

# Contents

List of figures	<i>page</i> viii
Acknowledgements	xv
Introduction: addressing the other woman	1
I Writing the 'I' otherwise: telegraphing black feminism in the work of Adrian Piper and Angela Davis	23
<b>1</b> Adrian Piper's textual address	29
<b>2</b> Letters from an imaginary enemy, Angela Davis	72
II Typing the poetry of monsters: Nancy Spero and Valerie Solanas write aggression	101
<b>3</b> Writing the drives in Nancy Spero's <i>Codex Artaud</i>	107
<b>4</b> Valerie Solanas's <i>SCUM Manifesto</i> and the texts of aggression	146
III Hieroglyphs of maternal desire: the collaborative texts of Mary Kelly and Laura Mulvey	179
<b>5</b> Rewriting maternal femininity in Mary Kelly's <i>Post-Partum Document</i>	186
<b>6</b> Feminist desires and collective reading in the work of Laura Mulvey	232
Conclusion	267
Bibliography	269
Index	286

## List of figures

- 1.1 Adrian Piper, *Context #7*, 1970. 7 black notebooks, ink, graphite, crayon, postage stamps, photograph, sugar package on paper. 11.75" × 11" each (29.84 × 27.94 cm each). Detail: Information page. Collection of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA. T.B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 2008 © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 30
- 1.2 Adrian Piper, *Here and Now*, 1968. Artist's book: cardboard portfolio, 64 loose leaf mimeographed pages with typescript, 9" × 9" (22.8 × 22.8 cm). Detail: Column 3 Row 6. Collection of Alan Cravitz, Chicago. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 37
- 1.3 Adrian Piper, *Concrete Infinity 6" Square* ["This square should be read as a whole ..."] 1968. Pagework: typescript, 11.5" × 8.5" (29.2 × 21.6 cm). Private Collection, USA. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 39
- 1.4 Adrian Piper, *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City*, 1970. Performance documentation. 4 black and white photographs, silver gelatin on baryta paper (prints c. 1998) 41 × 41 cm each; framed 49.8 × 51.6 cm. Detail. Collection Generali Foundation, Vienna. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 41
- 1.5 Adrian Piper, *Concrete Infinity Documentation Piece*, 1970. 57 framed graph paper pages with black and white photographs and handwritten-script, 11.5" × 9.75" (29.2 × 24.7 cm). Detail: Thursday 6/18/70. Collection of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 44
- 1.6 Adrian Piper, *Concrete Infinity Documentation Piece*, 1970. 57 framed graph paper pages with black-and-white photographs and handwritten script, 11.5" × 9.75" (29.2 × 24.7 cm).

- Collection of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.  
© Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 45
- 1.7a and b Robert Morris, *I-Box*, 1962. Painted plywood cabinet coated with Sculptmetal, containing black-and-white photograph, 19" × 12¾" × 1⅜" (48.26 × 32.39 × 3.49 cm). Photo Courtesy Castelli Gallery. © 1962 Robert Morris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. 48–49
- 1.8 Adrian Piper, *Catalysis IV*, 1970–71. Performance documentation: 5 silver gelatin print photographs, 16" × 16" (40.6 × 40.6 cm). Detail: 2 of 5. Collection of the Generali Foundation, Vienna. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin and Generali Foundation. 54
- 1.9 Adrian Piper, *Catalysis III*, 1970. One silver gelatin print photograph on paper, 16" × 16" (40.6 cm × 40.6 cm). Detail: #1 of 3. Photocredit: Rosemary Mayer. Collection of the Generali Foundation, Vienna. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin and Generali Foundation. 57
- 1.10 Adrian Piper, *Food for the Spirit*, 1971 (photographic reprints 1997). 14 silver gelatin prints and original book pages of a paperback edition of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, torn out and annotated by Adrian Piper. 15" × 14.5". Detail: photograph #11 of 14. Collection Thomas Erben. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 58
- 1.11a and b Adrian Piper, *Food for the Spirit*, 1971 (photographic reprints 1997). 14 silver gelatin prints. 15" × 14.5". Collection Thomas Erben. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 60–61
- 1.12 Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: A-108 (Kant)*, 1975. 6 vintage silver gelatin print photographs altered with oil-crayon. 25.5" × 17.75" (64.7 × 45 cm). Detail: #5 of 6. Private collection. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 64
- 1.13 Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: I Embody Everything You Most Hate and Fear*, 1975. Gelatin silver print photograph altered with oil crayon. 9.96" × 8.3" (25.3 × 21.1 cm). Collection of Thomas Erben, New York. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. 65
- 2.1 FBI Wanted Poster of Angela Davis, 1970. Courtesy of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. 73
- 2.2 Cover of *Life* magazine, 11 September 1970. Photograph by David Dornlas. LIFE logo and cover design © Time Inc. LIFE and the LIFE logo are registered trademarks of Time Inc. used under license. 77

- 3.1 Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud I*, 1971. Cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper 23" × 7' 5". © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 111
- 3.2 Nancy Spero, detail from *Codex Artaud I*, 1971. Cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper. © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 111
- 3.3 Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud XVII*, 1972. Cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper. 45" × 18". © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 116
- 3.4 Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud III*, 1971. Cut-and-pasted text and painted paper on paper. 20" × 6' 4". © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 123
- 3.5 Nancy Spero, *Mummified*, 1950. Newspaper, nylon stocking, plaster, and string, 15" × 4 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 128
- 3.6 Nancy Spero, *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You*, 1960, gouache and ink on paper, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 22". © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 130
- 3.7 Nancy Spero, *Homage to New York (I Do Not Challenge)*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 46 $\frac{7}{8}$ " × 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 132
- 3.8 Nancy Spero, Letter to Lucy R. Lippard, 29 October 1971. Lucy R. Lippard Papers, 1930s to 2010, bulk, 1960–1990. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. 135
- 3.9 Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud VIII*, 1971. Cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper, 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 8' 3". © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts. Licensed by Vaga New York/DACS London/Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York. 138
- 3.10 Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud IX*, 1971. Cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper, 18" × 10' (45.7 × 304.8 cm).

