Art | Theory | Criticism | Politics

OCTOBER

71

feminist issueS

edited by Silvia Kolbowski and Mignon Nixon

Questions of Feminism: 25 Responses

Round Table — *A Conversation on Recent Feminist Art Practices*

Mignon Nixon — *Bad Enough Mother*

Mark Cousins and Parveen Adams — *The Truth on Assault*

Sabeth Buchmann — *Information Service: Info-Work*

te Meta Bauer, Tine eissler, Sandra Hastenteufel — *Information Service*

e V-Girls — *Daughters of the ReVolution*

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Cover photo: From "Information Service." *Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. 1992.*

Bad Enough Mother

MIGNON NIXON

Mouths

We came to recognize the father's penis and a growing feeling of aggression against it in many forms, the desire to eat and destroy it being specially prominent. For example, on one occasion, [my four-year-old patient] Dick lifted a little toy man to his mouth, gnashed his teeth and said "Tea Daddy," by which he meant "Eat Daddy." He then asked for a drink of water.

—Melanie Klein

Once when we were sitting together at the dining table, I took white bread, mixed it with spit, and molded a figure of my father. When the figure was done, I started cutting off the limbs with a knife. I see this as my first sculptural solution.

—Louise Bourgeois

I was interested in the bite because it's both intimate and destructive; it sort of sums up my relationship to art history.

—Janine Antoni

Pondick's creatures seem to experience life through their mouths, rather than their eyes, as if they were babies.

—Elizabeth Hess

As Mary Jacobus has recently observed, "the current return to Klein . . . feels like eating one's words."[1] Or, to put it another way, maybe it feels like eating

1. Mary Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy': Poor Mrs. Klein and the Pencil Shavings," *Women: A Cultural Review* 2 (Summer 1990), special issue, "Positioning Klein," p. 160.

OCTOBER 71, Winter 1995, pp. 71–92. *© 1995 Mignon Nixon.*

Lacan. And how better to enact this cannibalistic desire to eat-Lacan-by-eating-his-words than through a return to Klein—the psychoanalyst whose object relations school Lacan himself deemed "incapable of even so much as suspecting the existence of the category of the signifier"—even if that return risks, as Jacobus says, "a kind of theoretical regression"?[2]

The putative regression of some feminist psychoanalytic theory from Lacanian to Kleinian modes of analysis is not so much my concern here, however, as are uses of the body in contemporary feminist art practices that also are often framed in terms of theoretical regression. This regression is charted as moving from an investigation of the signifier grounded in poststructuralist theory and a Lacanian account of sexual difference to a literal and essentialist conception of the body.

It will be my purpose here to read this recent shift as it appears in specific instances of feminist work in psychoanalytic terms: namely, as a turn to the drives.[3] Accordingly, I will be analyzing it not as a regression but as a repositioning and not as the revenge of the essentialized nineties body on the textual eighties body but as, in part, a critique of psychoanalytic feminist work of the 1970s and '80s as privileging pleasure and desire over hatred and aggression.[4] For as Jacqueline Rose observed in 1988, "If psychoanalysis is the intellectual tabloid of our culture ('sex' and 'violence' being its chief objects of concern), then we have recently privileged—ought indeed to base the politicization of psychoanalysis on that privilege—the first over the second."[5] And as Kobena Mercer noted in 1994, "There is no shortage of text-centered studies of pleasure and desire, but where are the analyses of pain and hatred as everyday structures of feeling too?"[6] I will suggest that the investigation of aggression in some recent feminist work can be related to this critique of Lacanian-based psychoanalytic studies. And I will propose that the shift in emphasis from neurosis to psychosis and from sexuality to the death drive effected by Melanie Klein's work in the 1940s and '50s offers a

2. *Ibid.* Jacobus's statement reads in full: "One response to the current return to Klein: it feels like eating one's words. Psychoanalytic feminism has been so thoroughly immersed in Lacanian theory for the past decade that taking Klein at her word—reading her literally, as she asks to be read—seems to risk a kind of theoretical regression."

3. Insofar as I will be arguing that this turn organizes a field that operates outside the binaries of gender, my analysis intends to open up a third option in the conflict between the operations of the signifier and of biological essentialism. In this sense, this text offers my own response to Question 1 as posed by Silvia Kolbowski and me as editors of this issue.

4. For a discussion of how recent reexaminations of Klein function as a critique of the Lacanian psychoanalytic model, see Ann Scott's "Melanie Klein and the Questions of Feminism" in "Positioning Klein," p. 129. As Scott observes, however, "This movement of thought remains dialectical, to-and-fro; Juliet Mitchell and Vivien Bar have reinstated the commentary on Klein from a Lacanian perspective and remind us that all theorisations within psychoanalysis set up their own counterpoint."

5. Jacqueline Rose, "Sexuality and Vision: Some Questions," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. 121. Quoted in Kobena Mercer, "Fear of a Black Penis," *Artforum* vol. 32 (April 1994), p. 122.

6. Mercer, "Fear of a Black Penis," p. 122.

possible framework for analyzing this tension between Lacanian-based feminist projects of the 1970s and '80s and recent work that I will argue is Kleinian-based.[7]

The turn in some recent feminist art from a Lacanian-based semiotic analysis of the body to a Kleinian-based object-relations analysis does not enact a regression, at least in Kleinian terms, precisely because regression is no more operative in the Kleinian model than is the signifier. According to Klein, psychic life is structured by unconscious fantasies driven by bodily experiences, and these fantasies, present from early infancy, persist not as states into which the subject may regress, but as ever-present positions in which, as Juliet Mitchell has written, "one is sometimes lodged."[8] In the Kleinian model of subjectivity, then, regression, like the signifier, scarcely exists.

