

# *Unpicking the Blanket*

*Escaping The Bed We Were Made To Lie In.*

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## **Abstract**

Women are in the prime position to initiate change in regard to gender equality for all. Through analysis of traditions that have shaped women's lives including the cultural constructs of Western patriarchal society and feminist action throughout history, this dissertation provides a solid base for discussion on the plight of the contemporary women

Working within an auto-ethnographic methodology the personal relationship between myself and my mother provided an intimate account of the complexity of the mother daughter relationship, with particular focus on the period post World War II up to the present day. Investigation into the perceived role of women not only as mothers and daughters but as active participants within society, provides insight into the double standards that still exist in relation to gender equality.

My project revealed that the use of subtle manipulation and control continues to be exercised over the lives of women and are so ingrained in our cultural norms that it regularly goes unnoticed. However, womanhood is no longer confined to the domain of the domestic environment and their roles as active participants in society provide platforms for initiating great change moving forward.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

What has been the actual reality of women's lives over the last century?<sup>1</sup> Are women constantly rebooting new versions of themselves based on behaviours, and beliefs that may actually be the very things that are holding them back in their fight for equality?

This study aims to address the complex bonds between not only the mother and child, but also women and society. Selecting my title came about during phone conversation<sup>2</sup> regarding outdated sayings that were used by mothers to their daughters. The old pre feminist adage, "you've made your bed, now lie in it"<sup>3</sup>, speaks directly to the situation many women throughout history were expected to accept as a consequence of their choices. Blankets live on beds, they symbolise security and warmth, a safe haven under which to sleep, cry, laugh, and love. This dissertation is about relationships between women, mothers, and daughters. Each generation of women unwittingly throws a blanket of their experiences onto the next and I will be unpicking the consequences of these actions from both personal and public perspectives. Working within an auto-ethnographical<sup>4</sup> methodology I discuss my personal experience as a daughter, mother, and woman, leading into conversations and discourse within the wider social context. Through research into both historical and contemporary culture I discuss how strategic and intentional manipulation is used to control women both physically and psychologically.

Womanhood is not just about giving birth and raising a child. All human life begins inside another, all people are born. Immediately after birth, we are dependent on others for survival. These primary interactions led to complex relationships which are underpinned by the historical traditions and expectations passed down from one generation to the next.

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<sup>1</sup> I am discussing women's lives within the Western context, not all women.

<sup>2</sup> Phone conversation with Dr Joe Citizen 30<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

<sup>3</sup> "You Made Your Bed Now Lie In It-Meaning, Origin and Usage", Pearson, July 21 2022, accessed November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, <https://english-grammar-lessons.com/you-made-your-bed-now-lie-in-it-meaning/>.

<sup>4</sup> Tony E Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis, eds., *Handbook of Autoethnography* (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2022).

Our earliest influences and perceptions of the world are born in these relationships, with each generation unwittingly carrying forward ripples from the previous, whilst also being informed by events and opinions specific to their own time. These early associations are instrumental in shaping our beliefs around what it means to be a woman.

A great deal has been written on the topics of womanhood and the maternal, presenting a varied and diverse range of theories and discourses from which to select research. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* states that motherhood can be seen as performative, an action with no clear distinctions or boundaries to a definitive whole<sup>5</sup>, while Susan Stewart in *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* claims that the 'maternal' is not only inherent in women<sup>6</sup>. Julia Kristeva challenges the face of motherhood describing it as self-limiting by suggesting the following, 'by turning all our attention on the biological and social aspects of motherhood as well as on sexual freedom and equality, we have become the first civilization which lacks a discourse on the complexity of motherhood'<sup>7</sup>.

It is not only motherhood that lacks a discourse on its own complexity, but womanhood in general. For too long societies have defined the role of woman and mother as significant mainly for the relational needs of humanity. Michel Foucault's discourse in *Discipline and Punish* concerning the docile body<sup>8</sup> is relevant in terms of the manipulation and control used to keep women in their place. I discuss Jane Bennett's theory on material vitality or 'thing power', from the perspective of the maternal, whereby inanimate objects are part of assemblages producing effects beyond the realm of their singularity.<sup>9</sup> Donna Haraway's theory concerning the gulf that exists between the values and systems of Western patriarchy and the dialogue within feminist culture presents interesting alternatives regarding the binaries of gender suggesting a way out of, 'the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies.'<sup>10</sup> Haraway introduces the concept of the chimeric cyborg,

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble Feminism, and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge New York 1990. PDF edition: Taylor & Francis e-library, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva, "On Motherhood", (Colloque Gypsy Vendredi, Rêves de femmes, Organisation Pr René Frydman et Dr Muriel Flis-Trèves, Jardin des planetes, Grand Amphithéâtre du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, 57 rue Cuvier, 75005 Paris 21 and 22 Octobre 2005-10-28). <http://www.kristeva.fr/motherhood.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, "Docile Bodies" in *The Foucault Reader An Introduction to Foucaults Thought*, ed Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Press 1984) 179-187.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter A Political Ecology Of Things*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Socialist Review* (1985).

which, were it ever to eventuate, would challenge the role of motherhood as belonging to a distinctly female domain.

Writers who discuss the relationships women have with each other and society have been an important part of my research. Author Nancy Friday's<sup>11</sup> perspective of the mother daughter connection, and Jia Tolentino's<sup>12</sup> discourses on contemporary culture, provide interesting points for discussion concerning the psychological aspects of being a women. Cultural critic and author Jessa Crispin's<sup>13</sup> controversial critique on contemporary feminism takes a wrecking ball to the whole structure<sup>14</sup> of feminism, presenting rousing and uncompromising opinions that challenge women to reassess our actions.

The changing dialogue of womanhood and the altering of attitudes in regard to what a woman represents has been discussed in depth from many perspectives. Recent times have focused on global situations while individually we appear happy to maintain status quo. Intersectional feminism addresses both the individual and the collective, yet it does so from the public arena rather than the personal. The world is changing at a rapid pace, with concern focused so much on the bigger picture, that cracks are appearing in the smaller one. That 'old chestnut' that equality for women means being equal to man is outdated and ineffectual. We have become so complacent and comfortable in our individualism that we are failing to see what is going on directly under our noses.

Throughout this paper are personal accounts in italics, that lead to discussion and analysis within wider contexts. My studio practice and research approach are discussed in a separate chapter entitled *Methodology*, while reference to my artwork is woven throughout the document.

The impact of generational and social influence on our relationships with ourselves and others is discussed in *Mother Self Others*. I begin in the personal with my mother's story, which opens doorways to my own experiences. I have endeavored to provide a candid personal response and analysis of her life and others, discussing how individually and together we are informed and influenced by wider social constructs beyond our control. In

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy Friday, *My Mother My Self*, (Hammersmith London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Jia Tolentino, *Trick Mirror Reflections on Self-Delusion*, (London: 4th Estate, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Jessa Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist, A Feminist Manifesto*, (New York: Melville House Printing 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Kirkus, "Forget busting glass ceilings. Crispin has taken a wrecking ball to the whole structure." Review of *Why I am Not A Feminist, A Feminist Manifesto*, by Jessa Crispin. *Kirkus Reviews* Issue: Nov. 1, 2016.

*Others* I address the bigger picture, with discussion around relationships regarding motherhood including personal observation of others and discussions regarding the mother as proposed by Barbara Creed<sup>15</sup> and Kristeva<sup>16</sup> and artists Louise Bourgeois, Jaqueline Fahey, Kiki Smith, Vivian Lynn, and Kathy Wilkes.

Feminism is relevant to any discussion that questions the place of women within society. *Herstory* looks at the enduring and diverse nature of feminist activism from both historical and contemporary contexts. I emphasis the longevity of women's fight for equality and discuss a range of perspectives concerning 'where to next?' Anna Uddenberg's powerful figurative installations provoke consideration into contemporary culture's attitude towards the uncompromising modern woman within society.

We are constantly bombarded with opinion and prejudice that are specific to gender. In *Double Standards and the Plight of the Contemporary Woman* I investigate and address the biases against women that we have come to accept as normal. My discussion centres around the attitudes and expectations placed on women from post World War II until the present. Foucault's theories on the 'docile body'<sup>17</sup> and Stewart's perception of the 'trickster'<sup>18</sup>, are also discussed, as both are common methods of control that are disguised in such a way, that women do not always recognise them. The work of artists Mika Rottenberg and Hayv Kahraman highlight the manipulation and control that exists within contemporary female environments. Taylor Swift's experiences of misogynistic behaviour and her reaction to this leads into discussion around popular culture including the influence of social media on young women today.

*My Story* places the personal in the context of the public arena addressing who I am now, not only as a woman, mother, and feminist, but as human being. I discuss Stewart's concept around the miniature and the gigantic<sup>19</sup> and how this can be related to the fight for equality for all humanity not just women.

It is not possible to unpick the complexities of womanhood and the maternal in their entirety within this project. I have endeavoured to explain how Western society is

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Routledge,1993),16-31.

<sup>16</sup> Kristeva, "On Motherhood".

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, "Docile bodies", 179-187.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 106-107.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 37-104.

structured and the injustices and inequities that continue occur for women, both individually and collectively. Most importantly, it is about relationships and has given me a much better understanding of myself, my mother, and others.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

*I am an observer.*

*I watch the world and its inhabitants collide, interact, absorb, and move on. Social order, behaviour, and relationships fascinate me. I like to listen, reflect, and endeavour to understand how my fellow humans relate to each other and their surrounding environment.*

*This academic journey has taken me on a voyage of self-discovery. I have found myself, my voice, and my purpose. I can now situate my practice alongside who I am, in a way I never thought possible. It comes as a constant surprise to realise that I was always there hovering on the edge, too afraid to plunge into the depths of the unknown.*

*Those days are gone forever.*



Fig.1 Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, detail of work in progress, 2022.

My research investigates womanhood with particular focus on relationships and how these influence the decisions we make within our own lives. I situate myself at the intersection between a practice-based<sup>20</sup> methodology and an auto-ethnographic<sup>21</sup> method of research that comes from lived experience using a feminist perspective.

Auto-ethnography is a qualitative method of research where the author is both observer and participant of events and situations. This autobiographical methodology allows one to draw on personal life encounters, constructing research and academic texts that elicit deeper meanings and understanding of lived experience within the wider social context. It is a starting point to understanding self as an individual identity in relation to others, providing personal experience of the interrelationships that occur between humans.<sup>22</sup>

Ethical issues can arise when working in an auto-ethnographic manner. When approaching research from a personal perspective the author must consider the implications that can occur for others involved. Whilst my mother is no longer alive, there are relatives and friends who knew her well and I am morally bound to ensure that I do not offend or upset these people. This was never my intention, as I am simply attempting to come to terms with my personal relationship with my mother and consider how this relates to the experiences of others. In regards to writing about more recent personal experience I have referred to the article Ethical Autoethnography: Is it Possible? by Jane Edwards Professor and Dean at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia<sup>23</sup> for guidance.

There is a relational aspect to my research as described by D Jean Clandinine, Vera Caine, and Sean Lessard in *The Relational Ethics of Narrative Enquiry*.<sup>24</sup> I acknowledge and identify the entanglements of human nature and the significance these associations have on our lives. Behaviours and interaction between people depend upon an understanding of what is considered acceptable and what is not within different lived experiences. Relational moral codes whilst providing greater understanding and acceptance of points of difference within cultures and societies, can also create tension and conflict.

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<sup>20</sup> Linda Candy, *Practice-based Research: A Guide*, Creativity & Cognition Studios, Sydney: University of Technology, 2006, accessed September 5, 2022, <http://www.creativityandcognition.com>.

<sup>21</sup> Tony E Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis, eds., *Handbook of Autoethnography 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, New York Routledge Taylor and Francis Group 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Tony E Adams, Carolyn Ellis, Stacy Holman Jones, "Autoethnography" in *The International Encyclopaedia of Communication Research Methods* 2017. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318858682\\_Autoethnography](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318858682_Autoethnography).

<sup>23</sup> Jane Edwards "Ethical Autoethnography: Is it Possible?" *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* Vol 20 1-6 (2021).

<sup>24</sup> D Jean Clandinine, Vera Caine, and Sean Lessard, *The Relational Ethics of Narrative Enquiry*, (New York Routledge 2012), 3-7.

Alison Jones in her autobiography, *This Pakeha Life, An Unsettled Memoir*<sup>25</sup>, addresses the way in which the personal is linked to her philosophical approach. By exploring how recall and memory are connected to imagination, referencing her own history, Jones discusses how the personal is linked to identity and belonging.

Kiki Smith, in an interview with Robyn Winters<sup>26</sup> speaks to the importance of being self-determinant and the need to talk of your own truth and reality so they are not dismissed or disappear. Creating objects and drawings based on the body both internally and externally, as a means to express what is felt beneath the surface Smith addresses both the physical and psychological in her work.

My research into feminist action and the treatment of women, particularly in the last hundred years, has helped to address the freedoms and rights of myself and my mother. The rise of feminism has altered the way women think, act, and behave, while historic factors emphasis how freedom has been gained and conversely stolen away. Michel Foucault discusses, in *Discipline and Punish*<sup>27</sup>, how methods of control and manipulation have had significant impact on the rights and freedom of women both personally and publicly.

I have collected information and data from a range of sources including writers and theorists who explore issues pertaining to women, in particular those who use a feminist lens. Butler, Kristeva, Friday, Bennett, Crispin, and Tolentino have all been instrumental in my research regarding the management of women within social, political, and personal environments.

Personal accounts concerning my mother and myself come from family documents, and the recollection of memories growing up, which in turn have informed my own experience as a wife, mother, and woman. Jones's autobiographical work resonates with me on a deeply personal level, as has the artwork of Louise Bourgeois and Jaqueline Fahey. Both women address the personal within their creative practice and can be seen to work from an autoethnographic viewpoint.

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<sup>25</sup> Alison Jones, *This Pakeha Life: An Unsettled Memoir*, (Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Kiki Smith, *Kiki Smith*, (Netherlands: Drukkerij Rosbeek BV, Nuth, 1990), 127-140.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" in *The Foucault Reader An Introduction to Foucaults Thought*, ed Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Press 1984) 206.

Within my studio practice I work intuitively and in an investigative manner. It is through the process of making that things become clear, providing access points that enable me to address the more collective experience. I am informed by Brad Haseman's *Manifesto for Performative Research*<sup>28</sup> and his discussion concerning the emergence of ideas from experimental starting points begun in the studio, not at the planning desk. Graeme Sullivan's<sup>29</sup> research concept that theory informs practice and vice versa as described below are also relevant to my practice:

As new visual arts research is undertaken, it can be located and critiqued within dimensions of theory and domains of inquiry so as to ascertain how practice informs theory and theory informs practice.<sup>30</sup>

Sullivan goes on to discuss a transcognitive method of working in *Artistic Thinking as Transcognitive Practice*<sup>31</sup> describing this in the following way:

The cognitive coalition involves an ongoing dialogue between, within and around the artist, artwork, viewer, and context where each has a role in co-constructing meaning. This process is iterative and strategic in nature as meaning is encompassed and negotiated. I describe this as transcognition. Transcognition is a process where the 'self and 'others' are parallel and necessary agents of mind that inform each other through analysis and critique.<sup>32</sup>

My process can appear chaotic. I chase many rabbits down holes exploring a range of theories, ideas, and influences, that in turn inform my practice. As a lateral thinker, initial ideas lead to exploration with multiple developments helping to influence final decisions. As Linda Candy puts it:

Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly [my emphasis] by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice ... Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in

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<sup>28</sup> Brad Haseman, "A Manifesto for Performative Research", *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, Issue Practice-Led Research no. 118 (2006): 98-106.

<sup>29</sup> Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Graeme Sullivan, "Artistic Thinking as Transcognitive Practice: A Reconciliation of the Process-Product Dichotomy", *Author, Visual Arts Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (2001).

<sup>32</sup> Graeme Sullivan, "Artistic Thinking as Transcognitive Practice", 10.

words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes.(2006,1)<sup>33</sup>

Working in this practice-based methodology enables me to resolve works that explore both the corporeal and psychological, blending the performative with the personal. Through this process I have come to realise that I work across a range of media and methods, preferring to have several projects on the go at the same time.

Aware of the environmental issues facing the planet, where possible I work with recycled or sustainable materials, including second hand blankets, egg cartons, and newspaper. While part of my methodology, the focus of this project is not about sustainability but is rather a by-product of the way I work and I am not looking specifically at artists who use sustainable materials.

