she constructs brings together works in an encounter with each other, and with viewers, in a way that challenges traditional ideas of classification and display inherent in modernism and museology. The method seeks instead to group together works in relation to a theme that refers backwards and forwards through time to search for new overlooked resonances. By this Pollock means that artworks are arranged in the vfm according to a plan that is not 'identical' to the time when they were made (historicism) but by some other criteria (Pollock, 2007: 11). The method makes use of a key characteristic of museums that encourages an act of looking back, of remembering, so that the implications of artworks from the past, for the present and the future can be considered. Simply making time to look at artwork made by women is implied as an important feminist move and artworks gathered in this way ask to be read as cultural practice, negotiating meanings shaped by both history and the unconscious. As such, they have the potential to challenge and change the culture to which they contribute.

The importance of the museum or archive in shaping both what we think and what we might become has been extensively discussed by historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984) in *The Order of Things* first published in Paris in 1966. Foucault argues that systems of knowledge were discernible for the human sciences in the same way they were for the pure sciences. He establishes a link between the ordering of the natural sciences in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and the emergence of systems of classification used in archives during this period, observing:

> 'the ever more complete preservation of what was written, the establishment of archives, then of filing systems for them, the re-organization of libraries, the drawing up of catalogues, indexes and inventories, all of these things represent, at the end of the Classical age, not so much a new sensitivity to time, to its

past, to the density of history, as a way of introducing into the language already imprinted on things, and into traces it has left, an order of the same type as that which was established between living creatures. And it is in this classified time, this squared and spatialized development, that the historians of the nineteenth century were able to undertake the creation of a history that could at last be true – in other words liberated from Classical rationality from its ordering and theodicy, a history restored to the irruptive violence of time' (Foucault, 1989: 143–144).

Foucault makes the point that the archive creates systems of remembering, of classification and storage into which historical artefacts are forced. He adds that archives are also generators of meaning because historically the mode of selecting material for archives has meant that only the memories and hence the histories of the powerful, political and religious have been recorded (Foucault, 1989). Thus, archives are never neutral spaces.

Pollock's vfm, therefore, works to counter this trend, providing a critical space into which pre-existing though dormant works can be recuperated and represented. Pollock's method encourages a remembering, reassembling and a bringing forward of works with a feminist agenda, allowing the possibility of connections that are currently unexamined and/or repressed. As a result, Pollock's vfm allows us to revise the relationships between women artists across history, to reveal unknown histories and challenge current ways of seeing things. This is not a case of trying to be definitive, to tell a story, or to provide an alternative narrative; rather, as Pollock herself made clear:

> 'The virtual feminist museum is not like the modernist museum about mastery, classification, definition. It's about argued responses, grounded speculations, exploratory relations that tell us new things about femininity, modernity and representation' (Pollock, 2007: 11).

The emphasis is on 'networks, transformations and interactions framed by feminist theory rather than classification and movements' (Ibid. 14). Ultimately, Pollock argues for assembling artworks according to a feminist logic rather than a phallocentric one.[11]

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[11] Sarah Gamble defines phallocentrism as 'a term relating to the advancement of the masculine as the source of power and meaning through cultural, ideological and social systems' (Gamble, 2001: 294).

Thus, Pollock invites you to view a series of imaginary exhibitions to read the work of women figurative artists from the 'ladies' side' during the period associated with modernism (Lacan cited in Pollock 1992: 105). Her method therefore aims to 'trace a different journey amongst women artists of varied cultures, ethnicities, nationalities and sexualities, joined here by a shared interest in representing their varied sense of living in and thinking through a feminine sexual body' to consider what this might bring to the discourse with modernism, representation and femininity (Ibid. 106).[12]

The design of Pollock's vfm

Pollock's vfm is a textual document that consists of seven rooms (2007: 106), each room of which forms a chapter of her book. Rooms One and Two address the legacy of 'framing fathers' in relation to the female body in culture and language, notably the 'aftermath' of imagery of the marble sculpture *The Three Graces* (1819) by Antonio Canova (1757–1822). In these rooms Pollock analyses a selection of postcards of the classical sculpture, demonstrating how they focus on the photographic fragmentation of the original image. Against these she juxtaposes representations of the mature and ageing body. Her strategy on the one hand is to acknowledge the 'phallic psychic economy' in which images occur, but on the other hand to 'allow that the act of viewing, can solicit a number of different registers, of inflections, depending contingently on the actual moment or situation' (Ibid. 42). Viewing pictures of the female body is not always, Pollock insists, problematic (sexist or pornographic) for feminism; rather, she is emphatic that the stillness of the photograph provides a unique opportunity to analyse why such images are difficult from a feminist perspective.

Room Three reflects on the significance of a series of photographs showing the collection of museum objects in Freud's consulting rooms (as discussed previously).

In Room Four Pollock gives the reader a guided tour around a virtual exhibition titled *Visions of Sex*. The groundplan of this exhibition (Figure 5) shows that each room exhibits the work of an individual woman. These are painter Georgia O'Keefe

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[12] Pollock explains that the purpose of this exhibition is to investigate how 'the visual art sign- the female body- could be refashioned … to speak of the feminine as the site of women's own sexuated subjectivity exploring its hitherto un-signified dimension' in the period of modernism (Pollock, 2007: 110).

(1887–1986), dancer, singer and actress Josephine Baker (1906–1975), painter Hannah Gluckstein (1895–1978), writer Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) (photographed in 1902 by George Bereford), painter Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976), and photographer Tina Modotti (1896-1942) (Ibid. 107).[13] They are all writers or artists that focus on representations of the female body within modernism and their importance to that discourse.

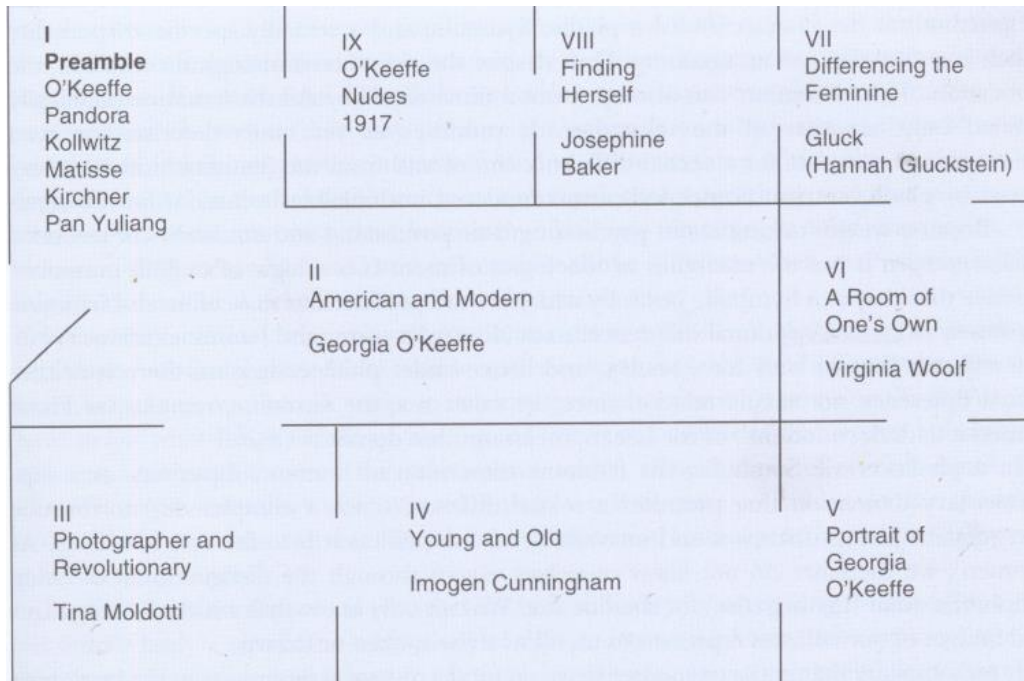| I | IX | VIII | VII |
Preamble	O'Keeffe	Finding	Differencing the
O'Keeffe	Nudes	Herself	Feminine
Pandora	1917		
Kollwitz		Josephine	Gluck
Matisse		Baker	(Hannah Gluckstein)
Kirchner			
Pan Yuliang			
	II		VI
	American and Modern		A Room of
			One's Own
	Georgia O'Keeffe		
			Virginia Woolf
III	IV		V
Photographer and	Young and Old		Portrait of
Revolutionary			Georgia
	Imogen Cunningham		O'Keeffe
Tina Moldotti			

Figure 5. *Visions of Sex* (2007)
Griselda Pollock
Printed diagram

In Rooms Five, Six and Seven we encounter the work of individual women artists Charlotte Salomon (1914–1942), Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger (b.1948) and Christine Taylor Patten (b.1940) respectively.[14] As in her virtual exhibition *Visions of Sex,* Pollock's concern is with the 'différance' these women artists bring to the dominant discourse within modernism about the reworking of signs of the female body and its signification.

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[13] The preamble to Pollock's exhibition includes a discussion of painter Georgia O'Keefe (1887–1986), singer and actress Pandora (b. 1970), printmaker Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1943), painter Henri Matisse (1869–1954) painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938), and painter Pan Yuliang (1895–1977) (Pollock, 2007: 106).

[14] Here Pollock captures 'the ruptures and catastrophes of the twentieth century' via an in-depth consideration of how these three women artists have been affected by the rise of Fascism, and examines the surprising ways they are connected via ancient myths and what she terms 'aesthetic affectivity' (Pollock, 2007: 135).

Pollock's method is crucial to my inquiry because it frames art history not as a chronological series of discoveries and discontinuities but as a signifying space for women artists. Yet I would argue that Pollock's application of these theoretical ideas in the design of her vfm limits the potential of her method to deliver a feminine perspective in two important respects. First, whilst the theoretical influences that shape her vfm propose a move away from linear (phallocentric) notions of time and the restoration of Kristeva's notions of women's time as cyclical and repetitive, her project is nevertheless framed by the modernist moment that surely imposes on these women artists a categorisation that may not relate to their own experience, privileging perhaps a historical classification rather than the concerns of women. Viewing art history from a feminist perspective the question is perhaps whether a feminine categorisation of the dominant shifts and key works associated with art history would be identical to the standard canonical account of art history?

Secondly, the design of Pollock's vfm places individual women artists in separate rooms of her exhibition. Although they are situated in the same signifying space of the vfm, imaginary walls continue to isolate works from each other and they are therefore engaged primarily in a lonely discourse with the prevailing canon and modernism, rather than with each other. I would argue that this means that the potential to discover the overlapping concerns of these women artist is not fully exploited and the possibilities of these discourses for feminism are perhaps diminished.

Such boundaries mean that the opportunity to discuss historical images in relation to the work of contemporary artists is not fully explored. Discovering the antecedents to contemporary artists on the topic of figuration is important for feminism because it allows missing art histories of women to be restored, and has the potential to disrupt existing chronologies and classifications. Nevertheless, Pollock's method provides a powerful precedent and the impetus for me to develop a similar space for women figurative artists on the theme of melancholy.

Having established the methodological framework for my thesis, I now turn to look at how my approach develops Pollock's ideas to create a Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy.

Research aims

From Pollock's notion of 'encounters in the virtual feminist museum' I propose a speculative methodology to address the problem of the representation of feminine melancholy in works of art by women figurative artists. I ask what will happen if I deploy Pollock's method of the vfm to bring together melancholy displays of women figurative artists from different historical periods to create a Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy. How might I select artworks for such a space? What will follow from writing about the exchanges between these exhibits? I am interested in what women figurative artists in this imaginary space might have to say or to demonstrate about the problem of melancholy through their artwork and in the range of sensibilities and material practices they bring to the issue. How do they 'speak' to each other about melancholy across historical moments? And how does what they have to say relate to the discourses provided by the art history of melancholy in the dominant canon, and theories of melancholy and feminism. Furthermore, what discoveries might be made about the nature of women's melancholic subjectivity and its representation, and what might their relevance be for the present moment?

Moreover, what will transpire from following the ideas ignited by these displays in my studio practice? How will my studio practice relate to the art historical and theoretical ideas I use to write about these artworks I gather in my vfm? In other words, what is the effect of bringing my own personalised language of melancholy and my intuitive and imaginative response via my studio work to this virtual space? What might be the contribution of these efforts on the story of the figurative art history of women's melancholy?

Theoretical influences

Although Pollock's method provides the overarching method for my project it is also necessary that I detail the key theoretical influences that have shaped the development of my vfm, namely, the figurative art history of melancholy, theories of melancholy and Freud, and my studio work.

The Figurative art history of melancholy

As the figurative art history of melancholy is the focus of my project, I first of all intend to cast some light on its key characteristics through an informal survey of two major exhibitions addressing melancholy that have taken place in Europe since 2006. The first of these was an important survey exhibition mounted in Paris between 13th October 2006 and 16th January 2007 at the National Gallery of the Grand Palais in Paris, titled *Genius and Insanity in the West.* This was curated by Jean Clair, an historian renowned for a long-standing interest in the field of melancholy (Frerot, 2006).[15] The Paris exhibition was significant because it attempted to present a chronological review, tracking the iconographic representation of melancholy from antiquity through to the present day, and providing an insight into the terms on which artworks were included in the melancholy frame. Over 250 artworks are listed in the catalogue for the Paris exhibition and looking through these it is notable that, with few exceptions, the figurative form is consistently used to represent melancholy. Prominent in the exhibition was the use of the male form. These included the well-known bronze sculpture of *Ajax,* (a mythological Greek war hero who committed suicide to protect his honour[16]) (Figure 6), through to *The Portrait of Doctor Paul Gachet* (1890) by Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), and in addition to *Big Man* (2000) by contemporary artist Ron Mueck (b.1958).

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[15] Prior to the Paris exhibition, Jean Clair had previously curated an exhibition called *The Soul in the Body,* at the Grand Palais (1993–1994), addressing similar themes.
[16] In Homer's *Iliad* Ajax is described as a great warrior, undefeated and heroic. But Sophocles' play about Ajax's demise tells the story of how the Greek Gods ruled that Ajax did not win a suit of magical armour forged on Mount Olympus, which was instead given to his rival Odysseus. Ajax 'the un-conquered' falls on his sword conquered by his own sorrow, preferring to die than live with the shame' (Graves, 1960: 56).

Figure 6. *Ajax* (early Augustan)
Exekias
Bronze
29 x l33cm

Only twenty-three of over 250 artworks used the female form to represent the
condition of melancholy. This included works such as Étienne Maurice Falconet's
(1716–1791) marble sculpture *La Mélancolie* (1763), where a young woman leans
with her head bowed against a stone pillar, and Jean-Bapiste-Camille Corot's (1796–
1875) personification of melancholy using a young female figure in *La Po*é*sie*
(1865). Amongst the most familiar was Edvard Munch's (1863–1944) painting,
Mélancolie (1906–7) in which a young woman sits by the seashore. The exhibition
confirms figuration as one of the basic tenets of the art history of melancholy, and
whilst the male figure is foregrounded, male artists also chose to represent this
condition, albeit with less frequency, with the female figure. In this history the
question arises not only of what the use of the female form signifies in this context
but also of what these histories mean for women.

Figure 7. *Melancholy* (1801)
Constance Charpentier
Oil on canvas
130 x 165cm

What is also noticeable about the exhibition is the almost total lack of women artists included in this history. Strikingly, the sole female artist included was the French figurative painter Constance Charpentier (1767–1849) with her painting *Melancholy* (1801). Does this mean that women did not make work that addressed this issue? Or are there reasons why they were largely excluded from the melancholy frame? It seems that the art history of the female figure and melancholy is a discourse that has not yet been separated out from the art history of melancholy and considered in terms of what this history means for women. However, it seems also that the contribution of women artists to this history is missing.

An insight into the terms on which this topic has been considered more recently is provided by another powerful survey exhibition on the theme of melancholy: *The Turin Triennial* held in Italy in 2009, curated by Daniel Birnbaum. The exhibition's title, *50 Moons of Saturn* (2009), was drawn from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), an extensive catalogue of the causes and symptoms of melancholy. Whereas the Paris exhibition cast light on the way figurative art had historically been used to represent melancholy, the Turin exhibition was important because it provided an insight into the responses of over fifty contemporary artists to the theme of melancholy.

The artists in this exhibition address a number of common themes including history, memory and narrative, individual perception and experience, and shifting identities. The intention of the curator of the exhibition was to gather together works that summoned up 'an experience of melancholy for the viewer through the creation of melancholy atmospheres and ambiances' (Birnbaum, 2009: 2). A significant number of these artists used figurative strategies to represent melancholy, including lead Danish artist Olafur Eliasson (b.1967) with his interactive film installation *Multiple Shadow House* (2009) (Figure 8).

Figure 8. *Multiple Shadow House* (2009)
Olafur Eliasson
Interactive colour projection

However, of the fifty artists included in the Turin Triennial, only thirteen were women, four of whom used figurative approaches in their work.[17] The presence of figurative artworks made by women artists within this exhibition is interesting to this inquiry because it confirms a canon that continues to be dominated by male artists, but establishes that there are some women contemporary artists using figuration as a means to explore women's experience of melancholy as a twenty-first-century phenomenon. In other words, despite 'her' near exclusion from the canon, how the female figure may be used to represent 'her' experience of melancholy is still a topic of concern for some contemporary women figurative artists. The question that therefore arises, is, what are the antecedent images for these contemporary works of art?

These preliminary inquiries also make me attentive to the use of the term 'figurative' in this inquiry. I note that it is possible to discern a continuum and interplay in the exhibitions between the figurative and the bodily. At one end of the spectrum the word figurative suggests 'outline and representation'; it is a term that carries 'a note of abstraction and distance from lived experience (Gent & Llewellyn, 1990: 2). In contemporary art practice these two terms have perhaps become divided, with current interest focused on embodied experience rather than figuration, though many works can be construed as both figurative and bodily, linked by an interest in 'representation of the self and of the body' (Ibid.). As the French philosopher and

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[17] Included in the Turin Triennial exhibition were Bonnie Camplin's (b.1970) films and drawings on paper of her family; as well as video artist Paulina Olowska's (b.1979) work that retells Wolfgang Petersen's *The Neverending Story* (1984), a film about a little girl who is given the task of preserving colour in a land of darkness. Also included was video artist Zoulikha Bouabdellah (b.1977) who produced a piece arising from her own complex ethnic background. Her film *Dansons* (2003) includes the unexpected scene of a woman performing a belly dance to the French National Anthem, drawing attention to the tensions between mixing French and Algerian cultures. Finally, the exhibition also featured films and a video performance by artist Ulla von Brandenburg (b.1974), which deal with questions of women and ageing (Birnbaum, 2009).

theorist Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) reminds us, the figure and the body, so often structured as two ends of the spectrum, should not be set up in opposition to each other because they are linked through sensory experience, 'the figural' (Ibid.).[18]

Theories of melancholy

Melancholy is a central concept of my vfm, but how is it accounted for within discourse and is women's melancholy explained in the same way? According to *Chambers Dictionary* the contemporary definition of melancholy is persons who are 'depressed in spirits, indulgent in thoughts of pleasing sadness, dejected' (Allen, 2003: 1303). Hence it is a term that is now popularly used in the English-speaking world to refer to a troubled state of mind. Popular contemporary usage of the term also links it to the experience of mourning and clinical depression and associated feelings of sorrow, sadness and even despair.[19] Yet, a contradiction persists at the centre of our contemporary understanding, because the term melancholy is also linked to the spirit of creativity and an excess of feeling, and can be used to denote something that is moving, joyful, beautiful and even defiant. For example, it is described as being felt by those with 'poetry in their souls' (Holly, 1998: 467) or as 'a movement in the soul' (Weiss, 2005: 275). It is therefore worth reflecting on how far melancholy is a popular term now or whether it has become a slightly old-fashioned term, even perhaps a 'high culture term', as seen in the recent film *Melancholia* (2011), directed by Lars von Trier, billed as 'a beautiful film about the end of the world' (Von Trier, 2011).

These other connotations of the word seem to stem from earlier meanings in which melancholy has been understood in different historical periods as 'mortal sin, an illness or the manifestation of genius', meanings that seem to be retained in our

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[18] In *Discourse, Figure* (1972) Lyotard argued that abstract conceptual thinking had dominated philosophy since Plato had denigrated sensory experience. His thesis defends the importance of the latter. For Lyotard the written text and the experience of reading are associated with conceptual thinking, whilst figures, images and the experience of seeing are linked with sensory experience. But Lyotard argued that this opposition is complex because discourse can contain the figural as in poetry and illuminated manuscripts, and visual space can be organised according to discourse. Ultimately he thought that the figural acts to disrupt discourse.

[19] Whilst the terms melancholy, mourning, and depression are often used interchangeably they have slightly different connotations that emerge as significant in this enquiry. Mourning is 'the feeling or expression of sorrow for a death' and is linked to 'the death of a specific person or persons and acts of lamentation' (Allen, 2003: 1364). Depression on the other hand is 'often the term used by the medical profession to label the effect of a depressed mood in others' (Malan, 1995: 137).

current usage of the term (Frerot, 2006: 102). First in the West, melancholy was regarded through the lens of Christian theology as a moral sin, related to Adam and Eve's original act of transgression in the Garden of Eden. Second, in medieval times when, according to art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) in 'humorological' theory, melancholy was an illness associated with an excess of black bile in the blood (Panofsky, 1943: 45). Third, in the fifteenth century, when Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) restored Aristotle's conception of melancholy as 'a specific sign for male creativity' in European culture during the Renaissance (Schiesari, 1992: 8). In these early accounts the body was the very locus of melancholy; the understanding was that there was a link between the inner emotional life of a subject and the outward appearance of this in the body. In this vein Robert Burton's vast compendium on melancholy *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) also considered mind and body as inseparable, detailing the symptoms of melancholy as they appear in the body and affect the mind.

These ideas continued to largely dominate thinking about melancholy until the beginning of the twentieth century when Freud, widely regarded as the founding father of the new discipline of psychoanalysis, published his seminal paper 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917). According to Freud, earlier theories of melancholy did little to reveal the causes of these mental states, and he endeavoured to turn melancholy into 'a new science of the soul' reflecting the growth of scientific ideas and principles that governed the early part of the twentieth century (Frerot, 2006: 103). Direct observation of his clients was at the centre of Freud's scientific method and through this approach he sought to 'say what he discovered to uncover what human beings sought to repress, mythologize or rationalise in terms of the experience itself' (Laplanche & Pontalis,1973: v). In short, melancholy, after Freud, is no longer defined by the body or the soul but rather more narrowly as a defined aspect of the development of the mind, a mental phenomenon, the subject's response to loss.

Crucially, however, the relationship of Freud's theory on mourning and melancholy to gender acquisition explored in his broader thesis has also been problematic for subsequent generations of feminist writers because feminine melancholy is accounted for in different terms from men's, in terms of lack, which has caused

Freud to be viewed as unhelpful to women by some writers.[20] Freud wrote his influential thesis nearly a century ago, but his ideas on how a woman's subjectivity is constituted, and how this in turn frames her experience of melancholy, remain of the utmost importance to understanding women's experience today and therefore will be central to the discourses on melancholy in my vfm.

In postmodern times there is a renewed interest in neuroscience and the relationship between the genes and their effect on behaviour. There is an acknowledgement that biology influences behaviour and vice-versa. Even though the central theme of the feminist psychoanalyst and theorist Julia Kristeva's thesis is the mechanism of symbolic representation in the Freudian account of melancholy, her proposal acknowledges that it is the neurological function of the brain that determines the psyche's register and linguistic representation in the subject, arguing that the two are relational, albeit in a manner that is not fully understood (Kristeva, 1989). Hence Kristeva speaks of a subject with a 'fluctuating central state' and passions that find 'their anchoring in the humoural in a manner that echoes the Renaissance view of melancholy as a consequence of imbalances in the humours' (Ibid. 39).

A discovery-led studio practice

The strategy of using my studio practice adds to Pollock's method of the vfm in a significant and original way, placing making and my own agency as a woman artist at the heart of the research process. It is therefore important that I explain the principles that guide the development of my studio work.

My studio practice traces and recuperates the fragile and fragmented histories of things, of people and events. It moves across different media using found material gathered from these histories as a starting point for further interpretations that explore the relevance and reverberations of these lost histories in the present. The inherent melancholy of things that have fallen out of circulation – objects retrieved from landfill sites, second-hand clothing, oral histories, archives and museum collections – has historically been the focus of my practice. In this project these

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[20] Freud's broader thesis on gender acquisition, which frames the feminine as 'lack', outlined in papers such as 'Essays on the theory of sexuality' (1905), has made some feminist writers regard Freud's ideas as unhelpful to women. Others have used Freud's ideas to investigate their own concerns about melancholy.

concerns now lead me to attempt to restore the missing history of women's figurative art and melancholy to address an absence noted in the dominant canon on melancholy.

My approach to studio work reflects my art education studying at the Visual Arts Department at Central Saint Martins, London in the 1990s, where I was encouraged to apply whatever media seemed the most suitable to my projects. Practice, from this perspective, is not limited to a particular medium, and this was a reflection of a particular strand of art and of arts education during the 1990s that cut its ties with crafts and traditions rooted in painting and sculpture. Instead, as an artist, I was encouraged to produce generic art focusing on particular ideas or concepts. Consequently, my own practice works to some extent from a blueprint put down during my arts education.[21]

Since leaving art college, like many women artists, I have faced the challenges of producing work alongside a busy working and family life. However, the artwork I produce does not deny these circumstances but seeks to draw inspiration and meaning from them. I have adopted an approach to making that uses what is near at hand, easily available to me and already part of my life. This decision was driven not only by my personal economic situation but also by a desire to make work that engages with my life experience and which is guided by my interests as a woman artist. For instance, in this research my studio work draws both on imagery collected from the family album and old media images but also from Screen Archive South East (SASE), the film archives where I worked for a period during the course of this project. Hence the research that I have carried out for this project reflects the significance of museums and archives in my working life.[22]

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[21] There are some disadvantages to this approach because shifting between different mediums meant that as an artist I sometimes lacked the technical skills to develop work. Barry Schwabsky applying the American sociologist Henry Braverman's term, described this new art environment as 'deskilled', meaning that artists were not necessarily encouraged to acquire the crafts skills associated with earlier generations of artists (Braverman cited in Schwabsky, 2002:10). There were some benefits to this situation, the institution encouraged radical experimentation with materials and processes to deliver conceptual ideas and impressed upon its students the importance of trusting their own intuition and instinct, as well as supporting collaborations with the world beyond education.

[22] Overlapping with the period of research for this thesis I also conducted research for the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning throughDesign (CETLD), into how museums and archives inspire the creative practice of art and design students (Reading, 2009). Adopting a

The value of approaching research from this personal perspective is highlighted by feminist theorist Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledge in which she argues:

> 'We cannot separate knowledge to be learned from the situation in which it is to be used. We need to acknowledge that personal interest motivates research and there is a unity between problem, context and solution' (Haraway, 1991, cited in Barrett, E., 2009a: 135).

For Haraway it is important to assert the self and lived experience into the research process in recognition that there is not one objective reality that we must come to know but that we can only really ever offer a subjective and personal view of the world (Barrett & Bolt, 2009). This perspective challenges approaches based in scientific enquiry which make claims of objectivity. As Barrett has argued:

> 'The scientific model has a false claim to objectivity, because these approaches lead to the effacement of the particularities of lived experience from which situated knowledge emerges' (Barrett, E., 2009a: 135).

Furthermore, Haraway argues that we need to adopt 'an embodied vision to research', which means 'seeing research from somewhere in a way that links experience, practice and theory to produce situated knowledge' (Haraway, cited in Barrett & Bolt, 2009: 185).

Importantly, this means that knowledge is:

> 'gained both through the relationship of the ideas in the research to antecedent ideas and practices but also from the particularities of lived experiences and living bodies and this has the capacity to change knowledge' (Barrett, E., 2009a: 138).

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phenomenographic approach this research found that combining a desire to make studio work that is personally meaningful, with discoveries made in museums and archives, may be helpful to the development of students' creativity and scholarship. This research underlined the significance of museums and archives to the development of my studio work. Following on from this I also worked for the Screen Archives South East (SASE) at the University of Brighton on a community research project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, designed to celebrate the centenary of the Duke of York's cinema in Brighton. Central to the work of SASE, a moving image archive, is the collection and preservation of films, video and associated materials that capture the many aspects of life in the South East of England from the early days of screen history to the present day. My work on the project has created the opportunity to use this important historical resource in my studio work.

Creative practice offers a method that is rooted in the practical and experiential, adding to the existing body of knowledge in particular ways that reflect the lived experience of the artist. Barrett comments that, 'in staging itself as artwork, the particularity of lived experience is returned to the universal' (Ibid. 140).[23]

Following on from this, my inquiry is also based on the premise that artists are able to uncover knowledge through the practical process of making and that this knowledge is embedded in the processes they use and the artworks they make. The importance of the interplay between theory and practice also stems from Heidegger's notion of 'hand-ability', as Bolt describes:

> 'that knowledge arises from our handling of materials and processes, so that we do not come to know the world through contemplative knowledge but rather we only come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling' (Bolt, 2009: 30).

Thus, new insights will arise through our involvement with materials, processes and ideas of practice, as well as through research and writing. As Bolt argues: 'the new is not achieved through the representation of already formed ideas or through a conscious attempt to be new', instead it 'originates from and through practice' (Ibid. 19), through the process of making. Hence I contend that my studio work is a form of critical investigation capable of producing new insights into subject matter, and that the understanding I have of the issues and the work that I do is therefore contained in the artworks I produce. The artworks I make therefore reflect the work I have done to understand the issues.

Developing a working methodology for my thesis

From these theoretical bases – namely, Griselda Pollock's notion of the virtual feminist museum (2007), the figurative art history of melancholy, theories of

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[23] It is important to add that the artwork I produce stems from the bricolage of my personal experiences and is constitutive of my own subjectivity. I believe that the subject is formed through art practice as much as it also produces artwork; the relationship between subject and artwork is therefore reciprocal and dynamic. This is because activities such as looking, thinking, making, imagining, etc. are part of our subjectivity and are involved in the processes of making work. In turn our subjectivity is affected by our engagement in these processes.

melancholy, and a discovery-led approach to my studio practice – I develop and extend Pollock's method to deliver a Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy.

Figurative art history, melancholy and feminism

I begin my inquiry by presenting my research on the art history of melancholy and the use of the female figure in the dominant canon. I do this in order to bring the story of the female figure to the forefront of the art history of melancholy and to consider the figurative language that has been significant for women in this originating history. Establishing this history is key to my inquiry because, as Pollock's method has shown, it is only on the basis of understanding the prevailing discourses that it is possible to have a fruitful discussion about the different perspectives women figurative artists might bring to the discourse on melancholy. Pollock notes:

> 'any effort to open spaces for such differencing to occur would have to struggle with the legacies of the phallic psychic economy that underpins the visual in relation to the fantasies of the corporal which have only just begun to be theorised through the political use of psychoanalysis and feminist challenge to that emerging canon'(Pollock, 2007: 39).

I regard this strand of my research as crucial because as Warburg (1920) has demonstrated, it is a question of rediscovering what such a chronological history might reveal in terms of information about the persistence across time of 'aesthetic memory traces' in visual images associated with the representation of melancholy within the dominant canon (Ibid. 45).[24]

Freud, melancholy and feminism

Secondly, as Freud's definition of melancholy is so central to the understanding of human subjectivity today, I will use the feminist discourse with Freud to understand what the term melancholy means when applied to women and to consider the implications for the representation of these experiences by women figurative artists.

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[24] Warburg drew attention to 'the unexpected persistence of aesthetic memory traces in visual images and aesthetic practices at all social levels across ages and cultures as indices of the kind of archaic forms of psychic processes that his contemporary Sigmund Freud would otherwise theorise through the synchrony of psychoanalysis unexpectedly meets contemporary cultural theory'(Pollock, 2007: 45)

I will examine the Freudian account of melancholy presented in a series of papers including 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917), 'The ego and the id' (1923), 'The dissolution of the Oedipus complex' (1924) and 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes' (1925). I shall draw on the work of women writers such as Luce Irigaray (b.1931), American film theorist Kaja Silverman (b. 1947), theorist Judith Butler, (b. 1956), psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva (b. 1941) and visual artist and psychoanalyst, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger (b. 1948). I intend to consider how these writers engaged with Freud's legacy to account for the representation of women's melancholic subjectivity today. These discourses will be used as a starting point for the analysis of artworks produced by women figurative artists on the theme of melancholy, subsequently considered within the context of my vfm. I am interested in whether the theoretical accounts provide a way of thinking about the artworks I gather in my vfm, in terms of what they say about the nature of women's experience of melancholy and its representation. How do these ideas relate to what the women figurative artists present in their artwork? I will argue that bringing together two overlapping discourses allows for the possibility that such an approach reveals new insights into my topic.

Studio work: Melancholia and the female figure

Thirdly, in my studio work I gather fragments from the distant and recent past to create a personal archive on the theme of melancholy and the female figure. I source these visual fragments from imagery gathered from art history, the family album, and from the media and film archives. This is not intended to be a systematic collection of sources, but to represent a bricolage of personal experiences and practical experimentation as it evolves during the project. Practically, I intend my response to this source material to remain open, fluctuating between different media at different points in the project. I intend to respond intuitively, building on prior experience as the project progresses and moving between fixed points in the past and the present to create a personal space in which insights into the subject matter can be revealed through my studio work.

My overarching intention for my studio practice is to interrogate the figurative language and gestures that reveal themselves through the process of observation of

the bricolage of visual imagery I gather, and to engage imaginatively, practically and emotionally with what is seen and perceived, with what is felt. I see my attempts to reinterpret this imagery in my studio practice as a way of coming to understand both the emotion contained in the originating imagery and my own response to those different moments.[25] The artworks I produce will be inherently a product of my reading of source material as it is revealed through the making of the work, and filtered by my own feminist agenda and the research that I do. (The chronological development of my studio work is presented in the supporting material in Insert One: *Documentation of Studio Work: A Chronology 2007–2014*).

The point of including my studio work in my method is the conviction that these processes might yield unanticipated insights into the discourses relating to figurative art, melancholy and feminism. The value of including practice as a mode of research that can potentially provide new insights into theoretical discourse on melancholy is evidenced by the painting practice of Bracha Ettinger. Crucially, it was the insights that Ettinger gained through her painting practice as 'translated into the seedbed of psychoanalytic theory' that paved the way for the development of her ground-breaking theory of the Matrix and the process of metramorphosis (Pollock, 1995: 62). Thus unanticipated discoveries in studio work may lead to new directions in the research, so that the research process itself is led by the discoveries of praxis, rather than led solely by theoretical objectives and therefore not predetermined or merely an 'illustration' of concepts. Consequently, the research process may be unpredictable and subject to repeated adjustment, risk and even failure, rather than remaining consistent and coherent throughout the inquiry.

The design of the Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy

My vfm brings together melancholy displays by women figurative artists past and present, and outlines the possibilities created by juxtaposing four to five works in

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[25] Ettinger writes that 'the artist as a partial subject takes part and testifies to/for an unknown other or rather, it is the matrixial threads of the artwork which testify to the trauma of an-other in wit(h) ness'. (Ettinger, 1999: 94).

relation to selected themes that emerge as significant during the research process. Selected examples of my artworks are included in these displays.

Through this method I aim to create a signifying space for the efforts made by women figurative artists to refashion and reframe the story of melancholy from the feminine. I aim to discover what issues might emerge as significant for women within my vfm, what they might have to say to each other and to contemporary artists, and what might be opened up through this process in my own studio work.

In this sense my vfm adapts Pollock's method to address not only the discourse these women have with the dominant canon but also the discourses that they have with each other. I am interested in how women figurative artists seek to give a presence to experiences of melancholy marginalised or ignored in prevailing discourses, and exploring the possibility of interplay between them. My intention is to look not just at where 'she' has been excluded from discourse, but also at what she has to say within the context of the signifying space of my vfm.

The vfm I construct is premised on the idea that knowledge is both situated and relational. By this I mean that understanding is 'constructed' not just in the particular circumstances in which an artist produces a work, but also in the encounter and dialogue between the works presented in my exhibition (Cousin, 2009: 51)[26]. For, as Ettinger's theory of the Matrix and the processes of metramorphosis emphasises, women's subjectivity needs to be understood in ways that transcend traditional boundaries of time and space. Hence the need for a method that can look across the generations to frame new ways of signifying the difference women bring to discourses relating to representation, melancholy and femininity.[27]

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[26] Birgitte Huitfeldt Midttun describes the concept of intertextuality as a hallmark of Kristeva's writing, commenting: 'she wanted to show how a text always communicates with another text in a polyphony of different voices that meet in the act of reading, which engender each other and new interpretations of the text' (Kristeva cited in Midttun, 2006: 2). Kristeva commented that 'there is agreement in all branches of linguistics today recognising that discourse is dialogue: its organization, rhythmic and intonational as well as syntactical nature, requires two speakers in order to be complete' (Kristeva, 1989: 41).
[27] Educational researcher Glynis Cousin has argued that knowledge is not something that is found, instead it is something that is 'co-constructed between people depending on their own positionality' (Cousin, 2009: 51).

My approach is guided by the belief that writing about the works gathered in my vfm is key to 'producing movement in thought itself' (Bolt, 2009: 37). In effect, I show that, as art historian Michael Ann Holly reminds us, 'writing is loss as it comes into existence in another form, language signifies not the thing but the absence of the thing and in so doing is implicated in the loss' (Stamelman, cited in Holly, 2007: 8). I explore the idea that writing about the lost art history of women's figurative art and melancholy provides a way to acknowledge loss, a process that, as I will discuss later, provides a way to overcome melancholy.

On this point Ettinger writes: 'even if we believe that language is really only phallic, we still have a lot of room for shaping different relationships towards it; "different" discourses. We might try to change it from within, to destroy it here and there, to damage its signifiers, to discover and explore empty spaces, holes in the tissue of discourse. We might discover a language of margins or marginal language – is that not what art and poetry are about?' (Ettinger, 1992: 194). Exploring these artworks is crucial to feminism asserts Pollock because 'inscriptions in the feminine require decipherment' (Pollock, 1995: 64). She continues: 'without readers or viewers who then own – ie recognise – the work in a profound sense never exists. It is annihilated or remains locked in silence in which nothing can be changed because the narrative is hidden' (Ibid.).

In a further development of Pollock's method and central to my approach is the idea of the 'double articulation between theory and practice', where ideas for the vfm I will construct emerge through practice, whilst at the same time my studio practice learns from theory and is interpreted within this framework (Bolt, 2009: 29).

I use the artworks and ideas gathered in research as a tool to both inspire and reflect on my art making. The research and initial reading of the visual imagery and theoretical texts in my vfm allows me to hear the 'angelic tongues of the moment of construction' (Seddon, 2003: 13). These are the voices of artists and writers, from the past and the present, which I aim to listen to and learn from in my studio practice. I am trying to hear what these voices from the past have to say. Although this is only ever an interpretation, it is my interpretation. It is this response to the text

or visual image and commentaries on aspects of the texts or imagery that is carried forward and combined with other influences into my making process.

Reinterpretations of the original text are carried forward into making as a trace or imprint, or a contributory factor in the development of my own studio practice (Ibid. 10). The trace of the original texts (visual and written) may be decipherable or not depending on the work. However, the point of the readings of the originals is precisely to inspire practice in this unpredictable way, and to provide the material that allows imaginative leaps to be made in practice, rather than confining itself to illustrating readings of the text

This means that my studio work is both inspired by the research and writing for my vfm while at the same time influencing the construction and content of my vfm. It is my argument, therefore, that changes in our understanding about the nature of feminine melancholy may also be produced by the process of making artworks about this subject matter.

In my vfm I set up the space to discover what it might lead to, examining the collisions and resonances arising from the juxtaposing of artworks via emerging themes. My use of Pollock's method does not anticipate or predict what might be discovered through this process; instead it should provide a dynamic, creative and critical space in which to begin to explore and examine the discursive issues through writing, researching and making, and to speculate on what it might reveal about the figurative representation of women's experience of melancholy. The plan will be at first provisional, based on my initial knowledge and understanding of the issues and therefore open to adjustment as the research progresses.

I will argue that women's figurative art and melancholy is a forgotten or unrepresented history, and the vfm I will create should offer a first step to redress that invisibility, 'to breach the cultural repression and silencing of the nature of female melancholia and give it a face and a body even in the face of its own destruction' (Pollock, 2007: 161).[28] I contend, after Pollock, that the continued

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[28] Pollock made this comment in relation to artist Charlotte Salomon (2007: 161).

efforts to suppress or negate women's contributions to a field indicate that something important is at stake, in this instance, the representation of melancholy. The result will be a study of material and discursive ways in which figuration is used by women artists to represent women's experience of melancholy. For, as feminist theorist Nancy Miller wrote, 'to re-read as a woman is at least to imagine the "lady's place", to imagine when reading the place of a woman's body; to read reminded that her identity is also re-remembered in stories of the body' (Miller 1987, cited in Pollock, 1999: 129).

Selecting works

Such an approach and selecting works for my vfm requires an initial definition of the term "melancholy" that frames it as an art historical and theoretical idea as well as a personalised act of making that results in an artwork. My approach to developing a definitional framework for the representation of melancholy in this project involves being attentive to the shifting nature of the term as revealed through my art historical discussion and the specific discourses rooted in Freud as they relate to women's experiences. My method owes something to Richard Wollheim (1923–2003), a philosopher with a specific interest in the emotions especially as they relate to the visual arts. Wollheim argues that personal perception is important because the significance of a work of art lies not just in the subject matter of the artwork, but in the affect the artwork has on the viewer:

> 'What is enough as I have argued is that the emotion is something that
> the artist or spectator has in mind, or perhaps better is something with
> which they are put in touch, or perhaps best it is something upon which
> or upon memory of which they can draw' (Wollheim, 1991: 64).

This judgement doesn't necessarily mean that the artwork expressive of melancholy should have a particular appearance; what is required, suggests Wollheim, is that:

> 'the causal chain that runs from the artist to the work of art (alternatively from the
> work of art to the spectator) should pass through a perception of the work as
> corresponding to the emotion that is expressed' (Ibid. 65).

Making a decision about whether an image is a representation of melancholy does not then rely on some objective fact signalled by a title for the work, or the figurative

language signalled by a particular pose or gesture associated with the condition, although these facts might provide clues to the significance of a visual image. Instead, the construct of melancholy I develop and the artworks I select for my vfm are based on whether, in my view, the artwork corresponds to or overlaps with my growing knowledge, experience and memories of women's experience of melancholy as informed by the practices of research, writing and making artwork about this subject.

Art historian and critic T. J. Clark has argued for the importance of keeping this difference between the verbal and the visual active, commenting that it therefore 'becomes more and more imperative to point to the real boundaries between seeing and speaking, or sentence and visual configuration. It is imperative to keep alive a kind of visuality that truly establishes itself at the edge of the verbal, never wholly apart from it, of course it is never out of discourse's clutches but able and willing to exploit the difference between a sign and a pose or a syntactical structure and a physical visual, material interval' (Clark, 2006: 176). Hence whilst I use the term melancholy to guide the art historical, theoretical and practical space of this research project, the emotional drama of the images that I gather under this banner cannot be wholly captured by this label. There is a gap between the expression of feeling in the artworks discussed within the project and the attempt to articulate those experiences with words, so that the word never quite encapsulates all that the pictures portray. Encircling the artworks discussed as part of this thesis with ideas about melancholy and Freud's thesis arguably activates those aspects of them that relate to the theme, whilst in turn looking at the gathered imagery may challenge preconceived and theoretical understanding of this issue. Hence this project acknowledges that the visual and the verbal cannot be wholly encapsulated by each other and 'that pictures in their own right generate new possibilities of understanding that slip outside language' (Clark, 2006: 175–176). Such an approach acknowledges that the artworks I gather in my vfm are selected, a process that privileges some images whilst discarding others, reflecting my personal perspective as it has emerged through the dynamic between the different aspects of the research project.

Ultimately, the artworks I discuss in my vfm are constructed and analysed through the activities of research, writing and making, and by my interpretative sense of their

relationship to the discourses of figurative art history, melancholy and feminism, and my studio work. This means that the final shape of my vfm, the issues it raises and the artworks I make emerge through these processes, with writing research and practice informing and guiding the development of my vfm.

Final exhibition of studio work: *Melancholia and the Female Figure*

The final exhibition of my studio work draws from the accumulated resource of the artworks produced during the research process. I use examples of these artworks to create a personal exhibition space, which aims to generate a critical and creative dialogue about the representation and use of the female figure and melancholy, historically and now, which I will call *Melancholia and the Female Figure.* The significance of the discoveries I make in my studio work are discussed within the context of the vfm. Hence the practical work manifests in the thesis within my vfm, in the chronological development of my studio work and in the final exhibition of studio work.

Conclusion

Pollock uses the vfm to construct a new art history of the female figure in modernism as manifest in the contributions of women artists. The subtle adaptations I have proposed to Pollock's method provide a way of interrogating the contribution of women figurative artists to the discourse on melancholy. This approach, I suggest, allows me to consider the interconnections between the works, including my own, raising the question of what happens to our understanding of the representation of women's interiority and melancholy when artworks are brought together and considered in this way. The approach is risky, the process of constructing my vfm means that collisions and shifts of emphasis and focus will occur – there is not a definitive collection of works or a definitive interpretation that can be anticipated. However, I would argue that although the outcomes I produce through this process will necessarily be fluid, open to change and not definitive, through these creative processes new insights into the nature of women's melancholic subjectivity and its representation could be revealed.

Chapter Two: Figurative art history, melancholy and feminism

> 'Changing representations of melancholy through art history is also a way of marking the changes in our understanding of the condition. Arguably the frame of art history can show something that medicine, religion and philosophy are unable to grasp' (Haase, 2006: 352).

In this chapter I present my research on the figurative art history of melancholy, investigating the use and significance of the female figure. It is a vast and intricate picture, so it must be regarded as an indicative rather than a definitive and comprehensive examination of the canonical images and dominant shifts in the representation of this emotional state. Beginning with Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer's (1514) work *Melancholia I* and ending with a discussion of Sue de Beer's autobiographical film *Black Sun* (2005), I trace how the female figure has been used and perceived in the representation of melancholy.

The iconography of the female figure: Metaphors

> 'Women's experience is lost to art history whilst men's is entombed in this written legacy – no longer active to interpretation, no longer engaged in the present' (Holly, 2007: 18).

In Dürer's (1471–1528) engraving, *Melancholia I* (1514) (Figure 9), a powerful winged female figure sits on a millstone, elbow on knee and head on hand, glaring into the middle distance.[29] The gloomy and inert form is surrounded by a densely packed jumble of objects including scales, a plaque covered in numbers, an hourglass, a bell and geometric shapes. Nearby are a winged child, a bat-like creature and a thin dog. 'The background is a seascape and a dark, forbidding sky lightened only by a comet, and perhaps, a rainbow' (Wood, 1999: 150).

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[29] Paul Wood identifies Dürer's angel as female (1999: 151). For Jackson Lear there is some debate about whether Dürer's angel should be read as male or female: Lear calls it 'the bulky angel whose sex remains unclear' (Lear, 2006: 129). On the other hand, Michel Anne Holly (2007) noted: 'melancholy's gender does not seem to be in question, especially when it comes to her many visual depictions throughout the ages. Melancholia is female; a melancholic can be of either sex' (Holly, 2007: 15, n 28). This research follows the view that the figure is female.

Figure 9. *Melancholia I* (1514)
Albrecht Dürer
Engraving
23.9 x 16.8cm

In an era of change, Dürer interwove complex humanist, religious and pathological

ideas about melancholy to produce an image whose exact meaning remains

ambiguous.[30] As Erwin Panofsky suggests, to fully understand the meaning of Dürer's engraving it is necessary to go back to the theory of the 'four humours' which had framed discourse about melancholy since antiquity (Panofsky, 1943: 157). According to this view, 'the body and mind of man' were conditioned by the balance of basic fluids or humours in the body.[31] Every human being was, because of their particular balance of humours, thought to be 'constitutionally a sanguine, choleric, melancholic or phlegmatic' (Ibid. 158).[32] Melancholia, the last of the temperaments, derived its name from the Greek for black gall and was linked to an excess of this fluid in the blood. While the balance of the humours in the body was thought, in normal circumstances, merely to 'qualify a person in a particular way', an extreme excess or deficiency of one of the humours could lead to mental and physical illness, even death. This balance not only governed an individual's physical appearance, 'tendency to disease as well as moral and intellectual qualities' but also determined their 'entire personality' (Ibid. 157-158). In excess, the black bile was thought to cause 'the most dreaded of diseases, insanity' and was consequently the most feared and hated of the humours (Ibid.). From this strand of discourse we understand Dürer's woeful figure as 'despairing under the cloud of the black humour' (Ibid.).

For Panofsky, 'the basic compositional formula as well as the gloomy inertia' that characterises Dürer's *Melancholia I* is provided by the traditional representations of the melancholic type and the associated vice of Acedia or Sloth, which were widely depicted in medical treatises, illuminated manuscripts and ecclesiastical buildings at that time (Panofsky cited in Wood, 1999: 159). According to Panofsky, Acedia or Sloth was understood as a state of listlessness, spiritual laziness or 'sinful sleep'

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[30] Jackson Lear (2006) reminds us that the interpretation of Dürer's engraving *Melancholia* (1514) has changed over time. He notes that 'for the Italian Baroque artists, the image represented the transience of human aspiration, for Romantics in various traditions the futility of technique in the absence of inspiration and for the English poet James Thomson, the indomitable will to work in the face of cosmic despair' (Lear, 2006: 129).

[31] Panofsky adds, 'each humour co-existed with the four elements, the four winds, the four seasons, the four times of day and the four phases of life' (Panofsky, 1943: 157).

[32] Panofsky explains: 'choler or yellow gall was associated with the element of fire and believed to share the latter's qualities of heat and dryness. It was thus held to correspond to the hot and dry Eurus, to summer, to midday and to the age of manly maturity. Phlegm, on the other hand was supposed to be moist and cold like water and was connected with the wind, Auster, the winter, with night, and with old age. The blood, moist and warm, was equated with air and was likened to the pleasant Zephar, to spring, to morning, and to youth. The melancholy humour, finally – the name deriving from the Greek, black gall – was supposed to be co-essential with the earth and to be dry and cold; it is related to the rough Bores, to autumn, to evening and an age of about sixty' (Panofsky, 1943: 157).

(Ibid.). The condition was associated with the departure of the 'God's Grace' from the individual (Appignanesi, 2008: 521).

Figure 10. *The Four Humours* (late 15th century) Anonymous Woodcut

In the fifteenth century illustration, *The Four Humours* (Figure 10), melancholy is signalled by a single figure that 'rests his head on his right hand' (Panofsky, 1943: 159).

Figure 11. *Acedia* (c.1490) Anonymous Detail of woodcut

Similarly, in another titled *Acedia* (c. 1490) from the same period, the condition with its connotations of slothful behaviour is represented by a female figure using the same figurative language of the head-in-hands pose subsequently used by Dürer in *Melancholia I*. Maria Ruvoldt reminds us that Dürer was not the only Renaissance artist to use the head-in-hands posture to portray melancholy: Raphael had used the pose a few years earlier in his painting *School of Athens, detail of Heraclitus* (1509 –

1511) in 'a pictorial homage to the myth of Michelangelo's melancholia' (Ruvoldt, 2003: 86).

Dürer's print *Melancholia I* is widely interpreted within the dominant canon of art history as a recuperation of the Aristotelian idea of melancholy that linked it to 'men of genius and talent' (Grotius cited in Moffit, 1988: 196). Panofsky, summing up Aristotle's thesis, said:

> 'Melancholics by nature, as opposed to the downright insane, are marked by a particular excitability which either over stimulates or cripples their thoughts and emotions and may, if not controlled, cause raving madness or imbecility: they walk, as it were, on a narrow ridge between two abysses. But they walk, just for this reason, way above the level of ordinary mortals. If they succeed in keeping their equilibrium so that "their very anomaly behaves somehow in a well-balanced and beautiful way" as Aristotle put it, "they may still be subject to depression and over excitement but they outrank all other men". All truly outstanding men, whether distinguished in philosophy, in statecraft, in poetry or in the arts, are melancholic – some of them even to such an extent that they suffer from ailments induced by the back gall' (Panofsky, 1943: 165).

