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Kokoli, Alexandra M. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3730-8570> (2017) Pre-emptive mourning against the bomb: exploded domesticities in art informed by feminism and anti-nuclear activism. *Oxford Art Journal*, 40 (1) . pp. 153-168. ISSN 0142-6540 [Article] (doi:10.1093/oxartj/kcx004)

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Pre-emptive Mourning Against the Bomb: Exploded domesticities in art informed by feminism and anti-nuclear activism

Alexandra M. Kokoli

ABSTRACT (188 words)

Art informed by second-wave feminism has often cast domestic space as a site of ambivalence if not unhomeliness, inspired by gender-critical dissent. This article expands on previous research into the strategic unhomeliness of feminist art by focusing on works informed by anti-nuclear activism as well as feminism in the 1980s. Drawing on psychoanalytic approaches to conflict, I trace anti-nuclear (per)mutations of dystopian domesticity in feminist visual and material cultures that give form to the collective nightmare of a nuclear holocaust. In the art practice under consideration domesticity is thrown into crisis anew: the home is expanded into a site of pacifist resistance while also being cast as the place of the feared premature and violent death of loved ones by nuclear disaster. Motherhood and gendered care-giving are simultaneously challenged and mobilised in the consciousness-raising performances and posters of Sister Seven, as well as Margaret Harrison's recreations of the periphery fence of the Greenham Common RAF military base. The feminist pacifist – curative – response to the threat of nuclear war as a 'paranoid elaboration of mourning' (Fornari) is pre-emptive mourning, which, unlike pre-emptive strikes, rises to the defence of survival.

WORD COUNT (text with notes): 8,317

WORD COUNT (text without notes): 7,006

‘Provisional tactics’: Evocations of dissident domesticity through craft

Art informed by feminism explored and exploited the ambivalence teased out in second-wave debates about the uses of domestic crafts to their aesthetic and activist limits. Some of the most iconic artworks associated with the Women’s Liberation Movement, such as *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago and others, not only reference domesticity but do so through the use of craft techniques, which come with their own associations of amateurship, matrilineality and use (as opposed to purely aesthetic) value, all of which were significant points of discussion in feminism’s critique of art history, theory and practice. Over the past twenty years a now well-established area of feminist scholarship emerged, devoted to the exploration of the artistic manifestations of a feminist critique of domesticity as an overdetermined space both physically and symbolically connected to a sexual division of labour. This division is held responsible for taking women out of the labour market and ideologically binding them to an idealised reproductive function, in terms both of procreation and the perpetuation of normative sexual and gender arrangements. As others, including myself, have previously argued, the mimicry of domesticity in installation art with the intention of challenging and subverting it has been a major strategy in feminist art practice.¹ In this context, mimicry should be understood in its anti-colonial definition: the feminist artistic challenge to domesticity does not manifest as a departure from the home but through a repeated performance (in a variety of media) of patriarchal domesticity as contradictory, fragile and frayed at the edges.² (Pseudo-)domestic art installations became the vehicle for the uncanny return of the repressed of patriarchal domesticity. The power of such installations consisted of their striking closeness to their ‘originals’: still home interiors but *not quite*. These treacherous feminist ‘homes’ were modelled on the Freudian uncanny in more ways than one. In addition to offering a material manifestation of the *Unheimliche* (unhomely) in the almost literal sense, they teased out the subtle

¹ Mira Schor, ‘You Can’t Leave Home Without It’, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism and Art Culture* (Duke University Press: Durham NC, 1997), pp. 191-203; Helen Molesworth, ‘House Work and Art Work’, *October*, vol. 92 (Spring, 2000), pp. 71-97; and Alexandra Kokoli, ‘Undoing “homeliness” in feminist art: Feministo: Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife (1975-1977)’, *n.paradoxa*, no. 13 (November 2004), pp. 75-83.

² Homi Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85-92.

but crucial unhomeliness already present in the home. If 'un-', the uncanny's prefix of negation, is the mark of repression, pseudo-domestic art installations bring social oppression home by materialising and embedding its symbols in simulated domestic interiors.³ Still, the significance of domesticity for such practices was not limited to a critical mobilisation of domesticity as sign, nor the use of the domestic interior as a formal framing device with the potential to disrupt the pristineness of the white cube. The DIY ethos of domestic crafts supported inclusivity and celebrated creative practices with little attachment to originality and individual authorship, which for related reasons had long been excluded from the mainstream artworld.⁴

When I curated a retrospective of Su Richardson's crochet and mixed media work in 2012, a participant in the Women's Postal Art Event, a.k.a. Feministo, a landmark collaborative feminist project and series of installations, I felt deeply ambivalent about benefiting from a resurgent interest in craft.⁵ In Britain, craft has emerged as an economically conservative response to austerity, and a signifier of nostalgia for wartime rationing, the thrifty sensibility of 'make do and mend' and even, possibly, for an implicitly white British identity, before the end of Empire and Commonwealth immigration. Austerity craft is also profoundly middle-class, concerned with environmental pollution and opposed to certain kinds of consumerism, specifically of cheap and disposable commodities favoured by differently classed subjects than its own, while simultaneously supporting market values, particularly entrepreneurialism and small business.⁶ Ele Carpenter considers the dismissal of craftivism as 'woolly activism' as a symptom of the sexism that craftivism seeks to oppose, while also recognising that crafts present as many opportunities for innovative feminist activist

³ Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' (1919), *Art and Literature*, *Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 14 (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 368.

⁴ In this sense and despite considerable thematic and conceptual similarities, the work of artists like Mona Hatoum and Doris Salcedo, whose work benefits from the highest production values and who operate as highly successful individual artists through recognised and prestigious channels including global art fairs, do not share the political aesthetics of the feminist art practices under consideration.

⁵ This is discussed in Kokoli, 'Not a straight line by a spiral: charting continuity and change in textiles informed by feminism', *Image and Text*, no. 23, pp. 110-29.