As Mitchell has noted, "for Klein the past and the present are one . . . what she is observing, describing, and theorizing is the very absence of history and of historical time."[9] For counter to a historical, or developmental, model of the psyche, Klein theorizes a nonlinear, horizontal play of positions in which the radically decentered subject, defined by its relation to objects, moves between positions that are never either secured or foreclosed. Thus, the move from the gendered to the infantile body that in a Lacanian framework would constitute a regression, functions in Kleinian terms simply as a shift of position along the horizontal axis of a model that theorizes, as Mitchell has written, "the very absence of history."[10]

Kleinian-based work, structured by object relations, operates in the atemporal field of infantile experience rather than the temporal-linguistic field of the Oedipal subject that is mapped by Lacanian-based work. A Kleinian-based analysis would, then, have to be grounded in Klein's theory of fantasy as produced by bodily drives, of such fantasy as the primary structuring principle of psychic experience. Constructing her model of subjectivity around the infant, and so in relation to an immediate and fragmented bodily experience unmediated by language, Klein places at the center of her model not the unconscious, but fantasy—fantasy understood not as a work of the unconscious mind, but as a bodily operation. The Kleinian subject relates to its environment as a field of objects to be fused or split, possessed or destroyed, by means of fantasies of introjection, projection, and splitting that are produced by bodily drives.

To return, then, to the epigraphs with which I began, eating, for example, might produce a complex fantasy of incorporating a good object and of devouring

7. This is not to suggest a fixed temporal or theoretical divide between body-centered feminist projects of the 1970s and '80s and those of the 1990s; in fact, feminist art practices of both periods are extremely diverse. But there does appear to be a shift away from a semiotic analysis of the body of pleasure and desire to an object-relations analysis of the body of aggression and the death drive in some recent work, and it is this move that I will consider here.

8. Juliet Mitchell, ed., *The Selected Melanie Klein* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), Introduction, p. 28.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

10. *Ibid.*

a bad one—of cutting an object into bits that, once swallowed, might turn into a swarm of internal persecutors. Klein asserts that it is through infantile oral sadism that the subject experiences the destructive effects of its own aggression. In effect, subjectivity forms around an experience of loss enacted through destructive fantasies; it is, we could say, formed by the mouth in the act of biting. Using Klein's case history of her four-year-old patient Dick to mediate three exhibitions—a 1974 installation by Louise Bourgeois entitled *The Destruction of the Father*, Janine Antoni's 1992 Gnaws, and a 1994 exhibition of Rona Pondick's *Legs*, *Mouth*, and *Milk Milk*—I will examine the structuring of these works through oral-sadistic fantasy and will also consider how they position the subject of aggression.

Bourgeois's oral-sadistic fantasy of dismembering and devouring her father's body is the double of another one, the desire to eat his words, for the fantasy enacted in *The Destruction of the Father*, simply stated, is that in order to shut the father up it is necessary to eat him up. This is Bourgeois's now well-known description of the work:

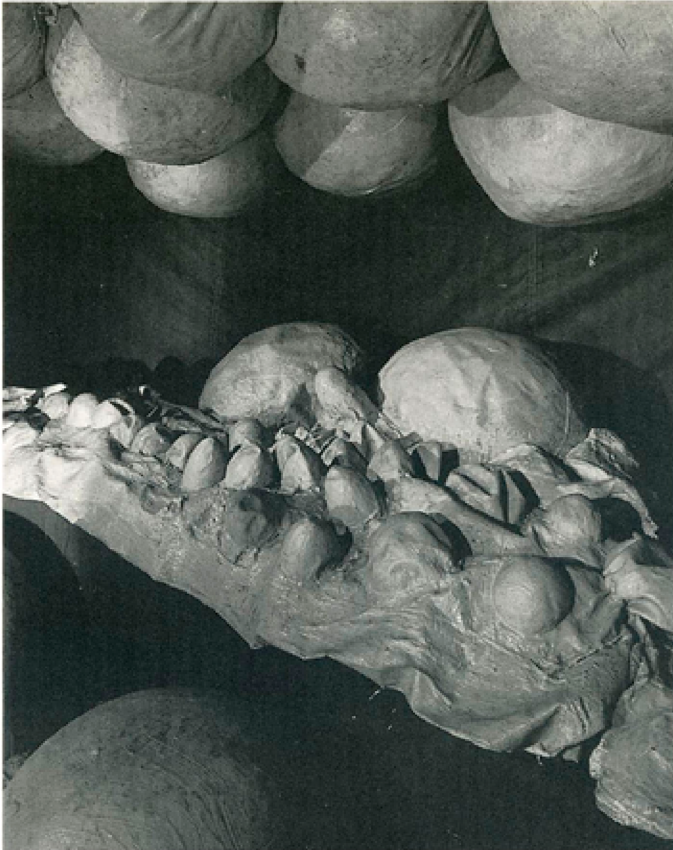
> It is basically a table, the awful, terrifying family dinner table headed by the father who sits and gloats. And the others, the wife, the children, what can they do? They sit there, in silence. The mother of course tries to satisfy the tyrant, her husband. The children are full of exasperation. We were three children: my brother, my sister, and myself. There were also two extra children my parents adopted because their father had been killed in the war. So we were five. My father would get nervous looking at us, and he would explain to all of us what a great man he was. So, in exasperation, we grabbed the man, threw him on the table, dismembered him, and proceeded to devour him.[11]

In this fantasy of devouring the father, eating takes the place of naming in a substitution of oral sadism for speech that is at once Kleinian and anti-Lacanian.[12] The little girl's desire to speak and her frustration at being silenced is transposed into another desire for oral power and pleasure—the desire to bite, to cut, to devour the one who oppresses with his speech. The desire to talk back to the father is transformed in fantasy into the desire to turn the social ritual of the family meal with its sublimated conditions of cutting and biting into a cannibalistic ceremony in which the father's power, his words, are consumed and incorporated by the children in the eating of his flesh.

Thus, Bourgeois turns "a Kleinian account of eating (cannibalism, even), incorporation, and primary identification," as Jacobus describes the case of

11. Louise Bourgeois, quoted in Jean Frémon, *Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective* 1947–1984, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Galerie Maeght Lelong, 1984).

12. Bourgeois's vigorous criticism of Lacan is well known. It is worth noting in this context that her antagonism for him is specifically as a figure of the father.