Kristeva's concept of the abject informs my work particularly in relationship to the female form. It is my reality that a woman's body is not always neat, but messy<sup>34</sup>, physically, and emotionally. Research and study of the waxworks of La Specola<sup>35</sup> and early life experiences visiting the W D Trotter Anatomy Museum<sup>36</sup> with my father, a medical professional, have informed my studio practice. My investigation into the abject and the relationship between mother and daughter is perhaps best described by Kristeva:

Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationships, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.<sup>37</sup>

By exploring the functionality of the human body, both the physical and psychological, by placing the concrete and explainable alongside the emotional, I am presenting women as human beings rather than gender based objects within patriarchal societies.

My installation work *Fruit* (Fig.1) represents a woman who has been laid bare, her abdomen an open wound, the womb, the nurturer of life, is absent. The skin, made of old blankets, references the nurturing characteristics that all women are supposed to possess, appears

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<sup>33</sup>Linda Candy, *Practice-based Research*,1.

<sup>34</sup> Phone conversation with Dr Joe Citizen 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Petra Lamers-Schütze and Yvonne Verlag, eds., *Encyclopaedia Anatomica, A Collection of Anatomica*, (China, Taschen, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> "WD Trotter Anatomy Museum", Dunedin, New Zealand, <https://www.otago.ac.nz/anatomy/facilities/museum/>.

<sup>37</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, (New York, Guildford, Surrey: Columbia University Press, 1982), 10.

washed out and worn. Objects occupy the surrounding space, as actants<sup>38</sup> with power over the lives of women.

The figure is stitched up, pulled apart and exposed - she is meant to be messy. Exploring both the corporeal and psychological, I blend the performative with the personal with this work, inviting the viewer to connect both physically and emotionally. The relationships between internal and external, while existing independently are also as inseparable and interrelated.

Drawing on a large scale is also part of my visual language and informs my three-dimensional practice, allowing me to explore themes and ideas in a way that is more immediate than making large sculptural works.

The anatomical drawings of Leonardo da Vinci<sup>39</sup>, waxworks of La Specola and William Blake's<sup>40</sup> illustrations - with their deeply psychological undertones - have been major influences in my exploration of the abject in relation to both the psychological and the physical.

Drawing was used to explore and develop ideas and helped to open pathways to understand the world we live in. Like Kathe Kollwitz<sup>41</sup> and Mary Cassatt<sup>42</sup> I explore experiences relating to womanhood in their drawings. Cassatt's drawings, made with a gentler hand, do not possess the aggressive mark making evident in Kollwitz's work, Both however allow narratives to unfold which explore the complex relationship between a mother and a child. Drawing has become an important part of my practice, my approach is generous, I am commenting on life and all its messiness, ignoring the politeness of constrained and measured compositional rules.

The fragments of reality that we choose to hide behind and the secrets we keep have an enormous psychological impact on how we behave and interact with each other. It is the

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<sup>38</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 8-10.

<sup>39</sup> *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and introduced by E Popham, Keeper of Prints and Drawings British Museum, (The Reprint Society Ltd by arrangement with Jonathan Cape, 1952).

<sup>40</sup> Kathleen Raine, *William Blake: The World of Art Library-Artists*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970).

<sup>41</sup> "Kathe Kollwitz, Mothers", (1919), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/398148>.

<sup>42</sup> Mark D Greenberg, ed., *Mary Cassatt: The Colour Prints*, Catalogue Published in conjunction with the exhibition, 1989-1990, Project Director: Margaret L Kaplan, Designer: Darilyn Lowe, (Printed and bound in Japan.1989).

internal response and what is going on beneath the surface that interests me, how we feel and react to experiences, and how these affect us physically and psychologically.

Fig.2 Redacted.

Leonardo da Vinci, *Dissection of the Principal Organs of a Woman*, c1510.

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/912281/the-cardiovascular-system-and-principal-organs-of-a-woman>

Fig.3 Redacted

William Blake, *The Whirlwind of Lovers Divine Comedy*, 1824-7

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/367367>

Fig.4 Redacted

Mary Cassatt, *Drawing for Maternal Caress*, 1890-1891.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/364213>

Fig.5 Redacted

Kathe Kollwitz, *Mothers*, 1919

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/398148> .

One final note regarding my methodology. While my practice and research are intrinsically linked together they are not carbon copies of each other. Their pathways run side by side, occasionally meeting before diverging on their own journey's again. In other words they speak to each other but they are both very much individuals in their own right.

## Chapter 3

### Mother Self Others

#### Mother



Fig.6 Elizabeth, Pauline, and Peter Brown, c.1965.

*To your own self be true.*

*Just because I said to do something doesn't mean you should do it.*

*The above are examples of advice imparted on me by my mother. These double messages created impossible scenarios, meaning getting it right and pleasing my mother was an impossible feat and one I never achieved.*

*Pauline's early family life was turbulent. She and her sister were sent to boarding school when very young, while her parents sorted out their marriage. They did, briefly, then they didn't, placing heavy responsibilities upon Pauline, the eldest, stranded in a situation she had no control over. Just as freedom from home beckoned, Britain was thrown headfirst into the Second World War, presenting Pauline with an exciting alternative future. Signing up for the Women's Auxillary Air Force (WAAF) she was assigned to Bletchley Park, working at an outpost*

*receiving and decoding messages from the enemy. The extent of her involvement in the war was not revealed until after her death. This was not her only secret, Pauline never spoke of her father, her school life, or childhood.*

*Anything regarding those early memories was learnt through conversations with my aunt, a much happier open person, unburdened by the responsibility of being the oldest child with a heavy weight upon her shoulders.*

*Post-war mother completed nursing training, hitch-hiking through Europe, before travelling halfway across the world to start a new life in Aotearoa. Here, she meet my father, married, giving up her nursing career to keep house. The war years had given her a taste of independence and she struggled to adjust to this new life, dependent upon my father and confined to domestic duties. Feelings of frustration were common among servicewomen post-war as they were pulled back and forth between a sense of duty and the yearning for new found independence. A 'new women' with 'a mind of her own',<sup>43</sup> my mother had found her voice but was unable to use it. Had Pauline been born in contemporary times I have little doubt she would have chosen career over domestic duties. Born in a time of turbulence and change, combined with the circumstance and influence of her upbringing situated my mother at the cusp between old traditions and new beginnings, influencing all aspects of her life, that eventually rippled outwards to include my own.*



Fig.7 My mother Pauline Lambert (Women's Auxiliary Air Force, World War II, 1940).

Fig.8 Pauline Lambert, centre, Nurse, and Sister in Charge.c.1950.

Fig.9 Barry Nisbet Brown and Pauline Lambert Wedding Day, mid 1950's.

<sup>43</sup> Penny Summerfield, "It Did Me Good In Lots of Ways: British Woman in Transition from War to Peace", in *When The War Was Over. Woman, War and Peace in Europe 1940 to 1956 Discourses of War and Gender*, ed. Claire Duchon and Irene Bandhauer Schoffmann, (Leicester University Press London New York,2000), 16.

As Carl Jung observes, “one does not have a complex, a complex has him”<sup>44</sup>. Operating beneath our awareness are a range of factors that have sway over how we approach life. Identity is fostered through ancestral pathways and familial relationships, intertwined with contemporary stimulus and individual experience. Entrenched traditions and beliefs can be influential in determining the attitudes and behaviours that are passed on to future generations.

My initial studio practice centred on creating a series of figurines representative of my female ancestors, however, information on my female lineage was sparse. Evidence suggested my male ancestors choose independently minded, tall poppies over wilting wallflowers. Or perhaps these women selected partners that would give them the freedom to ‘have their head’ and make their own choices. Examples of strong women pursuing independent careers and running businesses include Great Aunt Fran who attended art school in the United Kingdom in the late 1800s, Great Grandmother’s, Alice, who left home to pursue a creative career in France, and Amanda, who ran with the aid of her husband the Greyhound Hotel and Bar in Queen Street Auckland. Last but not least, is my own mother the service woman ,nurse and adventurer.



Figs.10 and 11 Lissie Brown, *Figurine of Evelyn Brown*, 2020.

Fig.12 Redacted

Rita Angus, *Betty Curnow*, 1942. <https://www.aucklandartgallery.com/explore-art-and-ideas/artwork/3721/portrait-of-betty-curnow>

<sup>44</sup> Gary Bobroff, *Carl Jung Knowledge in a Nutshell*, (London, Arcturus Publishing Limited 2020) 33.



Figs.13 and 14 Lissie Brown, *Figurine of Jeanne a Benejueq*, 2020.

Fig.15 Redacted

Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Armand-Gaston-Maximilien de Rohan*, 1710.

<https://www.hyacinthe-rigaud.com/catalogue-raisonne-hyacinthe-rigaud/portraits/1167-rohan-soubise-armand-gaston-maximilien-de>

Their stories became my story. This is evident in *Links in the Chain of Causation*, a triptych that represents past, present, and future with focus on the experiences of my mother, my relationship with her and the social context of the time.



Fig.16 Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, Right hand side panel, unfinished detail, 2022.

It is the side panels I wish to discuss here. The left hand panel represents the past, with my mother as a child looking out at the viewer and drawing them in to her world. She is joined by her older wiser self who looks more cynically towards her future. Above her is an archway which contains symbols representing aspects of her life and ancestry. Within the wider archway are images of my female ancestors in acknowledgement of past generations. Piano keys, musical notes, and pearls represent both my grandmothers.

The right hand panel (Fig.16) echoes the left but from the perspective of the future. My younger self draws the viewer in, a link to the representations of myself as mother and artist, a trinity of individual realities that exist within my whole. Symbols representing my European ancestry are intermingled with my own life experience as a Pakeha living within Māori and Pasifika communities and the future represented by images of my sons and their families. Collectively these panels acknowledge the links that connect the past, present, and future together as one.

This research provided me with a greater understanding of the challenges faced by women during World War II. These challenges had a profound influence on my mother and her contemporaries, by initially broadening opportunities and experiences, perceived by many as a pathway to enable women to break from their traditional roles and embrace newfound freedoms. The impact of this war on women's lives had a far reaching influence, not only on the women themselves but on wider family circles and society in general.

Three different opinions arose post-war concerning its effect on a woman's role in society.<sup>45</sup> The optimistic believe that their involvement and participation in paid employment led to state policies that supported women and children, profoundly altering their social status. This was, however, largely dependent on class structures and the social and economic status of these women to begin with. A second opinion centers around evidence that many women simply continued working in the unskilled repetitive jobs that they had held during the interwar years, receiving less pay and limited training compared to men doing the same job. Work was often temporary, nursery care limited, and all but phased out after 1945. In other words, life continued much as it had before and did nothing to support the

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<sup>45</sup> H.L. Smith, *War and Social Change: British Society in British Society in the Second World War*, (Manchester:, Manchester University Press ,1986) 208-229.

independence of 'new' women. Those who are even more critical believe the war years contributed nothing to gender equality and had actually widened the gap, polarizing gender identities and relations.<sup>46</sup> On one hand, was the optimistic belief that women's status in society profoundly changed for the better after the war, and on the other, was an acknowledgement that inequality between the sexes remained unchanged and in some cases was increased by the war experience.<sup>47</sup> As Dr Harold Smith, puts it :

The war's most important legacy for women was a strengthening of traditional sex roles rather than the emergence of new roles.<sup>48</sup>

This sentiment is echoed by the life of my mother who had found her independence as a service woman in World War II, a post-war nurse and independent traveller who believed a richer more independent life awaited her in Aotearoa, only to discover a world where attitudes towards women were much the same, if not worse, than those she had left behind in post-war Britain.

After a taste of freedom my mother and others like her, found their independence forcibly shut down by domesticity, replaced with a role as supporter for the male hero. Like 450,000 other women who served in the Auxiliary Services in 1945<sup>49</sup>, my mother was never referred to as a 'returning soldier', nor was consideration given for her readjustment post-war. Women had 'done their bit' for the war effort and were now expected to buckle under and return to their 'natural' roles of wife and mother.

My mother's experience after World War II, where doorways were opened for her only to be slammed shut and replaced by notions of starry-eyed domesticity in the 1950s. Crispin sums it up well:

The problem is that feminism has offered women so few alternatives to give their lives meaning and value. We have not created the infrastructure nor even the imagination to allow woman to live different kinds of lives outside of the romantic complex.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Smith, *War and Social Change*, 208-29.

<sup>47</sup> Summerfield, "It Did Me Good in Lots of Ways", 13.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *War and Social Change*, 208-229.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *War and Social Change*, 208-229.

<sup>50</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, 120.

Whilst wartime historically allows women to embrace roles outside the traditional roles of family and community, it is also a dangerous time for those caught in the middle.

For centuries, the safety of women has been used as a propaganda tool. If you want to commit an atrocity, talk about how the people you want to destroy are a threat to your woman.<sup>51</sup>

Crispin here is referring specifically to the situation in Afghanistan and how feminist support of the war was manipulated to justify the Taliban and their oppression of women, resulting in many deaths and increased aggression, and suffering of Afghan women. Careful consideration to the realities and consequences of using women as tools for change are often overlooked with terrifying results. As Crispin goes on to say:

We fought for the right of women to join the military and we celebrated winning the right of women to fight on the front lines in combat as a feminist victory. It's not only a name that others are fighting, we are now using our own safety as an excuse to pick up guns, invade other countries and kill their inhabitants.<sup>52</sup>

We must be careful, when petitioning the idea of women's safety, as historically this has been used to justify violence. Crispin draws attention to the fact that when looking for criminal justice we look to familiar patriarchal systems geared towards revenge and punishment, not rehabilitation and prevention.

Returning to women's experiences post-war, while not life threatening, women were marginalised, and their war service rendered invisible. The general expectation, was that they return to domestic duties and support their husbands readjustment to normal life, with no consideration given to women's rehabilitation.

My mother was no exception to this experience. As a child I never understood why she refused to attend ANZAC Day services or allow me to go, for she never spoke about her war experiences or life as a teenager. I was unaware that at just sixteen my mother's world changed forever, making her teenage experiences vastly different to my own. She romanticised, underplayed, and glossed over her war experiences, as was the case with

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<sup>51</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, 133.

<sup>52</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, 133.

many women, and their war stories remained largely untold. Acknowledgement did not come until much later.

We owe film maker Gaylene Preston and her work, *War Stories Our Mother Never Told Us*<sup>53</sup>, a debt of gratitude for bringing to the world's attentions these women's stories. In this moving documentary, seven women recall their personal stories of World War II, recounting with frankness and honesty their experiences during this time of conflict and change, tales of love, loss, and courage. These accounts reveal not only their personal struggles and determination but those of all women who lived through the war and the years that followed. As Kevin Thomas of the Los Angeles Times sums it up :

Gaylene Preston takes a simple idea and turns it into a rich, universal experience, proving that there is nothing more beautiful than the human face talking from the heart.<sup>54</sup>

*War Stories* unveils the unspoken and unacknowledged experiences that are an enormously important part of all women's history, both in Aotearoa and internationally.

The confusing messages relayed to me came from my mother's own conflicts. On one hand be the good little woman and on the other hand, stretch your wings and learn to fly. But beware, for the rug can be pulled out from under your feet at any time. I did not understand why she was so bitterly unhappy and so involved in community activities but absolutely hell to live with at home. She did not trust the system to deliver and she did not have the ability to cope or even understand her own dilemma. My mother grew up in the era of the British 'stiff upper lip' when women, and men, were expected to carry on regardless. There was no recognition or acknowledgement of the ongoing ripples this shutting down of emotion caused. The notion of self-reflection and processing of inner feelings came much later with the feminist movements, of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Links in the Chain of Causation*, (Fig.17) act posthumously as a way for me to acknowledge and tell the story of my mother's experiences, one's she never shared. If she was still alive I

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<sup>53</sup> Gaylene Preston, *War Stories Our Mother Never Told Us*, Documentary Film, Production Companies; Gaylene Preston Productions, New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand On Air 1995, <https://www.nzfilm.co.nz/films/war-stories>.

<sup>54</sup> Gaylene Preston, *War Stories Our Mother Never Told Us*. Kevin Thomas, LA Times Publisher, 1995. <https://gaylenepreston.co.nz/store/war-stories-our-mothers-never-told-us>.

have no doubt she would be berating me right now for my telling of her story, however, I have done the best I can. There is a heartfelt apology in this work for failing to see or understand my mother's perspective of a world we both shared and found challenging, for vastly different reasons. Her past and experiences rippled outward, influencing my approach to life as much as her own, and they have been influential in making me the woman I am today.



