

## re Cutting Out the New York Times, 1977

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At curator Nick Mauss's request, O'Grady first exhibited five of the 26 cut-outs that she'd done on successive Sundays, from June 5 to November 20, 1977, in a group show nearly 30 years later — *Between the Lines*, in March 2006 at Daniel Reich Temporary (The Chelsea Hotel). She wrote a binder statement about her original work method and state of mind.

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At the time, two things had happened simultaneously: I began to think that psychoanalysis might not be a bad idea; and I had to have a biopsy on my right breast. I took some books by André Breton to the hospital to help take my mind off it. *Nadja* and the *Manifestos* may have got mixed up with coming out of the general anaesthetic.

When the biopsy proved negative, I wanted to make a collage for my doctor. I thought it would feature the cult statue of Diana of Ephesus, the "many-breasted Artemis Ephesia." But I needed some text. . . . As I flipped through the *Sunday Times*, I saw a headline on the sports page about Julius Erving that said "The Doctor Is Operating Again." It seemed too good to waste on the collage, so I made a poem instead. But since I'd been flirting with the doctor, the poem turned into an imaginary love letter for an imaginary affair.

Then I began to wonder, what if. . . instead of Breton's random assemblages. . . I did cutouts and consciously shaped them? What would I discover about the culture and about myself? (In the place I was then, questions like "Who am I?" didn't seem so academic). And, if I reversed the process of the confessional poets everyone still read at the time. . . like Plath and Sexton who'd made the unbearably private public. . . if I pushed the cutouts further, could I get a "counter-confessional" poetry that

made the public private again?

To find myself in the language of the news didn't strike me as odd. In my first job after college, I'd been an intelligence analyst, at the Department of Labor and then the Department of State. After five years of reading 10 newspapers a day in different languages, plus mountains of agents' classified reports and unedited transcripts of Cuban radio, language had melted into a gelatinous pool. It had collapsed for me. That's when I'd quit.

For six months in 1977, I made a poem a week from the *Sunday Times*. Cutting out the *National Inquirer* would not have interested me. This wasn't about condescending to the culture, it was about taking back from it. It was just raw material. I think the process may have worked. When he read the cutouts, my ex-husband said it had been like leafing through the *Times* and coming across a photo of me accidentally. I never bought the *Sunday Times* again.