Louise Bourgeois. The Destruction of the Father. *1974. (Photo: Peter Moore.)*

Klein's patient little Dick, against a Lacanian account of the entry into subjectivity via language.[13] Performed under the title *The Destruction of the Father,* this critique of Lacan through Klein, framed as an attack on language through biting, on Oedipal naming through pre-Oedipal oral sadism, stages an assault on patriarchy from the infantile position. Dragging the paternal body onto the table, and thus repositioning it on the horizontal axis of infantile experience where it functions as an object of oral-sadistic fantasy, Bourgeois subverts the name-of-the-father logic of Lacanian theory through a destruction-of-the-father, part-object logic based in the Kleinian model. And, as I will suggest, it is in part through the reception of Bourgeois's work that the Kleinian model has recently been taken up and employed critically by a number of artists in relation to 1970s and '80s Lacanian-based work.

The desire to eat the father and to eat his words is, as Bourgeois's statement makes explicit, turned into the desire for sculptural solutions or, we could say, for object solutions—a sculptural solution being, in Bourgeois's terms, one that performs an aggressive or desiring operation on an object. For as she demonstrates with her dinner table story, the sculpture comes into being as the object of aggressive fantasy—as something to bite or to cut, to incorporate or to destroy.[14]

13. Jacobus, "Poor Mrs. Klein," p. 162.

14. Bourgeois's sculptural operations may also be organized by fantasies of reparation, of restoring the object perceived to be damaged by destructive fantasies.

In Klein's case history of the affectless four-year-old boy named Dick (a case analyzed in great detail by Jacques Lacan), the little patient arrives at a similar object solution.[15]

Dick, Klein reported, seldom played or spoke, except to string sounds together in meaningless sequences, and seemed completely detached from the people around him, including his parents and nurse, whom he tended to treat, as Klein observed, like so many pieces of furniture. The analyst theorized that her little patient was the victim of an anxiety so intense it manifested itself as an eerie absence, the absence, precisely, of any trace of anxiety. Employing her model of infantile fantasy, Klein concluded that Dick had as a baby become deeply disturbed by his own sadistic impulses to attack his mother's body, a body that contained, in fantasy, the father's penis (among other things). Through an interplay that is the pivot point of the Kleinian model, Dick feared, according to Klein, both his own sadistic desires and retaliatory assaults from the object of those attacks. And in order to defend himself against this fantasied destruction by the father's penis, precipitated by his own sadistic fantasy, Dick closed himself off from all desire, and thus all anxiety.

One key symptom of Dick's inability to tolerate anxiety was his refusal to bite into food. Another was his inability to grip knives or scissors. On one occasion,

15. Melanie Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego" (1930), in *The Selected Melanie Klein*. For Lacan's critique of this case study, see "Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis" and "The Topic of the Imaginary" in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953–1954)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991). For discussions of Lacan's reading of Klein, see Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), chapter 5, "Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Study of Psychoanalysis" and Jacobus, "Poor Mrs. Klein."

Lacan's complex critique of this case study, which turns on his assessment that Klein has confused the registers of the symbolic and the imaginary, cannot be summarized here. But it should be noted that Lacan's analysis shifts between condemnation of what he sees as Klein's literalistic approach and acknowledgment of the breakthrough she achieves with her patient. He writes, for example:

> She slams the symbolism on him with complete brutality, does Melanie Klein, on little Dick! Straight away she starts off hitting him large-scale interpretations. She hits him a brutal verbalisation of the Oedipal myth, almost as revolting for us as for any reader—You are the little train, you want to fuck your mother.
>
> Quite clearly this way of doing things leads to theoretical discussions which cannot be dissociated from a case-diagnostic. But it is clear that as a result of this interpretation something happens. Everything is there. (p. 68)

It is this uneasy tension between Klein's "complete brutality" and the suspicion that "everything is there" that, as Jacobus notes, seems to drive Lacan's own aggressive reading of this case, a reading that seems to open the possibility of a greater role for the imaginary within the Lacanian model itself:

> What is it, then, that Lacan may fear to discover in his own ideas? Surely, nothing other than the crucial role of the imaginary, the domain which Lacan associates loosely with Klein's account of projective identification and its allied processes, but which in his system is subordinated to the symbolic and to language. (p. 170)

however, the analyst reported that her patient "lifted a little toy man to his mouth, gnashed his teeth and said 'Tea Daddy,' by which he meant 'Eat Daddy.' He then asked for a drink of water."[16] Turning tea into eat, he had turned the tables, turned the tea table into a scene of cannibalistic incorporation. This is how Jacobus describes the challenge to Lacan produced by the little boy's play with anxiety:

> Here little Dick, in Lacanian terms, acts out his foreclosure of 'the Name of the Father,' the big Dick of language. For little Dick, the paternal phallus is a penile body-part—a part that he wants to eat whole. Making a meal of the phallus, instead of naming the father, little Dick seems to say, in this primitive psychic gesture: I am both little Dick and daddy-Dick, Saturn's child and Saturn himself. The undifferentiated little Dick and daddy-Dick constitute a primitive, devouring identity.[17]

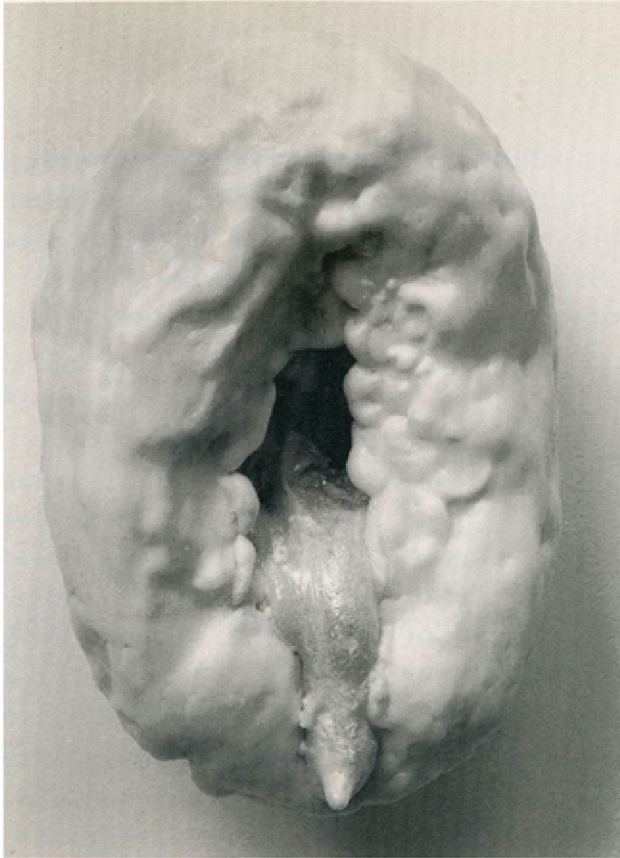
If little Dick became a subject by biting rather than by naming, and if he turned the father not into a name but into a part-object—something to eat and be eaten by—if, that is, he came into play via the logic of the part-object, then that is also what Louise Bourgeois did in her first sculptural solution and in the multiplicity of objects—part-objects—that followed in its train.