Paul Wood traces how this view of creative melancholy may have become available to Dürer through the writings of Florentine Neoplatonist philosophers Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) (Wood, 1999). These writers linked the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy to Plato's theory of the 'divine frenzy', which allowed melancholy to be transformed into something that, although feared, was the sign of genius (Panofsky, 1943: 165). From this point onward, 'the hitherto disparaged melancholy became surrounded by the halo of the sublime' too (Ibid.). Panofsky notes that this idea of melancholy, in which all great men were viewed as melancholic, was 'twisted into the assertion that all melancholics were great men, so that melancholy quickly became a fashionable and desirable characteristic' (Ibid. 160). [33] Yet, citing Aristotle's words, Panofsky overlooks the fact that women are denied the associative link between enhanced intellectual and spiritual powers that Aristotle's thesis brings to men, and that,

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[33] Beneath Jacob de Gheyn's (1569–1629) sixteenth-century painting *Melancholy,* Hugo Grotius wrote: 'Melancholy, the most calamitous affliction of the Soul and Mind, often suppresses men of talent and genius' (Moffit, 1988: 196).

consequently, ever since Dürer's produced the image melancholy has been associated with men and genius.

Dürer's print also shows us the changed conception of Self in the Renaissance. The period was associated with the rebirth of classical learning and the pursuit of science, and with the emergence of the notion of independent human capacity linked to the rise of humanism. The sense of divine control over human existence was being replaced by the notion that people, rather than religious or other spiritual powers, were the 'agents of human history' and Dürer's depiction of melancholy represents these changing ideas about the Self (Chirelstein, 1990: 30). Allegorical symbols such as the wise dog and instruments of learning are used in Dürer's print to refer to the occult and geometry. On the one hand, the erosion of the idea of God's supremacy paved the way for a view of the human condition in which 'the seeds are sown for a tragic view of human life as finite, separate from God, and thus in some deep sense alone' (Wood, 1999: 155). This mood is signalled by the gloomy despondency of Dürer's melancholy figure. The iconography of Dürer's print reflects the humanist idea of creative genius, in which humanity rather than God was regarded as the driving force behind creativity (Panofsky, in Lear, 2006: 129). Thus Dürer presents us with 'a superior being, superior not by virtue of her wings, but by virtue of her intelligence and imagination, surrounded by the tools and symbols of creative endeavour and scientific research' (Wood, 1999: 160).

Further contradictions of Dürer's print arise from the fact that despite the rise of humanism the idea of the soul was still central to the Renaissance idea of Self and was widely regarded as female. Robert Burton wrote: 'we can understand all things by her, but what she is we cannot apprehend' (Burton, 1621: 154). [34]

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[34] There was much debate about the essence and faculties of the soul, but most thinkers at that time accepted Aristotle's view of the soul as 'the first act of the organical body, having the power of life' (*De Anima*, cited in Burton, 1621: 154). Most thinkers after Aristotle debated the exact nature of the soul, but tended to regard it as divisible into three parts: the first part relating to the organic body responsible for nourishment and maintenance of the body; the second to the brain and outward operation of the five senses, of which the sight was held to be most precious; and the third to the inward senses of common sense, phantasy and memory. Its object is not only the present, but to 'perceive the nature of things to come, past and present' (Ibid.). Common sense or reason was believed to regulate the other faculties of the soul, including imagination and memory. In these traditions the soul's outward and inward facilities are bound together by sleep, which brings together body and soul. The imagination or phantasy was believed to be most free during sleep (Ibid. 160).

Melancholy in men was thought to be particularly commanding because their souls were believed to be concentrated at a higher level than those of women. Burton observed:

> 'In melancholy men this faculty (of the soul) is most powerful and strong, and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things, especially if it be stirred up by some terrible object, presented to it from common sense or memory' (Ibid. 159).

From this perspective, melancholy is an outward sign of an enhanced soul, a female soul, housed in the body of a man. The symbolism in Dürer's etching draws on tradition from Christian theology in the Renaissance in which figurative language was regarded as central to conveying the emotions pictorially because 'the movements of the body were intended to express the sentiments of the soul' (Berdini,1999: 105). Sandro Botticelli's fifteenth century painting *La Derelitta* (c. 1495) (Figure 1) discussed in Chapter One was also thought to signify the exclusion of the soul, shown as female, from receiving the blessings of the beatitudes given byJesus during his 'Sermon on the Mount' (Piccoli (1930) cited in Argen, 1957: 21).Whilst the religious message of *La Derelitta* runs counter to the strand of humanist thought in Dürer's *Melancholia I* (1514), a concern for the inner life and the use of the female figure to express the inner Self or souls of men created an affinity between them. [35] Hence the figurative language in Dürer's etching may be read as an allegory to express the souls of divinely inspired melancholic men, thereafter denying women access to a fundamental form for expressing her melancholy – her body.

Nevertheless, I would argue that the print *Melancholia I* (1514) is interesting from a feminist perspective because 'her' powerful physical presence and 'frozen state of rage' did not conform to the norm of representing femininity at that time as physically weak and submissive, but also because the image continues to challenge some contemporary representations of melancholy, with their connotations of

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[35] The use of the female figure to represent the soul of man has a long history. Raffaello Piccoli (1886–1933) was a professor of Italian at the University of Cambridge, England who argued that its symbolism, in which the female subject is isolated from the surrounding space in fundamental opposition to perspective, anticipates something that 'only took shape clearly somewhat later in the art of Albrecht Dürer so that there is no denying the strange kinship between *Derelitta* and *Melancholia!'* (Piccoli [1930] cited in Argen, 1957: 21).

feminine passivity and depression (Wood, 1999: 148). Furthermore, the symbolism of figurative language acknowledges the power of the feminine soul or inner Self but places it in the service of men rather than allowing women to harness this power to represent their own melancholy. From a contemporary perspective the question is perhaps, what continues to enrage this powerful feminine force; what is it that would quell her?
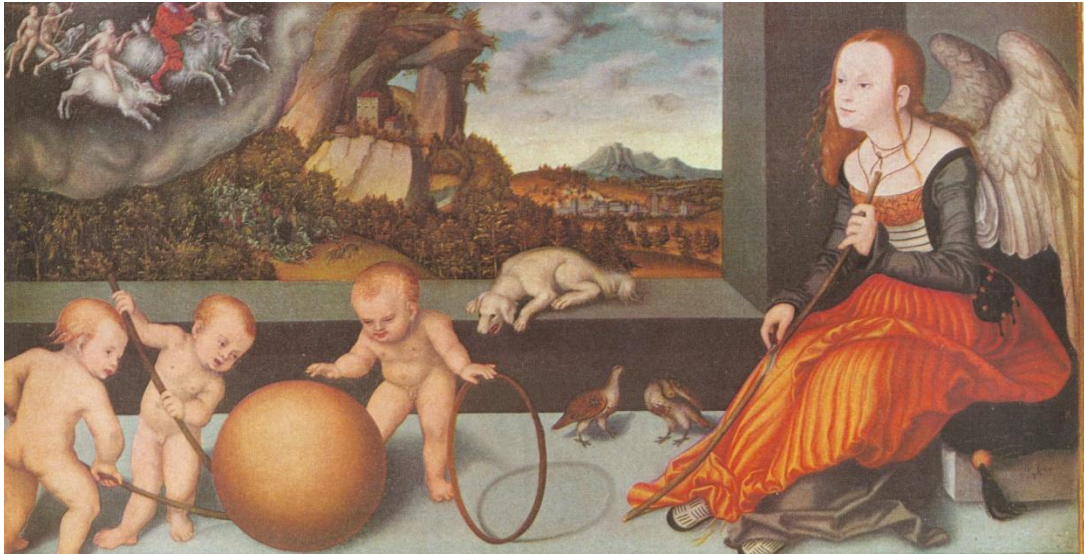

Figure 12. *Melancholy* (1532)
Lucas Cranach the Elder
Oil on panel
51 x 97cm

After Dürer, it is possible to trace a succession of images in which the seated female figure in head-in-hands pose is used to portray the concept of creative melancholy. These include *Melancholy* (1532) by Lucas Cranach the Elder (Figure 12), *La Melancholy* (1532) by Antonio Doni (Figure 13), *Melancolicvs* (1550) by Virgil Solis (Figure 14), *Melancholia* (1589) by Jost Amman (Figure 16), and Cesare Ripa's *Melancholy* (1603) (Figure 15). Art historian Eberhard Ruhmer has also suggested that 'there is a certain similarity between the principal figures of this picture [Cranach] with the figure of Melancholia in Dürer's engraving of 1514' (Ruhmer, 1963: 86).

Figure 13. *La Melancholy* (1552)
Antonio Doni
Woodcut

Both Cranach's *Melancholy* and Amman's *Melancholia* (Figure 16) reiterate the figurative image of the female winged angel and some of the associated iconography present in Dürer's print. In Doni's *La Melancholy,* Solis' *Melancolicvs*, Amman's *Melancholia* and Ripa's *Melancholia* the female figure not only becomes more feminine, less of a physical presence and thus perhaps less powerful than in Dürer's image but 'she' has also lost her wings to become more grounded in the world, perhaps further eroding the link with the divine.

Figure 14. *Melancolicvs* (1550)
Virgil Solis
Engraving

While variations of the conventional head-in-hands pose associated with melancholy continued, somewhere between Dürer's engraving and these slightly later works, the defiant glare of melancholy is lost.

Typically, the figure of melancholy is shown alone in a forlorn and barren landscape or, as in Cranach and Amman, surounded by 'her' instruments of learning. Collectively these artists and their works contribute to an evolving figurative language that is a means of expressing the concept of creative melancholy.

Figure 15. *Melancholia* (1603)
Cesare Ripa
Engraving from *Iconologia*

As with Dürer, however, this does not refer to women's experience, but to the generic and normative experience of men. In other words, creative melancholy was regarded as a condition suffered by men. The female figure is consequently used by these male artists to convey the melancholy of men or mankind whilst her own experience remains unseen and unheard.[36]

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[36] Juliana Schiesari makes a similar point in her discussion of the gendering of melancholia in Renaissance literature: 'she had been therefore lost to the world, unheard and unread' (Schiesari, 1992: 175).

Figure 16. *Melancholia* (1589)
Jost Amman
20 x 14.3cm

I note that apart from Cranach's painting, all the images gathered have been produced through a printmaking process; line, as a principal means of expression, used to outline the shape of the figure, its pose and gestures. In my own work, shown in Figures 17 and 18, I single out the linear, economical, diagrammatic quality of these early Renaissance prints; a quality that I find highlights the 'represented' nature of the female figure. Is it possible to recuperate this traditional figurative language associated with creative melancholy to represent how women live and suffer now?

Figure 17. *Zoe 1* (2007)
Christina Reading
Woodcut
6 x 5cm

Figure 18. *Zoe II* (2007)
Christina Reading
Woodcut
6 x 5cm

The female figure as a site for the contemplation of loss

> 'Silence is a consequence of the Fall, women do not preach or speak the word' (Berdini, 1999: 117).

The question remains: if melancholy is an emotional state aligned with men and enhanced intellectual, spiritual and imaginative powers, from what perspective is the figurative representation of women's experience of melancholy viewed during an overlapping historical moment?
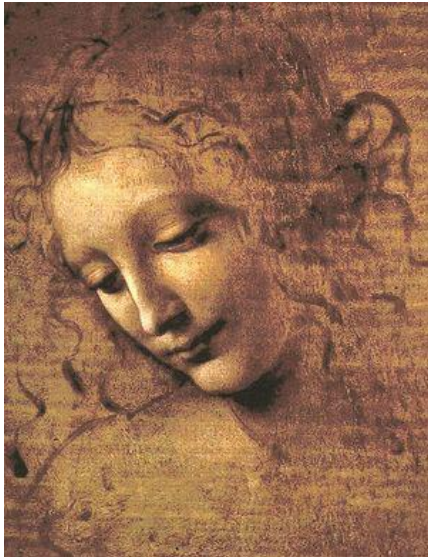
Figure 19. *Head of a Young Woman* (1508)
Leonardo da Vinci
Oil on canvas
24.7 x 22cm

Leonardo da Vinci's (1452–1519) unfinished painting *Head of a Young Woman* (Figure 19) shows a beautiful young woman with 'downcast eyes and tilted head' (Berdini, 1999: 120). [37] Da Vinci powerfully conveys a sense of this women's interior life through the turn of her head away from the viewer's gaze and her thoughtful and self absorbed demeanour. She is placed under the gaze, watched by both God and man, to reflect 'her' submission to a visual regime that governed the representation of women at the time (Ibid.).

According to the Christian theology then dominant in the West, all human suffering was thought to stem from Eve's primary act of disobedience, which led to the Fall of Man and expulsion from Eden. Responsibility for the act of transgression is placed firmly on Eve who defied God's command and picked the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. Hence woman is cast as transgressor in need of forgiveness, not only for acts of wantonness in her own life, but because of the stain of original sin (Kristeva, 1989: 190). In this discourse women were seen to have limited inner strength, weak souls that reduced their ability to resist temptation. Consequently,

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[37] Angela Ottino Della Chiesa in her catalogue of Leonardo's painting comments: 'A sketch in umber mixed with green through which can be seen either the white preparation or the roughness of a badly planned support or the marks of the saw that was used to cut down the panel. Most of the specialists overlook this small picture published by Quintavalle (E.1939). Some critics even cast doubt on whether this painting can be attributed to Leonardo' (Ettingner & Della Chiesa, 1967: 96). The painting is itself overlooked within art history. In this sense the painting is itself perhaps a lost object, identifying its melancholic feeling and affect. The painting is similar in mood to a number of drawings that Leonardo da Vinci produced on the subject matter, in particular an earlier drawing titled *Head of a Woman* (1488–1489).

woman's visual image was constrained for the edifying purpose of subjecting her soul to 'corrective measures' and to ensure that her image did not exert a corruptive influence on men (Berdini, 1999: 104).[38] As Berdini reminds us, 'she is placed under the gaze as a punishment for Eve's act of disobedience and the temptation she placed before Adam' (Ibid. 114).

Hence women's experience of melancholy is cast within a different conceptual framework from the notion of creative melancholy claimed for men, which influences the representation. Women's sinful bodies and souls were responsible not only for their own melancholy, but the melancholy of mankind. Consequently woman retreats into passivity and silence, her image designed to deliver a moral message and encourage reflection about the corrupting power of a woman. Although, therefore, women are regarded as the weaker and more sinful sex, the recognition of their potential to exercise power over men suggests a feminine nature constrained by the anxieties of men.

Art historical discourse about melancholy during the Renaissance also incorporated into its figurative language ideas developed by early humanist Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374). Berdini describes how in Petrarch's book of 366 poems marking his unrequited love for a married woman, Petrarch cast his subject Laura under an 'internalized' gaze (Berdini, 1999: 119). Berdini comments: 'when Petrarch speaks of *Laura* as the manifestation of a sentiment that is a complex mixture of recollection and fantasy, he refers to his vision of Laura as portrayed with "downcast eyes". "Downcast eyes" become the guarantee for a non-reciprocity which is an essential reassuring factor to Petrarch's mode of gazing' (Ibid.6). Crucially, however, the image of the female figure could only serve this function for men if it distanced itself from the real by suggesting ideal beauty, as opposed to the messy, earthy, materiality

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[38] This religious discourse echoed the discourse on the social status of women, which was defined almost exclusively in terms of marriage, because marriage was a hierarchical arrangement in which a woman's subjectivity was expected to represent the desires of her husband. Though this period saw the emergence of the companionate marriage in which the wife was regarded as having the intelligence to contribute to the partnership, her role was subordinate and obedience was considered the primary virtue of a good wife (Honig, 1990: 64).

of the real female body, for only idealised feminine beauty provided a conduit to the divine, to God (Ibid.). [39]

What, then, might be the meaning of this figurative pose in the context of images of women today? My woodcut *Niki – Big Brother* (Figure 20) captures a moment from a reality television show. I explore the figurative language found in a throwaway media image. In this context, the young woman's downcast gaze may signal her awareness that her image is still, in a different way, subject to public scrutiny and judgement, linking it to other images from art history to create an ongoing story of the use of the female figure and melancholy.

Figure 20. *Niki – Big Brother* (2007)
Christina Reading
Woodcut on paper
6 x 8cm

Aligned with Eve's story from Christian theology is Mary's (Mother of Jesus) story, which casts women's sorrow as mourning rather than melancholy. Art historian Anna Jameson's (1774–1854) pivotal work *Legends of the Madonna as represented in the Fine Arts* (1879) identified three traditional uses of the mourning female figure in Christian theology during the Renaissance as *Mater Dolorosa* (Mother of Sorrows), *Stabat Mater* (Here stands the Mother) and *Pietà* (Mourning Mother) (Jameson, 1879: 35).

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[39] Berdini notes that ideal beauty was thought to comprise a synthesis of parts of the female body belonging to different women. The assumption is that no actual woman can possess all the qualities of the ideal; consequently there can be no absolute beauty in real women. The ideal poses the problem and the need to select different qualities from different sources to be recomposed later in representation. Berdini explains: 'once beauty is distanced from any individual women it can be accepted as an object of contemplation as an intermediary step towards the divine' (Berdini, 1999: 118).

Figure 21. *Mater Dolorosa* (mid-15th century)
Bartolomé Esteban Murillo
Woodcut

In the first of these forms, exemplified by a mid-fifteenth century woodcut titled *Mater Dolorosa* by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), the image is of a middle-aged woman with 'the head bowed in sorrow, tears streaming from the heavy eyes and the whole expression intensely mournful' (Ibid. 36).[40] Mary's tears, the tears of a woman, are used in stories of maternal separation and loss, and deliver a moral message that faith is a means to bear such sorrow.

Stabat Mater, the second form of representation, places the idealised form of the Virgin Mary at the site of the crucifixion on the right-hand side of the Crucifix. The Virgin's figurative form is an idealised and mystical symbol that both represents her standing as the Mother of God and is a personification of the church (Ibid. 37).

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[40] Jameson adds: 'these forms of representation often refer in some way to the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin, understood as the Prophecy of Simeon, the Flight to Egypt, Christ lost by his Mother, the Betrayal of Christ, the Crucifixion, the Deposition and the Ascension with the Virgin left on earth' (Jameson, 1879: 36).

Figure 22. *Pietà* (early 16th century)
Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio)
Woodcut

Perhaps the most significant of these forms however, is the Pietà, a figurative form in which Mary is shown 'with her dead Son on her arms, or on her lap, or lying at her feet' (Ibid. 38). [41] Raphael's (1483–1520) delicate print of the Pietà is, for Jameson, defined by the Virgin's 'face of quiet woe' (Ibid. 39). The image is interesting because the face of the Virgin is not of an idealised youthful beauty but 'the agony' of a middle-aged woman (Ibid.). Whilst such imagery produced by male artists does imaginatively engage with the suffering of the mythological figure Mary, the exploration of Mary's emotional experience is confined within the religious story and women's views on this subject retreat into silence. Hence in the visual field a woman's sorrow is cast as mourning in a way that signals her acceptance of her role within Christian theology. For the viewer today the work summons the laments of Mary as a mourning mother as replayed through the centuries. Her sorrow is frozen in time, locked in the endless task of mourning her dead son, in melancholy.

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[41] The Pietà is the figurative form, dating back to the thirteenth century, in which Mary is shown holding her dead son, Jesus, across her lap. In the original form this image is a symbol for the suffering of Mary at the death of her son Jesus, but arguably stands as an emblem of human suffering. The image provides a reminder to Christians and non-Christians alike that we are destined to be separated from those that we love by death. Pietà is defined in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a representation of the Virgin Mary (and other holy women) mourning over the dead Christ' (Onions, 1973: 1581). Jameson adds that 'in some instances the Virgin is shown with lamenting angels but no other personages' (Jameson, 1879: 38).

Figure 23. *Pietà* (1498–1499)
Michelangelo
Marble
174 x 195cm

It is also significant that it was arguably Michelangelo's sculpture *Pietà* (1498–1499), (housed in the Vatican's St. Peter's Basilica, Rome), rather than Raphael's image discussed by Jameson, that entered the canonical art history of melancholy to become the recognisable form of the Pietà. In Michelangelo's sculpture Mary's exterior appearance is beautiful, intended to echo her own inner beauty and closeness to God. She is pictured as demure, passive and silent; her head is bowed, but there appear to be no tears even though she supports the weight of her dead child. Mary's display of grief is not ostentatious because more overt displays of grief would have been regarded as unchristian, implying doubts about a belief in the afterlife and other Christian ideals (Barasch, 1976: 32). Jameson, writing 140 years ago, was certainly critical of such a move. She comments:

> 'I have seen the sublime Mater Dolorosa transformed into a merely beautiful and youthful maiden, with such an air of sentimental grief as might serve for the loss of a sparrow' (Jameson, 1879: 36).

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Figure 24. *Catholic Icons* (2008)
Christina Reading
One of a series of eight painted slide projections
2 x 3cm

The problem for women seems to be the prescriptive narrative imposed on the representation of women's experience in the Christian faith. The visible form of the Virgin Mary is still immensely significant to Roman Catholics today and the figurative language used in images of her form predetermined by the messages she is destined to convey. Starting with photographic negatives of statues of the Virgin Mary found in a Catholic church, I overlaid this pre-set language with the fluidity of paint. I aimed to produce a language that is less fixed, to open up the possibility of unlocking Mary's narrative from the part assigned to her in the Christian story. The fluidity of the paint seemed to provide a way to free and suggest other discourses.

Central to the representation of woman's melancholy and her sorrow is the discovery that her experience is rarely depicted outside of her part in the Christian story in which 'she' is 'assigned a role rather than enacting a plot' (Berdini, 1999: 106). In this story 'she' is either held responsible for the melancholy consequences of the fall of man – Eve's story – or cast in the role of chief mourner for Christ – Mary's story. The figurative language of an idealised female figure in 'tilted-head-downcast-eyes' pose and a middle-aged female figure with 'an intensely mournful expression' and 'tears streaming from the heavy eyes', are used in contradictory ways to extend our understanding of the concerns of the prevailing canon (Jameson, 1879: 36). Although many of these interpretations made by male artists speak powerfully and sensitively of the experiences of mythological and idealised women, these representations gave rise to rules and conventions that governed how melancholy could be cast in the female figure at that historical moment. Women's voices on these experiences were excluded from the dominant canon.

The cultural legacy of the Renaissance

The Romantic tradition: Objects of virtue

The cultural legacy of the Renaissance persisted largely unchallenged until the birth of Modernism 300 years later and inaugurated a romantic tradition in which the female figure was used as a symbol or metaphor for the idea of melancholy. The use of the female figure was governed by two constants that emerged from that earlier historic moment. The first, the inactive drooping female figure in variations of the head-in-hands pose seen in Dürer's *Melancholia I* (Figure 9) or the tilted-head-downcast-eyes pose of Leonardo's *Head of a Young Woman* (Figure 19). The second was that the specifically idealised use of the feminine became 'aesthetically privileged as the very metaphor for loss' (Schiesari, 1992: 16). In other words, 'her' form was used not to represent her own concerns but as a place for the viewer to contemplate loss. This recurring figurative language was used in relation to different kinds of spaces in the external world to convey changing ideas about the inner life and melancholy.

Figure 25. *Landscape with Psyche Outside the Palace of Cupid, from The Enchanted Castle* (1664)
Claude Lorrain
Oil on canvas

Exterior spaces

One of the earliest works in the Romantic tradition is Claude Lorrain's *Landscape with Psyche Outside the Palace of Cupid [The Enchanted Castle]* (1664). The subject of the painting is Psyche, the mortal beauty who according to the ancient Greek fable defies the gods to look upon her lover Cupid. Consequently, Cupid deserts Psyche and in Lorrain's painting Psyche is pictured alone and abandoned outside Cupid's enchanted castle.[42] Though the subject matter of the fable seems to depart from the religious associations that governed the depiction of women during the Renaissance, its moral, Psyche's disobedience and the melancholic consequences, echoes the stain of Eve's original sin in the Christian story. As in the Christian story, the fable ends on a redemptive note: Psyche ascends into the world of the Gods when she and Cupid are married. The female figure is transformed into the unworldly, a channel to the divine and hence an object of contemplation of the divine.

The figurative language in the painting follows the Renaissance pictorial tradition of using the female figure in seated head-in-hands pose to signal melancholy. Yet whereas Doni's *La Melancholy* (Figure 13)*,* Solis's *Melanccolicvs* (Figure 14) and Ripa's *Melancholia* (Figure 15) placed the female figure in an infertile and bleak landscape, Lorrain placed the subject in dark, atmospheric and haunting landscape to suggest melancholy as a rich if profoundly overwhelming experience rather than an uninspired state.

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[42] Understanding the cause of Psyche's melancholy requires knowledge of the ancient Greek fable of the story of forbidden love between the mortal beauty Psyche and the god Cupid. This awareness would have been more commonplace in the seventeenth century than today, when an explanation is usually needed to access the picture's meaning. In Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* (Books IV–VI), Venus is jealous of Psyche's mortal beauty and hatches a plan to make her fall in love with her son Cupid. Venus thinks there is no worse suffering than unrequited love (love-sickness or love-melancholy). The plan backfires and Cupid falls in love with Psyche but conceals his identity, visiting her only at night in an enchanted castle. Fearing that he is an evil magician Psyche, though forbidden to do so, looks at him and Cupid leaves her (Graves, 1960: 57- 61).

Figure 26. Detail: *Landscape with Psyche outside the Palace of Cupid,* from *The Enchanted Castle* (1664)
Claude Lorrain
Oil on canvas
87.1 x 151.3cm

Yet in Lorrain's painting the scale of the relationship between the figure and the background has changed to emphasise the smallness, and hence insignificance, of the figure in relation to the vast and tremendous power of nature. Placing the female figure in relation to nature provides the opportunity to articulate the self-awareness and self-consciousness gained from contemplating the scene. The landscape setting shows a world not yet cultured, an external sign of a prevalent interior feeling about being lost and insignificant in the world, and perhaps as Psyche is a woman, the submerging of femininity within the natural world. Lisa Appignanesi reminds us that according to Dr George Cheyne, author of *The English Malady* (1733) throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries melancholy continued to be associated with 'the most refined and sensitive amongst the rising middle classes, those with the most leisure, who succumbed to spleen, to vagaries of the imagination, to various maladies of the nerves' (Appignanesi, 2008: 34). Melancholy was a condition that middle-class men aspired to and male artists such as Claude Lorrain sought to represent.

Over a century later the symbolic language of the idealised yet downcast female figure set in a landscape continued to flourish, but as in Vincent's *La Mélancolie* (1801) (Figure 27) the figure becomes more prominent in the painting and the landscape is more cultivated. The changing balance between the figure and background perhaps reflects the gradual mechanisation of agriculture and transformation of the English countryside that occurred at this time.

Figure 27. *La Mélancolie* (1801)
François-André Vincent
Oil on canvas
78 x 63.4cm

The notion of melancholy as a subjective mood is once again captured by the private meditations of the idealised female subject but this time the viewer is understood as male because of the sexual connotations in the image offered by the revealing drapery and bared shoulder. Exaggerated emphasis falls on the almost luminous figure, her white clothing set against the dark landscape, signalling perhaps her virtue and purity, a symbolism that continues to have religious undertones.

Interior spaces

The pictorial tradition of the idealised, downcast female figure continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but increasingly 'she' was placed in relation to an interior domestic space rather than an exterior, signalling shifts in the roles of women at that time. Debates about the rights of women in society were provoked by a series of texts over the period such as John Locke's 1690 essay 'Concerning human understanding'*,* Mary Wollstonecraft's book *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and John Stuart Mill's book *On the Subjugation of Women* (1869) but nevertheless, the reality and aspiration was that the roles of most middle and upper-class women of the mid-eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries revolved round household and children. This contradiction –on the one hand, a growing awareness of the limitations of the private lives of women at that time, and on the other, the submission of young women to a system where they were valued for their beauty and cultural accomplishments – distinguished the period, and the domestic interior space

became the backdrop against which the melancholy of idealised young women was represented by male artists.

The inner experience of melancholy from the point of view of the sufferer also became the object of curiosity for many writers and artists during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Melancholy was conceived as something to be embraced, part of the 'generalized pain of being alive or sentimentalism' (Frerot, 2006: 102).[43] The belief is associated with the writing of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) who sought 'not to communicate something but rather to make imaginatively accessible the tonality of a uniquely subjective experience' (Goethe cited in Radden, 2000: 182). In his influential novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) Goethe tells of the despair caused by a broken heart and unrequited love; for the male protagonist Werther, suicide is the only way to ensure that his love will not end: 'Oh, that I had enjoyed the bliss of dying for you! How gladly would I have sacrificed myself for you, Charlotte' (Goethe, cited in Radden, 2000: 193). Goethes's writings introduce a tradition of poetic melancholy where the emphasis is on introspection and the expression of feeling as a desirable aesthetic experience. Crucially though, the emphasis in the story is on the subjective experience and feelings of the man, Werther, rather than the woman, Charlotte, the object of his ardour. After Goethe, the poets John Keats (1795–1821) George Gordon (Lord Byron) (1788–1824), and Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) provided a similar focus and the literary backdrop and inspiration for artists during the period associated with the Romantic tradition.

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[43] The Romantic period (1770–1848) is generally thought to have originated in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century as a reaction to the Age of Enlightenment (1650–1800) and the Industrial Revolution (1760–1820) which emphasised intense emotion as a source of aesthetic experience, especially when experienced in relation to the overwhelming power of nature.

Figure 28. *Sweet Melancholy* (1756)
Joseph-Marie Vien
Oil on canvas
86.4 x 76.2cm

The intersection of these evolving ideas about melancholy is illustrated in Vien's *Sweet Melancholy* (Figure 28), where a gently regretful figure, expensively dressed, is seated in an opulent and highly decorated. Her bitter-sweet experience, 'sweet melancholy', is indicated by what is presumably a love letter discarded on the floor. The figurative language of head-in-hands and the downcast gaze is merged with a representation of the subjective and interior feelings.

In Lagrenée's *The Melancholy* (1785) (Figure 29), the way the hand props up the head echoes the figurative language of Vien's painting, but this time the details of the domestic interior are minimised to produce an image that focuses not just on her lavish clothing but also her delicate and flawless skin. Her form is used then to express the ideal qualities of women, vulnerable, passive and desirable, her melancholy unspoken.

Figure 29. *The Melancholy* (1785)
Louis Jean François Lagren*é*e
Oil on canvas
50 x 62.5cm

Figure 30. *Melancholy* (1860)
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot
Oil on canvas
48 x 36 inches

The pictorial language of the idealised downcast figure continued to thrive into the nineteenth century, seen, for instance, in Corot's painting *Melancholy* (1860). The painting is linked through a similarity in appearance to the figurative language seen across art history and in the previous two paintings. Corot's painting follows the head-in-hands pose used by Dürer, but this time the female figure does not seem to signal male genius but rather the role assigned to 'her' as an object of contemplation

in the visual field. Though the subject of Corot's painting wears modern dress, and although her eyes are downcast, she does not have the same 'fixed stare' or energy that chacterises Dürer's powerful winged figure (Panofsky, 1943: 160). Her elegant dress and voluminous skirt covers the lower half of her body, but the head, arms and upper body are revealed in a way that also invites comparion with Dürer's melancholy angel.

Figure 31. *Retrospection* (1880)
Thomas Eakins
Oil on canvas
36. 9 x 25.7cm

Subtle variations in figurative language are also seen in this period. For instance, in *Retrospection* (1880) (Figure 31) Thomas Eakins shows a solitary young woman, seated with head bowed and hands resting in her lap. In this image, as with others discussed in this section of the text, the female figure is enclosed in an interior space in which there is no sign of the exterior. There are no windows or doors in any of these paintings; the outside world (the world of men) is seemingly denied to these women. Once again this allegorical beautiful female figure is designed to be gazed upon, to provide a place for retrospection.

Collectively these paintings make use of the traditions laid down in the art history of melancholy, but subtle shifts in usage alter the meaning of this art historical language. The problem for women is that these images are defined by the male gaze.

The viewer, even if female, was 'schooled to look at the world through straight white men's eyes' and hence to see herself 'performing' her own melancholy for the patriarchal gaze rather than to represent her own concerns (Pollock, 2007: 132). The pictures that male artists brought into the visual field during this period influenced the subjective experience of young women because, arguably, to some extent they learned the behaviours associated with melancholy from the culture that surrounded them and enacted its passions. The images offer a patriarchal notion of the feminine, shaped by the concerns of men rather than the concerns of women, and provide men with an idealised place for them to contemplate their own melancholy whilst women's experience continues to remain unspecified and hidden from view.

Liminal spaces
However, in the nineteenth century, alongside the dominant figurative language, different gazes also emerged to challenge the visual histories that had hitherto confined women to a downcast gaze.

Figure 32. *The Sentimental* (1846)
Johann Peter Hasenclever
Oil on canvas
36.5 x 30.5cm

In Hasenclever's *The Sentimental* (1846) (Figure 32), a beautiful female figure gazes outward at the night sky through a closed window, whilst in Munch's work *The Evening Hour, Laura* (1888) (Figure 33) the artist's sister stares into the mid-

distance of the evening sky. Jacky Bowring (2008) reminds us that liminal spaces, such as the mid-distances depicted in these paintings, are typical symbols of melancholy, as is the descending darkness associated with twilight or early evening. There is a growing sense in these pictures of women's wish to move beyond the confines of the domestic world. In both paintings the female figure hovers on the boundaries between inside and outside space, the first gazing outward at the night sky from a closed window, the second sitting on the doorstep outside the house (Bowering, 2008).

Figure 33. *The Evening Hour, Laura* (1888)
Edvard Munch
Oil on canvas
75 x 100.5cm

These images are part of a pictorial tradition that flourished in the eighteenth and ninteenth centuries, which set in motion the cultural idea of loss as a subjective experience, an expression of feeling rather than a result of religious belief or humourlogical theory, as seen in the Renassiance period. These images, with their limited range of poses and idealisation of women, show us the constraints placed on women in the visual field, and in their limitations and narrow repertoire they mark an absence rather than summoning up a presence of the melancholic experience of women.

The scientific tradition: Objects of vice
Alongside this growth of Romantic ideas of melancholy, with their emphasis on intuition and introspection, the growing interest in science and knowledge which began in the aftermath of the period of the Enlightenment (1650–1790) placed logical argument and reason at the centre of methods. By the mid-nineteenth century

an evolving scientific method argued that the only authoritative knowledge was that which could be affirmed through the senses. This approach was extended to the human as well as the natural sciences. Scientific methods used to explain or predict phenomena in the natural world were also used to explain human behaviour.[44] Whereas melancholy had once been linked with spiritual malaise in Christian theology or an excess of black bile in the blood in humourlogical theory, there was instead a growing sense that clues to the working of the mind were observable in the body and could be interpreted by medical practitioners.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the physicians Citizen (Philippe) Pinel (1745–1840), Jean-Étienne Dominque Esquirol (1772–1840) and Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893) emphasised the taking of detailed life histories of patients, and the classification of mental illness according to its appearance in the body. Based on their observations of the mentally ill at the Hospital Pitié-Salpêtrière in Paris, many of whom were women, these men sought to understand what a body's pose and facial expression revealed about the state of mind of the subject. Hence during this period there was also a growing interest in direct observation of the facial features, body posture and expression as an external sign of madness. Questions were asked about what madness looked like, and what a body's pose and facial expression revealed about the state of mind of the subject. Pinel's classification system introduced four groups of madness: mania, melancholia, dementia and imbecility, thereby classifying melancholy as a mental illness treated in asylums or hospices as an ailment of the spirit.

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[44] Thomas Hankins suggests that the Enlightenment began in the seventeenth century and is associated with names such as Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) Rene Descartes (1596–1659) and Isaac Newton (1642–1727). Hankins explains that during the Enlightenment reason was regarded as the key to a new scientific method and discovering knowledge about the world. This was because 'the laws on nature, because they are freely chosen by God, can only be known through experience and therefore during the 17th century experiment became part of the reasoned approach to nature' (Hankins, 1985: 2).

Figure 34. *Planches 1, II and III* (1838)
Ambrose Tardieu
Illustrations in *Des Maladies Mentales* (1838)

In 1838 Ambrose Tardieu (1788–1811) responded with a series of illustrations presenting melancholy as a typology of women's facial features (Radden, 2000) (Figure 34). These diagrammatic drawings were presented as illustrations in the medical text *Des Maladies Mentales* (1839) by J. E. D. Esquirol. Thus, Tardieu's observations were seen first and foremost as science, as objective truth not as art. This intention shaped the materiality of these works; they were made as illustrations for a medical textbook rather than oil paintings on canvas, and the women were interrogated as objects of study rather than viewed as objects of contemplation. Later, Charcot also set up a photographic atelier in the Salpêtrière hospital as part of a rigorous scientific method designed to create a detailed visual record of mental illness. Given that most of the patients at the hospital were women it is hardly surprising that most of the subjects of his photographs were also women (Appignanesi, 2008: 68). Through the signs visually inscribed on their bodies the women pictured in these works were labelled as lacking, as having minds that were damaged and malfunctioning. Because of this veneer of objectivity a woman's melancholy was labelled by others as an illness, rendering her separate and distinct from the idealised female figure in classic melancholic pose that provided an allegorical representation of melancholy.

The iconography of mental illness created by this scientific tradition was largely placed outside the art-historical frame of melancholy with its tradition of using the vulnerable and rarefied female figure confined to a domestic space to contemplate loss. Instead, as in *Planches I, II and III,* we are faced with mad women confined to another kind of interior space, an asylum. Women, it seems, are too weak to escape the protection of patriarchal institutions, whether that is the confines of a plush domestic interior or the austere surroundings of the asylum.

This may raise a question about the legitimacy of the current boundaries of the melancholy frame within art history. Changing these parameters and complicating this history to include the use of the female figure in the representation of women's melancholy in a broader sense might, therefore, be considered an important and feminist move.

Figure 35. *Lypemaniaque I* (2009), after J. E. D. Esquirol's *Des Maladies Mentales*
Christina Reading
Oil on canvas
3 x 3ft

In my painting *Lypemaniaque I* (2009), I attempt to explore the gap between what is presented as fact in Tardieu's nineteenth-century illustrations and the dark secrets that this image might suggest. I use drawing brushstrokes and colour to acknowledge this unreconciled history of women, and consider what the sideways stare might betray about 'her' emotional life. Through this I attempt to reinvest the original

diagrammatic image with a concern for the subjective feeling found in the Romantic tradition.

Modernism: the marginalisation and absence of the female figure

The early part of the twentieth century witnessed the growth of scientific ideas and principles and the emergence of new philosophical discourses that tried in different ways to negotiate the implications of living in a world without religion and without faith.[45] The catastrophe of modernity was addressed by writers of the time including Friedrich Nietzsche (*The Birth of Tragedy,* 1872 and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 1896), along with Walter Benjamin (*The Origin of the German Tragic Drama,* 1928) and Theodor Adorno (*Minima Moralia; Reflections from Damaged Life,* 1951). They sought to confront the loneliness of mankind living in a world without God so that the 'long history of the world based on faith came to an end' (Frerot, 2006: 102). There was a concern with existential questions relating to God and death, and the melancholic consequences of these discourses. This movement in the West was given added momentum by the devastating effects of World War One (1914–1918) and World War Two (1939–1945). Hence the 'most powerful legacy of melancholy is not a function of iconography but of lack of faith, an undertow to the modernist period in art history' (Weiss, 2005: 275).

The period also saw the foundation of the disciplines of psychoanalysis and psychiatry, led by the writing of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), which provided an approach to the interpretation of human subjectivity based on the discourses of rationality and science. From this point, melancholy was no longer accessed through ancient fable, religious texts or merely subjective feeling, but was attributed to the existence of an unconscious and the development of the mind.

The trajectory this took in relation to art practice was, on the one hand, a new radical experimentation with the formal and material qualities of art and, on the other, 'a spiritual aspiration that sometimes took traditional religious forms and at other times

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[45] Nietzsche's ideas drew on the work of earlier German thinkers including Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who espoused the view that mankind should live without God and that death after a lifetime of struggling and suffering was to be welcomed. Culturally, these ideas were presented in Wilhelm Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (1857), which presents a positive notion of death that feels foreign to our times.

wandered through all kinds of alternatives, from quantum physics and genetics to occultism and cosmology' (Pollock, 2007: 232). Modern artists could see themselves as part of a struggle to assert new spiritual values in an era where traditional religious belief and spiritual practices were challenged.

In modernism the female form continued to be used by some figurative artists as the medium for representing melancholy; however, the idealised figure gradually came to be replaced by a figure that reflected the formal innovations and the new sense realism associated with modernism. The technological innovations of photography, film and design, for example, nudged artists into a new concern with portraying everyday life.
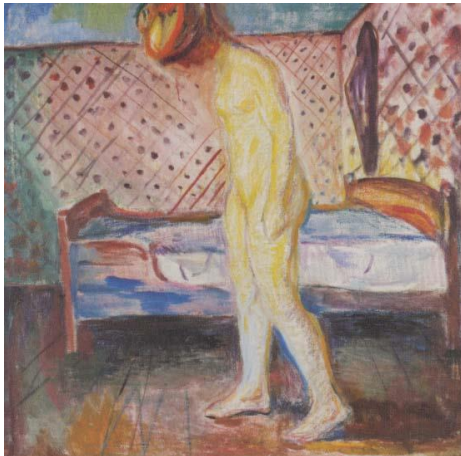

Figure 36. *Weeping Woman* (1907–1909)
Edvard Munch
Oil and crayon on canvas

Edvard Munch's *Weeping Woman* (1907–1909) (Figure 36) shows us a standing female nude figure set within a domestic interior, with her 'head bowed in sorrow' (Bolitho, 2012: 11). The figure is prominent in the foreground creating a sense of claustrophobia and unease in the space. The perspective of the figure reflects the fact that the original inspiration for this painting is thought to be a small photograph taken by Munch. The unappealing background wallpaper and the bare floorboards add to the sense of disquiet. The melancholy figure seems to be unaware of, or does not acknowledge, the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer.

The motif of the weeping woman, and the similarity in figurative language, links the painting visually to the melancholic iconography seen in Renaissance paintings that represent the sorrows of the *Mater Dolorosa,* but not necessarily to the same

maternal and religious narrative. Munch's *Weeping Woman* does not attempt to provide a narrative about the unnamed women in the painting. Rather, 'her' form is arguably used to convey the psychological state of the artist, through the expressive use of colour, while the experience of the woman remains unknown – a reflection perhaps on the fact that Munch's relationships with women were known to be difficult (Ibid).

Between 1907 and 1909 Munch painted many versions of *Weeping Woman:* six paintings, several drawings, a lithograph and a photograph – a repetition that seems to underline the melancholic feeling of the painting.[46] The cumulative effect of such repetition seems to hint at a sustained despondency which is not consoled by painting the first picture.

Figure 37. *Weeping Woman (Dora)* (1937)
Pablo Picasso
60 x 49cm
Oil on canvas

The reworking of the religious metaphor of tears seen in Munch is also seen in Picasso's cubist *Weeping Woman* (1937). On the 26 April 1937 German bombers attacked and devastated the Basque town of Guernica on behalf of Franco. Picasso painted the mural *Guernica* (1937) in response to the suffering caused by this event. One of the main motifs in this painting was a weeping woman holding her dead child and after *Guernica* was complete Picasso continued to make ten further studies of the woman's head, or *Weeping Woman*, over the course of the following year. In the devastation of war Picasso commented that 'it was a woman's role to weep', in other words, to mourn those killed in war (Picasso cited in Jones, 2000). The repetition of

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[46] As seen at *Edvard Munch: The Modern Eye*, Tate Modern, London, June 2012.

Weeping Woman seems to underline the fact that for Picasso women's mourning does not stop when the war is over, but continues.

The face of the *Weeping Woman* was reputedly inspired by a living person, Picasso's lover, the photographer Dora Maar, and by the traditional symbol of the mourning mother, *Mater Dolorosa* (Mother of Sorrows) found in Spanish churches. Picasso used the traditional metaphor of the woman's tears to assert a new idea of melancholy, as a response to the loss caused by war, not simply through subject matter but through changes to the manner in which a woman is represented. Rather than representing what he saw, Picasso's innovative approach analysed the female figure in terms of shapes, and used form and intense colour to express emotion. The vexed question of whose emotion is represented by this weeping figure continues, however, because 'her' image is still arguably used as a means to represent the concerns of man and mankind, rather than the specificity of her experience as a woman.

Figure 38. *Melancolie* (1912)
Giorgio de Chirico
Oil on canvas
78.5 x 63.5cm

The reworking of classical melancholic figurative language to represent the concerns of the modernist era is also seen in the work of Giorgio De Chirico. In his painting *Melancolie* (1912) the idealised sculpted female figure in familiar head-in-hands

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pose with downcast eyes is quoted and used to cast a long exaggerated shadow through gloomy architectural forms to produce a powerful image of emptiness and loneliness in a life without religion. 'She' is represented as a sculpture, her rigid and lifeless form interpreted as a symbol of the melancholy of mankind rather than a representation of women's experience.

During the modernist period there were important shifts in the social position of women because of radical developments in the feminist movement. Crucially, this era was marked by the introduction of universal suffrage in Britain for women over thirty in 1918, and two world wars afforded opportunities for some women to break away from traditional roles and behaviours. This change is exemplified though the work of Edward Hopper; his painting *Cinema in New York* (1939) (Figure 39), for example, reiterates the traditional head-in-hands poses associated with melancholy but places the figure in a workplace rather than domestic setting, reflecting the changing social position of women.

Figure 39. *Cinema in New York* (1939)
Edward Hopper
Oil on canvas
81.9 x 101.9cm

The reiteration of the traditional figurative language of melancholy continued to be used into the mid-twentieth century. The process of transforming the woman into a metaphor for the modernist notion of melancholy reflects the continued versatility and power of the dominant discourse to use the female figure in the service of its own concerns.

Despite this, by the twentieth century figuration had fallen out of favour with many followers of modernism, who argued that figurative art should be avoided in favour of the move to pure form, to abstraction and to the figural. Artists looked for new ways to reflect on their experiences, and some developed an abstract language leading the emergence of a new aesthetic in the art history of melancholy, in which non-representational artworks focused on the expression of pure form and feeling. Abstract painting was associated with the new, a way to express deeply felt forms of the self, whereas figuration was linked to the legacies of art history and was perhaps more uncertain about its role within the modernist agenda.

Some modernist artists focused on 'stripping down' imagery to bring to the fore the material and aesthetic qualities of the artwork (Greenberg, 1976 cited in Jaudon & Kozloff, 1978: 170). This shift towards abstract expressionism is evident in the work of disparate artists from the period including Mark Rothko (1903–1970), the American abstract expressionist painter who used vast scale, colour and pure form to evoke a non-religious spiritual experience of melancholy. It is also seen in the work of Barnett Newman (1905–1970), another leading American abstract painter known for his colour field painting. Other artists, such as German artist Anselm Kiefer (b.1945), made paintings that incorporated materials such as straw, ash, clay, lead and shellac to produce desolate paintings depicting the melancholic consequences of the horror of the Holocaust.[47]

As Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff argue, the sexual metaphor of 'stripping down' to make artworks pure is found in a range of work from the time. They remind us that artist Willem de Kooning (1904–1997) said that 'one of the most striking of abstract art's appearance is her nakedness, an art object stripped bare' (Ibid. 168). Hence they conclude that 'the assumption is that the artist is male and that the work of art (object) is female' (Ibid. 170). In this sense although the female figurative form is missing in the abstract work of art, the feminine, as subject of male desire, is used to signify melancholy and to provide a site for the contemplation of melancholic feeling.

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[47] Jack Fischel describes how between 1939 and 1945 the Nazis and their collaborators slaughtered six million Jews in their effort to 'rid the earth of its Jewish population' (Fischel, 1998: xiv). Fischel makes the point that the Nazis persecuted other groups of people including homosexuals and the disabled, but that it was the Jewish people that were the primary target of genocide (Ibid.).

One of the reasons why the place of figuration in the dominant canon of melancholy was overshadowed by the rise of abstraction was because changes in the position of women meant that the objectified female was no longer available to male artists in an unproblematic manner. This was because although patriarchy continued to dominate visual culture, feminism began to make its demands heard. The feminist argument that representations of idealised women were a kind of aggression against women because they did not allow the representation of real women in visual culture grew. Consequently male artists sought new ways to represent their concerns; arguably the strategies they developed meant that they continued to subsume women's concerns within the broader discourse, rather than placing them at the centre. Hence the representation of women's bodies remained regulated by the dominant canon, if only by their exclusion.

Within modernism, there was a tendency to equate women's experience with men's. Such representations are positioned as generic and normative; the particularities of women's experience of melancholy are subsumed and silenced within this broader discourse. However, it is by no means certain that the works by male figurative or abstract artists discussed provide an insight into women's experience of the condition. I would argue that what is missing is not just the female figure, but additionally any discussion about whether the collapse of belief and faith that drove much of the male artists' representation of melancholy during the modernist period, affected women in the same way?

Moira Gatens has argued that the silence regarding the experience of women during this period reflects 'masculine impotence to address the nature of the losses suffered by women at this time' (Gatens, 1996: 28). On the other hand, woman had not been sufficiently empowered to represent herself in order to ensure that her experiences were seen and heard. Representations of her melancholy as told from her own perspective largely remained absent. This absence is powerful, and whilst taking away the female figure from representations of melancholy avoids the limitations of the narratives associated with its use, it also removes from the visual field a fundamental tool for expressing the emotional life of women.

From a contemporary perspective, there are efforts by historians, museums and artists to try to remember women's experiences of the war by revisiting texts and artworks produced by women. An example of this was the 2011/12 exhibition *Women War Artists* at the Imperial War Museum, London, which gathered together artworks produced by women in response to World War Two.[48] For example, Priscilla Thornycroft (b.1917) recorded figuratively the lives of ordinary Londoners in Camden Town, examining the cost in terms of civilian suffering. Though perhaps hidden from view, overshadowed by the dramatic shifts and a move to abstraction within the dominant modernist canon, the figurative tradition was not entirely lost to the art history of melancholy.

Hence modernism nudged visual culture into an awareness of the ways in which the melancholy of man or mankind could be represented without using the iconography of the female form, how colour and form could be used to convey melancholy and be a source of aesthetic experience. In the process, modernism continued to deny women the figurative form as a means to represent her body and her melancholy.

Postmodernism: From objectified body to embodied subject

With the resurgence and development of the feminist movement during the period associated with postmodernism (post-1968), women figurative artists gradually emerged to challenge the way the representation of women's experience of melancholy is controlled by the dominant discourses in patriarchy.[49]

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[48] The War Commission recruited a few woman artists but their work was generally limited to documenting the Home Front and women's increased role in the workplace. Among these were Laura Knight (1877–1970), Flora Lion (1878–1955), Amy Airy (1882–1984) Victoria Monkhouse (1883–unknown) Stella Schmule (1908–1975) and Mary Kessell (1914–1977), who produced pictures of women in factories. Some, like Margot Abbott (1922–2008), secretly recorded life in the factories without War Commission permission. Women artists provided, in retrospect, valuable documents of the way women increasingly occupied traditional male roles in the workplace and the disruptive effect of this on society. For example, Evelyn Dunbar (1906–1960) examined women's work for the Women's Land Army, producing figurative pictures of women adapting to unfamiliar circumstances. Women's efforts to document war extended beyond the UK to other countries. For instance, Doris Zinkeisen (1898–1991) produced images of the Bergen-Belsen camp. Olive Cooke (1880–1973) documented medics behind the Italian frontline. Women artists who have responded to contemporary conflicts on an international scale include Linda Kitson in the Falklands, Frauke Elge who photographed the clothes of the dead of Kosovo and Sophie Ristelhauber who worked with Bosnian patients in a Paris hospital. Photographer Harriet Logan has explored the effect of war and repressive regimes on women.

