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THE RETURN OF THE FEMINIST BODY

AMELIA JONES

In the beginning, there was a feminist body.... As the women's movement developed in the 1960s and early 1970s, an attendant feminist art practice burgeoned — and both were fueled by intense and incendiary anger and desire. Feminist art practices in the United States were characterized by a flamboyant enactment of the desiring female body in all of its messy vicissitudes (although, one could argue too that these bodies were not as messy as most of ours: the artists at the forefront of this feminist body art tended to have uniformly gorgeous bods). Wads of paper pulled out of the artist's vagina (Carolee Schneemann's Interior Scroll [1975]), huge dildos held against the naked and greased artist's body (Lynda Benglis's infamous Artjorum advertisement in the November, 1974 issue), artists transformed by make-up and costume into glamorous or unpleasant alternative personas (the performative work of Adrian Piper and Eleanor Antin from the 1970s), cunt-like wads of gum punctuating the smooth flesh of the artist's gyrating body (Hannah Wilke's "Starification Object Series" [1974]): feminist artists expanded artistic practice into the eroticized personal cum political domain of the embodied self.

The intensity of this work and its overt threat to existing systems of critical and art historical value (if anything was theatrical, à la Michael Fried's opprobrious category for what he considered to be bad contemporary art, this was it), ensured its virtual obliteration from the annals of contemporary art history. Sadly and ironically, its suppression in subsequent accounts of the 1960s and 1970s was aided and abetted by 1980s feminist visual theory, which, drawing its polemical impetus from Laura Mulvey's strident and effective call for the destruction of visual pleasure in her now ubiquitous 1975 article ("Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"), called for and supported work that admonished the (putatively always already male) spectator of the visual image. The 1980s feminist repudiation of sensual experience and visual pleasure, while extremely effective in creating a space in which feminist artists could begin to break down the structural masculinism of visual representation and art historical/critical narratives under patriarchy, had the unfortunate side effect of cancelling out female desire along with male.

The reductive notion of visual pleasure under Mulvey's Freudian system (as inexorably male, driven by castration anxiety, inevitably scopophilic or fetishistic), facilitated the suppression of the question of the desiring body of spectatorial experience and dovetailed with anti-essentialist arguments to devalue the important and powerful feminist work that had been done in the 1970s. While the work of artists defined as playing out the distancing, Brechtian, admonishing role called for by Mulvey — such as that of Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Cindy Sherman, and
Sherrie Levine—ascended into the canonical firmament of the art world (October, Artforum, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and so on), the feminist body works sank into an "essentialist" oblivion, condemned by their putative reinforcement of biologically determined conceptions of female subjectivity. The Mulveyan model of criticality was, of course, crucial in establishing the viability of feminist discourses and practices in the 1980s; it also, however, became increasingly narrowly employed to promote a prescriptive and proscriptive conception of "proper" feminist art practice.

The time has come to challenge the more restrictive assumptions behind this model. Recent work by feminist artists and cultural theorists, in fact, has suggested that we must renegotiate and open up the boundaries of feminist art theory and practice by reopening the question of female, and particularly feminist, desire. A younger generation of feminist artists, critics, and art historians, supported by similar shifts in film and queer theory, are beginning to rethink the narrow model of visual pleasure that bolstered the critical acclaim of the work of the (unfortunately but perhaps tellingly) so-called "postfeminist" movement of the 1980s. Other kinds of feminist voices are demanding a space to create work, pointing out that 1970s and 1980s feminism tended to assume a unified, implicitly white, heterosexual, and middle or upper-middle-class feminist subject and to shrug off the anti-racist implications of the rare woman artist of color whose work was seen at all (such as Adrian Piper).

As feminism expands and diversifies in art and broader cultural discourses, it is also, naturally, returning to the question of the variously identified feminist body and its dangerous, vulnerable, angry, chaotic, and multifariously defined desires. There seems to have been, in the last three years or so, an unspoken consensus among younger feminist artists and art theorists that a return to the question of the body can provide a valuable rearticulation of feminist subjectivity and empower women as makers and viewers of art through an expression, however oblique or ironic, of the highly charged and alternatively destructive or productive effects of female pleasure.

Writing from Los Angeles, I can see this shift as articulated in a manner specific to this location — for a large percentage of the most interesting new work by feminist artists is, in my view, being done in the Los Angeles area. Furthermore, this efflorescence has interesting and important historical links: unknown to the writers of the vast majority of dominant, New York-based narratives of contemporary art history, Southern California was the central site for the development of feminist art practices in the early 1970s, with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro spearheading the Feminist Art Program at CalArts (the California Institute of the Arts) in Valencia, and the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (founded by Joyce Kozloff, Sheila de Bretteville, and others) working, from around 1970 on, to protest the exclusion of women from gallery and museum exhibitions (a "Guerrilla Girls" avant-la-lettre, as it were). The Feminist Studio Workshop school, Womanspace Gallery, Womanspace (the Feminist Art Program's first large-scale project, in 1972), and, slightly later, the Women's Building, all provided venues for feminist art teaching, practice, and theoretical debate in the Los Angeles area. Chicago, Schapiro, and Kozloff (as well as Eleanor Antin, Lynda Benglis, and Hannah Wilke, all of whom lived for various periods of time in Los Angeles), were central figures in the now devalued and virtually ignored 1970s feminist art movements (without which, we seem often to forget, the 1980s "postfeminist" canon could not have developed).

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that today, rising from the ashes of these foundational but unfairly obscured institutional and discursive developments, a dynamic feminist practice is revitalizing the Los Angeles art scene and the art world in general. Like the New York-based artists such as Kiki Smith, Rona Pondick, and Zoe Leonard, who are, not incidentally, better known to the New York dominated art world, a number of Los Angeles women artists are redefining what a feminist practice can be about, returning to the forms and experiences of the sexual body as culturally determined, often perverse or painful but always pleasurable as well. By doing so, they move away from the tendency to focus primarily on male pleasure and to view women as a universal category of victimized objects of a predatory and virtually unstoppable "male gaze," toward a notion of women as heterogeneous, polymorphously sexual, fully motivated and highly complex subjects of our own cultural representations. Filling the space generously laid open by the 1980s feminists' rigorous critique of patriarchal structurings of female subjectivity, these artists expand earlier conceptions of femininity to encompass non-normative aspects of female desire.

In "Sugar 'n Spice," a recent (and perhaps unfortunately entitled) exhibition at the Long Beach Museum of Art, a diverse group of thirteen Los Angeles women artists showed work that exemplifies these shifts I am describing here. Judie Bamber contributed metiseculous, almost photo-realist still lifes of single, highly charged objects hovering in fields of flat color. A wedding ring, a goldfish, a melting ice cube, a raspberry dripping with its own juice — these objects insinuate an erotic project, but in a manner so oblique that the viewer feels implicated in the confabulation of such sexual meanings. Anne Walsh's lists of evocative phrases (which, à la Jeopardy, are answers to questions we have to guess who has), a mummy, a candle, three fingers...), mounted on a strip of chewed foam rubber, and her copulating bed rests (or "husbands," as they are colloquially called) — with the arms of one penetrating holes made in another — are self-revealing material enactments of solitary erotic fantasies, told in the ironic tone of a woman who wants to be in control. The gnawed edges of foam, chewed by Walsh's cat (who becomes a feline alter-ego of sorts, the "other" to Walsh's isolated self), belie this effort at restraint, however, speaking of the neurotic underside of the dangerously uncontrollable female id. As in Bamber's suggestive "portraits" of objects, control and anxiety, pain and pleasure, are marked as opposed, yet mutually implicated, poles of female subjectivity.

In Gag, Jennifer Steinkamp personified the museum, which was formerly a house, projecting a hypnotically throbbing video image on the ceiling above the stairwell to the second floor of the exhibition space. Accompanied by the sound of choking, the piece seemed to suck the visitor upward to penetrate the nether regions of the site itself. No one was allowed innocence in this transgressive and violating act: the body of the visitor was thoroughly implicated in its driven pursuit of visual pleasure. Both men and women visiting the museum became masculine in
their ascent upward through the spaces of the ideologically over-determined, consumerist, and perhaps inevitably patriarchal institution of art.

Other works that I found compelling in this exhibition explicitly addressed the female body as a site of constructed and conflicting pleasures and pains. Erika Suderburg's video, *Diderot and the Last Luminarie: Waiting for the Enlightenment* (A Revised Encyclopedia) (1992), rewrites Diderot's rigorous system of classification in a playful and seductive anti-narrative of visual and aural elements, interpersing illustrations from the *Encyclopedia* with cosmic images of whirling tops and rotating planets, with dialogues between women, and with a dream-like erotic sequence of female to female sexuality (in which a woman licks and marks the nipple of another woman with red lipstick, then tucks the breast carefully under a black lace bra).

Lauren Lesko presented several examples of her furniture-like synecdoches of desiring female bodies, as warped through the lens of Freudian theory. Masquerading as fetishistic substitutes for female body parts, these meticulously crafted objects nonetheless refuse the comforting function of assuaging male castration anxiety assigned to the fetish by Freud. The female body is indirectly invoked and empowered through its refusal to succumb to Freudian attempts to master its contours via a masculinist map of sexual identity. In *Fur Muff*, for example, a dark, pubic monkey-fur muff is suspended a few inches above a saucer of cream, evoking Bataille's surrealist male fantasy *Story of the Eye*, in which a girl dips her genitals into a bowl of milk to the pleasure of the male narrator. The female body is signified by the muff, an accoutrement of feminine beauty fabricated of animal hair. The absence of the female point of view in the male narratives of sexuality (Bataille's, Freud's) is enacted here, yet is compensated for by Lesko's own ironic voice, which re-frames captures the potent image of female sexuality and fecundity for a feminist point of view. *Fur Collar* also makes use of a vaginal fur orifice, here atop a gorgeously modelled pedestal (made of a bustier form) covered in purple suede. Encircled by a row of teeth-like pearls, the beckoning vaginal hole becomes a vaginal dentata, fabricated of the very sartorial effects that adorn the patriarchally determined female object of male desire.

This type of work is compelling to me in particular for its interweaving of formal and conceptual concerns. It breaks from the insistently "intuitive" approach often seen to underlie much of 1970s feminist body art, and from the narrowly defined polemical and anti-pleasurable effects attributed to 1980s feminist text/image work by much contemporary feminist theory. Playing with the male traditions of minimalism (Lesko), minimalistic video (Steinkamp), bad-boy art (Walsh), narrative cinema (Suderburg), and photo-realism or still-life (Bamber), these artists approach feminist art-making with an anger underlined by humor and self-exposing desire. Far from operating unilaterally to admonish a putatively always already male viewer for his victimizing pleasures, this work as I read it articulates the feminist desires of the artist and in doing so implicates the viewer in the chiasmic exchange of subjectivity that sharpens the interpretive experience. This exchange, rather than simply admonishing a particular spectator, forces an awareness of every spectator's implication, no matter what her or his sexual orientation, gender, race, or class, in determining the meanings of female subjectivity, particularly as articulated in the always gendered and erotically motivated work of art.
want you to know I'm queer." It is very complicated. We're selling art to rich people and we cannot get around this. I feel like I'm fighting a good fight. You can't exist in the world without being aware of the world you're existing in, which is one reason why I use art history. You can't function in art history uncritically. I'm interested in how everything we were taught was "good" came from one particular point of view. Postwar art history has been written by white American men to maintain white American male power.

PC: Then how do you see the role of painting at the end of the 20th century? Is there "real" room for representing a multiplicity of subjectivities, specifically a homosexual female subjectivity?

DK: Either there is room for a multiplicity of subjectivities in that grand narrative of western civilization—painting—or it is as dead as has been claimed for the last 90 years and deservedly so. Like any language, it is dependent on the voice of the colonized and marginalized to keep it alive. And, like any language, it will die without it. Where would music be today without the voices of Black people, brought here against their will?

So with painting—I'm an existentialist. I'm stuck with the history. I'm stuck with the language. Adrienne Rich says: "This is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk to you." If women can write poems and novels, women can make paintings. Can we make painting speak to our experiences? Can we make it represent us? I have to think it's possible. It is certainly what all my work is about. In the last five years, I have been dealing directly with the language of high modernism. My work is about the construction of difference within high modernist art practice. Since modernism is based on ideas of transcendence and universality, it denies specificity or—my specificity. To see high modernism as another language or part of the bigger language that constructs difference in very particular and political ways, is just another way to deconstruct it.

PC: How much do we, as image makers, play into the hands of stereotypes if we aren't explicit about who we are, what we look like, and what we do in bed? Can we produce new ways of seeing or new inscriptions of the lesbian social subject in representation and not purely provide sympathetic accounts or "positive images" of lesbians?

