

Troubling Presence: Body, Sound and Space in Installation Art of the mid-1990s

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Producing Women
Ces femmes qui produisent ...

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Article abstract

Cet article examine l'art de l'installation au milieu des années quatre-vingt-dix. Il s'intéresse surtout aux projets de Maud Sulter, tout en discutant aussi des travaux de Sutapa Biswas, de Chila Kumari Burman, de Mona Hatoum, de Lubaina Himid, de Susan Hiller, de Cornelia Parker et de Tilda Swinton. L'idée directrice développe les inscriptions multiples dans l'art de l'installation de la présence et les implications complexes de la présence de l'artiste, des figures convoquées par ce dernier, ou même par les participants. L'intérêt ne consiste pas à simplement identifier la présence qui pourrait s'opposer simplement à l'absence, mais à considérer comment l'installation comme forme artistique remet en question et conteste la nature même de la présence. On demande souvent aux participants d'une installation d'entendre et d'écouter autant que de voir, de toucher, d'être touchés, de sentir et de se mouvoir dans des espaces et des temporalités différentes. Cette participation physique et sensorielle, de même que la capacité de l'installation à reconfigurer le temps et l'espace, ont été critiques dans le déploiement postcolonial de cette pratique, sensible aux identités instables et fluctuantes de la diaspora et aux questions d'histoire et de géographie. L'art de l'installation est aussi considéré à l'intérieur des débats actuels des théories culturelles, particulièrement aux glissements de la vision et de la visualité vers l'intérêt récent pour le corps et les sens. S'appuyant sur les écrits de Jacques Derrida, cet article conclut en proposant une nouvelle réflexion sur les rapports entre les sens, les croisements et les juxtapositions entre l'acte de voir et celui d'entendre.

Troubling Presence: Body, Sound and Space in Installation Art of the mid-1990s

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Résumé

Cet article examine l'art de l'installation au milieu des années quatre-vingt-dix. Il s'intéresse surtout aux projets de Maud Sulter, tout en discutant aussi des travaux de Sutapa Biswas, de Chila Kumari Burman, de Mona Hatoum, de Lubaina Himid, de Susan Hiller, de Cornelia Parker et de Tilda Swinton. L'idée directrice développe les inscriptions multiples dans l'art de l'installation de la présence et les implications complexes de la présence de l'artiste, des figures convoquées par ce dernier, ou même par les participants. L'intérêt ne consiste pas à simplement identifier la présence qui pourrait s'opposer simplement à l'absence, mais à considérer comment l'installation comme forme artistique remet en question et conteste la nature même de la présence. On demande souvent aux participants d'une installation d'entendre et d'écouter autant que

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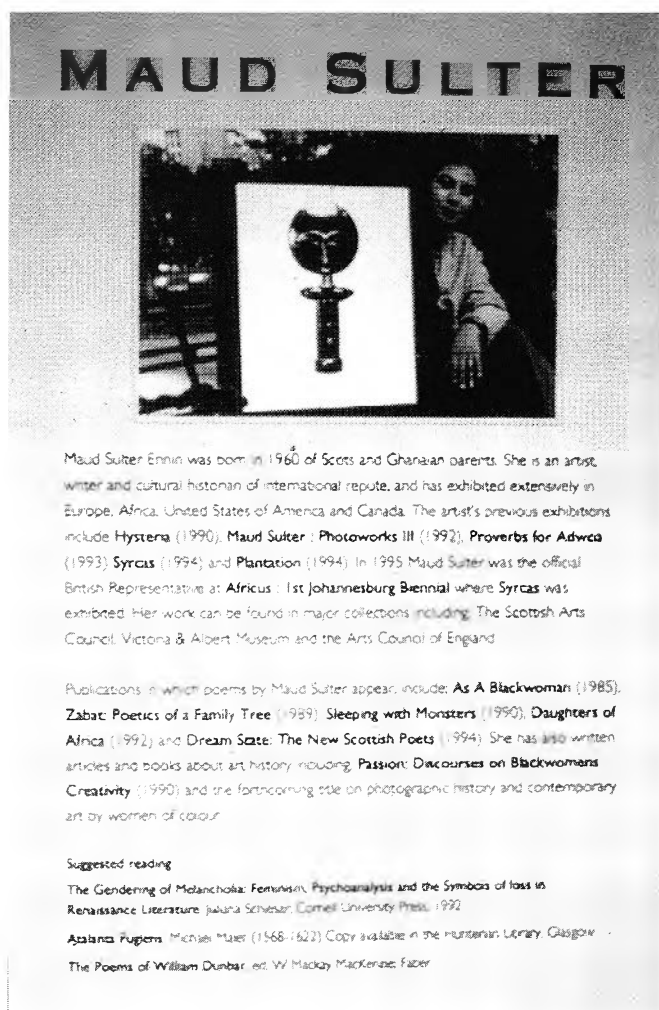
As a prologue to the installation of *Alba* at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston, UK, in spring 1996, a display panel provided a photograph and short biographical text about its woman producer, the Glaswegian-Ghanaian artist, Maud Sulter (fig. 1).¹ An invocation to an audience, the panel set up a dialogue within the defined spaces of the nineteenth-century municipal museum in the town in which the artist now resides. As the text informs its readers, Maud Sulter is a published poet as well as an artist; she has also worked as an exhibition curator and as the director of her London gallery, entitled Rich Women of Zurich, which promoted cultural diversity and mid-career artists. The interaction of these diverse activities has yielded *Alba*, her first major project in installation art.² From *Zabat*, a prize-winning series of photographs of 1989, to *Alba*, the artist has placed herself in her work, imag(in)ing herself in numerous guises: as *Calliope*, the muse of epic poetry, in *Zabat* and as the protagonist of *Hysteria*, an installation at the Tate Gallery in Liverpool of 1991 concerned with the nineteenth-century African-American sculptor, Edmonia Lewis.³ In *Alba* she signalled her presence through her selection of objects and music, the use of her personal possessions and the sound of her voice. Sulter's tactics are by no means uncommon in installations of the mid-1990s. Tilda Swinton's performance in *The Maybe*, Chila Kumari Burman's repeated self-portraiture and Mona Hatoum's *corps étranger* may be included among the numerous instances in which artists have appeared and performed in their art.⁴

This repeated production and dispersal of an artistic self raises questions about the nature of artistic subjectivity, particularly relevant for this special issue on "Producing Women." The status of the author/artist has been vigorously debated in femi-

nist studies as in contemporary critical theory. While feminism has set about dismantling masculine mythologies of artistic creativity, the study of the individual producer has been called into question by calls for the "death of the author" and the "birth of the reader." An examination of Sulter's *Alba* in relation to the artist's earlier work and selected contemporary installations will prompt a move beyond logocentric binaries (artist/participant, self/other, mind/body, original/copy, inner/outer) to a conclusion that a post-colonial practice may offer not so much the western sovereign subject formed in conflictual difference with a "native other," all too often the project of the imperial archive and the ethnographic museum,⁵ but the subjectivity of a woman artist in relation, but not necessarily in opposition, to the unpredictable, diverse and embodied subjectivities of installation's participants. This is to propose less a universalizing feminist discourse on "women artists," and more a small-scale, micro-history, attentive to particular moments, local conditions, global trajectories, corporeality, and the fluctuating identities of diaspora, which takes as its arena of concern an art form that moves beyond vision to address the body and to incite the senses. And it is to acknowledge that interpretation is contingent. What are offered here are by no means authoritative or necessarily authorized readings. Writing about the work of contemporary artists involves a process of dialogue in which meanings collide and shift; for a white woman addressing "black" cultural politics this writing demands not only engagement but self-reflexivity.⁶

In Preston, *Alba* was located in three galleries, the first and the second accessible from each other and the main stairwell of the museum, the third entered only from the second. Here the

Figure 1. Maud Sulter, *Alba*, installation, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, 1996. Display panel at the opening of the installation (Photo: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry).



artist and museum curators worked closely to realize her project, and this version is the focus of the present essay. Created to allude to (but never staged in) the echoing vaults of Stirling Castle in Scotland, *Alba* conjures time within its spaces, bringing together images of fourth-century Egyptian porphyry (The Tetrarchs) from San Marco in Venice, twelve photographs of the plates from a seventeenth-century alchemical treatise, and African art including objects used in Akan funerals, Fante and Asante dolls and a mmenson horn made from elephant tusk. Across the far wall of the third room was a sequence of five colour portrait photographs depicting luminaries of the art world in Britain and the USA: Peg Alston, an advocate and collector of African women's art; the artist, curator and writer, Lubaina Himid, in front of one of her paintings; Elizabeth MacGregor and Sandy Nairne, prominent members of the British art establishment with Scots ancestry. At the centre was Victoria Agbotui, the mother of J.J. Rawlings,⁷ then President of Ghana (fig. 2, 4). A soundtrack played contemporary, tradi-

tional and ceremonial African music, the artist reading "The Alba sonnets," and the plaintive, ceremonial sound of the mmenson horn used in West Africa to call ancestral spirits into the present.⁸ Through hearing, the participants were called into a sacred space.

Yet this was also the space of the western museum, whose displays are mimicked in the installation and whose architecture, with its sweeping staircases and massive porticoed entrance as here at Preston, so often recalls the sacred spaces of Greek and Roman temples. In *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, Carol Duncan considers the currency of neo-classical architectural forms for public art museums in Europe and the United States of America, their minimalist strategies of display and their "civilizing rituals" which transform the visitor into an ideal citizen of the local and/or national state.⁹ The museum's function in constituting the subject or citizen has also been discussed by Tony Bennett who argued that this institution is one of "a set of cultural technologies concerned to organise a voluntary self-regulating citizenry."¹⁰ While both these writers have re-theorized museological spaces, recent studies have tended, nevertheless, to emphasize the obedience of the homogenous, undifferentiated subject to the narratives of nation and imperialism.¹¹ Persuasive as these latter studies are, they tend to disregard the culturally diverse, heterogeneous and contradictory subjectivities formed in, and outside, the museum.

