NOTE TO USERS

AUTOFICTIONAL PRACTICES: SELF-FASHIONING IN DIANA THORNEYCROFT'S SELF-PORTRAITS

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January 2005

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Communication Studies

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 0-494-12709-0
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 0-494-12709-0

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores autobiographical practices and their relationship to autofiction, by focusing on practices of identity construction and artistic performance, as well as identity construction *through* performance. Emphasis is given to the ways gender and sexuality enter into, and shape, these practices by examining, in particular, the way they are expressed in Diana Thorneycroft's photographic performances. Chapter 1 discusses the history and key debates in autobiography theory, the ways gender has been introduced into the analysis of autobiography, and non-literary forms of autobiography. Chapter 1 also briefly discusses the (Western) history of art by women. Chapter 2 examines Thorneycroft's oeuvre and selected responses to it. Chapter 3 presents an analysis of autofictional practices through an examination of Thorneycroft's photographic self-portraits, thereby questioning the distinctions between autobiography and autofiction and suggesting that there is considerable overlap in their definition. The Conclusion briefly discusses agency in relation to autofictional (self-making) practices.

RESUME

Cette thèse explore les pratiques autobiographiques et leur rapport avec l'autofiction, en se concentrant sur les pratiques de construction d'identité et sur la performance artistique, de même que la construction d'identité *à travers* la performance. L'accent est mis sur les façons dont le sexe et la sexualité entrent dans, et forme, ces pratiques en examinant, en particulier, la manière qu'ils sont exprimés dans les performances photographiques de Diana Thorneycroft. Chapitre 1 discute l'histoire et les débats clés dans la théorie d'autobiographie, les façons dont le sexe a été introduit dans l'analyse de l'autobiographie, et les formes non-littéraires d'autobiographie. Chapitre 1 discute également, mais brièvement, l'histoire (occidentale) de l'art des femmes. Chapitre 2 examine l'oeuvre, et des critiques, de Thorneycroft. Chapitre 3 présente une analyse des pratiques d'autofiction en examinant les autoportraits photographiques de Thorneycroft, questionnant de cette façon les distinctions entre l'autobiographie et l'autofiction, suggérant de ce fait qu'il y a un chevauchement considérable dans leur définition. La Conclusion discute brièvement l'agent(e) par rapport aux pratiques d'autofiction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the patient help of numerous people. First of all, my supervisor, Professor Jennifer Burman who was very helpful in directing my research and was willing to advise me whenever I asked.

Thanks also go out to Professor Martha Langford for encouraging me to pursue research on Thorneycroft's work, and Professor David Crowley for long discussions about photography and autobiography theory.

Thanks to my proofreaders Karen Herland and Christine Mitchell who went above and beyond my expectations, by helping me to refine and clarify my arguments.

I would also like to thank Maureen Coote, Graduate Program Advisor, for her patient, courteous, and diligent help with the administrative aspects of thesis submission. As well, I would like to thank Professor Will Straw for helping me, with all aspects of student life and work, throughout my time in the department.

Special thanks go to my husband, Matt Surch, for his endless support, encouragement, and patience. Without him, I could not have finished this project.

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"What I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) 'self'; but it is the contrary that must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and 'myself' which is light, divided dispersed."

Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, *1981:12*

"The eruptions of the semiotic signal the eruption of the irrational, that which must be suppressed in order for the subject to imagine itself as coherent, unified, autonomous. Because the self is a fiction sustained by the very practices of representation, its fictiveness can be glimpsed in the shadows of the semiotic, in the gaps, in nonsense, in puns, in pleasurable rhythms, all of which erupt from the unconscious (or preconscious) to disrupt meaning."

Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, Women, Autobiography, Theory, *1998:19-20*

"Only a very limited number of subjects have been considered appropriate for 'art'; the rest fall into the realms of, for example, 'primitive' fetishes, low popular cultural forms or obscenity. That is, they become the marginalized, unframed 'other' to elite art."

Marsha Meskimmon, The Art of Reflection, *1996:4*

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines autobiographical practices through an analysis of self-portraits produced between 1989 and 2000 by Canadian artist Diana Thorneycroft. My interest lies in the practical (in)distinction that exists between "autobiography" and "autofiction," particularly with regard to the performative nature of each modality. The status of autobiography as verifiably distinct from fiction has long been debated (cf. Pascal 1960; Olney 1980; Eakin 1999). Autobiography is generally understood as a truthful retrospective narrative written by and about the author. Autofiction, on the other hand, presently enjoying renewed interest in academia (cf. Parachute no. 105), is defined as an autobiographical text containing "textual markers that signal a deliberate, often ironic, interplay" between fact and fiction (Smith & Watson 2001:186). As opposed to autofiction, autobiography often involves fictional tactics, yet they are generally not made apparent. As material for a case study that attempts to explore the (dis)similarities and (in)distinctions between these two approaches to, or categories of, life narrative, Thorneycroft's work provides an ideal analytical resource, since it is typically regarded and labelled as autobiography, while there are markers - both within the photographs themselves and in the artist's accompanying statements - that likewise emphasize a certain "fictionally-inspired" quality of performance, creativity and imagination. In what follows, performance as a practice within both art and identity will be examined through Thorneycroft's photographic performances of self, in an attempt to further interrogate and illuminate the close and complex relationships that exist between performance, identity and art production.[1] Though analysis of these interconnections promises to yield a fascinating body of research, it has, as yet, been relatively under-explored. There are, however, some notable exceptions that allude to these interconnections, namely, work done by Canadian scholars Susanna Egan (1999),

[1] Amelia Jones has persuasively argued that artists, in the 1960s, were an early site of "the emergence of the performativity of subjectivity" (1998:63). Through performance art, artists enacted and created identities for themselves. Their art production *was* the production of selves, of identities. I discuss the relationship between identity, performance, and art production in greater detail in the coming chapters. However, for further discussion of this relationship see Amelia Jones' *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (1998). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson also explore this relationship in their edited volume *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (2002).

Olivier Asselin and Johanne Lamoureux (2002a, 2002b), as well as Helen Lee and Kerri Sakamoto (2002).

THE SELF AS OTHER

The "cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" – or the advent of the self as other – is just one of the social effects of photographs, and particularly of photographic self-portraits, that continues to concern photographers, art critics and historians, and theorists of visual culture (Barthes 1981:12). Photographic self-portraits re-present the self as other. While all photographs are copies of originals, representations of things that *have been*, a portrait represents an image of a person that is *other*, that is wholly separate from the individual photographed. As biographical representations, photographic portraits are intrinsically bound up with notions of identity and consciousness; they speak about who the person represented was and what they may have been like. Self-portraits, then, are informative, not only to the viewing audience, but also to the person represented; for instance, the individual depicted gains a glimpse into how he or she may be (or may have been) viewed by others. Thus, along with shaping and forming part of the memories we collect, photographic self-portraits inform our consciousness and influence the way we think about ourselves.

Identity, or a coherent self, can be understood as a continuity of memories (Locke 2000; Cheetham 1991).[2] A relatively continuous set of memories over time is the central "criterion" for the constitution of a person's identity (Pojman 2000:433). Reliance on material continuity is problematic. This problem is exemplified in the case of a canoe that has one piece of wood replaced each year, such that eventually every piece has been replaced. Would we not say this is the same canoe, though it lacks material continuity? We *would* and *do* speak this way; and this fact supports the claim that we cannot appeal to the continuity of a material body to establish identity. Cases of memory loss or deterioration help to understand how memories establish the continuity of personhood, of identity. For

[2] Identity is not understood here in the strong philosophical sense of A = A. Rather, I am referring to the notion of personal identity, of the continuity of a subject over time.

example, amnesiacs act like different, new, people: they do not have the continuity of memories necessary to maintain their prior identity.

Identity, then, is significantly altered in a time when memory becomes more a burden of representation than a burden of the mind. Photographs and home videos, for example, can do the work of recording and remembering family gatherings, personal milestones, or other, often transient, life events. In a culture increasingly characterized by mediation, identity and memory (and consequently one's biography) are constituted and re-constituted through representation. Since memory-work is accomplished, at least in part, by media (for example, family photo albums), and since our identities are tied up in, and informed by these memories, our identities are intrinsically bound up with these representations of "self" as they appear in various media, and are shaped by the "supplemental" biographical information they provide. A person's photographic portrait, then, can be conceptualized as part of his or her prosthetic biography – a biography that is neither completely separate from, nor completely part of, that individual as subject (cf. Lury 1998; Asselin & Lamoureux 2002a). Although one's biography (in highly mediated societies/contexts) is intimately linked to and, indeed, recorded in media, the source of these representations (or copies) is always the person about whom they speak (the original). Thus, the biography cannot be said to constitute part of the person, but it can neither be entirely separated from him or her.

The photograph's ability to "fix" (that is, to freeze a moment in time) creates a "loop" in which a new individual can emerge (Lury 1998). Though this claim seems counterintuitive, it is fitting if one conceptualizes the photograph as part of a feedback loop. The photograph as information, as a representation, informs, and, in some cases, deeply affects the person viewing it. With self-portraits, the image informs our sense of self and inevitably changes the way we think about ourselves. For instance, what is viewed as an unflattering portrait may influence someone to embark upon an exercise regime or to stop wearing the colour yellow. It may also open one's eyes to aspects of the self one had never previously considered, for instance, a photograph in which one appears androgynous. The process of re-constituting (re-building) the self from one's self-

images suggests the possibility that identity is not only plastic, but also acquired (cf. Asselin & Lamoureux 2002a). That is, while identity, being malleable and variable, is evidently not stable, it can also be more radically understood as being (at least partly) acquired through imaginative, creative reflection inspired by representations of oneself. While such imaginings can be considered wholly new, they, in turn, are incorporated into one's self-identity, one's ongoing, processual autobiography. One's autobiography may therefore come to include elements of fiction, and, by extension, may, in fact, be considered an autofiction: the self may be an other. This notion of dual selves, of double consciousness, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1. There, I provide a case study of autofictional practices drawing on Diana Thorneycroft's self-portraits.

AUTOFICTION

Autofictions, according to literary studies, are works in which "authors create new personalities and identities for themselves, while at the same time maintaining their real identity" (Asselin & Lamoureux 2002a:11). Asselin and Lamoureux note that artists themselves, by making their own lives the subject of their work, have "[become] one of the privileged models of the practice of autofiction" (*Ibid*:13). Canadian artist Diana Thorneycroft (1956-) is just such a practitioner, using her life and body as the subject of her photographs. Employing her body as an artistic motif, she re-constructs, re-fashions and re-imagines herself (and, indeed, her*selves*). Her self-portraits are often considered autobiographical, but insofar as autofiction has been defined as a way of transforming, shaping, and re-fashioning the self, might it not be of added benefit, or simply more appropriate or precise, to describe Thorneycroft's works, rather, as autofictional prostheses? Perceptual prostheses, such as photographs, enable an individual to experiment with his or her identity, to "[dissociate] from his or her biography – consciousness and memories…[and] acquire a *prosthetic auto / biography* or biographies, of his or her own choosing" (Lury 1998:85, italics in original). Thus, this kind of prosthetic cultural production has implications for the study of identity; in fact, it necessitates new conceptions of identity.

The area of overlap between autofiction and prosthetic biography will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 through an examination of Diana Thorneycroft's self-portraits. The desire for self-creation, a descriptor of autofiction, is mirrored in the possessive individualism of prosthetic culture. The concept of prosthetic culture (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3) is theorized by Celia Lury as one in which:

> [The] individual passes beyond the mirror stage of self-knowledge, of reflection of self, into that of self-extension.... The prosthesis – and it may be perceptual or mechanical – is what makes this self-extension possible. In adopting/adapting a prosthesis, the person creates (or is created by) a self-identity that is no longer defined by the edict 'I think, therefore I am; rather, he or she is constituted in the relation 'I can, therefore I am'. In the mediated extension of capability that ensues, the relations between consciousness, memory and the body that had defined the possessive individual as a legal personality are experimentally dis- and re-assembled (1998:3).

Possessive individualism is the notion that in a "liberal democratic [society]...identity is constituted as a property," it is "free, self-determining and self-responsible" (Lury 1998:1). That is, one's identity is not predetermined at birth; it can be (within some constraints) manipulated and altered to better suit one's life circumstances and aspirations. As I will demonstrate, Thorneycroft uses memories in combination with her imagination in precisely this manner, as a way of re-imagining the self and of creating new selves, for instance, by "redrawing [the] lines of sexual difference" as they pertain to her specifically (and ultimately, as they pertain to the viewing audience and their own perceptions of self) (*Ibid*:5). This re-drawing of lines and pushing of boundaries is characteristic of prosthetic biography, as I will discuss in more detail below. Furthermore, and in relation to contemporary art, Asselin and Lamoureux suggest that autofiction – "ce type d'extension comportementale" – is a key characteristic of twentieth-century art (2002:14). This thesis will argue that autofictional practices, such as prosthetic biography (a biography that is performative, manipulated), are central to Thorneycroft's photographic self-portraiture. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that autofictional practices are instances of autobiographical agency. The performative potential of autobiographies, through autofiction, has important

implications for individuals and identities that have historically been marginalized, oppressed or silenced, as I will argue in Chapters 2 and 3.

DIANA THORNEYCROFT

Chapter 2 provides a general overview of Thorneycroft's work and discusses the critical responses it has received. Nonetheless, the current section serves to provide some introductory remarks on her work in advance of Chapter 1, which reviews the literature on autobiography theory.

In an attempt to gather my thoughts as I began this project, I reflected on the many articles, books, and catalogues that discuss Diana Thorneycroft's photography. Her work has received such a wide array of responses and interpretations, and is discussed in connection with such a variety of theoretical perspectives, that I was initially overwhelmed by what appeared to be an insurmountable synthesis project. For instance, her photographs have been discussed along Freudian and feminist lines of thought (particularly with respect to the questioning of gender constructs, sexual identity, and patriarchy), in terms of the mind/body binary, and with regard to the distinctions between fact and fiction, history and memory, reality and fantasy. Despite the variety in approaches and readings, I often found each interpretation valid, or at least compelling in some way. Though most would agree, there is no one "correct" interpretation of any artistic work. Diana Thorneycroft's work is particularly rich and easily allows for multiple interpretations. I have come to believe that this quality – her work precluding any singular interpretation, permitting no meta-theoretical explanation – is the most valuable aspect of her artistic production. But perhaps I am stating the obvious. It is difficult enough to agree on the meaning of a single photograph, let alone endeavour to interpret a body of work or an exhibition as a whole. Nevertheless, the polysemic nature of Thorneycroft's photographs, and her attention, both implicit and overt, to this very quality, is key.

Presenting herself in contradictory, perplexing, and provocative ways for her audience, Thorneycroft investigates the construction of her identity through her photographs. In her self-portraits, she underscores the multiplicity of

selfhood, which is exacerbated in highly mediated, postmodern societies.[3] Though certainly no singular self ever existed, the electronic media of communication have clearly contributed to the multiplication of the self. The fact that Thorneycroft uses photographs – a visual trace of an event plucked out of its particular spatio-temporal history and inserted into a process of reproduction and repetition – makes this point ever more literal and emphatic. Photographs do not represent reality; instead, they are a trace skimmed off of reality, but with much subtracted from the reality to which they refer (or referred) (Cartwright & Sturken 2001). As such, photographs are unable represent the "real" self, but may be understood as amounting to the sum-total "image" of our self at a particular moment in spatio-temporal history as captured on film. Writing in the 1920s, Kracauer stated that "the photograph annihilates the person by portraying him or her, and were person and portrayal to converge, the person would cease to exist" (1995:57). In a period when people are so heavily documented (converted into information) and our images becoming progressively more archived, is Kracauer's pronouncement cause for concern? Are we approaching a stage in which representations and reproductions of self portend the complete obliteration of the individual? As I will argue, Diana Thorneycroft's photography offers valuable insight into this question.

Though Thorneycroft's photographs transgress boundaries and question identity, these interrogations do not exhaust the significance of or meanings inherent to her work. In any case, considering the scope of her visual production, it will be impossible to sum up in this analysis everything that is of interest. I will, however, attempt to demonstrate the great breadth of interpretation her work allows for, and make note of its wide range of applicability. What I hope will become clear is that Thorneycroft's work is valuable in perhaps the best way art can be, by having relevance for all groups of people, from artists and academics to

[3] To elaborate further, as Mark Poster has argued (1995), "new communications technologies form subjects as 'unstable, multiple, and diffuse,' with a revolutionary fluidity of identity" (qtd. in Smith and Watson 1998:40). Smith and Watson add, "as we are drawn further into technology, we may find ourselves revising our notions of the autobiographical subject and of narrativity itself" (*Ibid*).

the lay public. One need not be educated in art and its history to make sense of her work or to find something of significance in it for oneself.

Thorneycroft's work is also valuable because of its immeasurable depth. First, this depth derives from Thorneycroft's own attempt to probe the deepest parts of her psyche. Second, it results from the dense layering of meaning in her photographs, each of which are rich in detail, due to both the quality of the prints and great number of props used in her images. Third, the photographs themselves exude a tangible denseness and depth commensurate with the artist's photographic technique; unlike the vast majority of conventional photographs, Thorneycroft compresses several seconds, and in some cases minutes, into a single photograph. Her lighting technique requires that the shutter be locked open in order to capture the image. Thus, she unsettles the notion that photographs are traces cleaved from reality that could otherwise not have been seen with the naked eye: hers are the compression of entire events – history is literally condensed – into a single photographic image.

