

*Developing a Connective Feminine Discourse: Drusilla Modjeska on
Women's Lives, Love and Art*

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Abstract: This paper discusses the work of the Australian writer and historian Drusilla Modjeska through a focus on the intersections between women's lives, love and art, which constitute the central triptych of Modjeska's writing. It argues that Modjeska's oeuvre unfolds a connective feminine discourse through a development of what the paper calls hinging tropes, discursive connectors that join life, love and art, such as weaving, folding and talking. That connective feminine discourse is indeed central to Modjeska's personal and sometimes idiosyncratic feminism.

Keywords: Drusilla Modjeska, Art, Femininity, Feminism, Discourse, Life, Love, Women

“[F]or ‘life’ and ‘art’ – those two huge categories – rarely sit comfortably together; men and women almost invariably take different positions and get angry.” (*Stravinsky's Lunch*, 17)

“‘With art,’ Rika said. ‘That can be a love affair, yes?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ Gina said. ‘The greatest of love affairs.’ She paused for a moment, looked at Rika, smiled. ‘But not necessarily the best’” (*The Mountain*, 68). This piece of conversation between protagonist Rika, a budding photographer, and the librarian Gina, from Drusilla Modjeska's 2012 novel *The Mountain*, highlights a central concern in Modjeska's work – the roles of love and art in women's lives. In all of her generically varied and experimental writing, Modjeska's enduring interest is in the complexity of women's

lives, love and art. Her research on women writers and artists is partly instinctive, she explains, “as if I knew without knowing that they had something to teach me” (*Timepieces*, 6). In *Stravinsky's Lunch* she tells stories about women's love lives and artistic lives, in order “to understand” (*Stravinsky's Lunch*, 22). That personal and instinctive engagement is present in all of Modjeska's books – fictional and non-fictional. Indeed, she enfold her own life, love and art into her writing in an organic and highly seductive way. Her use of the tricky first person is evident in this connection: “I' is a slippery creature, much given to ambiguity and prone to an almost chronic state of contingency. This too is the nature of secrets, and increasingly suits me well,” she admits in the author's note attached to her contribution to the collection *Secrets* (*Secrets*, 171-2). And it is the richness of what I call her central triptych – women's life, love and art – that I want to explore in this article. I am using the trope of a triptych for several reasons. A triptych is a work of art that consists of three panels that are hinged together and that can typically be folded together too. Life, love and art form just such a triptych in Modjeska's feminine and feminist writing. What I am particularly interested in exploring, however, are the hinges, the joints, the devices on which these three phenomena turn. In order to do so, I need to reflect on Modjeska's fondness for the word “feminine”, but also on how she ponders what the huge categories of art, love and life might be in the first place.ⁱ

There is no doubt that Modjeska writes from a feminist perspective, albeit a highly personal and sometimes idiosyncratic one. It is common in feminist scholarship to distinguish between female, feminine and feminist, where female is biological sex, feminine socially or culturally constructed gender, and feminist a political position not attached to sex (or gender).ⁱⁱ Drusilla Modjeska deliberately, I think, uses the label “feminine” in her work to cover both female and feminine, and sometimes even feminist – an approach I adopt in this article. Feminine, then, does the work of all three categories in Modjeska's work; it weaves biological sex together with socially constructed gender to compose a highly personal feminist project. This project is not traditionally feminist in the sense that it is primarily focused on critiquing the ideology and effect of patriarchal power and what Kate Millett famously called sexual politics back in 1971. Modjeska's focus lies elsewhere, though no less feminist for it. Her concern is with female-centred – feminine if you like – sustaining friendships, conversations and artistic and amorous experiences linked to that central triptych of her oeuvre: women's life, love, art. It seems to me that Modjeska's use of the term feminine has little to do with critiquing social or cultural constructs, but rather with a form of positioning. And by positioning I mean a gendered perspective from which to explore and experience the interwoven nature of the triptych. She is developing an unashamedly feminine and female aesthetics, indeed a highly recognisable discourse that draws out the connectivity at the heart of what she describes as the feminine, in her sustaining focus on women's life, love and art.