When *Alba* was shown in Preston, the installation drew on the familiar curatorial protocols of the western art museum. By contrast, previous stagings at the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in Glasgow and at the Ormeau Baths Gallery in Belfast might have suggested the surroundings of a dealer-gallery, the plinths hinting at the privilege accorded the collector (but not the museum visitor) to handle objects which might be for sale. Although the site-specificity of Harris Museum created a museum within a museum, the sound of one of the exhibits, the mmenson horn, disturbed the museum's ritual tranquillity, introducing the possibility of an interrogation of its display. Inclusion in western institutions has all too often diverted African art from its religious usage, from its historical locations and from touch, to enter into what Arjun Appadurai has characterized as "the social life of things" and an "aesthetics of decontextualization."¹² In the west, this decontextualization has been secured through the complementary approaches of the art museum and the ethnographic collection: if the one has contextualized "artefacts" for western audiences within a repertory of originary cultures delineated by anthropology and ethnography, the other has pared away explanation in favour of an emphasis on what are proposed as universal values.¹³ *Alba's* arrangement set aside the interpretative story-boards and cluttered cabinets of the ethnographic approach for a spatial isola-

Figure 2. Maud Sulter, *Alba*, installation, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, 1996. On the far wall is the alchemical image captioned "Sow your gold in Alba's foliate earth." A small terracotta funerary head is presented on the plinth. The portraits are glimpsed beyond (Photo: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry).

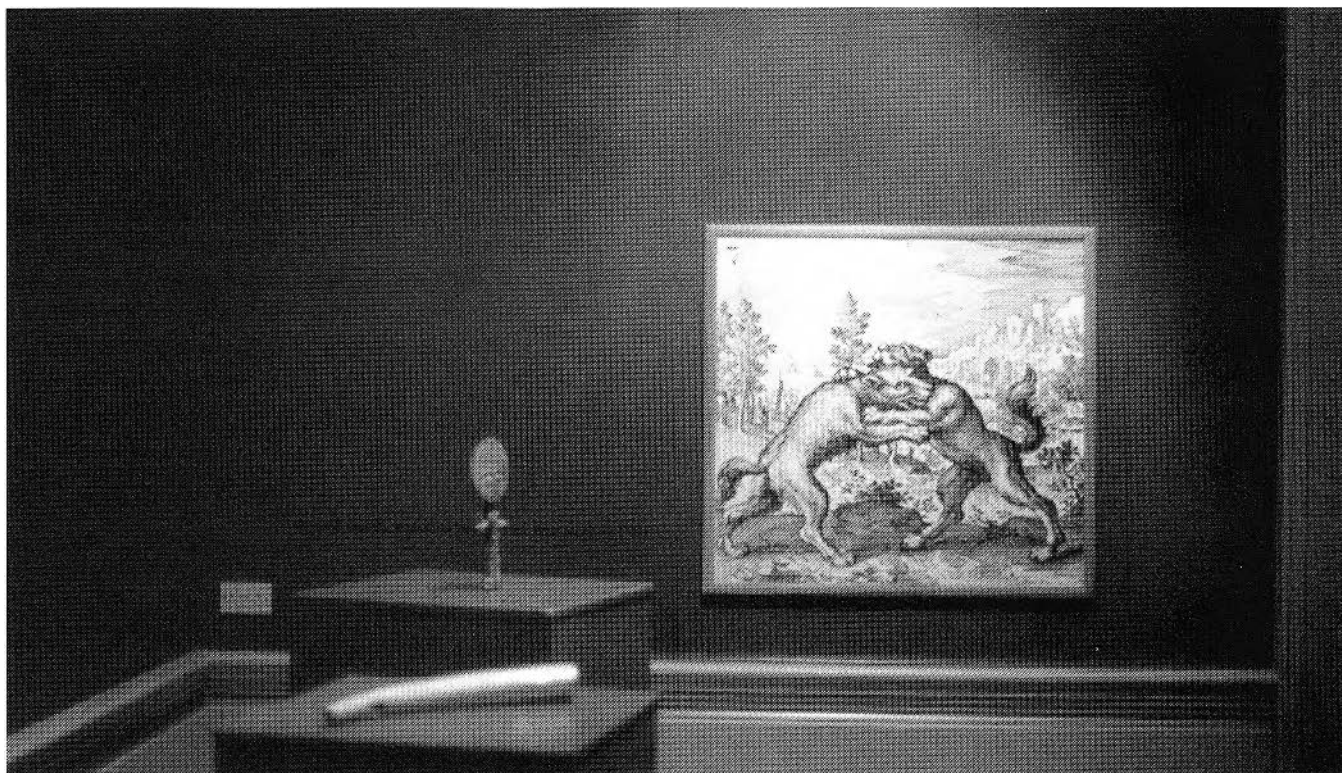


tion which has much in common with the presentation of a medley of ancient and modern global art objects initially acquired by Sir Robert and Lisa Sainsbury and now housed at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK (the artist taught a course on Photography at the University's School of World Art Studies in the session 1990-91). In analysing this form of display, Sally Price has commented, "Ethnographic artefacts become masterpieces of world art when they shed their anthropological contextualization and are judged capable of standing purely on their own aesthetic merit."¹⁴ As she has suggested, the dynamics of such displays juxtapose the western modern and the "primitive," proposing temporal distance between cultures which may well be contemporaneous.¹⁵

Although the alchemical images were accompanied with wall texts, no labels supplemented the African art displayed on plinths (fig. 3). While this absence, which prompts the question "what are these objects doing here?," suggests something of the profound dislocation and anonymization of African art in the collections of the west, their inclusion equally hints at migration and diaspora. All the items in *Alba* belong to the artist. Comprising her collection, fleetingly rehoused, the installation may thus be seen as an intervention into western patterns of art acquisition in which institutions and corporations joined prominent individuals (such as Edmund Robert Harris and Richard

Newsham of Preston whose wealth, in the case of the former, and art collections, in the case of the latter) founded numerous local, private and national museums. The installation thus echoed the "Wunderkammer" or a collection such as that of Sir John Soane in London in which spaces and times abut and collide, and classificatory demarcations fragment, creating a productive ambivalence and irresolution. In these respects *Alba* was unlike those installations in which native artists (re)appropriate the spaces and objects of the western ethnographic museum.¹⁶ Although such strategies disturb the classificatory systems and temporal order of things in the museum and its related disciplines, as Hal Foster indicated, "the danger, for the artist as ethnographer, [is that of] 'ideological patronage'," which he glossed for "the artist perceived to be other" in being "asked to assume the role of native informant."¹⁷ Sulter declined the role of native informant charged with providing unique and authentic access to a non-western culture, figuring her presence more as poet, photographer, curator and collector. But the strategies of the artist as ethnographer, so vigorously pursued by modernist artists of the earlier twentieth century,¹⁸ and the installation's post-colonial *bricolage* are not without risk. *Alba's* museological protocols, the site-specificity of the Harris, and the installation's potential for producing a generic Africa, unmarked by history or geography, may for some participants reiterate an all too familiar presentation of

Figure 3. Maud Sulter, *Alba*, installation, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, 1996. On the wall is the alchemical image captioned “The wolf from the East and the Dog from the West facing each other.” Adjacent, on plinths are Sulter’s Akua Ma doll and a horn (Photo: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry).



“primitive art in civilised places,” to echo Sally Price.¹⁹ Traces of previous usage and spatial histories are undoubtedly woven into the installation site, playing/preying upon its meanings. If the installation simultaneously called attention to and was complicit with their fetishization in the western imaginary, *Alba*'s objects may equally be the focus for a contradictory and unpredictable range of pleasures and fantasies. The installation's mimicry contributed to that “productive ambivalence” identified by Homi Bhabha as profoundly destabilizing and disruptive to the forces of authority.²⁰

On the walls and thus at the edges of the installation – and it is, as Catherine Ingraham has indicated, the edges that articulate architectural space²¹ – were framed images reproduced from *Atalanta Fugiens* or *The Flying Atalanta* by Michael Maier, an alchemical treatise first published in Latin in 1617 which incorporated 50 emblems, each with an image, epigram and discourse.²² *Atalanta Fugiens* extended the format of the emblem book and the alchemical treatise, by incorporating 50 pieces of music (the “fugues” or canons) so becoming, as Adam Mclean has argued, “an early example of multimedia.”²³ On the wall adjacent to each image is a one- or two-line text, loosely translated or adapted from the epigrams of the Latin edition. They are arranged in groups of one, three and four.²⁴ These late-twentieth-century reproductions of seventeenth-century prints, like the African art and the portraits, raised

questions about the nature of authenticity. In the alchemical images are allegorical figures such as Sol and Luna, fabulous creatures, rare beasts who no longer exist, indeed whose existence even then bordered on the mythical, as for example the venomous toad who suckles at a woman's breast until she dies, depicted in emblem 5, or the salamander who lives in flame, portrayed in emblem 29. The texts are unfamiliar, opaque, their relation to the images in no way direct or illustrative, but redolent of a complex lore, lost to the present and even indecipherable to it. Highly developed in ancient Egypt, alchemy was imported to western Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to be dismissed in the struggles for early modern science. Alchemy was concerned with transmutation, with changing one substance into another, and most famously with the quest for transforming base metals into gold. This process proceeded from the first stage when the substance was isolated, to the second stage of purification, and the third stage of transmutation; according to alchemical law these stages could be represented by black, white and red, the major colours of the installation. Alchemy evokes systems of thought which preceded the grand narratives of western modernity and imperialism and their logocentric binarism. The installation's texts speak of complementarity and reciprocity: “Nurture teaches Nature to overcome flame,” “Sun needs Moon as cock needs hen.” The discourse to emblem 6, whose text is translated by the artist as

Figure 4. Maud Sulter, *Alba*, installation, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, 1996. Five Cibachrome portraits, from left to right the sitters are Elizabeth MacGregor, Lubaina Himid, Mme Victoria Agbotui, Peg Alston and Sandy Nairne (Photo: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry).