The majority of reviewers contend that the aesthetic beauty of Thorneycroft's photographs stands in sharp contradiction to the ugly events depicted therein. By situating viewers in front of taboo scenarios and unpleasant events, which are photographically beautiful nonetheless, Thorneycroft emphasizes the in-betweenness of judgments; that it is much more reasonable to conceive of opinions, identifications, and judgments as dialectic rather than binaristic. Fact and fiction cannot be easily placed into separate, opposing categories. Autobiography and autofiction might therefore be more reasonably conceptualized as existing on a continuum, as connected by "and" rather than "or". In keeping with this continuum, Thorneycroft neither tries to replace one representation with another, nor have them exist side-by-side as mutually-exclusive opposites; instead of denying masculinity in favour of androgyny, for instance, she affirms both.

Having considered what Thorneycroft's photographs offer, in terms of providing access to extreme depth of signification, as well as a means of shaking up prescribed binaries, it remains to be asked: what do Thorneycroft's

photographs *want* (cf. Mitchell 1996)? Perhaps, as Mitchell concluded, they simply want to be *asked*. They want to be asked because the viewer, by posing questions, embarks upon a process of reflection that cannot help but loop back upon itself, becoming redirected back to the viewer's self-identity, inciting further questioning into her/his own identity construction and stability. It is impossible to look at Thorneycroft's photographs without being shaken, disturbed, or moved in some way; they do not dissolve into the background of the gallery wall, and there are none without a *punctum* (cf. Barthes 1981).[4] Just as one wants to look away and move on, one is at the same time captivated by her images and the process of questioning begins again; she does not allow her audience to remain idle. And in being moved, her audience members also change. While attention is called to the idleness of the gaze, the activity of identity is omnipresent. One cannot be found without the other, as is the case with fact and fiction, memory and history, self and other.

The richness of Thorneycroft's photographs, extending beyond Lacanian, Surrealist, mythological or dream interpretation, causes the photographs to linger in one's memory and incorporate themselves into one's own self-fashioning – the key ingredients of which are memory and imagination. Thorneycroft's lighting technique, which reveals and conceals aspects of her performance, leaves much to the imagination. Imagination is not only necessary to fill in that which is missing from her photographs, but also to incorporate them into one's own identity.

Thorneycroft's affirmation of the importance of memory, without denying its tenuousness, provides a fresh and welcome view in a world dominated by empiricism and positive science. Though her work often appears dark or tormented, my opinion is that it is ultimately optimistic. First of all, nothing in her work seems terminal; life and redemption can always be found. Second, instead of denying or rejecting any one thing, or concept, in favour of another, that "something else" is concomitantly affirmed. For example, femininity is not cancelled, negated or substituted, but, rather, androgyny is affirmed alongside it.

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[4] The *punctum* is the poignant element of a photograph that "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces" (Barthes 1981:26).

In this way, concepts are permitted to collide, divide, and fuse, but never vaporize. Critics and audiences alike have cause to celebrate the opening up and redirection of meaning with respect to art, identity, and viewership that Diana Thorneycroft's photographs accomplish so successfully.

AUDIENCE RESPONSE

To make sense of why Thorneycroft would choose to depict herself in such ways (erotically, sado-masochistically, transgendered, and so on), her audience inevitably feels compelled to account for her motives, to give explanation to her photographs. An attempt is made to reconcile "Diana Thorneycroft: the artist" and "Diana Thorneycroft: the image." The drive to find a certain reciprocity or link, indeed to force a connection between subjects and their representations, is powerful. But what if a connection does not exist, or what if there are multiple connections? Thorneycroft's audience is called upon to engage intersubjectively with the artist herself and with her work; viewers are motivated to bring their own biographies (perceptions, biases, intellectual capital, etc.) into contact with her work, to interface the two and draw out meaning, making personally relevant interpretations based on their own subjectivity. In so doing, Diana Thorneycroft's photographs further underscore the difficulties faced in attempting to reconcile subjects (or objects) with their representations. Her photographs emphasize the fact that such connections are often made by way of the imagination. Her photographs do not recount a coherent story or a single life. Rather, they tell stories about fictional selves she has fashioned from an amalgamation of memory and imagination, with the aim of exploring her identity. Her audience, in turn, is forced to use their own memories and imaginations to come to grips with the images being considered, thus motivating acknowledgement of the fact that images and the subjects/objects they represent are entirely separate.

Intersubjectivity and the nature of representation are therefore clearly central to Thorneycroft's work, and will also be examined in this project in connection with the key concepts discussed above. The relationship between memory, identity, and imagination, and the related (in)distinction between fact

and fiction will be explored in terms of how these interconnections are confronted, grasped, and integrated via audience response.

SEEING AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

That vision and knowledge, seeing and knowing, are intertwined is hardly an original statement. Nevertheless, this connection remains one of great importance since the nature of knowledge is, in effect, the nature of what we generally perceive as reality, and raises some provocative questions concerning self-knowledge and its relation to "visible" reality, facts, and the nature of truth. As a discursive formation, photography and photographs have been discussed at length in this regard. As Celia Lury has noted, "vision and self-knowledge have become inextricably and productively intertwined in modern Euro-American societies; photography...thus offers one way into an exploration of the historically specific and dynamic relations between seeing and knowing" (1998:2). That is, photography has taught ways of seeing that have, in turn, affected how we see ourselves, and thus how we understand ourselves. To the great delight of advertisers, photographic portraits invite one to "become what you are" (*Ibid*:4). Therefore, the self-understanding one draws from a photographic portrait possesses a distinct element of performativity, of acting in such a way as to "live up to" one's image. As opposed to representations that aim to look like the subjects or objects that they *re*present, contemporary subjects are motivated to retroactively "match" the previously recorded image. This retrodictive prophecy is a key aspect of the contemporary image (Lury 1998) and, indeed, the source of much of its power. It allows a subject to work with his or her present image, through pose, for example, to write the past as he or she hopes it will be later construed – in effect, actively manipulating one's biography, perfecting one's past.

The likeness captured in a photograph is fixed through an odd mixture of temporalities. That is to say, one attempts to both *write* and *right* the past by constructing an image of the past-perfected ('that which has been'), while one simultaneously fashions a future-perfected image of oneself ('that which will have been'). This peculiar collision of past and future in the present creates what Lury calls a loop in time (1998). "The loop is absolutely central to the photograph's

invitation to the observer to 'become what you are': it is the photograph's distinctive contribution to the emergence of the potential of the experimental individual" (*Ibid*:85). Photographs do not only exist as the source of, or stimulus for, self-understanding or self-improvement (depending on your point of view) from which a "newly self-possessed individual may emerge," but are themselves also manipulated relics (*Ibid*). Photography thus plays a curiously complicated role in self-knowledge, serving as an important reminder that the information value of a photograph must always be questioned. With regard to the age of photography, Kracauer said the following: "Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resemble them in a photographic sense" (1995:58). And he continued, "Never before has a period known so little about itself" (*Ibid*). If we take Kracauer's pronouncement seriously, alongside the arguments presented thus far, it stands to reason that a discussion of photographic work must address the construction of our own identities, along with what roles we play, both overtly and inadvertently, in this construction.

The following three chapters, in general, explore autobiographical practices and their relationship to autofiction by focusing on practices of identity construction and artistic performance, as well as identity construction *through* performance. I emphasize the ways in which gender and sexuality enter into, and shape, these practices by examining, in particular, the way they are problematized through Thorneycroft's photographic performances. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history and key debates in autobiography theory, along with a discussion that deals with non-literary forms of autobiography and the ways in which gender has been introduced into the analysis of autobiography. Chapter 1 also briefly discusses the history of art by women. Chapter 2 examines Thorneycroft's oeuvre and selected responses to it. Chapter 3 presents an analysis of autofictional practices through an examination of Thorneycroft's photographic self-portraits, thereby questioning the distinctions between autobiography and autofiction and suggesting that there is considerable overlap in their definition. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of agency in relation to autofictional (self-making) practices.

CHAPTER 1: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICES, GENDER AND ART HISTORY

"Autobiographical narration begins with amnesia, and once begun, the fragmentary nature of subjectivity intrudes. After all, the narrator is both the same and not the same as the autobiographer, and the narrator is both the same and not the same as the subject of narration. Moreover, there are many stories to be told and many different and divergent storytelling occasions that call for and forth contextually marked and sometimes radically divergent narratives of identity."

Sidonie Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," [1995] 1998:109

The 20th century saw a vogue in autobiography (Robin in Asselin & Lamoureux 2002b). Various sorts of autobiographical texts emerged because of an individualist turn and the concurrent privatization of memory. As Georges Gusdorf and others have argued, autobiography is a genre that "is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist" (1956:30). A sense of individualism, or the notion of the singularity of the individual, is necessary in order to reflect upon one's past and to produce an account of the self. This consciousness arose in particular Western societies, beginning in the Enlightenment period. The privatization of memory was also necessary as a condition for autobiography to emerge as a dominant literary form. Memory, which has predominantly been transmitted orally through communities, has, over the last two centuries, been increasingly recorded (often solitarily) in various media: diaries, newspapers, photo albums, weblogs, and so on.

The notion of individualism as necessary for the emergence, and later study of, autobiography has been criticized by feminist critics (Friedman 1998). For instance, the concept marginalizes minority identities in that it does not recognize that self-understanding and self-creation are fundamentally different for identities which are defined in relation to the dominant subject (man, white, heterosexual, and Christian). Furthermore, individualism does not properly acknowledge how identity can be relational or embedded in collective or group identity. The attention given to individualism in the study of autobiography not only reflects privilege but has also led to many autobiographies being excluded from the canon (*Ibid*).

This exclusion, however, has also led to productive interventions in the practices of self-making and autobiography. "By incorporating hitherto unspoken female experience in telling their own stories, women revised the content and purposes of autobiography and insisted on alternative stories" (Smith & Watson 1998:5-6). For instance, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson discuss in *Reading Autobiography* (2001), if one considers the various forms of life narratives produced by people who have historically been marginalized in literary circles, over 50 genres of autobiographical text exist outside the normative model. These include slave narratives and genealogies, but also more recently developed forms such as the biomythography proposed by Audre Lorde (1982). Biomythography is a text that "signal[s] how the re-creation of meaning in one's life is invested in writing that renegotiates cultural invisibility" (Smith & Watson 2001:190). For Lorde writing one's autobiography is about imagining one's 'mythic self' as it relates to its 'mythic community' of other similarly culturally invisible identities, in her case, lesbian women. Diana Thorneycroft's work also provides an intervention into the usual understanding of autobiographical texts as I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3.

The proliferation of, and recognition of, alternative forms of autobiography, as well as the questioning of the usefulness of the term "autobiography", has emerged in response to critics' and autobiographers' frustration with the dominant form. That is, many people do not recognize themselves in the traditional autobiographical subject (the prominent, public, usually male, individual) or cannot tell their lives through the traditional autobiographical form (the chronological re-telling of one's life through the events that led to one's greatness). The sense of not recognizing oneself in cultural representations has been theorized as double consciousness (Du Bois 2002). The self is not one. There is the self as defined by the culturally dominant group, and the self as different from this prescription. One is always looking at oneself as through the other's eyes. Diana Thorneycroft explores this relationship in her family self-portraits as I discuss in Chapter 2 (see Plates 1, 2 and 6).

The Facts and Fictions of Autobiography

Élisabeth Wetterwald has defined autobiography as a genre in which "the author tries to impart a coherent image of him- or herself by establishing a pact with the reader (one undertakes to tell the truth, the other to believe it)" (2002:81; cf. Lejeune 1975). But as we know, storytelling always involves a degree of adaptation (for example, to the medium or the audience). Régine Robin commented in a similar way that writers (and artists) no longer maintain, if they ever did, a strict pact with autobiography, in retelling they also remodel (Asselin & Lamoureux 2002b). In her book *Le Golem de l'écriture. De l'autofiction au cybersoi* (1997), Robin traces the development of autofiction beginning from the early 20th century. She argues that in autobiographies writers imagine who they are, who they are not, what they would like to be, and what they should have been. The product of this contemplation is a text that is a hybrid between biography and fiction. A difficult question surfaces here. Is a text fiction because parts of it cannot be otherwise denied? Or is it factual because parts of it are 'true' to reality? Robin concludes that "l'écriture finit par se prendre elle-même comme référent" (Robin in Asselin & Lamoureux 2002b:109). But does this mean that autobiography is obsolete? Should we more precisely speak of autofiction? What quotient of truth is necessary to speak of autobiography? The following section takes up these questions, which have come to trouble autobiography theory.

Current theories have exploded the concept of autobiography (Robin in Asselin & Lamoureux 2002b). However, Robin maintains that the genre has not been destroyed as a result of the fragmentation and dispersion of identity in postmodernity. Increasingly, autobiographical texts no longer maintain the concepts of fantasy and reality, reality and fiction, true and false in mutually exclusive categories (*Ibid*). "All sorts of cases exist where the border between true and false is unclear," and this blurring of lines opens up the genre to new possibilities (Asselin & Lamoureux 2002a:11). For Asselin and Lamoureux, as opposed to Robin, this suggests that "autofiction…is the genre of genres" (*Ibid*). Thus, for them it is more reasonable to speak of autofiction. Is autofiction a subcategory of autobiography or is it a more appropriate term for the genre itself?

I will come to this question at the conclusion of this project.

In the context of postmodernity it is easy to see why autofiction has received renewed interest in academia and why the genre of autobiography proper has been questioned. As Simon Blackburn defines it, postmodernism is a sceptical stance which "refus[es] any concepts of objectivity, reality, and truth" (1996:295). In its poststructuralist form it denies "any fixed meaning, or any correspondence between language and the world, or any fixed reality or truth or fact to be the object of enquiry" (*Ibid*). Clearly, postmodern theory poses troubling questions for autobiography; a genre which has generally speaking been taken as factual, as telling an objectively verifiable story about its author. While critics of a hardline postmodern viewpoint have noted that although there can be no correct version of history, no completely accurate account of an event, there can be more or less accurate versions that most people would agree upon. Nevertheless, postmodernism has troubled autobiographical theory.

The collection *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (Ashley, Gilmore & Peters, eds. 1994) addresses some of the problems raised by postmodernism for theorists of autobiography. It offers the optimistic view that, indeed, postmodernism opens up possibilities for agency, particularly in autobiographies produced by members of marginalized groups.[5] The decentered autobiographer calls attention to the difficulties associated with self-representation and to the multiple locations from which autobiographies emerge. However, taking deconstruction, which is sceptical of the notion of coherent meaning, into consideration, as well as the instability of texts and the dynamic nature of self-representation, our understanding of autobiography must be adjusted to accommodate the ways in which these factors undeniably affect our understanding of memory and our interpretation of autobiographies (Blackburn 1996). It will be useful to discuss the first wave of autobiographical theory, before the advent of postmodern theory,

[5] For example, in her essay "The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre" Leigh Gilmore raises questions with regard to the status of autobiography within the context of postmodern theory; but also asks what autobiographical theory can reveal about postmodernism. For instance, the stability of identity is troubled by postmodern theory, which in turn affects how theorists can speak about the subject represented in autobiography. Nevertheless, the subject represented in autobiography is often fairly enduring and has ties to the extra-textual subject, which postmodern theorists must contend with.

prior to considering further implications postmodernism holds for the study of autobiographies and autobiographical practices.

In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss the history and theory of autobiography criticism, which will bring to light some of the key debates and issues in autobiography theory. I will review research on the intersection of gender and autobiography, and on non-literary forms of autobiography. Though autobiographical criticism has only been popular in academia for about 30 years, I have chosen to focus on those works that are most relevant to contextualizing this discussion. In the final section of this chapter, I will situate Diana Thorneycroft's photography as a non-literary autobiographical practice within Western art history and theories of gender and sexuality.

HISTORY

The word autobiography is broken into three parts from the Greek *autos* meaning self, *bios* meaning life, and *graphe* meaning writing or text (Smith & Watson 2001). Most definitions, including Smith and Watson's, do not mention that *graphe* can signify various types of texts, not only written ones. This typical omission calls attention to the literary bias of much autobiography theorization. Only recently has any substantial amount of research been published which examines non-literary forms of autobiography, as I discuss later in this chapter. During the first wave of autobiography studies most theorists considered autobiographies to be the retrospective narrative of a "self-interested individual intent on assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement" (Smith & Watson 2001:2).[6] The canon of autobiographies at this time was exemplified by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781, trans. 2000) and Henry Adams's *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (1918).

The history of autobiography theory and criticism is plagued with debates; concerning which text is the first autobiography, whether autobiography is literature, or distinguishable from fiction, and so on. These debates, which have been around since the inception of autobiography studies, remain contested issues. It seems that their resolution is itself a fiction. One of the definitive texts,

[6] The first wave started slowly in the 1950s and then gained momentum in the 1970s.

Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical (Olney, ed. 1980) takes up and responds to these debates. James Olney's introductory essay traces the highly debated history of autobiography studies. It seems this area of study is founded on debate and that this has directed its development thus far.

In his introductory essay to the anthology *Autobiography* (1980), Olney credits Georges Gusdorf with writing *the* essay that set off a chain of inquiries which resulted in a loose community of scholars studying autobiography. In his essay "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie" (1956, trans. 1980), Gusdorf sets out to trace the reasons for the appearance of autobiography, to delineate the boundaries and elements of autobiography, and to name some of the problems associated with autobiography. Gusdorf argues that autobiographies begin to appear in the West after the Copernican Revolution. The declining influence of cosmic cycles in people's lives led people to wonder about their destiny and about the meaning of their lives. This self-reflexivity, a search for self-knowledge and understanding is ultimately for Gusdorf, what continues to spur people to produce their autobiographies. In terms of space, one of the limits made early on by Gusdorf is that autobiographies - and he only considers written texts - are a Western phenomenon. He argues "Western man" has a "conscious awareness of the singularity of [his] life," while in other societies individuals lead an "interdependent existence;" in these societies "consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist" (Gusdorf 1980:29, 30).

While Olney credits Gusdorf with having provided the impetus for autobiography studies, other critics credit Philippe Lejeune, author of *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975, trans. 1989 *On Autobiography*). His book is most famous for theorizing the autobiographical pact. This pact holds that the author's name matches both the identity (the vital statistics) and the name of the person the biography is about. The pact is made by the publisher who attests to the truth of the signature, and as such the reader undertakes to believe that the author and the protagonist are the same person. This pact enables the reader to believe that the claims made are truthful.

Though a few texts on autobiography were written before Lejeune and Gusdorf's contributions, these two writers can be taken as the main proponents of the first wave of autobiographical criticism. As mentioned, autobiographers studied at this time were, for the most part, prominent Western men with lives in the public sphere who had achieved some level of notoriety. Since it was this type of person who was, during the first wave of autobiography studies, authorized as an agent, many groups of people were not recognized as cultural subjects. The criteria for autobiography (prominence, theme, structure) were such that slave narratives, for example, were considered inferior and thus rarely studied (Smith & Watson 2001). The second wave of autobiography criticism addressed this point and others; such as the importance of oral autobiographies and other narratives that did not fit the traditional criteria.

SECOND WAVE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY THEORY[7]

While the first wave critics accorded more truth-value to the narratives than did the second wave, the latter saw trouble in the fact that autobiographies are by definition self-narrated (Smith & Watson 2001). That is, while the facts of the story can be verified against the biographical facts of the author's life, there remains the trouble that the narrator/producer creatively chose how to represent their identity. Indeed, the production of the autobiography may have raised questions for the author concerning how they would define themselves. This is to say, authors cannot tell their life story disinterestedly. The notion of a coherent self, free from self-deception, was questioned during the second wave. Autobiographies were read for the ways in which they actually contributed to shaping an identity, rather than reflecting a unified one that existed outside representation. Furthermore, autobiographies were seen as fixing that which is processual. The life recorded in autobiography, then, must be understood as the narrator's view of her/himself at the time of production, and not necessarily their current view. The first wave of critics recognized the creative aspects of autobiography, only within the constraints of their narrowly defined autobiographical subject, neglecting the narratives of marginalized subjects.

[7] The second wave took off during the 1980s.

Furthermore, the creativity they recognized was more in terms of form than content. The advent of postmodern and postcolonial theories precipitated the second wave of autobiographical theory.

The second wave of theory responded to a changing conception of the self and brought into visibility narratives that had been hitherto neglected. The forms of autobiography that were studied proliferated, as alternative modes of self-narration were valued (though these alternative forms were still predominantly literary). The subject of autobiography was re-conceptualized as decentered and fragmented (Smith & Watson 2001). With the valuation of various forms of self-narrative as autobiography also came experiments in autobiographical writing. One famous example is Michel Leiris' autobiography (published in 4 volumes), *Rules of the Game* (trans. 1997). In this text Leiris suggests that self-study is actually the study of others. He also argues that memory and image interact to create a trace of an "I". That is, the action of putting memory to paper (or canvas, etc) creates a new self. This point is relevant to my discussion in Chapter 3 of autofictional practices in Diana Thorneycroft's photography. Experiments in autobiography by Leiris and others introduced some of the problems of self-representation in the context of a changing notion of subjectivity. The view that the "I" of autobiography was elusive, or an impersonation, was offered by some as evidence of the impossibility of autobiography (Smith & Watson 2001).

Notions of transcultural, diasporic, and hybrid subjectivity, were also brought to autobiographical theory. For example, theorists began to study the autobiographies by African-Americans and Latin-Americans.[8] During this time critics also began to study autobiographies written by criminals (while in jail) and women. As well, autobiographies like Goethe's *The Auto-Biography of Goethe. Truth and Poetry: From My Own Life* (1872) were re-read, for example, to find the 'gay' Goethe in the text. An expanded understanding of subjectivity, together with poststructural and postmodern thought, made both subjects and forms of autobiography substantially different in this second wave. Importantly, the

[8] See for example, Henry Louis Gates's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (1988) and Sylvia Molloy's *Autobiographical Writings in Spanish America: At Face Value* (1991).

notions of authenticity and truth were significantly challenged, leading the way for theorists to begin to engage the concept of autofiction. The second wave effectively challenged the notions of a unified subject, the transparency of texts, and the authority of autobiographers.

THIRD WAVE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY THEORY

The contemporary, or what I call the third wave of autobiographical theory, has emerged from the theorization of identity as performative.[9] Critics now look to the politics and agency of autobiographical subjects. This shift in emphasis has also meant that most critics no longer forcefully engage questions of 'truth' in autobiography, which is problematic given the ways the term autobiography is generally employed. The shift has brought attention to some non-literary forms of autobiography. Notably the collection *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Smith & Watson 2002) examines various non-traditional forms of autobiography (including photography, painting, and performance art), and argues that these women's autobiographies create hybrid identities at the interface of subject and text. Returning to the concept of prosthetic identity discussed in the Introduction, this self is not completely separate from, nor completely a part of, the person or text.

The notion of performativity underscores how autobiography is not a self-expressive act. The performative view is strongly influenced by the work of Judith Butler. In the introduction to *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) Butler defines performativity and argues "against any simplistic recourse to the essentialized differences of identity politics" (Smith & Watson 1998:34). The term performativity is meant to relate the "provisional and political nature, the 'gender trouble,' of identity formation" (*Ibid*). Performativity is "the power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration" (*Ibid*:368). "For Butler, an 'I' does not precede the social construction of gender identity; the 'I' comes into being through that social construction" (*Ibid*:34). As she explains, identity is "always coming into being through reiteration and being unfixed through the

[9] The third wave overlaps somewhat with the second wave, with some third wave texts appearing in the late 1980s. However, it took force in the mid-'90s.

'gaps and fissures' that emerge 'as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm' " Butler in Smith & Watson 1998:34).

The notion of performativity has usefully been employed in the study of autobiography. Texts have been read as personal performances with the understanding that an agent designed and acted out the performance. The emphasis on performance implies a certain degree of scepticism toward the truthfulness of autobiography. The text does not retell the truth but creates a truth through the performance. Growing out of this notion of performativity is an understanding of the role of the reader/audience of autobiography. The reader interprets the text relationally, or dialogically, through their own biography. That is, the interpretation of an autobiography is an intersubjective experience, wherein the reader interprets the life portrayed through their own. The result is that the life read is different for each reader. Reading autobiography is itself an autobiographical act.

The third wave of theory reflects a shift from the first wave's documentary view of autobiography to consider performativity, positionality, and dialogism. As Smith and Watson state:

> Theorizing performativity contests the notion of autobiography as the site of authentic identity. Theorizing positionality, with an emphasis on situatedness, contests the normative notion of a universal and transcendent autobiographical subject, autonomous and free. And theorizing dialogism contests the notion that self-narration is a monologic utterance of a solitary, introspective subject. All of these concepts enable more flexible reading practices and more inclusive approaches to the field of life narrative (2001:146).

Thus, the third wave reflects a relatively inclusive view of the autobiographical subject. Where might autobiography theory go from here? One suggestion is to focus on autobiographical ethics (Smith & Watson 1998). I am interested in this suggestion because I believe Diana Thorneycroft's work seeks to raise ethical questions and engage ethical issues. For instance, Smith and Watson discuss the ethical questions regarding the dynamic between the autobiographer and their

family and friends represented in the text.[10] Thorneycroft raises another ethical question, not discussed by Smith and Watson but by Richard Shusterman in *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (2000) and Michel Foucault in *The Care of the Self* (1984, trans. 1986). This is the ethic of self-care and self-improvement, one of the longest standing foci of the philosophical and ethical life. I discuss Foucault and Shusterman's work in greater detail in Chapter 3.

GENDER AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY[11]

The theorization of women's autobiography is scarcely two decades old, even though women have been writing autobiographies for at least two centuries, and other forms of life narrative for even longer. One of the reasons for this omission from the study of autobiography is that women's autobiographies did not, as mentioned earlier, fit the traditional autobiographical form. Another reason is that women did not possess the characteristics of the traditional autobiographical subject. Furthermore, women who attempted to write a traditional autobiography had to reconcile the tension of being true to their identity while at the same time trying to fit the mould of the autobiographer and maintaining the appropriate characteristics of a being a "lady".

Today women's autobiographies are a privileged site of interrogation. Contemporary and historical autobiographies written by women are widely studied. Early theorizing on women's autobiographies sought to revise notions of heroic identity and the transcendental, disembodied subject. For many theorists, the key issue in the study of women's autobiography is subject formation (Smith & Watson 1998:5). Smith and Watson credit Domna C. Stanton with opening up autobiography theory to an interest in women, that is, offering theory a gendered lens (2001). Stanton's 1984 collection *The Female Autograph* transformed the discourse of autobiography. Stanton and others argued that the autobiographical pact is gendered. In her essay "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" Stanton coined the term autogynography to suggest the centrality of gender to subjectivity and to account for the different genres of texts produced by women

[10] Thorneycroft does raise this question, but it is not my interest here.
[11] Most of the theorization on the intersection of gender and autobiography has focused on women.

autobiographers (1984).

The majority of the early works discussing the intersection of women and autobiography focused on the how life experience was fundamentally different for women. Unfortunately some research essentialized women by assuming that all women had similar experiences of living as women in the world. For example, Estelle C. Jelinek argued that women's lives were marked by discontinuity, while men's were coherent, and therefore this explained why a difference existed in the forms of narratives they wrote (*Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* 1980). While we cannot generalize, some theorists have suggested that autobiographies written by women tend to portray subjects that are more fluid (Smith & Watson 1998:10). Given the significant theorization of gender and sexuality in the 1990s, "the new geography of identity insists that we think about women writers in relation to a fluid matrix instead of a fixed binary of male/female or masculine/feminine. A more flexible critical practice will not regard gender difference as a priori [sic] and immutable" (*Ibid*:41).

Aside from subject formation, other strands of theorization have looked at how women have produced alternative forms of autobiography. Concern has also been given to the autobiographer's specificity of location. That is, theorists have moved outside Western narratives to examine, for example, postcolonial narratives.[12]

The material body has also been a central concern for theorists of women's autobiography. Drawing on Elizabeth Grosz's theorization of corporeal feminism (cf. 1994) Shirley Neuman in her essay, " 'An appearance walking in a forest the sexes burn': Autobiography and the Construction of the Feminine Body," presents some of the unique difficulties women autobiographers face (1994). She argues that autobiographies have not typically dealt with the body. Indeed, traditional western autobiographies are 'spiritual' that is, 'noncorporeal' (*Ibid*:294). Since women's experience of their bodies, their immanence, is frequently central to their self-concept and to their life story, to efface this aspect of their self is to produce an

[12] For example, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976) and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) are part of this canon.

incomplete, if not corrupt, autobiography. Unfortunately, however, to write about the body may keep the text from being fully accepted into academic circles or considered for canonization (*Ibid*).

Sidonie Smith has also written on the intersection of gender and autobiography. In Smith's case she does discuss men, to the extent that they are the normative subject in autobiography theory, but her focus is primarily on women. In her *Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (1987) she looks at the links between gender and genre considering how women have used the autobiographical form to negotiate their marginality, to bring their voices into literary history. Smith's second book to focus on women, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body* (1993), "explored the relationship between subjectivity and autobiographical practice by posing questions about how women, excluded from official discourse, use autobiography to 'talk back,' to embody subjectivity, and to inhabit and inflect a range of subjective 'I's' " (Smith & Watson 1998:16).

In the opening chapter of *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body* (1993) Smith traces the history of the universal subject through philosophical discourse, which she argues is related to the norm of masculinity in autobiography. Like Neuman (1994) and Grosz (1990, 1994), Smith discusses the problems women face with regard to embodiment and subjectivity within autobiographical texts. She argues, following from Bakhtin, that autobiographical subjects engage dialogically with cultural discourses, which in turn allow them to dislodge and refashion themselves. This argument is taken up later by Susanna Egan in *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999) and is considered in their definition of autofiction by Asselin and Lamoureux (2002a) in *Parachute* (no. 105).[13] The self-creative process of self-fashioning is central to the argument I make in Chapter 3 with regard to Diana Thorneycroft's autofictional practices.

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[13] In *Mirror Talk*, Egan takes up the dialogical strain of autobiography theory as she examines crisis narratives, autobiographies that deal with death, "to understand how, in moments of crisis and decentering, the double voicing, or mirror talk, of autobiographical acts 'affects both the one who speaks and the one who listens'" (Egan 1999:25 in Smith & Watson 2001:128).

In the chapter "The Bodies of Contemporary Autobiographical Practice," Sidonie Smith takes up feminist theorizations of the body. She questions why the specificity of the body remains largely absent from traditional autobiographies, while at the same time it is the "nearest home for the autobiographical subject, the very ground" upon which to verify identity (1993:128). Smith traces the politics of the body as it affects the production of autobiographical texts using a number of examples. Jo Spence's *Putting Myself in the Picture* is perhaps the most interesting (1986). Smith describes it as a project in self-portraiture, "as a means to self-knowledge and cultural critique" (*Ibid*:131). As I discuss in Chapter 2, Diana Thorneycroft's work also aims at cultural critique on one level.

One result of theorizing the intersection of gender and autobiography has been a change in vocabulary. More terms for, and forms of, autobiography are discussed, such as autogynography (Stanton 1984), or biomythography (Lorde 1982). As such, the term autobiography is used less frequently. Often the term autobiographical practice is employed; this shift relates to a changed understanding of the autobiographical subject (Smith & Watson 1998:29). It has also opened the door more widely to investigations of non-literary autobiographies. This area of theorization is still in its early stages, as compared to the theorization of gender and its expression in, and through, autobiography.

NON-LITERARY FORMS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It is important to bring autobiographical theory to the examination of autobiographical works that are not literary in form. This is because autobiographical theory may shed new light upon, or could offer a fresh interpretation of, these works. For example, sculptural self-portraits can benefit from an analysis that is not embedded in art historical theories and discourse. A collection published in 1988, *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, expanded the form of autobiography to include, for example, painted self-portraits and films (Brodzki & Schenck). However, the study of alternative autobiographical media did not take off as a result of this publication. A few books discussed the relationship between photography and autobiography, mainly by examining the ways in which photography has been used in autobiography, for example, Linda

Haverty Rugg's *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* 1997). Both (written forms of) autobiography and photography have been the predominant modes of recording lives for the past two centuries. As well, both media have been discussed in terms of how they problematically represent the world. Both forms have troubled relationships with referentiality, they can be revealing but are, in many ways, concealing.

It took just over a decade after the publication of *Life/Lines* for there to be enough interest to publish the 2002 collection *Interfaces* (Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, eds.), discussed above, which is the most significant contribution to the study of non-literary forms of autobiography. The editors argue forcefully for the inclusion of non-literary forms of autobiography in autobiography studies. In these non-literary forms, "the sign of the autobiographical is the identity of the name of the artist (on the painting, on the poster announcing an installation or performance) and the subject of the work" (Smith & Watson 2002:5). Smith and Watson encourage the use of autobiographical theory to shed light on works that have typically been examined through an art historical lens. These autobiographical interpretations will add nuance to an understanding of the art works; conversely the art works may do the same for autobiography theory.

Context for Interpretation: Gender Theory and Art by Women

The questions concerning gender and sexuality raised by Diana Thorneycroft's photographic self-portraits make an examination of her oeuvre valuable to discussions of identity. In particular, the ambiguous nature of her self-portraits makes them ripe for academic exploration. Alternatively, their ambiguous quality has also made them highly controversial among her audience and reviewers. Some of the issues this section will address are salient topics in the history of art by women and feminist art such as: self-portraiture, performance (of art and of identity), transformation art (from the 1970s), representation of the body, and gender constructs. The richness of her work, however, has permitted writers to discuss her art from the perspective of memory, or theories of surrealism and psychoanalysis, particularly in terms of the Oedipus complex.