⁶ Stuart Jeffries, 'From Downton Abbey to Kirstie's crafts ... the New Boring is everywhere', *The Guardian*, 17 September 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/nov/17/downton-abbey-kirstie-new-boring>, accessed 29 April 2016.

engagement as for neo-conservative consumerist co-optation.⁷ 'Knitted cakes are [...] an irritatingly joyful distraction from the important history of craft as Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA)', including the woven webs of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, deployed as soft, loose but curiously resilient blockades and also in sit-ins and die-ins.⁸ Following women's craftivist collectives on social media suggests that even explicitly craftivist yarn bombing initiatives are often free from any reflexive analysis of the media of knitting and crocheting, viewing them instead in purely celebratory terms and casting their activities as unequivocally positive injections of colour and joy into the harsh (and implicitly masculine) urban environment. And it is not only to feminism that craft has been a problematic ally: Canadian artists and cultural workers Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch coined the term 'craftwashing' to refer to instances where craft (or a crafted aesthetic) is used to market lifestyles and/or fashionable goods in a way that 'obscures the sticky ethical, environmental, and economic effects of their production'.⁹

The conservative revival of the cult of domesticity through amateur craft and DIY highlights a condition that has long shaped the cultural meaning and political mobilisation of crafts. The ambivalence-inspiring ambiguity of craft for gender-critical and other countercultural and revolutionary social movements has been noted in both feminist theory and practice. As Janis Jefferies observes, weaving, more than any other craft, has been pulled into at least two contradictory directions due to cloth being:

inscribed within a range of humanist and universalist discourses as a container for full human expression; rites of passage, [...] rural idylls and safe havens. Closer to 'home',

⁷ Ele Carpenter, 'Activist Tendencies in Craft', *Concept Store #3: Art, Activism and Recuperation* (Arnolfini: Bristol, 2010), pp. 86-91.

⁸ Carpenter, 'Activist Tendencies', p. 88.

⁹ Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, 'Craftwashing', <http://performedausterity.tumblr.com/craftwashing>. Accessed 30 April 2014.

textiles have been mobilised as banners for Suffragette resistance, trade union rights, wrapping the Greenham Common fence and honouring those who have died of AIDS.¹⁰

Although it would be tempting to rest on this binary between conservative universalisms and progressive activisms, new domesticities versus a feminist critique of domesticity, the restless ambiguity of craft makes this difficult. As Rozsika Parker so eloquently articulated in *The Subversive Stitch*, craft's ambiguity, at least in the case of women's craft, has always been marked by ambivalence: simultaneously an outlet for otherwise marginalised creativity and a means of inculcating patriarchal femininity.¹¹ Craft's ambivalence was recognised and explored in art informed by feminism, complicated and enhanced by feminism's troubling of domesticity in general. In the words of Philippa Goodall, founding member of the artists' group behind the Women's Postal Art Event, their project 'both celebrated the area of domestic creativity and "woman's world" and exposed it for its paucity'.¹² Janis Jefferies suggests that by the mid-1990s, the meanings of craft had become as unstable, malleable and provisional as definitions of gender:

The mobilities of fabric can be traced through the echoes of another sign which can be loosened from its referent, i.e. the founding theory of 'femininity as masquerade', which scrambles the codes of the singular to encompass a signifying chain of fractured, multiple and precarious identities.¹³

Rather than 'good' or 'bad' (in the sense of activist versus conformist), craft appears 'fractured, multiple and precarious'. From this perspective, no distinction between serious (not

¹⁰ Janis Jefferies, 'Text and Textiles: Weaving across the borderlines', in Katy Deepwell (ed.), *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1995), p. 164.

¹¹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, rev. ed. (IB Tauris: London, 2010).

¹² Philippa Goodall, 'Growing point/Pains in "Feministo"', in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (eds), *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970-1985* (London: Pandora, 1987), p. 213.

¹³ Jefferies, 'Text and Textiles', p. 164.

‘woolly’) activism and ‘irritatingly joyful distraction[s]’ may be easily sustained, especially if one considers the tactics of Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) more closely. Admittedly, the avant-gardist scepticism of joyfulness is hard to shake, but even a cursory engagement with the practices of the Greenham Common Peace Camp reveals a deliberate and considered commitment to joy, which flew in the face of both government and military discourses about the need for nuclear deterrence but also the dominant anti-nuclear discourses of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Against academic treatises on ‘a vision of the ultimate catastrophe for all mankind’, the Greenham Common protesters offered ‘floating symbolic cobwebs on helium balloons’, teddy bears, sing-alongs – as well as break-ins into the base using bolt cutters.¹⁴ And yet, looking deeper, another layer emerges where joy is all but snuffed out by the nightmare of the nuclear total disaster. In anti-nuclear feminist activism, tracing the sadness in joy becomes more than a trite metaphor. Joy is both motivated by and infected by sadness and something more devastating than that: a pre-emptive mourning for the feared annihilation of humanity. This article examines some of the manifestations of this pre-emptive mourning in the visual culture and art of anti-nuclear feminism in the UK, supported as it is by feminist ambivalence towards domesticity and the ambivalent ambiguities inherent in craft.