- Los Angeles County Museum of Art. © 1971 Museum Associates, LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, New York. 138
- 3.11 Nancy Spero, detail from *Codex Artaud IX*, 1971. Cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. © 1971 Museum Associates, LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, New York. 139
- 4.1 Cover of the 1968 Olympia Press Edition of *SCUM Manifesto*. Photograph by Fred W. McDarrah. 160
- 4.2 Photograph of Valerie Solanas by Fred W. McDarrah, 1967. © Getty Images. 162
- 4.3 Cover of the 1970 Olympia Press Edition of the *SCUM Manifesto*. 163
- 4.4 Cover of the 1971 Olympia Press Edition of the *SCUM Manifesto*. 164
- 4.5 Still from *I Shot Andy Warhol*, dir. Mary Harron, 1996. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Playhouse International Pictures. Solanas and Monroe. 166
- 4.6 Still from *I Shot Andy Warhol*, dir. Mary Harron, 1996. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Playhouse International Pictures. Solanas's screen test. 168
- 4.7 Still from *I Shot Andy Warhol*, dir. Mary Harron, 1996. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Playhouse International Pictures. Solanas at the typewriter. 171
- 5.1 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Introduction*, 1973. Perspex units, white card, wool vests, pencil, ink. 4 units, 20 × 25.5 cm each. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 189
- 5.2 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Introduction*, 1973. Perspex units, white card, wool vests, pencil, ink. Detail, 20 × 25.5 cm. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 191
- 5.3 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation I, Analysed faecal stains and feeding charts*, 1974. Perspex units, white card, diaper lining, plastic sheeting, ink. 1 of 31 units. Detail, 28 × 35.5 cm. Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 193
- 5.4 Mary Kelly, Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt, *Women and Work*, 1973–1975, black-and-white photographs, charts, tables, photocopied documents, film loops, audiotapes, dimensions variable. Installation, South London Art Gallery, 1975. Tate Gallery, London. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 196

- 5.5 Mary Kelly, Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt, *Women and Work: Daily Schedules*, 1975, detail. Collection, Tate London. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 197
- 5.6 Mary Kelly, *Antepartum*, 1973. Video loop transferred from Super 8 film, black-and-white, 1 minute 30 seconds. Collection, Whitney Museum of American Art. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 198
- 5.7 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation II, Analysed Utterances and Related Speech Events*, 1975. Perspex units, white card, wood, paper, ink, rubber. 1 of 26 units. Detail, 20.5 × 25.5 cm. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 210
- 5.8 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation III, Analysed Markings and Diary-perspective Schema*, 1975. Perspex units, white card, sugar paper, crayon, 4 of 10 units, 35.5 × 28 cm each. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 212
- 5.9 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation III, Analysed Markings and Diary-perspective Schema*, 1975. Perspex units, white card, sugar paper, crayon, 1 of 10 units. Detail, 35.5 × 28 cm each. Collection, Tate Gallery, London. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 213
- 5.10 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation IV, Transitional Objects, Diary and Diagram*, 1976. Perspex units, white card, body/hand imprint in clay, plaster of Paris, cotton fabric, string. 1 of 8 units. Detail, 28 × 35.5 cm. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 214
- 5.11 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation V, Classified Specimens, Proportional Diagrams, Statistical Tables, Research and Index*, 1977. Perspex units, white card, wood, paper, ink, mixed media. 3 of 33 units, 13 × 18 cm each. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 216
- 5.12 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation VI, Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary*, 1978. Perspex units, white card, resin, slate. 1 of 15 units. Detail, 20 × 25.5 cm. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 217

- 5.13 Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation VI, Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary*, 1978. Perspex units, white card, resin, slate. 1 of 15 units. Detail, 20 × 25.5 cm. © Generali Foundation. Photo credit: Werner Kaligofsky. Reproduced with permission from the artist. 220
- 6.1 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Opening shot of *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 235
- 6.2 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Title. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 235
- 6.3 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Chapters. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 236
- 6.4 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Image of Woman as Bird. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 236
- 6.5 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. 'Sphinx Moderne.' Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 236
- 6.6 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. The Sphinx and Oedipus. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 237
- 6.7 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Laura at her writing desk. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 238
- 6.8 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. The lips of the Sphinx. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 240
- 6.9 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. Daughter in high chair. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 241
- 6.10 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Louise and Maxine. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 253
- 6.11 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Mary Kelly reading from *Post-Partum Document*. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 254

- 6.12 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Image of Mary Kelly with son. 255
- 6.13 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Image of Maxine at the mirror. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 256
- 6.14 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Image of Louise at the mirror. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 257
- 6.15 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Image of director between curtains. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 257
- 6.16 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. British Museum, mummy in glass case. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 259
- 6.17 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, still from *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1977. British Film Institute. Mother and daughter entering Egyptian Gallery. Reproduced with permission from Laura Mulvey. 260

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## Introduction: addressing the other woman

In the late 1960s and 1970s, women artists in the United States and Britain began to make texts and images of writing central to their visual compositions. This book explores the feminist stakes of that choice. It analyses how three artists – Adrian Piper, Nancy Spero, and Mary Kelly – worked with the visual dimensions of language to transform how women are perceived.

I became interested in the way women artists engaged with text and writing when I saw *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at MoMA PS1 in New York City in the summer of 2008.<sup>1</sup> This large-scale exhibition was devoted to artwork from the 1960s and 1970s produced by women and reflected the galvanising impact of feminism. Walking through the halls of what was once a public school (PS1), I was initially taken, not by how many different artists utilised texts, but by the disparate images of women's bodies placed on and protruding from the exhibition walls. These images ran the gamut from severe, minimalist, and spare (Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, 1972) to the messy, liquid, and amorphous (Lynda Benglis's *For Carl Andre*, 1970). Some images gave the body a sculptural malleability and an imaginative range of motion that transformed the spaces around it. Artists climbed ladders (Gina Pane's *Escalade non-anesthésiée*, 1971) and hung from swings (Barbara Hammer's *Double Strength*, 1978), and painted walls with blood (Ana Mendieta's [*Untitled*] *Blood Sign #2/Body Tracks*, 1974).