In *Stravinsky's Lunch* she asks “What feminine inheritance?” (*Stravinsky's Lunch*, 112) is it that she sees in the work of Australian painter and memoir-writer Stella Bowen? Is it the “feminine underbelly” of modernist painters? What is the connection, what hinges these women artists? How do they join life, love and art in the harmonic unity that Bowen was dreaming of? Where are the connections? What exactly hinges, or joins, love, life and art? How is life united with love and with art? In her work, Modjeska

makes use of several ideas to suggest hinging, notions that are at the same time literal and metaphorical, and that develop into her own discourse of feminine connectivity. In “Living on a Corner”, Modjeska ponders the “strange freedom of women artists in this country [i.e. Australia], working in the spaces they could make their own, in gaps and fissures.” Interpolating herself in the narrative, she goes on to reflect on life in Sydney in the 1970s, and wonders how to tell that particular story: “There’s no single line to that story, or from that time. I pull a thread called place” (*Inner Cities*, 64-5). Fissures and gaps are the in-between areas where women’s artistic and amorous lives are lived and they act as hinging tropes in a sense, illustrating the contingency of notions such as life, love and art. These are emphatically not discrete units in Modjeska’s universe. And typically, we are also introduced through meta-reflective comments on how to narrate the tale. She pulls a thread called place in order to find a focus for the story she aims to tell in this particular essay – on inner cities, meaning, literally, cities, but also cities of the mind, products of the imagination. However, the word thread recurs again and again in her stories, made to do different things in different contexts, while all the time uniting disparate elements especially in storytelling. In “The Cuckoo Clock”, for example, we are presented with the art of storytelling and how storytelling functions as glue that holds family life together. The narrator comments that the sister Aggie wants to hear the same story she’s heard many times before “as if the repetition itself will stitch her into the fabric of a family in which strains and separations are part of her woven birthright of love” (*Sisters*, 117). Here notions of stitching on fabric suggest the craft of uniting or hinging, in this case the life of the sister to the art of storytelling, that is to the central family story narrated in the familial story of the cuckoo clock. In “Writing Poppy” Modjeska uses other such sartorial metaphors that recur in her writing and that help us understand the hinges between life, love and art:

I pulled at the threads of memory until I found the life, or maybe only the tension in them. I began the work of remembering, weaving thoughts and feelings onto a loom strung with something (I’m not sure what) hard and inescapable. I used the shards of memory as a way back to the world and the life lived there (*Timepieces*, 73-4).

Pulling at threads suggests a method of finding focus for a story, of joining elements together, through notions of place, as above, or memory. The metaphor of the loom enlarges the threading and stitching on fabric metaphor and allows us to consider Modjeska’s art of storytelling as a kind of textual tapestry that pulls threads and stitches together in what will become networks or webs of women’s lives, loves and arts. In this connection, it is relevant to remember that the words text, texture and textile share the same etymology, from the Latin *texere*, meaning to compose and to weave.ⁱⁱⁱ Her mother comments on the young Drusilla’s stories that they are “Dru’s embroidery” and Modjeska herself insists that “[e]mbroidery was deep in my soul” (*Timepieces*, 79). The art of storytelling is here tellingly compared to the traditionally female art of embroidery. Thus it is not too farfetched to suggest that Modjeska’s generically very varied work from *Exiles at Home*, first published in 1981, to *The Mountain* (2012) be seen as her gigantic tapestry where the notions of thread pulling, stitching, interlacing, and interweaving can be understood as a way to hinge that thematic triptych of life, love and art both in a synchronic and diachronic manner. As far as art is concerned,

Modjeska is particularly attracted to the experimental and daring aspects of modernist women writers and painters. In these artists she learns how to gather together ideas, how to arrange words, how to order and link past and present. How to hinge, we might say: "What I wanted to capture in writing was the spreading, weaving talk that happens with an intimate friend" (*Timepieces*, 85), Modjeska writes, again using that metaphor of weaving that becomes her way of talking about female lives, friendships and conversations.