[49] Definitions of this widely used term vary considerably but Jean François Lyotard's *The Post Modern Condition* (1979) summarised it as: 'the rejection of all universal theories and ideas' and

Historically, because women's bodies and their representation had been used against them, some women artists sought to remove these images from the visual field. Much of this work focused on attempts by women artists to intervene and reclaim the body from the objectification. Thus in the 1960s feminist artists began to challenge the way women were depicted in the media, revealing representations within a society still dominated by patriarchy, of women as silent victims or sex objects. Artists such Jenny Holzer (b.1950), Barbara Kruger (b.1945), and Mary Kelly (b.1945) used textual practices as a tool for directing attention away from the figurative representation of women. This action was, for artists like Kelly, not a rejection of the female body per se but an approach that aimed to create 'significance out of absence' (Kelly cited in Iggulden, 2009: 78). These artworks reflected a trend within some strands of feminist discourse which encouraged an alienation from figurative representation, making it perhaps more difficult to work figuratively with images of women in a feminist and critical manner. Feminist writer and theorist Jacqueline Rose has influentially argued that the feminist challenge to the dominance of phallic forms of representation cannot be achieved by working with images of the feminine body, arguing:

> 'If the status of the phallus is to be challenged it cannot be directly from the feminine body but must be by means of a different symbolic logic or else from an entirely different logic altogether' (Rose, 1982: 56).

In other words, women's figuration was and is regarded by some feminist critics as too steeped in the symbolism of patriarchy for it to be helpful to women as a means to represent 'her' concerns, including presumably 'her' melancholy. Such a stance has led some feminist artists to develop approaches that largely absented the female figure as a tool to express 'her' emotional life.

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hence, 'a notion that offers women an opportunity to rewrite the patriarchcal script' (Lyotard cited in Gamble, 2001: 299). The student rebellion and wildcat strikes in France in May 1968 are generally regarded as a defining moment in the postmodern period because they nearly caused the collapse of the then government of Charles de Gaulle.
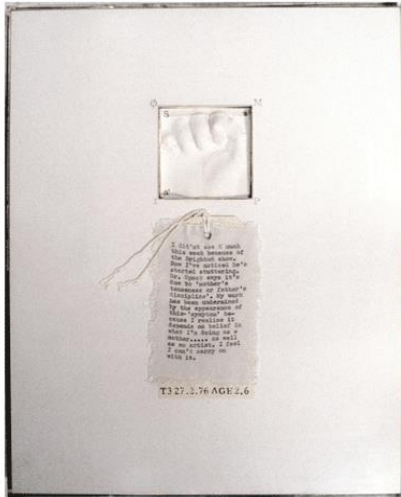
Figure 40. *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1979)
Mary Kelly
Mixed media (six sections of 135 frames,
diagrams,diary fragments and commentaries)

Seminal in this critical move was Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1979). *Post-Partum Document* is an exploration of the mother–child relationship over a six-year period. Each work of the six-part series concentrates on a formative moment in Kelly's son's mastery of language and her own sense of loss: representation moving between the voices of the mother, child and analytic observer. For Kelly, art then was not about images of women and how to alter them, for this in her view simply led to a perpetuation of what Kelly referred to as the 'patriarchal facade' (Kelly cited in Harrison & Wood, 1992: 1091). Instead Kelly aimed to address sexual difference and the body in 'a conceptual and scripto-visual way' (Ibid. 1090). This approach, however, means that the female figure is absent from the visual field and that woman is consequently denied forms of representation using the body, which both limits her artistic freedom and potentially offers only a restricted challenge to patriarchy. As artist Mona Hatoum (b.1952) comments:

'Well in early feminism the attitude was that any way of representing a woman's body is exploitative and objectifying. This question had to be reassessed later because women vacated the frame and became invisible in a sense' (Hatoum cited in Pollock, 2007: 49).

The challenge faced by these women artists was how to move from a position where women's bodies are only present within the visual field in a way that subordinates their image to the objectifying gaze of patriarchy, to a position from which the female body can be inhabited and owned by woman to represent her emotional life.

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Figure 41. *Waiting* (1971)
Faith Wilding
Video still

As a critical tactical move in the 1970s women artists increasingly used their own bodies to create important body-oriented performance-based work. In the video *Waiting* (1971) (Figure 41) the performance artist Faith Wilding (b.1943) used her own body to draw attention to the nature of women's lives under patriarchy. Wilding sits with her head bowed and her hands on her lap in a manner echoing nineteenth-century figurative allegories of melancholy, but the idealised female beauty of the preceding century is replaced by a woman dressed in rather dull attire, 'like a housewife', unlike the elaborate and attractive clothing seen in the Romantic period (Wilding, 2012). Wilding's performance, in which she repeats a monologue, titled 'Waiting', portrays women's lives as an endless and repetitive cycle of waiting:

> 'Waiting to be a pretty girl, waiting to have a boyfriend,
> Waiting to be married, waiting to have children,
> Waiting for the children to leave home and finally waiting for her body
> to break down'.
> Extract from 15-minute monologue *Waiting,* 1971 (Ibid.).

Wilding locates a woman's melancholy not in the events in her life, but in the yawning spaces, intervals, gaps and silences, the spaces in between. Crucially the presence of the female figure seems to highlight the difficulty of the female subject 'finding a voice within patriarchy' (Kristeva, 1989: 171).

As contemporary art critic Sally O' Reilly suggests, in recent years there has once again been a renewed interest amongst feminists in theories of the Self, the body and their representation (O'Reilly, 2009: 5). Jerry Flieger makes the point that 'it is this immanence, this materiality, this call to the experience as lived by the body' that is crucial to feminism now (Flieger cited in Buchanan & Colebrook, 2000: 60). For Rosi Braidotti, feminism needs to develop 'new figurations' that can adequately reflect these experiences (Braidotti cited in Buchanan & Colebrook, 2000: 169). Hence figuration can be argued to be crucial to feminism now because it counters our contemporary scopic regime, which focuses on the display of the female body at the expense of the representation of 'her' emotional life. I would also argue that a recuperated figurative language of melancholy provides important clues to understanding the relationship between a woman's body and her emotionalism in ways that challenge current models of patriarchy and representation as they interrelate.

Figure 42. *Crying* (1993)
Georgina Starr
5-minute video projection

Some artists have started to explore this territory. For example, in 2001 video-artist Georgina Starr (b.1968) presented the film *Crying* (1993) made using her own body, in which a woman cries into the camera, her make up running and smudging, dismantling idealised notions of female beauty and pointing instead to the reality of her lived experience. The figure gazes heavenward, in a way that evokes the religious iconography of the Madonna. By contrast, her folded arms strike a more defiant and questioning note that contests notions of sanctity and idealism, and

perhaps echoes the defiant stance of Dürer's melancholy angel. Starr's work is lens-based and she uses this medium to change the relationship of her body to the gaze, by making herself both subject and object of the work. The question remains, however, as to whether this strategy succeeds in disrupting the objectification of the female figure, or whether she succeeds only in simply objectifying herself?

Figure 43. *Rain 5* (2003)
Bettina von Zwehl
Video still

For Bettina von Zwehl (b.1971) the challenge is how to picture the subject's inner life without resorting to symbolism or metaphor, thereby returning us to the question of how form and expression may be given to a woman's emotional life in a way that does not alienate her from her own body (O'Reilly, 2009: 31). In *Rain 5* (2003) von Zwehl conducts an experiment on her subjects. She sits them in the same position and subjects them to a downpour, then captures the moment of their reaction to this event. As O'Reilly suggests, whilst Starr uses the lens to examine her own image, von Zwehl uses the lens to make the experience of other women the object of her gaze (Ibid.).

In Georgina Starr's work, the female figure still functions as an object for the contemplation of loss and for our own tears, partly because she leaves vacant the causes of her own sorrow. Like her art-historical antecedents, the image is melancholic because we perceive it as a place to reflect on our own experiences. I would argue that the memory of earlier ways of using the female figure to represent emotional life is still latent within this image, the pose and upward gaze evoking the figurative language of Murillo's fifteenth-century image of the weeping *Mater Dolorosa* discussed earlier (Figure 21). For those with an awareness of this art

history this prior language resurfaces to alter the viewer's perception of, and engagement with, these contemporary images.

Figure 44. *Black Sun* (2005)
Sue de Beer
Video still

Sue de Beer's (b.1973) video installation *Black Sun* (Figure 44), which references Julia Kristeva's key text on melancholy, *Black Sun* (1989), may offer a way through this impasse, this return to metaphor and symbolism, because unlike the previous artists she does not attempt to echo a particular historical figurative language. Instead, de Beer uses figurative language and a lens-based approach as a part of a narrative about aspects of women's lived experience. In the video, which was shown at New York's *Whitney Museum of American Art* in 2005, three actresses represent their respective age groups: teenager, young adult and sixty-year-old. Partly autobiographical, *Black Sun* is as much about the sibling bond between de Beer and her older sister as about the absence of their mother who died when de Beer was three (Barton, 2005).

De Beer's work is important because it locates women's melancholy in relation to her circumstances, in this case her family life. Her melancholy is not just tied to herself but is porous to others. Drawing on memories and narrative, her work brings these private and often hidden aspects of women's lives into the symbolic, developing a representation that makes these experiences available to others. Crucially, rather than the representation of melancholy being related to the

pre-existing narratives and memories prescribed in the dominant canon of art history. De Beer's representation draws from her own memories and narrative, and uses these as a starting point to develop a representation of her melancholy.

In a departure from modernist concerns with universal questions of God and death, these contemporary artworks by Georgina Starr, Bettina von Zwehl and Sue de Beer are united by a concern with melancholy arising from the particular situated aspects of women's everyday lives. Hence women artists have now begun the process of examining and representing their own experiences, looking for explanations of their melancholy rooted in their daily lives, rather than in the religious or pathological discourses that have thus far dominated art history. These recent efforts are tentative and fragmented, but are vital in terms of paving a way towards recuperating to woman her form as a means to represent her melancholy. It is noticeable that much of this initial work on melancholy uses a lens-based approach to change the nature of the relationship of the female subject to the gaze. The question perhaps for the development of my own studio work, is what specific contribution the craft traditions of painting and printmaking can make to the representation of women's melancholy now?

Conclusion

Melancholy defines an art-historical field but, as I have discussed, this term privileges an Aristotelian conception of melancholy which sees the condition as the necessary companion to the enhanced creative, intellectual and spiritual powers of men. Throughout the art history of the female figure and melancholy I have discovered a distinction between the use of the female figure to signal the melancholic male genius on the one hand and to provide an aesthetic object which is a site for the contemplation of loss on the other. The history sketched here affirms that melancholy is an intense human experience that has persisted across time and is an important part of our emotional experience today. I also note the repetition of figurative language that occurs across art history in different forms, such as the metaphorical head-in-hands pose, originating from the representations of acedia or slothfulness in mediaeval times.

However, the history of the female figure and melancholy that I have sketched here reveals the problems faced by women in securing the representation of their melancholy. The use of the female figure reflects the confines and restrictions of the role prescribed to women by classical, religious, literary and patriarchal beliefs that still resonate today. Hence the meaning associated with earlier uses of figurative language will perhaps always be incorporated into subsequent works, despite efforts by women artists to reclaim figurative language. This does not imply that representations of melancholy by women figurative artists based on this earlier figurative language simply provide the blueprint for subsequent representations of this condition, rather that aspects of the original meaning remain more or less explicit within new interpretations.

In my discussion of the art history of melancholy, I formulated an inquiry into the use of the female figure because I wanted to see what her form signified in this context. I have found that the history I have examined largely excludes women's experience, encouraging us to identify with imagery produced by men that flatters women's beauty, undermines women's intellect or demonises women's emotions. The point of the art history I outline, however, is to show how melancholy is represented by the female figure within the frame of the dominant canon of art history, and to demonstrate that other histories and artworks placed outside the standard art-historical canon of 'melancholy', labelled as mourning, hysteria or madness, are also important to women's experience. My intention is to put the concerns of women at the centre of the story of melancholy. In this effort I am guided by Freud and psychoanalytic theory, to his account of women's melancholic subjectivity, and its subsequent critique and revision by some women theorists and writers, to which I now turn.

Chapter Three: Freud, feminism and melancholy

Theories of melancholy in relation to art history have evolved into two discrete though related fields, and changes in the cultural discourse on melancholy have had a distinct impact on visual histories. The most critical element of contemporary discourse in this field relates to the legacy of Freud's theory. I re-examine a number of key theoretical texts to explore and speculate as to why the representation of loss appears to be more difficult or different for women than for men in the standard Freudian account of melancholy. As a fine art practitioner I am interested in how this discourse may suggest ways of understanding the representation of women's melancholy, and am motivated to consider how these concepts and ideas may help to feed into, shape and frame my studio practice.

'Mourning and melancholia' (1917)

Freud's pivotal essay compares the normal process of mourning with the pathological or abnormal condition of melancholia. Freud argues that:

> 'mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved one, or to the loss of some abstraction which had taken the place of one, such as the fatherland, liberty, an ideal and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and consequently we suspect them of a pathological disposition' (Freud, 1917: 251).

Freud continues that the traits of mourning and melancholia appear similar, with sufferers displaying 'a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition of all activity' (Ibid. 252). Yet in melancholia the subject displays an additional trait not present in mourning, which he describes as 'a lowering of the self regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self reproaches and self reviling and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment' (Ibid.).

The work of mourning and the preconditions for melancholia
The work of mourning is, writes Freud, an internal psychic process, an 'economics of pain' during which the subject is convinced by the 'sum of narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has

been abolished' (Ibid. 265). This is achieved 'bit by bit at great expanse of time and cathectic energy' via a process of 'reality testing' during which 'each one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected' until the libido is 'free and uninhibited' again (Ibid. 253). This process is painful, suggests Freud, as the libido does not willingly or easily withdraw its attachment from the abolished object; it tries to prolong its existence through memories and associations. Consequently this 'demand creates an intense opposition' in the psyche because 'people never willingly abandon the libidinal position' and their attachment to the loved object (Freud, 1917: 253). Freud regarded mourning, however difficult for the individual, as part of the normal human experience. Its work of detaching the libido from the love object is visible to others in the sense that the loss that causes mourning is evident to all.

In melancholy, Freud theorised that the ego is required to undertake similar internal work to mourning, but whereas in mourning nothing impedes the process, 'this path is blocked for the work of melancholia, owing perhaps to a number of causes or combination of them' (Ibid.). Freud continues that 'this presentation is made up of innumerable single impressions (or unconscious traces of them) and this withdrawal of the libido is not a process that can be accomplished in a moment, but must certainly as in mourning be one in which progress is drawn out and gradual' (Freud, 1917: 265). What is apparent in melancholia is that 'first one and then another memory is activated and that the laments which always sound the same and are wearisome in their monotony nevertheless take their rise each time in some unconscious source' (Ibid. 266). The 'location of these separate struggles' is carried out in the unconscious – 'the region of the memory traces of things' (Ibid).

There are, according to Freud, three preconditions within the subject that give rise to melancholy rather than mourning: loss of the object, ambivalence and the ego's incorporation of the lost object (Ibid. 251).

Loss of the object
First, Freud refers to melancholy as 'in some way related to object loss which is withdrawn from consciousness in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is

nothing about the loss that is unconscious' (Ibid. 254). He adds that the subject can also experience a more 'intangible sense of loss', commenting: 'one feels justified in concluding that a loss of this kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This indeed might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss that has given rise to the melancholia but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him' (Ibid.**)**. From these points of view we understand the primacy of the unconscious and that melancholy is equated to the loss of an object, which is 'unknown' (Ibid.). This formulation of object loss as something vague and unknown seems to return Freud to an Aristotelian view of melancholy, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, frames melancholy as something elusive, mysterious, unfathomable yet powerful.

Ambivalence

In melancholy the subject's relation to object loss is complicated by feelings of ambivalence. Freud elaborates that 'the occasions giving rise to melancholia for the most part extend beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being wounded, hurt, neglected, out of favour or disappointed, which can import opposite feelings of love and hate into the relationship' (Ibid. 260). The presence of ambivalent feelings in the subject 'makes the process of the ego's detachment from the lost object more difficult' (Ibid. 261). This is because 'countless separate struggles are carried on over the object in which love and hate contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain the position of the libido against the assault' (Ibid. 266).

According to Freud, ambivalence could be be 'either constitutional, that is, an element of every love relation formed by this particular ego or else proceed precisely from those experiences that involved the threat of losing the object' (Freud, 1917: 265). Hence Freud's interpretation of ambivalence starts from the internal 'constitutional factors', that is, 'repressed traumatic experiences' of the subject (Ibid. 266). These experiences will continue to influence 'real experiences' of ambivalence (Ibid, 266).

To fully understand what Freud meant by the phrase 'repressed traumatic experiences' it is necessary to refer to his explanation of the discovery of trauma in pre-pubertal life. Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis define trauma in Freud as related to at least two events: 'in a first scene – the so called scene of seduction – the child is the object of sexual advances from the adult which fails to arouse any sexual excitement in him. A second scene, occurring after puberty, often of a seemingly innocent nature, evokes the first one through some association. It is the memory of the first scene that occasions an influx of sexual simuli which overhelm the ego's defenses'(Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 467).

Crucially, although Freud called the first scene traumatic, 'this quality is only ascribed to it "after the fact" *nachträglich*, or, to put it another way: it is only as a memory that the first scene becomes pathogenic by deferred action in so far as it causes an influx of internal excitation' (Ibid.).

Incorporation

The concept of incorporation is, in Freud's view, a key precondition for melancholy. It refers to a process where the free libido available after the loss of the love object is soaked back up into the ego and the ego identifies with the abandoned object rather than being directed towards a new one, as it would in normal mourning. Hence the free libido is not displaced onto a new object but 'withdrawn into the ego' where it 'served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object'. Thus 'the shadow of the object fell upon the ego so that the latter could henceforth be criticised by a special mental faculty like the object, like the forsaken object' (Ibid. 258). Freud writes: 'in mourning it is the world that has become poor and empty: in melancholy it is the ego itself' (Ibid. 254).

Freud adds that in a similar way to mourning 'it is possible for the process in the unconscious to come to an end, either after fury has spent itself or after the object has been abandoned as valueless' (Ibid. 267).

A gendered perspective

It is important to point out that although Freud's account is foundational, it is also gendered, because having established mourning and melancholy as part of the human condition he uses the case study of Shakespeare's Hamlet to demonstrate that melancholy is linked to a tradition in which it is associated with influential and powerful men. Freud writes:

> 'A melancholic has a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic. When in his heightened self criticism he describes himself as petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, one whose sole aim has been to hide the weaknesses of his own nature, it may be, so far as we know, that he has come pretty near to understanding himself; we only wonder why man has to be ill before he can be accessible to truth of this kind' (Ibid. 255).

This assumption of a link between elevated powers and melancholy men allows men to experience a form of the condition that transcends normal experience, and which is denied to women. On the other hand, in the same paper, in his three case studies of women Freud treats them as categories: 'the good conscientious wife', 'the jilted bride' and 'the self critical wife', rather than named individuals like Hamlet (Ibid. 253–257).

First there is the case of 'the good conscious wife who may fall ill of this disease' (Ibid. 59). As Juliana Schiesari has noted, this example does not seem 'quite on a par with the gloriously tragic figure of Hamlet', who is 'a speaker of truths' (Schiesari, 1992: 59). Second there is the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted, whom Freud refers to as having experienced the 'loss of a more ideal kind' where 'the object has perhaps not actually died but become lost as an object' (Freud, 1917: 253). Finally, Freud refers to the case of 'the woman who loudly pities her husband for being tied to such a poor creature as herself', elaborating that such a woman 'is really accusing her husband of being incapable' (Ibid. 257). This self-critical wife expresses her rage by tormenting her husband with her illness but really she is accusing her husband of impotence, and once again she is given neither a name nor the powers of greater self-awareness granted to Hamlet.

In these examples women's losses are considered in relation to what they have lost in terms of status within patriarchy, rather than in terms of what these losses mean for women, which remains unspecified. Neither are the women in these case studies attributed with any of the compensatory powers of melancholy; instead their condition remains aligned with the pathological, linked to illness, madness and disease, rather than the cultural condition of creative melancholy established for Hamlet.

Given the proximity between mourning and melancholy in Freud's account, the question is raised of how melancholy, in contradiction to mourning, might leave its mark in the visual field. Perhaps clues to the pictorial situation for women might be considered from the perspective of how a work of art might ease or hinder the work of mourning and melancholy? If the work of mourning is related to the conscious remembrance of loss, then conceivably works of art provide a place for the attachment to a lost love to be acknowledged, prolonged, but ultimately severed as Freud proposes. Freud's analysis also suggests that apprehending melancholy in contrast to mourning in works of art involves making a distinction between conscious and unconscious losses in women, raising the question of whether it is possible to apprehend melancholy in works of art at all, let alone to identify the specificity of women's experience?

The Oedipus complex and castration

In a series of key texts including 'The ego and the super-ego' (1923b), 'The dissolution of the Oedipus complex' (1924) and 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes' (1925), Freud's evolving perspective on mourning and melancholia is situated within a discussion about male and female sexuality. This discourse casts some light on Freud's understanding of the differences between boys and girls, men and women, and provides an insight into why he regarded the process of representing loss as more difficult for the girl or woman.

In 'The ego and the super-ego' (1923b) Freud presents the concept of the Oedipus complex that provides an account of the loss of the child's first sexual objects. The concept is significant to the discourse on melancholy because it alters Freud's theory of the process of the ego's identification with object loss, by proposing that the process is more significant and more common than he had previously thought. Freud writes: 'since then we have come to understand that this type of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building what is called character' (Freud, 1923b: 368). According to Freud, the loss of sexual objects during the Oedipus complex results in the same 'alteration of the ego' and the same 'setting up of an object inside the ego' as observed in melancholia, and he even suggests that this event is what makes it possible for 'the ego to give up its objects' (Ibid. 368). Thus, 'especially in the early phases of development the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned objects cathexes and that it contains the history of those object choices' (Ibid.). Freud insists that 'whatever the subject's later capacity for resisting the influences of an object cathexes may turn out to be the effects of the first identifications made in earliest childhood will be general and lasting' (Freud, 1923b: 370). Crucially, therefore, the subject's experience of the loss of these first sexual objects comes to shape subjectivity itself.

To explain the Oedipus complex Freud refers us back to the myth of Oedipus Rex, the Greek king who, according to myth, killed his father and married his mother. In its simple form it refers to the boy's desire for the mother as sex object and his jealously towards his father as a rival.[50] Initially Freud focuses on the experience of the boy, assuming that the girl's experience is analogous, although opposite to the boy's. In this paper Freud deals with the complicating factor of bisexuality. Bisexuality within the child makes it difficult to 'obtain a clear view' of the facts in connection with earlier object choices and identifications, yet the resolution of these conflicting feelings shapes the child's experience of the Oedipus complex (Ibid. 372). From that point on Freud regarded the complete version of the Oedipus

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[50] Laplanche and Pontalis note that Freud theorised the complex after recognising in self-analysis his 'love for his mother, which was in him, alongside a jealousy of his father which conflicted with the affection in which he held him' (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 283). These insights were combined with other clinical data in his study of dreams in 1900 and major case studies of this period, Dora (1905), Little Hans (1909) and the Rat Man (1909), who provided examples of the complex.

complex as more problematic than the mythological story in that the presence of instinctual and incestuous desires by the child for both parents (bisexuality) shape the child's experience of first sexual objects. This means 'that a boy has not merely an ambivalent attitude to his father and an affectionate object choice towards his mother, but at the same time behaves like a girl and displays an affectionate and feminine attitude towards his father and a corresponding jealousy and hostility towards his mother' (Freud, 1923b: 372).

Dissolution of the Oedipus complex and castration

The Oedipus complex is brought to an end in the boy in Freud's account by the experience of seeing female genitals, which together with a parental prohibition against masturbation instils a fear of castration in the boy. It is significant, Freud argues in 'The dissolution of the Oedipus complex' (1924), that the only genital that is acknowledged by both sexes is the penis . Freud writes: 'we have lately been made more aware than before that a child's sexual development advances to a certain phase at which the genital organ has already taken over the leading role. But this genital is the male one only, or more correctly, the penis; the female genital has remained undiscovered' (Freud, 1924: 174). Freud insists that in the boy child, faced with a choice between the loss of his penis and 'satisfaction of love in the field of the Oedipus complex', 'the child's ego normally turns away from the Oedipus complex' (Freud, 1924: 176). In other words, the boy child's ego normally abandons the Oedipus complex because of his narcissistic desire to preserve the penis. This is because, according to Freud, the phallus is an essential component of the child's self-image, its narcissism, and it explains the severity of the threat of castration.

The role of the castration complex in the boy is therefore to provoke the terminal crisis of the Oedipus complex, and has the effect of placing a prohibition upon the child's maternal object. The threat of castration means that, for the boy, the Oedipus complex is not just repressed but literally crushed, and incestuous wishes towards the parental objects are replaced by identifications, especially with the father, via the

formation of the super ego.[51] Hence the boy emerges from the Oedipus complex with a strong superego.

The Oedipus complex, castration and the girl

Freud acknowledged that 'in general our insight into these developmental processes in girls is unsatisfactory, incomplete and vague' (Freud, 1924: 179). However, in a series of theoretical papers including 'Some psychical anatomical differences between the sexes' (1925a), 'Female sexuality' (1931), and 'The psychology of women' (1933) he moved on to address the experience of the girl in the Oedipus complex.

According to Freud's account the girl's first object of love is, like the boy, the mother, but whereas the boy retains that object in the Oedipus complex, the girl must transfer her love to her father. Freud asks: 'How does it happen that girls abandon it and takes their father as its object'? (Freud, 1925a: 251). The answer for Freud is to be found in the events that take place in the pre-Oedipal phase of a girl's development that lead up to her entry into the Oedipus complex.

At some moment in the pre-Oedipal phase, Freud writes that the girl makes the 'momentous discovery which girls are destined to make' on sight of the boy's penis that her sex organ is 'inferior' to the boy's (Freud, 1925a: 252). She forms the view that she has 'come off badly' (Freud, 1924: 178). As a result, the girl perceives that she has been castrated. There are several ramifications of this for the girl. First, because of the primacy of the penis for both sexes in terms of self-image, this experience has an immediate effect on the girl: 'she has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it' (Freud, 1925a: 252). Second, the girl holds her mother accountable for 'her lack of a penis' and sending her 'into the world so

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[51] Freud argues that the Oedipus complex is resolved through a mechanism of identification in which 'the authority of the father or parents is interjected into the ego' where it forms the 'nucleus of the superego' (Freud, 1924: 176). In other words, the boy's instinctual and incestuous wishes towards his parental objects is 'abandoned, desexualised and these subliminated objects are incorporated into the ego where they form the nucleus of the super ego and give that new structure its characteristics' (Freud, 1925a: 257). The conflict at the centre of the Oedipus complex is brought to an end in the boy by the surrender of the libidinal cathexis of his parental objects and their replacement 'by identifications' (Freud, 1924: 176). Such a process also allows the boy in an indirect and subliminated way to maintain the mother as a loved object, whilst at the same time continuing and intensifying his identification with his father.

insufficiently equipped' (Ibid. 254). Third, 'when she comes to understand the general nature of this characteristic, it follows that femaleness, and with it of course her mother, suffers a great depreciation in her eyes' (Freud, 1931: 233). Thus for the girl, her mother and her sex are devalued not only in the eyes of the boy, but in her own eyes.

Not only does the lack of the penis damage the girl's self-image and cause a wound to the girl's sense of narcissism, but she also 'develops like a scar a sense of inferiority' (Freud: 1925a: 253).

From this moment in her development the girl gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child. Freud comments: 'she slips along the symbolic equation, one might say from the penis to the baby' (Freud, 1924: 179). Hence the girl's experience of the Oedipus complex is characterised by two significant wishes: 'to possess a penis and a child' (Ibid.).

Whereas the boy's experience of the castration complex as something to be feared grants him a strong superego, the girl's experience of the castration complex, as something that has already happened, means that the motive 'drops out for the setting up of a superego' (Freud cited in Lacan, 1968: 103). Hence the girl emerges with different relations to the superego than the boy. Consequently the character of a woman's superego, 'her' internal moral system, is judged to be 'ethically' different to men. (Freud, 1925a: 257). Freud comments of women that 'their superego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origin as we require it to be in men's' (Ibid.). The emergence of the women's superego is, according to Freud, tied to the dynamics of her sexual desire, her experience leading up to the Oedipus complex, namely castration in particular. However, the superego is not a static entity but shaped on an ongoing basis to its relations with its ego and the internalised characteristics of other people. An account of the formation of the woman's separation from the mother and the formation of her superego is therefore simultaneously an account of the nature of her symbolisation and her morality.

In the case of the girl, Freud adds that the Oedipus complex is 'all too often not

surmounted at all', leaving the girl without a superego that is theorised to be part of the boy's subjectivity (Freud, 1931: 230). The girl's ambivalent feelings towards her mother therefore emerge as the central experience of her Oedipus complex. This challenge for the girl is exacerbated by the Freudian argument that a strong sense of narcissism is central to the experience of melancholy, and that the Oedipus complex is more likely to deliver excess narcissistic reserves for men, whereas for women any sense of narcissism is eroded by her experiences.

Works of art

Although challenging, Freud believes that through the work of analysis it is possible to supply the intermediate links to make things (ideas), which are repressed, conscious again. In 'The ego and the id' (1923a) Freud notes that the question of how a thing becomes conscious (therefore representable and mournable) is really a question of, 'how a thing becomes preconscious? And the answer would be: Through becoming connected with word-presentations corresponding to it' (Freud, 1923a: 358). These word-presentations are 'residues of memories, they were at one time perceptions, and like all mnemic residues they can become conscious again' (Ibid). For Freud the visual components of word-presentations are secondary to verbal ones and so 'to begin with may be left aside' (Ibid). Yet Freud urges us not to forget 'the importance of optical mnemic residues, when they are of *things* or to deny that it is possible for thought-processes to become conscious through a reversion to visual residues and in many people this is the favoured method' (Ibid. 359). Freud recognises that a memory that is inaccessible in one associative context may be accessible in another. The special character of visual thinking is for Freud demonstrated in dreams and phantasies. From this 'we learn that what becomes conscious is as a rule only the concrete subject- matter of thought, and that the relations between the various elements of this subject matter, which is what characterises thought, cannot be given visual expression' (Ibid.). Consequently Freud believes that 'thinking in pictures is, therefore, only a very incomplete form of becoming conscious. In some way too, it (thinking in pictures) stands nearer to unconscious processes than do thinking in words, and it (thinking in pictures) is unquestionably older than the latter, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically' (Freud, 1923a: 359).

Freud's argument is that 'a person's own body, and above all its surface, is the place from which both external and internal perceptions, may spring' (Ibid. 364). Hence Freud's thesis suggests the memory traces of repressed experiences of melancholy may originate from sensations and feelings associated with the body. Furthermore, if as Freud argues 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' then the body is surely the place where the 'ego loss' associated with melancholy will surely manifest (Ibid.). So it is therefore my argument that recuperating a figurative art history of melancholia as it relates to women means considering how the memory traces associated with unconscious loss might be etched in women's bodies or be represented in works of art.

Lacan's linguistic framework

If Freud laid the basis for understanding the ego's identification with the lost object in melancholia, it was the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) who argued that Freud's ideas had to be understood within a broader linguistic or symbolic framework. In this sense human reality is based on three different levels: the symbolic, the imaginary and the Real. Lacan called the order of language the 'symbolic, that of the ego and its identifications', the imaginary (Rose, 1982: 31). The 'Real' is 'precisely that which cannot be within language' (Lacan cited in Ettinger, 1992: 187). It refers to what has been 'left out of the process of symbolization, created by it or is what has been totally resistant to symbolization' (Ibid). The question prompted by Lacan's theory is, therefore, how is woman's melancholy and indeed pictures of that experience accounted for within this wider scheme, and what value is attributed to her experience of object loss in this context?

To address these points I refer to Lacan's account of sexual differentiation which, he argues, is governed by the concepts of language, the phallus and desire. In relation to the first concept Lacan argued that subjectivity is formed through the individual subject's experience of the pre-existent linguistic system. Thus, the core of an individual's subjectivity is 'a mirror reflection of something external to it' (Lacan, 1960: 86). Subjectivity in the Lacanian scheme is regarded as the result of the subject's entry into linguistic discourse, into the symbolic. In this revised theory the

unconscious and sexuality arise from this linguistic system and 'cannot be referred back to a body outside language' (Rose, 1982: 56). This means that a woman's experience of melancholy and its representation is to be explained as always 'mediated by language' by the symbolic (Ibid.). Therefore the importance of the function of the symbolic in relation to women's melancholy can perhaps be assessed in relation to its role in shaping her internal objects and their loss.

Furthermore, in this linguistic system the phallus rather than the biological penis is regarded as the primary signifier of sexual differentiation. The phallus is placed within the symbolic and is understood as a signifier in this. However, Lacan does not reduce the phallus to a biological difference between the sexes but instead tries to provide a differential account for men and women of its effects' (Mitchell & Rose, 1982: 74). This means that the phallus does not symbolise the biological penis, but it is related to it in that it equates with the male and the intrinsic power relations in patriarchy as they are played out through language. Lacan's account exposes 'the status of the phallus and the affect of its demands on subjectivity' (Ibid. 40). The problems created by the symbol of the phallus in relation to the processes of representation of women's melancholy arise from that fact that Lacan's account does not adequately distinguish and elaborate the experience of women but subsumes it under this sign.

Finally, Lacan's concept of desire is at the heart of the subject's experience of loss. Borrowing two of Freud's examples – first, a child crying for its absent mother's breast, and second, a child symbolising the pattern of absence and return of the mother in play by throwing a cotton reel out of the cot – Lacan suggests that the object only comes into existence when it is lost 'as an object' to the subject (Rose, 1982: 31). This is because any satisfaction of the demand made by the infant will always contain loss within it, the desire being driven by the child's intention to come together again with the lost mother, something that can never be achieved. Hence the child's demand always 'bears on something other than the satisfaction which it calls for' (Lacan cited in Rose, 1982: 32). This 'something other' is desire, 'the reminder of the subject', 'the left over', and is both 'constitutive and empty' (Ibid.). Lacan's formula for the lost object is, 'objet a', 'which underpins symbolisation', causes and

stands in for desire' (Rose, 1982: 48). Thus Lacan's account changes the Freudian notion of object loss from one that relates to the loss of sexual objects to one which is related to that part of a subject's desire that cannot be fulfilled, even by a reunion, real or symbolic, with the lost object.

For Lacan the child's experience in relation to the Oedipus complex and castration can therefore only be understood in relation to the wider symbolic. According to Lacan the purpose of the Oedipus complex is to introduce the subject to a dimension of desire by putting an end to an economy centred on demand, and it is this which confers its privileged status to the sight of the female genitals' (Lacan, 1968: 116). Similarly, 'castration means that the child's desire for the mother does not refer to her but beyond her, to an object, the phallus whose status is at first imaginary and then symbolic (Ibid). This means that in Lacan's account desire is framed in terms of the reunion with the lost object via the phallus and the symbolic. The limitation of such an argument is that it seeks to address what women have lost in relation to the phallus and the symbolic rather than on their own terms.

As the psychoanalyst and theorist Jacqueline Rose (b. 1949) elaborates, 'the man relates to this object and the whole of his realisation in the sexual division comes down to phantasy as the place where lack is projected and through which it is simultaneously disavowed, women is the symptom for man' (Rose, 1982: 48). On the other hand, in relation to women, Lacan theorised that even though a feminine difference exists in the Real, the feminine 'cannot be recovered by the female subject even if it exists in the body schema because of a lack, a hole in the tissue of discourse in which meaning is organised through (phallic) symbolic codes' (Ettinger, 1992: 187). The feminine aspects of women are therefore lost, 'drained off' in the passage from the Real to the symbolic, and hence women's language and other aspects of her signifying systems remain repressed by the subconscious (Lacan, 1960: 92). As such, 'The Woman' does not exist, in that the phallic sexuality assigns her to a position of phantasy' because the sexual relation is premised on women supporting the position of men (Mitchell & Rose, 1982: 137). The problem for woman is fundamentally that of accepting herself as desirable for the man and that in order to be the 'signifier of the desire of the Other' the woman will 'reject an

essential part of herself, notably all it attributes through masquerade'(Lacan, 1977b: 84).

Crucially, for Lacan the concept of the symbolic states that women's sexuality is inseparable from the representations through which they are produced, writing 'images and symbols for women cannot be isolated from image and symbols of women, it is the representation of sexuality that conditions how it comes into play' (Lacan cited in Rose, 1982: 43). In other words, representations of women matter profoundly because shifts in representation both reflect and shape changes in subjectivity and vice-versa. According to Lacan the feminine is the lost object in the symbolic. Lacan also suggests that clues to this still 'unknown' territory of the feminine are to be found in the notion of jouissance, 'to that movement of sexuality which is always in excess, over and above the phallic term which is the mark of sexual identity' (Lacan, 1972: 137). Hence the recognition that there is something of the feminine that is not represented though the phallic symbolic which is overlooked, but which we might recuperate for feminist purposes.

Feminist revisions

After Lacan the Freudian account of how the subjectivity of women is constituted was revisited by women writers, notably feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (b.1932), American film theorist Kaja Silverman (b.1947), theorist Judith Butler (b.1956), psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (b.1941), and visual artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger (b.1948). Each attempts to mark out the melancholic's psychic space from the perspective of women addressing the question of how melancholy can be considered in an environment where what a woman is remains, according to Freud's and Lacan's account, 'a mystery', an unknown. Through their analysis we begin to see the possibility that works of art may help to bring the wounds inflicted on women's psychic space into the open, into the symbolic. I use these theoretical developments to support my argument that the female body and its representation by women figurative artists becomes the ideal place to look for women's experience of melancholy.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) Luce Irigaray critiques the development of the girls 'libidinal economy' outlined by Freud. She argues that the girl's discovery of her castration complex, and that of her mother, could be interpreted as 'symptoms of melancholia' (Irigaray, 1985: 66). This is because that 'profoundly painful dejection', 'abrogation of interest in the outside world', 'loss of capacity for love', 'inhibition of all activity', and perhaps most crucially the 'fall of self esteem', which Freud links with melancholia, characterise the 'psychic modifications' of melancholia (Irigaray, 1985: 66-7). Hence, for Irigaray, a relationship exists between the wound to the girl's ego because of the castration complex, and the girl's dissatisfaction with herself in melancholy.

This complex problem of the relationship between mother and daughter, and its impact on a girl's sense of self-esteem is explored in my painting *My Niece Ginnie* (2008) (Figure 45), where the mother's presence looms in the background to affect the girl's sense of self-worth.

Figure 45. *My Niece Ginnie* (2008)
Christina Reading
Oil on canvas
3 x 3ft

Irigaray argues that the girl must deal with the psychic consequences of a series of unconscious losses: castration, her ambivalent relationship with her mother, relationships with other women that cannot, following Freud's thesis, be represented and therefore cannot be mourned. Irigaray notes; 'in more ways than one it is really a question of a loss that radically escapes any representation: hence the impossibility

of mourning it' (Ibid. 68). From this perspective the girl is left floundering in a state of endless melancholia.

Irigaray reiterates Lacan's position by writing that these insufficiencies mean that 'she functions [after Lacan] as a *hole* ... in the elaboration of imaginary and symbolic processes' (Irigaray, 1985: 71). The problem for Irigaray is that, 'this *hole* inevitably affords women too few figurations, images or representations by which to represent herself' (Ibid.). The question to be debated, from 'her' standpoint is, therefore, not whether 'she lacks some "master signifier" or that none is imposed on her', but rather how 'access to the signifying economy, to the coining of signifiers, is difficult even impossible for her because she remains an outsider, herself a subject to their norms' (Ibid.). Irigaray suggests that 'she borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark or remark upon them. Which all surely keeps her deficient, empty, lacking in a way that could be labelled "psychotic": a latent but not actual psychosis, for want of a signifying system' (Ibid.). In this scenario, women's sexual instincts remain latent, 'suspended' in a sexual economy where representation, symbolisation and sublimation is 'controlled by the phallus' (Irigaray, 1985: 72).

Irigaray notes that for Freud 'the girl's only objective in the formation of femininity and the only "sufficient reason" that could decide her to become a so called woman would be that thereby she appropriated in her turn the instrument of sexual pleasure, and possessed whether by imitation, replica or duplication, the sexual organ that seems to hold the monopoly on sexual use as well as the power to determine the value of sexual change' (Irigaray, 1985: 73). Irigaray adds that in doing so 'the man continues to maintain his hold on the phallus and that the woman is further alienated from her body because her phallicized body will support its currency, prop it up, defend its exchange rate, guarantee its stock holdings, while the father, the man is rich with other investments. She is appointed to collect homage and bring it back to its rightful owner' (Ibid.). From Irigaray we learn that woman struggles to articulate loss in a language governed by the phallus; but the interest of this thesis resides perhaps in whether it is possible to make sense of the signifiers 'she' has borrowed from this symbolic and what signs emerge as significant for women figurative artists.

Irigaray's formulation acknowledges that the subject has a body as well as a mind, and unconscious memory traces of this ambivalent relationship with the mother may 'result in their being remembered in the form of somatic affections characteristic of melancholia' or indeed in 'hysteria' (Irigaray, 1985: 68). This is significant because it gives precedence to the body as a means to 'escape' the confines of a symbolic rooted in phallic linguistic discourse (Lechte, 1990b: 35). Whereas, for Lacan the phallus always governs the body, in Irigaray's account the difficulty women face representing loss at a symbolic level is acknowledged, but she also suggests that the body may provide a response to this experience. Here Irigaray arguably returns to a 'figurative' (Freudian) viewpoint that identifies the body as a place to search for signs of loss.[52] In this respect the question about whether the body is always governed by the phallus or whether the body is a site that may in some measure escape this register means that in both cases the body is the place to search for signs of loss. The challenge, perhaps, is to recognise these external somatic symptoms as an indication of a woman's interior melancholy, and to assess whether there is a useful link between these two domains?

I pursued this territory by painting off-guard moments of sadness in family photographs. For instance *My Daughter Lizzie, Day Dreaming 2* (2008) (Figure 46) registers her awkward posture, her dreamy and musing state, and her sideways glance that avoids the gaze, which seems to hint at an interior discomfort. Is this a language of feminine melancholy or can such an image only be read through the phallic sign?

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[52] Laplanche and Pontalis remind us that in 'Beyond the pleasure principle' (1920), Freud suggested a figurative conceptualisation of 'repressed trauma' envisaging it in terms of an 'elementary relationship between organism and surrounding: the living vesicle is sheltered from external stimuli by a protective shield or layer which allows only tolerable qualities of excitation through. Should the barrier be breached, we have a trauma, so as to establish anti-cathexes, to immobilise the inflowing quantities of excitation and thus permit the restoration of the necessary conditions for the functioning of the pleasure principle' (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 467). Thus the character of trauma as somatic and the instinct that is repressed because of a traumatic event continues to present in the body as a sign.

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Figure 46. *My Daughter Lizzie, Day Dreaming 2* (2008)
Christina Reading
Oil on canvas
3 x 3ft

Nevertheless, Irigaray argues that it is not possible for melancholy as defined by Freud to account for 'her' experiences entirely, as 'the economy of female narcissism and the fragility of the girl's or woman's ego make it impossible for the melancholic syndrome to establish a firm foundation' (Irigaray, 1985: 71). So Irigaray deems that women's experience of melancholy is fundamentally different to men's because of the wound sustained to women's subjectivity by the Oedipus complex and castration, so that even if they show symptoms of melancholia 'they will be scattered about rather than organised on a coherent or permanent manner' (Ibid.). Irigaray continues that 'her' experience does not result in melancholy alone but in an array of 'polymorphic regressions (be they melancholic, maniacal, schizophrenic or paranoiac)' (Ibid.). Therefore, Irigaray's argument makes us aware that women's melancholy is unlikely to manifest in the same way as for men because their experience of the condition is different. This raises the difficulty of whether these other manifestations should be interpreted as a sign of melancholy, especially when they are presented in the symbolic under a different guise. It also alerts us to the fact that parts of the visual history of women's melancholy may be hidden in other discourses, namely hysteria and/or madness.

Other writers, notably Kaja Silverman, have tackled the problem of the effect of the girl's experience of the Oedipus complex and castration on her relationship with her mother and her sense of narcissism. In *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988), Silverman re-examines Freud's papers on 'Narcissism' (1914) and 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917). She reminds us that, according to Freud, women love according to the

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'narcissistic' rather than the 'anaclitic' model. Desire originates from 'what he is himself, what he once was, what he would like to be', and 'somebody who was once part of himself' (Freud in Silverman: 1988: 154). Because of this, Silverman argues that the daughter models herself and love for herself on the mother 'in whose image one finds oneself' (Silverman, 1988: 154). Whereas Freud argued that identification is separate from desire, Silverman describes a complex process whereby the girl both desires and identifies with the mother in the Oedipus complex. For Silverman 'this intersection of desire and identification with the mother' is the 'very site of feminism's libidinal struggle against the phallus' (Silverman, 1988: 154). This is significant, argues Silverman, because it means that 'considerable narcissistic reserves could be built up' in the girl (Ibid. 156). The girl's potential for narcissism matters because it creates the conditions for a female subjectivity that offers 'forms of resistance' to the positive Oedipus complex, challenging the legacy of 'self contempt and loathing' that according to Freud accompanies this phase of development in girls (Ibid. 154)

It follows, then, that examining artworks for signs of resistance potentially offers another dimension to understanding the attitude displayed by the girl. The possibility that the girl has a capacity for resistance, even fury, turned towards another rather than inwards towards the self as described in the Freudian account, is demonstrated though the defiance pictured in my painting *My Sister Laura – Fuck Off* (2008) (Figure 47) and overlaps with Silverman's argument that the girl's melancholy is shot through with narcissism.

Figure 47. *My Sister Laura – Fuck Off*
(2008)
Christina Reading
Oil on board
10 x 12 inches

For Silverman castration refers to a symbolic castration to which 'all cultural objects
submit since it coincides with the separation from the world of objects and the entry
into language' (Silverman, 1988: 1). This is a symbolic castration in the sense that
her concerns do not form part of discourse, hence her exclusion. The girl's
narcissism will encourage her to register her protest against the symbolic that
excludes her, so even if there is no language available to her to articulate loss, signs
of her resistance, her anger, may nevertheless penetrate and be discernible in the
symbolic.

In the Oedipus complex the mother is not only devalued but also, according to
Silverman, 'de-idealised' (Ibid. 156). Silverman argues that Freud fails to recognise
that this loss is incorporated into the girl's ego (Ibid.). Hence Freud's notion of
incorporation applied to this scenario means, for Silverman, that the girl's evaluation
of herself as worthless is directed against the once idealised mother.[53] In *The
Acoustic Mirror* (1988) Silverman reminds us that 'the daughter punishes the mother
(and consequently herself) for being inferior, unworthy of love' (Silverman, 1988:
158).[54] For Freud this devaluation is a 'cure' whilst for Silverman this devaluation is

[53] Silverman continues: 'at the risk of reiterating what is now painfully evident, I want to make it
absolutely clear what is at stake here. It is impossible for the girl to enter into the negative version of
the Oedipus complex through that sexually differentiating castration which Freud writes about in his
essays on female sexuality for the simple reason that its function is to devalue the mother and thereby
facilitate the displacement of the girl's desire onto the father. It is impossible under these theoretical
conditions to imagine the girl having sufficient narcissistic reserves to become melancholic since the
only identification with the mother which would be available to her is one based on lack,
insufficiency and self contempt' (Silverman, 1988: 156).
[54] Silverman notes that although the mother–daughter relationship is characterised by ambivalence in
the way that Freud theorised it, she argues that the 'real force of the hostility which she directs against

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'exactly what causes female melancholia' as the girl slowly and 'bit by bit'
'withdraws her attachment from the devalued object', the devalued mother (Freud,
1917: 256). However, as Siverman reminds us, for Freud the mother's significance
to the subject is reinforced 'by thousands of links or memories', so this process is
unlikely to ever reach a conclusion (Freud cited in Silverman, 1988: 158). So it is not
surpising that 'certain unconscious memories will retain their cathexis and assert the
mother's desirability even in the face of the most violent detraction on the part of the
culture and the superego' (Silverman, 1988: 158). Hence the networks of memory
traces that bind the subject to the mother are conceived to be reducible, inexhaustible
and endless. The question perhaps is how this network of memory traces might be
manifest in the body and be played out in the visual field for women.

Despite the difficulties of representing such experiences, Silverman reiterates the
Freudian position that 'conscious recollection or reconstruction would indeed seem
one way to halt that process, the insistence on conscious memory' (Silverman, 1988:
177–1788). The question, therefore, is whether such an intention can be used to
further my practice, and contribute to and explore the wider discourse on figurative
art and melancholy.

From a related yet slightly different angle, Judith Butler, in 'Melancholy gender /
refused identification' (1997), also explores the relationship between the mother and
the girl, focusing on the melancholic consequences for the girl of abandoning the
mother as an object of love. If, according to Freud, the purpose of the Oedipus
complex is to deliver heterosexuality, it is, Butler argues, on condition that the
homosexual desire for the object of the same sex is denied. Thus Butler argues that
'the girl becomes a girl through being subject to a prohibition which bars the mother
as the object of desire and installs this barred object as part of the ego' (Butler, 1997:
136). In Butler's view this homosexual taboo and prohibition is 'repeated and
ritualised through culture', and therefore it remains a grief that remains unspoken
and unrepresented (Ibid. 145). This is significant because, for Butler, 'heterosexual
identity is purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love that it
disavows' (Ibid. 140). Moreover, gender can only be understood by what is not

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herself after the conclusion of the negative Oedipus complex has more to do with the devaluation of
the original erotic object than with anything else (Silverman, 1988: 154).

performed, what is barred, Butler noting that the feminine gender is 'formed through the incorporated fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible act of love, exclusion never grieved but preserved through heightened feminine identification' (Ibid. 145).[55] What is presented to culture is therefore this enhanced sense of the feminine, which at the same time masks a loss that is denied and not represented by culture. It seems that Butler's formulation may have consequences for how we read the lavish clothing and luxurious hair present in some art historical depictions of melancholy.

Butler, like Silverman and Freud, also emphasises the importance of the conscious remembrance of loss and collective institutions for grieving, regarding them as crucial to survival, to reassembling community, to rearticulating kinship, to reweaving sustaining relations, 'because they are reminders of the psychic consequences of not acknowledging loss' (Ibid.). Whatever form this takes, there remains the difficulty, identified by Freud, of representing unconscious loss, and the particular challenge of this thesis is finding a way to represent the complexity of the girl's unconscious losses, I argue that women's figurative art practice may play a crucial part in this process.

Denial of the negation

In *Black Sun* (1989), Julia Kristeva echoes Lacan in suggesting that in the non-depressive state the workings of language provide the subject with a symbolic response to loss, whether that is for the girl the loss of the pre-Oedipal mother, or loss experienced because of her imagined castration. Hence, for Kristeva, the negation (cancellation) of loss (the mother) is what opens up the world of signs for the subject by allowing language to be a translation of affective loss (transposition).According to Kristeva the transposition is said to rely on 'two facets': first, 'the mourning gone through for the object' (or archaic thing), and second, the subject's 'acceptance of signs' which signify precisely because of the absence of the object (Kristeva, 1989: 40). She comments: 'If I did not agree to lose the mother, I could neither imagine nor name her' (Ibid. 41). Crucially, from this perspective a

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[55] This insight caused Butler to revise an earlier stance that 'gender is not expressed by actions, gestures or speech but that rather the performance of gender produces retroactively the illusion that there is an inner gender core' (Butler, 1997: 144).

'solid implication in the symbolic and imaginary code' becomes 'stimulation and reinforcement' to mitigate loss (Kristeva, 1989: 36).

Kristeva's account of negation accepts the dominance of the phallic sign, although she does consider the feminine in its dialectical relationship with it. The effort by women figurative artists to represent women's melancholy must therefore be considered in relation to pre-existing phallic signs in the symbolic.