While these artists revealed what women's bodies can do, other artists exposed what women have been expected to do to their bodies. Many pieces in *WACK!* enacted the regimes of modification to which women often subject themselves in order to produce pleasing images of femininity. In her *Double Life* (1974–1975), Sanja Iveković juxtaposed colour advertisements selling lingerie and black-and-white photographs in which she mimed the poses of the women displayed in those advertisements. A year before Eleanor Antin created *Carving* (1972), in which she lined up photographs of her naked body in a grid to document how a diet 'carves' her body, she created *Representational Painting* (1971), also included in *WACK!*, a thirty-eight minute video in which she sits in front of the camera at a three-quarter angle and applies make-up to her

face. In *Les tortures volontaires* (1972), Annette Messager placed eighty-six small black-and-white photographs into an assemblage that depicts the array of technologies for producing beauty: surgeries, masks, straps, and lifts. Each of these artists made the production of the artwork a site for disrupting two interrelated expectations: that a woman should present herself as a beautiful image, and if an artist, will create aesthetically pleasing objects.<sup>2</sup> This disruption exposed the efforts so many women have put into comporting their bodies to fit the visual 'sign' of woman: the term feminists working within semiotics and critical theory used to identify a representation that purports to represent all women but actually reflects an idea of woman that serves masculine dominance.<sup>3</sup> Aligning their artwork with theoretical investigations of 'woman as sign,' these artists resisted the imperative that women compose images of their bodies that transmit their willingness to become what Simone de Beauvoir identified two decades before as the 'Other' of patriarchy.<sup>4</sup>

Encountering the dynamic range of the artwork in *WACK!*, I saw how many of the defining movements in contemporary art coincided with women artists' attempts to expose the limitations that have constituted woman as a visual sign.<sup>5</sup> One can see women artists' dialogue with Pop Art's use of seriality to detach the image from its referent, Conceptual Art's sober reflection on art's discursive production, Performance Art's presentation of the body as a visceral medium, and Video Art's intimate exploration of the image of the self as an other. These movements, all of which erode the image and its authority, became part of women artists' work challenging the overdetermined relationship between images and women. If, as John Berger observes in his classic book *Ways of Seeing* (1972), 'men *act* and women *appear*,' then the artwork displayed in *WACK!* reminded viewers that women artists in the 1960s and 1970s passionately developed strategies to act against the entrenched connection between the sign woman and the imperative to appear as an image that submits to patriarchal desires.<sup>6</sup>

*WACK!* is one of many exhibitions to take place in the last decade that returned to women's art practices from the late 1960s and 1970s. Though there were significant efforts in the 1990s to curate nuanced histories of feminist art, in 2005 there was a renewed focus among museums, galleries, and institutions around the world to highlight feminist art's multiple iterations, narrate stories of their emergence, and speculate about their futures.<sup>7</sup> This renewed attention, which manifested on a global scale, marked a positive shift for women artists. Vibrant careers, long buried by the patriarchal criteria of choice (both within the art world and the world at large), were brought into well-deserved public view.<sup>8</sup> Building on earlier curatorial projects that defied the forces that have obscured artwork by women, *WACK!* and the other exhibitions like it continued the important work of unhinging the category of feminist art from the stubborn assessment that it was a short-lived embarrassment from the 1960s and 1970s,

obvious and obsolete.<sup>9</sup> And yet, by drawing attention to the various manifestations of feminism in contemporary art practices, it became clear that ‘feminist art’ could only really serve as a limited art historical placeholder, one that is ultimately inadequate to the disparate array of practices that gather under its name.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the exhibitions demonstrated the importance of the category – despite but also because of the contestations inherent to it – for valuing art practices by women. Situating itself within feminist art’s limitations and possibilities, exhibitions like *WACK!* reanimated familiar questions about the relationships among feminism, women, and visual art, but also created openings for seeing dimensions of the artwork that have yet to be fully explored. *WACK!* and the global trend of which it was a part made new forms of engagement – both scholarly and popular – possible, this book included.

Though I had been writing about the relationship between artwork by women and feminism for a while, the array of art linked to feminism had never been so vividly present before me. The exhibition’s title reflected the revolutionary demands inspiring the artwork and echoes the names of collectives such as Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) that coalesced in the late 1960s and 1970s to protest the entrenched sexism and racism of the art world and link it to the larger politics of inequities in cultural representation. By highlighting the demand for revolutionary change, *WACK!* underscored Griselda Pollock’s argument that the proliferation of art practices by women in the late 1960s and 1970s was a crucial moment in the history of the avant-garde, a belated continuation of the avant-gardes of the 1870s and 1920s that neglected the contributions of women.<sup>11</sup> The connections *WACK!* made between feminist art practices and revolutionary protest drew attention to the aspiration to make artwork contest how dominant images circulating through western culture reinforce the idea that women are – or should be – passive and subordinate. But to think of the artwork composed under feminism’s broad auspices as demonstrations of strength or claims to equality would be a mistake. The aspiration was to compose images that would allow women to recognise themselves differently. Turning to text and writing was a subtle articulation of this aspiration.

It was not until I saw *WACK!* a second time that I started noticing how many of the artists made the formal properties of language part of their work. In *Concrete Infinity Documentation Piece* (1970), Adrian Piper annotated black-and-white photographs of her naked body with handwritten diary entries carefully composed on graph paper. In photographs documenting her performance *Interior Scroll* (1975), a naked Carolee Schneemann pulled from her vagina a long and narrow handwritten script that tells the story of how a ‘structuralist filmmaker’ dismissed her films. Also displayed was Nancy Spero’s *Torture of Women* (1976), in which she placed typewritten and bold hand-printed fragments of written stories, myths, and reports together to tell a pervasive

story of gendered violence. In Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's video *Passages/Paysages* (1978), single typed words appeared on a grey screen at unpredictable intervals to mark the passage of time away from a communal/national home ('pays'). There was also *Angry Gertrude* (1973), in which Louise Fishman painted the letters of her title in thick strokes of dull pinkish red and grey paint that almost take over the entire picture plane and are placed amidst red and green cross-hatched marks that drip angrily down the canvas. In *10 Months* (1977–1979), Susan Hiller placed black-and-white photographs of a growing pregnant belly above white cards typed with black typewritten text that reflect on pregnancy's configuration of proximity, distance, time, and sensation. In *La Roquette, Prison de Femmes*, Nil Yalter (with Judy Blum and Nicole Croiset) (1974) wrote thin and simple white letters on grey paper to narrate a story of a woman entering prison and explain the significance of objects and body parts depicted in a series of black-and-white photographs. In *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1979), Mary Kelly composed written charts, graphs, and diary entries on and within an array of textured surfaces to mime the discursive positioning of maternal femininity in psychoanalytic discourse and impede visual access to satisfying images of motherhood. Echoing the focus on textuality in the 1996 exhibition *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, this sample from *WACK!* demonstrates how many women artists in the late 1960s and 1970s deployed text and writing as visual materials.<sup>12</sup> While a few key arguments have identified this turn and its stakes, the fact that so many women artists of this period made language one of their materials has not been explored with any sustained attention.<sup>13</sup>