“Cojoin Brother to Sister and offer them the cup of Love,” advocates that “the Human Race might be more strictly United & associated by affinity and friendship, & not divided by enmities.” So too the Tetrarchs, a collegium of four emperors founded by Diocletian (proclaimed emperor of Rome in 284) comprising two elder *Augusti* and two younger *Caesars* who shared power simultaneously.

The selection of emblems often drew attention to European perceptions of Africa. Of emblem 14, the dragon who in devouring its tail becomes a serpent, the discourse comments: “There were such Serpents in Africa, of a vast bignesse and in great numbers, which devoured part of Alexander’s army – the larger are bred among the Aschæans, a people of Ethiopia” In representing Africa as a continent filled with extraordinary, monstrous and predatory creatures, the alchemical treatise partakes of one of the most prevalent western mythologies of othering which, as Partha Mitter identified, survive well into the modern period.²⁵ For emblem 11, captioned by the artist “Make Latona white, tear up the books,” the accompanying discourse is as much about racializing difference as it is concerned with the alchemical transmutation of white lead (from which “red lead” or gold proceeds). Latona, “an Imperfect Body of Sol and Luna,” the mother of Apollo and Diana, and “one of the twelve Hieroglyphicall Gods of the Ægyptians,” must be “drawn from a Vile place.”

But the chief work and labour is to whiten Latona. ... But this Latona is brown and blackish, and hath many moles in her Face which must be taken away by Dealbation or blanching.

Not only is Latona disfigured by facial blemishes, but her skin must be lightened, not simply on the outside but from within “by penetration and by altering the skin itself.” The mimicry called for here is that which Bhabha has powerfully analysed as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as the subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite;” but as he concludes “[t]he menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.”²⁶

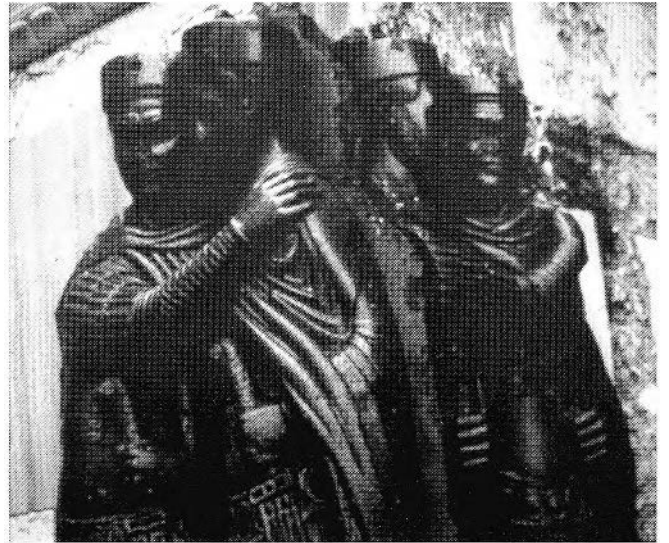
The Latin text of emblem 6, “Seminare aurum vestrum in terram albam foliatem,” is translated by the artist not as “Sow your gold in the white foliate earth” (interpreted in the discourse as well-prepared, whitish coloured, sandy soil) but as “Sow your gold in Alba’s foliated earth,” thus making reference to the ancient kingdom of Scotland. In fugitive ways the installation refers to and summons the history of Scotland when it was an independent country with its own monarchy and court; not united to England until the Act of Union in 1707, Scotland was international in its outlook. The five portraits conjure that court: its regal figures, its power brokers, its blood lines, its

artistic creativity, the several women of colour present there (fig. 4). According to Lorna J. White, they represent contemporary ancestors, linked through their connections to the artist.²⁷ Each is portrayed in a pose derived from Renaissance art, a visual strategy which is in part a reflection on Cindy Sherman's *History Portraits* (1988-90).²⁸ Sulter has stated that her own "enigmatic late twentieth-century Faerie Tale ... takes as its source historical evidence of the Black presence at the Scottish Court" before the institution of slavery.²⁹ The poet to the court of James IV of Scotland, William Dunbar, wrote of a resplendently attired black woman who participated in a tournament held by the king which lasted for 40 days and ended with three days of feasting, after which she disappeared.³⁰

Throughout the installation drifts the sound of the artist reading "The Alba Sonnets," poems which speak of the "Black people at the Scottish court" and the "hot tempers wild emotions and jealous lust" they aroused. Sulter's voice is fleeting yet recorded so that what is heard is the voice of the poet reading aloud, as William Dunbar recited to the Scottish court. The plaintive sound of the mmenson horn crosses the borders between life and death, presence and absence, while the texts of *Atalanta Fugiens* hint at resurrection and rebirth, one of the fundamental principles of alchemy. But two photographs of the damaged sculptures of the Tetrarchs, placed at Preston to frame views of the two main galleries, prompt reflection on the exigencies of survival (fig. 5).

The Akua Ma doll (seen in figs. 1 and 3) first appeared in two exhibitions of 1990: *Akua Ma: Museo* and Sulter's series of thirteen photographs, *Paris Noir*.³¹ In the latter, on each identical photographic print of the Akua Ma doll is a hand-written inscription by the artist which signals a long history of African artists, models and writers, including Jeanne Duval, Langston Hughes and "Gwendolen Bennett in Paris [who] was homesick for New York." The stamped impression on each print – "Paris Noir Museo" – not only suggests that the installation comprises a museum of African achievement, but it also signals the usual destination of African art in the west. The artist's own comment that "Paris Noir traces the historicism of an object. That object could be read as the artist herself"³² indicates that for Sulter self-representation extends beyond the artistic traditions of the west. In *Alba* western and West African visual traditions are juxtaposed to suggest diverse registers of portraiture, from the photographic portraits to the terracotta funerary head made as a memorial to a distinguished figure and considered by some to be a form of idealized portraiture, and the Akua Ma doll (figs. 2–4). Here as elsewhere, this latter both conjures and oscillates with the artist's presence. In the prefatory display panel to *Alba*, Sulter holds an un-inscribed print which might have been, or might yet become, one of the *Paris Noir* collection. The exhibition *Proverbs for Adwoa* (New York, 1993) presented three series

Figure 5. Maud Sulter, *Alba*, installation, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, 1996. One of the photographs of the Tetrarchs (Photo: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry).



dealing with African objects: in the museum, as personal possessions and as narrative characters; nine life-size Akua Ma dolls bore inscriptions in brass of Fante proverbs. According to Lubaina Himid, "[t]he artist has referred to the piece as a self portrait, picturing as it does her own Akua Ma doll."³³

Like many contemporary women artists, Maud Sulter has deployed herself as a model. In *Zabat* of 1989 she appears as *Calliope*, the centrepiece of an installation of nine Cibachrome images, each depicting one of the Muses (fig. 6). Conventionally imaged in the history of western art as white women, they are here portrayed by black women writers, artists, musicians and strategists. These are sumptuous, densely layered and strikingly beautiful images, created with the input of the photographer and the sitters and so transforming the conventional hierarchical relations between the artist and model. Several figures are easily recognisable. Carrying an overflowing cascade of flowers, Alice Walker is *Phalia*, the muse of comedy.³⁴ The artist Lubaina Himid is imaged as *Urania*, the muse of astrology. Singer Ysaye Maria Barnwell is *Polyhymnia*, the muse of sacred song. Far exceeding the personage who haunts the frame, sitter and figure supplement one another as model and Muse, uncannily oscillating between presence and absence, present and mythical past, in a manner akin to Derrida's "double session" not so much of inscription, in which, as he argues, any writing goes over its own mark with an "undecidable stroke," as a moment when several not necessarily compatible meanings double upon one another.³⁵ For the centrepiece of the series the artist (who is, it will be remembered, also a published poet) both becomes and is possessed by the muse of epic poetry. Staged as if in a nineteenth-century portrait photographer's studio, placed on a table are a pair of framed daguerreotypes, diminutive by comparison to the majestic figure of Calliope,

Figure 6. Maud Sulter, *Zabat*, installation, Rochdale Art Gallery, Rochdale, 1989. From left to right: *Terpsichore*, *Polyhymnia*, *Urania* and *Calliope* (Photo: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry).



wrapped in velvet and rapt in thought (fig. 7). At one level, *Calliope* is the artist's address to the sexualization, marginalization and disappearance of Jeanne Duval, known in literary history only as the mistress of Charles Baudelaire and in Felix Nadar's photographic albums as "unknown woman," and to photography's history in the west which, she has argued, was intimately connected to economic, sexual and racial exploitation. "Its birth pangs ran concurrent with the abolition of slavery and many of the uses to which it was first put was that of categorising the 'other'." But, she continues, as relations of power are not fixed but subject to change, photography can explore "an area as volatile and so at the centre of our renaming as Blackwoman's passion."³⁶

Yet *Zabat* is far more than a response. Each image encased in an ornate gold frame of the kind used for nineteenth-century academic painting, the series as a whole sets up a powerful force field which confronts the portrayals of women of colour as either liminal, almost unseen forms or as figures of a highly sexualised desire. Its powerful challenge is as much to popular culture as to the elite forms of western art. *Zabat* participated in a growing urgency to make imposing images which vigorously opposed and critiqued visual stereotypes. This imperative was voiced by Lubaina Himid in 1987, the year of her retrospective exhibition, *New Robes for MaShulan*, in which she showed larger-than-life painted and collaged cut-out figures: "I make images of blackwomen because there are not enough of them, ... I want to change the order of things and take back the art which

Figure 7. Maud Sulter, *Calliope* from *Zabat*, 1989. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Photo: V&A Picture Library; Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London).