If the non-depressive state is governed by the existence of a strong symbolic and imaginative code in the subject, as Kristeva outlines, then melancholy is the result of a symbolic realm that is inadequate so that 'the subject has no recourse other than withdrawal to the inaction of the state of retardation' (Ibid. 33). Retardation is understood by Kristeva to be a learnt defence to a 'dead end situation or unavoidable shock' based on the idea that 'when all escape routes are blocked, animals learn to withdraw rather than flee or fight' (Kristeva, 1989: 35). The principle is described by Kristeva as a slowing down of psychic and emotional reactions in an individual; it is a process that affects the 'rhythm overall of the melancholy person', including not just the 'succession of emotions, gestures and actions' but also their speech. From this perspective 'slow, repetitive and monotonous patterns of speech' are regarded as outward signs of 'cognitive chaos', providing external clues to the internal sufferings of the melancholic (Ibid.). The issue for my inquiry is how might these qualities be represented or inscribed in works of art by women figurative artists?

Another characteristic of the psychic space of melancholy people is that they evoke a sense of time that is located in the past. Kristeva notes that melancholy people have a skewed relationship to time (Kristeva, 1989: 60). In a melancholic the idea of a 'before' or 'after' does not apply because the psyche is not 'directed from a past toward a goal' (Ibid. 60). Instead the melancholic is attached only to the past: 'everything has gone by they seem to say, but I am faithful to those bygone days. I am nailed down to them, no revolution is possible, there is no future' (Ibid). In response to this it is important to note here that the vfm I have created takes place within this melancholic structure of time; it gives no priority to the present or the future (Ibid). This study of melancholy as a temporal phenomenon is also central to

Freud's concept of melancholy as a psychic object that is a memory event lost in time (Ibid).

Whilst Kristeva acknowledges that the exact nature of the relationship between symbolic breakdown and retardation observable in the melancholic is unclear, asking whether symbolic inadequacy is due to a dysfunction of the 'neuronal or endocrinal network' or 'family and social environment', her focus as a psychologist is on the latter (Kristeva, 1989: 36). Within this framework Kristeva's central concern is shedding light on the question, 'what mechanisms erase symbolic impact within the subject?' (Ibid. 37).

Kristeva argues that the depressed person denies or 'disavows the negation' and fails to develop an adequate symbolic to counter their melancholic state. Instead 'they cancel it out, suspend it, and nostalgically fall back on the real object (the Thing) of their loss, which is just what they do not manage to lose, to which they remain painfully riveted' (Ibid. 43). So whereas for Freud melancholy is a display of ambivalence for another object that is incorporated into the ego, Kristeva sees it as a relation that has failed to emerge; there is no object relation, only an attachment to a Thing (Lechte, 1990a: 185). [56]

Attached to the Thing, 'the depressed person speaks of nothing, they have nothing to speak of; glued to the Thing (res), they are without objects. That total and un-signifiable Thing is insignificant, it is a mere Nothing, their Nothing, Death' (Kristeva, 1989: 51). Such a scenario opens up a 'chasm' within the very psychic

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[56] Kristeva's notion of the 'denial of the negation' in her book *Black Sun* (1989) emerges from Freud's text *Negation* (1925b), which outlines its mechanism and its role in the representation of loss. Freud regarded an expression of denial or disavowal as a key mechanism for obtaining information and confirming the importance of 'unconscious repressed material' in the subject (Freud, 1925b: 235). Freud writes: 'There is no stronger evidence that we have been successful in our effort to uncover the unconscious than when a patient reacts with the words "I think that, or I didn't ever think that"' (Ibid. 239). For Freud, negation is a way of taking cognisance of what is repressed: 'the repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness on condition that it is negated' (Ibid. 235). In other words, the negation signals the moment when unconscious wishes, desires or memories begin to re-emerge. Second, Freud writes that whilst the negation accomplishes 'a lifting of what is repressed' (Ibid.), the separation of the intellectual and affections allows for an 'intellectual acceptance of the repressed material but what is essential to it persists' (Ibid. 236). Thirdly, 'the symbol of negation', expressed as a disavowal or denial of a memory or a wish' functions to bring repressed material to consciousness, so that expressions like 'I didn't think that', 'I didn't ever think that' provide a starting point in analysis. Hence the expression of the negation is in fact the representation of the repression of a lost object, which surfaces in language through the symbol of the negation (Ibid.).

structure of the depressed person; objects and signifiers they associated with life fail to register and the 'Thing' associated with death assumes an overwhelming value and significance (Ibid.). Hence for Kristeva melancholy is characterised by a continued and uncompleted mourning for the lost Thing and a desire for a reunion with the pre-Oedipal maternal thing in the Real.

Kristeva's idea of the 'denial of the negation' is interesting to this inquiry because it is linked to the failure to symbolise loss. Because of the subject's refusal to (symbolically) 'kill' off the mother, she is not lost and the work of repression and representation of loss (as in negation) is prevented. Not to 'kill' off the mother implies a failure to use the mechanism of the negation central to the construction of a strong symbolic. In his paper 'The dynamics of melancholia in Julia Kristeva's Black Sun' (2005) Professor Tsu-Chung Su speculates that women find it hard to symbolically kill the mother because by identifying with her they have encrypted the mother within themselves. Thus, to destroy the mother is to destroy an aspect of themselves as well (Su, 2005: 163–191). Consequently, according to Kristeva's formulation of denial, women rather than men are more likely to suffer melancholy; as such, her account helps to reclaim melancholy as a discourse for women. However, as Professor Su has argued, melancholy is only overcome by woman at a cost of reintegration into the phallic symbolic that paradoxically contributed to her melancholy in the first instance.

This means that the melancholic does not search for meaning; instead emotions become detached from symbolic constructions, so that instead of expressing an emotion through the symbolic the subject acts out the affects. Thus depressed people attach themselves to affects (as partial objects) rather than objects. If, as Kristeva maintains, this is a kind of 'perversion (fetishism, exhibitionism etc)', it is also the way that the depressed person regulates narcissistically their hold over the 'non objectal Thing', in a 'non verbal, unnameable and omnipotent manner' (Kristeva, 1989: 48).

Kristeva extends Freud's notion of denial from that which identifies language as a signal of repressed material to include 'the semiotic representation of drives and affects' (Kristeva, 1989: 43). In her account denial includes signifiers that inscribe

'semiotic traces' and 'transpose them in order to produce meaning for the subject (Ibid. 44). This alters the 'object of denial' to focus on what Kristeva describes as the 'intra-psyche (semiotic and symbolic) inscription of want' (Kristeva, 1989: 43). The trouble with 'the denial of the negation' and its expression through the semiotic rather than the symbolic is that, according to Kristeva, it offers only a flimsy defence against new losses. This is because, as first theorised by Melanie Klein (1882–1960) who built on Freud's discoveries, 'the incorporation of the mother as an internal good object into the infant's own self as a kind of "omnipotent possession" is only achieved at the cost of denial' (Klein, 1937: 63). The separation from the mother starts the depressive phase but 'upon losing the mother and relying on negation, I retrieve her as sign, image, word. Primary processes govern that expression of archaic domination' (Kristeva, 1989: 62). The expression of primary processes reflects the co-dependent relationship between mother and child, and the emergence of the subject as an individuated subject. But, crucially, Kristeva postulates that omnipotent meaning and preverbal semiology at the level of primary processes remains a 'dead letter' if not invested with 'signification' (Ibid.). In other words, if the child refuses separation from the mother and fails to develop language, the subject's focus on the semiotic rather than the symbolic delivers an empty speech and masks the attachment to the archaic object (Thing) – melancholy.

Failures, and the failure of representation I would argue, are often an inherent part of the artistic process, but are often overcome in later stages, so that meaning only emerges in the layers of struggle with an initial void. This process is evident in my painting *Linking Arms* (2012) (Figure 48), where the final image emerges through layers of paint that are the residual sign of the earlier attempts at erasure. If failure is central to the creative process of representing loss, may it not also be part of the linguistic process?

Figure 48. *Linking Arms* (2012)
Christina Reading
Oil on linen
40 x 40cm

Typically, however, the child discovers a compromise in the 'denial of the negation', which generally leads to a working through mourning and the establishment of a symbolic system. The subject then freezes unpleasant affects and preserves them in a 'psychic inside thus constituted once and for all as distressed and inaccessible' (Ibid. 63). For Kristeva this 'painful innerness put together with inner semiotic markings but not signs is the invisible face of Narcissism, the secret source of tears' (Ibid.). So even if the subject protects itself through language this 'hurt' is still locked up in the subject. Perhaps the advantage of the semiotic is that it permeates and flows between the body and the protective layer of language.

Kristeva addresses this point, arguing that, like the melancholic, the artist evokes the attachment to the Thing/lost mother through the semiotic signifying process, where the transposition of affect becomes rhythms, alliteration, intonation, etc. However, Kristeva argues that unlike the melancholic, the artist has control over these signs. This is because artists articulate the primary inscription of loss semiotically through their work and so give loss a mode of articulation. For Kristeva 'such a fiction, if it isn't an antidepressant, is at least a survival, a resurrection' (Ibid. 51). Mastery of signs in language, and works of art, replaces the pain of loss. Hence the work of art is 'a site of vanished melancholy' (Ibid. 141). Kristeva declares that such works 'ensure the rebirth of its author and its reader or viewer' because they 'succeed in integrating the artificial language it puts forward (new style, new compositions, surprising imagination) and the unnamed agitations of an omnipotent self that ordinary social and linguistic usage always leave somewhat orphaned or plunged

into mourning' (Ibid. 51). Kristeva cites the example of Hans Holbein's *The Body of the Dead Christ* (1520–1522) as a work of art that comes close to illustrating the denial of the negation. This is, argues Kristeva, achieved through a minimalism that isolates the body of Christ in the crypt and gives no sign of idealisation. Hence the power of the painting for Kristeva is not that it is a sign of grief, but that it *is grief* (Ibid.). Kristeva's analysis focuses on the example of a male artist using the male figure to represent melancholy. The question this leaves open is whether women figurative artists have produced work that expresses women's grief with the same power as Holbein's painting

Kristeva continues on to write that in art 'when the struggle between imaginary creation (art, literature) and depression is carried out precisely on that frontier of the symbolic and the biological we indeed see that the narrative or argument is ruled by primary processes' (Ibid.).[57] The principle of the primary inscription of loss is part of the theoretical framework Kristeva constructs in order to account for a loss that persists beyond denial and for the way that affect swamps the subject. This is useful for understanding how 'primarily processes and affects (semiotic) come into conflict with discourse (with the linguistic and beliefs, ideologies etc), in other words, with the symbolic' (Kristeva, 1989: 65). Such a view is significant, not only as a lens through which to examine the work of women figurative artists but also to consider those aspects that shape my own artwork.

In Black Sun (1989) Kristeva suggests that 'melancholia does assert itself in times of crisis; it is spoken of, establishes its archaeology, generates its representations and its knowledge' (Kristeva, 1989: 8). Pursuing this idea in *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995) Kristeva goes on to draw attention to a contemporary manifestation of the melancholic in which what is at jeopardy is subjectivity itself. She warns that modern humanity is losing its soul because 'the psychic apparatus that registers

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[57] The principle of the primary inscription of loss is part of the theoretical framework Kristeva constructs in order to account for a loss that persists beyond denial and for the way that affect swamps the subject. From this point of view sadness is 'an acknowledgement that the other is getting away from the self but that this self resists being abandoned' (narcissism). So sadness is an acknowledgement that the self is not yet joined with the other, but is 'carried within it'. Moreover, that discourse itself is affected by these semiotic rhythms and that narratives and arguments are ruled by these primary processes. Thus Kristeva proposes that primarily processes and affects (semiotic) come into conflict with discourse (with the linguistic and beliefs, ideologies etc), in other words, with the symbolic (Kristeva, 1989: 65).

representations and their meaningful value for the subject, the darkroom, is in need of repair' (Kristeva, 1995: 8). Kristeva argues that 'everyday experience points to a spectacular reduction in private life', caused by the erosion of religious and family life, and modern subjects no longer take the time or trouble to cultivate an interior life, resulting in psychological poverty that manifests in bodily symptoms (Ibid. 7). Kristeva continues: 'today's men and women who are stress-ridden and eager to achieve, to spend money, have fun and die dispense with representations of their experience that we call psychic life. Actions and their immediate abandonment have replaced the interpretation of meaning' (Ibid.). In other words the idea of the loss of an inner life is for Kristeva a new manifestation of melancholy. Subjectivity itself is the new lost object at the heart of modern man, who focuses on action rather than reflection and the cultivation of meaning.

In her analysis, Kristeva elaborates in particular on the effect of the media on subjectivity, arguing that modern subjects find themselves surrounded by and reliant upon new technology, so that the centre of their existence is increasingly constructed by and through the images absorbed through the media and social networking technology (Kristeva, 1995). As Kristeva sees it we are locked in a world in which psychic life is largely constructed by soaking up dreams and images presented in an endless stream via the media, and our ability to form interiority for ourselves is consequently eroded. This new subjectivity, she argues, is overwhelmed by images and narratives, both real and imaginary, of the lives of media personalities which are experienced as 'real', and which in time replace the need for subjects to develop their own moral and sexual identities. Kristeva warns:

> 'Let it stand for the record. There is nothing you can do about it. You are overwhelmed with images. They carry you away, they replace you, you are dreaming. The rupture of the hallucination originates in the absence of boundaries between pleasure and reality, between truth and falsehood. The spectacle is life as a dream – we all want this. Do this "you" and this "we" exist? Your expression is standardized, your discourse becomes normalized. For that matter, do you really have a discourse of your own?' (Kristeva, 1995: p. 8).

The new patients Kristeva encounters seem unable or unwilling to put in the time and effort to construct interiority, seeking instead to fill the vacuum with a series of

actions that have no inherent meaning and will not provide them with subjectivity. Kristeva views all mood-altering drugs, forms of technological entertainment and even the cult of fitness as 'diversionary activities' which cause suffering and manifest somatically as signs of a psychological poverty in modern life. She continues on to write that attempts to solve these problems will be hindered by the negative narcissism of modern mankind and its desire to remain in ignorance of its plight. Instead modern man, she feels, will resort to medicine to 'solve' these problems.[58] In Kristeva's view the subject is 'reduced to being a body without subjectivity, an empty shell that acts without clear sexual or moral values … he becomes swept away by insignificant and valueless objects that offer a perverse pleasure, but no satisfaction' (Ibid.). Kristeva's efforts to clarify issues relating to the nature of melancholy today and its link to the body are significant to my inquiry but still arguably leave open the question of the specificity of women's experience in Kristeva's scenario and its manifestation in the female body.

Kristeva was writing in 1995; since then financial collapse in the West and global tension have ignited new ethical debates about how we live, but these shifts do not invalidate the central premise of Kristeva's argument. The modern subject in developed societies is used to and demands constant communication via the media in all its forms and technologies. Through the media the modern subject enters into new and complex forms of social relationships, and following Kristeva's formulation melancholy grows at the narcissistic heart of major social networking mediums such as Facebook and Twitter. Facebook's promise of endless friendship is beguiling, but it creates new potential sources of anxiety because it causes the subject to see themselves and others as a media product, rather than as individuals with a complex and shifting subjectivity of their own. Profiles only provide a silhouetted view of a person rather than a holistic one, and are narcissistic because they encourage the subject to present a positive face to the world. Social media also provides many new opportunities for images of women's bodies to be displayed and objectified in a way that potentially alienates woman from her physical existence. One of the central

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[58] In 2001 a quarter (24 %) of people with a common mental disorder were receiving treatment for emotional and mental problems, mostly in the form of medication (Office for National Statistics Psychiatric Morbidity report 2001, cited in NHS Confederation Mental Health Network Fact Sheet: *Key Facts and Trends in Mental Health*, 2011).

aspects of woman's melancholy is her wounded narcissism that she brings to this unforgiving environment. In this new world, the endless presentation of self as happy, sexually attractive and displayed and socially engaged surely leaves less room for challenging aspects of subjectivity that are left unacknowledged or unexplored, so that loss remains unarticulated and unrepresented. It cannot be known yet just how much these ever new and burgeoning forms of communication will affect the development of emotional life or how they will manifest in the body; but it is evident that these new ways of communicating are at their core narcissistic. Within these new environments, although melancholy may be hidden from view at all costs it may paradoxically have a fertile ground in which to flourish. At stake today, therefore, is the erosion of subjectivity and the ability to deal with our melancholy.

Matrix and metramorphosis

In Chapter One I considered the importance of Bracha Ettinger's concept of the Matrix and the processes of metramorphosis for Griselda Pollock's formulation of the vfm. Ettinger's perspectives on female subjectivity have been expounded in a number of papers, notably 'Matrix and metramorphosis' (1992). Other key texts include the exhibition catalogue *Matrix Borderlines* (4 April – 20 June 1993), 'The matrixial gaze part 1: The uncanny' and 'The matrixial object part 2: The almost missed encounters as eroticised aerials of the psyche' (1995)*,* and 'Traumatic wit(h)ness-thing and matrixial co/in-habit(u)ating' (1999). Ettinger's ideas are also of great significance in thinking though the issue of female subjectivity, melancholy and its representation or 'inscription' in works of art.

To reiterate, Ettinger offers a discourse relating to prenatal and very early postnatal experiences that are recorded in the psyche, and their subsequent inscription in the symbolic. Her view is that 'although birth is the moment when the human biological and ontological unit comes into the world, it is already an experience on a continuum of on-going real existence' (Ettinger, 1992: 202). She argues that these 'internal inscriptions of early experiences of body schema (feminine) become later psychological and symbolic events when later experiences retroactively evoke the early ones' (Ibid.). Whereas according to the Freudian account the loss of the phallus becomes a later symbolic event for the subject, for Ettinger these early experiences

of the feminine Real also produce symbolic meaning for the subject. Ettinger acknowledges that within both Freud and Lacan there is recognition of the pre-Oedipal stage. Freud interprets it 'as under the sign of mystery, anxiety and female inferiority' (Freud cited in Ettinger, 1992: 185). Whereas for Lacan the pre-Oedipal stage is characterised by the split and fragmented body and part and partial objects that 'cannot be thought of, nor repressed' and therefore cannot be represented in the unconscious (Ibid.). This is because for Lacan this pre-Oedipal experience is an aspect of the Real, which is resistant to symbolisation in language. Hence the idea of the pre-Oedipal phase exists in Lacan but 'because it cannot be thought of, it cannot become part of subjectivity' nor 'pass into the symbolic' (Ibid.).

For Ettinger subjectivity is reconceived as constituted through experiences in the womb as much as through the loss of the phallus, for it precedes and complicates the child's subsequent experience of the Oedipus complex, castration and socialisation in the culture. This different starting point means that the first encounters of the subject are reconceptualised as occurring in the womb and not postnatally. Thus, for Ettinger, the unconscious is deemed to include an earlier feminine domain arising from a seemingly benign reciprocity between mother and child that contradicts and is at odds with the Freudian conception of this relationship in the Oedipus complex. This means that, for Ettinger, the other that we do not know participates in the development of our subjectivity, and this recognition of 'the other as an unknown not I' distinguishes it from the phallus (Ettinger, 1992: 199). Thus Ettinger theorises: 'the Matrix deals with the possibility of recognizing the other in his/her otherness, difference and unknown-ness' (Ibid. 200).

Ettinger argues that the theoretical assumption in Freud, Lacan and Kristeva that all signifiers can be reduced to the phallus, 'that every action in language has one meaning and is related to one lost or lacking object', is unwarranted (Ettinger, 1992: 203). How then are lost objects in the Matrix to be understood? In the Matrix, Ettinger theorises that lost objects will be 'multiple and plural and/or partial', without the symbolic value of 'the One' (Ibid. 203). Neither are they alone in the unconscious; instead they are 'holes in discourse and the space around fragments' (Ibid. 200). For Ettinger these aspects of the Matrix represent 'the not yet known,

the repressions, the denials of our culture and in themselves are ever changing; culture, history, personal experience and nature are constantly creating new holes hence their appearance in the symbolic can either be phallic or matrixial' (Ibid.). The Matrix or repressed womb is understood as the 'cultural expression' of this fragmented, partial or plural subjectivity (Ibid).

In Ettinger's theorisation of the Matrix and the process of metramorphosis 'the circulation of lacks', whether partial fragmented or plural are not dealt with 'in the same way as metaphors or metonyms are in the phallic system' (Ettinger, 1993: 18). For Ettinger 'the emergence of the Phallic I entails loss, and so does the emergence of the matrixial I and non I' (Ibid.). But 'within the matrixial system what is lost to the one can be inscribed as traces in the other and metramorphosis can allow passages of these traces from non I to I and back again in an enlarged stratum of subjectivisation as well as fragile *limitrope* representation' (Ibid.). The Matrix deals with 'what the phallic consciousness cannot reach' (Ettinger, 1992: 201). Such a conceptualisation of the circulation of loss between the I and non I implies a link between the feminine and unknown others which has powerful socio/political consequences, because it establishes the idea that the losses experienced by the stranger matter profoundly to the individual Self, but also introduces an enlarged notion of subjectivity that encompasses these unknown others.

Of further significance to this inquiry is Ettinger's argument that works of art are places where evidence of the feminine might be found and analysed because they are 'symbologenic' (Ettinger, 1992: 196). By this Ettinger means that works of art allow 'artists to inscribe traces of subjectivity, Oedipal or not, in external cultural symbolic territories (i.e artworks) and by analyzing these inscriptions it is possible to create and forge concepts of the symbolic representation and non-representation of the feminine within culture' (Ibid.). Hence artworks by women artists may provide clues to the nature of the feminine symbolic relating to melancholy.[59] This possibility

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[59] Before elaborating her theoretical position Ettinger describes how the process of making artwork constituted a theoretical discovery and that it was her experience of making artworks that led Ettinger to transform Freud and Lacan's notion of the symbolic to include the Matrix as well as the phallus. Ettinger makes the point that 'artists continually introduce into culture all kinds of Trojan Horses from the margins of their consciousness; in this way the limits of the symbolic are transgressed all the time by art' (Ettinger, 1992: 195). Ettinger continues to say that 'many art works carry subjective traces of their creators, but the specificity of works of art is the materiality that cannot be detached

arises because 'the artist as a partial subject takes part and testifies to/for an unknown other or rather, it is the matrixial threads of the artwork which testify to the trauma of an-other in wit(h)ness' (Ettinger, 1999: 94). The task, however, is not only to examine artworks for the inscriptions of the feminine but also to 'infuse the symbolic universe already burdened with ideas concerning femininity with other suggestions, in order to enrich the cultural historical text concerning women and the feminine' (Ibid. 181). In other words, it is important to consider how women figurative artists contribute different discourses to the dominant canon as well as reading artworks for traces of a specifically feminine symbolic arising from the Matrix. I speculate that because the feminine is 'massively repressed in culture' (Ibid.) this endeavour will be as much a question of re-finding the feminine articulation of loss in artworks, bringing it to the fore and giving it presence and recognition in culture, as about creating new forms of representation.

The question for this inquiry is what these traces of the feminine might look like. Is it possible that a coherent set of signs might emerge that we can attribute to women's melancholy? Ettinger's answer to this question is that 'if there is a feminine symbol, it would, like the Phallus, be non sexuated', and that the Matrix has the power to reveal such a symbol (Ettinger, 1993: 18). However, I would suggest that Ettinger's quest to propose one single unifying symbol, the Matrix that stands for the feminine, in the way that the phallus is aligned with the masculine, runs counter to her argument that what defines the feminine is its multiple, fragmented, fragile and even absent quality. Moreover, 'the Matrix is no more feminine than the Phallus is masculine', meaning that the experiences of the womb are repressed for both genders, not just the female child (Ettinger, 1992: 180). Therefore the crucial question is what happens to the relational ontology and the symbolism of the Matrix that Ettinger theorises as distinctively feminine after birth? From a theoretical point of view, as I have discussed, the symbol of the phallus has an essential role in the

from ideas, perceptions, emotions, conscious and cultural meaning, being interpreted and reinterpreted is their cultural destiny … From time to time the artist's gaze is split and we see ourselves in the position of observer, interpreter. I see the inscription of oneself in the Symbolic and the recognition of one's own desire through the symbolic as inter related, self-organising and continues events. I believe that the symbolic must be penetrated by women, even if choosing one / name / concept will be considered phallic. In those ways alternative ideas deviating from the Phallus may enlarge the text of culture' (Ibid.).

development of the child, but the question perhaps is whether the earlier matrixial symbolic modifies the later phallic stage for the child?

The notion of the feminine as a state of benign reciprocity symbolised by the womb is complicated, however, by the concept of horrorism introduced by philosopher and feminist thinker Adriana Cavarero (2009). Cavarero advocates the use of the term 'horrorism' rather than 'war' or 'terror' to describe acts of violence that are 'designed not simply to kill and maim but also to produce a terrorizing effect on whole populations, instilling fear of a violent death, inflicted at random on a defenceless, vulnerable population' (Ibid.). I would argue that this is important for understanding contemporary manifestations of melancholy because, for Kristeva, as I have previously discussed, the suppression of the fight or flee mechanisation (retardation) is associated with melancholy. Hence real and imaginary fear produced by these acts of horrorism shows how the body used as a weapon in this way has the capability to inflict a collective melancholia on whole populations.

In horrorism these 'massacres are now perpetrated, by a body that blows itself up in order to rip other bodies to pieces. Moreover, a female body as happens ever more frequently, sometimes the body of a pregnant mother to be' (Ibid.). Hence, in horrorism, the body of the woman is placed in the spotlight, a symbol of a new form of violence perpetrated indiscriminately on the defenceless and the vulnerable. To explain this phenomenon Cavarero revives the ancient cultural icons of Medusa and Medea to denote the female face of violence in horrorism. Greek mythology describes the severed head of the Medusa, who struck terror into the hearts of her victims before finally killing them with her deadly gaze. The other key cultural figure Medea, is a mother who killed her own sons in revenge for the lover who spurned her. These are symbols of a femininity that is violent and vengeful, capable of using her own body to inflict indiscriminate death on the vulnerable and defenceless, and even to destroy her own child. These symbols of the feminine radically alter the notion of women's bodies as givers of life and care, and bring to the fore the power of the feminine to 'kiss or kill' others.[60] What emerges from the

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[60] After Thomas Hobbs, Cavarero suggests that who gives birth to a child is of less significance than who cares for it once it is born. This is because it is at that moment that the child is totally reliant on the mother for survival. There is a total vulnerability and dependency on the mother postnatally.

discussion of these alternative feminine forms of symbolisation is the recognition of the need to move away from notions of femininity defined by notions of passivity and the need for women to acknowledge and accept responsibility for their part in inflicting pain and harm on others. The benign reciprocity between the 'I and non I' associated with the feminine symbolic of the Matrix seems to be repressed for these women, and this matters because humanity consequently suffers. Does this mean that the relational ontology associated with the Matrix fails to signify for these women?

At issue is how Ettinger's conceptualisation of the Matrix helps us to view the development of feminine subjectivity and melancholy. Judith Butler (2009), taking up this point during a conference presentation in 2009, argued that women may experience melancholy and mourning as a consequence of histories passed on to them from previous generations: within each of us is the 'trace and grain' of another's suffering, mourning and melancholy (Butler, 2009).[61] In this way a link is established between people who are not kin, who do not necessarily share the same history. This idea raises the possibility that we remain open to the likelihood of experiencing melancholy and mourning for an event that was not our own but one in the lives of our parents, the traces of which are passed down. Butler notes that it is crucial 'to remember a thing that I have not experienced/lost, a thing that remains buried within the mother, the subject, an unknown grieving, the alien and dead trace of somebody else's lost mourning' (Ibid.).[62] Butler also suggests that those who experience violent shocks, such as those experienced in war or civil conflict, may find themselves overwhelmed by these psychic events, and focus on forgetting them in order to survive. However, the following generation remembers on their behalf, invoking the loss not admitted by the preceding generation. Here Butler draws upon Freud's account of trauma discussed earlier in this chapter, whereby the first event becomes traumatic because a second event evokes a repressed memory of the first. In other words, it is only as a memory that the first event becomes pathogenic.

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[61] A phrase used by Judith Butler during a lecture I attended at the University of London, on 9 June 2009, at University College, London. The conference was titled *Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics* and other speakers included Griselda Pollock, Catherine de Zegher and Bracha Ettinger.
[62] A quote from Judith Butler from the same conference presentation.

Through this mechanism Butler suggests that melancholy and mourning can affect a generation that do not appear to have experienced loss so that, as Butler posits, the melancholy of others can take up residency in our own psychic development, triggered by seemingly benign or unrelated events. Perhaps, then, recuperating the figurative art history of women is a strategy for acknowledging that the current experience of women is always in dialogue with the experiences of women from a different historical moment, and also with women who are strangers, but whom I come to know in partial and fragmented ways, and whose experiences can have a profound, foundational effect on my psyche.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have pursued a discourse about melancholy and feminism as it relates to its appearance in works of art. The vastly influential Freudian perspective emphasises the unconscious, unknown quality of melancholy and has tied it to something that is unrepresentable in the symbolic, except via those insights that might be provided by the somatic symptoms in the body through actions, gestures, rhythms, slowed speech, etc. Freud wrote about the exhausting, and in the case of melancholia, endless, process of working through loss, both conscious and unconscious. Melancholy in Freudian terms, as we have seen, displays itself as a fall in self-esteem in the subject, which manifests as a self-critical attitude and masks an ambivalent relation to the lost love or the mother. How might these traits affect how the condition appears in works of art? Lacan shows us that images of the woman's body must be evaluated through the prism of the sign of the phallus and that such images in effect only mark her absence, providing new insights into the figurative art history of melancholy as disclosed so far. His analysis marks out the feminine as an unknown territory, and raises the crucial question for feminist discourse about whether it is possible to glimpse what a woman's melancholy might consist of beyond this framework.

Irigaray, Silverman, Butler, Kristeva and Ettinger have all in different ways addressed the absence of the female subject position in the work of Freud and Lacan, and have addressed the problem of why the feminine aspects of this experience still struggle to find representation. We have seen how Irigaray focuses on the psychic

consequences of the girl's tendency to devalue the mother – which means that even if she represents her experience it may not signify in the wider culture or even with herself – and how these experiences might appear in artworks. Silverman's analysis of the link between narcissism and melancholy, on the other hand, seems to provide the opportunity for the girl to vent her fury, not just at herself, as Freud proposed, but towards others too. Such a move towards externalising emotions offers the possibility of bringing the losses experienced by women into the visual field. Butler's insight that a heightened sense of the feminine masks a woman's melancholy perhaps provides another clue to this condition.

For Kristeva the artwork is the place where the primary semiotic process and affects overwhelm the subject and come into conflict with the symbolic, so that melancholy is constituted as inhabiting the territory between the symbolic and the experience of the body. As such the artwork has the capacity not only to represent the psychic space of melancholy, but also to affect the viewer. This capability extends the significance of art from the artist to the wider culture, hence its importance to this discourse. This is crucial to feminism, and to my practice, which endeavours to inhabit this territory as well as to examine the way in which other women artists have explored this space. Finally, the concept of the Matrix and the process of metramorphosis is key to this inquiry because for Ettinger the primary process and semiotic rhythms are related to the Matrix, a feminine symbolic, and can potentially be represented. This offers the possibility of searching for a feminine perspective on the issue of melancholy that moves away from simply deconstructing the phallus.

I endeavour to take these issues forward into my own art practice and writing. Julia Kristeva (1995) argued that women need to find ways to represent the realities of the relationship they have with their body, their children, lovers and significant others, in order to explore why they feel disconnected from the symbolic order and linguistic meaning; only then will they be able to question, challenge and work outside existing symbols and codes of expression. The reciprocal nature of our relationships with others, which Adriana Cavarero (2009) has shown us is not always benign, and the emotional uncertainties these relationships bring, affect our subjectivity and, as artists, the work we produce. It is therefore crucial to consider our personal histories in relation to the lives of others, past and present. Acknowledging these histories is

vital to the sense of self we create now as women and strive to build in the future. The work of women figurative artists interested in the representation of women's melancholic experience offers a way to explore the distinctively feminine/feminist interventions into the discourse on melancholy to date, and I now turn to an exploration of this.

Chapter Four: The Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy

Introduction

The Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy creates a space in which we can experience and reflect upon how women figurative artists question and confront, sometimes in a dramatic and far-reaching manner, at other moments, in tiny and nuanced ways, the prevailing modes of thinking about and making work about melancholy.

Within the cultural canon, as I have noted in Chapter Two, the female figure has been used to bolster representations of men's melancholic experience, or to represent women's experience according to the roles prescribed to them within patriarchy. So that whilst the contribution of male artists to this art history is recognised, taken as the general position and indicative of dominant thought on the topic, the contribution of women artists to this history has been forgotten and is yet to be fully acknowledged.

That does not mean that the artworks produced by women figurative artists should be presented as a coherent alternative history to the prevailing canon. Instead they are viewed as providing an insight into the changing experiences and ways of representing melancholy amongst women. My reading of the artworks in my vfm describes how all the women artists included not only faced the problem of working with the symbols of melancholy laid down by prominent male artists of the time, but sought to assert their own voice too.

This sometimes tense relationship between the dominant canon and feminism is described well by cultural theorist Claire Colebrook:

> 'Feminism has never been the pure and innocent other of a guilty and evil patriarchy. It has always been obliged to use the master's tools to destroy his house and has done so in the full knowledge that this complicity with its corruption and contamination is itself an action against metaphysics' (Colebrook, 2000: 3).

Following Colebrook, I do not suggest therefore that women's figurative art and melancholy sits purely and hermetically outside the dominant canon. I argue that feminism needs to both acknowledge the traditional canon of melancholy, and to speak of women artists' own history and engagement with the issue. My aim therefore, is not to set up a simple opposition between male and female melancholy, but instead to show how the discourse between women figurative artists opens up new ways of thinking about melancholy. Hence 'it is the strategy of locating oneself within a body of thought in order to disorganise that body' that characterises my vfm (Ibid. 4–5). It is about finding ways to include representations that have been excluded from the dominant canon and to use those works to raise new feminist questions about and suggest potentialities of the representation of women's experience of melancholy.

The initial inspiration for the themes of the vfm I have created is Robert Burton's historic text, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), after Hippocrates (c.460 BC – c.370 BC) and Avicenna[1], (c.980–1037) in which melancholy is divided into three principal categories:

> 'The first proceeds from the sole fault of the brain and is called head-melancholy; the second sympathetically proceeds from the whole body, and when the whole temperature is melancholy: the third arises from the bowels, liver, spleen or membrane called mesenterium, named hypocondrical or windy melancholy' (Burton, 1621: 175).

These categories are Burton's principal focus. However, there is a further additional but separate discussion of 'love melancholy' and 'religious melancholy' as forms of head melancholy in the third section (partition) of Burton's book. So Burton's categories attribute melancholy to aspects of the mind as well as the body. In practice, however, it is often difficult, as Burton acknowledges, to distinguish different types of melancholy from one another. This is because melancholy has historically intermixed with other conditions, such as madness, and there are 'so many opinions about the kinds (of melancholy) as there be men themselves' (Ibid.). As Burton commented on his own earlier attempt at subdivision:

'Tis hard, I confess, yet nevertheless I will adventure through the midst
of these perplexities and led by a clue or thread of the best writers,
extricate myself out of the labyrinth of doubts and errors, and so proceed
to the causes' (Ibid. 177).

Burton goes further than simply categorising melancholy, elaborating its causes,
symptoms and cures so that 'every man that is in any measure affected will know
how to examine himself and apply remedies to it' (Ibid.).

The themes I address reflect the judgements I have made about the issues most
relevant to women in the context of my vfm, and reflect the research and studio work
that I do (see Figure 49). I name the first category in my vfm 'melancholic
subjectivity'. The term melancholic subjectivity reflects the postmodern view of the
subject as 'a recipient site of meaning rather than the source' (Gamble, 2001: 324). I
also deploy aspects of Burton's thematic, namely the inclusion of love melancholy
and religious melancholy considered crucial to the women figurative artists in my
vfm. Later, Kristeva's writing in her text *Tales of Love* (1987) addresses the effect of
motherhood on the emotional life of women, identifying it as a powerful source of
melancholy. Here, therefore, I include mothers as a final category because it
provides an opportunity to consider an aspect of women's experience that is not
suggested by Burton's thematic, but which is significant for women.

The virtual feminist museum of woman's figurative art and melancholy

Room 1: Shadow of the self: Women's Melancholic Subjectivity

Pudenda Memba, (2007) Rachael Howard.

Chantelle Butterfly, (2007) Stella Vine.

The Wild Flower, Annie Chinery (Mrs Ewen Cameron) (1867) Julia Margaret Cameron.

Study From Life, Clementine Maude; 5 Prices Gardens (ca.1862) Lady Hawarden.

Shilpa Shetty, In the Big Brother House (2007) Christina Reading.

My Niece Ginnie, (2010) Christina Reading.

Room 2: Of Love, Women and Melancholy

Mariana in the craved chair, "She said I am weary, a weary, I would that I was dead" (1875) Julia Margaret Cameron.

Ariadne in Naxos, (1877) Evelyn De Morgan.

Girl with Ears (2008) Christina Reading.

Those that suffer, love (2009) Tracy Emin.

Country Dancing, (2011) Christina Reading.

The dream sequence (no 8), (2011) Christina Reading.

Room 3: Allegories of Sorrow: Religious Melancholy

Seville Magdalene, (1621-22) Artemisia Gentileschi.

Call, I follow, Let me die (1867), Mary Ann Hillier, Julia Margaret Cameron.

Hope in Prison of Despair, (1887) Evelyn de Morgan.

Dancing Nuns, (2007) Andreas Buttner.

Victorian Lady, (circa 1866), (2013) Christina Reading.

The Joyful Mysteries, (2007) Christina Reading.

Room 4: In the Wake of loss: Mothers, Mourning and Melancholy

Mother holding a dead child, (1903) Kathe Kollwitz.

Gladys and Elvis, (1997) Elizabeth Peyton.

Demeter Mourning for Persphone, (1906) Evelyn De Morgan.

Matrixial borderlines No1 Element (1990-91) Bracha Higher.

Missing, (June 2007) Christina Reading.

The Mothers, (2011) Christina Reading.

After The Mothers, 1-10 (2012), Christina Reading.

Figure 49. *The Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy* (2013)

Christina Reading

Diagram

Room One : *Shadows of the Self*: Women's Melancholic Subjectivity

Figure 50

Figure 51

Figure 52

Figure 53

Figure 54

Figure 55

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Works exhibited in Room One

Figure 50. *Pudenda Memba* (2007) Rachel Howard, Household gloss and acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4cm

Figure 51. *Chantelle Butterfly* (2007) Stella Vine, Oil on canvas, 90 x 120cm

Figure 52. *The Wild Flower*, *Annie Chinery (Mrs Ewen Cameron)* (1867) Julia Margaret Cameron, Albumen print, 292 x 243mm

Figure 53. *Study from Life, Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens* (c.1862) Lady Hawarden, Albumen print 116 x 94mm

Figure 54. *Shilpa Shetty in the Big Brother House* (2007) Christina Reading, Oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches

Figure 55. *My niece Ginnie* (2010) Christina Reading, Photograph on aluminium, 60 x 60cm

Introduction

In Room One I place Rachel Howard's (b.1969) stark figurative painting of female suicide *Pudenda Memba* (2007) (Figure 50), and Stella Vine's (b. 1969) painting *Chantelle Butterfly* (2007) (Figure 51), which represents the psychological trauma of celebrity. Alongside these I juxtapose two photographic works originating in the Victorian period, which picture the experience of being a young woman at that time. The first is the gentle and reflective photograph *The Wild Flower*, *Annie Chinery (Mrs Ewen Cameron)* (1867) (Figure 52) by Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879). Next to this is *Study from Life*, *Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens* (c.1862) (Figure 53) by Lady Clementina Hawarden (1822–1865). Into this group I add two of my own artworks, a painting, *Shilpa Shetty in the Big Brother House* (2007) (Figure 54), and a photograph, *My Niece Ginnie* (2010) (Figure 55).

Pudenda Memba (2007)
Rachel Howard
Household gloss and acrylic on canvas
121.9 x 91.4 cm

Rachel Howard's painting, seen at her first exhibition at the Haunch of Venison Art

Gallery in January 2008, *How to Disappear Completely*, investigates the

phenomenon of suicide from the perspective of its representation in the media and

from her personal experience. Howard's painting process starts with the retrieval of images of women who have committed suicide from the World Wide Web.

The central emblem of *Pudenda Memba* (2007) is a three–quarter-length nude female form presented in a slumped posture. The figure appears to be supported by that which is killing her, the noose. Her face is erased and blackened, tilted slightly forward and covered by hair so that the subject's identity is removed. Her arms hang limply by the side of her body and her figure appears lifeless. Naming the painting *Pudenda Memba* (2007) reiterates the subject as female.[63] It provides no narrative to ease our understanding of the event that is pictured; it simply shows us the final position of the body in the aftermath of suicide.

This intention is followed through in some of the accompanying smaller scale drawings (Figures 56–58), which show the outlines of young women who have committed suicide. In these drawings the head is covered, and the clothing partial or dishevelled, unlike the larger painting in which the figure is nude.

Figure 56. *Drawing (women with a black foot)* (2007) Rachel Howard, Ink on paper, 48 x76cm
Figure 57. *Drawing (young woman)* (2007) Rachel Howard, Ink on paper, 46.2 x 65cm
Figure 58. *Drawing (semi-naked cadaver)* (2007) Rachel Howard, Ink on paper, 43.9 x 76 cm

The drawings, like the painting, show us the manner in which this final act of the annihilation of subjectivity leaves its physical imprint on the pose of the body of these anonymous and therefore marginal women, the faceless remains of the body are all that survives the act of suicide. Howard's use of the simple power of line drawings to delineate the figurative language of her subject also seems to quote the diagrammatic quality of nineteenth-century prints in which the body's posture was observed and analysed for signs of madness, such as those by Ambroise Tardieu

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[63] The name of the painting refers to the external human genitals especially of the female.

(Figure 34), as well as being reminisceent of the Renaissance prints representing creative melancholy discussed in Chapter Two.

When I look at Howard's drawings I am reminded of the notorious photographs of the anonymous inmates of Abu Ghraib with their hooded heads. In Howard's drawings the head seems to be covered to preserve human dignity by anonymising the women, rather than to undermine it as in the pictures of the Abu Ghraib inmates. Nevertheless, the faceless and fallen forms in these images provoke a dialogue about erasure and powerlessness, a condition that is not reserved for women alone.[64]

Figure 59. *Picture 3: Soldiers Disciplined*. Photograph published in *The New Yorker,* 4 May 2004
Figure 60. *Picture 22: Horror.* Photograph published in the *Washington Post*, 21 May 2004

In *Pudenda Memba* the figurative element of the painting walks in tandem with a careful, sophisticated and subtle modernist aesthetic of precisely poured paint which clings to the canvas producing a highly polished and finished surface, invoking the modernist fascination with surfaces and the capacity of paint for pure expression divorced from representation. Howard combines both figurative language and the expressive qualities of paint to carry the meaning of her painting. Talking about her painting technique, Blain Southern Gallery commented that 'it mirrors the acts of desperation that encapsulate the human condition' (Blain Southern Gallery, 2011). Howard's method of painting is a metaphor; it is not simply the subject matter, nor the pose of the body, but the way in which the down-pouring of paint is used to

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[64] This distance may relate to the fact that Howard's drawings seem to reflect an act of care that preserves human dignity whilst the photographs from Abu Ghraib cancel the 'singularity' of the prisoners' faces in order to 'undermine human dignity' (Cavarero, 2009: 113)

reinforce the sensation, thought and tragedy of suicide as well. Part of what Howard gives the spectator through her poured painting method is an absence of touch. Howard doesn't just show us images of women's suicide, she shows us our cool detachment from them as well.

Paradoxically the down-pouring of paint is additionally used to produce a painting that has a highly polished aesthetic and to transform tragedy into beauty. We have seen this tendency before within the dominant canon of melancholy. For Kristeva, Hans Holbein The Younger's (1497–1543) bleak yet beautiful picture of the unadorned dead Christ, *The Dead Christ in his Tomb* (1521), gave birth to a new idea in European painting: 'that truth is severe, sometimes sad often melancholy' and that 'such a truth can constitute beauty in the visual field' (Kristeva, 1989: 127). It is precisely this aspect of Howard's work that is, in my view, important, this intention to use beauty to depict tragedy and to show us the dead body of an unknown young woman portrayed in an aesthetically pleasing way.

The question therefore arises as to whether this tendency to beautify suicide is problematic, or does it simply reflect the fact that artists and writers tend, as Hannah Arendt noted in *The Human Condition* (1958), to make private thoughts, passions and experiences more generic in the process of becoming fit for public appearance? The serenity and beauty of the smooth surfaces of Howard's painting help to make the ugly truth and cruelty of this image of suicide something we are prepared to look at and contemplate. The significance of Howard's painting, therefore, is in the way it uses figurative language and the aesthetic qualities of paint to invite the viewer to imagine the collapse of meaning and the sense of personal disintegration that caused these young women to end their lives. Her picture provides a space for us to contemplate what this might mean for our own lives.

Beginning her work with a photographic image as Howard does is significant as it means that the power of her paintings comes partly from the fact that she exploits photography's relationship to 'raw reality' (Cavarero, 2009: 55). This method of working provides Howard with a way of discarding the figurative language of art history and proposing new figurative forms that relate to and are recognisable as concerned with women's experience now.

For Kristeva, the suicidal person's sadness is the lost object, but sadness is a thing that does not lend itself to signification and is linked to the psychic mechanism of 'the denial of the negation' discussed in Chapter Three. To reiterate sadness is, for Kristeva, both a failure of object relations to emerge and a desire to be reunited with the 'primal object, or even of a Thing' of mourning (Kristeva, 1989: 66). For Kristeva it is the prospect of a reunion with this originally lost object, with 'sadness and beyond it, with the impossible lover never reached, always elsewhere, such as the promise of nothing, of death itself' that provides a suicidal attraction for the depressed person (Ibid. 15).[65] The subject can imagine a reunion with the lost thing and ultimate peace through the act of suicide. From this perspective suicide becomes 'the final triumph over the void of the lost object' (Ibid. 9). Suicide is the fulfilment of the desire for death. Hence, according to Kristeva's analysis, suicide should be viewed as an active decision, a perspective that helps explain why people who have made the decision to commit suicide often appear tranquil.[66]

Howard's image is powerful because it brings the private struggle of these unknown women to find meaning and significance in their lives back into the public arena, making their suffering visible in a way that it perhaps was not in life. Howard's paintings and drawings work to assert the presence of the sadness experienced by these women in life back into the symbolic after their death. Certainly her painting encourages us to engage with such imagery and arguably 'challenges us, and makes us responsible in some way' for the events that are pictured (Ibid. 56). Despite the subject matter, Howard's painting arguably conveys an understanding of the position of the subject and as such gives 'her' space to be seen and heard; it hints at the feminine dimension.

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[65] Kristeva describes sadness as 'the most archaic expression of an unnameable unsymbolizable narcissistic wound so precocious that the outside agent (subject or agent) can be used as a referent' (Kristeva, 1989: 2).

[66] Kristeva notes: 'the placidness, serenity and the kind of happiness that veils a number of suicidal people, once they have made the fatal decision is due to the fact that a narcissistic fullness seems to build up in imaginary fashion, it is one that removes the disastrous anguish over loss and finally gratifies the dismayed subject: there is no need to be distressed anymore solace comes though the beloved being in death' (Kristeva, 1989: 13).

Howard's painting also provokes, because it makes visual a certain refusal within contemporary culture to acknowledge women's suicide as a form of protest; it is generally accounted for in terms of her failure to fit into society. This point is illustrated by the media report of Muriel Degauque, a thirty-eight-year-old woman from Charleroi in Belgium who chose to detonate explosives strapped to her body in an attempt to wipe out a convoy of American soldiers. Journalist Nicola Smith reported that she had succeeded in killing six soldiers as well as blowing herself up (Smith, 2005: 7). The media did not show us a picture of Muriel's dead body; instead we were shown a picture of her as a child (Figure 61), as if that held clues to the future atrocity she enacted. The media report explained Muriel's conversion to Islam and her act of violence as the fault of 'a drug problem when she was younger, no real job and the fact that she was not very close to her family' (Ibid.). There is reluctance to accept the fact that women might be driven by their beliefs and rage to commit such acts of violence to themselves and to others.

Figure 61. *The making of Muriel* (2005)
Newspaper image
Published in *The Guardian*, 2 December 2005

Figure 62. *Muriel* (2011)
Christina Reading
Slide drawing
5 x 5cm
(1 of series of 10)

In my slide drawing *Muriel* (2011) (Figure 62) I respond to one line in the newspaper story that reports what Muriel Degauque's mother said when she heard of the death of her daughter: 'I've lost my daughter', she wept, 'I now have no children' (Smith 2005: 4). It portrays Muriel as a 'lost girl', lost to herself, to her family and to society. However, as Adriana Cavarero has argued in her account of horrorism, instead of dignifying the personal circumstances of these women, perhaps more attention should be paid to addressing their 'ethical responsibilities towards others' (Cavarero, 2009: 100). In acts of murder committed by female suicide bombers, there is no benign reciprocity, no relational ontology as symbolised by Ettinger's notion of the Matrix, only an exercise of deadly feminine power. It seems that the matrixial space, just like the phallic space, can be a frightening place.

Even though Howard's painting presents us with an image of a woman's suicide it is nevertheless, as I have said, an aesthetically pleasing image of the young woman. In Howards painting, as with media images, the integrity of the female figurative form is retained. This raises the question of whether pictures of women's bodies torn apart by their melancholy cause such an outrage that neither the media nor art practice dare venture there? The female suicide bomber is literally blown to pieces, destroying her body, and in a new affront to human dignity, mingling it in death with the body parts of other victims. As such, melancholy is inscribed not just on the singular body but on multiple fragments and traces of bodies, an extreme act of violence against the self and unknown others. In this instance the traces and fragments intermingle in a way that echoes the symbolism of Ettinger's notion of the Matrix, in disturbing new ways. The female body is blown apart as a way of inflicting pain on society and culture where 'her' position is too often untenable. We have few representations or paintings yet of the female body in its role as weapon and instrument of violence; such visual imagery is typically censored from the media in the West, and we are left only to imagine such horrors (Cavarero, 2009).

Cavarero reminds us that for Butler, writing in response to the carnage of 11 September 2001, 'vulnerability understood in physical and corporeal terms configures a human condition in which it is the relation to the other that counts, that

allows an ontology of linkage and dependence to come to the fore. In this relational context to recognise oneself as vulnerable signifies recuperating "our collective responsibility for the physical lives of another". In other words, after the losses of September 11, it signifies moving the "narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia into a consideration of the vulnerability of others"' (Ibid. 21). So for Butler it is our shared sense of vulnerability and responsibility for the vulnerability of others that creates the possibility for overcoming our melancholy.

Chantelle Butterfly (2007) Stella Vine, Oil on canvas, 90 x 120cm

The exploration of melancholy that Howard undertakes through imagery surrounding suicide, Stella Vine makes through the investigation of the celebrity subject, as seen in her exhibition of paintings at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art (17 July to 23 September 2007).

Vine's painting *Chantelle Butterfly* (2006) depicts the face of a star of *Big Brother*, a reality TV show. We are confronted with the subject's wide-eyed stare and her tears, motifs that are repeated in many of Vine's works, including *Emma* (2004), *Sylvia* (2005) and *Pauline* (2007). Returning our gaze, the subject forces us to acknowledge her sadness and her refusal to hide her tears. Once again, therefore, we are confronted with the troubled subjectivity of a young woman. Whilst Rachel Howard represents this through the slumped female form, which erases identity, Vine's painting represents the troubled emotional life of her young subject though a close-up of the expressively painted face.

Deploying an overtly messy process, dripping paint and clashing colours, Vine suggests a fragile and disintegrating subjectivity. Whilst the gravitational pull of precisely poured paint was used to produce the polished aesthetic in Howard's paintings, in Vine's work gravity is used to produce long streams of paint to suggest her subject's tears. Vine uses this painting technique to show us the way that the mask of celebrity, the public face of celebrity as it appears in the media, literally slides off the face. Life as a celebrity, she seems to suggest, is only an appearance or a caricature of a life, a masquerade that ends in tears. Academic Germaine Greer explains, 'she paints the painted face, the mask behind which celebrity females take cover even as they flaunt themselves' (Greer, 2007: 13).