Haunting domesticity at Greenham Common and feminist anti-nuclear activism

Activist discourses of women’s pacifist activism often emphasize their rhetorical and critical difference from the systems they are opposing by embracing the archetypal affinity between femininity, gentleness and nurturing, even while those same myths were challenged and deconstructed in emergent feminist analyses. At the same time, such gendered gentleness was

¹⁴ Owen Greene, Barry Rubin, Neil Turok, Philip Webber, Graeme Wilkinson, *London After the Bomb: What a Nuclear Attack Really Means* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1982), p. 1; David Fairhall, *Common Ground: The Story of Greenham* (IB Tauris: London, 2006), p. 87.

inflected and modified by the need to 'protest and survive' in defence of one's own and by extension all of life on earth.¹⁵ Teacher and CND press and publicity officer Alison Whyte describes this delicate balancing act and its positive impact in terms of allowing women a way into activism since 'some see themselves as having a very distinctive role to play in the peace movement', while also making note of the sexist deployment of gendered language by the conservative press in which 'the peace movement is stripped of masculinity – full of women, children, priests and long-haired youths – and embodies all the characteristics which hold no sway in our society.'¹⁶ In this context, nuclear deterrence becomes more than a question of military defence to be cast in terms of castration anxiety; as Julian Critchley wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* in October 1981, 'A neutral Europe would be the eunuch in the harem of great powers'.¹⁷ At the same time, the living arrangements at the peace camp at Greenham Common marked a clear departure from normative domesticity and a necessary reconfiguration of the domestic role of women in terms of their duties of care. A commitment to defending humanity's survival involved a break with the role of mother and, where applicable, wife, to different degrees. The visibility of non-heteronormative protesters, which scandalised the conservative press, added fuel to the condemnation of an already suspect and potentially subversive living situation. Even so, the stereotypically feminine characteristic of gentleness is often evoked in the campaigns and self-descriptions of the Greenham protesters, including in one of the most famous Greenham songs 'We are gentle angry women (Singing for our lives)'.¹⁸ As the song title itself suggests, gentleness in women is not a pure category. Speaking of some of the more humorous interventions in the periphery of the Greenham base, including a teddy bears' picnic that saw protestors dress up in plush animal costumes, Jean Hutchinson makes note of the darker aspects of

¹⁵ 'Protest and Survive' was the title of a pamphlet from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation by E. P. Thompson, 1980, parodying the British government booklet *Protect and Survive*. Wilson Center Digital Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113758>, accessed 25 April 2016.

¹⁶ Alison Whyte, 'Thinking for Ourselves', in John Minnion and Philip Bolsover (eds), *The CND Story* (Allison & Busby: London, 1983), p. 85 and p. 88.

¹⁷ Cited in Whyte, 'Thinking for Ourselves', p. 88..

¹⁸ Greenham Common Song Book, Words by Holly Near (altered lyrics by the women of Greenham Common) © 1979 Hereford Music, <http://www.yourgreenham.co.uk/#homepage>, accessed 20 April 2016.

protest humour and its psychological effectiveness: 'We were able to do things, in an apparently gentle way, that were actually hard as nails. Teddy bears, snakes, splashing holy water on gates – it terrified the Americans.'¹⁹ The Greenham Common Peace camp scandal was one of gender impropriety, emblematised in this 'successful experiment in anarchic feminist living' and, more generally, of the cross-contamination of categories such as humour and horror that were never truly separate to begin with.²⁰

The 'distinctive role' of women in the peace movement noted by Alison Whyte was most succinctly articulated in women's role as mothers, even if motherhood more often than not disrupted the contribution of those already involved in activism. This bind is addressed by Tamar Swade who describes the common experience of having a baby as both an interruption to her involvement in anti-nuclear activism, since demand feeding interfered with researching and writing her part of an anti-nuclear booklet she was co-authoring, and an opportunity for its revitalisation and reframing as a maternal issue: 'Those of us who had been involved before often feel an added urgency to our desire for peace after having a child'.²¹ Caring for an infant transformed Swade into 'a different kind of social being' with new social needs as well as a newly gained consciousness. Originally called 'Mother and baby anti-nuclear group', the name of her newly founded group was eventually shortened to the punchier and funnier 'Babies against the Bomb'. This new consciousness, which she admits is not necessarily nor exclusively feminist, is shaped by the joys of motherhood as well as personal grief over global crises, however remote they may be. Swade's statement is illustrated with a black and white photograph of three generations of protesters, the youngest of whom is nursing in their mother's arms; the older two are shown engaged in passionate conversation behind a hand-written sign reading 'Babies againts [sic] the BOMB' and piles of clothes with busy patterns in boxes and bags, probably destined for a charity collection. This unattributed

¹⁹ Cited in Fairhall, *Common Ground*, p. 87.

²⁰ Fairhall, *Common Ground*, p. 187. Cf. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', *Writing and Difference* (Routledge Classics: London, 2001), pp. 351-70. Admittedly, humour and horror have not always been viewed as wholly distinct, notably not by psychoanalysis.

²¹ Tamar Swade, 'Babies Against the Bomb', in Lynne Jones (ed.), *Keeping the Peace* (Women's Press: London, 1983), p. 65.

photograph is compositionally accomplished: the nursing mother's bare leg forms a V with the stick on which the sign is nailed; her patterned dress drapes over and merges with the assembled donations. The three figures are shown in intimate and intense engagement with one another: breast-feeding and being breast-fed and absorbed in conversation. More than the pleasures and challenges of caring for the young, maternal pacifist consciousness is shaped by an expansive investment in connections and connectivities, at home and crucially beyond, exemplified by the iconic woven webs of the Greenham Common protests. Swade's grief is over the violent severing of the ties that bind and is shared by many others:

One woman told me that the mention of nuclear war conjures up the waking nightmare of her children burning. Another pictures kissing her children goodbye for the last time. A third said her particular nightmare was that the four-minute warning would come while she was at work and she wouldn't be able to cross town in time to get them.²²

Swade's short statement exemplifies the dual tendencies of women's anti-nuclear activism. On the one hand, interventions at Greenham Common have been specifically described by both participants and their sympathisers as joyful, life-affirming and 'infectiously optimistic',²³ in contrast to the silent glumness of the RAF base. In visual terms, photographic documentation of protests and blockades shows motley congregations of women surrounded but barely contained by blue or black uniforms (fig. 1), with the different gates of the base named after the colours of the rainbow and the rainbow flag adopted by the protesters. Conversely, visual and textual documentation from the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp is replete with evocations of violent death on a mass scale, which is simultaneously resisted and expected, paradoxically cast as an inevitability which however both allows for and demands urgent action. Striking in their frequency and affective weight, such evocations include the delivery of a child-sized coffin with the inscription 'HUMAN RACE' to a

²² Swade, 'Babies Against', pp. 66-7.