Fig.17 Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, detail, 2022.

## Self

*Many of my life choices were made because I felt the pressures and expectations of family and society weighing heavily on my shoulders. When I became a mother, like mine before me, I made choices that were intrinsically linked to the unconditional love I had for my children.*

*The absolute love that motherhood brought, unexpected and unlooked for, has shaped my life choices bringing a myriad of emotions and experiences both good, bad, and otherwise. In hindsight it has given me a deeper understanding of my mother and what motherhood represented for her. I believe she loved me deeply but this came with conditions and expectations of the duties of daughter to her mother, that were expected to last her lifetime. Ironically, this gives her the last word here, I recall her frequently berating me with 'wait until you have children of your own, then you'll see!' Yes Mum, but what I see is maybe not what you thought I'd see.*



Fig.18 *Myself and Conor*, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988.

Fig.19 *Myself, Liam, and Conor*, 1991.

This photo (Fig. 20), taken as a record of my fourth birthday, documents the death of the child within. The image communicates feelings more reminiscent of a wake than a party, there is no evidence of magic, wonder, or imagination, rather we look afraid and upset. A moment of bizarre pantomime is being played out before the camera, documenting the personal, unspoken lives of others for perpetuity.



*Fig.20 Early Birthday Party, Susan, Robert, Peter, and Elizabeth, c,1965.*

How we inform our own understanding, knowledge and behaviour extends past the immediate, to cross time and space. Alison Jones, best known for her research into the intercultural hyphen, in her 2020 autobiography produced a work of social history that addresses issues around becoming and being Pākehā. It also speaks to family and parental relationships. Jones recalls similar feelings to my own:

I felt lonely at home. I have no visceral memory of being held close to the body of my mother, no sense of love or real warmth, no recollection of family laughter. My mother preoccupied... an unhappy husband, with no wider family support, and burdened by her own lack of maternal love, spread thin her small supply of affection. In a photograph, I clutch a hard-bodied doll. I am looking up

at the camera with a forced and anxious smile. Perhaps I am worried what the photographer expects of me.<sup>55</sup>

Both Jones and I are children of English immigrants, who arrived to a world of vastly different social constructs from those in Britain. While I do not recall a particularly unhappy childhood, the influence and exposure to two different worlds meant fitting in required greater effort. Differences went largely unacknowledged, as both cultures are based on Western ideology, yet had an underlying effect on who I became as an adult. Jones' upfront account of a life spent traversing Pākehā and Māori worlds, including the early influence of her British born parents, speaks to cultural gaps between generations that are experienced by many here in Aotearoa.

My childhood was steeped in traditional Western beliefs and ideologies, the dominant narrative in New Zealand culture during the 1960s and 70s. I was fortunate as an adult to live and work within Pasifika communities and acknowledge the importance of experiencing different cultural environments, which taught me greater acceptance and understanding for others.

Growing up in my perceived role as a female within society was due largely to the influence of my parents. I was given dolls to play with, my brother trucks and cars. In *Vibrant Matter*<sup>56</sup> Jane Bennett continues on from Bruno Latour's discourse around actants as a source of actions, human and non-human<sup>57</sup>, which can alter the course of events. Bennett's 'thing power', where objects have their own autonomy and the agential capacity to be part of a ripple on effect, was alive and well in our home. These actants helped press the very binary expectations around male and female roles within Western Pākehā society of 1960s Aotearoa, acting as oppressors of freedom of choice through the gender biased reality of their being.

The agential capacity of an object in relation to the lives of women is addressed in my works *Links in the Chain of Causation* (Fig.21) and *Inexplicable* (Fig.22). The kitchen plug is a useful tool that prevents water draining from a sink, however it can also symbolise the inability to

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<sup>55</sup> Jones, *This Pakeha Life*, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 9-11.

<sup>57</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social, An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

escape the drudgery of domestic life. Pills, while beneficial in treating illness, can also be addictive leading to the destruction of the lives of the user and their loved ones. This is supported by Bennett's discourse concerning an objects agential capacity or ongoing ripple effect in relation to human experience.

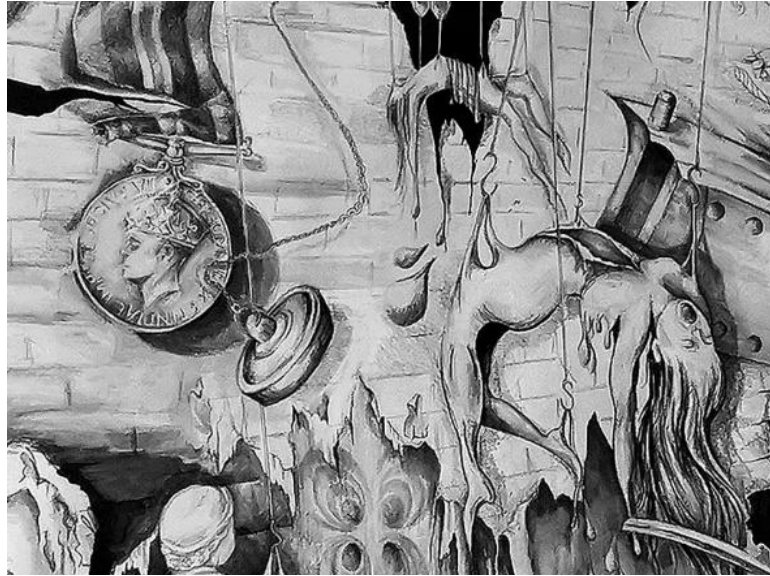


Fig.21 Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, detail, 2022.



Fig.22 Lissie Brown, *Inexplicable*, unfinished, 2022.

New freedoms and independence being offered to New Zealand women of the 70s and 80s added confusion and conflict concerning gender roles between generations, meaning many young women, including myself, struggled as they belonged to both worlds and to neither.

*As a young girl, I was free to roam the city. My best friend, and I cycled everywhere, we stole peacock feathers from the bird enclosures at the botanical gardens, smoked cigarettes in the bush on Māori Road and wandered through museums and galleries exploring different worlds. One vivid memory involved a man jumping out from behind a tree and exposing himself, secure in the knowledge that it was two against one, we laughed, and he ran off. Our parents never worried so long as we were home by dark.*

*Then puberty hit and everything changed, there were rules we had to abide by, ones that only applied to women. My friend became adept at climbing out windows and lying to her parents, culminating in her having to go away for six months to look after a sick aunt. She returned quieter and no doubt wiser. Publicly no mention was ever made of the child that she had born and been forced to give up. The father of the child, however, was often heard bragging to his mates about his part in it all, they responded with laughter and envy that he had 'got his leg over'.*

*Double standards were alive and well in the 1970s.*

I see-sawed between the roles of free spirit and the dutiful daughter, career over marriage, environmental, political, and social protest over compliance and conformity. This created gaps between my mother and I that required the dexterity of a tightrope walker to negotiate. A skill neither of us possessed. Our teenage experiences were so vastly different, that conflict was inevitable and all attempts to bridge this gap failed.

Like so many women of her time mother's life had not turned out the way she wanted, and she was afraid that the same would happen to me. In many ways it did, however the main difference was that, while a war and the obedient compliance for the rules of society, were responsible for many of my mother's choices, mine were more selfishly made. Growing up in a time where women were freer and more able to follow their own path, I failed to realise that the older traditions and expectations of my mother's generation also held sway over

my decisions. Larger factors were at play here, society has a way of placing restrictions on our dreams and decisions without us even realising. Friday makes a valid point when she states:

I always had the feeling that to keep my mother's love and approval I had to be perfect. I had to show her what she wanted to see, and not the me who had grown up in the years away from her. What I know now is that the pact I had set up killed any chance of being myself whether I was with her or not. And wasn't I doing the same to her?<sup>58</sup>

Consistently repeating patterns, failing to consider alternatives, trying to 'fit in' and 'do the right thing'. as perceived by generations older than us, are common traps to fall into. The impact on our external and internal being is monumental and many of us stoically battle on rather than confront the demons. Myself and others of all genders, become experts at the game where we are dealt cards under the guise of love that contains expectation, manipulation, control, and abuse. We throw the dice, pass go, collecting \$200 without fully realising what is happening. And those that lead us down that road are also largely unaware they are doing so.

Motherhood is a double-edged sword, on one hand I found unexpected joy in watching my children grow towards adulthood and independence, on the other, my relationship with my mother was shrouded in conflict and secrets due largely to her expectation around what a daughter should be. An emanation of past history mixed with contemporary beliefs, my response to becoming a mother meant I made decisions based on my perception of what I thought motherhood meant.

Kiki Smith, suggests we are a continuation of our ancestors, repeating their behaviour without realising we are doing so<sup>59</sup>, creating continuity but also change as every generation brings something new to the arena due to personal experience. Smith's work, *Untitled, of five seated paper girls*<sup>60</sup> (Fig.23) can be seen to represent female generations of her family, while similar each has individual points of difference. In an interview with Robyn Winters<sup>61</sup>,

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<sup>58</sup> Friday, *My Mother My Self*, 411.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Kiki Smith*, 127-140.

<sup>60</sup> Kiki Smith, "If You Can Outlive Most Men, All of Sudden You Can Be Venerated", Interview by Claire Barliant, *Apollo, The International magazine*, October 2012, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/kiki-smith-interview/>.

<sup>61</sup> Kiki Smith, *Kiki Smith*, 127-140.

Smith speaks to the importance of being self-determinant and the need to talk of your own truth and reality, so they are not dismissed or disappear. By addressing both the physical and psychological in this seemingly simple work Smith speaks directly to the influence each generation has on the next.

Fig.23 Redacted

Kiki Smith, *Untitled (Five Seated Paper Girls)*, 2007

<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/kiki-smith-interview/>

Louise Bourgeois made a lifelong career out of attempting to unravel the complexities of her familial relationships. The exhibition of Bourgeois' fabric artworks, aptly named *The Woven Child*<sup>62</sup> at the Hayward Gallery London in 2022 explores themes around the form, physiology, and psyche of woman. Bourgeois frequently addresses the personal in her work which resonates with links to past history and family:

It gives me great pleasure to hold on to my clothes, my dresses, my stockings, I have never thrown away a pair of shoes of mine in 20 years [...] The pretext is that they are still good - it's my past and as rotten as it was, I would like to take it and hold it tight in my arms.<sup>63</sup>

The works bear witness to past lives, through the use of personal objects. Hearts are torn apart by the often confronting, yet obscure references to Bourgeois' childhood experiences working for the family business restoring tapestries. By confronting rather than ignoring traumatic experience, Bourgeois attempts to move forward or at least challenge the confines these objects place around her memories. *Lady in Waiting* (Figs 24 and 25)<sup>64</sup> show a small, upholstered child sitting on a large armchair, the tentacle-like spider legs prohibit the child from escape. Framed and viewed through a sash window the viewer becomes the voyeur, watching a child removed from the outside world imprisoned perhaps by the demands of family.

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<sup>62</sup> Ralph Rugloff, Julienne Lorz, Curators, *Louise Bourgeois, The Woven Child*, Published on the occasion of the exhibition, (Hayward Gallery Publishing Southbank Centre London UK and Hatje Cantz Verlag GmbH Mommsenstrabe 27, a Ganske Publishing Group Company,2022).

<sup>63</sup> Rugloff and Lorz, *Louise Bourgeois, The Woven Child*, 29-30.

<sup>64</sup> Rugloff and Lorz, *Louise Bourgeois, The Woven Child*, 115-117.

Fig.24 Redacted

Louise Bourgeois, *Lady in Waiting* 2003.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/louise-bourgeois-lady-in-waiting>

Fig.25 Redacted

Louise Bourgeois, *Lady in Waiting, detail*, 2003

*Image in catalogue only, not available online.*

Fig.26 Redacted

Louise Bourgeois, *Do Not Abandon Me*, 1999.

[http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/lowery/louise-bourgeois6-15-10\\_detail.asp?picnum=22](http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/lowery/louise-bourgeois6-15-10_detail.asp?picnum=22)

Fig.27 Redacted

Louise Bourgeois, *Le Mare a Couper, Cordon*, 1998.

*Image in catalogue only, not available online.*

In *Do Not Abandon Me* (Fig. 26)<sup>65</sup> the umbilical cord is used as a symbol to represent bonds both physical and psychological that exist between mother and child. The drawing *Le Mare a Couper le Cordon* (Fig.27)<sup>66</sup> shows the mother severing the connection between her and her infant. In both these works the umbilical cord is connected at the mother's belly reversing the physical actuality of birth where it is the child that gains nourishment from their mother, not vice versa. This twist challenges the viewer to think about the relationship between the two and consider who is feeding off who.

The central figure in *Fruit* (Fig.28) was born out of lockdown, I had made an armature of a reclining female figure and taken it home to work on at a later date. Lock down meant that she was all I had to work on, the rest was in my studio. At my disposal were old family blankets that happened to be neutral in colour, all I could do was roll with it and see what happened. This led me down an unexpected and challenging pathway, opening new doorways to understanding myself. The works of both Smith and Bourgeois were instrumental in my progress, as both address issues of womanhood based on personal experience. Bourgeois uses materials that relate to the woman's role within family and domestic environments and the physical and emotional ties that are embedded in these relationships. Symbols of motherhood feature in the work of both Bourgeois and Smith and can also be seen in *Fruit*. Attached by umbilical cord a small foetus snuggles in a womb that becomes a blanket symbolic of protection and safety.

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<sup>65</sup> Rugloff and Lorz, *Louise Bourgeois, The Woven Child*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> Rugloff and Lorz, *Louise Bourgeois, The Woven Child*, 22.

*Fruit* is autobiographical, the hollow abdomen a reference to my years of chronic illness which resulted in major abdominal surgery. It was not until *Fruit* was completed that I realised I had subconsciously woven this traumatic event into the work. My main intention was to address the complex relationship between mother and child. Linking the personal with the collective in regard to mother daughter relationships. In my case mother delighted in retelling details of my illness, in my presence, to whoever would listen. This invasion of my privacy infuriated me for mother it reaffirmed her place as confidant and major player in the care of her daughter. It empowered her and she was oblivious to the damage it did to our relationship.



Fig.28 Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, 2023.

The work of both Smith and Bourgeois can be viewed under the lens of auto-ethnographic viewpoint. This methodology where personal stories are explored is a relevant contemporary approach to art practice, echoes my own approach. Attempting to unravel and explain my own situation as daughter and mother began with two works, one of indifference and one of angst. In *Converging Sentiments* (Fig.29) backs are turned, suggesting differences of opinion and beliefs, small putti linger demanding within the larger space. *Things We Do For Love* (Figs.30 and 31) speaks to the pressures placed on

young women to look and behave a certain way, and crying holding tight to the ponytail, oddly reminiscent of an umbilical cord is another putti. Motherhood is evident in both, informing how we think, behave, and relate, no matter our role in relation to the term.



Fig.29 Lissie Brown, *Converging Sentiment*, 2020.  
Figs.30 and 31 Lissie Brown, *Things We Do For Love*,2020.

Finally, motherhood is only part of my greater whole, primarily I am a human being. I have a mother and I am one, while these have informed who I am they are roles that define only part of me.

## Others

*I am me, but who am I? Not just an incubator, cleaner and cook.*

*Being a woman is more than the responsibility to produce life, caring for life, guiding, and feeding life. This body has a fundamental function, but this person has a soul. Don't lose me in the need to populate and procreate. I may be a good shag, but my womb is more than a purpose filled bag. My heart and mind need to create beyond the womb, life can come out of my head and hands. Once I have located 'self' then I can look beyond perpetual domestic function to the true purpose of my life.*

*But first I must do the dishes.*

*06/02/22*

*Linda xxx<sup>67</sup>*

*Fig.32 Redacted*

*Anatomical Female, c.1750, Museo La Specola, Florence, Italy.*

<https://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/sacred-anatomy/>

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<sup>67</sup> Linda Cook, Personal letter to author, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.