Figure 8. Maud Sulter, *Hysteria*, installation, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1991. *Hagg* is on the far left and *Inverno* on the far right (Photo: Ikon Gallery).



has been stolen. I am only interested in painting blackwomen as independent, strong, thinking people.”³⁷ In glossing “Zabat” as “Sacred dance performed by groups of thirteen,” “An occasion of power’ – possible orig. of witches sabbat” and “Blackwomens rite of passage [f. Egy.18th dyn.]”³⁸ Sulter’s accompanying brochure suggested for *Zabat* a ritual which far exceeds the museological tactics described by Carol Duncan and Tony Bennett. The recasting of the Muses recalls the great library of the “Shrine of the Muses” at Alexandria which was burnt and destroyed with the rise of Christianity in Egypt. A work of imaginative re-collection, *Zabat* is as much about remembrance, for the muses were daughters of Mnemosyne, or Memory.

Hysteria was created during the artist’s residency at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool, in 1991. Over this period, she also undertook extensive research leading to an exhibition on the work of women artists housed in the national collections of historic British and modern art housed at the Tate galleries. Sulter discovered that “these are few in number and are even more randomly representative of their oeuvres than those of male artists.” She was also struck by the “white Eurocentric nature of most of the collection,” tracing “very little Black art,” despite the fact that “there were Blackwomen artists active in Europe ... painters and sculptors such as Edmonia Lewis based in Rome, Meta Vaux Warrick in Paris, Lois Mailou Jones also in Paris.”³⁹ While the exhibition *Echo: Works by Women Artists, 1850-1940* involved the retrieval of many little-known art works,

it also engaged a politics of history. As the artist wrote in the catalogue, “[f]or Blackwomen artists active today, there is a need to recognize continuity and parallels between practice now and then.”⁴⁰ *Hysteria*, an installation of photoworks centred around a massive slab of incised marble (fig. 8), was loosely based on the history of Edmonia Lewis. This African-American sculptor, who left America to live and work in Rome, was figured by Sulter herself (fig. 9). Sixteen photographic prints in black and white and muted colour suggested a nineteenth-century studio with its artistic bric-a-brac, plants, illustrated volumes, studio properties such as ballet shoes, shimmering surfaces of *faux marbre*, sensuous swathes of velvet and ruches of netted fabric (fig. 10). The installation addressed the absences in the archive and the “disappearance” of Black women artists. The gallery presentation and the film-script which accompanied the music on the compact disk created an open-ended narrative: following an intense period of artistic productivity in which visitors, friends, lovers and models cluster round her, the protagonist abruptly vanishes, glimpsed thereafter in fragmentary reminiscences.⁴¹ A photograph of *The Lawyer and His Wife* (seen in fig. 9) re-stages a moment following the last sighting of Lewis by the lawyer, Frederick Douglass, who had glimpsed the artist on a hill in Rome. Another figure, at once mythic and a character in this nineteenth-century story, is Hagg (seen in fig. 8). Holding a skein of thread and thus reminiscent of one of the Fates or *Parcae*, the three goddesses who according to Greek and Roman texts determined human destiny and the span of human

Figure 9. Maud Sulter, *Hysteria*, installation, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1991. Left to right: *Hysteria* and *The Lawyer and His Wife* (Photo: Ikon Gallery).

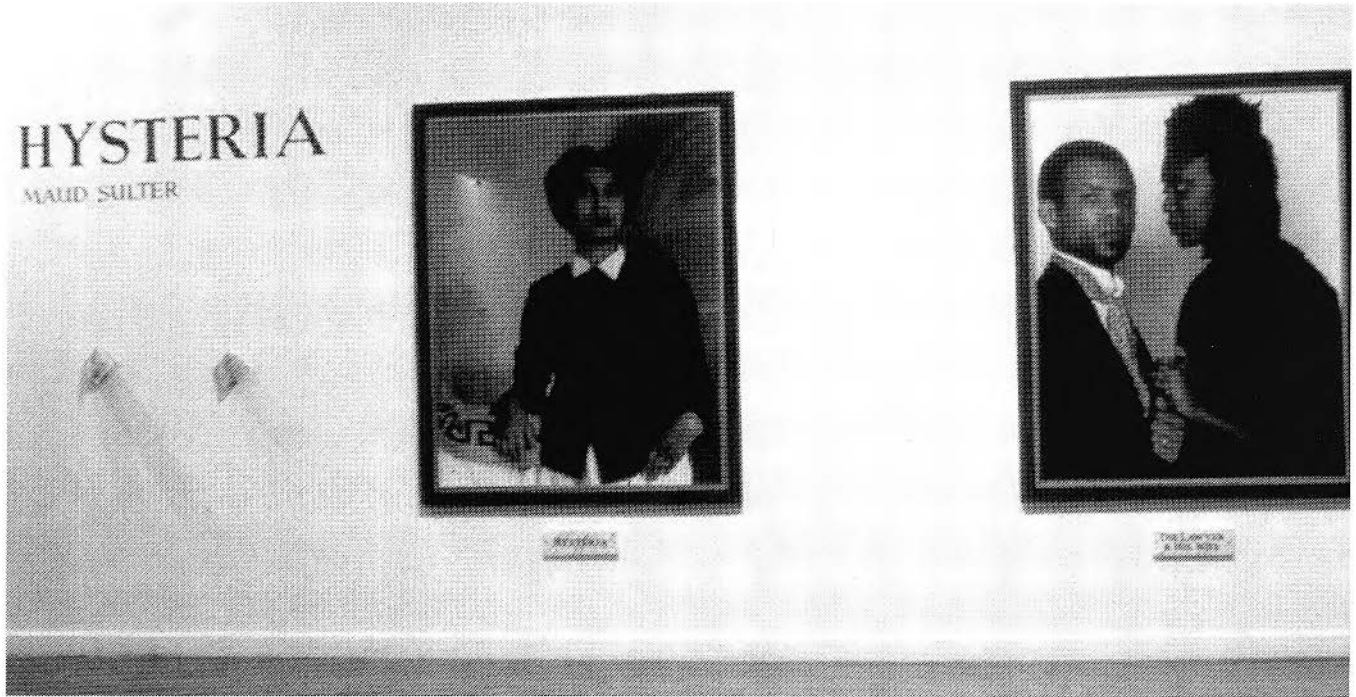


Figure 10. Maud Sulter, *Inverno* from *Hysteria*, installation, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1991 (Photo: Ikon Gallery).



life, Hagg contemplates the Black woman artist's fate in history as much as her unknown ending.

Mieke Bal's proposition of a poetics of "hysterics" / a "hysterical poetics" provides a way of reading the feminist project of *Hysteria* which is in turn modified by its encounter with Sulter's installation. Appropriating and re-reading Freud, Bal defines hysterics as "a search for the displaced, the unsaid, but often visible, sign of the unspeakable experience." Rather than reading for the plot, linearity or logic, she advances a counter-move which reverses and unsettles, so that "the categories of literal and figural change places." Comprising visibility, imagination and identification, this "hysterics" visualizes and imagines the woman's story in texts which have marginalized and silenced her, thus yielding a semiotics "to read the unsaid, recover the repressed." She suggests that "the 'hysterical' present of identification ... receives its figuration from the spatial."⁴² While recovery is indeed part of the project of *Hysteria* (as it is of *Echo*) and visibility and imagination central to its process, "identification" is a less certain enterprise. In the spatiality of *Hysteria's* installation, heterogeneous and culturally diverse subjectivities are constituted, and in that multiplicity "identification" is called into question.

An intermediate work produced by the artist in 1994 was *Plantation*, exhibited with *Alba* at its first venue. Dedicated to Bertha Antoinette Mason, described by Sulter as "the quintessential mad black woman in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*,"⁴³ this installation juxtaposed the projection of a video of the artist's major abdominal surgery with a text (printed white on black) to explore the connections between race and hysteria – as a psychoanalytic diagnosis and as a reading of femininity as deviance, physical sickness and mental illness. Its significance for *Alba* lay in its move towards an interrogation of corporeal politics and a dislodging of binary oppositions of mind/body, inner/outer, presence/absence. If *Alba's* red room(s) echo the crimson paintwork of "period" displays, they could also stir memories of the red chamber in which *Jane Eyre* was confined, as well as conjuring the "red gold" of alchemy doubled in the soils of West Africa. Whereas *Zabar's* monumental imagery oscillates between allegory and portraiture, between past myth and present achievement, *Alba* is an installation preoccupied with cultural exchange and its legacies; its oscillations are between presence and absence, north and south, Africa and Europe. Its address is through sound as well as sight, to corporeal sensation as much as vision.

This shift may be located within the transformations of and interactions between "black" cultural politics and contemporary critical theory in Britain. In an influential article on "New Ethnicities" Stuart Hall analysed a double strategy around representation in the 1980s in which access to the rights of representation accompanied a challenge to conventional stereo-

types with "the counter-position of a 'positive' black imagery." At this moment the term "black" was strategically mobilized to bring together diverse experiences and positions in a common struggle. Hall considered, however, that by 1989 a move was under way to what he called a politics of representation in which the understanding that "black" is "a politically and culturally *constructed* category" was allied to "the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects."⁴⁴

The increased visibility and organization of "black" artists in the 1980s took place within a decisive epistemic shift from "race relations" (the discursive framework of the 1950s to 1970s) to "cultural politics." In the 1980s culture became a particularly contested and politicized domain, an arena struggled over in a range of competing fields of power from politics to anthropology, corporate identity to the visual arts. In a cogent analysis, Susan Wright has argued that "[t]o unsettle and replace the dominant ideology [in place since the later 1940s] the New Right realized that they had not just to be active in politics but to make interventions in 'culture,' appropriating and reformulating the meanings of 'difference,' 'nation,' 'race' and 'culture'."⁴⁵ Against this centralized strategy and what was identified as the "new racism," autonomous venues outside the institutions of elite culture, as well as local spaces and several regional galleries, took the initiative in showcasing "black" art.

