

# Andrea Fraser

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- we started out of a reading group. We formed to read Lacan, Freud, female Lacanians like Jeanne Montherley, different people, but to read psychoanalytical texts. We did that for about nine months, and then we stopped doing that and we started talking to each other about our work, that we were doing, and then we just sort of started talking, ordering chinese food, watching movies. We invited a couple of people to speak to us. To the five of us.

*-Whom did you invite?*

- Mike Kelly, who is an artist and ... Hillmann, who is a writer, a fiction writer. We invited Yvonne Rainer, she didn't come, but we did watch her films. That's how we began. And eventually we got fed up with reading theoretical text.

But two things happened. At that time, there were a lot of panels in the art world, at the Dia Art foundation, there were panels organized by Hal Foster, there were a lot of that going on at that time. And then we were invited doing something in a space called Forwards, which was an alternative space in New Jersey, in Hoboken. There was an exhibition, that was just an evening, an exhibition that would just be an opening and a panel discussion or some kind of discussion by the people involved in the exhibition. The show was in a space, that was actually a studio, so we went there, we didn't do the show, we only did the panel, and that's how we started.

It was in December, the panel we did was about Christmas. It was called Sex in your Holiday Season. We started out of a theoretical analysis on Christmas, that was the strange thing to begin with. Now it's not so strange, you have a lot of people writing about Christmas. That was really before cultural studies started, in 87.

I can remember me saying, it's about Santa, Sodom and Psychoanalyses, a alliteration.

That would be the paper and then we got Sex in your Holiday Season. We just started coming up with titles, and then we wrote the papers afterwards. Some of the other titles were - I don't know if you can translate this - the subordinate Claus, which is a grammatical term, for a clause that's subordinate in a sentence, but it's also, in this case, referring to Santa Claus's wife. She is a subordinate Claus. Then the Reindeerman, this is a reference to Freud, the Ratman and the Wulfman.

It really emerged out of a kind of sense of frustration that we had, with the way academic theory was being used in the art world, in a way that didn't seem to consider the contexts in which it was written.

It was in response to discussions within feminism about epistemology about mastery and feminist critiques of pedagogy and of relations in a class room situation, in the concepts of transference, as they apply to a class room situation, a lecture situation, a kind of public speaking situation. They were in response to those issues, things we had been reading about, in the prior year and a half. But it wasn't enough just to be reading about them, but understanding these theoretical concepts did not make a difference. So we wanted to kind of put them into action.

We thought of what we were doing from the beginning as an interventionary activity. We were rejecting those theoretical concepts entirely, we were using them as a basis of a practice, I suppose to just kind of dealing with them on their own, as if in enough themselves, they could change the way that people interacted in situations. Does that make sense?

What we wanted to do was to go to conferences and this is where we perform, we perform in conferences, academic conferences.

There are two conferences, where we have performed. One was a huge conference for people in modern languages, the MLA, the modern language association, with a couple of thousands people there. It's all

panels, for days and days like two hundred panels at the same time, two huge hotels. It's where people go to look for jobs, people who are teaching at universities. That's the primary function of the thing, so everyone is there intervening for jobs. Then there is another one like that for art. It's called the College Art Association, it's artists and art historians and art critics it's mostly for art historians, for people who work in universities.

The last place, where we performed was a feminist conference in . We were there in July, and that was one of our best experiences, because we actually opened the conference, usually we are scheduled in the evening, as kind of entertainment.

We wanted to be listed as a regular panel, usually we are to some extent, but always a little bit outside and against the kind of mainstream of the procedo, not really participants. But in this conference in we were really participants, we were the opening panel session. We were the first panel, that was really wonderful.

We only do two panels, one is literary and one is art historian and we were doing our literary panel there, but what was great about that situation is, that we still were functioning there as an intervention, we had a critical function there. I think we made everyone pretty self-conscious about what they were doing on the panels that followed. But we were also there as examples of a feminist practice.

I suppose that's the difference of having a kind of negative status, as people, who are engaging in a sort of critical or ironical, ironical critical activity and having a positive status as examples of a kind of practice, that has been few by feminists. We were not doing something as outsiders of the discourse but we were participating to the extent that it was parody, or that it was not serious, in terms of what we would say, theoretically, but that we were doing something that was part of a debate, about how women teach, about how women function, in those kinds of situations, how women function in universities, in academic conferences.

So how we started, we were taking theoretical concepts and critical concepts, that we had been reading about in the study group and had been trying to put them into action in a way, turn them into a practice. That would go back into the context from where those concepts came. In the way that they were being ran, the sense that we had of a large contradiction, at least in certain fields, of what the theory says, and the use it's being put.

The material that we deal with, has to do with women in academic professions, in Universities, things like women studies programs, some psychographs, things that come up, but we tend to focus more thematically on issues about representation. At least for me the most important part has to do with pedagogical relations, so in a way that's something that is very material. But we are only dealing with that in a particular context.

When I say pedagogical relations, I'm thinking of... in the situations in which we perform, some issues are how many women, how many men, but what we try to deal with more, has to do with conditions of authority in that situation. Who appears as authoritarian and how? Who appears as being in control of the speech, or his speech and why? And why in terms of gender and also why in other terms. And thinking about a kind of power relationship there. A relationship to a teacher. There is this concept that has been central to a lot of our thinking. The concept of transference. I think of transference as a power relationship, the giving over - and I wouldn't say that this is individual but it is also institutionally organized, institutional determinant - the giving over of a subject to another, of the authority to articulate what one wants. Another way to say it is the giving over of the power and the knowledge of what one wants and what is good for one.

Basically there is a phrase: The subject is supposed to know, which is a Lacanian phrase, and Lacan says, as soon as the subject, who is supposed to know, exists somewhere, there is transference, and what the subject is supposed to know is, the subject who is supposed to know, what the subject is supposed to know, is supposed to know, if it says is what I want. But you can also extend that in other ways, the subject is also supposed to know, what things mean. We do not theorize primarily in terms of the position of the analysis, in terms of cynical practice, psychoanalysis and how the analysis function, the idea

that someone goes to an analysis, the primary thing by asking to be heard and in that they are giving over a certain kind of authority to the analyst, to know what it is that will cure me, to know what it is what I want, or what I should want, in order to be better. And you can think about that as a kind of disempowerment, what happens. To give someone the authority to speak for me, or the authority to know what I want, or the authority to know the truth about my experience.