DK: As dykes our responsibility is to be visible. The only way to combat stereotyping is to represent our complexity as clearly as we are able. The complexity of lesbian social relations, within our community, between ourselves and with the world at large and its investment in our invisibility, needs to be represented. These negotiations between our lives and the world, and between visibility and invisibility, take up so much of our lesbian lives. It is our responsibility as cultural producers to try and represent ourselves, whatever that means. Whether this phallocentric culture will be able to handle these representations is another question. This is the meaning of stereotype. Our job is to explore and represent our overlapping, usually conflicted, identities. Part of what is real to every marginalized life is the stress of trying to negotiate as an individual in the culture-at-large in the face of these stereotypes.

PC: Both images of Barbra in the paintings display such extreme drag. What is your interest in masquerade and gender construction? And why such butch/femme examples? What is your intent in expressing this desire?

DK: The image of Barbra in the Jewish Jackie Series was taken in the early 60s when Barbra first exploded on the Broadway scene and on television. I was an adolescent then. Her gorgeousness was not universally embraced, especially by first-generation Jews in suburbia trying to assimilate—such as my parents. I thought she was positively divine. Her "awkwardness," her "true," her difference, thrilled me. She embraced glamour of a particularly American kind, and did it with a vengeance and great aplomb. That a Jewish girl with wit, talent, and brains could be herself and "make it" spoke volumes to me. And she did it consciously, put it on and wore stardom like the diva she had yet to become. Drag! Absolutely. For Yentl, (Streisand's role from her movie of Isaac Bashevis Singer's story) doesn't it speak for itself or doesn't he speak for herself? Yentl dons male attire to study sacred texts, to realize her desire for knowledge forbidden to her by law. A perfect metaphor for a woman artist.

Butch/femme examples? Clothes make a person mean "male" or "female." As far as I'm concerned, I'm always in drag—artist drag, downtown drag, girl drag, boy drag. I always feel like a drag queen, especially when I put on girl clothes. I
even act differently; I can't help it. I put on my fabulous designer "little black dress" to wear twice a year for a wedding or bar mitzvah and I put on my heels, I FEEL different. The transformative power of these fetish objects is very intense. And then there's my collection of men's suits (preferably Power Suits)!

This work is about coming out as a fan. It is not unlike coming out because you have to tell this incredibly vulnerable thing about yourself that's really awkward, intimate, and embarrassing, that's really about who you are and what you love. Willa Cather said, "Admiration is the way you grow." There is a long history of women opera fans who worshipped various divas. Terry Castle has written a wonderful piece on this and her own diva worship "In Praising Brigitte Fassbaender (A Musical Emanation)." To Castle it is all about women's voice, literally, politically, and metaphorically. I am proud to be a part of this tradition.

PC: Some viewers interpreted your 1991 painting How Do I Look?, an image appropriating Picasso's painting of Gertrude Stein and Courbet's painting "The Sleep" to be an all encompassing, specifically lesbian image, and were disappointed. This is similar to criticism of early Black television programs that were expected to speak to the entire omission/negative representation problem and represent an entire community. How much validity is there in these overloaded expectations or how do How Do I Look?, Jewish Jackie Series, and My Elvis address the difficulties of representing lesbian subjectivity as distinct from both heterosexual female and homosexual male subjectivity? These works seem to be drawing attention to the construction and consumption of fantasy, whose fantasy and for what audience/community? In locating your own fantasies and erotic investments, how significant is it if the boundary is blurred with other sexualities' fantasies? How do you feel about Barbara's persona being a favorite in some gay male drag venues?

DK: This need for one artist or artwork to speak for an entire community is what Henry Louis Gates calls "the burden of representation." Does a painting by a man speak for all men? My painting How Do I Look?, is about Gertrude Stein, Picasso's reading of Gertrude, my reading of Picasso's reading and of Gertrude herself now and when I first saw the Picasso painting at the Met as a kid. It is also about Courbet and his fantasies of women together, these two 19th-century guys looking at one real person and two fantasy girls, and seeing, naming, and consuming. And identifying with all these positions as a reader of painting, a painter, a Jewish woman, and as a dyke, searching for representation.

Some criticism that I have heard from women who are feminists and who I respect, has been, "But aren't you just reinscribing the men and their work?" That is the most flat-footed and unsmiling reading of this work. The master narrative of modernism and American painting after World War II needs to be rethought. I am doing this in my work and you can decide if my use of David Salle's images make him important again. I think David Salle's art and his success is crucial to look at from a critical perspective, as is Jackson Pollock's. And if that makes David historically as important as Jackson, fine. From another position, they might be seen as just a couple of white boys jerking off in culturally sanctioned ways. Let the art historians, and I hope they are women, deal with it. The appropriation and critique that I'm involved with is something that has been done in every other area culturally, in the academy and literature. The method has a feminist lineage. My work comes out of Sherrie Levine's work and that is very important to me.

As far as the overlapping of lesbian, gay, and straight girl subjectivities, I expect the boundaries between these categories to blur, since mine are all blurred. We are all created by the culture at large. Our desires, especially, are constructed and manipulated usually, always, to profit someone else. We are all subjected to the same mass marketing of desire. It is actually amazing we end up as diverse and different as we do. It is probably the greatest tribute to what is left of the concept of the individual. Blurring is inevitable, unavoidable, and really interesting. I love my blues.

PC: Is it important that lesbians write about your work? Or that your work is critiqued by people that are knowledgeable about lesbian literary criticism, queer theory, cultural criticism, art history and feminist theory?

DK: Yes, will you? Lesbians should write, period. So far, gay men with a strong queer theory bent have been the most visible people writing about my work. But they are men and more visible in general, right? It seems to me that the people who respond to my work are the ones with similar concerns that I have. Isn't this always the case? White straight guys love to see their reflections in everything and have that opportunity. We are all looking for reflections of ourselves in images and ideas.

PC: Your work of the last four years has two distinct directions, the most recent being the Barbra paintings, and the earlier work, deconstructing white males' defining position in culture such as Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man. Did you have to critique the boys first before promoting what you wanted to see instead?

DK: I understand the difference between the image of an empowered woman and the deconstruction of a male language and that there is a real difference when you look at them. Just because I did 15 or 20 paintings that fit into the "deconstruct the hegemony" category, doesn't mean I've done enough. Everything is a challenge. Sue Williams' work speaks directly and personally about sexual abuse. One's experience is one's experience. I think our job as artists and women, lesbian or straight, is to represent our experience. And even if it looks negative and if it is violent, I think it is still our responsibility to reflect that experience, though it may not be what the world really wants to see and it is not utopian or "transcendent." Maybe we shouldn't be trying to get past our particular moment, especially if power relations depend on our being invisible and the idea of transcending has been calculated to erase our specific experiences. If one's subject position is writ large culturally, if every place you look, looks like you—art, literature, the law and power in general, representing yourself in a world where you are consistently represented would be redundant...and it is. What does it look like, representing the absence of women, people of color, and queers? How does it feel? I think this work has to be done.

PC: But I think this work is what the consuming art world wants to see. There's a reason why work of women artists that is sexual in nature and speaks from a position of pain, is supported. People, men, can buy the images that enunciate the injustices of abuse, and still maintain women's inequitable social status.

DK: You mean like the work of Kiki Smith and Sue Williams? I think reducing the complexity of this work to a one liner about victimization is inevitable in patriarchy
and in the marketplace. It then becomes the responsibility of what could too loosely be termed a feminist community to reiterate and insist, over and over again, on a more complex reading. The problem is in the interpretation and not in the work itself.

PC: That is so problematic for me and it is not a criticism of the artists’ work but of the art market.

DK: It is problematic, but the art world is always problematic because only rich people can buy work. In late capitalism the only way we know ideas are actually circulating is when they become commodities in the marketplace. The first person to buy Sue Williams’ work was Richard Prince. Great. But that doesn’t take away from Sue Williams’ work. It can’t because she is speaking to a larger reality and that’s simply more important to me than who buys the work or their motivation.

In some utopian way of thinking, and in the best of all possible worlds, we would only have powerful images of women because women were equally powerful economically and politically as men. Women, like men, would buy art because they would want to see their own reflections. But we are not there. I understand that the Jewish Jackie are powerful because they are positive images of a woman and that my other work is more complicated because it’s often about a history written for and by men. I’m interested in both situations. I’m evolving as an artist, I have a long-term view and I have to. I’ve been doing this for 20 years. It is a big subject, representing me and my absence in representation, that has barely been tapped and I am willing to tap it any place I see I can. Some people can like certain paintings more than others depending on who they are. But, a viewer, a reader is interested in how a white Jewish lesbian looks at history, painting, and culture, then one might be more interested in the other paintings. Me, I’m interested in all of it, so what do I care?

Since June, 1992, I have been researching and writing about women artists and aging. My focus is contemporary American artists over fifty. I chose fifty because it is the median age at which menopause occurs for Western women and because menopause remains a powerful marker of aging. From June, 1992 - January, 1993 I sent questionnaires to one hundred women visual artists and interviewed women artists who deal with aging or the body in their work. I received sixty-one responses to the questionnaire, and all subjects were fifty or older. Research continues, and “Aesthetic and Postmenopausal Pleasures” is excerpted from a chapter in a book-in-progress I’m writing on women artists and aging. In the complete chapter I present a theoretical approach to old(er) women’s pleasures and ground it in the art of Bailey Doogan, Claire Premian, and Carolee Schneemann, among others. My ideas develop from numerous sources, including real old(er) women’s self-aestheticization, Yvonne Rainer’s Privilege, whose hub character is menopausal, and the necessary proliferation of polymorphous perversities. My desire is to make connections between visual pleasure and female pleasures from a position of difference, female aging, that is a largely uncharted territory, outside cultural maps of conventional femininity, and that consequently may provide feminism with new models of female pleasure.

Young(er) women want to be seen, old(er) women are hypervisible, yet, paradoxically, erased by society’s alienation from its aging bodies. I question the force of socio-visual conventions—only young(er) women can assume the appearance and postures of sexiness—and the cultural imperative to age gracefully, a euphemism for fading away, haling lust. Grace derives from Latin gratia, pleasing quality. An old(er) woman who doesn’t act her age is not pleasing, unlike a young(er) woman in the guise of femininity, because the old(er) woman exposes her pleasure, which society tries to deny and names indecent.

Women can choose dyed hair, red lipstick, “inapropriate” dress, styles of flamboyance, spectacle, elegance, or “tastelessness” that may be indicators of self-love and lust for living. Love of color and texture is not a crime that old(er) women commit against themselves. A viewer cannot assume that an old(er) woman alive with colors and sensuous bodily and clothing surfaces is trying to mask her age because she hates herself. Old(er) women’s self-aestheticization is an autoerotic action that destroys visual pleasure as we have known it, for the postmenopausal woman cannot be the feminine fetish, eroticized by patriarchal womb-worship. The non-reproductive woman’s self-aestheticization deaestheticizes Woman as socially constructed femininity.

The erotically disenfranchised postmenopausal woman does not make femininity ugly but rather refuses to accept the exclusive canon of womanly beauty. Her defiance both shatters and expands the aesthetic of femininity and opens the
way to new meanings of woman. For even though femininity is misogyny's attempt to sanitize the female body, femininity is also a complex of pleasures that are lived and available and that women can use in order to change them. Postmenopausal eroticism, which includes taking pleasure in the vision of oneself and creating that pleasure, is overt triumph over societal and self-repulsion. What Carolyn Heilbrun calls "the heterosexual plot," has excluded old(er) women from the love story of romance and breeding, and it has no words for women's love of themselves. The woman who grows old gracefully, who is well-preserved, is a dead body, embalmed by a disgusted secularization of women once the culturally sacred womb can no longer bear children. The postmenopausal body deserves cultural resurrection as a site of love and pleasure. Without love, there is no revolution, and without pleasure, there is no freedom.

Female pleasure has been theorized in terms of sexual difference but not in terms of women's differences from women. This matters, because patriarchy has determined reproductive woman to be desirable, a site of pleasure, and post-reproductive woman to be undesirable. Young(er) women live the privilege of bondage and pleasure. Old(er) women live beyond that privilege. The Freudian story of the castrated woman lays the groundwork for hatred of old(er) women. A man cannot impregnate a postmenopausal woman, cannot even imagine his creativity visible in her body. Thus menopause is a subversion of female reproductive organs as the origin of male desire (and greed), of erotic symbols and narratives, and of womanhood when spiritualized as cosmic center of the female body.

Womb-privilege operates along with the eroticization of young(er), firm(er) flesh and muscles which represent the phallic symbol, the penis, in its state of power, erection. The old(er) body is the equivalent of detumescence and represents phallic failure. So man must avoid entry into the tomb of his desire. But the eye is polymorphously perverse and can be trained and lured into diverse pleasures, just as the libido can be. Erotic desire floats, ready for grounding, awaiting direction from a desiring or loving subject. Changing the image of the female body toward male ends. But pleasures abound in any body and therefore on "the other side of privilege." Many women artists over fifty say that doing what you love keeps you young. Thus their making art is the practice of love, and underlying the various ways women express belief in artmaking as fountain of youth, I find erotic motivation. Audre Lorde describes the erotic as rich living and ultimately an involvement in the transformation of self and society. The erotic is pleasure-work, and its practitioner engages in social risk and provides social sanctuary. The old(er) woman's artmaking as pleasure-work is a provident skill. The results fill a gap in the stories about women's lives with an eros that is self-reliant and resilient.