In another essay from *Timepieces*, "On Not Owning a Grace Cossington Smith" Modjeska reflects on the art that hangs on her own walls. She could not afford the Cossington Smith that she coveted, so instead she finds solace in the paintings by people she knows and that she has collected for years: "I like living alongside images made by people painting in the same environment in which I write. I like the interconnection of work and friendship and the art that comes from it. I like the traces of struggle and change and development" (*Timepieces*, 131). Here Modjeska develops another way of considering hinges – embodied this time in notions of interconnections and friendship and work and art – that she first introduced towards the end of *Poppy*, when musing on the "excellence of friendship" and "the connections between women" (*Poppy*, 309). Interestingly, the extract from "On Not Owning a Grace Cossington Smith" is noticeable for its repetition of the initial "I like" – the subjective, emotional and private is a characteristic feature of Modjeska's own method of engaging in an intimate conversation, as it were, with the reader. It also characterises what I call her feminine positioning, her own powerful brand of feminism, where the personal is political, yet in a muted and understated manner.

The notion of conversation as a hinging idea is more fully developed in *Stravinsky's Lunch*, especially in Modjeska's typical fashion of interpolating herself into the lives of her subjects: "The notion of conversation, as Stella Bowen was using it, and as I do, can be seen as both a feminine and a modern phenomenon". Conversation is linked to love (Bowen fell in love with Ford Madox Ford's talk) and intimacy: "Conversation was for her the basis for intimacy: the real exchange that occurs between people who are open to each other in feeling and ideas" (*Stravinsky's Lunch*, 141). Even Stella Bowen's memoir, *Drawn from Life* (1940), is described by Modjeska as a conversation piece (*Stravinsky's Lunch*, 150), where the reader is drawn into the other's intimate musings, not unlike the ways in which the reader is drawn into Modjeska's own conversation pieces, with women of the past and with (female) readers of the present. Conversation here becomes a linking device that operates synchronically and diachronically simultaneously. The art of conversation is a means to unite life, love and art but also a way for Modjeska to literally stage the feminine inheritance, the links between the women who people her books. It is also contingent on the notions of seeing and recognition, as we shall see.

Another manner in which Modjeska expands upon the connective hinges between women's life, love and art is through more traditional narrative epiphanies, where women characters suddenly experience profoundly their intimate connection with that feminine inheritance discussed above. Protagonist of *The Mountain*, Dutch-born Rika travels to Papua New Guinea and finds herself in the secret, female world of bark cloth artists. Here she experiences something akin to an epiphany as she contemplates the

location of the spirit and the spiritual, drawing on her own art of photography. Maybe it does not exist in material objects or in people, she muses: “Maybe it was more like negative space in photography, the connective tissue that joins the things that are seen, bringing them together through angle and light” (*The Mountain*, 139). Connective tissue names another method of hinging and it links Rika’s Western self with the Oceanic bark cloth artists in a female – feminine perhaps – sphere of creativity, that transcends “race”, class and age. Rika’s epiphany here echoes the first person narrator Lalage’s (or Drusilla Modjeska’s?) central epiphany in *Poppy*, a “triptychonic” moment that unites women, life and art. The narrator visits Crete for the first time and even though she has read much about the Minoan matriarchy, she is bowled over when she comes face to face with the figures that Poppy had already described to her before she died: “[T]he agile, the squat, the working women of Minoan: mothers, priests, animal handlers, acrobats, preparers of food. *Where do such women come from*, Poppy had written” (*Poppy*, 115, italics in the original). This powerful moment of cross-generational recognition yokes together mother with daughter and with representations of past women “still singing with life three or four thousand years later” (*Poppy*, 116). It is in Crete, contemplating women’s lives, loves and art, that mother and daughter are so powerfully moved, where Poppy, the thread maker, adopts Ariadne’s story – of art, love and life – as her own.