These interventions, and the debates about power, identity and difference which they engaged, were not simply matters of high theory, the policies of the national or local state, community activism or street-style; intellectual input was accompanied and informed by politics, and cultural endeavours were shaped by crossing the boundaries between theory and practice – in the studio and in the darkroom as much as in the library or the meeting-hall. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reflections on the relations between theory and practice, text and politics, are helpful in understanding the dynamics within which "black" cultural politics were forged. Lamenting a binary division which had produced deadlock on either side, Spivak advocates an interdependence in which theory situates and structures the limits of practice and a recognition that "no practice takes place without presupposing itself as an example of some more or less powerful theory."⁴⁶

Across the 1980s, the term "black" was strategically mobilized to claim space and visibility in the arenas of public exhibiting and art publishing. Following several shows in independent galleries or regional museums, in 1985 *The Thin Black Line* brought together the work of eleven African/Caribbean and South Asian women artists at a major venue in central London, the Institute of Contemporary Arts. As the exhibition's curator, Lubaina Himid, stated in the preface to the catalogue, if "[a]ll eleven artists in this exhibition are concerned with the politics

Figure 11. Chila Kumari Burman, *Body Weapons and Wild Women*, installation, 1994/5 (Photo: the artist).



and realities of being Black Women,” the recognition of difference between these artists and their approaches to art was equally important: “We will debate upon how and why we differ in our creative expression of these realities.”⁴⁷ Coalition and difference were also asserted in *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen’s Creativity*, a collection of essays, poems and photographs assembled and edited by Maud Sulter at the end of the decade.⁴⁸

Black women quickly recognized the importance of a cultural politics which was not simply based in either practice or theory but worked across a multiplicity of activities: networking, publishing, writing, editing special issues of magazines, curating, exhibiting, organizing conferences, archiving all became strategies for self-representation and survival. As indicated at the outset of this essay, Maud Sulter is a published poet and essayist, a photographer, painter, installation artist and curator. She founded the independent Urban Fox Press, whose list includes *Passion* and numerous exhibition catalogues.⁴⁹ In March 1999 she opened a gallery in London, wittily named Rich Women of Zurich to “support mid-career artists and celebrate diversity.”⁵⁰ Lubaina Himid founded “The Elbow Room,” a London-based exhibition venue; she has curated a number of major exhibitions, such as *The Thin Black Line* at the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London in 1985, and she has written

several essays on “black” women artists and their work.⁵¹ Although Sutapa Biswas is best known for her award-winning photography, as well as her earlier powerful paintings and drawings, she too has been an exhibition organizer, and she has published poems, essays and interviews.⁵² Chila Kumari Burman’s interventions and her emphasis on the intersections of race, class and gender have been as much through curating and writing,⁵³ as through her mixed-media art and installation (fig. 11). While these manifold activities can be related to the 1980s phenomenon of the artist-curator-writer – Mary Kelly was prominent among those producing art, organizing exhibitions and writing analytical and critical pieces to shape contexts for viewing – the work of “black” women articulated distinct positions within the controversies over the politics of visual representation which troubled feminist art criticism in Britain during these years.

While Sulter’s *Zabat* may be located within the double strategies of representation and within a counter-cultural politics characteristic of the 1980s, *Alba*, produced in the changed conditions of the 1990s, deals with identities and subjectivities which are dispersed and displaced and in which an emphasis on hybridity and migration has accompanied discussions of “the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse.”⁵⁴ Sulter’s major work of 1994 explored

the elliptical and elusive historical presence of Africans in Europe, the forces of fascism and rise of neo-fascism. *Syrca* is a series of photoworks in which monochrome images of African art from standard textbooks are collaged onto colour reproductions of European figure paintings and landscape views, so as to interrogate cultural exchange and appropriation.⁵⁵ While *Alba* shares some of these concerns, it may also be situated within the artist's focused address to the relations between Ghana and Scotland, generated in part through her own Scottish and Ghanaian ancestry. Cultural contact has produced unpredictable interactions which have re-shaped subjectivities and destabilized the logocentric binarism on which "otherness" has been predicated. Installation art has proved an enabling genre for these explorations, its semiotic force contingent on its production of space and time, its transience and its open-endedness. Although the artist's previous works may be perceived as installed, *Alba* may be described as a sustained piece of installation art.

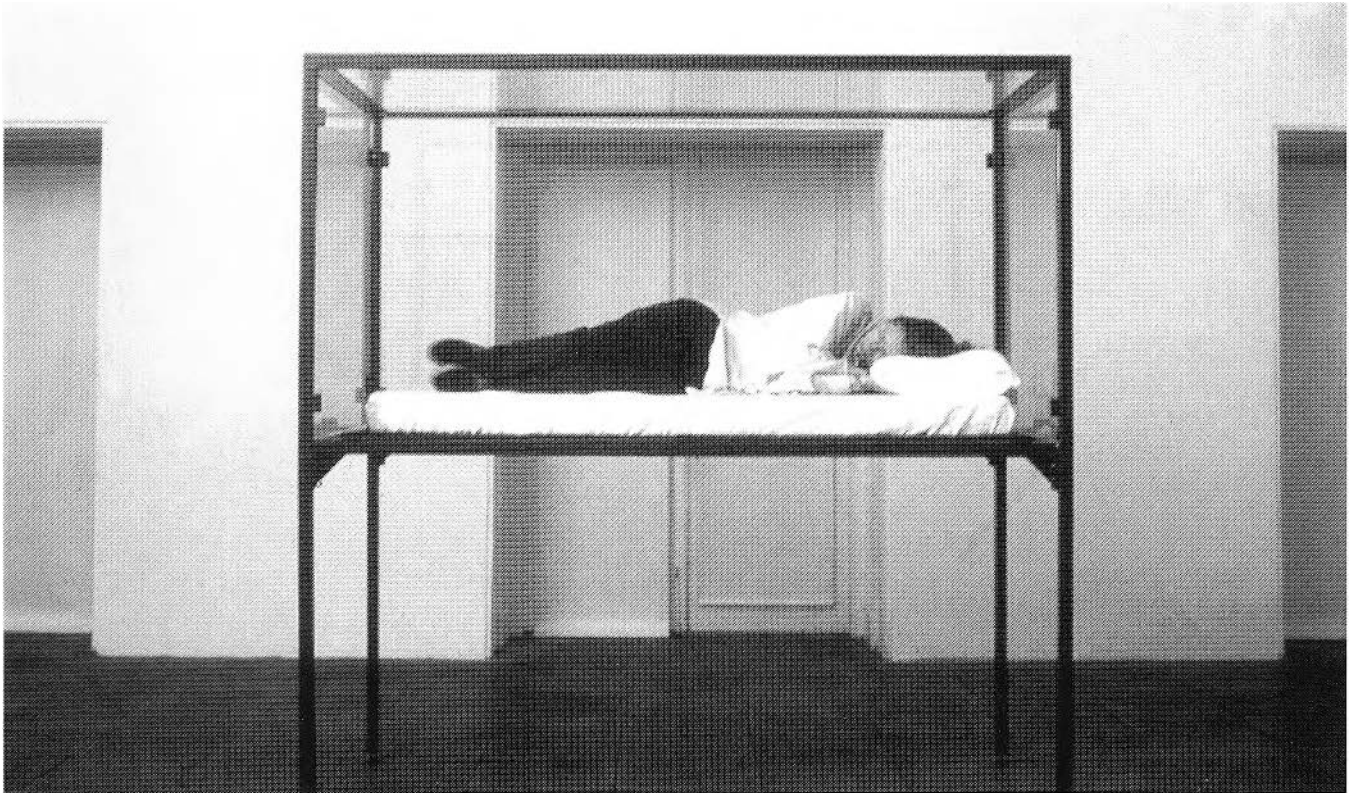
Installation art has become an important arena in post-colonial artistic practice and cultural criticism. It offers possibilities for deconstruction and reconfiguration, for remapping history and rehistoricizing space, for exploring the politics of location and the location of culture. Invariably described as a hybrid art, installation's potential for bringing together disparate objects and images to set up connections and discordant juxtapositions has offered possibilities for exploring a diasporan aesthetics concerned with migration and hybridity. Hybridity, as Homi Bhabha has suggested, is not a simple resolution between two opposites or a third term between them, but in contemporary practice it "entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" while exploring conjunction, blending, interaction.⁵⁶ These conjunctions are significant for the "gathering and re-using" – to deploy Lubaina Himid's description of the creative project of "black" women artists⁵⁷ – of some of the fragments of the diasporan, post-colonial histories of "black" settlers in Britain who have, argues Paul Gilroy, "forged a compound culture from disparate sources," creating an "intermixture of a variety of distinct cultural forms."⁵⁸

Gilane Tawadros has suggested that "black" women's art takes place within a diasporan "zone of indiscernability." For Tawadros, "Black women's creativity" is "an aesthetic and political project ... predicated on resistance and change" which "dissolves fixed boundaries between past and present, public and private, personal and political."⁵⁹ In works of installation which offer a complex and simultaneous address to the senses, familiar dualities of mind/body, artist/viewer, inner/outer precipitate into ruin through sensory and somatic incitations. Installation art offers a bounded and a borderless space, contained within its site yet offering sights and sounds, sites and times beyond its present. In reviewing *Alba* within contemporary installation,

four related themes emerge: the museum, oscillations of presence and absence, the voice and corporeal sensation.