Bailey Doogan says, "Female pleasure is a Pandora's Box. So much goes against your realizing what female pleasure is, but something about female pleasure is connected with a freedom and acceptance of myself. I find that I often can't talk about the things I care about and the passion for what I care about is reserved for my work."

"I feel more of a going inward as I get older," and perhaps this is associated with a positively narcissistic scrutiny: "The older I get the more I stare at myself." This desire to know one's soul-inseparable-from-the-body through observation is Doogan's pleasure, and she duplicates her visual self-fascination in her paintings of the old(er) female nude. She says, "I feel as if I'm crawling over the bodies inch by inch," as she paints.

Doogan wants to "define the body in relation to culture." As a painter of the female nude/herself seen in her model's flesh, Doogan creates what has been absent in male visual language while using that language to shatter it. The old(er) body, within the conventions of Western art and its vampiric relative, contemporary advertising, represents chaos, because it does not submit to the strictures of domination that have pictured the female body for man's eyes. While the standard female nude, or nearly-nude in advertising, is a sweet that pains a woman's mind, and old(er) female nude is an icon of womb-worship, Doogan's nudes retheorize the canonical female body. Her iconoclasm goes beyond resistance or rejection because she invents a difference from the norm that does not transcend the significance of liminal experience. Although Western culture has construed the female body to be more liminal than the male, because the former undergoes and manifests blood mysteries and has culturally been marked more cruelly than the male body as exemplar of time's ravaging passage, Western art has denied that liminality by shunning age (as well as pregnancy, menstruation, and menopause). Western art's use of the female body to control time—aging and death—contributes to our fear of flesh that moves, wrinkling even shrinking with age in a dephallicizing process.

As I wrote earlier, the old(er) female body is the tomb of man's desire. To picture the old(er) female nude is to represent the ultimate patriarchal taboo, which is the end of patriarchy. Doogan's female nudes then are models of feminist and female pleasure. They are made by a woman who questions to death the premises of erotic argument—only the young(er) body is desirable, and patriarchy decides that—and the subject who questions experiences pleasure. She is Mea Corpa, my body, standing in the posture of the resurrected Christ, and her flesh moves with the energy of eros. Veins protrude along her calves and feet, skin creases at her ankles and waist and both clings to and bulges at her knees. Light does not caress her, it illuminates her new seductions: eyelids and undereye pouches, bony shoulders, muscled arms and legs worked out in the gym and worked on by the force of gravity over time. Doogan's crawling over every inch results in a body that feels like fluids, flesh, and organs and that recalls Monique Wittig's resurrection of the female body in The Lesbian Body. Like Wittig, Doogan conceptualizes flux and inseparability by using erotic syntax and creating a body—a word that feels too categorical in Doogan's and Wittig's
usages—that deserves the name "my radiant one."

Naked splendor in Mea Corp6 offers itself to female eyes and recovers itself from the guilt, mea culpa, of not being beautiful or correct enough to be seen. This female figure steps out of the (literal) darkness (of guilt) deaccessorized of conventional erotic props, such as bed, fan, drapery, fruit, or flowers. She displays appetite for herself, my body, not the one Western art invented and permuted for Woman, so my body has risen, flown from the dystopian eras developed by patriarchy. Doogan puts an end to anorexia of the spirit.

To turn Doogan's phrase, "Female pleasure is a Pandora's box," in her paintings Pandora's Box is female pleasure gone wild, the pandemonium loved by some viewers and feared by others. I've heard several people compare her figures to Ivan Albright's. Both artists do present unforgiving spectacles, but Albright's most remembered paintings depict pathetic specimens of decay. Their flesh mocks them with the nudity not only of vanity but of living itself, so the figures, which are rarely nudes, become emblems of dying and death. Their skin looks iridescent, diseased, and worn, and they seem predisposed to growing tumors.

If Doogan's bodies seem like sore sights that frighten women's eyes, this is because they are uncustomed to "chaos," which is Doogan's assertion of corporeal specificity and individuality, which she says are beautiful. Doogan is friendly to the female body, and "mea corpa," in Doogan's language, reads most significantly as destigmatization, a transformation, from guilt to self-possession, that is responsible to women's real bodies. The nude's face in Mea Corp6 is tared, but both face and body speak pride, peace, and dignity, unlike the subjects' faces in Albright's Women (1958), Flesh (1938), and Into the World There Came a Soul Called Ida (1928-30), which are sad and grim.

As Doogan neared fifty—she was born in 1941—bodily specificity began to be present in all her nudes, young(er) and old(er), female and male, and she also focused on female aging. A change in style and content can be seen from 1987 to 1992. In Femalestrom (1987) Doogan paints a female St. Sebastian expressionistically and non-specifically in regard to age and physical idiosyncrasies. Haled in gold leaf and pierced by arrows—sticks of wood dipped in red paint—St. Sebastian gazes towards a bevy of bean pods, upon each of which Doogan has painted a young bikinied woman. The femalestrom is women's confusion over Western culture's splitting of woman into saint and sinner.

Nineteen eighty-nine was a pivotal year of change with three monumental exhibitions. In both bodies veins ripple and flesh seems to pulse with an energy from within and beyond. The chair flames in several spots, but mostly it is charred. The "chairman," the generic white male authority, has "fallen" from his seat of power, becoming sensuous and moving. Doogan paints his territory turbulent gray, and where his hand grabs the chair back, red flames flow from the dead seat of power and fill a rectangle that reads as burning sky. Mass: the bodies have weight and exhibit the pull of gravity. Mass: the woman prays for reconciliation between self (woman) and other (man), which is the resurrection of love and passion. On the horizon flames signal the destruction of old dynamics of power and the intensity of new erotic heat between old(er) woman and young(er) man.

Femalestrom and RIB are characteristic of Doogan's late 1980s female nude—suffering, melancholy, and (later) aging in monumental resoluteness and inspirational rage. She invests the newer works with reconciliation, the balance in one body, and between bodies, of seriousness and spirituality, and with a redirection of displeasures sustained from injuries by the fathers to pleasures maintained in service to oneself.

Redirection opens recognition of loss and the necessity of courting unsung, painful, or newly discovered passions. In Privilege Jenny, the menopausal hub figure, starts up from the bed where she has just had sex with a male lover, young in comparison to where she is her contemporary fifty self, and exclaims, "My biggest shock in reaching middle age was the realization that men's desire for me was the lynching of my identity." When women of fifty or so have fallen from the grace of womb-love, what do they love in themselves and in their unbecomingly hypervisible because erotically invisible sisters?

A reclining nude in Hannah Wilke's Instrumous Series (1992) is an assertion of erotic will. The 48" x 72" color photo continues her self-documentation as erotic agent and object. As in S.O.S. - Starification Object Series (1974), in which Wilke, beautiful in her early twenties, poses in chewing gum "scars" stuck to her body as symbiotic display of psychic and cultural wounds that come from living in a body marked "woman," Wilke is a damaged Venus, this time by cancer and its therapies. Intravenous tubes pierce her, and bandages cover the sites, above her buttocks, of a failed bone marrow transplant. Her stomach is loose, and she is no longer the feminine ideal. "My body has gotten old," she said close to a month before the bone marrow transplant, "up to 188 pounds, prednisone-swelled, striations, dark lines, marks from bone marrow harvesting." Although an art historian could cite Renaissance martyr paintings as sources, she could also understand Wilke's vulner-
able Venus, twenty years ago and now, as a warrior displaying wounds and as the dark goddess, Hecate at the crossroads of life and death. Wilke called her work "curative" and "medicinal," and she said that "focusing on the self gives me the fighting spirit that I need," and "My art is about loving myself." The **Extravagant nude** shows Wilke within—intra—the veins of Venus, a lust for living in the artist's blood.

Although Wilke resuscitates the boneless, erotic look developed by Giorgione and Titian, making herself, as usual, into a classical nude, she is not female body as erotic trophy. This is because she characteristically proves that the body's boundaries are liminal and insecure—most recently through vivid and explicit pathos—and because, more than ever, she affirms I AM WHO I AM. Bodily insecurity paradoxically becomes erotic social security, as does the ruin of the classical nude.1

The myth of the artist as risk-taker, adventurer, and visionary is embedded in art history's and criticism's language of war and language of miracles, and postmodern critiques have challenged the myth.11 But it doesn't die. Robert Mapplethorpe and David Wojnarowicz live on in contemporary art lore as heroes whose art and lives held erotic value, and the art press has lionized Matthew Barney, Richard Prince, Jeff Koons, and David Salle, still living exemplars of a masculine ethos, enforcers in their art of the patriarchal plot. Art history's and criticism's romance with them all is a sentimental replay of Western cultural legends in current and easy incarnations of Joseph Campbell's "Hero with a Thousand Faces."

When love is a large hunger for flesh that moves, the terms of romance transform. The art hero with the same old face turns into an actual old(er) woman whose erotic body as erotic trophy. This is because she characteristically proves that the body's boundaries are liminal and insecure—most recently through vivid and explicit pathos—and because, more than ever, she affirms I AM WHO I AM. Bodily insecurity paradoxically becomes erotic social security, as does the ruin of the classical nude.1

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When love is a large hunger for flesh that moves, the terms of romance transform. The art hero with the same old face turns into an actual old(er) woman whose art is known to provide erotic sustenance and activate ever more polymorphous perversities.

My thanks to the artists I interviewed and to those who responded to the questionnaire are deep. Work on the women artists and aging project was supported by a Faculty Research Award from the University of Nevada, Reno.

Notes

1. Kathleen Woodward, *Aging and its Discontents: Fraud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 158-59, tells a story from anthropologist Michele Dacher's and psychoanalyst Micheline Weinstein's *The Story of Louise: Old People in a Nursing Home.* The book gives psychoanalytic portraits of eight people who live in a French nursing home and focuses also on Louise, a seventy-two-year-old bistro habitue. She had platinum blonde hair, she downed liquor, sung loud, and exchanged obscenities with others, her lipstick was dark, applied beyond her mouth's contours, and she was physically dirty. Woodward writes, "The point of course is that Louise's ferocious excess was a sign of her desire—quite literally her erotic desire for a man named Jean—and a measure of her more general powerful investment in life. Her remarkable appetite and energy, her flamboyance, which had nothing to do with parody, drew these two younger women to her."


5. Doogan's statements were made during a telephone conversation with the author, February 4, 1993.


In The Hearing Trumpet, Leonora Carrington's comic parody, female endurance brings its own rewards. The novel, written in the early 1960s, recounts a fictionalized and feminized quest for the Holy Grail undertaken by Marion Leatherby, a ninety-two year old English feminist held captive in a medieval Spanish castle turned into a nursing home. Marion has long since given up catering to the social expectations of others. Stone deaf and toothless, her sight remains keen, and she is far from ceding the spoils of life to those who will succeed her. Though her grandson characterizes her as a "drooling sack of decomposing flesh," she herself finds her short gray beard "rather gallant."

With her companion, the red-haired Spaniard Carmella Vasquez (loosely based on the figure of Carrington's close friend, the painter Remedios Varo), Marion sets out to recuperate the powers taken from women over centuries of patriarchal oppression and masculinist revisions of history. Carrington's readers are invited to suspend belief in the rational order of things in order to enter a world in which the male god is displaced by a female, and Christian and pagan symbols and sites interchanged. Finally, the elixir of life is revealed hidden in the tomb of Mary Magdalen. "You may imagine the transports of delight which overcame me," reports Marion, "when I learnt that Magdalen had been a high initiate of the mysteries of the Goddess but had been executed for the sacrilege of selling certain secrets of her cult to Jesus of Nazareth."

Critic Susan Suleiman has noted the contradiction between the humorous intelligence of the novel's narrator-heroine, and the absolute denial of intelligence — indeed of subjecthood — to which her age, and her physical condition, reduce her in the eyes of her family. "Only by having the old 'senile' crone tell her own story from the start is this contradictory effect achieved: Marian's sharp wit counteracts her 'decomposing flesh,' and her dependent status is belied by her narrative mastery."

Carrington was in her early forties when she wrote the novel. She was born in 1917. As a young woman beloved by the Surrealists, and in particular by Max Ernst with whom she lived for two years before World War II, she had a personal familiarity with the fraught relationship between muse and male genius in twentieth-century vanguard art. Indeed her flight from France in 1940, and her subsequent mental collapse, have often been depicted as the first stages of a feminist Pilgrim's Progress toward autonomy and female agency that would lead her from Europe to New York and Mexico.