²³ Fairhall, *Common Ground*, p. 187.

guarded gate of the base and songs such as 'Four minutes to midnight', written by Rebecca Johnson and the women of Greenham, a countdown to nuclear Armageddon in four stanzas.²⁴

A series of die-in protests were also staged by peace camp protesters, both on the Common and in central London, the latter coinciding with official visits of political leaders. Originating around 1970 in environmental activism, die-ins are designed to 'elicit feelings of grief and shock, emotions that people want to experience alongside others', thus establishing the potential for connectivity not only among the protestors but also between the protestors and their witnesses, from passers-by to even possibly security and police forces.²⁵ In both anti-nuclear activism and subsequent movements in women's, LGBT+, ethnic minority and animal rights, die-ins have also been used to the opposite effect, as a way of attributing blame for murderous action or inaction to governments, law enforcement and other agencies of power. This effect is underlined by drawing chalk outlines around each other's bodies in emulation of the processing of crime scenes: 'these "living dead" protest their relegation to the hospice and the cemetery or to the silence that equals death. By moving "death" out into the public sphere, they resist the death sentences written by normative discourse and social indifference'.²⁶ In 'Dying to Live' Gillian Booth describes the preparations of a die-in in London by women from the camp to protest President Reagan's official visit, with the mostly inexperienced protesters, including herself, fearing arrest or worse. Unillustrated yet full of vividly visual descriptions, this short text offers an insight into the relatively under-explored part of the visual culture of feminist activism in its poetic self-representation. As in craft, an identification as an amateur (maker or, in this case, protester) seems instrumental and inseparable from the ethos and aims of the protest. Preparing for their first die-in, the women in Booth's group are plagued by doubts, lack of confidence and fear of arrest. Upon hearing that they have been assigned to a side

²⁴ Beeban Kidron, Lindsay Poulton and Guardian Films, [Greenham Common website] <http://www.yourgreenham.co.uk/images/archives/fabric/large/06.jpg>; and Greenham Common Song Book, <http://www.yourgreenham.co.uk/#homepage>, both accessed 20 April 2016.

²⁵ Marina Koren, 'A Brief History of Die-In Protests', *CityLab*, 2014, <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2014/12/a-brief-history-of-die-in-protests/383439/>, accessed 26 April 2016.

²⁶ T. V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2005), p. 195.

street leaving the major thoroughfares to more experienced protesters, relief is quickly replaced by terror as it dawns on them that they may be in the way of diverted traffic. In the hours before the die-in, the whole city turns strange and hostile, uncannily haunted by the horrors that the women are desperately trying to avert. As in a hallucination or a nightmare, time jumps forward, office wear is transformed into military uniforms, umbrellas into weapons, passers-by into aliens:

As we cross a street, suddenly we are engulfed by a huge grey wave of office workers, military provision of skirts and tailored trousers, and ah, those many pointed umbrellas. Dear god it was all this time a tyre crushing in my head I was fearing, not to be confronted by irate pedestrians with pointed missiles. For one moment I fear I shall throw up then the moment is over and I'm with a group of women striding through the early morning heat to a destination only one of us knows, getting looked at by 100 passers-by who could be inhabitants of another planet they seem that different but who I know will burn and shrivel up the same as me if the bomb fell in the clear light on such a Monday morning.²⁷

In this nightmarish vision, 'war' metastasises uncontrollably like a tumour to infect familiar places and daily routines like the morning commute. The repressed yet imminent danger, the full acknowledgment of which would grind everydayness to a halt, threatens to make life such as it is unliveable. As the last section of this article will explore, anti-nuclear struggle is vulnerable to a mental breakdown similar to the one that plagues nuclear deterrence, which psychoanalyst Franco Fornari described as 'paranoid elaboration of mourning'.²⁸ The challenge for the anti-nuclear war movement was to make this paranoid mourning authentic and hold on to the ability to distinguish between nightmare and reality.²⁹ Booth's narrative stops short of a psychotic break, as uncanny

²⁷ Gillian Booth, 'Dying to Live', in Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins (eds), *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (Women's Press: London, 1984), p. 57.

²⁸ Franco Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, trans. Alenka Pfeifer (Anchor Press/Doubleday: New York, 1974), p. xviii.

²⁹ Cf. Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, p. xix.

horror morphs into magical realism: 'The camera crew was staged outside the gates so we stayed in view, sat down in a circle holding hands and were joined by a group of spiders of all sizes and colours.'³⁰

The Art of Greenham Common

Greenham Common generated an impressive variety of artwork within and during the Women's Peace Camp and ever since, as a historical reference and a site with a concentrated potential of destruction, haunted by the projected fears of the public for what it represented. In this section, familiar artworks are considered alongside lesser-known grassroots projects and anonymous and collective practices to draw attention to their common ground: a shared haunting.

Gamma (1999) by Jane and Louise Wilson, a four-screen video projection with sound, was filmed in the decommissioned missile base at Greenham Common, activating its haunting potential as a physical remnant of Cold War paranoia and threatened catastrophes that were thankfully averted but somehow retain their potential to unnerve. Deserted by all but two uniformed characters played by the artists, the emptiness of the interiors is simultaneously broken and amplified by an assortment of unexplained noises, the nuclear military version of things that go bump in the night. This troubling absence according to Claire Doherty, 'seems to signify some kind of traumatic occurrence', suggesting a contiguity between event and threat when the latter acquires such widespread and intense cultural significance.³¹ Furthermore, *Gamma* insists on the cleavage between significance and signification, impact and legibility: the abandoned airbase becomes a material manifestation of the architectural uncanny by exposing something of the madness of nuclear deterrence and a war that proved profoundly traumatic despite remaining 'cold'.