Numerous artists, from Hans Haacke to Sophie Calle and Barbara Bloom, have questioned the museum's structures of knowledge. In analysing this major theme in contemporary practice, Jane Beckett has explained that "history has been referenced in a variety of registers and caught into a complex web of meanings from direct political references through analysis of the processes of memory and desire, from complex cues to a problematization of colonial photography and images of popular culture." Writing of a performance installation almost contemporaneous with *Alba*, she concluded "In loosening both the apparently familiar objects and the historical figures [who might have once owned them] from the secure ground of recognition, *The Maybe* suggested the precariousness of historical survival, as well as the pluralities and insecurities entailed in the processes of historical interpretation."⁶⁰ *The Maybe* was conceived and performed by Tilda Swinton in an installation for the Serpentine Gallery in London staged from 4 to 10 September 1995 and created collaboratively with Cornelia Parker (fig. 12). *The Maybe* asked its audience to consider the kinds of histories which might be attached to or fabricated for an assorted range of inanimate items putatively owned by historical figures, among which were Florence Nightingale's childhood slate, a cheque signed by Virginia Woolf, a quill pen used by Charles Dickens, a cigar butt discarded by Winston Churchill, Lee Miller's camera. The installation prompted questions about how and which objects survive, what they commemorate, and what they might now represent. Similar interrogations about things, their survival and classification were also set in play by Susan Hiller's installation which took its point of departure from the belongings of Sigmund Freud housed in his London residence, now a museum. Assorted artefacts and materials are assembled in a series of boxes, catalogued and placed in two long vitrines.⁶¹ But *The Maybe*, by including in a life-sized glazed cabinet the actress Tilda Swinton, seemingly in repose/asleep, her slight movements and the rise and fall of her breathing just discernible, pushed this questioning further, confounding museological exclusions of the animate. Swinton's compelling performance unsettled the looking of disinterested aesthetics and provoked disturbing questions about voyeurism. Reflection on diaspora was prompted by a Kashgay rug and chenille cushion owned by the founder of psychoanalysis, while headwear belonging to Henry Stanley and David Livingstone could provoke thoughts about imperialism as well as adventure, geography and exploration. Yet, however much an installation re-contextualizes its components, these objects come with a "trace" of their histories woven into them. It is the re-weaving of the text of installation which has allowed for strongly politicized investigations of national identity, imperialism and history. When in 1989 Lubaina

Figure 12. *The Maybe*, a performance installation by Tilda Swinton, with the collaboration of Cornelia Parker at the Serpentine Gallery, London, September 1995. (Photo: Hugo Glendenning, courtesy of Tilda Swinton, Cornelia Parker and the Frith Street Gallery London).



Himid's *The Ballad of the Wing* was re-assembled at a museum in Stoke-on-Trent in the heart of the pottery-making area of Britain,⁶² a quite ordinary object, a small brown tea-pot with a label "Made in Britain" displayed on an arrangement of sugar cubes, evoked a commonplace daily activity, the stirring of sugar into what is in the UK a "national" beverage (fig. 13). But placed within an installation which included massive canvases of figures such as Juliana Cuffay, involved in radical politics in London in the 1840s, Toussaint L'Ouverture's hat, subjects from Aesop's *Fables*, and "Spinster Salt's Collection" of African art, alongside smaller paintings such as "Two Shores," and objects such as a cricket bat, three rusty bolts placed in a pile of salt, two earthenware jars in a mound of sand (labelled "Cleopatra's milk") which might or might not enter a museum, the artist's arrangements came to have a much greater semiotic charge, recalling the global trading of peoples and commodities (a sugar trade founded on slavery and the slave trade, an imperial tea trade supported by South Asian plantations). These hitherto disparate/diasporan elements, "scattered remains strewn across history," become in the words of the artist "clues to events."⁶³ Everyday things have also been relocated in Mona Hatoum's installations. The terrifying power of her work derives precisely from the re-presentation in the museum of domestic objects such as a bed, bedspring panels, a carpet or a chair to

evoke not just disquiet and unease but profound sensations of fear and terror.⁶⁴

One question often provoked by installation art is the relation between absence and presence, the opposition between these two states until recently considered to be central to western metaphysics. *The Maybe* set in play inanimate objects and the absent historical figures who once owned them, present only in historical recollection, together with the living form of an actress hovering between waking and sleeping. Mona Hatoum's recent work also plays on the uncertainties of presence and absence. As Desa Phillipi tellingly observes, the body "rarely appears as an image; instead it supplies proportions and measurements."⁶⁵ If in Hatoum's *Short Space* (1992) the bed-springs map the size and scale of the human form extended in sleep or death in order to figure the body's absence, it is the vertical suspension of the panels and their inexorable movement up and down which haunts a vision of where a body might once have been.⁶⁶

The disembodied voice has also proved a telling means of interrogating presence and absence. It has been used to powerful effect in installations by Bill Viola and by Susan Hiller to suggest (often incomplete) narratives, to prompt recollection, to disorient and disturb, and to evoke unconscious and otherwise unspoken desires, fantasies and anxieties.⁶⁷ At first hearing,

Figure 13. Lubaina Himid, *The Ballad of the Wing*, installation, Stoke-on-Trent Art Gallery, 1989. The small brown tea-pot is on a plinth in the left foreground (Photo: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry).



speech projected as part of an installation seems to constitute, or at least give access to, presence and to bring into the present voices which are lost, forgotten or unheard. When Alison Marchant's *Tying the Threads* was presented at Oldham Art Gallery in 1992, this installation concerned with the fragmentary nature of working-class women's history included recorded reminiscences and testimonies by workers in the Lancashire cotton mills.⁶⁸

Yet, what is the nature of voice and indeed sound in installation? Reflecting on the difference between speech and writing, Jacques Derrida has considered the beliefs, widely held in western culture, that voice is linked to and expressive of consciousness, and that there is an "absolute proximity of voice and being."⁶⁹ In contrast to the weight of writing, the gravity of its engraving or inscription, Derrida has proposed that speech is evanescent, disappearing into air as soon as it is uttered: "le langage étheré s'oublie lui-même."⁷⁰ *Alba* provides a voice which is neither proximate to nor expressive of a tangible, visible or corporeal presence. At the same time speech, floating over the space, challenges the occidental prioritization of writing. Lis-

tening to the soundtrack, it is not readily ascertainable who is speaking or when: now and/or in "those far times." The artist's intonation competes with other sounds in the museum, from muffled speech to the muted footsteps of visitors within and outside the installation. In this, the installation voice contrasts to the audio-guide of the block-buster exhibition in which authoritative commentary, whispering into the ear of the beholder/listener, provokes a looking, listening and movement guided by its predictable itinerary, its interpretations temporarily halting the slithering proliferations of meaning. *Alba's* soundtrack deploys the disembodied voice as one of several sensory c(l)ues to disarm, to hint at the unfamiliar and to index the uncanny. A voice without an identifiable body haunts a room in which a book, massively enlarged in scale, floats upon the walls.

Music has been an important element in installations, often constituting an intervention in the environment of the public art museum to intensify its corporeal and sensory address and to precipitate cultural markers into its space. Installed at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 1994, Chila Kumari Burman's *Body Weapons and Wild Women: Beyond Two Cultures*

set up dynamic interactions between visually arresting, brilliantly coloured laser-printed images of Asian women, a video textured from family photographs of her women relatives in Liverpool and India (fig. 11). A soundtrack, mixed by the artist, included Bhangra, Reggae, popular and folk music: this was, she has said, “the music we grew up with.”⁷¹ In the mixing of images, in the diverse guises in which she makes her appearance, the artist’s self-portraiture troubles certainties of presence and absence, challenging any notions that identity is fixed, that appearance depends on an originating subject. The music resonated throughout the museum with an acoustic and bodily address as strong as that of the images and their over-written “truisms” such as “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” For many, including the artist, this multi-sensory address prompted memories and reflection on the scattering and collecting together of family members (the body of the family) and familial mementoes. Mona Hatoum’s installations have also deployed sound, though to radically different effect. The noise of motors or the amplification of electric currents intensifies sensations of anxiety, while the sounds within the body heard in *Corps étranger* precipitate enclosure and enwrap ocularity. Touch has also been significant, whether the danger of electric heating bars which would maim on contact, or the imperceptible touch of hair in *Recollection*.⁷² Hanging from the ceiling in this installation of 1995 were rows of individual hairs six inches apart which lapped against the faces and heads of participants with an almost indiscernible lightness: brushing them away only increased their tactility. In what seemed at first an empty room were placed a small wooden table on which was a miniature loom with woven hair, a bar of soap caked with hair, and on the floor hundreds of small hair balls. The physical encounter with the inert detritus of Hatoum’s body could prompt questions about presence and absence, and disturb memories, from the intimately pleasurable to the unsettling or the traumatic.