The artists' choice to move between visual and linguistic registers creates what Mieke Bal identifies as 'visual textuality,' a texture of signification that addresses viewers and asks them to engage in the act of reading.<sup>14</sup> To create this 'visual textuality,' these pieces aligned with contemporary art's multiple engagements with language: the sober displays of information and sentence-like sequences of Conceptual Art, the ordinary and playful typographies of Fluxus, and even the calligraphic gestures of Abstract Expressionism. These movements continued the attention many avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century paid to the visual and material qualities of language. Whether cutting and pasting typographic fragments from newspapers, composing calligrams in ink, or arranging swirls of unmoored letters, artists linked to Cubism, Surrealism, and Dadaism worked with the 'word-image' to fragment the illusions of pictorial space and draw attention to the picture plane as a two-dimensional surface.<sup>15</sup>

What this rich history cannot account for is feminism's impact on the choice to make language a visual material. Whether they identified with feminism or not, the artists of the 1960s and 1970s who chose to work with text and writing were responding to the fact that language had become central to feminist efforts

to transform the material conditions of women's lives. With protest signs, fliers, leaflets, periodicals, manifestos, banners, and an array of emergent writing practices, feminists were seizing language to write other worlds for women.<sup>16</sup>

Though not often noted, visual artists contributed to the feminist claim to language. They worked with texts and writing to show they had something to say about how women are seen and then wrote that claim upon the image itself. Central to this claim was a rejection of a long history in which women were depicted as images but were restricted from producing them. The artwork was also implicitly rejecting an unfolding historical present, one that was characterised by an unprecedented proliferation of mass-produced images in which visual signs of woman fix and naturalise the expectation that woman serves as the 'Other' of patriarchal culture.

Adrian Piper, Nancy Spero, and Mary Kelly are three artists who deployed text and images of writing with a particularly inventive intensity in the late 1960s and 1970s. In this period of feminist dissent, they created bodies of work that manifested the subtle and compelling innovations language made available. Though there are significant stylistic differences among these artists' work – which perhaps explains why they have never been read together – their shared use of text allows us to see the correspondences among their projects and the emergent feminist desires to address other women and embark upon a collective effort to rewrite perceptions of women.

As my survey of *WACK!* suggests, there are many women artists from this period whose work I could have analysed. I pursue the work of Piper, Spero, and Kelly here because it emblematises interrelated dimensions of women's art production in this historical period and identifies three crucial mechanisms for keeping women aligned with and measured against the sign of woman, respectively: pathologising racial difference, repressing women's aggression, and idealising maternal femininity. With text and images of writing, these artists targeted these mechanisms at work in the prevailing images circulating through western visual culture. Language became a tool to expose the work these images perform, confirming the assumption that woman serves as 'Other' to man. It also opened spaces for imagining women, as Griselda Pollock puts it, 'other than being other to men.'<sup>17</sup>

In the incisive work she produced in the late 1960s and 1970s, Piper worked with the interplay of words of images to break down how sexism and racism function as visual pathologies that call black women into subordinated positions and thereby exposed the fears and fantasies projected on to black women's bodies. Typing the writings of Antonin Artaud on paper and placing them in proximity to monstrous, sexually ambiguous figures in her epic scroll *Codex Artaud* (1971–1972), Spero staged an elaborate protest against the repression of aggression white American women are presumed not to possess and punished for wielding. And by composing intricate charts, graphs, and diary entries to

portray the relationships among maternal femininity, language, and loss, Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* represented the psychic complexity of maternal desires to undermine the idealisation granted to white women that keeps the feminist potential of desires in check.

Through and across these distinct bodies of work, I argue that by making language a primary material, Piper, Spero, and Kelly made a powerful claim: to compose representations of women that push beyond patriarchal desires and definitions, images are not enough. Writing across images, imprinting visual materials with texts, or making words into images by highlighting their formal and material qualities – these aesthetic choices ask viewers to see beyond the forms of visibility images make available and thus question the image as the only site through which to transform how women are perceived.

Piper, Spero, and Kelly ask viewers to see the 'picture' embedded in language and then notice that words shape not only how people see but determine what and who is allowed to appear.<sup>18</sup> Which is to say that their artwork reflects upon language as a system that governs what can be said and what can become visible.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, the artists invite viewers to see images as a kind of 'language' with their own syntax of construction that allows them to convey meaning. They exposed the imaginary conditions that set out in advance the proper place of identification, speech, and subject positions that are available to women. Aligned (with different degrees of intention and intensity) with the theory of language posited in the work of Jacques Lacan, the artists demonstrated that language functions as an tool of patriarchal dominance. By making this argument part of their work, they linked their projects to feminist efforts to create arenas in which women can find their voices and speak back to the patriarchal discourses by which they have been silenced and confined. But more than voice or speech it is *writing* – and in particular, the idea of writing offered by deconstruction – in which this artwork seems to be invested.<sup>20</sup> Within deconstruction, writing is regarded as cohering around fundamental absences, which undercuts the prestige of presence bestowed upon speech. The work of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous stands out for their attention to writing as a confrontation with the gaps and absences at the heart of signification. Whether women artists drew explicitly from deconstruction or not, the movement between presence and absence enacted through writing challenged the fantasmatic presence attributed to the sign woman (which is paradoxically premised on her absence and lack) and the punitive absences that have awaited women outside its recognisable boundaries. Indeed, by working with text and writing, Piper, Spero, and Kelly created images that were 'writerly,' Roland Barthes' term for texts that solicit readers' engagement through their porous openings and unfixed significations.<sup>21</sup> Working to unravel the historical orders consolidated through language and images, these artists' engagements with text and writing suggest meanings that exceed the signs through which women are habitually recognised

and therefore create the possibility of representing women through gaps and absences without filling them up with ready-made meanings that justify subordination.