In this section I will contextualize Thorneycroft's work by touching on some points in art history that relate to her work. Her work has been widely viewed as controversial. I would propose that the first reason relates to the nude/naked dichotomy. The nude/naked distinction as discussed by Lynda Nead (*The Female Nude*, 1992) and Helen McDonald (*Erotic Ambiguities*, 2001) suggests some reasons why Thorneycroft's work has been so hotly debated. Her naked self-presentation is, for some viewers, obscene and thus falls outside the realm of art. Her nudes are not in the tradition of high art. Instead, they are representations of a particular, real, body not represented for "display and delectation," and therefore are considered nakeds (Meskimmon 1996:4).[14] The second reason I suggest is, in Judith Butler's terms, the unspeakable nature of her representations. In this section I will sketch some of the relevant concepts, however, I address this issue in greater depth in Chapter 2.

Thorneycroft's depictions of sexual taboos and her troubling of gender stereotypes are frank and unapologetic. Many of her critics are clearly not comfortable with engaging the ideas she presents, which would force them to question their own identity or to open up discussion around the boundaries of identity and representation. Images of bondage and female nudity are certainly not absent from the contemporary imagescape, fashion advertisements found in magazines and on billboards are prevalent examples. Moreover, even within the realm of fine art, artists such as Helmut Newton have depicted women in ways comparable to Thorneycroft. This is to say that bondage and nudity are certainly not new to the art world. Thus, her images are not shocking simply because she is naked and/or she is tied up.

With photography's history of role-playing and transgression, and fine art's reverence of the female body and the nude, why is it that Thorneycroft's work remains difficult to digest? If nudity is not at issue, then is the suggestion of gender proliferation obscene? Especially in a time when cross-dressing and so-called gender-bending is certainly not absent from popular culture why is Thorneycroft's audience uncomfortable with her performance of masculinity and

[14] For further discussion of nudes and nakeds, see Chapter 2.

femininity? This issue will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter 2.

THE NUDE

In her book *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art* (2001), Helen McDonald examines the ways in which contemporary female artists have (re)conceptualized the female nude.[15] The notion of ambiguity is central to her study since, as she argues, "the female nude has given rise to an astonishing variety of ambiguities related to the construction of gender and identity" (McDonald 2001:7). Indeed, generally speaking, art is always ambiguous. Ambiguity, however, is not always seen as a good thing. One of McDonald's aims, then, is to show the ways in which ambiguity can be interpreted as positive. She delineates the ways female artists have contributed to broadening the definition of the classical nude by challenging patriarchal norms of representation to incorporate differences such as race and disability[16]. She argues that despite the increasing variety in the representation of female nakeds and nudes, an underlying conceptual ideal of the female body remains. This conceptual ideal has broadened the scope of representation to include a wide variety of differences such as, race, disability, sexuality, ethnicity, and gender. In her conclusion, she argues that while an ideal still exists for many feminist artists, it has enabled a positive re-visioning of the female nude in art. Therefore, ideals are not inherently positive or negative, but rather it is how they are taken up and appropriated by artists which makes them positive or not. With postfeminism and cyberfeminism having an influence on feminist art practices in the 1990s, McDonald speculates that the conceptual ideal may soon be abandoned.

McDonald defines ambiguity in the following way: "in the visual arts, ambiguity is an effect of representational processes, a complication, a blurring, an

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[15] According to Marsha Meskimmon, "The female nude, displayed in painting, sculpture and fine art photography and graphics, has come to connote beauty, wholeness and, in many ways, 'art' itself. The forms in which the female nude finds representation are highly stylized and have little to do with images of particular (individual) women's bodies. They are more often meant to be universal metaphors for masculine desire, creativity and culture" (1996:2).

[16] For example, Mary Duffy's *Cutting the Ties that Bind*, 1987, is an 8 panel series of photographs depicting a nude woman who does not have arms. Another example is Diana Thorneycroft's *Pietà (for Yvette)* (Plate 17), 1995, a triptych in which she performs as one of her past students, Yvette, who was confined to a wheelchair.

uncertainty or vagueness. It may be consciously intended, or it may occur as an accident or mistake" (2001:14). Given this definition, and the argument made in McDonald's book, Thorneycroft's work can be usefully interpreted in terms of ambiguity. Whether or not Thorneycroft intended her photographs to be ambiguous, they do complicate one's expectations and understanding of gender. Her viewers often remain uncertain of her intentions. For example, both through style and content, Thorneycroft's images blur boundaries. In terms of style, she blurs the lines between the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible. Stylistically her images are characterized by areas of sharp focus and areas that are dark and out of focus. In terms of content, she blurs the lines between masculine and feminine, male and female. For example, in the photograph *Untitled (She-boy)* (Plate 15), an androgynous character is depicted.[17] Beginning at the top of the photograph the character's mask is masculine, moving down to the chest and torso the body becomes ambiguous. That is, while the torso is not particularly feminine (read: shapely), the person appears to have small breasts. The person's muscular arms and legs are meant to reference masculinity. However, upon arriving at the person's pelvic area, the viewer discovers that there is no visible phallus. Beyond this the dolls placed on the bed beside the person suggest feminine interests. Thorneycroft deliberately constructed the scene to trouble viewer expectations (Brandt et al. 1994). The viewer is left thoroughly confused as to the gender of the person. The oscillation between masculine and feminine does not seem to confidently pull more in one direction or the other.

Thorneycroft has expressed her interest in confusing viewer expectations in a number of ways. One of the most provocative is her wish to provoke desire in her audience directed toward her ambiguous characters. For example, what feelings will a heterosexual woman experience in her attraction to the 'brother' in

[17] As Marsha Meskimmon has noted, other women artists have shown an interest in androgyny, particularly with respect to its liberating potential. "Where the women artists from the modern period...began to use the notion of androgynous creativity as the merging of masculine and feminine, women artists in the last few decades have been concerned to override such a binary thinking altogether. Their work and use of 'androgyny' stress the lack of fixed gender positions, rather than the mixing together of two poles. This assumption of androgyny as a position which permits us to think outside binary pairs has the potential to create liberating roles for women artists" (Meskimmon 1996:134).

Self-portrait (Brother Mask with Toy Gun) (Plate 1)? Upon discovering that the person is not in fact a biological male, will the viewer feel shame or disgust, or will they revel in a desire they were unaware of? I would like to suggest that one of the reasons some viewers of Thorneycroft's work react negatively is because their expectations and desires are challenged in visceral ways, that they cannot control. McDonald states that: "If art is to be seen as an extension to the body and as a point of mediation between the artist's body and that of the spectator, ambiguity is an effect of its being both an object for erotic display and an object of erotic, visual pleasure" (2001:14). It seems that erotic visual pleasure is not inherently a problem. The problem arises when spectators find themselves enjoying the erotic display of a body that undermines the ontological status of the sexual orientation they have built their identity upon.

SEX AND GENDER

Before continuing any further, it is useful to distinguish between the terms "sex" and "gender". Indeed, such a distinction is hard to draw as Butler (1990), among others, has pointed out. According to *Our Sexuality*, a leading textbook on the subject, sex is defined as "biological maleness or femaleness" (Crooks & Baur 2002:600). Gender, by contrast, is defined as "the psychological and sociocultural characteristics associated with our sex" (*Ibid*:597). Robert Crooks and Karla Baur attempt to clarify, by adding, "gender assumptions [relate to]...how people are likely to behave based on their maleness or femaleness" (*Ibid*). Thus, gender identity is "how one psychologically perceives oneself as either male or female" and does not necessarily correlate to one's sex (*Ibid*). That is, one may be biologically female while identifying as masculine. "Gender nonconformity" refers to either a lack of consistency in one's behaviour as masculine or feminine, or between one's sex and identified gender. Already it is clear that distinguishing between the two terms and the ways in which they are related is difficult. Indeed, even this well-respected textbook has difficulty on a few points. For instance, returning to the definition of gender we note that gender need not conform to the sex, however, if it does not, the person exhibits nonconformity. Thus there is an implicit norm that one's sex will correlate with one's gender if one is normal

(statistically, if not, socially). The authors use the term "gender dysphoria" to describe individuals in a state of "unhappiness with one's biological sex or gender role" (*Ibid*).

Crooks and Baur also dedicate a section of their text to a discussion of androgyny and hermaphrodicity. Androgyny is "a blending of typical male and female behaviours in one individual" (2002:595). Hence, it could be said that androgyny is a form of gender nonconformity. Intersexed individuals, are referred to as "pseudohermaphrodites," and are "individuals whose gonads match their chromosomal sex, but whose internal and external reproductive anatomy has a mixture of male and female structures or structures that are incompletely male or female" (*Ibid*:599). The authors also discuss a category of "exceedingly rare" individuals known as "true hermaphrodites"; these individuals "have both ovarian and testicular tissues in their bodies; their external genitalia are often a mixture of male and female structures" (*Ibid*:600).

Related to Butler's heterosexual matrix, elaborated in *Gender Trouble* (1990), the authors suggest that often sex, gender and desire correlate. However, they make the point of clarifying one can usually predict sexual orientation using the variable of gender identity (Crooks & Baur 2002:63).[18] For example, "a transsexual with a female identity...trapped in a man's body...(identified as male by society), is likely to be attracted to men" (*Ibid*).

While Crooks and Baur do an excellent job of distinguishing between sex and gender as they are commonly used, their discussion does not allude to the debates within feminism and queer studies as to the tenability of the distinctness of the terms. Indeed some feminists have begun using the word 'sex/gender' connecting the two with a slash. Judith Butler argues that like gender, sex is brought into relief by repeated acts (1990:157). She makes this argument long after defining gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of

[18] Indeed, as Biddy Martin suggests, it is difficult not to read gender and sexual identities as having "predictable contents" (1998:390). However, gender and sexual identities are "position[s] from which to speak" that "unsettle rather than...consolidate the boundaries around identity" (*Ibid* 1998:390).

substance, of a natural sort of being" (*Ibid*:43-44). At different points throughout *Gender Trouble*, Butler describes both sex and gender as categories of identity which seek to unify and regulate "an otherwise discontinuous set of attributes" (*Ibid*:146). By effectively defining the two in the same way she is trying, I would argue, to dismantle the notion that sex is prediscursive while gender is discursive. If anything, gender aids in establishing sex. She states: "This production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*" (*Ibid*:11). It can also be argued that Butler sees the terms as much less distinct than, for example, psychologists do.

In a practical sense, however, it is useful to distinguish between gender and sex. Thus, throughout this thesis I use the term "sex" with respect to the assumed or implied biological sex of the person, inferred by reference to the genitalia and secondary sexual characteristics. When I use "gender" I refer to the implied or assumed identification of the person as masculine or feminine (in some cases this may also include androgyny), which can be difficult to identify. In distinguishing between the two for the purpose of clarity, I remain firm in my belief that to understand the two as mutually exclusive is to misunderstand both.

ART BY WOMEN

Thorneycroft's work can be situated in a relatively short, however rich, history of women making art and feminist art. Within the domains of art by women and feminist art, Thorneycroft can be aligned with other artists and their interests in terms of her investigation of issues such as the representation of the body, self-portraiture, performance art, identity, gender and sexuality. I will begin with a discussion of the transformation art of the 1970s, which brought together and propelled many of these concerns.

Second wave feminism began to filter into the art world in the '70s, as issues that concerned feminists such as "body, soul, self and identity" became subjects of increasing interest to female artists (Lippard 1999:27). In particular, during the twentieth century, and especially since the '70s, women have been producing self-portraits which have challenged the genre and concepts of self in what has historically been a masculine tradition (Meskimmon 1996:1). Interest in

the body incited many women to re-vision the female body in art – to transform it into a woman's version of woman (cf. McDonald 2001). An interest in re-figuring and re-signifying the female body was coupled with the interest of many women artists in self-portraiture or in using the body as an artistic resource. Thus, the transformation of the body in art was also on another level self-transformation for artists. Self-transformation, in turn, suggested for many artists the ability, indeed inevitability, of identity play. Hence, the interests of some feminists in the body, self-representation, and identity play have long been intertwined. The boundaries of, and between body/ies, self, and identity were interrogated before Thorneycroft came onto the art scene. Both Martha Wilson and Adrian Piper produced photographs of themselves in drag, performing masculinity. A number of transformation artists used masks and techniques of cross-dressing as ways of extending the self. I will return to this point with regard to prosthetic identity and autofiction in Chapter 3.

While transformation art was certainly a way for artists to investigate personal change, transformation art was also often concerned with realizing wider public change; with challenging the status quo. Thus, Thorneycroft's work holds many affinities with transformation art and the work of women artists in the '70s. She has expressed a wish to provoke her audience into some form of change; in their perception of sex or of the stability of their identity. She hopes that her work will lead her audience to question their identity, gender norms, and the public/private division (Walsh 2000). Part of Thorneycroft's motivation in troubling gender is also to reveal the ways in which gender identification is a conflicting process. That is, even someone who "looks the part" of a woman, may feel conflicted about 'being' one. Her work questions the boundaries of, and between gender and sex. However, her work also presses against the boundaries between, object/subject (artist/model), viewer/viewed, history/memory, and performance/reality.

With regard to self-portraiture the '70s saw a rise in women using photography as a medium of expression. Photographic self-portraiture remains very popular among women artists – some would say it is a central part of

contemporary art (Gumpert 1999). Shelley Rice speculates that photography was popular with women in the '70s because it allowed women to try on many different roles, to temporarily escape their real-life situation (1999). Indeed, the history of photography has been aligned with the history of posing (or role-playing), and thus some researchers would also say that photography and performance have long been entwined (cf. Jay 1994).[19] Role-playing for the camera allows one to try out personal fantasies and to temporarily escape one's social situation and limitations. However limited one feels in their real life, their constructed life is as mobile as the imagination.

Shelley Rice has traced the history of twentieth century self-portraiture in the West, and argued it has become a "woman's issue in the arts" (1999:9). In an article discussing Cindy Sherman, Claude Cahun, and Maya Deren, she avoids a reductive reading of women's self-portraits as wish-fulfillment - a charge made innumerable times of Thorneycroft's work. Interpreting self-portraits as self-reflexive "ghettoize[s] the pictures within the female experience" (*Ibid*:24). Rice argues that the use of one's own body as subject is not simple self-expression, but could indeed be a mode of self-transcendence. Rice argues that by examining the work of these three artists we are able to reach back further than the '70s to see an interest by women in self-portraiture, gender identity, and photography's ability to help the artist question, push, and dismantle boundaries. Indeed, there have long been women working in similar veins as those pursued in the '70s, though, perhaps not in great numbers. It is clear that Thorneycroft's work takes up many of the salient issues in the history of art by women. The next chapter discusses Thorneycroft's work and selected interpretations of it.

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[19] In his article "Posing: Autobiography and the Subject of Photography" Jay explores the role of visual memory in autobiographical writing and self-identity (1994). To this end he discusses photographs since subjects often come to be "defined by a photograph" but more importantly because he posits a "creative, constitutive relationship" between image and identity in autobiographical texts (*Ibid*:191). His argument is particularly relevant in the context of Celia Lury's *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (1998), which argues that a prosthetic identity emerges from this constitutive relationship. I discuss prosthetic identity and Jay's article in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2: DIANA THORNEYCROFT: HER BIOGRAPHY, OEUVRE AND ITS INTERPRETATION

"If gender identity, and identity more generally, is a reiterative process of coming into being and simultaneously failing to cohere, then masculinity and femininity are not fixed attributes of the 'self.' 'Woman' is effectively a style of the flesh, a materialization, that can also be dematerialized, in unconscious and conscious iterations."

Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, "Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices," 1998:34

" 'in-betweenness'...puts the being of gendered identity into question."

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, *1999:xi*

"Thorneycroft's large cibachromes have caused controversy because of their overt, yet non-objectified representations of sexuality. The images are sensuous, but do not permit traditional readings of gender; their multiplicity and excess threaten to overwhelm the spectator and enable new concepts of the sexual body to emerge. Furthermore, the images are full of prosthetic bodies, masks and references to animals, which fact again [sic] requires the spectator to rethink the relationships between bodies, gender, technology, pleasure and sexuality."

Marsha Meskimmon, The Art of Reflection, *1996:134-135*

Diana Thorneycroft uses her life and her body as the subject of her photographs. Taking her body as a motif in her work, she re-constructs, re-fashions and re-imagines herself(ves). Her self-portraits are often discussed as autobiographical, but I would argue they fall into the category of autofiction. Autofiction is a way of transforming, shaping, and re-fashioning the self. Perceptual prostheses, such as photographs, enable individuals to experiment with their identity, to "[dissociate] from his or her biography – consciousness and memories...[and] acquire a *prosthetic auto / biography* or biographies, of his or her own choosing" (Lury 1998:85, italics in original). Thus prosthetic culture has implications for the study of identity, indeed, it necessitates new conceptions of identity. While I question the status of autobiography *vis à vis* fiction (see Chapter 3), I will nevertheless indulge in a brief biographical sketch of Diana Thorneycroft's life.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Thorneycroft, a white woman, was born in Claresholm, Alberta in 1956 and currently resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she teaches drawing at the School of Art at the University of Manitoba (Walsh 2000:119). She studied Fine Arts at the University of Manitoba at the Bachelor's level (1979) and then earned a Master of Arts from the University of Wisconsin in Madison (1980). Thorneycroft's art training is frequently mentioned in reviews of her work. It is my assumption that this is a way of justifying her status as an artist, and of sanctifying her work as art.[20] My intention here is to simply give the reader information that is relevant to interpreting her photographs.