Installation in the mid-1990s was a distinctively corporeal art, initiating responses, memories and experiences which might be as auditory, tactile, aromatic and somatic as they are visual. Assessing this corporeality involves charting a move towards sight as but one of the senses and towards the body as a volatile force, continually subject to definition and redefinition, a move away from “the empire of the gaze” and questions of “visual representation” which dominated feminist theory and critical studies in the 1980s.⁷³ It equally prompts a reflective assessment of feminism’s attention to “women’s look,” the representation of women and the activity of looking. Feminist writings initiated and took place within increasing concerns with vision and visuality in which the gaze, the glance and the look, as much as the viewer, the beholder, the spectator and the “focalizer,” were subjected to scrutiny, as was the status of vision in western metaphysics.⁷⁴

This emphasis on the primacy of vision was to be found as much in feminist art practice, particularly in what was termed “scripto-visual” art, as in the theorizing about it. Although the senses were stifled in Mary Kelly’s work – the nappy liners of *Post-Partum Document*, for example, exuding no odour, and the conversations of *Corpus* (the first section of *Interim*) silenced in their written transcriptions – the body as subject of scrutiny has been by no means absent, and the bodies of her audience have been doubled by the reflective planes of her work, such as the perspex surfaces of *Corpus* or the shields of *Gloria Patri*.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, although the artist has emphasized the totality of her installations, discrete elements or sections have generally been reproduced.⁷⁶ Interpretation, too, has prioritized the two-dimensional and the visual. In an authoritative account of Kelly’s work, Griselda Pollock proposed a new approach to spectatorship which engages reading, not for narrative but for a “new understanding” of the social and psychic construction of femininity.⁷⁷

By the early 1990s the body was back on the agenda. The title of a collection of essays, *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture*, pointed up a common preoccupation with the body as image which nevertheless reduced the corporeal to the visual and ascribed to vision an unchallenged authority.⁷⁸ Shifting this ground, Rosemary Betterton foregrounded the need to overturn “western systems of representation in art and science [which] have placed the act of looking at the centre of their enquiry” and she reaffirmed the significance of Luce Irigaray’s writings on embodiment and touch. Critiquing Roland Barthes’ concept of the reader as “without history, biography, psychology,” Betterton shifted attention to the body and to “the physical acts of an embodied subject” to reinscribe the body of the woman artist.⁷⁹

One way of coming to terms with the corporeal and sensory disturbance encountered in installation art may be through the “logic of the supplement” proposed by Derrida. Alluding to the double meaning in French of *supplément* as addition and replacement, Derrida has indicated that the supplement is a movement which revokes binary opposition and that it is, as such, disruptive and even dangerous: “Son glissement le dérobe à l’alternative simple de la présence et de l’absence. Tel est le danger.”⁸⁰ This dangerous supplement, he contends, “entre par effraction dans cela même qui voudrait avoir pu s’en passer et qui laisse à la fois frayer, violenter, combler et remplacer, compléter par la trace même dont le présent s’augmente en y disparaissant.”⁸¹ In intervening, pushing in/between and against, the supplement is a movement of violence as this description emphasizes with its intimations of breaking and entering, stealth and robbery. Taking up Derrida’s suggestions, installation sounds or smells do not so much disturb, or even interrupt, museum protocols of looking, as break into the house of high culture,

stealing (away) the primacy usually accorded to vision. It is not therefore that the senses other than sight are alternative, secondary or additional. Rather they may be construed as supplementary, displacing as well as enhancing the empire of the gaze. Installation sounds confuse and counter-point the museum's usually depleted repertory of sensory incitations: the muffling of speech and the shuffling of feet are as characteristic of this environment as the somatic deportment demanded of visitors who probably would not touch or smell exhibits placed on plinths without enclosing vitrines. Sound signals a corporeal address which charges the cavities of the body as much as the spaces of the installation. The motors, pulleys and bodily sounds announce as well as contribute to the anxieties provoked by Hatoum's installations. Repetition complicates the matter further. Derrida proposed in *L'écriture et la différence* that repetition is not the return of the same, since there is no original, but a movement of supplementarity. Like the sign which, he suggests, endlessly proliferates as meanings are continuously deferred, sound and the "trace" of the sound are delayed. This is explicable on a common-sense level in that participants will hear the sounds generated in an installation at various points. As the spatial co-ordinates change, so will the sound's meanings and its potential for disturbance or "*frayage*" into the field of vision.

In writing of "l'écriture comme 'frayage'," Derrida uses the metaphor of a route or path, defining the action of "*frayage*" as a breaching: "percée son chemin contre des résistances, rupture et irruption *faisant route (rupta, via rupta)* . . ." Elsewhere he writes that "le chemin tracé ouvre une voie conductrice . . . La voie est rompue, brisée, *fracta, frayée* . . ." ⁸² Although the route, whether round an installation or towards an interpretation, opens a path and makes (a) way, it is nevertheless uncertain, even confused; this text, like textile itself, persistently frays and constantly unravels, dislodging any certainties of passage or explication. Installation art offers sites through which participants may wander (on foot, in a wheelchair or a buggy), tracing and retracing serendipity or planned routes – through the space, over the floor, in pursuit of sight, sound and touch and/or smell trails. Bricolaged by the artist from disparate components, installations are varyingly and perhaps only partially put together by participants. They offer visual, auditory, tactile, written c(l)ues that can be pursued or forsaken, traces that can be apprehended or forgotten, pathways that can be followed or abandoned, tracks in interpretation, time and space which cross and intersect, interrupt and trespass one upon another. They may rely on secrets, hidden information or mysteries. ⁸³ To identify the sitters for the portraits is not to secure a meaning for *Alba*. Knowing that the corporeal conduits in the video are those of the artist will not solve the riddle of the strange/unfamiliar/foreign body that is Hatoum's *Corps étranger*. In installation art,

nothing adds up, not even at the end, wherever or whenever that is.

Re-assembling the "scattered remains strewn across history" involves the gathering and re-using of fragments, scraps, objects, images, sounds, voices which have survived, some almost by chance, some against the odds. The installations under discussion here neither visualize nor secure historical or contemporary personages, since "presence" cannot simply be inserted or asserted to fill what has hitherto been construed as "absence." As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discovered when reading the imperial archives, "there is no 'real Rani' to be found."⁸⁴ What emerges in these installations is unpredictable, what happens sensory and corporeal. Participants are called upon not just to look, but to read, listen, observe, detect, witness, testify, mourn, and most of all re-member. In the event we are all complicit.

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Notes

- ¹ *Alba* was commissioned by the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow with funding from the Scottish Arts Council. A complex installation piece, it was first exhibited there in September and October 1995, re-installed at Ormeau Baths Gallery in Belfast in January 1996 and shown in spring 1996 at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston. It is in the artist's collection. Each (re-) installation varied slightly in its disposition of the elements and in the decoration of the gallery.
- ² Julie Reiss indicates in *From Center to Margin: The Spaces of Installation Art* (London and Cambridge, Mass, 1999), xi–xiii, that "Installation art" is a relatively new term whose signification is elusive. She argues that whether objects are included, or omitted

- altogether, “[t]here is always a reciprocal relationship of some kind between the viewer and the work, the work and the space, the space and the viewer.” Moreover, she continues, “the artist treats an entire indoor space . . . as a single situation, rather than as a gallery for displaying separate works” while “the spectator is in some ways regarded as integral to the completion of the work.” This definition is helpfully inclusive of a variety of practices, despite the emphasis, which I challenge here, on installation’s participants as exclusively or primarily viewers or spectators.
- 3 *Zabat* was first installed at Rochdale Art Gallery in 1989. It is now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. *Hysteria*, an installation produced with a residency at the Tate Gallery in Liverpool, was shown there in 1991 before touring to six other venues, including the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham.
 - 4 *The Maybe* was conceived and performed by the actress Tilda Swinton in an installation for the Serpentine Gallery in London, created collaboratively with the artist Cornelia Parker in September 1995. Mona Hatoum’s video installation *Corps étranger*, 1994, is in the Collection Musée national d’art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.
 - 5 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives,” *History and Theory*, VIII (1985), 247–72; Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London, 1993).
 - 6 As Stuart Hall indicated, “black” is “a politically and culturally constructed category,” see note 44. On the dangers of white authority and appropriation, see bell hooks, “Critical Genealogies: writing Black art,” in her *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York, 1995), 108–18.
 - 7 J.J. Rawlings’ father was Scottish. He was brought up by Mme Agbotui.
 - 8 A compact disk with the sound of the horn and the artist reading “The Alba Sonnets” was produced for the Preston installation, with financial assistance from North West Arts. The text of the sonnets was included in Maud Sulter, “Kairos,” *History: The Mag Collection: Image-Based Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century* (Hull, 1997), 144–55.
 - 9 Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York, 1995), 2, 17.
 - 10 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London, 1995), 63.
 - 11 Mark Crinson, “Imperial Story-lands: Architecture and Display at the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes,” *Art History*, XXII (March 1999), 99–123 is a recent example of this kind of interpretation.
 - 12 Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (1987; Cambridge, 1997), 26–28. I am indebted to my colleague Craig Clunas for productive discussions on this text.
 - 13 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 222; he continues that other collectibles such as “tourist art” have been less systematically valued. See also Chris Steiner, *African Art in Transit* (Cambridge, 1994), 92.
 - 14 Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilised Places* (Chicago and London, 1989), 86.
 - 15 Price, *Primitive Art*, 63, bases her arguments on Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1963), 22–23; see also Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago and London, 1990), 119–37, and Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 226.
 - 16 Gerald McMaster, “Museums and Galleries as Sites for Artistic Intervention,” *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective*, eds Mark Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (Cambridge, 1998), 250–61. I am indebted to James Green of the Harris for information on its benefactors.
 - 17 Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds G.E. Marcus and F.R. Myers (Berkeley, Ca., 1995), 303, 307.
 - 18 For a thoughtful account, see Whitney Chadwick, “Fetishizing fashion/fetishizing culture,” *Oxford Art Journal*, XVIII (1995), 3–17.
 - 19 Price, *Primitive Art*, passim.
 - 20 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York, 1994), 67.
 - 21 Catherine Ingraham, “Initial properties, architecture and the space of the line,” *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton, 1992), 255–71.
 - 22 Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens. The Flying Atalanta of Philosophical Emblems of the Secrets of Nature* (Oppenheim, 1617; repr. Frankfurt, 1687). The artist utilized the Latin edition held in the Library of the University of Glasgow. Meier’s epigram at the opening of the volume explains that Atalanta, fleet of foot, was only once defeated in a race when three golden apples, given by Aphrodite to a putative suitor, were cast down in her path and so distracted her.
 - 23 Adam Mclean’s website: http://www.levity.com/alchemy/atalanta_fugiens.
 - 24 According to Lorna J. White, *Maud Sulter: The Vision of a Poet*, exhibition leaflet (Belfast and Preston, 1995/6), this arrangement refers “to the Trinity and to the fourth point of unity, the One,” echoing an alchemical movement towards unity, purification and the divine.
 - 25 Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (1977; Oxford, 1992).
 - 26 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86, 88, 92.
 - 27 White, *Maud Sulter*.
 - 28 Rosalind Krauss, *Cindy Sherman, 1975–93* (New York, 1993).
 - 29 Artist’s statement, 1995.
 - 30 *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. J. Kinsley (Oxford, 1979). Historical sources document the presence of Africans in Britain from Roman times. Neither continuous nor progressively numerous, but scattered, and varying historically and geographically, references to this presence are often indirect and tangential.
 - 31 Maud Sulter’s *Akua Ma: Museo* was exhibited in Sheffield at the Untitled Gallery in 1990. For a discussion of *Paris Noir*, see Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, eds, *Treatise on the Sublime: Maud Sulter, Lubaina Himid* (Fresno, Ca., 1990).
 - 32 Quoted in Beckett and Cherry, eds, *Treatise on the Sublime*, 5.
 - 33 Lubaina Himid, “A Brief Introduction of the Magical World of Maud Sulter’s ‘Photoworks,’” *Maud Sulter: Syrcas*, exh. cat., Wrexham Library and Arts Centre and national tour (Wrexham, 1994), 32.