In a different tone, *The Greenham Common Print Portfolio* was conceived in 1984 as a way of supporting the women at Greenham by donating the proceeds of its sale to the camp. It included a

³⁰ Booth, 'Dying to Live', p. 60.

³¹ Jeremy Millar and Claire Doherty, *Jane and Louise Wilson* (Film and Video Umbrella: London, 2000), p.76.

print by each of three artists, Jim Dine, Dieter Roth and Richard Hamilton.³² The portfolio packs a surprising diversity of artistic perspectives on Greenham as a site of protest and symbol of feminist (or at least women's) anti-nuclear struggle. Dine's contribution consists of a version of *Hiroshima Clock*, a clock stopped at 8.15am, the time of the Hiroshima bombing on 6 August 1945 and a prevalent motif in war monuments, to which Dine has since returned. Hamilton used a different stock image, in some ways diametrically opposed to Dine's. He made a drawing, a print edition and eventually a painting based on a found photograph of a mother and a young toddler, which was kept in his studio since the late 1960s among other source materials, and eventually 'assume[d] its place among the genres as a "Mother and child"'.³³ Signposting the polar opposites of annihilation and new fragile life, the contents of the Greenham Common portfolio are completed by an equivocal etching with aquatint by Dieter Roth of what could be deciphered as a trampled bunch of flowers and at least one human skull on the top right corner, framed by smudged fingerprints on either side of the paper. Hamilton's source is simultaneously anonymised as a specimen of a genre and given a compelling if anecdotal backstory. According to Jacqueline Darby, while working on 'Fashion-plate' in Milan, Hamilton was befriended by a young lithographic printmaker. In an attempt to overcome communication barriers as neither spoke the other's language well, the Italian pulled out of his wallet 'the quintessential photograph of his son by an indulgent father'. Hamilton said it was beautiful and his new friend insisted that he kept it, as a present.³⁴ It is significant that the photograph, not found but gifted, is cast as a universal bridge between strangers and foreigners, mending incomprehension with a shared visual language corresponding to common structures of affect.

Compositionally, the photograph and Hamilton's reworkings of it bear all the conventions and flaws of the family snapshot: the accidental criss-crossing of shadows on the ground emphasise

³² Sotheby's Auction e-catalogue, *Lot 57: Richard Hamilton, Mother and Child* (2007), <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.L07020.html/f/57/L07020-57.pdf>, accessed 20 April 2016.

³³ Jacqueline Darby cited in *Richard Hamilton*, exhib. cat. (Tate: London, 1992), p. 178.

³⁴ *Richard Hamilton*, p. 178.

the disarmingly earnest centring of the child in the frame, while the mother, in a literally supporting role, is cut out of the frame with a familiar carelessness. Dressed top to toe in pristine and gender-neutral white, with its features blurred by a fluidity typical of infant faces and the sunlight, the child could be any (white) child, almost an 'everybaby'. Taking into account Hamilton's motivation to support the women of the peace camp, another more narrowly contextual reading of the work emerges, one that homes in on a positive portrayal of the mother-child relationship and, specifically, of good enough mothering. This present to the Greenham women acknowledges the special mobilisation of mothering, as myth as well as experience, in the articulation of women's unique contribution to the anti-nuclear movement. The domestic quality of the living and care-giving arrangements at the peace camp were simultaneously exaggerated in their evocation of homeliness through craft, while these same arrangements were being misrepresented and condemned as aberrant and harmful to the institution of the nuclear family (and, by extension, society) in the conservative press (fig. 2). On 28 July 1983, *Daily Mail* reporter Stewart Payne published a piece on a baby delivered to a single-by-choice mother at the peace camp with the title 'The CND Baby Scandal'.³⁵ Headlines wildly overestimating the percentage of lesbian women on the camp, alleging systematic 'conversion' of straight women to lesbianism, breakdown of marriages because of the occupation and straightforwardly accusing the women of 'manhating', were common and were supplemented by more serious allegations of violent tendencies beneath a misleading peacenik exterior and even of espionage for the communists.³⁶ Vacillating between patriarchal myths of dangerous femininities and a paranoid defence of the family unit and government policy at once, age-old gendered slurs were re-entered into circulation and appropriated by the protesters, although it is not easy to determine which came first, their relaunch or the appropriation. While repurposing domestic crafts into making banners had a long history in British social movements from trade unionism to the Suffragettes, weaving loose colourful webs and attaching mementoes to the

³⁵ Stewart Payne, 'The CND Baby Scandal', *The Daily Mail*, 28 July 1983, page unknown. Found in 'Headlines', <http://www.youngreenham.co.uk/#media>, accessed 20 April 2016.

³⁶ 'Headlines', <http://www.youngreenham.co.uk/#media>, accessed 20 April 2016.

fence of the base could not be read in conventionally political terms, demanding a more archaic reference framework. 'The witches of Greenham', as they were vilified in the press, happily portrayed themselves as cartoon witches surrounded by spider webs in their DIY posters, proud to have invented protest practices with rich symbolic ramifications and practical possibilities.³⁷ In addition to a metaphorical challenge to linearity the web connoted the potential for a growing network of unexpected connections, which was important to the survival of the movement as the 'Carry Greenham Home' campaign indicated.³⁸ In practical terms, when used on the fence or over protesters in sit-ins and die-ins, untangling the web made surprisingly hard work for the police and military authorities faced with the task of removing it, and reduced them to 'the fiddly task of the kind women are traditionally required to do.'³⁹ Viewed as an intervention in this war in and of representation, Hamilton's *Mother and Child* offered a supportive if not radical message: the wilful challenge to domesticity at Greenham is not at the expense of 'everybaby' but in effort to ensure everyone has a future; the 'witches of Greenham' know how to take care of their own and could be trusted to do so. In a striking foreshadowing (or echo) of Louise Bourgeois' *Maman* series of enormous spider statues, one of the simulated spider webs on the Greenham fence includes white baby clothes, ambiguously woven into the web or ambivalently trapped by it (fig. 3).