Vine's painting also recalls the traditional symbol of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the weeping virgin. The thick black lines Vine uses to emphasise the saucer-like eyes of her subjects echo the black lines and wide eyes that Picasso used to frame the face in his picture, *Weeping Woman* (1937) (Figure 37), and the tears are also reminiscent of Murillo's mid-fifteenth century woodcut *Mater Dolorosa* (Figure 21).[67] Whilst the suffering of the women in Picasso's painting is attributed to the melancholic

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[67] Jonathon Jones reminds us that the *Mater Dolorosa*, the weeping virgin, is a traditional symbol in Spanish art, represented in baroque sculpture with glass tears (Jones, 2000).

consequences of war, and Murillo's of a maternal grief, Vine's painting constructs an image of a missing subjectivity concealed by the face of a celebrity. Hence Vine appropriates Picasso's use of the thick black line and Murillo's tears for her own purposes, and uses these to evoke the fragility of a subjectivity premised on celebrity life.

Like Rachel Howard, Stella Vine sources her images from digital media. However, we recognise the people in Vine's works because they are media celebrities. Vine's work is potent not just for what it tells us about the emotional lives of young celebrities but also for what it reflects back to us about aspects of our own subjectivity in the present moment. Vine unmasks the emotional trauma evoked by life as celebrity, her subject represented as a self who drowns in tears and is emotionally fragile. Manifesting Kristeva's idea of the erosion of subjectivity in contemporary culture Vine's painting shows us not only that Chantelle's celebrity face conceals her missing subjectivity, but that the loss of the mask of celebrity may be painful for her because her real Self remains an unknown, even perhaps to herself.

Our interest as a society in the celebrity subject in Vine's painting also reflects the fact that we are absorbed by the emotional dramas of people we come to know through the media. The point made by Kristeva (1995) that the modern subject is empty, constituted by media imagery and narratives, assumes a new level of significance and presence in Vine's work. Thus the display of the emotional trauma of celebrities, as presented in Vine's painting, is best explained from a Freudian perspective, not as evidence of the profundity and intensity of our feelings, but of the absence of a subjectivity that in turn allows these displays of emotion as spectacle to emerge. Kristeva asks: 'tell us the meaning of our inner turmoil, show us a way out of it, such is the cry of the psychologically helplessness, of the alter ego of the spectacle' (Ibid. 29). The process of what is happening to the Freudian psyche is, for Kristeva, summed up by Marcel Proust's saying, 'those that suffer feel closer to their souls', and I believe that it is this contradiction that Vine's painting successfully brings into the visual field (Proust, cited in Kristeva, 1995: 28). In the present day, the emotion of melancholy becomes not an object of scientific study but a unit of consumption, packaged for our entertainment and designed to fill the void of empty subjectivity.

My own studio work has engaged in the space opened up by Vine's exploration of the celebrity subject, exploring the figurative language used to represent women's sadness in the media. S*hilpa Shetty in the Big Brother House* (2007) is painted from a media photograph of the *Big Brother* star during a debate about the racism she suffered on the show.[68] Like Vine, it focuses on the face, drawing attention to the way the hands are used to half cover the eyes, different again to Vine's staring/crying eyes. The processes of painting echoes the methods of dripping, blurring and smearing integral to both Howard's and Vine's works.

Shilpa Shetty in the Big Brother House, (2007)
Christina Reading
Oil on canvas
24 x 24 inches

Vine's paintings also introduce another perspective on the state of the modern psyche. As conceptual artist Mary Kelly (b. 1941) has argued, the confessional is important to feminism as it 'bypasses masculine culture because it transgresses a psychic organisation which binds the feminine to passivity and to silence' (Kelly, cited in Robinson, 2001: 360). The question raised by Vine's paintings is, therefore, whether this leaky confessional mode and public display of emotion is a sign of a robust feminine subjectivity that refuses to hide its tears, or is instead a sign of a

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[68] In this media story the celebrity, Jade Goody (1981–2009), was accused of using racist language towards her fellow *Big Brother* housemate in the 2007 series of the show.

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subjectivity ill-equipped to deal with the emotional traumas induced by contemporary life, which could then reflect a more conventional model of femininity as weak. Perhaps, however vulnerable Vine's subjects are, they are marked by a refusal to hide behind the historical precedent of the tilted head and downcast gaze. Such images are important to the discourse on the feminine and melancholy because they bring aspects of the current state of disintegration into the visual field, and for that reason we can view them as part of a growing creative response to melancholy.

An explanation of the melancholic affect of Rachel Howard's, Stella Vine's and my own paintings is perhaps to be found in Ettinger's partial reinterpretation of Lacan's notion of the 'objet a' – a cause of desire – in the scopic field and its relationship to painting. Whereas for Lacan the gaze is the 'objet a' of the eye and like every lack or absent object is always phallic, the result of symbolic castration, Ettinger's ideas on the 'objet a' of the gaze emerge differently, its scope changed to include a 'beyond the phallic dimension' (Ettinger, 1995: 2). [69] Furthermore, Ettinger argues that the process of painting as opposed to the process of representing has a crucial role to play in the feminine. This is because painting 'touches us in a dimension which is beyond appearance' it offers a way to get in touch again with traces of the 'objet a' that have escaped phallic treatment to unconsciously embrace something of the 'objet a', from the non-male side (Ibid. 9). It potentially reveals 'another kind of loss that is not due to rejection or castration' and the capacity to make visible lack from different kinds of objects stemming from 'the mystery of the speaking body' and the 'mystery of the unconscious', both of which are viewed as contributing to aesthetic experience (Ibid. 27). Ettinger elaborates:

> 'if beyond appearance we can conceive of traces of the archaic mental object in alliance with unconscious desire both as a phallic *objet a* and as a matrixial *objet a,* if we can describe a beyond the phallus *objet a,* and in the scopic field, a matrixial *objet a,* then the possibility of a non-Oedipal matrixial sublimation arises and the relevancy of painting in contemporary art and the necessity of its study from the ladies side'(Ettinger, 1995: 9).

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[69] In this case Ettinger argues something is 'given – not to the gaze who is the field of the Other but to what I call the subject's *eroticised aerials of the psyche*, to the eyes of its phantasy something that is created by concession or surrender by laying down the gaze' (Ettinger, 1995: 10).

Hence the process of painting is important to feminism because it is connected to the gaze as 'objet a', and painting has the capacity to bring to the fore the feminine side of the symbolic that is related to the matrixial phantasy rather than the castration phantasy (Ibid. 10).[70] As Ettinger argues:

> 'the painter's creative gesture does not originate in decision or will but concludes an internal stroke, a stroke which also participates in regression, but contrary to regression, it creates – in backward movement, as in a reversal of the course of psychological time, a *stimulus* to which the gesture becomes a *reaction*. The gaze as a lack is the rear borderline of that movement. It is the beyond of it' (Ibid. 8).

Ettinger proposes that painting is important to feminism because the painter engages in a dialogue with the lost object and 'something of the gaze as lack, "objet a" is always contained' in the painting (Ibid. 9). Thus the gaze in painting 'touches something in us as spectators' and 'invites the viewer to lay down his gaze as he lays down his weapons' (Ibid. 11). From this perspective the pictures gathered in this room highlight the importance of painting as a process that manifests this gaze – this desire – and which crucially satisfies something in us as viewers relating to the feminine.[71] The potential manifestation of the feminine 'objet a' in the scopic field in work by women artists means that painting may be particularly significant to the representation of feminine melancholy, providing a means for understanding the forms that the representations of women's melancholic subjectivity take.

Purposefully at odds with the troubled subjectivity displayed in Howard's and Vine's paintings, in Room One I have placed two black and white photographs from the Victorian period, which suggest a melancholic subjectivity defined by reserve and restraint. The first is by Victorian artist Julia Margaret Cameron, titled *The Wild Flower*, *Annie Chinery (Mrs Ewen Cameron)* (1867) and the second, *A Study From*

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[70] Ettinger notes, as discussed in Chapter Three, that for Lacan 'the women is the man's "objet a", his desire. In the scopic field Lacan continues that the gaze is the "objet a"*,* of the eye', its desire (Ettinger, 1995: 2).

[71] Therefore acknowledged in painting is 'a certain experience of the sacred it is the early relations of the Other toward me – when it is me *who* is being related to which are represented in the gesture of painting when linked to the *"objet a"*. I am *subjected* to the gaze of the other, to desire of a part of the other, I am *exposed* to a looking which *takes me by* surprise, which I cannot commission or invite, I am "a disappeared" subject *given-to-be-seen* whose movement has been frozen under a spell, outlawed for a trice. When it appears, the being of the phallic *objet a* momentarily conceals the subject' (Ettinger, 1995: 9).

Life, *Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens* (c. 1862) (Figure 53) by Victorian artist Lady Clementina Hawarden.

The Wild Flower, *Annie Chinery (Mrs Ewen Cameron)* (1867)
Julia Margaret Cameron
Albumen print
292 x 243mm

In *The Wild Flower*, *Annie Chinery (Mrs Ewen Cameron),* (1867) by Julia Margaret Cameron, I discover a variation on the figurative art history gesture of 'tilted head

and downcast eyes', which I have shown is a traditional mark of subjugation in the standard canon on melancholy (Berdini, 1999: 103). However, in the hands of Cameron and her innovative photographic process, which I will elaborate here, its meaning seems to extend beyond this art historical root to assert what could be described as a type of 'feminine' perspective. Cameron borrows the figurative language from the prevailing canon but subtley alters it. As Hilde Hein comments:

> 'Feminist artists face the dilemma that having been cultured in a male dominated art world they have imbibed its traditions and values along with their artistic skills and aesthetic sensitivities. Rebelling against those values as women they confront themselves as artist whose expressive tools remain those of the prevailing order. While striving to express their own perceptions and experience they cannot escape the effect of prior tempering opinion those tools and even upon their own critical judgement' (Hein, 1990: 285).

The downcast eyes of the young woman in Cameron's photograph reads as an active gesture – shutting out the world – rather than a passive one or as a mark of subjugation. The subject in Cameron's photograph does not acknowledge the gaze of the viewer and so perhaps suggests an introspection and subjectivity that is not within our control or possession (MacKay, 2001).

Cameron's photographic portrayals of melancholy as something beautiful, yet sorrowful, celebrate an eighteenth and nineteenth-century romantic notion of melancholy. Romantic melancholy coupled two emotions, pain and pleasure, but as Jennifer Radden reminds us, the belief at that time was that 'only he that has felt the pain and darkness of melancholy can taste fully of its pleasure' (Radden, 2000: 220).[72] In other words, the more intense the (emotional) pain, the more beautiful something is perceived to be. Cameron's aesthetic of melancholy was firmly rooted in this romantic viewpoint.

Cameron used the focus on feminine beauty as a site for the contemplation of these complex emotions associated with melancholy during the Romantic period but I

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[72] I have noted in Chapter Two how this charged atmosphere led by Goethe (1749–1832) provided a springboard for poetry by Keats, Tennyson and Byron, alongside a revival of interest in Shakespeare and Milton. Through the century in which Cameron lived and produced her photographs, this view of romantic melancholy flourished, particularly in literature. There were also important female romantic poets such as Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) who wrote intensely personal ballads.

would suggest that her photograph foregrounds the feelings of the female subject, rather than those of men found in the dominant canon.[73] Thus Cameron reclaims from the prevailing canon the use of the female figure for women in the expression of melancholy.

The reflective mood prompted by the photograph accords with thoughts about the purpose of art at that time. For instance, Charles Hay Cameron, in a paper titled 'The sublime and the beautiful' (1835), argued that after philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1779), artists should aim to bring about an act of reflection or imagination. Moreover, he posited that it was not appropriate to represent the agitated state of distress or moments of pain because these images would not bring about calm reflection, writing:

> 'all tumult and agitation must have passed and be replaced with perfect calmness. It is only when the tranquil stage of sorrow has arrived that the act of reflection can take place' (Cameron cited in Weaver, 1984: 8) [74].

Rather than showing the heightened moments of emotional distress as in Stella Vine's painting of contemporary melancholy, the earlier historic moment advocated the representation of the calmer and reflective moments that followed distress, a way of thinking that certainly seems to have influenced Cameron. Hence she might have seen her artworks as serving a function in society by providing a space for calm contemplation and reflection, but, crucially, she reused the traditional figurative language from the dominant canon to do so.

In an age in which contemplation is less routine Julia Margaret Cameron's photograph forces us to pause, to be silent when confronted with the quiet acceptance of sorrow and the emotional stillness of the young woman. Perhaps, too, the invitation to contemplate melancholy provided by her photographs is also one of the reasons why Cameron's photographs still resonate today. As historian David Shaw has noted, such images are powerful because 'they intimate an absence or loss

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[73]It is perhaps significant that Cameron took this photograph when she was herself already middle-aged and youthful beauty was something she could only observe in others. I would also suggest that Cameron's photographs represent beauty and youth and the passing of these too – a lost moment of beautiful and youthful melancholy.

[74] This rare book is on loan to the Julia Cameron Museum on the Isle of Wight.

that is best expressed in silence of private mourning and an unshakeable reserve'
(Shaw, 1997: 449). [75]

Study from Life, Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens (c.1862)
Lady Clementina Hawarden
Albumen print
116 x 94mm

In *Study from Life*, *Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens* (c.1862) by Lady
Clementina Hawarden, the central focus of the photograph is on the striking full-
length pose of the young woman kneeling and leaning forward to rest her head on a
window ledge. Looking closely at this photograph, and others produced by Lady

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[75] See David Shaw (1997) who uses this phrase to describe a painting by Pre-Raphaelite painter
Edward Burne-Jones, (1833–1898), whose work Cameron was known to admire. The painting, titled
Portrait of Caroline Fitzgerald (1884), presents a young woman with an abstracted gaze that 'signals
her refusal to submit to the spectators' feelings and demands' (Shaw, 1997: 446).

Hawarden which are given the same title, we find that the question of the physical support for the collapsing body runs through her images.

Figures 63, 64 & 65. *Studies from Life, Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens* (1862–1864)
Lady Clementina Hawarden
Albumen prints

The figurative language of a languid and beautiful female figure with head resting on a bent arm and with the body supported by a chair or other external structure quotes the depiction of Romantic melancholy seen in the dominant canon. The figurative language also creates a bond with Rachel Howard's much later painting, in which the figure appears to be held upright by a noose. There is a conversation provoked, therefore, between these artists, about the kinds of support women might need to break their fall, to prevent emotional disintegration, or to provide an escape from it in Howard's case.

One of the key features of the young woman in *Study from Life* by Lady Hawarden is the fact that she is displayed or dressed in a dramatic full skirt and fine transparent chemise, reflecting the importance of clothing to the display of femininity at that time. We cannot help but compare her appearance to the disrupted and partial attire of the bodies of the young women in Rachel Howard's paintings, and the messy and dishevelled appearance of the young women in Stella Vine's paintings.[76] This

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[76] There is a disjuncture between the neat tightly bound hair of the young women in Hawarden's photograph and the loose hair in Cameron's photograph. Weaver (1984) argues that picturing women's hair as uncovered and loose is significant because it was only in the 1850s that women began to wear their hair free; prior to this women's hair was largely hidden from view as demanded by codes of femininity at that time. Hair was a source of power and a symbol of women's femininity,

interesting difference in clothing evokes the dimension of femininity because, as Freud stressed in his discussion of female sexuality, clothing is one of the visual guides the boy uses to help him distinguish between the sexes.[77] Freud was silent on the question of whether girls responded to these visual clues in the same way as boys, but what is certain to us now is that girls approached these signs from an unsatisfactory sense of their own bodies and an art history in which the image of their bodies had been constrained and restrained. The rigid corsets and tightly laced bodices associated with some feminine clothing at this time would have reinforced these existing messages.

 If luxuriant displays of clothing and folded textiles are linked to the feminine, or at least the cultural expression of femininity, nakedness and meagre clothing on the other hand suggest perhaps the opposite, something outside culture, not 'feminine' as such. In the history of the female figure and melancholy we therefore find that 'she' is both simultaneously dressed and undressed, complicating the relationship between feminine melancholies, the body and clothes. As the images in my vfm show, clothing can be used to present a body that is well dressed and groomed, as in Lady Hawarden's photographs, or to cover the face of a cadaver, as in Rachel Howard's paintings. I find an echo of Judith Butler's argument, outlined in Chapter Three, that a heightened sense of the feminine masks the prohibition against same-sex desire, perhaps connecting the motif of luxuriant displays of feminine clothing to this denial (Butler, 1997: 145).

The elegant young women in Lady Hawarden's photographs *Study from Life* (1862–1864) (Figures 53, 63, 64 & 65) convey a sense of entrapment and boredom that speaks of frustration with the traditional roles and values ascribed to upper class

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beauty and sexuality in the Victorian period. Loose hair in adult women was a common motif used by painters in the period to describe how a woman used her hair to either embrace or ensnare lovers in her web. Meghan Edwards (2004) discusses the artworks that use hair as a motif, including John Ruskin's *Proserpina* (1877), Dante Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* (1864–1868), William Holman Hunt's *The Lady of Shalott* (1886–1905) (Edwards, 2004). A woman's hair was, as Meghan Edwards argues, related visually to the power of a sorceress and the occult, a poisonous snake or an instrument with which to slay her victims, for loose hair was considered powerful and dangerous (Ibid.). Hence upper class women, like the ones in Lady Hawarden's photographs, tied their hair back in neat chignons.

[77] Lacan notes that 'according to Freud the boy learns to distinguish between men and women by going by all sorts of indications, clothes in particular without it occurring to him to relate these perceived differences on which he bases his distinction to a difference between the genital organs of the two parties' (Lacan, 1975: 126)

women in the Victorian period. The photographs, like those of Julia Margaret Cameron, can be read as significant insights into the realities of being a young woman within that context at that historic moment. The Victorian period was a time of contradiction and change for women, whilst Christian belief still dominated thinking, with its message of virtue, restraint and redemption for women, it was a time of ferment and dissent marked by demands for an end to the subjection of women and for women's suffrage.[78] From a Freudian perspective, Lady Hawarden's photographs point to a loss for these young women, which perhaps they were at that time unable to name but still felt, and which from our current vantage point might be interpreted as the emotions arising from the constraints of conforming to Victorian notions of femininity.

Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden lived and produced their work in an era that pre-dated Freud; their work therefore provides a unique insight into the melancholic subjectivity of women as it was represented before the turn of the twentieth century. A return to this moment is particularly relevant now because, as we have seen, Freudian discourse has become increasingly challenged by feminist reinterpretation, and a return to look again at images originating in this earlier moment are important because they provide clues to another way of thinking about female subjectivity that precedes the Freudian point of view.

As Pollock (1998) has argued, women joined the modernist project to 'escape the over-feminisation that had none the less held some potentialities registered in the considerable flowering of a self-consciously feminine culture in the nineteenth century' (Pollock, 1998: 106). This portrayal of femininity to some extent 'erases women by beauty' (Ibid.), just as surely as Rachel Howard's black cloths mask the face of the unknown women, yet in their excess perhaps create a borderline, a

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[78] See Sylvia Wolf (1998) who argued that for upper class women like Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden, 'religion, the religious training of their children and overseeing the household activities of staff' dominated their daily lives (Wolf, 1998: 41). Ideas about femininity at that time were shaped by publications such as Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861), which encouraged women to become models of virtue in keeping a morality in keeping with religious faith. Beeton described a Victorian woman as 'a formable leader with a responsibility to teach, nurse and above all exemplify to her servants the proper morality, charity, cleanliness, frugality and self-sacrifice' (Beeton cited in Wolf , 1998: 50). Victorian poet Coventry Patnore reflects the era's attitude towards the correct role for women in his poem 'The Angel in the House' (1856 –1862) in which he cast women as beings of higher moral fibre, loved, but without ambition, whose role was to create a home that was a safe haven from the world of men (Ibid).

threshold into the feminine to reveal what was unsaid about the feminine (Ibid). Like Howard's beautiful corpses, the Victorian photographs refer to a loss that is something unnameable, prior to experience and representation, but they also provide a place to contemplate this experience from a feminine perspective.

Cameron's and Hawarden's efforts to reorientate the figurative language from the dominant canon around the concerns of women are perhaps the consequence of their close personal relationships with their subjects, and their innovative technical processes. In *The Wild Flower* by Julia Margaret Cameron, the subject of the photograph is her daughter-in-law. Similarly, art historian Virginia Dodier notes that the young woman in *Study from Life* (1862) is Lady Hawarden's daughter who, along with her other daughters, provided the models for her photography (Dodier, 1999: 32). So although the subject is a young woman, in common with Vine's and Howard's work, this time these young women are sisters, daughters and friends, people with whom the artists had close personal relationships, rather than the anonymous young women who are only encountered through the media which are the focus of Howard's and Vine's paintings.

Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden made their photographs in the family home, a domestic space. Brian Hinton, writer and Chair of the Julia Margaret Cameron Museum has documented the process by which Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs were taken and produced in the glass house next to her family home on the Isle of Wight (Hinton, 2003). Similarly, Lady Hawarden's photographs were taken in one of the upstairs rooms of the house in which she lived in South Kensington, and produced within the home with the help of her daughters (Ibid. 37). The selection of subjects from amongst family and friends, and the production of their work within the home, reflects the prevailing Victorian idea of the women's role as the keeper of the domestic space, the place of the personal, the intimate and the private (Armstrong, 1999). Although their sphere of influence was largely restricted to the domestic and to the home, for upper middle class women like Hawarden and Cameron, within this realm their power could be considerable (Ibid.). As I have discussed in Chapter Two, the relationship between the phallic gaze and the female figure in the art history of melancholy has been crucial to the way these pictures have been understood. The phallic gaze reflects the power men have

traditionally wielded over the image of the women in the visual field. In Cameron and Hawarden's pictures the phallic gaze is replaced by a maternal one, reflecting the different relational ontology these women artists had with their subjects. Cultural theorist Carol Armstrong comments: 'this was Photography under the sway of the Mother, rather than the law of the father' (Armstrong, 1999: 110). In other words, these women artists used their privileged status within the domestic sphere to produce work that offers intimate and imaginative insights into the experience of being a young woman in the Victorian period, and overlaid the traditional use of the female figure as a metaphor for melancholy from the Romantic period with their own personal perspective.[79] Whereas, in the dominant canon, women are subjugated under the phallic gaze which influences women's visual experience in culture, I would argue that it is the maternal gaze in Cameron's and Lady Hawarden's photographs that allows the experience of the female subject to emerge.

In the repertoire of feminine melancholy offered by Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden the innovative technical processes were important in asserting a feminine perspective.[80] Photography was generally regarded as a dirty and cumbersome process not entirely in keeping with Victorian ideals of femininity. In 1865, Virginia Dodier tells us that the *Photographic News* attributed the dearth of female photographers to the messiness of the developing process, commenting that 'undoubtedly the difficulty of keeping their dainty figures stainless is the great reason why we have comparatively few lady amateurs' (Dodier, 1999: 35). In this sense, the two women stand out as pioneers in their field, and looking back now we know that their contribution is regarded as pivotal to the early history of photography as a fine art practice.

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[79] Sarah Gamble explains that the first stirrings of feminism are attributed to eighteenth-century writer Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 –1797) who argued in her book *A vindication of the Rights of a Woman* (1796) that women are not naturally inferior but only appear to be so because of a lack of education. She aimed to restore to women their lost dignity. It was the time when political theorist and advocate of women's rights John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) wrote 'The subjection of women' (1869), an essay that helped shape discourse about the role of women in Victorian society (Gamble, 2001: 338). Julia Cameron and Lady Hawarden produced work at a time when these traditional boundaries between the private life of the home, the world of women, and the public sphere, the world of men, were being blurred. Queen Victoria (1819–1901), a woman, sat on the throne, and the voice of women's demands for suffrage grew stronger (Wolf, 1998).
[80] Lindsay Smith argued that by introducing the production of their artwork into the home Cameron and other women artists contributed to a blurring of the traditional boundaries between the public, the world of men and the private, the world of women that had hitherto dominated Victorian society (Smith, 1998: 36).

However, although both Lady Hawarden and Julia Margaret Cameron were united in being pioneers of photography, challenging the traditional boundaries by producing work in the home, there are differences in terms of style and technical process. Lady Hawarden was a great technical photographer, her photographs commended for their composition and skill, in particular her command of depth of focus, reflecting the fact that the ability to make photographs that were in focus was regarded as the pinnacle of photographic practice at the time (Dodier, 1999). At the heart of Lady Hawarden's photographic practices were geometric and linear ways of seeing which placed great emphasis on clarity of focusing and depth of field. Lady Hawarden's approach to photography sought to master these traditional conventions and use them to make photographs of women's experience. Hence the atmosphere summoned up in Lady Hawarden's photograph *Study from Life* (1862) is largely the result of strong compositional arrangements: dark shadows and beams of light penetrate the room, contrasts that are echoed in the dark skirt and flimsy white bodice that the young woman is wearing.

On the other hand, Julia Margaret Cameron's distinction lies in her irreverent attitude to photography's conventions and she was undoubtedly more technically radical in her approach. In *The Wild Flower* (1867) as in other works, she dispenses with the surface detail of the face in order to describe a state of mind (Fletcher, 2003). Unfavourable judgements about Cameron's style persisted at the time.[81] She was heavily criticised by eminent photographers of the period such as Henry Peach Robinson (1869) for producing work that lacked definition, meaning that it was out of focus. Cameron rigorously defended her right to use soft focus and famously remarked in a letter to Sir John Herschel in 1865, 'What is focus and who has the right to say what focus is the legitimate focus?' (Cameron cited in Smith, 1998: 24). From this we can assume that her use of soft focus and lack of definition in her work was an intentional strategy aimed to convey an emotional state rather than caused by an inability or lack of skill.[82] The lack of focus of the lens technically aligned with the focus on the face in Cameron's work creates a complex picture of the feminine

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[81] Some reviewers appreciated the power of Cameron's photography. Carol MacKay reports how a reviewer of Cameron's work in 1877 wrote: 'the real secret of her method is in defeating the obtrusiveness of photographic detail by putting the subject out of focus. This gives them a massive breath not unlike the gloom and obscurity of some old pictures' (MacKay, 2001: 45).

[82] Lindsay Smith (1998) has equated the use of soft focus with a retrieval of disparate photographic practices at photography's inception in the early nineteenth century.

which is both vague and indistinct, yet to come fully into view as both Freud and Lacan were later to theorise, and also a sense of a female subject whose boundary with reality is open and fluid rather than defined and inaccessible. Cameron's focus on the blurry face of the female figure contrasts with the erased and covered face in Rachel Howard's painting, but conveys something of a similar message, that the feminine is still something unknown and hidden from view.

In this regard Cameron's approach seems to pre-empt Ettinger's (1995) later theorisation over a century later that the phallic gaze is related to 'being in focus' (Ettinger, 1995: 10). She elaborates: 'Oedipal castration focuses the sight and turns vision into an ordering, selecting, separating or unifying function. Being in focus the "armed eye" can now take aim at the target and claim omniscient and omnipotent knowledge. The gaze has been civilized by the resolution of the Oedipus complex; it becomes a conscious alienating cultural tool of power in the service of the ego' (Ibid.). The particular 'unfocused' approach used by Cameron reveals the overlap between judgements about the conventions of traditional photography and the phallic gaze. Cameron's production of unfocused imagery therefore intuitively sought to challenge the phallic gaze not just through her subject matter or figurative language but though her innovative technical processes.

Related to this disruption of the formal photographic processes was the slowness of Cameron's method, a rhythm which Kristeva (1989) has identified as central to melancholy. Hatch (2005) quoting Thierry de Duve's (1978) work on time exposure in photography argues that it is not the hazy effect of the images achieved through Cameron's use of the slow shutter speed alone that gives her work its melancholic feel, rather it is the 'slow, lingering gaze that they solicit' from the viewer (Hatch, 2005: 107). A longer time exposure, Hatch argues, provides a means and a metaphor for the melancholic work of mourning described by Freud (1917).

There is one further important aspect of Cameron's work: namely that her pictures do not attempt to disguise the traces of the human hand laid down in the process of making them. As Jane Fletcher (2003) reminds us, Cameron would print from glass plates that were cracked or covered in dust, hair and fingerprints, and made no effort to hide how her photographic work was made. In other words, her photography

retains an indexical link, not only with her subject, but also with her own body as the artist. This was perhaps for Cameron another way of disrupting the phallic gaze. Ettinger ventures that 'there are phenomena that can only be formulated in terms of a subject which is looked at from all directions in an absolute overview and wherein I situate myself in the picture as a stain' (Ettinger, 1995: 8). This is the matrixial gaze and it seems that Cameron's unfocused eye and messy 'hands on' photographic practices can be related to this thought. What seems to strive for visibility in Cameron's photographs are signifying processes related not just to the symbolic but also to the semiotic. The feminine for Cameron, as it was for Julia Kristeva, is associated with the rhythms and flows of the repressed memories of the womb and underlines her mode of figuration.

Photographic works from the mid-nineteenth century, such as that of Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden, are important because they show us what is absent from current representations of subjectivity in the visual field. These early photographs provide images that encourage us to contemplate the sadness of young women from an earlier historic moment. From a Kristevan perspective this is important because sadness, and by extension pictures of sadness, can have a protective role against the collapse of subjectivity, and ultimately suicide, providing something around which the self can build unity. The capacity to feel and represent sadness is crucial because the manifestation of these qualities helps to guard against the disintegration of the meaning of the symbolic that precedes the suicidal act. The contemplative nature of these photographs perhaps causes us to pause and to reflect on sadness, to linger over it and to accept it as part of lived experience, whatever its cause is deemed to be in Freudian terms.

Conclusion

The young woman in Rachel Howard's painting *Pudenda Memba* (2007), Stella Vine's painting *Chantelle Butterfly* (2007) and my own painting *Shilpa Shetty in the Big Brother House* (2007) (Figure 54), suggest in different ways troubled and fragile subjectivities whose private sorrows are played out within the public space of the media. On the other hand, the subjects in Julia Margaret Cameron's photograph, *The Wild Flower* (1867), Lady Hawarden's *Study from Life* (1862) and my own photograph *My Niece Ginnie* (2010) (Figure 55) propose subjectivities marked by reserve, stillness and restraint formed within the private and domestic space of the home. The juxtaposition of the differing responses to melancholy proposed by the subjects in these pictures seems to revive a forgotten conversation that contributes to expanding the discourse on the figurative representation of women's melancholy.

. Whilst placed in relation to the models of femininity that surround them at different historic moments, these artists are linked by a common purpose to assert feminine perspectives on melancholy and reclaim the figurative form to enable them to do so. The work of these women artists is powerful because it brings to the fore the gender bias present in art history, and helps set the course for a perspective that includes a consideration of the women's lived experience, and the ways in which the body can be used to express this. The result, in the case of Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden, interweaves notions of the idealised woman with knowledge of women with whom they have close relationships. Patriarchal figurative language persists in some important respects, yet what it refers to is altered by the perspective and treatment offered by these women artists. In the case of Howard and Vine, we are shown the struggle that young women face in finding ways to assert their melancholy within the current symbolic and the often tragic consequences of a failure to achieve this.

The interesting dialogue opened up between the contemporary paintings and the Victorian photographs seems to be essentially about the value of a contemplative subjectivity versus a demonstrative subjectivity as ways to live with melancholy. The challenge perhaps is whether the contemplative approaches offered by Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden, however resonant, may be a step backwards

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for women in their attempt to represent their emotional lives. These earlier approaches teach us something of what we have lost, making us aware of the loss of the cohesion in subjectivity that was a strength of earlier moments – perhaps they show us the importance of contemplation to enable us to live with our experiences of melancholy today? Nevertheless, I would argue that we need to embrace images that depict the fractures in our current forms of subjectivity, to allow more meaningful forms of figurative language to emerge. Perhaps the leaky, messy, subjectivity presented by Rachel Howard and Stella Vine has a power, then, reflecting a speaking subject asserting her right to be heard and to be seen. Furthermore, what also emerges as important for future consideration is the difference between what the paintings and the photographic might achieve and offer in regard to this.

In Room One a space opens up between the restraint of Julia Margaret Cameron and Lady Hawarden, who picture the emotional lives of women confined largely to their domestic roles, and Rachel Howard and Stella Vine, who picture contemporary women displaying their emotionalism and its melancholic consequences in the media. My own work attempts to examine both the intensity of the media image in *Shilpa Shetty in the Big Brother House* (2007) as brought to the fore by Rachel Howard and Stella Vine and adopts an approach that tries to convey, albeit in an imaginary way, the voice of the subject through the process of painting. I would argue that Cameron in particular brought this attitude to her work. As for *My niece Ginnie* (2010), the composition tries to convey not only her experience but to acknowledge her fortitude in dealing with her melancholy.

Room Two: *Of Love*: Women and Melancholy

Figure 66

Figure 67

Figure 68

Figure 69

Figure 70

Figure 71

Works exhibited in Room Two

Figure 66. *Mariana in the Moated Grange, "She said I am a weary, a weary,
I would that I were dead"* (1875) Julia Margaret Cameron, albumen print, 35.6 x 28.3cm

Figure 67. *Ariadne in Naxos* (1877) Evelyn De Morgan, oil on canvas, 23.75 x 39.25 inches

Figure 68. *Girl with Ears* (2008) Christina Reading, oil on unprimed linen, 40 x 40cm

Figure 69. *Those Who Suffer, Love* (2009) Tracey Emin, 1,000 drawings projected in a video animation

Figure 70. *Country Dancing* (2010) Christina Reading, DVD projection of archive film, duration 1 min 47 seconds

Figure 71. *The Dream Sequence* (2011) Christina Reading, Oil on linen, 12 x 12 inches

Introduction

In Room Two I bring together a selection of works by women figurative artists that attend to the question of the representation of women's love melancholy. I examine two images from the nineteenth century that picture in different ways the trope of romantic love. These works are *Mariana in the Moated Grange* (1875) (Figure 66) by Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879), and *Ariadne in Naxos* (1877) (Figure 67) by Evelyn De Morgan (1855–1919). Alongside these paintings is *Those Who Suffer, Love* (2009) (Figure 69), Tracey Emin's (b. 1963) sexually explicit drawing of feminine desire, and my own painting *Girl with Ears* (2008) (Figure 68), which deals with the routine focus on the consumption of sex in contemporary media images of love. Amidst these I place my film *Country Dancing* (2011) (Figure 70) and the accompanying suite of paintings titled *The Dream Sequence* (2011) (Figure 71), which gives visibility to the bonds of friendship forged between young women living in an orphanage in the early 1950s.

Mariana in the Moated Grange, "*She said I am a
weary, a weary, I would that I were dead*" (1875)
Julia Margaret Cameron
Albumen print
35.6 x 28.3cm

Mariana in the Moated Grange (1875) pictures a young woman leaning against the back of a high-backed carved wooden chair. She supports her head with one of her hands whilst the other gently rests on her lap. Her gaze is downcast. She is dressed in a dark-coloured robe and her long hair is loose and untidy. Darkness dominates the photograph both in terms of colouring and in the mood portrayed by the female figure. Her somewhat thunderous air seems to summon up Dürer's moody angel in *Melancholia I* (1514) (Figure 9), recalling the latter's unkempt hair, extensive drapery and the gesture of resting a heavy head on a hand. The overall figurative pose used by Cameron is, however, softer, the body gently leaning on a chair for support. The deep dark folds of drapery follow the gentle curve of the body, as does the subject's flowing hair.

In 1835 Charles Hay Cameron, Julia Margaret Cameron's husband, wrote about this pose:

> 'A weeping willow as the very name of the species indicates, represents the attitude and therefore partakes of the beauty of sorrow. The effect of sorrow on the human frame is to prevent all muscular exertion consequently every part, which in ordinary circumstances is sustained by such exertion alone, droops and collapses under the influence of the depressing passion. Everything therefore, which droops (for that word seems to express the whole idea of bending downwards without any pressure from the mere effect of gravity and the want of support) has a sorrowful and beautiful expression. Hence it is that the painters when they would fill their minds and images of grief, not only dispose the head and the limbs of their figures as grief would dispose of them, but take care that the hair and the drapery shall also droop though it is just as consistent with probability that they would be fluttering in the wind' (Cameron [1835], cited in Weaver, 1984: 7).

Cameron was not the first to use this figurative pose to suggest a woman's sorrow. The pose was regularly used by a number of Pre-Raphaelite artists to suggest love melancholy.[83] Mike Weaver, in his study of Pre-Raphaelite art, refers to this pose as 'the curve of despair', noting its use by John Everett Millais (1829–1896) in his illustration of Lord Alfred Tennyson's (1859–1869) poem *Mariana in the Moated*

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[83] Colin Ford (2003) describes how Cameron's Pre-Raphaelite contemporaries gave pose and gesture central place in their compositions. Dante Gabriel Rossetti for instance was known to experiment with the arrangement of the body into various poses and gestures by first taking photographs of his preferred model at the time, Jane Morris (Ford, 2003: 60-65).

Grange (Figure 72), in the Edward Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems (1857) (Weaver, 1984: 70).

Figure 72. *Mariana* (1857)
John Everett Millais
Illustration for Edward Moxon edition of
Tennyson poems
9.3 x 7.8cm

Figure 73. *Pre-Raphaelite Study (May Prinsep)* (1870)
Julia Margaret Cameron
Albumen print
35.4 x 28.1cm

It is a figurative expression that Cameron repeats in other works, including in *Pre-Raphaelite Study (May Prinsep)* (1870) (Figure 73), a black and white photograph picturing another melancholy maid suffering for love. In this photograph Cameron interprets John Keats' tragic love poem *Isabella and a pot of Basil* (1818) (Ibid. 136).[84] Hence Cameron's appropriation and reuse of this pose is reclaimed for the feminine from the dominant canon of art history. Weaver writes that the significance of the pose is the way that it signals the 'surrendering of the body to sadness' acknowledging, as did Charles Hay Cameron, the effect of the emotional state of melancholy on the body (Ibid.). In the photograph *Mariana in the Moated Grange*

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[84] Weaver describes how John Keats' *Isabella and A Pot of Basil* (1818) poem tells the tale of how Isabella keeps the head of her murdered lover Lorenzo in a pot of basil. In the nineteenth century, illustrations of this poem provided a popular theme for artists, especially amongst the Pre-Raphaelites. Most well known perhaps was Holman Hunt's painting *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1868), echoing Keats' words 'Isabella hung over her sweet basil evermore and moistened it with her tears to the core.' The tragic sentiments of Keats' poem are recognisable in Cameron's study but she replaces the pot containing Lorenzo's head with a cushion (Weaver, 1984: 136).

(1875) (Figure 66) Cameron shows us Mariana's body collapsing under the weight of emotional loss, its fall broken only by the chair upon which she leans, a motif that echoes the supported female form noted in Room One.

Cameron, in common with many other artists at that time, turned to the storytellers, poets and playwrights of the day to inspire her photographs. Tennyson was a close friend and neighbour of Cameron's, and his poetry influenced many of her photographic works including, most famously, her illustrations for his epic poem *Idylls of a King* (1859–1869). [85] The photograph placed in this room forms part of this sequence, retelling Shakespeare's classic tale of Angelo's jilted lover, Mariana, in his play, *Measure for Measure* (1603). In Shakespeare's play, Mariana waits for the return of her lover Angelo who abandons her for five long years in a moated grange after her dowry is lost at sea.

Thus Cameron's photograph portrays a solitary female trapped within the confines of a claustrophobic domestic space, isolated and alone, waiting for her distant lover to return. The notion of wearily waiting pre-empts and partially overlaps with Faith Wilding's 1970s film of her performance piece *Waiting* discussed in Chapter Two. I

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[85] See Brian Hinton (2003: 1)
Mariana of the Moated Grange by Alfred Lord Tennyson (1830)
With blackest moss the flowerpots
Were thickly crusted, one and all:
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable –wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
Unlifted was the clinking latch:
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
She only said, ' My life is dreary,
He cometh not' she said
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!

Her tears fell with the dews at even;
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven;
Either at morn or eventide.
After the flitting of the bats, When the thickest dark trance the sky,
She drew her casement, curtain by,
And glanced athwart the glooming faults,
She said only, The night is dreary,
He cometh not' she said;
She said I am aweary, a weary, I would that I were dead.

am reminded that in the Tennyson poem that inspires Cameron's photograph, Mariana longs for death to end her predicament: *'I am weary, I am weary I would that I were dead!'* This desire for death expressed by Mariana creates an unanticipated overlap between the subject matter of Cameron's nineteenth-century photograph and Rachel Howard's contemporary depiction of female suicide in Room One (Figure 50). Women as subjects, it seems, might die waiting for love, relating melancholy to wasted time.

Moreover, Cameron's *Mariana in the Moated Grange* (1875) focuses on the 'unfulfilled desire' of the female subject, on that point in the narrative that is most potent for the female subject. Although Shakespeare's tale finally brings together the two lovers in a forced union, this is not apparent from Cameron's photograph. The photograph arguably gains its strength from the fact that Cameron pictures the prolonged absence and the faraway distance of Mariana's lover described in Tennyson's poem.

I argue that Cameron's photograph anticipates Freud's later notion of love as absence or loss. Freud's account of love is outlined in a series of papers including 'Family romances' (1908), 'A special type of object choice made by men (Contributions to the psychology of love I)' (1910), 'On the universal tendency to the debasement in the sphere of love (Contributions to the psychology of love II)' (1912), and 'The taboo of virginity (Contributions to the psychology of love III' (1917). Love for Freud rests 'on a notion of emptiness which is at the core of the human psyche and which the subject seeks to address through a merger with another' (Kristeva, 1987: 21). According to Freud this experience of emptiness originates from our first experience of loss, the separation from the mother, and romantic and passionate attachment in adult life consequently seeks to eradicate this loss.[86]

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[86] Kristeva notes that the imaginary or the real object of love does not come solely from the libidinal relationship with biological parents. More fundamentally, it stems, according to Freud, from the desire to fulfil the primary identification with a 'father in individual prehistory' rather than the biological father (Kristeva, 1987: 26). In Freud's account this imaginary father is endowed with the sexual attributes of both parents and is thereby to be seen as an ideal, a lost ideal which is a 'a totalizing phallic figure' (Ibid. 33).

Love for Freud is therefore, at its core, the desire to address a lack in the subject's own ego, conceiving of sexual union as a means to address that lack (Freud, 1931). According to this perspective, the object that the subject loves is perceived to possess many of the characteristics that the subject's ego wishes for but does not possess, and so desires. Ultimately Freud constitutes the love object as useful to the subject in some way. As Lacan reminds us, the eternal question posed between lovers is 'what value has my desire for you?' (Lacan, 1977a: 191). Love is therefore to be understood as the subject's claim 'to something that is separated from him but which belongs to him and which he needs to complete himself' (Ibid. 195). From this perspective Freud's notion of love is really a dynamic involving three people: 'the subject, his imaginary or real object of love and the ideal of love' (Kristeva, 1987: 15).

Ariadne in Naxos (1877)
Evelyn De Morgan
Oil on canvas
23.75 x 39.25 inches

Similarly inspired by pre-existing literature, Evelyn De Morgan visually reinterprets a moment in the tale of Ariadne's desertion by her lover Theseus in Ovid's classical

tale of *Heriodes*.[87] Like Julia Margaret Cameron, Evelyn De Morgan focuses on the turmoil, when 'frantic raging and crying' subsided and there is a sense of quietness, interiority and melancholy (Yates, 1996: 53). She focuses on the reflective moment after emotional unrest. In De Morgan's painting Ariadne is pictured seated on the seashore, her despondent mood signalled by her lowered head and sombre expression. The figure has her back to the sea foregoing the hope of rescue by the lover who has abandoned her (there is no hint within the picture of the eventual rescue of Ariadne by Dionysus which the classical tale refers too). The red robe she wears perhaps signifies for De Morgan her martyrdom, its soft folds echoing the use of drapery in Cameron's photograph, as does her long flowing hair (Ibid. 57). Cameron's figure is depicted in a domestic space, while De Morgan's figure is shown in a liminal space, echoing a placement used in the Romantic tradition by, for example, Casper David Friedrich in paintings such as *The Monk by the Sea* (1809–1810) Edvard Munch also used this approach several times in woodcuts such as *Melancholy Evening* (1896). Perhaps most important is the fact that De Morgan, like Cameron, chooses to concentrate on the absence and the distance of the lover rather than the figure's eventual rescue, instinctively recognising (like Cameron and Freud) that this absence is the most potent moment in the narrative for the female subject. Love as lack, and waiting for love is, then, reiterated as an aspect of women's melancholic experience.

Although Freud acknowledged the intellectual and aesthetic qualities of writers and poets on the topic of love, such as those that inspired the work of Cameron and De Morgan, he argued that such works did little to reveal the origin and development of mental states in complete form because

> 'Writers are under the necessity to produce intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, as well as certain emotional effects. For this reason they cannot produce the stuff of reality unchanged – they must isolate portions of it, remove disturbing associations, tone down the whole and fill in what is missing, these are the privileges of what is known as poetic licence' (Freud, 1910: 231).[88]

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[87] See Ovid (43 B.C. 170r 18 A.D), *Heroides* (The Heroines) a collection of poems composed by Ovid in which the heroines address their heroic lovers who have in some way mistreated, neglected or abandoned them.

[88] Freud, continues: 'up until now it has been left for the creative writer to depict for us the necessary conditions for loving which govern people's choice of love object and the ways in which they bring

Thus Freud acknowledges that the intention of the artist or writer is at odds with the logic of his own thoughts, so that a qualitative difference exists between them in terms of what they aim to represent. This is because the writer or artist can 'draw upon certain qualities which fit him to carry such a task, above all the sensitivity that enables him to perceive hidden impulses in the minds of other people, and the courage to let his own conscious speak' (Ibid. 230). In other words, writers or poets aim to use their stories to express human feeling according to their own point of view and consequently portray only a partial or subjective picture of love, whereas Freud sought to examine reality and provide a full or objective account of love. His intention was to remove the imaginative and poetic from the discussion about a person's choice of love object and offer instead what he termed, a 'strictly scientific treatment to the field of human love' (Ibid. 231).

Hence in Freud's account on love the subjective and the personal is what is absent. Yet in a contemporary context the importance of locating research in the subjective, and personal approaches to research, as I have outlined in Chapter One, means that the literary and mythological tales that inspired both Cameron and De Morgan's artwork could be of renewed significance to feminist theorists today. One reason for this might be that recuperating these ancient stories enables women artists to pass on to another generation of women an experience of loss that is still regarded as significant to subsequent generations of women. Acknowledging the experience of previous generations of women, and mourning and working through losses on their behalf, is an aspect of what Ettinger describes during a conference presentation titled 'Aesthetics/Ethics/Politics' in 2009 as 'transgenerational memory'. Pollock describes this as the 'phenomenon of a trauma passing to a generation who did not live it but continues in its shadow so that they themselves have to perform mourning and working through what their parents cannot because of inconsolable grief' (Pollock, 1996: 272). Cameron and De Morgan's pictures overlap with this idea

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the demands of their imagination into harmony with reality. The writer can indeed draw upon certain qualities which fit him to carry such a task, above all the sensitivity that enables him to perceive hidden impulses in the minds of other people, and the courage to let his own conscious speak' (Freud, 1910: 230). He adds: 'moreover they can only show slight interest in the origin and development of the mental states which they portray in completed form. In consequence it becomes inevitable that science should concern itself with the same materials whose treatment artists has given enjoyment to mankind for thousands of years, though her touch must be clumsier and yield less pleasure' (Ibid. 231).

because part of the function of their pictures is the recognition of the losses experienced by earlier generations of women according to ancient fable or myth. The subject matter of Cameron and De Morgan's pictures suggests that there is a need for women to acknowledge and mourn the losses of the women in these ancient tales to overcome their melancholy. In Room Two of the vfm the losses of women in love from earlier historic moments continue to be shared symbolically with women from the present. This urges them to witness these losses and encourages them to find better ways to love in the future.

But what Cameron and De Morgan's depictions of love melancholy as an absence and Freud's later theorisation of love as a 'lack' reveal is the overlap in their conceptualisation of these experiences. Perhaps the reason for this is that Cameron and De Morgan, like Freud also drew upon earlier ideas of love to inspire and to inform their thinking. Freud acknowledges this common source of inspiration, writing: 'in consequence it becomes inevitable that science should concern itself with the same materials whose treatment by artists has given enjoyment to mankind for thousands of years, though her touch must be clumsier and yield less pleasure' (Freud, 1910: 231). For example, artists, writers and later Freud were inspired by the writings of Marsilio Ficino in the development of their notion of love. In Ficino's book *De Amore* (1469), a commentary is offered on Plato's *Symposium*, which theorises love as 'a nostalgic act of recuperating a lost ideal' (Schiesari, 1992: 115). [89] His belief is that 'birth is the moment when the soul and all its prior knowledge is depressed into the body' (Ficino cited in Letters i: vii: Schiesari, 1992: 116).[90] From this perspective there is no such thing as acquiring new knowledge through love, but only a process of remembering or recuperating knowledge that was already known to

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[89] Juliana Schiesari (1992) recounts Ficino's (1469) fable about Porous and Penia. Porous stands as an allegory for plenty and a celestial form of love. This form is driven by a desire to be reunited through the celestial qualities that shine through the lover: 'with the ideal or with God. What is loved is the soul, which stands for a reunion with God. Penia in contrast stands for poverty and is a lower less desirable form of love based on a desire for the corporeal body; it is a lesser form of love because the body, being corporeal and material, does not have access to the same knowledge as the soul. This is especially because the soul understands incorporeal things through the intelligence whereas through the body only corporal things are known' (Ficino [1469] cited in Schiesari, 1992: 122).
[90] Ideas of love as both absence and presence have characterised its conception since the Renaissance. This point is illustrated by the writing of Robert Burton who devoted a whole chapter of his book *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) to the subject of love melancholy, arguing that while desire signals absence, love on the other hand signals something that is present. Burton said, 'desire wisheth, love enjoys, the end of one is the beginning of the other that which we love is present, and that which we desire is absent' (Burton, 1621: 11).

the soul prior to its descent into the body. Here, Juliana Schiesari reminds us that Ficino prefigures Freud by grounding the source of love in the idea of overcoming lack or recouping what is lost. Therefore the lover is not to be understood in terms of his or her personal qualities and characteristics, but what the lover recalls in the self. Ficino remarked that the 'soul thus stricken recognises the image before it as something which is its own' (Ibid. 114). Ficino's ideas are important to subsequent generations of writers and poets because he created the idea that love is primarily the desire for something that is already partly known and possessed, this partial possession generates the desire in Freudian terms to overcome or re-find the lost object and eradicate the loss.[91] Kristeva has reiterated the importance of love as a transformational object that can overcome melancholy. She suggests that love is important to subjectivity because being loved by another 'it is possible to forgive ourselves by releasing, thanks to someone who hears us, our lack or our wound to an ideal order to which we belong and we are now protected against depression' (Kristeva, 1989: 216). Hence to be without love is to be melancholic, because it is to be without the other who acknowledges our pain.

In Cameron's photograph and De Morgan's painting, the female subject occupies different positions as both object and subject, intermingling both phallic and non-phallic ways of seeing. On the one hand, working within the prevailing art historical traditions Cameron and De Morgan depict women as the place where, according to Lacan, as I have discussed in Chapter Three, men's desire, the 'objet a' or lack, is projected (Rose, 1982: 41). From this perspective the woman in Cameron's photograph does not 'signify anything' that relates to the feminine but only the desire (as lack) of the man (Lacan, 1972–1973: 68, cited in Ettinger, 1993: 15). Ettinger reminds us that when 'she is put in one of these positions, women cannot reach one another, and she as subject cannot reach them since the woman is repressed for women as well as men', leaving women like Mariana and Ariadne

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[91] Juliana Schiesari reminds us that for Ficino, desire is rooted in theological recuperation or a reunion with God. His argument is primarily a religious and moral one, that it is acceptable to love ourselves in the body of another if 'we shall not really love those things but God in them' (Schiesari, 1992: 119). Although Freud's thoughts offer a secularised version of the origins of the lost object it seems that his ideas are indebted to Ficino's original thought (Ibid.). Both Cameron and De Morgan were Christian women whose faith was important to them and perhaps these images should then, after Ficino, be interpreted as an expression of the subject's desire for a reunion with God via a reunion with her lover.

isolated and alone (Ettinger, 1993: 15). This psychic mechanism is what allows the image of Mariana in some respects to function as a place for the contemplation of loss, a move that links this aspect of the photograph to the dominant canon of the art history of melancholy outlined in Chapter Two.