Carrington had taken up the fictional subject of aging at least once before embarking on The Hearing Trumpet. The short story titled "My Flannel Knickers" was written in Mexico in 1950. It revolves around the adventures of a "saint" (gender unspecified) who, dressed in a tweed golfing jacket and gym shoes, has taken up residence, not in a desert cave, but on a traffic island in the middle of a busy boulevard in a city — one that sounds very much like Mexico City. The saint, known far and wide for a habit of hanging his flannel knickers on a traffic light pole each day to dry, has come to its present circumstances as the result of a misdirected life abusing a beautiful face by wasting it on the social expectations of others. After a complicated series of adventures, and misadventures, the saint's cosmic destiny is played out on the traffic island. In a final meditation, the saint muses on a narrow escape from the world of social intercourse:

Here I might explain the process that actually takes place in this sort of jungle. Each face is provided with greater or smaller mouths, armed with different kinds of sometimes natural teeth. (Anybody over forty and toothless should be sensible enough to be quietly knitting an original new body, instead of wasting the cosmic wool.) These teeth bar the way to a gaping throat, which disgorges whatever it swallows back into the foetid atmosphere. The bodies over which these faces are suspended serve as ballast to the faces. As a rule they are carefully covered with colours and shapes in current 'fashion.' This 'fashion' is a devouring idea launched by another face snapping with insatiable hunger for money and notoriety. The bodies, in constant misery and supplication, are generally ignored and only used for ambling of the face. As I said, for ballast.

My first meetings with Leonora Carrington took place in New York, beginning in 1983. I'm only interested in three things," she told me firmly during one of our early conversations, "illness, old age, and death." When I congratulated her on her foresight in having chosen to write about such subjects from an early age, she replied, not without acerbity, that the earlier stories and novels "didn't count." "Because," she added, "I wasn't old when I wrote them."

I had taken Marion Leatherby very much to heart when I first read The Hearing Trumpet, several years before meeting its author. Now I was forced to concede that perhaps time, and age, would transform my own reading. At the same time, the fact that Carrington firmly rejected the notion that the character of Marion had anything to do with "real" old age led me to reconsider the function of the particular representations of aging in Carrington's oeuvre.

The fictional process of transforming the female body into one in which psychic and spiritual powers replace patriarchal constructions of femininity around physical beauty and sexual desirability is an important one. It represents a critical stage in a process of visualizing, and generating, images which may help fill the hole created by the lack of representations of old women in contemporary western culture. In one sense, these images served as the means to the embodiment of femininity in new forms. I also came to see them as integral to Carrington's belief that psychedelic and spiritual development require flexing the boundaries of material reality, a process which is an inevitable part of the physical deterioration of aging, and which underlies all of her work — whether painting or writing.

While living in Mexico, Carrington began to produce complex paintings whose psychic and spiritual content was created through manipulation of size and scale, the fusing of conscious and unconscious sources in a fabulist narrative, and
the gradual dematerialization of objects and images. During the 1980s, as she approached her own seventh decade, she began to paint with acrylic, a technique that resulted in subtle colors and thinner surfaces. Her recent paintings have a transparent feeling perfectly in keeping with subjects that increasingly revolve around a community of ancient figures. These old men and old women, their sack-like bodies lending them an androgynous air, travel in the company of animal companions, which are like the witches' familiars of Anglo-Irish legend and the nagual of Maya culture. Nocturnal beasts such as the badger, known as a fierce protector of its young, inhabit subterranean realms, and hybrid chickens and geese roost among cabbage roses.

The figure of an old woman looms over many of these paintings. She is the Crone, who dates to the earliest goddesses, the spinners, and the furies. Exuding great strength and mystery for Carrington, she represents not wisdom or old age but the female who has passed beyond conventional expectations and models of femininity. Accepting her aging body—the collapse of the social face with the loss of teeth, the changing bodily looks and scents—she produces herself with little help from anyone else.

Reading Doris Lessing's The Diary of Jane Summers, Carrington found valuable support for a concept of woman who is beyond the conventions of imagining. She fits neither the cultural stereotype of the witch, nor that of the wise and benign grandmother. Abandoning nostalgic ideals of the invincibility of the physical body, and the serenity of old age, Carrington turned instead to the powerful brujas and espiritualistas of Mexican culture, the exiled prophetesses of early Christianity, and the goddesses of Celtic Ireland.

It is this image which dominates Carrington's most recent paintings. In one, Kron Flower (1986), an old woman detaches her eyeball to peer at a red flower that has mysteriously burst from a pavement as cracked as her own face. In another, The Magdalens (1986), old women exchange malevolent glares with their crystals. The dry brushed surfaces of paintings like Kron Flower and The Magdalens, the restoration of knowledge and power to the elderly, the painting of aged and wrinkled faces, are perfectly in keeping with Carrington's belief that unless women reclaim their power to affect the course of human life, there is little hope for civilization.

Carrington's late paintings are an integral part of a decades-long attempt to capture moments marked by great psychic and spiritual clarity. "Living is a process," she said recently, "now I'm in the process of learning about dying." Yet there is nothing despairing about these recent works. Like the overturning of patriarchal narratives that accompanies Marion Leatherby's journey in The Hearing Trumpet, these paintings subvert dominant artistic mythologies. And they do so with earthy, often mordant humor. Unlike the heroic and timeless images of male spiritual vision we have come to expect from the experience of viewing the late works of Titian, Rembrandt, and others "old masters," they remain rooted in the mortal, as well as in the imm mortal.

Notes
1 The Hearing Trumpet, first published in French, is most recently published by Virago Books, London, 1991. I would like to thank Moira Roth for her helpful comments and suggestions on this manuscript.
3 It has recently been republished in Leonora Carrington, The Seventh Horse and Other Tales (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), pp. 165-168.
4 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of Leonora Carrington are from conversations in New York, Oak Park, Illinois, and Mexico City between 1983 and 1993. Notes from these conversations are in the author's possession.
A few years ago, I could have discussed feminist art—what it is, what it isn’t, what it has been, what it could be—with a greater degree of intellectual confidence than I can today.

I might have suggested that the primary aim of a feminist art must necessarily be based in an overt consciousness of the specificity of female experience as constructed and regulated under the ideology, social customs, and legal apparatus of male supremacy. I might have called “quality” into question. I might have spoken of the need to refuse the delusion of formalism. I might have referred to the myth of genius or the failure of individualism. I might have derived all of European bourgeois art history. Maybe I would have tried to think through the different critical obstacles proposed by some of the dominant feminist-inspired visual strategies of the last twenty-five years: the limits of "body" art; the endgame of appropriation; the failure of assimilation and the dissimilar failure of separatism; or, the perpetual questions that plague painting, women painting...

It was easier for me then, only a few years ago, to define, at least, the parameters for considering what is or what could be termed “feminist art.” I thought I knew where we stood, even though, then as now, we didn’t all stand in the same place. And if I didn’t know exactly where we should go, I had suggestions, or at least I remember having them...

But then, that few years ago was not so long after the ten years ago when I was freshly graduated from college, where I had begrudgingly graduated with a degree in anthropology, from an institution that only offered feminism as an extracurricular activity. That is, I learned feminism on campus, but outside of any classroom. I “learned” feminism as a member of a student group, the Women’s Union. We read the same books that had mobilized the Women’s Liberation Movement in the U.S. during the previous decade: Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet, Susan Brownmiller, Valerie Solanas, the anthology Sisterhood is Powerful, Redstocking’s Feminist Revolution, and other early writings from the activist movement. None of these books were ever “assigned” to me in class, nor were they being taught by any members of the faculty at the University of Chicago during the early 80s to the best of my knowledge—and I would have known. My college advisor, a natty, British-surnamed Harvard man whose father had been the same, was constantly at war with me: I didn’t respect the right things, after all.

During one memorable session, ostensibly devoted to designing my course selections for the coming year, he screamed at me accusingly: "You’re not interested in anything but Marxism and feminism!" Why should I be?

But forget my "interests": like all students, my education was limited by what was available. I studied under one Frankfurt School scholar in the philosophy department, and to him I was still thankful. To others responsible for my formal education, I have less than generous feelings. I endured more than a few lectures where male professors, before delivering their fictional accounts of "field work" gathered during trips to Africa or South America, prefaced their lectures with "And Laura, don’t ask me about the women, because I don’t have any information." The men in the class would then laugh. This off-the-cuff disclaimer was supposed to be sufficient to explain how someone could purport to have "information" about a "society," while all the "information" was gleaned from observing half of the social group, that is, from documenting the activities of men. It was also meant to humiliate me, to remind me that questions about "women" were not taken seriously, nor would they be tolerated.

The male bias accepted as normative in most anthropological perspectives was only part of the problem: that these white men, from the U.S. and other English-speaking countries, thought they were capable of "knowing" anything worth "knowing" about societies they knew little to nothing about, was the fundamental farce of the discipline. By the early 90s, the waning of Claude Levi-Strauss’s universalist claims and the post-structuralist response put forward by Roland Barthes and others had already led anthropology to its own endgame. Sophisticated practitioners, such as Clifford Geertz, were declaring the death of the field. As an academic discipline, anthropology had originated as a colonialist-mercantilist enterprise, a genesis that still controls its movements in the U.S. and elsewhere. But institutionalized practices seldom cease just because their methodological efficacy has been either called into question or patently disproved: the anthropological department at The University of Chicago, the first such department in the U.S., lives on.

It seemed to me then, as it does to me now, that if one is interested in investigating how a culture functions, how a society distributes wealth and constructs value, one could best begin by observing one’s own. The superstitions and irrationalities that motivate the social movements of members of the U.S. are at least as fascinating as those that mobilize smaller communities elsewhere. And given that the U.S., unlike smaller communities elsewhere, is in the process of vigorously exporting its cultural values abroad, doesn’t an examination of those values take on a kind of intellectual and moral urgency?

But maybe Chicago just wasn’t the "right" place for a young feminist interested in examining, from a critical perspective, American art and culture. That’s what the Whitney Independent Study Program is for—or so I was told by an art historian, a curator, and others who had been following my art writings in student and Chicago-based publications.

Needless to say, I wasn’t happy to arrive at a program "made for me" that, like my undergraduate training, didn’t include any feminism on its reading list.

Again, at the Whitney Independent Study Program, which I dropped out of twice, I
had to go "off campus" to satisfy my intellectual interests: in New York I met feminists, theorists, and activists, who had been active during the 70s and I joined one of the few small feminist activist groups still around in New York City during the early 80s. Unfortunately, there weren't enough of us in our "group" to make much of a difference to anything. The group eventually folded and most of its members subsequently joined Act-Up, which, through the rest of the decade remained the only large-scale direct action group in the nation. Meanwhile, feminism lost its entire radical fringe, leaving behind only the reform groups, like the National Organization for Women or the National Abortion Rights Action League or similar groups devoted to intervention on the electoral or legal levels.

Coextensive with its deference to the reformist arm of the movement, feminism became institutionalized, at least in name, within the academy. That none of the most important theory of Second Wave Feminism had developed out of the academy, or had, in cases such as those of Kate Millet or Mary Daly grown out of opposition to the academy, should have remained a permanent point of reference for those engaged in "Feminist Studies." How does feminism advance within a society defined by its belief in and maintenance of women's subordination: how especially can it advance within institutionalized practices such as academia? If you doubt the verity of this politically crude question, witness the evolution of "feminist studies" into "women's studies." Each subsequent shift in nomenclature is telling: the rhetoric moves progressively away from women's oppression as the cite of investigation. The shift from "feminism" to "women" is a move from a word that embodies a history of a people's fight for equality to a word that is simply descriptive of those people, women. The move from "women" to "gender" completes the de-politicization, as it suggests that the story of "women" is inadequate or incorrect, that "gender" both male and female is a preferable site of inquiry. The last move, from "women" to "gender" was both logical and inevitable after the first shift, from "feminist" to "women" was made: the only reason, after all, to study "women" is to study our oppression because oppression is, exactly, the defining characteristic of what a woman is, or what women are: we are people who are exempted from the rights given men and victim to specific forms of discrimination, prejudice, and harassment not levied against men.

Women have nothing as significantly in common than our common experience of being part of a group of people historically and presently subjugated to men. But if you don't want to look at that, if you want to deny, apologize for, or naturalize our inferior status in society, then, by all means, why not dance around in the fiction of "generes." Although I don't mean to condemn the entire academic apparatus or those working for feminist interests who coexist within it, I do think there's enough evidence to suggest that what has come to be termed "feminism" is not necessarily so; there can be no feminism, as Tania Modleski has suggested, in a "feminism without women." 1

For me, the most simple articulation of what has "happened" during the past few years goes something like this: Whereas in the mid-80s, this was something called 'feminism' often visible, but too often, I can't find the 'feminism' in it. This confusion of terminology—taking place in the academy and other cultural frameworks, such as the art community—has serious political implications for the advancement of women's rights as constructed in theory and in practice. The most obvious example is the work of someone such as Camille Paglia, who calls herself a "renegade feminist" when, according to any intellectual or political analysis, she is clearly anti-feminist. Perhaps less obvious is someone such as Judith Butler, who, while mis-reading de Beauvoir and Wittig, occasions to find the signifier "women" wanting, and therefore suggests we discard it. But without the category "women"—a category imposed upon us and enforced within male supremacist constructions—we are left without the nomenclature that not only binds us together, but binds us down. To suggest that there is no such thing as a "woman" may hold philosophical verity, so too for "race," "homosexual," or "class": all forms of classified subjugations are "false" constructions. But to abandon the categorical imperatives before they are materially eliminated is to play to the conservation of society as it is now: neither gender, race, or class.