Almighty, in creating woman sex, had taken the uterus, and built a woman around it.<sup>68</sup>

Presented in overtly romanticised poses, the wax work figures from Museum La Specola<sup>69</sup> (Fig.32) speak directly to the idea of a woman as simply casings that exist to support and protect new life. The outer skins of these models create a bizarre contrast to the graphically explicit, anatomically correct exposed inner organs, reminiscent of beautiful wrapping paper, pulled back to reveal gifts of horrific proportions. These works, originally used for medical research and educational purposes, inadvertently draw attention to Western attitudes concerning the perception of women as purely decorative incubators for future generations

*Fruit* (Fig.33) represents a woman who is laid bare, her skin is pulled back revealing organs, muscle, and bone, a casing for the inner workings of the human body. The abdomen, an open wound, contains no womb, instead a serpent rises up, turning into umbilical cord attached to objects that relate to women both physically and psychologically.



Fig.33 Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, detail of work in progress, 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Lynda R Ross, *Interrogating Motherhood*, (Edmonton, Alberta: AU Press),12.

<sup>69</sup> Petra Lamers-Schütze and Yvonne Verlag, eds., *Encyclopaedia Anatomica*.

*Fruit* is about womanhood and the maternal. I have purposely chosen the serpent as a central symbol in this work. Rising poised and expectant from the abdomen it represents one or more of the following, life force, rebirth, sexual desire, treachery, wisdom, and temptation. The use of blanket links this work to the domestic, bringing associations both personal and public. By appearing as part of or to have taken possession of a woman, the serpent is instrumental in drawing attention to the plight of women in regard to the maternal and the domestic. It not only addresses social context for collective understanding and symbolic meaning of womanhood but also engages on an intimate and personal level, having relevance for women across generations.

The concept that a woman can be more than just exterior decoration for the male gaze has long been challenged. In response to the La Specola waxworks I have explored the internal and external aspects of humanity from both physical and emotional perspectives. Wanting to communicate what is unseen but can be felt emotionally, I focused on trigger points such as the heart, throat, gut, and brain. The ripping open of our outer skin to reveal what lies beneath, leads to a series of emotional reactions directly related to our mortality and the realisation that we will not live forever. Using contrasts and contradictions evident in the waxworks I address complexities that define the representation of woman throughout history and into the present day.



Figs. 34 and 35, Lissie Brown, *Cerebral Twist*, 2020.

Fig. 36 Redacted *Waxwork Female*, detail brain, La Specola, c.1750.

Image not available on line. Link to La Specola, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/la-specola>

In my work *Cerebral Twist* (Figs. 34 and 35), mask-like and disengaged the figure presents a demure, serene, uncomplicated, and ornamental persona, the patriarchal ideal. The detail centre back, enhances this impression, what appears to be a decorative headpiece in fact replicates a specific part of the brain (Fig. 36). The skin acts like a casing containing the emotions and feelings hidden below, cracking over the heart hints at what lies beneath.

The brain is exposed, referencing the fact that women do actually have one and are quite capable of using it. Neck muscles transform into a braid, symbolic of strength, wisdom, and self-identity. The intricate detail of the human organs refers to the collective unconscious<sup>70</sup> and psychological network of emotions that remain hidden in our subconscious.

Women have been under supervisory detention within the domestic environment for centuries, objectified and often referred to as 'domestic goddesses'. New Zealand artist Vivian Lynn worked within a socially engaged practice creating multi-layered installations that address issues important to women from personal and social perspectives. In *The Gates of the Goddess-a Southern Crossing Attended by the Goddess*, (Fig.37) Lynn explores subjects that speak to the patriarchal, cultural, feminist, and biological<sup>71</sup>. Within a performative methodology Lynn uses diversity of process and multi-media to initiate both cultural and personal responses that question the ideological representation and treatment of woman within Western patriarchal culture.

In common with my work *Fruit* (Fig.33) Lynn's ability to navigate important issues using materials and media that have a connection to the intent or meaning behind a work adds depth and complexity to her art practice. When media used encourages personal response, the artist is enabling ongoing engagement, beyond the immediate, for the individual and the collective.

Lynn's work reaches across generations, diverse in nature it addresses the experiences of women from both social and cultural perspectives. In the following quote Lynn speaks directly to the experiences of women living in the 1940s and 50s, an era that included my mother:

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<sup>70</sup> Bobroff, *Carl Jung: Knowledge in a Nutshell*, 146-7.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*, (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1986).

Fig.37 Redacted.

Vivian Lynn, *The Gates of the Goddess-a Southern Crossing attended by the Goddess*, 1983-85.  
Image of work not available online.

There was value placed on women's work because it was politically expedient for it to be so in the early 1940s ... so I had formative years I was conditioned to expect equality. But social values changed after the War as women were required to be wives and mothers again, rather than members of the paid workforce. A profession and marriage were again presented as mutually exclusive.<sup>72</sup>

As discussed earlier, after World War II pressure was put on women to return to the roles of wife and mother. Freud's controversial discourses on hysteria, penis envy, and the oedipal complex<sup>73</sup> were influential in enforcing the idea that a woman's most important function pertained to the maternal. Adding fuel to the fire, was British psychiatrist John Bowlby and his studies concerning 'attachment theory'.<sup>74</sup> Bowlby claimed children deprived of their mother's care in early life, were adversely affected by this neglect. By embracing the roles of wife, mother and caregiver, women were doing their bit for society, ensuring the physical and psychological wellbeing of future generations. According to the social beliefs in the 1950s, innate maternal instinct was a quality all women within Western societies possessed. No pressure ladies, it's in your makeup! Fortunately this belief was challenged head on in the 1960s and 70s with the rise of Second Wave Feminism.

One constant vein agreed among my friends as we began our journey into motherhood, was that as women, we had a right to be heard. Growing up we all experienced two vastly dissimilar worlds, one within the home and one when we ventured out the door. We believed we were at the forefront of feminist action, that protest against the injustices of the patriarchal society was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century concept. The conflict this caused within the reality of our lives as daughter, wives, and mothers, varied according to our character, relationships, attitudes, and personal strengths.

<sup>72</sup> Juliet Batten, "What is a Feminist Artist?", *Broadsheet 110: 'Special feature on feminist art'*, (June 1983), Interview with Vivian Lynn, 22, <https://broadsheet.auckland.ac.nz/docs/1983/Broadsheet-1983-110.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> Riya Yadav, "Freud and Penis Envy a Failure of Courage?", accessed May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/freud-and-penis-envy-failure-courage>.

<sup>74</sup> Lynda R Ross, *Interrogating Motherhood*, 14.

Friday writes that when a woman gives birth to a daughter, they are linked together for life in a very special way, that by the simple fact of the sameness of gender a unique closeness will exist within mother daughter relationships. Tempering this Friday argues that this can also lead to mutually limiting relationships proposing the following:

If a mother suggests to her daughter that motherhood is not the glorious culmination she had been promised that life had not opened out for her but had somehow diminished instead, she is saying to the girl, I should not have had you.<sup>75</sup>

There is a danger here that mothers, the givers of life, creators, providers, and protectors of future generations, could be perceived as monstrous. In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*<sup>76</sup> Creed argues that the prototype for definition of the monstrous is the reproductive body. Discussing the *Alien Movie Franchise* Creed refers to Alien Queen as "the archaic mother", outlined by Freud as the first nourisher and "first seducer."<sup>77</sup> By arguing that the prototype for definition of the monstrous is a woman's reproductive body Creed places new meaning to the concept of mother. Taking aim at the male fear of female reproduction and exploring the trepidation and apprehension men feel when forced to respond to the archaic mother as represented by the alien, Creed adds weight to the concept of the inborn nature of a mother's love as something unrivalled in its monstrosity. This is where instinctive powers of motherhood can come into play.

Friday comments on the special closeness between a mother and daughter, however, fails to acknowledge that this tight bond can be relevant to all parent child relationships, regardless of gender. Observations made during my son's pre-school years provide insights into the diversity of reactive behaviours and beliefs that are born out of generational relationship bonds. My own experiences made me determined my sons grew up knowing they were loved could do anything they dreamt of, and that personal happiness held greater value than getting a haircut and having real job. In contrast one friend was adamant that because they had not been pushed into higher education, their children had to do so in order to be happy and successful. Another raising his children alone, pushed them to

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<sup>75</sup> Friday, *My Mother My Self*, 46-47.

<sup>76</sup> Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, 16-31.

<sup>77</sup> Howard B Levine, and Gail S. Reed, eds., *On Freud's Screen Memories*, (London: Karnac, 2015) 98.

participate in team sports, believing this would give them the sense of belonging he felt was missing due to the absence of their mother. There is no binary of right or wrong here, only individual truths and a desire to do right by your children.

There is however another side to monstrous in regards to motherhood. Women who either cannot or choose not to have children often come under attack for remaining childless, while the gender-diverse are judged for either having or not having children. It seems one cannot win whatever their choice or situation in matters pertaining to the maternal and the multitude of complex issues woven into the very fabric of opinion in relation to motherhood is monstrous in itself. Kristeva describes the “passionate violence of the maternal experience”<sup>78</sup>, as not subject to social manipulation, but rather a conquest that comes out of the role women take on when becoming a mother. Any inborn desire to have a child or be a mother, is a fabrication conveniently portrayed through the construction of greater social needs and expectations and is not instinctive in all women. The maternal can be a positive experience triggering a love that lasts a lifetime, while others feel a loss of personal identity and self.

Social constructs of the day hold underlying manipulation and control over how women perceive their role and relationships when becoming mothers. With each generation challenges will differ yet affect behaviours and attitudes long after their first appearance. Jacqueline Fahey in her work *Mother and Daughter Quarrelling*<sup>79</sup> (Fig.38) addresses the issue of expectations placed by one generation onto the next in the following statement:

She (Mother) later decreed that I must devote myself to my children and Fraser; I could no longer put myself first. And so, it continued, a futile struggle. Deeply disturbing, and very common between mothers and daughters throughout history. Mothers, out of fear, are determined to confine their daughters, daughters determined to find meaning in life. Genetic matter is repeated again and again...<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Julia Kristeva, “On Motherhood”.

<sup>79</sup> “Jacqueline Fahey: Say Something!”, *Exhibition*, 22 November 2017-11 March 2018, Christchurch Art Gallery, Te Puna o Waiwhetū, accessed May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/collection/83-18/jacqueline-fahey/mother-and-daughter-quarrelling>.

<sup>80</sup> “Jacqueline Fahey: Say Something!”.

Fig.38 Redacted. Jaqueline Fahey, *Mother and Daughter Quarrelling*, detail, 1977.  
<https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/collection/83-18/jacqueline-fahey/mother-and-daughter-quarrelling>

Education consultant Dr Judith Richs discusses the following theory in her blog *Healing the Wounds of your Ancestors*<sup>81</sup> that while we are all individual beings, we are also part of a greater ancestral lineage. Rich goes on to suggest that our prior ancestors pass on a certain energy to the next generation inviting us to think of the challenges we are presented with when we step to the front of the line. It is our opportunity to reshape family history, modifying and recasting throughways for future generations. We are all just links in a larger chain that encompasses both past and future generations.

The questions, 'who we are' and 'who we come from', are important as we seek to understand ourselves. We need to investigate our past, in order to position ourselves in the present and be aware of our influence on future generations.

In *Links in the Chain of Causation* (Fig.44) I sought to understand my mother's life and gained a greater sense of my own identity as Pākehā. It is interesting to note that while my mother identified herself as a New Zealander she continued to live by a very British code. She criticised and corrected those who did not speak the 'Kings English', referred to Britain as home and never attempted to embrace or understand the cultural context of Aotearoa beyond the Western perspective. It is for this reason that Aotearoa is not referred to more in this work, as the focus was to illustrate my mother's journey, and the underlying influence this had on my life.

Beliefs, behaviours, and mannerisms are passed down from generation to generation and a mother's wisdom is often given freely, however, not always gratefully received. Fahey, never one to bow to pressure, both defies and honours motherhood and her female ancestors in the work *Domestic Exposure I Paint Myself* (Fig.39). Appearing to work in auto-ethnographic methodology, Fahey lays herself bare, presenting evidence of her daily existence as a wife and mother in a way that is extremely personal yet relatable to all.

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<sup>81</sup> "Healing the wounds of Your Ancestors", Dr Judith Richs, accessed May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://www.judithrich.com/rx-for-the-soul/2018/1/25/healing-the-wounds-of-your-ancestors>.

Fig.39 Redacted. Jacqueline Fahey, *Final Domestic Exposure-I Paint Myself*, 1981-82.  
<https://teara.govt.nz/en/artwork/45028/final-domestic-expose-i-paint-myself-by-jacqueline-fahey>

Documenting the objects and situations that are part of her daily life, Fahey creates narratives that speak directly to the experiences of women. The objects illustrated in this work create ripples across generations that refer to bonds of connection through shared experience.

Cathy Wilkes's installations (Figs.41-43) tackle issues concerning the domestic environment, speaking of secrets untold and the unspoken struggles of everyday existence. Sparse isolated environments tell us parts of stories, leaving the viewer the freedom to piece together the underlying secrets and storylines left unsaid. Wilkes work comments on the unspoken fragments of daily life within the home, invoking consideration of the role of women throughout history. Discussing issues concerning the traditional roles and expectations of family life including motherhood, fatherhood, social demands, and conformity, Wilkes challenges the balance of importance placed on the domestic and binary roles within these environments. The figures mostly appear genderless, however due to their surroundings there is room for interpretation on who and what they represent:

Five children wash in a bath in a cutesy little print that's not by Wilkes. More children stand about with distended bellies and dumb, bean-shaped heads, eyes like dots, their expressions inscrutable. Dolls or people, it is hard to tell: sculpted beings. They might be traumatised and there's nothing much for them to do, as the biennale crowds come steaming through. A taller figure I take for the children's mother stands alone in a striped, green dress decorated with stuck-on photographs of a child eating soup. Her head is a white void and her legs and bare feet are cartoonish, tired, crumbling. An extra foot, unattached to her body, lags behind on the floor. I think of the footstep of someone who isn't there.<sup>82</sup>

These narratives include objects and imagery commonly used in homes today. While Wilkes does not work in a strictly auto-ethnographic manner her installations fall

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<sup>82</sup> Adrian Searle, "Should I scream or call social services?", *Cathy Wilkes at Venice Biennale Review*, 2019, accessed July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/may/07/cathy-wilkes-british-pavilion-review-venice-biennale>.

under this umbrella in the wider sense as they address relationships and private lives, invoking extremely personal responses from the viewer. Situations, objects, interactions, and domestic narratives speak to the familiar, yet the real power of these works is in the empty spaces and untold stories

Figs.40, 41, 42, and 43 Redacted. Cathy Wilkes *Installation* Museum Abteiberg, Nov 2015-Feb 2016.  
<https://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/project/cathy-wilkes-at-museum-abteiberg-monchengladbach-9500>

Collections of seemingly random objects are laid out in a way reminiscent of the objects we often find hidden in kitchen drawers, things collected in the belief they may one day be of some use. The placement of objects and figures exaggerates the importance of the empty spaces between, creating an atmosphere that is subdued and disturbing but also filled with compassion. Subjective experiences are present simply due to their omission, speaking to the unspoken truths that exist in these environments. Items are treated with care and tenderness, suggestive of the fine line between domestic bliss and family conflict. Figures and objects, while linked, remain isolated, possibly representing the gap between the reality of our daily lives and what we present publicly.

In response to both Wilkes's and Fahey's works I invited women to identify objects that related to the memory of their mothers. I recalled an old belt that hung on the kitchen wall in my childhood home which was used for disciplining us when we misbehaved, ominous and ever present, it possessed great power.



Fig. 44 Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, detail, 2022.

Representing the emotional attachment of one human to another, objects hint at ghosts of past generations and their influence on the present. From suggestions received I selected objects that I felt were universally relatable to motherhood. Due to the threatening and disturbing memory of the belt I choose not to include this in the finished work. It can however be seen in *Links in the Chain of Causation* (Fig.44) placed on a table next to an image of my mother.

Through their very existence as part of the everyday, these objects, from kitchen sink plugs to tampons, have influenced expectations around identity and life choices based purely on gender. They evoke emotional and nostalgic responses due to memories of the maternal within our daily lives. Dr Peter Schwenger, in his book *The Tears of Things* states the following:

For many, the familiar presence of things is a comfort. Things are valued not only because of their rarity or cost or their historical aura, but because they seem to partake in our lives: they are domesticated, part of our routine and so on.<sup>83</sup>

These objects trigger emotional responses to memories from the past and also represent physical objects that exist within the world of the readymade. Possessing some of Bennetts

<sup>83</sup> Peter Schwenger, *The Tears of Things Melancholy and Physical Objects*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 3.