However, this is not the whole story, for Cameron does not present Mariana as passive; instead she portrays her with what Brian Hinton has described as an underlying toughness mingled with 'a broody sexuality' (Hinton, 2003: 51). Hence the woman in Cameron's picture is not just a symbol of male desire but also asserts, in some way, her own point of view.[92] Cameron's Mariana is overlaid with a silent appeal from the subject signalling her own requirement for love too.

The defiant, rebellious mood that Cameron's Mariana portrays is the critical point of the photograph. Roland Barthes (1980) would refer to this as the 'punctum' of the image, the moment in the photograph that shows the anger of the 'wounded' female figure (Barthes, 1980: 10). Thus we can also read Cameron's photograph from the non-phallic point of view which challenges the view of a femininity symbolised solely by 'mercy' and 'loving kindness' (Pollock, 1996: 268). The discontented attitude of Cameron's Mariana suggests that women might be capable of being vengeful and hostile towards lovers rather than passively accepting their lot. Perhaps the question that this image leaves us with is whether Mariana's broody melancholy might be more than about love, whether it might refer more directly to the awakening and increasing feelings of discontent about the confinement of women whilst waiting for love. In Freudian terms, then, Cameron's image might refer to an unconscious loss, and by bringing such loss into an artwork, according to Freud, pathways are created for language and the symbolic to express women's experience. Perhaps too her unkempt hair suggests an abandonment of care or self-love, even a manifestation perhaps of the poor regard that Freud tells us the woman has for herself and her sex and which is a sign of melancholy.

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[92] Lacan speaks of love that 'for the man, whose lady was entirely in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject, courtly love is the only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relation' (Lacan cited in Rose, 1982: 48).

Although Evelyn De Morgan also presents us with a downcast beautiful young woman, she similarly seems to be more than an emblem of loss. In painting this subject matter I would argue that De Morgan offers a challenge to the phallic accounts of this tale because she insists on asserting this tale of women's melancholy into the visual. The fact that the female figure turns away from the lover who has abandoned her suggests a protest against Ariadne's treatment in love – a woman's isolation and powerlessness in a world in which a woman might die waiting for the love of a man.

By showing Mariana and Ariadne with a downcast gaze, the spectator is placed in the position of looking at a subject that does not return the gaze. As I have already discussed in Room One, in Lacan's view the gaze as the 'objet a' of the eye is always phallic, meaning that the female subject is subjected to the desire and mastering gaze of the Other. However, the intensity of both Mariana and Ariadne's internalised focus and 'her' refusal to 'look back at us' and acknowledge our desire suggests not passivity, but something more active of the part of the subject. Both Mariana and Ariadne leave us searching for an explanation that is viewed from a feminine rather than a phallic point of view.

In Room One I noted that to make sadness something we are prepared to engage with artists make use of the aesthetic of beauty. Ettinger's conceptualisation of the relationship between the art object and the 'objet a' adds to this. She notes that the 'objet a' may appear via sublimination in art as the 'beauty' within the work, or it is 'a lack behind the image, a hole, an absence, a blind spot onto which images are engraved' (Ettinger, 1993: 17).[93] Ettinger adds: 'it is also the incarnation of the Woman … In this topology of the "objet a", of the Thing and their relationships, the Woman is what is equated with the work of art and Lacan speaks of all the enigmas that appear, "and we know not why" when we study female sexuality' (Ibid.). So the beautiful images of women by Cameron and De Morgan do not just serve the masculine insistence that women's place in the visual field is simply to provide an object for the gaze of men. Instead the beauty of an art object might also, suggests Ettinger, be a manifestation of the 'objet a'.

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[93] Ettinger adds that the 'objet a' is what 'tickles the Thing from within and this is according to Lacan the essential quality of everything that we call art' (Ettinger, 1993: 17).

Ettinger reminds us that it is our first experience of being loved and handled by the mother that transforms us and shapes later relations with subsequent transformational objects, including aesthetic objects. From this perspective, the artworks presented by Cameron and De Morgan are conceived of as 'aesthetic transformational objects' which are active (not passive) in relation to the subject. Like our mothers, they 'provoke and prepare the female subject for activities which are yet far ahead'; in the case of Cameron and De Morgan by warning of the perils of love – abandonment for women (Ettinger, 1995: 50).[94]

Figure 74. *Portrait of Cheryl Cole* (2008)
Mario Testino
Photograph published in *Observer Magazine*,
5 October 2008

Girl with Ears (2008)
Christina Reading
Oil on unprimed linen
40 x 40cm

Yet it seems that women are still having trouble with love. My painting *Girl with Ears* (2008) responds to a magazine photograph of the singer and celebrity Cheryl Cole (Figure 74) shortly after she separated from her husband, the footballer Ashley Cole, who was reportedly unfaithful to her. The emotional turmoil of this incident played out in the spotlight of the media, leading to reports of Cheryl Cole's near

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[94] In adulthood, Ettinger argues, 'the object is pursued in order to surrender to it as a medium that alters the self, a person, place, event ideology. A person, an artwork, a place, an event and an ideology supply symbolic substitutes for the archaic transformational object, the mother. The longing for a symbolic object which will change one's life and give it meaning through fusion is a basis for an aesthetic experience of a reverential attitude towards the aesthetic or religious object nominated as sacred' (Ettinger, 1995: 50). In other words, it is possible that, even though the work of art depicts a moment of absence, as in Cameron's and De Morgan's work, its effect on the viewer can be transformational, like the presence of the lover, because it echoes our experience of being transformed by the presence of the mother.

emotional collapse. The pose Cole adopts here with her arms wrapped under her jumper almost as if she were in a straitjacket, can be read as portraying the emotionalism and fragile mental state caused by the betrayal of love. Such a pose refers back to the eighteenth-century tendency to classify women's melancholia as a cognitive disorder that required medical treatment (Radden, 2000: 21). The media image of Cheryl Cole, with her bunny ears and bare legs, signals sexual availability and complicity. Whereas in my own work *Girl with Ears* (2008), the blank face combined with the abject pose suggests instead the effacement of women's emotional lives in the press, which is always concerned, first and foremost, with their desirability.

So despite the fact that falling in and out of love might bring individual joys and sorrows, it seems more generally in the West that, according to Kristeva, we are in the midst of a cultural crisis of love, in which women are suffering from 'lacks in love' (Kristeva, 1987: 7). Kristeva suggests that this is because the old moral and religious codes that governed the selection of love objects are changing; hence women are less certain who to love. New social situations are emerging, amounting to an upheaval in love, with some women who have achieved social and economic success no longer needing to partner a man to climb the social and economic ladder. Whilst these developments are welcome on one level, as a mark of progress and a way out of love premised on a history of oppression, these changes may leave many women unable to find a partner, waiting for love, isolated and alone as surely as Cameron and De Morgan's subjects were.

Figure 75. Banaz Mahmod (2006)
Photographer unknown
Photograph published in *The Guardian*, 20 July 2007

Despite these shifts, the quest for love nevertheless continues even though the institutions of love, such as marriage, are riddled with a history that has demonstrated a lack of love for women.[95] Consider the young women in the West who have been killed because they have brought shame on their families by choosing to love somebody outside their religion or caste.[96] The continuing power of patriarchy within some communities in the UK is exemplified by the terrible story of Banaz Mahmod, a twenty-year-old Kurd who, in 2006, was strangled on the orders of her father and uncle because they disapproved of her boyfriend and her 'Western' ways (Figure 75). As journalist Rachel Williams reported in *The Guardian* newspaper at the time, what was perhaps so shocking about the incident was that the mother apparently did nothing to defend her daughter (Williams, 2011). Attempting to understand the motivations of Banaz's parents is challenging. It seems Banaz owed her fate to a clash between her own attitudes to love and the more restrictive attitudes of her family, arising from traditional religious beliefs and questions of family honour. But the special horror of the story lies in the fact that Banaz was 'helpless' against the attack by her own family, by her own father and mother.[97]

As I have discussed in Room One, Adriana Cavarero's discussion of female suicide bomber relates 'horrorisim' to a scenario in which 'the vulnerable one is unilaterally exposed to wounds against which he cannot defend himself' (Cavarero, 2009: 31). It seems to me that the vulnerability of young women to a deadly wound inflicted not by a stranger but by family members – as in Banaz's case, her mother, father and uncle – manifests another incidence of violence against women that is, though not random, equally horrific. The cultural icon of Medea, the mythological Greek mother

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[95] See Jane Ussher (1991) in which she draws attention to women's plight outside the Western tradition. She draws attention to the sacrificial Suttee, once commonplace in India, in which women were condemned to the funeral pyre of their husbands, and the Chinese practice of foot binding, which bent a young girl's feet into unnatural shapes for the sexual gratification of her future husband, and to signal her fidelity to her husband. Female circumcision and the medieval chastity belt are cited as extreme examples of the discourse of 'women as object' in the love arrangement (Ussher, 1991: 23-41).

[96] See Jane Ussher (1991) in which she argues that as well as honour killings, young women in the West also suffer from forced marriages of which there are (according to Refuge) over 1,000 cases each year. Most of the cases of forced marriage reported involve women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, sent back by family, and Ussher asks: 'who is to report their disappearance from the community if not the family?' (Ussher, 1991: 23).

[97] Cavarero (2009) uses the term 'helpless' to describe 'a person who, attacked by an armed other, has no arms with which to defend himself' (2009: 30). She continues: 'defenceless and in the power of the other, the helpless person finds himself substantially in a condition of passivity, undergoing violence he can neither flee from nor defend' (Ibid.).

who killed her children for revenge, recuperated by Cavarero, seems to manifest itself again in this incidence.

Although Banaz Mahmod's case was first reported in 2006, her image was a constant presence in the newspaper until the trial of her parents in 2011 (Figure 75). The cropped image which focuses on her face, her direct stare and the black lines around the eyes possibly echoes the figurative and aesthetic qualities of Stella Vine's painting *Chantelle Butterfly* (2007) discussed in Room One (Figure 51). The story perhaps provides a constant reminder of the need to 're-invent love', to address our melancholy in love and its representation (Mannoni cited in Kristeva, 1987: vii).

In answer to such tragic tales, in her book *Tales of Love* (1987), Kristeva calls for more 'open systems of love that acknowledged and gave space to the emotional traumas in women's lives' (Kristeva, 1987: 13). By an open system, Kristeva means not forgetting that 'the psyche is an open system connected to another and only under those conditions is it renewable' (Ibid. 15). Kristeva suggests that these incidents of trauma should be given signification as 'events in the life of the subject and embraced, rather than denied, as something which "broadens horizons" and expands psychic life and ultimately the capacity to love' (Kristeva cited in Lechte, 1990b: 34). Fundamentally, Kristeva argues that the more we embrace traumatic experience arising from difficulties in love, the more innovative and flexible our capacity for love, the more resilient our psychic structures. As Lechte puts it: 'the greater the capacity for love the less the other becomes a threat to our psyche' (Ibid. 33).

Perhaps, then, Julia Margaret Cameron and Evelyn De Morgan's pictures are valuable to the present moment because they provide clues, albeit from a different historic moment, on how to embrace and bring into the symbolic these incidents of love melancholy to which Kristeva refers. This reminds us perhaps of what is missing from current amatory codes and also of the need to make visual new forms of love melancholy that might emerge in the present moment.

Those Who Suffer, Love (2009)
Tracey Emin
1,000 drawings projected in a video animation

It is against this contemporary background that conceptual multimedia artist Tracey Emin approaches the question of her experience of love and sex. The work that I have selected for my vfm is a still from an animated film projection of 1,000 drawings titled *Those who suffer, love* (2009). The film was shown at the White Cube gallery as the primary focus of the exhibition. It shows a woman lying on her back, legs apart with her hand resting on her genitals, perhaps masturbating. The other drawings in the sequence continue the narrative begun by this first picture. The women's face is not visible and she is naked except for a shoe on her right foot.

It is significant for my thesis that the figurative language in Emin's drawing stems not from a literary or classical tale but from lived experience. Emin asks us to break away from art historical traditions and represent a women's bodily experience of love. Emin's image addresses this question in her film in which she reflects on the loss of her own sexual energy now that she approaches fifty, so the film is not as it first appears, about sex, it is 'saying goodbye to it' (Emin, 2009). Emin's portrayal of female masturbation seems to contradict what she says about her sex life, but perhaps the image is designed to evoke a memory of sex, a kind of remembering of the significance sex once played in her life.

Emin's focus on sex echoes Freud's thesis on love by placing sex at the centre of the experience. According to Freud, the girl turns away from masturbation because of its association with masculinity (see Chapter Three). Nevertheless, perhaps Emin's

work makes evident the limitations of the theory from a feminist perspective, asking what happens to love when sexual desire has diminished?

The thin, untidy, line of the drawing is used by Emin to mark her wounds on the paper, not as lack, as absence, but as presence, challenging the phallic gaze to acknowledge her sexuality in the visual field. The quality of the simple line drawing also differs from the film piece in the gallery because the latter flickers briefly across a screen, one of 1,000 images, part of a wider rhythm as important, perhaps, as the actual figurative pose. The use of the basic figurative line to signal melancholy is reminiscent of Rachel Howard's figurative drawings of female suicide in Room One (Figures 56–58).

Also important, however, is the way in which Emin's work confronts religious and patriarchal discourses, which declare the female body as sinful (Wiseman, 1990: 180). From this perspective the feminine disposition to sin is grounded in woman's insufficient control over her sexual drives historically regarded, as discussed in Chapter Two, as a cause of a women's melancholy. These ideas have exerted a powerful influence on the visual representation of women's sexuality as something that should be concealed or blurred in the visual field, rather than explicitly seen. Emin's female figure is, therefore, transgressive because she explicitly pictures an intimate aspect of female sexuality and asserts the right to mourn its demise. For Emin, the loss of her sex drive is a tragic loss; sex is what motivated her in life and shaped her engagement with the world (Emin, 2009). The demise of this aspect of her emotional life is a source of melancholy.

However, there is also another possible angle from which to read Emin's work: perhaps what her drawing seems to echo in some way is feminist theorist Luce Irigaray's call for women first to love themselves (Irigaray, 2000). In historical convention, women have always served the self-love of men rather than pursing their own self-love. However, even today a woman often lacks the power to clothe and house herself, which Irigaray suggests 'forces her into an internal exile; unless she is able to find a way to exist where she is no longer dependent on a man for his return, for love' (Irigaray, 1984: 64). In this position, Irigaray argues, the woman places

herself in the position of keeping love, for another, but without loving herself. She writes:

> 'Scarcely does she know herself scarcely does she begin to glimpse nostalgia for herself, her odyssey, to be able to tell her tears from those of Ulysses. Not because they were weeping the same loving tears, but because she took part in his quest for love for himself which does not come to the same thing. That might happen if women also went in quest of her own love successfully accomplishing her journey' (Irigaray, 1984: 65).

Country Dancing (2011)
Christina Reading
DVD projection of archive film
1 min 47 seconds

I address these issues in my work *Country Dancing* (2011), an archive film that shows young women dancing on a lawn on a summer day. In the aftermath of World War Two these young women were separated from their families and sent to live in

an orphanage at Barcombe Place in East Sussex.[98] The film is a disturbing reminder of an unreconciled aspect of women's history in which children were often separated from their mothers because local authorities judged that widows in particular often did not have adequate means to support their children and so they were placed in residential care.

From the silent film I can only imagine the young women's sense of loss and sorrow at the separation, and wonder whether the relationships they forged with the other young women in the home came in some way to replace their relationship with their absent mothers. Hence I find a link between the strengthened sibling bond arising from the death of the mother, which Sue de Beer reflects on in her film *Black Sun* (Figure 44), discussed in Chapter Two, and the questions raised by my *Country Dancing* (2011).

Describing the film *Country Dancing* (2011), I would argue that what is most compelling about the figurative language is the visual pairing of the young women, and the way their bodies are interwoven through the dance, creating an interconnected moving whole. In pairs the young women link arms or hold hands, their interwoven bodies dance rhythmically to music that we can no longer hear. Dressed in gingham and floral gowns, and some with ribbons in their hair, the young women repeat the steps of a dance in a seemingly endless circle. Part of my work with the film was to slow it down in order to exaggerate the movements of the young dancers and burden them with thoughtfulness, which perhaps might be overlooked in a normal temporality. Slowness emerges again as a concept linked to melancholy; however, this time the slowness is conveyed by the speed of the film in the same way Julia Margaret Cameron used a slow shutter speed to achieve her hazy photographic effect and elicit a lingering attentive gaze from the viewer. Hence I

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[98] Barcombe Place was purchased by Barnardo's in 1944 as an orphanage providing accommodation for girls over the age of five. *Country Dancing* is developed from amateur footage by a Mr J. A. Birch, originally filmed 1952. The film captures an open day during which young girls living in the orphanage mount a display of dancing for visiting friends and relatives. The period after the Second World War marked a change in the way children without families were dealt with by local authorities and whilst adoption and fostering were officially the preferred option, residential care continued to provide homes for children who were difficult to place.

find that slowness is a rhythm used by artists, including myself, to convey melancholy by softening movements and blurring imagery.

The film also reminds us that for Freud the child's difficult separation from the mother is assuaged by love (Kristeva cited in Lechte, 1990b: 34). For Kristeva, this desire for the 'other' makes the object of love essential to one's own psychic makeup: 'the object of love is a metaphor for the subject' (Kristeva, 1987: 30). It seems, however, that whatever the nature of the desired object, the loss of the mother plays through the Freudian account of love.

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, according to feminist thinking, the girl's emotional life is shaped by the unacknowledged loss of the mother as a first object of love. The movements of the circle of dancers and the bond between the female dancers allude to this loss, providing a way to silently mourn. This somatic acknowledgement of loss, signalled through the embrace of exaggerated femininity and the collective embrace of women seems for me to somehow lessen the losses.

I believe my film marks an assertion of how these young women might address their separation from their mothers and from their families through allowing these 'others' to become part of their identity, part of the self, in an 'open system' of love (Ibid. 13). Such a choice is 'an act of survival' for the young women, given their institutionalisation and abandonment (Kristeva cited in Lechte, 1990b: 30). The film, then, perhaps represents the desire of these young women to rebuild their psychic lives in relation to these others, to be open to this interwoven possibility of love as a counter for their melancholy. Despite its aural and discursive silence, the film brings into the visual field an aspect of young women's experience, so that, as a later generation, we might acknowledge and perhaps mourn their loss.

Whilst the nineteenth-century women artists included in Room Two provide a visual metaphor for the notion of absence at the core of Freud's thesis, I argue that the collective interwoven dance provides a visual metaphor for the idea of subjectivity viewed as a 'Matrix': an interwoven web as theorised by Ettinger (1992) and detailed in Chapter Three.

For Ettinger the Matrix is a:

> 'pre-natal symbolic space. The Several comes before the one, an enlarged subjectivity, a meeting between the co emerging I and non I, neither rejecting nor assimilating the other, energy consists not in fusion and rejection but continuously re adjustment of distances, a continuous negotiation of separateness and distances within togetherness or proximity. The Matrix is a zone of encounter between the most intimate and the most distanced unknown limits and thresholds' (Ettinger, 1993: 12).

Country Dancing might, then, symbolise elements of such an encounter. The young women move towards and away from each other, creating a rhythm of proximity and distance in a dance that holds them in a friendly embrace. Like the Matrix, there is for the dancers a 'joint investment in a mutual space' and recognition that, face-to-face, the encounter with the other in the dance has the potential to produce alterations in the subjectivities of both (Ibid. 13). In this way the lacks and losses experienced by the young women seem to be circulated between them, creating a sense of 'co-emergence from loss' a notion central to the idea of the matrixial symbolic (Ettinger, 1995: 277). Ettinger elaborates:

> 'within the matrixial system what is lost to the one can be inscribed as traces in the other and metramorphosis can allow passages of these traces from non I to I and back again in an enlarged stratum of subjectivisation as well as fragile limitrope representation. As both are parts of the same stratum, sharing and shared by the same border traces belonging to I as well as not I and recorded in joint space can be redistributed after their initial distribution. The borderline between what one has and what one has lost and between the Other and the Thing can therefore become Thresholds on the edges of subjectivity' (Ettinger, 1993: 19).

Hence, from this perspective, loss is shared between the young women in the dance, traces exchanged and moved around as the dance progresses. I argue that the narrative provided by this film should be interpreted as an example of efforts made by women to counter and oppose the patriarchal arrangements of power that placed them in these homes away from their mothers. Their bonds of friendship and the pleasure they take in their dance seem to be a small act of resistance to the circumstance in which they find themselves, objecting to their exclusion from the circle of power created by men in patriarchy. Irigaray notes the significance of this motif:

'He turns round and round within his own circle, the circle of his own dominion. He makes everything that enters his circle his own, subjecting it to his own perspective, increasingly forgetting the path of what is, and who he is' (Irigaray, 2000: 74).

The circle the young women create is, then, an exclusive alternative world, even if just for the duration of the dance, weaving a web around the void that is at the centre of subjectivity itself, finding small ways to overcome abandonment. For me this imagery asserts a creative, affirming and positive response to their melancholy. While the image of melancholy as romantic love in the nineteenth century was singular in the sense that it portrayed the unfulfilled desires of a lone female figure, this film maps the relationships between pairs of young women and creates a community of dancers.

These qualities I aim to bring to the fore in the accompanying paintings *The Dream Sequence* (2011).

The Dream Sequence (2011)
Christina Reading
Oil on linen
12 inches x 12 inches

The paintings do not mirror the film exactly, but attempt to draw attention (like the film) to the experience of the young women, imaginatively. I use the film and painting to give the experiences of these young women a narrative of their own,

albeit a silent and imaginary one. By painting a still from the film at five-second intervals to see what emerges from the film, I imposed a structure around my painting process, to avoid imposing my pre-existing ideas about the figurative language and aesthetic qualities of the film on the final paintings.

The title, *The Dream Sequence* (2011), refers to the link between emotional states and dreams or memories. This is significant because, for Freud, dreams provide clues to repressed experiences, which he relates to melancholy. I recall that Freud likens 'visual thinking' or the work of art to the dream state in its potential to convey meaning (Freud: 1923: 359) According to Ettinger, 'in the waking state there is an elision of the unconscious gaze and its sight, but in the dream "it shows"' (Ettinger, 1995: 6). At its most basic the dream state 'attests to the archaic essence of the gaze, to its relations of the Id'. In the dream the 'objet a' 'emerges as the gaze on a scene from which the subject is excluded where there is a possibility of being seen free with no seeing subject there to observe the seen being' (Ibid.). In other words, in the dream state the gaze shows us what it looks at whereas in the conscious state it does not. The dream state is important for allowing repressed memories and associations to come to the fore. Hence in these paintings I explore both the capacity of painting and the manifestation of a dream state to bring to the fore what I might define as a 'feminine' view of melancholy.

In these paintings I engage with the re-found material of the film to create a conjunction between this history and my own subjectivity, in order to 'deconstruct the distinction between them' (Pollock, 1995: 61). I intervene in this history with the marks, touches, rhythms, colours that come from my own work that I do with film and my handling of paint, so that the story about the dancing young women is interwoven in some way with my own memories and dreams. What is produced is the result of an encounter between the imaginary subjectivities in the film and my own subjectivity. In this sense, as Pollock puts it, 'history meets autobiography as a screen for the inscriptions in the feminine that are allowed metamorphically to filter into view, into affect' (Ibid. 66). The link between the film and the painting is important because, like Rachel Howard's and Stella Vine's photographic paintings discussed in Room One (Figures 50 & 51), the connection with the readymade photographic image means that a 'powerful trace of reality' penetrates the painting

(Ibid. 67). In the case of the film *Country Dancing* (2011) the painting gives attention through its array of strokes to a discarded history and retrieves it for women in the present.

Conclusion

The relationships set up in this room help to explain that love melancholy, according to the Freudian perspective, comes from a psychological need arising from the earliest phase of our development, the separation from the mother, and the desire for the sense of wellbeing that stems from being seen and heard through the eyes of another. The nineteenth-century images of romantic love seen here are embedded firmly in the notion of heterosexual love as it is played out in the context of the patriarchal society at that historical moment, and in this sense these images are not just about the absence of love, but about power as well.

However, these historical images provide a bridge to a way of seeing love melancholy that is different from contemporary media images that tend to focus on the allure of women as sexual objects. Julia Margaret Cameron and Evelyn De Morgan, working within the Romantic tradition, attend to women's experience. Even if these works are premised on literary works by male writers and poets, they nevertheless offer interpretations that might be said to speak from the perspective of being a woman.

Yet these images remind us that love relations between men and women are complicated by the political, social and economic oppression of some women; women who are left waiting and abandoned, as in Julia Margaret Cameron's *Mariana in the Moated Grange* (1875)*,* and Evelyn De Morgan's *Ariadne in Naxos* (1877). Hence the question of women's melancholy in love cannot easily be viewed solely either through personal relations nor cultural circumstance, but instead must be viewed as an intermingling of the two.

Whatever their limitations, the artworks gathered in Room Two endeavour to bring into the contemporary context historical incidents of women's experience of love melancholy. Although we may not be able to fully understand the meaning this

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imagery had to women in the past we can at least acknowledge its power and resonance in the present. The historical pictures in Room Two have provided an important stimulus for my own work.

My film *Country Dancing* (2011) and the paintings *The Dream Sequence* (2011) paint a picture of a different kind of love between women, a love forged through necessity and circumstance, displacement and absence. In an important sense, this figurative imagery differs from the nineteenth-century pictures of romantic love because it originates from a narrative based on lived experience, rather than on literary and art historical traditions. The repetitive performance of the steps, and the web they weave though the dance, stand for the strategies these young women have used to circle and live through their melancholy through bonds of friendship. In this sense, the imagery both captures and pictures desire, whilst at the same time acknowledging absence.

Moreover, such imagery, I argue, brings to the fore part of the difficulty with contemporary media images of love, in which love is routinely reduced to sexual activity and the desirability of women, and fails to give visual signification to different types of love objects outside of heterosexual love. This includes both homosexual love and the recognition of the importance of expanding our amatory codes and bringing into the symbolic the broader spectrum of love for friends, for family and even strangers from the past and present. For if the 'object of love is a metaphor for the subject' as Julia Kristeva maintained, then the absence of representation of different forms of love can only contribute to the current crisis in love (Kristeva, 1987: 30). From the contemporary perspective, such imagery raises the question: what new forms of arrangements in love might be needed, and how might they be represented, in keeping with a progressive feminist agenda?

Room Three: *Allegories of Sorrow*: Religious Melancholy

Figure 76

Figure 77

Figure 78

Figure 79

Figure 80

Figure 81

List of works exhibited in Room Three

Figure 76. *Seville Magdalene* (1621–1622) Artemisia Gentileschi, Oil on panel, 1.365 x 1m

Figure 77. *Mary Ann Hillier, Call, I Follow, I Follow, Let Me Die!* (1867) Julia Margaret Cameron, Carbon print, 350 x 267mm

Figure 78. *Hope in the Prison of Despair* (1887) Evelyn De Morgan, Oil on panel, 23 x 25.25 inches

Figure 79. *Dancing Nuns* (2007) Andrea Büttner, Woodcut, 120 x180cm

Figure 80. *Victorian Lady* (2013) Christina Reading, Oil on canvas, 36 x 36cm

Figure 81. *The Joyful Mysteries* (2007) Christina Reading, video projection, 20 minutes

Introduction

In Room Three I address the particular visibility of women's religious melancholy, historically and contemporaneously, and its role in the formation of female subjectivity. First, I argue that the oil painting *Seville Magdalene* (1621–1622), (Figure 76) by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1656) and *Mary Ann Hillier, Call, I Follow, I Follow, Let Me Die* (1867) (Figure 77), a photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) represent in different ways a key piece of the story of art of the Western Christian tradition: the representation of Mary Magdalene. Second, I suggest that *Hope in the Prison of Despair* (1887) (Figure 78) by Evelyn De Morgan (1841–1919) offers a slightly more austere religious message from the same tradition. Fundamentally these images represent different aspects of narratives attached to the Christian story, but in their treatment of the subject matter these women artists arguably overlay this traditional art history with their own feminine perspective, which could be interpreted as having a feminist resonance.

Adjacent to these three images, I place my work *Victorian Lady* (2013) (Figure 80), a painting inspired by a re-found archive photograph by an unknown photographer (c. 1866), which coincides historically with Julia Margaret Cameron and Evelyn De Morgan. The final two pictures in this room are *Dancing Nuns* (2011) (Figure 79), a woodcut by Andrea Büttner (b.1972) and my video projection *The Joyful Mysteries* (2007) (Figure 81). In both the final artworks I draw attention to the traditions of reflection, meditation and prayer that remain important to some women today.

Seville Magdalene (1621–1622)
Artemisia Gentileschi
Oil on panel
1.365 x 1m

The painting *Seville Magdalene* (1621–1622) pictures a young woman, Mary Magdalene, in a slumped posture, sleeping in a high-backed chair. Art historian Mary Garrard describes how her head rests on 'an awkwardly turned wrist' and an arm falls between her legs (Garrard, 2001: 48). She wears a simple rustic brown dress, with a white under blouse falling away from her shoulder, to reveal the upper part of her arm. Her long hair is unkempt and falls to one side. Her eyes are partially open, swollen from crying and her mouth is full and slightly downturned.

Penitent (Mary) Magdalene (1596)
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio
Oil on canvas
122.5 x 98.5cm

The subject of Gentileschi's painting is the Mary Magdalene, a prostitute who repented her ways to become a disciple of Christ (Luke Ch.8. v.2), and who was finally elevated to sainthood.[99] Her story and image were regularly used in biblical texts to convey the essential Christian message that no soul is irredeemable, and that all, no matter how debased, can reach a state of 'divine grace' through spiritual intuition and love (Cummings, 1974: 574).

The pose used by Gentileschi in her painting *Seville Magdalene* (1621–1622) echoes Caravaggio's earlier depiction of the Mary Magdalene in *Penitent Magdalene* (1596) presented in the Introduction as a source of inspiration to this thesis, and creates an

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[99] Marina Warner (1976) explains how Mary Magdalene may have been more of a mythological figure than an actual person, requiring an act of imagination to create a symbolic representation. Warner argues that close readings of the gospels suggest that Mary Magdalene was created from three unrelated stories of three different women: Mary of Bethany, Lazarus' sister; Mary Magdalene the witness to the resurrection; and Mary the sinner. Warner suggests that these Marys were collectively condensed into one person (Warner, 1976: 225). This imaginary figure, argues Warner, offered 'the prototype of the penitent whore' (Ibid. 226).

unanticipated link to my photograph *My Daughter Katherine* (2007), (Introduction, Figure 4) which was, I reflect, also inspired by Caravaggio's painting.[100] I am reminded that for Burton sleep is 'a resting or binding' of the outward senses, and the inner sense of phantasy and memory (Burton, 1621: 160).

Sleep, it seems, is important in allowing women to reconcile their imaginations with their current experience. In Caravaggio's painting the sleeping Magdalene is shown casting off her earthly vanities, sitting humbly on a hard chair, in a darkened interior space, with her head falling forwards and her hands neatly clasped on her lap, jewellery and perfume (symbols of worldly vanity) strewn on the floor. Gentileschi reiterates Caravaggio's sleeping posture, sparse treatment and colouring in her own work. After Caravaggio, Gentileschi produced an image of the Magdalene that fused the ideas of the rejection of worldly vanities with the religious concept of spiritual transformation.

Figure 82. *Michelangelo at the Age of Twenty-three* (mid-16th century)
Leon Davent
Etching

Figure 83. *Saint Helena* (early 16th century)
Marcantonio Raimondi
Engraving

Although Mary Magdalene is a religious icon, her role prescribed by her place in the Christian story, an idealisation, I suggest that Gentileschi's treatment of this subject matter seems to allow something of the feminine experience outside this phallic discourse to enter the visual field. First, art historian Mary Garrard (2001) renames Gentileschi's painting *The Mary Magdalene as Melancholy* because of the way Gentileschi quotes the figurative language of Leon Devant's mid-sixteenth century

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[100] Denis Cummings reminds us that Caravaggio produced four paintings on this theme (Cummings, 1974: 574).

portrait of *Michelangelo at the Age of Twenty-three* (Garrard, 2001: 26) (Figure 82). Devant's painting shows Michelangelo in the classic melancholic pose of 'head-in-hands' brought to the fore by Dürer in *Melancholia 1* (1514) (Figure 9) and is meant to establish Michelangelo as a melancholic visionary (Ibid. 48). Garrard argues that the the use of the this pose for a 'visionary figure' was common at that time, seen, for example, in 'an early sixteenth century print by Marcantonio Raimondi (Figure 83) which presented Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, and her dream of an angel carrying the true cross' (Garrard, 2001: 49). Through this reuse of Devant's figurative language Garrard argues that Gentileschi reclaims for women the link between melancholy and creativity reserved for men (Ibid.). Hence Gentileschi's Magdalene is imbued with a sense of the elevated spiritual powers that are reserved for men in the dominant canon of melancholy.

Figure 84. Copy of Caravaggio's lost
Magdalene in Ecstasy (1606)
Louis Finson
Oil on canvas

Detail: *Seville Magdalene* (1621–1622)
Artemisia Gentileschi
Oil on panel

Second, Gentileschi uses tears to portray the emotionalism of her subject, Mary Magdalene, at rest in the moments after her spiritual transformation and the casting off of earthly pleasures. I would argue that her tears are linked to a realisation that alters the subject's perception and experience of the world. Through her tears she sees the world differently and a new form of consciousness emerges that is based on the love of God rather than her past denial of him.[101] To signal the emotionalism of

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[101] In Chapter One, I noted how the tears of that other key female figure in Christian theology, the Virgin Mary, were used as a symbol of mourning for the dead Christ in the dominant canon by artists such as Murillo in *Mater Dolorosa* (mid-15th century) and Raphael in *Pietà* (early 16th century).

the Magdalene after her conversion Gentileschi borrows a pre-existing Caravaggio motif of tears, as shown in the copy of Caravaggio's lost *Magdalene in Ecstasy* (1606) by Louis Finson (Garrard, 2001: 46). It is interesting to note that the idea of tears, of weeping without end, to represent this emotional response to the conversion to Christianity originates from the conversion of Paul to Christianity. Julia Kristeva describes how the account of Paul's conversion provided by the theologian Symeon (999–1022) tells how he 'weeped without cease' as he searched for God (Kristeva, 1989: 208). Hence Gentileschi reclaimed the motif of tears from the dominant canon to represent the emotionalism of a female religious icon, the Mary Magdalene.

Garrard suggests that pictures of the Magdalene weeping are referred to as 'maudlin', and often dismissed today for being overly sentimental (Garrard, 2001: 47). However, I would argue that such imagery pictures a spiritual experience that is largely unfamiliar to us now in the increasingly secular West, but which nevertheless may be of renewed significance for understanding the powerful emotional intensity associated with some religious beliefs and practices in the Western world today. Perhaps too the tears of Gentileschi's Magdalene may be viewed as a sign of an excess of emotional feeling that brims over in the body. Hence these tears might be read, after Lacan, as a sign of that part of the women's 'jouissance', that part of her experience that 'escapes from or is left over from the phallic function, and exceeds it' (Rose, 1982: 51)[102]. In other words, the tears of the Magdalene refer to an excess of emotionalism that speaks of the feminine experience of faith.

Looking closely at Gentileschi's painting, we see that the Magdalene's eyes are red from weeping, so that her suffering inflicts its mark on the female body in a way that echoes Christ's suffering marked on his hands. Are the sore, tear-stained eyes the Magdalene's stigmata, an external sign of her dishonour and shame for her previous life and failure to see and recieve God's light? This perspective suggests that, seeing the light of God, the experience of her own conversion literally becomes a sight for her sore eyes.

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[102] Lacan refers to the notion of 'jouissance' as 'that moment of sexuality which is always in excess, something over and above the phallic term which is the mark of sexual identity' (Lacan, 1972–1973 cited in Mitchell & Rose, 1982: 137).

Of course the Magdalene's tears also literally blur her vision and her sight of God, and so from this it would seem that Gentileschi's painting places blurred vision at the heart of her experience of religious melancholy. Hence, in different ways, the eyes and questions of sight and seeing, vision blurred by tears, recur as a constant theme within this discourse about women's figurative art and melancholy. I notice weeping in Stella Vine's portrait of a crying celebrity, *Chantelle Butterfly* (2007) (Figure 51) where we are confronted with, forced to see, Chantelle's tears. This creates a link between Vine and Gentileschi, because the religious origin of this motif of tears remains as a trace within Vine's contemporary and secular work. The lingering and perhaps imprecise memory of the intensity of the religious experience, signified by the tears of Gentileschi's Magdalene, infiltrates and intensifies our engagement with Vine's later image. Vine's tears are associated with the disintegration of the mask that protects the subject from the unwelcome truth that her celebrity life is a sham. Just like the Gentileschi's Magdalene, the tears of Vine's subject Chantelle are associated with a realisation that shifts her understanding of the world.

I am reminded that the psychic processes that produce tears literally affect how we see. One of the interesting overlaps with Bracha Ettinger's theorisation of a matrixial subjectivity is her argument that this view of the 'the psychic network of the body', literally alters her vision (Ettinger, 1995: 48). For Ettinger the impulses of these psychic processes disrupt visibility to produce blurring and soft focus rather than depth of field and focus (Ibid.). Thus the feminine is linked to the question of blurred vision both visually and later through Ettinger theoretically. It indicates perhaps that tears and blurred vision alter 'her' perception or view of the world in some way. The motif of blurred vision in Gentileschi's painting creates an overlap not only with Stella Vine's painting but also with the blurred photographic process favoured by Julia Margaret Cameron discussed in Room One. This overlap suggests once more a link between the feminine and a subject that is presented as blurred and indistinct in the visual field but who is also regarded through a matrixial gaze which is defined by its imprecise and hazy qualities. In effect Freud's theorisation also places the girl's sight of the penis and her castration at the centre of his thesis, and so it is a possibility that from a Freudian perspective blurred vision and tears might signal the girl's awareness that she has been castrated and that from that moment onwards her

view of the world is irrevocably altered. However, although the feminine is linked by both artists and writers to the indistinct, to the vague, to the undefined, the question perhaps for feminism is what would it take for women to see themselves and their situation clearly and to define themselves with more confidence?

Mary Ann Hillier: Call, I Follow, I Follow, Let Me Die! (1867)
Julia Margaret Cameron
Carbon print
350 x 267mm

In Julia Margaret Cameron's *Call, I Follow, I Follow, Let Me Die!* (1867) the profile of a female head emerges out of an overwhelming darkness, all distinguishing features of her environment erased. The shoulders of the female figure are dressed in a plain dark robe and her long hair flows behind her. Her eyes are downcast and half closed, her neck exposed and lips slightly parted to suggest sensuality.

It is generally acknowledged that this photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron is one of eight images from her body of work that represent Mary Magdalene; others include *The Angel at the Tomb* (1869) and *The Angel at the Sepulchre* (1869) (Weaver, 1984). Despite a gap of over 300 years between the time when Artemisia Gentileschi produced her painting and Julia Margaret Cameron made her photographs, the subject of Mary Magdalene has remained a powerful and regularly used symbol of feminine religious melancholy.

However, the figurative language in Cameron's photograph is noticeably different to that used by Gentileschi. Cameron's focus is not on the pose of the body but on the proud upturned profile of the female head. There are no tears and no lingering sense of disgrace for the formerly wayward life of the Magdalene seen in Gentileschi's portrayal of her subject. Cameron's Magdalene is pictured basking in the illuminating and divine light that comes from somewhere beyond herself, though she does not seek to move towards the source of this light, nor does she gaze in its direction.Instead she receives the light on her face and casts her eyes downwards as if to acknowledge the power of its illuminating source. Cameron evokes an image in which the Magdalene turns towards the light that symbolises God. The intensity of this experience is underlined by the play between light and darkness in the photograph. Cameron uses the photographic process to flatten the space down to nothing, to blackness, and to remove signs of the background. Here once again Cameron makes deliberate use of soft focus, but this time she does not just blur the detail of the external world but extinguishes them so that they cease to have significance for the Magdalene. Cameron's process demonstrates a refusal to adhere to traditional Cartesian notions of space characterised by a focus on depth of field, and the detail and clarity of an image, and reflects a radical willingness to rethink traditional modes of conceiving the world (Smith, 1998: 25).This move encourages

the viewer to focus on the face and the Magdalene's half-closed and downcast eyes to attend to the struggle between darkness and light, both literally and spiritually. In this sense Cameron's photographic process is guided by her desire to convey a sense of religious sentiment through her imaginative process, rather than by a concern with technical precision, and thus challenges the established thinking about the purpose of photography.

As with her other photographs, Cameron's close circle of family friends and household staff provided the models for her biblical characters.[103] In Cameron's photograph *Call I Follow, I Follow. Let Me Die!* (1867) her former parlour maid Mary Ann Hillier is draped in a simple dark cloth to represent the Magdalene. Hence Cameron's photograph is not a straightforward representation of the religious icon, but interweaves a psychological portrait of her subject, Mary Ann Hillier with her endeavour to symbolise the Magdalene. This fusion of religious symbol and human subjectivity develops a revision of the representation of religious icons, in that 'real' women merge with the divine to produce an interwoven subjectivity that is both religious and profane. Hence the religious icon of the Magdalene is imbued with the weaknesses of a human subjectivity, and at the same time Cameron's subject Mary Ann Hillier interprets a sense of the elevated spiritual powers of the Magdalene.[104]

Cameron's picture perhaps provided an opportunity for women of the day to fuse their identity with the Magdalene, even if for a moment, to create a subjectivity that absorbed the moral and religious message of the saint (Kristeva, 1995: 28). So instead of allowing oneself to be overcome by melancholy, the imaginary fusion of subjectivity with the Magdalene manifests perhaps what Ettinger refers to as 'a rapport of co-emergence', not in this instance with an unknown stranger, but with the mythical and divine other (Ettinger, 1999: 90). Kristeva makes the point that it was

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[103] Mike Weaver (1984) argues that Cameron creates biblical types in her photographs. He writes: 'a biblical type might be said to represent a person or an event in the bible, who or which can be said to correspond to other types or anti-type' (Weaver, 1984: 14).
[104] Mike Weaver comments that Cameron's Magdalene projects a new kind of intensity that interweaves 'the sacred and the profane' (Weaver, 1984: 3). In Weaver's view, Cameron's depiction of the Magdalene presents us with a subjectivity that 'hints at the supernatural, the occult, and even witch craft and sorcery, alongside religiosity', interweaving a subjectivity of the Mary Magdalene we recognise from the Christian story, with pagan women from ancient and pre-Christian times (Ibid. 24.) This fusion evidences what Weaver describes as 'a certain theological feminism' within Cameron's work (Ibid. 23).

through this transfer of love to another – in this case the Magdalene – that women could imagine their escape from suffering, from melancholy, would be achieved (Kristeva, 1995: 32). Thus such imagery was invested with the power not just to acknowledge but to transform the melancholic subjectivity of women at that time. Cameron's photograph inserts a feminine perspective because it challenges the tradition in which the Magdalene is used simply as a tool to convey a moral message to women; instead it inserts into visual history an image in which there is no real borderline between the perceptions and emotions of her young sitter and the Magdalene. Hence the Magdalene is reclaimed as a symbol for women.

The manner in which Gentileschi's and Cameron's images address the viewer can be seen as reflective of the part religion has played in women's evolving melancholic subjectivities at different historic moments. The painting *Seville Magdalene* (1621–1622) was orginally produced as a commission for the church and displayed in Seville Cathedral (Garrard, 2001). In the Renaissance, Michael Baxandall (1972) explains, the church expected pictures to have a religious function, namely to tell biblical stories to the public, encouraging them to practise their devotion and ensuring that the holy mysteries remained at the forefront of memory. Citing John of Genoas, Baxandall said:

> 'Know that there were three reasons for the institution of images in churches. First, for the instruction of simple people, because they are instructed by them, as if by a book. Second, so that the mystery of the incarnation and the examples of the Saints may be more active in our memory through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being roused more effectively by things seen rather than by things heard' (Baxandall, 1972: 41).

Gentileschi's picture of the Magdalene was, therefore, designed to assist believers in their interior visualisations and mediations on the life of Mary Magdalene; a practice that, Baxandall reminds us, was encouraged as part of sixteenth-century religious life. Hence, a primary function of such religious imagery was to instruct women to live a life guided by religious faith and belief, and to offer a personal route to redemption. Furthermore it was a call to women to place their trust and love in the Mary Magdalene herself (Kristeva, 1989).

At the time when Gentileschi made this painting the figure of the Mary Magdalene was given renewed significance in the Christian story because she was claimed by the leading religious body of the day, the Council of Trent, as a symbol of penitence, chastity and conversion to the faith. Garrard explains that this move finally separated the saint from her previous association with 'a life of luxury, prostitution and adultery' (Garrard, 2001: 41). The Virgin Mary could not sin and so ordinary Christians, and particularly women, found solace from the story of the Magdalene, a woman with flaws and failures like them. The image of the Magdalene would have provided powerful catharsis to women in the sixteenth century through its message of forgiveness for women who have lost their virtue, whether through sexual transgression, rape or prostitution, and who were otherwise judged by society to be wanton or fallen by the prevailing systems of social honour and patriarchy. As Warner suggests, the symbol of the Mary Magdalene held 'up a comforting mirror to those that sin again and again and promise joy to human frailty' (Warner, 1976: 235).[105] The particular appeal of the Magdalene was perhaps then that, unlike the Madonna, she was 'not just' a vessel, the holy bearer of the Father's son who does not know her 'own interiority, sexuality or desire', and who leaves unsaid her feminine difference to become 'complicit in support of the paternal function' (Pollock, 1998: 107). Instead the Magdalene knows these things but rejects them all in order to serve God. Hence the selection of the subject of the Magdalene matters because it reflects a desire by Gentileschi to use a symbol that reflects women's actual experience.

In presenting such an image to the world, Gentileschi both acknowledges and provides a point of identification in the visual field for the emotional experiences of Christian women at that time. The purpose of Gentileschi's picture, profoundly expressive and beautiful as it is, is not simply to represent the moment of Magdalene's conversion, but to provoke a similar emotional intensity of experience in the viewer. Gentileschi's symbolic representation of the Magdalene's melancholic experience was, to borrow the term from writer Richard Wollheim (1991), 'projected' into the visual field, with the effect that viewers of the image struggling

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[105]This thesis leaves aside the question of whether Gentileschi used the symbol of Magdalene as a metaphor for her own experiences, acknowledging simply that there is a debate about the extent to which Gentileschi's personal experiences of rape might have influenced her choice and treatment of the subject matter.

with similar experiences – the struggle to live a virtuous life – would feel less alone, their own 'interior condition' eased somewhat (Wollheim, 1991: 58). [106]

Gentileschi's painting is therefore an allegory, a symbol that invites prayer and reflection on divine ideas; though perhaps what such religious imagery also reflects is an historical moment in which women set aside and gave time to devotional practice that cultivated the capacity to love another. For philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) the feminine 'is that principle in which the future is imagined as the contemplation of responsibility towards another in your eventual absence' (Levinas in Pollock, 1998: 108). As such the feminine is characterised by the condition in which 'the value of the other is asserted before my own' (Ibid.). Maybe, then, aspects of the feminine might be sought in the rituals and celebrations of religious practice that give time to contemplation of the melancholy of others.

The fact that Julia Margaret Cameron used the same symbol over 300 years later underlines perhaps how few symbols women artists felt they had available to them to represent the concerns of women. Nevertheless, Julia Margaret Cameron's version of the Magdalene would have had a different set of resonances for nineteenth-century women. This is because it reflected the fact that, although Christian religious belief was still powerful in Western society and provided the foundation of many women's subjectivity at that time, religious thinking was perhaps less stable than it had been. As Kristeva suggests, during the nineteenth century, religion was not experienced as the 'word of God', as it had been in preceding centuries; instead it was experienced as a spiritual quest, a passion, the search for a reunion with the 'unnamed thing' or 'supreme good' (Kristeva, 1989: 13). Whilst these things are in themselves perhaps un-representable because they cannot be signified, they can, argues Kristeva, be appealed to by 'invocations' (Ibid.). In this sense Cameron's Magdalene was designed less to retell the story of the Magdalene than to summon up this particular form of religious or spiritual feeling. Such images provide 'visions of the invisible'

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[106] See Richard Wollheim, (1991) who suggests that 'projection is an internal act that we carry out under instinctual guidance when there is either a mental condition of ours that we value (like love or curiosity) and that we find threatened, or one that we dread (like cruelty or melancholy) and by which we find ourselves threatened' (Wollheim, 1991: 57).

acting as substitutes or triggers for prayers (Ibid. 138).[107] Contemplating images of the Magdalene was part of women's experience, conveying sensations and sentiment that women then may have found difficult to put into words.

Whereas contemplation is encouraged by Gentileschi's painting as part of its social function as religious art, Cameron's photograph seems to engage us chiefly because of its beautiful aesthetic qualities. In the same way that Cameron merges the secular and sacred in her subject matter, the viewer's experience of these photographs also arguably combines these qualities to refer not only to an unsymbolisable God but also at the presence of the 'unpresentable Thing' or the 'lost archaic object' (Ettinger, 1999: 90). The idea of a 'lost archaic object' to which the feminine is drawn, perhaps desiring to be reunited, seems to exert a powerful influence on Cameron's work. I am reminded that in Rachel Howard's painting of female suicide discussed in Room One, the suicidal subject is also theorised by Kristeva as being attracted to the 'unpresentable thing', although on that occasion there were no religious connotations.

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[107] I note that Cameron's photograph, like Gentileschi's paintings, reflects the belief shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, that there is only one God who cannot be seen directly. Because images of God are taboo, Christianity has traditionally provided the image of Jesus, the two Marys and other religious figures to address the problem. In its focus on the Magdalene rather than God, religion provided women with an intermediary, somebody with whom they could identify in a way that would not have been possible with God. According to this view God is not worshipped directly but through the Magdalene..

Hope in the Prison of Despair (1887–1889)
Evelyn De Morgan
Oil on panel
23 x 25 inches

In Evelyn De Morgan's *Hope in the Prison of Despair* (1887–1889), we see a young woman locked in a castle dungeon. There are bars on the windows and chains fixed to the walls. She bends at the waist holding her head in one hand, projecting an attitude of despair. The other hand holds up the dark coloured drape that covers her body, revealing only her bare feet. Her face is covered by an arm that cradles her head. The figure fails to respond to the benevolent presence of a heavenly figure with a 'glowing halo and lamp' who stands behind her (Oberhausen, 1996: 39).

Insights into the beliefs that motivated De Morgan's painting are revealed through a series of automatic scripts which the artist made alongside her paintings. Producing this writing immediately before Freud published his work on the unconscious, De

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Morgan wrote about her thoughts and feelings on a daily basis in 'a stream of consciousness', noting her observations about life and the religious beliefs that provided the inspiration for her work (Ibid. 41). In these scripts De Morgan warns against the 'danger of becoming earth bound' and seeking gratification in the present rather than anticipating and preparing for the afterlife (Ibid. 44). In other words, De Morgan's writings reveal her belief that faith was the solution of earthly despair.

This point of view is expressed in her painting. The unnamed female subject turns away and fails to see the the angelic presence standing behind her offering her the light of faith. Here the failure to see signifies a subject restricted to an earthly life rather than seeing and being guided by the divine light provided by faith as was seen in Cameron's photograph.[108] The way De Morgan's subject turns away from the light contrasts sharply with the way Cameron's subject turns towards the light in her photograph. This is an expression of the refusal of De Morgan's subject to 'see' the light of God and embrace a life of faith.

Evelyn De Morgan's approach is strongly feminist because she uses her writing and her artwork to deliver her own message, warning firmly of the consequences of a life lived without faith. I note that her method of writing practice pre-empts the theory of writing practice as a tool for articulating the Self advocated by a later generation of feminist theorists, notably Hélène Cixous (b. 1937)[109].