Whereas during the 70s and the early 80s, anti-feminism was championed by women such as Marabel Morgan, Phyllis Schlafly and Midge Macdonald, all of whom articulated their opposition from the "outside" of feminism, since the mid-80s, the anti-feminist front has been led by women who call themselves "feminists." 2

My definition of feminism is any activity, thought or deed, which assumes both that male supremacy exists and that it must be dismantled. To not acknowledge the existence of male supremacy, or to not advocate its elimination, is to not be engaged with feminism. The process by which feminism is defined is also the process by which feminism happens. In the 70s, this "process" would have been termed "consciousness raising"; now, we are looking to establish an intellectual foundation for distinguishing between "consciousnesses," for an intellectual foundation that allows us to argue for the validity of one interpretation of women's experience over another. That the theories of postmodernity that decry the verity of both generalized assertions and subjectivity have put all radical political theory into serious crisis is something that must be worked through during the next decades.

But that the present would have come to pass this way is not surprising: anti-feminism in the name of feminism is the most effective way for conservative power to maintain itself, and postmodernity may eventually be considered a reactionary shuffle against the activism demands that hit the industrialized West circa 1968. Some of the most basic insights of feminism, the demand for women's equality can no longer be easily denounced, at least not in the U.S., and not by the same theories of female subordination that successfully kept women subordinated during previous centuries. Even Orrin Hatch, for instance, refrains from quoting the Bible or insisting on the literal meaning of the word "man" as written into the U.S. Constitution—though his view of women's position in society is derived from the Bible and the social customs of Europe's 18th-century. But in order to keep women economically, socially, and politically subordinated, new words and fresh explanations are needed to replace, while restating in different language, the old ones. Why not try:
Women are different.
Women enjoy prostitution, it is an act of sexual empowerment.
Women are liberated by Hustler magazine.
Women "deserve" to have babies and jobs too.

Just look, Mary Boone shows some artists who are women.

Women are empowered if one of them gets to donate free professional services to the federal government, a privilege given to her by virtue of her legal marriage to the President.

More men, after all, are doing housework.
This is just a "patricracy, not a "male supremacy."
Things are better now for women.
Motherhood is a "choice."

Female heterosexuality is a choice.
Lesbians and gays are both "Queers."
Women are "abjected" not "oppressed."
Women are women because Freud and Lacan explained why.
"Women" are not women because some of us are nonwhite lesbians.
Wife beating is spouse beating.

Women marry and take on their husband's surnames by "choice."

Women just need to try harder.

There is now a job available for a woman who is willing to occupy the category "feminist" while not practicing feminism, just as there is a job for a black who is willing to sell out other blacks, or for a homosexual who is willing to collude with homo-hatred. In terms of self-interest, either for economic or social survival, it's obvious that to "get ahead" in contemporary America, the best deals to be cut are those made with straight white male centrality in mind. And you don't have to "be" a straight white male; in fact, they especially need you if you're not because you campaign in a signifying practice, a form of representation, that they can not.

So what does any of this have to do with "art", with the idea or practice of a "feminist" art? There are many ways that art can be informed by feminism. At this particular moment, though, I am pessimistic because I don't think it's possible for any significant advancement, in art or in politics, until we synthesize and further elaborate the insights of the 70s, of the art and politics of the Women's Liberation Movement. We haven't done it. We are still working through—politically, culturally and artistically—the legacies of Women's Liberation, as well as those of the Black Power and Gay Rights mobilizations.

On the theoretical level, while there is a plethora of material published out of the academy that is inarguably more sophisticated than the early writings that came out of the Women's Liberation Movement, they are substantively not an advancement and, in many instances, they constitute a backlash. Theoretically, the biggest obstacle to the development of feminist theory has been the undue prioritization of psychoanalysis, specifically according to the writings of Jacques Lacan. How curious that the same methodology that ruined the movement in France has succeeded in becoming the primary intellectual obstacle of women's position in the United States. How curious that there is some commercial and museum interest for some contemporary work that evidences feminist concerns—Sue Williams, Janine Antoni, Kiki Smith, for instance—but at the same time, the avant-garde movement that originated the premises of these and other artists, the Feminist Art Movement of the late 60s and early 70s, has yet to be given any serious critical, much less financial, support from either critics or museums. Feminist and proto-feminist insights have guided the production and reception of American art since the 60s; many of the women who worked within the Pop Movement, such as Rosalyn Drexler and Marjorie Strider, produced work already conscious of the need to forefront their specific experiences as women in their art. Pre-70s performance works, such as those of Carolee Schneemann, evidence similar concerns and Louise Bourgeois's work from as early as the 40s often directly takes women's suppression as its theme.

By 1970-78, after feminism had reached critical mass and mass mobilization in the United States, the number of artists working directly from a feminist consciousness was enormous; the movement in the U.S. alone easily included more than a thousand artists. The Feminist Art Movement was decidedly anti-, not "post," Modernist. It called High Art into question, challenged the absoluteness invested in history, refused to follow the dictates of a formalist proscription, insisted on the importance of content, privileged autobiography, and was perhaps the only true avant-garde movement that occurred in the United States during this century. It was certainly the most ambitious: the Feminist Art Movement, like the radical activist movement which inspired it, wanted to change the world.

Many of the women artists who garnered international attention during the 80s, such as Laurie Anderson and Barbara Kruger, for instance, were Feminist Art Movement participants during the previous decade. (Kruger was a student under Miriam Schapiro at Parsons in the mid 60s, but how often is this lineage noted?) That Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, and Jenny Holzer could neither have existed nor been recognized had the 70s movement not preceded them is obvious. Why then is there so little respect for the diverse and groundbreaking feminist work of the 70s? Why are so many of the artists associated with the movement still treated with critical contempt? And by critics and artists and curators who are women who consider themselves feminists? Is it perhaps because white women, the largest sector of the Feminist Art Movement and the largest group of women working in art, are currently the most deluded members of American society? Middle-class white women comprise at least 50%, if not more, of the American art apparatus: as art school students, artists, curators, dealers, critics, and collectors. Have we no respect for ourselves, our history, the continual devaluation of our lives? I think not.

While women can continue to produce "feminist" art—and I hope that we do—I do not see any possibility of any serious leap forward until another historical configuration, such as that circa 68, provides the kind of creative explosion, on all cultural fronts, that significantly changes what kind of ideas and what kind of action and what kind of art is possible. At the present moment I see us as severely compromised: and in ways that we are responsible for, in ways that are neither inevitable nor necessary.
Notes
1. The Women’s Union, a student organization at The University of Chicago, had previously been called “The Chicago Women’s Liberation Union.” The name change took place sometime before I arrived on campus in September of 1979. One of the earliest-formed and most active of the college feminist groups during the 70s, the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union is documented in Sisterhood is Powerful with a 1980 statement that ends with: “At the U of C we see the first large action, the first important struggle of women’s liberation. This university—all universities—discriminate against women, impede their full intellectual development, deny them places on the faculty, exploit talented women and mistreat women students.” Sisterhood is Powerful, Robin Morgan, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 585-586.

2. How some methodologies and/or political movements “win” while others “lose” is perhaps my fundamental question here; in terms of feminism, we need to know not only what feminism “is” but how its “is-ness” could come into practice, could subvert, deflect and eventually replace the misogyny that currently defines and mobilizes our societies.

For instance, recently I have been trying to trace how psychoanalysis has come to occupy such a central place in Western intellectual life. It is obvious that economistic Marxism, or other materialist-based perspectives, are inadequate explanations for all of human motivation and behavior, so the introduction, through Louis Althusser, of neo-Freudianism during the 60s was perhaps inevitable. But the over-prioritization still given to Freud, specifically Lacanian, thought is appalling, given how inadequate and incomplete the psychoanalytic model is—most especially when utilized to analyze women’s subjugation.

One might assume that Lacan was too blindly and hastily accepted when first introduced to consciously-politicized intellectuals in France and in England during the late 60s and early 70s. This was not at all the case. In France, the reactionary implications of Lacan and PsychePo., the women’s group associated with Lacanian theory, were immediately discussed and published in everything from the Letters Column of Liberation to the feminist theory journal founded by Simone de Beauvoir and others, Questions Feministes. In England, the film journal Senses was one of the primary venues for the introduction of psychoanalysis as a valid framework with which to interpret and explain cultural experience and products, especially cinematic narratives. But, for instance, a 1978 essay published in Senses, “Difference” by Stephen Heath (himself an early Lacan enthusiast), reveals and critiques the male supremacist ideology imbedded in Lacan’s primary themes, particularly his privileging of the phallus. Heath’s essay is extensive and well argued; to me it seems impossible that women who claim to be working from a feminist impetus could submit so dutifully and so loyally to Lacan—and after arguments, such as Heath’s and others, were not only made, but made in precisely the “right” publications.

This is just one example, albeit far from a trivial one, of the failure of “information” to transform either opinions or practices. This failure of the emancipative model—just say it, say it clearly and loudly and it will be heard—is a more significant flaw in the premises that underlie the liberal, humanist, post-Enlightenment model than any of the lacks so far revealed by the ideas most associated with postmodernity.

3. It might appear that feminism should share similarities with Marxism in this respect. But within academia, the difference between feminist practitioners and Marxist practitioners is crucial. Marxist “professors” are, by Marxist definition, not the agents of change—a professor is socially and economically situated outside of the ‘working class.’ Whereas, in terms of feminism, if practiced by a woman or women, the “professor” is still an agent of change—and therefore, ipso facto, more threatening than her male academic-Marxist colleagues. (I owe this insight to Christine Delphy, in conversation.)


5. Even a theorist such as Julia Kristeva, who does not consider herself feminist and has never called herself one, is often defined as “feminist” in the U.S. Is this because she is a woman who sometimes writes about women? Is this so that women who are not doing feminism can claim to be doing so; that is, they can claim to be involved with the difficult demands of a politically engaged life while basically doing nothing?

6. The history of the MLF in France, specifically the ascension of the group PsychePo., is either unknown or conspicuously not referred to by American academics who have taken the neo-Lacanian theories associated with that group to heart. PsychePo. emerged as a consciously anti-feminist organization. For a discussion of the activist movement in France, and the problems involved in the devaluation of the word “feminism” see my “Interview with Christine Delphy,” off our backs, March 1984, pp. 10, 11, 24, 25. For a discussion of how the leader of PsychePo., Antoinette Fouque, has falsified the history of the French movement and appropriated it for her own (and others’) ends, see Christine Delphy, “Les origines du Mouvement de liberation des femmes en France,” Nouvelles Questions Feministes, 16-17-18, 1991, pp. 137-148.

7. Black women in America, for instance, are not dubbed enough to exist in significant numbers in the Republican Party. White women, however, are in such sorry shape that they send a misogynist such as Arlen Specter back to the Senate; Specter could not have won his 1992 race in Pennsylvania without women’s support—and it was from white women that he obtained it.
WE NEED A NEW HISTORY

SHEILA and JACK BUTLER

We Need a New History is a collaborative installation exhibition by Canadian artists Sheila and Jack Butler, comprised of photographs, research notes and working drawings, an audiotape and a printed essay of which the following is an edited version. In this work the artists propose alternative constructions for sex within difference, where the sexes are mutually transparent, and where the construction of sexual difference is embedded within a thickened layering of practices, enacted on their skins.

This collaboration brings together the different but related elements evidenced in the artists' studio practices. It reflects Jack's engagement with cross-disciplinary work joining the discourses of art and science. By means of a practice centering around the use of his physical skin surface as the ground on which to depict scientific diagrams, Jack creates his own material subjectivity as the site where art and science come together. The diagrams that he uses are derived from his original biological research and background gained as a research scientist in developmental biology at the University of Manitoba School of Medicine. Jack's constructions have often taken the form of lecture/performance works, in which he paints scientific diagrams on his chest while expanding their significance.

This work also takes off from Sheila's engagement with the practice of painting. Her work centers around research into creating meaning by making pictures, in comparison to the ways that meaning is created with words. Her paintings and drawings demonstrate the ways pictures can be physically different from the traditional practice of painting, and how these differences affect the gendered meanings created in the pictures. She makes use of pictorial representations in conjunction with written texts, as well as more traditional presentations of visual imagery unsupported by words.