This destruction-of-the-father logic grounded in the drives that Bourgeois enacts in her 1974 work might also be expected to operate in Antoni's Gnaws, oral-sadistic works in which the artist repeatedly bit into large blocks of chocolate and lard, spitting out the mouthfuls and collecting the expelled fat and chocolate to produce tubes of lipstick and heart-shaped candy boxes. And the critical reception of the Gnaws, employing a range of psychoanalytic concepts that included regression, oral fixation, and repetition-compulsion, did place the Gnaws in the register of infantile experience. Relating the Gnaws to 1970s transgressive body-centered works by Bourgeois, Hannah Wilke, and Eva Hesse, critics tended to read her attack on Minimalism—her biting into art history—as a repetition of seventies feminist performative uses of the body.[18] But what was not discussed was the structure of the work in which the aggressive acts of biting and spitting or swallowing became a logic for producing not part-objects like those produced by Bourgeois or little Dick, but conventional objects of female masochistic desire, lipstick and candy boxes.

16. Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation," p. 104.

17. Jacobus, "Poor Mrs. Klein and the Pencil Shavings," pp. 165–66. Noting Lacan's analysis of little Dick that "everything is equally real for him, equally indifferent," Jacobus observes that "little Dick has grasped the principle of linguistic difference (to a T) without being able to apply it to his own condition" (p. 166). Dick's own condition, of course, is a psychosis within which difference is not operative. And as Jacobus reminds us, "The characteristic of Kleinian psychoanalysis is its empathy with—its feeling for—psychosis" (166).

18. See, for example, Simon Taylor's review of *Chocolate Gnaw* and *Lard Gnaw* in *Art in America*, vol. 80 (October 1992), p. 149.



Maxine Hayt. Lick #2. *1993. (Photo: Adam Reich.)*

If, as I would like to suggest, performative practices grounded in a Kleinian model of infantile fantasy have the potential to construct representations of aggression that do not revert to essentialism, in the case of Antoni's Gnaws this possibility is foreclosed by turning the enactment of aggression into an essentializing spectacle of female masochism. The structure of this work, in which performative practices enacting infantile aggression (biting) lead to a compulsive behavior in the form of an eating disorder (gnawing and spitting out) that in turn is recuperated by the production of objects of conventionalized feminine desire (lipstick and chocolate displayed in mirrored cases) does, however, point to another crucial problem in Kleinian theory—the struggle to suppress aggression or to repair its perceived effects.

In the Gnaws, it is this effort to suppress aggression that, like little Dick's inability to grip scissors or bite into food, arrests what Klein calls the capacity for symbol formation. In the context of 1990s feminist art practice, this capacity might be thought of as the possibility of an enactment of aggression that does not fall back into essentialism. Antoni's use of her own body to produce works that reinforce rather than destabilize, or de-essentialize, the conventional construction of femininity however raises the question of how a Kleinian-based analysis, grounded in a theory of fantasy produced by bodily drives, might operate critically in relation to practices that are themselves enacted through the body in performative strategies hostile to the signifier. Would not such an analysis risk, if not regression, at least essentialism?

Klein's emphasis on innate drives, her elision of language and history in the

Rona Pondick. Mouth. *1992–93.*

foregrounding of pre-Oedipal, nonverbal experience, her indifference to the effects of social structures—all point to the biological essentialism, "incapable of even so much as suspecting the existence of the signifier," for which her work has so often been criticized. But the implicit biologism and insistent literalism of Kleinian theory have obscured one of its crucial insights—one that I will argue bears upon the recent feminist work I will consider here—and that is her analysis of aggression as deeply structuring unconscious fantasy in both sexes from infancy through life. For what interests Klein, in contrast to Freud, is not the neurotic symptom that is an effect of sexuality but the psychoses that arise as effects of the death drive. And through this shift of emphasis from sexual development to aggression and the death drive, the conventional construction of femininity and masculinity as opposed on axes of agency and passivity, aggression and nurturing—axes drawn to diagram the negotiation of the castration complex—is radically, if inadvertently, destabilized. I would, then, suggest that the significance of the Kleinian model for recent psychoanalytic feminist work is at least in part its analysis of aggression not as a function of sexual difference, but as structural to all subjectivities. For if the enactment of aggression in body-centered feminist work depends upon the possibility of constituting a female subject of aggression (just as other feminist work has confronted the problem of constituting a female desiring subject), then one way of producing such a subject is through a turn to the drives.

For Klein, aggression—and especially efforts to suppress it—rather than sexual development, is the pivotal psychic site of struggle. Thus, her most dramatic divergence from Freudian theory is her refusal of the primacy of castration. This

Rona Pondick. Legs *and* Mouth. *1993.*

Below: Milk Milk. *1993.* *(Photos: J. Kotter.)*

refusal has many implications, including the possibility of a less fixed model of sexuality. But what I would like to emphasize here is Klein's suggestion that the infant is plagued from the beginning with fantasies of destroying by its own violent means the objects of its love and envy, that is, that the infant fears not the loss of the mother to the father, or the loss of the penis, but the loss of all objects to its own destructive impulses. The first object of aggression is not, as it is in the Oedipal-centered Freudian model, the father, and not even the mother, but a series of part-objects—breast, milk, penis, children, womb—to which the infant fantasizes the connection of other part-objects—mouth, teeth, urine, feces—in frenzied attacks enacting, according to Klein, the force of the death drive.

Stringing, lumping, and sticking together, piling and hanging up rubber, plastic, and wax mouths, feet, legs, teeth, nipples, breasts, penises, vaginas, Rona Pondick all but speaks the name Melanie Klein. If critics have not spoken it for her, they have described its Kleinian operations, its enactments of biting, sucking, and excretion, its fragmentation of the body and conflations of its parts.[19] What I would like to consider here is the way in which these objects are structured by aggressive fantasy.