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[108] T. J Clark reminds us that it is through looking, through the eye and its gaze, that we extend our bodies to another place, to things that are some distance away from us, and bring them into our experience. By looking, the eyes allow us to experience something that we do not physically occupy (Clark, 2006: 237).

[109] Hélène Cixous wrote: 'women must write herself: must write about women and bring women to their writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reason, by the same law, with the same goal. Woman must put herself into text and into the world and into history by her movement' (Cixous et al, 1976: 875–893).

Victorian lady (2013)
Christina Reading
Oil on canvas
36 x 36cm

Figure 85. *Victorian lady* (c. 1866)
Christina Reading
Archive photograph
22 x 30cm

In contrast to the allegorical images of religious melancholy offered by Artemisia Gentileschi, Julia Margaret Cameron and Evelyn De Morgan, my painting *Victorian Lady* (2013) rephrases a found photograph *Victorian Lady* (c.1866). My painting *The Victorian Lady* (2013), inspired by the found photograph, seeks to attend imaginatively to aspects of a lost and unknown feminine subjectivity pictured in the photograph through the painting process.[110] Through the act of painting I contemplate the life of the unknown women in the photograph and endeavour to bring her story into the present.

The formal photographic portrait *Victorian Lady* (c.1866) contrasts sharply with the atmosphere conjured up by Cameron's repertoire of photographs produced at the same historical moment, and reminds us again of how Cameron's aesthetic challenged established notions of photography at that time. The found photograph of the unknown Victorian woman provides a tantalizing glimpse into the lives of women at that time. The severity of the image suggests an attitude that is more in keeping with the moral message of De Morgan's paintings and automatic scripts,

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[110] This painting is part of a series of my works inspired by re-found Victorian photographs. Although not discussed within the vfm the complete series can be seen in the supporting CD titled *Documentation of Studio Work: A chronology, 2007–2014* (Insert One).

than Cameron's intensely emotional subjects. Her formal dress is an outward sign of the religious practices that may well have governed how she lived her life, and also signals the effects of these conventions on her subjectivity. Her stiff formal attire, style of dress and neatly covered hair contrast sharply with the motifs of folded drapery, loose flowing hair and exposed flesh with their erotic connotations depicted by Gentileschi, Cameron and De Morgan.

I find that the visual language of clothing and hair continues to be important to women figurative artists. In this context it is interesting to consider that we have now perhaps returned to the wearing of particular forms of religious symbols and dress, such as the niqab, burqa, or the display of the cross, and these are emerging as a key political issue, particularly for women. The burqa hides women's bodies behind dark flows of material. Whether the rationale for this clothing is to 'protect' women from the male gaze or to prevent women's bodies inciting men's desire, the normal rounded form of the woman's body is replaced by a strange and triangular shape.[111] Hence clothing, used as an expression of faith, is arguably also a mark of how woman is subjugated to the power and ideology of religion, a move that denies her body visibility and masks her desires.

Both Evelyn De Morgan's painting and my found photograph and painting are a potent reminder of the significance of religion in the lives of women during the nineteenth century. They return us, like Gentileschi and Cameron, to an era that predates Freud, when nineteenth-century Protestant theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1815–1855) propounded an explanation of religious melancholy as a notion of 'a state of religious inwardness' in which worldly pleasures are renounced to the extent that there is even a willingness to destroy the self for faith – for this higher ideal

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[111] For example, Cardinal Keith O'Brien (2012) called on Christians to 'wear proudly the symbol of the cross of Christ on their garments each and every day of their lives to indicate that you are trying to live by Christ's standards in your daily live' (Press Association Report: 7 April 2012). Cardinal Keith O'Brien's call is set against a backdrop in which two women were reportedly discriminated against when their employers barred them from wearing the symbol and they were fighting to get their cases heard in the European Court of Human Rights (Ibid.). This argument mirrors a debate in France provoked by the law passed in 2003 banning its subjects from wearing any visible sign of religious affiliation, which introduced a strict separation between the secular state and religious organisations. The law meant that Muslim women living in France (or visiting France) were banned from covering their faces in public by wearing the full hijab or niqab. France is the first country in Europe to ban a form of religious dress, despite its being regarded as a religious duty by some faiths.

(Eilitta, 2000: 499).[112] I would argue that this view is perhaps one of renewed significance in the light of Cavarero's (2009) discussion of the rising phenomena of the religiously motivated female suicide bomber discussed previously. What seems to unite De Morgan's, Kierkegaard's and Cavarero's ideas is the fact that religion allows the subject to live a life according to the 'higher ideals' provided by faith, and as such gives purpose and guides the actions, horrific or compassionate, of the subject. There is also a sense that in the contemporary context religion is used by the modern subject to counter the sense of psychic disintegration that Kristeva, writing in *Black Sun* (1989), placed at the heart of modern life.

Nevertheless there is a crucial difference between Evelyn De Morgan's reluctant convert and Cavarero's suicide bomber, in that the latter is driven to acts of 'horrorism' in the name of faith. Returning to look again at the writing of Robert Burton (1621) on religious melancholy provides an insight into the crux of the difference. Burton argued that religious melancholy was caused by an overzealous commitment to God. So that whilst loving God and living a life committed to that path is good, when this intention becomes hijacked and commitment to religious faith becomes an excuse for attitudes of hatred, violence and intolerances towards others, it distorts the true purpose of religion which is the love of God, resulting in religious melancholy. For Burton, acts of superstition and idolatry that are performed in the name of religion are the excesses of religion arising from man's worldly ambition rather than true spiritual concerns. (Burton, 1621: 311). Burton goes on to describe the symptoms of religious melancholy as 'love of their own religion, hate of

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[112] 'See Leena Eilitta (2000) for a description of Kierkegaard's notion of suffering in religious life and Franz Kafka's notion of suffering in artistic life, which the author argues the latter borrowed from Kierkegaard. 'Kierkegaard distinguished three modes of existence, the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious and defines these three modes in terms of making the right choice. In the lowest mode of existence, the aesthetic mode, the human being explores all the possibilities of life without committing himself to binding decisions about it. By contrast, in the ethical state a human being consciously wills his own development and has undertaken a binding decision about his life. As a result his actions are no longer determined by outer circumstances like those of an aesthetic individual. When entering the highest state, the religious state, a human being makes the most significant choice possible, since in the religious state he chooses himself, his true and essential self. Kierkegaard emphasised that the person who is to achieve the religious state has to be able to experience despair and to withdraw from the temporal world. He stresses that religious withdrawal does not mean mere passive surrender to existence but a state in which a person actively renounces temporal matters with a view to eternity. When describing the religious state Kierkegaard suggests that the precondition for this state is the suspension of ethical norms. He recalled that Abraham was only able to perform his "leap of faith" after having sacrificed the ethical norms upon which his life has depended, his duties as husband and father' (Eilitta, 2000: 503–508).

the other religions ready to undergo any danger for it, martyrs, blind zeal, blind obedience, vows, impossibilities' (Ibid. 346). For the sense of distortion, of excess, Burton's concept arguably provides an old lens through which it is pertinent to view current experience.

Dancing Nuns (2007)
Andrea Büttner
Woodcut on paper
120 x 180cm

Contemporary artist Andrea Büttner addresses the question of the role of faith today in secular societies from a slightly different perspective, in a series of works made to depict the traditions of the nuns living in a closed Carmelite convent in Notting Hill. *Dancing Nuns* (2007) is one of these artworks. It shows a group of seven figures in the midst of a joyous celebratory dance in what we might imagine is a field of deep grass. We recognise that these figures are nuns in part because of the habits they wear and because of the symbolic poses they adopt, hands raised above their heads in an act of salutation. There is a wonderful sense of movement, one figure is leaning backwards with arms raised above her head in praise, another circles her hands in a dancer's posture above her head, another leans forward, three join hands above their heads and a still figure looks on from the left of the picture.[113]

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[113] Andrea Büttner was the winner of the 2010 Max Mara Art Prize for Women for her video piece *Little Works* (2007) and accompanying drawings and woodcuts including *Dancing nuns* (2007). Büttner spent six months revisiting her interest in religious communities; first in Rome, then in the

The first thing that I notice about this print is the simple and direct way the figures are printed on the paper from woodcuts. Highly stylised and very expressive, yet technically unsophisticated, the visual form refers us back to depictions of melancholy in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance when the woodcut was also associated with religious icons and devotional works of that period.

The print reveals a small community of nuns hidden from view, separated out from society, and usually unseen, not lost, although certainly hidden, out of sight. Büttner therefore reminds us that within some communities in largely secular societies, religion and hence faith remains strong and is a key aspect of feminine subjectivity even today. It is interesting that Büttner's small woodcut *Dancing Nuns* (2007) is reminiscent of the young women in my own film *Country Dancing* (2010) (Figure 70) discussed in Room Two, because both artworks give visibility to small communities of women hidden from view. Büttner shows us a group of nuns who devote their lives to religious ideals, placing them outside the profane world, meaning that they withdraw from the ordinary temporal aspects of life and focus on a life devoted to the eternal. Their daily lives are governed by the pattern of religious routines and rituals that contemplate and enact the stories of suffering and loss that are at the heart of the Christian story.

Remembering a key aspect of Freud's thesis presented in Chapter Three, I note that Freud (1917) invokes the notion of the lost love object and our attitude to this lost object as the primary cause of our mourning and melancholy.[114] Reflecting on the Christian story I find that particular forms of lost objects are integral to its narrative

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Northern Italian city of Biella where she made woodcuts of them depicting their traditions. The resulting works were shown at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 2011 (Barnett, 2011).

[114] Freud's view of religion is premised on a theorisation about a melancholic relationship with the father god figure. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913) Freud explains that the origins of religion can be understood in terms of the Oedipus complex and the ambivalent relationship between father and son. According to Freud this relationship oscillates between love and hate, and echoes the relationship between father and sons first encountered in prehistory in his reworking of Darwin's theory of the primal horde. In the theory of the primal horde the sons of the tribe overpower and kill the father, but are overcome by guilt and unable to replace the father so instead they erect a totem and commemorate and worship him in annual ceremonies. The murder of the father is symbolically re-enacted through these annual ceremonies. It is this event that Freud theorised is projected again in the idealised object of religious worship, the father god and submission of the population to this father god, believing that the ambivalent relationship between father and son from which it stems is the first characteristic of faith (Palmer, 1997: 30). In Freud's account there is little consideration given to the part played by mothers and daughters in this narrative, except as spoils that men in the primal horde distribute between themselves.

and relate variously to the loss of loved ones (the death of Jesus), the loss of ideals (the loss of innocence or virtue), the loss of territory (the loss of a homeland), and the loss of earthly pleasures (sexual pleasure, material possessions, youth and beauty). For Freud (1917) all these forms of loss may result in either mourning or melancholy, depending on our relationship to these lost love objects. The lost objects associated with faith are enacted and contemplated in religious practice. The routines and rituals of religious practice provide a way for the lost objects associated with religion to be mourned and remembered. This rhythm of forgetting and remembering, loss and return is what shapes the subject, and conceivably is most apparent in the religious subjects who place these rituals at the heart of their daily lives, such as Büttner's nuns. The repeated 'recalling to mind' of past events is thus established as a key part of a religious sensibility. Ettinger (1999) reminds us that for Socrates the soul is immortal and that all knowledge is incarnated in the soul only to be forgotten in the trauma of birth, so that what one perceives to be learning is in fact a remembering of what is forgotten (Ettinger, 1999: 90). In this sense what is recalled through religious practice is this forgotten knowledge of God, and in the sense that religious practice attempts to makes conscious what was previously unconscious to ease suffering, it overlaps with Freud's thinking.

The Joyful Mysteries (2007)
Christina Reading
Video projection
20 minutes

To illustrate this point we reach the last work in Room Three, *The Joyful Mysteries* (2007), in which I depict a woman saying the English Rosary in a British Catholic church.[115] The routine of saying the rosary is still undergone in my local church by small groups of women coming together two days a week in a regular practice of

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[115] This was filmed at St Mary's Church, Brighton in February 2007. The *Joyful Mysteries* are traditionally said on Mondays, Saturdays and Sundays from Advent to Easter except during Lent. The *Joyful Mysteries* cover key events in the story of the life of Christ: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the birth of Jesus, and the finding of Jesus after three days in the temple.

meditation and prayer. The film shows the ritual of saying the rosary as a prolonged (twenty minutes) intense and meditative experience that, like Gentileschi's and Cameron's earlier images of the Mary Magdalene, requires the viewer to reflect on the joys and sorrows in the life of another. Women saying rosaries are encouraged to respond to not only the losses associated with the Christian story and the sorrow this brings, but also to attend to the sufferings of others with love. It emphasises once again the importance of 'recalling to mind' central to a religious subjectivity and, as I have discussed in Room Two, the notion that the feminine is tied to the contemplation of the other (Ettinger, 1999: 90). Religious imagery from the past visualises a largely lost world, in which the subject gives time and space to reflect on the melancholy of others and, in so doing, eases their own plight and extends their capacity for love.

However as, Michael Palmer has suggested, our attitude to lost love objects is not static, but shifts with our age and changing attitudes (Palmer, 1997: 27). For example, the tears of Gentileschi's *Magdalene* are wept for the lost ideals of virtue, chastity and religious faith, and her painting pictures the acute melancholy caused by the tension between an impossible ideal and lived experience. This aspect of Gentileschi's painting collides with Freud's belief outlined in his 1908 article 'Sexual morality and the modern nervous system', that the clash between the demands of the religious life and libidinal impulse result in extreme religious melancholy as people fail to live up to religious ideals.[116] Julia Margaret Cameron's version of the Mary Magdalene, in *I Call, I Follow, I Follow. Let Me Die* (1867) suggests a more defiant and unruly attitude, hinting at a challenge to the roles attached to women in the Christian story. As women's attitude to this lost ideal of virtue and religion has changed with the rise of secular attitudes in the West, the power of this lost ideal as a source of our melancholy has changed too. Many women no longer strive to meet this impossible ideal, yet its power as a standard bearer of a life lived for the spirit can remain as a powerful memory trace within culture even today.

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[116] Freud's article charts the suffering in relation to the sexual instinct. According to Western Christian doctrine, sex is sanctioned only within marriage, imposing a demand of abstinence which, argues Freud, is almost impossible to fulfil, and the result is repression and neurosis on a large scale. This conflict between the religious ideal of virtue or sexual abstinence and the instinctual life can cause, argues Freud, acute human suffering (Freud, 1908).

In relation to this we can turn again to Pollock who argues that the social function of religious practice, and its artworks 'allows into but manages on behalf of the socio/symbolic ensemble the social order, affectivity, intensity, mysticism of the self' (Pollock, 1998: 103). In other words, it provides a 'channel for imaginary and corporeal phantasy' and excess of feeling typically through rituals, prayers and other devotional practices (Ibid. 102). Whereas in the Renaissance these feelings were routed through religious iconography, later imagery became 'sacrificed soma, dreams and pleasures of the subject' anticipating the birth of psychoanalysis and modernism in which the subject became 'responsible for their own imaginary' (Ibid.). One of the interesting things about this argument perhaps is that it gives a privileged place to artworks as conduits for the excess of feeling and the imaginary in society. This suggests that artworks are not just representations of melancholy, but also provide a way to manage the flow of these emotions in and between subjects, so that the absence of images of women's melancholy means these emotions and this imaginary get stuck in the same manner as outlined in Freud's account of melancholia.

In contrast to the messages conveyed by the religious imagery discussed so far, Freud famously argued in his broader theses 'Totem and taboo' (1913), 'The future of an illusion' (1927), and 'Civilization and it's discontents' (1930), that religion is a myth created by man in need of a protective father figure. Whilst acknowledging the value of religion for civilisation, Freud argued that it is only by abandoning religion and replacing it with a society based on rationality and science that it will be possible to remove oppression. Freud's work on religion was important to his thesis on melancholy because he advocated that religion is the source of mankind's melancholy.

Yet even for the secular person in the West, religious imagery still continues to have an effect on women's subjectivity. Even today iconic religious imagery of the key female protagonists in the Christian story, the Virgin Mary or the Magdalene,

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continue to provide an undertow to current visual experience in West.[117] The contents of churches, museums and art galleries and their reproductions remind us that religion is part of our heritage and part of culture now. Although religion and faith may not be part of experience for some women today, culture retains an attachment to this visual history. It is embedded in our collective memory, perhaps creating a continued human need for such imagery to represent our experiences, despite the erosion of religious faith in the West.

However, given that the West consists of largely secular societies, why does religious imagery still resonate and have a powerful effect on our lives? Kristeva has argued that this is because it continues to provide symbols and metaphors for our experience of loss more generally (Kristeva, 1989). For Kristeva, religious imagery has a unique ability to provide representation of the psychological processes of separation and loss that structure the process of our individualisation, birth, weaning, separation and death: that which Kristeva refers to as 'that rupture at the very heart of the absolute subject' (Ibid. 132).

Hence religious imagery signifies our becoming, or the critical experiences of loss that trigger our emergence as an individual. Crucially, from the Freudian perspective (as discussed in Chapter Three), these incidents of loss trigger changes in subjectivity, and it is for Kristeva the key function of biblical texts to symbolise these transitions or borderline states:

> 'The bible is a text that thrusts its words into my losses. By enabling, enabling me to speak about my disappointments, though, it lets me stand in full awareness of them.
>
> This awareness is unconscious, so be it, but, it causes me as a reader of the Bible to resemble somebody who lives on the fringe, on the lines of demarcation within which my security and fragility are separated and merged. Perhaps that is where we might discover the sacred value of the text – a place that gives meaning to these crises of subjectivity' (Kristeva, 1995: 119).

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[117] See David Barrett (2009) who argues that despite the history and heritage of Christianity, since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, religion has been in decline in the West, notably in Europe, Canada and Australasia, and that these societies have overall become more secular and less religious (Barrett, D., 2009).

However, the problem with this reliance on religious imagery to represent our losses is that it continues to provide representations that have meaning for us but, in doing so, these forms of representation deplete us of that which makes us human: our ability to make symbols of our experience that are not warped by religious ideology. Hence the images discussed in this room so far are powerful because they speak not just of women's struggle with loss, the lost ideal of virtue, but of the fragile and transitory subjectivity that accompanies these experiences. In Freudian terms such an attachment would be regarded as melancholic – melancholic because the continued refusal to mourn religion is seen as a barrier to fully coming to terms with our human experience. Kristeva said:

> 'Religion is our phantasmatic necessity to procure a "representation" (which could be animal, feminine, masculine, or parental, among others) that replaces the element that makes us what we are – our capacity to form symbols' (Kristeva, 1995: 221).

Furthermore, Kristeva argues that although the religious discourse and its characters do not solve melancholy in the sense that psychoanalysis attempts to, religion offers some solutions and a sense of catharsis that psychoanalysis could benefit from (Ibid.). Faith offers representation and forgiveness for our transgressions, revealing the continued attraction of religion and its representations even as it collides with a secular age. Pollock notes:

> 'Religious and literary representations possess real and imaginary effectiveness that comes closer to catharsis than to elaboration, it is a therapeutic device used in all societies throughout the ages' (Ibid.).

 Kristeva goes on to argue that psychoanalysis should pay greater attention to these 'sublimatory solutions' as well as strengthening a subject's cognitive abilities (Ibid.).

What then is the alternative to religious iconography? Ettinger writes, after the philosopher Jean Francis Lyotard (1924–1998), that artworks are places where the process of recalling or remembering these forgotten things or archaic lost objects can be worked through, to 'give traces to the invisible in the visible' (Lyotard, cited in Ettinger, 1999: 90). In this sense, works of art have the potential to manifest lost traces of women's experience without recourse to religious iconography.

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The works presented in this room therefore represent a feminine subjectivity that is sometimes at odds in many ways with contemporary life in the West: a subjectivity that is not shaped by consumerism, nor by sexual relations but by faith. This brings us back to the issue of Freud's definition of the lost object in women's experience of melancholy. Though Freud argues that the lost object for the girl is related to her first sexual experiences and the loss of the mother, the women artists in this room formulate the problem in terms of the women's refusal to see God and give rise to images that are all expressions of this denial.

The struggle with the temptations of the world is, for religion, at the heart of melancholy, and forgoing these things, the nuns in Büttner's image tell us, is what brings joyfulness. Melancholy is seen therefore as a positive, in terms of the losses associated with the Christian story and their own endeavours to renounce worldly pleasures in order to live life according to the principles of faith.

The representation of women's encounter with religion and questions of faith in a new age of global communication is important in part because of the rise of religious fundamentalism witnessed in different forms in countries including Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan during the early part of the twenty-first century, and the challenge they present to modernism and secularism. The rise of the religious state has severe implications, too, for women, because it often means the complete assertion of patriarchal authority, in the domestic just as much as the public sphere. The encounter of women living in Western secular states with these new manifestations of religious belief is made even more vivid and intense by global communication and media, so that women in the West can engage through social media or witness these events in a way that they could not before.. For instance, the violence of actions of religious regimes such as the Taliban against women, through rituals of punishment such as public stoning, is infiltrating the consciousness of women in the West and seems to sum up the global confrontation between democracy and religious extremism. In the context of social media this exchange might be viewed as an exchange between the 'I and the non I' as Ettinger theorised, yet I would add that

women in these contexts have differing amounts of power to bring their concerns into view, so that the exchange is also unequal and unfair (Ettinger, 1999). [118]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have made several suggestions. The first of these is that by working within the Western Christian tradition of art, Artemisia Gentileschi, Julia Margaret Cameron and Evelyn De Morgan all provided women of their day with representations of that narrative, but also with metaphors or symbols for the female viewer to reflect on their own emotional experiences. In looking at this imagery I have noted how the crucial question of seeing and sight is used as a key metaphor for faith, how blurred vision and tears are linked to altered perceptions and changed states of consciousness, and how blocking out the light or turning away from the light are all expressions of a denial of faith. The social function of religious imagery is to provide a site for the contemplation of the moral messages of the Christian story, but it is not just a historic feature of art history; it continues, as I have shown in the video *Joyful Mysteries* (2007), to be an important part of some women's religious practice today.

Second, I suggest that Freud's thesis is at odds with imagery that encourages faith, because it is premised on a 'modernist' view, that religion is what prevents people from becoming fully human. Nevertheless, despite this stance, Freud's thesis is helpful as a way of understanding changing attitudes towards what constitutes a lost object, and to recognise that the nature of what is regarded as lost shifts depending on prevailing attitudes to the Christian story. Freud's thesis is perhaps less helpful in explaining the continued attachment to and appreciation of religious imagery even in the secular West, and for explanations of this aspect of women's experience it may be necessary to look back beyond Freud to the writing of Robert Burton and others in this field. The women artists in this room picture are subjectivities shaped by faith and raise the question about whether women can find other beliefs around which to build their subjectivity in a secular world.

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[118] In Ettinger's theorisation of the Matrix she argues that 'I and the non I with the non I exchange traces / transcriptions of memory' of the traumatic thing (Ettinger, 1999: 90). In addition, 'tracers of the affected events of my others (including strangers) are unknowingly inscribed in me and mine inscribed in others' (Ibid.). Ettinger acknowledges that this exchange may be 'asymmetrical' in the sense that this exchange may be uneven. Such regimes reassert gender divides and roles in religion and present a challenge to secular states.

Third, I describe how the clash between religious extremism, democracy and the proliferation of digital imagery witnessed in the West brings new challenges of how to respond to the suffering some women experience under religious regimes. In the West an answer as to how to understand, represent and perhaps challenge a religious melancholy that causes women to kill and maim others might involve working with religious imagery of the past. Such historical imagery suggests a way forward in which it is possible to give time and space to acknowledge the religious melancholy of others, to contemplate their experience and perhaps in so doing to ease our own melancholy by expanding our current capacity to empathise. The question remains how to do this even within a secular context and to perhaps allow for a little of the joy that is pictured in Andrea Büttner's *Dancing Nuns* (2007).

Room Four: *In the Wake of Loss***: Mothers, Mourning and Melancholy**

Figure 86

Figure 87

Figure 88

Figure 89

Figure 90

Figure 91
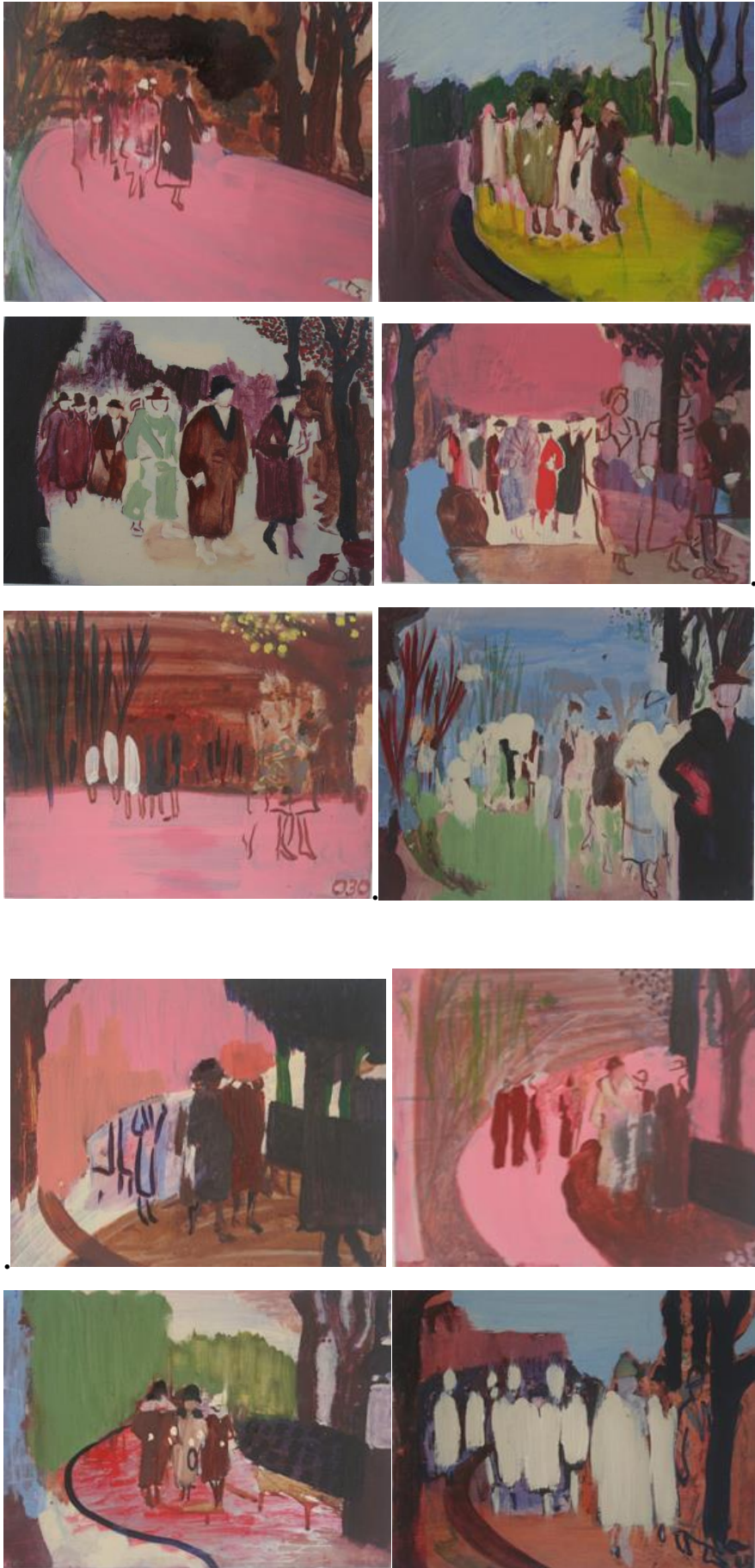
Figure 92

Works exhibited in Room Four

Figure 86. *Woman With Dead Child* (1903) Käthe Kollwitz, Etching, 440 x 386mm

Figure 87. *Gladys and Elvis* (1997) Elizabeth Peyton, Oil on canvas, 17 x 14 inches

Figure 88. *Demeter Mourning for Perephone* (1906) Evelyn De Morgan, Oil on canvas
19.25 x 17.25 inches

Figure 89. *Matrixial Borderlines No 1 Element* (1990–1991) Bracha Ettinger, Photocopy paper, ink
and oil paint, 160 x 35cm

Figure 90. *Missing* (2007) Christina Reading, Woodcut on paper, 6 x 6cm

Figure 91. *The Mothers* (2011) Christina Reading, Digital video projection of archive film, duration
60 seconds

Figure 92. *After The Mothers,* 1–10 (2012) Christina Reading, Oil on aluminium, 18 x 24cm

Introduction

The final room in my vfm brings together five images that refer in different ways to 'the bitterest of all earthly sorrows, the pang of the agonised mother for the loss of her child' (Jameson, 1879: 35). The images gathered here are *Woman With Dead Child* (1903) (Figure 86), an etching by Käthe Kollwitz; *Gladys and Elvis* (1997) (Figure 87), a painting by Elizabeth Peyton; and *Demeter Mourning for Persphone* (1906) (Figure 88), a painting by Evelyn De Morgan. Into this group I add Bracha Ettinger's subtle painting *Matrixial Borderlines No 1 Element* (1990–1991) (Figure 89); my own woodcut *Missing* (2007) (Figure 90); my film *The Mothers* (2011) (Figure 91), a digital video projection of archive film, and an accompainting suite of paintings titled *After the Mothers* (2012) (Figure 92).

Woman With Dead Child (1903)
Käthe Kollwitz
Etching
440 x 386 mm

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Woman With Dead Child (1903) is one of a series of drawings and charcoals that Kollwitz produced on the theme of maternal loss. Elizabeth Prelinger tells how Beate Bonus-Jeep, Kollwitz's friend, described this etching memorably as:

> 'A mother, animal-like, naked, the light coloured corpse of her dead child between her thigh bones and arm, seeks with her eyes, with her breath, to swallow back into herself the disappearing life that once belonged to her womb' (Prelinger, 1992: 42).

This is a posture that involves two people, the mother and the child, and therefore the mother's melancholy is not simply her own concern, but arises from and exists in the space created by her physical and emotional connection to her child. The mother's body engulfs the child and holds it tightly in a posture that closes out the world. Her head is downcast and her eyes are closed. No space is left between the living mother and the corpse of the child, not a hair's breadth, but despite this the posture speaks of the unbridgeable gulf between them, the distance between life and death, a distance that cannot be closed by their physical proximity. In this pose the mother bears the dead weight of the child, extending and deepening the motif of support that keeps surfacing in this lost figurative art history of women's melancholy.[119]

To construct this image of maternal loss, Käthe Kollwitz has reused the traditional figurative language of the Pietà which, in its orginal form, as I have discussed in ChapterTwo, pictures Mary holding the body of her dead son Jesus across her lap. Her use of the form, however, shifts away from the compositional strategy made famous by Michelangelo in his sculpture *Pietà* (1498–1499) (Figure 23), which focuses on the dead Christ, to one in which the mother's bowed head dominates the image. The mother in Kollwitz's Pietà is more aligned with the mature and woeful Mary seen in Raphael's perhaps less well-known woodcut of the *Pietà* (early sixteenth century) (Figure 22), discussed in Chapter Two, and contemplates, as Keith Harley said, the 'silent insistent sorrow of the mother', rather than the dead child (Harley, 1981: 28). Hence religious ideas give an underlining pictorial meaning to the figurative pose used by Kollwitz.

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[119] Here the mother supports the weight of the dead child whereas previously, as I have discussed in Room One, the woman's body was supported by external structures, such as the noose in Rachel Howard's painting *Pudenda Memba* (2007) (Figure 50).

Neither is the Kollwitz's reuse of this form a repeat of the idealised figure of the Virgin Mary shown in Michelangelo's sculpture, whose external beauty stands for the purity of her inner life. Instead we are presented with a naked aged figure, isolated and abandoned by God and the world. The abundant and luxurious robes of the Madonna represented in Michelangelo's sculpture have disappeared, replaced by rags. Similarly, the gentle curves of the Madonna are substituted by a bony, angular creature. This suggests some equivalence between the state of mind of Kollwitz's grief-stricken mother and the motifs of partial and dishevelled clothing and malnourished body to suggest a subjectivity that has slipped beyond culture. The motif of partial clothing I note is also used in Rachel Howard's images of female suicide presented in Room One (Figures 56–58) and Tracey Emin's drawing of female sexuality shown in Room Two (Figure 69).

Made in 1903, Kollwitz's image is particularly poignant because her son Peter modelled for this picture when he was a child and was later killed in World War One aged eighteen (Bittner, 1959: 8). Rachel Barnes adds that the death of Kollwitz's son provided the catalyst for her to represent the losses experienced by mothers in World War One and World War Two in her artworks (Barnes, 1994: 54).

The stark display of a mother's grief and the austere picture of a child's death that Kollwitz offers, seems to resurrect a way of mourning that precedes the English Reformation, in which more violent and physical displays of lamentation were accepted (Barasch, 1976). Its sober message of death also rivals the power of Hans Holbein's picture *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521), previously discussed, but arguably addresses the question of death from the perspective of the feminine experience. It represents what mothers fear more than their own death: the death of their child.

Gladys and Elvis (1997)
Elizabeth Peyton
Oil on canvas
17 x 14 inches

The next work in Room Four is Elizabeth Peyton's *Gladys and Elvis* (1997), a small-scale colourful and gestural painting. In the painting the young Elvis Presley is held in the gentle and protective embrace of his mother and placed under her watchful gaze.[120] Here, significantly, Peyton's painting is based once again on a posture involving two people, but this time the mother enfolds her living and thriving son.

Although the mood of Peyton's painting *Gladys and Elvis* is very different to Kollwitz's etching, it nevertheless shares the common characteristic of asserting what Kaja Silverman refers to as the 'trope of the maternal voice' (Silverman, 1988: 72). With perhaps a certain feminist ambivalence, the painting gently presents the point of view of the unknown mother into the story of a famous son.[121] Unlike the mother in Kollwitz's etching, *Gladys and Elvis* (1997) portrays a quiet form of maternal melancholy, in which the mother's slightly downward gaze betrays a gentle and tranquil despondency. The painting is affecting perhaps because it is based on a 1950's photograph and reflects on a moment in post-war culture in the West when to be a housewife and a mother was an ideal which was difficult for women to escape. The mother was and arguably still is placed at the centre of domestic life, accused of

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[120] This painting is one of a number of paintings that Elizabeth Peyton produced for her exhibition '*Live Forever*' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 2008 which addressed the theme of mothers and famous sons; others which address this theme included *Constance Wilde and Son* (1996) and *Jackie and John* (1999).

[121] *Gladys and Elvis* (1997) provides an image of the child as held within 'the sphere of the mother's voice' (Silverman, 1988:72).

being over-protective or possessive of her child but also responsible for preparing her child to face life alone.

The narrative of the home-loving mother devoted to her children has a religious underpinning. On the one hand, Peyton's representation of the relationship between mother and son reiterates the construct of the maternal that the West signalled by means of the Virgin Mary. This cult, Kristeva argues, establishes *Mother Mary* as a woman willing to suppress her own needs to enable her son to take his rightful place in society. But this desire of the mother to serve her son, Kristeva reminds us, complicates the relationship between mother and son within patriarchy. Many mothers, as Mary and Gladys's examples show, undertake the role willingly. This means that Mary's downward gaze should not be viewed simply as the subjugation of the mother in patriarchy, but instead seen as an 'indication of the mother's willingness to serve the destiny of her child, to be anonymous' (Kristeva, 1987: 263). It is this complexity and attitude that *Gladys and Elvis* (1997) seem to repeat. The mother willingly offers her young son a loving and protective embrace, enabling him to confront the world and take a public place within it, but the shadow of the Virgin Mary falls over this painting, echoing the roles ascribed to mother and son in the Christian story. Once again a contemporary painting finds a link with a religious premise. The mother in Peyton's painting, however, also seems to understand the complication that despite the constraints of this ideological framework serving a child is an opportunity for the mother to experience love for another rather than love for the self. Kristeva suggests:

> 'The arrival of a child guides the mother through a labyrinth of a rare experience, the love for another person, as opposed to love for herself, for a mirror image, or especially another person with which the "I" becomes merged (through amorous sexual passion)' (Kristeva, 1995: 219).

From this perspective motherhood creates an opportunity for the female subject to put the Self before the Other, and in so doing to create an ontological state that Levinas, as discussed in Room Three, tells us is orientated towards the future and strongly associated with the feminine (Levinas cited in Pollock, 1998: 108).

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By this Levinas does not mean that the Self should subordinate itself to the Other but the recognition that to be fully ourselves, and by implication overcome our melancholy, involves not the assertion of narcissistic self-interest, but the recognition that our own ontology cannot be separated from the ontology of others and that therefore in serving others we serve ourselves. The ever present challenge for mothers, then, is perhaps to ensure that their own needs are served rather than merely subjugated.

Moreover, for Levinas, 'the heart of the heart, the deepest of the feminine is dying in giving life, in bringing life into the world, I am not emphasizing dying but on the contrary, future' (Levinas cited in Pollock, 1998: 108). Women, as subjects and as mothers, may be viewed as having heightened awareness of the feminine because they have the potential to give birth, to give life; hence their experience is linked to the future. From this perspective we might suggest that when a mother mourns for a child she also mourns the loss of a future.

Demeter Mourning for Persephone (1906)
Evelyn De Morgan
Oil on canvas
19.25 x 17.25 inches

In contrast, the subject matter in Evelyn De Morgan's oil painting *Demeter Mourning for Persephone* (1906) is based on ancient Greek mythlogy, which tells the tale of how Hades (god of the underworld) steals Demeter's (goddess of agriculture) daughter, Persephone (maiden of spring) and forces her to live with him in the underworld. In De Morgan's image Demeter, the mother of Persephone, is pictured as a solitary grieving figure, kneeling in a barren landscape, her head bowed with hands covering her eyes. She is dressed in golden robes, with 'red poppies

falling from hair made of wheat' (Yates, 1996: 71). Although the picture's narrative is constructed, like the previous pictures in this room, in relation to two subjects, this time the painting's subject matter is the relationship between mother and daughter, rather than mother and son.

De Morgan's picture expands that part of the myth that focuses on Demeter's solitary grief, underlining the physical separation between mother and daughter. The figurative language De Morgan uses is unusual in showing Demeter alone, since male artists of the nineteenth century typically focused on the abduction of Persephone or the moment when she is returned from the underworld. *Return of Persephone* (1891), by Lord Frederic Leighton, shows Hermes (Mercury) delivering a pale, fragile Persephone back to her mother Demeter, thus restoring sun and life back to the earth. *Proserpine* (1874), by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, portrays Persephone with her symbol, a pomegranate.[122] Elsie Lawton Smith suggests, (after Joseph Kestner), that these images of Persephone should be viewed as attempts to reinforce male authority in the face of a myth that was clearly based on matriarchal tradition (Lawton Smith, 2002: 96). De Morgan's focus on the single female figure can therefore be read as radical and feminist in the sense that it reasserts the matriarchal perspective and, like Kollwitz's etching, focuses on the solitary grief of the lone mother.

According to the legend, Demeter refused to allow the earth to bloom until her daughter was released, and Zeus, fearful that mortals would starve, allowed Persephone to return to her mother for six months of the year. Consequently, each year is marked by seasons of plenty and scarcity in accordance with Persephone's cyclic periods of absence and return to her mother.[123] The cycles of separation and

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[122] This is the very famous portrait of Jane Morris, Rossetti's lover and the wife of the artist William Morris.

[123] For the contemporary viewer of this picture the myth may need a little explanation as it is not common knowledge as it would have been in De Morgan's day. See Elise Lawton Smith (2002) who provides a detailed account of this myth. In summary she explains that Demeter was the goddess of agriculture, an earth goddess and the mother goddess who watched over the harvest and grain. It was Demeter's love and happiness for her daughter that kept the earth in bloom, bestowing on it a never-ending season of good weather and abundant crops. One day Persephone wandered out of her mother's sight whilst picking flowers and Hades rose up from a crack in the earth to steal her. It was according to this myth Eros, that disruptive god of love, who shot a love arrow into Hades' heart whilst he was looking at Persephone picking flowers, highlighting the disruptive nature of love already discussed in RoomTwo. Overcome by grief, Demeter searched for her daughter and finally found out that Hades had taken her into the shadowy underworld. The thought of her precious, lively

reunion represented by Evelyn De Morgan's *Demeter Mourning for Persphone* have their theoretical explanation in Demeter's defiant attitude to loss. In a testament to feminine power, Demeter battles against the oldest and most powerful of Olympians, Hades, to demand the return of her daughter Persephone.[124] The defiant attitude of Demeter overlaps, in mood, with the principled attitude to loss observed as a theme in Kollwitz's print but also in Julia Margaret Cameron's photograph *Mariana in the Moated Grange* (1875) (Figure 66) presented in Room Two. The acts of resistance and protest over loss represented by Kollwitz and De Morgan challenge traditional representations of maternal loss rooted in Christian theology with its insistence on female passivity. Instead these artists make the female protagonist active and dangerous because they make their thoughts and feelings public (Silverman, 1988: 164). Dangerous too because, as artist Lubaina Himid explains, 'after melancholy comes revenge' (Himid cited in Pollock, 1999: 189). For Kollwitz and De Morgan the seat of the mother's melancholy is not just her dead or missing child, but also the symbols of patriarchy towards which a quiet rage is expressed. The pictures become the means, therefore, not just to express grief but also anger.

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daughter trapped in the shadowy wasteland of Hades broke Demeter's heart, and she vowed that until her daughter was returned to her the earth would never bloom. Zeus, fearful that all mortals would die, ordered Hades to return Persephone to her mother. Hades agreed knowing that Persephone would have to return to him because she had eaten a single seed of pomegranate, the food of the dead. Zeus decreed that because Persephone had only eaten one seed and had done so unwillingly she would only have to stay in the underworld for half of each year, and in the other half of the year she would be allowed to return to her mother. Consequently each year, during the months when Persephone returns to her, Demeter makes the earth green and blesses the harvest. During the months when Persephone has to stay in the underworld, Demeter mourns, and in her grief and loneliness she turns the earth barren and cold (Lawton Smith, 2002: 96).

[124] See Panofsky who recounts that 'as the highest of the planets and the oldest of the Olympians, and as former ruler of the Golden age, he (Hades) could be giver of riches and power. Nevertheless as a dry and icy star, and as a cruel father, God dethroned, castrated and imprisoned in the bowels of the earth, he was associated with old age, disablement and sorrow, all kinds of misery and death' (Panofsky, 1943: 166).

Matrixial Borderlines No 1 Element (1990–1991)
Bracha Ettinger
Photocopy paper, ink and oil paint
160 x 35cm

In this room I also present Bracha Ettinger's small subtle painting *Matrixial Borderlines Element No 1* (1990–1991). In Ettinger's painting the female figure is viewed from behind, turned away from our gaze, looking at a scene we cannot witness (Pollock, 1995: 61). To understand the potential significance of this figurative language, I turn to Ettinger's account of the story that inspired her painting. Ettinger tells us that the woman in her painting is imagined to be Naomi, from the biblical book of Ruth, who according to legend is driven from her homeland with her family by a devastating famine. Once settled in a new country her two sons marry, but tragedy strikes again when first Naomi's husband and then her sons die, leaving her with only her daughters-in-law. After the famine Naomi, grieving both her husband and her sons, returns home with one of her widowed daughters-in-law, Ruth (Pollock, 1996: 267). The two women, Naomi and Ruth, are thus united by grief, one by the loss of a son, the other by the loss of a husband. Ruth decides to 'follow after' her mother-in-law and 'makes a journey to become part of her mother-in-law's people and take on Naomi's God' (Pollock, 1996: 276). Ruth says to her mother-in-law: 'entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither you go'est, I will go' (Ruth I: 16 cited in Pollock, 1996: 276). Ruth does this 'because she loves her and shares her grief' (Pollock, 1996: 276). Hence Ruth 'crosses a frontier' and commits to a shared future in which both women will care for Ruth's newly born son, thus going some way to restoring Naomi to motherhood (Pollock, 1996: 276). Pollock elaborates:

'To follow after is to both go behind and to be a future. Ruth makes a series of promises to her mother-in-law. She will go, she will stay, she will take on Naomi's people, she will take on Naomi's God. She affirms that where Naomi is buried she will be buried. She is committed to a future, which includes death. The *Book of Ruth* in the bible is a unique text, which narrates a covenant between two human subjects both of whom are women. Ruth's decision involves taking on something of Naomi – the two women share a grief, which passes between them just like the son, whom they both lost, one as mother, the other as wife, and they share the son whom Ruth will bear and will in effect be borne to Naomi. Naomi nurses Ruth's child' (Pollock, 1996: 276).

For Pollock the positioning of the subject is crucial because Ettinger places the spectator behind the subject 'spatially, the harvesters' and calls upon us to witness 'the cruel horror of those that were cut down, brutally harvested', not just according to the biblical legend of Naomi but also later in the twentieth century during the holocaust. For Pollock, like Ruth, 'we come after the reapers and must live with that knowledge' (Pollock, 1996: 270).

Ettingner's painting is part of a series of paintings which show the back view of the subject. It is a motif that is repeated other works including *Women–Other Thing No 3* (1990–1992) and *Women–Other Thing No 7* (1990–1992). I reflect that this view also emerged as significant in my paintings *Dream Sequence No. 3* and *Dream Sequence No. 9* (2011) (Figure 93) which were presented as a part of an installation of paintings made in response to my archive film *Country Dancing* (2010) (Figure 70), discussed in Room Two.
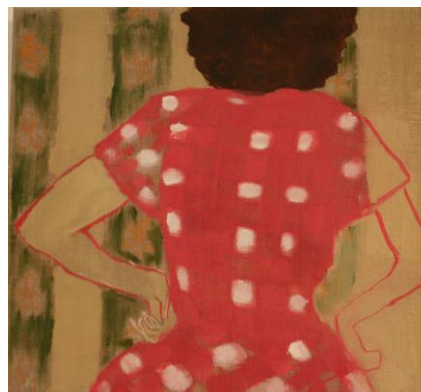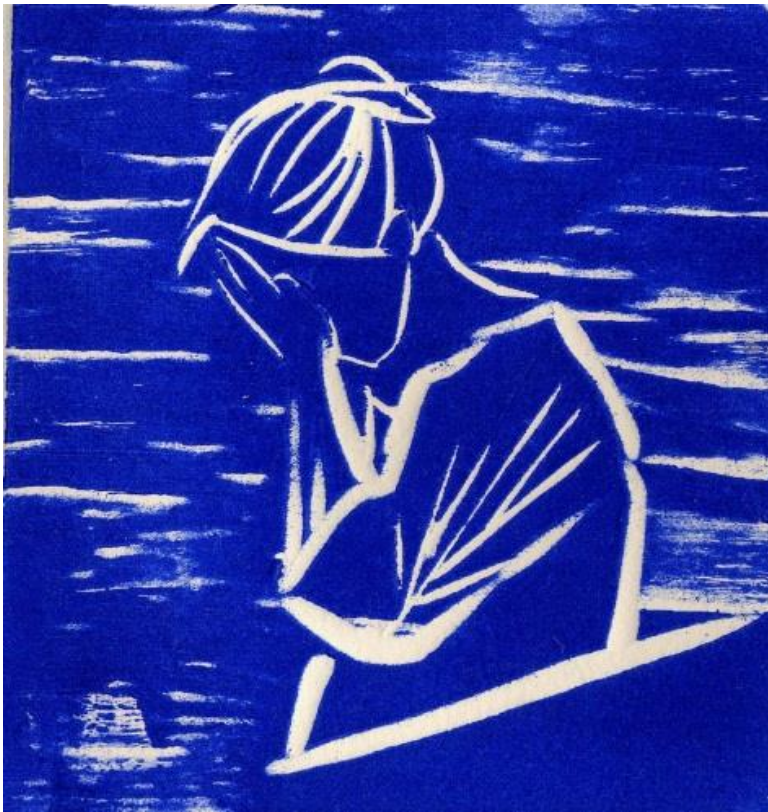

Figure 93. *The Dream Sequence, Nos. 3 and 9* (2011)
Christina Reading

Perhaps, then, the back views I encounter in my own paintings are significant because they invite the viewer to witness the losses suffered by young women from a different historical moment, in order to commit to a shared future for women, as in Ettingers painting.

Missing (2007)
Christina Reading
Woodcut on paper
6 x 6cm

The use of the solitary figurative form is also significant in my woodcut *Missing* (2007). It emphasises, like Evelyn De Morgan's painting, the separation of the mother Kate McCann from her daughter Madeleine in 2007, in a story that has some parallels to the ancient myth of Demeter mourning Persephone. Perhaps we are asked to imagine by press reports from the time that Kate McCann's daughter was also stolen from her by the 'underworld', but this time the mother is forced to live with a perpetual uncertainty about whether her daughter is alive or dead, and whether there will ever be a reunion. Although the women in De Morgan's painting and my woodcut *Missing* (2007) are pictured alone, their feelings are understood in relation to their stolen daughters and like the figure in De Morgan's painting my artwork pictures the bowed head and hands covering eyes to signify an internalised gaze.

Under the current imperative to capture and judge the emotional lives of others, the media scrutinised the mother of Madeleine McCann, Kate McCann, producing endless images of her ordeal. Her expressions, her posture, were endlessly analysed for visible signs of grief or guilt. In contrast, Gerry McCann, Madeleine's father, was not judged in the same way. Motherhood, therefore, still invites severe judgement on those who are viewed as having failed or transgressed in some way. It was Kate McCann, for example, who was held responsible for leaving her children asleep and alone in a hotel room whilst she and her husband ate dinner at a local cafe a short distance away. In exactly the same way that Eve is held responsible for the sins of men, so too is Kate McCann held responsible for the event that led to the disappearance of her daughter. The endless mourning, the enduring melancholy of Kate McCann, is underlined by the fact that a new investigation into Madeleine's disappearance opened in April 2012.

The Mothers (2011) Christina Reading, Digital video projection of archive film

Lastly there remains my film *The Mothers* (2011) and the accompanying sequence of paintings *After the Mothers* (2012). The film is a short sixty-second sepia coloured

digital film projection which brings to the fore the experience of an unknown group of mothers separated from their children in the 1920s in the aftermath of the First World War. The film shows a band of mothers on a termly visit to their children at the Southern Railway Servants' Orphanage in Woking.[125] The orphanage was for 'fatherless children' of former employees sponsored by the Southern Railway Company. Hence *The Mothers* (2011) speaks of a melancholy experienced by women who, because of the conditions of patriarchy, were judged to have neither the means nor social ability to care for their children. The series of paintings *After the Mothers* (2013) seeks to engage imaginatively with this subject matter through my interpretation of the original archive film.

Dressed in what we might suppose to be their finest coats and hats, the mothers walk along a winding path, rhythmically in small clusters of twos or threes, linked arm in arm, as they move towards their destination, which is always out of view. They direct their gaze into the far distance or towards each other acknowledging the mutuality of their enterprise. Their mood seems joyful and excited, and although we cannot know the thoughts and feelings of the mothers, we can imagine how they might eagerly anticipate the reunion with the 'lost' children from whom they have been separated.

For exhibition purposes the short and digitally slowed film is, like my film *Country Dancing* (2010) in Room Two (Figure 70), projected as an endless repetitive loop. This act of repetition and my efforts to make artworks that are aesthetically pleasing

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[125] *The Mothers* (2011) is a short extract from a compilation film recording the daily life of the children, relatives, staff and volunteers at *The Southern Railway Servants' Orphanage* (1926–1933). The original film opens with exterior shots of the buildings and grounds that comprise the Southern Railway Servants' Orphanage. A description of the entire film notes: 'Waterloo Bessie, a dog who helps to collect contributions for the orphanage (primarily at Waterloo Station), is filmed in close-up before being seen leading a church parade of marching bands, local people and banners. Laundry workers and auditors work behind the scenes whilst the orphans study in the library, practice needlework and woodwork, and display their bathroom washing techniques for the camera. A child's leaving outfit is laid out on a table, ready for collection. Mothers walk to the orphanage for their monthly visit. Guests pose for the camera at a New Year's party. The foundation stone is laid for the new hospital block; a service of dedication is performed at its opening in 1930. Sports Day sees the children riding aboard a train of the Southern Miniature Railway, and competing against each other in egg-and-spoon races, three-legged races and a tug-of-war battle. The winning children collect their prizes after the mothers and staff competes in running races. In 1933 the children perform an Empire Day Pageant, dressing up in national costumes and presenting gifts to a girl who represents Britannia' (S.A.S.E, 2011).

from this imagery is a sign perhaps of the continued significance of this hidden narrative to my own and other women's melancholic subjectivity today. As Pollock highlights, 'repetition in an artistic field, Jacqueline Rose reminds us, represents a psychic knot, "an insistence that is, the constant pressure of something hidden but not forgotten", a place of recurrent return from which there is no release in which the anxiety is generated in the belated recognition of loss can be disguised through a surplus of aesthetic pleasure' (Rose in Pollock, 1998: 89).