To understand the stakes of this writerly artwork, it has to be set in relationship to the visual cultures of capitalism, or what French Situationist Guy Debord identified in 1967 as the 'society of the spectacle' in his manifesto of the same name. Diagnosing the political economy that produces and benefits from proliferation of mass-produced images, Debord argues that capitalism had colonised everyday life to such a degree that visual perception itself had become a mode of consumption.<sup>22</sup> The society of the spectacle installs the image as the dominant signifier of western society, the primary site through which subjectivity, experience, and history are made into mirrors of capitalist imperatives. Needless to say, the society of the spectacle occludes and mutes language, reducing it to one purpose: buttressing acts of visual consumption. Words appear, but are given undervalued jobs as logo, caption, and copy.<sup>23</sup> In *Signatures of the Visible*, Fredric Jameson develops Debord's picture of visual dominance to argue that the 'all-pervasive visibility' of late capitalism has a 'pornographic' dimension that provokes an impulse to 'stare at the world as though it were a naked body' and 'possess' it.<sup>24</sup> Jameson claims that a betrayal is necessary if an analysis of visual culture is not simply an 'adjunct' to the 'rapt, mindless fascination' of visual culture seductively provokes.<sup>25</sup> Overshadowed by spectacle, language has the capacity to stage this 'betrayal.'

With different degrees of explicitness, the artwork of Piper, Spero, and Kelly suggests that the 'naked body' Jameson argues is central to western visual culture was most often imagined as and portrayed through the visual sign of woman. Their use of text deflects the impulse endemic to late capitalist visual culture to see through and visually possess this naked sign and insist that she serve as the other to western culture. Inscribed upon the image, language creates the possibility of seeing subjective differentiation – the differences between the sign woman and women as singular and historically specific subjects. While certainly language has been an instrument of women's dispossession, and is by no means free from capitalism's distortions, the artwork of Piper, Spero, and Kelly demonstrates that in an age of visual saturation, the choice to work with both the restrictive orders and imaginative possibilities of language made brief interruptions of visual dominance possible.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, the artwork aligns with feminism's intervention into visual culture, which itself overlapped with the theoretical investigation of 'woman as sign.'<sup>27</sup> Work in feminist visual culture exposed the fact that patriarchal powers are buttressed by an imaginary set of relationships that relies upon the visual sign woman as an object of exchange. In 'The Other Side of Venus: The Visual Economy of Feminine Display,' Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues that images of women's sexual display are conflated with the commodification of

visuality itself and offers a history of how ‘femininity, display, and spectacle become visually collapsed into each other.’<sup>28</sup> This collapse makes images of sexually available women have a ‘banal possessability’ that transports viewers into acts of consumption without recognising it as such.<sup>29</sup> Such images represent the alienation inherent to capitalist exchange, but they can also mollify the feelings that emerge from it because they are imagined to be outside it – in the realms of bodies, sexualities, and feelings – and therefore ‘manage’ the conflicts and contradictions of capitalism and soften its corrosive force.<sup>30</sup> The sign woman transmits a ‘fantasy of possession’ in which men are reassured that they have privileged capacities to control exchange relations.<sup>31</sup> Solomon-Godeau’s critique underscores the importance of reading the sign woman as a mirror that reflects the pervasive fiction that masculinity is not vulnerable to exchange relations.

The emergence of black feminist visual theory made clear what many women of colour had known all along – that the sign woman is a product and reflection of racial hierarchies. In 1992, artist Lorraine O’Grady argued that the sign woman was not ‘unitary’ but split by racial difference. Comparing this sign to a ‘coin’ (thereby situating her analysis within capitalist discourse and inflecting it with the question of value), O’Grady argues that it has ‘two sides.’ Needless to say, the sides are not equal. As O’Grady explains:

on the one side, it is white; on the other, not-white or, prototypically, black. The two bodies cannot be separated, nor can one body be understood in isolation from the other in the West’s metaphoric construction of ‘woman.’ White is what woman is; not-white (and the stereotypes not-white gathers in) is what she had better not be.<sup>32</sup>

It is Piper’s work in particular that aligns itself with O’Grady’s vivid description of the racial hierarchy the sign woman reinforces and occludes. Juxtaposed against O’Grady’s argument, it becomes clear that the artwork Piper produced in the 1960s and 1970s, which denaturalises the raced female body, vehemently exposes and critiques the assumption that women who bear the physical signs of racial difference have been historically excluded from the sign woman. Though far less explicitly, the work of Spero and Kelly contributed to calling the implicit whiteness of the sign woman into question. Their work undoes the mandate that white women should align themselves with the narrow ideals of white femininity that are assumed to be the natural ground of the sign woman. Drawing attention to this artwork’s implications for race (whether explicit or implicit) and the ways in which the artists reveal the various ways race inflects gender, I build upon recent work in feminist art history that refuses to see its objects of analysis with ‘colour blind’ eyes.<sup>33</sup>

When read in relation to each other, we can see that Piper, Spero, and Kelly produced their work during a historical period in which feminism was

impacting multiple dimensions of western culture and creating an expansive picture of feminism that does not consolidate into one easily consumable story. However, in response to black and post-colonial feminist critiques of western feminisms that gained rightful prominence in the 1980s, and the pervasive impact of intersectionality as a conceptual tool for bringing anti-racist and feminist critiques to bear on each other, there is a strong impulse in the feminist narratives of the present to see the feminisms of the late 1960s and 1970s primarily in terms of its racial exclusions.<sup>34</sup> These narratives are part of what Clare Hemmings identifies as a story of 'progress' in which black feminisms of the 1980s transformed and transcended what has been deemed the white middle-class essentialist feminism of the 1970s.<sup>35</sup> The racial exclusions to which these narratives point are central to feminism's histories, and cannot be denied. But attention to these exclusions should not elide iterations of black feminism that emerged in the 1970s, nor should it occlude the utopian aspirations of feminism, which extend beyond its discrete historical appearances and have offered the possibility (however small) for investigating how the sign woman allowed white women of the late 1960s and 1970s to perpetuate racisms with unreflective ease.<sup>36</sup>