In Pondick's installations, oral-sadistic and anal-sadistic infantile fantasies are staged not only by the play of objects—as in the conflation of greedy tearing mouth and persecutory devouring breast in such works as *Mouth*, *Charms*, *Treats*, or *Little Bathers*—but by their structure and arrangement. Hung from the ceiling, spilling across the floor, piled in a corner, molded into the furniture, these part-object works resist the integrity and vertical orientation of the adult body, operating instead at the level of the infantile drive.

Pondick's 1993 installation, for example, included three works, *Legs*, *Mouth*, and *Milk Milk*, which functioned less as discrete objects than as object systems. In *Legs*, double-footed pink-upholstered tubular cushions conflating leg and penis were stuffed into men's ready-made shoes, tied by the foot, and suspended from the ceiling by ribbons that trailed onto the floor. Legs swinging at graduated heights from above, *Mouth* was strewn across the floor, its hundreds of teethed or nippled, sticky scratchy blotchy bloody balls randomly scattered around the room. Placed on the floor in a corner, *Milk Milk* in turn was a collection of white bulbous clusters of breasts fitted with baby-bottle nipples. The three accumulations of objects functioned not as series or as multiples but as interconnecting systems defined through their relations to the ceiling, the floor, and the corner, or in other words by their positions, and through their relations to other object systems—as in the connection of biting and sucking mouths to the breast/milk.

Organized by the logic of the part-object, this installation enacted the experience of the body riven by the drives, an experience that much other recent feminist work has also investigated. One might think of Maxine Hayt's Licks,

19. See especially Elizabeth Hess, "Basic Instincts," the *Village Voice*, June 1, 1993, p. 83, and "Nasty Girl," the *Village Voice*, May 7, 1991, p. 85.

gaping slippery lumpy mouths from which foamy tongues stick out; of the part-object assemblages of Nancy Bowen and Ava Gerber; of the inside-out constructions of the body in works by Rachel Whiteread; or of the evocation of a pre-Oedipal maternal voice in Maureen Connor's *Three Female Voices*, to cite just a few examples. The critical reception of this recent feminist work organized by the Kleinian logic of the part-object, however, places it within a specific lineage of transgressive body-centered practices of the 1960s and '70s, a lineage that is often framed in terms of return or regression, but at other times as a function of mothering. The recent "Bad Girls" shows staged in New York and Los Angeles, for example, constructed a genealogy of "bad girl" mothers of the 1960s and '70s and "bad girl" daughters of the 1990s. I would like now to consider this construction of feminist mothering within the context of the Kleinian model in which, as I am suggesting, much recent work is based as a model that both foregrounds and insistently problematizes the mother-infant relation.

Mothers

> *The artists in* Bad Girls *and* Bad Girls West *have taken the examples of their foremothers to heart. Some make work that's parodic and satirical, "humoring" male tropes; some mischievously rewrite or revise the "master'"scripts from a different point of view. Others invent new narratives, images, and metaphors, new modes of representing and projecting their own specifically female experience—formally, stylistically, technically, conceptually—that circumvent paternal constructs altogether.*
>
> —Marcia Tanner

> *Some feminist critics have expressed worry over the idea of the female subject, mother or not, playing with the boundaries of the self, given the difficulties women in our culture have in attaining a sense of selfhood to begin with. . . . I believe that women—women artists in particular—must be strong enough to allow themselves this kind of play; one way to achieve such strength is for girls to imagine (or see) their mothers playing.*
>
> —Susan Suleiman

In the widely discussed recent "Bad Girls" shows, the mother-daughter relation of feminist artists was framed primarily through the desire on the part of younger artists for bad enough mothers among older ones. In her catalogue essay for the exhibition, Marcia Tanner constructed a matrilineage of bad-girl mothers beginning with Artemisia Gentileschi and proceeding to Meret Oppenheim, Yoko Ono, Louise Bourgeois, Faith Ringgold, Linda Benglis, and Cindy Sherman

Robert Mapplethorpe. Louise Bourgeois. *1982.*

to argue that through their identification with irreverent, transgressive artist mothers the younger generation of bad-girl artists is able to subvert patriarchal law, to "ignore the entire myth of male hegemony, of paternal lawgivers in art and everywhere else."[20] The suggestion that through their relation to strong individuated mothers these daughters are able to work outside the framework of patriarchy, to evade the terms of the Oedipus and castration complexes, is of course a claim grounded in feminist psychoanalytic work on the mother-daughter relation that is anti-Lacanian both in its positing of an extrapatriarchal relation and in its emphasis on pre-Oedipal experience. And this model of an empowering mother-daughter relation structured the "Bad Girls" shows as the profoundly liberatory display of mother-taught subversion, as the coming of age of a new generation of feminist artists who, unlike their predecessors, are positioned not only to produce critiques of the patriarchal construction of gender but also to produce works that, as Tanner puts it, "circumvent paternal constructs altogether."[21]

If, then, Lacan is the bad father of this new generation of feminist artists, the bad enough mother is a seventies feminist, herself a bad girl, with whom the daughter can identify and in relation to whom she can position herself in a genealogy. The Lacanian-based feminist work of the 1970s and '80s, a repressed

20. Marcia Tanner, "Mother Laughed: The Bad Girls' Avant-Garde," in *Bad Girls* exhibition catalogue (New York and Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1994), p. 77.
21. *Ibid.*

term in the maternal genealogy constructed by the "Bad Girls" shows, meanwhile seems to function as a kind of parental foil to the transgressive tactics of the bad-girl generations. That is, the "Bad Girls" shows were organized not only through identification with bad enough mothers but also through rejection of bad feminist mothers.

But in the Kleinian model in which much recent body-centered work on aggression is grounded, the mother-infant relation is not one of positive identification but of radical alienation. Aggression toward the mother and depressive anxiety about the destructive effects of this aggression, rather than identification, structure the Kleinian mother-infant relation. In the "Bad Girls" shows, the girl is positioned in identification with a transgressive mother, but this identification is achieved only by rigidly separating transgressive and non-transgressive mothers. And this splitting of the "mother" into good and bad objects reproduces a central fantasy of the Kleinian subject.