Active between 1981 and 1984, the artists' collective Sister Seven produced a series of consciousness-raising events, posters and performances, including notably the performance *Premature Endings* in Huddersfield in 1984. The collective originally consisted of seven women but came down to six (Evelyn Silver, Mary Michaels, Liz Hibbard, Shirley Cameron, Gillian Allnut and Monica Ross) and eventually five members. Their work is inflected by the paradox of much pacifist and particularly anti-nuclear activism, in which a pre-emptively mournful sense of impending doom by complete nuclear annihilation invites urgent action. John Timberlake describes visions of nuclear catastrophes as collective 'false memories': not only did a nuclear world war never take place but its

³⁷ Newspaper headline, The Fabric of Greenham video, <http://www.yourgreenham.co.uk/#fabric>, accessed 20 April 2016.

³⁸ Glossary: 'Carry Greenham Home', <http://www.yourgreenham.co.uk/#homepage>.

³⁹ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The allegory of the human form* (Virago: London 1985), pp.58-9.

multiple evocations and representations, including visual ones, are in themselves an effect of the traumatic fallout of the cold war.⁴⁰ Rather than false memories, however, which suggest a mass delusion sparked by real trauma, anti-nuclear art practice seems motivated by pre-emptive mourning for premature, abrupt and violent death on a mass scale, death which is entertained and to which diverse visual and other forms are given, while politically campaigning against it. Shirley Cameron's contribution to Sister Seven's anti-nuclear exhibition, which toured over sixty venues, is haunted by the spectre of her dead loved ones.⁴¹ She vividly describes her prematurely born children sleeping peacefully in their beds, whose premature deaths she cannot bear to imagine. A Sister Seven poster offers guidance for a simple DIY performance using a single prop in the shape of a nuclear missile, the 'end-of-the-book mark':

How to use End-of-the-Book-Marks

1. Choose a book (a novel or story book)
2. Place bookmark in any page near the centre of the book
3. Read from beginning of book to the bookmark and STOP!
4. THROW THE BOOK AWAY
5. And think about premature endings – the nuclear weapons exploding at any time – just when we had done the shopping or maybe when we were in the middle of reading a good book ...⁴²

The final bullet point, which retroactively sets the scene of sudden and unjustified killing in treacherously familiar, ordinary and even relaxed circumstances (just after the shopping, or 'in the middle of reading a good book'), reveals a fundamental dimension of anti-nuclear feminist practice and forms an accented addition to feminist dystopian domesticities: the nuclear version of uncanny

⁴⁰ John Timberlake, 'Nuclear War as False Memory', *Open Arts Journal*, no. 3 (Summer 2014), pp. 157-63.

⁴¹ Shirley Cameron, artist's statement (2014), <http://shirleycameron.org/index.php>, accessed 20 April 2016.

⁴² Sister Seven poster (1981), Monica Ross archive, Phoenix Studios, Brighton.

domesticity does not stem from a critique of a patriarchal division of labour but from the recognition that no place is safe from total war.

Originally created in 1989 during a one-month residency at New York's New Museum Margaret Harrison's installation *Common Land Greenham* was 'a reconstruction and reinterpretation' of the perimeter fence of the Greenham Common base bearing the protesters' personal and largely domestic additions, including photographs, children's clothing and toys, and kitchen implements (fig. 4).⁴³ The installation includes a mural, an empty pram, and a quotation from Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*: 'We can best help you prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods.'⁴⁴ Harrison's installation was recreated for her solo exhibition *Preoccupy*, Silberkuppe, Berlin (2012), with the initiative of the gallery curators who saw in it and, by extension, in the original perimeter fence of the base itself, an influential precedent for contemporary activism. In 2013 the fence became *Common Reflections* with the inclusion of mirrors, which had multiple meanings and effects. Harrison's exhibition for the Northern Art Prize exploited reflection literally and metaphorically in a series of works including the painting *The Last Gaze* based on Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem and John William Waterhouse's painting *The Lady of Shalott*, a woman cursed to only view the world through mirror images.⁴⁵ Harrison reflects on the politics and aesthetics of looking and being looked at as stock feminist concerns, while also exploiting the disorienting effect of differently angled mirrors on the viewer. Just as importantly, she references one of the biggest demonstrations at Greenham, 'Reflect the Base' in December 1983, which involved 50,000 women and resulted in a record number of arrests. 'Surrounding the base, we faced thousands of armed soldiers and police

⁴³ 'Margaret Harrison', Northern Art Prize 2013, <http://www.northernartprize.org.uk/2013-prize/shortlist/margaret-harrison>, accessed 20 April 2016.

⁴⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'Three Guineas', *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, ed. Morag Schiach (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000), p. 366.

⁴⁵ See also Kim Munson, *On Reflection: The Art of Margaret Harrison* (Neurotic Raven: Pacifica CA, 2015), pp. 61-2.

as we held up our mirrors so that they could see their own faces, guarding these nuclear weapons of mass suffering.’⁴⁶

The disorientation of the gallery viewer is not merely visual but extends to Harrison’s approach to the history of feminist activism. By recreating the fence anew, Harrison revisits earlier work on the same topic in 1989 but also invites the viewer to reflect on the meanings of repetition, return and history of and within feminism. This is no commemoration, nor a straightforward attempt to preserve something unchanged for future generations: ‘if women have been obliterated by history, then we can obliterate history by ignoring it’.⁴⁷ Ignoring history does not amount to an indifference towards past events, lives, and achievements but rather a recognition that ‘formal and conceptual strateg[ies] of fracturing chronologies’⁴⁸ are often at play in art informed by feminism. Feminist accounts of the past first emerged as feminist responses to gaps in historical narratives and historiographical failures to identify (let alone appreciate) either the labour or the oeuvre of women artists. The results often bear the scars of their past marginalisation and repression: thoroughly dismissive of chronologies, wilfully fractured, implacably disorienting. Unnervingly, the fence continues to mutate through and beyond its recreations.