When we look at and read the work of Piper, Spero, and Kelly together, it is possible to read it as animated by the hope that as artists they could create images that have yet to be seen and they invite viewers to collaborate in that creation. Text and writing are central to these interrelated aspirations. In *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (2007), Liz Kotz points to the fact that language is always in two places simultaneously, 'here,' as she explains, 'concretely present on the page, or in the moment of utterance,' but also 'elsewhere,' pointing toward 'sets of ideas, objects and experiences that are somewhere else.'<sup>37</sup> With text and writing, Piper, Spero, and Kelly all inventively drew upon the capacity of language simultaneously to be 'here' (appearing before the viewer) and 'elsewhere' (beyond the immediate field of vision and outside the frame of appearance). Text and writing enacted this movement and addressed viewers to see women beyond the ideas that dominant images allow into visibility. Moving between 'here' and 'somewhere else,' Piper, Spero, and Kelly asked viewers – other women – to become readers of the visual histories they inherited and engage in the process of imagining women beyond familiar words and images that reinforce women's subordination.

'Addressing the other woman' is my term for the utopian wish to reach other women and correspond with them across differences. To make the artwork's aspirations to address the other woman concrete, I place these artists in correspondence with writers who, from aligned historical contexts, also addressed the limited range of images through which women are allowed to become visible. The images and texts Piper arranged to identify the psychic impact of racism and sexism have clear (if unintentional) correspondences with the

writings of Angela Davis and the story she tells in her written reflections on becoming the ‘imaginary enemy’ of the US nation-state. The unruly shouts Spero typed across *Codex Artaud* correspond with Valerie Solanas’s infamous *SCUM Manifesto* (1967) and its angry claim to language as a revolutionary tool to dismantle the grim picture of the world patriarchy has created for itself. And finally, Kelly’s efforts to stage an intricate resistance to the alienating myths of maternal femininity in *Post-Partum Document* aligns with the feminist reconfiguration of woman in both the theoretical writings and film practices of Laura Mulvey, who reflected upon how the cinematic image became a site for connecting women to the project of ‘bearing’ meaning rather than ‘making’ meaning.<sup>38</sup>

Because they hold iconic places in the histories of feminism, identifying Davis, Solanas, and Mulvey as writers does not adequately capture the reach of their work. Mapping feminism’s political and intellectual interventions, drawing out its possibilities and revealing its limitations, their writings represent some of the most compelling aspects of feminism’s histories in the late 1960s and 1970s. Reflecting on her experience as an African-American woman on the run from the FBI, Davis crafted a sober picture of the punishments that are wielded when black women refuse to create images of subservience that appease dominant white culture. Composed with anger and humour, Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto* makes feminism into a counter-cultural force capable of destroying the foundations of patriarchal culture by ‘cutting up’ the imaginary picture of the world that masculine dominance has created for itself. Mulvey’s theoretical writings on film have defined the fields of feminist film theory and feminist visual studies. Her essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ which originally appeared in *Screen* in 1975, has been habitually cited in feminist analyses of film, included in countless anthologies of film theory, and is a staple of university film courses. ‘Visual Pleasure’ demonstrated how images of women on the screens of western cinema reinforce masculine dominance and exposed the psychic investments in women’s subservience. The archive of Mulvey’s theoretical writing on film (which extends far beyond ‘Visual Pleasure’) testifies to her commitment to writing a ‘new language of desire’ in both theory and cinematic images.<sup>39</sup>

Since there was so much compelling artwork produced by women from the late 1960s and 1970s that could be analysed alongside the work of Piper, Spero, and Kelly, my attention to writers might seem unnecessary. But I am interested in the ways in which the textual dimensions of these art practices corresponds to the work of writers who, with language as their ‘medium,’ wrote to expand the representations through which women could recognise themselves. While they did not use their hands to make images that can be framed and placed on walls, Davis, Solanas, and Mulvey were also contesting the dominant images of woman circulating in the eyes and minds of western culture. These

writers identify, narrate, and analyse specific experiences of living within the visual cultures produced by capitalist patriarchy and do so to create feminist publics that could read these articulations and extend the work of intervening in punitively narrow deployments of the sign woman. Finally, these writers expand the frames through which the artwork can be seen and point to its relevance beyond the art world's discourses and institutions. They help us see how deeply the artists were responding to visual culture, and their written efforts to imagine, create, and reach their audiences deepens our understanding of how and why the artists turned to language to create textual correspondences with their viewers.

Psychoanalysis informs my readings of this constellation of work in both broad and specific ways. To different degrees, the writers and artists operate from the premise that words and images are the materials through which subjectivity is composed, and they deploy these materials to reveal and rewrite the idea of women's subordination as it stubbornly lives in the psyche. Together they demonstrate a shared commitment to undoing the ways in which the subordination attached to women has an ideological tenacity that, in the words of Juliet Mitchell, 'live[s] in the heart and in the head and [is] transmitted over generations.'<sup>40</sup>

Jacques Lacan's 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function' (1977) is an important argument from which to think about the textual correspondences among these artists and writers.<sup>41</sup> 'The Mirror Stage' demonstrates how images create a foundation upon which the ego is composed and then points to the ways in which the subject, through its social determination in language and symbolic order, becomes intertwined with psychic investments, defences, and identifications.<sup>42</sup> Indirectly, 'The Mirror Stage' highlights what the artists and writers in this book sought to contest: a picture of subjectivity founded upon women's subordination. Positioned as a submerged maternal structure – which Lacan relies upon rather than questions – the suppressed figuration of woman in 'The Mirror Stage' represents the physical and psychic dependency the male subject imagines himself overcoming by mastering his image in the mirror. This identification lays the foundation for the entrance into the patriarchal order of language and culture and the Oedipal struggle enacted through them, which positions woman as site of fantasmatic plenitude and loss. The differences of actual women are occluded from vision and are replaced by polarised signs of woman (that are often made to correspond with racial divisions). A blueprint for the composition of masculine subjectivity and an implicit endorsement of the white patriarchal imaginary, 'The Mirror Stage' precisely identifies the stakes of feminist art and writing: to reconfigure the images through which women recognise themselves and rewrite their attenuated place in language.