In the "Bad Girls" shows, the division of good and bad mothers was portrayed very differently—as a disruption of stereotypes. And this use of a thematic of inverted stereotypes of good and bad girls as the principal curatorial strategy of the "Bad Girls" exhibitions—pervading not only the selection of works but also the extensive wall texts and the shows' catalogue essays—was striking in the context of exhibitions that explicitly rejected hierarchy and dichotomy, taking as their central theoretical model the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. For the strict oppositionality through which the shows were structured seemed markedly at odds with the stated purpose of overturning hierarchies of gender, race, and class and of high and low cultural forms, and especially of displacing feminine and masculine stereotypes. So the question I would like to pose is whether this determination to separate the bad girls from the good can be seen as manifesting an anxiety of or about feminist practice. And if so, might the staging of this anxiety in exhibitions devoted to the display of aggression be seen as enacting what for Klein is the pivotal psychoanalytic problem—anxiety about one's own aggression?

The "Bad Girls" shows constructed a mother-daughter relation grounded in aggression in part by taking up Susan Suleiman's question about what happens to the avant-garde when the mother laughs. In answer to her own question, Suleiman imagines what she calls the displacement from the patriarchal mother to the playful mother as both subverting patriarchy and bringing into (psychoanalytic) existence the mother as a subject through the aggressive behaviors of laughter and play.[22] But while the "Bad Girls" shows seemed to want to make the mother laugh, she didn't laugh after all. For despite abundant references to the subversive power of humor, and the display of comic forms like cartoons and gag props like whoopie cushions, the compulsive splitting of bad and good objects—and bad and good

22. Susan Suleiman, "Playing and Motherhood; or, How to Get the Most of the Avant-Garde," in *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

mothers—enacted in the shows blocked the doubling and crossing up of meaning through which humor is constructed.

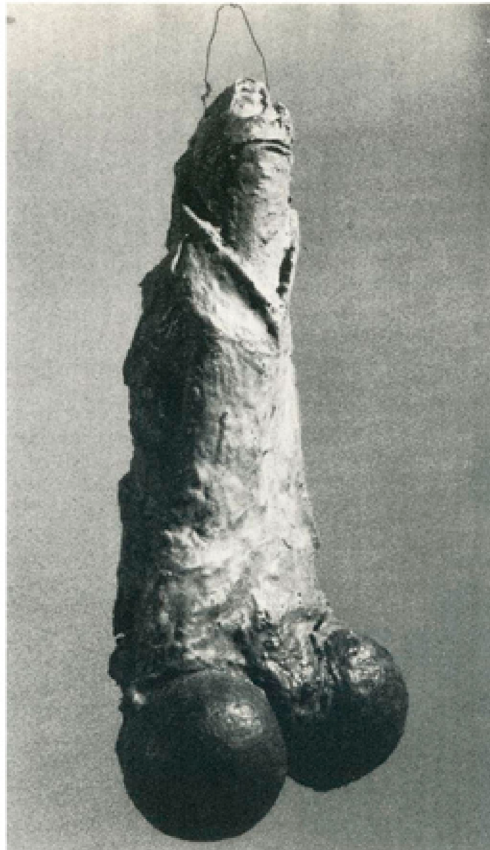
The effect of a kind of structural elasticity or ambivalence, humor is itself produced by a split subject, humor being, according to Freud, a strategic use of denial, a comedy that deflects suffering by turning trauma into pleasure.[23] So with humor, play, or the movement between positions, displaces anxiety. Projective splitting, on the other hand, has the reverse effect of intensifying anxiety. Incapable of tolerating the ambivalence that is structural to humor, such splitting produces good and bad objects that are held very far apart. And it is this kind of splitting, set up by opposition, that I would suggest structured the presentation of the "Bad Girls" shows.

In constructing her matrilineage of a bad-girls avant-garde, for example, Marcia Tanner cites, almost, an emblematic pairing of icons from the history of feminist art: Linda Benglis's 1974 ad for *Artforum*, in which the nude Benglis, masked by dark glasses, deploys a double dildo between her legs, and a 1982 portrait of Louise Bourgeois by Robert Mapplethorpe in which Bourgeois, dressed in a fuzzy coat, clutches under her arm an outsized latex phallus-doll, her 1968 sculpture *Fillette*. What Tanner actually reproduces, however, is the Benglis ad and a photograph of *Fillette* alone, hanging on a hook as it is displayed in exhibition, rather than the Mapplethorpe photograph. And this omission of the grinning, phallus-toting Bourgeois allowed Tanner to claim that Benglis's work "displayed a theatrical flair, a degree of bold insouciance, mischief, and daring that might have made the shy Bourgeois recoil."[24] It facilitated, in other words, a repression of the playful, aggressive mother at the very site that was to be charged with her laughter.

Positioning herself as the mother of the phallus-doll she grips firmly under her elbow, Bourgeois, as we remember so well, laughed; and her laugh did effect a displacement from the patriarchal mother to the playful, aggressive mother. Performing a fantasy of aggression toward the phallus and the infant, she demonstrated how the artist/mother might be constituted as a subject through aggression. In Mapplethorpe's photograph, Bourgeois made herself the very image of the bad enough mother: the mother who grins at the patriarchal overvaluation of the phallus, who parodies the metonymy of infant and penis, and in whose hands the phallus becomes penis, or in other words slips from its status as privileged signifier to become one more object of aggression and desire.

This is not a Kleinian fantasy *per se*, but rather a fantasy of turning psychoanalysis against itself. For if in Kleinian theory the mother does not exist as a subject, but only as the object of the infant's aggressive projections, Bourgeois produces a maternal subject constituted, like the infant subject, through a play of introjections and projections. So by turning the mother against the infant, the

23. Sigmund Freud, "Humor," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–64), vol. 21, pp. 160–66.
24. Tanner, "Mother Laughed," p. 73.



Louise Bourgeois. Fillette. *1968.*

part-object against the phallus, and humor against the fetish—that is, by exploiting the tension between Kleinian, Lacanian, and Freudian psychoanalytic models—Bourgeois produces the playful, aggressive mother. And psychoanalysis, to borrow Lacan's phrase once again, is incapable of so much as suspecting her existence.