Thorneycroft has had numerous solo and group exhibitions. The photographs discussed in this project are from her solo exhibitions: *Diana Thorneycroft: The body, its lesson and camouflage* (2000-2002), *slytod* (1997), *a slow remembering* (1994-1996), and *Touching: The Self* (1991-1993).[21] Since her 2000 retrospective, *The body, its lesson and camouflage*, she has moved away from self-portraiture and is now photographing dolls in colour. Thorneycroft has also been included in over 25 group exhibitions including: *Search, Image and Identity: Voicing Our West* (1993-1996), *The Female Imaginary* (1995), *The Pressing of Flesh* (1993-1994), and *Politics of Gender: Personal Mythologies* (1992). These titles allude to the ways in which curators have presented her work.

Her inclusion in *The Pressing of Flesh* (1993-1994) is, perhaps, the most interesting. This exhibit presented an investigation of male nudes. And according to the press release: "For these artists, significant investigation of the male nude is central to their work, rather than incidental" (Gallery TPW & Gallery 44, not dated, circa February 1993). Thorneycroft's self-portraits as her brother or father (and other male figures) are taken seriously as explorations of the male body (see Plates 1 and 2). That the same photographs can be included in exhibitions about women and about men is a credit to her ability to resignify the body (it is also

[20] While this is a convention in art historical discourse, it not as common for newspaper articles to do so.

[21] Slytod is an invented work from Thorneycroft's childhood. It is a name she gave to a game she played in the woods with her brother (Caws 2000).

worth noting that these photographs were not intended as autobiographical . Her photographs, like the others in the exhibit, "speak of [the] experience of individual men's bodies, and the failure of traditional Western culture to represent or accommodate diverse often critical perspectives" (*Ibid*). The same can certainly be said of her photographs of herself as female characters (see Plates 3 and 4). They challenge the dominant definitions of sex and gender. Her most challenging photographs in this regard are those in which she wears props that denote hermaphrodicity, which were more frequent in her early work (see Plate 5). By her 1997 show, she took greater interest in androgyny (see Plate 8). In these photographs she attempted to make the sex/gender of the person ambiguous.[22] Rather than emphasizing the sexual organs using prosthetics, she uses shadow and light play to obscure or de-emphasize the sexual organs.[23] Thus, she makes it difficult for her audience to clearly or easily assess the gender of a character by way of their sex organs. This point emphasizes for Thorneycroft's audience that sex organs are fallible tools for determining gender. Thorneycroft's continual challenge of the boundaries of sexual definition has not been universally accepted with open arms. Indeed, for many people she is considered a controversial, if not mentally unstable, artist for exploring these very issues, though these issues are certainly not new to the world of art.[24]

Thorneycroft grew up in a military family, and lived in a number of different places during her formative years. Living on military bases, she often played in wooded areas. Her father was a pilot, and later on her brother became one too. Her mother worked in the home, as many military wives then did. In her infancy Thorneycroft was hospitalized a number of times. Many of the

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[22] Although Thorneycroft did produce photographs of androgynous characters from the beginning, she eventually abandoned the hermaphrodite and concentrated on androgyny. Thorneycroft's work with the concept of androgyny reflects the trend in the last few decades "to override...binary thinking altogether. [Women artists'] work and use of 'androgyny' stress the lack of fixed gender positions, rather than the mixing together of two poles. This assumption of androgyny as a position which permits us to think outside binary pairs has the potential to create liberating roles for women artists" (Meskimmon 1996:134).

[23] Whereas hermaphrodicity is often associated with biological sex and sex organs, androgyny is associated with gender and the de-emphasis of sex organs, see discussion of sex and gender in Chapter 1.

[24] See pages 47-48 for further discussion of this point.

totems and themes in her work are inspired by childhood memories. For instance, she uses planes in images of her brother and father. The photographs that depict medical technology were, at least initially, influenced by her experiences in hospitals as a young child. The details of Thorneycroft's biography can only be taken so far in interpreting meaning from her photographs. They are only an entry point for the viewer, just as they are the initial inspiration for a photograph for Thorneycroft.[25] Besides memory being a tenuous archive, Thorneycroft often admits that much of what she depicts in her photographs are products of her imagination. Some aspects of her sets are completely arbitrary or imagined (Thorneycroft 1991).

Diana Thorneycroft began photographing herself because, according to her artist statement for *Touching: The Self*, she could not afford to pay models. Looking at the photographs of herself she was fascinated by how her body seemed to be able to "suggest different characters" (Ruttan 1991:32). She saw that her androgynous build could look both male and female. She also saw resemblances between herself and other members of her family. The possibilities of playing with different characters excited her and she began taking photographs with, in her own words, sexual props and masks that accentuated the similarities she saw (Thorneycroft 1991). The masks she wore were made from photographs of different family members (see Plates 1, 2, and 6). As Barthes and many others have noted, the photograph represents the advent of oneself as other (1981). For Thorneycroft, the full meaning of this statement is true. That is, she sees herself from outside, as an other, but she also sees herself as another person entirely. Perhaps, then, Barthes statement could be amended in the following way: the photograph is the advent of myself as others. Thorneycroft not only slips outside to view herself, but to view her selves.

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[25] Smith and Watson argue similarly of Tracey Emin's work (2002). "Emin's assemblage enacts multiple autobiographical performances in both visual and verbal modes. The bed becomes a memory museum to a specific time and place in her past. These material artifacts seemingly attest to her authentic citation of her past" (2002:1). Material artifacts "emit an aura of authenticity," while they are often used as decoys or in imaginative ways that run contrary to their history (*Ibid*:3).

Thorneycroft's emphasis on the secondary sexual characteristics of her subjects seems to encourage "the eye of the other" (Brunner 1991:10). Brunner refers literally to the eye that objectifies, but I understand Thorneycroft's work as encouraging another eye; the mind's eye, one's imagination. Thus, Thorneycroft's audience is called upon to both objectify and subjectify her. Her audience must imagine a biography for the subject in the photograph; they are asked to transcend her immanence. While the apparent biological sex of her subjects is salient, the viewer is asked to wonder about the subject's identity far beyond sex. What is the history of this subject who is represented in such an abnormal way, for example, in bondage (see Plate 7), or in an F-18 mask (see Plate 8)? The history of this subject "is buried as if under a layer of snow" (Kracauer 1995:51). The uncovering of this history is left to the imagination of the audience.

Diana Thorneycroft has adopted her body as sculptural material from which she builds identities. In this sense, she treats herself as both object and subject of her work. She sees herself as both an other and as a manipulable object. Astrid Brunner noted similarly: "The oft-discussed distinction of 'subject/object' (of 'man/woman') is continually broken down by the simple device of the artist photographing herself" (1991:10). Through photography Thorneycroft is able to record her performance of different identities. In fact, Thorneycroft herself refers to her photo sessions as performances (Ruttan 1991). Élisabeth Wetterwald has also noted photography's ability to infinitely reproduce performances (2002). The theatrical lighting in her photographs also emphasizes the 'acted out' nature of her identities.

In an issue of *Parachute* (No. 105, January-March 2002), the contributors explore the concepts of self-fashioning and autofiction. The contributors argue convincingly that people necessarily take on "meaning in relation to the other" (Pontbriand 2002:6; cf. Egan 1999, Eakin 1999).[26] A fiction emerges from the meeting of self and other. This fiction is created through the process of the self re-imagining itself by appropriating elements of the other. This can be done by

[26] The self is already self and other, however, in this case the other may be oneself (that is, genuinely seen as other).

"exploring the self's own strangeness," as Thorneycroft clearly does, or by appropriating "fragments of others and our surroundings" *Ibid*. The contributors argue that the contemporary excess of imagery necessarily creates many options for re-imagining the self. That is to say, people are documented, in photographs and on video, fairly regularly. It is safe to guess that most people own several hundred photographs of themselves and have likely been the subject of at least a few home videos. Therefore, people have many opportunities to examine their image, to reflect on how they have been represented, and how this has changed over their lifetime. As well, they can imagine how they would like to change their image, how they would like to be represented in future documentations, how they could be other. Thus, identity formation is fundamentally different contemporarily as we have so many more opportunities to view our own image and to use these images to reflect upon who we are. Photography, then, contributes to "novel configurations of personhood, self-knowledge and truth" (Lury 1998:2). Autofiction and practices of self-fashioning will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter 3.

OEUVRE: BODIES OF/IN WORK

The photographs discussed in this project draw from Diana Thorneycroft's four main solo exhibitions (*Touching: The Self*, *a slow remembering*, *slytod* and *Diana Thorneycroft: The body, its lesson and camouflage*). The photographs exhibited in each show are similar in style and lighting technique. However, the content of the photographs in each exhibition have taken up different, but related, themes. The first, *Touching: The Self*, focuses mainly on "family" portraits. These photographs overtly investigate identity, for example by taking up questions of androgyny, bisexuality, Freud's Oedipus Complex and gender-typing. In her next body of work, *a slow remembering*, Thorneycroft began to more clearly depict confinement or, what some consider, bondage (see Plates 9 and 10). She began to use a wider array of techniques of masking the face, such as veils or masks, which completely hid facial features, like, the F-18 mask (Plate 8). In *slytod* she used animal carcasses and remains more often in her sets (see Plate 7) and for costuming (see Plate 11). She briefly used models for some of the photographs

exhibited in *slytod* (for example, Plate 12). She did not continue to use models, however, because she did not like being behind the camera where she had more control over the outcome of the photograph (Enright 2000). Finally, in *The body, its lesson and camouflage*, she made medical imagery (conflated with torture) her focus (for example, Plate 13). Here Thorneycroft rarely used prosthetics or traditional masks, although she frequently blinded herself with medical gauze.

Thorneycroft's earlier work appears to address identity playfully. In her later works it seems easier to conclude that the images are constructed from traumatic childhood memories, than to say that she is engaging in play. Critics, I believe, prefer to conclude that her images, particularly those depicting 'torture', are inspired by memories because it is much too upsetting to suggest that they are figments of her imagination or, worse yet, fantasies. By insisting on memory as inspiration, rather than imagination, critics can emphasize the artistic nature of Thorneycroft's work. It is somehow easier to call her an artist when her images are not considered erotic but are instead recreations of trauma. Second, it is upsetting to think that Thorneycroft imagined these events herself rather than being the unfortunate victim of them.

As Vicki Goldberg (2000) and many others have noted, Thorneycroft's work takes issue with boundaries. Transgressing the boundaries of identity is Thorneycroft's overt way of transgressing the boundaries of comfort, the boundaries of art (for example between artist and audience), and the boundaries of fact and fiction. As Goldberg points out, Thorneycroft is not the first to cross these lines. Nevertheless, she is still considered extremely provocative and controversial, particularly in reviews found in newspapers.[27] Goldberg thinks this is so because Thorneycroft violates "viewers['s] expectations of respect for privacy...insisting that onlookers confront their own fantasies while they confront the photographer's" (2000:14). This confrontation makes most viewers uncomfortable in a way they have not experienced before.

Thorneycroft's transgressing, stretching, and dismantling of boundaries coheres perfectly, in my opinion, with questions of gender identity. Her move

[27] I note examples of these below.

from earlier investigations of sexual identity in her photographs that emphasized sexual organs using prosthetics to her later, more androgynous de-emphasis of sexual organs, demonstrates that gender and sexual orientation are not binaristic constructs. The concepts exist on a continuum, or in surrealist terms, are about in-betweeness.[28] Recent theorizations of sexual orientation and gender by psychologists have considered both concepts dialectically (Crooks & Baur 2002). For example, one's gender is a matter of personal identification, which stems from one's personal ratio of femininity and masculinity. A person who is androgynous is not unfeminine or unmasculine, but instead is a person who exhibits the 'best' characteristics of both ends of the spectrum.[29] Thorneycroft's photographs emphasize the in-betweenness of identity; identification is always in degrees, like points on a continuum.

Images that depict sex and violence, even for the infrequent museum visitor, are hardly new to anyone's imagescape. Indeed, sex and violence are the stock and trade of fashion magazines and advertising. Thus, Thorneycroft's work is not shocking for its content alone. Rather, her photographs disturb the viewer, in part, because they are self-portraits. Many viewers have difficulty with her work because it forces them to contemplate whether Thorneycroft gets pleasure by presenting herself in this manner to an anonymous public. The coupling of pleasure with taboo is exciting for some, but unsettling for many. With photographs, typically, one does not have the luxury of denying the event took place, as with paintings. The viewer must accept these events took place, and in Thorneycroft's case, by choice. Viewers, too, are not accustomed to seeing women pretending to be men. Both cross-dressing and sex reassignment surgery are more common in the male to female direction (Crooks & Baur 2002). Unlike Cindy Sherman's portraits of herself as men, all of Thorneycroft's depictions are

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[28] As Mary Ann Caws clarifies, "One of the primary inventions of the surrealist imagination is the in-between state of the swinging door – between in and out, night and day, death and life…the surrealist world is an in-betweenness all its own" (2000:20). That is, one area of interest for surrealism is the space in-between things or states of being.

[29] Similarly, sexual orientation is determined using two continua: degree of attraction to other sex partners and degree of attraction to same sex partners (Crooks & Baur 2002). For example, someone high on both scales is considered bisexual, and someone low on the same sex scale and high on the other sex scale is considered heterosexual.

unclothed. Nudes are always in some way, subversive (cf. McDonald 2001). Thus, Thorneycroft potentially invades another comfort zone in this regard. Her willingness to probe her fears and fantasies, to bare her body and soul (doubly self-exposed), to place herself in vulnerable positions, and to make all of this a spectacle, is perhaps what upsets and confuses viewers. It is also extremely courageous and, in my view, honourable, because she raises so many questions concerning identity and agency, which will be taken up in Chapter 3.

SELECTED RESPONSES FROM CRITICS

Since her first exhibition of photographs, *Touching: The Self*, exhibited from 1991 until 1993, Thorneycroft's work has been at the centre of a number of public debates concerning pornography, obscenity, and public funding for the arts.[30] Popular discussion of her work has focussed on, for the most part, the controversial nature and reception of her work, rather than attempting a critical engagement with the issues Thorneycroft presents. There are notable exceptions to this; academics such as Martha Langford have produced thoughtful critiques of Thorneycroft's work.[31] However, the number of writers who are willing to engage Thorneycroft's work are few and far between. Even some of the more thoughtful articles on Thorneycroft remain stuck on discussing why her work is controversial. For example, Goldberg discusses the history of photography and transgression to try to explain why Thorneycroft is controversial. Yet she never moves far beyond this point to interpret any photographs in particular or to suggest other ways into her work (2000). Granted, this project does focus in a substantial way on why Thorneycroft's work is controversial, but I do so as a way of suggesting the need for closure on this issue, and also as a way of digging deeper into the potential meanings of Thorneycroft's work.

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[30] I mention these debates since they are the ones relevant to the photographs I will discuss in this thesis. However, with respect to some of her more recent work, she has been attacked regarding censorship and copyright issues. For example, some of her drawings of familiar children's television characters, such as Bert from Sesame Street, could not be exhibited in Canada, but were featured in an exhibit entitled *Illegal Art* in New York. Indeed, I have come to wonder if Thorneycroft has ostensibly been labelled a 'controversial artist' and that to a certain extent her work will be interpreted through this lens by most of her reviewers.

[31] For example, see Langford's "In the Playground of Allusion" (1998).

In this section I will not focus exclusively on whether or not her work is controversial. Rather, I will suggest some reasons why discussion has been directed this way. I will consider why discussion of her work has been displaced by extended, and unproductive, debates on its controversiality. My argument is that Thorneycroft's audience's discomfort with her photographs has sidetracked engagement with the issues she raises into such questions as to whether her work is too obscene to exhibit in public institutions or if it is erotica masquerading as art. Effectively, the vast majority of lay critics have not arrived at the stage of engaging her work; they have remained one step removed in a domain obsessed with propriety and the maintenance of the traditional boundaries of fine art practice.[32]

Although some discussion of Thorneycroft's work has appeared in the popular press, her work has not received much attention in academia. This is in part because she has only been exhibiting since 1987. However, her work has been treated relatively extensively in newspapers. I hope the argument proffered here will contribute to a growing body of literature on Diana Thorneycroft and offer a new avenue into her work that avoids the reductive readings characteristic of many of her reviewers by instead engaging the 'difficult' issues of androgyny, hermaphrodicity, gender identity, and sexuality. As well, in Chapter 3, I use Thorneycroft's oeuvre as a way of examining the usefulness of autofiction. I would argue that Thorneycroft's self-portraits always carry an undertone of agency, of performative self-fashioning.