S and J: We are attempting a new tentative resolution, the invention of a new history that exceeds either of the two originary practices, within the context of shared social and aesthetic values and shared lives. Our invention involves a re-evaluation of the ways that we know and experience the gendered self. This examination of identity is carried forward through the process of painting marks on our own skin; by this means we intend to critique representations of the self in both art and science. Many other pressing concerns are raised in the process of representing these issues artistically, and so this exhibition exists as a way station in an ongoing project. As artists who have been married for many years, who have collaborated at the most intimate and the most public registers, raising children, surviving financially, nurturing our own studio work, we would like to consider our marriage an essential element of the collaborative project.

The History of the Human Figure as a Subject in Western Painting

Images of the human figure in Western painting, as they were created in succeeding historical periods, exist as visual experiences that we share with viewers of our work, and we feel that our audience will interpret our painting on the surfaces of our bodies partly through the medium of this shared history of images. Marks, scars, applied patterns and pictures alter not only the surface appearance of the skin. They also alter our perception of the totality of the human subject who bears the marks or patterns. Western painting constructs this totality along a social, political axis of power that begins and ends with the construction of gender, as male or female. So in order to look at surface embellishment as it interacts with a larger perception of identity, we selected Botticelli's paintings of Venus and St. Sebastian as paradigms of the gendered human figure common to the viewing histories of ourselves and members of our audience. In this examination of surface and subjectivity, St. Sebastian is especially appropriate to the questioning of boundaries for the gendered self. His surface is abundantly marked with open wounds penetrated by phallic arrows that eroticize him in an ambiguous way, his surface pain is painted with a transparent over-glaze of pleasure. The clear dichotomy male/female doesn't appear to be adequate.

New History seeks to stretch the two polarities, male/female, as traditionally presented in painting, into a continuum. We try seeing Venus through Sebastian and Sebastian through Venus, and ourselves as contemporary subjects who don't seem to fit the positions provided for us by art historical paradigms from the history of figure painting.

S: Botticelli's Venus also brings to mind the issue of canons of beauty as they exist in our culture. Images of the human figure, and particularly images of women in our culture center around a fantasy ideal of eternal youth, the promised reward of appropriate selections of cosmetics, clothing, food, exercise, and state of mind. Perhaps the most transgressive aspect of New History is the representation of Jack's and my older bodies. The contemporary canon of physical beauty does not sanction the viewing of people over 50 years of age, in the nude, drawing on their own skin. We cannot participate in the agenda of ideal eternal youth because we just don't look right, and so the cultural message is violated.

The code of beauty is, however, a gendered code, not applied equally to representations of men and women. Current commercially endorsed proportions for women are framed by narrowly defined limits of acceptable appearance in terms of age and weight. It is tacitly understood that women who exist physically outside these limits should remain unseen. For men, tolerable limits of beauty in these terms are much broader, with prescriptions focusing instead on representations of the penis. Cultural intolerance here is a reflection of the blurring of distinction between penis and phallus. Established power needs the penis (the physical organ) to be the phallus (power, truth) when phallocentric power is challenged, and the phallus not to be the penis when the process of male domination must be concealed.

Meryl Streep, as an aging, once-young-and-lovely actress in the film Death
Becomes Her, speaks to the condition of slipping outside the accepted canon of beauty. Inspecting her cosmetic surgery in the mirror, she murmurs, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, Hope they never see the scars." In this cinema fantasy of beautiful women attaining eternal life and beauty, Meryl Streep and Goldie Hawn are, by drinking a magic potion, reduced to inhabiting deteriorating bodies forever. They resort to spray paint from the hardware store to enliven their already pallor, and engage in a dialogue that could be seen as appropriate to our New History project.

GH: This is so embarrassing.

MS: This is a simple question of maintenance; yeh, this is upkeep. You paint my ass, I'll paint yours.

GH: Who could have imagined you and me together, painting on each other, painting each other's ass, day and night forever? (Death Becomes Her, Universal Pictures, 1992).

J: In theory, we know that the history of art and the history of science shape many of the paradigms that actually set the limits of somatic existence. Drawing, one of the most ancient and valuable human technologies-of-the-hand, is a symbolic process. Drawing-on-the-skin-as-art, like tattoo, body-building, cosmetic surgery, scarification, and piercings are forms of body alteration where we can physically see and feel this theory in action. These cultural markers represent transformation, real change, thinking, knowing, because the skin, like the brain, can be understood as an organ for conceptualization, a site for becoming.

In New History the skin is a site for drawing, and we have used the traditional Western practice of drawing in several different ways.

Borrowed contours: we reinforced the contour outlines of Botticelli's figures by drawing on life-sized reproductions of the paintings. The Italian painter understood the importance of the simple linear contour as a graphic tool that could define, with the economy of one line, both the social code for sexual difference (gender visually summarized), and visual pleasure. We desire the comfort of that social ordering, the pleasure of those seductive contours. But, they do not fit our bodies, or our lives. So we have appropriated Botticelli's process and drawn simple contours that describe wandering, uncertain boundaries on the three-dimensional volumes of our own bodies.

Embellishment: in the non-Western traditions of bodily adornment where painting on the skin may serve either to camouflage or to dramatize the subject, to locate the subject in the social matrix, we have chosen to embellish, to heighten, the visibility of our scars as a reminder for ourselves and a caution to others that we have been living here for some time now. We are committed.

Scientific diagram: We have used drawing as a scientific research tool to investigate first-hand empirical experience (the study of specimens), by constructing trial visualizations or descriptions. Drawing as an intellectual practice, as opposed to its expressive or decorative possibilities, uses traditional Western conventions for the description of space and formal principles pertaining to the organization of figure/ground relationships in order to convey visual meaning. Here, we carry this practice of drawing, integral to my investigation into the origins of sexual difference, onto the surface of our bodies.

Inked drawing: our backs and hips are covered with wet ink, we press against the paper mounted on the wall. The images produced in this way are as quickly read as signs of our sex as are Botticelli's gendered contours, and like forensic indicators they are tell-tale imprints of our individual selves. They function more like an index than like symbols. The indexical mark stands close to the tradition of scientific imaging: fossil remains, footprints, cast shadows, medical symptoms, the traces left by light on a photographic negative, X-ray, ultrasound, MRI. We claim both the index and the symbol as appropriate tools for our participation in the Western tradition of drawing/painting. And we are playing with the boundaries between them.

The Painted Savage

As members of contemporary North American society, we share with viewers of our work the knowledge of cultural biases that link painting or marking of the body surface to fantasies of the romantic savage "Other." Representations of painted, scarred, and tattooed people in non-Western societies as they appear in Tarzan movies, Westerns, and watered-down anthropological material in the National Geographic Magazine, as well as in academic social science texts have all contributed to this colonialist vision.

Modernist appropriations of material from traditional cultures (cultures with practices of marking the skin for social indications and for decoration), are now viewed as politically charged and implicated in relations of power and domination. We have considered how our personal work as contemporary artists, using our own physical surfaces as support for painted images, compares to the practices of people in traditional societies who use body marking in a socially integrated way. Will our marking of our own skins in New History be read by viewers as a form of nostalgia for the eroticized painted savage?

In our understanding of our position, it is the adoption of images from scientific research that is the key element in the process of painting our skins as art, as distinct from that practice in traditional societies. We and the viewers of our work live in a scientific society, where the paradigm of rational science defines the physical self by means of the discourse of biology. We are proposing that biology lives as well in the personal experience of one's own physical body. So if we approach biology from the standpoint of an auto-biology, which exists as an oxymoron in scientific terms (you can't have auto and biology in the same construction), then we are proposing an autobiographical biology, a new kind of history. Imaging that content graphically on our own surfaces, claiming skin surface as the site that is as close to yourself as you can get, is a way to bring art and art-making processes into the context of a scientific society.

S: When I think of painting on skin, I think of the way facial cosmetics contribute to the social construction of woman in our culture. With the purchase of Revlon products though, you purchase at the same time a whole political agenda centered around the cultural fantasy of youth and beauty and women as objects to be viewed. Am I complicit in a system of gender domination the minute I buy a lipstick? As I participate with some qualms in the practice of making up my face, it does seem to me that the experience has a slightly different cast or meaning for someone who is an artist and who is making marks and representations as part of a daily visual art practice.
My first-hand experience of body marking as a traditional culturally integrated practice was during the 70s when Sheila and our daughter Emily and I lived in the Canadian arctic settlement of Baker Lake, employed by the Inuit as art advisors to the Sarvik Co-op. The seven-year arctic experience was painfully difficult, filled with contradictions; political, personal, artistic, and cultural. The following is an edited excerpt from an audiotape that we made for the New History project. Sheila and I discuss Inuit tattooing, colonialism, and some of the conflicts that we faced in our work with Inuit artists.

Discussion

J: We were working on a daily basis with Inuit people. There were several women in contact with us who still had tattooed faces and tattooed hands and wrists. One woman, Qilluarq, was one of the oldest people in the North West Territories. It was interesting to see the kind of mixed feelings that the society around her had about her tattoos. It's a sensitive social issue in relation to contemporary Inuit culture and in relation to their process of acculturation. They, the tattoos, were very interesting to us as visual artists.

S: Yes, but it is a very sensitive issue for them. It's really funny though, that now-a-days so many young people I know, especially in the arts, are getting tattoos; not at all rare anymore to see young people who are interested in tattoos. So it's come full swing. It was the mark of the savage, and now it's the mark of the young intellectual in our culture.

J: The Inuit artists often included tattooing in their figure drawings, and so we had a good idea of what the patterns of the tattoos looked like, and where on the body and how they were used, what the intention was. It was often discussed as part of understanding the nature of the drawings they were making. And I think, as social markers as well as signs of aesthetic beauty, the tattoos played a very important part in earlier Inuit culture.

S: Yes, but I read this in anthropological writings later about how they actually did it traditionally. They didn't have a very wide range of coloured materials in the arctic. They used the soot out of the lamps after the fat had burned. The black soot was the colouring material. And they would draw it through the skin on a needle and a very fine piece of sinew. That is how the colour was deposited under the skin. It would have been painful. One anthropologist writing on this record that for women, as he was told by an informant in the arctic, since women were going to suffer in life, this early pain with tattooing was a kind of preparation for maturity.

J: It was visually very interesting and made a deep impression on me as an artist and seemed to have a potential for my own work...I really wasn't certain how to use it, but I was interested in trying to use this information...

S: Oh! You can't say that!

J: Can't say that?

S: I think that...

J: I can say it (in private) to this mike though...

S: Yes you can say it to this mike... The issue is that you constantly appeal to experience, like when I say that I'm uncomfortable using these people's names, because their relatives really might find this intrusive and embarrassing, that they don't want...

J: Because they have different feelings about the nature of tattooing...

S: ...about their own history. The reason we were in the arctic and were able to see those people and meet them was because we were empowered by our society to be there. And so we were placed in that position. All of our experience there was mediated through power. Even though we like to think of ourselves as being benevolent, still, I don't think that we can dissociate that (power) from the real experience of having lived and worked there.

J: It's... Well, it seems more positive to me than that though, in that the Inuit people were participating.

S: It is more positive. That is an important part of the mix. But also, they had less choice about whether to participate than we did.

J: So what is legitimate to say then about... other than your and my description of what the tattoos looked like... what is legitimate to say about them in relation to us as practicing artists?

S: I think that it's legitimate to say that we were interested and that we were led, then, to go and read. After that we read records by explorers and anthropologists and so forth that told more about what it had been like a few generations before we met those people. But, to say that you intended to use it... I think is just... It became part of our life experience, I think we can say that. But we can't dissociate it from the power that placed us there. And I think that's what we have to be really scrupulous about.

J: I don't want my language to... to not accurately represent my real feelings about this. And I'm sensitive to why you feel that power relationships are very important in any conversation that we have together, or any material about our experience in the North.

S: It is.

J: I had been working for a number of years with imagery painted directly on the skin before I went to the North, and I was interested in the response, as an artist, in my culture, in my time, with my uses and intentions. And though my intention was not to rip-off tattoos, the idea of imaging directly on the body, used by another people, for their own intentions, in a society where I was living and working on a daily basis, seems to me to be integrated into my own personal process.

S: Well then you have to be really really careful to say it that way.

J: That's what I'm trying to say. I mean, I think there is a right way to talk about it. And I do understand that I could say it in a way that could be misunderstood.

S: That's for sure. I really think that you have to be very up-front about the negative side of this. And there is no doubt that there is a negative side to this.

And then, where that comes out in your practice now, how that contributes to your prestige in your own society and your income and everything else. And I mean, Picasso didn't wear African masks, but he definitely ripped-off African masks. That's the issue.

J: I feel that I'm in a very different position in relation to drawing on my own body than Picasso was in relation to making paintings using imagery and formal
conventions and ideas taken from African masks; partly in that I have lived a daily life as an Inuit, without my physical experience with the Inuit people.