Nor does she exist in the "Bad Girls" catalogue, where she is displaced by an image of *Fillette* that stands fetish-like in place of the Mapplethorpe picture, a repression in reverse of the one performed a decade before in another museum catalogue. For this substitution of the object for the portrait is the reverse of the omission performed by the Museum of Modern Art in its catalogue for the 1982 Bourgeois retrospective: in that instance, *Fillette* was cropped out of the photograph, cutting off the grin from its gag to produce a more enigmatic smile for the catalogue's frontispiece.[25] Both of these deletions elide the playful mother by disrupting the object relation through which she is constructed, by dividing object and subject into discrete frames. And in both cases, one might suppose, it is an anxiety about the aggression registered in the figure of the playful mother that is defended by this insistent splitting of the image.

In the "Bad Girls" catalogue, the figure of the playful mother enacted by Bourgeois in the Mapplethorpe picture is displaced by the Benglis ad. There, aggression is enacted through a more straightforward appropriation of the phallus, which fully retains its conventional valences of power, virility, and aggression,

25. For a discussion of MOMA's cropping of the photograph, see my "Pretty as a Picture: Louise Bourgeois's *Fillette*," *Parkett* 27 (March 1991), pp. 48–57.

albeit parodically exaggerated. In taking on the phallus (rather than taking it up, as Bourgeois does), Benglis's body itself becomes both phallic and aggressive, and this assumption of aggression through the phallus is indeed, as Tanner suggests, a central trope in the staging of the "Bad Girls" shows.

But I would like to turn now to the different problematic of aggression that I believe structures much recent feminist work, and that is anxiety about aggression and its destructive effects. For it will be my argument that recent work by Bourgeois and others points not in the direction of the thematic of liberatory aggression that was presented in the "Bad Girls" shows, but toward a more complex structural analysis of aggression. In that analysis, which is Kleinian-based in its organization through object relations, loss is a function of fantasied destructive actions performed by the subject, a subject that is also capable, in fantasy, of repairing its damaged objects.

Beds

> *The material was there taking all that room and bothering me, bothering me by its aggressive presence. And somehow the idea of the mother came to me. This is the way my mother impressed me, as very powerful, very silent, very judging, and controlling the whole studio. And naturally this piece became my mother. At that point, I had my subject. I was going to express what I felt toward her. . . . First of all I cut her head, and I slit her throat. . . . And after weeks and weeks of work, I thought, if this is the way I saw my mother, then she did not like me. How could she possibly like me if I treat her that way? At that point something turned around. I could not stand the idea that she wouldn't like me. I couldn't live if I thought that she didn't like me. The fact that I had pushed her around, cut off her head, had nothing to do with it. What you do to a person has nothing to do with what you expect the person to feel toward you. . . . Now at the end I became very, very depressed, terribly, terribly depressed.*
>
> —Louise Bourgeois

> *The ego's growing capacity for integration and synthesis leads more and more, even during these first few months, to states in which love and hatred, and correspondingly the good and bad aspects of objects, are being synthesized; and this gives rise to the second form of anxiety—depressive anxiety—for the infant's aggressive impulses and desires toward the bad breast (mother) are now felt to be a danger to the good breast (mother) as well.*
>
> —Melanie Klein

Having begun, then, with the father dragged onto the dinner table and eaten, I would like to end by returning to the table, the bed, the floor, which is to say to the horizontal field of the infant, to what Mitchell has called infancy's "perpetual present . . . [a] horizontal, punctuated duration rather than a historical, vertical temporal perspective."[26] For if Kleinian fantasy is a structural space, vectored by the axis of the horizontal, this is a very different model of fantasy than that which forms around the gendered body. Enacted through processes of conflation, splitting, and multiplying performed on part-objects, the fantasies of the Kleinian subject are fantasies of the body riven by the drives and undifferentiated by gender.

To return to one of my earlier examples, Rona Pondick's installations are structured by a part-object logic in which the decentering of the body takes the form of a conflation and splitting of objects that function as part-object systems—hanging, scattered, or clustered in relation to the floor, the ceiling, and the corners of the room. Works like *Double Bed* (1989), an impossibly long twinned mattress tied up with a gridded network of cord to which baby bottles are attached, and *Loveseat* (1992), constructed of two facing breasted chairs with baby-bottle nipples, a raised pink plastic hole sunk between the seats, enact the projection of infantile drives onto external objects, or in other words the conflation through fantasy of the body and the structures that support and contain it. In the insistent literalness of their use of objects, and in the interaction of processes of introjection and projection through which the part-object logic of the infantile body structures object relations—so that, for example, the impulse to suck or to bite produces an entire sucking/biting system—these works construct the pre-Oedipal subject along the lines of what Klein called the paranoid-schizoid position.

Through this position, the subject produces the bad object, projecting its own aggression onto a destructive external object. These aggressive fantasies in turn set up the so-called depressive position, in which the subject is consumed with anxiety about the effects of these destructive fantasies and mourns the loss of the good object through its own aggression. Shifting between the aggressive paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position, the subject produces fantasies of destroying its own good objects (as well as bad ones) and of restoring them in turn. And through the interplay of these two positions, and of the destructive and reparative fantasies in which they are articulated, Klein constructs subjectivity through loss—loss suffered through one's own aggression, but also potentially recoverable through one's own reparative work.

The paranoid-schizoid position, then, is acted out in a frenzy of aggression and the depressive position through inertia and despair, feelings that are overcome, temporarily, in fantasies of destruction and reparation. Pondick's work can

26. Mitchell, *Selected Klein*, Introduction, p. 26.

be seen as enacting the destructive fantasies of the infant in the grips of paranoid anxiety. Rachel Whiteread's casts of bathtubs, beds, rooms, and other abandoned objects bearing the impressions of bodily use—stains, cracks, dents, and punctures—evoke, on the other hand, depressive anxiety's vacating of desire.

Through a literal process of evacuation, the object is lost, leaving the plaster or rubber mold of its spatial container or core to function as the work, a work that constitutes the loss of the object. In casts of the underside of a bathtub or a bed, or the inside of a closet, drawer, room, or house—spaces that contain or metonymically repeat the body—Whiteread materializes this loss literally as a negative, an inert registration of the space the body once occupied.