While 'The Mirror Stage' highlights the central role images play in the composition of gendered subjectivity, Lacan's *Seminar II* outlines his ideas

about language that reinforce the silencing of women. Drawing from Claude Lévi-Strauss's alignment of woman and words as objects of exchange, Lacan argues that woman is doubly subjected to the castrating force of language and presents woman as a prime example of the alienation language inflicts. In *Seminar II*, Lacan argues that man is able to identify with the 'Name of the Father' because it threatens him with castration and can shift between the concrete and the transcendent, man and god. Woman, on the other hand, is twice removed from the symbolic order; she is subjected to its castrating force as man is, but she is also a sign exchanged among men. That is, woman is marked – through the paternal signifier – by her exchangeability, a status that translates into and is confirmed by the positions of daughter, mother, wife, and sister. These positions are accompanied by expectations that they mirror patriarchal culture to itself, hence the relegation of woman to the imaginary. Woman is nothing but the sign 'woman.' By mastering the sign woman through exchange, man masters woman and overcomes the lack and losses she signifies. Lacan's formulations are clearly extreme, but his depiction of woman in the symbolic order does help account for the silencing of women, particularly in public discourse.<sup>43</sup> If this silencing was going to be overturned, if the objectification of woman in the symbolic order was going to be rewritten, if the linguistic structure of the patriarchal unconscious was going to be reconfigured, and if there was going to be a greater range of positions with which women could identify, feminists had to intervene at the level of the imaginary and expand the forms of recognition offered to women by writing a woman other than the patriarchal sign of woman. This is precisely what the artwork of Piper, Spero, and Kelly began to make possible.

While Lacan's work identifies what the artists and writers of this book worked to undo, Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) – which I understand as the writing of a feminist mirror stage – illuminates what they wanted to create: a feminist imaginary, a virtual site in which women can recognise themselves beyond the dominant signs of woman. *Speculum* stands out as one of the guiding texts for thinking the possibility of a feminist imaginary and offers a theoretical groundwork for proposing 'the other woman' with whom women could identify. Exemplifying French feminism's investment in embodied writing as a means to challenge the patriarchal orders of language, a dense literary and theoretical text that works with language as a supple material, *Speculum* is a textual investigation of western philosophy that defamiliarises the dominant sign of woman and her work constituting western culture.<sup>44</sup> Aligned, as Hilary Robinson shows, with women artists' efforts to find a visual language that can make women's subjectivities legible, *Speculum* works within and against the narrow forms of visibility woman has been granted within the patriarchal imaginary.<sup>45</sup> Irigaray interrogates the canonical texts of the western philosophical tradition to demonstrate how woman has been

flattened into a one-dimensional mirror of similitude, made into the ground of western culture's philosophical and economic speculations, and reduced to a figure for the unconscious, but not allowed to access her own.<sup>46</sup> Irigaray's analysis reveals the myriad ways women are coerced into serving as mirrors for patriarchal culture, which keeps the 'other woman' of her title suffocated and barely visible. Building upon Irigaray's work excavating and revealing a feminine imaginary from within the western philosophical tradition, the artists and writers whose work I analyse in *Addressing the Other Woman* deployed text and images as the materials of subjectivity to create work in which women can recognise themselves beyond the dominant sign of woman and thereby imaginatively address the possibility of an other woman.<sup>47</sup>

To illuminate the specific ways in which these artists and writers contribute to the production of a feminist imaginary, this book is composed of three parts, each of which are separated into two chapters: one devoted to the work of an artist, and the other devoted to the work of a writer. The paired chapters highlight the textual correspondences between the art and writing and formally suggest how they mirror each other.

Part I charts the correspondences between the artwork of Piper and the writings of Davis. Piper was the first artist to draw upon Conceptual Art's attention to language to expose racism and sexism as visual pathologies, and Chapter 1 analyses the artwork she created in the late 1960s and 1970s, the years in which she began using text to create artwork that moves between what is known and what is unknown, opening spaces for perceiving what Piper identifies as 'the singular reality of the "other."<sup>48</sup> Together with images of her own body, Piper arranged texts and images of writing on a variety of materials to create artwork that investigates the black woman as the hyper-visible icon of sexual and racial difference that impedes the possibility of rendering a subjective relationship to one's place in the orders of images and language. I read Piper's work through Hortense Spillers' (1987) concepts of 'telegraphing' – the means by which iconic images of black women have been transmitted across American culture – and 'ungendering' – the specific form of abjection inflicted upon black women in the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>49</sup> Bringing psychoanalysis to bear on the gendered history of slavery to draw out its historical and psychic legacies, Spillers argues that the repressed history of ungendering translates into black women's limited access to a place of value in the American symbolic order. Tracing Piper's early engagements with text and writing reveals her work's investment in making the image of the black female body move imaginatively between visibility and invisibility to rewrite the traumatic repetitions of ungendering.

The stakes of this movement become clearer by setting Piper's early work in relation to Davis's written reflections on her transformation into the 'imaginary

enemy' of the US nation-state. A spectacle in the most consequential sense, the iconic images of Davis transmitted across American visual culture demonstrate that the black female body is perceived to be a malleable ground upon which fears and fantasies can take visual form. Therefore, in Chapter 2 I analyse how Davis's writing exposes the fictions animating those projections. By following the related ways Piper and Davis rearranged the words and images that have reinforced the legacies of 'ungendering,' this part of the book highlights their works' corresponding efforts to create images through which black women could recognise themselves and reject the icon of the black woman and her fixed place in the American racial imaginary.

Part II of *Addressing the Other Woman* focuses on aggression and traces how its repression plays out across Spero's *Codex Artaud* and Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*. Chapter 3 begins with a close reading of *Codex Artaud*, an epic artwork in which Spero collaged together figures painted in gold and copper gouache and typewritten passages from the work of the notoriously crazed twentieth-century French poet Antonin Artaud. Analysing *Codex Artaud* closely, I show that by working with Artaud's writing, Spero worked with and reconfigured the aggression white women of post-war American culture were forbidden to wield.