But of course in reality life, love and art rarely hinge unproblematically. In *Stravinsky’s Lunch* Modjeska cogitates thus about Stella Bowen: “Love and Art became united as her hopes for one folded into the other. And like [modernist painter] Paula Modersohn-Becker she discovered that there is an uneasy rub, a chafing line, between these two desires” (*Stravinsky’s Lunch*, 14). Folding is yet another manner of depicting the hinges between love and art, and what is interesting here is how the hinges are not always smooth and well-oiled, as it were. It is precisely because the hinges are rusty, that they in reality chafe and rub uneasily against each other, that the triptych of life, love and art makes for such a fascinating and cornucopious thematics to explore for Modjeska. The chafing line between life, love and art, however, grows into a creative and productive rub from which much great feminine, as it were, art is produced, as Modjeska goes on to explore in her chapter on Stella Bowen and her complicated life with Ford Madox Ford. Bowen’s longing was for harmony between life, love and art, as we have seen: “Her hope was for a shared life of love and work” (*Stravinsky’s Lunch*, 78), but this dream evolves into “*their love, and his art*” (*Stravinsky’s Lunch*, 64, italics in the original). That harmony between life, love and art that Bowen desired is presented as a feminine attempt to speak “against the split” (*Stravinsky’s Lunch*, 337). The split is Modjeska’s personal counter-metaphor, her imaginative description of what she sees as the traditionally masculine and patriarchal division between thinking (figured as a male activity) and feeling (considered a female weakness), public and private etc. Patriarchally speaking, life, love and art are discrete categories, split from each other in a way that is foreign to the female world of Modjeska’s textual tapestry, where contingency and connections reign supreme. Masculinity, she suggests, relies on binary divisions that cannot be accommodated in the framework of that female triptych at the heart of Modjeska’s distinctive connective feminine discourse.

In the introduction to the edited volume *Inner Cities*, Modjeska, writes:

Women are practised on the peripheries. Our memories, our stories, like the ways we live, are formed in movement between inner and outer, past and future, centre and margin, between the physical environment and the social world. We shape our cities, and re-shape them from the edge, we always have; just as our cities shape us. We live in houses that weren't built for our dreams, in suburbs connected by transport systems we can't control. We fit our stories to the world we inherit. Or do we? (*Inner Cities*, 2).

While Harriet/Harry Burden, Siri Hustvedt's contemporary, female artist in *The Blazing World* takes the 17th century writer Margaret Cavendish as her guardian angel and soul mate, Modjeska draws on Christine de Pizan (1364-c.1430) in her rumination on female inheritance in connection with the role of the imagination, dreaming and place. Her essay in this volume is called "Living on a Corner", probably in homage to Gaston Bachelard's suggestion that "our house is our corner of the world [...] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (*The Poetics of Space*, 4). However, although she clearly draws on Bachelard's oneiric exploration of houses as containers of the imagination and (day) dreams – described thus in the foreword to the 1994 edition of *The Poetics of Space* by John R. Stilgoe: "his insistence that people need houses in order to dream, in order to imagine, remains one of the most unnerving, most convincing arguments in Western philosophy"^{iv} – she also critiques this insistence. Contrary to Bachelard's claim that "the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (*Poetics of Space*, 6), Modjeska suggests from her gendered positioning that houses are not built for *women's* dreams, since in her textual universe women's lives are not split between outside and inside, but rather lived in-between outside and inside. Consequently women's dreams are not contained by houses, but rather more elastic and contingent, both inside and outside cities and houses in an organic connection that is simultaneously and ambiguously both vulnerable and strong. And what is more, many of the women Modjeska depicts do not have the time nor the luxury to inhabit a house where they can dream in peace.