‘thing power’<sup>84</sup>, a material vitalism independent of the parameters of human existence, these works rub up against different paradigms. Whilst I acknowledge the agency of these objects within the material sense, my intention here comes from a representational paradigm that is based firmly in the human centric.

Public response to these works (Figs.45-49) surprised me, strangers sought me out and relayed personal stories about their mothers, siblings, and family life. Single objects held different meanings for different people yet there were links that tied them together. All spoke of feelings of belonging and sense of place, and of laughter, loss, sadness, and joy.



Fig. 45 Lissie Brown, *Memories of Mothers*, detail, 2021.



Figs. 46, 47, 48, and 49, Lissie Brown, *Memories of Mothers*, detail, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xvi.

This feedback encouraged me to explore the power of the nostalgia of things in my work and the use of objects linked to memory has been used in *Links in the Chain of Causation*, and *Fruit* (Figs.50 and 51).



Fig. 50 Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, 2022



. Fig.51 Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, detail, 2023.

The last word goes to a response written by Emily Crossen, who had visited my studio at the time I was completing these works. It speaks to the sharing of stories and experiences and

the interlinking of lives, both past present and future. Emily has kindly given me permission to share this here.

*Lissie,*

*We were talking in your studio the other day, about motherhood, being a woman, about all the fragments, the objects that make up a life. You have this wall of these beautiful, delicate, white objects, like tipping out a handbag and finding all these things you carry around. I told you that when cleaning (which I hate to do) I feel so responsible for all these small broken pieces of domestic life that I throw boxes of stuff in the bin, or I suck them up with the vacuum cleaner. Nobody misses them. A weight is lifted off my shoulders. One less responsibility in life. Motherhood is hard. Making art is hard. Keep going, have dirty floors in your house, spend your time making art and nurturing friendships. Your recognition of the hard slog of it all makes it worthwhile.*

*Emily*

*Emily Crossen 2021<sup>85</sup>*

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<sup>85</sup> Emily Crossen, Personal letter to author, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.

## Chapter 4

### Herstory-Feminism: Historical Context

In a purely anatomical sense, gender is predetermined before we are born, however the traditional Western belief that it sits within the binary construct of either male or female does not align with human behaviour. Historical context is necessary in order to fully understand the complexity of contemporary attitudes towards gender. It can be argued that the enduring nature of woman's various identifiers throughout history are performative and based on a repetition of acts. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*<sup>86</sup> challenges the traditional notion and illusion of gender as strictly binary, suggesting roles are repeated performances based on traditions and beliefs of the time we exist in.

Butler also suggests that social habits re-enacted from generation to generation, for example the announcement at birth of 'it's a boy' or 'girl', reinforce heterosexual roleplay, based solely on the assumption of the visual perception of the anatomy of a newborn child. These performative traditional beliefs have until recent times defined the roles humans are presumed to base their sexuality, behaviour, and gender upon.

*Venus of Willendorf*, approximately 25,000 years old, is an historic example pertaining to women as mothers, that demonstrates the extent of these performative patterns of behaviour. Discovered in 1908, experts claimed she represented fertility and motherhood. At this time, the field of anthropology was dominated by white males and therefore interpretations of meaning most likely reflected this bias, projecting contemporary ways of thinking back into the Paleolithic.<sup>87</sup>

Since first discovered many different theories as to the purpose and function of these female representations have been debated. For the purposes of this study, I wish only to draw attention to the idea that roles defined as specific to women are based on our

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<sup>86</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 7-11.

<sup>87</sup> Joshua Learn, "What Did the Venus of Willendorf Originally Represent," *Discover*, March 2021, accessed March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/what-did-the-venus-of-willendorf-originally-represent>.

anatomy and learnt behaviours that are not necessarily inherent to all those that identify as female.

Throughout history from Willendorf to Beyonce references to the role of women as mothers can be found. Both images below represent women as mothers and on first view it is difficult to separate Beyonce in the state of pregnancy from the small Paleolithic figure found in Willendorf. Upon deeper reflection differences are evident, Beyonce (Fig.52) presents a strange mix of poised sexuality and measured modesty<sup>88</sup> appearing to reinforce traditional beliefs that a women is at her best when embracing the role of motherhood. In contrast the tiny Paleolithic figurine (Fig.53) appears unbothered as to how she presents, contained within herself with none of the ‘peacocking’ evident in the Beyonce images, she represents a much stronger less compromising depiction of womanhood.

Fig.52 Redacted. Beyonce images showing stages of pregnancy, 2017.

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a10028784/beyonce-pregnancy-timeline/>



Fig.53 *The Venus of Willendorf*, c. 30,000 BCE. Photo Credit: Bjorn Christian Torrissen / [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://allthatsinteresting.com/venus-of-willendorf)  
<https://allthatsinteresting.com/venus-of-willendorf>

Beyonce, in displaying the importance of her choice to become a mother, has not diminished her iconic status as a strong female role model, suggesting rather that women can have their cake and eat it too. Does this give weight to the belief that the last one hundred years of feminist action has resulted in a more balanced society in relation to gender? Crispin argues otherwise, stating:

The problem is that feminism has offered women so few alternatives to give their lives meaning and value. We have not created the infrastructure nor even

<sup>88</sup> Megan Friedman, “A Timeline of Beyonce’s Pregnancy with Twins”, *Bazaar*, June 2017, accessed March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a10028784/beyonce-pregnancy-timeline/>.

the imagination to allow woman to live different kinds of lives outside of the romantic complex.<sup>89</sup>

Crispin's comment speaks directly to my mother's experience after World War II, when the doors that had been opened during the war were slammed shut post-war. Any freedoms granted were cruelly combined with more traditional pre-war expectations, under the guise of the 'you can have it all', approach. In reality however, this only added more pressure and expectation to the lives of many women. Consider now the images of Beyonce and the message she is sending to those who do not have access to nannies and an entourage of assistants as Beyonce does. Where exactly does this leave women in the realm of equal rights and freedom of choice today?



Fig.54 Lissie Brown, *Venus of Willendorf, Ocarinas*, 2021.

Women all dance to different tunes, most try to remain true to themselves and not bow to the social expectations of the times. Wanting to create a work that acted as a symbol of strength and unity I made ocarinas in the likeness of the Venus of Willendorf (Fig.54). These small whistles speak to the importance of both the individual and the need for

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<sup>89</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, 120.

solidarity found in the collective. Using a range of clays and oxides each has its own identity and musical pitch, together they operate as a unified group, an orchestra of sound, supporting each other.

Judy Chicago describes feminism as a cycle and believes we are presently in a phase of pushing back, as we address global issues that are relevant to women everywhere<sup>90</sup>. Gender inequality is not a new issue, history or rather herstory is filled with evidence that feminist action predates the waves of the 19<sup>th</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, backing up Chicago's theory of the cyclic nature of feminist action. Acknowledgement of the historical significance of feminist action is important to ensure positive change.

14<sup>th</sup> Century Frenchwoman Christine de Pizan is a fine example of the early feminist. The Italian poet and court-writer openly acknowledged women from history who had attained great feats in their lifetimes, de Pizan also argued against intellectual inequality and the chauvinistic nature of contemporary literature and religion of the time.<sup>91</sup>

French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician René Descartes, unwittingly made a claim for gender equality in 1619 when he suggested that the body may be an illusion of the senses when he coined the phrase, "I think therefore I am"<sup>92</sup>.

Professor Cecile Alduy clarifies this in the following statement. When "I" am thinking that very thought, "I" must exist, therefore "I" am. And this "I" is a thinking thing. Now, Descartes ... had he looked into it would have agreed that this "I" defined by reason alone is necessarily gender-neutral (no body, no sex...). Or as French philosopher Elisabeth Badinter puts it in *What Is A Woman* , ontologically speaking, "a woman is a man like any other."<sup>93</sup>

One could argue that in current times of gender diversity and the, he/ him, she /her, they/ them world of pronouns, some would protest at the idea of a women as 'a man like any other'. A more appropriate term of phrase would perhaps be 'a women is a human like any other'.

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<sup>90</sup> (Feminist Art) Judy Chicago on how working with Dior brought a long-planned feminist art project to fruition", accessed November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://podcasts.dior.com/judy-chicago>, Dior Talks ,Podcast, 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Sophie Bourgault, and Rebecca Kingston, ed., *Christine de Pizan , The Book of the City of Ladies and Other Writings*, Trans. Ineke Hardy (Indiana, United States of America: Hackett Publishing Company Ltd, 2018).

<sup>92</sup> Dictionart.com, accessed November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, <https://www.dictionart.com/browse/i-think-therefore-i-am>.

<sup>93</sup> Cecile Alduy, "*The Philosopher, the Mother and the Baby*", Berfrois, August 2012, Berfrois, <https://www.berfrois.com/2012/08/descartes-gave-us-all-we-needed/>.

Mary Astell, born 1666, described by Catherine Stimpson as the first Systematic Feminist Theoretician, urged women to embrace Descartes, challenging the idea that women were mentally inferior.<sup>94</sup> A believer in Cartesian Philosophy<sup>95</sup> Astell claimed women only needed the freedom to think for themselves applying rational judgement to prove this point<sup>96</sup>. Astell's political opinions on the rights of women express many of the primary concerns raised by radical feminists in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, including the belief that men were women's natural enemies and that women should be liberated from the need to please and serve as sexual playthings. Believing that women's opinions and feelings were as relevant and important as those of their male counterparts Astell stated that women should be allowed to contribute to the way society was structured.

Women's advocate, philosopher and writer Mary Wollstonecraft argued that women had the right to be educated in her work *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* published 1792, and Utopian Feminists St Simon and Fourier, who believed Marxist socialism would radically resolve gender issues almost immediately, also deserve acknowledgment<sup>97</sup>.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century women of Aotearoa had found their voice. July 1893 saw a petition presented to parliament with activist Kate Sheppard's signature appearing alongside 25,519 others in support of women's suffrage. Citizenship for both Māori and settlers, ongoing education for women, the right to vote and represent themselves in parliament were at the forefront of female agendas at this time, culminating with women of Aotearoa gaining the right to vote in September 1893.

Māori Leader Te Puea Hērangi epitomises the strength of women in Aotearoa at the turn of the century, raising issues concerning Māori rights, including re-establishing the mana and strength of the Kīngitanga, standing against conscription, and addressing land issues while raising funds and supporting land development in the Waikato region. Helping her people to have goals to work towards Hērangi worked with, rather than against, those in power showing the strength and courage of a true leader<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> Dominic Abakedi, Dorothy Oluwabemi-Jacob, Mary Egbai, and Angelica Effiong, eds., *A General Introduction to Feminism and Feminist Philosophy: Chapter 2*, Kindle, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "René Descartes (1596-1650)", <https://iep.utm.edu/descarte/>.

<sup>96</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Mary Astell (1666-1731)", <https://iep.utm.edu/mary-astell/>.

<sup>97</sup> Abakedi, Oluwabemi-Jacob, Egbai, and Effiong, eds., *Feminism and Feminist Philosophy: Chapter 2*.

<sup>98</sup> Charlotte MacDonald, Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams, eds., *The Book of New Zealand Women, Ko Kui Ma Te Kupapa*, (Wellington New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 1991), 664-669.

The 1960s and 70s saw great change for women in Aotearoa as new generations of activists raised questions concerning race relations, sexuality, employment, and the welfare system keeping pace with the rest of the Western world. The central focus of second wave feminism was the call for liberation and equality for women in social, economic, and political arenas. While first wave feminism had accomplished reforms around gender equality, women still had little control over their finances, sexuality and choices regarding fertility and pregnancy. Marrying and having children had become optional and the range of career choices open to women extended past the perceived feminine roles of housewife, teacher, or nurse. This led to a perception that women had more independence and freedom, however the reality was different, as they tackled multiple roles, working twice as hard and gaining little or no respect for their efforts.

At this time freedoms for girls in their pre-teens were in direct contrast to the restrictions placed on young women once puberty struck. Women of my generation saw second wave feminism as a rite of passage and a means to tackle the double standards that still existed in regards to expectations based on one's gender. With the nineties came the third wave which was informed by post-colonial and postmodern thinking. Young women embraced the idea that they were no longer objects of a sexist patriarchy, opting rather for the opportunity for experimentation and freedom in regard to gender identity. There was also a response to the backlash by media on the word feminism and its supposed association with male bashing and extremism.<sup>99</sup>

Anna Uddenberg<sup>100</sup> explores performativity in her figurative works that challenge the traditional perception of woman as the submissive weaker sex. Uddenberg grew up during the third wave era and her works embrace the attitude and confidence of women of that time. Uddenberg poses her figures in ways that are sexually charged yet not submissive, as shown below in *Disconnect* (Fig.55) and *Power Play Precarious Patricia*, (Figs.56 and 57). Creating sculptures that are provocative and brazen Uddenberg addresses attitudes regarding the idealised female body image head on. The figures are posed in an uncomfortable and confronting manner daring the viewer to challenge them, presenting a refreshing and dynamic representation of women.

<sup>99</sup> Martha Rampton. "Four Waves of Feminism", Accessed May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>.

<sup>100</sup> K-T Z, Kraupa-Tuscany Zeidler, Anna Uddenberg, Accessed September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.k-t-z.com/artists/39-anna-uddenberg/>

Due to the nature of their materiality Uddenberg's figures possess a hybrid quality an almost cyborgian dynamic that is both organic and mechanical. They are reminiscent of prowling cats crossed with machines and have an underlying power and energy that cannot be easily dismissed. The figures and objects dispense with social courtesy, reminding us of how far we have come in the fight for equality.

Misunderstandings in visual reading of Uddenberg's work can be drawn when compared to Stanley Kubrick's objectification woman as milk bar furniture in *A Clockwork Orange*<sup>101</sup>. Kubrick's furniture comes from a very male perspective and is brutally sexist, while Uddenberg approaches sexuality from a female perspective displaying a very astute understanding of twenty first century life. Parallels to the meaning and intention behind Uddenberg's work can be drawn from issues raised by Tolentino where she unpicks the exaggerated notions of perfection in relation to present day feminist issues<sup>102</sup> in Western society.

Fig.55 Redacted. Anna Uddenberg, *Disconnect (airplane mode)*, 2018.

<https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/68675/Anna-Uddenberg-Disconnect-airplane-mode>

Figs.56 and 57 Redacted. Anna Uddenberg, *Power Play, Precarious Patricia* 2019

<https://www.k-t-z.com/artists/39-anna-uddenberg/works/962-anna-uddenberg-precarious-patricia-2019/>

Contemporary feminism is diverse, consisting of vastly differing theories and approaches regarding treatment of women. While compellingly different, these also overlap, borrow from each other, contributing to collaborative ways of thinking that unite all under the umbrella of feminist action.

In 1989, Lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw used the term intersectional feminism describing it as 'a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other'<sup>103</sup>. Drawing attention to the seriousness of interrelated simultaneous systems of persecution and oppression, intersectional feminism is enormously complex. Addressing social factors including race, economic status, gender, indigeneity, religion, age, and education intersectional feminism addresses women's rights on a global scale. Through

<sup>101</sup> Stanley Kubrick, director, "Clockwork Orange", Scene, Alex at the Korova Milk-Bar, production companies Polaris Productions and Hawk Films, released by Warner Brothers Pictures, 1971, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ll4MxIMVzo>.

<sup>102</sup> Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 63-95.

<sup>103</sup> "Intersectional feminism: what it means and why it matters right now", UN Women, July 2020, Originally published on Medium. [com/@UN\\_Women, https://www.unwomen.org > stories.](https://www.unwomen.org)

the critique of earlier waves, current movements are finding ways to initiate change regarding issues of women's rights within the context of the contemporary environment.

In the article *Post Feminism, popular feminism, and neoliberal feminism?*, Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg discuss their understanding of these movements and their importance within the current feminist landscape.<sup>104</sup> Approaching feminism from different perspectives these women acknowledge that these 'theories articulate, borrow and contribute to each mode of thinking positioning contemporary feminism'<sup>105</sup> combining to create a diverse and multi-layered beast.

Central themes includes the positioning and recent popularity of feminism in society, the need to be aware of the co-constitutive nature of media platforms relationships with capitalism and the importance of investing in alternative approaches that challenge the current status quo.