The usual review of Thorneycroft's work includes a dry retelling of the exhibition (granted in newspapers this is somewhat typical), wherein the medium is named and the exhibition space is described. The author often alludes to Thorneycroft's past or present involvement in controversies. If the reviews discuss the artwork at all they typically say it is "challenging," "inexplicable," "difficult," and so on. Rarely do the articles arrive at the point of discussing possible meanings or offering interpretations of the work. In some cases, the articles include short quotes from the artist's statement. Most often the quote chosen is

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[32] As noted previously there are exceptions to this, notably essays by Martha Langford (1998), Robert Enright (2000), and Chris Townsend (1998). However, I maintain that the majority of critics have not engaged with her work critically.

the one regarding "our inherent bisexual condition." from her first artist statement of 1991. It seems that for some reviewers her allusion to bisexuality somehow helps explain the confusing images she constructs in her photographs.[33] As Judith Butler put it "the performance of gender subversion can indicate nothing about sexuality or sexual practice" (1999:xiv). That is, "the distribution of hetero-, bi-, and homo-inclinations cannot be predictably mapped onto the travels of gender bending or changing" (*Ibid*).

Ann Duncan's article, "They're Willing to Take Chances in St. Hyacinthe," provides a typical example of how Thorneycroft's work has been taken up by journalists and art critics writing for dailies (Duncan 1995). Duncan's review of the group exhibition, *Le déchirement des anges* (*Ibid*:15), at Expression Gallery in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, proceeds in the following way: 1) she begins (before naming the exhibit) that Expression is known for "putting on gutsy, risk-taking exhibitions," thus priming her readers for a reading of Thorneycroft as controversial; 2) she names Thorneycroft and notes she made a "fascinating" series of black and white self-portraits; 3) she proceeds to critique the hanging of the show and the exhibition space; 4) returning to Thorneycroft, Duncan notes again that Thorneycroft makes self-portraits which are "bizarre" and "surreal", a mixture of the "inexplicable", and that in some cases Thorneycroft "portrays herself as a man" using her "strangely ambiguous body"; 5) she uses another paragraph to describe the exhibition space; 6) to conclude she congratulates the curator Michel Groleau for taking such a risk in exhibiting this show (*Ibid*). Duncan never really explains what is risky about the show. The only piece of evidence that Duncan offers to her audience is that Thorneycroft cross-dresses.

In another review, by Vivian Tors, entitled "Bodily Paradox," Tors reviews Thorneycroft's retrospective exhibition, *Diana Thorneycroft: The body, its lesson and camouflage*, at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (2001). Tors attempts to offer some insight into the meanings of the photographs and encourages her readers to try to go beyond what is initially "sick" and

[33] Or rather, the reviewer's lack of understanding of bisexuality disallows them any segue into the work.

"infuriating[ly] ambigu[ous]". She states that while you might feel "repel[led]" by the photos, if you put some effort in you might "begin" to see the "integrity" of the work (*Ibid*). These two reviews characterize the treatment of Thorneycroft in newspapers and online reviews. They superficially engage the material, and focus upon either the difficulty of understanding Thorneycroft's work, the controversial nature of her work, or both.

Thorneycroft's most controversial exhibition was *Monstrance* (1999), an installation of decaying rabbit carcasses in a forest. The installation was designed to question "the apparent contradiction between nature's insistence on returning lifeless bodies to earth, and humankind's fascination with and reverence for preserved bodily remains" (Canada Council for the Arts, Sept. 1999). The public outrage was so great that the Canada Council for the Arts felt they had to issue four press releases to justify their funding of her work.[34] The press releases addressed questions posed to the council including: "Is this art?" and "why should the Canada Council fund this kind of thing?" (*Ibid*). A review of the press releases makes clear that the Council did not defend her work so much as they defended their selection process.[35] In the end, the Council stated that they funded her because of the scope of her work and her reputation as an artist. They do not ever address the merit of her work, but simply suggest that art is about "beauty and truth, but [that] the truth is not necessarily beautiful" (Canada Council for the Arts, Nov. 1999).

Up to this point I have alluded to a number of the reasons why Thorneycroft's work is interpreted as controversial. And for most of these I have countered by saying the charges brought against her are unfair: nudity is not new, bondage is not new, nor is transgression, gender play, and so on. Some writers have suggested reasons why Thorneycroft's work is controversial, and two of these are worth closer consideration. The first suggestion was offered by Vicki

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[34] Possibly more than 4, these are the ones I found still posted on the Internet.

[35] Therefore, one could read between the lines that they regretted funding her, but must stick to their (usually) effective bureaucratic processes of selection.

Goldberg (2000).[36] Goldberg argues that what remains transgressive is the way in which Thorneycroft impinges upon people's comfort zone.[37] She does this by "violating viewers['s] expectations of privacy" by "insisting that onlookers confront their...fantasies" (*Ibid*:14). I have already discussed some of the ways in which Thorneycroft does both these things.

The second suggestion was offered by Jan Allen in the curatorial essay for *The Female Imaginary* (1994-95). Allen makes an argument similar to Goldberg's: Thorneycroft arouses anger by forcing her viewers to probe their own "psychological space," since the photographs "destabilize the sexual identity of the viewer," and thus "provok[e] unacceptable desire" (1994:14). Essentially, Allen concludes, the "loss of sexual difference" is the most disturbing aspect for Thorneycroft's audience (*Ibid*). That is, the inability of her viewers to distinguish between the male and female, masculine and feminine characters in the photographs undermines the sex and gender schemas her viewers have used to build their own identities.

NUDES AND NAKEDS

I would argue that part of the reason why Thorneycroft's work is controversial is related to the fact that the photographs are nakeds. Quickly, then I will draw a distinction between nudes and nakeds. I will also define the obscene body, since charges of obscenity have been lodged against Thorneycroft. In her book, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (1992), Lynda Nead explains that the nude is historical, academic, singular, and exclusive. Drawing on Nead's distinction, McDonald states that the nude is the "body in representation" (McDonald 2001:1). The "transformation from the naked to the nude is thus the shift from the actual to the ideal" (Nead 1992:14). Therefore, the naked is what the nude is not: a real person, with a historical and social context. For Nead, the naked is freer from mediation, it is liberated (*Ibid*:15). From this definition we can

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[36] While I do have some problems with this article, which appeared in the catalogue for Thorneycroft's retrospective exhibition, Goldberg does offer a useful interpretation. See pages 44-45 for a short discussion of Goldberg's article.

[37] Here Goldberg basically implies that transgression makes for controversy, and thus, Thorneycroft's transgressive moves are what make her work controversial.

see that Nead wishes to revalue the naked.[38] The obscene body is "a body without borders or containment," it "moves and arouses the viewer rather than bringing about stillness and wholeness" as a nude does (*Ibid*:2).

Thorneycroft's photographs, therefore, are nakeds. Her characters are often of real people, the model, in most cases, is named and there is historical and social information available. Not only are Thorneycroft's photographs nakeds, which are not as easily accepted into the canon of fine art, they are nakeds of herself. That is, she has chosen to portray herself in a challenging way. When the artist is also the model, as with self-portraiture, this asserts "that the nude is the artist, not just an unnamed 'model' to be viewed as an object produced by the artist on the canvas" (Meskimmon 1996:2). According to Meskimmon, historically:

> The power of the artist (usually male) over the nude female model was multiple; he had economic control, 'aesthetic' or representational control and social control within the economy of the studio. When women artists approached the subject of the nude female in representation, they frequently subverted these power politics by representing themselves. This confounds the simple constructions of the difference between the subject and the object of the work (the woman artist is both) and forecloses on the traditional disempowerment of the female nude (*Ibid*:2).

Thus, it is easy to see why her photographs are controversial, but also why they are potentially liberating. As well, it is possible to say, given the discussion of ambiguity (see Chapter 1), that Thorneycroft's photographs are obscene. Their placement within the realm of the obscene (as traditionally defined) suggests another reason why her photographs are controversial. She is not merely naked, her photographs push or even lack boundaries. For many people, it is much more challenging to understand why an artist would choose to represent herself in transgressive ways, ways that might be used to draw conclusions about her identity. It is easier for some viewers to accept nakeds produced using hired models, since one can conclude that the model(s) had little control over the way they were depicted (which, of course is a tenuous idea).

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[38] Other writers have attempted a similar revaluation, for example Berger (1972).

To complicate things further, Thorneycroft has not simply undressed and laid herself upon a bed. Her poses are striking and imposing; she opens her legs, and represents herself in taboo situations (Plates 5, 7, and 14). That an artist would choose to present herself this way to the public is clearly challenging for many viewers. Thus, the obvious conclusion, for some, is that only someone who is mentally unstable or trying to pull a fast one (trying to make a mockery of art galleries, contemporary art or public funding) would do such a thing. Either way, the conclusion is that the work should not be in a gallery, nor be publicly funded.

THE UNSPEAKABLE

Another reason why her work may be considered controversial is that it gives voice to the unspeakable. It is somewhat obvious at this point in the discussion why I would argue this. However, to return briefly to an earlier example, the unspeakable nature of her work is made quite evident in the review by Duncan, who described her work as "inexplicable" (1995). In the following section I will discuss Judith Butler's notion of the unspeakable as it relates to Thorneycroft's work. I argue that her forceful representations emphasize the ostensible slippage between the (unattainable) ideal of a coherent identity, and the everyday circumstances and bodies people live with and use to communicate.

Butler's theory of the performativity of gender is elaborated in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), where she defines the heterosexual matrix, which aligns sex, gender and desire in a rigid and naturalizing manner. This matrix enables certain identities to be spoken while others remain unspeakable. Among these unspeakable identities are Thorneycroft's images of hermaphrodites.[39] Butler problematizes gender, arguing for its performative quality; her troubling of gender extends, however, to other categories of identity, including sex and race. Butler argues convincingly against

[39] It is useful, however difficult, to clarify my point. The representations that Thorneycroft produced are of identities that have (literally) been spoken, but are largely still (pragmatically) unspeakable. Clearly, we cannot even talk about truly unspeakable identities since this would be impossible linguistically. Thorneycroft's representations, however, are of rarely spoken identities, of identities not acknowledged in "the ordinary" and "the everyday". Furthermore, once they have been "spoken", many people remain unwilling to "speak about" them.

the idea that sex is pre-cultural, while gender is cultural. Both, she argues, are products of the matrix and hence are cultural.

In the preface published in the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler discusses the need to open up possibilities for identities that are " 'impossible', illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate" (Butler 1999:vii.); a message she hoped to have made clear in her text, published ten years earlier. In arguing to open up possibilities, Butler clarifies that she is not sanctioning or condoning any and all subversive or minority identities. However, for her, it is important that "we ought to be able to think them before we come to any kinds of conclusions about them" (*Ibid*). In a passage that helped solidify my position with regard to the treatment of Thorneycroft's work, Butler states:

> What worried me most [while writing *Gender Trouble*] were the ways that the panic in the face of such practices rendered them unthinkable. Is the breakdown of gender binaries, for instance, so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think gender? (*Ibid*:vii).

The heterosexual matrix is productive of identities but also constitutes what is thinkable, meaning what can be represented or spoken. Identities are created, and are thus made legible and intelligible, through culture. Thorneycroft's work clearly speaks of and for bodies that are not part of the matrix. But given what we know about the responses to her project, I am curious to know whether she is actually destabilizing the matrix. While she can bring into visual culture representations that rub against various norms, it seems that a significant portion of her audience does not engage with the representations. In Thorneycroft's case, it is clear to me that the majority of her audience is more interested in the fact that her work is controversial, than in its social value or the questions it raises. A large part of her audience remains one step removed from the representations, in a safer zone concerned with discussing *that* her work is controversial rather than *why* it is controversial. Discussing why it is controversial would require the discussant to question her/his identity, something that is unspeakable within the heterosexual matrix. Are the representations produced by Thorneycroft literally unthinkable, unspeakable, and unable to be engaged? Is

such panic incited by her troubling the binaries of identity that "primary engagement" is completely precluded from possibility? Does her audience lack the vocabulary and conceptual frameworks to recognize and engage with her ideas?[40] The qualitative nature of some of the responses to her works - related to public funding, censorship, obscenity and indecency - suggest that many critics, even some critics who have been trained in art history and identity politics, tend toward a secondary engagement. Can Thorneycroft's attempts to question the matrix only be interpreted as deviations from it, rather than as the possibility of new, alternative or different and parallel matrices?

As I hope to have shown, the great richness of Thorneycroft's work leaves its interpretation fairly wide open. Indeed, she states herself that she hopes her audience will come up with unanticipated or contradictory readings of her work (Brandt et al. 1994). The communicative amplitude of her work is just one reason why writing and discussing it is so valuable. In a time when many people prefer television to the local gallery, it is great to have an artist that draws attention to the art world and brings people into the gallery.[41] Besides, one of the great indicators of art's power, for me, is its ability to challenge popular modes of thought, and to elicit fundamental questions about the discourse itself. The curator for *Monstrance,* Louise May, when faced with responding to the vandalism of Thorneycroft's installation noted that at the very least Thorneycroft's work was able to "excit[e] the public imagination" (www.cbc.ca 1999).[42] However, I would also argue that one of the most valuable aspects of Diana Thorneycroft's work is its insistent and consistent production of images that articulate the unspoken, or the rarely spoken. "Representation is always partial, yet its significance can be

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[40] Perhaps, then, Thorneycroft's photographs offer a way to begin building a vocabulary and framework for speaking about the hitherto unspoken.

[41] Or, at least, people go online for a virtual viewing of her work.

[42] *Monstrance* (1999) was an installation Thorneycroft mounted in a Winnipeg forest. Rotting and dried rabbit carcasses were hung from trees. Thorneycroft's intention was to raise questions with regard to the contradiction between the natural process of decomposition and people's insistence on preserving the dead. As well, she sought to bring attention to the ambivalent relationship people have with animals. In the case of rabbits, on the one hand they are pets, on the other, meat available at the butcher shop. The installation was vandalised only a few days after being mounted. According to May (1999), people assumed Thorneycroft's installation was designed to shock, rather than to address social issues.

measured by the extent to which it opens up new territories, offering the viewer the pleasurable shock of recognition of the newly spoken" (Allen 1994:8-9). The "shock" felt in the presence of the newly spoken is why Thorneycroft remains controversial.

The next chapter looks at how Thorneycroft's work can be used to examine the distinction between autobiography and autofiction, how it exhibits practices of self-fashioning, and how it negotiates autobiographical agency.

CHAPTER 3: AUTOFICTION: SELF-FASHIONING IN DIANA THORNEYCROFT'S PHOTOGRAPHIC SELF-PORTRAITS

"We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?"

Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," 1979:919

"But the 'self' so often invoked in self-expressive theories of autobiography is not a noun, a thing-in-itself, waiting to be materialized through the text. There is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating. Nor is the autobiographical self expressive in the sense that it is the manifestation of an interiority that is somehow ontologically whole, seamless, and 'true'....In each instance, then, narrative performativity constitutes interiority. That is, the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an effect *of autobiographical storytelling."*

Sidonie Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," 1998:108-109

This chapter looks at what Celia Lury calls prosthetic identity - the process by which mediated representations are appropriated into one's self-concept - as a way of theorizing the autofictional practices of self-fashioning expressed in Diana Thorneycroft's self-portraits. Paul Jay discusses a similar process in his article, "Posing: Autobiography and the Subject of Photography" (1994); he argues that there is a creative and constitutive relationship between image and identity. Lury's concept of prosthetic identity sheds light on whether a distinction between autobiographical and autofictional practices can be made in a prosthetic culture or in a postmodern context. That is, contemporarily, is it more appropriate to speak of autofiction than autobiography? How do autofiction and prosthetic identity offer opportunities for agency and activism through self-fashioning and performance?

The theorization of autobiographical performativity, discussed in Chapter 1, troubles the traditional understanding of autobiography as the reflection of a pre-existing subject. Rather, autobiographical performativity suggests the subject represented in the text is an effect of the storytelling rather than its impetus. The performance of identity in artworks provides an excellent example of autobiographical performativity in a non-literary form of autobiography. The

interpretation of these artworks requires a nuanced understanding of autobiography, one that attends to the fact that, for many autobiographers, autobiography is an imaginative, self-creative medium – a medium that has a tenuous allegiance with factuality. In many ways, the performative, autobiographical practices engaged by Diana Thorneycroft, are better termed "autofictional". The subject created in the text is not a reflection, but an imaginative creation of the autobiographer. The subject may bear the same name or display itself through the same body, but it is new, an effect of the text (cf. Smith 1995). This new subject, in turn, speaks to the autobiographer in ways that facilitate, encourage, and suggest change in the originary subject. Thus a feedback loop exists between the autobiographer and their self-representations. Since their self-representations have fictional, imaginative elements, they are perpetually self-fashioning in an autofictional way.[43]

Paul Jay has argued in *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (1984) that ultimately it may be impossible, and even pointless, to distinguish autobiography from autofiction. However, I argue that the term autofiction may be more effective in conveying the meaning, and facilitating the interpretation, of autobiographies, particularly in a postmodern context. Jay states "if by 'fictional' we mean 'made up,' 'created,' or 'imagined' - something, that is, which is literary and not 'real' - then we have merely defined the ontological status of any text, autobiographical or not" (1984:16). Nevertheless, it is true that when told a text is autobiographical, readers (or spectators, or listeners) come to the text with a certain expectation; the text is about a real person, who's real history, or a part of it, is told in the text. They expect the text to be somewhat transparent. While we know this is not true of most autobiographies, many critics continue to use the term "autobiography" in contexts when "autofiction" would enable a more nuanced interpretation of the text. I suggest using the term autobiography to describe Diana Thorneycroft's work forecloses the interpretation to a limited range of meanings. Most often these interpretations disregard, or fall

[43] The concept of autofiction has been briefly discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1 of this thesis. Further discussion is provided in a later section of this chapter.

far from, Thorneycroft's theses in her artist statements and interviews. The term "autofiction" allows for a wider range of interpretation, which also better accounts for Thorneycroft's own intentions with the work. "Autobiography" applies to her work only in its loosest sense.