We have seen that art is central in Modjeska's writing. All art is provisional and contingent, Modjeska tells us in the conclusion to *The Orchard*: "Art is created in the tension between that contingency, a necessary instability, and the order, the meaning, the pattern, that graces it. As is a garden. Or a well-lived life" (*The Orchard*, 257). Art is indeed linked to life and love – and such contingency can create tensions that upset "well-lived lives". Art as such can also be many things: it can be the balsa wood models that the first person narrator of "Ripe to Tell" (in *Secrets*) first makes of European cathedrals and later, having discovered Oceania, of the Cathedrals of Papua New Guinea. Poppy, in the matremoir^v of the same name, has a habit "of plaiting scraps of wool, cotton, thin strips of material, hair ribbon, crêpe paper and anything else at hand, into a thick multi-coloured twine" (*Poppy*, 15). Poppy's "braided twine" (*Poppy*, 16) is a kind of bricolage, a craft or, as we are encouraged to consider it in the book, a kind of art.^{vi} Importantly it also doubles as a way of holding onto love and life. It functions as kind of Ariadne's thread and precipitates the following reflection in the narrator: "Is that the feminine condition, always a life-line to other people's lives and therefore split from our own? Who holds the thread for us? Who held it for her [i.e. Poppy]?" (*Poppy*, 16). This solid string is thus both a creative and a relational phenomena – like storytelling, it makes use of scraps to create something new and in the process of braiding Poppy also

tries to interlace, or hinge, her family in what is her life-line. Later in the book the narrator explains in one of the many powerful moments of recognition that hinge the daughter's story to that of the mother's that she sees her mother's work echoed in hers: "Sometimes I think it is in work that we live most deeply. Worklines, Lifelines. The lines of a map, the lines on our skin" (*Poppy*, 139). Such lines function as connective tissue, linking life, love and art across generations of women, and they inscribe the feminine inheritance around which Modjeska's work is fashioned.

The epiphanies discussed above have profound effects on the lives of the women who experience them. These moments of spiritual awakening are linked to notions of recognition and of sight in Modjeska's writing. Recognition has to do with seeing and being seen – with the links between a subject and an object. In this way, recognition is contingent and relies on connectivity. The narrator of "The Adultery Factor", the first essay of the triptych of essays that makes up *The Orchard*, comments thus on life, happiness and being oneself:

Happiness is perhaps the wrong word. It is the quality of being fully oneself, not at rest so much as defining one's own terms, not to impose them on others but as a basis of mutual connection – and not only with a spouse. Individuation is close to the quality I mean, a more hardly wrought and painful process than the rose-covered cottage the word *happiness* conjures up [...] though to achieve it, even to begin to achieve it is, surely, a source of the fullest pleasure. It requires the ability to see others as sovereign as oneself [...] (*The Orchard*, 85).

The connection between "sovereign selves" relies on mutual acceptance and recognition of the other's sense of selfhood, of human worth and dignity. Women, of course, have traditionally been seen in patriarchal discourses as a relative creature, as the second sex, the object, the other to the male subject.^{vii} We could perhaps in this connection draw a parallel to Frantz Fanon's plea for recognition of that other so-called other, the black man, without implying that these two others are the same, that they represent homogenous groups or that their experiences are similar.^{viii} In the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon makes a heartfelt claim for what he calls "reciprocal recognitions" (*Black Skin*, 218):

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on the other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed (*Black Skin*, 216-7).

Reciprocal recognition is thus the basis for full humanity, and for attaching meaning to one's life. Lack of mutual recognition is an abridgment of humanity. For traditionally marginalised groups – and again I am fully aware of differences between and diversity within these groups – such as women and non-white people in Eurocentric discourses, pleas for mutual recognition are linked to acknowledging not only the so-called others' humanity, but also their lives. Indeed, as Sara Ahmed reminds us: "To recognise means:

to know again, to acknowledge and to admit" (*Strange Encounters*, 22). The moments of recognition that stand out in Modjeska's writing are instances when the female characters – and by extension, perhaps, female readers – acknowledge, know again, greet and admit the feminine tradition Modjeska weaves and embroiders in her textual tapestries. Thus women's lives and their art are seen again – in the sense of noticed and paid attention to as meaningful and valuable, and integral to the history of art.