- 34 Reference is made to Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London, 1984).
- 35 J. Derrida, *La dissémination* (Paris, 1972); translated by Barbara Johnson as *Dissemination* (Chicago, 1981), 193.
- 36 Maud Sulter, "The Nature of Photography: Black Notes from the Underground," *Feminist Arts News*, III, 1 (1989), 12–14.
- 37 Lubaina Himid, "We Will Be," *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, ed. Rosemary Betterton (London and New York, 1987).
- 38 *Zabat: Maud Sulter. Photo Works*, exh. brochure, Rochdale Art Gallery (Rochdale, 1989), 4.
- 39 Maud Sulter, *Echo: Works by Women Artists, 1850–1940*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery Liverpool (London, 1991), 6, 26.
- 40 Sulter, *Echo*, 26.
- 41 The artist collaborated with the Ghanaian musician Miles Ofusodanso to produce the music. A limited edition of 1000 copies of the CD was issued as a joint venture between the Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal, and Tate Gallery Liverpool.
- 42 Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge, 1991), 63–64.
- 43 Quoted from the press release, CCA, Glasgow, 1995. *Plantation* was also exhibited at the Plug-In Gallery in Winnipeg and at University of Leeds Art Gallery in 1995. It is in the artist's collection.
- 44 Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities: Black Film, British Cinema," *ICA Documents: 7* (London, 1989), reprinted in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffin and Helen Tiffin, *The Post Colonial Reader* (London and New York, 1995), 224–27.
- 45 Susan Wright, "The Politicisation of 'Culture'," *Anthropology Today*, XIV (February 1998), 7–15.
- 46 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sara Harasym (London, 1990), 1, 120.
- 47 Lubaina Himid, *The Thin Black Line*, exh. cat., Institute of Contemporary Arts (London, 1985; reissued, Hebden Bridge, 1989), n.p. The exhibition was controversial, and on Himid's own account she was "accused of being a cultural terrorist," "Afterward," 12.
- 48 Maud Sulter, ed., *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity* (Hebden Bridge, 1990): contributors were Bhajan Hunjan, Delta Streete, Dionne Sparkes, Frederica Brooks, Lubaina Himid, Nialah, Nina Edge, Olusola Oleye, Robyn Kahukiwa, Roshini Kempadoo, Sutapa Biswas, Veena Stephenson, Asian Women Writers Collective. Photographs by Ingrid Pollard.
- 49 Her collections of poetry include Maud Sulter, *As A Blackwoman, Poems, 1982–85* (London, 1985; reissued Hebden Bridge, 1989), and *Zabat: Poetics of A Family Tree, Poems 1986–89* (Hebden Bridge, 1989). Urban Fox Press has also published catalogues of exhibitions including *Donald Rodney: Critical* (Hebden Bridge/Rochdale, 1990) and *Claudette Johnson: Pushing Back the Boundaries* (Hebden Bridge/Rochdale, 1990), both curated by Lubaina Himid.
- 50 See www.richwomenofzurich.com. Between the time of writing and publication, Rich Women of Zurich has (temporarily?) closed, unable to maintain its London premises without an injection of major funding.
- 51 See Jane Beckett, *Lubaina Himid* (London/St Ives, 2000).
- 52 See *Synapse: New Photographic Work by Sutapa Biswas*, exh. cat., Photographers Gallery (London, 1992), 23.
- 53 Chila Kumari Burman, "Ask How I Feel," *Feminist Arts News*, III, 6 (1991), 16–17; see also L. Nead, *Chila Kumari Burman* (London, 1996).
- 54 Paul Gilroy, quoted in hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 167.
- 55 *Syrca* is in the artist's collection.
- 56 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4.
- 57 Lubaina Himid, "Fragments," *Feminist Arts News*, II, 8 (1988), 8.
- 58 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, 1993), 15, 7.
- 59 Gilane Tawadros, "Beyond the Boundary: the Work of Three Black Women Artists in Britain," *Third Text*, 8/9 (1989), 121–50.
- 60 Jane Beckett, "History (Maybe)," *History: The Mag Collection*, 139, 141.
- 61 See Susan Hiller, *After The Freud Museum* (London, 1995). The work entitled *From the Freud Museum* is in Tate Modern, London.
- 62 Initiated at Chisenhale Gallery in London, the installation went on national tour in the same year.
- 63 Lubaina Himid, *Revenge*, exh. cat. Rochdale Art Gallery (Rochdale, 1992), 6; see also Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, "Clues to events," *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, eds. Mieke Bal and Inge Boer (Amsterdam, 1994), 48–55; quoted in Jane Beckett, "History (Maybe)," *History: The Mag Collection*, 133–43, 139.
- 64 *Mona Hatoum*, exh. cat., Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1994); M. Archer, et al., *Mona Hatoum* (Oxford, 1997).
- 65 Desa Philippi, "Some Any No Every Body," *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the feminine*, ed., Catherine de Zegher (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 364.
- 66 See note 64.
- 67 Bill Viola's installation *Tiny Deaths* was included in *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Century*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery (London, 1995). For installations by Susan Hiller, see *Susan Hiller*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery (Liverpool, 1996).
- 68 Alison Marchant, "Tying the Threads," *Feminist Arts News*, IV, 5 (1992), 27.
- 69 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), 11–12.
- 70 J. Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, trans. A. Bass as *Writing and Difference* (Chicago, 1978), 9, note 23; "ethereal language forgets itself."
- 71 I am particularly grateful to the artist for discussing this work with me. "Hello Girls" of 1999 is a dazzling mix of images, from self-portraits to the beauties of Indian miniatures to the Wonderbra Girls. It was shown at the Andrew Mummery Gallery in London in 1999.
- 72 *Recollection* was made for the Beguinage at Kortrijk, Belgium, and was reassembled for the exhibition, *Inside the Visible* at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1996 (see note 65). Collection De Vleeshal, Middleburg, the Netherlands.
- 73 I am indebted here to Elizabeth Grosz's work, particularly "Bodies/cities," in Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space*, 241–57.

- 74 See, for example, Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting* (London, 1983); Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London, 1986); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference* (London, 1988); Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, 1988); Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision* (London, 1989); Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London, 1989); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley, 1993); Stephen Melville and Bill Readings, eds, *Vision and Textuality* (London, 1995). The "focalizer" was proposed in Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*, 138-76, 207-15.
- 75 Kelly wrote of *Interim*, "I will risk saying [it] was 'inspired' by over one hundred conversations, observed and very informally logged in the interval between 1981 and 1984." "Invisible Bodies: Mary Kelly's *Interim*," *New Formations*, II (Summer 1987), 7. Kelly and commentators on her work have frequently mentioned the shift in psychoanalysis from the visual imagery produced by Charcot to the "talking cure" initiated by Freud. See also Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (London, 1983), and *Imaging Desire* (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1996).
- 76 *Talking Art: Mary Kelly in Conversation with Margaret Iverson*, ICA Video (London, 1993). Some installation views are provided in Kelly, *Imaging Desire*.
- 77 Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 163-70.
- 78 Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon, eds, *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture* (Cambridge, 1993).
- 79 Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body* (London, 1996), 2-7.
- 80 J. Derrida, *La dissémination*, 124, translates as "Its sliding [or slipperiness, slithering] slips it out of the simple alternative of presence and absence. That is the danger."
- 81 Derrida, *La dissémination*, 126, translates as, "breaks into the very thing that would have liked to do without it, and which allows itself to be simultaneously cut into, violated, filled and replaced, completed by the very trace through which the present augments itself in the act of disappearing into it." With thanks here to Geoffrey Bennington for an illuminating discussion of this passage.
- 82 Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 317; Bass, *Writing and Difference*, 214, "breaking of a path against resistances, rupture and irruption *becoming a route . . .*" Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 298; Bass, *Writing and Difference*, 200, "the tracing of a trail opens up a conducting path. . . . The path is broken, cracked, *fracta*, breached . . ."
- 83 According to one source, Sulter, an avid reader of the Sherlock Holmes stories and the Nancy Drew mysteries, "often approaches her work with the tools of a detective." Himid, "A Brief Introduction," 34.
- 84 Spivak, "The Rani," 271. In *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge Mass, 1999), Spivak elaborates on her more recent searches.