PROSTHETIC CULTURE

The concept of a prosthetic culture is elaborated in a book that guided me toward this project, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, and Identity* written by Celia Lury (1998). Lury's central claim is that technologies have supplemented the senses, increasing many of our capabilities, including our ability to remember.[44] Lury claims technologies (prostheses) are altering our consciousness, our subjectivity, and our bodies. The extension of memory enabled by photographs, she argues, has altered our conception of the self. For example, the encounter of images of oneself may encourage one to re-fashion one's self-identity. Her examination of photographs - a perceptual prosthesis - explores how they contribute to the (re)construction of self-identity. She argues, as we increasingly rely on prostheses to do the work of memory for us, it is hard to say with complete confidence that we possess and control our identities.[45] Since autobiography relies on memory, it is crucial that we question how memory operates contemporarily.

In *Prosthetic Culture*, Lury discusses many concepts relevant to a discussion of autofiction, including experimental individualism and prosthetic biography.[46] As well, it will become clear that experimental individualism is quite similar to the notion of self-fashioning, and prosthetic biography is in many ways similar to the concept of autofiction. Lury introduces the concept of prosthetic biography to account for the "performative self-understanding" characteristic of the experimentation with identity in a prosthetic culture (1998:4). Experimental individualism is the re-fashioning, renovation, and reconstruction of oneself that is facilitated by technologies. It is truly self-experimentation, the disassembling and re-assembling of the self. For example, the encounter of one's portrait may encourage the adoption and later adaptation of this image into one's self-identity.

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[44] Though Lury does not cite McLuhan (1964), clearly he preceded her on this point.
[45] cf. Locke's definition of memory discussed in the Introduction.
[46] Both are discussed in the Introduction.

Images, then, are "stylistic resources," the palette from which one paints a self-portrait (*Ibid*:24). As the case of Paul Ingram points out, even mental images can contribute to a re-imagination of oneself.[47] "Visual memory, the 'reading' of images from the past - be they fixed in a photograph or fluid in the mind's eye - can often be integral to the construction of identity in autobiographical works" (Jay, 1994:191). As the Ingram case makes clear, "the act of interpreting visual memories...becomes integral to the very construction of identity" (*Ibid*:192). One's identity, then, can be reconstituted as a matter of taste (Lury 1998). Lifestyles may now be more precisely referred to as stylized lives.

As noted above, Paul Jay has theorized the role of visual memory in written autobiography and in concepts of self-identity in a way similar to Lury. In his article, "Posing," Jay examines "the role of images in the construction of identity" (1994:203-204). Among other things, he argues, "the subject...comes to be defined *by* a photograph" (*Ibid*:191, italics in original). That is, there exists a "creative, constitutive relationship...between image and identity in autobiographical writing" (*Ibid*). He goes on to state that "identity is autobiographically fashioned in the struggle to name the self reflected in images" (*Ibid*:205). That is, people fashion their identity in response to images. When there is self-awareness of this fashioning, the possibility of autobiographical agency is introduced. One can seize opportunities in prospective, future, images to "fashion an identity for the future" (*Ibid*:207). Thus Jay concludes:

> Identity, then, is always the result of a complex interaction between cultural forces and what we call the private imagination, but the line between the two seems impossible to draw. There surely is a real sense in which we choose or imagine our identities, but those choices are always mediated by culturally conditioned possibilities that work to circumscribe what we can imagine for ourselves and to question the very categories of the chosen and

[47] As Lury (1998) recounts, Paul Ingram was accused by his daughters of satanic and sexual abuse. The case is particularly interesting since Ingram, who as it turns out never abused his daughters, actually came to believe that he had abused them, as a result of the powerful effects of interrogation, which resulted in his false memory syndrome. The mental images Ingram created, in response to scenarios related to him by the police officers during multiple interrogations, began to incorporate themselves into Ingram's sense of identity, and thus he believed himself to be an abusive father. When his daughters came clean and admitted the allegations were false, Ingram was at first adamant that he had indeed abused them. However, with therapy he returned to his previous belief that he had never abused his daughters. This case demonstrates the powerful effects images (even mental ones) on one's self-identity.

the conditional (*Ibid*:209).

This realization is what some, including Jay (1994) and Shusterman (in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002), have suggested produces existential anxiety. However, Jay's argument highlights the dialectical relationship, or process, of reading images. In reading an image there is a measure of control. And agency can be found in image production, which can be "wilful self-transformation" (1994:210). The prospective visioning of images is an act of agency, an attempt to choose, and control identity.

Photographs present endless opportunities to (re)encounter oneself. Indeed, one has little choice in the matter. In contemporary Western societies, photographs have become an impetus for self re-fashioning. As discussed in the Introduction, photographs offer us the opportunity to reflect on who we are and to imagine who we could be. Thus, self-identity emerges as the product of the re-appropriation, and incorporation of instances of oneself that have been mediated by a technological prosthetic. The renovation of self-identity precipitated by photographs is one of the ways in which Lury argues prosthetic culture has enabled the emergence of the experimental individual: the self-possessive and self-determining subject. By contrast, before the introduction of technologies such as the camera, identity was interiorized to a much greater extent. This is because we had fewer material self-representations.

Lury's thesis makes clear that photography can enable movement across so-called boundaries of identity, for example classifications of type, which presents the possibility of political change. If the contingent arrangement of reality is made obvious, change becomes a matter of choice. As discussed in Chapter 2, movement across boundaries (of gender, or comfort, or biological sex) is one of the most salient characteristics of Diana Thorneycroft's photographs. These movements are one of the ways in which her photographs suggest opportunities for agency through self-fashioning.

One of the dominant roles photographs play is as a site of memory. Photographs have become a way of remembering. This means prostheses are doing the work of memory that the mind once did. For Lury, memory has

become disembodied. With the use of prostheses as memory banks, the solidity of memory is less tenable. At the very least, the nature of memory is fundamentally different. If memory is the source of self-identity, as Locke (2000) persuasively argues, what are the implications of an ever-increasing distance between our minds and our sites of memory? One of the implications of this is that we may not actively try to remember an event, since we can rely on a photograph to cue our memory. However, as we know, often our memories of an event are only (or mostly) those captured in the photographs taken. In time, we may only remember those parts of the event that have a visual cue. In contrast, when one has no media to record information, one must actively remember, and will likely have a different, more holistic, memory of the event/information. Using photographs to prompt memory has implications for the process of identity formation, particularly in the case of staged photographs (i.e. not snap-shots). The re-incorporation of these memories can be likened to autofiction since the events are not, properly speaking, documentary. Photographs are, by their very nature, stripped of their context. They are only made meaningful when re-inserted in a context or placed in a narrative.

Lury argues that in prosthetic culture, false memories are the result of the power of the image, both mental and material, to create a prosthetic biography.[48] Images "refigur[e] the relationship between consciousness, memory, and embodiment" (Lury 1998:224). Lury offers as an example the case of Paul Ingram, noted above, wherein a man accused of sexual abuse created false memories in response to the powerful images that were provoked by interrogation and therapy. The memories were then incorporated into his new self-identity as a sex offender. This example clearly shows the importance of imagery in the (re)construction of self-identity and memory, and its role as a powerful interface between interiority and exteriority. But are people nothing more than "artefactual" (*Ibid*:85)? The process of identity formation occurs both "within and outside representation, within and outside the frame" (*Ibid*:5). Identity is a collaboration between subject and text.

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[48] Defined in the Introduction.

Diana Thorneycroft's photographs epitomize the tension between the identity constituted within and outside the frame. Identity is a collaboration between the two, and Thorneycroft encourages the recognition of this. She underscores this by asking her audience to collaborate with her in making their own meanings about her and about their own identity.[49] As noted in Chapter 2, she hopes her audience will come up with "unexpected" and "unanticipated" meanings for her photographs (Brandt et al. 1994:not paginated). These meanings assist her in creating new representations of herself, but also contribute to her processual, that is, unending identity formation.

AUTOFICTION

If we consider the concept of prosthetic biography in terms of the postmodern, sceptical view of fiction and reality in autobiography, autofiction seems an appropriate term for their combination. Élisabeth Wetterwald has defined autofiction in the following way:

> This is a genre in which an author steps out of him- or herself to create a character through a process of basing fiction on reality in order to recreate that reality. The character becomes in a sense the author's alter ego – the same person, but reflected through the mirror of fiction in order to compose a polymorphous identity. This is autofiction as an expression of the author's fantasies, in the sense that he or she is able to express all of their 'selves' at once, through a process of fragmentation and shattering (2002:81).[50]

Certainly, much in this definition resonates with the discussion underway. While autofiction is arguably a privileged form of self-expression, particularly in an age characterized by an excess of information, the genre is not altogether new (Asselin & Lamoureux 2002a). Indeed, logically, it cannot be so. If, as it has been

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[49] This in one way in which Thorneycroft sees her photographs as, in some cases, more about her audience than herself. Similarly, in his short article "The Autobiography of Alice B. Fungus," John Greyson discusses the strange fact that autobiographies often seem to be more about the author's human community than themselves, and that novels, memoirs, and biographies are often very much about the author (2002). Greyson argues that Richard Fung's autobiographical work is "about everyone else," while it is true that he uses his own experience and body to make his art (*Ibid*:11).

[50] As discussed in the Introduction, Asselin and Lamoureux argue that autofiction is a concept with considerable explanatory amplitude for contemporary art. Autofiction is a work in "which authors create new personalities and identities for themselves, while at the same time maintaining their real identity," a hybrid between 'traditional' autobiography and the novel (2002b:11). It is very difficult to set strict limits for autobiography and its related/altered forms.

suggested, people re-appropriate fragments from texts and their surroundings into their self-identity, then surely autofiction is as old as humans. Nevertheless, it hardly needs to be argued that the "materials of self-fashioning have increased" (Pontbriand 2002:8). As a consequence, approaches to the self have changed according to a new ratio of interior to exterior images of oneself, and according to the new (historically speaking) predominance of photography in representations of the self.

Autofiction highlights the creative and inventive nature of self-identity. The Latin root of the word "fiction" is *fingere*, which figuratively means to imagine and literally means to fashion or model (Asselin & Lamoureux 2002a).[51] Thus, autofiction is an obvious mode of expression for one's self-transformation and, indeed, one's self-production. While works of autofiction change the subject in their process of assessing and imagining themselves otherwise, the person does not necessarily become the person they represent. "Authors create new personalities and identities...[while] maintaining their 'real' identity" (*Ibid*:11). They may change in a way that reflects a compromise of both selves, or they may reject the representation entirely.

The idea that person and image do not necessarily come together is crucial for understanding Diana Thorneycroft's work. As noted earlier, much of Thorneycroft's audience feel compelled to explain the image via the person or the person via the image. Theories of autofiction emphasize the difficulty in attempting such a reconciliation. It is perhaps more productive to imagine how the selves represented in her self-portraits express any of the following: who she is, who she isn't, who she wishes to be, or who she should have been (cf. Robin 1997). For example, I can imagine the following list paralleling the last: *Untitled (Self-portrait with Rabbit)* (Plate 17), *Self-portrait (Father and Child with Clouds)* (Plate 2), *Untitled (She-boy)* (Plate 15), *Untitled (Patient/Prisoner)* (Plate 18). *Untitled (Self-portrait with Rabbit)* relates her experience of snaring a rabbit when she was a young girl. This experience is part of who she is. I interpret *Untitled (She-boy)* as depicting the

[51] The term was originally used in French to refer to a "fictional narrative in the first-person mode" (Smith & Watson 2001:186).

ambiguity Thorneycroft feels toward her sexual identity. She does not feel strongly male or female. She does not like being forced to identify as one or the other. I can imagine this, but perhaps you cannot. Each spectator, as Thorneycroft hopes, will see different truths and fictions in her work. Ultimately, I would suggest both what one is ready to acknowledge as true, and what one dismisses as fiction, speaks more to one's own self-identity than to Thorneycroft's biography. A photograph does not have to represent something perfectly factual in order to say something true about the world. A photograph must speak of something real when it moves one to tears, or releases a shudder down the spine (Lageira 2002).

In the end, does it matter which aspects of Thorneycroft's self-portraits are taken from her history-proper, and which are products of her imagination? We know, according to her artist statements, that she uses a combination of memory - which has a tenuous relationship to history - and imagination in her work. Thus, teasing these components apart is not only difficult, but perhaps something even Thorneycroft could not do. However, the spectator's memory and imagination are of utmost importance because they react to her photographs and choose what to incorporate into their own prosthetic biography.

SELF-FASHIONING

It is hard to call self-fashioning an abstract or far-flung concept given the relative accessibility of such procedures as plastic surgery and sex reassignment surgery. The problem associated with attaching memory and identity to the body is certainly made obvious in a time when the body does not simply develop and mature, but has parts permanently added to, or taken away from it. In the art world, Orlan is an obvious example of someone actively engaged in self-fashioning. However, self-fashioning is not only the province of artists. Cindy Jackson documents on her website (www.cindyjackson.com), and in her book, *Living Doll: The Amazing Secrets of How the Cosmetic Surgeons Turned Me Into the Girl of My Dreams* (2002), her transformation from an 'unattractive' woman into a Barbie

look-alike.[52] While self-fashioning does not always occur in such obviously material ways as plastic surgery, it remains a key aspect of identity. Indeed, perhaps the most interesting ways self-fashioning occurs are those not immediately obvious to the eye. These changes, too, are certainly more common.

Self-fashioning permeates "life-work" and has for centuries. For instance, part of the project of philosophy is the art of living (Shusterman 2000). It is what some consider the "highest art of all" (*Ibid*:9). This life project calls for "creative self-expression and aesthetic self-fashioning...to make ourselves into something fulfilling, interesting, attractive, admirable" (*Ibid*:10). Ideally, people would work toward making themselves into positive role models for others. For Shusterman, this means fostering intellectual and emotional growth, social responsibility, and care for the physical body. Shusterman argues for self-fashioning as an ethics of living. The following section outlines some of the theoretical strands that have been taken with regard to the concept of self-fashioning.

Michel Foucault has written about the art of living in *The Care of the Self* (1984). As he explains, the cultivation of the self is the art of existence, an ancient theme of Greek culture, which operates on the principle that one must take care of oneself. The art of existence, caring for one's body and soul, was, from an early time, considered to be the centre of philosophy. It is this deep, reflective care of the self that distinguishes man from animal. The ability to care for oneself is a privilege, and should be a duty. From the practices of cultivating the self developed the notion of an ethics of pleasure. "The task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself...makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing – central to the formation of the ethical subject" (Foucault [1984]1986:68). Foucault theorizes self-fashioning as part of an ethical life project.

As noted above, Richard Shusterman has written about the practice of self-fashioning in *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the End of Art* (2000). In his book he argues that self-fashioning, although not an altogether new phenomenon,

[52] Her transformation was so inspirational that another woman, Isobel Hayes, chose to become Barbie as well, and a man, Miles Kendall, decided to make the transform into Ken!

has increased in popularity. He elaborates considerably on his theorization in an interview with Chantal Pontbriand and Olivier Asselin for *Parachute*'s special issue on autofiction. People have long been concerned with developing their own lifestyle; this is "a natural extension of human expressiveness" that is only a possibility once one gets past providing for the basic necessities of life (Shusterman in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002:60). This stylization occurs in a number of ways, such as decoration, ritual, and play, all of which are evident in Thorneycroft's photographs. Self-fashioning is said to be a response to the fragmentation and dislocation of identity in contemporary society. However, it is also a response to the emphasis on stylization and individuality promoted by the advertising industry.[53] As a result, new practices of the self have emerged alongside new conceptions of identity (Asselin & Lamoureux 2002a). Indeed, Régine Robin goes so far as to say that fantasies of self-creation, wherein one has complete control over her/his body, are the signature of contemporary individualism (Robin in Asselin & Lamoureux 2002b).

Self-creation, however, is not the same as self-fashioning, and most theorists say self-creation is a complete fantasy. However, if one considers Cindy Jackson's transformation "into a bombshell who wasn't born that way," it seems as though the possibilities must be examined (Jackson, www.cindyjackson.com). The distinction between self-creation and self-fashioning highlights the tension that underlies the "two ideals of self-fashioning": self-discovery/expression and self-creation (Pontbriand & Asselin 2002:59).