The notion of sight is inextricably linked to Modjeska's recognition of women's life and art. Reflecting on one of Cossington Smith's rare self-portraits in "Sight and Solitude" Modjeska insists that the painting has "everything to do with sight: with seeing, with being seen, wanting to be seen; and with not being seen. And there is nothing straightforward about any of that if you are a woman and an artist" (*The Orchard*, 135). Seeing and being seen thus have everything to do with recognition in the broadest sense of the term. Furthermore, this links up with Modjeska's own recognition and rediscovery of women artists whose lives, love and art have not been seen, admitted or greeted. Modjeska's penchant for the first person pronoun is also relevant here – hear me and see me it says, as does a self-portrait. Furthermore, mutual recognition is a sign of mutual agency. Thus, sight is profoundly central in Modjeska's reflections especially on women artists: "In writing about women and their art, this question of vision and visibility, of seeing and being seen, presents itself in many forms" (*Stravinsky's Lunch*, 194). It is tempting to connect these reflections on recognition to the kinds of confessional art introduced by Louise Bourgeois – an artist who is constantly enfolded in Modjeska's own work – and popularised by many other women artists, such as Frieda Kahlo and Tracey Emin.

Throughout Modjeska's writings, then, there is a recognition of what we might call a network of women, of women's lives linked as in a piece of embroidery – textual or otherwise. In "The Adultery Factory", Modjeska considers these women lives and is struck by the women who break free from patriarchy: "Behind all these women, or alongside and beneath, inside and beyond them, is an unnameable sense of herself" (*The Orchard*, 95). That sovereign sense of (her) self is what Modjeska wants us to recognise in her delineation of a feminine tradition. Towards the end of *Poppy* Modjeska writes about her own work, not only *Poppy* but also *Exiles at Home*, that she gradually realised that her search for a way of writing, for a way of creating art, also entailed "the discovery of a feminine history of writing and art" (*Poppy*, 260). And not only that, writing about *Poppy*, the mother, the woman, the life, her art and her love, what she discovers "is that everything is fundamentally related" (*Poppy*, 291). That is why Modjeska weaves her own life, and incorporates readers' responses, into her characters' lives, so that all our lives become part of the same (feminine) textual tapestry. Modjeska weaves with words – and the notions of weaving and threading suggest something ongoing, organic and living associated with women's craft. It also suggests a way of hinging love, life and art. It becomes a kind of network where the experimental and the daring add frisson and interest to the traditional. And it is a recognisable feature of Modjeska's own discourse. By creating an embroidered network in language of women artists and writers – and by folding those writers and artists into her own life and her own (semi) fictional characters, Modjeska creates her own feminine tradition that is often found in "silent, forgotten stories, in the everyday, the ordinary, the unsystematic and unrecorded, the omissions and slippages, the ways of living that affected us quietly,

their meanings accruing over years, not exposed in a single, masculine climax” (*Poppy*, p. 26). In this way Modjeska creates a perhaps idiosyncratic discourse characterised by her exploration of the uniquely and trans-generational feminine. Again Modjeska contrasts her creative act of hinging life, love and art in a feminine tradition with what she sees as the splitting of the ordered masculine from the slow-paced messy everyday.^{ix} This is what Modjeska instinctively learns from women writers and artists, and what she wants to teach us, so that we also become folded into this conversation. This kind of baton passing is vividly expressed in *Poppy*, where we learn that Poppy reads books by women writers given to her by women friends, and she reads the most unexpected text – such as translations of the not-much-read Norwegian writer Cora Sandel (1880-1974) (*Poppy*, 24).