As I was working through an early version of this article in June 2015, an American-owned factory on the outskirts of the city of Lyon became the target of a terrorist attack.⁴⁹ Following multiple small-scale explosions (larger ones were planned as it transpired but didn’t pan out), reports emerged of a decapitated body found on the scene and a severed human head ‘stuck’ on the fence of the Air Products facility. Before forensics investigators were able to identify the head as belonging to a manager at the factory, there was speculation that the head may have belonged to one of the attackers and may have been severed and caught on the fence by accident as the result of an explosion. The exact meaning of the French verb ‘*s’accrocher*’ was debated: it means to hang

⁴⁶ Dr Rebecca Johnson cited in Sarah Graham, ‘Reflections on Greenham, 11 December 1983’, *Feminist Times* (2003), <http://www.feministtimes.com/reflections-greenham-11-december-1983/>, accessed 20 April 2016.

⁴⁷ Nancy Spero cited in Joanna S. Walker, *Nancy Spero, Encounters* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 90.

⁴⁸ Walker, *Nancy Spero*, p. 90.

⁴⁹ BBC, ‘France Attack as it happened’, 26 June 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-europe-33287095>, accessed 25 April 2016.

from, to hook on but also to catch.⁵⁰ Early reports were open to the suggestion that the head may have been caught by the fence after a fatal explosion. I made a concerted effort to avoid seeing visual documentation of the factory fence. While I was writing I couldn't take the image of the severed head on the fence out of my mind, not seen but imagined; it stuck. Looking at Harrison's fence again, I blanked out the pegs holding up the assorted objects. The object placement could be accidental, the result of extreme force; unlike what has been often repeated, they consist of both precious mementoes *and* everyday objects, essential to the business of living but not precious, such as pots and pans – the contents of a home, not memento boxes. *Common Reflections* joins a canon of works relating to Greenham Common but also offers the flickering suggestion of something that no other work does: a literally exploded view of the alternative domesticities of the peace camp.⁵¹

Like the subversively decorated perimeter fence of the Greenham Common RAF base, Margaret Harrison's recreations demand an embodied approach from the viewer. The fence becomes 'sticky', a term proposed (or rather repurposed) by Mieke Bal to describe contemporary works of art that promote an enhanced experience of time in the act of viewing, without deploying time-based media but by manipulating the experience of the viewer through an engagement of her senses and sensibilities. To be precise, sticky images do not so much engage as they transfix the viewer, thus conveying something of the trauma that informs their making.

They slow down to the extreme; they make you dizzy from the back-and-forthness between microscopic and macroscopic looking where no eyeglasses or contact lenses will quite do the job. Looking itself becomes tortuous, almost tortuous. [...] these surfaces, whose structure of microscopic detail conjures up such massive violence as to make it impossible for any

⁵⁰ Oxford Dictionaries: French, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/translate/french-english/accrocher>, accessed 30 June 2015.

⁵¹ I am referencing the subtitle of Cornelia Parker's installation *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View* (1991). Tempting though it may be to include this work in the discussion, Parker, whose work was made with the help of the army, views explosions as culturally iconic, 'from the violence of the comic strip, through action films, in documentaries about Super Novas and the Big Bang, and least of all on the news in never ending reports of war.' (<http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/cold-dark-matter/explosion>, accessed 20 April 2016).

historical or journalistic account to encompass it, so foreshorten time as to enter the viewer's life-time, breaking its linearity and regularity. They stick to you, long after the intense experience of time has faded back into everyday life.⁵²

The Psychoanalysis of (Anti-)War (Protest)

In *The Psychoanalysis of War*, originally published in 1966, Italian psychoanalyst Franco Fornari reviews psychoanalytic approaches to conflict to make a special case for nuclear war and its prevention with the help of psychoanalysis. Fornari's proposals, which are fairly specific and involve the foundation of the Omega Institution, a global defensive and judicial organisation whose purpose would be to prevent all future wars, never came to fruition and are less important than his analysis of the problem of war in its nuclear mutation.⁵³ Defending the role of psychoanalysis in the examination of war phenomena, he notes a series of 'symbolic peculiarities' through which 'the emergence of an all-destructive reality is associated with the symbols of procreation and preservation of the species, through a primary love relationship such as that between mother and child'. For instance, the bomber of Hiroshima named his B-52 after his mother, Enola Gay; and the 'father' of the atomic bomb General Leslie Groves, on completion of the first successful experiment with the bomb, messaged President Truman that 'Baby is born'.⁵⁴

With such familial symbolism in mind, the cover of the Doubleday/Anchor 1974 edition of the English translation of Fornari's book seems particularly well-chosen (fig. 5). A seemingly purpose-made Ralph Steadman cartoon shows a disturbing mother and child scene in a barren interior

⁵² Mieke Bal, 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of time in an art of duration', in Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed), *Time and the Image* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000), p. 99.

⁵³ Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, pp. 199-236.

⁵⁴ Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, p. ix.

space.⁵⁵ A demented skeletal female figure feeds a stiff baby from a missile filled with blood. As Freud proposes in 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', woman is culturally coded as the giver of life, love and death.⁵⁶ That the scene is set in an interior, albeit one with no visible walls, is also significant: in the context of 'pantoclastic' nuclear warfare, any distinction between the war front and the home front melts away.⁵⁷ The stock psychoanalytic explanation of war as defence of the love object against destruction no longer applies when war would result in total destruction. Fornari agrees with Freud that war involves an 'outward deflection of the death instinct', not a defence against an external enemy but the *invention* of an enemy, in 'an unconscious security maneuver [sic] against terrifying fantasy entities which are not flesh and blood but represent an absolute danger [...] the "Terrifier"'.⁵⁸ Jacqueline Rose makes a similar argument in her discussion of death, the ultimate 'Terrifier', in her book *Why War?*:

Death is a problem, not because we cannot surmount its loss or imagine our own death, but because it forces us to acknowledge that what belongs to us most intimately is also a stranger or enemy, a type of foreign body in the mind.⁵⁹

Mourning is therefore psychologically challenging due to an 'estrangement' between conscious and unconscious thinking, leaving the affected party with 'a form of thinking unable [...] to own or possess itself'.⁶⁰ Fornari names 'paranoid elaboration of mourning' the elision of real mourning, the refusal to acknowledge the 'Terrifier' within and to instead project it outwards: 'we imagine that the

⁵⁵ The book credit reads simply 'Cover Design by Ralph Steadman'. Steadman made a series of anti-war cartoons and posters, including for the Stop the War Coalition against the war in Iraq in 2003 (<http://huckcdn.lwllies.com/admin/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/steadman.jpg>) and for the front page of Nuclear Times (Summer 1978) (<http://hqinfo.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/nuclear-news1-can-nuclear-power-save-us.html>). Accessed 20 April 2016.

⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913), *Art and Literature, Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 14, pp. 233-47.

⁵⁷ Adjective signifying 'total destruction'. Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, p. xxvii, n.6.

⁵⁸ Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, p. xvii and p. xvi respectively.

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Rose, *Why War? Psychoanalysis, Politics, and the Return to Melanie Klein* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1993), p. 19.

⁶⁰ Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, p. 20.

love object has died not because of our own fantasy sadistic attacks against it, but because of the evil magic of the enemy.⁶¹ The eradication of one's own ambivalence therefore results in a real risk of violence on a mass scale.⁶²

Short of founding a global organisation for universal justice and personal responsibility, what can psychoanalysis do? Reflecting on the clinical situation of patients presenting with anxiety and depression over the nuclear threat, Lowell Rubin admits that acknowledging the validity of the analysand's concerns will be helpful, and goes so far as to indicate that empowering analysands to take some form of action against the source of their fears can be a significant part of the treatment.⁶³ In other words, activism is the cure.

The artist-protesters at Greenham Common exploded the symbolism of the fences of Greenham Common by wrapping them into their knitted webs and tearing into them, as if they were made of yarn. Challenged, transformed, materially and affectively invested, the fences marked the line between everyday life and the perpetually deferred but menacingly imminent moment where both life and time would melt down. On the grounds of Greenham and its artistic evocations and recreations, feminist anti-nuclear pacifists waged war against 'a costly and tragic system of security'.⁶⁴ Pre-emptive mourning, in its visual and material elaborations, fended off the paranoid elaboration of mourning and, in a small but meaningful way, presented a vital counterpoint to the destructive capabilities of the 'Terrifier'. The Greenham women's choice of methods and materials was far from accidental, even though it was also practical: craft's baggage, its ambiguous ambivalence and ambivalent ambiguity, its home-made character and its adaptability to alternative

⁶¹ Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, p. xviii.

⁶² Interestingly, Fornari uses 'mourning' in a sense that is not too far from the colloquial rather than specifically psychoanalytic sense of the word. In Fornari's discussion of Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917) features much less prominently than Freud's texts on war and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Where Fornari references Karl Abraham, he does so in relation to the totemic feast and not his elaboration of mourning, melancholia and their distinction, on which Abraham famously insisted. See Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV (1914-1916) (Vintage Classics: London, 2001), pp. 237-58; and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), *On Metapsychology*, *Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 11 (Penguin: London, 1991), pp. 269-338.

⁶³ Lowell Rubin, 'Melancholia, Mourning, and the Nuclear Threat', Howard Levine, Daniel Jacobs and Lowell Rubin (eds), *Psychoanalysis and the Nuclear Threat* (Analytic Press: London, 1988), pp. 245-57.

⁶⁴ Fornari, *The Psycho-Analysis of War*, p. xviii.

living situations, its whiff of amateurism and lowly status sustained their actions, fed their practice and embodied their values. In this respect, Margaret Harrison's citation of Virginia Woolf signposts a profound affinity that is not exhausted in their shared women's pacifism across the decades but is also philosophically and psychoanalytically founded on a revalidation of that which is usually devalued:

Virginia Woolf proposes ridicule, censure, and contempt as the great antidotes to vanity, egotism, and megalomania, and then poverty, chastity, derision, and freedom from unreal loyalties (all mostly imposed on the female sex) as the conditions for women's entry into a world of professionalism which, without them, will inevitably lead to war.⁶⁵ Hang on to failure, hang on to derision – a failure and derision that would not invite a reactive triumphalism but pre-empt it – if you want to avoid going to war.⁶⁶

CAPTIONS LIST

Fig. 1. Blockade at Greenham Common by protesters from the Peace Camp, c. 1982. The Danish Peace Academy Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp's Songbook,

<http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/abase/sange/greenham/sigrid.htm> (Photo: Sigrid Møller, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; slides scanned by Holger Terp, June 2006)

Fig. 2. The fence at Greenham Common with additions by protesters from the Peace Camp, c. 1982.

The Danish Peace Academy Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp's Songbook,

<http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/abase/sange/greenham/sigrid.htm> (Photo: Sigrid Møller, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; slides scanned by Holger Terp, June 2006)

⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 90, paraphrased in Jacqueline Rose, 'Why War?', *Why War* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1993), p. 37.

⁶⁶ Rose, p. 37.

Fig. 3. The fence at Greenham Common with additions by protesters from the Peace Camp, c. 1982.

The Danish Peace Academy Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp's Songbook,

<http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/abase/sange/greenham/sigrid.htm> (Photo: Sigrid Møller, the

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; slides scanned by Holger Terp, June 2006)

Fig. 4. Margaret Harrison, *Common Reflections*, installation shot, 2013. Northern Art Prize 2013,

Leeds Art Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Leeds Art Gallery. (Photo: Simon Warner)

Fig. 5. Book cover designed by Ralph Steadman, of Franco Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War*

(Anchor Press/ Doubleday: New York, 1974). (Photo: Alexandra Kokoli)