The film quietly reminds us that the response of the mothers may be communal and collective rather than solitary and individualistic. Looking back through art history I find the motif of a band of mothers is also found in Kollwitz's strident image *The Mothers* (1922–1923) (Figure 94) where women huddle together for comfort against the suffering inflicted on them and their families by war and poverty. This image is seen as a 'rallying cry' to mothers to stand up against these events and circumstances (Harley, 1981: 22).

Figure 94. *The Mothers (Die Mütter)* (1922–1923)
Käthe Kollwitz
Woodcut
Sixth print in a series of seven called *War (Kreig)*

Figure 95. *Christ Taking Leave of His Mother* (c.1520)
Huber Wolf
Oil on fir
95.5 x 68.2cm

This motif can also be seen much earlier in the sixteenth century, where paintings that depict the events in the life of the mother of Jesus also depict a collective response to maternal loss. For instance, in Huber Wolf's painting *Christ Taking Leave of His Mother* (c.1520) (Figure 95) Mary collapses after hearing the news of the crucifixion, but she is supported and held by a small cluster of three women. In her discussion of women's mourning historian Patricia Phillippy argues that its communal focus can be traced back even further to the fourth century, noting:

> 'Lamentation is often depicted as a group activity involving a community of women, united by shared sorrow and often bonds of kinship, who join together to mourn' (Phillippy, 2001: 78).

So the communal nature of women's response to loss and the support they offer each other on these occasions has a pre-existing history, which I have noticed in the work of other women figurative artists and revived for my film *The Mothers* (2011).

The film also demonstrates the importance of rhythmic patterns of separation and return in the mothers' experience of loss. For the mothers, long periods of separation from their children are punctuated by short reunions; after months apart mothers will see their children for a few hours on visit days. These reunions, like Demeter's reunion with Persephone in the ancient myth, will always be characterised by seasons of absence and presence, and are therefore partial and incomplete. The *Mothers* therefore adds another note to the motif of rhythmic intervals of separation and reunion seen in De Morgan's painting.

Nevertheless, looking back at these experiences through archive film, the demeanour of the mothers suggests an acceptance of the circumstances that have given rise to the separation from their children, and a shared pleasure in the anticipation of a brief reunion. Restoring this film brings to the fore the understanding that the mothers' experience of loss in this earlier historic moment is camouflaged by their joyful mood. Yet from a contemporary perspective, I know that something important in terms of loss is brought into focus in this film: the routine separation of mothers from their children. I view my effort to salvage visual imagery of women's experience from the film archive as a way to acknowledge and bear witness to the

experiences of mothers in the past, which helps to counter the persistent marginalisation of imagery of maternal loss. This film would have remained lost in the archive, unremembered, except for my efforts to recuperate it and digitise it. This gesture on my part brings together notions of past and present in a way that allows us to represent aspects of feminine experience lost to history and also perhaps creates an opportunity for women today to consider the effect of this history.

Freud, melancholy and mothers

At one level the artworks discussed here draw attention to the failure of Freud's theory of 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917) to consider the psychological suffering associated with motherhood. Kristeva commented:

> 'The fact remains as far as the complexities and pitfalls of maternal experience are involved, Freud only offers a massive nothing, which, for those that care to analyze it, is punctuated with this or that remark on the part of Freud's mother, proving to him in the kitchen that his own body is anything but immortal and will crumble away like dough; or the sour photograph of Marthe Freud, the wife, a mute whole story. There thus remained for his followers an entire continent to explore, a black hole, one indeed where Jung was the first to rush in and get his esoteric fingers burnt' (Kristeva, 1987: 255).

Freud's silence could be interpreted as his assumption that motherhood provides an answer to all of women's melancholy and that mothers therefore should not have a place on the psychoanalyst's couch. Kristeva writes:

> 'Among the patients analyzed by Freud one seeks in vain for mothers and their problems. One might think that motherhood was a solution to a neurosis and by its very nature ruled out for psychoanalysis as a possible other solution' (Ibid. 254).

Instead, Kristeva suggests, women view things differently, arguing that all women's pain and suffering should be scrutinised through the lens of their relationship to motherhood:

> 'One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain: the child represents it and henceforth settles in it, it is continuous. Obviously you may close your eyes, cover up your ears, teach courses, run errands, tidy up the house, think about objects, subjects. But a mother is always

branded by pain: she yields to it. And a sword will pierce your own soul too' (Ibid. 241).

In addition, the relationship extends, argues Kristeva contentiously, to childless women, because their position is defined in relation to this experience whether they have children or not.

Kollwitz's etching *Woman With Dead Child* (Figure 86) was produced in 1903, before Freud's pivotal study, and asserts the mother's experience as first and foremost embodied. It eloquently draws attention to the way in which woman's psychological experience of maternal loss is bound up with her corporal experience. In the post-Freud era, in *Tales of Love* (1987), Kristeva places the physical connection between mother and child at the heart of her discussion about the body's role in a woman's psychological development, and the ways in which the body's externality affects the interiority of a subject (Grosz, 1990a: 82). From Kristeva's perspective, motherhood is therefore something that happens to women because of biology, because of the body; it has nothing do with agency or identity (Ibid. 90).

So whilst Kollwitz's etching refers to a psychological refusal or unwillingness of the mother to accept the gulf opened up by the child's death, Kristeva instead talks of a pre-existing divide that is brought about by the severance of the physical link between mother and child. Either way it seems, as Kristeva has argued, that there is a separation that occurs between mother and child, a distancing or loss, that is brought about by the body. She writes:

> 'There is this other abyss that opens up between the body and what is inside, there is this abyss between mother and child. What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and this internal graft and fold, which once the umbilical cord has been cut is an inaccessible other. My body and him, no connection'. (Kristeva, 1987: 255)

Ettinger's theorisation of the Matrix also encourages us to consider the significance of the corporeal relationship between mother and child. Ettinger reminds us that the 'mother carries the child in the womb with a similar awareness of I and not I' that affects the later pre Oedipal and Oedipal stages (Ettinger, 1992: 176). She suggests

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that pre-Oedipal experiences of the child in the mother's womb and the memory of this physical connection between them has a lasting effect on the child and its development that has the potential to give rise to a feminine symbolic.

Although Kollwitz's image is austere, the intensity of the emotion displayed by the mother, and the religious message associated with the composition of the Pietà, seem to call into question Freud's pivotal argument that the subject detaches itself from the lost love object leaving it free to form new allegiances. Instead Kollwitz's image, with the religious lineage of the Pietà, places this mother and all mothers in a perpetual state of mourning for, hence melancholy about, the dead child. After all, in the Christian faith believers are placed in a constant state of mourning and therefore melancholy for the Virgin Mary's dead son Jesus. There is no severance from this lost object.

As a way into understanding how Freud's theory can be related to the figurative language in Peyton's painting *Gladys and Elvis* (1997) (Figure 87), it is helpful to recall the arguments of Melanie Klein (1937) concerning the mother's responsibility for the emotional development of her child. Klein proposed that the process of detachment from the mother, of which detachment from the mother's breast is the first, is accompanied by loss, but, vitally, the positive role model of the mother helps the child to adjust to these changes.[126] Hence the mother and the mother's breast are the first lost objects. As we grow up, the imperatives of sexuality and hunger are slowly detached from the mother and this process of separation is what allows us to become well-adjusted individuals and to cope with episodes of melancholy later in life (Klein, 1937). Thus, Klein asserts, 'in detaching ourselves from the mother we finally become, by our different paths, grown men and women' (Ibid. 110).

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[126] Melanie Klein (1937) argued that because the baby at the breast is completely dependent on somebody else but has no fear of this because he/she doesn't yet recognise its dependence, the baby cannot initially distinguish between 'me' and 'not me'. The baby's first experience of the non-existence of something (the breast) is experienced as an overwhelming sense of loss. The baby becomes literally, according to Klein, 'tortured with desire and the whole of his world is one of suffering' (Klein, 1937: 9). Klein adds that this experience brings 'an awareness of love (in the form of desire) and the recognition of dependence (in the form of need) at the same moment as feelings of pain and threatened destruction within and without, a strike and an earthquake happened in the world and this is because he loves and desires and this brings pain and devastation' (Ibid. 10).

Crucially, this first experience of loss and the mother's role in guiding the child through this initial separation provides the model for future responses to loss, meaning that when we experience disappointment later in life the subject refers back to this experience. Furthermore, if this process happens too quickly, the child can lose faith and belief in the mother's goodness, resulting in a tendency to distrust and avoid what is good, as well as to hurt and destroy it out of disappointment and revenge. Such an argument is problematic from a feminist perspective because it holds the mother responsible not just for the child's development but also how the child adjusts to all subsequent experiences of loss. Melanie Klein argues that whilst the process of separating from the mother it is painful, it is also imperative that it occurs because it is this event that promotes the subject's desire to search for a new love object and fill the emptiness left by this original loss.[127] The painting *Gladys and Elvis* (1997) seems even more poignant when we discover that Elvis was an identical twin and that his twin Jesse Garon was stillborn (Dundy, 2004). This personal history manifests in the painting via the mother's protective embrace and her loving gaze towards her remaining son. Peyton's painting underlines the Freudian view, as articulated by Klein, that the mother is a sustained presence in our subjectivity and our ability to deal with loss.

On the other hand, I am reminded, as discussed in Chapter Three, that for the child who fails to separate from the mother the consequence is acute melancholia because without this separation there can be no replacement. As Kristeva states: 'No object can replace the mother, no sign can express the loss, the desire fails to emerge' (Kristeva cited in Lechte, 1990 b: 27). Within this scheme, the failure to separate from the mother results in mourning for a partial loss, which cannot be named or symbolised; 'the individual in that loss is weighted down by tears and silence' (Ibid. 35). Schiesari explains that 'the mother is not simply a lost object but that pre objectal thing whose loss precipitates one into risky and decentring possibilities in which objects can be lost or found' (Schiesari, 1992: 66). Arguably, mothers today are held responsible for the failure of their children to separate from them, and are

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[127] Lechte notes: 'from the very beginning of its unfolding, separation is psychically painful, a sense of loss or emptiness comes to exist where once there was a satisfying union with the mother' (Lechte, 1990b: 29).

hence deemed responsible for their melancholy, just as surely as they were in Peyton's reflection on motherhood in the 1950s pictured in *Gladys and Elvis* (1997).

Whilst the effect of the mother on the child's development and ability to deal with loss is well rehearsed from a Freudian perspective, less has been said about the impact on the mother of the process of separating from her child. It is interesting and puzzling to wonder why, in a contemporary world, where women are speaking about and giving visibility to many aspects of their experience, so little is still heard or seen on this topic. Where, for instance, are the images or theories of women dealing with the ubiquitous challenge of children leaving home, with its potent mixture of maternal sadness and joy? Where are the theories that deal with her painful experiences of separating from her child, or must all roads lead back to experience of her own mother?

Another example of the feminist challenge to Freud's thesis on mourning and melancholy is provided by De Morgan's painting *Demeter Mourning for Persephone*, (1906) (Figure 88). De Morgan's painting is important because it represents the bond between mother and daughter, a relationship largely ignored in Freud's theory (Spitz, 1990: 411). This is despite the fact that Freud was known to have read Ovid's tales and would have known the story of Demeter and Persephone (Ibid.) As Spitz argues, Freud's omission is surprising given that Demeter's behaviour overlaps with Freud's theory of object loss. She becomes 'sorrowful and depressed and bitterly indignant' at the loss of her daughter (Ibid.). Demeter 'turns her aggression inward, she tears her hair, refuses food and drink and ceases to bathe' (Ibid. 413). These symptoms are similar to the symptoms Burton (1621) and Freud (1917) used to characterise melancholy, in which the condition takes up all the energy of the subject. Demeter does not accept this scenario passively, but rages to assert herself as a mother who loves her daughter.

I have outlined in Chapter Three how, for feminist writers seeking to update Freud's theory, a daughter's melancholy begins with the mother whose devaluation arises from the overall depreciation of the female self, a situation that is incorporated within the daughter as a loss that forms her identity. In this situation what is lost is not only the maternal presence of the mother but also her cultural presence and the

means to signify her own experiences. I have included in my vfm artworks that point to powerful maternal figures, such as De Morgan's representation of Demeter, that are neither silenced nor passive in the world, to counter the sense of frustration and even alienation that mothers experience in culture and which is detrimental to the interests of women.

My film *The Mothers* (2011) takes us back to women for whom being separated from their children was an accepted part of life; these marginalised women seem to call to us from the past to acknowledge their plight. In Chapter Three I described how feminist attention has recently turned to address the way that the losses experienced by previous generations can still be active in our lives today (Butler, 2009; Ettinger, 2009). In part this is because those who experience loss put all their energies into survival, and have no time to mourn or experience melancholy; this important task is left to subsequent generations. I would argue that it is particularly important to give form and expression to the losses experienced by previous generations of mothers, not simply out of a sense of care to mothers from the past, but also because our own subjectivity is in part a consequence of the histories passed on to us from previous generations. So that, to reiterate Butler's argument, within each of us is the 'trace and grain' of our mother's suffering which needs to be acknowledged and mourned, and for which we experience melancholy (Butler, 2009). The film, with its repetitive rhythm of reunion and separation, demonstrates that for these women there is not just one episode of loss as Freud theorised but several. Ettinger proposes that losses may be partial rather than total and that these losses circulate in the matrixial space. She asks how such losses are worked through and mourned when such an endless cyclical process frames their experience.

Media and melancholy

The choice of media by the artists in this room reflects differences in terms of approaches to making the work. Kollwitz's image *Woman With Dead Child* (1903) (Figure 86) is an etching, a printing method that she selected in preference to painting to express her ideas. This choice was based on Kollwitz's belief that this medium could most powerfully deliver the overall ambition she had for her work – picturing the consequences of war, want and poverty on the German people. This

conviction stemmed, as Mina and Arthur Klein argue, from her encounter with printer Max Klinger's work and reading his Pamphlet, *Drawing and Painting* (1891). Klinger thought that 'the graphic arts can best express the darker aspects of life whilst painting, on the other hand, should be reserved for more celebratory themes' (Klinger, 1891 cited in Klein & Klein, 1972: 14). For Klinger the graphic arts lacked the immediate sensual appeal of painting because the graphic arts were:

> 'Necessarily incomplete (notably in colour) and unreal and so relies more on the imagination to complete what was missing, the artist should exploit these characteristics to represent his view point of the world' (Klinger in Harley, 1981: 23).

However, for Klinger, this did not mean that the graphic arts were of lesser importance; by contrast he advocated that the graphic arts should be placed on the same level as the art of painting, a belief that Dürer had asserted with his engravings and woodcuts of melancholy almost four centuries before (Bittner, 1959: 4). *Woman With Dead Child* (1903) is an etching produced quite early in Kollwitz's career. Kollwitz uses heavy contours to separate the figures from the background and small intense cross-hatched lines to merge the bodies of the mother and child. Reportedly by 1920 Kollwitz, influenced by the work of printer Ernst Barlach (1870–1938), had moved to woodcut because Kollwitz found that the greater economy of form woodcut imposed on her images was helpful to her creative aspirations.[128]

Part of the aesthetic force of Kollwitz's image comes from the limitations dictated by the printing process at that time, which produced black and white images from a plate etched by hand. The lines she etches are wounds in the surface created with what seems to be a violent strength of feeling. Kollwitz's preference for print, and the use of line, creates a bond between her and contemporary artist Andrea Büttner's expressive woodcut presented in Room Three (Figure 79). Today coloured digital images are the norm in printmaking, so that the economies of Kollwitz's black and

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[128] Elizabeth Prelinger (1992) describes how Kollwitz was influenced by the woodcuts of Ernst Barlach (1870–1938) and how Kollwitz produced her first work in this medium in 1919, a print to commemorate the murder of the leader of the young communist party, Karl Liebknecht. This led to a series of seven woodcuts grouped under a banner called *War* (1914–1918). Included in this series were *The Sacrifice*, *The Volunteer*, *The Parents*, *The Widow*, and the *Mothers*.

white etching, just like Büttner's woodcuts, stand out against today's sea of digital colour.

I also use woodcut in *Missing* (2007) (Figure 90) to convey the emotionalism of Kate McCann, the mother of the missing Madeleine. Here I find the medium appropriate to my creative desires because it allows the making of a representation that depicts Kate McCann's suffering, yet spares her the brutalising glare of media imagery. Hence whilst the image I produce stems from a media photograph of Kate McCann, I aim to produce a print that extends beyond this particular incident and has wider recognition in culture. The line that creates the figurative image is in fact a white space formed because of a process of subtraction, a cut on the surface of the wood. The 'line' that defines the form thus itself embodies an absence, an absence delivered via the artist cutting into the wood, an absence that can metaphorically signify the absence of the mother as described by Freud as discussed in Chapter Three. Line is a powerful medium for manifesting melancholy because 'a line can produce a wound with no cure' (Ettinger cited in Pollock, 1996: 269). I would argue that woodcut relies as much on the artist's handling of the media, their 'touch', as on the figurative language that is used in an image, and this embodied response is what in part gives images in this media their strength (Schiff, 1991: 145). Hence my subjectivity affects the way I cut into the surface of the wood in my studio work and and has an impact on the final image I produce.

Among the paintings in my vfm, Elizabeth Peyton joins fellow contemporary artists Rachel Howard and Stella Vine (Room One) in using a method that works from pre-existing photographic images. These might be retrieved from the private and domestic world (non-public) hidden from view in the family album as in Peyton's case, or images retrieved from the digital sea (public) as in Vine's and Howard's work. Their method is united by a desire to encourage us to look again at the meanings attached to these re-found photographic sources. In so far as the events that are pictured are in the past, there seems to be a shared concern amongst artists to retrieve these experiences to make them visible and therefore mournable.

In contrast to the photographic flawlessness of the original image, Peyton uses paint to transform the drab mechanical media representation of a family photograph into

something tactile and beguiling, inviting us to consider again the experience of the mother of this famous son, Elvis. The painting restores to Gladys a vibrancy, colour and significance previously denied to her in the original photograph. Peyton's brushstrokes create flows of colour in contrast to the monochrome print presented by Kollwitz.

Painting the original image is therefore for Elizabeth Peyton, like Stella Vine and Rachel Howard, a way of critiquing the original image and asserting painting as a feminist practice identifying and representing the melancholic subjectivities of women. Perhaps such an impulse finds some agreement with Pollock's argument outlined in Chapter Three that the advantage of painting is its ability to produce images that are affective, which touch our emotions and manifest the lost object in the gaze they produce (Pollock, 2007: 182).

As for Ettinger, her painting uses photographic source material but her intention is different again. Photocopies and texts are arranged in layers and are 'redefined through their juxtaposition to other works'. Through the photocopying and painting process the negative and positive elements of the image are blurred to create a dialogue between the familiar and the strange (Ettinger, 1993: 1). Ettinger's painting method brings together photocopied images from photographs, texts from journals, and hand-drawn images. These disparate elements are brought into an exchange in an elaborate photocopying process. As Rosie Huhn explains, Ettinger's artistic process makes use of Walter Benjamin's scientific and methodological procedure for investigating history in which 'not only contours of the positive parts have been set off against negative ones but also until once again a new division has been applied to the previously eliminated negative part in such a way that a shifting of the angle brings out new positive and different aspects of the aforementioned' (Benjamin cited by Huhn, 1993b: 6). Huhn continues that Ettinger's painting practice ensures each element is brought into perspective equally 'until the unconscious parts of the picture and text is vivid, and familiar and the conscious part instead becomes distant, transported and enraptured as veil and enigma. The strange becomes familiar the familiar strange' (Huhn, 1993b: 7).

The process is also important as a device for playing with the notion of fading and emerging meanings, for implying the co-existence of past and present and to 'dispose of the dangerous leftovers contained in them while moving omissions and hollow spots into the field of vision' (Ibid.7). Ultimately her practice provides a method for evoking a possible feminine symbolic place from which 'forms are found for the unsaid and unthought-of as the site of symbolic genesis' (Ibid. ii). Ettinger aims to produce paintings in which meaning is unfixed and open, and where past and present are not hierarchical in their contribution to the formation of meaning (Ibid. 1).

Ettinger's painting practice, similarly to mine, is based on combining fragments of found images from the family album, images from historical sources along with text from books and archives. She used the insights gained from this process to argue that in an encounter between the event pictured in an artwork and the viewer, both have the potential to be reconfigured, writing: 'the active transformational object is active in relation to the subject, and the passive aspects of the creative act emanating from the subject are emphasized since the object sprints from a post natal stratum in which the subject is subjected to the mother who is an active Other' (Ettinger, 1994: 52). Ettinger's paintings capture the fact that in the matrixial space she proposes events that are others' are also mine, and conversely my events are handled and processed by others. Ettinger explains: 'in the matrixial psychic space "my" traces will be trans-scribed in others, thus others will process these events for me' (Ettinger, 1999: 92).[129]

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[129] Pollock notes that in Ettinger's painting practice 'something is struggling not exactly into representation, but into a field of recognition, more something like a glimpsed or even missed encounter, an experienced affect, that is the momentarily holding at the very limits of conscious/unconscious, an awareness of what is already there' (Pollock, 1995: 62).

After The Mothers, 1–10 (2012)
Christina Reading
Oil on aluminium
18 x 24cm

In my studio practice I have engaged in a process of painting stills from *The Mothers* (2012). Painting is a time-consuming process allowing me space to observe and ponder these images, to live with them. The process of painting the film stills brings my own presence as an artist to the film, repeating it, interacting with it, and responding through colour, sensation and movement. Painting as an act of repetition is used as a metaphor to breathe life and to bring to the fore a past moment, to give it space and to honour the experience of mothers whose lives I have witnessed in the film I retrieve from the archive.

Amongst the colour in my painting I find that patches of pinks, reds, blues and greens often dominate. The paintings' other elements, such as the figure's clothes, receive a slightly different treatment; the old fashioned and heavy clothing painted in brown earthy tones with flashes of red and green. The soft contour of the road is used to guide the journey of the small groups of women and to shape the composition of the painting.

Reinterpreting the photographic image through paint is not new as a fine art practice, but what interests me is how painting can bring to the fore an image retrieved from history and explore its meaning within a contemporary context. The inclination to paint these lost moments may also be the way that I am able, as an artist, to engage my emotions, to be affected by this dialogue rather than treating it solely as a conceptual and intellectual exercise. Perhaps such an effort overlaps with Kristeva's suggestion that a better understanding of what motherhood and maternal loss means

to women can only be achieved by attending to the experiences of individual women. She says:

> 'there might doubtless be a way to approach the dark area that motherhood constitutes for a women; one needs to listen carefully, more than ever, to what mothers are saying through their economic difficulties and beyond the guilt that a too existentialist feminism handed down, through their joys, angers, desires, pains, and pleasures' (Kristeva, 1987: 256).

I would add that how women artists have represented this experience in the visual field is equally crucial to improving our understanding of a woman's subjectivity. Painting this imagery brings me into contact with the maternity of mothers from the past. They represent in some sense my own experience as a mother just as surely as I represent theirs, placing me in a continuous corporeal and psychological arrangement with these women from the past. [130] This engagement with history, and the impulse to engage in a dialogue with mothers from the past, to give them space by painting them, cannot therefore in my view be dismissed as nostalgia: it is a creative and feminist act.

Conclusion

In this final room I have curated and interpreted an exhibition to show the importance of figuration in women's art to the understanding of a woman's melancholic subjectivity and motherhood. Perhaps what the works gathered in this room demonstrate are the particular approaches women figurative artists take and have taken to picturing maternal melancholy. But they might also represent an obligation placed upon mothers not to forget a child lost – real, imaginary or symbolic. That there are inscribed in the artworks children lost to the underworld, to Hades, to poverty, to war, to fame or to celebrity, means that mothers are placed in a state of perpetual mourning, and hence melancholy, for the lost child.

While Freud's theory of melancholy remains compelling, the ambivalence or anger displayed by some of the subjects of these pictures seems to suggest a rage directed

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[130] Kristeva wrote that 'the baby comes to represent the mother herself, and she her own mother, in a vertiginous identification which brings the mother into contact with her own mother's maternity' (Kristeva cited in Grosz, 1990: 90).

not at the lost child, but at the forces of patriarchy in its various guises that have separated the mother from her child. Figurative language is also used to powerful effect to highlight that, for mothers, melancholy is something that arises from the relationship between mother and child, and that loss is often borne collectively by women to counter the patriarchal conditions that give rise to their separation from their children.

Perhaps the works collected here also speak to the future, and signpost a call to mothers not to forget their experiences, to ensure that they do not become the lost objects of their own present-day histories. In order to mourn our losses as mothers, women must first know and acknowledge that these losses exist, otherwise they remain forever losses without signification. There is at the heart of these images a story about patterns of loss across generations caused by separation and the promise of reunion, albeit that the most graphically powerful of the images, Käthe Kollwitz's *Woman With Dead Child* (1903) (Figure 86), offers no such hope.

The collection of artworks in this final part of my vfm, with its focus on remembering and retelling the lives of women from the past, is essential to recuperating lost stories and visual imagery to represent a mother's loss. If women artists today and in the future are to create new forms of representation and expression for women's melancholy, it is vital that they are aware of these histories and perspectives.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The main goal of my vfm has been to establish the part played by women figurative artists in the understanding and representation of women's melancholic subjectivity. I wanted to consider whether there was a strictly feminine language that could be separated out from a phallic language of women's melancholy, to ask whether there is a sign or set of signs that function in my vfm in such a way as to enable me to reach a conclusion that indicates women's melancholy.

Method

To cast light on this question my vfm brings together the different perspectives offered by women's figurative art history, feminist theories of melancholy and my own studio work rooted in a feminist methodology. Within my vfm each perspective incorporates elements of the other and I argue that these multiple, interwoven viewpoints are necessary for fully understanding the scope and complexity of the representation of women's experience of melancholy.

The approach contributes to fine art discourse a new signifying space relating to women's melancholic subjectivity by giving individual women figurative artists, past and present, a voice on this important topic, countering the silence and addressing the absence noted in the dominant canon. Additionally, in a metaphorical parallel to the pictures I retrieve from art history for my vfm, my exploration of imagery in my studio practice increases the visibility of examples of women's melancholic experience, and contributes to fine art discourse material incidences of these experiences from the past for the present. This is seen in the *Documentation of Studio Work: A Chronology, 2007–2014*, and the final exhibition *Melancholia and the Female Figure,* presented at the Herbert Read Gallery at the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury, 22–25 April 2012.

Adopting and elaborating Griselda Pollock's method of the vfm was a journey I undertook in order to understand the representation of women's melancholic subjectivity from a particular subjective viewpoint. I acknowledge that what is presented here is based on my understanding at the time that I wrote about the works,

and were I to start again new associations and themes would certainly emerge in my vfm. Similarly, I accept that another researcher or artist using the same methodology I have proposed would select different works and highlight other issues. What I offer therefore is not a definitive history or findings per se, but a personal view on the topic that is already latent, partial, fragile and fragmented: I accept that there are more stories to be told. I recognise that the network of tangled histories and memory traces relating to women's experience of melancholy may be inexhaustible, but that it nevertheless optimistically suggests that it is possible with time and effort to reveal all that is hidden; the point of my vfm is to begin this journey.

Through my research I have come to understand that the process of searching for meaning in my vfm has mirrored Freud's account of the work of mourning and melancholy by which the retrieval of memories and associations assists the slow processes of recovery and reparation. I am reminded that, for Freud, in order for melancholy to become mourning, it is necessary first to remember something, before forgetting and overcoming it. Like melancholy, my vfm roams through time and creates the opportunity to search for signs of lost memories and associations of the feminine that manifest in artworks, and recuperate them so they can be acknowledged and mourned. However, the the process of remembering melancholy in my vfm does not always offer a perfect recollection of the narratives associated with women's experience of loss because it attempts to activate memories that are difficult to disclose and which are often traumatic. Instead my vfm allows us to find fragments and catch glimpses of these memories as they struggle to appear in works of art. These memories are fragile, partial and plentiful, and reflect the recurring efforts of the women artists in my vfm to bring these memories to the surface,

With these realisations in mind I have argued that my vfm is not simply a space in which artworks expressive of melancholy are gathered; rather, I have found it to be a constructive and dynamic space in which the work of mourning and melancholy occurs for women. Hence I view the figurative language in the imagery I gathered in my vfm as fragments of a lost history, an 'archaeology of melancholy', the result of a process of excavating and evidencing the figurative representation of women's experience from different historical moments. In this context the individual contributions of women figurative artists matter because hidden narratives that are

significant for women are given visibility, and these efforts have the potential to transform the whole representational space for women's melancholy.

Motivation and argument

The basis for the project was the emotional turmoil of melancholy for women and establishing whether this is capable of being given form and expression through the female figure. Thus my vfm represents a continuum of the debate that began in the modernist period amongst feminist writers and artists, about the role the body and images of the body can play in the representation of women's experience.

First, my vfm provides strong support for the argument that figurative representation of melancholy matters to women, both historically and in the present, and that the reasons for this need to be explored. I present evidence of the fact that women figurative artists actively engage in making work about women's experience that has contributed ideas about melancholy, viewed from the perspective of the body, and put these concerns into the symbolic, but that until now these works have not been brought together under the collective banner of women's melancholy. Acknowledging this history is important because it reclaims the figurative form for women as a means to express her melancholy. It also shows us how different perspectives offered by women artists challenge the prevailing canon and asserts this as a new territory that is crucial for feminism to investigate. If the problem of representing feminine melancholy is the symbolic articulation of her concerns, then the efforts of women artists working within the symbolic to decipher, disrupt and extend these forms seems to be one way to change the hitherto gendered representation of this history.

Second, melancholy, I have discovered from my vfm, is not just a mental phenomenon associated with an internal world of the mind but is associated both historically and in the present day with the body. Whether the meaning of the body is always governed by the phallus as Lacan maintained (1977b: 84), or whether signs of these repressed experiences escape this regime to be represented in the body as Freud suggested (Freud, 1923a: 364), I would argue that the body and its representations is the place to search for these signs. Such a search helps to confront

the phallic representation of loss, to deconstruct it as many artists in my vfm do, but also to remain open to the possibility of signs that emerge from a different symbolic, from the pre-Oedipal experience of the womb as symbolised by the Matrix. Thus in my vfm there emerges a discourse not only about the nature of women's experience of loss but also about how signs of a woman's experience of melancholy are to be recognised in the body and represented figuratively.

Third, considering the question from the perspective of my studio work also raises questions about how to develop strategies that enable women to reclaim the body to represent their experience of melancholy. From Freud we learn that 'thinking in pictures' has the capacity to provide a bridge from the unconscious to the conscious mind so that potentially melancholy can be symbolised and overcome (1923a: 359). Placing objects and the stories of women's melancholy told via means of figurative language in my vfm has allowed me to locate myself in the midst of this discourse about melancholy, and to use my own agency, like the other women artists in my vfm have done, to contribute to the transformation of imagery of women's melancholic subjectivity. What emerges from my studio work is my effort to attend to the experiences of other women in my artworks, weaving complex threads and circulating affects between my own subjectivity and the lives of other women, past and present.

I argue, therefore, that figuration is uniquely placed to restore to woman her form as a means to represent her emotional life because the body appears in works of art as a representation but also it is the means through which artworks, including my own, are made. Furthermore, I suggest that considering the question of multiple perspectives within the space of the vfm raises fascinating and significant questions about the nature of women's melancholic experience that would not be raised by looking at either art history, theories of melancholy or studio practice alone.

The Virtual Feminist Museum of Women's Figurative Art and Melancholy

Figurative art history and melancholy

As I have shown, there is within my vfm evidence of a relation between women's figurative art history and melancholy that is stronger and much more significant than is acknowledged in the dominant canon of the art history of melancholy.

A diversity of figurative language and a multiplicity of stories

The vfm created in my work urges us to consider the diversity of figurative language, the stories invoked and the array of meanings arising from the work of women figurative artists. From a variety of art historical traditions it draws together a repertoire of figurative language linked to women's experience that challenges the overarching phallic visual economy of melancholy. The variety of figurative language is significant because it complicates, extends and deepens the figurative language and motifs associated with the representation of feminine melancholy to date. No longer confined to particular forms, these new visions of melancholy have a positive effect, addressing the silence in the dominant canon and allowing the figurative language associated with melancholy and it's meaning to be reappraised. This is important because it places more images for women within the symbolic so that it becomes more reflective of the range of their experience.

Some of this figurative language is recuperated from the dominant canon, repeating traditional figurative language associated with melancholy. Some figurative language comes from the visual analysis of stilled media imagery circulating in the phallic visual economy, or the documentary evidence gathered by women artists of their lived experience. Whatever its source, I have found that women artists use this figurative language to unfold stories of their melancholy. Moreover, I have found that the persistence of particular poses and gestures, such as the art historical head-in-hand pose or the tilted-head-and-downcast-eyes pose, in my vfm is significant because they can be read for the clues they provide to losses that remain unresolved for women.

This does not mean that some experiences are signalled as necessairly more significant or meaningful for women, but rather that in the dialogue that takes place between them the specific qualities of women's experience of melancoly begins to emerge. To put it another way, I find these artworks are important because they internalise and reflect prevailing ideas about melancholy that are important to women and which are therefore crucial to overcoming the failure to adequately represent women's experience of loss. Additionally, because the linearity of art history does not correspond with women's experience exactly, I find that juxtaposing imagery and the ideas they contain has the potential to challenge current ways of thinking about melancholy, creating a productive conflict between the past and the present, and enabling us to see what is missing from our current experience.

An altered gaze

My vfm suggests a link between the gaze offered by women figurative artists and the expression of women's experience that is significant because it brings into the visual field representations that symbolise their experience not enabled by the phallic gaze as used in the prevailing canon. Within my vfm I find that the dominance of the phallic gaze and its focused vision is also challenged by the use of other gazes. There is the assertion of a maternal gaze and blurred vision by artists such as Julia Margaret Cameron, the deeply introspective gaze used by Evelyn De Morgan and Lady Hawarden, the hazy vision of Artemisia Gentileschi, the confrontational stare used by Stella Vine, the invitation to look beyond the subject into another time and place suggested by Ettinger's painting, and the reciprocal exchange of gazes suggested by my works. These altered gazes are significant in allowing figurative language to appeal to women and transforming its meaning to refer to their experience.

Time, tears and clothing: The semiotic inscription of melancholy

These women figurative artists' search for meaning is not confined to theoretical boundaries or art historical motifs, instead they have a language that is connected via the artworks they make to their bodies and they use this embodied approach to represent their experience. Looking closely at the works in my vfm it is evident that some women figurative artists have articulated these signs semiotically at the level of moods, tones and rhythms affecting the meaning of subject matter and the figurative

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language used in the artworks. I have found that through 'her touch', through the handling of her media, these women artists question and transform the meaning of the figurative language to appeal to the feminine.

Significantly, I have found that particular temporal rhythms modulate how work is made across my vfm, marked by a preference for slowness, patterns of absence and return, repetition, and the recuperation of art historical processes from the past that encouraged the lingering forms of perception associated with melancholy. Thus across my vfm there is, for instance, Julia Margaret Cameron's slow shutter speeds, my slowed-down film and layered painting processes, and Andrea Büttner's return to woodcut. These temporalities are not just the consequence of old-fashioned technical processes or nostalgia; rather, I have found that these slow and repetitive rhythms provide a crucial conceptual underpinning to the vfm because they are strategies used to hint at events and memories yet to be named, yet to enter the symbolic. These temporalities are what allow the signs waiting for recognition, articulation and transformation the opportunity and time to come very gradually into view.

Tears, blurred vision and down-pouring of paint are used to refer to the leaky, messy and fluid qualities of the feminine, but also to indicate that the feminine is yet to come fully into view.

Woman's melancholy is also disclosed through her clothing. The traditional phallic motifs of exaggerated beauty; opulent dress; long, flowing hair; and tears associated with the phallic conception of the feminine as something unknown, an excess, a mystery, are reclaimed though semiotic processes in my vfm as an expression of 'her' own sense of inscrutability and melancholy. Melancholy is to be found in the soft folds of 'her'voluminous and lavish dresses.

On the other hand, dishevelled appearances, unkempt hair, partial clothes and meagre textiles seem to accompany some of the most painful experiences of loss for women, perfect symbols perhaps of the lack of self-esteem and care the woman shows towards herself in melancholy. These forms of representation suggest an experience of the feminine that is removed from culture, without access to the symbolic, hence melancholic. Identities provided for women by clothing, textiles,

hair and other cultural symbols associated with the feminine are left in tatters – literally and metaphorically.

The treatment given by women figurative artists to this subject is often very experimental, using a diverse range of art practices in a search for meaning. Whilst some women artists continue to use traditional approaches to making art, for example, easel painting as in Evelyn De Morgan's artworks, others prefer to explore languages across boundaries, such as in Julia Margaret Cameron's painterly photographic process, and Tracey Emin's projected drawings. This diversity suggests a desire on the part of these women artists to find their own means of expression.

The feminist debate with Freud

The Freudian account of melancholy has been explored in my vfm but this does not suggest that this provides the only way of understanding these experiences for women. Rather, juxtaposing these theoretical accounts alongside the work of women figurative artists provides an alternative framework that raises questions for current theories in terms both of the nature of that experience for women, and how it manifests in the body.

The conception of melancholy is related, according to the Freudian perspective, to past events, to the loss of the penis or phallus, and the consequent devaluation of the mother and the female sex. Consistent with the assumption that these repressed experiences constitute the core aspects of women's experience of melancholy, my vfm does not repudiate these experiences for the girl, but finds that the girl nevertheless demonstrates a capacity to challenge this scenario. Hence the powerful Demeter, the commanding Ruth and the brooding Mariana set the mood of the female characters in my vfm, contradicting the Freudian account of melancholy which portrays the girl's self-esteem as irrevocably damaged by her experience of the Oedipus complex and castration. The defiant attitudes of these female subjects offer signs of a feminine response to melancholy that has some agency, rather than entirely passively accepting her subjugation.

Of particular theoretical significance to my vfm is the fact that a contradiction exists for women at the heart of the Freudian account, which suggest that for the girl to evaluate herself positively and overcome her melancholy she must, in Kristeva's words 'kill off' the mother from whom she also gets her sense of self-esteem. Whilst the Freudian account suggests that melancholy is a failure to symbolise loss, I find that the accommodation my vfm suggests is that the girl counters her sense of devaluation by surrounding herself with figurative language and searching for signs that allow these experiences of loss to be 'remembered'.

The women figurative artists in my vfm give us glimpses of an alternative form of symbolism, bringing together figurative language recuperated from the dominant and inscribing melancholy in works of art in the form of moods, marks and gestures associated with the semiotic to represent the lives of women. The artists embrace the idea that women are not just an extension of the phallus and that the feminine can escape the repression of this symbolic and overcome their melancholy. Through their artworks women figurative artists show us their melancholy and in this process they transform their experience. Hence my vfm reflects the collective efforts of women figurative artists to conceive of the possibility of a set of signs as the representation of women's melancholy.

By their actions the women artists in my vfm also show us how women's melancholic subjectivity is not soley the result of some private internal world but is closely interwoven with and structured in relation to the lives of others. It underlines a notion of feminine melancholy that is related to a collective sense of subjectivity and the subsuming of the individual woman's melancholy into a communal body of experience, this time the communal body of melancholy women. It is a sense of subjectivity that values relationships with other women and pays homage to the lost mother in women's prehistory. Expressed another way, my vfm suggests the importance not just of repressed experiences of loss in the unconscious gained through the Oedipus complex and castration, but also those associated with the matrixial experiences.

These perspectives are of interest to the way that women's melancholy is understood and represented because they have the potential to change the nature of such

representations for the future. They provide insights into woman's beliefs concerning her own agency in relation to melancholy, specifically her capacity to shape her own experiences. My vfm suggests a need to look again at women's apparent refusal to blame their mothers or their sex for their melancholy, and what this means for our theoretical explanations of this experience. Certainly some of the women figurative artists in my vfm attempt to acknowledge the losses they share with other women. Moreover, some also demonstrate willingness to look at their own responsibility for their melancholy. This is a hopeful sign because it also suggests a readiness to address their capacity to inflict loss on others, surely a priority in contemporary life.

I also note that in my vfm women figurative artists assert the importance of the conscious remembrance of loss, through acts of commemoration and lamentation. My vfm suggests that giving time and space to processing the suffering of others is strongly associated with feminine melancholy. However, this is not just a question of the factual remembrance of loss, rather it is through remembering an event with feeling, through embodied subjectivity, that the event has the capacity to ease our melancholy.

My vfm affirms a figurative notion of melancholy, suggesting that the psychic wounds experienced by the girl in melancholy, whether from the Oedipus complex and castration or the pre-Oedipal experiences in the Matrix, have an effect on the whole body, not just the mind. Moreover, it asserts that a woman's experience of her body affects her psyche and consequently her melancholy.

The vfm tells us that searching for signs of the figurative melancholy is not, therefore, just a question of looking for images of sad-looking women in drooping forms or with tear-stained faces, although these may be expressions of melancholy. Instead, the vfm suggests it is a question of exploring the languages developed by women figurative artists to counter, engage with and even perhaps mask their melancholy. Crucially, this means engaging with the ontology of others, because my vfm suggests that it is through the process of telling the story figuratively that the visual signs used to represent women's experience of melancholy will come into view.

Studio practice

My vfm of course is not just a curatorial exercise but has involved me as a maker, a practitioner and an artist. I argue that it would not have been possible to achieve the same level of understanding and exploration just through discussing the works made by other women artists. My studio work has provided me with the opportunity to recuperate the language of poses, gestures and signs associated with feminine melancholy, and to absorb these traditions, not just theoretically or art historically but practically, to revive these discourses in my artworks.

Given that my studio work begins with the exploration of the figurative found in objects that are themselves retrieved from the family album, from yesterday's news media or from the dusty store of the archive, I have discovered that there is both the recuperation of experience of loss that is represented, and the actual retrieval of a physical lost object.

I have discovered an interesting conflict between the structure of my vfm and the way that it positions itself to challenge linear narrative, and my studio work, which finds its way back to narrative, to stories of women's lives, raising interesting questions about linear narrative and feminism. While turning away from figuration and the narratives of melancholy that prevail in the dominant canon was a necessary move for feminism, I am making the adjustment through this research project that it is now time to return to woman not just her form but also her stories of melancholy as represented by women figurative artists.The artworks I have made are not about the lives of women known and unknown per se, rather my interpretative process explores the boundaries and thresholds between the lives of the women in the past and the present, as mediated by my own experience. Ultimately I have found that the ability of my own work to be affective was not just a question of medium, of paint, as Griselda Pollock (2007) maintained, or print, as Keith Harley (1981) reminds us Max Klinger claimed, but of the embodied subjectivity that I bring to the subject matter and to my choice of material practices. For instance I find that the use of line carved firmly into the woodblock or a brushstroke painted expressively across a canvas delineates not only a figurative pose or gesture but also signals the depth, force, boundaries and mutual spaces of our melancholy.

The formal dynamic of my work consists of the tension and interplay between the materials I use and the personal experiences I bring to this engagement. They ultimately represent my relationship with the 'other' and my empathetic understanding of the experiences faced by the 'other' established through the material practices of my studio work. The emotional resonance of my effort to represent these experiences is in effect produced by the extent of my willingness to consider the position of the stranger, a position, I have found, that is linked to the feminine. Moreover, I have found that the transformation of this original imagery involves me as an artist in a reciprocal exchange of traces with the other who is subject, and in this regard the artworks I have made have been transformative of my own understanding and subjectivity, as much as the transformation I enacted upon the original imagery.

Final exhibition of studio work: *Melancholia and the Female Figure,* **presented at the Herbert Read Gallery at the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury, 22–25 April 2012**

From the broad base of my studio work (*Documentation of Studio Work: A Chronology, 2007–2014*) (Insert One), which I argue was crucial for underpinning my developing understanding of the issues raised by the research, I selected a number of key works to exhibit. The intention of this exhibition was to formulate a personal response to the problem of the question of the figurative representation of feminine melancholy, drawing upon the artworks produced during the process of articulating the space of my vfm in the written aspect of my thesis. I used these artworks to create a personal exhibition space, which aimed to generate a critical and creative dialogue about the representation and use of the female figure and melancholy, historically and in the present, which I named *Melancholia and the Female Figure* (2012) (Insert Two).

Country Dancing (2011)
Christina Reading
DVD projection of archive
film
1 min 47 seconds

The Mothers (2011)
Christina Reading
DVD projection of archive film
60 seconds

The archival films presented in the exhibition picture communities of women brought together by shared incidences of loss. The first, *Country Dancing* (2010), as discussed in Room Two of my vfm, explores the experiences of young women who were sent to live at Barcombe Place (an orphanage) in the aftermath of the Second World War. The second, *The Mothers* (2011), as discussed in Room Four of my vfm, deal with the sometimes routine separation of mothers from their children in the early part of the twentieth century. The films express the nostalgia, loss and rhythm of women's lives. They are in a sense an enactment, metaphorically, of the mental and emotional acts of returning and remembering what is irretrievably lost and rehearsed in melancholy. The filmic fragments are recollections or reconstructions that bring to the fore the rhythmic sense of separation and return from the lost (devalued mother).

Juxtaposed with these films were two suites of narrative paintings, titled *The Dream Sequence* (2011) and *The Mothers* (2011), which I produced in response to the films. The imagery of the films reveals seemingly contradictory moods of joy and underlying melancholy, and attempt to fix or freeze an action, a gesture or emotion in paint whether that is the interwoven limbs or pointed elbows of the dancing girls, or the linked arms of the walking mothers.

Like Ettinger in her photomontage painting process, my intention was not to impose a hierarchy on the images in the film in order to construct meaning, but to bring all aspects of the film into the visual field equally, to create an opportunity for the unconscious parts of the film to gain in significance. My decision to paint this imagery at five-second intervals was an attempt to see what emerged from the film rather than imposing my view of what figurative language was significant. I did this in order to create opportunities for hidden narratives and affect to emerge from the film and to decipher these in my paintings. The paintings also represent the challenge of depicting the film. They offer fragments of a remembered dream rather than the entire narrative, meaning that the paintings have a potential significance that extends beyond the film.

The curation of the exhibition mirrored the processes I used to produce my vfm, creating juxtapositions, clashes and overlaps between the ideas, forms, moments, materials and processes of melancholy offered by the filmic imagery and the paintings to contribute further insights into the figurative representation of women's melancholic subjectivity.

The exhibition of artworks I produced is closely interwoven with the ideas and practices I discuss in my vfm, but they are not the same. The space within and between my vfm and the exhibition of my studio work coexists with and combines historical and contemporary perspectives, to recuperate the partial, fragmented and lost histories of the female figure and melancholy, and explore their significance and usage today.

Ultimately, both my vfm and the exhibition of studio work are interwoven in an attempt to counter, through both verbal and visual discourse, the current sense of marginalisation in the figurative representation of a woman's emotional life and restore to her a fundamental tool for expressing her melancholy – her body/the female figure. I conclude that the key to overcoming melancholy is by acknowledging loss rather than resisting it.

Final thoughts

There emerges from my vfm a discourse about the nature of women's experience, how that experience manifests in the body and how these signs might be represented visually in works of art by women figurative artists. I view the vfm as 'an archaeology of melancholy', a method to recuperate a lost history and uncover exemplars of women's figurative art practice in this field. Memories and narratives of women's lives have provided starting points for the representation of women's experience in ways that challenge the canon, and suggest a way of exploring a figurative language that speaks of a woman's experience of melancholy. In terms of figurative language, I have found that although every effort is used to recognise the feminine in the women artists' work, the effort is somehow sabotaged by the pre-existing phallic language. The figurative language women artists employ often only fully makes sense when considered in relation to this prevailing history. The feminine exists in relation to the phallic and emerges because of this discourse.

Nevertheless, the meaning of this figurative language is often transformed by semiotic processes in artworks, so that my vfm is at least a place to search for affects, rhythms, tones and events associated with feminine melancholy. Consequently the identification of a feminine symbolic in relation to melancholy requires women figurative artists to immerse themselves in this territory to reshape and refine the meaning of melancholy for women. Ultimately my vfm does not provide proof of a feminine symbolic nor does it reject the possibility; it simply provides a space in which that possibility can be allowed for.

There is much left to do. Issues for further research include continuing to explore the connections between figurative representation and women's own experiences, memories and narratives of melancholy. The implication for contemporary fine art is that it might need to let go of its attachment to certain motifs and figurative languages, and to instead explore a new figurative language rooted in women's experience, past and present, which consists not just of drooping female figures with tilted heads and downcast gazes but which might also include jutting elbows, exchanged glances, linked arms, even dancing girls and walking women. It also involves being attentive to the semiotic signs of melancholy as they appear in and

between works of art, being attentive to the rhythms, spaces and other affects of melancholy. Articulating experiences from women's lives and exploring this trajectory may lead to the emergence of new forms of figurative language stemming from the interpretation of women's experience.

The images in my vfm are also important in terms of the future experience of being a woman because the works of art offer another form of understanding and exploration of melancholy not found in theories, which stem from women's lived experience, including my own. My vfm tells a story of women's experience of melancholy that is complex and historical; mourning these old losses is difficult because they first of all need to be acknowledged. The women figurative artists in my vfm essentially make work to deal with their inner conflicts and the conflicts they observe in other women and notice in themselves, placing these experiences and observations at the centre of the struggle to represent melancholy. Once created, the artworks in my vfm offer the benefit of having the capacity to affect the lives of other women for good, because they provide a mirror of women's experience and help them to understand and acknowledge their melancholy. Such representations help women to understand how old responses and reactions of melancholy are repeated across art history, and encourage women to see the connection between their melancholy and the history of their experience. Encouraging women to reflect on experiences in the history of being a woman offers perhaps the potential to overcome this melancholy and contribute positively to the experience of being a woman in the future. Hence bringing these artworks into the public realm via my vfm is important because it provides a place for women's melancholy to play out, to be challenged and potentially reformulated.

In my vfm I have found that women's bodies and their representation bear the wounds of their melancholy, betraying their histories and hampering their futures. The history of this story unfolds in the space of my vfm. Contemporary images and their antecedents are juxtaposed so that they can talk to each other over time, not just about changing styles and media associated with making art, but about the melancholy of women. Although the images in my vfm originate from different historical moments, the content and the concern of these women figurative artists remains constant. I have found that despite the fact that some of the images are made

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Figure 89. Ettinger, Bracha L. (1990–1991) *Matrixial Borderlines No 1 Element* [photocopy]. In: Women–other–thing: A matrixial touch. In: (1993) *Matrix Borderlines* [Exhibition catalogue]. Page 15. Oxford Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 90. Reading, Christina (2007) *Missing* [Woodcut on paper].

Figure 91. Reading, Christina (2011) *The Mothers* [Still from digital projection of reworked archive film].Source: *The Southern Railway Servants' Orphanage at Woking* (c.1926) Brighton: Screen Archives South East. Production unknown. Accession no. S 970703.

Figure 92. Reading, Christina (2012) *After The Mothers 1–10* [Oil on board].

Figure 93. Reading, Christina (2011) *The Dream Sequence, Nos. 3 and 9* [Oil on linen].

Figure 94. Kollwitz, Käthe (1922–1923) *The Mothers (Die Mutter)* [Woodcut]. In: Klein, M. C. & Klein, Arthur (1972) *Käthe Kollwitz: Life in art.* Page 82. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

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