Tracing how Spero represents Artaud's work in *Codex Artaud*, it becomes clear she was not just emulating his aggressive acts. Knowing he was wracked with pain (both psychic and physical) and tortured by psychiatric institutions, Spero cites Artaud's work to question the ease with which he represents his aggression. By enacting this contestation through her formal choices, Spero shows that Artaud was able to imagine himself on both sides of the patriarchal orders of language. He could make aggressive declarations, but he could also represent himself as a victim of linguistic authority who mourns the presence and plenitude language cuts away. To explain this licence to aggression, I draw from Sigmund Freud's early definitions of sexuality, particularly those that highlight the expectation that women should not indulge in the pleasures of aggression but should instead create an image of a 'normal' sexuality free from disgust and shame and aimed toward heterosexual reproduction. By resisting the imperatives Freud identifies, *Codex Artaud* resonates with Solanas's tightly crafted address that plays with the fantasy of a violent feminist collectivity. Chapter 4 traces how Solanas deploys language as a weapon capable of 'cutting up' patriarchal authority and shows how her history as a feminist lesbian of the 1960s helps evoke a historical milieu that brings the stakes of *Codex Artaud* into sharp relief.

If Spero used text and writing to lash out against the suffocating contours of an idealised white femininity, then in *Post-Partum Document*, the subject of Chapter 5, Kelly worked with the visual appearance of language to enter idealised myths of maternal femininity and deconstruct them from within. In

this well-known installation, Kelly made letters, words, and sentences into visual objects by inscribing them on images that lyrically ‘document’ the mother’s acts of fetishising her child. I argue that in *Post-Partum Document*, texts and pieces of writing become fetish objects that Kelly arranges into visual and linguistic ‘poems’ that forestall a confrontation with loss.

I show that by portraying the mother’s desirous attachments to her child, so often dismissed and pathologised, Kelly challenged white ideals of maternal femininity as an identity women naturally assume. Informing this challenge is the psychoanalytic argument that through pregnancy and the first months of infant care, women re-experience their psychic lives before their negative entry into the Oedipus Complex and what Lacan identifies as their castrated place in language. While Freud and Lacan see this negative entry as inevitable, Kelly shows that mining the feminine pre-Oedipal for its affective and aesthetic plentitude opens up the feminist possibility that women can do more than serve as the ground for patriarchal losses; they can actually compose their own forms of fetishisation, a ‘language’ capable of writing women’s desires and subjectivities into cultural visibility. In *Post-Partum Document*, it is the visual language of the hieroglyph that Kelly draws upon to represent this fetishisation and the feminist efforts to excavate the repression of maternal femininity, not just from the force of patriarchy, but also in the psychic lives of women themselves. While the British Marxist feminism with which Kelly’s work aligns most often focuses on repressive class hierarchies as the impediments to feminist alliances, I build on this work to argue that by staging an imaginary excavation of maternal femininity through hieroglyphic forms, *Post-Partum Document* also touches upon the legacies of British colonial history and its manifestations as metropolitan racism in London in the 1970s. As Kelly quite subtly demonstrates, this structural racism was consolidated through the naturalisation of maternal femininity *Post-Partum Document* puts into question.

Since it is so well known, readers familiar with *Post-Partum Document* and the rich body of scholarship devoted to analysing Kelly’s contributions to feminist art, visual theory, and psychoanalysis might wonder why it is included in *Addressing the Other Woman*. But it is precisely because *Post-Partum Document* is familiar to those interested in feminist art practices that I have featured Kelly’s now canonical artwork here. I want to acknowledge the significance of *Post-Partum Document* for women’s art practices in the 1970s – it exemplifies the array of feminist work text and writing can perform – but also place it in a broader context that will undermine its iconic isolation and draw out aspects of the artwork, such as its engagement with the legacies of British colonial history, that have yet to be fully revealed but have everything to do with the feminist collectivities from which the artwork emerged.

To better see the feminist politics of *Post-Partum Document*, in Chapter 6 I trace its correspondence with Mulvey’s theoretical writings on film and her

essay film *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). Like *Post-Partum Document*, *Riddles of the Sphinx* creates a hieroglyphic aesthetic that mines the feminist possibilities of repressed maternal desires and draws out their connections to British colonial history. By placing the hieroglyph and the colonial extractions for which it figures in the context of women's atomised struggles with reproductive labour in late capitalism, *Riddles* writes collective feminist reading practices that might allow women to correspond across the divisions created by colonial, racial, and class hierarchies and therefore create a 'new language of desire.'<sup>50</sup>

To reveal the collective feminist reading practices their work emerged from and made possible, I place the corresponding works of Kelly and Mulvey in the context of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain. Though Kelly and Mulvey became actual collaborators through this specific (and quite rich) historical conjuncture, I show that their collaboration was no less interested in creating forms of differentiation within the feminist imaginary – and no less invested in addressing the 'other woman' that is distinct from the sign woman upon which patriarchal culture insists. While *Addressing the Other Woman* is primarily focused on artists working in the United States, I have chosen to include the work of Kelly and Mulvey, and situate it squarely within the British context. I do so knowing that they 'corresponded' (both literally and figuratively) with their American counterparts as feminists in the West confronted how the histories of women's subordination were becoming written into and naturalised by western visual culture.

By analysing the ways in which these artists and writers shared in the aspiration to address the other woman, this book creates a variegated image of the feminisms that emerged in the United States and Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s. Presenting this textual archive of feminist art and writing, I trace the desire that women, despite and because of their differences, might see and create correspondences among their feminist interventions and participate in the collective project of directing images of women into unforeseen meanings.

## Notes

- 1 *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, organised by Cornelia Butler and presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (March–July 2007). The exhibition travelled to PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York, February–June 2008. Another exhibition of this period was *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, organised by Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly and originally presented at the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (March–July 2007).
- 2 An articulation of the first expectation is just under the surface of Linda Nochlin's discussion of the 'lady painter.' 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,' *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (1971. Harper & Row, 1988), 145–178: 164–168.