Stevie, to me that point means much less than it does to you. Because, as I say, I don't think that you can extricate that from the political power realities that were part of why we were there and how that intermixed in every aspect of our daily life. And, so, I'm not saying that it was wrong that we should have been there, but I'm saying that in everything that I do or say about this I want to acknowledge very clearly that I'm very much aware of what I was complicit in, in terms of the domination of those people. I mean, I saw a great deal go on there that I was absolutely horrified...

J: And continues to go on there. That's why it's so painful to go back. But I have gone back. And painful to continue to relate, though I continue to collaborate with Ruby Aarna'naaq on projects now where she has a defining role and where there is much greater equality of power.

Stevie, I think we have to say one more thing about this. I think we have to fill in our history too, before we arrived there; the kinds of pop art and easily available material that was in our society when we were children contributed to the general notion of what was known as the painted savage. We were able to experience the people in the Canadian arctic as one example of that. It was tattooing, it wasn't painting, but I think that is what that term, "the painted savage" implies.

Contemporary Art and Popular Culture

In New History we have juxtaposed images of the individual subject as represented in visual art to images of the human subject represented in the rational truth of scientific diagrams. The uniquely personal surfaces of our own flesh interacts with and contradicts the rigid objectivity demanded by scientific research. In developing this comparison, we have given considerable thought to artists whose concerns and processes overlap our own to varying degrees. For example, Suzy Lake, in her work A Genuine Simulation of..., also painted her own skin in a similar artistic meditation on identity, but with a somewhat different emphasis. In this piece, Lake painted her face white and then painted another face over her features as a visual critique of stereotypical roles that mask and obscure individual female subjectivity. As a guide, she ironically referred to a popular "how-to-draw" text, a procedure that parallels our appeal to art historical dictates for representing the human figure.

Lisa Steele's videotapes on the theme of identity are also works that can be considered here. Lisa Steele, in the video Birthday Suit, also presented her scars, in this case scars of injuries. Steele commented, "On the occasion of my 27th birthday I decided to do a tape that chronicled my passage through time." As with other works by Steele, the intention was to attempt to retrieve memory to make memory present. In New History, however, we begin with an uneasy scepticism about the reality of the present and our own agency as a force in constructing the present. The question we pose is: How much of what we accept as the reality of immediate experience is mediated for us through unconsciously accepted directives?

Genevieve Cadieux's evocative images of scars focus in a different way on the interaction of skin with subjective identity. In works such as Memory Gap, The Unexpected Beauty, she framed the scars as individual features, greatly enlarged beyond human scale. This process separates the textual surface of the skin from particularized individuality until even the anatomical position of the scar cannot be determined for sure. Where we have relied on scars to verify our own personal existence and history, Cadieux's image of the scar reveals generalized human pain, disconnected from any particular human being. This is mostly due to the enlargement of the image, which brings intimacy into the realm of the social and emphasizes the wound that prefigures the scar. Chantal Pontbriand commented on Cadieux's work, "Immersed in the intimacy of the scar, we are all touched by the wound and, ... subjected as viewers to a loss of identity, a lapse of memory."

On first viewing, Donigan Cumming's photographic installation, Pretty Ribbons, seemed to us a subversive presentation of the analytically beautiful body of a very aged woman. We found the images of Nettie, Donigan's model, to be fascinating and dignified portraits of that time of life toward which we are all heading. We read Donigan's work as similar to our New History, as an artistic challenge to the ageist biases in our society against the public display of older human bodies.

Although, in the catalogue for his 1990 exhibition Diverting the Image, Cumming gives his "warmest thanks" to "the star of Pretty Ribbons, Nettie Harris, who has been the anchor of my work for more than a decade" the two essays in Cumming's catalogue counter our interpretation. In one of the essays, Patrick Roegiers comments on old age in general: "the bruised, scarred worn-out body marks the decline of the excluded." He describes Nettie as "a primitive, fascinating and repulsive primeval mother—now almost blind." He refers to "The relentless accentuation of her withering flesh" and "The final view of a disintegrating figure." Roegiers describes the views of Nettie posed with elderly male nudes as "the comedy of impossible love" that "ends in free fall back into a new hell." Roegiers quotes the French philosopher La Rochefoucauld who wrote, "Old age is women's hell." But he fails to note that La Rochefoucauld died of gout in 1680; surely we could call up a more contemporary voice and avoid this ancient bigotry.

The other essayist in Cumming's catalogue, Nicole Gingras, takes a much more restrained position toward Nettie's aging body, lest we identify with such a fate. Gingras describes Nettie as "an ambivalent figure who is difficult to get a hold on."

So we pose our question again: how much of what we accept as the reality of immediate experience is mediated for us through unconsciously accepted directives? Carter and Turner, in Political Somatiques: Notes on Klaus Theweleit's Male Fantasies, localize markings on the skin as one site for these unconsciously accepted directives, "...first, as a site of coherence, around which political collectivities crystallize and are consolidated; and second, as a site for the marking of difference—tattoos on the body of the punk..." In New History, we are looking for directives that mediate personal experience in the realms of art and science. But although our project to imagine "a new history of the marked" proposes a deconstruction of Western figure painting and a scientific, diagrammatic explanation of the development of the human genitals in the womb, our images painted on our own skins could easily appear on the pages of Tattoo magazine, or Skin and Ink under the headings "...tribal to traditional, flash to fantasy..." "Tattoo extends the..."
A tattoo is an affirmation: that this body is yours to have and enjoy while you're here. Nobody else can control what you do with it. That's why tattooing is such a big thing in prison: it's an expression of freedom."

When he was out on bail, all three of us decided to get a small tattoo on a single body.

Despite these collective categories that influence their personal choices of imagery, tattoo artists and their clients have often expressed their support for the popular art of marking the body as a means of forming collective identity with, and individuating an identity against conventional society. They are critical of the society that we have critiqued as dominated by the rationality of scientific paradigms: individuating an identity against conventional society. They are critical of the society of traditions with new pictorial inventions seems to us to contain other forms of unconsciously accepted directives. They often appear side by side or even on top of each other in "cover-ups" on a single body.

By contrast, consider this conversation between contemporary Inuit women, Ruby Arnuna'naaq and her mother Myrah Kukiiyaut, discussing the tattoos of her grandmother, Juuraat.

MK: Old people? I guess because they too wanted to look beautiful.
RA: Yes, there was nothing else in those days.
MK: Myself, I've heard it was to beautify an Inuk woman.
RA: My grandmother, Juuraat, was not about to be a shaman: she had tattoos around her skin.
MK: Akpaliapik said that it was because a person's skin is so colorless.
RA: They make one beautiful?
MK: No, my grandmother, Juuraat, was not about to be a shaman: she had tattoos around her skin.
RA: How was it done, in ashes?
MK: Yes, it was said to be done by ashes and it was said that some were no problem while others caused pain and scarring. It is said that those who did the work were different from each other...not the same touch.

New History is a collaboration to mark our skins in a somatic art practice that is embedded in a politics of representation, a socially responsible action, not an art practice separated from living, but an art that can be understood as intrinsic to lived experience.
BOOK REVIEWS

HAPPY, MERRIE, LOONEY...AND DROOPY TOO

Tex Avery King of Cartoons: The Man Who Created Bugs Bunny, and the Story Behind Those Lunatic Looney Tunes by Joe Adamson A Da Capo Paperback, New York, 1975, $15.95

Chuck Amuck The Life and Times of an Animated Cartoonist by Chuck Jones Aeon Books, New York, 1989, $12.95

The Cartoon Network Turner Broadcasting

Metro Pictures Gallery in New York City put up a warning at the entrance to its 1992 exhibition of Cindy Sherman's new works: "Parents may wish to view the exhibition prior to bringing their children." The wording of this disclaimer was peculiar, suggesting that, after viewing the work, parents would indeed choose to bring their children to see Sherman's photographs of figures constructed from plastic anatomical body fragments disposed in unusual sexual configurations. Considering that, after seeing Ben-Hur when I was eight years old, I couldn't turn the light off until I was totally under the covers—a near physical impossibility— because I was afraid of seeing the lepers who in fact I'd not seen in the movie because I covered my eyes, I can only imagine the protective bedtime rituals that Sherman's recent works might occasion were I a child now. Mommy, what are those funny dark red things (that look like blood engorged super-tampax though too big and too evenly shaped so maybe they're sausages, or purple turds) coming out of that scary old lady's (head unattached) vagina? The 1993 Whitney Museum's Biennial, in which this work was included, positioned a similar warning near the elevators.

I was particularly amused by these nervous disclaimers because of the sexual shenanigans, including intra-species romances and deconstructive body arrangements, appearing regularly, without any such caveat emptor, on the recently launched Turner Broadcasting The Cartoon Network. It is useful to consider what these cartoons, from the 30s, the golden age of the 40s and 50s into the 60s, offer in relation to the current obsession with dysfunctionality and the abject.

The Cartoon Network runs a lot of Warner Bros. Merrie Melodies, including many Chuck Jones cartoons, as well as Popeye cartoons, Tom and Jerry, and spring-fed stingly through the mixes, although the gem of their film library, Tex Avery cartoons. Most if not all of these works circulate around characters engaged in life and death conflicts, although, as it is often noted, no one dies but lives to continue the conflict to which they are so dedicated. Cartoon figures undergo remarkably violent bodily transformations, often of a sexual nature or caused by sexual desire. But while Sherman pictures a sexuality that is permanently dismembered, cartoon figures are always immediately and miraculously restored to theirformer shape, in order to start all over again. They are usually oblivious, noisy, nosy, rude, and hostile, but also self-confident and possessed of remarkable buoyancy and elasticity. Even sentimentality and bathos are never a prelude to the abject.

At a time in which popularization (and perhaps misunderstanding) of Judith Butler's gender theory—gender as masquerade, femininity as drag—dominates contemporary views about sexuality, and when heterosexuality is discredited by a diversity of positions previously considered marginal, the cartoons display a rampant, thumping, heterosexuality. "Girls, girls, where's the girls, wanna kiss the girls, where's the girls, sure do love girls!" In one of the best Avery cartoons, Little Red Riding Hood (1949), both country bumpkin wolf and his ultra-suave city cousin go berserk with literally explosive desire at the sight of a curvaceous city girl and an unarguably, buck-toothed Rural Riding Hood. Even the diminutive and always impassive Droopy bangs his head with his ears when kissed by a saloon singer in The Shooting of Dan McGoo (1945). "You know what," he says haphazardly in his wonderful rheumy bank-manager voice, "I'm happy." Only testosterone seems to cause fragmentation, for women in cartoons never fly apart, although Olive Oyl is often seriously stretched. As often as not, cartoon females (or "shemales" according to Popeye) are unpredictable, independent, or downright aggressive. Since the cartoons send up other forms of popular entertainment, heroines who parody Bette Davis and Katharine Hepburn abound in 30s Merrie Melodies. They are always self and career-obsessed and handle their wolfish pursuers with cool dispatch. Olive Oyl follows her pleasure, her long legs carry her in pursuit of big brawny Hollywood stars, although when she turns abusive, she lets him have it: going from "Hubba hubba he sends me" to "Anscray you phoney Caesar" and "Too many streets, too many deals, you strain your brain" in short order, as she returns to the rather maternal and feminine Popeye, who may be seen wearing an apron, doing her dishes or bringing her flowers until an infusion of spinach causes an infinite variety of reactions to take place in his biceps and other muscles.

But, believe it or not, sexuality isn't everything! If no pleasure can be said to be pure, the cartoons provide pleasure on many levels. They don't necessarily make you laugh. Rather, the breathtakingly quick movement of cascading visual jokes in Avery cartoons as in Chuck Jones' Roadrunners provokes an intensely pleasurable state of sustained wonderment. And their self-awareness, displayed in various comments to the audience—"Noisy isn't it?", "I'm da hero of dis picture"—only enhances the experience. The color is often wonderfully saturated. The voices are also great, in Avery's case the distillation of all the character voices and different styles of narration voice-over from radio and film. And one can only wish to see the actors doing the Popeyes, probably in a phone booth while dubbing a Hercules movie. Ineffable cuteness occasionally strikes one with delight, as for me the first
sight of a lovelorn spindly, pink-eared chihuahua in a skunk suit about to be unfortunately pursued by the indefatigable Pepe Le Pew? "Zee little petite, she want to play see hide, go, and I seek," (Scentsational Over You, 1947).

The continued appeal of these cartoonists' works perhaps can be traced to Jones's first principle: "You must love what you caricature," and "There is no such thing as sympathy without believability; there is no such thing as real laughter without sympathy." They didn't pandeir to any particular audience, Jones said he 'made] cartoons for me," and, to end where we began, Avery admits "I tried to do something I would laugh at if I were to see it on the screen, rather than worry about 'Will a ten-year old laugh at this?'" and "I leaned more toward an adult audience."