These casts of space occupied and then vacated by the body also manifest the collapse through which object and desire, like self and other, are enfolded by infantile fantasy. The distinctions of inside and outside or body and environment that are foundational for the gendered body are not observed by infantile fantasy. So these works produced through conflation and splitting—the collapse of body and environment, the peeling away of inside from outside—materialize a world structured by the part-object.

In Whiteread's case, this logic is articulated less by the play of objects than by the construction of a space that is the condition of infantile fantasy. For it is not the part-object body itself that confronts us in Whiteread's work, but that elision of body and environment, inside and outside, through which the infantile world is made. Working, then, at the limits of the body, at the interface of the body and its supports, Whiteread examines interstitial structures with evident parallels to the in-betweenness of infantile experience.

The inside-out construction, in which, for example, a cast of the underside of the bathtub that contains the body forms another tub, or the space beneath a mattress makes a bed, in reversing the functions of object and container, of inside and outside, performs a decentering of the body. In other pieces, such as a recent series of beds in which the work sometimes is a cast of the object itself rather than of its interior or surrounding space, the limit of the body is defined, or eroded, not by its surrounding space but by the support it impresses and to which it molds itself. The beds are foam, rubber, and plaster casts of mattresses and box springs stacked or folded over, propped or slung against the wall, the tracery of springs pushing up vein-like from under the stained surfaces of the amber, yellow, and white skins. Dense and inert, these beds bear the hardened imprint of the body stretched out in the horizontal field of infantile experience, the field structured, according to Klein, by the death drive.

I have suggested that works by Pondick and Whiteread materialize infantile fantasy through the interaction of the positions Klein called paranoid-schizoid and depressive, both of which are functions of aggression (or the struggle to suppress it), and of loss. These are only two examples of recent feminist work that is structured in these terms, and I have offered them together to evoke something of the structural dimension of this model, a model that exceeds the thematics of the

Rachel Whiteread. Untitled (Double Amber Bed). *1991.*

Left: Untitled. *1991.*

infantile and the part-object through which it is often read. I have also attempted to demonstrate how the Kleinian model, with its emphasis on aggression as the pivotal psychoanalytic problem, has been employed critically by these artists and others in relation to Lacanian-based feminist work of the 1970s and '80s that centered on investigations of pleasure and desire. Organized structurally by position rather than temporally by stage, the Kleinian model displaces concepts of essentialism and regression to open a space in which fantasies of aggression can be examined as structural to the subject of either sex and of any gender, in which the subject of aggression is constituted not in essential but in relational terms.

The field of infantile fantasy as a space in which to investigate aggression in a feminist context has been articulated most fully in the work of Louise Bourgeois, and the practices I have discussed here must be read in relation to that body of work and as part of its delayed reception. The part-object logic of Pondick's work in particular closely follows Bourgeois's complex development of that logic, repeating many of its moves almost verbatim. Those moves include: strategies of inside-out construction and of multiplication, splitting, and conflation that subvert the phallic logic of gender and disarticulate the Oedipal body; techniques of pouring, cutting, scratching, and fragmentation that enact the ferocity of the drives—or alternatively of stitching, wrapping, and polishing that effect the repair of damage inflicted through aggression; and the staging of objects in installations or setups structured as part-object fantasy spaces. All of these are processes through which Bourgeois has enacted the subject of the drives and bodily fantasy and through which the current generation of feminist artists has received and reexamined the investigation of the drives as a project of feminist art.

For while Bourgeois's work received increasing critical attention following her retrospective at MOMA in 1982, it has been in the early 1990s in the context of critiques of Lacanian psychoanalysis and semiotics, and of intensive concentration focused on the body as subject to aggression and pain, that her work has assumed a pivotal position in mediating feminist practices. Bourgeois's recent exhibition of works from the past decade at the Brooklyn Museum, and especially the series of works called Cells (1989–94), staged the part-object logic of infantile fantasy as a play of position. In domestic spaces encaged by screens, doors, and broken and soot-covered windows occupied by part-objects—a giant pair of marble eyes, a pair of folded hands, glass globes, an ear—Bourgeois materialized the Kleinian notion of position as "a place in which one is sometimes lodged." With great insistence on the concreteness of the objects, the corporeality of the viewer, and the six sides of the cube as the markers of real space, she deployed objects to which pastness seemed to cling—weathered architectural remnants, broken mirrors, schoolroom chairs, and narrow beds—in the construction of memory itself as a "perpetual present."

As a number of feminist theorists have pointed out, Klein's object relations model, focusing as it does on the internal experience of the infant and fantasies of the mother, who always functions as an originary object and never as a real subject,

fails to open an intersubjective space.[27] This is also the case with Bourgeois's work, which concerns itself with a problem defined in the title of an early work as that of "figures who talk to each other without seeing each other." In the Cells, the fantasy screens occluding intersubjectivity are literalized in the meshed wire or gloss of dirt through which we viewers glimpse one another partially. When the space of the Cell is articulated by hinged mirrors angled to disrupt and cut up the field of vision, we inhabit a play of projections, staring back at our own faces reflected behind the emprisoning tracery of the screen. The experience of the Cells is of an interplay of introjection and projection in which it is structurally impossible to "see each other."

And this is the very condition of aggression, as Klein describes it. Loss, the loss of the other that is destroyed in fantasy, is embedded in the structure of one's own aggression. Thus, when Kobena Mercer complained recently of "a stubborn resistance to the recognition of unconscious fantasy as a structuring principle of our social, emotional, and political life," and called for analysis of "the oppressive and unhappy phantasies of love and hate that condition our mutual enmeshment," it was not surprising that he pointed toward Melanie Klein. For Klein, as he observed, "defined phantasy as merely the way we organize, perceive, and give form to our feelings, which are always conflicted by the coexistence of love and hate."[28]

Klein's model of unconscious fantasy as a structural space articulated by the infantile body offers only one possible approach to the problem of developing psychoanalytic feminist readings of aggression that are not grounded in concepts of essentialism or regression. But, as I have attempted to demonstrate here, a significant body of recent feminist work calls for readings of aggression as complex as the analyses of pleasure and desire offered in Lacanian-based feminist art and critical theory of the 1970s and '80s.

27. See, for example, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).
28. Mercer, "Fear of a Black Penis," p. 122.