In her writing, then, Modjeska stages conversations that did not take place in real life – for example in the intercourse, as it were, between Bowen and Cossington Smith which happens in Modjeska’s embroidery on female modernists. This conversation develops and extends the conversation that began in *Exiles at Home* in 1981 where Modjeska poses questions that “are woven with many threads. They are questions that can only be answered in the interconnecting histories of the writers, the fiction and the political struggles of the period [i.e. the 1930s]” (*Exiles at Home*, 3).^x The stories about women’s lives, love, and art that Modjeska wants us to understand and learn from frustratingly remain what she calls a *koan* (*Stravinsky’s Lunch*, 22 and 338), a problem or a riddle that admits no logical solution. Perhaps because the stories are simultaneously similar and different? Perhaps because the stories are messy and on-going and resist climatic closure? Perhaps because the stories form part of a larger network of unceasing conversation? In her idiosyncratic connective feminine discourse, images of hinging love, life and art are celebrated as female acts that counter the male tendency towards what Modjeska calls splitting. Writing and reading about these women is “joining a conversation” (*Stravinsky’s Lunch*, 337). Or in the words of Modjeska in the conclusion to *Stravinsky’s Lunch*, which also conclude this article, “When it comes to a subject like love and art, or daily life and the great work, there are no answers, no conclusions, only conversations, meditations – and the shining work” (*Stravinsky’s Lunch*, 337).

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ⁱ As I have been writing this essay, and rereading Modjeska's work, I have been seduced by Siri Hustvedt's recent novel, *The Blazing World* (2014). This text also treats women's lives, love and art. Hustvedt strikes a claim for the female dialogic tradition too, embodied in particular in the cross-generational relationship between Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73) and Harriet (also known as Harry) Burden, the contemporary (fictional) artist at the heart of Hustvedt's narrative. Furthermore, Hustvedt shares Modjeska's fascination with the first person pronoun, with notions of seeing and being seen, and with sustaining female artistic traditions. Indeed, it is tempting to say that the novel is "Modjeskan" in its thematics. The same can be said for Susan Vreeland's *The Passion of Artemisia* (2003). Vreeland's Artemisia ruminates thus on the intertwined relationship between women's lives, love

and art: "The two things I wanted most in life – painting and love – and one had killed any chance of the other. Why was life so perverse that it couldn't or wouldn't give me one shred of good without an equal amount of bad?" After she has achieved success, she insists on the intimate connection between life, love and art: "'We've been lucky,' I said. 'We've been able to live by what we love. And to *live* painting, as we have, wherever we have, is to live passion and imagination and connection and adoration, all the best of life – to be more alive than the rest.'" (NY: Penguin Books, 2003), 111 and 308.

ⁱⁱ See for example Toril Moi, "Feminist, Female, Feminine" in *The Feminist Reader*, eds., Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan, 1989), 117-32.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thank you to Martin Renes for drawing attention to the "positively dazzling" associations such a train of thought sets in motion.

^{iv} See John R. Stilgoe's foreword to Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* [1958], translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), viii.

^v Matremoir is a memoir about the mother, a term coined by Andre Gerard.

^{vi} Fascinatingly, Harriet/Harry Burden's daughter Maisie, in Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*, is a film maker, and in one of her films a woman is depicted making twine: "The woman had also gathered bits and pieces of twine, ribbon, string, and wire on her journeys around the city and knotted the pieces together in a gigantic hairy, multicolored ball. She told me she just liked to do it. 'It's my way, that's all'" (*The Blazing World*, 91). Thus women's lives, love and art are connected across contemporary writers too.

^{vii} Famously discussed at length by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, first published in French in 1949.

^{viii} Drawing on Fanon here is not so farfetched as it may seem. In "Living on a Corner" Modjeska describes what she read during her sojourn in Papua New Guinea in the late 1960s. Sitting on a "dusty veranda" her reading alternates between the Australian novelists she would go on to write about in *Exiles at Home* and the works of Lenin and Frantz Fanon. This reading turns her intellectual world, her inner city, upside down (*Inner Cities*, 62).

^{ix} In *Poppy* the mother describes just such an unsystematic and unrecorded everyday family life for women in the 1950s: "Maybe there were moments of insight, I don't know. Mostly we lived by moving from one thing to another, children, daily chores, vegetables to be prepared, small repetitions. I lived by them. I had to. They sustained me. And brought me down" (*Poppy*, 73).

^x *Exiles at Home* describes the watershed period of the 1930s in Australian fiction in a book that in itself marked a watershed moment in the reception and recognition of Australian women writers.