Shusterman responds to Pontbriand and Asselin's claim that self-creation is a fantasy with the following argument:

> I could say paradoxically that self-creation is both inevitable and impossible. It's inevitable because who you are is a fiction of what you do; so assuming that we have choices, our choices help make us who we are; and since we must make choices, we have to make who we are. [It's impossible] because it can never be self-creation *ex nihilo*. The self you have to work with in self-creation is made of things you didn't create but were given or done to you (qtd. in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002:59-60).

[53] Lury argues that advertising is a key factor in the notion of prosthetic identity, that is, it entices one to "become what you are."

Thus, self-creation is tricky both to assert and to deny. By contrast, the practice of self-fashioning is much less difficult to identify and agree upon. Furthermore, Shusterman's point that we must contend with the things "given or done to you" supports my argument that mediated representations necessarily change who we are.

Shusterman distinguishes between two types of self-fashioning: representational and experiential. The representational form concerns itself with "beautifying our external forms" (Shusterman in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002:59). At one end of the spectrum we find radical body art such as mutilation and branding, and at the other end, ear piercing, hair dying, and body building. The experiential form concerns itself with our well being, for example, practices such as yoga and meditation. Although the two forms have been separated here, in order to simplify their explanation, the two are inextricably linked. That is, when someone believes they look bad they often feel bad about themselves or, inversely, if someone is depressed, often their appearance suffers along with their psyche. Shusterman's understanding of self-fashioning is not one driven by a belief in the existence of a predetermined, fixed, or essential self that one can discover and express. Rather, the self, for him, does not exist prior to our fashioning it. "For me the interesting form of authentic self-expression does not mean just doing what one already does or discovering and being faithful to one's prior 'true self' but rather working creatively with talents, qualities, experiences and desires that one can find and acquire for oneself in order to enrich one's life and network of relationships" (*Ibid*:59). Ultimately, "the self is always a construction of work in progress" (*Ibid*).

As noted in the section on prosthetic culture, self-fashioning is quite similar to experimental individualism. Indeed, self-experimentation is one of the key techniques of self-fashioning. One of the clearest instances of experimentation is in the practice of individuation adolescents engage in as a way of distinguishing themselves from their family, for example, by taking charge of their wardrobe. One's self-image is the product not only of one's fashion choices, but emerges from "communication with others with whom you identify and from whom you

distinguish yourself: first your family and then larger social groups to which you belong" (Shusterman in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002:60). Thus, self-fashioning does not occur in one way, nor is it always active. The concept of self-fashioning perhaps connotes a meaning that is more active than is really the case. I would argue self-fashioning occurs in many unconscious ways, and since it is the way one has always acted toward one's identity it is understandable that one does not take note of, nor perhaps even recognize, the practice.

The world of art and the lives of artists have become privileged loci for self-fashioning. Artists' creativity, which has typically been channelled into works of art, is now more than ever redirected toward the artists themselves (Shusterman in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002). The direction of creative energy toward oneself has principally taken two intertwined routes for artists: the creation of artist identities/persona and the depiction of identity play as the art object. For example, artists from Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman, to Orlan and Robert Mapplethorpe, seem concerned with creating their "identity as an artist" as much as they are with creating art objects and aesthetic experiences (*Ibid*:58). Today, the artist's *oeuvre* is the self. Shusterman notes some artists have been very successful in depicting identity play through "transformative photographic self-portraits" (*Ibid*). For example, Claude Cahun and Lyle Ashton Harris have both produced such self-portraits. I would argue that Diana Thorneycroft's work has been exceptionally successful in this regard. Identity play is not simply a strategy for recognition in the art world, it is a way of releasing oneself from the constraints of one's gender, race, and other physical signifiers. In the release from one (or many) signifier(s), one is now capable of feeling the constraint or freedom of others.

There are certainly a number of ways to critique or to worry about self-fashioning. For one, does the concept necessarily mean that we are all existential nomads (Asselin & Lamoureux, 2002b)? Does an emphasis on the individual pose a threat to a thriving public sphere? Does it mean people will ultimately be more concerned with personal choices? Perhaps these suggestions do characterize the current Western situation, but self-fashioning is not the cause of this. Indeed, self-

fashioning and autofiction do not deny community, though they do appear to focus on the individual. That is, the self exists only with reference to others - other people in one's community and others in representation. The notion of community, too, is intrinsic to the individual: "community oscillates between the idea of singularity and the idea of our relationship to the other" (Pontbriand 2002:8). Perhaps we are existential nomads, but self-fashioning cannot be ignored, so we cannot simply abandon it. What we can do is think about the way we fashion ourselves, to self-fashion in a responsible way. Shusterman states one of the ways we can be less solipsistic in self-fashioning is by developing,

> the idea of self-styling [by] insisting on the necessary and enriching social dimension of the self...there is no substantive self without society, and the more the self is informed by the social network of shared meanings, the richer and more distinctive the self will be and the more individuality can be meaningful and productive (Shusterman in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002:60-61).

Shusterman's answer makes intuitive sense. That is, if one relies simply on one's own thoughts and representations of the self as materials for self-fashioning, one will not be able to change much – the solipsistic person will be caught in an unproductive vicious circle.

Diana Thorneycroft's photographs are an excellent example of self-fashioning through identity play. Some artists produce representations that play with identity as a way to develop their artist persona, while others do so to call attention to the constructedness of identity and to the realm of play available for identities. I argue that Thorneycroft falls into the latter camp, though some might say she falls into both. It seems clear, from her interviews, that her photographs are very much something she feels she has to make rather than something she chooses to do as a route to success (Enright 2000). As well, her identity play is not pre-planned in that it is not aimed at developing a particular persona. As she recounted to Robert Enright in an interview, the outcome of her performances/photographs often emerges from her unconscious (*Ibid*). She lets her body language take over during her photo sessions, and is often quite surprised when she develops the photographs and sees the results of her

performance. Thorneycroft stated that if she stopped playing with her identity, digging into her unconscious, in this creative and productive way, she would become depressed.[54] Thus, her play is not a performance aimed at propelling her career. Rather, it is an activity she feels maintains her mental health, which has had the lucky consequence of helping her career.

Thorneycroft's work does not simply call attention to the plasticity of her own identity; her work also aims to contribute to the fashioning of her audience's identities. She hopes her work will force her audience to question their own identity construction, perhaps to contemplate their "inherent bisexual condition" (Thorneycroft 1991). This motive can hardly be interpreted in a solipsistic way, rather Thorneycroft is acting in a way Shusterman would approve of: she encourages others to contemplate their self-fashioning by involving herself in community.

As this project has alluded, one of my concerns is that people become more aware of the agency they hold in the degree to which they can modify, if not change, their situation. My hope is that people realize, to a certain extent, the conditions into which one is born do not determine one's life. This is certainly a highly optimistic claim and does, to an extent, disregard the real limitations many people live with. However, I do think everyone can in some way take charge of, at least, certain aspects of their life (cf. de Beauvoir 1953). In North America, advertising provides solutions to the problem of an aesthetic life. While advertisers try to limit their audience's options to those they can offer for sale, artists, I would argue, tend to leave options more open for their audience. Furthermore, and particularly with Thorneycroft, the self-fashioning of artists tends to flow in many directions, for example, from audience to artist and vice versa. However, the fashioning advertisers are involved in is unidirectional.

Self-representation is obviously part of autofiction, just as it is necessarily an aspect of self-fashioning. The representational trope of self-fashioning suggests this. But to elaborate, self-fashioning implies one has an idea of what one would like to be, that one has an image of one's future perfect self. As Jay discusses in

[54] However, since the time of this interview, she has ceased making self-portraits.

reference to Barthes's reflections on posing, it is "a site, or theatre, of self-creation in which the subject desires to project something delicate and moral, to literally work upon the 'skin from within,' to 'let drift,' to 'mean' and be his profound, essential self. But it is also a theatre of conventions and rituals working to appropriate that self for its own ends" (Jay 1994:194).[55] Thus, imagination is central to self-fashioning. In terms of photographic self-portraits, which aim to represent the self, even in cases where the aim is to represent the self 'truthfully', there are always fictional elements. For example, self-representation assumes a "continuing narrative, [and] since one can't know the real meaning of any action or event or feature in one's self without presuming a larger whole in which that element plays a role," and because we are unable to know how our narrative will unfold in the future, we must draft it in the present using our imagination (Shusterman in Pontbriand & Asselin 2002:61). So even if every effort to be honest is made, one's self-representation always has a "dimension of fictionality" (*Ibid*). To add to this problem, the nature of memory complicates the accuracy of one's representations of the past. "We always fictively reconstruct some of our past that we no longer properly remember" (*Ibid*). The self, then, is an amalgam of the "imaginative elaboration" of the past, present and (predicted) future.

The discussion of Thorneycroft's work in this chapter, and the interpretations offered in the preceding chapters, demonstrate the ways in which Thorneycroft uses photography and her body as a medium for autofictional practices. I argue that her self-portraits are more appropriately interpreted as instances of self-fashioning and identity play, than as a reflection of a pre-existing subject, that is, as traditional autobiography. The term "autofiction" and the practices of self-fashioning bound up with it allow for a broader interpretation of her work that includes the notion of agency in autobiographical practices and engages the viewer intersubjectively with her work. Both of these implications are significant, for they highlight the possibility of social and political change. This is

[55] The result of posing is "a dispersed self: 'in front of the lens' he is at once 'the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art'" (Barthes 1981 in Jay 1994:194).

extremely important for historically marginalized, silent, and unspeakable identities, all of which Thorneycroft gives voice to by fashioning these identities into her own.

CONCLUSION

"Because the self is a fiction sustained by the very practices of representation, its fictiveness can be glimpsed in the shadows of the semiotic, in the gaps, in nonsense, in puns, in pleasurable rhythms, all of which erupt from the unconscious (or preconscious) to disrupt meaning."

Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, Women, Autobiography, Theory, *1998:19-20*

In this project I have tried to do a number of things. First, I have attempted to re-read Thorneycroft's self-portraits as instances of autofiction. Thorneycroft's self-portraits depict practices of self-fashioning that critique traditional understandings of autobiography, as well as the stability of identity. Second, in re-reading Thorneycroft's work in this way, I hope to have made a case for "autofiction" being a more appropriate term for many contemporary autobiographical practices. Third, my aim in the former pursuits was to raise the issue of autobiographical agency.

Autobiography is a self-reflexive medium, but it is also a form of self-invention that works to constitute the subject. Autobiographical practices of autofiction demonstrate the ways is which autobiographers actively contribute to, and shape their future identities. Agency is found in "tactical dis/identifications," in finding spaces through which one can manoeuvre and resist normative representations of subjectivity (Smith 1998:111; Scott in Smith & Watson 1998). In these spaces and dis/identifications, the autobiographer offers alternative representations of subjectivity, giving voice to unspoken subjects. In her book, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*, Leigh Gilmore argues for a similar counter-practice, which she terms "autobiographics" (1994). Autobiographics is a practice that entails the production of experimental identities. Experimentation creates multiple and contradictory identities, which are locations of autobiographical agency. Diana Thorneycroft's self-portraits depict experimentations with identity. The multiple selves she depicts in her photographs offer contradictory biographical information about their author. Her photographs offer possibilities for "new," or alternative, identifications. That is, Thorneycroft's autofictional practices make room for new or counter-knowledges.

Agency is found in moments of autobiographical performativity and resistance, which "signal the making and unmaking of identities and thus undermine the foundational myth of autobiographical storytelling as self-expressive" (Smith [1995]1998:114). That is to say, emphasis on the performative nature of identity undermines the notion of autobiography as expressive of a pre-discursive self. Indeed, the text "enacts the 'self' it claims has given rise to the 'I'" (Smith 1995:18). Autobiographical subjects are produced and reiterated through performance. Putting on an identification, such as masculinity, suggests that it can be taken off. Performative moments also push against the boundaries of the included and the excluded. The heterogeneous recitations of identity found in Thorneycroft's work are ruptures that open up space for creative self-fashioning. Producing an autofictional autobiography is a self-authorizing and empowering experience (Smith & Watson 2001:160). However, to say that autobiography is a universally empowering medium would be an overstatement.

I argue that Diana Thorneycroft's self-portraits are instances of autobiographical agency, which resist cultural inscriptions by rupturing and exceeding sexual bodily norms. Her work is self-creative, interfacing biography with imagination, emphasizing that the self never coincides with its image.

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PLATES

Plate 1 *Self-portrait (Brother Mask with Toy Gun)*, 1990

Plate 2 *Self-portrait (Father and Child with Clouds)*, 1990

Plate 3 *Untitled (Self-portrait with Clenched Fist)*, 1990

Plate 4 *Untitled (& if she wakes)*, 1994

Plate 5 *Untitled (Animus/Anima)*, 1990

Plate 6 *Untitled (Family Self-portrait)*, 1990

Plate 7 *Untitled (Snared)*, 1997

Plate 8 *Untitled (F-18 Mask)*, 1997

Plate 9 *Untitled (Bird-boy)*, 1992

Plate 10 *Untitled (Snare)*, 1994

Plate 11 *Untitled (Cloven Hoof Mask)*, 1997

Plate 12 *Untitled (Slytod with Prisoner)*, 1997

Plate 13 *Untitled (Subject with Rope)*, 1998

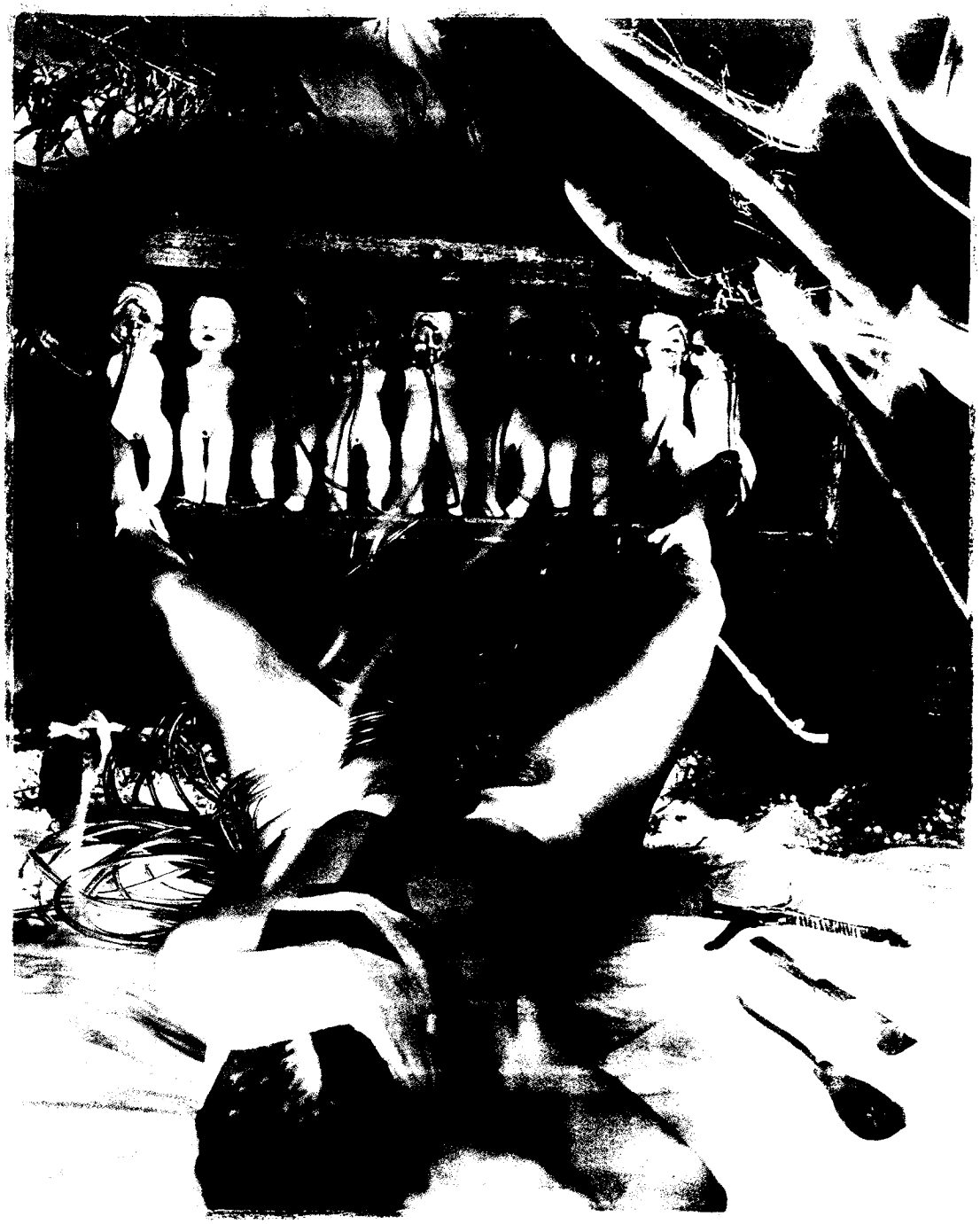

Plate 14 *Untitled (Witness)*, 1998

Plate 15 *Untitled (She-boy)*, 1990

Plate 16 *Pietà (for Yvette)*, 1995, triptych

Plate 17 *Untitled (Self-portrait with Rabbit)*, 1999

Plate 18 *Untitled*
(Patient/Prisoner), 1998