Both Chuck Amuck and Tex Avery King of Cartoons are rather tacky looking books, like all similar cartoon history books in paperback, although the Jones book is a bit more elegant. The narrative of each shares the non-linear, episodic feel of the cartoons themselves. Both books pay vivid homage to each other's work as well as the contributions of their co-workers and predecessors for while animated cartoonists had distinctive styles, the cartoons also anticipate postmodernist critiques of authorship and originality, as themes and jokes are endlessly copied and reworked.

I recommend Jones' book which has wonderful character anecdotes; his writing is as deftly amusing as his work, with an authentic American sound rather like James Thurber. Avery remains a gentle mystery; Jones calls him "a Buster Keaton. But Adamson's book on Avery, which is sur-

One of my favorite chapters in Donald Kuspit's study of Clement Greenberg, published in 1979, was the one on "Dialectical Conversion" in which the author attempts to define the historical process whereby one stylistic evolution supercedes another by encapsulating part of the former into its vocabulary. This concept, as explained by Kuspit, elucidated the important and subtle theoretical shift from Romanticism to Modernism as proclaimed by Greenberg in his essay "Modernist Painting."

Dialectics is a favored theme—or, should I say, method—used by Kuspit. It is a method that was defined and developed in relation to critical theory several decades earlier in the Frankfurt School. In contrast to the Cartesian method of dialogical coefficient, dialectical theory foregrounds the notion of progressive thought as empirically and materially grounded. In doing so, it manifests a perspec
tival history in relation to the logic of the syllogism. To engage in any dialectical process, one needs a certain resistance between theoretical issues as perceived in the present and those historical antecedents which have informed them. Consequently, the historical gravity of the encounter can become rather intense.

One of the chief concerns among dialecticians is how or where to locate the dialectic. Often the point of a discourse can be made or lost with respect to clarify
ing the nature of the opposition. Kuspit begins The Dialectic of Decadence by posit
ing the problematic of decadence as linked to representational art. Specifically, he is interested in a comment, quoted from Minimal artist Donald Judd, that the Neo-

expressionist artist Sandro Chia represents "goodness to himself ," vio
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tment to dialectical reasoning. As Kuspit moves from critical theory into the medium of psychoanalysis, he attacks Judd on the grounds that his one-sided exclusionary approach is unsatisfactory and too limited:

The habit of mind that makes and maintains the division is paranoid-schizoid. In victimizing Chia's art by describing it as decadent, Judd functions as a vio

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remodernization of art by means of novelty... is invariably improvised, tentative, ultimately unconvincing," there are times when the rhetoric seems tautological, dogmatic, even reactionary: "Artistic wholeness is impossible in modern times, because the issue of art—the avant-garde issue—is to articulate the modern, without any preconceptions of it."

Nonetheless, he does manage to argue wonderfully in relation to the issue of time and how time factors into the dialectic of decadence: "To live decadently in the present, to insist that the fragment of time speciously called the present is the whole of time, or the only important time... is a defense against the past." The point being that within the dialectic of decadence one must search out the possibilities of art's rejuvenation. This is a project quite different from merely accepting the condition of "one's decadent immediacy." Kuspit further acknowledges that the meaning and passion in the art of the past is not simply a matter of "restoring its appearance, but of reaching into the substance of its depth."

One might conclude from Kuspit's essay that the condition of the fin de siecle, as it has been looming over us at what appears as the end of modernity, is opening up a territory of divisions that in many ways have virtually defined modernism as an exercise in schizophrenia. Kuspit tries to make it clear in his diatribe against Judd's diatribe against the Neo-Expressionists that a single view of modernism is insufficient in times of decadence—that the dialectic of decadence needs to be viewed culturally, rather than from an isolated point of view. This is traditionally not the case with artists who tend to view art from the point of view of their own interests. Critics, however, have a similar tendency—to view art as if it could be nailed down without springing back to resist. In dealing with the past, dialectical reasoning has the power to control and contain. In the present, it is a little more difficult, perhaps impossible. Clarity of issues in art is not necessarily the acting-out of the desire to control them.

Modernities is an appropriate title for Joseph Masheck's book. Given his breadth of interests, from visual theory to architecture, from sculpture to photography, from Neo-Ex to Neo-Geo, the concept of "modernism" would not have functioned with the same accuracy. As he confesses in the "Preface":

In terms of the politics of modern art history, I am not such a relativist as to think that modernity collapsed or should have, under the last straw of a simplistic, doctrinal "modernism" trademarked circa 1965. In one sense, any number of modernities is possible.

Clearly Masheck has no intention of gridding an axe with Greenberg, nor is it at this juncture in history, a necessary task. Rather he focuses on the space between the theory and practice, on making a bridge that will give the role of the critic some renewed legitimacy. In contrast to Kuspit's approach to dialectics, Masheck offers a more obvious historical tension between objects. Whether it is a comparison between Duchamp's readymades and their postmodern extensions in the sculptural objects of Robert Gober or Maureen Connor, or whether it is an attempt to define the param-eters of early expressionist painting with Neo-Expressionism, Masheck struggles to keep the tension in view. It is as if one cannot see the present without first laying the groundwork in the past; one never loses sight of the other. This is quite close to the concept of "dialectical conversion" that Kuspit discusses in his Greenberg book.

The task of functioning as a Modernist art historian in today's academic... or, for that matter, non-academic—environment has become a challenging profession, to say the least. Often viewed with skepticism, even paranoia, by specialists in other areas, like early Mesopotamian art or Northern Medieval architecture, today's Modernist often finds himself in an isolated zone, trying to balance iconography with semiotics, in order to prove that one's methodology has not been usurped or seduced by the current art world trend. In recognizing the odds, Masheck gives touches of brilliant credibility to the use of historical methodology in his opening chapter on Alberti's "Window"—a superbly researched essay in which he weighs various historical interpretations against one another in an attempt to define the present situation for abstract painting:

What matters is not any innocent supposition that a window may happen to frame a stretch of the outside world picturesquely, but the polemical significance of insisting that a painting is supposed to be a window, onto or into any sort of "view," even once there was such a thing as abstract painting. Indeed, the conventional nineteenth-century conception long persisted, provoking in the New York School the distinction between a (false) picture and a (true) painting supposed to have eluded even the theoretical capability of Andre Breton, among the Surrealists.

Masheck inquires further into the subject, bringing in interpretations from Panofsky, Gombrich, and Arnhem, Edgerton, and others. At one point he questions why in Rosalind Krauss' text on "Grids" there is no mention of Alberti who would seem to have been a major antecedent to her argument.

One of the most incisive, poignant, and severely critical pieces in the latter section of the book concerns a lecture by Neo-Geo artist Peter Halley at Columbia University. Masheck questions not only Rainer Crone's choice of the speaker, but also virtually deconstructs the aura created by Halley and his supporters in terms of the art world veneer of the 80s:

For many in the artworld, including artists, social power has become the predominant obsession, overshadowing aesthetic concerns. No wonder the likes of Halley have found a ready market, courted with mirrors by greedy collector-investors and art pimps. But there is more authentic culture in a roadside jukebox than in the lives of many of these art fans, and their latest pet diversions don't help anybody.

Masheck's criticism takes a bold and necessary stand by indirectly refuting the system of marketing that seems to have grabbed art by the throat in recent years. After more than a decade of ignorant and power hungry collectors declaring their mindless tastes, and thereby determining the direction of art trends by lavishing money on sub-mediocre artists, one cannot help but applaud the task of real criticism—criticism that is knowledgeable and insightful, criticism that is responsible and aware of its method.

—Robert C. Morgan
"Pro-Creation?"
Seven collected essays by various international artists
Edited by Marion Laval-Jeantet & Benoit Mangin
Bilingual (French/English)
CQFD 24 rue de la Vega, 75012 Paris, 1993, (77F/$16)

A very curious new book which gathers together seven essays by international contemporary artists has just appeared here in France. It is the first in an ongoing series of such books which collects and publishes artists' essays under a thematic context. With their searching title and theme of "Pro-creation?" and in the introductory essay, the editors put forward the very pertinent question of "Why produce?" I did not actually find a convincing answer to that question within the book, but I found much of interest. Primarily I detected a search for an expanded social function for art in lieu of the hyperconscious market forces which seem for so many to be the barometer of artistic worth. Moreover, I found implicit challenges to the now ossified presumptions of the Duchampian, Minimalist, and Postmodern aesthetic.

In the first essay French artist Hubert Alfonsi beautifully articulates his highly personalized and idiosyncratic artistic response to his having had a vasectomy and its resulting motivational drive to produce "objects increasingly insipid and polluting." But by contrast, here he manages to produce a very intricate and enticing and worthy bit of artistic reflection in a broad theoretical and art historical context. He at times dwells fruitfully on the commodity discourse and then in response asserts his own beautifully written sterile counter propositions which include the impossibility of abstinence. I found this equivocal and witty essay to be significant.

ART ORIENTE, a Parisian artistic group, puts forward the concept of the "ready-thought" in opposition to the "open work." A wrathful critique is established towards the "open work" and its (by definition) necessary vagueness. The closed work of the semi-humorous "ready-thought" with its insinuated content and desired singular interpretation is much preferred. They contend that if Dadaism pondered the questions of the machine age, and the International Situationists questioned the urban capitalist environment, then today's question would be to find the place of artistic production in an excessively image saturated world. Their ready answer, "the ready-thought."

Moscow artist Pavel Pepperstein speaks of the enormously burdensome ideological situation in Moscow culture today and goes on to define three current types of aesthetic-ideological gestures: founding, protective, and farewell. He then moves on to articulate a position of meta-decadence which ostensibly transcends normal decadence. This dissertation is rather jumpy and discontinuous but loaded with fresh insights and rare information on the Moscow art scene.

Italian artist Bernhard Rudiger's prose poem was incomprehensible to me. It read like a cut up of a first person Donald Kuspit piece. By contrast Italian artist Adriano Trovato's lucid Camus-style existential lament inspired me. It oscillated wildly between despair and exaltation and I liked its openness and honesty a lot. Perhaps he comes closest to answering the query "why produce?" when he states that art "presents as nothing else in the world."

Well, yes it does. The conviction mixed with doubt makes this essay a very valuable document of our current transitional period. It seemed to implicitly ask the question, "How much longer to the year 2000?"

American artist Jeffrey Vallance does not appear riddled with doubt at all as he straightforwardly and pragmatically describes his humorous Fluxus-tinged art action involving the formal burial of a typical dead supermarket chicken (named by him Blinky) in Los Angeles' Pet Cemetery. Heavily documented and cross-referenced with multicultural and mythological parallels, this essay was fun to read but ultimately shallow. It seemed to ignore the weightier problems of artistic function and identity the Europeans grappled with in favor of a rather uncritical, entertainment-oriented justification.

Maria Wultz, from Nice, takes a faux logical-positivist approach to the subject of Pro-creation and attempts to build what at first seems to be a rigid rationalist exploration of the theme, but no real analysis was achieved nor any new ideas put forth.

Theories of the death of the avant-garde notwithstanding, what "Pro-creation?" ultimately offers us is the stubborn desire to go on producing art (for why bother to even raise the question of production if it is not to strive for a new way to produce art). Given this modest yet critical role, I'd have to say it succeeds.

Next: "Inhuman?"
CONTRIBUTORS

JACK BUTLER is an interdisciplinary artist who combines studio work in traditional disciplines with experience gained as a research scientist in developmental biology at the University of Manitoba School of Medicine.

SHEILA BUTLER is an artist and teacher in the department of Visual Arts at the University of Western Ontario, London.

WHITNEY CHADWICK's most recent book is Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership, edited with Isabelle de Courtivron.

LAURA COTTINGHAM is an art critic who lives in New York.

PATRICIA CRONIN is an artist living and working in Brooklyn. Her work was exhibited in "Coming to Power: 25 Years of Sexually X-plicit Art by Women" at David Zwirner Gallery and "Love in a Cold Climat (21st Century Sex)" at Dooley Le Cappellaine Gallery.

JOANNA FRUEH is an art critic, art historian, and performance artist. She is author of Hannah Wilke: A Retrospective (University of Missouri Press) and a co-editor and contributor to Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology (HarperCollins) and New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action (HarperCollins). She teaches at the University of Nevada, Reno.

DEBORAH KASS is an artist living and working in New York. She is represented by Jose Freire Gallery and her work was exhibited at the Venice Biennale.

AMELIA JONES is an assistant professor of art history at University of California, Riverside. She publishes criticism and essays on modern and contemporary art and feminism and her book Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp will be available this fall from Cambridge University Press.

ROBERT C. MORGAN is an artist, critic, art historian, poet, and curator who lives in NYC. His book After the Deluge: Essays for the Art of the Nineties is published by Red Bass Publications.

JOSEPH NECHVATAL is an artist living in Arbois, France and New York. His "Virus Project" will be debuted at the Saline Royale in the fall of 1993.
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