British sociologist Gill writes extensively regarding postfeminist culture with emphasis on choice and autonomy. Post feminist conversations centre around similar issues as intersectional feminism. Gill quotes:

It is not simply a matter of integrating sexism with other axes of power and difference but also facing up to the complex dynamics and complicities in play in the current moment.<sup>106</sup>

Post feminism has in the past rejected what could be seen as outdated feminist ideas, which have at times challenged the status quo. This is done, with no antagonistic intent regarding past actions, but rather with a nod to the need for flexibility and acknowledgment of what is important moving forward. In recent times women, especially public figures, are embracing their feminist identity, and there is a new mediated visibility to feminism. This is perhaps double edged sword, as media platforms and capitalism play a part in the manipulation of this new wave just as they have in the past. A sign that the misogyny of the 90's lad culture and patriarchal power plays, still hold sway and influence within contemporary society.

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg, "Post Feminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation", *Feminist Theory* Vol 21(1) (2020), [sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions).

<sup>105</sup> Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg, "Post Feminism".4

<sup>106</sup> Rosalind Gill, "Sexism Reloaded, or It's Time to Get Angry Again", *Feminist Media Studies*, vol.11 no.1, (2011), 61-71.

Post feminist sensibility is built and expanded upon by contemporary popular and neoliberal feminist theory. Popular feminism described by Professor of Communication Sarah-Banet Weiser as visible, affirming, media friendly and accessible to the wider public, reinforcing positivity and personal choice. Catherine Rottenberg, Associate Professor at University of Nottingham, believes these are also crucial rationalities of neoliberalism. Supporting individualism and entrepreneurialism with focus on interdependent gender relationships the neoliberals can be seen to be assisting the flourishing of popular feminisms role within media and popular culture.<sup>107</sup>

There are however recent worrying trends within Western society that present formidable challenges moving forward. These include the overturning of abortion rights by the United States supreme court and the upending of Roe vs Wade.<sup>108</sup> Demographer Paul Morland's, suggestions for solving the United Kingdom's current declining population concerns include introduction of a 'grow your own' policy that contains a 'negative child benefit,' where childless couples pay more tax than those with children<sup>109</sup>. These situations are untenable and lean towards ultra-conservatism and authoritarianism designed solely to fill the coffers of the state<sup>110</sup>.

It is interesting to note that within New Zealand tax credits for families with dependent children, are available based on yearly family income and circumstance. The forefather of these Working for Families Tax Credits was the introduction in 1913/14 of a Child Tax Exemption of twenty five pounds per child. In 1938 the Social Security Act included a means tested Family Benefit. Since that time, while the names, conditions and requirements may have altered, families of Aotearoa have been offered tax exemptions and financial assistance in raising children.<sup>111</sup> Financial support for children to ensure they are living in safe and nurturing environments is essential, however, Morland's proposal for a negative

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<sup>107</sup> Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg "Post Feminism", 9.

<sup>108</sup> Jessica Glenza, Martin Pengelly and Sam Levin, "US supreme court overturns abortion rights upending Roe v Wade", The Guardian, June 2022, accessed July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/24/roe-v-wade-overturned-abortion-summary-supreme-court?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/24/roe-v-wade-overturned-abortion-summary-supreme-court?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other).

<sup>109</sup> Zoe Williams, "Tax the childless! Encourage 'our own' to breed! What an asinine, inhumane way to tackle a population crisis", The Guardian, July 2022, Accessed August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/04/population-crisis-britain-paul-morland?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/04/population-crisis-britain-paul-morland?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other).

<sup>110</sup> Liam Mertens in private conversation with the author, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

<sup>111</sup> Kia Piki Ake Welfare Expert Advisory Group, "A brief history of family support payments in New Zealand", 2018, accessed September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <http://www.weag.govt.nz/assets/documents/WEAG-report/background-documents/133db2ad05/History-of-family-support-payments-010419.pdf>.

child benefit where childless couples are taxed more for not having children is misguided and beneficial to no one.

In stark contrast to the Working for Families Tax Credits is Aotearoa's Paid Parental Leave Scheme<sup>112</sup>. Labour Member of Parliament Sue Maroney<sup>113</sup> questioned why, as the first country in the world where women gained the right to vote, we struggle to keep up with international trends in relation to paid parental leave. In 2021 Aotearoa ranked 39<sup>th</sup> out of 41 countries in the OECD regarding parental leave support, posing questions as to why raising a family is seemingly not valued on both social and economic levels. Paid parental leave was extended to 26 weeks in 2017<sup>114</sup>, for mothers only, fathers receive no remuneration at all for taking time off. Ironically in our patriarchal society it appears that men, as parents, rate as the second sex and are not considered as instrumental in the hands on care of a newborn child. The stress this presents for the family unit, emotionally physically and financially is astronomical. Considering the fact our Prime Minister is a woman and a mother, as was the leader of the opposition until recently, the question must be asked as to why, particularly from a capitalist perspective, the care and welfare of the future generations within Aotearoa is so undervalued. How are we to move forward when we live in a society that presents one face and lives by another?

In recent times Aotearoa has seen a backlash against women in power, Jacinda Ardern has been vilified for many of her recent policies and actions<sup>115</sup>. Colleen Scribner, program officer for the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund comments in a recent article that there appears to be an eroding of democracy and resurgent rationalism. This in turn restricts freedom of thought and behaviour, centred around new attacks of the liberty and rights of women in many countries.<sup>116</sup> When a woman enters a world dominated by patriarchal rules and opinion it does not follow that things will automatically change for the better in regards to issues of gender and equality. The way society is constructed, both privately and publicly needs to be challenged, world views on how societies are run must be contested, and changes made. The way forward is paved with good intentions but if these never leave the boardroom or reach the factory floor little progress will be made.

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<sup>112</sup> Employment New Zealand, "Parental leave eligibility", <https://www.employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/parental-leave/eligibility/eligibility-table/>.

<sup>113</sup> Radio New Zealand "The Panel with Paula Penfold and Wade Jackson," aired September 2022 at 4.30 pm.

<sup>114</sup> Kelly Buchanan, contributor, "New Zealand: Paid Parental Leave To Be Extended To 26 Weeks By 2020", Library of Congress, accessed October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2017-12-05/new-zealand-paid-parental-leave-to-be-extended-to-26-weeks-by-2020/>.

<sup>115</sup> Tess McClure, "Threats against Jacinda Ardern nearly triple amid rise in conspiracy groups", The Guardian, June 2022, accessed July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/13/threats-against-jacinda-adren-nearly-triple-new-zealand-conspiracy-theories?>

<sup>116</sup> Colleen Scriber, "Why Strongmen Attack Women's Rights", Freedom House, June 2019, accessed July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/why-strongmen-attack-womens-rights>.

I have had discussions with women who believe most of the goals concerning equal rights for all have already been achieved, meaning no further action is required. Tolentino addresses contemporary politics and youth culture reflecting on the way humans delude themselves into believing how they think, act, and behave is independent of any outside manipulation and control.<sup>117</sup> Crispin also challenges the status quo, where many exist in a safety zone that does little to aid progress. Addressing the state of contemporary culture head-on with the following statement:

There is a big difference between safety and peace, safety is a kind of surface level cleanliness, where outward behaviour is the most important thing. It's like the city that brags about how safe and clean its streets are, meanwhile, the jails are filled with the homeless and the poor and the mentally ill, and littering gets you publicly whipped.<sup>118</sup>

Returning to my earlier question regarding where exactly all this leaves women in the realm of equal rights and freedom of choice today? Contemporary feminist thought acknowledges that women's identities and experiences differ greatly and are linked in with other beliefs and injustices. The convergence of combined factors can amplify gender-based discrimination and the future aim should be to ensure all reap the benefits of women's rights. The need to act in whatever form necessary should be at the forefront of contemporary women's rights.

If we have learnt nothing else from history it should be this.

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<sup>117</sup>Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 156-195.

<sup>118</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, 131.

## Chapter 5

### Double Standards and the Plight of the Contemporary Woman

*I was recently told that as a contemporary woman living in the Western world  
that I am free to make my own choices.*

*Apparently I am in control of my own destiny, able to do whatever I choose  
without the fear of judgement or reprisal. The person that told me this is of  
course delusional.*

*As a women there will always be judgement and expectation placed upon me.  
Every day I am confronted by subtle forms of control and manipulation that  
undermine my freedom of choice based solely on the fact  
that I am a woman.*

Fig.58 Redacted. Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris (In praise of Venus)*, 1873–8.  
<https://victorianweb.org/painting/bj/paintings/21.html>

In his work *Discipline and Punish* Michel Foucault looks at the manipulation and control of the mind through the examination of punishment systems and strategic approaches used to control prisoners. Foucault refers specifically to Bentham's Panopticon<sup>119</sup> where inmates were controlled from a central point by guards hidden from their view. This made it impossible for the prisoners to know when they were under observation. The intentional use of power over the mind to maintain control of inmates was so successful that subtle variations of this technique have become common place in society as an effective way to manage humans.

Relationships between political power and bodies, are used within society to train humans to make them collectively malleable. Foucault brings to our attention, through discussion on the docile body the underlying restrictions within society that persuade us to unwittingly respond in certain ways, which in turn regulate the way we think and behave. Claiming the docile body is a malleable object Foucault believes it can be stage-managed and manoeuvred to behave and think in a certain way, and therefore become bound to certain patterns of behaviour<sup>120</sup>. These subtle forms of domination are carried out through regulation of space, time and behaviour using devices such as architectural design, controlled hours, and the wearing of uniforms. Most commonly seen in schools and offices these methods control behaviour and crush individuality, ensuring power stays in the hands of a minority. This management of populations is a strategic move by those in power who wish to create order in society and control over others<sup>121</sup>.

There are many examples of domination over women throughout history including that illustrated in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and British Orientalists at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These works draw attention to the relationship between enchanted domestic interiors and their female occupants. This can be seen in Edward Coley Burne-Jones painting, *Laus Veneris* (Fig.58) which depicts a sumptuous yet oppressive environment where the women appear despondent and lethargic. While this painting captivates the viewer with its richness and detail, it equally reveals the hopelessness of the women's

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<sup>119</sup> Foucault, "Panopticism", 206-213.

<sup>120</sup> Foucault, "Docile bodies", 180-183.

<sup>121</sup> Foucault, "Docile bodies", 185.

situation. Trapped within idealised domestic environments they have neither ownership nor control over their existence.

The lyrics of a popular song of this time by Arthur J Lamb and Harry Von Tilzer, '*A Bird in a Gilded Cage*' talks of the confinement of women within domestic situations<sup>122</sup>.

She's only a bird in a gilded cage,  
A beautiful sight to see,  
You might think she's happy and free from care,  
She's not, though she seems to be,  
'Tis said when you think of her wasted life,  
For youth cannot mate with age,  
And her beauty was sold,  
For an old man's gold,  
She's a bird in a gilded cage.

The author is commenting on the fact that regardless of the luxury of the cage, it is still a cage and escape is impossible.

Fig.59 Redacted. Hayv Kahraman, *Bab El Sheikh, (Acts Of Reparation)* 2013.  
<https://www.meer.com/en/29195-hayv-kahraman-acts-of-reparation>

The confinement of women continues to occur today and is illustrated in the painting *Bab El Sheikh 2013* (Fig.59) by Los Angeles based artist Hayv Kahraman<sup>123</sup>. This work presents the house as the domain of woman, where figures interact within controlled space. The composition and figures are reminiscent of those in Matisse's *Dance 1909-10* (Fig.60) however Matisse's painting is full of saturated colour and joyous energy, while Kahraman uses muted colour and the mood is melancholy. The figures appear trapped within the physical space, fading like ghosts, confined by invisible constraints alluding to cultural and social situations.

<sup>122</sup> Madeleine Kennedy, "Exhibiting Enclosure", in *The Enchanted Interior*, ed. Madeleine Kennedy, Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition, 2019, (Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom. Laing Art Gallery 2019) 10.

<sup>123</sup> Bentom Museum of Art Pomara College, "Project Series 52: Hayv Kahraman", Exhibition, 2018, accessed June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, <https://www.pomona.edu/museum/exhibitions/2018/project-series-52>.

Fig.60 Redacted. Henri Matisse, *Dance*, 1909-10.  
[https://www.henrimatisse.org/the-dance.jsp#prettyPhoto\[image1\]/0/](https://www.henrimatisse.org/the-dance.jsp#prettyPhoto[image1]/0/)

The domestic interior as a setting for the subordination of women has been well documented. Crispin draws attention to the fact that the relegation of women is not solely confined to the home stating:

We had historically been shut out of masculine spaces, like public life, the workplace, and education. Our traditional realm of the home, and the family, and the nursery, looked like prisons. What feminism thought it was offering its followers, then, was escape. It was an expanded life. A life of independence, of adventure, of work. But in order to believe that we have to forget that women have always worked. Many women have always had to, the unmarried, the widowed, the poor, the disadvantaged, have always worked. When feminists decided to fight for the right to work what they meant was the right to become doctors, lawyers, and others. Women have always scrubbed toilets and floors have always been paid to touch other people's bodies as nurses and assistants and sex workers.<sup>124</sup>

Feminist movements in the past were the domain of middle class well-educated women and the voice of the working class women was not heard. As discussed in the intersectional feminism section, so called servitude and menial work are commonly labelled 'women's work' and an extension of their connection to the domestic environment and all it encompasses. This reinforces the belief that women are born with the need to care for others and therefore better equipped to deal with the messy jobs in relation to human bodily functions. Historically, roles given to women and the spaces they occupy have been controlled by those in power as a means to control the 'unnatural' behaviour of women who do not adhere to expectations concerning traditional gender roles.

Multimedia artist Mika Rottenberg<sup>125</sup> creates visual narratives using Foucault-like concepts regarding divisions of space. Rottenberg's works also gives a nod to Foucault's theories

<sup>124</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, 26-27.

<sup>125</sup> "Mika Rottenberg", accessed June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Ocula, <https://ocula.com/artists/mika-rottenberg/>.

regarding the docile body, drawing attention to both psychological and physical methods of control within more recent times.<sup>126</sup>

This is particularly evident in *Squeeze*<sup>127 128</sup> 2010. Small, enclosed environments exist where groups of female workers (Fig.61) perform mundane, repetitive tasks. In one image a woman looks directly into the eye of the viewer inviting us into her confined and restricted space leaving us with a sense of restriction, surveillance, and confinement. There is an irony and pointlessness of their situation, on one hand they have a job and life outside of the home on the other, every second of their day is controlled, creating an environment even more repressive than that of the domestic. Rottenberg explores the partitioning of space and the docile body in *Squeeze*, making a powerful social statement that is laced with dark humour and human despair and masterfully presented in the mundane existence of everyday life.

The extreme closeup of the 'squeezers' face (Fig.62) pressed tightly between two cushions barely able to breathe, adds to the theme of repression and captivity - both physically and psychologically. Referring specifically to the lives and experiences of women, Rottenberg tackles activities and situations that speak directly to the way this type of manipulation and control has become normalised and readily accepted in society.

Fig.61 and 62 Redacted. Mika Rottenberg, Stills from *Squeeze*, 2010.  
[https://www.art-almanac.com.au/ngg\\_tag/muma/](https://www.art-almanac.com.au/ngg_tag/muma/)

Criticised for showing little interest in the plight of women, Foucault does state that while there should be freedom in sexual choices, acts such as rape are not acceptable, and acknowledges that some societies are ethically unsound in their treatment of women. Aurelia Armstrong from the University of Queensland Australia draws attention to the fact that Foucault used the term 'ethics' in reference to 'practices of freedom'<sup>129</sup>. While suggesting freedom exists only to be implemented, Foucault believes that release from this

<sup>126</sup> Foucault, "Docile Bodies", 180-185.

<sup>127</sup> Urban Mishmash, "Mika Rottenberg/Palais de Tokyo", Exhibition 2010, <https://www.urbanmishmash.com/paris/art-culture/exhibitions/mika-rottenberg-palais-de-tokyo/>.

<sup>128</sup> Mika Rottenberg, "Mika Rottenberg", interview by Judith Hudson, *Bomb*, October 2010, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/mika-rottenberg/>.

<sup>129</sup> Aurelia Armstrong, "Michel Foucault: Feminism", A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource, Internet, Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://iep.utm.edu/foucferm/>.

sort of control will not secure freedom from oppression and new outlooks in attitude and patterns of behaviour that invest in empowerment for all are necessary for positive change to occur<sup>130</sup>. So, whilst not directly referring to the concerns of women, Foucault's concepts are relevant to the cause of feminism and equal rights.

One 'public figure' who has done much to elicit positive change for women in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Barbara Millicent Roberts.<sup>131</sup> Entering the world as a blonde sexually charged adult doll for children, Barbie had an unforeseen and positive influence on the shaping of young girls' minds and attitudes. She became a feminist, inadvertently paving the way for acceptance of successful, independently minded, female role models. Barbie acted as a paradigm of resistance to the traditional pathway's women were supposed to pursue. Rebellious, destabilising, and liberated, Barbie lived alone, paid her own mortgage, never married or became a mother, had a range of unconventional careers, and dressed as she pleased. Alas, despite her independence 'Secret Hearts Barbie' came out in 1992 with Ken, her straight stereotypical boyfriend, as the groom.<sup>132</sup> The inference being that while managing very well on her own, Barbie still needed a man and possibly a child to make her complete.

Creator Ruth Handler had seen a gap in the market for an adult doll that allowed young girls to dream about their future.<sup>133</sup> Unfortunately, in 1959 the woman's role was still largely dominated by patriarchal concepts and Barbie's body image was based firmly on the male ideal. Clearly no stranger to plastic surgery, as surely one cannot believe those perky little breasts and narrow waist have not been surgically interfered with, Barbie's figure was unachievable, sexually blatant, and grotesque.

In a final twist of fate, the nature of Barbie's body proportions opened pathways for dialogue and debate on how female body image is perceived within patriarchal societies. This forced questions around traditional concepts of how a woman should look and behave and a shift in Mattel's approach to the marketing of their products.<sup>134</sup> Mattel's attempts to

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<sup>130</sup>Armstrong, "Michel Foucault: Feminism".

<sup>131</sup> Mattel accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://shop.mattel.com/collections/barbie>.

<sup>132</sup>Worthpoint, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/secret-hearts-barbie-ken-1992-238252850>.

<sup>133</sup> Hannah Tulinski, "Barbie As Cultural Compass: Embodiment, Representation, and Resistance Surrounding the World's Most Iconized Doll", (*College of the Holy Cross, Crossworks, Sociology Student Scholarship, 2017*), [hrtulinski@gmail.co](mailto:hrtulinski@gmail.co) / Barbie As Cultural Compass Embodiment Representation and Resis (2).pdf, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Hannah Tulinski, *Barbie As Cultural Compass*, 26-29.

diversify and push past stereotypical representations of woman bodies bought acknowledgment that dolls are not simply toys to be played with. Dolls, while given to young girls as toys, allude to the stereotypical role of women as mother, actants in the journey towards motherhood. Barbie however, bucked the trend, in a spectacular and unexpected fashion.

*The words, 'I love you', are loaded with romantic and idealistic belief structures.*

*It is my experience that in reality 'I love you', can mean the ownership and objectification of one person by another. Failure within a relationship, be it lover, relative, or friend to identify, acknowledge, and respect someone as a human being, over and above their supposed gender role, is common.*

*When, for better or worse, turns into, it's too much effort for me to want to work at this so let's call it quits, self-esteem is shattered, worlds crumble, and what remains must be scrapped off the floor and rebuilt. 'I love you', can force people to remain loyal and dutiful to each other regardless of what is it doing to their own happiness, self-worth, and identity. When respect is not mutual, it is an indication that the relationship is not equitable and something needs to change. Within this context, I believe women and motherhood are scrutinised and judged in ways that men and fatherhood are not.*

In an ideal world I would discuss my own personal experience regarding abusive situations. Constrained by ethics, it is extremely difficult to do this without the permission of others involved. While acknowledging self-experience as a valuable and worthy method of examining social occurrences it is important to be aware of the challenges faced when referring to others involved. Edwards points out that this can impact negatively on the authors reputation but also that of anyone else that is easily identifiable. For these reasons I will not be discussing personal situations in relation to this topic.<sup>135</sup>

The stories we are fed influence behaviour, challenging us to question our understanding of how we see ourselves in relation to familial behaviours and beliefs. Tolentino sums this up well by stating:

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<sup>135</sup> Edwards "Ethical Autoethnography: Is it Possible?".

We are what we do, and we do what we're used to.<sup>136</sup>

In today's society most of us happily conform to the norms, unaware that we are being manipulated and controlled by clever marketing strategies. Using the example of the fantasy that is Reality TV, Tolentino discusses her own experiences and analysis of her time on the show *Girls vs Boys* and the roles her castmates were pre-determined to occupy:

...fixed archetypes; the sweet guy, the all-American girl, the wacko, the bitch.<sup>137</sup>

Tolentino likens this to a form of hypnosis stating that these identities were given:

...clear narrative importance that is aimed at creating characters categorised around social dramas based on the idea that everyone wants to be famous and thinks they could be a better Kardashian than the Kardashian.<sup>138</sup>

Most of us have at some time in our lives sat blankly staring at screens watching fantasy versions of reality. This formula has been so successful it has influence over everything from what we eat and wear, to how we behave. Pliable and unaware, the targeted audiences do not stand a chance and those at the helm continue to make large capital gains that go well beyond the profits made from the actual show.

Confirmation of the continuation of bias against women within contemporary society is clearly evident in the recent conflict between Taylor Swift and Kanye West, over the lyrics used in his song *Famous*:

I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex, Why? I made that bitch famous.<sup>139</sup>

Prior to release of *Famous* West checked in with Swift regarding his reference to her in his song. However, after release of the work Swift challenged West regarding the misogynistic way he described her, something she had not agreed upon. Media outlets from *People Magazine* to *USA Today* sided with West who described Swift as a 'snake' on social media regardless of the fact that similar situations involving male celebrities saw them being

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<sup>136</sup> Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 195.

<sup>137</sup> Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 44.

<sup>138</sup> Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 44-46.

<sup>139</sup> Open mic, accessed September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <http://genius.com>Kanye-west-famous-lyrics>.

dubbed ‘cunning’ or ‘smart’. In contrast, Swift, who incidentally is famous due to her own hard work without any assistance from West, received only a sully of her reputation.<sup>140</sup>

Fig.63 Redacted. Taylor Swift, Still from ‘*The Man*’, 2.07mins.

Fig.64 Redacted. Taylor Swift, Still from ‘*The Man*’, 2.10 mins.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqAJLh9wuZ0>

Swift has consistently fought against misogynistic attitudes during her career, and addresses these double standards head on in *The Man*. Disguised as a man Swift moves through a range of scenarios that highlight the difference in attitudes towards human behaviour due to gender, using lyrics that express her frustration on gender bias within the music industry for example:

I’m so sick of running as fast as I can. Wondering if I’d get there quicker if I was a man.<sup>141</sup>

In one scene (Fig.63) Swift represents a father on an outing with his daughter<sup>142</sup>, and is met with applause and reference to ‘the world’s greatest dad.’ Immediately afterwards the video slides effortlessly into a scene (Fig.64) where Swift’s character and his mates brag about getting ‘bitches and models.’ Using clever editing Swift highlights the bias, discrimination, and blatant systematic sexism she has been confronted with since she first entered the music scene at the age of fourteen.

Internet activism has become a key feature of fourth wave feminism as a way to achieve objectives and goals focused on intersectionality and the fundamental rights of all women. Both the internet and social media apps provide a platform where women are able to speak freely, share experiences and voice their opinions from their own perspective. These messages travel around the world within seconds capturing global audiences.

Exploring and using an online space can prove hazardous with many women finding it difficult to negotiate yet another dimension where they can be viciously attacked and bullied by others who hide behind pseudonyms. Added to this are the pressures placed on

<sup>140</sup> The Review, “Feminist Icon Taylor Swift has fought misogyny her entire career”, February 2021, accessed September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://udreview.com/feminist-icon-taylor-swift-has-fought-misogyny-her-entire-career/>.

<sup>141</sup> Taylor Swift, “*The Man*”, music video released January 2020, Studios New York City: Electric Lady, and Auckland: Golden Age West, producers Taylor Swift and Joel Little, accessed September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqAJLh9wuZ0>, video.

<sup>142</sup> Taylor Swift, “*The Man*”, 1.52-2.22 minutes.

young women today to live up to the perceived status and lifestyle they have created and present on social media, making the internet a complicated web that is as problematic as it is enabling.

In 2003 a young university student called Mark Zuckerberg launched Facemash changing this to Facebook five months later. Focused firmly on peoples self-interests and the need to be visible on the internet Zuckerberg had found a way to capture the world's attention and manipulate the way social and behavioural data is used. Tolentino sums up the impact of Zuckerberg's creation on society in the following statement:

What began as a way for Zuckerberg to harness collegiate misogyny and self-interest has become fuel for our whole contemporary nightmare, for a world that fundamentally and systematically misrepresents human needs.<sup>143</sup>

Zuckerberg jumped on a bandwagon that had been growing for some time with television shows including *Survivor* and *The Bachelor* as well established and extremely popular. These shows work on the premise that people will happily sell their souls in order to be visible, while others choose to live vicariously from the comfort of their living rooms. Working on the production of *The Bachelor USA Season 18*<sup>144</sup> in 2013 when an episode was filmed here in Aotearoa. I was able to observe the behaviour and interaction between contestants. There was a guarded camaraderie and friendship amongst the women who all appeared fully invested in achieving their dream. This slick media machine presents a fantasy world that allows people to escape the reality of their daily lives, where the only true reality is that not everyone gets their 'happily ever after' but all get their fifteen minutes of fame.

Facebook was followed by You Tube (2005), Twitter (2006), Instagram (2010), Snapchat (2011), and TikTok (2016)<sup>145</sup>. Add to this blogs and apps for every imaginable subject and it appears there is something for everyone. Being visible on a global scale has never been easier, or more addictive, for both the performer and the voyeur. Phones and other portable devices enable immediate and constant access to these apps and the lives of

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<sup>143</sup> Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 173.

<sup>144</sup> "The Bachelor USA Season 18", Network ABC, released 2014, accessed August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0313038/episodes?season=18>.

<sup>145</sup> Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 174.

others. When used wisely these are useful tools, however they can be extremely dangerous and damaging in the wrong hands.

Young women in particular face constant pressure to present as their best selves, living a perfect life. Whatever role they choose to portray it is important to appear popular, capable, and successful to those who watch, judge, and compare. Germany Kent, media expert and bestselling author, draws attention to the reality of these sites by stating:

When it comes to love and happiness, don't compare your real life experiences to someone else's seemingly perfect well-crafted social media posts.<sup>146</sup>

This is a valid warning, as social media provides the best possible platform to create whatever persona you want to be in cyberspace. We must not forget that these sites are profit-based businesses that use algorithms that gatekeep your content, controlling your searches under the guise of creating more personalised and relevant experiences for the user. The targeting of young women is strategic, they are an engaged and easily influenced market. When you consider that two most prominent families in this category are The Trumps and the Kardashians<sup>147</sup> there is cause for concern.

The darker side of these social media sites, that of cyberbullying and harassment, is often downplayed. A recent United States study on cyberbullying among teens revealed the following statistics: 90% of US teens believe cyber harassment is a problem, 59% of US teenagers experience bullying or online harassment, students who are cyber bullied are twice as likely to attempt suicide and 37% develop social anxiety<sup>148</sup>. The effect of social media on society is not a focus of this dissertation however, these young women and men represent the future and the control and manipulation that occurs within these environments deserve mention. It is my generation's responsibility to ensure that the double standards that exist within these platforms do not become the accepted norms of the future.

Kings and queens of the social media circus are called influencers, content creators sponsored by companies seeking a particular target market for their products. While many

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<sup>146</sup> Good Reads, "Social Media Audience Quotes, accessed October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/social-media-audiences>.

<sup>147</sup> Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*, 174.

<sup>148</sup> Ivana Vojinovic, "Heart-Breaking Cyberbullying Statistics for 2022", accessed October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022, Dataprot 2022, <https://dataprot.net/statistics/cyberbullying-statistics/>.

choose to promote and sell products such as makeup and fashion, others tackle a diverse range of issues including environmental issues, world politics and women's rights. One such example is the Aotearoa based Instagram account, '*Shit You Should Care About*'. In 2018 students Lucy Blakiston, Ruby Edwards, and Olivia Mercer came up with the idea of creating a page that addresses local and world issues and events.<sup>149</sup> With over 2.9 million followers they tackle subjects that include black lives matter, feminism, cultural affairs, and politics. Adding their obsession with Harry Styles to the mix proved a stroke of genius, drawing in a target market that is often left to languish in the realms of less noteworthy social media sites.

There is a host of young women on the internet who are paving the way as role models and support within the context of the fourth wave feminist movement. Crispin states the following:

If you want to create a better world and a better existence for your people, you must exist in the imperfect world that exists now.<sup>150</sup>

Working within current social media constructs, which are far from perfect, has become a viable and productive way forward in the fight against injustices and double standards within society. From this perspective the future for women and feminism is bright, however the structures of the society we live in remain much the same. Oppressions imposed on anyone, based solely on the opinion that women are one way and men are another, are very still evident within contemporary culture.

Susan Stewart's discussion on the character of the trickster<sup>151</sup> comes into play here. The trickster is someone who breaks the rules, challenging customs, and beliefs, creating mayhem and unrest. So, who then is the trickster? There is strength in the argument that women have been beguiled, victimised, and objectified in continuous waves throughout history, however, one must acknowledge that they have remained throughout a driving force, maintaining keystone strengths within societies that implement positive change for future generations. The cleverness of women cannot be dismissed and their ability to see and provide what men want and need most is perhaps their greatest strength. Yet there is

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<sup>149</sup> Shityoushouldcareabout, Website, <https://Shityoushouldcareabout.com>, Instagram @shityoushouldcareabout.

<sup>150</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, 143.

<sup>151</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 106-107.

no denying that women have and continue to be deceived by men, placing the male as the trickster who beguiles and bewitches with the intent of manipulation and control. The patriarchal method of training girls to be compliant by presenting opinion as truth has been well practised throughout history, however the structures that support this system are losing a foothold as acceptance of gender diversity grows.

Putti, angelic winged infants often associated with cupid, possess elements of the trickster. In Raphael's *The Sistine Madonna* two putti (Fig.65) rest on their elbows looking up at the Virgin, playful, and speculative, they appear to be planning their next move. Both complex and simple we can only wager a guess as to what they will do next.

Fig.65 Redacted. Raphael, *The Sistine Madonna, Detail* 1513-14.

<https://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Sistine-Madonna.html>.

Figs.66 and 67 Redacted. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Tomb of Pope Urban VIII*, 1627-47.

[https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/b/bernini/gianlore/sculptur/1620/urban\\_8.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bernini/gianlore/sculptur/1620/urban_8.html)

In stark contrast is Bernini's putto (Figs.66 and 67) on the *Tomb of Pope Urban VIII* in St Peters Basilica, Rome. A powerful almost demonic infant reaches upwards, clinging to the leg of Charity demanding her attention. There is nothing frivolous or fun-loving about this portrayal, it is a child in the throes of a tantrum perhaps represented in this way as reference to the unselfish love provided by the Christian meaning of Charity.

These putti address something familiar to us all, that of our interactions with each other and the environments we live in. They also draw attention to the subtle manipulation and control within society, in this case through religion. Putti represent the interplay between human beings and are complicated multi-layered characters with hidden complexities

. Possessing elements of cuteness interlinked with the grotesque, putti feature regularly in my work (Fig.68). I have used them as representative of the manipulation and control of women both internally and externally. They reference not only the dependency of the child on the mother but also the maternal influence that can linger long after the child has left the home environment. Both Raphael's and Bernini's putti are referenced in my drawings. In *Links in the Chain of Causation* (Fig.69), Bernini's putto plays puppeteer manipulating the flayed skin of Botticelli's Venus in one hand, while the other controls the angels as they swoop in, on an iron, attempting and failing to save Venus. Botticelli's representation of Venus has long been a thorn in my side, so often described as representing the ideal

woman, she is a flaccid lump of flesh that has the physical presence of a simpering butterfly. This one dimensional, insipid, and frivolous creature embodies none of the strengths of real women. Perhaps she is the trickster beguiling men with her supposed charms, or maybe a victim of the manipulation, and control used by the patriarchy to define womanhood? Whichever it is, her bizarre body shape identifies her as an influencer and predecessor of Mattel's equally famous plastic icon. Barbie however, backs her idealised beauty up with the sass and attitude of a 1990s feminist.



Fig.68 Lissie Brown, *Workbook sketches*, 2020.



Fig.69 Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, detail, 2022.

As mentioned earlier, Butler argues that sex is socially constructed, that gender identity is a product of actions and behaviours and therefore performative in nature. Butler deconstructs Foucault's theory, based on the belief that the soul acts as a regulator justifying actions of power upon the body.<sup>152</sup> By proposing that gender is constructed by everyday

<sup>152</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Body of the Condemned", in *The Foucault Reader An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Press 1984), 170-178.

actions, influences and behaviours Butler provides an alternative that suggests Foucault's theory is a fabrication and not a reality.<sup>153</sup>

Like Butler, Donna Haraway challenges us to look beyond the idea of traditional gender roles but from a different perspective. Rejecting notions of essentialism, Haraway offers the following approach to addressing gender issues and double standards, proposing instead a chimeric monstrous world of syntheses between the organic and the machine, Enter the Cyborg; biomechatronic, meaning of both mechanical and biological parts, a fusion of science and technology.<sup>154</sup>

A fictional character, the cyborg's physical attributes and abilities cross the boundaries of normal limitations. Based around the notion of the cyborg as a rejection of inflexible boundaries and the duality of gender, this discourse presents an excellent argument for a new line of thinking and Uddenberg's figures, as discussed earlier, speak directly to these ideas. It is important to note that Haraway's has been criticised by feminists as fundamentally anti-feminist as it denies any commonalities of women's experience, due to declarations such as:

There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women.<sup>155</sup>

This statement defies what many see as a focal point of tradition, that of women coming together to support each other and the affiliation of their gender. However, it also challenges the idea that women are separate from men, something that could work against them in their fight for equality.

I am not proposing the introduction of cyborgs at the expense of humanity. Imagine not equality but acceptance and a world where humans are identified based not on gender but their individuality as humans. Foucault talks of discipline and control, Butler too, through the influence of behaviours that are performative. Haraway speaks of a race, albeit cyborgs, where all are accepted equally regardless of gender, a common ground of unity where gender bias does not exist. I would like to acknowledge here that contemporary views on the construction of gender are evolving at a rapid rate, meaning change must be considered

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<sup>153</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 15.

<sup>154</sup> Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 16.

inevitable as social norms recreate themselves however, this is not the purpose of this dissertation and I will not be discussing this in depth.

One could argue that blanketing all under one umbrella is problematic and in the current climate of gender diversity is not a feasible argument. There are both internal and external aspects of being female that are undeniable and extremely complex. Women are both constructed and themselves, and they understand and recognize the difference between reality and the unreachable within each other.

Haraway's cyborg, while dated, has relevance when discussing how women identify and position themselves on social media sites such as Instagram, and so on. For many the reality of their lives is vastly different from the one they post online, they are like fictional characters caught up in a wave of media approval and addiction. Social media platforms are part of contemporary life and must be acknowledged when discussing the relationships between women in regard to women's rights.

Human beings when subjected to disciplines beyond their control become pliable compliant bodies that can be transformed and improved according to the desires of those in charge. The power relations involved in the idea of Foucault's docile body limits a person's capacity for freedom and autonomous behaviour. My concern is that even when freed from the docile body, the overall concept of power within socio-political agendas, still holds sway over our actions. Unwittingly, while experiencing a sense of freedom women in particular, continue to play into the hands of those in power. While appearing to have agency over our own bodies and minds, it is evident to me that capitalist and patriarchal systems are so embedded within social norms that it is almost impossible to avoid becoming entangled in their web. Media, politics and most importantly pressure from social expectation all work against women being acknowledged and valued for their individual achievements beyond the understanding of traditional gender roles. The docile body concept is so embedded in every aspect of our everyday lives that it is often difficult to recognise. Resistance to normalisation of double standards is essential if we are to unpick the past, gather up the relevant threads, add some new ways of thinking and weave them together to create a better future.

## Chapter 6

### My Story

*As a child I played netball. This year Sportsbrowser<sup>156</sup> ranked it as the second most popular sport in Aotearoa. I have always hated the game. The rules seem to work against the idea of enjoyment through activity - don't move with the ball, don't bounce the ball while running, and never step outside your third.<sup>157</sup> Add to this the constant whistle blowing, and any hint of enjoyment that I may have experienced, was stolen away. The way I saw it, the game was just another form of social control over women.*

*Lately, I have come to realise that my life has in many ways been a mirror image of the game. Whilst under the illusion that I was a feminist, I played along with the patriarchal expectations of my role as wife, mother, and woman, just as my mother did before me. What changed was taking hold of that ball and allowing myself to run with it, as fast as I could in the opposite direction.*

*So who am I? I am myself. I am also the sum of many. A blend of lives passed down through generations, I hold the fragments of others in the palm of my hand. Each breath I take, is the continuation of the breath of my ancestors. They are alive in me. I am their daughter, and I stand now at the front of the line. It is my turn to lead. I have found my own voice and taken my rightful place in the world, that had nothing to do with my gender.*



Fig.70 *Myself*, 2022.

<sup>156</sup> Sourav Das, "Top 10 Most Popular Sports in New Zealand-2022 Ranking", July 2022, Accessed October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://sportbrowser.net/most-popular-sport-in-new-zealand/>.

<sup>157</sup> *Rules of Netball*, Netball New Zealand Poitara-whiti Aotearoa, Accessed October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.netballnz.co.nz/netball-nz/our-game/rules-of-netball.html>.

Rich's theory as discussed in Chapter Three, states that while we are all individuals, we are also part of an ancestral lineage. As we step to the front of the line it is important to consider the challenges of our time, and if necessary reshape family histories, modifying and recasting throughways for future generations.<sup>158</sup> Addressing the healing of past wounds and the need to act wisely when at the front of the line, Rich refers to the words of Reverend Chris Michaels who states:

You are a link in a chain of causation that stretches before and after your life for a thousand generations.<sup>159</sup>

I come from a long line of sassy, strong-minded, independent women. There is much I have taken from them and much I would change. Researching my ancestors has made me realise that I do not have to submit and tolerate a life less lived and also that it is up to me to make amendments moving forward. As terrifying as this seems, it is preferable to carrying on with the status quo.

Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against the traditional roles that apply to women. Some of the best years of my life were those spent raising my children. However, this alone does not define who I am, no single thing, event, experience, or quality does, they are all part of my whole.

I have made several important realisations in the last few years. Not least of which is the understanding that my mother was never out to make my life miserable, she was simply fighting her own demons. Another is that I am not alone but surrounded by women running their own race. Everywhere I look I see women quietly going about their business, embracing all that they are, often from a feminine perspective, but more importantly as humans, not as a gendered species separated from the rest of humanity. The fact that we can do this openly and freely in today's society is evidence of how far we have come in our fight for acceptance and equality. These realisations have been incredibly freeing and instrumental in allowing me to move forward, to understand and speak up for myself, and for others. Writing auto-ethnographically is about placing personal experience into the

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<sup>158</sup> "Healing the wounds".

<sup>159</sup> "Healing the wounds".

realms of the public arena, it begins with self-analysis and discovery but ripples outwards into the lives of others.

Taking the word 'longing'<sup>160</sup> Stewart applies it to a yearning or ache for the past and for the nostalgia of things. Stewart examines the challenges that arise as we try to make sense of the world, of our experience through language, the perception of scale in relation to our bodies and the links between object and narrative.<sup>161</sup>

Both *Fruit* (Fig.71) and *Links in the Chain of Causation* (Fig.72) are narratives that have unfolded through a performative methodology and relational experiences. They speak to a woven narrative between my mother, myself, and all women; of Bennetts 'thing power,' and the use of blankets that have passed through multiple generations. These works are about human interaction and an attempt to understand the complexity of human existence and our relationship with the worlds we live in:



Fig.71 Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, detail, 2022.

<sup>160</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, ix-xi.

<sup>161</sup> Judith E Stein, "Anxiety of Influence", 2019, *Ursula*, (Spring, 2022), <https://judithestein.com/2019/05/08/anxiety-of-influence/>.



Fig.72 Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, 2022.

Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially. We move through the landscape; it does not move through us. This relationship with the landscape is expressed most often through an abstract projection of the body upon the natural world.

Consequently, both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment - the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container.<sup>162</sup>

Arguing that we perceive scale through the primacy of our bodies, Stewart suggests the miniature represents our character and psychological world, one of measure, regulation, and balance; the gigantic, through our relationship to the natural world, one of disarray, chaos, and imbalance. While the miniature is intimate and all embracing, the gigantic is of a scale where only a partial view of the whole can ever be perceived.<sup>163</sup>

The personal and public are, as Stewart suggests through the use of the words 'miniature' and 'gigantic,' vastly different beasts. When related to gender issues within Western

<sup>162</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 71.

<sup>163</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 77.

patriarchal societies, the dangers of the relationship between the contained and the container becomes evident. From an early age men and women are taught to see the world from different perspectives, within societies where the rules applied are unevenly balanced in favour of men. What comes into play here is how we, as individuals, approach the world, which is grounded in the influences and construction of our upbringing, something we have little control over. The miniature can be seen as all-encompassing, a secure blanket that covers our whole world. Once we leave the miniature the experiences we have grown up with blinker our view of the gigantic, in other words our partial view is coloured by the influences from the miniature. The containment of women begins during childhood. Take for example the doll, representative of a baby which in turn signals motherhood, marriage, and the domestic, desired roles for a women within the realm of the traditional patriarchal container.

A new-born's world is defined and controlled by their caregiver, not only from an external perspective but also from a psychological perspective. How we interact, relate to, and behave toward others is influenced by our relationship with our mother or caregiver. Even now, as a mature adult I am struggling to come to terms with and work through behaviours and attitudes that link to early experiences. I remain contained within my mother's ideologies, teachings, and ways of seeing, decades after leaving home and living independent of her influence.

However, there is also much in those early experiences that have provided me with great strength, making me the independent women I am today. This ongoing interrelationship and connection between generations of women is complex, and the multitudes of experiences that are subtly carried forward from person to person create a gigantic whole. In this way the contained eventually becomes the container.

Applying Stewart's interpretation of the miniature and the gigantic to womanhood enables me to address the personal and the collective. My early experiences with my mother affected my later experiences with all women, finding it much easier to trust men due to my more affirming and positive relationship with my father. I refer back to the Rev. Michaels quote<sup>164</sup> concerning links in the chain of causation that stretch before and after individual

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<sup>164</sup> "Healing the Wounds", 1.

lifetimes, affecting both the personal and the public. Moving forward it is important we stand up both individually and as a collective, as these combined experiences when used wisely will enable women to embrace new found strength and unity.

*One of the first things I did when I began this new phase of my life was buy fairy lights. Seemingly such a small thing, for me it was all part of my rebellion - fairy lights had not been well loved by those in my past life. I have always seen them as the manufactured stars of the universe, my miniature connection with the gigantic.*

*Not long ago, I mentioned to friend how much I loved fairy lights, and when we went camping, they bought some along and put them up. They did it because they had listened and knew that I liked them. It was a moment of realisation, that I was among friends, that it was ok to be me, and my life was my own.*

*I had found myself again, that was a good day.*

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

*Motherhood is not the 'obvious', it is far more complex. It is different things to different people. A multifaceted minefield littered with tears of love, joy, heartbreak, betrayal, loneliness, hard work, despair, laughter and much more. The social order of motherhood is an expectation thrust upon women early in life, the imagined reality of what it represents is part of the double standards that are pressed upon women from the moment at birth when it is observed they didn't arrive in the world attached to a penis.*

*Motherhood is the thread of humanity that links generations and shapes futures. It is also simply a gender specific term for parenthood. A mother, is a parent, is a human; surely that alone is grounds for the deconstruction of gender roles and equal rights for all.*



Fig.73 Lissie Brown, *Blanket Stitch*, detail, 2021.

While the last one hundred years has seen great change for women, this study has shown that recurring cycles of behaviour and actions based on gender bias continue to occur in contemporary society. These are so ingrained in our everyday existence that they have become the norm indicating that the struggle for gender equality is still in its infancy. Underlying methods of manipulation and control, encourage structural hierarchies, based solely on one's human anatomy, limiting the potential for effective change in regard to an equitable society. Women are willing participants in the continuation of this current social structure. It is time we stopped playing along to rules, made by the patriarchy, and working instead to our strengths in order to initiate real change.

The problematic issues pertaining to traditional patriarchal systems have been addressed throughout this paper, however tradition in itself is not the enemy. Within *Herstory* I have documented the long standing tradition of ongoing action by women demanding equality and fair treatment for all. How we continue this custom is what matters now. Being open to change and innovation in the fight for equality is essential. It is time for new beginnings where women do not simply participate in the world as it already exists, but actively attempt to re shape it.<sup>165</sup> To do this we need to acknowledge the fundamental characteristics and traits of women, from the perspective of the matriarchy rather than the patriarchy.

While women are not doing anything wrong, complacency and a refusal to acknowledge and move out of the comfort zones that current systems so happily provide, does nothing to aid the fight for equality. Looking for new ways of restructuring society based on human-centric ideology and acknowledgment of individual strengths is more likely to initiate change away from gender based bias.

Using an auto-ethnographic methodology provided pathways for my research into both personal and public experience enabling me to relate my own narratives to those of my mother and others highlighting the powerful influence of one generation onto the beliefs and behaviour of the next. The interrelationships between the individual experience and that of the collective became pivotal in providing insights into both the behaviour and treatment of women in contemporary society.

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<sup>165</sup> Crispin, *Why I Am Not A Feminist*, xi

Stewart relates the miniature to our individual experience, while the gigantic has its origins in the public and natural world, the interface between the environment and humanity<sup>166</sup>. While there is more awareness of the constraints, restrictions, and controls within society by individuals, collectively many still live in environments where these methods are accepted as normal and not problematic. Research clearly illustrated that women's situation in both the miniature and the gigantic are linked together but also raises the question of how best to proceed.

The saying 'it takes a village to raise a child'<sup>167</sup> has never been more relevant, as the way we perceive the world begins the day we are born. By addressing gender bias early on through the nurturing of ability over physical appearance much can be achieved. Women have held the traditional position of primary caregiver for centuries, as influencers of the very young they have been in the hot seat to initiate change for a long time. Why then have they not done so? Perhaps because they have been fighting their own fight - a very successful feminist campaign within Western culture that has resulted in greater freedom of choice and independence for women.

However with greater freedom comes greater responsibility. While expressing ourselves as independent authentic beings we should not forget the importance of the collective as a means for creating alternatives to the way we live.

Popular culture holds the key to changing the way we think, it always has, as there is power in numbers. If feminism has taught us nothing else it has taught us this. In contemporary culture, social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, project our private worlds onto the public arena reinforcing social attitudes and beliefs. The importance of these universal platforms as a network for change cannot be underestimated.

My findings regarding the continued manipulation of women in contemporary culture through subtly disguised methods of control, challenge existing assumptions that radical feminist action is no longer necessary. The history of feminism shows that sustained change occurs through persistent actions and focus on specific goals. These two factors highlight

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<sup>166</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 71.

<sup>167</sup>"It Takes a Village to Raise a Child Understanding and Expanding the Concept of the "Village"", *Frontiers*.2022, accessed November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.756066/full>.

the need to continue the tradition of feminist action using fresh and innovative approaches. The first fight has been won, in the Western world at least, where we are able to, 'have our cake and eat it too'. While contemporary women appear to have much more freedom of choice there are warning signs that indicate changes are afoot that will widen the gender gap, for example the recent changes to abortion laws in some states of America that diminish the freedom and rights of women. Further research into current attitude changes in regard to women's rights and gender equality plus ongoing discussion around appropriate methods of action, would build on and enrich my conclusions.

Internationally renowned New Zealand artist Frances Hodgkins once said, "I feel that if I had known what was before me, I should never have had the courage to begin"<sup>168</sup>. As a role model for challenging social norms and working to her strengths in order to achieve her goals we need look no further. Women whatever their role be they mothers, aunts, teachers, world leaders, lawyers, artists, or other, are currently in the hot seat to initiate positive change in the fight for equality both individually and as a collective. The need for extensive investigation, research, and discussion into effective and innovative action has not been addressed in this dissertation, however, is necessary if we hope to initiate lasting change.

On a personal note, within this research project, I set out to investigate and unpick my own and my mother's experiences, as a means to understand the complexities of the mother daughter relationship. This led to a journey of self-discovery, that has provided me with a platform for the future, where I am comfortable in my own skin, as a member of humanity, in both the 'miniature', and the 'gigantic'. For this reason alone this journey has been worth it.

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<sup>168</sup> "Frances Mary Hodgkins", Jonathan Grant Gallery Auckland, accessed November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.franceshodgkins.com/biography>.

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